COUNTERFEITING THE DEEP TRAGEDIAN AND DROPPING MILLSTONES FROM THE EYES – THE RHETORICAL CONNECTION IN SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDY (SOME BRIEF NOTES)

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Elizabethan tragedy provides copious exemples both of the enticing role of rhetorical manipulation and the enriching art of persuasion, and the reference to Shakespearian tragedy substantiates the ambiguous status *of the speaker and the misleading power of words. This paper aims at illustrating this concern with language and with the accomplished orator and performer as a figure often deprived of feeling of pity and sympathy.*

Elizabethan tragedy has rhetoric and rhetorical devices at its core, adding to the traditional concern of treatises and studies on the art of the orator or on the wit of persuasion, either in the Aristotelian and Ciceronian legacies or in their medieval and Renaissance sequence, the emphasis dictated by the suggestive power of words or the captivating virtue of speech. As a matter of fact, in the symbiotic and cross-fertilizing languages involved in a play written by Shakespeare and his

fellow dramatists, no matter how vital the spectacular moment as the full consummation of the words on the stage claims to be, the fascination of speech acting in beauty or in evocation (having as a rule the bare support of space and scenery lacking in gorgeous or sophisticated panoply of technical possibilities), text and words join what is to be seen ('theatrum') and what is to be heard ('audience', 'audire', those who are there to listen). Public occasions describe and identify genres of rhetorical speech – forensic speech, deliberative speech, epideictic speech -, and theatre and drama plays the role of an educational source of *disputatio* and argument at schools and universities, going hand in hand with the multifarious aspects of daily life and experience. The stage is a tremendous rival of the pulpit, and actors and preachers are qualified instruments of information, hystrionic agents of persuasion and revelation, deceit and illusion.

Rhetoric matters when the actor, or the character he embodies, finds in speech a primary reference of his identification. Shylock, the old obstinate miser, exposes his obsessions in repetition, 'let him look to his bond, let him look to his bond', and his article of faith in the ready-made proverb 'Fast bind, fast find - / A proverb never stale in thrifty mind' (*The Merchant of Venice,* 2. 3. 552-53*)*[1], Polonius, King Claudius' affected adviser, displays his vanity and vacuity in redundancies and platitudes, even when he claims accuracy and promises to revert to plainness of style – 'Madam, I swear I use no art at all. / That he is mad, 'tis true; 'tis true 'tis pity, / And pity 'tis 'tis true – a foolish figure, / But farewell it, for I will use no art,'(*Hamlet,* 2. 2. 97-100) -, Holofernes exhibits his pedantry in the convolutions of his ludicrous speech – 'The posterior of the day, most generous sir, is

liable, congruent, and measurable for the afternoon. The word is well culled, choice, sweet, and apt, I do assure you, sir, I do assure' (*Love's Labour's Lost,* 5.1. 77-80), Falstaff, exposed by Prince Harry in the tavern (*1 Henry IV* 1.2), is the funny merry rogue that still amuses his jolly good fellows with the absurd deviousness of his *pro se* argument, Hotspur proclaims his extravagant sense of honour – 'Imagination of some great exploit / Dives him beyond the bound of patience' (1. 3. 197-198), as the shrewd and pragmatic Northumberland observes – in passionate hyperbolic ejaculations – 'By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap / To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon, / .../' (1. 3. 199ff), an insinuated tragic defeat ratified later on, in the sacrificial tone of this brave knight out of joint on the eve of the final battle – 'Come, let us take a muster speedily. Doomsday is near; die all, die marrily' (4. 2.134-135).'; and who else could say those beautiful and delicate verses of the subverted *epithalamion*, the apostrophe to 'love performing night' in the female most charming voice but fair Juliet (*Romeo and Juliet,* the opening of 3. 2.), or could give form and meaning to mutual love in a shared sonnet with the gente pilgrim in the ball of the Capulets (1. 5. 90ff) and make with him the trivial sublime in the night enchantment in the balcony scene (2. 1.)? And does not Othello, the great general of Venice, display his self-assertiveness when, surrounded of threatening solicitors, raising his terse voice of command in disarming authority with the so quoted 'Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust'em' (*Othello,* 1. 2. 60), and later, before the Senate, when the deliberative occasion concerning the movements of the Turks gives way to the judicial moment of the arraigment of the Moor, does he not impress the audience with the calm potency of his

eloquence, timely modelled with the humble peroration of the soldier allegedly deprived of the skills of the orator - '…Rude am I in my speech, / And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace, /…/' (1. 3. 81-82) and conjure the supremacy of his unassailable *ethos*?

The *locus classicus* of the word in action in a public occasion is perhaps to be found in Act 3 scene 2 of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Marcus Brutus, the leader of the conspirators that will kill Caesar – 'a bleeding business' performed by 'sacrificers, not butchers', as the idealistic noble Roman insists on – addresses the plebeians in a plain, balanced and classical prose, and facts are presented in an even testimony, with poise and deliberate rational command. The reluctant conspirator had examined with method and scruple his inner conflicting voices (*v. g.* 2. 1. 10-39); now the orator appeals to the scrutiny of the citizens, his style is not high or lofty, as it would become the epideictic laudatory speech, because what is at a stake is not the exaltation of the virtues of the deceased man of state, or the qualities of friend and companion, but the justification of an act that should be taken as a painful cruel necessity that goes beyond personal ties and affections and aims rather at the preservation of the dignity and liberty of Rome threatened by an impending danger: 'not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more', he asserts with emphasis and conviction. A strong prerequisite of persuasion is the *ethos* of the speaker, his authority as an honourable man and a respected citizen – 'Believe me for mine honour, and have respect for mine honour, that you may believe' – and his argument, served by a regular swaying rhythm and balanced structure – 'As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honour him; but,

as he was ambitious, I slew him' – does not produce its intended effects on the crowd, surrendered to the elegant oratory, and ignorant of the purposes of the orator´s voice and the urge for reasoning and cool ponderation; the Plebeians are ready to replace the dictator that never was by the brand new absolute ruler to be ('Let him be Caesar' /…/ Caesar better parts / Shall be crowned in Brutus').

Anyway 'purgation' cannot prevail over 'murder' when the dialogical moment is denied and the unconclusive narrative is taken over by an alternative voice ready to subvert the precarious version of the generous noble Roman. His cunning adversary speaks in verse, a more appropriate vehicle for the creation and manipulation of emotions. Brutus is absent, a sign of his inconditional trust in his recalcitrant fellow traveller, thus entitled as the herald of the cause: in fact a suicidal move that erases dialogue, gives free vent to the remarkable rhetorical abilities of Caesar's protégé, and devastates an argument in drastic need of support and consistence. The orator is inviting in his *exordium*: 'Friends, countrymen, lend me your ears' is decidedly warmer and more intimate than the terse and conventional 'Romans, countrymen, and lovers, hear me for my cause, and be silent, that you may hear' of the preceding speaker; and his promised apology – 'Do grace to Caesar's corpse, and grace his speech / Tending to Caesar's glories, which Mark Antony, /By our permission, is allowed to make' -, that seals the fatal gesture of the credulous Brutus, if not informing the main intention of his *inventio*, it antecipates, at least, a brief ceremony of mourning ('I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him'.) with further inflexions of devastating import. What follows is also well-known – a convoluted discourse that gropes at possibilities in its captivating

insinuations, and the adversative, conditional or concessive clauses twist and undermine Brutus' stance and jeopardize the integrity of his *ethos*:

> 'But Brutus says he was ambitious,
> And Brutus is an honourable man.
> /…/
> Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,
> And Brutus is an honourable man.'

It is a modest and honest man who addresses the assembly – 'I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke, / But here I am to speak what I know' – and later on a touching peroration will vibrate in the same tone – ' I am no orator, as Brutus is, / But as you know me all, a plain blunt man, / That love my friend;', reviving the contrast between the deceitful artifice of the flowery speech and the plain unadorned words of the simple truth; his testimony will inflame the passions of the common people, moving on by careful steps, testing reactions, with the most accute and operative *kairos*, or sense of time, a precious item in the legacy of the acccomplished orator. The alleged 'ambition' is ruled out by means of the joint operation of *entimeme*, or rhetorical syllogism (*v. g.* An ambitious man grabs a kingly crown whenever it is offered to him / Caesar thrice refused a kingly crown, *ergo* Caesar is not an ambitious man) and *topoi* found in the most basic experience (the non-scientific proof, in Aristotelian tradition – to be just to his friends, to bring captives to Rome, to feel sympathy towards the poor, and everything that the orator has yet in store to describe the man, all that clashes against label and allegation that would vindicate the bloody action of the conspirators); and the 'honourable man', a phrase

so recurrently conjured to characterize Brutus, slides down and becomes the euphemistic covering for vice and iniquity, the *paradiastole* working at the level of an argument *in utramque partem* and demolishing a refashioned murder – the manly deed of the noble sacrificers, thus exposing the nature of Brutus' undertaking in the paradox that exploits the vulnerable *pathos* of the crowd and urges an impossible composed discrimination:

> 'O judgement! Thou are fled to brutish beasts,
> And men have lost their reason. /…/' (see also the open pun on *Brutus*).

Angels do not stab, and Brutus was Caesar's angel, 'Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms', was the crucial factor in great Caesar's fall – the audience weep before the hystrionic captivating performance, the impressive *actio* or copious delivery, appropriately spiced by the iconic reference, 'Even at the base of Pompey's statue, / Which all the while ran blood, great Caesar fell', and the powerful symbol provided by the timely *oxymoron* of the visual proof – 'I tell you that which yourselves do know / Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor poor dumb mouths, / And bid them speak for me'. Then the last will and testament, another trumph in a wide range of resources, fuelling the insidious suggestion of mutiny behind the mask of wisdom and restraint (*v. g.*, 'I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke, / But here I am to speak what I do know', 101-102). Power lies in words and Brutus' naïve great expectations in the persuasive nature of *logos* and reason crumbles down in face of the irruption of the corrupting force of *pathos* and inordinate passions, perhaps, as Quentin Skinner writes, in a victory mainly directed by the rhetorical figure of *paradiastole,* the instrument

of excuse, according to Henry Peacham in his *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) –

> 'Unlike Falstaff, or even Shylock, Brutus cannot simply be dismissed for attempting, in Peacham's phrase, to oppose the truth by false terms. But nor is he able to provide an unassailable justification of his act. Was he a purger or merely a murderer? It is part of his tragedy, we are made to realise, that this is a question without an answer: it will always be possible to argue in utramque partem, on either side of the case. Such is the power of rhetoric; more specifically, such is the power of paradiastole.', 'Paradiastole: redescribing the vices as virtues'.[2]

Drama is dialogue and conflict, negotiation between contrary positions, and so is rhetoric; on the stage each character or faction brings a glimpse of truth, each cause has to be pondered in relation to the whole web of possibilities the action provides us with. The audience is there to evaluate and judge and deliberate. In *Julius Caesar* Mark Antony rejoices in his success: 'Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot, / Take thou what course thou wilt' (3. 2. 261-263) is the blissful outburst of the victorious antagonist; and in spite of the impressive projection of Caesar's shadow to the second half of the action, which entitles him as the tragic hero that gives the play its name, it is the idealistic and generous Marcus Brutus who catches our attention and sympathy.

But what happens when the hero is a villain that knows no pity and is utterly closed to any sense of community? If Caesar was, after all, not ambitious, and Brutus was a conspirator *malgré lui*, how can we take the heroic eminence of the assumed malefactor that our conscience and our better selves would reject *in limine* ? Rhetoric may be one of the sources of a puzzling seduction. In the Renaissance rhetoric was seen as

a basic instrument of education and a key companion to public life. A social paradygm of the gentleman and courtier – Ophelia's words that mourn Hamlet's apparent transformation and decline come to mind at once, or the supercilious and relaxed pose of the young man in Bronzino's portrait, an eloquent image of the *sprezzatura,* the nonchalance of a familiar intercourse with culture in a sophisticated milieu – suggested flexibility and adaptation as ingredients for the fine art of living, caution in behaviour and conversation, as Castiglione and Gracián advise in their handbooks of promotion and survival, and when it comes to the exercise of power, the most dispassionate or cynical minds would advocate, given their views of human nature and condition - ´...men are wretched creatures who would not keep their word to you, you need not keep your word to them', 'a flexible disposition, varying as fortune and circumstances dictate'[3]. Flexibility is a password in Richard of Gloucester´s words and deeds. And since the very beginning of *Richard III* the hero displays the skills of an accomplished rhetorician in love with his craft. In the first famous lines of the play –

> ' Now is the winter of our discontent
> Made glorious summer by this sun of York,
> And all the clouds that loured upon our house
> In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.
> Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths,
> Our bruisèd arms hung up for monuments,
> Our stern alarums changed to merry meetings,
> Our dreaful marches to delighful measures.'

- the speaker accumulates metaphors, alliterations, internal rhymes, puns, anaphoric structures, ... and he sustains his ingenuous verve to

the end of his speech. The orator joins the director ('Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous') that will orchestrate the other characters' movements and allocate their roles. 'I am determined to prove a villain', he says without a grain of shame, unawares of the ambiguity of his determination (the expression of free will or, conversely, the deterministic supervision and direction of superior mysterious powers). It is not the moment to discuss the place of *Richard III* in the economy of the First Tetralogy, but it is fair enough to say that, even if the protagonist takes his time to assert ambition to the throne as his target – 'And look when I am King, claim thou of me / The earldom of Hereford and the movables / Whereof the King my brother was possessed' (3. 1. 194-196), a promise to his most outstanding crony that he will forget, putting at bay his powerful ally -, the character's background, firmly established in the minds of audience and reader, for whom the image created in *Henry VI, Part 3*, was familiar, includes this purpose as an axial stimulous of the vital Renaissance energy on a free stage for his joyful incursion, 'the world for me to bustle in' (1. 1. 152), as he says when accounting for his achievements and antecipating his next moves, his 'deep intent', in confidence to the audience. Time will come when he stops trusting Buckingham, enraged by hesitations before the monstrous prospect of the murder of the King's nephews in the Tower – 'The deep-revolving witty Buckingham / No more shall be the neighbour to my counsels', 4. 2. 42-43 -, and in fact the absense of this daredevil on his side has momentous import. His right-hand is, like Richard, an expert in the art of dissimulation and performance –

> 'Tut, I can counterfeit the deep tragedian,
> Speak and look back, and pry on every side,

> Tumble and start at wagging of a straw;
> Intending deep suspicion, ghastly looks
> Are at my service, like enforced smiles;' (3. 5. 5-9)

- and in the play that both direct and perform, the fake ceremony that seals Richard's acceptance of the 'golden yoke of sovereignty', the first part of the dialogue (3. 7. 116-172) obeys formal rhetorical devices – petition is structurally arranged in an *introductio* with *captatio benevolentiae* and preamble, then the *narratio* and at last the *conclusio*, and response is made accordingly, with a prefactory *aporia* or *dubitatio,* followed by *narratio,* and the speech comes to an end with the due *conclusio* ; the remaining part of the rigged debate is arranged according to similar patterns and configuration. But Richard proves that he could tread the primrose path to damnation on his own. Deformed, sent before his time in this breathing world, hated by his mother, for whom he was 'the wretched'st thing' when he was young – generally, in fact, hated by women, which are in the front line of the moral and political stigmatization of his crooked body, the hero claims to be subtle, false and treacherous (1. 1. 37) and to have no friends but 'the plain devil and dissembling looks' (1. 2. 236). All said and done, Richard of Gloucester has no pity: even Clarence Second Murderer can feel 'a kind of remorse' before the bloody deed, and to repent after it, Sir William Catesby freezes in sight of the rumour to be spread around, devised to seal Lady Anne's fate (4. 2. 49-58), Tyrrel, the murderer hired by the King to dispatch the two brats in the Tower, cannot suppress his horror when listening to the narrative of 'piteous massacre' and 'ruthless butchery' that exterminate innocence and perfection and rouse 'conscience and remorse' in the killers themselves.

The hero is deprived of the most basic human feelings, and he can, in his dispair on the eve of death, only meet the puzzling sense of doom in the most essential and radical loneliness:

> '…There is no creature loves me;
> And if I die, no soul will pity me.
> Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself
> Find in myself no pity to myself?' (5. 3. 201-204).

How can we feel pity for him then? How can be entitled to tragic heroism a character that claims proudly to be a villain and an impious master of lies –

> 'And thus I clothe my naked villainy
> With odd old ends stolen forth of Holy Writ,' (1. 3. 335-337)
> /…/
> Thus, like the formal Vice, Iniquity,
> I moralize the meanings in one word' (3. 1. 82-83)

- keeping the double nature of character and actor, the impostor that amuses his audience and invites them to share his triumph ('Was ever woman in this humour wooed? Was ever woman in this humour won?', 1. 2. 227-228)?

Pity is not the reading touchtone here. Perhaps admiration and certainly pure entertainment. When the knave is in his prime, he can be brilliant and amusing: he plays the devoted lover courting the most improbable lady in an attempt against all odds. But the fact is that Lady Anne, at first playing the role of the mourning widow and revengeful abused woman (a combination of feelings on the brink of the grotesque in the suspect extravagant voluptuousness of its expression – the lady seems to protest too much, as Gertrud says in

respect to the Queen in *The Mousetrap*, the play in the play in *Hamlet*), vituperates the 'dreadful minister of hell', feeds a vivid take-and-leave with her importunate suitor – the Petrarchan lover and lyrical adorer, burning in passion and sublime worship. A surprising lack of convictions that will lead to a final surrender conveyed in the ludicrous pathetic immobility of the female figure holding precariously the weapon of his alleged enemy, that kneels before her with his bare breast inviting the strike; and the acceptance of the ring that celebrates the perplexing aliance is an eloquent move providing the vengeful woman with a brand new role. Later in the action, he interrups the vigourous wrathful speech of Queen Elizabeth, disarming with the *kairos* of his inexpected and caustic intrusion the fiery torrent of accusations of the old prophetess (I. 3). The villain bustles in a world deprived of moral sense, permanently coping with their past horrors and present treasons. God's scourge and minister?

It is Iago, Othello's archenemy and betrayer, the supreme rhetorician. Resentul against Othello's decision to promote Cassio, and fuelling his destructive purpose with a heap of blurred motives (among them, however, sexual jealousy seems to stand out as a familiar experience to the villain – 'the green-eyed monster, which doth mock / The meat it feeds on.', 3. 3. 154-155, is a suspect reference, in its vivid expression and personal vibration), 'honest' Iago will use his reputation as a humble faithful soldier and loyal friend to tread a path of mounting challenges coming up to the final colapse of the hated Moor. He keeps the credulous Roderigo on the vain expectation of gaining Desdemona's love, accosts in his perverted mind the gallant Cassio, that he will treacherously bring to perdition by the agency of Roderigo,

agent provocateur, and the virtuous Desdemona, giving his engendered monstrous birth an insinuating and corrupting image to be printed in the unguarded mind of the great General of Venice. The temptation scene (act 3 scene 3), right in the middle of the action, illustrates the sly and unobtrusive commitment of the villain, supreme director and dramatist orchestrating movements, stimulating sensations and passions and suggesting associations. His talent finds in the cooperation of the victim its touchstone, and it works out according to carefully designed moves. The vague figure that gets away furtively from Desdemona as though escaping from Othello's gaze cannot be Cassio ('Ha! I like not that', remarks the insidious tempter), the apparent reluctance to satisfy Othello's curiosity and the untimely intercession of Desdemona in favour of the gallant suitor fallen in disgrace becomes suspicious (how interesting, they knew each other before the General's marriage, and Cassio played the go-between in their courting!), and man and woman put together in the picture – they should of course seem honest – paves the way to a daring prospection of Othello's frailties. At this juncture 'think', 'honest' and 'seem' condense an atmosphere of innuendoes and doubts conjured, one should stress, by the accosted part, the one who after all takes the initiative and keeps the dialogue going on. Restraint, contrived hesitation, exploration of the authority of precedent or *exempla* ('She did deceive her father, marrying you, / And when she seemed to shake, and fear your looks, / She loved them most, 203-204), evoking Brabantio's ominous warning earlier in the action ('Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see. / She deceived her father, and may thee' (1. 3. 289-290), and the crafty inscription of the *logos* conveyed by the

entimeme or rhetorical syllogism (Venetian women are used to private vices and public virtues, Desdemona is a Venetian woman, *ergo* …) – do their work with overpowering effects. The timing, or *kairos*, is perfect, it directs the enticed hero through a line of associations to the final revelation of the bare and crude truth, confirming liminar fears and repressed intuitions, with a seal of adamant force of persuasion for conclusive evidence apparently having been found out by Othello himself. Nothing will come of nothing. The false substantiality of the 'ocular proof' and the manipulation of Cassio and Bianca in *the play in the play* will then produce their effects in the moment when the victim is no more able to think and discriminate. In his *via sinuosa* the hero assimilates the imagery of his foe, pervaded by lascivious animal references, violent outbursts of destructive energy, sinister remarks announcing murderous deeds; and deliberate control of speech and action gives way to shattered fits and starts, self-abjection and broken speech. Desdemona's sacrifice is a black ritual of blood and expiation, performed by a mesmerized priest obsessed with the cruel necessity of purification. What can save Othello from this criminal degradation and rescue him as a tragic hero? What redeems the hero in our eyes? Besides the assumption of guilt and the acceptance of punishment ('/… O cursèd, cursèd slave! / Whip me, ye devils,/ From the possesssion of this heavenly sight! / Blow me about in winds! Roast me in sulphur! / Wash me in the step-down gulfs of liquid fire!', 5.2.283-287), the rhetorical outline of the hero's speech, 'the Othelo music', as Wilson Knight calls it in a famous essay[4], or the idea of loss and waste that the protagonist registers in his last moments, converge in redemptive motion. It tis the voice of grave and fascinating eloquence what readers

keep in mind when books close or andiences bustle in rumourous agitation to the exit; and suffering, the tormenting pain that goes hand in hand with the course of damnation and that only imagination on this side of the *theatrum mundi* can pay due tribute to.

So too in *Macbeth*. The protagonist pours the milk of concord into hell when he gives in to the instruments of darkness and, urged by Lady Macbeth's solicitations, a mighty echo of the Weird Sisters' encantations, stops up t'access and passage to remorse. When touched by temptation, he cannot fully cope with the strange stirrings in his bosom, and tries to give them form and meaning:

> 'If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
> If it were done quickly. If the assassination
> Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
> With the surcease success – that but this blow
> Might be the be-all and the end-all! – here,
> But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
> We'd jump the life to come. But in those cases
> We still have judgement here – that we but teach
> Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
> To plague the inventor. This even-handed justice
> Commends the ingredience of our poisoned chalice
> To our own lips. /…/' (1. 7. 1-12)

Alone on the stage and in the midst of a deliberative process, Macbeth examines his wishes regarding his views of the life to come, acknowledges the enormity of a crime to commit upon his virtuous liege and guest, and interrogates his conscience. The unbearable tension gives to the speech an erratic course, rythm and repetitions bring to mind the incantations of the imperfect speakers, lay emphasis upon a distressing progress charged with inflections and diverse attitudes and feelings struggling in the speaker's breast for regiment. Against his

better self, he will strike a blow that will kill time – and will ultimately bind him to the ever-moving wheel of dry Fortune ('Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow'), deprive him of the blessings that accompanies old age, 'As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends', and dress him for dusty death. He will find in his wife a persuasive accomplice, ready to deny her sex and nature (in her sinister conjuration of the 'spirits / That tender on mortal thoughts' and the invocation of 'thick night' and its protective blank of the dark) and to exhort her husband harping on the cord of maleness and male integrity in brave Macbeth ('But screw your courage to the sticking place') with the irresistible urge reverberating in a patriarcal universe preordained by the supreme virtue of courage in the battlefield and pervaded by strange images of death, strange images of blood and strange screams of death. Macbeth feels no pity – the assault on Banquo and Fleance by the hired murderers (who are reckless of what they do to spite the world, or would set their lives on any chance to mend their wretched lives), or later the ravaging incursion in Macduff's castle and the slaughter of 'His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls / That trace him in his line' (4. 2. 151-152) are clamorous evidence of his ferocity. The violent appropriation of the crown – a fruitless crown and a barren sceptre – will afflict him with an agonizing feeling of loss and reprobation (Macbeth shall sleep no more, and his eternal jewel is given to the common enemy of man). Terrible dreams and the anxiety of an unfulfilled task torture him - 'O full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife' (3. 2. 36), he confides to his partner in evil in excruciating pain. It is the point of no return ('I am in blood / So stepped in so far that should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er., 3.

4. 136-138), describing a station in his path to nothingness and the surrender to a brave and fatal death, pressed by the feeling of impending disaster. This anatomy of evil opens the door to the inner tribulations of the tyrant, helps the granting of his status as tragic hero; and his lack of pity is tempered by one of its most poetic definitions, right on the eve of his drastic resolution:

> 'And pity, like a new born babe
> Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin horsed
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
> That tears shall drawn the wind. …'(1.7.21-25)

It is the protagonist's language what ultimately reverberates in our minds with qualified poetic and imaginative impact. As in *Othello,* eminence rescues heroes from their indiferent condition and makes them visible at their peril, in their splendour and misery, leads them beyond placid hapiness and peaceful resignation of the common and average woman and man; and certainly Mark Antony's rhetorical venture has not much to do with the ciceronian *cursus honorum* of the Roman patrician, Iago's cunning moves and Richard of Gloucester's skills challenge most outrageously moral intentions or neutral pragmatism assigned to Rhetoric by Isocrates or Quintilian, and the ambiguous line of *antithesis*, the artifact of *paralelism* and contrived *isocolon*, the sense of feverish urgency depicted by *enumeration*, the mystery conveyed by dense *metaphor*, the opacity given by *metalepsis* or convoluted speech do not fit in the art of persuasion or the operative location of debate or negotiation. Danger lies in words, but also in the charm of the evasive complex meaning and the beauty of rythm and

cadence that, even when furtive and ambiguous in their *logos*, fascinate readers and audiences with that kind of music that goes on living as a solid glory in our time.

1 | All references to the plays are to the Norton edition (GREENBLATT, Stephen, general editor, *The Norton Shakespeare*, New York and London, W. W. Norton & Company, 1997).

2 | 'Paradiastole: redescribing the vices as virtues', in ADAMSON, Sylvia, ALEXANDER, Gavin, and ETTENHUBER, Katrin, ed., *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 163.

3 | BULL, George, translation and introduction, *Niccolò Machiavelli: The Prince*, London, Penguin Books, 1981, pp. 100-101.

4 | 'The *Othello* Music', in *The Wheel of Fire – Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy*, London and New York, Methuen, 1949, pp. 97-119.