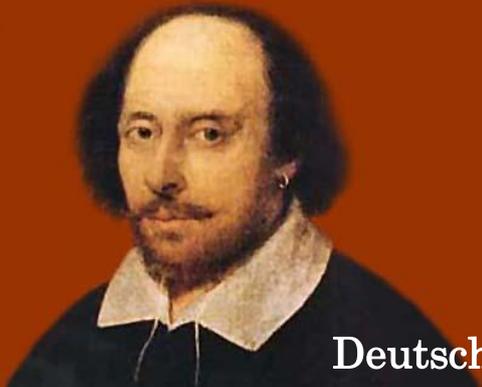


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Heroes and Heroines

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## CONTENTS

Introduction <i>Christina Wald and Felix Sprang</i> .....	1
<i>Fortinbras's Revenge: Genre and Sovereignty in Hamlet</i> Martin Moraw .....	3
<i>Rediscovering Ophelia: Conception and Perception of Hamlet's Revenge Tragedy Heroine</i> David J. Amelang .....	15
<i>(Un)Heroic Madness: The Jailer's Daughter as Playwright and Audience Figure in The Two Noble Kinsmen</i> Karoline Baumann .....	27
<i>The Pain of Others: Silencing Lavinia in Titus Andronicus</i> Marlena Tronicke .....	39
<i>'There's not a boy left alive': The Heroic Eloquence of Shakespeare's Silenced Children. An Analysis of Henry V and Macbeth</i> Gemma Miller .....	51
<i>Feeble Heroism: 1&amp;2 Henry IV and Intellectual Liberty</i> Sam Gilchrist Hall.....	63
Call for Statements – <i>Shakespeare Seminar at the Shakespeare-Tage 2016</i> .....	74

# INTRODUCTION

BY

CHRISTINA WALD AND FELIX SPRANG

## Shakespeare's Unsung Heros and Heroines

Without Paulina and Antigonus there would be no reunion, however tainted, between Leontes and Hermione, and there would be no union of Perdita and Florizel. In a sense, then, Paulina and Antigonus are the unsung heroine and hero of *The Winter's Tale*. Undoubtedly, Antigonus's exit pursued by a bear is not typical of a tragic hero. Taking Antigonus melodramatic departure as an example, Sir Walter Raleigh, then Professor of English Literature at Oxford, famously complained in 1907 that Shakespeare disposed of his minor characters "in the most unprincipled and reckless fashion" (137). In this seminar we would like to explore heroic qualities in Shakespeare's minor characters, and thus equally revisit preconceived notions about the status of these minor characters as well as traditional concepts of the tragic hero. What did Shakespeare's contemporaries make, for example, of Enobarbus deserting Antony and then dying of grief when confronted with Antony's generosity and Octavius' cynicism? Was Enobarbus a tragic hero in the eyes of contemporary audiences? Do we see him as a tragic hero? Considering heroic qualities in Shakespeare's minor characters can help bring into focus changing attitudes to heroism and hero worship. At the same time, this perspective also allows for probing into more fundamental dramatic and literary conventions: how 'minor' are minor characters in Shakespeare's plays? Does poetic justice only appertain to the great?

The papers in this volume address manifold aspects of unsung heroism. Martin Moraw draws our attention to Fortinbras's revenge, and reads Hamlet's Norwegian other through the lens of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*. David J. Amelang discusses the early reception of Ophelia and argues that the focus on her madness in act 4 has overshadowed the complexity of the character which is modelled after early modern conduct books. The Jailer's Daughter in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, again a character often reduced to being a madwoman on the stage, is scrutinized by Karoline Baumann as a character that operates on a metatheatrical level to tease out the audience's desires. Marlena Tronicke argues that Lavinia's silence is in fact a form of empowerment as it turns her into the play's tragic heroine, its central character. The children in *Henry V* and *Macbeth*, Henry's Boy and Macduff's Son, whose murder haunts the entire plays, are scrutinized by Gemma Miller. Sam Gilchrist Hall reads the character Feeble in *Henry IV*, who refuses to take part in the court's power politics as well as Falstaff's spree, as a hero who shines as an epitome in our time, urging us to resist the marketization of impact-factor driven universities.



## FORTINBRAS'S REVENGE: GENRE AND SOVEREIGNTY IN HAMLET

MARTIN MORAW

This paper argues that Hamlet and Fortinbras inhabit two distinct generic modes. Hamlet's revenge on Claudius is best understood as a Danish *Trauerspiel* as theorized by Walter Benjamin, yet Fortinbras's revenge on Denmark is a Norwegian romance. The discontinuity between the two modes allows us to grasp *Hamlet* as what Fredric Jameson calls a "socially symbolic act," that is, as an "ideological — but formal and immanent — response to a historical dilemma."<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the remotivation of the older romance structure within the new generic environment of *Trauerspiel* functions to contain an ideological problem that emerges in early modern revenge drama. The Fortinbras plot symbolically resolves the conceptual scandal that is the dialectical unity of the outlaw and the sovereign by transforming the Norwegian prince, as though by fortunate accident, from one into the other.

What makes Hamlet a *Trauerspiel* rather than a tragedy? Benjamin's sharp distinction between tragedy, which for him belongs exclusively to ancient Greece, and early modern *Trauerspiel* rests on what he sees as fundamental differences between the notions of fate and guilt articulated in each form. The fate of tragic protagonists is that guilt falls upon them through misfortune, and thus from without: "[this] is always the guilt of those who are guilty by their actions, not their will."<sup>2</sup> Over the course of the dramatic action, tragic guilt "is taken over by a hero ... and absorbed into himself. By reflecting it in his consciousness of himself, he escapes its demonic jurisdiction" (*O*, 131). *Trauerspiel*, by contrast, lacks a similarly isolated subject of fate, just as it lacks the internal coherence of action valued in Aristotelian tragic theory. The reason is that here, guilt is conceived in Christian terms as "creaturely" (*O*, 129), that is, as the reflection of original sin; it is already an essential part of every agent, prior to any individual transgression having occurred. *Trauerspiel* therefore dramatizes the complex workings out of guilt as a datum, as opposed to the encountering and overcoming of guilt by a tragic consciousness. In Greek tragedy, fate is particular, whereas in *Trauerspiel*, it is universal.

For Benjamin, the core of the notion of fate in *Trauerspiel* thus consists in the "conviction that ... creaturely guilt," in whatever guise and however briefly it may manifest itself, "unleashes causality as the instrument of the irresistibly unfolding fatalities" (*O*, 129). In the early modern drama of fate, in other words, guilt causes causation; conversely, fate is revealed over the course of the action as "the entelechy of events within the field of guilt" (*O*, 129). This metaphysical texture explains why,

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<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981), 139.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 131. All citations from this text are taken from the English translation, hereafter abbreviated *O* and cited parenthetically by page number.

on the level of plot, fate dwells not in the appearance of necessity as in tragedy but instead in the appearance of accident. For within the field of guilt delineated by *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin writes,

everything intentional or accidental is so intensified that the complexities — of honour for instance — betray, by their paradoxical vehemence, that the action of this play has been inspired by fate. It would be absolutely wrong to argue: ‘If we encounter improbable accidents, contrived situations, unduly complicated intrigues ... then the impression of fatality is destroyed.’<sup>3</sup> For it is precisely the far-fetched combinations, those which are anything other than natural, which correspond to the various fates in the various fields of action. (O, 130)

The twists and turns of the dramatic action — “accidental judgements” (5.2.326),<sup>4</sup> in Horatio’s words, such as the blind stabbing of a man behind an arras, “purposes mistook / Fall’n on th’ inventors’ heads” (5.2.328-29) as in an exchange of rapiers in the midst of a heated scuffle, or when a queen drinks from a poisoned cup intended for someone else — are the events that confirm, by virtue of their being the least likely and the most consequential, the drama’s galvanization by fate. At the end of *Hamlet*, Benjamin writes, the drama of fate “flares up” in the “drastic externality” of Hamlet’s death (O, 137). For Benjamin, Hamlet himself has discovered fatality as the inner principle of dramatic contingency: the prince of act 5 “wants to breathe the suffocating air of fate in one deep breath,” and “die by some accident” (O, 137).

Yet even as this conscious embrace of fate sets Hamlet apart, his death still “has no more in common with tragic death than the Prince himself has with Ajax” (O, 136). The scene of Hamlet’s death — of which one could give a perfectly adequate account by describing the treacherous movements of various objects in space, the way the “fateful stage-properties gather around [Hamlet], as around their lord and master” (O, 137) — is anything but the scene of an individual coming up against his singular tragic destiny. In the multiple killings choreographed by accident that together make up the conclusion of *Hamlet*, death instead “takes the form of a communal fate, as if summoning all the participants before the highest court” (O, 136). Without telling us, Benjamin is here echoing Shakespeare, who offers the same image for the play’s catastrophe: “O proud death,” Fortinbras exclaims upon entering a stage strewn with bodies, “What feast is toward in thine eternal cell / That thou so many princes at a shot / So bloodily hast struck!” (5.2.308-11)

The translation of fate into dramatic structure means on the one hand that everything in the play drives the action towards this bloody conclusion, and yet on the other hand, it simultaneously prevents the achievement of formal completion in the strict sense. For if *Trauerspiel* represents an extreme intensification of the universal fate of creaturely guilt, then individual plays can no longer be thought of as autonomous wholes with a beginning, middle, and end. Instead, they sink to the level of episodic iterations affording us with varying illustrations of what, in the last analysis, always remains the same content. The fate of the creature — guilt and death

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin is citing Johannes Volkelt, *Ästhetik des Tragischen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1917), 125.

<sup>4</sup> All citations from *Hamlet* are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: Norton, 1997), and cited in the text by act, scene, and line.

— never changes. It is the same for everyone, and for this reason, the outcome of a Trauerspiel can never have the quality of a decisive break with the order of fate that the conclusion of a Greek tragedy has. Rather, in a way unimaginable in a classical tragic context, the action is merely “adjourned” (O, 137) at the end of the play, to be taken up again another time, as one Trauerspiel bleeds into the next in a potentially endless paratactic series:

It has rightly been said of the English Trauerspiel before Shakespeare that it has ‘no proper end, the stream continues on its course.’<sup>5</sup> This is true of the Trauerspiel in general; its conclusion does not mark the end of an epoch, as the death of the tragic hero so emphatically does, in both a historical and an individual sense. (...) Whereas the tragic hero, in his ‘immortality,’ does not save his life, but only his name, in death the characters of the Trauerspiel lose only the name-bearing individuality, and not the vitality of their role. This survives undiminished in the spirit-world. ‘After a Hamlet it might occur to another dramatist to write a Fortinbras; no one can stop me from allowing all the characters to meet again in hell or in heaven, and settling their accounts anew.’<sup>6</sup> The author of this remark has failed to perceive that this is determined by the law of Trauerspiel, and not at all by the work referred to, let alone its subject matter. (...) Whereas tragedy ends with a decision — however uncertain this may be — there resides in the essence of the Trauerspiel, and especially in the death-scene, an appeal of the kind which martyrs utter. (O, 135-37)

The response that such an appeal strives to awaken in the audience is the one anticipated by Horatio during the final moments of *Hamlet*: Trauerspiele are mourning plays or, as Benjamin also puts it, “plays for the mournful” (O, 119). Concurrently, the impossibility of release from the ensnarement of fate only deepens the survivors’ obligation to “speak to th’ yet unknowing world” (5.2.323) and “Truly deliver” (5.2.330) what has happened.

Even as Benjamin insists, meanwhile, that “the law of Trauerspiel” as opposed to the “subject matter” of Hamlet is responsible for paradoxically forcing the play beyond the boundaries of its own conclusion, there does exist a certain elective affinity between the former and the latter. Revenge, as Hegel knew, shares with fate the structural capacity to generate a potentially limitless number of repetitive cycles of action from a single common principle.<sup>7</sup> In this sense the drama of revenge, just like the drama of fate, can only be paused and never be properly concluded. Indeed, if one were to seek some concrete proof of Benjamin’s claim that in early modern tragic drama, a character’s role survives his death only to be inhabited once more in a different play, one would need to look no further than to those numerous other revengers who, before and after Hamlet, crowd the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage: Kyd’s Hieronimo, Shakespeare’s Titus, Marston’s Antonio, Middleton’s Vindice, and so forth.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin is citing Hans Ehrenberg, *Tragödie und Kreuz*, vol. 1, *Die Tragödie unter dem Olymp* (Würzburg: Patmos, 1920), 46.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin is citing Albert Ludwig, “Fortsetzungen. Eine Studie zur Psychologie der Literatur,” *Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift* 6 (1914): 141.

<sup>7</sup> See G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge UP), 130 (paragraph 102).

For Benjamin, Hamlet effectively ends with the non-conclusion of Hamlet's death-scene. This is not a coincidence. The framework of Trauerspiel corresponds to Horatio's closing summary in that the focus of both remains restricted to the play's main action. While Benjamin thus teaches us why it would be within the rights of another dramatist to write a Fortinbras, his generic categories are at the same time unequal to the task of explaining the arrival of Shakespeare's Fortinbras in the closing moments of Hamlet — or, more properly, they are capable of doing so only negatively. Fortinbras, that is to say, stands “the law of Trauerspiel” on its head. After cutting short Horatio's speech by postponing a full report to a later time — “Let us haste to hear it, / And call the noblest to the audience” (5.2.330-31) — Fortinbras in turn gives his own interpretation of the play's action, which arrives at conclusions that not only differ from, but are in fact the opposite of, the ones reached by Horatio only a moment earlier. What previously appeared as fated inevitability now becomes fortunate coincidence, and what seemed a communal devastation is suddenly transformed into individual opportunity: “For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune. / I have some rights of memory in this kingdom, / Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me” (5.2.332-34).

This is, on the level of plot, Fortinbras stepping in to make the most of a state of emergency in Denmark. In this sense, and contrary to what Benjamin suggests, Hamlet does in fact end with a decision: it is just that it is Fortinbras and not Hamlet who takes it. On the level of genre, moreover, Fortinbras's lines do not have the effect of concluding the Trauerspiel action on its own terms (which, according to Benjamin, would in any case be impossible) so much as revising it in the first person singular. Fortinbras's revenge involves a perspectival shift, a trading of positions between the play's foreground and background: from the Norwegian's point of “vantage” at the end of the play, the preceding Trauerspiel as a whole appears an accidental, chance event that is meaningful only insofar as it allows him to “claim” his “rights.” Accidents tended to advance the central plot line toward the achievement of revenge, and the same is true for the peripheral one. Yet whereas in the former the emplotment of contingency disclosed the collective subjection to fate, in the latter it reveals an individual's good “fortune.” It is as if Fortinbras is not under the jurisdiction of the merciless “law” of Trauerspiel because he belongs to a rival generic mode. This is the mode of the romance.<sup>8</sup>

For not only Fortinbras's name and adventurous disposition, but also the play's peripheral plot, when viewed from a Norwegian point of view, recall the competing genre of the chivalric romance: a young prince, his homeland currently ruled by an aging king, attempts to put right the wrongs committed against his dead royal father, is foiled, goes on to prove his valor in a foreign country, and is rewarded in the end when, by some unexpected happy coincidence, the self-destruction of his father's old

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<sup>8</sup> Critics have often mentioned the connection between Fortinbras and the romance tradition in passing. Cherrell Guilfoyle suggests that Fortinbras's name may recall Ferumbras or Fierabras, names used in the Charlemagne romances (“King Hamlet's Two Successors,” *Comparative Drama* 15, no.2 (1981): 120-138, 126). The fullest treatment of romance motifs and themes in *Hamlet* to date is Michael L. Hays's discussion of the play in *Shakespearean Tragedy as Chivalric Romance: Rethinking Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 130-154.

enemies allows him to claim the ultimate prize. The substitution of Poland for Denmark as the target of Fortinbras's campaign, which earlier seemed only to indicate a conspicuous blockage in the development of the Norwegian revenge pattern, now appears simultaneously as the comparatively seamless replacement of the expected major romance adventure, Fortinbras's invasion of Denmark, with an unexpected minor one, the Polish campaign.

Fortinbras's triumph at the play's conclusion, meanwhile, becomes legible as a generic and ideational counterpoint to the accidents of *Trauerspiel*. For from a Norwegian perspective, Fortinbras's timely arrival appears as the kind of formally necessary accident that we associate with the world of romance, as the type of felicitous coincidence that Michael Witmore describes as a "rhyme on the order of plot."<sup>9</sup> Accidental events in romance, Witmore tells us, "are not an interruption of the regular order of things but rather an integral part of a landscape which is obliged to supply them for the purposes of advancing the plot."<sup>10</sup> Rather than fatefully disrupting human action as in *Trauerspiel*, romance accidents manifest themselves as "the happy consonance of means and ends," and thus as "a signature or token of some pervasive mode of providential action."<sup>11</sup> Instead of frustrating intention, these accidents guarantee its realization. This is what happens in *Hamlet* at the moment when "the dream of [Fortinbras's] advantage" (1.2.21), still held in derision by Claudius in act 1, is finally fulfilled as the Norwegian prince assumes the point of "vantage" (5.2.334) of Denmark's new sovereign in act 5.<sup>12</sup> Fortinbras's early exit from *Hamlet*'s *Trauerspiel*, then, is at the same time an entry into another mode — *Hamlet* tells the same story twice, the first time as mourning play, and the second time as romance.

In my view, the ideological significance of this generic constellation is best understood in terms of Fredric Jameson's model of "formal sedimentation."<sup>13</sup> For Jameson, a genre such as the chivalric romance is "in its emergent, strong form ... essentially a socio-symbolic message," or, in other words, "immanently and intrin-

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Witmore, *Culture of Accidents. Unexpected Knowledges in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001), 25.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> This is also what distinguishes Fortinbras's accidental triumph from the play's most famous chance event — *Hamlet*'s rescue by pirates while traveling to England — which critics have associated with the world of romance. As Witmore puts it: "News of the encounter ... seems almost smuggled in from outside of the world of the play, as if a generic field stops at the west coast of Denmark and the sea surrounding it is governed by the quick-bending laws of romance, pirates swooping in just in time to take the hero somewhere else. The pirates literally come from elsewhere, from the sea, from the romance, even - when we consider Shakespeare's audience of the early 1600s - from contemporary political and commercial concerns about the effects of piracy on the shipping trade" (97). Even as the pirates "come ... from the romance," and even as the encounter saves *Hamlet* from Claudius's plot against him and prompts the prince's realization that "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (5.2.10-11), this accident still serves to take *Hamlet* back to Denmark, back to *Trauerspiel*, and thus to his revenge and death. On the significance of *Hamlet*'s turn to providence in act 5, see below.

<sup>13</sup> Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 140.

sically an ideology in its own right.”<sup>14</sup> “When such forms are reappropriated and refashioned in quite different social and cultural contexts,” Jameson argues,

this message persists and must be functionally reckoned into the new form. (...) The ideology of the form itself, thus sedimented, persists into the later, more complex structure as a generic message which coexists — either as a contradiction or, on the other hand, as a mediatory or harmonizing mechanism — with elements from later stages.<sup>15</sup>

In *Hamlet*, the Fortinbras plot serves as a formal and ideological harmonizing mechanism. I have already noted that the sedimented romance structure solves the formal problem of conclusion. At the same time, the ideological content of the romance form — which, for the purposes of the present inquiry, expresses itself first and foremost in the genre's emplotment of accident as a confirmation of providential design instead of an actualization of creaturely guilt and fate, as in *Trauerspiel* — allows for the symbolic resolution of an ideological dilemma. As I will show now, the transformation of Fortinbras from avenging outlaw to sovereign — indirectly, by way of an apparent accident rather than as the direct result of his own actions — functions to dispel the ideologically troublesome affinity between these two figures.

In the play's opening scene, Horatio responds to Marcellus's wish to learn “Why this same strict and most observant watch / So nightly toils the subject of the land” (1.1.70-71) with an account of the backstory and current state of the Danish-Norwegian conflict. “At least the whisper goes so,” Horatio cautiously adds, before recounting how

our last king,  
Whose image even but now appeared to us,  
Was as you know by Fortinbras of Norway,  
Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride,  
Dared to the combat; (1.1.79-83)

The story of the kingly duel forms the basis both of what Fortinbras sees as his “rights of memory” (5.2.333) in Denmark and of Claudius's dismissal of the same claims as violations of “all bonds of law” (1.2.24). Horatio, it would appear, firmly supports the latter view: in his speech on the castle battlements, he repeatedly insists on the duel's procedural legality — Horatio refers to the agreement between the combatants twice, first as “a sealed compact / Well ratified by law and heraldry” (1.1.85-86), and again when telling us how “the same cov'nant,” after the duel, brought about “the carriage of the article designed” (1.1.92; 93) — and describes the late king as “our valiant Hamlet” (1.1.83); young Fortinbras's present effort to recover the formerly Norwegian territory, by contrast, proceeds not by legal means but “by strong hand / And terms compulsative” (1.1.101-2), and the aggressor, himself “Of unimproved mettle hot and full” (1.1.95), has enlisted a band of “landless” (1.1.97; F) or “lawless resolute” (1.1.97; Q2) to pursue it.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-41.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

But why, we ask, should the seemingly unambiguous matter of King Hamlet's single combat both be common knowledge in Denmark — as Horatio implies in 1.1.81 — and at the same time remain a topic of quiet “whisper” (1.1.79)? The phrase “Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride” (1.1.82) provides an answer. It is often understood to refer exclusively to Old Fortinbras and his motivation for issuing the challenge, but the line's syntactic position means that it may also be taken to describe Old Hamlet and his reasons for agreeing to fight the Norwegian. Both kings made a choice, and both, Horatio gives us to understand, were driven by rivalrous pride when they made it.

It is important to note in this context that Shakespeare changed earlier versions of the Hamlet story not only by incorporating the figure of young Fortinbras but also by modifying the terms of the duel. In Saxo's *Historiae Danicae*, the pact between the combatants stipulates the burial arrangements of the vanquished, and in Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*, the fight is over the warriors' treasure-ships. The alteration of the wager to lands transforms the contest from one that still reflects the source material's medieval origins into one that now helps occasion the distinctly early modern political geography of Shakespeare's play. What was an episode about the mortal struggle between two feudal lords now involves kings and their territory, and, over the course of the play, results in ambassadors and armies criss-crossing northern Europe from Norway to Denmark to Poland and back. Its momentous consequences, thus unfolding at the level of international diplomacy and war, in turn retroactively change the significance of the duel itself.

The agreement between the two kings would have appeared to early modern audiences at best as an illegitimate wagering of their sons' inheritance and at worst as a violation of the inalienability and indivisibility of the royal domain, depending on whether one understands “all those his lands / Which [Old Fortinbras] stood seized on” (1.1.87-88) and Old Hamlet's “moiety competent” (1.1.89) to refer to the combatants' estates or to royal territory. At the same time, deadly contest also functions at a deeper level to put into question the very notion of sovereign rule into whose historical and conceptual horizon it has now been drawn. The political problem raised by King Hamlet's duel, a fight that is particular in its motivation and contingent in its outcome, is not that the sovereign's actions are murderous and wrong (as in the case of Claudius and the play's main revenge action) but rather that they are only accidentally right. The dilemma that the single combat raises with regard to sovereignty, in other words, has the same structure of a mismatch between form and content that interests Hegel in the relationship between revenge and universal right: just as the content of revenge, justice, is at odds with its form as the action of a particular will, so King Hamlet's actions preserve — and, in the short term, even strengthen — his kingdom but at the same time conflict with the sovereign's claim to universality in that they are motivated by pride and follow the protocol of personal honor.

Benjamin, we recall, teaches us that *Trauerspiel* has no proper end: while tragedy ends with a decision, the mourning play is merely paused and cannot be completed. The story of the duel shows that, within the purview of the drama of creaturely guilt, there is also no proper beginning. On the level of form, the *Trauerspiel* action of Hamlet reaches backward before its starting point just as, in the absence of the

Fortinbras plot, it would point forward beyond its end: fate is “the true order of eternal recurrence” (O, 135), and if King Hamlet’s return from the dead is itself a manifestation of that order, then King Hamlet — had the drama of this proud royal life “Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin” (1.5.76) been written — would be as well. What is crucial in the present context is that the boundlessness of Trauerspiel, its formal incapability to represent a radical break and thus divide what is into a before and after, corresponds on the level of the genre’s ideological content to the impossibility of arriving at a sovereign decision.<sup>16</sup> For in order to be truly sovereign, such a decision would have to transcend what, in Trauerspiel, is an absolute horizon:

The level of the state of creation, the terrain on which the Trauerspiel is enacted, also unmistakably exercises a determining influence on the sovereign. However highly enthroned over subject and state, his status is confined to the world of creation; he is the lord of creatures, but he remains a creature. (O, 85)

The sovereign cannot extricate himself from the rule of creaturely fate in which the characters of the mourning play are collectively entangled. Instead of somehow interrupting or suspending the destructive workings out of fate in history and fulfilling the promise of their concept, his decisions fall back into particularity, reveal his own subjection to unruly passions and desires, and thus themselves perpetuate the very disorder that they are intended to set right. In Trauerspiel, decision turns against the decider and against itself. Such is the case with King Hamlet’s reckless choice to fight King Fortinbras over territory, which, instead of putting an end to the Danish-Norwegian conflict, calls forth its (re)appearance in the play’s present, and ultimately leads to Fortinbras’s triumph.

The politico-theological opposition between sovereignty and creatureliness in Trauerspiel — “the disproportion,” as Benjamin puts it, “between the unlimited hierarchical dignity with which [the sovereign] is divinely invested and the humble estate of his humanity” (O, 70) — reflects a larger conceptual crisis of political authority in early modernity, a crisis in which older, religious modes of legitimation of political rule are no longer dominant but have also not yet been replaced by new, secular alternatives. Extending Benjamin’s line of argument, I contend that tragic drama’s generic orientation toward the sovereign’s particular will and creaturely estate not only brings to the fore the incommensurability between political authority and that of the divine, but also raises the specter of the passing over of authority into mere power, of the collapse of decision into decisiveness, and thus of the sovereign’s transformation into the outlaw.

In Hamlet, these possibilities are at once invoked and contained by the Fortinbras plot: at its origin lies the story of King Hamlet’s duel and the ideological problem of the sovereign’s capriciousness; its conclusion consists in Fortinbras’s triumph and the transformation of the Norwegian outlaw into the sovereign of Denmark. The accidental nature of the latter permits the symbolic resolution of the former: the

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<sup>16</sup> For a detailed discussion of this issue, and of the ways in which Benjamin at once relies on and criticizes Schmitt’s theory of sovereignty and the notion of sovereign decision, see Samuel Weber, “Taking Exception to Decision: Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt,” *Diacritics* 22, no. 3/4 (1992): 5-18.

apparent contingency of Fortinbras's revenge on Denmark recasts the fateful disruptions of Trauerspiel as the benevolent providential mode of causation at work in romance, and thereby reconciles once more creature and sovereign, particular and universal.

For Benjamin, we note, a comparable dialectical reversal occurs in Hamlet not on the level of plot but of character. "For the Trauerspiel," Benjamin writes,

Hamlet alone is the spectator by the grace of God; yet what can satisfy him is not what they play for him, but only his own destiny. His life, the exemplary object of his mourning, points, before its extinction, to the Christian providence in whose bosom his mournful images are transformed into a blessed existence. Only in a princely life such as this is melancholy redeemed, by being confronted with itself. The rest is silence. (O, 158; translation modified)

The figure of Hamlet personifies that "audacious twist" which makes it possible "to recognize in the features of the sorrowful contemplator the reflection of a distant light, shining back from the depths of self-absorption" (O, 157). Benjamin's Hamlet is both "spectator" and allegorist of his own fated life. His "mournful images" of the world express subjection to fate and simultaneously become allegories of fate's apparent antithesis, redemption. I have been arguing that the story of Fortinbras's revenge similarly turns the formal, generic, and ideological logic of Trauerspiel into its opposite, that of the romance. Yet for Benjamin, this movement involves not so much a shift away from the mourning play and toward some alternative mode but rather a sudden reversal in the way the same content is being perceived: namely, the recognition that what previously appeared only to render the wretchedness of the earthly order of universal, creaturely guilt is already the negative image of its own overcoming, and of humanity's eternal salvation. If, for Benjamin, Hamlet's providential "readiness" (5.2.160) in act 5 in this way signals the self-reflective, immanent *Aufhebung* of Trauerspiel in Hamlet, then the figure of Fortinbras, I have suggested, shows that the play at the same time paradoxically stands outside the confines of its own form from the very beginning.

The two ways of breaking free from the mourning play converge in Hamlet's dying act of endorsing Fortinbras as sovereign of Denmark. Hamlet has just learned that Fortinbras's army and the English king's ambassadors are arriving: "I cannot live to hear the news from England, / But I do prophesy th'election lights / On Fortinbras. He has my dying voice" (5.2.296-98). When uttering these lines, Hamlet has already told us, twice, that he is "dead" (5.2.275, 280) — his prophesy thus takes on the quality of a belated reply to Horatio's exhortation to the Ghost, which remained unanswered during the first time Norwegian troops were said to be approaching, in the play's opening scene: "If thou art privy to thy country's fate / Which happily foreknowing may avoid, / O speak!" (1.1.114-16). Whereas then King Hamlet, condemned to return once more to the living, set in motion his son's Trauerspiel, Hamlet now concludes Fortinbras's romance and, as Horatio hopes, will soon be sung to his final "rest" by "flights of angels" (5.2.303). "The secret of [Hamlet's] person," Benjamin tells us,

is shut up in the playful, theatrical, and, as a result, measured traversal of all stations of this intentional space [of melancholy], just as the secret of his fate is shut up in events that are entirely homogenous to this, his gaze. (O, 157-58; translation modified)

Hamlet's secret can never be articulated except as the process of its own coming into being, for this secret constitutes itself as such only when his path through mournfulness — and the mourning play form — is finally complete, that is to say, in death. As soon as it becomes known to him, it can no longer be revealed to us:

I am dead, Horatio. Wretched Queen, adieu!  
 You that look pale and tremble at this chance,  
 That are but mutes or audience to this act,  
 Had I but time — as this fell sergeant Death  
 Is strict in his arrest — O, I could tell you —  
 But let it be. (5.2.275-80)

Hamlet's final act in the staging of his destiny is to exclude us, who "are but mutes or audience to this act," from his staging his destiny. Hamlet withholds his secret, leaving behind an audience cast in the role of trembling and uncomprehending spectators: "O, I could tell you — / But let it be." Yet if Hamlet's truth is structurally unknowable, then the truth of Hamlet, the way in which the play's action has itself now become "entirely homogenous to this, his gaze," is not. Just as Hamlet passes through and leaves behind *Trauerspiel*, so too does the play. The difference between the two movements is that the former finds completion in Hamlet's falling silent, whereas the latter is disclosed in and through his "dying voice."

For the dialectical figure that not only animates Benjamin's reading of *Hamlet* but also plays an important role in his theory of Baroque allegory more generally — namely, the unexpected proximity of mournfulness and redemptive anticipation, the way in which the one can call forth and transform itself into the other by way of one "audacious twist," "about-turn," or "[leap] forward" (*O*, 157, 232, 233) — also furnishes the schema of the relationship between *Trauerspiel* and romance in Shakespeare's play. Indeed, these generic categories themselves appear from this perspective no longer as independent modes but rather as the two sides of a single Christian vision, in which judgments of fate pass over into providential guidance, and creaturely guilt occasions divine forgiveness. If, according to Benjamin, this dialectic is brought to the verge of articulation in the figure of Hamlet — "O, I could tell you - / But let it be" (5.2.279-80) — then it is fully realized on the level of political content. But whereas Benjamin stresses the way in which this kind of reversal allows Shakespeare to "overcome" mournfulness "in the spirit of Christianity" and thus permits the mourning play form "to inspire itself to new life" (*O*, 158), we find that it functions here to control and imagine away the dismantling of sovereignty in *Trauerspiel*: the Fortinbras plot originates in a story about the mismatch between personal will and sovereign authority, begins as the threat of an outlaw's revenge and then twists, turns, and leaps forward into the sovereign's "election" (5.2.297), a term that at once recalls theological legitimation and promises some form of political deliberation and consent. In this way, revenge itself, which in the play's main action projects what Hegel would call a bad infinity is transformed into its opposite.

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## Zusammenfassung

Dieser Essay zeigt, dass Hamlet und Fortinbras zwei unterschiedlichen Genres angehören. Hamlets Rache an Claudius spielt sich nach Walter Benjamin als ein dänisches Trauerspiel ab, wohingegen es sich bei Fortinbras Rache an Dänemark um eine norwegische *romance* handelt. Die Diskontinuität dieser beiden Modi erlaubt es uns, *Hamlet* als ein, in Fredric Jamesons Terminologie, "socially symbolic act," also als "ideological — but formal and immanent — response to a historical dilemma" zu verstehen. Die Wiederkehr der älteren *romance* Struktur in dem neueren Genre des Trauerspiels hilft dabei, ein ideologisches Problem, das in der Rachetragödie der frühen Neuzeit auftritt, im Zaum zu halten. Die Geschichte des Fortinbras löst auf symbolischer Ebene den begrifflichen Widerspruch, der in der dialektischen Einheit des gesetzlosen Rächers und des Souveräns liegt, indem sie den norwegischen Prinzen von dem Einen in das Andere verwandelt.

**Abstract**

This essay argues that Hamlet and Fortinbras inhabit two distinct generic modes. Hamlet's revenge on Claudius is best understood as a Danish *Trauerspiel* as theorized by Walter Benjamin, yet Fortinbras's revenge on Denmark is a Norwegian romance. The discontinuity between the two modes allows us to grasp *Hamlet* as what Fredric Jameson calls a "socially symbolic act," that is, as an "ideological — but formal and immanent — response to a historical dilemma." Specifically, the remotivation of the older romance structure within the new generic environment of *Trauerspiel* functions to contain an ideological problem that emerges in early modern revenge drama. The Fortinbras plot symbolically resolves the conceptual scandal that is the dialectical unity of the outlaw and the sovereign by transforming the Norwegian prince, as though by fortunate accident, from one into the other.

# BEFORE THE MADNESS: *HAMLET*'S OPHELIA AS AN UNSUNG REVENGE TRAGEDY HEROINE

DAVID J. AMELANG

## Introduction

The consensus among scholars and editors is that the source text Shakespeare probably used for *Hamlet* was a late 1580s dramatisation of the Danish myth of prince Amleth of Denmark, one of many revenge plays that were so popular among Elizabethan theatregoers.<sup>1</sup> This earlier version of the play, the *Ur-Hamlet* as it has been called, seems to have been very similar to Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, as Kenneth Muir observes, and could have possibly been written by Kyd himself as well: "both plays begin with a ghost demanding vengeance; both are concerned with the madness, real or assumed, of the avenger; both contain the death of an innocent woman; both heroes blame themselves for their procrastination; both contain a play within the play" (158). Shakespeare modifies the source play, as he so often does, to add his own particular nuances to the plot and its characters. The temperament of Hamlet's young heroine Ophelia, for instance, seems to be an invention of Shakespeare's, for "the girl who foreshadows her in Belleforest [one of the three historical chronicles of Prince Amleth from which *Ur-Hamlet*'s plot must have been taken] is hardly individualized at all", according to William Lawrence (409). In other words, Shakespeare was working with a blank slate when it came to characterising the young heroine of his play; he had the possibility of either looking at his theatrical precedents in other revenge plays such as those written by Kyd, or to go elsewhere to find and develop a new and different sort of character.

Throughout his career, especially in the stage leading up to the writing of *Hamlet* in 1599-1600, Shakespeare for the most part endows his female protagonist roles with a remarkable amount of esprit and dynamism. Lawrence notes that "the heroines of Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies, so different and so distinctive in character, are alike in one respect: they are courageous and resourceful." Hamlet's Ophelia, however, is in Lawrence's mind the most notable exception. "Whatever we think of that unhappy lady, and we should certainly not judge her too harshly, we cannot call her courageous or resourceful" (409). The instinctive questions are: why did Shakespeare put such an apparently colourless heroine at the heart of his most ambitious play? From where did the motivation for this new character originate? And how did his immediate audiences react to this unexpected change? These queries, however, have not necessarily met with answers, since the early history of analysis of the character of Ophelia has not been very thoroughgoing. The first critic of the heroine of *Hamlet* is thought to have been William Richardson in *On Shakespeare's Imitation of Female*

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<sup>1</sup> More in Thompson & Taylor 44-47; Jenkins 82-111; Erne 146-156.

*Characters* (1788). Richardson, generally thought of as someone sympathetic to Shakespeare's attempts at creating inspiring young heroines, had very little to say about Ophelia and none of it was particularly positive (White 95). Critics in the following century thought along those lines as well. Up until the early 20th century, in fact, the vast majority of critics would rather give her the 'silent treatment' than dissect the text in search for her literary/dramatic essence:

The romantic critics apparently felt that the less said about Ophelia the better. "What shall be said of her? For eloquence is mute before her" asks Mrs. Jameson. Hazlitt considers that she "is a character almost too exquisitely touching to be dwelt upon", and calls her a "flower too soon faded". Strachey writes, "There is more to be felt than to be said in the study of Ophelia's character just because she is a creation of such perfectly feminine proportions and beauty". And Bradley believes that in her fate we have "an element, not of deep tragedy, but of pathetic beauty, which makes the analysis of her character seem almost a desecration". (Camden 247)

Such considered opinions notwithstanding, there is much to be said about Ophelia, if not necessarily in her defence. Indeed, much has been said since Camden published those words in 1964; as R.S. White explains, "Ophelia has unexpectedly generated a rich, more varied, and even perverse afterlife than any literary figure" (93). However, most of recent scholarship discussing Ophelia focuses almost exclusively on her extraordinary madness scene in the fourth act.<sup>2</sup> Very little has been written about the character that existed (on stage and page, I mean) before that passage. In this brief article I walk down the less trodden path of 'Ophelian' analysis and focus on the character before tragedy struck, the unsung heroine before the swansong. A close reading of Ophelia's interventions, especially when put side-by-side with those of her most prominent generic predecessor, The Spanish Tragedy's Bel-Imperia, will shed light on this new type of character that would for the first time take the Elizabethan stage. This article explores how the character of Ophelia stylistically and conceptually challenges the traditional figure of the young female heroine in Elizabethan revenge plays.

### **Ophelia, an exemplary Gentle Lady**

From a broader social point of view, the prevailing perception of women in Elizabethan England was, without any doubt, unflattering. At the beginning of her classic essay "Women on Top", Natalie Davis reminds us that the "female sex was thought to be the disorderly one par excellence in early modern Europe. 'Une beste imparfaicte,' went one adage, 'sans foy, sans loy, sans craincte, sans constance' (an imperfect animal, without faith, law, fear, constancy)" (147). Shakespeare, who is considered one of the more generous playwrights when it comes to creating admirable female characters, time and time again evokes, and ironically exposes, the notion that women are weak and base by nature. "I thank God I am not a woman", Rosalind tells Orlando under the male guise of Ganymede, "to be touched with so many giddy offences as he hath generally taxed their whole sex withal" (*As You Like It* 3.2.335-

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<sup>2</sup> Some noteworthy titles focusing exclusively on Ophelia's madness are Bialo; Charney; Guilfoyle; Leverenz; Mazzaro; Neely (1991) 323-338; Neely (2004) ch2; Ronk; Salkeld; Showalter; Trudell. For a good summary on recent Ophelia criticism and afterlife, see Thomson; White.

338).<sup>3</sup> Women were considered “dangerous, unstable, and sexually voracious” (Tague 19). It was believed that these imperfections, which can be traced all the way back to the Garden of Eden,<sup>4</sup> could only be kept in check with constant vigilance and a proper upbringing based on the principle of subduing her personality and by doing so stifling any possibility of the woman’s real nature ever taking over. This idea of education grew in the 17th and 18th centuries with the popularisation of conduct books for ladies, which promoted a lifestyle such as the one described by Ruth Kelso in her pathbreaking study *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*:

The girl in her father’s house would grow to marriageable age, habituated to modest and discreet behavior, in which pert looks, roving eyes, loud laughing and babbling, were abhorrent. Still happy and composed she would have learned to show a modest and shy face, to keep her eyes down, her whole body composed, to speak only when questioned and the to reply humbly and briefly. (54)

In other words, being a good gentlewoman in early modern Europe meant being modest, chaste and all in all unremarkable, in the literal sense.<sup>5</sup> This, however, contrasts quite sharply with the character presentation of heroines of the Elizabethan stage, who were more often than not made of more assertive qualities than those Elizabethan educators desired of their real-life gentle ladies. The heroines in Shakespearean romantic comedies (and sometimes in other genres as well) are “active, enabling, even redemptive, often in breeches or other disguise. They are witty and self-confident, usually well-born, always beautiful [...] [...] Many of them are aristocratic young women, often unencumbered by parents” (Mann 208). Juliet, Portia, Rosalind, Beatrice, Viola... a long list of charismatic female roles, in some cases unleashed by the license given to them by a male disguise, was proof to Elizabethan theatregoers that it was possible to act contrary to the principles of ‘the body enclosed’ without necessarily becoming a shrew or a scold.<sup>6</sup> One of the most prominent non-Shakespearean characters of this sort is *The Spanish Tragedy*’s heroine and Elizabethan fan-favourite Bel-Imperia, “a formidable woman”, as editor J.R. Mulryne describes her, “decisively able to control and direct her emotions” (*The Spanish Tragedy* 24).<sup>7</sup> Bel-Imperia fits almost perfectly Mann’s description of the young

<sup>3</sup> By pointing this out I am in no way claiming that these were the thoughts of Shakespeare himself. However, as David Mann explains, even if “Shakespeare did not enter into all the aspects of the theatrical response to this manifestation of male anxiety [...] he is by no means untouched by it and it helps to frame much of his work” (130).

<sup>4</sup> “The quest for perfection”, Elisja Schulte van Kessel reminds us, “was the primary task of every believer. In reality, it was a duty imposed on women more than on men, and girls’ education placed greater emphasis on virtue than did a boy’s. Moreover, women were scrutinized far more closely than men, because Eve, the prime instigator of evil, lurked in every member of her sex” (146).

<sup>5</sup> Despite the overwhelming acceptance of this reading of history, Phyllis Rackin cautions about the possible exaggeration of this narrative. As she rightfully points out, “reminders that women were expected to be chaste, silent, and obedient probably occur more frequently in recent scholarship than they did in the literature of Shakespeare’s time” (11).

<sup>6</sup> In Valerie Traub’s words, the phrase ‘body enclosed’ “refers simultaneously to a woman’s closed genitals, closed mouth, and her enclosure within the home”. More in Traub 129-134; Stallybras.

<sup>7</sup> Fredson Bowers (82) discusses the popularity of Bel-Imperia among Elizabethan theatregoers, who view her as a symbol of romantic passion and strength.

Shakespearean heroine. And yet, she finds her direct generic successor in Ophelia, who could not have a more different stage personality.

One of the main differences one can observe between Ophelia before her madness and the other young heroines is that not only she still has a parent, but an extremely controlling one at that. Polonius, a prominent figure of the court of Elsinore, embodies one of the most oppressive and claustrophobic environments in the Shakespearean corpus, especially in relation to women. "Ophelia and Gertrude exist within a corrupt state," writes Marguerite Tassi, "where gender constraints give them little defence and few choices in response to harm, threatened violence and injustice" (76). It would be expected that Polonius, ever the tutor, would make sure his daughter received the most proper education available to gentlewomen of the time. Unfortunately, what passed as 'elite' education for ladies in the Renaissance was hardly inspiring, especially in comparison with what their male counterparts were taught:

The sons of the nobility and later of the bourgeoisie were made to study classical culture: the culture of the preparatory school and the university, a culture that could be understood only by those who knew Latin and that opened their way to important careers in the ecclesiastical or civil bureaucracy. Daughters of all strata of society were relegated to learning skills useful around the home: things that a girl could learn from her mother and that were useful in Christian households (Sonnet 101).

If Bel-Imperia and the heroines of Shakespearean comedy are surprisingly unlike the ideal gentlewoman, Ophelia as we get to know her before Act 4 is equally surprising by how much she sounds like the perfect lady as dreamed of by the patriarchal education doctrine of the period: silent, chaste, and obedient to a fault. By setting Bel-Imperia side by side with Ophelia and compare them according to their degree of observance of what scholarly research defines as the proper behaviour of the lady in Renaissance Europe, we may come closer to understanding the singularity of each character in relation to the contemporary audience's understanding of women.

The first axiom every gentlewoman of the time must observe is that of obedience. Obedience underwrites every other value; obedience to the father first, to the husband later; never is there a moment in their life in which she is not to have a man telling her what to do and how to do it (Kelso 44). Natalie Davis summarises the period's explanation of the need to subjugate women: "the lower ruled over the higher within the woman [...] and if she were given her way, she likewise would want to rule over those above her" (148). The way in which Ophelia interacts with the rest of the characters in *Hamlet* seems to be the perfect practical representation of this principle: she is just an instrument in the hands of Hamlet and Polonius and Claudius, a pawn in their game, and her only reaction to their never-ending commands is "I shall obey, my lord" (*Hamlet*, 1.3.135).<sup>8</sup> Bel-Imperia, however, "rebels against her superiors' assumption that people can be manipulated like things", Katharine Maus says of her, "her spirited refusal to comply with the dictates of a patriarchal system makes her an attractive character" (xvi). Critics like Bowers even go on to say that her spiting Balthazar, son of the Viceroy of Portugal and one of her suitors, in favour of her

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<sup>8</sup> More on Ophelia's suffering and manipulation at the hand of other characters in Camden 249; Baldo 23.

heart's choice and lower-born Horatio is in itself an act of certain defiance and independence of mind (67). What is clear is that Bel-Imperia's attitude stands in sharp opposition to Ophelia, who rejects her beloved Hamlet because of her father's direct order. As far as early modern society's expectations are concerned, Bel-Imperia would have appeared to an Elizabethan eye as the more outstanding of the two characters, and Ophelia a much more realistic portrayal of the true gentlewoman – if indeed the educators Kelso cites succeeded in their efforts to repress young women. In terms of literature and theatre, on the other hand, Bel-Imperia is far from being alone; she fits in the group of popular heroines of the likes of Juliet, Hermia, Jessica, and to some extent Portia as well. To see a young woman defy the social rules or conventions in favour of true love is a common literary sight, much more so than a young woman who follows the impositions of her father to infinity and beyond the way Ophelia does.

Another interesting point of difference between Ophelia and Bel-Imperia is the fluidity and the confidence with which they speak. Early modern educators thought the base nature of women could be rectified through speech, or rather lack of it: women should avoid talking unless prompted to by their male superiors (and if so, they should be as brief as possible), “for there is nothing”, a clergyman wrote for his daughters, “that doth so commend, avaunce, set forthe, adourne, decke, trim, and garnish a maid, as silence” (Kelso, 50). Ophelia seems to exemplify this doctrine from her very first appearance in the play in 1.3: out of the 135 lines of the scene, and with her being the only character on stage throughout the entirety of it, she is allotted twenty lines (under 7%), and four of these are half-lines. For the most part she speaks only when asked to, and does so in a brief and humble manner; most of her interventions are either corroborations of understanding what is being said to her, i.e. a marker of obedience, or answers to questions posed to her. According to Shakespeare's own Rosalind, the modest and brief speech which is demanded of gentle ladies goes against their own nature: “Do you not know I am a woman? When I think, I must speak”, she exclaims to Celia (As You Like It 3.2.243-244). Yet Ophelia's longest speech in that scene is a seven-line address to her brother, which stands out because of its length and tone:

I shall the effect of this good lesson keep  
As watchman to my heart. But, good my brother,  
Do not as some ungracious pastors do  
Show me the steep and thorny way to heave  
Whiles, a puffed and reckless libertine,  
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads  
And reckes not his own rede.      (*Hamlet* 1.3.44-49)

This is an exceptional speech for a character much better known for a less inspiring sentence: “I do not know, my lord, what I should think” (*Hamlet* 1.3.103).<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, in her first appearance on stage in 1.4 Bel-Imperia asserts her agency, in contrast with Ophelia's deference, by starting and conducting the dialogue with

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<sup>9</sup> Her tone when talking to her brother Laertes is in general much more casual than when speaking to their father, as it was to be expected; this might be the reason why so modest a speaker finds some elbow room to exercise her own voice at this point of the scene.

Horatio. Even in the wake of death of Andrea, her late lover or love interest, she is not only eloquent but forcefully so:

Signior Horatio, this is the place and hour  
Wherein I must entreat thee to relate  
The circumstance of Don Andrea's death,  
Who, living, was my garland's sweetest flower,  
And in his death hath buried my delights. (*The Spanish Tragedy* 1.4.1-5)

Throughout her stage presence in this scene, a total of 99 lines, she speaks almost half of them. 19 of her 44 lines form a soliloquy in which she reveals her intentions of revenging Andrea's death whilst at the same time confessing she has feelings for Horatio and she intends to act on them. Every line she is given, Bel-Imperia reminds us that she will not sit idly by under any circumstance, that she is an active character to her very last fictitious limb. She is so active that without Bel-Imperia there would be no play: she initiates the love-affair with Horatio that will unleash the chain of events that will follow; her presence is necessary to link the two murder plots together; it is her letter to Hieronimo that lets him know his son's death is in need of revenge, and that if he does not execute the revenge she will; her suicide at the end of the play within a play is the final straw for an already overwhelmed audience. Ophelia's lack of activity, on the other hand, has resulted in published summaries of *Hamlet's* plot in which there is no mention of her existence (Clare). Even John Kerrigan, who has written a book on the history of revenge tragedies, does not find many opportunities to talk about Ophelia's relevance regarding the development of the plot other than saying that her rejecting the prince may be yet another reason for Hamlet's distress (184). The apparent irrelevance of Ophelia in the revenge story of *Hamlet*, however, clashes directly with the fact that her madness scene in the fourth act is the catalyst for Laertes' revenge, and the consequential death of the main protagonist. "Remove women," Marguerite Tassi points out, "and the play loses some of its depth and ethical potency" (76).<sup>10</sup>

Focusing now not on what is being said but on how it is being said, the differences between Bel-Imperia and Ophelia are no less extreme. Bel-Imperia not only enjoys taking centre stage in conversation, but also has a certain dexterity when it comes to words, whereas Ophelia's speech lacks in poetic flair. For instance, the signature rhetorical device of Bel-Imperia's idiosyncratic dialect is her ability to engage in banter repartee and stichomythia, "a form of dramatic dialogue in which two disputing characters answer each other rapidly in alternating single lines, with one character's replies balancing (and often partially repeating) the other's utterances" (Baldick 243). In 1.4.77-89 she engages in a rapid exchange of witticisms with Lorenzo and Balthazar, picking up some of their words and phrases and recycling them to her advantage. She does this again with Horatio in 2.2.24-29 and in 2.4.24-29 in the climactic love scene of the play. Not only is her tongue sharp, but it is also rich with implicit references to passion ("If I be Venus, thou must needs be Mars / And where Mars reigneth, there must need be wars" *Spanish Tragedy* 2.4.34-35) as well as explicit content ("Then ward thyself: I dart this kiss at thee" *Spanish Tragedy* 2.4.40).

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<sup>10</sup> More on Ophelia's role as inciter of action in Tassi 78-97.

This is a direct act of defiance against the doctrine of chaste behaviour expected from a gentle lady, who should from a very young age be “guarded against learning unclean, wanton words, together with uncomely gestures and movements of the body, even in innocence, because she will use the same when older, unaware and often against her will” (Kelso 42). Even her erudite reference to classical mythology was to be condemned since, as Kelso’s sources remind us, reading was one of the great threats to chastity and moral rectitude: “It was a pity, some thought, that girls should learn to read at all, and they would have them taught late” (41).

On the opposite side of things, when Hamlet assails Ophelia with sexually charged puns and double-entendres right before the mousetrap in 3.2, she refuses to take part in the bawdy undercurrent of his language:

HAMLET. Lady, shall I lie in your lap?  
 OPHELIA. No, my lord.  
 HAMLET. Do you think I meant country matters?  
 OPHELIA. I think nothing, my lord.  
 HAMLET. That’s a fair thought to lie between maid’s legs.  
 OPHELIA. What is, my lord?  
 HAMLET. Nothing.  
 OPHELIA. You are merry, my lord.  
 HAMLET. Who, I?  
 OPHELIA. Yes, my lord. (*Hamlet* 3.2.108-117)

Not only does Ophelia dismiss Hamlet’s sub-textual dialogue, but she avoids (however elegantly and successfully we may argue) offering him any opportunity to twist a sexual misinterpretation of her words. She is consciously working against the stichomythia and mockery Bel-Imperia enjoys so much, just as the proper gentle lady should. Needless to say this has nothing to do with Shakespeare’s ability to weave a sharp-tongued female character; Beatrice’s constant repartee with Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing* is testament to some of the most enjoyable wordplay of the period’s stage literature, and the play which everybody assumes Shakespeare to have written right before *Hamlet, As You Like It*, has in Rosalind one of the most praised female roles of the Shakespeare corpus.<sup>11</sup> Ophelia talks only when she is asked to, as briefly as possible, and with an absolute modesty of meaning and style. She is Shakespeare’s best exercise at natural speech.

### Conclusion

With the character of Ophelia, Shakespeare seems to have shifted his gaze away from literary/theatrical sources and precedents and directed it toward the model gentlewoman of his day and age. Ophelia is the theatrical representation of ‘the ideal lady’ as encouraged by early modern educators and later put on display in the popular conduct books of the 17th and 18th centuries.<sup>12</sup> However, and at the risk of sounding

<sup>11</sup> For all conjectural chronological references in Shakespeare’s career I refer to Wells & Taylor.

<sup>12</sup> These social constraints were aimed specifically at gentlewomen, not Englishwomen of all tiers of society. More in Tague 22-24.

contradictory, this ideal lady is still a character educated to survive and exist in the real world and not in the realm of fiction, or in other words, not in the Castle of Elsinore. She is put in a position that requires much more than what she can offer. Shakespeare consciously, and probably with a lot of self-restraint, takes away from his young heroine the best weapons he could have given her to survive the psychological torture to which he was about to subject her: a strong and independent mind, quick wit and feet, and a sharp tongue to match.

Ophelia is an uncomfortable character for critics, and has often been a subject to avoid because the text does not give us enough to paint a clear picture of what she is: a slice of Emmental cheese, full of gaps, a meal made out of air. Even though in the last fifty years or so criticism of Ophelia has increased exponentially when compared to the previous four centuries, much of what is being said about her either focuses on her madness scene in Act 4, which is certainly her most interesting and redeeming appearance in the play, or is committed to rereading the character in order to cast her in a more positive light. This runs the risk of misreading her, for the truth is that Ophelia, even before going mad, is a formidable *dramatis persona*, perhaps not from a personality standpoint but definitely from a literary and theatrical one. If we understand courage and purpose as synonyms of strength, then she is anaemic; and yet, Shakespeare casts her in one of the most cumbersome roles in dramatic tradition, that of the young female heroine in a revenge tragedy, and then deprives her of any means of weathering the storm that is to come. Her act 4 swansong adds a further, undoubtedly commendable, dimension to the character, “a moment of spotlight to give voice to injustice” in the words of Tassi (73). Tassi goes on to suggest that Ophelia can only promote said justice “once freed from the socially determined behaviours and restrained speech of a young, rational female” (76). However, the first step needed for the swansong to take place is for the playwright to recreate the aesthetics of ‘restrained speech’ through speech, a remarkable effort in its own right.

So *why?* *Why* did Shakespeare put such a defenceless creature in the middle of the psychological sea of troubles that is the castle of Elsinore? *Why* did he develop a character that poses so many questions, and yet gives us so little real material with which to elaborate our interpretations? Perhaps, if the theories of anxiety have any truth to them, Shakespeare was fighting the stereotype and looking to represent this timeless story – timeless genre, indeed – in a way that had not been done before. In his rejection, or reassessment, of genre and plot he replaces a quintessential literary heroine like Bel-Imperia with the factory results of the repressive Elizabethan gentlewomen’s education. That would make sense, in my opinion. I am also inclined to believe that there is a chance Shakespeare wanted to remove some degrees of alienation for his audience, who were used to seeing young men playing the female roles on the professional stage, by creating a character with whom early modern English audiences might identify. But the truth is I do not know, and I wonder if there is anyone who can answer this question with the surviving *Hamlet* texts as the only clues in hand. However this might be precisely the point of Ophelia, and to a certain extent the whole play of *Hamlet* as well: a human tragedy such as this does not have to be fully apprehended in each step it takes for it to be appealing, for it to engage the audience (or reader) as a play. “Beyond the evidence of the text we have no right to

go”, William Lawrence reminds us at the end of his essay (416). That said, the same text is better read when one has a sense of where Shakespeare was coming from when he began to write his play, and that necessarily involves what his contemporaries expected or wanted women to be. The problem is that sometimes this image distorted their – and our – view of the text, and instead of looking at the actual words written we look at the spaces between the lines and fill them with what we think is right. And when we do this, we run the risk of making Ophelia a victim a second time.

As it is so often the case, this paper was written at an intersection in an on-going research. The work forthcoming involves analysing how the doctrine of early modern behavioural guides translated into the real world of the Elizabethan gentle lady. It would be rather simplistic to take the descriptions compiled by Ruth Kelso and other historians, which are after all literary texts, as a literal source for social reality. Despite Rackin’s cautionary warning, it is difficult to argue with the fact that the early modern period’s “vogue for conduct literature was simultaneously schooling young women on how to be ‘chaste, silent, and obedient’, alongside a sprinkling of learning in music and other arts” (Parker 195-196). However, as Ingrid Tague points out, conduct books and similar documents of the period were not “the *only* discourse of femininity. The same society that produced conduct literature also produced pornography that revelled in female sexuality” (21). The use made of Kelso’s study in this article, will benefit immensely from extensive research on early modern elite women, including analysing the language of what could be understood as transcriptions of their public voice. Additionally, the often overlooked characteristics of pre-Act 4 Ophelia must finally be integrated within the global reading of the *dramatis persona*. Or, in other words, the madness of Ophelia should be effectively discussed with her prior disposition in consideration and vice versa. Through the comparative and correlative study of the two behavioural modes, new assessments of the role of repressive education and a consequent state of distress or insanity can be made. Although it is beyond doubt that Ophelia’s outburst in the fourth act derives in no small part from the way the title character systematically belittles her in his quest for revenge, perhaps a dip into the archives may indicate that her father’s questionable didactic ways deserves some of the blame as well. Finally, I plan to compare the portrayals of gentlewomen in English theatre with those in countries in which women were allowed to perform professionally on the stage alongside men, such as Spain and Italy. Moreover, education manuals in these other countries should prove insightful in reconstructing the thought process not only behind the emergence of a character like Ophelia, but also behind the solid preference in all European stage literatures for characters such as Bel-Imperia, Portia, Rosalind, Olivia, Juliet, ... in other words, women who would transgress the limits established by a philosophy of education that encouraged the social constriction of gentlewomen’s voices.

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## Zusammenfassung

Dieser Aufsatz untersucht, wie der Ophelia-Charakter die traditionelle elisabethanische Rachetragödie-Heldin hinterfragt. Im Laufe von Shakespeares Karriere, insbesondere bevor er *Hamlet* schrieb, nahmen dramatische Heldinnen wichtige Rollen in der Handlungsentwicklung ein, obwohl sie sich im Grunde nicht in den Quellen für die jeweiligen Geschichten, die Shakespeare nutzte, befanden. Trotzdem ist Ophelia von ihren direkten chronologischen Vorgängerinnen im Genre zu unterscheiden.

Was inspirierte Shakespeares neue Heldin? Dieser Aufsatz argumentiert, dass die Situation von Frauen jenseits der Bühne der frühen Neuzeit die Quelle von Shakespeares Ophelia waren, jedenfalls, was das Verhalten Ophelias vor ihrem Wahnsinn in den Akten 1 bis 3 betrifft.

### **Abstract**

With the character Ophelia Shakespeare draws attention to what we can identify as conventions of the heroine in Elizabethan revenge tragedy, exemplified, for example by Bel-Imperia, the heroine of *The Spanish Tragedy*. The focus of this paper is on acts 1 to 3 prior to Ophelia's madness, which has usually been the focus of interpretation. While Shakespeare's plays, in particular the ones written before *Hamlet*, are all marked by multifaceted female characters who, in their complexity, have no counterpart in the sources that Shakespeare used when writing these plays, it is in Ophelia that we see a departure from generic conventions most clearly. This paper addresses the question what may have prompted Shakespeare to develop this new type of heroine. Contrasting Ophelia and Bel-Imperia, it is arguably the changing norms and hence the shifting role of the gentlewomen in Shakespeare's London, evidenced in conduct books, that served as an inspiration for the character Ophelia prior to her turning mad.

# (UN)HEROIC MADNESS: THE JAILER'S DAUGHTER AS PLAYWRIGHT AND AUDIENCE FIGURE IN *THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN*

KAROLINE JOHANNA BAUMANN

Although it is a dramatization of the first and best known of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* has never had a broad audience. Given the lack of critical interest, it can itself be seen as something of an unsung hero of the Shakespeare canon. Why is that so? The play shares many features with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, arguably Shakespeare's most popular play.<sup>1</sup> But like *Pericles*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* was not included in the first Folio, and like *Pericles*, it is the product of a collaboration between, in this case, Shakespeare and John Fletcher. It is thus no legitimate child of Shakespeare's, but a 'bastard' play (its prologue equates plays with children and calls authors their "breeders" (PROLOGUE 10; 16). When the play finally gave rise to some scholarly interest that interest was predominantly directed at the question of authorship, at defining exactly who wrote which portions of the play. Just as, in the play, Theseus arranges a deadly competition to decide once and for all between the kinsmen,<sup>2</sup> so, too, scholars have endeavoured to settle the authorship controversy conclusively.

The play is based on Chaucer, "noble" Chaucer as referred to in the prologue (PROLOGUE 10, 13), and it follows Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale* closely, except for one significant change: the subplot of the Jailer's Daughter which was added. This character, who goes mad as a result of unrequited love for one of the kinsmen, is not found in *The Knight's Tale*. The early authorship debate has focussed to a great extent on the authorship, and, it is implied, therefore the significance of the Jailer's Daughter, even to the extent that stylistic and linguistic criteria seem to have been subordinated to the apparent wish to remove the story of the Jailer's Daughter from the essence of the play by ascribing it to Fletcher's "apprentice talents."<sup>3</sup> "Lower-class characters go with Fletcher, the lesser dramatist; Shakespeare is preserved for the formal, 'sane' realm of male authority" (Green 122). Evidently, the Jailer's Daughter serves as a nexus for questions of generativity/ class and gender.

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<sup>1</sup> Both start with the imminent marriage of Hippolyta, Amazon Queen, to Theseus, Duke of Athens, after her defeat in war. Then, couples are assorted in the woods outside Athens. In "*The Two Noble Kinsmen or A Midsummer Night's Dream, Part II?*" Glynne Wickham argues that one is a sequel of the other (Wickham, "*The Two Noble Kinsmen or A Midsummer Night's Dream, Part II?*").

<sup>2</sup> Susan Green notes this analogy (121).

<sup>3</sup> Green 121. According to Green, "the attributers of authorship [...] forge a critical apparatus made to intensify class division." See Green 121-122 for a summary of the authorship debate in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Daughter's great similarity to Ophelia has been noted by many.<sup>4</sup> Both Ophelia and the Jailer's Daughter are apparently motherless,<sup>5</sup> both suffer from unreciprocated love, and their madness manifests itself in similar ways: They start to sing, use bawdy language and exhibit a great affinity to water. The (mad) Jailer's Daughter is described, for example, as follows:

The place  
 was knee-deep where she sat; her careless tresses  
 A wreath of bullrush rounded; about her stuck  
 Thousand fresh water-flowers of several colours,  
 That methought she appeared like the fair nymph  
 That feeds the lake with waters, or as Iris  
 Newly dropped down from heaven. (4.1.82-88)

The Daughter's immense thirst alludes to Ophelia's death of drowning and can be seen as prefiguring something similar for the Daughter, too: "She is [...] altogether without appetite, save often drinking" (4.3.3-5), as the Jailer says. And while the Jailer's Daughter is likened to a water nymph, Ophelia is called a mermaid. The very visual description of Ophelia's drowning has inspired so many artists to paint that scene that these now seem to be more present in the cultural memory than the 'original'.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless the scene is worth recalling:

QUEEN. There is a willow grows askant the brook  
 That shows his hoary leaves in the glassy stream  
 [...]

<sup>4</sup> In his 1808 "lectures on dramatic art and literature", Schlegel says, "Die Rolle der Tochter des Schließers, deren Wahnsinn kunstlos in lauter Monologen fortgeführt wird, ist gewiß nicht von Shakspeare, man müßte den annehmen, er habe seine Ophelia überbietend nachahmen wollen" (*Werke VI*, 350). Although the Jailer's Daughter's monologues are characterised as "artless" here and as an imitation of Ophelia's, they are said to "surpass" those of Ophelia, though in what sense he does not say. Coleridge puts it very similarly (in Collier's report), but more disparagingly: "The mad scenes of the Jailor's daughter are coarsely imitated from 'Hamlet': those were by Fletcher, and so very inferior, that I wonder how he could so far condescend. Shakespeare would never have imitated himself at all, much less so badly" (Raysor 32). Usually a comparison between the two is to the Jailer's Daughter's disadvantage: Bradbrook calls the Daughter "a parody of Ophelia" (29); Charney and Charney find she "politely echoe[s]" Ophelia and has "charming" hallucinations, "in the style of a child's fable" and "almost purely ornamental." They concede that "[t]he Jailer's Daughter is the most extensively developed madwoman in all of Elizabethan drama" (457). In her article *On Ophelia's Madness*, Carroll Camden remarks that the parallels to the Jailer's Daughter's madness serve to "strengthen the belief that Ophelia is 'distract' from unrequited love" (253). Bruster lists intertextual connections between Ophelia's and the Jailer's Daughter's speeches (280-281).

<sup>5</sup> Not that this is unusual; on the lack of mothers in Shakespeare's plays see Mary Beth Rose, "Where Are the Mothers in Shakespeare?"

<sup>6</sup> The number of Ophelia's appearances in works of art is even more remarkable considering her limited presence on stage: Ophelia has only 4% of the lines in *Hamlet* and appears in five scenes. By comparison, the Jailer's Daughter has 10 % of the lines and appears in nine scenes, which is hardly less than Emilia (11% of lines, 10 appearances) and just as many as Theseus has (10% of lines, 9 scenes). Only the kinsmen have more lines (see Bate/Rasmussen 1922, 2358).

There on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds  
 Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,  
 When down her weedy trophies and herself  
 Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide  
 And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up,  
 Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds  
 As one incapable of her own distress,  
 Or like a creature native and endued  
 Unto that element. But long it could not be  
 Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,  
 Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay  
 To muddy death.

LAERTES. Alas, then she is drowned.

QUEEN. Drowned, drowned.

LAERTES. Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,  
 And therefore I forbid my tears. (4.7.164-184)

At the moment of her death, she becomes “a creature native and endued/ Unto that element”. She does not seem to be aware that she is dying, she rather immerses herself in, and dissolves into, her natural element, water, which is also meant to signify femininity. That suicide is clearly gendered: male madmen, like Lear or his fool, never sing, whereas Ophelia sings right up to the moment of her death, and male madmen do not busy themselves with flowers, while Ophelia and the Jailer’s Daughter are constantly preoccupied with flowers.<sup>7</sup> Ophelia certainly set an example here for the madness of the Jailer’s Daughter, especially with her bawdy discourse.<sup>8</sup> Madness definitely licenses sexually explicit language for female characters on the early modern stage (and perhaps today). The Jailer’s Daughter also becomes a social satirist, a role that had previously been reserved for male fools or cynical figures, like Lear’s fool or Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida*. However, as Douglas Bruster points out, her placement outside of the main plot – she never shares a scene with the nobles of the play – results in her satire not having a definite object, so that it rather seems to “[float] within the play” (Bruster 287).

But there are some important differences between the Jailer’s Daughter’s madness and that of her aristocratic predecessor. Before Ophelia turns mad, she only talks when she has been spoken to, and her answers are servile and short: “Ay, my lord” (3.2.117) and “I shall obey, my lord” (1.3.135). Like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and other minor characters in the play, she appears as little more than a string puppet at the hands of conflicting power interests at court. Only when, probably as a result of these strings being pulled, she finally loses her sanity and becomes mad does she begin to get real attention and be herself the centre of the scene. Now the other characters watch her, and the prior staging practice with her at the margin is reversed. The attention she gets and the show she displays has a strong performative aspect, an

<sup>7</sup> E.g. the Daughter: “We shall come there and do nothing all day long but pick flowers with Proserpine. Then will I make Palamon a nosegay” (*TNK* 4.3.24-26); Ophelia: “Fantastic garlands did she [Ophelia] make/ Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies and long purples (*Ham* 4.7.166-167), etc.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas Bruster even calls this madwomen’s bawdiness a “subgenre” that “perhaps originat[ed] in Ophelia’s mad discourse” (Bruster 280).

element of a play within the play (see, for example, her appearance in act 4, scene 5, where her singing is interspersed with comments from her "audience" on stage: "Pray you, mark" (4.5.28, 35), or "look here" (4.5.37). After her exit, the King orders her to be observed like Hamlet: "Follow her close. Give her good watch, I pray you" (4.5.74)).

The Jailer's Daughter, however, has room for soliloquies that give us insight into the *process* of her losing her sanity, and she does so with powerful words, while Ophelia only speaks longer passages once she is mad and not before. Ophelia's madness frees her from courtly etiquette and licenses her to speak more freely but, ultimately, that freedom costs her life. The Jailer's Daughter seems to be going in that same direction, but then takes a different turn. She also figures as a foil for Emilia, the (aristocratic) love interest of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and expresses the anger Emilia cannot articulate. She thus becomes, according to Richard Abrams, "the secret voice of Emilia's resentment" (Abrams 159). Emilia, after being pushed by Theseus to accept Arcite as her master, for example, "exits with a mildly insubordinate rejoinder, on her heels the Daughter enters, trumpeting rebellion – 'Let all the dukes and all the devils roar' (2.6.1)" (Abrams *ibid.*).

When we consider Shakespeare's plays, madness is marked as a "privilege" of the aristocracy (see King Lear, Ophelia, Othello, Lady Macbeth). Even if it is a dubious kind of attention, as the example of Ophelia shows, a character's madness heightens the audience's awareness of that character within the play, with the character granted a larger role, more lines, and a more nuanced subjectivity. Madness allows for psychological depth and complexity, unfolded in long monologues, which thus becomes newly obtainable for bourgeois characters. It is also due to Fletcher's more democratic language usage that the hitherto aristocratic prerogative of madness becomes possible for a lower class character like the Daughter. Shakespeare often identifies his characters' social position with the help of their language, with verse reserved for the nobility and prose for the lower social and economic classes (see Vickers 45). High-born characters are able to change register: when occasion demands, they can fall into prose, for example when going mad. Characters from the prose domain, evidently, cannot change register and thus linguistic markers to show their madness are more limited. At the same time, as Douglas Bruster observes (289), madness loses its class valency with Fletcher's tendency to use blank verse for every character.

Similar to how Ophelia's real madness is juxtaposed with Hamlet's feigned one (cf. Camden 249), the Daughter's suffering ("Food took I none these two days;/ Sipped some water. I have not closed mine eyes/ Save when my lids scoured off their brine" (3.2.26-28) is contrasted with Palamon and Arcite's. They, too, are supposed to be suffering of unrequited love, but they talk happily, eat venison and drink wine: "To your health!" (3.3.12), "Drink a good hearty draught: it breeds good blood, man" (3.3.17); "I'll tell you/ After a draught or two more" (3.3.18-19), "I am glad/ You have so good a stomach" (3.3.20-21), "'Tis a lusty meat" (3.3.27), "Give me more wine" (3.3.29), and talking about "the wenches/ We have known in our days" (3.3.28-29): "Made her groan a month for't./ Or two, or three, or ten. – The Marshall's sister/ Had her share too, as I remember, cousin" (3.3.35-37), etc. The Jailer's Daughter's reality is

quite different: once she has realised that Palamon, whom she helped escape from prison, is not keeping his appointment with her, she conjures up a scene whose contrast with the beautiful May day in which Palamon and Arcite celebrate their reunion could not be starker: “Would it were perpetual night/ And darkness lord o’th world! – Hark, ’tis a wolf!” (3.2.4-5); “I have heard/ Strange howls this livelong night” (3.2.11-12). Her monologue depicts a *locus terribilis* that serves as a dark undercurrent to the *locus amoenus* in which the kinsmen are located: “Lo, / The moon is down, the crickets chirp, the screech-owl/ Calls in the dawn” (3.3.34-35), “I am very cold and all the stars are out too” (3.4.1). For the moment, then, the aristocratic/tragedy and bourgeois/comedy assignation is reversed.<sup>9</sup>

The audience is privy to the process of the Daughter going mad when her soliloquies become ever more fantastical. With her second soliloquy, the one just quoted, it might just be possible that she did hear wolves at night, but in the next one it becomes obvious that she is hallucinating: “Where am I now?/ Yonder’s the sea and there’s a ship; how’t tumbles!” (3.4.4-5). The tumbling ship, arguably, represents her disordered mind, and she seems strangely aware of her own madness being able to comment upon it, as she continues to do in the course of the play: “Good night, good night, you’re gone” (3.4.11).

The most important difference between her and Ophelia, for the purposes of this paper, is that the Jailer’s Daughter’s madness is only temporary; she is “cured” by friends who steer her out of madness, symbolically on a fictitious ship. She is also saved when she is on the point of drowning. As mentioned earlier, she seems to be repeating the fate of Ophelia, almost assuming her exact position in the picture that has been drawn of Ophelia so many times, when, at the last moment, she is snatched from it by her friend, the Wooer, who steps unto the scene and pulls her out of the water. This is the scene that made Ophelia famous beyond *Hamlet*, turned her into a myth even. Her death became a popular motif in art especially in the nineteenth century,<sup>10</sup> and she has sparked a long series of adaptations in literature that turned into a veritable fashion in the wake of Arthur Rimbaud’s poem *Ophélie* (1870). In *Bruges-la-Morte* (1892), George Rodenbach describes “l’ophélisation d’une ville entière” (Bachelard 121). The Jailer’s Daughter never gained such fame, although “in performance, [she] turns out to be the star part,” as even her critics have to admit (Bradbrook 29).

Ophelia learned to ‘swim’ only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> When the Jailer’s Daughter, however, is on an imaginary ship in act 4, scene 1, all her friends and relatives participate in her delusions, play along and, quite expertly, steer the fictitious ship in the direction the Jailer’s Daughter commands. This participatory support from her friends differentiates the Daughter’s madness from that of noble characters, but it deprives her of a tragic status. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is indeed a modern play in that it indicates at least tragic potential for members of society that belong to the middling

<sup>9</sup> *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, now usually subsumed under “problem play”, was entered into the Stationer’s Register as a tragicomedy.

<sup>10</sup> For the history of the Ophelia motif in art, see Kindler, especially 100-129 for the eighteenth and 150-212 for the twentieth century.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Susanna Kubelka’s novel *Ophelia lernt schwimmen [Ophelia learns to swim]* (1987). For swimming as a metaphor for female artistic speech, see Bayer, 268-283.

sort, even if that potential emerges only momentarily. Mary Beth Rose also points out that it is a *doctor* who saves the Daughter, and in her view the subplot is “distinctively modern” insofar as the Doctor appears “more successful at regulating sexuality” than the Duke Theseus (226).

It is indeed significant how she is saved and what this implicates. There is an apparent analogy of the Jailer's Daughter's madness and the imaginary tackling and sailing involved in the process of saving her to an image the prologue draws of the playwrights (and/or the theatre company): they, too, need to be saved, “weak as we are, and, almost breathless, swim/ In this deep water” (PROLOGUE 24-25). The audience is asked for help: “Do but you hold out/ Your helping hands and we shall tack about/ And something do to save us” (PROLOGUE 25-26). This image of sailing in difficult waters corresponds to a recurrent fantasy of the Daughter, described for instance in act 3, scene 4.<sup>12</sup> Like the playwrights or a stage director, she makes people act out her fantasy in the sailing scene, which she ‘directs’:

DAUGHTER. You are master of a ship?  
 JAILER. Yes.  
 DAUGHTER. Where's your compass?  
 JAILER. Here.  
 DAUGHTER. Set it to th'north.  
 And now direct your course to th'wood, where Palamon  
 Lies longing for me. For the tackling,  
 Let me alone; come, weigh, my hearts, cheerily! (4.1.141-145)

The other characters quickly catch on, and under the Daughter's direction, the imaginary sea voyage becomes ‘real’:

ALL. [severally]  
 Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!  
 'Tis up! – The wind's fair! – Top the bowline! –  
 Out with the mainsail! – Where's your whistle, master?  
 BROTHER. Let's get her in.  
 JAILER. Up to the top, boy.  
 BROTHER. Where's the pilot?  
 1 FRIEND. Here.  
 DAUGHTER. What kenn'st thou?  
 2 FRIEND. A fair wood.  
 DAUGHTER. Bear for it, master;  
 Tack about! (4.1.146-152)

With the help of all these people working the ship, the Daughter manages to steer clear of the dangerous waters and to overcome the storm she sees. In the early

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<sup>12</sup> “Yonder's the sea and there's a ship; how't tumbles!/ And there's a rock lies watching under water;/ Now, now, it beats upon it; now, now, now!/ There's a leak sprung, a sound one! How they cry!/ Run her before the wind, you'll lose all else./ Up with a course or two and tack about, boys!” (3.4.5-10).

modern imagination, a disturbed mind was comparable to a ship in a tempest.<sup>13</sup> In addition to being director of this ship of theatrical illusion, the Daughter becomes an artist and, as such, a surrogate figure for the playwright(s) in various other ways. I have already mentioned that, like Ophelia, she displays a sudden affinity to music and singing that comes with her madness (see, for example, 3.5.60-72, 4.1.104-107 and 4.1.153). She also becomes an impressive dancer. The other characters immediately take it that by virtue of her madness she is unusually qualified for their dance. When she, “mad as a March hare” (3.5.74), enters a scene where country people are trying to set up a Morris Dance, it is immediately understood that she will improve the performance: “A madwoman? We are made, boys” (3.5.77). Not unlike her triggering the action of the main plot when releasing Palamon from prison, here she steps onto the scene, and immediately the dance will start, as 3 COUNTRYMAN says:

There’s a dainty madwoman, Master,  
Comes i’th’ nick [...]  
If we can get her dance, we are made again;  
I warrant her, she’ll do the rarest gambols. (3.5.73-76)

She also takes the leading role in the dance: “I’ll lead” (3.5.91). The Jailer’s Daughter fuses all three types of character that Theseus lists in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as creatures made up entirely of imagination: “The lunatic, the lover, and the poet/ Are of imagination all compact” (*MND* 5.1.7-8). She is a lover with regard to Palamon (and the play’s “most potent figure of desire” (Green 124) at that), a lunatic by virtue of her hallucinations, and a poet because of her sung rhymes and the constant stream of fantastical pictures she utters. This poet, playwright, director, actor, singer, and dancer role is made possible by her madness. Moreover, she seems to be aware of this. When the Schoolmaster asks her the (rather unusual) question: “And are you mad, good woman?” she answers, no less peculiarly: “I would be sorry else” (3.5.78). Theseus, of course, like his counterpart in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, does not appreciate this madness and tries to constrain it, though not so much with regard to the Jailer’s Daughter, who is out of his sphere, than with regard to the kinsmen, where he tries to channel it into a formal tournament. The Daughter’s madness, though, as Richard Abrams remarks, is not so easily restrained: She only returns “madder than ever” (160).

This madness is clearly associated with art and artistic creation. I have mentioned above how the audience is asked to assist in sailing the ship out of danger. The Daughter directs the work on her fictitious ship, which not only signifies the way out of her madness but also the success of a theatrical performance as a collective endeavour that only works if everyone believes in its fiction or at least acts as if they do. But the Daughter is not just a substitute for the artist on stage, she also is an *audience* figure whose desire for Palamon reflects the audience’s desire for the aristocratic characters, as Bruster observes (295). She also is the judge on whose verdict the success of the collective performance depends; she is the authority who determines whether the show was successful, in the scene with the fantasy ship, but

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Levinus Lemnius’ popular medical work *The Touchstone of Complexions* (translated 1581), A3 and A8<sup>v</sup>.

also in the Wooer's show. Only if Palamon plays his part so convincingly that she believes him, does his performance, and that of all the others who partake in it, achieve its aim. It is not quite clear, however, whether she really is deceived and truly believes that the Wooer *is* Palamon. She never calls him a pretender, although at other times she does not hesitate to be rude and direct.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, she does not say anything that would indicate that she is in fact convinced that the Wooer is Palamon. Arguably, she complies like the friends who in turn comply with her and her fantasies. It is equally possible, though, to assume that she wants to be saved and thus wants to believe that the Wooer is Palamon. Finally, she could also have been cured by the show even if she realizes that it is "only" theatre. It is neither clear whether she believes the show to be real nor whether she is cured by it; in recent stagings, all versions have been realised by various directors.<sup>15</sup> When one of the Friends remarks, "This is strange", and the Jailer's Daughter answers, "As ever you have heard, but say nothing", to which another Friend replies, "No" (4.1.133-134), it sounds as if all had agreed to the *pretension* of madness.

Who believes what part of this show within the show remains ambiguous. Be that as it may, the Daughter has many friends on stage with whose collective effort she is saved: unlike Ophelia, Lear or Macbeth, she remains alive even if she may not have been cured. The aristocrats die as heroes, their 'reward' is fame and admiration but also speechlessness and death, as in Ophelia's case, who is honoured and immortalised by paintings that at the same time reduce her to a silent surface for projection. *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, moreover, teases out an opposition between "good" and "honourable": When the Jailer and his friends discuss the conditions of the tournament Theseus has arranged, they explicitly differentiate between these terms: "JAILER I hope they are good. 2 FRIEND They are honourable;/ How good they'll prove, I know not" (4.1.30-31). Abrams points out (156) that while the kinsmen gain honour with their duelling, the Daughter gains money from Palamon and his knights, who all give their purses to her. Arguably, then, the kinsmen get what is "honourable" and the Daughter gets what is "good." And while Palamon, laying his head on the block, claims to die happy in the prospect of sipping nectar with the gods and being well remembered on earth (5.4.1-13), he still fears that he and his knights have sold their lives "too, too cheap" (5.4.15), and he is relieved when the death verdict is repealed (cf. Abrams 156). With the material transaction of the purses, balance shifts in favour of the 'bourgeois' character, who profits economically from the kinsmen's tragedy.

Another unsung Shakespearean hero that has not been done justice in this paper is the audience, summoned by the prologue to "hold out/ Your helping hands" and "something do to save us" (PROLOGUE 25-26). The Jailer's Daughter's (temporary) madness with all the play-acting and imaginary voyages it entails serves as a metaphor for the collective endeavour that brings about the theatrical illusion itself. In the image the prologue draws, the audience, with their applauding hands, provides the wind for the sails of this ship, playing its part in the performance, too, which highlights the collaborative nature of a theatrical production and the necessity of the audience's

<sup>14</sup> As when she calls the Schoolmaster a fool, for example (3.5.80).

<sup>15</sup> See Potter 52-53 and 59-95 for the performance history.

imaginative participation. Palamon's question shortly before the ending, "What/ Hath waked us from our dream?" (5.4.48-49) is one of the many intertextual echoes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and its metatheatrical negotiations. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the end of the performance is compared to waking from a dream – not madness, but still a mad dream.<sup>16</sup> Like the Daughter, the audience is simultaneously part of the performance and watching; what is being represented on stage reflects the theatre-goers and *vice versa*.

So, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* points towards modernity and the growing self-consciousness and influence of a 'middle class' in that it grants a non-aristocratic character a major role (in the subplot), even if it does not become a tragic one. The tragic status that is, in the end, denied the Jailer's Daughter,<sup>17</sup> is, however, certainly not celebrated as univocally positive. It must be noted that the play is not a tragicomedy because its main plot is tragic and its subplot comic; both main- and subplot are tragicomical in themselves: The main plot ends with one of the twin-kinsmen dead while the other one marries – after they were exchanged at the last possible moment – and the subplot forms a union between a pseudo Palamon and the Daughter who is either still mad or deceived in her partner's identity.

In his final speech, Theseus sums up the events of the play as "The conquered triumphs/ The victor has the loss; yet in the passage/ The gods have been most equal" (*TNK* 5.4.113-115). The balance between main- and subplot is anything but equal, though: the rise of the Jailer's Daughter might not just be a counterweight to the main plot's disaster but its very source. When the imaginary ship's crew, participating in the theatrical madness, "tacks about", "the watery death meant for the Daughter shifts to the main plot" (Abrams 157). Emilia's non-aristocratic alter ego heralds the end of aristocratic hegemony, at least on stage, and thus foreshadows, from the aristocrats' perspective, the factual tragedy.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. the well-known epilogue: "If we shadows have offended/ Think but this, and all is mended:/ That you have but slumbered here,/ While these visions did appear;/ And this weak and idle theme,/ No more yielding but a dream" (*MND* 5.1.414-419).

<sup>17</sup> A status also denied other characters of the kind. The – unnamed – Daughter is not a unique character: Bruster lists earlier plays entitled *The Painter's Daughter* (1576), *The Blacksmith's Daughter* (1578) or *Fair Em, the Miller's Daughter of Manchester* (1590) (292). *The Two Noble Kinsmen* also mentions "the tanner's daughter" (2.3.46), "The Lord Steward's daughter" (3.3.28), and "Cicely the sempster's daughter" (3.5.45), even if none of them appears on stage.

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## Zusammenfassung

Als „Bastard“-Stück, das in Zusammenarbeit mit John Fletcher geschrieben wurde, kann *The Two Noble Kinsmen* selbst als *unsung hero* des Shakespeare-Kanons gelten. Es beruht zwar auf „noble Chaucer“, enthält aber zusätzlich eine Nebenhandlung um die *Jailer’s Daughter*, die aus unerfüllter Liebe zu einem der *kinsmen* den Verstand verliert. Diese Figur bildet einen Nexus wichtiger metatheatraler und politischer Diskurse. Der Beitrag untersucht, wie Wahnsinn, bislang ein „Privileg“ der Aristokratie, in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* einer nichtadeligen (und somit eigentlich nicht tragödienfähigen) Figur nuancierte Subjektivität ermöglicht. Anders als ihre Vorgängerin Ophelia und anders als die *Noble Kinsmen* wird *the Jailer’s Daughter* jedoch von ihrem Wahn geheilt, und zwar von Freunden, die sie daraus erretten, symbolisch auf einem fiktiven Schiff. Auch die Dramatiker schwimmen "breathless[ly] in this deep water", wie der Prolog erklärt, und benötigen die Unterstützung des Publikums. Die *Daughter* wird so zu einer Autoren-, zugleich aber auch zu einer Publikumsfigur: Sie ist die Instanz, die über Erfolg oder Scheitern der Bühnendarbietung entscheidet. Der dritte *unsung hero* dieses Beitrags ist daher das Publikum, das vom Prolog aufgefordert wird: "hold out/ Your helping hands [...] And something do to save us." Der (vorübergehende) Wahn der *Jailer’s Daughter* wird so zur Metapher für die Illusion des Theaters selbst und reflektiert den kollaborativen Prozess, der sie hervorbringt, ebenso wie die soziale Position ihrer Teilnehmer\_innen.

## Abstract

*The Two Noble Kinsmen*, being a ‘bastard’ play that was written in collaboration with Fletcher, has itself been an *unsung hero* of the Shakespeare canon for a long time. It is based on “noble Chaucer” but as an important addition includes the subplot of the *Jailer’s Daughter* who goes mad out of unrequited love for one of the *kinsmen*. Her character forms a nexus for various metatheatrical and political discourses. This paper will examine how madness, previously a privilege of the aristocracy, enables nuanced subjectivity for a character of the middling sort. Unlike her predecessor Ophelia and unlike the noble *kinsmen*, the *Jailer’s Daughter* is effectively ‘cured’ from her madness by friends who steer her out of it (symbolically on a fictitious ship) once her hallucinations have been acted out collectively. They also save her when she is on the point of drowning. However, not only the *Jailer’s Daughter* must be saved in the play, the playwrights themselves need to be saved, swimming as they are "breathless[ly] in this deep water". As such, the *Jailer’s Daughter* becomes an on-stage surrogate

for the artists and, at the same time, an extension of the audience on stage; the Daughter's desire for Palamon reflects the audience's desire for the aristocratic characters. What is more, she is also the authority on whose persuasion the success of the collective performance depends. Shakespeare's last unsung hero this paper will examine is, therefore, the audience, summoned by the prologue to "hold out/ Your helping hands" and to do "something [...] to save us." The Jailer's Daughter's (temporary) madness thus becomes a metaphor for the collective fiction of the theatrical illusion itself, the collaborative effort of which it is an effect, and the social position that it provides for its participants.

# THE PAIN OF OTHERS: SILENCING LAVINIA IN *TITUS ANDRONICUS*

MARLENA TRONICKE

In 2006, Lucy Bailey's hugely popular but also controversial production of *Titus Andronicus* at Shakespeare's Globe set a new record: never before had a performance made as many people faint, with "audience members going down like ninepins in the theatre yard" (Spencer n. pag.). The revival of this bloodfest in 2014, advertised as "brutality of the highest order," again both wowed and shocked audiences. *Telegraph* critic Charles Spencer described the production as marked by graphic violence and gleeful cruelty, exerting "a dramatic power that makes the stomach churn and the hands sweat" (n. pag.). Similarly, even though less gorily, Michael Fentiman's recent staging for the RSC emphasised the disturbing violence of this play and so, vis-à-vis Peter Brook's iconic and distinctly stylized interpretation in 1955, it seems to be this brutality that hits a nerve with twenty-first-century audiences. Whilst the play is often accused of gratuitous violence,<sup>1</sup> it appears simultaneously formalized and detached, full of macabre imagery and perverted symbolism. Hence, for a long time it had not only been notoriously unpopular with critics and discounted as artistically immature but also gained a reputation for being impossible to stage and act.<sup>2</sup>

And yet, this play is only fully understood in performance, almost impossible to be read only. As Pascale Aebischer aptly phrases it:

Whereas in the study, reading *Titus Andronicus* means reading Titus' grief in response to the textual gap left by his daughter's violation, in the theatre, the mutilated rape victim is insistently kept before the audience's eyes for six scenes. The actor's body represents the absence of words. Watching *Titus Andronicus* therefore means watching Lavinia. (26)

Common reactions to the play, be it alienation, resentment, or disgust, are caused by what happens to Lavinia, who is one of the most readily marginalised of all Shakespearean characters, often discounted as mere collateral damage in a play in which the bodies virtually keep piling up. Through rape and mutilation, she literally loses her voice and is stripped of all forms of agency, which is epitomized in her inability to even commit suicide. To make it worse, she is first killed by Titus, and then

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Foakes, who argues that Shakespeare follows a "trajectory that begins with a delight in representing violence for entertainment only" (2).

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Johnson famously contended that "[t]he barbarity of the spectacles, and the general massacre which are here exhibited, can scarcely be conceived tolerable to any audience" (qtd. in Bate 1-121, 33). Similarly, Coleridge considered the play "obviously intended to excite vulgar audiences by its scenes of blood and horror – to our ears shocking and disgusting" (279). Bloom insists that "[w]ithout Aaron, *Titus Andronicus* would be unendurable (82). For a more extensive overview of the play's critical reception, especially the more favourable approaches in the twentieth century, see Kolin 3-55. On the play's troubled stage history see Dessen, especially 24-50.

Lucius solemnly proclaims: “My father and Lavinia shall forthwith | Be closed in our household’s monument” (5.3.192-193).<sup>3</sup> In other words, she is buried next to her murderer. Even though presented as the ultimate honour, this leaves a sour note, to say the very least.

Lavinia has been variously interpreted as the epitome of “wholly female plight” (Cohen 81), a symbol of Rome’s body politic (Woodbridge 327-354; Rowe 279-303), or a “handmaid of revenge” (Bate 12; Cohen 79-93). Considering the ways in which Lavinia is instrumentalised, these readings are justified, but they all reduce her to her representational function within the play. Of the few critics who have given Lavinia her due recognition, Coppélia Kahn’s account is especially convincing. As she illustrates, “Shakespeare makes the hauntingly mute, hideously disfigured Lavinia much more than a patriarchal icon of the dutiful daughter. Deprived of speech and the usual means of writing, Lavinia herself becomes a signifier” (48). She even goes a step further: “[i]n thus placing dramatic emphasis on her injuries, rather than on the murder of her brothers, Shakespeare calls attention to the role of women in Rome’s sexual politics – a role that, overshadowed by the strident patriarchal motif of the opening scene, is nonetheless central” (49). In an equally persuasive reading, Alexander Leggatt has identified Lavinia as an emblem of torment, a precedent for the later plays’ frequent violations and misreadings of female identity (1-28). Whilst most interpretations concentrate on the rape, the following excruciating debate of whether or not she can or should be killed is largely neglected. In his general contempt for the play, Bloom states: “If sadomasochism is your preferred mode, then *Titus Andronicus* is your meat, and you can join Tamora in her cannibal feast with the same gusto that you experience in raping Lavinia, slicing out her tongue, and chopping off her hands” (Bloom 79). Even though intended as a mocking comment, this touches on a crucial issue: the audience’s involvement in Lavinia’s disfigurement, of which her rape and subsequent mutilation is only the beginning.

Taking feminist criticism’s concern with an investment in the female voice as my point of departure, I argue that in the context of this play, it is Lavinia’s lack of voice, her silence, which has to be understood as a form of empowerment. She is victimized to the extreme, yet I suggest that it is precisely this victimisation which makes her the focal point of both the play and the audiences’ attention and thus serves to expose the perversity of the play’s aggressively masculine ideology and aesthetics. Lavinia is the character that most urgently calls for poetic justice and it is her, not her father’s, suffering that elicits the cathartic effect. According to Aristotle, these characteristics are reserved for the tragic hero, and to call Lavinia the play’s heroine might challenge preconceived notions of the term. Her striking presence in the play forces us to reconsider rigid categories such as ‘minor’ and ‘major,’ since to dismiss Lavinia as a minor character would be a misreading not only of her character but also the entire play.

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<sup>3</sup> All references to *Titus Andronicus* are to the Arden Shakespeare Third Series.

### Mutilation and Silencing

With only fifteen speeches, Lavinia's is the second smallest part in the play; only young Lucius speaks less. But her few lines portray her as unmemorable and indeed unlikeable, a cipher rather than a character in her own right. She consents to everything her father has arranged for her and the sole active contribution she makes is to insult Tamora, the only other female character in the play (2.2.66-84). Thus, literally, the text is not interested in giving her a voice. On the contrary, the violation and denial of Lavinia's identity, her loss of agency, are inextricably linked to her body. This already becomes evident when taking a look at the play's hypotext, Ovid's accounts of Philomel as well as Lucrece. Jonathan Bate, a little misleadingly, states that *Titus Andronicus* is one of Shakespeare's "'sourceless' plays" (85). What he means is that, unlike any of the other Roman plays, it does not follow any identifiable historical source, since surely this is the play in which the sources are most obvious. These hypotexts do not merely function as a faintly recognisable palimpsest but rather provide for active intertextual communication with the play. All the characters seem to have read the *Metamorphoses* and hence know what will happen to Lavinia. Her fate is pre-written by the classical texts, and so she is denied any form of agency on a meta-level. What is more, both hypotexts are defined by sexual violence against their female protagonists, but Lavinia has to suffer worse than either Philomel or Lucrece. Whereas Ovid's character is raped and loses her tongue, Lavinia's tormentors know better because they, too, have read Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and so Lavinia also has to lose her hands.

Moreover, her fate is predetermined by other characters within the play; from the beginning, she is silenced and objectified. The opening scene identifies her as a trophy for the future emperor, and she is tossed around between Bassianus and Saturninus, both of whom claim her as their future wife. This objectification is brought to the fore by the first mention of the term 'rape,' an apparently slippery signifier in the play, and here used in the sense of 'theft' or 'abduction': when Saturninus likens Bassianus' seizing of Lavinia to rape, the latter replies "'Rape,' call you it, my lord, to seize my own, | My true betrothed love, and now my wife?" (1.1.410-411). Even the actual rape is not directed at her as a person. Rather, it happens as *quid pro quo* in response to Titus's tearing off the limbs of Tamora's son Alarbus, which, typical of revenge tragedy, mirrors the original offence. Therefore, even when she suffers most cruelly Lavinia only serves as a means to an end.

As soon as Aaron announces "Lucrece was not more chaste than this Lavinia" (1.1.110) it is clear what will happen to her. Emily Detmer-Goebel notices that, contrary to other early modern rape scenes, Chiron and Demetrius never address Lavinia directly or seek to make her consent to the act (79).<sup>4</sup> Even though she is on stage, they cheerfully discuss their cruel intentions; Lavinia as an individual is ignored. Once she realises what they are planning, she begs Tamora to kill her instead: "O Tamora, be call'd a gentle queen | And with thine own hands kill me in this place" (2.2.168-169). Whereas Ovid's Philomel verbally tries to defend herself against Tereus

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<sup>4</sup> On the discussion of rape in other early modern plays see Williams 93-110.

and also speaks before her tongue is cut out,<sup>5</sup> Lavinia is silenced mid-sentence (2.2.182-184). As Detmer-Goebel phrases it: “Shakespeare undoubtedly makes Lavinia’s verbal defence against rape less persuasive (emotionally moving) than, say, Lucrece’s, and this suggests, I think, the limitations of authority vested in Lavinia’s voice” (80). It is only through watching the play in performance that we fully understand the dimensions of such a lack of investment in her voice; here, silencing within the realm of the text becomes a physical reality. In line with the conventions of Greek tragedy, the rape takes place off stage, and when Lavinia re-enters raped and mutilated, she has turned into a spectacle, bleeding from her mouth and the stumps of her arms. This shocking stage tableau is contrasted with Chiron and Demetrius’s mocking comments, heightening the pain for both her and the audience. “An ’twere my cause, I should go hang myself,” Chiron remarks, and Demetrius’s cynical reply is: “If thou hadst hands to help thee knit the cord” (2.3.9-10). With perverse poignancy, this sums up the hopelessness of Lavinia’s situation.

In the context of mutilated and gendered bodies, it is adamant to turn to Judith Butler’s conception of ‘abject bodies’. Butler’s line of argument refers to non-heteronormative, and specifically intersexual bodies. What these have in common with Lavinia is that they do not conform to hegemonic discourse:

Given this understanding of construction as constitutive constraint, is it still possible to raise the critical question of how such constraints not only produce the domain of intelligible bodies, but produce as well a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies? This latter domain is not the opposite of the former, for oppositions are, after all, part of intelligibility; the latter is the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside. (*Bodies that Matter* xi)

After the rape, Lavinia’s becomes such an “unthinkable, abject and unlivable body,” but this definition *ex negativo*, as Butler proposes here, exposes the play’s gender politics. Only the play reverses the scenario Butler defines, for it is Lavinia’s unviolated and therefore intelligible body that haunts the play as a spectre. Butler’s words also reference Kristeva’s concept of the abject, the displacing of the subject into a liminal, taboo space neither inside nor outside of the body.<sup>6</sup> The abject refers to that which “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (Kristeva 4). A woman with a voice would ‘disturb’ homosocial Rome, and as a consequence Lavinia is violently rejected by this world. However, in turn she begins to undermine the play’s social order. According to Kristeva, the confrontation with the abject is a traumatic, repulsive experience, often caused by the encounter of wounds or

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<sup>5</sup> “You cruel barbarian! How could you | do such a dreadful deed? [...] I’ll tell the world of your crime myself. If I’m given the chance, | I’ll cry it aloud in the marketplace; and if you still hold me | prisoner deep in the forest, my words will ring through the trees; | the rocks will know and be moved to pity by what I have suffered; | the sky will listen and so will the gods, if any exist there.” Ovid, *Book 6*, ll. 533-548.

<sup>6</sup> Kristeva and Butler use the term differently, though: for instance, whereas Kristeva describes the abject as a ‘non-object,’ Butler situates the abject within discourse, comparing it to a ‘non-subject.’ Similar to Kristeva, the Butlerian abject subverts discourse, yet this happens from within. Through adopting the terms of hegemonic discourse, Butler argues, its artificiality can first be exposed and eventually challenged (*Bodies that Matter* 3).

indeed corpses (3). The same reaction is elicited by Lavinia's body, which never fully stops bleeding.

Another central concern in this play is the empowering function of language – through taking Lavinia's speech, Chiron and Demetrius have de-humanized her.<sup>7</sup> But why does Shakespeare silence Lavinia? On a plot level, this is, of course, a rhetorical question. Nonetheless, Douglas Green illustrates that this needs to be done for the sake of the play's ideology at large, since Lavinia's silence not only prevents her from revealing the crime but also from speaking up against the manifold cruelties inflicted on her by all the men in her family who have persistently ignored her will. "For Lavinia to speak now would undermine the play's design – the reconstitution of patriarchy under Lucius" (Green 323). Strikingly, Lavinia's silence enhances her status in the play, and this is not only due to the fact that from now on, everything is geared towards Titus's revenge. Although entirely passive, she is put at the centre of attention, a position she has never held before. Leggatt summarises that

in silencing her [Chiron and Demetrius] have inadvertently made her the most powerful character in the play. What the rape means for them is straightforward: an expression of power. What it means for her is beyond language, beyond imagining. That is what her silence conveys to us, and from this point on that silence haunts the play. (8)

This new importance that Lavinia has gained is exemplified in one of the play's most disturbing moments, a scene so odd that it is often cut in performance.<sup>8</sup> Cutting this passage is beside the point, though, because it provides the key to Lavinia's function within the play.

### Voyeurism

When Marcus discovers his bleeding niece, instead of helping her he erupts into 47 lines of beautiful poetry, arguably the most poetic lines in the entire play. First of all, his speech is painful to hear because it is entirely unrealistic, exceeding any credibility of theatrical representation. His rhetorical flourish runs counter to the stage tableau, and his words put a time freeze to a moment which would normally require action. Bate supposes that Marcus needs this pause of action in order to realize the extremity of what has happened and so to "slowly and painfully confront suffering" (62). Yet the prime function of this deliberately unrealistic scene is another, as Aebischer points out: "while the incisions in [Lavinia's] body open her up to the spectators' voyeuristic gazes, her obscene on-stage presence renders outside observation (whether visual or verbal) obscene" (30f.). Seemingly unrelated in the context of Shakespearean drama, this notion of the voyeuristic gaze brings to mind Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others*, her seminal essay on war photography. Sontag traces the iconography of suffering and addresses the rather unsettling question as to why we are attracted to watching others in agony, provided it is from a safe distance. Sontag speaks of a

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<sup>7</sup> On the relationship between language and the body see Fawcett 261-277. On the deliberate silencing of the play's female characters see Aebischer 43-46.

<sup>8</sup> On specific productions and directorial decisions see Bate 59 and Aebischer 37-41.

‘prurient interest’ in both the display of and looking at mutilated bodies, be they imaginary or real. As she reminds us,

[a]ll images that display the violation of an attractive body are, to a certain degree, pornographic. But images of the repulsive can also allure. [...] It is also, for many, the wish to see something gruesome. Calling such wishes ‘morbid’ suggests a rare aberration, but the attraction to such sights is not rare, and is a perennial source of inner torment. (95)

Lavinia’s maimed body keeps reappearing on stage until the final scene, and it is integral to the play’s sadism that neither the other characters nor we as the audience can avert our eye; we never leave the position of the voyeur. As such, we are forced to adopt Marcus’s point of view, whose poetic language clashes with the horrific sight in front of him and instead turns this into an ekphrastic scene. He aestheticizes Lavinia’s bleeding body, enacting a perverted version of the blazon with images such as the “crimson river of warm blood” (2.3.22) and cheeks as “red as Titan’s face” (2.3.31). Even in its traditional form, the blazon necessarily objectifies and colonises the female body and so Marcus, albeit unwittingly, repeats the offense. Other than this, his speech re-creates a version of her body that is no longer there, and so verbally produces a spectral body of the kind that Butler refers to. Adding to the discussion on how the play fetishizes Lavinia’s mutilated body, Heather James draws an interesting parallel to the pit in which Lavinia is raped on top of her dead husband’s body. She claims that both “violate the norms of representation, since they both produce and consume meaning. They are semiotic black holes” (129). For this reason, these images can be read as metaphors for the entire play, which consumes femininity and produces only ultraviolent masculinity instead.



Fig. 1: Flora Spencer-Longhurst, dir. Lucy Bailey, Shakespeare’s Globe 2014, © Simon Kane



Fig. 2: Flora Spencer-Longhurst and William Houston, dir. Lucy Bailey, Shakespeare’s Globe 2014, © Simon Kane

Although Marcus's explicit reference to the Lucrece story indicates that he understands what has happened (2.3.26), Lavinia's family continue firing questions at her (3.1.117-136), which on the one hand further highlights her silence but on the other hand situates this dialogue on the brink of black comedy. On a similarly awkward note, Titus and Marcus refer to her as a "deer | That hath received some unrecurring wound" (3.1.90-91) and so, unbeknownst to them, address her in the same words Chiron and Demetrius have used prior to the rape (2.1.26). Presupposing that the body itself is a culturally and politically fabricated surface, Butler raises the question as to what means are left to read and decode forms of corporeal enactment (*Gender Trouble* 189). With Lavinia, this becomes even more difficult because hers is a mutilated, "illegible" body, and she can neither communicate via words nor gestures. Titus, however, proclaims "I can interpret all her martyred signs" (3.2.36) and takes over her voice, believing that his daughter communicates through him and that he acts on her behalf. In a further grotesque image of the rape and mutilation Lavinia is forced to carry Titus's severed hand in her mouth, which Titus enacts as a symbolic transfer of power onto her (3.1.283).<sup>9</sup> Still, Katherine Rowe correctly asserts that this scene subverts the symbolism of the hand as a means of action because Titus does not act on behalf of his daughter at all (296), and his severed hand is as tragically ineffectual in Lavinia's mouth as it would be anywhere else.<sup>10</sup>

Ironically, the exact circumstances of the rape are revealed through a copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that Lavinia opens at the story of Philomel. For the first time since the rape, Lavinia is able to communicate information herself. As Bethany Packard points out, Lavinia uses *stuprum* instead of the more common *raptus* with its associations of theft and women as male property. That way, she identifies the rape as something that has happened to her personally rather than a public offence against her father, which Packard understands as an attempt to co-author her own story (293). And yet, Lavinia cannot do this in a language of her own but has to borrow another's, namely Ovid's, voice. This de-personalizes her suffering even further, as Leggatt explains: "Like Caesar's 'Et tu, Brute' at the moment of his death, this fixes and formalizes the accusation as a literary tag, weighting her personal voice with the voice of a whole culture" (22). As a result, even if Lavinia's choice of words intentionally reinterpret the rape and mutilation as a personal offence, this goes unnoticed by her father, who continues to treat her as a collective object: "I will go get a leaf of brass | And with a gad of steel will write these words" (4.1.102-103). Inevitably, though, "these words" could never be Lavinia's. Unlike her transitory writing in sand, Titus's version is the one destined to survive.

### Perverted Catharsis

After the rape, the tension gradually heightens, and both the audience and Lavinia are waiting for someone to put an end to Lavinia's pain. Since she cannot do that herself,

<sup>9</sup> For a Freudian reading of this passage see Fawcett 261-263.

<sup>10</sup> Rowe discusses the play's dismembering more generally and shows how "[t]he severed hands of *Titus Andronicus* display both the adequacies and insufficiencies of the metaphor of the body as a means of constituting political community" (280).

someone must take over this role for her. But instead of leaving room for these loose ends to be tied up and poetic justice to be established, the final moments of the play are overloaded with action, culminating in the gory banquet hosted by Titus. The sensationalism and spectacle of this scene diverts the attention away from Lavinia and instead builds up towards Tamora feasting on her own sons, a moment which, in the eyes of the audience, is revolting and rewarding in equal measure. For Lavinia's death, the play draws on another hypotext, this time taken from Livy. Titus casts himself in the role of the avenging father but still considers it necessary to establish that killing Lavinia would be an act of justice or indeed (his) moral obligation:

TITUS.           Was it well done of rash Virginius  
                       To slay his daughter with his own right hand,  
                       Because she was enforced, stained and deflowered?

SATURNINUS.    It was, Andronicus.

TITUS.           Your reason, mighty lord?

SATURNINUS.    Because the girl should not survive her shame,  
                       And by her presence still renew his sorrows.

TITUS.           A reason mighty, strong, and effectual;  
                       A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant  
                       For me, most wretched, to perform the like. [Unveils Lavinia]  
                       Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee,  
                       And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die. [He kills her.] (5.3.36-46)<sup>11</sup>

Even though Titus's question may sound rhetorical or ironic, it is indicative of the play's 'shame culture' of ancient Rome. Unlike a 'guilt culture,' which focuses on the victim's lack of consent and in which the victim is able to vindicate her honour by making the offense public, in a 'shame culture' lack of consent is irrelevant. After the rape, the woman becomes a threat to her family's reputation and thus has to be killed in order to re-establish the status quo (Williams 94-95). Although Titus's reasoning appears unacceptable to a twenty-first-century audience, the play makes us complicit with his line of argument. No matter how ideologically questionable, at this point we would welcome Lavinia's death, not only because of empathy but primarily because it would release us from our voyeuristic position of having to see her suffer.

The first of this sequence of bodies, the killing of Lavinia appears quite sudden, unexpected and bathetic in its lack of ceremony and so poses another directorial challenge.<sup>12</sup> As the stage directions suggest, she remains faceless throughout most of the scene; the veil is only lifted the moment Titus kills her. But there is no time to process her death and to contemplate the image of her body: within only nineteen lines of speech, the stage tableau also exhibits the bodies of Tamora, Titus, and Saturninus. Suddenly, Lavinia is only one of the many casualties claimed by the play. In his closing speech, Lucius gives orders to bury both Titus and Lavinia in the family monument, but this appears to be a punishment rather than reconciliation or honour.

<sup>11</sup> According to Livy, the centurion Virginius killed his daughter Virginia after she had been raped. As Bate explains in footnote 36 on p.266, in some editions Virginius kills his daughter to prevent her from being raped whilst in others he does so after the rape.

<sup>12</sup> On different directorial choices of how to stage Lavinia's death see Dessen 94-97 and Aebischer 56-63.

Throughout, the play has identified her as Titus's property and so she has to remain with him forever. Against the background of the later plays, this image additionally evokes associations of similar Shakespearean burials, namely that of Romeo and Juliet or Antony and Cleopatra. In addition to supporting the play's latent Freudian subtext,<sup>13</sup> such a parallel provides an absurdly romanticized notion that undermines the brutality and also distinct masculinity of the ending, which is a celebration of Rome's patriarchal authority. But also, in terms of both generic structure and imagery, this ending casts Lavinia as the play's tragic heroine.

For all its unmasking juxtaposition between the 'noble' Romans and the 'barbaric' Goths, *Titus Andronicus* is a decidedly unheroic play, and especially its titular character complicates the notion of the tragic hero.<sup>14</sup> Together with its lack of tragic vision and lyricism this is certainly one of the reasons why the play has been rejected by critics and audiences alike. However, I argue that all of these 'deficiencies' are deliberate. Clearly, I am not implying that anything of what happens to Lavinia is a form of empowerment *per se*. But through its extreme cruelty, the play guides our investment as an audience towards Lavinia, and not despite but because of her silence she becomes the play's linchpin, the foil against which everything and everyone else is measured. Lavinia may lose her voice, but her silence is so loud that it becomes almost unbearable. This play presents a disturbing, nightmarish vision of patriarchal authority, and it is through her eyes that we have to perceive this. Although Spencer felt that the "sight of [Lavinia's] stumps, dripping with gore, and the uncontrollable trauma shakes that overwhelm her [were] almost unbearable to behold," he confesses that he left Shakespeare's Globe "feeling both harrowed to the marrow and disconcertingly elated" (n. pag.). How ironic that one of Shakespeare's least-loved plays apparently seems to be able to provoke a response which, in Aristotle's terms, could be considered the prototypical cathartic effect. If our watching Lavinia with this 'prurient interest' that Sontag describes triggers such a feeling of elation, the play's very own (per)version of catharsis, this is an uncomfortable realization for an audience. Also commenting on Bailey's production, Lyn Gardner writes: "There is no getting away from our complicity in the unfolding events as heads roll, blood spurts and hearts crack" (n. pag.). After all, then, fainting might be an oddly appropriate reaction to this play and its treatment of its unsung tragic heroine.

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Kahn 46-76, who addresses the various sexualised images and illustrates how within this play "sexuality is a family matter that only the father can deal with" (48).

<sup>14</sup> On the play's construction of 'otherness,' and specifically its affirmation and simultaneous subversion of pro-empire rhetoric see Antonucci 119-130.

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### Zusammenfassung

Innerhalb eines Stückes, das von grotesker Gewalt und kompromisslosen Patriarchat bestimmt wird, gilt Lavinia oft lediglich als 'Kollateralschaden.' Vergewaltigt und verstümmelt, verliert sie nicht nur ihre Zunge und somit Stimme, sondern auch jegliche Form von Autonomie und Handlungsfähigkeit. Sie ist dabei zugleich Fokus und Identifikationsfigur des Publikums, jedoch Erlösung und poetische Gerechtigkeit bleiben ihr verwehrt. Ihr blutender Körper bestimmt als stumme Präsenz das Geschehen auf der Bühne, aber wir können unsere Augen nicht abwenden und bleiben Voyeure. Eine solch starke Viktimisierung stellt zweifellos den Begriff der Heldin in Frage, jedoch im Kontext dieses Stückes kann und muss Lavinias Leiden als heroisch verstanden werden – es erhebt sie zur eigentlichen Heldin in *Titus Andronicus*.

### Abstract

Lavinia is one of the most readily marginalised of all Shakespearean characters, often discounted as mere collateral damage in a play that keeps piling up body after body. Through rape and mutilation, she literally loses her voice and is stripped of all forms of agency, which is epitomized in her physical inability to commit suicide. As the focal point of the audiences' attention and sympathy, Lavinia is the character that most urgently calls for poetic justice, but this is deliberately denied her. The haunting presence of her dismembered body on stage becomes a site of performative gender in Butler's terms, and since we cannot avert our eyes we are forced into the position of the voyeur. This essay argues that Lavinia's silence has to be understood as a form of empowerment; it makes her the play's tragic heroine. Such extreme victimization challenges, if not altogether unsettles preconceived notions of the term 'heroine,' but to dismiss Lavinia as minor or indeed passive would be a misreading of not only her character but also the entire play.



**‘THERE’S NOT A BOY LEFT ALIVE’: THE HEROIC ELOQUENCE OF  
SHAKESPEARE’S SILENCED CHILDREN  
AN ANALYSIS OF *HENRY V* AND *MACBETH***

GEMMA MILLER

Shakespeare’s children are the most disregarded and underanalyzed of his unsung heroes, when we take into account the OED definition of an unsung hero as “a person whose heroism or achievements are unacknowledged or little-known“. Yet their marginalization is critical rather than dramatic. Child-characters feature more numerous and prominently in the Shakespearean canon than in that of any other early modern playwright (Campana 18). Extensive work has been carried out over the past 30 years to recuperate voices subordinated by class, gender, disability and race. However, the excellent work of scholars such as Carol Chillington Rutter, Kate Chedgzoy, and Katie Knowles notwithstanding, the significance of the children, both on the page and on the stage, demands more rigorous examination and evaluation. Shakespeare’s heroic children speak with a wisdom that belies their tender years, warning of the specious nature of political rhetoric, as in *Richard III*. Dramatically, they function as *peripeteia*, manipulating audience empathy and hastening tragic resolution, as in *King John*’s Arthur. Formally, they threaten generic conventions, tipping the balance from comedy to tragedy, like Mamillius in *The Winter’s Tale*. And symbolically they reflect and magnify the major dramatic themes, whether they be the futility of war, as in *Henry V*’s butchered Boy, or issues of familial abandonment and political tyranny, such as Macduff’s defiant son in *Macbeth*. It is to these final two examples that this paper will turn its attention, drawing on performance examples and close textual analysis to give a voice to two of the most overlooked yet heroic children in the canon.

It is widely acknowledged that *Henry V* and the narrative of heroism is constantly undermined by divisions and tensions, both within Henry himself and in the political landscape of the play more generally (see Rabkin 33-62; Sutherland/Watts). By juxtaposing choric speeches and dramatic action, tavern and court, comedy and tragedy, prose and verse, the play holds in tension antithetical forces that draw attention to the gap between perception and reality, while the rhetoric of nobility and mercy is undercut by threats of rape, murder and revenge. The low-life characters of Pistol, Bardolph and Nim shadow the progress of the army, their petty thieving and cowardly evasion of military duty providing an ironic counterpoint to Henry’s patriotic talk of brotherhood and manliness, and the Chorus’s propagandist narrative of national solidarity and military might is undercut by scenes of internal wrangling and disaffected troops. However, it is the Boy – the unsung, unnamed and critically overlooked hero of the play – who provides the most powerful and dramatically effective counter-narrative to the main plot.

Throughout the play, the Boy functions as an alternative choric figure whose plain-speaking truths provide a deflating corrective to the overblown rhetoric of the official Chorus. He discloses hypocrisy ("the empty vessel makes the greatest sound" 4.4.68-9), and questions authority ("I am boy to them all three, but all they three, though they could serve me, could not be man to me" 3.2.29-30). Moreover, he demonstrates a fluency in French that highlights the deficiencies of not only Pistol but of the king himself (4.4.25-66). As the spectators listen to Henry's deplorable attempts to woo Katherine in the final scene ("*Je, quand j'ai le possession de France, et quand vous avez le possession de moi* – let me see, what then? Saint Denis be my speed!" 5.2.181), they will almost inevitably recall the Boy acting as interpreter for Pistol and the French Soldier. Even after his death he hovers over the play as a presence-absence, mocking the king with his superior linguistic proficiency.

The Boy's function in the play, however, is more than just that of "truth-speaker". He is also a central element in the play's turning-point: the routing of the English camp by the French. His decision to return to the "lackeys" and the luggage because "there is none to guard it but boys" (4.4.76) is a moment of heroic self-sacrifice that is pivotal for two fundamental reasons. Structurally, it functions as a *peripeteia*, providing the crisis point that signifies a change in fortunes for the English and drives the plot towards dramatic closure; while dramatically, it provides the audience with an opportunity to witness and evaluate the hypocrisy and self-serving political pragmatism of a king desperate to justify his aggressive militarism and to consolidate his position of power.

Deviating from his source, Shakespeare initially links the king's order for "every soldier [to] kill his prisoners!" (4.6.37) not with the murder of the boys, but with the sound of a 'new alarum' (4.6.35).<sup>1</sup> As Sutherland notes, "[a]s Shakespeare has portrayed it on stage [...] Henry cannot have known at the point that he ordered the massacre of prisoners that the French cavalry were acting simultaneously in such an unchivalrous fashion some miles to his rear" (113). It is only after the discovery of the boys' corpses that Shakespeare has Fluellen and Gower, two sympathetic characters, retrospectively justify the killing of the prisoners by linking the king's orders directly to the deaths of the boys:

- FLUELLEN. Kill the poys and the luggage! 'Tis expressly against the law of arms.  
'Tis as arrant a piece of knavery, mar you now, as can be offert, in your conscience now, is it not?
- GOWER. Tis certain there's not a boy left alive, and the cowardly rascals that ran from the battle ha' done this slaughter. Besides, they have burned and carried away all that was in the King's tent, wherefore the King most worthily hath caused every soldier to cut his prisoner's throat. O, 'tis a gallant king! (4.7.1-10)

<sup>1</sup> According to Holinshed, the order of events was as follows: the English took French prisoners; 600 French horsemen entered the king's camp; the Frenchmen destroyed tents, stole caskets and killed whoever was remaining; boys and lackies fled screaming; hearing the affray, King Henry ordered his men to slay their prisoners to avoid a French rally (Shakespeare. *King Henry V*, 4.6.0.1n., 4.6.35-8n., 4.7.1n., 4.7.5-8n.)

By acting as apologist for the king's actions, these two characters simultaneously affirm and bring into doubt the legitimacy of the king's earlier order. Not only do they draw attention to this temporal discrepancy by retrospectively re-writing the order of history in their account of events, but they also introduce a new ambiguity. Syntactically, the "wherefore" of Gower's explanation refers directly to the subject of the preceding clause, the destruction and pillage of the luggage, and not to the slaughter of the boys. Where Fluellen's zeugma "kill the poys and luggage" can be overlooked as a rhetorical contraction consistent with Fluellen's idiosyncratic (mis)use of English, Gower's language has been precise and unambiguous up to this point. Should his statement be taken at face value, the inevitable conclusion is that, for Henry, the lives of children are dispensable, whereas the destruction of property is an act worthy of retaliation. It is a subtle distinction, and one likely to be overlooked by many in the audience. However, taken in conjunction with Fluellen and Gower's retrospective re-ordering of events, it is a damning indictment of the integrity of Henry, and another example of the centrality of the boy's function as moral touchstone in the play.

In his influential essay "Invisible Bullets," Stephen Greenblatt argues that the temporal ambiguity in the ordering of events in this sequence is symptomatic of a play that exploits what he terms a "deferral of doubt," or "intimation[...] of bad faith" to set up a subversion of monarchical power in order to dramatize its containment. He further argues that Henry is vindicated in his pre-emptive order to kill the prisoners by the French routing of the camp and that his royal authority is enhanced as a result. "The charismatic authority of the king," he declares, "depends upon falsification" (Greenblatt 62-3). Greenblatt's politically conservative subversion-containment model is persuasive in terms of Henry's other numerous "deferrals of doubt". For instance, Williams's interrogation of the king's "cause" in France is a moment of potentially subversive theatre which, if not entirely contained, is at least partially neutralized by the scenes that follow: Henry's pious appeal for mercy (4.1.134-146; 286-301), the English victory at Agincourt (4.7.85), and the king's modest attribution of his successes to God (4.7.86). However, the "deferral of doubt" argument is far more difficult to sustain in the face of dead children, particularly one as dramatically significant as the heroic Boy.

Although he remains nameless, the Boy's role is the third largest child-role in the Shakespeare canon in terms of spoken lines.<sup>2</sup> He functions as a moral touchstone, his asides, soliloquies and interventions ironizing and undermining the self-serving actions and empty bombast of his adult counterparts. He rejects the lawlessness and cowardice of the men he serves ("I must leave them and seek some better service" 3.2.51-2), but is also unapologetically anti-jingoistic ("[w]ould I were in an alehouse in London! I would give all my fame for a pot of ale and safety" 3.2.12-13). If, as Greenblatt argues, the play dramatizes the permission and containment of subversion, then this Boy is a dissenting voice that must be silenced.

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<sup>2</sup> He has a total of 60 spoken lines across 4 scenes. Moth in *Love's Labour's Lost* is first with 159 lines and Arthur in *King John* is second with 121 lines (Lawhorn 240-41, 244).

What Greenblatt does not account for in this analysis is the phenomenological and semiotic effects of the Boy in performance. His age is indeterminate, although it is reasonable to assume that he is between the ages of seven and fourteen, an age of dependence and vulnerability.<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare makes a point of humanizing him through his extensive speaking role in this play and in his role as Falstaff's page in both *Henry IV* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. But it is his embodied presence in performance which induces an affective response from an audience because, as Anne Higonnet notes in her analysis of images of children through history, the ideal of childhood innocence is not a function of language, but "an attribute of the child's body" (Higonnet 8). However precocious and, to our modern ears, anti-mimetic his speech may sound, the physical manifestation of the Boy, on stage and screen, will almost certainly over-ride his words as a signifier of innocence and vulnerability. This is particularly relevant in the context of a play that foregrounds the speciousness of rhetoric and the brutality of war. As a subversive force, therefore, Shakespeare's boy-character is almost impossible to contain.

In Kenneth Branagh's film of *Henry V*, the murder of the boys not only marks a turning-point, but also provides Branagh with an iconic image which at once flatters and subverts his portrayal of Henry. Eschewing any of the textual ambiguities relating to the sequence or causality of events, both Henry's order to kill the prisoners and Gower's slippery "wherefore" are edited out. The film cuts from a long shot of Henry racing back to the camp on foot in pursuit of the routing French to a close-up of Fluellen mourning over the body of the dead Boy. As he arrives at the camp, Henry stops short with a look of horror as the camera pans across the bodies of half a dozen lifeless young boys. The sequence of frames – from the corpses, shot as though through Henry's eyes, to a close-up of Henry's angst-filled face – makes the connection between his fury and the bodies of the boys absolute and unequivocal. He and his men begin to pick the corpses up and carry them out of the camp, their single voices blending gradually together to form a rousing chorus of *Non Nobis*. As the camera tracks Henry's slow and laborious progress through the muddy battlefield, the Boy draped pathetically over one shoulder like slaughtered game, the men's anthem to the dead boys gradually merges with an extradiegetic full-orchestral version. A grieving woman tries to break through the men to reach the Boy in Henry's arms but is held back as Henry places him in a wagon with the other dead boys. He kisses him tenderly on the forehead and looks away, eyes screwed shut and mouth twisted in an expression of grief. This short but much-cited sequence is clearly designed to generate audience empathy for Henry. However, by humanizing the boy with these small details – the grieving woman, the kiss, the close-ups, the wagon upon which Henry had earlier stood to give his pre-Agincourt call-to-arms – the film also highlights the dehumanizing effects of war. Holding these two antithetical elements in tension, Branagh's film acknowledges the heroic innocence of the

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<sup>3</sup> As a working page, he is likely to be at least seven, which is the standard age of breeching. As he is given the title of 'Boy' he is unlikely to be older than fourteen, which would be considered the beginning of adolescence. See Kathman (240), Munro (39-40) and also Belsey (61): "[n]o evidence exists of any apprentices in the adult companies under 11 or 12 years old, though it is possible that little boys acted on stage before they were bound."

children, while cynically appropriating that icon of innocence for pro-Henry propagandist purposes. Like the duck/rabbit analogy used by Rabkin in his analysis of the “inscrutability” and “ambiguity” of the play, Branagh’s film deglamorizes war yet reifies Henry’s kingship, using the figure of the child as the nexus for negotiating these opposing concerns (296).

Even in Olivier’s nationalistic film version, funded by the Ministry of Defence and released while England was still at war with Germany, the Boy provides the means by which Henry’s militaristic jingoism is momentarily held up for question. Following the French routing of the camp, the body of the young Boy is cradled by a sombre Fluellen. Like a *pieta*, the boy lies limply in his arms, head thrown back and blood trickling from his mouth to merge with the crimson of his tunic and stockings. In contrast to the confusion of the battle-sequences, accompanied by the rise and fall of William Walton’s full-orchestral score, and characterized by swift changes in camera angle – from above to below, close-up to long-shot, static to tracking – it is a moment of remarkable stillness and quiet. Like Branagh’s film, by omitting the ambiguous references to the prisoners and the associated temporal slippage, the film makes a direct causal link between the death of the boys and Henry’s fury. Although the textual cuts in this sequence bolster the image of Henry as a “king with a conscience,” the scene also reminds viewers of the human cost of a war that requires the sacrifice of children. In Olivier’s film, the Boy is not developed as an individuated character (many of his lines are cut), but in his death he transcends the personal to become an emblem of children everywhere. Unlike the gritty realism underscoring Branagh’s film, the power of this scene comes from its almost mythical qualities. The film holds the Boy up as a Jungian archetype of childhood, interrupting Olivier’s almost undiluted celebration of Englishness with a brief moment of stillness and atemporality. Its disruptive power pierces, however fleetingly, the illusion of what Michael Pursell calls Olivier’s “never-never land of a mendaciously idealized past” (268).

Many parallels can be drawn between the dramatic function of the Boy in *Henry V* and Macduff’s son in *Macbeth*. Like the killing of the “poys and luggage”, the attack on Macduff’s castle is a senseless and cowardly act. In both plays, the boys die helpless and exposed, heroically defending what has been abandoned by their adult counterparts (in the case of *Henry V* this is the camp and the king’s possessions, in *Macbeth*, it is Macduff’s castle and family). They speak with a wisdom beyond their years, throwing into high relief the follies of their elders. In both cases the boy is humanized and individuated, yet he remains nameless.<sup>4</sup> This is significant because it enables him to function as an emblem of heroic childhood innocence, while simultaneously eliciting audience empathy as an individual. And finally, the powerlessness of the two boys is underscored by their association with the politically marginalized: in *Henry V* this is the social underclass, in *Macbeth* it is the women. In spite of these overlaps, there are two fundamental differences that make the heroic victimhood of Macduff’s son even more dramatically affective than that of Henry’s Boy: he is unbreeched, and therefore under the age of seven; and he is murdered on stage in full sight of the audience.

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<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the other boy-character in *Macbeth*, Fleance, is referred to by his given name.

As in the case of the Boy in *Henry V*, temporality and the sequential ordering of events play a central role in the murder of Macduff's son. This time, instead of introducing ambiguity, Shakespeare deliberately re-works his source material to clarify cause and effect and to reinforce further the helplessness of the innocent child in the face of tyrannous power. In Shakespeare's play, Macbeth orders the murder of Macduff's unprotected family, in spite of prior knowledge that Macduff has already fled to England to join forces with Malcolm:

LENNOX.        Macduff is fled to England  
                      Fled to England?  
 LENNOX.        Ay, my good Lord

MACBETH.      The castle of Macduff I will surprise;  
                      Seize upon Fife; give to th'edge o'th'sword  
                      His wife, his babes, and all the unfortunate souls That trace him in his  
                      line' (4.2.142-3, 150-153)

Shakespeare's source, however, is far less transparent. Holinshed suggests that Macbeth knew of Macduff's flight ("Makduffe, to avoid peril of life, purposed with himselfe to passe into England, to procure Malcolm Cammore to claime the crowne of Scotland. But this was not so secretlie devised by Makduffe, but that Makbeth had knowledge given him thereof"), and yet expected him to be still at home when he attacked the castle ("he came hastily with a great power into Fife, and forthwith besieged the castell where Makduffe dwelled, trusting to have found him therein" (Boswell-Stone 36-7)). By making Macbeth's prior knowledge of Macduff's flight so unequivocally clear-cut, Shakespeare presents the murders as senseless, pre-meditated and motiveless acts of brutality borne out of a generalized hatred towards children and what they represent. Macbeth receives no intelligence that suggests he should fear the descendants of Macduff. The apparitions that are summoned during his visit to the three weird sisters warn Macbeth to "beware Macduff" (4.1.71), but the "*show of eight Kings*" in response to his question "shall Banquo's issue ever/ Reign in this kingdom?" are not Macduff's descendants but those of Banquo.

In her analysis of *Macbeth* as an extended dissertation on time, Carol Chillington Rutter explains this apparently motiveless murder as follows: "having no children, [Macbeth] has no future. To keep that at bay, he must kill it, by crushing the "seeds of time" (1.3.56) that are the future". As Rutter observes, the siege of Macduff's castle is "the crisis" to which the play has been building since the murder of Duncan, and marks the turning-point in terms of the tragic demise of Macbeth (165). In terms of the way in which this scene works structurally within the play overall, I agree with Rutter that it has an important *peripeteial* function. Not only does it precipitate a response from the English forces by fuelling Macduff's motives for revenge, but it also turns audience empathy away from Macbeth. However, this is not the whole story.

This scene fulfils one further function that Rutter does not consider. The exchange between Macduff's son and Lady Macduff immediately preceding the murder emphasizes the childlike vulnerability of the boy, prompting the audience to view the flight of Macduff to England less as a politically inspired manoeuvre and more as a cowardly act of familial desertion. As with the language of the Boy in *Henry V*,

Macduff's son speaks with a precocity that belies his tender years. Yet in this precocity there is a childlike wisdom that prefigures his bravery in the face of certain death some twenty-five lines later:

LADY MACDUFF. Sirrah, your father's dead  
And what will you do now? How will you live?  
SON. As birds do, mother.  
LADY MACDUFF. What, with worms and flies?  
SON. With what I get, I mean; and so do they.  
LADY MACDUFF. Poor bird! Thou'dst never fear the net, nor lime,  
The pit-fall, nor the gin.  
[...]  
Now God help thee, poor monkey! But how  
wilt thou do for a father?  
SON. If he were dead, you'd weep for im: if you would  
not, it were a good sign that I should quickly have a  
new father. (4.2.30-34, 58-62)

As far as can be discerned, this is a scene entirely of Shakespeare's invention.<sup>5</sup> By humanizing the boy in this short exchange, and drawing attention to his youthfulness through the use of epithets such as "bird", "monkey" and "prattler" (4.2.62), Shakespeare heightens the pathos of his heroic defiance in the face of Macbeth's hired killers.

FIRST MURDERER. Where is your husband?  
LADY MACDUFF. I hope, in no place so unsanctified,  
Where such as thou may'st find him.  
FIRST MURDERER. He's a traitor.  
SON. Thou liest, thou shag-hair'd villain!  
FIRST MURDERER. What, you egg!  
Young fry of treachery!  
SON. He has kill'd me, mother:  
Run away, I pray you! (4.2.79-84)

In defending his father's honour and entreating his mother to save herself, the boy displays a bravery and selflessness designed to contrast with both Macbeth's senseless brutality and Macduff's cowardly desertion. Again, the language used to describe the boy ("egg", "young fry") emphasizes his youthfulness and, as with the boy in *Henry V*, the embodied presence of the boy-actor in performance will only enhance this sense of child-like vulnerability, particularly if he is played by a child under the age of seven. It is a deliberately pathos-ridden scene intended to maximise audience empathy with the boy and away from Macbeth, while simultaneously raising questions about the integrity of Macduff. This young boy is sacrificed for dramatic effect, but Shakespeare ensures that his heroism is given a voice that speaks for all the silenced victims of tyranny.

In his dystopian production of *Macbeth* for the Trafalgar Studios in 2013, Jamie Lloyd maximized the pathos of this scene by both concealing and displaying the

<sup>5</sup> Holinshed does not record any such dialogue between Macduff's son and Lady Macduff.

murder of Macduff's young boy. In the context of a production noted for its visceral realism, violence and sheer quantity of stage blood, it was a decision that paid dividends in terms of dramatic effect. For not only did the spectators "see" the murder played out in front of them, but they also had to call on their imaginations to fill in the gaps. At the entrance of the murderers, Macduff's young "fry" (4.3.93) was pushed by his mother into a large chest to hide. He was invisible to both the actors on stage and to the audience from this point onwards. Lady Macduff was then pinned down on top of this chest by the three murderers and garrotted with a rope. As the murderers left, Macbeth entered alone. Checking Lady Macduff was no longer breathing, he turned to leave, muttering "he's a traitor" (4.3.91). At this, a childish voice cried out "thou liest" (4.3.92) from inside the chest. Slowly and deliberately, as though shot in a filmic frame-by-frame sequence, Macbeth turned, unsheathed his sword, placed his ear to the chest and, after pausing for a beat, thrust his sword deep into its side. The silence that followed was felt throughout the auditorium as both Macbeth and the audience seemed to be collectively holding their breath. Satisfied that his young challenger had been silenced forever, Macbeth eventually departed and the spectators were left to consider a silent chest alone on stage. It was a *coup de theatre* that avoided over-sentimentalization or aestheticization of the child's death, yet retained all the horrors of Shakespeare's text through the powers of suggestion. Casting a popular and affable screen actor such as James McAvoy in the role of Macbeth was undoubtedly a gamble. The play cannot achieve its full tragic effect if Macbeth is portrayed as a blameless victim of circumstance and absolved of all personal responsibilities. However, by making Macbeth himself responsible for the murder of Macduff's son, Lloyd ensured that no trace of audience empathy remained after this point. Not only was Macduff's son butchered when in a position of utmost vulnerability, but the audience was required to imagine the terrible details of his death – and as Macbeth himself knows only too well, the imagination can be considerably more terrifying than reality.<sup>6</sup>

Although it is perhaps forgivable to gloss over the child-characters when reading Shakespeare's plays (and many have), the phenomenological and symbolic effects of their presence in performance preclude such interpretive oversights. Whether brought to the fore, as in the two films of *Henry V*, or veiled, as in Lloyd's production of *Macbeth*, the sacrificial murders of these heroic children reverberate throughout the plays. In life they function as screens on which the flaws of society are writ large, and in death they have the affective power to move an audience and re-direct the whole focus of the play. Their lines may be minimal, but as a presence and an absence, these heroic children speak with an eloquence that demands to be heard.

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<sup>6</sup> See Act 2 Scene 1, where Macbeth describes the vision of a dagger as "a false creation,/ Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain" (Shakespeare. *Macbeth*, 2.1.37-9) and Act 3 scene 4, where he describes the ghost of Banquo as "a strange infirmity" and "[u]nreal mockery" (Shakespeare. *Macbeth*, 3.4.85, 105).

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## Zusammenfassung

Die Kinder in den Dramen *Heinrich V.* und *Macbeth* sind Gegenstand dieses Aufsatzes, der argumentiert, dass die Söhne von Heinrich und Macduff sowohl strukturell als auch dramatisch einen wesentlichen Beitrag zur Gesamtanlage der Stücke leisten. Obwohl diese namenlosen Figuren wenig Beachtung in der akademischen Auseinandersetzung mit den Stücken gefunden haben, ist ihr kurzes Leben und frühes Sterben äußerst Bühnenwirksam. Dabei ist es unwesentlich, ob die Morde explizit in den Vordergrund gerückt werden, wie in den beiden diskutierten Verfilmungen von *Heinrich V.*, oder nur angedeutet werden, wie in Lloyds Inszenierung von *Macbeth*. In beiden Varianten stilisieren die Opfer-Morde die Kinder zu Helden, die die Rezeption der Stücke entscheidend beeinflusst. Vor ihrem Tod dienen sie als Projektionsfläche für die Verfehlungen der andern Figuren und der Unzulänglichkeiten der Gesellschaft insgesamt; als Ermordete wirken sie affektiv auf die Zuschauer und erzwingen so eine Neuausrichtung der Perspektive auf das Geschehen. Auch wenn diese Nebenfiguren nur wenige Zeilen Text sprechen, verkörpern diese Kinder – aufgrund ihrer puren Anwesenheit und Abwesenheit – einen eindringlichen Appell, als tragische Helden gehört zu werden.

## Abstract

This paper explores the unsung heroic children of *Henry V* and *Macbeth*, giving a voice to two of the most overlooked yet heroic characters in the Shakespearean canon. Drawing on textual analysis and performance examples from stage and screen, it argues that both Henry's Boy and Macduff's son perform functions that are structurally and dramatically central to the play's overall design. Although these nameless children are under-acknowledged and under-analysed within the academy, their lives and deaths have a theatrical impact that is incommensurate with the size of their roles. Whether brought to the fore, as in the two films of *Henry V*, or veiled, as in Lloyd's production of *Macbeth*, the sacrificial murders of these heroic children reverberate throughout the plays. In life they function as screens on which the flaws of society are writ large, and in death they have the affective power to move an audience and re-direct the whole focus of the play. Their lines may be minimal, but as a presence and an absence, these heroic children speak with an eloquence that demands to be heard.



## FEEBLE HEROISM: *1&2 HENRY IV* AND INTELLECTUAL LIBERTY

SAM GILCHRIST HALL

Resolve no longer to be slaves and you are free!  
—Étienne de la Boétie (8)

Nothing is self-evident about heroism anymore. Neither the social function of the hero, nor his right to exist can go unquestioned, despite what Hollywood films and comic books might have us think. Indeed, even the Golden Age of Chivalry proves to be something of a vanishing point, since heroism has seldom been straightforwardly endorsed in any serious work of literature after the High Middle Ages. In Chaucer, for instance, the writing is already on the wall for this concept. Although the narrator of *The Canterbury Tales* considers the Knight to be the epitome chivalric virtue, the ironies occasioned by his rusty chainmail and work as a mercenary, a hired killer, tell quite another story.

At the close of the Renaissance, in *Don Quixote*, the protagonist is characterised as insane precisely because of his playing the chivalric hero, whereas in *Hamlet* the Prince is driven half-mad by the expectation that he will fulfil the Ghost's injunction—"Remember me" (1.5.91) – and perform his pre-scripted role as an avenging hero. But when Hamlet finally takes his revenge, it is as a consequence of an accident—namely, Gertrude's drinking from the poisoned chalice – and his discovery that the fencing match, in which he is embroiled, is a deadly game, a "jest" that quite literally "poison(s)" (3.2.228). And in *As You Like It* the wise fool Touchstone, the *spiritus rector* of the play, *foolosophically* travesties the ways that the rich and powerful invoke honour to legitimise their actions and opinions. He riddles about "a certain knight that swore 'by his honour' they were good pancakes, and swore 'by his honour' the mustard was naught" (1. 2. 54–55). While the jester avows the contrary, insisting that "the pancakes were naught and the mustard was good" (55–6), this does not make the Knight a liar, for like Rosalind and Celia, who swear "by [their] beards" (61), this disreputable knight with a sweet tooth has sworn "by that that is not" (63), his honour, and is, therefore, not "foresworn" (62).

However, it is in his history plays in general and *1&2 Henry IV* in particular that Shakespeare's critique of heroism reaches its zenith. Heroism, these plays imply, is not simply a quaint nicety, which compels middle-aged men to tilt against windmills; rather, it is an insidious ideal that is cynically employed by the elite as a cover for their instrumental desire to gain and maintain political dominance. The rebel Hotspur may be considered by both his friends and foes to be "the king of honour" (*1 Henry IV*, 4.1.10), but it is his earnest adherence this ideal in an otherwise disenchanting world that causes his death at Shrewsbury. Furthermore, not only does Falstaff defile Hotspur's corpse, but also Hal, in his skit in the tavern, travesties Hotspur's naive infatuation with the prospect martial glory; the Prince mocks the young northerner, describing him as "he that kills some six or seven dozen Scots at breakfast, washes his hands, and says to his wife, 'Fie upon this quiet life!'" (2.5.95–96). Clearly, then, since

Shakespeare's plays are implicitly and explicitly critical of conventional conceptions of heroism, uncovering the unsung heroes and heroines of the plays is not altogether unproblematic.

Yet because conceptions of heroism are of manifest importance to the action of the plays and because *2 Henry IV* represents an alternative sort of heroism, the feeble heroism with which this article is concerned, it would be a mistake to altogether dispense with heroes and heroines. Starting with an analysis of Shakespeare's characterisation of Falstaff in the light of the contemporary humanist critique of honour, this article argues that Falstaff, who confesses to being "a dull fighter and a keen guest" (*1 Henry IV*, 4.3.73), is far more than the cowardly parasite he first appears to be. His reprobate lifestyle, along with his overt indictments of heroism, offer nothing other than a seriocomic dramatization of Erasmus and Montaigne's critiques of heroism. This article then turns to an unsung hero, Francis Feeble, a marginal and plebeian character, whose willed passivity offers an alternative both to the cynical instrumentalism, characteristic of Northumberland, Henry IV and Hal, and to the brazen cowardice of Falstaff and Pistol. Feeble voices an alternative way of existing, which is not premised merely upon getting by in the world. And insofar as he seeks neither self-aggrandisement, nor to save his own skin, in its own idiosyncratic way, Feeble's comment, "let it go which way it will, he that dies this year is quit for the next" (*2 Henry IV*, 3.2.219–20), is a defiant credo.

Clearly, Feeble is prepared to live (and, perhaps more importantly, to die) following his intellectual convictions. Nearly two hundred years later, Kant would consider taking courage in one's own convictions – rather than blindly following the prevailing dogma – as key to the process of Enlightenment itself:

Enlightenment is humanity's emergence from their self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. The motto of Enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own understanding!  
[Translation modified] (17)

It is no coincidence, therefore, that the greatest Renaissance humanist, Erasmus, had as his personal motto a statement of intellectual independence, a statement of his willingness to dissent from orthodoxy: *concedo nulli* (I yield to none). Crucially, however, Renaissance humanism contains within it a form of Enlightenment that does not so much encourage us to arrogantly trust in our own convictions – such thinking can ultimately only ever lead to another kind of dogma – as to maintain a healthy scepticism about our convictions, and to distrust any assertion of an absolute truth. Indeed, as the distinguished Adorno scholar Gerhard Schweppenhäuser pointed out nearly thirty years ago, Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* furnishes us with nothing other than "an introduction to the unsystematic self-reflection of Reason [*Vernunft*] upon its own problematic realisation" (573); and his remarkable mock encomium is characterised by an "implicit humanistic pathos" (569). The despotism of the powerful, the dangers of humankind's pretensions to certainty and, most significantly, humankind's obstinate servility – that is, our tendency to prefer servitude to taking courage in our own convictions – generates the "humanistic pathos" apparent in humanist thought from Erasmus to Shakespeare.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari were well aware of the stakes of humankind's cowardly disinclination to take courage in their own beliefs. "The fundamental problem of political philosophy" they write "is still precisely the one that Spinoza saw so clearly (and that Wilhelm Reich rediscovered); why do men fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?" (31). There can be little doubt, this article concludes, that this "fundamental problem of political philosophy" is clearly apparent in the state of the humanities today, in which "art [is] made tongue-tied by authority / And folly, doctor-like, control[s] skill" ("Sonnet 66", 9-10). The deplorable state of affairs in the arts and humanities, I conclude, has come about precisely because many twenty-first-century humanists, blind to the revolutionary potential of Renaissance humanism, prefer servitude to thinking for themselves. Yet the capacity to refuse to follow the whims of some semi-literate middle manager is integral to academic dissent today. We can and should refuse to be complicit in the corrupt managerial hierarchies and insidious systems of intellectual and personal surveillance that have taken hold in the Anglo-American academe in recent years.

### 1. Falstaff's Anti-Heroic Roots

In 'That A Man Should not Communicate his Glorie', Montaigne debunks common conceptions of heroism:

Of all the follies of the world, the most universall, and of most men received is the care of reputation and study of glorie, to which we are so wedded that we neglect and cast-off riches, friends, repose, life and health (goods effectuall and substantiall), to follow that vaine image, and idle-simple voice, which hath neither body nor hold-fast. (137)

For Montaigne, concern for one's glory is the greatest of all the "follies of the world". Honour, it transpires, is an insubstantial ideal that compels men to gamble all that they have. The fantasy of fashioning oneself as a hero is dangerously foolish.

Falstaff's estranged and estranging opinion of honour, which is avowedly anti-heroic, views honour in an analogous manner; the "fat rogue" (*1 Henry IV*, 1.2.165) contends that the intangible ideals of the past have all too tangible consequences in the present:

FALSTAFF                    I would 'twere bed-time, Hal, and all well.

PRINCE HARRY            Why, thou *owest God a death*.

[Exit]

FALSTAFF                    'Tis not due yet. I would be loath to pay him before his day. What need I be so forward with him that calls not on me? Well, 'tis no matter; honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on? How then? Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word 'honour'? What is that 'honour'? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died o'Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No 'Tis insensible then. Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with

the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon. And so ends my catechism. (*I Henry IV*, 5.1.126–139; [my emphasis])

Falstaff's mastery of language illustrates language's mastery over us. Having given the lie to honour's significance, his seriocomic "catechism" reveals how suffering is caused by ossified ideals, which have become so debased through exchange that they are mere "air". Honour may be an abstract ideal, but this does not prevent it from maiming and killing. Like other abstract concepts, moreover, honour lacks, as Montaigne memorably puts it, "a hold fast", or concrete referent. Because it is built on the shifting sands of opinion and contingent upon an account of events penned by the winner, there is no such thing as "undying honour" and this is manifest from Shakespeare's dissonant reworking of one of Western literature's foundational myths, *Troilus and Cressida*.

Although it is not included in Geoffrey Bullough's compendious collection of sources and analogues for *1&2 Henry IV*, Erasmus's colloquy, *A Knight Without a Horse, or Faked Nobility*, not only "provides a paradigm for Falstaff's nature" (Kaiser 210), which is gestured to in the play when Hal describes him as "uncolted" (*I Henry IV*, 2.2.35), but it also uses irony to question the concept of honour in a manner not dissimilar to Shakespeare. In this respect, it is a striking example of Erasmus's and Shakespeare's sceptical detachment from the values of the past. *A Knight Without a Horse* takes the form of a playful discussion: Nestor will tell Harpalus how to simulate being a knight so long as the former will tell him why he wants to be a knight in the first place. The reason he gives is "Simply that knights do as they please and get away with it" (884). The satire in this piece operates on two levels. First and foremost, it is a satire on what passes for nobility: "Unless you're a good dicer, a skilful card player, an infamous whoremonger, a heavy drinker, a reckless spendthrift, a wastrel, heavily in debt, decorated with the French pox, hardly anyone will believe you are a knight" (884), advises Nestor. Falstaff's tongue-in-cheek reflections about his virtue echo this comment quite closely:

I was as virtuously given as a gentleman need to be: virtuous enough; swore little; diced not—above seven times a week; went to a bawdy-house—not above once in a quarter—of an hour; paid money that I borrowed—three or four times; lived well, and in good compass. And now I live out of all order, out of all compass. (*I Henry IV*, III.3.12–17)

While he pays lip service to some sort of "order", the qualifications attached to each statement ensure this "order" is that of the *mundus inversus*.

Erasmus's second satirical technique in this colloquy, which inverts 'the doctrines of the courtesy books' ("Introduction" 881) is to use the structures of an unreflexive, ideologically passive genre ironically: any wastrel can emulate this depleted form of nobility. To do so is desirable, because it enables one to live outside the very social conventions that chivalry is supposed to support. In other words, the modern knight wrongs rights, rather than rights wrongs. Harpalus is proud that he can "change" his "countenance as easily as a mask" (883) and realises – like Falstaff, and Prince Hal – that "Reputation is the best substitute for reality" (881).

Combining an image of agrarian labour with one of atrocity, Harpalus designs a heraldic symbol based on his cutting of geese's throats and even composes his own positively Falstaffian motto: "Cast all the dice" (883). Nestor reflects that "the fundamental principle" of knighthood must always be maintained: "for a knight to relieve a common traveller of his money is both just and right. What's more outrageous than for a vulgar trader to be rich while a knight hasn't enough to spend on whores and dice?" (883). Insofar as it consists of members of the nobility robbing the upwardly mobile, the robbery in *1 Henry IV* follows the logic of this comment.

In *A Knight Without a Horse*, honour is pervasively associated with a calculable kind of debt – this colloquy is, after all, the main source of the trickster Panurge's famous praise of debt in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, in which debt is viewed as the basis of human existence and the essential principle of the universe. And this connection between debt and honour not only inspires Falstaff's "catechism", but is also invoked by him when the Prince asks "Sirrah, do I owe you a thousand pound?" to which Falstaff shamelessly invokes man's infinite debt to God, responding: "A thousand pound, Hal? A million! Thy love is worth a million; thou owest me thy love" (*1 Henry IV*, 3.3.125–26). This invokes St. Paul's injunction: "Owe nothing to any man, but to love one another; for he that loveth another, hath fulfilled the Law" (Romans, 13.8). But whereas Falstaff's comment effectively reminds us that, as Montaigne puts it, "Neither men nor their lives are measured by the Ell" (39), his insincere evocation of Paul's authoritative discourse nonetheless works to undermine it.

Elsewhere in the plays, moreover, Shakespeare assaults the petrified ideal of honour by linking it to the inglorious world of exchange. Hal aims to have Hotspur's honour *transferred* to him:

For every honour sitting on his helm,  
Would they were multitudes, and on my head  
My shames redoubled; for the time will come  
That I shall make this northern youth exchange  
His glorious deeds for my indignities.  
Percy is but my factor, good my lord,  
To engross up glorious deeds on my behalf;  
And I will call him to so strict account,  
That he shall render every glory up. (*1 Henry IV*, III. 2. 142–150)

Because of his dissembled illness, Northumberland considers his "honour is at pawn" (*2 Henry IV*, 2.3.7); Morton describes the Archbishop of York as "a man / Who with double surety binds his followers" (1.1.189–90), since the Archbishop is "followed both with body and with mind" (202). His vocation is significant only in so far as it gives him credit with those he commands. Indeed, even Henry's crusade is not a battle to win back the "Holy Land" from the infidel, but a cynical strategy with a carefully calibrated aim: "Be it thy course to busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels, that action hence borne out / May waste the memory of former days" (*2 Henry IV*, 4.3.338, 341–3), advice that, as the events of *Henry V* attest, his son clearly takes to heart. Yet the universality of the folly that Montaigne describes as the "study of glorie" is best

attested to by Hotspur's dying words. Whereas his comment "O Harry, thou hast robbed me of my youth" (*1 Henry IV*, 5.4.76) seemingly registers the personal consequences behaving according to the prevailing ideology of personal honour, Hotspur then qualifies his initial statement in such a way as to lay bare his absolute enthrallment to this "vaine image": "I better brook the loss of brittle life / Than those proud titles thou hast won of me" (77–78).

## 2. Feeble Academics

But something approaching a genuinely honourable intention in the play comes from a surprising source, the outwardly unpromising Feeble, whose effete profession as a "woman's tailor" (*2 Henry IV*, 3.2.141) does not escape Falstaff's derision. Whereas the recruits Mouldy and Bullcalf bribe their way out of military service, Feeble retains a philosophical fortitude in the face of death; recalling Hal's earlier comment to Falstaff in *1 Henry IV*, from which the latter fashions his sophistic mock "catechism", Feeble stoically accepts his perilous situation:

FEEBLE	By my troth, I care not. A man can die but once. <i>We owe God a death.</i> I'll ne'er bear a base mind. An't be my destiny, so; an't be not, so. No man's too good to serve's prince. And let it go which way it will, he that dies this year is quit for the next.
BARDOLF	Well said; thou'rt a good fellow. ( <i>2 Henry IV</i> , 3.2.216–20; [my emphasis])

Feeble's ambivalence about his future is at odds with the temporality of the play, which lies in the "hollow of history: a time predominantly of recollection and anticipation" (Baldo 74). With something of Pyrrho's pig about him, he is neither haunted by illusions of past honours, nor perplexed by worries about his future as the princes and the rebels of the Second Tetralogy are. Feeble here anticipates Hamlet's famous resolution: "We defy augury. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all" (*Hamlet*, 5.2.197–200). Whereas the Danish Prince's comment has been lauded as an exemplary instance of the philosophical readiness for death, the *ars moriendi*, with which early modern thought was obsessed (e.g. Cutrofello 93; Gatti 161), Feeble's demotic prequel of Hamlet's decision to act has not been an object of critical attention, despite Shakespeare's best attempts to show how misguided it is to search for honourable behaviour in kings and aristocrats.

While voicing a conventional fatalism, Feeble's quiet fortitude offers an alternative both to the ruling elite's instrumental use of honour and to Falstaff and Pistol's cowardly bravado, which, at best, views honour as incidental. "Give me life, which if I can save, so; if not, honour comes unlooked for, and there's an end" (*1 Henry IV*, V.3.8–59), proclaims the former. After all, Feeble neither sides with the pursuit of personal glory – the egocentric arithmetic of which Henry exploits in his famous St Crispin's Day speech: "The fewer men, the greater share of honour" (*Henry V*, IV.3.22) – nor attempts buy his way out, twice insisting that he will "ne'er bear a base mind" (*2 Henry IV*, 3.2.217, 222). In this respect, he expresses a way of being outside of the predominant modes of understanding. Unlike his namesake Francis the drawer in *1 Henry IV*, Francis Feeble is not caught between two masters. His eloquent refusal to

seek either self-aggrandisement or follow a course of self-preservation implies that while one “must be circumstanced” (*Othello*, 3.4.196), for we are always part of a specific set of socio-historical circumstances, it does not necessarily follow that “Men are as the time is” (*Lear: Conflated Text*, 5.3.31–32). No matter how bound we are by our conditions, there is always the possibility of refusing to follow the received wisdom.

A similar philosophical acceptance of death from characters without a Socratic education can be found in a surprising place: namely, Werner Herzog’s 1977 documentary, *La Soufrière – Warten auf eine unausweichliche Katastrophe*. Herzog interviews three twentieth-century bedlam beggars, who refuse to leave the volcanic Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, after it has been evacuated because of the imminent eruption of its volcano, with a predicted force of “two or three atom bombs”. Herzog and his crew mainly focus on a man, whom they discover asleep with his cat on the foothills of the volcano, shrouded by clouds of toxic gas. In a supine position, with his hands outstretched as if to embrace the forthcoming eruption, the dispossessed man, who is in his fifties, states prosaically and recurrently: “I am not afraid of dying”. Herzog questions the nameless man about his reasons for staying on the island:

HERZOG	You have refused to leave the district, haven’t you?
MAN	Yes, I am here because it’s God’s will. I am waiting for my death, and I wouldn’t know where to go anyway. I haven’t a cent. I am poor.
HERZOG	You are waiting for death?
MAN	Yes, and no one knows when it will come. It is as God has commanded. He will not only take me to his bosom, but everyone else [...]. It’s God’s will, and nobody can tell when death will come.

“The readiness”, it transpires, “is all”. Or perhaps not: despite all scientific predictions, the volcano did not explode. With wry irony, Herzog admits: “there was something pathetic about this documentary for us; now it has come to represent an inescapable catastrophe that never took place”.

For the Director, however, “it is not the volcano that remains, but the neglect and oblivion in which those black people live”, a state of abject poverty comparable to that of Falstaff’s conscripts in *1 Henry IV*. For the purposes of this article, however, what is more significant is that the three remaining inhabitants of the city in the shadow of the volcano, all of whom are social outcasts of one sort or another, *live* according to some pretty sound philosophical logic: namely, what cannot be escaped, death, should not be feared. Moreover, the impoverished man is strangely empowered through his ecstatic acceptance of death, not least because his spiritual fortitude confounds the fundamental law of the bourgeoisie, self-preservation at all costs. And it comes as little surprise that the weekly faithful (and their priests) have long since scarpered, leaving their air conditioning, televisions and radios on in their understandable haste to leave the danger zone.

Because they break with socially sanctioned forms of behaviour, Feeble’s stoic resolution and the hermit’s decision to await his death with philosophical calm are remarkable. Both men have enough courage in their intellectual convictions to behave in an utterly unconventional manner, a manner that ultimately does not so much transgress as transcend the prevailing dogma. Now, whereas the future of Anglo-

American academe clearly does not lie in following the example of mad hermits on volcanic islands anymore than it does in adhering to the Christian determinism Feeble endorses, the way that their actions give the lie to the powers that be is politically significant. Their striking readiness for death, albeit for one that does not come, reminds their respective audiences that they always have the possibility of refusal; even in the worst of situations, one can echo Herman Melville's melancholic clerk, Bartleby, by saying: "I would prefer not to" (11 *et passim*).

Moreover, one of the key works of political philosophy in the Renaissance, Étienne de La Boétie's *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* (pub. 1579), endorses such passive resistance as a form of political praxis: "Resolve no longer to be slaves and you are free! I do not want you to push him or overthrow [the tyrant], but merely no longer to sustain him and, like a great Colossus whose base has been pulled away, you will see him collapse of his own weight and break up" (8). As La Boétie recurrently emphasises, the success of tyranny depends upon the "mind-forg'd manacles" (Blake, 216) of its victims, upon a cowardly mentality that is more willing to fear its Master than to live in a manner it judges to be fit. In this respect, "It is people who enslave themselves [...], who, when given the choice of being either free men or slaves, give up their freedom and take up the yoke" (La Boétie 6).

This sort of fear, however, whether it is of a tyrant or a manager, proves to be unjustified, since authority is established by the performance of power: "Anyone who thinks that halberds, guards, and watchtowers protect tyrants is quite mistaken [...] they are helped by these as a formality and a bogeyman" (30). La Boétie, it transpires, is not alone in the period in debunking the bogus nature of authority; some thirty years after the *Discourse* was published, a demented king, who has been turned out of his palace, riddles to an erstwhile courtier:

LEAR           Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar?  
 GLOUCESTER     Aye, sir.  
 LEAR           And the creature run from the cur? There thou mightst  
                   behold the great image of authority: a dog's obeyed in office. (*King  
 Lear: Conflated Text*, 4.6.150–154)

"A dog's obeyed in office": increasing numbers of academics will their own servitude both by acquiescing to the whims of bureaucrats and by cynically resigning themselves to the fact that the catastrophe facing the arts and humanities is an inescapable one. Although the corporations and governments are in part responsible for the marketization of the academe, no small portion of the blame lies with those who prefer to serve the powers that be rather than think for themselves.

It is, moreover, hardly as if those who work in Higher Education must risk their lives for the sake of their intellectual liberty as countless numbers of their forbearers have done. In truth, the worst horrors that one faces for refusing to submit to a cult of complacent mediocrity, managerial exploitation and professional surveillance is a disciplinary proceeding, and perhaps unemployment. For the sake of maintaining our intellectual liberty, however, these unpleasant experiences are a small price to pay. If academics, those who should nurture the practice of *parresia*, frank speech, at all costs, willingly choose to live in bondage, there is a real risk of them encouraging their students to do the same, not least because "The first reason for voluntary servitude is

custom” (La Boétie 17). It is, ultimately, the task of those with a “clear understanding and perceptive mind” both to “see what is ahead and behind” and “not to recall past things to judge those of the future and to measure present ones” (La Boétie 18). In other words, just because things are this way, it does not mean that they must remain so. But just because things are this way, it does not mean that they must remain so, for if Herzog teaches us anything, it is that it is possible to escape even inescapable catastrophe.

To my mind, the significance of the arts and humanities does not lie in the fact that they contribute 5% (2012) to the British economy, which is how the recent Warwick Report justifies the continued existence of what it describes in its nauseating double-speak as the “creative industries”. Rather, there is no better justification for continued study of the humanities than that they teach people take courage in their convictions; the heroic kernel of humanism—be it Shakespeare’s dramatization of history, La Boétie’s thrilling little polemic, or Herzog’s mesmerising documentary—lies in its refusal to be hoodwinked by the prevailing dogma; it lies, quite simply, in art’s obstinate resistance to the way things are. Moreover, by attempting to rid its readers and viewers of an irrational fear of imaginary Masters (and their attendant “bogeymen”), the arts not only represent, but also help to inculcate, a life that is no longer blighted by voluntary servitude. For sure, the time has come to refuse to kowtow to the managers, the Research Excellence Framework and the Student Satisfaction Surveys. The time has come to be Feeble.

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### **Zusammenfassung**

Der Aufsatz entwickelt die These, dass Shakespeare mit seiner Figur Feeble eine außergewöhnliche Art des Helden dargestellt hat. Feeble ist heroisch insofern, als er nicht an der Machtpolitik von Hal, Hotspur und Heinrich IV und zugleich auch nicht an der komischen Selbsterhaltung von Falstaff und Pistol teilhat. Dieser Heldenmut, betrachtet im Kontext des Renaissance-Humanismus, kann als Feebles paradigmatische Ablehnung sowohl der gängigen Machtpolitik als auch einer Selbsterhaltungsstrategie gesehen werden, die Humanisten heutzutage aufzuzeigen vermag, wie sie sich gegen die Vermarktung der akademischen Welt wehren könnten.

### **Abstract**

This article argues that in the character of Feeble Shakespeare creates an unusual type of hero. Feeble is heroic insofar as he is neither part of the power-politics of Hal, Hotspur and Henry IV, nor part of Falstaff's and Pistol's comic self-preservation. Viewed in the context of Renaissance Humanism, his heroic refusal could provide a paradigm for present day humanists to fight against the current tendency to acquiescence to the power politics of the marketized academy in the name of self-preservation.

**CALL FOR STATEMENTS—*SHAKESPEARE SEMINAR AT THE  
SHAKESPEARE-TAGE 2016***

**Shakespeare's Green Wor(l)ds**

In Shakespeare's colourful world, green, arguably, holds a special place. It is the colour that pre-eminently connects the human sphere to the natural world. At the same time, Shakespeare uses green metaphorically to refer to a range of human conditions whose relation to natural processes is more oblique. Some of Shakespeare's characters, both female and male, are "troubled with the green sickness", while others fall victim to "green-eyed jealousy" or are haunted by the "green-eyed monster". In Shakespeare, eyes are "as green as leek", and "estates are green". In some cases the metaphor evokes the notion of immature, juvenile or foolish behaviour, for example when "orators are too green". In other cases, like the green sickness, the meaning is more technical. There are, however, also semantic fields that are more elusive, and in which the colour green is less clearly defined, semantic fields, for example, that open up ecocritical or other contemporary theoretical frameworks. In our seminar, we would like to explore these different semantic fields and bring to the fore the manifold uses of green in Shakespeare's plays and poems.

Our seminar plans to address Shakespeare's green wor(l)ds with a panel of six papers during the annual conference of the German Shakespeare Association, Shakespeare-Tage (22-24 April 2016 in Bochum, Germany). As critical input for the discussion and provocation for debate, we invite papers of no more than 15 minutes that present concrete case studies, concise examples and strong views on the topic. Please send your proposals (abstracts of 300 words) and all further questions by 30 November 2015 to the seminar convenors:

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