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Jacek Mydla

The Shakespearean Tide

Studies in the Dynamics of Human Time



Wydawnictwo
Uniwersytetu
Śląskiego

Katowice 2012



The Shakespearean Tide
Studies in the Dynamics of Human Time

To Professor Marta Gibińska-Marzec



NR 2936

Jacek Mydla

The Shakespearean Tide

Studies in the Dynamics of Human Time

Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



Katowice 2012

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There is a tide in the affairs of men...

Julius Caesar

Preface

This is my second book on time in Shakespeare. *The Dramatic Potential of Time*, published by the University of Silesia (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego) in 2002, was based on my doctoral dissertation, which I had written under the supervision of Professor Marta Gibińska-Marzec and defended in January 2000. One part of that book offered a copious introduction to the time problem in philosophy and literature, and to dramatic time in particular. This introduction was followed by a detailed analysis of poetic time in the Sonnets and of the transition from poetic to dramatic time in the narrative poem *Lucrece*. The second part, devoted exclusively to drama, offered interpretations of five plays: *Love's Labour's Lost*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and – in the role of a concluding chapter – *The Tempest*. Studies of two more comedies and two more tragedies have since been awaiting publication.

It is not to be thought that the only reason I have decided to prepare another book on time in Shakespeare has been to prevent the unpublished material from accumulating more dust than it already has. On re-examining these analyses I came to the conclusion that a change of approach would be justified, that an interpretive synthesis of Shakespeare's handling of time is both desirable and feasible. The new approach consists in analysing individual plays with an eye upon larger issues and universal themes, with a view to a comprehensive understanding of the way in which the dynamism of man's engagement with time animates Shakespeare's drama, indeed the dramatic genre itself. This is roughly the same as saying that that engagement penetrates – defines even – the dramatic genre as such, regardless of the various inflections of human temporality across the different shapes of drama. Animated by this new purpose, I have not only undertaken an extensive revision of the unpublished material but also written new interpretations of four more plays, two tragedies (*Hamlet* and *King Lear*) and two romances (*The Winter's Tale* and

Pericles). For the reasons just stated, I introduce the category of human time and define it in relation to what in my previous book I termed natural or organic time.

Despite the seemingly complex structure of this book, the sections devoted to particular plays are relatively autonomous and can be read as such. There is no concluding section in the strict sense; the final chapter performs the function of tying up the different time-related themes and the accompanying rhetorical and theatrical strategies that were lifted out of the texture of the four plays analysed earlier. In particular, it traces a redemptive movement in Shakespeare's treatment of natural time, a passage from the tragic sense of cursed temporality in the tragedies to the emphatic affirmations of *Pericles*.

Throughout, the focus is on the Shakespeare texts themselves and critical debate has been relegated to the margin. The broad and sometimes baffling variety of scholarly approaches to the problem of time, to time in literature, and to time in Shakespeare, as well as distinctions of chiefly academic nature (areas covered in some detail in my previous book) have been overviewed in the Introduction and then largely left behind.

There is another reason for publishing these studies and I feel obliged to reveal it, even though it is not of a strictly academic nature. Unlike the previous work, this has been long in preparation and thus may justifiably claim the co-parenthood of time itself. This revisiting of the time problem in Shakespeare has been an opportunity for me to reread and interpret my favourite plays. At the same time, some of the plays close-analysed in this book have become my acquaintances through repeated teaching over the past several years. The united forces of fondness and familiarity exert a pressure for expression in writing which is difficult for the mind to withstand. There are many ways to discover drama, as there are many ways to discover Shakespeare – mine in both cases was, years ago, through the time problem. It is my fond hope that somehow these pages have retained some of the enthusiasm that animates every discoverer.

Though prepared in compliance with the rules of academic publication, this book has not been written with Shakespeare scholars as its only intended readers. A degree of acquaintance with the plays discussed here is required, to be sure; the reader is kindly advised to study the plays on his or her own before reading these "studies," because there has been no room for the summarising of plots or the introducing of characters. But these interpretations are first and foremost renewed attempts – or "essays" – to come to terms with time as a "factor" (some awkward term of this kind must content us, for none will adequately define time) of supreme significance in both human life and in drama. As creatures endowed – some would prefer to say "burdened" – with consciousness, we

cannot ignore the time factor; similarly, a self-conscious playwright – and Shakespeare certainly was one – cannot afford to do so in his art.

Textual analysis is throughout the preferred method. To read Shakespeare closely, however, is to keep a watchful eye on the stage business as it comes into view, as it transpires, as it were, through the printed and spoken word.¹ In other words, efforts have been made not to lose sight of the “mimetic” or “theatrical” side of the relation between time and drama. After all, live performance is perhaps as close as art can get to lived and living time.

¹ This insight is entirely to Professor Gibińska’s credit, as are the interpretive strategies that are its natural consequence. In acknowledging this debt I cannot help recalling the veritable “school of Shakespeare” that I went through as I participated in her seminars in Kraków in the years before completing my PhD.

Introduction

Time – analysis versus synthesis

This book picks up on, but also takes off from, an earlier attempt to confront “the same” subject. Some justification may reasonably be expected of the presumption that yet another book on time in Shakespeare makes sense and its perusal worth the while. The simple distinction that I would like to use is that between analytic and synthetic types of approach. *The Dramatic Potential of Time in Shakespeare* was largely an analytic effort in that emphasis was firmly laid upon the many and different ways of understanding “time.” This book offers a change of perspective. Let me explain how this difference works when applied to the matter in hand.

An analyst will insist on distinctions. He or she will approach time in drama by introducing, fine-tuning, and then interpretatively or otherwise employing a great deal of “aspects” and “terms.” Philosophers, scientists, but also literary scholars have been uniquely prolific when it comes to the time problem. Here is an overview of some of the basic ideas.¹

1. The different philosophies of time; different philosophical ideas (conceptualisations) of time.

A common distinction is that between physical time or, more generally, world time, on the one hand, and mental time or soul time, on the other. While the former is associated with Aristotle and Newton, the latter with Augustine and Bergson. Many will think such bundling off or pairing, of Aristotle with Newton and of Augustine with Bergson, to be a gross simplification, and rightly so. “Nature” in Aristotle and in New-

¹ See Jacek Mydla, *The Dramatic Potential of Time in Shakespeare* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2002), Introduction.

ton means different things. Yet in both the respective philosophies, time is approached outwardly rather than introspectively. Similarly, Bergson is as much interested in nature as he is in the operation of the human mind; and still, his preoccupation with memory determines his approach to time as such. Only after exposing the fallacy of spatialised time – time misconceived as “homogenous medium”² – does Bergson return to the outside world to find in it the kind of duration (lived and living rather than empty time) that he has detected in the mind.

Bergson is commonly associated with the discovery of “internal time” as distinct from “physical time,” and therefore not only with some other “new” philosophies (phenomenology, existentialism) but also with the modernist turn in literature and the accompanying invention of new narrative techniques. But the following quotation from *War and Peace* ought to make us realise that the revolt against narrowly scientific ideas of time was not as unprecedented as we might wish to think:

Absolute continuity of motion is not comprehensible to the human mind. Laws of motion of any kind become comprehensible to man only when he examines arbitrarily selected elements of that motion; but at the same time, a large proportion of human error comes from the arbitrary division of continuous motion into discontinuous elements. There is a well-known, so-called sophism of the ancients consisting in this, that Achilles could never catch up with a tortoise he was following, in spite of the fact that he traveled ten times as fast as the tortoise. By the time Achilles has covered the distance that separated him from the tortoise, the tortoise has covered one tenth of that distance ahead of him: when Achilles has covered that tenth, the tortoise has covered another one hundredth, and so on forever. This problem seemed to the ancients insoluble. The absurd answer (that Achilles could never overtake the tortoise) resulted from this: that motion was arbitrarily divided into discontinuous elements, whereas the motion both of Achilles and of the tortoise was continuous.

Here Tolstoy proceeds to answering the Achilles-chasing-tortoise conundrum, itself an indication that the awareness that the intellect may not be capable of apprehending motion has troubled philosophers for hundreds of years. But perhaps – slightly to change the perspective – we need not to overemphasise the dichotomy between intellect and in-

² Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will. An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F.L. Pogson (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2001), p. 98. On the other hand, common language does spatialise time; it suffices to consider expressions such as “in the space of so many hours/days.”

tuition and the other one that accompanies it, between mechanistic succession and continuity. Modern thought, no matter whether we side with Newton or Bergson, has been marked by a persistent fascination with change and motion, triumphing thereby over the Platonic partiality for permanence.³

2. The transition from antiquity to modernity; its different expressions, including literary ones.

It is claimed that the Renaissance brought with it a new sense of time, in one way or another connected with the process of the Western civilisation stepping out of the Middle Ages – with the world order regarded *sub specie aeternitatis* (“under the aspect of eternity”) and the accompanying feudal system – and into the modern era. Humanism is understood as an experience-orientated world-view, governed by mercantile values and mundane pursuits,⁴ but at the same time informed by an acute realisation that the now-much-valued life on earth is painfully transient. Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* may be seen as a literary depiction of the drama of this transition: of the “existential” dilemmas accompanying it, of the either-or facing humanity in the process of outgrowing its medieval swaddling clothes. Faustus decides to seize his days, to buy a brief now during which to gratify the appetites and passions and pursue earthly delights rather than think of death and blissful afterlife. Having accepted the bargain, Faustus is troubled with a mounting sense of having dissipated a higher good, of having sold his better self. The penultimate scene of the play, with the clock ticking off Faustus’ remaining minutes on earth and “measuring” his deepening despair, as he in vain prays to Nature to “make perpetual day,” gives a fine theatrical representation of the modern condition as a temporal dilemma.

3. Pictorial and iconographic representations of time and time-related subjects.

In this department we find a wealth of images, many of which inspired the imagery that in the form of rhetoric permeated Renaissance poetry. Among the most common representations of “Time” and his operations are: the Devourer, the Reaper and Leveller, Father, Occasion, Fortune. Personification supplies the obvious vehicle whereby “mate-

³ As in this passage from *Phaedo*, describing the soul’s longing for “that which is pure and always existent and immortal and unvarying [...]” (79a; see Bibliography for details).

⁴ As Francis Bacon puts it in his essay “Of Dispatch”: “For time is the measure of business, as money is of wares; and business is bought at a dear hand where there is small dispatch.” (See Bibliography for details of the edition used.) In Bacon’s use “dispatch” means promptness or alacrity required in the proper management of one’s affairs, especially those economic in nature.

rial” can be transferred between iconography and poetry. Shakespeare’s poems (the Sonnets and the narrative poem *Lucrece*) are evidence of this blending of the pictorial and the poetical. Thus, to name the best-known instance, when in Sonnet 116 we read that “love’s not Time’s fool,” the metaphor is couched in a personification of time as the Reaper; equipped with a “bending sickle” he cuts down “rosy lips and cheeks.”

4. This pictorial (and rhetorical) legacy, when conceptualised, allows us to distinguish the following six meanings of time in Shakespeare’s poetry:⁵
- physical or abstract time (roughly equivalent to Bergson’s “objective” or “spatialised,” non-durational, time): a line consisting of units such as hours, minutes, etc. (succeeding one another, and themselves divisible into smaller units, and so *ad infinitum*);
 - periodicity in nature (and its reflections in the human world): diurnal and seasonal cycles and rhythms (clock time, calendar time);
 - organic, biological or natural time, either in its augmentative, restorative aspect (growth, renewal) or deteriorative and entropic (decline, death, decomposition);
 - subjective time (“felt time”), manifesting itself in memory and through inner rhythms and fluctuations (psychic “ups and downs,” mental dynamic) which make duration (“objective” lengths of time) seem relative to how we experience things;
 - artistic or ideal time (as in Plato’s dichotomy of changeability and permanence), related to our experience of how beauty transcends the sphere of the corporeal and transient and to our intuitions (“intimations”) of the spiritual and enduring; this experience found such a haunting expression in Keats’ Odes;
 - *kairos*, literally “the opportune moment,” but also a moment of fulfillment (redemptive or eschatological time, though not necessarily in a strictly religious sense); many of the Sonnets owe their rhetorical energy to the opposition between the natural deterioration of things and restorative (almost “salvational”) powers of poetry and beauty.⁶
5. The different ways of representing time in literature.

In my previous book I advanced the proposition that the poem *Lucrece* could be seen as a “transitional” work, i.e. as one that makes palpable a shift from poetry to drama, from time represented rhetori-

⁵ See Mydla, *The Dramatic Potential*, p. 60.

⁶ In some of the Sonnets (see Sonnets 59, 106) the addressee is represented as an Adonis, a semi-Christian “messiah,” a divinity capable of endowing things (and time itself) with meaning. The poet admits to his sense of living in a time hallowed by the presence of the admired object.

cally (as in the Sonnets) to time represented mimetically, from time spoken of to time imitated, from time described to time experienced. *Lucrece* was for Shakespeare an opportunity to convey to his readers an acute sense of time's passing, to make time's passage felt. This is evident at a moment when, after the rape, the heroine realises that her speaking about time is a way of passing the time, *her* time. She comes to see, in other words, that her elaborate apostrophes and lamentations are means of eluding the pressing present moment, a moment that demands resolve. Seen from this angle, the heroine's predicament is not unlike Hamlet's, and Shakespeare was drawn to the notion that speech can be a means of procrastination.⁷ *Lucrece*, despite Shakespeare's heavy reliance on the tradition of iconographic and poetic representations of time, is a *dramatic* poem in that it depicts the tragedy of a life winding down to the self-inflicted death of the heroine. In other words, it makes us alert to the distinction between spoken and real time, especially thanks to the disturbing realisation of *Lucrece* that speaking about time ("smoke of words") may be a means of dodging the pressures of real time.

Telling and showing, narration and imitation, diegesis and mimesis – this crude distinction found in Plato's *Republic* may still be a viable method of approaching time in drama.⁸ Time represented verbally needs to be distinguished from shown time and yet, if a given play is to work (in the sense explained below), the playwright has to attain an agreement between the two "times," to bring them into a state of synchronisation. This means in particular that the dramatic poet needs to harmonise a play's concrete time (with the troubling "realistic" double time⁹) with that play's (or, rather, the characters') ideas about and attitudes to time. In Shakespeare as a rule we find both; namely, we have a web or rather a track of realistically represented time by means of deixis (i.e. through references to the clock and the calendar) and we also have characters verbalising their time-related ideas and expressing their feelings about the past, the present, and the future. Harmonisation is pursued so as to give the play (that is to say, us, the spectators or readers) an experience of an imaginative unity.¹⁰

⁷ Compare the self-incriminating line in *Hamlet*: "That I [...] / Must like a whore unpack my heart with words [...]" (II.ii. 581).

⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, Book 3, pp. 393 ff; see Bibliography for details of the edition used.

⁹ See my discussion in "The Idea of Time in *Othello*," *Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny* 44 (1997), pp. 231–243.

¹⁰ In support of this proposition we can claim the authority of Samuel Johnson. In his famous preface to his edition of the plays, Johnson emphatically argues that dramatic illu-

Plato's distinction is not only crude; it may be misleading. As the epic is not pure narration, so drama is not pure imitation. However, although we need to forego dreams of conceptual purism, it still makes sense, in my opinion, to distinguish between time-language used for purposes of representation (mundane references to the clock and the calendar) and time-language used for strictly dramatic purposes, i.e. as a mode of behaviour. "Today is Thursday." is different from "I'll meet you tomorrow morning and we'll fight." Both utterances, despite the obvious difference between mere informing and actual doing (in the latter utterance the character of the speaker "shines through," and therefore we have here an instance of imitation and action rather than mere speaking), are mundane both because they refer to concrete time and because we do not detect in either an element of "poetry." When Claudio, a young man in *Much Ado About Nothing* impatient to be married, says: "Time goes on crutches till love have all its rites" (II.i. 334) – the utterance strikes us as poetical (due to the personification) besides the fact that it may (and does) fulfil a "mundane" function. Shakespeare's plays are spoken plays; in them, speaking always accompanies action (the written text can be compared to a musical score; a performance has been encoded in it), but, moreover, there is in them a surplus of the poetical element. We shall be referring to this element as "rhetoric"; and so Claudio's line just quoted can be called an example of Shakespeare's rhetoric of time. We shall return briefly to this towards the end of this introduction.

6. Time of the characters and time of the audience.

The distinction between telling and showing leads us beyond represented time and into the sphere of experience. We can speak about experiencing time in a double sense: Time dramatically (verbally and mimetically) represented is time lived by the characters; a Macbeth or an Ophelia may decide to "seize" an opportunity that presents itself or to give up on a proverbially fleeting occasion, to run away mentally from the current situation if they have found it burdensome into either the past or the future, etc. While thus characters experience or live their "dramatic" situations (critical moments in their individual lives), spectators, on the necessary condition of their empathetic involvement in what is shown (what is being experienced on the stage), imaginatively live through the thus represented experiences. This statement calls for another distinction; for while characters – even though they have no actual existence – actively participate in the portrayed events

sion can overcome our sense of clock time: "There is no reason why a mind [...] wandering in ecstasy should count the clock [...]." See Bibliography for details of the edition used.

(to use the word “act” would be fatally ambiguous), spectators, who are real persons, remain passive despite their acute involvement. If this sounds paradoxical then paradoxical is the nature of the theatre.

Now, to return to the analytic-synthetic distinction mentioned earlier, it is obvious that time in drama can be approached and examined in a great variety of ways, as the ideas and distinctions just presented illustrate. An analytically minded interpreter is welcome to pursue a chosen “aspect” and use sharpened tools to attain his or her goals. Sharp-focusing and fine-tuning inevitably militate against the comprehensiveness of the results attained, which – I take it – is the desideratum of all self-conscious interpretation; even if we feel compelled to limit our perspective (as we perforce do, for no interpretation can be valid without engaging the text), we still wish to be able to say something substantial about the work in its entirety. To juggle the terms, all interpretation is analytic in the “Kantian” sense: the interpreter does not go beyond the meanings contained in the text, for no matter how seemingly loose and vagrant those word-strings may be they have a common unifying core and source, which is the text itself. The interpretations in the studies presented here are fuelled, as we might put it, by this dialectic tension between the synthetic and the analytic, or centripetal and centrifugal, energies.

Human time

Time in drama is thus experienced or lived in a double sense. To refer to Bergson’s critique of spatialisation, time in drama cannot be “objective” or “abstract,” and the so-called double clock in Shakespeare shows that it never is. References to the clock and the calendar matter little in live reception and no wonder that Shakespeare did not care to be precise in using them. We tend to forget about the clock (thus also about *our* watches) while watching a play and our intellect fails or simply refuses to cut time up into discrete lengths, even if we know that we move between scenes and acts.¹¹ Our involvement in the unfolding action makes us unable to

¹¹ Shakespeare’s plays were designed for continuous performance, and so a well-crafted, smoothly-montaged film adaptation of a play may bring us closer to the original experience than a typical contemporary staging with intervals for changes of setting and dress.

“bracket off” lived (durative) time, which may be or may become computable and measurable only when that involvement is switched off, as is the case when our involvement has petered off and boredom causes us to keep glancing at our watches to see how long “we have to go.”

Such is the principal contention of philosophies which represent the “subjectivist” approach to the time problem (Bergsonism, phenomenology, existentialism). Inasmuch as being-in-the-world logically precedes turning that world into an object of scientific inquiry, time is (“always already,” to use the favourite phrase) filled and meaningful before it can become “objective,” i.e. empty and measurable. And vice versa, it can only be measured because – prior to intellectual anatomising – it is filled with meaning. Both in Shakespeare and in everyday life, “biology” comes before “physics,” and this before “mathematics.” Perhaps now, in our digital age, this is truer than ever; we want a fast processor (that is to say, a superfast *computing* machine) simply because our modern humanism has made us so conscious of the value of our time. The possessive pronoun now permanently affixed to “time,” we wish to save our (human: lived, filled) time when we sit down to our PCs, which is possible on the condition that we forget about *its* time. Similarly, we want a new, superefficient washing machine because its digital display will tell us exactly how much time (*our* time) we have saved – while waiting for the program to run its course – in comparison with the old one. And we may still remember that we bought our first washing machine because we are hypermodern and hence unshaken in our belief that hand-washing is a gross waste of time.

All this is about human time, which is time filled with meaning. Human time is lived time rather than an abstract and pure duration, which perhaps does not exist unless as “t” in a mathematical equation. Time is thus so much experienced duration also when “nothing happens”; as Martin Heidegger has shown, “moments” drawn out *in infinitum* by tedium (the example of a useless wait, as for a train that we have been just informed is delayed by an hour and fifteen minutes, has always served its purpose) confront us, if in a rather unpleasant manner, with the raw nature of our time which, absurdly, has ceased to be felt as ours.¹² But then,

¹² The following passage from *Madame Bovary* springs to mind: “[...] and the succession of identical days began again. So now they’d go on and on like this, numberless, always the same, bringing nothing! [...] The future was a dark corridor, with a firmly closed door at the end.” (Part I, Chapter IX; see Bibliography for details of the edition used). Don’t let us miss Flaubert’s challenge: to take up boredom as a viable literary subject. In our analyses of the plays we shall examine Shakespeare’s attempts to represent tedium; those, however, must pale in comparison with, say, Beckett’s determination to “dramatise” waiting. See also my article “The Displeasure of Reading; Brief Prolegomena to Tediology,” in:

what is entertainment there for? In our obsessive pursuit of the idea of the conservation of time, we remain untiring in finding ways to “beguile the time,” to “kill it” even. Here is what *Hamlet* and the four-hundred-and-fifty-seventh episode of a TV series have in common: both can help us to pass the time (hence the useful word “pastime”), both serve as means to experience how other people live their “drama” and thus perhaps ward off imminent boredom, “to while away the time,” as another phrase helps us to express it.¹³

The phrase “human time” sounds as though it had been borrowed from Georges Poulet, whose *Etudes sur le temps humain*, or *Studies in Human Time*, first appeared in 1949. But while Poulet in his approach owes a great deal to the phenomenological “revolution,” my understanding of human time is oriented towards the Shakespearean material: the ways the characters express their “personalities,” “moods,” and “goals,” thus inevitably also their attitudes to time and its three dimensions and how these ideas and attitudes determine their actions. As we shall see, of special importance in Shakespeare is the so-called natural or organic time. This idea – which is not to be confused with a scientific abstraction, but is rather to be perceived through the images and rhetorical figures used to convey it – occurs repeatedly to express personal attitudes. One of the most striking instances is a line spoken in *Othello* by a villain: “There are many events in the womb of time which will be delivered” (I.iii. 369). This is certainly an example of Shakespeare’s attempt to make time present and felt with the help of a “strong,” visceral metaphor. In its actual placement this line is spoken by Iago, the inveterate and ever-busy wrongdoer. This may mean that Iago enters here into a kind of comradeship with time itself, that he has appropriated an essential property of time. Realisations of this kind certainly add to the ominous nature of this quaint prediction. Regarded in abstraction from its immediate context (that is, besides its being a way in which the villain expresses his sense of control over the play’s “action” by scripting the main figures’ particular decisions and actions), it seems to define Shakespeare’s idea of dramatic action as such. (We naturally tend to regard any protagonist who drives the action forward as the playwright’s alter ego.) Furthermore, it is meaningful that here the villain appropriates the procreative properties of time and puts himself in the role of a woman conceiving a child and then delivering it in the shape of a ca-

(*Aesthetics of Interpretation. Essays in Cultural Practice*, eds. Wojciech Kalaga and Tadeusz Rachwał (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2000), pp. 40–49.

¹³ We can no more than hint at the problems to do with modern commodification of time. Like so many other commodities time has the double nature of being both – though not necessarily at once – highly desirable and burdensome.

tastrophe: "I have't. It is engender'd; Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light" (I.iii. 401). Othello has all the reasons to cry out in terror when he intuits the monstrous foetus in Iago's brain. A parallel between the villain and the playwright suggests itself very strongly indeed, but it will not be until Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (the 1831 Introduction, to be precise) that an author should openly confess pride and motherly warmth towards another "hideous progeny," and publicly acknowledge her "thing of darkness," to use Prospero's words about Caliban. Demonic or not, biology is evidently needed to humanise literary representations of time.

Nature and the soul

Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Essays* have been a fresh inspiration for this attempt to visit anew the supposedly time-worn subject. In his "transcendentalism" Emerson gives us a sense of the unity of thought and its object, of the mind and Nature. There is no Emerson essay on time and we may indulge in speculations about its possible contents, had Emerson written it. His thoughts on time are little more than occasional remarks, and yet we feel that, very much like Shakespeare, time is there at the back of his mind.

For one thing, Emerson stresses the links between biological and human time and observes that they naturally strive for expression; biology undergoes a humanising transformation as it passes into signification. "The Universe is the externisation of the soul," he writes in "The Poet," and thus natural time "naturally" assumes a human dimension; it has to pass through the lens of a soul and be filled by experience. This mutual interpenetration of man and Nature makes obvious the desire to express our sense of time through such images as "womb," "pregnancy," and "labour," even if the speaker is not a woman. In the same essay, Emerson speaks of the "passage of the world into the soul of man," and describes the process in phrasing reminiscent of Shakespeare: "All the facts of the animal economy, sex, nutriment, gestation, birth, growth, are symbols of the passage of the world into the soul of man, to suffer there a change, and reappear a new and higher fact."¹⁴ It seems to me that this is the best

¹⁴ Compare the famous phrase in Ariel's song: "suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange" (*The Tempest*, I.ii. 401). Emerson, an admirer of Shakespeare, wouldn't be the first writer to express his ideas with Shakespeare's language in his inkhorn. But this

in nuce description of what happens when Shakespeare makes his characters experience and debate time. Symptomatically, Emerson does not speak directly of “time” and indeed he may have wished not to impede the flight of his thought with this cumbersome word. His discourse conveys the idea of human time clearly nonetheless, inasmuch as time is any of its human externisations but is not exhausted in any single one of them. To paraphrase Emerson once more, if “Nature is the incarnation of a thought” (“Nature”), then Shakespeare’s plays could be described as so many depictions of these incarnations caught as it were in the process of becoming.

Shakespeare may not have shared the optimism that informs Emerson’s views (as well as Bergson’s, for that matter). Emerson expresses his affirmative notion of nature in statements such as this: “Nature is loved by what is best in us.” In Shakespeare, so often in the tragedies, the opposite is true. Edmund, the bastard (“natural”) son of Gloucester in *King Lear* (Scene I.ii), flaunts his Nature-given endowments and brazenly airs beliefs that could be summed up by reversing Emerson’s dictum: “Nature is loved by what is *worst* in us.” But as we leave the murky underworld of the tragedies and pass on to the romances (as we do in the final chapter) the vision brightens.

Attempts have been made to reconstruct Shakespeare’s philosophy and scholars interested in the problem of time have been especially fond of this, as we shall see in the course of our analyses. Yet, rather than being another philosopher-poet, Shakespeare will not turn out characters who are slaves to any pre-established system, unless it be a system of their own making. Consequently, the views on man and Nature in the plays are multicoloured and thereby represent the idea that to traditionalists would sound oxymoronic, that of personal philosophy. With the arrival of Charles S. Peirce and William James this idea lost its ludicrousness and received the philosophical justification known as pragmatism.

Time is a daunting abstraction. It has long enjoyed the reputation of being able to turn philosophers speechless. “*Si quaerenti explicare velim nescio*” (if anyone asks me to explain what I mean by time, I seem not to know what time is) — a favourite quotation from Augustine with those who embark on yet another attempt to capture time’s nature. Shakespeare’s characters, however, have never had a reputation for being lost for words. In *As You Like It* a discourse on time goes on for two pages of the printed text and in *Richard II* the dethroned king tries to while away the

covert allusion to *The Tempest* has a special significance; in the sea “nothing fades” — sings Ariel — and so even dead things acquire a new life.

time with poetical reflections on the clock. To be sure, more common are brief remarks, figurative *ad hoc* expressions, such as Claudio's and Iago's lines quoted above. These indeed are frequent enough to call for detailed, context-oriented analysis, both textual and dramaturgical. Let us briefly explain this distinction. Drawing on Emrys Jones's idea of the "movement" as "a compelling dramatic sequence,"¹⁵ in the first two chapters, we analyse in detail the representation of time in four plays, two comedies and two tragedies, examining their opening and closing "movements." According to Jones, in a Shakespeare play we can distinguish two major units or "movements," the first one corresponding to Acts I through III and the second to Acts IV through V.¹⁶ Jones points out that the idea of a "larger imaginative movement" of the action as a whole does not preclude the existence of "lesser unities" with their internal temporal devices (most importantly, references to concrete time). Taking these ideas as a valuable cue, in that the somewhat rough division into movements allows us to sharpen the focus of analysis (especially when concrete time is kept in view), we have to bear in mind that a study of any "lesser unit" should remain tuned to larger imaginative unities or, in our case, a play's dominant time-related rhetoric. Still, the synthetic interpretive energy needs to be kept in check by its analytic opponent.

The word "rhetoric" has become disorientating in its ambiguity, but because it is going to assist us in our analyses some preliminary explanation and – alas – distinctions are necessary. Ordinarily "rhetoric" refers to either or both of these two things: 1) the use of figures of speech, such as apostrophes, metaphors, similes, etc.; 2) the use of language as a means of persuasion. "Rhetoric" can also be used for the study of rhetoric in either sense 1) or sense 2) or of the cooperation between the two species of rhetoric. A work by Shakespeare, be it a sonnet or a play, is made up of rhetoric in both these senses; a Shakespeare text is usually both figurative and persuasive. But figurative language, especially this or that type of imagery, besides its persuasive function, forms a significant representational layer in a poem or a play. For example, "beauty's rose" in Sonnet 1 is an element in the "field" of the poem's vegetative imagery, to which "bud" and "gaudy spring" also belong. Obviously, the situation is much more complex in a play than in a single poem, but the point is that in a play we

¹⁵ Jones argues that a unit of action in Shakespeare "makes a compelling dramatic sequence, with its own internal system of anticipation, long-drawn-out suspense, and finally a sustained climactic movement [...]." Emrys Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 45.

¹⁶ Jones, *Scenic Form*, p. 68. Jones refers to A.C. Bradley's description of the Shakespearean pattern; the first part of an action is characterised by a rising movement and the second a falling one.

also detect rhetorical fields, nets of imagery, as we might call them, and time-related language may be tightly woven into a play's verbal texture. When in *Macbeth* the witches are described as being able to "look into the seeds of time," the question for an interpreter is this: What textual field does the metaphor of "seeds" open? And because imagery usually evolves with the developing action we must not lose sight of the dynamic that the imagery possesses; this alone explains the frequent occurrence of "dynamic" words like "seed" and "womb." In conclusion, *textual* analysis must go hand in hand with its *dramaturgical* counterpart. In fact, as we shall see, imagery effectively assists in pushing the action forward,¹⁷ and to this function of time-related imagery in a given play we shall be referring as the rhetoric of time.

A note on referencing

References to Shakespeare's plays are by Act/Scene/line number, e.g. *Measure for Measure* (I.iii. 39). The edition used for direct quotations of Shakespeare's text is described in a footnote to the first citation from the play referred to. References to editorial matter (such as alternative readings of the text) are given as follows: *Measure*, ed. Gibbons, p. 26, where reference is to bottom-of-page editor's notes on page 26 of Brian Gibbons's edition of *Measure for Measure*. In many cases more than one edition of a play has been consulted. In some cases the Reader is referred to the Bibliography for full description of the edition of a work used.

All emphasis in quotations, unless specified otherwise, is mine.

¹⁷ It does so as much as it assists in constituting the fictive world of a play. The two functions ought not to be regarded as separate ones; worlds that drama represents are human worlds, worlds made of human actions and interactions, and so a "social" dynamic is intrinsic to them.

Two Comedic Movements



Pregnancy and Infinite Punishments: the Opening of *Measure for Measure*

“With ripen’d time unfold the evil”

In our analysis of *Measure for Measure*, one of the “dark” or “problem” comedies, we first examine closely the theme of pregnancy. Next we take a critical look at the arrangement of the opening scenes and Shakespeare’s representation of concrete time. Finally, we make an attempt to interpret the temporal, i.e. time-related, meaning of the play’s title.

Pregnancy is a central issue in *Measure for Measure*. Here, as in *The Winter’s Tale*, a pregnant woman appears on the stage; but pregnancy is also used as a thematic axis around which the play’s rhetoric revolves. This theme is figuratively evoked as early as line eleven of the opening scene, long before we learn of Juliet’s illegitimate child by Claudio and see her on the stage. In his opening speech, the Duke uses the adjective “pregnant” in the sense of “resourceful” or “well-versed,”¹ which may be regarded as a hint at the poet’s endeavour to explore the ideas of conception and childbearing beyond the scope of the conventional biological denotation.² Indeed, a thematic field has been opened in which to locate further plot developments and which will also encompass a “procreative” connection between truth and time: *veritas filia temporis*, or “truth is the daugh-

¹ According to the Arden edition of the play by J.W. Lever (p. 4); see Bibliography for details.

² The idea of “intellectual or mental conception” in the sense of having a plan for future actions appears in *Hamlet* (the hero is “unpregnant of his cause”) and *Othello* (Iago’s wit “labours” and “delivers” a murderous conceit).

ter of time.” At the focal point we find a man, not a woman: Angelo, whose uprightness the Duke is determined to put to the test, a pregnancy test of sorts: “Hence we shall see [...]” Time will show if Angelo is made of flesh and blood and if his appetites are those of the common man (see I.iii. 51–55).³ But, according to the sense of the metaphor, truth will “show” (emerge) as Angelo’s progeny. The drama to unfold will be played out between literal and metaphoric (spiritual) meanings of being pregnant and giving birth.

The *veritas filia temporis* adage has supplied a number of scholars with a convenient *Leitmotiv* for time-oriented analyses of *King Lear*.⁴ In that tragedy, through excruciating experience, the old king comes to see into the true nature of things initially veiled, by the flattery and hypocrisy in others and by vanity in himself. An analogous relation between rising to power (as Lear’s daughters do after his retirement) and exhibiting one’s true qualities informs both the tragedy and our problem comedy: “Would you know a man? Give him power.” – says the motto to a critical essay on the theme of power in *Measure for Measure*.⁵ Just as Lear’s personal tragedy (and his tortuous journey towards enlightenment) begins with transference of authority and the ensuing unleashing of wickedness, Angelo’s suppressed impulses break out of their cage and take control with his ascension to the position of the Duke’s deputy. The epic first scene of *King Lear* ends with the good daughter’s prediction (addressed to the two other daughters, whose true nature has not yet manifested itself), its meaning based also on the revelatory properties of time: “Time shall unfold what plighted [i.e. concealed, as in folds] cunning hides” (I.i. 274).

Juliet and Claudio’s “unlawful” pregnancy⁶ builds up the dramatic conflict (the death sentence on Claudio and the possibility of waiving it) but it also draws attention to the problem of responsibility, which soon assumes wide relevance. The idea that unlawful actions entail unclaimed responsibility becomes a major concern for the other characters; thus, Isabella fears both a furtive and sordid loss of virginity, i.e. if she complied with Angelo’s blackmail, as much as she does conceiving an illegiti-

³ Quotations, unless indicated otherwise, are from The New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of the play by Brian Gibbons; see Bibliography for details.

⁴ See for instance: Susan E. Linville, “‘Truth is the daughter of time’: Formalism and Realism in *Lear’s* Last Scene,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41 (1990), pp. 309–318; and Chapter 5 in Soji Iwasaki, *The Sword and the Word: Shakespeare’s Tragic Sense of Time* (Tokyo: Shinozaki Shorin, 1973), pp. 117–198.

⁵ Harold C. Goddard, “Power in *Measure for Measure*,” in: Harold Bloom, ed., *William Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure. Modern Critical Interpretations* (New York, New Haven, Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), p. 23.

⁶ For the word “lawful” see Isabella’s wordplay at III.i. 188–190.

mate child by him (III.i. 185). The “precise” Angelo is himself found guilty when his relationship with Mariana has been revealed. The “lewd fellow” Lucio, too unwary and cock-sure *not* to confide in the Duke disguised as Friar, confesses the secret of his illegitimate child and his getting away with it (IV.iii. 158–161). But, ultimately, responsibility has to be confronted despite the concealment and delay. In the final scene, the Duke makes Lucio’s transgression public and is helped there with another visible pregnancy.

DUKE

[...]

Proclaim it, provost, round about the city:
If any woman wronged by this lewd fellow,
As I have heard him swear himself there’s one
Whom he begot with child, *let her appear*,
And he shall marry her.

V.i. 501–505

The task of revelation puts the Duke in the role of those more-than-human powers invoked in *The Tempest* that may delay but do not forget (see *Tempest*, III.iii. 73). Inasmuch as Time needs a human officer to do its job, the Duke is Time’s deputy. This effort to fight against concealment brings to mind passages in *Lucrece*, “‘Time’s office [and glory] is [...] To unmask falsehood and bring truth to light [...]’” (l. 935 ff). In *Measure for Measure* the additional complication consists in the fact that in order to perform his office well, the Duke first *conceals his* identity.

The underlying metaphysics is legalistic in nature: Appearing is proof; revelation equals confirmation; time conspires with truth. Just as Juliet’s pregnancy cannot remain hidden for very long, so the unmasking of Lucio’s lewdness and Angelo’s wickedness is also (literally) a matter of time. As Isabella puts it, desperately seeking some comforting belief when faced with the Duke’s pretended disbelief:

Then, oh you blessèd ministers above,
Keep me in patience, and with ripened time
Unfold the evil which is here wrapped up
In countenance.

V.i. 115

Characteristically of Shakespeare, time is here endowed with revelatory biology: As required by both the dramatic and the thematic dynamic of our comedy, this imagery suggests a connection between the organic process of ripening (and fruit-bearing) and the moral-social-religious

truth-revealing and evil-scouring processes. These involve all the characters, even though the Duke may be the presiding agent.

Angelo is given power so that his untried-in-practical-use virtues may unfold. One of the meanings of “pregnant” (see the Duke’s speech in I.i. 9–13, already mentioned) suggests the inward qualities, resources of knowledge and experience, virtue in an unexercised and untested state. The Duke argues that virtue should manifest itself, that it naturally strives for verification by way of outward action. In this sense Angelo is perhaps “more pregnant” than Escalus; yet both, having ample potential for propitious action, are “pregnant” in the more general meaning of resourcefulness. The ambiguity of this “pregnancy” makes for the play’s rhetorical (thus thematic) – and as a result also dramatic – tensions: No person or action can be judged appropriately, “measuredly,” before they have become full-fledged entities, i.e. before attaining public manifestation. These ideas have a familiar ring to them. One parallel is biblical: “[...] for the tree is known by his fruit” (Matt. 12, 33), another one Platonic: “All human beings are pregnant [...] – says Diotima to Socrates in *The Symposium* – in body and in soul, and when we reach maturity it is natural that we desire to give birth” (206c). In Shakespeare we have a combination of the biblical ethics (good or bad fruit) with the Platonic aestheticism (beautiful or ugly progeny). On a spiritual level both the senses converge: the bad fruit of wickedness and the ugly progeny of vice.

Inner potential strives for outward verification. What fruit will the Angelo tree bear, then? What is his “progeny” going to be like?⁷ Thus, even before Shakespeare mounts these questions on theatrical wheels, he has taken care to accumulate ample propelling force. This strategy (of constructing anticipative tensions) has parallels in other plays: In *Othello* Iago’s monstrous scheme of vengeance goes through a period of gestation and eventually brings about domestic catastrophe. In the crucial scene of the play (III.iii), Othello acts as midwife to Iago’s ugly thought and the birth is his (Othello’s) supposed cuckoldry. Shakespeare hesitates not, to play with the etymological affinity between “monster” and “demonstrate” (via “be-monster”);⁸ Iago’s monstrous thought (when revealed) turns Othello into a “horned man.” In *Macbeth* anticipative tensions are sown early in the metaphor of “seeds of time.”⁹ Childless or not, later in the

⁷ Compare the Duke’s ambiguous question: “What *figure* of us think you he will bear?” (I.i. 16; no comment in The New Cambridge edition on the ambiguity of “bear” in this line.)

⁸ The Latin *monstrum* is “portent” and *monstrare* “to show.” For “be-monster” see *King Lear*, IV.ii. 63 (in a speech addressed by Albany to Lear’s “monstrous” daughter Goneril).

⁹ There is evidence for *Measure for Measure* and *Othello* being composed one after the other. See Angelo’s lines on a prophetic vision of “future evils” (II.ii. 97).

play Macbeth is heard referring to his intentions to do harm as “the very *firstlings* of my heart” (IV.i. 147), the word suggesting fatherly intimacy and affection. The scene that follows ruthlessly unravels the obscure metaphor: we see the butchering of Macduff’s family. In these cases the movement is from anticipation to realisation, from rhetoric to mimesis, from language to action.

But manifestation does not have to be tragic or fatal. The obligation to propagate beauty, corporeal and spiritual (preferably through procreation), is a motif well-known from the Sonnets. If unused – goes the speaker’s argument – personal qualities are deplorably wasted; “niggarding,” self-centred withdrawal from the traffic of the world, turns a person into his own (and the world’s) enemy (see Sonnet 1). The Duke enlarges upon this idea in an early interview with Angelo:

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

I.i. 29

Twining the idea of thrift with that of propagation (“going forth”) of personal qualities, this speech has a strikingly familiar ring to it, reminding us of the strategies of persuasion in some of the sonnets.¹⁰ The Duke’s goal is to awaken in Angelo a sense of responsibility with the aid of pecuniary metaphors: “issue,” “creditor,” “to lend.” “Issue” (meaning both “coin” and “deed” but also “progeny”; see *Macbeth*, III.i. 64) carries an ambiguity that links the speech with the theme of pregnancy. This connection is strengthened by the casting of Nature in the role of a dispenser (“bestower” or “lender”) of gifts, or “creditor.” The Duke makes biology and economics join hands in an attempt to coerce Angelo into action. For

¹⁰ Compare, for instance, “the world’s due” (Sonnet 1); “unthrifty loveliness,” “beauteous niggard,” “thy beauty’s legacy,” “bounteous largess,” “profitless usurer,” “having traffic with thyself alone” (suggestive of masturbation), “acceptable audit,” and “executor” (Sonnet 4); “issueless,” “unthrift,” “spend” (Sonnet 9).

the time being, this coalition is verbal; there is no mimetic counterpart to what we hear and we can only hope that some action (“fruit”) will follow and the plot will develop in the predictable direction.

Tension has thus begun to build up between untested virtue (and the hint that as long as it remains untried it is not real) and the hazards of wielding real power. Angelo has yielded to the force of the argumentation: “Let there be some more test made of my *metal*” (I.i. 47). To an extent, the situation pre-arranged by the Duke has foredoomed Angelo; we detect here the familiar (indeed, biblical) pattern of innocence and pride exposed to temptation. Angelo is offered the prospect of exercising unlimited authority without having previously the possibility of proving his metal/mettle, i.e. of putting his resources to the test.¹¹ Spiritually, perhaps also carnally, he is still a virgin. As the plot evolves, the semantic fields of “procreation” and “authority” overlap. To begin with, Angelo is childless and seems to be wifeless; he is also immaculate and seemingly incorruptible. Later he turns out to be half-married (to Mariana) and capable of sexual blackmail and murder. What seems to justify Mariana’s staunch loyalty towards him is her belief in his potential for improvement (his mettle *in potentia*); this untried virtue she must have detected in him despite the mercantilism and heartlessness with which he has treated her in going back on his promise of marriage. Her love of him *bails him out*, as it were: prevents *our* wholesale condemnation of his person.

“Stealth of entertainment and denunciation of outward order”

The business of rendering-public¹² has two further essential extensions, material and tangible: 1) the dormant and ineffective law, which is to strengthen its grip; 2) the to-be-revealed past, which has binding power; what has come to light and become public can be made into a case for the law to try. Both these senses meet in the case of Juliet and Claudio. Claudio speaks of the “enrollèd penalties” (I.ii. 147); the dormant, ne-

¹¹ “Metal” is homophonically linked with “mettle” and thus semantically related to the theme of procreation (as proof of virility). Meaningful *loci* are found in *Macbeth* (I.vii. 74–75) and *King Lear* (I.i. 68); in both theses instances a female character (Lady Macbeth and Regan, respectively) assumes the procreative potential conventionally vested in man. We return to these ambiguities in the section on *King Lear*; see pp. 133–135.

¹² Note the meta-dramatic sense of “staging” at I.i. 68: [Duke:] “I love the people / But do not like to *stage me to their eyes* [...]”

glected, and all-but forgotten decrees have now been awakened and put in operation again. Juliet's pregnancy can no longer be concealed (I.ii. 135–136):

You know the lady, she is fast [i.e. nearly] my wife,
 Save that we do the denunciation lack
 Of outward order. This we came not to
 Only for propagation of a dower
 Remaining in the coffer of her friends,
 For whom we thought it meet [i.e. reasonable] to hide our love
 Till time had made them for us.¹³ But it chances
 The stealth [i.e. secrecy, concealment] of our most mutual entertainment
 With character too gross is writ on Juliet.

I.ii. 128

The positive, natural character of Juliet's changed state escapes Claudio; his mind dwells on the legal aspect of his (and the fiancée's) predicament. He sees the pregnancy as a subpoena: a writ, a summons, a statement of inculpatory evidence. The public nature of marriage *should* go hand in hand with the public character of child-bearing, but *their* marriage "lacks the *denunciation* [...] / *Of outward order*" and hence is not legally valid.¹⁴ The punishment administered to Lucio at the end of the play, a consequence of making his clandestine and morally dubious deeds public, explains the use of "denunciation" by Claudio. Hidden goings-on ("stealth") strive for exposure, which in turn makes it possible properly to apportion responsibility. The pedestrian references to time in the passage quoted suggest that "time" and "chance" have refused to conspire with the lovers. The further suggestion is one at the denunciatory mechanics at work in the plot. Figuratively speaking, the passage of truth towards revelation can be imaged as a period of gestation, towards the end of which things can no longer be concealed. Indeed, the last scene, the great finale of the comedy, is an eruption of disclosures of almost every conceivable manner: the unmuffling of Claudio, the unveiling of Mariana, the unhooding of the Duke-as-Friar, and the denunciation of Angelo.¹⁵

¹³ This line probably means that with time those friends would be "won over" (*Measure*, ed. Gibbons, p. 91).

¹⁴ On the public character of marriage see M.C. Bradbrook, "Authority, Truth, and Justice in *Measure for Measure*," in: Bloom, ed., *Shakespeare's Measure for Measure*, pp. 13–14.

¹⁵ James Black, "The Unfolding of *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Survey* 26 (1973), p. 127; the author argues that the revelations scene of Act V is foreshadowed in the Duke's "unfold" (twice in Act I, Sc. i). Naturally, the word reappears in the already-quoted lines spoken by Isabella in Act V. On the "sequence of discoveries" see also "Introduction," in: *Measure*, ed. Gibbons, pp. 35 and 44.

Sterility makes up a “natural” binary with “mettle,” and another one with pregnancy (or fertility); the one is coded as female-male, the other as female-female. Shakespeare insists on making these oppositions mimetically obvious. And so, Mistress Overdone, the bawd and “worn-out” prostitute (“that / [has] worn [her] eyes almost out in the service”; I.ii. 92), visually completes a pattern of binaries, where Juliet occupies the pole of fertility.¹⁶ This bawd is a living illustration, as it were, of lewdness and fornication, i.e. those vices which make Vienna infamous and which it is the Duke’s wish to extirpate. Both Juliet and Mistress Overdone embody and reveal unsettling moral truths, i.e. the connection between the daily occurrence of actions that at once remain hidden from public regard and avoid being submitted to the inspection of the law. Their appearances introduce a striking disharmony: “The visual contrast between the affirmative and vulnerable image of love and fertility, and the physically and morally corrupt old woman, seems obvious and extreme.”¹⁷ Yet, binaries are never entirely dissimilar. The Cambridge editor points up what he calls “disconcerting similarities” of the “opposite images of womanhood.” The most significant of them has, alongside a moral, also a temporal side to it: both are *altered* appearances. As such, they send the puzzled viewer back in time to coition, to acts concealed from public view. Both the female figures perform this indexical function, “showing” what is naturally performed in secret.

An act of coupling may be a “fruit-less” spell of indulgence in unbridled sensuality; it may also be a moment of conception (fecundity being Nature’s “gift,” sustaining the cycle of life). In our *problem* play, to the discomfiture and undoing of the male characters, coupling is both these things. Claudio, Lucio, and also Angelo — all have been guilty of fornication and all are also begetters. Angelo’s intercourse with Mariana-as-Isabella (Mariana has taken the place of Angelo’s blackmail victim) is a case in point: it is highly clandestine (IV.i); it is abortive (it leaves also *him* “unpregnant”; IV.iv. 18; see below); at the same time it leaves open the likelihood of his “seducee” having conceived by him (V.i. 411–415). However, from the perspective of the revived law both the bawd ridden with venereal disease and the pregnant half-married fiancée reveal a past misconduct, and, figuratively speaking, are growths or weeds which the Duke hopes to eradicate. The blackmail, whose carnal if bitter fruits Angelo reaps, falls into the same dynamic pattern, that of a tension between furtive past deeds and their “labour” (to use the dominant meta-

¹⁶ Gibbons finds the two female characters “opposite images of womanhood”; “Introduction,” in: *Measure*, ed. Gibbons, p. 26.

¹⁷ “Introduction,” in: *Measure*, ed. Gibbons, p. 26.

phor) towards a “birth,” the nativity of revelation. Revelation enforces acknowledgment of paternity, literal and figurative.

Though far from unambiguous, the sterile-corrupt versus fecund-virtuous binary is reflected in the topography of the play, particularly in the contrast between the suburbs and the city proper. Writes Gibbons: “In the suburbs a livelihood is made from what the city excludes, suppresses and exudes, but the suburbs *witness* also to the evils produced by the city. These things are *openly apparent* in the suburbs of the city just as they are in the sub-plot of this play, where disease, poverty and degradation are *obvious*; and the contempt for the law is *outspoken*.”¹⁸ The extirpation of the outward and the physical (the pulling down of brothels, the execution of Claudio) will not put an end to vice or to inner wickedness, and Angelo, in his role of an outwardly-virtuous prosecutor, is the figure upon which this truth is to be demonstrated.

“And sinne thus made perfect, brings forth death”

The change taking place in Angelo is not unrelated to, nor uninfluenced by, the intricate net of literal and figurative references we have been examining. The character of Angelo seems to operate on two levels: 1) the level of rhetoric, where his nature and its dynamic are woven into the thematic texture, and 2) the level of mimesis, where he is the prime schemer, the scripts involving seduction, rape, and homicide. The two sides cannot be separated; his intrigues and transgressions are couched in rhetoric and this in turn accentuates the central and mimetically highlighted opposition between sterility and procreation.

The “sexually suggestive language” of Angelo (as well as that of Isabella, for that matter, though in her case we would speak of a subliminal level) has of course been noted by scholars.¹⁹ There is a great deal of sexually charged wordplay in what Angelo says but we will not analyse his lines closely here. Instead, let us concentrate on the most important stages in his inward change. An excerpt of Puritan casuistry contemporary with Shakespeare can lead the way: “Sinne in *conception*, is when with the delight of the mind, there goes content of the will to do the evill thought

¹⁸ “Introduction,” in: *Measure*, ed. Gibbons, p. 24.

¹⁹ See “Introduction,” in: *Measure*, ed. Gibbons, pp. 31 ff. Gibbons uses the phrase to refer to Isabella, who seems to be “prone to use, unconsciously, sexually suggestive language.”

on. Sinne in *birth*, is when it comes forth into action of execution. Sinne in *perfection*, is when men are growne to a custome and habite in sinne, upon long practice. [...] And sinne thus made perfect, brings forth death.”²⁰ The passage’s verbal ambiguity is striking; moreover, the imagery that depicts the “progress” of sin from “conception” to “perfection” is disturbingly close to the plot-line of our dark comedy, where the “execution” of Claudio (mock-execution, in fact, but an actual one from Angelo’s point of view) is followed by Angelo’s self-loathing and death-wish. This imagery and Shakespeare’s (rhetorical and dramaturgical) pursuit of it connect the Angelo plot with the Juliet plot; in both the plots, the chief motif is that of illegitimate pregnancy. At the outset, Angelo identifies himself with the emotionally indifferent operation of the law. He sets the law above (indeed, in opposition to) organic actuality:

ANGELO

The law hath not been dead, though it hath slept:
 [...] Now ’tis awake,
 Takes note of what is done, and like a prophet
 Looks in a glass that shows what future evils,
 Either new, or by remissness new-conceiv’d,
 And so in progress to be hatch’d and born,
 Are now to have no successive degrees,
 But ere they live, to end.

II.ii. 93²¹

The law is superior to the organic dynamic of reality because it operates by means of detached supervision. This super-vision or privileged, supreme vision (an early version of Bentham’s panopticon?),²² allows the awakened law to prevent the birth of human (i.e. willingly pursued) evil.²³ To put it crudely, but in the spirit of this type of imagery, the law is capable of aborting sin, of causing evil intentions to miscarry. This much is expressed by “ere they live, to end,” clearly suggestive of miscarriage.²⁴

²⁰ Quoted in Ph.S. Spinard, “*Measure for Measure* and the Art of Not Dying,” in: Bloom, ed., *Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure*, p. 122. Reading this, one cannot help recalling Hamlet’s admonitions to Gertrude in Scene III.iv. We return to this in the section devoted to *Hamlet*, p. 131.

²¹ This quotation is from the Arden edition by Lever. The Cambridge edition has “now” for “new” and “here” for “ere.”

²² In the words of Angelo, “[...] your Grace, like power divine, / Hath looked upon my passes [i.e. actions]” (V.i. 362).

²³ On the idea of human evil see Robert Bechtold Heilman, *Tragedy and Melodrama. Versions of Experience* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968).

²⁴ Organic images of temporal progress commonly make up for the shortness of stage-time, i.e. for drama’s incapacity to show human agency according to its real duration.

Angelo's suggestion of abortion could be read as a subliminal hint at his metamorphosis, which may have already begun. Scene II.ii shows his first interview with Isabella and he may have already felt the sting of sexual attraction, of desire that, considering the circumstances, is illicit and therefore potentially sinful. In an aside at the end of the interview, he confesses that his "sense breeds" with her speech (II.ii. 147). This is ambiguous; we feel that now Angelo is being played with by language as much as, so far, he has played with words. To us, his language already betrays more than he is conscious of, and this is so because, in the first place, he has connected the idea and image of breeding with sinfulness. We are now the "prophets," and soon our predictions receive the expected confirmation.

Before their second interview, Angelo plainly detects in himself "the strong and swelling evil / Of [his] conception" (II.iv. 6). This may suggest muffled sexual potency (i.e. mettle, once more), but "swelling" in Shakespeare is unambiguously connected with conception and pregnancy.²⁵ It is now clear to us, as well as to Angelo himself, that what we are dealing with is "sin in conception" and its "natural" (unnatural, in fact) drive towards "execution" (in the sense of "performance," but in the context of the play, also in the literal sense), or "perfection." Because of the unleashed ambiguities, the fulfilment or gratification will bring with it a sense of defeat or anticlimax. The ensuing act of physical violation leaves Angelo "unshaped," "unpregnant," and "dull to all proceedings" (IV.iv). He has become entangled in the carnal matters (opposed to the rational sphere of the law) that he was determined to eschew and discipline. His fall simultaneously takes place on the two levels distinguished above; the stage action is accompanied by an unfolding of ideas and images. Angelo becomes a "perfect" villain; his crime and the hypocrisy to cover it are "absolute."²⁶

Our reservation fully to recognise his wickedness has to do with the fact that the Duke's scheme prevents actual evil from taking place; the Duke has the privilege of pre-emptive super-vision, which Angelo has

Images of conceiving, breeding, and hatching serve to humanise theatrical representation and to fill out the discontinuities in stage-time. But because such images are never morally neutral, more is at stake. On the level of rhetoric, Angelo, to make his point, has appropriated organic time and given it a decidedly disparaging meaning. The question arises: Can this kind of verbal appropriation go unpunished by time? See also below, pp. 137–140.

²⁵ See Eric Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 254; "to swell" is "to become pregnant," to "grow big with child." Partridge does not record an occurrence which would suggest an erection.

²⁶ The word "absolute" is another instance of Shakespeare's verbal playfulness; as in the Duke's "Be absolute for death" addressed to Claudio.

wished to claim for himself. Angelo's criminal record as listed by Isabella in the public complaint-hearing scene arranged in Act V is thus oddly inadequate:

Most strange, but yet most truly will I speak.
 That Angelo's forsworn, is it not strange?
 That Angelo's a murderer, is't not strange?
 That Angelo is an adulterous thief,
 An hypocrite, a virgin-violator,
 Is it not strange, and strange?

V.i. 37

"An hypocrite" Angelo is, and certainly forsworn, but he is innocent of the much heavier charges, and this despite Isabella's oath of truthfulness. Isabella may not know that her brother lives (so Angelo is not a murderer), but she *does* know that Angelo has not violated her. Isabella's indictment refers to Angelo *in potentia*, so to speak, and not to his actual guilt. Is *she* then herself forsworn or hypocritical or is she lying for a higher good? This is a baffling suspicion and surely more baffling still as a conclusion. Her knowledge may be deficient in some respects, but the charge of sexual assault is a deliberate lie on her part. With the avowal of being "most true," she might now appear to us to be as sinful as Angelo, forswearing being his only real offence. We shall return to the issues of actual guilt and verbal offence, and see how these connect with suffering and penitence.

"This deed ... makes me unpregnant"

Pursuing the implications of the procreation imagery, we have arrived at Angelo's confession to what could be called spiritual abortion. His grief-stricken speech reminds us of Macbeth's wish to be able to restore his victim's (king Duncan's) life.²⁷ Here is Angelo's post-crime confession:

ANGELO
 This deed unshapes me quite, makes me unpregnant
 And dull to all proceedings. A deflowered maid [...].
 [...] [Claudio] should have lived,
 Save that his riotous youth with dangerous sense

²⁷ See *Macbeth*, II.ii. 73.

Might in the times to come have tane [taken] revenge,
 By so receiving a dishonoured life
 With ransom of such shame. Would yet he had lived.

IV.iv. 18

“Would he had lived” sounds like Macbeth wishing he had not killed Duncan. But like Macbeth later in the tragedy, Angelo has murdered to ensure personal safety. In both plays deeds of blood are performed in order to pre-empt possible threat (“revenge”) in the shape of others’ “issue” (in *Macbeth* Duncan’s, Banquo’s, and Macduff’s progeny). Having none of his own, Angelo’s only “offspring” (like Macbeth’s) seem to be wicked actions. His own sterility, stated oddly in the “unpregnant,” is juxtaposed contrastingly with the “riotous youth” of Claudio.

While recognising the common trope according to which human transgressions sprout up in further evil, we must not omit a clash between the time-related rhetoric and time’s real presence. Ironically, it is Lucio – the libertine guilty of dodging his paternal responsibilities – who explicitly addresses augmentative time. Whether in jest, in earnest, or because the uncomfortable situation calls for circumlocution, in his exchange with Isabella, he makes a speech that – in contrast to Claudio’s speech quoted above – beams with affirmation of life-renewing nature:

LUCIO

[...] Your brother and his lover have embraced;
 As those that feed grow full, as blossoming time
 That from the seedness the bare fallow brings
 To teeming foison, even so her plenteous womb
 Expresseth his full tilth and husbandry.

I.iv. 40

This eulogy on natural time stands unparalleled in the Shakespeare canon. The underlying simile, not unique in Shakespeare,²⁸ juxtaposes nature’s life-sustaining properties (the un-entropic tendencies to overcome barrenness and attain profusion) with the procreative potential in the human being: the man is the farmer and the woman’s body the land that it is his job to cultivate and bring to fruition. Coupling is here situated outside the polity with its prohibitive laws and man-made statutes.

Does his moral feebleness make Lucio so alert to the difference between abortive and productive sexuality? Perhaps one ought not to expect

²⁸ The imagery used here, of cultivation and harvesting, reminds us very strongly of Sonnet 3: “[...] For where is she so fair whose unearned [i.e. empty of seed, not yet impregnated] womb / Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry?” (ll. 5–6). See p. 92 below.

anyone endowed with Lucio's temperament to anathematise procreation, and yet there is more here going on than a clumsy escape into circumlocution, an attempt to convey an embarrassing message without offending the ears of a maiden, and a novice at a convent to boot. Lucio neither accuses Claudio of fornication nor bemoans the result as shameful. On the contrary, even if he does escape into periphrasis, then noticeable is also a parallel between the speaker's volubility and the subject matter he addresses. Lucio may be an inveterate talker; he may also be an incorrigible womaniser. In the social realm, these personal features will not earn him a good reputation, but his elaborate simile "expresseth" his intemperance as much as Juliet's pregnancy "expresseth" nature's love of plenty and thus time's love of its produce.

In sharp contrast to this eulogy is Lucio's mock-portrait of Angelo and his nativity:

They say this Angelo was not made by man and woman after this downright way of creation: [...]. Some report a sea-maid spawned him, some, that he was begot between two stock-fishes; but it is certain that when he makes water, his urine is congealed ice, that I know to be true; and he is a motion [un]generative, that's infallible.

III.ii. 91

This description, first focusing our attention on Angelo's unnatural birth, evokes images of barrenness and impotence, which we can link up with Angelo's self-diagnosis cited above: the stock-fishes are "dried cod (i.e. cold and bloodless dead fish)" and "motion [un]generative" (unproductive and thus unnatural movement) is to be understood as referring to a "puppet or automaton, despite having the organs of generation."²⁹ The leading motif is that of water, which should be a life-sustaining element. Yet, instead of procreative coupling we have one-sex spawning or, more disturbingly, an act between two dead fish – Angelo is a product of a kind of generation that is either fantastical or simply abortive, which explains the baffling ambiguity of "a motion generative." Of course, Lucio is only describing Angelo's assumed identity, which as we know is not his true self. Lucio may not be a respectable citizen, but – unlike Angelo – he does not seem to be split in two. Seemingly or "outwardly" incapable of actual procreation (he passes ice instead of urine, and so by implication seems unable to "pass" anything else), Angelo, perversely, "breeds" moral evil instead. We think once more of Macbeth and his "barren sceptre" and "fruitless crown" (III.i. 60, 61). Organic impotence, no matter what its

²⁹ *Measure*, ed. Gibbons, p. 142. "Ungenerative" is Theobald's amendment of the phrase, and this is what we have in the Arden edition of the play.

causes, seems to be twined in Shakespeare's imagination with potential for wickedness.³⁰

The rhetoric of procreation has to be recognised as laying out the main thematic concerns of the play. Now, however, we turn to the dynamic of concrete time. As we shall observe, a structural analysis, focused on methods and devices responsible for producing a sense of live actuality and anticipative tension, in a word – an analysis of *Measure for Measure* as a drama rather than a poem, will enrich our understanding of Shakespeare's treatment of time.

“Time is come even now”

The Duke's scheme of withdrawal strikes us as uncommon, even if we disregard the extravagance and possible symbolism which both his position and his decision seem to suggest.³¹ His departure does not comply with the common and reasonable method of leave-taking observed by Shakespeare: a character that is leaving states her purpose and appoints a time for returning. The Duke keeps stressing his need to depart from Vienna, yet refuses to reveal his purpose; “My haste will not admit it” (I.i. 61) – he will not even allow Angelo to see him off. Not until Scene I.iii do we find out about his intentions in parting from Angelo and Escalus, i.e. that he has left his polity in order that they administer to it a dose of moral audit. This erratic behaviour arouses suspicions of a ruse on his part. It also makes us wonder about the playwright's conception of this character, at once central and withdrawn. Does Shakespeare cast him as his *alter ego*, i.e. in the position of the orchestrator of events, a semi-playwright who scripts plots for the other characters to take part in? This role would make the Duke similar to Iago and Prospero. Unlike these two, the Duke strikes us as a character who seems to be free from the strictures of concrete time.

³⁰ Iago comes to mind, too; Iago suspects Othello of having “done his [e.g. a husband's] office between his sheets” (“I hate the Moor: / And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets / He has done my office [...]”; I.iii. 384).

³¹ “Though there is consummate psychological insight here and at least one person of most vivid and poignant human interest we must first have regard to the central theme, and only second look for exact verisimilitude to ordinary processes of behaviour. We must be careful not to let our human interest in any one person distort our single vision of the whole pattern. The play tends towards allegory or symbolism.” G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1949), p. 73.

Many plays, tragedies in particular, throw the audience in the very midst of concrete time. We shall be able to see an example of this when we examine the opening of *Antony and Cleopatra*. One of the oddities of *Measure for Measure* is that here we have a play that opens with a scene of withdrawal. In *Macbeth*, for instance, despite its unearthly atmosphere, the opening is dense with time-and-place designations that whet our expectation, while in *Richard III* the hero-villain has, besides the lengthy opening soliloquy (“Plots have I laid, [...]”), also two asides in which appropriately to enlighten the spectators and shape their anticipation. Similarly to *Measure for Measure*, also the first scene of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* is lacking in time specifications and consequently “the imitation of an action” has to await its cue to be allowed on the stage. A degree of structural laxity seems to be characteristic of Shakespeare’s comedic world. In *As You Like It*, as we shall see, it predominates.

As things stand, little can prevent the opening of *Measure for Measure* from incurring the stricture of awkward or simply faulty construction, were we to insist that a well-wrought play ought to plunge the audience in a whirlpool of actuality. If the first scene largely fails to perform the task required of an opening scene, then our earlier analyses supply an explanation: Shakespeare wishes from the start to tune our attention to the dominant moral concern of the entire play and for that reason first ushers the *quid pro quo* that serves that concern for a vehicle. The changing of places puts Angelo in the prominent position; his “unfolding” (“[...] That to th’observer doth thy history / Fully unfold”; I.i. 28)³² provides the plot with a theme of considerable dynamism, while the Duke’s disappearance is evidently meant to introduce an element of tension by causing us to anticipate something unexpected.

There is then a great deal to be said by way of justifying Shakespeare’s strategy. However, with the amount of obscurity veiling the Duke’s departure and because of the lack of concrete time-designations, the action does not evolve according to the pattern to which passage from one scene to another usually conforms. In other words, the opening scene does not lead us smoothly into what comes next, the golden rule being that the audience’s anticipative interest must be given a direction. At the end of our scene, however, we do not even know whether (let alone, when, where, and in what circumstances) we are going to see the Duke again. “We shall write to you, / As time and our concernings shall importune [...]” (I.i. 55) — is all that we are given by way of explanation. As the play’s high-

³² Gibbons explains the ambiguity of the Duke’s expressions thus: “the Duke’s earlier questions to Escalus and warnings to Angelo in this speech suggest that he is concerned with faults in his character already detected [...]” (*Measure*, ed. Gibbons, p. 81).

est-in-rank character, he ought not simply to disappear, but Shakespeare provides no link to the scenes that follow. Left clueless, we await illumination and gather, from what we find out later, that he has been deliberately vague on the point of his future contact with his deputies, Angelo and Escalus. Why should Shakespeare have chosen this kind of arrangement, however, if a few lines addressed by the Duke to the audience would supply the desired information? Personally, I do not think there is a good answer to this question, which is no reason not to ask.

The second scene in *Measure for Measure* fully makes up for the deficiencies by entangling us in a tightly woven net of time and space references atop a rich representation of the social milieu.³³ With the entry of the bawd, the action begins to flow smoothly and rapidly. The word of Claudio's arrest is brought and spread, and the three-day term for Claudio's execution is made known ("within these three days his head is to be chopped off!" I.ii. 55), which accurately-enough shapes the audience's short-term expectation as well as outlines the plot-time of the entire action. (If, by convention, there are no deaths in a comedy, is Claudio really going to die? — Shakespeare leaves this open for as long as possible.) There is a great deal of to-ing and fro-ing: Lucio, on hearing the bad news, leaves the stage to find out more; Pompey enters and announces the prompt arrival of Claudio being escorted to prison. Added to this commotion there is a discussion of a "proclamation" to demolish suburban brothels. Lucio re-enters the stage, accompanying Claudio with the officers, Juliet and others. Claudio confirms the fact of Juliet's pregnancy (I.ii. 76 ff and 137 ff); the "poetical garb" answers to the difficulty of the situation: "The stealth of our most mutual entertainment / With character too gross is writ on Juliet."³⁴ We gather that the strict law has been in operation for some short time (since, we surmise, the appointment of Angelo as the Duke's deputy); yet, to repeat our previous observation, we are not told exactly how much time has elapsed between then and now.

Because of the Duke's stealthy and hasty departure, Claudio's message and his request for pardon remain unanswered. Consequently, Lucio is asked to act as a messenger and is sent to Isabella, Claudio's sister, who is about to enter the order of St. Clare. Lucio's task is to persuade her to intercede with Angelo in Claudio's behalf. The scene which follows (Scene I.iii), i.e. the interview between the Duke and Friar, could perhaps as well

³³ This alone, I believe, allows us to speak of deficiencies, even though we may not be accustomed to finding faults with Shakespeare.

³⁴ This metaphor links up with the words (already alluded to) that the Duke addresses to Angelo: "There is a *character* in thy life / That to th'observer doth thy history / Fully unfold" (I.i. 27).

have been placed between Scenes I.i and I.ii: in it, the Duke reveals his concern with the impotent law, his suspicions regarding Angelo blended, ambiguously, with a hope that Angelo will perform his office (I.iii. 42). The rationale for the *actual* scene arrangement seems to be that of variety combined with extension; hence we have two relatively static scenes (despite the Duke's insistence on his "haste") divided by one of unusual animation and mimetic vigour (i.e. Scene I.ii).

We can still have doubts whether enough off-stage action has been represented, or at least hinted at, to allow for or make credible the great bustle of Scene I.ii, which performs the role of the play's truly dramatic exposition. To be sure, some off-stage time is taken up by a trivial exchange between Lucio and the gentlemen (I.ii. 1–34). Later, however, we learn that Lucio has been waiting for Claudio for two hours ("He promised to meet me two hours since [...]"), a duration that can hardly cover much decision- and law-making (e.g. the proclamation), which must have taken place. We have not seen any of this, and neither have we been properly introduced to Angelo, his personality, his motivation, and his recent operations. We see Shakespeare juggling two clocks: Events – as we watch them unfold – make us suspect a busy time of some length having elapsed between Scenes i. and ii., and yet this is mere conjecture which as such cannot make up for the vacuum which the playwright overleaps as his pen moves from the opening scene to its sequel.

Scene I.iii, as we have already hinted, has a double function. First, it provides the expected continuation for the Duke plot; it clarifies his purposes and so makes the representation of his actions more credible. Furthermore, it awakens new expectations: concerning the Duke himself, the broader social realities of the portrayed world, and the character of Angelo, now the chief agent in that world. It is only now that we are encouraged to begin suspecting that Angelo may be a hypocrite (I.iii. 51–55), and, retrospectively, to detect a double meaning in the Duke's speeches previously addressed to him (about the "character" and the "history" it is to "unfold"; already quoted). On a broader scale, we look back at the past and the weeds grown due to indecision and inaction:

DUKE

We have strict statutes and most biting laws,
The needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds,
Which for this fourteen years we have let slip [...].
I.iii. 20

There is much that justifies this scene but there is little that alleviates our sense of its awkward nature and placement. It makes the impression

of a quasi-soliloquy in which Shakespeare gives the Duke a chance to reveal the genuine purpose of his withdrawal. This revelation, however, is furtive and confessional, and not free from ambiguities, some of which we have already discussed. Besides, it is belated. In the off-stage time, *not* alluded to, between Scenes I.i and I.iii, Angelo seems to have been doing precisely what the Duke meant (but never expressly told) him to do. In Scene I.i no special commission is given to Angelo as Deputy concerning the necessity of strengthening the grip of the law on those who offend against the ancient codes (“Liberty plucks Justice by the nose”; I.iii. 30).³⁵ What Angelo has been doing in this off-stage time so far he seems to have done spontaneously and yet precisely as intended and anticipated by the Duke. This puts unnecessary strain on our sense of probability, and indeed endows the Duke with almost-superhuman powers of cognition and prescience: he has seen through Angelo’s character even before the latter’s history has been given a chance “fully to unfold.” Reality has here pre-empted design; comedy (indeed, drama) has been thrown out of its native element and tipped into the realm of “allegory or symbolism.” The fact that Angelo’s actions have fulfilled the Duke’s expectations (as shown and proven in Scene I.ii) is perhaps less incredible than this fact’s dramatic realisation, the Duke informing us of what may happen *after* we have seen it beginning to happen. Perhaps more puzzling still, the Duke has no knowledge of Angelo’s proceedings so far (involving the proclamation and the death sentence), even though the whole city is abuzz with news of the harsh measures that he has taken to stamp out depravity.

In their actual placement, both the Duke scenes are technically speaking an oddity, and yet thematically they “do their job.” Indeed, one can easily think of a more natural arrangement, where Scene I.iii would immediately follow I.i, and I.iv come after I.ii. Shakespeare’s arrangement can be justified by both the already-mentioned desire to supply the varied pace of the double plot (and divided interest) and his observance of the rule of separating annunciation and completion in order to create and sustain a proper level of dramatic tension.³⁶ In the actual sequence, Scene I.i

³⁵ In the BBC production of the play Angelo receives from the Duke a *written* commission, in which, as the audience suspects, he is informed about the extent of his prerogatives. Such a clue from the Duke as to the necessity of restoring the citizens’ respect for the law, would not diminish the spontaneity of (and therefore his responsibility for) the harsh measures he takes. It would definitely render the plot more credible.

³⁶ For a formulation of this rule see Peter Pütz, *Die Zeit im Drama. Zur Technik dramatischer Spannung* (Göttingen: Vanderoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), p. 40. Writes the scholar: “Apart from the stage-technical, there is a deeper reason for the doubling in the form of anticipation and realisation; the reason lies in the principle of dramatic tension. The precipitating action calls for a repeated representation of the same thing” (trans. mine – J.M.).

anticipates Scene I.iii, and Scene I.ii – Scene I.iv. Having said this, the potentially misleading announcement of the Duke’s reappearance and its vaguely stated circumstances (“We shall write to you, / As time and our concernings shall importune [...]”; I.i. 55; “I will, as ’twere a brother of your order, / Visit both prince and people.” I.iii. 45) make it doubtful whether tension can be properly sustained. Furthermore, because he fails to inform us in advance of his doubts and expectations concerning Angelo’s discharge of the authority newly thrust upon him, the great mimetic force that Scene I.ii unleashes comes as a surprise to us rather than sustaining (or releasing) previously built-up tensions. The desired causal link between Scenes I.i and I.iii has not been effectively established and thus the latter scene hovers as it were uneasily over what seems to us to be the play’s action proper. However, the placement of Scene iii between Claudio’s arrest and Lucio’s visit to the nunnery does serve its principal purpose, that of providing a breathing space, of driving a wedge between the sending of messenger (Lucio) and the delivery of bad news. This is, presumably, the chief justification for the existing succession of first-act scenes in our “problem” comedy. Examining closely the existing arrangement of these scenes we see the playwright at work, busy in negotiating a large number of demands. We also feel that the actual decisions are in one way or another related to the trickiest demand: that of time.

“Tomorrow? Oh, that’s sudden!”

In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare’s use of references to the nearest future is as resolute and skilful as in other plays. We have commented on the appointment of Claudio’s execution as a means of establishing a temporal horizon (“within these three days”) for the evolving action. But, as we soon find out, this frame is not inflexible. Whereas in *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, the anxiously anticipated event, Juliet marrying Paris, is advanced one day, in *Measure for Measure* the equally weighty event of Claudio’s execution is postponed. In both plays, the occasional inconsistencies put aside, we detect the hand of the dramatist in its action of shaping and controlling our future-oriented perception and thus influencing our experience of what is happening on the stage.

Let us go into some detail. In Scene I.ii, we have learnt of the appointed time for Claudio’s execution. The ensuing interview between Isabella and Lucio takes place, we assume, on the same day: “I’ll to her. [...] Within two hours” are Lucio’s parting words to Claudio at the end of the street-scene

(I.ii. 171). At the end of the interview, Isabella declares her resolve to see Angelo immediately (“I will about it straight”; I.iv. 85), to intercede with him, and, that very night (“soon at night”), to send Claudio word about her “success.”³⁷ This concludes the first act of *Measure for Measure* and clears the stage to make us ready for what is to come.

In Scene II.i, Angelo commissions the execution to take place “by nine tomorrow morning” (II.i. 34). Evidently the action has advanced one day, as it is now morning (Escalus: “What’s the clock, think you?”; Justice: “Eleven, sir.” II.i. 236), which is at odds with the time designations strewn around Act I. The perplexing double clock once more, and the playwright’s wish for the thickening of the plot. In the ensuing exchange between Isabella and Angelo (Scene II.ii), the next-day designation for the beheading of Claudio is repeated, first as an answer to Provost’s question: “Is it your will Claudio shall die tomorrow?” (II.ii. 7), and then as explicit confirmation on Angelo’s part: “[...] he must die tomorrow.” In response to this comes Isabella’s anguished plea: “Tomorrow? Oh, that’s sudden! Spare him, spare him!” (II.ii. 85). Finally, however, inflamed by desire, Angelo suspends the execution and bids Isabella “come again tomorrow” (II.ii. 149, and then 160, 164, and 165: “At any time ’fore noon”).

This “tomorrow” materialises in Scene II.iv, but we still do not know whether Isabella has sent any information to Claudio. Perhaps we are meant to have forgotten all about that promise and are now expected to focus solely on Angelo’s blackmail. On the other hand, Isabella as yet has nothing to communicate to her brother. Angelo restates his previous decision: Claudio “cannot live” (II.iv. 33).³⁸ Yet, as the intrigue thickens, a new appointment has to be made, which means that the execution has to be postponed further still. Only now is Isabella going to visit Claudio in prison and thus keep her promise of “sending word of success,” now its meaning bitterly ironic. By this method the action so far has covered a number of days without allowing audience attention to relax or suffer excessive strain. In other words, the imaginative cohesion of the represented time has not been compromised. This makes the two first acts of *Measure for Measure* into a neat illustration of the unwritten rule of relative temporal unity.³⁹

³⁷ “Success,” as is not uncommon with Shakespeare, is here used in the sense of “outcome” or “result” (event), this meaning shading ambiguously into the now common meaning of “achievement”; compare with the classic occurrence in *Macbeth*, I.vii. 4.

³⁸ Alternative interpretations of this passage are possible, because it is disputable whether Isabella’s second visit takes place the next day.

³⁹ For its formulation see Mydla, *The Dramatic Potential of Time*, pp. 48 ff. The rule — we can call it “rule of imaginative unity” — states that what matters is not measurable duration but short-time anticipative horizon. And so, even if days and hours do not “add up,”

Things, however, are not entirely neat once rigorous computation is applied. When Isabella visits Claudio the next morning and confirms that the death sentence has been upheld (“Be ready, Claudio, for your death tomorrow.” III.i. 106), the reference is far from clear. Even provided that Isabella is going to refuse Angelo, Claudio may not be executed “tomorrow,” especially in view of the torture which Angelo was determined to inflict upon him for the remainder of his life, were his sister to refuse him her body:

[...] Or else he must not only die the death
 But thy unkindness shall his death draw out
 To lingering sufferance. Answer me tomorrow,
 Or by th’affection that now guides me most
 I’ll prove a tyrant to him.

II.iv. 166

The idea of “drawing out death” is, in its actual wording, a temporal absurdity and so we can say that its sense consists in the “emotional value” attached to it: making a moment last, the instant of death extended (“drawn out”) into interminable suffering. We shall return to the issue of emotionally measured time presently.

The intervention of the Duke-as-Friar gives the action a new momentum. He appears at the beginning of Act III in the role of Claudio’s confessor. Later in the same scene (III.i), he sends Isabella back to Angelo, having instructed her on the scheme of the bed-trick. We have also become acquainted with the story of Mariana, i.e. of Angelo abandoning her on the false pretence of having discovered her “dishonour.” The scheme involves making Angelo repeat the offence for which he has sentenced Claudio to death. Isabella goes straight to Angelo and makes an appointment to visit him in the middle of the night. Clearly the orchestrator of the intrigue to expose Angelo knows that if he is to succeed he has to conspire with the proverbially fleeting time:

DUKE

It lies much in your holding up. *Haste you speedily* to Angelo: if for *this night* he entreat you to his bed, give him promise of satisfaction. I will *presently* to Saint Luke’s; there at the moated grange resides this dejected Mariana; at that place call upon me; and dispatch with Angelo, that it may be *quickly*.

III.i. 245

“we” (the audience) are right to believe that we have seen a faithfully or plausibly represented sequence of events.

The action accelerates to comply with the demands of what we can call the next-day (i.e. short-time) horizon, the day appointed for the execution. “The time is even now” (IV.i 19) – says the Duke to Mariana, thus stressing the compression of the fast-evolving action into a span so brief that it encompasses virtually only the “momentous” present.

“For the momentary trick be perdurably fined?”

We have had some evidence why one ought not to disregard religion when interpreting *Measure for Measure*. Christian doctrine is too conspicuous in the play to escape our attention. The question that now presents itself is as follows: What can a theological point of view add to our time-oriented analysis? Specifically, what new meaning does it add to the Duke’s role as orchestrator of the intrigue? Do his scripts (acted out by the other principal characters) bring with them a special “temporal” meaning? The title itself offers an obvious “theological hint” by referring us to the known chapter and verse in the Gospels: “Judge not, that ye be not judged. [...] and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matt. 7. 1–2). This admonition allows us to see clearly the irony in the unfolding of the “precise” Angelo. It hardly helps us with the temporal side of the plot. In our analysis of *As You Like It*, we shall be concerned with the idea of measure (*metron*) in the Aristotelian definition of time; here let us see if we can link the moral sense of *mensura* or *metron* with the temporal one.

What strikes us in the play is the way in which the Duke’s schemes expose his fellow creatures to (seemingly) unnecessary mental agony, a point that – it seems to me – criticism has ignored. If suffering should be a “measure” duly administered for an offence, and if suffering should be a “measure” of penitence, then so much suffering should be administered in proportion to the “heaviness” of the offence committed; in other words, a period of repentant anguish should have the effect of cleansing the offender.⁴⁰ This theological context, this theology of human time, this – as we might term it – divine economics of human time is made explicit in Isabella’s prison interview with Claudio. By the cruel logic of Angelo’s blackmail Claudio is to buy extra time at the price of her chastity:

⁴⁰ A similar motif is perhaps more vividly present in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, where already in Scene I.i Navarre sentences Costard for his carnal trespass with Jaquetta to a month of fasting.

ISABELLA

Oh, I do fear thee, Claudio, and I quake
 Lest thou a feverous life shouldst entertain
 And six or seven winters more respect
 Than a perpetual honour. Dar'st thou die?

III.i. 73

Isabella puts these scales before her brother: so many years (why winters?) on the one and her perpetual disgrace on the other. She expects him to read, as it were, the result of this weighing. Of course, he can only do so inwardly, in his mind. Is his mind up to such a task? The dizzying nature of such speculations (attempts to figure out how much honour equals, i.e. can buy, how many days, etc.) is perhaps best expressed in Claudio's agonised question: "[...] Why would he [Claudio] for the momentary trick / Be perdurably fined?" (III.i. 113) This could be paraphrased as, "Why should one risk *eternal* perdition for a *transient* gratification of a sensual appetite (here: the commission of the deadly sin of lust, illicit sexual intercourse)?" But nothing appeases Isabella's fears, just as Claudio's question receives no answer.

This debate takes us back to the problem of whether and how penitence measures up temporally to guilt. Discussing the type of sin which the play puts in the focus of our interest, St Thomas Aquinas has the following to say about the length of punishment it incurs:

Since punishment is measured in two ways, namely according to the degree of its severity, and according to its length of time, the measure of punishment corresponds to the measure of fault, as regards the degree of severity, so that the more grievously a person sins the more grievously is he punished. [...] The duration of the punishment does not, however, correspond with the duration of the fault, as Augustine says (*De Civ. Dei* xxi, 11), for adultery which is committed in a short space of time is not punished with a momentary penalty even according to human laws. [...] Still another reason may be given why the punishment of mortal sin is eternal: because thereby one offends God Who is infinite. Wherefore since punishment cannot be infinite in intensity, because the creature is incapable of an infinite quality, it must needs be infinite at least in duration. And again there is a fourth reason for the same: because guilt remains for ever, since it cannot be remitted without grace, and men cannot receive grace after death; nor should punishment cease so long as guilt remains.⁴¹

⁴¹ *Summa Theologica*, Supplement, 99, 1: "By Divine justice, is an eternal punishment inflicted on sinners?" At <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/5099.htm> (accessed 01.02.2011).

For most of the characters involved, portions of the action (lengths of represented time) have the meaning of purgatorial cleansing. This is perhaps most evident in Claudio's predicament; his having to wait for death while being constantly reassured of the irrevocability of his doom.⁴² If we wished to put the Duke down as a whimsical demi-god seeking diversion at the expense of others, the plot would turn into a farce: Why should Claudio be set free so late, having been exposed to the torments of the seemingly irrevocable sentence? Why should Isabella suffer in her certainty about Claudio's alleged death? With these and similar questions we return to the previously mentioned difficulty in distinguishing between potentiality and actuality (e.g. Is Angelo a potential or actual violator and murderer?). In the terms of Aquinas' moral theology, sin incurs infinite punishment, but human life is not infinite; similarly to the theologian, the playwright has to negotiate the demands of actuality and potentiality. The play's action seems to contain as much actuality as can be measured by so much painfully experienced duration, or so much time spent in mental torment. Angelo's serious crime is not a real one, if assessed by bare facts rather than intentions. Rather than violating a maiden, he has merely consummated his semi-matrimonial relationship with Mariana. As we have pointed out, his offences listed by Isabella are almost all illusory, and yet his repentance and his excruciating self-discovery are real as well as the accompanying anguish of self-revulsion. This refers also to the other characters.

"Measure" could be understood as so much mental time. But this would hardly be justified, because mental time is not "strictly speaking" at all measurable. Aquinas' idea of "infinite duration" of punishment is not as absurd or otherworldly as it might seem, even if the philosopher may not have dreamt of our protagonists' predicaments. It is not perhaps wholly absurd to argue that, in different ways, Claudio and Angelo have suffered infinitely, both finding themselves plunged in a state of perdition, or simply despair. The comedic convention prevents human evil in its gruesome actuality;⁴³ a comedy's world is a test-tube world, the metaphor justified I think by the social experiment carried out by the Duke. The reality which pierces this bauble of the scheme is the initial anathema:

⁴² The wait for the execution is consistently fast-forwarded during the continuous on-stage sequence of events in Scene IV.ii, where "Shakespeare manipulates fictional narrative for dramatic effect" (*Measure*, ed. Gibbons, p. 155). Perhaps this "dramatic effect" consists in supplying illustration of the observation that time *gallops* "with a thief to the gallows, for though he go as softly as foot can fall, he thinks himself too soon there," as Rosalind puts it in *As You Like It*; see p. 67 below.

⁴³ There is a death in this comedy, to be sure, but the person who dies in Claudio's place, Bernardine, is – in sharp contrast to Claudio – totally indifferent to his fate.

Juliet and Claudio's illegitimate child, the all-too evident pregnancy "writ" on the woman's body, and the other child, whose existence binds Lucio to one of the prostitutes. How great the tragic potential of this piercing can be will become clear in our interpretation of *King Lear* in the final chapter.

The Duke's handling of mental suffering, the way it makes time so tangible and man's experience of it so distressing, causes in the audience a sense of something approaching epiphany. In *Measure for Measure* concrete time has been inflated, as it were, to embrace moral and religious dimensions. These dimensions are related to an awakened sensitivity to the short-time economy of the plot, its capacity for intense mental accommodation, but they also carry the fundamentally comedic message, that of never-too-late for atonement and compensation. Both the theological argument and Shakespeare's play depend for their moral efficacy on our capacity — if we are to enter into them — to imagine time. Yet, when we compare the theologian and the playwright, the latter seems to be more effective. Aquinas expects us to believe in the actuality of imagined time. Shakespeare shows and makes us experience the imaginary element of actual time.

Clocks, Entropy, and Resoluteness: the Closure of *As You Like It*

“Nothing but growth”

The idea of time in *As You Like It* has courted scholarly attention in much the same manner as that in *Macbeth*: many critics have seen in it a key to the play's meaning. In the words of Rawdon Wilson, “The importance of time in *As You Like It* can scarcely be overstated.”¹ Our considerations in this chapter have in part been stimulated by a desire to confront the existing opinion and especially to assess the soundness and validity of some philosophically-minded and philosophically-inspired interpretations. It is an undisputable fact that a considerable number of passages in the play ostensibly deal with time as an idea, which seems to justify intense critical concern. On the other hand, however, the material may be overabundant; the sheer number and variety of time-related speeches and allusions, strewn all over the comedy, have naturally occasioned the difficulty of providing for them a common denominator, a unifying conceptual framework. The water teems with fish, but many nets thrown in it easily mesh with one another. And shouldn't we also be interested in reasons for the great abundance of fish in this particular pond?

Before we seek for a common denominator or common ground of the kind mentioned, let us review some of the attempts to approach time in *As You Like It* and the results they have yielded. We need to be ready to point out simplifications and stereotyping as well as facile, vague, and im-

¹ Rawdon Wilson, “The Way to Arden: Attitudes Toward Time in *As You Like It*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 26 (1975), p. 17.

PLICIT valuations, so as to be able to avoid short-cutting – and consequent short-coming – in our subsequent analysis.

Among a number of approaches, Rawdon Wilson's ranks as one of the most daring philosophically but also as typical in its reliance on the common distinction between objective and subjective "times" and on an uncritical acceptance of the perceived pastoral timelessness of Arden with an implicit appraisal attached to it.² The critic ventures out to describe a clash between the following binaries: the "essentially Aristotelian" concept of time conceived as "the measurement of objective change," on the one hand, and "the subjective, or interior, time sense," on the other.³ The presence of these two senses or concepts of time (the vacillation of some critics is symptomatic)⁴ is reflected in the play's topography with its juxtaposition of the "urban polity" of Duke Frederick's court and "the pastoral way of life in the forest of Arden," with the meaningful transition from the one to the other.⁵

This point of departure leads to conclusions that sound problematic, some of them apparently unforeseen by the critic. The favourable evaluation of the sylvan setting has to do with the way Arden seems to promote illumination (as opposed to psychological ignorance and hypocrisy); and thus the ending should be seen as conveying a sense of spiritual self-discovery. (Let us observe, in passing, that this reading of the plot of our play, i.e. as one that depicts a growth towards authentic existence, is almost commonplace. In the words of Ricardo Quinones, "The passage of the play is toward the discovery of a nature free from posturing."⁶) The events as lived by some of the characters (especially Orlando) are a "mind's journey," which ends with the traveller being reinstated into the "polity." But this journey is also to be a process of gradual freeing oneself from mercantile and – implicitly – corrupt attitudes (suggested by Wilson in "commercial world of exchange"⁷), attitudes fostered in the dog-eat-dog jungle of communities that promote self-seeking.

² In *As You Like It* – writes Jay L. Halio – Shakespeare "exploits timelessness as a convention of the pastoral ideal;" Jay L. Halio "No Clock in the Forest," Time in *As You Like It*, *Studies in English Literature* 2 (1962), p. 197. Sylvan Barnet compares the a-temporal pastoral setting of *As You Like It* with *3 King Henry VI*, II.v. 31–37; Sylvan Barnet, "'Strange events': Improbability in *As You Like It*," *Shakespeare Studies* 4 (1968), p. 120.

³ Wilson, "The Way to Arden," pp. 17–18. A similar interpretation can be found in Halio, who perceives the change of attitudes in terms of a shift of "emphasis from the movement of a person, to the movement of time as apprehended" (Halio, "No Clock," p. 205). The "other" sense of time is that of duration and perception rather than movement.

⁴ Wilson, "The Way to Arden," passim.

⁵ Wilson, "The Way to Arden," p. 16.

⁶ Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 423.

⁷ Wilson, "The Way to Arden," p. 20; both quotations.

Commonly, scholars regard the growth of the mercenary mindset as symptomatic of the cultural transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, thus supplying a bigger picture (or rather a bigger story) for the action of this and other plays with similar topographies and shifts of setting (e.g. *The Tempest*). But what should we make of the fact that at the end of *As You Like It* the exiled characters return to the polity and reclaim it? If, as some wish to have it, the play favours the carefree sylvan alternative to the mercantile polity then this ending would be a self-inflicted falling-away from bliss. This interpretation seems to me dubious simply because it prevents us from making sense (i.e. from reaching a constructive explanation) of the final re-appropriation of the initially corrupt environment of the dukedom. But perhaps one should argue that spiritual growth in a forest (providing that we can speak of growth in a timeless element) justifies the return and makes the ending consistent with the rest of the play. We shall have to look into this.

There are further objections to the juxtaposition of forest and court. It does not sound like a good idea to construct a notion of polity-time on the basis of the Aristotelian notion of time as measure of motion (see below). Such constructions are vague and precarious, given the distance (various distances, in fact) between the world of the *Physics* and that of the Renaissance court. Besides, as Maurice Hunt has demonstrated, polity time (defined by the continuity of tradition and law), if inspected more closely, appears to have worth and significance in its own right in that it imposes basic temporal arrangements or “frames” with values attached to them.⁸ Among such frames is the law of primogeniture, or “the time of birth order,”⁹ violated by Duke Frederick; it imposes a hereditary succession of ownership and its violations occur at the price of proprietorial discontinuity and inevitably cause societal disturbance.

As You Like It depicts a variant of such violation and links it with the issue of inheritance in a broader sense, including spiritual heredity. The infringement is committed by Oliver against his younger brother Orlando. To begin with, Orlando makes the frame explicit: “The courtesy of nations allows you my better, in that you are the first-born, but the same tradition takes not away my blood [...]” (I.i. 45).¹⁰ Orlando does not object to the law but to its harmfully narrow observance by his brother: the breach of their father’s will and the resulting insufferable negligence and idleness of

⁸ Maurice Hunt, “*Kairos* and the Ripeness of Time in *As You Like It*,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 52 (June 1991), p. 115.

⁹ Hunt, “*Kairos* and the Ripeness of Time,” p. 116.

¹⁰ Quotations from *As You Like It* are from Agnes Latham’s Arden Shakespeare edition; see Bibliography for details.

Orlando (“I will no longer endure it [...]”; I.i. 24). He may not have inherited the property but he will not give up his lawful claim to the “blood,” which suggests the presence and validity of another type of continuity. This heredity, as we shall observe later, calls for verification by action and hence what Orlando desires from the very beginning is anything but pastoral timelessness.¹¹ We do not have to share Touchstone’s irony in order to call in doubt the attitudes of *dolce far niente*, blissful rusticity or care-free inactivity.¹² Indeed, we begin to suspect that some interpretations of *As You Like It* have been biased towards the widespread romantic, in particular Wordsworthian, opposition between the country and the city and the pertinent affixing of values. It takes some effort to denounce the anachronism of its uncritical application to Shakespeare.

Some balance between two senses of “time” has to be found; a return from forest to polity is as inescapable as it is desirable. It falls to Orlando to render this homecoming “psychologically” credible. The idea of maturation (rather than mere “growth”; see I.i. 14) conceived as the gradual shining forth of inherent, inborn virtue supplies the plot with a dynamically developing theme: Orlando’s father’s spirit begins to “grow” inside him (“[...] the spirit of my father, which I think is within me, begins to mutiny against this servitude.”; and then: “The spirit of my father grows strong in me [...]”; I.i. 21 and 70). Events, predictably, confirm this: the threat he poses to Oliver, his victory in the wrestling match, and finally his re-enactment of the innate nobility (of his heredity, we might say) as a verification of heroism towards the end of the play.¹³

“This wide and universal theatre ...”

One of the time-related ideas occurring in the play is that of the wheel of Fortune.¹⁴ This idea hardly supplies another fixed frame; rather, it is — in one of its senses — in opposition to fixity. And yet in Shakespeare, the

¹¹ Compare the ethically dubious (for the reasons discussed) idea of pastoral timelessness in Jay Halio’s article.

¹² Significant is Orlando’s contempt of keeping, breeding, stalling, staying of a human being in social-temporal backwaters, and his debunking of this as the marring of God’s work (I.i. 33–35).

¹³ This can be called a “foreshadowing” of matters that will occupy us in the final part of the book, devoted to the theme of nativity and those related to it: heredity and legitimacy.

¹⁴ The idea of Fortune will occupy us later, in our analyses of *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Pericles*.

idea of Fortune assumes a “temporal logic” of its own, which in the case of our comedy is shown on the example of Orlando’s story.

Fortune is conventionally prone to tergiversation; she is “the bountiful blind woman” and, contrasted with Nature, is the ruler of the world of human affairs in which she arbitrarily bestows her gifts. This fanciful image emerges from a humorous exchange between Rosalind and Celia in Scene II.i, as they try to “mock the good hussif Fortune from her wheel” (I.ii. 30–41). Nature may be praised for gifts of wit, and Touchstone, despised for his lack of intelligence, is merely “Nature’s natural.” Ill-endowed, he is “fixed” and as such set against the naturally noble Orlando (I.i. 164 ff), whose excellence strives to come forth (stirring Oliver’s envy) and who seeks confirmation of his qualities and personal fulfilment in action. Finding himself at the bottom of Fortune’s Wheel, Orlando ventures “abroad” to “buy” his fortunes (I.i. 74). By the logic of the image, he ought to ascend with any further revolution of the Wheel. The condition is that he climbs onto it and clings to it; to “buy one’s fortunes,” one has to put faith in Fortune. Is such faith authentic? When entering for the wrestling match, Orlando challenges Fortune and certainly thereby tilts the course of the action towards the “Aristotelian” movement and change. But because the match has been arranged, Orlando is not yet given a chance to mount the Wheel on its way up; the trajectory of his personal fate has not yet been clearly drawn. But then, does it make sense to believe in Fate or Fortune? Can one choose to become Fortune’s slave?¹⁵ Perhaps (with a glance forward, to *Pericles*) Fortune herself has to be redeemed in a manner similar to other symbols of inauthentic beliefs and attitudes; Fortune will not change things for us.¹⁶ As we shall see, most of the characters embrace (indeed, some of them seem to represent) more or less inadequate ideas of time, ideas polluted by bad faith.

Our main concern in this chapter is the time-related thematics in the concluding scenes of *As You Like It*. First, however, we turn to passages which testify to the comedy’s persistent preoccupation with the idea of time and ideas about time. This analysis will prepare us for an interpretation of the play’s ending, and our aim is to put these ideas to a test, or rather to observe Shakespeare do this in the course of the action.

There are three passages of some length which explicitly conceptualise time, i.e. where the nature of time as such and of human time is debated. All of them occur, symptomatically, in the earlier parts of the play;

¹⁵ The idea of “Fortune’s slave” occurs in *Antony and Cleopatra*. See p. 88 below.

¹⁶ For the idea of inauthentic existence I am obviously indebted to existentialism; especially to Sartre’s notion of bad faith (*la mauvaise foi*): a person’s belief that he or she is not a self-determining entity. But the idea that a person cannot choose to give up his or her freedom has a British root, namely in John Locke. See also p. 147 below.

I call their placement symptomatic because they indirectly express the characters' sense of being dis-placed into the sylvan surroundings of Arden. The list, in order of occurrence, is this:

- Jaques' account of Touchstone's contemplation of the dial (II.vii. 12 ff);
- Jaques' *theatrum humanae vitae* set piece ("All the world's a stage"; II.vii. 139 ff);
- the exchange between Rosalind-as-Ganymede and Orlando (III.ii. 194 ff).

The first thing to do when approaching these passages is to situate their meaning in their proper *dramatic* environment, and by doing so to contextualise and relativise them. This "relativisation" seems especially relevant for a close analysis of Jaques' account of Touchstone's solitary meditations on the human condition. We are inspired and guided in this approach by a general assumption which can be formulated thus: When characters share their personal ideas about time (or any other abstract notion, for that matter), the truth-value of those ideas is to be regarded as relative. I believe this assumption to be evident because it expresses the nature of the dramatic genre. Language in drama is not, at least not primarily, referential or descriptive but instrumental. Abstract notions and other general representations (personifications, etc.) occurring in drama are in fact doubly relative, to the character and to the situation.¹⁷ This supposition, when taken seriously into account, precludes facile generalisations concerning a play's "message" and specifically it ought to prevent criticism from ascribing universal ideas to the playwright. In our particular case, to relativise in this sense is to undertake a comprehensive investigation of the comedy's idea of time (without presupposing that there is such a thing) by turning to both particular ideas and statements (also to so-called set-pieces, i.e. one-theme passages of some length) and at the same time to the particulars of the situation (hardly ever simple) in which they happen to be embedded. To relativise is thus to particularise.

It would be an example of scholarly naivety, of which – alas! – much criticism is guilty, to seek or see in the two speeches delivered by Jaques an expression of Shakespeare's own, pessimistic or otherwise disused (borrowed and hackneyed), views on time.¹⁸ Indeed, we do not have to

¹⁷ This makes our approach "pragmatic" in the sense described in the Introduction.

¹⁸ This is Frederick Turner's contention; he gives a brilliant analysis of Jaques' seven-ages speech by uncovering in its generalisations an undercurrent of cynicism, static historicity, and a vivisectionist's objectivity; see Frederick M. Turner, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 34. However, the scholar does not hesitate to ascribe to Shakespeare directly ("Shakespeare means that," "according to Shakespeare," pp. 39–40) other ideas on time gleaned from other characters' speeches. I am not arguing that an inquiry into Shakespeare's beliefs is totally unwarrantable, but I seriously doubt whether we can find them in his characters' speeches.

search far and wide to repudiate Jaques' vision of human time as consisting of "seven ages": the vigour and loyalty of Adam and Orlando's successful overcoming of the "sighing" phase of love effectively undermine any attempt to attach a universal meaning to Jaques' set-piece and to make it support a wide conceptual framework. Apart from its *thematic* function (to convey ideas), the speech has a specific *dramatic* one to perform (to express an attitude, to shape a situation), which lends it further justification. An interpretive localisation or placement of this and similar passages, as we have argued, makes evident their conceptual contingency in that the ideas voiced in them appear to have a limited significance. It has to be admitted, however – in contrast to what is explicitly stated – that Shakespeare, in the figure of the banished Duke, courts universality:

DUKE SENIOR

Thou seest we are not all alone unhappy:
This wide and universal theatre
Presents more woeful pageants than the scene
Wherein we play in.

II.vii. 136

This is clearly a cue for Jaques, who instantly picks up on the idea of the theatre of human life. But this is precisely our point here: these universalising reflections are given a very particular context indeed. The company have been "surprised" while "los[ing] and neglect[ing] the creeping hours of time" (II.vii. 112), in Orlando's meaningful words, and Jaques delivers his speech while they wait for the youth to return with his aged and travel-weary companion, the Duke having promised Orlando to abstain from eating "till you return." The speech may be a little more than a means to fill out the interim, but it is also much less, or more, than a philosophic disquisition. In the passage quoted Shakespeare suggests that the "world's theatre" offers more engaging scenes than the one we are witnessing.

To be sure, there have been attempts at localisation and relativisation. To name one example, Frederick Turner attributes the ideas of petrified historical time to Jaques, biological or natural to Touchstone and personal or dynamic to Orlando and Rosalind.¹⁹ By granting preference to personal time, in view of its perceived authenticity, Turner seems to disregard *its* own localisation to the situation in which the passage on personal time occurs and which gives it dramatic and rhetorical justification, simply by making it *useful* there and then. In his conclusion, Turner qualifies his statements and finally argues that the ending of the play harmonises all

¹⁹ Turner, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Time*, p. 38.

the different “times”: “True love must ultimately deny both ‘historical’ and ‘natural’ time; though it must also find some reconciliation or *modus vivendi* with them.”²⁰ Confronted by different and conflicting views on time, the critic feels compelled to select one of them and advertise it as that of the playwright, after being romanticised; one idea among the many must be valid. If only things were as simple as that.

The predicament is the critic’s, entangled in paradoxes and contradictions, and does not have to be the dramatist’s. Shakespeare, unlike his critics, does not (not as a rule, at least) promise neat conceptual reconciliations. Unlike his critics, Shakespeare makes use of ideas and concepts without giving unequivocal preference to any single one and without caring much for conceptual hygiene. Neither do people in the real world; and to this extent Shakespeare may be called a realist, i.e. in view of the way he gives a reflection of the “muddle” in which abstractions and generalisations occur in actual life, coloured by personal interest. As we shall see, however, the reading of the comedy’s ending in terms of reconciliation between various temporal perspectives is largely legitimate. Equally appropriate seems to be seeing in Orlando an embodiment of both dynamism and authenticity. The fact that we cannot give unqualified preference to any of the explicitly stated views on time does not mean that all of them are in equal measure invalid. Besides, some situations have more temporal significance in them than others.

“How the world wags”

Let us return to the set-pieces and examine first the one in which Jaques gives an account of Touchstone’s reflections on the way of the world. This meditation or “moralising” on the clock (or “dial”), taken in its proper context, offers appealing if somewhat complicated matter for interpretation. Its significance for our concern lies in its addressing the ambiguous presence of the clock in the world of the comedy. Following our rule of relativisation, we shall interpret the passage (containing a double focus: in his account, Jaques tells us also about his response to what he has seen and heard) by taking into account external and even seemingly unimportant circumstances as well as its baffling semantic looseness.

Inspired by Helge Kökeritz’s attempt to address the bawdy quibbling in her book *Shakespeare’s Pronunciation* (1953), some criticism has been

²⁰ Turner, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Time*, p. 42.

concerned with ambiguities in Jaques' account of Touchstone's apparently straightforward and fairly decorous reflections on human time.²¹ On a superficial level, Touchstone, looking at his watch, muses over the inevitable transience of man's life. The *topoi* befit such musings:

As I do live by food, I met a fool [i.e. Touchstone],
 Who laid him down and basked him in the sun,
 And railed on Lady Fortune in good terms,
 In good set terms and yet a motley fool.
 "Good morrow, fool," quoth I. "No, sir," quoth he,
 "Call me not fool, till heaven hath sent me fortune."
 And then he drew a dial from his poke,
 And, looking on it, with lack-lustre eye,
 Says very wisely, "It is ten o'clock.
 Thus we may see," quoth he, "how the world wags:
 'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine,
 And after one hour more 'twill be eleven;
 And so from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe,
 And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot;
 And thereby hangs a tale." When I did hear
 The motley fool thus moral on the time,
 My lungs began to crow like chanticleer,
 That fools should be so deep-contemplative;
 And I did laugh, sans intermission,
 An hour by his dial.

II.vii. 12

Let us start with what seems to be an obvious parallel. Perhaps no other passage in Shakespeare bears more affinity to the Aristotelian definition of time:

When, therefore, we perceive the "now" as one, and neither as before and after in a motion nor as an identity but in relation to a "before" and an "after," no time is thought to have elapsed, because there has been no motion either. On the other hand, when we do perceive a "before" and an "after," then we say that there is time. For time is just this — number of motion in respect of "before" and "after."²²

Time, says the Philosopher, is "number" of motion; time is motion when observed and measured by a clock or any other device that "expresses"

²¹ See Jenijoy Le Belle, "Touchstone's Dial: Horology or Urology," *English Language Notes* 24 (1987), pp. 19–25.

²² Aristotle, *Physics*, Book IV, 219 b. See Bibliography for details of the edition used.

our consciousness based on that observation. Because we cannot measure the present moment (when nothing has passed and nothing is to come), the past and the future make the perception of time possible and allow us to define it. Inasmuch as the past and the future are dimensions of time, there is an element of circularity in Aristotle's definition. The meaning, however, is clear enough: perception of change is the condition that makes time (and the idea of time) possible. There seems to be an Aristotelian ring to Touchstone's speech and we now proceed to examine how far the affinity really goes.

To begin with, Touchstone describes change ("ripe and ripe," "rot and rot"), rather than "pure" motion. Moreover, he relates this perception to time's passage read off a timepiece. The reflections (Aristotle's and the fool's) go in opposite directions: whereas the philosopher starts with motion as a universal phenomenon to arrive at an abstract notion of time, thus grounding the possibility of measuring, or "numbering," and defining it, the fool starts with mechanical and measured time and then fills it with meaning, captured in the word "to wag." Touchstone's meditation sounds cynical (inauthentic)²³ and "foolish" inasmuch as his time also seems to be empty; not physically empty, like the "t" in a mathematical equation, but empty in the human way: not making much sense. As a response to the melancholy mediation, Jaques "fills" the fool's "empty time" with his laughter. Once more, debating time's nature is a means of passing time, an entertainment, and — do we need to remind ourselves of this? — not only for an exile such as Jaques and his audience but for Shakespeare and his audience as well.

But perhaps there is more to the fool's speech. As Jenijoy Le Belle pointed out (drawing on Kökeritz), the subject of Touchstone's observation and concern might not be a clock at all, but, somewhat bewilderingly, his own penis.²⁴ Le Belle draws attention to Jaques' account and suggests that it is a generalising interpretation of the potentialities of the off-stage

²³ Let us observe in passing Touchstone's manner of filling the empty idea of Fortune with organic content. His method can be called biological reductionism: ripening and rotting, generation and corruption, are here equivalent to the pendulum-like movement of Fortune's wheel.

²⁴ Taking into account the use of homophones and the ambiguity of diction, the substitutions would be as follows: "hand [of the clock]" = "penis" (see also *Romeo and Juliet*, II.iv. 112–113); "poke" = "codpiece"; the meaning of "draw" is clear, given the context; "hour" = "whore" (Fortune is traditionally also a strumpet; see *Hamlet*, II.ii. 235); "to ripe[n]" may be suggestive of erection (especially in the context of the hand of the clock moving to the noon position, as in Mercutio's pun in *Romeo and Juliet*), while "rotting" — of venereal infection (see also editor's note in ed. Latham, p. 49). Touchstone is then "clinically examining himself for the pox" (Le Belle, "Touchstone's Dial," p. 22). For this sense of "rotten" see also *Pericles*, IV.ii. 9.

event he recounts and the speech that accompanied it. This shifts emphasis to the report. The critic concludes that “the body/bawdy action is primary. The secondary discourse is the philosophical speculation introduced by Jaques on the basis of witnessing this profoundly physical and non-philosophical performance.”²⁵ A “urological” interpretation may shed some light on the hidden ambiguities of Touchstone “philosophising,” yet its basic meaning remains pretty much the same: an experience of empty clock-time as a starting point for a rather disheartening insight into the human condition. So there indeed is more to this speech than it being a mere inversion of the Aristotelian argument.

“There’s no clock in the forest”

Touchstone’s “moralising” raises yet another issue, because it collides with Orlando’s statement that “there’s no clock in the forest” (III.ii. 295). This issue has commonly been regarded as crucial in any interpretation of the play.²⁶ Of course, if one were to make much of the quibbling just discussed (where “clock” means “penis”), then the apparent contradiction would disappear; and indeed there are scholars who insist on Arden’s timelessness. Yet, isn’t this an even grosser contradiction? Does not the fool’s speech make us aware of the presence of other “clocks,” biological or otherwise? This seems to be the crucial point of his moralising: the nagging awareness, not merely of the incessant flux, or flow of things, but of their changing, and, admitting the quibbling suggestive of venereal disease, of universal entropy and decay – even in the vaguely pastoral environment of Arden. One might still wish to argue that in forests there are not clocks; Nature does not make them nor do “naturals” know them. But then the “spectacle” and its “moral” make palpable an intrusion, upon the idyllic setting, of human time, of the human condition, thus of civilisation with its temporal concerns and frames. Blossoming forth and rotteness, the burgeoning of life and carnal deterioration are natural enough, but only as long as they do not pertain to man; once they are related to man, they become part of that “other” temporality. By this process of mak-

²⁵ Le Belle, “Touchstone’s Dial,” p. 24.

²⁶ See the title of Jay Halio’s article, cited above. Turner attaches much significance to this apparent absence of the clock: “the human measurement of time has no meaning here” (p. 29). Barnet’s comment has already been mentioned: there is no clock in the forest “despite Touchstone’s dial,” and the scholar concludes that “the characters in Arden are in a sort of suspended animation” (Barnet, “Strange events,” pp. 120–121).

ing-human, “wagging” too can become a measure of human time. To put it differently, if there is a message that Shakespeare seems to be conveying here, it is this: in drama, there is no “natural” time, if that idea were to mean some sort of time not permeated by human consciousness. It is the job of the playwright – it certainly was Shakespeare’s – suggestively to portray such permeations. *Measure for Measure* is one example and *Hamlet* another. In the world of *As You Like It*, to return to the quibbling once more, human time is represented as an infection: “[t]he pox-rotten Touchstone has brought time and disease into the pastoral forest,” insists Le Belle.²⁷

But biological, physiological or even “venereal” interpretations of the Touchstone passage ought not to occlude its more universal meaning: the awareness of change, of time’s entropic “progress,” also in the paradisiacal scenery of Arden. Even if we concede the existence of a concrete biological signified (the penis rather than a timepiece), the man-related and universal meaning is still conspicuous and actually renders the case more credible. Like any other part of the human body (indeed, perhaps *more convincingly* than any other member of the human body), the sexual organ can serve as a time-reading device.²⁸ But, of course, not of the time of Aristotle’s physics, but of the filled and lived time of human experience, which is never indifferent or objectively measurable and is always observer-relative. Touchstone sees in his life the workings of “strumpet” Fortune, which causes him to complain or “rail” at her.

Any given concretisation of human time suspends the meaning in mid-air, so to speak, between the impersonal continuum of measurable movement and the lived changeability keenly felt by a creature aware of its (his) mortal nature, or the finiteness of existence. This awareness and this sense of time cannot be found just by “looking on a dial,” and certainly not in a matter of hours. This makes the latter part of Touchstone’s speech sound so absurd. The condition of being-towards-death (“we rot and rot”), to use Martin Heidegger’s jargon,²⁹ cannot be read off a clock, but it *can be conveyed* or “projected” onto any time-measuring device. And to broaden the interpretation with another of Heidegger’s insights, the ambiguity of Touchstone’s self-analysis, no matter how obscene or shocking we may think it, must not blind us to the bare fact that time’s nature is here discovered through or in some kind of action. It is Heidegger’s asser-

²⁷ Le Belle, “Touchstone’s Dial,” p. 23. The implications of his marriage to Audrey become especially poignant.

²⁸ It is one of the major contentions of these analyses that the organs and functions of procreation are in Shakespeare essentially related to the idea of human time.

²⁹ To be sure, Touchstone would, on Heidegger’s view, live inauthentically towards death; in contrast to Orlando. We shall return to this distinction.

tion in the context of his existential hermeneutics (and, more broadly, that of phenomenology) that time-reckoning derives from our preoccupation with things. On this view, clockwork time, as a collection of empty “nows,” is derivative, and so is the Aristotelian “measure of motion.”³⁰ What comes first is a “natural clock,” and it would be appropriate for Touchstone to detect one *on* or *in* his own body, despite it being so unlike the obvious natural chronometer, the Sun. The point made in existential hermeneutics or phenomenology is, to simplify matters, that before measuring motion as such we “measure” the changes in our being, which seems to be the drift of Touchstone’s reflections. So, a fool and a philosopher do meet after all, thanks to Shakespeare.

This does not level out all the ambiguities of the passage analysed, especially in the broader context of the entire play. The dubious existence of the clock in Arden will occupy us still further.

“The lazy foot of Time”

It might seem that in our analysis so far we have digressed from the task of interpreting the closure of *As You Like It*. However, the ideas we have been discussing are relevant for a time-focused assessment of what happens in the second half of the play, which features Orlando’s heroic action and the play’s hymeneal conclusion.

Of the three time-debating passages, the exchange between Rosalind and Orlando has usually been regarded as one which best highlights a changed attitude to time caused by the topographical shift from the polity to Arden. As we have mentioned, Orlando’s statement that “there’s no clock in the forest” has commonly served as a leitmotif for a time-oriented analysis of the *entire* play, the assumption being that somehow Shakespeare has captured here the meaning of the whole action. A change to an “internalised” sense of time, perceived as more “authentic” — the “Wordsworthian” argument goes — has been caused by this restoration of a primeval state of communion with Nature and thus of basic human sentiments. This state has been attained by Orlando thanks to the intercession of Rosalind-as-Ganymede, thanks to her guidance and training.

³⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), sections 80 and 81. Heidegger “deduces” time’s irreversibility and destructiveness from our intimate awareness of mortality.

No doubt a kind of materialism or mercantilism initially marks the way in which Shakespeare presents the life of the exiles. We may wish to see Orlando's ruthless assault on the banished Duke's party in Act II as an illustration of an attitude contracted in the polity and brought over into the forest; this would make a parallel with Touchstone's physical condition (if real, and with his cynicism and melancholy). Orlando's address to the refugees may be an expression of an "imported" (inauthentic, assumedly) time-sense according to which life in the forest is mere idleness and as such must be described in disparaging terms: "But whate'er you are / That [...] / *Lose and neglect* the creeping hours of time" (II.vii. 109–112).³¹ This negative diction is symptomatic. Indeed, negativity is here doubly stressed: time outside the polity creeps and there seems to be no use for it. Life in the forest, rather than bringing freedom from care, is infected by an acute sense of deprivation.

Rosalind's argumentation, her insistence that there *is* a clock in the forest, is of double consequence. In terms of dramaturgy, it prepares the audience for the ensuing enlivening of the action (which will depend largely on Rosalind's appointing dates and Orlando's mistiming). We shall look more closely at this in the next section. But the point that she makes in her interview with Orlando also fits the play's broader idiom and links up with the problems posed by Touchstone's equivocal spectacle. The point that Rosalind is trying to get across has little to do with timelessness.

ROSALIND

I pray you, what is't o'clock?

ORLANDO

You should ask me what time o' day; there's no clock in the forest.

ROSALIND

Then there is no true lover in the forest; else sighing every minute and groaning every hour would detect the lazy foot of Time, as well as a clock.

III.ii. 294

³¹ Compare Orlando's lines earlier, about the exiles "*fleet[ing]* the time *carelessly*, as they did in the golden world" (I.i. 117–119). Relevant is also Celia's "I like this place, / And willingly could *waste* my time in it" (II.iv. 92–93). From a different perspective, the exiles' attitude thus portrayed is disclaimed in the very introductory speech by the banished Duke (II.i. 1 ff), now an "insider" rather than an observer. Writes Hunt: "Time [...] is not experienced 'fleetingly' in the pastoral world. [...] [T]he temporal revolution of the seasons [...] cannot be rushed. These images contradict the idea of time's fleeting passage of pastoral mankind" (Hunt, "*Kairos* and the Ripeness of Time," p. 119). These remarks do not undermine the fact that a Golden Age time-sense in the fictive world of the play cannot be reframed in affirmative terms.

What is Rosalind implying? Generally speaking, her idea seems to be that feelings, situations, and occupations influence our sense of passing time. Love-sickness may lengthen the hours (as also in the case of Romeo and Juliet) and the lover becomes aware of the passing of time and “hears” the lazy foot of time, when away from the loved one. The love-sick person’s predicament is not very different from that of an exile destined to “lose and neglect” time in a forest. In such cases, time makes itself felt, which is also true of solitary confinement (see the section on *Richard II* below). To time’s relativity to the person who lives it, its “diverse paces” (“Time travels in divers paces with divers persons.” III.ii. 302), Rosalind adds an inner sensitivity to its passage.³² There is an inner clock that detects and measures time’s variable pace. Time may still be the Aristotelian measure of motion with respect to before and after, but now the mind is the measuring device. Some critics display surprising determination in their attempts to read an absence of clocks into Rosalind’s argument,³³ but this is in overt conflict with what she states elsewhere (see IV.i. 41). Rosalind insists that a true lover cannot help but detect the passing of time. Whether mockingly or not, Shakespeare plays with both these monumental ideas of time: the infinitely divisible continuum of instants (“divide a minute into a thousand parts”; IV.i. 41), and the mentally extendible moment, cosmological time and psychological time, world time and soul time.³⁴

Rosalind may be said to postulate some sort of interpersonal synchronicity, preferably in accordance with the ticking away of the mechanical chronometer. To make social intercourse feasible there needs to be a clock; co-existence of people is only possible if personal watches have been synchronised. But this has little to do with positive timelessness. The absence or uselessness of a shared “synchroniser” in the forest makes its “inhabitants” collide with one another, live at best in separate clusters rather than a community. This social disjointedness, as exemplified in the chance meeting between Jaques and Touchstone, anticipates the predicament of the survivors on Prospero’s island.³⁵

³² Turner gives a close analysis of the exchange between Orlando and Rosalind-as-Ganymede; see *Shakespeare and the Nature of Time*, pp. 38 ff.

³³ “The true lover is concerned not with measurable and divisible time, but with moments.” Turner, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Time*, p. 41.

³⁴ Ricoeur ascribes the ideas to Aristotle and Augustine respectively; Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), vol. 3, pp. 12–22.

³⁵ The socially synchronising function of the clock can also be found in *Macbeth* and could be related to the fatal failure to harmonise depicted in *Romeo and Juliet*. In the latter tragedy, despite the presence of the clock and the calendar, other and more basic means of effecting social harmony fail to work.

There is a tendency in criticism to overestimate the benefits of Rosalind's influence on Orlando. As we have seen, one cannot naively ascribe to her an awareness of the regenerative property of time.³⁶ It may be true that the inhabitants of the forest, beset by enforced idleness, come to know another sense of time, the Augustinian *distentio animi*,³⁷ i.e. the durational time, as opposed to the Aristotelian measured motion. But to argue that the former is more "authentic" than the latter would be an exercise in imposing arbitrary valorisation on the play's action. The opinion that Rosalind's training increases Orlando's awareness of time conceived as "internal duration" is both vague and blind to the fact that it is Rosalind-as-Ganimede who impresses on Orlando's mind an acute awareness of the clock and of the de-personalised succession of infinitesimally divisible moments.³⁸ A lover *should be* keenly aware of time's passage, and so, informally speaking, she tries to make him a punctuality freak and we can only be glad that she fails. It cannot be denied that, under Rosalind's influence, Orlando matures as a person, but it is no accident that this transformation finds its apex precisely at the point where he has to violate the strictures of punctuality she has been trying to impose. If then Rosalind's training (her games and exercises can be seen as so many tricks to pass the time) has not brought about her disciple's spiritual maturity, its cause has to be sought elsewhere. This makes necessary a reinterpretation of the rescue scene.

³⁶ As in Hunt's article, where Rosalind is described as blossoming influence on Orlando: "Orlando romantically blooms under Rosalind's cultivation" ("*Kairos* and the Ripeness," p. 125).

³⁷ "From this it appears to me that time is nothing other than extendedness; but extendedness of what I do not know. This is a marvel to me. The *extendedness* may be of the mind itself. For what is it I measure, I ask thee, O my God, when I say either, roughly, 'This time is longer than that,' or, more precisely, 'This is twice as long as that.' I know that I am measuring time." Augustine, *Confessions*, Book XI, Chapter 26 (emphasis mine; see Bibliography for details of the edition used). In the Latin original the relevant passage reads: "Inde mihi visum est nihil esse aliud tempus quam *distentionem*; sed cuius rei, nescio, et mirum, si non ipsius *animi*." While Aristotle is concerned with succession, Augustine is with continuity or permanence.

³⁸ For this reason, I cannot choose but disagree with Wilson's opinion: "The time which Orlando has not kept is scarcely the objective time of the polity, of course, but rather the interior time of the lover's awareness. This interior form of time characterizes the time-sense of Arden" (Wilson, "The Way to Arden," p. 22).

“And therefore take the present time”

Maurice Hunt has given a convincing interpretation of *As You Like It* by applying to the plot the idea of the appropriate moment or *kairos*.³⁹ Steering clear of such dubious ideas as “timelessness” and “interior duration,” Hunt has been able to turn our attention to socially crucial aspects of the issue of time; the episode in which our hero wrestles with a lioness is accorded the place in the interpretation that it rightfully deserves. Writes Hunt: “Orlando does break his promise when seizing a redemptive moment that takes precedence over courting her [Rosalind].” This redemption in equal measure concerns the “rescuer” (Oliver) and Orlando himself: “Orlando courageously seizes an opportune moment in the passage of time’s natural ripening and rotting to express his brotherly love. In doing so, he *momentarily recovers* the Golden Age.”⁴⁰ Orlando not only “redeems the rottenness of time,” in Hunt’s phrasing (referring chiefly to Touchstone’s reflections on the dial); he enacts an unforeseen (if not unprecedented) situation, in which action exposes and overcomes inauthenticity and posturing, Jaques’, Touchstone’s *and* Rosalind’s.

To the lioness episode we shall apply Heidegger’s notion of resoluteness. This will help us to iron out difficulties and prevent misunderstandings.⁴¹ According to Heidegger, authentic temporality consists in responding to the call of the situation by re-enacting a past example and at the same time overcoming forgetfulness about death. We might simplify his conception and say that resoluteness consists in heroism. The circumstances of Orlando’s rescue of Oliver supply, in my opinion, a model example for the kind of situation Heidegger has in mind. The feat re-enacts Orlando’s heroic past and thereby recovers his legacy (or “heritage”) as son of Sir Rowland de Boys.⁴² At the same time, the situation makes him

³⁹ In the article already quoted. See also Donn Taylor, ““Try in time in despite of a fall”: Time and Occasion in *As You Like It*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 24 (1982), pp. 121–136.

⁴⁰ Hunt, “*Kairos* and the Ripeness,” p. 127.

⁴¹ It has to be borne in mind that this conception is an integral part of Heidegger’s search after some ultimate idea of time; in other words, he aims to provide a philosophical foundation for the common understanding of and attitudes to time.

⁴² As in the following speech: “I am no villain. I am the youngest son of Sir Rowland de Boys: he was my father, and he is thrice a villain that says such a father begot villains.” Heidegger develops his idea of resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) in section 62 of *Being and Time*. The ideas of heritage, handing down and fate are discussed in section 74. “The resoluteness in which Dasein comes back to itself, discloses current factual possibilities of authentic existing, and discloses them *in terms of the heritage* which that resoluteness, as thrown, *takes over*.” (p. 383; Heidegger’s emphasis).

confront death. Moreover, when responding to the call of the moment, Orlando responds to the voice of conscience. Whether we interpret this moment as a “moment of vision” (as Heidegger’s *Augenblick* has been translated⁴³) or as *kairos* does not change its climactic nature, its essential features being defiance of mortal danger in order to find one’s lost self (“a heritage of potentialities,” *Erbe* in German⁴⁴), and thereby uniting in the present instant the dimensions of the past and the future. This moment of emergency has the value of highest priority and raises the hero above other modes of being-in-the-world,⁴⁵ and especially those where one speaks rather than acts. Orlando’s feat exposes as inauthentic such time-related activities as discoursing upon the ages of man, moralising upon universal transience and decay, roaming the forest in the posture of a love-sick rhymester (Orlando acting out the lover’s part), and preaching the observance of the clock and punctuality. Also, it reminds us that with Shakespeare the *playwright* we always have to be on our guard and keep reminding ourselves that time-talk will ever be so much time-talk, i.e. that words never turn into action. At the end of the day, time-talk is time-wasting.⁴⁶ As Ricoeur puts it in the jargon of Heideggerian hermeneutics: “Anticipatory resoluteness alone escapes the dilemma: always having time or not having time. It alone makes the isolated now an authentic instant, a moment of vision (*Augenblick*).”⁴⁷

An iconographic interpretation of the heroic triple-encounter, as a critic calls it, between Orlando, Oliver and the lioness, confirms the relevance of the idea of resoluteness.⁴⁸ Apart from embodying lethal danger,

⁴³ “Moment of vision” rather infelicitously hints at “illumination,” while *Augenblick*, similarly to the Polish word *okamgnienie* refers to the brevity of an instant, as in a situation calling for immediate action, an emergency. Unlike the wrestling match in Act I, this is a moment that elicits response and as such depends on what in football jargon is referred to as “reading the play.”

⁴⁴ “In [authentic resoluteness] Dasein hands itself down to itself, free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen.” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 435.

⁴⁵ Inauthentic modes of being in the world are, according to Heidegger, modes of fallenness; an entropic worldview might be an example.

⁴⁶ George Herbert’s poem “Time” (1633) uses this idea to produce a witty conclusion; on hearing the speaker’s elaborate oration addressed to Time, Time (conventionally personified as Reaper, etc.) realises that speaking is for the man a means of playing for time, of putting off the moment of reckoning: “He [says Time about the speaker] does not crave less time, but more.”

⁴⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, p. 83. In the scene of rescue, Orlando undergoes a kind of awakening to actuality: “[...] pacing through the forest, / Chewing the food of sweet and bitter fancy, / Lo, what befell! He threw his eye aside, / And mark what object did present itself” (IV.iii. 100).

⁴⁸ Raymond B. Waddington, “Moralising the Spectacle: Dramatic Emblems in *As You Like It*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33 (1982). Waddington claims that “Oliver’s rescue draws its

the lioness can symbolise Orlando's state of mind; he has to come to terms with his resentment: "[t]hus Orlando grapples with his own wrath and vengeance." In the light of the heroic tradition, the rescue may be reminiscent of one of Hercules' labours, and Raymond Waddington notes that its symbolism may vary depending on the audience. Without insisting on this or that symbolic interpretation, however, we need to stress the important aspect, that any added but largely external significance goes along with the idea of heritage in the Heideggerian sense, as a range of heroic possibilities which call for re-enactment (the rising of the father's spirit in the son, as Shakespeare would put it). This idea in turn relates us back to that of set-frames as guarantors of social cohesion and continuity. All this considered, Orlando's rescue of Oliver, far from being an arbitrarily invented incident, is an indispensable element in the play's complex engagement with human time, and this precisely because of what is performed rather than said.

"Break an hour's promise in love!"

The set-speeches in *As You Like It* are not exceptional in their two-sidedness, being relevant at once mimetically and thematically, even though this linkage is susceptible to being misconstrued or even overlooked altogether. The very amount of discourse going on must give us pause, as must also the number of symbolic suggestions and iconographic situations in the Arden part of the action. Where is the action proper? Certainly not in the tableaux and the speeches describing or accompanying them. The rescue of Oliver is a case in point – even though we have seen in it a surplus of action over word – in that it is an offstage event and moreover an "event" of iconographic nature. Doing seems to have been displaced by speaking and looking-on or imagining; "Lo, what befell!" – says Oliver to introduce his account of the event, but we still remain hearers. "Notoriously, – argues Raymond Waddington – *As You Like It* is a comedy of words and not actions."⁴⁹ But this is not the whole truth. There is no denying, on the one hand, that a verbally painted emblem or a song slow down the pace of the action proper; in *As You Like It* they un-

significance from a cluster of iconographic commonplaces," and as an illustration cites emblems (from Alciati and Peacham) which identify: "lioness" with "wrath" and "bare-handed triumph over a lion" with "bravery."

⁴⁹ Waddington, "Moralising the Spectacle," p. 157.

mistakably perform the function of illustrating or even imitating the manner of time-passing characteristic of the sylvan setting.⁵⁰ On the other hand, such “insets” and “interludes” have to be regarded as belonging to a “bigger picture”; i.e. we must keep in view the incessant progress of the action even if it may seem to have come to a halt. Apposite is the seven-ages speech, which as we have seen provides the required off-stage time for Orlando to perform the task of fetching the fainting Adam to the spot of the exiles’ repast.⁵¹ A speech on human time plays here the role of an entertaining time-filler. Rosalind’s punctuality regime administered to Orlando can be justified on similar grounds, but the repercussions of her conversations and games with Orlando are significant for Shakespeare’s management of audience perception in Acts III through V. Were we inclined to put it facetiously, we could “accuse” Shakespeare of teasing the audience: time is being talked about because it is not passing.

There is something specific about a comedic handling of time and Shakespeare seems to have been determined to find this something out. Little wonder, then, that a “romantic” comedy such as *As You Like It* attracts critics and lends itself readily to a study of relations between dramatic and thematic treatments of time. To make salient the playwright’s exploratory resolve let us come back to the apparent paradox of the clock and its dubious existence in the forest. Touchstone’s emblematic moralising, with or without its quibbling, allows us to infer that a clock is either absent or useless; the “progress” of biological decay can be detected without its assistance. The clock can be substituted by natural means of reckoning time’s passage.⁵² Having said this, we need to reject the idea of a substitution of the Aristotelian time by an inner time-sense, because the play will not support it. Rosalind persists in imposing temporal strictures upon Orlando, who – oddly – refuses to protest against her reminding him that there is no instrument properly to time his conduct; it is the mind (especially that of a love-sick person) that makes time infinitely divisible. Contrary to his previous denial, as well as against the idea of

⁵⁰ On the decelerating and pacifying function of the song in drama see Pütz, *Die Zeit*, pp. 138 ff. Making this concession, Pütz goes on to say that songs, besides a lyrical one, may also perform the dramatic function of future-indication (*Vorgriff*, pp. 140–141).

⁵¹ In a consistently iconographic interpretation, Orlando’s heroic feat is yet another emblem and is interpreted as such by Duke Senior; see Waddington, “Moralising the Spectacle,” pp. 158 ff.

⁵² A replacement of clockwork time can only be effected by resorting to images of cyclic movement, analogous to that of the travelling of the hand on the dial. Duke Senior’s reference to “seasons’ difference” (in Scene II.i) evokes time’s cyclicity or the natural rhythms. In this sense, time “was associated with the passing of seasons, the alteration of night and day, the movement of the stars, etc.”; Wilson, “The Way to Arden,” p. 23 (note 20).

Arden's imputed timelessness, Orlando's education as lover involves making his sense of passing time acute:

ROSALIND

[...] Why how now Orlando, where have you been all this while? You a lover! And [i.e. if] you serve me such another trick, never come in my sight more.

ORLANDO

My fair Rosalind, I come within an hour of my promise. [i.e. I am late, but less than an hour]

ROSALIND

Break an hour's promise in love! He that will divide a minute into a thousand parts, and break but a part of the thousandth part of a minute in the affairs of love, it may be said of him that Cupid hath clapped him o' th' shoulder, but I'll warrant him heart-whole.

IV.i. 36

One may be tempted to accept Wilson's interpretation: "The consciousness of time continues [in Orlando] but is transferred [thanks to Rosalind] to the interior of the mind's apperception." Let us ignore the anachronism; we have already poured some irony on the critics' insistence on modernising Shakespeare. But neither the Kantian "apperception" nor the Husserlian "inner time-consciousness" seem to solve the paradox of Rosalind imposing strict temporal obligations,⁵³ evident in the mocking reference to divisible and mechanically measured time. Incidentally, Shakespeare seems to have been aware of what Bergson would describe as the intellect's tendency to "spatialise" time; but in our passage Rosalind evidently plays with the idea of "infinitely divisible continuum." The passage in fact mocks a philosophic discourse⁵⁴ and the figure of Cupid, which rounds it off, appears in the role that is traditionally played by the fleeting Occasion.⁵⁵ Indirectly, the passage mocks also the idea of punctu-

⁵³ There are obvious references to the clock later in the same scene: "(Rosalind to Orlando) Two o'clock is your hour? [...] if you break one jot of your promise, or come one minute behind your hour, I will think you the most pathetic break-promise [...]" (IV.i. 176).

⁵⁴ Consider the following passage in Augustine: "[...] And that one hour itself passes away in fleeting fractions. The part of it that has fled is past; what remains is still future. If any fraction of time be conceived that cannot now be divided even into the most minute momentary point, this alone is what we may call time present. But this flies so rapidly from future to past that it cannot be extended by any delay." *Confessions*, Book IX, Chapter 15.

⁵⁵ I cannot support my interpretation with the existing annotations to this notoriously difficult passage. My reading is this: "He has allowed Cupid to go right past him and his heart has not been broken (i.e. is still whole)."

ality (or, as we might put it, the idea of absolute romantic synchrony); infinite divisibility makes it impossible to “seize” the moment and therefore no lover can ever be on time. The idea that “Orlando wastes his time in the forest by poetising Rosalind, [whereas] she resolves to seize the moment”⁵⁶ finds no confirmation (Where do we see *her* “seize the moment”?);⁵⁷ besides, it does not solve our very mundane problem, either. And if a director decided to put a clock or a dial on the stage, its presence would either be found incongruous or force the audience into an altered perception of the apparently time-free pastoral atmosphere.

Even so, Shakespeare makes the clock *verbally* present. To appreciate fully the comedy’s treatment of time we need to recognise this presence, indeed its fundamental role. This recognition will inevitably raise the interpretation to a meta-dramatic level, where it becomes clear that the clock ticking away in Arden at once measures audience perception. In other words, it seems vital that the audience should be kept aware of clock-time; there may be no clock in the forest, but there is always one on the stage. The grafting of the clock on the trees of Arden is to be seen as a concession on the part of the playwright, a signal that — even if his characters, absurdly, may have lost their awareness amid all their time-related discourse — he keeps time and remains mindful of the expectations of his public. In a much earlier comedy, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, Shakespeare, rather ruthlessly, makes a piece of bad news ruin the festive mood at the end of the play. In a much later comedy, *The Tempest*, the concurrence of action with perception is maintained with unprecedented self-consciousness and precision; Prospero keeps reminding us that time is fleeting. In *As You Like It*, as we have seen, Rosalind’s idea of synchronicity between lovers has a direct bearing on the time economy in the “second movement” of the play. The clock is of continuous assistance in the managing of dramatic tension (suspense even) in the space between Orlando’s promise of return (IV.i. 170), its repetition by Oliver (IV.iii. 100), and the resolution in the latter’s account of the potentially tragic off-stage events.

With the coming of the next day, the day appointed for the weddings, this manner of time reckoning is partially cancelled, which coincides with the termination of Orlando’s training in punctuality. Admittedly, clock-time has finally been invalidated. Orlando’s rescue of his brother indicates an urgency and a readiness of a higher order, superior to the time-sense of a lover;⁵⁸ it is also a direct response to the demand of the moment, to an

⁵⁶ Wilson “The Way to Arden,” p. 23.

⁵⁷ Here is certainly much water for the mill of gender-oriented criticism.

⁵⁸ Rosalind can also be playfully unromantic: “men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but not for love” (IV.i. 101).

emergency. I believe that Bergson and Heidegger would appreciate the way in which clock-time has been overcome. As previously Rosalind in curbing Orlando's verse-mongering, now Orlando disciplines her in urging that their verbal love-games should come to an end:

ORLANDO

I can live no longer by thinking.

ROSALIND

I will weary you then no longer with idle talking.

V.ii. 50

The play is being roused from the idyllic slumber. The unequivocal symptom is the use of next-day references. Appropriately, it is Orlando who is responsible for the appointment (repeatedly made) of "tomorrow" for the day of the wedding and it is he who causes Rosalind to arrange the recognition scene (V.ii. 41). With Touchstone's impatience at the time-keeping song, the action moves to the eagerly anticipated next day. All the promises are repeated (V.iv. 5 ff), after which Rosalind and Celia leave the stage to reappear in the company of Hymen. The masque celebrating marital union ensues, but is interrupted by the arrival of Orlando and Oliver's brother bringing the news of Duke Frederick's decision to resign, retire, and repent. The polity with its concerns has claimed its due.

Apart from a superficial parallel with *Love's Labour's Lost*, the fifth-act intrusion of the news (the revelatory closures in *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* fall into a different category), there is a deeper affinity in the lifting of illusion and putting an end to illusory time. *Love's Labour's Lost* departs from convention by postponing the resolution to a not-to-be-shown, distant future. In *As You Like It*, the meta-dramatic element is contained within the conventional epilogue (V.iv. 198–220). With the Duke's invitation to merry-making (V.iv. 196) the action proper extends into post-dramatic festivities in a manner resembling the ending of *Much Ado About Nothing*, the Lenten moods reserved for the penitent, the melancholy, and the malcontent. Marriage fulfils here the conventional function of closure, but there is also a sense that too much "thinking" and "talking" has been going on: one cannot live long "by thinking," and "idle talking" becomes wearisome.

Do we hear in Orlando's complaint and Rosalind's admission the voice of the dramatic poet unsure about just how much idleness he can get away with? Perhaps we do. But then, despite the surplus of word over action, there is also a sense that debating time is a means to make lighter the burden of actually living it. Marriage, now eagerly anticipated but as yet regarded as so much empty future, will supply the stuff with which

to replace idleness. Rosalinds and Orlandos will return in tragedies and romances bearing different names, and – alas – no longer able to afford being idle. Chronologically, *As You Like It* does not come after *Measure for Measure*, but here it has provided us with a much-desired interval before, first with the tragedies, we dive again in the troubled currents of actuality.

Two Tragic Movements



Tides and Tidings: the Opening of *Antony and Cleopatra*

“The varying tide”

Approaching *Antony and Cleopatra* one finds it difficult to withstand the temptation to note various parallels between it and *Macbeth*. Some of the most interesting ones concern the problem of time and therefore we shall not avoid examining them. Ample time-oriented criticism has been devoted to *Macbeth*, but we shall see that the other play, the great Roman tragedy of state and passion, merits an equal amount of attention. In *Antony and Cleopatra* we find time-related factors active in the build-up of thematic interest similar to those in *Macbeth*. These are chiefly various ideas about time and the characters' attitudes which those ideas express. Our analysis of *As You Like It* has made us alert to this link and to the need to establish a dramatic (situational) context for time-related beliefs.

Already the introductory dialogue between the two main protagonists arouses this interest in time. The eponymous couple represent and impersonate different senses of time; Cleopatra's emotional and leisurely sense of time (contrasting sharply with the expediency with which Lady Macbeth sets about her scheme of regicide) is set against Antony's mounting restlessness and the haste with which he departs from her.¹ The leisure, much as Antony willingly indulges in it, feels like fetters which have to be shaken off (I.ii. 112 and 125). His “Roman” soul rebels against “Egyptian” dalliance and dotage. This conflict of distinct time-senses is represented both dramatically (Antony's actual departure from Egypt) and

¹ For instance at I.ii. 129: “I must with haste from hence.” Quotations are from the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition by David Bevington.

rhetorically (the justification of his decision to break the fetters of idleness and dotage).

Whatever the initial configuration of attitudes, tragedy proper arises when they are confronted with forces active in the realm outside the couple, threatening to shatter the bower of amorous bliss that encapsulates them; this greater time, as we might call it, is psychologically intractable: its demands do not admit of negotiation.² The role played in *Macbeth* by augmentative time (time of growth, against which Macbeth raises his impious hand) has, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, a parallel in the Wheel of Fortune (and Fortune's temporary favourite, Octavius Caesar). The parallel has a dynamic – thus dramatic – rather than conceptual significance. While Macbeth is doomed in his inability to exterminate the “other” side of reality always ready to shoot up, as it were, from under the ground to oust him (Banquo's offspring is the “seed of time” which will eventually produce crops upon Macbeth's unhallowed grave), Antony feels entangled by Fortune's Wheel (I.ii. 121 ff), and finds himself unable to confront Octavius Caesar, who has all the odds on his side. By the “logic” of the Wheel of Fate, “each step in Antony's decline ensconces Octavius more firmly at the top of the wheel.”³

Michael Lloyd has stressed the influence of Plutarch on *Antony and Cleopatra* and sees Fortune as a chief theme in both the historical narrative and the tragedy.⁴ In our tragedy, Fortune enters into meaningful connections with images of tide and flood. Lloyd quotes the famous lines from *Julius Caesar* which express the belief that the affairs of men are governed by the rule of occasion; Brutus builds an image of an inconstant, sea-like entity which creates opportunities for man to seize, and then takes them away. The marine imagery (including the common image of life as a sea voyage) is here combined with the idea of Fortune:

² The opening of *Antony and Cleopatra* throws the audience “in the midst” of a complex situation. This is common with Shakespeare, but this particular case is still unusual: on the one hand, we must assume that Shakespeare expected a great deal of knowledge concerning the situation in the Empire after the assassination of Julius Caesar and during the triumvirate of Octavius, Antony, and Lepidus. On the other hand, Shakespeare takes great liberties with the historical material (see “Introduction,” in: *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. Bevington, pp. 3 ff). I rest my analysis on the assumption that knowledge of the historical context must play second fiddle to Shakespeare's reshaping of it; we cannot shut it out, but we must prioritise the dramatic representation.

³ C.A. Hallet, “Chance, Fortune and Time: Aspects of the Sublunar World in *Antony and Cleopatra*,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 75 (January-April 1976), p. 83.

⁴ Michael Lloyd, “Antony and the Game of Chance,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 61 (1962), pp. 548–554.

BRUTUS

The enemy increaseth every day;
 We, at the height, are ready to decline.
 There is a tide in the affairs of men,
 Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
 Omitted, all the voyage of their life
 Is bound in shallows and in miseries.

Julius Caesar, IV.iii. 214

This cluster of politically-oriented images arranged into an allegory of human time is of some relevance to *Antony and Cleopatra*. One way to consider it could be to see in it an exposition of the political sense of the common saying that “Time and tide wait for no man.”⁵ The fluctuating sea with its tides is a background, a world-view but also a challenge; human affairs are subordinated to this tidal ontology.⁶ If a distinction should be made between tide and Fortune as time-related images, then the one suggests oscillation while the other – cycles. But perhaps we do not have to be that punctilious. The main point is quite clear, especially when these are linked with the idea of seizing the opportune moment.⁷ As Lloyd puts it, “good fortune depends not only on fluctuations external to man, but on man’s willingness to take the flood when it comes.”⁸ Yet, what makes the tidal allegory with the seize-the-day philosophy inscribed within it so attractive to poets is the potentially tragic idea that “taking the tide at the flood” means also being taken by it (and carried along).

Tidal movement can be represented as inundation and then it can acquire another meaning. This is how Machiavelli (1513) works the idea of flood into a piece of political discourse:

[...] since our free will must not be denied, I estimate that even if fortune is the arbiter of half our actions, she still allows us to control the other half, or thereabouts. I compare fortune to one of those torrential rivers which, when enraged, inundates the lowlands, tears down trees and buildings, and washes out the land on one bank to deposit it on the other. Everyone flees before it; everyone yields to its assaults without being able to offer it any resistance. Even though it behaves this way, however, it does not mean that men cannot make provisions during periods

⁵ Here are two 16th-century formulations of the proverb: “The Tyde abydeeth no man.” and “Tyde nor time tarrieth no man.” (*Concise Dictionary of Proverbs*, see Bibliography for details.) See also p. 85 below.

⁶ Lloyd, “Antony and the Game of Chance,” p. 550.

⁷ We have seen the relevance of the idea of *kairos* in our analysis of *As You Like It*.

⁸ Lloyd, “Antony and the Game of Chance,” p. 552.

of calm by erecting levees and dikes to channel the rising waters when they come, or at least restrain their fury and reduce the danger.⁹

Building bulwarks and making other provisions is one way of preventing disaster. Another is to change one's conduct according as the circumstances change. Successful policy, or the property of being "politic," consists in being heedful and flexible. For Machiavelli freedom of the will is a matter of course; for him there is no point in debating the issue. He advocates the moderate optimism of prudent self-governance.¹⁰ With Shakespeare things are far less obvious; Brutus envisages a situation in which the boat has sailed at high tide having left the belated miserable man in the shallow waters. As we shall see, in the context of *Antony and Cleopatra* overflowing and flooding acquire meanings not dreamt of in political philosophy. The play makes us reconsider the worldly wisdom of "Roman" level-headedness, carried over into Renaissance political casuistry.

Shakespeare was attracted to the tidal imagery and rhetoric as a playwright. Thus, on top of the ones discussed is a meta-dramatic meaning of fluctuation, i.e. the way this imagery can be used to capture some essential characteristics of drama. In other words, Shakespeare foregrounds tidal time in both the play's plot and its verbal texture because it affords an intimation of the nature of dramatic action, or at least of a certain type of dramatic action. According to Stephen Shapiro, in *Antony and Cleopatra* "audience [is] continually aware of potential oppositions and reversals."¹¹ A sense of universal mutability is conveyed by the diverse settings, shifts between them, and the duration covered by the plot (about 10 years of historical time). "The world of *Antony and Cleopatra* – writes Shapiro – is a world of events and feelings in motion with a framework of tides, moons, and varying winds – motions which may be seen as patterned and subject to laws, but which are not subject to the will of man."¹² In terms of the Jacobean three-levelled cosmography (earth, heaven, and hell), the tragedy depicts a world which is wretchedly incomplete, flattened to its sublunary dimension, defined by mutability and impermanence – features emblematised by water.¹³ "Shakespeare – argues

⁹ Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Daniel Donno (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), Chapter 25.

¹⁰ Bacon also favours the level-headed opinion: "It cannot be denied, but outward accidents conduce much to fortune [...]. But chiefly, the mould of a man's fortune is in his own hands." Essay "Of Fortune" (see Bibliography for details of the edition used).

¹¹ Stephen A. Shapiro, "The Varying Shore of the World. Ambivalence in *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 27 (1/1966), p. 20.

¹² Shapiro, "The Varying Shore," p. 22.

¹³ Hallet, "Chance, Fortune and Time," p. 78.

C.A. Hallet – [...] has taken great pains to create a world which is never at rest.”¹⁴ Change is omnipresent and penetrates both the micro- and the macrocosm. Does Shakespeare give this universal mutability a human dimension?

If the portrayed world as such epitomises universal instability, then, as always in analysing drama, we must not allow the human factor to disappear from view. There are at least these two reasons for insisting that we ought not to: First, the title protagonists are not, and are not to be seen, as mere puppets in the hands of this power or that fickle goddess (Fortuna). To repeat after Machiavelli, “fortune is the arbiter of half our actions, she still allows us to control the other half.” Whatever human agents have to endure depends as much upon their decisions and deliberate actions as upon circumstances extraneous to them; they remain *agents*. Second, extraneous circumstances also tend to have a human face, and in our tragedy this is chiefly the face of the “Machiavellian” and politic Octavius Caesar. We may agree with scholars that “[t]he Universe of the play is Heraclitean – flux, conflict, and paradox are its elements,”¹⁵ but we also have to see clearly the human factors at work in this universe, be they social, cultural, political, and topographic. Besides, underlying many of the “elements” are the deep division and sometimes fierce clashes between two mind-sets and the accompanying different time-senses. Thus, even though criticism brings up the theme of corrosive instability with which the world of *Antony and Cleopatra* is ridden,¹⁶ we must avoid brushing aside the human dimension.

In the Platonic worldview, the universal changeability of worldly things is potentially devastating. Opinions (judgements of the nature of *doxa*, as opposed to *episteme*) lose whatever truth-value they may possess when confronted with the ever-changing political environment and its pressing demands. But, according to the tidal logic, mutability may also have a constructive side to it, on the condition that the dynamically developing situation, demanding constant efforts of accommodation, does not discourage those who wish to remain on top. The question is: Is Antony one of the few?

¹⁴ Hallet, “Chance, Fortune and Time,” p. 81.

¹⁵ Shapiro, “The Varying Shore,” pp. 24–25. On the so-called theory of flux ascribed to Heraclitus see for example Edward Hussey, “Heraclitus,” in A.A. Long, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999): “Plato [...] and Aristotle [...] report that Heraclitus held that ‘the whole universe is in flux like a river’ or that ‘all is in flux’ or ‘in progression’ or ‘in change.’” (p. 99).

¹⁶ Hallet, “Chance, Fortune and Time,” p. 76.

“Her infinite variety”

The fate of Pompey illustrates the proverbial fickleness and omnipotence of Fortune, parent of Occasion, and her amoral ways.¹⁷ But the scene to be analysed presently also shows how much depends on human agency, on man’s willingness to conspire with this goddess. While hosting the triumvirs – Octavius, Lepidus, and Antony – his temporary allies but also potential adversaries, on board his ship, Pompey Macbeth-like is visited by a temptation of political nature. In an aside exchange during the revels, Menas, a ruthless pirate, suggests killing off his guests and thus becoming the sole ruler of the world. (This brief sequence has a parallel in both *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*.) Yet Pompey’s response is unique in that he (unlike Macbeth and Sebastian) decides to remain loyal, and thereby sentences himself to political demise, inevitable with the turn of the tide. Menas has no doubts that this passing-up on the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity dooms Pompey and makes his fall inevitable:

MENAS

[*Aside*] For this, I’ll never follow thy palled fortunes more.
Who seeks, and will not take when once ’tis offered,
Shall never find it more.

II.vii. 77

The Fortune, Occasion, and tide imagery is not mere rhetorical embellishment. Scenes like this one fill the tropes and images with mimetic immediacy. We almost see these entities appear in the midst of the action, and likewise we see the characters hearkening to their promptings and decrees. In other words, we observe the presence and the silent workings of Time: “one’s fortunes depend upon one’s response to Time and [...] Time is constantly demanding new judgements. [...] To stand still is to be left behind.”¹⁸ Pompey is the man who has missed the boat, which leaves him “bound in the shallows”; Menas sees the occasion fly past Pompey and decides to bid him farewell. By the logic of the Fortune allegory, Menas is right to do as he does, provided that there is no other logic.¹⁹

¹⁷ Shakespeare’s Pompey, or Sextus Pompeius, is a character who balances the power of the triumvirs; any disagreement or division among them creates an advantage for him. “Power, like Nature, abhors both a vacuum and an inert equipoise; [...]” (Bevington, “Introduction,” p. 23).

¹⁸ Hallet, “Chance, Fortune and Time,” p. 85.

¹⁹ As Bacon puts it in his essay on Fortune: “[...] extreme lovers of their country or masters were never fortunate, neither can they be” (“Of Fortune”; see Bibliography for details of the edition used).

Marilyn Williamson has argued that Fortune is the neglected protagonist of *Antony and Cleopatra*.²⁰ The word “fortune” occurs no less than forty-one times in the tragedy, and there are also two scenes of fortune-telling. Does this brush aside or eliminate Cleopatra with her charms and powers? Not necessarily. For one thing, Antony’s changing attitude to Cleopatra endows her with special properties. As the critic observes, his tirades against her “recall the rhetoric of those victimised by Fortune.”²¹ But Fortune is a Roman divinity and Cleopatra is her rival. Plutarch’s Fortune is beneficent to Rome; Shakespeare’s – some argue – seems to be “the blind, fickle personification of chance and change.”²² This may be an exaggeration, but Antony’s “split personality” reflects the larger dichotomy of the fictive world of the play. He wishes to act according the Roman code of virile conduct and pays lip service to Fortune, which means blindly obeying her decrees. His great dilemma or “tragic flaw” and the ultimate cause of his fall is his desire to live, as it were, simultaneously in these two worlds and to keep his allegiances undivided. He wishes to live according to his inner sense of loyalty (in sharp contrast with the disloyalty of Enobarbus), yet is unable to remain true to all of his commitments, especially political ones. His emotional “fixation” on Cleopatra, his “dotage,” may be the cause of his undoing in political terms, but is certainly the cause of his keen sense of having forfeited his wonted martial demeanour. No wonder that she finally comes to typify the vicissitudes of Fortune. From the very beginning of the play to the scenes of defeat at sea, Antony is fettered to Cleopatra by a fatal and “toxic” love-hate relationship. His invectives cast at the “triple-turned whore” in Scene IV.xii make it clear that the Egyptian has become for him the epitome of changeability, whose allure he is unable to withstand. “Fortune and Antony part here” (IV.xii. 19); he has been cheated, as in a card-game, by Cleopatra represented as “a right gypsy.” His construction of the events is that Cleopatra has changed her loyalties once more and is still on top while he has been cast down, not to rise again.

The world of the play is a “sublunary” world and as such is governed by the moon. The play’s topography gravitates towards Egypt, not Rome, as does Antony’s heart. Cleopatra may typify the attributes of the fickle goddess but she also sustains archetypal associations between time and tide.²³

²⁰ Marilyn Williamson, “Fortune in *Antony and Cleopatra*,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 67 (1968), pp. 423–429.

²¹ Williamson, “Fortune in *Antony and Cleopatra*,” p. 427.

²² Williamson, “Fortune in *Antony and Cleopatra*,” p. 426.

²³ “Time” and “tide” have the same root and etymologically are synonymous. See the entry “tide” in Eric Partridge’s *Origins. A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

Antony's outbursts are naturally biased; Cleopatra is a whore who "turns" with every new revolution of the political wheel; or perhaps she herself *is* the Wheel. Enobarbus' description gives us another, positive image: "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite variety" (II.ii. 245), an image that goes beyond characterisation and uncovers the iconographic potential of her character. But then again, abundance or bounty is yet another attribute of Fortune. Fortuna, related to her Greek predecessor Tyche, may be "an artificial deity,"²⁴ but she is also related to natural time and "was worshipped originally as a fertility goddess."²⁵ If "Fortuna" comes from *vortumna* (as it does according to Robert Graves), then Fortune was responsible for turning the year about. Shakespeare may be said imaginatively to follow in our tragedy the process whereby, with the absorption of Greek mythology by the Romans, the properties "naturally" possessed by deities assumed political signification. But he is also determined not to let go of the old ties and the double setting with its dichotomies allows him to keep even conflicting connotations in play. Like Cleopatra's, Fortune's variety cannot be exhausted verbally. If Cleopatra is Egypt and Egypt is the Nile, then Cleopatra is the Nile: a life-giving and life-sustaining principle. The image of the irrigation of the land enriches the dominant water-related imagery of the play and the iconographic significance of both the setting and the main female protagonist.

"The strong necessity of time"

A number of passages in *Antony and Cleopatra* make us sensitive to a mutual interpenetration between time and human affairs, for example: "the strong necessity of time" and "the time's state." "The time's state" (I.ii. 86) is the current situation, the way in which recent events have re-configured political allegiances.²⁶ The big-picture situation is that political stability depends on the equilibrium (which is not to be confused with friendship) between the triumvirs (Octavius, Lepidus, and Antony). The three are so many world-supporting "pillars" and as such provide a bulwark against civil strife or another type of disruption. Letters from Rome

²⁴ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, section 32.1 (see Bibliography for details).

²⁵ Entry "Fortuna" in: Mike Dixon-Kennedy, *Encyclopedia of Greco-Roman Mythology* (Santa Barbara, Denver, Oxford: ABC-Clío, 1998).

²⁶ "The time's state" is explained by Bevington as "the political and military necessities of the moment" (p. 87).

bring the news of the death of Fulvia, Antony's wife. Fulvia has not been politically indifferent; with Antony's brother she rebelled against Octavius, Antony's official ally.²⁷ Her going affects the current situation; the ever-fragile political equilibrium has been upset, possibly to Antony's disadvantage. He speaks of his departed wife as of his substitute on the political scene: "The business she hath broached [i.e. opened] in the state / Cannot endure my absence" (I.ii. 164). Absence is political death and Antony has not given up his position as a major player in the great arena. His dalliance, his love-stricken inertia is symptomatically likened to growing weeds instead of plentiful crops (I.ii. 105) – a striking transference of vegetative imagery to the political realm. Elsewhere, in the presence of his allies, he calls the time spent with Cleopatra "poisoned hours" (II.ii. 97). The contrast between time ill-spent and time wasted is emphasised, and yet we are never absolutely certain about the implied valuation, because Antony himself never is. Despite his much-protesting, he is deeply unsure which of the "times" is better, especially in view of the suggestion that to embrace Cleopatra is to embrace eternity. Evaluation of time is not given a fixed point of reference. Rome is governed by Fortune, but none of her many suitors can be sure of her favour. Egypt, on the other hand, with its floods and irrigations, and its presiding goddess, the queen, is, like the moon, never the same and yet has the power to endure. Besides, Shakespeare makes palpable the rule that the sea, the in-between territory that seems to be no man's land, is the decisive element.²⁸

Antony's "dotage," shown and at once censured in Scene I.i, is contrasted with his haste in the scene that follows, where he decides to break Cleopatra's spell and escape. Temporal urgency thus brought into play seems to be important for the tragedy as a whole.²⁹ David Kaula stresses the discrepancy between the two main settings, Rome and Egypt, and the respective different velocities of time. According to Kaula, there are analogies between the protagonists' attitudes and the three dimensions of time: Octavius Caesar represents the future, Antony the past, and Cleopatra the

²⁷ "Antony was so captivated by her that, while Fulvia, his wife, maintained his quarrels in Rome against Caesar by actual force of arms, and the Parthian troops, commanded by Labienus [...] were assembled in Mesopotamia, and ready to enter Syria, he could yet suffer himself to be carried away by her to Alexandria, there to keep holiday, like a boy, in play and diversion, squandering and fooling away in enjoyments that most costly [...] of all valuables, time." Plutarch's *Lives*, p. 757 (see Bibliography for details).

²⁸ As Bacon puts it: "There be many examples where sea-fights have been final to the war; [...] he that commands the sea is at great liberty, and may take as much and as little of the war as he will" ("Of True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates"; see Bibliography for details of the edition used).

²⁹ David Kaula, "The Time Sense of *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15 (1964), p. 211.

present.³⁰ Being the most fortunate, Octavius achieves success but forfeits personal freedom. He seeks neither to outrun time nor to hold it back. He collaborates with time, or rather tunes himself to the time-sense of effective policy-making, and thus becomes *that* time's servant and Fortune's slave. As Cleopatra puts it, "'Tis paltry to be Caesar; / Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave, / A minister of her will" (V.ii. 2).³¹ Indeed, in political terms, Octavius may have all the trumps up his sleeve, and yet he will not have the chance to fulfil his wish, i.e. to drive Cleopatra back to Rome in his triumphal procession. Cleopatra's words about Fortune are curiously self-reflexive. Is she referring to herself when she says "Fortune"? Does this ambiguity give her the feeling of superiority that her words convey? Antony, argues Hallet, seeks to retrieve his past eminence, yet he is constantly falling behind the flow of events whereas on Cleopatra time seems to have a "ripening effect." "Age cannot wither her"; as the critic puts it, she "inhabits a sphere where time is *natural rather than historical*."³²

As has been suggested, *Antony and Cleopatra* bears some affinity to *Macbeth*; but perhaps instead of affinity we should rather speak of opposition. In terms of structure, we can definitely speak of reversal. At the beginning we are called upon to perceive the change which has taken place in Antony, who has been losing "in dotage" his wonted Martian demeanour and his valour. We are told that his heart "reneges all temper" (I.i. 8), where "temper" means moderation but also suggests "the hardness and resiliency of good steel that is possessed in war."³³ Antony, after receiving news from Rome, decides to engage anew in political and military activity. In this respect, the attitudes of the male protagonists in *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra* and the roles of the respective female ones could not be further apart. There is indeed a profound rift between the two senses of actuality which either play presents. *Macbeth* takes place in a gore-reeking arena of the "real" time, whereas Antony's "reality" has a doubly fictitious nature; he is deliberately disengaged from the exigencies of the mighty empire. He already is placed as high as Macbeth wants to climb, but he finds his position uncomfortable. Antony has already tasted power, but he has found it unsavoury and now longs for some

³⁰ Kaula, "The Time Sense," p. 216.

³¹ Bevington traces "Fortune's knave" to its alleged proverbial root in "Fortune's fool." He also considers other meanings: Fortune's servant and the jack in a deck of cards dealt by Fortune; *Antony and Cleopatra*, p. 237. The meaning of "servant" or "lackey" seems the most fit for Octavius, especially if one recalls "time's fool" from Sonnet 116 or Romeo's outcry: "O, I am fortune's fool" (*Romeo and Juliet*, III.i. 138).

³² Hallet, "Chance, Fortune and Time," p. 84.

³³ *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. Bevington, p. 78.

Macbeth on the heath, or, more to the point, the appointment of Angelo as the Duke's deputy. The audience is cast in the position of Philo's interlocutor, Demetrius. Before the stage is cleared off at the end of the scene, we are directed towards the next scene by means of the common future-oriented designation:

DEMETRIUS

I am full sorry
That he approves the common liar, who
Thus speaks of him at Rome; but I will hope
Of better deeds tomorrow. Rest you happy!

I.i. 60

In *Macbeth* the war council "on a camp near Forres" is removed from the centre of affairs, i.e. the battlefield. Nevertheless, the king (both the person and the office) remains the axis of the events. In *Antony and Cleopatra* such detachment is conspicuous and extreme. Alexandria as a setting is radically detached from Rome, the political capital of the world, not only geographically but mentally. Unlike Duncan, anxious to receive "the newest state of the revolt," Antony, in the opening scene, insolently dismisses the messenger who brings him news from Rome ("Grates me! The sum." I.i. 19). His "space" is where he is, i.e. by Cleopatra's side, and not with Caesar and the pressing affairs of state. This is in tune with the wish of creating ("finding out") "new heaven, new earth" for the lovers to share. To be sure, this sounds potentially tragic. In both plays, the current political situation exerts a compelling influence, but the respective responses are utterly different.

Sketchy images of the past supply the necessary background against which we can observe and appreciate the recentness of the events and the accompanying change of attitudes. Between the horizons of the past and the future – the former abandoned and the latter impenetrable – actuality is being played out. Hence the immense significance of rhetoric, which is meant to grasp the audience's attention and aggravate it with a sense of either doom (*Macbeth*) or instability (*Antony and Cleopatra*). This allows the audience to share in some of the confusion of the on-stage observers and agents. In both tragedies then the moment chosen by the dramatist for the opening scenes is critical: the male protagonist is derailed from his previous customary social conduct. Antony's falling-off, his transformation from valiant leader to doting lover, is opposed to Macbeth's transformation as a result of the promotion.³⁴ Plutarch stresses the change in personality

³⁴ The historical Antony may have had a way of reconciling both reputations; see *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. Muir, pp. 9–10.

brought about in the Roman warrior by his infatuation with Cleopatra; her influence supposedly consisting in bringing out the worst in Antony: "Such being his temper, the last and crowning mischief that could befall him came in the love of Cleopatra, to awaken and kindle to fury passions that as yet lay still and dormant in his nature, and to stifle and finally corrupt any elements that yet made resistance in him of goodness and a sound judgment."³⁵ Shakespeare evidently decided to use Plutarch's censure as a frame for the opening scene; somehow, however, the audience finds it difficult to share this point of view.

After finally receiving the news from Rome, Antony finds Cleopatra to inform her of his decision of going back to Rome. The tide of affairs, "the strong necessity of time" (I.iii. 42), makes the couple part.³⁶ The remembrance of past joys, their promise of "eternity," embitters the leave-taking:

CLEOPATRA

Nay, pray you, seek no colour [i.e. superficial excuse] for your going,
 But bid farewell and go. When you sued staying,
 Then was the time for words. No going then.
Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
 Bliss in our brows' bent; [...].

I.iii. 33

The idyll may be over, but its taste, the taste of eternity, lingers and perhaps cannot be forgotten.

"Nature's infinite book of secrecy"

Another parallel between the two tragedies concerns knowledge of the future. Like the witches' prophecies, the fortune-telling scenes in *Antony and Cleopatra* are far from unambiguous. The Soothsayer in Scene I.ii can read something "in nature's infinite book of secrecy," which reminds us of the Weird Sisters' ability to look into the "seeds of time." Like Antony's anxious deliberations about the future, also these half-serious prognostications contain organic imagery. Despite the similarities, natural growth and succession perform here a different function to their parallels in *Macbeth*.

³⁵ Plutarch's *Lives* in Dryden's translation; see Bibliography for details.

³⁶ Compare Caesar's advice to Octavia: "Cheer your heart; / Be you not troubled with the time, which drives / O'er your content these strong necessities, / But let determined things to destiny / Hold unbewailed their way" (III.vi. 84).

For one thing, the tone of the prognostications in *Antony and Cleopatra* is largely that of jesting:

CHARMIAN

[...] Prithee,

How many boys and wenches must I have?

SOOTHSAYER

If every of your wishes had a womb,

And fertile every wish, a million.

I.ii. 34

We are thus reminded that we are in a land where fertility is the ruling principle and as such will not be managed. The idea of death itself can be discussed irreverently as when Enobarbus plays with the word “to die”: “Cleopatra [when she hears of Antony’s decision to leave] dies instantly. I have seen her die twenty times upon far poorer moment” (I.ii. 136), and this in the same scene in which news is brought of the actual death of Antony’s wife. It should come as no surprise that Cleopatra is an occasion for Shakespeare to use what seems to have been his favourite conceit on female fertility: “She made great Caesar [Julius Caesar] lay his sword to bed; / He ploughed her and she cropped” (II.ii 237).

Antony’s anxiety about the future, though also dressed in the imagery of breeding mischief (see his use of “to hatch” at I.ii. 127), seems less extreme than Macbeth’s. Macbeth desires to control the progress of time, agonises over his “barren sceptre,” and, ineffectually, struggles to establish a dynasty. These yearnings for political continuity have no place in the story about the Roman general and the Egyptian queen. The fortunetelling scene in *Antony and Cleopatra* rings with apprehension but the reasons are different from the scenes of prophecy (chiefly the cauldron scene) in *Macbeth*. Charmian is told: “You shall outlive the lady whom you serve,” which she unsuspectingly assumes to be a promise of longevity: “This enigmatic prophecy of death sounds to Charmian like a promise of long life.”³⁷ Contrary to this, our reception of this fortunetelling heightens our expectations of a tragic resolution. In scenes of prophesying or fortunetelling, an undefined future comes to the fore, especially when, as is usually the case, such spectacles touch the characters’ nerves, i.e. reveal their inmost fears and yearnings.³⁸ Shakespeare seems to be suggesting that the desire to know what is to come, ultimately cannot be satisfied.

³⁷ *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. Bevington, p. 84.

³⁸ In the BBC production of the play, Cleopatra, seen in the background throughout the sequence, listens attentively to the fortunetelling, which makes her anxious.

His prophecy scenes are ironic because they are ambiguous. Uncertain future can only properly be expressed in equivocal language.

We now turn our attention to concrete time.

“Now, for the love of Love and her soft hours”

Some pedestrian time references are given in Scene I.i., but their meaning is far from purely technical; i.e. they – as is common in Shakespeare – do more than assist in establishing the spatiotemporal parameters of the represented world. Demetrius refers us to the nearest future by saying “tomorrow,” but he also combines this pedestrian reference with hope, thus personalising it: “I will hope / Of better deeds tomorrow” (I.i. 62). Technically, he ushers us into what is to come with “tomorrow” by setting the conventional hook-up at the moment of emptying the stage.³⁹ At the same time, he says he *hopes* for a change of scene; he wishes soon to see the general (Antony) act rather than waste time in Cleopatra’s company. Antony, on the other hand, defies this temporal pressure and the hopes and wishes linked to it, all alien to the time-sense that he wants to espouse. To Antony, tomorrow seems to be of no consequence, and his language expresses his concern with the present and his concentration on the joys it is capable of yielding: “What sport tonight?” (I.i. 45). He has been taunted by Cleopatra (“Me or Rome? – Which is it going to be?”) and hence the elaborate language:

ANTONY

Now, for the love of Love and her soft hours,

Let’s not confound the time with conference harsh;

There’s not a minute of our lives should stretch

Without some pleasure now. What sport [i.e. entertainment] tonight?

I.i. 46

In this way, Shakespeare renders dramatically the passage in Plutarch’s narrative which relates the childish amusements (“sport”) Antony indulged in while in Egypt. The seize-the-day (night, to be precise) philosophy underlying Antony’s attitude expresses his desire to discard the burden of governing and to alleviate the duties even to the point of mingling

³⁹ For the idea of the hook-up see Mydla, *The Dramatic Potential*, p. 42. Also in *Macbeth* we see Shakespeare pick up and “poetise” the common time designation, as for instance when Lady Macbeth says that King Duncan will never see the next day.

with the plebeians. Night is welcome because the day to come will pester the mind with affairs in Rome, left unattended. Pleasure is capable of “stretching” the passing moment; the metaphor is telling. The couple’s plans for the night consist in doffing their royal and warlike selves; they wish to go among the common people:

ANTONY

To-night we’ll wander through the streets and note
The qualities of people. Come, my queen,
Last night you did desire it. [*To the Messenger*] Speak not to us.
I.i. 54

Even though no idea of this type ever occurred to the Macbeth couple, thoughts of time-passing free from care have parallels in other plays. In tragedies, they often sound almost ironic, for there is no room for untroubled enjoyment. If the protagonists do hope for some, the price is always high. There is, for instance, this parallel in *Othello*, the couple wishing for time shut off from the concerns of the outside world:

OTHELLO

Come, my dear love,
The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue;
That profit’s yet to come ’tween me and you.
Good night.

II.iii. 8

The irony, by convention unintentional in the speaker, soon becomes apparent. By starting a brawl, Iago will spoil, this very night, the happy hours the newlyweds are hoping to spend together.

In the context of tragedy then there is always a note of uneasiness, of apprehension about images of time as a bountiful, infinitely extendible entity waiting to be enjoyed at leisure. The unmistakable note of irony may not be heard by the speaker, but, as in the case of Antony, it may be obvious to the bystanders. In *Othello*, the audience know too well how precarious the blissful present of the lovers is. In history plays, the note may be even harsher: The ever-turning Wheel will not allow for permanence; happiness and prosperity will not last. To enjoy the present moment means, paradoxically, to be able to forget about time, as is the case in Antony’s desire to ignore the news from Rome. Time, however, will not be ignored, and Fortune will topple those who turn away from her. Augmentative time is opposed to tidal rises and falls, as in Desdemona’s hope for increase of “loves and comforts / Even as our days do grow” (*Othello*, II.i. 194). Desdemona seeks to appease Othello’s uneasiness expressed earlier in the

play: “for, I fear, / My soul hath her content so absolute / That not another comfort like to this / Succeeds in unknown fate” (*Othello*, II.i. 190). In the “reality” of the tragic stage the latter prevails, i.e. anxiety over unknown fate. Reversals are the rule of the genre, and the rhetoric of “ever-growing loves and comforts” is proved to be powerless. Othello and Desdemona’s first night together will be ruined by a drunken brawl. “Tomorrow” Antony will hear the news and confront the recent inauspicious turn of events.

Both short-term and long-term future seems unpredictable and hopes to control it or “freeze” the present moment illusory. The nearest future, as in the case of the news, can be handled with some assurance; the distant future, as in the case of the fortunetelling or prophesying, is beyond control. The greater time “out there” (Rome, in the case of our play) may batter short-term expectations and destroy long-term ones, no matter what verbal conjurations the protagonists may use to retain their grip on the passage of time. The ironic potential of the initial great expectations gradually comes into view. Seeds of catastrophe have been sown and characters will have to confront the future as it is being shaped by events rather than hopes.

“The nature of bad news”

Circulation of information is the unrecognised nervous system of drama. It is of course of special significance in fictive worlds of extensive and complex topography. So far we have paid little attention to the common means of conveying messages, i.e. the messenger and the letter, and now we need to make up for this negligence. In *Antony and Cleopatra* Shakespeare makes dispatch and delivery of news especially conspicuous, as we have already observed, and so it has not escaped scholarly attention. Some critics have focused their analysis of the play on the use and importance of reporting.⁴⁰

The opening scenes in *Antony and Cleopatra*, like those in *Macbeth*, make obvious the way dynamic action depends on how effectively information is spread among characters. Besides the “technical” issue of who knows (and finds out) what at which point, Shakespeare foregrounds the human dimension, e.g. the eagerness to send and receive news. A skilful

⁴⁰ See for instance Kaula, “The Time Sense,” p. 212; Marion Perret, “Shakespeare’s Use of Messengers in *Antony and Cleopatra*,” *Drama Survey* 5 (1966), pp. 67–72.

playwright will circulate information not only for the sake of tightening representation but also for the sake of deepening characterisation. The following exchange between Cleopatra and her maid is telling; letters bearing news to and from Antony (now away from her) have become vital for the heroine. The “sending thick” (exaggerated dispatch) is a means to convey the idea of impatience:

CLEOPATRA

[...] Met'st thou my posts?

ALEXAS

Ay, madam, twenty several messengers.

Why do you send so thick?

CLEOPATRA

Who's born that day

When I forget to send to Antony

Shall die a beggar. Ink and paper, Charmian.

I.v. 64

The obvious problem is that Cleopatra has nothing of moment to communicate to Antony. Similarly to *Macbeth*, in *Antony and Cleopatra* there are messenger-sending/receiving sequences, which – as is commonly the case – serve the obvious purposes of triggering the action and then (and thereby) raising the tension. Shakespeare usually skilfully and economically combines both these functions. Macbeth receives the news of his promotion and sends a letter to his wife; the news makes a decision inevitable. When Antony receives the news of his wife's death, he immediately decides to leave Egypt and make peace with Octavius Caesar. *New* information, when vital, rouses the principal characters; it triggers action. It is a stimulus to actual *doing*, even if it is preceded by *thinking*. What all this means is: Travelling information is a basic property of dramatic time.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, as we have seen, Antony decides to recoup his weakening valour and to achieve this by responding to the necessities of the situation, represented by news from Rome. The distance between Alexandria and Rome makes reporting necessary; spatial distance thus acquires a significant temporal dimension and topography translates into so much duration. The Bakhtinian chronotopicity might be a useful idea at this point; the conveyance of messages is a means of uniting the temporal and spatial dimensions of the fictive world.⁴¹ But reporting, especially in

⁴¹ There is no doubt of the great value of Bakhtin's insistence on the close and indeed intimate connection between literary representation of time with that of space. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), p. 85. See also Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997),

our tragedy, takes on distinct colouring from the broader meaning of time and the respective attitudes of the protagonists; the above-quoted exchange makes this clear. Similarly, Antony's dismissal of the messenger from Octavius Caesar indicates his wilful retreat from the military sphere.

The representation of messengers or letters can serve the purpose of characterisation. Thus, to name a very special instance, in Scene I.ii of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Julia, in the presence of her maid, tears up a letter only painstakingly to put it together in private. Cleopatra in Scene I.i taunts Antony by demanding an avowal of absolute dedication to her, as a proof of which he has to dismiss the messenger from Rome. Alternatively, news may oppress and demand response. In the actual reporting scene, Shakespeare uses messages to create a sense of acceleration verging on oppression. This seems to be the purpose of the cramming of reports in Scene I.ii., where the messengers arrive one upon another's heels (I.ii. 92–127; lines 81, 110, 111, 115).⁴² In this way, i.e. by compression, Shakespeare telescopes the events of his historical source. "In North's Plutarch, this news [concerning the death of Fulvia] reaches Antony considerably later than the report of war involving Lucius [Antony's brother], Fulvia, and Octavius; in the interim, Antony undertakes a campaign against the Parthians [...]. Shakespeare condenses his historical source."⁴³ Clearly, Shakespeare's treatment of the historical background has the meaning of a statement concerning the relation between narrative time and dramatic time. Shakespeare has no business with history as it unfolds. His interest is in the personal sphere: "Time's state" calls upon the Roman general. The messengers finally have to be heard; a language suggestive of disrupted leisure becomes the dominant rhetoric. Antony has to take up the neglected duties, even though Cleopatra's bad temper does not make this easy.

Interestingly, messengers in *Macbeth* and in *Antony and Cleopatra* enter at roughly the same moment, at line 18. In *Macbeth* the witches take up 12 lines, which is analogous to the 10 plus 3 lines of Philo's comment on Antony's dotage. By line 75 from the beginning of *Macbeth* two reports have been delivered. In the respective scene in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the news is never heard due to Cleopatra's taunts: either me (Egypt) or Caesar and Fulvia (Rome). In line 57 the messenger is dismissed, which is strik-

pp. 200 ff. The "chronotopic approach" seems to me especially valuable in an analysis of the playwright's management of the relations between on-stage and off-stage worlds.

⁴² Scene I.ii. can be divided into two sequences or units: the Soothsayer sequence (an interrogating one) and the reporting sequence with Antony receiving a package of news after which (with the interim of a brief soliloquy) enters Enobarbus to whom the gravest is repeated.

⁴³ *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. Bevington, pp. 87, 89.

ing if we compare this image with that of Duncan eagerly devouring the reports from the battlefield. The opening in *Antony and Cleopatra*, as we have seen, ends with the choric Demetrius and Philo expecting “better deeds tomorrow” (l. 64).

The extended reporting sequence in Scene I.ii of *Antony and Cleopatra* has a construction similar to that in Scene I.v of *Macbeth* (Lady Macbeth receiving news from her husband). The list below will help us visualise what is meant by Shakespeare’s method of “cramming historical time”; here is the succession of events in Shakespeare’s dramatised rendition:

- the first messenger: news of Fulvia joining Antony’s brother in a military action against Caesar; news of the conquest of Antony’s territories in Asia;
- the first part of Antony’s soliloquy (in the presence of the messenger): “O, then we bring forth weeds [...]”;
- the second messenger (from Sicyon) announced;
- the second part of Antony’s soliloquy: “These strong Egyptian fetters I must break [...]”;
- the second messenger: news of Fulvia’s death;
- Antony’s second soliloquy: “There’s a great spirit gone! [...]”;
- entry of Enobarbus, to whom Antony relates the news and communicates his resolve to leave Egypt.

In both plays, soliloquising interchanges with reporting and interrogation of messengers. Lady Macbeth’s soliloquies (“Glamis thou art [...]” and then “The raven himself [...]”) are much longer than Antony’s despite the greater historical time-span in the narrative source in *Antony and Cleopatra*. In the latter tragedy, the cramming of reports is accounted for by Antony’s reluctance to receive any news up to this moment. Furthermore, the fact of his *simultaneously* receiving the news of his wife’s conflict with Octavius Caesar *and* of her death after a period of illness considerably lengthens the duration of background historical time covered in this scene; by means of reporting much time has been compressed and the stage now imaginatively represents Rome rather than Egypt. The bauble in which Antony has been living has been pierced by a sense of urgency. Antony’s urge for a hasty parting from Cleopatra intensifies the awareness both of the spatial distance he has to cover in order to confront (“front”; I.iv. 81) the hectic political situation and of the amount of time wasted (note the metaphor of unproductive life in “bringing forth weeds”) by Antony during his leisurely sojourn in Egypt. In both plays, to return to our comparison, there is an unmistakable sense of the urgency of the present moment produced by the reporting. The receivers of messengers decide to plunge into action. At the end of her second soliloquy, just before the en-

try of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth has steeled herself for the commission of the assassination.

Cleopatra's ill-humoured behaviour has the function of causing in the audience an experience of a discrepancy between the two territories and the respective modes of life – this discrepancy, already commented upon, has cloven Antony's soul in twain. We can criticise her for that childish moodiness but must not fail to see that this is so because she wishes to continue living in an entirely different time-zone. Yet, like Antony, she has been evicted from her Egyptian carelessness; when Antony is away, she grows impatient with waiting and weary with anxiety. "Tide" is now used in a different meaning, unrelated to the tidal temporality characteristic of the exotic setting. "Tidings" are also "messages" or simply "news." In the following passage, suggestions of burning sexual appetite (and something like violence needed to satisfy it) convey the intensity of her impatience; she wishes that the news will assault her ears and fill them up with living substance:

[Enter a MESSENGER]

CLEOPATRA O, from Italy!

Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears,

That long time have been barren.

II.v. 23

Cleopatra has grown impatient of living in empty time; now she longs for filled time, filled with the presence of the lover, of which letters are a poor substitute. There is a tone of desperation in her words (provided that we are ready to go beyond the obscenity of the conceit) as she imaginatively tries to make this substitution bring some gratification.

Our considerations have not exhausted the many parallels (and striking differences) between *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Another one seems to be that between the Macbeth couple's eager plunge into the time of political exigencies and their subsequent deepening alienation (from one another and from the community, both personal and social) and the idea of fulfilment that builds up in the plot of the other play, despite the protagonists' initial separation and despite the increasingly tragic shape of the situation. In simple terms, while politics in *Macbeth* causes love to wither away, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, love conquers or surmounts politics. The Macbeth couple initially enjoy a sense of togetherness, their emotional closeness conveyed in a language suggestive of amorous impatience (consider Lady Macbeth's "Hie thee hither, / That I may pour my spirits in thine ear; [...]." *Macbeth*, I.v. 23); the much-desired future, however, when it materialises, turns out to be barren. Time, in Macbeth's

much-quoted lines, has become the nothing-signifying succession of empty “tomorrows.” In the Roman tragedy, there is a sense, tragic to be sure, of transcendence which prevents the couple from despair. The parting word belongs to Cleopatra: “Put on my crown. I have / Immortal longings in me.” Rather than descend into murky hell, Cleopatra as it were crowns the present moment by proudly stepping out of the flux of changeability and into permanence. She has a sense of escaping from the prison that the sublunary realm has become for her: “Now the fleeting moon / No planet is of mine” (V.ii. 238). These immortal longings may be illusory (if we decide to judge them “objectively”); still, the poignant self-assurance that Cleopatra’s lines convey is unmistakably real. Unmistakable is the sublimity with which Shakespeare has endowed Cleopatra’s language throughout the play. If we find ourselves indifferent to it, we must remain impervious to some of Shakespeare’s finest poetry.

Wastefulness and Wastedness: the Closure of *Richard II*

“Waste of idle hours”

In discussing *King Richard II* we first need to address an aspect of dramatic art that we have not yet dwelt upon, its relation to history. In the previous chapter, we have made some comments on Shakespeare's attempt to convey a sense of “historical” time, or rather time of political urgency, as a background to his close study of a troubled relationship between two protagonists poised on the top of the world. But while *Antony and Cleopatra* makes no claim to historical accuracy, a play traditionally regarded as “historical” or simply “a history” apparently does, and thus historical time might be expected to play in it a special role. The title itself under which our “history” originally appeared, *The Tragedie of King Richard the Second*, ought to warn us that things may not be straightforward.

Dramatic renditions of history unavoidably raise the problem of discrepancies between the factual, documented, “raw material” and its artistic reworking. That a transition from the factual-historical to the dramatic naturally entails omissions or transpositions seems obvious;¹ yet, as we shall see, the fact has not stopped some scholars making “findings” about Shakespeare's unrealistic handling of time. Shakespeare's technique has its place also in our analyses; but technical matters, such as compressions or “telescoping,” must not push out other concerns and reduce interpretive efforts to a repetition of truisms instead of taking them as points of depar-

¹ See for instance Peter Saccio's book *Shakespeare's English Kings. History, Chronicle, and Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 20 ff.

ture. Discrepancies and assorted anomalies will help us little towards an understanding of the playwright's handling of history as material for drama. We should rather ask why Shakespeare decides to give his chosen subject matter a dramatic shape despite the refashioning this involves and, in particular, what methods of introducing a sense of "history in the making" into a play he has chosen.

Let us consider as an example an interpretation of Shakespeare's handling of historical time by Edgar Schell, who devoted an entire article to one scene of *Richard II*. Scene II.i is unusually complex; we can identify in it three or four sequences:² 1) Gaunt (on his dying bed) awaits King Richard; 2) Richard arrives and he and Gaunt have an interview; 3) Gaunt leaves and Richard has an interview with York; 4) Richard leaves and some lords stay to form an opposition. Despite the complexity, the scene as a whole has a clear *moral* focus throughout; it is an appalling spectacle of Richard's recklessness with a hint, at the end, of the predictable consequences. Richard is deaf to admonitions and warnings (including those of a dying patriot, whose property he has seized) and Shakespeare cuts a long story for us ("telescopes" events) to show that this will not go unpunished. At the end of his essay, Schell concludes that Shakespeare manipulates time by creating a situation outside time: "A real time may seem to tick comfortably behind the action of the early part of the scene, but the second half is outside of time, cast in a dramatic version of the summary rhetorical mode in which Holinshed describes the way that Richard's seizure of Gaunt's estates drew to a head the widespread discontent with Richard's government and led to the summoning of Bolingbroke."³ It is as if Shakespeare did not make it rhetorically clear in the preceding sequence that time ill-used will strike back with a vengeance. Certainly, York's pleas to Richard — to be analysed presently — contain enough of such rhetoric to justify the quick-ensuing discontent and insurgent optimism of Richard's opposition. Characteristically of much Shakespeare time-oriented criticism, Schell disregards the rhetoric of time at work in the seizure-sequence but, surprisingly, discovers a "rhetorical mode" in the largely factual sequence that represents the rise of anti-monarchical sentiment and the inception of organised opposition. If there is any "stepping out of the temporal sequence of the action" then surely not in this part of the scene. Schell sees here only what he calls "misleading stylistic conti-

² The idea of sequence is helpful in the case of complex (long) scenes. Scene in the traditional sense (according to which a scene ends when the stage is empty) is not necessarily a unit of action; it may contain several units.

³ Edgar Schell, "*Richard II* and some Forms of Theatrical Time," *Comparative Drama* 24 (Fall 1990), p. 265. Bolingbroke (or Bullingbrook) is the eldest son of Gaunt.

nuity” but in fact misleading is the critic’s insistence to disregard the role “stylistic continuity” has to play. Here, to repeat our point, rhetoric has prepared the audience for Richard’s undoing in rendering his downfall almost inevitable.

As we can see, this particular case is not different in nature to examples discussed in earlier sections, i.e. scenes in which rhetoric is given the task of representing time-related ideas. Of course, the problem in part has to do with the larger issue of conveying information, thus, once more, with reporting. The news shared by the lords in the last sequence of Scene II.i is indeed too fresh. In other words, we feel that not enough *dramatic time* has been allowed for the news of Richard’s seizure of Gaunt’s property to reach the latter’s son (i.e. Henry Bolingbroke) in his exile in Brittany. The results of Richard’s violations have been anticipated verbally but this cannot prevent us from concluding that the audience has not been given the opportunity imaginatively to experience the process. Thus the main drift of our censure of the structural looseness in the opening scenes of *Measure for Measure* applies also to this crucial scene in *Richard II*.

Rather than concentrating exclusively on how Shakespeare deals with lengths of historical time, we ought to turn our attention to the way in which he persistently brings time to the audience’s attention. Robert Montgomery observes that in *Richard II* the audience becomes increasingly aware of the role of time due to continual references: “Shakespeare’s repetition establishes time as a natural, fundamental part of the lives and language of the characters, almost as natural and fundamental as their existence in the play.”⁴ Already the first part of the play (the two “halves” or movements can be roughly set apart by Bolingbroke’s ascension to power, his supremacy over Richard made explicit in the Flint castle scene, i.e. III.iii) achieves this by placing natural time firmly as background to Richard’s loss of power (his “unkinging”; see IV.i. 219) and to Bolingbroke’s rebellion and seizure of the crown.⁵ There is a palpable see-saw movement; the fall of the one is parallel and simultaneous to the ascent of the other. This dynamic, this dramatic “change of places,”⁶ central as it is to the plot does not destabilise the temporal frame (perhaps even more than one)

⁴ Robert L. Montgomery, Jr., “The Dimensions of Time in *Richard II*,” *Shakespeare Studies* 4 (1968), p. 74.

⁵ Quotations are from The New Cambridge Shakespeare edition by Andrew Gurr (see Bibliography for details). The spelling “Bolingbroke” is more common and so I have used it to replace “Bullingbrook” in Gurr’s edition.

⁶ The representation of time in *Richard II*, precisely because of this persistence, is related to the politically hazardous theme of dethronement or deposition. This relation is an interesting subject in its own right, but we do not go into it here.

that Shakespeare draws for us with great consistency. We now proceed to analyse it in some detail.

The number of rhetorical tropes related to what we might call the time-idiom of our historical tragedy is itself astonishing. Montgomery draws attention to “seasonal time,” i.e. time expressive of “the relationships between the rhythm or tempo of human life and the larger cycles of nature.”⁷ “Seasonal” seems to be another way to refer to what we have called organic, natural or augmentative time. Conceived as a positive force, capable of sustaining and restoring social order, this time ought to remain inviolate. Richard, as we shall see in more detail, is represented as its enemy, which makes him similar to Macbeth. By the strength vested in the “seasonal trope” (tropes have a vigour to which a playwright is particularly sensitive) violations should redound upon the offender as a matter of course. But in drama ideas have not only orators to express them but also “actors” or executors who act upon them. This “seasonal trope” is used to justify the condemnation of both Richard’s wasteful rule and his advisers, the latter portrayed as pernicious weeds and cankers feeding, leach-like, on the body of the commonweal. This natural frame is the backdrop against which to see and to judge Richard’s personal and political failings. Its dramatic function is evident; as the critic puts it with ironic ambiguity: “The natural ripening of events and man’s fortunes foreshadows *the birth* of Richard’s downfall.”⁸ Its subjective counterpart consists in the build-up of an emotional readiness (in some characters) to conform to natural rhythms, seasons especially, which acquire political significance. The dying Gaunt sees in Richard a force inimical to life: “[...] thy unkindness” – he says to Richard – “be like crooked age / To crop at once a too long withered flower” (II.i. 133). He is old and ready to go, indeed almost dead; but ominous is the casting of the young king in the role of sickness, old age, perhaps of Death himself (as “cropping” emblematically suggests). This rhetoric, known well from the Sonnets (as when the addressee is called upon to observe the seasonal rhythms of human life) and other plays, verbally prepares a setting for the catastrophe of Richard’s dethronement. At a crucial moment, Shakespeare borrows from Ovid the tale about a reckless young god whose whim occasions the upsetting of the temporal order of the whole world.

The law of succession underlies and supports social order and its violation by the monarch himself must, “naturally,” cause his downfall. This frame and the “logic” accompanying it are familiar. We find them, for example, in *Macbeth*, but of course *Richard II* is an earlier play. Having suc-

⁷ Montgomery, “The Dimensions of Time,” p. 77.

⁸ Montgomery, “The Dimensions of Time,” p. 79.

ceeded to the throne by the law of primogeniture, Richard ought not to prevent another man's succession. By seizing upon the patrimony left by the late Gaunt, legally the inheritance of the banished Hereford (Bolingbroke), Richard violates time itself and thus unintentionally courts political ruin. As much is made clear in the following speech:

DUKE OF YORK

Was not Gaunt just, and is not Harry true?
 Did not the one deserve to have an heir?
 Is not his heir a well-deserving son?
 Take Hereford's rights away, and take from time
 His [i.e. Time's] charters and his customary rights.
 Let not to-morrow then ensue today.
 Be not thyself. For how art thou a king
 But by fair sequence and succession?

II.i. 192

The law of succession by lineal descent, reflected and functioning on a smaller scale as the law of inheritance, is parallel to natural time. The image of days orderly following one another provides a rhetorical support for the law that guarantees unbroken succession; but in point of fact York inverts this. This parallel, used as a justificatory trope, in fact blurs the distinction between natural and civil laws ("charters," "rights"); after all, the ambiguity of "succession" allows and encourages this. Clinging to this parallel, York goes so far as to suggest the civic nature of temporal succession. Laws become rights; that tomorrow follows today is guaranteed by Time's charter, i.e. code of civic rights. Extending property-holding and office-holding into the future, laws produce and preserve social order. In this way "Time" is placed above Richard.⁹ Finally, this rhetoric justifies York's ominous prediction concerning the rapacity and rashness of Richard: "But by bad courses may be understood / That their events can never fall out good" (II.i. 214). This grim augury, classically ambiguous as it is, comes true with Bolingbroke's seizure of power. Will Richard be able to denounce it as usurpation? Will he have the rhetorical weapons? Listening carefully to Gaunt and York we realise that, prior to the actual confrontation between the king and the rebel, we are witnessing a war of words in which one of the trophies is the right to claim (perhaps even to define) the properties of time itself.

Another temporal meaning of Richard's displacement from office, besides the violation of the law of succession, has to do with his reputation

⁹ Consider Gaunt's speech beginning with "But not a minute, king, that thou canst give. [...]" (I.iii. 225).

as a wasteful ruler, thus also a squanderer of time. This wastefulness cannot be taken literally: after all, he seizes upon Bolingbroke's property in order to supply himself with resources for his military campaign in Ireland. This is where he hastily departs, trusting that the time is ripe for the action: "Tomorrow next / We will for Ireland, and 'tis time, I trow" (II.i. 217). Yet because violation of the social order by its highest guardian cannot pass without consequences, Shakespeare exploits the mistiming, fatal for Richard, of the Irish expedition. His departure for Ireland could not take place at a worse moment.¹⁰ As it happens, his martial success in Ireland leaves him desolate and "lapsed in time" the moment he again sets his foot on the English soil, now claimed by Bolingbroke and his rapidly increasing following. The dispersion of Richard's army in England caused by the rumours of his alleged death only embitters the irony of the sudden reversal of Fortune. Richard receives its full impact within the space of one scene (i.e. Scene III.ii.), but the audience has been prepared to see it as the decisive phase in the process leading inexorably to the downfall.

As in the plays previously analysed, in *Richard II* we can also observe a consistency and continuity of time-related rhetoric, or a dissemination of time-related imagery, imaginatively preparing us for the final resolution. Act V begins with a scene of parting between the Queen and King Richard. Earlier, she turns vehemently on the gardener, who has censured the "wasteful" king's extravagant ways. Here the proverbial lore concerning self-consuming surfeit (once more, Sonnets 1 and 3 come to mind) is called upon to show that Richard's courtiers, left untrimmed (that is, wanton), have failed to bear "fruits of duty" (III.iv. 63). The gardener assumes larger-than-human proportions, and the idea of gardening takes us back to Gaunt's death-bed speech. In it, Gaunt's famously glorifies England's horticultural topography and her vegetative attributes: "This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England, / This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings" (II.i. 50). The parallel with the desolate royal spouse of Richard is poignant, though Shakespeare has chosen not to make it explicit.

In Act V, the royal couple cannot help but sustain the dynamic of this imagery. The Queen is overwhelmed by the logic of organic time hostile to her spouse: "But soft, but see, or rather do not see, / *My fair rose wither*: yet look up, behold" (V.i. 8). This metaphor further strengthens the obvious parallels with the wasteful addressee of the "procreative" Sonnets; "beauty's rose" appears at the very beginning of the collection. Richard is

¹⁰ Saccio, from a historian's perspective, speaks here of "an error of timing." Also during Richard's return to England time seems to have been hostile to him: "Word of Bolingbroke's actions reached Richard late, delayed by adverse winds on the Irish Sea. His measures to meet the crisis were ill judged" (*English Kings*, pp. 27 and 29).

unproductive in more than one sense. Now, imprisoned and forlorn, he delivers a blunt confession of his negligence of time, now duly repaid: “I wasted time, and now doth time waste me” (V.v. 49). But this may be misleading; Richard in a sense has not wasted time, but he definitely has offended against time. And he definitely has wasted himself in the process.

“Like glistering Phaëton”

Through the metaphor of gardening, including the influence of the sun on vegetal growth, the play’s idiom focuses our attention on natural augmentative time, which – like the rhetorical foreshadowings of impending doom in other tragedies – whets the audience’s expectations of a catastrophe. As in *Macbeth*, but perhaps less drastically represented, violation of natural time awakens the forces of restoration and triggers their conspiracy against the main protagonist. When we regard *Richard II* as a tragedy, the stress falls on Richard’s foredoomed lot; but the larger picture is optimistic, inasmuch as the country does not share in the decline of its sovereign. Richard, his royalty “melting” before the ascending sun of Bolingbroke (IV.i. 260),¹¹ has to go, and the image of sunrise is suggestive of recuperation, which has a parallel with the motif of blood shed by those who depose Macbeth. Richard’s “melting into water-drops” prepares the land (“the teeming womb of royal kings”; II.i. 51) for future growing.

What renders the scene of resignation (Scene IV.i) and the imagery which accompanies the representation even more effective is Richard’s favourite portrayal of himself as the Sun, which through consistent occurrence assumes increasingly ironic overtones. In this scene, the simile no longer matches his present state: “Was this the face / That like the sun did make beholders wink?” (IV.i. 282) There are tragic overtones, which take us back to the myth of Phaëton, son of Phoebus Apollo, the heedless charioteer known from Book II of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Richard with his majesty is also “like a shooting star” falling to “the base earth from the firmament” (II.iv. 19). This early simile anticipates his extended “celestial” speech (in Scene III.ii), which is supposed to legitimise his reign with the aid of the solar metaphor. In the words of Richard, Bolingbroke will see him rising in his throne in the east and tremble at his transgression,

¹¹ On the idea of regenerative, circular time and the sun-motif see Luisa Guj’s article “*Macbeth* and the Seeds of Time”; for a discussion see also the chapter on *Macbeth* in Mydla, *The Dramatic Potential*.

i.e. the rebellion against the lawful monarch (III.ii. 50). Forced to accept defeat, Richard not so much rejects this rhetoric as inverts the roles. Now he is “night,” and Bolingbroke “fair day” (III.ii. 218). His coming down to encounter Bolingbroke at Flint castle fully unfolds the implications of the mythical precedent: “Down, down I come, like glistering Phaëton, / Wanting the manage of [i.e. unable to control] unruly jades” (III.iii. 178). Stage action and the rhetoric accompanying it are fully if poignantly harmonised.

It remains to be seen what this elaborate metaphor or allegory contributes to the meaning of time in the play. We shall be better prepared to appreciate its import when we take into account the underlying identification of the protagonists (both the descending monarch and the ascending rebel) with time as such. The story of Phaëton in its Ovidian rendering expresses at length the connection between human time and the movements of the sun:

The God sits high, exalted on a throne
Of blazing gems, with purple garments on;
The Hours, in order rang'd on either hand,
And Days, and Months, and Years, and Ages stand.
Here Spring appears with flow'ry chaplets bound;
Here Summer in her wheaten garland crown'd;
Here Autumn the rich trodden grapes besmear;
And hoary Winter shivers in the rear.

Metamorphoses, Book II¹²

It is Phoebus' job to set the rhythms of the fundamental temporal order of the world, of which any disruption must have disastrous consequences. In Ovid, trouble begins when Phaëton demands from Phoebus a proof of parentage. To prove himself a lawful father, Phoebus allows his son to make a wish for him to fulfil. Phaëton “asks, without delay, / To guide the sun's bright chariot for a day.” This makes the father immediately “repent his oath.” There is here a double rashness: “Rash was my promise, rash is thy desire.” But there is also a fundamental discrepancy, which the god describes thus: “Thy lot is mortal, but thy wishes fly / Beyond the province of mortality.” This applies to Richard, who up to a point also entertains thoughts of royalty impervious to death's sting, but then is made to confront his mortal nature, first in thought and then in actuality.¹³

¹² Joseph Addison's translation in Sir Samuel Garth's edition of the *Metamorphoses*. See Bibliography for details.

¹³ “Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs, [...]” (III.ii. 145).

In the fable, Phaëton is predictably unable to manage the horses (Shakespeare's "unruly jades"). The earth is scorched and all rivers hide below the ground: "The frighted Nile ran off, and under ground / Conceal'd his head, nor can it be found [...]." The Earth herself complains: "[...] This the reward for all the fruits I bear / Tortur'd with rakes, and harrass'd all the year?" Eventually the near-universal catastrophe calls for Jove's intervention. Struck by a thunderbolt, Phaëton falls to the earth, which is the moment to which Richard alludes in: "down I come, like glistening Phaëton." In Ovid we read: "The breathless Phaëton, with flaming hair, / Shot from the chariot like a falling star, [...]." There is in Richard's simile both a sense of fatality and a note of glorification of this kind of death, answering to the Ovidian prototype as expressed in the epitaph, which sums up the fable: "Here he, who drove the sun's bright chariot, lies [...] in the glorious enterprize he dy'd." Shakespeare's sun-king is — to remain with Ovid for a little longer — also a kind of Narcissus. Richard's wastefulness is thus also verbal; he loves to hear himself speak even when the subject is his own defeat and undoing.

How neatly this identification of Richard with the heedless charioteer agrees with the image of *him* (i.e. not the one which he so eagerly appropriates) as violator of temporal order (including the law of succession) deserves little further elucidation. Two social times, as it were, have come into conflict, both clad in the rhetoric of the most natural and time-hallowed idea of temporality, i.e. that of diurnal and seasonal cycles. It is the sun that in so many ways supports the orderly succession of things. However, when represented poetically as Sun King, it no longer fulfils this role of guarantor, especially if we take into account the discrepancy in the Ovidian fable between the god, Phoebus, and the wilful son, temporary usurper of the royal prerogative. Richard's proud and eager appropriation of the solar metaphor was an act of usurpation, a verbal one, to be sure, and so much unlike the actual seizing of power by Bolingbroke. (In contrast to Richard, Bolingbroke is a man of few words.) Ironically, this metaphor came linked with its ancient parallel and the allegorical significance "prepared" Richard's downfall by making it rhetorically viable. Taking this into account, it may not be far-fetched to see in Richard a victim of his rhetoric, the rhetoric of solar kingship. More generally, we have seen evidence early in the play that there are energies in language which it may be difficult for the king to control — a theme naturally attractive to a playwright.

The thus uncovered significance of the spoken word in *Richard II* is certainly puzzling and definitely worth delving into. Our next concern is the relation between language and time in the play.

“How long a time lies in one little word!”

Among the ideas that reflect Shakespeare’s concern with time in *Richard II* is language, which the play metonymically represents as “breath.” This “linguistic” interest finds ample expression in the stress on performative utterances and the issue of personal identity in its relation to name and naming. The central scene, that of Richard’s abdication, makes this relation especially intriguing by suggesting that the king verbally “undoes” himself.¹⁴ For our concerns in this section, it is important to note the connection between the royal privilege to control language and the idea of time this prerogative involves.¹⁵

Performative language, puzzling philosophically as it is, has turned out to be a real crux in literary theory, and in the theory of drama in particular. This is in part a consequence of the vagueness of some basic distinctions, chiefly that between constative and performative utterances. While constatives are “utterances which just describe the surrounding world and relations holding within it, instead of influencing them in any way,” performatives are utterances that, when produced “under specific circumstances bring about immediate changes in the surrounding world.”¹⁶ According to Richard Ohmann’s well-known statement, “[i]n a play the action rides on a train of illocutions.”¹⁷ This is a broad view of the problem and may not be of much help in detailed analysis. Ohmann’s statement is in fact meta-dramatic, while in some particular cases (and

¹⁴ For a detailed, speech-acts-oriented analysis of the play, and especially of this scene, see my article “Undoing Selves. *Richard II*, Theatrical Incarnation, and Verbal Exile,” in: *The Writing of Exile*, eds. Wojciech Kalaga and Tadeusz Rachwał (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Naukowe “Śląsk,” 2001), pp. 207–223.

¹⁵ For an analysis of performative language in Shakespeare see, among other studies, Emrys Jones’s *Scenic Form*. Jones trims the issue down to situations of taking a pledge (as in *Othello*, III.iii.), and then enlarges upon the climactic function of such moments. For a time-related analysis of performatives see my analysis of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* in Mydla, *The Dramatic Potential*, pp. 84 ff.

¹⁶ Olga Sokołowska, *A Cognitive Study of Speech Acts* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2001), pp. 10 and 12. (Minor adjustments have been made in the actual statements). It has to be added that “world” and “reality” here mean strictly “social world” and “interpersonal reality or relations”: precisely the kind of reality that is represented in drama. See note 22 below.

¹⁷ The statement, as quoted by Keir Elam, is this: “In a play the action rides on a train of illocutions [...] movement of the characters and changes in their relations to one another within the social world of the play appear most clearly in their illocutionary acts.” Quoted in Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 159. Source of this quotation is Richard Ohmann’s article “Literature as Act” (published in Seymour Chatman, ed., *Approaches to Poetics*, 1973).

Richard II is one of them) performative language may be an explicit thematic preoccupation, demanding an interpretation focused on that particular theme rather than the nature of drama as such. And so, it makes sense to distinguish the large-scale problems concerning the so-called literary performative¹⁸ from the far humbler questions concerning the operation of performative language (illocution and the so-called felicity conditions) within a particular play or even a single scene or sequence.

If we keep to John Austin's initial sharp distinction between constative and performative utterances (i.e. between what we state and what we verbally do or perform), some situations in drama lend themselves to productive analysis focusing on, for instance, the distribution of illocutionary force among characters.¹⁹ One of such situations is the bungled-lists, or failed-duel, scene in *Richard II* (I.iii). The quarrel is between Mowbray and Bolingbroke and the duel has been arranged to settle it.²⁰ It is a highly ritualised affair from the start, as the stage directions suggest: "The trumpet sounds and the King enters with his nobles; when they are set, enter the Duke of Norfolk [i.e. Mowbray] in arms defendant." Mowbray states his case and then Bolingbroke enters to do the same: "Trumpets sound. Enter Duke of Herford appellant in armour." The scene is set for a court trial, although here the case is to be settled by arms and not by words. At least this is the idea.

One could say that from Richard's point of view the duel is an occasion to show the power of royal speech, to demonstrate his authority over language. The opponents are not able to settle their quarrel; the king is not able or willing to reach a resolution by verbal means (the "strong" and elaborate accusatory speeches are, we presume, of equal weight); the duel-situation is evidence that language has failed or its powers have been exhausted. The rhetoric of the opponents suggests that the lists are to prove either right, because language has become ineffective.²¹ But Richard

¹⁸ One of them concerns the already mentioned distinction between constatives and performatives proper, i.e. the need to distinguish between language that constitutes the fictive world and language in which characters negotiate mutual relations.

¹⁹ This roughly means: How much force (in the sense of purpose; there is always a purpose behind an utterance or "locution") can a given speaker claim for him- or herself in a given, interpersonal, communicative situation? For instance, when I come up with a demand of this or that kind, can I expect that my demand is going to be recognised by those it is addressed to? See George Yule, *Pragmatics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 48, and Sokołowska, *A Cognitive Study*, p. 13.

²⁰ In our analysis we ignore, for the sake of clarity, the rather complicated political context of the conflict, and thus also the issue of how much the king is at fault and for what reasons he favours one of the contestants.

²¹ As in: "To prove [...] / In lists [...] / That he is a traitor, foul and dangerous, / To God of heaven, King Richard and to me." It is as though a bare fact could logically and law-

decides to intervene and to use language to settle the matter. He throws his warder and next formally announces the banishment of both contestants. Then, in another feat of performative speech, he makes them take an oath “on our royal sword” and swear not to scheme against their king when in exile. What their speech has failed to perform, his word will, even if his intervention is no real settlement. Rather, it is a blatant manifestation of his prerogative; all can observe him change words into actuality (like water into wine). Seen from another angle, Richard’s verbal feat or *fiat* invests reality (social reality, of course²²) with properties of speech. He is like a child who has discovered that he can bend spoons by using his thoughts. And so he prevents the celebration of deed-as-word (the settling of the quarrel by duel) and offers in its stead his celebration of word-as-deed. The problem (*the* question to be settled) is this: Does he have the power? For the time being he does, yet for the audience (on and off the stage), his intervention is another example of how Richard maims social set-frames, or a time-hallowed rite in this case. Verbal performance is placed above a real settlement.

This “train of illocutions” does not stop there, however. An exchange ensues, in which Gaunt despairs of ever seeing his son again, whereupon the king, by means of yet another speech act, shortens the period of Bolingbroke’s banishment. The broader context just described lets us perceive here a peculiar connection between speech (royal speech in particular) and time. We cannot analyse at great length the way in which Gaunt and his son use tropes appropriately associating time and exile (I.iii. 215–273). This connection is cast into relief by the traditional ideas of time as journey and extinction (used by the grieving Gaunt). What Bolingbroke reflects upon, saying:

HENRY BOLINGBROKE

How long a time lies in one little word.

Four lagging winters and four wanton springs

End in a word, such is the breath of kings.

I.iii. 212

fully demonstrate a man’s fault. Perhaps we need to remind ourselves that scenes of combat, so common in certain types of movies and so popular, do *not* settle quarrels. The audience has to be provided with other means of knowing who is right and who is wrong. This makes those scenes, central as they may seem in movies like *Rambo*, quite pointless. This is in sum Sir Richard Steele’s argument against dueling in one of his *Tatler* essays (June 7, 1709).

²² For the sake of clarification, when Austin speaks of “doing things with words” by “things” he means social relations of different types. The world of drama is social world and thus, by consequence, a world built and rebuilt with the help of language, a negotiable world. Perhaps one needs to reread a play or two by Pinter to see this in all clarity.

is of key import for the idea of language's sovereignty over time. The inherence ("lying") of time in word can be described as appropriation of time by language, a seizure or conquest emphasised in the shocking disproportion between the brevity and weightlessness of speaking ("breath") and the tangible consequences of the decree. The king's decree, arbitrary by nature, his "one little word," which takes almost no time to utter, has the weight of so many drawn-out seasons, where the words "lagging" and "wanton" suggest lengths of time (to be spent in exile) which cannot be measured "objectively."

Seeing clearly the implications of such appropriation (of time by word) enables us freshly to address Richard's deposition as an event in which, losing the throne, he also loses his authority over time. This in turn will help us to tune ourselves to Richard's solitary temporal reflections at the end of the play. In "performative terms," the abdication is an absurd performance, one in which the reigning king speaks himself into nonbeing (Richard's "for I must nothing be"). Similarly absurd is the contrast between the "breath" which cancels Richard's sovereignty and his volubility in the solitary confinement.

Initially, Richard may feel empowered to control time verbally. Language is a tool with which to exercise authority and time seems a malleable kind of material. His behaviour during the duel and the sentences of banishment make this also mimetically plain; Shakespeare treats us to a veritable linguistic show, a spectacle of speech acts. The royal prerogative can only be emulated by others, i.e. the subjects. We feel that Bolingbroke's speech just quoted expresses a desire to wield so much verbal authority over time. Others share in this desire; such power of mere "breath" seems to place the speaker beyond the confines of a mortal being. This is not unlike the immortal longings of Phaëton to drive the chariot of time rather than being a passenger. Hence, not only Bolingbroke but Aumerle (one of Richard's supporters) too dwells on his powerless speech when confronted with the implacable actuality of time's subjection to the royal say-so:

Marry, would the word "farewell" have lengthened hours
 And added years to his short banishment,
 He should have had a volume of "farewells."
 But since it would not, he had none of me.

I.iv. 16

Only the royal word, the king's breath, has the capacity of lengthening or shortening time at will, which sounds like performing a conjurer's tricks. But little does Richard anticipate a moment when he is no longer able to

do things with words, when his language has unexpectedly failed to perform. Little do his subjects suspect that Richard and his “breath” may have to part. To return to the Ovidian allegory, language may temporarily give one the reigns of time to hold, but time’s chariot will never belong to any mortal creature.

“Now hath time made me his numbering clock”

The power of speech to perform, the illocutionary force, is impersonal; it cannot be arbitrarily created *ex nihilo* and does not belong to any given person. In the emblematic example of christening a ship,²³ the power of naming, wielded during the ceremony by the appointed person, is a temporary entitlement and has its source in the community. The loss of the crown to Bolingbroke leaves Richard, ever the compulsive talker, with language for a companion, but a language from which the power to do things has evaporated. For Shakespeare this situation, of an unkinged king turned speechless poet, was irresistibly attractive.

Among Shakespeare’s history plays, *Richard II* may be exemplary in its faithfulness to the sources,²⁴ yet the penultimate scene (V.v) has a precedent in none of them. We see Richard in solitary confinement. He is discovered musing over his situation, and a considerable part of the lengthy soliloquy could be called a lyric on the theme of time. In the BBC production of the play starring Derek Jacobi in the title role, the soliloquy is divided into as many as six parts and filmed in a sequence of so many different frames: a trick impossible in live theatrical performance, but illustrating the difficulty with which this scene confronts a theatre director. What this production mimetically brings home is the central meaning of the soliloquy: the confined Richard, each time occupying a different place in the cell and each time attempting to *occupy himself* in a different way, is shown as languishing in a most unbearable of plights: the futility of all occupation. Moreover, the film sequence emphasises the final, “temporal” part of the meditation: when admitting that he has become a Jack in Bolingbroke’s clock (i.e. the figure that “strikes the bell to sound the hours”²⁵), the actor raises his voice in anger.

²³ See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 23.

²⁴ Schell, “*Richard II*,” p. 262.

²⁵ According to *Richard II*, ed. Gurr, p. 168.

RICHARD

Music do I hear?

[*Music*]

Ha, ha, keep time! How sour sweet music is
 When time is broke and no proportion kept.
 So is it in the music of men's lives.
 And here have I the daintiness of ear
 To check time broke in a disordered string,
 But for the concord of my state and time
 Had not an ear to hear my true time broke.
 I wasted time, and now doth time waste me,
 For now hath time made me his numbering clock.
 My thoughts are minutes, and with sighs they jar
 Their watches on unto mine eyes, the outward watch,
 Whereto my finger like a dial's point,
 Is pointing still, in cleansing them from tears.
 Now sir, the sound that tells what hour it is
 Are clamorous groans, which strike upon my heart,
 Which is the bell. So sighs and tears and groans
 Show minutes, times and hours. But my time
 Runs posting on in Bolingbroke's proud joy
 While I stand fooling here, his Jack of the clock.
 This music mads me.

V.v. 42

The idea of keeping time has a parallel in a passage from *As You Like It* in which Touchstone listens to a song only to complain afterwards of the time wasted in doing so:

TOUCHSTONE

Truly, young gentlemen, though there was no great matter in the ditty,
 yet the note was very untuneable.

FIRST PAGE

You are deceived, sir: we kept time, we lost not our time.

TOUCHSTONE

By my troth, yes; I count it but time lost to hear such a foolish song.

V.iii. 38

In *Richard II* the role of music as a device used to trigger meditations on time is fraught with melancholy meaning, and Richard pursues the clue with unflinching self-sounding frankness. The quibbling encourages us to associate time and time-keeping. The time-sense or the sensation of its passage detects the "ticking away" of an inner clock. As befits the situation of a solitary prisoner (or an exile in a forest; the parallel suggested in "I stand fooling here") this sensation is especially keen due to the absence

of an external clock. But the thus internalised time-sense need not be a cause of jubilation. With objective time gone, the “patient” or sufferer is left to measure the movement of his thought, to count the “befores” and the “afters,” to philosophise at will. He will not be able to synchronise his watch with the rhythms of life “out there.” The music brings it home to him. Disharmony in music jars against inner harmony. But also, harmony in music jars against inner disharmony; the inner clock in Richard is a broken one. There is no music in his life.

Deprived of real power (cut off from the sources of power), Richard continues to use language “performatively,” but his performance now is purely “poetical”: the product is a conceit. Richard makes himself into a clock, but – somewhat masochistically – a clock that stands still. A scholar captures the psychic quality of the time that Richard here meditates thus:

[T]hough Shakespeare probably considered time as part of the natural cosmic order, he could hardly help knowing that of all temporal units the “minutes, times, and hours” he emphasises here are the most arbitrary – since days, months, seasons, and years are at least based on periodicity in nature. This stress upon the arbitrary and distorting features of temporal representation is reinforced by the fact that Richard’s bodily clock reflects his internal state, so that the external representation of time (the “outward watch” of eyes, finger, heart) is governed by the subjective experience of time. The overall effect of the conceit is to bring home to us the extent to which time is humanely created rather than mimetically measured, and hence how fundamentally cut off from time man is.²⁶

Shakespeare’s mixing of the subjective and objective elements would certainly merit careful elucidation. Our critic, typically, generalises the meaning of the soliloquy in an attempt to arrive at a neat philosophical idea, e.g., that of man being “fundamentally cut off from time.” But no; *Richard* is here cut off from *a time*. Richard desires to become time (once more) and to turn himself into a clock (time’s synecdoche and emblem, if time is conceived as measured movement of things) – but he fails miserably. The presence of music (time’s synecdoche and emblem, if time is conceived as orderly flow of thoughts) and Richard’s inability to tolerate it make poignant *our* sense of the tragically personal dimension of this dramatic moment, unique in all of Shakespeare.

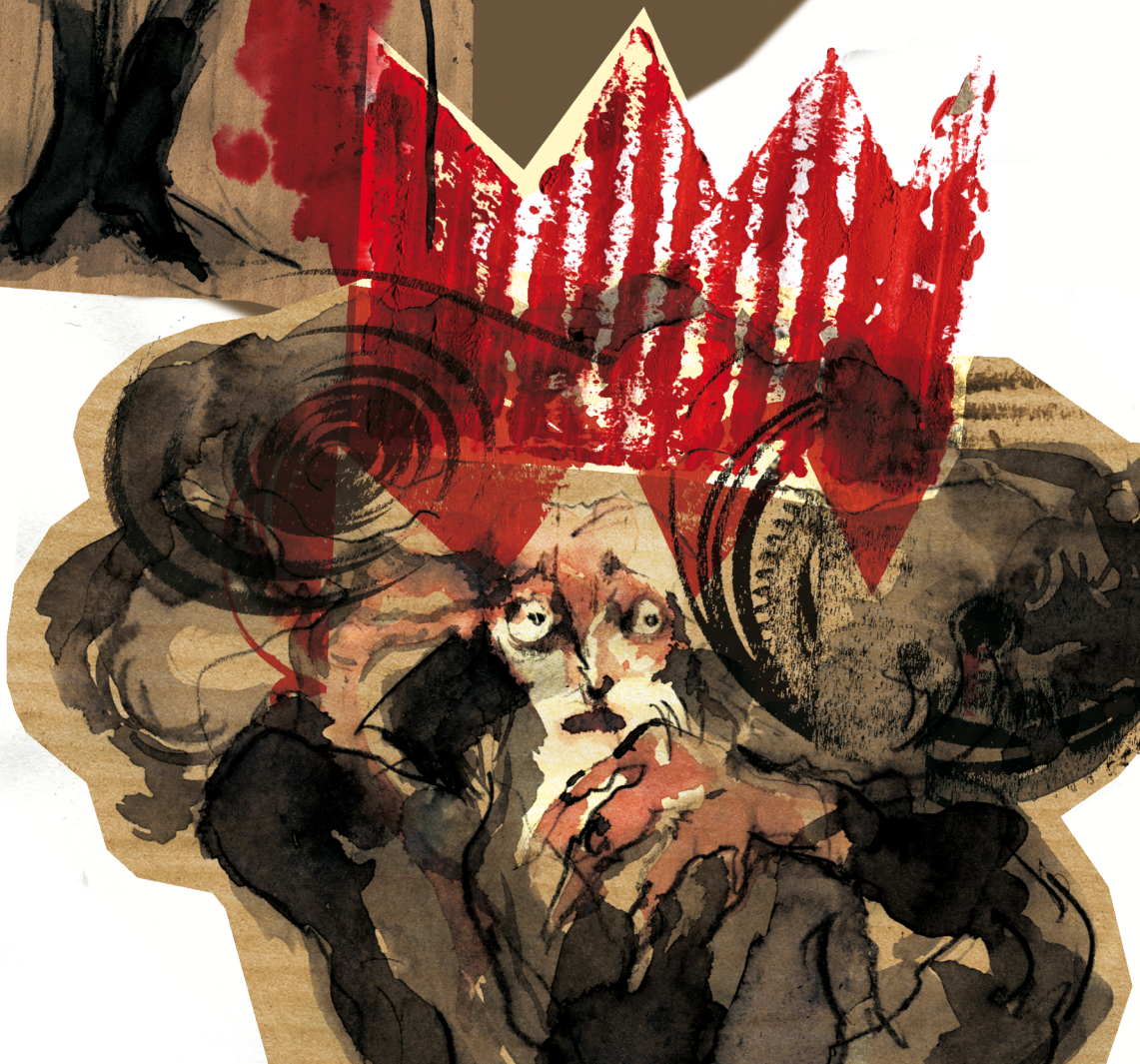
As a non-representative and “sequential” art (unlike, say, painting), music can give us an intimation of pure duration. Pure duration, however,

²⁶ James L. Calderwood, *Metadrama in Shakespeare’s Henriad*. *Richard II to Henry V* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1979), p. 11.

is an idea that the mind will not tolerate (unless of course the mind is that of a philosopher and his name is Bergson). This makes music a non-representative “illustrator” or commentator on Richard’s present predicament as one deprived of any means to affect time’s passage, or, in plain terms, to change his situation. Richard is left with the consciousness of his thoughts being cut off from actuality; his self-searching produces self-revulsion. All that he is left with is the ability to “measure” the tune. In attempting this, he goes a step further and now feels that time flows through him, because he is unable to mould the flux into something that he could fill out or appropriate. His hours and days are “numbered” in a most literally cruel sense. “His” time feels like so much duration emptied of content, of life; his time is now his successful rival’s joyful servant. When he falls back on memory, his mind torments him with an awareness of wasted opportunities. Finally, like the unfortunate lover in the Sonnets,²⁷ Richard concludes that real time is elsewhere; his time has been stolen and now is being lived by someone else. With Bolingbroke, time (“my time”) is gleefully running, while in the prison cell it seems to have ground to a standstill. As in *As You Like It*, “real time” is polity time, but for Richard, divested of his identity, there is no going back to a community. On the contrary, he will spend what’s left of his numbered hours measuring out — possibly with words — their empty flux, but only until the exigencies of *realpolitik* come knocking at the door of his cell in the shape of a murderer sent over by the new king.

²⁷ For an analysis of Sonnets 57 and 58 and the motif of “temporal enslavement” see Mydla, *The Dramatic Potential*, pp. 74–75.

Nativity



Cursed ...: *Hamlet* and *King Lear*

“Cursed spite”

Hamlet’s curse at the end of Act I, despite its stress on the particularity of his accursed situation – “The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right.” (I.v. 196¹) – carries with it a weight of tradition, both ancient and classical, and both Biblical and Christian. Curse of nativity, the wish not to have been born, is as old as tragedy itself (perhaps the most strident is the voice of Oedipus²), but is also heard in the Old Testament, in the complaints of Job. They need to be quoted here at some length:

After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day. And Job spake, and said, Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived. Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. [...] Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? (Job 3: 1–11)

In the Christian tradition, we hear the curse sound loud in the post-lapsarian world of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Adam’s complaint in Book X of the poem (Book IX depicts the temptation and the fall) is certainly less “bodily” and poetically more sophisticated than Job’s. One passage has become famous:

¹ Quotations from *Hamlet* are from the Arden edition by Harold Jenkins.

² As in the moment of horrible illumination: “All clear! O Light! I will never look on you again! Sin! Sin in my birth! Sin in my marriage! Sin in blood!” Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, p. 27 (see Bibliography for details of the edition used).

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
 To mould me Man? did I solicit [i.e. ask] thee
 From darkness to promote me, or place
 In this delicious garden?

Paradise Lost, X. 743

The significant difference, a kind of radicalisation of the usual complaint, consists in the fact that Adam addresses his curse to God himself, and not like Job to his mother or the female body as source of generation. But of course the mother is there in the background, so to speak:

All that I eat or drink, or shall beget,
 Is propagated curse. O voice once heard
 Delightfully, "Increase and multiply,"
 Now death to hear!

Paradise Lost, X. 729

It is, however, in Milton's descriptions of infernal inbreeding that – it seems to me – we reach the limit or bottom of poetically viable assault on procreation. In Book II of *Paradise Lost*, when about to pass through the gates of Hell, Satan meets his daughter, Sin, who unfolds for him a tale of perversion and violence: First Sin springs from the head of Satan, who "conceives in [her] womb / A growing burden." This act of incest is followed by a much grosser perversion; for, after painfully giving birth to a son, Death, Sin is pursued and raped by him to produce a whole new breed of living horrors: "[Death] Me overtook, his mother, all dismayed, / And in embraces forcible and foul, / Engendering with me, of that rape begot / These yelling monsters [...]" (II. 792). This may be allegory, but its visceral detail (as in the phallic image of Death's "brandishing his fatal dart") and the foregrounding of the female perspective make it into a most gruesomely vivid representation of the curse of nativity. Milton may have had a reason to go so far and so low, because the ultimate goal of his theodicy is a vindication of human procreation as a condition for the eschatological nexus, the birth of Christ of a woman. Thus, when Eve advises sexual abstinence as a way of robbing Death of his human booty ("to prevent / The race unblest, to being yet unbegot. / Childless thou art, childless remain: so Death / Shall be deceived his glut [...]"; X. 987) and to avoid the "foretold" "pains in childbearing" (X. 1051), it falls to the angels to refute this abnegation as a side-effect of the Fall. Abstinence is a Satanic idea: "Our Maker bids increase; who bids abstain / But our destroyer, foe to God and Man?" (IV. 748). The promise of "one greater Man" ("Seed of Woman" – occurring repeatedly) needs to be fulfilled, and so humanity must "increase," and the organs of procreation, both male

and female, are necessary in their redeeming functions: “[...] yet from my [i.e. Adam’s] loins / Thou [i.e. Virgin Mother] shalt proceed, and from thy womb the Son of God Most High; [...]” (XII. 380).

Thanks to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Adam’s curse has been carried into modern times. She quotes Milton’s lines as a motto to her *Frankenstein*, and then makes both Victor and the monster repeat and rephrase the curse. Especially in the lips of the monster, Adam’s curse approaches profanity, as in “Cursed, cursed creator! Why did I live?” (at the beginning of Chapter VIII of the second volume). In Shelley’s bleak narrative of ungodly creation, there is a double tragedy; the “fatal propensity” (to use Robinson Crusoe’s phrase) of Victor causes him to bring to life a creature that is doomed from the moment it opens its eyes and causes its creator immediately to abandon it “unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created” (Chapter IV, vol. I).³

The Promethean element in *Frankenstein* has to do, not only with the portrayal of Victor as *plasticator*, but with the fundamentally tragic movement of the novel’s plot, its central irony being the curse of a dream-come-true (or dream-turned-nightmare). Shelley’s Prometheus has no god to complain to; her Adam has only a mockery of God to turn against and no womb to return to.

Curse of nativity belongs to and is an expression of the tragic vision of life. It is certainly a paradox of our culture that the most sublime literary genre should be informed by, indeed predicated upon, this gesture of wholesale rejection or denial of life. The tragic hero desires to stop or stifle life at its source, at the very fountainhead. With this comes, as we shall see, the counter-temporality, the absurd desire to make time run backwards, or to cause the course life to fold back upon itself and to return to its prenatal state.

As we have seen in our studies of individual plays, Shakespeare in his time-related imagery richly draws on nature. We have observed that natural time (we also called it organic and biological) figures prominently in the plays and as it were props up the netting of concrete time, that of passing hours and days. Without this conceptual and imaginative support, a play would merely supply us with glimpses of rather than insights into life. “Nature” is in Shakespeare a word notorious for its ambiguity, as these sample lines testify: “all that lives must die, / Passing through nature to eternity.” (Gertrude about Old Hamlet; *Hamlet*, I.ii. 72); “in them

³ The 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* brought with it a sharpened sense of cursedness; and thus, describing his involvement in the death of Justine, Victor calls it “the work of my thrice-cursed hands!” (p. 218; see Bibliography for details of the edition used). In the novel Victor’s hands are the organs of procreation, in blasphemous analogy to God’s shaping hands in Milton (*Paradise Lost*, VIII. 470).

Nature's copy's not eterne." (Lady Macbeth about Banquo and his son; *Macbeth*, III.ii. 38). We sense that "nature" means here human life and its duration, but we also register that something greater than that is implied. Perhaps there is a good reason for this ambiguity, because what individual plays bring into especially sharp focus is man's idea of nature, of the big "out there" with its laws, our nature, life as such (as in Wordsworth's "life of things"), the nature of things, Nature. Curse of nativity in its many particular formulations creates and stresses a distance, between man and Nature, our nature and Nature. But "nature" is etymologically related to birth (as in Latin, *natus*, "born," which comes from *nasci*, "to be born"), and hence drama, to rephrase the line from *Hamlet*, shows so many passages through nature, where "nature" is constantly debated and where man occasionally becomes inimical to "nature," widening the gap to the point of becoming unnatural. The violence of Victor Frankenstein in his act of "penetrating the secrets of nature" immediately comes to mind, as does the case of the natural / unnatural Heathcliff.⁴

In this, concluding, part of the book we first take a closer look at two tragic visions of human life and subsequently turn to life-affirming ones in the romances.

"Conception is a blessing ... friend, look to't"

"The time is out of joint" – the metaphor is of organic nature, i.e. creates a picture of an organism or a limb that fails to function properly. Time, in other words, is lame, its progress is not smooth or is arrested altogether. In a comedic mode a similar image is suggested in *Much Ado*, where Claudio expresses his impatience with time's slow progress thus: "time goes on crutches till love have all its rites" (II.i. 334), where "rites" may refer both to a wedding ceremony and to the physical consummation of marriage (as in Milton's "rites mysterious of connubial love," *Paradise Lost*, IV. 742⁵). Hamlet's image makes time less abstract but at once more

⁴ See Terry Eagleton's analysis of the "ambiguous naturalness" of Heathcliff; Terry Eagleton, "Wuthering Heights," in: *The Eagleton Reader*, ed. Stephen Regan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998). Eagleton finds nature "a thoroughly ambiguous category, inside and outside society simultaneously" (p. 58). This type of analysis of Heathcliff, a "contradiction incarnate" (p. 60), though not necessarily Marxist, could be carried out upon Frankenstein's creature/monster. Of course, both plots are versions of the tragic.

⁵ There is a grating disharmony between Milton's hymn to matrimony in the "prelapsarian" Book IV of *Paradise Lost* ("Hail wedded love [...] true source / Of human offspring, [...]"; IV. 750) and the curses of the fallen Adam in Book X, quoted above.

ambiguous. Claudio has a concrete image in mind when he says his line, an image that concretises time's nature; what Hamlet has in mind, we cannot be sure. His mind fixes on the task, which is to set right the disjointed limb (of time), so that time again can walk straight. For the time being, the present state of things is unwell and needs doctoring. Unwillingly, Hamlet is to be time's orthopaedic surgeon.

The definite article, "*the* time," fits Hamlet's puzzling metaphor in that it concretises time into a graspable present with a particular situation attached to it. The present does not run smoothly – we may speculate further – because its course has been disturbed by an intrusion from the past, the Ghost and his tale. Time needs a doctor because the past will not rest; the present situation, *the* time, in which Hamlet finds himself, is a confusion of the dimensions of the past and the present and as long as this muddle lasts there can be no future, either. At least it does not make sense, for Hamlet, to look into the future, to "project his life onto a future possibility," as an existentialist philosopher might put it.

More radical, however, is the representation, also organic, of the body politic as a decaying body, an appropriate representation in the wake of the death of the lawful monarch. The famous "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" connects with (foreshadows, in the actual dramatic sequence) the Ghost's narrative of the murder of Old Hamlet in which poison poured in his ear pollutes the body and makes it rot while still alive.⁶ The overriding simile is that of leprosy; the king's body is an analogue to the body politic. By the logic of this analogy, the Ghost connects this image (earlier in his speech, i.e. before he describes the invasion of his body by the poison, thus creating another foreshadowing) with the infection of the whole country by a false report of the monarch's death.⁷ The circulation of the false report in the body politic is analogous to the coursing of the poison in the body of the king; both types of corruption are through the ear, which imaginatively strengthens the analogy. The false report causes the "ear of Denmark" to be "rankly abused."⁸ Moreover, they have the same source: in both these images (that of poisoning and that of spreading false report), the main actor or agent is of course Claudius, the sexually incontinent satyr (see I.ii. 140). To add another image to the two,

⁶ Later the gravedigger speaks freely of the possibility of being "rotten" before actual death (V.i. 159).

⁷ The "leperous distilment" is counter-organic, a device of entropic operation.

⁸ We ought not to ignore the connotations of the word "rank." "Rankly abused" can be read as "abused by sexual immoderation." In Partidge's "bawdy" dictionary under this entry we find: "In heat; sexually exacerbated or sexually dirty; obscene." *Shakespeare's Bawdy*, p. 223.

the Ghost infects Hamlet's mind with the image of his uncle as "the incestuous, the adulterate beast [...]" (I.v. 42).⁹

Images of rottenness and decay imply organic entropy and as such remind us of the "wagging" of the world (how we "rot and rot") described in *As You Like It*. There is also in them a hint at nature turning against itself or herself. Decomposition may be a facet of biological time, a process, natural and organic if non-augmentative, but from the human perspective it is nature drawing to a standstill, or perhaps even nature outgrowing wholesome bounds. The life of the lawful monarch – as in *Richard II* – is represented as a guardian and guarantor of peaceful and orderly progress of things, of the incessant passage of the past (through the present) into futurity. Significant is the representation of the monarch as the hub of "a massy wheel" to the spokes of which is affixed the well-being ("weal") of the country (see III.iii. 11–23).¹⁰ Shakespeare may be using here, as the underlying motif, the image of the Wheel of Fortune,¹¹ but even so the modification is significant, as suggested by the homophony: the "weal" and the "wheel" are interdependent. But for Hamlet, who knows of the corruption, there is no "weal" and there is no "wheel." For Hamlet memory is a curse ("Must I remember?"); he almost envies those who, like his mother, enjoy the "bestly" ability to forget (see I.ii. 150), to cleanse the mind of the past. Contrary to this, Hamlet wipes clean the "table" of his mind in order better to remember the father's "commandment" (I.v. 98–104). Life may need death for its ceaseless renewal,¹² but in the human realm there is no facile renewal or restoration or purging or cleansing. Rather, the "rank" deeds of the past return to plague the living.

Does it then at all make sense to expect that Hamlet's orthopaedics, his "setting the time right," will cleanse the deep-seated corruption? In assuming his "antic disposition," Hamlet sides with forces of regression, and

⁹ Shakespeare throws yet another parallel onto the pile of the three: Gertrude was "won" by Claudius (i.e. "corrupted") by Claudius's "wit" (I.v. 43–44), thus also through the ear. The root (Latin) meaning of "adultery" is "corruption" and is related to "falsification" (as in thinning wine by adding water to it and thereby making it impure). See p. 141.

¹⁰ We must not undervalue this speech simply because it is given by Rosencrantz. In *Hamlet* many significant ideas are expressed by characters who, like Polonius and Rosencrantz, do not win our moral approval.

¹¹ Jenkins's suggestion in his edition of *Hamlet*.

¹² Late in his life Robert Browning attacked the *fin-de-siècle* pessimism in the following way: "Death, death, it is this harping on death that I despise so much. [...] Why, *amico mio*, you know as well as I, that death is life, just as our daily momentarily dying body is none the less alive, and ever recruiting new forces of existence. Without death, which is our church-yardy crape-like word for change, for growth, there could be no prolongation of that which we call life. Never say of me that I am dead." Cited by G.K. Chesterton in Chapter V of his life of Browning; *Robert Browning*, an online edition at the Gutenberg Project.

his mind develops an obsession with phenomena and images of entropy. If there is indeed any method in his madness, then his methodical translation of the ordinary course of things is perhaps best expressed in the paradox of “growing young.” He says, addressing Polonius: “For yourself, sir, shall grow old as I am [i.e. young, comparatively] – if like a crab you could go backwards” (II.ii. 202). This is hardly a joke or a mere puzzle; not for Hamlet at least, for whom temporal progression no longer makes sense and the state of rottenness or rather the rottenness of the body politic makes time’s healthy march future-wards absurd. There is here a verbal stab at Polonius, to be sure; Hamlet underscores the oxymoronic nature of the phrase “*growing* old,” when applied to people who are past their prime. But Hamlet’s feat of the cleansing of the mind (to make room for his father and the great commandment) resembles the process of growing senile, mentally. Hamlet is so unkind to Polonius because he is so much like him. He feels old. All walking is but walking “into my grave,” and the fact that the grave is “out of the air” does not make things better. Infection is universal and so there is no such thing as fresh air, not in the biological sense: “For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion –” (II.ii. 181),¹³ whereupon comes the mention of Ophelia, the implication being the rather revolting image of conception where the woman’s body is likened to that of a dead dog. (We should note the distance between this and the images of fertility and bounty in *Measure for Measure* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.) For Hamlet there is nothing fresh and sound in nature: “Things rank and gross in nature / Possess it [i.e. the world] merely”; “’tis an unweeded garden / That grows to seed [...]” – we hear in the first soliloquy (I.ii. 135).¹⁴ In other words, this type of temporality makes no sense; one side, the augmentative one, of time has been lopped off, which leaves the natural world (and this includes man with his biological functions, among them also and even chiefly procreation) as a realm of “permanent” decay. The phrase “grows to seed” seems to contradict this pessimism, but with Hamlet the focus is not on the unceasing cycles of growth and decay but on the mindlessness of the biological games. Hamlet’s “garden” is a far cry from Gaunt’s “blessed plot” and “teeming womb of royal kings.” In fact, Hamlet’s “garden” is no garden at all.

Hamlet’s suicidal thoughts confirm the image of him as of a prematurely aged man. Hamlet famously contemplates self-slaughter, which is

¹³ This may remind us of Othello’s image. In reply to Desdemona’s hope that he thinks she is honest, he says: “O, ay, as summer’s flies, are in the shambles, / That quicken [i.e. come alive, are born] even with blowing: [...]” (IV.ii. 67).

¹⁴ For a corresponding description of “wanton growth” see *Paradise Lost*, IV. 629.

oddly parallel to Macbeth's desire to counter natural and augmentative time.¹⁵ Also in *Macbeth* the lawful monarch, Duncan, represents natural growth (he promises Macbeth to "make [him] full of growing"), which casts the usurper in the role of time's foe.¹⁶ This parallel (between Hamlet and Macbeth) may strike us as odd, but perhaps it ought not to, for revulsion with and enmity towards Nature are attitudes that represent the tragic vision of things and are expressions of cursed nativity. Hence little wonder that in *Othello* and *King Lear* we also find parallels. Returning to *Hamlet*, a closer one may be a parallel between the prince and the young man in the Sonnets. The handsome youth is guilty of self-abuse, a word suggestive of masturbation as a way of avoiding procreation. He is represented as walking – unwittingly, unlike Hamlet – into his grave, and that is because of his determination not to take a wife and thereby to "stop posterity" (Sonnet 3). Therefore, he even becomes something like his own grave ("To eat the world's due [i.e. progeny], by the grave and thee." Sonnet 1.14). More gruesomely still and more to the point, he makes grave-worms his inheritors ("To be death's conquest and make worms thine heir." Sonnet 6.14).¹⁷ This parallel with the handsome youth brings us to the issue of Hamlet's attitude to the female characters, to women, and to femininity in general. First, however, let us examine more closely the opposition between progress and regress.

Naturally (that is, counter-naturally, to be precise), Hamlet's "method" is to turn against organic time, i.e. against the principle that sustains it: procreation. As we have seen, he warns Polonius that his daughter may "conceive" (II.ii. 184), perhaps playing, like Gloucester in the opening scene of *King Lear* (to be analysed presently), on the double meaning of the verb. Hamlet repeats the theological platitude according to which "conception is a blessing" only to crush it with a witticism worthy of

¹⁵ As in "[...] though the treasure / Of nature's germen tumble altogether / Even till destruction sicken: [...]" (IV.i. 57). Editors suggest an equivalence of "germen(s)" to "seeds of time." There is besides an obvious analogy with "germains" in Lear's curse at the beginning of III.ii; see *Macbeth*, ed. Braunmuller, p. 193. Possibly the closest philosophical parallel to the "cosmology" that these and similar metaphors express is in *De rerum natura*. Among the terms that Lucretius uses to present his theory of atoms in Book I are: *rerum primordia* ("first beginnings of things"), *materies* ("matter"), *genitalia corpora* ("productive bodies"), and *semina rerum* ("seeds of things"); see James Warren, "Lucretius and Greek philosophy," in: Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 22.

¹⁶ Mimetically, i.e. in terms of stage representation, Macbeth's war with nature is made conspicuous in the gruesome scene of the slaughter of Macduff's wife and children. Nature's chief avenger is Macduff, even though his birth was not natural. The progeny of Duncan and Banquo also plays a part. Much excellent criticism has been devoted to the symbolism of childhood in *Macbeth*.

¹⁷ Compare with *Romeo and Juliet*, IV.v. 35–38.

a naturalist. Conception seems much too easy, but at the same time repulsive, if the sun is capable of breeding maggots in carrion. If maggots are analogous to weeds then carrion is analogous to the garden of, at once, wanton growth and universal decay. In addition, organic time levels all distinction. In the description of Alexander going through the belly of the worm (V.i. 197),¹⁸ time indeed makes no progress, the word “progress” itself having a ring to it that suggests, again ironically, a meaning opposite to the common one: “Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar” (IV.iii. 30). With the dead Polonius this “progress” has already started: “Not where he eats, but where a [i.e. he] is eaten. A certain convocation of politic worms are e’en at him.” And then expounding the point: “Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots” (IV.iii. 19–23). In all this we observe Hamlet’s imagination in its perverse and cruel occupation of reducing the human realm to that of biology, organic nature mindlessly running its course. He may complain that for him Denmark is a prison, but his actual prison is the circle of life, the natural clock, whose revolutions his imagination cannot help tracing, and then tracing again.

The idea of “progress,” upon which the poisoned mind of Hamlet dwells with evident relish, reappears in the grave-digger scene, appropriately for the melancholy circumstances and the setting. There is an uncanny sense that Hamlet’s mind is indeed running in circles, returning time and again to the same conceits. And so we are treated to yet another sample of Hamlet’s reductivism: “To what base uses may we return, Horatio” (V.i. 196), whereupon he proceeds to demonstrate how “imagination” may “trace the noble dust of Alexander till [it] find it stopping a bung-hole.” Hamlet’s mind cannot distance itself to this law of returns, to the way living things turn into dead ones, go through the belly of a worm, turn into maggots, and finally into dust. One begins to think that Hamlet’s ruthless treatment of the man may be unwitting revenge for the way Polonius depicted Hamlet’s “progress” from sanity to madness (II.ii. 146). Indeed, Hamlet’s self-analysis confirms this idea of decline, if not of his *élan* in the biological sense then of willpower. When examining his mind, does not Hamlet discover a sickness of will: “[...] And thus the native hue of resolution / Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought” (III.i. 84)? This confirms our diagnosis of some sort of mental infection. The idea of turning in the sense of decline crops up once more: “enterprises [...] / With this regard their currents turn awry [...].” As the Arden editor points out, the underlying imagery is that of sea and tide; a parallel

¹⁸ “To what base uses we may *return*, Horatio!” (V.i. 196).

occurrence of “current” is found in *Julius Caesar* (IV.iii. 221), where “taking the current” is used in the above-discussed sense of seizing the opportune moment. Hamlet seems not to be able to rise to the occasion, to use a common phrase.

Hamlet’s manner of considering things “too curiously,” to use Horatio’s phrase, his naturalist reductionism, makes him turn with revulsion against women, first Ophelia and then Gertrude. In his violent outbursts and inspired raillery, he “naturally” dwells on sexuality, and on procreation in particular. Both women are “breeders”; one has already bred children and the other might, as he has already warned Polonius. In his notorious quibble on “nunnery” (meaning chiefly a convent, but also a brothel), he rails at procreation: “Get thee to a nunnery. Why, wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?” (III.i. 121). The meaning is that in both these houses, conception is *not* a blessing. We may have the impression that we are back in Vienna and the opening scenes of *Measure for Measure*. But the implied meaning is that Ophelia, potentially his wife and thus potentially another mother, blends – in Hamlet’s heated imagination – with his mother, and so he proceeds to list *his* vices. In other words, why give birth to yet another Hamlet? The procession of fathers, of which Claudius spoke earlier (“your father lost a father [...]” I.ii. 89), must be stopped: “What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven?” (III.i. 128).

Being another sinner, Hamlet puts himself in line with weeds and maggots. It would be difficult to formulate a more devastating counter-argument to the exhortations advanced in favour of procreation in the Sonnets and in *Paradise Lost*. We must not forget or ignore Ophelia’s apt description of Hamlet as “th’expectancy and *rose* of the fair state” (III.i. 152), which invites comparisons of Hamlet with the handsome youth of the Sonnets but also, and more to the point, with his royal predecessor (not in the historical sense, of course), Richard II. But *Hamlet*, a tragedy of fatally postponed revenge, evokes yet another comparison, that of Hamlet with “proper” avengers.¹⁹ The rhetoric used by Laertes (but also that used by Claudius to canvass Laertes) presents Hamlet in a none-too-favourable light. According to it, a prompt and “unbounded” act of revenge is a proof of lawful birth:

That drop of blood that’s calm proclaims me bastard,
Cries cuckold to my father, brands the harlot
Even here, between the chaste unsmirched [i.e. untainted] brow
Of my true mother.

IV.v. 117

¹⁹ We may also wish to recall here the rhetoric used by Orlando in his quarrels with his elder brother. See pages 55–56 and 69–70.

Much earlier, the Ghost similarly appeals to Hamlet's sense of loyalty by calling on nature, i.e. consanguinity: "If thou hast *nature* in thee, bear it not [...]" (I.v. 81).²⁰ *Has Hamlet nature in him?*

Hamlet's discourse with his mother owes its violence to the implications of such rhetoric. To put it bluntly, Gertrude's blood seems to "proclaim him bastard." What is it that has caused the "falling off," the "stepping" (see I.v. 47; III.iv. 71) from her former to her present husband? "You cannot call it love; for at your age / The heyday in the blood is tame [...]" (III.iv. 68). Or, rather, should be. Turning against his mother, Hamlet "crab-like" returns to his/her (both pronouns seem to apply) "womb," his life's source. As before with Ophelia, now he wishes to turn Gertrude into a nun ("Confess yourself to heaven [...]"; III.iv. 150). Consistently, he preaches the virtue of chastity and literally advises developing the habit of sexual abstinence, as a means to "stop posterity," to quote the Sonnets.²¹ She is to refrain from relations: "But go not to my uncle's bed" (III.iv. 161). This is not only because "another Hamlet" would in all likelihood cancel Prince Hamlet's succession to the throne of Denmark.

As our analysis has shown, denial of procreation is tightly woven into the fabric of the play, which makes it into an exemplary treatment of the curse of nativity. In this respect, *Hamlet* is very much like *Oedipus* without being at once "Oedipal." We realise that the play as such, with *this type of character*, is a veritable dramatic poem that runs on one major theme. As Sophocles in his *Oedipus*, so Shakespeare in his *Hamlet* – the curse of nativity is the theme to which they have given a dramatic shape. This theme is not merely there, one among many other subjects; rather, the tragedy is an insistent expression of it. But, as we have suggested at the outset of this part of the book, the curse of nativity essentially belongs to the tragic vision and admits of many different renditions. To see this more clearly we shall look at another treatment of it in another play.

"Nature ... suspend thy purpose!"

King Lear opens with Gloucester's quibbling on the double meaning of "conception." Apparently unable directly to answer Kent's simple: "Is not his your son, my lord?" about his bastard or "natural" son Edmund, he

²⁰ The murder is "unnatural" because it is a violation of the relation of consanguinity ("propinquity of blood" in a phrase that occurs in *King Lear*).

²¹ Sonnet 3: "Or who is he so fond will be the tomb / Of his self-love, to stop posterity?"

prevaricates.²² To Kent's "I cannot conceive you." he replies, "Sir, this young fellow's mother could; whereupon she grew round-womb'd, and had indeed, sir, a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her bed" (I.i. 6–13). Thus the uncomfortable problem of illegitimacy is shifted to the woman ("she could," "she grew," "she had"), while the man is able to stay in the background and keep the distance. Even so, and despite the admission that "she was fair" and that "there was good sport at his making," Edmund is still referred to as "whoreson." This somewhat "coarse" exchange (in the words of the play's New Cambridge editor) has been occasion for debate over just how much Edmund has heard of it. In the words of S.T. Coleridge, Edmund "hears his mother and the circumstances of his birth spoken of with a most degrading and licentious levity."²³ Knowing the rest of the play, we have reasons to be confused about this fuss over mothers. No mothers or wives appear on the stage (that is, if we disregard the new marriages); daughters do and take centre stage, and with them, as we shall see, motherhood.

Shakespeare's openings are famously, sometimes notoriously, dramatic in the most pedestrian sense of the word, but no other first scene equals the fierce confrontation in *King Lear's* opening. Colloquialisms such as "no punches pulled" and "all guns blazing" would be fully justified, and in the middle of Scene I.i jesting has long given way to sinister language. The three daughters have been challenged to make love-speeches according to the order of their birth: "[...] Which of you shall we say doth love us most, / That we our largest bounty may extend / Where nature doth with merit challenge?" (I.i. 46). We have learnt not to ignore references to nature. So what is Lear implying in this suggestion of a contest or "challenge" between nature and merit? Some editors read "nature" as "natural affection:"²⁴ How much they love their father and is this love equal to their merit (or the extent to which they have deserved to be loved in return). However, it seems to me that George Steevens's paraphrase is closer to the intended meaning: "Where the claims of merit are superadded to that of nature, i.e. birth."²⁵ Closer but perhaps still not close enough, for what Lear is implying is that there may be different as it were degrees of naturalness. This may sound absurd in view of the fact that all his daughters are obviously *his*, and yet the most obvious things become complicated as the action unfolds.

²² Quotations from *King Lear* are from the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition by Jay L. Halio. "Edmund" is the preferred spelling of the name.

²³ Quoted by Kenneth Muir in the Arden edition; *King Lear*, ed. Muir, p. 4; see Bibliography for details of this edition.

²⁴ See *King Lear*, ed. Halio, p. 98.

²⁵ See *King Lear*, ed. Muir, p. 6.

Verbal “proofs” of daughterly love of the father meet with appropriate “bounty” in the shape of dowers. Thus, for her ample speech, Goneril receives land of “plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,” perpetually to be owned and enjoyed by hers and her husband’s “issue.” The implied meaning is that the father’s bounty answers to the apportioned land’s plenitude, which in its turn is to guarantee the favour of natural time expressed and embodied in human offspring. Regan, the second-born, receives the same treatment. Cordelia, however, though youngest, has been meant to receive “a third more opulent than her sisters.” Her refusal to take part in the quaint verbal contest is cause of a rejection and a curse. (To this extent we will have found here a parallel with *Richard II* with its representation of verbal authority, its abuse and crisis. Besides, the history play has taught us much about the binding of sovereignty and time.) These are consequences – and here lies the absurdity of Lear’s expectations and demands – of making explicit his desire to be loved “all,” to the exclusion of the daughters’ husbands. Cordelia exposes the contradiction (and thus also the hypocrisy) implied in her sisters’ speeches. When Regan has professed herself “an enemy to all other joys,” the words stand in opposition to the expectation of future prosperity and plentiful offspring implied in Lear’s description of her portion as “ample third of our fair kingdom.”

Lear’s elaborate curse (I.i. 103), itself a rhetorical feat answering to the occasion, ends shockingly but to the point with the image of “the barbarous Scythian,” i.e. a savage additionally demonised into a cannibal. With this epitome of inhumanity (“he that makes his generation messes to gorge his appetite”; i.e. he that chops up his offspring to feed on their flesh; l. 110), Lear now aligns himself. On the surface of it, this seems to be yet another disturbing image of familial violence, of domestic unnaturalness, similar in this to Lady Macbeth’s oath to be able and ready to dash out the brains of her newborn child (*Macbeth*, I.vii. 55 ff),²⁶ as proof of her mettle.²⁷ But once more we have to tune ourselves to the implied sense and import of what is stated, and to the idea of time thereby expressed.

First of all, Lear’s curse is about bringing to a halt natural succession, about cutting off generation and posterity. Such is the implication in Lady Macbeth’s ruthless pledge, which makes Macbeth’s enthusiastic response (“Bring forth men-children only [...]”) so absurd. Yet, another implication

²⁶ Piling up absurdities, Macbeth, it will be recalled, is impressed and bids his wife: “Bring forth men-children only, / For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males” (I.vii. 72). See the next footnote.

²⁷ Again Partridge may be helpful in bringing into the open the implied meanings: “Mettle” is “natural ardour,” but is also associated with “abundance (and vigour) of semen” (which makes the word a variant of “spunk”); *Shakespeare’s Bawdy*, p. 191.

of the curse is the way in which Lear has shifted emphasis away from embodying the vegetative qualities of time (in the royal appropriation of the fairness and plenty of his dominions) to the destructive ones. This shift has its emblematic equivalents, from time as cornucopia to Time the Eater-up of Things, or the mythical Chronos.²⁸ But there is yet another aspect to Lear's curse; for in thus turning against his most beloved child (whom he expected to "nurse" him), he has given time over into the hands of his bad daughters. In giving away sovereignty, he has also, and literally, given away *his* time. This is what makes his ruling sound ominous: "Ourself by monthly course [...] / By you to be sustained" (I.i. 124).

This idea of sustenance is not going to work; Lear, unlike those around him, has been all along blind to the true "nature" of his offspring. Cordelia's prediction that "Time shall unfold what plighted [i.e. concealed, as in folds] cunning hides" (I.i. 274) and her ironic farewell to her sisters, "Well may you prosper." – both foreshadow the development of the plot, its passage or progression from the initial metaphorical blindness (because we must not leave out Gloucester, as a parallel to Lear), through madness and actual blindness, to painful illumination and eventual catastrophe of both the sinners and those who are sinned against. If in this process the truth-saying and truth-predicting Cordelia plays the role of "daughter of time," then she is also finally time's victim. Time, the command of which has been given up by Lear, eventually consumes its "offspring."

Lear does not exhaust his potential for cursing in the opening scene. He has saved the bitterest and most virulent words for his other daughters. In Scene I.iv he picks up on the ideas of bounty and plenty, but now he wishes for their opposites. Cursed nativity is given an elaborate treatment as Lear pleads that Nature should somehow work against herself:

Hear, Nature, hear, dear goddess, hear:
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful.
Into her womb convey sterility,
Dry up in her the organs of increase [i.e. generation],
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honour her. If she must teem [i.e. have offspring],
Create her child of spleen, that it may live
And be a thwart [i.e. perverse] disnatured torment to her.
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,
With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks,

²⁸ As in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book XV): "Thou tyme, the eater up of things, and age of spyghtfull teene, / Destroy all things." (Arthur Golding's translation). See Booth, ed., *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Appendix II.

Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
 To laughter and contempt, that she may feel
 How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
 To have a thankless child.

I.iv. 230

This curse, unequalled even in tragedy, is in fact a double one; Lear is saying: "I wish my daughter had no offspring, but if she were to have some, then let them be her torment and cause of her premature aging." The invocation to Nature is meant to assist Lear as he rhetorically moves backwards, from procreation to sterility, inverting "time's arrow," retracing the steps of organic progression. This violent shift is anticipated in the wish that Nature should "suspend her purpose," i.e. by stifling procreation, the goddess of generation will herself become unnatural, as in a different sense his daughters already have.

It is worth noting that although we are still in the first act of the play, ambiguities have already multiplied, we fear, beyond our ability to keep track of the dissemination. Let us try to review them. In one sense of the word, Lear's daughters are perfectly "natural," for they have turned out to be but bastard offspring (he calls Goneril "degenerate bastard"; I.iv. 209). On the other hand, they are "unnatural" for they lack the natural, i.e. filial, affections (chiefly that of gratitude) with which Nature should have endowed them. Before we hear Lear's apostrophe to Nature, the bastard Edmund has already (at I.ii) claimed Nature for his patron goddess, arguing that for their "spunk" (mettle)²⁹ bastards are more natural than legitimate offspring: "[natural children] in the lusty stealth of nature take / More composition and fierce quality [i.e. mettle, again] / Than doth [...] a whole tribe of fops [i.e. fools] / Got [i.e. begot, conceived, produced] 'tween a sleep and wake?" (I.ii. 11) "Lusty stealth of nature"³⁰ can be paraphrased as "stealthy enjoyment of natural sexual appetite,"³¹ but, given the larger context, the suggestion is that what really counts is the fulfilment of

²⁹ To make this clear, "spunk" does not occur in Shakespeare; Partridge names the following equivalents for *spermata* in Shakespeare: "bullets," "germen," "marrow," "mettle," and "stuff" (*Shakespeare's Bawdy*, p. 29). We have so far dealt copiously with the ambiguities of mettle/metal (first in the chapter on *Measure for Measure*), and there are two occurrences of "germen" (one in *Macbeth* and one in *King Lear*) in which this may be the implied meaning.

³⁰ Which also sends us back to *Measure for Measure*, both to the illegitimate child waiting to be born and to the bed-trick. To the convention of this odd dramatic device (bringing together legitimacy and transgression) belongs the idea that the woman gets pregnant. Thus, in *All's Well*, the heroine, after contriving to spend a night with her runaway husband, "feels her young one kick" (V.iii. 296).

³¹ See *King Lear*, ed. Halio, p. 112.

Nature's purpose, increase of life, regardless of the moral qualification of the act and its consequence. The palpable irony is of course that Edmund takes so much after his father, who admitted that there was "good sport at his making" (which answers neatly to "enjoyment of natural sexual appetite"). Now we see Edmund turn against his father exactly because he (Edmund) is not another fop (referring, by implication, to his brother) and has been endowed, "at his making," with those qualities ("[...] I am rough and lecherous.") that will allow him to "top the legitimate," to "grow," and "prosper" (I.ii. 21).³²

We do not need to go beyond the first act to stand in awe before the spectacle of cursed nativity that *King Lear* displays for us. Natural time seems to have been doubly cursed, for besides Lear's repeated and prolix curses there is the idea that those who take the initiative do so precisely because they are nature's favourites, i.e. bastards. Edmund exults over his evil endowments. Here he mocks a possible astrological interpretation of his birth: "My father compounded with my mother under the Dragon's tail, and my nativity was under *Ursa major* [...]," which is yet another showing-off of wit, for in fact he believes in self-reliance and dedication to Nature rather than having any faith in "heavenly compulsion."

Time in the grasp of the wicked is one of the subjects for the Fool's bitter wit to dwell on. As in *Hamlet*, the ordinary course of things has suffered an odd reversal: "thou mad'st thy daughters thy mothers" (I.iv. 134), says the Fool to Lear. Most appropriately, if cruelly, Gloucester and Lear have to learn to walk when they are too old to be wise (see I.v. 35). Time does not make the usual progress and now "the cart draws the horse" (I.iv. 183). The Fool's words about the mother-daughter confusion may remind us of the Gertrude-Ophelia confusion in the mind of Hamlet. Both Hamlet and Lear, Oedipus-like, are made to retrace their life back to the womb from which it sprang, as is suggested in Lear's desire to "anatomise Regan" in order to see, ambiguously, "what breeds about her heart" (III.vi. 34). Indeed, the audiences are justified in feeling rather unwell because of the amount of verbal dissecting going on on the tragic stage. Lear's hideous vision of the open body of his dead daughter ought to give us a sense of how deep Shakespeare's incisions have gone into the tissue of natural time. Now we turn to two plays in which he makes attempts at healing the wounds that his tragedies leave open. We shall see that he goes even further and raises some of the dead bodies that bestrew the stage at the end of the tragedies.

³² To "top" is one but not the only possible reading of the corrupt line.

... and Blessed: *The Winter's Tale* and *Pericles*

“Th’argument of Time”

Three romances, *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Pericles*,¹ tell us copiously of Shakespeare's awareness that time is a medium in the hands of an artist. They do no less than put on display his acute awareness of the dramatic malleability of time, especially if, by comparing them, the differences in handling come into view. Any self-conscious playwright is a time-write, a sculptor in time. “Time is the stuff that plays are made on,” Shakespeare seems to be saying to us; and shows how a skilful playwright can make time obey his say-so. The near-outworn analogy comes to mind, between Shakespeare and his art, on the one hand, and Prospero and Ariel, on the other. Without his obedient and invisible living “instrument,” Prospero would be helpless to manage the spectacle of compensation he is so eager to stage on the enchanted island. The plays examined in the first two chapters of the book contain ample evidence that before sitting down to write his “romances” Shakespeare was concerned with time as the “stuff” of drama; yet they contain no indication that he was intent on continuing to study the properties of this stuff.

Among the questions that express the spirit of such probing may have been these: How far can the artist go without compromising the imaginative unity of the representation, which seems to be the overriding concern? Is the creative imagination entirely free in spinning its dreams? Apparently not, and so: Are there any restraints on the playwright's handling of time? Shakespeare's temporal awareness has manifested itself in two distinct ways, a fact that on its own justifies the idea of probing.

¹ This ordering does not reflect the actual chronology of composition. For a time-oriented analysis of *The Tempest* see the last chapter in my *Dramatic Potential of Time*.

In *The Tempest*, Prospero, whom we may call Shakespeare's time-conscious alter ego, is anxious over the limited time he has at his disposal (roughly equal to the duration of an actual performance of an Elizabethan play) and uses his "Art" and his "Spirit" to meet the strictures. In *The Winter's Tale* and *Pericles*, on the other hand, Shakespeare takes great liberties with the same stuff, reminding the audience that he counts on their active imaginative involvement, which will entitle and enable him to leap over long stretches of duration. His alter ego materialises as two chorus figures, Time and Gower respectively, who have been introduced in order to justify the "violence," or the licence taken with the traditional unities.

Time the Chorus in *The Winter's Tale* (Scene IV.i)² claims the right to "slide o'er sixteen years" (the gap that separates the two parts of the play). It is obvious that we have here a conflation of Time and poetic licence. And so, Time comes clothed in a traditional poetic garb: his "wings" make "swift passage" possible. At the same time, there is a sense of violation of natural progressions and orderly developments. So much is suggested in "leave the growth untried" and, in a different sense, in the idea of "one self-born hour" that can "overthrow law" and "plant and overwhelm custom." The poet, by way of justification, indicates here a parallel between his licence (which may cause him to misrepresent time) and the destructive powers of time, which some of the Sonnets treat of at length. Certainly, time poetically represented is self-born (or, to be precise, fancy-born), but the big question that we have been concerned with in our studies of human time is to what, if any, higher sense of time should poetic time (thus also dramatic time) be subservient, in order to be convincing. And so, Time the Chorus may have been free to leap over the stretch of sixteen years, but this has been, not to overthrow and overwhelm, but, contrary to what He suggests, to connect the past and the future, i.e. to establish a continuity between the tragic (at least potentially) and the recuperative "halves" of the play.

Certainly, we feel that the mind has power over the actual passage of time, no matter how illusory that power may prove in the long run. Gower, the Chorus in *Pericles*, is humble in comparison with the quibbling Time figure in the other romance:

And time that is so briefly spent
With your fine fancies *quaintly eche* [i.e. skilfully supplement]; [...].
Act III, Chorus³

² Quotations from *The Winter's Tale* are from the Arden Shakespeare edition by J.H.P. Pafford; see Bibliography for details.

³ Quotations from *Pericles* are from the Arden Shakespeare edition by E.D. Hoenerger; see Bibliography for details.

Fancy (what we have referred to as “imaginative involvement” on the part of the spectator) is called upon to fill out those gaps in the action that dramatic representation overleaps.⁴ This task of filling out ought to be taken seriously, because time “briefly spent” (actually leapt over) is not real time. Humbler still is Gower’s (Shakespeare’s, again, as I think we must keep reminding ourselves) four-line confession in another speech:

The unborn event
I do commend to your content;
Only I carry winged time
Post on the lame feet of my rime; [...].
Act IV, Chorus

The phrase “unborn event” (where “event” is used in the sense of “out-come”) – referring to an incident that is yet to be shown – brings natural time into play. The organic metaphor is used here, as so many times before, for rhetorical purposes (here, justificatory ones). Because the event is an attempted murder, the metaphor reminds us of the ghastly image of the parturition of evil in *Othello*. The meta-theatrical sense, however, is this: no matter what the moral quality of events taking place in the human realm, so much time is required to bring them “to the world’s light,” and poetry (“rime”) cannot hope adequately to cover this duration. This is so for two reasons: First, the poet decides which fish to lift out of the stream of events.⁵ Second, if he decided to capture (describe) all the fish as they pass, he would soon run out of his allowance of performance time and exhaust the patience of his audience in the process.⁶

There is then an ambiguity in the way “winged time” is introduced to bear upon the matter: Is winged time real? The speech suggests once more that poetic representation speeds up, as it were, the natural course of events; poetic representation needs to fly on the wings of time. In either case, active participation on the part of the audience is expected because the poetic feat depends on “your thoughts.” Expressed somewhat crudely

⁴ As in the ambiguous “your fancies’ thankful doom” (*Pericles*, V.ii. 20) which could be paraphrased as “the kind cooperation of your imagination-dependent understanding.”

⁵ I say “stream of events” because the idea that the poet may try to capture all the fish (the small fry, in fact) in the stream of *consciousness* never crossed Shakespeare’s mind.

⁶ Gunter Müller’s distinction between *Erzählzeit* and *erzählte Zeit*, i.e. between time of narration and narrated time (or, alternatively, the duration of the representation and the duration that is represented) is perfectly applicable to drama. Unlike in fiction, however, in drama the time of representation is usually strictly limited to how long the play should take in performance. In the Prologue to *Romeo and Juliet* the Chorus speaks of “the two hours’ traffic of our stage.” In actual fact plays took twice as long to perform.

but to the tune of Shakespeare's imagery, time is not naturally "winged" (or "feathered") and the poet's licence gives it the emblematic wings.

Upon close inspection, a great deal of confusion can be detected in these justifications. Time, as Hamlet wants to see it, can indeed be lame; it tends to be slow-paced, while its poetic representations will be winged. We grasp the main idea: The poet wishes time to fly because he desires to be able artistically to contain as much of it as the medium of poetry makes feasible. But the "feathered briefness" of poetic representation (see *Pericles*, V.ii. 15) is at odds with time's human dimension. Therefore, some approximation to real time, however illusory, is the ultimate purpose. Art has no choice but to be winged, even though time may go unhurriedly about its business and events may take months to be born, and truth years to come to light.

In both the romances presently to be analysed, preoccupation with natural time is intense, which may be regarded as the legacy of the tragedies which the playwright is at pains to come to terms with. (It makes sense to see in *The Tempest*, for instance, an attempt to go beyond the conventions of revenge tragedy.) An all-penetrating determination of the playwright is conspicuous, to overcome and transcend the entropic and time-reversing forces unleashed in the tragedies and related to, and expressed in, the idea of cursed nativity. The romances frame this as a one-sided or myopic vision of natural time.

"False generations ... fair issue"

The Winter's Tale opens with a scene of friendly parting. Leontes says an unwilling farewell to his friend Polixenes, who is to leave Sicilia "to-morrow." But clouds are quick to gather. Thus, ironically, when Hermione has "won" Polixenes, i.e. persuaded him to stay a little longer, Leontes feels a deadly sting of jealousy. More ironically still, another thing that makes Polixenes comply with the entreaties is his recollection of the Peter-Pan days of youth spent in the company of Leontes: "We were [...] / Two lads that thought there was no more behind, / But such a day to-morrow as to-day, / And to be boy eternal" (I.ii. 62). But this everlasting boyhood, this never-changing present or divine *nunc stans*, is — alas! — gone for good. Passions expelled the friends from that paradise; they were thrown into real time, and their lives have been haunted by disquietude of moral nature: "Temptations have since been born to 's" (I.ii. 77). This kind of anxiety, the con-

sciousness of living in a passion-troubled world, informs the first “movement” of the play.

Leontes is cast (or, rather, casts himself) in the position of spectator, interpreting what seems to him to be a display of illicit passions that bring his wife and his friend much too close to one another. Two things make the jealousy-conceiving scenes in *The Winter's Tale* more distressing than their equivalents in *Othello*: the presence of the son Mamillius and Hermione's visible pregnancy. The boy's name alone suggests his closeness to the mother, and we watch the gap between father and son open and then widen every minute as Leontes becomes more and more positive that Hermione is “an adultress” (II.i. 88). His first question to his son is: “Mamillius, / Art thou my boy?” The next one is much rougher: “How now, you wanton calf! / Art thou my calf?” (I.ii. 120, 126). There is here a telling descent from the human species to animals with the accompanying suggestion of “animal” passions (in “wanton”⁷), and casting Hermione and Polixenes in the role of beasts.⁸ The “naturalist” and “reductionist” drift of such rhetoric is well-known from *Hamlet*. The foreseeable generalisation is soon reached: “It is a bawdy planet [...]” (I.ii. 201). The jealously-maddened Leontes is here side by side with the mad Lear exclaiming: “Let copulation thrive!” (IV.v. 110)⁹ and not very far from the irate Hamlet unloading his disgust with female frailty upon painted maidens and hot-blooded mothers.

Leontes comes to suspect the illegitimacy of both his children. His wife is now clearly “an adulteress” (II.i. 38). As the above-quoted line spells it out, he has now become another “natural philosopher” with an acute and privileged insight into the laws of Nature. Antigonus makes a speech on the subject of procreation (II.i. 140–149), which is meant to convince Leontes that he may be wrong; Leontes, however, will not be convinced. In Scene II.ii Perdita has been born, and Paulina makes a “liberation” speech: nativity “enfranchises” (sets free) the child. The newborn does not belong to the parents and is not to be troubled by their quarrels because there is a law superior to human decrees. The child has

⁷ “Wanton” carries the connotations of “lewd” and “sexually light” (Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy*, p. 279). In other words, Leontes has carried onto the boy his suspicions of Hermione's seeming lewdness. See above, p. 127.

⁸ The obvious parallel for this occurs in the opening scene in *Othello*, with Iago's intentionally repellent images of the sexual act between Desdemona and the Moor.

⁹ In the statement that follows this exclamation (“[...] for Gloucester's bastard son / Was kinder to his father than my daughters / Got 'tween lawful sheets.”) Lear is of course remarkably wrong about the “kindness” of Edmund. The question/statement that precedes it (“Adultery? Thou shalt not die. Die for adultery? No, [...]”) assumes a special relevance in the context of our analyses.

been “[b]y law and process of great nature, thence [from the womb] / Free’d and enfrenchis’d” (line 60). To sustain the allegory of liberation, the womb is called “a prison.” This metaphor may sound strangely unnatural, but so far as we ignore both the circumstances surrounding Perdita’s birth and the often pejorative sense of obstetrics in Shakespeare (the Reader will recall the “womb of time” in *Othello* once more). Paulina’s speech is in fact a powerful declaration of the privileges of natural time over human encroachments upon its province. (Leontes like, for instance, Richard II “before him” occupies a position of authority.) Human decrees, as we (the audience of *The Winter’s Tale*) shall soon see on the example of Leontes’ flagrantly abusive verdict against his wife, are notoriously susceptible to whim, contingency, and misconception (pun intended). Leontes’ verdict, despite the pretence of legalism, repeats Othello’s mock-trial and sentencing of Desdemona; both men act on the idea of cleansing the world of corruption (“Yet she must die, else she’ll betray more men.” V.ii. 6; clearly drawing on Iago’s idea of women’s native and inherent promiscuity¹⁰). In *The Winter’s Tale* there is, however, a higher than human authority, which exposes Leontes’ mockery of justice. Apollo’s Oracle confirms that “Hermione is chaste” and the “innocent babe [is] truly begotten”; logically then, Leontes is now denounced for “a jealous tyrant” doomed to live without an heir (III.ii. 132–135).

His lunacy of jealousy, his raving misconception, leads Leontes past the imaginary infanticide of Lady Macbeth and to actual slaughter of innocents. First it is (referring to the newborn), “This brat is none of mine [...] / Hence with it, and together with the dam [Hermione] / Commit them to the fire!” (II.iii. 92), but soon the threat becomes even more callous: “My child? Away with’t! [...] If thou refuse [to throw it into the fire] / [...] The bastard brains with these my proper hands / Shall I dash out” (II.iii. 131–139). The word “proper” – meaning “own” – acquires here a semantic opalescence in view of the lines spoken earlier by Paulina, and addressed to Nature herself:

And thou, good goddess Nature, which hast made [the child, Perdita]
So like to him that got it, if thou hast
The ordering if the mind too, ’mongst all colours
No yellow in’t, lest she [i.e. Perdita] suspect, as he does,
Her children not her husband’s!

II.iii. 103

¹⁰ For a rather ugly image expressing this idea see the remainder of Lear’s speech on copulation in Scene IV.v: “Down from the waist they’re centaurs [...]” (l. 120). Centaurs were “notorious for lechery” (see *King Lear*, ed. Halio, p. 223).

Earlier in her speech, Paulina is amazed at the great resemblance of the newborn Perdita to her “proper” father, evidently something to which the proverbially yellow jealousy has completely blinded Leontes. But in the passage quoted, we are back in the midst of the natural-unnatural ambiguities. First of all, the father-daughter resemblance is the work of great Nature and thus Nature confirms by it Perdita’s legitimacy. (She, in this sense, is not another “natural” child, like for instance Edmund.) At the same time, however, it is Paulina’s wish that Perdita should not inherit Leontes’ “mind,” i.e. his “natural” or inborn proneness to suspicion and jealousy. Nature should and at once should not act according to her laws. More ambiguously still, Perdita has not been “freed and enfranchised.” She may still be imprisoned by the supreme and tyrannical laws of heredity.

Without examining the “second movement” of *The Winter's Tale* and its miraculous rebirths and resurrections we now move to *Pericles* with its less ambiguous and more affirmative treatment of natural time.

“All love the womb that their first being bred”

In the opening scenes of *Pericles* we see the hero fleeing arbitrarily imposed strictures of concrete time. He has come a-wooing to Antioch and now has an “Oedipal” riddle to solve: “He’s father, son, and husband mild; / I mother, wife, and yet his child: [...]” (I.i. 69). To the thus suggested violation of the ordinary scheme of things, Antiochus, the prime violator — as it soon turns out — and would-be assassin, adds a very actual deadline: “Your time’s expir’d: / Either expound now or receive your sentence” (I.i. 90). In his soliloquy, Pericles does “expound”; the solution to the riddle is the incestuous relationship between Antiochus and his daughter:

Where now you’re both a father and a son,
By your untimely claspings with your child, —
Which pleasure fits an husband, not a father;
And she an eater of her mother’s flesh,
By the defiling of her parent’s bed;
And both like serpents are, who though they feed
On sweetest flowers, yet they poison breed.

I.i. 128

“Untimely claspings” not only refers to the paedophilia (premature intercourse) implied by the incest, but also suggests a violation of the natural succession of things. This meaning is further sustained by the cannibalis-

tic image of (the daughter's) consuming the flesh of the mother; as we have seen in *King Lear*, cannibalism is associated with entropy and also recourse or reversal. The "serpent" further sustains the idea of destructive (self-consuming) temporality, inimical to continuity and thus also to progression founded in procreation. The oxymoronic "breeding" of "poison" is telling in the thus-suggested counter-productiveness, as we might call it.

The opening scene sets a pattern for the entire play in that it introduces a conflict between concrete time and natural time, the latter, somewhat paradoxically, being that of return. This much is indicated in the conclusion of Pericles' answer to the threat implied in Antiochus' "your time has expired": "All love the womb that their first being bred [...]" Pericles will now flee abused time; but then he will repeatedly come into conflict with a time inimical to the higher law, that of self-preservation and, more generally, to life-sustaining impulses, succinctly referred to as the "love of womb."

What gives *Pericles* its special romance-and-adventure aura is the way Shakespeare casts here natural time (in the narrow sense of organic, vegetative powers of nature, proper to our studies) against the background of the "Heraclitean" flux or universal changeableness (symbolically represented by Fortune and Chance). Other plays also foreground a "large-scale" temporality, which is usually inimical to an individual's pursuits. In our analysis of *Antony and Cleopatra* we have observed the overruling imagery of the sea and water used to express the "law" of impermanence. The sea voyages in *Pericles* convey a similar idea, but do so with a super-added vividness, as we shall see.

The scene at sea in Act III, which combines a tempest with a birth and a simultaneous death, makes mimetically vivid the drama of the human condition as the predicament of being exposed to chance and at once endowed with a yearning for continuance and the biological potential to gratify that yearning. The wedded couple, the wife pregnant, are at the mercy of the whimsical element, as foretold by the Chorus: "but fortune's mood / Varies again" (III. Chorus, 46). At the critical moment of birth-giving, Pericles calls upon Lucina, patron goddess of women in childbirth (III.i. 10), but he does so in vain, as it may seem. Nativity coincides with death; Thaisa dies giving birth to a daughter, whose name, Marina, carries an allusion to the circumstances of the event. Life is passed on, but the price is high: "Here's all that is left living of your queen [...]," says the maid and midwife, bringing the infant on the stage. Pericles' language is ridden with oxymorons and paradoxes to such an extent as to verge on absurdity. First comes this puzzling statement clad in the alliteration and anastrophe: "For a more blusterous birth had never babe [...]," where "blusterous" refers to both the circumstances: the tempest and the

untimely death of the mother. Following this, his speech is even more ambiguous: "Thou art the rudeliest welcome to this world / That e'er was prince's child." And next: "Thou hast as chiding a nativity / As fire, air, water, earth, and heaven can make, / To herald thee from the womb [...]." Evidently, Shakespeare has not exhausted his wit with these suggestions that the elements have conspired against the family and that the birth is a chastisement as well as a blessing for Pericles. The last conceit comes in Act V; Marina was "mortally brought forth" (V.i. 103).

More ambiguous, if possible, is the "resurrection" of Thaisa,¹¹ i.e. her second nativity from the casket in which she was meant to be buried at sea. The element "tosses her up," not only literally. She is offered a second birth (a third even, if we include her daughter in the reckoning), this time out of "the sea's stomach" (and back into the proper, human element, we might add), those who are present acting as midwife. For one of them, Lord Cerimon, this is an occasion to extol the vegetative powers of Nature, operating in defiance of death: "Death may usurp on nature many hours, / And yet the fire of life kindle again / The o'erpress'd spirits" (III.ii. 84). And more emphatically several lines further: "Nature awakens a warm breath out of her. [...] See, how she 'gins to blow into life's flower again!" (III.ii. 95). As in the case of Hermione's "resurrection," also here music assists in the reanimation of one seemingly dead. The idea of music will occupy us later, when we analyse the scene of the final recognition and family reunion.

If in *Pericles* Shakespeare's aim is to transcend the Fortune-governed world of *Antony and Cleopatra*, from which escape consisted – it will be recalled – in death-defying self-inflicted death, then this "romance" also straightens out some of the ambiguities of procreation in *Measure for Measure*. Marina is put in a brothel (as another turn of the Wheel of inauspicious Fortune, "ungentle fortune"; see IV.vi. 95¹²), where every attempt is made to "take off her maidenhead," or to "crack the glass of her virginity" (IV.vi. 142).¹³ More appropriately perhaps, as the bawd puts it commenting on the futility of those attempts, "She is born to undo us." It is of course bitterly ironic that because of her staunchly preserving her virginity Marina is described as unnaturally frigid, "able to freeze the god Priapus [god of fertility] and undo a whole generation" (IV.v. 3), as if

¹¹ This has a parallel in *The Winter's Tale*, where at the end of the play Hermione comes back to life as an animated statue in a spectacle arranged to the utter stupefaction of the grieving and repentant Leontes. This mock-resurrection is in fact far less miraculous than that of Thaisa.

¹² Perhaps as an illustration, because Fortune herself is "a strumpet"; see *Hamlet*, II.ii. 235.

¹³ For the "taking off of maidenheads" see also the opening scene in *Romeo and Juliet*.

whore-mongering had much to do with that god's business, the business of promoting "generation" rather than "rutting."¹⁴ The ambiguities of "nunnery," known from *Hamlet*, are resolved, if somewhat paradoxically; Marina is a "nun" in a brothel, i.e. she has the gift and the powers to reform Lucios and Touchstones. One of the reformed clients says, after meeting her: "Come, I am for no more bawdy-houses." And another: "I'll do any thing now that is virtuous; but I am out of the road of rutting for ever" (IV.v. 6–9).¹⁵

Fortune itself (herself) assumes a more optimistic face, because the play eventually suggests its subservience to the time of growth. As much is conveyed by Pericles' motto and the "present" that accompanies it: "He hopes by you his fortunes yet may flourish" (II.ii. 42); "you" is Thaisa, when the two first meet on the occasion of a tournament. Also earlier, having successfully dodged the clutches of Antiochus, Pericles addresses Fortune directly thanking her for giving him "somewhat to repair myself; [...]" (II.i. 120). He contents himself with "fortune's alms," to borrow a phrase from *King Lear*. More or less halfway through the play, he recognises in the thus personified entity a monarch superior to any earthly one, including himself:

[...] Time's the king of men,
He's both their parent, and he is their grave,
And gives them what he will, not what they crave.
II.iii. 45

In other words, he is resigning himself to a fate of one tossed about by whimsical Fortune. That this is merely an assumed belief and a posture (expressions of resignation rather than deep-seated conviction) is confirmed by the Chorus, who offers the audience a view as it were from a distance:

Let Pericles believe his daughter's dead,
And bear his courses to be ordered
By Lady Fortune [...].
IV.iv. 46

¹⁴ "The Roman god of male potency and virility; hence, a penis-like statue or symbol." Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy*, p. 216.

¹⁵ Clearly "rutting" means here womanising or whoring, even though literally "rut" is "heat," or "the period of sexual excitement in male deer, goat, ram and other animals." Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy*, p. 230. Of course this literal meaning also makes perfect sense; the gentleman is to treat his sexual appetite in a human rather than animal fashion. This is in contrast to another animal metaphor to do with procreation; Thaisa refers to parturition as "eaning time." This rare word normally refers to the breeding of sheep. See *Pericles*, ed. Hoeniger, p. 96.

Almost until the end of the play, Shakespeare casts Pericles in the role of a believer in the power of Fortune, but – as Gower's lines quoted above suggest – this is so much “bad faith” – to use once more the Sartrean idea. The attitude of resignation, besides its verbal expressions, manifests itself outwardly in Pericles' beard; he has decided to put his personal time “on hold,” so to speak. But Fortune herself finally gives in to a power superior even to herself. If Gower has any title to express a more comprehensive view of things, then he gives us a clue very early in the play:

[...] Till fortune, tired with doing bad,
 Threw him ashore, to give him glad: [...]
 II. Chorus, 37

As before with Thaisa, Fortune tosses the hero out of its element. A full realisation of this felicitous expulsion takes place in the final scenes of the play.

Highly crafted scenes of recognition are a characteristic feature of the romances. In *Pericles*, imagery of procreation assists our dramatic poet in fashioning a convincing climax, so desirable in view of the marvellous stuff that the play is made on. The recognition is initiated by a long exchange between Marina and Pericles, where Pericles has to awaken from his resignation to fate and relive the painful past. In the course of our analyses, we have become accustomed to appropriations of the imagery of parturition by male characters; here is another instance, in a new, plaintive clothing:

PERICLES
 I am great with woe
 And shall deliver weeping.
 V.i. 105

More significantly and also radically, we have here not only a realisation of Lear's hopes of receiving “kind nursery” at the hands of Cordelia, but a rebirth. Now the male faculty of begetting is transferred to the female progeny; says Pericles,

O, come hither,
 Thou that beget'st him that did thee beget;
 Thou that wast born at sea, buried at Tarsus,
 And found at sea again.

V.i. 194

Marina, as the somewhat perplexing syntax of another line conceals from view, is “another life to Pericles [her] father” (V.i. 207). The revival and

the recapture of “lost time,” however, are to become mutual and subsequently to involve the wife as well. In Diana’s words (spoken during the vision in which she appears to Pericles), Pericles is to “give them [i.e. the daughter and the wife] repetition to the life” (V.i. 244). Once more Shakespeare is bent on squeezing as much rhetorical juice as the occasion affords. Thus, turning to Cerimon, Pericles bids him: “Will you *deliver* / How this dead queen re-lives?” (V.iii. 63). In other words, since a miraculous rebirth is the occasion or subject, the metaphor of parturition befits the event and the account of it.

The imagery of the organic sustains both the revivals and the final reunions. The rhetoric of self-renewing Nature makes *Pericles* a “peerless kinsman” (to borrow a phrase from *Macbeth*) even among the optimistic visions of the romances. The tragedies and the dark comedies have been left a long way behind. At the end of *King Lear*, we hear an agonised complaint over the dead body of another daughter: “No, no, no life! / Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, / And thou no breath at all?” Here vindictive and whimsical Fortune has turned her Wheel with utmost ruthlessness, strangling life out of the beloved daughter and then causing the father literally to expire (“Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir.”) while trying in vain to detect even the most humble manifestation of life in the corpse. In *Pericles*, the revolutions of the Wheel have ceased to matter and regeneration in all kinds of ways and senses has won the day.

Appropriately, the music of the spheres accompanies the great finale. It is Pericles who hears the heavenly music: “The music of the spheres! List, my Marina” (V.i. 228). What should we make of this? Is it something more than a symptom of a changing theatrical convention, a shift towards something like “a broadening of the means of artistic expression”? What we have seen in our analysis allows us to see here a celebration of a sense of time superior to that expressed in the image of Fortune’s Wheel and the accompanying rhetoric of readiness that verges on resignation, a reversal of tragic reversals and regresses. For Plato, the harmony of the spheres is a representation, imperfect though it may be, of eternity: “an eternal image of the eternity which remains for ever at one.”¹⁶ Heavenly revolutions “imitate eternity.”¹⁷ Pericles hears the music of the spheres — i.e. has a sensation of eternity — at the moment when he is at one with the externisations (to use Emerson’s language) of his soul: “O heavens bless my girl! But hark, what music?” (V.i. 222). Unlike Richard’s bitter consciousness of music representing life passing him by, Pericles’ sensation confirms a state of fulfilment and plenitude. The discord in his soul has

¹⁶ Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Desmond Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 37.

¹⁷ Plato, *Timaeus*, p. 38.

been healed and he is one with the world, with his “nearest and dearest,” and also with himself. This harmonisation is perhaps as much as a mortal creature can taste (or foretaste) of eternity while “crawling between earth and heaven.” A paraphrase of lines from the last act of *The Merchant of Venice* will supply an appropriate ending to this chapter: “Such harmony is in immortal souls, / [And even though] this muddy vesture of decay / Doth grossly close it in, we [can still] hear it [...].” (V.i. 63).

Afterword

It is time to return to our Emerson. Let us look at a passage in “Nominalist and Realist”:

Nature will not be Buddhist. [...] You are one thing, but nature is *one thing and the other thing*, in the same moment. She will not remain orbéd in a thought, but rushes into persons; and when each person, inflamed to a fury of personality, would conquer all things to his poor crotchet, she raises up against him another person, and by many persons incarnates again a sort of whole. She will have all. (Emerson’s emphasis)

According to Emerson, Nature attains different manifestations with each individual person or thing. Like Shakespeare’s Cleopatra’s, Nature’s variety is inexhaustible. This is no different with human time; as Nature rushes into persons, so human time rushes into drama and attains different incarnations in different plays. Each play offers us a unique experience of human time and thereby of the many complex circumstances that affect our sense of time’s passage. A play, whether we experience it in performance or in reading, is a throbbing nexus of three “times”: time verbally represented and debated by characters (time’s rhetoric), theatrical action accompanying that representation on the stage, and finally the way both the verbal and mimetic modes of representations affect the mind of the spectator. Because of the dynamic nature of dramatic art, it is not possible to arrive at generalisations concerning the “nature of time in Shakespeare” and not reasonable to strive to attain any. An individual play is an “externisation” of time in much the same way in which individual people, with their ideas and actions, are externisations of nature. It is impossible to grasp the proverbial stream of time and Bergson warns us not to freeze it with our cold intellect.

The distinguishing feature of Shakespeare's plays is the unusual blending of the conceptual and mimetic components in drama; in so many plays (not all, to be sure), time is not only shown – there is after all nothing peculiar about that: any play may be said to do that – but is also debated. Time-related rhetoric makes the spectator or reader aware of the characters' heightened awareness of the temporal factor in their lives (i.e. they may, like Romeo, believe themselves to be fools of Fortune, etc. etc.), and yet there never is an easy mirroring between word and action. Sometimes, as in *As You Like It*, one facet of time may be shown while another is being debated. Thus, on a purely conceptual level, we may agree with Rosalind and say that "Time travels in divers paces with divers persons," and simultaneously be aware that her discourse is just another means of passing time. In the forest of Arden, there is ample time to engage in philosophising, but neither Helena nor Hermia in the forest near Athens have the opportunity or willingness to do any such thing; instead, they are at each other's throats maddened by love and jealousy. We cannot affix a particular mode of time passing or "temporal attitude" to a given dramatic genre; we can say, because we find evidence of that in *Richard II* and *As You Like It*, that Shakespeare was alert to the sometimes baffling relation between time and language. This awareness made him devise scenes which show how troubled the relation between lived and spoken time can be. And this we may generalise, for speech is a mode of behaviour and as such is related to time, and this in turn makes it worthy of notice in the eyes of any true-born dramatist.

Shakespeare is certainly skilful in handling abstract ideas, unlike some poets. But, unlike most philosophers, he refuses to tie his wit down to any single abstraction. Similarly, unlike some poets, Shakespeare refuses to tie down his representation of human time to any uniform metaphor or personification. No single time-related idea or image ought to be regarded as Shakespeare's. Our analyses encourage us to believe that he found the idea of Fortune so attractive, not because it conveys a clear-cut unit of meaning, but – on the contrary – because it can carry such different and sometimes contradictory senses, without becoming less eloquent (as an idea or an image) for all that. Therefore, if there is an idea in the plays that we can call Shakespeare's own, we can sum it up as the belief that appealing or "lively" characters should not remain indifferent to time. Some prominent characters tend to adjust their thoughts to the changing circumstances of their "lives," and such accommodations show that human time is dynamic, which is what makes it human in the first place. Shakespeare's persistent use of organic or vegetative imagery (to depict human time) serves to render his representation of time dynamic and thereby to humanise that representation, i.e. to make it matter for the

viewer. Uniform temporality, time read off the evenly ticking clock, man finds terrifying. Hamlet is appalled by the tale about lost fathers; similarly, Richard is appalled by the harmonies of a piece of music because they jar with the dissonance in his mind. Any even and measured succession in the human realm is maddening and belief in it may be a symptom of a disordered mind, as in Macbeth's reflections on the "petty pace" of an unending procession of "tomorrows." A clockwork, mechanistic picture of the universe may be a man-made one (as Bergson has shown in his critique of the intellect), and yet we do not need Blake or Dickens to prove to us that this hardly is a habitable world. A life may be lived to the stunning monotony of the moving piston, as in Dickens's Coketown, but such life is immediately recognised as a nightmare. A work of art that conveys a representation and a sense of the dynamic of human time — a theatrical play or a piece of music — is in no doubt to gratify the mind. Lived time is susceptible of dilations and compressions, which, paradoxically, does not take away its stubbornness. Time may not be our sworn enemy, but it is usually a hard-bargaining business partner. Images such as that of Fortune have helped man to convey the idea of time's intractability. But the images of water in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Protean element, life-sustaining but also formidable and treacherous, are perhaps even fitter vehicles of our haunting knowledge that time is both vital and ungraspable.

These studies have been written with the aim to show, and at least in part to explain, on the example of several plays by Shakespeare, how drama handles the dynamics of human time. The goal has been what I believe it should be: to particularise, and in our pursuit of it we have been guided by the idea of natural — or organic — time (both in its augmentative or vegetative and entropic or deteriorative varieties), with its varying poetic expressions and mimetic manifestations. This added focus, made explicit in the third part of this book, has its origin and rationale in Shakespeare's rhetoric and our choice of the literary material has helped us to follow the transformations of this idea across the different dramatic genres and the accompanying world-views and life-visions. In the sequence followed in this book we have gone from life-negating to life-affirming attitudes and beliefs. This passage, reflecting in broad terms the chronology or "development" of Shakespeare and his art, allows us to speak of a desire to overcome, in the "late plays," the pessimism of the tragic vision and the curse of nativity that informs that vision. Which vision of life is more convincing is of course left to the individual reader to decide.

As with every sharpened focus, a great deal of the subject has inevitably been left out. Besides, our principle idea was not to reach a definitive view of "time in Shakespeare" but rather to come into contact with the

plays, to make their content vibrant and articulate. This ought not to dishearten those who have come across in these pages ideas that make the subject intellectually enticing for them. The tides in real life come and go – there is no denying this truth. If this is any comfort, the tides in human affairs as represented by Shakespeare will stay for anyone to catch in reading or in performance and to make the best of the occasion.

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Jacek Mydla

Szekspirowski przyływ **Rozważania nad dynamiką ludzkiego czasu**

Streszczenie

Książka *Szekspirowski przyływ. Rozważania nad dynamiką ludzkiego czasu* jest w znacznej mierze kontynuacją studiów nad czasem dramatycznym u Szekspira przedstawionych we wcześniejszej publikacji autora, *The Dramatic Potential of Shakespeare* (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2002). Książka *Szekspirowski przyływ* składa się z trzech rozdziałów, podzielonych na sekcje poświęcone poszczególnym sztukom. I tak, w rozdziale pierwszym, gdzie omawiany jest czas „komiediowy”, analizowane są *Miarka za miarkę* oraz *Jak wam się podoba*. W rozdziale drugim, poświęconym czasowi „tragicznemu”, analizowane są *Antoniusz i Kleopatra* oraz *Ryszard II*. Rozdział trzeci podejmuje wątek „przekleństwa narodzin” i przynosi analizę: *Hamleta*, *Króla Lira*, *Zimowej opowieści* i *Peryklesa*. W rozdziałach pierwszym i drugim zwraca się uwagę na to, w jaki sposób Szekspir konstruuje czas literacko przedstawiony, czyli głównie tzw. czas konkretny (wyznaczany odniesieniami do dni, godzin itd.). Szczególny nacisk położony został na czas przeżywany: na to, jakie znaczenie ma czas i jego różne wymiary we wzajemnych relacjach postaci i jak rozumienie oraz przeżywanie czasu przez postaci wpływają na dynamikę owych relacji. Czas konkretny jest dla Szekspira elementem niezbędnym w tkance dramatu, ale nie centralnym, jest zaledwie tłem, na którym rozgrywiają się ludzkie dramaty. Znacznie ważniejsza od czasu konkretnego jest retoryka czasu, która towarzyszy podejmowanym przez postaci działaniom, podpowiada ich intelektualne uzasadnienie oraz pomaga czytelnikowi/widzowi wczuć się w toczącą się akcję. Czas językowo przedstawiony w dramacie (wypowiedzi o czasie) pełni zatem bardzo istotną funkcję w racjonalizacji motywacji bohatera, co ma z kolei znaczący wpływ na empatię jako niezbędny czynnik umożliwiający „nasz” żywy odbiór treści utworu wraz z całą jego ludzką dramaturgią. Cechą wyróżniającą sztuki Szekspira jest właśnie wyeksponowanie w nich czasu, lub raczej świadomości czasu, jako elementu w sposób istotny określającego ludzkie bytowanie w świecie.

Każda sztuka postępuje się własną retoryką czasu, co wymusza na zaangażowanym czytelniku (odbiorcy) wnikięcie w tkankę językową utworu. Szekspir częstokroć zapożycza się u różnorodnych tradycji intelektualnych Zachodu, konstruując ową retorykę, toteż stosunkowo szybko i łatwo rozpoznajemy poetyckie

wątki i filozoficzne koncepcje, takie jak: Fortuna (niestałość spraw ziemskich), Okazja (ulotność chwili), ziarna czasu (czas organiczny), nieskończona podzielność odcinka czasu (czas zmatematyzowany), względność czasu subiektywnie przeżywanego (czas fenomenologiczny, przeżywany), wszechobecność i nieuchronność śmierci i rozkładu (entropia). W poszczególnych sztukach Szekspir nadaje tym i innym koncepcjom ludzki wymiar przez uwikłanie ich w konteksty międzyludzkich relacji: zobowiązań, konfliktów, rywalizacji, występku.

Wyjątkową rolę odgrywają u Szekspira wątki związane z organicznym pojmowaniem czasu, czyli retoryka ujmująca człowieka i jego postępowanie oraz – ogólnie – przebieg życia (czas ludzki) w kategoriach „biologicznych”: ciąży, narodzin i rozwoju, śmierci i rozkładu. Dramaturgiczna nośność figury – „łona czasu”, zostaje w niektórych sztukach wzmocniona rzeczywistą obecnością ciężarnej kobiety, jak dzieje się to w *Miarce za miarkę*, *Zimowej opowieści* i *Peryklesie* – w kontraście do retoryki „sterylizacji” obecnej np. w *Makbecie* i *Hamlecie*. Szekspirowska poetyka czasu organicznego nie jest jednak ani konceptualnie jednolita, ani moralnie jednoznaczna, np. nikkzemnik w *Otelli* mówi o skutkach swojej podłości jako o dziecięciu, które czas powije.

Walent retoryki czasu organicznego polega na tym, iż nadaje czasowi literacko przedstawionemu rozpoznawalnie ludzki wymiar. Kierując się tym przekonaniem, podjęto w ostatnim rozdziale książki próbę prześledzenia wątku nazwanego „przekleństwem narodzin”, który niemal nierozzerwalnie wiąże się z tragiczną wizją rzeczywistości i ludzkiego bytowania. W sekcji otwierającej rozdział szkicowo przedstawiono kulturowe dzieje owego motywu, wskazując jego obecność w *Księdze Hioba*, *Królu Edypie*, *Raju utraconym* i we *Frankensteinie*. Biorąc pod uwagę ten szerszy kontekst, można powiedzieć, że przekleństwo narodzin to jeden ze sposobów konceptualizacji czasu ludzkiego: tego, jak człowiek pojmuje swoje bytowanie w świecie. Przeklinając swoje narodziny, człowiek wyobrażeniowo powraca do matczynej łona, czyli innymi słowy wyrzeka się czy sprzeciwia zorientowanej na przyszłość „strzałce” czasu. Taką pesymistyczną wizję losu ludzkiego znajdujemy w *Hamlecie* i *Królu Lirze* – w sekcjach poświęconych tym sztukom ukazane zostały różne odmiany owego przekleństwa (np. Lir przeklinający swoje córki, rzucający klątwy na ich łona). W późnych sztukach Szekspira, tzw. romansach, widzimy próbę przewyciężenia – wyrażonego w formie przekleństwa – tragicznego pesymizmu. Dlatego możemy mówić o swoistej ewolucji, którą określono w książce jako przejście od narodzin przeklętych do błogosławieństwa narodzin. Bodaj najwyraźniej jest to widoczne w sztuce *Perykles*, gdzie trumna staje się płodnym łonem, a w kulminacyjnym punkcie bohaterowi przywrócone zostają „zmarłe” i bezsilnie opłakiwane – w czasie „pustym,” bo niejako pozbawionym przez śmierć swego naturalnego biegu – żona i córka.

Jacek Mydla

Shakespeares Zustrom

Die Überlegungen über die Dynamik der menschlichen Zeit

Z u s a m m e n f a s s u n g

Das Buch ist in hohem Maße eine Fortsetzung der Studien über die dramatische Zeit Shakespeares, die der Verfasser in seiner früheren Publikation, *The Dramatic Potential of Shakespeare* (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2002) betrieb. Es besteht aus drei Kapiteln, welche in die den einzelnen Dramen gewidmeten Unterkapiteln geteilt worden sind. In dem ersten, der „Komödienzeit“ gewidmeten Kapitel werden *Maß für Maß* und *Wie es euch gefällt?* besprochen. Der Untersuchungsgegenstand des zweiten Kapitels wird die in den Dramen *Antonius und Cleopatra* und *Richard II.* dargestellte „Tragödienzeit“. Das dritte Kapitel berührt das Motiv „Geburtsverfluchung“ anhand der Dramen *Hamlet*, *König Lear*, *Ein Wintermärchen* und *Perikles, Prinz von Tyrus*. In den zwei ersten Kapiteln wird es darauf Acht gegeben, auf welche Weise die literarisch geschilderte Zeit, also vor allem die so genannte konkrete Zeit (die in Bezug auf Tage, Stunden, usw. angesetzte Zeit) von William Shakespeare konstruiert wird. Das Schwergewicht wurde dabei auf die erlebte Zeit gelegt: welche Bedeutung hat Zeit und deren verschiedene Dimensionen in gegenseitigen Relationen zwischen den Figuren und wie die Dynamik der Relationen durch Beurteilung und Erlebnis der Zeit von den einzelnen Figuren bedingt ist. Die konkrete Zeit ist für Shakespeare ein für das Drama unentbehrliches Element, aber doch kein Hauptelement, sondern kaum ein Hintergrund, in dem sich menschliche Tragödien abspielen. Viel wichtiger von der konkreten Zeit ist die Zeitrhetorik, die die von den Figuren unternommenen Schritte begleitet, deren intellektuelle Begründung nahelegt und einem Leser/Zuschauer hilft, sich in die spielende Handlung hinein zu fühlen. Die in dem Drama mittels Sprache zum Ausdruck kommende Zeit (Äußerungen über die Zeit) spielt also eine sehr wichtige Rolle bei Rationalisierung der Beweggründe des Helden, was wiederum zur Empathie beiträgt; die Empathie ist nämlich ein Faktor, der eine lebendige Rezeption des Werkes mit dessen ganzen menschlichen Dramatik möglich macht. Shakespeares Theaterstücke tun sich gerade durch Hervorhebung der Zeit, oder eher des für die Existenz des Menschen in der Welt ausschlaggebenden Zeitbewusstseins hervor.

Jedes Theaterstück bedient sich seiner eigenen Zeitrhetorik, was von einem engagierten Leser/Rezipienten das Eindringen ins Sprachnetz des Werkes erzwingt.

Shakespeare verschuldet sich oftmals bei verschiedenen intellektuellen Traditionen des Westens, indem er jene Rhetorik bildet, so dass wir relativ schnell und leicht solche poetischen Motive und philosophischen Ideen erkennen können, wie: Fortuna (Unbeständigkeit der irdischen Sachen), Gelegenheit (Vergänglichkeit der Zeit), Zeitkörnchen (organische Zeit), unendliche Teilbarkeit der Zeitspanne (mathematisierte Zeit), Relativität der subjektiv erlebten Zeit (phänomenologische, erlebte Zeit), Allgegenwärtigkeit und Unabwendbarkeit des Todes und des Zerfalls (Entropie). In den einzelnen Dramen gibt Shakespeare den und anderen Konzepten den menschlichen Ausmaß, indem er sie in Zusammenhänge der zwischenmenschlichen Relationen: Verpflichtungen, Konflikten, Rivalität, Verfehlungen verstrickt.

Eine besondere Rolle spielen bei Shakespeare die mit dem organischen Zeitverständnis verbundenen Motive, d.h. die den Menschen, dessen Handlungsweise und – allgemein genommen – den Werdegang (menschliche Zeit) in „biologischen“ Kategorien: Schwangerschaft, Geburt und Entwicklung, Tod und Zerfall auffassende Rhetorik. Dramaturgische Tragfähigkeit der Figur „Zeitschoß“ wird in manchen Stücken mit wirklicher Präsenz einer Schwangeren verstärkt, wie es in *Maß für Maß*, *Wintermärchen* und *Perikles* der Fall ist – im Kontrast zu der in *Macbeth* und *Hamlet* erscheinenden Rhetorik der „Sterilisation“. Shakespeares Poetik der organischen Zeit ist jedoch weder konzeptuell gesehen einheitlich, noch moralisch gesehen eindeutig, z.B.: der Schuft in *Othello* spricht von den Folgen seiner Gemeinheit als von einem Kind, das von der Zeit entbunden wird.

Der Vorzug von der Rhetorik der organischen Zeit beruht darauf, dass sie der literarisch dargestellten Zeit einen deutlich menschlichen Ausmaß gibt. Sich der Überzeugung leiten lassend versucht der Verfasser, im letzten Kapitel seines Buches das als „Geburtsverfluchung“ bezeichnete und mit tragischer Vorstellung von der Wirklichkeit und vom menschlichen Leben beinahe untrennbar verbundene Motiv zu erforschen. In dem das Kapitel eröffnenden Teil schildert der Verfasser die Kulturgeschichte des Motivs, indem er dessen Vorhandensein in den Werken: *Das Buch Hiob*, *König Ödipus*, *Verlorenes Paradies* und *Frankenstein* aufzeigt. Den weiteren Kontext in Betracht ziehend kann man sagen, dass die Verfluchung der Geburt eine von den Methoden der Konzeptualisierung der menschlichen Zeit ist: sie zeigt, wie sich ein Mensch seine Existenz in der Welt vorstellt. Seine Geburt verfluchend kehrt der Mensch in seiner Phantasie in den Mutterleib zurück oder anders gesagt verzichtet er auf eine zukunftsorientierte „Zeitnadel“ oder widerspricht ihr. Solch eine pessimistische Vorstellung von dem menschlichen Schicksal findet man in *Hamlet* und *König Lear* – in den genannten Dramen gewidmeten Unterkapiteln wurden verschiedene Arten der Verfluchung geschildert (z.B.: der seine Töchter oder deren Schöße verfluchende Lear, usw.). In späteren Shakespeares Dramen, sog. Romanzen sieht man den Versuch, den mit einer Verfluchung ausgedrückten, tragischen Pessimismus zu überwinden. Man hat also mit einer eigenartigen Entwicklung zu tun: von verfluchter Geburt zum Segen der Geburt. Am deutlichsten kommt es in dem Drama *Perikles, Prinz von Tyrus* zum Vorschein, wo ein Sarg zu einem fruchtbaren Mutterleib wird und wo im Höhepunkt des Dramas die „verstorbenen“ und ratlos beweinten Gattin und Tochter des Helden – in der „leeren“, denn sozusagen infolge des Todes ihres natürlichen Laufes beraubten Zeit – wiederbelebt wurden.

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