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“Bit[ing] the Law by the Nose”: Shakespeare’s Revisions of Fear and Punishment

Anne-Marie Miller-Blaise

- 1 In a world ridden with what may seem to be new fears, we are tempted to turn to Shakespeare’s plays as we turn to a sacred text, hoping to find providential lessons and words of comfort, for Shakespeare too lived in a time rife with religious tensions and anxieties about plots and treasons – we desire Shakespeare to be both a prophet and “our contemporary.” Perhaps it would be fairer to say that as scholars, eager to exert just a little more critical distance than that, we turn to Shakespeare in the same way as Patrick Boucheron recently turned to Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s frescoes of good and bad government in the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena, enquiring whether they might teach us how to “avert fear” – “*conjurer la peur*.”¹ For Boucheron, the fires, the unruly soldiers, the desiccated fields that are glimpsed on the western wall, supposedly depicting the effects of bad government – or the antithesis of the Republic – in fact translate and materialize the anxiety of the Republic – the slow, inevitable subversion of civic values from within.
- 2 The “troubled” “heavens” of *Macbeth* (2.4.6),² the wind, rain, and thunder of *King Lear*, the “o’erflowing Nilus” (1.2.42) of *Antony and Cleopatra* bespeak the diseased state of other common weal about to turn common woe. Boucheron asks whether the frescoes will in effect ward off fear – “le danger sera-t-il écarté?” – and immediately responds in the negative to his own question: “les images n’ont pas ce pouvoir [...] la force politique des images consiste précisément à ne rien dérober au regard” (“images do not have that power [...] the political power of images consists precisely in concealing nothing from the eye,” my translation).³ Of course, 1606 England is not 1338 Siena, anymore than it is our 2017 more globalized political stage, but might we suppose that the power of Shakespeare’s theatre consists precisely in not concealing anything from the eye, that it addresses fear by becoming a theatre of fears? If so, how does Shakespeare represent fear and what does he do with fear? Does he seek to play with fear or create fear? Does he attempt to deconstruct or demystify fear? My particular focus in this paper will be on the

dialectics of fear and punishment and the way Shakespeare's dramaturgy questions both the fear of punishment and punishment as an effective response to fear. I approach these questions through three different lenses, a Foucauldian one, a Hegelian one, and finally through the definitions that are given to fear in early modern religious literature, which appear to be more pertinent in delineating the implications of Shakespeare's dramatic treatment of fear.

- 3 In the *Year of Lear* (a year of fear), James Shapiro argues that it is "no coincidence" if "[t]he year 1606 would turn out to be a good one for Shakespeare and an awful one for England" for the playwright "grasped the dramatic potential of popular reaction to the plot: a maelstrom of fear, horror, a desire for revenge, an all-too-brief sense of national unity, and a struggle to understand where such evils came from."⁴ As I started piecing out chastisement scenes that seemed to dramatize the complex interworking of fear with punishment, I was drawn, like Shapiro, to the three great tragedies, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, presumably written in 1606 in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot, as well as *Measure for Measure*, an earlier play, but written quite shortly after the 1603 Main Plot, to which it may well relate. These four plays undoubtedly stage fears, show some of the ways fears are dealt with, and – most importantly for my purpose – attempt to inflict punishment upon traitors. Chastisement scenes are more or less prominent in each one of these plays. Sometimes they relate only to secondary characters or inset plots, or are even reduced to a very short, reported story within the play, as is the case with the execution of the treacherous Thane of Cawdor in *Macbeth*. Other times they constitute the play's "grand finale," as is the case with *Measure for Measure*, even though here the expected executions are overturned *in extremis* thanks to the Duke's pardon.
- 4 Put together, these scenes of chastisement, execution, or reprieve, suggest that punishment is ineffective in deterring from further wrong-doing (*Macbeth* is not instructed, for instance, by the example of Cawdor's treason and execution) and that punishment is ineffective in putting an end to fear, for fear breeds hate which, in turn, breeds more fear. Charmian's warning to her mistress Cleopatra that "In time we hate that which we often fear" may well apply beyond matters of love (1.3.14). Later in the play, at the end of act 3, when Antony is defeated, and at the very moment when Enobarbus is about to turn traitor to his master, the servant sheds light upon another troubling aspect of the mechanism of fear in which the fearlessness and valour of the epic hero, turned tragic, are in fact only a higher level of fear, or fear "in her most exalted mood."⁵ "Furious" – that is, seemingly heroic – cruelty grows from the seeds of fear:

ENOBARBUS. To be furious,
Is to be frighted out of fear; and in that mood
The dove will peck the estridge; and I see still,
A diminution in our captain's brain
Restores his heart: when valour preys on reason,
It eats the sword it fights with. (3.13.227)

- 5 The description of Antony by Enobarbus curiously echoes the glorious portrait the captain gives of *Macbeth* in the liminal lines of the play, suggesting perhaps a secret terror that has yet to be externalized and dramatized in the passage from the heroic account to the direct staging of *Macbeth*'s troubled spirit:

For brave *Macbeth* (well he deserves that name)
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish'd steel,
Which smok'd with bloody execution,
Like Valour's minion, carv'd out his passage (1.1.18-21)

- 6 What frightens Enobarbus into treason or desertion is in fact Antony's more awesome fear. He does not attempt to hedge himself against the same type of chastisement as the one just undergone before his eyes by Thidias, Caesar's servant, violently whipped by Antony and Cleopatra for bringing bad news. Ironically, Enobarbus will not be punished for deserting his master but kill himself for not having been punished by his master. Though punishment does not dispel fear (whether the fear of the wrong-doer or the righter of wrongs), mercy is not restorative either: it only underscores, by contrast, the vileness of the traitor.
- 7 Punishment in early modern plays has largely been explored in the past couple of decades by a rich literature of historicist readings building on a Foucauldian perspective.⁶ Violent punishment is read as a ritual performance enabling political control, a subsuming of discordant bodies into the great body politic as traitors and trespassers are tortured or dismembered to be better reintegrated or absorbed in spectacles where the awesome display of power is not systematically exclusive of carnivalesque festivity.⁷ Prospero, sole ruler of the island, compares the "afear'd" monstrous Caliban, who dreads him more than he dreads the dark Setebos, to becombs or wax which he has to pinch into form through corporeal forms of punishment (1.3.386). Physical punishment and torture are performed publicly not only as a spectacular warning to others but because they are the performative means of the exercise of power, which is also an exercise of fear. The bloodiest of Shakespeare's plays, it is argued, blur the distinction between the theatre and the scaffold as a space of performance, building on the model of the Elizabethan revenge tragedy and its gusto for executions, however in a somewhat more subdued vein.⁸ The Shakespearean theatre reenacts the ritual of punishment while keeping it at a certain distance to better bring it into the limelight, revealing its most subtle mechanisms.
- 8 Though it stages the political assassination of one who is a threat to the body and the laws of the Roman Republic, and not a chastisement ordered by the application of a penal code, *Julius Caesar* shows Shakespeare pinpointing already at an early stage the impossibility for the performance of the physical ritual of power not to be at once an act of butchery. The violent act of revenge that the plebeians unfairly commit against the poet Cinna (3.3), for bearing the same name as one of the conspirators, only furthers, on a burlesque and fully indiscriminate mode, the butchery of the political assassination. Though fear is part and parcel of such analyses focusing on the tyrannical control of rebellious or extravagant bodies by the body politic (in turn legitimate or illegitimate), it is apprehended mostly as part of the mechanics of the exercise of power, and is largely erased as a "mood", to use Enobarbus's term. We are given a commanding view of how the use of fear or terror plays into the exercise of power, but it is seldom explored from within or for itself. To find a more intimate view of the dialectics of fear and punishment, we need to revert to the former, longer Romantic trend of criticism that developed out of Hegel's readings of Shakespeare, privileging the study of the Shakespearean moral imagination, which remained current down to Harold Bloom.
- 9 In "Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate," Hegel uses Macbeth as an example to distinguish the moral law, expressed in the penal code and generating a fear of something "alien," from "fate as punishment," which the philosopher describes as a fear or "awe" of oneself. For Hegel, the trespasser's experience of fear, when submitted to the penal code, is always embodied by another person, i.e., the executor of the sentence or the "lord of this reality."⁹ This dread, just as the prospect of punishment that sparks it, is absolute, because alien, and is equated with a fear of death, the ultimate fear. The penal law offers

a moral horizon and an incentive to moral betterment; it rests upon a belief in deontological and teleological system as it lays the foundations for duty-driven and purpose-driven action but it does not lay the basis for a truly ethical life in Hegel’s view.¹⁰ In the contemplation of one’s fate, on the other hand, life itself becomes its own enemy. Macbeth, the eponymous protagonist of Shakespeare’s most clearly “frightful” tragedy (in that it most explicitly refers to fear than any other in the Shakespearean corpus, rendering with great precision down to the physiological symptoms of fear), stands to a certain extent for both of these types of fear and of punishment. Macbeth clings onto the witches’ prophecy as to the penal law, making their ominous, sentence-like prophecies the rule of his action – in Hegel’s own terms, Macbeth “clung to alien Beings, and so in their service had to trample and slay everything holy in human nature, had at last to be forsaken by his gods (since these were objects and he their slave) and be dashed to pieces on his faith itself.”¹¹

- 10 At the same time, he stands on the brink of embodying the modern tragic hero, as his fear opens onto a metaphysical experience in which he becomes an enemy and stranger to himself. His famous comment that “Life’s but a walking shadow” (5.5.24) in the last stages of the play articulates not only the baroque *topos* of the ephemeral and illusory quality of life, but also what Hegel later calls the nullification of one’s own life that comes in “fate as punishment”:

only through the killing of life, is something alien produced. Destruction of life is not the nullification of life but its diremption,¹² and the destruction consists in its transformation into an enemy. It is immortal, and, if slain, it appears as its terrifying ghost which vindicates every branch of life and lets loose its Eumenides. The illusion of trespass, its belief that it destroys the other’s life and thinks itself enlarged thereby, is dissipated by the fact that the disembodied spirit of the injured life comes on the scene against the trespass, just as Banquo who came as a friend to Macbeth was not blotted out when he was murdered but immediately thereafter took his seat, not as a guest at the feast, but as an evil spirit. The trespasser intended to have to do with another’s life, but he has only destroyed his own, for life is not different from life, since life dwells in the single Godhead. In his arrogance he has destroyed indeed, but only the friendliness of life; he has perverted life into an enemy.¹³

- 11 The excess of fear and the fear of self collide with a senseless fearlessness in which life is “its terrifying ghost”:

I have almost forgot the taste of fears
The time has been, my senses would have cooled
To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hai
Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir
As life were in’t: I have supp’d full with horrors;
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts
Cannot once start me. — (5.5.9-15)

- 12 But it is precisely because life appears “as its terrifying ghost,” that this experience of frightful self-estrangement can also give way to a transformation, transcending both fear and punishment, and offer the premises for an ethical life founded on moral imagination. Hegel uses in other places the example of Auteur0000-00-00T00:00:00AHamlet.¹⁴ “To be or not to be” is an unsolvable question: Hamlet cannot choose life over death or death over life. Unlike the hero of classical tragedy, he cannot commit the envisioned suicide nor even blind himself, submitting himself to penal-like punishment. He is trapped in fear and condemned to contemplate his life as an enemy through the process of sublation.

- 13 Hegel’s reading of the two types of fear and two types of punishment is compelling but problematic notably because of his association of penal punishment and the law to “the spirit of the Jewish people”, as opposed to “fate as punishment”, which keys into the idea of grace that participates in the “Spirit of Christianity.” We cannot deny, however, that discourses on fear, as well as the very experience of fear itself, were already articulated in religious terms in Shakespeare’s day. A contextualization of notions of fear in relationship to punishment in the early modern period and especially in the Christian doctrine of Reformation England may provide a better basis for understanding what sort of dialectics of fear and punishment are really at stake in Shakespeare’s plays and what Shakespeare does with fear.
- 14 The tension between two types of fear described by Hegel is in fact inherent in the religious thought of the early modern period, and its complex typology of the different kinds of fear, both holy and unholy, charted with much more psychological finesse than we tend to realize in theological texts. One may argue that looking towards soteriological teachings and spiritual comfort literature does not have much to do with the English legal system, its enforcement of punishment and the fears it might have fostered in the early modern period. However, because crimes of treason became more than ever religious crimes against royal supremacy with the Main Plot and the Gunpowder Plot, and because England developed a special penal code to uphold the establishment of its national Church throughout the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods, at a symbolical and imaginary level at least, the fear of eternal damnation was in many ways redoubled if not fused with the dread of legal punishment and its executor. Looking more closely at the echoes to spiritual discourses on fear Shakespeare weaves into his plays, enables us to move beyond the acknowledgment of the impressive spectacle of violence and punishment to look at what Shakespeare does with, or to, fear, a disposition which is so inward that, despite its symptoms, it is difficult to fully denote on stage. I would like to suggest that one of the things Shakespeare does with fear is that he subtly shows how the trespasser often embodies or materializes not his own fears but the fears of the executor, thereby revealing, through a system of dramatic reverberation, that trespass, including treason, is not an easy thing to define and that the law (and more specifically the godly law of the godly kingdom of England) in fact generates its own ghosts and dangers. Shakespeare does not deconstruct the law nor explicitly advocate a different penal system than the one prevailing in the society to which he belongs but, as is the case with Lorenzetti’s frescoes of the effects of good and evil government as analyzed by Boucheron, he does not shut his eye on fear, however inward and inherent it is in the executor himself.¹⁵
- 15 Fear, in the early modern experience, is first and foremost the fear of death as the moment of ultimate judgment. Few people in Shakespeare’s age would have been inclined to follow Francis Bacon’s opinion according to which “Nothing is terrible except fear itself.”¹⁶ Such an attitude might have been seen as characterizing the fearless self-confidence of atheists, whom no prospect of judgment could frighten (Mark Antony and Macbeth seem to epitomize the irreverent pride and Icarian motif that was also associated with the figure of the atheist in early modern culture). Robert Burton articulates two of the prevalent ideas on the matter in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* when, dealing first with religious melancholy, he suggests that Catholic soteriology leads to despair because of the frightful perspective of the hardships of purgatory and, beyond purgatory, eternal punishment in hell.¹⁷ Criticizing the teachings of the Council of Trent,

he asks: "good God, how many men have been miserably afflicted by this fiction of Purgatory?"¹⁸ While pre-Reformation depictions of purgatory in church frescoes were notably geared at frightening believers into good actions (and the necessity of intercession), it is illusory to think that such representations were not indexed upon a more complex understanding of fear and punishment, as it is illusory to think that in whitewashing these frescoes, Protestant iconoclasts erased the fear of last judgment. Stephen Greenblatt has attempted to demonstrate that Shakespeare's stage functioned in part as a substitute for such visual depictions of purgatory in becoming a sort of performance of a purgatorial space and furnishing the lost visual support.¹⁹

- 16 One of the most brilliant testimonies of the fear aroused by the prospect of judgment is perhaps the collection of "Holy Sonnets" by John Donne, in which the persona quakes with fear as he comes face to face with death:

I run to death, and death meets me as fast,
And all my pleasures are like yesterday.
I dare not move my dim eyes any way;
Despair behind, and death before doth cast
Such terror, and my feeble flesh doth waste
By sin in it, which it towards hell doth weigh. (sonnet 13, l. 3-8)²⁰

- 17 However, the sonnet sequence reveals that it is not only this vision of purgatory, where sins are weighed, that frightens the poet's soul. He is equally terrified by what could be interpreted as a sentence of predestination to damnation, the anxiety that "thou [...] wilt not choose me" (sonnet 1, l. 13) or the baffling consideration that "if serpents envious / Cannot be damned; alas, why should I be?" (sonnet 5, l. 3-4). This gestures towards types of fears generated at the other end of the religious spectrum, signaled again by Robert Burton – the way Reformation doctrine, and especially double-predestinarianism, with the hiatus it introduces between crime and punishment, could be conducive of greater fears yet than the belief in the purifying punishments of purgatory.²¹

- 18 In fact, one finds a striking continuity between pre-Reformation and post-Reformation understandings and classifications of fear, preparing for the late sixteenth-century Puritan or Godly emphasis on the very positive notion of the "god-fearing" and the opposition between holy types of fear and sinful or interdicted types of fear. The distinction between "filial" and "servile" fear was formulated in scholastic thought.²² Whereas "servile fear" (a taxonomy that foreshadows Hegel's own analysis) is the mere fear of punishment that may be felt by a servant towards his master, "filial fear" is alike to the reverence a child may feel for his parent. Catholic writers of the very early Reformation period in England, such as William Bonde, in his 1534 *A deuoute epystle of treaty for them that ben tymorouse and fearefull in conscience*, advised that holy fear lead to the exercise of charity. Servile fear, on the other hand, risked being indiscreetly used and would then displease God.²³ It seems that the idea of the use of servile fear as a dubious political tool may be contained within such an understanding. Roger Edgeworth in a 1540 sermon entreating to "godly fear" distinguished more finely between "carnal and worldly fear" of losses in this life, "servile fear" of punishment in hell, and "filial and charitable fear" thanks to which "servile fear" is abolished.²⁴ Interestingly, however, the experience of "servile fear" was not all together ill, in that it could gradually lead to a better sense of justice and a turn of the soul toward filial fear. Protestant reformers were going to use these distinctions and ambiguities to forward a different soteriology. But both traditions testify to the growing turn "inward" of spirituality in the sixteenth century and the

consideration of natural fear as an element that needed to be addressed and be eased by theologies of comfort and instruction on well-dying.

- 19 William Perkins, the prime Calvinist theologian of the later Elizabethan Protestant Church, seemingly polarizes the typology of fear by contrasting holy fear and “forbidden fear,” which is when one looks only to the punishment without consideration for the ethical value of one’s acts. In his *Whole Treatise of the cases of conscience* he defines “feare” in general as a Christian “inward” virtue pertaining to the believer’s adoration of God, along with Obedience, Patience, and Thankfulness. Holy fear, for him, is “not a feare of the offence alone, but of the offence and punishment together, and of the offence in the first place” whereas forbidden or sinful fear is that “of punishment alone.”²⁵ He is also intent on turning his treatise into a work of consolation as well as of admonition, for, as a theologian and pastor, he seeks to take into account the psychological needs of the faithful. Thus, he recognizes that there can be more natural forms of fear. He carefully explains that fear can arise either from a disturbed conscience or from a disturbed imagination but that it is not always easy for the fearful person to distinguish between the two. In the first case, fear derives from sin and can only be cured by Christ, but in the second case it derives from melancholy distempers, or pathologies, and can be cured thanks to the intervention of Physicians:

Therefore the fourth and last helpe, is the arte of Physick, which serues to correct and abate the humour, because it is a meanes by the blessing of God, to restore the health, and to cure the distemper of the bodie. And thus much touching the trouble of mind, caused by Melancholy.²⁶

- 20 In both Catholic and Protestant early modern understandings of fear, the moment of punishment, bet it only moderate chastisement or an execution, becomes a moment of trial, a test of the believer’s repentance. If the trespasser wants to die well, he must shun and overcome the sinful fear of his impending punishment, showing instead reverence (or holy fear) for God. From a Catholic perspective then, dying well, becomes one of the means to salvation. From a predestinarian perspective, the trespasser’s ability to surmount his natural fears and demonstrate reverent fear of God instead becomes one of the legible signs of his salvation.
- 21 *Macbeth* can be read along the lines of such early modern typologies of fear. Testimony of godly fear at the hour of death, or, at least, testimony of the spectacle of a godly death, is given from an early stage of the play as a foil for “brave Macbeth” who “disdains fortune with his brandish’d steel” (1.2.18-19), when Malcolm recounts the traitor Cawdor’s execution:

DUNCAN. Is execution done on Cawdor? Are not
Those in commission yet returned?

MALCOLM. My liege,
They are not yet come back. But I have spoke
With one that saw him die: who did report
That very frankly he confess’d his treasons,
Implored your highness’ pardon and set forth
A deep repentance: nothing in his life
Became him like the leaving it; he died
As one that had been studied in his death
To throw away the dearest thing he owed,
As ’twere a careless trifle. (1.4.1-12)

- 22 Duncan’s ambiguous reply, however, to this reported testimony casts a shadow on this ultimate expression of master- and god-fearingness. “There’s no art / To find the mind’s

construction in the face," he declares (1.4.13-14). But is he speaking about Cawdor's unexpected treason here, or the moment of the ultimate, godly spectacle of his death?

- 23 Though Shakespeare situates the action of his play far before the days of the Reformation, this inserted narrative of a scene of punishment and repentance calls to mind late sixteenth-century accounts of executions, such as that of the Jesuit priest and poet Robert Southwell, a close friend of Henry Garnet, superior of the English Jesuit Mission from 1586 on, who, despite his efforts to discourage Robert Catesby from carrying out the Gunpowder Plot, was also accused of treason, tried and executed in 1606. The main charge in Garnet's case was that of equivocation, as he had heard Catesby's intentions at confession but had not warned the crown directly, keeping the information under the seal of confessional. While Garnet's trial has repeatedly been linked to Shakespeare's treatment of equivocation in *Macbeth*, the account of Southwell's 1595 torture and execution offers an unnoticed parallel to the short inserted story of the Thane of Cawdor's execution. Arrested by Topcliffe in 1592 for treason, i.e., for having practiced Catholic rites in private homes in England, Southwell was in fact the first Jesuit to be charged with equivocation²⁷ and was finally sentenced to death three years later. Testimonies of Southwell's torture and execution reveal that all witnesses, including a vast majority of Protestants, were impressed by his admirable behavior. Accounts stress his fortitude, his ability to overcome his fears, and, therefore, to manifest his true devotion.²⁸ This impression was apparently shared even by the executioners, who, stirred to pity, would have pulled on his legs to help him die faster after the hanging and before the disembowelment and quartering, usually performed on the agonizing but still living traitor. Unlike Cawdor, he did not confess to treason but only to have been a Catholic priest and true believer. Yet, similarly to Cawdor, "Nothing in his life" became it "like his leaving it."
- 24 In contrast to these spectacles of repentance or stoic enduring, *Macbeth's* sinful fears, in which he seems to be paradoxically fearless of any sort of punishment, may be inspired by the devil. From a stark predestinarian perspective, the physiological symptoms of dread he experiences could be seen to reveal his predestined damnation. The symptoms are poignantly described by the damned character himself when he speaks of the "horrid image" of the still unaccomplished murder of Duncan which haunts his mind as soon as he is made Thane of Cawdor, "unfix[ing] his hair" and "mak[ing] [his] seated hear knock at [his] ribs" (1.3.145-146), or yet in the unnatural vision he has of the dagger in which his eyes are "made the fools o' th'other senses" (2.1.51). This is not to say that Shakespeare adheres to such a reading but he dramatizes it as one of the possible readings. The final couplet of *Macbeth's* dagger soliloquy, which "summons" Duncan "heaven or to hell", seems to mime the arbitral sentence of the predestinarian God, unless these horrid images are only the symptoms of a distempered imagination. Symbolically, *Macbeth* embodies at once the traitor, trespasser and damned sinner, ridden with fears signaling his damnation, and the executor of another man's sentence. If he prefers to slay both guards and king at night in their sleep, it is perhaps never to contemplate his own image and dread in the terrified faces of his victims. Through the overlapping of the figure of the damned traitor and the executor, Shakespeare does by no means endorse a predestinarian understanding of fear. Rather, he chooses not to close his eyes upon these anxieties and reveals on stage how these anxieties and imaginings may in fact be born from within the system of values that allegedly tries to keep these same anxieties at bay.

- 25 Interestingly, in the final act of the play, the doctor's diagnosis concerning Lady Macbeth's illness, recalls the careful distinction in contemporary theological literature between natural fear or melancholy, that can be "abated" by the physician through God's blessing, and unnatural or sinful fear, against which the physician is powerless:

Foul whisperings are abroad: unnatural deeds
 Do breed unnatural troubles: infected minds
 To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets:
 More needs she the divine than the physician.
 God, God forgive us all! Look after her;
 Remove from her the means of all annoyance,
 And still keep eyes upon her. So, good night:
 My mind she has mated, and amazed my sight.
 I think, but dare not speak.

- 26 Whether they are damned or not – Shakespeare cares little to determine so –, both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have come to embody the monstrous ghosts of a social structure that feeds on and fuels its own fears.

- 27 The early modern typology of holy fear and sinful fear may again furnish a key for reading the scene of Gloucester's violent blinding in *King Lear*. The violence of the chastisement led many, including Samuel Beckett, to believe that this scene was virtually unstageable as such. Yet, the violence of this punishment is mitigated when compared to the early modern practice of hanging, training, and quartering traitors. Plucking out the eyes of a trespasser was a medieval treatment inflicted upon traitors and adulterers, as it was a common punishment used against early Christians. The symbolism of the type of chastisement Shakespeare chooses is in any case multilayered: while it identifies Gloucester as a traitor to Lear's daughters, it may also discreetly reminisce the character's adultery of old (that which led him to give birth to his natural son Edmund), and signal his ultimate identity as a stoic and true Christian, undergoing unfair persecution. Gloucester remains remarkably calm throughout the ordeal, at least if we follow the speech indicators rather than later stagings of the play. The dissipation of the physiological symptoms of fear show him to have become truly repentant and god-fearing: "O my follies! Then Edgar was abused / Kind gods, forgive me that and prosper him" (3.7.97-98).

- 28 Regan's use, on the other hand, of exclamations and the haltering rhythm of her speeches betray that she is more frightened than the victim of her punishment: "Wherefore to Dover?", "filthy traitor", "how now, dog". While her name etymologically suggests kingship, it may also derive from the Gaelic Irish adjective *riodhgach*, meaning "furious." Her anger turns into dread, preventing her from responding to Gloucester's question right after she has cut off a piece of his beard:

These hairs which thou dost ravish from my chin
 Will quicken, and accuse thee. I am your host.
 With robber's hands my hospitable favours
 You should not ruffle thus. What will you do? (3.7.39-42)

- 29 To a certain extent, it is Gloucester himself who verbally performs his own punishment before Regan and Cornwall actually blind him when he explains that he sent Lear to Dover to protect him from the type of chastisement he himself is about to endure:

Because I would not see thy cruel nails
 Pluck out his poor old eyes; nor thy fierce sister
 In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs. (3.7.59-61)

- 30 Gloucester's fear is all inward and godly, as he calls upon himself a punishment he takes in the end to be a godsend. Most stagings of the horrific scene highlight the gory quality of the mutilation, in keeping with accepted ideas about the Elizabethan relish for blood on stage. Yet, directors might be more faithful to Gloucester's ultimate stoicism and acceptance as translated by the text in showing him with his back to the audience and concealing his hideously mutilated face to let the audience read instead the horror on the faces of his punishers. Gloucester has indeed acted treacherously towards Regan and Cornwall but what he comes to materialize and reveal, are the sinful fears of the executors.
- 31 Similar reverberations occur in two chastisement scenes in *Antony and Cleopatra*, though they concern much more secondary characters and bring together a sense of the burlesque in association with violence. The first one takes place, or nearly takes place, soon after Antony is "bound unto Octavia" (2.5.69) by marriage. A messenger is sent to Cleopatra's court to bring her the news. Though he is no traitor and only an informer, he is immediately confused by Cleopatra with the contents of the message he bears. She strikes him and promises to perpetrate upon him the same chastisement as Regan and Cornwall inflicted upon Gloucester: "Hence horrible villain, or I'll spurn thine eyes, / Like balls before me! I'll unhair thy head" (2.5.77-78). The second one, already mentioned above at the beginning of the present essay, occurs at the end of act 3 when Thidias, he too a herald of ill fate who has been sent to try to convince Cleopatra to rally Octavius Caesar, is whipped before Enobarbus. His face is made to reflect and make visible the executors' fear once more: "Whip him fellows," orders Antony, "Till like a boy you see him cringe his face / And whine aloud for mercy" (3.13.121-123). All of these plays then, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, presumably written in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot and testifying to the fears of a nation suspicious of further religious treasons, show how difficult it is to pronounce fair judgment and enact fair punishment, for who can tell whether their fears are sinful or holy in the end? Whether these are caused by the criminal's conscience or simply by a disturbed imagination? Indeed, "There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face." Or who can say whether the fears of the punished are not simply the ghosts of the fears generated by the body politic but which sustains its structure and cohesion thereby? Traitors themselves may secretly be the temples of godly fears or, when their fears are mostly unnatural, they may become in the face of their impending damnation, models of the deepening of self-consciousness, which stands at the beginning of the ethical life, according to Hegel.
- 32 *Measure for Measure*, written a few years earlier, in 1603 or 1604, also gives shape to an impending sense of danger and pervasive fear. At one level, it may be read as allegorizing the discovery of the Main Plot leading to the sentences to death of Lord Cobham, Griffin Marham, and Walter Raleigh (represented by the slanderer Lucio in the play) for treason, though these men would obtain reprieves for various reasons. Shakespeare satirizes Angelo's, or the Duke deputy's use of the moral law to his own personal benefit. He stands as the figure of the Puritan hypocrite who "bites the law by the nose" (3.1.119) in self-interest.²⁹ Claudio, who is condemned at an early stage in the play and sentenced to death for fornication, at first seems to embody the cool stoicism of one who knows he has not in fact committed a sin: "If I must die, / I will encounter darkness as a bride / And hug it in my arms" (3.1.89-91). But the prospect of his impending death makes him lose faith and fall prey to "the fear of death," to the point that he even encourages his own sister to sin in order to save him:

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where
 [...] 'tis too horrible.
 The weariest and most loathed worldly life
 That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
 Can lay on nature is a paradise
 To what we fear of death.
 [...]
 What sin you do to save a brother's life,
 Nature dispenses with the deed so far
 That it becomes a virtue. (3.1.129, 139-143, 146-148).

- 33 The only character to remain unimpressed by his own death sentence is Barnardine, a murderer, who is to replace Claudio secretly on the scaffold. When Abhorson, the executioner, comes to fetch him in his cell, Barnardine is drunk. But this in fact turns out to be less of a carnivalesque gesture of resistance to the fear of death than a clever technique to escape the death penalty. Well versed in the religious culture of Shakespeare's one times, Barnardine knows that a drunk man cannot be put to death in a state of semi-conscience, which would obscure whether he is ultimately justified or reprobate.³⁰ As the Duke in disguise himself declares: "A creature unprepared, unmeet for death / And to transport him in the mind he is / Were damnable" (4.3.49-51). The terrifying execution scene, which is the work of Angelo, who rules by fear and by the rod, is ultimately overturned by the gracious pardon and mercy of Duke Vincentio, who stands as the ultimate figure of Justice and the double for King James I.
- 34 Yet, the Duke's ambiguous attitude towards Lucio in the final lines of the play, betray that Shakespeare is also keeping his eyes open on the secret fears of the royal double in his play, of this all-too merciful executor. Lucio begs the duke not to be punished, for his slander was "spok[en]" "but according to the trick" (5.1.529). The Duke himself has done nothing but play a trick on everyone throughout the play. He ultimately "remits" Lucio's "other forfeits" but enforces the sentence to have him marry a "punk" which, for Lucio is the equivalent of a "pressing to death, whipping, and hanging" (5.1.545). The Duke's appeal to have his "pleasure herein executed" (5.1.544) nonetheless because "slandering a prince deserves it" (5.1.546) may suggest that the only punishment he enforces in the end testifies to his innermost fears. In sending most characters to a "worthier place" through his mercy, but condemning Lucio to this abhorred marriage, Duke Vincentio, who seemed to stand up to the frightening, Puritan hypocritical penal code, performs, just as arbitrarily as the predestinarian God, sentences of salvation and damnation according to his "pleasure."
- 35 Though mercy triumphs in this "problem" comedy, here, as in the tragedies written in 1606, all fears have not been dispelled. Shakespeare keeps an eye open on the anxieties that are inherent in kingly mercy. Through the use of complex dramatic framing devices based on mirror effects and reverberations, that turn the (supposed) trespassers into the image of the executors' fears, Shakespeare creates a special perspective, that is not unlike the theatrical and strident effects built into the pictorial space of Lorenzetti's frescoes, enabling the viewer to look at Peace, sitting "on her podium, so beautiful in her immaculate dress,"³¹ looking at her own ghosts on the western wall of the Sala dei Nove of the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena.

NOTES

1. Patrick Boucheron, *Conjurer la peur. Essai sur la force politique des images*, coll. “Points histoire”, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2015 [2013].
2. All Shakespeare references are to *The RSC Shakespeare. William Shakespeare. Complete Works*, ed. Jonothan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, London, Royal Shakespeare Company and Macmillan, 2008 [2007].
3. Boucheron, *op. cit.*, p. 210-211.
4. James Shapiro, *The Year of Lear*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2015, p. 7, 9.
5. The phrase is, of course, a reference to Wordsworth’s famous definition of imagination as “reason in her most exalted mood” yet the term “mood,” it shall be noted, is also used by Shakespeare in the following passage from *Antony and Cleopatra*.
6. The chief source of inspiration here is Michel Foucault’s *Surveiller et Punir* (1975), and especially the first chapters “Le corps des condamnés” and “L’éclat du supplice.” For an English translation see *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Vintage Books, 1995.
7. See in particular Charles Mitchell, *Shakespeare and Public Execution*, Lewiston, New York, Edwin Mellen Press, 2004; Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross, and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999; Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000; J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England 1550-1750*, New York: Longman, 1999, and “‘Last Dying Speeches’: Religion, Ideology and Public Execution in Seventeenth-Century England”, *Past and Present* 107 (1985), 144-167.
8. See, for instance, Andreas Höfele, *Stage, Stake, and Scaffold Humans and Animals in Shakespeare’s Theatre*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.
9. Friedrich Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate”, in *On Christianity. Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox, New York, Harper Torchbook, 1961, p. 231. Excerpts of this early essay in T. M. Knox’s translation are also made available in Paul A. Kottman (ed.), *Philosophers on Shakespeare*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2009.
10. On the difference between *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit*, see Jennifer Ann Bates’s useful introduction to *Hegel and Shakespeare on Moral Imagination*, Albany, New York, SUNY Press, 2010, p. 10-11. Bates explains this distinction becomes more clearly delineated in Hegel’s later works and especially in his definition of *Sittlichkeit* in the *Philosophy of Right*, see n. 41, p. 298.
11. Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity”, *op. cit.*, p. 205.
12. The original German term is “Differenzschrift,” which can be glossed as “forcible separation” or, according to J. A. Bates, as a “dialectical sundering or negation”, *op. cit.*, p. 186.
13. Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity”, *op. cit.*, p. 229.
14. Hegel writes of *Hamlet* in several of his later works, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, and, more briefly, in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. For an analysis of Hegel’s notion of *Aufhebung* or “sublation” (or the dialectical means by which the consciousness progressively rises to higher levels of insight) in relation to *Hamlet*, see Bates, ch. 3, “*Aufhebung* and Anti-*Aufhebung*, Geist and Ghosts in *Hamlet*”, p. 55-84.
15. I am use the terms “law” and “penal system” in a broad sense here as my own focus is not to work specifically on legal issues and, notably, on the difference between the “common law” and the “penal” code that was used to punish traitors and dissenters. For a recent in-depth study of Shakespeare’s theatre in relation to the elaboration of a uniquely British legal system, relying on

the “common law”, see Dominique Goy-Blanquet, *Côté cour, côté justice. Shakespeare ou l’invention du droit*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2016. As we shall see at the end of the present study, Shakespeare probably broaches this issue more head-on in *Measure for Measure*.

16. “*Nil terribile nisi ipse timor*”. Quote taken from “*Fortitudo*”, *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, bk VI, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, London, printed for C. and J. Rivington, 1826, vol. 7, p. 300.

17. Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* [1621, et 1624], 6 vols, ed. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989-2000. See in particular Part. 3, Sect. 4. Memb. 1, Subs. 2, “Causes of Religious Melancholy. From the Divell by Miracles, Apparitions, Oracles...”, in vol. 3, p. 343 & ff, where Burton criticizes the institutional (political and religious) instrumental uses of religious fear.

18. *Idem*, p. 358.

19. Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2001.

20. All quotations from John Donne’s “Holy Sonnets” are given after Donald R. Dickson (ed.), *John Donne’s Poetry*, Norton Critical Edition, New York and London, Norton, 2007.

21. See the section “Causes of Melancholy. GOD a cause” in Burton, *op. cit.*, part I, sect. 2, subs. 1, vol. 1, p. 172-173.

22. See Thomas Aquinas’ discussion of *timor servilis* and *timor filialis*, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, 19, in ed. and trans. T. Gilby et al., 60 vols, London, Blackfriars, 1964-1981, vol. 13, p. 43-85.

23. William Bonde, *A deuoute epystle of treaty for them that ben tymorouse and fearefull in conscience*, London, 1534, 2v-4r.

24. Roger Edgeworth, *Sermons very Fruitfull, Godly and Learned*, ed. J. Wilson, Woodbridge, D. S. Brewster, 1993, p. 128.

25. William Perkins, *The whole treatise of the cases of conscience*, Cambridge, printed by John Legat, 1606, p. 259.

26. *Idem*, p. 195.

27. See Christopher Delvin, *The Life of Robert Southwell, Poet and Martyr*, New York, Farrar, Strauss and Cuhady, p. 300-302, and Thomas M. McCoog S. J., *The Society of Jesus in Ireland, Scotland, and England, 1589-1597: Building the Faith of Saint Peter upon the King of Spain’s Monarchy*, Farnham and Burlington, Ashgate, 2012, n. 132, p. 181.

28. See in particular “A Brief discourse of the condemnation of Mr. Robert Southwell, priest of the Society of Jesus” held in ABSI, Anglia II, 1, published in Henry Foley, *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus : historic facts illustrative of the labours and sufferings of its members in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*, London, Burns and Oates, 1875-1883, vol. 1 (1877), p. 364-375. For more detailed information on his trial and execution, see Devlin, *op. cit.*, p. 274-290 and 303-324, and Caramon, *op. cit.*, p. 59-66.

29. These words are spoken by Claudio, on the eve of his planned execution. He hopes that Angelo will actually “bite” the law rather than enforce it here. The phrase echoes Duke Vincentio’s own words in act 1, scene 3 when he complains to Angelo that the city has become dissolute, that “liberty plucks justice by the nose” (1.3.29), and that “the rod” has become more “mocked than feared” (1.3.26-27). In the end, Angelo is revealed to be the one who actually and ironically “plucks justice by the nose”.

30. See act 5, scene 3, lines 40 to 75.

31. Patrick Boucheron, p. 211, my translation (the original French reads: “La Paix voit cela. Depuis son estrade, si belle dans sa robe immaculée, elle voit tout cela.”)

RÉSUMÉS

Cet article traite de la dialectique de la peur et du châtement dans quatre pièces de Shakespeare écrites dans le contexte de la conspiration principale (1603) et de la conspiration des poudres (1606) : *Mesure pour mesure*, *Macbeth*, *Le Roi Lear*, *Antoine et Cléopâtre*. Il se demande ce que Shakespeare fait de et à la peur, en adoptant différentes approches critiques qui offrent, chacune, une autre réponse à cette question. L'accent sur la mécanique de l'exercice du pouvoir et le spectacle du corps supplicié mis au jour dans l'approche foucauldienne ne permet pas de véritablement aborder la peur comme une expérience ou une émotion vécue par le malfaiteur. Il y est avant tout l'instrument d'une consolidation du corps-politique. La distinction hégélienne entre la peur de la loi pénale et morale, et la peur plus profonde du destin ou de soi-même, permet une meilleure exploration de l'expérience même de la peur, de la conscience morale, et du processus menant de la peur et du châtement vers un plus grand degré de conscience. Cet article suggère, cependant, que le traitement dramatique que Shakespeare réserve à la peur est mieux compris lorsque lu à la lumière de la pensée théologique de la peur et de ses tentatives pour la rationaliser le plus finement possible. Shakespeare met en scène cette typologie de la peur qui lui est contemporaine mais pour mieux questionner la foi aveugle dans une justice prétendument inspirée de la loi divine et montrer que l'angoisse du malfaiteur (supposé) devant le châtement est en réalité le reflet des peurs de l'exécuteur de la loi.

This article focuses on the dialectics of fear and punishment in four plays by Shakespeare written in the wake of either the Main Plot (1603) or the Gunpowder Plot (1606): *Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. It asks what Shakespeare's dramaturgy does with fear and to fear, using a variety of critical approaches that yield different responses to this question. The Foucauldian emphasis on the mechanics of the exercise of power and the awesome display of chastised bodies tends to by-pass the examination of fear as a mood and experience of the punished trespasser, considering it instead as an instrument put to the service of the body politic. Hegel's distinction between two types of fear, the fear of the penal code or moral law, and a deeper fear of oneself or "fate as punishment," enables us to probe deeper into the experience of fear, the moral imagination, and the process leading from fear and punishment to a greater degree of self-consciousness. This paper argues, however, that the implications of Shakespeare's dramatic treatment of fear are best understood when read in light of early modern theological literature and its attempts to finely rationalize the experience of fear. Shakespeare's plays dramatize a contemporary typology of fear, undermining beliefs in a "native punishment" (*Henry V*) and "God's law", better to show how the (supposed) trespassers are in fact the reflectors of the executors' fears.

INDEX

Mots-clés : Antoine et Cléopâtre, châtement, complot des poudres, complot principal, conscience morale, Foucault Michel, Hegel Friedrich, Macbeth, Mesure pour mesure, peur, punition, trahison, Roi Lear (Le)

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