Shakespearian play: deconstructive readings of

The Merchant of Venice, *The Tempest*, *Measure*

for Measure and *Hamlet*

by

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$$m^2 = \frac{\partial}{\partial t} \sum_{a=1}^{34} a\,\frac{t'}{t}$$

Abstract

Poststructuralism may be broadly characterized as a move away from traditional Western foundationalist thinking. Such thinking is exemplified by post-enlightenment transcendentalism, humanism and subject-centredness. This study aims to contribute to the poststructuralist decentering of the subject by means of the application of the critical practice of deconstruction – a type of analysis named and popularized by Jacques Derrida, who is himself frequently classified as a poststructuralist, in which the ruling logic of the text is undermined and the meaning of the text is therefore shown not to be fully present within it – to four texts by a writer who is arguably among the most prominent within the English literary canon: William Shakespeare.

The first deconstructive reading centres around the court scene at the climax of the bond story in *The Merchant of Venice*. Here the apparent contrast between the restrictive law – which views Shylock's claim of a pound of Antonio's flesh as valid – and justice and mercy – which regard adherence to this bond as contrary to the spirit of the law – is collapsed, and justice is shown to be capable of being as restrictive as the law, while mercy becomes embroiled in all the trading that occurs in *The Merchant of Venice*, and demonstrates the capacity to be mercenary.

The Tempest is examined next: the starting point is the apparent Nature/Culture distinction within the play. The reading is influenced by Derrida's use of the notion of supplementarity in his examination in "… That Dangerous Supplement …" of the Nature/Culture distinction in Rousseau. Particular attention is given first to the

wedding masque, where the central figure of Ceres, who is goddess of agriculture and marriage, and also the source of seasonal changes, is shown to problematize any absolute distinctions between Nature and Culture. Such distinctions are further collapsed with reference to Prospero and Miranda's teaching of language to Caliban, as the latter, who supposedly is representative of natural man, is shown to have had his thought supplemented by language before Prospero's arrival on the island.

Hamlet is approached with a reading that again draws from Derrida – this time his exploration of Mallarmé's "Mimique" in "The Double Session". Plato's theory of forms also becomes involved as this chapter plays with the distinction between Being and imitation, destabilizing this distinction within *Hamlet* and problematizing Hamlet's question: "To be, or not to be".

And finally, the chapter on *Measure for Measure* is concerned with the ideas of restraint and freedom, inspecting Lucio's suggestion that his restraint arises from "too much liberty", as well as many other instances in the play where restraint, as well as freedom – which seems at times to function in the same way as restraint – seems significant. The reading draws attention to its own impulse to restrain the reader with the truisms it presents by being written in the form of thirty-four aphorisms, and thus alludes to Derrida's "Aphorism Countertime".

Key Terms

Shakespeare

Derrida

Deconstruction

The Merchant of Venice

The Tempest

Hamlet

Measure for Measure

Postructuralism

Literary theory

Renaissance drama

Foreplay

Preface

I am faced in retrospect with the problem of the preface: hors livre, hors d'oeuvre, foreword, foreplay, bookend, postface, extratext[1]. Facing.

For in a preface I will perhaps have to present the game I have already played before it has begun. I will perhaps have to "retrace and presage" what has already been written but is yet to be read, announcing

> in the future tense ("this is what you are going to read") the content or significance … of what will *already* have been *written*. And thus sufficiently *read* to be gathered up in its semantic tenor and proposed in advance. From the viewpoint of the fore-word, which recreates an intention-to-say after the fact, the text exists as something written – a past – which, under the false appearance of a present, a hidden omnipotent author (in full mastery of his product) is presenting to the reader his future. Here is what I wrote, then read, and what I am writing that you are going to read. After which you will be able to take possession of this preface which in sum you have not yet begun to read, even though, once having read it, you will already have anticipated everything that follows and thus you might as well dispense with reading the rest.

> (Derrida, "Outwork" 1981: 7)

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[1] See the title page to Derrida's "Outwork" (in *Dissemination* 1981: 2), where some of these synonyms for 'preface' – which are not fully synonymous, but perhaps imitate the preface, even as they are imitated by it – appear.

My reluctance to present and thus reduce "the future to the form of manifest presence" (Derrida, "Outwork" 1981: 7), to present, or rather represent, the future as being present, might serve as an indication of what I *do* intend to have done. But I do not wish to be misleading by beginning in this way, for I do not intend to dwell too long on the question of the preface.

I will have begun in a somewhat misleading way. I will have begun, after the preface, with an introduction, which may mislead in the form of an illusory presence of meaning. For in my introduction I will have attempted to *present* something of the history of Western metaphysical thought, of Western humanism and subject-centredness, and something of its relation to literary theory and interpretation. I will have attempted to *present* the Western urge for and belief in manifest presence and coherent meaning – the very presence and meaning that may appear to be *present* in my introduction. I will also have attempted to present the meaning of deconstruction – that which attempts to dispel the illusion of the manifest presence of meaning, that which refuses to *place itself* in the present (or even future perfect), rather deferring, not quite in the movement of an antithesis (a negative placing), nor in the movement of a thesis (that which is a placing), nor of a synthesis.

I will have presented this present of a thesis (in a thesis, in the form – rather than essence, perhaps – of a thesis) so that I may then begin engaging in some Shakespearian plays – readings of plays that might be seen as playful in the sense that they will not attempt to place or face the meaning of the text, nor to deface it, but rather to explore ways in which it *could mean*, ways in which it is in itself full of play,

as a text which is written, and thus engaged in a play of signification that prevents it from presenting any full, coherent meaning (comes before it without arriving, comes before as foreplay, which is also play).

I will begin reading, as writing, four Shakespearian plays: *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, *Measure for Measure*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. My choice of plays is arbitrary. In *Hamlet* I could play with a question of being that begins with the question "To be, or not to be", that encounters Plato along the way, and finds imitation, which is play, inscribed within being in Hamlet and being-in-*Hamlet* – though perhaps not in a teleological line, but along a route that wanders across many paths; I could play in *Measure for Measure* with restraint, restricting myself to a reading that occurs within the confines of the aphorism, within which I can play with(out) restraint with the strictures of the play; I could play in *The Tempest* with what seems to be a distinction between Nature and Culture, with a desire for the manifest presence of Nature that takes place in the movement of a supplement and is inscribed with(in) the impossibility of the coming of Nature; and I could play in *The Merchant of Venice* with the sense of the apparent presence of justice, mercy and generosity within the play, and could perhaps discover something mercenary about mercy, as it trades even as it gives justice as a present.

My choice of plays is arbitrary. But the choice of a play like *Hamlet*, with all its cultural stature and influence, could hardly be called arbitrary; and *The Tempest*, the site of much postcolonial debate, much appropriation (or re-appropriation) of Shakespeare; *The Merchant of Venice*, with its famous antisemitism, *Measure for*

Measure, designated a problem play, and thus the site of much debate – surely the choice cannot be purely arbitrary.

The choice is arbitrary inasmuch as there is no overwhelming thesis that I want to present through these plays, no as-yet undiscovered mode of Shakespearian writing of which these plays serve as a model. Of course I am proposing a type of Shakespearian writing – a reading of Shakespeare's plays that is also a writing of them, a writing of his texts as writing (a playing with them as plays). But such a reading which is also a writing is a writing of any text of Shakespeare's – a writing of any text.

This writing will have been of specific texts. This writing will have been the writing of certain texts by Shakespeare, or at least bearing his signature, his presence reiterated throughout the centuries in(to) the texts which bear his name, but bear it not (are incapable of bearing) as a full presence of being, bear it not as the being of logos, but bear it as a signature – repeated and repeatable, authoritative, authoritarian, and forgeable, marking the presence of the absent author – in the movement of writing.

This writing will have been a re-writing of certain texts by Shakespeare – a re-writing of the absence of the author into texts where he seems to be so present as a prominent force within so many Western discourses. We may therefore perhaps note (the presence of) the absence of certain other texts by Shakespeare that I do not re-read (nor re-write, re-play), decreed to be absent by an arbitrariness that cannot be fully arbitrary, haunting this thesis perhaps with a presence to come, a writing deferred. The memory of a play that is to come: "Remember me".

Deconstruction: the Essentials

Introduction

In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) Richard Rorty argued that the Western philosophical tradition, at least since the seventeenth century, has been seduced by the metaphor that the mind mirrors the world. This metaphor, in turn, has inspired the view that philosophers, as those who investigate the structure of mind or the conditions of knowledge, stand in the privileged position not only of assessing the accuracy of our mental representations but also of assigning to the various kinds of representations (scientific, moral, aesthetic) their respective cultural and social importance. That is, the task of the philosopher is not only to determine whether our theories of discourses are true but also to define the proper relation between discourses about the True, the Good, and the Beautiful.

(Baynes, Bohman & McCarthy 1987: 21)

What the pragmatist Rorty is lamenting about the Western philosophical tradition in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, namely the Pretensions of Philosophers, might certainly also be said about the history of literary theory, with theorists and critics traditionally acting as judges of written forms of aesthetic (perhaps also moral?)

representation, of the True Literature, the Good Literature, and the Beautiful Literature. The links between the histories of philosophy and of criticism are, in fact, explicitly strong: traditional literary theory may be seen as arising from, or at the very least being significantly influenced by, traditional philosophical conceptions of what it means to be human, what it means for humans to interact with the world, and what the exact nature of human knowledge is, from as far back as Plato's rather restrictive account of the role of the aesthetic in an ideal society and Aristotle's still influential *Poetics*.

Although Plato's answers to man's (traditionally) most profound questions have certainly been among the most influential in shaping Western thought, it is possibly the philosophy of the Enlightenment thinkers, who were certainly influenced by Plato's ideas, which can most clearly be seen as providing the foundations for traditional literary theory[1]. For the Enlightenment philosophers, taking their cue from Descartes's "founding of knowledge on the certainty of self-consciousness", insisted that "human reason, or subjectivity ... [is] responsible for the validity of its own beliefs, values and decisions". This privileging of the human subject, known as "philosophical rationalism", extends even unto a transcendental level: for Kant the "subject of knowledge becomes abstract mind or reason, a reconstruction of the cognitive capacities of human or rational beings in general". Every individual – excepting those who are insane or otherwise retarded in their capacity to reason – thus possesses direct access to a universal, context-free, unchanging, objective Truth, about him or herself and about the world, through his or her ability to

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[1] Though we shall explore the influence of Plato's conception of *mimēsis* in "The Play's the Thing".

reason. This 'humanism' thus regards the subject as the centre of his or her own universe
(West 1996: 154-155).

The parallel with literary theory is obvious: traditional criticism regards the author as "a
coherent identity, endowed with initiative and purposefulness, whose design and
intentions effectuate the form and meaning of a literary ... product" (Abrams 1993: 259-
260). The author/subject is thus seen to have an intention when writing the text that is
entirely transparent to him or herself, and is able to inscribe the text with meaning
entirely coherent with the original intention – meaning which is then accessible to the
reader in its pure form if the reader is capable of reading the text correctly, which is fully
present in the text and able to manifest itself in its full presence to the reader. Every text
is thus seen to possess a True meaning given it by the author, and the task of the reader is
to accurately access this True meaning, to encounter it in its full presence. The enjoyment
of a text would thus seem to depend on the extent to which the reader has understood the
author's intention; and different texts may be judged as being more valuable or 'literary'
– and presumably more enjoyable to the discerning reader – depending on the value or
quality of meaning given them by the author. A canon of particularly meaningful
'literature', written by an author/subject to whom the truth of his or her own intentions
and the truth of the world is transparent, with the power to "instil into men's hearts ...
manifold observations on the myriad problems of life and eternity" (Gollancz in Evans
1989: 7), is established.

Building a foundation

Of course, the histories both of philosophy and of literary criticism are far more complicated than my brief outline would suggest: people's ideas both about the world and about literature obviously did not remain static from the beginning of the Enlightenment until the beginning of the so-called post-modern era. It is, however, important to note that thought during this period was undoubtedly based upon the humanist belief in subject-centredness; philosophy and literature were constantly approached from the assumption that there was an eternal, unifying, objective truth to be discovered about the world or the text – that being (existence itself, the existence of a truth, of a text, etc.) could be fully accessible. Thus even those approaches that seemed to undermine the precepts of rationalism still in some way confirmed them by insisting on the possibility for the self in some way to be able to access Truth, to be present to meaning and to itself. Examples of such approaches may among many others include "the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics, the critique of the concepts of Being and truth, for which were substituted the concepts of play, interpretation, and sign (sign without present truth), and "the Heideggerean destruction of metaphysics, of onto-theology, of the determination of Being as presence" (Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play" 1978: 280). Because my discussion is necessarily brief, I shall only outline a few such decentering approaches in more detail, and limit my discussion to those that may be most readily accessible within the context of literary theory.

Marxism, one of the earliest clear breaks from the then entrenched humanism of Descartes and Kant, serves as my first example: according to Marxist theory, the subject does not have "reliable access to rational criteria of theoretical or moral truth", since our "beliefs or attitudes, even our most deeply held moral values, reflect our position in society rather than absolute truth". The subject is therefore no longer autonomous, but to a large extent shaped by forces outside of his or her control. However, Marxism does not "abolish ... the privileges of the individual subject", but rather transfers them to "a collective historical subject, namely the proletariat which, in virtue of its position within the capitalist mode of production, is destined to overthrow capitalism and achieve true consciousness". So although subjects are unable to achieve immediate, absolute self-knowledge through an act of pure reasoning, they will still be able to do so "by subordinating their alienated self to the collective will of the class"; and universal access to true consciousness will occur with the arrival of communism, when "the ideological distortions of class society will come to an end", meaning that "[social] relations ... become transparent and individuals ... attain their true 'species being', the full and undistorted flowering of all their human capacities" (West 1996: 156-157).

Freudian pscychoanalysis – Freud's "critique of self-presence, that is the critique of consciousness, of the subject, of self-identity and of self-proximity or self-possession" (Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play 1978: 280) – similarly displaces the humanist subject without entirely abolishing it. Again the "Cartesian principle that the mind or subject is simply equivalent to a full transparent consciousness is undermined" (West 1996: 158): Freud suggests that the conscious functioning of the human mind – what he terms the

'ego' – is steered and even controlled by unconscious drives arising from the 'id', the more "innate, primitive component" of the mind, which is constantly seeking to gratify its basic – even bestial – urges for food, sex, and self-preservation (Meyer in Meyer, Moore & Viljoen 1993: 43). However, like Marx, Freud "holds out for the conscious self at least some prospect of recovering its sovereignty". Through the process of psychoanalysis the self can theoretically "come to understand the unconscious springs of its conscious states and impulses", approaching "something like the ideal of transparent selfhood held out by the Cartesian tradition" (West 1996: 157-159).

The ideas propounded by Marx and Freud have had a significant impact on the study of literary theory, giving rise to Marxist and psychoanalytic interpretations of texts that had all too often been interpreted from a purely subject-centred perspective. The former have certainly proven invaluable to the project of dispelling the forms of criticism which conceive of an "idealized, context-free 'literature'" (Hawkes 1992: 8) created by the inspired genius of god-like, self-aware authors – the type of critical process in which certain texts and discourses are privileged and dignified with the status 'literature' (Evans 1989: 5), and are assumed to have "an essential, culture-reinforcing, morally-uplifting and context free set of meanings" inscribed into them by their authors (Hawkes 1992: 9). Marxist criticism sees literature in terms of socio-historical phenomena, so any individual work of literature is not a transparent manifestation of the author's controlled intentions, but merely a manifestation of the broader political discourse that is transpiring within his or her society, suggesting that it is not so much the Truly Superior nature of the author of the privileged text, "but the received readings of it, its normalization as a cultural icon or

familiar construct", which determine its elite place within the 'literary' canon (Parker in Parker & Hartman 1985: vii). However, humanism – albeit in a very different form – is still apparent in this type of criticism: instead of accessing the 'truth' of the text in terms of the author's intentions, Marxist theory acquires the 'truth' from the political and historical context surrounding the text - literary works are regarded "as 'products' of the economic and ideological determinants specific to [their] era" (Abrams 1993: 242). The assumption is that there is still an objective method of identifying, measuring, and judging the value of meaning in a text. A new literary canon, one whose works most accurately represent the socio-economic context within which it is written, merely replaces the old one.

A similar problem is, of course, encountered by psychoanalytic criticism: in its most common forms, those which attend "to the *author* of the work" and those which attend "to the work's *contents*" (Eagleton 1983: 179), psychoanalytic criticism dispels the notion that there is an immediately accessible and self-apparent meaning that has been inscribed by a fully conscious author into the text in question, only to suggest that there is a deeper meaning that *can* be fully accessed by the reader in terms of Freudian psychological theory. By applying such theory to the author, psychoanalytic critics obviously face the same risks as those critics who choose to discuss "the relevance of authorial 'intention' to works of literature"; the application of psychoanalytic theory to the content can be accused of being "too often reductive", and the "security with which the [psychoanalytic] commentary considers the self-identity of the text, the confidence with which it carves out its contour, goes hand in hand with the tranquil assurance that

leaps over the text toward its presumed content, in the direction of the pure signified"
(Derrida 1976: 159).

Other prominent forms of literary criticism can similarly be seen to provide readings that
present themselves as being able to access the 'essence' of the text. New Criticism and
Practical Criticism abandoned the assumption that the importance of a text lies in the
transcendent meaning inscribed into it by its self-aware author/subject, only to propose a
method of gaining a 'true' appreciation of the text by means of a 'close reading' of its
literary form, which was supposed to reflect and form an organic unity with its content.
Such criticism "assumed that you could judge literary 'greatness' and 'centrality' by
bringing a focused attentiveness to bear on poems or pieces of prose" - an obvious
continuation of the essentialist, subject-centred Enlightenment project, which
"encouraged the illusion that any piece of language, 'literary' or not, can be adequately
studied or even understood in isolation", if, of course, it can be understood at all
(Eagleton 1983: 43-44). Formalism, another type of criticism that focused on literary
form, sidelined the analysis of content altogether. It, too, was foundationalist, insisting
that "'making strange' was the essence of the literary". Despite avoiding essentialist
value judgements – by refusing to try to define 'literature' – it still made essentialist
claims as to the nature of 'literariness', which, although differing in form within different
social contexts, in nature always remained that same "function of the differential
relations between one sort of discourse and another" or 'strangeness' (Eagleton 1983: 5-
6). And this belief in a fundamental quality of 'literariness' which can be identified and

measured of course allies Formalism with the essentialist claims of the subject-centred humanist tradition.

Another form of literary theory that "passed over the analysis of literary 'content'" (Eagleton 1983: 3) was literary structuralism - the application to literature of "the methods and insights of the founder of modern structural linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure" (Eagleton 1983: 96). Saussure's linguistic theory demanded that *langue*, the "objective structure of signs which made ... speech possible" (Eagleton 1983: 97), rather than *parole*, the "particular 'speech acts' of individual speaking subjects" (West 1996: 164), be studied. This view, as well as his central theoretical proposition that the relation in language between the constituent parts of a sign – the 'signifier', "what Saussure calls the 'image', the 'psychical imprint' of a physical … phenomenon" (Derrida, "Différance" 1982: 10), that is "the word or sign considered as a particular sound or set of written characters" (West 1996: 165); and 'signified', the "ideal meaning" (Derrida, "Différance" 1982: 10) or "concept the signifier represents" – is an arbitrary one, not reflecting "any intrinsic or essential quality of the signifier", apparently set him strongly at odds with humanist subject-centredness (West 1996: 165). Because a sign has no essential quality, "no necessary core which must persist, it must be defined as a relational entity, in its relations to other signs" (Saussure in West 1996: 165): the meaning of any sign is thus determined by its difference from other signs, implying that language, the medium subjects are supposed to use in order to reason their way to true consciousness and communicate that consciousness to others, and the medium authors use to encode texts with meaning for readers to simply decode, is a far less reliable tool than had previously

been thought. However, Saussure's linguistics, and the Structuralist project, which largely grew and "developed within a more or less direct and avowed dependence upon phenomenology" and could thus be regarded as "a tributary in the stream of Western metaphysics", could not, "above and beyond its anti-Platonism", avoid going "back to Plato" – and thus essentialism (Derrida, "Force and Signification" 1978: 27). Saussure saw *langue* as an objective structure of signs – a 'deep structure' which could be identified and studied – and those who followed him similarly sought deep structures of just about any object or activity, viewing everything from literature to "myth, wrestling match[es], system[s] of tribal kinship, restaurant menu[s] or oil painting[s] as a system of signs" and trying to "isolate the underlying set of laws by which these signs are combined into meanings" (Eagleton 1983: 97). By looking for an 'underlying set of laws', the structuralists yet again turned to the essentialism the Enlightenment had so influentially proposed three centuries before.

Deconstructing the foundation

Of course, my superficial sketch of the history of literary theory and (recent) philosophical thought is an extreme oversimplification of the ideas that have guided intellectual inquiry for the past three centuries or so. Such a sketch focuses only on the essentials of each sphere of thought, thus being far too reductive, and fails to do justice to the diversity of the ideas, beliefs, and critical approaches of my predecessors. It does not account for the Marxist approach of Eagleton, or the psychoanalysis of Lacan, for example, which are arguably less reductive in certain ways than I have suggested

Marxists and psychoanalysts in general are. Hopefully, however, it does demonstrate the major common failing of the traditional approaches I have so reductively outlined – their tendency to be reductive themselves, to attempt to account for everything in terms of a single, essential, pervasive set of ideas, which is readily accessible and is supposed to act as a key to unlocking the door to all knowledge. This is an important background to provide, as it is this tendency towards reductive essentialism that provides the context to the rise of possibly one of the most influential and controversial literary theories of the twentieth century: poststructuralism.

Poststructuralism is in many ways a reaction against humanist foundationalism, an attack on its "expansive sense of self, its confidence in our knowledge, its a priori assurance that all people everywhere are ultimately like us" (Solomon 1988: 196). Poststructural theories, in fact, "are posed in direct opposition to standard and inherited ways of thinking in all provinces of knowledge and values."

> [They] expressly 'challenge' and undertake to 'destabilize,' and in many instances to 'undermine' and 'subvert,' what they identify as the foundational assumptions, concepts, procedures, and findings in all the traditional modes of discourse in Western civilization (including literary criticism).

(Abrams 1993: 259)

One might say that one of the poststructuralist *raisons d'être* is to decentre the subject, to oppose the humanist subject-centredness that insists on regarding everything in terms of such foundational assumptions, concepts and procedures. Postructuralists frequently do this in accounting for the diversity of assumptions, concepts and procedures that exist, rather than attempting to find the ultimate, foundational One; in fact, they demonstrate the impossibility of discovering any one, unifying Truth, and point out the inherent danger in questing after this Holy Grail: attempts "to unify society artificially according to some grand, 'totalizing' theory or ideology" have certainly been influential in causing "unlimited global wars, bureaucratically organized genocide and fascist and Stalinist totalitarianism" in the twentieth century (West 1996: 199), not to mention the reckless expansion of European powers, their unjust appropriation of land, and forcible enculturation and often unrecognized genocide of native peoples, in preceding centuries. Derrida in fact suggests that "one can assume that ethnology could have been born as a science only at the moment a decentering came about" ("Structure, Sign, and Play" 1978: 282). And one might say that the poststructuralists thus battle essentialisms, and champion "the often neglected role of difference in philosophical thought", ethical decisions, justice and the law, literature, architecture, and just about every other sphere of thought (May 1997: 78).

Difference is thus an important concept in poststructural thought; however, as poststructuralists essentially avoid any type of essentialism, it would be risky to suggest

that it is the unifying concept that underlies all poststructuralist thought, and it would be grossly inaccurate to imply that all poststructuralists approach this concept in the same way. Michel Foucault, for example, using structuralism as a starting point (as poststructuralists tend to do – hence the name), rejects Saussure and his followers by concerning himself "not ... with the possible permutations of a system but only with its actual, historical instances", thus inverting Saussure's preference of *langue* over *parole*, and giving an account of "the changing transformations of meaning" – the differences of different meanings within different contexts interpreted by different people, etc., that defies any "all-embracing concept of humanity" like structuralism (Solomon 1988: 198).

Perhaps equally (in)famous for his poststructural philosophy is the Algerian-born French Jew, Jacques Derrida, whose slightly different take on difference leads him to creating his own neologism, *différance* ("which is neither a word nor a concept" [Derrida, "Différance" 1982] – but we'll touch upon this point again soon enough), in order to elucidate his complex understanding of the concept of difference. As with Foucault, we might most easily access Derrida by using his structuralist heritage as a starting point (though his heritage is not simply and only structuralist, as he develops his philosophy from not only structuralism, but also, among others, the ideas of Freud, Nietzsche, and Heidegger). Taking Saussure's structuralist view of language in which there is "no harmonious one-to-one set of *correspondences* between the level of the signifiers and the level of the signifieds" (Eagleton 1983: 127-128 [my italics]) to its logical extremes, he suggests that Saussure in fact marks that "the signified is inseparable from the signifier, that the signified and signifier are the two sides of one and the same production"

(Derrida, "Semiology and Grammatology" 1981: 18), asserting that there is "no fixed *distinction* between signifiers and signifieds either" (Eagleton 1983: 128 [my italics]) – each signifier refers to a signified, which in turn does not intrinsically reflect the concept it refers to, or possess its meaning, but rather acts as a signifier itself in terms of its difference from other signifieds: "the signified always already functions as a signifier.... There is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language" (Derrida 1976: 7). The "principle of difference, as the condition of signification, affects the *totality* of the sign", both the signifier *and* the signified, and the "signified concept is [thus] never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself" (Derrida, "Différance" 1982: 10-11). So, to put it simply, if, by analogy, "you want to know the meaning (or signified) of a signifier, you can look it up in the dictionary; but all you will find will be yet more signifiers, whose signifieds you can in turn look up, and so on" (Eagleton 1983: 128).

What Derrida hopes to achieve with this position is a critique of what he terms the "'logocentrism' of the western philosophical tradition", the "pervasive tendency of western thought to associate truth with the voice or 'the word' (*logos*), which is conceived as the immediate expression of the self-presence of consciousness" (West 1996: 178-179) [2]. He thus attempts to dispel 'metaphysical' thought, the western reductive, essentialist tendency that I have outlined, the persistent, arrogant attempt to

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[2] Johnson provides a useful footnote: "'Logocentric' – that which is 'centered' 'on the Logos' (= speech, logic, reason, the Word of God) – is the term used by Derrida to characterize any signifying system governed by the notion of the self-presence of meaning; i.e. any system structured by a valorization of speech over writing, immediacy over distance, identity over difference, and (self-) presence over all forms of absence, ambiguity, simulation, substitution, or negativity" (in Derrida, "Outwork" 1981: 4).

seek "beyond signs and representation, the real and the true, the presence of being, of knowing and reality ... – an access to concepts and things in their pure, unmediated form" (Grosz in West 1996: 179) – and to believe that something can "at a certain moment become *present*, manifest, … be shown, presented as something present, a being-present in its truth, in the truth of a present or the presence of the present" (Derrida, "Différance" 1982: 6). Derrida thus calls "these claims and this confidence ... 'the myth of presence'" – a myth which can, for example, take "the form of the immanent presence of God, or of the world as a determinate entity, or of the self as an 'inner' certainty" (Solomon 1988: 200).

The myth of presence is dispelled by Derrida's identification of the endless play of "signifying references that constitute language". He exemplifies this play with his neologism *différance*. He plays on the fact that "in French 'differer' means both 'to differ' and 'to defer'" (West 1996:180), and creates the word *différance* (as opposed to the existing word *différence*) to preserve the dual meaning of the French verb form and account for his explanation of the operation of signification: as Saussure had already begun to show by "emphasizing the *differential* … characteristics of semiological fuctioning" (Derrida, "Semiology and Grammatology" 1981: 18), "the meaning of a sign is a matter of what the sign is *not* [i.e. its *difference* from other signs], its meaning is always in some sense absent from it too" (Eagleton 1983: 128) – meaning is thus never fully present in a sign; but meaning does not only involve the "recognition of 'difference'", but also "a temporal 'deferral'" (West 1996:179), a "*temporization*" (Derrida, "Différance" 1982: 8). In this second sense, *différer* "is to temporize, to take

recourse, consciously or unconsciously, in the temporal and temporizing detour that suspends the accomplishment or fulfillment of 'desire' or 'will'" – the desire for or will to presence (Derrida, "Différance" 1982: 8). Derrida explains this deferring role of *différance* more fully:

> The sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing, "thing" here standing equally for meaning or referent. The sign represents the present in its absence. It takes the place of the present. When we cannot show or grasp the thing, state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign. We take or give signs. We signal. The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence…. [The] circulation of the sign defers the moment in which we can encounter the thing itself, make it ours, consume or expend it, touch it, see it, intuit its presence.

> (Derrida, "Différance" 1982: 9)

Meaning, or at least its presence – and presence in general – is, according to Derrida, deferred, even at the same time that it arises (is presented) from the interplay of differences between things. *Différance* describes both the "temporal difference" and the "otherness" that "looms on the horizon", which is characterized "both as a *passive difference* and as a *deferral that produces difference*" (Habermas in West 1996: 180). *Différance*, unlike "Saussure's apparently static system of differential positions", is thus "intrinsically temporal and dynamic" (West 1996: 180), insisting that there is "no escape

or apparent respite from the shifting play of meanings" (Derrida in West 1996: 180). It demonstrates how the logocentric myth of presence is mistaken in its presumption "that whatever is present to us is wholly and immediately so, grasped in an act of pure intuition which has no recourse to signs" (Sturrock in West 1996: 180-181), by insisting on "the indissoluble interweave of the intelligible with the sign-substrate of its expression" (Derrida in West 1996: 181). This does not imply that meaning is simply fully absent either – a suggestion which would be an inversion of the myth of presence that still retains its logic – but that it is *neither* fully present *nor* fully absent: the sign, "which defers presence, is conceivable only on the *basis* of the presence that it defers and *moving toward* the deferred presence that it aims to reappropriate" (Derrida, "Différance" 1982: 9). Therefore, importantly, "the substitution of the sign for the thing itself is both *secondary* and *provisional*: secondary due to an original and lost presence from which the sign thus derives; provisional as concerns this final and missing presence toward which the sign in this sense is a movement or mediation" (Derrida, "Différance" 1982: 9). Signs do not merely fulfil their traditional function of reflecting "inward experiences or objects in the real world"; they are unable simply "to 'make present' one's thoughts and feelings or to describe how reality" is: it "is an illusion for me to believe that I can be fully present to you in what I say or write, because to use signs at all entails that my meaning is always somehow dispersed, divided and never quite at one with itself" (Eagleton 1983: 129-130):

> [The] movement of signification is possible only if each so-called "present" element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the

mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark

of its relation to the future element, this trace … constituting what is

called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it is

absolutely not, not even a past or a future as a modified present. An

interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the

present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must …

divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the

present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present….

(Derrida, "Différance" 1982: 13)

And it is thus clear that I cannot ever escape from using signs, that "language is

something I am made out of, rather than a convenient tool I use.... I still need to use signs

when I look into my mind or search my soul, and this means that I will never experience

any 'full communion' with myself" (Eagleton 1983: 130). When Descartes thought to

himself he was using signs – they may have been visual, phonetic, tactile, olfactory or

gustatory, but they were signs nonetheless, and were thus as embroiled in the play of

différance, its differentiation and deferral, as his writing about his thinking is.

Consciousness inescapably has "recourse to signs", and Derrida can accordingly assert

that presence "can never be immediate ..., [but] only mediated by language" (Sturrock in

West 1996: 181).

This argument allows Derrida to dispel yet another western philosophical myth, that of

'phonocentrism', which "regards speech as a more transparent medium of thought or

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meaning than writing", insisting that the "voice is closer to the immediacy and self-presence of thought or meaning" (West 1996: 179) than writing, which is seen to designate "the exterior surface, the insubstantial double of a major signifier, *the signifier of the signifier*" (Derrida 1976: 7): speech – and even consciousness itself – has recourse to signs, and thus is as entangled in the play of *différance* as writing is. All speech acts have recourse to signs, are immersed in the play of signification – in *différance* – and speech thus also acts as "signifier of the signifier" (remember that all signifieds also act as signifiers, and vice versa), a term which thanks to Derrida now describes not only the operation of writing (as the phonocentrists would have it), but the very "movement of language" (Derrida 1976: 7). Derrida therefore suggests "that all language is now *written* language ('in the broad sense')" (Solomon 1988: 201), since the "secondarity that it seemed possible to ascribe to writing alone affects all signifieds in general, affects them always already, the moment they *enter the game*" (Derrida 1976: 7). And he also controversially suggests that "*There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas hors-texte*]", that "there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but … substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the 'real' supervening, and being added only while taking meaning from a trace" (1976: 158-159). There is nothing that does not take place in the movement of language, and thus take place in the movement of writing – of the text.

It is important to note that even here Derrida is attempting to dispel the myth of presence. Since, in written language, we "are not tempted to attribute meaning to presence, because in the case of writing the author is normally absent" (West 1996: 181) – and the written

form thus "detaches any given text from the context in which it arose" (Derrida in West 1996: 181) – it is far easier to see how *différance* operates in a written text. When I am speaking, I *seem* far more "to 'coincide' with myself" (Eagleton 1983: 130), far more certain and convinced of my "own immediate consciousness", and truth seems self-present (West 1996: 183). When I am writing, it seems as though "my meanings threaten to escape my control: I commit my thoughts to the impersonal medium of print ... which can always be circulated, reproduced, cited, used in ways I did not foresee or intend" (Eagleton 1983: 130). In writing there is a clear indication of the "absence of the sender, of the receiver, from the mark that he abandons, and which cuts itself off from him and continues to produce effects independently of his presence and of the present actuality of his intentions, indeed even after his death, his absence" (Derrida, "Signature Event Context" 1993: 5). But since "every sign … presupposes a certain absence" (Derrida, "Signature Event Context" 1993: 7), since absence "belongs to the structure" not only of writing, but "of all language in general" (Derrida, "Signature Event Context" 1993: 5), since all language *is*, in a sense, writing, I can never coincide with my self. Meaning is never fully present to itself. Instead of being determined by its author (since all language is writing), meaning depends "on a potentially infinite array of possible contexts and interpreters, and so leads to what Derrida calls 'dissemination', an endless dispersion and multiplication of meanings" (West 1996: 185), "an irreducible and *generative* multiplicity" (Derrida in West 1996: 185).

The implications for literary theory are obvious: since the meaning of any text depends on an infinite dissemination, it is pointless and merely restrictive to attempt to discover

its 'true' meaning, to try to discover the key that would unlock its inherent value and beauty. Meaning can never be fully present or presented in the text. Derrida thus proposes a type of reading that does not seek to find the meaning of the text, but rather seeks to see how the text produces meanings, to see how the text functions as text. It is partly to allow for differences, to break the restrictive bonds of attempts to find the essential meaning of a text, that Derrida developed the "critical practice" (West 1996: 184) of 'deconstruction'.

Deconstruction is thus – among other things – a reading of a text that seeks to undermine its "logocentric claims and metaphysical assumptions" (Johnson in Derrida 1981: xiv). It is an analysis of a text which "violently inscrib[es] within the text that which attempted to govern it from without", "putting into question the major determination of the meaning of Being as *presence*", and, by identifying "symptoms [though Derrida is suspicious of this word] of something that *could not be presented* …, and which, moreover, is *nowhere present*", tries to show what has been "dissimulate[d] and forbid[den]" (Derrida, "Implications" 1981: 6-7) within it, and within the history of western philosophy and thought.

The "violent inscri[ption]" (Derrida, "Implications" 1981: 6) of deconstruction is not "random" or a "generalized skepticism" (Johnson in Derrida 1981: xiv), but rather arises from a careful reading of the text, a reading which tries "to respect as rigorously as possible the internal, regulated play of philosophemes or epistimemes[3] by making them

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[3] Units that make up philosophy and epistemology respectively, equivalent to phonemes in speech.

slide – without mistreating them – to the point of their nonpertinence, their exhaustion, their closure" (Johnson in Derrida 1981: xiv). Violence is thus done to "not meaning but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another" as the *différance* of the text – the way in which it "signifies in more than one way" – is explored (Johnson in Derrida 1981: xiv).

This exploration may be done by means of a "double play" – "marked in certain decisive places by an erasure which allows what it obliterates to be read" (Derrida, "Implications" 1981: 6) – or "double gesture", a "double writing" (Derrida, "Positions" 1981: 41): a "double science" (Derrida, "The Double Session" 1981: 173-286, "Positions" 1981: 41). Part of this double writing of deconstruction is perhaps marked by a "phase of *overturning*" – the overturning of an opposition in the text that may be characterized as a "violent hierarchy" rather than a "peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*" (Derrida, "Positions" 1981: 41), a binary opposition arising from "the either/or logic of noncontradiction that underlies Western metaphysics" (Johnson in Derrida 1981: xvii), in which, for example, presence may be seen as being favourable to absence, speech to writing, masculine to feminine, right to left, etc. Although this overturning may in some ways resemble "negative theologies" (Derrida, "Différance" 1982: 6), which are in themselves theologies – are in themselves concerned with the absolute presence (or absolute absence) of Being – deconstruction is not simply a negative theology: not only are binary opposites "dislodged", but "the interval between inversion, … and the irruptive emergence of a new 'concept,' a concept that can no longer be, and could never be, included in the previous regime" (Derrida, "Positions" 1981: 42) is also marked. So,

for example, through (within) Derrida's deconstruction a "new concept of writing" emerges, "that *simultaneously* provokes the overturning of the hierarchy speech/writing, and the entire system attached to it, *and* releases the dissonance of a writing within speech, thereby disorganizing the entire inherited order and invading the entire field" ("Positions" 1981: 42). Rather than simply inverting the binary opposition and thereby reproducing the binary logic, deconstruction "attempts to elaborate an 'other' logic" (Johnson in Derrida 1981: xxvii):

> it has been necessary to analyze, to set to work, *within* the text of the history of philosophy, as well as *within* the so-called literary text …, certain marks, … that *by analogy* … I have called undecidables, that is, unities of simulacrum, "false" verbal properties (nominal or semantic) that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, but which, however, inhabit philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, *without ever* constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics (the *pharmakon* is neither remedy nor poison, neither good nor evil, neither inside nor outside, neither speech nor writing; the *supplement* is neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an inside, neither accident nor essence, etc.; the *hymen* is neither confusion nor distinction, neither identity nor difference, neither consummation nor virginity, neither the veil nor the unveiling, neither the inside nor the outside, etc…. Neither/nor, that is, *simultaneously* either *or*….)

(Derrida, "Positions" 1981: 42-43)

Thus the double science of deconstruction may be seen to simultaneously overturn and preserve binary oppositions, to overturn them as undecidabilities or unities of simulacrum, without ever resolving the opposition – neither allowing resolution in terms of a kind of negative theology in which the opposition is inverted and absence is marked simply as present or open to presence, nor allowing it in terms of the production of a third term *that acts as a synthesis* and thereby "*inter[s]* difference in a self-presence" (Derrida, "Positions" 1981: 43). It is therefore a reading that seeks to identify the "conflictuality of *différance*" – note that *différance* is for Derrida a "nonsynonymous substitution" ["Différance" 1982: 12] for *pharmakon*, for *supplement*, for *hymen*, etc. inasmuch as these terms (though they are not exactly terms) all exemplify the same movement of undecidability – that arises from the differing and deferring play of signification within which the text is immersed, and acknowledges that this conflictuality "can never be totally resolved" (Derrida, "Positions" 1981: 43).

However, Derrida acknowledges that he is himself operating within the Western metaphysical tradition, that he is unable to fully escape this way of thinking that he criticizes (is unable to resolve the contradiction), and is consequently producing his critique of metaphysical thought from within metaphysics. A deconstructive reading (or writing) thus attempts to prevent itself from becoming totalizing, from presenting itself as being fully present or meaningful, exempt from the play of signification. Deconstructive writing must thus be not only "dislodging", but "dislodged" as well (Derrida, "Positions"

1981: 42). The double science, then, in "accordance with [Derrida's] deconstruction of summary meaning, … mimes the *movement* of desire rather than its fulfillment, refusing to stop and totalize itself, or doing so only by feint" (Johnson in Derrida 1981: xvi). Some of the "mechanisms" of what Johnson terms "this signifying frustration" include Derrida's syntax, his "grammar [which] is often 'unspeakable'" – with "rampant" ambiguity, sentences and even parentheses that "go on for pages", and puctuation that "arrests without necessarily clarifying"; allusions to often "unnamed sources and addressees" entailed by the "pluralization of writing's references and voices"; the [*f*]*ading in and out*" of the "[b]eginnings and endings" of some of his essays; and the sense that in his essays the "unit of coherence is not necessarily the sentence, the word, the paragraph, or even the essay", but that "[*m*]*ultiple coherences*" are "woven together through the bindings of grammar …, 'theme'…, anagrammatical plays", etc. (Johnson in Derrida 1981: xvi-xvii).

Deconstruction, that double science which is not a science, which makes points even as it defers them, which prompts desire even as it frustrates it, dislodges even as it is dislodged, might thus be characterized as being *playful*, inasmuch as there is a "tension between play and presence", inasmuch as "[p]lay is the disruption of presence", inasmuch as "[p]lay is always play of absence *and* presence" (Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play" 1978: 292, my italics). Deconstruction is playful inasmuch as the "concept of *play* keeps itself beyond" any simple, totalizing "opposition" (Derrida, "Différance" 1982: 7), inasmuch as "differences *play*: in language, in speech too, and in the exchange between language and speech. It is playful inasmuch as what "is written as *différance* …

will be the playing movement that 'produces' – by means of something that is not simply

an activity – … differences, … effects of difference" (Derrida, "Différance" 1982: 11),

inasmuch as *différance* characterizes the play of signification – of differing and deferring.

Now let us play.

(Four) play(s)

The Mercy of Venice

We will begin with the impossible. We will begin with the "'experience' (which means to travel or go through)" of "paralysis (the inability to move)" in the face of an impossibility (Caputo in Derrida & Caputo 1997: 111). We will begin by reading an experience of undecidability that Lancelot Gobbo explains he is enduring at the start of Act II Scene ii of *The Merchant of Venice*:

Certainly, my conscience will serve me to run from this Jew my master. The fiend is at my elbow and tempts me, saying to me "Gobbo, Lancelot Gobbo", or "Good Gobbo", or "Good Lancelot Gobbo, use your legs, take the start, run away." My conscience says "No: take heed, honest Lancelot, take heed, honest Gobbo ... do not run, scorn running with thy heels." Well, the most courageous fiend bids me pack. "Fia!" says the fiend, "Away!" says the fiend. "'Fore the heavens rouse up a brave mind," says the fiend, "and run." Well, ... my conscience says "Lancelot, budge not!" "Budge!" says the fiend. "Budge not!" says my conscience. "Conscience", say I, "you council well." "Fiend", say I, "you council well." To be ruled by my conscience, I should stay with the Jew my master who ... is a kind of devil; and to run away from the Jew, I should be ruled by the fiend who – saving your reverence – is the devil himself. Certainly the Jew is the

very devil incarnation, and, in my conscience, my conscience is but a kind

of hard conscience to offer to counsel me to stay with the Jew.

(ll. 1-22)

This parody of the struggle of a conscience, reminiscent of Faust, with the good angel at the one shoulder and devil at the other, shows Gobbo experiencing an impossible situation. We may follow Mahood (1987: 82) in noting that I Peter 2.18-19 demands that servants "submit to [their] masters and show them complete respect, not only those who are kind ..., but also those who are harsh" (Good News Edition), and this is what Gobbo's conscience – which perhaps reflects or is supposed to reflect a kind of Christian morality – suggests he does; but Gobbo sees his master as being "the very devil incarnation", and it is uncertain whether the Christian doctrine of meek, humble subservience to *any* master does not clash with an arguably equally important Christian doctrine – that of not serving the devil – in this particular situation. Gobbo is here faced with the same type of interpretative dilemma that led Biblical scholars to develop hermeneutics, the type of dilemma that Kant was trying to avoid, always and regardless of context, when he proposed rational – and thus, he believed, unquestionable, eternal, transcendental and absolute – grounds for morality: he is in a situation in which the moral law (here represented by Christian doctrine) according to which he lives (or tries to), contradicts itself, demonstrating its own contingency to "historical, social, and linguistic" contexts (Caputo in Derrida & Caputo 1997: 52). Biblical law and Kant's transcendental moral criteria alike, as much as they try to provide an unquestionable, supreme guideline

according to which all moral decisions must in all situations be made, as much as they try

to build an undeconstructible foundation that encapsulates the essentials of morality,

cannot escape the "irreducible *alterity* of the world" (Caputo in Derrida & Caputo 1997:

52, my italics). This alterity arises from what Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysics

of presence and of logocentrism has already shown, that there is no God or Law

transcendentally *present* in each situation or context, waiting, like a *deus ex machina*, for

its cue to descend from the heavens, presenting itself to resolve each dilemma; there are

simply an infinite number of different contexts within which different individuals will

interpret the differing and deferring signs which make up the language within which

moral laws are communicated differently.

Gobbo's situation demands that he either serve the devil by disobeying the Biblical law

that insists that servants serve their masters regardless of their masters' natures, or serve

the devil by quite literally acting as his servant. Regardless of how Gobbo chooses to act,

he will in some way be transgressing the moral law according to which he lives. This is

why his situation is impossible. Regardless of how he chooses to act, he will in some way

be transgressing a moral law because it is in some sense present, but the moral law is

simultaneously absent, refusing to present him with a clear sense of a just choice. The

Biblical law does not fully (manifestly, in a way that defies amibiguity) cover the

contingency that a servant, by being faithful to his bad master, actually transgresses other

laws laid out in the Bible. A faithful servant, asked by his master to murder someone, for

example, could hardly be blamed for disobeying.

However, we might reply, nothing quite so drastic is ever demanded of Gobbo by Shylock. And this brings us face to face with our own undecidabiliy: can we accept this isolated metaphor that regards Shylock as the devil incarnate as sufficient evidence that he is a bad enough master to warrant the creation of the dilemma I have been outlining in Gobbo's mind? Traditional textual interpretation, with its understanding of metaphor as "a detour to truth" – a truth "that the critic can deliver through her interpretation" (Spivak in Derrida 1976: lxxvi) – might respond to this problem by trying to establish whether or not Shylock is *truly* such a bad master. Traditional criticism might scour the entire play for other metaphors which support this one, desperately searching the text for enough *evidence* to make a case in favour of or against Gobbo's image of Shylock as the devil, finally pronouncing judgement, perhaps, as to how Shakespeare intended us to view Shylock. And, depending on the result of the hearing, Gobbo may be prosecuted for disobeying the laws governing service laid out by Peter, or released with all charges dropped because he sees the *truth* about Shylock, and demonstrates to servants everywhere what the truly moral solution in such a case is.

We are not, however, searching for the truth of the text. We are not attempting to make manifest the truth of the text, or of Gobbo's situation. This does not mean that we are ignoring the "'metaphoric' structure" of the text. But we shall regard the metaphors not as bearing truth, as "reducible to truth", but as being "'as such' ... part of the textuality ... of the text", using them "not as a transcendental key that will unlock the way to truth but as a *bricoleur's* or tinker's tool – a 'positive lever'" (Spivak in Derrida 1976: lxxiv-lxxv). What matters is not the truth behind the metaphor, but the appearance (neither presenting

itself by coming into view nor presenting a chimera by seeming) of the metaphor in this context: Gobbo describes Shylock as "the very devil incarnation" – not merely a 'monster' or 'fiend' as he may have done – and this establishes the force of the dilemma I have outlined. Only if he describes Shylock as the devil, thus establishing moral justification for his desire to leave him that is at least of equal strength to his moral obligation to stay, can there be a *moral* dilemma in the first place. If he were to simply bewail not being paid enough, or having to work unreasonable hours, or list any other reason that may be seen from a Christian perspective as merely pragmatic and not moral, there would be no argument in Gobbo's conscience. There would be no chance of the "fiend" at his shoulder bidding him to "run away" eventually being regarded as "friendly" – being viewed as friendly, having the *appearance* of being friendly, the appearance of the being of friendship. Gobbo perhaps seems aware of this – unconsciously at least: he does not use this metaphor immediately, but only as a response to his having called the aforementioned "fiend" "the devil himself" as opposed to Shylock's being merely "a kind of devil", and thus not fully devil. Might we then not disregard the entire crisis as having been constructed by Gobbo, and thus not being a real crisis; might we not say that the crisis simply is not *there*?

This all appears to be rather more complicated than another scene concerning a moral dilemma in *The Merchant of Venice*. The so-called 'bond story' struggles with a difficulty similar to the one Gobbo faces: the Venetian court is caught between the two evils of obeying the letter of the law, which would result in Antonio's death, on the one hand, and disregarding the law, undermining it, and thus depriving it of its function to

regulate the actions of the society's citizens and prevent chaos and lawlessness, on the other. Unlike Gobbo's dilemma, this one rises purely from circumstance, and there is no question of the duke's having created the situation for self-interest; we can feel assured that the dilemma is fully present. An interpretation of the court scene that perhaps presents itself is that it is "a symbolic confrontation between law ..., on the one hand, and equity with its religious equivalent, mercy, on the other" (Jordan 1982: 49), with Shylock representing both the secular law, "which, to be just to all in general, must only approximate to justice in particular cases" (Bradbrook 1969: 132), and the "Old Law of the ancient Hebrews" which is being disputed by the "New Covenant of Christianity" (Jordan 1982: 49).

We shall for certain reasons avoid confronting the religious aspect of this particular interpretation too extensively; we shall avoid, to some extent, seeing the play, as Coghill does, as "an allegory of 'Justice and Mercy, of the Old Law and New'" (Midgley 1969: 194). We might do this because although Shylock is Jewish it is perhaps a bit of a stretch to see him as representing Hebrew law and (implicitly) its shortcomings. In the first place, the law that he (ab)uses in order to exact his revenge upon Antonio is not a Hebraic law but a secular law laid down and enforced by the Christian rulers of Venice; one might argue in response that "Shylock's creed [of] an eye for an eye" is sufficiently allusive to the Old Testament to "lead to the identification of [the] Jew with legal concepts of justice" and to provide grounds "for the opposition of the Old Law to the New" (Bradbrook 1969: 133). However, such an argument would assume a generalized view of the differences between Old Testament and New, between Judaic Law and

Christian Law, the latter which, of course, contains perhaps in places as harsh punishments and threats (and enactments) of heavenly justice for those who defy God's law ("I tell you that if you do not turn away from your sins, you will all die" [Luke 13.5], to cite but one example) as the former does. It would assume the same level of generalization of Hebrew law as the identification of Judaism with usury does, when "both the Talmud and the Midrash condemn usury", and it was the laws laid down by the *Christians* that in medieval times so limited the number of professions Jews were allowed to pursue that many of them turned to moneylending to earn a living (Mahood 1987: 20). (I think one would also be hard pressed to suggest that the play represents the opposition of the Old, Judaic Law of capitalism to the New, Christian communism.) We might allow Shylock himself the honour of further steering us away from an interpretation which would suggest that *The Merchant of Venice* contrasts vengeful Judaic Law with merciful Christian Law: his justification for his vengeance on Antonio is that, like Christians, Jews are human, and thus, like Christians, seek vengeance when they are wronged; in fact, Shylock claims that it is the "villainy you [Christians] teach me" that he will "execute" by demanding a pound of Antonio's flesh (III.i.56).

A final important reason why we shall steer away from an interpretation that sees the court scene as a simultaneous confrontation between law and equity *and* "the Old Law of the Hebrews and the New Covenant of Christianity" is that it is very difficult in the latter contrast to sustain a coherent distinction between "Law" and "Covenant", the apparent site of the said contrast suggested by Jordan (1982: 49). A law (or set of laws) – a 'thing laid down' – is a very similar thing – perhaps a parallel concept – to a covenant, a *co-*

venant, a coming together: to lay down a law is to prescribe the ways in which members of a society are permitted to behave within all contexts that approximate the context for which the law was created; a covenant, although appearing far more democratic and representative of the masses since it is a coming together, is guilty of the same reductiveness that a law may be accused of. In both words there is a sense of a blocking off of alterity – both words struggle with the same impossibility, that in order (in the words of a critic who would have Shylock stand for the law) "to be just to all in general", they "must only approximate to justice in particular cases" (Bradbrook 1969: 132). The coming together of a group of people, in its attempt to unify, to reach consensus, to appease the general appetite, must ignore the particular, the different, the other that is not anticipated – cannot be anticipated because of its very otherness – in the same way that a law, a laying down of boundaries, does. The New Covenant of Christianity thus cannot be seen as representing the religious equivalent of equity, contrasted with the Old Law of the Hebrews and with laws in general. The Christian Covenant makes the same attempt as laws of all sorts to prescribe to a group of people, regardless of individual differences between them and individual contexts within which they find themselves, how to behave – what moral or ethical foundation they should build their behaviour upon. We consider again poor Lancelot Gobbo and his moral dilemma. He sees himself as trapped within the reductive confines of the Christian Covenant in much the same way as Antonio is trapped in the reductive confines of the legal system, which Shylock abuses not because the reductiveness of secular law is more similar to Hebrew Law and thus more prone to manipulation by a Jew, but because he is in a situation in which he may pragmatically (as opposed to according to moral prescriptions) expose and gain from the contradictions

inherent in any set of principles that must always be followed regardless of context. The Christian Portia is certainly as quick to pragmatically demand adherence to the letter of the law, when she turns the *jus strictum* that prescribes that Shylock's bond is valid into a *jus strictissimum* that demands that he may take no more and no less than his pound of flesh (Jordan 1982: 51).

So, if we regard the court scene not as a dispute between vengeful Hebraic Law and the more equitable Christian Covenant, will we view it as a dispute between strict secular law and equity? In order to answer that question, we must first examine a final aspect of a religious or pseudo-religious interpretation of the scene: the "commonplace" identification of equity with mercy, which is called its "religious equivalent" (Jordan 1982: 49). Considering my reasons for not delving into a religious interpretation, I would suggest that this identification of equity with religious mercy is similarly inappropriate for our investigations: the concept of mercy seems to be closed off, restrticted, in a purely Christian context, merely playing a role in Christian doctrine. Furthermore, the equivalence between equity and mercy seems similarly restrictive: we shall examine the concept of mercy in more detail later on, but suffice it to say, even a superficial comparison of the two words suggests to us that they are not fully equivalent. The word 'equity' in its technical sense refers to a specific "method of adjudication" – a use of the word which Jordan shows it to be rather fruitless to pursue in the context of *The Merchant of Venice*, as the court scene has "little claim to reality", to any real or even likely legal systems, and thus lacks the "substantive accuracy" necessary to make an examination of the "technical feature[s] of equitable jurisdiction" viable (Jordan 1982:

52; 58). In its more general sense, equity is a closer equivalent to justice before the law. It refers to "the milder principle of law" which tries to mete justice equally (*aequitas*) to all people in proportions equivalent to the severity of their crimes. Mercy is very different from justice. Perhaps it is even contrary to justice, as when mercy is shown to a criminal by making his punishment less severe than the nature of his crime demands – making his punishment less severe than the punishment given to other criminals for the same crime. Mercy defies equal treatment by treating a criminal more beneficently than justice would demand.

This does not mean that we are going to do away with the role of mercy in the scene altogether. Instead, we are simply separating mercy firstly from its religious association, and secondly from its identification with equity. As a result, our slightly modified version of an apparent interpretation of the scene is that it is a dispute between the law, on the one hand, and equity and mercy, on the other, a dispute in which equity and mercy must assert their superior status to the law, must remind the law of their presence within it, must remind it that it is created in order to serve them, and must thus cede to their demands.

The first part of this dispute (involving equity) certainly seems apparent in the court scene: according to the law, it is perfectly acceptable for Shylock to demand a pound of Antonio's flesh as punishment for the latter's not paying his debt to him, a punishment we feel would not be just, regardless of what prior agreements were made between the parties involved. The mutilation of the defendant demanded by the plaintiff seems

unreasonably harsh and unnaturally cruel, and the compliance of the law with a demand so "repugnant to reason and nature" (Jordan 1982: 58) cannot be regarded as being just. The law, having been 'laid down', is "stabilizable and statutory, calculable, a system of regulated and coded prescriptions" (Derrida in Derrida & Caputo 1997: 136), asking of its judge not to regard the unique conditions of the "singularity" of the case, but to be a mere "calculating machine" which needs not "ensure justice but mere conformity to the law" (Caputo in Derrida & Caputo 1997: 137). The law, as an impersonal structure, "is pusillanimous and mean-spirited, blind and unkind, ... tight-fisted and rigoristic, wooden and 'legalistic'" (Caputo in Derrida & Caputo 1997: 150). Motivated by "a desire to be just", the court is unwilling to allow Shylock his pound of flesh, but has no power to undermine what has been laid down, lest the entire legal system collapse as a result (Jordan 1982: 58).

'Equity,' on the other hand, encapsulates both the justice that the court seeks, and the means by which Portia achieves this justice: Shylock is defeated by equity in the sense that it is the equal treatment of all before the law and the equal treatment of all laws before the court that causes his downfall. Equity demands that he is not permitted in "the cutting" of Antonio's "pound of flesh" to "shed / One drop of Christian blood" (IV.i.304-306), that his insistence on the legality of the bond and refusal to abide by anything but the letter of the law be mirrored by an equally strict insistence on the legal wording of the bond and refusal to abide by anything but the letters written on the contract. Equity and justice thus prevail, foiling Shylock's attempt to manipulate the law, and the play

convincingly sketches the problematics of the law in its blindness to contingency and difference, urging us to temper its harshness with more humane equity and justice.

There is a problem, however. Somewhere along the way the distinction between equity and the law, which seemed to present itself so convincingly, has disappeared. For, while the law demands that Shylock's bond be adhered to, and equity demands that it be adhered to according to the exact conditions stipulated in the contract, does the law itself – in its regulations about contracts – not *also* demand that the bond be adhered to according to the exact conditions stipulated in the contract? And does equity not *also* demand that it is adhered to in the first place? Equity demands that all is equal before the law: it demands that an unreasonable and unnatural contract be regarded by the law as being as valid – if it adheres to all legal requirements – as any other contract. Equity does not simply challenge the structure of the law, does not only refute its laid-downness. Rather, it also reinforces the structure, focuses its attention wholly on the structure, bracketing off the content of a particular case and preventing the arrival of the other. It focuses on equality, on unification, on the *covenant* of the law. The structure of the bond is shown by Portia to be more important than its content – although it is unreasonable and unnatural to expect someone to cut a pound of flesh from another, this is what equity allows be done, since the contract says nothing about blood; this is equivalent to Shylock's bracketing off the unreasonable and unnatural content of the bond, which allows him to kill Antonio simply because Antonio has not repaid his debt in time, by focusing on the structure – the fact that it is a legal contract, signed by both parties, etc. This is what equity allows need be done. It is not distinguishable as separate from the

law, but informs the law on how to be equitable even as it serves as merely a function of it, a function that serves to reinforce the very blindness, rigidity, reductiveness and structuredness of the law that it ostensibly challenges in this scene; it is not the ideal origin of the law, it does not infuse the law with its presence, but rather functions in the same way that the law does – is informed by the law as it informs the law.

But this argument challenges equity only as equality before the law – and does nothing to undermine the dispute between the law and equity *as justice*. Our interpretation seems to be safe – the law is a function not of equity, but of justice. Surely, although it may be lawful and equitable of Shylock to demand his pound of flesh, it cannot be viewed as being just – in fact, we have been consistently referring to justice in terms of a contradiction between it and the law that we assume to be present in the scene. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case. There is no point at which the justice of Shylock's claim is challenged by any character. Portia uses the word "justice" four times from lines 193 to 199 and another four times from lines 311 to 335 for a total of eight times in the court scene, and each use merely confirms Shylock's plea as just. She begs that, "Though justice be [his] plea" (IV.i.194), he allow that "mercy seasons [his] justice" (IV.i.193), trying to "mitigate the justice of [his] plea" (IV.i.199); with some irony she insists that since he "urgest justice ... / [He] shalt have justice more than [he] desirest" (IV.i.311-312), he "shall have all justice" (IV.i.317) but "merely justice" (IV.i.335). The irony does not challenge Shylock's claim to justice, does not refer to some higher, more just justice. It merely confirms Shylock's view of justice as a simulacrum of equity, as emulating a blind adherence to the law in all its reductiveness.

We have been speaking about the law as being blind to otherness, and might think here of

justice being similarly blind; but we might be reminded of the ideal conception of justice

as blind, might think that it is in fact necessary for justice to be blind in order to be fully

just, in order for it to judge not acording to the appearances of a case, but according to

what is correct and fair. Yet this very necessary blindness of justice, which is perhaps a

prerequisite for its fairness, seems to *simultaneously* prevent it from seeing fairness – by

seeing only fairness, only equity, which is of course just the way we would like justice to

see. Within the very possibility of justice, within its fulfillment, lies its impossibility and

end, as we see when blind justice, like equity, provides both the grounds for Shylock's

claims and the grounds for the defeat of his claims; like equity, justice does not fully

dispute the law, but functions like it. The appeal to something higher, more pure, fairer,

and more human than the law, which is supposedly based on it, actually turns out to also

be an appeal to something that cannot be fully differentiated from the law, at least not

according to the type of differentiation – in which something will act as transcendental to

the law, informing it with a sense of how it should behave in any and all situations – that

we are looking for. The scene's apparent demonstration of the unfairness – the injustice –

of Shylock's claim turns out to be a demonstration of a limitation in justice according to

which justice may be seen to act in a way that is merely just – that is 'only' – designating

a limitation inscribed within the word 'justice', an aspect of the just act that is precisely

generalizing and totalizing in a way quite contrary to the kind of transcendental justice

we are seeking, even at the same moment that justice behaves in a way that is *contrary to*

unfairness, that is equitable. There seems to be no higher principle fully defended in the

scene, no moral truth that makes the reader feel completely satisfied and vindicated that Shylock's suit is turned against him. It seems that justice, in its blind striving towards complete fairness – towards just fairness, only fairness – presents itself as a higher principle fully defended in the scene.

But perhaps not as the source of our satisfaction; or not the only source of our satisfaction: we enjoy the fullness of the justice of Shylock's plea – the preciseness with which it is carried out – yet we enjoy it not only for the sake of justice, but perhaps also because we feel the injustice of Shylock's claim as much as we feel its justice, because we feel that there is something wrong about his claim and the law that upholds it. Perhaps what is missing, what is left to reclaim the law for the function it was created to serve – a transcendental function – is mercy. Indeed, it is mercy that is shown to be at odds with Shylock's just, equitable and lawful claim. It is mercy that is shown to be capable of challenging the law. The duke sees Shylock's adherence to the bond as being the result of his being "void and empty / From any dram of mercy" (IV.i.5); he thus pleads with Shylock, "show thy mercy" (IV.i.20), hoping that his mercy will annul the bond, for this is the only way in which justice may be achieved (and defied). Portia similarly appeals to Shylock's mercy as the only means of preventing the law from being carried out: once she has discovered the exact nature of the situation, she offers, "[t]hen must the Jew be merciful" (IV.i.178), as the only alternative to the bond's being carried out, and spends twenty lines explaining to Shylock the nature of and virtue in mercy (IV.i.180-199), finally begging him to season "justice" with "mercy" (IV.i.193). Such 'seasoning' would be done to "mitigate the justice of [his] plea" - mercy can be used to loosen the rigidity of

the law, to weaken its harshness. Mercy may be just the thing necessary to open the law's

blind eyes and force it to see the other, to acknowledge difference, to notice that "every

'case' is different; every case is more than a case, a *casus* - a falling from or declension

of universality" (Caputo in Derrida & Caputo 1997: 137). Mercy may compel a judge to

see a situation not as "a case but a singularity" (Caputo in Derrida & Caputo 1997: 137),

providing the justice with sentience beyond one that merely mechanically calculates

variables according to the formulas and aphorisms laid out by laws. I suggested before

that mercy may be seen as contrary to equity, and, since equity refers precisely to

conformity to those structures of the law that make it unbendable, it seems to be contrary

to the law as well.

When trying to convince Shylock to be merciful, Portia states that "the quality of mercy

is not strained" (IV.i.180), that it is not forced or distorted, perverted beyond its original

intention – again contrasting it with the law and justice as these are portrayed in the

scene. In order to illustrate the point, she compares mercy to "gentle rain" that "droppeth

... from the heaven" (IV.i.181), showing it to be natural, spontaneous, giving, generous

and godly – providing life-giving nourishment to "the place beneath" (IV.i.182) and

expecting nothing in return – as opposed to man-made law which is contrived,

procedural, and used to take away freedom and even – as in this case – innocent life. The

'giving' nature of mercy is then made more explicit and extended, as Portia explains that

not only the receiver of mercy, but its giver, benefits from the transaction: "It is twice

blest; / It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes" (IV.i.182-183). Yet it is precisely

the fact that the giver benefits that acts as the lever to the exposure of the contradiction

that resides in mercy. Portia spends the next few lines expounding the value of mercy in kings, which ostensibly lends some weight and strength to her explanation of the value of mercy in general; but what this actually does is expose the link between mercy and power. She insists that mercy "is above [the] sceptred sway" (IV.i.189) that represents the king's "temporal power" (IV.i.186). The reason she gives is that it is when temporal power is combined with mercy that "earthly power doth ... show likest God's" (IV.i.192). This statement which seemingly innocently seems to suggest that the practice of mercy brings one closer to the perfection of the actions of God, who serves as a transcendental example of the Good practice of power towards which one should strive, simultaneously bears the trace of a suggestion that earthly power comes closest to the level of godly power when it is combined with mercy. While trying to suggest that mercy makes one more alike to the beneficent Christian God, Portia hints that mercy makes one possess god-like power.

So where is this trace leading us? Firstly, it helps us note one of the preconditions of mercy: in order to show mercy to someone they must first be in your power – hence Portia's using the example of first kings and then God. Kings are of course representative of 'earthly' and 'temporal' power, and God of infinite power, of omnipotence. They are in a position from which they can be merciful, unlike a beggar, for example, who has little opportunity to show mercy. Kings and God have the power over people's livelihoods and their lives: their decrees could make a rich man poor, or even have someone put to death. It is only their beneficent mercy that spares their subjects. People are thus *at their mercy*. A beggar is unable to show mercy because he has no-one in his

power – he has no-one at his mercy. A beggar also cannot show mercy because he does not have anything to give. And this brings us back to the giving nature of mercy that Portia highlights. Whenever mercy is shown something is given: a ruler who does not act as a complete tyrant gives her subjects the opportunity to live their lives in a relative amount of freedom; she gives them freedom which, importantly, is not inherently theirs, since she has the power to take it away.

So far so good. Although power is a prerequisite for mercy, and an act of mercy always involves a giving, this does not problematize mercy too severely. There still appears to be no real contradiction. But we ran into problems earlier on when Portia suggested that one who shows mercy does not only always give, but always gains as well. And the link with power makes these problems explicit: by being merciful, secular rulers may make their power more like God's – they can become more powerful. This is because if you have someone in your power and give him freedom from that power, he becomes indebted to you and gives you more power over him in return. A merciful king, by showing mercy, constantly gains more power over his subjects as they accumulate a kind of 'mercy debt' – a debt of gratitude. A tyrant, by constantly demonstrating his more repressive powers, conversely loses power over his people: they owe him nothing, so, if they can overcome any ideological inhibitions against regicide, they can quite happily revolt.

This exchanging nature of mercy is certainly hinted at in the court scene. Three lines after concluding her account of the mercy of kings – in the same speech – Portia continues to try to convince Shylock of the value of mercy, but this time with an allusion to the Lord's

Prayer: "We do pray for mercy, / And that same prayer doth teach us all to *render* / The deeds of mercy" (IV.i.196-198, my italics). We pray for mercy from God, who has us completely in his power, and in return offer to show mercy to others. 'Show us mercy, as we show mercy unto others.' Portia is proposing that the giver of mercy gains mercy as a reward for his mercifulness, and, conversely, that when mercy is shown to one, one is obliged to render – to pay back – that mercy. The duke proposes a similar transaction earlier in the scene, when he tries to convince Shylock to drop his suit against Antonio. He asks Shylock: "How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering none?" (IV.i.88). Because Shylock refuses to give, he cannot expect to receive. In this context it is useful to note that the word 'mercy' in fact is derived from the Latin *merces*, which means both pity and reward. It is a cousin of the word 'merchant', and like it happily engages in trade for profit. Show pity, and you gain your reward; give mercy, and you shall receive power. Mercy is not a spontaneous, generous gift-giving in which nothing is expected in return, but rather a give-and-take exchange, a trade not unlike any other the merchants of Venice engage in, in which no one party gives more than he takes. For this reason the word 'mercy', used so persistently by the duke to try to persuade Shylock to drop his suit (IV.i.6, 20, 88), is conspicuously absent in his triumphant speech when he shows mercy to Shylock by sparing his life. Instead of gloatingly using the word 'mercy,' he merely congratulates himself on "the difference of our spirit" (IV.i.364) from Shylock's. The word 'mercy' here would betray his own mercenary use: he demonstrates his mercy in line 365 – "I pardon thee thy life before thou ask it" – and demonstrates the link between mercy and power, since Shylock does not ask for mercy – "Nay, take my life and all, pardon not that" (IV.i.370) – knowing that the duke's pardon indebts him to him, places

him in his power. The absence of the word 'mercy' hides this power play of mercy, disguises it as a beneficent 'difference' of 'spirit' - an apparent challenge to the meanspiritedness of the law, justice, equity, and Shylock. Mercy thus contradicts itself by appearing to be (presenting itself as being) self-serving and mercenary, while appearing to be (presenting itself as being) wholly directed at the other, to be completely self-sacrificing. The contradictory play involved in an act of mercy cannot be escaped, as every act of mercy is simultaneously generous and self-serving, providing its giver with a reward for complete generosity.

Portia's question, "What mercy can you render him, Antonio?", exposes both mercy and the duke, and shows an awareness of the benefits a mercy-giver may reap as a result of his 'kindness'. She offers Antonio a chance to mete vengeance upon Shylock – to 'render', to repay Shylock's attempt on his life – by suggesting that he be merciful and give him more than the law would have him deserve, thus placing him in a debt of gratitude that no amount of ducats or flesh can repay. She gives Antonio the chance to take Shylock into his power, and Antonio catches the hint – spots the trace.

It should not come as a surprise that it is Portia's speech which demonstrates the most insight into the ambiguity of mercy, since it is her actions that most clearly evidence the power play involved not only in the giving of mercy, but in giving in general. Portia has been identified by several critics as being consistently involved in power play throughout the play. Berger (1981: 159) suggests it is merely because of her "fear for [Bassanio's] haste to win her in order to secure his fortune" that she seeks to gain power over him;

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Newman (1987: 23) shows that a "sex/gender system" that "produces and reproduces" the "exchange of women", in which "the traffic of women is only part of an entire system of 'sexual access, genealogical statuses, lineage names ... , rights and *people* – men, women and children – in concrete systems of social relationships", exists in the patriarchal society of *The Merchant of Venice*. It is to escape this system that Portia involves herself so deeply in power play (it is an escape perhaps more successful than Park [1983: 109-116] would suggest, as will become clear shortly). Whatever her motivation, Portia gains a good deal of power, over Bassanio and others, through the act of gift-giving. As both Berger and Newman's essays seem to suggest, Portia's role as gift-giver allows her to place a debt of gratitude on first Bassanio, "then ... Antonio, and finally ... Venice itself" (Newman 1987: 26) that allows her more power than a woman within the patriarchal Venetian society would normally have access to. In III.ii.149-171 she ostensibly gives Bassanio a gift he cannot hope to repay: having listed some of her qualities, she commits that her "gentle spirit" ...

> to you and yours
>
> Is now converted. But now I was the lord
>
> Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
>
> Queen o'er myself; and even now, but now,
>
> This house, these servants, and this same myself
>
> Are yours, my lord's.

(III.ii.163-171)

In actual fact, by giving him absolute power over her – which he has a right to anyway in Venetian society – she also "lays him under a burden of gratitude beyond his means to discharge", making him feel as though he has a debt to pay her, and reclaiming some of the power she automatically gives away by becoming his bride. She further burdens him with the gift of a ring, which she uses "to convert this first gift to a loan, a bond, which can be forfeit, but even in imposing *that* qualification she brings it off as a generous act" (Berger 1981: 161). When, disguised as a lawyer, Portia succeeds in confounding Shylock's attempt to relieve Antonio of a pound of flesh, she yet again places Bassanio in her power, since it is because of him that Antonio entered the bond in the first place, and he thus sees himself as being responsible for his friend's safety in this particular context. It is this power of giving, of placing someone in one's debt, that allows her to so easily gain the ring from Bassanio, who feels obliged to repay 'the doctor', Portia, in whatever way it is conceivably possible for him to do. Of course, when she confronts him about giving the ring away, she demonstrates how her gift was given not in some ideal spirit of giving in which nothing was expected in return, but in a kind of mercantile spirit – not unlike the mercy of the duke and Antonio – where something – gratitude, love, freedom, an oath, etc. – is expected in return. Bassanio, understanding the gift in this same way, feels that he has transgressed the rules of gift-receiving ("I were best to cut my left hand off / And swear I lost the ring defending it" [V.i.176])[1], and his remorse and shame give Portia yet more power over him: how can he ever make up to her – render her – his giving away her precious gift? When she returns the ring and reveals all, her gift-giving

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[1]Bassanio suggests only cutting his *left* hand off, indicating that at this point the power that Portia has over him may not supercede the already existing power he has over her by courtesy of their respective positions within a patriarchal society. Underlying his unwillingness to part with his *right* hand may be "man's

reaches its overwhelming culmination. She has given Antonio his life, paying back Bassanio's debt of gratitude to him, and she has given Bassanio the ring *again*, given him a second chance when he owes her so much already. She has shown him mercy, and in return, can take power. Portia's generosity pushes Bassanio so deeply into the red that he will have to spend his entire married life with her repaying the debt (Berger 1981: 161).

Of course, Portia is not the only character who uses gift-giving to gain power over others. Nerissa's giving Gratiano a ring as well quite obviously mirrors the exchange of the main plot; more importantly, Antonio, whose relationship with Bassanio has been characterized "not only as a version of idealized Renaissance friendship, but also as homoerotic" (Newman 1987: 22) – binds Bassanio to him by entering into the bond with Shylock: he not only gives Bassanio the money he needs to win Portia, but risks his life for him in the bond, placing poor Bassanio (who seems to spend the majority of the play becoming indebted to someone or other) in a grave debt that he will be forced to repay by remaining close friends with Antonio. By providing him with the opportunity he needs to introduce an unwelcome (in Antonio's eyes) third party, Portia, into their relationship, Antonio actually binds their relationship more securely (Portia's rescuing Antonio, of course, elevates her power over Bassanio above Antonio's, loosening his hold on him) (Berger 1981: 157).

Though we might wish to pause here for a moment from a desire to be equitable, to be just, to be merciful. In a moment of free-spiritedness we might stop to reconsider our

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assumption that men are superior to women, that it is men who save each other" (Berger 1981: 161).

position (since we now have mercy and gift-giving at our mercy). Our reconsideration of the concepts of mercy and gift-giving as mercenary and selfish has done little to recognize the mercy of mercy, and the selflessness of gift-giving – which it is important not to forget. For a certain mercy *is* shown to Shylock, even if he does not ask it, and even asks it not to be shown, and Portia (and others) *does give*, does give freely even as she receives – gives *what is not expected* of her to give, and perhaps receives more than is expected of her (as a woman) to gain. What we have tried to see in the movement of giving is not simply giving as receiving, but rather receiving as a kind of requirement of giving in the moment that giving is defined by its refusal to demand a rendering: we have tried to problematize giving (and mercy as a giving of mercy) insofar as it presents itself as a *pure* giving, insofar as it presents itself as the *opposite* of trade; yet we cannot recognize it as exactly equivalent to trade either, as it gives what is not asked for – what it is not expected to give. We can only, perhaps, recognize that there are certain preconditions for giving: not only that there must be a willingness to give or a certain free-spiritedness, but that there must be something to give, and that there is therefore a certain power play involved in giving – as the very prerequisite for giving – that prevents giving from ever being purely and only giving, a fully present giving.

Thus Brown's assertion that "Shylock lends only for what he can gain, Antonio for the sake of friendship" (1969: 164), an assertion that may inadvertantly touch upon the problematics of gift-giving we have been exploring by equating Antonio's lending with giving, seems accurate only insofar as we regard friendship as something Antonio might

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Portia, as a woman – an other – deserves the sacrifice of only the *other* hand.

gain (from the exchange). The implication that Brown is looking for, that all the characters in *The Merchant of Venice* may be contrasted with Shylock, since he is the only one who acts purely for profit, can simply not be found in the mercantile world of this text – in its presentation of mercy and gift-giving. We might pause and ask ourselves: who exactly *is The Merchant of Venice* (Newman 1987: 19)? The most obvious answer would certainly seem to be that it would have to be either Shylock or Antonio, who are, of course, merchants by profession. But the persistent appearance of mercy and its related concept of gift-giving within *The Merchant of Venice*, within the 'merchantness', if you will, of Venice, within mercy's appearance *as* the merchant of Venice – or at least one of Venice's merchants – allows us to question any distinction between acts of generosity and their more mercenary counterparts, and thus allows us to identify a host of characters acting as, among other things, merchants in Venice (Newman 1987: 19). There exists simply no ideal reference point outside of the give-and-take, no mercy outside of power and reward, no gift outside of obligation and indebtedness – nor, perhaps, inside, if by inside we mean that mercy and gift-giving are *purely* or *only* self-serving, which of course they are not, are not purely or only anything nor nothing. There is also no absolute opposition between the greedy usurer Shylock and the loving, generous, merciful Antonio, Portia, Bassanio, etc. (besides the mercy and generosity, even the love is suspect: "Bassanio does not hesitate to say that Portia's wealth is necessary to his happiness" [Van Doren 1969: 91]); rather there seems to be something of Shylock inscribed within the other characters, and something of the other characters inscribed within Shylock. Neither is there an absolute opposition between the rigid, restrictive, reductive and impersonal structures of the law that bind and imprison the other, and a

kinder, gentler equity or justice which acts as a counterbalance to the blindness of the law and recognizes singularity and difference, making judgements based on individual merits – on singularities – rather than performing what might appear to us as mere mechanical calculation: equity and justice function like the law – in an equivalent, and an equivalently blind and fair, manner – and serve to reinforce it (and its fairness) rather than challenge it (and its unfairness); nor is there even an opposition between the cold, hard, unforgiving law and gentle, pitying mercy, as mercy is similarly blind to the other – binding it into a power relationship – even as it recognizes the other in a moment of free-spirited selflessness.

And now to return to poor Lancelot Gobbo, whom we left in the throes of the moral struggle of deciding between two evils – a struggle perhaps and perhaps not of his own making. Considering all we have discussed, we might now view Gobbo's dilemma slightly differently: we have been unable to discover anything to infuse the law (including, perhaps, moral law), to be presented within it and beyond it, and thus to oppose it as it refuses to acknowledge the otherness of the court scene and of Gobbo's situation, or even acknowledge that a dilemma is presented within the law. We have discovered no origin of the law. The unfortunate Gobbo cannot appeal to justice or equity – these function in the same way the law does, by means of being fair, treating all situations in all contexts in an equivalent manner; he may throw himself at the mercy of the reader or critic, but that would simply put him into their power, allowing them to judge the truth of his situation. It is perhaps then only fair (equitable? just? merciful of us?) to let Gobbo, if he does not feel paralysed by undecidability as we do, follow the

lead of the other characters and pragmatically serve his own interest, make the choice that he perceives will give him the most gain. If he wishes to see Shylock as the devil incarnate, and thus – perhaps – like the duke cast his decision in the light of a 'difference of spirit' that would challenge the mean-spiritedness of the law and encapsulate the essence from which law-making is derived, so be it. Let him accept the advice of the fiend that "gives the more friendly council" (II.ii.23) and gives the better gift (and creates the bigger obligation – perhaps the biggest obligation: how does one repay 'the devil himself'?).

But to do that would possibly be to present a different kind of presence within the law – one that is entirely pragmatic and self-serving. To do that would possibly be to choose the fiend rather than the angel, to make 'fiend' 'friend', to reduce the just, which we have been unable to discover, to being merely just – exact, precise, only: laid down like the law.

Yet we have not sought a solution; we have simply been exploring a dilemma in which the angel has appeared to us as neither angel nor devil, and the fiend has appeared as neither fiend nor friend. Indeed, they have not quite appeared – appeared only, perhaps, as a metaphor for Gobbo's conscience. Or perhaps have not quite appeared yet, borne by the metaphor that presents us with their possibility even as it draws our attention to their impossibiliy.

Coming in(to) *The Tempest*

In his introduction to The Arden Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, "the most influential modern version of *The Tempest*" (Evans 1989: 71), Frank Kermode defines this play as "a pastoral drama" which is concerned with "the opposition of Nature and Art", with the "main opposition" being "between the worlds of Prospero's Art, and Caliban's Nature" (Kermode 1970: xxiv). He goes on to explain that Caliban is "the natural man against whom the cultivated man is measured", and, although admitting that he is oversimplifying, insists that "Caliban represents ... nature without benefit of nurture; Nature, opposed to an Art which is man's power over the created world and over himself; nature divorced from grace, or the senses without the mind" (Kermode 1970: xxiv-xxv). In his elucidation of this statement he explains that Caliban "represents the natural man" and the "wild or salvage [sic] man", a familiar figure in various European art forms, who was "believed to occupy an 'intermediate position in the moral scale, below man, just as the angels were above him'" (Kermode 1970: xxxviii-xxxix). This link is established by Caliban's maternal line: Sycorax, the witch, "is a practitioner of 'natural' magic", whose "black magic" stands as the "antithesis" of the "holy magic" of Prospero, the "theurgist", whose "Art is to achieve supremacy over the natural world", whose "Art is 'the absolute perfection of Natural Philosophy'", whose Art is "the Art of supernatural virtue which belongs to the redeemed world of civility and learning" (Kermode 1970: xl-xli). And the rest of the play bears this link out:

[Caliban's] origins and character are natural in the sense that they do not partake of grace, civility, and art; he is ugly in body, associated with an evil natural magic, and unqualified for rule or nurture. He exists at the simplest level of sensual pain and pleasure, fit for lechery because love is beyond his nature, and a natural slave of demons. He hears music with pleasure, as music can appeal to the beast who lacks reason; and indeed he resembles Aristotle's bestial man. He is a measure of the incredible superiority of the world of Art, but also a measure of its corruption.... [He] is an extraordinarily powerful and comprehensive type of Nature ... against whom civility and the Art which improves Nature may be measured.

(Kermode 1970: xlii-xliii)

I begin with reference to this influential version of *The Tempest*[1], this influential reading of *The Tempest* as a site of an opposition between nature and art, nature and artifice,

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[1] A footnote, a supplement to my reading, though not the main thrust, not the being of my reading in itself: although Kermode (1970: xxv) does suggest that his guide "is a simple diagram of an exquisitely complex structure", and later "concludes by gesturing again to the unique and irreducible, those distant meanings wrapped in a numinous haze 'beyond the last analysis of criticism'", Evans (1989: 71) points out that "between [his] celebrations of an elusive essence that offers, in its complex invisibility, a guarantee of transcendent meaning is an explanation of the text which is all too straightforward". Evans thus accuses Kermode of being too reductive in his assumption that characters "are discrete and 'represent' specific 'ideas'", in his neat resolution of ambiguities "by appeal to the laws of genre", and his confirmation of the "commentary as a whole ... with reference to Shakespeare's intentions"; for Kermode, Evans (1989: 73-74) explains, the "play is *there* to be understood ... free of prejudice and ideology". Evans is here arguably criticizing Kermode for much the same reason that Skura (1989: 42) objects to other "idealist readings of *The Tempest*": Kermode's explanation of the play "is conservative in its critical ideology" (Evans 1989: 73). Bloom's (1999: 663, 679) objections to ideological readings and "ideologues" aside, Kermode's claim – and that of any other – to be free of ideology is of course simply an affirmation and reinforcement of the dominant ideology, for it considers the dominant ideology not to be ideology at all, but self-apparent truth.

nature and culture – an opposition upheld by many "writers and philosophers throughout our history", a view in which natural man is led by some lack or need to develop culture, which "comes to take the place of nature", adding on to it and becoming a substitute for it, and potentially acting in "both detrimental and beneficial" ways (Leitch 1983: 170). This opposition is described by Derrida as being "relayed" to us, from ancient times, "by means of a whole historical chain which opposes 'nature' to law, to education, to art, to technics – but also to liberty, to the arbitrary, to history, to society, to the mind, and so on" ("Structure, Sign, and Play" 1978: 283). It is an opposition which is inscribed within a certain view of the being of nature, and the nature of being. This view of nature is also a view of Nature, of that which fully is Nature – and nothing else, no other – of that which is Nature[2] fully present to itself. As opposed to Culture, which may be seen as improving Nature or may be seen as replacing it. But it is always seen as other to it. The opposition remains intact – Nature, being deficient ("nature divorced from grace" [Kermode 1970: xxiv-xxv]), needs to have Culture added to it in order to be completed (to become Nature more fully: Prospero, whose "Art is to achieve supremacy over the natural world", whose Art is "the Art of *supernatural* virtue which belongs to the

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The opposition between Nature and Art that Kermode reads into *The Tempest* is exemplary of his being immersed in western essentialist modes of belief, in which 'violent hierarchies' of binary opposites are established – in which a sharp distinction is made between the self and the other, and the other is perpetually excluded to the margin as a result of its otherness. Kermode (1970: xlii) without doubt makes strong ideological assumptions about means of political rule, intellectual elitism, and education, not to mention colonialism, in his carefully phrased suggestion, "If Aristotle was right in arguing that 'men ... who are as much inferior to others as the body is to the soul ... are slaves by nature,' ... then the black and mutilated cannibal must be the natural slave of the European gentleman, and, *a fortiori*, the salvage [*sic*] and deformed Caliban of the learned Prospero". Evans (1989: 73) explains how the "rhetoric of complexity, maturity and exquisite riches clothes the nakedness and barbarism of the basic affirmation about masters and slaves being created by nature" (Evans 1989: 73).

[2] I am here engaging with Derrida's reading of Rousseau's *Confessions* in *Of Grammatology*, especially "… That Dangerous Supplement…" (1976: 141-157), where he examines the distinction between nature and culture in Rousseau's writing in terms of a desire for presence through what Rousseau has to say about writing and masturbation.

redeemed world of civility and learning", whose "*Art is 'the absolute perfection of Natural Philosophy'*" [Kermode 1970: xl-xli, my italics]); or Nature, complete in itself, is replaced by Culture, removed by it from its full being ("nature divorced from grace" [Kermode 1970: xxiv-xxv]). And in this opposition lies a desire for Nature, for the completeness of Nature, for Arcadia.

I begin with reference to this reading of *The Tempest* as "a pastoral drama", in which resides a desire for Nature unblemished and uncorrupted (by art, by artifice, by culture), a desire for Nature in its true being, its being as Nature, its being as Nature fully present to itself. It is a reading that desires Nature in its fullness and perfection even in the very moment it rejects it for its deficiencies and flaws, that adds to or substitutes for it culture as a *supplement* – which is both/neither an "addition" and/nor a "substitute"[3], which "adds itself" as "a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence", "cumulat[ing] and accumulat[ing] presence", even as it "supplements", as it "adds only to replace", "interven[ing] or insinuat[ing] itself *in-the-place-of*" (Derrida 1976: 144-145) – even in the very moment that it exposes itself as a supplement itself, a supplement to itself[4]. We shall explore this moment.

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[3] While the quotes are taken from Johnson in Derrida (1981: xxiii), see Derrida (1976: 141-157) for a fuller (more complete, more filled with being, more present to itself) account of Johnson's brief supplement.

[4] In another supplement – which is of course not merely a supplement – Leitch (1983: 171) notes Derrida noting that "nature untouched by the force of *supplementarity* possesses no truth-value: there is no unsupplemented nature - only a desire for it or a myth creating it".

The death masque

This moment within the masque[5]. Which is the supplement to the play? This masque, which is an invocation of the pastoral, of a utopian, precultural Arcadia in which happy shepherds lead easy lives in perpetual Spring, of a yearning for Nature unblemished, unsupplemented, begins with an invocation of Ceres: a call for Ceres to be present – "Approach, rich Ceres" (IV.i.75). Ceres – Demeter, "who took her name from Mother Earth" (Grimal 1965: 120) – is the goddess of agriculture, the culture of fields; a supplement to Nature itself – scion of Nature and Time[6], the goddess of the fields, created by man.

The masque is a wedding masque, a celebration in anticipation of Ferdinand and Miranda's union. But within it is also a revulsion in anticipation at the thought of their union, a yearning for innocence and purity within the union unblemished by the violation of sexual intercourse. Ceres is to bless this union, for she is the goddess of marriage (Bulfinch 1962: 354) and the goddess of the pastoral – of the fields unblemished by the ravishing of winter's death. She asks: "Tell me, heavenly bow, / If Venus or her son, as thou dost know, / Do now attend the queen?" (IV.i.87-89). It is imperative that the amorous influences of Venus and Cupid be absent from this wedding masque, for it is they who will bring the violation, bring the death, as it is they who did "plot / The means that dusky Dis my daughter got" (IV.i.89-90), they that drove Pluto to such lechery that

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[5] The masque, the masquerade, where the mask is worn to hide identity and to convey it, where the *mascar*, the one who wears the mask, is neither himself nor the identity he has assumed. Masque, masquerade, mascar – being neither present nor absent.

[6] Is she the supplement of agriculture itself? Her father, Cronos – Time – is Saturn, god of agriculture.

he took Proserpine-Persephone to the underworld, where she became his bride – under the auspices of neither Ceres nor Hymen, the god of marriage, the preserver and violator of the hymen – and ruled after not only as queen of vegetation, growth, life, but also as queen of death, as bringer of death to the world: death, the orgasm, the fulfillment and end of desire, the end of the season.

The desire of the wedding masque is a yearning for a world without death, a world of perpetual life. This yearning is inscribed within the yearning for a virginal marriage – within the hymen (and the Hymen), the moment between desire and the fulfillment of desire, which is neither fulfillment nor desire[7], the moment between beginning and end, which is neither beginning nor end, the moment "when the veil is, *without being*, torn"[8] (Derrida, "The Double Session" 1981: 213). The god shares his name with the membrane that marks the moment of the physical union of two bodies, after which union the violation and death of the self is assured, as the offspring of the couple – the assurance of the perpetuation of the self, of perpetual life within a mortal world – is blemished by the mark of the other[9], is a hybrid, an inaccurate copy, a poor supplement[10]. The desire of the

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[7] Derrida discusses the hymen as the between, as neither desire nor fulfillment, neither presence nor absence, neither inside nor out, etc. in "The Double Session" (in *Dissemination* 1981: 173-286, esp. 194-226), and to some extent in "Mallarmé" (in *Acts of Literature* 1992: 111-126). In French the link between hymen and Hymen is further reinforced by the fact that 'hymen' means both "marriage" and "maidenhead" (Attridge in Derrida 1992: 128). The trace of the Greek "Υμήν [which] designates a fine, filmy membrane enveloping certain bodily organs" (Derrida, "The Double Session" 1981: 213) may also be noted.

[8] We may here be anticipating (preventing?) our noting of a desire for an impossibility, for a presence that is also an absence, a neither presence nor absence that may be different from the desire for full presence within which it is inscribed.

[9] See Charnes for an account of the "fantasy of keeping one's essence pure, without the contamination of Otherness" (2000: 200) in *Hamlet* in "The Hamlet formerly known as Prince" (2000: 189-210).

[10] We might note the absence of Hymen from the masque. We might note in (the being or presence of) Hymen the quite *natural* – according to Levi-Strauss's definition of the natural as being "everything universal in man", "characterized by spontaneity", as opposed to "everything subject to a norm", which is "cultural and is both relative and particular" (Levi-Strauss 1969: 8) – movement of "*incest prohibition*" (Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play" 1978: 283), the natural desire towards the death of the self that results

wedding masque is the desire for perpetual life, a desire fulfilled by marriage's promise

of procreation – Ceres is also goddess of "human fertility" (Bulfinch 1962: 354) – but

simultaneously denied by marriage's promise of procreation – its promise to bring the

death of the self even as it assures its survival.

Ceres represents marriage – the culture of love, love supplemented, cultivated, love

which assures the perpetuation of the self through monogamy. But the perpetuation of the

self through procreation – through Ceres representing fertility – whether supplemented

by the assurance of fidelity or not is always already an extermination of the self, a

supplementing of the self. Procreation itself takes place in a movement that is

supplementary, substituting one for the other, adding one to the other. The illusion of the

preservation of the self that the supplement of marriage adds to the nature of procreation

is nothing but an illusion, and the presence of Ceres is an assurance both of eternal life

and of death.

It is Ceres herself who brings winter, and death, as she mourns her daughter's absence.

She herself represents Nature as she respresents Culture, causing the seasons even as she

teaches Triptolemus "the use of the plough, and how to sow the seed" (Bulfinch 1965:

63). The origins of agriculture and of Nature occur in the same myth; there is little to

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from procreating not with that which most approximates the self, but with that which is other to the self.
We might also note in Hymen the entirely *cultural* movement of incest prohibition – cultural because it is a
prohibition, and thus (part of) "a system of norms and interdicts" (Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play"
1978: 283). We might thus note in Hymen, in marriage – which regulates procreation and removes from it
the *scandal* that might, within the prohibitions outlined by certain cultures, characterize procreation outside
of it – a "*scandal*" in the Levi-Straussian sense, that is "something which no longer tolerates the
nature/culture opposition…, something which *simultaneously* seems to require the predicates of nature and
of culture" (Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play" 1978: 283).

contrast between Nature and Culture, as within both is inscribed a certain supplementarity, an assurance of the impossibility of the fullness of the self, of spring. Ceres, who is Nature, who is Culture, is always already a supplement[11] – scion of Nature and Time, and their hybrid. Nature and Time assure winter and death. And there is always already winter and death, for the self is but a hybrid, never fully itself. Approach, rich Ceres: approach, draw near, but never arrive.

The coming of meaning

Let us return via death, and the attempts of Culture as supplement to Nature to prevent[12] death, thus creating a Nature unsupplemented, to the site of Kermode's Nature/Culture distinction: the distinction between Caliban and Prospero. Caliban's base, blemished nature is a nature within which the self seems to have no awareness of itself, no existence as a self – in which the self is already dead. Miranda points out to Caliban:

when thou didst not, savage,

Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like

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[11] And within *The Tempest* further attention is drawn to her supplementarity by the fact that it is not the real Ceres who appears in the masque – it is not Ceres who is present, who is fully present, who answers the call to be present; Ferdinand and Miranda are not presented with the person of Ceres, but rather with an impersonation of her – not the being present of Ceres, but rather a *towards being present* of her.

[12] Perhaps this attempt at prevention is rather an attempt at a *circumvention* – a going around death rather than merely a coming before death, which is of course always already implied in the being of death – which would be (if it could be) an *unvention*, a not-coming in order to not go. Perhaps then between the *un* and the *vention* (though not *between* in a positional sense, but rather in the sense that it is neither here nor there, neither a coming nor not), in the place between desire and fulfillment inhabited by the hymen, we may place the (ex)it – the anonymous third person singular denoting being, inscribed in anticipation, but in brackets, with a reminder of its being in the past tense, of its being which is also always already a non-

A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes

With words that made them known.

(I.ii.357-360)

In order for one to be able to "express [one's] thoughts", "make known what [is] in [one's] mind" (Kermode 1970: 32n.), in order to make meaning out of meaninglesness and know one's own meaning – to approach the fullness of being that is one's self – one needs the supplement of language. It would perhaps be superflous to note that this cure to the death of the self is not a remedy, is a remedy but also a poison, is *pharmakon*[13], has inscribed within its movement which is the movement of language (which is the movement of writing), within its creation of meaning and of the self, the deferral of meaning, its impossibility, and the extermination, or at least deferral, of the self[14]; it would perhaps be superfluous to note that language teaches neither Miranda nor Caliban their "own meaning", does not "endow" their "purposes" with "words that [make] them known", as language is immersed in the play of *différance* that disseminates, rather than makes present, meaning. What we might wish to note, however, is that Caliban's base nature, described as distinctly opposite to the supplemented natures – the culture – of Miranda and Prospero, in fact itself seems to function in a way that is as supplementary as Miranda and Prospero's culture of language.

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being, an *ex being*; and the 'one goes' that is also a 'one goes out', a deferral of the going towards the exit, outside of a unified and immortal self. Perhaps then there is always simply *vention* – coming.

[13] The reference here is to Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy" (in *Dissemination* 1981: 61-172), where he examines how the translation of Plato's use of the word *pharmakon*, which means both poison and remedy, to designate writing has led to translators "consistently *decid[ing]* what in Plato remains undecidable, and thus influenc[ing] the course of the entire history of 'Platonism'" (Johnson in Derrida 1981: xxiv-xxv). I also refer to the second half of *Of Grammatology* (1976), where Derrida identifies writing with both *pharmakon*, and the related word never used by Plato to characterize writing – *pharmakos*: scapegoat.

Prospero and Miranda's taking "pains to make [Caliban] speak" (I.ii.356) is presented as *adding to* what Caliban had available to him before Prospero's arrival. Johnson (1991: 41) suggests that "*Caliban* had learned to speak from *Prospero* and his daughter, he had no names for the sun and moon before their arrival, and could not have invented a language of his own without more understanding than *Shakespear* [sic] thought it proper to bestow upon him". And Caliban freely admits that Prospero "taught me language" (I.ii.365). Yet a few lines before this, he says that Prospero did

> teach me how
>
> To name the bigger light, and how the less,
>
> That burn by day and night: and then I lov'd thee,
>
> And show'd thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
>
> The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile….
>
> (I.ii.336-340)

Prospero taught Caliban the names for the sun and the moon, but there is a suggestion here that Caliban already had his own *conception* of 'sun' and 'moon' – "the bigger light" and "the less" – *before* Prospero's arrival. He was already able to distinguish between the sun and moon by virtue of their differences: the sun shines more brightly than the moon and comes during the day, while the moon comes at night (and day is the time when the bigger light shines, night the time of the lesser light). Thus he had an idea

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[14] See especially Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976) and "Différance" (1982: 1-27).

of the signifieds of both 'sun' and 'moon', although he did not describe them with the same signifiers Prospero subsequently taught him. And I have hinted in my last parentheses that within Caliban's thought the distinction between signifier and signified collapses in the same way that it does in Prospero and Miranda's thought supplemented by language – their thought which is writing – and that Caliban's thought is itself supplemented, is itself writing: not only do Caliban's signifieds 'bigger light' and 'less light' act as signifiers by using *comparative* adjectives, suggesting distinction from each other (and other signifieds and signifiers) because of difference, they act as signifiers of 'day' and 'night', which in turn again act as signifiers for 'bigger light' and 'less light', and possibly some other signifieds, such as 'see clearly' or 'burn skin' or 'fall over objects', which in turn act as signifiers, etc.

That Caliban had such a system of signification is further evidenced by the fact that he could show Prospero the "qualities o' th' isle", to lead him to "fresh springs" and "fertile" places, and help him avoid "brine pits" and "barren" places. He was able to differentiate between the island's good qualities and bad ones; he recognized the difference between "fresh springs" and "brines" and had associations with each of them: "fresh springs" perhaps acted as a signifier for 'quench thirst', and when Prospero arrived, for 'lead stranger there' – demonstrating that his system of concepts also possessed iterability, the ability to be repeated: when a completely new and strange context arose – Prospero and Miranda arrived on the island – Caliban repeated his sign, 'quench thirst', and modified it to 'quench thirst of strangers – lead them there', signifying this new situation in terms of his sign system, and assimilating the new

concepts, Prospero and Miranda, into his 'vocabulary' in the same terms. And this iterability is another quality of writing, which is always repeated in a different context, and thus always has a different meaning to itself, never possesses meaning present to itself.

When Caliban says to Prospero, "You taught me language.... / The red plague rid you / For learning me your language" (I.ii.365-367), we may place an emphasis on the 'your': Prospero has indeed merely taught Caliban *his* language, *his* system of signs that relies on spoken words, which is no more pure a form of communication – no more real a language – than a system of signs that relies on written words, or on sensory associations. The very fact that Caliban is able to learn this new language, to assimilate this new system of signs into his old one (bigger light = sun, lesser light = moon), replacing his signifiers with Prospero and Miranda's, testifies that he uses the same system of differentiation that Prospero does – that he is already immersed in language – and that he therefore does not exist "at the simplest level of sensual pleasure and pain" (Kermode 1970: xlii), and has more understanding (or less, if his meaning, through language, is never present to itself) than Johnson thought to bestow upon him. In a certain sense we may suggest that not only did Caliban already possess language, he already possessed writing[15] – hence the lack of clear distinction between Caliban and Prospero[16] (and the Nature and Culture that they

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[15] Shall we, in terms of a previous footnote (a footnote that came before, and of which this footnote is then a supplement), suggest that what we have been talking about may be language as *scandal*, or the *scandal* of language?

[16] We could, if we wished, explore other instances of this supposed contrast. The monstrosity of Caliban – derived from his parentage – may serve as another instance of a Nature/Culture debate in the play:

Kermode believes this distinction is also made through the comparison between Prospero's magic and that of Caliban's mother, Sycorax. He sees Sycorax as "a practitioner of 'natural' magic, a goetist" – a practitioner of black magic, whose powers are "derived from evil communion with the devil" (Sisson 1969: 98) (we might here pause to consider how representative Caliban is of Nature at all, if he is, in fact, the "product of a sexual union between a witch and incubus" [Kermode 1970: xl]; is he then not a hybrid, a supplement, neither incubus nor human?) – while Prospero is a "theurgist" (Kermode 1970: xl), whose powers are "derived from deep study" (Sisson 1969: 98). Sycorax's witchcraft, her black magic – her natural magic, magic which is not supplementary to her nature, but part of its baseness – is contrasted with Prospero's theurgist magic, acquired from 'deep study', the practice of which required great discipline and the leading of a "strictly pure life" (Symonds in Corfield 1985: 35). Sisson (1969: 98) draws great importance to this distinction, and believes that the "only obvious approach" of Prospero's powers "to the known evil powers of witchcraft" – associated with Sycorax, of course – is "the raising of a tempest to affect the fate of ships at sea", reminiscent of the disturbances caused by the witches in *Macbeth*. His dismissal of this connection through the suggestion that "'There's no harm done' in the wreck" and "All is done to good and desirable ends" does not erase the link that undoubtedly exists, does not create a unified – if complex – meaning out of this obvious quandary; and that is, of course, assuming that Antonio and the people of Milan see the reinstatement of their previously inept ruler as a desirable end, and that there is no harm done in the union of Ferdinand and Miranda, which is a direct result of Prospero's actions, and leaves him with a happily secure power base.

Similarly, Corfield fails to iron out Prospero's reference to his "rough magic" - a description of his magic entirely contrary to the controlled artistry of a theurgist. Corfield's explanation that Prospero's use of the term "rough magic" is a "recognition" of the fact that Prospero has realized that, during the course of the play, his powers have started "going in the wrong direction", becoming "impurely applied to mean and personal ends" is betrayed by a footnote: referring to Prospero's claims to feats of necromancy (V.i.48-49) in his invocation which begins "Ye elves of hills" (V.i.33-51), he suggests that "Prospero could be looking back ... further into the past. His 'secret studies' (I.ii.77) in Milan, twelve years previous [*sic*], could have offered ample occasion for necromancy" (Corfield 1985: 42). If Prospero's magic has only "become debased" during the course of the play as a result of the convergence of the "most auspicious star" that increases his magical power with the "accident most strange" (debased to be elevated, corrupted to be more natural, as a supplement to be supplemented by that which is itself supplementary) through which "his enemies have been brought within his reach", which provides the temptation for him to use his powers to "mean and personal ends" (Corfield 1985: 42), then he would not have practiced necromancy twelve years ago, when his studies were still aimed towards a holy theurgy. If he did practice necromancy then, then perhaps his magic has been 'debased' all along.

seem to represent) in this respect. There is no Nature unsupplemented, no state of meaning or the being of meaning that allows meaning to be fully present to itself. Meaning is always already dead, deferred by the words that make it known.

Brave new world

Inscribed within the distinction between Nature and Culture is a desire for a Nature unblemished, for a full presence of Being, fully meaningful, fully one with itself, and thus unchanging – since such completeness would foreclose change. Inasmuch as this desire is a hope, it is a hope expressed in the future perfect for a Nature unsupplemented

Corfield is not the only one who encounters problems with this passage. Sisson, shortly after claiming that Prospero's "only obvious approach to the known evil powers of witchcraft is ... the raising of a tempest" (Sisson 1969: 98), admits that there are some "disconcerting phrases" in Prospero's speech, which "seem inconsistent with the general picture of his white magic" (Sisson 1969: 99). These 'disconcerting phrases' are explained away as Shakespeare simply being "unwary in his borrowing from Ovid" and his reading "too much of Medea into Prospero's speech" (Sisson 1969: 99). (Could it be that the Bard, the great bearer of such "superiority of Intellect" [Carlyle in Bloom 1999: 1], made a mistake? No, apparently this slip is because "Shakespeare had too much education, not too little" [Sisson 1969: 99] – was debased by this elevation.) The level of desperation of Sisson's lame attempt at explaining away the "Ye elves speech" demonstrates the extent to which a lack of explanation collapses all theories which see Prospero as the white magician/theurgist to whom Sycorax, the black/natural magician/goetist is the antithesis. Frye (1969: 65) seems to see no need for such dodging: picking up on allusions to Virgil's *Aeneid*, he points out that near "the route of Aeneas' journey, ... was the abode of Circe, of whom ... Sycorax is a close relative. Circe suggests Medea, whose speech in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is the model for Prospero's renunciation speech". Sycorax is linked with Circe is linked with Medea is linked with Prospero. Sycorax is linked with Prospero. Like him, she was exiled. Like him, she ruled the island. Like him, she controlled Ariel (and is controlled by Ariel, to the extent that Prospero's powers seem to be supplemented by Ariel, who makes up for the deficiencies in his power, but also replaces that power to some extent). Like her, he practises black magic. His magic is not a an enlightened, cultured version of her dark, natural magic. His theurgist Art

– even if it must be supplemented to be so – that will have come, and/or in the past perfect for a Nature unsupplemented that has come. It is the hope for a brave new world that will have arrived (by/at the time the shipwrecked party return to their world, supplemented by culture, to be [to have been] supplemented by the brave new culture they bring from the island where Nature is present, having been supplemented by Prospero, the island which is a supplement to the political realms of Naples and Milan); it is the hope for a brave new world that has come, on the island, in Naples, in Milan.

But the brave new world is never to come, has always already left, supplemented and deferred. Not at any specific moment in time – not at the moment when the curtain is drawn to reveal Miranda and Ferdinand playing chess, nor at the moment when Prospero discards his magic, substituting it for politics, nor when he discards his state, substituting it for magic, etc. – but rather within the very movement of supplementarity, within a coming that will never fully have arrived and a difference and a deferral that are already arriving, not in a fullness or presence, but rather a *prevention* of fullness or presence – a coming before (and after) to destabilize the arrival of presence.

Within the threat of the brave new world is a threat of arrival and of death, the future perfect which is a completion and an end. Within the threat of death is the threat of the brave new world, the future continuous which is an end deferred.

We shall be ending (here)

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slips imperceptibly into a "rough" goetism that no amount of complexity can explain away. He reluctantly

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has to admit: "this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine" (V.i.274-275).

The Play's the Thing

"To be, or not to be", asks Hamlet in a singularly famous, singularly binary moment (III.i.56). It is, perhaps (rather than is not), a phrase of which much could be said – of which its fame is testament that much has been said – but to which we shall, for now at least, limit our commentary and choose (pick out one and not an other) to explore only one thing (which is in a sense two things) that the phrase evokes: its aforementioned binarism. "To be, or not to be" asks for a choice between the two extremes of being and non-being, of existence and void, without positing any possibility for any alternative other than these two. My use of the preposition 'without' and all that follows it is insensible and must be lost in some semantic void (if only a void were not nothing – but then it would be something), such is the strength and logic of this particular binary division, for there can be no 'without' it – there can be no thing, and there cannot be nothing, outside of the division between being and non-being. No preposition can follow this division, because there can be no thing, and there cannot be nothing, placed before or after it. It appears that it is (for now, at least) the division that must mark the very beginnings of the discourse of ontology, and by marking, by drawing a figure on a blank page and creating something where there was nothing, writes the very being of ontology (by writing the word (*logos*) of being (*on*)), which is the discourse (*logos*) of being.

We turn now for a moment to a discourse which has informed much of the history of Western ontology, not least because our discussion seems to be so intricately involved in ontological questions, nor least because of a certain resonance. This resonance perhaps is perched in a rather precarious ontological position, being one which

resonates with Hamlet's question most powerfully in translation – in a particular translation, written long after Shakespeare put words into Hamlet's mouth, of a text written long before this act. But perhaps we ignore the coincidental nature of this synchronicity, accepting that the reflection we encounter is due to the absoluteness of the distinction between being and non-being that we and Hamlet are discussing, even as this very reflection raises doubt about such absoluteness. We turn now to Paul Shorey's translation of Plato's *Republic*, and we read Socrates say: "to be *and* not to be" (Plato, *Republic* V: 477, 478e, my italics). The conjunction makes all the difference: whereas the 'or' establishes and affirms the distinction between being and not being, forcing a choice between one or the other by severing the one phrase from the other, the 'and' is doubly conjunctive, not only joining the two phrases with one another, but coordinating 'to be' with 'not to be' in a separation that is less a severing and more a dehiscence. Existence is no longer simply a question of either being or not being, since the two are joined together, with this conjunction allowing something to both be and not be.

How is this possible? We may begin an explanation by pointing out that the Greek word for 'to be' used by Plato here is *einai,* which

> has a wider range of meaning than the English 'to be' normally used to
> translate it. It may be used in the common predicative sense ('Socrates
> is wise'); it may assert or imply existence (there is no separate Greek
> verb for 'to exist'); it may be used to speak of what *really* is, what is
> ultimately and genuinely real, as opposed to what merely *appears* to be

so; and in suitable contexts it can be used to refer to what is true (what

is so, as opposed to what is not).

<div style="text-align: right">(Lee in Plato 1987: 206-207).</div>

Let us also look at the contexts within which Plato's 'to be and not to be' occur in

Shorey's translation:

> If a thing, then, is so conditioned as both to be and not to be, would it
>
> not lie between that which absolutely and unqualifiedly is and that
>
> which in no way is?
>
> <div style="text-align: right">(*Republic* V: 477)</div>

> It would remain, then, as it seems, for us to discover that which
>
> partakes of both, of *to be* and *not to be*, and that could not be rightly
>
> designated either in its exclusive purity, so that, if it shall be
>
> discovered, we may justly pronounce it to be opinable, thus assigning
>
> extremes to extremes and the intermediate to the intermediate.
>
> <div style="text-align: right">(*Republic* V: 478e)</div>

It is clear that what Plato is concerned with is not simply a matter of existence or non-existence (though that is certainly one of the things he is concerned with). He is referring here to a specific kind of existence, of being, a being in which that which is *truly* is, fully is, in which it has presence (*parousia*) with itself – *on* as being-present. Something may be and not be if it is not fully (itself), if that which it is is not fully present in it, as Plato explains:

> [Is] there any one of these many fair and honourable things that will
> not sometimes appear ugly and base? And of the just things, that will
> not seem unjust? And of the pious things that will not seem impious?
> … And again, do the many double things appear any less halves than
> doubles? … And likewise the great and small things, the light and the
> heavy things – will they admit these predicates any more than their
> opposites?
>
> (*Republic* V: 479a, b)

Double one thing is half another, something small is large next to something smaller, something heavy is light compared to something heavier, so the double is not fully double – is both double and half (is and is not) – and the small not fully small, the heavy not fully heavy. Between being and not being lies that which is and is not – that which is neither a complete presence of being, being fully at one with itself, nor a complete absence of being. Something which is and is not in this way is said to partake "of both, of *to be* and *not to be*", without fully possessing either – without either being fully present (or absent) in it – and so there seems to be a degree of presence (of being) possessed even by something which is not fully.

But let us quickly broaden our discussion and venture outside of our focus on these passages from *Republic* V to discuss Plato's theory of forms more extensively. For Plato the 'forms' (*eidos*) are those things which truly are (*Republic* VI: 507), are in themselves, are absolute (*Phaedo*: 65, 74, 100b; *Protagoras*: 360c; *Republic* V: 476) and unchangeable (*Phaedo*: 78); they are what those other things which both are and are not share in (*metechein*). And the latter comprise the world of phenomena – the

things we perceive, the actions we perform, etc. What we encounter in the world around us is thus part of the world of simultaneous being and not being – true being is beyond our physical perception, and what we do perceive is derivative of the world of forms (*Republic* V: 476; VI: 507b), acting merely as a reflection of things as they truly are; what we perceive is thus illusory (*Republic* VII: 514), transient, and deceptive (*Protagoras*: 356d).

The relation of the phenomenal world to the world of forms is that of imitator to imitated – and in terms of this it is useful to examine something of the concept of imitation or *mimēsis* in Plato's philosophy – or rather Derrida's rereading of a "certain interpretation of *mimēsis*"[1] ("The Double Session" 1981: 183). And it is through this turn that we may perhaps begin to approach Hamlet again – or at least that figure which appears in the literary performative work that bears his name – since the "whole history of the interpretation of the arts of the letters has moved and been transformed within the diverse logical possibilities opened up by the concept of *mimēsis*" ("The Double Session" 1981: 187).

But our digression into the realm of *mimēsis* is not a complete abandonment of our investigation into being, since the "classical understanding of mimesis … is fundamentally ontological: it involves either the self representation of a being-present or a relation of adequation between an imitator and an imitated" (Johnson in Derrida 1981: xxvii). The latter mode of *mimēsis* is easy enough to identify in Plato: he is critical of the practice of the mimetic form – for example judging and condemning poets "for being imitators" (Derrida, "The Double Session" 1981: 186) – since the

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[1] I have tried to highlight some of the points made by Derrida that are salient to my argument. For a fuller picture of this particular investigation into *mimēsis*, see Derrida's "The Double Session" (1981: 173-286)

nature of Plato's ontological framework, in which the phenomenal world is merely an imitation of the world of *eidos*, assigns to that which imitates something else the role of mere imitation of an imitation. Plato is thus "obliged … to condemn *mimēsis* in itself as a process of duplication, whatever its model might be"; however he "must sometimes … disqualify *mimēsis* only in function of the model that is 'imitated,' the mimetic operation in itself remaining neutral, or even advisable" (Derrida, "The Double Session" 1981: 187).

The "double inscription of mimēsis" (Derrida, "The Double Session" 1981: 186n.) is clear in the *Sophist*, where Plato points out that as

> a "wizard and imitator," the Sophist is capable of "producing" "likenesses and homonyms" of everything that exists (234b-235a). The Sophist mimes the poetic, which nevertheless itself comprises the poetic; he produces production's double. But … the Sophist … eludes his pursuers through a supplementary division, extended toward a vanishing point, between two forms of the mimetic (235d): the making of likenesses (the *eikastic*) or faithful reproduction, and the making of semblances (the *fantastic*), which simulates the eikastic, pretending to simulate faithfully and deceiving the eye with a simulacrum (a phantasm).
>
> (Derrida, "The Double Session" 1981: 186n.)

The Sophist's trickery arises from his abuse of the 'supplementary division' 'between the two forms of the mimetic', but it follows that his diabolical trickery is effective

because of his conflation of the *eikastic* with the *fantastic*. *Mimēsis* in its *eikastic* form is not misleading in itself, and is judged only according to what it is imitating, functioning in a way that is similar to (imitative of) *logos* or discourse itself. In fact, the *Philebus* connects imitation and discourse, *mimēsis* and *logos*, in this way, comparing the soul to a book and describing discourse with the self first in terms of writing in this book of the soul, and then in terms of painting, and thus presenting the process of the acquisition of truth (access to true being) in terms of imitation: *logos* is shown to be "first and foremost a faithful *image* [my italics] of the *eidos*" – the metaphorical painter in the soul is able to 'paint' the "naked image of [a] thing … as it shows itself in its intelligible *eidos*" – and the similarity between it and *mimēsis* thus swings the other way (*logos* imitating *mimēsis*) (Derrida, "The Double Session" 1981: 189). Within Plato's metaphor lies a complex imitation matrix, in which the relation between imitator and imitated becomes uncertain – with each acting as a kind of supplement to the other – and time itself is destabilized as the present perfect tense of imitation (in which the imitated always comes before the imitator) is conjoined with the past perfect in which the imitation has always already been performed and the future perfect in which both the imitation and the imitated are anticipated. And being itself joins in the play of imitation, as Plato "is able to *compare* the silent relation between the soul and itself … to a book … because the book imitates the soul or the soul imitates the book, because each is the image or *likeness* of the other" (Derrida, "The Double Session" 1981: 187-188). The soul here must imitate in order to be fully present – must represent itself in order to present itself as present. One may even follow (Derrida reading) Heidegger in positing that one aspect of the "process of truth is … agreement (*homoiōsis* or *adequatio*), a relation of resemblance or equality between a re-presentation and a thing (unveiled, present), even in the evaluation of a

statement or judgement" (Derrida, "The Double Session" 1981: 192-193). *Mimēsis* may thus be regarded as being intricate to "the unveiling of truth (*alētheia*)" (Derrida, "The Double Session", 1981: 191), and to being itself, inasmuch as true being is a being-present – being presenting itself as fully present to itself.

And so *mimēsis* may signify "the presentation of the thing itself" as it "appears (to itself) as it really is, in the presence of its image", "the movement of the *phusis*[2] … through which the *phusis*, having no outside, no other, must be doubled in order to make its appearance, to appear (to itself), to produce (itself), to unveil (itself)"; but it may also "set up a relation of *homoiōsis* or *adequatio* between two (terms)", in which the "two faces are separated and set face to face: the imitator and the imitated, the latter being none other than the thing or the meaning of the thing itself, its manifest presence", while the former "effaces itself of its own accord in the process of restoring freely … the freedom of true presence" (Derrida, "The Double Session" 1981: 193).

> In each case, *mimēsis* has to follow the process of truth. The presence of the present is its only norm, its order, its law. It is in the name of truth, its only reference – reference itself – that *mimēsis* is judged, proscribed or prescribed according to a regular alternation.
>
> (Derrida, "The Double Session" 1981: 193).

But this reference is "displaced in the workings of a certain syntax, whenever any writing both marks and goes back over its mark with an undecidable stroke", escaping

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[2] Derrida translates this as "essence or life" ("The Double Session" 1981: 193).

through the "double mark" "the pertinence or authority of truth: it does not overturn it but rather inscribes it within its play as one of its functions or parts" (Derrida, "The Double Session" 1981: 193). And with that in mind we will now (re)double back, turning our delay into action, returning where we began, to Hamlet, in *Hamlet*, where we will hope to see this double mark at play.

We left Hamlet in contemplation – an infamous contemplation, "To be, or not to be" – trying to decide between the extremes of being and of not being, of existence and non-existence, life and death. We begin (again) by noting that Hamlet is here contemplating suicide: he is longing to put an end to being, "to die, to sleep", to "end" being in an "end" that is "a sleep" – "to die, to sleep" (III.i.60-64). Sleep is here an imitation of death and death an imitation of sleep – the rest from action, from being, the state of inactivity and oblivion which requires nothing from one as one is no thing. But this sleep which is death contains "perchance" a "dream" (III.i.65) – the image of being, the copy of life, the "mistaking of resemblance for identity" (Plato, *Republic* V: 476c) in which existence has not vanished but simply been duplicated. It is not an escape at all. For death (which is and is not death, which is sleep) as opposite to life is presented as an escape – an escape from the passive suffering of the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" (III.i.58) and the bearing of "the whips and scorns of time / Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely", etc. (III.i.70-77); but life as this passive acceptance of stimuli, in which no action bears consequence and action is consequently meaningless, resembles sleep, or, more specifically, a dream-sleep, where the dreamer simply receives whatever his mind dreams up without any recourse to agency. And action and agency are here connected not with existence but with non-existence: it is clear that action is required to end all action, to end existence – a

supreme act of agency opposes (III.i.60) and overcomes passivity in order to attain

passivity; and the "enterprises of great pitch and moment" (III.i.86), actions which are

almost identified with their consummation, "lose the name of action" (III.i.88) –

becoming inaction and passivity through inaction and passivity, which is of course

exactly what the result of this action was intended to be. To be seems then not to be,

to be without being – like being in a dream – and not to be requires a supreme act of

being not required for being. Being is not being – or at least being and not being

imitate each other, partaking of both being and not being, but perhaps simultaneously

also partaking of neither being nor not being.

But we may observe yet another movement of the being of not being within this

passage, as in Hamlet's speech the not being of the passivity of death merges with the

being of the activity of revenge. For within the context of Hamlet's being within the

play that is (at least sometimes is – is and is not) a play about revenge, the context

within which Hamlet is the avenger of his father's death – or should be the avenger of

his father's death, being measured by how well he plays the part of revenger, how true

his representation of the revenger is in terms of the extent to which he conforms to the

actions that a son in his position (or a character in a play in his position) is expected to

perform – we might suggest that when Hamlet protests that "conscience does make

cowards of us all; / And thus the native hue of resolution / is sicklied o'er with the

pale cast of thought" (III.i.83-85), the resolution sicklied over, the action whose name

is lost, is not only that of suicide, but also that of vengeance.

Certainly his berating of himself for his inaction here is reminiscent of (allows us to

remember because it shares a resemblance, *adequatio*, with – because it imitates and

is imitated by) other instances in the play where Hamlet rebukes his inaction in terms of his role as avenging son. We remember (in anticipation) act IV scene iv, where Hamlet claims that "all occasions" "spur [his] dull revenge" (IV.iv.32-33); we remember his self-condemnation as he says:

> Now, whether it be
>
> Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
>
> Of thinking too precisely on th' event –
>
> …
>
> I do not know
>
> Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do',
>
> Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means,
>
> To do't.
>
> …
>
> How stand I then,
>
> That have a father killed, a mother stained,
>
> Excitements of my reason and my blood,
>
> And let all sleep
>
> (IV.iv.39-41,43-45, 56-59)

The 'craven scruple / Of thinking too precisely on the event' echoes the 'resolution / Sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought', casting on the latter's resolution to end being the pall of the former's resolution to be (a revenger) – to initiate being, to become. Revenge echoes suicide, and suicide – a leap into inactivity and non-being – echoes revenge – a leap into activity and becoming.

We are also reminded of an earlier speech in an earlier scene – one whose reminiscence is made all the more provoking by its placement shortly before the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy: this second (first) soliloquy introduces the first (second) because it is the last we see of Hamlet before he walks onto stage contemplating suicide, and this positioning suggests to us that his thoughts of suicide may not be too far removed from thoughts of revenge (may even be linked to, imitative of, simultaneous to). But this scene allows us perhaps to note a further double stroke that is perhaps connected to and is perhaps not entirely the same as the coincidence of suicide and revenge. Let us see what Hamlet has to say:

> O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
>
> Is it not monstrous that this player here,
>
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
>
> Could force his soul to his own conceit
>
> That from her working all his visage waned;
>
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
>
> A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
>
> With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing,
>
> For Hecuba!
>
> What's Hecuba to him or he to her,
>
> That he should weep for her? What would he do
>
> Had he the motive and the cue for passion
>
> That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,
>
> And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
>
> Make mad the guilty, and appal the free,

Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed

The very faculties of eyes and ears.

(II.ii.516-532)

Aside from highlighting a kind of will to being – being passionate in response to his father's murder, being the revenger – present in Hamlet here that is contradictory to and coincides with his will to not being in his next soliloquy, this passage is interesting in its demonstration in Hamlet of a kind of will to imitation. Perhaps not aside from: perhaps in addition to, but not that either, for this will to imitation is not supplementary to the will to being but coincidental to it – it is a kind of will to being even as it is the opposite to the will to being, marking it even while erasing it.

For what Hamlet longs to be here is not simply or only the wronged son of a wronged father who is incited to a passionate revenge. He longs to be like the player, to be able to produce the tears in his eyes, the distracted air, the broken voice suited to someone in his position. Because the player's performance is more real than Hamlet's genuine response. The imitation is truer than the imitated – the being which is Hamlet's experience of his father's murder is less true than the *mimēsis* of that type (form) of experience provided by the actor. A little later on, when giving instructions to the players, Hamlet claims that "the purpose of playing … was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature" (III.i.17-19) – a claim certainly in accordance with Platonic and neo-Platonic views of *mimēsis*. But in his soliloquy about the player the mirror is reflecting nothing other than another mirror – nature is supposed to imitate the play, the passion felt by an avenging son is supposed to resemble – to imitate – the artificial

passion acted by, displayed by, a player giving a passionate speech. The soul should be forced to the conceit, being forced to artistry.

Now the inversion of the Platonic model of the supremacy of the imitated over the imitator is by no means new or radical:

> In the domain of "criticism" or poetics, it has been strongly stressed that art, as imitation …, should not be "slavish" … and that consequently, through the liberties it takes with nature, art can create or produce works that are more valuable than what they imitate….
>
> (Derrida, "The Double Session" 1981: 192)

But what is marked here in *Hamlet* is perhaps not a simple inversion, but rather a certain confusion between imitated and imitator. If the player had Hamlet's 'motive' or 'cue for passion', his performance would be all the more moving: he would 'drown the stage with tears, / And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,' etc. So the true being of the player would affect the truth of the performance – the player's actions and speeches would be truer for being the outward reflections of his true inner passion. *Mimēsis* remains judged by the truth of what it imitates. But it is simultaneously prioritised above what it imitates. Hamlet imitates the imitator (whose imitations create what they imitate) so that he can become what he is; but if the imitator partook more of that which he is imitating, his imitation would be truer, and thus the imitator imitating Hamlet would drown the stage in tears, creating what he is imitating more fully.

Hamlet's entire being is similarly uncertain, unstable, hovering between being and not being, between being one thing, being another, at *playing* at being – imitating being in order to become, to become what he already is or has been or will have been. When we first encounter Hamlet on stage, the first long speech he gives is one in which he "styles his grief as that which 'passes show'" (Mullaney 1994: 149):

> Seems, madam? Nay, it is. I know not 'seems'.
>
> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
>
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
>
> Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
>
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
>
> Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
>
> That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
>
> For they are the actions that a man might play,
>
> But I have that within which passes show –
>
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

(I.ii.74-86)

Hamlet here characterises his being as one in which what "you see is what you get: surface and depth, appearance and reality, stage posture and being coincide and cohere fully in a proclamation of sincerity that marks all around him as theatrical dissemblers" (Mullaney 1994: 150). But what you see is not simply what you get. The 'forced breath', the 'river in the eye', the 'dejected haviour of the visage' which Hamlet here insists are merely the 'trappings and the suits of woe' – the outer images,

or even imitations, of the true inner being of sorrow – remind us (again, in advance) of the 'Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect' and 'broken voice' of the player that Hamlet wishes to imitate, and by imitating, become. Instead of 'what you see is what you get' we might say 'now you see it, now you don't': here Hamlet possesses – embodies – the outward trappings of sorrow that he later seems to lack; here he experiences the passion he later seems to miss; but we are never really sure what we see – is Hamlet really at one with his appearance here? Is he simply putting on a show of sorrow because that is the appropriate thing for a son who has lost a father to do (is he thus imitating grief)? Perhaps he has never had the passion, and this lack is what causes his envy of the player: could he wish simply to possess the passion that the player seems to possess (or seem to possess the passion that the player seems to possess)?

The answer to any of these questions is uncertain, because the text is inscribed with a certain uncertainty. What the scenes we have looked at might show us is the referential quality of the presentation of the being of Hamlet: now he is overcome with passion, now he lacks passion, now he is imitating passion (was he simply imitating lacking passion before?), now he is imitating the imitation of passion, now he is, now he is not, now he longs to be in order not to be in a supreme act of being (which is sometimes imitation – not being, or not entirely being); and the uncertainty of the being of Hamlet does not simply arise from a possible fluctuation between the different moods that are all part of the same being of Hamlet; it is marked and persistently re-marked within the very syntax of the play – of the dramatic production that is a text awaiting to be performed as a dramatic production, and of the referential games and ludicrousies at play within the play.

Within the very syntax of the play: within the way in which the game is put together, and the way in which the act is put together – the act, the imitation of being, the playing at being which cannot fully be, within which being cannot be fully present, within which it can only be fully present, presenting itself as imitation, which cannot be a full presence of being; the game, the imitation of being filled with play, the arena within which the play can occur, within which it is restricted and shown how to be, within which the play escapes its boundaries through the act of play, which is an imitation of being that cannot be fully grasped. The play, the suspension of being and its consummation, an act and a game – a game which is acted and an act in a game – which is even as it has not been and will not have been, which marks even as it erases and has re-marked that which already will have been erased. The syntax of the play, the arranging together of the play as if it were a language (which is a kind of play), as if it were a text to be understood – but, having been written, is involved in the differential play of signification, deferring understanding even as it presents it: is and is not.

Within the very syntax of the play Hamlet must act in order to avenge his father – must play the part of the revenger, must be overcome with passion, be suicidal; but he is unable to act, even as he acts, even as he plays his part, plays the part of Hamlet, who is always already an *actor*, the player he wishes to act like. He is always already *played* (or will always already have been played), played by an actor in a play which, "embedded in the ideology" of our society "in a variety of roles" has, "for complex social and historical reasons, always already begun" (Hawkes 1986: 94). And the player which is Hamlet plays a variety of roles – which Hamlet plays: that of mourner, that of revenger (and in this role plays the part also of Fortinbras and Laertes

– imitates them, defines, perhaps, his playing of the part at least partially in terms of them), that of "antic" lover (Hunt 1988: 37) (is he an antic lover – the antic lover who "importuned [Ophelia] with love" [I.iii.110], "With almost all the holy vows of heaven" [I.iii.114], called her "celestial" and "my soul's idol" and "the most beautified", and praised "her excellent white bosom" [II.ii.109-113] in the tradition of European lovemaking, who implores her to doubt that "the stars have fire" or that "the sun doth move" or that "truth be a liar" before she doubts his love for her [II.ii.115-118] – when he treats her so cruelly? is the Hamlet "whose phrase of grief / Bears such an emphasis" [V.i.230-231], who "loved Ophelia" with a "quantity of love" greater than that of "[f]orty thousand brothers" [V.i.247-249] and who would "weep", "fight", "fast", "tear" himself, "drink up eisel, eat a crocodile", and even be "buried quick" [V.i.253-257] with Ophelia to demonstrate this love, not the antic lover? is he imitating love? imitating grief? imitating cruelty? imitating Laertes? does he not resemble "the literary figure of the distracted and dishevelled lover" [Hunt 1988: 37] in Ophelia's description of his behaviour when he is playing not the antic lover but the antic?), that of lunatic (he chooses to act mad, to "put an antic disposition on" [I.v.171], but does he play the part truly, or demonstrate through his sharp wit that his wit, in fact, remains sharp? or does he play the part too truly, forcing his soul to the conceit – is the "sore distraction" with which he is "punished" [being passive, as in a dream, a sleep, a death] to blame for the "wrong" he has committed [V.ii.205, 208], and can he claim that "Hamlet from himself [was] ta'en away", that "Hamlet [did] it not, Hamlet denies it" [V.ii.213-215]? "Who does it then? His madness" [V.ii.216]? is Hamlet "of the faction that is wronged" [V.ii.217]? is Hamlet "Hamlet's enemy" [V.ii.218]?).

Hamlet also, of course, plays "a theoretician", explaining mimetic theory to the players, a "theatre critic" ("an excellent play, well digested in the scenes, set down with as much modesty as cunning" [II.ii.411 ff.]), "dramatist", "director" and "chorus" (Weimann 1985: 283). And he plays a player, speaking his part from "Aeneas' tale" (II.ii.417) "with good accent and good discretion" (II.ii.437-438) (if we can trust Polonius playing the theatre critic). And we come full circle, or rather see the image of the mirror reflecting the mirror within the mirror as we note that he plays the part of a player playing the revenger, playing the antic lover, playing the antic.

And in his role as antic he again plays a theoretician:

> When Polonius asks Hamlet what it is he reads, Hamlet responds: "Words, words, words" [II.ii.190], anticipating Derrida by some three and a half centuries, and announcing nothing less than a radical reformulation of conventional ways of looking at words, texts, and the process of reading itself. Referentiality is at a stroke obliterated; words can no longer be understood as being indistinguishable from "things," or as being representations of things, or even as objective sounds that can be understood as things; now they are free-floating signifiers waiting for the kind of arbitrary attachment to a signified that Hamlet will so outrageously play with in the interpretation-of-clouds moment in 3.2.

> (Ayers 1993: 424)

Hamlet himself points to the instability of language, of referentiality, of representivity, of being. His speeches are filled with puns and tropes, with play, from his first line ("A little more than kin, and less than kind" [I.ii.64]). They are filled with a play which points to things as being one thing now, now another (now you see it, now you don't, rather than what you see is what you get), demonstrating in the verbal play of the dialogue what is demonstrated in the mimetic play of the characterization: the absence of a presence of being in the being-present.

> HAM: Do you see yonder player that's almost in the shape of a revenger?
>
> POL: By th' mass, and he is like a revenger indeed.
>
> HAM: Methinks he is like an antic lover.
>
> POL: He is backed like an antic lover.
>
> HAM: Or like a lunatic.
>
> POL: Very like a lunatic.

And not just Hamlet, but *Hamlet*, is constantly engaged in (and by) such verbal and, shall we say (again), syntactical (in the arrangement of its elements to form a play) play. The verbal play is evident, for example, in the language of the gravedigger (we shall perhaps return to comment on some verbal play again a little later on, but we'll leave the gravedigger to his rest). We may begin to identify the semantic play within the play by pointing to its "echoic, self-referential quality" (Berry 1986: 204); there are in *Hamlet* many instances of a kind of doubling up – for example, our attention is "forcefully drawn to the death of no fewer than *five* fathers: King Fortinbras; King Hamlet; Polonius, Priam; and Gonzago, the Player King. In three of these cases an

avenging son presents himself: Fortinbras; Hamlet; Laertes" (Hawkes 1986: 99) (we may note here that the "pattern seems to push Hamlet, in his role as revenger, into the foreground" [Hawkes 1986: 99]). There is also a doubling up in the different roles that the same character plays: Claudius, for example, Hamlet's "uncle-father", is also husband-brother-in-law to Gertrude, usurper-king to the nation, and brother-heir(who is not the heir)-murderer to King Hamlet (according to Hamlet's Biblical logic Claudius is also his "mother: Father and mother is man and wife, and man and wife is one flesh. So, my mother" [IV.ii.49-50]). Hawkes identifies a certain set of "symmetries" between the beginning and ending of the play, which helps to "undermine" our "notion of *Hamlet* as a structure that runs a satisfactorily linear, sequential course from a firmly established and well-defined beginning through a clearly placed and signalled middle to a causally related and determined end" (1986: 94): "It begins without words…. It ends without words" (Hawkes 1986: 92).

> At the beginning, the action is overshadowed by war: by the 'fair and warlike form' (the Ghost) who dominates it even in his absence…. At the end, the warlike form of Fortinbras also hangs over the action in his absence: he finally obtrudes heralded by a 'warlike noise'…. At the beginning a dead king's presence overhangs the action and the nervousness of the sentries evokes it. At the end another dead king's presence overhangs the action, and it is evoked by those final cannons, whose, sound has been associated with him throughout…. There is even a mirror reflection of phrases. At the beginning Bernardo comments, "How now, Horatio? You tremble and look pale" (I.i.56).

At the end, Hamlet's words echo to a larger audience: "You that look

pale and tremble at this chance" (V.ii.339).

(Hawkes 1986: 93-94)

This doubling up marks within the play (of the play) an intricate self-referentiality, a

radical instability of being[3] (Hawkes even identifies a "current" in *Hamlet* which

"seeks to roll the play backwards, … making it … move only unwillingly and

haltingly forward" [1986: 96]), perhaps particularly noticeable in the play-within-a-

play scene, which, at least for an "orthodox view" of the play, is crucial, as it reveals

whether or not the Ghost is "objective" and "truth-bearing" (Hawkes 1986: 102). The

self-referentiality of this scene is of course evident in the mirroring effect of the play

within the play, which mirrors the action of and introductory to *Hamlet*, even while it

mirrors the act of playing. But it also marks (and erases) the Ghost as a thing both

from heaven and from hell – a thing from purgatory – as a truth-bearer and a liar, as it

refuses to release a verdict on the being of the king's death. Hamlet's play to catch

(the conscience of) a king both fails and succeeds, neither failing nor succeeding. For

the dumb-show, which "presents the stark details of Claudius's supposed crime, in

more or less exactly the form retailed by the Ghost", fails to elicit any response from

him (Hawkes 1986: 102); it is only when words are added (words, words, words) and

the play depicts the murder of Gonzago (not another, unnamed king, who could be

King Hamlet), which is commited in Vienna (not another, unnamed place, which

could be Elsinore) by Lucianus (not possibly Claudius), the king's nephew (not

possibly his brother), that Claudius reacts. Was the Ghost lying about the details of

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[3] We could here perhaps also look at Tom Stoppard's play on *Hamlet*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*, in which the identities of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are so indistinguishable from one another that they themselves are uncertain who is Rosencrantz and who is Guildenstern.

the crime (Hawkes 1986: 102)? Is the players' imitation of the crime truer than the Ghost's? Does the imitation here supercede the reality? The mirror reflects all of these, reflects them in the mirror into the mirror, so that the mirror is the reality, which is a mirror.

The image of the Ghost is reflected in a mirror. It is the image (the imitation) of a being and a not being and neither, of a being (and not being and neither) which is both alive and dead and neither. It is a phantasm, reflected in its transparency, in the absence of its being-present. It "throws into doubt the fundamental twos upholding traditional thought. Neither alive nor dead, absent nor present, real nor unreal, [it] elide[s] or exceed[s] the binaries that organize learned inquiry" (De Grazia 1999: 264).

It is also the one part of yet another trope, another play in this play that plays so tropically.

Another part is Hamlet. Hamlet and the Ghost – Hamlet and Hamlet – form part of a trope, are joined together by a trope that makes them one even as they remain two. It is not only a name that they share. They might be joined together in an Oedipal reading by a shared desire for Gertrude (De Grazia 1999: 259). They might be joined together by "*testa*", by "*testis*", by "testes" and by "testimony", by a double "patrimony" – the one "patronymic", the other "biological" (Charnes 2000: 192). They might be joined together by their role (fulfilled and unfulfilled) as head of the body politic (even though Hamlet is not *crowned* king, he is still regarded as successor to the throne – Laertes, for example, says that Hamlet's choice must "be

circumscribed / Unto the voice and yielding of that body / Whereof he is the head"
[I.iii.22-24]) (Charnes 2000: 196). They might be joined together by Hamlet's
command to Hamlet, "Remember me" (I.v.91), to which Hamlet responds: "from the
table of my memory / I'll wipe away all trivial fond records, / … all pressures past /
That youth and observation copied there, / And thy commandment all alone shall live
/ Within the book and volume of my brain, / Unmixed with baser matter" (I.v.98-103).
Perhaps they are joined together by this command, which is (and is not) a command to
"become a scissoid replicant – a creature meant to go perpetually from one to the
same", to "remember only me, while the maternal body is effaced from the replicant
relation" (Charnes 2000: 201). Perhaps they are joined together by patrimony, by
kingly patrimony, by the name and the body of a king, which is the body of a nation,
and the king's "sublime body", manifest in his commandment to 'Remember me',
"cannot 'Live / within the book and volume of [Hamlet's] brain / unmixed with baser
matter', unless the son agrees to be the father's clone" (Charnes 2000: 201), and
perhaps as the clone of Hamlet Hamlet desires Gertrude. Re-member me – perhaps
another play: put me back together again. Thy commandment all alone shall live
within the book and volume of my brain. Hamlet playing at being Hamlet.

Another part is *Hamlet*. The king, the prince. The father, the son. The ghost that
neither is nor is not. The play.

Another play on words. Another syntactical play. Another play.

What do you call the play?

Marry, how? Tropically.

Hamlet.

m = measure; a = aphorism; t = time

$$m^2 = \frac{\partial}{\partial t} \sum_{a=1}^{34} a \frac{t'}{t}$$

1.

If I were to tell you that I feel restrained by the conventions of critical writing about beginning a reading of a Shakespearian play in the manner in which I am indeed beginning this reading, then you may feel that I have in fact transgressed these conventions – perhaps by assuming a rather casual, conversational style, perhaps by assuming a meta-writing type approach, perhaps by failing to refer in my opening to some critic or theorist or theory, or to some seminar anecdote or historical anecdote or set of historical circumstances surrounding the writing of the text or a reading or performance thereof, or even to the author or the text itself. Or you may feel that I have chosen as my way into this chapter an approach that is clumsy, or forced, or affected. Or you may feel that I have transgressed in some other way that I have not mentioned. Or you may feel that I have not transgressed at all, but my concern remains because there are certain strictures placed by convention on the type of approach a critic may take, and the punishment those who feel a transgression has occurred mete is at best a raised eyebrow from the reader and a sense of sympathetic embarrassment for the writer, and at worst the exclusion of the unconventional writing from the category of literary criticism. So, depending on how strictly you adhere to the conventions of critical practice, and how strict the conventions you adhere to are, you may be having grave doubts – or worse – as to whether my approach has any merit within the realm of literary criticism, and be hoping that I get to a point soon.

2.

I'm afraid I shall defer my point. (Another transgression?) Instead, I shall use my thoughts about restraint in literary academia to create a link with a discussion of restraint in *Measure for Measure*. (Am I allowed to establish a link merely by saying that I am establishing a link, or does there have to be a free flow of ideas in which the linking is implicit?)

3.

We first encounter Claudio in restraint, his movement, his actions, his very body directed and monitored by the Provost and several officers. McCandless suggests that our encounter with Claudio in Act I Scene ii marks "the play's true beginning" (1998: 89). Another restraint. McCandless stands like the Provost surrounded by officers at I.ii.108 and says: 'Move forward. Move this way. Do not go beyond that point.' As I am doing: 'Here, follow this track. Follow my lead as I take you one way but not another.' As soon as McCandless or I or any critic begins a critique, the reader – and the text, inasmuch as it is being read – is placed under restraint, as Claudio is early in *Measure for Measure*.

4.

"Whence comes this restraint?" Lucio asks Claudio (I.ii.116). "From too much liberty", he answers (117). One might explain his paradoxical reply, which continues through I.ii.117-122, by suggesting that he is implying that he committed the action which caused his restraint – premarital intercourse with Juliet – because he felt at liberty to do so, since the laws, those restraining agents which are supposed to prevent or at least discourage him from performing certain actions, had failed in their

function, leaving him feeling unconstrained. He makes a good point: the slack enforcing of laws under Duke Vincentio has, perhaps, allowed Claudio to shrug off the restraint these laws were meant to place on him, letting him believe that he can recklessly disobey them without suffering any consequences.

<div align="center">5.</div>

But there is more to Claudio's explanation. He also says that "every scope by the immoderate use / Turns to restraint" (I.ii.119-120). This also seems a good point. Within any context in which restraints exist – a community, like Vienna, in which laws regulate and measure the actions of its inhabitants for whatever purpose, for example – an increased tendency towards the loosening of those restraints, towards an untying of them, may lead the enforcers and regulators of these restraints – if they feel that the restraints serve some purpose – to tighten them again. Too much liberal action from the constrained may lead the restrainers to revise their strictures, and enforce them more strictly. Obviously, for else there is no point to the restraints. Restraint is opposed to freedom of movement. It is the limiting of movement. It is the tightening and the tying up of its Latin root, *stringere*, which it shares with constraint, with constriction, with restriction, with strictures and with strictness. It is the tying together of disparate units into homogeneity, it is the ordering of a community into a tight unit.

<div align="center">6.</div>

It is also, however, the creation of the very possibility of movement. Claudio's action does not arise from too much liberty, for if he had too much liberty it would be impossible for him to perform any sort of meaningful action. He is tied up in the community of Vienna, and perhaps in a broader human community, in which

interaction with others is possible because each member of the community shares with the others a common set of restraints that dictate what actions may be performed within what context by whom, and what meaning those actions have within the given contexts. Without these restraints, action becomes suspended in a void – there is no reason to act, because action has no meaning. But as soon as an action is performed, meaning, and restraint, is created. If Claudio existed in some limbo where an infinite variety of action were possible, he would only be able to act if he could choose from this infinity an action or set of actions to be regarded as more valuable or more worth performing than the others. That is to say, he can only act if he restricts himself to some action, at the exclusion of another, as I am only able to write this essay by restricting myself to one approach, at the exclusion of another, by telling the reader: 'Go this way, not that way', by telling the text: 'Show me this concept, not that one'.

7.

Restriction denies the possibility of the other. But restriction also opens up to the other. It opens Claudio's action and my writing up to someone else, allowing him or her to derive meaning from the action or writing because we are both operating within a set of restraints we may share with that other. Or we may be operating outside of these restraints.

8.

Claudio's transgression arises not from his possessing "too much liberty" as an individual; nor does it arise from his community in general having "too much liberty" in principal; nor does it arise from his misunderstanding or denial of the restrictions that exist within his community. It arises from the disparity that exists between two

sets of restraints that exist within his community: that of the law, and that of "custom", which has made "a scarecrow of the law" (II.i.3, 1). The restraints according to which Claudio and his peers and friends – most notably represented in the libertine Lucio – operate are very different to the restraints imposed upon them by the Duke and enforced by Angelo. There is a breakdown of the dual operation of restraint within Vienna, with the emphasis placed on the restrictive quality of restraint – that quality which we most normally associate with the concept – rather than its productive quality.

<div align="center">9.</div>

The other is shut out and closed off. Meaningful interaction is possible, of course, within the realm of this imbalance of restraint, but the number of things with desirable meanings is severely limited, as one group of people places a set of restraints upon another which does not entirely share the value attached to these restraints. And here I am not only saying that the values upheld by the Duke's camp (to speak very broadly and dangerously simplistically for the moment) are being opposed to and are restricting the values held by Lucio's, but also that Lucio's values have been placing strain on – restraining – the Duke's. Witness the Friar – in conversation with the Duke – refer to "this tied-up justice" (I.iii.32). Justice, the enforcer of the law, which is the agent of restraint within the Duke's value-system, is tied up – rendered unable to move or function – by the libertine value system that adopts as one of its conventions the defiance of the law. The law is tied up by the custom – the unwritten law of convention – of law-defiance. Restraint is restrained by restraint.

10.

And yet another layer of restraint exists here. The Duke attaches a certain value and meaning to the concept of restraint and to his role and responsibility as restrainer, and is restricted by this restricted conception of restraint in the number and variety of ways that he may restrain in a justifiable way: "'Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them / For what I bid them do" (I.iii.36-37).

11.

Although we may have detected a hint of the more positive aspect of restraint in Claudio's explanation of the cause of his imprisonment, it is its more repressive aspect with which we are most overtly and obviously confronted in much of *Measure for Measure*. Not the least clear example of this is, in fact, Claudio's imprisonment. But he is not the only character to be arrested in the course of the play: Pompey, Froth, Lucio, Barnardine, Isabella, Juliet and Angelo are all in custody of the enforcers of the law at one point or another, and put under direct, physical restraint. And of the characters presented in the play, only the two gentlemen (friends of Lucio's), the Friar, Varrius, Mariana and Francisca are neither placed under physical restraint by the law, nor enforcers of such physical restraint. The comprehensive list of characters involved in the act of physical restraint demonstrates my earlier simplistic division of opposing sets of restraint structures between the Duke's camp (which would presumably include Angelo and Escalus, and presumably the Provost) and Lucio's camp (the two gentlemen, Pompey, Froth, Mistress Overdone, possibly Claudio and Juliet, perhaps even Barnardine) to be both misleading and mistaken. Not only are there several characters not accounted for in my rough division between those who regard the chief agent of restraint to be the law and those who are guided in

their actions by a more liberal set of social conventions, but representatives of both camps defy the law, demonstrating that it exists as an unrealistic restriction, representative of the values and custom of practically no members of the society.

12.

The division between the camps is fuzzy and I am restrained: there is a limit to my segregation of the peoples of Vienna into two disparate groups. (But will this restraint open up an other avenue?) Ryan further tightens the chains: he suggests that in *Measure for Measure* there is an "obsession with doubles and doubling, [a] compulsive multiplication of alter egos and substitutes" (2001: 241). He proposes that Angelo and the Duke are identified with one another through the Duke's appointing "Angelo his deputy, addressing him in the opening scene as 'one that can my part in him advertise' and commanding him: 'In our remove be thou at full ourself'", and that we can "read Angelo's subsequent career … as a manifestation of the Duke himself, a pursuit by his double of the course Vincentio might have taken, had he not had his stand-in to hand" (2001: 241). The identification, Ryan contends, is completed when the Duke is "certainly happy to step into Angelo's shoes at the end, hijack as his bride the woman whom Angelo has plagued in his name" (2001: 241). Furthermore:

> The difference that divides the Duke from Angelo, and both of them
>
> from their supposed inferiors, … is also blurred by the parallels
>
> between the couples Angelo and Mariana, Claudio and Juliet, Lucio
>
> and Kate Keepdown, and even poor Elbow and his wife…. The chain
>
> of substitution and analogy binds everyone in the play to each other,
>
> playing havoc with official social and moral distinctions. Escalus

stands in for Angelo at the cod trial of Pompey and deputizes for the Duke at the denouement. Mariana takes the place of Isabella in the infamous bed-trick…. Mariana's maidenhead is exchanged for the muffled head of Claudio, which has itself been replaced by the head of Ragozine, which in turn had been swapped for the stubborn bonce of Barnardine. And Pompey Bum swaps his life as pimp for the hangman's hood without batting an eyelid.

(Ryan 2001: 242)

13.

The crisscross identification of one character with another and then yet another perhaps reaches its climax when the Duke joins a comprehensive list of characters (Angelo, Claudio, Lucio, the Provost, Froth, Pompey, Barnardine, Juliet and Mistress Overdone) who at one point or another defy the law – or at least bend it past breaking point – when he himself defies the law by granting Barnardine, whose guilt in the charge of murder against him is "Most manifest, and not denied by himself" (IV.ii.137), a pardon. An act of mercy this is, but it defies the law which cries for "Measure … for Measure" in the meting out of punishment (V.i.409). Like so many characters in the play, the Duke is unable to operate fully meaningfully within the restrictions imposed upon him by the law. It seems as though there is a definite conflict between the law's restraint and the looser restraints offered by convention and custom – not only the custom of the libertine Lucio and his mates, but the custom of the community of Vienna as a whole.

14.

Custom and the law clash particularly over the issue of sexual restraint. It is in order more effectively to restrain sexual desire that most of the physical punishment is meted out: only Isabella (who is arrested only as part of the Duke's ruse), the murderer Barnardine, and perhaps the slandering Lucio (who does also transgress sexually by impregnating Kate Keepdown out of wedlock) are under arrest for crimes that are not sexually related. Watson even suggests that "sexual morality" (morality – a set of codes of restraint) is what the play is about: the "polar outposts of this play are brothels and convents, prudery and lechery are what chiefly characterize its characters, and its two crucial actions are bouts of sexual intercourse – one a premarital impregnation, the other a form of attempted rape" (1998: 130).

15.

Brothels and convents, prudery and lechery, each with its own code of sexual convention, of sexual restraint. Even in the brothels there is a sense of strain, of limit, of some restriction that could be transgressed. Mistress Overdone is the madam. Overdone – excessive, too much, transgressing. She can only be overdone if she is measured against some sort of norm – some sort of code of restriction, since to measure is to acknowledge a boundary, a point where this ends and that begins. Else she would merely be Done. And it is appropriate that the madam is the one who is Overdone, since she is the one who deals in 'doing', and is thus perfectly placed to represent a limit (a restraint) or the transgression of a limit – a sexual limit which serves to define the difference between fulfilling sexual desire at a 'normal' rate, and overdoing it. And Pompey confirms that her 'doing' is, in fact, sexual, when he explains that she has had nine husbands, and is "Overdone by the last" (II.i.199).

"Nine!" exclaims Escalus (the scale – measuring, restricting) (II.i.200). That is too much. That is overdone. Eight is pushing the limit, but nine is overdone.

<div align="center">16.</div>

Restrained by a name, Overdone must needs be overdone, confined to a single identity – bearing *this* name and not *that* one, and although she has had nine different husbands and her name is thus in some sense "detachable and dissociable" (Derrida, "Aphorism Countertime" 1992: 426), she is still Overdone by the last. And it is the same with Angelo. Angelo, 'angel', not quite human – human in appearance only – who "scarce confesses / That his blood flows; or that his appetite / Is more to bread than stone" (I.iii.51-53), "a man whose blood / Is very snow-broth" (I.iv.57), who, it is said, "was not made by man and woman, after this downright way of creation" (III.ii.100-101) and "when he makes water, his urine is congealed ice" (III.ii.106-107). Angelo, angel, human in appearance, but perhaps lacking something, because he "never feels / The wanton stings and motions of the sense" (I.iv.58-59), perhaps "ungenitured" (III.ii.167-168), like an angel. Angelo, restrained, unable to escape the slanders of Lucio's tongue – which will not be restrained, yet is restrained within the boundaries of the play, as is Angelo, who is doomed to be a "motion ungenerative" (II.ii.108) in the realm of the text.

<div align="center">17.</div>

Yet Angelo is not fully an angel. Although he "studiously rejects the allure of procreation (1.4.57-61)" and "seeks to be otherworldly here on earth", to be a "kind of 'angel'" (Watson 1998: 146-147), he is restrained by his very human sexual desire from being one. Thus he can never take flight, can never act as *angelos* – messenger –

of the Duke's law. And if the Duke "acts as a little image of God", as Gless suggests (1979: 254), then Angelo acts as a little image of Lucifer – fallen angel, tied down to the role of falling because there must be a cause for evil in the world.

18.

Isabella, like Angelo, has "aspirations to celibacy and sanctity" (Lever 1979: lxxvi), and "is determined to abjure physical pleasure … and procreation" (Watson 1998: 144). She wishes extreme restraint to be placed upon her – we first encounter her on the day she enters a cloister of the order of the nuns of Saint Clare (I.ii.167-168 and I.iv.5). The supreme degree of the sexual restraint placed upon this order is made clear when Francisca tells Isabella that:

> When you have vow'd, you must not speak with men
>
> But in the presence of the prioress;
>
> Then, if you speak, you must not show your face;
>
> Or if you show your face, you must not speak.
>
> (I.iv.10-13)

19.

Yet Isabella longs for even more restraint than Saint Clare can offer, "wishing a more strict restraint / Upon the sisters stood" (I.iv.4-5). She feels that, when she takes her vow to join the order, she will be constrained from restraint by the level of restraint the nuns feel is appropriate.

20.

But she never takes her vow. She is restrained from doing so, first by the arrival of Lucio with the news of her brother's imminent execution, which necessitates her leaving the convent to intervene on his behalf, and then by the Duke's proposal of marriage, which we presume she accepts – certainly, she does not object, and may feel she is hardly in a position to do so, as the Duke is the lord of her land and has, moreover, just saved her brother's life. She is restrained by her love of her brother, or a sense of responsibility for him, to "see what [she] can do" on his behalf. The moral code according to which she lives, the set of strictures she has given herself that define what she can and cannot do, prevents her from taking any other action, even though Claudio's action is, in fact, a violation of this code:

> There is a vice that most I do abhor,
>
> And most desire should meet the blow of justice;
>
> For which I would not plead, but that I must;
>
> For which I must not plead, but that I am
>
> At war 'twixt will and will not.

> (II.ii.29-33)

She is restrained by Lucio, who will not allow her to merely make a perfunctory attempt to plead for Claudio's life and then give up and return to her nunnery. He prevents her from leaving after her first, half-hearted plea, and insists that she "Give not o'er so. – To him again, entreat him" (II.ii.43), after which he continues to direct her ("You are too cold" [II.ii.56]), urge her on ("Ay, touch him: there's the vein" [II.ii.70], "Ay, well said" [II.ii.90], "That's well said" [II.ii.111], "Thou'rt i' th'right,

girl; more o' that" [II.ii.130], "Art avis'd o' that? More on't" [II.ii.133]), and insist

that she does not relent ("O, to him, to him, wench! He will relent; / He's coming: I

perceive't" [II.ii.125-126]). And she is restrained by the Duke, who finally prevents

her from ever returning to convent life, with his marriage proposal. She is thus

constrained to a different kind of restraint than the one she had envisaged for her life,

and must now abandon the sexual role she had chosen for herself in favour of a more

conventional one.

21.

The restriction of women's sexual identity is prevalent in *Measure for Measure*.

Isabella, whose "sexual identity has become the site on which dissatisfaction with the

play, and disagreement about the play, have turned" (Rose 1990: 103), is confined by

critics to the role of inspiring either "excessive admiration" or "excessive

repugnance" (Smith, in Rose 1990: 104), as illustrated by Knights asking about her:

"Is she the embodiment of a chaste serenity, or is she … an illustration of the frosty

lack of sympathy of a self-regarding puritanism" (1942: 222). Rose gives another

example, referring to "Wilson Knight's essay on *Measure for Measure*, which Leavis

refers to as the only adequate account which he knows of the play":

> [Although Knight says she is] "More saintly than Angelo" with a
> "saintliness that goes deeper, is more potent than his", Isabella
> gradually turns in the course of the analysis into a "fiend". Her
> rejection of Angelo's sexual demand and her refusal to sacrifice herself
> for the life of her brother makes that same sanctity "self-centred", "ice-

cold", lacking in "humanity", "feeling" or "warmth".

(1990: 104)

22.

When critics hold Isabella as "a thing enskied and sainted" (I.iv.34), it is generally for her admirable piety, moral idealism, and sexual restraint; when she is vilified, it is through an accusation of "not enough" sexuality (Rose 1990: 95). This viewing of Isabella's behaviour as representing one of two extremes is representative of what Freud identifies as the "mystification … of the woman which makes of her something both perfect and dangerous or obscene (obscene *if not* perfect)" (Rose 1990: 96). And Isabella's 'perfection', her "excessive propriety", produces "an image of sexuality as something unmanageable which cannot be held in place" (Rose 1990: 97). Angelo, confronted with a young woman who is fairly sexually restrained and probably more virtuous than most, exaggerates and idealizes what he sees, assigning to her the role of a saintly virtuous maid (II.ii.181-185). Yet she is obscene in her saintliness – her perfection – because she is not perfect, else she would give in to his demands and play her part as a woman, as a man's sexual object. It is her obscene perfection which "overturns the sexual identity" of Angelo, which causes sexuality to infringe upon his otherwise spotless morality (Rose 1990: 97). One can hardly blame him, or expect him to restrain himself (as Leavis says, Isabella's "attitude is not Shakespeare's, and is not meant to be ours" [1942: 238]). It is "the desire provoked by the woman which is above all the offence, and … the woman who refuses to meet the desire is as unsettling as the one who does so with excessive haste" (Rose 1990: 104). The saint is as offensive as the "strumpet" (II.ii.183), if not more so; while the latter gives too much (Overdone. Nine husbands. Nine! That is too much. That is Overdone. No

"morsel" [III.ii.52] this: rather a full course meal. "Troth, sir, she hath eaten up all her beef, and she is herself in the tub" [III.ii.54-55]. Whore. "I beseech your Highness, do not marry me to a whore" [V.i.512-513]. Cuckold. "I had rather it would please you I might be whipped" [V.i.504]. Punk. "Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, Whipping, and hanging" [V.i.520-521]. Nine times. Nine! Overdone.), the former does not give what is promised – what is promised by all women simply by being women:

> Be that you are,
>
> That is, a woman; if you be more, you're none.
>
> If you be one – as you are well expressed
>
> By all external warrants – show it now,
>
> By putting on the destin'd livery.
>
> (II.iv.133-137)

The destined livery. Destiny: restraint, the confinement of all events to a single set of outcomes. The tying down of possibility. The strictures of womanhood: that is the way it is meant to be. Isabella will fulfill the Duke's desires. Destiny.

<center>23.</center>

And Isabella will do more than fulfill the Duke's desires. The Duke will need an heir, and Angelo will not do (Watson 1998: 139). It is only natural.

> As those that feed grow full, as blossoming time
>
> That from the seedness the bare fallow brings

To teeming foison, even so her plenteous womb

Expresseth his full tilth and husbandry.

(I.iv.41-44)

What is true for Juliet will be true for Isabella. It is in the order of things. Once she is noticed by Angelo, and thus subsequently noticed by the Duke, she cannot enter a life of celibacy as a nun, cannot "abjure … procreation" (Watson 1998: 144). For when she is noticed as a woman, speaks as a sexually restrained woman – one who promises by not promising and yet refuses to give – then she must needs give, as she has promised, by putting on her destined livery, by being woman. And woman is that which is not man, "the feminine [is] that which is not masculine": women are "defined precisely as the *opposite* sex, and the 'evidence', the location of this antithesis, is the process of reproduction" (Belsey 1990: 178). Because she is able to bear a child, while the Duke cannot, she must bear a child, so that the boundary which marks the difference between the two of them can be clearly marked. Because she is able to bear a child, she must bear a child.

24.

It is no wonder that the votarists of Saint Clare may not speak with men, but in the presence of the prioress, and if they speak, must not show their faces, and if they show their faces, must not speak; and it is no wonder that the nuns wear habits that hide most of their bodies. If they are recognized as women – as beings filled with the promise of the sexual gratification of men, as beings who pose a sexual threat in their unwillingness or overeagerness to sexually gratify men, as beings whose difference from men lies in their ability to bear children, and who must thus bear children, to

remind us of the difference – they must act as women, act as Isabella, "apparently about to give up her virginity, Mariana (by the convention of such stories) probably newly impregnated, Juliet newly delivered, and Lucio's whore the mother of his young child" (Watson 1998: 143), and adopt the role of wife, lover and mother. They must exchange their habits with their destined livery – exchange one habit for another. One restraint is exchanged for another.

<p style="text-align:center">25.</p>

But it is not only the nuns who are creatures of habit, not only women who have a destined livery to wear. For all his protestations that he is immune to attempts by "the dribbling dart of love" to "pierce" his "bosom" (I.iii.2-3), that he is "not inclined" towards women (II.ii.119), the play ends with the Duke's choosing of Isabella as a bride. For all his insistence that he is "complete" (I.ii.3) in himself, he must needs take what Isabella can give (V.i.534), most notably, a child. As the lord of Vienna, he may feel bound to act as guardian not only of the present interests of his subjects, but of their future interests as well. Thus he must secure an heir. The difference between the masculine and the feminine is evidenced by the process of reproduction. Masculine is what feminine is not. Masculine is that which lacks that which is feminine. Masculine lacks something. Even if the Duke's "bosom" is "complete" (I.ii.3), his anatomy is not. It lacks – the ability to bear an heir. His bosom is not complete. It lacks – the ability to feed a child. The Duke is incomplete. He needs to take what Isabella can give. He is restrained by the limitations of his anatomy.

26.

But perhaps the Duke's final succumbing to the reproductive tendencies displayed by so many of the characters in *Measure for Measure* is not simply due to his realization that he must supply his people with an heir. One might argue that he is simply giving in to an urge to propagate common to human beings. Perhaps he is forced into action (restrained from restraint) by some biological imperative to perpetuate the species: Watson argues in favour of a "human identity based in reproductive biology" (1998: 154n.) and a "self-perpetuating natural system … far more in control than the vagaries of individual human will" (1998: 143). Perhaps he is forced into action (restrained from restraint) by some religious imperative: he may regard, as Reformation thinkers did, "the precept 'Increase and multiply' as the first of the divine commandments", and seek to obey this "primary injunction to breed" (Lever 1979: lxxxiv). Perhaps he is forced into action (restrained from restraint) by a broader cultural imperative that urges procreation as the norm (a restraining measure). In the face of any or all of these, it may be difficult to restrain oneself from obeying the imperative.

27.

And, of course, as Lucio may well tell you, obedience of the reproductive imperative may not be the only reason people engage in acts of fornication. Whether it is because they are driven by "desire" (II.ii.174), or enjoy the "entertainment" (I.ii.143) sex provides, or for some completely different reason altogether, the youth of Vienna cannot restrain themselves from engaging in coition unrelated to procreation. Pompey makes the point clear when he says to Escalus that unless he "geld and splay all the youth of the city" (II.i.227-228), "they will to't" (II.i.230). And he should know: he is arrested for being a bawd twice in the course of the play subsequent to Angelo's

outlawing of brothels and punishing of Claudio with the death penalty for engaging in premarital sex. The fact that he still has customers in the face of Angelo's severe strictures demonstrates that these said customers are so overwhelmed by their need to have sex that they are willing to risk execution to fulfill this need. They are restrained by their desire even from preserving their lives. And Pompey testifies that it is by no means the minority of the populace that is involved in this dangerous licentious behaviour: "If you head and hang all that offend that way but for ten year together, you'll be glad to give out a commission for more heads" (II.i.235-237).

<div align="center">28.</div>

Of course I am assuming here that the urge to have sex for pleasure or to fulfil desire is necessarily separated from the procreative imperative, which may not be the case if the imperative is, for example, a biological one (the fact that Pompey suggests that a solution to the state's problem with lechery may be to "geld and splay all the youth of the city" certainly suggests a link between sexual desire and procreative function). Whether the two are, in fact, linked or not is irrelevant. What is relevant is that many of the people in Vienna (Claudio, Juliet, Pompey, Kate Keepdown, Froth, Mistress Overdone, perhaps even Elbow and his wife – if we believe that he was truly "respected" with his wife before they were married [II.i.162-175]) seem to follow (Go this way, not that one) both imperatives, or are driven purely by desire, while the government of Vienna favours only procreation. Through the law, it places restraint on desire, allowing desire to take place within only one context: marriage. Why it does this is open to debate. The short answer is that it is "a matter of convention" (Engle 2000: 95), as is illustrated by Pompey when he responds to Escalus's question about his profession, "Is it a lawful trade?"(II.i.222-223), with, "If the law would

allow it" (II.i. 224). The suggestion that law is based on convention "is never disputed by Escalus" – a representative of the law – "who simply argues that conventions are now changed" (Engle 2000: 95). Whence these conventions arise is less certain: perhaps they are a product of an older religious convention, whose origins may be similarly cloudy; perhaps they are the product of a view of women as possessing "the will to seduce and ensnare, the charm of deceit, the kindness that conceals a cruel purpose" (Conti in Rose 1990: 100) and "a sensuality that is ruthlessly demanding – consuming men as if they were alien beings" (Freud in Rose 1990: 100), and a resultant fear of their sexuality, which may have been seen as able to be contained in marriage ("do not [make] me a cuckold" [V.i.514-515]); perhaps they are the product of something else altogether.

<p style="text-align:center">29.</p>

The point is that the law is derived from convention, and not natural or implicitly true. It is derived from convention – a set of restraints a group of people habitually adhere to, a set of restraints a group of people derive meaning from. Convention – a 'coming together' (*con-venire*) of people and of meanings, a tying up of people and meanings into a tight unit.

<p style="text-align:center">30.</p>

But the people in Vienna are not tied together, are not a tight unit. The convention of the law is opposed to the convention of many of the people. In fact, there are more than merely two disparate conventions, as can be seen by contrasting the Duke and Angelo in their actions as agents of the conventions of the law. The Duke does not act strictly according to these conventions, which he does want to be followed (hence his

employment of Angelo as enforcer), but does not want to be enforced, at least not by himself – he believes that it would be wrong for him to act too strictly against his subjects, is guided by some convention *outside* of the law that prescribes how he as Duke may act. Angelo, on the other hand, enforces the law to the letter, and seems to truly believe in its conventions. Yet he, too, is restrained by other conventions, by conventions of desire and sexuality, from living according to the law in which he believes and which he enforces. Not even Angelo escapes the disparity of conventions.

31.

And so, we have in Vienna too much restraint. The codes of restraint according to which its people act are incongruous and conflicting. The conventions of the law restrain the conventions of the libertine; the conventions of marriage restrain the conventions of desire; the conventions of desire restrain the conventions of asceticism; the conventions of sexual identity restrain the conventions of the would-be nun. "Whence comes this restraint?" From too much restraint.

32.

And so, we have in Vienna too little restraint. The codes of restraint according to which its people act are incongruous and conflicting. There is no convention, there is no restraint. There is no tying together, no tightness. "Whence comes this restraint?" From too much liberty. Restraint is the poison the rats ravin down; restraint is the cure.

33.

Restraint acts as a language common to the members of the community, allowing them to make meaningful utterances to one another. But, like language, it cannot be fully restrained. Like language, it attempts to tie things down, to tie meanings down. But, like language, it is iterable, infinitely repeatable in an infinite number of contexts, each one slightly different, each one with people involved, problems faced, and pressures applied. Like language, its meaning is not innate, is not fully present, but is rather conventional, and thus repeatable and repeated, and thus really only meaningful in terms of its difference, of what it is not – now, here, repeated, repeatable.

34.

Restraint, like language, allows us to make meaningful utterances to one another. That is why I must feel restrained when I think about beginning in the manner in which I began. I can write for myself without restraint, but even then I cannot write without restraint, because I will have needs and expectations about what my writing should be and what it should do, even if my need and expectation is to write without restraint, need or expectation. But restraint attempts to tie down meaning, to close off the other. That is why I must write without restraint, leave a gap for meaning to enter when I was trying to shut it out. Perhaps I will not restrain myself. Perhaps I will not open with a reference to an author or theorist, theory or text. Perhaps I will write with reference to an author, a theorist, a theory, a text. Perhaps I will restrain myself. Thirty-four aphorisms for thirty-four restrictions. Measure for measure. If I am derivative of Derrida, if what I have written seems a poor supplement to "Aphorism

Countertime", then I do apologize. I have tried to restrain myself. (Thirty-four! Have I

gone too far? Have I done too much? Overdone?)

For play

(Conc)lusion

Shall we try to conclude? Shall we try to conclude the game with a final play? An endgame? Shall we seek plays within conclusions, shall we try conclusions with plays?

> In Latin *concludere* means "to shut up." Peace and quiet. Constriction. Confinement. Guarded silence. *Ludere* means "to play." Inside this final sign, then, lies a game, a finishing lure, another possibility, a further clue, a lasting con. The word admits, though disguises, the truth about conclusions: they stop textual play. Conclusions serve as guardrails - as protection. A conclusion typically promotes unified closure and ordered coherence. The end of the text either repeats the initial thesis with a difference, or repackages the main points within tighter borders, or enacts deduction as a final supplement. A conclusion renders up results, passes judgements, reduces details, effects settlement, shuts down play.
>
> (Leitch 1983: 253)

It is difficult to gauge who the winner is. In this trace which is not a trace the lusion's final con appears at its beginning, prevents the play in the totalizing of the con's completeness even as it anticipates the play to follow – shuts out the other in order to initiate the game.

Perhaps we can take heart, then, when this game is undecidable, when the *claudere* is haunted by the *ludere*, and the *ludere* by the *claudere*, when that which is wholly other is admitted by its opposite, when the play must begin as a result of an end, a limit, the designated field of play within which the game occurs.

We shall then try conclusions with a conclusion, and do so for play and (as a) by( )play, on behalf of the play that is to come – and supplementing it, and being supplemented by it, and using it as a tool, a supplement to our skills and our argument – and has been coming from the moment the field (of language, of the thesis) became (already was coming as) limited, shut off, concluded.

For play, by play, we were playing in the play of *The Merchant of Venice* with the play of justice, mercy and gift-giving, and the conclusion of justice, mercy and gift-giving – their closure as fully just and selfless, as the just and selfless as self-present, and their closure as unjust and selfish, as just; but we concluded with a play at their being present or just just, merciful/mercenary, selfless/selfish; in *The Tempest* we were playing with Nature concluded, completed, but supplemented by a certain byplay, and perhaps also not concluded, perhaps itself a certain byplay – a byplay which is also conclusion, as this perhaps is; in *Hamlet* we were playing with being and the conclusion of being, its death, which is also the initiation of its play, its activity which is also acting – the imitation (which is a limitation) of action, of the making present, and thus the conclusion, of being; and in *Measure for Measure* we were playing with(in) the limits of restriction – the limits

of freedom – but could not be fully conclusive in our measurements, rather finding restriction to be to be neither fully restricted nor unrestricted.

In the preface we shall be ending the play, concluding it, mirroring the conclusion by presenting summary meaning, by presenting the thesis in its completion.

But the summary meaning is not fully present: in the conclusion, in the preface, in the thesis. For the thesis is and is not, neither is nor is not, these points that have been made, and in being made, unmade. The preface, the conclusion, neither adding to nor replacing the thesis, the thesis, neither adding to nor replacing the preface, the conclusion, the plays, have not been written.

In the preface we shall be engaging in the play.

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