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SHAKESPEARE ET LA GUERRE

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Illustration de la couverture : DERRICKE'S *Image of Ireland*, 1586

«Strange images of death»: the primacy of the signifier in Shakespeare's tragic representation of war

In a famous passage¹, T.S. Eliot contrasts the «intensive» images of Dante and the «expansive» images of Shakespeare, «a vice of style, a tortured, perverse ingenuity of images which dissipates instead of concentrating the imagination²». In a reading of *Macbeth*³, I have argued that this perverse ingenuity of image is not a vice but the very key to understanding the liminary battlescene and beyond it the linguistic and representational fabric of the play. Indeed, the Captain's speech⁴ is paradigmatic of this «ingenuity» for the root of *ingenuity* is *gignere*, to give birth to and the essence of the Captain's speech is warfare perverted by midwifery. It is this perversion of military fiction by obstetric fantasy that is repeated and exorcised in the closing battlescene, where midwifery this time announces the *end* of war with the untimely ripping of Macduff from his mother's womb.

The perverse ingenuity of image or word, *a fortiori* the pun, which Eliot dreamed of stripping from Shakespeare is the prime instance in the Shakespearean text of what Barthes called the *punctum*, *le reste*, *le point de débordement* — *pun* and *punctum* are entirely cognate. It is this perversity of signifier that prises it away from the referent and creates the space of an interpretation which is specific to the literary as opposed to the historical text. In tragedy the distance opened up between signifier and referent attains its maximal development, *perversion* becomes *inversion* — which is why amphiboly was *par excellence* the tragic figure for Aristotle and why the *tragic*

fact of warfare in *Macbeth* is its liminal and seminal conflation with midwifery. Having recently dealt with *Macbeth* in great detail, I propose a necessarily brief survey of the representation of war in the other tragedies to suggest that this is more than a «one-off».

From the outset, this pattern of perverse ingenuity is discernable in scene I of *Titus Andronicus*. As in *Macbeth*, it contains the germs of the tragedy. The last act of the war against the Goths is the ritual commitment of the war dead to the mausoleum. In Shakespeare's text, but seemingly nowhere else, not in the source notably, the climax is the ritual holocaust of the captive prince, Alarbus. It is this that sows the seeds of the entire revenge tragedy, transforming a military and political conflict into a claustrophobic interfamily feud where arms on the battlefield are relayed by teeth at table as they eat one another. This global transformation of vision has its roots in the perverse play of signifier which marks the crucial passage evoking the burial of the warriors with due military rites. It begins with Titus apostrophising the mausoleum:

O sacred receptacle of my joys,
Sweet cell of virtue and nobility,
How many sons hast thou of mine in store,
That thou wilt never render to me more!⁵

The Cambridge edition glosses «receptacle of my joys» as «sepulture, vault», but this is to collapse the signifier on the referent, which has never been the business of the literary critic, though it is that of the historian. The Latinate indeterminacy of *receptacle* is followed by the no less Latinate ambivalence of *cell* («Sweet cell of virtue and nobility») which, by the end of the 16th century, was adding the minimal unit of life to the earlier hermit's retreat. From *cell*, the text proceeds less to a last resting place than to a treasure-house of goods garnered («in store»). The entire apostrophe is a delicate act of equi-poise, hovering between womb and tomb, just as *Macbeth*'s witches hover in the filthy air. The perverse

undercurrent is clinched when, from latent, it becomes manifest as Marcus calls the mausoleum a *nest* («His noble nephew here in virtue's nest», I.i.376). The point is that nests have nestlings, that they cry for food and have to be fed with fresh flesh. Which is precisely what the family proceeds to do by butchering the captive prince in violation of all laws of arms. The text is juicily ambivalent for what it says is that it is not for the gods but «*for their brethren slain* / Religiously they ask a sacrifice.» Only «barbarian» Tamora calls on the gods, and to accuse the Andronici of usurping their place: «Wilt thou draw near the nature of the gods?» The central act of what the family call «Our Roman rites» is thus one of *feeding* (the fire with human flesh for their phoenix sons): «Alarbus'limbs are lopp'd, / *And entrails* feed the sacrificing fire.» The much discussed syntactic hapax which here leaves entrails unattributed seems an apt reflection of a sacrifice which is a sacrilege in that it too is unattributed, feeding men (albeit dead ones) in lieu of gods. This is no banal *topos* of renown as immortality, but a perversion of it⁶. In *Titus*, if the tomb is a nest, the holocaust of Alarbus is the prototype of the Weird Sisters'cauldron, catering for no less a monstrous brood — of living dead, of fledgling dead. *Macbeth* ends by exorcising — by explicitly re-enacting — the perverse conflation of warfare and midwifery of the liminary battlescene. So too, if *Titus ends* with a spectacle of inter-family cannibalism, it is precisely because it *began* with such a feast, in fantasy if not in fact, by way of a perverted ritual honouring the war dead. Revenge is the return of the repressed with a vengeance, the end a mere repetition, an acting out in fact of the submerged fantasy of the start.

One should add that Shakespeare adds a *second invented* «strange image of death» to the triumphal return of the warrior in *Titus*, one that is symmetrical to the first. Mutius dies by his father's hand because he bars his father the door behind which his sister Lavinia has taken refuge with her betrothed, after Titus, despite her *sposalia*, has disposed of her to the Emperor in the peace treaty. He then debars Mutius'corpse from the family tomb. This is

no mere manifestation of tyranny. It creates *two* privileged spaces within the global stage space, to which one is admitted or not: on the one hand, the family tomb, on the other, the nearest thing to the family womb in the guise of the door which disposes of the virginity of Titus' *only* daughter. There too, her fate at the end is a synthesis of the two liminary «strange images of death»: her limbs are first «lopp'd» like Alarbus, then what remains is stabbed by her father, like Mutius. Thus, the ceremony of the return of the warrior in Shakespeare's *first* tragedy is no less glorious in promise but disastrous in outcome than Coriolanus' in his *last* tragedy.

In *Hamlet*, we find a very similar logic but this time built upon two military emblems, similar in substance, and, in 1601, similarly anachronistic in presentation. The first is the suit of armour, cap à pie, the «complete steel» which haunts the stage and so haunted Milton that he ressurected it intact in *Comus*. The second is the ordnance, the cannon shot off just before the «complete steel» makes its second appearance, its thunder contrasting with the silent stalking of the suit of armour. These two objects were frequent objects of blasons: here they set up a subtle dialogue between what each represents of the ghostly vestiges of a glorious past.

The complete steel is a visual emblem of the single combat between sovereigns, the individual version of the collective judicial combat fought out at the end of *Henry V*, written just before (1599), this originally Germanic custom having early been integrated into European chivalry so that God's hand was deemed to strike on the side of the victor. Yet as early as under Edward III, such royal challenges to single combat were no more than «grand chivalric gestures^{7a}»: Philippe de Valois turned down Edward and Edward him; Henry IV ungraciously refused to meet Louis d'Orleans, though Charles VI wished expressly merely to revive chivalry, on the grounds that Henry's ancestors never accepted challenges from inferiors, and he might get hurt into the bargain! thus

endangering king and body politic^{7b}. Its remoteness is before the Fall, from which Henry V is explicitly redeemed in the opening words of that play.

In *Hamlet*, the second emblem, the ordnance, plays the unchivalric part of the Serpent. As the play progresses this liminary emblem, associated with the drunken Claudius as debased military blason of the new regime, comes increasingly to *reactivate* the qualities attributed to it in the prelapsarian Age of single combat: *instrumento illo bellico sive diabolico quod vulgariter dicitur gonne* (John Mirfield, c. 1390), diabolical, sacrilegious, stealthy and downright effeminate qualities. By 1601, the great gun controversy was all but dead. Witness the House of Burgundy that had become the foremost exponent of chivalry and possessed the most-up-to-date artillery in Europe. In 1595, the view of Samuel Davies in his poem *The Civil Wars* castigating ordnance was something of a rarity:

For, basest cowards from a far shall wound
The most courageous, forc't to fight afarre;
Valour, wrapt up in smoake (as in the night)
Shall perish without witenesse, without sight.⁸

His tableau of Valour perishing by cannon is however the strict *analogon* of the stealthy assassination of the sleeping warrior of Elsinore, «without witenesse without sight», all the more so as Luciano is clad, if not in smoky night, in the same inky black as Hamlet. In *Hamlet*, to the disciples of Machiavelli, poison is to court-fare what ordnance is to warfare. In *Romeo and Juliet*, poison is «As violent [...] as hasty powder fired. / Doth hurry from the fatal cannon's mouth». They are mirror images of sacrilegious death. As Ambroise Paré, who had first-hand experience of gun-shot wounds, points out in *La Méthode de Traicter les Playes faictes par Harquebutes* (1545), cannon are properly called serpents and basilisks. Beyond Samuel Davies, Shakespeare's anachronistic use of cannon as postlapsarian blason, in this dialogue of emblems, harks

back ultimately to the most famous indictment (with Ariosto's) in 16th century literature: Don Quixote's Curious Discourse on Arms and Letters, which is an exact transposition of Old Hamlet's poisoning in the orchard of Eden,

Blessed were the times which lacked the dreadful fury of those diabolical engines, the artillery, whose inventor I firmly believe is now receiving the reward for his devilish invention in hell; an invention *which allows a base and cowardly hand to take the life of a brave knight [...] without his knowing how or why [...] and puts an end in a moment to the consciousness of one who deserved to enjoy life for many an age.* (my italics)

Cannon are to Claudius what poison is to Luciano, the diabolical serpent of sedition and seduction, of *agôn* and Eros, that made of Eden a battlefield.

It is at this point that the perversity of signifier intervenes: in the complementarity between the poison ingested and digested by Old Hamlet's *ear* and the deleterious belching of the cannon's *mouth*, itself an inflation and conflation of the belly-belching of the quintessential drunken Dane, *Pierce Penniless*' «bursten-bellied sot».

This version of the cannon as the weapon of the belly in contradistinction to the male vigour and rigour of the suit of armour, not to say the transparent phallicity of the steel in its «completeness», is elaborated primarily in Shakespeare's delineation of Young Fortinbras' wayward warfare. Here the signifiers impose on the ideological and moral debate the primal fantasy of the essentially female, ferocious belly. This corresponds to the explicit suspension of the Law of the Father and the regression from the symbolic code of culture to the imaginary maternal chaos of nature, represented in Shakespeare's text by a vision quite literally of skirts, sharks and stomachs — the *vagina dentata*⁹ in all its glory: Young Fortinbras

Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there

The signifier *shark'd up* used to typify such wayward warfare recalls the celebrated passage of 16th century literature on the decline of chivalry in book I of *Orlando Furioso* where Ariosto has his hero send the captured cannon of Cimosco to its doom in the watery deep. The problem was that from thence it was, if not «*shark'd up*», at least *fish'd out*, as Protestant legend would have it, by the German alchemist or monk, Bertholt Schwarz, to be born anew to mankind. The watery tomb became a watery womb, for Ariosto's text yokes together sea-fishing and the female belly in the same fantasmatic scenario as underlies Shakespeare's depiction of the decline of chivalry on the one hand, Young Fortinbras on the other:

The comic counterpart of this fantasmatic scenario is in Rabelais' *Quart Livre* in the war against the Andouilles, where the heroes have recourse to a parody of Leonardo's or Francesco di Giorgio's multi-barrelled artillery fantasies, which Rabelais baptizes «la grande truie», the historical original of which is in Froissart's *Chroniques* — «la grande truie de la Riote». If the court of Elsinore is swinish in drink («with swinish phrase/Soil our addition»), their recourse to ordnance to blazon it abroad makes it doubly so. The cannon as sow is to Claudius what the mausoleum as nest is to *Titus*.

The point is that the regressive female *imago* looms large when the rites or acts of war are *unsanctioned* by the Law of God. Ariosto's own patron Alfonso d'Este, was portrayed by Titian with his hand resting on a cannon ; the

cardinal criterion is whether the soldier is fighting the good fight or not. Thus, an apt conclusion to war in *Hamlet* is afforded by a homily of Samuel Buggs to the military in 1622 which resumes the entire debate:

As S. Paul gives a Christian in his welfare, the *whole armour* of God; a Sword to offend, a Shield to defend; so in this kind of Warre, we must improve all things whatsoever the bowels and face of the earth can afford for our defence ... [even] such an invention that many a brave spirit dies by the hand of a Boy, or as ignoblie as Abimelech, by the hand of a Woman. But seeing the fiery disposition of our enemies, use this ... to our annoyance, why may we not snatch those weapons out of madde mens hands, and turn them into our own bosom? (my italics)¹²

On the one hand, the «whole armour» of God, an exact equivalent of Shakespeare's «complete steel», on the other, whatever may be brought forth from the *bowels* or the *face* of the earth, for castrates, women and boys: the cannon in battle, poison at court. This fantasmatic logic explains the otherwise gratuitous detail of the single combat *on the ice*. Ice is the suturing in a landscape of the anamorphic anfractuosités immanent in the female anatomy. As the armour of the warrior without chink is «complete», so the *locus* of battle is a mirror image of that physical — phallic — integrity. The ice is thus a double emblem of warfare in contradistinction to the warfare of the belly, to the diabolical effeminacy of the cannon and the volatile quicksilver of poison.

The cannonfire at the *end* of the play inverts the liminary perversion of this image. Echoing Hamlet's «dying voice» for the succession to the throne, the cannon is systematically made «complete», as it were, systematically prefaced by the epithet *warlike*: «What warlike noise [...] This warlike volley». The point is that, like the first single combat, the last war in the play is explicitly placed

under the sign of *nomos*, the name, the law of the Father, le Nom-du-Père: «*Old Norway gives him his commission [...] to gain a little patch of ground/That hath no profit in it but the name*». Cause and effect are one: the *name* of the land, not the land itself, which is why *Old Norway* replaces *Old Fortinbras*. In this light, Young Fortinbras' «spirit, with divine ambition puff'd» comes to embody the phallic fecundation of Avicenna's *ventositas*, Galen's *pneuma*, Othello's billowing sails, as it subjugates the *vagina dentata* to the laws of the land.

If the Nom-du-Père triumphs in the last cannonfire at Elsinore, at the battle of Philippi in *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare comes nearest to showing us the triumph of «la grande truie», (though this anachronism does not of course run to having ordnance at Philippi), while at Actium it is again the nest, here the swallow's nest, that wins the day. Already in Plutarch, Philippi is an affair as strange as Macbeth's images of death. For it not only shows but thematizes the equivocation of the visual and linguistic sign in the confusion of the enemy with the self and the capture of one who is and is not Marcus Brutus. This non-castration in sight and sign engenders, in the choric comment of the messenger, a vision very close to that represented by *Macbeth's* Weird Sisters.

What is crucial is that when Brutus makes his famous apostrophe,

O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet!
Thy spirit walks abroad and turns our swords
Into our proper entrails¹³,

that spirit has a name: Error, Melancholy's child, following the early Christian view of Melancholy as punishment for spiritual pride in Eden, as in the works of St. Hildegard of Bingen, for example. But this Christian allusion merely introduces a pagan psychological allegory which for all its quaint pre-scientific bizarrerie contains a kernel of truth more modern than 19th century positivist psychology.

O hateful Error, Melancholy's child,
 Why dost thou show to the apt thoughts of men
 The things that are not? O Error, *soon conceiv'd*,
Thou never com'st unto a happy birth,
But kill'st the mother that engender'd thee.

This Elizabethan conception of Error in terms of engendering and matricide is the vision with which Spenser begins *The Faery Queen*, being the first of all the monsters encountered by the «Patron of true Holiness», the Red Cross Knight:

She lay upon the durtye ground,
 Her huge long taile her den all overspread [...] Of her there bred
 A thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed,
 Sucking upon her poisonous dugs, eachone
 Of sundry shapes [...] Soone as that uncouth light upon them shone Into
 her mouth they crept, and suddaine all were
 gone.¹⁴

Elizabethan Error is a poetic apotheosis of «la grande trueie», a swinish conflation of womb and mouth, suddenly revealed on the field of Philippi, where Bellona loomed up at Forres and Medusa at Actium. The matricide is an integral part of the picture in both texts:

Her scattred brood [...] Gathred themselves about her body round,
 Weening their wonted entrance to have found
 At her wide mouth: but being there withstood
 They flocked about her bleeding wound,
 And sucked up their dying mother's blood
 Making her death their life, and eke her hurt their
 good.

If the bloodless spirit of Caesar walks the field of Philippi, it is his handmaid Error, bloated with blood, that «turns our swords/In our own proper entrails»

The point is that when one tries to kill the name (Caesar) in the body (of Julius Caesar), the repressed body returns with a vengeance, no longer controlled by name, *nomos*, the Law, the law of castration: the body that returns is the primal body of oral fantasy where one eats the (M)Other or is eaten by it/her. Shakespeare's and Spenser's Error is a pre-Freudian paradigm of Lacan's *grand Autre* having regressed from the symbolic form of the Name and its cohort of *unequivocal linguistic* signs to the *alimentary* orality of a terrifying mouth which is both womb and tomb. That the great Elizabethan poet *intuited* this logic is proven beyond all doubt by the fact that Error vomits up without distinction both meat *and* the *logos*: «Her vomit full of *bookes and papers* was» and «great lumpes of flesh and gobbets raw».

In Error stalking the field of Phillippi there is again an uncanny ironic commentary in the return of the repressed. The vision of matricide with Error's corpse surrounded by her brood in a bloody feast is an almost term-for-term re-enactment of the perverted bloody ritual of the conspirators around the corpse of Caesar, which becomes *a posteriori* an emblematic *tableau vivant* of Error:

They flocked all about her bleeding wound,
And sucked up their dying mothers blood,
Making her death their life, and eke her hurt their
good.

*Othello*¹⁵ is a patent allegory of the pattern I have been tracing from *Titus* — from the nest, to the swinish cannon, to the *grande truie* of Error and ultimately back to the swallow's nests of Actium. The whole — perverse — point is that when Othello believes his love is gone, what he *says* is that his identity as warrior is gone. As name was collapsed on body in *Julius Caesar*, military «occupation» is collapsed on to sexual «occupation». In the celebrated adieu to arms, it is not by chance if the item of warfare that specifically modulates the passage and rhyme from *war* («Pride pomp and circumstance of glorious *war!*») to

whore («Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore») from military prowess to sexual shame, is none other than the *cannon*: «O ye mortal engines, whose wide throats/ The immortal Jove's great clamour counterfeit; /Farewell, Othello's occupation's gone!» Given its recent redemption from the diabolic, the cannon is the exact military *analogon* of Othello's blackness, all too ready to return to the Devil. This is why the *unequivocal* emblems of warfare (the steed, trump, drum and fife) are apostrophized in the *third* person: only the cannon, in its elective affinity with Othello, is humanized and apostrophized as *ye*.

Shakespeare's strategy is to reduce war as military conflict to little more than a passing noise off. Providence, not Othello, disposes of the Turk in its own wonderful way. Thus when Desdemona sets foot in Cyprus, Shakespeare paints a Botticelli Venus about to be occupied by visiting Mars. But when erotic fortress is conflated with *place forte*, *agôn* and Eros engender their own Nemesis which transforms Venus into Medusa. In *Othello*, the «cistern» speech (IV.ii.48ff) is seminal in the conception of Shakespeare's three great white generals. For it is the speech of the *three faces*:

1. the first, *upper* face (and lips) of Job, isolated island in a sea of troubles, vindicating the ways of God to man

2. the final, *lower* face (and lips), «Patience, thy young and rose-lipp'd cherubin./I here look grim as hell»), a central sink reversing Job's island

3. a third, *intermediary* face, proleptic of Poe's Pendulum, the *clock* face, the face of petrification and castration — the face of Medusa herself, the logical link between the divine face of man and the diabolical face of woman

but, alas, to make me
A fixed figure, for the time of scorn
To point his slow unmoving fingers at ... oh, oh.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare is even more explicit: in the climactic encounter at Actium, war is a *face*

— «you fled/From that great face of war ;» when warring is whoring, as in *Antony*, when woman is knit to man not in bed but in battle as in *Macbeth*, it is not Mars but Medusa that presides over the outcome. On the relation between Mars and Medusa, Shakespeare is again nothing if not explicit, and the relation between these two *faces* of war is explicitly anamorphic: «Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon/The other way's a Mars». One recalls Samuel Buggs' opposition between the *whole armour of God* and *the face of the earth*. *Macbeth* too ended up as an apotropaic Gorgon's head «Painted upon a pole.»

Indeed, Antony's warface on a double «front», the martial front of war and the marital front of woman, opens the play on an anamorphosis of war :

those his goodly eyes,
That oe'r the files and musters of the war
Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front.¹⁶

If Mars is a *visual* anamorphosis of Medusa, the word «musters» of war is a *verbal* anamorphosis, for *muster* is a deformed version of *monster*, of which it is a doublet. It is this anamorphic vision of war that comes home to roost at the battle of Actium in the swallows nests in Cleopatra's rigging. At Actium, Shakespeare uses not a landscape but a marine anamorphosis, which is the tragic version of Othello's nuptial *retour du guerrier*: Othello's billowing sail is «*blessed*» by the haven of Desdemona's arms as he alights in Cyprus; as he embarks for Actium, Antony's sails are *blighted* by Cleopatra's nesting swallows. As in *Titus*, it is a confusion of incompatibles — tomb and womb in *Titus*, nest and mast in *Antony*. For the swallows' nest prevents the sail from bellying out battlewards: no wind, no war, no wind, no whore. Only the sails on Cydnus work with the wafted perfumes of Aphrodite bedward. War in *Antony* is structured around this anamorphic diptych: «the perspective painting» of Mars and Medusa and the

miniature marine anamorphosis at Actium. They are mirror images — microcosm and macrocosm. For, as in *Julius Caesar*, *Othello* and *Coriolanus*, war is less against another than against the self as other. The general is his own best enemy: Antony marches on his own men in Antony's front line — in what is a *return of the repressed* of the double front on which the play opens (I.i.6); in *Othello*, the «infidelity» of the «*circumcis'd* dog» is to the chastity of his wife, which is precisely why execution is conflated with castration. As at the beginning of *Titus*, at the end of *Othello*, virginity¹⁷/chastity are at once opposed to and conflated with the soldier's tomb. And *Coriolanus* depicts in its climactic tableau the great Roman general about to «tread [...] on thy mother's womb/That brought thee to this world.¹⁸» As if on an analyst's couch, Shakespeare finally enunciates *en toutes lettres* and in broad daylight what was hardly perceptible in *Titus* — after which, as at the end of a competent analysis, he had worked it out of his system and wrote no more tragedies. But this is to anticipate.

Above all, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare finally spells out the relation between what he calls the «word of war», the *name* of Antony, and the *face* of war. In a short but strategic exchange, two of Antony's captains evoke his name: «I'll humbly signify what in his name, That magical word of war, we have affected», but this conclusion rings with singular hollowness after their picture of the valiant footsoldier's self-effacement to escape envy: «Caesar and Antony have ever won/more in their officer than person». Their example is a lieutenant who, «For quick accumulation of renown, [...] lost his favour.» This man is Antony's double in valour. His name is emblematic: Sossius, *sosie*. As renown Antony's *name* is *double*. Between these two faces, the positive face of Sossius and the negative face of the Gorgon, Antony is emptied of his martial substance, as are his sails of wind. As in *Othello*, the tragic representation of war is a vision of three faces, a vision of hell recalling Dante's Worm of the World. The face of war is the counterpart of Antony's

hamartia: his warfare is of and for the eye: «this grave charm/Whose eye beck'd forth my wars, and call'd them home.»

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare's warrior hero sees himself like Shakespeare's original rapist, Tarquin, led on by a dripping phallic dagger, «with ravishing strides, towards his design». At this point he evokes what he calls «the horror» of the time! *Coriolanus* is the most far-reaching exploration of the «horror of the time» specific to war, where the witches' cauldron of *Macbeth* is relayed in military guise by Corioles as «pot»: «See, they have shut him in./To th'pot, I warrant him.» On the battlefield, in the heat of combat, Antony as warrior was less Antony than two others: Medusa and Sossius. Shut in alone in the «pot» of Corioles, Coriolanus too acquires two new names, the name of the «pot», Coriolanus, but also initially a name which is transparently the equivalent of Antony's Sossius. An uncanny onomastic *phonetic Doppelgänger* (where Sossius is visual), this *sosie* is Marsyas. And Caius Martius' transformation by war into Marsyas is what the whole play is about: this acquisition of another body as Antony acquired another face, Marsyas («Who's yonder,/That does appear as he were flay'd? O Gods,/He has the stamp of Martius», I,6.21-3, Marsyas being a homophone of Martius). This vision of horror is Marsyas to Antony's Medusa. In Corioles yielded up to the sword, «Coriolanus» is reborn of death from the burning bowels of the city, whence he takes the name of the maternal «pot» (the Roman version of the Scottish cauldron). Shakespeare even invents the only episode we learn of what actually happened inside Corioles after the shutting of the gates: it has nothing to do with warfare as such but with the forgetting of a name, of the man «to whom he owes his life» — a transparent scotomization of the paternel signifier in the maternal belly.

The first name he acquires in lieu is Marsyas: what is Marsyas? It is the denomination of an apparition as hallucinating as that of Medusa in *Macbeth*. When Caius Martius emerges in glorious isolation from the gates of

Corioles the scene is a veritable epiphany: the being standing there «mantled» in blood from top to toe is as unrecognizable as he is unnamable. Like Marsyas he seems flayed alive. Like Gargantua on emerging from the belly of his mother, he is recognizable only by his bellow: «The shepherd knows not the thunder from a tabor,/More than I know the sound of Martius' tongue».

Like Shakespeare's other strange image of death in war, that of Macdonwald, the victory at Corioles is at once a rape and a monstrous parturition. Again, Shakespeare goes to the unprecedented length of inventing a minor episode to point to the latent fantasy beneath the manifest representation of war: in a truly pregnant instance of *dramatic metonymy*, we see Volumnia hurrying off at the same moment as Caius Martius, her son, hastens to war: whither her haste? To attend a «lying in», of which we naturally never hear anything more. For the simple reason that the «lying in» is that of the *Urbs* » Corioles: the emergence of a bloody bawling being baptized in blood as/ma: s j ə s/(Martius/Marsyas), before the city of Rome baptizes him «Coriolanus».

From the nest of *Titus* to the nests of *Antony*, the strangeness of Shakespeare's strange images of war in tragedy turns out to be a constant exemplification of the Freudian uncanny in its most exemplary form: the immanence of the face of war in the name of war, the anamorphic torsion of Mars into Medusa. Thersites is not so far off the mark with his quip about war and lechery, lechery and war.

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Université de Paris XIII

NOTES

- (1) In «Dante» (1929), *Selected Essays* (London: Faber 1934, 1966) 245.
- (2) In «Christopher Marlowe» (1919), in *Elizabethan Dramatists* (1943) (London: 1962) 59-60.
- (3) «Mannerist Macbeth: between Medusa and Maccabee» in *Miroirs de l'Être*, ed. J.-P. Debax et Y. Peyré (Toulouse: 1987).
- (4) I.I.7-23. Ed. Arden (London: 1953, 1985).
- (5) Arden edition (London: 1953, 1985).
- (6) There is also a whole ambiguous development on the *lading*, a curiously mercantile term, used to designate the cargo of coffins shipped home by Titus, which goes in the same direction. I have no room to expand here.
- (7) Expression of R.C. Kilgour, *The Decline of Chivalry* (Harvard: U.P. 1937) ch. I, as are the two examples quoted.
- (8) *Complete Works*, ed. A. Grosart (London: 1885-6) vol. 2 bk. 6 st. 40.
- (9) This fantasy is also behind the famous *Mousetrap* Hamlet shows at the centre of the play.
- (10) Ed. Arden (London: Methuen 1982) I.I.100-104.
- (11) I.9.23. My translation. *Portata* is literally «borne», the context superimposes on this basic rendering the secondary sense of «born».
- (12) *The Midland Souldier* (London: 1622) 26-7 in «Gunpowder and the Renaissance» by J.R. Hale in *From the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation*, ed. C.H. Parker (N.Y.: Randon House 1965) 125-6.
- (13) Ed. Arden (London: Nethuen 1955, 1966) *passim*.
- (14) In *Selected Pætry* of Spenser (ed. L. Kirschbaum, (N.Y.: 1956, 1965). I.13-26.
- (15) Ed. Arden (London: Methuen 1958, 1982) *passim*.
- (16) Ed. Arden (London: Methuen 1967, 1981) *passim*.
- (17) This goes in the direction of those who claim that the marriage of Othello and Desdemona was never consummated, though I am not sure that it is something I would care to argue myself.
- (18) Ed. Arden (London: Methuen 1976, 1978) *Passim*.