From Universal to (Flawed) Particular: Subversive Attempts to Re-Create the Real in Elizabethan Theatre

by Giuseppe Leone*

1. Reality Becomes Realism: Dangerous Acting

Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1690, is certainly among the best known and most successful works in the English philosophical and literary tradition.[1] The essay carries out a survey on the true extent of human knowledge. Divided into four books, the treaty lays the theoretical foundations of English empiricism. Of great interest for this article is that, in the third chapter of the third book, the philosopher proposes a consideration on the transformation of ideas from particular to general:

> […] ideas become general by separating from them the circumstances of time and place and any other ideas that may tie them down to this or that particular existence. By means of such abstraction they are fitted to represent more individuals than one.
>
> (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, 3, 6)

From this it can be conversely inferred that general ideas become specific when set in a given time and in a given space, being *tied down* to specific existences – in other words: when an idea does not conform to all individuals, but to a single man or, at most, to a class of isolated individuals, characterized by a chronological and spatial specificity.

It goes without saying that this theoretical precept is valid without exception and may be referred to any historic season. The idea of dying, which was introduced on stage by Death, in *Everyman*, puts

* University of Palermo.

[1] See C. A. Viano, "Introduzione", in *Locke*, ed. C. A. Viano (Milano: Mondadori, 2008), p. XIII.

*In*Verbis, n. 2, 2016, pp. 119-138

forward a notion shared by all human beings. By virtue of his allegorical charge, Death represents the abstract, universal, concept of dying through the concrete image of the skeleton. The allegory operates on a higher plane than that of simple visible perception; it acts on an intuitive and collective level. The death of Duncan, in *Macbeth*, instead refers to a fatal act related to a unique and exclusive individual, set in a given space (the Scottish territory), and at a given time: the period of Macbeth's reign (presumably in the late Middle Ages). No longer does the event of dying refer to the whole community but it is now fixed in the personal – one might say specific – history of the Scottish King. The departure of the monarch does not determine the allegorical end of humanity: other characters will continue the action on stage. The murder of the King does not curtail the development of the action over time. The indeterminate and exemplary personification of Death is now transformed into a specific, fully characterized, death. One could say that Death is now de-universalized: turning from the status of theoretical concept to that of earthly reality experienced in an ordinary sense. For this to happen there had to be the historicizing process of the event (i.e. its being placed in time), a positioning of the event (i.e. its being placed in the geographic space), and of course the construction of a singular, definite character, with the consequential loss of the allegorical mask.

Not only did the modern theatre undergo a secularization process, but it also went through a process of placement in an identified, geo-political environment. The events represented are no longer divorced from the context in which they are set. They now belong to a precise scenario which will possibly be varied from time to time, even changing within the same play. Spaces change and time proceeds diachronically. The action is projected in the sensible world, marked by specific temporality. Correspondingly, the universality of the message (too often clerical and predictable) is also channelled into a plurality of contents and concepts now produced through a variety of linguistic forms and styles.[2] This obviously does not imply that new plays disperse the moralistic-didactic component entrusted to allegorical staging, but now this component refers to events grounded in ordinary life.

This process of de-universalization transforms the act of staging into an epistemological category, an experience that allows the achievement

[2] For further information, see F. Marenco, "Shakespeare e dintorni. Gli inizi del teatro moderno", in *Storia del teatro moderno e contemporaneo*, Vol. 1, ed. R. Alonge, G. Davico Bonino (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), pp. 278 ff.

of specific knowledge, based on recognition and classification of observable and identifiable data, a burst of light on everyday civic life, on actions no longer situated in an immaterial or generalized dimension. The immutable, a-chronic, a-spatial example of the medieval drama turns into a dramatic idea that is localized and variable, generic events turn into events related to specific existences, and a passage from Universal to Particular is activated. The Lust/Reason clash, typical of the Morality plays, for example, is de-universalized in the verbal dispute between Marina and Lysimachus (*Pericles*, 4, 1, 18 ff.). And now the clash opposes Marina's mindset (and only Marina's) to Lysimachus' (and only Lysimachus'), in the city of Mytilene (and nowhere else), in pre-Christian times (and in no other historical time).[3]

This chronological and geographic arrangement (albeit in a fictional story) determines a space-frame that plays a primary role in the creation of the sense. The literary chronotope, recovering Bakhtin's concept, not only portrays the coordinates where the scene takes place but "involves specific signs of time-space structures which point towards a spatio-temporal framework beyond physical presence. It creates a whole background which can be taken for granted: 'off the screen' characters and objects are 'there' without being shown".[4] The space in which the scene takes place is charged with values and aspects that refer to a coeval offstage characterized by historical and social information. The space is not given just as a physical place, but as a complex and metaphorical representation of the community that inhabits that place; as a space where information related to that time and to the social 'qualities' of that time and that community converge, thus ensuring "a better understanding of how humans act in their biotopes and semiospheres".[5]

As a result, literature becomes a device for knowledge, an investigation into man, into his historical transformation and his partaking in civic life. It becomes a social instrument able to define

[3] Thus, even if now it is difficult to define a precise chronological setting, yet the absolute timelessness is avoided**.** Furthermore, as we shall see, in early modern plays the space-time coordinates are often approximate and sometimes even contradictory.

[4] P. Lorino, "The Bakhtinian Theory of Chronotope (Spatial-Temporal Frame) Applied to the Organizing Process", Second International Symposium on Process Organization Studies, p. 7.

[5] N. Bemong, P. Borghart, M. De Dobbeleer, K. Demoen, K. De Temmerman, B. Keunen, , *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope*, *Reflections, Applications, Perspectives* (Gent: Ginkgo Academia Press, 2010), p. IV.

roles, identities, perspectives, ethical and legal rules in the context in which the theatrical fiction is set. It becomes mirror and report.[6] Reality becomes realism and the staging immediately turns itself into a protean, dynamic, dangerous act.

2. Everyman's Death. From Eternity to Transience

This attempt to adhere to shared everyday life can be inscribed in the wake of the great cultural transformation to which there concur both the exaltation of man – now at the centre of any investigation and speculation – produced by Humanism, and the influence of Latin and Greek works, as well as that of Italian literature, which brought about a new conception of drama.[7]

De-universalisation develops, though, in the Humanistic-Renaissance cultural climate, i.e. in a period characterized by extraordinary developments in philosophy, science, arts and literature. And possibly it is but an expression of a mutated epistemological need, the inevitable outcome of a process of renewal and socio-cultural transformation that in a few years will see its consecration in the introduction of the new empirical-inductive Baconian method. Indeed, the de-universalization process is located precisely in sixteenth-century man's urgent desire to experience the world in a new way, to investigate reality starting from the concrete, objective fact, from his own personal experience, cognizable in an empiric way.

A learning is now supported which is immediately oriented towards useful knowledge (a very Renaissance concept), far away from previous abstract speculations and allegorical generalizations. The fundamental trait of modern thought is precisely embodied in the break with metaphysics to stimulate knowledge fully concentrated on earthly matters and profit. It is not by coincidence that in those years there was a real turning point in literature: the transition from treatises to handbooks; from writings dealing with philosophical and scientific

[6] The action relinquishes stereotypical and predictable traits to accommodate the unexpected and unconventional solutions of the new performances; for further information, see Marenco, "Shakespeare e dintorni". It is worth remembering that faint traces of realism can already be found in the Wakefield cycle (see for example the *Second Shepherds' Play*, XV sec).

[7] It goes without saying that the interlude represents a fundamental link between the Morality and the modern English play: one thinks, for example, of Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrece* or of Heywood's *The Merry Play between Johan the Husband, Tyb his Wife, and Sir John the Priest*.

topics – aimed at general and theoretical knowledge – to the printing of educational-specific texts; a trend to the production of booklets directed to the formation of man: texts expressly written to investigate and define subjects and themes regarding a given discipline, to provide a specific education, as well as behaviour manuals (often addressed to the courtesan). The books that bear witness to the development of the new editorial production are numerous: one thinks of Elyot's *The Book of the Governor*, 1531;[8] or Ascham's *The Scholemaster*, 1570,[9] or *The Art of English Poesy* (1586) by George Puttenham; not to mention the translation of manuals imported from Italy: one thinks of the translation of Castiglione's *Il Cortigiano* (1528) by Sir Thomas Hoby in 1561,[10] or of *La civil conversazione* by Stefano Guazzo translated by George Pettie and Bartholomew Young in 1586, or of *Il galateo* by Giovanni della Casa (1558) translated into English by Robert Paterson in 1576, or, finally, one could take into account the great attention paid to Machiavelli's *Il principe* (1513, 1st ed. 1532).

Surely, the transition to the new way of investigating reality starting from empirical experience is not immediate. As Michele Stanco states: "the 'old' magic-analogical thinking not only survived but flourished, interweaving with the recovery of ancient alchemical practices".[11] Old and new methods, reality and magic, scientific advancement and witchcrafts coexist. Yet now, in drama, the supernatural persists as a magical projection acting in real life, thereby establishing a correspondence and an identification with historical truth, showing itself as a testimony to the inexplicable aspects of daily life. In the new stage production, the idea, for example, of Madness or Evil is de-universalized and embodied in the figure of the witch. And, once again, a general idea turns into a particular idea, closer in time and space,

[8] Dedicated to Henry VIII, the book analyzed and showed the virtues necessary for a statesman.

[9] Not by chance, in his text, Ascham says: "specially prepared for the private brynging up of youth in gentlemen and noblemens houses".

[10] As it is known Castiglione's text theorizes and analyzes the tasks of the Courtier and among them there was the art of conversation. This conversation should necessarily be far from the typical oratory of the metaphysical philosopher: "Neither wil I have him to speak alwaies in gravity, but of pleasant matters, of mery conceits, of honest divises, and of jestes according to the time" (*The Courtier*, I, xxxiv). Metaphysical cogitations and ruminations must turn to pleasant and shared conversations dealing with worldly, simple arguments.

[11] See M. Stanco (ed.), *La letteratura inglese dall'Umanesimo al Rinascimento. 1485-1625* (Roma: Carocci, 2016), pp. 15 ff.

"tied […] down to [a] particular existence". With their circumscribed esotericism, anchored in Elizabethan reality, the witches suggest a localized belonging to evil, a sharing of knowledge restricted to few members. Identified in a specific gender, they represent the concrete embodiment of a horror and phobia *de facto* experienced, sorceresses being considered part of a dark and dreaded existing world (not by chance the highest number of witchcraft trials took place between 1559 and 1675).[12] These forms of alienation, or mental imbalance are inserted into the dramatic magma as an anomaly in behaviour not attributable to all humanity but to a restricted portion confined to the female universe, like an endemic disease rooted in the concrete world of experienced reality.

Likewise the fool, another element of irrationality, now masculine and not necessarily linked to evil, not only is an evolution of medieval Vice, but embodies that element which, in Clara Mucci's words, "represents the theme of Renaissance *topsy turvydom*",[13] acting as the highest expression of a disorder able to symbolize truth and to lead to truth.

In both cases, the metaphysical and allegorized category of Madness is replaced by the earthly category of senselessness; it is reduced to a human quality, to a personal attribute. Everyday reality is put on stage with its aberrations and imperfections, yet with its deeply rooted, anthropological and pedagogical luggage. To the allegorical and the eternal, the fleeting and the perishable are symmetrically opposed, with all the inadequacies and fragilities typical of human nature.

3. Actions Set in Time and Space. Subversive Attempts to Re-Create the Real

In sum, it is not only in the break with sacred topics that the advance toward modern drama can be detected, but, as we have seen, also in actions and protagonists set in a defined instant and space, in their being normalised and conceived as a process of becoming-in-time of the individual. But the translation was not without consequences.

New plays provided new scripts strongly opposed by politics and Puritanism that will detect an isomorphism between de-universalization

[12] On this see C. Mucci in *Il teatro delle streghe. Il femminile come costruzione culturale al tempo di Shakespeare* (Napoli: Liguori, 2003).

[13] C. Mucci, in "Quando 'Fair is Foul': pratiche rinascimentali di inversione e la retorica delle streghe in *Macbeth*", eds. R. Gasparro, R. Mullini, *Il meraviglioso teatrale tra fiaba e magia* (Pescara: Tracce, 1999), p. 50.

and subversion of modern performances. The reason is simple. Freeing themselves from sacred or allegorical plays, and leaving the aisles of the churches, the new theatre began to be offered to a wider public as a chronicle of facts with the presumption of telling the truth, or at least of furnishing a trustworthy imitation of it. To place events in time and space meant to make them immediately real, or rather realistic. The historicized process of human events was now staged: from the simplification implied in the no-place-all-places, one passes to an initial (but as we shall see not precise) identification of the setting; from the a-temporality of the Morality Plays to the not-fully-specified-temporality of modern drama; from the protective vagueness of the allegorical persona to the uniqueness provided by distinctive names; from the cyclical predictability of medieval plays to the unpredictable and credible trajectories of modern plays; from divine judicial power over Man's faults to earthly jurisdiction over characters' crimes, no longer condemned by heavenly courts but submitted to the civil verdict of the Prince.[14]

Obviously this transformation prompted a debate which called into question the very essence of the staging: i.e. the fact of constructing an arbitrary vision of the real and showing it to the public at the risk of corrupting their minds, or diverting them from the orthodox precepts of religion – as well as offering itself as "blasphemous and unnecessary appropriation of the holy act of creation".[15] The controversy was particularly intense, since performances were often connected with issues that were a cause of conflict between the Christian Reformed theorising and the new Protestant church. Topics such as the salvation of the soul, free will, the corruption of the spirit and predestination covered too broad a spectrum not to be intercepted by theatrical plots dealing with events set in everyday life and performed according to the criteria of verisimilitude.[16] Moreover, it is worth considering that the pulpit and the scene had become the main means of communication in, as Marenco states, "what is perhaps not wrong to consider as the

[14] It should be underlined that in those years the monarch began a process of assimilation to the divine, at least as far as his political-juridical power was concerned.

[15] Marenco, "Shakespeare e dintorni", p. 292. The translation is mine. The issue became particularly controversial, especially after the posting of Luther's theses (1517). As is known, the debate lasted for a long time and involved, in different ways and in different seasons, different layers of society, finally leading to a law closing all theatres, ordered by Cromwell with the Puritans in power (1642).

[16] See G. Leone, *Il Palcoscenico esemplare. La questione della giustizia nelle tragedie shakespeariane*, 2 ed. (Napoli: Liguori, 2016), pp. 25 ff.

first draft of the public sphere".[17] For that reason, sacred preaching stood in harsh contrast to the profane and seditious communication of the theatre. Reactions were not long in coming. The very idea of comparing the theatre to preaching was vehemently attacked and considered blasphemy. The Puritan Philip Stubbes in his *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) wrote:

Philoponus: Oh blasphemy intolerable. Are filthy plays and bawdy interludes comparable to the Word of God, the food of life and life itself? It is all one, as if they had said, bawdry, heathenry, paganry, scurrility, and devilry itself is equal with the Word of God. Or that the devil is equipollent with the Lord.[18]

The desire to recreate the unstable variety of life, presenting specific, detailed pitfalls triggered the reprimand of preachers and moralists who accused theatrical performances of luring playgoers with lascivious topics, inciting them to vanity, inducing them to lust or violence. In his *A Treatise Against Dicing, Daunting, Vaine playes, or Enterluds*, *with Other Idle Pastimes* (1577) written in dialogic form, John Northbrooke even attributed satanic origins to theatrical performances:[19]

Age: I am persuaded that Satan has not a more speedy way and fitter school to work and teach his desire, to bring men and women into his snare of concupiscence and filthy lusts of wicked whoredom, than those places, and plays, and theaters are: and therefore it is necessary that those places and players should be forbidden and dissolved and put down by authority, as the brothel houses and stews[a] are.[20]

Evil described in tragedies, lust or vice shown to the public, were placed in an everyday, recognizable time associated with common, specific people. The risk of emulation increased due to the possible identification of the viewer with the character. Otherness and a-temporality now turned into identity and modernity, into recognition and circumstance. The criticisms grew in both number and violence.

[17] Marenco, "Shakespeare e dintorni", p. 293.

[18] P. Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses*, cit. in *Voices of the English Reformation, A Sourcebook*, ed. J. N. King, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 225.

[19] Unlike many other anti-theatricals, Northbrooke justified theatrical plays when recited in Latin and if purged of any reference to lust or vanity.

[20] J. Northbrooke, *A Treatise wherein Dicing, Daunting*, cit. in *Shakespeare's Theatre. A Sourcebook*, ed. T. Pollard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 3.

Stephen Gosson, in *The Schoole of Abuse*, 1579, attacked theatrical performance as a subversive and treacherous product, despite the intention of most of the playwrights to amend their texts by removing any vulgarity of language. Indeed, precisely under the guise of an amended text the danger in theatrical performances could be spotted:

> The carpenter raiseth not his frame without tools, nor the devil his work without instruments: were not players the mean to make these assemblies, such multitudes would hardly be drawn into so narrow room. They seek not to hurt, but desire to please; they have purged their comedies of wanton speeches, yet the corn which they sell is full of cockle, and the drink that they draw overcharged with dregs. There is more in them then we perceive, the devil stands at our elbow when we see not, speaks when we hear him not, strikes when we feel not, and woundeth sore when he raiseth no skin nor rends the flesh. In those things that we least mistrust the greatest danger doth often lurk.[21]

Northbrooke's and Gosson's texts were followed by others: Philip Stubbes wrote *Anatomy of Abuses*, 1583; William Rankins produced *A mirrour of monsters wherein is plainely described the manifold vices, &c spotted enormities, that are caused by the infectious sight of playes, with the description of the subtile slights of Sathan, making them his instruments*, 1587, not forgetting the anonymous *A Short Treatise against Stage Plays*, 1625, or William Prynne's *Histriomastix: the Player's Scourge*, or *Actor's Tragedy*, 1632. According to the critics, in tragedies, man's sins, or murders, were enacted in a seductive way, while in comedies, people laughed at vices and abuses of men, sometimes making a mockery of power. Overall, theatrical performances proposed morally inadequate models which could have a negative influence on the audience. The result was that – as early as the sixteenth century – concerns about the risks of staging spread among playwrights and writers.[22] Consequently, often, either in the introduction or in the dedicatory prologues of works, especially if relating tragic or bloody events, there were authors' justifications: a sort of defence presented to

[21] S. Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse Containing a Pleasant Invective Against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Jesters and Such Like Caterpillars of the Commonwealth* (1579), cit. in *Prose of the English Renaissance. Selected from Early Editions and Manuscripts*, eds. J. W. Hebel, H. Hudson, F. F. Johnson, A. W. Green (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1952), p. 263.

[22] Indeed, the figure of the Master of the Revels, which was entrusted with the supervision of the plays to be put on stage, was much respected, even dreaded, by playwrights.

the spectator (or to the reader) which testify to the caution with which the staging was offered to the public, i.e. to an audience grounded on the precepts of Christian culture or, worse, troubled by the ethical issues emanating from the Lutheran Reformation.

Thomas Newton, in the preface to his edition of Seneca's tragedies, considered it worthwhile to produce a preliminary *excusatio* to preserve his work, defending the tragedy from his detractors and strongly emphasizing the educational aim of modern theatre.[23] Alexander Nevyle did likewise. In the introduction to his translation of Seneca's *Oedipus* (1563), the author recalled the reasons that had led him to produce the rendition from Latin: "Mine only entent was to exhorte men to embrace Vertue and shun Vyce".[24]

Yet, as is known, *excusationes* failed to stop the attacks on the theatre. Modern drama was charged with producing a continuous,

[23] One reads from the text: "For it may not at any hand be thought and deemed the direct meaning of Seneca himself, whose whole wrytynges (penned with a peerless sublimity and loftinesse of Style) are so farre from countenauncing Vice, that I doubt whether there bee any amonge all the Catalogue of Heathen wryters, that with more gravity of Philosophicall sentences, more waightyness of sappy words, or greater authority of sound matter beateth down sinne, loose lyfe, dissolute dealinge, and unbrydled sensuality: or that more sensibly, pithily and bytingly layeth downe the guerdon of filthy lust, cloaked dissimulation, & odious treachery: which is the dryft, whereunto he leveleth the whole yssue of each one of his Tragedies". T. Newton, *The Epistle Dedicatory*, in *Seneca, His Tenne Tragedies*, London 1581; cit. in Seneca, *His Tenne Tragedies*, ed. T. Newton, 2 Vols. (London: Constable and Co, 1927). To confirm the circulation of this literary production, one thinks of the monologues collected in the volume entitled *A Mirror for Magistrates. Wherein may be seene by example of other, with how grievous plagues vices are punished: and howe frayle and unstable worldly prosperities is founde, even of those, whom Fortune seemeth most highly to favour*, published in 1559. In 1578 *The Seconde part of the Mirror for Magistrates, conteining the falles of the infortunate Princes of this Lande. From the Conquest of Caesar, unto the commyng of Duke William the Conqueror* was printed. Soon after, to present just another example (of many possible), Thomas Beard's *The Theatre of God's Judgements: or, a Collection of Histories out of Sacred, Ecclesiaticall, and Profane Authors, concerning the admirable Judgments of God upon the transgressours of his commandements. Translated out of French, and Argumented by more three hundred Examples, by Thomas Beard* (1597) was published.

[24] Cit. in "Introduction" by E. F. Watling, in Seneca, *Four Tragedies and Octavia*, ed. E. F. Watling (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966). Similarly Thomas Elyot in his *The Book of the Governor* (1531) conceived performance as a tool to struggle against sin and vice, and Sir Philip Sidney, in *An Apology for Poetry* (1579), thought of theatre as an instrument with a precise educational task. For further information, see Leone, *Il palcoscenico esemplare*.

subversive, identification between life and stage, experience and performance. During the "two-hours' traffic of […] stage" (*Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue, 12), a specific and immoral attack on God's work was carried out, usurping, or at least imitating, His creative capacity, giving free rein to historicized representations of obscene and reprehensible attitudes and behaviours, teaching vice and showing pride.[25]

4. The Flawed Particular

It goes without saying that the de-universalization process does not forthwith find a complete and flawless application. Often, the transition from timelessness to identification of time, from no-places to geographical definition determined an approximate designation of spatio-temporal coordinates.[26]

In this sense, the Shakespearean canon is paradigmatic. Critics have already thoroughly analyzed the flaws in his canon: from the improper use of the word 'dollar' (a term coined in 1519), in *Macbeth*, 1, 2, 63 – i.e. in a play that is historically located in the mid-eleventh century –, to Cleopatra's desire to play a game invented long after the Empress's death: "Let's to billiard" says the woman in *Antony and Cleopatra*, 2, 5, 3. Similarly, in *Troilus and Cressida*, 2, 2, 165, Hector will make a foolish chronological reference to Aristotle, born around 384 B.C., i.e. a few centuries after the Trojan war, allegedly fought between 1250 and 1194 B.C. But one also thinks of the reference to Hamlet's studies at the University of Halle-Wittenberg, when it is known that, in Hamlet's time, Universities had not yet been established.[27]

In addition to chronological overlaps, political incorrectness can be found: one thinks of the words spoken by Hermione, who called

[25] Often the theatre draws inspiration from true historic events: the first regular English tragedy, *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex*, 1561, for instance, is strongly linked to the problems of the contemporary Elizabethan period, dealing with the question of succession and the use of political power. The play by Sackville and Norton treats an event which had its historical roots in the story of the King of Britannia related in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britains* (ca. 1136). But one thinks also of Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*, or of Shakespeare's *Richard II* and *Henry VIII*.

[26] As is known, the exact definition of time and place, and the accurate identification of the characters will be carried out thanks to the rise of the novel in response to specific historical and cultural needs.

[27] One thinks also of the chimes of a mechanical watch on the Ides of March (44 B. C) in *Julius Caesar*.

herself the daughter of the king of Russia in *The Winter's Tale*, that is to say in a romance set in pre-Christian times (as the pronouncement of the Delphic oracle testifies to):

> *Hermione*: The Emperor of Russia was my father.[28]
> (*The Winter's Tale*, 3, 2, 118)

In the same text, the Renaissance painter and architect Giulio Romano (with further carelessness referred to as a skilled sculptor) is present. And in *The Winter's Tale* the 'abuses' also extend to geographical imprecision, if one considers the presence of seashores in the Bohemian territory.[29]

Nor do Shakespearean inaccuracies limit themselves to this: a *prochronism* can be found in the use of pistols in *Pericles*, i. e., in a text in which celebrations in honour of Neptune go along with the processions of the vestals consecrated to the worship of Diana.[30] The incongruity, as is known, is uttered by Thaliard:

> *Thaliard:* My lord,
> If I can get him within my pistol's length,
> I'll make him sure enough.
> (*Pericles*, 1, 1, 167-169)[31]

Again in *Pericles*, thus in a story set in ancient times, one can find the presence of customs and codes typical of the Middle Ages: one thinks of the investiture as a knight in the dumb show of Act II: "Pericles gives the messanger a reward and knights him".

[28] Shakespeare quotations are taken from J. Jowett, W. Montgomery, G. Taylor, S. Wells, *The Oxford Shakespeare. The Complete Works*, 2 ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[29] It has been noticed that the same mistake was already present in Green's *Pandosto*, i. e. in Shakespeare's primary source for *The Winter's Tale*. Conversely, J. H. Pafford underlines that, in the 13th century, under Ottokar II, the Bohemian kingdom stretched to the Adriatic, for more information see W. Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. J. H. Pafford (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 66.

[30] An anachronistic use of guns is also found in *1 Henry IV*, II, v, 348-349: "*Prince Henry*: He that rides at high speed and with his pistol/ kills a sparrow flying". On this Johnson wrote: "Shakespeare never has any care to preserve the manners of the time. 'Pistols' were not known in the age of Henry"; see S. Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, cit. in *Shakespeare Survey: Volume 58, Writing about Shakespeare*, ed. P. Holland, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 130-1.

[31] Quotations from *Pericles* are from: W. Shakespeare, *Pericles*, *Prince of Tyre*, ed. P. Edwards (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).

Surely, the inclination to insert incongruities was not exclusively Shakespeare's. Jonathan Bate, among others, enlightens the "Renaissance habit of thinking in terms of parallels between present experience and mythological precedent".[32] Indeed, the custom was rooted in most of the authors of that period who often presented arbitrary connections, historical slips and overlaps, also introducing on stage objects, practices and allusions divorced from the reality enacted.

In his study on *Tamburlaine the Great*, John Gillies notes that Marlowe "invests a fifteenth-century Mongolian conqueror with a late-sixteenth-century geographic imagination".[33] In *Edward II*, instead, the playwright makes a double reference to St. George as patron of England forgetting, as Forker painstakingly noted, that "St. George was not adopted as the patron saint of England until the reign of Edward III":[34]

> *Warwick*: Saint George for England and the barons' right!
> *Edward*: Saint George for England and King Edward's right![35]
> (*Edward II*, 3, 3, 35-36)

In *The Duchess of Malfi*, Webster makes an anachronistic (as well as misogynistic) reference to Galileo's telescope: "We had need go borrow that fantastic glass/ Invented by Galileo the Florentine/ To view another spacious world i' th' moon, /And look to find a constant woman there" (2, 4, 24-27).[36]

[32] J. Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), p. 115. The use of anachronisms cannot be limited to the Renaissance period, as Michelle Martindale sharply points out: "Anachronism was also sanctioned by the practice of Roman poets like Virgil, who included in the *Aeneid* customs and objects which clearly did not belong to the heroic world of primitive Italy that he was describing", M. Martindale, *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity: An Introductory Essay* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 122.

[33] J. Gillies, "*Tamburlaine* and Renaissance Geography", in *Early Modern English Drama: A Critical Companion*, eds. G. A. Sullivan Jr., P. Cheney, A. Hadfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 37. Further 'irregularities' have been detected, among others, by Justin Kolb in his: "'In th'armor of a Pagan knight': Romance and Anachronism East of England in Book V of *The Faerie Queene* and *Tamburlaine*", *Early Theatre*, 12, 2, 2009: 194-207.

[34] C. Marlowe, *Edward II*, ed. C. R. Forker (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 233.

[35] Cit. in C. Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*, ed. D. Bevington and E. Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 368.

[36] Cit. in J. Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. J. Russel Brown (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 90.

It is of no use investigating here the numerous Renaissance occurrences where this kind of imprecision takes place. Instead, it is far more interesting to explore the reasons why such chronological or geo-political incorrectness occurs. Recent studies tend to suggest that anachronisms, geographical imperfections and general flaws are intended gimmicks designed for a deliberate rhetorical purpose. As Hamlin too observes: "Many, more recent, critics agree that Shakespeare's apparent historical slips are (for the most part) deliberate historical strategies, reflecting not a naive lack of proper historicism but a sense that the best use of history is in comparison to the present".[37]

Anachronisms as well as flawed elements and information were offered to the public to create a surprise effect and to permit the direct association with the qualities correlated to the discrepancy; they were inserted as a figurative and indicative juxtaposition able to produce an immediate conveyance of sense. Objects or allusions that could be in some way familiar to the Elizabethan audience were brought on stage; in this way, the spectator could easily grasp the symbolic value of that allusion, retrieving the information it was charged with. Incongruence was not always a mistake nor was it a value in itself, but would lead, more or less consciously, to an association in the spectator's mind.

In *King Henry VI* (*3 Henry VI*, 3.2.191-193), Richard III compares himself to Machiavelli – who would have been an infant in the years in which the play is set – thus evoking, in the perception of the Renaissance viewer, an immediate reference to the shrewdness and cruelty of the Florentine statesman.[38]

The theatrical error carried within itself characteristics and qualities readily recognizable, provoking a sudden and consistent connection. In this way the action, while remaining chronologically determined, projected itself in a different time and space, in an elsewhere saturated with specific features and known to the public, thus producing "a false

[37] H. Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 179.

[38] See J. Barish, "Hats, Clocks and Doublets: Some Shakespearean Anachronisms", in *Shakespeare's Universe: Renaissance Ideas and Conventions*, eds. J. Mucciolo *et al.* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), pp. 29-36. On the misinterpretation of Machiavelli's thought and political theories see: M. Fleisher, *Machiavelli and the Nature of Political Thought* (London: Croom Helm, 1973), of great interest is also A. Arienzo, A. Petrina (eds.), *Machiavellian Encounters in Tudor and Stuart England. Literary and Political Influences from the Reformation to the Restoration* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

continuity between the ancient past and the Elizabethan present".[39] The fact that the association involved a temporal abuse was of no importance. Anachronisms, as well as political, geographical or other inconsistencies were proposed without real concern for the correspondence between what was staged and the real, in a strict historiographical sense. Referring to Shakespeare, Edward Dowden states "it is an ideal truth, truth spiritual rather than truth material, which he seeks to discover".[40] It was not history itself the playwright was interested in – i.e. the exact conformity of historical data – but the personalities that lived and partook in that history. The play had to recover the intimate and violent forces that spurred characters' actions without paying too much critical attention to retracing the exact sequence of events or respecting the pertinence of biographical data.

In *The Winter's Tale*, Bohemia was inserted in the text as a geographic marker of reality, as a localizer used for purposes of concreteness. The fact that there was, or was not, a sea shore was information not necessarily to be verified. Bohemian territory only served to render plausible the place where the action took place, and was a first step from the medieval no-place to the identified-though-inconsistent-place of the early Renaissance.

Likewise, the incoherent presence of Giulio Romano shows that the author's interest was fully focused on the presentation of a reality that had to be in some way credible but not necessarily true. Giulio Romano was a well-known artist in Shakespeare's time, and it was of little importance that he was in fact a sculptor or that he could hardly have been in Sicily in an era so far away in time: the verisimilitude of the text, its being 'real', was, in all cases, ensured; thorough internal consistency of the romance was not necessarily sought. The playwright operated a transposition of elements and traits belonging to collective and shared knowledge, drawing their references indistinctly from the vast historical basin of the past or from the more limited, coeval baggage, often producing a convergence of data not mediated by coherence of space, time and characters' qualities. Inappropriateness did not undermine the credibility of the texts. Rather, paradoxically, they made them more understandable to the public: they were closer to the everyday truth experienced by the viewer and to his personal baggage of information. While recognizing the need to set actions

[39] S. Purcell, *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 38.

[40] E. Dowden, *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* (1875), cit. in Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare*, p. 179.

in an identifiable time, in an ordinary space filled with ordinary and recognizable protagonists, Renaissance authors did not feel the need to check the reliability of statements related to place, person and time.

As a consequence, a time in which past melted with present without censure or formal disapproval was brought on stage: a *staged present* existing only during the performance. This present was informed of the possibility that an anachronistic event, a geographic imprecision, or an inappropriateness of any sort could be introduced as an effective and decisive hint.

In this sense, the texts reveal the limits – or, perhaps, the qualities – of an imperfect de-universalization. In his *Preface to Shakespeare*, Dr. Johnson writes:

> He [Shakespeare] had no regard to distinction of time or place, but gives to one age or nation, without scruple, the customs, institutions, and opinions of another, at the expense not only of likelihood, but of possibility. […] We need not wonder to find *Hector* quoting *Aristotle*, when we see the loves of *Theseus* and *Hippolyta* combined with the *Gothick* mythology of fairies.[41]

The Universal turns into an incongruent, flawed Particular. Elements of the past, geopolitical inconsistencies, character's cozenages are integrated and interpreted in a present that is not called into question; a present set in time and space, and related to particular existences, but that did not necessarily have to be consistent or without contradictions.

Indeed, Renaissance *staged time* is in some way Augustinian. In his reflection set forth in Book XI of *Confessions* (397), overcoming Aristotle's tripartite division, Augustine developed the idea of a subjective perception of time: the moments of past, present and future exist only in the perception that everyone has of them in the present.[42] One reads in the text:

[41] Cit. in *Shakespeare Survey: Volume 58, Writing about Shakespeare*, ed. P. Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 131.

[42] Certainly Augustine's texts were known in the Renaissance period, as Michael Shurgot states: "Of course Augustine's attitude did not necessarily coincide in every respect with the ordinary experience of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Yet Augustine's influence was pervasive, and it became even stronger after the Reformation", M. W. Shurgot, *Shakespeare's Sense of Character: On the Page and From the Stage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 38. Luther himself, in a note in his *Table Talk*, writes: "At first I devoured, not merely read, Augustine. But when the door was opened for me in Paul, so that I understood what justification by faith is, it was all over with Augustine", cit. in *Luther's Works, Vol. 54*, ed. T. Tapper (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 49. For more information about Augustinian influence on English Renaissance culture see, among others, J. C. Hawley (ed.),

20. 26. Quod autem nunc liquet et claret, nec futura sunt nec praeterita, nec proprie dicitur: tempora sunt tria, praeteritum, praesens et futurum; sed fortasse proprie diceretur: tempora sunt tria, praesens de praeteritis, praesens de praesentibus, praesens de futu. Sunt enim haec in anima tria quaedam et alibi ea non video, praesens de praeteritis memoria, praesens de praesentibus contuitus, praesens de futuris expectatio.

[20. 26. What now is clear and plain is, that neither things to come nor past are. Nor is it properly said, "there be three times, past, present, and to come": yet perchance it might be properly said, "there be three times; a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future". For these three do exist in some sort, in the soul, but otherwhere do I not see them].[43]

Almost recovering Augustine's teaching, a time is enacted in which the future is *anticipated* in the present or, likewise, a time when the present *illustrates* and *contains* the past.

"The time is out of joint" Hamlet utters soon after the revelations of the Ghost (1, 5, 189). In an umpteenth disorder of time, in a chronological overlap, the past intervenes to inform the present and is harboured in it. It is exactly this unhinging of the axes of time and space that Shakespeare and the Elizabethan writer, generally speaking, recognize as possible. A theatrically fertile turmoil of places, actions, habits that determines the scenic vitality, and in which the translation from the Medieval universality of the Morality plays to the realism of Renaissance drama (even though steeped in anachronistic and geographical inconsistencies, or in slips regarding characters' features) is accomplished. There is a sort of trans-historical transaction, a data crossing that creates the only theatrical reality existing: a fictional present that incorporates, actualizes, and makes simultaneous the past, or, conversely, which is informed by the future. It is a present made of echoes, updating, geopolitical flaws, errors in presenting specific skills: a suspended reality which the viewer had to rely on without harassing it with enquiries into truth.

Certainly, it is difficult to judge on what occasions the inappropriateness is due to an author's lack of knowledge and when it is the result of a deliberate intention. Yet, and this is what matters here,

Reform and Counterreform: Dialectics of the Word in Western Christianity since Luther (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994); R. Camerlingo, *Crimini e peccati. La confessione al tempo di Amleto* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2014).

[43] St. Augustine, *Confessions of St. Augustine: Spiritual Meditations and Divine Insights*, trans. by E. B. Pusey (Auckland, New Zeland: The Floating Press, 2009), p. 338.

it is indubitable that the incongruence was given little importance. Even when anachronisms, geographical overlaps, protagonists' incongruities are due to a deliberate will – in order to respect the sources or in order to captivate the audience – both Renaissance authors and spectators did not consider the imperfection unpardonable. They did not think that disconnections with the real could somehow lessen the educational-informative result of their texts. As we have seen, modern playwrights cared to educate the public, to preserve it from possible moral offenses, even to present an *excusatio* before the performance, but openly confessed to not wanting to comply with the laws of spatial or temporal congruence.

Hence, transition from Universal to Particular is doubly revolutionary: on the one hand, being an attempt to recreate a plausible reality, stealing God's creational power, and on the other, claiming the right to change, according to the author's will and to his theatrical urgent convenience, the axes of time, space, etc. The categories on which the construction of the Particular is based (identification of place, time, and characterization of dramatic personae) have been circumvented or, rather, arbitrarily, these categories are not subject to the laws of reality anymore.

Renaissance performance is an act of creation to all intents and purposes. The authors produce a sliding from Universal to a flawed, capricious Particular. Likelihood is established, albeit in the incongruity of the product put on stage. The events staged are set in a specific scenario where past melts with present and geo-political slips go together with further inexactnesses with neither severe coherence, nor censure, nor formal disapproval. In this sense too, the use of the Renaissance stage can be considered subversive.

Works Cited

Arienzo A., Petrina A. (eds.), *Machiavellian Encounters in Tudor and Stuart England. Literary and Political Influences from the Reformation to the Restoration* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

Augustine, *Confessions of St. Augustine: Spiritual Meditations and Divine Insights*, trans. by E. B. Pusey (Auckland, New Zeland: The Floating Press, 2009).

Barish J., "Hats, Clocks and Doublets: Some Shakespearean Anachronisms", in J. Mucciolo *et al.* (eds.), *Shakespeare's Universe: Renaissance Ideas and Conventions* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996).

Bate J., *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011).

Bemong N., Borghart P., De Dobbeleer M., Demoen K., De Temmerman

K., Keunen B. (eds.), *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope, Reflections, Applications, Perspectives* (Gent: Ginkgo Academia Press, 2010).
Camerlingo R., *Crimini e peccati. La confessione al tempo di Amleto* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2014).
Castiglione B., *Il Cortigiano*, ed. A. Quondam (Milano: Mondadori, 2002).
Cummings B., *Mortal Thoughts: Religion, Secularity & Identity in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
Dempsey C., "Response: 'Historia' and Anachronism in Renaissance Art", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (Sep., 2005): 416-21.
Di Pietro C., Grady H. (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Urgency of Now: Criticism and Theory in the 21st Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
Edwards P. (ed.), *W. Shakespeare, Pericles*, *Prince of Tyre* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).
Fleisher M., *Machiavelli and the Nature of Political Thought* (London: Croom Helm, 1973).
Gillies J., "*Tamburlaine* and Renaissance Geography", in G. A. Jr. Sullivan, P. Cheney, A. Hadfield (eds.), *Early Modern English Drama: A Critical Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)
Gosson S., *The Schoole of Abuse*, cit. in *Prose of the English Renaissance. Selected from Early Editions and Manuscripts*, eds. J. W. Hebel, H. Hudson, F. F. Johnson, A. W. Green (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1952).
Hamlin H., *The Bible in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
Hawley J. C. (ed.), *Reform and Counterreform: Dialectics of the Word in Western Christianity since Luther* (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994).
Holland P. (ed.), *Shakespeare Survey*: *Volume 58, Writing about Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
Jowett J., Montgomery W., Taylor G., Wells S. (eds.), *The Oxford Shakespeare. The Complete Works*, 2 ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
Kantorowicz E. H., *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).
Kolb J., "'In th'armor of a Pagan knight': Romance and Anachronism East of England in Book v of *The Faerie Queene* and *Tamburlaine*", *Early Theatre*, 12, 2, 2009: 194-207.
Leone G., *Il palcoscenico esemplare. La questione della giustizia nelle tragedie shakespeariane*, 2 ed. (Napoli: Liguori, 2016).
Lorino P., "The Bakhtinian Theory of Chronotope (Spatial-Temporal Frame) Applied to the Organizing Process", Second International Symposium on Process Organization Studies.
Marenco F., "Shakespeare e dintorni. Gli inizi del teatro moderno", in R. Alonge, G. Davico Bonino (eds.), *Storia del teatro moderno e contemporaneo*, Vol. 1 (Torino: Einaudi, 2000).

Marlowe C., *Edward II*, ed. C. R. Forker (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).
Marlowe C., *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*, eds. D. Bevington and E. Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
Martindale M., *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity: An Introductory Essay* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
Mucci C., "Quando 'Fair is Foul': pratiche rinascimentali di inversione e la retorica delle streghe in *Macbeth*", in R. Gasparro, R. Mullini (eds.), *Il meraviglioso teatrale tra fiaba e magia* (Pescara: Tracce, 1999).
Mucci C., *Il teatro delle streghe. Il femminile come costruzione culturale al tempo di Shakespeare* (Napoli: Liguori, 2003).
Northbrooke J., *A Treatise wherein Dicing, Daunting*, in T. Pollard (ed.), *Shakespeare's Theatre. A Sourcebook* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).
Pafford J. H. P. (ed.), *W. Shakespeare, The Winter's Tale* (London: Methuen, 1962).
Purcell S., *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
Shurgot M., *W. Shakespeare's Sense of Character: On the Page and From the Stage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).
Seneca, *His Tenne Tragedies*, ed. T. Newton, 2 Vols. (London: Constable and Co, 1927).
Seneca, *Four Tragedies and Octavia*, ed. E. F. Watling, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).
Stanco M. (ed.), *La letteratura inglese dall'Umanesimo al Rinascimento. 1485-1625* (Roma: Carocci, 2016).
Stubbes P., *Anatomy of Abuses*, cit. in J. N. King (ed.), *Voices of the English Reformation, A Sourcebook* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
Tambling J., *On Anachronism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).
Tapper T. (ed.), *Martin Luther's Works, Vol. 54* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).
Viano C. A. (ed.), *Locke* (Milano: Mondadori, 2008).
Webster J., *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. J. Russel Brown (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997).