

Between Dreams and Reality: The Message and the Image of Renaissance Humanism

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ABSTRACT

Contrary to the claims of some influential postmodern trends celebrating the burial of historical humanism, as something ‘old-fashioned’ and pedagogically orientated, in the present paper an effort will be made to show how Renaissance humanism can be interpreted as a ‘border culture’ *par excellence*, capable of accumulating ambiguities —a substantial premise for producing powerful ‘explosions’ and subsequent ‘leaps’ (in Yuri Lotman’s terms) to new and different qualities in culture, as well as in our ‘semiospheric’ existence. The repercussions of these ‘leaps’ have reached vitally the start of the 21st century. I intend to outline the image of humanism as it has emerged from the work of Erasmus, Thomas More, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina and Calderón, to show on its example the ‘intra-history’ of the historical process that has been called the ‘Enlightenment’. To a far greater extent than the noo-spherically inclined ‘extra-history’, the interior Enlightenment, with its deep roots in historical humanism, has provided openness to ‘border’ sensibility and new cultural syntheses in the semiosphere, including culture, with literary creation as its ideologically and philosophically burdened nucleus. In the latter part of my article, I will centre on exemplifying my theoretical conclusions by Thomas More’s *Utopia* and the plays of William Shakespeare.

...over that art,
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes.
[...]
The art itself is nature.
(Shakespeare, *The Winter Tale*, IV, 3)

The heyday of the discourses engendered by postmodern and post-structuralist deconstruction (in literary and cultural research, philosophy) seems to be gradually fading. Yet, there is apparently little doubt that deconstruction is bound to leave deep traces in the mentality of our world's *episteme* (to use the term applied by Michel Foucault, to denote the set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices) at least during the first quarter of the present century.

The deconstructionist episteme has also become synonymous with the wider term of *posthumanism*.¹ The latter, however, is seldom used as an analogy of postmodernism. The opposition of deconstruction to modernism is much more relaxed and relative, it does not amount to the tense antagonism that characterizes deconstruction's relation with humanism. In other words, humanism is hardly equated with modernism. In a number of studies obvious parallels between both modernisms, the older and the younger one, have been observed. Both seem to belong to the same basic 'revolutionary' paradigm, albeit with shades of difference. Thus, a 'culturological' tendency, as well as an accentuated meta- and inter-textuality, including subtle irony, is shared by the modernist poets T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, on the one hand, and a whole generation of postmodern poets in many parts of the world, especially those born in the 1950s and later on the other. Besides, even geographically close ethnic-cultural spaces seldom work in a perfect synchrony, as history 'contaminates' them, dictating individualities. Are there any basic differences at all, for instance, between the *ars poetica* and human attitudes of T. S. Eliot in his *The Waste Land* (1922) and one of the leading figures of Spanish postmodern poetry of the 1970s and 80s, Pere Gimferrer? Or should this 'post' be interpreted, rather than 'after' in the sense of difference and opposition, as something that belongs to the same modernist paradigm but has simply been deferred, revealed later, with a delay in time?

There is thus no unity in postmodernism and the postmoderns, our present—the reality we can understand, feel and touch around us as living phenomena and beings. Why should we presuppose, then, that the phenomena of the past, of which we can only evoke and resuscitate images to the extent our frail memory allows it, have been more simple and homogeneous? We have conserved and archived a good deal of the materially

¹ Thus, in the programme of the 17th world congress of the ICLA (Hong Kong, 2003), the term "post-humanist", as applied to the world in which we live at the start of the 21st century, has been repeatedly used.

tangible memory of those past phenomena. However, they are not vital for us, for our present-day existence, and we tend either to undervalue them or activate them only according to our vital and existential needs. The need—in fact, for any new generation—is to find an opponent, to dispute its truth, and by claiming a superiority, to reassert one's place, a very concrete and limited *topos* under the sun. It seems to be a natural law, one of a number of ways by which nature plays its games with us.

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In the following, I am first and foremost interested in this most complicated part of humanist discourse, *i.e.*, the work of those humanists who in constructing their discourses consciously relied on artistic imagery. As for English humanism, the work of Thomas More and William Shakespeare, at the respective 'border' of the beginning and the sunset of the Renaissance, wonderfully incarnated that playful, plurivocal, and polysemantic literary-artistic discourse of the European Renaissance humanism, directed against the monologues of dogmatic and power-bound 'official' reason.

When coming to analyze the image and philosophy in the work of More and Shakespeare, I will find important support in the ideas of the late writings of Yuri M. Lotman (1922-1993), the head and the main brain-centre of the Tartu (-Moscow) school of semiotics. Little if any attention has been paid to the substantial philosophic shift in Lotman's late writings, especially in the book *Kul'tura i vzryv* ('Culture and Explosion', 1992), as compared with his earlier writing. Yet the differences are obvious. While until the start of the 1980s Lotman considered culture a "collective intellect" or "collective reason", in his later work he made culture the central segment of 'semiosphere', the imagined dialoguing 'border' between the biosphere and the noo-sphere (the one determined overwhelmingly by the activity and the impact of *noos*, the human intellect). The semiosphere, as Lotman claimed, is the most fertile ground for semiosis. It is here that cultural-artistic 'explosions', discoveries, and 'leaps' to new original meanings are most likely to take place. Contrary to the 'noo-sphere' dominated by the human intellect/reason and submitted to a more or less regular and gradual or, in Lotman's words, 'syntagmatic' development (like in science), the processes in 'semiosphere' are unpredictable. Artistic geniuses work 'paradigmatically', rather than 'syntagmatically', as here intellect is in a constant and intense interchange of information and codes with the biosphere, or nature.

I can hardly hope to discuss here all details of the image and philosophy emerging from the work of More and Shakespeare. A lot has been written about it. I would just intend to stress the ambiguity and openness of their artistic-philosophical image, its dialogically semiospheric nature in a constant revolt against any petrified significations, manipulated by the power-structures of their time or the times to come.

Thomas More's famous *Utopia* was fully translated into my mother language, Estonian, only last year. Such a regrettable delay in its reception has to do, unfortunately, with misreadings shared by the orthodox Marxist ideology and deconstruction. The former tried to derive from the work sacred significations, a kind of a plan for a communist society that at least in the 1960s was believed to be within reach. Several principles in the so-called "Codex of the Builder of Communism" (that I still remember from my own school-years), such as the alternation of physical and mental work, as well as of urban and agricultural life, were direct borrowings from Thomas More's *Utopia*, not to mention the rejection of private ownership, the very cornerstone of the communist model of society constructed by Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin and Iossif Stalin, among many others.

Deconstruction, on the other hand, with its fury directed against 'sacred truths', has shared with Marxism the same naïve and straight-forward belief in the existence of such truths in the writings of Thomas More and other humanists. Both have forgotten that the ambiguity and polysemantics of More's small genial book, very much in the same vein with another playful humanistic writing, *In Praise of Folly* (1511) by More's friend Desiderius Erasmus, quite differently, were themselves wonderful parodies of all kinds of sacred writings and that, far from projecting a topos that could be occupied by real historical humans, More presented a vision of *U-topia* —a non-place, that in More's own words he could "rather wisshe for than hope after" (More 1904:144).

Instead of constructing such an artificial distance between language and the physical-biological reality, as can be seen in deconstruction, humanist writers constructed their discourses 'semiospherically'. Here, the openness both to reality and human reason is the basic feature. The writing is open to reality in its widest sense: to all five senses and all faculties comprised by man, as well as to the 'other' that is not man. Here is genuine ground for miracles or 'explosions' of semiosis. Here the *homo sapiens* dwells deeply in the *homo somnians*, man of dreams. Dreams (fiction, myths) overlap with the real, but still transcend the real we *know*, to open new horizons. The *episteme* is never only bodily or rationally/intellectually shaped, but

includes the imaginative visions or discourses of reality provided by writers and artists. These visions are never ‘definite truths’, but rather approximations of truths. In the quality of approximations of truth, they are more real than mere sketches drawn by the intellect from a distance: they represent, instead, human being as a whole. The creators (writers/artists) let themselves merge into reality, be part of it, and by their mediation, philosophy itself becomes part of human reality, which is not only understood, but felt, *i.e.*, received not only by the intellect but the senses and the intellect closely knit together. The topos constructed by humanist writers is, therefore, simultaneously a place that is unreal and real. By its ambiguity, however, it revolts against the united forces of logocentrism and soma-centrism—the forefathers of the postmodern deconstruction—which have, indeed, been the historical mainstream discourses determining the history of the Western world.

The subtle interplay between fiction and reality emerges from the very form or frame of the humanist ‘core writing’. While visiting Thomas More in England, Erasmus wrote his *In Praise of Folly*, in which he made Moria, or Folly, a lady that very much seems to embody Life itself, pronounce a lengthy self-apology. From the view-point of reason, she is, indeed, a fool. However, as Erasmus makes it sufficiently clear, truth can never be based exclusively on reason. As soon as that criterion is removed, Moria can well represent truth, or more exactly, approximation of truth, the more so because reason is not at all abandoned in her, but is seen as one of her faculties.

In the footsteps of his friend, Thomas More wrote and published a few years later his *Utopia*. Like Erasmus’ *In Praise of Folly*, *Utopia* is a kind of mystification, an ingenious text crowded with ambiguities and subtle ironies. It is not a novel, with an entirely fictional set of viewpoints, but is neither an essay, as the author’s own viewpoint becomes submitted to a thorough mystification. The frame story, comprising More’s letter to his friend and disciple Pieter Gilles (after the publication of *Utopia*, 1516), as well as Gilles’s letter (of the same year) to Jerome Busleiden, the mayor of Ardenne and advisor of king Charles, and Gilles’s four-line poem written in the language of *Utopia*, is the very source of mystification. Both More and Gilles refer to their meeting in Antwerp, probably two years earlier, with a certain Raphael Hythlodæus, and More claims to have written down in *Utopia* the travel impressions of Hythlodæus, a highly intelligent and experienced gentleman who, however, firmly rejects More’s suggestions that he might become, following More’s own example, a state officer and

thus make available his rich knowledge to those that govern countries and people. Although Hythlodæus's views are apparently approved by More and Gilles, in Part I of the story, when Hythlodæus considers private ownership the very source of social evil, More dares to doubt it and argues that such an arrangement would lead to an even greater anarchy (More 1904:45-46).

It is just the starting-point of Part II of the work, in which Hythlodæus tells More and Gilles about the island of Utopia. Both More and Gilles unanimously claim that Hythlodæus is a real person, and More asks all those who may have doubts in the truthfulness of Hythlodæus's story to directly approach Hythlodæus himself and inquire about the matter (More 2002:12).

Like in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, a century later, the narrative frame in More's *Utopia* mythicizes the main story and provides it with an autonomy it could hardly have if it had been told directly by its author. Cide Hamete Benengeli and Raphael Hythlodæus in their respective cases are the mythmakers. They are presented as historical persons and the story they tell us sounds absolutely real. Even though we know that they do not exist and are really pure fiction, we are made to believe their story or at least believe it contains some truth beyond its fantastic appearance.

The main story of *Utopia*, therefore, moves between the real and the unreal. The unreal may acquire shades of the real, not abandoning its essence as a dream. Yet even a dream may profoundly influence real processes of the world, and More's great vision is just a brilliant proof of it. It is regrettable that isolated fragments of visions like his have been translated too precipitously and violently into historical societies, to convert them into reality. The result of trying to make a *U-topia* a real and habitable *topos* in an historical fortnight is ever destined to lead to a historical disaster, like Yuri Lotman has shown, referring to the recent experience of Soviet Russia (Lotman 1994). And yet, an approximation to transcendent truths is never excluded from the realm and myth of Utopia and its creator, the *homo somnians*.

From my point of view, it is important to come closer to the understanding of the work of humanist writers as creative acts which, despite all individualities, share a certain basic unity of human attitudes or, philosophy. The work is conditioned historically and by a concrete historical culture, but, as in case of any genuinely creative act in literature and arts, there is a strong impetus towards a philosophical transcendence, or a myth transcending time. It is never satisfactory in the case of great writers to try

to reduce the philosophical content of their work to some preceding or coeval philosophy or philosophical current. Any genuine creative act in literature is itself, besides an aesthetic act, also a philosophical exercise. In other words, despite the strong intertextuality reaching down from ancient philosophers and writers to More, Erasmus, Shakespeare and Cervantes, it would be definitely wrong to convert them, against their own will, let us say, into Platonists, Plutarchists or Stoics. The greatest advantage of literary creation over 'pure' philosophy is that by means of concrete and sensual images, reaching out to the senses of the receiver, it tends to create a kind of a mythic philosophy, in which meanings and notions are never purified, to become mental schemes, but reveal themselves rather as symbols —hinting at, referring to, letting themselves be intuited as a deeper potentiality of human perception and yet retaining and resisting in a certain ambiguity.

The core paradigm in the philosophy of humanist writers, as far as I see it, is a kind of philosophy of nature. It does not coincide with any particular *philosophia naturalis*, as conceived by philosophers, and has yet had a resounding continuation in the work of writers and poets ever since the days of the Renaissance. I think it would be deeply erroneous to make rationalism a comparable key sign in humanist writers. On the contrary, rationalism is admitted in their work only as an emanation of nature. Whenever reason starts to contradict nature and claim its superiority over nature, it has been viewed critically and parodied. On the other hand, as humanists centre their observation on human beings, a distinction is made between nature, in the sense of bio-totality, on the one hand, and human nature, on the other. The latter, however, even if reason has been allocated its important part, is never separated from the greater or cosmic totality. An accordance is sought, whenever possible. Nature is not adapted to reason (as it is in the philosophical mainstream starting from Descartes) but, on the contrary, reason is adapted to nature. This essential feature constitutes also a fundamental realism in humanist writing. Idealism is rejected, as well as any intellectual emanation that tries to impose itself more or less violently on nature. Humanism is, naturally, anthropocentric, but at the same time it is also zoo-centric, defending life as totality against the excesses of human reason, especially, when reason becomes manipulated by ambitions of power.

If More and Erasmus are known as Christian (or Catholic) writers, their writing does not mean sacrificing nature to the Christian dogma. On the contrary, Christianity is adapted in nature or, in other words, Christian philosophy, in their treatment, becomes a kind of an emanation of a basic

wisdom of nature. Thus, the categories of good and evil are not mere inventions of Christianity or any other religion. They do exist also in the conscience of all living beings. If in man's preaching they had become, by means of logocentric speculations, dogmatized and fundamentalized, then one of the goals of humanist writers was just to revolt against that dogmatization. Human qualities like love, kindness, generosity, mercy, compassion—that comprise humanness, often considered a synonym of humanism—are not treated by humanist writers as a great invention of Christianity, but as part of human nature, extolled historically by Christianity. That is why humanist writers, in the times of the fiercest conquest and submission by Western man of the 'other'—nature and human communities close to nature—comprised a tiny minority that still tried to oppose these excesses of power and reason. Virtue for them was basically a gift of nature, to quote Thomas More, from *Utopia*:

For they define virtue to be a life ordered according to nature; and that we be hereunto ordeined of god; and that he doth followe the course of nature, which in desiering and refusyng thinges is ruled by reason. [...] And they defyne vertue to be lyfe ordered accordyng to the prescript of nature. (More 1904:84-85)

God, thus, follows the course of nature, while nature provides the faculty of reason, by which god can determine what is good and evil. The role of reason, in More's treatment, still retains a good deal of ambiguity. Its emanations seem sometimes real, historically achievable, and in other episodes, quite certainly belong to the non-existing realm of Utopia. Even though they are not likely to become effective as social projects, they still symbolically reflect some basic human instincts, aspirations and dreams. The shades of irony as well as of parody on mechanically applied reason, however, are never excluded, when More imagines—like Swift in his footsteps two centuries later—a society where population growth is strictly controlled and regulated by state. In this and many other aspects, More's Utopia reminds us of the European Union, at the start of the 21st century, where rigid rational norms for producing meat or milk for its old and new member-states are being prescribed and the quota for immigration now raised, now restricted, according to the needs the Europeans have for unskilled labour (cf. the slaves in Utopia). Did More genially, smilingly, foresee it at the beginning of the 16th century?

In most episodes of *Utopia*, however, More seems to warn against the excesses of reason, especially when it becomes dogmatized or made a

tool in the hands of power-structures, to suppress nature and the “other”. The idea of a gradual development of civilization is accepted —as Utopia itself too has developed from an initially savage island into a state where culture and education have an important role, but the *civitas*, the main motor for industry, science, and letters, is kept in Utopia in an intense contact with the country-side, or nature. More’s ideas coincide totally with the modern ideas of ecological sciences, trying to resist the excesses of rational and technological development, impelled by industry and commerce. Labour is a basic value in Utopia both in the sense of creating social welfare as in the psychological education of its inhabitants. However, labour, another emanation of man’s rational faculty, is not allowed to become a routine that deadens man’s spiritual and intellectual needs. On the contrary, More envisages a society where people deal with routine labour as little as possible (6 hours daily), to dedicate the rest of their time to the development of their natural talents, to research, write poems, etc. The rejection of money and, thus, the daily need for rational calculation, as well as of any bureaucracy, can likewise be interpreted as symbols of the essential need of man to remain in his actions as natural and immediate as possible, rejecting alienation.

Democratic rule itself grants to the Utopians an important degree of natural liberty and equality, though by introducing a large chapter on the situation of slaves on the island, More also seems to remind us of the complications and reverse sides of whatever democracy the world has known until today. In any case, the slaves in Utopia are treated humanely, and there is always a chance for them to become free.

Although More wrote his *Utopia* in Latin, the common language of theology and science of Europe since the Middle Ages, the importance of one’s mother language is stressed in the educational system of Utopia (Ch. 6). As we see, in the eternal opposition of the universal and the individual, More sides with the latter, *i.e.*, the human reality most inalienably immersed in nature. Once again one comes to a topic that has not at all been ‘overcome for ever’ in our postmodern age but, on the contrary, has become the focus of an intense discussion world-wide.

Nobody would suppose, of course, that in describing the marriage rites in Utopia (Ch.7) More could have seriously suggested that Europeans should follow the example of the Utopians who make their young ladies and their suitors see each other naked. However, as a symbol image of a desirable natural correspondence between the young people entering into marriage, it is in full accord with the core philosophy of humanist writers. The same goes about the role of women in Utopia. Unlike the radical trend

of modern feminists More does not make any attempt to even out the natural differences between man and woman, established by nature (harder physical work is for men, easier for women, in Utopia). However, by the image of the Utopian women acting, like men, in the office of priests, and becoming thus the transmitters of supreme divine truths, More undoubtedly foreshadowed the basic cause of the revolt of modern feminism against masculine tyranny, *i.e.*, the historical submission by man-kind of its human 'other', the very natural source of human existence. Religious tolerance in Utopia should be understood as a further symbol of respect for the natural human 'other', as well as for the natural and historical diversity and difference in the world.

The myth of Utopia stresses the importance of collective values in human society. Again, this is in full accord with natural existence. If taken too literally, as an example to be followed, it certainly tends to the grotesque. From our personal experience of life in the former USSR we still remember vividly scenes like those described in *Utopia* (Ch. 6): common citizens were allowed to travel abroad, including the 'socialist countries', only in groups, always accompanied by spies employed by the KGB...

On the contrary, war as a collective enterprise, not really inherent in nature, but practised specifically by humans, impelled by greed and power ambitions, with the widest possible use of *tekhniké* invented by reason, is condemned unanimously by More and Erasmus. It is plausible only when a just cause is to be defended.

Nothing in More's Utopia has lost its significance for the postmodern age. Utopia is a place that does not exist, but the myth and the symbols it exposes are as vital as ever. If I am not mistaken, the Netherlands became the first Western country to make in 2001 euthanasia a legal means to end painlessly one's life tortured by an incurable illness. Euthanasia was practised by the Utopians, though under the strictest control of priests and the governing council. Was that measure foretold by nature or by reason? We will probably never know it exactly...

To come to the work of William Shakespeare, one should not forget the humanist intertextuality reaching him from More and Erasmus via Rabelais and Montaigne. The core paradigm of values remains the same, though every individual writer adds new stresses and features. Nature continues to be the fundamental strong-hold against scholastic preaching as well as the excesses of power-ambitions. Rabelais goes beyond More and Erasmus in touching the depths of the physical and sexual realm of nature, or 'low' nature. Montaigne, on the other hand, goes further than

anybody else in understanding nature's diversity, the endless species of the 'other', and makes in his longest essay, *An Apologie of Raymond Sebond*, the boldest assault ever made by modern Western philosophy against anthropocentrism. The fact, however, does not distance him at all from the humanist position, but on the contrary, strengthens it, as the understanding of the coherence of the bio-totality, of which humans are part, becomes deeper.

The creative novelty emerging from the work of Shakespeare has few parallels in the English literature of his time. However, these parallels do exist beyond English literature, and most outstandingly in the work of Cervantes. What Cervantes did in the genre of the novel, Shakespeare effectuated in drama. The work of both is an incarnation *par excellence* of the creation of a dreaming man, a poet and a creator comprising the *homo sapiens*. Existing previous myths are present in the work of both, but neither of them limited themselves to copying myths. Instead, they became the creators of new myths. These new myths merged with the concrete historical time were made a powerful tool of synthesizing reality.

The artistic novelty of Shakespeare was never merely artistic, but reflected his philosophical-perceptual positions. Shakespeare never wrote any treatise in the vein of Lope de Vega's *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias* (1609) but the parallels with the coeval Spanish theatre, in search of a natural openness, are striking. When Lope de Vega claimed that contemporary drama did not need to copy the ancients but had to mix the 'high' and the 'low', as well as to suppress both the unity of time and place, these principles were already fully active in the poetics of himself and Shakespeare. In Shakespeare's early tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* (1595) there are at least seven or eight different places of action, while in *The Tempest* (1611) and *The Winter's Tale* (1611), his late dramas, the spatial openness is retained as one of the fundamental features enhancing the dynamics of theatre. The time of action in Shakespeare's plays is likewise unlimited. In *The Winter's Tale* the choir is embodied by Time, an allegorical character prophesying the final development and the outcome of the events in the play (Act IV). Some twenty years have lapsed since the events shown in the previous acts, and the place of action has moved from Sicily to the far-away Bohemia.

The openness in time and place both in the plays of Shakespeare and the great Spanish playwrights Lope de Vega and Calderón, as well as other contemporary dramatic writers, embodied an essential revolt of nature against any strictly rational norms imposed on theatre. Let us remind us that these rational norms reached their very peak in the French neo-classical

theatre, contemporary of Descartes' s *Discours de la méthode* (1637) —in many ways, an *urquell* for the followers of the postmodern deconstruction. That spatial-temporal openness of Renaissance drama, continued in the Baroque theatre of Calderón, is the very source of a 'semiospheric play', in which all possible levels of reality become intermixed, with dream and myth actively supporting even the crudest historical material.

I do not know if enough attention has been paid to the extensive use of prose speech in Shakespeare's plays. Although the other two giants of the Renaissance-Baroque drama, Lope de Vega and Calderón, too, occasionally introduced prose texts in their plays (especially, when reproducing messages, like letters, that would have sounded artificial in verse form), there is still a notable difference, compared with Shakespeare. In his comedies Shakespeare uses not only prose speech, but lets it boldly intermingle with verse, including rhymed verse, in his most 'purified' tragedies, like *Hamlet* (1600/02), *King Lear* (1606) and *Macbeth* (1606). Not only comical, or so to say, 'low' characters are made to speak in prose, but also Hamlet speaks with Polonius, Ophelia and Claudius, the King, extensively in prose, as do Edgar and Edmund, Lear, Kent, Gloucester, and so many other 'high' characters of Shakespeare's plays.

The humanist writer Shakespeare revolts against all formal dogmas imposed by reason and logic, to create a poetic logic that accords with the openness, change and relativity of values predicted by nature. In *Macbeth*, indeed, the use of prose speech is more restricted, but, on the other hand, prose is significantly introduced by the medical doctor and the gentlewoman, secondary characters who, however, produce with their intervention a very similar effect with the role of the clergyman and the barber in Cervantes's *Don Quixote*: they are the voice of reason as a kind of a common sense from the 'middle level' that suddenly interrupts the spell of the myth (whether tragic or comic) and brings it into contact with the daily and simple human existence which, too, is a part of reality.

On the other hand, even though the extensive use of prose speech shows Shakespeare's revolt against any artificial conventions of art, and the 11-syllable iambic blank verse employed generally in English Renaissance drama favoured his artistic inclinations, Shakespeare never became monotonic or uniform. As one of the greatest poets of his time, he at the same time alternated regular blank verse and episodes in prose with lyrical songs, mostly in rhymes, thus playing constantly with alternations in the rhythm of his poetical-dramatic image. Colloquial speech, characteristic of the prose parts of his plays, is quite often extended to versified and rhymed

speech, while on the other hand, his fireworks of metaphors ‘descends’ with a similar frequency from the ‘high’ lyrical level, to ‘elevate’ by means of a highly artful word-creating mechanism even the most vulgar speech, like the one in the mouth of Mercutio, in *Romeo and Juliet*:

Without his roe, like a dried herring. Oh flesh, flesh, how art you fishified! Now he is for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in: Laura to his lady was but a kitchen-wench; marry, she had a better love to be-rime her; Dido a dowdry; Cleopatra a gipsy; Helen and Hero hildings and harlots [---]. Signor Romeo, *bon jour!* There’s a French salutation to your French slop. (Shakespeare 1930:895)

Shakespeare thus opens his work to the totality of nature, the widest possible embodiments of time and space, and accepts nature as the deepest source of all art. At the same time he does not idealize nature. The ‘dark’ reverse of human nature, referred to in Erasmus’s *In Praise of Folly* as having its origin in the revenge spirits of the ‘underworld’, or the Hell (Ch. XXXVIII), is scrutinized to its very depths, especially in *Macbeth*. The deepest possible psychological impact is achieved, as Shakespeare humanizes even the most wicked characters, like Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Jago or Claudius, if not by revealing some weaknesses and doubts in their evil passion, then in any case by making them speak by the means of metaphors and poetical images that generally belong to the ‘high’ human nature of poets and philosophers, the ‘dreaming men’. This is a way of gaining an immediate access to the senses of the receiver. As Macbeth speaks, after murdering the king:

Methought I heard a voice cry “Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep,” the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravell’d sleeve of care,
The death of each day’s life, sore labour’s bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second course,
Chief nourisher in life’s feast, -
[...]
To know my deed ’twere best not know myself.
(Shakespeare 1930:985-986)

Even Lady Macbeth, the most ruthless among Shakespeare’s characters, is made to speak, at the most crucial moment, in a highly poetical style:

My hands are of your colour, but I shame
To wear a heart so white.
(Shakespeare 1930:986)

And although Lady Macbeth does not reveal any trace of scruples, *as mulier sapiens*, her dreams still reflect a chaos in her deeper self, or *mulier somnians*: “Here’s the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh! Oh! Oh!” (Shakespeare 1930:1001)

Like in Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, in the best dramatic work of Shakespeare there is a perpetual dynamic play with the point of view of characters: now they become almost identified with the point of view of an average reader, now they are pushed away, to alienate them, make them ‘others’; now they come closer, ‘natural’, once again. Now they are parts of a timeless myth, now they are brought into the contact with the most concrete and historically perishable.

Shakespeare does not limit himself to roaming freely in the region of human nature and art as an essentially semiospheric phenomenon, a deep mixture of nature and human artifice. He goes on to the very limits of nature and arts, where biological as well as human existence borders with non-existence, the great cosmic totality. In fact, the core theme of Shakespeare’s poetical-humanistic discourse is the war of *homo sapiens* against *homo somnians*, to realize his temporal power ambitions at all levels: in a state (like in most Shakespeare’s historical tragedies, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, etc.), in family (*Romeo and Juliet*, *The Winter’s Tale*) racially (*Othello*, also tentatively in *The Merchant of Venice*). The sufferers are the ‘others’: dreamers, poets and philosophers (Hamlet), lovers (Romeo and Juliet, Othello and Desdemona, Ophelia, and so many others), women (Desdemona, Hermione, ironically, Katharina, in *The Taming of the Shrew*), people of a different race (Othello), in any case, those who feel themselves an essential part of *homo somnians* and nature. The *homo sapiens* with his temporal power ambitions pushes the dreaming man to the very borders of the human ‘otherness’, where the realm of the beyond, the frontier zone between life and death starts. Hamlet and Edgar (in *King Lear*) feign madness, King Lear is driven to madness.

Their position of the ‘other’ on the edge of existence, frail and fragile as it might seem, gradually builds up, however, a fairly solid discourse of both human and natural ethicality. This is nothing provided in advance, and nothing definite, but still fairly consistent, as based on a larger human experience.

It is the position of relativity and change, the view of the temporal both as temporal and timeless. Like Calderón, some thirty or forty years later, Shakespeare makes the beyond and the world of dreams actively penetrate into the possessions of *homo sapiens*. In a way, a character from

the beyond, the ghost or the spirit of Hamlet's father, start to direct the action on the stage (of the hither, this life here). Similarly, some twenty years later, Tirso de Molina creates one of the most persistent literary myths of the new era by making a character from the beyond, the Stony Visitor, enter the realm of the living. Macbeth, in fact, a victim of temporal power ambitions himself, sees the spirit of Banquo occupying his place in the castle, when Lady Macbeth, the architect of the crimes, impelled by power ambitions, fails to see it.

Shakespeare crowds his stage with spirits and magic creatures who actively intervene in historical life. The presence of life's totality is most energetically manifested also in the fact that Shakespeare lets a 'telluric chaos' constantly enter the stage (like with a special symbolic stress, in *King Lear* and *The Tempest*), to show the relativity of the temporal constructions of human reason, as an ally of power (embodied in royal castles, palaces). One can claim that in the humanist creation of Shakespeare, Cervantes, Tirso de Molina and Calderón, the poetics of 'magic realism' is gradually initiated.

Shakespeare stages plays within his plays, turns the world itself in which we live into another stage. In a comical cue, actors stage a play in the "Induction" of *The Taming of the Shrew*, in which Sly, the tinker, is made to prefigure Segismundo, in Calderón's *Life is a Dream*. In an existential key, the tragedy of Hamlet is played through in the play *The Murder of Gonzago*, staged and directed by Hamlet himself. Above all, Shakespeare makes us feel and understand that the logic's refuges against time and nature, like those constructed in our days by deconstruction, are nothing but temporal. It is perfectly feasible to kill an innocent sleeping man —Macbeth proved it. It is also easy to kill a humanist —Henry VIII proved it, or to deafen, by a mass of eloquence and logical ornaments, their ideas. However, the humanist dream, that of *homo somnians*, embracing both love and the *homo sapiens* of a deeper and more sensible logos, is fated to linger on. Although some influential postmoderns might think the opposite, reality elects us and makes us its signs, and provides us with a capacity to intuit its other signs, to dialogue with them and, thus, be orientated in our temporal lives, as well as to survive our existence with a certain dignity.

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