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INTERPRETATION AND “LOGIQUE DU SENS”: THE PROBLEM PLAYS’ PROBLEMATIZING OF LANGUAGE

Ann LECERCLE

Assuming its—to some—political incorrectness, the paper takes as its starting point Stephen Booth’s simile of Shakespeare, “our most underrated poet”, as representing a “King Kong” compared to “other monkeys”; accordingly it puts the case for what it calls “slow Shakespeare”, attempting to go beyond analysis of random clusters of cruxes so as to suggest something approaching a form of verbal plasticity informed, at least in part, by the unconscious’ being itself structured “like a language” (Lacan). This is why it looks more specifically at the “Problem Plays”, arguing that the above outline plays no small part in their very problematicity.

Assumant ce qu’il peut y avoir de politiquement incorrect dans l’argument qu’elle défend, cette communication prend comme point de départ la thèse de Stephen Booth, pour qui Shakespeare est le poète « que nous sous-estimons le plus », thèse selon laquelle ce dernier est un « King Kong » comparé aux « autres singes ». Ce qui amène l’auteur à défendre ici ce qu’elle appelle un « Shakespeare lent » en ébauchant, plutôt que l’analyse de « cruxes » (passages, ou mots, énigmatiques) pris un peu au hasard, une forme de plasticité verbale à mettre sur le compte, au moins en partie, du fait que l’inconscient lui-même est structuré « comme un langage ». C’est la raison pour laquelle le commentaire ne porte que sur les « pièces à problème », car si « problème » il y a, la cause est à chercher notamment de ce côté-là.

1. “SHAKESPEARE OUR MOST UNDERRATED POET”

At the end of the last century, in the liminary essay to a volume on *Shakespeare and Language*,¹ Stephen Booth, with his usual incisiveness, quailed not at launching his subject with the following incipit:

Shakespeare is our most *underrated* poet. It should not be necessary to say that, but it is. We generally acknowledge Shakespeare’s poetic superiority to other candidates for greatest poet in English but doing that is comparable to saying that King Kong is bigger than other monkeys. [...] The densities of his harmonies — phonic and ideational both — are beyond comfortable calculation, are so great that the act of analysing them [...] uncovers nests of coherence that make the physics of analysed lines less rather than more comprehensible. [...]

Booth was writing in the 90’s, but his reminder is no less timely today — if anything more so, the bard being currently served up to every kind of sauce in the critical cookbook. These sauces, however, tend to be of the

¹ “Shakespeare’s Language and Language in Shakespeare’s Time”, in *Shakespeare Survey* 50, March 1997, p. 1.

thinning species, unlike the recipes of *Macbeth's* witches, who knew what they were talking about when they called for gruel that was "*thick and slab*". Poetry, after all, is nothing if not *Dichtung*, thickening – Booth's "densities". At this interface of orality between word and food, you used, simply, to have food – or famine; now – courtesy, of such as the CEO of Titan tyres – you have not only fast-food but food-not-fast-enough. What I propose to serve you up, and what I, and by implication Booth, are invoking is *slow Shakespeare* – if only, in the first instance, because of what a conference of 2006 called the "otherness of language" in Shakespeare's drama,² otherness not only as "different from" (other exemplars) but, more importantly, language as inherently estranged from itself – not *diachronically* by the cutting and tailoring of subsequent centuries, but *synchronically* for reasons I hope to suggest.

To illustrate this perspective and suggest one of the reasons, I'll begin by taking a crux from *Troilus and Cressida*.³ One of the notions the playwright is visibly exploring in the years 1603-5 is a representation common, though in different guises – and indeed genres – to both his last comedy (*Measure for Measure*) and the Folio's first tragedy (*Troilus*). In fact, at that moment in time this notion may be said to constitute the conceptual hinge between the two works. Far from being an error, this *notion*, via one of the hapaxes he was wont to resort to to get his "ideational densities" into the English tongue, is what Shakespeare terms "bifold authority" (*Troilus*, v.ii.163), under which "reason can revolt / Without perdition, and loss assume all reason / Without revolt" – a prospect, incidentally, where Angelo outdoes any Trojan. The Folio's "by foul authority" (recently adopted by Bate and Rasmussen)⁴ seems to me a patent, not to say a blatant, rationalization of a signifier forged for the occasion and following directly on from "If there is rule in *unity*". In fact, of course, what is being adumbrated in this signifier, even if the English language cannot *say* it, is what goes to the heart of *Measure for Measure* (hereafter *MM*) even more than *Troilus*, namely a non-existent word which would, if it could, subsume both *readings*: bifold authority is *per se* foul authority – a problematic this that goes back to the rationale behind the very *first* tragedy of

² Ann Lecercle and Yan Brailowsky, eds., *Language and Otherness*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de Paris-Ouest, 2007.

³ All references will be to *Troilus and Cressida*, Kenneth Palmer, ed., London & N.Y., Methuen, 1982.

⁴ *The RSC Shakespeare*, Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, eds., London, Macmillan, 2007.

Elizabethan England which its authors called *Ferrex and Porrex* (1570) and not *Gorboduc*, the unitary, because pirated, title of the earlier edition of 1565. Even more suggestive for *MM* is the semantic supplement conveyed, on first acquaintance with this alien term, by "fold". In the first instance, the "bi-", of course, reads as the Latin prefix for the two in "twofold"; but the strangeness then shifts and lodges in the term's resulting hybridity (Romance/Anglo-Saxon). Moreover, because "bifold" had, and has, no established existence, on first encountering it the *second* syllable also comes to us afresh. So one hovers, like Macbeth's witches, between the *computational* (x2) and the *topographical*, where "fold" is not only a suffix but a *noun*, problematizing, in *MM*'s body politic,⁵ the authority of a governor not only shrouded in the *folds* of monkish robes but replaced *by* a *bi*-nome (Angelo and Escalus). This in turn has the effect *après coup* on "bi-" of shifting the focus from the *first* (numerical) to the *second* (judicial) meaning of the prefix /bai/ in English, *a fortiori* when "authority" is the issue: namely the *bye*- or simply *by*- of "bye-law" or "byway", those corresponding to the lesser lines and lanes of direction or governance: those privileged, respectively, by the dark corners of Vienna and the deviousness of warfare, erotic or military, at Troy. Above all, *MM* demonstrates how the *by(e)*- takes over from the *bi*-: for, albeit thereafter commandeered out of the blue as ducal spouse — a fate met with silence — the last words Isabella ever speaks are the following: "His act did not o'er (whore ?) take his bad intent, / And must be buried but as an intent / That perish'd *by the way*" (v.i.449-50; emphasis mine).

"Bifold", in sum, is a "blast": a blast is an embryonic bone marrow cell, normal but not yet "licked into shape". If they proliferate excessively, the marrow cannot do its work; likewise with language, too many blasts and it no longer works; yet they are necessary to inject new life. In the case of "bifold", it is in *MM* that the author teases out the implicatures and really licks it into shape.

⁵ i.e. with his *own* surprise espousals.

2. “LANGUAGE” AS SIGNIFIER IN SHAKESPEARE

There is a problem though: Booth’s fascinating account of Shakespeare’s language resembles his investigation of what he argues to be Shakespeare’s anagrams (in this following the rather less than felicitous example of Saussure on Latin poetry): in other words, Booth’s account constitutes a cluster of brilliant illuminations of Shakespearean *Dichtung* – and that is what it remains: a cluster. What interests me is how Booth’s *cluster* of densities came to be a cluster: what is, less their common component than, the force of poetic or other gravity that brings them together, what the early Deleuze, reader of Lewis Carroll, calls “*logique du sens*”.⁶

This problematic is best approached through a remark in an exceptionally well written and percipient article on the rhetoric of citation in *Troilus* by Elizabeth Freund.⁷ I am thinking of the phrase Freund uses for the one, and probably the only, aporetic moment in her entire argument: when she writes of *another* of the play’s textual cruxes: if not a technical error, she writes, this crux must, on the poet’s part, be *either* a *lapsus* or what she calls “daring of the imagination” (p. 20). This phrase, to my ears at least, has a decidedly, not to say waywardly, *romantic* aura in a critique that purports to think Shakespeare “theoretically”. Margreta de Grazia has argued cogently for a *Hamlet without Hamlet*,⁸ meaning the Hamlet inherited from the Romantics: I want, for a moment, to look at Shakespeare’s language without the Romantic “daring of the imagination”. Given the time available, this agenda is most conveniently broached if one begins by looking at language itself as signifier in the canon.

Writing of the epochal epistemological shift in Renaissance semantics that prefigures Saussure, Richard Waswo argued that

we need to notice [the] basic context [...] Historical self-consciousness [teaches us...] that [‘the traditional vocabulary of discourse’] includes no single term for what we today automatically understand by ‘language’ —

⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, Paris, Minuit, 1965.

⁷ Elizabeth Freund, “‘Ariachne’s broken woof’: the rhetoric of citation in *Troilus and Cressida*”, in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartmann, eds., N.Y. & London, Methuen, 1985.

⁸ Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet without Hamlet*, Cambridge, CUP, 2007.

that is, a unitary, all-inclusive concept of any systemic means of communication.⁹

and he continues, "the first such extension of the word in English — *extension from a body of words to something else* — is given by the *OED* from Shakespeare[']s *Troilus and Cressida*". Such may be one's astonishment at this item of information that Waswo immediately adds "One would think that such an apparently obvious metaphor would have occurred to an earlier poet; but I have not found him."

He is wrong, of course — there is always one that gets away (though in this case the exception does indeed prove the rule — to the point of constituting a blueprint of the logic I want to trace, but it occurs before the Problem Plays, so this is not the place). Freund begins by stressing what she calls the Problem Plays' "heightened language consciousness"¹⁰ The point, though, is that this newly emergent signifier of "language" is a very particular, not to say peculiar, creation — or rather creature, those *créatures* that disdainful *dames de la haute* called the flighty young things in their domesticity: in this case Cressid — no domestic, but better *and* worse, being hostage to the entire Greek host. This "language", rather than being an object of rhetoric or citation, reason or argument, is, to quote Richard III, "only half made up", being embroiled with, and ultimately bedded in, the flesh, like the inchoate figures of *natura naturans* in Renaissance grottoes. Waswo speaks of "language" as denoting the extension "from a body of words to something else." What Shakespeare gives us is an antimetabole of this: from "a-body-of-words-as-language" back to language-as-body, but not any body. For the passage Waswo refers to as constituting the very birth of "language" not only in Shakespeare but *in the English language* is Ulysses' verdict on the eponymous heroine: "Fie, fie upon her! / There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip— / Nay, her foot speaks."¹¹ This is less characterization than anatomization, indeed an atomization. This may suggest a blazon; yet it is not a blowing up of a part (*blasen*) but the breaking down of a whole into *membra disiuncta* — and, by implication of its *incipit*, "Fie, fie", the cry of "Maistre Fi, fi !" in Cotgrave, the latrine

⁹ Richard Waswo, *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 85-6.

¹⁰ Freund, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

¹¹ *Troilus and Cressida*, IV.vi.55-57.

cleaner, not only *disiuncta* but *disiecta* held together by the *tabula rasa* of co-ordination, parataxis.

Immediately in the very next line, Shakespeare completes this *Urgestalt* of language as the erotically cathected *membra disiecta* of the female of the species in the cry that rises from the Greek host as one man: "The Trojan's trumpet".¹² Here language is approached from its *other* side, i.e. applying the same *logique du sens not* to the signified (here the referent: eye, foot, etc.) but to the signifier in its an-atomized form: namely the letter, now litter. Nor is this *any* letter but that transcribing the primal sibillance of Eden conveying the irruption of lust into a landscape of Law. For when we perceive the phonetic sequence of the cry, we need, like the Cressida of legend, to squint: Do we hear the *proleptic* "Trojan's trumpet" or the *analeptic* "Trojan strumpet"? Here indeed, fair is foul and foul is fair. The "s" is cut free to *go between* — and between *what*? On the one hand, the male emblem of martial men (the trumpet, Othello's trump) and, on the other, the (in Ulysses' words) "secretly open" slut or *strumpet*. The "s" is, as it was in Eden, the tongue of the serpent: the originary, the oral phallus.

Going-between, of course, was something Shakespeare had touched on just before he wrote *Troilus* (1602). In *Hamlet* (1601), the heart of the representational abyme that is the-play-within-the-play, contains yet *another* play-within-the-play, one in miniature, for it is a puppet play. And it is this "play in little" that delivers one of the keys to reading the Shakespearean idiolect I am concerned with: "I could interpret between you and your love if I could see the puppets dallying", says Hamlet. Here, interpretation is simultaneously of text and sex, *Lust* and *Schaulust*, the actor being at once ear, eye and phallus. When Hamlet speaks these words, he can *not* see the puppets dallying: a year or so later, Troilus can and does. In terms of Shakespearean genetics, this is, *on the one hand*, the puppets (Diomedes and Cressida) dallying, and at the same time Troilus as Hamlet's "I" *interpreting*, not only in the superficial sense of commentary, but *inter-pres* as eye and above all, in more covert way I will come to shortly, the phallus — in spite of the fact that he is spying on Cressida's infidelity from afar, and that logic thus locates the phallus on the *other* side of the great, the grievous divide (called "jealousy") between the subject (Hamlet's "I") and the object (puppets dallying) of the vision... Not forgetting that that vision is itself

¹² In Palmer's Arden edition there is, perhaps a little surprisingly, no note on this.

mise en abyme: from Troilus' perspective the "thing inseparate [which]/ Divides more wider than the sky and earth" is Cressida; for us as interpreters this is Troilus himself torn between present longing and long past love. Symptomatically, the *semantic* division is disavowed (*Verleugnung*) in part – by the *acoustic* constancy of "wider" "-vides" and "sky", and how "-er" returns as "earth". What, therefore, is the *covert* form of Troilus' interpretation of the scene espied? His *verbal* interpretation is predicated *syntactically* in its *incipit* on the simplest of *paradoxes* ("This is and is not Cressid"); *a contrario* its conclusion relies on the most contortedly complex of *amphiboles*: "And yet the spacious breadth of this divison / Admits no orifex for a point as subtle / As Ariachne's broken woof to enter". Like Hamlet's playlet, the paradox is *en abyme*: the framing paradox is limpid (vast space/no space), but nested within it is another "no orifice for an orifice to enter, be the latter ever so small", with coiled at its very centre a lexical and logical chimaera, Ariachne (*sic*) – an error perhaps but equally the height of fantasmatic coherence. In one overarching signifier "Ariachne" subsumes the two faces of the most radical form of *linguistic* going-between, subsuming the founding antithesis of language as such (subject/object): Ariadne, betrayed, in spite of yarn, Arachne weaver of yarn – text and textile – that betrays. What, however, is crucial in the signifier generated by this epiphanic moment is the "i" –inelegantly shoved in the middle, which is *also* the I of Hamlet-*interpretes*. *Either* this letter is litter (the weak reading, an error) *or* this *contorted* signifier is the *tortured* realization of Troilus' desire, the tongue in lieu of sex, the "i" as fantasmatic phallus – the lower case "i", *unlike* the upper, being an age-old *graffito* on view in the habitat of Cotgrave's *Maistre Fi, fi*. There is nothing "daring" here: such notions had already been canvassed in courtly circles as early as Geoffroy Tory in his *Champfleury* (1529). This, finally, suggests that the *other* curious signifier in this speech, "orifex" is the "orifice" Shakespeare borrowed from Marlowe, but at the same time the bard's little Latin surely stretched as far as to apprise him that the *-fex* suffix named a "craftsman" while "or-" is a quasi homophone of *aur-* gold. In this speech Shakespeare himself, in a *clin d'oeil*, is working in filigree.

Thus logically (paradox) and lexically (hapax) Shakespeare's "orifice" is, and is *not* an orifice, is there and not there, in other words it is marked by what Jean-Louis Baudry (apropos oysters in Zola's *Bel*

Ami)¹³ has defined as the *battement* in which, in the last analysis the fantasy consists.

Troilus and Cressida is not Shakespeare's farewell to arms (*Coriolanus* is still to come) but it is the gravestone he plants fairly and squarely on chivalry. And this, in turn, suggests why "language" (in its systemic sense) veritably comes into its own in *Troilus*, *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*) though not as instrument of knowledge or power but configured more as *lalangue*, i.e. predicated on the fantasy, than as language *tout court*. In historical terms the conceptual juncture in question here is that outlined by Michel Foucault as follows:

When scientific or disciplinary mechanisms replaced historical rituals in the forging of individuality, the normal relayed the ancestral and [*mesures*] measure or measurement *took over from laws*, substituting calculable man for memorable man, [...there was] equally [a] transition from epic to the novel, from the deed of derring-do to the singularity of the secret [...], *des joutes aux fantasmes*, from jousts to fantasies [...].¹⁴

What an earlier psychology calls *Troilus*' "betrayal scene", is in fact the bones, the skeleton, or early modern "syntax", of the *fantasme* laid bare – with *Troilus* as subject paradoxically but paradigmatically "*en exclusion interne*" in Lacan's phrase. Language in Shakespeare is also a matter of topology.

3. INTERPRETATION IN *ALL'S WELL*, OR THE LANGUAGE OF "HEDGE CORNERS".

This "*logique du sens*" is replicated in luminous fashion in *All's Well*, which contains Shakespeare's only sustained piece of nonsense. Here, what is filigree in *Troilus* becomes "lattice work" (and that explicitly) This is how this comes about.

All's Well centres on *three* things: in order

N°1. the mysterious healing of an impotent king with a hole or fistula in his groin by a heroine equipped by her father with a mysterious "third eye".

¹³ In *Tropismes*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de Nanterre, n° 3, 1987, p. 33.

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975, p. 195, translation and emphasis mine.

N°2. the comeuppance of a character, Parolles, a paradoxical comeuppance for it is by hoodwinking that his unmasking takes place — a hoodwinking where nonsense of tongue makes sense of image.

N°3. the bedtrick (to be repeated in *MM*).

In a nutshell, the point is that what happens *after* (N°3: the bedtrick) is the spelling out and writing large of what happens *before* (N°1: the thaumaturgy). The logic behind this arsy versy is Shakespearean interpretation.

For when the old courtier Lafew brings together maidenly medic and ailing monarch, the playwright is carrying on from *Troilus* — and that explicitly: "I" says Lafew "am Cressid's uncle / That dare leave two together"; Cressid's uncle i.e. Pandarus, unsaintly saint of pandars — interpreters "going between you and your love". And Lafew quits the unlikely pair with "Fare you well" which, in this potently fantasmatic context, *literalizes* the banally figurative *congé*. In other words, the scene of healing by Helena, like Troilus' bedding of Cressida, is unseen and unseeable (Lafew indeed prefaces the scene by saying "miracles are past"), so we do not get to see it. What we *do* get to see in its stead is the most literal rendering *anywhere in the canon* of interpretation in the *textual* sense of simultaneous translation — *but* an interpretation, which, like Lafew's miracle, is *impossible*, for the hoodwinking language of the soldiers is nonsense. As object of *textual* interpretation, the soldiers' nonsense is a screen representation for the unseen scene of thaumaturgy orchestrated by the pandar. Thus what characterizes this nonsense of the "hedge corner" — this being the otherwise unexplained site of the scene — is its *Unheimlichkeit*: it is both like and unlike "homely" English; and one recalls the example Freud gave on the subject, namely Eckhart's "*Alle Ecke sind mir heimlich*",¹⁵ where *heimlich* at the *same* time can mean familiar and un-*heimlich* (strange) — as corners can be source of exposure or concealment. This glossolalic screen configures the text as a textile (which, of course, it always was), but one with *jour de Venise* in it to let the light through — very like the image with which Lafew takes leave of Parolles; for this is what, in the last analysis, *paroles* here are: "So, my good *window of lattice*", says Lafew "fare thee well; thy *casement* I need not open, for I look through thee". It is, for me, one of the most extraordinary characterizations in all Shakespeare. A "window of lattice", to employ

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, "Das Unheimliche" (1919), trans. mine.

the parlance of the problem plays, is and is not a window – it is a window hesitating, one might say, between the bare and the barred, a window *in part* debarred by its multiplication as parts (I have lived with them, and know what I am talking about).

After this, the bedtrick of Act III simply transcribes *en clair* what was *en crypté* in Act II (the other crypt, after all, being where the king already had one foot at the beginning of the play). If glossolalic nonsense is one *interpretation* for another, the bedtrick is one *sex* for another – not forgetting, of course, that the sexual trick was there from *before* the beginning, being what *Elizabethan* theatre was predicated on: its, then unique, exclusion of women as actresses – the screen in this case being less text than textile, that of costume.

4. “MEASURE” AS A COMPLEX WORD: FROM THE LANGUAGE OF DARK CORNERS TO THE DARK CORNERS OF LANGUAGE

The fact that, in Ulysses’ vignette of Cressida, language as system should *in the first instance, in its first occurrence*, explicitly be a language of body objects is entirely substantive with the problematics which makes these plays “problem plays”, informed as they are by, amongst other things, the passage from *joutes* to *fantasmes* mooted by Foucault in a forging of individuality which substituted calculable (measurable) man for memorable man, the novel for the epic and the singularity of the secret for the deed of derring-do.

The secrecy and *mesures* are the part foregrounded in Shakespeare’s last problem play¹⁶ with the *fantasme* as the ongoing *basso continuo*, this time surfacing larger than life as a character defined *ab limine* quite simply as “a Fantastic”; and if there then existed various acceptions of the term, the ultimate fate of the character seals the fantasy into its sense and puts its stamp on it, this character’s last words being “Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death”¹⁷: eroticism and sadism

¹⁶ An overly exclusive restriction to the moral and biblical senses led me recently to argue for retaining the Folio’s comma in the title of *Measure for Measure* (in “Much virtue in the comma; your comma is the only p(e)acemaker”: prolegomenon for *Measure for Measure*”, *Études anglaises*, autumn 2012.

¹⁷ *MM*, v.i.525-526.

not only indistinguishably but paroxystically bound up in the only form of torture existing in English law – death by torture, “pressing to death” – here torture chamber and *thalamus* all in one. The fantasme don’t come much better than that. Which is no doubt why W. Dunkel could write in the 1960s¹⁸ that critics were equally divided as to what exactly is to happen to this “Fantastick”. Whatever it is, it is in the run-up to this most grotesque of the dénouement’s egregious mismatches that the complexity of “measure” is configured – and the genre of comedy abandoned for good.

From the beginning of his career and not only in the play thus named, “Measure for Measure” is no self-evident commonplace, oven-ready, as it were, for audience consumption, though there exists what I would almost call a “Tea Party” interpretation which tends to suggest that it is. When, in 1604, it acquired titular status in this last of Shakespeare’s comedies, it was not the first time the playwright had used the expression. (In *3 Henry VI* he had put it in the mouth of Warwick the “Kingmaker”.)

In fact the scenario orchestrated around the phrase in *3 Henry VI* and the semantic slippages it sets in train furnish the core representation of the later “problem” play. Reduced to essentials from the bloody gate of York to the (quote) “boiling, bubbling” cauldron of Vienna’s corruption, the conceptual nucleus of *MM* is not Warwick’s image of head for head, but the *developed* forms of *be*-heading and *maiden*-heading (whether the “and” be an “or” to Isabella or a “for” to Angelo). The “/h e d/” is unchanged. What changes, to the point of inversion, is the *affect*, which, in the fully-fledged form of a play (as opposed to the history’s mere scene), takes the form of a *signifier* almost identical to but a *signified* radically different from the earlier “-ed” nucleus: namely *bed*-, which comes to occupy the foreground of preoccupations to the point, not only of obscuring the erstwhile “(h)ed”, but of having an extraordinary amount of time accorded to its whereabouts and topology – and this in spite of the fact, that, *unlike* what happens in the *Othello* Shakespeare had just finished writing, where it is looms large as the very visible location of that play’s catastrophe, from bed becoming bier, in *MM* the bed *is and is not there*, just as, in the catastrophe of *Troilus* “This is, and is not Cressid”. Not only is the bed there and not there, it is and is not a bed – at least after the exclusively descriptive

¹⁸ In “Law and Equity in *MM*”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 13, 1962, p. 275-285, reference p. 278.

introit to *MM*'s fourth act, where the *description des lieux*, carefully couched in conceits culled from the *Song of Songs*, reconfigures horticultural topology as the intimate anatomy of woman.

What concerns me here, though, is that the topology thus ushered in by the slippage of signifiers I have traced is a topology characterized in fact *by what was there* in *3H6* but seemingly without relevance or import, although common to both scenarios. Both of these scenarios, in their very different ways – one, a very public, urban landscape, the other the most private of secret gardens – are predicated on the existence of a *gate* – and here measure again is immediately of the essence. For in neither play are we dealing with the common-and-garden species of gate; as when Alice drinks of one or other bottle, one gate is writ very large, while the other is not one big but two little ones (Q). In both cases measure as measurement is not measure as the median or middle course, but measure as *démesure* – that adumbrated in *Henry VI*'s bloody head aloft a gaping city gate by way of the phallic female that haunts the battlefield of England, indigenous cousin of Greek Ate or German Walkyrie. In a word, in *Measure* (b/h +ed) adumbrates the type of *nom secret* posited by Leclaire as the proto-linguistic crux that fixes the *fantasme* in form.¹⁹

When Edmund Spenser, in the great epic of the age, portrays the wellspring of “temperaunce”, he prefaces it with a remarkable instantiation of measure couched – in the depths of his Elizabethan Wonderland – in quasi Euclidian terms: “The frame thereof seemed partly circulare, / And part triangulare, O work divine; [...] And ‘twixt them both a quadrate was the base / Proportioned equally by seven and nine, / Nine was the circle set in heavens place” (II, ix, 22). Measure as *matheme* here rules supreme, yet in spite of all, half way through, albeit overarchingly contained within the outer circle of 9, the human rears its postlapsarian head; and it does so in the congruence, but not the conjunction, between male and female: “Those two the first and last proportions are, / The one imperfact, mortall, foeminine; / th’other immortal, perfect, masculine”. In the epic dedicated to Gloriana, *metricality* subsumes *sexuality*.

In Shakespeare’s foray into the domain of measure, three decades later and under a very different monarch, sexuality is not subsumed by metricality, it unshapes it. Of this there is no more

¹⁹ See Serge Leclaire, *Psychanalyser*, Paris, Seuil, 1968.

illuminating example than the seemingly futile *incipit* of the play's second scene (ls.1-40), which, immediately after the Duke's liminary act of *anomial* abdication and *binomial* deputation by the Duke, Shakespeare inserts as a hermeneutic prism for what follows – a dark glass wryly clarifying this play of dark corners [a *prolegomenon* in miniature] –featuring the prime specimen of Shakespearean go-between, Lucio, the Duke's *alter ego*: light and fire (Lucio/Lucifer) to the Duke's emblematic "dark corners".

Of the many things Shakespeare does in the *incipit* of 1.ii., I have time for only one, which is central to my problematic: he redefines his title. "Measure" in line 20 is now represented by the form most germane to Shakespeare's very existence as poet: namely metre ("No, A dozen times at least. / What, in metre? / In any proportion, or in any language"). In this way, as he prepares for two of the most suspenseful moments in the entire canon – the encounters between seeming zealot and would-be saint – Shakespeare from the outset plays *on*, or rather plays *off*, *two* measures: the legal-moral type and the metricality of maths or music. In the process he creates a coinage that encapsulates the entire problematic: this is "name-chewing" ("Heaven in my mouth / As if I did but chew his name", says Angelo, II.iv.4-5). "Metre", in other words, in contrast to Spenser's allegorical *Aufhebung* of sexuality, is to be received in its *matter*: in its letter, and the materiality of that letter is to be *chewed*. Chewing breaks up, it disjoins; if one chews "metre" the result is "meet her"; the "meting" – that-is-measuring (with *one* "e") is underpinned, i.e. undermined by the "meeting" (with two "e"s predicated on Spenser's "pro-portion", but Shakespeare's pro-portion is the portion or part that is out in front (pro-): in plain Greek, that of Diomedes in *Troilus*: the ithyphallic. "Meet her" for "metre", meeting for meting. One wonders, indeed, to what extent, for Shakespeare, there was not a constant interference between the two sides of this particular coin between the two faces of what appears to be the most abstract trait of poetry: metre. Which tends to prove Deleuze's point, that what distinguishes a great writer from a good is the ability to make language stammer, *bégayer*: in Shakespearean parlance, to chew names.

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