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ACTION SUITED TO THE WORD



ESSAYS IN MEMORY
OF ISTVÁN GÉHER AND GÉZA KÁLLAY

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PREFACE

These two volumes (one in English, one in Hungarian) testify to the importance and impact of two outstanding scholars in English studies in Hungary, István Géher and Géza Kállay. In the fall of 2022, an international conference entitled “Action Suited to the Word” was organized by Eötvös Loránd University and Károli Gáspár University in Budapest, in their memory. The participants were asked to reflect on the ways in which either Géher’s or Kállay’s oeuvre has influenced the speakers’ own works in their own fields; or the ways in which the title of the conference (a paraphrase of a quotation from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*) might apply to the attitude or disposition of either Géher or Kállay or the speaker. Round-table conversations were also held in connection with both Géher’s and Kállay’s works in the fields of Shakespeare studies, philosophy, theatre studies and poetry – and, of course, contributions focusing on personal memories were also welcome and were inevitable. The event had a special, family-like atmosphere – and not only because of the evident family ties, since Kállay was Géher’s son-in-law. The concept of family was extended – as one of the participants put it in the album compiled on the spot, it was a rare experience of a ‘conference about love’. Indeed, with the presence of one-time colleagues and students, the past was conjured up – a past that seemed to have a relevant message for the present: it *is still* possible to talk about literature and philosophy in a way that the questions in focus might be matters of life and death for the speakers, and in spite of the seriousness of professional discipline and respect for the texts, one’s whole attitude may be imbued with all-embracing humor, flavoring the occasion with the rare spice of understanding. The books, *Action Suited to the Word* and *A szót követő tett*, in English and in Hungarian, respectively, contain the contributions of Hungarian and international colleagues and friends, who had become witnesses to the harmony between word and action in both scholars’ lives and works. The two volumes are published in the hope that their tone and attitude may find resonance in the reception of new generations of readers.

Their significance may be illustrated by the following brief introductions:

István Géher (1940–2012) was a professor of English and American literature, a poet and a translator. As a Shakespeare-scholar and the one-time president of the Hungarian Shakespeare Society, he is best known for his thought-provoking *Shakespeare-olvasókönyv* (“Shakespeare Reader”) (first published in

1991), in which (as the subtitle¹ suggests) his aim is to show “a mirror held up to us in thirty-seven pieces” (the word for “piece” and “play”: “darab” is the same in the Hungarian language). The *Reader* is both systematic and experimental: it provides a reading for all of the plays in a basically conversational tone with a great academic background but deliberately without footnotes. In the preface, “To the Reader”, he says the following:

My Shakespeare reader, in which scholarly information atones for the lyrical motivations, is not so much a study in literary history as a work of literature; a narrative of my thoughts: followed in its unfurling, a novel of consciousness; the worth and interest of which depends on the extent to which one believes that man can enjoy and benefit from getting acquainted with the thoughts of another man. Thinking, as a matter of fact, has never been a harmless practice, and nowadays – in an age of false contingencies organized into forms of government and ways of life, an age of pseudo-truths forced on our fallibility – it is, one may say, an addiction. I say, in time, and from experience, that it is troublesome and dangerous to think *honestly*, even about Shakespeare. Or: especially when about Shakespeare. Shakespeare’s common place (a stage of the world unique in its up-to-dateness) is held up to our thought in order to make common, on its mirror-faced surface, all our deep and private doubts. Whether it is possible to live a meaningful life... whether it is worth the trouble and danger of thinking... Reader, look around in your world, and think! Are you really interested in my thoughts on Shakespeare?

If you are, you find yourself in my spiritual company; what’s more, in the company of spirits: while thinking about Shakespeare, the thinker is never alone; his thoughts are filled with the thoughts of great minds of the past, his sentences reverberate with the discourse of professionals and amateurs, writers and readers of four hundred years of literature. The history of scholarship names and classifies the souls errant, pinning them down to their allotted places, by the spell of quotations. The essay, rather, conjures them up: by way of providing them with a texture of a body in its own living text, thus reviving their immortality. This is my way of thinking, my way of working. I have lived for a good many years encased, metaphorically, in Shakespeare’s work; my readings about him would, practically, fill a good-sized bookcase. But in my book, I deliberately avoid references. Naturally, I mean, as I practice my profession. In the practice of the essayist a literary opinion is not a patent, nor an invention. It is, like its origin and its outcome, an *experience*: a source of energy, an inspiring creative opportunity. We ought to feel free to take it. We exist – like in the infinity of time our transitoriness is heir to – in all that we know; our knowledge taken wherever it could be found, and given over to whomever it may concern. Back and forth: we learn from our students so we can teach our masters. The spirit of our trade, having a basically social disposition, feels at ease in the

¹ Tükörképünk 37 darabban.

atmosphere of collective thinking. Its element is the (mutually naturalizing and alienating) community of thought; the stream of opinions in which a stand taken – what you think and what I think – although it literally demands our whole personality, is also, poetically, impersonal, because what we passionately claim to be our own is not only ours... To be my companion, Reader, you needn't remember my name; it's enough if you further my thoughts.²

The most recent edition (2015, Budapest, L'Harmattan) contains Géza Kállay's foreword in which Kállay emphasizes the uniquely performative aspect of Géher's teaching and writing, remembering how each of his classes was a celebration of some sort of mystery because of his ability to be present and make the reading as well as the readers present for this occasion. When trying to place this approach among different schools of interpretation, Kállay mentions ethical criticism and deconstruction, using the term "family resemblance". But he immediately adds that Géher followed no pre-given paradigm, it was rather the Bakhtinian "dialogic imagination" along which Géher's thoughts unfolded. Among Géher's sources of inspiration, Kállay names S.T. Coleridge, A.C. Bradley, George Wilson-Knight, William Empson and Stanley Cavell – representatives, in Kállay's interpretation, of the "metaphysical" reading of Shakespeare, but beside these, as Kállay points out, Géher, having a social interest, was also influenced by New Historicism, Shakespeare scholars like Stephen Greenblatt or David Scott Kastan, who were also his personal acquaintances and friends. Still, perhaps most of all, it was Jan Kott, author of *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* whose disposition and attitude proved to be thought-provoking for Géher.

Géher's invocation of Montaigne and the genre of the essay at the very beginning of his preface³ is also vital: the original meaning of the word is "attempt", "experiment" – and Kállay points out the importance of the personal responsibility of the essayist, a lot is at stake when the experiment is targeted at his own life.

Kállay also adds that the scope of Géher's teaching (not only in his classes, special seminars, but in the radio programmes as well as the innumerable forewords and afterwords to various editions) grew far beyond a concrete "university". He addresses universality and the universe –but only through the particular, one-time presence of a certain experience, a specific constellation of meanings – this is what makes his prose close or tantamount to poetry.

² Géher, István: *Shakespeare-olvasókönyv*, Budapest, Cserépfalvi és Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1991, 10–11. (Translation mine.)

³ "Reader, thou hast here an honest book; it doth at the outset forewarn thee..." This is how Montaigne begins his confession of the essay. (Translation mine.)

Géza Kállay (1959–2017) was a student of Géher’s school, but like all good students, he found other ways to continue and expand what he had learned from his master. With the discovery of Stanley Cavell’s writings (eventually becoming Cavell’s student and personal friend), he turned to philosophy and his Shakespeare interpretations are imbued with the interest of the philosopher. In Kállay’s works we find long-lasting textual bonds and a natural cohabitation of Hamlet and Descartes, Macbeth and Wittgenstein, Lear and Kierkegaard, just to quote a few examples. His most recent (already posthumous) publication on Shakespeare is his chapter in *The Routledge Companion to Shakespeare and Philosophy*, a chapter entitled: “The (New and Old) Metaphysical Reading of Shakespeare”. In its first paragraphs, he explains what he means by “metaphysical”:

By the (new) ‘metaphysical reading of Shakespeare’ I mean reading his texts asking how he may inform our lives when we expect to find in his dramas and poems presentations of human problems which we consider to be deep and fundamental. I take those problems to be ‘deep’ and ‘fundamental’ which may – directly or indirectly – have an effect on our very being. A main characteristic of such profound questions is that they do not disappear even if we gain new empirical evidence or new information about them, information or evidence that can be evaluated with our five senses (i.e. these questions are not eliminable through empiricist means). Whether Old Hamlet’s Ghost is standing in front of the door can be empirically resolved: I open the door and have a look. Whether it is possible that Old Hamlet’s Ghost appear at all, which logically implies asking whether ghosts are possible, cannot be: there is no straightforward empirical answer to these questions (although, of course, empirical considerations may play some role in deciding them). Such deep and ‘fundamental’ questions also include, first and foremost, what it means to be human, how we are related to our language and our other modes of representation – in what portrayals, visuals, pictures, images, symbols, sentences, modal attitudes we relate to the world and how we see the world related to us; on what we put the burden of meaning (what we appoint as responsible for being and remaining meaningful). Is it the external world? Is it truth and falsity? Our concepts? Our intentions? The web of language itself? Our actions and practices? Our metaphysical concerns may also include what constitutes our actions and the events befalling us, what level of certainty we can attain and which skeptical scenarios are relevant to undermine (or precisely to build) knowledge; how ‘make-believe’ (‘art’, ‘fiction’, i.e. ‘willed non-reality’) relates to what, for better or worse, we call ‘reality’; how we shape time and how time shapes us, since we are temporal beings with a beginning (birth) and an end (death), who are aware of, and can reflect on, this; how we relate to powers greater than us, be these social-historical and/or transcendental/supernatural (or both); how much of our selves, including our gender roles, we can identify as ‘typical human nature’, which part of our nature may be called ‘unique’, and how much

of both of these is constructed by external forces and in what way; how we can enter into meaningful personal human relationships including those between parents and children, adults and youth, between siblings, partners, friends, rivals, enemies – ‘decisive questions of life’ all of us have to face sometimes, certainly in moments of crisis.⁴

Géza Kállay calls attention to the interplay between philosophy and literature, the two realms making each other *present* through a *personal* involvement of the speaker in the discussion of professional matters. The ‘stake’ and the ‘responsibility’ he emphasizes in Géher’s work is equally vital in his own writings.

Both scholars *perform* their processes of thinking – in both critical approaches there is something basically dramatic. Their dialogic imagination brings the ordinary, everyday problems alive, particular personal drama and personal tragedies gain a cosmic scope in their writings. These volumes celebrate their performances of thought.

Katalin G. Kállay

⁴ Géza Kállay: The (New and Old) Metaphysical Reading of Shakespeare, in C. Bourne – E. C. Bourne (eds.): *The Routledge Companion to Shakespeare and Philosophy*, London – New York, Routledge, 2019, 88–89.

FOREWORD

After many delays and difficulties, the long-awaited conference in memory of István Géher and Géza Kállay – originally planned for 2020 – took place in the fall of 2022. Although the title of the conference, “Action Suited to the Word”, is an obvious reference to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the interests of both professors extended beyond the Bard’s works, and as such, they have influenced many generations of students, colleagues, scholars, and thinkers from various backgrounds and with various interests. The talks delivered at the conference, as well as the papers in these books, reflect the colorful variety of these interests. The spirit of the conference is also conveyed by the diversity of genres defining the works in these conference proceedings: some papers are research articles strictly following academic rigor, some are essays reflecting on deep philosophical or even theological issues, and some are personal recollections. The conference proceedings were divided into two volumes: one in Hungarian and one in English.

The volume is framed by two speeches delivered on different occasions. **János Kenyeres’** *Opening Remarks* at the conference “Action Suited to the Word” offers a glimpse into the conference’s professional yet familiar atmosphere. **Zsolt Komáromy’s** moving laudation of Kállay concludes the volume. The speech was delivered at the HUSSE 16 conference on the occasion of Kállay’s receiving the Ország Award posthumously. Komáromy’s address is a touching recognition of the merits of Kállay’s works and his lasting influence on generations of Hungarian scholars of English studies. Due to the vast range of topics covered in this volume, we, as editors, decided not to divide the volumes into explicit sub-chapters. Nevertheless, some broad thematic patterns have emerged: the majority of the submitted English-language papers are connected in some form to Shakespeare, who, not incidentally, is a central figure in both Géher’s and Kállay’s oeuvre. Nine out of the eighteen contributors feature Shakespeare prominently in their works, so these essays form the first block of this volume. **Sanford Budick’s** paper discusses a topic that deeply interested Kállay: the self’s authenticity. The article, by providing a philosophical background and applying it for the interpretation of Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, maps out how freedom can be achieved by overcoming the theatricalization of the self. **Annamária Fábíán’s** essay is not strictly about Shakespeare, yet her deeply insightful understanding of Kállay’s adaptation of Lear’s story highlights why Kállay’s short stories are so successful when it comes to teaching students about Shakespeare. She emphasizes Kállay’s unique ability

to help us understand the humanity of Lear, which is chiefly due to the fact that his short stories defy straightforward categorization. She convincingly highlights that the novellas in *Jobbítsd szavaidat* ("Mend your speech") can be understood as adaptations, rewritings, translations and interpretations of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, and that this multiplicity helps Kállay to avoid painting Lear as a one-dimensional tyrant. In a similar vein, the volume continues with **Kinga Földvály**'s work on an adaptation of another of Shakespeare's great tragedies, with Joel Coen's *The Tragedy of Macbeth* as the focus of her paper. Special attention is given to the film's cinematography as it highlights – in Földvály's view – the metaphysical associations in the text. Földvály convincingly argues that the visuals facilitate Biblical associations. **Bálint Gárdos** sets his focus on Charlotte Smith's take on Shakespeare's *King Lear* and explores the role Smith played in re-politicizing *Lear*. Gárdos draws a vivid picture of the context in which Smith wrote, and by providing a detailed analysis of Smith's literary arc from her French works through the French–English relations to *The Old Manor House*, Gárdos demonstrates the persistence of the sympathetic reading of *King Lear*. **Marcell Gellért**'s article transports the reader to Burgess' fictional biographies of Marlowe and Shakespeare as not only doubles of each other, but also of Burgess himself. Gellért notes how the novels reflect on their Elizabethan subjects as much as they do on Burgess' complex and varied authorial personas. **Márta Hargitai** focuses on the significance of justice in *Macbeth*. She analyses three major occurrences of the word, all the while providing historical and iconographical precedence. Moving beyond merely contrasting the absolute and relative forms of justice, she presents them as overlapping each other. She also demonstrates how the absolute is made relative in the hands of a tyrant. **John J. Joughin**'s essay is inspired by a private conversation with Kállay, and not surprisingly, it delves into the metaphysical issues of *Macbeth*. Joughin probes the issue of succession in the framework of Laruelle's non-philosophy and in the second half of the paper, he dissects the body politic of Ewan Fernie and Simon Palfrey's *Macbeth*, *Macbeth*. **David Scott Kastan** sets out to explore the uncertainties and speculative elements surrounding Lucrece's rape and its possible (re-)interpretations. The essay provides the historical context drawing on a rich classical tradition including Livy, Ovid and St. Augustine, and moves towards the analysis of the political ramifications of Lucrece's suicide. **Veronika Schandl**'s research of Eastern European Shakespeare productions during the Socialist era is illuminating in many ways. First, the article identifies the problem of discussing these socialist Shakespeare studies in a national setting without giving much attention to general Eastern European trends. Second, she identifies the difficulties of researching the topic, since the political situation of the time should warn scholars not to take written documents at face value, given the possible repercussions on behalf of socialist authorities. Third, her paper tracks an

exciting segment of Hungarian theater history by investigating the evolution of Tamás Major's directorial style as the director of the Hungarian National Theater.

Shakespeare's cohesive force links Géher, Kállay and the present contributors into an intellectual bond; however, as previously noted, the two eminent academics had extensive fields of interests beyond Shakespeare. The love of philosophy may be more closely related to Kállay's interests, and this volume provides a glimpse into his influence with the help of four contributors: Brett Bourbon, Ádám Czitrom, Zoltán Márkus and Péter Tamás. **Brett Bourbon** explores the topic that Kállay gave many lectures and seminars about: the relationship of literature and philosophy, but even more precisely the nature of fiction in philosophy. His thought-provoking essay describes the distinction between fiction and non-fiction as a logical one. **Ádám Czitrom's** thoughts have also been quite clearly influenced by Kállay. Two major areas are covered: an interpretation of being, action and representation in the Bible; and the tragedies of Othello, Hamlet and Lear. The influence is most tractable in his discussion of Shakespeare's tragedies, which he approaches as tragedies of interpretation. **Zoltán Márkus'** paper on translation studies is put to this philosophical section because his analysis of the various misunderstandings and mistranslations of Walter Benjamin's "Task of the Translator" has a clear bent of language philosophy to it. The study discusses the difficulties of adhering to textual fidelity, and he shows how inconsistency distorts the intended meaning of the author. The difference between the German *Überleben* and *Fortleben* introduce a metaphysical layer not intended by Benjamin. **Péter Tamás'** reading of Paul Auster is clearly inspired by Kállay's reading of *King Lear* and Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* in the light of Kierkegaard's sickness unto death, as Tamás himself acknowledges the indebtedness. Tamás provides an original reading of Auster's *The Book of Illusions* by exploring how Kierkegaard's philosophy can be applied to the narrator, David Zimmer, and the actor, Hector Mann.

Enikő Bollobás' reminiscence about Géher's classes is of a personal nature. It vividly describes not only Géher's teaching style and personality, but also offers a glimpse into Hungarian higher education in the 1970s.

The three papers by Ágnes Beretzky, Géza Marácz and István D. Rác open horizons to broader issues related to topics that highlight Hungarian-specific issues. **Ágnes Beretzky's** essay sets its sight at post-World War I Hungary. She describes the involvement of Carlile Aylmer Macartney in promoting the ideas of the League of Nations and his work as a diplomat and a supporter of Hungarian minorities. **Géza Marácz** turns to the history of D. H. Lawrence's critical reception in Hungary. Marácz meticulously tracks the publication history of Lawrence's works, offering insight into the tastes and political considerations of the changing times between the 1940s and the 1990s. For the

reader's benefit, Marácz also offers a comprehensive appendix which includes the list of Hungarian translations and publications of Lawrence. **István D. Rácz's** text is devoted to the turbulent relationship of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes with a sharp focus on role-playing and translation. Hughes' methods of translating the poems are not abstractly discussed but rather as case studies. Rácz sets the poem "Ravensbrücki Passió" and its English translation side by side to illustrate the translating strategies employed by Hughes and his collaborator, Csokits János. Rácz's analysis goes even further by extending his research into Hughes' choice of punctuation marks, dashes and line breaks to shape the poems to his own artistic vision.

Although the conference was devoted to Géher's and Kállay's memory in equal measure, as the brief summaries above show, the English volume seems to contain an imbalance between the presence and influence of Kállay and Géher. This perceived imbalance in favor of Kállay is due to the fact that Kállay has a larger corpus in English. The Hungarian volume restores the balance as it is more emphatically Géherian. It is the Editors' hope that these volumes can serve as an indication of how rich and varied the intellectual heritage of István Géher and Géza Kállay is.

Gergő Dávid

OPENING REMARKS AT THE CONFERENCE ACTION *SUITED TO THE WORD*

—◀—
JÁNOS KENYERES

Dear Distinguished Guests, Dear Colleagues, Dear Students, Dear Friends,

This conference has been in the making for several years, born out of our shared desire to commemorate two esteemed colleagues: István Géher and Géza Kállay. From the outset, we felt that the time would only be right for such an event once the initial pain of their loss had eased and the grief could be offset, at least in part, by the joy of reflecting on their extraordinary intellectual contributions. Originally planned for 2020, the conference was postponed due to the pandemic. We then thought that this autumn would be the right time. However, the recent and unexpected passing of another beloved colleague, Tibor Frank – the founding father of the School of English and American Studies at ELTE – has returned us to a time of mourning. Please allow me to pause for a moment in memory of Tibor, who now joins István and Géza among our late greats...

I first met both István and Géza when I was a student in Pesti Barnabás utca. István was already a renowned professor – his lectures were so popular that the room could hardly contain the audience. Géza, on the other hand, was just beginning his career, having joined the teaching staff the previous year. I remember him vividly: he was very young, wore a light-coloured suit and taught general linguistics in the Hungarian Department. It was in his class that I first encountered the theories of Saussure and Chomsky. He impressed us with his vast knowledge, kindness and gentle manners. He was truly inspirational.

Later, Géza moved to the English Department and eventually the three of us became colleagues. When István was head of the Department of English Studies, he honoured me by inviting me to be his deputy. Although he was not particularly enthusiastic about administration, he carried out his duties with integrity, and I had the privilege of regularly meeting with him and experiencing the breadth of his intellect.

There were so many things that connected István and Géza: their profession, their passion for teaching, their love of the arts – both as literary historians and writers – and, of course, their family ties, with Kata being the first bond between them. I often imagined that Shakespeare himself could have

used their story as the basis for a play, combining elements of *Romeo and Juliet* and *King Lear*, but with a happy ending.

However, there is one thing I would like to highlight today: their authenticity in the truest sense of the word – the way they lived genuinely authentic lives. Most people draw a line between career and family, between work and personal life. This was not the case for Géza and István. For them, family and profession were deeply intertwined, forming a unified whole. Marika, Kata, and later the children and grandchildren were ever-present at conferences, lectures and other academic events, actively engaging in discussions.

As a student, I once witnessed Kata and István having a minor but passionate disagreement about a literary issue at a conference. In his gentle yet firm manner, István challenged Kata's interpretation and perhaps even reprimanded her for missing a point, but Kata stood her ground. It was wonderful to see such an intellectual exchange between father and daughter in a public forum. Decades later, I saw a similar scene: this time, it was Géza's daughter Eszter asking Géza a challenging question during a conference presentation. These moments were more than just endearing family anecdotes – they reflected a shared intellectual curiosity that transcended generations. In their world, rigorous thinking and heartfelt connection went hand in hand.

We were constantly learning from István and Géza. They embodied wisdom, serenity, respect, tact and profound humanity, as well as humour and self-irony. They were not only outstanding teachers but also living examples of how to lead an authentic and fulfilling life. Let us now celebrate the rich legacy they have left us.

I wish you all a fruitful conference.

OVERCOMING THEATRICALIZATION IN *RICHARD III*: “WHY SHOULD CALAMITY BE FULL OF WORDS?”

—◀▶—
SANFORD BUDICK

In his keenly perceptive literary-critical and philosophical essay on “The (New and Old) Metaphysical Reading of Shakespeare” Géza Kállay broached, among other key topics, the idea of an “existential, ontological ... separatedness.” From this separatedness, he wrote, a “scepticism grows [that] is not just disbelieving or not believing in this or that but an overall, overarching scepticism [that] we cast upon the whole world and everybody.”¹ I would here like to describe, also in both literary-critical and philosophical terms, a way in which Shakespeare profoundly registers this separatedness and attempts to overcome it – finally achieving a free and authentic self that can then be in a non-sceptical relation to other such selves.

I

In Shakespeare’s view it is through aesthetic experience of a certain kind that we can attain to the freedom and authenticity of a self. Paradoxically, to achieve this aesthetic experience, Shakespeare most especially shapes and directs the aesthetic experience of theatre against the mind’s, the imagination’s, habitual inauthenticities of theatricalization. By theatricalization I mean the oscillations between role-playing and a would-be non-role-playing that is itself never free from fictive role-playing. As a result, our imaginations, our lives, may perpetually linger in a condition of posing as something that misses who we most deeply, most freely are. Shakespeare again and again turns to the realm of politics for the extreme cases of such theatricalization.

To be sure, it is by no means self-evident that it is possible to discover a free and authentic self or even how to conceive of a self that would not be role-playing. Nor is it all obvious what might supply an antidote to the inauthenticity of the theatricalizing self. As I have begun to suggest, Shakespeare faces these challenges by employing the imagination’s resources of theatricalization in order to suspend theatricalization. This he achieves in an effectively endless mirroring and reverse doubling of theatricalization. We will see that these repeated mirrorings or reverse doublings – which pointedly constitute the figure of chiasmus, of AB / BA

¹ Géza Kállay: The (New and Old) Metaphysical Reading of Shakespeare, in Craig Bourne – Emily Caddick Bourne (eds.): *The Routledge Companion to Shakespeare and Philosophy*, London – New York, Routledge, 2019, 92.

– totally suspend the role-playing of theatricalization, of theatre and its fictionality. This special kind of aesthetic impact begins to make possible the disclosure of the playwright's and the spectator's free selves, even in a relation between those selves.

II

In Shakespeare's *oeuvre* as a whole the template pronouncement of this goal of overcoming theatricalization is articulated by Hamlet. Hamlet's pursuit of revenge "with wings as swift / As meditation" (1.5.29–30) is secondary to something far more important – far more important, at least, to him.² This is the disclosure to himself, exactly in meditation, of the inward self that he has claimed from the beginning. – "that within which passes show" (1.2.85). We recall that when Hamlet's mother asks him to "cast his nighted colour off" together with what "seems" to be his continued mourning, he responds sharply, bitterly, saying, "'Seems', madam, nay it is, I know not 'seems'." "A man might play" at such shows of "grief." "But I have that within which passes show" (1.2.68–85). This affirmation of the self, against theatricalization, against meaningless "show," will turn out to be aimed not only against false mourning but against the corrupt language, the corrupt representation of reality, in the court politics that surrounds him in the mendacious role-playing of Polonius and Claudius and even of his erstwhile friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

With the professional purveyors of theatricalization, the newly-arrived players, Hamlet mercilessly pursues his attack on the falsity of role-playing. With sustained anger, virtual rage, he shouts out that his preoccupation with reforming the activity of playing comes from the depth of his being: "O, it offends me to the soul"; "O, there be players"; "O, reform it altogether" (3.2.8, 27, 36). Hamlet's most significant confrontation with the emptiness of theatricalization – serving virtually as the mould for all his other employments of this figure – is his self-accusatory chiasmic question concerning the player's capacity to feel and to express emotion. After asking about that emotion whether it is all for a meaningless affect, "all for nothing," he asks further in the reverse doubling or mirroring of chiasmus – that is, in the configuration AB / BA – "What's [A] Hecuba to [B] him, or [B] he to [A] her, / That he should weep for her?" (2.2.492–494). Lisa Freinkel has noted that the impact of chiasmus stems from the fact that its elements necessarily form an effectively infinite progression because "Repetition becomes inversion and inversion takes us back to where we started." As a result, she says, chiasmus initiates "an exchange that seems to have no beginning and no end." Freinkel adds that chiasmus "precludes a present... The now itself ... is lost," leaving, she says,

² My citations from *Hamlet* are from the text edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, London, Bloomsbury, 2014.

an “odd temporality.”³ In *Hamlet*, however, this observation about a lost *now* is only true for the precluded present and the lost now of chronological temporality. Indeed, for Hamlet a different kind of now is at the heart of all his experience, so that he even monumentalizes it within his most oracular chiasmus:

If it [A] be now, 'tis [B] not to come.

If it be [B] not to come, it will [A] be now. (5.2.198–199)

These clauses are tightly driven by the effects of chiasmus that produce an atemporal space of the *now*. Here the “now” emerges from within the thematizations of the chronological now, not, however, from the thematizations per se but from the aesthetic formalism in which the thematizations are embedded. The effect of this formalism needs to be explained.

III

Shakespeare's procedures in overcoming theatricalization through his employment of chiasmus are illuminated by close parallels in the meditative line of phenomenology that begins with Edmund Husserl. Husserl shows that only through “the disconnection of all belief-positings” can we overcome the inauthenticity of living “naively in perceiving and experiencing... acts of positing in which unities appear” that *seem to be* “actual.” We can achieve this disconnection in what Husserl calls the “*epoché*.” In the *epoché* we “parenthesise” or “bracket” the falsifications of belief-positings. “Instead of living in them, instead of effecting them, we effect acts of reflection directed to them... We are now living completely in such acts of the second degree.”⁴ In Hegel's term for such experience, we are now living in a space of *negativity*. By “performing the *epoché*,” Husserl observes, each person “lays bare the transcendental onlooker in himself, he passes into him. This onlooker, however, does not first come to be by the *epoché*, but is only freed of the shrouding cover of human being.”⁵ What is more, the *epoché* of bracketing produces an atemporal *now*, the “*Jetztzeit*” that Walter Benjamin found in Husserl and celebrated in his own “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”⁶ In Husserl's own Benjamin-like language, when

³ Lisa Freinkel: *Reading Shakespeare's Will: The Theology of Figure from Augustine to the Sonnets*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2002, 22–23.

⁴ Edmund Husserl: *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1998, § 50, 114.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ On Benjamin's relation to Husserl, see Uwe Steiner: *Phänomenologie der Moderne: Benjamin und Husserl*, *Benjamin-Studien* 1 (2008), 107–125, as well as comments by Peter Fenves throughout *The Messianic Reduction: Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time*, Stanford,

we “blast open captivation-in-an-acceptedness” we produce this unique atemporality within the present moment, a free *now*.⁷ Although, to my knowledge, Husserl did not comment directly on the figure of chiasmus, an extensive exploration of the “chiasm” is famously prominent in Merleau-Ponty’s unfolding of Husserl’s concept of the “*ineinander*” or “intertwining.”⁸

My aim in applying to Husserl’s ideas is not to find the ways in which Shakespeare’s practice matches Husserl’s theories. Husserl, in my view, amalgamated a coherent schema from meditative concepts and practices that were already available, in their elements, to Shakespeare. Indeed, the concrete efficacy of Shakespeare’s effectively endless repetitions is already that it produces exactly such a bracketing and its space of negativity, together with the *now* and the condition of the onlooker. Although, interestingly enough, Husserl did not himself reach an account of the way the bracketing of the *epoché* can actually, in practice, be achieved, a powerful philosophical explanation of exactly this thing is not far to seek. As Husserl surely realized but did not acknowledge, Kant supplied just such a means for producing something closely equivalent to the *epoché* – and to Shakespeare’s experience of negativity within chiasmus. Kant did so in his writings on the sublime (specifically in what he calls the “mathematically sublime”), where his serviceability with regard to Shakespeare is not surprising since he elsewhere identified Shakespeare (along with Milton) as one of the two greatest modern geniuses.⁹ For Kant an experience of the sublime and of the space of the negative are intertwined. In the “Analytic of the Sublime” of the third Critique, Kant described an experience of “a momentary check” (“einer augenblicklichen Hemmung”) to consciousness that runs

Stanford University Press, 2011, and by Sami Khatib: *A Non-Nullified Nothingness: Walter Benjamin and the Messianic*, *Stasis* 1 (2013), 82–108.

⁷ Edmund Husserl: *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, § 50, 114.

⁸ See Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel: Chiasm in Merleau-Ponty: Metaphor or Concept?, in Boris Wiseman – Anthony Paul (eds.): *Chiasmus and Culture*, New York, Berghahn, 2014, 91–115, especially 93. See also Jean-François Mattéi: The Heideggerian Chiasmus, in Dominique Janicaud – Jean-François Mattéi (eds.): *Heidegger: From Metaphysics to Thought*, trans. Michael Gendre, Albany, SUNY Press, 1995, 39–150; Maurice Merleau-Ponty: The Intertwining – The Chiasm, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968; Robin M. Muller: The Logic of the Chiasm in Merleau-Ponty’s Early Philosophy, *Ergo* 4.7 (2017), 181–227; and Joel Smith: Merleau-Ponty and the Phenomenological Reduction, *Inquiry* 48.6 (2005), 553–557, which traces Merleau-Ponty’s acceptance of the importance of the Husserlian *epoché*. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty explicates the workings of the chiasm, saying that what is invisible to consciousness is “what in it prepares the vision of the rest... is what makes it see, is its tie to Being” (248, 296). Gasché surveys thinking about chiasmus in poststructuralism, especially in Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida; Rodolphe Gasché: *Reading Chiasmus*, in Andrzej Warminski: *Readings in Interpretation: Hölderlin, Hegel, Heidegger*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, ix–xxvi.

⁹ Cited from Kant’s manuscripts by Otto Schlapp: *Kants Lehre vom Genie, und die Entstehung der Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901, 392.

parallel to his account of a transcendental deduction in the first Critique.¹⁰ It, too, amounts to a transcendental deduction in that, after the “check” in the experience of the sublime, the mind recovers an “immediately following and all the more powerful” consciousness of its independent powers, particularly of its freedom (5: 245, 313, 318). Kant explains that the suspension of consciousness of the external world in the sublime is occasioned by a particular kind of aesthetic encounter, namely of trying and failing to grasp the totality of an effectively endless progression of items in a given field of consciousness (5: 250). Encounters of this kind, he argues, are most familiar in experiences of natural phenomena but he makes clear that they are also to be found in experiences of works of art. In other words, in such aesthetic encounters the mind’s chosen act of momentarily bracketing consciousness of the world is enabled by the momentary “check” to consciousness in the sublime. In the momentary condition that is produced in this way the mind experiences a suspension of the world’s spatio-temporality, in effect a *negativity* in which the residual self reposes in total freedom in its own special temporality – having removed, Kant says, “the time condition” (5: 258–259).

IV

Seen with the help of Husserl’s and Kant’s terms for understanding experience of the *epoché* and the sublime, we can more easily grasp the vast importance of an effectively endless series of chiasmi, each of which generates its own impact of endless repetition.

Hamlet’s, Shakespeare’s, management of chiasmus subsumes and builds upon the mind’s initial condition of narcissism (some would say, a primary narcissism) – in Shakespeare’s terms, the narcissism of role-playing and gazing at ourselves from another turn of role-playing; in other words, in theatricalization. Shakespeare’s mirrorings and doublings in chiasmus, and the kind of consciousness that they achieve, have little or nothing in common with Lacan’s account of an infantile mirror stage or even his later revised accounts of mirror perception. For Shakespeare, when we visualize and conceive the chiasmic mirroring, the reverse doubling, of our own narcissistic role-playings – our own theatricalization – two things occur simultaneously: (1) the suspension of the narcissistic self by dint of the sublime experience of the endless repetitions that are set in motion within the mirroring that is chiasmus; (2) the birth of awareness, by the mirror observer, of the endless plurality of other minds or imaginations in their interactions of theatricalization and even

¹⁰ Quotations from the third Critique in German are from volume five of *Kants Werke: Akademie Textausgabe*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1968. Translations of Kant’s German into English are from *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith, Oxford, Clarendon, 1973. Page numbers of volume five of the *Akademie* edition are given in parentheses within my text.

their possibility of overcoming theatricalization – as does the mirror observer. I propose that for Shakespeare a substantive experience and idea of humanity come into being precisely here. Thus for Hamlet the deeper “purpose of playing” – not for himself but for humanity – is indeed “first and now... to hold... the mirror up to Nature” (3.2.20–22). For Shakespeare, even such seemingly innocent statements as that spoken by cynical Jacques in *As You Like It*, “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players” (2.7.139–140) is not a neutral observation.¹¹ Within the unfoldings of language in that play, this statement, too, hints at the duplicities of the theatricalizing self that, in Shakespeare’s view, are rampant in human behavior. For Shakespeare, chiasmic mirroring is not merely a rhetorical invention. Rather it represents for him – it discloses – the inherent capacity of the human imagination to overcome its role-playing or narcissistic theatricalization, to achieve an onlooking in freedom of the self, and then to participate in an interactive experience of humanity. I believe that the purpose of this chiasmic mirroring – of the *chiasm* in this particular sense – can be extrapolated to a general theory of aesthetic experience, but that is a subject for another occasion. Neither will I detour from these remarks to any contemporary political events or persons, though in broaching political topics it is probably impossible for each of us not to summon up, in our own minds, what we may feel are current corresponding phenomena.¹² I turn now to *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*.¹³

¹¹ *As You Like It* is cited from the text edited by Michael Hattaway, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

¹² During the years of the first Trump administration, Stephen Greenblatt published a study, centered in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, which he entitled *Tyrant: Shakespeare on Politics* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2018). Without once mentioning Trump’s name – possibly so that Trump could have no hold on him in a libel suit – it is unmistakable that the entire book is written to expose what Greenblatt considers to be the tyranny of Trump’s presidency. The remainder of my remarks here is in fact focused on Shakespeare’s *Richard III* – not, however, to confirm or dispute Greenblatt’s Trump–Richard III equation. Rather, I suggest that Shakespeare’s principal goal in this play, as in his representation of blood-soaked politics in many other plays of his, is to achieve a freedom of the self by using the theatricality of theatre to confront and to overcome the inauthenticity of the self’s theatricalization.

In fact, my view of Shakespeare’s language of negativity in *Hamlet* is complementary to, but revises, Greenblatt’s observation that in “Hamlet Shakespeare made a discovery by means of which he relaunched his entire career. The crucial break through . . . had to do . . . with an intense representation of inwardness by a new technique of radical excision,” by which Greenblatt means “occluding the rationale, motivation, or ethical principle that accounted for the action to be unfolded.” Greenblatt adds that side by side with this “excision” and “suspension” Shakespeare creates a “strange interim.” See Stephen Greenblatt: The Death of Hamnet and the Making of Hamlet, *New York Review of Books* 21 October 2004. In slightly different forms these comments were incorporated into Greenblatt’s *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York, Random House, 2012). The phrase “strange interim” echoes language in *Julius Caesar*.

¹³ *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third* is cited from the text edited by Stephen Greenblatt in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al., New York, Norton, 1997.

V

Beginning with Richard's first word, the word which opens the play – "Now" – he serves as Shakespeare's archetype of theatricalization and of everything that Shakespeare works to metamorphose from that theatricalization. Speaking here "*solus*," Richard's absolute narcissism plays to himself alone, seeks only to ingratiate himself to himself, to *creep*, as he will later say, "in favour with myself" (1.2.245).

RICHARD

Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this son of York,
And all the clouds that loured upon our house
In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.

...

.....since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determinèd to prove a villain
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.
Plots have I laid, *inductions dangerous* ...

(1.1.1–4 and 1.1.28–32; italics added)

Richard's theatricalization even empties soliloquy of its quondam authenticity. Yet from the first moment that Richard speaks, Shakespeare is extracting an anti-world that overcomes all theatricalization. This anti-world is made available to the onlooker playwright and the onlooker spectator. Thus in this play an overwhelming circularity controls the valences of representation. The playwright's onlooker point of view, which he has already acquired by conceiving the effectively endless series of repetitions that he now proceeds to record, transmutes the entire series of representations of horror – all of its "inductions dangerous" – into a gallery of pictures whose affective import is completely taken over by the aesthetic impact of the sublime. Here the images of horror are by the onlooker playwright finally rendered no more life-threatening than the fearful overhanging boulders of a mountain in Kant's famous exemplification of the experience of the sublime. In other words, while Richard sets this series in motion for *his* dark purposes, the onlooker playwright and the onlooker spectator press the same series, in a different order of representation, into a very different service. Although *Richard III* (1592–1593) was composed seven, perhaps nine, years before *Hamlet* (1599–1601), the aesthetics of chiasmus and mirroring that Hamlet articulates within his play is already evident in the earlier play. In *Richard III*, however, no consciousness of this aesthetics or its impact is evinced by any of the protagonists – who remain mere elements

within the chiasmi. And in *Richard III*, as in *Hamlet*, that impact is finally experienced only by the playwright and the spectator or reader.

I will now particularly instance one chiasmus of *Richard III* that has been ably mapped by William Davis, though Davis does not explain the sources or dynamics of its aesthetic impact. This chiasmus is one of Queen Margaret's curses, addressed to Queen Elizabeth, in the first act. I reproduce Davis's mapping of the chiasmus in all its detail of reversed doublings:

A: Thyself a *queen*, for me that was a *queen*,

B: *Outlive thy glory like my wretched self.*

C: *Long mayst thou live to wait thy children's death,*

D: *And see another, as I see thee now,*

D: *Deck'd in thy rights as thou art stall'd in mine!*

C: *Long die thy happy days before thy death,*

B: And after *many length'ned hours* of grief,

A: *Die neither mother, wife, nor England's queen!*

(1.3.199–206; emphasis added)¹⁴

As impressive as this gigantic chiasmus is, its aesthetic impact is completely lost on the speaker herself, since she is totally immersed in the desire for revenge and the fever of cursing. Only the onlooker playwright and spectator can take in the aesthetic object that is here created, only they can benefit from its impact and use it to experience a free self.

Just so, an unembarrassed theatricalization is highlighted in Buckingham's announcement, "Tut, I can counterfeit the deep tragedian" (3.5.5). Within Shakespeare's design, this "counterfeit" role-playing plunges Buckingham into a life of duplicities; it empties his life of meaning just as it furthers the emptying of values of English politics. In his own words at the moment of being led to be beheaded, that politics is a mere oscillation of wrongs for which all are reciprocally to blame: "Wrong hath but wrong, and blame the due of blame" (5.1.28–29).

Most shockingly perhaps, this endless series of enacted hypocrisies, lies, and lethal aggressions, includes the women commentators on Richard's horrors. Their suffering is no less the outcome of degraded role-playing than that of the men who form the play's parade of self-interest. The women in this play are motivated, that is, by vain self-aggrandizement hardly less than by the instinct of self-preservation, whether for themselves or their families. These women come to see that the roles that they and their families have been so

¹⁴ Cited from William L. Davis: Better a Witty Fool than a Foolish Wit: The Art of Shakespeare's Chiasmus, *Text and Performance Quarterly* 23 (2003), 322.

ambitious to play have been rife with deadly duplicities. Queen Margaret rails principally at the other women, opening with this chiasmus that governs everything she has to say:

Hear me, [A] you wrangling pirates, [B] that fall out
[B] In sharing [A]that which you have pill'd from me! (1.3.158–159)

Later she even shows acute awareness of the theatrical frame of the women's collective catastrophe, yet she cannot step back to see the theatre and mirroring in which she is a player:

Thy Edward he is dead, that killed my Edward,
Thy other Edward dead, to quit my Edward; ...
And the *beholders of this frantic play*,
Th' adulterate Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan, Grey,
Untimely smothered in their dusky graves. (4.4.63–70; italics added)

As if to point to the endless repetition of chiastic patterning in the entirety of *Richard III*, the climactic scene of dreams, in Act V, rings out hammer blows of chiastic inevitability. One by one the ghosts of Richard's victims appear to him and, alternately and antithetically, to the Richmond who will kill Richard, again and again repeating variations of the chiastic mirroring that places their antithetical fates in the mirroring that *we* – the spectators – see, *we* experience:

to Richard, "[A] Despair and [B] die";
to Richmond, "[B] Live and [A] flourish!" (5.5.80–92; etc.)

Thus this play's repetition series of chiastic rebound pursues the reader as what may seem to be merely a nightmare. Without doubt, the play relentlessly represents this nightmare world of political theatricalization. But, rightly understood, within Shakespeare's aesthetic design the impact of this gigantic repetition series offers the spectator or reader a vast blessing. This is the blessing of – at least momentarily – finding a self that is free from any role-playing.

VI

To sum up and conclude: The whole of the aesthetic impact of the play, *Richard III*, is already recorded in its first word, "Now." Totally different from, even antithetical to, Richard's speaking of this "Now," this is the inward *now* that the playwright has already experienced in completing the play and that he now proceeds to make available to the spectator or reader. This *now* is generated

in the experience of the sublime that is produced by the endless series of chiasmic representations which Richard's "inductions dangerous" have set in motion. This *now* is the same as the Husserlian *Jetztzeit* opened up by the *epoché*, the same as Kant's "removal of the time condition" in the "check" of the sublime, and the same as Hamlet's "it will be now." This is the *now* to which the spectator will attain by the end, when she or he exits the experience of theatre itself. Momentarily at least, the spectator who experiences the sublime of this *now* has gained access to a self that is free of role-playing. Equipped with this kind and this measure of authenticity, such a free self, as Shakespeare suggests, may emerge, most of all, from systematic confrontation with duplicitous theatricalizations – including those deployed by one's own self. Such a self, I suggest, can at least momentarily overcome the scepticism of separatedness – and turn in acknowledgement to the self of the playwright who underwent the very same transmutation of consciousness.

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ADAPTATION, THEORY AND PRACTICE – GÉZA KÁLLAY AND LEAR’S HALO

—◀◊▶—
ANNAMÁRIA FÁBIÁN

Géza Kállay’s legacy is difficult to label, his works are not easy to characterise, to put on the shelf of either literary theory, philosophy, linguistics, or fiction. He was perhaps most evidently a professor of literature and an expert of Shakespeare, but just as much was he a language philosopher, perplexed and enraptured by the working magic of language, and what humans can do with language that can create literature, and how the mechanisms of its rules, its words (and sometimes the lack of them) take over, and involve the reader on an ontological level. His fascination with what language can do, what literature can achieve as a transformative force led him to writing his own fiction and poetry, thematising the centre of his field of research on another level. In this paper, I’d like to demonstrate first how one of Kállay’s fictional stories in his book *Nem puszta kép* (“Not Mere Image”)¹ show off all the various aspects of his research and fields of expertise (namely, the teacher, the Shakespeare scholar, the language philosopher), then I’d like to show how his short-story sequence on Lear can be seen as the perfect piece to illustrate the various mechanisms of the all too abundant field of literary adaptations, unyielding to any definition. In the last section, I would like to share my experiences briefly on how and why Kállay’s *Lear* has turned out to be one of the most intriguing and well-received pieces in teaching adaptation theory in general, and adaptations of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* in particular.

KÁLLAY, LEAR AND ADAPTATION THEORY

Shakespeare was undoubtedly a central figure in Kállay’s universe, and *King Lear* in particular seems to have been in the centre of his attention. He worked with the text on several levels: it was of key importance in his lecture series at university, he wrote several articles on various aspects of *Lear* and included it in various projects experimenting with writing fiction. He wrote extensively on *Lear*, most prominently perhaps in his book *Not Mere Image*, the second part of which is entitled “King Lear and its Halo”, which is my ineffectual

¹ Kállay Géza: *Nem puszta kép*, Budapest, Liget, 2002.

attempt to translate the Hungarian title *A Lear király és holdudvara* – a translation lagging behind the Hungarian meaning, quite aptly demonstrating the impossibility of passing smoothly from one language to another. The Hungarian title contains a metaphorical compound referring to the blurred light seen around a full moon, including the word “moon” (*hold*), and “court” (*udvar*), so it would be something like the “court of the moon” or “moon-court” if we wanted to be anywhere near the complex meaning of the title. It would imply that the analyses presented here would be built around Lear, somewhat naturally, and to connoisseurs of the text it would perhaps evoke Lear’s royal *court* (and in it the love test), as the word *holdudvar* has the metaphorical connotation of a man in power and those loyally following him. This is made possible by the Hungarian possessive structure allowing for both “his” and “its” as possessor because only “holdudvar” (Halo) is marked.

The word “halo” might suggest that the Shakespearean play would be seen not only by itself but through/by the light of related texts, lines of thoughts and concepts. The chapter is divided into 3 parts, the second’s title in English is “*Tell Me: Which of you Doth Love Me the Most?: King Lear, St Augustine, Wittgenstein and nothingness*;² it is a language philosophical analysis of the love-test scene inspected through the two philosophers’ major works, *Confessions* and *Philosophical Investigations*, respectively. The third is a comparative analysis involving the 19th-century Hungarian poet Vörösmarty’s later poetry and his translation of *King Lear*, focusing on “The Language of the Visions of Destruction.”³ These already unveil the method of Kállay’s reading and writing process: he constantly draws the Shakespearean work – the language and the characters – into the context of other mindfields, providing a plethora of new approaches to the possible analyses of the text by the philosophical and poetic “halo” attached to it, as all his fields of interest – language, philosophy, and poetry – are summoned to give a new and insightful interpretation to *King Lear*.

The opening of the Halo-chapter seems to be even more intriguing from this aspect, though. It is bringing in one more asset of Kállay’s analysing technique, creating fiction by adapting, by rewriting the Shakespearean play, presenting a fictitious world of *what if...* on the margins of the play’s opening scene. Much of Kállay’s literary work (for example, his short stories in the volume *Melyik Erasmus kávéházban?* (“In Which Erasmus Café”)⁴ toy with the idea of Shakespeare’s stories rewritten, intertwined with the hero’s research – and his quest in life to be able to define the meaning of friendship, love, language and literature, and the blurred lines of reality and fiction.

² „Mondjuk hát, melyiktek szeret leginkább”: Lear király, Szent Ágoston, Wittgenstein és a semmi, in: Kállay Géza: *Nem pusztá kép*, 202–223.

³ A pusztulás vízióinak nyelve Vörösmarty kései verseiben és Lear-fordításában, uo., 224–246.

⁴ *Melyik Erasmus kávéházban? Novellák*, Budapest, Liget Műhely Alapítvány, 2007.

This first, opening piece in *King Lear's Halo* is entitled *Jobbítsd szavaidat* ["Mend your speech"] – *Shakespeare: Lear király*,⁵ and it is not a research paper, or a careful, analytical approach offering new readings through the involvement of various great minds' works filtering it through various philosophies. It is a series of 4 short stories, or rather: tales, which all endeavour to write around the love-test scene. The four tales explore four options Cordelia could have said or done in the love-test bringing about the crisis of the play, and it also experiments with the idea of what events would have followed these various reactions. Here Kállay uses all his signature creative research techniques, adding the creation of fiction to literary theory and philosophy, moulding it into an adaptation of Shakespeare.

Adaptation as a genre and a literary entity is manifold, and there are various attempts to define what is or isn't *adaptation*, what the difference is between appropriation and adaptation, rewriting or reinterpreting. Fischlin and Fortier,⁶ for lack of a better concept, fell back on using *adaptation* as an umbrella term to include every possible genre and mode of recomposition or reimagining or reuse, transcription, translation or transformation, precisely because these labels and definitions all seem to be defied by one or the other mode of dealing with an origin-text⁷ and a new form of existence for it (whether in literature, film, fine arts or other media). In her seminal book *Adaptation and Appropriation* from 2006, Julie Sanders admits that "the vocabulary of adaptation is highly labile",⁸ but then, perhaps in the wonted scholarly urge to *define* what we deal with, and to fortify the quite rickety terminology adaptation theory has ever had to face, she introduces the titular terms *adaptation* and *appropriation*. Adaptation, thus, "most often signals a relationship with an informing source text either through its title or through more embedded references",⁹ whereas appropriation "effects a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain, often through the actions of interpolation and critique as much as through the movement from one genre to others".¹⁰ Thus, the highly influential and relatively usable distinction is created, which, however, to my experience, has changed from Sanders's liberal and fluid defining attempt¹¹ into something quite rigid through the

⁵ 'Jobbítsd szavaidat': Shakespeare: Lear király, in Kállay: *Nem pusztá kép*, 181–201.

⁶ Daniel Fischlin – Mark Fortier: *Adaptations of Shakespeare*, London – New York, Routledge, 2000.

⁷ Instead of *original* or *source text* I prefer to use *origin-text*, as it draws the question of originality into play, and precisely by differing, it consciously rejects it as an idea, maintaining the fluidity of textual origins in general.

⁸ Julie Sanders: *Adaptation and Appropriation*, London – New York, Routledge, 2006, 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ "Adaptation and appropriation now provide their own intertexts such that they often perform in cultural dialogue with one another, so perhaps it will increasingly serve us better to think in terms of complex filtration, and in terms of networks, webs and signifying fields, rather than simplistic one-way lines of movement from source to adaptation." *Ibid.*, 33.

decades, and any definition remains just as labile as before and not the least all-encompassing. The same instability of terminology still applies in the more recent collection of *Studying Adaptations of Shakespeare*¹² by Pamela Bickley and Jenny Stevens, who claim that “the prefixes [of terms] are telling, ‘re’ implies a revisionist activity, [...] ‘trans’ suggests crossing over [...] into a different medium, [...] adaptation brings its own connotations of Darwinian survival; appropriation suggests a possessive act”¹³ of taking over; not finding a neutral term, they, too, fall back on using the least loaded, most neutral of these, *adaptation*. So does Sujata Iyengar, who, in her book *Shakespeare and Adaptation Theory*,¹⁴ approaches adaptation theory and Shakespeare through an extensive network of metaphors, analysing the modes of adaptation that have been used over the years. Her attempt aims at taming the term *adaptation* into a more controllable entity, to be able to manoeuvre the Shakespeare-inspired multitude of creations from translation to meme. She highlights the potential of seeing adaptation as derivative or rhizomatic, as intermedial or appropriative, as accommodating or transformative. To provide this tip-of-the-iceberg overview on the complex struggle over how *adaptations* might (not) be defined was necessary here in order to demonstrate how even one text as subtle and undefinable as Kállay’s take on Lear can destabilize any definitive attempt, for there seems to be neither a label nor a set of criteria in use within the framework of adaptation theory to pin down what is happening in Kállay’s *Mend your speech...* tales. It appears that all the various and sometimes contradictory labels and terms used in adaptation theory could be aptly referring to the series of stories he carefully places as the opening of his complex essays on *Lear*.

On the one hand, uniquely in Kállay’s oeuvre, these stories function as a proemium to the two upcoming analyses looking out on Wittgenstein, St Augustine and later Vörösmarty. On the other hand, the set of tales have their own short proemium introducing the fictional but all too familiar author and *Mend your Speech...* can be read and analysed independently of the more serious, more in-depth analyses following it, as a separate literary piece of work, a literary adaptation of Shakespeare.¹⁵ As such, the tales do not tolerate any yoke of labels or definitions within adaptation theory: they are linear (thus derivative), but also circular, re-enacting the love-test of the play again and again (thus recomposing and reinventing, recontextualising the origin-play), with prequel-sequel like sections intertwining with it hypothesizing about

¹² Pamela Bickley – Jenny Stevens: *Studying Shakespeare Adaptation: From Restoration Theatre to YouTube*. London – New York, Arden, 2020.

¹³ Ibid., 1.

¹⁴ Sujata Iyengar: *Shakespeare and Adaptation Theory*, London – New York, Arden, 2023.

¹⁵ This is why it could be the opening piece in the collection of his short stories in Kállay: *Melyik Erasmus kávéházban*, 5.

what could have happened differently, what could have motivated these events in the past of the royal family, and what consequences might come altering everything we ever imagined about *King Lear* (thus being accommodating and appropriate at the same time). The tales also radically change the medium from drama to prose fiction, the narrator's voice and conclusions usher the reader towards a more guided interpretation, not to mention that it also translates the language of whatever remains from the Shakespearean text into another language (thus being intermedial and transformative: transferring, transforming the play into a new shape).

What makes things even more complicated – and more intriguing – here, is that Kállay did not constrain the process of adaptation to the origin-text of Shakespeare's *Lear* only. He ventured to combine his *Lear* with philosophy in a more sophisticated way. The structure is familiar: a proemium introducing a young scholar and telling the reader how a certain story could not let him go, how a story devoured him as he turned older, how it became "more important for him than anything else"; then we read four versions to an iconic, almost archetypal love test. Kállay is not only adapting and rewriting *King Lear* here, but also wields the work of another beloved thinker and a key piece of Kállay's later investigations, Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. *Fear and Trembling* is brought forth not only by the careful imitation of structure – the proemium followed by the four variations on a theme, for Kierkegaard, Abraham's love of God tested in his sacrifice of his son Isaac, for Kállay, King Lear's love test for his daughters – but Kierkegaard's text is consciously evoked by the tone and verbal echoes applied in Kállay's as well. Thus, the opening of *King Lear and its Halo*, albeit yet shrouded from imminent view and subtly done, bears the first traces of a more in-depth contextual analysis with Kierkegaard's philosophy, fully formed in a later piece in the 2013 volume *És most: beszélj! ...* ("And now, speak..."),¹⁶ in the essay entitled "Vén ember, mit cselekszel?" – a „halálos betegség” szorongató öröme: Scrooge, Lear és Kierkegaard ("What Wilt Thou Do, Old Man?" – the anxious joy of "sickness unto death": Scrooge, Lear and Kierkegaard),¹⁷ where Kállay's research overtly connects Kierkegaard (and Dickens) with Lear, as he tries "to read *King Lear* and *A Christmas Carol* from the perspective of Søren Kierkegaard's [*The*] *Sickness Unto Death*"¹⁸ – viewing the play in the framework of multiple intertextuality, like he did with Wittgenstein, St Augustine and Vörösmarty earlier.

¹⁶ Kállay Géza: *És most: beszélj! Nyelvfilozófia, dráma, elbeszélés*, Budapest, Liget, 2013.

¹⁷ "Vén ember, mit cselekszel?" – a „halálos betegség” szorongató öröme: Scrooge, Lear és Kierkegaard, in Kállay: *És most...*, 184–207.

¹⁸ See also in English: Kállay Géza: "What Wilt Thou Do, Old Man?" — Being Sick Unto Death: Scrooge, King Lear, and Kierkegaard, in *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 9(2), 2011, 267–283, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pan.2011.0026>

THE THEORY APPLIED: KÁLLAY'S POTENTIAL
IN TEACHING ADAPTATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE'S *LEAR*

I have been teaching drama adaptations of Shakespeare for several years at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, and under whatever title¹⁹ the course was held, Kállay's *Mend your speech...* was part of the course curriculum. The text had to be translated into English for the sake of international students, but even so, every year I find it is one of the best liked texts we read during the seminar, especially when we narrow the choice down to adaptations of Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

Depending on the focus of the class, the *Lears* we look at vary, usually Nahum Tate's *King Lear* is included; one candidate to follow is a prequel by Gordon Bottomley (*King Lear's Wife*), then Edward Bond's *Lear* may be added; I usually want to include Howard Barker's *Seven Lears*, and we tend to conclude our *Lears* with a feminist prequel, *Lear's Daughters* by Elaine Feinstein and the Women's Theatre Group. Kállay's text has the potential to conclude not only the weeks spent on *Lear*-adaptations but the whole course as well, therefore I usually time Kállay's text as the last adaptation of the semester. This decision is not only based on logic and chronology (it is the most recent *Lear*-adaptation we look at), but also on a conscious choice of ending the course on a *positive note* concerning the character of *Lear*: *Lear*-adaptations, and especially prequels seem to be unanimously presenting a rather negative image of Shakespeare's *Lear* – and Kállay's text breaks this "habit" quite effectively, maintaining the versatile humanity of his main character.

It is quite intriguing to see how Shakespeare's tragic hero *Lear* is transformed into more or less one-sided and usually negative character(s) in these plays. As for Tate, his *Lear* is reduced into a choleric type character, so much so that Cordelia literally pronounces this in Act I, when – aside, for the audience to surely comprehend her situation – she comments on the events of the love-test scene: "Now comes my trial. How am I distressed, / That I must with cold speech tempt the *choleric king* / Rather to leave me dowerless, than condemn me / To loathed embraces!"²⁰ Gordon Bottomley's 1921 *King Lear's Wife* por-

¹⁹ Usually there are three aspects, thus there are three different courses. 1) *Side Characters in Focal Position*: this course focuses on the changing point of view in rewritings of Shakespeare, in the case of *Lear*, it is the missing queen, the Fool and the daughters that are usually highlighted in various adaptations, including Kállay's. 2) *Shakespeare Reloaded: Adaptation and Rewriting*: this focuses on the various modes Shakespeare can be looked at not only as a text but as a cultural entity, in this case the approach of philosophy is highlighted in Kállay's text. 3) *The Patient Text: Shakespeare Adaptations in Theory and Practice*: this course uses Kállay's text to present how it is defying the attempts to be defined by adaptation theory.

²⁰ Nahum Tate: *King Lear*, in Lynne Bradley (ed.): *Internet Shakespeare Editions*, University of Victoria, Act I, Scene 1, 125–130, https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/doc/Tate-Lr_M/scene/1.1/ (accessed 1 May 2024). Italics mine.

trays a king that is a selfish, petty cheater forcing the conception of a male heir, resulting in the death of his wife and in turn planting the seeds of hatred and revenge in Goneril's heart. Bond brings manic obsession culminating in desperate madness with his dictator Lear building a wall, with estranged and neglected daughters; he is an "anti-Lear"²¹ finding his identity in consciously differing Shakespeare's in any possible way, in a tragedy staging cruelty almost to an unbearable level. Howard Barker's 1990 *Lear* – with an ingenious structure and a fascinatingly subtle and sophisticated characterisation – is easy to interpret for students as an arbitrary, spoilt, arrogant pervert. This Lear feeds off from the lines of Shakespeare: "The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash"²² – and, mirroring the "seven ages of a man",²³ Lear in *Seven Lears* is driven by the sole consistency of being unpredictable, inconsistent, and "merely arbitrary" as he defines himself in Sixth Lear.²⁴ The most forthrightly negative image of Lear, however, is presented in *Lear's Daughters*, since Elaine Feinstein and the Women's Theatre Group go as far as to hint incest, sexual harassment, and domestic violence as the source of the daughters' hatred. In this play, Lear is not even granted his own bodily presence (he is impersonated by the Fool), and the stories about him unfold a character who is not only a selfish, petty cheater (similarly to Bottomley's) using and abusing the Queen (also impersonated by the Fool), but who is suggested to be a father exploiting and sexually abusing his own daughters as well.

This transformation by a negative curve is a somewhat logical and natural consequence of adaptations, and especially prequels in general, as they tend to look for hidden backstories and motivations behind the Shakespearean universe's intricate plots, equivocal utterances, arcane events and complex characters. As Lynne Bradley concludes, adaptations tend to approach Shakespeare with a typical *double gesture*, which "constitutes both a figurative collaboration with [...] as well as a deliberate rejection of the author, an assertion that original meaning is either irretrievably lost to us or no longer desirable. [...] it allows us to author and experience new works and new ideas that express [...] concerns without severing all ties to the cultural traditions that underlie our society."²⁵

²¹ Stratmann, Gerd: 'Edward Bond: Lear', in Priessnitz, Horst (Hrsg.): *Anglo-amerikanische Shakespeare-Bearbeitungen des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980, 353.

²² Shakespeare: *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes, London, Arden, 2002, Act I, Scene 1, 296.

²³ *Seven Lears* presents seven different stages of Lear's life, starting with the young boy, through the adolescent, the soldier, the young ruler, the inventor, etc., which, in my opinion, can quite conveniently be mirrored to the monologue of Jacques in *As You Like It*, Act II Scene 7, from line 139.

²⁴ Howard Barker: *Seven Lears*, in *Plays Five*, London, Oberon Books, 2010, 160.

²⁵ Lynne Bradley: *Adapting King Lear for the Stage*, Surrey, Ashgate, 2010, 7. Bradley's statement refers to 20th and 21st century adaptations, which she finds markedly different in approach to the origin-text. I, on the other hand, believe that *all* adaptive strategies and thus all adaptations share this double gesture.

Thus, the early modern, somewhat irrational but still deeply human tragic hero of Shakespeare, who is struggling to understand the meaning and value of love, who is losing balance between the public and private, the sane and insane, the comic and tragic – is transformed, recomposed, appropriated into a quite different character in all the adaptations that include him. All these readings can be decoded and transported from Shakespeare's text, precisely because the Shakespearean character is conveniently protean, and the tacit motivations, unsaid thoughts, implied characteristics, and the obscure past of the royal family can be converted into anything: a place of repressed trauma, a political-social experiment, or a place of family dysfunction. King Lear's character seems to be able to comply with or (in the case of prequels) "arrive" into the Shakespearean character in all these rewritings, but he almost inevitably becomes transformed from a complex tragic hero-king to a more one-dimensional, repulsive tyrant.

It seems that Kállay is more forgiving to his Lears, as he seeks to create protagonists that are more versatile, closer to the flawed yet still human, malleable hero of Shakespeare. He envisions four Lears, and his stories slip out of all sorts of theoretical definitions: by letting his readers peek into the hours just *before* the love-test scene, it provides some prequel-like takes on *King Lear*; on the other hand, it lets Shakespeare echo in the text with direct quotations and with well-recognizable parallel scenes, characters and patterns from the Shakespearean plot. However, these love-test scenes and their Lears, daughters, courtiers and Fools also hypothesize about the outcome of the changes made in the opening scene: mending their speech acts, Kállay experiments with sequel-like previews as well, proposing how intimate whispers, eloquent speeches, stubborn silence or impertinent argument from Cordelia would change everything, resulting in various takes on the private and public spheres of the royals' future.

Even more importantly, perhaps, Kállay's interest in humanising characters does not stop at Lear. His Goneril and Regan are not "pelican daughters" revenging their father, they are seen as ladies, loving sisters and worthy heirs. The missing mother, so problematic in Shakespeare's play, and of so much concern for all the adaptations, can also be seen in one story, but it seems Kállay is not as disturbed by this absence in Shakespeare, he is not as preoccupied by Lear's hypothetical curse on her ("I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb, / Sepulchring an adultress.")²⁶ as Bottomley, Feinstein or Barker. The focus is not shifted from the father and daughters. Kállay already hints in the Proemium that his narrator (who admittedly loves Lear just as much as he is terrified of him) is trying to establish the role of Lear, and in him most of all

²⁶ Shakespeare: *King Lear*, Act II, Scene 2, 320–321.

the father, who is terrified of realising that he does not love his daughters equally, and “who did all he could to hide from words behind words”.²⁷

The 4 stories are each concluded with a short passage, deducing the moral of each tale, just as it happens in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, who concludes his Abraham-experiments with short, intimate exempla, presenting the difficulties and practices of a mother weaning her baby. Unlike in *Fear and Trembling*, here it is not the mother and the child that are the main agents of this moral, but the father and the child, and how every past and present word and action of the father defines and forms the identities of the children, and how contentment and happiness of the father lie in that of his offspring.

At the end of each semester (somewhat driven by and also acknowledging *Lear's* impossibility of measuring the unmeasurable) I ask my students which of the texts they loved most – and almost without exception every time Kállay's *Mend your speech...* is the story most students go for. I often wonder why students pick Kállay's *Lear* adaptation as their favourite take on the Shakespearean story, and while I may not have a conclusive answer based on academic points to this, but I do have a hypothesis: unconsciously, in great literature – and *King Lear* is perhaps beyond that – students tend to look for the familiar, the relatable, the likeable. After reading Shakespeare's play, they cannot always find that in the *Lear*-story: the time, the problems, the language – it might all appear too distant to easily relate to. The adaptations we read together have the potential to offer various readings and interpretations much closer to their immediate experiences considering language, characters, and context, but in most cases, and especially with the prequels, these will be (and in a way, have to be) unsettling. It became a recurring concern of mine that it is quite difficult to establish a *separate* *Lear* character for all these rewritings of the Shakespearean story, so in a way it is inevitably the Shakespearean figure that is identified and seen as this distorted character emerging in the various adaptations. Reading the prequels relying on, feeding off but at the same time undermining and deconstructing the tragedy of Shakespeare, students are presented with a character that is becoming less and less heroic, less and less tragic, and after the feminist play, not the least relatable or lovable at all – until we read Kállay's text. Kállay's text has the potential to lead students to the recognition of their own relatedness to the play, and *Lear* and his daughters get the chance to be reborn yet again, as the stories provide new and intriguing readings and interpretations *without* taking away the complexity and humanity of the Shakespearean characters themselves.

Lear's Halo and in it, *Mend your speech...* seem to be the perfect illustrations of Kállay's versatility as a literary scholar, a language philosopher and an author of fiction. *Lear's Halo* can, therefore, be seen perhaps as the essence of

²⁷ „[M]indent megtett, hogy szavak előtt szavak mögé meneküljön”, Kállay: *Nem pusztá kép*, 182.

Kállay's method, revealing his quest for the genuine understanding of the human in *King Lear* and his awe and love for the versatility and timelessness of the Shakespearean tragedy. At the same time, it also seems to be one of the most intriguing pieces among *Lear*-adaptations both on a theoretical level, and when used in practice, teaching literary adaptations. Not only does the text challenge and thus illustrate the various modes of adaptation theory, but it also presents four (sets of) relatable Lears (and daughters) resisting the t(r)endency to degrade and narrow down Shakespearean characters so commonly seen in other adaptations.

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ACTION SUITED TO THE WORD, IN THE BEGINNING AND EVER AFTER

—◀—▶—
KINGA FÖLDVÁRY

Hamlet's advice to the Players, urging them to "suit the action to the word, the word to the action" (3.2.17–18),¹ points out how theatrical illusion can be born out of a harmony between words and their embodied representation in performance. At the same time, I believe the life and work of both István Géher and Géza Kállay, who inspired this collection, exemplified another way in which one's inner self can reflect a harmony between action and word, that is, the Word (λόγος), which the Gospel of John presents as the starting point of all: "In the beginning was the Word" (Jn 1:1). The way both of these scholars and educators talked not only about books, but also the book of books, the Bible, or the way they pointed out Biblical references in Shakespeare or elsewhere, displayed a readiness to bring together texts that were forced to be kept apart by history. To my eyes, this in itself manifested the devotion and attention that characterized their work, and that spoke volumes of how belief in and of the Word could add a further depth to what they could achieve with their words. With their scholarly readings of word and Word, literature and Scripture, they showed that not only is it possible to admit that one knows about the Bible, but one may even use this knowledge to better understand literature as a whole.

In what follows, I endeavor to illustrate how their work and respective dedication to the Word – both the literary and the sacred – have influenced my own interests, and are still guiding my hand in my own research. Therefore, moving slightly away from theology and literary close reading, I will look at a recent film adaptation of a Shakespearean tragedy that was clearly close to their hearts, as it is evident from their work. The film that I wish to discuss is a new *Macbeth* adaptation directed by Joel Coen, first screened at the New York Film Festival in the autumn of 2021, then released on Apple TV in January 2022.² When watching the film parallel to reading István Géher's and Géza Kállay's interpretations of *Macbeth*, one cannot help but notice certain connections between their approaches to the play and the way the film envisions it. Interestingly, *Macbeth* seems to have become *the* Shakespearean drama of

¹ William Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins, The Arden Shakespeare second series, Walton-on-Thames, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1997.

² *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, dir. Joel Coen, A24, IAC Films, 2021.

our age, judging from the number of recent theatre productions and film adaptations, both in Hungary and abroad. Furthermore, it was also *Macbeth* whose most recent translation into Hungarian was made by Géza Kállay, and the play inspired many of his latest essays in the volume *Mondhatunk-e többet? Nyelv, irodalom, filozófia* (“Can We Say More? Language, Literature, Philosophy”), published posthumously in 2018.³

I find it also intriguing that Coen called his film *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, since *Macbeth* was the play István Géher described as “the tragedy of tragedy.”⁴ This phrase is echoed by Géza Kállay in his argument: “*Macbeth*, from the temporal point of view, might be envisaged as the tragedy of the tragic plot itself, no longer being able to interpret, to give meaning to the events that happened before.”⁵ However, a reference to the Biblical and theatrical power of the word may be equally apt here, as István Géher claims that *Macbeth* is “set in metaphysical place and time,”⁶ a “nightmarish world of visions,” pure theatre, where the presence of props – the dinner table, the dagger – may be no more than “a mirage, nothingness made tangible by words, pure sensual illusion,” and later, in a concise statement: “The homogeneous medium of reality and unreality: the word.”⁷ Géza Kállay is equally drawn to this dimension of the play, placing it in the center of his discussion of “The (New and Old) Metaphysical Reading of Shakespeare,” another publication he did not get to see in print, in *The Routledge Companion to Shakespeare and Philosophy*.⁸

It is true that my fascination with the play and Joel Coen’s film adaptation may be rooted in completely different aspects of the text – and here I mean the visual text, rather than the verbal one – but for all my interest in the visual and the cinematic, I am drawn to Joel Coen’s *The Tragedy of Macbeth* also through the realization that this film allows itself to be read as a quasi-Biblical text through some of its creative choices, a few of which I would like to mention in what follows. First and foremost, I believe this film is a contemplation about artistic creation, but the way it establishes its own createdness, embedded within the cinematic medium itself, can also be interpreted as creation from nothingness through logos, not simply reminding us, but rather making us experience, how in the beginning was the word and the word only. The film opens with a title card, accompanied by voiceover narration, thus we may say

³ Kállay, Géza: *Mondhatunk-e többet? Nyelv, irodalom, filozófia*, Budapest, Liget, 2018.

⁴ Géher, István: *Macbeth*, in *Shakespeare-olvasókönyv: Tükkörképünk 37 darabban*, Budapest, Cserépfalvi – Szépirodalmi, 1991, 230–243, 230.

⁵ Kállay, Géza: What Is a (Shakespearean) Source?, *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)* Vol. 18, No 1/2, 2012, 325, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43488478> (accessed 24 May 2024).

⁶ Géher: *Macbeth*, 231.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Kállay, Géza: The (New and Old) Metaphysical Reading of Shakespeare, in Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne (eds.): *The Routledge Companion to Shakespeare and Philosophy*, London – New York, Routledge, 2019, 88–101.

that the opening scene is in fact a scene without a scene – there is no place, no setting, no space, but pure nothingness, and the audiovisual void is filled with the word. (By the way, the question whether this word is Shakespearean, or possibly Middletonian, does not really matter here, as Géza Kállay succinctly argued in his essay “What is a (Shakespearean) Source?”.⁹) The word is an opening, not even a performative verb, only a question, yet with its request for specification it takes the first step towards creating a performance.

In the meantime, the words that we hear are the weird sisters’ opening dialogue, the first 12 lines of the play, with the exception of lines 8–10. Yet, what we see is a single word, “when”, without a question mark, printed in white capitals against a black background. True, this is the single most often used word in this short dialogue (unless we count the definite article and the copula), but even when printed and vocalized, it is still strangely disembodied compared to what we expect from a cinematic rendition of the text. Moreover, the solitary word, taken out of context, also creates an ambiguity where there was none: on its own, “when” can be adverb or conjunction, pronoun or even noun – and this verbal power of equivocation is yet another theme that gains significance in the play, most importantly through the speakers uttering this primordial “when” that is equated with the theatrical here and now. After the couplet that concludes the scene, “Fair is foul, and foul is fair: / Hover through the fog and filthy air” (1.1.11–12),¹⁰ the sound of distant bells that could be heard under the witches’ words is broken by a mechanical sound, a clank, which can be the sound of the camera shutter, a switch powering up some machine, or the flash illuminating the nothingness: blackness is suddenly replaced by a white screen.

But it can simply be the sound of a window opening (or maybe closing – every time we start telling a narrative, the windows on all other possible narratives are closed), and it may be no accident that the film abounds in images of windows and doors, opening up the performance space to metaphysical depths. One of the most powerful scenes involving such an aperture is that of Lady Macbeth reading and then burning Macbeth’s letter, where we witness her standing by a window, before she touches the candle’s light to the paper’s corner. The way the flaming letter flies skywards is another indication that we are witnessing a moment when the physical and the metaphysical worlds collide. And from the starlit sky into which the letter disappears, we descend unto the earthly version of a star-studded scene: the royal court, where the embroidered cape of King Duncan mirrors the starry night with its star-patterned darkness.

⁹ Kállay: What Is a (Shakespearean) Source?, esp. 323.

¹⁰ All parenthetical references to the play pertain to this edition: William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*, The Arden Shakespeare second series, ed. Kenneth Muir, Walton-on-Thames, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1999.

Another scene of equal metaphysical import comes towards the end of the narrative, at the invasion of the internal space of the protagonist by Birnam wood. On hearing the messenger's report on the sight of the "moving grove" (5.5.38), Macbeth turns to the window, but before he could even touch its handle, a sudden gust of wind throws it open, thrusting a mass of leaves in his face. As the swirling leaves fill the room as if having a will of their own, they represent a powerful intrusion of the exterior world into Macbeth's interior space, a dark void that he kept isolated and hoped to keep protected from the outside world. At the same time, the leaves can also be seen as the embodied word – the prophecy of the weird sisters – that Macbeth himself helped to materialize by following his chosen path of sin; therefore, it is his very own actions that end up dismantling the air castle he built, that now dissolves into thin air when confronted by greater powers.

Apart from these iconic scenes where windows are given a role beyond what is implied by the dramatic text, we can also observe other types of openings throughout the film: gates, doors, tent openings, archways, and open roofs, all of which allow us to slice through space and time in an instance. Macbeth is invited to witness, or in fact, to perform, the execution of the former Thane of Cawdor: Rosse opens his tent door and beckons to Macbeth, who declines by closing the tent once again. Nonetheless, the tent's walls are unable to keep out reality – the reality that Macbeth's ascendancy has come at the price of another life, and the same message is confirmed by the preponderance of apertures throughout the film. Each window and door makes connections where there were none, and emphasizes the porousness of boundaries within the world. This becomes most emphatic in the dagger scene, when the dagger, the imaginary weapon that draws Macbeth towards the irrevocable crime, opening avenues in his imagination that lead to the point of no return, appears as the shining handle of the door leading to Duncan's room. The long corridor, with the series of archways letting the light in from the side, show how the external world is about to intrude into the most sacred of interiors, the human body. When Macbeth opens this door, he enters into complete darkness, which is most fitting, as this doorway will lead him to the creation of openings on what should not be opened: the anointed body natural of the king – such a violent opening-up of what was whole will lead to the disintegration of the body politic as well. His awareness of the sacrilegious aspect of his actions is evident from the way he describes the scene of the murder, pointing to the unnatural openings by heaping one visually powerful image over another:

Here lay Duncan,
His silver skin lac'd with his golden blood;
And his gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in nature
For ruin's wasteful entrance

(2.3.109–112).

But the black-and-white film not only abounds in images of windows, doorways, passages, and archways leading to unseen spaces. The camera also creates connections where there should be none, joining temporal and spatial planes through mist or darkness, which appear to be mirror images of each other: white or black forms of impenetrable invisibility. The whiteness of the first scene presents itself as an unreadable and complex nothingness, and “nothing” is of course a key word in *Macbeth*, just like illusion is a key concept: the drama makes us question what is in front of our eyes, the visible reality of the universe that here sometimes dissolves into the vision of nightmares. This is precisely what the cinema thrives on, and the Coen film makes brilliant use of the medium’s ability to create and dissolve what seems real in front of our eyes. The minimalism of the film’s visuality serves many purposes; it creates an atmosphere that can only be described as metaphysical: human existence reduced to its essence, constantly questioning itself and its reality. Such a monochrome retelling may seem to be in contrast with the bloodthirsty and bloodstained protagonists of the drama, where Macbeth laments that his hand “will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine” (2.2.60–61) than ever be clean again, and where the natural ruby of one cheek is contrasted to the blanch’d visage of another (3.4.114–115); however, this reduced color palette is capable of invoking a variety of cinematic traditions and forerunners, adding further depth to the film’s meaning.

Following my interest in genre cinema and the way cinematic conventions create meaning by evoking a frame of reference for the viewer, it is hard to deny the brilliance of a film that can equally be seen as an example of auteur cinema, a powerful representative of the Coen oeuvre – and also belonging to a genre tradition, while it never denies or hides for a second its Shakespearean essence. One such genre tradition that many critics expected to see reflected in any film directed by one of the Coen brothers is the *film noir*, a popular genre, or cinematic mode of the mid-century, which was the genre of choice of many *Macbeth* adaptations, from *Joe Macbeth* (1955, dir. Ken Hughes), through *Men of Respect* (1990, dir. William C. Reilly) to the dark comic version of *Scotland, PA* (2001, dir. William Morrisette).¹¹ But contrary to these expectations, Coen’s film does not display any significant generic traits. What we can find at points, however, are subtle references to the Coen brothers’ oeuvre, invoked among other things by images of human figures hardly visible in a landscape of endless whiteness, a vision easily associated with the Coen brothers’ *Fargo*.¹² As Jerold J. Abrams describes the film’s setting: “we get that creepy

¹¹ For more on *film noir* Shakespeare adaptations, see Kinga Földváy: *Cowboy Hamlets and Zombie Romeos: Shakespeare in Genre Film*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2020, esp. 104–143; Douglas M. Lanier: Murdering Othello, in Deborah Cartmell (ed.): *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation*, Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, 198–215.

¹² *Fargo*, directed by Joel and Ethan Coen (Working Title Films, 1996).

feeling of being in a place that is not a place, a sort of nowhere. ... What dominates the screen instead is a total whiteout, blankness everywhere, with virtually no human effect whatsoever, and this serves to reveal our modern existential situation in an entirely new, but still very noirish, way.”¹³

This whiteness that feels like an existential fog, a mist that no human vision can pierce, is a recurring element of *Fargo*, and its existentialism is evidently an authorial sign, as several of the Coen brothers’ narratives invite the viewer to contemplate existential issues.¹⁴ In *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, however, the opening white screen does not simply appear as an isolated instance of blankness, or an indescribable space, but the film repeatedly forces us to remember and return to the opening scene in even more direct ways. Right before Macbeth’s second encounter with the witches, another title card appears unexpectedly on the screen, flashing up once again a single word: “tomorrow.” The word and the card can be interpreted in a variety of ways – it is in fact a temporal reference confirming that what we are about to witness is Macbeth’s visit to the weird sisters, as he made his intention clear in Act III Scene 4: “I will tomorrow, / And betimes I will, to the Weird Sisters” (3.4.131–132).

Yet using a title card for simply defining the passing of time, particularly in such an obvious moment, would be almost ironic and somewhat out of place in this film – we do not need to be reminded that it is already tomorrow, therefore we may suspect that the word carries more meaning than first meets the eye. Returning to the opening scene, the similarities are evident: both cards have white script on a black background, accompanied by the distant sound of howling wind and church bells, and the witches’ words, in this case from the beginning of Act IV Scene 1: “’Tis time, ’tis time” (4.1.3). In contrast to the first scene, however, where the first word of the whole play, “when,” was shown us in its printed form – here, “tomorrow” is not uttered in the witch’s voiceover speech. But the connection between the two temporal references is easily made: “’Tis time” – it is tomorrow. Remembering the first scene we can even experience this flashing of a word as an answer to the question: “When shall we three meet again?” – or even more, the answer to our existential question: when is it that we will know what there is to know? And the answer is always tomorrow, never today, never the here and now. Tomorrow is used eight times in the play, each and every time by Macbeth – on the last, most famous occasion, three times in a row, in a passage that confirms the associations between tomorrow, the word, theatrical illusion, and the metaphysical dimensions of human life:

¹³ Jerold J. Abrams: “A Homespun Murder Story”: Film Noir and the Problem of Modernity in M. T. Conard (ed.): *Fargo*, in *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers*, Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 2009, 211–223, 212.

¹⁴ For more on this topic, see Mark T. Conard (ed.): *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers*, Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 2009.

She should have died hereafter;
 There would have been a time for such a word.
 To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
 To the last syllable of recorded time,
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
 And then is heard no more: it is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing. (5.5.17–28)

The temporal and spatial references within the drama were indeed one of the central themes of Géza Kállay's latest work,¹⁵ and I can only imagine how he would have enjoyed the associations evoked – and denied – by the film's visuality. There are, however, a few more such instances where the cinematic performance and all its component parts illustrate how the image can be associated with the Word in the Scriptural sense. Some of these are fleeting associations, such as the tree in the center of the Macbeths' courtyard, bringing to mind the tree of knowledge and its association with evil. This tree is surrounded by water where the sleepwalking Lady Macbeth tries to wash away her bloodstains, and where she speaks words of forbidden knowledge, knowledge that is irreconcilable with life, bringing back the ghost of Duncan from the dead and sending the sinners to their unholy graves.

Blood and water, so central to Christianity, are also granted a central role in another crucial scene in the film: the night of the murder. Once again, it is the monochrome minimalism that underlines an association between two distinct spaces, eliminating the difference between the colors of the two precious fluids, focusing on their tendency to resist containment. With the exaggerated sound effect of the drops of precious and life-supporting liquids booming like drumbeats, the temporal dimension is unified into a single moment frozen in time, impossible to banish from the mind.

It is equally hard to shake the memory of the snake-like figure of Rosse, who is always where there is knowledge to be gained or granted, where information is shared or overheard, and whose involvement in the events is as troubling as that of the first snake in the story of mankind. Is he the voice and hand of Fate or Providence? Is he there to heal or to harm? What we do know is that he has the knowledge and, in the film, he is the one who first utters the performative

¹⁵ See esp. Kállay, Géza: "Ott találjuk Macbethet": Tér és hely Shakespeare *Macbeth*jében, in *Mondhatunk-e többet? Nyelv, Irodalom, Filozófia*, Budapest, Liget, 2018, 27–61.

“Hail, King Malcolm!” – rather than Macduff, who confirms Malcolm’s kingship in the drama exclaiming “Hail, King! for so thou art” (5.9.20), ending his passage with yet another “Hail, King of Scotland!” (5.9.25). The small difference could be easily overlooked, were it not for our awareness of the significance of proper names and their association with a representation of identity, as discussed so powerfully by Géza Kállay in connection with the most famous passage in *Romeo and Juliet*.¹⁶ Rather than reinforcing the royal identity of Malcolm, Rosse’s salutation ends up creating an ambiguity by identifying the new monarch by his personal name, rather than his kingdom, as if his kingship was centered on himself, rather than on serving his nation.

Interestingly, Coen’s film omits the disturbing conversation between Malcolm and Macduff in Act IV Scene 3, where Malcolm characterizes himself as full of the blackest vices, before accepting the invitation to reclaim his throne. Therefore, the haunting fears concerning the kingdom’s future are associated with Rosse, rather than Malcolm, and as if to confirm these fears, it is indeed Rosse who takes young Fléance at the end of the film, and disappears with him into an underworld-like fold in the landscape. The earth has bubbles, and the weird sisters may have come from these, but the future line of kings also goes down under the earth, into the void, as if experiencing a symbolic death, anticipating rebirth. The motif is as much Biblical as universal, and the film offers us questions without granting answers – but the images of this broken world are certainly powerful companions to the Shakespearean word, bringing vision and deed, action and word in a harmony that may remind us of our masters we are remembering in this collection. If only we could hear what they had to say about this *Tragedy of Macbeth*.

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“YET WE MUST SAY SOMETHING”:
CHARLOTTE SMITH’S RESPONSE TO *KING LEAR* IN THE
CONTEXT OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

—◀▶—
BÁLINT GÁRDOS

My title is taken from William Hazlitt’s 1817 essay on *King Lear*. “To attempt to give a description of the play itself or of its effect upon the mind, is mere impertinence: yet we must say something.”¹ It is a line that Professor Géher was fond of quoting at the beginning of any lecture on that tragedy and I would like to begin by recalling one of those lectures, given as part of a course entitled *Shakespeare on Film*, held regularly on Fridays, late in the afternoon. This particular class was made all the more memorable by the fact that the otherwise extremely punctual Professor somehow mistook the time, leading him to believe that he still had a full hour left to speak when the lecture was, in fact, nominally over. It says something about the magnetic pull of his words that he managed to draw enormous crowds, filling the room well beyond normal capacity at a time when students tend to be otherwise engaged. However, it is a testament to quasi-hypnotic powers that, to my recollection, no one left the room or even made any disturbance as the lecture kept expanding into the night. We all wanted to know what more he had to say about *King Lear*.

If memory serves, the film that he used to explore the scenes depicting Lear’s descent into the world of Poor Tom was Grigori Kozintsev’s 1971 adaptation, with its unflinching attention to the suffering of the poor. I seem to remember him commenting on the sympathy shown towards the Dostoyevskian *Insulted and Injured* as something rather characteristic of our part of the world. I do wonder if he would still say the same thing today.

In any case, my paper concerns a tradition of sympathetic response to the fate of King Lear. As Jean Marsden explains, theatre-goers in the eighteenth century gradually became accustomed to seeing the man behind the king; instead of focusing on the unreasonable and uncharitable acts of an aging despot they learnt to feel sympathy for the suffering father. Sympathy was seen as based in commonality of experience: while most of us have not been monarchs, many of us have had children; therefore, we can more easily relate to that part of his story. Losing his public position, Lear could be understood as

¹ P.P. Howe (ed.): *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, Vol. 4, London, Dent, 1930, 257.

offering himself up to fellow feeling as a private person.² The romantic generations' interest in *King Lear* is also well known. Veronika Ruttkay, for example, has demonstrated how both Wordsworth and Coleridge used allusions to the play as ways of examining the operations of the poetic imagination.³

The poet and novelist Charlotte Smith (1749–1806) inherited the sympathetic tradition but, faced with the events of and the debates surrounding the French Revolution, she also used allusions to the play to interpret revolutionary change and thus to re-politicize discussions of *King Lear*, a play that, according to her biographer Loraine Fletcher, she quoted more often than any other.⁴ Many critics, most notably Susan Wolfson and Joy Currie, have commented on Smith's allusiveness in general.⁵ In this essay, I would like to argue for the specific importance of references to *King Lear* in understanding the politics of her writing in the revolutionary years.

For a politically attuned reading of the tragedy, there is a lot of contemporary resonance in the story of a king gradually denuded from all power, pomp or privilege; one needs only quote the *Decree Abolishing Hereditary Nobility and Titles in France*, issued on 19 June 1790. It begins: "1. Hereditary nobility is abolished forever; accordingly, the titles of prince, duke, count, marquis, viscount, *vidame*, baron, knight, *messire*, squire, noble, and all other similar titles shall neither be accepted by, nor bestowed upon, anyone whomsoever. 2. A citizen may assume only his real family name; no one may wear liveries or have them worn, or have coats of arms. [...]. 3. The titles of *monseigneur* and *messeigneurs* shall not be bestowed upon any group or individual, nor shall the titles of excellency, highness, eminence, grace, etc."⁶

Charlotte Smith's work of the early 1790s is rare in its very close temporal proximity to the revolutionary transformations that seemed to level all traditional social stratification, including royal powers. Some milestones of the chronology that we need to bear in mind when reading these works include Louis XVI swearing an oath of loyalty to the new constitution on 14 July 1790; Louis XVI's suspension from office until he agrees to ratify the constitution

² Jean Marsden: *Shakespeare and Sympathy*, in P. Sabor – P. Yachnin (eds.): *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century*, London, Routledge, 2016, 34–37.

³ Veronika Ruttkay: *Passion's Rhetoric: Coleridge on King Lear and the new rhetorical tradition*, *The Coleridge Bulletin*, 28 (2006), 83–91. Veronika Ruttkay: *Encounters with Lear: Beggar-Imagery in Wordsworth's Poetry*, *The Anachronist*, 1999, 53–69.

⁴ Loraine Fletcher: *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 1998, 241.

⁵ Susan J. Wolfson: *Charlotte Smith's "Emigrants": Forging Connections at the Borders of a Female Tradition*, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 63 (2000), 509–546, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i292128> (accessed 13 March 2024); Joy Currie: "Mature Poets Steal": Charlotte Smith's Appropriations of Shakespeare, in J. M. Ortiz (ed.): *Shakespeare and the Culture of Romanticism*, Farnham and Burlington, Ashgate, 2013, 99–120.

⁶ John Hall Stewart: *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, New York, Macmillan, 1951, 142–143.

on 16 July 1791 (which he does on 13 September); France proclaiming itself a Republic on 22 September 1792; Louis XVI's trial for treason by the National Assembly on 11 December 1792; Louis XVI being sentenced to death on 19 January 1793; Louis XVI's execution on 21 January 1793; Marie Antoinette's execution on 16 October 1793.

The ultimate question in this connection probably seemed to be: where would the levelling politics of the revolution lead? Should all privileges be abolished, what would we find? As deposed King Lear saw it, if we "Allow not nature more than nature needs, / Man's life is cheap as beast's" (2.2.455–456) and "[u]naccommodated man" "is no more but ... a poor bare, forked animal" (3.4.105–106).⁷ The revolutionaries' and their followers' hope, however, was that this is exactly how the modern subject of the "rights of men" will be revealed. As is well known, such questions exercised thinkers in the pamphlet-warfare of the early 1790s in Britain.⁸ Charlotte Smith seems, however, to have been the first and, according to Stuart Curran, the only novelist to comment, with almost journalistic immediacy on the still very much unfolding events in France, as well as the intellectual debate surrounding those events in the shape of fiction, and also, somewhat later, poetry. The first reference to her contemplating a new novel can be found in a letter dated 27 July 1791 and one on 4 July 1792, she is already writing to her publisher about where to direct her author's copies.⁹ The resulting novel, entitled *Desmond*, is a passionate defense of the revolution, the only book she would publish with the radical bookseller George Robinson, who also published William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) and Helen Maria Williams's *Letters Written in France* (1790–1796).¹⁰ It has been called the first historical novel by György Lukács's criteria to examine large-scale historical transformation through the fate of its characters, and indeed it seems to be no accident that Walter Scott, who favorably reviewed Smith's work, should have a character who shares a name with the brother of Smith's heroine, a certain Mr. Waverley. Unlike Scott, however, Smith's narrative is firmly contemporary, with the ideological and historical conflicts left largely unresolved by the end.¹¹ It is, more obviously,

⁷ Quoted from the following edition: William Shakespeare: *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes, The Arden Shakespeare, London, Thomas Nelson, 1997.

⁸ Takács Réka: Az 1790-es évek pamfletháborúja, in Zs. Komáromy – B. Gárdos – M. Péti (eds.): *Az angol irodalom története. 1640–1830. Második rész*, Budapest, Kijarat, 2021, 154–159.

⁹ Stuart Curran: Introduction, in Charlotte Smith: *Desmond. A Novel*, ed. S. Curran, The Works of Charlotte Smith, vol. 5, New York, Routledge, 2016, xi.

¹⁰ Jo-Ellen DeLucia: Charlotte Smith, *Desmond* (1792), in K. Berndt – A. Johns (eds.): *Handbook of the British Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century*, Berlin and Boston, De Gruyter, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110650440-025>, 436.

¹¹ Fletcher: *Charlotte Smith*, 145; Kari Lokke: Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*: The Historical Novel as Social Protest, *Women's Writing* 16(1), 2009, 60–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09699080902768273>

an epistolary novel making creative use of the tensions between letters as associated with the literature of sensibility, where they are seen as endowed with the ability to express someone's most private thoughts and feelings on the one hand and, on the other, the political use of the letter as the most recognizable genre used in the debates surrounding the French Revolution.¹² The gendered double standards involved in the problematic access to public discourse is the subject of the novel's preface:

But women it is said have no business with politics. – Why not? – Have they no interest in the scenes that are acting around them, in which they have fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, or friends engaged! ...

Knowledge, which qualifies women to speak or to write on any other than the most common and trivial subjects, is supposed to be of so difficult attainment, that it cannot be acquired but by the sacrifice of domestic virtues, or the neglect of domestic duties. – *I* however, may safely say, that it was in the *observance*, not in the *breach* of duty, *I* became an Author; and it has happened, that the circumstances which have compelled me to write, have introduced me to those scenes of life, and those varieties of character which *I* should otherwise never have seen...¹³

It can be said that the two most central literary patterns available to the romantics for a narrative concerning a fall from great heights (as for much else) came from Milton and from Shakespeare. Sublime and rebellious, romantic Satanism, based on impassioned responses to *Paradise Lost*, is a much-discussed phenomenon, which comes into sharp focus especially after the fall of Napoleon. The *King Lear* model, however, in which loss of stature can potentially be seen as an educational journey in terms of sympathy and solidarity also forms a significant pattern. Witness also the beautiful combination of the two models in Keats's *Hyperion* with the fallen Saturn's Satanic fantasies of revenge and restoration ("Saturn must be King. / "Yes, there must be a golden victory; / "There must be Gods thrown down, and trumpets blown..." [Book 1: lines 125–127])¹⁴ but also his Lear-inspired bewailing of his lost royal identity or his sister Thea's Cordelia-like care for the former king ("One hand she press'd upon that aching spot / Where beats the human heart, as if just there, / Though an immortal, she felt cruel pain: / The other upon Saturn's bended neck / She laid" [Book 1: 42–45]).

In the context of the British debates surrounding the lessons of the revolution, a strategically placed quote from *King Lear* is recited by the titular character, Desmond. It is part of a passionate outburst prompted by a cartoonishly

¹² Scott C. Campbell: Chapter Three "Disagreeable Misconstructions": Epistolary Trouble in Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*, in Miriam L. Wallace (ed.): *Enlightening Romanticism, Romanticizing the Enlightenment: British Novels from 1750 to 1832*, Burlington, Ashgate, 2009, 55–68.

¹³ Smith: *Desmond*, 45–46.

¹⁴ Cited from John Keats: *The Complete Poems*, ed. Miriam Allott, New York, Longman, 1970.

unfeeling and unthinking member of the aristocracy who presents an almost comically simplified version of the Edmund Burke vision of the naturalness of hierarchy and social as well as financial difference. The answer, a loosely Thomas Paine style defense of the rights of man, which Smith allows to have all the urgency of the moment, reaches its rhetorical climax with the following:

To-day, we see displayed in tinsel panegyric, the superb trappings, the gorgeous ornaments, the jewels of immense value, with which the illustrious personages of our land amaze and delight us – To-morrow, we read of a poor man, an ancient woman, a deserted child, who were found dead in such or such alley or street, "supposed to have perished through want, and the inclemency of the weather"; and is it possible to help exclaiming,

"-----Take physic, pomp—
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel;
So shalt thou shake the superflux to them,
And shew the heavens more just!"

The young peer, who had shewn more patience than I expected, now interrupted me – "All this is very fine, Sir," said he; "but give me leave to say, that it is all common place declamation (that was true enough), and does not go to prove that the form of our government is defective – Misery exists every where, and is intended to exist: even according to your own quotation, it is allowed –

'And shew the heavens more just.'

It is heaven so decides then, and by no means the fault of governments
– It is the lot of humanity, and cannot be changed."¹⁵

It is, therefore, through a negotiation of the political meaning of *King Lear* that both sides seem to try to articulate their positions on revolutionary change. The positively evaluated exposure of the privileged "to feel what wretched feel" seems to be central to the political vision of the novel; the equalizing thrust of the revolution is presented as a "physic" indeed. Sympathy for the plight of the impoverished leads the most important characters to embrace fairly radical positions, including the rare occasion when Geraldine, the central character, even seems to excuse violence when prompted by actual starvation:

While humanity drops her tears at the sad stories of those individuals who fell the victims of popular tumult so naturally excited, pity cannot throw over these trans-actions a veil thick enough to conceal the tremendous decree of justice, which, like

¹⁵ Smith: *Desmond*, 149.

“the hand writing upon the wall,” will be seen in colours of blood, and however regretted, must still be acknowledged as the hand of justice.¹⁶

Charlotte Smith’s later writings tend not to strike such a radical voice, but instead of focusing on the well-known pattern of romantics abandoning their utopian hopes after the revolution turned violent and international conflict ensued, the more recent emphasis seems to be on continuities. Her political views can be relatively well understood. A mature woman of *girondiste* political sympathies, her hopes were for constitutional reform, not a violent transformation, and one that could serve as a model for progress in Britain as well.¹⁷

Desmond as a novel concludes, somewhat disappointingly, according to the rather conservative patterns of the marriage romance, with every important character safely led towards the respectable social institution whose aptitude for abuse and even violence towards women the novel as a whole had consistently demonstrated. Desmond’s final letter to his friend, however, strikes a jarringly proprietorial tone (“Geraldine will bear *my* name – will be the directress of *my* family – will be my friend – my mistress – my wife!”).¹⁸ While the novel reaches a happy ending, many commentators have highlighted the ambiguities in the final few letters’ complete exclusion of the female voice and in its undercutting of the positively angelic image we have had about Desmond (it turns out that he has had a French mistress). As regards the broader social questions, the novel inevitably reaches an end before historical events come to anything resembling a reassuring conclusion, but the little signs of progress that the reader can notice by then are again not very utopian or idealistic and operate on a smaller scale. They seem to point not towards sweeping social change but more towards forms of gradually improving coexistence, including the marriage of English Protestant Fanny Waverly with Catholic French aristocrat Montfleuri,¹⁹ or the strong and respectful friendship between the radical Desmond and the rather more conservative Erasmus Bethel, who even shares monograms with Edmund Burke.²⁰

The second work in what has been called Smith’s French period²¹ is her 1793 long poem *The Emigrants*, which takes as its subject the reception of French

¹⁶ Smith: *Desmond*, 253–254.

¹⁷ Fletcher: *Charlotte Smith*, 129–206.

¹⁸ Smith: *Desmond*, 335. Cf. Amy Garnai: *Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald*, New York, Palgrave, 2009, 19.

¹⁹ Anne K. Mellor: Embodied Cosmopolitanism and the British Romantic Woman Writer, *European Romantic Review* 17 (2006), 289–300, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509580600816710>

²⁰ Fuson Wang: Cosmopolitanism and the Radical Politics of Exile in Charlotte Smith’s *Desmond*, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 25 (2012), 37–59, <https://doi.org/10.3138/ecf.25.1.37>

²¹ The phrase is from: F. M. A. Hilbish: *Charlotte Smith, poet and novelist, 1749–1806*, PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1941; cited in Sarah M Zimmerman: *Smith [née Turner], Charlotte*

refugees, mostly aristocrats and members of the clergy, in Britain. Politically, its focal question seems to have shifted from a somewhat optimistic 'what could happen?' to a resolutely non-utopian 'how to live with what has happened?'. Smith ties both books of her poem to contemporary reality in terms of time and space, defined very exactly at the beginning of each of the books of the poem:

BOOK I.

SCENE, on the Cliffs to the Eastward of the Town of Brighthelmstone in Sussex.

TIME, a Morning in November, 1792.

BOOK II.

SCENE, on an Eminence on one of those Downs, which afford to the South a View of the Sea; to the North of the Weald of Sussex.

TIME, an Afternoon in April, 1793.

Following Susan J. Wolfson's contextualization, this means that

[t]he "scene" of Book I is set in "November, 1792," six months after priests who refused to support the Constitutional Church were declared traitors, three months after the decree for their expulsion and the arrest of the royal family at the Tuileries, two months after the September massacres (3 bishops and 220 priests among the slaughtered) and the confiscation of emigrants' property, and one month after the death penalty was established for any returnees. By November, Robespierre, the Terror's architect, had risen to power and Saint-Just was demanding judgment of Louis XVI as "a foreign enemy" of the Republic's "independence and unity"; in the same month, Smith was sheltering some emigrants in her own home. Book II is set ... after the king's execution (January) and England's declaration of war against France (February), with the queen and her children in prison.

In this context, the first quality of the poem reminiscent of *King Lear* is the locality, strongly associated with Gloucester's attempted suicide in the play. As in Shakespeare, it is a sight of potential conflict with France but also one associated with sympathy and reconciliation. The British and the French are at war in the tragedy but Cordelia arrives with the French armies to bring consolation. Britain and France are at war in Smith's present but she seems to remain hopeful of an understanding between (at least) the disenfranchised of both nations.

(1749–1806), Poet and Novelist, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 4 Oct. 2007, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/25790>

Throughout her work, Smith was to establish a narrative of Britain and France (and by extension, maybe, continental Europe) as much more closely related than insular and nationalistic views might hold.²² In *Beachy Head*, her unfinished final poem, she hints at a deep history of geological connection, as potentially shown by the British shoreline's snug fit with the French shore facing it,²³ while in terms of human history she hypothesizes, following David Hume, a deep connection of the French and the British (Hume's account refers to the times prior to the Anglo-Saxon invasion, but Smith clearly extends the implications).²⁴ In *Minor Morals*, an educational book for children, she even says that

the island called Britain was peopled from Gaul, as that part of the Continent was then named which we now call France: – for you see we can trace our origin no farther than the people we despise and hate. There is a remote tradition, which tells that this island (so little a while since esteemed the mistress of the world) was, by some violent concussion of the earth, severed from the Continent, and it must have been precisely from France.²⁵

Smith uses the liminal territory of the shore to seek for difficult connections between warring parties. Exposed, like Lear, to the elements, divested from power and riches, the emigrants become subject to British sympathies. Not renouncing her suspicions towards the privileged classes, this enables the poet to still reject aristocratic lifestyles and powers, while moving the focus towards mutual reconciliation, which must have seemed more pressing during times of a shift from a revolution in France to international military conflict.²⁶ The poem offers a series of snapshots of the emigrants, representing reprehensible but abolished lifestyles, values and choices, with a consistent emphasis on the exposed humanity of the French indigents:

²² Matthew Bray: Removing the Anglo-Saxon Yoke: The Francocentric Vision of Charlotte Smith's Later Works, *The Wordsworth Circle* 24 (1993), 155–158, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24042447> (accessed 13 March 2024).

²³ "...the strange and awful hour / Of vast concussion; when the Omnipotent / Stretch'd forth his arm, and rent the solid hills, / Bidding the impetuous main flood rush between / The rifted shores, and from the continent / Eternally divided this green isle." (5–9) Smith's poems are cited from the following edition: Stuart Curran (ed.): *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993.

²⁴ Hume's remarks appear close to the beginning of the first volume of his *History*, published (as the last of the six volumes) in 1762. See David Hume: *The History of England*, Vol. 1, Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, 1983. 4.

²⁵ Charlotte Smith: *Minor Morals, Interspersed with Sketches of Natural History, Historical Anecdotes, and Original Stories*, London, A. K. Newman & Co., 1825, 107.

²⁶ For context on Smith's response to the war, see Harriet Guest: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson and the First Year of the War with France, in J. M. Labbe (ed.): *The History of British Women's Writing, 1750–1830*, The History of British Women's Writing, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 207–230, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230297012_11

Whate'er your errors, I lament your fate:
And, as disconsolate and sad ye hang
Upon the barrier of the rock, and seem
To murmur your despondence, waiting long
Some fortunate reverse that never comes;
Methinks in each expressive face, I see
Discriminated anguish; there droops one,
Who in a moping cloister long consum'd
This life inactive, to obtain a better,

...

Another, of more haughty port, declines
The aid he needs not; while in mute despair
His high indignant thoughts go back to France,
Dwelling on all he lost – the Gothic dome,
That vied with splendid palaces; the beds
Of silk and down, the silver chalices,
Vestments with gold enwrought for blazing altars;
Where, amid clouds of incense, he held forth
To kneeling crowds the imaginary bones
Of Saints suppos'd, in pearl and gold enchas'd,

...

Now alas!
He, to whose daring soul and high ambition
The World seem'd circumscrib'd; who, wont to dream
Of Fleuri, Richelieu, Alberoni, men
Who trod on Empire, and whose politics
Were not beyond the grasp of his vast mind,
Is, in a Land once hostile, still prophan'd
By disbelief, and rites un-orthodox,
The object of compassion – ... Still, as Men misled
By early prejudice (so hard to break),
I mourn your sorrows... (I.107–155)

We might say that it is the *King Lear* model that enables finding compassion without excusing the perceived sins or prejudices of the past. Emily Sun observes how "[f]or Lear and Edgar, the heath is a site of exile and exposure; but [also] an external vantage point from which to view the kingdom as finite whole," and examines how Wordsworth uses this trope in his earliest work as his political vision moves away from an embracing of revolutionary violence.²⁷ Of

²⁷ Emily Sun: *Succeeding King Lear: Literature, Exposure, and the Possibility of Politics*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2010, 106.

course, Wordsworth was also a reader of Charlotte Smith, who also seems to have appropriated the Shakespearean tradition for a meditation on the consequences of post-revolutionary militancy.²⁸ Indeed, the many portraits of former beneficiaries of the Ancien Régime repeat the pattern of divesting individuals of their former public selves and opening up the possibility of responding to their plights as refugees in a humane manner.

The final major French-themed work is the 1794 novel entitled *The Banished Man*. By this stage, Charlotte Smith's views on revolutionary France seem to have shifted considerably. Instead of people acting on legitimate grievances we see Jacobin mobs, described as "anarchists and murderers,"²⁹ unleashing havoc all through the country. The likeable French people tend to be former aristocrats and this time, the politically significant quotation from *King Lear*, "a man more sinned against than sinning,"³⁰ is applied to Louis XVI. In some ways, however, this is the most Shakespearean of the works here discussed, in that almost the entirety of the novel takes place, as it were, on the "heath," its characters mostly the formerly privileged, now displaced and dispossessed by the ever-more violent forces of the revolution. The most *King Lear* like quality of the novel is its choice of "unaccommodated" characters: individuals thrown about by social and historical forces, but between whom the most unexpected forms of friendship and even love spring, despite their very different backgrounds. At the end of the novel, "the Anglican Englishwoman Angelina Denzil marries the Catholic Frenchman D'Alonville, the Protestant Scots-Englishman Ned Ellesmere marries the Catholic Polish woman, Alexina Carlowitz".³¹ Even more importantly, they settle down in a small inter-cultural, inter-faith and inter-language cosmopolite community in Verona in the company of Angelina's mother, Mrs. Charlotte Denzil, who is clearly a self-portrait of the writer herself.³²

²⁸ On the poetry of Smith and Wordsworth of the early 1790s, see Jacqueline M. Labbe: *Writing Romanticism: Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth, 1784–1807*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2011, 49–77.

²⁹ Charlotte Smith: *The Banished Man. A Novel. By Charlotte Smith. In Four Volumes*, Vol. 2, T. Cadell, jun. and W. Davies, 1794, 209.

³⁰ Smith: *The Banished Man*, Vol. 2, 121.

³¹ Mellor: *Embodied Cosmopolitanism*, 293.

³² On cosmopolitanism and its limits in Smith's discussed works, see: Adriana Craciun: "Empire without End": Charlotte Smith at the Limits of Cosmopolitanism, *Women's Writing* 16 (2009), 39–59, <https://doi.org/10.3138/ecf.25.1.37>. Adriana Craciun: Citizens of the World: Émigrés, Romantic Cosmopolitanism, and Charlotte Smith, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 29 (2007), 169–185, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08905490701584676>; Mellor: *Embodied Cosmopolitanism*; Katharina Rennhak: Tropes of Exile in the 1790s: English Women Writers and French Emigrants, *European Romantic Review* 17 (2006), 575–592, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509580601071414>; and Wang: *Cosmopolitanism. On the autobiographical impulse in the novel and self-presentation as a professional female author*, see Jennie Batchelor: *Women's Work: Labour, Gender, Authorship, 1750–1830*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2010, 67–107.

Mrs. Denzil sees herself as a victim not of very spectacular historical transformations, merely the injustices of the British legal system and its unfairness towards women. As did the speaker of *The Emigrants*, as did Geraldine in *Desmond*. As, most probably, did Charlotte Smith herself. If sympathy is created by commonality of experience, all these speakers have been exiles, in one sense or another, just like the emigrants or King Lear.³³ In *King Lear* the personal and the political tragedy are inevitably connected, since the hero is a king. However, a sympathetic response, based on personal experience enables Charlotte Smith to create a connection between the personal and the political and thus to claim authority to comment on public affairs.

The Old Manor House is the first novel, written between August 1792 and January 1793,³⁴ in which Smith steps away from more direct engagement with the ongoing events of, and debates surrounding, the French Revolution. Its historical backdrop is the American War of Independence, in which the male hero, Orlando, has to fight. Nevertheless, most of the plot unfolds in Britain, with much of it revolving around who inherits the titular manor house. That does not mean, however, that revolutionary politics is altogether forgotten. Orlando, very young and almost comically idealistic, schools his love interest in the nature of *domestic* tyranny in the following words: "like all other usurped authority, the power of your aunt is maintained by unjust means, and supported by prejudices, which if once looked at by the eye of reason would fall. So slender is the hold of tyranny, my Monimia!"³⁵ However, the revolutionary politics become domestic politics, both in the sense of national and in the sense of familial. There is no longer any talk about large-scale social restructuring, only about a socially responsible use of the powers of the landed elite, anticipating in this way the novels of Jane Austen. The quotations from *King Lear* seem to follow this shift in emphasis. On one occasion, Lear's "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is / To have a thankless child" is used to describe a mother's pain.³⁶ A more intricate interaction with the play comes close to the end of the narrative, at the point of Orlando's *peripeteia*. He seems to be bereft of all hopes for financial success, when unexpectedly old Thomas, a beggar and wounded veteran, towards whom he had shown charity, reveals the secret

³³ On the centrality of exile to Smith's literary personas, see Monica Smith Hart: Charlotte Smith's Exilic Persona, *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 8(2), 2010, 305–323, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pan.0.0183>; Melissa Sodeman: Charlotte Smith's Literary Exile, *ELH* (76) 2009, 131–152, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27654655> (accessed 13 March 2024).

³⁴ Jacqueline M. Labbe: Introduction, in Charlotte Smith: *The Old Manor House*, ed. J. M. Labbe, Peterborough, Broadview, 2002, 13.

³⁵ Smith: *The Old Manor House*, 75.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 444.

access to the hidden will that appoints him as the rightful heir of the property. Thomas is introduced with explicit references to *King Lear*:

as the hovel was not in very good repair, and the cold extremely severe, he opened a door in it, made for the purpose of throwing straw out of the adjoining barn, and took shelter in the barn itself – repeating those lines of Shakespeare where Cordelia describes her father; and, in recollecting all that had of late befallen him, all that he had lost, and the cruel uncertainty of his future destiny, as he applied to himself those descriptive lines,

To hovel him with swine and rogues forlorn,
In short and musty straw,

he remembered the preceding exclamation,

Alas! alas!

'Tis wonder that thy life and wits at once
Had not concluded all.³⁷

Given the circumstances, Orlando's appropriation of the Shakespearean lines to himself is characteristically very narcissistic, but eventually he recognizes "[h]ow unworthy, how unmanly are my complaints, when I compare my own situation with that of this poor old man, who, trembling on the verge of life, seems to have none of its common necessities."³⁸ Indeed, the very last paragraph of the novel concerns Orlando and Thomas, closing with the words: "Orlando never passed through his own gate without being agreeably reminded, by the grateful alacrity of this contented servant, of his past afflictions, and his present felicity."³⁹ After its passing into the rightful hands, the crumbling old manor house is transformed from a gothic location of arbitrary power into a place of charitable care, where "[e]very subsequent hour of the lives of Orlando and his Monimia was marked by some act of beneficence."⁴⁰ Even though this is a political vision rather different from what *Desmond* seems to reflect, its articulation still depends on the sympathetic reading of *King Lear*.

I began with a memory connected to Professor Géher, so naturally I wish to conclude with one connected to Professor Kállay. It concerns a conversation I had with him on the subject of *King Lear* after I translated Samuel Johnson's "Preface" to his edition of the plays of Shakespeare. Johnson famously reveals

³⁷ Ibid., 456–457.

³⁸ Ibid., 457–458.

³⁹ Ibid., 523.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 522.

that he finds the final scenes of *King Lear* almost too shocking to read.⁴¹ I remember confessing to Géza that I find it very easy to sympathize with Johnson's response and I also remember his very eloquent justification of the brutality of the play's ending as the only way to represent how much was at stake. He was right of course. Nevertheless, I was rather moved to find that he finished what I think is his most extensive analysis of *King Lear* with the need to justify the pain that tragedy inflicts on all of us. So, I would like to finish with the final sentences from Géza's essay entitled "*What Wilt Thou Do, Old Man?*" — *Being Sick Unto Death: Scrooge, King Lear, and Kierkegaard*:

Do we need the irrevocability, so much in the nature of tragedy, to see where love begins and ends? ... There are cases when we have done things that cannot be undone, and there are cases when we lose somebody, and that is irrevocable and the person irreplaceable. As there are cases when we find that we can remedy a situation, we can get rid of our selfishness and our avoidance of love, a new page is turned in our story, or we realize we still have a role in another story. Neither experience, one captured so powerfully by tragedy, the other by comedy, can be one-sidedly over-emphasized at the expense of the other. Wisdom, among other things, means, I think, an ability to realize which kind of story we happen to be in. It might not be as unproblematic as it seems to say why comedy gives us pleasure, but at least it appears to be easier than to say why tragedy, under these circumstances, does. As far as the latter question is concerned, I am afraid I cannot go beyond the aesthetic principle that our pleasure in tragedy derives from our ability to represent it, and thereby attribute at least some meaning to pain, suffering, dread, and despair — that we are, at least, able to talk about irrevocable events, and losses which are forever, and are forever inexplicable to us, in meaningful words.⁴²

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⁴¹ See, for instance, Arthur Sherbo: *Johnson on Shakespeare*, The Yale edition of the works of Samuel Johnson, Vol. 8, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1968, 704.

⁴² Géza Kállay: "What Wilt Thou Do, Old Man?" — Being Sick Unto Death: Scrooge, King Lear, and Kierkegaard, *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 9(2), 2011, 281, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pan.2011.0026>

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“THE RIVALS OF MY WATCH”:
BURGESS AND HIS DOUBLES IN *NOTHING LIKE THE SUN*
AND *A DEAD MAN IN DEPTFORD*

MARCELL GELLÉRT

Nearing the dénouement of his story, WS, the rapidly ageing hero of *Nothing Like the Sun*,¹ in a vision that lay coyly beyond the tail of his eye, catches an epiphanic glimpse of truth, the true nature of his art and the mission of the playwright: “There was a reality somewhere to be encompassed and, with God’s grimdest irony, it might only be grasped through playing at play, thus catching reality off its guard”.² If we manage to catch reality off its guard by doubling fiction and leaving Burgess-Paley of *Enderby’s Dark Lady*,³ the 67/25-year-old novelist-literary historian in sector B303, i.e. the London of 1595, to the greatest chagrin or delight of the New-Baconians, we might have another candidate for the authorship of the plays attributed to The Bard. Had Burgess been a contemporary of Shakespeare – fiction then good only for pragmatic purposes –, he surely would have written plays, among them a few in collaboration with his most beloved and admired poet-playwrights, Marlowe and Shakespeare.

Though rivalry among the playwrights of the Elizabethan stage was one of the prime movers of the dramatic renaissance, Marlowe and Shakespeare or, as they are more intimately addressed by Burgess, Kit and Will/WS were not rivals for their biographer’s favors. In fact they too had their rivals – for Marlowe Kyd, for Shakespeare Chapman and Jonson – yet Burgess cautiously avoids their critical comparison. He does so even when the issue gets topical in *Nothing Like the Sun*, when the addressee of the sonnets breaks the news about Marlowe’s death to his friend: “you may exult now, friend or no friend’ said his lordship Mr WH Harry ‘that you are without peer. Now my poet is the only poet... You may gladly lose a friend to know that.’ ‘He was not so close a friend. But there was no pet like him.’”⁴ It may not be mere accident that in the last lines of the author’s note to *A Dead Man in Deptford*, concluding his last but one novel, he pays the due tribute to Marlowe by similarly avoiding judgemental comparison: “Ben Jonson knew what he was talking about when he referred

¹ Anthony Burgess: *Nothing Like the Sun*, London, Allison & Busby, 2009.

² Burgess: *Nothing Like the Sun*, 211.

³ Burgess: *Enderby’s Dark Lady, or No End to Enderby*, London, Hutchinson, 1984.

⁴ Burgess: *Nothing Like the Sun*, 121.

to the mighty line. Shakespeare may have outshone him but he did not contain or supersede him. That inimitable voice sings on.”⁵

Though we should be careful with relying on volume, the size of the output as authentic critical measure of poets, playwrights or novelists’ worth, in case of Burgess and his Elizabethan doubles numbers do count. Shakespeare wrote – though partly in collaboration with fellow playwrights – some 37 plays while Marlowe’s dramatic oeuvre is a total of seven pieces. However, according to Burgess’s calculations, if we compare those 7 plays with the ones Shakespeare had accomplished by 1593 (*The Comedy of Errors*, *Titus Andronicus*, *King Henry VI Part I, II, III*, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*), there is no doubt about Marlowe’s superiority. We can only guess what he could have achieved in a dozen or two more plays, had he lived to 1616. Shakespeare may or must have learnt a lot from his greatest peer but his art – as Burgess the critic observes in his 1970 Shakespeare biography – did not develop out of Marlowe’s, mostly because they were temperamentally too different – a major concern for the author of both historical and fictional biographies. “It is to Ben Jonson... that Marlowe leads, to a kind of satirical comedy which Shakespeare never had any desire to write.”⁶ Partly because Marlowe was a lyrical rather than a dramatic genius, and “the glory of plays like *Tamburlaine* and *Dr Faustus* lies in the orchestral range of the verbal music, and the manner in which classical properties ... are transmuted into air, fire and crystal.”⁷

The amount of attention Burgess the scholar and writer pays to Marlowe and Shakespeare respectively is more or less in proportion with their output in terms of numbers. For Burgess, however – a most conscious composer of pieces musical as much as literary – timing is of crucial importance. He started his literary career as a would-be scholar with a thesis on *Dr Faustus* and concluded it with a novel on its author. Both pieces were timed though differently. The former by its renewed topicality. Burgess heard in Marlowe, especially in *Dr Faustus* the prophetic voice of the vatic poet. In the first volume of his autobiography *Little Wilson and Big God* recalling the times of his graduation in 1940 he explains his choice: “I was specializing in Chr. Marlowe and was writing a thesis on *Dr Faustus*. This had a lot to say about my own condition while the Nazi bombers were droning in to demolish Trafford Park. Death might be near (‘enter the devils with fireworks’) and the hell the renegade catholic had scoffed at as a fable might be all too real... *Dr Faustus* as a symbolic autobiography was the theme of my thesis. Faustus wants to gain power through knowledge. But there is only one kind of knowledge worth having, and that is knowledge of ultimate reality.” Then, in an apologetic comment he

⁵ Anthony Burgess: *A Dead Man in Deptford*, London, Vintage, 1994. 272.

⁶ Anthony Burgess: *Shakespeare*, New York, Hachette Books, 1970. 105.

⁷ Burgess: *Shakespeare*, 101.

adds: "One does not write literary theses out of one's uneasy soul. Writing about *Dr Faustus* out of uneasy nerves was imposed upon me by the times."⁸

The artistic autonomy, integrity and identity of both playwrights are also emphasized by their mutual absence in each other's fictional biographies. There are hardly more than a dozen references to Marlowe in *Nothing Like the Sun*, in terms of volume not more than 3-4 pages out of 234, and, to balance the scales, Shakespeare appears either in person or through references altogether 5 times on five different pages in Marlowe's story. This double-neglect is all the more telling if we take into account the amount of scholarship – in his own terms "secondary scholarship" – Burgess the historian, the biographer and the linguist deployed for the fictional staging of the two playwrights' lives. Reflection on the professional communication between Shakespeare and Marlowe, however, is a must for Burgess the scholar, the omniscient author of the Bard's biography written only six years after the fictional one, not completely free either from conjectures, guess-work, even invention that make up for the lack of documentary material indispensable for historical biographies. For the scholar, issues of inspiration, collaboration and succession are of vital importance. Shakespeare – like his predecessor – was as much the maker as the make of an age when both the professional career and the individual achievement of a playwright depended – through various channels of communication – on practically all the factors of his life: economic, political, ideological, social and cultural alike. This may be called the *existential* aspect of the two playwrights' relationship. Its *essential* aspect – their artistic kinship – can be revealed only through their work. Burgess, however, deliberately and consistently resists the temptation of playing the critic. In the foreword of his Shakespeare biography, he makes his purpose clear:

If I discuss the content or technique of what Shakespeare or other men wrote, it is not with a view to providing literary history or literary criticism; it is because the people in this book are mostly professional writers, and what they attempted in their art often relates closely to what they did with their lives. But it is the lives that come first, and especially one particular life.... Genuine criticism is a different thing but that has become highly specialized and there is certainly no room for it in a book of this kind.⁹

Existence and essence must be different by profession for the biographer or the critic but they may be synonymous for the novelist and the playwright. The essence of a play as much as that of a piece of Burgessian fiction is concentrated in the characters – only they can verify the kinship of their authors. WS/Will

⁸ Anthony Burgess: *Little Wilson and Big God*, New York, Vintage, 2002. 227.

⁹ Burgess: *Shakespeare*, 9.

of *Nothing Like the Sun* and Kit/Marlow of *A Dead Man in Deptford* are such creatures. Neither of them has much to do with what can be known about them from previously published biographies. In sharp contrast with their figures, the existential context of their life – the scene, the cultural milieu, the religious, political and social state of contemporary affairs – is called to vivid life in minute details which are as accurate as they can be even by the strictest measures of historical criticism. Elizabethan London is home ground for Burgess, the chosen second home of the writer. A world to which he belongs the way his narrator-persona does in *A Dead Man in Deptford*. He is an imaginary double of Burgess's distant relative, Jacke Wilson, the actor-musician-composer of Shakespeare's playing company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men, whose name – instead of the character, Balthasar – appears in the stage direction of *Much Ado about Nothing* in the First Folio by accident. The alleged descent is suggested by certain historical records feeding the imagination of the family myth-makers, but it comes in handy for Burgess to confirm his authorial claims of kinship and partly explains his deep-felt attachment to both the times and the place as well as the irresistible allure of the profession itself.

Nothing Like the Sun: A story of Shakespeare's Love-Life focuses on Shakespeare the poet. The now lyrical, now dramatic interplay of Shakespeare's life and works is most intense and convincing – and no doubt, at its best – when the sonneteer takes the lead. Burgess takes the words of Wordsworth, the famous titling sentence of "Scorn not the Sonnet"¹⁰ literally and renders particular poems to all the major stages of Shakespeare's extramarital love affairs homo and hetero alike. Through the careful selection of the key-pieces, he unlocks all the doors opening to the chambers of Shakespeare's heart, which beats the loudest in the bedchambers of his amorous endeavors, where the Bard – seen through Huxley's glasses – unlocks also his pants. Burgess's Manichean match of Wordsworth's romantic and Huxley's satirical views of Shakespeare's love-life is the biographer's key to the whole story. The two keys in unison unlock also the novelist's mind, whose composition is organized by the grounding concept of dualism. The duplicity of all things, human nature above all, is a genuinely Shakespearean concept, in full accord with Burgess's "modernist-postmodernist preoccupations with ambiguity and polysemy".¹¹ Duality, more precisely its synonymic variations by gradation from mere ambiguities to straight oppositions is the common semantic denominator of the novel's compositional elements. East and west, lofty castles and suburban hovels, playhouses and brothels, lust and love, faith and atheism, conformism and rebellion, idealism and materialism, art and craft, high poetry and drunken bawdry, the

¹⁰ "Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned, / Mindless of its just honours; with this key / Shakespeare unlocked his heart; the melody / Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound; ..."

¹¹ Ákos Farkas: *Will's Son and Jake's Peer*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2002. 113.

praise of beauty and the curse of diseases, literature as a gift of grace by divine inspiration and the product of sheer libidinal drive, an "epiphenon of the action of the flesh"¹² – an endless set of such duplicities form the richly textured thematic tissue of the novel.

Burgess, in full accord with his master's dialectical views and practices, removes the beautifying veil of bardolatry from Shakespeare's image to reshape it into a moving picture, his own portrait, the creature of shared creative agencies: those of the maker and the make.

The flesh and blood embodiment of Burgess's dialectical practices is Shakespeare himself – doubled. Now Will, now WS he is a narrative-lyrical-dramatic composition of authorial duplicities, the product of the biographer and the novelist's close collaboration. The biographer's is Stratford's upstart whose chief ambition – driven by delusions of noble descent – is to rise in wealth and rank, to become a gentleman, to buy the second-best house in his home town and ensure a safe future for his family. It is the bourgeois Shakespeare whose fragmental mosaic-image emerges from the painfully scanty collection of historical facts: commercial, legal and church documents. His counterpart is the dreamer, the devoted lover of men and women, poems and plays. Pieces written to the dictation of a mysterious goddess with the purpose to purge the devil lurking in all of us on the stage "by images of order coaxed out of wrack and filth to keep chaos under, to emboss a stamp of order on time's flux".¹³ His figure is shaped by the same aesthetic principles the playwright himself voices in his professional disputes with his fellows in *The Lord Chamberlain's Men*. He criticizes Chapman's characters in his new play, *A Humorous Day's Mirth*, saying: "But they are not true people. They are not built out of warring elements. They are a sort of potion... They cannot surprise either themselves or others by becoming other than what they are... a human soul is not just one repeated air, it is many."¹⁴

Shakespeare the poet is safely driven home in Burgess's world under the guidance of his sonnets, but the playwright's share in the joint venture is far from being that evident. With both the teacher and the critic muted, he carefully avoids interpretation and addresses plays solely in respect to their relation to Shakespeare's life and the times of their making. Informed again by the biographer, Burgess enlists all the plays written between the question-marked date of the beginning and the 1599 opening of the Globe, and by careful timing he weaves them loosely into the narrative tissue of their author's story. Most of them are merely mentioned, quasi passingly on the periphery of the narrator's vision. Only a handful of them deserve special attention, the ones that are closely related by theme, plot or character to the known or assumed

¹² Burgess: *Nothing Like the Sun*, 233.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

time of their making, the private or the public spheres of their author's life (*Titus Andronicus*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*). All this – however varied the plays are in genre, character, mode or style – is still the work of the “sweet Master Shakespeare”, whose pretty poems and plays “were driven by the mild engines of right and wrong”, to whom “evil was yet to be born”.¹⁵ The light of youth and love in *Nothing Like the Sun* gets darkened toward the end of the unfinished story. The ever-growing awareness of corruption – exterior and interior, that of body and soul in tight embrace – leads to disillusionment and despair but the readiness/ripeness to face evil, the fate that awaits in the yet unwritten tragedies is missing.

Burgess leaves Shakespeare at the most dramatic turn of his life with his first bitter comedy, *Troilus and Cressida*, a work in progress. It is the oddest play of the period, the joint work of the doubly cheated-upon lover (by friend and mistress arm in arm) and the moralist playwright, who had seen enough of the vile world's ways to go on with mere pleasing. The counterpointed voices of utter disillusionment produce a piece of discord, one of the most unpleasant plays of Shakespeare's.

Burgess twenty-nine years later – as if he wanted to make up for the lack of a second volume covering the rest of Shakespeare's life – in his last novel published in his life (the year he died), *A Dead Man in Deptford*, returned to his first beloved author, Chr. Marlowe.

A Dead Man in Deptford, a belated sequel to *Nothing Like the Sun*, is also a book of manifold duplicities. Marlowe's fictional biography is the double of Shakespeare's by mutual substitution. It should have been written in 1964 to grace the quatercentenary of its hero's birth, but his date-mate's claim was stronger.¹⁶ It offered greater challenge and an unmissable opportunity for Burgess for the joint celebration of the Bard and his latest avatar. Thus in 1964 (half of) Shakespeare's story was written instead of his peer's, whereas in 1993 on the occasion of his death's quatercentenary, Marlowe was honored with his double's swansong to substitute for the missing Shakespeare-sequel.

A Dead Man in Deptford, a double-timed testamentary piece, is the work of a graver Burgess burdened with the accumulated knowledge and experience of 30 years. It is, in many ways, formally as much as contentwise, a close kin of its antecedent: a historically informed piece performed on authenticated period instruments sounding the full orchestral range of early-modern English. It is a work of consummation weighing the graver issues of an author ready and ripe for the final account offering food for thought much harder to digest

¹⁵ Burgess: *Nothing Like the Sun*, 261.

¹⁶ The first editions of *Nothing like the Sun*: London, William Heinemann, 1964; New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1964.

than whatever Shakespeare was occupied with before the great tragic sequence. Marlowe, "the pederastic atheist with mouth of gold and mourning in his eyes"¹⁷ is as much alive as his peer in *Nothing Like the Sun*, but the forces that shape his career gradually overcome the life of the artist, who falls victim to his double agency to become the Faustian hero of his unwritten eighth play – that of his own life.

Marlowe, Marley, Merlin, or Kit for the confidential narrator, is called to life on the second page of his story by a representative sequence of blasphemous curses attributed to him by his ex-bedmate to ensure his flesh-and-blood presence in a book dedicated to the most pressing ethical and theological concerns of his age, which was deprived of religious certainties by the all-undermining skepticism of thought and its prevailing political practices.

Burgess's Marlowe is the fusion of contrary views and ways of life fully accorded with its author's postmodern character-ideals: a dagger-flashing pub-crawler and a Cambridge-trained divine, a fiery loudmouth and a well-versed scholar of the classics, a turncoat spy and the greatest poetic genius of the stage. He is a colorful composite of features, forces, interests, occupations, talents and identities – a historical-tragical-lyrical-comical-farcical mosaic portrait whose bits and pieces are scattered about in the characters of his plays, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, the two parts of *Tamburlaine the Great*, *The Jew of Malta*, *Edward II*, *The Massacre at Paris* but most of all in Burgess's favorite, *Doctor Faustus*, the play he deemed its author's "symbolic autobiography" in his now lost BA dissertation, the prelude to their love affair. It is through Marlowe's dramatic double that Burgess, at the end of his career, finds his way back to its beginning, rounding his own portrait with a finely-fitted frame.

After getting acquainted with Burgess's doubles, we will see – perhaps even read – both Marlowe and Shakespeare differently. The truth that the painted curtain hides may be manifold and the more portraits we face, the clearer the outlines of the authors may become.

If the Shakespeare of *Nothing Like the Sun* falls victim to its author's heart, the Marlowe of *A Dead Man in Deptford* to his mind. One to the uncompromising love of beauty, the other to the undeterred pursuit of truth, whatever this or that may be. The main force that shapes their lives and works, existence and essence is freedom. The freedom of faith and thought, speech and action, but above all the freedom of expression, the artist's gift and curse.

Authorized by this same freedom, Burgess encourages us to see and read both Marlowe and Shakespeare as freely as he does. And if we can read his doubles that way, we will read him differently as well – both the Burgess of fictional and historical biographies and the author of dozens of novels and

¹⁷ Burgess: *Little Wilson and Big God*, 228.

stories long and short: an oeuvre that far outnumbers the joint output of all his doubles. Size, for Burgess, does matter after all.

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THE EVEN-HANDEDNESS OF JUSTICE IN *MACBETH*

MÁRTA HARGITAI

“Suit the action to the word, the word to the action”; although a practical piece of advice tailored to Hamlet’s taste and needs in instructing the Players, the formula can be understood as having a distinctive moral character as well, presupposing that your words should perfectly reflect whatever good/right you do; and whatever ethically correct words you utter, should be followed by the corresponding right/correct deeds. I believe it is this moral stance that the two great professors’ lives and oeuvres exemplified and keep instructing many generations to follow.

This advice, however, as so many other concepts in *Hamlet* and in Shakespearean plays in general, is as ambiguous as it can get: are not Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Iago, and many other empty-hearted following it as well (c.f. Kent’s maxim, “Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sound / Reverbs no hollow-ness” [1.1.160–161]). They say the right (in their case, amoral or immoral) words to achieve their goals no matter what. Shakespeare discovered this contradiction in *Henry V*, where he gave it a comic treatment: “I did never know so full a voice issue from so / empty a heart: but the saying is true: ‘The empty / vessel makes the greatest sound’” (the Boy about Pistol, 4.4.67–69).

In his tragedies, on the other hand, such behaviour not only leads to tragic consequences, but will disintegrate the whole society, which is based on duties, bonds, and loyalties, and will eventually question any absolute basis of existence itself as well. Thus, from this perspective, Hamlet’s instruction cannot be expanded to represent absolute truth as both words and actions can be either morally good or bad, therefore, the formula can only further relativize a more basic problem: that of the possibilities for the absolute to exist in a world of relativity.

There is a similar case in *Hamlet* when Polonius advises his son, Laertes, “This above all: to thine own self be true” (1.3.78), which only has moral validity if the self is true in general, i.e. if there is absolute goodness somewhere out there that could qualify the self good. Certainly, this is Polonius’ intended meaning as his consecutive lines show, “And it must follow, as the night the day, / Thou canst not then be false to any man” (1.3.79–80). But what if one’s self is bad, corrupt, depraved, etc.?¹

¹ C.f. Philip Edwards’ gloss for 1.78 in the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of *Hamlet* (2003 updated edition), to ... true “There are higher aims in life than to be true to such a limited self as Polonius. Again, these words rise from their immediate context and radiate over the whole

This kind of relativization is typical of Shakespeare's treatment of moral categories, yet what he tries to achieve in his great tragedies is "to create something absolute in a modern world of relativity and to create the myth of the individual in a world demythologized" (Géher).² This oscillation between what *is* relative and what *should be* absolute can be seen in the image of *even-handed justice*.

Although the precise phrase only occurs once in Shakespeare, in Macbeth's speech in Act I Scene 7, the idea of justice frequently emerges in other plays as well, for example, in *The Merchant of Venice*, where there are 15 occurrences of the word *justice*, and where we hear a similar expression from the Prince of Morocco, "weigh thy value with an even hand" when contemplating which casket to choose, "'Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.' / As much as he deserves! Pause there, Morocco, / And weigh thy value with an even hand" (2.7.23–25).

In the play, it is Portia who uses the word *justice* the most frequently, and in two of the most important stage props, the balance (i.e., the scales) and Shylock's knife, we can perhaps recognise the misappropriated emblems of justice.³

Within the aforementioned framework, the paper will investigate the concept of justice (both absolute and relative) in the context of Renaissance iconography, *Macbeth* and the philosophy of law. Even-handedness, meaning impartiality, obviously recalls images of Justitia holding a pair of scales in one hand and a sword in the other. The scales are perfectly balanced, which traditionally symbolizes "reasoned decision-making and the search for truth since early Egyptian scrolls depicted the actions of a deceased soul weighed against a feather – symbolizing Reason and Truth would decide the fate of the soul."⁴

Sutherland-Smith in her semiotic analysis of Justitia adds that "[t]he scales of justice are commonly associated with the symbolic need, in Law, to weigh

play. Such an injunction, of dubious value for Polonius and Laertes, touches the centre of Hamlet's predicament. 'To thine own self be true!' But to which self? He cannot reach the self to which he must be true" (110).

² This is the idea of Prof. István Géher (preserved in one of my university notebooks) that I most frequently use (misuse/abuse?) in class, and I have noticed that students always put this down very carefully in their own notebooks recognizing its eternal significance. A former student of mine used this as inspiration to write his thesis about the *Godfather* trilogy, a topic he chose after his supervisor, Prof. Géza Kállay tragically died, and he had to choose another tutor.

³ C.f. M. M. Mahood's comment in the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of *MV* (2003 updated edition), "Shylock's scales, a misappropriated emblem of justice" (37); and also his gloss for 4.1.251 balance=scales, "But for the Renaissance spectator the balance was a powerful classical and religious emblem; and an audience familiar with the figure crowning the Old Bailey can still recognise in Shylock's knife and scales a cynical parody of the trappings of Justice" (157).

⁴ Wendy Sutherland-Smith: Justice Unmasked: A Semiotic Analysis of Justitia, *Semiotica*, 2011/185, 241, <https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.2011.039>

the merit of arguments presented in a case and take account of all relevant facts in order to reach a reasonable, fair, and justifiable decision. This means the process is designed to ensure there is a winner and a loser – the scales must tip in favor of one party or another”.⁵ In *Macbeth* the winner is the loser, the battle is lost and won by the titular character, which further complicates the problem.

Modern interpreters of law, including Sutherland-Smith, Barbara Underwood, and Bradley A. Knox, however, never fail to point out that the scales can be tampered with, as only what is called admissible evidence will be chosen to be heard, thus to be weighed. Knox adds that “the ‘empirically driven’ scales is also a trope that can be manipulated”⁶ and refers to Barbara Underwood, who notes that “putting a thumb on the defendant’s side compensate[s] for a systematic flaw in the scales.”⁷

Sutherland-Smith also considers this paradox:

[O]f course, legal processes also ensure that evidence is only able to be heard, and therefore form part of the information on which a decision is based, if it is considered admissible evidence under legal rules of procedure. Balancing the need to ensure a fair hearing and deciding what information will be admitted to the hearing may also see the scales of justice become unbalanced in the eyes of citizens.⁸

Justitia traditionally, “also holds a double-edged sword in her right hand, symbolizing the powers of Reason and Justice, which may be wielded either for or against any party in a case”, adds Sutherland-Smith. “Historically,” she traces the object, “a sword of justice could be used to behead those judged guilty of crimes by those in power and one such sword dating from 1599 exists in the Museum of Criminology in Rome”, therefore, as Sutherland-Smith concludes, we might sense a tension between the two implications of the symbolism of the sword: justice and punishment.⁹ Thus, the question legitimately arises, are those in power right and just or are they abusing the power they have?

There is a third attribute of Justitia, that she is blindfolded, which is ambiguous in itself as well, as it is unclear whether she is deliberately covering her eyes to be able to stay impartial or is she blind like Fortuna, randomly meting out punishments – but as this idea does not emerge in *Macbeth*, I will not discuss it here.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Bradley A. Knox: The Visual Rhetoric of Lady Justice: Understanding Jurisprudence Through ‘Metonymic Tokens’, *Inquiries* Vol. 6, No. 05, 2014, <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=896> (accessed 27 July 2022).

⁷ Ibid. (Citing from: Barbara Underwood: The thumb on the scales of justice: Burdens of persuasion in criminal cases, *The Yale Law Journal*, 86(7), 1977, 1299–1348.)

⁸ Sutherland-Smith: Justice Unmasked, 242.

⁹ Ibid., 239–240.

In sum, the sword, the scales and the blindfold can all be seen as ambiguous polyvocal, “metonymic tokens” (c.f. Knox n.p.) in the Justitia-tradition, and this ambiguity is typical of the verbal occurrences of *justice* in *Macbeth* as well.

THE FIRST OCCURRENCE OF *JUSTICE*

In *Macbeth* the word *justice* appears three times, first in 1.2 in the sergeant’s account of the happenings on the battlefield.

As whence the sun ‘gins his reflection
 Shipwrecking storms and direful thunders break,
 So from that spring whence comfort seem’d to come
 Discomfort swells. *Mark, king of Scotland, mark:*
No sooner justice had with valour arm’d
 Compell’d these skipping kerns to trust their heels,
 But the Norweyan lord surveying vantage,
 With furbish’d arms and new supplies of men
 Began a fresh assault.

(1.2.25–33) (emphasis mine)

The closeness of *king* and *justice* may justify Braunmuller’s view that Duncan here is “analogous to personified Justice and Macbeth to valour”,¹⁰ as *valour* recalls its personified use in l. 19 (*Valour’s minion with a brandished steel*), and maybe also because it is here that the dialogue first identifies Duncan as king.¹¹ The juxtaposed images of king as justice and the picture of a brave soldier holding a sword might also evoke the tradition of distinguishing between the two roles of English monarchs, one as military leader, another as embodiment of justice as it can be seen in the iconography of the Great Seal of English monarchs as demonstrated by Rosemarie McGerr.¹² Tracing the evolution of the iconography of the great seal, McGerr writes that “Several English kings after the Norman Conquest used a Great Seal on which the king appears enthroned and holding an upright sword in his right hand on the reverse side”.¹³ A significant change took place under Henry III, she continues based on Paul Binski’s 1999 and Anthony Musson’s 2001 research. “Whereas Henry III’s first Great Seal continued the earlier imagery of the king holding a sword on both sides, in 1259 he commissioned a new seal that kept the image of a king on

¹⁰ Albert R. Braunmuller glosses for ll.28-9, 106.

¹¹ Cf. *ibid.*

¹² Rosemarie McGerr: *A Lancastrian Mirror for Princes: The Yale Law School New Statutes of England*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2011.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 54.

horseback with a sword in his right hand on the reverse side, but changed the image of the enthroned king on the obverse side".¹⁴

On Henry III's first seal from 1219 he is depicted holding a *sword* and *orb* on the obverse and brandishing a sword on the reverse on horseback. The second seal introduced in 1259 makes a substantial change in the so far traditional structure further separating the two roles by depicting the king holding a *sceptre* and *orb* on the obverse and brandishing a sword on the reverse, effectively severing the sword from the sceptre fulfilling Merlin's prophecy.¹⁵ The *Liber de Antiquis Legibus* (1259) made a "special note of the change of style of Henry's seal and its exchange of attributes, adding in a margin "thus was fulfilled the prophecy which says, 'By reason of wondrous change, that sword shall be severed from the sceptre', an allusion to the allegorical prophecies of Merlin which were cited more than once in opposition to Henry's rule".¹⁶ Binski explains the further changes, "[i]n place of the sword in the right hand of the king, we find instead a long rod with a bird, probably a dove, on its tip".¹⁷ The rod, writes Binski, is a direct allusion to the seal of St. Edward the Confessor, with the sword migrating to the counterseal.¹⁸ The new seal, Binski postulates, is a link in the chain of ideas promoting the cult of Henry's patron saint, St. Edward.¹⁹ Thus, Binski concludes, Henry fashioned himself on this wise Solomonic ruler image as a peaceable and not merely sword-bearing monarch. Therefore, Henry by virtue of the seal's allegory, discloses that he is "the successor of the virtuous Anglo-Saxon ruler to whom he was distantly related."²⁰

It is compelling to juxtapose this new arrangement with the Shakespearean play-text where we see Macbeth brandishing a sword and the image of the king as justice rapidly following each other. Thus, following the above analogy, one might not be wrong to claim that Macbeth can easily be conceived as Duncan's reverse side:²¹ Duncan retains the name, titles and honours to a king while conferring military leadership on younger strengths (c.f. *KL* 1.1.35).²²

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Paul Binski: "Hierarchies and Orders in English Royal Images of Power", In *Orders and Hierarchies In Late Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, Edited by Jeffrey Denton, London: Macmillan, 1999. 74-93. 77.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 79.

²¹ Doubles do abound in *Macbeth*, for one, we have Macbeth & Banquo presented as each other's doubles in the same scene 1.2, and the word is repeated most famously in the weird sisters' idiom as well.

²² Interestingly, in Shakespeare's main source, *The Holinshed's Chronicles, Volume V*, Duncan and Macbeth are presented as two cousins who make a perfect contrast, "Makbeth a valiant gentleman, and one that if he had not beene somewhat cruell of nature, might haue beene thought most woorthie the gouernement of a realme. On the other part, Duncane was so soft

McGerr accepts Binski's idea that Henry's second seal, where on the obverse side, he holds a sceptre, topped with a dove, links him "to a biblical symbol of divine grace and to the sainted English king, Edward the Confessor, whose coat of arms included five doves."²³

It is Edward to whom Act III Scene 6²⁴ refers as the holy English king – Edward the Confessor (1042–1066) –, describing him as most pious, receiving Malcolm with much grace, as a sharp contrast to Macbeth's unholy misrule of Scotland; therefore, this can be called yet another example of Shakespeare's usual method of presenting both the good king and the bad one, the use and abuse of power in juxtaposition.

The son of Duncan,
 From whom this tyrant holds the due of birth,
 Lives in the English court and is received
Of the most pious Edward with such grace,
 That the malevolence of fortune nothing
 Takes from his high respect.
 (3.6.24–29) (emphasis mine)

Duncan, therefore, paradoxically will be Edward's double in retrospect, that of another gracious sovereign – *gracious* being Duncan's epithet, used three times in the play²⁵ – deriving his authority from God alone. (In contrast, the rebel Macbeth makes a breach with nature's rule, and seizes the throne by force and betrayal.)

Yet, Edward the Confessor is a much more ambiguous character in history, with which Shakespeare's audience might have been familiar: as he was childless, he had to consider various candidates for his succession during his reign, and although historians are divided whether he appointed William as his successor or not, his reign was followed by the Norman conquest. Stephen Baxter calls it a "revealing commentary on Edward's handling of the succession

and gentle of nature, that the people wished the inclinations and maners of these two cousins to haue beene so tempered and interchangeable bestowed betwixt them, that where the one had too much of clemencie, and the other of crueltie, the meane vertue betwixt these two extremities might haue reigned by indifferent partition in them both, so should Duncane haue proued a woorthie king, and Makbeth an excellent capteine" (264–265). Raphael Holinshed: *Chronicles of England, Scotland, And Ireland*, Vol. V. *Scotland*. 1587 reprint, edited by Henry Ellis, London, J. Johnson, 1808, <https://archive.org/details/chroniclesofengl05holiuoft> (accessed 30 August 2022).

²³ McGeer: *A Lancastrian Mirror for Princes*, 63.

²⁴ 3.6 is often left out of performances, more on this see Nicholas Brooke: Introduction to *Macbeth*, 51–53.

²⁵ C.f. "gracious England" referring to Edward twice in the play-text.

question that it was decided by a rebellion, not by the king",²⁶ adding that "in the end, Edward had little choice but to comply with the rebels' demands".²⁷ As Baxter concludes his description of the period, "[i]n a revealing passage which concludes its treatment of this episode, the *Vita*²⁸ twice refers to the king's powerlessness, his impotentia. That word, impotentia, epitomises Edward's handling of politics and the succession question during the last few years of his reign".²⁹ (109). Thus, in this more complex view, Edward is not so much the antithesis of the unholy Macbeth, but more likely a variation on the topos of bad king, with qualities shared by both Macbeth (impotentia, heirlessness) and Duncan (piety).

Gracious, on the other hand, is also applied in Seyton's ("What is your gracious pleasure?" (5.3.30) and the messenger's ("Gracious my lord" 5.5.29) address to Macbeth, which can be seen as instances of dramatic irony, considering the audience's familiarity with Macbeth's previous deeds, which are far from being gracious. This kind of handling of an otherwise positive concept might recall Othello's overuse of *honest* in application to Iago,³⁰ or Antony's *honourable* (10 times) in his famous speech in 3.2. of *Julius Caesar*.

Gracious appears in yet another context, in reference to England (4.3.43). Although it seems paradoxical that the Scottish heir to the throne, Malcolm, should be talking about England in that tone, in the already established contrast between unnatural, chaos-stricken Scotland³¹ and England ruled by the later-to-be-sainted king³², it makes perfect sense and is, therefore, justifiable.

The holy English sovereign is further contrasted with Macbeth in 4.3: the latter is sickness and perversion, bringing nothing but disaster, chaos and destruction to his own country, whereas Edward can heal the King's Evil, or scrofula, by touching and by hanging a golden medal around the neck of the sick.

²⁶ Stephen Baxter: Edward the Confessor and the Succession Question, in Richard Mortimer (ed.): *Edward the Confessor. The Man and the Legend*, Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2009, 108.

²⁷ Ibid., 109.

²⁸ Mortimer claims that "The most difficult of all the sources for Edward's life, but potentially the most important, is the first work which claims to be his biography, the *Vita Edwardi*, the *Life of King Edward who Rests at Westminster*" (14).

²⁹ Baxter: Edward the Confessor, 109.

³⁰ But maybe all the 45 occurrences of *honest* are better to be taken that way in *Othello*.

³¹ See the Old Man's description of the night of the murder of Duncan at the beginning of 2.4.

³² See "The son of Duncan, / From whom this tyrant holds the due of birth, / Lives in the English court and is received / Of the most pious Edward with such grace, / That the malevolence of fortune nothing / Takes from his high respect. Thither Macduff / Is gone to pray the holy king upon his aid" (3.6.24–39).

'Tis call'd the evil:
 A most miraculous work in this good king;
 Which often, since my here-remain in England,
 I have seen him do. How he solicits heaven,
 Himself best knows: but strangely-visited people,
 All swoln and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye,
 The mere despair of surgery, he cures,
 Hanging a golden stamp about their necks,
 Put on with holy prayers: and 'tis spoken,
 To the succeeding royalty he leaves
 The healing benediction. With this strange virtue,
 He hath a heavenly gift of prophecy,
 And sundry blessings hang about his throne,
 That speak him full of grace.

(4.3.148–161)³³

Along these lines, we could say that perhaps the two kinds of justice (absolute and relative) are already possible to tell apart in these verbal & iconographic images, confirming the belief that the king can only represent absolute justice if he fully aligns with the divine law and keeps in mind the well-being of his subjects; neither of which is ever respected by Macbeth.

THE SECOND MENTION OF JUSTICE IN *MACBETH*

After its introduction in 1.2, the notion of justice is given full momentum in Macbeth's soliloquy about his desire to jump the present moment and arrive in the future escaping retribution (1.7). The passage is rich in ambiguities, and complex enough to be given at least three different interpretations.

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
 It were done quickly. If th'assassination
 Could trammel up the consequence and catch
 With his surcease, success, that but this blow

³³ Elizabeth and James, writes Braunmuller, gave a gold coin, an 'angel', depicting the Archangel Michael, to those they touched (Braunmuller's gloss for 'stamp', 211). It is interesting to note that, traditionally, Archangel Michael and Justitia are both represented with scales, with which they weigh the souls and they both have a sword as well. "In art St. Michael is represented as an angelic warrior, fully armed with helmet, sword, and shield (often the shield bears the Latin inscription: Quis ut Deus), standing over the dragon, whom he sometimes pierces with a lance. He also holds a pair of scales in which he weighs the souls of the departed, or the book of life, to show that he takes part in the judgment" (<https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/michael-the-archangel-saint>).

Might be the be-all and the end-all - here,
 But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
 We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases,
 We still have judgement here that we but teach
 Bloody instructions, which being taught, return
 To plague th'inventor. *This even-handed justice*
Commends th'ingredience of our poisoned chalice
To our own lips. He's here in double trust:
 First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
 Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
 Who should against his murderer shut the door,
 Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
 Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
 So clear in his great office, that his virtues
 Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against
 The deep damnation of his taking-off.
 And pity, like a naked newborn babe
 Striding the blast, or heaven's chérubin horsed
 Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
 Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
 That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
 To prick the sides of my intent, but only
 Vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself
 And falls on th'other –

(1.7.1–28) (emphasis mine)

I have formerly written about the educational aspect of the soliloquy, examining the *upon this bank and shoal of time* phrase as *bench and school of time*. This reading is supported on the one hand by Muir, who is citing Heath, in *Revisal of Shakespeare's Text* (1765) arguing for bank (=bench) and school,³⁴ and on the other, by Braunmuller's conviction that "Folio's "Banke and Schoole" could also be modernised as 'bench and school'.³⁵

I also addressed another context of the same phrase in another article, concentrating on the time aspect of the idiom "bank and shoal of time" (1.7.6), which can be called a "characteristic Shakespearean near-redundancy, treating time as a river" presenting Macbeth momentarily halting "time's flow by standing on a shoal or by grasping the bank".³⁶

When Braunmuller adds that OED defines 'bank' (=bench) as referring to the seat of justice, the mountebank's stage, or the rower's bench (OED Bank

³⁴ Kenneth Muir's gloss for 'bank and shoal', 37.

³⁵ Braunmuller's gloss for 'bank and shoal', 131.

³⁶ Ibid.

sb2 1-3), he seems to fuel yet another interpretation, namely a legal reading of the passage, as this is the third, and perhaps final full context in which the soliloquy can be interpreted. Braunmuller calls attention to the fact that Macbeth will soon mention 'instructions' and 'justice', "which might be anticipated in 'school' and 'bench'",³⁷ therefore both an educational and a legal context is possible to maintain at the same time.

My suggestion with the three different readings is, therefore, that we should perhaps use them complementing each other rather than seeing them as mutually exclusive.

Muir in his critical edition of the play refers to Bethell, who is one of the few modern critics to defend 'school'. He adopts the suggestion of the Rev. G. Shaw that *bank* is the 'judicial bench', probably from O.F. *banc*. Muir claims that the word 'bank' was certainly current in the meaning of judicial bench in Shakespeare's time, as Bethell writes, "Time is thus seen as the period of judgement, testing, or "crisis", and as a school; corresponding to these meanings we have later in the speech, "judgement here" and "teach bloody instructions".³⁸

Peat & Fitzpatrick in their study "*Macbeth* in Performance" hypothesize that Macbeth is delivering the speech directed at the audience in the theatre, thus *we* includes the audience in the Macbeth design, and they postulate that "the basis of the speech in dramatic and linguistic terms is the law".³⁹ They add that *surcease* is "a legal term for a stay of proceedings"; and *bank* "has been taken to suggest the judicial bench and 'cases' coming before 'have judgement' clearly takes on a legal tinge".⁴⁰ In this they follow Muir, who glosses that *surcease* (O.Fr. *sursis*, from *surseoir*), a legal term, meaning 'the stop or stay of proceedings', is not elsewhere in Shakespeare used as a substantive, but in *Lucr.*, l. 1766 ("If they surcease to be that should survive") it is used in a phrase meaning 'die', and Muir believes the word in *Macbeth* is "a euphemism for death – one of several in the play – and that 'his' refers to Duncan".⁴¹

Peat & Fitzpatrick also find that 'even-handed justice' is central to the speech, "which in a hideous parody of communion offers retribution", and "Commends th' ingredience of our poisoned chalice / To our own lips".⁴² They call attention to two types of justice contrasted in the speech: the justice of this world and that of the "world to come" in the lines about Duncan's virtues, which "Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against / The deep damnation of his taking-off". They comment that to Dover Wilson, this connection even "suggests the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Muir's gloss for 'bank and shoal', 37-8.

³⁹ Derek Peat – Tim Fitzpatrick: *Macbeth* in Performance, *Sydney Studies in English*, Vol. 8, 1982, 94, <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/SSE/article/view/389> (accessed 03 August 2022).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Muir's gloss for 'his surcease', 37.

⁴² Peat–Fitzpatrick: *Macbeth*, 94.

Last Judgement".⁴³ Muir makes the same reference to Wilson adding that Garrick used to make a long pause after 'Angels' to indicate that the epithet agreed with 'virtues'. Muir, however, finds this interpretation unlikely, suggesting that 'trumpet-tongued' must refer to Angels, as it "either means 'using their trumpets for speech', or more likely, 'with voices as clear, penetrating, and musical, as trumpets'".⁴⁴

Carrying the idea of Macbeth talking directly to the audience further, Peat & Fitzpatrick conclude that "[i]t is not just the language which suggests a law court; in direct delivery the entire speech takes on legal associations. Macbeth appears as a man presenting a case: acting as both judge and advocate", and most probably he is judging himself as well. They call attention to the "rhetorical nature of the speech, the careful weighing of the evidence, and the creation of that distance between the speaker and himself as his own subject as Macbeth characterizes himself, 'his kinsman', 'his subject', 'his host' and glances at a role he should avoid, 'his murderer'".⁴⁵

Therefore, if we agree that Macbeth here is carefully weighing evidence against his already estranged other self, even-handed justice can also have another referent: his own inbuilt sense of even-handed, i.e. impartial justice. This image of Macbeth further corroborates Géher's idea that Macbeth is not intrinsically evil: he is originally a predominantly good person, and that the biggest tragedy is when a good man commits a crime. Thus, I argue, it is also possible to see the dichotomy of justice as follows: it is not so much a contrast between the justice of this world and that of the "world to come" but more of the reiterated image of a bendable version of eternal justice in the hands of a usurper/rebel (remember the brandished sword in Macbeth's hand); i.e., the absolute made relative – that's where the dichotomy of justice lies.

Macbeth repeatedly speaks about the deeds bouncing back on the perpetrator, as a rule of eternal justice, and it is this consequence he wants to skip wishing that "this blow / Might be the be-all and the end-all" (1.7.5). The conditional frame of the speech, however, demonstrates that he knows it is not the case and the sinner cannot trammel up, i.e. catch the consequences as in a net and the ill deed will return to plague the inventor.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Muir's gloss for 'trumpet-tongued', 39.

⁴⁵ Peat-Fitzpatrick: Macbeth, 94.

THE THIRD OCCURRENCE OF *JUSTICE*

The third occurrence of *justice* is truly intriguing for yet another reason: Malcom, the royal member of the nemesis-group – whose main function is to take revenge on the rebel-figure and also to restore something of the previous order⁴⁶ – only uses *justice* once in his utterances, and even more surprisingly, in an extremely ambiguous, ironical, or cynical manner:

But I have none: the king-becoming graces,
As *justice*, verity, temperance, stableness,
Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,
Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude,
I have no relish of them, but abound
In the division of each several crime,
Acting it many ways. Nay, had I power, I should
Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell,
Uproar the universal peace, confound
All unity on earth.

(4.3.91–99) (emphasis mine)

All the more so, as his usage of *unjust* came just as ambiguously a few lines earlier:

With this there grows
In my most ill-composed affection such
A stanchless avarice that, were I king,
I should cut off the nobles for their lands,
Desire his jewels and this other's house:
And my more-having would be as a sauce
To make me hunger more; that I should forge
Quarrels *unjust* against the good and loyal,
Destroying them for wealth.

(4.3.77–84) (emphasis mine)

He seems to be using *good* and *loyal* as absolute concepts; therefore, he is presenting himself as willingly evil in this false self-image. The problem,

⁴⁶ Cf. Northrop Frye: *Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1967, 17.

however, as many before me including great actors,⁴⁷ pointed out is that he is equally convincing when he paints this image and when he unmakes it.

Macduff expresses his puzzlement, "Such welcome and unwelcome things at once / 'Tis hard to reconcile" (4.3.138–139). The audience is therefore in the same position as Macduff: hesitant about what to believe; c.f. his "Why are you silent?" (4.3.137). The equivocation is reminiscent of that of the weird sisters' prophecy, where Macbeth was in the same position as now Macduff is. As for his motive, as Braunmuller plausibly suggests, Malcolm might be claiming these evils because he distrusts Macduff, and wants to test his loyalty, particularly because Macduff abandoned his wife and children.

Malcolm declares he lacks the king-becoming graces and "he indicts himself of hyperbolic evil".⁴⁸ In this, I argue, he effectively contrasts himself with gracious Duncan, his father, and allies himself with his supposed enemy, the tyrannical Macbeth.⁴⁹

This final ambiguity, therefore, corroborates the thesis of this paper that the two types of justice: absolute and relative, are not only contrasted but they invite us to address their interconnectedness and the overlapping of their semantic fields from the first to the last occurrence of the word.

CONCLUSION

In *Macbeth*, the absolute, including absolute justice, ideally to be represented by the lawful ruler, is called into question, relativized and, in reaction, its antipode, the image of absolute evil emerges. But as we know from Géher, Macbeth is not as evil as he is painted, and the real tragedy is that a good man commits sin after sin until he realizes he is "in blood / Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er" (3.4.136–138).

Thus, although the absolute as such is probed and found relative in this play, yet somehow a villain-hero emerges, greater than anyone in his daring rebellion: he captures our imagination and takes on mythic dimensions. Shakespeare, in Géher's words, once again creates something absolute in a modern world of relativity and generates a myth of the individual in a world demythologized. Equivocal action is hence suited to the equivocal word, and vice versa.

⁴⁷ See Braunmuller: Introduction to *Macbeth*, 93, about actor Trader Faulkner playing Malcolm alongside Olivier's Macbeth at Stratford in 1955, that he was told by his colleagues that he was "too convincing in the two contradictory aspects of the character".

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁹ On the other hand, Brooke is also perhaps right suggesting that the catalogue of vices is conventional and not typical of Macbeth. See Brooke's gloss for 'luxurious', l.58, 184.

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“JUMPING THE LIFE TO COME”: ON THE NEW METAPHYSICS AND *MACBETH*, *MACBETH*

—◀—
JOHN J. JOUGHIN

NO EXIT

Twenty years ago, amidst late-night discussions in a hotel bar in Stratford, Géza Kállay and I first became properly acquainted and discussed Shakespeare into what they call in Scotland “the wee hours” – and the smaller the time left to us the more expansive our discussions became. There was in those first meetings though an immediate affinity. It was as if temporal succession had been suspended; or at least, we lost track of time – each one of us finishing the sentence of the other. And, unsurprisingly perhaps, this dual identity ran alongside, or often found its source, in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, a common ground that kept forcing the issue, even as it kept each of us from giving way. One night, not so much by way of ending things, more by way of enacting a temporary cessation, Géza pronounced: “There’s simply no way-out, John, no exit from *Macbeth*.”

Over the years that followed I came to understand what Géza meant. Yet in an important sense of course we were already pre-possessed. A common experience, as amidst those distinctive creative and critical efforts to commune with Shakespeare’s play, one might say that the “Scottish play” necessarily retains a non-reciprocal alliance with its own successor forms of life. As such, in distorting any conventional sense of causality and time, it customarily pre-empts us. In the process, the undifferentiated distinction between *Macbeth* and extra-*Macbeth* is impossible to fathom – or remains unspeakable. So much so, that in rehearsal or in its varied restaging those uttering “Macbeth” are frequently asked to leave the theatre; as if some charm or apotropaic device could turn back time before coming after the disaster. No real surprise then, to me at least, when I caught up recently with Géza’s work only to find “a deed without a name” already featuring as the very title of his fine monograph on Shakespeare’s play.¹ And now, echoing again, as if to challenge the very title of our conference, for how, after all, is it possible to speak of “action suited to

¹ Géza Kállay: “A Deed Without a Name”: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and the Singularity of Meaning, Budapest, SEAS, ELTE, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/18749596/_A_Deed_Without_a_Name_Shakespeares_Macbeth_through_the_philosophies_of_Stanley_Cavell_and_Ludwig_Wittgenstein (accessed 5 March 2024).

the word” in a play in which deeds cannot be named, and where words and the performance of words themselves seem to pre-empt knowing, in knowing more than we could possibly ever know?

In coming after, the day of the conference was another inevitably belated attempt to meet again, but also an attempt to confront the myriad ways in which, as Stanley Cavell reminds us, in our appropriations, Shakespeare the playwright ends up appropriating us; and where often “the violence of the appropriation the text exacts upon our attention, its attack upon our prepossessions, our preoccupations with which we think we know about what our intellectual or cultural fathers and mothers have instilled in us ... will mean to learn how to enquire without dispatching the object of our enquiry.”²

As Cavell implies, these and other questions become even more pressing when we seek to take a critical stance or position on the play in question and where in the case of *Macbeth* the play possesses the author, the reader, the audience, and indeed the actor (and here again one thinks of the attendant rituals of superstition which come as if pre-installed with any production of the “Scottish play”) as if in reading the text of *Macbeth* as already being read by *Macbeth*, we are caught in a type of unilateral relation which determines its own outcome.

SUCCESSION-WITHOUT-SUCCESSION I

In teasing out the implications of the intelligibility or otherwise of our shared response to Shakespeare’s resistance to appropriation, I want to turn first briefly to Géza’s contribution to *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy* (2019),³ which appeared alongside his final monograph on Shakespeare’s play. It is here, in what he confesses is a life-long preoccupation with *Macbeth*, that he suggests contemporary Shakespeare studies could benefit immensely from “(new) metaphysical” readings – an approach which, in its consideration of the serious “big” questions, “starts with, is ‘engendered in,’ close-reading.”⁴ In response, my own close reading commences by focusing on what Kállay identifies in his monograph as a key interpretive crux in the play, contained within Macbeth’s soliloquy at the opening of (1.7) as he contemplates “the pros and cons of Duncan’s assassination,”⁵ beginning:

² Stanley Cavell: Foreword, in John J. Joughin (ed.): *Philosophical Shakespeares*, London, Routledge, 2000, xvi.

³ Géza Kállay: The (new and old) metaphysical reading of Shakespeare, in C. Bourne – E.C. Bourne (eds.): *The Routledge Companion to Shakespeare and Philosophy*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2019, 91–105.

⁴ Kállay: The (new and old) metaphysical reading, 94.

⁵ Kállay: “A Deed Without a Name,” 161.

If it were done, when'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly. If th' assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success: that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all...

(1.7.1–5)⁶

Kállay's question at this juncture is essentially how can the "be-all" simultaneously be the "end-all"? And, in the course of unpacking and resolving this apparent temporal paradox, he draws on Paul Ricoeur's distinction between narrative and dramatic time in *Time and Narrative*⁷ – arguing that: "The dramatic, indeed, always aims at containing and possessing its own end, at being the 'be all' and the 'end all' at the same time, at embracing the 'after' into itself, at controlling temporality by not yielding to the 'and then' in the sweep of the narrative."⁸ In some ways of course the notion of "dramatic time" and the "immediacy" of the dramatic moment (which Ricoeur might term "phenomenological time") is key here; and might also accommodate a "presentist" reading. Insofar as it constitutes a suspenseful moment of the "now," which Kállay makes full use of throughout his reading of the play – as time's timeless moment – a qualitative or heterogenous experience of excess; it is also of course the evanescent time of performance. Yet, as Kállay notes, we also need to pause ourselves at this point, noting that:

Here [1.7. 1–5] we may, for a moment, think of the deed and its consequence especially in terms of Duncan's wound and the blood that flows from it, returning, at the same time, to the problem of "success and succession" discussed above. After the discovery of the King's dead body Macbeth presents the situation to Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain with: "The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood / Is stopp'd; the very source of it is stopp'd" (2.3.95–97), yet the rejoinder, suggesting that there is no stop to the flow of blood, comes from Lady Macbeth in the sleep-walking scene: "Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" (5.1. 37–38).⁹

As Kállay suggests, the serious "big" questions "start with, are 'engendered in' close-reading." That sense of "engendering" in close proximity is also particularly

⁶ All quotations from the play are taken from the Third Arden Edition: William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*, eds. Sandra Clark – Pamela Mason, London, Bloomsbury, 2015.

⁷ Paul Ricoeur: *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1., trans. Kathleen McLaughlin – David Pellauer, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1984.

⁸ Kállay: "A Deed Without a Name", 162–163.

⁹ Ibid., 162.

apt here, insofar as “engender” comes from the Latin *generare* “to generate” or “to beget,” and of course the key issue here, as Kállay implies, surely also congeals around bloodline as well as timeline. Meanwhile the question of the “stopped” head (and its multiple figurations in *Macbeth*) is one to which I will want to return later. For the moment, suffice it to say that it immediately raises the question of the head of state, of sovereignty, and political theology, topics that have taken up a central role in the discussion of Shakespeare in recent years.

So, at this point, I would want to double down, as Macbeth indeed does himself at this juncture, on the notion not merely of the complexity of temporal succession, but also of “succession” in its generative sense. And, as such, it’s worth remembering that the fuller passage reads as follows:

If it were done, when ’tis done, then ’twere well
 It were done quickly: If th’ assassination
 Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
 With his surcease success; that but this blow
 Might be the be-all and the end-all, here
 But here, upon this bank and shoal of time
 We ’d jump the life to come.

(1.7.1–7).

What does it mean to “jump the life to come”? Does this simply mean to evade the consequence of the “hereafter” – the “life to come” in the sense of the life after death and therefore to evade the consequence of probable damnation? Or does it mean that the “here” (and Macbeth is insistent on the “here” here) and what comes “after” and the “hereafter” (and the promise that Macbeth “shalt be king hereafter” [1. 3.50]) somehow remain co-extant and conjoined here in the present? That succession is only truly possible without succession, and if Géza were here I would want to ask him: “What if we took Macbeth’s pre-emptive stasis as it stands?” What would it mean if (as Stanley Cavell puts it altogether more bluntly) the protagonist would simply “end time,” if:

Macbeth, in wishing for the success of his act to be a surcease of the need of action, for a deed that undoes doing, must (logically) wish for an end to time. For to destroy time is what he would, with paralyzing paradox, risk the future for: “that but this blow / Might be the be-all and the end-all – here, / But here, upon this bank and shoal of time” (I, vii, 4–6). This is what “We’d jump the life to come” in favor of (whether the life to come is taken to mean the rest of his time, or the rest of time). Why?¹⁰

¹⁰ Stanley Cavell: *Disowning Knowledge: In Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 234.

Why indeed? Again, Cavell touches here upon the impossibility of succession, but in "jumping the life to come" does Macbeth not also contemplate the horror of extinction, of an end to timeline and bloodline – at least for us as well as for the Macbeths – of a life to come which is not merely inhuman but radically unfruitful, even unhuman? Or as Cavell himself puts it in the broader reaches of his essay, at the very least, the wish to be exempt from time in order "to escape a condition of the human." Cavell continues with the following closing parenthesis:

(And suppose the life to come suggests the life to come *from* him. He says that the worth of this kinship is bound up for him with the question of his succession. But we have just heard him say in effect that success would consist for him in surcease, in remaining, with respect to the act which is the type of the consequential – producing progeny – "unlineal," "unfruitful." Well, does he want babies or not? Is this undecidable? If we say so, then Macbeth is the picture of undecidability.)¹¹

In its mainstream critical reception (which Cavell knowingly alludes to here), this touches on the apparently "undecidable" question of "how many children"; yet I want to argue that the impossibility of the life to come, or the issue of issue, also conjures up the horrifying consequence of no consequence, of a life without telos or a "lived-without-life".¹² In short, my suspicion is that the play seems to ask how does one come after or even hereafter, whilst simultaneously living in the end times? And it is a compelling question that no rewriting or adaptation can avoid in engaging with the play.

Baldly stated then my hypothesis is that in this instance sovereignty must equal "succession-without-succession" and that this mutation proves a generic condition for those of us who try to succeed as critics, audiences, performers, directors and adaptors. That there is a non-reciprocal compact between attempted forms of making sense, of speaking, or indeed of knowing the play, which result in an absolute complicity with it; in being forced to think according to what Macbeth already unknowingly knew.

¹¹ Ibid., emphasis in original.

¹² "Lived-without-life?" or "the possibility of a *non-life*, a life than cannot be lived" in any conventional sense? I borrow the term from Eugene Thacker: *Tentacles Longer Than Night: Horror of Philosophy*, Vol. 3., Alresford, Zero Books, 2015, 88. Thacker locates its provenance in the non-standard philosophy of François Laruelle. For his part Laruelle's formula, "lived-without-life," counters the standard philosophical telos of "lived experience" formerly located in idealist "philosophies of life," suggesting instead that as "radically immanent lived experience" lived-without-life is the axiomatic "first term" that names "the 'thing' of real lived experience reduced to its identity-in-One." See François Laruelle and collaborators: *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Taylor Adkins, Minneapolis, Univocal Publishing, 2013, cf. esp. 77–78. I return briefly to the fuller import of Laruelle's work in reading *Macbeth* below, and in the final section of this essay.

In speaking in this way, I'm indirectly deprivileging any critical position which attempts to take a correlative stance between the critic and the object of criticism and to argue instead for a non-standard approach to philosophy. Laruelle's non-philosophy challenges the teleological "sufficiency" of standard variants of philosophy as well as its "metaphysical presuppositions" in arguing that "all philosophies play for some other the role of meta-philosophy. This role with its adopted claims of authority, comprehension and critique, recasts the most general philosophical project and does not constitute a science or a true theory of philosophy."¹³ Instead, Laruelle takes a stance which might be said to clone existing material and in so doing to discover "the immanent identity of thought and reality."¹⁴ This is distinct from a "new metaphysics" insofar as those variants of standard philosophy (old and new) which Laruelle challenges, still operate directly within a binary relation between mind and matter, in deriving a "riven condition of the given," which they then proceed to "transcend or negate."¹⁵ Instead, I want to commit to a radical immanence of Laruellian indivision where, in working in the shadow of Shakespeare's play; *Macbeth* might be said in every sense "to force the issue." As such, contemporary sequels are necessarily in-accordance with the play as an object which "seizes thought" for those who find themselves already in any case pre-possessed by any prior response to the play. This might stand as a further twist on Cavell's sense of the unilateral violence of appropriation, insofar as if any given reading, adaptation or performance of the play claims to be a sequel, then *Macbeth* might be said to prematurely force our hand – simultaneously exposing the complicity of our critical stance in challenging the duplicity of our claim to come after, rooted as it is in the play's axiomatic problematization of the very possibility of sequelization.

MACBETH, MACBETH

In the space that remains, I want to focus briefly on one attempted sequel in particular, a recent work of theory fiction, Ewan Fernie and Simon Palfrey's novel *Macbeth, Macbeth*, which as the super-positioning of their title suggests might be said to be an attempt to read Macbeth "according to Macbeth," or as they put it themselves:

¹³ François Laruelle: *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Nicola Rubczak – Anthony Paul Smith, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, 9.

¹⁴ Alexander R. Galloway: *Laruelle: Against the Digital*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2014, xxiii and passim. Galloway provides an excellent introduction to Laruelle's thought.

¹⁵ Ibid.

We wanted to get inside Macbeth's murder chamber – something Shakespeare never allows. This meant imagining what it would be like to be Macbeth, captured in the act. We wanted to possess the terrible passions of the play – even to be possessed by them – rather than to pretend to master or explain them. How else to touch the play's intense moral life? How else to enter and suffer its wounds?¹⁶

In *Macbeth, Macbeth* the matter of timeline as well as bloodline is further complicated and enriched by the shadow of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* so that the avatars of Karamazov's four sons now double as sons of Macbeth and in part re-emerge to repeat the tragedy of the Father. As a consequence, the genealogy of succession is rendered still more complex and heterogenous. In indirect lineage the twins, Macbeth's sons (who are now raised by the Porter) are Grim ("the atheist intellectual") and Fyn ("the errant sensualist"). Meanwhile in remaining truer to the source, Fernie and Palfrey also revert to Gru or Gruoch, the "real" Lady Macbeth of Shakespeare's Hollinshed (also now Dostoevsky's femme fatale Grushenka).

All this of course serves to further complicate "the issue of issue"; as Gru is the mother of a further set of twins by the aforementioned twin Fyn, but also during the novel the partner sought by Macduff as his prospective Queen. Finally, as events unfold, we also learn that Gru is the Mother of Lulach, son of Macbeth the "helmutman" who comes to her in the night, a rape that her Mother instructs her is in the service of a subject to her Sovereign.

In terms of the question of succession, Malcolm hardly features, or features only as a clown king, an infant in waiting asleep like a slumped corpus in the back of a wagon. It is rather Macduff, the self-styled "History Man" whose narrative arc the novel loosely tracks. His sequel or new beginning "The time is free" constitutes a type of year-zero, as he launches forth on a post-history which is notionally theocratic. A truly dystopian vision with a slave economy who are fodder for the giant grinding mills or Bread factories – charred baking ovens fed by trees culled during deforestation and encroaching from the south leaving an ash-laden sky behind them. All underpinning a form of resurrectional fundamentalism – the wholesome bread of life which Macduff claims will rise again.

Against the grain, the play's political unconscious or counter history is quite literally embodied in the gender fluid Sod/Rose, "the bastard in the shadows," who is very much cast as the prophet/seer figure of the text and who keeps an archive, "a stack of thin parchments," part history / part prophecy secreted and stitched in his/her wounded thigh. A secret history written perhaps again,

¹⁶ Ewan Fernie – Simon Palfrey, with pictures by Tom de Freston: *Macbeth, Macbeth*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, vii.

in order to jump time “to ensure it [Macbeth’s history] doesn’t happen again. To avoid repetitions”¹⁷ – in some sense then an archive or counter history that is also written both within but also against sequel.

As the complex family history unfolds, the novel effectively stages its dissolution from within Shakespeare’s “original” – simultaneously unleashing a threat to health of any conventional structure of the body politic in the form of a “counter-movement that is its own undoing.”¹⁸ In other words, this is Shakespeare and sovereignty in parts if you like, as the short divergent sections of the novel are headed by truncated extracts from the play; while lines from Macbeth and other plays are also “superposed” throughout in the text.¹⁹ The overall impact is a type of re-composition by decomposition. Though, in terms of the putative post-history that follows, the question remains: what type of afterlife is on offer here? While the components are here for a Christological extension of sovereignty, this is no *corpus mysticum* of integrated parts and wholes; instead, we are offered a subscendent body-politic wherein the whole is less than the sum of its parts. A gothic anatomy of monstrous forms, often animal or vegetative, is evoked wonderfully by the visual artist Tom de Freston, whose illustrations of the novel’s teratological figures appear throughout the text. Here in figure one, featuring an early vision of the twins – perhaps Fyn and Grim or perhaps the twins fathered by Fyn later on in the story:

¹⁷ Ibid., 5.

¹⁸ Again, I borrow the term from Thacker to whom I’m indebted here and throughout in terms of his discussion of a “*necrology* of the body politic” (Thacker: *Tentacles Longer Than Night*, 47, 49). In arguing that “the greatest threat to the body politic comes from within,” Thacker suggests a decomposition of the Body Politic which is not dissimilar to Laruelle’s refusal of the structures of transcendence and domination that serve as the condition for the conventional entwinement of politics and theology.

¹⁹ In a sleeve note to the novel Slavoj Žižek notes “the dense network of its superposed states,” observing that “*Macbeth, Macbeth* is as close as one can come to a quantum physical literary criticism.” This is surely right as the creative response doubles as its own commentary even as the play’s own spellbinding linguistic properties determine the recasting of the weave. In these doubly “charged moments,” as Stanley Cavell remarks, it is as if “a word does not exist until it is understood as repeated” (Cavell: *Disowning Knowledge*, 232). Again, this is another dimension of “succession” that I have no room to explore here, yet Cavell’s description of linguistic recurrence as a condition of language as prophecy that the play itself “acknowledges or interprets” comes intriguingly close to the quantum phenomenon in question in “bond[ing] a small group of generally small words so that they may then at any time fall upon one another and discharge or expel meaning” (*Ibid.*, 232). Or, as Fernie and Palfrey put it: “we have tried to stay faithful to the *Macbeth*-playworld’s most intimate movements and physics” (Fernie – Palfrey: *Macbeth, Macbeth*, 280).



Figure 1. Tom de Freston's illustration in *Macbeth, Macbeth*, an early vision of twins.

In many ways then, despite Macduff's attempt to impose an integrated Eucharistic monostate, we are confronted with the extension of sovereignty by other means; and as the body politic confronts the immanent possibility of its own disintegration, the recently decapitated "usurper's cursed head" refuses to stay buried. As such, the novel opens with Sod the prophet/seer figure in the text addressing Macbeth's recently disinterred head:

"Where did it all go wrong, old man?" "Where did it all go wrong?" He [Sod] was addressing an enormous face that swayed before him in the breeze. The great head was stuck on a broomstick, the broomstick pitched in the drying mud. Seagulls stood motionless, shamelessly eyeing the head's eyes.... "Perhaps I should employ you as my doll. Make a tour of any village left standing. Shouldn't take long. Stick my glove in your neck, waggle your lips, impart a few home truths." Yes, thought Sod, that'd show them. Big Beth is alive!²⁰

²⁰ Fernie – Palfrey: *Macbeth, Macbeth*, 5.

In a macabre extension of a family tree Sod stows the head of the tyrant usurper in a nearby tree by clipping Macbeth's nose-ring onto a twig "for security."²¹ Meanwhile the impossibility of reanimating a decapitated talking head in many ways stands as the thing that remains but cannot be reconnected with a living body politic. As a consequence, by the end of the novel things quite literally come to head as Lulach, Macbeth's illegitimate son, is witnessed in the throes of enacting an extraordinary scene of gothic coronation worth citing in full (compare Figure 2):

*'The time has been,
That when the brains were out,
The man would die,
And there an end.
But now they rise again.'*

Lulach rose to his feet, a large grey-white sphere in his hands. He lifted his arms high and brought the object slowly down to his crown. He pulled hard and his head felt alarmingly soft. He was jamming a huge skull around his ears. Though his head was large the skull was still larger. His head contorted as the skull was forced down. The flesh beneath the hair was pressed into tumour-shaped bubbles; his head felt spongy and yielding as a newborn's. His face turned pink with the effort and his ears felt murdered. An egg of doughy flesh was pressed out through a slit in the cranium. The egg was bright white, its follicle sacs strangely revealed and excretory. Lulach pulled harder still and the skull shut down over chin and jaw, encasing his head like a giant helmet.²²

The scene effectively offers the culmination of a "*necrology* of the body politic,"²³ presenting as it does so a generic extension of the foreboding apparitions that already appear in Shakespeare's play, incorporating and recombining the "armed head" of the first apparition, but also of course re-raising the issue of issue and again explicitly the second and third apparitions in 4.1: "a bloody child" and "a child crowned" that "rises like the issue of a king" (4.1.86). Lulach's helmet is also reminiscent of the birth caul that Gruoch took from her missing baby's head; and believing her firstborn to be dead stitched in her stomach with a few sheets of disintegrative text which recorded the tale of her little hoodman by the helmet man Macbeth, thus anticipating the resurrectional rebirth of the double helmeted man we now encounter.

²¹ Ibid., 9.

²² Ibid., 256–257.

²³ Thacker: *Tentacles Longer Than Night*, 49.



Figure 2. Tom de Freston's illustration. An extraordinary scene of gothic coronation.

Again, the head is far from the exemplary or "expository head," or the post-head on open display that we find at the end of Shakespeare's play. Rather the two-headed or "bicephalic" body politic is predicated on the interchangeability of anatomical parts. As such the composite head offers a macabre prosthesis of sovereignty, a "hermetic or hidden head," that now encases and confines the living head of the successor, so that the hollowed-out head or brainpan of Macbeth now becomes a death mask. Father and son literally con-fused, "the two having become inextricably entwined."²⁴ A resurrectional economy of the undead, which is paralleled by the prior invocation of Banquo's hollowed skull: "The times have been / That when the brains were out, the man would die" (3.4.76–77). Is this just a refusal of the dead to die, or is it rather a refusal to divide the living from the dead; and in this success that is a surcease in "succeeding-without-succession," an inability to merely put an end to things trapped as we are in accordance with a pre-emption that prevents succession?

Meanwhile, Lulach's distinguishing feature, his double umbilical cord (clearly made visible in de Freston's illustration) reminds us of a double relation to the past, but also of course a double detachment. Itself a traumatic reminder of a past and a "primal scene" that is in some sense unrepresentable but again one which

²⁴ For more on "masks and heads becoming confused with each other" and the fuller implications of this popular gothic trope in modern horror films, see Thacker: *Tentacles Longer Than Night*, 96–100. Again, I'm indebted to Thacker here.

ties Lulach's issue to an issue of history. A version of what Fred Botting terms "History's Navel" – "which ties the subject to a history that is both his/her own and that of others the knots that bind and separate The navel of history signifies an internal difference both constituting and dividing history from itself."²⁵ Again, in some sense marking the "real" *in situ* between and within the living and the dead, as well as the incommunicable entwinement between the two.

In the event the composite head proves irremovable, Lulach eventually slain by Macduff, stabbed in the eye with a rib taken from his brother Grim and tied to a stake only to be taken down from his cross and subsequently decapitated by Gru, who severs his and Macbeth's head, even as Lulach's double omphalos now serves as the distinguishing mark that reconnects her with her long lost son at the very moment she detaches his and his father's head from her son's body. As Gruoch circles back to Dunsinane, the distinction between Dunsinane and Golgotha collapses, simultaneously remarking the site of an immemorial disaster:

Gruoch heaved the basket onto her back and picked the skull up by the nose-ring... What would old Sod think, she thought cradling his awful daddy's skull like an heirloom? Another Golgotha perhaps The skull ticked like a metronome as mum and boys and bird began the long trek back to Dunsinane. (278)

The place of skulls joined with the metronomic tick, of the dangling skull, tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, the petty pace of time offers no consolation. Nothing and no-one is safely dead, but the resurrectional motifs barely convey a sense of afterlife that is redeemable. The double header is stuck, "stopped," and cannot be fully reanimated, only repeated endlessly.

SUCCESSION-WITHOUT-SUCCESSION II

There is far more to say here and I have barely done justice to the complexity of *Macbeth, Macbeth*. Yet I want to close by suggesting that here and elsewhere in our attempts to appropriate, or come after, or to succeed *Macbeth/Macbeth*, it is as if the talismanic heads of the play necessarily feature in each re-writing as a cadaverous presence of its own image, as if living on only in the shadow of its own form of un-lived (and perhaps unbearable) life. And here we inevitably confront what we might term after Kállay the "stopped head" of sovereignty head-on.

In a recent public reading of *Macbeth, Macbeth*, Simon Palfrey returns to pre-empt this theme in considering "The Death Masks of Macbeth" by

²⁵ Fred Botting: *Sex, Machines and Navels: Fiction, Fantasy and History in the Future Present*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999, 97–98. Also cf. Scott Wilson: *Cultural Materialism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1995), whose discussion of the Lacanian "real" in relation to history Botting draws upon here.

comparing the deaths and afterlives of Macbeth and Oliver Cromwell. The latter's death mask constituting another shadow of Macbeth – another displaced placeholder for "Britain's repressed imaginary"; as if Cromwell's death-mask unearths a trace of Macbeth's "secret man of blood waiting and watching."²⁶ The terrifying Medusa-like heads of Macbeth are themselves "apotropaic" only insofar they displace and pre-empt their subject, so that, as Marjorie Garber suggested long ago, in coming after yet also before, insofar as "the head as a talisman seems to have preceded the myth."²⁷

As such, the waiting and the watching are very much to the point so that, as Eugene Thacker reminds us, "beheaded heads are rarely alone"; and just as they are frequently exhibited and displayed, they also have "the peculiar privilege of watching themselves been watched."²⁸ This sense of a "blind watch" of course rehearses one of many tropes of sightless vision that already recur in the play. Yet the Medusa optics of *Macbeth* also reverse the idea of causality and of whether, as Cavell puts it, "we can see what we make happen and tell its difference from what happens to us."²⁹ Cinematic attempts to engage with the play often return to these de-occulted skulls; compare, for example, the death's heads surrounding the hovering figure of the Forest Spirit in Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957). Here on the eve of Dunsinane the insomniac presence of the discordant Forest Spirit generates light immanently – emitting her own non-reflective bioluminescence alongside the ambient fog, yielding a photographic presentation of a Real that remains immanent to itself.



Figure 3. *The spirit in the forest in Kurosawa's Throne of Blood.*

²⁶ Simon Palfrey: The Death Masks of Macbeth, *University of Oxford Podcast*, Added 7 June 2016, <http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/death-masks-macbeth> (accessed 21 February 2021), n.p.n.

²⁷ Marjorie Garber: *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality*, London, Routledge, 1987, 98.

²⁸ Thacker: *Tentacles Longer Than Night*, 96.

²⁹ Cavell: *Disowning Knowledge*, 223.

Elsewhere, in addressing the elemental strangeness of Macbeth's mask in his *Macbeth* (1971), Roman Polanski frames the protagonist's decapitation so that we view the post-mortem-action from inside the "brain pan" of Shakespeare's protagonist. In other words, we witness the impossibility of looking back at what comes after, even as we also witness the spectators of the scene from "inside the severed head" and "its witnessing of being-seen."³⁰ In reversing the conventional distinction between the image and its object, the impossibility of the after image is made visible through the emptied "camera-head" of Macbeth, which looks without looking in any conventional sense of looking.

Maybe this is simply to say that rewritings of *Macbeth* always already operate according to a non-specular logic where the image is never "secondary to the object" but rather becomes its own reality. Or as Ray Brassier puts it, in summarising François Laruelle's non-philosophical, non-standard challenge to the "correlational consensus" of more mainstream philosophy: "It is no longer thought that determines the object, whether through representation or intuition, but rather the object that seizes thought and forces it to think it, or better, *according to it*."³¹ In defying conventions of succession, Shakespeare's play turns thinking inside out, or at least seeing, thinking, and doing are rendered co-extant. In the process the image of the deed reverses causality and time – a sight that undoes thinking for a deed that undoes doing?³²

In teasing out his reading of Macbeth's desire to end time and therein escape the consequence of "deeds done," Cavell draws on Nietzsche's discourse "Of the Pale Criminal" in the early section of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, which he (Cavell) proposes as Nietzsche's study of Macbeth in exhibiting:

³⁰ Nicola Masciandaro: Decapitating Cinema, in N. Masciandaro – E. Thacker (eds.): *And they were Two in One and One in Two*, USA, Schism Press, 2014, 66–97, 68. And also cf. Kenneth Rothwell on whom Masciandaro also draws upon here; Kenneth S. Rothwell: *A History of Shakespeare on Screen: A century of film and television*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 151 (Rothwell's emphasis). As Masciandaro notes decapitation and cinema are "intimately related" through severing and joining so that "The camera through which one cinematically sees is a head-severing severed head", 68. For more on the "impossibilities" of beheading also cf. Nicola Masciandaro, *Non potest hoc corpus decollari: Beheading and the Impossible*, in Tracy Larissa – Jeff Masey (eds.): *Heads Will Roll: Decapitation in the Medieval and Early Modern Imagination*, Leiden, Brill, 2012, 15–36.

³¹ Ray Brassier: *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 149, Brassier's emphasis.

³² This preponderance of the image of the deed is a form of what Laruelle might term "Being-in-photo" where in contrast to a representationalist metaphysics, it is not a matter of being a photo *of*, but rather a "non-specular manifestation of identity" – "a blinding of the light of logos by the really blind thought of photography" François Laruelle: *The Concept of Non-Photography*, trans. Robin Mackay, Falmouth, Urbanomic, 2011, 112–113 and 57–58). For more on Laruelle's non-standard "thought art" or "photo-fiction", also cf. François Laruelle: *Photo-Fiction a Non-Standard Aesthetics*, trans. Drew S. Burt, Minneapolis, Univocal Publishing, 2012.

[A] problematic of blood and human action in which performing a deed is taken over by an image of the performance of the deed, an image that functions to fixate or exhaust the doer's identity so that he becomes nothing but the doer of this deed, suffering subjective extinction as it were in the doing of what he does.³³

Or, as Nietzsche puts it: "[T]he thought is one thing, the deed is another, and yet another is the image of the deed. The wheel of causality does not roll between them."³⁴ In Shakespeare's play the image of the deed is an object that seizes thought, or forces thought to think according to it. It is as if forces of darkness exert a gravitational pull – emitting a type of weird and radical exteriority –, a disorientating phenomenon that wholly undoes Macbeth's phenomenological resources:

Whence is that knocking?
How is't with me, when every noise appals me?
What hands are here? Ha: they pluck out mine eyes
(2.2. 58–60)

Here, hand and eye, knowing and doing, acting and seeing, precede division and are rendered co-extant as complicit, as hands are precisely an instrument of a darkness which blinds thought, even as the sonic knocking noise which "appals" (makes pale) turns the protagonist ashen -- again as if seen-through rather than seeing, translucent and monochrome. Henry Fuseli's X-ray image of the scene "Lady Macbeth Seizing the Daggers" (1812) captures this well enough, in holding the couple as if impaled by an exterior force that turns them inside out.³⁵

* * *

How then to rewrite or indeed, even read, "view" or endure the Macbeths? Maybe it is enough to say that in evoking the horrifying consequence of a life lived without knowledge, without being, that, as Cavell argues, the Macbeths in their "wish to escape a condition of the human," also inevitably remain "victims of [human] intelligibility"³⁶ – theirs and ours. And maybe like Fuseli, we can only ever be possessed by the force of this dispossession? For their part, the Macbeths remain "appalled" (made pale), drained of blood and without

³³ Cavell: *Disowning Knowledge*, 248.

³⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, trans. R. J. Hollingworth, London, Penguin Books, 1961, 65.

³⁵ For a fuller speculative realist reading of Fuseli's image to which I am partially indebted here, cf. Matthew Poole – Robin McKay in Kristen Alvanson et. al.: *The Real Thing: The Real and the Sublime*, <https://www.urbanomic.com/document/the-real-thing-the-real-and-the-sublime/> (accessed 27 September 2022), n.p.n.

³⁶ Cavell: *Disowning Knowledge*, 233.

bloodline, left sleepless and out of time – “lack[ing] the season of all natures, sleep” (3.4. 139) – subsisting on the verge of a fathomless darkness. And if sovereignty = succession-without-succession, then lately these longstanding questions of the impossibility of an “afterlife” have become linked with a turn to a speculative philosophy which, in a world confronted by planetary disasters, has sought to confront its own unthinkability. As such, I would argue, *Macbeth* as a “vision-in-One” also precipitously remarks the “end of visible history,”³⁷ engendering a “*horror vacui*” that resonates powerfully with our own era of extinction, where, as the eco-critic Tim Morton is fond of reminding us, the end of the world has already happened.³⁸ In that sense “jumping the life to come” may simply equate to an indifferent “world-without-us” in being bereft of both timeline and bloodline.³⁹ As such, as Ray Brassier reminds us, the “truth of extinction” cannot be understood within the standard philosophical correlationist synthesis of space and time:

[T]here is an absolute disjunction between correlational time and the time of extinction, precisely insofar as the latter is not just a localizable spatio-temporal occurrence, and hence something that could be chronologically manipulated ... but rather *the extinction of space-time*. Thus, it is not so much that extinction *will* terminate the correlation, but that it *has already* retroactively terminated it. Extinction seizes the present of the correlation between the double pincers of a future that *has always already been*, and a past that is *perpetually yet to be*. Accordingly, there can be no ‘afterwards’ of extinction, since it already corrodes the efficacy of the projection through which correlational synthesis would assimilate its reality to that of a phenomenon dependent upon conditions of manifestation.... extinction is a transcendental trauma: it is the conceptual transposition of a physical phenomenon which undoes the phenomenological resources through which the manifest image would *make sense* of it.⁴⁰

Accordingly, there can be no “sense” in succession and no “afterwards” for Macbeth, for whom extinction and usurped sovereignty in the guise of Banquo’s ghost therefore also necessarily already remains a deeper issue. A sight, that

³⁷ “Vison-in-One” is another Laruellian neologism designed to resist the auto-positioning of standard philosophy and suggesting instead “the given as the identity (of the) given, as given-without-givenness, outside-the-fold or the doublet of the given and givenness.” Laruelle adds: “It is thus radical phenomenon without the phenomenological hinter-world in its broadest sense.” Laruelle and collaborators, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, 167.

³⁸ See among other texts by Morton: Timothy Morton: *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*, London, Verso, 2017.

³⁹ “World-without-us” is Thacker’s term and conjoins with his sense of the “horror” of philosophy and therefore in Laruelle’s terms remains “foreclosed to thought.”

⁴⁰ Brassier: *Nihil Unbound*, 230 and 234, Brassier’s emphases.

in being unassimilated undoes seeing and thinking in returning the radical phenomenon of a non-specular gaze:

Avaunt! and quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee.
Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
Which thou dost glare with.

(3.4. 91–94)

For Macbeth, and for us, the horrifying consequence of no consequence, remains unassimilable, but also perhaps suggests a type of exterior that is already here within and thus remains occluded, in which the promise of Banquo's succession, "Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none" (1.3. 67), necessarily remains buried. Sovereignty in Shakespeare's play is not just the product of a contaminated past related to a localizable event, or an endlessly retold point of no return that has already been and which cannot be cured or purged; but also of a deep past that is yet to be, still "hiding in the earth." In that sense too, surely there is no exit from *Macbeth*. At least not for us.

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“MEANS TO MOURN SOME OTHER WAY”:
PLAINTS, PAINTINGS,
AND POLITICS IN SHAKESPEARE’S *LUCRECE*



DAVID SCOTT KASTAN

In remembrance of István and Géza

Sometime in the spring of 1594, a long narrative poem by Shakespeare was published in London and made available for sale “at the signe of the white Greyhound in Paules Church-yard.” The book was simply called *Lucrece*.

Later that year, Henry Willoughby’s *Willobie his Avis* was published, with an anonymous introductory poem that included the first independent mention of Shakespeare in print. The poet admiringly compares Willoughby’s poem with the way “*Shake-speare* paints poor *Lucrece’s Rape*.” The well-intentioned comparison doesn’t do the largely forgotten Willoughby any favors, but the claim about Shakespeare, in any case, is untrue. Shakespeare didn’t paint anything, although we can forgive the metaphor. But he didn’t even metaphorically paint the rape of Lucrece in the poem that bears her name.

In Shakespeare’s poem, it seems to take place in the space of a comma: “The wolf hath seized his prey, the poor lamb cries” (677).¹ Or maybe it happens soon after: in the white space dividing two stanzas (between lines 686 and 687). There is a lot of before and after in Shakespeare’s poem, but Lucrece’s rape, although it takes place, does not appear in it at all.

This is not merely a narratological or grammatical observation. Its absence from the poem cannot reflect any reluctance on Shakespeare’s part to confront the brutal reality of rape (think *Titus Andronicus*). It might, however, indicate that Shakespeare instinctively understood that the experience of rape belongs to the victim, or, more consciously, at least realized that narrativizing rape risks eroticizing it.² *Lucrece* was the “graver labour” that Shakespeare had promised the Earl of Southampton in the dedication to *Venus and Adonis*. That earlier poem might well be thought a sophisticated piece of soft-core

¹ The line is a near literal translation of Ovid’s *Fasti*, 2, 800: *parva sub infesto cum iacet agna lupo*.

² See, for example, Margaret Rice Vasileiou: Violence, Visual Metaphor, and the “True” Lucrece, *Studies in English Literature* 51 (2011), 47–63, esp. 55.

pornography, and certainly it was read that way by those “who list [i.e., wish to] read lust.”³ *Lucrece*, however, was not designed to titillate. Sex with an unwilling partner isn’t sex (and the partner isn’t a partner). It’s rape.

Yet by some definitions (and definitions are very much at issue here), *Lucrece* has not been raped. That may turn out to be the more unsettling explanation for why the rape is not explicitly an event in the poem. In the long history of the *Lucrece* story, there always has been some suggestion that, however reluctantly, she has consented.⁴ The inevitable qualification (usually it is some version of “under duress”) should make it clear that there must be a more suitable word. Duress would seem to nullify the very idea of consent. “Surrendered” might be better, or maybe “submitted.” But it turns out there is no good word for what she has done. “Suffered,” certainly, but, ultimately, not even “survived.”⁵

And, at least as the poem is concerned, there isn’t even a good word for what has been done *to* her. That isn’t the case in the poem’s preliminary prose “Argument.” There at least it is clear what has happened. *Lucrece* has been “violently ravished.” The poem itself, however, is much less forthcoming – although it is worth remembering that “The Rape of *Lucrece*” appears on almost every page of the poem’s early printings as the running title that serves as a header.

Only in 1616, in its sixth edition, did *The Rape of Lucrece* become the poem’s title, and the first to include Shakespeare’s name on the title page. “Rape” is given a line to itself and is printed in much the largest font on the page. It is an unusual typographical layout, but especially odd for a poem in which the rape can hardly be located in the text. The word occurs only twice in the poem: once in reference to the “rape” of Helen of Troy (1369) and also in a list of despicable human behaviors that an abstract “Opportunity” permits: “Wrath, envy, treason, rape, and murder’s rages” (909).

Neither directly refers to the rape of *Lucrece*, but each usefully marks a distinct sense of the English word.⁶ Helen’s “rape” comes from the Latin *raptus*, which meant ‘abduction’, and marks rape as a crime against male property. The “rape” allowed by Opportunity is the English translation of *stuprum*, the Latin word used to refer to a violent crime against (usually) a woman’s body. Both senses of rape are present in Shakespeare’s poem. But it is the sense derived from *stuprum*, the idea of sexual assault, that causes most of the problems.

³ Thomas Freeman: *Rubbe, and a Great Cast. The Second Bowle*, London, 1614, epigram 92, sig. K2v.

⁴ E.g., S. Clark Hulse: “A piece of skilful painting” in Shakespeare’s *Lucrece*, *Shakespeare Survey* 31 (1978), 15 (“Livy and Ovid clearly say that *Lucrece* consented under duress”).

⁵ See Ian Donaldson’s useful *The Rape of Lucretia: A Myth and Its Transformations*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982, 40–56. Also, Norman Bryson: Two Narratives of Rape in the Visual Arts: *Lucretia and the Sabine Women*, in S. Tomaselli – R. Porter (eds.): *Rape*, Oxford, Basil Blackwood, 1986, 152–173.

⁶ See James N. Adams: *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982, 175, 200–201.

The difficulty is legible in the sources. Livy says that Lucretia was "overcome, as if with force." The "as if" is what complicates things. I suppose Livy means only that the plausible threat of force was enough to ensure her submission, and Tarquin restraining her on her bed with a sword in his hand makes that threat very plausible indeed. The "as if," however, would likely have been exculpatory under Roman law, though it isn't obvious how Shakespeare would have known that or why the drawn sword wouldn't count as force for Livy.⁷

In Ovid's *Fasti*, Lucrece is also "overcome," although there it is "by fear for her reputation."⁸ In Shakespeare's poem, it has become more problematic still. "Tarquin wronged me, I Collatine" (819), Lucrece says, carefully choosing a verb that is capable of distributing the transgression. "Raped" wouldn't work in this sentence. She admits that "she fear'd by Tarquin's falchion to be slain" (1046), but after the rape she quickly focuses on her own "offences," her "unseen sin," her "guilt," and her "helpless shame" (749–756). The language uncomfortably conflates what has been done to her with what she thinks she has done. It should be enough that she didn't consent, but it isn't enough even for her.⁹

One influential commentator on the classical Lucretia story insisted, however, that there had to have been "a secret consent." In *The City of God*, Saint Augustine asks why if she had not consented would she commit suicide: "If she be chaste, why did she kill herself?" And then, out of nowhere, he begins to wonder:

What if it were so, which none could know but herself, that though Tarquinius' son offered her force, yet she herself gave a lustful consent, & after did so grieve at that, that she held it worthy to be punished with death.¹⁰

It is certainly a very odd bit of wondering, made odder still by a commentary note in the 1610 edition by the Spanish Humanist, Juan Luis Vives, who glosses Augustine's "which none could know": "For who can tell whether she gave consent by the touch of some incited pleasure?" A somatic response to nerve stimulation becomes proof that the act was not rape, or at least that it could

⁷ Livy: *History of Rome, Books 1 and 2*, trans. B. O. Foster, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1919, 200–201. On Roman legal theories of rape, see Nghiem L. Nguyen: Roman Rape: An Overview of Roman Rape Laws from the Republic to Justinian, *Michigan Journal of Gender and Law* 13 (2006), 75–112; Diana C. Moss: Livy's Lucretia and the Validity of Consent in Roman Law, in Angeliki E. Laiou (ed.): *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, Washington, D. C.; Dumbarton Oaks, 1993, 39–81.

⁸ Ovid, *Fasti*, 2, 810, trans. Anne and Peter Wiseman, Oxford World's Classics, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, 39.

⁹ See Amanda Bailey's provocative account: *Shakespeare and Consent*, London and New York, Routledge, 2023, esp. 43–48 and 74–79.

¹⁰ Augustine: *Of the Citie of God*, trans. J. Healey, London, 1610, sig. D4r. Spelling modernized.

reasonably be “thought that that was suffered with the consent of the mind, which it may be could not be suffered without some delight of the flesh.”¹¹ Wow.

So much for consent serving as a compelling ethical or legal principle. There’s no hope for the principle if consent can be given “by the touch of some incited pleasure.” But in Shakespeare’s poem, there is neither “delight of the flesh” nor “consent of the mind,” although the fact that Lucrece feels it necessary to deny any “accessory yieldings” (1658) reveals that she knows exactly how her story will be told unless she can take control of the narrative. In the anonymous *Tragedy of Nero* (1624), you can see how far it might get away from her. Petronius imagines a scene in which “fair *Lucrece* lies by *Tarquin’s* lusty side, / And woos him now again to ravish her.”¹²

In Shakespeare’s poem, of course, Lucrece resists and tries to convince Tarquin not to “stoop... to foul desire” (574). Sadly, predictably, her resistance works only to “harden lust” (560), with its awkwardly sexualized verb. Tarquin insists she “yield” (668) and “sets his foot upon the light” (673), before... well, we don’t know. We know he uses her night dress to stifle “her outcry” (679), and soon we are told that “she hath lost a dearer thing than life” (687). We never know how she has lost that “dearer thing,” or even what that “thing” precisely is. It shouldn’t be her honor or reputation, though she has lost her innocence and sense of safety in the world. We do know that, whatever it was, it wasn’t really “lost”; it was taken from her.

Strangely the poem discourages us from thinking about any of this. It immediately shifts to what *Tarquin* has lost, or what he wishes he now might lose: “he hath won what he would lose again” (688). The poem does invite us to “Look” (694) but only after the act’s “accomplishment” (716). When “the spotted princess” is asked “how she fares” (721) after “her consecrated wall” has been “battered down” (723), it comes as a surprise to realize that the lines refer not to Lucrece’s violated body but to Tarquin’s defiled “soul.” It takes a while for the poem to make Lucrece the subject rather than an object, but that is part of its point.

At the end of the poem, Lucrece provides her own account of what has taken place. She offers herself as witness, reliving the rape even as she alienates herself from her experience of it in order to do so. Her testimony confirms what the narrator has earlier reported (668–672). She ventriloquizes Tarquin’s brutal threats:

“For some hard-favored groom of thine,” quoth he,
 “Unless thou yoke thy liking to my will,

¹¹ Augustine: *Of the Citie of God*, sig. D2r. See also, William P. Weaver: “O Teach Me How to Make Mine Own Excuse”: Forensic Performance in “Lucrece,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Winter, 2008), 429.

¹² *The Tragedy of Nero* (London, 1624), sig. G4v.

I'll murder straight, and then I'll slaughter thee,
And swear I found you where you did fulfil
The loathsome act of lust, and so did kill
The lechers in their deed. This act will be
My fame, and thy perpetual infamy"
And then against my heart he set his sword,
Swearing, unless I took all patiently,
I should not live to speak another word;
So should my shame still rest upon record. (1632–1643)

She has been gagged, threatened with a deadly weapon, and, what to her is seemingly of greater consequence, with the promise of "perpetual infamy." She did "deny" and did not "yoke" her "liking" to his "will" (1633). Surely this should be enough to clear her of any suggestion of complicity. The violence registers in the incoherence of her reaction, trying to make sense of an experience that cannot make sense, should never make sense. Should never happen. But it does.

When she is not blaming herself, she sees herself as the victim of "dreadful circumstance" (1730), railing against everything that has conspired to enable this to happen: "comfort-killing Night" (764), who is "guilty of [her] cureless crime" (772), "Opportunity," whose "guilt is great" (876), and "injurious shifting Time" (930). The abstract and impersonal language understandably fails to register the immediate horror of her experience, which is exactly what it has unconsciously been designed to do. And of course she rails against the guilty Tarquin, but even more against the infuriating inability of all her words to prevent, change, or improve a thing.

In vain I rail at Opportunity,
At Time, at Tarquin, and uncheerful Night,
In vain I cavil with my infamy,
In vain I spurn at my despite,
This helpless smoke of words doth me no right. (1023–1027)

The compulsive repetition of "in vain" makes its own point about the emptiness of the rhetoric, although there is still more rhetoric to come. But all her words are but "helpless smoke": "idle words," "unprofitable sounds, weak arbitrators" (1016–1017).

Even the letter Lucrece writes to Collatine merely allows "Her certain sorrow" to be "writ uncertainly." It permits her husband to "know / Her grief, but not her grief's true quality" (1311–1313), because, as she says, "more it is than I can well express" (1286). What has happened is unspeakable, on the far side of what can ever be said. But there is also her anxiety about how the informa-

tion will be received. “She dares not thereof make discovery / Lest he should hold it her own gross abuse” (1314–1315). That anxiety is always there for Lucrece: the fear that she will be blamed for the rape. She knows her culture all too well.¹³ Words will never be enough “to clear her / Of that suspicion which the world might bear her” (1320–1321), and they are unlikely ever to be enough to allow her to revise and redescribe her experience so the “disgrace” (1320) would not be her own and her rage could be directed at Tarquin.

It comes as no surprise (and for a reader usually comes with some relief) that here she pauses her exhausting lament and seeks “for means to mourn some newer way” (1365). The poem pauses too, focusing on a different medium: not verbal but visual, a “skillful painting” (1367) of the fall of Troy.¹⁴ In terms of the plot, what the episode does is fill the time to allow the messenger to take her letter to her father and husband and for them to have time to return to Collatia. For Lucrece, on the other hand, the encounter with the painting allows her to escape her abjection.

There is no known painting that Shakespeare has described in his poem. It is a “painting” that he has created in language. (That is, it is Shakespeare’s poetic version of Lorenzo Lotto’s painted “drawing.”)¹⁵ It is one of literature’s most famous examples of ekphrasis, the verbal description of a visual object, like Homer’s depiction of Achilles’ shield in Book 18 of *The Iliad* or Henry James’s account of Bronzino’s *Portrait of Lucrezia Panciatichi* in *The Wings of the Dove*.¹⁶ One temptation is to see it as an extended measure of self-reflex-

¹³ There have been many fine essays on the poem’s sexual politics, often taking their cue from Nancy Vickers: “The Blazon of Sweet Beauty’s Best”: Shakespeare’s *Lucrece*, in P. Parker – G. Hartman (eds.): *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, New York, Methuen, 1985, 95–115; Coppélia Kahn, The Rape in Shakespeare’s *Lucrece*, *Shakespeare Studies* 9 (1976), 45–72. More generally, Stephanie H. Jed’s brilliant and idiosyncratic: *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1989.

¹⁴ Many critics have insisted that what Lucrece sees hanging is a “tapestry,” perhaps as some unconscious recollection of Philomela’s legendary weaving to identify her rapist. The poem, however, insists that it is a painting: “painting” (2x), “painted” (4x), “painter” (6x), “well-painted,” “paint,” even “pencilled,” which meant “painted” (a “pencil” was a fine brush). When Lucrece focuses on the figure of Sinon, it is a “picture” that she sees, and she (ironically) praises “the painter for his wondrous skill” (1527–1528).

¹⁵ No one has ever identified a painting matching the specifics of the description. It is interesting that the only contemporary artist Shakespeare ever mentions is Giulio Romano (in *The Winter’s Tale*, 5.2.97), who did paint the Trojan story in an elaborate set of murals and ceiling paintings for the so-called *Sala di Troia* in the ducal place in Mantua in the late 1530s. There is, however, no evidence that Shakespeare knew of this (it is not mentioned in any English book published before 1685), and his description of the painting does not correspond to Romano’s extravagantly classicized frescoes in the *Pallazo Ducale*.

¹⁶ There is an extended literature on ekphrasis, which only in modern times has been narrowly conceived as a verbal description of an artefact, even if, as is often the case, that artefact is imagined. See Ruth Webb: *Ekphrasis Ancient and Modern: The Invention of a Genre*, *Word and Image* 15 (1999), 7–18. But see, among many others, Eleanor Leach: *Ekphrasis and the*

ivity, Shakespeare's contribution to a long-running debate between painting and poetry: mute pictures set against speaking poetry. Shakespeare's contemporary, Edmund Spenser praised the "Poet's wit, that passeth Painter farre," and maybe Shakespeare, though at much greater length, does the same.¹⁷

The episode is long, longer than Ovid's treatment of the entirety of the Lucrece story in his *Fasti*. But Shakespeare doesn't seem anxious about the relative claims of word and image. In the poem, what is most important about "the well-painted piece" (1443) is how little interest Lucrece has in it, although in her circumstances it could hardly be otherwise. It is a history painting, but she is concerned neither with the painting nor really with the history. Her passions are aroused, although she came to the painting with her passions already aroused. The painting provides no new understanding of her situation; it only confirms what she already feels. She is indifferent to its artistry; certainly, she's unable to focus on it just now.

The narrator is the one interested in the painting. He (of course, "he") directs the readers' attention to the "thousand lamentable objects there" (1373), repeatedly pointing us to what "one might see" (1386) or what "You might behold" (1388). He is the one alert to the "sweet observance in this work" (1385). He praises the artist's ability to capture and individualize emotion, rendering faces, with a wondrous "art of physiognomy" (1304–1305) so that "their manners most expressly told" (1397). He recognizes the artist's proficiency in organizing the density of the chaotic history on the painting's two-dimensional surface. Figures are arranged "[s]ome high, some low, the painter was so nice [i.e., subtle, skilled]; / The scalps of many almost hid behind, / To jump up higher seemed, to mock the mind." (1412–1414). The resulting overlaps often prevent the painted figures from being shown in their entirety, but that is part of what he sees as the artist's ingenuity:

For such imaginary work was there:
Conceit deceitful, so compact, so kind [i.e., natural],
That for Achilles' image stood his spear,
Griped in an armed hand; himself behind

Theme of Artistic Failure in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *Ramus* 3 (1974), 102–142; James A. W. Heffernan: *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993; W. J. T. Mitchell: *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994; Valentine Cunningham: Why Ekphrasis, *Classical Philology* 102 (2007), 57–71; and Leonard Barkan: *Mute Poetry, Speaking Pictures*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2013. With specific regard to Shakespeare, see Catherine Belsey: Invocation of the Visual Image: Ekphrasis in *Lucrece* and Beyond, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63 (2012), 175–198.

¹⁷ Edmund Spenser: *The Faerie Queene*, Book 3, Proem, l. 2.

Was left unseen, save to the eye of mind:
A hand, a foot, a face, a leg, a head,
Stood for the whole to be imagined. (1422–1428)

The art historian Ernst Gombrich was the first to recognize the similarity of this stanza to a description by Philostratus the Elder of a painting of the siege of Troy:

The clever artifice of the painter is delightful. Encompassing the walls with armed men, he depicts them so that some are seen in full figure, others with the legs hidden, others from the waist up, then only the busts of some, heads only, helmets only, and finally just spearpoints. This, my boy, is perspective; since the problem is to deceive the eyes as they travel back along with the proper receding planes of the picture.¹⁸

But the only “perspective” that interests Lucrece is her own. Although the narrator says that the time “that she with painted images hath spent” has “brought” her “from the feeling of her own grief / By deep surmise [i.e., contemplation] of others’ detriment” (1577–1578), it is more accurate to say that her grief has brought Lucrece to the painted images. The “deep surmise of other’s detriment” provides her no relief, and it is almost all her own projection. The narrator believes in the power of art to instruct and delight, or at least to distract. The painting doesn’t do any of those things for Lucrece.

Her relationship to the painting is eccentric and undisciplined. “Desperate,” I think, might be the proper word. She “throws her eyes about the painting round, / and who she finds forlorn she doth lament” (1499–1500). No less than Tarquin, she has a “willful eye” (418). She wants only “to find a face where all distress is stelled” [i.e., portrayed or engraved] (1440), not to lose “her woes in shows of discontent” (1580), as the narrator suggests, but to find a “show” that would be fully answerable to her own suffering. She casts about “till she despairing Hecuba beheld” (1447).

In *Hamlet*, when the actors are visiting Denmark, the prince famously wonders how the travelling player could generate so much emotion in his speech: “and all for nothing – / For Hecuba? / What’s Hecuba to him? Or he to her / That he should weep for her?” (2.2.492–495). But Lucrece knows exactly what Hecuba is to her, and she “shapes her sorrow to the beldam’s [i.e., old woman’s] woes” (1458). She identifies and she projects. The painting holds (“as ‘twere”) a mirror up to herself.

¹⁸ E. H. Gombrich: *Art and Illusion*, London, Phaidon, 1962, 176–177. The passage from Philostratus appears in his *Imagines*, trans. Arthur Fairbanks, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1960, 17.

The skillful painter has accurately portrayed the signs of Hecuba's distress, but "Lucrece swears he did her wrong / To give her so much grief and not a tongue" (1462–1463). But this is more about her than about the painted Hecuba. Paintings are always mute. They are never really speaking pictures. Lucrece decides that she will "weep for her" and "tune [her] woes with my lamenting tongue" (1465).¹⁹ The painter provides the images; Lucrece adds a soundtrack and some animation. Viewer and painting become an inter-active mixed-media installation. "To pencilled pensiveness and coloured sorrow / She lends them words, and she their looks doth borrow" (1497–1498).

Lucrece promises Hecuba to act on her behalf, to say and do what a painted Hecuba is obviously unable. She pledges to

drop sweet balm in Priam's painted wound.
And rail on Pyrrhus that hath done him wrong.
And with my tears quench Troy that burns so long.
(1466–1468)

As she was being raped, Lucrece was "afeared to scratch her wicked foe" (1035), but here she assures Hecuba that she will "with my knife scratch out the angry eyes / Of all the Greeks that are thine enemies (1469–1470). She settles on one of them and "tears the senseless Sinon with her nails" (1564). His image activates her repressed rage. "Patience is quite beaten from her breast" (1563). She "tears" the painting, not sheds more "tears."

In *The Aeneid*, Sinon is the Greek warrior who persuades the Trojans to bring the massive wooden horse into the city. At night, the soldiers, hidden inside, open the gates, allowing the Greek army to overrun Troy. Tarquin's desire for Lucrece had been described in similar terms: "to make the breach and enter this fair city" (469). Looking at the painting, this is exactly what Lucrece sees:

For even as subtle Sinon here is painted,
So sober sad, so weary, and so mild...
To me came Tarquin armed to beguile
With outward honesty, but yet defiled
With inward vice. (1541–1546)

Hecuba's grief is a pretext.

To the degree that the painting provides Lucrece with some "newer way to mourn," it doesn't come from her identification with Hecuba's painted grief.

¹⁹ See Lynn Enterline: "Poor Instruments" and Unspeakable Events in *The Rape of Lucrece*, in her *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, 152–197, esp. 185–192.

That was the old way. The newer way is to act, though this action comes at the expense of the painting and with the chagrin of realizing that Sinon's "wounds will not be sore" (1568); that is, she has allowed herself to forget that it is only a painting that she has damaged. But she never really cared about the painting anyway.

I suppose one might prefer to see this as another version of the well-known story of the contest between the Greek painters Parrhasius and Zeuxis (4th c. BCE).²⁰ (The story is well-known, though the artists are not so much anymore.) Zeuxis showed a painting of grapes rendered so realistically that a flock of birds came to eat them, but Parrhasius won the competition with a painted curtain that Zeuxis asked to be opened so he might see the painting Parrhasius had submitted. When the prize was awarded to Parrhasius, Zeuxis graciously accepted the decision, acknowledging, with some embarrassment, that his own painting had merely deceived some birds.

Pliny's story is about the triumph of illusionism, where what is represented remarkably seems as realistic as the real. But in Shakespeare's poem, when Lucrece tears at the painting, it is not because of its *trompe l'oeil* virtuosity but because she has identified so passionately, first with Hecuba and then with the fate of Troy. She tears at the figure of Sinon only because it reminds her of "that unhappy guest [i.e., Tarquin] / Whose deed hath made herself detest" (1565–1566). The shock of seeing the torn painting works to return her to the present, but this is the first and only time that it has registered for her as a work of art.²¹

"Fool, fool," she says "smilingly," and the wry recognition of her error registers her awareness of the limitations of lament as well as of art's familiar consolations. With the painting torn, she can make good on her declaration that "I am the mistress of my fate" (1069), willing to undertake the necessary action to shape her own story so it will make sense to herself. She composes "the sad dirge of her certain ending" (1612) as a solo performance that ends with her suicide.²² Her swan song.

At long last she takes possession of her narrative (which has had to be almost entirely *about* possession), although one might have hoped it might have had a less calamitous conclusion. She has been raped, but she could have taken "refuge" in her knowledge that "though my gross blood be stained with this

²⁰ The *locus classicus* of the story is Pliny the Elder: *Natural History*, 35.36, Loeb Classical Library, trans. H. Rackham, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1959, vol 9, 305–311. See also Patrick R. Crowley: *Parrhasius' Curtain, or a Media Archaeology of a Metapainting*, in Pantelis Michelakis (ed.): *Classics and Media Theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020, 211–236.

²¹ See, however, Richard Meek: Ekphrasis in *The Rape of Lucrece* and *The Winter's Tale*, *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 46 (2006), 389–414, where he argues the reverse: that it is Lucrece who "studies" the painting, engaging with "its *trompe l'oeil* success" (390).

²² Enterline: "Poor Instruments," 192.

abuse / Immaculate and spotless is my mind" (1655–1656). Why wasn't that enough? She knows (better than some readers) that she is not guilty of any dishonorable act, and her husband, father, and the other returning lords have reassured her that "her body's stain her mind untainted clears" (1710). But she refuses any absolution. "'No, no,' quoth she, 'no dame hereafter living / by my excuse shall claim excuses giving'" (1714–1715). That's Shakespeare's version of the famous line from Livy, the phrase that Lotto paints: *nec ulla deinde impudica Lucretia exemplo vivet*.²³ The language is crabbed in Shakespeare's poem, but the idea in both places is that her suicide will prevent unchaste women from claiming that they too did not consent and so should be absolved since Lucrece has been.

The whole episode might be thought (has been thought) a little grandiose. The English reformer, William Tyndale, said of Lucretia "that she sought her own glory in her chastity and not God's," though he seems to have forgotten that she was not a Christian.²⁴ A more predictable response might have been for her to commit suicide to escape the "poisoned closet" of the body that encloses her "pure" mind (1657–1658). There were precedents for that. But she designs her suicide in order that she would be able to "make her own excuse" (1653). That has never been an option for her. Always she has played a role in someone else's story-telling – and of course she does in Shakespeare's too, but his at least was called *Lucrece*.²⁵

When Lucrece had first considered suicide, her motive was to protect Collatine's honor. "I will not poison thee with my attain't" (1073). The "unseen shame, invisible disgrace ... unfelt sore, crest-wounding private scar" (827–829) that she laments are his, not hers: "crest-wounding" refers to the family crest, the literal badge of honor, that her rape, or so she thinks, has permanently dishonored and demands her death.

Now, however, it is not his honor but hers that she protects. If her suicide could be thought to "bail" her soul "from the polluted prison where it breathed" (1726–1727), it is an almost accidental effect of the act. What is primary is how it endows her story with significant form. She addresses her husband and her father as she "that *was* thy Lucrece," but asking to be "suddenly revenged on my foe" (1682–1683). The shifting pronouns, "thy" to "my," mark the process. Once she was theirs, now she is her own. She makes all the assembled lords promise "to venge this wrong of *mine*" (1691). She has been wronged, not her husband. The story now is her story.

When Lucretia wrote the letter to her husband calling him home, she said only that "my woes are tedious" (1309), unwilling to say anything more "with

²³ Ovid, *Fasti*, 38–39.

²⁴ Tyndale: *The Obed[i]ence of a Christen Man*, [Antwerp], 1528, f. xxxvii. Spelling modernized.

²⁵ See Amy Greenstadt: "Read it in Me": The Author's Will in *Lucrece*, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57 (2006), 45–70.

words, till action might become them better" (1323). Now there is action, not the dramatic "sighs and groans and tears" that she thought should "grace the fashion / Of her disgrace" (1319–1320), but a single decisive action that might revise and redeem it. Her "self-slaughtered body" (1730) serves as witness to her innocence and to her agency. She insists upon her place in the "Legend of Good Women," though as something more noteworthy than merely "a true type" of a "loyal wife" (1048–1050), which is what she knows she has been and, in this Roman world, can no longer be – perhaps revealing the human inadequacy of the Roman conception of both marriage and honor.

But this isn't quite where the poem ends. There is the grotesque competition between her husband and her father arguing, literally over her dead body, about to whom she belongs and which of them has now lost the most. And then there is Brutus, who pulls the knife from her body and exploits her corpse for his political ambitions, however justifiable they may be. He makes Lucrece the efficient cause of his political intentions, makes her his "excuse," repurposing her rape and suicide as Rome's disgrace (1833); that is, he wants to turn *Lucrece* into the politicized Republican "Argument" that introduces the poem.²⁶ Somehow she knew early on that this is how it all would end: "The orator to deck his oratory / Will couple my reproach to Tarquin's shame" (815–816).

Her "bleeding body" (1852) is no longer (and it hasn't been so very long) the sign of her chastity but is now the evidence of the tyranny of the Tarquins. For Brutus, her suicide is politically expedient, although he sees it as her mistake: "to slay herself, that should have slain her foe" (1827). But she *had* elicited a promise from Brutus and the rebellious lords that they would be "revenged upon [her] foe" and "let the traitor die (1683, 1686). How far the poem retreats from Lucrece's story is that we forget (as do they) that they fail to keep their promise. Even earlier she had decided that her death should serve as the example for his punishment: "How Tarquin must be used," she imagined saying to her husband, "read it in me" (1195). But no one reads the text she has written exactly as she intended it.

They successfully drive the Tarquins from power and establish the Republic in place of the tyrannical monarchy, but the younger Tarquin is not killed but banished along with his father. It is not justice that they seek on Lucrece's behalf, but political change for the state, as well as political opportunity for themselves. "With speedy diligence," we are told (but one might wonder about how the adjective inflects the noun), "The Romans plausibly did give consent / To Tarquins' everlasting banishment" (1884–1885). But what happened to

²⁶ See Andrew Hadfield: *The Beginning of the Republic: Venus and Lucrece*, in his *Shakespeare and Republicanism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, 130–154. For a different reading of the poem's politics, see Eric Nelson: *Shakespeare and the Best State of the Commonwealth*, in D. Armitage – C. Condren – A. Fitzmaurice (eds.): *Shakespeare and Early-Modern Political Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 253–270.

killing Lucrece's "foe," as both Brutus and Lucrece had demanded? Look how quickly everything concludes, and how much of it is idealized or mystified – or is it falsified? Could her body still be "bleeding"? But since it is just for "shew," it would be better if it were.

The closing couplet can hardly provide a satisfying resolution. "Plausibly" means "with applause." It hadn't yet assumed the hint of qualification in how we use the word today. But who counts as "the Romans" who have speedily consented – and to what exactly? It seems they have consented only to the Tarquins' banishment, with nothing said here about any new form of government. But, in any case, how can the word "consent" be used so confidently to authorize the actions that will follow, when the story of the rape has put the concept under so much pressure?

Rome is spelled "Roome" on the page (as it often was), and clearly there is not room in Rome for both the Tarquins and Brutus (though they were closely related: Brutus's mother was the sister of Tarquinius Superbus). There is, however, no room at all for Lucrece. She has served her purpose and gets written out of the story that she has labored so hard to have made her own. It isn't only from the couplet. In the same year that Shakespeare's poem was published, Richard Beacon, an English political theorist, would write that Brutus was able to "change the state of the commonweal *without any difficulty, danger, or injury sustained by any other than the expelling of Tarquin.*"²⁷ How soon they forget.

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²⁷ Beacon: *Solon his Follie, or a Politique Discourse, touching the Reformation of Common-weales*, Oxford, 1594, sig. D1r. Emphasis mine.

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“TRUTH WILL COME TO LIGHT”:
QUESTIONS OF DISCUSSING ARTISTIC INFLUENCE IN
SOCIALIST HUNGARIAN SHAKESPEARE PRODUCTIONS

—◀▶—
VERONIKA SCHANDL

As a young PhD student, I was offered an Erasmus grant to Munich, where, in the wonderful confines of the Shakespeare Research Library I was hoping to work on my proposed topic, the Shakespearean apocrypha. The day I arrived, I flipped through the library catalogues and found Christa Jansohn's *Zweifelhafter Shakespeare: Zu den Shakespeare-Apokryphen und ihrer Rezeption von der Renaissance bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, a volume so comprehensive on the apocrypha that I lost faith in my own research very soon. Just for fun, I ended up browsing the open shelves of the Shakespeare and theatre section and was drawn to books on Socialist Shakespeare more and more. After having, I thought, wasted a month reading Lawrence Gunthner's and Wilhelm Hortmann's writings on East-German Shakespeare, I called Professor Géher in desperation. Standing in the phone booth outside the post office on Amalienstraße, I bayed into the phone how I lost my purpose of study, and instead was thinking about theatre, my hobby, all the time. István listened to me patiently, then suggested that maybe I should write about theatre instead. "But can one write about that?", I howled desperately. "Yes, one can," came the reassuring answer. And ever since 2001, I have been doing just that.

Since the early 2000s, a lot has been accomplished in the field of Eastern European Shakespeare studies. Single volumes have been devoted to the national receptions and domestications of Shakespeare under, before, and after Socialism, essay collections have discussed cults, translations, performance, and films, while encyclopedias and companions all have devoted a segment to Eastern European Shakespeare reception. Several of us, students of Professor Géher, have actively contributed to this research. What is painfully missing, however, are works that would, in a true European fashion, delineate trends and connections that cross / have crossed national borders. We do acknowledge international tendencies, we do know about what our colleagues are writing, we are familiar with the important names and trends from across the border, however, we still rarely address topics that would require a more international, a more European perspective – a scholarly discussion within the framework of Eastern and larger Europe. This essay endeavors to take a step into that direction by discussing a topic that requires looking beyond the borders of

Hungary, our usual frame of reference: the topic of artistic influence in the context of Hungarian Socialist Shakespeare productions.

The project, of course, is hindered by obstacles on all sides. Artistic influences can be gained through reading, so the first stop should be written materials, annotated books found in archives, letters, and articles in which artistic influences are discussed, interviews that mention names, personal recollections that track artistic lineage. These, however, should be read in the context of Socialist publicity – that is, with healthy suspicion. Since all public, and to some extent private, communication was regulated by the states, also, we must acknowledge that names and artistic influences were often named by artists to authorize their own works, and not necessarily because of actual existing connections.

Next, we should consider visual influence – that is, productions artists could have watched and experienced firsthand. Given the hermetic nature of Socialist Eastern Europe, travelling was limited and regulated; yet, unless we find passports or travel allowances, we can hardly track personal journeys. Festivals are a good place to start, and so is mapping travelling productions, or searches for reviews that discuss foreign productions. We should have an open ear to anecdotes that consider personal postings, or arriving delegations, as well as to international artistic exchanges. This is looking for a nail in a haystack, and we can never speak with hundred percent certainty, but this is where international research would be of primal importance.

Last, but also first, we should watch productions, if possible, and read reviews with a keen eye to parallels. To aid this, we should read one another (more) and engage in joint cross-cultural projects more often. I am certain that with today's historical hindsight we can find and establish connections that were not visible in the then and there of the Socialist past.

As a possible step into these directions, this paper wishes to discuss artistic subversion with regards to artistic cross-pollination in Socialist Hungarian Shakespeare productions. Through a case study of Hungarian actor-director Tamás Major, who, with 23 Shakespeare productions, was a force to reckon with in the Hungarian stage reception of Shakespeare for more than forty years, the essay wishes to investigate what the pitfalls and difficulties are when exploring international influences in a country where all forms of public discourse were monitored and up to a certain level controlled by central cultural authorities. It will look at how, when wishing to connect some dots and establish artistic bloodlines, one must face the problem of metanarratives, often created first by the artists themselves, then taken over not only by contemporary Socialist reviews and publications, but also by scholarly work done after 1989 that often regards these narratives as starting points for their surveys. These narratives habitually wished to insert the artists in question into contemporary

discourses about subversive, revolutionary or retrograde artistic tendencies; however, they often do not reflect the actual productions they wish to describe, rather comment on contemporary discussions of Shakespeare and/or theatre. My aim with this paper is to ask questions, but also to offer some solutions through the analysis of Major’s so-called Stanislavskian period of Shakespeare directions, on how to look past labels when wishing to move beyond pre-conceived, pre-formulated narratives. Embracing that, “when done right,” theatre history “should be untidy, messy, sometimes frustrating, often inconclusive, characterized by contradictory and conflicting experiences,”¹ the paper does not wish to replace one narrative by another, but to start a conversation about pre-conceived notions of Socialist performativity.²

Our hero, Tamás Major, steps onto the main stage of the Hungarian theatre world in 1945, when, arriving with the “liberating” / invading Soviet armies, he self-appoints himself as the director of the National Theatre (Nemzeti Színház) in Budapest, a position he held between 1945 and 1962. As for the previous period, he is mostly known as a character actor of mostly minor roles, as a director of productions first intended for the youth theatre, often also taken over by the Chamber Theatre of the National, and as an enthusiastic reciter of poetry, active at poetry readings organized by the resistance during the war years. Since no official records of his appointment to the Theatre’s management survives, this turn in his career has been a starting point of much speculation – how his connections to the Soviet army or to the illegal Communists could have played a role, how he forced himself onto the Theatre, etc. Major himself interpreted his promotion as a natural consequence of his willingness, and theatre historian Magdolna Jákfalvi has recently also argued that Major was indeed a logical choice,³ since he took the position with a clear directorial and managerial concept in mind, and with a cast of fellow-minded actors and directors – his friends from his early years at Nemzeti (Zoltán Várkonyi, Hilda Gobbi, Magda Olty and László Ungváry) – supporting his ideas. If we accept this claim, we should first assess what the elements of his directorial concept could have been.

Between 1946 and 1949 (the year in which Hungarian theatres are nationalized and Major’s political position weakens, forcing him to streamline his

¹ William Ingram: What Kind of Future for the Theatrical Past: Or, what will Count as Theater History in the Next Millennium?, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 48:2 (Summer, 1997), 215–225.

² One caveat: I am at the beginning of working myself through the Major manuscript collection in the Hungarian Theatre Archives, so my research reflects how I stand now. This can (and probably will) be modified by my ongoing research.

³ Jákfalvi, Magdolna: *A valóság szenvedélye. A magyar realista színház emlékezete Magyarországon*. Akadémiai nagydoktori mű, Színház- és Filmművészeti Egyetem, 2020, <http://real-d.mtak.hu/1243/>

work into a more conservative, less innovative style), Major directed *Much Ado about Nothing* (1946), *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1946), *Twelfth Night* (1947), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1948), and *As You Like It* (1949). The tilt towards comedy shows his personal inclination and preference, but even this short list demonstrates how he systematically started to build a Shakespeare-cycle in the early years of his directorship. In this endeavor, his biggest influence was Sándor Hevesi, actor, director, and former manager of the National Theatre between 1923 and 1932. Hevesi was a friend and correspondent of Edward Gordon Craig and one of the first Hungarian theatre makers who realized the revolutionary nature of Stanislavsky's acting method, who actively turned against the naturalism of his predecessors. In his continuous struggle with the seriously conservative ensemble and a similarly old-fashioned audience of the National Theatre in the first half of the twentieth century, Hevesi consciously used Shakespeare in his numerous Shakespeare cycles to smuggle in new artistic concepts under the cloak of the well-known plays.⁴ Major follows suit – to lure new spectators into the playhouse and to satisfy growing political requirements about the repertoire, he launches a Shakespeare cycle to introduce his directorial concept, too.

While Hevesi is an undoubted influence on Major's concept of management, his Shakespeare productions are markedly different from those of Hevesi's. Contemporary reviewers notice already with *Much Ado*, the first play in the cycle, that Major has a feel for classical comedy. His style is described as boisterous, full-bodied comedy,⁵ and as "intense, crass and rowdy."⁶ When revived in 1952, the production includes even more gags, fireworks, and cannon shots, as well as a "hilarious" funeral scene, in which the actors enter the stall rows of the theatre "in the spirit of cabaret, linking the auditorium to the stage."⁷ Even if he is criticized for not being lyrical enough, especially by 1960, when the production is revived for a second round, reviewers comment on Major's "definite directorial concept" in this "confident and mature" production.⁸ They even go as far as to label his concept as "establishing a style,"⁹ the ingredients of which are clearly decipherable: over-the-top, almost burlesque comedy, bodily humor, slapstick, and a willing destruction of the fourth wall.

⁴ He directed ten Shakespeare cycles throughout his career. See also: Gabriella Reuss: In search of the "real Shakespeare": Sándor Hevesi's *Taming of the Shrew* in 1923, Budapest," *Theatralia*, 26/1 (2023), https://journals.phil.muni.cz/theatralia/article/view/35120?fbclid=IwAR3zxarn9b-LmsWtzZVZbfNmuLTqDfUFp1Q8S8VjU3Lkew4aR3VTT0bY_TQ (accessed 23 March 2024).

⁵ Kéry, László: Sok húhó semmiért, *Magyarok*, July 1946, 408.

⁶ H.I.: Sok húhó semmiért, *Jövendő*, June 13, 1946.

⁷ Mátrai-Betegh, Béla: Sok húhó semmiért, *Magyar Nemzet*, October 26, 1952, 8.

⁸ Ungvári, Tamás: Shakespeare ciklus a Nemzeti Színházban: *Sok húhó semmiért*, *Magyar Nemzet*, March 13, 1960, 11.

⁹ Dersi, Tamás: Sok húhó semmiért – Shakespeare-vígjáték a Nemzetiben, *Esti Hírlap*, March 27, 1960, 8.

Even though Major does not cut the plays¹⁰ – “the complete Shakespeare is the only acceptable theoretical stance,”¹¹ he claims in a radio interview in 1948 – all reviews comment on the quick pace of the productions.¹² These uncut productions are famously long – some start earlier than seven so that the audience could leave the theatre before midnight – yet they make use of a permanent single unit scenery,¹³ and play every part of the stage, directorial decisions that allow for quick scene changes.

When it comes to naming his artistic influences, Major, in his early interviews as manager, only lists one source: Stanislavsky. In Major’s understanding, a Stanislavskian theatre rested on two pillars: first, it should reflect contemporary life in its fullest,¹⁴ second, all roles should replicate the actor’s own life, visions, and ideology.¹⁵ His descriptions remain this vague and allusive all through the 1950s, and Major is attacked throughout the Stalinist years for not being Stanislavskian enough – culminating in 1954, when literary scholar Péter Nagy denounces the National Theatre for its lack of socialist realist productions,¹⁶ listing Major’s directions as well as his portrayal of classical roles as the main culprit. Indeed, the stylistic features we have reconstructed from contemporary reviews do not line up with a Stanislavskian performativity, not even the distorted Socialist misinterpretation of Stanislavsky’s writings the Stalinist theatres worked with. In my opinion, Major’s own narrative that

¹⁰ Major fought a lifelong battle against a phantom enemy he called literary theatre, which, in his understanding, meant a theatre practice that cut Shakespeare and other classics, juggled the scenes around, and generally “misunderstood the author’s intention.” (He often quoted the National Theatre’s 1938 *Hamlet*, directed by Antal Németh, as the worst example of this tendency.) According to his argument, bourgeois directors cut Shakespeare, because his diversity hurt their delicate feelings. Contrary to this, the people’s theatre, that is, Socialist art, realized and embraced Shakespeare’s polyphony and only considered “complete” Shakespeare plays to be worthy of watching. (This is the most frequently recurring element in Major’s writings; therefore, the following list only contains a few examples: Major, Tamás: Shakespeare-i pillanatok, in Gyárfás, Miklós (ed.): *Élő dramaturgia*, Budapest, Magvető, 1963, 161–181. Antal, Gábor (ed.): *A mester monológja*, Budapest, Magvető, 1986, 7–47; Kocsis, L. Mihály: *Van itt valaki?*, Budapest, Minerva, 1987, 19–20, 21.) During the 1950s, Major often compared Shakespeare to a symphony, where all instruments had their own distinct voices but together, they played in a harmony that would have been lost when attempted with a chamber orchestra. See, e.g., Antal, Gábor (ed.): *A mester monológja*, 23.

¹¹ Major, Tamás: *Az örök Shakespeare* – radio interview with István Békés. 1948. Typed transcript of the National Theatre Museum and Institute, 2017.160. 1–3.

¹² Not only in the comedies, but also in *Anthony and Cleopatra*; see Sándor, Iván: *Antonius és Kleopatra* – Shakespeare tragédiája a Nemzeti Színházban, *Film Színház Muzsika*, February 12, 1960, 8.

¹³ Major often claims that the changes of the scenes should not stop the flow of the performance. See: *Az örök Shakespeare*.

¹⁴ Quoted by Hofer, Miklós – Kerényi, Ferenc (eds.): *A Nemzeti Színház 150 éve*, Budapest, Gondolat, 1987, 152.

¹⁵ Major, Tamás: *A Nemzeti Színház megnyitására* – opening speech. September 1, 1945. Transcript of the National Theatre Museum and Institute, 2017.27.1.

¹⁶ Nagy, Péter: Mi a baj klasszikus előadásainkkal, *Csillag*, 8/4 (1954), 673–688.

links his early endeavors at the National Theatre to Stanislavsky, is more a legitimizing description used to forego criticism than an actual adherence to a style, and a connection the exclusivity of which we should question.

The physicality of Major's productions, the importance of movement evident not only in his Shakespeare directions but also in his portrayal of Shakespeare characters, links his visions rather to Meyerhold's biomechanics. However, in the Stalinist years, aligned with the Party line, Major frequently rejects Meyerhold's theatrical vision as reactionary, a "formalism" that smuggles the worst bourgeois traditions into Socialist art,¹⁷ a method "that chooses the easiest path," "to seek cheap popularity,"¹⁸ and a practice generally to be discarded. It is only after the 1960s, when Meyerhold is rehabilitated, that Major starts mentioning his name in a positive way and linking his own works to his biomechanism. This should warn us to contextualize Major's Stalinist writings in the precarious situation he was in as the manager of the National Theatre, where all his public utterances came under heightened scrutiny, so Major quickly adopted a strategy to streamline his announcements to echo centrally prescribed doctrines, thus distancing himself from Meyerhold, whose work he knew and made use of.

In 1949, when his close personal friend, László Rajk, Foreign Secretary of the Stalinist government is tried and sentenced to death in a show trial, Major's position weakens. He is sent to five months of political training and is required to publicly disavow his previous artistic and managerial conduct. In this article, which appears in the magazine *Színház és Filmművészet* in 1951, he, in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek manner, openly describes his method (which he seemingly distances himself from), commenting on how he used to approximate Stalinist literature to his own purposes:

Comrade Horvai mentioned at the last meeting of the Association Board that he had once appeared in the office of the National Theatre when I was reading a chapter from Comrade Stalin's book *On the Peasant Question*. To him I declared that I would use what I have read for at least two months on the stage. And what I read I did use, but such a remark shows superficiality and a lack of reflection.¹⁹

Major's talent in making two-months' use of a few pages from Stalin, should, we feel, alert us to take whatever he publicly uttered with a pinch of salt,

¹⁷ Major's lecture on his experiences in the Soviet Union, November 18, 1948, December 11, 1948. Transcript of the National Theatre Museum and Institute, 2017.42.2–3.

¹⁸ Major, Tamás: *Válasz Molnár Miklós előadására* [An answer to Miklós Molnár's lecture], around April 13 – May 26, 1950. Transcript of the National Theatre Museum and Institute, 2017.54.1.

¹⁹ Major, Tamás: *Pártunk útján szabad elvi bírálattal és önbírálattal*, *Színház és Filmművészet*, 1951/9, 257–260. Typed transcript of the National Theatre Museum and Institute, 2017.63.1.

abandon his master narrative, and establish artistic connections based on other sources.

Our investigation leads us into several directions. Let us first look for textual evidence. Luckily, we have several of Major's personal Shakespeare volumes in the Theatrical Archives of Budapest, in which he annotated some of the plays he was interested in. These annotations often call our attention to parallels between Shakespearean plays, pointing out similarities between dramatic situations. Furthermore, they often explain how characters in certain situations should react. What is evident from these notes is that Major was primarily interested in characters when engaged in interaction – that it is the dramatic situation that is at the core of his analysis of the plays, not so much the characters in their singularities. His directions of Shakespeare between 1945 and 1949 also highlight his understanding of Shakespearean dramaturgy as a series of scenes, not so much as a continuous narrative. His performances are organized around gags, his characters react to situations and to other characters more as types than as psychologically accurate depictions of human beings. This also leads to a tonal variety in his directions that puts jocular next to tragic, a trait he admires in a Soviet *Othello* production during his first, 1948 visit to Moscow, and this is what leads him not only to Shakespeare but to Molière, too.

When in search of non-textual evidence, we must trace Major's steps back to before 1945. His greatest influences then come not from Soviet theatres (although through his friend, Ferenc Hont, a Moscow emigree, he did hear about Tairov and Meyerhold), but from France. A student of French at the university, Major was a frequent visitor to Paris from 1937 onwards,²⁰ where he visited Jacques Copeau's Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier and saw Louis Jouvet at the Théâtre de l'Athénée. Copeau's permanent architectural stage left a visible mark on his later usage of the stage, while his insistence on improvisation and on physical stamina made Major join movement classes and was later implemental in his emphasis on the physical aspects of performance. Jouvet's character acting is echoed in Major's own acting style, but also in the way he directs his actors as types reacting to certain situations, rather than developing through the course of the play. It is in France where Major sees commedia dell'arte, and how folk theatrical as well as circus elements can be incorporated into productions of the classics, both of which remain staples in his own oeuvre.

Reading Jouvet, whom his friend Várkonyi translates, but more importantly, seeing him perform, lead Major and his group of friends to mount two productions as market comedies in Budapest City Park: a Hungarian classic, *Karnyóné*,²¹ and a rewriting of *George Dandin* (*Duda Gyuri*), both in 1943. In these pro-

²⁰ It is in Paris that he saw Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre, too.

²¹ Written by Mihály Csokonai Vitéz.

ductions we can see the forerunners of many of the traits contemporary reviewers will note in Major's early Shakespeare directions: a heavy reliance on physical and situational comedy, an understanding of characters as types, and burlesque comedy. What is there in these pre-war attempts that is also central to Major's artistic agenda is a wish to agitate or at least to engage wider audiences with his productions. During the war and in the early years of his managerial career, he wished to achieve this by positioning the classics (notably Shakespeare and Molière) in a tradition that embraced folk plays, and low comedy yet was also innovative in ways that audiences and critics both appreciated.

By the mid-1950s, Major came under continuous attack for his non-realist portrayal of characters, as well as the over-the-top directorial solutions. While in the early 1950s he repeatedly defends his "exaggerations," claiming that "the demand for so-called naturalism is wrong and bourgeois. Condensations are reckless, dangerous games, without which art is not interesting, they must be filled with life, and that is the hard way,"²² he gradually abandons many of his previous innovations, and it is not until 1959, when he discovers Brecht, that his Shakespeare directions are resuscitated. That, however, is a topic for another paper.

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WHERE'S THE PHILOSOPHY IN LITERATURE?¹

— ◀ ▶ —
BRETT BOURBON

A number of years ago, Géza gave and then published a lecture on the relationship between Literature and Philosophy. In that lecture he delineated the various ways of linking philosophy and literature. He also situated my own work relative to these delineations, as well as the work of our advisor at Harvard, Stanley Cavell. I would like to return to his lecture and respond to it – to engage in a posthumous discussion with Géza about where the philosophy is in literature. I am speaking to him in what I say to you. Specifically, I will re-examine the logical form of fiction relative to our own relationship with language. This will also allow me to develop Géza's particular and astute characterization of how philosophy can open up new dimensions in our understanding of fiction, life, and reality.

I tend to be far more deflationary in my arguments about philosophy than Géza was, but we both disliked many of the too easy deflationary gestures of Richard Rorty. Rorty was my colleague at Stanford, and I knew him well. He was a philosophical provocateur. His provocations often took the form of diagnostic analyses of philosophical diseases in which he determined the causes of the illness and offered a cure. The cure was often the philosophical equivalent of 'Take two aspirin and call me in the morning.' He offered, of course, his own special brand of aspirin – *The Pragmatist Analgesic For Ailments You Don't Really Have But Think You Do*.

Rorty provides a pointed diagnosis of the dominant analytic theories of fiction in his essay *Is there a Problem about Fictional Discourse?*² He argues that the motive for these theories of fiction all rest on two mistakes. (1) First, they all attempt to solve an epistemological challenge (to verify or justify a proposition) by semantic means: to guarantee that our statements are not governed simply by conventions, but by how things are in the world. (2) Second, they all accept Russell's proposition that "What is referred to must exist".³ Both of these positions arise out of a more fundamental philosophical picture in which statements, propositions, or thoughts must hook onto the world. Russell's proposition about reference, for example, seems to provide the glue between

¹ Some part of this essay was published on <https://formadevida.org/bourbonfdv20>, under the title *Pencils, Birds, Fictions, and Stop Signs*.

² R. Rorty: *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Brighton, The Harvester Press, 1982, 110–138.

³ *Ibid.*, 111.

propositions (or statements or thoughts) and the world. Rorty argues against both of these mistakes, as well as the general goal of trying to get language to hook onto the world. As a consequence, he finds most philosophy of language to be both moribund and unnecessary. He also concludes that without these assumptions about reference, epistemology, and the relation between language and world, there are no interesting problems for theories of fiction to solve.⁴ While this is true for most of the theories of fiction in analytic philosophy, as well as those in literary studies, I do not think it is true more generally. Our need to conceptualize fiction is not simply the consequence of mistaken theories about how we know or talk about the world of objects and things. Fictions remain puzzling even without elaborate philosophical theories.

If one accepts Russell's proposition that "What is referred to must exist," then fiction becomes a problem. Since fictional characters seem not to exist (and if we accept Russell's premise, then) we cannot refer to them, and yet we do refer to them. So, how can we do this? Either fiction means in some special way not requiring such referential targeting or fictional characters exist in some special way such that we can refer to them. Or, of course, we can reject Russell's premise ("What is referred to must exist"). Rorty argues for this last solution.

I am sympathetic to Rorty's solution, but my goal in this essay is neither to rehearse nor evaluate Rorty's arguments against theories of fiction. My goal is to situate fictions within a broader category of logical distinctions, and in so doing reveal something of the oddity of fictions. What I will provide are not theories, but descriptions with supporting arguments (often arguments of demonstration, generated from examples): a philosophical net to catch fictional fish.

I begin with the essential question: What does it mean to be fictional, which is to ask, what is a minimal logical description of what counts as a fiction? We can describe the logical form of fiction in a minimal way: a fiction is a story or sentence or whatever from which we should not infer in any straightforward way, by virtue of what is said or asserted or claimed, anything about the author or the world. It may express the beliefs of the author, but we cannot conclude that from the fiction in the way we would if someone said with conviction and as a confession '*I believe in leprechauns.*' Nor should we infer something about current or past states of affairs from a fiction in the way we could if someone said, "*Gaius Gracchus' son committed suicide when he learned that his father had been killed.*" This might be false (although I think it is true), but it is not fictional by virtue of that. A fiction can in this sense be neither true nor false. Utilizing other information and setting the fiction in context, we can use it to help confirm or trace aspects of a cultural or historical situation. This is to *use*

⁴ Ibid., 114.

the fiction, not to read it as a fiction. In order to use it to make such confirmations or inferences, we are required to normalize aspects of the fiction relative to our understanding of evidence and relative to the logic and constraints of non-fictional statements and stories. A non-fictional statement need not be true or undistorted, but it can be evaluated relative to what is the case, and thus can be false, even if only potentially. Thus, it is necessary, when we understand a fiction, that we understand that certain inferences to the author and the world are not permissible. Consequently, what is *necessary* for a fiction to be a fiction – that straightforward inferences to author and world are blocked – is also *sufficient* for it to be a fiction.

If this last is true, then fictionality is a logical distinction, regardless of how we decide if something is a fiction and regardless of its content. It is an example of the conceptual resources that allow us to talk about anything. How we evaluate and use fictions is determined by a number of psychological and cultural factors. That we can make and grasp fictions is not dependent, however, on psychology or culture, except in that someone must have a certain minimal cognitive and probably linguistic capacity in order to grasp the distinction between fictions and non-fictions.

I am situating fiction as a logical category with other logical distinctions, all of which do not depend on psychology or culture (except contingently). I will describe a few of these logical distinctions in order to sketch the landscape in which fiction exists and thrives. My first example requires some sleight of hand. It is a kind of magic trick in which I turn a pencil into a concept. The trick is simple. Let's pretend we are in a classroom about to take a test. I raise the pencil in my hand and tell you, my class that you must use *this* on your test. I do not expect you all to rush desperately towards me in order to grab the pencil out of my hand, so that you can use *that* particular pencil. You understand that I mean the kind of thing called a *pencil*. I turned this pencil I am holding from a token into a type, and thus into the concept pencil: I translated the physical pencil into a logical pencil. It is as if I am putting single quotation marks around the pencil, turning it into a kind of symbol of the pencil I want you, my students, to use. By turning the pencil into an example of the pencil I want you to use, I am doing something akin to mentioning a set of words, and thus I am framing the pencil as a kind of thing, and thus as logically distinct from the actual pencil I am holding in my hand. This is like saying – "I want you to use the words 'a person is a person and not a chair' in your essay." I am mentioning the phrase – 'a person is a person and not a chair' and not using it. Mentioning words alters their logical form, and thus alters our relation to them in a way that is *akin* (*although not the same*) to our logical relationship to fictions and to fictional characters. In my example, I am mentioning the pencil (by demonstration), abstracting the physical object, which is still there, into the kind of thing I want you, my students, to use.

The relationship between the pencil I hold and the logical pencil I refer to is like the relationship between a stop sign and the laws about stop signs. The sign tells us that we should abide by the law governing our behavior relative to such signs. But the traffic law has no physical relationship with the sign. Even if we put a statute book next to the sign, the law, itself, which is not the words by which it is expressed, is not at that moment close to that one sign and farther away from others. If it is a law, its domain is the domain of law – and ‘domain’ in this case characterizes the scope of its legitimate application. And while that scope includes the physical space that includes all stop signs within the jurisdiction where the law is in force, the law remains neither close nor far from any stop sign in that domain.

Asking how far or close a law is to the stop sign is a nonsensical statement that is akin (but not the same) as asking how statements hook onto the things in the physical world. The dualism between laws and signs is benign since it need not imply two kinds of substances. Similarly, we talk of different kinds of things without committing ourselves to different kinds of existent substances. We speak of right and left, of gestures of dismay, and of subatomic particles. We can be agnostic about whether these are *three different kinds of existent (ontological) things* – or simply distinctions we make. Nothing rests on deciding if these three things really exist, as if we might discover that while I used to believe that a left turn existed, I now know it does not. We can clarify the differences amongst these, however. In the case of traffic laws, we can note that laws in general do not need to interact with or hook onto signs since they govern (or provide the normative rules for) *our* behavior with these signs.

To imagine that there is a distance between laws and stop signs is not to say something false, it is to say something nonsensical. This is a characteristic of a logical confusion. The joke on which my pencil magic trick turns is that it would be nonsense to imagine that I am saying only one person can take the test with the one pencil that I happen to have. In this pencil example, as well as with the stop sign case, I am characterizing two kinds of things *from within* our ability to conceptualize things. I will return to this point below.

The distinctions I am highlighting here are mundane *ways of pointing* to what Wilfred Sellars calls the *space of reason*. I want to stick as close to the mundane as I can. We are the link between the stop sign and traffic laws, just as we are between the pencil and the concept of pencil. To understand how these objects relate to our concepts, laws, ideas and so on is just to account for our conceptual abilities *tout court*. In these cases, the distinctions, it needs to be repeated, are logical not ontological. We have ways of talking about stop signs that are different from ways of talking about traffic laws, and these differences are partly founded on the fact that these are different kinds of things. What it means for them to be different kinds of things is simply that we know (or should know) that we cannot measure the number of atoms in any

specific traffic law, although we could measure those of a stop sign. Similarly, we know that we **cannot** reduce the law to the marks on the page by which it is defined, even if in order to understand the law we interpret these words made from these marks. Certain things are made of atoms, but other things are not. A mark on a page is not the same kind of thing as what those marks mean. When we speak of kinds we are articulating differences from within our ability to speak, to represent and conceptualize.

Language remains the most powerful *means* by which we conceptualize things. And it provides, of course, the primary tools for making and understanding fictions, as well as for articulating things like traffic laws. The sentence you are hearing (reading) now both *is* something and *means* something. The previous sentence is a sentence, but it is also a string of words, a string of letters, marks on a page, something to read or vocalize; it is meaningful, self-referential, part of English, something I wrote, and so on. Some of what the sentence *is* is tied to how we understand it relative to particular aspects and descriptions of it – descriptions highlighting that it is in English or that I wrote it, for example. Gottlob Frege argues that a sentence *means* just the thought that it expresses, which suggests that what a sentence *is* is just the thought that it expresses. That there is some relation between the thought a sentence expresses and the logical form of the sentence suggests, even if one rejects Frege's theory of meaning, that the attempt to separate what a sentence *is* from what it *means* will not succeed. To individuate a sentence is in many ways to say what it means.

A sentence is not individuated simply by its being a certain set of marks or vocalizations. We might think that a nonsensical string of words is a sentence syntactically, and yet still not count it as a meaningful sentence. We can reasonably claim that a sentence that means nothing is not a sentence, or that nonsense sentences just look like sentences but they are in fact factitious. Such nonsense phrases, that we mistakenly call sentences, can provide the resources and the constraints for us to rewrite them into some kind of sense. This is often what we do when we interpret poems, for example.

A number of conclusions follow from these descriptions. First, sentences are not physical objects, individuated causally; they are individuated logically, relative to their meanings. Thus, sentences are strange objects – and those linguistic forms, like poems and fictions, which are partially constituted by them, are likewise strange objects. One way in which they are strange is that, while we must grasp them as they are manifest to us (by sounds or in marks), we do not stand toward them as we do toward other objects. We are, it is tempting to say, inside the meaning of sentences, because their meaning is something we grasp from the inside out – from within the possibilities of meaningfulness that constitute our involvement with language (including our ability to speak and understand one). [We see the dead as parodies of a living

person, because we necessarily see them from within our living. A nonsense sentence exposes a similar kind of limit to sense as the dead do to the living. I do not have space to develop these analogies here.]

Another example will help me re-focus our involvement with language towards the oddity of fictions. I can do to myself what I did to the pen in my earlier example. Imagine that I am playing myself playing myself in a fictional play. What I am doing in the play is what I am doing in playing myself: I am pretending to pretend. My playing myself, however, is still different than my playing myself in the play. The *Brett* I am is different than the *Brett* I am playing. There is a logical difference, just like that between the pencil I am holding and the concept pencil I indicate by saying 'Use *this* on your test.' An actor who plays herself acting as herself within a fictional play fictionalizes herself, but only in the way that I conceptualized the pencil. I cannot become completely fictional: there remains a distinction between outside and inside the fiction.

Fictions are fictions because they are framed as fictions. Neither the content nor the fictional status of the characters or anything else makes a fiction a fiction. A fictional character is ontologically no more odd than a stop sign described in the non-fictional statement 'I have learned to stop at stop signs.' Of course, someone might deny this equivalence if they accepted Russell's premise that such a sentence must include a reference to an existent stop sign, here understood as a general concept (cut for talk: does that commit us to believing that we are referring, when we say this sentence, to a thing that is both the concept of a concept and the/a concept of stop signs?). I will not reenter the debate about this here. I will, however, reiterate that the inclusion of a non-existent thing in a story is not what makes that story fictional. We can turn a non-fictional statement into a fictional statement simply by treating it as such. What this means is that fictions are logically distinct not from the actual world but from non-fictional statements. If that is the case, then the distinction that matters, that tells us about the logical kind of thing fictions are is not between fictions and the world but between fictions and non-fictions. What we count as a non-fiction or a fiction might be determined culturally, or sociologically as Rorty would say, but what it means to be the one or the other is a logical distinction.

The logical distinctions manifest as the differences between signs and laws, pencils and 'pencils,' and fictions and non-fictions define some of the conceptual limits we live amidst. To collapse these limits produces nonsense. To fail to understand a fiction as a fiction, for example, as happens to hilarious effect in the film *Galaxy Quest*, is to act nonsensically. To imagine that a pretend spaceship can really fly in space is absurd. Sometimes we can survive such slippage into nonsense, sometimes we cannot.

The distinction between fiction and non-fiction is a fundamental logical relation, a logical limit, organizing our powers of representation. We live in a world of logical possibilities. Fictions are one form of this, akin but not the same as hypotheses, plans, pictures, and even fears (our fears of abstract possibilities – of disease, for example). Fictions rely on and thus provoke our own attention and confusions about the realm of logical possibilities. Those possibilities are not actual in the same way my keyboard is as I write, but both the world and these possibilities are the world we human beings live in. It not only allows us to write fictions, it is the reason we want to read them.

I want to offer a final example of how we live amidst the possibilities of form and sense. The example is mundane in its way, but slippery to grasp in its implications and force. In *The Peregrine*, a masterpiece of descriptive writing, J.A. Baker describes his efforts to get close to a set of peregrine falcons in the fen lands of eastern England. At one point in his pursuit of these birds, he watches a peregrine hunt. The raptor circles, swoops, passes nearby. All the animals around him quiet into silence: a first silence. Baker hears the quiet; he hears the world shift from one tone into another. Then, the peregrine makes a kill. Afterwards, it shrieks and all turns silent again. But this second silence is different:

The curved hook of its beak protruded from the heart-shaped disc of the mask, like a single claw. The dark eyes were rimmed with wine. It flew overhead, and in the first coldness of the spring night, suddenly called. A hoarse bellowing shriek drew out to a sharp edge, and bristled away to silence. But not the silence that was there before.⁵

In this passage we first have a moment of sound given form – “a hoarse bellowing shriek drew out to a sharp edge, and bristled away to silence.” Then, we have the aftermath in which all is changed – “but not the silence that was there before.” Silences can have different qualities, but that difference cannot be in the silence itself, which is simply quiet. The quality of a silence depends on things other than the lack of noise or sound.

This second silence is a memory of the first, with a difference. Something has been killed. The silence is an after-something silence, not a before-something silence. That is its difference. It is a silence arising from slightly different motives and reactions than the first disturbance into silence. That first silence expressed wariness and fear. The second happens amidst a kind of relief, a lessening of fear, for those that react as possible prey to the peregrine's hunting. The hunt is temporarily in abeyance. Baker feels paused by the event of that killing, halted in his own pursuit of the raptor.

⁵ J.A. Baker: *The Peregrine*. NYRB Classics, 2004, 158.

The silence is part of a current state of affairs, but it is also separate from that state of affairs; it is not just the silence of the moment, but a silence that fits and recalls the silence that preceded the hunt. The silence speaks threat, but also death. The death of the peregrine's prey is caught in the silence. Death in that silence is an event, like an ocean calm, like the splendor of the grass. This might sound like poetic extravagance, but it is not. It is a way of articulating the way the world emerges for us through a matrix of logical distinctions.

This second silence mimics the first. The first silence becomes the concept by which the second is grasped as similar but different; but this sense of silence is understood as part of a series of actions and events. We might say that the first silence is both an event and an idea relative to which the second silence is grasped as both second (an after-the fact silence) and as different from the first. This should recall my earlier example of the pencil that I turned into a concept. The first silence is the pencil that becomes a concept by which the second silence can be distinguished as both alike and different.

Silence isn't anything in itself. How it is heard is what it is. Silence is a kind of auditory form, and a second silence takes its form relative to the first. But not only that. It is a manifestation of the power of the peregrine that is grasped as an event (a killing), through its effects on the world and Baker's perception of those effects as events that also happen to him. What Baker means by silence and its form of absence is nothing vague or gestural. We hear silence as a form as surely as we hear a melody, and for the same reason. We do not live in the moment, no matter how immediate. We are dispersed backwards and forwards in time. We hear patterns of tone, not single pitches, and what we take as a single pitch is itself an oscillation of frequencies.

There is a feeling of revelation, but is it more than a feeling? We borrow the vocabulary and ideas that feel native to us, in which we have learned to talk about the ephemeral, the so-called spiritual, the vague and portent. And we give our feelings that form, or they take those forms. But this is the accident of our cultural upbringing. We can turn ecumenical and imagine the truth shown takes many forms but is the same truth. But there is no greater justification for that than there is for the particular form we take it as revealing.

Baker's second silence, while caused by the actions of the peregrine and constituted by the reactions of various birds and animals, is neither simply a human action nor is it the action of silence. In other words, it is not an action and event functioning through the normative expectations that constitute the realm of human meaning. Baker is not hearing the world speak as if it were either a human or a god. He hears a form of the actual world that happens. It is an event that includes his own awareness and his own history of awareness. The event of the silence is partly the result of the actions and expectations of the peregrine and of Baker. But it remains an event of the world in which he is participating. It is not his projection, but it is revealed through his

awareness. This second silence as an event has a form that is akin to the logical pencil and not just the physical pencil. It is an everyday event of form that situates Baker as well as the birds and animals relative to the actions of the peregrine and its killing. He and all who are silent in the aftermath of the peregrine's after-killing shriek integrate the quiet with the memory and syntax made by the previous events. The silence is in the world, but its form is achieved in Baker's hearing.

Still, someone might want to insist: 'Silence is silence, but a second silence is not real, it is mere subjective projection.' Silence is heard, so it is nothing without a hearer. But it is also not deafness; something is heard, and that is a silence relative to before and after. But it is a silence, in this case, that is also part of the lives and situation of the animals in the world of their landscape. In some sense, all silences are second silences of previous silences. All silence is recognized, and thus part of some pattern, but not always a relevant pattern. After the peregrine has killed, the silence is a concentrated awareness of the negative space, or rather, the negative sound that outlines the raptor's shriek of rage and power.

A second silence, which shows itself as an afterward of both an earlier silence of fear, but also of the life that was before alive, and of the cause of that killing, which is not murder but is mere hunting; it is an emptiness of sound caused by the lives and the kind of death on which that life is built and sustained. The sound does not honor the dead, but it is the reaction of the living to the killing and thus to that which was killed. The second silence is an epitaph, an epitaph that happens as an event and not as a conscious making. But it is an epitaph nevertheless.

The peregrine kills its prey, but that is not murder; it is survival and feeding. The bird has no choice. Still the silence it makes is the complement to its rage, and expresses the fear of its prey. A human battle and its carnage is also *a* killing that produces its own kind of second music – the silence of the dead, expressing in their silence the human rage and fear that were part of the killing. The silence is a form of horror. Geoffrey Hill describes this kind of human silence in the third poem of his *Funeral Music*:

A field

After battle utters its own sound

Which is like nothing on earth, but is earth.⁶

⁶ Geoffrey Hill: *Funeral Music*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48460/funeral-music>

The aftermath of the battle has a different noise than the cacophony that was the battle. And if it is not quite silence, the field, which is the earth on which the battle was fought, speaks in a voice that is not human; it is “like nothing on earth” – but it remains earth. It will absorb the dead, our dead.

What seems like a mere rhetorical trope, personification and fantasy, is not. The world speaks to us through our ability to correlate aspects of the world with other aspects of the world, by using our logical tools of abstraction and identification. The world speaks, but it requires that we be there to hear, since we are partly speaking to ourselves through our ways of hearing it. Nevertheless, the field “utters its own sound.” A silence that follows the peregrine’s hunt is different than the silence that preceded the kill; in this, the world describes itself through our being held by it. We recognize the silence like we might a spoken word or the concept pencil. But with the second silence, it is not an action of a person that is recognized, but the event that follows from the action of a raptor. But this is not projection; it is the way the world emerges as meaningful for us within our own involvement with it. This is not the kind of argument Rorty makes, but it is the direction in which he points us.

But it also suggests that our philosophical interest in fiction, as well as other conceptual questions about similar limits of sense, are not exhausted by resisting the question “How do our statements hook onto the world?” What is mysterious, strange, and wondrous **is** how we inhabit the world in the ways we do. Words can hold something dear and silent. “Silence is a shape that has passed,” Wallace Stevens writes towards the end of his life, listening for death, the sun less and less hope for him.⁷ The shape of silence is second silence. We hear what is passed because that past is over (the sound has ceased), and yet the silence now recalls an earlier quiet. We do not need theories about semantics, reference, or language to explain the shapes of silence. That silence has a shape is wondrous, and our philosophical descriptions help reveal that wonder. We live in a conceptual world, in which silence is akin to fictions. This is what Géza would call philosophy and literature.

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ON REPRESENTING AND BEING PRESENT

ÁDÁM CZITROM

If I had to name one valuable lesson I took from my years as a student of Géza Kállay, and perhaps the one I have revisited most often in my later work as a musician, it is that interpretation is a mode of *presence* rather than *representation*.

In Exodus 3 God calls his reluctant prophet Moses so as to send him to Egypt to lead his chosen people back to Kanaan. I find the dialog between God and Moses at the inauguration of Moses to be perhaps the most comprehensive and yet capacious meditation on the question of interpretation:

And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.

And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

(Exodus 3:11–14, King James Version)

“What shall I call you?” and “Who am I?” are, I believe, the two most pivotal questions one can ask in the act of interpretation, be it literary or other. The realization of “who I am” through the presence of the other implied by God’s words, “*certainly I will be with thee*,” is a statement so incredibly charged that I cannot help but conjure up my own loss of self when separated from someone close; or conversely, a realization of self through the presence of another person. At this point, in relation to both experiences, I cannot help but think of Géza.

Introduced to his mission, Moses struggles to understand a mode of *representation*, while God, in response, endows him with a definition of *presence*. With his tautological statement ‘I am that I am,’ perhaps more accurately translated from the Hebrew original as “I will be what I will be,” God states the myth of presence – “ehey easher ehey.”

According to another etymological reading, “ehey asher ehey” is understood as suggesting a creative act, i.e., “*I shall bring into being what I shall bring into being.*” In my understanding, it is the implication of a simultaneous mode of *presence* and a mode of *action* through which a statement of omnipotence is made. In other words, God declares “*I will be present wherever, whenever and in any form I choose to,*” which, of course, entails that he will be *absent* whenever and wherever he chooses – a perception that has often been invoked in the darker chapters of history.

There is much to be inferred from this passage in relation to interpretation and literature in general. Obtaining self-awareness through the presence of something other than ourselves is a transaction in knowledge that Géza particularly encouraged us, his students, to embrace and reflect in our own work. When discussing drama and theater, Géza often referenced the Aristotelian notions of *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia* indicating a transformation brought about by a recognition of self through something other – a transformation of “*there is*” or “*there was*” into “*I am.*” He referred to these terms not as fossilized exhibits of literary heritage, but in fact as relevant experiences to draw upon in our quest to develop personal standards for reading literature. “Reading and having standards,” as Susan Sontag suggested, “are thus relations with the past and what is other.”¹

Hamlet, Othello and Lear are thinkers who invent and reinvent themselves, much like the centuries of their readers, much like you and me. Each era has seen Shakespeare, for better or worse, as its own child. Perhaps more than with any other writer, Shakespeare’s work has often been repurposed to affirm certain views of certain times while providing supposed evidence for disavowing other views of other times. I can recall Géza opening his drama seminar by claiming that Shakespearean critics have done everything possible to intimidate future readers and discourage them from having views of their own. Therefore, he continued, we as readers and interpreters should do everything we possibly can to resist being intimidated.

It is Hamlet with whom we interpreters of Shakespeare share, according to Géza, a Heideggerian *state of thrownness*. We find ourselves in a grave set of circumstances in which all questions appear to have been answered and all matters decided long before our arrival on the scene – an arrival that occurred too late to begin with and that seems to make no difference anyway. Like Hamlet, we find ourselves in a play in which we have barely any desire to participate, and yet, like Hamlet, we are still expected to be bold, provocative, questioning and self-reliant. Using this and other analogies, it was often from within the hermeneutic dilemma of the tragic heroes themselves that Géza

¹ Susan Sontag: *The World as India. The St. Jerome Lecture on Literary Translation*, in *At the Same Time: Essays & Speeches*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, 179.

took his cue when interpreting and teaching Shakespeare. Seeing Shakespeare's works as both vessel and contents of literary interpretation has liberated us, the students, from the menacing shadow of centuries of Shakespearean criticism to which it is seemingly impossible to add anything.

Hamlet, Othello and Lear are seekers of truth, much like us interpreting their tragedies. Hamlet is much rather a subject in communication than he is a source of information – a quality that, if misunderstood, may lead to tragic consequences in the play as well as in the process of interpreting it. Othello's tragedy reveals that *all that can be believed is merely an image of truth*, not truth itself. And King Lear, whose quest for the realm beyond language, for the thing in itself, will show how inexplicably vast and silent the universe really is. Their tragedies are *tragedies of interpretation*; in turn, our interpretation of their tragedies should be nothing less than a form of *taking action*, a way of *being present*. It is this tenet that I would like to support in the remainder of this paper.

OTHELLO

Othello is a tragedy that laments the inherent failure of the narratives we as humans create in the hope of understanding reality. Tragedy here emerges from the rift between what can be known and what there can be.

Othello is aware of the simultaneous existence of conflicting realities: "I think my wife be honest, and think she is not. / I think that thou art just, and think thou art not" (3.3.387–388). The cognitive dissonance that Othello seeks to reconcile addresses truth in both senses of ontological credibility, i.e. what is there in reality as well as in the sense of Desdemona being true to *him*, that is, "faithful." In a similar vein, *to know* has also a double meaning, referring on the one hand to the ontological knowledge of reality, and on the other hand to the biblical use of the same term, which refers to having an intimate relationship with someone. E.g., "David knew Bathsheba."

Knowing and *Truth*, with their physical implications, suggest that meta-physical values are forever conditioned by the body. While in Hamlet's case, truth and knowledge are confined to the realm of abstract thought, Othello's tragedy lies in the very opposite: that knowledge and truth can never be isolated from a body, which in turn keeps us forever isolated and short of owning the truth that beckons us from the other side.

In response to this vulnerability, for better or worse, we create stories. It makes a difference which story or variant we choose to tell, and there are criteria for preferring certain stories over others, yet our criteria of choice can hardly rely on objective truth, given that the "object" about which the discourse can be said to be true or false has been constructed by the discourse itself. Rather, like Othello, we interpreters must choose among competing construc-

tions on the basis of various kinds of rightness or fit, such as validity of inference, internal consistency or coherence, representativeness of sample, appropriateness of scope, repetition, richness of interconnections, fineness of detail, and productivity, i.e., a story's capability to generate other stories, to stimulate lively conversation, to keep the discursive ball rolling. And it is this very last aspect I believe is perhaps the most significant purpose literary interpretation serves: *to keep the discursive ball rolling*.

HAMLET

According to Harold Bloom, the teaching of Shakespeare enacts a reading of his ellipses. That is to say, no other writer has been nearly as adept at the art of leaving things out. Though everything in the tragedy of Hamlet is questioned and questionable, the darkest enigmas remain unmentioned. More than any other Shakespearean protagonist, Hamlet does not mean what he says and does not say what he means. When not on stage, Hamlet's absence can only be a presence, as there is no other focus.

One of the classic mysteries surrounding the play is why didn't Hamlet call out Claudius right after learning about the king's murder? A short answer to this is, of course, that the play would end after Act I. Nevertheless, Hamlet, like Othello, is a seeker of truth, who will embark on an obsessive quest for evidence before acting. He will embrace the very dialectics of the ambiguity he is tormented by, and speak a language that simultaneously conveys its own failures and inadequacies in a form that is more than adequate, and even triumphant.

The task given to Hamlet by his father's ghost seems to demand very much the same as what Claudius expects of him: to deny his ways and become someone he is not, in this case a murderer – an identity Hamlet cannot accept taking up unconditionally. Thus, Hamlet's quest to reveal the truth behind the King's death parallels his search for his own true identity; his call to investigate truth, again, is possible by no other means than realizing and practicing a mode of *presence*.

In the midst of so much uncertainty, Hamlet explores whether it is possible to generate an identity from within one's own consciousness, and thus to rebel against and challenge Claudius's authority and the state of throwtness in which he is trapped. While being expected to *represent* a certain behavior, Hamlet chooses to be *present* in an unexpected way.

Hamlet is an interpreter and an experimental thinker for whom no truth is credible until he has first reconstructed it within his own consciousness. It is only within this realm that all events, sins and virtues can be validated, only to be obsessively mirrored and reenacted.

Hamlet's mentalization of reality works in the opposite way to Othello's, as rather than producing a possible narrative of reality, it seems to be a precondition for its existence. Epistemology and ontology revolve around each other so rapidly that they are indistinguishable, leaving us readers with questions that have lingered for centuries, but also prompting us to compulsively construct and reconstruct Hamlet in our own consciousness. In trying to make sense of reality, Hamlet chooses a mode of presence that is given to theatricality on one hand but also to a terrifying inwardness. I believe it is this double-bind that eventually tears him apart by Act V.

KING LEAR

Unlike Othello and Hamlet, Lear has no doubts about the truth of the universe: if there is such a truth, it is none other than Lear's truth. Unlike Hamlet, King Lear is not a tragedy of questions, but a tragedy of statements. It is clear from the outset that Lear believes in the capability of language not only to state concepts such as "Love," but also to create them. Lear's disposition can thus be understood as romantic in the sense that he seeks truth in representations of the human through creative means, in this case, *language*.

Unlike *Othello* or *Hamlet*, *Lear* is not a tragedy concerned so much with the ambiguity of existence as with man's ability to exist in the world at all. Whereas Othello sought to define his existence through the other, and Hamlet within the ambiguity of reality and language, Lear's epistemological quest automatically becomes an ontological one: *Can language as such express the human being? Can this human being exist in the world at all?*

Nietzsche suggested that "we have not yet gotten rid of God since we still have faith in grammar" (*Twilight of the Idols*). We assume that no matter how ambiguous reality is, there must be a universal grammar that unifies it, an underlying representation that reflects the inherent order of the world as was guaranteed by God. Romanticists, on the other hand, claim that our very understanding of reality is preconditioned by language, and thus challenge the notion of a pre-given ontological order that exists independently of the reality described by language.

I believe that Lear's way with language embraces and reconciles both of the above doctrines by shifting them to be shown from a divine perspective. Lear displays a faith in the divine power of language to bring the abstract into physical existence, not only in the form of verbal performance, but also in a way that can be literally *shown on the map*. The old king invites his three daughters to experience what it is like to be God; what it is like to alter the landscape and obtain a kingdom through the power of the spoken word.

To say ‘genuine love is inexplicable’ is self-contradictory, as the speaker who utters these words is, after all, giving a kind of verbal explanation. This is the paradox that all three daughters are aware of, and which makes Lear’s game truly futile. The first daughter to speak, Goneril, reflects on this very problem when she admits that language falls short in “wielding the matter of her love.” Ironically, Goneril’s speech supports Lear’s idea of the divine power of language as with her eight lines she has essentially predicted the events of the play. The metaphors she uses in her speech (“eyesight,” “space,” “liberty,” “health,” “beauty,” etc.), while reflecting on the limits of language itself, are all central themes in the events to unfold.

Regan, the next daughter to speak, attempts to outdo her sister by engulfing all that her sister has said, setting new standards for her own hyperbole. Like Goneril, Regan’s speech foreshadows the events to come, as both Edgar and Lear will “profess themselves enemies” to all joys as they wander, deprived and miserable, in the hostile universe they must learn to appreciate as their new home.

Yet, it is Cordelia’s *Nothing* that ultimately sets the tragedy off, pointing to the very core essence of the play itself, to the realm beyond what maps can locate or language can grasp. A self-conscious irony regarding language is revealed as the play endorses the very limits of the language that is writing it. Lear did not know how right he was in believing in the divine power of language, for he ended up handing his kingdom over to the story of his own tragedy.

Cordelia deprives Lear of both his divine disposition and his faith in language by revealing, with the word “nothing,” the gap between *word* and *deed*. Lear is thus thrown into a universe that is much wider than he would have ever imagined; he finds himself in a reality where fools and beggars are more apt to display competence, courage and wisdom than God himself, and where something can only come of *nothing*.

The discrepancy between word and deed is realized not only as a central theme of the play, but also as a feature carried by the very existence of *King Lear* as a text. The inconsistency between the Quarto and Folio versions of the text ironically reflects the central theme of the play.

Cordelia: [aside] What shall Cordelia *do*? Love and be silent. (Q 1.1.55)

Cordelia: [aside] What shall Cordelia *speak*? Love and be silent. (F 1.1.61)

When calling his daughters before him to decide who loves him the most and to pass the reward accordingly, Lear is cheating. His court knows full well that the matters were decided long before Lear unrolled the map. It is not the words of Lear or his daughters that divide the kingdom, but an act that precedes both.

In like manner, endorsing language's "divorce from power," Faust sets the stage in Goethe's play, altering the opening text of the Bible. Faust cannot accept that "In the beginning was the Word." For him, it is not the Word of God that has primacy, as there had to be an act of creation prior to that Word. So he proclaims: "In the beginning was the Deed." Faust teaches us that there must always be a creative act prior to whatever text or discourse it may produce, a tenet I find again to be a most essential guide for us interpreters.

Something is revealed to Lear through the metamorphosis he undergoes and witnesses in others. He realizes a truth, again in a mode of presence and not in the representation of it, as he expected at the beginning of the play. I identify this mode of presence with the notion of the *thing itself* as it appears in the drama: "Thou art the thing itself: Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor bare, / Forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come unbutton here" (F 3.4.98–101).

Thus Lear speaks to Edgar in Act III Scene 4, just before tearing off his clothes, in a way preparing for his death and rebirth at the same time. *The thing itself* is a notion the Hungarian language ingeniously yields through the similarity of the words *lény* and *lényeg*. It is a quality that philosophers throughout history have dwelt on endlessly, referring to a fundamental and rigid quality of a thing that is complete-unto-itself and free from all external authority claiming to provide a representation of it. The paradox in Lear's case is that the recognition of the *thing itself* is preconditioned by a prior recognition of *nothing*, that is *no-thing at all*.

Edgar reveals an existential paradox to Lear. The experience of the *thing itself*, which Lear refers to as being embodied by Edgar, and which is later revealed to him in Cordelia's death, seems to be a peculiar mode of presence in which the existence and the loss of a value are interdependent. Lear recognizes in Edgar a layer of human existence that is conditioned by its very loss. In like manner, it will be Cordelia's death that finally makes Lear realize the deed of her love, only this time not as part of an act.

Death and rebirth, thus circle each other so quickly that we cannot make out which is which. The play begins with Cordelia's *Nothing*, setting the tragedy off by pointing at the realm which is beyond what can be shown on a map or spoken of, and it is Cordelia's death in the end through which Lear will acknowledge the existence of love, and its death, each through the presence of the other – *the thing itself*: a state in which the existence of a value hinges on its loss, and *being*, like a much-repeated word – never, never, never, never, never... eventually loses its sense.

CELEBRATING LIFE – TRANSLATION AS AN ACT OF SURVIVAL¹

—◀▶—
ZOLTÁN MÁRKUS

To the memory of István Géher

I

In the introduction to his recent book, *The Afterlife of Texts in Translation* (2019), Edmund Chapman suggests that “the term ‘afterlife’ comes from Benjamin’s 1923 essay on translation ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers.’ Benjamin’s (1996d: 254) statement that ‘a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife’ implies that a text must already be within ‘afterlife’ to be translated. ‘Afterlife’ makes translation possible.”² The reference in the parentheses indicates that Chapman quotes Walter Benjamin’s famous essay in Harry Zohn’s translation into English (1996, originally published in 1968); he uses this specific passage to explain his book’s title and to consign translation to the “afterlife” of the original text.

When we discuss Shakespeare adaptations and translations in light of Benjamin’s essay, we all seem to agree that these belong to the original’s “afterlife”, or, in German, *Nachleben*. In a fine scholarly article on recent German cultural references to Shakespeare, Tobias Döring discusses the German words “Nachleben [afterlife],” “Nachwelt [the other world, posterity],” and “Nachreife” [“after-ripening,” “maturing process”], and points out that, “in a transferred sense, *Nachleben* and *Nachreife* have come to serve a special purpose in the theory of language and translation, as proposed by Walter Benjamin in his much-cited 1923 essay “The Task of the Translator.”³ In a fascinating personal account, furthermore, on “The Experience of Translating Shakespeare,” Maria João Pires compares translation to a palimpsest in which “Shakespeare’s English had been almost completely obscured, blocked out, covered by the

¹ This article is an edited version of my book chapter Celebrating Life: Translation as an Act of Survival, in Michael Saenger – Sergio Costola (eds.): *Shakespeare in Succession: Translation and Time*, Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2023, 202–218. I thank the editors and the publishers of that volume for their permission to publish my work here.

² Edmund Chapman: *The Afterlife of Texts in Translation: Understanding the Messianic in Literature*, Cham, Switzerland, Palgrave Pivot, 2019, 5.

³ Tobias Döring: “On the Wrong Track to Ourselves”: Armin Senger’s *Shakespeare* and the Issue of Artistic Creativity in Contemporary German Poetry, *Shakespeare Survey* 66 (2013), 153.

Portuguese” and observes that “Benjamin’s ‘Task of the Translator’ speaks of this process in terms of the essential historicity of literary works – their ‘*Fortleben*’ or ‘*Überleben*’ or ‘*Nachleben*,’ that is, the way in which works of the past continue to survive, or pursue afterlives.”⁴ It is evident that adaptations and translations are created *ex post facto*: their creation follows (from) the creation of the original. By emphasizing that translations belong to the original’s “*afterlife*,” or “*Nachleben*,” we add a metaphysical dimension: translations assume – instigate even – the death of the original and exist only in its ghostly, *post-mortem* life.

This is exactly what Paul de Man suggests in his lecture on Benjamin’s essay when he contends, “The process of translation, if we can call it process, is one of change and of motion that has the appearance of life, but of life as an after-life, because translation also reveals the death of the original.”⁵ De Man claims that a series of linguistic disjunctions alienate the work from its translations and bring about “the death of the original.” For him, the process of translation is relegated to the realm of the original’s “afterlife.” By following de Man, there appears to be a consensus about Benjamin’s essay, asserting that, suspended in the cultural and historical context of their creation, translations belong to an “afterlife,” or “*Nachleben*,” that is significantly detached from the original.

II

After having established all this, however, we are in for a few surprises when we turn to Benjamin’s original text, “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,” in German.⁶ The first surprise is that the word “*Nachleben*” (or “afterlife”) never appears in Benjamin’s text. Instead of “*Nachleben*,” we find the nouns “*Überleben*” (survival) and “*Fortleben*” (continuing life). The next surprise is that these words get translated as “afterlife” by Benjamin’s most famous English-language translator, Harry Zohn.

So wie die Äußerungen des Lebens innigst mit dem Lebendigen zusammenhängen, ohne ihm etwas zu bedeuten, geht die Übersetzung aus dem Original hervor. Zwar nicht aus seinem Leben so sehr denn aus seinem ›Überleben‹. Ist doch die Über-

⁴ Maria João Pires: A Palimpsest, or an Image of a Mutilated Statue: The Experience of Translating Shakespeare, in Rui Carvalho Homem – Ton Hoenselaars (eds.): *Translating Shakespeare for the Twenty-First Century*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2004, 190.

⁵ Paul de Man: Conclusions: Walter Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator,” in *The Resistance to Theory*, foreword Wlad Godzich, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, 85. Originally delivered as the Messenger Lecture, Cornell University, 4 March 1983, and published in *Yale French Studies* 69 (1985), 25–46.

⁶ Walter Benjamin: Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers, in Tillman Rexroth (ed.): *Walter Benjamin Gesammelte Schriften*, Frankfurt-am-Main, Suhrkamp, 1991, 4.1: 9–21.

setzung später als das Original und bezeichnet sich doch bei den bedeutenden Werken, die da ihre erwählten Übersetzer niemals im Zeitalter ihrer Entstehung finden, das Stadium ihres *Fortlebens*. In völlig unmetaphorischer Sachlichkeit ist der Gedanke vom Leben und *Fortleben* der Kunstwerke zu erfassen.⁷ (my italics)

Harry Zohn translates this passage as follows:

Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its *afterlife*. For a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of *continued life*. The idea of life and *afterlife* in works of art should be regarded with an entirely unmetaphorical objectivity.⁸ (my italics)

As we can see, Zohn translates Benjamin's "Zwar nicht aus seinem Leben so sehr denn aus seinem ›Überleben‹," as "not so much from its life as from its afterlife." "Überleben," meaning survival, is translated as "afterlife." "Fortleben," meaning also a kind of survival or, more precisely, continuing life, is first translated as "continued life" and then, second, as "afterlife": for Benjamin's "der Gedanke vom Leben und Fortleben der Kunstwerke," Zohn offers "the idea of life and afterlife in works of art."

Benjamin uses the word "Überleben" only once in his essay; more often, he refers to the original's "Fortleben" (continuing life) manifested (and generated) by a translation. Zohn's surprising choice of "afterlife" for the German "Fortleben" alternates with the occasional "continued life." Benjamin's words:

Und ist nicht wenigstens das *Fortleben* der Werke unvergleichlich viel leichter zu erkennen als dasjenige der Geschöpfe? Die Geschichte der großen Kunstwerke kennt ihre Deszendenz aus den Quellen, ihre Gestaltung im Zeitalter des Künstlers und die Periode ihres grundsätzlich ewigen *Fortlebens* bei den nachfolgenden Generationen. Dieses letzte heißt, wo es zutage tritt, Ruhm. Übersetzungen, die mehr als Vermittlungen sind, entstehen, wenn im *Fortleben* ein Werk das Zeitalter seines Ruhmes erreicht hat.⁹ (my italics)

Zohn translates these sentences as follows:

⁷ Benjamin: Die Aufgabe, 10–11.

⁸ Walter Benjamin: The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens*, in Hannah Arendt (ed.): *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, New York, Schocken Books, 1969, 71.

⁹ Benjamin: Die Aufgabe, 11.

And indeed, isn't the *afterlife* of works of art far easier to recognize than that of living creatures? The history of the great works of art tells us about their descent from prior models, their realization in the age of the artist, and what in principle should be their eternal *afterlife* in succeeding generations. Where this last manifests itself, it is called fame. Translations that are more than transmissions of subject matter come into being when a work, in the course of its *survival*, has reached the age of its fame.¹⁰ (my italics)

Benjamin uses the same word "Fortleben" three times here, which Zohn surprisingly – and inconsistently – translates twice as "afterlife" and once as "survival."

This inconsistency results in surprising translations of Benjamin's sentences. An important statement toward the middle of the essay, for instance, claims, "Denn in seinem *Fortleben*, das so nicht heißen dürfte, wenn es nicht Wandlung und Erneuerung des Lebendigen wäre, ändert sich das Original" (my italics).¹¹ Zohn translates this sentence as, "For in its *afterlife* – which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living – the original undergoes a change" (my italics).¹² Benjamin's "Fortleben" (continuing life), which can be called as such precisely because it is the product of "a transformation and a renewal of something living," is rendered confusing when it is translated as "afterlife."

These examples demonstrate that the idea that a translation belongs to the – quasi-metaphysical – afterlife of the original does not exist in Benjamin's article. In fact, Benjamin clearly insists that "the idea of life and its continuation ['Fortleben,' and not 'afterlife'] after translation" of works of art "should be regarded with an entirely unmetaphorical objectivity." The word *afterlife*, or *Nachleben*, does not exist in the essay; it is Harry Zohn and his influential translation into English that have projected this notion into Benjamin's work. It is an intriguing fact that the English translation, which has likely been circulated in greater numbers worldwide than the original German text, has been more influential than the original. Harry Zohn's proficiency in German was excellent (he was born in Vienna); he might have claimed that he used the word *afterlife* simply to indicate the temporal deferment that is inevitable for the creation of any translation. It is later readings of Zohn's translation that have projected the opposite of "an unmetaphorical objectivity" on Benjamin's "Fortleben" of the original.

Benjamin's work discusses translation as "a form" (eine Form), which Zohn – not entirely wrongly – translates as "a mode," and questions the concept of

¹⁰ Benjamin: The Task, 71.

¹¹ Benjamin: Die Aufgabe, 12.

¹² Benjamin: The Task, 71.

“fidelity” as the measurement of success of a translation. Instead, Benjamin argues that both translation and the original are expressions of “pure language” (reine Sprache). As Zohn translates it into English, “In the same way a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.”¹³ In a lecture series he gave at Cornell University (posthumously published in the volume *The Resistance to Theory*), Paul de Man takes issue with Zohn’s translation, and (following Carol Jacobs’s corrections¹⁴) proposes the following translation of this passage: “So, instead of making itself similar to the meaning, to the *Sinn* of the original, the translation must rather, lovingly and in detail, in its own language, form itself according to the manner of meaning [Art des Meinens] of the original, to make both recognizable as the broken parts of the greater language, just as fragments are the broken parts of a vessel.”¹⁵ This translation is more precise than Zohn’s.¹⁶ More important than the derivative and hierarchic relationship between the original and its translation is that they are both parts of a larger, though broken and fragmented, system of being and speaking: “pure language.” In this sense, Shakespeare adaptations and translations are all fragments of a larger unit that is not identical with English Shakespeare, let alone Shakespeare in English.

Although de Man calls attention to other problematic places in Zohn’s translation of Benjamin’s essay, it is astonishing to me that he never criticizes Zohn’s incorrect and inconsistent translation of “Überleben” and “Fortleben” into “afterlife.” It is clear in de Man’s text that he does not simply ignore Zohn’s decision; he condones it. In a brief passage on “Nachreife” (late ripening), de Man points out that this word “is associated with another word that Benjamin constantly uses, the word *überleben*, to live beyond your own death in a sense.”¹⁷ But *überleben* does not mean “to live beyond your death” in any sense: it does indicate a temporal structure that assumes the survival of a potentially traumatic event, but it does not refer to an otherworldly existence. Although the noun *Überwelt* does mean an “afterlife” after death, the verb *überleben* means to “survive,” to avoid death, and its noun form *das Überleben* means survival, the act of avoiding death. In other words, de Man purposefully amplifies Zohn’s translation and helps misread Benjamin.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See Carol Jacobs: The Monstrosity of Translation, *MLN* 90, no. 6 (Dec. 1975), 755–766.

¹⁵ De Man: Conclusions, 91.

¹⁶ In German, this text reads as follows: “Einzelheiten einander zu folgen, doch nicht so zu gleichen haben, so muß, anstatt dem Sinn des Originals sich ähnlich zu machen, die Übersetzung liebend vielmehr und bis ins Einzelne hinein dessen Art des Meinens in der eigenen Sprache sich aneignen, um so beide wie Scherben als Bruchstück eines Gefäßes, als Bruchstück einer größeren Sprache erkennbar zu machen.” Benjamin: Die Aufgabe, 18.

¹⁷ De Man: Conclusions, 85.

III

Why does de Man do so? In his own reading of Benjamin's "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers," Jacques Derrida offers a fascinating clue, even though without referring to de Man. In his essay, "Des Tours de Babel," Derrida argues that Benjamin's work, a preface to his translation of Baudelaire, "circule sans cesse entre les valeurs de semence, de vie et surtout de 'survie,'"¹⁸ which Joseph F. Graham translates by saying that Benjamin's essay "circulates without cease among the values of seed, life, and especially 'sur-vival.'"¹⁹ Graham translates the French word "survie" as "sur-vival." He explains his decision right after his translation of Derrida's essay in a "Translator's Note" with the following commentary: "*survie*. The word means 'survival' as well as 'afterlife'; its use in the text also brings out the subliminal sense of more life and more than life. The hyphenation of 'sur-vival' is an admitted cheat."²⁰ Graham recognizes the potential metaphysical double entendre of the French "survie" ("the subliminal sense of more life and more than life"), and he tries to recreate it by the hyphenated, and admittedly contrived, "sur-vival." While Graham proves to be a reliable translator from French into English by reproducing the metaphysical sense of "afterlife" of the word "survie," he cannot acknowledge that Benjamin's German words "Überleben" and "Fortleben" do not mean "afterlife."

In "Des Tours de Babel," Derrida uses the original German text and, especially, Maurice de Gandillac's French translation of Benjamin's essay.²¹ He reminds his readers that the German words "Übersetzen" (translation) and "Übertragen" (translation, transfer) resonate with the word "Überleben" (survival) and quotes Benjamin's passage that includes the word "Überleben" in Gandillac's French translation:

De même que les manifestations de la vie, sans rien signifier pour le vivant, sont avec lui clans la plus intime corrélation, ainsi la traduction procède de l'original. Certes moins de sa vie que de sa 'survie' [Überleben]. Car la traduction vient après l'original et, pour les oeuvres importantes qui ne trouvent jamais leur traducteur prédestiné au temps de leur naissance, elle caractérise le stade de leur survie [*Fortleben*, cette fois, la survie comme continuation de la vie plutôt que comme vie post mortem]. Or c'est dans leur simple réalité, sans aucune métaphore ['in völlig unme-

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida: Appendix: Des Tours de Babel [in French], in Joseph F. Graham (ed. and intr.): *Difference in Translation*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1985, 222.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida: Des Tours de Babel [in English], trans. Joseph F. Graham, in Joseph F. Graham (ed. and intr.): *Difference in Translation*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1985, 178.

²⁰ Joseph F. Graham: Translator's Note, in Joseph F. Graham (ed. and intr.): *Difference in Translation*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1985, 206.

²¹ Derrida refers to Maurice de Gandillac's French translation, *La tâche du traducteur*, published in Gandillac's *Ceuvres I, Mythe et violence*, Paris, Denoël, 1971, 261–275. See Derrida: Appendix, 219.

taphorischer Sachlichkeit'] qu'il faut concevoir pour les oeuvres d'art les idées de vie et de survie [Fortleben].²²

Joseph F. Graham translates into English Gandillac's French translation from the German that Derrida quotes and annotates it here in the following way:

Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the living, without signifying anything for it, a translation proceeds from the original. Indeed not so much from its life as from its survival [Überleben]. For a translation comes after the original and, for the important works that never find their predestined translator at the time of their birth, it characterizes the stage of their survival [Fortleben, this time, sur-vival as continuation of life rather than as life post mortem]. Now, it is in this simple reality, without any metaphor ["in völlig unmetaphorischer Sachlichkeit"], that it is necessary to conceive the ideas of life and survival [Fortleben] for works of art.²³

As Derrida's interlinear comments in square brackets point out, Gandillac translates both "Überleben" and "Fortleben" with the French word "survie." Derrida, however, draws a distinction between these two words: "Überleben" means "survie" as "afterlife," "life postmortem," whereas "Fortleben" means "survie" as "continuation of life." Graham translates both into English as "sur(-)vival."

Derrida's (mis)identification – following Gandillac – of the German "Überleben" with the French "survie" as "afterlife" offers a helpful pointer to de Man's (mis)reading of Benjamin's essay in Harry Zohn's translation. But Derrida's reading is more precise than de Man's. Derrida would not agree with de Man that "translation also reveals the death of the original."²⁴ Instead, he points out that translation entails "the sur-vival of works, not authors."²⁵ Derrida reads Benjamin more precisely when he realizes that a translation provides, in fact, more life and entails the death of not the original but the author. He claims, "Telle survie donne un plus de vie, plus qu'une survivance. L'oeuvre ne vit pas seulement plus longtemps, elle vit plus et mieux, au-dessus des moyens de son auteur."²⁶ In Graham's translation: "Such sur-vival gives more of life, more than a surviving. The work does not simply live longer, it lives more and better, beyond the means of its author."²⁷ By drawing distinctions between "survie" ("sur-vival") and mere "survivance" ("surviving") (as well as "vie" [life]), Derrida insists on

²² Derrida: Appendix, 222.

²³ Derrida: Des Tours, 178.

²⁴ De Man: Conclusions, 85.

²⁵ Derrida: Des Tours, 179. In French: "La survie des oeuvres, non pas des auteurs." Derrida: Appendix, 223.

²⁶ Derrida: Appendix, 223.

²⁷ Derrida: Des Tours, 179.

a metaphysical fullness of “survie” – not as an “afterlife” but as a “more and better” life of the original that necessitates the death (and afterlife) of the author. Derrida places translation into Benjamin’s discourse of “pure language”: “a translation espouses the original when the two adjoined fragments, as different as they can be, complete each other so as to form a larger tongue in the course of a sur-vival that changes them both. For the native tongue of the translator, as we have noted, is altered as well.” This is what Derrida calls his “own interpretation,” his own “translation,” or his own “task of the translator.”²⁸ He refers to it as “the translation contract: hymen or marriage contract with the promise to produce a child whose seed will give rise to history and growth,” and he adds, “Benjamin says as much, in the translation the original becomes larger; it grows rather than reproduces itself – and I will add: like a child, its own, no doubt, but with the power to speak on its own, which makes of a child something other than a product subjected to the law of reproduction.”²⁹ Instead of imagining translation as a post-mortem, apocalyptic event that assumes the death of the original, Derrida offers a progenitive view that sees a procreational relationship between the original and its translation.

IV

The way in which Benjamin posits the relationship between translation and the original is so intricate, however, that a somewhat oversimplifying genetic (or genealogical, even) model cannot do justice to it. In a posthumously published, book-length study on Benjamin’s essay, Antoine Berman complicates Derrida’s schemata further. Berman quotes Benjamin’s sentence “Zwar nicht aus seinem Leben so sehr denn aus seinem «Überleben»,” and remarks, “Let me immediately stress that Benjamin does not mean that translation is the text’s mode of survival.”³⁰ Berman also uses Maurice de Gandillac’s French translation, but he is more critical of Gandillac’s work than Derrida has been. Berman

²⁸ Ibid., 191.

²⁹ Ibid., 190–191. In French: “Rappelons la métaphore ou l’ammétaphore: une traduction épouse l’original quand les deux fragments ajointés, aussi différents que possible, se complètent pour former une langue plus grande, au cours d’une survie qui les change tous les deux. Car la langue maternelle du traducteur, nous l’avons noté, s’y altère également. Telle est du moins mon interprétation – ma traduction, ma “tâche du traducteur.” C’est ce que j’ai appelé le contrat de traduction: hymen ou contrat de mariage avec promesse de produire un enfant dont la semence donnera lieu à histoire et croissance. Contrat de mariage comme séminaire. Benjamin le dit, dans la traduction l’original grandit, il croît plutôt qu’il ne se reproduit – et j’ajouterai comme un enfant, le sien sans doute mais avec la force de parler tout seul qui fait d’un enfant autre chose qu’un produit assujéti à la loi de la reproduction.” Derrida: Appendix, 234–235.

³⁰ Antoine Berman – Isabelle Berman – Valentina Sommella: *The Age of Translation: A Commentary on Walter Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator”*, trans. and intro. Chantal Wright, New York, Routledge, 2018, 132. Between 1984 and 1989, Berman taught seminars on *traductologie* in general, and on Benjamin’s essay in particular, at the Collège international de

emphasizes the difference between Benjamin's usage of "Überleben" versus "Fortleben" and suggests that "we cannot translate *Fortleben* as 'survie' if we (perfectly correctly) translate *Überleben* as 'survie' earlier on. *Fort* is less semantically charged than *über*." Berman further explains that "*Fort* ... contains the simple idea of continuation. The *Überleben* that precedes it in the text designates an act (that of surviving), whereas *Fortleben* appears to express merely a state of continuation. It would therefore be better to tentatively translate *überleben* as 'survivre' [survive – verb] rather than 'survie' [survival – noun], reserving the substantive form for *fortleben*." As Berman puts it, "Certes pas tant de son vivre que de son «survivre»." In other words, Berman argues, "This sentence pronounces that the translation bursts forth – organically – from the 'survie' [Fortleben], the active 'survivre' [Überleben] of the text."³¹ The English translator of Berman's text, Chantal Wright, offers the following in English: "Indeed not so much from its vivre [living > life: vivre is the verb meaning 'to live'] as its survivre [surviving > survival: survivre is the verb meaning 'to survive']".³²

Like Derrida, Berman underlines that "Benjamin is clearly linking the *survie* of the text to the death of the artist here."³³ Berman claims, "The continuing life of the text is therefore the time when the text becomes glorious *on its own terms* and enters the sphere of its *autonomy*" [italics in the original]. And he concludes that "these two characteristics – the fact that the text has to wait for the death of the author for its glory; and that it possesses an anticipatory temporality – explain, quite aside from Benjamin, why a true translation of a text, one that does justice to its grandeur, is not really possible at the time of its birth."³⁴ Berman, furthermore, draws a distinction between "Überleben" and "Fortleben" similar to the one that Derrida has suggested:

Fortleben simply indicates that the text has entered into the period of its ongoing reign. It continues on through time and this continuation is a phenomenon of maturity leading to fame. With translation, the text suddenly accedes to a more elevated life. Translation takes the text, or rather its sur-vival, to another level. The *über* of translation lifts the *über* of the life of the text – which was only a *fort*, a continuation – to an elevated state. Because *über* means above and beyond.³⁵

philosophie (founded by Jacques Derrida) in Paris. Berman died in 1991; Isabelle Berman and Valentina Sommella published his notes in French in 2008; the English translation by Chantal Wright was published ten years later.

³¹ Italics in the original; texts in square brackets are by the translator Chantal Wright. Berman – Berman – Sommella: *The Age of Translation*, 133–134.

³² Ibid., 134.

³³ Ibid., 135.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 139.

For Berman, however, the relationship is not as much genetic or progenitive as qualitative or metaphysical: translation as an “*Überleben*” of the original entails an elevated existence, which is a more significant recognition than the simple assumption that translation as a “*Fortleben*” of the original is a continuation – or simple survival – of the original. In other words, Berman further explains that “there is a shift here from a perpetual temporality to an elevated temporality, that is to say to a different temporal ‘sphere,’ a sphere where it is always the text that changes – it becomes, if not complete, at least imbued with the promise of completion ... From this point on we can say that *the text itself is moving to another level*”³⁶ (italics in the original). In an endnote referring to this sentence, Berman further adds that “this is a level where one has to think of *Entfaltung*, this de-velopment, this de-ployment, this un-folding of the work effected by translation – and the neverending re-translations of the work. Translation shifts the text from *Fortleben* to *Überleben*.” Berman admits here that his understanding of Benjamin’s words is pushing the envelope: “We are twisting Benjamin somewhat with this formulation. But the fact remains that he used these two terms, *Fortleben* and *Überleben*. For me, *Fortleben* is not *Überleben*.”³⁷

In an erudite and helpful introductory note to Berman’s passage quoted above, Chantal Wright explains that “Benjamin is contrasting *Leben*, *Überleben* and *Fortleben*, all of which represent different stages of the literary text’s existence. A text’s *Fortleben* is the fact of its continued existence over time, beyond the era in which it was created and, we are led to understand, after the death of its author.” As we have seen, “Berman argues that ‘*Fort* is less semantically charged than *über*... The *Überleben* that precedes it in the text designates an act (that of surviving), whereas *Fortleben* appears to express merely a state of continuation.’”³⁸ As discussed above, Gandillac has used the French word “*survie*” (survival) for both “*Fortleben*” and “*Überleben*.” “Berman,” on the other hand, Wright points out,

initially translates *Überleben* as *survie*, but then argues the need to differentiate between *Fortleben* and *Überleben*, coming to the conclusion that *survie*, the nominal form, should be more properly reserved for *Fortleben*, and *survivre*, the verbal form, used for *Überleben*, to indicate the act of surviving, as contrasted with mere continuation. French is able to mimic the structure and semantics of the German with its *sur-vie* [above-life].

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., endnote 26, and 142.

³⁸ Ibid., 133–134.

It is all clear and helpful: Berman's distinction between "Fortleben" as "survie" and "Überleben" as "survivre" is revealing. Wright, however, does not stop here: she reminds us that "*sur-vie* also has the religious connotations of 'after-life' that the German does not."³⁹ Similarly to Zohn's infelicitous translation of both "Überleben" and "Fortleben" as "afterlife," "survie" also offers a metaphysical connotation that the German words do not offer.

The paradox of Chantal Wright's project is that, as the editor and translator of Berman's French study in English, her task (or, with Benjamin's word, "Aufgabe") is to present – as precisely as possible – Berman's argument, in which he claims that Benjamin's "Überleben" can be properly translated into French with the word "survie," which, beyond its denotative meaning "survival," also has a connotative (primarily religious) meaning as "afterlife." Chantal Wright is well aware that the German original "Überleben" and "Fortleben" do not have this metaphysical meaning at all. In her prefatory notes, Wright calls attention to Harry Zohn's mistranslation of "Überleben" as "afterlife" and points out that

the resulting widespread adoption of the term 'afterlife' in the English speaking world in its reception of Benjamin's essay has been accompanied by the erroneous reading that translation creates an 'afterlife' for the literary text. What Benjamin actually argues is that translations emerge from the *Überleben* of the text. The English 'afterlife' is problematic on a number of levels.⁴⁰

At the same time, as we have seen, Berman maintains that the French "survie" – or "sur-vie" – is a correct translation of "Überleben," even though Wright clearly sees, as she reminds us, that "*sur-vie* also has the religious connotations of 'afterlife' that the German does not."⁴¹

V

What is the solution then? Wright explains that she has decided "to translate *Fortleben* as 'continuing life' and *Überleben* as 'sur-vival'" (thus following – as we have seen above – Joseph F. Graham), and adds, "the latter is a more artificial term than either the German term or the French translation, but it gestures towards the *über* of *Überleben* while remaining a homonym of the everyday word 'survival.'"⁴² As to renditions directly from German into English,

³⁹ Ibid., 122.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

we should recall that *überleben* is a transitive verb (to survive *something*, such as an accident, a trauma, or other difficulty), while *fortleben* is intransitive (to live on, to continue living). Most important, however, the most satisfying way out of this conundrum is to avoid the mistake of translating either *Überleben* or *Fortleben* as “afterlife.” The two most recent, most widely circulated translations of Benjamin’s essay, however, do not seem to follow this solution entirely. The third edition of Routledge’s *Translation Studies Reader* (2012) offers a new translation of Benjamin’s essay by Steven Rendall (the previous two included Zohn’s translation). Zohn’s mistranslation of “Überleben” as “afterlife,” however, haunts both the volume editor’s introduction and the new translation as well. In his introduction to the section that includes Benjamin’s essay, “1900s–1930s,” Lawrence Venuti argues that, according to Benjamin’s essay, “a translation participates in the ‘afterlife’ (*Überleben*) of the source text, enacting an interpretation that is informed by a history of reception (‘the age of its fame’).”⁴³ Moreover, in his translation, Steven Rendall translates the German sentences, “So wie die Äußerungen des Lebens innigst mit dem Lebendigen zusammenhängen, ohne ihm etwas zu bedeuten, geht die Übersetzung aus dem Original hervor. Zwar nicht aus seinem Leben so sehr denn aus seinem *Überleben*” as follows: “Just as expressions of life are connected most intimately with the living being without having any significance for the latter, a translation proceeds from the original. Indeed, not so much from its life as from its “afterlife” or “survival.”⁴⁴ As we have seen, however, the German *Überleben* means “survival” and does not mean “afterlife.”

J.A. Underwood offers a different solution in his translation published in the volume *Walter Benjamin’s One-Way Street and Other Writings* (2009): “Just as the expressions of life are very closely linked to the living creature without being of any significance to that creature, so does the translation proceed from the original. Not, admittedly, from the life [*Leben*] of the original so much as from something higher, its survival [*Überleben*].”⁴⁵ Underwood moves away from the mistranslation of “afterlife” and inserts “from something higher,” which clearly resonates with Berman’s interpretation discussed above, but which does not appear in Benjamin’s text. In the rest of the translation, Underwood consistently translates “Fortleben” with the somewhat cumbersome “continued existence.”

⁴³ Lawrence Venuti (ed.): *The Translation Studies Reader*, 3rd ed., New York, Routledge, 2012, 71.

⁴⁴ Walter Benjamin: *The Translator’s Task*, trans. Steven Rendall, in Venuti: *Translation Studies Reader*, 76. Rendall’s translation was first published in *TTR [Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction]* 102 (1997): 151–165.

⁴⁵ Walter Benjamin: *The Task of the Translator*, in *Walter Benjamin: One-way Street and Other Writings*, trans. J.A. Underwood, New York, Penguin, 2009, 31.

Underwood's forgoing of Zohn's mistranslation of Benjamin's "Überleben" as "afterlife" is an important step in the right direction. As we have seen, Benjamin argues that a translation of a work is not a distant, far-removed inferior of the original: it is a continuation of the original's life in which the translation and the original are fragments of a larger whole. Translation does not reveal "the death of the original," as de Man has proposed; it reveals the death of the author and the survival of the original. Although Benjamin claims that a translation is derivative of the original, the words *Überleben* and *Fortleben* mean prolongation, survival, and ultimately the continuance of the life of the original. In this sense, translation gives life, not death, as it idealizes a version from which it takes place: it perpetuates the idea of the original work of art. Every translation assumes and solidifies the existence of a (singular or plural) original. In this process, foreign Shakespeare evokes, even interpellates (in Althusser's sense), English Shakespeare.

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THE KIERKEGAARDIAN SICKNESS UNTO DEATH IN PAUL AUSTER'S *THE BOOK OF ILLUSIONS*¹

—◀▶—
PÉTER TAMÁS

There is no denying that several of Paul Auster's works draw upon Søren Kierkegaard. Auster's oeuvre is bookended by pieces that explicitly reference the philosopher. His first memoir, *The Invention of Solitude*, incorporates a quotation from *Fear and Trembling*², while his latest novel *Baumgartner* opens with the eponymous character writing a "monograph on Kierkegaard's pseudonyms".³ Accordingly, scholars have commented on the Kierkegaardian elements in some of Auster's works.⁴ However, *The Book of Illusions* seems not to have been studied from this angle yet. The present paper will try to demonstrate how that novel resonates with Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death*.

LITERARY DEPICTIONS OF KIERKEGAARDIAN DESPAIR

My research is inspired by the essay in which Géza Kállay reads Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* as, respectively, a tragic and a comic

¹ To the best of my knowledge, Auster is mentioned only once in Géza Kállay's scholarly output: the motto for one of his papers is taken from the novel *Oracle Night* (see Géza Kállay: Is a Dramatic Theory of History Possible? Shakespeare's *Richard II* and 'Historical Truth', in Krzysztof Brzechczyn (ed.): *Towards a Revival of Analytical Philosophy of History*, Leiden, Brill, 2017, 204). However, Kállay was familiar with Auster's works. When I told him in an email that I had seen Auster at a reading in New York City, he humorously asked me to give his regards to Auster and noted that Auster was the contemporary writer by whom he had read almost everything: "Ha Austert legközelebb látod, mondd meg neki, hogy üdvözlöm, és nagyon szeretem az írásait, ő az a mai kortárs író, akitől majdnem mindent olvastam" (private correspondence, March 2, 2017). It seems appropriate to me, then, to commemorate Géza with an essay on Auster. Sadly, it also became an act of commemorating Auster, since he passed away while I was writing this essay. Incidentally, his widow described his struggle with cancer with an explicit reference to Kierkegaard: "Paul never left Cancerland. It turned out to be, in Kierkegaard's words, the sickness unto death." Siri Hustvedt: I was naïve, but I had imagined that I would be the person to announce the death of my husband..., *Instagram*, 3 May 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/sirihustvedt/p/C6eG0lyAgR/>

² Paul Auster: *The Invention of Solitude*, London, Faber & Faber, 2012, 73.

³ Paul Auster: *Baumgartner*, London, Faber & Faber, 2023, 1. This could potentially be a nod to Siri Hustvedt, who draws on Kierkegaard in her scholarly and fictional works alike. See, for instance, her essay "Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms and the Truths of Fiction" in Siri Hustvedt: *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2016.

⁴ Stefano Tani: *The Doomed Detective: The Contribution of the Detective Novel to Postmodern American and Italian Fiction*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1984, 46.

depiction of the inescapable state of anxiety that Kierkegaard calls the sickness unto death.⁵ This is relevant to *The Book of Illusions* because, as we will see, the fates of Hector Mann and David Zimmer, the two main characters of the novel, can also be understood as a tragic and a comic version of the sickness Kierkegaard examines. It should be noted that the term *comedy* is used in the Aristotelian sense: its primary requirement is not the presence of humor but a change from bad to good in the main characters' fortune. This, incidentally, is precisely how Auster defined comedy in an interview where Mary Morris asked him to what extent his novel *The Brooklyn Follies* is a comedy: "There are many dark passages in this book. It's not slapstick. It's tough. People suffer. Crazy things happen. And yet, finally, most of the characters in the book are a little better off at the end than they were in the beginning. And that's how I would define comedy as opposed to tragedy."⁶

Part of the reason Kállay points out the similarities between Kierkegaard's description of the sickness unto death and the despair experienced by both Lear and Scrooge is to challenge George Steiner's implicit assumption that Dickens' novella, unlike Shakespeare's play, downplays the tragic side of existence.⁷ Steiner cites *A Christmas Carol* as an example for the "death of tragedy", i.e., the dilution of "authentic tragedy", in the following passage:

The destiny of Lear cannot be resolved by the establishment of adequate homes for the aged [...]. In tragedy, the twist of the net which brings down the hero may be an accident or hazard of circumstance, but the mesh is woven into the heart of life. Tragedy would have us know that there is in the very fact of human existence a provocation or paradox; it tells us that the purposes of men sometimes run against the grain of inexplicable and destructive forces that lie 'outside' yet very close [...]. And beyond the tragic, there lies no 'happy ending' in some other dimension of place and time. The wounds are not healed and the broken spirit is not mended [...]. But it is precisely a 'compensatory Heaven' that romanticism promises to the guilt

⁵ Géza Kállay: "What Wilt Thou Do, Old Man?" – Being Sick Unto Death: Scrooge, King Lear, and Kierkegaard, *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 9(2), 2011, 267–283. For a comparison of *A Christmas Carol* and *King Lear* with a different focus, see Géza Kállay: *Mondhatunk-e többet?: Nyelv, irodalom, filozófia*, Budapest, Liget, 2018, 132–154.

⁶ Paul Auster: *Conversations with Paul Auster*, ed. James M. Hutchisson, Jackson, MS, University Press of Mississippi, 178.

⁷ Auster might share Steiner's low opinion on *A Christmas Carol*. In Auster's short story "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story", the narrator is commissioned to write a Christmas story, and since he denounces these types of stories as "wish-fulfillment dreams, fairy tales for adults", he describes himself "warring with the ghosts of Dickens" and other practitioners of the genre. Like Steiner, Auster contrasts Dickens with Shakespeare inasmuch as Auggie's photographic project is justified with a quotation from the "tomorrow and tomorrow" soliloquy from *Macbeth* (Paul Auster: Auggie Wren's Christmas Story, *The New York Times*, 25th December, 1990, 31). Despite this, Kállay's commentary on *A Christmas Carol* can still serve as a jumping-off point for the difference between the fates of Hector Mann and David Zimmer.

and sufferings of man [...]. By virtue of remorse, the tragic sufferer is restored to a condition of grace. Or the ignorance and social injustice which have brought on the tragedy are removed by reform and the awakening of conscience. In the poetics of romanticism, the Scrooges turn golden.⁸

A Christmas Carol can indeed be read as a cautionary tale suggesting that real tragedy can be avoided if one changes one's ways. After all, when the spirits visit Scrooge and show him visions, including a vision of his own grave and the heartrending consequences of his present way of life, he regrets his callousness and becomes a compassionate man. What Steiner misses in this interpretation, Kállay argues, is that this happy ending is not absolute. For Dickens, an individual might be lucky enough to get some compensation for his or her suffering, but humanity as such is destined for tragedy.⁹ Even genuine love cannot change this. Both Lear and Scrooge are forced to face the limitations of love. The only difference is that Dickens focuses on the "positive, creative side" of this discovery, i.e., the possibilities remaining for Scrooge, while Shakespeare highlights the "negative, destructive side".¹⁰

To contextualize the happy ending of Dickens' novella, Kállay points out that Scrooge's unease corresponds to Kierkegaard's ideas on the sickness unto death. The miserly character's "real despair comes from the realization that from now on he might have to *go on living* with the *awareness*, the *knowledge* of what is awaiting him, that it will haunt him wherever he goes, that he, as Kierkegaard claims, from that time on will be *in death*, in agony, yet will not be able to die, to put an end to it" (emphasis in the original).¹¹ Scrooge does not have any concrete evidence that the future will be altered; his only so-called proof is the change in his emotions, the warming up of his cold heart.¹² Thus, the happy ending is more limited than it would initially seem. Scrooge's despair is not alleviated completely, his existence remains influenced by his "sickness unto death". An absolute cancelation of all the sorrows of the world would require an intervention from God, but Dickens does not promise that this would happen. As Kállay argues, "*A Christmas Carol* is not quite a Christian book."¹³ Its focus is on human love; by contrast, "everything associated with the Christian religious tradition is at best a backdrop."¹⁴

It is at this point that the sense in which Kierkegaard uses the expression "the sickness unto death" should be clarified. Kierkegaard suggests that the

⁸ George Steiner: *The Romantic Evasion of Tragedy*, in R.P. Draper (ed.): *Tragedy: Developments in Criticism, A Casebook*, London, Macmillan, 1980, 172.

⁹ Kállay: "What Wilt Thou Do", 271.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 278.

¹² *Ibid.*, 280.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 274.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 275.

path to God leads through a state of intensified despair. This despair is compared to an inability to die:

For there is not the remotest possibility of dying of this sickness in the straightforward sense, or of this sickness ending in physical death. On the contrary, the torment of despair is precisely the inability to die. In this it has much in common with the condition of the mortally ill person who is in the throes of death but cannot die. Thus to be sick unto death is to be unable to die, yet not as though there were hope of life. No, the hopelessness is that even the last hope, death, is gone. When death is the greatest danger, one hopes for life. But when one learns to know the even more horrifying danger, one hopes for death. When the danger is so great that death has become the hope, then despair is the hopelessness of not even being able to die.¹⁵

If the sickness of the mortally ill person is a physical one, then the despairing person's condition is of a spiritual nature. The equivalent of physical suffering is an anxiety over one's own self, one's personality. In the same way as the mortally ill person longs to but is unable to die, the despairing person wants but fails to get rid of his or her self.

To illustrate how those in despair suffer from avoiding their selves, Kierkegaard imagines a scenario where a girl loses her significant other – either because he dies or because he cheats on her. For Kierkegaard, the girl despairs not so much over the fact that he lost her beloved but over the kind of person she becomes by this loss. The real source of despair is that she wants to be the man's partner and cannot accept no longer being it; she cannot embrace a version of her own self that is independent of the man:

A young girl despairs of love, she despairs over losing the loved one, because he died or became unfaithful. This despair is not declared. No, she despairs over herself. This self of hers, which if it had become 'his' beloved, she would have been rid of, or lost, in the most blissful manner – this self, since it is destined to be a self without 'him', is now an embarrassment; this self, which should have been her *richesse* – though in another sense just as much in despair – has become, now that 'he' is dead, a loathsome void, or a despicable reminder of her betrayal.¹⁶

Kierkegaard lists various forms of despair and offers many other scenarios, but this is arguably the one that most evidently resonates with Auster's novel. As we will see, the main characters are depicted to be suffering from the same condition that the young girl is afflicted with in Kierkegaard's example. Significantly, however, the promise of redemption by a higher being is absent in Auster's world.

¹⁵ Søren Kierkegaard: *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. Alastair Hannay, London, Penguin, 1989, 47–48.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

What is offered instead is a meditation on the possibilities and limitations of human love.

DAVID ZIMMER'S DESPAIR

When we meet David Zimmer, the narrator of *The Book of Illusions*, he has already lost not only his significant other but also their two sons in a plane crash. Since it was him who picked the flight and, when his family members were running late, it was him who broke the speed limit to drive them to the airport in time, he is afflicted with survivor's guilt. In his depression, he withdraws from the world and chases off anyone who wants to help him. When his friend Alex tells him that "[e]veryone is worried about"¹⁷ him, he deflects the expression of sympathy with bitterly ironic remarks. He is even more dismissive with Mary Tellefson. When she reminds him that his deceased wife was her best friend, he dismisses her grief by replying, "No she wasn't. She was my best friend. And I was hers. This has nothing to do with you, Mary."¹⁸ His avoidant behavior is not unlike that of Scrooge, who wants "all human sympathy to keep its distance".¹⁹

The first clear example of how Zimmer wants to escape from his self comes early in the novel. After the death of his wife and children, he resorts to two strategies to cope with his loss. He either gets drunk to dull his senses, ending up "in a blur of alcoholic grief and self-pity"²⁰ that prevents him "from feeling too much"²¹, or roleplays as his deceased family members:

When I wasn't drunk or sprawled out on the living room sofa watching television, I spent my time wandering around the house. I would visit the boys' rooms and sit down on the floor, surrounding myself with their things. I wasn't able to think about them directly or summon them up in any conscious way, but as I put together their puzzles and played with their Lego pieces, building ever more complex and baroque structures, I felt that I was temporarily inhabiting them again—carrying on their little phantom lives for them by repeating the gestures they had made when they still had bodies. I read through Todd's fairy-tale books and organized his baseball cards. I classified Marco's stuffed animals according to species, color, and size,

¹⁷ Paul Auster: *The Book of Illusions*, New York, Henry Holt, 2002, 65.

¹⁸ Ibid., 76.

¹⁹ Charles Dickens: *The Christmas Books*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1994, 8. It is beyond the scope of this essay that Auster draws a different but more explicit parallel between *A Christmas Carol* and a character of his own in the novel *Timbuktu*: Willy's vision of Santa Claus recalls Scrooge's vision of the three spirits. See Emilio Cañadas Rodríguez: The Question of Identity and the Perception of the Self in *Timbuktu*: A Novel by Paul Auster, *ES: Revista de filología inglesa* 24 (2002), 94.

²⁰ Auster: *The Book of Illusions*, 7.

²¹ Ibid., 9.

changing the system every time I entered the room. Hours vanished in this way, whole days melted into oblivion, and when I couldn't stomach it anymore, I would go back into the living room and pour myself another drink. On those rare nights when I didn't pass out on the sofa, I usually slept in Todd's bed. In my own bed, I always dreamed that Helen was with me, and every time I reached out to take hold of her, I would wake up with a sudden, violent lurch, my hands trembling and my lungs gasping for air, feeling as if I'd been about to drown. I couldn't go into our bedroom after dark, but I spent a lot of time there during the day, standing inside Helen's closet and touching her clothes, rearranging her jackets and sweaters, lifting her dresses off their hangers and spreading them out on the floor. Once, I put one of them on, and another time I got into her underwear and made up my face with her makeup. It was a deeply satisfying experience, but after some additional experimentation, I discovered that perfume was even more effective than lipstick and mascara. It seemed to bring her back more vividly, to evoke her presence for longer periods of time. As luck would have it, I had given her a fresh supply of Chanel No. 5 for her birthday in March. By limiting myself to small doses twice a day, I was able to make the bottle last until the end of the summer.²²

By doing the activities his loved ones used to do, Zimmer renounces his self in order to "inhabit" theirs (not only metaphorically but also literally, since he inhabits their living spaces and gets into his wife's clothes). This is why he sleeps in Todd's bed: so that he would not have to face the images his own subconscious conjures up in his dreams. Yet, for all of his endeavors to get rid of his self, pretending to be someone else does not erase his personality. Professor Zimmer acts in a scholarly way even when playing with his children's toys and admiring his wife's clothes: he arranges them with a scientific rigor reminiscent of his classification of Hector Mann's films. (He writes a treatise on Hector's films as a way of dealing with his sorrow.) Zimmer also mentions reading Todd's books, which likewise aligns with his profession.

Even the act of putting together the puzzles might reflect on his personality or at least foreshadow the direction his life will take: putting the pieces together can obviously be read as an allegory of his discovering more and more about Hector's secret life.²³ Of course, whether Zimmer truly solves the puzzle of Hector's case is debatable – his narrative, after all, ends with conjectures about Frieda's, Hector's wife's, involvement in Hector's death and about the existence of spare copies of Hector's late films. Thus, Zimmer's efforts of gaining certainty are frustrated. Having lost his family to an unpredictable event, he seeks solace in trying to discover the unknown – at least about Hector –,

²² Ibid., 7–8.

²³ The quest for uncovering secrets is a recurring narrative pattern in Auster's universe. See, for instance, Debra Shostak: In the Country of Missing Persons: Paul Auster's Narratives of Trauma, *Studies in the Novel* 41 (2009), 66–67.

but he is not completely successful. The passage cited above hints at this eventual failure, since Zimmer keeps disassembling the puzzles to put them together again, and builds different Lego structures, which emphasizes impermanence. That he also keeps rearranging the toys and the clothes might likewise be a reflection of his struggle with ambiguity: the toys and clothes do not have a definite order; any order one establishes between them is a result of personal interpretation. Moreover, the frequency with which he indulges in these activities suggests the depth of his sorrow and his inability to move on.

At any rate, Zimmer's self certainly sticks out when he masquerades as his family members. The incongruence between the actor and the role is the most conspicuous when he puts on Helen's underwear and make-up: since there is no indication in the text that he would otherwise be interested in cross-dressing, the image of Zimmer embodying Helen has a touch of dark comedy. The intensity of Zimmer's wish to not be his own self is suggested by his choosing to wear the pieces of clothing most evidently associated with femininity, underwear. Moreover, since the face is a conventional symbol of one's identity, it is also significant that he puts on makeup, which changes his countenance.

A later scene reveals the Kierkegaardian nature of his despair even more clearly. When traveling overseas to watch some of Hector's obscure movies in European archives, Zimmer decides to face the fear of flying he developed after the death of his family members. He buys a plane ticket and asks a doctor to prescribe him sleeping pills for the flight. Asked why he is afraid of flying, Zimmer replies: "Because planes are safe. Everyone knows that. Planes are safe, fast, and efficient, and once you're up in the air, nothing can happen to you. That's why I'm afraid. Not because I think I'm going to be killed—but because I know I won't."²⁴ The doctor takes pity on Zimmer and prescribes him Xanax, which he calls a drug that can turn Zimmer "into a zombie, a being without a self, a blotted-out lump of flesh."²⁵ Zimmer later echoes this description of his zombielike existence when refers to the house he buys for himself as "a hospital for the living dead"²⁶ and when he calls himself "a dead man who spent his days translating a dead man's book."²⁷

It takes a near-death experience to effect a change in his despair, which is also in accordance with Kierkegaard's ideas. In Kállay's words, "[*The*] *Sickness Unto Death* already contains the insight that only in the face of Death, of personal non-being, is one capable of becoming who one is meant to become, i.e., of growing into the unique and irreplaceable self that only oneself can be."²⁸ This brush with death happens when Alma Grund, a mysterious woman

²⁴ Auster: *The Book of Illusions*, 23.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁸ Kállay: "What Wilt Thou Do", 276.

living on Hector's ranch, visits Zimmer and holds a gun to him in an attempt to coerce him into joining her on a flight to the ranch. He utters the following sentences at gunpoint: "Go ahead and shoot, I said. You'll be doing me a great service."²⁹ This seems to correspond to Kierkegaard's idea that the despairing person suffers so much that death would be a relief. To be fair, Zimmer claims not to know whether he actually intended to provoke Alma into killing him or merely wanted to "trick her into dropping the gun."³⁰ Yet, he certainly exhibits a desire to lose his self:

All I know is that I wasn't afraid. When Alma Grund pulled out that revolver and pointed it at my chest, it didn't strike fear in me so much as fascination. I understood that the bullets in that gun contained a thought that had never occurred to me before. The world was full of holes, tiny apertures of meaninglessness, microscopic rifts that the mind could walk through, and once you were on the other side of one of those holes, you were free of yourself, free of your life, free of your death, free of everything that belonged to you.³¹

As this passage makes clear, his defiance of death relies upon a losing of the self. Even death is described as something that belongs to him, to his ego, presumably because one's final moments are defining moments and because the exact nature of one's death can potentially be traced back to one's personality and life choices. If Zimmer becomes independent of his own death, it is because the close connection between one's personality and one's way of death does not apply to freak accidents, such as the death of his family in a plane crash, which the Zimmers had absolutely no way of foreseeing. Its occurrence had nothing to do with their personalities and choices and, thus, constitute an example of the very meaninglessness that Zimmer experiences at gunpoint.

This experience of his is complicated by what happens next. Believing that Alma is just bluffing, he wrestles the gun out of her hand, presses it to his head and pulls the trigger to demonstrate that he knows the gun is not loaded. He is shocked to find out that the gun was very much loaded and the only reason he is alive is that Alma forgot to release the safety catch. Zimmer's indifference of and potential wish for death vanishes: he describes his behavior as "madness" and feels "horror"³² over it. He assesses his survival thusly: "for once in my life my luck had won out over my stupidity. I had come within an inch of killing myself. A series of accidents had stolen my life from me and then given it back, and in the interval, in the tiny gap between those two moments, my life had become a different life." As the self-accusatory words (madness, horror, stupid-

²⁹ Auster: *The Book of Illusions*, 109.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 112.

ity) reveal, unlike the death of his family, his near-death experience can certainly be attributed to character flaws of his own: recklessness and pride. In this sense, he leaves the “tiny apertures of meaninglessness” and returns to a world that he feels, rightly or wrongly, to be governed by reason and causality.

The other, even more significant consequence of his realization that the gun was loaded is that he develops empathy for Alma. While he is at gunpoint, Zimmer's account focuses mainly on his own emotional reaction; after he learns that his actions almost lead to a fatal outcome, the narrative dwells on the effect the events had not only on himself but also on Alma. He notes “how badly she had been defeated, how mortified she was by what she had done. Inexplicably, the sight of her leaving the room touched something in me.”³³ As Auster himself points out in an interview, the word *zimmer* means ‘room’ in German,³⁴ and thus her leaving the room (the living room at that) might have symbolic significance. Faced with a vision of Alma “leaving” him, he holds her back and agrees to fly with her to Hector's ranch. Before long, they become lovers. As we will see, this suggests that Auster contrasts despair not with an authentic relationship with God (as Kierkegaard did) but with a compassion for the Other.

HECTOR MANN'S DESPAIR

If the similarity between Zimmer's behavior and Kierkegaard's description of the sickness unto death are conspicuous, this correspondence is even more explicit in Hector's case. His despair is triggered by an accident in which his fiancée, Dolores St John, shoots and kills his pregnant ex-lover, Bridgette O'Fallon. Feeling responsible for her death, he sets out to methodically deprive himself of his self. First, he shaves his iconic mustache, “removing his most identifiable feature, transforming his face into another face through a simple act of subtraction”³⁵ (note that Zimmer also transformed his face by putting on his wife's make-up). Then, inspired by the name inscribed on a cap he finds in a restroom, Mann takes up the name Herman Loesser. “He was Herr Mann, was he not? If he took to calling himself Herman, he could change his identity without altogether renouncing who he was. That was the important thing: to get rid of himself for others, but to remember who he was for himself. Not because he wanted to, but precisely because he didn't.”³⁶ Mann's reasoning

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Judith Moore: Paul Auster, *The Book of Illusions*: Holderin [sic], Chateaubriand, and Much More, *San Diego Reader*, 10th October 2002, <https://www.sandiegoreader.com/news/2002/oct/10/paul-auster-book-illusions/> (accessed 29 May 2024). See also Jim Peacock: Carrying the Burden of Representation: Paul Auster's *The Book of Illusions*, *Journal of American Studies* 40 (2006), 57–58.

³⁵ Auster: *The Book of Illusions*, 143.

³⁶ Ibid., 144.

echoes that of Kierkegaard. In Kállay's words, what Kierkegaard suggests is that

the self strives to become what it is meant to be just as much as it does *not* wish to be what it should be: one's first despair is that one is willing to be oneself, but cannot; the second is that one is not willing to be oneself because then one would have to *get rid of oneself*, which, of course, one again cannot do, because how could anyone become oneself if that self has been got rid of, if that self has been annihilated?³⁷ (*italics in the original*)

Mann likewise strives to get rid of himself despite knowing that his attempts cannot be completely successful. He divests himself of everything he considers central to his identity but keeps the awareness that he should not be who he is now. That this dehumanizes Hector is reenforced by a literary allusion: the actor, who is not a native English speaker, reads Shakespeare's plays and reports "struggling with the pronunciation of the words *Thou ow'st* in the third act of *Lear*".³⁸ In the scene in question, a despairing Lear suggests that the sight of the near-naked beggar Tom o' Bedlam captures the animalistic essence of mankind: Lear, at least at this point, is convinced that "one arrives at a definition of man by finding the bare minimum one can still call human, and in that state a man is virtually indistinguishable from a beast."³⁹ In the same way Lear "starts to divest himself of his clothing, to cast aside the customary trappings of his kingly status",⁴⁰ Hector also discards his white suit, the other iconic feature of his screen persona besides the mustache.

Hector's sickness unto death is further exacerbated when he starts performing sexual acts with a prostitute called Sylvia Meers in front of wealthy audiences. His self-tormenting emotional state is explicitly described as an inability to die: "Her name was Sylvia Meers, and under her guidance Hector learned that he could go on killing himself without having to finish the job. She was the one who taught him how to drink his own blood, who instructed him in the pleasures of devouring his own heart."⁴¹

While Brigid O'Fallon's death seems to be at the root of Hector's avoidance of his self, from a Kierkegaardian perspective, he appears to have been despairing long before that tragedy. The philosopher notes that many people drown out their despair by worldly pursuits. "A man in this kind of despair can very well live on in temporality; indeed he can do so all the more easily, be to all

³⁷ Kállay: "What Wilt Thou Do", 276.

³⁸ Auster: *The Book of Illusions*, 156.

³⁹ Paul A. Cantor: Nature and Convention in *King Lear*, in Joseph M. Knippenberg – Peter Augustine Lawler (eds.): *Poets, Princes, and Private Citizens: Literary Alternatives to Post-modern Politics*, Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield, 213.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Auster: *The Book of Illusions*, 176–177.

appearances a human being, praised by others, honoured and esteemed, occupied with all the goals of temporal life."⁴² Even if they believe themselves to be happy, such people are merely distracting themselves from the difficulties associated with becoming one's true self.

Hector's choice of professions is certainly relevant to the idea that his despair precedes Brigid O'Fallon's traumatic death. If Zimmer's roleplaying as his deceased family members demonstrated his sickness unto death, Hector pretends to be someone he is not, as it were, for a living. While not extremely famous, he is still accomplished enough to distract himself with artistic pursuits from a spiritual anxiety. Zimmer quotes an evaluation of Hector's career from a documentary on silent-film comedians he catches on television: "Hector Mann did not add anything new to the genre, the narrator said, but he was acknowledged as a talented gagman with exceptional body control, a notable latecomer who might have gone on to achieve important work if his career hadn't ended so abruptly."⁴³ He is also a notorious womanizer, and the ease with which he jumps from one conquest to the other, his displays of intense but fleeting passion, and the impulsivity with which he decides to get married only to have second thoughts might suggest that his stormy love life compensates for a deeply rooted sense of emptiness.

THE LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES OF LOVE

As mentioned before, Kierkegaard's goal in analyzing the sickness unto death is to explain how an authentic relationship to God can be developed. The world of Auster's novel, by contrast, seems secular; none of the despairing characters come to be "grounded transparently in the power that established it."⁴⁴ Mann even confirms to Mr. O'Fallon, the father of his deceased lover, that he does not believe in God.⁴⁵ Zimmer does not address his views on this subject, but there is nothing in the narrative that suggests that he is a believer. While Brigid O'Fallon seems to undergo this transformation, a closer look will reveal that she also fails to develop a true relationship to God. After learning that Hector was going to marry another woman, she attempts to commit suicide and is taken to a mental ward. She remains suicidal for two months, after which "a miracle happened."⁴⁶ The description eventually seems to suggest that she finds God in a Kierkegaardian way: "she no longer wanted to die. She had lost her faith years ago, she continued. She hadn't been to confession since high school,

⁴² Kierkegaard: *The Sickness unto Death*, 65.

⁴³ Auster: *The Book of Illusions*, 12.

⁴⁴ Kierkegaard: *The Sickness unto Death*, 44.

⁴⁵ Auster: *The Book of Illusions*, 174.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

but when the nurse came in that morning to give her the results of the test, she felt as if God had put his mouth against her mouth and breathed life into her again."⁴⁷ However, the next sentence reveals that it is not God she has found but a new way to tie her life with Hector: "She was pregnant."⁴⁸ Inasmuch as her priorities remain unchanged, she is self-deceiving and still in despair, an embodiment of the superficial religiousness Kierkegaard so often criticized. Her sister Nora might be a believer, and her faith might or might not be authentic, but she is not depicted to be despairing in the Kierkegaardian sense (she might or might not be trying to shun her self – the readers are not given enough information). At any rate, she is hardly a central character in the narrative.

Like Dickens, Auster focuses on human love instead of an absolute redemption from a higher power. In the absence of God, Auster's despairing characters turn to each other. Zimmer and Hector both manage to attain partial control over their sickness unto death when they open themselves up to the Other. Zimmer's compassion for the emotionally crushed Alma in his bathroom and Hector's willingness to put himself at risk to save Frieda in a bank robbery sends the male protagonists down a path that ultimately allows them to regain some peace of mind. In a reading that draws on the philosophy of Stanley Cavell, Thorsten Carstensen suggests that "Zimmer needs to regain what Cavell calls 'interestedness' in the world outside the prison of the self, reconnecting with the lives of others"⁴⁹ (this applies to Hector as well). Eventually, Alma's love propels Zimmer to restart his life. This is evident when he invites her to move in with him and takes down the belongings of his deceased family members to the cellar from a room he wants to convert into a study for her.⁵⁰ The symbolic significance of this gesture is heightened by the fact that Zimmer's name means 'room' in German – the renovation of his house obviously parallels the emotional journey he is making.

Yet the peace of mind brought by a community with the Other is not absolute. This is presented as an inevitable part of the human condition. The supporting force of others is tenuous simply because the individual can lose their loved ones at any moment. The novel constantly reminds its readers about this point with the sudden death of various characters. As Mark Brown points out, newfound families are able to provide a "point of equilibrium" for Zimmer, Hector, and Alma, but these families are "shown to be fragile and provisional."⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Thorsten Carstensen: Skepticism and Responsibility: Paul Auster's *The Book of Illusions*, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 58 (2017), 416.

⁵⁰ Auster: *The Book of Illusions*, 297–298.

⁵¹ Mark Brown: *Paul Auster*. New York, Manchester UP, 2007, 126.

Arguably, there is a slight difference between Hector's and Zimmer's fate, with the former being more tragic. Hector never stops being haunted by guilt and arguably keeps avoiding his self till the day he dies. Moreover, in a particularly tragic vein, it is possible that he gets betrayed by the very person who has helped him regain his will to live. If Zimmer is to be believed, Frieda smothered Hector with a pillow so that her husband would not have the chance to break his vow of having his late movies destroyed: "After years of steadfast courage, Hector had buckled in to doubts and indecision, had wound up questioning everything he had done with his life in New Mexico, and the moment I arrived in *Tierra del Sueño*, the beautiful thing he had made with Frieda would be smashed to bits."⁵² Frieda projects an ideal image onto Hector and is willing to go so far as to kill him to keep this image from shattering. Like *Lear*, Hector's storyline reminds us that love can turn from a redemptive power into something harmful.

Zimmer's arc is more comic in nature (if we follow Auster's forecited definition of comedy as an arc where "the characters in the book are a little better off at the end than they were in the beginning"⁵³). Unlike Hector, he manages to return to the world, and even after losing Alma, he has the strength to rebuild his life, as he indicates in the following short summary of his recent years:

It doesn't matter what happened to me after that. This is a book of fragments, a compilation of sorrows and half-remembered dreams, and in order to tell the story, I have to confine myself to the events of the story itself. I will simply say that I live in a large city now, somewhere between Boston and Washington, D.C., and that this is the first piece of writing I have attempted since *The Silent World of Hector Mann*. I taught for a while again, found other work that was more satisfying to me, then quit teaching for good. I should also say (for those who care about such things) that I no longer live alone.⁵⁴

Despite the hint at a new partner (that is the most obvious, albeit not the only interpretation of what he might mean by his living with someone), what Zimmer experiences is at best an incomplete redemption, not an absolute one. While he suggests that the reason it does not matter what happened to him afterwards is that those events are not relevant to the story he is telling, he also seems to believe that whatever happens to him in general does not matter anymore. It is as if his life had concluded but he kept on living. Much like Scrooge, whose absolution is limited by "the realization that from now on he might have to go on living with the awareness, the knowledge of what is

⁵² Auster: *The Book of Illusions*, 319.

⁵³ Auster: *Conversations with Paul Auster*, 178.

⁵⁴ Auster: *The Book of Illusions*, 316.

awaiting him”⁵⁵, Zimmer gets a glimpse of his imminent demise in the form of two heart attacks, which changes his perspective on his life: “Until then, I had refused to think of fifty-one as old. It might not have been particularly young, but neither was it the age when a man was supposed to prepare himself for the end and make his peace with the world.”⁵⁶ The rest of his days are dominated by the thought of his mortality: “To use a phrase I have always been fond of, I discovered that I was living on borrowed time.”⁵⁷

Why does he receive only partial absolution? Multiple critics have argued that Zimmer has his own share of responsibility for his inability to truly transcend his despair. For one thing, while he manages to open himself up to Hector and especially Alma, he fails to fully embrace the alterity of the Other. Or, to use Stanley Cavell’s expression, he does not succeed at acknowledging them. Cavell once demonstrated the difference between knowing and acknowledging the Other through a reading of *King Lear*: Lear’s fatal mistake lies in his unwillingness to accept that Cordelia loves him more than she is able or deems proper to express verbally; he demands that she put her emotions into words because he wants to know her thoughts and enter her mind, which marks his failure to trust her and acknowledge her separateness, her autonomy as a person.⁵⁸ As Jim Peacock mentions in passing and Thorsten Carstensen examines in more detail, Zimmer’s behavior towards Alma is in many respects characterized by the same kind of narcissism.⁵⁹ He is so deprived of human connection that he jumps at the chance to begin a new life with “a woman he barely knows”, and in doing so fails to notice “the complications that Alma experiences on the Blue Stone Ranch.”⁶⁰

Zimmer’s tendency to project his own thoughts is not limited to his amorous relationships. His treatment of Hector is a case in point. Discussing Hector’s silent films in his monograph, Zimmer argues that the twitching of the actor’s mustache “tells you what Hector is thinking, actually allows you into the machinery of his thoughts.”⁶¹ While Zimmer is aware of the role close-ups play in creating this effect and notes that “[t]he intimacy of the talking mustache is a creation of the lens”, he does not suggest that this artificiality would create any ambiguity: “We can read the content of Hector’s mind as though it were spelled out in letters across the screen.”⁶² He even takes these close-ups to be

⁵⁵ Kállay: “What Wilt Thou Do”, 278.

⁵⁶ Auster: *The Book of Illusions*, 317–318.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 318.

⁵⁸ Stanley Cavell: *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1976, 267–353. For an introduction to Cavell’s philosophy, see Géza Kállay: Stanley Cavell: Filozófia és irodalom mint kétely és bizalom szövegei, *Helikon Irodalomtudományi Szemle* 44 (1998), 511–531.

⁵⁹ Peacock: *Carrying the Burden*, 57–58; Carstensen: *Skepticism and Responsibility*, 420–423.

⁶⁰ Carstensen: *Skepticism and Responsibility*, 420.

⁶¹ Auster: *The Book of Illusions*, 29.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 30.

symbols of the human condition: “it is during those moments that Hector is most fully and convincingly human, a reflection of what we all are when we’re alone inside ourselves.”⁶³ While Zimmer is right that Hector’s movies may give an insight into what it means to be human, he downplays the unknowability of the Other. He might even underestimate the specificities of the medium of film.⁶⁴ In an essay that draws on Cavell’s ideas on cinema, Meiping Zhang argues that film as a medium appears to capture reality but at the same time tends to substitute rather than faithfully capture the actual person playing a role in the movie. Similarly to how audiences tend to think of iconic actors like Humphrey Bogart not as actual persons but precisely as icons (Bogart is first and foremost a type, a star, and only distantly a person), Hector’s person and persona are not easily distinguished.⁶⁵ Zimmer only realizes the incongruity between the two when he finally meets Hector in person.⁶⁶

Moreover, as David Huebert notes, Zimmer allows his intense and “pathological” wish to document and archive Hector’s works to overtake him and reduce his existence to that of the single-minded archivist; he records for posterity at the expense of being present in his own life.⁶⁷ Hector himself, by contrast, makes movies whose destruction he arranges for; he creates art not because he wants to leave it for future generations but because it “has autonomous value and he takes pleasure in its creation.”⁶⁸

Zimmer never overcomes his obsession with archival: he ends his narrative by hypothesizing that Alma must have made copies of those movies of Hector’s that were burned by Frieda:

One could argue that she would have let me in on the secret, that she wouldn’t have kept such a thing to herself, but perhaps she was planning to tell me about it when she came to Vermont. [...] She forgot to tell me. She meant to tell me, but then she forgot. If that was the case, then Hector’s films haven’t been lost. They’re only missing, and sooner or later a person will come along who accidentally opens the door of the room where Alma hid them, and the story will start all over again.

I live with that hope.⁶⁹

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ In a reading that ties Auster to the category of the sublime, Pál Hegyi argues that the medium of film is singular in the novel because films cannot be represented verbally. Hegyi Pál: *Az amerikai fenségesről: A puritanizmustól a metamodernig*, Budapest, ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, 2021, 187–188.

⁶⁵ Meiping Zhang: “A World Complete Without Me”: Writing Cinema in Paul Auster’s *The Book of Illusions*, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 60 (2019), 400.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 403.

⁶⁷ David Huebert: Archival Futurism in Paul Auster’s *The Book of Illusions*, *Canadian Review of American Studies* 46 (2016), 247.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 256.

⁶⁹ Auster: *The Book of Illusions*, 321.

Zimmer's final words suggest that his sickness unto death never goes away completely. If he lives with the hope that Hector's movies survived, if he perceives the meaning of his life to be dependent upon these external objects, then he is still turning away from his self. Kierkegaard's sense of the fantastic is relevant here: "The fantastic is generally speaking what carries a person into the infinite in such a way that it only leads him away from himself and thus prevents him from coming back to himself."⁷⁰ One might want to understand, to study something (as Zimmer wants to study Hector's films), but this study should help the self in better understanding itself. If one's understanding is divorced from oneself, it becomes fantastic, and in this case "the more understanding increases, the more it becomes a kind of inhuman knowledge in the production of which man's self is squandered, much as men were squandered in the building of the pyramids [...]"⁷¹ At the beginning of the novel, when Zimmer researches Hector's early films, the movies clearly function as diversions that allow Zimmer not to face his self. At the end of the novel, he arguably latches onto the potential discovery of the late movies for the same reason.

Whether or not Alma's hypothetical copies even exist is never confirmed, but Zimmer's theory is somewhat problematic. It can be inferred that no copies surface in Zimmer's lifetime: he arranges his manuscript to be published posthumously, and if the hidden reels had been found before his death, there is no reason why he would not mention this in the text. Moreover, the repetitive diction ("She forgot to tell me. She meant to tell me, but then she forgot"; "Hector's films haven't been lost. They're only missing") suggests that Zimmer is aware of the improbability of his supposition and keeps reformulating his point in an attempt to convince *himself*. His vision that "the story will start all over again" also seems to be a reflection of his traumatization rather than a reasonable deduction: after losing first his family and then Alma and Hector, he expects the cycle of death and new beginnings to continue.

Yet, it is equally important that Zimmer says he *lives* with the hope that Hector's movies survived. Even if he is deceiving himself, he manages to continue his life due to this hope.⁷² This is to say, what may only be an illusion has very real and tangible consequences for him. Art, for all its imperfections, has a redemptive power. And sometimes art is our only remaining link to people that are no longer with us.

Auster explores both the possibilities and the limitations of human love and offers a palliative rather than an antidote to the sickness unto death. With the support of Alma and Frieda, Zimmer and Hector manage to make pieces of art that reflect the human condition. They capture the so-called comedy of life: how, due to the companionship of a significant other, they are "a little

⁷⁰ Kierkegaard: *The Sickness unto Death*, 61.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷² I owe this observation to Zsuzsanna Czifra.

better off at the end than they were in the beginning” (in accordance with Auster’s definition of comedy). Yet, they do not downplay the tragic side of existence. Even if they cannot completely accept the meaninglessness of freak accidents, their artistic depiction provides a local palliative. In Kállay’s words, “our pleasure in tragedy derives from our ability to represent it, and thereby attribute at least some meaning to pain, suffering, dread, and despair—that we are, at least, able to talk about irrevocable events, and losses which are forever, and are forever inexplicable to us, in meaningful words.”⁷³

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⁷³ Kállay: “What Wilt Thou Do”, 281.

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TEACHING THE LOVE OF LITERATURE – REMEMBERING ISTVÁN GÉHER’S CLASSES IN THE 1970s

—◀▶—
ENIKŐ BOLLOBÁS

Over the five years as an English major at ELTE, I took four courses with István Géher:

- English literary history /seminar (autumn semester, 3rd year);
- English Renaissance theatre (spring semester, 3rd year);
- 20th century English drama (autumn semester, 4th year);
- William Faulkner (spring semester, 4th year).

Given the curriculum we followed, we started with the 18th century (Dryden, Swift, Defoe, Walpole, etc.), then moved on to the 19th in year two, returning to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in year three, and then moving on to the 20th century in year four. Year five was basically left open for courses in pedagogy, student teaching, and thesis writing.

Each semester we would have one survey lecture course (rounded off by a final oral exam), and one or two seminars – *anyagkövető szeminárium* – in which we actually read and discussed the texts covered in the lectures, gave presentations, and wrote seminar papers. We had comprehensive exams after year two and year four, which covered the material of the respective two years. The selective principle current today was unknown at the time, which meant that we had to read everyone and everything. No exceptions. (At least that was the impression we got.)

The English Department was much smaller than SEAS today, with a faculty comprised of some twenty-five to thirty instructors in the fields of literature, linguistics, language teaching, and language pedagogy.

István Géher was one of the most popular instructors. Students flocked to his classes – indeed, there was usually quite a rush to get into them at the beginning of each semester. He was also one of the “outsiders”, who refused to enter the academic rat race. ELTE Almanac of 1989-90, that is, nearly 20 years after I began my studies at ELTE, lists nearly all names in the English Department with *Dr.*, indicating the fact that they had earned what was called “university doctorate” at the time – a degree one obtained a few years after graduating, usually in our 20s, and that served as the requirement for being promoted to *adjunktus*, or “Sen. Assistant Prof.”

Four names stick out that do not start with this “Dr.”: Ruttkay Kálmán, András László, Géher István, and Kodolányi Gyula, who, at this later time still insisted on being outsiders. Yet, I must add, three of them are *adjunktus*’s, one (Ruttkay) is *docens* – that is, they were recognized according to their merit, disregarding the otherwise required qualifications.

I remember István Géher as a tall, lean man, always dressed in a dark suit – worn perhaps, but still a suit. (When the weather got warmer, he would wear white trousers with a dark jacket, unusual at the time, but certainly elegant.)

He was a chain smoker, at that time at least, who would bring his small personal ashtray in the pocket of his jacket, which he would place on the table before the class began, and would smoke three or four cigarettes during the 90 minutes. Everyone smoked in class, it was believed to be a requirement of a true “*bölcsész*”, so we always sat in smoky rooms we thought reflected how absorbed we were in our studies. And somehow nobody was bothered, not even the non-smokers (of whom there were very few).

He was a very understanding instructor, never even scolding us if we had not read the required texts. Here I must add one seemingly minor detail: we never received course descriptions or syllabi in those times. The instructor would give us the assignments at the end of each class, and if you were absent, you basically had an excuse for not doing your assignments. Moreover, books were not easily available. Of course, there were libraries, which carried some of the books assigned – not all, mind you. I remember, for example, that Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* was on our compulsory reading list, yet not a single library carried a copy. And there were no photocopies, no mimeographs, or xerox copies at this time. (We must remember that this was the dark pit of the Kadar era, when making copies of anything counted as breaking the law.)

He was very understanding when giving grades too, giving only 5’s and 4’s. That is, those who had never read the texts got a 4.

István Géher possessed the rare quality of taking all his students seriously. Even “girls”, as we were called at the time, which was certainly not a general quality among the learned (male) professors. (Some of the most learned ones felt much more comfortable among “boys”, and managed to intimidate the girls by the tone they took with the larger part of the student population.) Looking back now, I would call Géher a Merleau-Pontyan intellectual, who knew exactly what *recognition* was: the capacity to “recognize” the thoughts of other individuals as human work. Indeed, I think his popularity could be explained not just by his grading habit, but much more by being a master of recognition. He recognized his students as human subjects; even when we said something not terribly brilliant, he would say, very graciously, “Yes – but ...”, and from then on he tried to provide a meeting ground for what the students said and what he said.

Another reason why we all loved him was that the texts always came to life in his classes, and somehow he managed to coach his students into loving literature. As he unpacked the complexities of a novel or short story, he opened a world full of wonders and excitements. He reassured us that reading literature was the most worthwhile activity in the world, for the more one reads into the text, the more it will reveal its intricacies and secrets. His classes were true feasts, for not only did he teach authors and texts across the curriculum, but also showed us that reading was an adventure, an adventure without closure – a never-ending story.

Moreover, our classes grew, to use a much later term, into sensitivity trainings of sorts, for Géher helped us acclimatize to medieval and Renaissance English diction, the grotesque vision of the American South, or the subversive discourse of Anglo-American drama. During the years when we lived in Kádár's barracks, supposedly happy yet certainly closed, Géher opened windows on the world, and we, his students, learned to look and see what was out there.

He always conducted very exciting plot analyses, commentaries on plots, with special emphasis on the dynamics among characters. In these seminars, after an initial collective survey of some basic facts and background, he took over, but always invited the students to contribute. He always gave unexpected interpretations, or commentaries from a particular angle or perspective, so that he unhinged our minds, demanding the acceptance of new thoughts.

I see Géher as a "Merleau-Pontyan" in this sense too: he tried – as every good teacher tries – very hard to conduct dialogues in his classes, and thereby establish a common ground – so that his thoughts and the thoughts of students came to be interwoven. Indeed, this is how Merleau-Ponty describes this dialogue:

In the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are interwoven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator. [...] we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity. Our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world.¹

Géher always made sure his rather elaborate interpretations were palatable to students not versed in literary theory. For theory was totally absent from our English curriculum, we never heard about structuralism or New Criticism (at least not in the department's classes), and, of course, it was way too early for

¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, London, Routledge, 1992, 354.

poststructuralist tenets to trickle down to Hungarian university education. But in a sense “no theory” in the English curriculum was a subversive act in itself, for theory at the time was strictly Marxism. But not in the English Dept.

* * *

To illustrate how memorable Géher's classes were, I'd like to recall two of the lighter – and more humorous – moments from our *Canterbury Tales* course.

First, our discussion of the “Pardoner's Take”. As probably you all know, the Pardoner is described in “The General Prologue” as either “a geldyng or a mare” (I 691). Now, I am pretty sure none of us knew the meaning of either *geldyng* [*gelding*, castrated male horse], or this particular meaning of *mare*, an effeminate male, possibly a homosexual male. So we listened innocently to Géher's explanation – not knowing what would lie ahead.

The professor gave us a long and elaborate lecture on the Pardoner presented as a eunuch; the medieval understanding of the eunuch; how eunuchry was to be understood metaphorically, as spiritual sterility; Chaucer's satiric presentation of the Pardoner as “feminoid”; how the Pardoner's eunuchry and effeminacy – his beardlessness, his fine hair, his concern with looks and fashion – were confused with homosexuality, reinforced by his characterization as a mare, which had been a synonym for male homosexual, “the passive pederast”, from the 12th century on. Moreover, Géher explained to us how the Pardoner's image as homosexual is confirmed by his wooing of the Summoner, his love song for him; and how Chaucer treats homosexuality as that “abominable sin, of which no man hardly ought to speak nor write” (“The Parson's Tale”, X.909), while challenging the sexual bias of his readers by using homosexuality as a metaphor, emphasizing that the Pardoner's corruption is not sexual but moral.

His conclusion was put in a summary form: “the Pardoner is either a homosexual or sexless, or both” – a claim I don't think either of us understood.

My second example is our discussion of “The Summoner's Tale”. As is well-known, this is one of the “fart tales” of Chaucer. It is about the friar going to the house of a wealthy man, Thomas, who is quite sick, already at the gates of death. The friar is trying to persuade Thomas to donate more, insisting that he will become better if only he gave more to the church. Thomas replies that has already given a lot, but the friar disagrees: a “ferthyng”, or farthing, he says, is not worth anything if divided into twelve.

After the friar's sermon on anger, Thomas agrees to one last donation, on the condition that the friars, altogether 13, divide the donation equally among themselves. After the friar promises to do so, he's told to reach down to his buttocks, at which moment Thomas lets out a big fart into the friar's hand.

‘Now then, put your hand down behind my back,’
 Said the man, ‘and grope around behind,
 Beneath my buttocks; there you will find
 A thing that I have hidden secretly.’
 ‘Ah!’ thought the friar, ‘that will do for me!’
 And down his hand he sank to the cleft,
 In hopes of finding there a little gift.
 And when the sick man felt the friar
 Groping round his arse, here and there,
 Into the friar’s hand he let fall a fart.
 There was no dray-horse pulling on a cart
 That could have farted with a louder sound.

The friar started up like an angry lion.
 ‘Ah, false churl!’ quoth he, ‘by God’s bones,
 This was done for spite!’ The friar moans:
 ‘You’ll pay dearly for that fart, some day!’ (III. 2140–2155)

Bound by his promise to divide Thomas’s “gift” among the convent members, the friar goes to the Lord’s Squire, asking him how a fart can be divided into twelve equal parts. The Squire recommends a somewhat elaborate solution: that each friar be placed at the spokes of a huge wheel, and the thirteenth sit in the middle. His fart will be distributed equally among the other friars.

How this fart might be divided equally
 Among your convent, if it was up to me.’
 [...]
 ‘My lord,’ quoth he, ‘when the weather’s fair,
 Without wind or perturbation of the air,
 Let them bring a cartwheel here into the hall.
 But look that it have its spokes, one and all –
 Twelve spokes has a cartwheel generally.
 And bring me then twelve friars – why? You’ll see.
 [...]

Then shall they kneel down, with their assent,
 And to every spoke’s end in this manner
 Full firmly lay his nose there shall a friar.
 Your noble confessor, may God him save,
 Shall hold his nose up right beneath the nave.
 Then the churl, with belly stiff and taut,
 As any drum, hither he shall be brought,
 And set upon the wheel of the cart,
 Upon the nave, the hub, and let him fart.

And you shall see, on peril of my head,
 By proof demonstrative, as I have said,
 That equally the sound of it will wend,
 Just as the stink, to the spokes' far end.
 Save that this worthy man, your confessor,
 Because he is a man of great honour,
 Shall have the first fruit, as right it is.
 The noble custom friars keep is this,
 The worthiest of them shall first be served,
 And certainly he has it well deserved.
 He has taught us today so much good,
 Preaching in the pulpit where he stood,
 That I shall grant him, if it's up to me,
 The first smell of every fart, say three.
 And so would all his convent, certainly;
 He bears himself so fair and holily.' (III. 2243–2270)

Before our discussion István Géher had to give a summary of the plot, because not all the students had read the text. Those, however, who had, fully appreciated his dead-pan performance. Moreover, not everyone was familiar with the meaning of the word *fart*. So the class was divided: those who had not read the tale, together with those who did not know the meaning of the word sat there with blank faces, unaware of the irreverent humor of both Chaucer and Géher. The other group just about died of holding back their laughter, trying to restrain their response to Géher's poker-faced performance.

For not only did he give a plot summary, but also a long, elaborate, and very scholarly interpretation, mentioning the phonetic-cum-semantic correspondence between the farthing and the fart, the significance of the repulsiveness of the fart, the narrative signs of its foul nature, the friar's hypocrisy, and the contrast between the mathematically planned, complex method of distributing the fart and the vulgar and obnoxious nature of flatulence.

All this to us in our early 20s, mostly girls, who had not been exposed to the actual and metaphorical obscenities of medieval high literature. – And very much like in Karinthy's *Röhög az egész osztály* (The whole class laughs), we finally exploded with a raucous, uncontrollable laughter after our instructor stepped out of the English Department's library's reading room.

* * *

István Géher's lesson remained with us, vivid in our memory even after some 48 years, as has his scholarship, his ethos, his figure, his example, for our whole life. I think we became different persons – probably even better persons – because

of his teachings. And because he was “out to convert your soul”, as a student of the poet Charles Olson, one of the truly magnificent teachers of the 20th century, put it.²

I think we were very grateful that somebody was trying to grab our souls...

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MERLEAU-PONTY, Maurice: *Phenomenology of Perception* [1962], trans. Colin Smith, London, Routledge, 1992, 354.

² John Cech: “Olson Teaching”, *Maps* 4 (1971), 72.

IN MEMORIAM CARLILE AYLMER MACARTNEY
(1895–1978)
BRITISH HISTORIAN AND MINORITY-EXPERT
IN WORD AND DEED

ÁGNES BERETZKY

*“What we need is not a visit from revisionists,
but from people who objectively present our real situation
to the European public.”¹*

Born in Northern Ireland, Carlile Aylmer Macartney was the fifth child of a prosperous lawyer. He received a scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1914, but he chose to volunteer for the war and was enlisted as a Second Lieutenant soon after it started. Of the fifteen scholars in his year, seven were killed, but he survived. Horace Brown, a civilian miner, saved his life at Ypres, and despite their disparate socioeconomic classes, the two stayed in touch for the remainder of his life.² Following the armistice, Macartney went back to Trinity, but he never received a degree.

It was in August 1919 when Macartney arrived in Budapest. As a boy, back in his school library, he had spent many hours reading a beautifully drawn geography of the Hungarian Kingdom. It was a huge and intriguing country that he had been determined to visit. There is no doubt that the autumn of 1919 was the most unfavourable time for the young man to realize his long-held dream: due to economic exhaustion from a lost war, the nation was on the verge of collapse, with neighbours attempting to take over more of it, and Romanian soldiers marching through its capital. It was hard to imagine the country being anything other than disappointing. “The little patch in the centre, the rainswept desolation on which the gypsies had camped, seemed to be Hungary still,”³ he recalled.

At the time, Maxwell, his only older brother, by fifteen years, was a well-known *Times* correspondent in Vienna who specialized on Eastern Europe and the Balkans. He helped Macartney launch his diplomatic career by inviting

¹ Jakabffy, Elemér: C. A Macartney látogatása Romániában [Macartney’s visit to Romania], *Magyar Kisebbség [Hungarian Minority]*, Vol.13, No. 20, 16th October, 1934, 598.

² Hugh Seton-Watson: Carlile Aylmer Macartney 1895–1978, *The Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. 67, 1981, 411–432, 411.

³ Macartney: *Hungaria Aeterna, The Hungarian Quarterly (HQ)*, 1936/1, 50.

him to Vienna, and Macartney served here as the British vice-consul from 1921 to 1925. There he fell in love with and married the Bulgarian Colonel Dimitri Mamarchev's daughter Nedella Mamarchev (1899–1989). She became an expert on Bulgaria during the interwar period and helped her husband's academic career among other things because of her proficiency in Slavic languages. While serving as vice-consul in Vienna, Macartney encountered a number of well-known opposition figures on the right who had fled the Soviet Republic of Hungary. Among them was Gyula Szekfű, a lifetime friend who was conducting study in the Austrian capital in the early 1920s and who quickly exposed Macartney to Hungarian sources.⁴ Soon, in his debut book, *The Social Revolution in Austria*, Hungary was called "the most difficile of all nations"⁵ quite concealing the fact that during his extended time in Vienna its author developed a lifelong affection for Hungarian history and people.

Macartney's first article on Hungary was published in his mentor's, Robert William Seton-Watson's own journal, the *Slavonic and East European Review*, at the onset of 1929. In "Hungary since 1918," the author emerged as a staunch critic of interwar Hungary, which he described as "reaction in the truest sense of the world,"⁶ with political power concentrated in the hands of "a rather narrow" Hungarian or Magyarized landowner oligarchy. Though Macartney's opinion on Hungary under Horthy–Bethlen and boundary readjustment mostly overlapped with that of the majority of his fellow historians, he adopted a different approach to the minority question, the significance of which they all acknowledged.

In the interwar period, the preservation of the status quo was the principal goal of France and the Little Entente states, who were adamant that any disruption to the system's delicate balance may jeopardize it. As the United States refused to join the League of Nations, the organization was left without a functional armed force, endangering its stability and casting doubt on the value of the promises it offered. Despite these flaws, a lot of Britons put a lot of faith in the League and the League of Nations Union (LNU), its sister organization, particularly in their capacity to uphold international peace. The League of Nations Union (LNU) was founded in Great Britain in October 1918 with the aim of using education and awareness-raising to forward the goals of the League of Nations, which include collective security, international justice, and a sustainable peace between nations. With more than a quarter of a mil-

⁴ An exchange of letters between the two friends can be found in OSZK KT Fond 7/1271 and Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, Egyetemi Könyvtár és Levéltár Kézirattár [Eötvös Loránd University Library and Archives Manuscript Archives], Budapest. G628/3.

⁵ Macartney: *The Social Revolution in Austria*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1926, 265.

⁶ Macartney: Hungary since 1918, *Slavonic and Eastern European Review* (SEER), 1929/3, 581.

lion registered members by the mid-1920s, the organization was the biggest and most influential in the British peace movement.⁷

It might not be overstated to say that maintaining the Versailles system was the Little Entente states' principal priority and, in contrast, Hungary's post-1927 diplomacy focused on changing it. Thus, obsession countered obsession, which—apart from Communists—was supported by all groups within their own local populations, equally as strongly as in Hungary. One notable distinction, though, was that after 1920, the annexation of 3.5 million Hungarian citizens to the successor states—of whom nearly 1.5 million resided in close proximity to the mother country—fuelled the Hungarians' preoccupation with revisionism and served as a constant reminder of the “unfortunate” borders drawn in 1919–20.

Between 1928 and 1934, Macartney produced a number of books and actively promoted the League of Nations' initiatives while working for the British League of Nations Union and the League of Nations Intelligence Department. The studies originally made a lot of positive claims on the function, significance, and future of the League of Nations and the LNU, the influence of the latter, Macartney believed, increased every year.⁸ A man of extraordinary social sensitivity, Macartney could not miss the fact that the minorities, who had real grievances and could potentially be compensated for them through revision, were the ones who stood to lose the most from the post-Versailles system. Examining these topics was the most significant aspect of his work at the LNU.

In one of his early studies for why the League of Nations had failed to protect minorities, the young historian identified two reasons: on the one hand, any action taken on behalf of a minority by an outside authority could be quickly interpreted as “unjustifiable interference”⁹ in the domestic affairs of the state, which, in the absence of coercive measures, could easily avoid accusations. However, the great majority of complaints about rights abuses were not even able to reach the Council, let alone the Permanent Court of Justice, as a result of the practice of favouring governments over minority, and as a result, they were not able to be addressed. As Macartney bitterly remarked: “The more crying a grievance, as a rule, the less chance it has, under the present procedure of being heard [...] the greatest sufferings are endured by minorities which are either wholly unacquainted with the existence of the Treaties, or afraid to appeal on account of the reprisals which they know will

⁷ On the birth and role of the LNU, see Donald S. Birn: *The League of Nations Union*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981.

⁸ Macartney et al.: *The International Federation of League of Nations Societies*, League of Nations Union, April 1933, 5, in: C.A. Macartney, *League of Nations Union [Macartney LNU]: Miscellaneous Pamphlets*, Vols. 1–10, British Library, 3685–3805.

⁹ Macartney: *Minorities. The History of Racial, Religious and Linguistic Minorities in Europe*, League of Nations Union, London, 1929, 7. Carlile Aylmer Macartney LNU Miscellaneous Pamphlets Vol. 4. British Library 3685–3805.

follow.”¹⁰ Thus it is no surprise that Macartney drew a largely gloomy conclusion: the League of Nations’s defence of minorities was “inoperative to such a degree to cause profound dissatisfaction.”¹¹

The year 1934 saw the arrival Macartney’s *National States, National Minorities* on the subject of revision which summarised his experience as a minority expert in the Intelligence Department of the British League of Nations Union. Macartney claimed that, unlike previous settlements, the Treaty of Versailles had been concluded *expressis verbis* on the basis of the principle of national self-determination. In the meantime, however, it became apparent that the settlement had “either wilfully or in ignorance and prejudice” violated these principles in more than one instance, so “there is stronger reason than ever for invoking them once again to modify it.”¹² The author of *National States, National Minorities* particularly addressed the dire situation of minorities living in a block in the annexed border territories, citing it as the most egregious example of injustice, and he reached a very negative conclusion. The dominant nation, he claimed, would stop at nothing to weaken them even more in order to prevent a legal ethnic revision, and their sheer existence represented a “permanent menace”. A nation state and national minorities appear to be “incompatibles,” he opined.¹³ According to Macartney, when border determination was based on both strategic and economic considerations, the ethnic principle was typically broken. He believed that the strategic claim had been especially unfair because, as the war drew to an end, the idea that the victor required protection more than the defeated state was no longer valid, especially considering that the latter had also been subject to the disarmament commitments. The empowerment of the oppressed nationalities of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy created a system of small states that were at odds with one another and unable to cooperate economically, according to Macartney, who claimed that “the split of Hungary [...] put an end to one intolerable situation only by creating another.” The author contended that as long as ethnicity was seen as the state’s practically exclusive organizing principle, ethnic revision would be an “act of mere justice,” however, it would likely worsen economic problems.¹⁴

The aforementioned makes it abundantly evident that Macartney was not motivated by a conviction in the fictitious idea of self-determination when he revised the Treaty of Versailles based on the ethnic principle: “It is very arguable, whether the ills from which Central and Eastern-Europe are suffering today do not arise more out of the excessive deference paid to [that criterion in 1918] than

¹⁰ Ibid., 36.

¹¹ Ibid., 37–40.

¹² Macartney: *National States and National Minorities*, London, 1934, 427–428.

¹³ Ibid., 416.

¹⁴ Ibid., 477–478.

out of occasional disregard of it.”¹⁵ Since the absolutization of the ethnic principle required the establishment of the nation-state, which could only be accomplished by eradicating minorities, Macartney saw this as a dangerous development. He believed that the best way to address the issues facing Hungary and the Danube Basin would be for the participating states to work together politically and economically, maybe following Great Britain as a model and creating a supranational state that would protect democratic freedoms and equality for all of its citizens.

Despite his pro-Hungarian leanings, Macartney was much unwilling to bend to (Hungarian) propaganda. His letters to the eminent classical scholar, as well as secretary general of the *Society of the Hungarian Quarterly* József Balogh from 1934 are worth quoting in detail:

[...] The trouble has been all along that the only people who enjoyed any reputation of having anything whatever about the county were uniformly hostile to it, and although a certain number of MPs and similar people from time to time made speeches about it, the immediate reply has been that they knew nothing about it, that they were only repeating what they were told from one side, and that the real facts are quite different, [which] will be found in the works of authorities referred to (hostile to Hungary). [...] I must of course admit that you know (and I have never pretended anything else) that I do not agree with all the [...] contentions and ambitions of the Revision League [Hungarian Frontier Readjustment League] and cannot write what I do not believe. [...]¹⁶

A month later, in another letter, he added:

One of the great complaints made over here against the Hungarians is their extreme intransigence...Thus it is said that Hungary cannot be given a small revision, because it would not satisfy her – and so, because she wants everything, she gets nothing at all. If your readers find my book, which has been criticized over here as too pro-Hungarian, attacked by you, I cannot help believing, that this complaint will be repeated [...] that you must be a people impossible to please [...] I believe that I have gone a considerable way towards awakening more sympathy for and interest in your country.¹⁷

In the same year of 1934, under the auspices of Royal Institute of International Affairs and its Director, Arnold Joseph Toynbee himself, financed by the Rockefeller Research Fund, Macartney left for a two-year-long trip to the Carpathian Basin to study the post-war successor states of Austria-Hungary on the spot, with special attention to the situation of their minorities. The result of his labours became his five hundred page-long heavy hitter titled *Hungary and*

¹⁵ Ibid., 429.

¹⁶ Macartney to József Balogh, November 13, 1934. OSZK KT Fond 1/2067, 18590.

¹⁷ Macartney to József Balogh, December 14, 1934. OSZK KT Fond 1/2067.

her Successors: The Treaty of Trianon and its Consequences, which discussed the internal politics of the five states that made up historic Hungary in 1920, paying particular attention to the circumstances facing the local Hungarian minority. The author commended the relatively liberal nationality policies of Austria and Czechoslovakia, but pointed out that in the latter country, the Language Law—which permitted national minorities comprising twenty percent of the population to conduct business in their mother tongue—was “less good than it looks.” It did not extend to postal or railway inscriptions, and Hungarian-speaking Jews and Gypsies had to register separately, making the law on linguistic minorities apply to members of ethnic minorities. According to Macartney, even more depressing was the fact that according to the Czechoslovak census of 1930, there were about 200,000 stateless persons in Slovakia and Subcarpathia alone, which had hitherto caused “indescribable suffering”.¹⁸

The post-war Romanian chapter stood in stark contrast to the generally liberal nationality policy of the Czechoslovak state. According to Macartney’s analysis, the Hungarian minority was the unified Romanian nation-state’s “irreconcilable enemy”; he found that the theory of Re-Romanianization—which held that the Hungarians in Transylvania were Magyarized Romanians and that their re-Romanization was desirable and legitimate—was less harmful than the theory that identified the Szeklers as “the lost sheep from the Romanian fold.” The latter, which Macartney considered all the more unfortunate, was proposed by Nicolae Iorga, no less an authority, and as a result became an article of faith. He concluded the chapter in the following way:

Standards all around have been lowered. The administration and even the justice seem less honest, less hard-working, less efficient. The trains are less punctual, the police regulations more tiresome, the officials more brutal and exorbitant, the streets dirtier, the very bugs in the beds bite more confidently, as though feeling that under the new order people do not mind them so much. Things go to ruin and are not repaired, either because the authorities are accustomed to second-rate, shoddy, patched materials or because someone has pocketed the money voted for repairing the damage. [...] Hitherto, [...] the Roumanians have constructed little in Transylvania. They have simply taken over what the minorities had accumulated in past centuries, and are living on it [...]. All that is beautiful and almost all that is valuable seems to date from long time ago.¹⁹

¹⁸ In Historic Hungary, any person having lived and paid taxes in a commune for four years, acquired Hungarian citizenship automatically, thus several thousands of people did not know and did not care, in which commune, if any, they possessed citizenship rights. Therefore, after 1920, many such (Hungarian) inhabitants of Czechoslovakia who could not prove their citizenship, became stateless persons with no papers, being liable to arbitrary expulsion and unworthy of social services, pension, or suffrage. Macartney: *Hungary and Her Successors: The Treaty of Trianon and its Consequences 1919–1937*, Oxford University Press, 1937, 154–164.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 349–351.

According to Macartney, Yugoslav minority policy could but exceed Romania. Local elections were not held in Belgrade until 1927, and the representative system was supplanted in 1929 by a brief reign of royal dictatorship. The country made little effort to preserve even the pretence of democratic institutions.

Trianon Hungary—the only monoethnic state in the region other than Austria, where over ninety per cent of the population is of the same ethnicity—was, too, the focus of the analysis. Macartney's view of the minority policy of the Horthy era became progressively negative after Trianon, as a significant portion of the Hungarian political class and public opinion concluded that the small concessions made prior to the war had been detrimental as well as pointless. The fact that there were no universities for the over half a million Germans living in Hungary and that the Magyarization of names was still being spread with such zeal would do "immeasurable harm" to the country, Macartney opined, and it was precisely because of such practice and the attitude of the public that the promises of autonomy in the event of a revision, made by some responsible politicians such as Bethlen, could not be taken seriously.²⁰

"The truth was that national feeling was not nearly so advanced among the nationalities of Hungary as the Peace Conference was made to believe."²¹ — claimed Macartney stating that it would not have been so simple to reject the Hungarian historical claims over the Highlands, Ruthenia, or the Voivodina if it had not lost the Great War. He did not swallow the concept that the new nations that replaced the Monarchy would automatically be more democratic and liberal in their nationality policies than their predecessors either. Macartney concluded that if the right to self-determination had been equally applied, i.e., through a referendum requested by the Hungarian delegation, Hungary would have lost Transylvania and Croatia-Slavonia in 1919. However, once autonomy had been guaranteed, the Slovak and Ruthenian regions—and probably Vojvodina as well—would have stayed with Budapest.²² The author did not, however, spare the central tenet of Hungarian revisionist propaganda either: he asserted that in 1937, not only Slovaks and Germans from Burgenland as well as the Serbs and Romanians, but also nearly thirty percent of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia, would not wish to return to Hungary!²³ Therefore, flatly refusing the dream of a "thirty million Magyar Kingdom", i.e. integral revision, in accordance with the ethnic principle and League of Nations Statute Section 19, he advocated minor border changes with one exception: the return of the whole of Subcarpathia to Hungary, with autonomy.²⁴

²⁰ Ibid., 446–458.

²¹ He also asserted that "denial of national culture is only oppressive when it is felt to be oppressive... [Magyarization] was in no way resented by the great majority of the Slovaks". Ibid., 70.

²² Ibid., 486.

²³ Ibid., 183.

²⁴ Ibid., 198.

In Hungary and Her Successors Macartney concluded that

Hungary's claim to the preponderantly Magyar areas contiguous to her frontiers is even stronger today than it was in 1919, in one important respect. She can no longer fairly be regarded as the sole villain in the nationality drama. [...] Given the form of the national state, which is of its very essence so deeply inimical to national minorities, [...] peace and justice are probably best served by reducing the number at least of such frontier minorities as far as possible.²⁵

The significance of Macartney's book is well illustrated by the fact that after 1937 it was cited in British government circles as "the most authoritative study of ethnic problems in the Danubian Basin."²⁶ Later the author did not alter his position on revision, even after the return of the overwhelmingly Hungarian areas of the Highlands, or the Nazi occupation of Prague. (March 1939). Soon, due to geopolitical concerns, namely to offset German predominance in the area, Hungarian Minister to London, György Barcza was discreetly notified in February 1939 that Britain would back Hungary's occupation of Subcarpathia and the creation of a single border between Hungarians and Poles.²⁷ As we have seen, due to its strategic and geographic importance, Macartney had previously advocated the Hungarian annexation of Subcarpathia (with autonomy!). To be fair, however, it should be noted that despite the Czechoslovak commitment made in the tenth clause of the Treaty of Saint-Germain, Subcarpathian autonomy had not materialized in Czechoslovakia until its breakup, nor in Hungary after 1939, in contrast to PM Teleki's backing and guarantees.

In his pamphlet titled *The Danubian Basin*, published in the same year, Macartney stressed that the dire situation and eventual dissolution of Czechoslovakia only made the flaws in the application of the nation-state concept in Central and Eastern Europe and the defencelessness of the region even more apparent. Therefore, after having remedied the most blatant injustices of the 1919 settlement, a "settled and united Danube-basin not directed against any outside power nor the puppet of any, would be infinitely more satisfactory to all Europe [...] than either the position to-day - or of ten years ago."²⁸

But in 1939, this vision of an Independent Eastern Europe, first put up by Macartney in the pamphlet above and further developed in his co-written 1962 book of the same title with Alan Palmer, was no longer a viable option. In addition to its previously established economic hegemony, Germany was poised to further expand its political and military sway over the region. The outbreak

²⁵ Ibid., 490–491.

²⁶ Public Record Office, Foreign Office Papers (PRO FO), c 12627/2319/12.

²⁷ Becker, Andras: The Dynamics of British Official Policy towards Hungarian Revisionism, 1938–39 *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 93, No. 4, October 2015, 655–691, 682.

²⁸ Macartney: *The Danubian Basin*, Oxford, 1939, 8–9, 32.

of war soon propelled Macartney into various (semi-)governmental positions; as one of its 131 experts in the *Foreign Research and Press Service*, his task constituted in monitoring Hungarian press or visiting among others the recovered Transcarpathia, as well as contributing to memoranda on the future of East-Central Europe.²⁹ Three years later he rose in status while transferred to *The Foreign Office Research Department* (FORD), among others by obtaining unrestricted access to official documents.

Already as a member of FORD, Macartney outlined four potential outcomes for East-Central Europe in his most important wartime memorandum entitled “The Settlement of Eastern Europe”: permanent German or Russian rule, in which case “Britain would ex hypothesi be reduced to the role of a spectator,” or an independent Eastern Europe founded on either a selective or comprehensive principle. “Many observers believe that no single factor has been so largely responsible for the present chaos in Eastern Europe as the attempt to foist upon it the West-European ideal of nation-state” – he added. Macartney remained confident that the fourth version, that is reorganisation on an equal basis, would be the most ideal for both the region and the global community. He correctly concluded that, as long as the confederal reorganization was not preceded by the “political satisfaction” of the peoples involved, the belief in the cooperation of the local populace remained illusory. This involved the establishment of political borders based on the equal treatment principle, closely adhering to the ethnic principle, and ensuring that the fewest minorities were left on the “wrong” side of the border.³⁰

In all frontier issues, which Macartney addressed in several memoranda since the 1930s, his priority had been to diminish the number of ethnic minorities. Concerning the Hungarian-Slovak border, he suggested keeping the ethnic line “practically unchanged” for centuries,³¹ which largely coincided with the First Vienna Arbitration; in the South he advised that Hungary should keep about half of the territory reoccupied by Budapest in April 1941³² and

²⁹ Between 7 July 1940 and 15 August 1943, Macartney made 186 broadcasts in fluent Hungarian under the auspices of BBC. In his talks, he focused not so much on minorities or minority policy but fateful events such as Hungary’s adhesion to the Tripartite Pact in November 1940, or joining the German attack on Yugoslavia less than half a year later. Following the British declaration of war in December 1941, Macartney carried on with his broadcasts, but he adopted a more stern stance, concentrating mainly on exposing German and Hungarian war propaganda. He was told to “rub into” the “ad nauseam” Hungarian public opinion, which held that “we would treat our enemies as our enemies, and their friends as our enemies”. Macartney, *British Policy Towards Hungary in the Second World War*. Anglo-Hungarian Conference of Historians, 1977. Manuscript. 9.

³⁰ Macartney: “The Settlement of Eastern Europe”. PRO FO 371/34400.

³¹ Macartney: “The Hungarian-Slovak Frontier”. February 6, 1942. Macartney Papers MSS. Eng. c. 3287, Doc 7 (fols 176–179).

³² Macartney: “The Magyar Minority in Yugoslavia”. October 15, 1944. Macartney Papers MSS. Eng. c. 3288, Doc 46 (fols 308–312).

was eventually brought around to the idea of Independent Transylvania: his ideal would have been a separate state comprising six autonomous cantons on nationality basis, and Brasov-Brassó free city.³³

Given that Hungary and Romania were allies of Hitler, he maintained some optimism for an impartial resolution, especially with regard to Transylvania. However, Macartney's memo was prepared in the context of a world where the Soviet Union's influence was becoming increasingly prevalent who, after having occupied the whole of the region, vigorously demanded the restoration of all 1920 Hungarian frontiers. Great Britain could not intervene in any meaningful way and Macartney's further government activity was thus rendered futile.

In October 1946, he was elected a full member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and reacted with the words: "Nothing I had received from Hungary in thirty years has given me so much pleasure"³⁴ – he recalled. When, during the height of the Cold War, the Hungarian Communist Party ordered the withdrawal of his membership in 1949, as scientists labelled as anti-regime were no longer allowed to join academic associations. It was a terrible memory to carry till the end of his life.

Regarding Macartney's legacy in Hungary, the following passage from an insightful but rather nostalgic summer 1978 edition of the emigrant journal *Magyar Élet* is noteworthy:

In Budapest, unfortunately, too many people have been given statues and monuments, who perhaps did not deserve them in their lifetime. Too many streets are named after people who died long ago, who perhaps did not know or love Hungary. I wonder if anyone at home will think of naming a street after this great English scholar with a Hungarian heart? Will the Hungarian nation express its gratitude—in the form of a statue, a monument—to C.A. Macartney, who has just died [...]?

Thirty-four years after the fall of communism, the Hungarian academic community at last erected a fitting memorial to Macartney nearby the former British Legation in Budapest, not so much for his "Hungarian heart," but rather for his exceptional and, in contrast to most of his contemporaries, impartial knowledge of East-Central European history as well as for his untiring efforts to create a lasting peace in the region based on the willing cooperation of the peoples concerned.

³³ Macartney: "The Situation of Hungarians in Transylvania Since Roumania Changed Sides on 23 August 1944." Annex 5: Scheme for Transylvania as an Independent State. MMs. Eng. c. 3301. Doc 1 (fols 331–354).

³⁴ Macartney to the Hungarian linguist Gyula Németh, 1946 OCT 20. OSZK KT 121/1076.



*Macartney plaque Unveiled April 5 2024 at Iskola lépcső,
Castle district in the vicinity of former British Legation 1922–1941.*

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“A PURITAN FAUN”: THE RECEPTION OF D. H. LAWRENCE IN HUNGARY FOLLOWING THE CAESURA OF THE AFTERMATH OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

—◀▶—
GÉZA MARÁCSI

INTRODUCTION

Similar to a major range of the various aspects of my research interests, my enthusiasm that has often amounted to a passion for accumulating knowledge of several literary historical elements of the influence that the writings of my beloved English-speaking authors made on Hungarian literature, and the reception they elicited from the contemporary and the posterior Hungarian culture was ignited and shaped by my exposure to the knowledge and teaching of professors Géher and Kállay in the most formative ten and fifteen, respectively, years of my intellectual life, which I was privileged enough to be able to spend in their amicable proximity. I tend to reflect on a daily basis on how a major part of who I am, what I am interested in and what I think about what I am interested in, I owe to them.

The present paper discusses the critical reception of D. H. Lawrence's work published in Hungarian, and the publication history itself, with respect to the time that followed the caesura occasioned by the change of the political system after the Second World War. The philological details that pertain to each of its sections are to be found in the Appendix – containing more than what the paper mentions.

Unusual reception?

One of the reasons why the reception, or at least, the presence, of David Herbert Lawrence in Hungary may merit our attention is that it was so voluminous, or, at any rate, continuous throughout the decades dominated by the cultural politics of the socialist state, that it may seem unusual in proportion to the attention devoted to other major authors of his generation or of the one preceding that. Indeed, it may seem as a template for what could have been desired in terms of sensitivity to the works of those figures who have come to be closely or remotely associated with modern(-ist) trends in fiction, and who have held their place in the canon. Here one may think of Henry James or Joseph Conrad as well as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and even E. M. Forster, who, in my

judgement, all received somewhat less attention in terms of publishing than Lawrence did.

With respect to his poetry, however, the situation was different: as opposed to William Butler Yeats, T. S. Eliot, or even Thomas Hardy, the poet Lawrence, as I will show, was kept alive, one may say, solely by the efforts of his poet-translators as well as of his scholar, László Kéry.

A good deal of a possible explanation for this may be found in the versatility of Lawrence's profile in terms of the literary kinds and genres his writing encompasses – and, indeed, in terms of the scope of subject matter his writings in a specific genre, that of the short story, encompass. Another explanation may be the fact that certain facets of his narrative art appear to have given themselves up nicely for being located on the horizon of a 'traditional' as opposed to innovative or modernist aesthetic. The latter one of these perhaps never escaped some suspicion of 'decadence' in the Hungary of the second half of the twentieth century. A third factor might be constituted by the presence in the establishment of cultural politics through the decades of state-controlled publishing of a scholarly 'champion' of the author, in the person of the editor and university professor László Kéry; a champion the like of which perhaps no other twentieth-century English novelist had.

A CONSIDERABLE PRESENCE

Lawrence was first published in Hungarian while he was still alive, as the major publisher Révai brought out *A tollas kígyó* in 1929, a translation of *The Plumed Serpent* by Andor Gaál, a novelist who was to be the victim of the Holocaust, in a series of 'foreign masterpieces' that did not feature any other British author, but published such contemporary works as a translation of *Twilight Sleep* by Edith Wharton, of *The Woman of Andros* by Thornton Wilder, as well as titles by Sherwood Anderson, Anatole France, and Flaubert's *Salammbô*.

The other novel to be translated before the second world war was *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Brought out in 1933, *Lady Chatterley és a kedvese* (Lady Chatterley and her consort) was a translation based on the expurgated version of the novel published in London just a year before. The poor quality of the translation and its design seemingly relegating the book to genre fiction was repeatedly condemned by later commentators.

Following the caesura of the Second World War in what came to be known as 'the three-year long literature' of the years 1945 to 1948 before the turn of the tide in politics in 1948, there is no seeming rationale behind the choice of the third volume by Lawrence in Hungarian, the last one to appear before the late 1960s. This was *Szénaboglyák között* (Among haystacks) in 1947, a trans-

lation based on a posthumous collection of unpublished early writings, *Love Among the Haystacks and Other Pieces* (1930, 1933).

A BREAK IN MANY CAREERS

Presumably due to the alleged immorality of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and the exoticism of *The Plumed Serpent*, all the three volumes dating from before 1948 were featured on the book withdrawal lists produced by the ministry of culture in the early years of dictatorship, as research by Zsófia Gombár reveals.¹

Indeed, no prose works by Lawrence were published throughout the better part of the 1950s, and not much of his poetry either. The poet Lőrinc Szabó's translations most likely produced after 1950 and the poet Zoltán Keszthelyi's renderings were both published at the end of the decade. The anthology of world literature meant to be used in higher education printed five poems in 1962. György Somlyó, Géza Képes and István Jánosy were the other poet-translators who would also include verse in their collections of translations in the next two decades.

With respect to fiction, it was the year 1958 when the late story "Things", dating from three decades before, found its way into a collection entitled *Mai angol elbeszélők* (English short fiction today), that ushered in the period outlined in my introduction. In the month of the *Lady Chatterley* Trial in London (reported on in only one article in a daily paper), November 1960, professor László Kéry commemorated the anniversary of Lawrence's death in *Nagyvilág* (Wide world / Globe), in the first year of his editorship of the up-to-date review journal of world literature of unusual standard, by publishing a translation of the story "You Touched Me", together with a succinct introduction to Lawrence's thought and concerns. From that point on, *Nagyvilág* featured Lawrence fairly often. In 1963 it also reproduced a painting, which was only repeated in the case of the jacket illustration for the Hungarian *Lady Chatterley's Lover* twenty years later, and printed a poem in the translation of the poet Lajos Kassák.

¹ Gombár, Zsófia: Brit irodalom Magyarországon és Portugáliában 1949 és 1974 között, *Múltunk*, Vol. 55, No. 3, 2010, 292.

Gombár, Zsófia: The reception of British literature under dictatorship in Hungary and Portugal, *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2009, 269–84.

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WHAT WAS AND WAS NOT PUBLISHED

All of Lawrence's fiction was published by Európa publishing house, the publisher of foreign literature of the best standard. Under the title *Szülők és szeretők* (Parents and lovers), *Sons and Lovers* was the first novel to appear in 1968, followed by *Szivárvány* [*The Rainbow*] and *Szerelmes asszonyok* [*Women in Love*] in 1974 and 1975, respectively.

One may be prompted to view this resurgence as following in the wake of the revival of interest in, and reassessment of, Lawrence in Anglo-American criticism; and indeed, the unprecedented increase in the foreign readership of the novelist and the large number of paperbacks is reflected in all the commentary the Hungarian editions received. In Hungary, on the other hand, this development was belated and had a comparatively narrow scope.

Although the more exotic concerns of Lawrence in what the poet and critic Balázs Lengyel called his "prophetic phase" were represented by a handful of stories (complemented by the novella *The Fox*) in the 1965 collection selected by Lengyel, *Aki a szigeteket szerette* (Who loved islands); from among his longer fiction it was only the above-mentioned three major novels, written in his "more realistic phase" (in Lengyel's words),² that were published and that received several reprints, and these only from the late 1960s onwards. Even the conventional and idyllic early "Love Among the Haystacks" received a second illustrated translation published separately, but although the controversial "The Man Who Died" was included by Lengyel and reprinted, the transitional *The Captain's Doll* and *The Virgin and the Gipsy* (though it had been suggested by one reviewer to the publisher twenty years before) were only published, and even then by the side of "Love Among the Haystacks", in the 1980s.

Apart from the unexpurgated *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which finally appeared in 1983, nothing more of the later fiction, and apart from the stories "Odour of Chrysanthemums" and "Fanny and Annie", nothing more of the fiction was translated until 2011.

With respect to the poetry, there was not much place reserved for Lawrence in various thematic anthologies or the volumes in the publisher Európa's fine series titled "Lyra mundi", but in 1988 *Az érintés föltámadása* (The resurrection of touch), a more than fairly representative selection of his poems was produced, also with Európa. It was proposed to the publisher, selected and translated in a unified tone entirely by the poet József Tornai, who had already published some translations a decade before, as well as a review of the Hungarian version of *Women in Love*, praising it as its author's most topical book that conveys his views on the harmonising power of love, capable of reushering

² Lengyel, Balázs: *Hagyomány és kísérlet*, Budapest, Magvető, 1972, 305.

man and woman to paradise, in the purest form.³ The Lawrence-enthusiast Tornai's selection, in turn, was perhaps the most favourably received Lawrence title, and beyond the affinity his own verse shows with that of Lawrence, a number of links were discovered with the poetry of László Nagy or Gyula Illyés.⁴

In 1986 Európa's definitive anthology of English verse in translation, *Klasszikus angol költők* (Classic English poets) printed a generous selection of poetry, the majority of which are the works of the masterful Dezső Tandori, who concludes the list of Lawrence's distinguished poet-translators.

On the 'what' and 'why (not)' of publishing

Research into the – in many cases anonymous – reviewers' reports in the archive of the publisher Európa, deposited at the Petőfi Literary Museum, contributes in no small measure to any investigation of the kind here attempted. This reveals that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was strongly and univocally suggested for publication as early as in 1967. The reviewers actually vocally advocated contesting or possibly eliminating what they saw as middle-class prudishness by bringing out the book. The portrayal of aristocracy was only a minor one among the positive arguments highlighting the novel's influence comparable to that of Proust, Kafka or Gide. Publication, however, was postponed due to purported intervention by the politician in charge of culture politics, György Aczél, himself, or by the ministry, at any rate.

Sons and Lovers was also considered for publication twelve years before its actual date, in March 1956, and it was only their personal lack of enthusiasm for certain implausibility in the plot and tediousness of inner characterisation that prevented its idiosyncratic reviewer from recommending the novel. It was reconsidered a decade later when three reviewers univocally suggested it.

Another reviewer in 1969 promoted the novels that would be published following *Sons and Lovers* (*The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*) pointing to the contrast between the lukewarm reception of what had been brought out in the 1960s in Hungary, as if that had comprised the works of a dated writer, and Lawrence's esteem and readership in the Anglo-American world current at that time; a gap which needed to be filled by making accessible the most characteristic and most esteemed of the author's works.

As for Balázs Lengyel's 1965 selection of shorter fiction, one of the reviewers of the Phoenix Edition of Lawrence's short stories and short novels in 1963 had hailed in him an author who "felt universal responsibility for the well-being

³ Tornai, József: Vissza a Paradicsomba (D. H. Lawrence: Szerelmes asszonyok), *Nagyvilág*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1976, 629.

⁴ Kristó-Nagy, István: Az ősi meg az őstehetség, *Nagyvilág*, Vol. 34, No. 11, 1989, 1734.

and happiness of humanity”, whose short stories show best that “he noticed nearly all the troubles of the world, even if the solutions are rather lopsided.”⁵ Thus, Lawrence needed to be known more so as to be talked about by the public in less disparaging terms, and even when “his discoveries have become commonplace”, he had to be published for his artistic merits.⁶ A few stories including “A Christening” and “Monkey Nuts” as well as *The Ladybird* were suggested for omission by this reviewer from another’s selection for their perceived poor quality, while “The Shades of Spring” was suggested for inclusion but was not included by Balázs Lengyel, to be translated only almost half a century later.

Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to mark that Európa commissioned reviews on the definitive posthumous collections of Lawrence’s short fiction and novels – the Phoenix Edition – not many years later than their publication (1955 and 1956, respectively), and indeed within a couple of years of the American publication of *The Complete Short Stories* (1961), even in socialist Hungary, and that the first collection of translations got published by the middle of the British-American Lawrence revival’s decade. Furthermore, it might be also revealing that the reviewing did not happen in the 1950s but in the so-called ‘thaw’ of the next decade.

On the whole, one may hazard the conjecture as to the reason why no work by Lawrence appeared in the first decade of state-controlled culture (or at least after 1953), before 1958, that editors were busy establishing the status of ‘classics’ proper of world literature, before they could get round to map up what ‘twentieth-century classics’ had to offer.

THE PROFILE IN CRITICISM

One may, likewise, construe the judgements influencing Lengyel’s selection, with respect to the stories, as having had been influenced by aesthetic and qualitative considerations and an awareness of current tastes in prose, rather than by issues related to any of the morally unsettling qualities that would have been attributable to Lawrence’s later fiction.

In 1960, in the first introduction to Lawrence to appear in the post-war period, and his first text on the author after his dissertation back in the 1940s, the academic László Kéry pointed to the popularity of Lawrence the thinker in Western bourgeois societies, and pointed out that Lawrence’s vision of the problems of humanity penetrates beyond the troubles pertinent to class strug-

⁵ “D. H. Lawrence: *The Complete Short Stories*, Vols. 1–3, 1955, 1958, 1961, 1962, *The Short Novels*, Vols. 1–2, 1956, 1959, 1961, 1962, 1963” *Reviewer’s report*, 1963, Petőfi Literary Museum, archives of Európa publishing house, 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

gle. He attributed the appeal that what he calls Lawrence's irrationalism had been having for "bourgeois thinking in an age of imperialism" to the fact that Lawrence ostensibly offered a solution for everything that "western man" perceived as unsettling by promising liberation "without affecting the structure of bourgeois society"; while his ultimate solution lies in "pointing beyond man and society altogether."⁷ What is implicit here is not only that Kéry doubted the viability of such a solution, but that he considered this a misrepresentation of Lawrence; one he would elucidate again in his essays and monograph, by then already in the past tense.

He somewhat predictably emphasised the merits the short stories *Sons and Lovers* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* have in portraying their age from the perspective of the class Lawrence knew, which had been occluded by the later novels' controversial linguistic achievements. For Kéry, or for Lawrence to be acceptable at the time of Kéry's writing, this realism had to counterbalance Lawrence's "misguided and lopsided theories", and Kéry also contended that "the psychological subtlety" of Lawrence's writing, which is "complex on an unprecedented level", could only be "valid [or plausible] in so far as he could locate his characters within the tangible networks of an actual society in an actual age."⁸ However, Kéry would be able to examine more freely the psychological subtlety as well in his book-length study written almost two decades later, *A sötét láng prófétája* (The prophet of the dark flame, 1978).

In the essays out of which that book evolved, Kéry attributed (or felt himself allowed to attribute) to Lawrence's thoughts, which at first he had granted only "subjective validity", more and more relevance in highlighting "objective truths, helping to discover unknown realms", to use the phrases he wrote back in 1960.⁹

In contrast with Kéry's enduring urge (voiced with a unique *parlance* with criticism being written in English) to narrow the gap between the author's foreign as opposed to Hungarian recognition, the expatriate cultural historian, the masterful essayist László Cs. Szabó grappled already in 1960 with the problem of locating the manifold parts of what this "puritan faun" created between the two poles of enduring relevance and being forgotten, in a memorial essay published in an expatriate journal in Munich. György Somlyó in the mid-1960s would even consign the fiction to the past and only the verse to the present.

One of Balázs Lengyel's fine insights is in pointing to Lawrence's "indisposition for disciplined critical thinking", which makes his progress illustrate the case when "those who discover relevant connections seek to explain more

⁷ Kéry, László: D. H. Lawrence, *Nagyvilág*, Vol. 5, No. 11 (1960), 1651–1652.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1652.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1652.

by their discoveries than what those actually explain”, to which those under the influence of Freudianism are particularly prone, according to Lengyel.¹⁰

László Kéry’s monograph on the novelist, *A sötét láng prófétája* appeared in 1978. Even though one cannot duly represent the manifold character of Kéry’s scholarship on Lawrence, nor fully estimate his role in forming the Lawrence-image and sustaining the accessibility of the author and his works – furthermore, their acceptability from the perspective of culture politics –; justice done to his unparalleled philological knowledge, in my view, it is his chapters on the great novels, *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, that merit the most attention today. He discusses *The Rainbow* on the axis of revolutionary ideology pertinent to romanticism, versus realism, relying on a perceptive reading of its metaphorical artistry and on insights into the increasing dominance of “descriptive” over “dramatic” techniques of representation. In *Women in Love* the demolition of individuality is analysed, while the third chapter is on Lawrence’s development of the three versions of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, while also elucidating the anomalies of Lawrence’s remote relations with political radicalism.

THE REST IS SILENCE?

Coming to the 1990s, which brought the demise of state-funded publishing, which had been invested with a certain sense of educatory mission, it is more or less coincident with the death of László Kéry that someone tracing Lawrence’s reception would be tempted to conclude that the rest is silence.

That being said, under the current market conditions of publishing, it is an almost miraculous surprise to discover the collection of short stories titled *Tövis a testben* ([A] Thorn in the flesh / body), published in 2011 as the work of the translators Éva Balázs and Mónika Mesterházi. This is a splendid publication of all the twelve stories in *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories* (Lawrence’s first published collection from 1914), three of which are masterful new renderings and nine of which seem actually to be the only new stories published in Hungarian after the preceding thirty years. (One has to be mindful, nevertheless, of the fact that the print run seems to have been fairly low.)

Apart from the fact that only *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* has been kept in print, it is notable that in the wake of the mercerisation of publishing from 1990, a few obscure firms briefly experimented with the longer fiction available in Európa’s 1970s editions, under alternative titles in editions that may even have been pirated. Hence *Sons and Lovers* was split into *A vér hatalma* and *A vér szava* (The power of blood and The call of blood, respectively), while *The Rain-*

¹⁰ Lengyel: *Hagyomány*, 303.

bow and *Women in Love* were given the titles *A szerelem hullámai* (The waves of love) and *Szívek harca* (Clash of hearts). These garish but worn-out titles were given cover illustrations that did do to the books what the design of the first Hungarian *Lady Chatterley's Lover* had allegedly done in the 1930s: they relegated them to the realm of pulp fiction.

A later romanticising come-back then brought "Daughters of the Vicar" and *The Virgin and the Gipsy* to the side of Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and even James's *The Wings of the Dove*, beside the unfinished but emended works of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell, presented to the market as some sort of a variety of romance genre fiction that was practiced by classic authors.

What is notable here is that the identity of the author seemed to undergo a transformation, which would be the second one, if the shift in attention from his later works to those that made him a 'classic' was to be counted as the first one; and that this latter transformation has proven moderately successful. One has no more way of knowing when Lawrence would come into his own with more than a fraction of his prose – not to mention his breathtaking oeuvre of the essay, the absence of which is a particular regret of mine – translated than of shedding one's doubts about whether Kéry's feat of scholarship and his and Lengyel's feat of stewardship would soon be repeated.

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APPENDIX OF HUNGARIAN TRANSLATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

❖ *A considerable presence*

A tollas kígyó [*The Plumed Serpent*]: 1929 (Andor Gaál), reprinted 1935

Lady Chatterley és a kedvese (*Lady Chatterley and her consort*): 1933, reprinted 1935 – based on the first expurgated edition printed in London in 1932

Szénaboglyák között (*Among haystacks*): 1947 – based on *Love Among the Haystacks and Other Pieces*, 1930, 1933

Poetry sparse: László Cs. Szabó included “Bats”, “Cypresses” and “Sicilian Cyclamens” in *Márvány és babér*, 1947, an anthology of verse on Italy, his last volume to be published in Hungary before his long exile; only “The Argonauts” printed elsewhere

❖ *A break in many careers*

Lőrinc Szabó: “Bat”, “Snake” in *Örök barátaink*, 1958 – the last of his authorial collections, not there yet in the 1950 version; Zoltán Keszthelyi: “Ballad of Another Ophelia”, “Abysmal Immortality”, “Ultimate Reality”, “Fidelity”, “After the Opera”, “Song of a Man Who Has Come Through”, “Beautiful Old Age” in *Mindenki énekel*, 1959

1962: “Sicilian Cyclamens”, “Abysmal Immortality”, “Beautiful Old Age”, “Fidelity”, “Song of a Man Who Has Come Through” and excerpt from “Love Among the Haystacks” in *Világirodalmi Antológia*, ed. profs. Tibor Lutter, Albert Gyergyai

György Somlyó: “Poverty”, “Two Performing Elephants”, “The Blue Mystic” in *Szélrózsa*, vol. 2, 1965; Géza Képes: “Tortoise Family Connections”, “Snake”, “Elegy”, “Phoenix”, “Seaweed”, “The Greeks Are Coming”, “All Souls”, “Green”, “Song of a Man Who Has Come Through”, “The Man of Tyre”, “Mountain Lion” in *Először magyarul*, 1971; István Jánosy: “The Man of Tyre”, “Sicilian Cyclamens” in *A valóságos oroszlán*, 1971

“Things” in 1958 collection of contemporary British short fiction

in *Nagyvilág*: “You Touched Me” in 1960; “Tortoise Family Connections”, “Snake” (Képes) in 1963; “Bare Fig-Trees” (Lajos Kassák) in 1969

❖ *What was and was not published*

Szülők és szeretők (Parents and lovers) [*Sons and Lovers*]: 1968, reprinted 1977, 1984; *Szivárvány* [*The Rainbow*]: 1974, reprinted 1984, 1986, 1994 (Könyvműhely); *Szerelmes asszonyok* [*Women in Love*]: 1975, reprinted 1985 (all by Ilona Róna)

Aki a szigeteket szerette (Who loved islands): 1965 – incl. 13 stories and *The Fox* selected by Balázs Lengyel; “The Man Who Died” reprinted in a 1969 collection of 20th-c. novellas *Szerelem a kazlak közt* [*Love Among the Haystacks*]: 1968 (Árpád Göncz, illustrated by Károly Reich)

A szűz és a cigány [*The Virgin and the Gipsy*]: 1986 – incl. *The Captain’s Doll*, *The Virgin and the Gipsy*, *The Fox*, “Love Among the Haystacks”

Lady Chatterley szeretője: 1983 (Mihály Falvay), reprinted 1984, 1992, 2004, 2008, 2022
"The Prussian Officer" (in some anthologies), "Odour of Chrysanthemums" in 1982 collection of inter-war stories; "Fanny and Annie" in 2005 collection of 20th-c. British stories
Az érintés föltámadása (The resurrection of touch): 1988 – 45 poems selected by József Tornai
"Love on the Farm", "Gloire de Dijon", "Bare Almond-Trees", "Fish", "Snake", "The Mess of Love", "Fidelity", "Peace and War", and by Dezső Tandori: "The Best of School", "Sorrow", "Piano", "Tortoise Gallantry", "When the Ripe Fruit Falls" in *Klasszikus angol költők*, 1986
Tornai's renderings in *Nagyvilág*, some uncollected: "Attila", "Sun In Me", "Abysmal Immortality", "Future Religion", "The Greeks Are Coming!", "Red Geranium and Godly Mignonette", "Temples" in 1978; "Song of a Man Who Has Come Through", "Tortoise Shout", "Bavarian Gentians", "On the Balcony", "When I Went to the Film", "When I Went to the Circus" in 1988; also: "Baby Asleep After Pain" translated by Dezső Kosztolányi collected only in 1988, "A Young Wife" by Ágnes Gergely, 1973

❖ *The profile in criticism*

László Kéry in *Nagyvilág*, 1960; László Cs. Szabó in *Új Látóhatár* (Munich), 1960, reprinted in his *Örzök*, 1985; György Somlyó in *Szélrózsa* in 1965; Balázs Lengyel in 1970
László Kéry: *A sötét láng prófétája*, 1978 – evolved partly from essays reprinted in his *Angol írók*, 1975

❖ *The rest is silence?*

1993: *Sons and Lovers* split into *A vér hatalma* (The power of blood) and *A vér szava* (The call of blood); 1994: *The Rainbow* as *A szerelem hullámai* (The waves of love), *Women in Love* as *Szívek harca* (Clash of hearts); 1996: "Love Among the Haystacks" in a series of bestsellers; 1997: "Daughters of the Vicar" and *The Fox* as *Harc a szerelemért* (Fight for love) in a series of bestsellers
2005: "Daughters of the Vicar" and *The Virgin and the Gipsy* in series by LAZI; 2006: *The Plumed Serpent* in old translation, Könyvművés; 2007: *Lady Chatterley's Lover* retranslated by Ulpius-ház
Tövis a testben ([A] Thorn in the flesh / body): 2011 (Éva Balázs and Mónika Mesterházi) – all the 12 stories of *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories*, 1914

SYLVIA PLATH AND TED HUGHES – A HUNGARIAN PERSPECTIVE

—◀—▶—

ISTVÁN D. RÁCZ

LIFE AND ART

Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes were two major poets in the second half of the twentieth century who constructed two intertwining and inseparable life works. It is well-known that the two of them (a British and an American poet) were married to each other. They first met in the mid-1950s, and then everything happened very quickly. They fell in love passionately, got married, had two children, and then separated. Sylvia Plath, who had attempted suicide before they met, killed herself in February 1963.

The story that I have just summed up in two brief sentences is the tragic romance of two major poets. When we consider it, we soon realize that life and work are inseparable: it is impossible now to interpret Plath's and Hughes's poems without the context of the multitude of critical texts and biographies that continually construct and re-construct the life stories as well as possible readings of the poems.

Life and art seemed to be particularly closely intertwined after the publication of Plath's letters and diaries. When István Géher gave recommendation to publish the Hungarian translation, he asked the question: why do we read the private letters and diaries of poets instead of just reading the poems? His answer is: although we are reluctant to admit, we do not trust literature. What we really trust is something that is beyond literature, the "real story" behind the text. We think that the actual poet is more authentic than the persona speaking in the poem or the mask that the poet wears. His conclusion is eye-opening: we should be aware that the artist always plays a role. Playing a role is the essence of art, but role-playing is also an integral part of an artist's life.¹

I could not agree more. To mention another example from British poetry: Philip Larkin was famous for "pretending to be himself," his persona most frequently is "Larkin playing the role of Larkin." But what does role-playing mean in Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes? To simply say that they mutually inspired each other is an understatement. They started their careers together, sharing

¹ István Géher: *Mesterségünk címere: Amerikai könyvek magyar olvasóknak*, Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1989, 38–39.

the study of their house to write their texts. Their marriage soon developed to be a thriller. If we are really interested in “actual life,” as Géher suggested, here it is. Their joint life started as an idyll: sharing their reading, revising each other’s writing, enjoying the prospects of their careers. But when jealousy appeared, that was not only Plath’s, the wife’s, jealousy but also rivalry between two poets. Plath started re-using the sheets of paper with Hughes’s manuscripts, sometimes she ritually burned them in the yard. After they had decided to separate, Plath moved to a London flat with the two young children – importantly, a flat where William Butler Yeats used to live. Symbols were always centrally significant to her; committing suicide by gas a few months later was also symbolic.

The story, however, continued in Hughes’s life, who was accused of causing her wife’s death, but had full authority of the manuscripts left behind as Plath’s legal successor. His work of mourning started immediately after Plath’s death, and it lasted till his own death thirty-five years later. A well-known manifestation of this process is Hughes’s best-selling volume, *Birthday Letters*, an outstanding book, even though their mutual friend, Al Alvarez was right in saying that most people were interested to read it for the wrong reason.² It was read for the gossip, not for the poetry; to most readers it revealed two private lives, not the relationship between two poets. This is true, but Alvarez himself had his share in making the lives a part of their texts. In his book about suicide, *The Savage God*, he gave all the details of Plath’s suicide that have been repeated innumerable times in Plath criticism, volumes of literary history and textbooks. Not to speak of popular magazines and Hollywood cinema.

As a scholar of literature, I am mainly interested in the mechanism of texts, and I have two points to make: role-playing in their games largely determined their poems, and in Ted Hughes’s case translation, as one form of role playing, was centrally important in the machinery of constructing texts.

ROLE-PLAYING AND TRANSLATION

What is well known about the relationship is Plath’s subordinate (even submissive) role, particularly at the beginning of their marriage, and her later rebellion against this situation: her oppression by, and revolt against, the order of patriarchy. This was a situation originating partly in Ted Hughes’s dominating character, but it was also encoded in Plath’s earlier life. When they first met at a launch party in 1956, Plath was full of self-doubt and a feeling of inferiority; as Heather Clark has put it, she was “a disciple in search of a master.”³

² Lynda K Bundtzen: *The Other Ariel*, Stroud, Sutton Publishing, 2005, 208.

³ Heather Clark: Hughes and Plath, in Terry Gifford (ed.): *Ted Hughes in Context*, Cambridge, CUP, 2018, 17.

Consequently, Ted Hughes was exactly the man she wanted at that time. When later she rebelled against her situation, she also rebelled against her earlier self. In life the result was her depression and a destructive tendency: destroying Hughes's manuscripts (as I mentioned earlier, even burning them as a ritual), or re-using the sheets for her own poems. In literature this revolt proved to be the basis of the best of her poetry. "Daddy," "Lady Lazarus," and at least a dozen further poems are well known.

Hughes was also a role-player in the game. In Plath's lifetime he played the role of the master, but also that of the emotional husband. After the suicide this duality was transformed into the roles of the editor of a dead poet's texts and that of the widowed husband. Hughes separated these two roles, almost to the extreme. Lynda K. Bundtzen calls attention to Hughes's use of the third person when he as an editor refers to Hughes the husband: "The second of these books her husband destroyed, because he did not want her children to have to read it..." Bundtzen asks the question: is this the way "lucid and detached editor Hughes criticizes the impetuous or emotional husband Hughes," or is this a case of split personality, a Jekyll and Hyde story?⁴ Both are correct, and there is no help now: editing has become a part of the meaning. The question is that of authorship. Whose text do we read when we perceive a volume of Plath edited and introduced (in some cases even censored) by Hughes?

Apart from splitting his persona into an actor and a reader, into an experiencing and a cognitive agent, he also put his persona into the context of translation. For five years (1966–1971) Hughes was editor of the journal entitled *Modern Poetry in Translation*. Importantly, this was shortly after Plath's suicide, when he badly needed the mental help of tragic and cathartic poetry. Reading those East-European poets who had had a first-hand experience of the Second World War (including prisoners' camps and concentration camps) became a part of his work of mourning. (In his reading war imagery probably interacted with Plath's references to her father's German background.) This was matched by his consciousness of British literary tradition, in which, as he said in a radio interview, translation always played an important role. He added: the most significant work of British literature is the Bible in English, which is a translation.⁵

But how did he read poets such as Vasko Popa, Miroslav Holub, Zbigniew Herbert, and János Pilinszky if he did not understand Serbian, Czech, Polish, and Hungarian? Mainly through rough translations, and since this meant collaborating with other people, the job suited Hughes very well. As Diane Middlebrook has observed: "Hughes has always thrived in collaboration, and well-paid commissions worked on him as releasing agents for the massive learning and

⁴ Bundtzen: *The Other Ariel*, 20.

⁵ János Csokits: *Pilinszky Nyugaton*, n.p., Nap Kiadó, 2017, 121–122.

technical expertise he had acquired through lifelong, unstinting practice of his craft.”⁶ He even translated a volume of Pilinszky in collaboration with the Hungarian poet János Csokits. How did they collaborate? One would expect: after checking the literal translation and the formal features of the original, Hughes transformed the rough English text into a poem. But this was not exactly the case. In a letter to Csokits (1974) he wrote:

I’m getting back to a few things. First job, is to finish these translations of Pilinszky.

You’ll recognize yours – they are not much changed. [...]

I’d like them to be as literal as possible. Some of those we did long ago seem to me very fine English poems – and they are almost entirely your words.⁷

He confirmed this in a letter to Lajos Koncz a year later: “As you will see, they are pretty literal. In fact my co-translator, Janos Csokits, has let me get away with very little. He insisted on the closest verbal accuracy. This was very much to my own taste.”⁸

Rough translation as good translation? Yes, and Hughes goes even further: in his view, rough translation is the ideal translation, precisely because it is rough. One must add: for Hughes, the learned poet, turning a text written in classical meter into free verse was as hard work as the opposite would have been. János Csokits wrote that it took Hughes a long time and considerable energy to create the English version of Pilinszky’s “Harbach 1944”; as a result, this text is not only Pilinszky’s poem but also Hughes’s.⁹

Importantly, he believed in a “Universal Language behind language.” The suggestion he makes in his introduction to the Serbian poet Vasko Popa’s collection is revealing: “when the poetic texture of the verbal code has been cancelled ... we are left with solid hieroglyphic objects and events, meaningful in a direct way, simultaneously earthen and spiritual, plain statement and visionary.”¹⁰ The Ted Hughes scholar Tara Bergin draws the conclusion that “for Hughes the post-translation text has become the most fitting representative of the post-war poem.”¹¹ This conviction had its roots in the Spoleto poetry

⁶ Diane Middlebrook: *Her Husband. Hughes and Plath: A Marriage*, London, Little Brown, 2004, 268.

⁷ Ted Hughes: *Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. Christopher Read, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008, 346.

⁸ Ted Hughes: Letter to Lajos Koncz, Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Typescript. Ms 5911/412.

⁹ Csokits: *Pilinszky Nyugaton*, 97.

¹⁰ Tara Bergin: Hughes and Eastern Europeans, in Terry Gifford (ed.): *Ted Hughes in Context*, Cambridge, CUP, 2018, 113–122, 118.

¹¹ Ibid.

festival in 1965, where Hughes was fascinated by the rough translations of the poems distributed during poetry readings.¹²

His ideal of translation can also be seen in his practice. This is his translation of a well-known poem by Pilinszky:

RAVENSBRÜCKI PASSIÓ

Kilép a többiek közül,
megáll kockacsendben,
mint vetített kép hunyorog
rabruha és fegyencfej.

Félelmetesen maga van,
A pórusait látni,
mindene olyan óriás
mindene oly parányi.

És nincs tovább. A többi már,
a többi annyi volt csak,
elfelejtett kiáltani
mielőtt földre roskadt.¹³

PASSION OF RAVENSBRÜCK

He steps out from the others.
He stands in the square silence.
The prison garb, the convict's skull
blink like a projection.

He is horribly alone,
His pores are visible.
Everything about him is so gigantic,
everything is so tiny.

And this is all.
The rest—
the rest was simply
that he forgot to cry out
before he collapsed.

(translation: János Csokits and Ted Hughes)¹⁴

You do not have to understand Hungarian to discover the differences between the two forms. Hughes's text sounds like prose; if we read it as a poem, it is definitely free verse whereas the Hungarian original is iambic verse. Pilinszky's text rhymes; Hughes's does not. In addition, Hughes breaks the first line of the last stanza – his own innovation, not something that Csokits offered in the rough translation (see below).

One is inclined to say: all these can be justified by the subject matter of the poem, if not by our expectations of literary translation. The simplicity of the story is reinforced by prose style, and the visual silence in the broken line is also absolutely meaningful. The same victim position can be observed in this English text as in Pilinszky's poem: in the moment of your death you are hopelessly alone and hopelessly a victim. The problem is that, by applying a strikingly conventional form to create tension between the beauty of the form and an inhuman world, Pilinszky gave a further dimension to the situation. The clas-

¹² Tara Bergin: Hughes as Translator, in Terry Gifford (ed.): *Ted Hughes in Context*, Cambridge, CUP, 2018, 73.

¹³ János Pilinszky: *Kráter. Összegyűjtött. és új versek*, Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1976. 58.

¹⁴ Miklós Vajda (ed.): *Modern Hungarian Poetry*, Budapest, Corvina, 1977. 144.

sical form is a part of the meaning, the poem becomes a part of a long tradition in poetry. This tradition and the transcendental meaning that it constructs are absent in Hughes's version.

In Hughes's reading, Pilinszky belonged to the same generation as Herbert, Holub, and Popa,¹⁵ although he also points out something unique in his poetry: the duality of the classical form on the one hand and the intimacy of his diction on the other.¹⁶ His essay on Pilinszky offers evidence that he understood the relevance of these two features very well; choosing the latter at the expense of the former in translation was a conscious choice.

THE AESTHETICS OF THE DASH

Tara Bergin has observed that "[i]n his Pilinszky translations, Hughes regularly swapped Csokits's commas and full stops for dashes, and in some instances inserted dashes where there was no other punctuation mark at all."¹⁷ The same scholar has also included an interview with Elaine Feinstein in her Ph.D. thesis, in which the interviewee commented on the use of dashes in different languages and various functions. Feinstein is right in pointing out that in written Russian a dash can stand for the equivalent of the verb "to be."¹⁸ In Hungarian, however, a dash cannot have the same function. Although literary Hungarian frequently uses it to signify the beginning of a sentence in dialogues (where English usually uses inverted commas), a dash can also be a sign of hesitation, contemplation, or an unfinished sentence. In this function, there is no difference between English and Hungarian. Consequently, if the English translation of a Hungarian poem contains a dash where it does not have one in the original, that is an obvious deviation from the original meaning. In the typescript of János Pilinszky's *Selected Poems*, the layout of "Passion of Raven-sbrück" is exactly the same as in the printed version, with a dash and line break in the third stanza. (Under the text, like everywhere else in the volume, one can read: "Translated by Janos Csokits and Ted Hughes.")¹⁹ In Csokits's literal translation (1958), which Hughes worked with, the stanza looked like this:

¹⁵ Ted Hughes: Pilinszky János, trans. Viktor Volom, *Új Forrás* 2013/3, 35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁷ Tara Bergin: *Ted Hughes and the Literal: A study of the relationship between Ted Hughes's translations of János Pilinszky and his poetic intentions* for Crow, PhD thesis, Newcastle University, 2013, 119, <https://theses.ncl.ac.uk/jspui/bitstream/10443/2214/1/Bergin%2013%20%2812%20mth%29.pdf>

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁹ János Pilinszky: *Selected Poems*, Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Typescript. Ms 5946/25–27. 7.

And there is no further. The rest,
the rest was merely that
he forgot to cry out
before he fell to the ground/collapsed.²⁰

dency the opposite of Wordsworth's (and his own) method of composition, based on tranquility.²⁵ Graham's observation is to the point: Hughes's attraction to literal translations eludes Wordsworth's ideal of contemplation the same way as his original poetry does. A typical example is his shocking poem "February 17," which was written on February 17, as Hughes, importantly, marked under the text.

This was reinforced not only by his interest in oral literatures and traditions (this is why he changed his studies from English to Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge in 1953) but also by his acquaintance with Walter Benjamin's famous essay on "The Task of the Translator." He read it in 1968, and identified Benjamin's ideal of "pure language" with literal translations.²⁶ This is his misreading of the German scholar, ignoring some other ideas in the same essay, such as: "Fidelity in the translation of individual words can almost never fully reproduce the meaning they have in the original."²⁷ This is an argument against, rather than for, literal translation. For Hughes, however, fidelity was not as important as reconstructing a text as a part of his own work.

INSPIRATION AND POETRY

The English text, therefore, is very poor as a translation, but very powerful if we read it as a poem of Ted Hughes inspired by Pilinszky. This is also how it became a part of his life work. What he found in Pilinszky was something missing from his own texts. There is nothing surprising about what he wrote in a letter: "I've lived with some of his poems now for 7 or 8 years & they are still as interesting & still seem as good as ever."²⁸

He had the same attitude towards Plath's poems. He never admitted but he needed her poetry for the same reason why he needed Pilinszky and Vasko Popa: to help him not only with his work of mourning but also to survive as a poet. This was reinforced by the mythological framework: he imagined their marriage as a relationship in which Graves's White Goddess appeared in the figure of Sylvia Plath.²⁹ Elaine Feinstein has drawn the conclusion: "Part of the determinism of *Birthday Letters* comes from the sense, with hindsight, that the service of poetry had to take some of the blame for what happened to their love."³⁰ After the mystic reunion following a long period of silence, what remains is poetry and the space between poems. The texts of his last volume are his

²⁵ Ibid., 199–200.

²⁶ Ibid., 79.

²⁷ Walter Benjamin: *The Task of the Translator*, *Illuminations*, London, Pimlico, 1999, 78.

²⁸ Hughes: *Letters of Ted Hughes*, 350–351.

²⁹ Middlebrook: *Her Husband*, 27–28.

³⁰ Elaine Feinstein: *Ted Hughes: The Life of a Poet*, New York and London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2001, 77.

own rough translations of Sylvia Plath, of his own earlier poems and of other poets' texts.

"Daffodils" is a poem in which Hughes re-writes not only Wordsworth's "I wondered lonely..." (frequently published as "The Daffodils") but also his own earlier poem published in the volume *Flowers and Insects*. The new version goes back to the event that the poem is based on: a shared experience (rather than a lonely experience, as in *Flowers and Insects*). This way, it also recreates the relationship between Wordsworth's poem and Dorothy Wordsworth's famous diary entry, which is often compared with his brother's poem. Hughes starts the poem with this line: "Remember how we picked the daffodils?" and continues: "Nobody else remembers, but I remember."³¹ If we read it together with the earlier version, it appears a correction of his previous recollection.

He is the only authority of remembering. In her book on *Birthday Letters*, Erica Wagner mentions two important poems in which a demonized Plath's head is separated from the body. One is "Moonwalk,"³² and the other is a re-writing of Plath's "The Lady and the Earthenware Head," entitled as "The Earthenware Head." Wagner comments: "The imagery of the head separated off from Plath recalls the dual nature of her personality, and casts her as a female Orpheus, her head still singing though severed from her body."³³ The image recalls Hughes's earlier poem from the volume *Moortown*, "February 17", in which the severed head of a still-born lamb haunts the speaker. The horrifying image also reflects on the separation of Plath's texts from re-writings, and Wagner mentions a number of poems in *Birthday Letters* that can be classified as rough translations from Plath, such as "The Tender Place" (based on *The Bell Jar* and "The Hanging Man"), "The Shot" (after "Daddy"), "Visit" (using Plath's diary), and "Sam" (re-writing Plath's "Whiteness I Remember").

By translating Plath's texts, Hughes explored the experience behind his late wife's poetry. He did the same as he did with Csokits's and other co-translators' versions: he made Plath's texts sound rough, unpolished, as if part of an oral tradition of literature. Hughes was conscious of this. In a letter to a friend he revealed: "It was a kind of desperation that I finally did publish them – I had always just thought them unpublishably raw and unguarded, simply too vulnerable."³⁴ However, it is precisely this "rawness" that makes *Birthday Letters* an organic part of his life work, signifying the way towards a "Universal Language behind language."

To return to Géher's point about art and life: where is this universal language to be found? In poetry or in the biography? The Plath–Hughes story, as it is

³¹ Ted Hughes: *Birthday Letters*, London, Faber, 1998, 127.

³² Erica Wagner: *Ariel's Gift: A Commentary on Birthday Letters by Ted Hughes*, London, Faber, 2000, 76.

³³ Ibid., 86.

³⁴ Ibid., 4.

continuously constructed and re-constructed in our reading, is an oscillation between poetry and life experience. The example Péter Benedek Tóta discusses in an essay is revealing: the previously mentioned poems on an earthenware head echo an early poem by Hughes as well as a real statue of Plath.³⁵ The circle is full: the two people were both sources of inspiration and poets inspired by the other. In another article, Tóta quotes Hughes's introduction to Leonard Baskin's engravings, in which he compares the pictures to stained glass windows through which one can see another world.³⁶ Hughes's simile is a manifestation of his own ideal as a poet. While echoing other poets' experience of the transcendental represented by similar imagery (such as Geoffrey Hill's "In Piam Memoriam" and Philip Larkin's "High Windows") it also signifies Hughes's way from literature towards a "rough" reality. In other words, in his life work the translated texts (including *Birthday Letters*) are palimpsests through which we see other texts but, paradoxically, their roughness contains the promise of transcendental values.

In conclusion, I will quote something from the outstanding reader of poetry, István Géher, again. Discussing a poem by the classic Hungarian poet János Arany he makes a comment on his extremely prolific period in old age. Although some critics see it as a blessing, a fellow poet will cross himself and face the danger of such a "fit of inspiration." A poet needs to be very strong to survive the kind of inspiration that eventually killed Sylvia Plath.³⁷

Sylvia Plath died, Ted Hughes survived – struggling with this "fit of inspiration" fueled by his wife and fellow poet.

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³⁵ Péter Benedek Tóta: Ted Hughes, az idegenség és társai: Sylvia Plath, Pilinszky János, Simone Weil, *Műhely* 2014/5–6, 119–126. passim

³⁶ Péter Benedek Tóta: Misztikus mozzanat: Ted Hughes és Keresztes Szent János között Leonard Baskin, T.S. Eliot és Pilinszky János nyomán, *Vigilia* 2015/7, 515.

³⁷ István Géher: *Rádiókollégium*, Pozsony, Kalligram, 1996, 181.

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LAUDATION OF GÉZA KÁLLAY



ZSOLT KOMÁROMY

It is heart-rending that I have to speak about Géza Kállay in the past tense. Almost five years have passed since his untimely death at the age of 57. This, I believe, is the first posthumous Országh Award that the committee has endowed; I think we can all be grateful for this decision because this is also a symbolic gesture on the part of our community, honoring the memory of an original and devoted scholar and a hugely influential teacher. And, of course, it is also a well-considered decision because he would be no less deserving of the Award if he were with us today, for the outstanding merits of his work and its influence on our profession.

At the time of his death, Géza's work was at its height. He had already written the essay on the metaphysical readings of Shakespeare that he did not live to see published in the *Routledge Companion to Shakespeare and Philosophy*; he was in the process of writing a book for a US publisher that was likely to have been the summation of his work up to that point on Shakespeare and philosophy – the finished and the unfinished pieces both testifying that he had at that point entered the international vanguard of his scholarly field. Although fate may have denied the full blossoming of his career, the work he left behind is a true oeuvre, even in its unfinished state. The seven self-standing books, the countless articles and chapters and public lectures in both English and Hungarian reveal the development of a coherent body of thought, an unquenchable intellectual thirst for understanding how works of art are bound up with fundamental questions of philosophy. "If they asked me," he wrote, "what I am interested in most, I would say: the relation of literature and philosophy ... and if asked, which literature and which philosophy, I would answer, Shakespeare and Wittgenstein." The versatility of Géza Kállay's intellectual world is well demonstrated by how the Shakespeare-scholar was also a scholar of Wittgenstein's thought. Not a self-evident pairing, one would say. But the hallmark of Géza's work was that his interest, as he continues to say in the same essay, centered on the conjunctive "and" in the term "literature and philosophy." His relentless questioning of a conjunctive (a piece of grammar) is itself characteristic of his enterprise; he was a scholar of literature and of philosophy, but he also had a background in linguistics, and it was primarily the philosophy of language that he believed

could reveal how literature involves us in final questions. Perhaps the timorous may see something naïve in pursuing final questions, but his conviction was that scholarship must, ultimately, be about no less. His starting point, in this regard, was Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which ends with the claim that "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." Kállay understood this as a call to attend to how language can say the unsayable – to cite the title of one of his collections of essays, his endeavor was to probe the "limits of language" and to do so through language. For logicians, language can produce nonsensical propositions. Wittgenstein concluded that, for instance, the propositions of ethics are senseless, for they lie beyond the boundaries of propositions about facts of the world. This, Kállay comments, compels us to see ethics not in terms of the logic of propositions, a set of rules, but as a situation engaged with personally, as behavior that positions itself in relation to others, a relation that emerges by probing the limits of language. Indeed, his exploration of the conjunction "and" is an exploration of relation, and for him, the philosophical understanding of literature for this reason also meant an ethical understanding. The ethical, he writes elsewhere, is an ontological relation to the limits of language seated in the depths of the self. Probing the limits of language to him was not a naïve attempt at final things, at a knowledge of the transcendent, but a form of behavior that makes up the ethical, and that is always personal.

And indeed, he took scholarship personally: for him it was not merely a disinterested inquiry but a relation to the world, a way of life. He lived his scholarship. In the spirit of László Országh, English studies for him was not simply a field of specialization. He had a holistic approach to the field that embraced linguistics, literature, philosophy, as well as such things as acting in Shakespeare plays staged by students, translating Shakespeare, experimenting with crossovers of academic and literary discourse, or paying devoted attention to his students. His lectures and seminars were memorable even for students whose interests lay elsewhere as he showed so many of us that literature is a source of enjoyment and that thinking about it matters. There are more than a few working in the profession today in whom the decision to become scholars was nurtured by Géza's classes, and many of us are indebted to his intellectual influence.

But his influence was not only intellectual. It was also due to his temperament – "the most warm-hearted instructor at ELTE," as his students called him in their farewell – and also to his unfailing conviction that what we in the humanities and in English studies are all doing is worthwhile. At the time of his death, he was engaged with the Hungarian language English literary history that he initiated as a vast project bringing together most Hungarian

scholars of English literature. (All the seven volumes of *Az angol irodalom története* ["The History of English Literature"] have been completed and published since - the ed.)

He may no longer have been with us at the last stages of this work, but the memory of his optimism, his trust in our scholarly community as a whole, his energy and his devotion remained with us as an influence driving this project towards completion. To my mind, this Országh Award is also the acknowledgment of all such influences, and may they stay with us for long, and may Géza rest in peace.

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