Université de Montréal

Of Gods, Heroes, and Men

Identity, Orientation, and Historical Providence
In
Shakespeare

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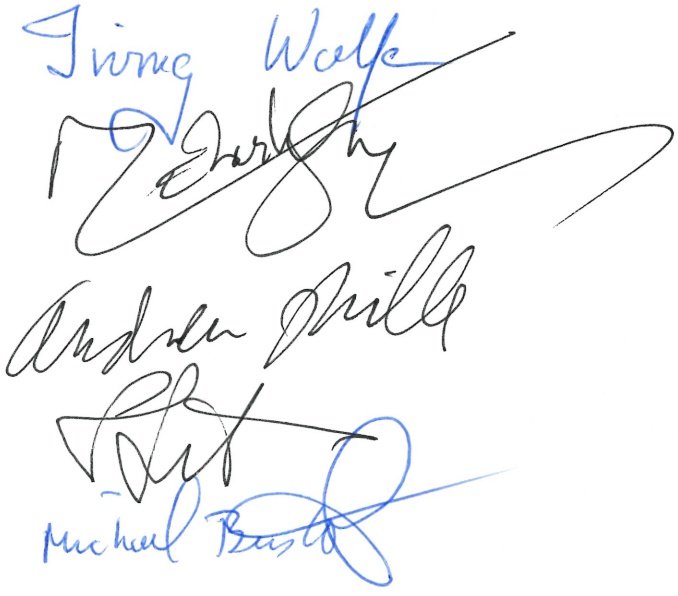

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RÉSUMÉ

L'objet principal de ce travail consiste à démontrer la façon dont la notion d'identité, pour Shakespeare, est étroitement liée à celle de préférence et d'orientation fondamentale. À partir de six pièces (*Richard II, 1 Henry IV, 2 Henry IV, Henry V, Julius Caesar* et *Antony and Cleopatra*), je soutiens que les personnages de Shakespeare acquièrent un sentiment de ce qu'ils sont et parviennent à l'individualité en demeurant axés sur ce que représente pour eux la vertu suprême dont l'acquisition est susceptible de leur procurer le bonheur. En d'autres termes, il existe toujours une chose à laquelle le personnage shakespearien accorde une valeur au-dessus de toutes les autres, moins parce qu'il est porté vers cette chose que parce qu'elle représente pour lui la quintessence du bien.

Ce travail se veut également une mise en lumière de l'aspect dialogique de l'identité dans le théâtre de Shakespeare. L'orientation fondamentale du personnage est cruciale pour l'articulation de son identité parce qu'elle lui procure non seulement un point de départ et une direction, mais également un langage d'expression solide dont il peut se servir pour communiquer avec les autres, tout particulièrement avec ceux qui comptent pour lui.

Une interprétation basée sur l'orientation fondamentale des personnages plutôt que sur les actions que ceux-ci devraient ou ne devraient pas poser ne mettra certes pas fin aux désaccords interprétatifs, lesquels sont si caractéristiques de la critique shakespearienne, voire même de toute la critique littéraire. Il n'en demeure pas moins que cette approche interprétative peut nous aider à en savoir un peu plus sur les personnages de Shakespeare et un peu moins sur ses commentateurs; car lorsqu'Alfred Harbage dit, par exemple, qu'Henri V est un roi «vertueux» et que Yeats déclare que c'est un roi «aux vices grossiers», il est évident que nous en apprenons plus sur Harbage et sur Yeats que sur Henri.

Dans le même ordre d'idées, le fait d'insister sur l'aspect dialogique de l'identité dans l'œuvre de Shakespeare est une façon de tenter de résoudre le problème de l'«autonomie», lequel constitue l'une des principales préoccupations en études contemporaines de la Renaissance. Le personnage shakespearien est libre de choisir son orientation fondamentale quelle qu'elle soit et de lui demeurer fidèle, mais ne peut pas le faire seul. Il a besoin de l'aide des autres; d'où l'importance pour un personnage d'utiliser un langage que les autres peuvent comprendre et auquel ils peuvent répondre. L'«Autre» dans les pièces de Shakespeare n'est ni celui que nous ne sommes pas, ni celui dont la répression est vitale à notre existence; il est simplement l'interlocuteur qui nous accompagne dans notre quête d'identité.

Mots-clés: Théâtre de la renaissance, Shakespeare, identité, éthiques, providence historique.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to read Shakespeare's notion of identity in the light of contemporary ethical philosophy. More precisely, I want to show the way in which the identity of the Shakespearean character is closely linked to his or her preference and defined in dialogue, or dispute, with other characters.

Through study of six plays (*Richard II, 1 Henry IV, 2 Henry IV, Henry V, Julius Caesar,* and *Antony and Cleopatra*) I argue that the Shakespearean character gets a sense of who is and achieves individuality by being "oriented" toward what he or she considers the ultimate virtue the acquisition of which is likely to lead him or her to happiness. Such "orientation" is crucial to the articulation of an identity because it provides the character not only with a point of departure and a direction, but also with a strong language of expression that he or she can use to communicate with others.

Key words: Renaissance drama, Shakespeare, identity, ethics, historical provivence.

CONTENTS

For Souad,

"Ma folle, ma belle et ma douce"
Aragon

What? A great man? I always see only the actor of his own ideal.

Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

The best way to take all people, black or white, is to take them for what they think they are.

Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*

You are more authentic the more you resemble what you dreamed you are.

Agrado, the transsexual prostitute in Pedro Almodovar's film, *All About My Mother.*

INTRODUCTION

There is a memorable scene towards the end of Cervantes' *Don Quixote.* On his way for more "heroic" adventures, the mad Don Quixote de la Mancha encounters a young man determined to restore him to sanity. To fulfil his purpose, the young man pretends to be a knight, and challenges Don Quixote to single combat. It does not take long before the frail, mad knight is vanquished. The young knight, who calls himself the Knight of the White Moon, demands that Don Quixote renounce Dulcinea as the most beautiful woman in the world, if he wants to be saved. Without the slightest hesitation, Don Quixote opts for death. "Dulcinea del Toboso is the most beautiful woman in the world," he says, "and I the most unfortunate knight on earth, and it is not fit that my weakness

should discredit this truth: knight, push on your lance, and take away my life" (Cervantes 1992:994). In the end of the episode, the Knight of the White Moon does not kill Don Quixote, but forces him, instead, to give up knight-errantry and to return home to live with his family under his real name, Alonso Quixano. Devastated by a strong identity crisis, Don Quixote dies shortly after his return. He is unable to live among people who refuse to acknowledge his preference for what he considers the best life, the life of chivalry. It is much better to die as Don Quixote de la Mancha, than to live as Alonso Quixano.

This episode is a remarkable illustration of the way in which a person's identity is not so much what he is as what he wants to be, which is the subject of my thesis. I want to suggest that, like Don Quixote, Shakespeare's major characters get a strong sense of who they are and articulate an identity by being oriented toward what they regard as the good life. I subscribe here to the revival of "character" criticism advocated recently by contemporary moral philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Charles Taylor, and inaugurated, perhaps, by Christy Desmet's *Reading Shakespeare's Characters: Rethoric, Ethics, and Identity* (Desmet 1992). More precisely, I draw on Charles Taylor's notion of the human agent as a "strong evaluator" whose identity is associated with his orientation and defined

in dialogue, or dispute, with other people. I shall lay particular stress on the way in which the characters' notions of the good are affected by historical change, in the sense that what is valued by a certain community at a certain time is not necessarily valued by another community at another time. Although I make extensive use of both radically dissident critics and conservative ones, I do not necessarily seek to stage a debate between the different positions they represent; and, as much as possible, I try to move beyond the rigidly polarised attitudes that characterise contemporary criticism of Shakespeare's plays. What I seek, rather, in my treatment of Shakespeare's notion of identity, is the golden mean between two extremes: between those, like Harold Bloom, who believe that Shakespeare "invented" everything, including "us" (Bloom 1998:xviii), and those, like Stephen Greenblatt and his followers, who swear the glovemaker's son invented nothing, not even his characters (Greenblatt 1984:256).

Few notions have been more discussed, more questioned, and more discredited in Renaissance studies during the last two decades or so than the notion of an autonomous, coherent, and transcendent identity. Materialist critics, in particular, do not seem to be quite pleased with the human subject depicted by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. For instance, in the epilogue to his very influential *Renaissance Self-*

Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare, Stephen Greenblatt describes his journey to the heart of sixteenth-century culture and his encounter with the early modern man as almost a traumatic experience:

> When I first conceived this book several years ago, I intended to explore the ways in which major English writers of the sixteenth century created their own performances, to analyse the choices they made in representing themselves and in fashioning characters, to understand the role of human autonomy in the construction of identity…. But as my work progressed, I perceived that fashioning oneself and being fashioned by cultural institutions -- family, religion, state -- were inseparably intertwined. In all my texts and documents, there were, so far as I could tell, no moments of pure, unfettered subjectivity; indeed, the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of relations of power in a particular society.
>
> (Greenblatt 1984:256)

Shakespeare's characters, according to Greenblatt's account of subjectivity, are less human agents than cultural constructs caught up in an irrational network of menacing forces. They lack not only autonomy and freedom

of choice, but also the capacity for creativity and resistance that human beings are believed to possess(1).

Nor can such representation of the human subject be attributed mainly to the Bard's imaginative powers; it is rather the consequence of the fact that "there is in the early modern period a change in the intellectual, social, psychological, and aesthetic structures that govern the generation of identities"(2) (Greenblatt 1984:1). The implication here is that Shakespeare's characters are merely dramatic reflections of people produced by specific historical conditions, and, therefore, must upon no account be treated as representative of a permanent, universal human nature (Hawkes 1996:9-10). Readers and spectators who identify with Othello's jealousy, for instance, or Macbeth's guilt, are, according to this view, either naive or misguided; and those who argue in favour of such identification are (because they believe in a common human nature) dishonest, if not racist *tout court* (Dollimore 1984)(3). The strength and originality of this approach lie in its acknowledging the cultural and ideological provenance of Shakespeare's dramatic work. Shakespeare's characters cannot be treated as supernatural creatures that come out of nowhere to haunt our imagination. Its weakness, on the other hand, has to do with its determination to reduce human subjects to helpless creatures interpellated by forces beyond their reach or command.

Despite its tremendous influence, Greenblatt's notion of subjectivity is far from satisfying everyone (Bristol 1990:207; Grady 2000:34-41); for although few critics would wish to return to the character criticism of Johnson, Hazlitt, and A. C. Bradley, there is a growing sense among materialists themselves that the state of total passivity to which the human subject has been reduced by the current critical practice is hardly satisfactory. "It will be necessary," says Hugh Grady, "for renewed materialist theories of subjectivity to create an account of agency, of the potentially creative, power-resisting activity of the self within the world -- without at the same time regressing to myths of complete individual autonomy from the social" (Grady 2000:40). Among the attempts made recently to give the Shakespearean subject the autonomy that the materialists have denied him, Harold Bloom's massive *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (1998) is certainly the most provocative. I shall dwell here a little longer on Bloom's book, not only because of the reaction it has provoked within both academic and journalistic circles, but also because I hope that exposing the limitations of Bloom's argument will help me get my own across.

The main argument of Bloom's book is that Shakespeare's plays are less the reflection than the source itself of modern identity:

> Literary character before Shakespeare is relatively unchanging; women and men are represented as aging and dying, but not as changing because their relationship to themselves, rather than to the gods or God, has changed. In Shakespeare, characters develop rather than unfold, and they develop because they *overhear* themselves talking, whether to themselves or to others. Self-overhearing is their royal road to individuation.... The plays remain the outward limit of human achievement: aesthetically, cognitively, in certain ways morally, even spiritually. They abide beyond the end of the mind's reach; we cannot catch up to them. Shakespeare will go on explaining us, in part because he invented us, which is the central argument of this book.
>
> (Bloom 1998, xvii-xviii)

To be sure, this is an extreme view of Shakespeare's genius, going far beyond the Bard's notorious ability to depict aspects of human nature with astonishing accuracy, a commonplace in Shakespearean criticism at least since Samuel Johnson's famous "Preface" (Johnson 1968, first published in 1765). Bloom's contention is that Shakespeare should be credited with no less than "the invention of the human." The "human" here is neither a linguistic sign nor a pure cultural product, but rather a

"self-overhearer." Although Bloom never really explains exactly what he means by "self-overhearing," we may infer from his discussion of certain characters, notably Hamlet, that the term refers to a sudden insight into one's own consciousness, an insight achieved while talking either to oneself or to others. Bloom believes that this insight is the basis of whatever change an individual is likely to undergo.

Harold Bloom is probably right when he says that Shakespeare cannot be rivalled in the creation of individuals; however, individuation has, I think, less to do with "self-overhearing" than with what Charles Taylor, following Bakhtin, has called the "dialogical character" of human life (Taylor 1996:33). Shakespeare's characters become full individuals capable of change because, like other individuals, they are engaged in a continuous dialogue, or dispute, with those who matter to them. Such a dialogue is possible only within what Taylor calls a framework of "strong evaluations." As opposed to "weak evaluations," which consist in a simple weighing of alternatives based on desire, strong evaluations imply ethical assessment (Taylor 1986:15-44). This inescapable framework is crucial to the articulation of identity:

> My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to

> case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand. . . .
>
> What this brings to light is the essential link between identity and a kind of orientation. To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary.
>
> (Taylor 1989: 27, 28)

Identity and ethics are here inseparably intertwined, for knowing the kind of person you want to be involves both having a particular idea of virtue and being ready to embody that virtue. And it is in these terms, I suggest, that Shakespearean character should be read.

The Shakespearean character I propose, then, is a "strong evaluator," a person whose identity is determined by what is of crucial importance to him or her. In other words, there is always something that the Shakespearean character values above all other things, not so much because he or she feels inclined towards it, as because it represents for him or her the quintessence of the good life (being a king, for Lear; being a god on earth, for Richard II; being a virgin, for Isabella). And the

identity crisis that a number of characters in Shakespeare undergo amounts precisely to a certain loss of orientation. An "identity crisis," says Taylor, is "an acute form of disorientation, which people often express in terms of not knowing who they are, but which can also be seen as a radical uncertainty of where they stand" (Taylor 1989:27). What is Lear's massive question--"Who is it that can tell me who I am?" (*King Lear*, 1.4.221) but an expression of a sudden loss of orientation caused by certain people's failure to recognise in him his strongly valued preference for his kingship?

A character criticism more sensible than the one we have had so far should probably focus on the characters' orientation rather than on the actions they take or fail to take; for if Shakespeare's characters are as complex, life-like, and probable as they are believed to be, then it is futile to attempt to know who they really are. "Knowing who a person is" is an illusion; the only thing we are likely to know about someone is what he or she wants to be. It is our one access to their identity. I hardly intend here to oppose action to orientation; what I mean rather is that an action should upon no account be isolated from the character's orientation, if that action is to be elucidated. To borrow an example from modern fiction, both Jay Gatsby and Clarissa Dalloway love to give parties. But if for some reason these two characters were to be deprived of doing that, only Clarissa Dalloway

would go through an identity crisis, because being an excellent hostess is what she considers to be of fundamental value; it is her idea of virtue, her orientation. For Jay Gatsby, giving parties is merely an option among many others; anything capable of attracting Daisy's attention would do.

According to contemporary moral philosophy, a character's orientation is constitutive of his or her identity, but an orientation can be developed and articulated only in dialogue and interaction with other people. An "orientation" provides the individual not only with a point of departure and a direction, but also with a rich language of expression that he or she can use to communicate with others. In other words, if my name is Alonso Quixano and I want to become Don Quixote de la Mancha, knight-errant, I am compelled to use the language of chivalry in my interactions with others. At first blush, Bloom's notion of "self-overhearing" suggests a certain dialogue, sometimes with oneself and sometimes with others. But Bloom gives no clear example of the way in which a character changes because he (or she) overhears himself (or herself) speaking to others. The very few examples we are given are those of soliloquies in which characters go through a thinking process and change their minds. The implication here is that Bloom's Shakespearean character can develop and achieve individuality alone. And it is in this sense, I think,

that Bloom's character criticism is at odds with contemporary ethical philosophy, for which a monological identity is simply inconceivable (Taylor 1996:31-35). Nor is there such a thing as a monologue; words are always uttered with the idea that someone at some point will understand them (Bakhtin 1986:72). When a Shakespearean character speaks supposedly to himself, the "self" he addresses is always presented as an "other"--the other that he seeks to please, convince, or prove wrong.

Although Bloom implies that Shakespeare's great characters develop and become full individuals through "self-overhearing," what he appears to have in mind is one character in particular, Hamlet, who does indeed develop every time he speaks to "himself." But even in his most intimate moments, Hamlet never lacks an addressee, or rather what Bakhtin calls a "super-addressee," beyond his present interlocutors(4). The "other" to whom Hamlet speaks in his famous soliloquies is sometimes his dead father, and in this respect he is scarcely different from the rest of us, as our parents seem to be the interlocutors with whom we never stop conversing, even when they are no longer with us (Taylor 1996:33); and sometimes the "other" is those who hold opposing or similar views on such philosophical issues as death and revenge. For example, Hamlet's famous reflections on death as either sleep or a dream (*Hamlet*, 3.1.60-80) echo Montaigne's essay on "Death"(5)

(Montaigne 1992:120-121). Indeed, Hamlet's very preoccupation with death might have to do with Montaigne's assertion that "*philosophy teacheth us ever to have death before our eyes, to foresee and consider it before it come*" (122). But for any meaningful dialogue to take place, in Bakhtin's view, three elements are required: "an utterance, a reply, and a relation between the two" (Holquist 1990:38). Seen from this perspective, Hamlet's main problem lies less in the fact that he "thinks too well" (Bloom 1998:393) than in the fact that he and his community do not use the same language of expression. In a world where most people adhere to heroic virtues and speak the language of honour and vendetta, Hamlet, the Wittenberg student, has chosen a life of philosophical reflection, not so much as an option among other more or less valid options as because he associates reflection with virtue and the good life: "What is a man / If his chief good and market of his time / Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more" (*Hamlet*, 4.4.33-35).

If Hamlet is indeed more intelligent than any other Shakespearean character, as Bloom repeats incessantly throughout his book, his intelligence must stem from his remarkable capacity to step back from the virtues of his community and regard them from outside, something that the Ghost, Laertes, and Fortinbras are incapable of doing. In his historical account of the virtues, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that the virtues of heroic society, as

represented by Homer's poems, were replaced later by the Athenian virtues we find in the writings of Sophocles, among others (MacIntyre 1986:114-36). For example, while in heroic society the notion of honour has to do with what the individual owes to his community, in Athenian society "the question of honor has become the question of what is due to a man" (133). Hamlet's preoccupation with existential questions makes him seem closer to the virtues of Athens than to those of his own society. The implication here is that Hamlet's willingness to accept the idea of revenge, "a kind of wild justice," in Francis Bacon's terms (Bacon 1986:13), entails no less than a laborious return to an ancient code of behaviour as well as to an ancient age. Such a return would not have been necessary had the ghost acknowledged Hamlet's orientation and his preference for a life based on intellectual reflection. Hamlet's notorious delay is, in this sense, no more than the illustration of his disorientation.

Emphasising the importance of the part played by ethics in shaping the personalities of both people and literary characters does not -- indeed, must not -- mean a return to universalising essentialism. "Morality which is no particular society's morality," says MacIntyre, "is to be found nowhere" (MacIntyre 1984:265-266). Virtues appear and disappear both according to the need that particular communities at particular epochs have for them, and according to the role they are believed to play

in maintaining order or providing protection for those communities (MacIntyre 1984:181-203). To demonstrate the way in which the notion of virtue is historically-bound, I shall use, as a framework for my thesis, Giambattista Vico's theory of historical providence, which corresponds in more than one respect to Shakespeare's own historical vision.

One of the fundamental arguments of Vico's *New Science* is that all nations rise and fall in cycles within history in a pattern governed by providence. The world of nations exhibits, according to Vico, a pattern of three ages of "ideal eternal history" (Vico 1994:335). Every nation passes through a theocratic age, in which people think in terms of gods, and believe everything to be commanded by divine power; an aristocratic age, in which all virtues and institutions are formed through the heroic model, and where the only law that exists is the "law of Achilles who referred every right to the tip of his spear" (338); and, finally, a democratic age, in which all sense of the divine is lost, and the laws are "dictated by fully developed human reason" (338). Then the cycle must begin again. The two first cycles are particularly characterised by their submission to the primordial power of imagination (*fantasia*) and to "poetic wisdom."

Shakespeare's affinity with Vico's reading of human history is apparent most evidently in his notion of

leadership. Shakespeare's leaders see themselves as either gods (Richard II, Julius Caesar), or heroes (Hotspur, Antony), or men (Henry V, Octavius). To show the extent to which the order itself in which Shakespeare's leaders rise and fall is remarkably similar to Vico's *corso* and *recorso*, I have chosen to work on two historical sequences, the Henriad, on the one hand, and *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, on the other hand. The two sequences open with leaders (Richard and Ceasar) who have divine proportions. Both are succeeded or challenged by heroic figures (Hotspur, Antony), who are in turn overcome by Machiavellian leaders (Henry V and Octavius). I hardly need to add that I am less interested in what these leaders really are than in what they want to be. Whether Richard is really a god or just a spoiled child, or whether Antony is a real hero or merely an irresponsible leader, is of little consequence here. It is not so much the valued good itself than the orientation towards the good that is constitutive of personal identity.

PART ONE

The Henriad

I. BORN TO COMMAND:
RICHARD'S POETIC WISDOM

The impression one gets when one is reading *Richard II* is that the world in which the characters of this remarkable play live is a world entirely commanded by divine powers. Gods are expected to come down at any moment and intervene in people's affairs, or send their angels to support the legitimate king and punish the rebels:

> For every man that Bolingbroke hath press'd
> To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,
> God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
> A glorious angel: then if angels fight,

> Weak men must fall. For heaven still guards the right.
>
> (*Richard II,* 3.2.60-62)

The king compares himself to Christ on a number of occasions; and Bolingbroke and his followers are Judases (4.1.170), and sometimes Pilates trying in vain to wash their hands of the horrible crime of deposing another god (4.1.239-242). In the famous "garden scene," the queen calls the deposition of her husband a second fall of man (3.4.76). Indeed, the play in its entirety appears to be the tragedy of a man who believes that he is a god on earth, and that heaven sanctions whatever he says or does, only to realise in the end that few people around him share his conviction.

Richard's firm belief in the sanctity of his position has provoked the indignation not only of his enemies but also of a host of critics who have chosen to harp incessantly on the king's flaws, deeming it unnecessary perhaps to mention the qualities of a man who scarcely misses an opportunity to tell his audience who he thinks he is. Some of these critics have gone so far in their indignation as to use Lancastrian arguments -- sometimes Lancastrian words -- to condemn the king. For example, in his introduction to the play in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, Hershel Baker says that

> Richard has nothing but his royal birth and title to justify his misbehavior, and these are not enough to save him from the consequences of his crimes and follies. He acts flippantly toward Bullingbrook and Mowbray, insolently toward his uncles Gaunt and York, and illegally toward his banished cousin. Dissolute and avaricious, and "basely led / By flatterers," he converts his "sceptered isle" into a "pelting farm" and himself into the "landlord" of the realm.
>
> (Baker 1974:801)

Besides taking at face value Gaunt's judgement, which is certainly obscured by his son's banishment (if not also by envy for not being among the king's favourites), Baker seems as well to take literally what most editors of the play consider to be no more than a metaphorical exaggeration of a usual practice. Richard does not "farm" his whole "royal realm" (1.4.45). He merely grants the profits from the royal taxes to particular persons in exchange for an immediate sum of money to finance the war. This right is usually granted to the highest bidder.

Alfred Harbage, who rarely minces his words, goes even further in his support of the usurpers, his main authorities being Northumberland and Ross. For him, Richard is

> treacherous to friends at home; and to enemies abroad he basely yields 'upon compromise' what 'his ancestors fought for.' He indulges his pleasures and pillages the realm, losing the hearts of both commons and nobles.... If we look for the opposite of Henry the Fifth, who is virtuous and strong, we will find him in neither Richard the Third, who is strong if not virtuous, nor in Henry the Sixth, who is virtuous if not strong, but in the indescribable Richard the Second, who is neither strong nor virtuous.
>
> (Harbage 1961:67)

For Harold Bloom, Richard is "humanly sympathetic... despite his self-pity, his petulance, and a veritable hoard of other bad qualities" (Bloom 1988:1).

Nor are these attacks particular to twentieth-century readings of the play. The long list of Richard's "vices" is the result of centuries of extensive digging into his character. Coleridge, for instance, who admires Richard's power of mind and the courage he displays at the moment of his assassination, is particularly disgusted by the king's effeminate nature. "He is weak, variable, and womanish," he says, "and possesses feelings, which, amiable in a female, are misplaced in a man, and altogether unfit for a king" (Coleridge 1960:145). Hazlitt, for his part, deplores the king's

"want of resolution" but sympathises with the very character traits that Coleridge seems to abhor:

> his heart is by no means hardened against himself, but bleeds afresh at every new stroke of mischance, and his sensibility, absorbed in his own person, and unused to misfortune, is not only tenderly alive to its own sufferings, but without the fortitude to bear them. He is, however, human in his distresses; for to feel pain, and sorrow, weakness, disappointment, remorse and anguish, is the lot of humanity, and we sympathise with him accordingly.
>
> (Hazlitt 1951:272-273)

Though, in passing, one should give Hazlitt some credit for refusing to let himself be manipulated by the demagogic moves of the house of Lancaster (or at least credit for using his own words), the main point here is that the reader, after reading these analyses of Richard's character and dozens of others like them, gets confused as to the notion of virtue that each critic seems to have. Harbage's reference to Henry V, for instance, as a "virtuous king" is enough to make the new historicists and cultural materialists gape at each other from both sides of the Atlantic. One also cannot help

here but consider David Hume's account of the virtues and vices.

According to Hume, qualities and flaws of character are no more than perceptions in the mind of those who contemplate them:

> take any action allowed to be vicious.... Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call *vice*. In whichever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions, and thoughts.... The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You can never find it till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action.... So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compared to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind....
>
> (Hume 1998:468)

What Hume's argument brings to light is the fact that whether Richard's actions are good or bad is not so simple a question as some critics believe, for the answer depends in large part upon the angle from which we as readers tend to judge his behaviour and motives. In other words, it depends on the framework within which we articulate opinions of right or wrong. The passages quoted above are more likely to give us an insight into their authors' moral values than to provide any accurate reading of the King's character. What is crucial, I suggest, for a better appreciation of the play is to understand Richard's own idea of virtue, the things or qualities that he values most and would like to be praised for. This would be possible in my view only if we explored Richard's moral space, that is to say, the framework in terms of which all his actions and decisions should be explained.

The framework of preferences within which Richard operates and issues evaluations is the divinity of the king. Strange as it might seem to us today, the idea that the king is a god on earth, or God's deputy, is a commonplace of Renaissance political thought. The notion is derived from Aristotle's *Politics* according to which a king ought to be esteemed as a god among men (Aristotle 1981:22) as well as from the Christian teachings of the Middle Ages -- a blend that is given its fullest articulation in the writings of, among

others, John of Salisbury and Thomas Aquinas. In his book *Policraticus* (written in 1159), in a chapter concerned with the qualities of the leader, Salisbury argues that

> the prince is the public power and a certain image on earth of the divine majesty. Beyond doubt the greatest part of the divine virtue is revealed to belong to the ruler, insofar as at his nod men bow their heads and generally offer their necks to the axe in sacrifice, and by divine impulse everyone fears him who is fear itself. I do not believe that this could have happened unless it happened at the divine command. For all power is from the Lord God, and is with him always, and is His forever. Whatever the prince can do, therefore, is from God, so that power does not depart from God, but it is used as a substitute for His hand, making all things learn His justice and mercy.
>
> (Salisbury 1995:28)

The divinity of the king is also the subject of some of the homilies that were frequently read in churches during Shakespeare's time. The primary purpose of the homilies was to counter any eventual assaults on the government's authority by inculcating in the people the idea that the monarch was God's deputy on earth, and

that any challenge to his or her authority was a challenge to the divine order of things. To show the extent to which this discourse was still strong during the Renaissance, one has only to mention that thirteen years after the publication of the first Quarto of *Richard II*, King James, in his speech to the Parliament on 21 March 1610, declared that "The state of MONARCHIE is the supremest vpon earth: for kings are not only GODS lieutenants vpon earth, and sit vpon GODS throne, but euen by GOD himselfe they are called GODS"(qtd in Tennenhouse 1994:117).

It is the exact same discourse with which Richard can be said to identify, and the only framework within which he seems capable of answering questions of right and wrong and of making decisions. Walking beyond the limits of this framework would mean no less than losing all sense of identity, as there is nothing that Richard thinks he can possibly be if not the Lord's anointed. Being a little god on earth is what Richard values most; it is his orientation in life as well as the source which provides him with the rich language of expression that he uses so extravagantly to communicate with others and answer all sorts of questions. It is hardly surprising then that the king's language echoes in many of its aspects the language of the Geneva Bible. There is in fact scarcely a speech by Richard that does not contain a biblical allusion (Shaheen 1989:94-120).

Richard believes so much in the sanctity of his position that his development in the play can be seen only as a continuous dialogue with those who recognise in him this identity, and a continuous dispute with those who fail to recognise it.

Among Shakespeare's adherents to the discourse of the king's divinity, those for whom being god's appointed deputy is the chiefest virtue, Richard is perhaps the one who enjoys his role to the full. None of the Bard's other kings, for instance, applies the adjective "royal" to himself so often: "Lay on our royal sword your banish'd hands" (1.3.179); "We are enforc'd to farm our royal realm" (1.4.45); "Make pale our cheek, chasing the royal blood" (2.1.118). And the first scenes of the play are perfect examples of a king who takes delight in the pomp of his position and indulges in what may seem to a modern audience unnecessary rituals.

The play opens with a situation that might have looked strange even to Shakespeare's Elizabethan audience: two mighty lords, Bolingbroke and Mowbray, accuse each other of high treason in the presence of the king -- who easily and most naturally assumes the role of God's representative on earth -- and are ready to fight each other to death, not to prove who is stronger than the other, nor even because they feel insulted and would rather die honourably than go on living in shame. Bolingbroke and Mowbray are determined to fight rather

in order to prove who is right (1.1.46). This implies the existence of a providential power, ready to intervene in favour of the contender telling the truth and help him overcome his "false" opponent. What this also implies is that, despite its heroic appearance, the scene belongs essentially to the theocratic age of gods, the age, as I said earlier, in which everything is commanded by a divine power.

After a series of accusations and counter-accusations, Richard decides that he has heard enough and orders reconciliation:

> Wrath-kindled gentlemen, be rul'd by me,
> Let's purge this choler without letting blood—
> This we prescribe, though no physician;
> Deep malice makes too deep incision.
> Forget, forgive, conclude and be agreed...
>
> (1.1.152-156)

Yet the two contenders have gone too far in their confrontation to accept a reconciliation; and a day and a place for the inevitable encounter have to be designated: "Be ready, as your lives shall answer it, / At Coventry upon Saint Lambert's day" (1.1.198-198). The king's offer then is rejected. What the two mighty lords seem to forget, however, is that a suggestion made by the Lord's anointed is no less than a divine order. Ignoring such an

order is a serious challenge not only to Richard's authority but also to God's will: "we were not born to sue but to command" (1.1.196). The situation in which Richard finds himself at this point in the play is particular but scarcely unusual in Shakespeare. It has to do with that specific moment when every Shakespearean leader -- indeed, every Shakespearean character -- is asked to make at least one difficult choice, a choice between what he wants and what he should do, between his inclination and his duty, his preference and his safety. It is also the moment when an extremely important question needs to be answered, a question upon which depends both the future of the subjects and the identity of their leader. This is Richard's first predicament, his own "to be or not to be." To let or not to let the duel take place is the first of a series of crucial questions with which Richard is faced. But questions of this nature can be answered only against a background of intelligibility, a moral space. And Richard's moral space (like anybody else's, for that matter) is a sea-walled garden beyond whose limits there lies nothing but water. In other words, Richard has little choice as to the way in which the quarrel of the two dukes should be handled. He is a god on earth, and must behave accordingly. Any other decision would be a threat to his identity.

Richard's decision to stop the confrontation has been heavily condemned by twentieth-century critics.

"Precisely why Richard chooses to halt the joust between Bolingbroke and Mowbray at the very last moment we do not know," says Robert Ornstein, "but we recognize the characteristic theatricality of the gesture: here is the weakling's pleasure in commanding (and humiliating) men stronger than himself" (Ornstein 1972:110). In the view of many critics the duel would have rid the king of one of the two powerful dukes. But to allow the duel to take place is also to bend to the contenders' will, which is, in Richard's eyes, a defeat he can hardly suffer. Thus, in a highly ceremonial scene where the rituals of the trial by combat are duly observed, and where the king himself is concerned about the success of the ceremony: "let the trumpets sound / While we return these dukes what we decree" (1.3.121-122), Richard decides to stop the trial and banish both Bolingbroke and Mowbray.

Those who blame the decision on Richard's incompetence, and argue that the whole episode is meant to show how unfit for his office the king is, tend to judge Richard's actions from their own moral space, or at least from the point of view of deontological ethics, according to which people ought to take actions in conformity with their duty(6): the king's duty being the stability of the realm and the welfare of its people. But if the main purpose of studying a literary character is to understand his or her behaviour and motives, then the critics, who disregard the kind of leader that Richard

wants to be in favour of the actions that a good leader ought to take, mistake the matter. To be sure, shrewdness is one of the qualities of a good leader; but Richard's power depends less on political calculations than on the idea of being the Lord's anointed. In this respect, the dukes' refusal to be ruled by their sovereign has much more dangerous implications for Richard's authority than their banishment. To be king, in Richard's understanding, is to be worshipped; to be a subject is to submit and be ready to offer your head to the axe for sacrifice.

What seems to have troubled critics is the nature of the sentence imposed on the contenders, particularly on Mowbray ("never to return" (1.3.152)). Though a large number of explanations have been offered, few indeed can be said to bear any plausibility. "The unequal banishments," according to Graham Holderness, "tacitly acknowledge Mowbray's guilt, and endeavour to appease the Lancastrian interest" (Holderness 1998:154). But such a reading can hardly satisfy those who seem to be convinced of the king's involvement in the murder of Woodstock, and have little doubt as to his partiality to Mowbray. Some of these critics have gone so far as to accuse of dullness those who see no signs of the king's favouritism. "The more vigilant spectator," says John Palmer, "may detect a subtle difference in Richard's address to the two men. Surely there is a touch of irony in his words to Bolingbroke...and a touch of affectionate

approval in his valediction to Mowbray.... But these are hints to the wary. The simple onlooker is absorbed by the knightly courtesy of it all and is as eager for the fight as the champions themselves" (Palmer 1945:130). But if we understand Richard's notion of kinship as well as what he expects of his subjects, if we take into account the fact that it is Mowbray who first rejects the king's offer (Bolingbroke only follows), and the manner as well as the language in which the rejection is expressed, the implications of the banishment become quite intelligible:

RICHARD:

Norfolk, throw down we bid, there is no boot.

MOWBRAY:

Myself I throw, dread sovereign, at your foot;
My life thou shalt command, but not my shame:
The one my duty owes, but my fair name,
Despite of death, that lives upon my grave,
To dark dishonour'd use thou shall not have.
I am disgrac'd, impeach'd, and baffl'd here,
Pierc'd to the soul with slander's venom'd
spear,
The which no balm can cure but his heart-blood
Which breath'd this poison.

RICHARD:

Rage must be withstood:
Give me his gage; lions make leopards tame.

MOWBRAY:

Yea, but not change his spots.

(1.1.164-175)

Not only is Mowbray the first to reject the king's bid, he also does so in a highly poetic language that echoes the language of the Geneva bible. The last line of the quote is an obvious allusion to "Can the blacke More change his skin? Or the leopard his spottes?" (Shaheen 1989:97). Richard is here being scourged, in front of everyone, with his own whip, as it were. Mowbray must disappear forever, because he steals the show from God's minister, something that no one else manages to do throughout the play, not even Bolingbroke when he seizes the crown. A great deal has been said about Richard's extraordinary talent as poet. But what we seem to forget is that the great poet of the initial scenes is not Richard but Mowbray. With the possible exception of Dante's famous passage in *The Divine Comedy* (*Paradiso* XVII.55-60)(7), I do not think there is in all Western poetry a more powerful expression of the difficulty of living in exile than Mowbray's comment on his heavy sentence:

The language I have learnt these forty years,
My native English, now I must forgo,
And now my tongue's use is to me no more

Than an unstringed viol or harp,
Or like a cunning instrument cas'd up—
Or being open, put into his hands
That knows no touch to tune the harmony.
Within my mouth you have engaol'd my tongue,
Doubly portcullis'd with my teeth and lips,
And dull unfeeling barren ignorance
Is made my gaoler to attend to me.
I am too old to fawn upon a nurse,
Too far in years to be a pupil now:
What is thy sentence then but speechless death,
Which robs my tongue from breathing native breath?
(1.3.159-173)

We become conscious of Richard's poetic powers and his immense ability to handle words only after the duke of Norfolk gets out of the picture. The point here is not to say that Mowbray's banishment is intimately linked to his being a better poet than the king is, although those who have had the opportunity to get closely acquainted with a king will tell you that it is not altogether unlikely. What I am trying to say rather is that, after rejecting the king's bid, Mowbray's beautifully expressed arguments do not seem in the least to have helped him.

The motive for metaphor, according to Nietzsche, is to be different, to be elsewhere (Bloom 1998:251). Mowbray's reply, in this sense, is an attempt to rob

Richard of the two things that make him different and apart: his divinity and his language; and take but these two things from Richard and hark what discord follows. Michael Bogdanov's famous production of the play for the *English Shakespeare Company* captures most powerfully the point I am trying to make. Bogdanov shows us a foolish, irresponsible and spoiled king, hardly aware of the real implications of the show displayed before him, but as soon as he hears Mowbray's reply he loses his temper and then leaves the stage in a fury. "Most people," says Baltazar Graciàn, "do not mind being surpassed in good fortune, character, or temperament, but no one, especially not a sovereign, likes to be surpassed in intelligence. For this is the king of attributes, and any crime against it is lèse-majesté" (Graciàn 1992:4).

Bolingbroke's offence, on the other hand, comes after his sentence is pronounced:

> Ourself and Bushy
> Observ'd his courtship to the common people,
> How he did seem to dive into their hearts
> With humble and familiar courtesy;
> What reverence he did throw away on slaves,
> Wooing poor craftsmen with craft of smiles
> And patient understanding of his fortune,
> As 'twere to banish their affects with him.
> Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench;

A brace of draymen bid God speed him well,
And had the tribute of his supple knee,
With "thanks, my countrymen, my loving friends"—
As were our England in reversion his,
And he our subjects' next degree in hope.

(1.4.23-36)

The implications of Bolingbroke's treatment of the common people are more than political. The homily "Concerning Good Order, and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates" places the king at the apex of society as "supreme gouernour ouer all" followed by his "honourable counsell" and "other noble men" (Shaheen 108). The commoners come at the bottom of the social scale. But, in Richard's view, Bolingbroke does not observe this order; for to be courteous to the common people is to believe in an order other than the one set by God, an order in which people are equal. Bowing to "slaves" also means bowing to the wrong god, and that is an act of miscreancy deserving punishment.

One should be careful, however, about underestimating Richard or taking for granted his incompetence and foolishness. The motives he gives for stopping the duel might not be the true ones, but still they do make some sense if we take into account the horrors which the image of an eventual civil war used to evoke in the minds of the English people of that time.

His seizure of Gaunt's fortune to finance the war against the Irish rebels is illegal, to be sure, but can scarcely be avoided, as Green tries to explain: "Now for the rebels which stand out in Ireland, / Expedient manage must be made, my liege, / Ere further leisure yield them further means / For their advantage and your Highness' loss" (1.4.38-41); and the strong reaction against it should, in a sense, show us the opportunism of the English noblemen who give the impression here of placing their personal interest before their country's. Richard does not have to be a calculating leader like Octavius Caesar or Henry V, or a heroic conqueror like Antony or Coriolanus in order to remain in power; all he needs is to have around him people who believe in what he himself believes, that is, the sanctity of the king's person and the divinity of his position.

At the beginning of the play such people are not lacking. Wise and highly respected people such as Gaunt, York, and the bishop of Carlisle are all on Richard's side, or rather on God's side. So much so that when Woodstock's widow, the Duchess of Gloucester, speaks to Gaunt of the king's involvement in her husband's assassination and tries to persuade him of the necessity of revenge, Gaunt' answer is unequivocal:

> God's is the quarrel--for God's substitute,
> His deputy anointed in His sight,

> Hath caus'd his death; the which if wrongfully,
> Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift
> An angry arm against his minister.
>
> (1.2.37-41)

This passive obedience is something the Elizabethans were quite familiar with; for it is assumed, according to the homily *Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion* which argues in favour of "the obedience of subjects not only unto their good and gracious governors but also unto their evil and unkind princes," (Pinciss & Lockyer 1998:38) that there is a reason behind God's selection of a bad king. Since God is all-wise, his placing of a bad ruler in power must result from some divine intention, such as the punishment of a sinful people. If the good king is God's minister, the bad one is God's scourge; and to try to get rid of him can only make matters worse. The only solution then is to put everything in the hands of providence and wait passively.

Yet the historical Gaunt is neither passive nor wise nor pious. In Holinshed, he is an old ruffian, and in the anonymous play *Thomas of Woodstock*, universally acknowledged as a source to Shakespeare's play, Gaunt is the first to proclaim revenge against the king for his part in Woodstock's murder. Shakespeare has totally ignored this version; and one thing we learn from the study of Shakespeare's sources is that whenever he

deviates from his authority it is always with a purpose. The purpose of altering Gaunt's character, in my view, is to show that Richard is not the only product of the theocratic age of gods and the sole believer in the old order of things, and that he can rely on some of the most powerful men in the realm.

The only thing that should have worried Richard, I think, is the fact that his wise supporters are also old people. Gaunt dies in the second act, and York finds himself obliged to join Bolingbroke's army out of weakness and old age rather than any belief in his nephew's cause (2.3.152-156). The order then in which Richard believes is an old and dying one, an order which depends on the power and support of a bunch of old and senile aristocrats who are afraid to raise a finger against God's minister.

Many critics believe that Richard's downfall is the result of his constant refusal to take good advice (Ure 1994:lxvii; Frye 1986:57). But Richard has always been like that, and could probably have ruled for more years with such a flaw had he preserved the one principle upon which his throne stands: hereditary succession. Richard's seizure of Gaunt's lands and money after his death, if we judge by the reaction it provoked, is the most dangerous of his decisions. The implications of this gesture can be elucidated in terms of Lawrence Becker's rendering of the idea of reciprocity.

Richard's crown as well as Gaunt's fortune and lands are gifts of the past that the king and his uncle owe less to their hard work than to tradition. The principle of reciprocity, according to Becker, requires that gifts be returned (Becker 1986); yet there seems to be only one way that the gifts of the past can be returned, and that is by being bestowed on successor generations. Reciprocity, says David Cheal, is "a pattern in the flow of valued objects within a system of transactions in which a social actor who is the source of one transfer is the recipient of another transfer" (Cheal 1988:192). When Richard stops the process, by seizing his uncle's lands, he not only provokes the nobility of England, but also strips his position of all legitimacy. If the right of inheritance is not that important, as Richard's gesture seems to imply, then the rightful king does not have to be the first in line of succession. And this is what York tries to explain to the king:

> Take Hereford's rights away, and take from time
> His charters, and his customary rights;
> Let not to-morrow then ensue to-day:
> Be not thyself. For how art thou a king
> But by fair sequence and succession?
>
> (2.1.195-199)

If giving increases the authority of the person who gives, and enables him to gain a certain control over the recipient (Bristol 1996:142), Richard's failure to grant Bolingbroke what God, law and tradition have given him, decreases his authority and broaches a deep gap in the ground on which he stands(8); and it is only a matter of time before his royal carpet is pulled from under his feet. The aristocrats' right to pass on their property to their heirs, as Katharine Eisaman Maus has remarked, was protected by Magna Carta (Maus 1997:946). Only a conviction of treason could prevent an heir from getting his father's estates. What springs to mind here is the idea that Richard could have, in all legality, appropriated his uncle's estates to finance his Irish wars, had he waited a little; for by the time of Gaunt's death Bolingbroke is already preparing to invade his own country (Maus 1997:946). But Richard needs no tennis balls to put to execution what he already has in mind. He is above all laws, and therefore needs no justification.

In his fascinating biography of Elizabeth I, Christopher Hibbert relates an incident in the life of the Queen that can illuminate, by way of contrast, the implications of Richard's decision:

> Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, was certainly a personable and gallant young man; but he was also selfish, arrogant and persistently

> quarrelsome. Whenever there was a fracas at court he was often to be found in it. He quarreled violently with Sir Philip Sidney who -- though Oxford was as usual in the wrong -- was reprimanded by the Queen for refusing to apologize for calling him "a puppy," for forgetting "the difference in degree between earls and gentlemen." "She laid before Sidney," Sir Fulke Greville wrote, "the respect inferiors owed to their superiors; and the necessity in princes to maintain their own creations, as degrees descending between the people's licentiousness and the anointed sovereignty of crowns; and how the gentleman's neglect of the nobility taught the peasant to insult both."
>
> (Hibbert 1991:126)

The difference between Richard's behaviour and that of Queen Elizabeth amounts precisely to the kind of notion each one of them has of being a good leader. While Richard sees the king as immune and therefore above all calculations, Elizabeth thinks that a good leader is a calculator who anticipates the blows before they arrive. She knows only too well that she owes her position to a tradition based upon hierarchy of blood. Her safety therefore lies in preserving and maintaining that tradition, even if that might imply displeasing a gentleman or two from time to time.

When Richard returns from Ireland with the news that a certain rebellion is going on against him, he still feels confident; the ground on which he stands is still firm under his feet, and the frontiers of his moral space well defined:

> Not all the water in the rough rude sea
> Can wash the balm off an anointed king;
> The breath of worldly men cannot depose
> The deputy elected by the Lord.
>
> (3.2.54-57)

Even when he learns that twelve thousand men from his army have deserted him, he does not seem to care much:

> Is not the king's name twenty thousand names?
> Arm, arm, my name! A puny subject strikes
> At thy glory. Look not to the ground,
> Ye favourites of a king, are we not high?
>
> (3.2.85-88)

The real protagonist of the Shakespearean tragedy, says Jan Kott, is history itself (Kott 1974:36), and tragedy begins when the king becomes conscious of the workings of history (41). At this point in the play, Richard is not yet aware of the movement of history; and both the bishop of Carlisle and Aumerle are there to strengthen his sense

of who he is: "Comfort, my liege, remember who you are" (3.2.82), and "Fear not, my lord. That power that made you king / Hath power to keep you king in spite of all" (3.2.27-28). It is when he learns that York has joined Bolingbroke that he really feels that time is out of joint, and that his uncle's transfer of allegiance marks the end of a whole era and the beginning of another in which being the legitimate king might not be the only quality required of a leader. Here also begins Richard's ordeal, though not necessarily his *anagnorisis*, as many critics have suggested.

Richard has been more than once compared to Lear as a king who has reached wisdom through suffering. But this is to mistake poetic maturity for wisdom, or, at least, to confuse two types of wisdom, Lear's being a philosophical one, based upon a deep grasp of the true meaning of life and what human nature is all about; whereas Richard's is poetic, emanating from the power and reach of his imagination. What Richard experiences when he is told that he is totally abandoned and his most loyal friends killed is a false recognition; for what is expected here from a man in his situation is to realise that he is neither a god beyond human reach nor God's deputy with angels to protect him and fight in his place. Surprisingly, Richard's notion of the king's divinity remains intact; what he realises in his exquisite and most famous speech is that *he* is not a king:

Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs,
Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.
Let's choose executors and talk of wills.
And yet not so--for what can we bequeath
Save our deposed bodies to the ground?
Our lands, our lives, and all, are Bolingbroke's,
And nothing can we call our own but death;
And that small model of the barren earth
Which serves as paste and cover to our bones.
For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings:
How some have been depos'd, some slain in war,
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping kill'd,
All murdered--for within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps Death his court, and there the antic sits,
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
To monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with looks;
Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
As if this flesh which walls about our life
Were brass impregnable; and, humour'd thus,
Comes at the last, and with a little pin
Bores through his castle wall, and farewell king!

> Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood
> With solemn reverence; throw away respect,
> Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty;
> For you have but mistook me all this while.
> I live with bread like you, feel want,
> Taste grief, need friends--subjected thus,
> How can you say to me, I am a king?
>
> (3.2.145-177)

What this extremely important speech reveals most eloquently is the kind of *fantasia* in which Richard lives, and the idea that he has of being a king. For him, a king does not "live with bread" or "feel want" or even "need friends"; a king is nothing less than a god.

The Shakespearean character moves in a space of questions, questions that have to be answered sooner or later. As long as his moral space is well defined and his orientation clear, the character will have no problem answering for himself. It is when he loses his moral space that his capacity to answer questions is lost, and with it his sense of identity. The crucial scene that takes place before Flint Castle best illustrates this situation. When Richard meets the rebels, one feels that he still has what Max Weber calls institutional charisma, the kind of charisma which is often "inherited, or passed along with accession to an office, or invested in an institution" (Lindholm 1993:24); and the rebels

themselves, especially Bolingbroke, are amazed and intimidated by his appearance:

> See, see, King Richard doth himself appear,
> As doth the blushing discontented sun
> From out the fiery portal of the East,
> When he perceives the envious clouds are bent
> To dim his glory and to stain the track
> Of his bright passage to the occident.
>
> (3.3.62-67)

Bolingbroke's eloquence here not only works against his own interests, as Katharine Eisaman Maus has rightly pointed out (Maus 1997:947), it also shows him as the champion of the old order, the order in which degree, priority and place are all observed. Bolingbroke does not seem to object to Richard's staying in power as long as his right to inherit his father's property is not taken away from him. It is very important to imagine this scene on stage. The First Folio's stage direction tells us that Richard "enter on the walls" (the 1597 quarto has "Richard appearth on the walls"), which implies that at this point Richard is assuming a Godlike position over the rebels. This not merely increases his self-confidence and authority, it strengthens as well his sense of who he is:

> We are amaz'd, and thus long have we stood
> To watch the fearful bending of thy knee,
> Because we thought ourself thy lawful king;
> And if we be, how dare thy joints forget
> To pay their lawful duty to our presence?
> If we be not, show us the hand of God
> That hath dismiss'd us from our stewardship;
> For well we know no hand of blood and bone
> Can gripe the sacred handle of our sceptre,
> Unless he do profane, steal, or usurp.
>
> (3.3.72-81)

If we judge by Northumberland's mild and courteous answer, the rebels seem to be immensely impressed by Richard's confident speech. Bolingbroke wants no more than what has been taken away from him by the king, his father's land and title. Richard seems disposed to accept this compromise, but not without some reluctance: "We do debase ourselves, cousin, do we not, / To look so poorly, and to speak so fair?" (3.3.127-128). And the second major question that Richard must answer in the play is whether to accept or not to accept compromise. Aumerle's "let's fight with gentle words, / Till time lend friends, and friends their helpful swords," (3.3.131-132) would have most probably pleased a Machiavellian leader like Henry V, or Octavius Caesar. But certainly not Richard. To be a shrewd and calculating leader is not what Richard

values most or what he wants to be praised for; it lies completely outside his framework of valued preferences. What happens next is a remarkable example of the way in which a person loses his moral space and with it the capacity to answer for himself. Before he even hears Bolingbroke's message, Richard gives his answer, an answer that bears no relation whatever to what the rebels have to say: "what must the king do now? Must he submit? / The king shall do it. Must he be depos'd? / The king shall be contented. Must he lose / The name of king? A God's name, let it go" (3.3.143-146). The dialogue between Richard and the others is broken, because the relation between what has been uttered so far and his excessive reply is missing. Who talked about deposition? What the rebels want is a compromise; but Richard would rather leave the stage than play a role that is so decidedly below his ideal. He simply lacks the language required for this new part; and this is what he expresses most admirably later:

> Alack, why am I sent for to a king
> Before I have shook off the regal thoughts
> Wherewith I reign'd? I hardly yet have learn'd
> To insinuate, flatter, bow, and bend my knee.
>
> (4.1.162-165)

It is wrong in my view to speak of the play as a conflict between *de jure* and *de facto* authorities (Frye 1986:51-81), or as a comparative study of the "practical and artistic temperaments" (Chambers 1935:91). Richard has simply decided not to play a role that falls short of his notion of kingship.

A person like Richard, who, as Hershel Baker has rightly observed, places more importance on symbols than what the symbols stand for (Baker 1974:801), would have laughed at the censors who decided during Elizabeth's reign to remove the so-called "abdication scene" (4.1); for the real abdication, at least for Richard himself, is his descent to the "base court":

> Down, down I come, like glist'ring Phaeton
> Wanting the manage of unruly jades.
> In the base court? Base court, where kings grow
> base,
> To come at traitors' calls, and do them grace!
> In the base court? Come down? Down, court! Down
> king!
>
> (3.3.178-182)

What happens later in Westminster Hall is no more than the formal embodiment of an event that has taken place before (Laan 1978:122); and the show staged by Richard is his own idea of a good revenge.

Richard's easy and wilful abdication could be usefully read in terms of Milan Kundera's concept of *litost*. According to Kundera, *litost*, is "a state of torment caused by a sudden insight into one's own miserable self" (Kundera 1986:122). This feeling is usually followed by a strong desire for revenge, a desire to make the person who caused your misery share your torment. Now, if your counterpart is weaker than yourself, you merely insult him under false pretences. In other words, if Mowbray's eloquence offends you, you just banish him forever and say that it is in order to prevent another civil war from taking place (1.3.125-139). But if your counterpart is stronger, if he has a whole army behind him, you avenge yourself by destroying yourself. *Litost*, in this sense, is an attempt to seek revenge through self-destruction; and a man obsessed with *litost*, whether his name is Richard or Werther (the hero of Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*), will always opt for the worst defeat, his consolation being that those who have caused his torment and misery will regret their deeds or get punished by some providential power. What springs to mind here is the fact that those like Richard who suffer from *litost* are constantly in dialogue with a "super-addressee," beyond their present interlocutors: somebody will one day understand their behaviour. In this light, Richard's self-dramatisations are not so much addressed to his enemies as to an

eventual audience, those who will remember his abdication with regret when they see the "disaster" it has caused England and the pains it has inflicted upon its people. Richard is not totally wrong: in *1 Henry IV*, Northumberland prays God to forgive him for the role he played in the deposition of "the unhappy king" (1.3.146), and Hotspur calls Richard "that sweet lovely rose" (1.3.173).

Along with his crown, Richard loses his identity as well: "Alack the heavy day, / That I have worn so many winters out, / And know not now what name to call myself!" (4.1.257-259). And when we meet him later in his prison cell, he is a different sort of person, a person in search of a new identity. Yet there is no such thing as a monologic identity; a person cannot forge an identity alone. The search for an identity is a quest in which one has to travel to others first, before returning with a sense of self. Well aware of his aloneness, Richard decides to people his prison with "thoughts" (5.5.6-8). But that is hardly necessary as Richard seems to be already engaged in a dialogue with other points of view, his super-addressees being those, for instance, who believe that hunger can tear down walls (5.5.18-21), or those who think that a person should tolerate an embarrassing situation on the grounds that many people before him have gone through it, and many others will do so after (5.5.23-30). The latter reflection is most

significant here, as it appears to bear in it the first seeds of a real change in the king's character.

Richard does not grow wise at the end of the play, as Dr. Johnson believes (Johnson 1989:195), and is scarcely a better poet either. His last speech may well be anticipatory of Hamlet's soliloquies, as Harold Bloom likes to say, but I am not quite sure it is his "best poem" (Bloom 1998:268). The real change takes place when Richard grows weary of his passivity and strikes the keeper: "patience is stale, and I am weary of it" (5.5.103). The implication of this incident is that Richard comes to realise for the first time in the play that he can no longer rely on divine protection, and that he had better do something with his own hands. With his action against the keeper, Richard not only puts an end to the age whose virtues he has in vain endeavoured to keep alive, he also makes his own little contribution to the introduction of a new age, the age of heroes in which people take arms against their troubles.

II. AS HEART CAN THINK: HOTSPUR'S POETIC POLITICS

Richard's fall and murder must have proven at least one thing to his entourage: that God does not intervene in people's affairs. Whether the king is the Lord's anointed or not is a different business; what is certain is that God did nothing to defend the legitimate king or punish the usurpers, and that Richard was mistaken in his belief in divine protection. The queen herself is outraged by her husband's excessive passivity and lack of resistance:

> What, is my Richard both in shape and mind
> Transform'd and weak'ned? Hath Bolingbroke depos'd
> Thine intellect? Hath he been in thy heart?

> The lion dying thrusteth forth his paw
> And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with rage
> To be o'erpow'r'd, and wilt thou, pupil-like,
> Take the correction mildly, kiss the rod,
> And fawn on rage with base humility,
> Which art a lion and the king of beasts?
>
> (*Richard II,* 5.1.26-34)

None of the spectacular divine interventions that Richard was expecting occurred, nor did the "armies of pestilence" (3.3.86) strike the children of those who threatened "the glory of my precious crown" (3.3.87-90). As to Carlisle's prophesies (4.1.134-149), no one seems to take them seriously. Richard's subjects are now Bolingbroke's, and Bolingbroke himself, whom everyone knows to be a usurper, is being called "a god on earth" by the duchess of York (5.3.134), which recalls Ben Jonson's line "'tis place, / Not blood, discerns the noble, and the base" (*Sejanus* 5.2.12). As for Richard's blood which still weighs heavily on the new king's conscience, a little trip to the holy land and the killing of a bunch of Moslems is likely to wash it away: "I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land, / To wash this blood off from my guilty hand" (5.6.49-50). The implications of Henry's decision to go on a crusade are much more important than they might appear at first glance. A major change seems to be taking place here, and

the old order is being slowly replaced by a new one. In the new order, heroism appears to be much more valuable in God's esteem than piety: now, one can kill the legitimate king and get away with it if one is capable of performing a heroic deed such as the killing of infidels in the Middle East. The change starts at the end of *Richard II,* and when we get to *1 Henry IV,* we find that the change is completed, and that we are already in the aristocratic age of heroes, an age in which the reign of *pietas* cedes to the rule of *virtus.*

Graham Holderness is right in his reading of the chronicles as a form of historiography. "Shakespeare," he says, "developed his own understanding of history from his historical sources" (Holderness 1998:153). What is disturbing in Holderness' account, none the less, is that history seems to move in the wrong direction:

> The conflict which ultimately leads to [Richard's] deposition is not a conflict between old and new, between absolute medieval monarchy and new Machiavellian power-politics. It is a conflict between the king's sovereignty and the ancient code of chivalry.... Richard initially acquiesces in this code... [but] subsequently attempts to affirm a policy of royal absolutism.
>
> (Holderness 1998:153)

Holderness might have in mind the history of England, during which various attempts to impose certain absolutism were made. Whether any of these attempts succeeded or not is a different matter; what is of interest here is that this cannot apply to Shakespeare. The Bard's historical vision is primarily Viconian. In his two mature sequences (The Henriad as well as *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*), the heroic leader of the aristocratic age always emerges as a reaction to the absolutism of a leader who begins to assume divine proportions, and is often overcome by a Machiavellian leader from the democratic age of men. In other words, what is threatened at the beginning of *Richard II* is more the king's absolutism than the feudal system. Besides, Holderness' reading presents Richard as a calculating leader who seeks to curb the power of a menacing opposition, and this kind of leader is precisely what Richard is not.

Bolingbroke's seizure of the crown by force has introduced England into a new age and to new virtues, valour being the most important and the most coveted of all. The language of war dominates the first part of *Henry IV*; and the most important figures now are no longer bishops or old relatives of the king; they are either war heroes, with such names as Hotspur, Glendower and Douglas, or braggart soldiers like Falstaff. The theocratic world of *Richard II* is filled with rituals and

words, and the emphasis, in terms of imagery, is placed on "the idea of speech, illustrated by the repeated and significant use of words such as *tongue*, *mouth*, *speech*, *word*" (Clemen 1969:56). The banished Mowbray, for instance, is less concerned about the loss of his homeland than about his inability to use his "native English" in exile (*Richard II* 1.3.160). With *1 Henry IV* we move from the world of speech to the world of physical action and movement; and the play, as Humphreys has pointed out, "abundantly annotates emotions and behaviour as expressed physically" (Humphreys 1994:lviii). The historical change is illustrated as well by the fact that the usurper is not challenged by the champions of the old order or the old leadership, as it is usually the case in Shakespeare; the real threat here comes from new pretenders. Few people seem to be interested in avenging the deposed and murdered king; and Bolingbroke is challenged less for his usurpation of the English crown than for his moral qualities, as we shall see in due course. Every age has its own virtues; and the leader who falls short of these virtues must clear the way for the one who excels in them. This proposed leader, the most virtuous of his age, is Hotspur, "the theme of honour's tongue" (1.1.80), as the king himself is forced to admit, though not without bitterness and envy (1.1.184-191).

In more than one respect, *1 Henry IV* is the tragedy of Hotspur, and the play that traces his rise and fall;

even the behaviour of such a character as Falstaff, whose importance in the play is beyond question, is meant in some sense to stand in contrast with that of Hotspur. Falstaff's famous speech on honour (5.1.126-141), for instance, is rightly seen as a response to Hotspur's excessive commitment to the ethos of chivalry and a cynical comment on his "methinks it were an easy leap / To pluck bright honour from the pale-fac'd moon" (1.1.199-200). That the play is named after King Henry IV can be explained by the fact that it is Shakespeare's custom to name his plays for the highest ranking figure (Bloom 1998:104). But Shakespeare is only too conscious of the importance of the character of Hotspur in the play. The play was entered in the Stationers' Register in 1598 as *The historye of Henry the IIIJth with his battaile of Shrewsburye against Henry Hottspurre of the Northe with the conceipted mirthe of Sir John Ffalstoff.* The first quarto keeps the same title, but in both the second quarto and the first folio, the name of the battle as well as the reference to Falstaff are dropped to give more prominence to Hotspur: *The First Part of Henry the Fourth with the Life and Death of henry Sirnamed HOT-SPURRE.*

Like Antony, Coriolanus, Hector, and, to some extent, Tybalt, Hotspur lives according to a chivalric code of honour and *virtus.* Works such as Spencer's *Fairie Queene,* Sidney's *Arcadia,* Castiglione's *Book of the*

Courtier, and Romei's *Courtiers Academie* played an important part in the revival of the *ethos* of chivalry during the Renaissance. Besides an idealisation of war and duels, and a glorification of death on the fields of honour, the image that this heroic world attempts to project is that of the hero as a strong man and a great warrior who provides protection and leadership for his family and community. The most important qualities of the hero are courage and physical strength:

> Courage is important, not simply as a quality of individuals, but as the quality necessary to sustain a household and a community. *Kudos,* glory, belongs to the individual who excels in battle or in contest as a mark of recognition by his household and his community.
>
> (MacIntyre 1981:115-116)

Out of these social facts crucial to the understanding of the heroic society emerges what anthropologists call a "shame culture," according to which the hero's behaviour should be in total accord with the aristocratic culture of honour, in the sense that he must upon no account bring shame on his family or community by acting in a disgraceful manner such as refusing to take part in a war, or ignoring a challenge to single combat, *inter alia* (Cantor 1994:3).

Great men, says Nietzsche, are no more than actors of their own ideal (Nietzsche 1968:273). The ideal that Hotspur endeavours to act and live up to throughout the play is the ethos of chivalry. It is the life he has chosen for himself, not so much as an option among other more or less valid options as because he associates it with his idea of virtue and the good life. "O gentlemen, the time of life is short! / To spend that shortness basely were too long," he says to his companions before the battle of Shrewsbury (5.2.81-88). The life of the knight is also the moral space from which he draws the strong language of expression that enables him to establish a certain communication with others, and to author his own identity. Hotspur's identity is defined and articulated less in dialogue than in dispute and struggle with those who fall short of his ideal; and his description of the king's messenger, in his first speech, is a brilliant account of the kind of person he refuses to be:

> My liege, I did deny no prisoners,
> But I remember, when the fight was done,
> When I was dry with rage, and extreme toil,
> Breathless and faint, leaning upon my sword,
> Came here a certain lord, neat and trimly dress'd,
> Fresh as a bridegroom, and his chin new reap'd
> Show'd like a stubble-land at harvest-home.

He was perfumed like a milliner,
And 'twixt his finger and his thumb he held
A pouncet-box, which ever and anon
He gave his nose, and took't away again--
Who therewith angry, when it next came there,
Took it in snuff--and still he smil'd and talk'd:
And as soldiers bore dead bodies by,
He call'd them untaught knaves, unmannerly,
To bring a slovenly unhandsome corse
Betwixt the wind and his nobility.
With many holiday and lady terms
He question'd me, among the rest demanded
My prisoners in your Majesty's behalf.
I then, all smarting with my wounds being cold,
To be so pester'd with a popinjay,
Out of my grief and my impatience
Answer'd neglectingly, I know not what,
He should, or should not, for he made me mad
To see him shine so brisk, and smell so sweet,
And talk so like a waiting-gentlewoman
Of guns, and drums, and wounds, God save the mark!

(1.3.30-55)

Despite his apparent rage, Hotspur seems to take delight in remembering the incident. The desire to remember is linked to slowness, says Kundera, as much as the desire to forget is associated to speed (Kundera 1996:39)(9). A

person cannot dwell so much on a particular memory unless he or she derives a certain pleasure from it. What I am trying to say here is that the king's envoy is the Other that Hotspur needs to travel to in his heroic quest for an identity. He simply cannot do without "popinjays" if he is to have a strong sense of his self, if he is to articulate an identity. The speech not only provides a very good insight into Hotspur's idea of a good leader: courageous, masculine, and indifferent to physical suffering; it also reveals his immense contempt for the life of the courtier. A courtier, for him, is an effeminate creature whose life is devoted to fashion and mannerism, and who is therefore unfit for leadership. A country is vulnerable, in Hotspur's understanding, as long as it is run by courtiers. In addition to such effete courtiers as the "popinjay" messenger, Hotspur has little respect for the king and his son, the prince of Wales: they do not fit into his own idyllic image of virtue. The king is "a vile politician" (1.3.238), a term with strong pejorative connotations in Elizabethan usage, and meaning, among other things, a deceitful opportunist; and the prince of Wales is armed, like a plebeian, with "sword and buckler" (1.3.227) instead of the rapier and dagger the gentlemen of Shakespeare's day habitually wore.

For Hotspur, people are of two categories: those who are gentlemen in possession of chivalric virtues, and

those who are not; and, according to his own criteria, the king is not a gentleman. His demand that the prisoners be delivered is counter to the code of honour. The law of arms allows Hotspur to retain his prisoners. "The Ransome of a prisoner," says Turner in his *Pallas Armata* (1683), "belongs to him who took him, unless he be a person of very eminent quality, and then the prince, the state, or their general seizeth on him, giving some gratuity to those who took him." (qtd. in Humphreys 1994:8). Hotspur's decision then to retain the prisoners and deliver the Earl of Fife alone is in perfect accord with the laws of chivalry. If there is someone to blame in this business, it is most certainly the king, who not only fails to observe the rules of the age he himself has established, but also, in his attempt to reassert his authority and be himself (1.3.5), behaves in a godlike manner in an age in which the divinity of the king has become a quaint notion. The king is no longer God's lieutenant to be feared and obeyed; he is rather a partner bound to his subjects, or rather to some of his subjects, by fealty, which is a feudal law that allows the lord to enjoy certain privileges in exchange for his services to the state and his loyalty to the king(10). The king's refusal to redeem Mortimer, Hotspur's brother-in-law, on unfounded grounds of treason is yet another slap in the face of the House of Percy, which the fiery Hotspur will not be able to abide for a long period of

time. But all this puts Hotspur in an extremely uncomfortable position. To be sure, the king is not a gentleman, and Hotspur is right to defend his honour and that of his family, but disloyalty to the king, as Norman Council has pointed out, is itself an act of dishonour (Council 1973:45). This is the first difficult choice that Hotspur has to make; and his dilemma manifests itself most particularly in the speeches he delivers after his meeting with the king. Besides being short and repetitive, the speeches lack the lustre, the imagination and the eloquence so characteristic of the language he uses throughout the play.

Unlike his opportunist father and uncle, Hotspur cannot go to war against the king for reasons having to do with personal interests. So far, "unthankful" (1.3.134) is the only thing he can accuse the king of being; and that is not reason enough to prompt him to go to war. A quixotic hero like Hotspur needs an honourable war, a war, for instance, in which some kind of justice needs to be restored; and this is precisely what his uncle Worcester has in store for him: Richard's refusal to ransom Mortimer is politically motivated. Mortimer, as Hotspur seems to ignore, was proclaimed by Richard heir to the crown:

HOTSPUR:

But soft, I pray you, did King Richard then

Proclaim my brother Edmund Mortimer
Heir to the crown?

NORTHUMBERLAND: He did, myself did hear it.

HOTSPUR:

Nay, then I cannot blame his cousin King,
That wish'd him on the barren mountain starve.
But shall it be that you that set the crown
Upon the head of this forgetful man,
And for his sake wear the detested blot
Of murderous subornation--shall it be
That you a world of curses undergo,
Being the agents, or base second means,
The cords, the ladder, or the hangman rather?
--O, pardon me, that I descend so low,
To show the line and the predicament
Wherein you range under this subtle King!
Shall it for shame be spoken in these days,
Or fill up chronicles in time to come,
That men of your nobility and power
Did gage them both in an unjust behalf

And shall it in more shame be further spoken,
That you are fool'd, discarded, and shook off
By him for whom these shames ye underwent?
No, yet time serves wherein you may redeem
Your banish'd honours, and restore yourselves
Into the good thoughts of the world again.

(1.3.153-180)

This speech can be easily called "the heroic manifesto." All the fundamental virtues of the heroic society are expressed here as well as the things that a hero should or should not do to protect his family's honour. The importance of the speech stems also from the fact that it presents Hotspur as a pure product of the shame culture. The Percys are covered with shame, he thinks, not only for the significant part they played in the accession to the throne of a usurper, which is an unjust cause unworthy of so noble a family as his, but also for being unpregnant of their cause and incapable of taking action against the king in order to redeem their "banish'd honour." The speech acquaints us as well with Hotspur's great concern about the "chronicles in time to come." This eventual audience is as crucial to Hotspur's authoring of his identity as the "popinjay" or "the king of smiles" are. And before the scene is over we see him already engaged in a silent dialogue with his super-addressee: "Imagination of some great exploit," says Northumberland, "Drives him beyond the bounds of patience" (1.3.197-198). This is a key moment in the play; henceforth, what we see is Hotspur the author of his own life story, the hero of his own romance. He is well oriented now towards what he considers the quintessence of the good life, the life of the knight;

and his moral space furnishes him not only with the right kind of answers he needs in order to deal with the new situation, but also with the rich and eloquent language that makes him one of the most attractive and engaging characters in all of Shakespeare. How odd that the person who finds scarcely anything to say after his meeting with the king is all of a sudden unable to stop talking or let anyone else utter a word of his own: "peace, cousin, say no more" (1.3.135); "good cousin, give audience for a while" (1.3.209); and "you start away, / And lend no ear unto my purposes" (1.3.215). Restoring justice is an honourable enterprise, and an opportunity that not a single hero would let pass; and defeating "this subtle king" (1.3.167) will not merely "pluck up drowned honour by the locks" (1.3.203), it will erase the shame that covers the Percys as well. The king's provocation then is an undreamed-of-opportunity for Hotspur.

"We do not place especial value on the possession of a virtue," says Nietzsche, "until we notice its total absence in our opponent" (Nietzsche 1977:152). The king's failure to behave in a gentleman-like manner towards the Percys, as well as the Percys' failure to redeem their stained honour, give Hotspur a stronger sense not only of his own courage and determination but also of his being "the theme of honour's tongue" (1.1.80). From now on, the sky is the limit for Hotspur; and the role he will play is no less than that of the realm's supreme hero and

protector against injustice and villainy. And since he despises stay-at-home politicians, his throne will be his roan horse (2.3.71).

In the aristocratic age of heroes, there is no such thing as a legitimate king: there are only worthy and unworthy leaders. And worthiness is determined by the extent to which the individual plays or fails to play the role assigned to him by the members of his community:

> Every individual has a given role and status within a well-defined and highly determinate system of roles and statuses. The key structures are those of kinship and of the household. In such a society a man knows who he is by knowing his role in these structures; and in knowing this he knows also what he owes and what is owed to him by the occupant of every other role and status.
>
> (MacIntyre 1984:122)

Hotspur's previous deeds in war, something that even his enemies cannot deny, leave no doubt as to his ability to assume the role of the protector of his family as well as its uncontested leader. This is what he owes the others. In return, he asks for nothing less than a total compliance with his decisions and orders. Any objection, any cross, any impediment is insufferable to him. Both his family and the king want to treat him the way

Coriolanus is treated by the patricians, that is, as the arm in the body-politic. But that is hardly how he wishes to be treated. Hotspur sees himself rather as the heart whose pulse keeps the other members alive. The Percys want an executioner; Hotspur wants loyal followers. They have a plan; he has a quixotic quest and an impossible dream. But who, besides Hotspur, believes in impossible dreams any more in this rapidly changing world? Even those who admire Hotspur's virtues cannot subscribe to them, because they think that their safety lies elsewhere. Glendower's fantasies about the omens surrounding his birth, for instance, seem to be more valuable to him than any chivalric commitment to telling the truth (3.1.11-58); and Northumberland's manoeuvres are as politically motivated as the king's refusal to redeem Mortimer. Both Glendower and Northumberland prove uncertain allies when the hour of the battle approaches. Thus, the honour for which Hotspur is ready to sacrifice his life does not seem to exist outside his imagination.

Few critics have failed to recognise Hotspur's attractive qualities; nevertheless, with the possible exception of Hazlitt, who possesses this extraordinary (almost Shakespearean) capacity to put himself inside the character and get a glimpse of the way he feels (Hazlitt 1951:283-284), most critics wish Hotspur were a different type of person. According to Northrop Frye, he is "foolish in many respects" (Frye 1986:71); Claire

McEachern deplores his "recklessness" and inability to negotiate (McEachern 2000:xxxii), and David Bevington dislikes his impatience and pride (Bevington 1988:xviii). What these critics seem to forget is that some of the virtues they appear to cherish are simply inconceivable in a heroic structure, and some, such as humility, would be regarded as vices (MacIntyre 1982:182). In any heroic society, Hotspur's "recklessness" and "foolishness" would be celebrated and taught in schools; and I would go so far as to say that there are many places in the world today in which the commentators' praise of prudence and compromise would be condemned as sheer cowardice. If Vico is right in his reading of history, and I assume he is, the West is approaching the end of the democratic age of men; however, a good many nations throughout the world are still living in their heroic age. The Gulf War is a good example here. While the Western people and media were astonished by Saddam's recklessness in facing such great military powers as the United States, Britain, and France, millions of demonstrators were marching on the streets throughout the Arab World to support and celebrate the Iraqi leader's suicidal defiance of the world. The shame culture is still strong in the Arab world, and it would have been considered a disgrace to the Arab nation had Saddam yielded to the allies' threat and withdrawn his forces from Kuwait. I hardly intend to applaud the chivalric *ethos* or condemn modern political

realism. My point is that what is considered a virtue in a particular culture at a particular historical period may not be considered as such in a different culture at a different time.

According to a well-known reading of the play, Hotspur and Falstaff are the two extremes in the middle of which virtue is to be found (Tillyard 1991:270-271). One is the excess and the other is the defect of military spirit; the middle is the place where Prince Hal is to position himself if he is to achieve excellence and become a successful leader. The reading is inspired by Aristotle's definition of virtue as a mean between two extremes:

> Virtue...is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate.
>
> (Aristotle 1980:39)

If the golden mean in militarism is courage, then Falstaff represents cowardice, according to this view, and Hotspur stands for recklessness. The inadequacy of this reading resides in the fact that it reduces two of Shakespeare's most attractive creations to mere

representations of vice, which is a gross oversimplification; for while Hotspur is complex enough to resist being framed within such a narrow reading, the fat knight's notorious vices may turn out to be no more than mere disobedience to customs, which Nietzsche considers to be the origin of morality:

> Morality is nothing other (therefore *no more*!) than obedience to customs, of whatever kind they may be; customs, however, are the *traditional* way of behaving and evaluating.... The free human being is immoral because in all things he is *determined* to depend upon himself and not upon a tradition: in all the original conditions of mankind, 'evil' signifies the same as 'individual', 'free', 'capricious', 'unusual', 'unforeseen', 'incalculable'.
>
> (Nietzsche 1977:87)

A Nietzschean reading of Falstaff seems to me to be more illuminating and rewarding than an Aristotelian one. The fat knight's immorality lies less in his behaviour than in his age and physical appearance. Old people are supposed to be the best guardians of tradition and customs. Society cannot suffer the sight of an old, fat man spending most of his time in taverns drinking sack, laughing, and meddling with youngsters and women of

dubious reputation. An old man should renounce the life of pleasure. An old man should fall to his prayers. To be sure, such people as Falstaff can be dangerous for, and disruptive of, the social and political order, but that is merely because they are free individuals who live according to their own life standards. That such standards look unacceptable to most of us does not make them necessarily vicious or immoral, for they can be so only through our moral interpretation of them.

The popularity of the Aristotelian reading has led many commentators to read Hotspur's decision to go to war against the king's massive army, without the expected support of Northumberland and Glendower's troops, as evidence of his recklessness. This interpretation overlooks not only Hotspur's moral space and the kind of leader he wants to be, but also the Renaissance notion of honour, which is, as Norman Council has persuasively argued, almost identical to that of Hotspur (Council 1973:36-57).

For Worcester, who must choose between defeat and safety, Northumberland's failure to show up at the last moment is a good excuse for a face-saving retreat (4.1.56). For Hotspur, the situation is much more complicated: he is forced to choose between an almost certain death and a perpetual shame. "A man of honor," says Count Romei in *The Courtiers Academie* (translated into English in 1596) "should alwaies preferre death,

before infamous saftie" (qtd in Council 1973 40). Instead of stepping down after being abandoned by most of his allies, Hotspur thinks rather that his glory will be greater with the odds against him. Thus, his father's absence is not altogether a bad thing:

> It lends a lustre and more great opinion,
> A larger dare to our great enterprise,
> Than if the Earl were here...
>
> (4.1.77)

Knowing that no expression or deed can be fully grasped in the present moment, and that "every meaning," as Bakhtin has pointed out, "will have its homecoming festival" (qtd in Holquist 1997:39), Hotspur believes that in time to come a glorious death will serve his family much better than a shameful safety. Hotspur's decision is reminiscent of that of the hero of *The Song of Roland*. In a famous episode Count Roland (another product of the shame culture) refuses to sound his horn in order to get help from Charlemagne and the main body of the French army, because that would bring shame on him and the whole French nation (*The Song of Roland* 86.1088-1092). The consequences of his decision are by no means better than those of Hotspur's.

Hotspur's decision to go to war proceeds, as I said earlier, less from a simple weighing of two options than

from a strong evaluation, one that is intimately linked to his idea of virtue -- itself an inseparable part of his identity. It is a great deal less intolerable for him to lose his life than his sense of orientation toward what he considers the good life; for if not "the theme of honour's tongue" (1.1.80), there seems to be little that Hotspur wants to be. His dying speech is very idiosyncratic: "O Harry, thou hast robb'd me of my youth! / I better brook the loss of brittle life / Than those proud titles thou hast won of me" (5.4.76-78). He is less loath to part from life than from the glorious titles he has won, and which will be Harry's now.

III. LET THE END TRY THE MAN: HENRY'S RATIONAL HUMANITY

If the death of Richard, as I indicated earlier, is a clear evidence that God does not meddle in politics, Hotspur's death at the hand of the calculating Hal must have proven beyond any doubt that such good ingredients as pride, honour, courage, and honesty can by no means guarantee victory in war or success in politics. It took Hotspur several battles and injuries to become a hero; and while he was fighting for his country and king, Hal was wasting the lamps of night in revel with such strange companions as Falstaff, Pistol, and Bardolph. What are the missing ingredients then which caused the legendary warrior to be robbed of his youth as well as his titles

and glorious deeds by the "sword-and-buckler prince of Wales"?

To engage in a meaningful dialogue or dispute with others, one should use a language of expression that one's interlocutors are capable of understanding and responding to. In the rapidly changing world of the play few people seem to understand Hotspur's commitment to heroic virtues and to an ancient code of honour. The other ingredient that Hotspur conspicuously lacks (and which constitutes Harry's strength, as we shall see in due course) is the capacity to take a detached view of the situation in which he is involved and pass judgement on it. It has never occurred to Hotspur that the ideals for which he is ready to "die merrily" (4.1.134) might not be cherished by everyone, and that for most people a living dog is a great deal better than a dead lion.

> In heroic society there is no 'outside' except that of the stranger. A man who tried to withdraw himself from his given position in heroic society would be engaged in the enterprise of trying to make himself disappear.
>
> (MacIntyre 1984:126)

Hotspur not merely lacks, but cannot, being a heroic leader, possess the capacity to leave his framework momentarily and evaluate his decisions and choices from a

different standpoint, a capacity that MacIntyre attributes to the modern self (MacIntyre 1984:31). A brief encounter with the remarkable Rosalind in the Forest of Arden would have undoubtedly taught him that dying for honour could be as absurd sometimes as dying for love(11). Hotspur is unfortunately denied the great variety of perspectives with which Rosalind is endowed; he can neither see himself from other people's perspectives, nor can he slightly change his own to see the others in a different light. In other words, the heroic age is incapable of producing a leader in possession of such a capacity; it will take another age and other conditions for such a leader to appear. England must wait a little and let time do its work. And nowhere else in the canon is Shakespeare more conscious of the passage of time than in *2 Henry IV.*

Whether *2 Henry IV* was part of Shakespeare's initial scheme or simply written to meet a popular demand for more Falstaff is not easy to determine; and despite the considerable body of criticism dedicated to this particular question, one can scarcely speak of a consensus in favour of one argument or the other. What is certain, however, is that the second part is almost a copy of the first. Both plays, for instance, make a balanced use of verse and prose; and in both we have scenes of political intrigue juxtaposed with scenes of comic plotting. Also, in both plays the king's concern is

divided between the rebellion threatening his crown, and the wayward behaviour of his son, which constitutes a serious menace to the future of the Lancastrian dynasty. In 2.2 of each play we see Hal and Poins setting a plot to embarrass Falstaff, and in 2.4 we have a long hilarious tavern scene meant to expose the fat knight and present him as a liar. Both plays present Falstaff as a corrupt recruiter of soldiers, and show us battle scenes at the end of which he claims undue distinctions. Yet despite all these similarities Shakespeare knows only too well that one cannot visit the same place twice, for even if the place and the person occupying it are the same, time is never the same. And time is the real hero of this seemingly heroless play.

Like Yeats's Ireland, the England of *2 Henry IV* is no country for old men. The King, Falstaff, and the Lord Chief Justice, for instance, are all having a hard time being what they have been. The king is too old to enjoy his son's success in capturing the rebels (*2 Henry IV*, 4.4.102-111), and Falstaff's main concern is his health. "Sirrah, you giant, what says the doctor to my water?" (2.1.1) is the first sentence that the fat knight utters in this play. The Lord Chief Justice, for his part, is so worried about his future under the young king's reign that he wishes his life could end with that of his present king (5.2.6). The sickness from which the old people suffer is, we are told by the Archbishop of York,

a mere reflection of the sickness afflicting the nation as a whole: "The commonwealth is sick" (1.3.87), and "we are all diseased" (4.1.54). Aging and sickness are often accompanied by a nostalgic search for lost time. Mowbray remembers the abortive trial by combat involving his father and Bolingbroke in highly chivalric terms (4.1.114-129), and Justice Shallow has a great deal to say about his youthful adventures: "Jesus, the days that we have seen" (3.2.214). The purpose of these nostalgic remembrances, as Stanley Wells has remarked, is to show, among other things, "the effects of the passage of time on people" (Wells 1997:148); for, as Shakespeare makes sure to remind us, the past is not as glorious as these people think. Mowbray's Homeric description of the duel is met with Westmoreland's harsh rebuke: "You speak, Lord Mowbray, now you know not what" (4.1.130); and Shallow's romanticised account of his youth is counterpointed with Falstaff's elaborate version:

> Lord, Lord how subject we old men are to this vice of lying! This same starved justice hath done nothing but prate to me of the wildness of his youth, and the feats he hath done about Turnbull Street, and every third word a lie, duer paid to the hearer than the Turk's tribute. I do remember him at Clement's Inn, like a man made after supper of a cheeseparing. When a was naked, he was for all the world like a forked

> radish, with a head fantastically carved upon it with a knife. A was so forlorn, that his dimensions to any thick sight were invisible; a was the very genius of famine, yet lecherous as a monkey, and the whores called him mandrake. A came ever in the rearward of the fashion, and sung those tunes to the overscutched housewives that he heard the carmen whistle, and sware they were his fancies or his good-nights.
>
> (3.2.296-309)

What is also remarkable (and this applies to the sequence as a whole) is the fact that time is made so real, and its movement so constant that we almost hear its winged chariot hurrying near as we read the plays or watch them. For example, the old people of the play seem to be running out of time, while the young are too young and inexperienced, and therefore need more time to be ready to assume power. And there seem to be few middle-aged men in this realm, this England. There is also a sense in which the only way to survive in this world is to keep a firm hold on time. Those who like to dwell upon the past have little chance of success, because the real threat, contrary to what we have in the tragedies and some of the other chronicles, lies less in the past than in the future. Bolingbroke forces Richard into abdication, but he is not challenged by Richard's supporters, as one would expect; the challenge comes from

the young Hotspur, and for reasons having little to do with Richard's fate. Similarly, Hotspur's challenge to Henry IV's authority is not answered by the king himself but rather by his son, the prince of Wales. In its second attempt, the rebellion is confronted not so much by the calculating Hal (the hero of the war against the first rebellion) as with the subtle and unscrupulous Prince John, the character most representative of the post-Shrewsbury era.

The battle of Shrewsbury not only separates the two plays, it is also the incident that seems to have triggered, or at least accelerated, the historical change and the passage from the age of heroes to the age of men. Harry's unexpected victory over the legendary Hotspur has established new standards and new virtues, the most important being cunning. Now, you can overcome a war hero who surpasses you both in physical strength and experience if you can only use your brain.

If the world of Richard is governed by the power of the word, and that of Hotspur by physical strength, the post-Shrewsbury world is governed by the power of the false word. Language has acquired a new function in *2 Henry IV*; it is less a means of communication than a device meant to lull people into a false sense of security. The rebels' leader is no longer a war hero but a bishop whose function is to turn "insurrection to religion" (1.1.201). Sincerity is replaced by commodity,

and things are measured by the profit they can bring to those who use them: "A good wit will make use of everything," says Falstaff, "I will turn diseases to commodity" (1.3.249-250). What counts here is not so much the action you perform as the action that people think you have performed or are capable of performing. Falstaff is rewarded for his "day's service at Shrewsbury" (1.2.147), a service we all know he never did. On the battlefield, the rebel Colevile yields to the valiant soldier he believes Falstaff to be: "I think you are Sir John Falstaff, and in that thought yield me" (4.3.16-17). It is hardly surprising then that the induction of the play is spoken by a character called Rumour, who identifies himself as "a pipe / Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures" ("Induction" 15-16).

For the age of men to emerge, all sense of the divine or the heroic has to be lost and replaced by a life dominated by luxury and falsehood (Verene 1996:836). If Mistress Quickly betrays the religious spirit by breaking the law against meat-eating in Lent: "All vict'lers do so. What's a joint of mutton or two in a whole Lent?" (2.4.344-345), Prince John betrays the spirit of chivalry in his coldly calculated victory over the rebels, a victory in which faith is used as a commodity. The prince dupes the rebels into believing in a peace treaty before he gets them arrested on charges of high treason:

ARCHBISHOP:

Will you thus break your faith?

LANCASTER: I pawn'd thee none.

I promis'd you redress of these same grievances

Whereof you did complain; which, by my honour,

I will perform with a most Christian care.

.....

Some guard these traitors to the block of death,

Treason's true bed and yielder-up of breath.

(94.2.112-124)

Those who seek Hotspur's opposite in Falstaff look in the wrong place; for the fat knight is as much the product of the heroic discourse advocated by Hotspur as mock-epic is the product of epic. Both use the same language but in two different contexts. Falstaff does believe in heroic deeds and would like very much to have the reputation of being valiant and honourable. He only thinks that the kind of honour that the likes of Hotspur preach is too costly:

Well, 'tis no matter, honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour pricks me off when I come on, how then? Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or

> take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word honour? What is that honour? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died a-Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible, then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon….
>
> (*1 Henry IV*, 5.1.134-141)

Falstaff is rather in favour of an honour acquired at minimum cost. And the best he can offer is his participation in the war; for what we seem to forget is that a man of his age and shape has no business at all being on a battlefield.

Hotspur's real opposite is Prince John of Lancaster; one stands for honour, and the other for the absence of honour. Prince John cares little about his reputation as long as he can achieve his goals. He is in my view the legitimate ancestor of Octavius Caesar, and his understanding of "Christian care" recalls Octavius' notion of "universal peace" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 4.6.5). In the play's main source it is not Prince John but the Earl of Westmoreland who tricks the rebels (Holinshed 1988:136-138). The explanation given by Clifford Leech (and endorsed by a number of critics) that

"Shakespeare wanted to bring this line of conduct more closely home to the royal house" (Leech 1953:19) is hardly convincing, as the implications of such a decision on Shakespeare's part remain unclear. My contention is that Shakespeare wants to show us that the old virtues in which the Archbishop believes have long gone, and that the new generation, represented here by the young Prince, has its own ethics, one that is based on ends rather than means, an ethics of which Harry will prove the undisputed master.

Few Shakespearean characters have generated more conflicting opinions among critics than Harry has. Does he stand for Shakespeare's image of the ideal leader, or is he a subtle and ironic portrait of the heartless and unscrupulous king who spares no means to consolidate his power? Is *Henry V* a celebration of patriotism and national pride or a satire on the brutality and meaninglessness of war?

That there is a wide discrepancy of opinions about a Shakespearean character is no surprise to anyone; one has only to think about all that has been said about Hamlet. What is striking here and perhaps particular to Harry is the fact that the various interpretations offered reflect not merely the moral views of their authors but also the historical period in which they live, and most particularly the image they have of war. Patriotism, it seems, is not always considered a virtue;

there are times during which it hangs quite out of fashion like a rusty mail in monumental mockery. For Shakespeare's contemporaries, who lived constantly under the threat of a foreign invasion and held the French in great enmity, Harry was the quintessence of the national hero. "What a glorious thing," says Thomas Nashe, "it is to have Henry the Fifth represented on the stage leading the French King prisoner and forcing the Dauphin to swear fealty" (qtd Wells 1997:151). With a Romantic critic like Hazlitt the situation is quite different. Hazlitt was much influenced by the ideals of the French Revolution and enamoured (like most Romantics) of Napoleon. For him, Harry stands for all that is bad and hateful in the notion of kingship:

> Henry declares his resolution 'when France is his, to bend it to his awe, or break it all to pieces'--a resolution worthy of a conqueror, to destroy all that he cannot enslave; and what adds to the joke, he lays all the blame of the consequences of his ambition on those who will not submit tamely to his tyranny. Such is the history of kingly power, from the beginning to the end of the world.
>
> (Hazlitt 1951:286)

Hazlitt's adherence to French republicanism can hardly be mistaken; and it looks quite clear that the essay is more

an attack on kings and "kingly power" in general than a treatment of Shakespeare's character. The only tolerable thing about Harry, according to Hazlitt, is that he rid the world of another king: "he was the conqueror of the French king," he says, "and for this we dislike him less than if he had conquered the French people" (286).

For the New Historicists, who grew up in the United States during the 1960s, and whose critical practice was in large part informed by the strong reaction to the Vietnam War, Harry is, in Stephen Greenblatt's terms, "a 'juggler', a conniving hypocrite, and...the power he both serves and comes to embody is glorified usurpation and theft" (Greenblatt 1994:30). Attacking Harry, for the post-Vietnam War intellectuals, is attacking imperialism; and siding with such marginalised characters as Bardolph and Pistol means siding with the thousands of innocent victims who get sacrificed in order to satisfy the imperialistic ambitions of certain leaders and governments (Vickers 1994:221).

Nor is the way in which *Henry V* has been treated on stage and in film different. For example, Lawrence Olivier's film adaptation, which was made during the Second World War, is a celebration of England's glorious past. On the other hand, Kenneth Branagh's 1989 film, which was certainly made with the unjustified wars of Vietnam, Afghanistan, and the Falklands in mind, is a severe critique of the brutalities of war.

More striking than the interpretive disagreements about the play and its main character is the fact that Harry is in most cases presented less as he is than as the critics and producers want him to be. Those who like him overlook his defects, and his detractors turn a blind eye on his qualities. Shakespeare's critics have often a great deal to say about how probable and complex Shakespeare's characters are, but the first thing they seem to do in their readings is to flatten the roundness of the character they want to analyse, by making him either too good or too bad. And yet, the lesson one should draw from Shakespeare's method of characterisation is that character flaws are no barriers to greatness: "They say best men are moulded out of faults / And, for the most part, become much more the better / For being a little bad," says Mariana (*Measure for Measure*, 5.1.444-446)

The play is undoubtedly patriotic. One has only to consider the serious tone of the choruses as well as the caricature-like presentation of the French side. Is it not strange that Shakespeare, who always manages to endow his characters, no matter how minor or insignificant they are, with distinct voices, decides all of a sudden to deprive the French of a voice of their own? The French in the play are presented not as they really are but rather as they are seen by the English, that is, arrogant, vain, selfish, and stupid (in Olivier's film the French King is

an idiot); and the only intelligent speeches they are given are those in which they praise the English and their glorious kings. Nevertheless, the patriotic material, inherited from Holinshed, does not prevent Shakespeare from drawing a faithful and realistic portrait of a modern leader, the leader of the age of men. Whether we like the portrait or not is our business, not Shakespeare's. The only thing we should try to avoid is confusing the portrait with the golden frame that surrounds it.

Students of Harry's character usually find themselves obliged to go back to his famous and most quoted speech in *1 Henry IV*, the speech in which he reveals to the audience the nature of his friendship with the tavern crew, and particularly the use he intends to make of that friendship (1.2.188-210). Yet that is hardly a good starting point. The speech itself is no more than a reaction to the impression that Harry's behaviour seems to have fostered in people's minds, most notably in his father's. For an adequate reading of Harry's character and his development throughout the sequence one should, I suppose, start with the very first mention of him in *Richard II*:

> Can no man tell me of my unthrifty son?
> 'Tis full three months since I did see him last.
> If any plague hang over us, 'tis he.

> I would to God, my lords, he might be found.
> Inquire at London, 'mongst the taverns there,
> For there, they say, he daily doth frequent
> With unrestrained loose companions,
> Even such, they say, as stand in narrow lanes
> And beat our watch and rob our passengers,
> While he, young wanton, and effeminate boy,
> Takes on the point of honour to support
> So dissolute a crew.
>
> (*Richard II*, 5.3.1-11)

What is obvious in this speech is the king's dissatisfaction with his son's character. The life that Harry seems to lead is unworthy of a crown prince, the person supposed to hold the future of the realm in his hands. He is even believed to be the scourge or "plague" sent by God to punish the king for his usurpation of the English throne. It should be noted, however, that the king's disapproval is the result not of what he knows his son to be but rather of the reports he gets from others -- what "they say" (5.3.6) -- those whom Harry will later call "smiling pickthanks and base newsmongers" (*1 Henry IV*, 3.2.25). The king compares his son's irresponsible behaviour to that of Richard (3.2.94), an extremely insulting comparison if we take into account the king's opinion of the late Richard. The implication of the comparison is that Harry will be as bad a king as Richard

was. But Harry sees things a bit differently. He believes that his tainted reputation is undeserved, the product of other people's calumny (*1 Henry IV*, 3.2.130-131), and promises to "redeem all this" on the "head" of "Percy," to whom Harry is compared unfavourably (3.2.132).

We are not allowed to know exactly what kind of father Bolingbroke is, but his sons' eagerness to please him at any cost might be an indication of his highly authoritative character. His conversations with his children, even those in which he sounds most affectionate, often begin with a reproach: "How chance thou art not with the Prince thy brother? / He loves thee, and thou dost neglect him," he says to Clarence (*2 Henry IV*, 4.4.20); and "See, sons, what things you are, / How quickly nature falls into revolt / When gold becomes her object," he says to Gloucester and Clarence (*2 Henry IV*, 4.5.64-66). Not to mention his long and elaborate reproaches to Harry (*1 Henry IV*, 3.2.4-11; *2 Henry IV*, 4.5.92-136). It is not surprising then that the king's sons are more comfortable elsewhere in other people's company than at court near him. "Why did you leave me here alone?" says the dying father to his sons (*2 Henry IV*, 4.5.50).

The point I am trying to make here is that Harry's character as well as his development throughout the sequence can be understood only in terms of a long dialogue in which he, his father, and the "newsmongers"

are engaged. Everything that Harry does, every decision that he makes (the fight with Hotspur, the rejection of Falstaff, the invasion of France, and the execution of Bardolph) is meant in some sense to prove that the others are entirely wrong in their assessment of his abilities. The others are wrong, for instance, in underestimating Harry's physical strength; wrong in believing that Falstaff and Bardolph can take advantage of his friendship; wrong in assuming that he is too weak and inexperienced to conquer France. But although Harry might agree with Lord Goring's view that "other people are quite dreadful" (Wilde 1994:522), there is a sense in which the others are not that bad, after all; in fact, they are Harry's best allies in his quest for an identity, since only through them can he forge a Self. It is in his attempt -- indeed, obsession -- to prove to his father and the "pickthanks" that they are mistaken about him that Harry becomes himself. To become oneself here is to find an orientation and be faithful to it. It is against this background, I suggest, that Harry's famous speech should be read:

> I know you all, and will awhile uphold
> The unyok'd humour of your idleness.
> Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
> Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
> To smother up his beauty from the world,

That when he please again to be himself,
Being wanted he may be more wander'd at
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.
If all the year were playing holidays,
To sport would be as tedious as to work;
But when they seldom come, they wish'd for come,
And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents:
So when this loose behaviour I throw off,
And pay the debt I never promised,
By how much better than my word I am,
By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;
And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly, and attract more eyes
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
I'll so offend to make offence a skill,
Redeeming time when men think least I will.

(*1 Henry IV*, 1.2.203-206)

Though a monologue, this speech quivers with consciousness of the Other. Yet the Other here is not merely the tavern crew, which Harry seems to address; it includes all those who believe that he will make a bad king, particularly his father. It is in this sense that Harry's identity is dialogic; it is a continuous struggle with those who fail to recognise his abilities. And there

is no other way for Harry to prove that the others are wrong than by becoming a good king. Becoming a good king is Harry's preference and orientation in life, the thing he values more than anything else, and for which he wants to be praised.

Yet this puts Harry in a strange position: he cannot prove to his father that he is a good leader so long as the father is still alive; it must be by his death. But, if Bolingbroke dies, who will witness Harry's virtuosity as a leader? Ghosts are usually Shakespeare's version of the "super-addressee," but there are no ghosts in the second tetralogy. And though he shares Hamlet's eagerness to please his father, Harry lacks Hamlet's good fortune, which allows him to please his father even after the father's death. This situation most probably accounts for Harry's ambivalence. On the one hand, he is extremely grieved for his father's illness, as he confesses to Poins, "my heart bleeds inwardly that my father is so sick" (*2 Henry IV*, 2.2.45-46); but, on the other hand, he is so impatient to become king that he wears the crown before even making sure his father is really dead (4.5.40-56).

I have repeatedly said throughout this work that every Shakespearean leader finds himself forced at some point to make a difficult choice, and that in most cases the leader goes for the option that is associated to his notion of virtue and the good life. In Harry's case, the

moment of choice comes as soon as he becomes king at the end of *2 Henry IV.* Cedric Messina's 1979 production of the play for the BBC (directed by David Giles, with the remarkable Anthony Quayle as Falstaff) captures successfully the spirit of this scene. There is an extremely heavy atmosphere at court. The king has just died, and everybody is expecting the worst from the new sovereign, most of all the Lord Chief Justice, his fierce enemy and the main recorder of his wild behaviour. The Chief Justice is anxious, almost shivering with fear. He is also the first to speak when Harry makes his appearance: "Good morrow, and God save your Majesty!" (5.2.43). The king's utterance comes after a long and heavy silence. He first assures his brothers that there is nothing to be afraid of, and then turns to the Chief Justice:

KING:

You all look strangely on me--and you most.
You are, I think, assur'd I love you not.

CH. JUST:

I am assur'd, if I be measur'd rightly,
Your Majesty hath no just cause to hate me.

KING: No?
How might a prince of great hopes forget
So great indignities you laid upon me?
What! rate, rebuke, and roughly send to prison

> Th'immediate heir of England? Was this easy?
> May this be wash'd in Lethe and forgotten?
> (*2 Henry IV*, 5.2.63-72)

Harry thinks that he has good reason to retaliate; and everybody seems to expect him to do so. Instead, he not only forgives the Lord Chief Justice, but also converts him into a new father, saying: "You shall be as a father to my youth" (5.2.118). The implications of Harry's decision are quite clear. First, he must prove to everyone that they have underestimated his capacities as a good and just leader, and this is what he meant when he said that he would "falsify men's hopes" (*1 Henry IV*, 1.2.206). To falsify men's hopes does not necessarily mean to deceive them or cheat them, as certain critics, alas, have tried to make us believe (Greenblatt 1994:30). Secondly, Harry needs an ambassador to his dead father: all that Bolingbroke cannot see will be seen by the reporter of his son's misbehaviour. In other words, Harry's dialogue with his father must be mediated through the Lord Chief Justice, who serves as the father's ghost, as it were; and this is the aspect in which Harry comes closer to Hamlet than to any other Shakespearean character (Fahmi 2000:86-87). It is hardly surprising then that the Lord Chief Justice disappears entirely in *Henry V*; he has a new function there: to witness Harry's success. The rejection of Falstaff, too, should be read

in the same terms; and it is most significant that it is the Chief Justice who is asked to speak to Sir John: "My Lord Chief Justice, speak to that vain man" (5.5.44). This is in a sense Harry's way of saying to his father: "didn't I tell you?" And if Falstaff is not allowed to respond to Harry's rejection, as Harold Bloom has rightly remarked (Bloom 1998:277), it is merely because the new king's dialogue is less with Sir John than with those standing around Harry at that moment.

According to Aristotle, everything aims at its own unique perfect destiny (Aristotle 1980:1). A knife, for example, fulfils its purpose by cutting well, whereas a tenor fulfils his purpose by singing well. In the light of this view, a king's purpose is not just to govern, as someone like Richard would assume, but to govern well. A king who does not govern well would be as intolerable as a dull-edged knife or a tenor with a bad voice. But what kind of qualities or virtues can Harry aspire to have in the post-Shrewsbury world? A world governed by "continual slanders" and "false reports," a world in which all faith is lost. In a world of commodity, Harry can rely neither on people's piety, as Richard tried to do, nor on their honour, as Hotspur did; and his father's experience has showed him how fragile friendship is. Harry's problem then is that he has no model to follow. And since he himself has seen the collapse of so many values, to become a good leader, he must invent his own virtue; and

it is only in this sense that Harry is a Machiavellian leader.

Those who argue in favour of Richard III as Shakespeare's Machiavellian leader *par excellence* miss the essence and spirit of Machiavellism. The author of *The Prince* has little respect for those like Richard III who come to power by crime (Machiavelli 1981:61-66). For him the good leader is above all a virtuous man; and Machiavelli's *virtù*, as Harvey C. Mansfield has so persuasively argued in his excellent book *Machiavelli's Virtue*, should not be translated as anything other than "virtue." Virtue here is a mixture of necessity, prudence, and cunning (Mansfield 1998:7-51). Yet the good leader's best quality resides in his ability to *use* virtue as a means to an end, the end being the prosperity and maintenance of the state. The Machiavellian leader would most certainly be considered a villain in heroic society, a society in which most people adhere to the same virtues. But the situation is totally different in the age of men, where no particular code of behaviour seems to prevail, and where it is impossible to know whether those you have to deal with share your values or not. "In those days, force and arms did prevail," Elizabeth I is reported to have said in reference to a former age, "but now the wit of the fox is everywhere on foot, so as hardly a faithful or virtuous man to be found" (qtd Liebler 1995:58). Like Elizabeth, Harry is

the product of the realistic discourse of the Renaissance; he has a great sense of the time in which he lives, and sees the world and its people as they are rather than as they ought to be.

"In using virtue," says Mansfield, "the prince steps back from it and regards it from outside" (Mansfield 1998:19). To use virtues convincingly means as well that the Machiavellian leader should be capable of subduing his nature to what it works in, like the dyer's hand. In other words, the leader should have the capacity not only to leave his moral space momentarily and borrow somebody else's, he should also be able to express that virtue in an appropriate language, more precisely the language that is habitually linked to that virtue. The virtue of the soldier, for instance, cannot be articulated in a religious language, nor can the virtue of the religious man be expressed in military terms. Several passages illustrate Harry's use of virtue. For example, before ordering the execution of the three traitors at Southampton, he asks Exeter to "enlarge the man commited yesterday / That railed against our person. We consider / It was excess of wine that set him on, / And on his more advice we pardon him" (2.2.39-43). Harry's godlike mercy, as Janet Spencer has pointed out, is an act of sheer *realpolitik* (Spencer 1996:165). Later in the play, he asks God forgiveness for boasting, and blames it on French air; and when he learns that the day (battle) is

his he says: "Praised be God, and not our strength, for it" (4.7.86). Harry's religious attitude is no more than a show intended to convince his soldiers that God is on their side, and that their cause is just, as his speech about honour is meant to inflame his army (3.1.22). The implication here is that the virtues in which Richard believed blindly, as well as those for which Hotspur died, are, for Harry, mere tactics meant to serve a higher purpose, that is, the maintenance of the state. Harry is conscious that few people believe in such virtues as piety and honour, but he knows only too well that there is a market for them. This aspect of Harry's character is best illustrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury's speech at the beginning of the play:

> Hear him but reason in divinity
> And, all-admiring, with an inward wish
> You would desire the King were made a prelate.
> Hear him debate of commonwealth affairs,
> You would say it hath been all his study.
> List his discourse of war, and you shall hear
> A fearful battle rendered you in music.
>
> (*Henry V*, 1.1.38-44)

The other implication of this speech is that Harry is an excellent actor, always ready to play whatever part the situation requires, and to play it in a persuasive

manner. And role-playing is one of the aspects of Harry's character that is quite often evoked by critics (Laan 1978:32-33; Greenblatt 1994:33).

Yet while it can scarcely be doubted that Harry is an actor, the question is, who is not? All Shakespeare's characters have a particular idea of virtue, and try to play the role that embodies that virtue. Richard plays the part of a god on earth, and Hotspur performs the role of the heroic leader of medieval romance. In *Twelfth Night,* Olivia's part is that of the cruel mistress of the Petrarchan sonnet, and Count Orsino's is that of the sick and suffering lover. But that is hardly particular to Shakespeare's characters. All individuals, says Irving Goffman, are players (Goffman 1959:17-21); the only existing difference between one player and another has to do with the belief or disbelief in the role each plays. Some are so taken in by the role they play that it becomes their reality, while others remain detached and never forget that their performance is meant to delude their audience rather than themselves. Richard II and Hotspur belong to the first category, those that Goffman calls "sincere," while Harry most obviously belongs to the second, the "cynical" (18). It must not be supposed, however, that all cynical performers are interested in deluding their audiences for reasons of self-interest. "A cynical individual," says Goffman, "may delude his audience for what he considers to be their own good, or

for the good of the community" (18). What Goffman expresses here is in my view the very essence of Machiavellism: a successful prince should use certain virtues to deceive his people not so much for private gain as for what he regards as the good of the community.

To be able to delude your audience, whether for its own good or for yours, you have to speak its language. Richard II and Hotspur have one language for all occasions and audiences. The language of divinity for the former, and the language of chivalry for the latter. "Henry V," as Graham Bradshaw has pointed out, "is a vituoso in the art of adapting his register to a particular audience or occasion" (Bradshaw 1987:51). Indeed Harry's competence in mastering other people's languages is impressive. "I can drink with any tinker in his own language," he says to Poins (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4.17-19). Harry is also proficient in the languages of divinity, chivalry, and love. It is all part of his mastery of the art of theatrical improvisation: he can play his father, Hotspur, Hotspur's wife, a thief in buckram, and a musician. Yet Harry's best role, his masterpiece, the one with which not only his audience but also a number of Shakespeare's critics have been deluded, is that of his reformation. To believe that there is such a thing as a reformation in Harry's case is like believing that there is indeed a Cliffs of Dover scene in *King Lear*. With the exception of *Richard II*, in which he

is mentioned only at the end, Harry is an important character in three of the four plays that constitute the Henriad. And as early as the first act of *1 Henry IV*, Shakespeare makes sure to call our attention to the fact that Harry's prodigality is a mere trick to make people believe later in his repentance (1.2.190-212). The Machiavellian leader, says Mansfield, should get people to expect the worst; "the virtue will appear as bringing relief in the contrast" (Mansfield 1998:19).

To get people to expect the worst is Harry's royal road to his ultimate goal, which is to prove to his detractors that he is a good leader. Harry's identity, like Hotspur's, is articulated in dispute with the others. But while Hotspur's main concern is to force the others either physically or verbally to accept the image he has of himself, Harry's great sense of time enables him to put his enemies to sleep, as it were; and if only they can sleep until he wakes them up, his triumph is always unequivocal. In other words, Harry's genius resides in his extraordinary ability to distract and deflect his enemies from their purposes by flattering their pride, on the one hand, and nurturing the low opinion they have of him, on the other. "For my part, I must speak it to my shame / I have a truant been to chivalry" (*1 Henry IV* 5.1.93-94) is the message he sends to Hotspur before the battle of Shrewsbury. In *Henry V*,

he sends a similar message to the French before Agincourt:

> Though 'tis no wisdom to confess so much
> Unto an enemy of craft and vantage,
> My people are with sickness much enfeebled,
> My numbers lessened....
>
> (3.6.142-145)

No philosopher could be more different from Machiavelli than Aristotle, and yet both believe that virtue is a golden mean (Mansfield 1998:19). But while Aristotle's virtue is a mean between two vices, Machiavelli's is a mean between good and evil. The other difference is that Aristotle's mean is what the two extremes are not (courage is neither cowardice nor recklessness). For Machiavelli, the web of the virtuous leader is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together. The ill, however, should be at the service of the good. The end here not only justifies the means, it makes it honourable (Machiavelli 1981:101). The excuse that Machiavelli invokes is that

> because men are wretched creatures who would not keep their word to you, you need not keep your word to them. And no prince ever lacked good excuses to colour his bad faith.

(Machiavelli 1981:100)

Whether Shakespeare shares this view or not is not easy to tell. What we can say, nonetheless, with some certainty is that he does not entirely disapprove of tricking people of bad faith. The "bed trick" of which Bertram in *All's Well That Ends Well* and Angelo in *Measure for Measure* are victims would have been intolerable had these two characters been honest persons. In the Henriad, Shakespeare seems to follow the same pattern. Henry's bad actions are done either in anticipation of, or in response to, someone's bad faith.

The England that Harry has inherited from his father is divided by civil strife; his first "honourable" goal is to unite it. One way of doing that would be to involve all the quarrelling factions in a war against a foreign enemy. To finance his war, Harry needs a massive contribution from the church. Knowing that this latter would not give him the needed sum, he resorts to his cunning by urging a bill in Parliament to appropriate the better half of the church's wealth, not without pretending to be on the church's side. This is certainly not an honest gesture; but Shakespeare opens his play with a scene that exposes the bad faith of the church in broad daylight. To preserve the church's control over its property, the Bishop of Canterbury intends not only to give the king an amount never granted to a monarch

before, but also to invent a motive to legitimise his war against the French (*Henry V*, 1.1.75-89).

The rejection of Falstaff is, to be sure, a political move with which Harry means to win the respect of those who were in some doubt as to his ability to govern the country properly. But Shakespeare, once again, makes sure to acquaint us with Falstaff's intentions. As soon as he learns that Harry has become king, the fat knight declares: "Let us take any man's horses--the laws of England are at my commandment. Blessed are they that have been my friends, and woe to my Lord Chief Justice!" (*2 Henry IV* 131-134). The king's approval of Bardoph's execution is another show of virtue that aims at enforcing discipline among soldiers. The reason behind the show is that

> When a prince is campaigning with his soldiers and in command of a large army then he need not worry about having a reputation for cruelty; because, without such a reputation, no army was ever kept united and disciplined.
>
> (Machiavelli 1981:97)

But Bardolph's offence (stealing from churches) is, by Elizabethan standards, a very serious crime, deserving exemplary punishment (Vickers 1993:266).

Jan Kott reads Shakespeare's historical vision in terms of what he calls the "staircase" metaphor. For him, history in Shakespeare is like a staircase upon which English monarchs walk. With each step upwards, power gets nearer; but there is at the top a final step that can lead only to the abyss (Kott 1974:10). While there are, to be sure, plays to which this vision may be applied, most notably *Richard III* and *Macbeth*, I do not see how we can apply it to all the plays. History in Shakespeare's chronicles, particularly in the Henriad, is more like a stream whose current can lead you to whatever station you want, but cannot stay with you there. The safest way then to reach power and remain in it is by following the movement and the speed of the stream. If you try to stop it, or row against the current, you sink. Both Richard II and Hotspur tried to stop the movement of history: the former at the theocratic Age of Gods, and the latter at the aristocratic Age of heroes. None of them survived at the end of his play. Harry's triumph lies, as I indicated earlier, in his remarkable sense of time ("he weighs time / Even to the utmost grain" (2.4.137-138)), as well as his ability to detach himself from any given situation and pass judgement on it. It is no wonder then that he is one of the few Shakespearean leaders to remain alive at the end of the play that bears his name.

PART TWO

Julius Caesar

&

Antony and Cleopatra

I. CONSTANT AS THE NORTHERN STAR: CAESAR'S POETIC WISDOM

Though there is little agreement about the chronology of Shakespeare's plays, most scholars agree that *Julius Caesar* was written right after *Henry V* (Daniell 1998:12-15; Wells 1997:191). Not only does the former begin exactly where the latter ends, that is, the triumphant return home of a leader after a great conquest, but the world of the two plays as well seems to be the same in Shakespeare's mind. In the prologue to the last act of *Henry V*, the English king's glorious return is depicted in bright Roman light:

But now behold,
In the quick forge and working-house of thought,
How London doth pour out her citizens!
The mayor and all his brethren in best sort--
Like to the senators of th'antique Rome,
With the plebeians swarming at their heels--
Go forth and fetch their conqu'ring Caesar in.

(*Henry V,* 5. Chorus. 22-28)

Caesar's Rome, on the other hand, can scarcely be more English. For instance, Flavius' rude address to the commoners in the very opening lines of *Julius Caesar* is an allusion to the 1563 Statute of Artificers whose purpose, in Richard Wilson's terms, was "to control the movement of labourers and punish vagrants, stipulating prison for vagabonds ... and fines for workers who left their work place or failed to signal their identity in their mechanics' outfits" (R. Wilson 1992:23). Shakespeare's audience, particularly those who paid one penny to watch the play standing in the yard of the Globe theatre, must have related more easily to these "anachronisms" than we would do. They must have as well recognised the topography of their own city in Merellus' beautiful and lively description of Rome, with its towers and chimney-tops, a description that bears strong affinities to the views of London we find in certain baroque paintings:

> Many a time and oft
> Have you climbed up to walls and battlements,
> To towers and windows, yea, to chimney-tops,
> Your infants in your arms, and there have sat
> The livelong day, with patient expectation,
> To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome.
>
> (*Julius Caesar*, 1.1.38-43)

Nor does the anachronism end there; the popular celebration of the hero's return home as depicted by Shakespeare recalls, in the view of many, the glorious return home of the heroes of the victory over the Spanish Armada (Kott 1992:65). In other words, Shakespeare seems to squeeze three different historical periods into one; thus, antique Rome, Henry's England, and Elizabethan England become one. The point I intend to make here is that, from the point of view of Vico's historiography, we are still in the third cycle, that is to say, the age of men. Caesar's Rome, like Henry's England, is a society in which everything is governed by human laws and human reason. The leader is expected to be neither a god nor a hero, but a man among men, endowed, to be sure, with remarkable intellectual capacities, yet not immune to human limitations. Shakespeare makes this quite evident in his portrayal of Caesar: the great Roman leader must cope not only with some serious physical infirmities but also with a senate that is all but willing to yield its

authority to one man, even if that man's name is Julius Caesar.

Commentators have noted other similarities between the two plays. "In the interpretation of *Julius Caesar*," says Chambers, "it is of the first moment to realise that it was probably written immediately after *Henry the Fifth*, and that its speculative outlook upon life begins precisely where that of *Henry the Fifth* leaves off" (Chambers 1963:146). Chambers pushes his comparison further to encompass the heroes themselves of the two plays, who, according to him, share a number a characteristics, notably the way in which they stand for the image of the superman (147). Yet despite all the similarities, there is a crucial difference having to do precisely with the two leaders: their sense of the time. To be sure, both are "Renaissance" characters and products of an epoch whose thought is in part informed by the realism of Machiavelli and the scepticism of Montaigne; but while Henry looks comfortable with the spirit of his age, Caesar does not seem quite at home in Rome's bureaucratic system, where the leader, no matter how great he is, remains forever accountable to the powerful senate.

Henry's strength, as I have already argued, resides, among other things, in his remarkable ability to adapt himself to all sorts of situations. Caesar's weakness lies, *contra* Brutus and those who take his

theory for granted, not so much in his "ambition" as in his inflexibility and his firm belief that he can adapt the world to his own vision of life, something that puts him at odds with history itself. I can hardly resist quoting G. B. Shaw's brilliant remark that "the reasonable man adapts himself to the world: the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man" (Shaw 1986:260). It is no wonder that Caesar's impact on the history of the world (Britain not excluded) is far greater than whatever impact Henry V may have had. Far from attempting to condemn Caesar, I want to argue that Caesar's idea of what a great leader should be, as well as his exceptional charisma, are simply incompatible with the democratic age of men, most particularly with the republican system, and that this incompatibility accounts in large part for his fall.

There is more than one sense in which the case of Julius Caesar is unique among Shakespeare's tragic heroes. For one thing, he is the only hero in the whole canon that dies halfway through the play, after appearing in no more than three scenes. On the other hand, while most of Shakespeare's protagonists are treated by commentators in terms of what they do or fail to do, Caesar is usually judged in terms of what is done to him, his assassination. This explains perhaps the critics' inability to provide an accurate reading of Caesar's

character. Since Caesar cannot soliloquise on his own assassination, some critics deem it necessary to return to Shakespeare's sources, notably Plutarch, to fill the gap left by the Bard's unsatisfactory portrayal of his hero. Other critics think that the best way to account for Caesar's fall is to stand among the crowd in the Forum and listen to Brutus and Mark Antony deliver their speeches, and then decide whose argument to take. Thus, in his introduction to the Cambridge edition of the play, Dover Wilson seems to share Brutus' view that Caesar was a great leader, who out of ambition and "lust for power ruined the Roman Republic," and therefore deserved his death (D. Wilson 1949:xxv). On the other hand, the editor of the Arden edition (second series) seems to agree with Antony that the motive behind the assassination is envy of Caesar's greatness (Dorsch 1994:xxx).

While relying on what the other characters of the play say about Caesar might sometimes be inevitable, one should, I think, avoid precisely the arguments offered by Antony and Brutus, as none of them seem quite reliable. Mark Antony is an obvious manipulator who, despite his pretences, comes to avenge Caesar, not to bury him; and Brutus is a self-deceiver who likes to formulate "eloquent" arguments and end up being the only one to be convinced by them. What I propose then is a way of reading Caesar's character in the light of his own orientation, that is, the thing he values above all other

things because it represents for him the only virtue the acquisition of which is sure to lead him to the ultimate happiness. And though Caesar's presence in the play is considerably brief, the few speeches he delivers are enough in my view to give us an insight into his orientation.

The key to Caesar's character in the play lies in his notion of greatness, which is illustrated, among other things, by his repetitive reference to himself in the third person. A lot of ink has been spent on this particular trait of Caesar's character; "he is a *numen* to himself," says Edward Dowden, "speaking of Caesar in the third person as if of some power above and behind his consciousness" (Dowden 1965:38). However, a close examination of the context in which Caesar refers to himself in the third person will show us that what he means by "Caesar" is the "great leader" he intends to be, as when he says, for instance:

> Be not fond
> To think that Caesar bears such rebel blood
> That will be thawed from the true quality
> With that which meltheth fools -- I mean sweet
> words,
> Low-crooked curtsies and base spaniel fawning.
> (3.1.39-43)

On the other hand, the first person singular occurs in ordinary situations that require no "greatness," and it is generally used to mean Julius Caesar himself, as when he says to his wife "How foolish do your fears seem now, Calphurnia! / I am ashamed I did yield to them" (2.2.105-106); or, "I am too blame to be thus waited for" (2.2.119). It would be strange to hear him say "Caesar is ashamed" or "Caesar is too blame." Sometimes, he uses both the first and third persons in the same passage: "Shall Caesar send a lie? / Have I in conquest stretched mine arm so far / To be afeared to tell greybeards the truth?" (*Julius Caesar,* 2.2.66-68). The meaning of the lines seems quite clear: the great leader must not lie, and if he (Julius Caesar) has gone so far in his conquests, it is but to prove that he is a great leader (Caesar); therefore, he will not lie.

In his recent discussion of the play, Scott Wilson makes an interesting point by distinguishing between the hero and his name, between Julius Caesar and "Caesar". "The ironic thing about Julius Caesar," he says, "is of course that he never becomes 'Caesar'" (S. Wilson 2000:96). What is relevant here is that "Caesar" is what Julius wants to be. Whether this takes place or not is not as important as it might seem; for, in people's quest for an identity, it is less the goal itself than the orientation toward the goal that matters. Does Alonso Quixano ever become Don Quixote de la Mancha? Certainly

not; and yet, as soon as he is deprived of the name and role he has chosen for himself, he undergoes an identity crisis that leads to his death. Wilson is right to separate the man from his last name; however, it is when he makes "Caesar" synonymous with "emperor" that it becomes evident that what he has in mind is less Shakespeare's Caesar than the historical one:

> Assassinated before he can make himself emperor, it is only his *name* that goes on to wear the monarchical laurel with Augustus. It is curious that so many monarchs, emperors, absolutist czars, shahs, Kaisers and so on should seek to authorize and legitimate their -- in most cases -- divine right to rule on a man who *wasn't even king.* Julius Caesar was only a Roman general. And yet, after his death, his name was swiftly to become synonymous with absolute authority...
>
> (S. Wilson 2000:96)

To read Caesar's orientation in terms of a strong desire to become emperor is either to have in mind Plutarch's Caesar (not Shakespeare's), or to adopt Brutus' way of seeing things. In Shakespeare, Caesar never expresses any special concern to become emperor. We are even told that he refused (three times) the crown given to him by Mark Antony (*Julius Caesar,* 227-229). Caesar's main -- indeed,

obsessive -- preoccupation in the play is to be recognised as a great and unique leader, and to be treated accordingly; and his character is the result of an implicit dialogue with those who recognise his orientation (the Roman people), and a struggle with, on the one hand, those, like Pompey, whose greatness makes Caesar look less unique, and, on the other hand, those like Cassius, who are "never at heart's ease / Whiles they behold a greater than themselves" (1.2.207-208). It is also wrong in my view to regard "Caesar" as the name that stands for "absolute authority;" rather, it stands for great conquests and remarkable achievement in politics. But what are the virtues of the great leader that Caesar seeks so desperately to embody? In other words, what is the moral space within which Caesar articulates opinions of right and wrong?

Caesar's notion of the great leader is expressed above all in the eloquent speech he delivers right before his assassination, the speech in which he answers Cimber's plea for his brother's return from banishment:

> I must prevent thee, Cimber:
> These couchings and these lowly courtesies
> Might fire the blood of ordinary men,
> And turn pre-ordinance and first decree
> Into the lane of children. Be not fond
> To think that Caesar bears such rebel blood

That will be thawed from the true quality
With that which melteth fools -- I mean sweet
words,
Low-crooked curtsies and base spaniel fawning.
Thy brother by decree is banished.
If thou dost bend and pray and fawn for him
I spurn thee like a cur out of my way.
Know, Caesar doth not wrong, nor without cause
Will he be satisfied.
.....
I could be well moved if I were as you:
If I could pray to move, prayers would move me.
But I am constant as the northern star,
Of whose true-fixed and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament.
The skies are painted with unnumbered sparks:
They are all fire, and every one doth shine;
But there's but one in all doth hold his place.
So in the world: 'tis furnished well with men,
And men are flesh and blood, and apprehensive.
Yet in the number I do know but one
That unassailable holds on his rank
Unshaked of motion. And that I am he
Let me a little show it even in this,
That I was constant Cimber should be banished
And constant do remain to keep him so.

(3.1.35-48;58-73)

Like Richard II, who believes that he was "not born to sue but to command" (*Richard II*, 1.1.196), Caesar thinks that the great leader is an infallible person, chosen out of a multitude to rule and be followed and obeyed, his major qualities being strength, constancy and indifference to whatever is likely to seduce or tempt ordinary people, notably flattery. This is, in a sense, Caesar's notion of virtue; and any attempt, albeit unintentional, to prove the opposite is a threat to Caesar's sense of orientation toward what he considers the ultimate good, becoming a great leader; hence, his strong reaction to Cimber's plea. To bend to Cimber's "couchings" and "lowly courtesies" is to be an ordinary man, not Caesar.

To get a good grasp of the implications of Caesar's speech, we must not overlook the context in which it is delivered. Caesar is at the Capitol to be crowned, and his discharge of grandeur should be seen as an attempt to show to everyone in Rome how worthy he is of the ultimate honour about to be bestowed on him. Caesar's speech must not be seen as addressed only to Cimber and the senators who plead in his brother's favour; it is addressed as well to the Roman people, Caesar's significant Other and best ally in his quest for greatness. Caesar's refusal to consent to a special treatment for a senator's brother will certainly reach the ears of the plebeians, and these

will know that the man they worship is fair and, above all, constant. Likewise, the conspirators' decision to kill Caesar is meant to curb more than Caesar's power. The people too have grown too important, to the senate's taste, as the principal source from which Caesar draws whatever power he needs; and getting rid of Caesar implies as well undermining the role that the plebeians play indirectly in Roman politics. But if Caesar's speeches are the royal road to his character, one should look elsewhere for the motives behind his assassination.

There is an important and quite relevant passage in *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which Pompey gives his own version of the factors that led to Caesar's death:

> What was't
> That moved pale Cassius to conspire? And what
> Made the all-honoured, honest Roman, Brutus,
> With the armed rest, courtiers of beauteous
> freedom,
> To drench the capital, but that they would
> Have one man but man?
>
> (*Antony and Cleopatra,* 2.6.15-19)

The passage is illuminating in more than one respect. For one, Pompey seems to put everything in its proper perspective: the conspiracy is linked to Cassius (not Brutus), while Brutus and the others are mere idealists,

motivated by their great respect for such high values as freedom and honour. The speech also relates the assassination to the senators' (not the people's) refusal to have a "god" as leader. The structure of the republican system, in which the senate occupies the largest place, has certainly no room for a god, who is, naturally, above political debate.

A leader is always accountable to his source of power. Whether this source is God, the people, or the multinational corporations is all the same. Richard II refuses to negotiate a compromise with the rebels, because, being the Lord's anointed, he thinks that he is accountable to no one but God. The Roman leader, on the other hand, is accountable to those to whom he owes his position, namely the senators. An infallible leader is undesirable, because he would make the senate's role look unnecessary. A senate that can neither approve nor censure the leader's actions and decisions is no more than a symbolic institution stripped of all power. It is also significant that Pompey alludes to Caesar's divinity rather than his tyranny, the difference between the two terms being crucial to the understanding not only of the hero's character but also of what the entire play is all about. Whereas becoming a tyrant is usually an act of will, becoming a god is not necessarily so. In other words, a tyrant produces himself, while a god is in most cases produced by others, namely by those who interpret

his deeds as miracles. My point here is that the people's belief in the extraordinariness of Caesar's exploits has not only given him a divine status, but has also isolated the senators and undermined their authority:

> These growing feathers plucked from Caesar's wing
> Will make him fly an ordinary pitch,
> Who else would soar above the view of men,
> And keep us all in servile fearfulness.
>
> (*Julius Caesar,* 1.1.73-76)

Caesar has become a god because the people have made him so. This point is emphasised by Shakespeare's deviation from his main source. While in Plutarch the Roman leader is said to be hated by everyone in Rome (Plutarch 1968:80-81), in Shakespeare, the plebeians celebrate spontaneously Caesar's glorious return and "rejoice in his triumph" (*Julius Caesar,* 1.1.31-32). But the people's deification of Caesar hardly serves the senate's purpose; and one of Caesar's problems is that he must choose between the people's veneration of him and the senators' approval of his leadership. He cannot have both, for, ironically enough, the character traits that make him a god in the eyes of the Roman people are scarcely different from those for which he is considered a threat to the future of the Republic. And since Caesar's divinity has, I think, a great deal to do with

his charismatic personality, it would be helpful to read his character in the light of Max Weber's account of the notion of charisma.

Max Weber distinguishes between two types of charisma. One is linked to certain positions of authority, and can be acquired either by inheritance or through accession to a particular office: becoming priest, for example, or prime minister (Lindholm 1993:24). The second form, genuine charisma, is not merely different from the first, but also antagonistic to it, in the sense that it cannot live within institutional limits. In charismatic situations, people submit to the imperious demands of a person, not so much because he or she occupies an important position within a particular structure or hierarchy, as because of the magnetism he or she exerts on them:

> Charisma knows only inner determination and inner restraint. The holder of charisma seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission. His success determines whether he finds them. His charismatic claim breaks down if his mission is not recognized by those to whom he feels he has been sent. If they recognize him, he is their master--so long as he knows how to maintain recognition through 'proving' himself. But he does not derive his 'right' from

> their will, in the manner of an election. Rather, the reverse holds: it is the *duty* of those to whom he addresses his mission to recognize him as their charismatically qualified leader.
>
> (Weber 1958:246-247)

The charismatic person is a self-appointed leader who possesses the firm conviction that what he does is always done for the good of his followers, hence his obsessive concern to be totally obeyed; he can be neither elected nor dismissed from office. His authority remains undisputed as long as he is able to go on performing his extraordinary deeds. But the moment he ceases to do that, his authority melts gradually until he is scarcely seen; and there's the rub, for, unlike ordinary leaders, the holder of charisma is allowed neither a recession nor a normal retirement from office. He must always "prove" himself. If he is a prophet, he must not stop performing miracles; if he is, like Caesar, a conqueror, he has no choice but to keep prolonging his list of conquests; and if there are no more enemies to conquer, he is very likely to turn to his friends. The holder of charisma likes to soar above the heads of men, like a bird; unfortunately, like a bird, he must either fly or fall, never keep still in the air. It would be totally wrong, however, to confuse the charismatic leader with those tyrants whose main concern is material wealth. "In its

'pure' form", says Weber, "charisma is never a source of private gain for its holders" (247). More often than not, the charismatic leader "shuns the possession of money and of pecuniary income *per se*" (247).

Although Weber is more interested in Charisma as a phenomenon than in the historical figures that embody it, his account seems to be an accurate reading of Caesar's life. Indeed, Caesar is a self-appointed leader whose rise to fame and glory is the result of the people's belief is his extraordinary abilities. His famous thirst for more conquests, even if they are achieved at the expense of former allies, has to do with his constant need to prove himself to his followers. His will, in which he bequeaths "To every several man, seventy-five drachmas" (3.2.235) as well as "all his walks, / His private arbours and new-planted orchards" (3.2.238-239), reveals quite clearly his indifference to material fortune. Charismatic leaders care little about such things as salary and income. In fact, they hate to get paid for what they do; what they want is to be rewarded for the great services they do to their followers. And it is in this light that Caesar's consent to be crowed by the senate should be seen: not something he asks for, but something he accepts as a well-deserved honour.

For Caesar, the great leader is less someone who has an assigned role to play within a specific structure than a unique person with a mission, the mission being to

lead his people to glory and prosperity. As long as no one can prove that he has failed, or that he is no longer capable of pursuing his mission, Caesar will demand nothing less than obedience and total compliance with his resolutions. Unlike the pure dictator, who believes that his people are unable to know what is good or bad for themselves, and therefore should yield to his "wisdom," Caesar's message to his followers seems to be something like: "Is this what you want? I'll give you more of it if you follow my orders." Caesar believes that he is, by virtue of his mission, above rules, conventions, and institutional routines. He can neither explain his vision to others nor wait for it to be approved; hence, his total incompatibility with a political system based upon consultation and approval by general vote.

To say that Caesar is "only a Roman general" (S. Wilson 2000:96) is not only to underestimate the role that strongly valued preferences play in shaping the identities of people and literary characters, but also to see things from a bureaucratic perspective, where people are treated in terms of the jobs for which they get paid. It is, in a sense, like saying that *The Waste Land* was written by a banker: nothing can be falser that such a truth. It is wrong in my view to see Caesar as merely a general in the Roman army, for the very simple reason that it is hardly how he makes sense of himself. And there lies his tragedy.

Caesar's notion of the great leader has not only reduced the senators of Rome to mere stewards of his excellence it has also put Caesar himself at odds with history. Whatever Caesar's intentions may be, it is quite obvious that a leader, who conceives himself as a unique being chosen for a mission, has no place in a democratic structure such as Republican Rome, especially if this leader has behind him an entire population to believe in his miracles. Caesar's deification has moved Rome from the democratic age of men back to the theocratic age of gods, an age of auguries, portents, and supernatural phenomena. Is it not strange that Coriolanus' Rome, which is, chronologically speaking, older than Caesar's, looks much more modern? Nor is it difficult to understand, at least from the point of view of modern democracy, Cassius' decision to react against Caesar's archaic way of governing. What is disturbing, however, is the fact that Cassius' own notion of leadership is no less outmoded than Caesar's.

For Cassius, Caesar's fault lies less in his desire to assume divine proportions than in the fact that he does not deserve to be a leader at all, let alone a god. Cassius' definition of a good leader is expressed in his long speech, the one in which he tries to persuade Brutus to join the conspiracy:

For once upon a raw and gusty day,

The troubled Tiber chafing with her shores,
Caesar said to me, 'Dar'st thou, Cassius, now
Leap in with me into this angry flood
And swim to yonder point?' Upon the word,
Accoutred as I was, I plunged in
And bade him follow; so indeed he did.
The torrent roared, and we did buffet it
With lusty sinews, throwing it aside,
And stemming it with hearts of controversy.
But ere we could arrive the point proposed
Caesar cried, 'Help me, Cassius, or I sink!'
I, as Aeneas, our great ancestor,
Did from the flames of Troy upon his shoulder
The old Anchises bear, so from the waves of Tiber
Did I the tired Caesar: and this man
Is now become a god, and Cassius is
A wretched creature, and must bend his body
If Caesar carelessly but nod on him.
He had a fever when he was in Spain,
And when the fit was on him I did mark
How he did shake. 'Tis true, this god did shake:
His coward lips did from their colour fly,
And that same eye, whose bend doth awe the world,
Did lose his lustre: I did hear him groan:
Ay, and that tongue of his that bade the Romans
Mark him, and write his speeches in their books,
'Alas,' it cried, 'give me some drink, Titinius',

> As a sick girl. Ye gods, it doth amaze me
> A man of such a feeble temper should
> So get the start of the majestic world
> And bear the palm alone.
>
> (1.2.100-131)

Cassius' principal criterion for a good leader seems to be physical strength. Caesar is not worthy of the position he occupies as head of state because he faints and cannot swim as well as Cassius can. In his elaborate description of the Tiber incident, Cassius sets Caesar's physical weakness in sharp contrast with his own heroism, especially when he compares himself, saving the "tired Caesar" from drowning, to Aeneas bearing "old Anchises" on his shoulder. Cassius belongs to a small category of characters in Shakespeare who often have a good deal to say about how masculine they are and how feminine their opponents are, and how versed they are in the practical aspects of war, while their enemies' competence is, in Iago's words, "mere prattle without practice" (*Othello,* 1.1.26). The bad news for Cassius is that such heroic malcontents never thrive in Shakespeare, and are usually surpassed by those they mock. Like Essex, who, according to G. R. Elton, "looked down upon Elizabeth as an old woman...frustrating his greatness" (Elton 1962:470), and even drew his sword on her once (Boyce 1991:181), Cassius believes that a "sick girl" cannot rule a country.

But, alone, Cassius' chances of putting an end to Caesar's archaic reign are rather weak. The inadequacy of his public image makes it difficult for him to sell the *coup* to the people; hence his pressing need to recruit a credible and persuasive person like Brutus. Brutus is virtuous, articulate, and, above all, has the reputation of being "an honourable man" (3.2.83). In fact, Brutus is perhaps the only character in Shakespeare on whose honour and nobility friends, foes, and critics all agree. What is strange, however, is that Brutus' reputation for virtue seems to be the source of his troubles; and in this he is, despite all apparent dissimilarities, reminiscent of Hotspur. Both believe in a chivalric notion of honour; and both prove in the end to be victims of their reputation: one for being "the theme of honour's tongue" (*1 Henry IV,* 1.1.80) and the other for being "an honourable man" (*Julius Caesar,* 2.2.83) and "the noblest Roman of them all" (5.5.68). But while Hotspur believes that honour is a goal to be pursued, Brutus seems to think that honour is a treasure one should preserve. Hotspur is motivated by ambition; Brutus is haunted by a proper sense of shame, exhibiting, in Aristotle's terms, "a kind of fear of dishonour" (Aristotle 1980:104-105). Hotspur is eager to reach honour; Brutus is afraid to lose it. Hotspur's eagerness drives him towards great dangers; Brutus' fear seems to reduce him to a passive person, willing to accept anything in the name of honour.

In Plutarch Brutus is admired and praised for what he does (Plutarch 1968:105), whereas in Shakespeare's play he is a man whose virtue is shown more in the things he fails to do: he refuses to kill Antony along with Caesar because "Our course will seem too bloody... / To cut the head off and then hack the limbs" (2.1.161-162); he does not prevent Antony from speaking in Caesar's funeral, because he sees only advantage in giving Caesar "all true rites and lawful ceremonies" (3.1.241); and he does not consent to Cassius' suggestion to bind the conspirators by an oath, because the word of a Roman is inviolable (2.1.113-139). Shakespeare's Brutus is more a "nice guy" than anything else; and his stubborn will to please, or rather not to displease, is the source of his torment and vulnerability.

Brutus' predicament lies in the difficult choice laid at his door; he must choose between two unhappy alternatives: to disappoint those who put their faith in him as Rome's saviour, or to betray his "best lover" (3.2.45). In other words, he is torn between a sense of guilt and a sense of shame. I am alluding here to Gerhart Piers's definition of these two terms:

> Shame is occasioned when one fails to achieve a goal or an ideal that is integral to one's self-conception, whereas guilt is occasioned when one transgresses a boundary or limit on one's conduct

> set by an authority under whose governance one lives. Succinctly, shame goes to failure, guilt to transgression. Shame is felt over shortcomings, guilt over wrongdoings.
>
> (Deign 1996:226)

By presenting the conspiracy as a "story" whose "subject" is "honour" (1.2.92), Cassius -- a "great observer" who "looks / Quite through the deeds of men" (1.2.201-202) -- seems to make Brutus an offer that he cannot refuse. Declining Cassius' invitation to join the conspiracy to save Rome would imply a failure to rise up to the only ideal upon which his conception of himself is based, that is, being "an honourable man." On the other hand, by accepting to murder Caesar, he transgresses the limits of friendship, trust, and loyalty. Between betraying his friend and leading those who believe in his "honour," he chooses the second option, for what can he be if not "an honourable man"? Love of honour is more than a simple option for Brutus; it is his strongly valued preference and his orientation towards what he regards as the good life: "For let the gods so speed me as I love / The name of honour more than I fear death" (1.2.86-89). Brutus' notion of honour is so crucial to his self-interpretation that -- to convince himself -- he is ready to base the necessity of killing Caesar upon a purely hypothetical assumption:

It must be by his death: and for my part
I know no personal cause to spurn at him
But for the general. He would be crowned:
How that might change his nature, there's the
question.
It is the bright day that brings forth the adder,
And that craves wary walking. Crown him that,
And then I grant we put a sting in him
That at his will he may do danger with.
Th'abuse of greatness is when it disjoins
Remorse from power; and to speak truth of Caesar
I have not known when his affections swayed
More than his reason. But 'tis a common proof
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder
Whereto the climber upward turns his face;
But when he once attains the upmost round
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend. So Caesar may.
Then, lest he may, prevent. And since the quarrel
Will bear no colour for the thing he is,
Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented,
Would run to these and these extremities.
And therefore think him as a serpent's egg
Which hatched, would as his kind grow mischievous,
And kill him in the shell.

(2.1.10-34)

What this masterpiece of self-deception reveals is the extent to which Brutus is vulnerable to flattery. Just because Cassius tricked him into believing that all Rome is waiting for him to save her from bondage, Brutus is ready to see tyranny where it is not. Caesar must die less for what he is than for what he may be; not for what he has done, but rather for what people in his situation usually do. He concedes that Caesar is humble in his treatment of the common people, but humility, he argues, is often used by ambitious leaders as a means to reach their ends. And although Caesar does not seem disposed to do that, it is better not to take any chance. In other words, there are situations, according to Brutus' theory, in which the best way to prevent a good person from becoming bad is to kill him. And since there is no plausible accusation whatsoever to be made against Caesar, why not "fashion it thus"? "Fashion it thus" means, in Harold Bloom's view, "to make your own anxious fiction, and then believe in its plausibility. Caesar, contrary to his entire career, will become an unreasonable and oppressive tyrant, only because Brutus wants to believe this" (Bloom 1998:108). The point I want to stress here is that, in order to prove to the Roman people that he is the "honourable man" on whom they can count, Brutus is capable of the most outrageous nonsense.

Like all soliloquies in Shakespeare, Brutus', too, is a dialogue, the interlocutor being those who might blame Brutus for taking part in the assassination. One striking feature of this soliloquy, none the less, is that it has no beginning. Despite its familiarity "It must be by his death" remains a strange way of opening a speech; it sounds more like a comment on some unuttered thought than the introduction of an argument. "It," in particular, seems to have no specific reference. One possibility is that it might refer to Brutus' possible rise to unprecedented prominence as Rome's saviour from bondage, and the sole guardian of its traditional values; *this* must be by his death.

What I hope to make clear at this point is the idea that, by re-asserting the importance of such virtues as physical prowess, honour, and self-sacrifice for the general good, Cassius and Brutus seem to have rescued Rome from the theocratic age of gods back to which Caesar had moved it, only to place it in the aristocratic age of heroes, an age in which everything is settled by force, mostly in the name of honour, an age in which the Roman hero *par excellence,* Antony, would feel most comfortable.

II. THE NOBLENESS OF LIFE IS TO DO THUS: ANTONY'S POETIC POLITICS

Two views dominate the critical treatment of *Antony and Cleopatra*: the moral, Kantian view, according to which Antony is an irresponsible leader who sacrifices an empire for the sake of a depraved woman; and the Romantic view which presents the play as a remarkable example of the way in which love can triumph over all other considerations. Both views focus on Antony, though both use Cleopatra to make their point. The moralists' contention is that she is the cause of a great man's fall, while the Romantics try to prove that she is worthy of whatever sacrifice is made for her sake. Thus, George Bernard Shaw pretends that Dr. Johnson's comment on Lady Diana Beauclerk, "the woman's a whore, and

there's an end on't" (Boswell 1991:537), was in fact said about Cleopatra (Bevington 1995:13). "You can't feel any sympathy with Antony," Shaw says, "after he runs away disgracefully from the battle of Actium because Cleopatra did. If you knew any man who did that you'd spit in his face." (qtd in Bevington 1995:13). In the preface to his *Three Plays for Puritans*, Shaw goes on to say that

> after giving a faithful picture of the soldier broken down by debauchery, and the typical wanton in whose arms such men perish, Shakespear finally strains all his huge command of rhetoric and stage pathos to give a theatrical sublimity to the wretched end of the business, and to persuade foolish spectators that the world was well lost by the twain.
>
> (Shaw 2000:29)

Conversely, Hazlitt thinks that the character of Cleopatra is a "masterpiece ... a triumph of the voluptuous, of the love of pleasure and the power of giving it, over every other consideration" (Hazlitt 1951:228-229). What is surprising, though, is that, despite the wide influence of the two readings and the confident tone of their authors, the arguments they present are, to some extent, mere prose renderings of

what certain characters in the play express in some of the most beautiful poetry in the English language. Shaw's condemnation of the two lovers, for instance, is inspired partly by Philo's angry speech at the beginning of the play (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1.1.1-13), in which Cleopatra is described as a "strumpet" and Antony as her "fool," and partly by Scarus' speech in which he expresses his indignation towards his captain's cowardly behaviour at Actium: "I never saw an action of such shame" (3.10.22). Likewise, Hazlitt's reading, particularly his "masterpiece," echoes some of Enobarbus' speeches, most notably his reply to Antony's wish not to have met Cleopatra: "O, sir, you had then left unseen a wonderful piece of work, which not to have been blest withall would have discredited your travel" (1.2.160-162), as well as the famous:

> Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety. Other women cloy
> The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
> Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
> Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
> Bless her when she is riggish.
>
> (2.2.245-250)

In other words, what is generally called the moral and Romantic readings of the play can be easily termed the Philo and Enobarbus perspectives.

Harold Bloom's recent analysis of the play, in one of the best chapters of his *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, looks like an attempt to avoid adopting either of the two views: "Romantic love," he says, "can be said to have hastened Antony's Osiris-like dismantling, yet it would be difficult...to demonstrate it either as value or as catastrophe, on the basis of his decline and fall" (Bloom 1998:550). What Bloom fails to explain is why it is difficult to demonstrate whether Antony's fall is a triumph or a disaster. In my view, the difficulty stems from the fact that the answer depends in large part on the reader or spectator's own moral outlook. "There are no moral phenomena," says Nietzsche, "but only a moral interpretation of phenomena" (Nietzsche 1968:275). This accounts perhaps for the fact that we know more about the moral and political values of Shakespeare's critics than about those of his characters. Bloom is far from being unaware of this problematic:

> We are not here to make moral judgments.... Shakespeare perspectivizes his dramas so that, measure for measure, we are judged even as we attempt to judge. If your Falstaff is a roistering

> coward, a wastrel confidence man, an uncourted jester to Prince Hal, well, then, we know something about you, but we know no more about Falstaff. If your Cleopatra is an aging whore, and her Antony a would-be Alexander in his dotage, then we know a touch more about you and rather less about them than we should.
>
> (Bloom 1998:15)

Bloom suggests that whether Antony's actions seem good or bad depends upon the perspective from which we, as readers, judge his behaviour and motives. In other words, our reading of Antony's character depends upon the framework within which we articulate opinions of right and wrong. And one of Antony's major problems is that those who speak about him (friends, Romans, and critics) tend to impose on him their own moral values. But Harold Bloom does not (at least not clearly enough) propose any way out of these moral judgements. On the contrary, more often than not, he seems to favour one judgement -- his -- over the rest. But, as I have been arguing throughout this work, only by considering the purposes that direct a character's actions can we get an adequate understanding of those actions. In other words, Antony's choices and decisions can be elucidated only as part of his orientation towards what he considers the ultimate virtue: the life of chivalry. What Antony wants

to be is a Romantic hero, the kind of hero that Don Quixote has in mind: strong, generous, honourable, and capable of great and intense love. That is Antony's idea of virtue; and, like the other leaders I have discussed so far, his character in the play is informed by his dialogical relationship both with those who share with him his conception of himself (Cleopatra, for instance, who refuses to love a defeated and conquered Antony) and those who do not (Octavius Caesar, who refuses to see Antony as anything other than a soldier). Is Antony's fall a triumph or a disaster? The answer depends less on how we see Antony than on how he sees himself.

The play opens, as I have intimated earlier, with a moral condemnation of Antony by one of his soldiers:

> Nay, but this dotage of our general's
> O'erflows the measure. Those his goodly eyes,
> That o'er the files and musters of the war
> Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
> The office and devotion of their view
> Upon a tawny front. His captain's heart,
> Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
> The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper
> And is become the bellows and the fan
> To cool a gypsy's lust.
>
> Look where they come!
>
> Take but good note, and you shall see in him

> The triple pillar of the world transformed
> Into a strumpet's fool. Behold and see.
>
> (1.1.1-13)

The image that this remarkable description yields is that of a great hero in total decline. Philo's portrait of Antony is an alternation of light and shadow; Antony's glorious past is set in sharp contrast with his dim present. The result is hardly flattering: from a legendary hero to be compared to no less than Mars, Antony's irresponsible behaviour has reduced him to a Roman gigolo. Moreover, the representation of Antony given here is not at all what you would be expecting if you were reading or watching the play for the first time. To borrow Hazlitt's famous words about Julius Caesar, Antony scarcely "answers to the portrait given of him in his commentaries" (Hazlitt 1951:195). But that seems to be Shakespeare's idea of introducing Roman heroes; Philo's description recalls the tribunes' iconoclastic attitude toward Caesar at the beginning of *Julius Caesar*, and anticipates the negative way in which the heroic Caius Marcius is introduced by the plebeians in the opening scene of *Coriolanus*. There is, none the less, a significant difference: while Caesar and Marcius' first appearance on stage contradicts -- indeed, discredits -- the account given of them by their detractors, Antony's appearance does only confirm

Philo's narrative, not only through the display of passion he and his queen make in front of everyone (1.1.14-17), but also by his refusal to receive the messenger from Rome (1.1.18-19). What happens next is crucial to the understanding of Antony's character, and it would be preferable to imagine the scene on stage.

The scene takes place in Alexandria, presumably at court. Cleopatra and Antony are giving a huge feast/show in which they themselves occupy the centre stage. Their audience consists of kings, soldiers, attendants, musicians and eunuchs. It is one of those Shakespearean situations in which the stage becomes the world itself. In this world Antony is the most powerful man. He is not merely a leader, but the leader of leaders, with no less than kings for his servants (3.12.15;4.2.13). The messengers arrive in the middle of the feast. Antony has no time for a detailed account of the news they have brought from Rome; he wants the "sum" (1.1.19). Cleopatra insists that he receive the messengers, not so much because it is his duty to be aware of the situation in his country, as because his wife "Fulvia perchance is angry, or who knows / If the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent / His powerful mandate to you: 'Do this, or this'" (1.1.21-23). She even accuses him, before everyone, of being afraid of his wife and of Octavius Caesar (1.1.31-33). The implication here is that Antony is being teased and challenged by the Queen of Egypt in

front of the whole world; and in front of the whole world he must make his choice: Rome or Egypt, his duty or his orientation. To receive the messengers is to confirm what Cleopatra has just said. On the other hand, if he ignores them, he "approves the common liar who / Thus speaks of him at Rome" (1.1.61-62). Antony's answer is both beautiful and unequivocal:

> Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
> Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space!
> Kingdoms are clay! Our dungy earth alike
> Feeds beast as man. The nobleness of life
> Is to do thus....
>
> (1.1.34-38)

Antony makes his choice: Egypt is his *angulus terrarum* and Cleopatra his woman, his Dulcinea. From a Kantian point of view, Antony is undoubtedly a moral patient, unable to take the right action at the right moment, and his choice is no more than the illustration of his irresponsibility.

For Kant, moral agency depends upon reason. Reason not only guides people toward actions in conformity with their duty, but also produces in them the desire to do this duty (Kant 1977:140-208). The inadequacy of this reading stems from the fact that it takes Antony's irrationality for granted, which is hardly true. Among

Shakespeare's major characters, Antony is perhaps the one who possesses the highest degree of rationality and self-awareness. He knows perfectly well that his duty as a Roman leader is to return home and take care of state affairs: "These strong Egyptian fetters I must break, / Or lose myself in dotage" (1.2.122-123). Later in the play he says to Octavia: "Read not my blemishes in the world's report. / I have not kept my square" (2.3.5-6). But Antony has no wish to act according to his duty, because what is required of him by the Roman people as well as by his partners in the triumvirate lies outside his framework of strong evaluations; it is not something he is committed to or something he links to his notion of virtue and the good life. What Antony values more than any other thing is the life of adventure away from home in the company of a great and gorgeous queen to whom he can offer kingdoms and islands. Antony is the Don Quixote that Alonso Quixano always dreamed of becoming; and what distinguishes Antony from the other products of the age of heroes is that, besides being an honourable man and a great warrior, he is, like Don Quixote, what Milan Kundera has called *homo sentimentalis*:

> *homo sentimentalis* cannot be defined as a man with feelings (for we all have feelings), but as a man who has raised feelings to a category of value. As

> soon as feelings are seen as value, everyone wants to feel; and because we all like to pride ourselves on our values, we have a tendency to show off our feelings.
>
> (Kundera 1991:194)

At the beginning of Cervantes' book, Don Quixote decides to fall in love with a woman he hardly knows, just because a knight-errant, according to the tradition of Romance, must have a mistress to whom he can dedicate his conquests; "a knight-errant without a mistress," he says to himself, is "a tree without leaves or fruit, and a body without a soul" (Cervantes 1992:27). Later in the book, he comes across a group of merchants on their way to buy silk. Imagining himself in some kind of adventure, he cries out to them:

> Let the whole world stand, if the whole world does not confess, that there is not in the whole world a damsel more beautiful than the empress of la Mancha, the peerless Dulcinea del Toboso.
>
> (Cervantes 1992:46)

This is, in my view, what the story of Antony is about: a hero who seeks adventure away from home, and decides to fall in love with a great and exotic queen, not so much because he really loves her as because it is part

of his very orientation in life to be in love with a lady of immense beauty and fame. His decision to stay in Egypt cannot be explained in terms of any lust or infatuation with Cleopatra; it is something he does "for the love of Love and her soft hours" (1.1.45). The presence of Cleopatra in his life is as crucial as the presence of Dulcinea is in Don Quixote's life; she is not only the interlocutor whose existence is necessary to Antony's articulation of an identity, but also the motivating force behind him: "I go from hence / Thy soldier, servant, making peace or war / As thou affects" (1.3.70-72). And in exactly the same way that Don Quixote forces what he imagines to be his enemies to admit the supremacy of his lady over all other women, Antony wants the whole world to pay allegiance to Cleopatra: "I will piece / Her opulent throne with kingdoms. All the east, / Say thou, shall call her mistress" (1.5.47-49); and those who dare refuse to do so are susceptible of being punished: "I bind, / On pain of punishment, the world to weet / We stand up peerless" (1.1.39-41).

The best thing that a *homo sentimentalis* can hope for is to make the taste of love sweeter in people's mouths. But the way Antony makes a show of his love has made the people around him not just wish to fall in love, but to fall in love with Cleopatra herself. Besides Enobarbus and Shakespeare himself, who are

evidently enamoured of the queen of Egypt (Frye 1986:127), there is reason to believe that the Romans of the play as well as the critics who call her "whore" (to echo Lear's words) hotly lust to use her in that kind for which they whip her. "Shakespeare's Antony," says Allan Bloom, "as opposed to Plutarch's, cannot help but draw us, at least momentarily, toward a desire to have such a love. Plutarch is not indignant, but rather more contemptuous, while Shakespeare seduces us. Antony is drinking poison, but oh how good it tastes!" (A. Bloom 2000:31-32).

The attitude taken by critics (male critics, in particular) toward Cleopatra is, to say the least, curious. Those who hate her call her "whore," while her admirers praise her in sexist terms such as "childlike", "irrational", or "passionate" (Bevington 1990:15). It is obvious in my view that any reading of the play that does not treat Cleopatra as an independent leader with a goal and an orientation of her own is incomplete.

Cleopatra is queen in a world dominated by men. Her ambition is as great as that of any great Roman leader of her time, and her goal is no less than the domination of the eastern part of the world, if not more. Impressive as it is, her military power cannot compete with that of some of her enemies. However, she possesses a weapon that only she can use effectively, her charms. It is more than enough for her to make all great leaders

serve her and kneel before her majesty. "She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed," says Agrippa (2.2.237). Pompey, too, succumbed to her charms: "And great Pompey / Would stand and make his eyes grow in my brow; / There would he anchor his aspect, and die / With looking on his life" (1.5.32-35). And Antony himself is forced to admit: "You did know / How much you were my conqueror, and that / My sword, made weak by my affection would / Obey it on all cause" (3.12.54-58).

The light in which Cleopatra's character in the play should be read is that of a political leader whose actions are all directed toward one end: becoming supreme queen of the east. The Egyptian notion of kingship being inseparable from the notion of divinity, it would be more accurate to say that what Cleopatra wants to be is the goddess of the east. Not only is she enthroned "In th'habiliments of the goddess Isis" (3.6.17-19), but she is also, more often than not, described by those around her in divine light:

> The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
> Burned on the water; the poop was beaten gold;
> Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
> The winds were love-sick with them; the oars were
> silver,
> Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
> The water which they beat to follow faster,

As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
It beggared all description: she did lie
In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold tissue,
O'erpicturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature. On each side her
Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling cupids,
With divers-coloured fans, whose wind did seem
To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
And what they undid did.
.....
Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides,
So many mermaids, tended her i'th' eyes,
And made their bends adornings. At the helm
A seeming mermaid steers. The silken tackle
Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands
That yarely frame the office. From the barge
A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast
Her people out upon her, and Antony,
Enthroned i'th' market-place, did sit alone,
Whistling to th'air, which, but for vacancy,
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra, too,
And made a gap in nature.

(2.2.201-228)

This is less a queen's portrait than a goddess's. The very image of Cleopatra sitting in a barge that looks

like a throne on the water recalls, according to Frye, "a kind of Venus surrounded by love spirits" (Frye 1986:134). Monarchs are usually surrounded by courtiers, ministers, advisers, or soldiers, and are also supposed to serve their people, or at least pretend to serve them. Here the people of Egypt appear to be Cleopatra's last concern, and those who keep her company are fully dedicated to her, less in the manner of loyal subjects than in the manner of ardent worshippers. Her maids would rather kill themselves than live in a world where she is not; and eunuchs sacrifice their manhood to please her, although she takes "no pleasure / In aught an eunuch has" (1.5.10-11). To have enough messengers to send every day to Antony, she is ready to "unpeople Egypt" (1.5.81). The people of Egypt are less important than her great lover: they cannot give her what she wants; he can. From this perspective, her relationship with Antony should not be seen as anything other than what Jonathan Dollimore has called a "transfer of power" (Dollimore 1984:216). "I drunk him to bed," she says to Charmian, "Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst / I wore his sword Philippan" (2.5.21-23). Antony has conquered the world only to yield it to her: "Unto her / He gave the stablishment of Egypt, made her / Of lower Syria, Cyprus, Lydia, / Absolute queen" (3.6.8). Nor is he unconscious of the strong spell she exercises upon him: "I must from this enchanting queen break off"

(1.2.135). Yet he is unable to free himself from the silken net put around him by a goddess who knows perfectly well how to play her part.

Gods are particularly characterised by their inaccessibility; an available god would sooner or later lose his divinity in the eyes of his worshippers. Cleopatra is not merely aware of this, she seems to adopt it as a principle:

CLEOPATRA:

See where he is, who's with him, what he does.
I did not send you. If you find him sad,
Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
That I am sudden sick. Quick, and return.

CHARMIAN:

Madam, methinks if you did love him dearly,
You do not hold the method to enforce
The like from him.

CLEOPATRA: What should I do I do not?

CHARMIAN:

In each thing give him way; cross him in
nothing.

CLEOPATRA:

Thou teachest like a fool: the way to lose him

(1.3.3-10)

According to Catherine Belsey, Cleopatra's inaccessibility and her "absence" from the place where she is expected to be constitute the secret of her immense power of seduction. She is "constantly exploiting the lack which is the cause of desire" (Belsey 1996:42). Yet it must not be supposed that Cleopatra's relationship with Antony is cynical and devoid of any pure feelings for him. She does love him, as the tremendous speech she delivers after his death bears witness; however, what she loves is Antony "the greatest soldier of the world" (1.3.38), the "Herculean Roman" (1.3.84), Antony to whom she can order the head of Herod of Jewry (3.3.4), not Antony who can lose a war. She loves Antony the lover, but prefers Antony the conqueror. After his first defeat at sea, she is ready to pack "cards with Caesar" (4.14.19), but as soon as he assures her that the next battle will be his she says: "That's my brave lord!...since my lord / Is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra" (3.8.180-189). Cleopatra sees her greatness and divinity in the greatness and power of her lovers; they represent for her the significant other to whom she must travel before returning with a strong sense of who she is. With Octavius, the situation is totally different; she loses all interest in seducing him after their first encounter: no matter how powerful he is, Octavius falls

short of her idea of greatness. He cannot do Antony's job. But can Antony himself keep doing the job for her?

As a great leader, followed by courageous and loyal soldiers, Antony seems to have on his side all the factors he needs in order to conquer the world and then present it to Cleopatra on a silver platter, all the factors except one, time. Antony is anachronistic: he lives in a world that is not totally his; and Octavius Caesar, as the soothsayer tries to explain to Antony, is there to remind him of this bitter reality:

> O Antony, stay not by his side.
> Thy daemon--that thy spirit which keeps thee--is
> Noble, courageous, high unmatchable,
> Where Caesar's is not. But near him, thy angel
> Becomes afeared, as being o'erpowered; therefore
> Make space enough between you.
>
> (2.3.17-22)

As long as Octavius is away, Antony will have no problem being himself; it is when Octavius gets closer that Antony is in serious danger of losing his identity. Not that Octavius is a greater leader, for Antony's heroic qualities are undisputed in the play. Octavius himself recognises Antony's greatness and superiority (3.6.44-56), whereas Agrippa calls him "the best of men" (2.2.136). The only reason why this "Herculean Roman"

(1.3.85), this "demi-Atlas" (1.5.75) loses his lustre whenever the unattractive Octavius is around is that this latter's realistic approach to politics amplifies Antony's detachment from the reality of his time, and shows the great extent to which his notion of leadership is archaic. For Antony, the conquered lands have no intrinsic value, they are "clay" (1.1.36), the only value they can have is that they can confer glory on the person who conquers them, or serve as gifts to be presented to the beloved ones (3.6.8-11). Like a fisherman who travels miles and miles away from home in search of excellent fish, but every time he catches a good one, he throws it back into sea, Antony is less concerned about the goal itself than about the path that leads to it (Waith 1967:118).

Among the difficult choices with which Antony is faced throughout the play, the choice between accepting and refusing Octavius Caesar's challenge is most important. Despite his obvious superiority in ground war, Antony decides to accept Caesar's challenge to fight by sea, a decision that gives Caesar a decisive advantage. Antony's soldiers are not unaware of their leader's mistake:

> Most worthy sir, you therein throw away
> The absolute soldiership you have by land;
> Distract your army, which doth most consist

> Of war-marked footmen; leave unexecuted
> Your own renowned knowledge; quite forgo
> The way which promises assurance; and
> Give up yourself merely to chance and hazard
> From firm security.
>
> (3.7.34)

Even the most incompetent of leaders will tell you that the best strategy in war is the one that allows you not only to use your best weapons but also to take advantage of your enemy's weakness. Therefore, those who accuse Antony of being unwise are certainly right, and Antony himself would probably agree with them. But who said that Antony wants to be remembered for his wisdom? What Antony wants is to be a legendary hero who can defeat his enemies even when the odds are against him. His answer when asked about the reason behind his decision to fight by sea is simple but extremely significant: "For that he dares us to't" (3.7.29). To accept Caesar's challenge is unwise, to be sure, but to reject it is to be no Antony.

A good deal has been said about Antony's flight from the battle of Actium. "We can bear to see Mrs. Quickly pawning her plate for love of Falstaff," says G. B. Shaw, "but not Antony running away from the battle of Actium for love of Cleopatra" (Shaw 2000:30). For Harold Bloom, it is "one of the least persuasive episodes in

Antony's degradation" (Bloom 1998:551). But while everyone seems to think that it is, to say the least, Antony's most unfortunate decision, little explanation is offered to account for it. And I think it is quite naive to assume that Antony flies for love of Cleopatra.

Antony's light preparation for the battle, as his conversations with his soldiers show, might be an indication that he does not take the war with Caesar seriously, at least not as seriously as he should; it is Cleopatra's war, after all. For Antony, it appears to be no more than a good opportunity to display before Cleopatra his heroic abilities. "O love," he says to her before leaving for the second battle, "That thou couldst see my wars today, and knew'st / The royal occupation! Thou shouldst see / A workman in't" (4.4.15-18). In other words, what is for thousands of soldiers a matter of life and death is for Antony a mere dialogue with his significant other. Antony leaves the battle because he feels that there is no point in pursuing a show after the most important member of his audience -- indeed, the member for which the whole show is intended -- has left. Phaedrus' account of Love in Plato's *Symposium* is pertinent here:

> a lover who is detected in doing any dishonorable act, or submitting through cowardice when any dishonor is done to him by another, will be more

> pained at being detected by his beloved than at being seen by his father, or his companions, or any one else.
>
> (Plato 1993:7)

What this suggests is the idea that Antony would have fought to death had Cleopatra stayed around, not only because he loves her, but also, and most particularly, because she is his major interlocutor, and the one person who never fails to recognise his orientation and preference for the life of adventure.

Is Antony's suicide in the fourth act of the play a triumph or a catastrophe? For us, as readers or spectators, the answer will always depend on where we stand. But if seen as part of Antony's orientation, his suicide will most certainly appear as a triumph, since "Not Caesar's valour hath o'erthrown Antony, / But Antony's hath triumphed on itself" (4.15.15-16). According to G. Wilson Knight, the imagery of the play supports the idea of death as triumph:

> We see the protagonists, in love and war and sport, in death or life or that mystery containing both, transfigured in a transfigured universe, themselves that universe and more, outpacing the wheeling orbs of earth and heaven....So Cleopatra and Antony find not death but life.

(Knight 1979:262)

From the same perspective, Antony's fall seems less the result of his infatuation with Cleopatra than the result of his disorientation: "I am so lated in the world that I / Have lost my way forever" (3.11.3-4). Antony is a "Renaissance" character who lives according to an outmoded code of behaviour, and observes the virtues of another time -- the heroic age -- and another society. One cannot simply transport the virtues of another time and another community into one's own, because there exists no possible method by which these can be successfully detached from the social structure that produced them (MacIntyre 1981:116).

Only too late does Antony realise the magnitude of his loss. With the battle of Actium, Antony loses a sense of who he is; and the attempts he makes later to redeem his fading identity, especially when he challenges Octavius to single combat, only emphasise his detachment from the reality of his time, a time in which there is no place for such a corny notion as single combat (3.3.29-37; 4.1.4-6). Certain critics such as Jonathan Dollimore and Catherine Belsey argue that Antony's loss of a sense of identity is closely linked to his loss of political position (Belsey 1993:39,40; Dollimore 1984:211). To be sure, there are situations in Shakespeare, in which the loss of political place

entails a loss of identity. What is wrong in my view is to make it a general rule, as both Belsey and Dollimore seem to imply. Shakespeare's plays contain a number of characters (Cassio, Prospero, Duke Senior) whose loss of political or military position does not necessarily lead to a loss of identity. A loss of political office can result in a total dissolution of the self only if the office in question constitutes the character's strongly valued good. Antony's identity crisis occurs the moment he realises that he is treated less as a legendary hero than as any defeated leader:

> Authority melts from me. Of late when I cried 'Ho!',
> Like boys unto a muss, kings would start forth
> And cry 'your will?'
> Have you no ears? I am
> Antony yet.
>
> (3.13.94-97)

According to Charles Taylor, the relationship between a character and his orientation is hardly static; a character can acquire a strong sense of identity either by getting closer to what he wants to be or by moving away from it (Taylor 1989:44,45). In this sense, of course, Antony's desperate cry "I am / Antony yet" is the cry of a sinking boatman who sees his boat

moving further and further from the shore that he has always dreamed of reaching, as it were.

III. POSSESSING TIME:
OCTAVIUS CAESAR'S RATIONAL HUMANITY

Like Hotspur's death at the hands of the calculating Harry, Antony's defeat at Actium is a striking evidence that such heroic virtues as honour, courage, and prowess are hardly transcendental, and that there are times in which they become more obstacles than assets for the person who possesses them. What the battle of Actium has revealed is that, to be a successful leader, you scarcely need to be a man of heroic stature. What you need above all is a good sense of the time; and a good sense of the time is precisely what constitutes Octavius' strength. It is also what relates him to the democratic age of men.

For Vico, the age of men is not merely a stage leading to the development of humanity, but rather the crowning itself of that development. It is also with this age, or rather with what men become in this age, that he identifies human nature. Vico speaks, for instance, of the "rational humanity" of the age of men, of the "true and proper nature of man," and of the "intelligent nature, which is the proper nature of man" (Vico 1994:339). Shakespeare's treatment of Octavius Caesar leaves little doubt as to the type of leader he has in mind, which is no less than the true and accomplished Renaissance prince: neither a god above human errors, nor a hero, constantly in search of the bubble reputation, sometimes to his country's detriment, and sometimes to his own. Shakespeare's leader is above all a good politician whose primary goal is to maintain peace and stability among his people, not without being conscious of his limitations or of what is at stake in politics. And nowhere else in the canon does Shakespeare's conception of a good leader come closer to Machiavelli's prince than in the case of Octavius Caesar. Even the formidable Henry V looks reckless and unsophisticated in comparison with this prodigy of *realpolitik.*

The critical treatment of the character of Octavius Caesar leaves a great deal to be desired. When he is not totally excluded from the discussion of the play

(Hazlitt 1951:228-232), he is treated as a foil for Antony. "Here," says Frank Kermode in his introduction to the play in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, "we may better understand the defeated by considering the victor" (Kermode 1974:1346). Sometimes, he is a lifeless leader who marches like a robot steadily and heartlessly toward his aim (Bradley 1988:226), and sometimes a destructive force whose main function in the drama is to bring about the fall of the two lovers and push them to ruin and death: "Octavius is the Typhon-crocodile -- treacherous, powerful creature, destructive of natural beauty yet also an emblem of the sun -- who destroys Osiris," says Frank Kermode (Kermode 1974:1346). What most critics fail to explore is the reason why Octavius seeks so desperately to destroy all those who get in his way, particularly Antony. To get some insight into what motivates Octavius' behaviour, we should go back to *Julius Caesar*, a play in which Octavius has a very small part.

Being Julius Caesar's adopted son and heir, Octavius must not only bear his great father's name but also deserve it. This is no small matter, particularly if we consider the difficulties that such responsibility might imply; for not only is Octavius bound to make his way through such legendary figures as Mark Antony, Brutus, and Cassius, but he must as well overcome the prejudice against his young age. The first sentence addressed to

him directly by Mark Antony is "Octavius, I have seen more days than you" (*Julius Caesar* 4.1.18). Later in the same play he is called by Cassius "A peevish schoolboy" (5.1.60). In *Antony and Cleopatra,* he is "the scarce-bearded Caesar" (1.1.23), "the boy Caesar" (3.13.17), "the young Roman boy" (4.12.48), and "ass / unpolicied" (5.2.306-307). Nor is the prejudice against Octavius' age limited to his enemies; "It is shameful in this boy," says Bradley, "as hard and smooth as polished steel, to feel at such a time nothing of the greatness of his victim and the tragedy of his victim's fall" (Bradley 1988:226).

Although we are never given the opportunity to hear Octavius express himself when he is alone, the motives behind his determination to destroy Antony may be detected in his refusal to grant his enemy any chance to save his face:

> He calls me boy, and chides as he had power
> To beat me out of Egypt. My messenger
> He hath whipped with rods; dares me to personal
> combat,
> Caesar to Antony. Let the old ruffian know
> I have many other ways to die; meantime
> Laugh at his challenge.
>
> (*Antony and Cleopatra,* 4.1.1-6).

The revengeful tone in Octavius' speech can hardly be mistaken; these are the words of someone who is living a moment he has been dreaming of for a long time. What I am implying here is that Octavius' character is strongly informed by his dialogical relationship with both Antony and Julius Caesar, and his development throughout the sequence should be read as a reaction to all those who believe that the "Roman boy" is unworthy of Caesar's name:

ANTONY:

Octavius, lead your battle softly on,
Upon the left hand of the even field.

OCTAVIUS:

Upon the right hand I. Keep thou the left.

ANTONY:

Why do you cross me in this exigent?

OCTAVIUS:

I do not cross you: but I will do so.

(*Julius Caesar*, 5.1.16-20)

It is hard to imagine that such a reaction can proceed from the impulse of the moment; it is something that Octavius must have thought of and prepared beforehand. The "right hand" is the traditional position of honour which is often taken by the most experienced leader of the army. By insisting upon the right position at that

critical moment, Octavius wants to tell Antony that one cannot be Caesar's heir without taking precedence over the rest. In Plutarch, the dispute over the "right wing" is between Brutus and Cassius:

> Then Brutus prayed Cassius he might have the leading of the right wing, the which men thought was far meeter for Cassius, both because he was the elder man, and also for that he had the better experience."
>
> (Plutarch 1968:155-156)

Shakespeare's deviation from his source is a clear indication that he wants to amplify the rivalry between Octavius and Antony, as he does in the Henriad, when he reduces Hotspur's age to match it with that of Harry.

Although the origin of the rivalry between Octavius and Antony is not easy to determine, we may surmise that Caesar's fatherly treatment of Antony as well as Octavius' total absence from the initial scenes of *Julius Caesar* might have something to do with it. Like a father to his son, Julius Caesar is seen, during the feast of Lupercal and after, advising, warning (1.2.191-213), and teasing Antony (2.2.116-117), yet not a word is uttered about Octavius, who is apparently not taking part in the festivities. Even the conspirators, who should normally take into their account the fate of

Caesar's heir after the assassination, are much more concerned about Mark Antony than about Octavius (2.1.154-160); in fact, they do not even mention his name. What we have here, reproduced to us by Shakespeare, is the triangular relationship between Harry, Bolingbroke, and Hotspur. Caesar's fondness for Antony recalls Bolingbroke's wish that Hotspur (instead of Harry) were his real son (*1 Henry IV,* 1.1.85-89). And, like Harry's, Octavius' main concern is to prove to his adoptive father that he will be a worthy successor, worthier than Antony, Caesar's favourite. Julius Caesar and Mark Antony are, therefore, Octavius' principal interlocutors, and the "other" whose existence is essential to his own articulation of an identity. Antony, in particular, is the open book that Octavius believes he must never cease to consult if he is to achieve his ultimate goal, which is to dominate the world and prove to all those who judge people by their age that they have been mistaken in underestimating his competence. Conscious of Antony's immense popularity, and of the possibility of being accused of jealousy, Octavius' first utterance in the play is an attempt to justify his criticism of Antony's life style:

> You may see, Lepidus, and henceforth know
> It is not Caesar's natural vice to hate
> Our great competitor. From Alexandria

> This is the news: he fishes, drinks, and wastes
> The lamps of night in revel; is not more manlike
> Than Cleopatra, nor the Queen of Ptolemy
> More womanly than he; hardly gave audience, or
> Vouchsafed to think he had partners. You shall find there
> A man who is the abstract of all faults
> That all men follow.
>
> (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1.4.1-10)

Octavius makes sure to defend himself against any charges of ill will; it is not his "natural vice" but rather Antony's own behaviour that is to blame. Antony is, according to Octavius, the epitome of human weaknesses that people, who wish to avoid those weaknesses, should read. Octavius is speaking here of the use he himself makes of Antony's behaviour; for what he seeks throughout the play is to be everything that Antony is not. Antony is passionate, extravagant, exuberant, adventurous, generous, and a great lover of music, games, wine, and women. Octavius is none of the above; he even prides himself on taking little delight in such amusements (2.7.99-100). In the end, Octavius' recipe proves more efficient than Antony's.

According to his enemies, Octavius' success is the result of his extraordinary luck. Octavius, they think, is a lucky man, who happens to be at the right place at

the right moment. "The very dice obey him," says Antony, "And in our sports my better cunning faints / Under his chance" (2.3.32-34). Cleopatra calls him "the full-fortuned Caesar" (4.15.25), refusing to give him the slightest credit for defeating her and her Antony: "'Tis paltry to be Caesar. / Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave, / A minister of her will" (5.2.2-4). But does one become Rome's emperor -- an honour of which even the great Julius Caesar was incapable -- with luck? Perhaps. But can luck, alone, rid one of such an impressive list of rivals as Cassius, Brutus, Lepidus, Pompey, Mark Antony, and Cleopatra? Not really. The point I attempt to make here is that Octavius' strength lies less in his being a lucky person than in his remarkable ability to make luck serve him; and in this, Machiavelli himself would have been proud of Shakespeare's "Roman boy." If Harry's strength resides in his capacity to manipulate appearance, Octavius is the undisputed master of the art of manipulating Fortune.

Machiavelli's most important contribution to the art of government and statecraft has to do, according to a number of his scholars, with his treatment of Fortune (Mansfield 1998:189; Skinner 2000:43-44). Machiavelli's *Prince* is scarcely unique in its genre; in fact, it is only one of a long list of books, both classical and medieval, whose purpose is to give advice to princes and

help them govern successfully. But while Roman moralists and historians such as Livy and Cicero believe that success depends in large part on Fortune, and Christian authors think that good government depends entirely on Fortune, or providence (Skinner 2000:28-35), Machiavelli's originality resides in his belief that prosperity in politics is dependant upon the prince's ability to *influence* Fortune:

> I compare fortune to one of those violent rivers which, when they are engaged, flood the plains, tear down trees and buildings, wash soil from one place to deposit it in another. Everyone flees before them, everyone yields to their impetus, there is no possibility of resistance. Yet although such is their nature, it does not follow that when they are flowing quietly one cannot take precautions, constructing dykes and embankments so that when the river is in flood they would keep to one channel or their impetus be less wild and dangerous. So it is with fortune. She shows her potency where there is no well regulated power to resist her, and her impetus is felt where she knows there are no embankments and dykes built to restrain her.
>
> (Machiavelli 1981:130-131)

Machiavelli hardly denies fortune's tremendous power or the important part it plays in shaping people's affairs. But Fortune, he thinks, can be tamed, or at least canalised and re-oriented if one is wise enough to act in advance; for, to curb the power of Fortune, one should not wait until it rages and gets out of control. Yet how can a leader tame Fortune and make it serve his purpose? First, by being brave, because "fortune is a woman" and therefore is more likely to be attracted by masculine qualities (133), and then by suiting his "methods" to "the nature of the times" (131). In a letter to one of his friends, written seven years before *The Prince*, Machiavelli insists upon the importance for a wise prince to harmonise his way of governing with the times. "Nature," he says, "has given every man a particular talent and inspiration," yet "the times are varied" as well as "subject to frequent change." Therefore, "those who fail to alter their ways of proceeding" are doomed to meet "good Fortune at one time and bad at another." Thus, if a man wants "always to enjoy good Fortune," he has no choice but to "accommodate himself to the times." A man who can do that, that is, "rule his nature," is most likely to be "the ruler of the stars and of the fates." (qtd Skinner 2000:43-44).

Octavius' reply to Antony's invitation to have more wine, in the memorable scene on board Pompey's galley, is a key moment in the play:

POMPEY:

This is not yet an Alexandrian feast.

ANTONY:

It ripens towards it. Strike the vessels, ho!
Here's to Caesar!

CAESAR:

I could well forbear't.
It's monstrous labour when I wash my brain
And it grows fouler.

ANTONY:

Be a child o'th' time.

CAESAR:

'Possess it', I'll make answer."

(2.7.101-102)

To be a child of the time is to be both carried by its tide and subjected to its changes, which is, to some extent, Antony's life story. Cassius and Brutus' revival of the ethos of chivalry, as well as their reliance upon violence to settle political problems, had made the leadership of Rome available to whoever was courageous, strong, and honourable enough to seize it. And Antony was there at the right time. But his inability to adapt

himself, after the battle of Philippi, to the more realistic and flexible virtues of his epoch has caused him to fall on hard times. On the other hand, to possess time is to master it and leave very little to chance. In two words Octavius acquaints us with his notion of virtue and the good life. A human agent, he believes, is someone who holds a good grip on his own nature, someone who can influence Fortune and re-orient its flow. And no one, I think, can deny Octavius' impressive mastery of time; all his actions, for instance, are planned in advance, and carried out according to a schedule. He eliminates his enemies one by one, always with the help of an eventual victim; First, Pompey with Antony's assistance, then Lepidus, whose resources he uses against Antony. He is like the "whale" that "plays and tumbles, driving the poor fry before him, and at last devours them at a mouthful" (*Pericles,* 2.1.30-32). And his refusal of Antony's challenge to a duel (4.1.4-6) is a classic of *realpolitik*. Why would he risk his fortune in a duel with the world's greatest soldier now that he is only an inch away from victory? Even the shrewd Harry would have been tempted by the duel; for, despite his great sense of the time, it can hardly be denied that Harry's underdog victory over the French at Agincourt, as well as his unexpected victory over the heroic Hotspur, are huge risks that owe their issue to Fortune's helping hand. With Octavius, fortune is never

allowed to take the lead. The Roman boy is never provoked, and attacks only when he is sure to win; and his decisions are always taken without the slightest regard to such values as friendship or honour. His idea of possessing time could very well be translated into Milton's lines in *Paradise Regained*: "Each act is rightliest done / Not when it must, but when it may be best" (Book IV, 475).

Antony's cynical description of Octavius at Philippi -- far from obscuring his image -- does him credit:

> He at Philippi kept
> His sword e'en like a dancer, while I struck
> The lean and wrinkled Cassius, and 'twas I
> That the mad Brutus ended. He alone
> Dealt on lieutenantry, and no practice had
> In the brave squares of war.
>
> (3.11.35-40)

Though unintentionally, Antony is telling us here both what accounts for Octavius' success and what is wrong with his own notion of leadership. While Antony's width of outlook, as MacCullum has pointed out, disperses his interest and makes him want to be a statesman, a hero, and a lover at the same time (MacCullum 1967:382), Octavius believes that the good leader's contribution in

the war should be limited to management without the slightest attempt at personal heroic actions. Trevor Nunn's 1972 brilliant production of the play with the Royal Shakespeare Company (directed for television by Jon Scoffield in 1974) captures like no other production I know of the striking contrast between Antony and Octavius' two different notions of leadership. While Antony is presented as a hero in brown military uniform, followed by adventurers who share his love for extravagant entertainment, Octavius and his companions are shown, in their white Roman togas, as a team of politicians at work. Nor does Octavius attempt to do more than is required of him as a statesman, which is crucial in Shakespeare.

In the work of certain Elizabethan dramatists, particularly Marlowe, success and prosperity depend upon ambition. "That like I best that flies beyond my reach," says the Guise in the *Massacre At Paris* (1.2.42). In Shakespeare, both success and safety depend upon limitation to one's role. "Only the thing I am shall make me live," says Parolles (*All's Well That Ends Well,* 4.3.335-336). "Be that you are, that is, a woman. If you be more you're none," says Angelo to the virgin Isabella (*Measure for Measure,* 2.4.33-34). Accused by his wife of being unable to behave in a manly manner (when he refuses to kill the king), Macbeth declares: "I dare do all that may become a man / Who dares do more is none"

(*Macbeth,* 1.7.46-47). In other words, being a Shakespearean character, Octavius' success must be closely linked to his being more devoted than any of his enemies to his role: he is a politician and does not seek to be something else.

Octavius' enormous capacity to "suit his methods to the nature of the times" is illustrated, among other things, by two aspects of his rule, of which Antony is conspicuously deficient: first, his concern to have competent advisors around him, to whom he can give a certain freedom of manœuvre, as, for example, when he refers Maecenas to Agrippa: "I do not know, Maecenas. Ask Agrippa" (2.2.17), or when he allows Agrippa to propose the marriage between Antony and Octavia (2.2.125-127); second, his ability to make full use of all the tactics of war that his time can afford, instead of sticking to the old methods. For example, his reliance on intelligence and information is astonishing: "Thy biddings have been done, and every hour, / Most noble Caesar, shalt thou have report / How 'tis abroad" (1.4.34-36). Later in the play he says himself to Octavia, referring to Antony: "I have eyes upon him, / And his affairs come to me on the wind" (3.6.63-64).

Octavius' refusal to be Fortune's fool, or victim of nature's changing course, return us to the play with which I opened this work, and to one of Shakespeare's favourite metaphors. In *Richard II,* the kingdom is

compared to a garden that owes its health, its productivity, and its beauty less to nature than to art. To take advantage of your garden and enjoy its fruits, you should work it and take constant care of it. Octavius has never stopped working his own garden, which is why he has not only kept it, but has added other gardens to it as well; and though the play ends before we get the chance to see him really enjoying the fruits of his work, Lucius, a Roman general in a play written only a year later, says to the king of Britain, "Caesar...hath more kings his servants than / Thyself domestic officers" (Cymbeline, 3.1.63). Conversely, Antony, who had rather been enjoying his garden, lost it in the end. Antony's notion of leadership can be said, in this particular context, of course, to represent the pastoral aspect of the kingdom/garden; Octavius, on the other hand, stands for the georgic aspect.

As opposed to pastoral, which idealises nature and celebrates the idle life of the shepherd, georgic deals, in its broad sense, with the realistic aspect of nature, and celebrates hard work and husbandry(12). Octavius' tremendous victory over leaders greater than him in stature and fame is not only an evidence of the importance of determination and hard work, but also, in a sense, a celebration and a glorification of it. In his discussion of Octavius' character, Northrop Frye quotes Blake's line "Attempting to become more than man we

become less" (Frye 1986:136). Julius Caesar and Antony's attempts to soar above the heads of men have caused them, in the view of many, to fall very low; Octavius, in Frye's terms, "never descends to that level, because he never rises above his own" (136). His triumph is not only the triumph of a new style of government based upon human reason and human laws; it is also the triumph of self-awareness and of man's capacity to govern his own nature.

CONCLUSION

A reading strategy based upon characters' orientations rather than the actions they should or should not take will by no means put an end to the interpretive disagreements so characteristic of Shakespearean criticism -- indeed, of all literary criticism. Nevertheless, it might help us know a bit more about the Bard's characters (which is the aim of all character criticism) and a bit less about his commentators; for when Alfred Harbage says that Henry V is a "virtuous" king (Harbage 1961:67), and W. B. Yeats declares that he is a king of "gross vices" (Yeats 1998:181), it is obvious that we are told more about Yeats and Harbage themselves than about Henry. Throughout my thesis, I have tried to show the way in which Shakespeare's characters articulate an identity by being oriented toward what

represents for them the good life, and how most of them undergo an identity crisis when other people fail to recognise their orientations. Shakespeare's characters are what Charles Taylor calls "self-interpreting subjects" (Taylor 1985:4), in the sense that the understanding they have of themselves, that is, how they view themselves, is what constitutes their true self. The question whether a character like Richard, for instance, is God's deputy or not is quite irrelevant here; for even if a character's idea of himself is totally wrong, the way in which he makes sense of himself is still the scaffolding upon which his identity is built. "Self-interpretation" does not have to be approved by everyone in order to be significant. For example, an untalented young man, who wants to become a Rock star (and behaves as a Rock star), although he makes his living by selling cars, would not mind being called a bad salesman, but would certainly go through an identity crisis if he were called a bad singer.

I also tried to show how Shakespeare's characters are always engaged in a continuous dialogue with, or struggle against, other people, especially those who matter to them. Reading Shakespeare's characters dialogically can prove fruitful in many respects. First, it can help us get a better appreciation of the characters themselves; secondly, it might help to solve the problem of autonomy that presents a main issue in

contemporary Renaissance studies. The Shakespearean subject is free to choose whatever orientation he wants and to be faithful to it, but he cannot do it alone. He needs other people's help; hence the importance for a character to use an intelligible language of expression, a language that the others can understand and respond to. Those who speak an unintelligible language of expression, whether because they are, like Hamlet, ahead of their time, or because they are, like Antony, behind their time, lose their orientation and, often, see their life end tragically. The "other" here is neither the one we are not, nor the one whose repression is crucial to our existence; he is simply the interlocutor who accompanies us in our quest for an identity

NOTES

1. In his comment on Greenblatt's account of subjectivity, Edward Pechter says:

> In this view, human power to shape the world, even to fashion that small part of the world called the self, turns out to be illusory. There is no free space in Greenblatt's functionalist conception of culture, not in the theater, not for the self. As sometimes in Foucault, or at least in the earlier Foucault, we are only what we are constituted to be by the power relations that govern, anonymously and without human face, even the governors. (Pechter 1995:70)

2. "This change, " Greenblatt adds, "is difficult to characterise in our usual ways because it is not only complex but resolutely dialectical. If we say that there is a new stress on the executive power of the will, we must say that there is the most sustained and relentless assault upon the will; if we say that there is a new social mobility, we must say that there is a new assertion of power by both family and state to determine all movement within the society; if we say that there is a heightened awareness of the existence of

alternative modes of social, theological, and psychological organization, we must say that there is a new dedication to the imposition of control upon those modes and ultimately to the destruction of alternatives" (Greenblatt 1984:2).

3. The belief in a transcendental self expressed by Kant and Hume is, according to Dollimore, linked to their racism:

> The enormous differences between the two philosophical traditions represented by Hume and Kant respectively could hardly be exaggerated, yet on two things at least they agree: first (like Descartes) they begin with the individual taken in abstraction from any socio-political context; second, Kant concurs with Hume on the (human) condition of blacks: 'Mr Hume challenges anyone to cite a simple example in which a negro has shown talents...So fundamental is the difference between these two races of men [black and white] and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in colour'….This second point on which Hume and Kant agree is in part the consequence of the first; the abstraction in abstract individualism (ie its

> metaphysics) is the means whereby the historically specific has been universalised as the naturally given. (Dollimore: 1984:256)

See also Michael Bristol's discussion of Dollimore's argument in Bristol 1996:20-21.

4. "Super-addressee" is a term used by Bakhtin to refer to those interlocutors who exist outside the present moment--for example, God for a martyr, a future audience for an unpopular artist, or simply dead or absent parents for most people (Holquist 1990:39).

5. In his essay on "Death," Montaigne says:

> Therefore Socrates was wont to say that death might be resembled either to sound sleep, a long journey, or destruction.... If the soul doth live, and after death feeleth nothing, then is it like unto a sound sleep, because therein we rest without either feeling or understanding.... The broken sleeps, the slumber and dreams full of visions, are commonly in them that have weak and sickly bodies.... But if thou compare death to long travel, and that the soul--being let loose from prison of the body--seeth all things and

walketh everywhere, then what can be considered more happy.... For there is nothing that doth better or more truly prophesy the end of life than when a man dreameth that he doth travel and wander into for countries...and that he traveleth in countries unknown without hope of return. (Montaigne 1992:120-121).

6. According to Kant, an action taken out of inclination "has no true moral worth, but is on a level with other inclinations; e.g. the inclination to honor which, if it is happily directed to that which is actually of public utility and accordant with duty and consequently honorable, deserves praise and encouragement but not respect. For the maxim lacks the moral ingredient that such actions be done *out of duty*, not from inclination (Kant 1977:145).

7. Thou shalt leave all that thou hast loved most dear
This is the arrow, shooting from the bow
Of banishment, which thou hast first to fear.

How bitter another's bread is, thou shalt know
By tasting it; and how hard to the feet
Another's stairs are, up and down to go.

(*The Divine Comedy:* Paradiso, XVII. 55-60).

8. Shakespeare's interest in tradition as a gift of the past that must be passed on to successor generations is expressed as well by Orlando's speech:

> I know you are my eldest brother, and in the gentle condition of blood you should so know me. The courtesy of nations allows you my better, in that you are first-born, but the same tradition takes not away my blood, were there twenty brothers betwixt us. I have as much of my brother in me as you, albeit I confess your coming before me is nearer to his reverence. (*As You Like It,* 1.1.44-51)

9. To illustrate this idea, Kundera gives the following example:

> A man is walking down the street. At a certain moment, he tries to recall something, but the recollection escapes him. Automatically, he slows down. Meanwhile, a person who wants to forget a disagreeable incident he has just lived through starts unconsciously to speed up his pace, as if he were trying to distance

himself from a thing still too close to him in time (Kundera 1996:39).

10. "He who swears fealty to his lord," says the eleventh century bishop, Fulbert of Chartres, ought always to have these six things in memory: what is harmless, safe, honorable, useful, easy, practicable.... The lord also ought to act toward his faithful vassal reciprocally in all these things. And if he does not do this, he will be justly considered guilty of bad faith, just as the former, if he should be detected in avoiding or consenting to the avoidance of his duties, would be perfidious and perjured (qtd Cantor 1995:88-89).

11. I am referring here to Rosalind's beautiful speech:

> The poor world is almost six thousand years old, and in all this time there was not any man died in his own person, videlicet, in a love-cause. Troilus had his brains dashed out with a Grecian club, yet he did what he could to die before, and he is one of the patterns of love. Leander, he would have lived many a fair year though Hero had turned nun, if it had not been for a hot mid summer night; for, good youth, he went but for to

> wash him in the Hellespont, and being taken with the cramp, was drowned, and the foolish chroniclers of that age found it was Hero of Sestos. But these are all lies: men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but not for love (*As You Like It*, 4.1.89-103).

12. I am indebted here to William Kinsley's definition of "Georgic" given in his seminar, *Studies in Genre.* Université de Montéal, Winter 1994.

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