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«MONGREL TRAGICOMEDY» AND ITS ORPHIC BACK-CLOTH

In a *Defence of Poetry*, Sir Philip Sidney's scathing denunciation of the English dramatists' practice of mingling the tragic and the comic, the basic principle of «mongrel tragicomedy», reflects amongst the men of letters of the sixteenth century a growing preoccupation with decorum and more feeling for classical form and artistry in the construction of plays. The *Defence* is an interesting compendium of Renaissance Neoplatonic theories about the artist as creator. A pervasive Orphic voice is present singing the praises of Orpheus and Amphion, the standard symbols of the artist's ability to impose harmony on chaos and to bring about, through means of æsthetic enchantment, some socially beneficial end. Although Sidney does not exclude the possibility that a conjunction of the tragic and comic might prove praiseworthy, («if severed they be good, the conjunction cannot be hurtful»¹), he is at pains to find either «decorum» or what he calls «delightful teaching» in the tragical comical plays of his day.

Even the endeavours of a playwright like Richard Edwards escape any mention. The prologue to Edwards' *Damon and Pithias* (1566)² sets out the aims of what the dramatist considers to be a new type of play, which he specifically names a «tragical comedy». Full of «matter mixed with mirth and care» (l.37), it promises none of the comic excesses of previous «toying plays» (l.6) and bids the spectator to «hear and see the effect» (l.45) of the power of dramatic art to combat the abuses of tyranny

and to transform the society in which it is allowed to flourish. Music, poetry and love, major components of the multifaceted Orpheus myth, play an important role in *Damon and Pithias*, as they do in later milestones along the road to the recognition of tragicomedy as a separate genre, namely in Robert Greene's *James IV* (1590) and in Shakespeare's late plays, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*.

A closer look at some of these plays and at Sidney's *Defence* will show how their composers bear a certain resemblance to Sidney's Orphic bard, to the musician-poet who looks within himself to discover the harmony of the cosmos and whose descent to death wins back new life, bringing deeper knowledge of the human condition. The plays examined illustrate the play-maker's art of transforming listeners and performers alike as the woe-to-weal trajectory of the protagonists is contrived to end in a final *discordia concors* that celebrates art's triumph over formless chaos, and the triumph of the forces of art and life itself over death.

Written in the 1580s, Sidney's *Defence* circulated in manuscript among the learned of court before it was published posthumously in 1595. Exerting a wide influence in academic circles for about a quarter of a century, it is not surprising that the use of the term «tragical comedy» in critical essays was largely discontinued after Sidney's barb had been directed at the hybrid form. Scholarly playwrights like George Whetstone and George Gascoigne were amongst the first playwrights to call their plays tragicomedies and Whetstone, in a somewhat contradictory fashion, criticized in his dedication to his own play *Promos and Cassandra* (1578)³ the indecorous practices of English playwrights when making «a Clowne companion with a Kinge», a criticism which Sidney reiterates in the *Defence*. In spite of Whetstone's acquaintance with classical drama, his play leans as much towards the dramatic traditions of the mediæval stage which fostered the union of tragedy, comedy, farce and other incongruities in the same piece. *Promos and Cassandra* contains the usual medley of farce and songs in accompaniment to the serious theme, a characteristic of almost every popular play of the day. And yet, whatever may have been the notions of tragicomedy held by the first English writers of it, the type of play cultivated by Whetstone was not regarded by its author as a mixture of kinds liable to the charge of indecorum. The critical utterances of Whetstone and, later, of Sidney are directed against such hybrid productions as John Pickering's *Horestes* (1567) and Thomas Preston's *Cambyses* (1561) and against the indiscriminate insertion of mirth in serious matter, which Sidney calls the «matching of hornpipes and

funerals» so often vaunted in the titles and prologues of the earlier sixteenth century English drama. The play presented by the rustics at Theseus's revels, described as «A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus / And his love Thisbe, very tragical mirth» in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (V.1.56-7) is an illustration of the kind of hotchpotch a literary critic like Sidney must have had in mind.

Sidney's backward glance at the hybrid «mongrel tragicomedy» condemned it to err as a shadow in the margins of literary circles, even if the critical obloquy levelled at it had little effect in discouraging the practice itself which was aided in its development by examples from abroad that were subsequently grafted onto the national popular root. A sideways glance at the Italian scene reveals the existence of a similar situation with the Denores-Guarini controversy which began in 1588 with *Il Verato*, written by Guarini before the publication of his tragicomedy, *Il Pastor Fido*, in 1590. Defending the hybrid drama was no easy task, as Shakespeare himself tells us in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* :

Proteus. For Orpheus' lute was strung with poets' sinews,
Whose golden touch could soften steel and stones,
Make lions tame,

(III.2.77-80)

Denores' use and abuse of Aristotle and Horace tended to stifle or at least retard innovation in dramaturgical practices, as did Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*. However, by integrating more and more romance elements from various sources and, in particular, from Italian romance tales, the English poet-dramatist gradually conceived of a dramatic form which, reflecting the poetic task of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, brought together different measures in harmonious union. At the time when *A Defence of Poetry* was penned, the kind of tragicomedy that took its point of departure from a play like *Damon and Pithias* was moving into a new period of steady development in which it would become a more distinctive type form of a kind that is hinted at in Fletcher's *To the Reader* (1609-10), itself a reformulation of Guarini's *Compendio*, which is a veritable manifesto of Renaissance tragicomic blending. When the romantic element — a convenient term for denoting the unreal and imaginative in literary expression in contradistinction to the familiar and merely commonplace — sounded the dominant note in English drama in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, its ruling spirit became the very essence of tragicomedy.

Foreign scenes, strange adventure, heroic exploit, impending danger, love beset with difficulty, idealized women were stock elements that offered every opportunity for a more unified blending of the tragic and comic : the checkered course of romantic love lent itself naturally to tragicomedy.

In a *Defence of Poetry*, Sidney declares that the right poet is not simply a maker of verses, drawing for his materials on nature's world of sensible objects, but a creator, god-like in his powers of invention, who generates an imaginative world independent of nature's :

Only the poet, [...] lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth or, quite anew, forms as never were in nature, as the heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies and such like.⁴

And yet, the right to «freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit»⁵ is denied the tragicomic playwright on the grounds of the Aristotelian unities. Even a tragedy like *Gorboduc* is criticized for not respecting the unities of time and place. Dramatized romance plays like *Common Conditions* (1576) and *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* (1570) display the fighting and rescues which befall the fortunes of amorous knights and distressed ladies before they are conducted to a propitious close. An obvious pejorative reference to plays of this sort occurs in Sidney's *Defence* which echoes that of Stephen Gosson's *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582) :

Comedies so tickle our sense with a pleasanter vein, that they make us lovers of laughter, and pleasure, without any mean, both foes to temperance. What schooling is this ? Sometime you shall see nothing but the adventures of an amorous knight, passing from country to country for the love of his lady, [...] What learn you by that ? When the soul of your plays is either mere trifles, or Italian bawdry, or wooing of gentlewomen, what are we taught ?⁶

Sidney laments the absence of «right tragedies» and «right comedies [...] where the whole tract of comedy should be full of delight, as the tragedy

should still be maintained in a well-raised admiration»⁷. The «right» use of comedy is described by Sidney as the correct handling of parts like those of a «flattering Gnatho» or a «vainglorious Thraso», whose «signifying badge given them by the comedian»⁸ makes it clear that evil is not to be learnt by seeing it set out, but to be abhorred. «Right» tragedy is that which stirs the «affects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded»⁹.

Sidney sees «delightful teaching» as the end of the «comical part» and as the end of poetry itself, not the loud laughter prevalent on the popular stage, which he considers to be but «scornful tickling»¹⁰. Delight and laughter, he concedes, may coalesce in scenes of a kind that show Hercules in woman's attire, because love of Omphale inspired the hero's cross-dressing. Only very «daintily» mixed mingles of tragedy and comedy, as in certain classical plays, seemed acceptable to Sidney. He expands upon the Horatian principle that the best poet both pleases and teaches¹¹, that the function of poetry is essentially didactic, but can also serve as a way of introducing philosophical ideas with the pleasures of metre, rhyme and fable, to intellects too feeble to digest philosophy unadorned. Coexisting with this is the humanist commonplace concerning the ameliorative potential of poetry. Poetry teaches and also moves men to action, making them better, causing them to imitate the moral ideal set before them. Humanist theory regards poetry as having an important political function. The humanist myth of the birth of civilisation through Orpheus's song has its origins in Horace's allegorisation of the story¹²:

Orpheus, who was a holy man and the interpreter of the gods, deterred the men of the forests from killing and from disgusting kinds of food. This is why he was said to tame tigers and rabid lions.

Sidney is very much preoccupied with the form of «right» poetry. If «right» poetry (and by extension drama) could be used to inspire a love of virtue — in Sidney's words «to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of»¹³ — such an essentialist view of human nature that recognizes humanity's inherent potential for purposive change also recognises man's innate limitations and potential to be inspired by love of less noble things.

Poetry and song had the potential to allay or inflame the passions, as Shakespeare specifies in *Measure for Measure*¹⁴:

Duke. [...] music oft hath such a charm
To make bad good, and good provoke to harm

(IV.1.14–5)

Poetic eloquence was a key to control, but could also be used for seditious purposes. Sidney was anxious to defend only the «right» kind of poetry and drama and therefore, like Plato, wished to banish the abusers from his pantheon, abusers amongst whose ranks Sidney places the writers of bastard tragicomedy.

Had Sidney lived longer he might have held a more temperate view on generic mixing and seen in the effects of many writers of the tragicomic scene an effort to «teach and delight» even through the lens of what Shakespeare's Hippolyta calls «fancy's images» in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (V.1.25). He might have perceived a didactic element in the god-like playwright's engineering of the plot towards a propitious ending, in his tuning of the discordant elements to a harmonious synthesis. The Orphic back-cloth of tragicomedy is to be seen in the early tragicomic romance plays even though somewhat crude techniques are used by the artist to shape experience to an image of the Christian order in eternity. The artist can be glimpsed at, spanning opposites, suspended over paradoxes, enacting a form of *sparagmos* as he gathers fragmented and scattered truths from the natural world around him to create a world as he thinks it should be. In early plays like *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* (1570) and *Mucedorus* (1598), we witness a demonstration of the artist's creative powers which even includes a form of modal dialogism in *Mucedorus* where tragedy and comedy argue as to the final resolution of the play. Envy threatens, in Iago-like fashion, to «set down the pegs» (*Othello*, II.1.200) that make Comedy's music and to transform the play into a tragedy. The Comic Muse finally wins the day as the controlling playwright draws the play to its happy conclusion. To amoral and chaotic fortune, the conscious contrivance of art is juxtaposed as a purposive force.

When Sidney links God and the poet through their common creative capacity in the *Defence* he is expressing, albeit in a daring way, a Renaissance commonplace :

Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature ; but rather give right honour to the heavenly maker of that maker, who having made man to his own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature : which in nothing he showeth so much as in poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth surpassing her doings.¹⁵

We find the same idea expressed by Puttenham in the *Arte of English Poesie* in which he conceives of poets «as creating gods»¹⁶.

The poet's world is considered to be analogous to God's because it is controlled by the same principle of discordant concord, or unity through variety. The design of a world of art was deemed to be like the design of the universe, not because the poet imitates God's design but because he creates on the same principles as God, that is to say according to geometrical and musical proportion. The discovery by Pythagoras of the fundamental musical intervals of the Greek musical system corresponded to basic mathematical ratios. This gave a scientific reality to the ephemeral powers of music upon the human psyche, a concept which gave rise to the formulation of a general cosmology that unified the motion of heavenly bodies, the structure of the human soul, the tuning of the lyre, through their mutual participation in these mathematical proportions. According to the Platonists and Pythagoreans, knowledge of music could lead to nothing less than knowledge of the structure of the universe and the essence of God. Sidney's poet aims at producing such a response in the listener and aims at recapturing the affect-producing results ascribed to Greek music, symbolized through the figure of Orpheus :

[...] he [the poet] cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with or prepared for the well enchanting skill of music.¹⁷

Sidney echoes Plato in emphasizing the value of the rhythmical element in music and by extension in poetry, and its ability to express qualities that can arouse a response in the life and personality of the listener. According to Plato, sound and hearing were bestowed by the gods to allow men to realise in their souls the divine pattern of creation. Music derives from a divine source :

And harmony, which has motions akin to the revolutions of our souls, is not regarded by the intelligent votary of the Muses as given by them with a view of irrational pleasure, which is deemed to be the purpose of it in our day, but as meant to correct any discord which may have arisen in the courses of the soul, and be our ally in bringing her into agreement with herself, and rhythm too was given by them for the same reason, on account of the irregular and graceless ways which prevail among mankind generally, and help us against them.¹⁸

Neoplatonic and Pythagorean theories about cosmology are woven into the tragicomedies of Shakespeare's era, illustrating as they do that human nature was in need of periodic retuning to avoid discord. Tragicomedies of the day end with the restoration of lost harmony in persons, families and communities through means similar to those used by musicians to tune instruments. The positive paradigmatic Orpheus is seen as the quintessential poet-musician whose artistic talent stands for the ultimate power of musical affect. This figure haunts many a tragicomedy and also haunts Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*.

In Richard Edwards' *Damon and Pithias* (performed at court during the Christmas season of 1564-65), the Orphic back-cloth is often highlighted in the play's presentation of the romance story of the eponymous faithful friends whose outcome illustrates what the Italian Neoplatonist Ficino, who translated several of the Orphic texts, considered to be the summary of Orphic teaching: love, the power that produces harmony in all things was «the perpetual knot or link of the universe»¹⁹.

The Prologue to *Damon and Pithias*, published in 1571 and «somewhat altered for the proper use of them that hereafter shall have occasion to plaie it, either in Private, or open Audience», as the title page specifies, sets out the intentions of a dramatist who pays careful attention to the principles of dramatic art that were likely to be criticised in academic circles. Edwards declares that his play observes Horatian decorum in its presentation of characters at the court of Dionysius of Syracuse, possibly the tyrant whom Plato was unable to transform, to whom Sidney refers in the *Defence*²⁰. Edwards calls his play a «tragicall comedy», which seems to him most fitting to the nature of the piece, «matter, mix'd with mirth and care» (l. 37), an echo of the Horatian

principle of *dulce et utile* and of Sidney's «delightful teaching». The prologue is one of the first apologies for dramatic art in the English language and prepares in the audience the proper expectations that will effect the proper responses. The previous «toying plays» (l. 6) from which he says he has turned away suggest simple jesting without education, art without virtue for an audience without wisdom. The newly metamorphosed poet wishes to take possession of the audience's «eye» and «ears», to gain the correct response when they «hear the cause» and «see th'effect of this new tragical comedy» (l. 46). Edwards' Muse is a potent force for change and suggests an Orphic presence.

Damon and Pithias is about friendship, tyranny, flattery and the power of poetic drama to combat abuses and transform abusers. Two types of friends are contrasted : the false friends, Aristippus and Carisophus, and the true friends, Damon and Pithias. Aristippus is the philosopher-turned courtier who is a lover of wisdom, which he defines as self-love : «I am wise for myself» (l.14-2). Carisophus is the parasite flatterer who has no wisdom or learning and no virtue. Damon and Pithias are the true philosophers both in their conception of amity and in their behaviour as friends described as being «two» yet «as one». Carisophus and Aristippus, being wise only for the self, always remain separate and disunited. The tyrant, whose word has the power to kill, plays Death to the faithful friends when Damon is wrongly accused of spying in Syracuse and subsequently imprisoned. The root of the story bears a strong resemblance to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Separation of the friends entails a warning from the tyrant that if Damon looks back on his promise to return in time for the execution, then the broken pledge will result in the execution of Pithias in his stead.

Dion. A mad kind of amity ! Advise thyself well : if Damon fail
at his day,
Which shall be justly appointed, wilt thou die for him, to me
his life to pay ?

(l. 831-5)

The subsequent transformation of the tyrant Dionysius resembles the assuaging of the gods of the dead whose will, unbending to reason, is finally swayed by the power of musical ethos and love. As Damon and Pithias vie for the single role of victim in the bloody drama that Dionysius had programmed, the tyrant and his court are struck almost dumb by the

wonderful spectacle of the heroes' «unspeakable friendship» (l. 1655). Dionysius undergoes a great moral transformation thanks to the force of the dramatic scene and to the demonstration of love that he witnesses. He makes clear the fact that a «speaking picture» (pace Sidney) engaging ear and eye can move in ways not available merely to the abstract world of counsel and reason, but superior to all other forms as a means of leading to virtue :

Dion. My heart this rare friendship hath pierc'd to the root,
And quenched all my fury. This sight hath brought this about,
Which thy grave counsel, Eubulus, and learned persuasion could never do.
[*To Damon and Pithias*] O noble gentlemen, the immortal gods above
Hath made you play this tragedy, I think, for my behoof.
Before this day I never knew what perfect friendship meant ;
[...]
Damon, have thou thy life ; from death I pardon thee.

(l. 1667-78)

In this speech Dionysius refers to the long oration which Eubulus had delivered in order to try and persuade him to spare Damon. The counsellor quoted historical precedent to illustrate how tyrants were doomed to a «ruinous fall» (l. 761), how tyrants stood on «fickle ground» (l. 759). However, reason combined with eloquence had no effect on Dionysius who brushed aside the counsellor's «vain talk of mercy» (l. 778).

The Muses play an important role in the final transformation. Their presence and burden in the lament convey the notion that Pithias' death would figure the debasement of learning and art in general and the victory of death over love and art. Civilisation would therefore be doomed along with Pithias in Dionysius' tyrannical court, if the former were put to death.

In the prologue, Edwards promised his audience «matter, mixed with mirth and care». The mirth is provided by a scene in which Grim the Collier and the self-seeking purveyor of «coals for the king's mouth» (l. 1103) is literally shaved by the lackeys, Jack and Will, who rob him of his vouchers which he received in payment of his services. Grim is punished for his willingness to be flattered, and the whole scene provides a Dionysiac dismembering of the serious matter presented to the audience. The lackeys' «*in vino veritas*» allusion, misapplied to an ignoble purpose, announces the ensuing denouement that proves to be a miraculous metamorphosis. The power of the tragicomic dramatist's ameliorative art

is conspicuously framed as it turns a tyrant into a benevolent monarch, thereby restoring life and health to the commonwealth.

The tyrant is initiated into the Orphic mysteries which conceal the keys to harmony and order in the universe. The civilising power of words, music and love is shown to be the force that wins back new lives and restores harmony. The final address to the Queen stresses the importance of the Orphic lesson, that love (true amity in this play) is «The strongest guard that kings can have [...] their state to save» (l. 1761-2).

Shakespeare's tyrant Leontes is also tamed by Orphic skills in *The Winter's Tale*. The plastic arts along with music are solicited by Paulina in a Pygmalion-type scene that stages Hermione as a feigned statue coming to life and the tyrannical Leontes experiencing a complete melt-down in response to the enchantment and sensuous appeal of the moving tableau. In Ovidian fashion Shakespeare dramatises the way the creative artist reaps the rewards of his artistic ability to transform unbending matter. For Ovid, Orpheus represented the victory of love and art over death. In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes is forced by Paulina to lead a life of mourning once he realizes how he has wronged his wife and children. His is a journey of enlightenment after a period of repentance during which he learns to temper the inward and outward man. He becomes «the man who dwelt by the churchyard» (II.1.33) of Mamillius' tale until, finally, he is allowed to look upon the divine vision personified in his redemptive wife.

Paulina, the stage-manager of the play, brings about this state of love by imposing order and shape on the final events. As the statue breathes, love in its ideal form, spiritual love, spells out the Orphic teaching by proving itself to be stronger than the immutable laws of nature. Love is shown to raise man above the limitations of his corporeal state and to lead the mind beyond understanding to a state of joy. As one who loves and suffers, Leontes, filled with the «*furor amatoris*» that the Orphic initiate of the *Song to Eros* is said to experience²¹, declares «this affliction has a taste as sweet / As any cordial comfort» (V.3.75-6).

Although the myth of Orpheus contains the theory of the transforming power of art and love, it also suggests the precariousness of civilisation and even the destructive capacities of inspiration. As Ovid reminds us, Orpheus was torn apart by the Maenads and Calliope his mother was unable to save him since his singing was drowned out by the cacophony the enraged women created. Shakespeare also portrays the abuse of music and illustrates the way it can be deviated from its civilising function to produce harmful effects. Autolycus is a kind of anti-Orpheus,

reminiscent of the Vice character of the morality play whose songs are performed to conclude a pact with the forces of evil. In the fourth act of *The Winter's Tale*, he boasts about the songs that seduce the simple folk at the sheep-shearing festivities : «all their senses stuck in ears. You might have pinched a placket, it was senseless» (IV.595-7). Unlike Paulina's redemptive art, Autolycus' art is pure trumpery, designed to inveigle and, ultimately, to destroy.

Another hybrid play, *James IV* (1590)²², penned by Shakespeare's contemporary Robert Greene, might have won Sidney's stamp of approval for its experimentation with music and dance sequences which frame a stern moral exemplum provided by the play-within-the-play that relies heavily on the pattern of the moral interlude with its main protagonist torn between spiritual aspirations (as king of Scotland and representative of the Divinity) and earthbound passions. The inset play in *James IV* is presented by the misanthropic character called Bohan in order to illustrate why he has withdrawn from the world. By means of the framing play, Bohan is able to sign-post Robert Greene's aims as he poses as the «maker» of the play-within-the-play, the «creating god» who presents the world he has quitted to the real-life audience in order to give it a second chance, to redeem it with a happy ending in which Virtue triumphs over Evil in a finale of reconciliation and feasting. In other words, Bohan the poet-dramaturgist presents the court of his own day in its state of discord and disintegration, and from the scattered pieces re-creates that world as it should be, recovering something of that true and perfect knowledge lost since the «first accursed Fall», to coin Sidney's phraseology²³. Greene accomplishes in fact what Sidney considered to be the task of the «peerless poet»²⁴, that is to say, to «figure forth» a «nature» of a higher order. The consciously contrived felicitous end is an example of Orphic tuning as discord in the personal, domestic and state matters is conducted by the tragicomic playwright to a final *discordia concors*.

Greene's play shows how a Platonic journey to intelligent enlightenment, that of turning away from love of Eros to love of Anteros, can be grafted onto the basic spiritual odyssey of the earlier providential moral drama, with its progression from innocence to degeneracy and eventual repentance and regeneration. The King of Scots is captivated by the sirens' song and gives way to his lustful desires soon after his marriage to the virtuous Dorothea, an English princess. As in the morality plays, his good and bad acquaintances on the road to regeneration are either tempters or supporters between whom he has to choose. Ateukin, a kind of Italian

Vice figure, uses eloquence of the wrong kind to flatter and inflame James IV's unlawful desire for the chaste Ida. When the King is doubtful about the legitimacy of his love for Ida, Ateukin reminds him of the scope of his power :

You have the sword and sceptre in your hand,
You are the king, the state depends on you :
Your will is law

(James IV, I.1.247-9)

Ateukin's evil influence brings Scotland to the brink of war with England. However, when Dorothea, a personification of feminine virtue of the Patient Griselda type, miraculously reappears after escaping near-death when supposedly assassinated by the agency of Ateukin, James IV's irrational waywardness is tamed by her moving demonstration of charitable love. Love, combined with eloquence, triumphs over death and restores order in the repentant king, thus avoiding the tragedy of war. The play-within-the-play ends in festive celebration.

The framing play, however, ends on a more pessimistic note. As the fairy king Oberon disappears at the break of day, his fairies sing a lullaby to rest the ever misanthropic playmaker Bohan. The note of Orphic pessimism at the close of the play serves to underline the recognition of the inherent limitations of humanity, of man's constant need to look within himself to gain deeper understanding of his own nature and of the universe. Bohan's return to the tomb is symbolic of the artist's disenchantment after the ephemeral «shows of guidly sights» (V.Chorus.7) that the audience has been treated to. He seems to be expressing on the one hand the artist's capacity to apprehend other-worldly perfection and on the other his incapacity to mediate between the celestial and the mundane. Bohan's turning in upon himself, his descent into the tomb and desire to exchange life for death — «My grave is mine that rids me from despites» (V.6.8) — might be seen to symbolise the Orphic descent in search of the truth that resides in introspection. Not far beneath Bohan's railing lies a palpable sense of the contrast between the theoretically god-like nature of man and his mortal condition, of his innate corruption that is beyond the reach of the supernatural powers.

In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare stages a similar show of self-conscious artistry with the musician-king Prospero as master of ceremonies, a complete embodiment of the artist as creating god, conjuring up masques

and exempla for the benefit of all, off-stage and on. *The Tempest* offers its audience a vision of social harmony in which discords are resolved through the agency of poetry, music and spectacle. And yet, as in Greene's *James IV*, the final harmony is tinged with melancholy. Prospero has much in common with the musician-king Orpheus²⁵: like Orpheus, he uses «heavenly music» (V.1.52) to temper unruly passions, and even has the power to bring the dead back to life with his «so potent art» (V.1.50). He is also an enchanter who uses his skills to create social concord. However, the self-conscious playwright, by repeatedly drawing attention to the artificiality of his drama, emphasizes the hypothetical nature of its harmonious society. As Touchstone remarks in *As You Like It*, there is «much virtue in if» (V.4.97).

The unreformed Caliban may be seen to represent «this thing of darkness» (V.1.278), the natural desire that forms an innate part of all human nature, and which constantly poses a threat to humanity in that the balance of the humours is likely to be upset at any time and reason overturned. Shakespeare presents an idealized world, and, as in *James IV*, underlines its fictional status whilst simultaneously suggesting that it is as plausible a world as the one that human wickedness has actually created. Its coming into existence would depend on whether humankind were capable of effacing the innate propensity for evil which has caused human suffering since the Fall. Such is the essentialist view of human history that *The Tempest* and *James IV* seem to present in their tragicomic treatment of the myth of Orpheus.

In *Orpheus, the Myth of the Poet*, Charles Segal points out the fact that in both Ovid's and Vergil's versions of the myth, Orpheus compels the elemental forces of love and death to confront each other in art. Orpheus becomes the ideal symbol of the paradoxes of both life and art because he owes his existence as a mythic symbol to the need to find a form that can hold contradictions. Inherent in the earliest stories of Orpheus is the notion of what Segal calls

[...] the basic interrelatedness of all parts of the world. The magic of the poet's song makes visible and communicable that hidden harmony: it reveals the unity in which life and death appear as ultimately parts of the same continuum.²⁶

In *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare provides a fine display of Orphic artistry. Harmonist statements abound and his use of emblem and symbol convey

an impression of unity. The spiritual odyssey of Posthumus illustrates the complex process of reconciling the Bacchic and the Apollonian through the tempering or tuning of the outer and inner man. Posthumus's Platonic progress involves personal reformation, a turning away from the love of terrestrial Eros to the love of virtue or Anteros, represented in the play by the constant Griselda figure, Innogen, the tempering or tuning agent. Through the example of her constancy and forgiving love, she is able not only to heal her father, Cymbeline, but also to offer a second chance to Posthumus : like Ovid's Orpheus and Eurydice, they are reunited in a second life. Orpheus provides the Renaissance tragicomic playwright with a convenient way of bridging the gap between æsthetics and ethics, and with a means to finding an all-inclusive dramatic form for «delightful teaching».

Sidney's backward glance at early sixteenth-century tragicomedy was not fatal for the developing genre which was later set above all other theatrical genres on the emblematic title page of *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson* (London 1616) engraved by William Hole²⁷. If Sidney had not died a tragic death caused by a wound in 1586, an alternative, more tragicomic fate might have awaited him, one that is suggested to us in the peroration of *A Defence of Poetry* : an angry Apollo descending from on high to fix upon that revered man of letters the «ass's ears of Midas»²⁸ to show his disapproval of the exclusion of Orpheus' progeny, «mongrel tragicomedy», from the school of instruction and delight.

Pauline BLANC
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NOTES

¹ Sir Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, ed. J.A. Van Dorsten, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 43.

² Richard Edwards, *Damon and Pithias*, in *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Drama*, ed. Joseph Quincey Adams, Cambridge, Riverside, 1924, p. 571-608.

³ George Whetstone, *Promos and Cassandra*, «Dedication to William Fleetewoode» (1578), in Norbert Platz, *English Dramatic Theories, vol. 1. From Elyot to the Age of Dryden, 1531-1668*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1973, p. 17.

⁴ Sidney, *A Defence*, p. 23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶ Quoted in Leo Salinger, *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy*, Cambridge University Press, 1974, p. 73.

⁷ Sidney, *A Defence*, p. 67.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹¹ Horace, *The Art of Poetry*, l. 343-6. In *Classical Literary Criticism*, ed. D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom, coll. The World's Classics, Oxford University Press, 1989.

¹² *Ibid.*, l. 391-4.

¹³ Sidney, *A Defence*, p. 28.

¹⁴ All references to Shakespeare are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, London, W.W. Norton & Co., 1997.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁶ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, li, ed. Edward Arber, Birmingham, English Reprints, 1897.

¹⁷ Sidney, *A Defence*, p. 40.

¹⁸ Plato, *Timæus*, 47d-e, trans. Benjamin Jowett in *Plato : The Collected Dialogues*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1961, p. 1175.

¹⁹ See John Warden, «Orpheus and Ficino», in *Orpheus : The Metamorphosis of a Myth*, ed. John Warden, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1982, p. 102.

²⁰ Sidney, *A Defence*, p. 58.

²¹ Warden, *Orpheus*, p. 103.

²² Robert Greene, *James IV*, ed. J. A. Lavin, London, Ernest Benn, 1967.

²³ Sidney, *A Defence*, p. 25.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁵ For a thorough account of these similarities consult Robin Headlam Wells, *Elizabethan Mythologies : Studies in Poetry, Drama and Music*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 63-80.

²⁶ Charles Segal, *Orpheus. The Myth of the Poet*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1989, p. 28.

²⁷ See Margery Corbett and R.W. Lightbown, *The Comely Frontispiece : The Emblematic Title-page in England, 1550-1660*, London, 1979, p. 144.

²⁸ Sidney, *A Defence*, p. 75.