

ACTA UNIVERSITATIS SZEGEDIENSIS DE ATTILA JÓZSEF NOMINATAE  
PAPERS IN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES V.

Monograph Series 1



**ATTILA KISS**

**THE SEMIOTICS OF REVENGE**

Subjectivity and Abjection in English Renaissance Tragedy

**ANTÓNIA SZABARI**

**DEMAND, DESIRE AND DRIVE**

in Sidney's Texts and Their Contexts



**SZEGED**

**1995**



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ATTILA KISS

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## PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

Papers in English and American Studies (PEAS), the occasional publication of the Szeged English Department was established a number of years ago to represent the scholarly interest and output of the department. The first volumes contained miscellanea, articles written by members of the department, and represented the full scale of our research spectrum. In later volumes we concentrated on thematic issues, always in association with a conference organized by the department. With this volume we establish a new venture, the monograph series. Under this subtitle we intend to publish larger scale, individual works by our colleagues or outstanding students. We hope to have always enough material, exciting experimental works — such as the two long essays included in this first volume — to keep this series going.

We have decided to publish the two works by Attila Kiss and Antónia Szabari respectively together because they well represent two fields of interest actively pursued at our department: Renaissance studies and poststructuralist literary theory. Since both works treat eminent Renaissance literary texts with an approach following the psychoanalytical schools characterized by Lacan and Kristeva, we hope that this thin but powerfully drafted volume will attract an audience worldwide among scholars of English.

Sarolta Marinovich-Resch, PhD  
Chair of English

**THE SEMIOTICS OF REVENGE**  
**Subjectivity and Abjection**  
**in English Renaissance Tragedy**

by  
Attila Kiss



## PREFACE

Several years ago, as a member of the "emblematics team" of the English Department at Attila József University, I embarked upon a project which was inspired by my professors of Renaissance literature and iconography - Dr. Tibor Fabiny and Dr. György Endre Szőnyi. My intention then was to investigate how the *emblematic logic* of staging and reception shaped what I called the experience of testimony in English Renaissance theatricality. I thought that the understanding of this emblematic cognitive system and the theatrical *hermeneutics of being a witness* could bring us closer to a general theory of tragedy based on the concept of testimony.

The project soon turned out to be too ambitious and I realized that it had to incorporate not only emblematics and Renaissance studies but also more general theoretical foundations in *the semiotics and the genealogy of the speaking subject*. In the process of textual analysis, *abjection and violence* appeared to be constitutive representational techniques in the tragedies of the English Renaissance, and semiotics became my critical apparatus. For this, I am greatly indebted to my professors in the English Department at the University of Oregon, Prof. Linda Kintz and Prof. George Rowe, whose courses served as my first introduction to the field of Renaissance and poststructuralist theories of subjectivity. I am grateful to all my colleagues and professors at both universities for their instructions and help; special thanks are due to Dr. Zoltán Szilassy at Lajos Kossuth University for his scholarly advice and insight and to Thomas Williams for his painstaking assistance in reading and re-reading the manuscript. While doing research at my home institution, I received financial support from the *Pro Cultura Hungarica Foundation*, which provided me with a six-month regular scholarship.

The present collection of originally independent essays is a partial outcome of the yet unfinished project. They focus only on *revenge* as a thematic and dramaturgical technique used to problematize the changing notions of subjectivity. My aim was to combine them into a coherent argumentation which could be further developed into a theory of that experience of testimony which, I believe, is constitutive of all theatrical contexts.

These writings are dedicated to my wife Anikó and to my friends in the *deKON Group* at Attila József University: Endre Hárs, Annamária Hódosy, Sándor Kovács s.k., Ferenc Odorics and László Szilasi.



# I INTRODUCTION

Subjectivity and identity are problematized in English Renaissance tragedy in complex metatheatrical frameworks through the metaphor of *authorship*. The protagonists of these dramas are subjects whose identity is constituted in relation to a task which places them in a situation where they must occupy positions of authorship as opposed to others who do not control the discursive space around themselves. The task almost always involves the taking up of some new identity, often one opposed to the original personality of the actor-character, and the course of role-playing, aimed at the fulfillment of the task, becomes a testing of the subject's ability to preserve his/her original, authentic identity. The fashioning of the new identity results in the assimilation, or the fusing together, of the earlier and the new, fake personalities, and by the end of the dramatic action the protagonist faces an identity crisis in which, retrospectively, even the reality of some initial, self-sufficient identity or self-presence becomes questionable. What we find in these plays is a radically negative answer to Orthodox Christian and humanist ideas of innateness and the self-identity of the subject.

The aim of the present study is to reinterpret facets of this metatheatrical aspect in English Renaissance tragedy from a semiotic point of view. It should be noted at the very beginning that the semiotics applied here is not the linguistic structuralist analysis which usually lends itself to the examination of theatrical deixis and stage representation although some of the chapters here will involve a focus upon the logic of representation in the emblematic theater. Rather, I intend to examine the characters and their interpersonal situatedness from the theoretical angle of the *semiology of the speaking subject*, as constituted in and through historically specific discursive practices that govern the circulation of meaning in society and the construction of available positions necessary for the subject to predicate identity and context. I argue that a semiotic approach to the metatheatricity of these dramatic texts reveals hitherto untheorized perspectives that are significant markers of a decisive turn in the historical typology of world models and early modern culture.

Interpretations in this essay will focus on the plays as dramatic texts written for performance. A performance-oriented semiotic approach restores the texts to the (hypothetically reconstructed) original *theatrical logic* of the specific age in which these texts functioned fully only on the stage, where the multiplicity of sign channels and the traditions of involvement and presence actualized potentials of the dramas that remain inactivated in reading. The system of emblematic connotations,

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the dimensionality of stage-audience interaction, and *the hermeneutical experience of testimony* can only be revealed through an investigation of the *performance text*.

In the chapters that follow I will attempt to show that a semiotic approach to English Renaissance tragedy can bring us to a more complex understanding of:

— the function and logic of the *metatheatrical perspective*, which is constitutive of both the thematic and the dramaturgical structure of the plays;

— the nature and the crisis of the *emblematic theater*, which is based on a metaphorical cognitive system and a special semiotic readiness on the part of the audience;

— the pervasive and growing presence of the *macabre* and the *abject* in Renaissance tragedy, which has traditionally led critics to dismiss later Jacobean tragedy on the basis of critical commonplaces about decadence and perversion; and

— the much-debated *indeterminacy of meaning* which I maintain is characteristic not only of Shakespearean but of Renaissance drama in general.

These aspects of the texts manifest the presence and competition of two radically different world models at the turn of the 16-17th centuries and changing but as yet unsettled ideas about the nature of signification and the signifying capacity of the human subject.

In a semiotic typology of cultures, the late Renaissance in England witnesses the clash of the medieval vertical world model, and the Enlightenment-type horizontal world model. The organic, hierarchical view is based on what Lotman calls high-semioticity,<sup>1</sup> and its semiotic attitude to reality studies every element of the universe as an inscribed sign which is granted an inherent signifying capacity, being the emanation, the written sign of the Absolute. The dominant metaphor of this paradigm is the *Book of Nature*: the *Specula Mundi* tradition relates to the world as an open book, the elements of which can be interpreted on several potential levels of meaning.

In the horizontal, syntagmatic world model the sign becomes passive and ultimately suspicious. Elements of reality should not be investigated for their position in a signifying system of correspondences but for their material imbeddedness in a link of cause and effect relationships. Thus, the great ladder of the Chain of Being falls flat, and a new semiotic attitude develops according to which the sign should stand as naked as possible. The transition into this cognitive paradigm is marked by the appearance of the *Theater of the World* metaphor; role-playing,

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<sup>1</sup> LOTMAN 1977.

self-fashioning, social theatricality, dramatic testing of appearance and reality reflect the epistemological uncertainty of the period. The theater becomes the institutionalized site for the simultaneous foregrounding (expenditure) and suppression (containment) of new signifying practices that rewrite the discursive rules of relationships between authority and representation, subject and power, body and ideological positionality.

The changing role of the theater in public life and the metamorphosis of theatrical semiosis can also be discussed in terms of this shift from a vertical into a horizontal world model: it is this transition that actually gives rise to literary drama and psychological dramatic representation. Renaissance tragedy is situated in this metamorphosis as a peculiarly transitional mode which is mid-way between the transparency of medieval allegorical performance and the realistic stage techniques of the 17th and 18th centuries. The process of re-orientation from emblematic to photographic theater is still in a balanced state in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, and the presence of radically different theatrical practices and cognitive systems gives rise to an ambiguity, a specific semiotic polyvalency which is a constitutive facet of the plays I will examine.

For real, psychological drama to appear, there has to be an interpretive task imposed upon the spectator, which is based on the dramatic characters' opportunity to act and behave in ways not fully determined by the logic of allegory in advance. The semiotic *transparency* of medieval (semi-)dramatic performances do not require such an interpretive effort of the audience: miracles, mysteries, and moralities as well as later Tudor interludes enact themes that are strictly coded and follow rules that set the fashion of the representation and the allegorical meanings in a non-alterable way. Everyman, Humankind, and Inequity are types, or "kinds", of principles and their actions *report* certain meanings rather than represent a singular instance of reality. The *typological logic* of allegory inverts the relationship of stage and audience: the world of the allegory becomes the authentic, "real reality", the dimension whose elements originate in the all-generative trope of the ultimate *figura*, Christ or the Absolute; and the world of the audience is understood as the dark, fallen, "unreal reality", a blurred image that we see "through a glass, darkly." Flesh and spirit can unite in allegorical representation, and the subject of "Imitatio Christi" is intended to fashion his/her identity according to that moral set forth in the drama. The problem of *re*-presentation, the gap between the *figura* of Christ and the figure on the stage is suppressed and does not become part of the scope of the play.

The *representational insufficiency* that is inherent in any theatrical representation is foregrounded only later, in Elizabethan drama, and it becomes an organizing

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principle of the logic of these plays on several levels. Literary drama appears when characters are no longer abstract ideas but psychologically established subjects with personal responsibility and a chance to act in ways unforeseeable by the spectator. However, this dramatic logic always incorporates the problem of the gap between actor and role, dramatic illusion and reality, stage and audience. The theater either suppresses this representational insufficiency, constitutive of any semiotic practice, or uses it thematically to focus upon problems of signification. It is characteristic of English Renaissance drama that it *foregrounds* this gap in order to use the very theatrical context to investigate facets of the above-mentioned epistemological crisis. Renaissance drama imitates rather than reports, but the concept of mimesis here always works with a systematic questioning or shattering of dramatic illusion and verisimilitude.

Meta-drama acts out the unbridgeable gap between the symbol and the Real. The *self-conscious metatheatricality* of Renaissance drama serves to scrutinize from several aspects problems of the constitution of the subject and his/her discursive situatedness in the ideological efficiency of the Real. This practice indeed continues medieval traditions of involvement and stage-audience interaction, but it does not aim at enveloping the spectator in the metaphysical reality of allegory; it rather questions and *unsettles* the identity of the subject through the uncertainty established by the foregrounding of the problematics of show vs. reality, subjection vs. authority, role-playing vs. authentic identity, *writing as opposed to being written*.

The themes favored by Renaissance tragedy, especially the *revenge motif*, serve to create situations in which rules of discursive identity-formation can be tested. A semiotic approach to these themes and to the logic of metatheatricality must investigate the speaking subject as one element in the process of semiosis (rather than the *origo* of meaning), the relation of this theatrical practice to ideological technologies that incorporate or fail to contain them, and the techniques of stage representation that are used to foreground problems of signification. Thus, the revenge theme can be interpreted as a dramaturgical framework which turns Renaissance revenge tragedies into laboratories of identity.

In the present essay special attention will be paid to the theatrical treatment of the following semiotic issues:

- the human subject as a sign and his/her signifying potentiality;
- the turning of the traditions of the emblem (a genre which emerges as a special semiotic endeavor) and emblematic theater into an ironic questioning of these traditions;
- the logic of abjection and the staging of the body on the Renaissance stage;
- and the dramaturgical structure of *revenge tragedy* and tragedies of

consciousness in relation to the problems of authorship, here understood as a theatrical metaphor of the subject's (in)capacity to enter positions where he/she can master the discursive space of identity-formation.

Before a more systematic discussion of Elizabethan and Jacobean ideas about the semiotic nature of the subject and an analysis of the theatrical discourses that *invite* specific subject positions for the act of interpretation, it might be appropriate to delineate the basic points of a theory of the speaking subject, on which the understanding of the subject is based in this study.



## II THE SUBJECT OF SEMIOTICS

The constitution of the speaking subject is determined by historically specific technologies of power that establish institutionalized sites of discourse where the circulation of possible meanings in society is governed. The discursive practices create ideologically situated positions which the subject must enter in order to have access to (a version of) the Real and in order to be able to predicate an identity and a context for that identity. Thus, subjectivity is a function and a product of discourse: the subject predicates his/her identity in a signifying practice but always already within the range of rules distributed by ideological "regimes of truth." The subject is a property of language.

This thesis implies that the status of the subject in theory is first of all a question of the *hierarchy between signification and the speaking subject*. Recent developments in critical theory share the common goal of "theorizing the Subject", that is, establishing a complex account for the material *and* psychological constitution of the human speaking subject as positioned in a socio-historical context. Although they employ various strategies (semiotic, psychological, political, moral aspects, etc.), they all strive to *decenter* the concept of the unified, self-sufficient subject of liberal humanism, often referred to as the Cartesian ego of Western metaphysics.

The Cartesian idea of the self-identical, transhistorically human subject is replaced by the subject as a function of discursive practices. This project calls not only for a complex account of the socio-historical macrodynamics, but also for the psychoanalytically informed microdynamics of the subject, which traces the "history" of the emergence of subjectivity in the human animal through the appearance and the agency of the symbol in consciousness. Since the symbol always belongs to a historically specific Symbolic Order (society as a semiotic mechanism), the historical problematization of the *macrodynamics* and the psychoanalytical account of the *microdynamics* of the subject cannot be separated and are always two sides of the same coin: the identity of the subject coined by the Symbolic.

For a more detailed discussion of the macrodynamics and the microdynamics of the constitution of the subject, let us take a passage from Benveniste as a starting point, a critique of which may highlight the most important points of theory.

"It is in and through language that man *constitutes* himself as a subject, because language alone establishes the concept of "ego" in reality, in its reality which is that of being.

The "subjectivity" we are discussing here is the capacity of the speaker to *posit himself* as "subject". ...Now we hold that "subjectivity", whether it is placed in phenomenology or in psychology, as one may wish, is only the emergence in the being of a fundamental property of language.

"Ego" is he who says "ego". That is where we see the foundation of "subjectivity", which is determined by the linguistic status of the 'person'."

*(Problems in General Linguistics)*<sup>2</sup>

Benveniste initiates a very important step in the theory of the subject: he reveals the fundamentally *linguistic nature* of subjectivity. Rereading Saussure, Benveniste points to the absence of the referent in his theory of the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified: although Saussure defines language as a signifying system of differential elements, he does not account for the fact that language has no direct access to reality. On the other hand, as Benveniste shows, it is only through verbal cognition that we can conceive of the Real, the result of which is that language becomes constitutive of both the object and the subject of the cognitive signifying process.

While drawing attention to a problem ignored by structuralism, Benveniste's argument contains an essential contradiction which becomes the object of post-structuralist critiques. He defines the psychic unity of the subject as a product of signification, and at the same time he endows the subject with the ability to *posit himself* (herself not yet being within Benveniste's scope) in this language, thus presupposing a center, a unified consciousness *prior* to language. In short, his theory cannot account for how the subject becomes able to use the signifying system, or how his/her relation to that system is determined by the context of meaning-production.

To show how problematic the linguistic status of the subject is, it may suffice here to refer to Althusser's theory of interpellation and ideological state apparatuses, to Foucault's historicizing the technologies of power governing the production of truth and subjectivity in society, or to the independence of the syntax of the Symbolic Order in Lacanian psychoanalysis,<sup>3</sup> In post-structuralism, the subject is no longer a controller or autonomous user but rather a property and a product of language. Julia Kristeva's writings define the signifying process, which is constitutive of culture as a semiotic macro-text and of the human cognitive

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<sup>2</sup> BENVENISTE 1971. p.228.

<sup>3</sup> See Bibliography on the relevance these theories bear upon the present study.

system as a basically unsettling one, displacing the subject of semiosis "from one identity into another."<sup>4</sup>

*The macrodynamics of the subject*

The relation of the subject to society and ideology is in the center of socio-historical theories of the subject. Technologies of power in society work to subject individuals to a system of exclusion, determining the way certain parts of reality are structured and signified as culture. They position the subject within specific sites of meaning-production: power and knowledge become inseparable; the way information is circulated becomes constitutive of one's "personality."

In his project to draw a genealogy of the modern subject, Michel Foucault points out that the persistent concern with the individual in the human sciences is a relatively new development, arising from a new need to categorize and structure reality and the place of the human signifier in it. This attempt is part of a new, syntagmatic world model which deprives the human being of its medieval high semioticity and subjects him/her to a material and categorical position within a horizontal structure.

In Foucault's analysis of the disciplinary technologies of power, knowledge and power become inseparably intertwined: truth-production about reality is always governed by historically specific modes of meaning-making activities. Technologies of power set up regimes of truth; knowledge of reality is always connected to discourse, and technologies define a regularity through which statements are combined and used. The distribution of power not only regulates the language of subjects but also functions as a micro-physics of power applying to the physical constitution of the subjects as well: bodies, not only knowledge of the bodies, are discursively produced as well. The technologies of power that organize discursive practices have a fundamental homogenizing role in society, subjecting human beings by the institutionalization of discourse in a twofold process: through a meticulous application of power centered on the bodies of individuals, these subjects become individualized and objectivized at the same time. Discourse confers upon the subject the experience of individuality, but through that very process the human being is turned into an object of the modalities of power.

The three main modalities of power/knowledge are: the *dividing practices* that categorize subjects into binary oppositions (normal vs. insane, legal vs. criminal, sexually healthy vs. perverse, etc); the *institutionalized disciplines* that circulate

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. KRISTEVA "From One Identity into an Other." In: KRISTEVA 1980. pp. 124-147.

ideologically marked versions of knowledge of reality (scientific discourses are always canonized); and the various modes of self-subjection, a more sophisticated modality of modern societies through which the subject voluntarily occupies the positions where s/he is objectivized and subjected to power.

Different historical periods are based on different *economies of power*. The history of power-technologies manifests a transition from openly suppressive, spectacular strategies into more subtle ways of subjection, when the discursive commodification of reality and subjectivity takes advantage of the psychological structure of the subject.<sup>5</sup> Through the course of the 17th-18th centuries, a new economy changes the *dimensionality of power* in society.

Earlier, power was exercised by disseminating the idea of the presence of power in society: technologies of the spectacle displayed the presence of authority in social practices either directly (processions, Royal entries, allegories, etc.)<sup>6</sup> or indirectly, through the displaying of the ultimately subjected, tortured body in public executions. Here the economy of power is vertical: the subject relates to a hierarchy of positions at the top of which there is the Monarch, the embodiment of authority, who, at the same time, cannot directly penetrate the constitution of the subjects. (Bureaucracy, state police, confinement can never set up a system of surveillance that envelopes every subject).

In the 17-18th centuries, the dimensionality of power becomes horizontal rather than vertical: new technologies of *categorization* aim at distributing power in every site of social discourses and they set up a new *hermeneutics of the self*. Modern state societies indeed inherit this strategy from the Christian technique of confession: it is in this sense that Foucault defines modern societies as societies of confession. It becomes an incessant task of the subject to relate not to a meta-physical locus of authority at the top of a hierarchy but to his/her own selfhood. The subject, through a social positionality, is inserted into discourses that offer specific versions of knowledge of the self, and the subject scrutinizes him/herself all the time whether s/he produces *the right knowledge* about his/her self, body and identity. This technique was already constitutive of the Christian practice of confession, where the subject re-tells the stories of his/her self in the face of an absolute authority of salvation (the priest as an agent of God). The practice

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<sup>5</sup> The discourses of commercialism, for example, are based on the dissemination of discourses in which the linguistic production of subjectivity confers the sentiment of identity on the subject (You can't miss this, You can make it, I love New York, I vote for Bush), but at the same time it positions the subject in ideologically determined sites. This commodification of subjectivity is not a result of violent exercise of power upon the subject; it is based on the idea of free subjects.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. ORGEL 1985.

becomes more elaborate in modern culture, where the guarantor of salvation is the State.

Early modern culture, like England at the turn of the 16th-17th centuries, proves to be a period of transition again, when different modalities of power manifest themselves in social antagonisms that rewrite the discursive rules of authority and subjection. The idea of subversion and its containment in Renaissance discourses proved to be an especially rewarding field of investigation for the New Historicism when reinterpreting the period.

The historicization of the constitution of the subject throws light on the logic of discursive practices that structure a system of subject positions and the formation of social identities in these positions. However, this approach does not penetrate the structure of the subject itself, the mechanism which uses language to predicate identity in ideologically determined ways. We also have to account for how the subject becomes able to use language, and how the intervention of the symbolic system into the psychosomatic structure of the subject produces specific subjectivities.

#### *The microdynamics of the subject*

According to Julia Kristeva, theories of the speaking subject can be categorized either as theories of the enunciated or theories of the enunciation.<sup>7</sup> The former orientation studies mechanical relationships between the signifier and the signified and considers the subject as a controller of the production of meaning. The subject is a possessor of linguistic rules, a closed unit who always stands hierarchically above the elements of meaning-production (signifier, signified, grammatical rules, etc.): s/he is the guarantee, the *origo* of meaning and identity.

Theories of the enunciation are interested in the *production* of the above elements of semiosis that are no longer understood as monads, or units, but rather as unstable productions in a heterogeneous signifying *process*. The "Freudian revolution" introduced a decisive inversion in the hierarchy of the signifier and the subject. It became clear that the human subject is not a homogeneous unit but a system in which different modalities are always simultaneously at work. The subject as a heterogeneous system can no longer be the controller of meaning and identity.

Lacan's re-reading of Freud argues that the subject is constituted through a series of losses: systems of differences are established in consciousness at the

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<sup>7</sup> "The Speaking Subject." pp.10-11. In: BLONSKY (ed.) 1985. pp. 210-220.

expense of the suppression of primary drives and the loss of objects of demand.<sup>8</sup> In order to be able to relate to itself as separate from the outside (a necessary condition for the auto-reflexivity of identity), the subject must be inserted into a signifying system where s/he is absent from the signifier. The signifier represents the subject for other signifiers in the chain (the Real having been ultimately lost, separated from the subject), and it emerges as a stand-in for drives transposed into the unconscious through primary and secondary repression. The subject, i.e., the signified of this psychoanalytic model, glides on the chain of signifiers and has no direct contact with reality.

The first structures of *difference* are results of the territorialization of the body, i.e., edges and zones of excitement that are always engraved on the baby's body according to symbolic rules (the care of the body is socially encoded and gender-specific). A logic of introjection and projection develops in consciousness based on the circulation of stimuli around the erotogenic orifices of the body, and this logic begins differentiating the body from the outside. The first decisive differentiation is the result of primary repression, which is the abandonment of *identifications* with the Mother and the outside, with the objects of demand. Through the mirror phase the child recognizes its image in the mirror of the social space around itself, considers that image as a homogeneous, separate entity with which it identifies, and thus internalizes a sentiment of the body as different from the outside.

This otherness, the basis of the ego, is solidified by secondary repression, when the subject occupies a social positionality whose value is determined by the key-signifier of binary oppositions: the Name of the Father or the Phallus. Through Oedipalization (i.e., the replacement of the mother as an object of desire with the position of the father, the wielder of phallic, symbolic power), the subject is inserted into the symbolic order of society, where his/her position receives value only in relation to the key-signifiers of binary oppositions (having or not having the Phallus, controlling or not controlling the discursive space, etc).

It follows that the fundamental experience of the subject is that of lack: the signifier emerges in the site of the Other as the only guarantee for the re-capturing of the lost Real, and the desire to compensate for the absences within the subject will be the engine of signification. The subject endows the Other as the site of the signifier with the capacity to re-present for him/herself the lost objects of desire. This is why it is crucial that the subject should be absent from the signifier: the signifier must be different from the subject in order for the subject to refer to him/herself as someone other than the Other. However, the signifier does not

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. "The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious." In: LACAN 1977. pp. 292-325.

recapture the Real for the subject. S/he relates him/her to other signifiers in the chain; the agency of the signifier has an autonomous order which is not controlled by the subject, a split subject constituted through absence and the repression of drives into the unconscious.

The subject's conscious modality, according to Lacan, flees from the unconscious; the subject does not dare to face the contents whose repression constitutes the seeming solidity of his/her identity. If we relate this psychoanalytical microdynamics of the subject to the socio-historical account of his/her constitution, we see that the intervention of ideology into the psychic structure of the subject is experienced as a traumatic event, setting up a fundamental wound, a *traumatic kernel* in the subject. Ideology, however, does not offer itself as an enforced reality but as an escape from the Real of our desire which the conscious avoids and refuses to face. Ideology becomes the exploitation of the unconscious, of the subject — it offers ideologically overdetermined versions of the Real where the subject can "take refuge" and enter positions from which an identity can be predicated as opposed to the heterogeneity of the drives and the alterity of the body.

This somewhat lengthy outline of the theory of the subject has been indispensable for us to see the background against which notions of the subject in Renaissance tragedy will be investigated and in order to arrive at a semiotic problematization of the concept which is one of the most pervasive and problematic motifs in these plays: the concept of *the body* in semiosis and of the materiality of meaning-production.

The body, the corporeal, is one of the central concepts in Julia Kristeva's theory of the speaking subject as a subject-in-process. The attempt to involve material components of signification and the question of the body as agent in signification is part of an overall project to account for the positionality and psychosomatic activity of the subject in the historical materiality of the social environment. For Kristeva, signification is not simply representation (a mechanistic understanding of the text), but an *unsettling process*: the positioning of identity is always merely a transitory moment, a momentary freezing of the signifying chain on which the subject travels: signification posits and cancels the identity of the subject in a continuously oscillating manner. The subject of semiotics is a subject-in-process: the amount of *symbolic fixation* depends on how successfully the signifying system suppresses those modalities in the consciousness of the subject that are heterogeneous to identity-formation and symbolic predication.

In this theory of the constitution of the subject, the signifying *process*, *signifiante* has not only one but two modalities. Meaning is generated in the *symbolic modality*, in relation to the central signifier (Phallus) and according to linguistic rules of difference, at the expense of the repression of the heterogeneity

of corporeal processes and drives. The "battery" of signification and desire, however, is a dimension of the psychosomatic setup of the subject called the *chora*: here the unstructured, heterogeneous flux of drives, biological energy-charges, and primary motilities hold sway in a non-expressive, i.e., non-signifying, totality. This unstructured heterogeneity of drives and corporeal fluctuations is redistributed or rather suppressed when the subject enters the symbolic order: the signifier will emerge as a master of drives and heterogeneities, but at the same time the agency of the signifier itself depends on the energies of the semiotic chora as its suppressed opposite and material basis. The logic of introjection and projection within the primary processes is repeated in the logic of predication and negation on the symbolic level. The semiotic and the symbolic modalities of signification are always simultaneously at work, and the discursive predication of identity (the unity of the I as opposed to the indirectly signified Other) is only effective as a momentary pinning down of the signifying chain.

Certain signifying practices and "marginal discourses", however, threaten the symbolic (that is, ideological) fixation of identity by breaking the symbolic, grammatical rules of discourse. They transgress the categories of the linguistic norm, *foreground* suppressed dimensions of the experience of the body, and put the subject into crisis by bringing it to a halt, or to the borderlines of meaning. The foregrounding of the semiotic modality of signification through rhythm, the violence of linguistic logic, code-breaking or the abjection of the symbolically coded object (e.g., the body), deprives the subject of its comfortable linguistic self-identity, plugging him/her back into corporeal motility and the "pulsations of the body."

The body, the material basis of signification, is always the opaque, suppressed element of semiosis: it is the body which speaks, but the identity of the speaking subject is always predicated as opposed to the otherness, the heterogeneity, of that body. Historically specific discourses contain and suppress this experience of the body through different technologies, and one of the specific semiotic achievements of the syntagmatic world model is the construction and dissemination of a "modern" understanding of subjectivity through the expulsion of the experience of the body from the dimensions of discourse.<sup>9</sup>

In Kristeva's semiotic model, the first splitting of the semiotic continuum by symbolic positioning does not occur only with the decisive mirror phase but has a more inherent source in the corporeality of the body itself. The first sites of difference in consciousness are articulated by the agency of *abjection*. The logic

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. BARKER 1984. In the subsequent chapters, I will refer more elaborately to Barker's analysis of the treatment and containment of the body at the turning point of the two world models.

of mimesis, constitutive of the mirror phase, is preceded by the logic of rejection: "repugnance, disgust, abjection." Looking at it from a hypothetical angle *preceding* the mirror phase, abjection is the response of the body to the threat of engulfment imposed on it by the Outside. The Other penetrates the subject (which is not yet one), whose rejection marks out a space, a demarcated site of the abject; but, at the same time, this site can now serve to "separate the abject from what will be a subject and its objects."<sup>10</sup> Looking at it from the angle that follows Oedipalization and the subject's positioning in the Symbolic Order, the abject is always that which is a *non-object*, a non-signifiable other for the subject. In the sight of the abject, meaning does not emerge, the identity of the subject collapses: the borderline subject is brought back to its heterogeneous foundations with no symbolic fixation to mark out the poles of its subjectivity. The body as such is an example of the abject, but the most pure instance is the abjected body, the mutilated, dissolving, or rather the wholly other body: the corpse, the *cadaver*.

Everything that is improper, unclean, fluid, or heterogeneous is abject to the subject. "Abjection is above all *ambiguity*."<sup>11</sup> The ambiguous, the borderline, the disgusting do not become an object for the subject because they are non-signifiable: *without an object*, the subject's desire for meaning is rejected, and s/he is jolted out of identity into a space where fixation and meaning collapse.

The semiotic orientation of structuralist anthropology has already demonstrated that culture as a semiotic mechanism is articulated like a language: it is based on systems of differences, and the binarisms that hold the structure together are governed by key-signifiers (incest, fetish, phallus, name-of-the-father). One of the most important dualities that define culture - as opposed to the non-signified, the non-culture - is organized by the logic of the abject. Specific sites of reality (the sexual body, the unclean, the feminine, etc.) have always been ritualistically expelled from the scope of the symbolic first of all because culture defines itself through a logic of opposition to these.

In the following chapters, the staging of the abject body and of violence in Renaissance tragedy will be examined as a *representational technique*, an attempt to transgress and subvert the dominant discourse, and also as a means to formulate modes of *perfect representation* in an age of representational crisis and uncertainty.

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<sup>10</sup> KRISTEVA 1982. p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> KRISTEVA 1982. p. 9.



### III

## THE SUBJECT OF THE RENAISSANCE

In this chapter I will delineate a theory of the subject in Elizabethan and Jacobean discourses on the basis of the theoretical considerations formulated in the semiotics of the constitution of the subject. I will focus on the changing ideas of signification at the turning point of the symbolic and syntagmatic world models with special attention to the transformation of representational techniques in the theater. This transformation reflects the re—evaluation of the human subject's position in the textuality of the world and his/her relation to reality, authority and ritual.

According to Robert Knapp<sup>12</sup>, the appearance of literariness in dramatic form has to do with the emergence of professional theaters, of the literary institution as such, but first of all with a change in concepts of the *nature of representation* itself. This change assigns a new social status to dramatic (and artistic) discourse and inevitably connects it with politics, ideology and the idea of *authority*.

Dramatic representation undergoes a radical change as ("really theatrical") Renaissance drama develops from, and as a counterpart of, medieval and early Tudor "narrative" drama. Medieval religious drama reports things, narrates a typological story the whole audience is familiar with and part of. Renaissance drama emerges as a *mimetic art*, an art of doing, rather than reporting, which explores a different relationship between actor and individual *persona*, surface and reality, being and meaning, stage and audience. The transition from purely religious drama and emblematic interlude into literary drama and theatricality is part of a semiotic transformation in which the favorite metaphor of medieval epistemology, the "*book of life*", gives way to the Renaissance metaphor of the "*theater of the world*". This replacement stems from changed ideas about the very nature of reality and also of signification, that is, knowing and representing that reality. Art as representation appears in European culture at the same time as Shakespeare writes, and a semiotic analysis of the history of the above-mentioned key—metaphors explains the appearance of this new idea of representation which is bound to a new concept of authority.

In medieval theater, dramatic world and doctrine are inseparably bound together. Mysteries, moralities and miracles reveal the faithful image and likeness

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<sup>12</sup> KNAPP 1989.

of God. The religious content of this drama strangely reverses the actor-audience relationship: the play becomes a reading of the world, and "the audience constitutes the material and active sign of which the plays are spiritual and eternal sense"<sup>13</sup>. Medieval drama, through the primary *figura* and all-generating trope of Christ, enacts the union of flesh and spirit, of the signifier and the signified, which is promised by God, the inscriber of all signs. In this world-view, we ourselves and all the elements of reality are non-unitary signs in a larger body of writing, whose "letters" all point towards the ultimate signifier. This view of language and life, the idea of an "all-encompassing textuality" is based on the *logic of the symbol*: in medieval *high semioticity* the elements of reality as symbols in the textuality of the world are in a *motivated, direct* relationship with universals and with the generating figure of the Absolute, or Christ, who is the pure manifestation of the union of Flesh and Spirit, signifier and signified.<sup>14</sup> This philosophy (which will be attacked later by nominalism and reformed theology) offers the task of becoming God as the only step out of this textuality, the book of life. Thus, medieval drama aims at *transparency*; it does not impose an interpretive task on the audience; it reports and presents rather than imitates. Yet this transparency is illusionistic since religious drama always copes with a "representational insufficiency" for Christ can never totally be present; the restoration of the unity between flesh and spirit can never really be achieved on the stage. The transparency of representation becomes *problematized* once the book of life metaphor gives way, in Protestantism, to the question whether a human being has signifying value at all. Medieval drama cannot become literary because it fails to raise the *interpretive instinct* in the audience. Without a possibility for heroism on the stage and some possibility for misunderstanding among the audience (as opposed to pure didacticism and transparency of representation), no great drama exists. "The basic issue is a semiotic one: what kind of a sign is a human being?"<sup>15</sup> Does it carry semantic value? Is it a sign or a writer of signs? Is it writing or just being written? These are the questions that effect the development of a new theatrical discourse, which is based on a new idea of textuality.

In medieval drama, the characters on the stage are symbols (in Kristeva's sense of the term), not real individuals. The relationship between person and *figura*, character and universal idea is ontological, based on an intrinsic analogy: Cain and

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<sup>13</sup> KNAPP 1989. p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the emergence of Renaissance writing as a shift from the logic of the motivated symbol into that of the unmotivated sign, see KRISTEVA "From Symbol to Sign", In: KRISTEVA 1986. pp. 62-73.

<sup>15</sup> KNAPP 1989. p. 104.

his men are all *members* and *images* of Satan, or the great kind, the Vice. Reformed theology and Protestantism, on the other hand, reject intrinsic natural analogy in man with these kinds, and therefore Tudor drama (even the interludes) relies on an *external* likeness between character and person: the relationship is not ontological, but rhetorical and imitative. Hieronimo, Edmund or Vindice are no longer "parts" of Revenge or Vice: Protestant theology, in order for the image of God to be pure, makes the human signifier a passive unit which does not intrinsically signify or refer to something else. The motivated relationship between the Absolute and the signifying capacity of the subject is denied. This new theology, of course, provides a radically different context for the problem of human action itself, imposing a greater individual responsibility on the person.

The "readable", medieval world gives way to a dramatic reality, and a new *semiotic anxiety* emerges because of the dissonance between desire and actuality. Once this anxiety and desire are suppressed and contained in new discursive practices, the foundations of modernism are laid. Instead of the symbol, the sign emerges as a non-motivated element in a horizontal system of cause and effect relationships.

The shift from a transparent, narrative mode of dominant representation to a dramatic, theatrical mode replaces ritual with *ideology*. The gap in the semiotic field between experience and reality, being and meaning, history and ideas opens up, and, as a result, there arise a number of ideological discourses to *control representation*, to contain within limits more radical practices that aim at subverting the metaphysical structure of authority still based on the vertical world model. Censorship becomes one of the most important technologies of power, and, as Francis Barker shows,<sup>16</sup> modern discursive practices, eg. that of the idea of the narrative, will define their very mode of existence in relation to censorship and surveillance.

According to Knapp, *desire* (for the Real, for authority, for the Other, with which the subject no longer has motivated contact) enters the new drama in three new themes: the production of corpses, the love of women, and violent, disruptive theatrical rhetoric. The semiotic nature and grounds of these themes can now be investigated in the light of the above semiotic metamorphoses.

Renaissance drama aims at involving the audience in the experience of representational attempts to get beyond the discursive embeddedness and limitations of the subject, to transcend the limits of language. The *logic of involvement*, based on traditional techniques of stage-audience interaction, works according to two basic modes, both of which aim at an unsettling and a reconstitution of the

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<sup>16</sup> BARKER 1984. Ch.I.

spectator's *identity*. This semiotic understanding of the theatrical experience points forward to a new theory of catharsis.

The logic of comedy is based on the carnivalesque involvement in laughter: the foregrounding of joy and the practice of laughter unsettles the identity of the spectator. Eros, the metaphor for desire, liberates the flesh from the symbolic position, from the law of the father, and the concrete rhythm of laughter is the agency of the semiotic, now breaking to the surface. In comedy, the body speaks in laughter.

Tragedy involves the spectator in the theatrical experience of being present to something, in the experience of *testimony*: bearing witness to the *sacrifice*, the foregrounding of death. The actor in tragedy tries to dominate the flesh around him, so he produces corpses (or tries to grasp the body in its non-symbolized reality) since Death comes closest to the wholly Other, the wholly Real, the pure signifier. The corpse, the abject body dissolves the distinction between signifier and signified, representation and reality. It rejects symbolically codified social meanings that are based on the absence of the represented thing, and deprives the subject of its identity: the corpse does not signify — it "shows."<sup>17</sup> The theatrical hermeneutics of testimony again depends on the unsettling of the subject's identity.

Astounding, violent rhetoric, characteristic of both comedy and tragedy, threatens to subvert the structural order of the symbolic, the fixation of meaning, of authority.

*Sexuality, the body and disruptive discourse*: all being present both in Renaissance comedy and tragedy, they participate in a semiotic attempt to devise representational techniques that surpass the very limits of representation and show up the most faithful image of the Real. This attempt indeed will turn into an ironic and also subversive denial of the possibility of such techniques, but in order to trace the emergence of this irony, we have to examine in greater detail the theatrical logic of stage representation in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama as well as the relationship between theater and authority. In this period, which is a transition from emblematic into photographic theater<sup>18</sup>, the real subversive power of the theater is not in the questioning or critique of ideology and authority, but in

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<sup>17</sup> KRISTEVA 1982. p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> WICKHAM 1963. p. 155. "...I wish to argue that what we are really confronted with is a conflict between an emblematic theatre - literally, a theatre which aimed at achieving dramatic illusion by figurative representation - and a theatre of realistic illusion - literally, a theatre seeking to simulate actuality in terms of images."

the problematization and negation of total representational techniques in which all ideologies and power structures are grounded.<sup>19</sup>

A semiotic analysis of the three themes introduced above will inevitably lead to debates about the nature of representation in English Renaissance drama. Arguments about the dominance of the word or the image on the Renaissance stage of course pertain to the problem of staging the corpse, the sexual body or the questioning of the power of discourse. I think the peculiarity of the Elizabethan and the Jacobean stages is that they foreground and undermine at the same time traditional emblematic ways of representation, thus providing a negative semiotic answer to the epistemological uncertainty of the turn of the century. However, the undecidability, the *play* between meaning and the questioning of that meaning creates a special theatrical effect which involves the spectator in the semiotic experience of *jouissance*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> This would be, I think, a more subtle and semiotic understanding of theatrical subversion commonly theorized in new historicism and cultural materialism.

<sup>20</sup> "In Julia Kristeva's vocabulary, sensual, sexual pleasure is covered by plaisir; "*jouissance*" is total joy or ecstasy (without any mystical connotation): also, through the working of the signifier, this implies the *presence of meaning* (jouissance=j'ouis sens=I heard meaning), requiring it by going beyond it." Introduction by Leon S. Roudiez to KRISTEVA 1980. p. 16.



#### IV

## THE SEMIOTICS OF THE EMBLEMATIC THEATER

In order to situate the problematics of representation and the themes of the subject, abjection and the body more closely in a theatrical context, in what follows I will discuss the semiotics of the emblem and emblematic stage representation, since these signifying practices can be held to be representative of the semiotic activity of the Renaissance.

There is an ongoing debate in Renaissance criticism about the importance of the visual in Elizabethan theater. Besides writings defining the theatrical representations of the late 16th century as essentially verbal in nature, we have an increasing number of iconographic and semiotic studies investigating the visual, emblematic strategies of encoding and decoding in dramatic performances of the period. In the focus of these approaches the dramatic text is replaced by what can be defined as the *performance text*, a necessarily hypothetic reconstruction of the original staging and enactment, which employed the playwright's text as a skeleton to be completed through the multiplicity of sign channels that are at work in the theater. The performance text is a complex macrotext, interpreted by a system of codes shared by both actors and audience. A performance-oriented semiotic approach restores the dramatic text to the special *theatrical logic* of the age on the basis of these code systems. This logic includes not only the various techniques of staging, verbal and visual enactment but also the spectators' interpretive practices and *semiotic attitudes* to the theatrical experience and to reality in general. The theatrical logic of the Renaissance stage to a large extent relied upon a special semiotic consciousness and upon the emblematic horizon of expectations of the audience. If we do not understand this, our reinterpretations of Renaissance drama will fall subject to partiality.<sup>21</sup>

In this chapter I make an attempt to problematize the semiotics of this theatrical logic and to theorize the connection between Renaissance emblem literature and the Elizabethan stage as a typically semiotic phenomenon, which occurs in a period that witnesses the fusion of two competing world models. I will argue that the emblem as a genre and the emblematic strategies of the theater participate in the same *semiotic endeavor* which characterizes the cognitive system of the late Renaissance in England. In order to situate the emblem and the emblematic theater

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. DESSEN 1980., WICKHAM 1963.

within the semiotic practices of the Elizabethan period, we will have to clear up the confusion in terminology, which is mainly due to the common failure in criticism to distinguish between metaphoric, symbolic and emblematic ways of representation.

The classical three-piece emblem, popularized by Andreas Alciatus' *Emblematum Liber* of 1531, has been long neglected in literary criticism although recent studies sometimes define it as a separate genre with distinctive characteristics.<sup>22</sup> It consists of an *inscriptio*, a *pictura* and a *subscriptio*, thus employing *different sign channels* to convey a complex meaning which is to be deciphered through the contemplative and simultaneous reading of the particular channels. From a semiotic perspective, the emblem manifests a fundamental *semiotic desire* to devise a complex sign which is so polysemous that it transcends our normal epistemology, and establishes direct contact with reality or the Absolute. As a genre and a meditational object, the emblem is what Jöns calls the "last spiritual attempt to conceive of reality in its totality through exegetical methods."<sup>23</sup>

There are several interpretive traditions behind this endeavor in the emblem, and as a semiotic attempt it is located within a historical process of the transformation of ideas about signification and world-textuality during the late Renaissance, delineated in the preceding chapters. Besides the *high semioticity* of medieval theology and the Neoplatonic emphasis on the power of the *visual* sign as opposed to verbal representation, we have in the Renaissance the emergence of a new, skeptical semiotic way of thinking, the transition from the dominance of the motivated symbol into the dominance of the passive, unmotivated sign. At the end of the 16th century the symbolic and the syntagmatic world models are still simultaneously at work, and the interpretive uncertainty of the age is expressed by the changing concepts of representation: the "book of nature" metaphor of the *Specula Mundi* tradition is replaced by "the theater of the world."

Culture, as a semiotic process structuring reality, suffers a crisis when a dominant world model is replaced by another. This crisis, according to Juri Lotman, is accompanied by *intensified semiotic activity*, which gives rise to attempts to devise new ways of signification and approaches to reality.<sup>24</sup>

The emblem can be defined as a genre emerging in the intensified semiotic activity of this epistemological crisis, a *compound sign* which, in the methodo-

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<sup>22</sup> FABINY, Tibor "Literature and Emblems. New Aspects in Shakespeare Studies." In: FABINY 1984., pp. 7-56., DALY 1979. "The Emblem." pp. 3-53.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in FABINY 1984. p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> LOTMAN & USPENSKY 1986. p. 410.

logical debates about the power of visual versus verbal representation in the Renaissance, indicates the triumph of the former, the power of the *image*. In 16th-century England, we have the largest number of symbolic representations circulating in society. Medals, devices, *impresas*, emblems, occult diagrams and hieroglyphs, pageants, and exegetical illustrations all manifest the Neoplatonic belief that the *pictura* has more power to establish a dialogue with the Absolute. (Against this belief iconoclasm will launch a major attack.) Of course, the traditions of the *spectacle* were deployed as one of the most important *technologies of power* in Elizabethan England, "making greatness familiar,"<sup>25</sup> but if we examine them in the semiotic typology of Renaissance culture, we cast new light on the emblem and the influence it bears upon the theatrical representations of the age.

The attempt, discovered in the semiosis of the emblem, to convey a multi-leveled meaning is a strategy constitutive of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage as well. A panmetaphoric attitude to reality has long been held accountable for the *emblematic horizon of expectations* in the Elizabethan audience. Although this hypothesis is problematized in the recent decanonization of Shakespearean drama,<sup>26</sup> we lose sight of important aspects of these texts if we do not make them work in the theatrical logic of the contemporary stage. This logic enabled the stage representation to use an extremely small number of properties to evoke a broad *context* of connotative references. This logic I define here as emblematic, and this definition has to be based on a distinction between symbolic versus emblematic codes as well as a differentiation between emblematic genre and emblematic value.

Traditional approaches to emblematic theater identify representations of literary emblems in the dramatic text and argue that the emblematic allusion situates the scene in a broader context and provides a basis for a more complex meaning and reading. Nevertheless, they often speak about emblematic representation when there is no literary emblem identifiable on the stage or in the text or when it is difficult to see why they call the meaning emblematic instead of symbolic or metaphoric. This terminological confusion calls for a new definition of emblematic decoding.

Following the investigations of G. Wickham and P.M. Daly, I define the emblematic code as one which assigns a *context of symbolic connotations* to a sign in order to enlarge its scope of possible meanings. In the performance text, literary emblems become important subtexts when they are identified by the spectator as commentary on the meaning of the scene, opening up a broader context of

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<sup>25</sup> ORGEL 1985.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. WEIMANN 1988. For a radical criticism of "Tillyardism" and a more critical concept of the Renaissance subject see DOLLIMORE 1984. and BELSEY 1985.

associations, for example, that of the "memento mori" tradition in Falstaff's words "do not speak like a death's head: do not bid me remember mine end"<sup>27</sup> or that of the "dance macabre" or "gate of underworld" images in Hamlet's jumping into the grave. However, there does not need to be a literary emblem behind the representation of Kent put into the stocks for the audience to be able to interpret this scene as the familiar image of Truth subdued and put into stocks; a very popular pattern in Tudor interludes and emblematic representations. This identification sets off a *dissemination* of symbolic references, ranging from traditionally circulated representations of Truth to the tradition of *Veritas Filia Temporis*.<sup>28</sup> The allusion to the "Truth is daughter of Time" imagery, which is a persistent one in *King Lear* and in Shakespearean tragedy in general, creates new ways to interpret the scene.

When an indexical code enables the spectator to identify the representation of a sword as an attribute of the King, a symbolic code gives the sign the connotation of nobility and honesty. The emblematic code situates these connotations within a network of references so that the sword can represent not only Monarchic but Godly authority as well as the attribute of Justice as opposed to the "corruption" of the dagger. Furthermore, in its emblematic stage use the sword can easily be employed as a cross, a mirror, or an emblem of the country.

Allan Dessen warns us that only the potential pragmatics of the stage can govern the workings of these connotations since it is exactly the *semiotic polyphony* of the verbal and spectacular texts of the theater which activates these potentialities.<sup>29</sup> We have seen different stagings of the scene in *King Lear* when Gloucester is blinded. Cornwall is staged using various tools for the representation of horror: spoons, fingers, metal objects. Yet there is explicit reference in the text that Gloucester's head is stamped on, that is, his eyes are kicked out.<sup>30</sup> If the visual representation avoids this image of stamping on an old, venerable patriarch's head, the scene fails to participate in a network of connotations or references to the head as emblematic of respectability, of the Christian bond which ties the young to the old or man to order. In short, and in my definition, in the above mentioned staging the scene fails to achieve emblematic status.

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<sup>27</sup> 2H4 2.4.218.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. FABINY, Tibor "Veritas Filia Temporis. The Iconography of Time and Truth and Shakespeare." In: FABINY 1984. pp. 215-274.

<sup>29</sup> DESSEN 1980.

<sup>30</sup> "Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot." (Cornwall, 3.7.68.)

Emblematic stage representation in Elizabethan drama relies on the "imaginary forces" of the audience,<sup>31</sup> presupposing the collaborative, imaginative participation of the spectator. The *theatrical interaction* between stage and auditorium, based on the tradition of audience participation in Shakespeare's theater, imposes a complex semiotic task on the audience through which they do not simply decode but also *create or encode emblematic meanings*. This semiotic disposition played a very important part in the strategies of interpreting the character or the play as a whole. The development of characterization in English Renaissance theater is part of an overall metamorphosis of ideas about the semiotic status of the human being as signifier in particular and the textuality of the world in general. In Chapter III I tried to summarize how the 16th century, Protestant theology, and the emerging syntagmatic world model desemioticize reality and humankind's place in it. The human being no longer has an active semantic value, which could automatically refer to and manipulate God, the Ultimate Signifier. The sign becomes passive, unmotivated, and the allegorical transparency of medieval semidramatic representation is replaced by mimetic, psychological characters and actions. This, however, does not yet result in the semiotic iconization (in the Peircian sense) of the stage representation. The emblematic devices and systems of encoding are at work *simultaneously* with the developing techniques of mimetic role-playing and the questioning of emblematic correspondences. We have a peculiar *polysemy* of stage and character which is a result of the inherited allegorical-emblematic and the emerging syntagmatical modes of thinking.

This polysemy of characters, now both realistically psychological and emblematically complex, is largely accountable for the indeterminacy of meaning in Renaissance drama. When we characterize Lear as the emblem of the human condition, we do not hunt for an emblematic literary allusion behind his figure. Rather, this emblematic interpretation is based on the audience's readiness to read not only the scenes but also the characters and the totality of the drama, on different levels. To the psychological character, the spectators assign emblematic values on the basis of the network of attributes s/he bears in the performance text. Thus, it is not only a pageant, a procession, or a masque that can become an "extended emblem"<sup>32</sup> but also the character and the play as a whole. Through the images of blindness, folly, suffering, and fallibility, the character of Lear is transformed into an emblematic representation, and, to recall the terminology of the emblem, this representation is commented on by the title of the play as *inscriptio* and the verbal enactment as *subscriptio*. This emblematic value is

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<sup>31</sup> H5, Prologue, 8-18.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. DALY 1979. Ch.4.

constantly *decentered and questioned* by the new strategies of interpretation, which desemiotize the human signifier and deprive it of its multileveled polysemous potentiality. Yet a balance or rather an uncertainty is maintained between the two semiotic attitudes, situating the Renaissance stage at the point of *transition* from emblematic to photographic theater.

The Shakespearean theater, with its very structure as the emblem of the universe and its preconditioning motto "Totus Mundus Agit Histrionem" above the entrance to the Globe theater, relies on the audience's emblematic way of thinking, which semiotizes every element of the stage on different levels.

With the rise of the syntagmatic world model, which projects the vertical axis of cognition onto a horizontal dimension with no correspondences or semiotic overcoding, the dominant techniques of theatrical representation change. Emblematic stage properties and actions are replaced by an aim to create an illusion of reality, a photographically mimetic theatrical environment. At the same time, the appearance of the proscenium arch and lighting techniques alienate the audience from the world of the performance, and the close interaction between stage and auditorium dissolves. Still, before Inigo Jones' photographic backdrops appear on the popular stage, we have in the Shakespearean theater a strong emblematic tradition, involving the audience in a complex interpretive semiotic process of decoding and encoding. The "emblematic agreement" between actor and spectator — verbalized so explicitly in the Prologue of *Henry V* — is a special way of creating the aesthetic experience of involvement and presence, the production of which is an essential goal of the intensified context of reception in the theater:

"But pardon, gentles all,  
The flat unraised spirit that hath dar'd  
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth  
So great an object...  
O, pardon! since a crooked figure may  
Attest in little space a million,  
And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,  
On your imaginary forces work."<sup>33</sup>

It is one of the objectives of recent Renaissance criticism to disclose the relationship between Shakespeare's canonicity and the rivalry of word versus image in Renaissance drama. As Francis Barker argues, it is exactly Shakespeare's turn

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<sup>33</sup> H5, Prologue, 8-18. References to Shakespearean plays are from SHAKESPEARE 1972.

from the violence of the image (e.g., *Titus Andronicus*) to the dominance of the word which may give one reason for the canonization of his works later in the 18th-19th centuries — in a culture established exactly on the suppression and exclusion of the image and the spectacular (especially that of the visual *immediacy* of the body) from a discursive society.<sup>34</sup>

The logic of emblematic representation turns more and more straightforwardly into an ironic questioning and suspension of that logic in Jacobean drama. It is not that emblematic characters or values disappear from the stage; on the contrary, in many tragedies they are *multiplied* and foregrounded to such an extent (especially in the context of the *macabre*, the *memento mori* and the *ars moriendi* traditions) that the emblematic value turns into its own negation. It intensifies the semiotic uncertainty of a universe in which there is no longer any metaphysical guarantee for the representational power of the symbol.

It will be the aim of a psychoanalytically informed semiotic study in the following chapters to discuss how the theatrical contexts of reception outlined above produce specific *subject positions* for the spectators. The simultaneous foregrounding and questioning of emblematic values - together with the staging of abjection and the violence of rhetoric - unsettle the identity of the receiver, producing a *subject-in-process*. This technique, which turns the performancetext from mechanical representation into *signifiante*, is the characteristic aesthetic achievement of Renaissance emblematic theater.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> BARKER 1984. pp. 22-23. 59.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. KRISTEVA 1980. According to Kristeva, any signifying practice can be studied as a process of *signifiante* (ie., a heterogeneous *process* which involves both modalities of signification in the positioning and unsettling of the subject) instead of as a mechanistic generation of meaning. I imply here that the emblematic theater consciously plays with and foregrounds this nature of its discourse.



## V

"To know the author were some ease of grief."<sup>36</sup>

### IDENTITY AND AUTHORSHIP IN *THE SPANISH TRAGEDY*

The indebtedness of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama to *The Spanish Tragedy* could hardly be overestimated and has rightly been pointed out in several critical essays.<sup>37</sup> The essential structural and thematic elements of Renaissance tragedy are all present in this pioneering work, and, except for the occasional imperfection and repetitiveness of the rhetorical devices, they are combined to create a tragic universe that already signifies or foreshadows the social antagonisms and semiotic dilemmas of early modern culture on several interpretive levels.

The very first lines of the play introduce us to a world of irreconcilable opposites. The diads of soul and flesh, reason and passion, legality and secrecy are important not only because they set up the *logic of contrariety* that is constitutive of tragedy but also because — together with the repeated references to heaven and hell, above and under — they start building up the *dimensionality* and (vertical) multi-layeredness of the drama which will play a fundamental role in the complexity of the play's meaning.

As Thomas McAlindon points out, the idea of *discordia concors*, the universe built on the balanced fight and co-existence of opposites, was at least as important for Elizabethan cosmology as that of the *analogia mundi*, the hierarchical system of correspondences and analogies. The Renaissance inherited the theory of polarity from the Greeks and the Middle Ages and understood life not only as an ordained rite of correspondences in the great chain of being but also as an incessant tension and battle between the primal elements of the cosmos and between those of the human soul. Contrariety brings about change, but the violation of a balance of opposites, or the dominance of one of them, results in violent change, disorder, and chaos.

The fundamental duality in the human subject is, of course, that of reason and passion. Natural Law, an inherent capacity in the human being implanted by God, enables him/her to tell the difference between good and bad, lawful and unlawful. Reason is servant to conscience while passion is always the agent of will, and its

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<sup>36</sup> Hieronimo, II.v.40. References to *The Spanish Tragedy* are from KYD 1970.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, McALINDON 1986. Ch. 2.

purest manifestation on the English stage is ambition, the engine of numerous villain-actors. In the protagonists of Elizabethan revenge tragedy the balance of opposites is shaken, and the predominance of passion turns them into a *split subject* who oscillates between contrarious alternatives he/she is unable to choose between, since the role does not fit the personality.<sup>38</sup>

I emphasize that the character turning into a destructive agent is almost always an actor since this is part of a pervasive *metatheatrical perspective*, perhaps the most important and unifying dramatic technique of English Renaissance drama. This technique is already foregrounded in *The Spanish Tragedy* in a way which connects it to semiotic problems of the subject and its constitution in discursive practices. Also, I am concentrating on the *revenge tragedy* because the task and performance of revenge will be the most frequent thematic structure in the tragedies to investigate problems of the subject as built on contradictions. The immense popularity of the *revenge theme* cannot be accounted for simply by referring to a taste for blood and sensational horror on the part of the audience. It is used as a kind of laboratory to create situations for the human subject in which problems of identity-formation, self-forgetting, and self-fashioning can be tested.

Revenge in Renaissance society was treated as a revolt against the law of God and the order of timeliness; delivering justice was a privilege of the divine plan which unfolds through a natural sequence of time. The revenger, obsessed with the idea of retribution and assertion of self-identity, violates the divine strategy: revenge is a subversion of time, a hastiness resulting from the self overcome by passion. However, the problematics of the personality of the revenger has been oversimplified in criticism by ignoring its special status in a society based on the semiotic activity of differentiating between opposites: between the natural and the unnatural, the divine and the devilish, the clean and the unclean, the sane and the insane. The status of these polarities was codified by historically specific social discourses, but what is important for us here from a semiotic perspective is that the successful *containment* of the opposite, the threatening "abnormal", is a condition of the ability of the social structure not so much to suppress as to define and categorize it as separate, as something *other*, in a binary system of differences. The staging of revenge is truly *subversive* in a new historicist sense because the revenger is often the uncategorizable, the subject who is outside the categories of

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<sup>38</sup> It is no wonder that reformed theology imposes a very strict prohibition upon any communication with the supernatural. The agents of the supernatural (usually those of the Devil) always find the *gates of passion* in the otherwise already split (i.e., not inherently clean, substantially devoid of evil) subject through which they enter his/her mind to manipulate reason. The supernatural in Renaissance tragedy always presents a Protestant theological problem.

the social discourse, who transcends the logic of social and non-social. In short, the *abject subject*.

The bloody murderer, the rapist, the maniac are easy to ward off because they are clearly members of the set against which culture and the social subject define themselves and with which the subject feels no partnership whatsoever. But the revenger, as staged in Renaissance tragedy, is always the *in-between*: a split, heterogeneous subject who oscillates between alternatives in a realm where meaning collapses in a short circuit of object and non-object, sense and non-sense, a subject who draws sympathy and repulsion at the same time. The revenger has a seemingly legitimate cause for action, yet according to the Law he should not perform it; he should be conducting himself with self-discipline, yet he seems to sink more deeply in mental disintegration; he should assert his identity in the course of action, yet he is lost in an assimilation of his personality and the role, the mask. The revenger is cunning, and he is the uncanny of the drama. He does not revolt openly — he pretends; he does not negate — he violates the rule of language; he does not kill — he devises the performance of death. He is everything that is heterogeneous, ambiguous, borderline. Abject.<sup>39</sup>

The revenger, as the abject subject, performs abjection. He performs, that is, *he stages* abjection: the revenger is the metatheatrical agent of the abject in English Renaissance tragedy.

What I attempt to do in this chapter is draw an outline of the logic of this abjection in *The Spanish Tragedy*, a logic which will be employed so persistently throughout Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy, and which participates in theatrical attempts to create an effect that unsettles the meaning-making activity and the identity of the spectator. The ironic problematization and emblematic use of the revenge as abject are not yet fully present in the drama, but the theme itself appears in a metatheatrical framework that paves the way for Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy.

As has been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the polarities introduced in the very first passages of the drama do not only set up a world of contrariety but also create a *dimensionality* for the play which works fully *only on the stage*. Renaissance plays, of course, always take place in the verticality that situates the subject in between the extremes of heaven and hell, the celestial and the underworld. However, *The Spanish Tragedy* takes advantage of this idea and builds up

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<sup>39</sup> "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite." KRISTEVA 1982. p. 4.

a stage world in which characters occupy different levels of verticality from which they attempt to spy on and manipulate each other.

The entire stage action is put into a constant *ironic* perspective by the presence of the Ghost and Revenge above everybody else. They are the representatives of the underworld, "the ambassadors of death", as G.W. Knight would probably put it, and they contemplate the action of worldly strife which the Ghost calls "the mystery."

"Here sit we down to see the mystery,  
And serve for Chorus in this tragedy."

(I.i.90-91)

This already initiates the spectator to a drama in which the emphasis is not so much on the outcome as on the way characters act and reach the end. We learn at the very beginning that Bel-imperia will kill Don Balthazar, "the author of thy death" (I.i.87), so we have the detective story in which the reader can follow the sequence of intrigues in the story without having to bother about the end. Of course, it will be a surprise and it may create anxiety to see how Hieronimo devises his ingenious revenge, but the beginning preconditions us to pay attention to the manners and ironies of action.

Irony is created by the presence of the Ghost and Revenge residing above all the events because a good deal of the play is about how characters try to occupy positions in which they *think* they are above the others, they control them, they are in the position of being "the author" of others' fate. This does not always happen in a vertical economy, but the play also uses multi-leveled staging (e.g., Lorenzo and Balthazar above, peeping on the lovers in II.ii). When characters believe they are now in a higher position, the spectator is aware that they are indeed seen and presided over by the agency of revenge, their knowledge is limited, they are still captured in a general economy of *surveillance*. They do not know "What 't is to be subject to destiny." (III.xiv.195)

A metaphorical reading of the quote cited above the title of this chapter may reveal the semiotic nature of the play's obsession with the idea of *authorship* in this vertical, hierarchical economy. The notion of the author has been extensively problematized in post-structuralist theory. The fact that textual productions (i.e., every signifying practice) are outside the scope and control of "the author", the writing or speaking subject, shows that we can never know who the author is. The signifying potential of the text can never be controlled by any kind of authority; when we think we are writing, it turns out that we are being written by the text; when we think we see others and control the play, a metaperspective reveals that we are being seen and the play (of the text, of the Signifier) controls us. The meta-

position of the Ghost and Revenge maintains this perspective in the play. Characters on the stage can never construct a perfect metatext that could control all the other practices in the action. Indeed, it *seems* that "it were some ease" to know the author, or, even better, to *become* the author. However, this dimensionality of the play highlights the fact that there is no total authoritative position.

Except that of the Absolute. Since, above the meta-agents of revenge, there is supposed to be still one more level in the Elizabethan theater: that of God, the guarantee of true meaning, order and justice. However, this metaphysical center is already undermined in *The Spanish Tragedy* by the fact that Revenge seems to take that locus of absolute power, and it would be difficult to find any place for Godly providence in the drama. The absence of God and the heavenly sphere is conspicuous. In this respect, the play initiates one more important theme which will contribute to the real subversiveness of Renaissance tragedy: the displacement and questioning of any metaphysical center *in general* which could be the absolute guarantee of order, meaning, and authority in the universe or society. This questioning subverts the idea of metaphysical, transcendently motivated power in the State or in authority and will reach its climax in Jacobean tragedy, where the chaos of life negates any transcendence. Later, I will discuss in psycho-analytical terms how ideology still takes advantage of such tragedies to use them as a "domesticated" representation of subversion and violence in order to contain more dangerous impulses in subjects. As Stephen Greenblatt puts it, the "apparent production of subversion...is the very condition of power."<sup>40</sup>

In *The Spanish Tragedy*, revenge still seems to occupy a position of "absolute authorship," the ultimate writer of fates and director of subjects. The play does not totally sever ties with the idea of a governing center. But at the same time, this fact is a rather pessimistic answer to the question about the presence of order in the universe and the ability of the subject to shape his/her own destiny. It is not God's hand or the omnipotence of the Monarch that governs the events but a metaphorical representation of the most powerful *passion* in the human being: Revenge. The play is presided over by the representative of the underworld, who does not really have to become involved in the action because he is already *inside* the characters:

"Content thyself, Andrea: though I sleep,  
Yet my mood is soliciting their souls."

(III.xv.19-20)

Revenge is the representative of the underworld, the images of which darkly dominate the world of the play. In psychoanalytical terms, he is a quite clearly drawn representative of the unconscious, whose contents here burst forward with

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<sup>40</sup> GREENBLATT 1988. p. 65.

uncontrollable energy and put the identity of the protagonist in the play into process.

In embarking upon the strategy to devise the means of his revenge, Hieronimo's aim will be to become one with revenge, to identify completely with the task, and he does this with repeated references to and invocations of the underworld. The "visitations" of hell upon Hieronimo begin immediately after the murder of his son:

"The ugly fiends do sally forth of hell,  
And frame my steps to unfrequented paths..."

(III.ii.16-17)

Later he "rips the bowels of the earth," as if he were trying to penetrate the material surface of his existence, to internalize hell in himself, whose real agent, again ironically, is probably keeping an eye on him from somewhere above.

"And here surrender up my marshalship;  
For I'll go marshal up the fiends in hell,"

(III.xii.76-77)

However, identifying with the task is never easy, and not simply because evidence is not always at hand but because Reason advises the protagonist against usurping the role of God. This is the situation which starts the oscillation between alternatives in the character's mind, resulting in mental disintegration. A scheme employed with great regularity in Renaissance tragedy.

It is very interesting to note that the most comprehensive details of Hieronimo's tortured mind, pictured as a *representational problem*, are given in a scene that is the longest of the "additions," passages built in the play later. In the "painter scene", Hieronimo presents the painter with the fundamental representational problem: is it possible to depict, that is, to re-present perfectly the abjection of the tortured mind? Is it possible to bridge the gap between reality and interpretation? The desperate deixis of the lines intensify the attempt at full representation:

"There you may show a passion, there you may show a passion!... Make me curse, make me rave, make me cry, make me mad, make me well again, make me curse hell, invoke heaven, and in the end leave me in a trance — and so forth."

(4th addition, 151-157)

However, the potentialities of the scene come to surface again only if we try to make it work in actual *performance*. The power of the action here depends on what Hieronimo is actually doing while he pictures the setting of his rage, for he himself should be raging during the scene. He does not simply re-tell the story of his finding the dead body of his son. He *re-enacts* the events, and he does so (in my

hypothetical interpretation) for at least two reasons. First, it is an occasion for him to release all the tension that has been accumulating in him, a chance to become really mad and incite himself to the act of revenge, which he otherwise is still too careful to do. Second, the scene is situated in the metatheatrical and semiotic problematics of the play. Hieronimo knows that total representation is impossible, so he *turns himself into the picture*, into a *living emblem of madness*, and acts it out in order to reduce the representational insufficiency of the would-be painting. But, in so doing, he takes up a role, and tries to identify with it as completely as possible, and this provides the irony of the scene since this is the tragic mistake the revenger always makes. He surrenders his identity for the sake of the role, loses himself, and the radical self-assertions of revenge tragedies are in fact manifestations of *disintegration* ("Know I am Hieronimo", "Tis I, Hamlet, the Dane", "Tis I, 'tis Vindice, 'tis I.").

It is not by chance that the scene is an addition inserted a little later, that is, exactly when the epistemological dilemmas of representation, signification, and role-playing reach a climax. Criticism usually argues that the scene should be ignored in performance since it breaks the continuity and rhythm of the original. In my view, this is to miss the meaning of one of the most powerful scenes in the play.

At the end of the scene Hieronimo also suggests that the real torment is not in raging or madness but in the state of being in-between.

"As I am never better than when I am mad; then methinks I am a brave fellow, then I do wonders; but *reason abuseth me, and there's the torment, there's the hell.*"

(4th addition, 159-162. my emphasis)

Hell is in the hero's mind, but, in fact, it is not the underworld but being in-between: neither sane nor mad, neither world nor underworld. Tortured, hurt, oscillating without borders. Abjected.

As already mentioned, the scene also participates in the metatheatrical framework, for here Hieronimo is playing. What is more, he believes he is the real author and controller of this role and scene since this is his attempt — but, once more, he is mistaken, since the role is already above him, overpowering the revenger, silently contemplated by the metaphor of the role, Revenge itself.

After this intriguing scene, Hieronimo enters in III.xiii. reading Seneca, but again the lines are metatheatrical since it is here that Hieronimo identifies completely with the task of revenge, and through the words commits the greatest blasphemy. "Vindicta mihi!" — these are the words of the Almighty, whose privilege it is to take revenge, and Hieronimo in this soliloquy *thinks* he can enter the position of the Great Scriptor. He does so in a theatrical way: he becomes

author of a/the play in which the characters are too ignorant to see the nature of their imposed roles. "Author and actor in this tragedy" (IV.iv.150), Hieronimo becomes the director who shapes the sequence of events, and he will be the author of others' deaths. However, the tragic irony reaches its climax here, for the role, that is, the *text*, the production, is again hierarchically above the author. Hieronimo is merely acting out a role in a play whose real author is not him, but Revenge, and in which his imaginary authorship does not assert but radically disintegrates his identity.

Hieronimo introduces his theatrical skills as early as I.v. as a director of the masque which "contents the eye of the king." However, he is not only the director but also the *interpreter* of the performance, he mediates meaning between the world of the masque and the world of the play. The play-within-the-play technique is employed here, as always in Renaissance drama, to *comment on the multi-layeredness* of the entire dramatic action. In this scene Hieronimo, as an interpreter between worlds, occupies a position in regard to meaning which is hierarchically above the other characters. In the metatheatrical framework, this is the position which every character tries to occupy in the play which is based on the difference between levels and gazes. The world of the revenger is the highest level because he is the most cunning actor and pretender: his strategies will finally overcome everybody. He is also the most active *agent of involvement*, his soliloquies involve the audience in the play by initiating them into knowledge the other characters do not possess (although *The Spanish Tragedy* does not employ this technique as systematically as subsequent plays). All the other characters strive to enter the highest position where they could become "the author of others' death." Almost everybody is engaged in some strategy of taking revenge: Hieronimo against the murderers of his son, Balthazar against Horatio, Bel-imperia against Balthazar, Villuppo against Alexandro. The tragic irony is always created by the fact that the subjects involved in this *intricate web of revenges* never possess a meta-perspective from which they could see and manipulate all the others. That metastance is granted only to Revenge, who, again ironically, is inherent in every subject and represents that unconscious agency which is beyond the control of the subject.

That irony is constitutive of the tragedy is also manifest in one of the dramaturgical turning points, the murder of Horatio in II.iv. The "kiss in the arbour scene" is an extended emblem of the Neoplatonic idea of death-in-love so common in the Renaissance.<sup>41</sup> Everything depends, again, on the logic of staging.

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<sup>41</sup> For the Neoplatonic idea of the relationship between love and death see PÁL, József, "Csókhálál (Egy szinkretikus motívum a XV. századi Firenzében)." In: FABINY & PÁL & SZÓNYI (eds.) 1987. pp. 5-20.

The rhetoric Horatio and Bel-imperia use is definitely metaphorical of love-making and the careful planning of the perfection of the act:

"O, let me go; for in my troubled eyes  
Now may'st thou read that life in passion dies.  
O, stay a while, and I will die with thee;  
So shalt thou yield, and yet have conquered me."

(II.iv.46-49)

The kiss as metaphor of death-in-love is here turned into death as metaphor of orgasm: the lovers are approaching the climax "entwined in yoking arms", as parts of the arbor entwine each other. The scene has a double effect.

If it is staged as real or almost open love-making, it turns the arbor scene and the "kiss" as emblem of pure love into a manifestation of violent sexual passion, which indeed is congruent with the logic of the entire play, obsessed with violence and perversion. This problematization or destruction of pure values was already introduced with Bel-imperia's *morally very questionable* decision to love Horatio merely in order to take revenge upon "the author of Andrea's death":

"Yes, second love shall further my revenge!  
I'll love Horatio, my Andrea's friend,  
The more to spite the prince that wrought his end."

(I.iv.66-68)

Even more important, the love-making scene with the metaphor of orgasm-as-death in its center is immediately turned into a real staging of death. With a sudden reversal, it is *really death* that comes to Horatio: the one who wanted to penetrate and die in the perfection of love is now penetrated and dies in the perfection of physical death. Balthazar and his fellow villains do not simply murder him — they kill him "perfectly": they hang him and stab him *repeatedly*. Horatio "erected" and penetrated several times. A cruel mockery of love-making.

"Ay, thus, and thus: these are the fruits of love."

(Lorenzo, II.iv.55)

The two kinds of death are similar to the extent that they both imply the relinquishing of identity, and they establish a direct contact with reality, the unknown. With "death in love", orgasm is the mutual abandonment of two people's identities in an experience when it is the *immediacy of the body that speaks*. With real death, the dying one also experiences the unknown, and the condition of this experience is again the leaving behind of identity. The difference is that here the subject does not return. In later Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy sexuality and the *prolonged process of dying* will become favorite themes to investigate the limits, the *border-lines* between life and death, the known and the unknown, identity and non-identity.

The spectacle of death is staged in the greatest complexity in Hieronimo's final play, the perfection of revenge, which, for him, is the perfection of authorship since not only is he the all-powerful author and director of the tragedy they act out but he also becomes the author of death, the producer of corpses.

The corpse, in the Lacanian sense, is the pure signifier, the thing which represents most perfectly since it is the thing it is supposed to represent. For Lacan, the sign is always the symbol of lack; it is the symbol of the absence of the thing it stands for. The perfect signifier as absence is thus the corpse because the dead body is the manifestation of the total absence of life. Also, in a Kristevan sense, the corpse is one of the most "powerful" signifiers since it does not represent, but *shows, presents* death in its *immediacy*. The corpse seems to be a form of spectacle in Renaissance tragedy which bridges the gap between signification and reality and achieves perfect representation.

It is indicated elaborately in *The Spanish Tragedy* that Hieronimo devises the courtly play with great care and with several intentions in mind. He insists that the tragedy should be performed in different languages so that it becomes the fall of his enemies and the representation of the confusion and corruption of the world at the same time:

"Now shall I see the fall of Babylon,  
Wrought by the heavens in this confusion."

(IV.i.195-196)

Nonetheless, Hieronimo may be the author of death but not the total author of the play and the events. His tragic blindness makes him unable to see that he is not an agent of the heavens but one of hell. The play also *goes beyond* his representational control, as he admits when he takes the role of the *interpreter* again after the performance, and explains the death of Bel-imperia:

"For as the story saith she should have died,  
Yet I of kindness and of care to her,  
Did otherwise determine of her end;  
But love of him whom they did hate too much  
Did urge her resolution to be such."

(IV.iv.141-145)

It turns out that Hieronimo's authorial power is still limited, and he cannot determine everybody's end.

In his interpretation, when he reveals the meaning and the cause of the tragedy to those who always need interpretation to understand, Hieronimo displays the

ultimate *spectacle of abjection*: the corpse of his son, which is now probably in the process of decaying.

"See here my show, look on this spectacle!  
Here lay my hope, and here my hope hath end;  
Here lay my heart, and here my heart was slain;  
Here lay my treasure, and here my treasure lost;  
Here lay my pleasure, and here my pleasure bereft:  
But hope, heart, treasure, joy and bliss,  
All fled, fail'd, died, yea, all decay'd with this."

(IV.iv.89-95)

It turns out that Horatio's corpse has certainly been the cause, the *generating figure* of all the other corpses in the play. With the death of Horatio, all meaning has decayed for Hieronimo in the world, as all meaning collapses now, at the moment which the intensified deixis of the lines point to, in the sight of the abject. On a metaphorical level, the multiplication of corpses and the staging of the central, abject, terrifying cadaver show that in this world (and, indirectly, in the world of the involved audience) authority as a metaphysical locus of order has been replaced by the agency of death and the underworld.

When the stage is littered with corpses, the revenger realizes that the play is over, his part has come to an end, and he steps off the stage. Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy* is prevented from committing suicide, yet he makes every effort to *maintain his authorship* and his control over the representation. He bites out his tongue in order to become a mute body who no longer reveals its secrets. Again, it is in the later, added version of the last scene that we find the explicit meta-theatrical reference to the end of the revenger's role-playing:<sup>42</sup>

"Now to express *the rupture of my part*,  
First take my tongue, and afterward my heart."

(5th addition, 47-48)

The protagonist's last, desperate act also participates in the thematized interrogation of representation and control in the play. Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy* never stops talking about the fact that he should actually be *somewhere else*: not in this world of corruption and loss but in hell. The world of the "mystery" in fact turns into hell for him, and he does everything to transform it

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<sup>42</sup> The so-called "additions" are usually grouped at the end of critical editions of *The Spanish Tragedy*. There is evidence that these additions were inserted into the original text in 1602 to replace parts of Kyd's text which were felt to be old-fashioned. I would like to emphasize the importance and the value of this "textual correction" since the new parts so pregnantly demonstrate the semiotic and representational dilemmas at the turn of the century.

into hell for the other subjects as well. Hieronimo's logic is that of displacement: he strives to displace, to transform everything in a world where he is ultimately out of place. Identity, position, integrity for him are radically dislocated, put into process. As long as he is in this world, he is a *split subject*. His biting out of his tongue is his final, ultimate negation and transgression of the world which holds him captive and which he aims to subvert. In a world which seems to be constituted on the *discrepancy between word and thing*, discourse and reality (talk of love vs. death instead of love, courtly entertainment vs. bloody murder, confusion of languages vs. real meaning and interpretation), the subject is defined as a *speaking subject*, and this code is what Hieronimo finally transgresses by turning himself into a mute *body*. Writing as opposed to speech turns into death in his hands.<sup>43</sup> Hieronimo here seems to achieve perfect representation at the expense of his own subjectivity: his body materially represents his transgression. In the interrelated framework of motifs including problems of representation and the gap between seeming and reality, often foregrounded emblematically (the arbor scene, the painter scene, the emblematic masques), Hieronimo here turns himself into the pure emblem of his revolt, into the image which surpasses discourse.

Nevertheless, even if Hieronimo maintains his inviolated authorship to the end, the performance of revenge results in the loss of his identity, which is indicated once again by a motif characteristic of Renaissance drama. Through the course of role-playing, the actor-villain identifies so much with the role that he will be unable to stop playing it. After biting his tongue out, Hieronimo has no reason whatsoever to kill the Duke with the knife he ingeniously obtains "to mend his knife." This already is a result of the *compulsion* to carry on with his role, to produce more corpses, to indulge in a seeming control over the other subjects. Yet, as we have seen, the real agent, the all-powerful author was not Hieronimo but Revenge, the metaphorical representation of the underworld, the passion of the unconscious. "The rest is silence", that is, the rest now belongs to the underworld, where Revenge takes over the real directorship:

"For here though death hath end their misery,  
I'll there begin their endless tragedy."

(IV. Chorus, 47-48)

The *Spanish Tragedy* uses the revenge theme in a metatheatrical framework in order to foreground with tragic irony the fact that full representational control is never possible, the position of *unconditional authorship* always turns out to be relative, and meaning (representation, play, fate, destiny) elude the regulative

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<sup>43</sup> This motif of writing with, in, and through the body ("writing in wounds") will be thematized later in, e.g., *Titus Andronicus*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Bussy D'Ambois*.

capacity of the subject. With this framework and complex irony, *The Spanish Tragedy* introduces the themes which will be employed in Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedy with more radical overtones. The decentered protagonist of the play is the prototype of Tudor and Stuart tragedies that interrogate and question the idea of the self-identical, metaphysically human subject of Christian essentialism.<sup>44</sup> In Catherine Belsey's terms, in *The Spanish Tragedy* the discrepancy between the subject of enunciation (Hieronimo as character) and the subject of the utterance (the subject Hieronimo's discourse denotes) is already so substantial that the *subject position* it offers for audience identification through involvement is one of unsettled, discontinuous, questionable identity.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. DOLLIMORE 1984. Ch.10/1. "Tragedy, Humanism and the Transcendent Subject.", Ch.10/2. "The Jacobean Displacement of the Subject."

<sup>45</sup> For a discussion of how texts offer specific subject-positions for the receivers see: BELSEY 1985. Ch.I. "Introduction: Reading the Past." pp. 1-12.



## VI

"Words, words, words."<sup>46</sup>

### THE SURFACE OF THINGS IN *TITUS ANDRONICUS* AND *HAMLET*

Thing and nothing, substance and show: the penetration of the surface of things to reach some authentic meaning is a goal pursued by "Shakespearean" heroes in such a thematized fashion that any study of its logic risks falling into the enumeration of critical commonplaces that have been produced about the topic. However, little attention has been paid to the semiotic nature of the pilgrimage of these characters from the no-thing to the thing in relation to the constitution of their identities as speaking subjects, articulated through the difference between the materiality of the thing and the materiality of the Signifier. The *body* seems to occupy a peculiar role in this epistemological problem: through the motifs of mutilation, torture, infection, and decay, these plays foreground that "opaque element of signification,"<sup>47</sup> the sentiment and the agency of the body which is the material basis of the signifying process. The protagonists of Shakespearean tragedy strive to uncover the true foundations, the real body of signification, through the testing of the *corpus* only to reveal in the end that the impenetrable materiality of the word, the signifier, prevails even over the materiality of the physical body. This revelation subverts the idea of a metaphysically motivated relationship between body and identity, i.e., the meaning of that body. Indirectly, Shakespearean tragedy is the negation of the transcendental logic of the "body politic." "The sovereign is the missing element, the impossible being in Shakespearean tragedy."<sup>48</sup> But not only the monarch: nobody can be sovereign of his/her body and its meaning.

In this chapter I propose to discuss in semiotic and representational terms some of the central motifs that recur in two Shakespearean tragedies. I will argue that the obsession with the dissolution, mutilation, and torture of the body — as well as the penetration of the surface of signification (metaphorically designated by the flesh) in general — is symptomatic of the semiotic desire to delve into the most fundamental yet unfathomable layers of meaning, to unite the word with the flesh (or to deprive the flesh of the word) as completely as possible.

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<sup>46</sup> Hamlet, II.ii.192.

<sup>47</sup> KRISTEVA 1985. p. 215.

<sup>48</sup> MORETTI 1992. p. 66.

*Titus Andronicus* abounds in scenes that multiply the images of horror in a continuously intensified rhythm of abjection. One bloody tableau follows the other, and the spectator can never be sure when the progression of events will reach the final spectacle, that of the utmost terror. Even nowadays many critics dismiss the play as a bloody, unstructured hash of terror and sensationalism. They are quick to point out that the sacrifices, traps, self-mutilation, and torture are beyond any tolerable point of verisimilitude or slightly realistic logic. The plot includes riddles that would seem very easy to solve, yet the characters delay in uncovering their meaning (e.g., Lavinia could easily write with her feet in the sand, yet that is not the solution the play chooses), and they engage in seemingly irrational or redundant action (e.g., the arrow-shooting scene, the prolonged, detailed depiction of the pit). However, for the critic trained in the emblematic logic of Elizabethan theater and contemporary attitudes towards the nature of representation, the entirety of the play suggests a consistent effort to present the scenes of abjection in order to foreground the attempt constitutive of the theater itself: to achieve an *immediacy* between representation and idea, spectacle and meaning. The components of scenes in *Titus Andronicus* are often arranged in a way that they take up symbolic values in a tableau in which the characters and objects cannot and should not be considered as realistic but rather as *emblematic*. It cannot logically be otherwise: in reality, men do not give their hands as letters, women do not immediately recover from mutilation as speaking images rather than howling, aching bodies. The play straightforwardly denies the logic of realism, but this does not mean that it cannot arrange its emblematic themes on other levels of meaning.

The beginning of *Titus Andronicus* depicts Rome itself as a *mutilated body*, setting up an imagery that will be pursued throughout the play.

”Be candidatus then and put it on,  
And help to set a head on headless Rome.”

(*Marc. I.i.185-86*)

This attempt to restore the body of the empire takes place in front of tombs, coffins, and the scene of sacrificial mutilation. Death lingers over the scene and suggests that the restoration carried out through more bloodshed and corpses cannot last long. The multiple references to the body provide it with a multivalent emblematic value, which contains the macabre picture of the entrails burning on the sacrificial fire as well as the body of Titus metaphysically becoming the potential head of the empire. Titus declines the offer, which is an act of blindness, turning to rage when his paternal authority is threatened. In a sudden outburst of passion, he kills his son who tries to block his way while Lavinia escapes with Bassianus. The unsound deed implies that Titus feels insecure, and before anything else he wants to preserve his fatherly position. Rome is a place where the meaning

of subjects is defined by their metaphysical position in the social hierarchy, based on the Name of the Father as absolute signifier.

"What, villain boy,  
Barr'st me my way in Rome?"

(I.i.290-91)

Once that position is unsettled, confusion follows since the metaphysical center that guarantees the motivatedness of relationships in the hierarchy no longer holds. In this context, then, there is little point in asking whether a father is capable of killing his son in such an irrational stir. It is the only logical reaction for Titus who, at this point, is still firmly embedded in his metaphysical thinking, just like Lear when dividing his kingdom.

Confusion certainly settles in, and Saturnius usurps the crown and further disintegrates the "body of Rome." The imagery of the play is increasingly dominated by lust and the violence of revenge: the intricate web of vengeance starts building up. There is reference early in the first scene to Titus losing himself although it will never be completely certain until the end whether he really goes mad or is just pretending.

"He is not with himself, let us withdraw."

(Quin. I.i.368)

At this stage, it is Tamora who is engaged in taking revenge, and it will be characteristic of the play's intrigue that Titus turns into a revenger playing against the other revenger, Tamora.

The first elaborately painted scene of revenge is that of the forest with the pit, a curiously central locus of the play, to the description of which entire passages are devoted. The pit is pictured by Tamora as a *site of sheer abjection*:

"Here never shines the sun, here nothing breeds,  
Unless the nightly owl or fatal raven;  
And they show'd me this *abhorred pit*,  
They told me, here, at dead time of the night,  
A thousand *fiends*, a thousand hissing snakes,  
Ten thousand swelling toads, as many urchins,  
Would make such fearful and confused cries,  
As any *mortal body* hearing it  
Should straight *fall mad*, or else die suddenly."

(II.iii.96-104, emphasis mine)

These images clearly link the pit in the depth of the dark and desolate forest to the underworld, whose manifestations the subject is unable to face because they threaten, dissolve, throw into crisis the integrity of the mind.

More importantly, in the next lengthy description provided by the trapped Martius and Quintus, the pit is not simply described as an opening to hell, but as a "fell devouring *receptacle*", directly related to the generating *womb* now swallowing up its victims:

"Reach me thy hand, that I may help you out,  
Or wanting strength to do thee so much good,  
I may be pluck'd into the *swallowing womb*  
Of this deep pit."

(Quin. II.iii.237-40, emphasis mine)

The traditional emblematic meaning of the pit here is of course the gate to the underworld, the hell-mouth, and the trapdoor is probably employed in its staging. Nonetheless, through its attributes as *receptacle* and the *womb of the earth*, it becomes at the same time a negative emblem of that generating force of drives and suppressed energies in the unconscious to which these characters now return, being *trapped by their passions*. The pit is also a *sacrificial place* where Bassianus lies "like a slaughtered lamb" (II.iii.223): Martius and Quintus — who were so engulfed by the passion of revenge on the Goths at the beginning of the play — here get trapped ironically in the emblem of those passions, the gaping wound on the surface of the earth which leads to unfathomable depths, and they fall victim to Tamora's revenge. It is as if the semiotic chora — the generating but always threatening *receptacle of drives* and heterogeneous energies — were swallowing up the subjects who gave way to the bursting up of those drives in their consciousness at the beginning. The pit as a womb is linked to the feminine lust of Tamora who uses it, and who, together with the darkness and primitivity of Aaron, represents allegorically the *passion* of revenge. The twist is tragic and ironic at the same time, as it usually is in Renaissance tragedy: Quintus and Martius as revengers now fall subject to revenge, here symbolized by the swallowing mouth of the underworld and the unconscious. Later on, in a logical sequence, the revengers Demetrius and Chiron will return to their generating source, *Tamora's body*. But, even if Tamora seems to be an allegorical condensation of passion and revenge, the wielder of power, she herself cannot control the agency of Revenge which is beyond the limits of the subject. Exactly as in *The Spanish Tragedy*, here again Revenge is an uncontrollable force and may metaphorically stand for the energy of the unconscious which is beyond any regulation and authorship, above and beyond the subject whose identity depends on the successful repression of these energies. Renaissance revenge tragedy foregrounds the fact that the subject which gives way to these contents will be swallowed up by their heterogeneous and unsettling energy. The subject is a heterogeneous process and produces its identity through discourse in which it can "look upon itself." Once that discourse and the discursive

order of things are violated, the subject does not come into being: this is the point these plays foreground through the violation in and of plot, imagery, emblem, and discourse.

With her tongue torn out and hands cut off, Lavinia ceases to be a speaking as well as a writing subject. She is turned into an object for which characters try to construct different interpretations, but they are unable to relate to her until she becomes a *text* for them again, a text whose meaning the speaking subject could verify. Lavinia's diminishment is carried even further by rape: not only her identity but her *body* is taken away from her since her chastity was the only guarantee for the potential *commodification* of her body in a patriarchal order. Deprived of signification and a body that could be meaningful, Lavinia is transformed into pure negativity and — through that complex negativity — a walking emblem of abjection.

Yet, with Lavinia's transformation, metaphorically, the very idea of harmony in language and the social order is expelled. Marcus describes her original state as a personification of *artistic harmony*:

"O, had the monster seen those lily hands  
Tremble like aspen leaves upon a lute,  
He would not have touch'd them for his life!  
Or had he heard the heavenly harmony  
Which that sweet tongue hath made,  
He would have dropp'd his knife, and fall asleep..."

(II.iv.44-50)

With order and language gone, new ways of signification are needed, and the play starts focusing on *the mute body speaking*. Titus talks about creating a new order of signification in a world where the rule of the father and the metaphysics of symbolization have been violated and replaced by the passion of the body:

"Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy stumps to heaven,  
Nor wink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make a sign,  
But I, of these, will wrest an alphabet..."

(III.ii.42-44)

References to the problem of communication become more frequent. Titus, in an attempt to save his sons, hastily has his hand severed (in the play's logic this does not, and should not, create a problem in terms of physical realism), which he sends to Tamora, currently occupying the position of authority, as if it was a letter. The letter does not fulfill its task, and is returned, becoming an emblem (again, through its negativity) of the failure of writing, communication, and, indeed, amity. Next, Titus makes a try with the Gods. In the arrow-shooting scene he

disseminates his woe in letters aimed at the gods, but once more the letters are diverted from their route and all meet in the court of the emperor, the locus of tyrannous power which has replaced the transcendence of the order of the missing gods.

Before this, in one of the grisliest scenes, Lavinia carries Titus's severed hand in her mute mouth off the stage. It is difficult to imagine a picture more horrifying and repelling: the hand of the father between the teeth of the mute daughter of negativity.

"Come, brother, take a head,  
And in this hand the other will I bear;  
And, Lavinia, thou shalt be employ'd;  
Bear thou my hand, sweet wench, between thy teeth."

(III.i.279-82)

The picture is ghastly and subversive at the same time. Titus's severed hand is not only the emblem of the breakdown of communication but also an emblem of patriarchal order which has been violated in the world of the play. The hand of the Father, a metaphor of phallic power, is here displaced to the mouth of the daughter reduced to sheer negativity, nothingness. No stage tableau could express more totally the confusion and the loss of original order, the replacement of the patriarchal Key Signifier by the destructive primary passions now symbolized by Tamora and her court.

Quite typically, the problematics of communication and of the misdirection of signification is inserted into a metatheatrical framework, just as in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Lavinia reveals her "story" by pointing out the passage of the raped Philomela in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. She could have found other and faster ways to try to communicate, but in the logic of the play this is the only "writing" that befits her case, since here it is foregrounded that the only chance for her to define and communicate her "new identity" is through a kind of *intertextuality*; and now she is no longer Lavinia but Philomela, whose story makes her self readable. Here the play takes up the idea that subjects are textual productions, a theme elaborated extensively in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, for example. Lavinia is an enigma before this scene; now she becomes a condensed representation of the fact that things are readable to us only through other texts that have already been produced.

In a network of role-playing, it turns out that nobody can master a position of absolute power and authority. Tamora who is comfortable in the knowledge that now she is the master-Revenger and actually turns herself into an allegory — will be cheated by Titus's role-playing and walks into the trap of the banquet he organizes. The multiplication of horror reaches its climax here. Titus makes the offspring of Tamora, the agents of passion and revenge, return to their generating

source, to the body of allegorical Revenge. *Tamora's body* becomes the metaphor of those uncontrollable drives and primary energies that generate and swallow up the subject at the same time, a "receptacle" which is the material engine of signification and the subject but which needs to be controlled, suppressed in order for the subject to become separate, homogeneous, self-identified. In the logic of the play, the pit, that "swallowing womb," typologically foreshadows the staging of Tamora's body as devourer of its offspring in the last scene.

The power of abjection is so intense in this scene because it is so close to the subject. The abjection of *eating* touches the very materiality, or corporeality of the human being. Food-loathing, according to Kristeva, is one of the most "archaic" experiences of the subject, the most primary agency of the abject setting up demarcation lines of separation and difference in the consciousness of the subject.<sup>49</sup> The eating of human flesh, and even more, the eating of one's own children in the last scene of *Titus Andronicus* violates one of the strongest taboos of the symbolic order, transgresses the absolute difference imposed on the eatable and the non-eatable by civilization. Thus, the staging of abjection is capable of producing the most direct, *immediate* effect in the subject. As Tamora lifts the patties made of her children's blood and flesh to her mouth, the spectator faints in repulsion and disgust, his/her consciousness rejecting, escaping from the sight of what s/he actually is: blood, bones, flesh, liquids. No compact, unified, homogeneous subject exists in *Titus Andronicus*, and the staging of abjection unsettles the spectator's identity as well, foregrounding the suppressed materiality and unconscious energy of what constitutes the subject as a heterogeneous process in the first place.

The role overthrows Tamora as well as Titus. Seeing that his plan is coming to perfection, he can see everything only in terms of revenge, and with the fulfillment of the task, Lavinia's part as a mute witness and handicapped assistant (which is now the only legitimate reason for her being) is also over. Consequently, Titus kills her, and this is his last, insane attempt to assert his fatherly authority over the daughter, to place himself in a position of seemingly absolute authorship.

What we have in *Titus Andronicus*, in semiotic terms, is an attempt to create the *immediacy of perfect representation* through the staging of abjection, often with the help of complex emblematic tableaux. The logic of the play (the apparent nonsensicality of intensified horror) invites the audience to treat the scenes realistically *and* emblematically at the same time: the horror of mutilation and

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<sup>49</sup> KRISTEVA 1982. Ch.I. "Approaching Abjection."

violence is there, but the mutilated characters are, at the same time, transformed into emblems that represent the values that are violated in, through, and by them. This enables them to continue to act as mutilated bodies that do not carry inherent, transcendental identities within themselves: they are what they are turned into by the role and the discourse, the "play" they participate in. *Titus Andronicus* tries to penetrate "the surface of things," to bridge the gap between the word and the thing and reveal a more direct, faithful image of reality by combining the immediacy of the body and the complexity of the emblem at the same time.

This attempt will be pursued in later tragedies with a more pessimistic attitude towards the possibility of achieving any immediacy with the Real at all. In *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, the Letter seems to cover totally the body and reality, and no attempt to penetrate that cover of discourse can arrive at a direct relationship with the thing.<sup>50</sup> The thing is the discourse itself — the understanding of this is the cause of Hamlet's disintegration and the failure to understand this results in Lear's tragedy.

In the rest of the present chapter I will concentrate on particular scenes in *Hamlet* in order to demonstrate how this tragedy takes up the same representational problems examined in *Titus Andronicus* with an intensified but, at the same time, different semiotic attitude.

Hamlet, obviously, is involved in an interpretative enigma that is related to the nature of the Ghost and the nature of reality at the same time. I would like to employ here a concept by John Bayley, who defines *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello* as *tragedies of consciousness*. In these plays, the attention centers not so much on the intrigue and unfolding of the plot, but rather on the mental activities and inner transformations of the protagonist.<sup>51</sup> The play offers a penetration into the spiritual and cognitive transformations and processes of the hero; so consequently, soliloquies dominate the verbal dimension of the stage representation. Hamlet's mind is obsessed by conflicting interpretations of the apparition that imprints an indelible stamp on his consciousness, and this only intensifies his fixation in meditating on the dichotomy of appearance and reality, so conspicuously manifest in the court. For him, all the members of the social context he is part of are engaged in a discursive play which aims at hiding the real nature of their existence: corruption, ambition, immorality, infection, disease. Role-playing. Hamlet is the

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<sup>50</sup> When Lear contemplates Edgar and says "Thou art the thing itself." (III.iv.106), he is still tragically wrong. Later, during the abjection of the trial scene, he tries to go deeper than the naked skin, and sets out to "anatomize" the daughters.

<sup>51</sup> BAYLEY 1981. Ch.III. "Tragedy and Consciousness."

one who knows no seeming, no masking, who has "that within which passes show", or, at least, he hopes to possess such an identity. But the identity he predicates for himself through the rebelliously penetrating insight of a philosopher is radically incompatible with the task imposed on him by the visitation of his father's ghost. Hamlet is alienated from the Danish court not only because of its rottenness and its villain-ruler but also because it is a world he would like to leave behind altogether. It is the world where "violence prevails", and when violence is done, words can prevail, to employ Lorenzo's words from *The Spanish Tragedy* (II.i.108). It is a universe of ancient rules, patriarchal codes, and social taboos that are primitive and suffocating for his sensibilities. In such a society, Hamlet is an outcast by nature, and it is impossible for him to assert an acceptable identity. The task he receives from the ghost is an opportunity for such a *self-assertion*: revenge could indeed define him as Hamlet, the Dane. But, paradoxically, this is what Hamlet does not want to be. Performing what the ghost demands of him would inevitably place him back into the ancient order, the order of the Father, the frame of reference where the subject's identity is defined always in relation to the key signifier of the Name-of-the-Father, the center of meaning. With revenge, Hamlet would merely restore his position in a rigid system he wants to escape from, and he would certainly be exposed to the challenge of becoming a monarch, i.e., the transcendental subject — precisely what is missing from the imaginary universe in his mind. Hamlet is a religious subject, but he is also one who is deeply distressed by the indecipherability of the Absolute, the inaccessibility of the ultimate point and guarantee of meaning. His final statements sound more like self-persuasion than a proclamation of absolute belief. "The readiness is all": for the Protestant subject who has lost his inherent signifying capacity and direct interaction with God, there is nothing left but to be ready at any time.

The duty of revenge is alien to Hamlet's personality, but this is something his consciousness tries to suppress all the time since the denial of the order of revenge equals the disintegration of his identity in a context which does not yet offer other means of selfassertion. He passionately loves his father because his image is the focal point of his ego, but, at the same time, his suppressed "alter-ego" strives to separate from that image and break free from the Law of the father. The oscillation between these extremes results in a disintegration of his mind, a loss of self-control which is not only an affected madness but a truly unsettling factor. Hamlet, the would-be revenger, is the most complex example of the *in-between subject* on the Renaissance stage.

Paradoxically, his escape from the act of revenge imposes the necessity of role-playing on him, an unwelcome compromise. He is trapped in a situation in which

he cannot really account for his inability to act since the denial of revenge and of the order of the father is largely suppressed by his ego into his unconscious. The subject, as we know, flees from the desire of the unconscious, which it does not dare to face.

Hamlet's role-playing is not merely a method of gaining time in order to make sure about the truth of the ghost. It is also a play to delay the revenge, a technique to put off the performance of the duty he cannot relate to. This way he gets totally trapped in the world he despises so much. His role-playing alienates him from his own self, and it also intensifies the awareness of his being a misfit in Denmark.

In the Danish court, discourse serves to cover, to conceal the real nature of things, it is the vehicle of pretence. Hamlet's reaction to this surface is fittingly verbal, a discordant discourse which disrupts the seemingly coherent unity of the word in the court, and foregrounds the artificiality of language that other subjects use to wrap up their reality. The word is the thing for Hamlet which separates the subject from the real, the truth from falsehood; it is the ultimate agent of deception. He deliberately communicates with people in the court in a way which confuses them, deprives them of the possibility to relate to Hamlet or to themselves in that discourse in a meaningful, homogeneous way.

Interestingly, *Hamlet* abounds in references to the *body* that lies beyond the layer of discourse, the body whose meaning is only secured by the word that covers it. In his attempt to penetrate the surface, to get beyond the show and grasp at the real, it is the materiality of the body that Hamlet arrives at. "The Jacobean body...is distributed irreducibly throughout a theater whose political and cultural centrality can only be measured against the marginality of the theater today;...In the fullest sense which it now possible to conceive, from the other side of our own carnal guilt, it is a *corporeal* body, which, if it is already touched by the metaphysics of its later erasure, still contains a charge which, set off by the violent hands laid on it, will illuminate the scene, incite difference, and ignite poetry. This spectacular visible body is the proper gauge of what the bourgeoisie has had to forget."<sup>52</sup>

The "too, too sullied flesh" that Hamlet calls upon to melt seems to be enveloped entirely by the signifiers of courtly power that maintain the metaphysics of meaning in Denmark, but his images of infection, disease, rotteness, and melting away as allusions to the *rotten body* beneath the facade of the word all add up to the conspicuous presence of the *corporeality* that for him cannot be fully contained by the symbolic discourse. Hamlet's awareness of the body is metaphorical of the epistemological uncertainty he represents. The transcendence of the body

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<sup>52</sup> BARKER 1984. p. 25.

politic for him no longer holds, his logic is that of the unmotivated sign rather than that of the motivated symbol. However, the body — the uncontainable heterogeneous corporeality — is exactly the sentiment that the *new discourses of modernity* have to suppress, to ignore absolutely in order to create the *ideological misrecognition* of the subject as a unified, homogeneous speaker that is independent of the uncontrollable, sexual body. In *Hamlet*, the metaphysics of the body as a letter in the writing of the Transcendental is radically questioned; on the other hand, the presence of the corporeal is not yet contained and suppressed by the discourses of the new world model. Hamlet is the in-between, paradoxical revenger in an in-between world where it is not yet possible to take sides.

Nonetheless, if we examine the play in terms of the relation between spectacular image and word, *Hamlet* already signifies the emergence of the dominance of *discourse* over the conspicuous presence of the desemiotized body. The violence that centers around the displayed and mutilated body in *Titus Andronicus* is absent in *Hamlet*, and instead of the attempt to stage the immediacy of the body as a representational fullness, we have nothing but words. The ghost, the "ambassador of death", does present horrifying images of the tormented and abject body for Hamlet's mind but only by way of verbal description; otherwise, he is so much concealed in his armor that they cannot even see his face. The disintegrated body itself does not appear on the stage. Actually, the immediacy with the body could only be achieved by Hamlet through two actions he contemplates but evades: suicide and revenge. Suicide is excluded because of a still active religious coding, but also (and perhaps rather) because of the uncertainty of the afterlife. Revenge could turn Hamlet into an author of the corpse, a dominator of the corrupt flesh around himself, but, once more, it is a deed improper for his self-assertion. Thus, what Hamlet encounters all the time is the *materiality of language* instead of the immediacy of the Real and the body. He is caught up in the discourse he can disrupt only discursively: disrupt, but not penetrate. His famous comment delivered to Polonius, "Words, words, words.", is a scene that very rarely receives adequate staging because it is not matched to the semiotic logic of the play. Hamlet is not being phlegmatic, melancholic, or simply cynical here. His cynicism is mixed by a *frustration* which results from his inability to escape the agency of the signifier, the sheath of discourse, beneath which, instead of the real, there is mere nothingness. Hamlet is talking about the nature of semiosis, the logic which Polonius is too stupid and conformist to understand. Hamlet is more aptly staged in a rage here than in his traditional condescending cynicism. A radical performance could indeed make him tear the pages from the book: the Book which here thus turns into an emblem of the textuality of the world that is now so disrupted

and questionable in nature for Hamlet. If, instead of an absent-minded smile, he suddenly tried to stuff the pages into his or Polonius's mouth, that scene could certainly represent his attempt to penetrate the word, the surface of things, or make Polonius aware of the discourse at whose mercy he is. The discourse of power and self-fashioning which is replacing the metaphysical pantextuality of the world.

The point when Hamlet draws nearest to the body is the closet scene with his mother, one of the rather few perfect scenes in Zeffirelli's film version, for example. Hamlet, already desperate, outraged, and impatient, gives way to the passion of his unconscious, whose metaphor and object of desire in psychoanalytical terms is the mother's body itself. This scene — if not the entire play — is certainly dominated by the surfacing and disrupting of the Oedipus complex. Hamlet's verbal and physical attack on Gertrude violates the taboo imposed on the mother's body by the Law of the Father. The ghost, naturally, reappears here in his "mind's eye", unseen by the queen: a projection of Hamlet's ego, constituted in relation to the order of the father, against which his self-tormenting passion revolts only unconsciously. Hamlet's ego interprets the apparition as a warning, a reminder of Revenge, which, throughout the play, is itself an extended emblem of the Phallus, the Name of the Father. The agency of the central signifier, whose assertion the initial encounter with the ghost serves, is in an incessant conflict with Hamlet's unconscious, and the process of oscillating between the alternatives disintegrates his identity.

The emblematic gravedigger scene stages Hamlet's changing relation to the idea of revenge in a very complex way. The grave, Hamlet's moralization over Yorick's skull, and the references to dying establish the emblematic frame of reference of the *memento mori* tradition. But more than this, Hamlet's jumping in and out of the grave becomes emblematic of the *descent into the underworld* and the return from the unknown, the other scene, the realm of the unconscious. It is exactly at this point that he announces the usual self-proclamation typical of Renaissance revenge tragedy: "This is I, Hamlet, the Dane." However, this self-assertion is at the same time the final, radical relinquishing of his ideal identity, since as Andrew Gurr pointed out, the title "Hamlet, the Dane" belongs to the old elected king, the father, old Hamlet the King.<sup>53</sup> The scene, thus, condenses in one emblematic moment Hamlet's testing of his unconscious, his coming to terms with his desire to deny the law of the father, his recognition of the impossibility of that desire, and his final *identification with the father* and his commandment. This is Hamlet's re-

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<sup>53</sup> This is a point Professor Gurr drew my attention to in a lecture on "Shakespeare's Theatre" in Corpus Christi College, Oxford, during the British Council's Conference on Literature Teaching Overseas, 1993.

oedipalization but at the cost of desires and aspirations for a new, different identity and at the expense of his identity *in general*. By this time, his balance and consciousness have been substantially unsettled through the course of mental oscillation and role-playing, and the identification with the father results from frustration and the realization of his failure. Hamlet, the Dane is what he did not want to become.

Yet the identification still does not compel him to act and carry the task to completion. Instead he cheats himself into a sense of security in providence although his line "...how ill all's here about my heart." (V.ii.212) suggests doubt. The "revenge" Hamlet performs is an accident which does not ensue from the deliberate decision of a firm subject. Hamlet, the subject-in-process, who never became a revenger, has failed to occupy a position from which he would have been able to control the formation of his identity. No matter that the stage is littered with corpses, he did not become an author since he is the *archetype of the modern subject who realizes that he is not the origin of meaning*. His in-betweenness represents the transition in which the security of the metaphysical symbol is already lost, and the ideological discourses producing the Cartesian subject's misrecognition of itself as a unified origin of meaning are not yet fully at work. Hamlet's endeavor to penetrate the surface of things, to get beyond the show and the discourse to an authentic body or subjectivity only comes to the realization that at the center of himself there is: nothing.<sup>54</sup> The rest is silence, at least for Hamlet, since in no way will he be able to control the narratives that will circulate the versions of "his story." It will be Horatio's task to start the production of the discourse on Hamlet.

As has already been mentioned, the corporeality of subjects and of the body de-transcendentalized is a pervasive presence in *Hamlet*. But it is not staged with the logic of violence characteristic of *Titus Andronicus* since this time the Word already overpowers the Image and the discourse blocks the way from the immediacy of the body promised by the "full representation" of violence. This shift, this turning away from the spectacle of violence to the dominance of the word in Shakespearean drama is largely accountable for the later canonization of the Shakespearean corpus (especially the "great tragedies"), which has been defined as the greatest achievement of English Renaissance literature exactly *in opposition to the spectacular* sensationalism of other Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights.

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. BARKER 1984. pp. 26–32.

The Shakespearean canon (save some embarrassing exceptions, *Titus Andronicus*, for example) has served as a touchstone for a bourgeois ideology which was based on the suppression of the spectacle and of the material presence of the body. This body still surfaces in Renaissance tragedy with an insistence, but the fact that it is so often staged "in the process of its effective dismemberment no doubt indicates that contradiction is already growing up within this system of presence and that the deadly subjectivity of the modern is already beginning to emerge."<sup>55</sup> What I attempted to show in the preceding chapters is that there is more than this brought into play in these tragedies. The testing of the body as well as the mutilation and abjection of the material basis of signification is staged as a *semiotic attempt* to penetrate the surface of things and go beyond the appearance to the *presence* of an authentic reality, through the power of some *full representation*. The "great Shakespearean tragedies" already recognize the failure of such a representational undertaking, but as such they are quite distinct from the vogue of Jacobean tragedy still dominated by the spectacle of corporeality.

In the chapter that follows, I will examine *The Revenger's Tragedy* as one of the culminations of the tradition of abjection and violence presented in a metadramatic framework on the Renaissance stage.

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<sup>55</sup> BARKER 1984. p. 24.

## VII

"The very ragged bone."<sup>56</sup>

### ABJECTION AND THE ART OF DYING IN *THE REVENGER'S TRAGEDY*

Drama is always inherently a metadrama about the unresolvable crisis of signification: the threatening but also nourishing gap between the signifier and the signified, our body and the Other, our never-ending attempt to grasp the destination of the gliding Signifier. Desire — which pours our discourse into this chasm gaping between the elusive Real and the imaginary structures maintaining our identities — is, by definition, in the center of dramatic art. The distance (or intimacy) between spectator and symbolic action re-enacts the split that separates the material and the meaningful, Chaos and identity, fluidity and the fixation of meaning. The thetic break that gives rise to duality and representation is problematized in multi-layered complexity by the theater, where identification and its suspension are constantly at work in the stage-audience and the actor-role dichotomies.

"Metadramatic" performances play with this internal characteristic of the art and *foreground* the problematics that resides in identity and role-playing, reality and representation, involvement and the shattering of mimetical illusion. Thus, the desire for the Other, the motor of signification which creates *and* tries to bridge the thetic gap between Self and Real, is also the constitutive and focalized element of metadrama. The desire to uncover and picture reality in its totality, to discover a sign or a role that stops the dissemination of signifiers and excavates the heart of the Real (that is, the role, the mask, the body): this is what metadrama centers around, and this representational enigma is the reason why metadrama so often stages the *Object*.

*The Revenger's Tragedy* has called forth an extraordinary range of critical attitudes. Some critics have condemned the play as an incoherent projection of an infected artistic mind, a decadent and immoral product of a pessimistic historical milieu.<sup>57</sup> Those at the other extreme of the play's critical history defend the drama

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<sup>56</sup> "The very ragged bone has been sufficiently revenged." *Vindice*, III.v.152. References to *The Revenger's Tragedy* are from TOURNER 1989.

<sup>57</sup> Besides claims about the perverse multiplication of evil, the thematic incoherency, the abrupt and amoral ending, the agitated and segmented language, we have such extremes of critical evaluation as that of William Archer: "I will only ask whether such monstrous melodrama as *The Revenger's Tragedy*, with its hideous sexuality and its raging lust for blood, can be said to belong to civilised

as a moral allegory unified by the co-existence and synthesis of several traditions of representation, a rare masterpiece in the genre typical of Jacobean England.<sup>58</sup>

However, the play requires no defense. What it requires is a careful and comprehensive reading of its intertextual situatedness. To defend the unity of this play on the basis of its thematic structure and to argue that *The Revenger's Tragedy* is the culmination of the *danse macabre* tradition in English literature is to miss the very point of the drama.

Jacobean drama was essentially a mode of entertainment; coherence and thematic unity were not the primary goals of the theatrical entertainer. A Jacobean play was designed to evoke the greatest possible variety of emotional and intellectual responses through the juxtaposition of allegory, symbol, parable, typology, emblematic stage action, masques, and tableau vivants. Indeed, we come closer to an understanding of English Renaissance drama if we think of it as one extended dramatic *device* "to present always some one entire body, or figure, consisting of distinct members...to the illustration of the whole."<sup>59</sup> Thus, behind the seeming contradictions, arbitrary plots, and abrupt endings we may decipher a persistent referent in the play, which does not unite the drama but renders every part of it meaningful.

A great deal of criticism deals with the medieval and Renaissance traditions of representation that are so densely displayed in *The Revenger's Tragedy*.<sup>60</sup> The

literature at all? I say it is a product either of sheer barbarism, or of some pitiable psychopathic perversion." In: ARCHER 1923. p.74. The critical discontent, if not hostility, towards the play was well summarized (and sanctified) by T. S. Eliot in his essay on Tourneur. Just as *Hamlet* failed to live up to the principle of the "objective correlative", *The Revenger's Tragedy* also proves to be a failure, since here the object exceeds the play: the drama is the expression of an immature, "adolescent hatred of life". "It is a document on one human being, Tourneur; its motive is truly the death motive, for it is the loathing and horror of life itself". In: ELIOT 1951. pp. 189-90.

<sup>58</sup> Almost simultaneously with Archer's harsh criticism, Oliphant considers *The Revenger's Tragedy* as one of the most outstanding dramatic achievements of the Jacobean period and, indeed, of dramatic art in general. (See his introduction to OLIPHANT 1921.) A major turning point in critical response came with Salingar's article in 1938. Salingar closely investigated the medieval semi-dramatic, dramatic, and moralistic traditions that inform the universe of *The Revenger's Tragedy* and pointed out that the medieval morality play as well as the religious, homiletic, and allegorical traditions form the fundamental basis of the drama. (SALINGAR 1938.)

<sup>59</sup> Ben Jonson *Part of King James's Entertainment*, quoted by WICKHAM 1981, p. 66.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, EKEBLAD, Inga-Stina 1959. "An Approach to Tourneur's Imagery" In: *Modern Language Review*, LIV, pp.489-498., ELLIS-FERMOR, Una 1935. "The Imagery of *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Atheist's Tragedy*" In: *Modern Language Review*, XXX, pp. 289-301., SALINGAR, L.G. 1938. "The *Revenger's Tragedy* and the Morality Tradition" In: *Scrutiny*, 6, 402-424., SCHOENBAUM, S. 1954. "The *Revenger's Tragedy*: Jacobean Dance of Death" In: *Modern Language Quarterly*, XV, pp. 201-07.

pervasive presence of *memento mori* and *contemptus mundi* motifs, of the techniques originating in the *exemplum horrendum* and medieval homiletic moralizings is often meant to turn the fashionable revenge theme into a unified moral allegory, the Emblem of Evil in the corrupt City of Man. Strangely enough, the study of one particular moral and iconographic tradition which is related to all of the above-mentioned discourses is usually ignored in these interpretations. The *Ars Moriendi*, the Art of Dying (Well), has a very powerful line in the Western history of ideas, and, by the late Renaissance, it undergoes a representational metamorphosis which is of particular interest to Jacobean drama. *The Revenger's Tragedy* is not so much a culmination as a mixture of ironic and internalizing comments on the *memento mori*, and the screen upon which this satirical network is projected is the *Ars Moriendi*. At the same time, the thematic and purposefully disrupted structure of the play also displays a genuinely new and terrifying theme which is beyond any ridicule and provides the audience with an *undecidability* typical of English Renaissance drama. P. M. Murray calls *The Revenger's Tragedy* an Anatomy of Evil: what we really have here is an anatomical imagery of the gap which stretches between the Unrepresentable and the Meaningful, a display of the process which is characteristic of the subject oscillating between identification and disintegration, which borders on the limits that divide the Signifier and the Signified. *The Revenger's Tragedy* is a meta-dramatic study of the Abject, where bodies dissolve, skulls are exhibited and produced, and we are jolted out of our identity to face of the truly Other, which fascinates and horrifies us.

It is only in ritual that the double paradox of representation seems to be resolved in Sacred Time. Magic conjures up the total presence of the Real, which is not represented but lived here, and, at the same time, the ritual agent is not coping with the split between identity and the mimetic role: the action is not symbolic but "real." In primitive societies, the central action of ritual is the sacrifice, where the violence of primary psychic processes is displaced onto a representable body, a circulated sign which becomes the Primary Signifier and the point of reference for the maintenance of social identity.<sup>61</sup> Dramatic art either suppresses the representational insufficiency arising from the gap in mimesis, or foregrounds it in metadrama, and involves the spectator in a game where borders merge and identities come into play.

What puzzles us in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is the juxtaposition of the medieval allegorical tradition, where the transparency of meaning raises no interpretive challenge, and a psychologizing mimetic tradition, where role-playing and its meta-commentary do foreground an awareness of the signifying insufficiency. The

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. KRISTEVA 1984. I/11. "Poetry That is Not a Form of Murder." pp. 72-85.

allegorical frame of the play hides a laboratory where a Janus-faced agent investigates identities and anatomizes bodies. The axis of this frame rests on an introductory and a closing scene foregrounding problems of identity and a semi-ritual sacrifice in the central dramaturgical turning point of the play. In the following, I will concentrate on these three points in the structure of the drama (Vindice's "descent" into the play, the murdering of the Duke, and Vindice's "self-murder" scene), but first we must turn to the history of dramatic modes in order to understand how the special irony of the drama arises from the above mentioned juxtaposition.

On the English Renaissance stage at the turn of the 16-17th centuries, the representation of violence centers with anatomical penetration upon the *body*. Flesh is tainted by poison, bodies are mutilated and disintegrated, tongues are nailed down and torn out, heads are crowned with hot iron and cut off, etc. The product of these practices is, of course, the corpse, but the cadaver itself would not so much have fascinated an audience which grew up on representations and everyday realities of death: epidemics, plagues, public executions, tortures, murders, high death rate, and an elaborate iconography of the dead body.<sup>62</sup>

As mentioned in Chapter III, the appearance of three motifs signal the emergence of "literary" Renaissance drama after Medieval allegory: corpses, the love of women, and the violence of language.<sup>63</sup> However, we should not fail to see that it is not really the display of the corpse that intrigues the imagination of the spectator but the *moments* that witness the body turning into cadaver: the unsignifiable yet absorbing fluidity of the process that takes hold between the Wholly Other or Unrepresentable and the still-Meaningful. This is the process which marks the borders of identity and meaning, where the actor strives to arrive on the Renaissance stage. The *anatomizing and dissolving* of the body is a testing of the corporeal-material, an expulsion of signs in the face of the *Abject* which does not represent but engulfs and repudiates the spectator at the same time: the casting away of the mask and the probing of identity. In order to dominate the flesh around him, the actor has to produce corpses because Death is the Pure Signifier, the Wholly Other, which seems to suspend the insufficiency of representation for a passing moment. The *staging of the Abject is a prolongation* of this lapse of time, a dramatic source of *jouissance*.

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<sup>62</sup> For a study of the history of such representations, see SPINRAD 1987.

<sup>63</sup> KNAPP 1989, p. 104.

What are the traditions that lead to the staging of the *Abject in death* in Jacobean theater? The picturing of death was always connected with the *Ars Moriendi* in the Middle Ages. The dying man received advice from a number of counselors gathering around the deathbed (cf. the ironic inversion in *Volpone*); allegories argued for his body and his soul, and the final representation of the corpse was often horrifying but also, because of its very nature; static. The *memento mori* was an integral part of the Art of Dying since the earthly pilgrimage itself was considered a preparation for that vital moment of *passing over* to the other side where all our sufferings are compensated for. Indeed, in medieval moralizings the walk of life turns into an expanded *Ars Moriendi*: since Death is *the* possibility for salvation, it turns into a personified agent, loathed and desired at the same time. Dramatic action, unfolding in four dimensions, can problematize this point of passing over.

The iconography of the corpse undergoes a metamorphosis as we approach the Renaissance. The decomposing bodies, static replicas of the *Abject* covered with snakes and frogs, turn into clean skeletons, and finally, after the skeleton of the late moralities and before the withered flower of Romanticism, we have the crystallized emblem of the Renaissance: *the skull*.

Nevertheless, we should always bear in mind that by this time the representation of death is such a commonplace that it always carries an *ironic overtone*. Attempts to explain, denote, internalize the Unexplainable were so various and numerous in Elizabethan England that, for example, even whores wore medals with death's heads just in order to look like the real aristocrats, who displayed an immense variety of "death-accessories." It is arguable that the first pathetic appearance of Vindice with the skull in the Prologue of *The Revenger's Tragedy* is at least as laughable as frightening. The morbid is introduced later when we learn that the death's head belongs to the body of his beloved.

The process of transformation and sublimation also affects the agents of Death. The demonic-allegoric crawling creatures and disembowelled corpses that inhabit early medieval engravings and tombs become the skeleton of the Dance of Death, which is macabre *and* carnivalesque at the same time (a point often ignored in criticism), and summons people of all estates to the grave. The Skeleton is also one of the most popular abstractions on the medieval stage: Death now takes on a fiendish, mischievous character. It is not represented as an emblem of horror but becomes a threatening omni-present potentiality: Death peeps over the shoulders of mortals, suddenly appears when least expected, and always comments on its strategies and plottings in extra-dramatic *asides*. *Ars Moriendi*, by this time, is the ability to handle this potentiality in existence: "the readiness is all." Besides Death,

there is only one character in medieval performance which is granted the same privilege of playing with and mocking the idea of death; which occupies the same platea-oriented mediatory space between stage and audience; and which, again, unites the macabre and the carnivalesque, the tragic and the ironic-comic: this is the figure of the Vice. Vindice's character is a condensation of all these traditions.

It is usually noted in criticism that Vindice appears at the beginning of *The Revenger's Tragedy* as the satiric presenter of the morality play, as the Vice who involves the audience in an extra-dramatic prologue from the very beginning. This and the title itself precondition the spectator and place the very nature of the play under question marks. Are we expecting a moral allegory, a series of plays-within-the-play, or a drama about how to play the Revenger? Yet the beginning of the play presents an even deeper complexity.

It is generally left unmentioned that Vindice, besides being a platea-oriented Vice-like character, is staged *exactly* like the allegorical Death of moralities and interludes who *directs* everybody to a final destination in the grave. This is a very fitting *role* for Vindice, the Director, whose main preoccupation will be the manipulation and production of corpses. But, again: is Vindice playing a role, is somebody playing Vindice taking on a role, or are we manipulated into believing that actor, revenger, corruptor, and death are separate? We have to restore the original *theatrical logic* of these scenes in order to understand the layers of Vindice's figure.<sup>64</sup>

After the commonplace but also cynical ("go...Four excellent characters") moralizing with a dull skull in one hand (an *enumeratio* before symbolic action), Vindice becomes essentially *grotesque*, and, ironically, it is the grotesque that is capable of foregrounding the skull here. The death's-head is the skull of the Death-presenter's beloved: a most unusual and morbid configuration, which would trigger as much laughter as terror among the contemporary audience. Precisely at this moment, Vindice turns the *memento mori* inside out: he starts a pathetic but really comic speech over the skull, which should definitely be staged so that the scene foregrounds its double nature: *memento mori* *and* its burlesque — "making death familiar."

As P.S. Spinrad points out, after the early Middle Ages the discourses about dying served to ward off the threatening presence of mortality, to internalize and thus neutralize the horror-capacity of death. By the time of the late Renaissance,

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. DESSEN 1977, 1983.

and in the hands of Vindice, the skull becomes a *memento mockery*, a joyfully tragic game in the hands of the Vice, the great manipulator.<sup>65</sup>

While mocking the presence of death in the hands of Death, the initial monologue also sets off one of the most important themes of the play: the signifying potential of the material *body* and the marketing of *commodified identities*.<sup>66</sup> Gloriana's most important signifying value here is a *commercial* one, and later, in the universe of the play, characters will be reduced to bodies that are exchangeable on the market dominated by the commerce of lust. When sexuality becomes equated with death in the drama, as early as the initial skull monologue, libidinal drives are superseded by the death drive in Vindice.

Vindice's invocation to Vengeance and tragedy (I.i.39-40) further complicate the nature of the dramatic action. Now he clearly occupies the position of the Director, the organizer of the performance, a role not alien to a Vice-like figure. But he is still *outside* the play: he is just about to enter, descend into the world of the Tragedy, a movement familiar from mythology, where mischievous supernatural agents trouble the lives of mortals. Vindice is not supernatural but meta-dramatic: he enters the dramatic world to test the nature of identities and to cast an ironical overtone on everything through the dilemmatic juxtaposition of the comic and the tragic. The central undecidability is whether he is still an actor-director at the end. With a tone of almost intimate personal attachment ("be merry, merry, / Advance thee, O thou terror to fat folks" I.i.44-45), Vindice "rolls" the skull, his real lover, into the world of the play and follows it promptly to pursue his primary drive: the production of skulls. This drive finds its Central Signifier in Gloriana's skull, which becomes the *origo of meaning* in the entire play, foregrounding the primacy of the death drive instead of the libidinal in the subconscious.

It must be the subject of a separate psychoanalytic study to show Vindice's relations to the sexual and diverse psychological processes that are at work in the play. We may note here, however, that Vindice's father has just died: the Law of the Father, the Phallus gives way to the Law of the Skull, a perverted version of

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<sup>65</sup> I would probably stage Vindice kissing the skull during the "a usurer's son/ Melt all his patrimony in a kiss" lines. Besides its intensifying morbidity, this interpretation could function in the *typological* structure of the play, foreshadowing the demystification of the Neoplatonic kiss in the sexuality of the murder scene, and it would also make Vindice *identify* with the usurer's son, as indeed his mind is already infected by corruption.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. AGNEW 1986.

a psychic return to primary drives. Vindice's mental processes are structured around images of death. His pursuit of death engulfs him in a process which deprives him of his original coherent (imaginary) identity, and it will never be clear when he turns from director into a victim of the avalanche of skulls he has started.

His "entrance" to the play echoes the traditional *typology* of medieval (semi)dramatic representations, where the world of the allegorical play is considered to be the *exemplary Reality*, and the Real of the spectators but a corrupted world where we see "through a glass darkly." Vindice seems to offer an *exemplum* for the audience, a moralizing tragedy prepared by the Presenter, and it is the problematics of this task, this role-playing, that is at the heart of the play. The Revenger's Tragedy is about a dramatic failure: the director becomes entangled in his own plottings; the idea of Almighty Revenge is ridiculed by a dissemination of revenge schemes; the omni-present *memento mori* and the multiplication of *sententiae* become a laughable exuberance of hypocritical moralizing.

By the middle of Act III, when we arrive at the dramaturgical climax of the play in the murder scene, revenge-plots are multiple, lust and death dominate the imagery, and Vindice is "far from himself." As already mentioned, this losing of identity is complicated by the meta-dramatic perspective of the play: is it pretence and the difficulty of role-playing?; is it the director's identification with the creation of his mind?; or are we witnessing a meta-dramatic statement about the inescapable presence, necessity and ambiguity of self-fashioning on *every level of reality*? When the play's inside and outside satirically but also threateningly fuse, and the spectator is thrown into the process of indecisiveness: role and identity, involvement and the shattering of illusion, tragedy or macabre burlesque. An unnameable crisis of identity throws the spectator's identity into process. The act of producing corpses becomes an act of self-assertion because there are no identifiable human cores behind the masks that multiply in the drama and also because producing (and identifying with?) a corpse still offers a possibility for the witnessing of the Real and the total identification with a mask.

The poisoning of the Duke is the most explicit staging of the Subject in the macabre world of The Revenger's Tragedy. The body of the victim is turned with anatomical detail into a corpse, a Skull, and we are witness to the *process* in which language collapses and the Sign disintegrates into its unrecognizable materiality.

The signifying status of the human being was extremely problematic in the epistemological crisis of the late Renaissance when the vertical world-model of Medieval high-semioticity clashed with a new horizontal, syntagmatic model. In the first, Man is semiotically overcoded on several levels, and, like every element of

reality in the Book of Nature, automatically refers to the ultimate Signifier, the Great Scriptor: God. Protestant theology shatters this semioticity and makes the human signifier essentially passive without any possibility to affect the Almighty in his decisions. The question becomes: are we writers of our fate, or are we passive signifiers, secretly written by the Ultimate Signifier (or, in contemporary terms: by the heterogeneous processes of the pre-conscious modalities of signification)?

Instead of moralizing on the theological positionality of the human signifier, Jacobean tragedy chooses to investigate the very materiality of the human signifier: it attempts to take us deep behind the Sign, behind the Flesh, to arrive at the Real, to capture the passing of Meaning from the dead body in the process of dying at the prolonged moment of death.

We are witnessing the production of the Duke's corpse as if we were sitting beside the death bed of a dying man, to catch the last words that could reveal something about the enigma of the Other, of Death. *Ars Moriendi* turned upside down.

The Duke identifies with death in a morbid kiss of the skull: Neoplatonic Enlightenment is replaced by disintegration through poison. It is no wonder that the Jacobean stage favors *poisoning* so much: the decomposition of the Flesh, of the integrated Body, has to be part of the staging of the Abject: the only state which takes us to a territory which is closest to the mystery of the unrepresentable. "Brooking the foul object" (III.v.202.) — horror fascinates and distances us at the same time: suddenly, we catch a glimpse of the Real behind the diminished sign, and we are floating from "one identity to an Other" at the degree zero of signification.<sup>67</sup>

This epistemological answer to the Renaissance crisis is peculiar to late Renaissance English drama and is situated in the context of commonplace questions about show and substance, seeming and reality, role-playing and identity.

The spectator can hardly "decide" how to relate to this emblem of the collapse of Language, an emblem of the Abject: a decomposing head (emblematic of Reason, Authority, Christian bond) with the tongue (discourse) nailed down by a dagger (villainy, corruption). Meaning escapes the viewer in the sight of the cadaver-in-process, which borders on but does not yet enter the realm of the Unrepresentable. *The subject-in-process approaches the Other most closely in the gaze of the body-in-process.*

Vindice arrives at the climax of his self-assertion upon the disintegration of the Duke's body: the ecstatic outcry "'Tis I, 'tis Vindice, 'tis I" is Vindice's total

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. KRISTEVA 1980. Ch.IV. "From One Identity to an Other." pp. 125-147.

identification with the Role. However, this maintenance (and split) of identity borrows its integrity from the elimination of the Duke's identity: Vindice here also identifies with the Duke, which, again, typologically foreshadows his own "self-murder" scene, where his body is the corpse of the Duke.

The third pivotal point in the typological structure of the play, resting on problems of identity and role, is the beginning of Act V, where Vindice substitutes the corpse of the Duke for himself, to be murdered again. The scene is emblematic of Vindice's identity split, and his total distancing from an identifiable center in a maze of masks. However, these lines also contain a deep irony that is seldom recognized. Borrowing his new integrated identity from the Duke's death, Vindice (unconsciously) identifies himself with the Duke, whose body now *really* stands for him, but now he is too far from himself to realize the macabre irony of the situation. "I must kill myself": it is when his body arrives at the highest point of its signifying capability (when it is metaphorically identified with the Cadaver) that Vindice abandons himself totally: the scene enacts the *paradox* that the Human Signifier can reach the origo of meaning, the other side of the gap between sign and the Other, only when he/she is *farthest* from original identity and self. Vindice, after a series of identifications, ponders about the mirror-image of his own body, now no longer his: he has arranged for his own metamorphosis.

In the masque of revengers, when Vindice imitates the "intended murderers" in the greatest possible accuracy ("we take the pattern/Of all those suits, the colour, trimming, fashion, / E'en to an undistinguish'd hair almost" V.ii.15-17.), who is already totally indistinguishable from those he murders. Revenge as self-assertion becomes a relinquishing of identity.

Still, at the very end we are provided with one more enigma, which questions the entire nature of the play. Vindice departs for his execution in excellent spirits: the tragic moment is deconstructed, the fall of the protagonist is made ironically meaningless. It is true that, after putting an end to all possible revenge plots, and producing an arsenal of skulls, Vindice the Director has nothing to do on the stage. But is he contemplating his Work from the same meta-dramatic stance as at the beginning of the play? Is there a way to tell whether we are left with any identifiable trace that is continuous and is in connection with the figure who utters the first words on the stage? Or do we suddenly realize that Vindice's message is a way to ridicule of the *Ars Moriendi*: eliminate your identities in order to die joyfully?

Just as the revenge theme is turned into a macabre burlesque of revenge tragedy, the *memento mori* line culminates in a satire of the *Ars Moriendi* moralizing promised by the Presenter at the beginning. We are left with am-

biguities, indeterminacies that dissolve our secure identities in the face of the lack of meaning. This indeterminacy, characteristic of English Renaissance tragedy in general and not exclusively of Shakespeare, allows for only one permanent trace in the drama: that of the meta-dramatic perspective, which arises from the paradox of existence that we never know if we are writing or being written.



## VIII

"Who dost think to be the best linguist of our age?"<sup>68</sup>

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Malevole's answer to the question quoted in the title of the present chapter is, of course:

"Phew! *the devil*: let him possess thee;  
he'll teach thee to speak all languages most  
readily and strangely; and great reason, marry,  
he's travel'd greatly i'the world, and is *everywhere*."

(I.iii.36-40. my emphasis)

Indeed, English Renaissance tragedy represents worlds where *language and discursive practices* are ruled by the devil or his representatives. The discord in discourse is emblematic of the discord on all levels of existence: the universe, the court, the family, the subject all seem to be "out of joint." Malevole, as the protagonist of a tragically gloomy comedy in a corrupt court, can be the counter-example of the heroes of the tragedies examined in the preceding chapters. Comedy is based on the possibility of *return*: Malevole does not lose or dissolve his identity through the course of role-playing, while the subjects of the tragedies are unable to maintain and preserve an original identity to which they could return after the end of role-playing. However, the corruption and violence foregrounded in *The Malcontent* and comparable comedies offer us a representation of a society as questionable and discordant as that of the tragedies.

In the preceding chapters I have attempted to demonstrate that the violence of rhetoric, together with the violated, abjected body, is used as a representational technique in order to surpass the limitations of language, to involve the spectator in a theatrical experience which overcomes the insufficiency of representation. In this respect, the multiplication and exuberance of violence on the English Renaissance stage can be treated not as a decline into decadence and sensationalism but as an attempt to bring theatrical semiosis to perfection, to achieve the *immediacy of experience*.

The persistent *metatheatricality* of these attempts serves to provide an ironic framework in which the subjects of the tragedies can ultimately never become masters of their discursive space or of their identities. English Renaissance tragedy

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<sup>68</sup> *The Malcontent*, Ferrardo, I.iii.35. References are from BROOKE & PARADISE 1933.

is based on an understanding of the subject that becomes foregrounded with the same intensity again only in postmodern literature and critical thinking. The subject is a product of discourse, and identity is always an ideologically determined formation the shaping of which is not altogether under the control of the individual. The epistemological and intellectual crisis of early modern culture deprives the subject of his/her inherent center and signifying capacity — the subject of the late Renaissance is a hollow, desemiotized subject. This is why Hamlet can be considered the archetype of the postmodern subject who realizes that he is not the master of his identity. The subject must conform to the rules of the discourse, and the aim of social discursive practices in modern culture will be exactly to enforce in the subjects the *misrecognition* of their identities as stable and self-originated. As Foucault and Barker argue,<sup>69</sup> the *individuum* as a typically modern social construction enters the society of the 17-18th centuries exactly through the *suppression* of marginalities that are difficult to *contain* within the symbolic order. The sexual, corporeal *body* is perhaps the most important of these. The expulsion of the body from social discourses defines corporeality as something radically *Other*, as opposed to which the subject should maintain an identity through a constant *self-hermeneutics*.

The turn of the 16-17th centuries is a peculiar period when this corporeality surfaces in social and dramatic discourses with an intensity which is no longer grounded in the idea of the body as a metaphysically motivated symbol, and which is not yet suppressed or contained as a sign by the new discourses of bourgeois ideology. This is why the body can be used on the Renaissance stage as the powerful signifier which best *involves* the spectator in a theatrical experience to test and investigate his/her discursive positionality.

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<sup>69</sup> FOUCAULT 1973, 1978a, BARKER 1984.

## APPENDIX

### "Under a Sun of Torture": Staging the Traumatic Event in Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine*

It is in postmodern drama that the problem of identity as a product of ideological discourses and the problem of the body as a potential site for resistance appear with as powerful an intensity as in Renaissance tragedy. In this final chapter I set out to interpret Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* as a play which foregrounds the semiotic and representational problems discussed in the preceding parts. Thus, the drama shows fundamental analogies with the epistemological dilemmas that are constitutive of early modern culture: Renaissance tragedy is representative of the beginning of that cultural practice the crisis of which is thematized in Müller's play.

In order to introduce the theoretical dilemmas presented by the play, I would like to refer to a critical commonplace which has become rather fashionable recently. Let us accept that Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* is a *systematic theatrical attempt to resist* and deconstruct the automatized meaning-making strategies of society. In this case, the greatest possible violation that can be practised upon the text is to theorize it. Thus, the present paper sets out on the basis of an unresolvable paradox: writing about Müller's text can only be successful if it ultimately fails and annihilates itself as theory. However, if we do manage to come up with a coherent interpretation of the text, this would falsify the above mentioned critical argument. Thus, the question becomes: can the drama as *representation* go beyond the limits of ideologically determined meaning-generating practices, or, quite the contrary, it is exactly its own textual nature which prevents the play from getting outside the rules of textuality.

In the present chapter I would like to show that, in spite of all the anti-coherency strategies, *it is* possible to construct a coherent reading of the play, so the alleged primary subversive attempt of the play fails. However, it is the understanding of this failure which brings us closer to the real subversive element in Müller's text. It is not that the drama (or the potential theatrical performance) goes beyond and deconstructs the textuality which holds *the subject captive* of representational rules. Rather, it is *this textuality as such* that *Hamletmachine* shows up and raises from the *automatism* of signification. In this way, the drama and the interpretation of the drama (which shows the nature of its textuality) both revolve around the same paradox: *Hamletmachine* demonstrates the unpenetrable materiality of language, of the Signifier. This materiality is the reason why the *representational* attempts to go beyond or to master ideological meanings are

destined to failure right from the beginning, since they all get caught up on the resistance in signification; at the same time, it is this resistance which transcends all the attempts of theory to exhaust and possess the materiality of the letter, the play of language and symbolization.

Such a paradoxical movement is constitutive not only of any theory, but of all our signifying practices in general. The paradoxical moment, a fundamental antagonism can be localized both in the speaking subject and in the Social as the locus of the productive: the Split which gives rise to endless signification. Theory - which problematizes and circles the unrepresentable void in a self-nurturing act - must demonstrate its failure in order to reveal the cause of its impossibility, which, at the same time, is its only ontological basis: the resistance to theory. The localization of this resistance (in language; in "matter"; in the Social), the experimentation with it in the "brute materiality of fact" is a thematizing force in Müller's work: perhaps the only one around which a theoretical attempt to discuss it can be structured.

We can state in advance that *Hamletmachine* unavoidably remains captive of textuality on *two levels*.

- On a thematic level: through the attempts to experience the immediacy of the decentered body, the subject cannot go beyond representation, since the signifier covers the body and all the experiences of the body as well.
- On a metadramatic level: the textual existence of the play itself keeps the drama within the limits of representation.

It follows that the theoretical question is how to *unsettle the subject and deconstruct the play from within the text*, staying inside the dramatic representation.

*Hamletmachine* as representation uses two strategies to unsettle the subject and make him/her heterogeneous.

- It presents an *abject*, in-between subject who deprives himself of all the social markers that define him as a subject, and then tries to arrive at the immediacy of experience through the abjection of the body. Since this experiment is always part of a *re-presentation* on the stage, the immediacy cannot be realized, and the abjection of the body can function only as a strategy to intensify the power of the theatrical effect.
- The drama "launches a more successful attack" by transgressing the rules and conventions of reception, by bringing about a crisis in the identity of the receiver: as a *deconstructive text* it *denies the receiver those conventional positions* which confer the sentiment of subjectivity upon the subject in the process of reading or aesthetic reception.

*Hamletmachine* does not transcend textuality or the generation of meaning, but undermines the *authority* of the text and the author, exposing more clearly the textual social positions that are unavoidable.

According to Slavoj Žižek, the intervention of ideology into the psychic structure of the subject is experienced by the unconscious as a traumatic event, but, at the same time, Ideology offers itself not as an enforced reality but as an escape from the Real of our Desire which the conscious avoids and refuses to observe.<sup>70</sup> This paradoxical event is the "ideological exploitation" of the subject: the psychic repression of desire, of semiotic motility and the experience of the Split finds a locus for displacement in the Symbolic Order, in Ideology. The traumatic kernel, the constitutive wound of the subject is the ontological basis of, and the fundamental resistance to, signifying practices: a residue, a leftover in language. The theoretical problem is the *localization* of this traumatic kernel in the constitution of the speaking subject, where its position is very similar to thethetic break discussed in French theories of the subject. Even if Materiality is defined as that which resists symbolization, and thus has nothing to do with empiricism, this wound, this cleft should be given a basis in a material account of the subject, a localization on the "bodily", psychosomatic level, which then will concern the body both on a biological-empirical and a symbolized plane. Of course, the cleft between these two is exactly the one between the signified and the referent: we can only hypothetically conceive of the empirical. Yet what happens in Müller's text is much more than "false empiricism": it is an exploration of the possibility for resistance in the body, which is constituted by the ideological network of social imagery.

The production of *identity* and of the *body* in history, politics, cultural codification, and (inter)textual traces is the problem *Hamletmachine* attempts to investigate. Why the relationship between identity and body? One of the "post-modernist revelations" is the finding that the (perversion, rejection, and sacrifice of the) body offers no escape from our pan-textual positioning: it is no place of resistance against the ideological machinery of the symbolic since the psychic and physical development and experience of the organism is governed by specific technologies, which manipulate all possible emergences of meaning. The *immediacy of the experience* of the body seems to offer an (ecstatic) withdrawal from the ideological. Yet no matter how deeply we explore the material presence of the body through dissolving its symbolization and disintegrating its biology, the immediacy is not achieved. The "flesh" does not resist language. On the contrary,

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<sup>70</sup> ŽIŽEK 1989. Ch.I. "How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?"

what we discover in the depth of the biological is still the same symbolic overcoding and the resistance of language, not of the body, to our theories. What we find in the intestines of the disembowelled subject in *Hamletmachine* is not the immediacy of experience through the Presence of the body but the De Manian "brute materiality of the letter": the residue, the leftover which resists symbolization. We never arrive at the presence of the body since the letter not only covers it totally but is also its ontological basis, the locus of the productive from which practice and production emerges. The authority of the Letter can only be attacked from within: the deconstruction of meaning after and along with the deconstruction of the body in *Hamletmachine* is a confrontation with Ideology on several planes.

One of the fundamental attempts of Müller's text is to *get outside of itself*: itself unavoidably being a representation not devoid of ideology. Through its multi-layered references to the historical-political-literary canon it creates a complex referentiality which tries to eliminate itself through its exuberance: to undermine the authority of the text as such in order to deconstruct the authority of Ideology behind meaning.

The first theme which appears at the very beginning of the text is that of the construction of identity and the rejection of this identity: "I was Hamlet." (HM 53)<sup>71</sup> The extremely connotative nature of the name Hamlet serves several purposes: the tragic hero itself is representative of the theme of identity as manifested in literature, but it also refers to the machinery of the literary and socio-political institution which produces a cultural cliché out of this name. The name Hamlet is an *emblematic condensation* of imposed identity, canon-formation, interpellation, the linguistic positioning of the subject in society by the act of naming. The particular name here is extremely powerful, but this way it is capable of revealing that we are all Hamlets, that we all shape our identities according to available patterns of the social imagery. The rejection of this identity (I was Hamlet) is a fight with the Name: with the "procreators" (the Name of the Father), with history, with time and eventually with the body, which may appear to be something else than the crossing point of the above discourses but which also turns out to be the production and the bearer of these cultural and ideological markers. The problem is whether the peeling of the marks off the body can arrive at any remainder.

"I dispensed my dead procreator." (HM 53) The rejection of the predecessors is a struggle against the historical situatedness and linearity: the past, which is constructed through the interpretation of the traces that arrive at us (here: the body

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<sup>71</sup> References to *Hamletmachine* are from MÜLLER 1984.

of old Hamlet), is dispensed. The future is prevented: "Tomorrow morning has been cancelled." (HM 54) All the text wants to concentrate on is the Presence of the present moment: the desperate deixis of the speech acts serves to conjure up this presence: "Now, I tie your hands...Now, I tear the wedding dress...Now, I smear the shreds...Now, I take you..." (HM 54)

However, the present is not part of a linearity but only a momentary fixation at the crossing point of various discursive traces. After the rejection of linearity and history, even this present moment is deconstructed and denied: "I'm not Hamlet. I don't take part anymore." (HM 54) The text denies itself; after emptying all the markers it bears, the subject rejects its own presence: "My drama doesn't happen anymore." (HM 54) The meta-theatricality of these sentences is part of the self-reflexive nature of the text.

*Hamletmachine* tries to resist and avoid the emergence of any "coherent" meaning, coherence being an ideological containment which projects the notion of unified identity and structure onto that which is ultimately fragmented ("history", "identity", "the work of art"). The resistance against these technologies of containment and authority is the persistent act of fragmentation in the text, in which the very identity of the work dissolves.

The drama presents itself not as a self-identical Work of Art which is a representation by the Author, but as a *presence of the Textual itself*. The incoherence, fragmentation of the play is part of the attempt to stage not a play but a text, the nature of a cultural practice. The theatrical experience here emerges not from a cognitive process but from the manifestation of the Text.<sup>72</sup> The event that the Actor does not succeed in dissolving this text, the fact that even after the announcement of its end the Hamlet-actor is still part of the play-text manifests the resistance and the persistency of the Letter. The photograph of the author (which, in my imagined staging, should be that of the Hamlet-actor) is torn apart: the Author has no control or authority over the text: the text produces and then eliminates the writer. "Work toward the disappearance of the author is work against the disappearance of humankind." (MÜLLER 1984. Afterword.)

This event disrupts the automatized connection between representation and authority. It brings into crisis the spectator's meaning-making (or comfortable identity-producing) activity through the *denial of automatic subject-positions* that the spectator aims at occupying in the act of reception. At the same time, however, it also further complicates the question of the subject's ability to get beyond the textual, beyond the cultural production of manipulative meanings. After the rejection of the Name of the Father, history, the cultural canon, the linearity of

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. BLAU 1990. Ch.III. "The Most Concealed Object."

time and the fabricated identity, the attention is focused on the body and its abjection.

The disruption of theatrical and ideological coherency starts focusing on the *abjection of the body* already in Act II, where Ophelia/Chorus/Hamlet is again introduced as a cultural emblem, the continual trace of the "Ophelia-identity": the psychotic woman always in the process of killing herself. However, this cliché also stages a revolt and stops the process constitutive of her identity: "Yesterday I stopped killing myself." (HM 54) The props of her ideological captivity, the clothes, the bed, the chair, the table, the clock (waiting) are destroyed, and the abject body shows itself and its ideological markers (breast, thighs, womb) clothed in blood: the fluidity which defines her as the Other of society, the unstructured which has to be contained, marginalized in symbolization. Fluidity escapes ideological containment and brings the spectator to the borderlines of meaning. This blood is not strictly feminine any more but participates in the theatrical abjection of the body which probes the limits of identity as dependant on meaning. Ophelia is still triumphant in her revolution, but Hamlet's revolution is eventually abandoned in the great self-annihilating monologue of ACT IV. The actor/author wants to step out of the performance, but the theatrical space still controls him, and "Unnoticed by the actor playing Hamlet", the tools of ideology appear again (refrigerator, TV-sets: consumerism).

The narrative about the revolution and the schizophrenic revolutionary subject is representative of the fundamental split of the subject. The intervention of ideology renders it impossible for the subject to be on both sides, to be contained by and to revolt against ideology at the same time, just like the symbolic positioning of the speaking subject renders it impossible to satisfy and contain desire simultaneously. The borderline is under erasure in the play here: "My place, if my drama would still happen, would be on both sides of the front." (HM 56) The search for the authentic subject, after the overthrow of the authority of the male writer, converges toward the "undivided self", the disintegration not only of any identity but of the body as well. The opening of the flesh sealed by ideology is a desperate attempt to penetrate as deep into the abject as possible, to escape the symbolic coding by the mutilating exploration of the body. Nausea, blood, excrement become a privilege, a jump out of meaning.

"I force open my sealed flesh. I want to dwell in my veins, in the marrow of my bones, in the maze of my skull. I retreat into my entrails. I take seat in my shit, in my blood." (HM 57) But the attempt is utopian: the drama is not happening, and the machine beneath the disintegrated body is incapable of action. The actor/author steps back into the armor of history, and kills his political predecessors: but, once again, inside the ideological.

The "revolution scene" contains precise references to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 (the fall of the Stalin statue, the speech on the balcony of the Parliament, the first confrontations with the police), and the schizophrenic experience of the soldiers who were ordered to shoot at their own civilian fellow citizens. The actor/author wants to be on both sides, to bridge the gap in the divided self: "I see myself in the crowd pressing forward, foaming at the mouth, shaking my fist at myself." (HM 56) The subject shaking his/her fist at him/herself is the one free of the antagonism of society, the one which is not alienated from him/herself through "misrecognition." *Hamletmachine* does not even pretend to be the drama of that impossible, unrepresentable subject; the drama negates itself ("My drama does not take place..."), but it does so in a narrative which still holds it within the boundaries of representation. As long as the character speaks, the play cannot step out of itself.

Does the fragmented text, then, offer itself as a site for resistance to ideology? Or is it the resistance of the text that is still controlling the actor/subject? The body is unable to get totally rid of its social markings; its total abjection may liquify the identity of the spectator, but the actor himself survives only as a machine back in the armor, the *ideological costume*, without a meaningful future. Nausea, blood, excrement, fluidity become privileged sites of subversion in *Hamletmachine*, sites of potential extra-textuality. At this point, everything depends on the *staging* of the play, which should observe the *internal logic* of the play. According to the present interpretation, this logic does not allow the Hamlet-subject to dissolve and appear on stage as a *really* abject spectacle, drowning in blood. The Hamlet-actor, who has by this time become a Hamlet-machine, only *narrates abjection*, which can appear around him on the stage, but he himself stays isolated, separated from the immediacy of the experience, since his narrator-position keeps him captive of the textual space. This logic makes the drama and the Hamlet-subject in general *the metaphor of the representing and represented subject*, who cannot be fully present to him/herself as long as his/her self-reflexive subjectivity is constituted by the actuality of discourse.

The scene of the Ice Age concludes Müller's anti-drama. The revolutionary attempt is seemingly transferred from Hamlet to the Other, the female Ophelia-identity. But Ophelia is bound. While Hamlet endures the millenniums in his fearful armor (my reading), the Body of the Other emerges as a possible site of productive resistance which is paradoxical: resistance as a denial of biological production, procreation. However, Ophelia's attempt, once more, is only a narrative: her prediction about the revelation of truth offered by death flies as an exalted and twisted propaganda-statement and she remains motionless in a deserted,

apocalyptic space. The revolutionary and extra-textual subject, in the end, did not come into being.

*Hamletmachine* does not get beyond itself, beyond representation. It shows the impossibility of that *presence* on the stage which Artaud wanted to achieve in the theater of cruelty.<sup>73</sup> However, the director can make use of the strategies of fragmentation offered by the text, and the performance can arrive at the full presence of the TEXT itself: baring the mechanism of Ideology, unveiling the logic of representation. In this respect, *Hamletmachine* realizes Brecht's idea of the theater as *a locus of social productivity*, and increases the spectator's awareness of his/her discursive ideological positionality.

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. DERRIDA, Jacques, "Le théâtre de la cruauté et la clôture de la représentation." In: *L'écriture et la différence*. Éditions de Seuil, Paris, 1967.

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**DEMAND, DESIRE AND THE DRIVE  
in Sidney's Texts and Their Contexts**

by  
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My interest in Philip Sidney was evoked by the seminars of György Endre Szőnyi in 1989/90 at Attila József Tudományegyetem and later evolved into writing a research paper under his guidance. The following thesis, then, in its present form, was written as a series of term papers for private tutorial classes with Casey Charles in the Winter and Spring of 1994 at the University of Oregon. Many of the ideas in it were learnt, borrowed from or conjured up with him.

## INTRODUCTION

Psychoanalytical theory has left the confines of the mental clinic and — among other fields — broken into the field of literary criticism. The "hermeneutic approach" within psychoanalysis emphasizes that texts, as well as people, can be "psycho-analyzed." Moreover, the French founder of the *école freudienne*, Jacques Lacan, argues that Freud's analysis of people via, for example, the analysis of their dreams, was already the analysis of a linguistic structure, a "discourse":

...in *The Interpretation of Dreams* every page deals with what I call the letter of the discourse, in its texture, its usage, its immanence in the matter in question. For it is with this work that Freud begins to open the royal road to the unconscious.... The linguistic structure that enables us to read dreams is the very principle of the "significance of the dream," the *Traumdeutung*.<sup>74</sup>

Lacan takes up the Freudian task of interpreting "linguistic structures" when he undertakes the task of re-reading Freud's writings. "Commenting on a text is like doing an analysis," as he defines the relation of psychoanalysis and textual interpretation.<sup>75</sup> In his theory, language and interpretation become inseparable from traditional psychoanalytic issues, such as the problem of symptoms, transference, etc. For him therapy and theory are not one another's opposites, but they are manifestations of the same hermeneutical process. Lacanian theory thus, fulfilling the hermeneutical purpose which is inherent in psychoanalysis, becomes a convenient tool for interpreting non-clinical texts, for example literature.

While psychoanalysis has become an established (although not unchallenged) part of standard literary criticism and theory, the question of submitting literary texts written before the modern era to psychoanalysis is still a matter of controversy. Analysing texts written before the foundation of a Cartesian world-view and subjectivity, which psychoanalysis has attempted to challenge and of which, undeniably, is itself some sort of an heir, contradicts the logic of theoretical explanation; it can be argued that these texts are outside the range of Freudian theory. Lacan points out Freud's indebtedness to the Cartesian philosophical, scientific tradition in the following manner:

The colophon of doubt.... indicates that Freud places his certainty, his *Gewissheit*, only in the constellation of the signifiers as they result from the recounting, the commentary, the association, even if they are later retracted.

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<sup>74</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 159.

<sup>75</sup> Lacan, *Seminar I* 73. Quoted by Judith Butler in her "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary," *Differences* (4, 1, 1992) 140.

Everything provides signifying material.... That is why I compare it to the Cartesian method.<sup>76</sup>

Here, Lacan locates that element, doubt, within Freudism, which closely links it to the Cartesian tradition and consequently to a tradition of the subject as the perception-consciousness system of positivist science. This doubt is, at the same time, that inherent uncertainty within Cartesian philosophy which, pointing towards the linguistic uncertainty of the unconscious, undermines its basic premises, the idea of a unified consciousness, the *cogito*.

Such an intimate interrelation of Cartesian thought and psychoanalysis brings up the problem of interpreting pre-Cartesian texts in an intensified manner. This problem — as another fundamental uncertainty — has, in reality, been in the core of psychoanalysis since Freud analyzed the Oedipus-complex of the Sophoclesian hero who, since then, lends his name to the phenomenon. Joel Fineman, a contemporary psychoanalytical critic of Renaissance literature, summarizes the famous Oedipus/Hamlet versus Freud controversy in the following manner: "Is Shakespeare a Freudian or is Freud a Shakespearean?"<sup>77</sup> His suggestion for solving the controversy is to reject the logic of cause and effect in psychoanalytical literary criticism: "There is at least a possibility that modernist...theories of the self are not so much a theoretical account or explanation of subjectivity as they are the conclusion of a literary subjectivity initially invented in the Renaissance."<sup>78</sup> Fineman rejects the authoritative position of (psychoanalytical) theory of subjectivity over literary manifestations of subjectivity. Such a dethronement of theory is also a refusal of the logic of the relationship between cause and effect — according to him, neither did Shakespeare beget psychoanalysis, nor did psychoanalysis beget Shakespeare — , which is the only way to validate the psychoanalytical interpretation of a Renaissance text.

I agree with Joel Fineman's proposal to place psychoanalytical theory on the same plane — neither above, nor below — with a Renaissance text. This proposal allows for a text oriented method of interpretation instead of a solution oriented one and, thus, is closer to the hermeneutical agenda of Freudian-Lacanian theory. The text oriented critic does not look for solutions, "theoretical accounts" of the rebus of a text, but concentrates on its particularities, "its texture, its usage, its immanence in the matter in question."<sup>79</sup> It will be my attempt to follow his method and carry out a text oriented interpretation, applying the Lacanian theory

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<sup>76</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed., Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978) 44.

<sup>77</sup> Joel Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 46.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 47.

<sup>79</sup> Lacan, *Écrits* 159.

of demand, desire and the drive to a Renaissance text and its contexts. In Lacanian theory, demand, desire and the drive are three different manifestations of the subject's attraction to an object, which is a common theme in the literary texts to be analyzed. The following three essays, which constitute the paper, will attempt to prove that a Renaissance text is an appropriate place to witness psychoanalytical theory in the form of demand, desire and the drive.

The literary texts which will be the subject of my analysis are Sir Philip Sidney's two *Arcadias* (the *Old Arcadia* and the *New Arcadia*) and two further texts, which constitute their context — an early Renaissance Italian poet Sannazaro's *Arcadia* and Ovid's well-known story "Pygmalion" from *Metamorphoses*. I will look at Sidney's *Arcadias* in three different ways.

The first part of the paper will examine demand, looking at the theme of unrequited love as it appears in the eclogues of the *Old Arcadia* and their Italian predecessor, Sannazaro's *Arcadia*. From here on, demand will be defined as the "deviation of man's needs from the fact that he speaks in the sense that in so far as his needs are subjected to demand, they return to him alienated."<sup>80</sup> Demand, therefore is that kind of speech which alienates the subject from his needs and thus cuts him off from satisfaction. Demand establishes an "unrestorable" split between language (by which Lacan designates speech and writing within the family as well as culture itself) and the pre-linguistic, pre-social biological existence of man. The Lacanian theory of demand is at the same time the theory of culture, for example literature, which emerges by severing itself from the real of biological needs. Such an emergence of demand in the form of love-poetry is characteristic of the bucolic lyric of both Sidney and Sannazaro. Their lyric constitutes a frame which allows the speaking subject (the lyric "I" of the eclogues) to reject the satisfaction of his needs and thus, establish himself as the subject of language.

The second part of the paper will look at the narrative of Sidney's *Old Arcadia* and Ovid's "Pygmalion," a text which the Renaissance narrative establishes as its distant and ambiguous, but recurrent, point of reference. It will be shown that the characters' commonly held sexual frustrations in both texts give the reader an example of Lacanian desire. Desire, as opposed to demand, which marks the split between language and the real of needs, can be defined as a lacking inherent to the symbolic field, the field of language. It is "neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting (Spaltung)."<sup>81</sup> Desire is, therefore, generated by the fact that the symbolic field, by nature, is inflicted with a certain splitting or gap. The Lacanian signifier of this inevitable symbolic lacking, the "symbolic phallus," is what reappears in certain key images in both Sidney and Ovid.

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<sup>80</sup> Lacan, *Ibid.* 286.

<sup>81</sup> Lacan, *Ibid.* 287.

The third part of the paper will look at the heroic features of the narrative of Sidney's revised book, his *New Arcadia*, and Lacan's concept of the drive. By the latter, Lacan means that process of "headless subjectification," that is, that mechanical, repetitive process, to which the symbolic subject is subordinated beyond his symbolic subordination to the castrating, alienating order of language.<sup>82</sup>

The field of the drive is "beyond" the subject's symbolic field of existence, in the sense, that the drive's conservative nature, its endless return, points towards an unchanging excess of the real within the symbolic, which is not affected by language. The heroic nature of Sidney's revised *Arcadia*, defines the book as an excess in two ways: On the one hand, the new version is, in itself, an excess, a "reduplication" in relation to the shorter, non-heroic "old" version. On the other hand, heroism itself, appears to an excessive extent in the revised text; the images associated with heroism occupy central, "over-estimated" positions and the stories which give account of heroic deeds take up a majority of the narrative. This excess of heroism is expected to elevate/sublimate the frustrated sexuality of the narrative of the original version, to "fill in" the gaps of desire in it. The object of the drive's endless circulation, the *object petit a*, is exactly this excess, "a certain type of objects which, in the final resort, can serve no function" as opposed to the "beneficent, favourable objects," the objects of desire.<sup>83</sup> The heroic *objects petit a* in the analyzed literary text, the sword, the armour and the wounds, prove to be such forms of excess, which also represent that "point of lack" in which "the subject has to recognize himself," which is an impending threat to the subject's symbolic existence.<sup>84</sup>

Thus, in the following three parts, it will be my attempt to show that, even if psychoanalytical criticism is not prevalent in Renaissance literary scholarship, Renaissance texts and modern psychoanalysis both function as interrelated catalysts, which generate the process of the interpretation of the other text. Thus, reading these two types of text side by side allows for a text oriented interpretation, in which the theoretical text and the literary text can equally be foci of analysis.

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<sup>82</sup> Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 184.

<sup>83</sup> Lacan, *Ibid.* 242.

<sup>84</sup> Lacan, *Ibid.* 270.

## PART ONE

### "Sweet tunes do passions ease": Sidney's and Sannazaro's Eclogues as Manifestations of Lacanian Demand

Mastix, one of the shepherds in the eclogues of the *Old Arcadia*, names "blow point," "hot cocles," and "keels" as the shepherd's favorite pastimes. He forgets, however, to name among these popular games the most popular one, the singing contest, in which he himself is partaking.<sup>85</sup> Singing, often in the form of a contest, is the predominant "game" among shepherds — at least, among those of the literary genre. Virgil's *Eclogues*, for example, are entirely made up of songs of shepherds. Later, Sannazaro, in his *Arcadia*, became the first poet to combine songs with narrative elements. Even for him, however, the narrative is of secondary importance; the songs, in the form of eclogues, dominate his book. Sidney, who follows Sannazaro in combining narrative with prose, writes eclogues which remain independent from the narrative plot. Even some of the main characters of the narrative part, for example Pyrocles/Cleophila and Musidorus/Dorus, are willing to postpone their amorous plottings in the eclogues and be content with merely singing about love. The narrative's forward progress is, thus, repeatedly stopped by the eclogues, in which the characters entirely devote themselves to static singing.

In the first part of my paper, I will examine the relationship between this thriving lyric poetry and the woman to whom most songs are sung. In order to do this, I will look at the eclogues of Sidney's *Old Arcadia* and the eclogues of Sannazaro's *Arcadia*, arguing that the eclogues in both books are manifestations of the Lacanian concept of demand, which designates the subject's attempt to re-establish the pre-symbolic, imaginary stage of fullness within language. In order to find a common ground between the otherwise distant discourses of the pastoral and psychoanalysis, I will compare the eclogues to the structurally similar "fort-da game," which in psychoanalytical literature is known as the archetypal story of demand. Then, I will look at those particular characteristics of the eclogues, which allow us to define them as forms of demand. For example, the singing contests are

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<sup>85</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The Old Arcadia)*, ed., Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) 69. Hereafter, page numbers in parentheses, in the body of the text, will refer to this edition.

never really contests between shepherds; rather they are contests for the recognition of a third party, the woman whom the shepherd loves. This woman is the addressee of the shepherd's songs; she is, however, never addressed as an actual person, but as a set of conventional poetic images. Moreover, she exists in the poet's imagination as a phantasy, which Lacan calls the (m)Other of demand. Demand itself works as a metaphor, which substitutes this phantasy-Other for the mother, lost at the acquisition of language. The eclogues follow the metaphorical structure of demand, since the actuality of the woman is abolished in them and she is turned first into a metaphorical discourse, usually into landscape metaphors, then into a source of symbolic meaning and imaginary love. This metaphorical discourse of demand is believed by the subject-poet to compensate him for his Oedipal loss.

This phantasy of the woman-Other makes the poet's lyrics thrive through deprivation. In order for demand to be maintained undisturbed, the dialectical relation of demand to the non-linguistic "needs" requires that the woman-Other should be posited as inaccessible, as someone who deprives the shepherd of her own presence. Conventionally, thus, the woman of the pastoral is cold and refusing; she is absent from the pastoral scenario. In this way, the shepherd's "clamour" is the loudest and the most undisturbed when his love for the woman is the most unhappy and unrequited. Pastoral poetry, thus, thrives by covering over the gap of alienation inherent to language through a love relation with an imaginary Other.

### The Oppositional Structure of the Pastoral

The pastoral genre is inseparable from the myth of the Golden Age, described by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*. For classical, medieval and Renaissance readers, it presents the vision of how the world ought to be. What most definitions of the pastoral share in common is that it creates the phantasy of an idyllic place and/or time, to which men can withdraw to redress their wounds gained in amorous courtings and political intrigue. Critics do not always agree what the perfect features are which belong to the ideal state the pastoral envisions. Poggioli, for example, defines this "golden age" on the basis of free love. The pastoral genre, he asserts, "projects its unrealizable yearning after free love into a state of nature that exists nowhere, or only in the realm of myth."<sup>86</sup> At the same time, the pastoral also envisions a world devoid of physical needs, social or political tensions and any kind of constraints. In all pastorals, there is a reference to the myth of a golden past of some sort. In Sannazaro's *Arcadia*, for example, we get the following lengthy account of the past from the old shepherd, Serrano:

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<sup>86</sup> Renato Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1975) 43.

One man could not grow wrathful toward another:  
the fields were common and without boundaries  
and Plenty caused her fruits always to spring forth anew.

(...)

The happy lovers and the tender maidens  
went from meadow to meadow renewing in their minds  
the fire and the bow of the son of Venus.

There was no jealousy, but pleasing themselves  
they trod their sweet dances to the sound of the cither,  
and in the manner of doves exchanging kisses.<sup>87</sup>

Sannazaro's fairly conventional description at once employs the images of a lack of social tension, freedom, fulfilled love and natural plenitude. There is, however, more than just a description of a perfect state in this part of the text. Serrano tells the story of the past with a special purpose, in order to contrast the present, the corrupted state of Arcadia. His nostalgic account of the past is evoked by the story of another shepherd, Opico, who says that, in the present, "faith is dead and envies hold the reign; and bad practices grow stronger every hour."<sup>88</sup> Serrano's "heart is pierced with an empoisoned and incurable wound," when tells the story, which indicates the present state of sadness and void, as opposed to the happiness and plenitude of the past.<sup>89</sup> What we encounter here is not simply an idyllic situation, but a contrasting of that past state of bliss with the present turmoil. The contrast, however, is not only between the past and the present, but also within the present. We find stories and lamentations about death (Ergasto's mother and father's) and unrequited love (Sincero, Carino and Clonico's parallel stories of unhappy love) as well as fulfilled and promising love relationships. Gallico, in the third eclogue, for example, sings about his unrequited love, but in the following narrative section, the "crimsoned" face of his beloved Pastorella immediately answers Gallico's Petrarchan laments and renders them unnecessary.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Carino's tormenting unrequited love dissolves into the good omen of the happily kissing doves.<sup>91</sup> These examples suggest that the pastoral — rather than solely envisioning an idealized state of love, peace, satisfaction nor a state of complete lack and sorrow

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<sup>87</sup> Jacopo Sannazaro, *Arcadia*, trans. Ralph Nash (Detroit, 1966) 67-68.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 65.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* 68.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* 49-50.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* 82.

— operates by creating a tension between the two types of visions.<sup>92</sup> The pastoral scenario is conventionally set up in the way that it is capable of integrating any opposition, ranging from plenitude to loss, from happy to unhappy love or from court to the country. Thus, prior to the question of what the subject matter of the pastoral is, what kind of perfection it presents, we should look at the structure of the pastoral genre. The focus on the structure of the pastoral reveals its closeness to another cultural phenomenon, very distant in subject matter, but similar in structure. This cultural phenomenon is a game, used in psychoanalysis to understand/explain the mastering of oppositions.

### The Pastoral as the "fort-da" Game

In psychoanalysis there is an exemplary story of the signification of oppositions, known as the "fort-da" game. This game was the invention of Freud's one and a half-year-old grandson. The game takes place when his mother leaves the small child for her everyday chores. It consists of the child's throwing away a small reel and then pulling it back on a string, while repeating the words "fort" (gone) and "da" (there)<sup>93</sup>. The reel, thus, serves as a means for the child to master the oppositions of absence and presence or here and there. In the Renaissance pastoral, in the phantasy land of extreme opposites, the bucolic poet attempts to master oppositions in a similar way. He subordinates all oppositions in his poetry to one main opposition, the absence and presence of the woman.<sup>94</sup> The woman is the shepherd's main concern, either the condition of his well-being or the cause of his

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<sup>92</sup> D.M. Halperin arrives at the same conclusion. After reviewing the classical and Renaissance concepts of the pastoral, he establishes four criteria necessary for the genre, one of which is the oppositional nature of pastoral texts. He asserts that these texts achieve "significance by oppositions, by the set of contrasts, express or implied, which the values embedded in its world create with other ways of life." See D.M. Halperin, *Before Pastoral: Theocritus and the Ancient Tradition of Bucolic Poetry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983) 64.

<sup>93</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. C.J.M. Hubback. (London: The International Psycho-Analytic Press, 1922) 14-15.

<sup>94</sup> The influence of Petrarchism on the pastoral genre has a significant role in the thematic dominance of the shepherd's love for the woman—and consequently his preoccupation with her absence and presence—in the Renaissance pastoral. Sannazaro's undertaking is archetypal in this sense. His *Arcadia* is the first Petrarchan pastoral, which Sidney closely followed both in the mixed (lyric-prose) structure of his *Old Arcadia* and in the form of certain particular eclogues. On the influence of Petrarchism on Sannazaro and Sidney, see David Kalstone, *Sidney's Poetry: Contexts and Interpretations* (New York: Norton, 1977) 9-39.

plight. In the *Arcadia* of Jacopo Sannazaro, who is the founder of Renaissance pastoral, for example, the whole country becomes the projection of the main character's mind. Sincero is a sojourner from the city, who is lamenting over the loss of his mistress. In his lamentation, the natural images of fullness ("daylight bright" or "green hills") are associated with her perfections, while the natural images of lack and suffering ("places shadowy and black") are associated with her cruel refusal of Sincero's poetical wooing.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, the reader often finds shepherds like Ofelia and Elenco, for whom the most pleasant Arcadian idyllic situation is the loved woman's presence, and the lack of this bliss is her absence:

The woods are shady: and were not my sun  
now present you would see in novel fashion  
the flowers withered and the springs exhausted.

The mountain bare, and there is no climbing further;  
but if my sun appear there, I shall see it yet  
clothing itself with grass in a pleasant shower.<sup>96</sup>

Just as Sincero, Ofelia and Elenco also use the sun as the metaphor of the woman who penetrates every inch of the literary landscape, just as the sun penetrates into the woods and mountains of Arcadia. In this way, the woman becomes the signifier of presence and absence in the hands of the Arcadian shepherd. The woman is the main signifier, the "reel," in the rudimentary form of language, which is embedded in the basis of the pastoral tradition and its elaborate metaphors. The shepherd's singing contest is, thus, an elaborate, adult version of the fort-da game. As the child learns to master the signification of absence and presence, by throwing away and pulling back the reel, the shepherd, using the signifiers "present woman" and "absent woman," hopes to master language, as it is manifested in the art of poetry.

### **The "Woman" as the Addressee of Bucolic Poetry: The Other of Demand**

The "fort-da" game, for Freud, illustrates the supremacy of the pleasure-principle. The consequences he draws from the observation of the game are that there are always "ways and means" of making of "what is in itself disagreeable, the object of memory and psychic preoccupation."<sup>97</sup> The disagreeable memory the child has to learn to cope with is his weaning. The game Freud's grandson plays is a way of learning to deal with a traumatic experience, to compensate himself for the loss of the mother. The game can be seen as a rudimentary exercise in language

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<sup>95</sup> Sannazaro 75.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 99.

<sup>97</sup> Freud 16.

acquisition, what Saussure would define as the signification of the difference between absence and presence as well as the phonemic differences of the two syllables. Lacan re-reads Freud's text and further interprets it, arguing that the game represents the moment "in which the child is born into language."<sup>98</sup> He adds that the "fort-da" game not only represents language because the differential nature of the symbolic system is embodied in the two "elementary exclamations" of "fort" and "da", but also because by repeating these words, the child becomes engaged in the "concrete discourse of the environment," he picks up his words from a space alien to him, the family, society and language.<sup>99</sup> Thus, with the first pair of words uttered by the small child, he enters the cultural heritage, linguistic field surrounding him, which is called by Lacan language or the big Other. The game, thus, creates a symbolic register in which the absent mother, whose loss is the consequence of the incest taboo and the castration threat, is repressed and the place of her loss is covered over by a system of signifiers. For the subject this means that, although the loss of the real mother can never be filled in, the signification of her going away and coming back, or any signification, allows him to avoid that real, pre-symbolic lack in his speech. Lacan calls this manifestation of language "demand." He further states that the subject uses demand in order to fill in the gap of the subject's repressed desire for the lost mother.

Demand, therefore, strives to fulfill the pleasure principle by reducing the anxiety that the incest taboo and the castration threat implants into the subject. While doing so, however, it reiterates this Oedipal loss, which is constitutive of the speaking subject. When the child is denied access to the mother by the prohibitions involved in the Oedipus-complex and represented by the phallus, he replaces his repressed desire for the mother with an attempt to articulate this desire verbally. To use a simple analogy, the child's gaping mouth, which misses the mother's breast, is filled with words. Demand serves as a way of substituting language for the pre-linguistic loss. Lacan, however, points out that the use of language as a substitute, results in the "deviation of man's needs by the fact that he speaks, in the sense that as long as his needs are subjected to demand, they return to him alienated."<sup>100</sup> That is, demand is always for something more than what the subject needs. While the subject's needs are satisfiable with certain objects during his undifferentiated symbiosis with the mother, "they return to him alienated," after his entrance into language. Being the consequence of the phallic intervention into the mother-child dyad, where needs are satisfied, demand comes about as the result of the unrestorable split between the real (needs) and the symbolic (demand).

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<sup>98</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 103.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* 103.

<sup>100</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, eds., Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1982) 80.

Because of the self-referential nature of language, demand is never capable of compensating the subject for what he has lost.<sup>101</sup> The loss, which reappears in the phenomenon of "splitting" (Spaltung) between need and demand, indicates that demand is unsatisfied and unsatisfiable by nature.<sup>102</sup>

To the question of what makes demand capable of furnishing the subject with the belief that language can compensate him for the loss crucial to his emergence, the eclogues provide us with a more elaborate answer than the fort-da game. The eclogues, often sung as singing contests, posit a figure of authority for their field of poetry, by whom the compensating power of language is guaranteed. Formally, the singing contest is the contest of two or more shepherds in verse. However, the rules of the contest dictate that there be a "third party" present. This "third party" is not present as a speaking voice, but only in the phantasy of the shepherds. For example, in the First Eclogues of Sidney's *Old Arcadia*, Lalus and Dorus, two love-sick shepherds, compete to see who can better "signify" his amorous sorrows and the perfection of his mistress (52). Their singing is not a contest in the strict sense of the term, since instead of addressing the other or attempting to surpass him in poetry, they echo parallel stanzas of similar imagery and rhetoric. Their real addressee is not the fellow-poet, but the beloved lady, whose love they demand. For example, when it is time to decide who is the more skillful poet, Dorus, withdrawing from the contest, gives up his aspiration to defeat Lalus, but still keeps his ambition to win the lady's favors:

Of singing thou hast got the reputation  
Good Lalus mine; I yield to thy ability:  
My heart doth seek another estimation. (56-7)

Dorus withdraws from the contest in order to maintain his conversation with and contest for "another estimation," the demanded love of his beloved lady. This example illustrates how the singing contest presents a peculiar form of interpersonality, which is never between the two parties actually present, but between the subject and a "third party," who is absent (only present as a phantasy).

Already in his earlier essays, Lacan emphasizes this interpersonal nature of demand. In "Aggressivity in psychoanalysis," he defines verbal communication within the psychoanalytical practice as the "dialectical grasp of meaning."<sup>103</sup> In the "Function and Field of Speech and Language," he asserts that "all speech calls for a reply" and later he adds that "what I seek in language is the response of the

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<sup>101</sup> "No signification can be sustained other than by reference to another signification." This unescapable self-referentiality of language implies that it can never designate that extra-linguistic realm of needs, which Lacan calls the real. Lacan, *Écrits* 150.

<sup>102</sup> Lacan, *FS* 80.

<sup>103</sup> Lacan, *Écrits* 9.

other."<sup>104</sup> The interpersonality of demand ("verbal communication" and "speech") is, therefore, not to be understood in the sense communication theories define interpersonality. Interpersonality for Lacan does not mean the transmission of a "signal" from a sender to a receiver, from one subject to the other.<sup>105</sup> Lacan refuses this communication model when he asserts that language is not a business between the subject and another subject. The addressee of demand is never the other subject, but a fantasized authority in control over love and meaning.<sup>106</sup> In his later essays Lacan terms the addressee of demand the "Other," in order to distinguish it from the other, the fellow-speaker. The shepherds refuse to consider the singing contest a matter between two shepherds; they consider it a communication between a shepherd and the absent imaginary "woman," in this way elevating her to the position of the Lacanian Other of demand.

The "woman," in order to fulfill the role of the addressee of demand has to take on certain characteristics. She becomes elevated in position and is often referred to as a goddess. In Sannazaro's *Arcadia*, the shepherds elevate Philli after her death to the position of an "earth-goddess." In their lamentation, the landscape becomes her altar and temple. Philisides, the melancholic lover of the *Old Arcadia*, sees Mira, his mistress, in the company of Venus and Diana in his vision-like dream. In this vision Mira, the "waiting nymph" of Diana, exceeds both goddesses in perfection "as orient pearls exceed / That which their mother height, or else their silly seed" (293). Philisides, who, like Paris, is chosen to decide who of the two goddesses is more worthy to rule, boldly appoints Mira, who, in his eyes, is more worthy of the title of a goddess than the real ones. The "goddess" Mira appears as a vision, rather than an actual person and in many ways she is inseparable from the pastoral landscape. She the exemplar of the pastoral "woman," who inhabits the landscape in a pantheistic manner, penetrating into every element of it. When Philisides goes to sleep like a "feeble flow'r" or as a "silly bird," observing "nature's rule," he finds himself in such a "sweet repast," an enchanted "Samoathean" forest inhabited by the goddess Mira (291-2).

The idea that the woman belongs to the Arcadian landscape like a ghost, or a vision is a very frequent theme in both texts. Dorus, for example, describes his love's presence in the following way:

O sweet woods, the delight of solitariness!  
O how well I do like your solitariness!

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 40, 86.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. 83.

<sup>106</sup> In the process of the psychoanalytical treatment the figure of the analyst is transformed into that authority, which "punctuates" the analysand's flow of free association thus "conferring meaning" upon it. Parallel, he also becomes the distinguished object of the analysand's transference. See Jonathan Scott Lee, *Jacques Lacan* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990) 40.

Yet dear soil, if a soul closed in a mansion  
As sweet as violets, fair as lily is,  
Straight as cedar, a voice stains the canary birds,  
(...)  
Oh! If such a one have bent to a lonely life,  
Her steps gladly receive, glad we receive her eyes.  
And think not she does hurt our solitariness,  
For such company decks such solitariness. (146)

He uses the similes of flowers, cedar trees and canary birds in order to describe the beauty of his love, the body which her soul is closed in. The neo-Platonic cliché, which says that the beautiful body of the woman leads her adoring lover to her more perfect soul and then to abstract virtue, is at work here, but transformed in meaning when combined with Dorus' pastoral images. The new connotation Dorus' lines gain is that the woman is imprisoned in the woods, like a bodiless soul or a nymph, who is invisible to the human eye. In the song she is represented only as feet stepping and eyes, two body parts that ensure her presence but do not allow her to take an active part in his "solitariness." She is portrayed as mute and without response to Dorus' feelings. An earlier song by Dorus expresses the same idea. Dorus feels her to be "seen and unknown; heard, but without attention" (57). Here, the woman is reduced to eyes and ears; she is capable of seeing and hearing the shepherd, but she cannot provide him with a reply. The "woman"/Other of demand has to be silenced and transmuted into an empty screen, on which the poet can project his own phantasy, because her answer would disrupt the poet's demand; it would indicate that the Other is not what the subject of demand posits it to be in his phantasy.

### **The "Landscape-Woman": Pastoral Language as Metaphor**

What Lacan terms the Other is different from what the subject fantasizes it to be. It is not a tool in his hand, but an external precondition, that "material support" of the "letter" (language) upon which the speaking subject depends on for his existence. The Other is the field of language into which the subject is born and in which he becomes what he is, a speaking subject.<sup>107</sup> For the child who plays the

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<sup>107</sup> "By 'letter' I designate that material support that concrete discourse borrows from language.

This simple definition assumes that language is not to be confused with the various psychical and somatic functions that serve it in the speaking subject--primarily because language and its structure exist prior to the moment at which each subject at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it"

"fort-da" game, for example, the two syllables of "fort" and "da" are parts of language or the cultural heritage, a linguistic field external to him, in which he "finds" himself, both in the sense of discovering his identity and falling to the lot of existing within that culture outside his own will. Language is called the "Other" because it always transcends the subject's rationalizing, meaning-making attempts, it always remains "other" to him.<sup>108</sup> This "Otherness" of language signifies to the subject the alienation inherent in the language of his demand. Demand recognizes the inherent dependence and alienation of the subject on and from the Other. To cover up the point of alienation the demanding subject creates a phantasy of the Other, different than it is in reality.

In demand, language appears as a metaphor which substitutes the phantasy-Other for the maternal, real loss. Demand creates the phantasy of the Other, in order to compensate the subject for the loss, which constitutes him, as a site of control over language, where the fundamental "Otherness" of language disappears. This presupposed capacity of language to fill in the gap separating the real from its symbolization, defines language as a metaphor. Lacan's formula for the metaphor, "one word for another," follows the logic of substitution:

The creative spark of the metaphor does not spring from the presentation of two images, that is of two signifiers equally actualized. It flashes between two signifiers one of which has taken the place of the other in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present through its metonymic connexion with the rest of the chain.<sup>109</sup>

The Lacanian notion of the metaphor is a such a substitution, which — although in reality it takes place between two signifiers and not between a pre-symbolic entity and the signifier — is interpreted by the subject of demand. Metaphor supports this delusion of demand since in it, "sense emerges from non-sense," in which the non-sense is the irrationality of repressed desire, the effect of language's incapacity to be a maternal substitute, which demand strives to conceal.<sup>110</sup>

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(Lacan, *Écrits* 147-8).

<sup>108</sup> In order to argue that language is not a unified field, Lacan reinterprets its structuralist definition. The field of the Other is "the locus of the signifier's treasure, which does not mean the code's treasure, for it is not the univocal correspondence of a sign with something is preserved in it, but that the signifier is constituted only from a symbolic and enumerable collection of elements in which each is sustained only by its opposition to each of the others" (Lacan, *Écrits* 304).

Jonathan Scott Lee argues that the Other is "the condition structurally necessary for there to be a speaker of language, and this condition is itself utterly distinct--utterly other--from any individual other" (Lee 60).

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, Lacan 157.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, Lacan 158.

Metaphor attempts to make sense out of the nonsensical nature of language invested with lack and desire.<sup>111</sup> Thus, the structure of the metaphor supports the phantasy of demand to substitute the Other for the mother. Demand, addressed to this metaphorical (m)Other, furnishes the subject with an imaginary relation to language, promising a state of fullness and meaning, instead of the lack and irrationality of desire that characterizes the post-castration symbolic field. In the eclogues of Sidney's and Sannazaro's respective *Arcadias*, the actual woman is substituted by the phantasy of the metaphorical "woman."

In the shepherds' demand, the woman becomes the metaphorical Other. Instead of being an actual person, the "woman," to whom most eclogues are addressed and whose excellencies they praise, is a series of conventional images, poetic clichés, a "sexual" and rhetorical "archetype," who remains identical in the different texts.<sup>112</sup> Her image is shaped by the conventions of the pastoral genre, rather than by the attributes of an actual woman. The "woman" of the pastoral is nothing but a discourse, a system of poetic figures (mostly similes and metaphors), into which the shepherd-poet enters and which he has to learn to master in demand. The pastoral repeats the process of language acquisition in the sense that the shepherd, like the small child playing the fort-da game, picks up pieces from a large field of cultural heritage whose existence transcends him. For the child this heritage is language itself, from which he picks up the words "fort" and "da." For the poets of the pastoral genre the cultural heritage is embodied in the conventions of the

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<sup>111</sup> While in metonymy, meaning is always "resisted, excluded, suspended or defended," in metaphor meaning emerges. The reason for this is that "the signifier that produces an effect of 'significance' is not somewhere else, in a dislocation, but instead, appears directly in the chain itself, albeit as a substitute that takes the place of another signifier, thereby deriving it from the chain, repressing and supplanting it." See in Samuel Weber, *Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan's Dislocation of psychoanalysis*, trans. Michael Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 66.

<sup>112</sup> Poggioli 16.

very genre.<sup>113</sup> Most conventionally, the pastoral lyric uses images of the landscape to represent the beloved "woman."

In the conventional discourse of the Renaissance pastoral, heavily influenced by Petrarchism, the beloved lady and the pastoral landscape become so strongly connected that it is hard to separate one from another. The "woman" fades into the landscape and becomes a sort of "landscape-woman," which is itself a metaphor. This transformation of the actual woman into a metaphorical "landscape-woman" in the pastoral, functions as a way of transforming the other into the Other of demand. Strephon, another of Sidney's Arcadian shepherds, for example, believes that his Urania's beauties shine "more than the blushing morning;" she exceeds "in state the stately mountains" and in straightness she outdoes "the cedars of the forest" (287). The main task of the shepherd becomes the naming of his love and the singing contest becomes a contest over who can recite more metaphors for the lady. A typical challenge is the way Lalus challenges Dorus in the First Eclogues: "Come, Dorus, come, let songs thy sorrows signify," adding that "no style is held for base where love well named is" (52). In this challenge, Lalus expresses the main goal of the pastoral love-songs as the naming of the lover. Lalus, himself, recites a number of conventional metaphors for his beloved Kala: a "heap of sweets," "a bee," "a lily field," and "a lamb" (53). Of the two of them, however, Dorus is still the more skillful singer by pastoral standards, since his metaphors are closer to the way the metaphorical mechanism of language, demand, works.

Seemingly against the logic of the "naming-game," Dorus insists that his mistress is beyond naming, that her "name to name were high presumption" (53). But if we re-examine the Lacanian definition of the metaphor, whose "creative spark (...) does not spring from the representation of two images, that is of two signifiers equally actualized," we find that Dorus' reluctance to name his beloved lady realizes the function of the metaphor better than Lalus' direct and abundant metaphors. This is true, since in the metaphor, two signifiers, one of which is

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<sup>113</sup> Historically, for the sixteenth and seventeenth-century subject, the pastoral was the genre through which he could enter the Other of poetic discourse. It was the genre in which the young and aspiring poets-to-be of the Elizabethan era first tired their hands. According to Sidney, it was the "lowest hedge to leap over." The pastoral, as a central part of school curriculums, served as a means of initiating the Elizabethan schoolboy into the political and cultural discourses of the era. The school, being the representative of these dominant discourses, was also a site of "second weaning," a site where they did not have to deal with actual women, but had to leave their mothers and sisters behind. Instead of the maternal, domestic space, they had to deal with figures and tropes, classics and rhetoric. See Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed., Forrest G. Robinson (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1970) 42; Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991) 79-85.

substituted for the other, are *not* "equally actualized," only the absent or "occulted" signifier is a necessary element of the metaphor.<sup>114</sup> Therefore, when Dorus calls the lady unnameable, he follows the logic of the metaphor faithfully. Only as absent and unnameable can the "woman" appear as the "occulted" signifier of the metaphor, the lost (m)Other of demand. The more Dorus talks about her being beyond naming, the better his words, his demand, fill in the gap of her absence. In this way, for Dorus, any word he utters (his demand), becomes a metaphor that is substituted for the real loss, which is, ultimately, at the core of his poetry (signification in general). While Lalus uses metaphors in his poetry, we can say that Dorus uses language, in general, as a metaphor.

In the Lacanian system, the phallus, the "paternal metaphor," functions as the indicator of the metaphorical mechanism of language. In Sidney's *Old Arcadia*, the metaphor of the sun (sunset, sunrise), in the songs of Dorus and Philisides, takes on the function of the phallic signifier and thus tells us a great deal about the working of language as a metaphor:

Feed on my sheep; my charge, my comfort, feed;  
With sun's approach your pasture fertile grows,  
O only sun that such a fruit can breed.

Leave off my sheep: it is no time to feed,  
My sun is gone, your pasture barren grows,  
O cruel sun, thy hate this harm doth breed.(110)

The metaphor of the sun is the most frequent metaphor the Arcadian shepherd uses to designate his love. On the one hand, the signifiers "sunset" and "sunrise" in the two subsequent stanzas work similarly to the reel in the "fort-da" game; they are the signifiers of absence and presence: The presence of the sun is the shepherd's "da," which signifies fertility and prosperity in the pastoral world. This state of presence is opposed by the sun's absence, which is the signifier of absence, barrenness, the poet's "fort." The images,  $\pm$  sun, in this sense, work in a homologous manner to Saussurean signifiers, which only exist in their opposition to one-another. On the other hand, the image of the sun represents the more complex Lacanian notion of the signifier as well. Behind the sun's fluctuation between absence and presence, there is a steady presence, which transcends this fluctuation. When the "sun" is gone (that is when absence, "fort" is signified), its cruelty and hatred are still present, which suggests that there is a second function of the signifying "sun." This "second sun," which the poet addresses with the "O cruel sun" exclamation, transcends the "sun"/"no sun" opposition. This transcendence of a certain signifier over signification is that Lacanian signifier which is the pre-condition of all signification. Lacan calls this powerful signifier the phallus, or

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<sup>114</sup> Lacan, *Écrits* 157.

the paternal metaphor. The paternal metaphor is the indicator of how signification works: first, it creates a lack through the Oedipal prohibitions (incest taboo and castration threat), then covers it over with a system of signifiers. To some extent every signifier works like the paternal metaphor. Lacan call this effect of the signifier the metaphorical side of the "effective field constituted by the signifier," because the metaphor re-enacts castration and abolishes the subject and fills in its empty space with another signifier.<sup>115</sup> In the same way, the actual woman is abolished and expelled from the pastoral text, by the metaphor of the sun, only to be preserved as the (m)Other of the shepherd's demand.

### The "Woman's" Refusal

We have seen so far that in order to play the role of the fantasized Other, the woman, cannot be present in the pastoral scenario, except in the form of a phantasy. However, because demand has to be, by definition, unsatisfied and unsatisfiable, this phantasy-woman, this poetic cliché, is created in such a way that she is inaccessible to the man. Unrequited love dominates the pastoral discourse of love. The "woman's" power is more in depriving the man of herself, than in rewarding him with her presence. What happens in the eclogues is that the poet, in his demand, "constitutes this Other as already possessing the 'privilege' of satisfying needs, that is, the power to deprive them of the one thing by which they are satisfied."<sup>116</sup> In other words, the logic of demand dictates that only as long as the woman-Other deprives the shepherd from the satisfaction of his needs, can the male subject maintain the illusion that she is capable of bestowing bigger gifts upon him; her love raised to the phallic power. "Hence it is that demand cancels out (aufhebt) the particularity of anything which might be granted by transmuting it into a proof of love, and the very satisfactions of need which it obtains are degraded (sich erniedrigt) as being no more than a crushing of the demand for love."<sup>117</sup> The eclogues serve as an example of how the "absolute Otherness of the woman" secures the man's "self-knowledge and truth."<sup>118</sup>

Freud's grandson, after becoming engaged in his game, refuses the presence of the mother and takes great pleasure in his solitary game. Freud notes that the child plays "going away" more often than "coming back," as if he was saying: "Yes, you can go, I don't want you, I am sending you away myself."<sup>119</sup> He is that subject of demand who realizes that if the other is present to satisfy his need, he

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 156.

<sup>116</sup> Lacan, *FS* 80.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 50.

<sup>119</sup> Freud 14.

will never be propelled to articulate his demand — the satisfaction of a need is a "crushing of the demand for love." The lack of the other, via the lack of the satisfaction of a need, is what supports the shepherd's demand. The Lacanian concept of demand can be found behind the idea, so popular in the Renaissance pastoral, that poetry and love, especially unrequited love, are closely connected: "As without breath no pipe doth move, / No music kindly without love," is the summary of some shepherds' argument about the nature of love in the First Eclogues of the *Old Arcadia*. (52). We may add that love kindles music better when unrequited.

The shepherd, then, is more and more deprived of his love and as a consequence, sinks more deeply into despair. He usually arrives at a state at which the woman's inaccessibility nearly kills him. Pyrocles/Cleophila, for example, sings a song about his attempt to use his eyes to communicate with his beloved lady. The deprivation the lady inflicts on him consists of refusing to answer him. This cruelty almost drives Pyrocles to a strange death:

Yet dying, and dead, do we sing her honour;  
So become our tombs monuments of her praise;  
So becomes our loss the triumph of her gain;  
Hers be the glory. (73)

For Pyrocles, death, the state of complete deprivation, paradoxically represents an exalted state; the real triumph does not belong to the lady, but to him, who transforms "her gain" into his means of poetic self-fulfillment. As a result of his "death," the poet is transformed into a "monument," a source, from which praise of the lady is emanated. The metaphor he chooses to describe this state a few stanzas later, in the same sapphics, is the musical instrument, a flute or a lute, which is a dead, "mute timber" brought into life, into music, which can play love songs only in its death (73).

In the Fourth Eclogues of Sidney's *Old Arcadia*, the cruelty of the "woman" and the suffering of her male lover become the central theme of the almost unstoppable flow of the poet's demand. She is described, for example, as "hard," "fierce" and revengeful by Philisides. Although Philisides is driven into near death by this "heavenly tiger," together with his tears, his ink also flows unstoppably (297). His sorrow and frustration propel his singing so much that he could go on for ever "telling the rest of his unhappy adventures, and by what desperate works of fortune he was become a shepherd." Fortunately, however, his tears are stopped when he is interpreted by a messenger bringing the news of the Arcadian king's death.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> This point in the text is one of those occasions when the narrative interrupts the lyric of the pastorals. This interruption is symbolic; it indicates that demand, which is the continuous, static repetition of the same metaphor (Other for mother)

The two saddest shepherds in the Fourth Eclogues are, no doubt, Klaius and Strephon. Both of them base their songs on taking the logic of deprivation, the inherent logic of demand, to its extreme. They posit their mistresses as the absolute depriver, who is lethal, like a "fish torpedo" or a "crowded basilic" (289). In their description, she is more destructive than all possible natural disasters together, leaving behind a devastated landscape, which stands for the devastated souls of her two agonizing lovers. The violent destruction that she causes throughout the landscape, as well as in the hearts of the shepherds, instead of putting an end to the singing career of Strephon and Klaius, propels them into action:

Ye goat-herd gods, that love the grassy mountains,  
Ye nymphs, which haunt the springs in pleasant valleys,  
Ye satyrs, joyed with free and quiet forests,  
Vouchsafe your silent ears to plaining music  
Which to my woes gives still an early morning,  
And draws the dolour on till weary evening.

O Mercury, foregoer to the evening,  
O heav'nly huntress of savage mountains,  
O lovely star, entitled of the morning,  
While that my voice doth fill these woeful valleys,  
Vouchsafe your silent ears to plaining music,  
Which oft hath Echo tired in secret forests. (285)

The void that appears in the form of the silent ears of the addressees and the hollowness of the valley which surrounds the shepherds is the void separating language and the real, the Other and the mother, the gap over which speech continuously slides. This void evokes the songs of Klaius and Strephon to fill it up. The songs of Klaius and Strephon represent demand in its pure form, speech uttered in order to fill in some loss, but at the same time depending on this loss, originating from it and reiterating, recreating it.

The valley with its hollowness becomes the symbol of the deprivation of the subject from the satisfaction of its needs. The shepherds typically sing in a hollow valley, in which their Petrarchan eclogues reverberates endlessly. Pyrocles, for example, when singing about his unrequited love for Philoclea, wishes to "teach th' unfortunate Echo / In these woods to resound the renowned name of a

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is interrupted by the dynamic events of the narrative. It might even be reasonable to say that all the five narrative parts which are inserted between the clusters of eclogues are such interruptions of demand and, in this way, indicators of the desire in it. This suggestion leads to the second part of this paper, in which I will examine the narrative parts of the *Old Arcadia*, as texts which carry within themselves traces of symbolic desire.

goddess," Philoclea (74). Echo often becomes the shepherds' "partner" in singing, as in the case of Philisides, who frames "his voice in those desert places as what words he would have the echo reply unto, those would sing higher than the rest, and so kindly framed a dispute between himself and it" (140):

Fair rocks, goodly rivers, sweet woods, when shall I see peace.  
Peace? What bars me my tongue? Who is that comes so nigh? I.  
Oh! I do know what guest I have met; it is echo.

'Tis echo. (140)

The personification of echo in such a way is not the only way for the shepherds' songs to be echoed. The verse structure Sidney uses in the eclogues is highly repetitive in itself. The double sestina of Klaius and Strephon is the high point in Sidney's attempt to create repetitive structures. The double sestina is sung by two shepherds, who repeat the same themes in the successive stanzas. The singers also have to repeat in the first line of their stanza the last line of the previous stanza. Moreover, there is a considerable amount of stanzas in the sestina that share the same grammatical structure; the poem echoes itself.<sup>121</sup> If we look at the other songs in the book, we find that most of them are based on a similar repetitive principle, carried out on a simpler level.<sup>122</sup> In this way the pastoral obeys the laws of acoustics, which in this case are the same as the Lacanian concept of demand. The emptier the valley becomes because of the deprivation and the destruction the woman carries out in it, the louder and clearer it echoes the shepherd's song.

## Conclusion

Dorus' vehement outcry, in one of the songs of the First Eclogues of the *Old Arcadia*, summarizes the operation of the pastoral lyric as the Lacanian demand.

Not limited to a whisp'ring note, the lament of a courtier,  
But sometimes to the woods, sometimes to heavens, do decipher,  
With bold clamour unheard, unmarked, what I seek, what I suffer (76)

The bucolic poet's singing does not know limits; it echoes boundless in the Arcadian valleys. His songs, the manifestations of Lacanian demand, are not disturbed by anything. The actual woman, whose presence would disrupt this poetic form of demand, is effaced twice: First through being transmuted into conventional

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<sup>121</sup> Robert L. Montgomery, *Symmetry and Sense: The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961) 44-7.

<sup>122</sup> On the "double sestina" and the repetitive nature of pastoral poetry, see Kalstone 71-83.

images of the landscape, a form of the Lacanian imaginary Other of demand. As this phantasy-Other, she is only present as a "landscape-woman," in the shape of the "woods," rivers or the sun. Second, this phantasy-woman is posited as inaccessible. The poet's demand must go "unheard" and "unmarked" by her, she is not supposed to reply, to disrupt his demand with her speech, in which the Other would be revealed in its actuality, as a field of lack and alienation. Instead, she has to deprive the subject of everything, most of all of her own presence, so that in a state of suffering his lyric can thrive.

## PART TWO

### "Bastard Love": The Emergence of Desire in the Narrative of the *Old Arcadia* and in Ovid's "Pygmalion"

The representation of the woman in Sir Philip Sidney's *Old Arcadia* considerably changes as the lyric poetry of the pastoral gives way to the narrative and the static position of the shepherds is replaced by the dynamic adventures of the noble heroes and heroines. Unlike their female counterparts in the eclogues, Philoclea, Pamela and Gynecia are far from being materially absent or reduced to a set of literary conventions. Philoclea, the younger of the Arcadian duke's two daughters, for example, not only falls in love with Pyrocles/Cleophila, the cross-dressing prince of Macedon, but also consummates this love. Philoclea is a present and independent partaker of the plot, which evolves dynamically, as the romance dictates, towards her union with the male hero. She has her own desire and acts upon it, which provides her with a personal identity comprised of innocence and sensuality. Although Pyrocles, by playing numerous tricks and by being involved in certain sexual intrigues, has his share in the voluptuous side of the narrative, this new type of female subject is the main reason that the unrequited love of the pastoral dissolves into an over-eager, often uncontrollable and unfulfillable sexuality, a "bastard love" (18).<sup>123</sup>

Using the narrative of Sidney's *Old Arcadia* and Ovid's "Pygmalion," a subtext around which the narrative's meaning can be organized, my paper will show how the transformation of unrequited love into sexuality represents the shift from the Lacanian notion of demand to desire and how this desire, then, disrupts the sexual relation between two lovers, in this case, between Pyrocles and Philoclea or Pygmalion and his statue-woman.

The best way to understand the shift from love to sexuality in the male-female relationships of the *Old Arcadia* is demonstrated by the shift from the static representation of the pastoral woman to the more dynamic representation of Philoclea. It is her portrait which Pyrocles stumbles upon soon after his arrival in Arcadia, in the gallery of Kerxenus. It acts as a catalyst, which evokes his amorous

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<sup>123</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The Old Arcadia)*, ed., Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985). Hereafter, the page numbers appearing in parentheses, in the body of the text, will refer to this edition.

passions. Moreover, it sets the whole story in motion by introducing an uncertainty and by posing a number of questions to Pyrocles, which kindle his passions and propel him into action.

The portrait evokes an Ovidian analogy, that of the statue-woman carved by Pygmalion. Pyrocles faces much the same task which Pygmalion does; he must attempt to "turn" the image of Philoclea into a real woman and realize his unrequited love in a sexual relation with her. The transformation of the portrait of Philoclea into the actual Philoclea and the parallel metamorphosis of the statue-woman in "Pygmalion" into an actual woman also serve as examples of Lacan's shift from demand (as witnessed in the eclogues) into desire.

While love is traditionally characterized by (at least fantasized as) a state of imaginary fullness, Lacan defines sexuality (Sidney's "bastard love") in relation to a certain lack. This lack is embodied by the symbolic phallus. The sexual relation is the failed attempt of the man and woman, respectively, to "have" and to "be" the phallus. The phallus then, governs the sexual relation by its absence. It is a non-existent object. No one can "have" it or "be" it, only desire it. Desire thus, is predominantly, a state of lacking. Philoclea's desire for the phallus, finding its signifier in the conventional Petrarchan image of chastity, a white marble stone, further entangles *The Old Arcadia* with "Pygmalion." Since her sexual relation with Pyrocles is culminated and terminated at the end of Book Three, my analysis will focus alone on the first three books of the *Old Arcadia*.

### Philoclea's Picture: The Emergence of Desire

When in the gallery of his Arcadian host, Kerxenus, Pyrocles catches sight of the portrait of Philoclea, we, as readers, witness a very different male-female relation from the one which dominates the eclogues. Pyrocles, like the shepherds, falls in love with a woman who is not actually present, but appears only in the form of an image, a painting. Yet his love does not remain a static pastoral *tableau vivant* of unrequited love. Pyrocles is not the Keatsian "fair youth," who "canst not leave [his] song" and neither is Philoclea the Pastorella, who "cannot fade" in the eternity of the pastoral scenario. Philoclea's portrait includes a certain excess, which is missing from the image of the Pastorella, glued together from static figures and tropes. The excess is that the picture tells a story with a certain enigma in it:

[Pyrocles] perceived a picture, newly made by an excellent artificer, which contained the duke and duchess with their younger daughter Philoclea, with such countenance and fashion as the manner of their life held them in, both parents' eyes cast with loving care upon their beautiful child, she drawn as well as it was possible art should counterfeit so perfect a workmanship of nature. For therein, besides the show of her beauties, a man might judge even the nature of her countenance, full of bashfulness, love, and reverence — and all

by the cast of her eye, mixed with sweet grief to find her virtue suspected.  
(101)

Philoclea's portrait sums up, for Pyrocles, what the reader already knows: the ambiguous prediction of the oracle (which subjects Philoclea's virtue to suspicion), Basilius' subsequent enigmatic withdrawal to the countryside (the new "manner of their life") and the senselessly strict regulations Basilius has introduced regarding the princesses. The fact that Pamela is missing from the family portrait signifies that she has to live under the supervision of Dametas' family, in an enforced pastoral sojourn. Philoclea, in the meantime, is guarded by her parents' "loving care" in the neighboring lodge. The portrait, therefore, is not static, but dynamic; it tells a story. Retrospectively, it tells the story of what has happened so far to the royal characters of the *Old Arcadia*. It, however, leaves certain spaces blank ("What is the significance of the oracle's predictions?," "Why has Basilius abdicated his regal responsibilities?," "What will happen to Philoclea?," etc), which become the enigmas of the story, and also propel the it forward. Structuralist and Post-Structuralist narrative theories suggest that the narrative always metonymically moves towards a gap, an uncertainty or a question. It is in this sense that Philoclea's portrait can be called "narrative." It poses the narrative question on two levels: The first one concerns Philoclea's grief over her present situation, subdued to the cryptic text of the oracle. She "questions" the Apollonian authority. It foreshadows one of the main themes of the romance, which will be her "quest" for virtue. The second question concerns the interest which the portrait evokes within the viewer, Pyrocles. The portrait functions as the object-cause of his personal story; it engenders his cross-dressing as an Amazon and his subsequent amorous adventures in Arcadia.

Suspicion is the key-signifier of the narrative enigma within the portrait. It indicates how the oracle, foretelling the whole of Philoclea's story, casts a shadow of doubt onto her. When the oracle predicts to Basilius that "thy younger shall with nature's bliss embrace / An uncouth love, which nature hateth most," this ambiguous text (how can it be a love which is both "nature's bliss" and what "nature hateth most?") introduces some gaps of uncertainty into the previously full and self-contained idyllic bliss of the royal family by questioning Philoclea's virtue. Philoclea's relation to this oracular questioning — the oracular questioning represented mainly by the father, Basilius, who becomes the agent of the oracular imperatives — is expressed in the family portrait by a "sweet grief" on her face. This "sweet grief" indicates both obedience and dissatisfaction (grief), which is a passive form of rebellion on her part. Such an attitude, the silent questioning of unchangeable, but nevertheless, senseless and enigmatic facts of life, is a characteristic subjective position in the enigmatic Lacanian field of the Other, where the subject has to "play the Other's field," question the Other, represented by, for example, the parent:

The desire of the Other is apprehended by the subject in that which does not work, in the lacks of the discourse of the Other, and all the child's why's reveal not so much an avidity for the reason of things, as a testing of the adult, a "why are you telling me this?" ever-resuscitated from its base, which is the enigma of the adult's desire.<sup>124</sup>

Philoclea's "sweet grief" is not a form of demand for the recognition of her father, not a form of demanding more of his "loving care." It is rather a desire, a form of testing the paternal-oracular force — this omnipotent "subject-supposed-to-know" of the *Old Arcadia* —, as if Philoclea were asking: "Why is my father/the oracle/the Other putting my virtue in doubt?" "Why is the Other telling me to partake in this inquiry, in this portrait, in this story?" As the child in Lacan's passage is asking for more than what the parent can give (his questions are not an "avidity for the reason of things"), so Philoclea is asking for more (virtue) than what her father's "loving care" can give. Philoclea's grief is addressed to the Other, and concerns those enigmatic gaps in it, which Lacan calls the "desire of the Other." Her desire for her lost virtue demonstrates that in the field of the Other, the subject's desire is "bound up" with the desire of the Other. The subject itself becomes reduced to an enigma upon confronting the riddle of the Other.<sup>125</sup> In this way, as the embodiment of the desire of the Other, Philoclea's portrait becomes the object-cause, the catalyst, of another story — another desire —, that of Pyrocles.

For Pyrocles, Philoclea's portrait represents the Lacanian Other of desire. This Other having been introduced into the portrait, the lover's static state of fullness is broken and Pyrocles is propelled to do something the bucolic poet would never do. He is first moved "to fall into questions of" Philoclea, then lets these questions carry him into the chaotic undertaking of cross-dressing, deceit and sexual intrigue. Unlike the eclogues, in which the Other's discourse has no gaps (since it is reduced to a silence through the substitution of a mute image for the actual woman), the picture evokes several questions within Pyrocles about the actual Philoclea, starting with who she is and how she can be reached. Moreover, the effect of the portrait is such that Pyrocles

from questions grew to pity; and when with pity once his heart was made tender, according to the aptness of the humour, it received straight a cruel

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<sup>124</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed., Jacques Alain-Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978) 214.

<sup>125</sup> Lacan defines the Other as "that beyond in which the recognition of desire is bound up with the desire for recognition." What the subject desires, therefore, is bound up with what the Other desires, in other words, the Other's designs for the subject. See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 168.

impression of that wonderful passion which to be defined is impossible, by reason no words reach near to the strange nature of it. They only know it which inwardly feel it. It is called love. (11)

This passage is a characteristic example of Sidney's verbal elongation, which here, serves as a way of intensifying, for the reader, his main character's multi-phasal development of desire. In the quoted sentences, the suspenseful linear movement of Sidney's rhetoric is combined with the displacing movement of Pyrocles' desire, the force which steers him towards Philoclea. Desire propels Pyrocles into action, into dressing up as an Amazon in order to gain access to the semi-imprisoned Philoclea.

Paradoxically, but not contrary to the logic of Lacanian desire, only by degrading himself as a woman can Pyrocles hope to obtain the desired object, and thus reach self-completion in love. His desire for Philoclea finds its expression in a certain loss, in the fact that through his transformation into a woman, Pyrocles becomes somewhat less than he was before.<sup>126</sup> Pyrocles' friend, Musidorus, is the one who reveals the demeaning nature of his cross-dressing by revealing to Pyrocles his opinion that, "this effeminate love of a woman doth (...) womanize a man." (18).

Pyrocles' Amazon-garb becomes the emblem of the self-loss which desire inflicts upon the lover. More precisely, it represents the paradox of desire, that while the yearning lover strives at self-completion through obtaining the object of his desire, his yearning by definition, forces a constant loss of self upon him. The Renaissance rhetoric of love defines love's psychology in an Ovidian manner, as a kind of warfare, in which conquest, loss and victory occur. This rhetoric is the "double-talk" of desire, in which conquest (self-completion) means defeat (self-loss). Pyrocles, just after he has attired himself as a woman, echoes this type of double-talk:

Transformed in show, but more transformed in mind,  
I cease to strive, with double conquest foiled;  
For (woe is me) my powers all I find  
With outward force an inward treason spoiled.

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<sup>126</sup> Elizabeth Dipple suggests that the self-loss, suffered by the princely lovers, is the main theme of the book when she asserts: "it seems to me that the central ideological impulse in the *Old Arcadia* is to deliver a study of frustration." The characters' self-loss is the loss of a stereotypical Renaissance ideal image of the self. At "every turn [the princes] encounter frustration: neither virtue, nor beauty, nor canniness can allow them to maintain their idealistic selves." See Elizabeth Dipple, "Metamorphosis in Sidney's *Arcadia*," *Essential Articles: Sir Philip Sidney* (Hamden, Connecticut: Shoestring Press, "Anchor Book," 1986) 334-5, 335.

For from without came to mine eyes the blow,  
Whereto mine inward thoughts did faintly yield;  
Both these conspired poor reason's overthrow;  
False in myself, thus have I lost the field.

And thus mine eyes are placed still in one sight,  
And thus mine thoughts can think but one thing still;  
Thus reason to his servants gives his right;  
Thus my power transformed to your will.  
    What marvel, then, I take a woman's hue,  
    Since what I see, think, know, is all but you? (26)

In this poetic account of his transvestitism, Pyrocles/Cleophila (to whom, from this point on, even the narrator refers to under the feminine pronoun) defines love in terms of "striving," "conquest," "treason," etc. — the terminology of warfare. Love is an attack, for example, of the outside upon the inside, of an "outward force" upon the mind of the lover (stanza one), of the eyes upon the lover's "inward thoughts" (stanza two) or a joint attack of the eyes and the inward thoughts upon the lover's reason (stanza three). These three attacks gradually annihilate the lover. He is first defeated on this psychic battlefield because of "inward treason," then his inward thoughts "faintly yield" and finally his reason is "overthrown" by the "conspired" forces of his eyes and thoughts. Parallel to the increasing loss, however, the outside battle of love is quickly becoming a process of union.

The semantic tension, set up in the first stanza between "show" and "mind," "ceasing" and "striving," and "outward" and "inward" is diminished in the next two stanzas, since the lover's self, while being lost on the one side of the battlefield, is being united on the other side, on the victorious side. When the lover says: "I cease to strive," his inside is joining the conquering outside. Next, his conquered thoughts join the treacherous eyes, and finally, his reason joins the conspired forces of eyes and thoughts. Thus, while the poem describes the lover's self-deserting, it also describes a parallel unification, self-completion by means of a conspiratory alliance of his deserting parts. Significantly, for the lover, the conspiratory union entails his union with the beloved lady. This union is first indicated by the twice repeated word "one" in stanza three. The logic of the poem, therefore, suggests that in the warfare of love, in which the lover is repeatedly and inevitably defeated and loses parts of himself on the one hand, on the other hand is a victory, in which the lover and the beloved lady become one ("one sight," "one thing"). As a final twist, this self-completion, by means of a complete assimilation with the lady ("what I see, think, know, is all but you") is also the point of complete self-loss, the disappearance of his original self ("I take a woman's hue"). Pyrocles' Amazon costume is a form of the aforementioned "double talk," since it refers to his identification with the woman of his desires

both as a victory (union, self-completion) and as a loss (the disappearance of his ideal, masculine self). Being a twist on the conception of art as demand, Pygmalion's story summarizes the woman's side of desire in the sexual relation and the man's self-loss and frustration, which it evokes.

### **The Pygmalion Myth: The Desire of the Statue-Woman**

Pygmalion begins by creating a statue, which, done so well, is elevated to a level of perfection which no actual woman can attain, and originally embodies the mute Other of his demand for love. Seeing what sinful lives real women, the cold prostitutes called Propoetides, lead, Pygmalion is "offended with the vice whereof great store is packt within / The nature of the womankynd."<sup>127</sup> He refuses all women, with the exception of the statue he has carved out of ivory, in which he "tooke / A certaine love."<sup>128</sup> Pygmalion's attempt to avoid actual women and adore a woman who only exists in his phantasy, through a work of art, is merely a fetishistic attempt to posit an Other of love (which is the reason why the myth was often condemned for idolatry by medieval and Renaissance scholars).<sup>129</sup> From the point of view of this fetishistic attempt to posit the addressee of the love, Pygmalion is similar to the bucolic poets — both of them practicing an art which is stimulated by the imaginary phantasy of the artist. Ovid, however, adds a magical twist to the usual story of art kindled by unrequited love.

The magic of Pygmalion's statue is in its peculiar fluctuation between being a statue and being a real woman — that is, using the terminology of the myth, between the hardness of ivory and the softness of flesh. This fluctuation transforms the original idyllic situation of unreturned love into an even more frustrated sexual relation. The fluctuation performed by the statue is a unique Ovidian invention, which subverts the pornographic fetishism of the earlier Hellenic version of Philostephanus, in which Pygmalion simply satisfies himself by making love to the statue of Aphrodite.<sup>130</sup> Pygmalion finds more than an inaccessible woman or a sexual toy in the ivory statue. Becoming enchanted by the perfection of his statue, he cannot decide whether it is a statue or a real woman: "The looke of it was ryght a Maydens looke, / And such a one as that yee would beleeve had lyfe, and that

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<sup>127</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses: The Arthur Golding Translation: 1967*, ed., John Fredrick Nims (New York: Macmillan, 1965) 256.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 256.

<sup>129</sup> A brief overview of medieval and Renaissance adaptations and evaluations of the Pygmalion story can be found in William Keach, *Elizabethan Erotic Narratives: Irony and Pathos in the Ovidian Poetry of Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Their Contemporaries* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1977) 136-7.

<sup>130</sup> Keach 135.

/ Would moved bee, if womanhod and reverence letted not.<sup>131</sup> The statue-woman's strange oscillation between being a statue and being a real woman attracts Pygmalion to the white ivory and, interrupting his unrequited love, lures him into a sexual relation with it:

He often toucht it, feeling if the woork that he had made  
 Were verie flesh or Ivorye still. Yit could he not perswade  
 Himself to think it Ivory, for he oftentymes it kist,  
 And thought it kissed him ageine. He hild it by the fist,  
 And talked to it. He beleved his fingars made a dint  
 Upon her flesh, and feared lest sum blacke or broosed print  
 Should come by touching over hard.<sup>132</sup>

Pygmalion's demand for the love of the statue is frustrated when the statue is suddenly transformed from hard into soft — from a projection of his phantasy into a fellow being. In this peculiar animation of the statue, it is the fluctuation between hardness and softness and not the fact that in the end the "Ivory waxed soft: and putting quight away / All hardnesse, yeelded underneathe his fingars" that counts.<sup>133</sup> Shortly, it is through the *fluctuation* between ivory and flesh, statue and real woman, that the statue "comes alive," becomes a desiring fellow being, who acts upon her desire instead of being the passive object of Pygmalion's demand for love. Her fluctuation is the indicator of her desire, because it opens up an enigma in the formerly self-contained unrequited love-relation. In actuality, Pygmalion does not "fall into questions," like Pyrocles does in front of Philoclea's portrait, but his uncertainty shows that he is confronted by the famous Freudian question: "What does the woman want?" ("*Was will das Weib?*"), which for him is equivalent to the questions: "Does she kiss me back? If she does, then why does she withdraw from my embraces when I become excited, and turn back to ivory?," which is, ultimately, the question "Does she want me?"<sup>134</sup>

The emerging desire, introduced into the relation by the statue's fluctuation, frustrates the relation, because it points to a post, which is outside the relation and which is not occupied by Pygmalion. Ovid's Pygmalion becomes entangled in a frustrating, dissatisfying relationship with a statue-woman, who comes alive, but always immediately turns back into a statue, as soon as Pygmalion is sexually aroused — as soon as the sexual relation is about to become actualized. The statue's constant return to its hard state indicates that her desire is for something other than what Pygmalion can offer. Lacan's theory of the sexual relation names

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<sup>131</sup> Ovid 256.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 256.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 257.

<sup>134</sup> On "*Was will das Weib?*" see Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989) 112.

the phallus as the point of convergence for the woman's desire, as the element which always comes to stand between the two parties, to foil their sexual relationship.

Lacan's understanding of the "relation" between the sexes altogether questions the possibility of a fulfilled union. "There is no sexual relation" — he says in his *Seminar XX*, suggesting that the relation only takes place in the phantasy of the participants.<sup>135</sup> In the "Meaning of the Phallus," an earlier essay, Lacan goes into more detail, explaining that it is failure which is introduced into the sexual relation by the phallus:

Let us say that these relations will revolve around a being and a having which, because they refer to a signifier, the phallus, have the contradictory effect of on the one hand lending reality to the subject in that signifier, and on the other hand making unreal the relations to be signified.<sup>136</sup>

There are two different relations of subjects to the symbolic phallus, one assigned to men, the other assigned to women. Man is defined by "having" the phallus and the woman is defined by "being" it.<sup>137</sup> "Having" and "being" are not, however, simply the ways men and women relate to the phallus. "Having" and "being" establish male and female subjectivity. Thus, the "realities" of both types of subjectivity are established, "lent," to man and woman by the phallus. Lacan, however, suggests that the physical interactions of the sexual relation are "unreal" in some way. The sexual relation does not take place in reality, but only as a phantasy of the participants.<sup>138</sup> For the purpose of this paper, it will be necessary

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<sup>135</sup> Quoted by Jacqueline Rose in her "Introduction II" to Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, eds., Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1982) 46.

<sup>136</sup> Lacan, *FS* 83-4.

<sup>137</sup> Both "having" and "being" are imaginary positions, means of covering over the lack of the phallus. "Having" connotes the possession of an organ, which appears to simulate the function of the phallus. It is the myth of obtaining the missing object of desire. "Being" suggests that the phallus is the desire of the mother and the subject wants to become the object of her desire. It is ultimately a mask, with which the "phallic mother" and later the woman becomes equated, before it becomes clear to the subject that behind the mask there is nothing, just a lack.

<sup>138</sup> The subject's phantasy, which turns the actual other in the relation into an Other of demand (the site of fullness, the site where the phallus resides) is what prevents the actual sexual relation between subject and other from taking place. The phantasy, however, is doomed to fail, since the phallus, the support of the phantasy, is a non-existent object, essentially a fraud. At the same time, it refers

to look at the woman's side in the Lacanian theory of the sexual relation more closely, since her desire plays a central role in the development of the eager but unfulfilled sexuality which characterizes both the narrative of the *Old Arcadia* and "Pygmalion."

The woman's "being" is called a "masquerade" by Lacan. This concept suggests that the woman only "masquerades" as the phallus, but that she is *not*, in reality, the phallus. It suggests that she "expects to be desired as well as loved" for "what she is not."<sup>139</sup> The position of the woman, thus, is a mask, which covers over the fact that she is lacking. Moreover, this mask covers over the man's lack of "having" as well. "Being" the phallus, the ultimate object of male desire, the woman supports the man's position of "having." Her desire for what she lacks makes the man believe that he can provide it for her. This is why Judith Butler suggests that for "women to "be" the Phallus means (...) to reflect the power of the Phallus, to supply the site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through "being" its Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectical confirmation of its identity."<sup>140</sup> The masquerade establishes the illusion that the male-female relation is mutually satisfactory and "confirming;" the woman is given her much desired "phallus" — indeed a fetishistic substitute — by her man, who, in return, can rest assured in his belief that he really "has" the phallus. The sexual relation, therefore, an attempt to cover over the crude fact that it is not a relation of the sexes with each other, but the non-relation of each sex with the non-existent phallus. There is, however, an excess of desire to this non-relation.

Lacan emphasizes that the sexual relation does not simply cover over its own impossibility, but also reveals it, that the "confirming" nature of the woman's "being" for the man's "having" is undermined by her desire for the phallus. He further suggests that the "Verdrängung (repression) inherent to desire is lesser" in the case of the woman than in the case of her male partner.<sup>141</sup> This Lacanian suggestion implies that the woman, partaking in the sexual relation, has a tendency to realize that what the man has to offer to her is not the phallus, but something

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to the total presence of the pre-symbolic mother and the power of the symbolic father, whose exclusive property the phallus is, after the child realizes that the mother does not have it, but only desires it. However, "even the father cannot possess the phallus, but only speaks in its name." Since the phallus does not exist, no one can "have" it or "be" it, there is no Other, but only an other. See Samuel Weber, *Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan's Dislocation of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Michael Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 146.

<sup>139</sup> Lacan, *FS* 84.

<sup>140</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 44.

<sup>141</sup> Lacan, *FS* 84.

else, a mere fetish, which "ideally deprives her of that which it gives."<sup>142</sup> The sexual relation, thus, instead of repressing or satisfying the woman's desire for the phallus, reiterates it, by repeatedly making her realize her state of lacking. The Lacanian theory of sexuality, which portrays the woman as a constantly "frigid" subject (Lacan's phrase), who refuses the satisfaction offered by the man and whose desire always points outside the thus thwarted sexual relation, is articulated in the Ovidian myth by the fluctuation of the statue-woman.

Ovid's story demonstrates how desire, which reappears on the woman's side, disrupts Pygmalion's fetishistic demand for the love of his ivory toy. It is in vain that Pygmalion takes his beloved statue to bed on a "pillow soft," since as soon as he embraces her, she is a statue again.<sup>143</sup> His idolatry is also thwarted when the statue does not react to the abundance of presents which he showers her with: precious stones, flowers, birds, garments, pearls, etc. She does not react to his attempt to "give," a metonymical support of his "having:"

Sumtime (the giftes wherein the yong Maydes are wonted to delyght)  
He brought her owches, fyne round stones, and Lillyes fayre and  
whyght,  
And pretie singing birds, and flowres of thousand sorts and hew,  
In gorgeous garments furthermore he did her also decke,  
And peynted balles, and Amber from the tree distilled new.  
Riche perles were hanging at her eares, and tablets at her brest.<sup>144</sup>

At those moments when the statue is animated, she represents the woman whose desire for the phallus is converging onto that fetishistic substitute the man is offering, confirming the illusion of "having" on his side. In the act of returning to her inanimate state — and especially in the act of hesitant oscillation — she represents the woman who realizes that instead of obtaining the phallus in the sexual relation, she is being deprived of it. The ivory statue's repeated withdrawal to its hard state implies the repeatedly experienced gap of desire by the woman in the sexual relation. By turning back into a statue, she refuses the satisfaction offered by the man and continues desiring the phallus, which, she knows, the man does not have. The cold, removed nature of the ivory statue signals to the man that he is incapable of satisfying her desire. Demonstrating the impossibility of "having" and "being," Pygmalion's story unveils the gap of desire, which inevitably lingers around every act of love-making.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 84.

<sup>143</sup> Ovid 257.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. 257.

**Philoclea: The Statuesque Woman of *The Old Arcadia***

Not only the portrait of Philoclea, but her character, as represented throughout the narrative of the *Old Arcadia*, acts as Pygmalion's statue-mistress. She also, like the statue-woman, fluctuates between acceptance and refusal. Her fluctuation, however, is assigned a terminology different from softness and hardness, flesh and ivory. Her position is defined, instead, in terms of chastity and sensuality. In fact, it is Pyrocles himself, who, in his argument with Musidorus over the nature of love, introduces this new terminology.

In the argument, which takes place soon after the princes' arrival in Arcadia, Pyrocles introduces a paradoxical notion of female chastity in order to talk his way around Musidorus' strict ideal of virtue, which allows for no sexuality. Musidorus, the older of the two cousins, who has yet to follow the predictions of the oracle and fall in love with Philoclea's sister, Pamela, represents the imaginary position of unrequited love. Very similarly to the Pygmalion who rejects the Propoetides, he uses misogynistic language to disguise his demand for "heavenly" or "virtuous" love. Worldly — sensual and sexual — love, he says, "utterly subverts the course of nature in making reason give place to sense, and man to woman" (18). He scorns the "bastard love" of actual women and promulgates the neo-Platonic love of abstract virtues, which becomes the site of his narcissistic self-elaboration, a means of becoming the emblem of the heroism and the education, which is expected from the Renaissance prince (18).

On the contrary, Pyrocles, who is already in love with Philoclea's magical portrait, promulgates a definition of the beloved woman. This female object of love, represented in the narrative by Philoclea, reconciles carnal love with chastity and denotes a symbolic relation of the man towards his object of love. This is in direct confrontation with the idea of the imaginary relations of the eclogues, represented here by presence and words of Musidorus. Pyrocles' rebuttal to Musidorus' neo-Platonic ideas of love goes in the following manner:

Let this suffice: that they [women] are capable of virtue. And virtue, you yourself say, is to be loved; and I, too, truly. But this I willingly confess: that it likes me much better when I find virtue in a fair lodging than when I am bound to seek it in an ill-favoured creature, like a pearl in a dunghill. (20)

In his argument, Pyrocles does not attempt to hide the fact that a woman's physical beauty is not a bit less important to him than her chastity.

The expression which summarizes his idea of the ideal woman, "virtue in a fair lodging," echoes another of Sidney's works, sonnet 71 from his "Astrophil and Stella":

Who will in fairest booke of Nature know,  
How vertue may best lodg'd in beautie be.

From this point in the story, indeed, from this point in the essay, Pyrocles and Astrophil are bonded together by a certain similarity in their respective psychologies and rhetorics of love.

The bond which ties these two characters, Astrophil and Pyrocles, together, is a bond of duplicity, which characterizes Sidney's love poetry. This duplicity is Sidney's peculiar kind of "Petrarchism," which informs both his Sonnets and the *Old Arcadia*. The desired woman portrayed by these texts is both virtuous — which, according to sixteenth-century morals, demands the complete lack of sexual experience on her part — and physically attractive, on the elaboration of whose physical details the poet gladly spends time. Because of these characteristics, Sidney's "Petrarchism" must be differentiated from Petrarch himself. In Petrarch, the poet/lover willingly accepts the exile his lady inflicts upon him, because he knows that he can only receive the grace of poetic illumination and momentary visions of bliss from/of her, in this state of deprivation. Petrarch's poet/lover finds satisfaction in the poetry substituted for the lady and his poetry is static, nothing more than "variations on a single emotional experience."<sup>145</sup> On the contrary, in the case of Sidney's lovers, Astrophil and Pyrocles, the lady's virtuous refusal does not hold the lover in the same static position of reiterating his deprived state and his hopes for future bliss. For Astrophil and Pyrocles, the hindrance of desire is "what gives it leave to go," so that, in the final line of the quoted Sonnet 71, Astrophil exclaims: "'But ah,' Desire still cries, 'give me some food.'" This is why the omnipresent Petrarchan rule, which dictates that the lady's chastity should be preserved, encourages the emergence of elaborate sensual-sexual imagery, which is not simply substituted for the sexual relation, but is in itself a form of figurative-verbal sexual relation.<sup>146</sup> In the hands of a "Petrarchan" poet like Sidney, who

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<sup>145</sup> On the difference between Petrarch's *Rime* and Sidney's Petrarchism see David Kalstone, *Sidney's Poetry: Contexts and Interpretations* (New York: Norton, 1970). The quotation is from Adelia Noferi, whom Kalstone quotes on page 108.

<sup>146</sup> Sidney's Sonnet 9 from "Astrophil and Stella" is a characteristic example of the sensual-sexual overtones Sidney has contributed to Petrarch's love poetry:

Queene *Vertues* court, which some call *Stellas* face,  
Prepar'd by Natures choisest furniture,  
Hath his front built of Alablaster pure;  
Gold is the covering of that stately place.  
The doore by which sometimes comes forth her Grace,  
Red Porphir is, which locke of pearle makes surt:  
Whose porches rich (which name of cheekes endure)  
Marble mixt red and white do enterlace.  
The windowes now through which this heav'nly guest  
Looks over the world, and can find nothing such,  
Which dare claime from those lights the name of best.

uses the same language to express the lady's virtue and the man's sexual relation to her, the Pygmalion myth proves to be a convenient tool, since it articulates the paradoxical coexistence of virtue and sexuality.

While the "Petrarchan" poet is an artist in language, who creates a fictional relation with his (often fictional) lady, Pygmalion is an artist in stone, who does the same to an ivory statue. Pygmalion, thus, is the ideal Petrarchan lover (in the sense of Sidney's "Petrarchism"), since he realizes a sexual relation with a perfectly virtuous woman (Ovidian "hardness" is reinterpreted as "virtuousness" in English Renaissance poetry), who does not cease to be perfectly virtuous even in the sexual relation — provided that the story ends quickly. This does happen soon after, when the statue is transformed into a real woman by Venus, because the unlimited availability threatens even the ivory woman's "virtue." There can be established, therefore, a parallel between Pygmalion and the Petrarchan lover, on the basis that "where the Petrarchan lover's mistress is figuratively as hard and unyielding as a stone, Pygmalion's statue is literally that way."<sup>147</sup> Because of the high potential Ovid's story has for Petrarchan love poetry, as it was introduced into England by Sidney, it became a theme, which was echoed throughout Elizabethan love poetry either openly, as in Marston's *The Metamorphosis of Pigmalion's Image* or covertly, with the "false Florimell" of the *Faerie Queen* (Ch8, Bk3), put together by the witch to satisfy her son. Sidney's Philoclea is one of the elaborate, although not completely open references to the Ovidian myth. She is "virtue in a fair lodging," the chaste but sensual mistress of the desiring lover.

The duplicity of Philoclea's character is the kind of duplicity of virtue and beauty which so much kindles Astrophil's desire in sonnet 71. Philoclea's blushing sensuality arouses a "strange delight" in Pyrocles (as it did within Astrophil). It is not the static delight of poetic illumination, but the desirous one which compels him to look for possible ways to enter into a sexual relation with her (34). From the narrator's brief description in Book One, we learn that Philoclea is more physically attractive and sensual than her sister, Pamela. At the same time,

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Of touch they are that without touch doth touch,  
Which *Cupids* selfe from Beauties mind did draw:  
Of touch they are, and poor I am their straw.

On the one hand, the poem solves the virtuous spirit-sensual body opposition by asserting that Stella's body, her face, is "Vertues court." On the other hand, however, the mine-imagery, used in the elaboration of the assertion is a sexual pun. Through this pun, the poet, while exalting the lady's virtues, establishes a figurative sexual relation with her. See Sir Philip Sidney, "Astrophil and Stella," *English Sixteenth-Century Verse: An Anthology*. ed., Richard S. Sylvester (New York: Norton, 1984) 421-2.

<sup>147</sup> Keach 138-9.

however, she is also the more markedly innocent of the two sisters. While Pamela is noted for her "noble heart" and her "shepherdish apparel," Philoclea appears in her semi-transparent "nymplike apparel," which displays her bodily "perfections," her "excellent fair hair," the perfect blackness of her eyes and the perfect whiteness of her skin, yet remains "so apparelled as did show she kept the best store of her beauties to herself" (33, 34). This duplicity of Philoclea's character, that she is both desirable and unobtainable, is represented by a Petrarchan-Ovidian image, a white marble stone.

The image of the white marble stone appears in two poems written by Philoclea and links her figure to the statuesque woman of the "Pygmalion" myth. At night, when everyone else from the lovesick Arcadian company is asleep, Philoclea steals out of her parents' lodge to visit a little wood, "where many times before she had delighted to walk" (96). She returns to a white marble stone, the symbol of chastity, in relation to which she defines herself. There are two poems which describe Philoclea's two different relations, past and present, to the marble-stone. The past Philoclea, as she appears in the first poem, is similar to the mute and unresponsive statue Pygmalion originally intends to create and to the mute and refusing phantasy lady of the bucolic poet:

Thou purest stone, whose pureness doth present  
My purest mind; whose temper hard doth show  
My tempered heart; by thee my promise sent  
Unto myself let after-livers know.

No fancy mine, nor others' wrong suspect  
Make me, O virtuous Shame, thy laws neglect. (96)

Her identification with the stone freezes her in the role of the object of love ("being" the phallus), that fullness of "being" which poetic demand addresses in the eclogues. Through the metaphor of the marble, thus, she "masquerades" in the role of the Other of demand. The marble stone represents Philoclea in a state of self-contained satisfaction, as a woman "not knowing evil," "not passed through the worldly wickedness, nor feelingly found that evil carrieth with it" (95). The marble stone is an image of an innocent woman who "enjoyed herself," "was the mistress of herself" and had no "other thoughts but such as might arise out of quiet senses" (96). The white marble stone is a phallic signifier which provides her with completeness and self-control both on the levels of sexuality and writing, which the poem merges in her self-confident vow that her "virgin life no spotted thought shall stain" (96). This first poem, in which her "purest mind" and the "purest stone" are identical, shows her in a state of imaginary fullness. This imaginary identification is then broken in her second poem.

Like Pygmalion's statue, Philoclea also "comes alive" in the second poem. This poem tells how in the present, upon her secret return, Philoclea finds her first poem written on the stone "foreworn and in many places blotted" (97). This transformation of the poem suggests the alienation of Philoclea not only from the

marble stone, but also from chastity ("being" the phallus) and writing. The image of the blotted stone indicates her lost completeness and self-control both on the field of sexuality and writing. "Fair marble, which never receivedst spot but by my writing" (97), she laments. In her second poem, although Philoclea still defines herself in relation to the marble stone, the image of the marble stone shifts from an object representing imaginary fullness, to representing her alienation from this state of fullness:

My words, in hope to blaze my steadfast mind,  
This marble chose, as of like temper known:  
But lo, my words defaced, my fancies blind,  
Blots to the stone, shame to myself I find;  
And witness am, how ill agree in one,  
A woman's hand with constant marble stone.

My words full weak, the marble full of might;  
My words in store, the marble all alone;  
My words black ink, the marble kindly white;  
My words unseen, the marble still in sight,  
May witness bear, how ill agree in one,  
A woman's hand with constant marble stone. (97)

The stone, instead of being her identical image, becomes the object of her desire, the phallus: she desires, but has no access to it. The stone is inaccessible, since she cannot read her poem on it, which became blotted and she cannot write a new poem on it, because it is too dark. The second poem, which she desires to write down, "but she could not see so perfectly as to join this recantation to the former vow," hovers at an uncertain distance from the stone and thus articulates her emerging desire. She "comes alive" from the block of stone, similarly to Pygmalion's woman, through articulating her emerging desire for the phallus, embodied by the same marble stone. This desire of Philoclea is revealed in the narrator's next direct allusion to the Pygmalion myth.

Soon after the marble stone episode, at the end of Book Two, the plot comes to a point when Pyrocles, still remaining in "drag," reveals his true sex and identity to Philoclea. In this episode the reference to the Ovidian story is direct, but with a peculiar reversal of roles:

The joy which wrought into Pygmalion's mind while he found his beloved image wax little and little both softer and warmer in his folded arms, till at length it accomplished his gladness with a perfect woman's shape, still beautified with the former perfections, was even such as, by each degree of Cleophila's words, stealingly entered into Philoclea's soul, till her pleasure was fully made up with the manifestation of his being, which was such as in hope did overcome hope. (106)

The narrator turns the story upside-down by placing Philoclea in the position of Pygmalion and Pyrocles in the position of "his beloved image." Pyrocles' role as a woman can be explained by his "drag," but Philoclea's transformation into Pygmalion surprises the reader. Why is Philoclea in the male role of Pygmalion? The logic behind the narrator's role reversal, however, is not novel for the reader. It is similar to the logic used when Philoclea becomes alienated from the marble stone. In both cases, she is represented as a desiring woman instead of "being" a static object of desire. Placing Philoclea into the position of Pygmalion is the narrator's way of designating her "coming alive." Her "joy" evoked by Pyrocles' story, is the indicator of such a desire finding its' object. Philoclea's "joy," however, does not last long. The romance of the happy lovers is suddenly interrupted when Philoclea's desire diverges from Pyrocles and converges on her "honour," which disrupts the seemingly idyllic relation. Her "honour" signifies that point, outside her relation with Pyrocles, onto which her desire is directed. "Yet did a certain spark of honour arise in her well disposed mind. . ." (106). Her honor is then, the "phallus," which reveals itself in its lack, in the threat that the "the pureness of her [Philoclea's] mind may be stained" and disrupts the story evolving towards the union of the lovers. The same lack, articulated as desire has to be covered up in Pyrocles and Philoclea's (non)consummation of their relation at the end of Book Three, where the narrative breaks up and gives way to the lyric.

At the end of Book Three, then, Philoclea and Pyrocles finally, after a great deal of sexual intrigue and many deceitful acts, consummate their love. This consummation is, however, evaded to the greatest possible extent, by the narrator, who literally "covers up" the act by a poem. The narrator has chosen a peculiar way to describe the sexual act, this crucial and climactic event in the narrative. While Pyrocles and Philoclea "make love," he gives us, the readers, a poetic blazon. The blazon is a metaphorical and highly conventional representation of a lady's body in verse. The lyric "I" of the blazon lists her body parts in great detail, designating them with metaphors of precious stones, fruits, natural treasures and a great deal of other things, which in the Renaissance were considered appropriate for the description of a desirable woman:

What tongue can her perfections tell  
In whose each part all pens may dwell?  
Her hair fine threads of finest gold  
In curled knots man's thought to hold;  
But that her forehead says, 'in me  
A whiter beauty you may see.'  
Whiter indeed; more white than snow  
Which on cold winter's face doth grow." (207)

The blazon is not only a way of evading the relating of the sexual act, but it is also an elision, a gap created in the text, which has to be covered up. The animated, desiring Philoclea has disappeared at the narrator's command and has been replaced

by a mute, static and statue-like image of a woman. The metaphors of the blazon create a woman-statue out of snow, ivory, marble, precious stones and crystals, materials similar to the materials Pygmalion used to build his statue and the wine, milk, jewels and fruits that Pygmalion carried, as treasures, to the feet of his adored, but not adoring mistress, when she resumed the position of a statue and, thus, regressed from being Pyrocles' sexual partner to being the addressee of Pyrocles' demand again. Only by relegating Philoclea to the position of the Pygmalionian statue-woman, can her "relation" with Pyrocles — frustrated by her desire, which has been diverted from him and refocussed upon her virtue — be rescued. The relation, however, is rescued in the form of a non-relation, the phantasy relation of the poet and image, the Other of his demand. The blazon, since it is an enumeration of *all* the body parts of the beautiful lady, is a such a genre, which, in its description, posits a feminine site of fullness. Moreover, the blazon implies a regression back to the imaginary realm, where poetry (for example bucolic love-poetry) is substituted for the sexual relation. The blazon merges the images of writing with the images of chastity and describes a state of fullness, in which her completeness of "being" (chastity) and his poetic capacity support one another. Her chastity thus, turns into the poet's figurative writing pad, which "nothing but impression lacks" and is readily waiting for his poetic "tongue" to relate "her perfections" and "dwell" in the totality of her body, which the blazon, enumerating her body-parts in abundance, so does (209, 211).

### Conclusion

Even if, at the end of Chapter Three, the narrative regresses back to the static, lyric mode, to a self-elaborating lyric "I," addressing the woman as a fantasized site of fullness, the female character (Philoclea) portrayed in the text to this point, is of an entirely different kind. Instead of being a mute image (painted, carved or verbal), the Philoclea of the previous text "comes alive," mimicking Pygmalion's statue-woman from both her portrait and the white marble stone she identifies with. Her "coming alive" is in both cases equivalent to a manifestation of desire, with which she disrupts imaginary fantasies of unity and self-completion, represented by the white marble stone, as well as by the motionlessness of the unrequited love-relation. The consummation scene's regression back to the lyric mode indicates the shift the narrative has made from unrequited love to sexuality and from demand to desire. This shift is made possible by the introduction of a new type of female subject, represented by Philoclea and the nameless statue-mistress of Pygmalion, who introduce the enigma of desire into the male-female relation.

## PART THREE

### In Pursuit of "More": The *object petit a* of the *New Arcadia*

Sidney's *New Arcadia* is a peculiar literary project which is "more" than itself. It is not a completely separate book from the *Old Arcadia*, since Sidney preserved the main line of the original plot and much of the original text in it, nor is it the same as the *Old Arcadia*, since Sidney put a great amount of effort into improving the original text. Thus, the two versions cannot be equated, but nor can they be clearly differentiated from one another. This merging and splitting of the text(s) is further complicated by the fact that they merge into one book in the Countess of Pembroke's edition. Instead of defining the *Old* and *New Arcadias* as two separate texts or as one self-identical text, I propose that we should define them as one *non-identical* text. The new version, thus, becomes a strange a-symmetrical reduplication of the "old" one. A-symmetrical, because it is a reduplication containing an excess which the *Old Arcadia* lacks. It is a perplexing creature, which keeps readers and critics busy trying to grasp its main accomplishment, trying to discover what makes it "more" than the "old" version. In this paper, I will argue that this "more" is the surplus which distinguishes the *Arcadia* from itself, and that the *New Arcadia* marks that point of fracture in which Sidney's text loses its self-identity.

From Sidney's literary theory, his *Apology for Poetry*, we learn that he rewrites his book in order to capture a certain surplus which exists in literature and which he calls the "fore-conceit" of a work of art. This theory explains why literature is "more" than other forms of writing, such as history or philosophy, but it does not account for that *surplus* which appears in literature itself, as seen in the case of his reduplicated *Arcadia*. The Lacanian theory of art and signification provides us with the answers which explain why literature is "more" than itself. According to him, in all forms of art, the real is revealed as a surplus. This surplus is responsible for the non-identity (a-symmetrical nature) of the symbolic system. He equates a special object, the *object petit a*, with this "more."

Heroism, or rather some objects associated with heroism, serve as the *objects petit a* of the *New Arcadia*. This is so, because the most conspicuous excess in the new version which is lacking from the old one is the additional series of heroic-chivalric stories, which initiate Pyrocles and Musidorus, idle lovers in the original version, into the world of heroism. Sidney installs an abundance of new heroes, such as Amphialus, Anaxius and Argalus, to name only those who come first both alphabetically and heroically. This surplus heroism has the function of making the

*New Arcadia* more than its original by propping up the places where the original is lacking, where the characters' are unable to control their desire, manifested in their overpowering sexual passions, and the failures they encounter as they attempt to repress or satisfy these passions. Heroism, however, most truly takes on the role of the *object a*, when it is incarnated by such particular objects as suits of armor, shields, swords and the wounds which occur on the battlefield.

One of Sidney's new characters, Amphialus, demonstrates the subject's relationship to these objects and, through them, to the real, the field, which is heterogeneous to the subject's symbolic existence. In Amphialus' subsequent confrontation with his armor, his sword and finally with the blood and the wounds, which accompany the chivalric jousts, the Lacanian subject is revealed. This subject recognizes, in the *object a*, the real and lost part of himself, identifies with this loss and disappears from the symbolic order in submitting himself to the dictates of the death-drive. Amphialus is a hero who always loses something of himself in his victories, until finally, in his wounds, he is reduced to that emptiness which the drive encircles when it encircles the *object petit a*. The case of Amphialus demonstrates that the *object petit a* makes it possible for the subject to resolve his own symbolic lacking in another lack, the real. Similarly, Sidney's magnificent style, which swells into an excessive rhetoric in its description of the glitter of battles and jousts and, which is itself an *object a*, accumulates around sites of cutting, bursting open and wounding, till the manuscript, abruptly, breaks off, revealing a similar relation between literature and the real.

### The Non-Identity of Literature: The Real

As it has been stated, Sidney's *New Arcadia* is not a completely independent version from the *Old Arcadia*. Critics, for example, often refer to a vague amalgam of the two books as "Sidney's *Arcadia*." Moreover, when, after Sidney's death, his writings were published under his sister's supervision, only one text was produced out of the two versions. A great amount of meticulous work was invested into producing a single volume, known as *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* or the *New Arcadia*, involving Sir William Alexander's bridging passage and Mary Sidney's emendations to the earlier work, attached to the end of the revised manuscript.<sup>148</sup> The attitude of both modern critics and the contemporaries

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<sup>148</sup> Their meticulous work was not all in vain. *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* has become one of the most widely read books in English Literature. The drawbacks of this success are, however, that the original version, *The Old Arcadia*, was destined to be forgotten till 1912, when Feuillerat bought it out in his edition. On the circumstances of the publications of the two versions and on their relation see Maurice Evans, introduction, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, by Sir

suggests that they look at the two books as the reduplication of one "Arcadia," rather than as two separate and independent books. The question, most pursued by critics, arises: What has propelled Sidney into the revision — the reduplication — of his book? What is that "more" in the *New Arcadia*, which validates the revision?<sup>149</sup> The most available answer is to be found in Sidney's literary theory, the *Apology for Poetry*.

Sidney wrote his *Apology for Poetry*, a short summary of his literary agenda, in the interval between the writing of the two versions, at a time when he was already contemplating the transformation of the *Old Arcadia*. The *Apology*, because of this, is not only a defense of literature in general, but also a verification of the forthcoming revision. In this book, Sidney defines literature in regard to a certain excess which it contains. He asserts that the "skill of the artificer standeth in that idea or fore-conceit of the work, not in the work itself."<sup>150</sup> This definition arrives at the paradox that the work of art is not equal to the work of art, because there is always something more in the work of art than itself. He calls this excess the "idea" or "fore-conceit." This strange non-identity of art dominating Sidney's literary theory, is what propels him to search for something more in the *Old Arcadia* than what it is. His attempt to write the new version is an attempt to capture and make visible the Platonic excess of the idea or fore-conceit in his "Arcadia." In his attempt to define the nature of excess, he arrives at the conclusion that the fore-conceit makes it possible that art is more than the reality it imitates. Poetry is as "an art of imitation..., a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth — to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture — with this end, to teach and delight."<sup>151</sup> Poetic mimesis, therefore, offers more than a mirror image of the world. It also involves a pragmatic excess (which makes it possible for the

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Philip Sidney (London: Penguin Group, 1987) 11-12.

<sup>149</sup> Critics' views vary according to the answers they provide to this question. Here are two of the various approaches: Katherine Duncan-Jones sees the motive for the revision in Sidney's "deepening commitment to the intellectual French band of protestantism," on the one hand, and in the non-satisfying nature of his marriage, on the other. See Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991) 251, 256. Annabel M. Patterson, on the contrary, believes the "more" to be less. She sees a growing mystification of the clear Old Arcadian political judgements in the *New Arcadia*. See Annabel M. Patterson, "'Under...Pretty Tales': Intention in Sidney's *Arcadia*," *Essential Articles for the Study of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed., Arthur F. Kinney (Hamden: Shoe String Press, "Anchor Books," 1986) 357-375.

<sup>150</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed., Forrest G. Robinson (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1970) 16.

<sup>151</sup> Sidney, *Ibid.* 18.

poet to deliver nature's "brazen" world "golden") and an excess of enjoyment.<sup>152</sup> The excess of "teaching and delight," however, only explains why poetry (literature) is more than history and philosophy. Sidney's defense of poetry, thus, is only a defense in relation of other forms of writing, but it does not explain why poetry is more than itself. Sidney's far-reaching proposition that there is something more in the work than the "work itself," remains unaccounted for in his theory. This missing theory of the non-identity of art is explicated in the Lacanian concept of art.

Lacan argues that art reveals the excess of the real which haunts the symbolic system. His symbolic order is never a self-contained entity as, for example, structuralist theories envision it. According to Lacan, the automatism of signification, the reference of signifiers to signifieds or other signifiers, is never undisturbed in language. Instead, the symbolic system becomes the locus of some alien, disturbing, non-symbolic surplus, over which signification has no power. This point of surplus disrupts the mechanism of all reference because it does not take part in signification. It does not refer to anything and resists the possibility of being referred to. This surplus within signification, around which the signifiers endlessly circulate, is the Lacanian real.<sup>153</sup> In his definition of art, Lacan relies on the non-identity of the symbolic system. Art reveals the fraction in the symbolic caused by the real. It becomes "the support of the hidden reality," since the work of art "always encircles the Thing," the real.<sup>154</sup> Art, thus, does not signify the real, which cannot be involved in the mechanism of signification. By encircling it, however, it makes it more apparent. Lacan names a specific object, the *objet petit a*, which makes the real more apparent.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Sidney, *Ibid.* 15.

<sup>153</sup> The real is one of the three fields, the imaginary, the symbolic and the real, on which subjectivity is played out according to Lacan. In this triad, the real is, for example, the organism and its biological needs. More precisely, the real is what is completely heterogeneous from language, what cannot be designated by language. It lingers on in language as an alien residue, "the foreclosed element, which can be approached, but never grasped: the umbilical chord of the symbolic"; see Alan Sheridan, introduction, *Écrits: A Selection*, by Jacques Lacan (New York: Norton, 1977) x. Because of the real's fundamental heterogeneity to language--the real is what language is *not*--Lacan often refers to it as a lack or nothing.

<sup>154</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: 1959-60*, ed., Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1992) 141.

<sup>155</sup> By *petit a* (small "a") Lacan designates the small other (*autre*). In this way, he distinguishes it from the "big Other," the symbolic order. The *objet petit a* represents such an "otherness," which is an otherness even to the symbolic Otherness of language.

The *object petit a* has a heterogeneous role in the heterogeneous orders of the symbolic and the real. Although part of the real, it lingers in the symbolic order due to its strange complicity with the fetishistic object of desire, the object which the subject chooses as a poor substitute for the lost phallus. As an element of the real, it "rises in a bump" in the symbolic system into which it is inserted.<sup>156</sup> It sticks out. When the desiring subject, constituted as deprived, castrated at its entrance into language, is confronted with the surplus the *object a* represents, he takes it for the lost object of his desire. The thus "over-estimated" *object petit a* is used as a stuffing that would fill up the porous field of language invested with the lack of the phallus.<sup>157</sup> Sidney, in his revision, invests a similar expectation into heroism. He hopes that the increased heroic quality of his book will put an end, on the one hand, to his shortcomings as a writer and, on the other, to the troubles his heroes create when they prove incapable of satisfying their vehement sexual passions.<sup>158</sup> By transforming his light-hearted lovers into heroes, he expects them to be capable of dealing with problems in the interpersonal field of desire, something which normal men cannot do.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed., Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978) 257.

<sup>157</sup> Lacan, *Ibid.* 256.

<sup>158</sup> Lacanian theory contends that castration, the subject's lacking of the symbolic phallus, is an inevitable consequence of every subject's--male or female--entrance into the symbolic order. Moreover, this lacking has an equal impact on the field of signification and the field of desire. The subject's relation to both the language he speaks and the objects he desires are means of compensating for the lost phallus. Thus, the phallus becomes the signifier of the lacking state of the subject's symbolic existence, "a privileged signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire." See Lacan, *Écrits* 287-9. Such a conjunction of language and desire in the Lacanian theory underlies my attempt to draw a parallel Sidney's attempt at revision and his heroes' attempt to come to a point of satisfaction in their amorous and heroic pursuits.

<sup>159</sup> Even Sidney, as a writer, aspires to obtain heroic virtues. He attempts to shape poetry and writing into forms of heroism. Edward Berry suggests that, in his *Apology*, Sidney argues in favor of a literary heroism, by fusing the contemplative and active vocations of the poet and the warrior, by defining the goal of poetry as incitement of the reader to "virtuous action," by using military metaphors when discussing poetry and by exalting the heroic genre as the "most accomplished kind of poetry"; see Edward Berry, "The Poet as Warrior in Sidney's Defence of Poetry," *Studies in English Literature* (29, 1989) 21-34. This close association of poetry with heroism suggests that not only the characters' transformation from lovers into heroic examples but Sidney's attempt to capture a certain "more" in art is a form of heroic pursuit.

### The Excess of Heroism: In Pursuit of Desire

Heroism demands that one follow the road Aeneas took in Virgil's epic when he obeyed "the god's commandment to leave Dido," that is, to sacrifice love in order to continue heroic duties<sup>160</sup>. In the *Old Arcadia*, the two princes do exactly the opposite. They give up their heroic pilgrimage and stop in Arcadia to be completely absorbed in matters of love. This failed heroism has to be restored in the new version. Sidney's solution is, however, not absolutely Virgilian. His heroes do not sacrifice love for heroism, nor heroism for love. They attempt to reconcile love with heroism, hoping to redress the shortcomings of the former in this way. In order to furnish Pyrocles and Musidorus with more heroic traits, Sidney installs, into the plot, a lengthy journey the princes take prior to their arrival to Arcadia. In Book Two, Pyrocles and Musidorus, already in love with the Arcadian duke's two daughters, give a detailed account of this heroic journey. They use their narration in order to draw the princesses attention to their worthiness and, in this way, win their favors. Hence, the lustful tricksters of the *Old Arcadia*, are have turned into narrators of their own heroic adventures. They substitute the act of talking about their adventures for the pitfalls of desire involved in the sexual relation.

Sidney breaks the tradition of the sweet talking seducer, embodied by, for example, Chaucer's student or Marlowe's Leander, when he transforms Pyrocles and Musidorus into mouthpieces of their own heroism. When, for example, Pyrocles, still wearing the costume of an Amazon and using the name Zelmane, reveals his true sex and feelings to Philoclea, the barrier standing between them and the consummation of their love is lifted. The heroic narrative threatens to break off and turn into Pyrocles' and Philoclea's love-making — as eventually happens in the *Old Arcadia*. After several promises of love and marriage, kisses and embraces, however, Philoclea "kindly" persuades Pyrocles to keep himself busy talking of "those things which have made" him "precious to the world."<sup>161</sup> Pyrocles continues speaking, and his narration becomes a means of avoiding the sexual relation:

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<sup>160</sup> Sidney, *Apology* 49.

<sup>161</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed., Maurice Evans (London: Penguin Group, 1987) 331. Hereafter, the page numbers in parentheses, in the body of the text, refer to this edition. This edition merges the revision and the second part of Book Three and Books Four and Five of the *Old Arcadia*. In my essay, however, I use the name *New Arcadia* to refer to the revised Books One and Two and the first part of Book Three; and the name *Old Arcadia* to refer to the original five books, which is *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The Old Arcadia)*, ed., Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985).

Pyrocles easily perceived she was content with kindness to put off occasion of further kindness, wherein love showed himself a cowardly boy that durst not attend for fear of offending. But rather love proved himself valiant that durst with the sword of reverent duty gain-stand the force of so many enraged desires. But so it was, that though he knew this discourse was to entertain him from a more straight parley, yet he durst not but kiss his rod, and gladly make much of that entertainment which she allotted unto him... (331)

There is a fusion of the images of heroism and sexuality in the narrator's hesitation about whether love is "cowardly" or "valiant."<sup>162</sup> In Renaissance discourses of love, following the Ovidian tradition, it was common to use such military and heroic metaphors. Cupid's valiance is usually in his triumphant arrow, capable of wounding any one and achieving a very "straight" or, at least, very successful "parley." The narrator of the above passage, however, decides that restrained love is "valiant." In this way, the love of Pyrocles becomes a different kind of warfare. His love is heroic because it resists and controls the temptation of "enraged desires." "Duty" and obedience become his "sword." Pyrocles is not Cupid's passionate warrior, but a warrior against his passions. At this point, thus, heroism governs love and sexuality. Furthermore, Pyrocles is doubly a hero, for he is also heroic in talking about his heroic deeds. This exaltation of the power of the hero follows the logic of the "over-estimation" of heroism: heroism exceeds the problems of love and desire — there is "more" in it — , therefore, it is capable of solving them.

Sidney devotes a significant part of Book Two to showing that there is an excess amount of heroism in Pyrocles and Musidorus, which makes them capable of handling problems created by greed, love and hatred. At the end of Chapter Nine, after their first heroic successes in Phrygia and Pontus, the two princes make

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<sup>162</sup> Paul Allen Miller examines the fusion of images of love and heroism in Sidney's rhetoric and concludes that they are of Ovidian origin. Moreover, he argues that Sidney's first name, *Philippos*, which is Greek for Horse-Lover, already predestines him to the role of a knight, of which the poet is well aware. Sidney is also aware of the implication of the prefix *phil* (lover) in his name, which is discernable in his frequent use of this prefix in naming his heroes. Among these heroes are, for example, Astrophil (Star-Lover), Philisides (Star-Lover), Philanax (King-Lover), Pamphilius (All-Lover) and Antiphilus (Opposed-to-Loving); see Paul Allen Miller, "Sidney, Petrarch, and Ovid, or Imitation as Subversion," *English Literary History* (58, 1991) 516-18. Sidney's preoccupation with both the military and the amorous images explains why he exploits the fact that in his own name matters of love and heroism are already mingled. As a "Horse-Lover," a poet-knight, he fuses these two matters with an exceptional sensitivity in his writings.

a promise to actively seek honorable adventures, to "privately seek exercises of their virtue, thinking it not so worthy to be brought to heroic effects by fortune and necessity, like Ulysses or Aeneas, as by one's own choice and working" (275). Pyrocles and Musidorus are eager to prove that their heroism is "more" than the heroism of Ulysses and Aeneas. Their heroism appears as a point of fracture within the heroic tradition — that point of fracture where the heroic genre goes beyond itself. Possessing this excess of heroism, Pyrocles and Musidorus are expected to provide what other people lack or pursue in their relations with each-other.

All the characters Pyrocles and Musidorus run into are pursuing something unobtainable. The paranoid king of Phrygia, "full of watchful fearfulness," pursues personal safety above everything else (266). The king of Pontus, who lacks all consistency, does not know what he wants. Indeed, he even lacks an object to lack and, thus, he pursues a variety of objects, for example, generosity, cruelty and flattery. His counsellor, on the contrary, wants everything, so his jealousy turns what other people have into "the ground of his unhappiness" (272). On the whole, what most of the characters want is power. Plexirtus, however, the usurper of his brother's throne, and Antiphilus, who takes advantage of Queen Erona's love to obtain it, desire it the most. The other unobtainable object of desire is the object of love. Unrequited love dominates the chapter. It includes the friendly love of Tydeus and Telenor for Plexirtus, the self sacrificing love of Erona for Antiphilus, the aggressive love of Tiridates for Erona, the lecherous love of Andromana for Pyrocles and Musidorus, the faithful love of Palladius for Zelmane and the tragic love of Zelmane for Pyrocles. Indicative of this complicated emotional mixture of love, greed and jealousy is the story of Pamphialus.

Pamphialus pursues women or, as he puts it, "beauty, in others and delight" in himself (338). In his miscellaneous love relations, he takes advantage of the very fact that everyone pursues whatever he/she lacks. He makes his harem of women "now jealous, now envious, now proud..., desirous of more, now giving one the triumph" (336). When Pamphialus manipulates his mistresses' jealousy, he takes advantage of the Lacanian mechanism of desire, which dictates that desire should be a state of lacking, rather than the pursuit of an object.<sup>163</sup> This lacking field of

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<sup>163</sup> Lacan argues that desire cannot be embodied by an object, but rather, it is the lack of the object. For example, the phallus, the ultimate object of desire, is nothing else but a lack, "the minus-phi  $[(-\phi)]$  of castration" (Lacan, *FFC* 89). Pamphialus takes advantage of the Lacanian mechanism of desire, because, he gains the women's desperate desire primarily not by being a supremely attractive object of love or--to use Joan Rees' expressions--not by "his deployment of persuasive arts," but by "his use of the weakness which the women's infatuation" exposes. Pamphialus, thus, demonstrates Lacan's argument that desire does not originate in the desired object, but in the desiring subject. See Joan Rees, "Sidney and a Lover's Complaint," *The Review of English Studies* (42, May, 1991) 159.

desire is what Pyrocles and Musidorus are expected to bring to a state of fullness by their being heroic.

Pyrocles and Musidorus try to live up to this heroic ideal, by attempting to rescue and supply these people being missed. For example, they rescue the countries of Phrygia and Pontus from unjustly ruling tyrants with foul ambitions and restore the rightful rulers. They expel Plexirtus, the malicious bastard son of the Paphlagonian king, who usurps the throne, and restore the true son, Leonantus. They help Erona, the queen of Lycia in her battle against the aggressive love of Tiridates, by rescuing Antiphilus, the man she is in love with, from Tiridates' revenge. On his way to teach a lesson to the over-proud knight, Anaxius, Pyrocles rescues Pamphilius from dying at the hands of the tormenting Dido and other furious gentlewomen. Pyrocles and Musidorus, then, turn out to be victorious and valiant heroes in all their fights. While they do not lack anything as heroes, there is a price to be paid for their heroism.

In spite of the princes' best efforts to be heroic, towards the end of Book Two, their deliberate heroism turns into survival skills. Their fights are carried out not so much by their "own choice and working," as forced by accidental circumstances or even by the evil forces they unleash. Most often, their well-intended chivalric deeds backfire, and, when they labor to restore what or whom is most desired, they cause more trouble than good. At Phrygia, for example, their victory against the melancholic and wickedly suspicious king is glorious, but it has a price. The price is to be paid by the two faithful servants of the princes, who are executed as an act of revenge by the inconsistently cruel king of neighboring Pontus. The subsequent restoration of the just Leonantus to the throne of Paphlagonia unleashes a number of evil manipulations by his bastard brother, Plexirtus. One of them causes the death of Tydeus and Telenor after they battle each other in disguise. Pyrocles and Musidorus rescue Antiphilus from Tiridates, but it is all in vain, since Antiphilus proves to be so unworthy. In return, this cowardly and hypocritical character puts Queen Erona into the danger of being burnt alive. Similarly, when Pyrocles saves Pamphilius from the fervent vengeance of the women, he, indirectly, causes the death of the noble Dido. Ironically, when the princes' own person is desired by the lecherous Andromana, they quickly escape from the burdens of her desire. This escape demands the lives of the helpful Palladius and the languishing Zelmane. As the story progresses, there is more of what the princes should avoid doing and less of what they should do. Although they always find themselves in the middle of already very problematic situations, these problematic situations explode into a myriad of losses and even serious tragedies as soon as they touch them. Their adventures in the pursuit of what others lack end on tragic notes.

Mopsa, Pamela's simple-minded maid, tells a mock-heroic romance, which turns out to be a comic echo of the princes' stories about the impossibility of the pursuit of a desired object. The heroine of her story, the "fairest daughter" of the "mightiest" king, gets her prince-charming, the knight with "one hair of gold, and

the other of silver" (311) Still, the princess gains no satisfaction from what she has obtained. As soon as she asks the name of the knight, he vanishes. When the princess sets off on a quest for him, she finds the same disappointment with every object she obtains. Mopsa expresses this disappointment with the dull repetition of the element of the nut which is given to the princess, but which she cannot open. The fact that the knight vanishes as soon as she asks his name — which she does, since "her mouth so watered that she could not choose but ask him the question" — indicates that underneath the subject's pursuit of its desire the oral drive is present (311). On the one hand, Mopsa's greediness — revealed by her insistence on over-telling the story and her desire for Philoclea's wedding gown, which she is offered if she stops talking — and, on the other hand, her preoccupation with food, indicate the complicity of desire and the oral drive. Such a complicity of desire and the drive becomes more apparent in Amphialus' heroism mixed with love.

#### The Heroic Excess in Amphialus: The *object petit a*

Amphialus appears as a new character in the *New Arcadia* and becomes a double of both Pyrocles and Musidorus in matters heroic and amorous. His figure, however, is not an identical reduplication of the princes, since he embodies the heroic excess missing from Pyrocles and Musidorus. Amphialus is the hero whom Pyrocles and Musidorus would like to or should be. His relationship to Pyrocles and Musidorus is similar to the relationship of the *New Arcadia* to the *Old Arcadia*. There is a certain "more" in Amphialus. He is, for example, characterized as an all-exceeding super-hero in Queen Helen's telling description: "Who is courteous, noble, liberal, but he that hath the example before his eyes of Amphialus? Where are all heroical parts but in Amphialus?" (122). She suggests that Amphialus is the paragon of chivalric heroism. The fact that Amphialus exceeds Musidorus as a hero is further illuminated in the scene in which Musidorus finds his scattered armor. He puts it on, but feels that the armor is "something too great," indicating that Amphialus is greater than Musidorus (119). Amphialus' armor, the symbol of his heroic prowess, is alien to Musidorus, who does not even have a chance to grow into the armor in a series of ordeals, like other chivalric heroes of Renaissance narratives (for example Spenser's Red Cross knight, who grows into the old and dented armor he takes on as he sets off on his heroic pilgrimage to rescue Una's parents). The fact that Pyrocles is inferior to Amphialus in heroic prowess is further shown when they both fall in love with the same woman, Philoclea. In their mock fight, by the river Ladoñ, over the glove of Philoclea, Pyrocles/Zelmae wounds Amphialus, yet Amphialus still proves to be superior in chivalric heroism over Pyrocles in Zelmae-"drag." He enrages Zelmae by being what she/he would like to be: masculine and heroic. The Zelmae costume allows Amphialus to be a chivalric hero who does not hurt a lady and it degrades Pyrocles/Zelmae to a

feminine, non-heroic level, which he keeps till the end of the manuscript. Amphialus, therefore, is set up as an example for Pyrocles and Musidorus, with whom they cannot compete.

Although Amphialus is a near-flawless knight, there is one trouble with him. His whole existence in the story is superfluous. Amphialus is always at the wrong place at the wrong time. He has no evil within him, yet his mere existence is enough to cause tragedies. He unintentionally kills his best friend and his stepfather. Through another unintended murder, he inflicts death on his faithful servant Ismenus. He kills Parthenia without knowing about it. He is also inserted into the love quartet of Pyrocles-Philoclea-Musidorus-Pamela as a "fifth wheel." He is especially superfluous in the relationship of Pyrocles and Philoclea, which he threatens to destroy with his fervent love. Although we cannot condemn him for any of the actions, his presence proves very destructive to the other characters. Rather than being an image to solely identify with, he also functions as a "stain" which blurs the "picture" of both the romance and heroism.<sup>164</sup> In the case of Pyrocles and Musidorus, we have seen that heroism is not capable of providing what other people lack. However, while Pyrocles and Musidorus do not lose anything, but watch others lose, Amphialus is, himself, inflicted with loss. His entrance into the story, for example, is already related to a series of tragic relationships.

Sidney's introduces the reader to Amphialus' story *in medias res*. We see him after he became "all directed to setting forward the suit of his friend, Philoxenus," to Helen Queen of Corinth (124-25). This is shortly after Helen's has fallen in love with him and after Amphialus has left the court to avoid the awkward love-triangle. Nonetheless, still he ends up unintentionally causing both his friend's and his old stepfather's death. The reader first "encounters" Amphialus at this point of the story. The encounter is a peculiar one because it does not take place in the ordinary sense of the word. Amphialus is not present when Musidorus and his companion, Clitophon, on their quest for Pyrocles, come upon his deserted armor:

... Clitophon espied a piece of armor and, not far off, another piece; and so the sight of one piece teaching him to look for more, he at length found all, with

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<sup>164</sup> This metaphor of the stain anticipates the relation of Amphialus to the real through the *object petit a*, which my paper explains a little further. The stain is a function of the *object petit a* of the scopic drive, the gaze. Lacan defines it as that, "which always escapes from the grasp of that form of vision that is satisfied with itself in imagining itself as consciousness" (Lacan, *FFC* 74). The stain, therefore, disrupts, blurs, the visual identifications, both the narcissistic one with the ideal-ego in the mirror and the symbolic one with the ego-ideal, constituted by the image of the "parent holding [the child] up before the mirror" (Lacan, *Ibid.* 257). Amphialus is, similarly, such a heroic example with whom Pyrocles and Musidorus find it increasingly difficult to identify or, simply, coexist.

head-piece and shield, by the device whereof he straight knew it to be the armor of his cousin, the noble Amphialus. (119)

Although Amphialus has never lost a fight, nor has he ever failed in his heroic duties, still, his armor indicates that, as a hero, he is suffering from a certain loss. He has lost a good friend and a stepfather and has made a noble lady's life a tragedy. All of these losses become represented by the loss of his armor. His relationship with the armor and the heroic ideal ego, which it represents, indicates why he cannot be a heroic example. Until the tragic loss of his friend, Philoxenus, and his step-father, Timotheus, Amphialus wears the armor and identifies with the chivalric ideal it represents. The scattered pieces of the armor lying on the ground, however, indicate that the identification is broken. Another form of "identification," the drive's movement around its *objet petit a*, is also revealed in the relation between Amphialus and his armor.

The armor, lying almost carcass-like, functions as an *objet petit a* for Amphialus. Scattered on the ground, in pieces, which have been taken off Amphialus and, which used to fit his body very well, the armor closely resembles the body-parts of its owner. These empty armor-pieces fulfill Lacan's definition of the *objet petit a*:

The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking. It must, therefore, be an object that is, firstly, separable and, secondly, that has some relation to the lack.<sup>165</sup>

The pieces of Amphialus' armor function as the *objet petit a*, since they imitate the body-parts (arms, legs, chest and head) from which they have been detached. Through the anthropomorphic nature of the armor, Amphialus' own carcass, his mutilated body, is imitated. Although he has won the fight with Philoxenus, it is as if he had lost parts of his body, as if he had also been wounded, like Philoxenus, and as if he were missing metallic limbs. Moreover, Amphialus is himself missing from the scene. Since the *objet a* represents what the subject has lost in

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<sup>165</sup> Lacan, *FFC* 103.

The subject is always in loss of something real, since he never stops separating himself from parts of himself. The subject separates himself from various body-parts (placenta, feces, urine, sperm, and so on) and from parts superimposed on him: the breast, the voice and the eye. These objects are the originals of the *objet petit a*, the lost object of the real. See Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Lacan: The Absolute Master*, trans. Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991) 230-1. These objects have to be separable, indeed, already separated from and never to be regained by the subject in order to embody what the subject lacks in the real.

order to appear as a subject, the armor scene reflects on the parallel nature of self-loss and symbolic existence. This paradoxical emergence of a split in the Lacanian subject is manifested in Amphialus' own disappearance from his armor and with his coinciding emergence in the story.

Amphialus enters the story through his "device," displayed on the shield, which Clitophon recognizes. In Lacanian terms, this heraldic design takes on the function of the signifier which represents Amphialus "for another signifier" and, in this way, drags Amphialus "by the shield" into the signifying network of chivalry.<sup>166</sup> He is tossed "device first" into the story, which is being narrated, at this point, by Helen. Queen Helen's mourning coach comes, and she reveals the intricate relationship of Amphialus to Philoxenus and herself. The coach also, "itself very richly furnished in black and white, ... drawn with four milk-white horses furnished all in black, with a black-a-moor boy upon every horse, they all apparelled in white" in a sense tells a certain story (119). It arrives in intricate black-and-whiteness, which is like — to use a contemporary analogy — an embellished, hand-written page of a chronicle (after all, Helen relates old events) or — to use a modern, Saussurean analogy — the symbolic field of differences, onto which the subject's story is inscribed. At the same time, it is a mourning coach, indicating that Amphialus is represented in his own story as someone dead — or at least absent. In this scene, Amphialus, the subject, is constructed, but constructed as what Lacan calls a split subject (\$). The subject is divided by a bar, like the signifier from the signified, because language "refers itself to the discourse of the other" and never to the real. Thus, in language, something is inevitably alienated.<sup>167</sup> His device on the armor embodies the loss which destines Amphialus to be absent from his own story. As a lost body-part of Amphialus, the armor embodies the real loss. As a signifier, it signifies the symbolic loss the split subject has to suffer. Thus, "two lacks," a symbolic and a real lack, overlap in the armor.<sup>168</sup>

### **Amphialus Disappears: The Death-Drive**

The second lack of the real is revealed behind Amphialus' pursuit of desire. Amphialus pursues heroic victories, which he always equates with amorous victories. The whole revised part of Book Three is a description of a series of such victories. After Amphialus' mother, the cruel Cecropia kidnaps the princesses and Zelmane/Pyrocles, Basilius' launches a siege on his castle. Amphialus is prepared, and a chivalric "tug-of-war" over the "three ladies" begins. Amphialus, like

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<sup>166</sup> Lacan, *FFC* 207.

<sup>167</sup> Lacan, *Écrits* 85.

<sup>168</sup> Lacan, *FFC* 204-05.

Pyrocles, Musidorus and, as we have seen, many Renaissance lovers, treats victory in love as he does victory in battle. Although the capability of Amphialus as a military commander is contrasted with his incapability as a lover, he still tries to substitute one for the other. As a commander, Amphialus "amplified with arguments and examples, and painted with rhetorical colours" spreads "abroad many discourses" (454). As a lover, however, he becomes "dumb-stricken" at the sight of Philoclea (457). Amphialus' solution is to organize the battle into a means of obtaining Philoclea. He hopes that by proving a hero in Philoclea's eyes, he will change her emotions towards him for the better. He organizes private jousts with, for example, Phalantus, who similarly fights "for the love of honour or the honour of his love" (494). He victoriously takes part in a number of jousts, held in front of Philoclea's window, deluding himself as if it were simultaneously a victory in love. Cecropia helps him believe in this delusion in order to satisfy her political ambitions. Heroic victory and amorous victory, however, go separate ways. Heroic victory is inflicted with loss, the loss of Amphialus as well as of his adversaries.

In the end, all of Amphialus' victories prove to be Pyrrhic victories. One by one they undo him. As private jousts of Amphialus become more and more tragic, they serve less as occasions of victory, and more as occasions of loss. In their description, for example, the emphasis shifts from providing a proof of Amphialus' heroic prowess to portrayals of wounding, cutting, bursting open and death. In, for example, Amphialus' fight with Argalus and, subsequently, Parthenia, Amphialus' victory proves to be a cruel victory. Argalus dies, because "Amphialus forgat all ceremonies, and with cruel blows made more of his [Argalus'] best blood succeed the rest" (506). This time, Amphialus only loses tears, with which "he honoured his adversary's death" (509). In the subsequent death of Parthenia, however, the tragic widow of Argalus, his loss is greater. Realizing the vanity of his victory, he casts away his sword, after breaking it into pieces:

[Amphialus'] wisdom could not so far temper his passion but that he took his sword, counted the best in the world (which with much blood he had once conquered of a mighty giant) and brake it into many pieces (which afterwards he had good cause to repent) saying, that neither it was worthy to serve the noble exercise of chivalry, nor any other worthy to feel that sword which had stroken so excellent a lady; and withal, banishing all cheerfulness of his countenance, he returned home, where he got him to his bed, not so much to rest his restless mind as to avoid all company, the sight whereof was tedious unto him. (531)

The rejection of the sword is almost the exact repetition of the act of shedding the armor. Here too, the sword embodies a certain loss. The broken pieces of the sword are reminders of the blood Amphialus lost when he obtained it. The sword transforms from the signifier, which initiated Amphialus into the field of the Other — the Lacanian "mighty giant" — into the *objet petit a*, his blood. The blood

Parthenia shed when she was struck by the sword, and his own "blood," stand for the real loss the subject is invested with, in the field of language. As the sword breaks into pieces, it is transformed from a phallic substitute into a manifestation of such a loss, from a signifier into an *object petit a*. Reduced to mere fractures, the sword serves as the lack, with which Amphialus identifies, and in this identification fantasizes about his own disappearance, "banishing all cheerfulness of his countenance" and retiring to his room. Because of his intimate relation with his broken sword, after casting it away he hides from people, as if saying: "What if I ceased to exist too, like my sword, or like I already ceased to exist, when I came into existence at the loss of myself, my blood, my *object petit a*?" The phantasy of disappearing in the annihilating identification with the *object a*, the death drive, is the only solution that Lacan proposes to the split subject's symbolic existence in the dialectic of alienation:

The phantasy of one's death, of one's disappearance, is the first object that the subject has to bring into play in this dialectic, and he does indeed bring it into play—as we know from innumerable cases, such as anorexia nervosa. We also know that the phantasy of one's death is usually manipulated by the child in his love relations with his parents.<sup>169</sup>

The phantasy of the *object petit a*, then, is a chance for the subject to step out of the rigid network of its symbolic existence. Such an exit is only possible, because the *object a* furnishes an image of the subject in which he "identifies, without being able to identify himself in it."<sup>170</sup> Identification with the *object a* opens up a real field of existence, an existence fundamentally other than being constructed by various chains of signifiers. This identification is fundamentally different from the subject's imaginary or symbolic series of identifications. The narcissistic identification with the ideal ego is full and unobstructed, and in it, the ego is constructed. The symbolic identification is an obstructed and partial one, the subject can never completely be like the ego ideal, however, it engenders the subject. In the *object petit a*, however, the subject identifies with what is *not* him, that is, his own absence. The identification with the *object a* annihilates former identifications and their products, the ego and the subject. The *object a*, thus, is that "point of lack" at which "the subject has to recognize himself."<sup>171</sup> The subject's exit from the alienated symbolic field is, at the same time, his disappearance as a subject, the death drive.

The fight of Amphialus with the Black Prince, the most significant joust of Book Three, becomes a foreshadowing of his disappearance. In its description, the

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<sup>169</sup> Lacan, *Ibid.* 214-15.

<sup>170</sup> Borch-Jacobsen, *Lacan: The Absolute Master* 237.

<sup>171</sup> Lacan, *FFC* 270.

text revolves around images of wounding and death. It is a fight of exaggerated mutilation. The two knights do not stop fighting when they are "bleeding so abundantly that everybody that saw them fainted for them..." (541). They still fight, animated by wrath and courage alone, after they receive the following injuries:

[T]he forsaken knight, coming in with his right leg and making it guide the force of the blow, strake Amphialus upon the belly so horrible a wound that his guts came out withal. Which Amphialus perceiving (fearing death, only because it should come with overthrow) he seemed to conjure all his strength for one moment's service; and so, lifting up his sword with both hands, hit the forsaken knight upon the head a blow, wherewith his sword brake. (542)

To the horrifying images of mutilation, Sidney adds the element of an irrational and inhuman heroic persistence. In the fighting figures of Amphialus and the Black Prince ("the forsaken knight"), he has created figures of almost supernatural proportions. Such an extremity of perseverance resembles Old English heroic poetry, in which courage and vengeance know no obstacles, and Arthurian romances, in which supernatural forces often assist the hero. It is not, however, a characteristic feature of Sidney's writing, whose heroes tend to be very human in all aspects. The senseless mutilation of the fight is carried out to its extreme. If Amphialus' supporter, Anaxius, does not rescue him and put an end to the fight, both knights would, undoubtedly, fight till the end of time, since "pain rather seemed to increase life than to weaken life in these champions" (542). Amphialus is especially heavily wounded, after "receiving wound upon wound" and is carried back into the castle half dead (543).

Sidney proceeds by experimenting with the reader's imaginative capacities. The fate he allots to Amphialus is not death, but more wounds, and it is in dying, not in death, that his hero "lives" the death drive. Having been ignorant of the fact that Cecropia has been mentally and physically tormenting the princesses in order to satisfy her political ambitions, Amphialus is deeply shocked when he finally learns about it. He takes Philoclea's knives and stabs himself "into divers places of his breast and throat, until those wounds, with the old, freshly bleeding," bring him "to the senseless gate of death" (575). While he stabs himself, the knives become both symbolically and physically integrated into his body. As an *object petit a*, the knives appear as a cut in every attempt of integration. In this way, when Amphialus stabs himself, he imitates the workings of the drive, which encircles its lost object and, in its circular movement, constitutes the body as an empty

"rim."<sup>172</sup> Amphialus' wounded body becomes this rim of the drive. Repeating the motion of the drive, he stabs himself with a senseless and mechanical persistence.<sup>173</sup> Instead of the finality of death, he becomes a "living wound," an *alien* body in this world, which is, nonetheless, still present. At the end of the manuscript, it is still not certain, whether he will die or survive with the help of Helen's magic "surgeon". He is still bleeding and as he lingers on in the story, his tragedy causes similar losses in his faithful servants as well, who are "tearing their clothes" and even "wounding themselves, and sprinkling their blood in the air" (579).

### Sidney's Revision: The Death Drive

Shortly after the "death" of Amphialus, leaving neither enough time for the servants' blood to stop "sprinkling" nor for Helen's tears to stop flowing, Sidney's manuscript breaks off. Is Sidney engulfed with his hero by the annihilating leftover of the real, which he has been pursuing in the surplus of the fore-conceit? Has Sidney, the "poet-knight," encountered the gap of the real behind the glitter of heroism? Certainly, we can say that along with Amphialus' increasing confrontation with blood, wounding and the bursting open of the body, Sidney's text also swells into a rhetorical excess around such sites of lack. In Book Three the narrator is most preoccupied with images related to cutting, which, in their overelaborated superfluosity, become "stuck in the gullet" of Sidney's signifiers, as disturbing surpluses, like Amphialus' dead, but still bleeding body.<sup>174</sup> A good example of

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<sup>172</sup> The identification with the *object a* transports the subject into the realm of the drive, since the point of lack the subject has to identify with is the part-object of the drive, the forever lost real object. The drive starts out from the "cuts," those parts of the subject's body, where the inside and the outside meet, like the lips, the anus, etc. From these points, which Lacan calls the "rim" of the drive, the drive encircles the non-existent *object petit a*. The drive is never capable of reintegrating the lost object into the subject's already mapped out, symbolic body. However, it is never capable of discharging it either. See Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990) 112. Identifying with the nothingness of the *object a*, becoming the empty rim of the drive, is the only way for the subject to identify with the nothingness of the real from within his symbolic body, which is mapped out by the drive.

<sup>173</sup> The compulsion to repeat is a manifestation of the real, which is attributed by Freud to the conservative nature of the instincts and by Lacan to the circular and persistent movement of the drive. See Jonathan Scott Lee, *Jacques Lacan* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1991) 143.

<sup>174</sup> Lacan, *FFC* 270.

such a rhetoric is the description of the dying Parthenia's wound. The metaphors which Sidney uses, ascribe a great deal of beauty to the wound. On her neck, Sidney writes:

most dainty blood laboured to drown his own beauties, so as here was  
a river of purest red, there an island of perfectest white, each giving  
lustre to the other. (528)

This magnificent rhetoric describes the horrifying wound, the embodiment of loss and destruction, through images of self-destruction. Since the wound is both the island and the river and the one is flooded with the other, the wound is not simply the image of destruction, but an image of intensified destruction — destruction destroying itself. This image creates an increased sense of loss. To this intensified loss of all beauty, an excess of beauty is added, generated by the aesthetically appealing nature of the images of river and island. This beauty of rhetoric/rhetoric of beauty, which is a mesmerizing surplus added to the horrifying image of destruction, is the *object petit a* of Sidney's text. His magnificent rhetoric, thus, encircles the non-symbolic "Thing" embodied in the incomprehensible beauty of destruction.<sup>175</sup> Lacan points out that in every intellectual attempt to write something extraordinary, the elevated white sheet of paper turns into a "piece of lavatory paper," the empty object of the anal drive. Sidney's rhetorical effusions come to a stop in this way, indicating the persistence of the death-drive in writing. His images are not simply images of destruction, but images which destroy themselves. His over-valued and over-elaborated text "drowns" in its own flood of rhetoric.

## Conclusion

At this point, the parallel, I have been drawing has come to its natural conclusion. Sidney has attempted to revise the *Old Arcadia* and capture a certain "more" within it. Pyrocles, Musidorus and Amphialus have attempted to bring heroism to an excessive degree, where their shortcomings as lovers are made up for. The Lacanian concepts of the real and the *object petit a* have shown why, paradoxically, Sidney has found the surplus of the "fore-conceit" in that point of fracture where his text loses its self-identity, and why Amphialus' solution to the void of desire, created by Philoclea's refusal, becomes his own disappearance through a transformation into a "living wound." The Lacanian symbolic system carries an alien element in it, which is equivalent to the destruction of the system. The subject has an intimate relation with this surplus in the form of the *object petit a*. This *object petit a* may indeed be a solution to the subject's lacking symbolic

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<sup>175</sup> Lacan, *Seminar VII* 141.

existence. Not, however, as a filling in of the porous symbolic field, but as a possible exit out of it. Thus, the subject's relation to his own non-existence, the death-drive, is manifested in Sidney's *New Arcadia*, on two levels: on the level of the text, in its non-identical reduplication and its over-abundant imagery of wounds, and on the level of the story, especially in the persistent and superfluous presence of the living-dead hero, Amphialus.



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