

Rhetorics of Identity from Shakespeare to Milton

Lynne M Robertson

Submitted for the Degree of Ph.D.
Department of English Literature
University of Glasgow

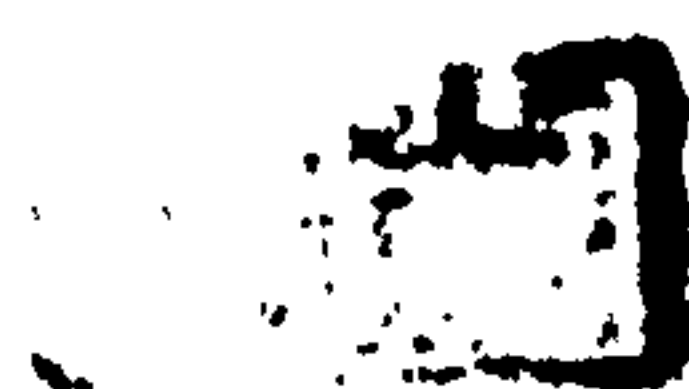
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Abstract

This thesis deals primarily with Renaissance tragedy and with Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It is structured around three main Sections each of which identifies a dominant theme in the drama/poetry of the period 1580 - 1670 and considers the way in which it is utilised in order to express or represent what was arguably the most pressing concern of the age - the concept of individual identity, or 'selfhood'.

Section One takes as its theme 'death', or more specifically 'death scenes'. It considers the way in which the battle for what I have chosen to term 'directorial control' in the death scenes of both playhouse and scaffold shapes the symbiotic relationship between the two, and can be viewed as a vital component in the rhetoric of identity which emerges from plays such as Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, and scaffold texts of the period.

Section Two deals with the remaining Shakespearean mature tragedies - *Hamlet* and *King Lear* - as well as with Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*. It takes as its focal point the viability - or otherwise - of the 'interiorised contexts' which such plays construct. This Section contends that these (relative) microcosmic interiors are, in fact, limited by the 'absolute' of death. The third and final Section of the thesis consequently addresses the implications, for the contextualised self, of removing this limiting factor. The text which lends itself most naturally to this is *Paradise Lost*, and Section Three concludes by placing Milton's epic alongside a small selection of contemporaneous poetry by Traherne.



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Introduction

vanishing self that was revealed anonymously (in an appropriately postmodern fashion) in the year 1805`:

It is all role, the role itself and the play actor who is behind it, and in him in turn his thoughts and plans and enthusiasms and buffooneries - all belong to the moment and swiftly flees, like the word on the comedian`s lips ... Does no I stand in the mirror, when I step before it - am I only the thought of a thought, the dream of a dream - can you not help me to find my body ... ? It is indeed terribly lonely in the ego, when I clasp you tight, you masks, and I try to look at myself - everything echoing sound without the disappeared note - nowhere substance, and yet I see - that must be nothing that I see! Away, away from the I - only dance on, you masks!⁴

`Enough already` declares Shalin, and regardless of how seriously we attend to our research responsibilities, we would surely concur. There is a sense, of course, in which all of this is simply a `post-modernist` version of the type of vexed questioning of subjectivity which was begun by Descartes over three centuries ago and has served to fascinate (as well as to frustrate) philosophers and theologians alike ever since:

... the problem of subjectivism, relativism and even scepticism is not solvable within general philosophical epistemology. The same holds good for theology. The way in which the subject-object epistemological structure had been handled in theology over the centuries, and all the abortive attempts to make corrections to it, affirm this observation. Developments in the twentieth century`s theological hermeneutics have scuttled all pretensions in this regard. There is no hermeneutical system that, in a logical way, can forcefully exclude the human subjectivity ... The history of theology since the Enlightenment

⁴ Anonymous [1805], *The Night watches of Bonaventura* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 209, 169. Quoted in Dmitri N. Shalin, "Modernity, Postmodernism, and Pragmatist Inquiry: An Introduction," *Symbolic Interaction* 16.4 (1993): 324.

tells the story of a gradual eroding of the long-accepted dichotomy of body and soul in human nature until in the twentieth century a significant number of theologians are becoming increasingly convinced that a human being cannot be split up into these two components, as the so-called 'soul' is merely the psychological manifestation of very intricate processes of the human brain.⁵

The notion of human identity being somehow inextricably linked with 'the so-called 'soul'' may well be losing currency in some modern theological quarters, but ideas of 'selfhood' are as much a draw to the arts today as they ever have been. From the Furies who 'turned up the volume of the inner monologue, magnified qualities already present to great excess, [and] made people so much *themselves* that they couldn't stand it'⁶ to Marc Quinn's *Self*, a bust which the artist cast in eight pints of his own blood and which formed part of Charles Saatchi's *Sensation* collection at the Royal Academy in September 1997, the complexities of identity seem to have held an innate fascination for artists and writers through the ages. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'Self':

... first appears as a living formative element about the middle of the 16th cent[ury] ... The number of Self- compounds was greatly augmented towards the middle of the 17th cent[ury], when many new words appeared in theological and philosophical writing, some of which had apparently a restricted currency of about 50 years (e.g. 1645 - 1690), while a large proportion became established and have a continuous history down to the present time.

⁵ J.J.F. Durand, "Theology and Resurrection - Metaphors and Paradigms," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 82 (1993): 7, 16.

⁶ Donna Tartt, *The Secret History* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 40.

It is clear from the above quotation that the period spanning approximately the mid-sixteenth-century to the mid-seventeenth-century is, in terms of the development of 'self', one of intense activity, and it is on a selection of Renaissance and Reformation texts that this thesis will focus. In describing the social, cultural and ideological milieu of the Reformation world Michel Foucault uses the phrase 'confessing society', and it is appropriate in more ways than one. Gary Waller expands upon Foucault's quote with his own formulation: '... [a society] obsessed with self-examination and with developing means to produce some fixed truth about the self.'⁷ In critical terms this is a road well travelled - it is not for nothing that one of the most influential critical works of the last twenty years in the field of Renaissance poetry and drama is titled *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. Stephen Greenblatt writes of self-fashioning as:

occur[ring] at the point of encounter between an authority and an alien [and] what is produced in this encounter partakes of both ... and hence ... any achieved identity always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion or loss.⁸

This notion of 'subversion or loss' is clearly significant and we will return to it later in the thesis, but we will begin, for the moment, with Waller's brief quote. While it undoubtedly strikes an important chord, it is necessary, for my purposes at least, to modify it slightly, for I will concern myself less with the attempted *production* of 'some fixed truth about the self' than with its

⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 59 quoted in Gary Waller, *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Longman, 1986), 102.

⁸ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 9.

attempted *expression*. 'Self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language'⁹ states Greenblatt in his Introduction, (although the 'extent to which my identity and the words I utter coincide'¹⁰ is no-where more forcefully illustrated than in the tale of the Baltimore to Boston plane journey of the Epilogue). Looking primarily at the tragedy of the late 1590s and early 1600s, as well as at Milton's *Paradise Lost*, I will outline the various rhetorics utilised by these texts to explore and express the concept of individual identity or selfhood. The thesis is structured around three main sections which are themselves sub-divided into smaller segments, and since Section Three (dealing largely with Milton's epic) is the natural culmination of the argument, a separate conclusion would have been somewhat redundant.

Section One deals with Renaissance tragic death scenes and the various 'rhetorics of power' which can be seen to function in both these plays and contemporaneous scaffold deaths. When dealing with the drama of Shakespeare and Webster it is difficult to avoid an element of 'stating the obvious' when one speaks of these scenes as being essentially theatrical, but this theatricality is, nonetheless, indicative of something more significant than mere sensationalism. This is not to say that all Renaissance tragic death scenes are couched in a theatrical rhetoric but regardless of whether or not this is the case, there is always a battle for what I have chosen to term 'directorial control'. This power struggle draws its dramatic intensity from the fact that it is not simply the character's death which is at stake, but their essential identity, or dramatic 'self'.

⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰ Ibid., 256.

This subtext of power and control is in itself neither complex nor subtle - although the externalising of it may be. The drama enacts a hidden agenda existing below the surface of the text which, if verbalised, would in its simplest terms read: He who controls the last moment of life, controls the moment of death, and therefore by extension controls the creation of the self-image which confirms the coherence, or (to invoke Waller's term) the fixity of the pre-existing dramatic 'I' which is at that precise moment being obliterated by the experience of death.¹¹

The symbiotic relationship between playhouse and scaffold which this Section posits as central to the development of these 'rhetorics of power' has received a fair amount of critical attention of late, the most recent of which, Molly Smith's 1998 text *Breaking Boundaries: Politics and Play in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, convincingly argues for the type of critical overview of the period which is capable of encompassing, and more importantly assimilating, the remarkable extent to which 'cultural practices' between 1585 and 1649 insisted upon (at times self-consciously) melding the social into the theatrical:

... the merging of theatre, festive topsy-turviness and punishment in the mid-seventeenth century may owe much to the deconsecration of authority in the drama that preceded it, but the drama of the early seventeenth century owes as much to the highly experimental and bold invocation of spectacles of

¹¹ It is important to be clear that we are not dealing here with the well-known: 'sixteenth-century leitmotif ... that is, the belief that one's state of mind at the final instant of life eternally committed one's soul to salvation or damnation.' Richard Wunderli and Gerald Broce, "The Final Moment before Death in Early Modern England," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 20.2 (1989): 260. The rhetoric of power (or directorial control) which I will outline in various Renaissance texts relates to the 'I' of the life which precedes the moment of death, not the 'I' which will follow it - whatever that may or may not be.

death in the 1580s and 1590s in the drama of Kyd and Shakespeare.¹²

Smith's text takes as its baseline the kind of 'new historicist revaluations of Renaissance culture'¹³ which dominated much of 1980s and 1990s criticism, and writers such as Greenblatt¹⁴ and Frances E. Dolan naturally loom large in this regard. 'The scaffold' according to Dolan:

... becomes not only a locus of domination and oppression, but also an arena of boundary crossing, negotiation, and possibilities for agency. Specifically, in the processes of subjectification that representations of executions make visible, the condemned is at once spectacularly acted upon and an agent.¹⁵

The above quotation is drawn from a 1994 essay "'Gentlemen, I have one more thing to say": Women on Scaffolds in England, 1563 - 1680' which is a useful appraisal of the specific socio-political issues faced by women of the period in terms of public execution, and the phrase which stands out as being not simply suggestive, but arguably the key to the whole process, is surely 'possibilities for agency'. It is some of these numerous 'possibilities' that

¹² Molly Smith, *Breaking Boundaries: Politics and Play in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1998), 137.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5

¹⁴ Greenblatt's 1980 *Renaissance Self Fashioning* could surely be argued as seminal in this context, but also clearly relevant is *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1988).

¹⁵ Frances E. Dolan, "'Gentlemen, I have one more thing to say": Women on Scaffolds in England, 1563 - 1680," *Modern Philology* 92 (1994): 157.

Smith picks up and expands upon when she writes of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* as:

... perform[ing] punishments on-stage as an enactment of patriarchally sanctioned authority but nevertheless demonstrat[ing] that enactors of violence such as Bosola frequently provoked not fear and anguish in their victims but contempt and pity.¹⁶

The issue of 'patriarchally sanctioned authority' also figures in my own reading of the Duchess' death scene which will in one sense follow on from Dolan's comments by actively privileging the idea of passivity. Unfortunately, Smith's text was published in the Summer of 1998, and therefore appeared too late to be of any real influence on this thesis. I would say, however, that I consider my argument in Section One to be complementary, rather than contradictory, to Smith's work on the subject.

Section Two deals, in one sense, with the flip side of the coin, for although the tragedy of the 1590s and early 1600s was moving away from a rhetoric which privileged the essentially Medieval notion of a body/soul dichotomy, it had not yet settled upon a satisfactory vocabulary to somehow express this new concept of selfhood. Texts such as Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* demonstrate clearly this state of flux, but they also illustrate that one of the methods by which these texts began to move towards some kind of literary representation of self was via the idea of context. Scientific developments such as the telescope and theories of a heliocentric universe created an environment which was continually fascinated by notions of time, space, and their relationship both to each other and to perspective. The intensity of this

¹⁶ Smith, 37.

interest combined with the traditional microcosm/macrocosm theory to produce, in many contemporary texts, a rhetoric which was intrigued by the possibility of some type of interiorised and entirely independent context. Such contexts, however, are not infinitely expansive, for as we shall see when we look at *Hamlet* and *Dr Faustus*, they are limited by something which is central to the genre of tragedy, and which, ironically, has no specific context to call its own. I refer, of course to the one thing which is capable of ending this self; death. And this is the flip side of the coin, for while the self appropriates death in order to confirm the fixity of the dramatic 'I' which is at that point being erased from the text, that same self is frequently expressed through a rhetoric of interiorised context which is itself limited by the very thing which it will later appropriate. Death is therefore both essential and restrictive to the self of such texts.

The most obvious question then is what is the effect (upon self) of removing this secular limit of death? Shakespeare's *King Lear* goes part way towards answering this question by making its interiorised context convergent with that which, in *Hamlet* and *Dr Faustus*, serves to limit it. By considering the way in which Gloucester's 'dreamscape of death' (Dover Cliff) is verbally painted by Edgar and 'mapped' by his blind father, Section Two will establish Gloucester's precipice as a stepping stone, situated midway between the type of physical geography represented by Lear's map in the opening scene of the play, and the cartography of damnation which would prove to be fundamentally central to the character of Milton's anti-hero approximately half a century later.

John Gillies' 1995 text *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* represents, according to Virginia Mason Vaughan: 'the most extensive analysis of Shakespearean geography since J. D. Rogers's chapter "Voyages

and Exploration: Geography; Maps" in *Shakespeare's England* (1932).¹⁷ Three years later in 1998 Vaughan and Gillies co-edited what is the most recent criticism on the topic to date, *Playing the Globe: Genre and Geography in English Renaissance Drama*, a collection of essays dealing with what Gillies terms 'mapmindedness' in the work of Sidney, Marlowe, Jonson, Heywood, and Shakespeare. Unfortunately Gloucester's Dover Cliff receives scant coverage here; Gillies understandably declares: 'A full-scale reading of [the chaos of the "heath" scenes] as an extended commentary on mapmindedness lies outside the purview of [his] introduction',¹⁸ while Bruce Avery's contribution to the same volume: 'Gilded Continents and Plenteous Rivers: Cartography as Rhetoric in Shakespeare' focuses - as did Gillies - primarily on Lear's literal map of the First Act. There has nonetheless been much useful work done upon Gloucester's imagined landscape, (indeed it will be necessary to return to Gillies, among others, in some detail in Section Two), but I believe that I am the first person to read the episode in terms of a 'dreamscape of death' which can itself be viewed as an interiorised context and thereby placed alongside Hamlet's soliloquies and Faustus' hell.

In the end, however, we are forced to concede that *King Lear* is, in one sense, merely a half-way house, for Gloucester is ultimately limited by his own mortality. To truly answer the question of the effect upon context (and that which it is being used to express and represent, i.e. self) of removing the secular limit of death, we must look forward to the middle of the seventeenth-

¹⁷ Virginia Mason Vaughan, "Preface: The Mental Maps of English Renaissance Drama," in *Playing the Globe: Genre and Geography in English Renaissance Drama*, ed. John Gillies and Virginia Mason Vaughan (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1998), 11.

¹⁸ John Gillies, "Introduction: Elizabethan Drama and the Cartographizations of Space," in Gillies and Vaughan (ed.), 37.

century and the contextualised self that is Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for here we can begin to assess the full effect of linking self and an interiorised context (in this case hell) in the absence of mortality.

Section Three argues that if we read the character of Milton's Satan as a statement regarding identity, it is possible to interpret it as a complete and profound rejection of the notion of 'body as text' which Jonathan Sawday points to the presence of in manuscripts dating from as early as the twelfth-century. By replacing the 'body as text' metaphor with the concept of 'self as context' - context in terms of time and space, and context in terms of con-(tra)-text - Milton draws to its natural culmination the process which was begun in texts such as *Dr Faustus*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*. For these tragedies the interiorised context was always limited by death. For Milton, death is not an issue in the same way (Satan and the other fallen angels are not mortal) but damnation most certainly is. This is why I see *Paradise Lost* as the culmination of the cultural concerns I am setting out here. When the limiting factor of death is removed from the equation then - as we will see in *King Lear* - the reality of a truly internalised context holds the potential to become, for the individual in question, absolute, and this is precisely why it becomes so very difficult to distinguish the material geography of hell from Satan's 'hell within'. What for Hamlet was 'the undiscovered country' is, for Satan, not the dreamscape of death, but the cartography of damnation with its natural tendency towards micro/macrocosmic shifts in perspective due to its temporo-spatial construction.

Taking up Foxe's Protestant establishment (over a century earlier in *Christus Triumphans*) of the idea of 'locus' or place as somehow central to Satanic identity, Milton's Satan can be read as mapping not only his 'self' onto the geography of hell, but also it onto him. By this act what were

previously the absolutes of internal and external, and imagined and actual, are made relative. The final Section argues that while death does not act as a limiting factor upon Satan's interiorised context in the way that it did for Faustus and Hamlet, it does nonetheless serve an important function in Milton's epic by underlining the devaluing of body (as it is associated with text) and the privileging of 'self' (as it is associated with context) as the posited site of what we might term 'essential identity'.

This Introduction has dealt with only a few of the most recent secondary texts which have proven relevant to my research and the explanation for this lies, quite simply, with the problem of space. Given the centrality and diversity of the works under discussion - the tragedy of Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Webster, as well as Milton's epic - subjecting the reader to a comprehensive 'survey of criticism' would be both tedious and ineffective. Restrictions of length also result, inevitably, in some issues/questions which could fruitfully be developed in detail, only being touched upon; it may be interesting, for example, to address the extent to which phrases such as John Norris' 'to descend into the lowest Abyss of Self-abdication'¹⁹ are developed from Milton's yoking of 'self' and the 'rhetoric of the abyss' which Section Three will outline. Since the English 'abdicate' is derived etymologically from the Latin *abdicare* ('to disown'), the Sartrean potential for self-referentiality which could doubtless be discerned within Norris' phrase is dizzying indeed. In the end, however, I will take my lead from neither Sartre nor the anonymous 'pre-postmodernist' author of *The Night watches of Bonaventura*, but from a 'writer' made in an altogether

¹⁹ John Norris, *Christian blessedness: or, practical discourses upon the beatitudes of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (London: Edmund Parker, 1724), 23.

different mould, Melville's Pierre, the Faustian intellectual who sums up more than his own predicament when he defiantly declares that in the end: 'It is ambiguous still.'²⁰ And so we return once again to Pattison's quotation with which I began this Section, to find that research is indeed 'always incomplete', always provisional. It is unlikely that this thesis will be able to disprove Pattison, but in the cluttered world that is Renaissance criticism, if it achieves just a fraction more than Montaigne's assessment of his own *Essais* then there is at least one sense in which its purpose will have been fulfilled.

²⁰ Herman Melville, "*Pierre: or The Ambiguities*," in *The Writings of Herman Melville*, vol. 7 (Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1971), 360.

Section One

**Exteriorising the Self:
Rhetorics of Power in the Renaissance Death Scene**

Introduction.

After the first death, there is no other.

Dylan Thomas¹

Death is the singular point in time at which life ends. It is also, by definition, beyond all secular experience and must therefore always be delineated by those who have never truly known it. Christa M. Loffler, writing on Irish mythology, points out the somewhat paradoxical mix of periphery and centrality which is inherent to this perception of death by the living:

Death certainly is the most striking of the rites of passage in human life, for nothing else touches upon the problem of the *raison d'être* so immediately. Man, as far as it is known to us, is the only living being who is aware of the limitation of his existence in this world by death and, therefore, also knows that he can put an end to his life himself. Both our existence and death are hard to grasp, but also the fact that we have not existed before. A meaningful life, which is fundamentally orientated towards the future, must include the factor of death, as the one is not possible without the other.²

¹ Dylan Thomas, "A refusal to mourn the death, by fire, of a child in London," in *Dylan Thomas. Collected Poems 1934-1953*, ed. W Davies and R. Maud (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1988), 85.

² Christa M. Loffler, "The pre-Christian conceptions of time, death, and eternity as reflected in Irish Mythology," in *Zeit, Tod und Ewigkeit in der Renaissance Literatur*, ed. James Hogg, vol. 3 (Salzburg: Institut Fur Anglistik Und Amerikanistik Universitat Salzburg, 1987), 21. Joseph A. Amato also writes of death as: '... shadow[ing] contemporary life ... as Philippe Aries explained [death] cannot be experienced as a natural phenomenon. Nor can it be disassociated from the family of misfortune, bad luck, sickness, and the devil himself. (In fact, in French - as Aries notes - it keeps company with the *mal* family: *le malheur*, *la malchance*, *la maladie*, and *le malin*.' Philippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (London: Allen Lane, 1981), 605. Quoted in Joseph A. Amato, "Death, and

Loffler's final point in this passage is an important one for if our perception of time ('the future') is inextricably linked to death - and one senses instinctively that it is, - and 'identity and time' are, as Dietrich Schwanitz puts it 'structurally linked by death'³, then it stands to reason that, by extension, death and identity should bear a deep relevance to one another. But if death and human identity (or ideas of selfhood) are natural bedfellows, it is hardly surprising that they should attract the company of other 'ultimates':

The experiences associated with dying and death are profoundly religious in the Tillichian sense. As a life is ending, either our own or someone else's, we confront the ultimate meaning of human existence in general, and perhaps more importantly, we reckon with the meaning of our own individual lives.⁴

Laurence O'Connell is drawing here on Tillich's definition of religion as: 'the encounter with the holy, and the holy can be defined as the manifestation of what concerns us ultimately and with unconditional seriousness ... Religion, in the largest and most basic sense of the word, is ultimate concern.'⁵ This notion of 'ultimates' slides the emphasis suggestively onto a sense of limits, a

the Stories we Don't Have," *The Monist* 76.2 (1993): 252.

³ Dietrich Schwanitz, "The Time Is Out Of Joint, But Life Goes On: Hamlet or the Ephesian Matron," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51 (1983): 41.

⁴ Laurence J. O'Connell, "Religious Dimensions of Dying and Death," *Western Journal of Medicine* 163.3 (1995): 231.

⁵ P. Tillich, "The Relationship today between Science and Religion," in *The Spiritual Situation in our Technical Society*, ed. J. M. Thomas (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1988), 152, and P. Tillich. *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959) 7-8. Quoted in O'Connell.

theme which we will be returning to frequently throughout the thesis, but in literary terms, the 'ultimate concern' surrounding death is commonly broached by recourse to a rhetoric which draws heavily upon the notion of 'advancement by negatives'. Johnson's famous response when asked to define poetry ('Why Sir, it is much easier to say what it is not.'⁶) might be equally appropriate in this context, for it is almost impossible to attempt to arrive at some kind of definition for (or even discuss the existence of) death without some degree of reference to the concept of life; we cannot approach the question of consciousness unless we encompass the idea of its absence:

For I am every dead thing,
 In whom love wrought new alchemy.
 For his art did express
 A quintessence even from nothingness,
 From dull privations, and lean emptiness
 He ruined me, and I am re-begot
 Of absence, darkness, death; things which are
not.

John Donne

'A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day' 12-18.⁷

In one sense, this 'absence' is nothing less than essential for all literary representation, for it is always re-representation. As Jacques Derrida argues: 'All graphemes are of a testamentary essence'.⁸ Any representation, whether literary or artistic, therefore exists within the boundaries of a set of inherent limitations - temporo-spatial, metaphysical, linguistic - and these limitations

⁶ James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), 38.

⁷ A.J. Smith (ed), *John Donne: The Complete English Poems* (London: Penguin Classics, 1986) 72. All subsequent quotations from Donne's poetry are from this edition.

⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 69.

simultaneously necessitate and restrict the process of re-presentation.⁹ Combining these limitations with those attendant upon any discussion (in secular terms) of death, brings us to the conclusion that death itself - to use Garrett Stewart's phrase - 'marks the impossible limit of representation, while at the same time death is an inevitability of representation'.¹⁰

The roots of the Renaissance obsession with death are clearly to be found in the Medieval period when death was an occurrence profoundly linked with the public domain. Esther Cohen details the 'spectacular event' that was the execution of a pair of Augustinian monks in 1398 who, after somewhat rashly claiming supernatural powers, failed to rid Charles VI of France of an attack of madness (marched through the streets in a procession, stripped of their chasubles etc., and eventually confessed and beheaded): 'The hangman placed their heads on lances on a high spot, their cut-off limbs in front of the principal gates of Paris, and their trunks on the gibbet.'¹¹ This 'tradition', moreover, can be seen as stretching back to the twelfth-century; according to Wemple and Kaiser: 'In a treatise erroneously attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux, Hugo of St Victor (died 1141) remarks about the dead '... Cum eorum sepulcra respicio, non venio in eis nisi cinerem et vermem,

⁹ See the Preface to Richard Stamelman, *Lost Beyond Telling. Representations of Death and Absence in Modern French Poetry* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990).

¹⁰ Garret Stewart, "A Valediction For Bidding Mourning: Death and the Narratee in Bronte's *Villette*," in *Death and Representation*, ed. Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 51.

¹¹ Esther Cohen, "Symbols of Culpability and the Universal Language of Justice: The Ritual of Public Executions in Late Medieval Europe," *History of European Ideas* 11 (1989): 408.

fetorem et horrorem. Quod ego sum, ipsi fuerunt; et quod ipsi sunt, ego ero.'¹² It would be a mistake, however, to think of death in the Medieval period as in some way homogenous. Klaus P. Jankofsky and Uwe H. Stuecher concede that much of what is now a vast body of work in this area serves purely to characterise the Medieval attitude to death as 'an excessive and morbid fascination with the decay of the body and the transience of earthly power, beauty, and glory.', before going on to highlight the efforts of more recent scholarship in attempting to redress the balance:

In recent years national and international symposia and special sessions devoted to various aspects of death studies at professional conventions have greatly contributed to draw a more nuanced picture, and the "history of death" as it is being written now by researchers like Philippe Aries is an attempt to gather and assess the infinite variety of individual and collective ways of coping with this universal phenomenon.¹³

Another pre-eminent point stressed in the Medieval period was the inevitability of death. *The Legend of the Three Living and Three Dead* ('Quod fumus, estis. Quod sumus, eritis' (What we were, you are. What we are, you

¹² ('Whenever I look at their tombs, I see in them nothing but ashes and worms, stench and dread. What I am they were; and what they are I will be.'. Translation my own. Wemple and Kaiser quote 'venio' but the reading is more likely to be 'video' - 'venio in eis' is dog-Latin and Hugh of St Victor was a good Latinist). Quoted in Suzanne F. Wemple and Denise A. Kaiser, "Death's dance of women," *Journal of Medieval History* 12 (1986): 335.

¹³ Klaus P. Jankofsky and Uwe H. Stuecher, "Altruism: Reflections on a Neglected Aspect in Death Studies," *Omega* 14 (1983-4): 337. In support of their first point Jankofsky and Stuecher quote from F. Warren's introduction to the Early English Text Society's *Dance of Death* (London, 1931): 'To the man of the fifteenth century the material side of death with all its attendant horrors was hideously familiar ... All the grim sights of the grave were insisted on, and he was constantly bidden look upon the repulsive material presentment of his future self.'.13.

will be)) was among the texts designed for this purpose, but it was also a contributory source for the *dance of death*, an allegorical representation based on the universality of death, which appeared in the art of the fifteenth-century and sixteenth-century as the product of Christian theology and heathen superstitions.¹⁴ The most famous series is, of course, Holbein's *Dance of Death*, published in 1538 at Lyons, although it could be argued that the Medieval concept of a collective dance of death has given way here to Renaissance individuality. It is worth exercising caution, however, in attempting to trace a changing trend purely from such artistic sources. Questioning the textual evidence for a Burckhardian notion of death in the Renaissance, Peter Burke warns:

So far the art historians ... tend to be somewhat sceptical of arguments from changes in visual imagery to changes in mentality, unless there is supporting evidence from other sources, such as texts. The point is not that images are worth less, evidentially speaking, than texts, but simply that it is dangerous to rest general conclusions on one type of evidence alone. In addition, historians using images as evidence run two more specific dangers. One is assuming that changes in images over time reflect changes in attitudes to life, ignoring the fact that images have a certain degree of autonomy, that they change for internal as well as for external reasons. A second danger resides in the fact that images can only juxtapose; they cannot say anything about the possible relationship between the elements juxtaposed in this way; the pagan and Christian elements in the Bruni tomb, for example.¹⁵

¹⁴ Wall-paintings range from the one in the cemetery of the monastery 'Aux Innocents' in Paris, probably dating from 1425 (but destroyed in the seventeenth century) to the early sixteenth century examples at Meslay-le-Grenet (Eure-et-Loire). The arrangement, however, varies little.

Representatives of all classes from pope and emperor downwards are led away. The usual scheme is a row of people in which the living and the dead alternate, forming pairs sometimes separated by arcades. These pairs figure on single pages when the design is transferred to blockbooks.

¹⁵ Peter Burke, "Death in the Renaissance 1347-1656," in *Dies Illa: Death in*

Although it is considered a moot point whether the 'Danse Macabre' paintings were the inspiration behind the verses or vice versa these examples can be taken to usefully illustrate two points. Firstly that 'the majority of the public in the high Middle Ages was reached primarily through visual representations',¹⁶ and secondly that death was, from this period onwards closely associated with the concepts of both spectacle and drama, for there is evidence which proves that these 'dances of death' were, in fact, acted out in a highly theatrical manner. Beatrice White calls attention to an article in the archives of the Besancon cathedral concerning the 'delivery made to one of the officers of Saint John the Evangelist of four measures of wine to be given to those persons who performed the Dance of Death after mass':

Sexcallus (seneschallus) solvat D. Ionni Caleti matriculario S. Ioannis quatuor simasias vini per dictum matricularium exhibitas illis, qui *choream Machabaeorum* fecerunt 10 Iulii (1453), nuper lapsa hora missae in ecclesia S. Ioannis Evangelistae propter capitulum provinciale fratrum Minorum.

The steward/seneschal must pay to Master John Cales, a beneficiary of St. John's, four measures of wine which were shown by that said beneficiary to those who performed the 'dance of the Maccabees' on 10 July 1453, just after the end of mass in the Church of St. John the Evangelist close to the provincial chapter-house of the Friars Minor.¹⁷

the Middle Ages. Proceedings of the 1983 Manchester Colloquium, ed. Jane H.M. Taylor (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1984), 61.

¹⁶ Wemple and Kaiser, 336.

¹⁷ Beatrice White, *The Dance of Death*, ed. Florence Warren (London: Early English Texts Society, 1931), xi. The translation into English is my own.

Not until the early Renaissance period would drama fully emerge from the umbrella of religion under which it had sheltered during the Middle Ages. And this is both a vital step and an important point, for it allows us to more clearly differentiate 'death' from 'manner of death'. So while death (simply as a universal phenomenon) has always been associated with ritual or drama, it is not until the emergence of a canon of secular drama, in the late Medieval/early Renaissance period that we notice a steadily increasing emphasis being placed upon the manner of death in the context of a theatrical spectacle. This is the process which begins in the fourteenth-century with the type of public execution described by Cohen, and culminates over two centuries later in the spectacular set-piece that is the execution of Charles I, encompassing along the way the theatricality and attention to detail which characterises so many of the great on-stage Renaissance deaths, summed up in many ways by Bosola's determined pedantry to Webster's Duchess: 'Yet, methinks, / The **manner** of your death should much afflict you'.

And so the Medieval dances of death (both the poetry and art) are designed to remind the public of the inevitability and universality of death. The point of this is, generally speaking, to induce repentance. By the time Marlowe, Shakespeare, Webster and Ford come to write the dominant drama of the late sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century, death has become steeped in spectacle, for it is now no longer enough simply to die a good death, one must be actively *seen* (and heard) to die a good death. Last words now take on a hitherto unheard of level of importance in both life (as we will see in the scaffold speeches) and art, for the Medieval ideas of death have now combined with the previously mentioned concerns over the fixity of the self, and transient nature of existence, and given rise to the craft or art of 'dying well'.

Robert Kastebaum points out that 'ontologically and epistemologically what is truly unique about death [as such] is that it is inherently **without** context.'¹⁸ As we have noted, in the Medieval period the emphasis was placed primarily on two main themes - universality and inevitability, but it is not until the Renaissance that we find such great importance attached not simply to the act of dying, but to the individual's death, for one of the main things which Humanism brings to the Medieval concept of death is individual contextualization. When Everyman tells his companions that he requires assistance they are both eager and verbose in declaring absolute loyalty:

Cosyn. Ye, Eueryman, and to vs declare
 If ye be dysposed to go ony-whyder;
 For, wete you well, we wyll lyue and dye to-gyder.
Kynrede. In welth and wo we wyll with you holde,
 For ouer his kynne a man may be bolde.
 (322-26)

However, upon the revelation that what is required in practical terms is in fact 'someone to accompany [Everyman] to his rendezvous with death'¹⁹, their attitude is immediately and drastically altered:

Cosyn. What, to go thyder? Is that the mater?
 Nay, Eueryman, I had leuer fast brede and water
 All this fyue yere and more ...

Kynrede. A, syr, what ye be a mery man!
 Take good herte to you, and make no mone.
 But one thyng I warne you, by Saynt Anne-

¹⁸ Robert Kastenbaum, "Last Words," *The Monist* 76.2 (April 1993). 286. Kastenbaum is referring here to death in general.

¹⁹ Julia Dietrich, "Everyman, Lines 346-47," *The Explicator* 40.3 (Spring 1982): 5. Dietrich attributes this change in attitude to: 'the play's doctrinal point that only repentance can remove Death's sting by making it the gateway to eternal life.'

'directorial control' and the corresponding 'rhetorics of power' through which they are played out, that we must now turn.

II 'By indirection[s] find direction[s] out': The Battle for Directorial Control in the Renaissance Death Scene

i) Stage Deaths

In the tragic vision, death, according to Northrop Frye: 'is what defines the individual, ... It gives to the individual life a parabola shape, ... and this parabola movement of rise and fall is also the typical shape of tragedy.'¹ Here, we are immediately aware of two primary points. Firstly, and most obviously, the emphasis upon death as a pre-eminent point in life - 'it is what defines the individual' - and secondly, its importance in the process of the formation of a (self) constructed image, the term 'self' being doubly suggestive as the image is both constructed *for* the self (and others), and *by* the self. The fundamentally problematic nature of 'the self' and its relation to the body in Renaissance literature has, of course, attracted the attention of numerous commentators, with Catherine Belsey attributing its appeal to the fact that: 'The quest for the truth of the self, our own and others', endlessly fascinating, is precisely endless, since the subject of liberal humanism is a chimera, an effect of language, not its origin.'²

Writing in the context of the Christian in relation to twentieth-century society, I. A. McFadyen defines 'self' as:

A particular theory concerning the nature and structure of the inner personal core around which a personal identity is structured ... 'self' should therefore be understood as a means

¹ Northrop Frye, *Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 3.

² Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985), 54.

of organizing oneself through a belief about oneself; as an organizational process rather than a substance or entity.³

The context may be entirely different but this is in many ways a useful working definition here, primarily due to its acknowledgement of the importance of 'change' within the concept of selfhood: 'an organizational process'. This notion of a fundamentally dynamic yet nonetheless autonomous self is inextricably linked to the essential theatricality of the poetic or dramatic 'I' around which many of the texts of this period centre. Just as death plays - and the verb is particularly appropriate - a vital part in self-definition, theatricality can play a key role in death. This is a notion which lies at the core of the Renaissance fascination with the self as - to use Greenblatt's term - 'the product of manipulable, artful process'⁴ for the self of such an utterance is characterised primarily either by its profound plurality and radical instability, or by its desperate attempts to rebel against and overcome this fluidity:

Why, that's the way
To fool their preparation and to conquer
Their most absurd intents.
 Now Charmian!
Show me, my women, like a queen. Go fetch
My best attires. I am again for Cydnus,
To meet Mark Antony. Sirrah, Iras, go.
Now, noble Charmian, we'll dispatch indeed;
And when thou hast done this chare, I'll give
 thee leave
To play till doomsday. Bring our crown and all.

Antony and Cleopatra

³ I.A. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood; a Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 318.

⁴ Greenblatt, 2.

(V, ii, 224-231)⁵

It is only through a strong sense of staging here that an equilibrium is maintained between the noble Roman sacrifice and the sensuous Egyptian element of the lines,⁶ for it is perfectly clear that Cleopatra does not regard death as in any way a negation of self, the term 'noble act' in line 283 referring not to the passive imposition of death upon her, but rather to the active assertion of her will upon the situation in which she finds herself:

- Methinks, I hear
 Antony call : I see him rouse himself
 To praise my noble act ; I hear him mock
 The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men
 To excuse their after-wrath. Husband, I come:
 (V, ii, 281-5)

Cleopatra's use of the phrase 'I am marble-constant' (line 239) in the same scene may bring to mind Macbeth's 'I had else been perfect, / Whole as the marble' (*Macbeth* III, iv, 21-2), but the line serves a very different purpose in this Egyptian context. The point, for Macbeth, is that things are - as they stand - not perfect, not whole. As we shall see later in the Section, there is a chink in his armour, a crack which will, through the passage of time, develop into a chasm between self and identity and eventually envelop the tragic hero.

⁵ All Shakespeare quotations are from *Complete Works of William Shakespeare: The Alexander Text* (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1994).

⁶ On the 'Roman/Egyptian' elements of this speech Hymel writes: ' ... If [Cleopatra] takes her life for fear of being exhibited as a prize of conquest, she dies to preserve her "honor" - to a Roman, the most ultimately "noble" reason possible ... But if the aim of her suicide is to join Antony, her death could be considered an entirely appropriate Egyptian conclusion to an Egyptian life. In this context, it would become highly ironical that a Roman means (suicide) enables Cleopatra to die for the most Egyptian of motives - love.' Cynthia D. Hymel, "Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*," *The Explicator* 37.4 (Summer 1979): 3.

By the time we reach Macbeth's Act V, Scene v soliloquy ('Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow ... ') all temporal coherence is, for him, collapsing, and the sense of a confined and controllable present is receding from his grasp at an ever-accelerating rate. There is, however, no hint of this to be found in Cleopatra's profound rejection of the transient and ephemeral 'now the fleeting moon / No planet is of mine.', and it is difficult to imagine a more confident declaration of self-assertion than:

My resolution's plac'd, and I have nothing
Of woman in me: now from head to foot
I am marble-constant

(V, ii, 236-9)

Cleopatra has now cemented any cracks in her 'marble' (self) from 'head to foot' and this could almost be read, in one sense, as an attempt to remove all traces of the human ('I have nothing / Of woman in me'), for to be mortal is - as Frye reminds us - to be 'formed and shaped by death'. Cleopatra's greatest triumph lies in her ability to turn what is potentially a passive human limitation into active transcendence: 'Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have immortal longings in me' (278). Her present is therefore both whole and total, with 'I am marble-constant' standing in contrast to Macbeth's notion of the conditional past in 'I had else been perfect'. Death, therefore does not 'form and shape' Cleopatra; it is she who forms and shapes death, taking the parts of both director and leading lady as she stage-manages, to the last detail, her own final moments, exercising ultimate and absolute control over this last self-defining act of life. The ease with which this is achieved places at the forefront of our minds the 'sprezzatura' which Castiglione holds up as an example to all in *The Courtier*.

Shakespeare's Cleopatra is not the only Renaissance tragic heroine who must wrestle with the problems of passivity, however. In Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, the protagonist declares:

Good comfortable fellow,
 Persuade a wretch that's broke upon the wheel
 To have all his bones new set: entreat him live,
 To be executed again. Who must dispatch me?
 I account this world a tedious theatre,
 For I do play a part in 't 'gainst my will.

(IV, i, 79-84)⁷

This is a highly relevant speech, throwing together as it does the key themes of death, self-construction and control. Quoting lines 82-3 in her highly perceptive article on the significance of tyranny in relation to spectacle in Jacobean drama Karin S. Coddon writes:

The subordination of agency ('will') to power's spectacle comprises one important foundation on which pageants of power rested in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. But Webster's play demonstrates this structure primarily to interrogate and parody it. By the end of the play it is Bosola, the self-identified 'creature' of a mad tyrant, who invokes the 'world-as-stage' topos to account for his subjection to lunatic authority, referring to himself as 'an actor in the main of all / Much 'gainst my good nature' (V, V, 87-8). Theatricality comes to trope - and demystify - the determination of the subject by an absolute power unable to sustain the coherence of its own illusions.⁸

⁷ All Webster quotations are from *The Selected Plays of John Webster*, eds. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁸ Karin S Coddon, "The Duchess of Malfi: Tyranny and Spectacle in Jacobean Drama," *Themes in Drama* 15 (1993): 12.

It is, of course, entirely appropriate that the two elements which Coddon highlights are 'theatricality' and 'will' for while death may have been one of the most singularly vital points in the process of individual self-definition the ability to die well was certainly not considered inherent to the human condition. Rather, it was something to be practised, to be repeated, rehearsed, and acted out again and again - a way of life even. Like so much else in Renaissance culture, it is an art to be mastered, a performance to be perfected through constant repetition and endless practice, in Vaughan's words (which are admittedly drawn from a very different context) 'let me die before my death'⁹. The fact that this is not possible in life goes part way to explaining its consistent appearance in art. The constant desire to shape and choreograph what is patently beyond the limits of human control occurs with great regularity in Renaissance literature and art, for, as we have already noted, it is ultimately about the absolute assertion of the 'self' at the very moment when the 'self' is, in physical terms, undergoing a process of complete negation.

⁹ Henry Vaughan, 'Regeneration' in *Henry Vaughan: Poetry and Selected Prose*, ed. L. C. Martin (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 226. Anticipation - or even rehearsal - of death is certainly not confined to Renaissance and Reformation texts. An obvious seventeenth century example would be Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*: '... I was also at this time so really possessed with the thought of death, that oft I was as if I was on the Ladder, with the rope about my neck; onely this was some encouragement to me, I thought I might now have an opportunity to speak my last words to a multitude which I thought would come to see me die;'. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 100., but it is, in a different way, just as relevant to the first part of Solzenitsyn's twentieth-century exposé of the Soviet prison system *The Gulag Archipelago*: '... even the executioner doesn't know about everything right to the very end ... Only those who have been killed know it all to the very end - and that means no one. It's true, however, that the artist, however obliquely and unclearly, nevertheless knows some part of what happens right up to the actual bullet, the actual noose.' Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918 - 1956* I.xi 'The Supreme Measure' (London: Collins and Harvill, 1974), 444.

Faced with this negation of 'self', John Donne poses in February of 1631 for a drawing of himself in his shroud - he did not die until the last day of March. It is certainly theatrical, but it is much more than this, for Donne is a man whose 'culture and a religion is in the process of erasing the body and substituting for it a concept of self'.¹⁰ If the portrait had been painted at the appropriate time then the 'self' (at least in secular terms) would have ceased to exist; only the body would remain.

These notions of death, self and body pose problems enough, yet Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* highlights a further set of limitations - those associated with a fundamentally patriarchal society - within which the women of the Renaissance (both actual and fictional) were forced to exist. Lisa Jardine writes:

Two direct consequences of Protestant reform had the accidental effect of disadvantaging women and women's thought. The abolition of the convents removed a sphere of separatist, independent activity for women, in which during the Middle Ages individual women had risen to intellectual prominence unhampered by family obligations ... And the abolition of saint worship, as Natalie Davis has pointed out, removed a moral support from women which went unexpectedly deep.¹¹

¹⁰ Thomas H. Luxon, "Book Review: Iconoclasm and Poetry in the English Reformation: Down Went Dagon," *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 51 (1988): 237.

¹¹ Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Sussex: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1983), 50.

I have already looked, albeit briefly, at Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, and focused specifically on Cleopatra's death, but in Robert Garnier's *Marc Antoine* Cleopatra's demise is entirely absent. The play closes as follows:

Moy, ne le pouvant plus de mes pleurs arrouser,
 Que feray-je élarnee, hélas! que le baiser?
 Que je vous baise donc, ô beaux yeux, ma lumiere!
 O front, siege d'honneur! belle face guerriere!
 O col, ô bras, ô mains, ô poitrine où la mort
 Vient de faire (hà! mechef!) son parricide effort!
 Que de mille baisers, et mille et mille encore,
 Pour office dernier ma bouche vous honore;
 Et qu'en un tel devoir mon corps affoiblissant
 Defaille dessus vous, mon ame vomissant.

(1990-99)

I, no longer able to wash him with my tears,
 What shall I do, alas, (I whose eyes can weep no more) but
 kiss him?

Let me kiss you then, oh fair eyes, my light!
 Oh brow, seat of honour! fair warrior's face!
 Oh neck, oh arms, oh hands, oh breast upon which death
 Has just wrought its murderous efforts! (ah mischance!)
 Let my mouth honour you as its last task
 With a thousand kisses and a thousand and a thousand more,
 And may my weakening body expire upon you whilst carrying
 out this duty

Pouring out my whole soul. ¹²

In a convincing essay linking the Countess of Pembroke's translation of this text with both her mother Mary Sidney's death (memorialised in Holinshed's *Chronicles*), and female models of behaviour in the Renaissance, Mary Ellen Lamb quotes from Daniel's *Tragedie of Cleopatra* (1594) (which, of course, carries a dedication to the Countess):

And in that cheere th'impression of a smile,

¹² Robert Garnier, *Two Tragedies: Hippolyte and Marc Antoine*, ed. Christine M Hill and Mary G Morrison (London: The Athlone Press, 1975), 166. The translation into English is my own.

Did seeme to shew she scorned Death and *Caesar*,
 As glorying that she could them both beguile,
 And telling Death how much her death did please her.
 (V, 1626-29)¹³

While acknowledging that the issue is far from clear cut, Lamb goes on to conclude:

Cleopatra's serene death suggests by implication a means by which ordinary women can demonstrate their heroism ... In both the Countess's translation of Garnier and in Daniel's play, the heroic representation of Cleopatra functions as an exemplification of the female virtues idealized in Renaissance England. If women could not fight in battle, argue in the lawcourts, intrigue in the royal court, at least they could achieve heroic stature by preserving Stoic equanimity at home. This virtue was, obviously, extremely convenient for men to promote; for this form of heroism did not challenge the status quo.¹⁴

The situation can therefore be summarised as follows: great emphasis is placed upon a virtuous and heroic death - dying well is all important. Women, however, through the existence of certain ideological constructs, are denied access to the social and religious activities which would facilitate this process. The only way around this is through what Lamb terms: 'Cleopatra's self-sacrificing form of heroism'. Lamb, it should be added, supports this phrase with a quote from Mary Beth Rose's "Gender, Genre, and History: Seventeenth Century English Women and the Art of Autobiography" in the same volume: 'In this respect Cleopatra's heroism implies a "bitter subtext of egotism repressed," a conflict between self-assertion and self-effacement

¹³ Mary Ellen Lamb, "The Countess of Pembroke and the Art of Dying," in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 218.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 216, 218.

present in several seventeenth-century autobiographies by women.' This acknowledgement - albeit in an endnote - of the tension between self-assertion and self-effacement is what allows Lamb to narrowly avoid overplaying her hand (through what would have been the placing of excessive emphasis upon the 'self-effacement' side of the argument). She eventually goes on to find the counter-point to this type of fictional self-effacement in the very act of the Countess's translations and publications, but while Lamb's argument is, on the whole, convincing, if the 'female heroism via passivity' theory is to feed into the wider body of criticism in this area, it must surely be tested against other modes of on-stage death in Renaissance drama. Webster's *Duchess* allows us to do just that, for we are now no longer dealing with a voluntary act, but rather with a forced execution.

I intend to argue that the theory will, generally speaking, hold up under this type of analysis, but I do not wish to place the Duchess's death in quite so strong a 'female' context. This may seem unusual - especially in light of recent critical trends¹⁵ - but it is my belief that the means through which the tragic protagonist in Webster's drama exerts 'directorial control' over her own death does not necessarily benefit from being considered in terms of female deaths of the period. Rather, I will place it simply against the backdrop of death scenes in the tragedy of the Renaissance and let the Duchess take her

¹⁵ Belsey sees the play as: 'valoriz[ing] women's equality to the point where the Duchess woos Antonio ... even in the twentieth century the Duchess's behaviour has seemed so scandalous that the majority of recent critical discussions of the play have taken it for granted that her 'wantonness' and 'wilfulness' in so challenging convention are to blame for the tragic events the play depicts.' Belsey, 197, 192, while Kathleen McLuskie argues that: 'The possibilities for a woman character are constantly reworked by Webster ... The complex dramatic structures which lie behind all the women characters in Elizabethan drama have important implications for feminist criticism.' Kathleen McLuskie, *Renaissance Dramatists* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 143, 145.

rightful place alongside the tragic heroes of the period. And this is an important point, for despite Lamb's implied exclusion of women from an actively heroic death ('women could not fight in battle ...'), I intend to situate the Duchess and her death scene, quite deliberately next to that of the tragic hero who, more than any other character in Renaissance drama, embodies and personifies the ideal of the warrior culture; Macbeth.¹⁶

Writing on the conclusion of *Macbeth*, William Ingram observes:

It seems inescapable that the closing events of the fifth act - Birnam Wood moving, Macbeth arming, Macduff telling of his birth, Macbeth's death, the bringing in of the head - repeat in reverse order the apparitions of the beginning of the fourth act ... Macbeth's own head is 'armed' for the first time to our view when Seyton dresses him for combat in V, iii; the helmet, even more than the head, ought to be the same (in stage productions) as the apparition, and at this point, and not earlier, we ought to notice the resemblance. The prompt fulfilment of the other two prophecies would then leave us in little doubt about the impending fate of Macbeth's armed head.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Coriolanus* is also relevant in this context although the fragmentation of identity which I intend to illustrate in *Macbeth* is not present to the same degree in the Roman text, and this is perhaps linked to the presentation of a secular afterlife via memory - Aufidius' insistence that: 'he [Coriolanus] shall have a noble memory.' (V, vi, 154) stands in stark contrast to Macduff's final pronouncement on: 'Th' usurper's cursed head.' (V, viii, 55), and it is even further away from the complete obliteration of identity which can mark Old Testament deaths such as Jezebel's: 'And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of *her* hands ... And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the potion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, This *is* Jezebel.' ('II Kings' 9: 35, 37).

¹⁷ William Ingram, "'Enter Macduffe; With Macbeth's Head'," *Theatre Notebook* 26 (1971): 75.

Julian Mates, however, in his response to Ingram's article, surely comes closer to the crux of the matter:

All Londoners were familiar with heads atop the southern gate towers of London Bridge, the heads of those executed as traitors. Surely here we have the reason for Macbeth's death offstage, a death necessarily followed by decapitation, in order that the final view the audience had of Macbeth was not only as dead, but also, and the association must have been immediate, as traitor.¹⁸

This seems to me to be highly relevant, but I would disagree with Mates' earlier assertion that Shakespeare creates an 'obviously awkward situation' by spending the 'better half of the play leading to a confrontation, then [having] the murder take place offstage'. What Mates dismisses as a 'seeming dramaturgical lapse' is in fact more complex than he allows. In all the breadth of the Shakespearean canon, there is only one other tragic hero who dies offstage (Timon, whose death is of course of an entirely different sort), and no others who are beheaded. What this means is that Macbeth - unlike any other Shakespearean tragic hero - is denied the right to 'stage' his own death; the closest he comes to the traditional death speech which we associate with the likes of Othello, Lear, and Hamlet, is in his climactic battle with Macduff:

I will not yield,
To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet
And to be baited with the rabble's curse.
Though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane,
And thou oppos'd, being of no woman born,
Yet I will try the last. Before my body
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff;
And damn'd be him that first cries 'Hold, enough!'
(V, viii, 27-35)

¹⁸ Julian Mates, "Macbeth's Head," *Theatre Notebook* 28 (1974): 138.

This 'intolerable ... dislocated self'¹⁹, although at this stage not literally beheaded, is in fact the culmination of a process of disembodiment that has been steadily emerging from the second act of the play onwards. After murdering Duncan, the shaken Macbeth returns to his wife who instructs him to 'wash this filthy witness from your hand' (II, ii, 47), and continues:

... If he do bleed,
I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal,
For it must seem their guilt.
(55-57)

The consistent 'hand' imagery is continued over the next fifteen lines in the dialogue between them, and is picked up again by Lennox in the following scene:

Those of his chamber, as it seem'd had done't.
Their hands and faces were all badg'd with
 blood;
(II, iii, 97-99)

We notice immediately that Lady Macbeth refers only to the faces of the grooms while Lennox mentions both their hands and faces. This is all the more remarkable as the term 'hand' (or its plural) is mentioned five times in the previous conversation between Macbeth and his wife. Why then does Shakespeare have Lady Macbeth attempt to shift the emphasis away from 'hand(s)' and onto 'face'? She is in fact marking here the initiation of a process of association through repeated imagery which will permeate the entire play and ultimately inform our reading of the closing scene where it will

¹⁹ Dorothy McMillan, "Introduction to *Macbeth*," in *Complete Works of William Shakespeare: The Alexander Text*, 1049.

(having now outlived Lady Macbeth) be echoed once again, this time by her husband in his conversation with the servant:

MACBETH The devil damn thee black, thou cream-fac'd
loon!
 Where got'st thou that goose look?
 SERVANT There is ten thousand -
 MACBETH Geese, villain?
 SERVANT Soldiers, Sir.
 MACBETH Go, prick thy face, and over-red thy fear,
 Thou lily-liver'd boy. What soldiers, patch?
 Death of thy soul! Those linen cheeks of thine
 Are counsellors to fear. What soldiers,
whey-face?
 SERVANT The English force, so please you.
 MACBETH Take thy face hence.

(V, iii, 11-19)

What this process involves is an initially inferred and ultimately explicit dichotomy between 'self' and 'body' which is made manifest through a code of imagery and rhetoric linking 'self', as essential identity, with head (or face); and 'body' with the complete absence of this. When Macbeth is beheaded therefore, he is not only - as Mates correctly argues - marked immediately as a traitor, but his essential identity is also instantaneously removed.

From the first act onwards, *Macbeth* establishes and develops the 'clothes' and 'dressing' metaphor as a means of representing the cloaking of one's true intentions. This begins when Lady Macbeth asks her husband 'Was the hope drunk / wherein you dressed yourself?' (I, vii, 36) and is picked up firstly and most obviously, by Macbeth himself later in the same act with the famous 'False face must hide what the false heart doth know' (I, viii, 81-2), and again in Macduff's hope that 'things [be] well done ... Lest our old robes sit easier than our new' (II, iv, 39), but the metaphor can also be seen as relevant to Macbeth's famous soliloquy which immediately follows the news of his wife's death:

She should have died hereafter;
 There would have been a time for such a word.
 To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
 To the last syllable of recorded time,
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more; it is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing.

(V,v,17-28)

It is at this point that the gradual process of disembodiment (which will end with Macbeth's beheading) first begins to build towards its climax. Following the strong medial caesura in line twenty-three the imagery centres around the stage metaphor and this serves a double purpose. Firstly, it is the opportunity to 'stage' his own death which - unlike Shakespeare's other tragic heroes - Macbeth is to be denied. The parallels (of theatrical rhetoric) with *Hamlet* are obvious enough but it is also worth comparing it with the 'shadow' dialogue in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*:

FERDINAND Leave me.
 MALATESTES Why doth your lordship love
this solitariness?
 FERDINAND Eagles commonly fly alone:
 they are crows, daws, and starlings that flock
together.-
 Look, what's that follows me?
 MALATESTES Nothing, my lord.
 FERDINAND Yes.
 MALATESTES 'Tis your shadow.
 FERDINAND Stay it; let it not haunt me.
 MALATESTES Impossible, if you move, and
the sun shine.
 FERDINAND I will throttle it.
[Throws himself upon his shadow]
 MALATESTES O, my lord: you are angry with
nothing.

FERDINAND You are a fool. How is 't possible I should catch my shadow, unless I fall upon 't? When I go to hell, I mean to carry a bribe: for look you, good gifts evermore make way for the worst persons.

PESCARA Rise, good my lord.

FERDINAND I am studying the art of patience.

PESCARA 'Tis a noble virtue -
(V, ii, 28-46)

It is interesting to note how in Webster this is followed by Ferdinand's casual, off-the-cuff literalism 'What I have done, I have done: I'll confess nothing.' (V, ii, 50) recalling as it does, Lady Macbeth's 'What's done is done' (III, ii, 12). What Lady Macbeth would like is to live in an eternal present - one in which she did not have to face the consequences of her actions. An existence in which a 'crudely compartmental view of time'²⁰ allowed her to ignore the fact that the present is shaped and formed in part by the past (through memory) and in part by the future (through anticipation).²¹ Frye writes of the essence of the tragic vision involving 'being in time'²², and

²⁰ John S. Tanner, "The Syllables of Time: An Augustinian Context for *Macbeth* 5.5," *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 8 (1987): 53.

²¹ It is worth noting here that such terms ('memory', 'anticipation' etc.) are useful only in relation to our perception of time, and not to time itself. The theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg argues that the basic temporal distinction between past, present and future is only meaningful if we first acknowledge what he terms 'the human consciousness of the present.': 'That time appears to be divided thus into past and future is a consequence of the character of the irreversible character of the course of time, which flows in a fixed succession from earlier to later ... However, seen from the perspective of a place outside the flow of time, the distinctions between past, present and future would disappear. Only the series of events would remain, but they would be seen together as in a single present.' Wolfhart Pannenberg, *What Is Man? Contemporary Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 71.

²² Frye, 3.

while this notion is nothing less than essential for all tragic drama, it is particularly relevant for *Macbeth*, for there is perhaps no other Renaissance text which illustrates quite so clearly the inextricable connection between the coherent or fixed self, and the concept of a temporal continuum of which we are all part, and in which our every action must be situated.

To ignore the existence of this temporal continuum is to 'deny coherence to one's own life and thus to one's self.'²³ The result of this denial is a total and complete collapse of the barriers and limits by which we define and organise our day to day existence. Lady Macbeth's 'Unsex me now' (V, ii, 236-7) may remind us of Cleopatra's 'I have nothing / of woman in me now', but the essential difference lies in the fact that the former is a complete rejection of femininity, the latter, it could be argued, a profound rejection of humanity. Both women may commit suicide in the end, but unlike Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth's sense of coherent self will ultimately disintegrate in death, for she does not carry the weight of tragic stature. And so sleep and waking become, for her, one, and the hand which once 'a little water' cleaned, cannot now be sweetened by all the perfumes of Arabia. The past must be continually re-enacted and the result is a complete loss of the 'present self' i.e. madness:

FERDINAND To drive six snails before me, from this town to Moscow; neither use goad nor whip to them, but let them take their own time - the patient'st man i'th'world match me for an experiment! - and I'll crawl after like a sheep-biter.

CARDINAL Force him up.

[*They get FERDINAND to his feet.*]

FERDINAND Use me well, you were best.

What I have done, I have done: I'll confess nothing.

²³ Tanner, 57.

DOCTOR Now let me come to him. Are you mad, my lord?
Are you out of your princely wits?

(V, ii, 47-56)²⁴

A similar line occurs at the end of *Othello*: 'Demand me nothing. What you know, you know.' (V, ii, 306), but Iago is fundamentally a villain of a different sort. He never loses his sense of coherence and his retreat into silence is in one way an affirmation of his defiant belief in that coherence. His sense of 'self' is cemented by his unshakeable belief in it, and so for him, the boundaries remain clear, so much so that he can confidently mock them in his 'complement extern' speech (*Othello* I, i, 41-66) by inverting the self-constructing rhetoric of Sonnet 121 ('I am that I am; and they that level / At my abuses reckon up their own.'):²⁵

For when my outward action doth demonstrate
The native act and figure of my heart
In complement extern, 'tis not long after
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at; I am not what I am.
(I, i, 62-6)

²⁴ Considering the 'madness' theme in this speech it is perhaps reasonable to speculate that Webster had at the forefront of his mind the Fourth Act of *King Lear* where Lear's 'Use me well; / You shall have ransom.' is preceded by Edgar's 'Reason in madness!' comment. *King Lear* IV, vi, 176 -93.

²⁵ Joseph A. Porter also sees the character of Iago as bound up with acts of self-construction in the play: '... Shakespeare uses Iago to manifest contradictions in the notion of self, or in the process of self-fashioning ... Whereas the speaker of *Sonnet 121*, confident of the immediacy of the self, could boldly echo *Exodus* with "I am that I am," now Iago ends his "complement extern" speech with "I am not what I am." Joseph A. Porter, "Complement Extern: Iago's Speech Acts," in Virginia Mason Vaughan and Kent Cartwright (eds.), *Othello: New Perspectives* (London: Associated University Presses, 1991), 85. Greenblatt too refers to this line as: '... the motto of the improviser, the manipulator of signs that bear no resemblance to what they profess to signify ... Iago knows that an identity [Othello's] that has been fashioned as a story can be unfashioned, refashioned, inscribed anew in a different narrative.' Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 238.

Iago, of course, is not the tragic hero of the play, nor does this act of self-deconstruction occur in the last act, but it is, nonetheless, of interest in the context of this Section for he appears initially to stand in radical opposition to the notion of self-construction which is being proposed here; 'I am not what I am', i.e. I am not myself and am therefore going to make no attempt to construct myself through any kind of rhetoric (theatrical or otherwise). The implications of the line, however, are deeply theatrical, for in superficially denying his sense of coherent self, Iago is in fact inferring the utilisation of the very rhetoric (i.e. theatrical) which is an essential component of the assertion of self which he appears at his first glance to be exploding. His existence is undisputed and so if he is not himself, he must therefore be something or someone else i.e. he must be playing the part of himself on behalf of this true 'other'. This is, of course, deeply theatrical in the strictest and most literal sense of the term. 'I am not what I am' therefore becomes a First Scene imploding and cyclical parody of the theatrically created self-constructed image which tragic heroes enact in the final scene, itself charged with and steeped in the inference of that theatricality. While tragic heroes attempt to counter the ultimate negation of self (in death) by affirming their sense of self (through the ability to exercise control of the end of one's own secular existence), Iago, at one and the same time both explodes his sense of self (through the literal meaning of the line) and proceeds to rebuild it through a smirking multi-layered parody which infers the rhetoric of the very self-assertion which his line - on initial reading - appeared to mock. The fact that Iago speaks here in such emphatic terms (he does not say 'I am not what I seem', but rather 'I am not what I am') feeds into the wider issues of identity and appearance in the play as a whole. Indeed it may be possible to argue (somewhat ironically in light of the above quoted 'complement extern' speech) that the word 'seem' would be more appropriately associated with

Othello and Desdemona than with villain of the piece. Othello himself binds his identity with story and representation in Act I, Scene iii when addressing the Council, and then proceeds to construct an opinion of his wife based entirely upon suggestion, half-truths and innuendo. It is therefore entirely appropriate that Iago is not what he *is*, for it is Desdemona, and in a different way Othello, who are not what they *seem*, and this is underscored in the Final Act when Iago retains a degree of personal coherence that almost escapes the tragic hero.

Iago's rhetoric then demonstrates that he has (unlike Lady Macbeth) an over-arching and absolute belief in the coherence of his own sense of self. And here, once again, we can see the usefulness in this context of McFadyen's definition: '... a means of organizing oneself through a belief about oneself; an organizational process rather than a substance or entity'. It is the 'belief about oneself' which allows Iago to manipulate the entire play with such staggeringly mercurial panache, while it is precisely the 'substance or entity' which for Macbeth, as we shall see, is entirely absent.

And now we find ourselves approaching the second important point which Macbeth's soliloquy highlights. If Iago, through a confident belief in himself, is able to echo *Exodus*, what we find in Macbeth is a submerged echo of Psalm 90²⁶ and the effect is that of an underscoring of the deep sense of

²⁶ R. M. Frye writes of: '... Macbeth's unbiblical player who struts and frets his hour upon the stage, "and then is heard no more," where the idea ... is that of the unstable and the transitory, as with the unrighteous whose "remembrance shall perish from the earth, and he shall have no name in the street" (Job 18. 17). In precisely the same way, the "tale told by an idiot," recalls from yet another angle the frailty of this life, and does so in possible reference to Psalm 90. 9: "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told.'" R. M. Frye, "'Out, Out, Brief Candle" and the Jacobean Understanding,' *Notes and Queries* 200 (April 1955): 145. On Biblical echoes in Macbeth as a whole, see Paul N. Siegel, "Echoes of the

futility which is the predominant feature of the speech. 'Life' may be 'a poor player, / that struts and frets his hour upon the stage' with all the attendant notions this carries, but it is also, equally importantly, 'a walking shadow', a disembodied figure - an undifferentiated representation of the original upon which it depends for its existence (the relationship, it is worth noting, is not symbiotic). This disembodied figure has no presence just as it has no present ('struts and frets his hour and then is heard no more'); it has, in effect, no self, just as the tale has no meaning (only 'sound and fury').

In the Introduction to this Section I argued that representation has historically involved the attempt to recapture an absence as a presence. The discourses, images, and representations inherent within this can, however, by their very nature, only ever provide a reflection of the object. And so, it is for Macbeth's dislocated self, the 'walking shadow' which lacks the coherence of an autonomous whole. This process of disembodiment will of course be brought to its conclusion in the final scene when Macbeth's head is held aloft by the victorious Macduff with the pole now taking the place of his body. From the first act the play has prepared us for this through the parallel development of, firstly the cloaking of intentions metaphor, and secondly the association of these cloaked intentions (and therefore the person's true nature and identity) with the head/face:

DUNCAN Is execution done on Cawdor? Are
not
Those in commission yet return'd?

MALCOLM My liege,

Bible Story in "Macbeth," *Notes and Queries* 200 (April 1955): 142. It is worth making the distinction here - as Frye and Siegel do not - between the 'telescoping' effect in the Shakespeare and the 'rolling expansiveness' of the Biblical text.

They are not yet come back. But I have spoke
 With one that saw him die; who did report
 That very frankly he confess`d his treasons,
 Implor`d your Highness pardon, and set forth
 A deep repentance. Nothing in his life
 Became him like the leaving it: he died
 As one that had been studied in his death
 To throw away the dearest thing he ow`d
 As `twere a careless trifle.

DUNCAN There's no art
 To find the mind's construction in the face.
 He was a gentleman on whom I built
 An absolute trust.

(I, iv, 1-13)

Compare this with Lady Macbeth`s later observation:

Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
 May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
 Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
 Your hand, your tongue; look like th` innocent
 flower,
 But be the serpent under`t.

(I, v, 59-63)

Macbeth later demands reassurance that Banquo is in fact dead, which the murderers supply with the lines `Ay, my good lord. Safe in a ditch he bides, / With twenty trenched gashes on his head, / The least a death to nature.` (III, iv, 2-28) and this is picked up again in Banquo`s ghost's `gory locks`. When Macduff's wife enquires as to the identity of the murderers she asks `What are these faces?` (iv, ii, 770), but the most obvious foreshadowing of the events of the final scene comes in the immediately preceding act:

 That will never be.
 Who can impress the forest, bid the tree
 Unfix his earth-bound root? Sweet bodements,
 good!
 Rebellion's head rise never till the wood
 Of Birnam rise, and our high-plac`d Macbeth
 Shall live the lease of nature, pay his breath
 To time and mortal custom. Yet my heart

Throbs to know one thing; tell me, if your art
 Can tell so much - shall Banquo's issue ever
 Reign in this kingdom?

(IV, i, 94-103)

The meaning of the phrase 'rebellion's head' is obvious enough in its primary sense, but the verb which follows it is particularly relevant, for if Macbeth is to be the physical embodiment of rebellion, then the raising of rebellion's head (on a pole) is precisely what Macduff will enact in the final scene. There is, however, a further layer below the surface of the text, doubling back upon, and undercutting itself, for at the very moment when Macbeth is held up (literally) and displayed as what he really is (the embodiment of rebellion), he is in fact entirely disembodied (his head is on a pole). At the very moment when the cloaking of intentions metaphor is brought to a conclusion and thrown aside, the disembodiment theme rises up (in two senses: (1) like rebellion (2) on a stick, literally) and dramatically undercuts it. This is one reason why the play has been, since the First Act, associating essential identity with the head and face. That Macbeth's beheading is an act bearing considerable symbolic significance is, in itself, irrefutable, but the manner in which this particular act channels into larger questions concerning violence and the State is, for the play as a whole, a more complex issue:

Generally, in Europe in the sixteenth century the development was from Feudalism to the Absolutist State ... The reason why the State needed violence and propaganda was that the system was subject to persistent structural difficulties. *Macbeth*, like very many plays of the period, handles anxieties about the violence exercised under the aegis of Absolutist ideology.²⁷

²⁷ Alan Sinfield, "*Macbeth*: history, ideology and intellectuals," *Critical Quarterly* 28 (1986): 63, 64.

Justice must be seen to be done, the tyrant must be seen to be overthrown, and a new ruler must emerge. The undercutting of one strand of imagery by the simultaneous climax of another cannot therefore be allowed to stand in the way of this: another means must be found of achieving the effect, and this is why Macbeth is beheaded, for according to the symbolism and imagery of the drama up to this point, a person's essential identity (their essential 'self') resides wholly in their face/head. Earlier in the play Lady Macduff proclaims that all traitors 'must be hang'd' (IV, ii, 50), but Macbeth - traitor though he undoubtedly is - is not hanged because that would not facilitate annihilation of his true 'self':

Hail, King! for so thou art. Behold where
stands
 Th' usurper's cursed head. The time is free.
 I see thee compass'd with thy kingdom's pearl
 That speak my salutation in their minds;
 Whose voices I desire aloud with mine -
 Hail, King of Scotland!

(V,viii,54-59)

Writing on beheadings during the French Revolution, Regina Janes asks why a disembodied head should carry such social and ideological power, and finds the answer in its potential, its relevance as a signifier:

Like other detached body parts, ambulatory hands or forlorn feet, a detached head is a sign we privilege. As a sign, it can enter into a variety of discourses and its meanings will derive from the discourse(s) of which it forms a part, from the tribal to the psychoanalytic, from the developmental to the discursive. Wherever it appears, a severed head is a sign in a discourse over which that head exerts no power and no control.²⁸

²⁸ Regina Janes, "Beheadings," in Goodwin and Bronfen (eds.), 250.

The discourse which Macbeth's head enters into is that of power, or more specifically, a transfer of absolute social power in a warrior culture. Virgil's *Aeneid* (2, 557-8) is also quoted by Janes in support of what she terms 'the prestige of the head', but this reverence for the human head can be traced back much further than Virgil. There is strong archaeological evidence which points to the presence of head-hunting in Europe during Mesolithic times. A reverence for the human head and a recognition of its importance in relation to the identity of an individual has therefore been in place since before the dawn of what we would now term civilisation; it is something both primal and inherent to the human condition and as such its consistent appearance in literature through the ages should hardly surprise us. In Classical drama the death of the main character is not a prerequisite for tragedy. Indeed, it is not uncommon for the tragic hero not to die at all (e.g. Philoctetes). Even here, however, where characterology can often be - in contrast to Renaissance tragedy - of secondary significance, the same theme arises:

ELECTRA. Glorious victor, sprung of a father that brought victory from the war at Ilium, receive, Orestes, this diadem for the clusters of your hair. You return from no profitless six-lap race that you have won, but from killing your enemy, Aegisthus, who destroyed your father and mine.

Orestes enters at this point in Euripides' play bearing the head of the slain Aegisthus, whose body is carried by the following servants. Electra then crowns him with chaplets and he proceeds to offer her the head in order that her former master be her slave:

... expose him for the wild beasts to devour, or impale him on a high stake to be plunder for the birds, the children of the sky. He is now yours.²⁹

The fact that the head in question is not that of the tragic hero, in combination with the traditionally cosmic scale of classical dramaturgy may well serve to undercut the effect somewhat, but this is still quite clearly a discourse of power. Orestes enters carrying the head, is himself crowned, then offers the head to Electra to impale it. She will then exert power over this head upon the stake (her former master) in the same way that Macduff will control his former ruler when he holds Macbeth's disembodied head aloft and declares the time to be free. The subtext here is not concerned so much with the acquisition of authority as with the display of authority. And so the Greek text continues:

ELECTRA. I am ashamed, yet I should like to speak--

ORESTES. What? Say it. You have nothing now to fear.

ELECTRA. I am ashamed to insult the dead for fear some ill
may strike me.

with the fear of the dead placed here in a social context 'Our city is hard to please and quick to find fault.', but it can, on other occasions in classical texts, take a more literal form, and is seen at its most extreme in the concept of 'maschalismos' - the act of removing a dead body's hands/feet to eliminate the possibility of its somehow taking revenge upon its murderer.³⁰

²⁹ The English translation used here, *The Plays of Euripides*, trans. Hadas and McLean, (New York: The Dial Press, 1936), 323 refers to "the body", however, F.A. Paley's commentary on the Greek text clearly relates to Aegisthus' head. See 'The Electra,' in *Euripides, With An English Commentary*, ed. George Long and A.J. Maclean, vol. II (London: Whittaker and Co., 1858), 361.

³⁰ On 'maschalismos' see G.L. Kittredge, "Arm-Pitting Among the Greeks," *American Journal of Philology* 6 (1885): 151-69.

An interesting variant of this is to be found in the Anglo-Saxon text *Beowulf*. Grendel is killed by a fatal blow which rips his arm from his shoulder. The hero subsequently - in Grendel's lair for the purpose of killing his mother - seeks out the corpse and proceeds to decapitate the lifeless body. As in the *Electra*, the head is then taken as a trophy, to play its part in the discourse of power that operates within the context of 'comitatus':

Four men were needed laboriously to cart Grendel's head on a spear-shaft to the hall of gold-giving ... Then, by the hair, the head of Grendel, fear-some thing, was borne into the hall where people were drinking, into the presence of the earls, and of the queen in their midst, a rare spectacle; the men stared at it.³¹

The association of a disembodied head with the notion of spectacle is not uncommon in texts of this period. A. H. Smith defines 'heafod-stocc' as 'the post on which the head of a beheaded criminal was exposed', and goes on to state that it appears frequently in O.E. charters.³² *The Toronto Concordance*, however, lists only two occurrences, the first of which comes from the *Sawyer 470 Charter*³³ and would therefore date the usage around 940 A.D. (Precise dating of the *Beowulf* manuscript is still disputed).

³¹ S. A. J. Bradley (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1991), 454-5.

³² A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*. English Place Name Society Vol. XXV (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 237.

³³ MS 1. Winchester College, Muniment Room, Cabinet 7, Drawer 2, no.2 (s.x med.; O.S. *Facs.*, ii, Winchester Coll. 3).

Compare this with the following quotation from *Judith*³⁴ which dates from approximately 1000, and we can clearly see a line of this type of imagery which can be traced from Mesolithic times through classical dramaturgy, to Old English, and eventually into Renaissance art and literature:

Then the clever woman ornamented with gold directed her attentive servant-girl to unwrap the harrier's head and to display the bloody object to the citizens as proof of how she had fared in the struggle. The noble lady then spoke to the whole populace:

'Victorious heroes, leaders of the people; here you may openly gaze upon the head of that most odious heathen warrior, the dead Holofernes,'³⁵

(Relevant sections of the Deuterocanonical Books are 'Judith' Chapter 13, Verses 15 and 18, and Chapter 14, Verse 1).³⁶

It is interesting to note, moreover, that examples of severed heads are not confined to literature. Benvenuto Cellini, for example, was one of the leading sculptors and goldsmiths of the late Renaissance. He is well known for his striking and dramatic creations, but arguably the most successful of all his works is the heroic bronze statue *Perseus and Medusa* (1545-1554, Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence), in which the naked, muscular hero holds the bloody, severed head of Medusa high in the air as he surveys the Piazza della Signoria, the main square of Florence. The list of such occurrences in both art

³⁴ London British Library Cotton Vitellius A xv Folio 202a-209a.

³⁵ Bradley (ed.), 500.

³⁶ "Book Of Judith," in *The Holy Bible Revised Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments Catholic Edition*, ed. D.B. Orchard and R.C. Fuller (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1966), 445.

and literature could easily be extended,³⁷ but the point has surely been made; the physical disfigurement of Macbeth - the separation of head from body - which McMillan rightly points to as a 'mirror of his psychic disfigurement'³⁸ can be constructively viewed in this wider context, and Macduff's line 'That way the noise is. Tyrant, show thy face.' (V, vii, 14) takes on even greater significance for it can reasonably be read as a synonym for 'Tyrant, show thy self'. When we continue into the following scenes this becomes yet more apparent in Macbeth's previously quoted speech 'Before my body / I throw my warlike shield' (V, viii, 28-35) where 'body' means just that, and in this case (according to the symbolism of the drama to this point) we must interpret 'body' as representative of an absence or lack of essential identity (i.e. self). The fact that all this immediately follows Macduff's 'We'll have thee ... Painted upon a pole' serves, of course, to underline the point. Macbeth's 'self' is, in this act, almost exclusively associated with Macduff who uses only terms linked in some way to the head ('face', 'pole'), and so all that remains for Macbeth himself is the 'body' along with the inevitable accompaniment to this (complete absence of coherent identity). This is the loss or absence which Macbeth has fought desperately to prevent throughout the Final Act as the creeping inevitability of his fate gradually enveloped him. The witches' prophecy begins to reach fulfilment:

... [I] begin
 To doubt th' equivocation of the fiend
 That lies like truth. 'Fear not, till Birnam wood

³⁷ One could look, for example, at the Orpheus myth which sees the head cast into the river Hebrus by the Thracian women, before being washed up on the shores of Lesbos and ultimately buried by the Muses (and for that matter at the way in which Milton uses this in *Paradise Lost* (Book VII, 33 - 9). For a further Shakespearean treatment of the theme of disembodied heads in relation to identity, the obvious text is *Cymbeline* (see IV, ii).

³⁸McMillan, 1049.

Do come to Dunsinane.' And now a wood
Comes toward Dunsinane.

(V,v,42-46)

and Macbeth responds with a bold and actively direct assertion of his own identity ('My name's Macbeth') in the face of constantly increasing odds, for the momentum is now clearly moving irretrievably in the opposite direction. And so as the incorporeal and intangible slayer of Macbeth ('What's he / That was not born of woman?') becomes the very real and present Macduff, the tragic hero - despite his best attempts at self-assertion - becomes in his own final speech a mere 'body', and ultimately not even that (a head upon a pole). Macbeth then, loses not simply his head, but perhaps more importantly, his essential identity, and with it his right to die 'as one that had been studied in his death'; his integrity and unity the inevitable sacrifices in order that the final speech of the play may carry the same weight as that of Shakespeare's other non-Roman tragedies.

Once again, however, it is in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* that we find some of the most telling parallels, for 'My name's Macbeth' finds its natural counterpoint in Webster's 'I am Duchess of Malfi still'. Belsey makes the point as follows:

It is possible to see, then, why it has not seemed anachronistic to find evidence of humanism in the self-assertion of Elizabethan and Jacobean protagonists when they proclaim the continuity of inviolable identity: 'I am/Antony yet' *Antony and Cleopatra*, III. xiii. 92-3); 'I am Duchess of Malfi still' (*The Duchess of Malfi*, IV. ii. 142); ... 'at myself I will begin and end' (*The White Devil*, V. vi. 258) ... 'I am myself alone' is the exultant cry of Gloucester, the future Richard III, as he stabs Henry VI (*3 Henry VI*, v. vi. 83).³⁹

³⁹ Belsey, 35-6.

It is perhaps in the Duchess' death speech, though, that we find the most significant lines; 'Dispose my breath how please you, but my body / Bestow upon my women, will you?' (IV, ii, 218-19), for it is precisely because she can and does still exercise some element of control over her own death that she has not - unlike Macbeth - been subjected to such an annihilation of essential identity. What her death has in common with that of Macbeth is, most obviously, that it is a murder, a forced act. She does not voluntarily take her own life in the way that Othello and Cleopatra do (and her death is still further away from that of Lear). How then, does the Duchess come to exercise this studied control?:

Not a whit:

What would it pleasure me to have my throat
cut

With diamonds? or to be smothered
With cassia? or to be shot to death, with pearls?

I know death hath ten thousand several doors

For men to take their exits: and 'tis found

They go on such strange geometrical hinges,

You may open them both ways - any way,

for heaven sake,

So I were out of your whispering. Tell my

brothers

That I perceive death, now I am well awake,

Best gift is they can give, or I can take.

I would fain put off my last woman's fault,

I'd not be tedious to you.

(IV, ii, 219 - 31)

The submerged echo of Seneca (compare the Duchess' 'I know death hath ten thousand several doors / For men to take their exits' with 'Anyone can stop a man's life, but no one his death; a thousand doors open onto it.')40 provides an

40 '... eripere uitam nemo non homini potest, / at nemo mortem; mille ad hanc aditus patent.' *Seneca's Phoenissae*. With commentary by Marica Frank (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 53. The translation quoted above is my own.

interesting context here, but as with Iago's line this section of text would appear, on first reading, to radically undermine the argument that a Renaissance obsession not simply with death, but with the form of that death, leads to a desire to 'stage' one's own final moments and therefore confirm the validity of the pre-existing dramatic 'I', the essential 'self' of the tragic hero(ine). Bosola asks the Duchess 'Doth not death fright you?' to which she responds 'Who would be afraid on 't,? / Knowing to meet such excellent company / in th' other world?' This was clearly not the answer Bosola desired, and so he presses her further 'Yet, methinks, / The manner of your death should much afflict you, / This cord should terrify you?', with the weak feminine ending in combination with the absence of enjambment in the middle line building a sense of anticipation and placing the emphasis dramatically and firmly on the concluding 'This cord should terrify you?'. As the terms of his questioning become more specific, so they become more extreme; 'death' becomes 'the manner of your death', while 'fright you' becomes 'terrify you'. The cord, however, does not terrify her, and she proceeds with the speech quoted above, a dismissal of the multifarious forms of death as ultimately interchangeable. The differences are irrelevant as the final effect is the same: 'any way, for heaven sake, / So I were out of your whispering.'

In order to appreciate the full significance of this passage, however, we must read it in its wider context, not simply as a component of the 'periodic debauching of Shakespearean humanity' which Geoffrey Hill finds in this death,⁴¹ but in direct relation to the previously quoted speech of Act IV,

⁴¹ Geoffrey Hill, *The Lords of Limit: Essays on Literature and Ideas* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1984), 54.

Scene i ('Good comfortable fellow ... '). When discussing Macbeth I argued that his 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow' soliloquy of Act V, Scene v should be viewed as a prelude to the events of the final scene in two senses: firstly the development of the theatrical metaphor ('poor player'), and secondly the transfer of social power through the annihilation of the tyrant's 'self' (manifest as this is through the physical disfigurement of the bodiless head which itself evolved from the disembodied 'shadow'). And so, if we compare Macbeth's Act V, Scene v soliloquy with the Duchess' speech from Act IV, Scene i, we can see the same theatrical metaphor ('I account this world a tedious theatre'). She too is apparently to be denied - as was Macbeth - any control over her own death. This is the absolute control which Bosola is attempting to gain as he brandishes the cord before her eyes. The Duchess, however, embraces her apparent impotence and entrapment and through her calm acceptance eventually overcomes it, taking the elements of Bosola's lines, effectively turning them through one hundred and eighty degrees, and throwing them - now converted to suit her own means - back in his face. It is through this self-effacing acceptance of not only her fate, but her lack of control over the form of that fate, that she is able to rise to the level of tragic heroine that we see in Cleopatra's death scene. Cleopatra's death lies, in one sense, at the opposite end of the spectrum; it is a suicide and is therefore, by definition, an act of choice. Cleopatra, as we have already seen, takes this intrinsic element of control one step further by effectively externalising it. The Duchess, like Macbeth, is not privileged with this level of freedom, but unlike the warrior hero who takes refuge in a physically frantic denial of his fate: 'Lay on, Macduff; And damn'd be him that first cries 'Hold, enough!'', she uses this moment to dramatically differentiate herself from and rise above the 'poor wretch' of the previous speech. It is the very fact that she refuses to enter into the spectacle of death and be a 'play[er] in the tedious theatre' which so frustrates Bosola. What Cleopatra does for herself (controls and

directs her death) Bosola wants to do not for, but to the Duchess. Coddin highlights the significance of the Duchess's use of the phrase 'gainst my will', but it is not until this scene with Bosola that the real implications of the phrase in its previous context become entirely clear. The successful imposition here of his will would assign to him the control which would otherwise allow the Duchess to negate - or at the very least undermine - the annihilation of 'self' which her death, to Bosola, represents.

Just as Macbeth's Act V, Scene v soliloquy must be taken in relation to his final speech with Macduff, so we must do the same for the Duchess, not simply in terms of the 'death' section of her speech (lines 79-82), but also in terms of the enforcement of her will. Bosola wishes to be director to the Duchess's actor, but the only part which she will take on is that of a 'player' who refuses to engage with Bosola's text. In dismissing the multifarious forms of death as ultimately interchangeable she effectively removes the *raison d'être* for Bosola's theatre of death. While he wishes to place the emphasis upon the means, she undercuts (rather than overpowers) him through her insistence only upon the ultimate significance of the end. By constantly frustrating Bosola's attempts at control she reclaims the position of power which was rightfully hers, and effectively steps back while turning the tables, making him the player to her director. It is in this final and supreme act of controlled manipulation that we can meaningfully speak of the Duchess as matching Cleopatra in stature as tragic heroine. While Cleopatra impresses through the absolute assertion of her will, the Duchess does so by apparently embracing her own passivity and complete lack of control:

Pull, and pull strongly, for your able strength
 Must pull down heaven upon me-
 Yet stay, heaven-gates are not so high arch'd
 As princes' palaces: they that enter there
 Must go upon their knees. Come violent death,

We will return to this distinction between the manner of the Duchess' death and that of her maid later in the Section, but for now it is enough to note the way in which Webster's tragic heroine embraces the 'passivity' of her 'female' death and emerges from the scene with a greater degree of 'directorial control' than Shakespeare's epitome of the warrior culture, Macbeth, whose climactic battle with Macduff is invested with a degree of sheer physicality which has led critics such as Sugnet (misleadingly I believe) to refer to it as the tragic hero's death scene.⁴² David Norbrook's stance is perhaps closer to my own in also seeing a dichotomy in terms of identity within the play, although for him it is inextricably bound up with social status:

Macbeth and his wife, however, are not so much overrun by unruly passions as forcing their bodies to carry through their calculating political stratagems. And their bodies resist this rebellion against natural order, as if the principles of monarchy and hierarchy were too deeply implanted in the body to be overcome.⁴³

The intention of Norbrook's essay is to determine the extent of the influence of the poet and historian Buchanan upon Shakespeare; he is not primarily interested here in issues of identity. However, his notion of the fundamentally 'unnatural mind' attempting to exert absolute control over the body - and by extension the 'natural' social hierarchy with which it is associated - becomes more relevant to my own stance when considered alongside his more recent comments regarding *Richard II*.

⁴² Charles J. Sugnet, "Exaltation at the Close: A Model for Shakespearean Tragedy," *Modern Language Quarterly* 38 (1977): 334.

⁴³ David Norbrook, "Macbeth and the Politics of Historiography," in *Politics of Discourse*, eds. Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 113.

Concurring with, and consolidating, Maynard Mack's criticism of *King Lear* Marie Axton asserts: 'the traditions of the morality play which alternatively saw the king as everyman or the king as God's unique vicar, had become politically charged by the succession debate'.⁴⁴ Making the distinction between the traditional notion of the body politic where kingdom=body of people, ruler=head, and the concept of the 'Queen's two bodies', Axton goes on to consider the significance of this 'symbolism and iconography' for such texts as *King Lear* and *Richard II*. Unsurprisingly Ernst Kantorowicz's 1957 work *The King's Two Bodies*⁴⁵ figures highly in this. Indeed, such is the importance of this treatise and the theory it expounds, that it has become almost as integral to any modern commentary on *Richard II* as the text of the play itself. In 1996 Norbrook attributed the speed with which this process of absorption has taken place at least partly to the 'canonical status' which Foucault afforded the treatise in 1975 when he: 'presented it as a counterpoint to his own *Discipline and Punish*'.⁴⁶

In this thesis Shakespeare's histories are not my main concern but the comments of Axton and Norbrook are nonetheless useful in this context, for they serve to underscore the extent to which the fragmentation of identity which I have highlighted in *Macbeth* can be viewed as another strand in the rope that ties histories such as *Richard II* to the mature tragedies:

⁴⁴ Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), 12.

⁴⁵ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

⁴⁶ David Norbrook, "The Emperor's New Body? *Richard II*, Ernst Kantorowicz, and the Politics of Shakespeare Criticism," *Textual Practice* 10.2 (1996): 329.

Music do I hear?

Ha, ha! Keep time. How sour sweet music is
 When time is broke and no proportion kept!
 So is it in the music of men's lives.
 And here have I the daintiness of ear
 To check time broke in a disorder'd string;
 But for the concord of my state and time
 Had not an ear to hear my true time broke.
 I wasted time, and now doth time waste me.

(V, v, 41-49)

Maguin suggests that the final line here 'I wasted time, and now doth time waste me.' can be read as 'a summary of Richard's tragic fate',⁴⁷ and in many ways he is correct, but the speech as a whole can also be meaningfully placed alongside Macbeth's 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow' soliloquy (note the temporal imagery of the Act V speech, and the theatrical imagery of the Act III speech: '... a little scene'), just as Gaunt's 'More are men's ends mark'd than their lives before.' (II, i, 11) parallels 'Nothing in his life / became him like the leaving it:' (I, iv, 7-8). The seeds of the self-fragmentation which we find in the mature tragedies then, were planted not 'newly with the time', but approximately a decade earlier in the second tetralogy. Indeed, it is Macbeth's Act V, Scene v soliloquy which Quinones chooses to cite as 'leading us to a level of reflection which the Histories do not.'⁴⁸ And so while Norbrook's association of the concept of the 'King's Two Bodies' with the 'politics of the extreme right'⁴⁹ may be outwith the

⁴⁷ F. Maguin, "The Breaking of Time: *Richard II*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*," *Cahiers Elisabéthains* 7 (1975): 26.

⁴⁸ Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 359.

⁴⁹ '... The revolt against 'old' historicisms tends to be seen as an emancipatory move against an intrinsically conservative methodology. But the 'King's Two Bodies' concept, as it has tended to circulate in recent critical discourse, has roots in an earlier phase of counter-Enlightenment discourse

scope of this Section, his general point regarding a 'growing interest in the role of the body in history' certainly forms a useful backdrop for my own observations.

And now, having made much of the fact that Macbeth loses his head offstage, we must turn our attention to the antithesis of this fictional death, and consider the symbiotic relationship between constructions of essential identity on the scaffold and those of the stage.

which was closely linked with the politics of the extreme right.' Norbrook, "The Emperor's New Body? *Richard II*, Ernst Kantorowicz, and the Politics of Shakespeare Criticism," 330.

II.ii) Scaffold Deaths

That thence the Royal actor born
 The tragic scaffold might adorn:
 While round the armed bands
 Did clap their bloody hands;

He nothing common did or mean
 Upon that memorable scene,
 But with his keener eye
 The axe's edge did try;

Andrew Marvell. 'An Horatian Ode upon
 Cromwell's Return from Ireland'
 (Stanzas 14-15).⁵⁰

The 'appeal' of the scaffold in literary terms, is not limited to the Renaissance and Reformation period. Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* may spring immediately to mind, but perhaps most famous of all is the conclusion of Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. The scaffold has clearly always held the latent possibility for drama in one way or another - it was always a place of tension, unpredictability and (in a less obvious sense) mystery. Its aim may have been, in general terms, to show death in all its finality, but even in the absence of death, the significance of the scaffold can be such that an entire work of literature can be actively structured around both scaffold scenes and the strength of public feeling that inevitably surrounds them:

It [the scaffold] was, in short, the platform of the pillory; and above it rose the framework of that instrument of discipline, so fashioned as to confine the human head in its tight grasp, and thus hold it up to the public gaze. The very ideal of ignominy

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Story Donno (ed.), *Andrew Marvell. The Complete Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 56. All subsequent Marvell quotations are from this edition.

was embodied and made manifest in this contrivance of wood and iron. There can be no outrage, methinks, against our common nature, -whatever be the delinquencies of the individual, -no outrage more flagrant than to forbid the culprit to hide his face for shame; as it was the essence of this punishment to do.

The Scarlet Letter
Nathaniel Hawthorne.⁵¹

The strong sense of mid-seventeenth-century Boston Puritanism which forms the backdrop to this scaffold drama admittedly creates a context somewhat different to that of Shakespeare's or Webster's London, and yet even here we can clearly see the importance of a constructed self and the significance of the manner in which it is created.

The true 'self' must be seen to be upon the scaffold; real 'identity' must therefore be associated with a socially representative self which is constructed - as it was in *Macbeth* - through the imagery of head, face, and by implication, identity. The consequence of this is the 'disembodiment' of the individual, although in this case, it is not literal (there are no beheadings in Hawthorne's novel). The human body itself is therefore usurped by the structure of the scaffold, the embodiment of 'the ideal of ignominy'. In the Hawthorne text the scaffold at one and the same time usurps and contextualises the individual; it forms the backdrop against which they must take their place, while enveloping (almost to the point of entirely consuming) the body of that individual. Such is the emphasis placed upon face as the presumed site of manifestation for repentance and shame that the body all but disappears, its place taken instead by the structure which surrounds and

⁵¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 55.

frames the whole proceedings. The aim is to come as close as is humanly possible to a representation of pure identity or 'true self'. This is why the words 'embodiment' and 'manifest' are juxtaposed in the above passage: the power which a sense of embodiment would imply has been stripped from the offender and transferred to the site of the structure itself, and since the structure of the scaffold is always an instrument of the state and a representation of its social power, control is therefore being actively transferred from the individual to the state. Foucault writes: 'the public execution is to be understood, not only as a judicial, but also as a political ritual. It belongs, even in minor cases, to the ceremonies by which power is manifested'.⁵²

Much has been written about the 'carnival' nature of these public events, with most recent writing on the subject inevitably involving a degree of reference to Peter Burke's *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*,⁵³ and perhaps even more importantly T. W. Laqueur's 'Crowds, Carnivals, and the English State in English Executions 1604-1868'.⁵⁴ Central to this debate is the place of the crowd in scaffold drama: 'At the heart of the British execution is not the state, nor even the condemned, but 'the people' themselves,

⁵² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 47, quoted in J.A. Sharpe, "'Last Dying Speeches': Religion, Ideology and Public Execution in Seventeenth-Century England," *Past and Present* 107 (1985): 166.

⁵³ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Temple Smith, 1978).

⁵⁴ T.W. Laqueur, "Crowds, Carnival and the State in English Executions, 1604-1868," in *The First Modern Society: Essays in Honour of Lawrence Stone*, ed. A.L. Beier *et al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 305-99.

gathered in a carnivalesque moment of political generativity'.⁵⁵ This view, however, is radically opposed by Gatrell who places the emphasis firmly upon state control, and extends this as far as the crowd itself, thus denying its 'free autonomy of expression'⁵⁶ (although it should be noted that he is dealing with eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century execution). It is not my intention to enter into this debate in any detail other than where it is directly relevant to the theatrical nature of such events, for I will consider these performances in the same way as traditional criticism tends to view the plays of the period; with an awareness of them as both performances and texts.

The three texts under discussion here all date from the first half of the seventeenth-century and I have chosen them for analysis for several reasons. Since original manuscripts for two out of the three are housed in the Special Collections Department of Glasgow University Library, access was available to me throughout the course of my research, but perhaps more importantly there was, at the point of writing, no published (or to my knowledge, unpublished) work available on the two Glasgow texts (*A True Relation of such things as passed at the Execution of John Ogilvie ...*⁵⁷ and *The several speeches of Duke Hamilton Earl of Cambridge, Henry Earl of Holland, and Arthur Lord Capel, upon the scaffold immediately before their execution*⁵⁸).

⁵⁵ Ibid., 332.

⁵⁶ V.A.C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 91.

⁵⁷ John Spottiswoode, *A true relation of the proceedings against John Ogilvie, a Jesuit, executed at Glasgow, the last of Februarie, anno 1615 ... with all that passed at his execution* (Edinburgh: Andro Hart, 1615).

⁵⁸ *The several speeches of Duke Hamilton Earl of Cambridge, Henry Earl of Holland, and Arthur Lord Capel, upon the scaffold immediately before their execution, on Friday 9. of March; also the several exhortations, and conferences with them, upon the scaffold, by Dr Sibbald, Mr Bolton, & Mr*

In order to counterbalance what might be termed the 'obscurity' of both these texts the final one which I have chosen to examine is that relating to the trial and execution of Charles I in 1648.⁵⁹ Obviously this text has received a fair amount of critical attention - primarily, but not exclusively, from historians - for it made an enormous impression upon subsequent scaffold scenes of the period, and is actually referred to (and its rhetoric echoed) in the speech of Capel the following year.

Analysis of scaffold (or for that matter gallows) texts is not without its problems, however, for while detailed accounts of public executions are not uncommon, the reliability and objectivity of their authors' is a more obvious and immediate problem:

[gallows literature] ... is didactic and normative in its intent ... Only a small number of people might witness an execution, but the pamphlet account was designed to reach a wider audience. A further problem is that not much is yet known about the writers of this literature, and it is unclear what, if any, links of however indirect a nature they had with officialdom either on a local or national level.⁶⁰

This is undoubtedly true, and something to be constantly borne in mind, but the fact that these accounts exist at all is indicative both of the cultural significance of such events, and of the desire to diffuse and disseminate this

Hodges (London: Peter Cole, Francis Tyton, and John Playford, 1649).

⁵⁹ *The Trial and Execution of Charles I. Facsimiles of the contemporary official accounts* (Leeds: The Scolar Press, 1966). Since I will be quoting fairly extensively from each of these texts, the page numbers appear in brackets following the quotes.

⁶⁰ Sharpe, 148.

type of information throughout society at large. That such texts cannot be relied upon to provide a truly authoritative and objective account of events does not render them any less deserving of critical consideration than the scaffold speeches themselves, which were almost entirely controlled by the state. These written reports then, are no more reliable in terms of 'truth' than are the speeches of which they provide an account, and yet in one sense, this fact is irrelevant, for they can nevertheless provide vital clues as to the notions which formed the ideological backdrop to the events. It is not therefore, strictly speaking, necessary - although it is clearly preferable - to know whether these texts are 'truthful' or not, for we are looking here at the way in which they present death and public execution, as much as at the actual events themselves.

It is, moreover, not always the case that we have absolutely no information regarding the authors of such accounts or their affiliation with the state. John Ogilvie was a Jesuit who was tried for acts of treason and convicted by Archbishop John Spottiswoode. Spottiswoode then went on to write 'A True Relation ..' of Ogilvie's trial and execution in response to an alternative - and critical - account published at Douay. While Ogilvie was never beheaded (he was hanged and quartered), the account nonetheless makes interesting reading, for it clearly betrays the anxiety of the state as it attempts to reconcile the contradictions inherent within the 'production' i.e. the theatre of death, which it itself has created. If we return briefly to the issue of the importance of the crowd this point may become clearer.

The crowd - or audience - is a necessary component of the procedure for both parties; the state requires a spectacle in order to encourage political conformity and this spectacle is not possible without the presence of onlookers. For the state then, there is a sense in which the witnessing is more

important than the act itself, and the crowd is manipulated into actively playing a part in the process by which it is to be controlled. However, the crowd is also important for the condemned; 'It is someone else's gaze that brings me into being' writes Jacques Lacan.⁶¹ The presence of the crowd necessitates the sense of ritual which - in combination with the scaffold speech - allows for the type of self-construction (via control over one's final moments of life) which we have already seen in the stage drama of the period. This type of ritual, of which illustrations will be provided, is, in practical terms, unnecessary; its significance is therefore ceremonial. It is part of a display put on by the state to encourage political conformity in those who witness it. The inevitable consequence of this, however, is that the state (as director) must assign to the condemned the leading role, and it is here that we may find the true significance of the fact that the Greek word for martyr 'martur' means 'to witness'.⁶² In an act of self-assertion as dramatic as anything found on the late Renaissance stage, Charles I declares from the scaffold:

If I would have given way to an Arbitrary way...I need not have come here, and therefore I tell you (and I pray God it may not be laid to your charge) That I am the Martyr of the People.(6)

⁶¹ Quoted in Marie de Hennezel, "How The Dying Teach Us To Live," (Extract from *Intimate Death*: Little Brown, 1997). *You*, March 2 1997, 40. This is probably a loose paraphrase rather than a direct quotation, although Lacan does deal with the topic in Seminar XI of *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. The thematics of the gaze have also been dealt with fairly extensively by film critics - particularly in relation to Feminism. See for example Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), a collection of essays spanning the period 1971 to 1986.

⁶² The etymology is: English 'martyr' from Old English 'martir', from Church Latin 'martyr', from Late Greek 'martur'). *Collins English Dictionary*, Third Edition.

What this means is that a certain element of control - for the scene if not the whole drama - is handed over to the condemned, and it is this element of control which the state is constantly attempting to wrestle back:

Then *Ogilvie* asked, *If hee should bee licensed to Speake unto the people?*

The Arch-bishop answered, If you will declare, that you suffer according to the Law, justly for your offence, and crave his Majesties pardon for your treasonable speeches, you shall be licensed to say what you please: otherwise you ought not to bee permitted.(32)

The Archbishop's response here is, of course, bordering on the oxymoronic, for it is a subtle game which the state must play. The conditional 'If you will', initially linked with 'what you please', is finally contradicted by the qualification following the emphatic pause created by the colon. As with stage drama, the prize at stake is not the criminal's life (for that is almost certainly already beyond salvation) but rather his death, or more accurately, the manner of his death. And the equilibrium within the drama here is of vital importance. 'Both the victims of and the audience at the scaffold were subordinated actors'⁶³ states Gatrell, and in a very real sense he is correct, for as we have already noted, the crowd enthusiastically plays its part in the process by which it is both controlled and repressed (just as the victim begs to be allowed to address his audience and thereby play his allotted part in the ritual). And yet, perhaps a more interesting - and in some ways more relevant - question may be the extent to which these parties were aware of their own manipulation. The 'directorial control' which I have already highlighted in the stage drama is no less present on the scaffold, but just as the tragic stature

⁶³ Gatrell, 96.

of the stage hero(ine) prevents the equilibrium of power from shifting too far towards the fictional murderer, so the absolute state control which a 'puppet on the scaffold' would convey is not the intended effect of the public execution: 'Public executions were carried out in a context of ceremony and ritual, and the reactions which they aimed to excite among spectators were evidently more complicated than mere terror.'⁶⁴ This 'ceremony and ritual' is fundamentally central to the maintenance of the equilibrium of power which lies at the heart of these public displays of authority. The state must ultimately exercise, and perhaps more importantly display, absolute (or directorial) control, but this must not be attained via the passivity of the main 'actor'. Let us expand upon this point.

Of fundamental importance to the whole dynamic of the scaffold drama is a set of opposing forces, equal in magnitude, but opposite in direction. And here we come to the significance of the term 'dynamic', for the effect of these opposing forces is not to counter (in the sense of cancelling out) each other, but rather to create an equilibrium. This idea of a dynamic balance is in itself a parallel for the notion of a fundamentally dynamic yet nonetheless autonomous self - which I derived from McFadyen's definition and argued the usefulness of earlier in the Section - but it is also important in a more direct sense here, for the tension inherent in this situation creates not a vacuum, but a space. In this space exist the key features which give the drama of the scaffold its essential characteristic: potential.

The previously mentioned sense of ceremony and ritual is the keystone around which the whole display of state control is built, for it serves to both

⁶⁴ Sharpe, 146-7.

create and highlight the uneasy tensions on which the theatre of the scaffold depends for its existence. In opposition to this ceremony, this constant, unchanging, dependable script, stands unpredictability. The unpredictability of a leading actor who may or may not play his part according to the script, and perhaps even more enticingly, the possibility - however slight - of a 'last minute reprieve'⁶⁵ for the condemned. The second opposition, branching out from and yet in its own way feeding into this notion of ceremonial ritual, involves the familiarity of tradition, the notion that this individual ritual is only one of many, it is part of a larger whole; something which has been done before and will be done again. And this is important for two reasons; firstly the sense of patterned controllability is a vital foil for the mystery of death which will form the climax of this staged performance, and secondly it leads into the final set of oppositions; namely universality and individual contextualisation.

The scaffold speech is therefore of great importance for, as a vital component of the ceremonial ritual, it consciously places this performance in a more universal context by enlarging the backdrop against which this particular drama is played out. It is, however, simultaneously the sole feature which affords the condemned the opportunity for uniqueness (despite the fact that it does not, in any sense, represent 'free speech'). And this is precisely why it is - for the state - so potentially dangerous. The state, by necessity, sets the scene for the drama of the scaffold, but it must also attempt to set the script (without actively appearing to do so): 'If you will declare ... you shall be licensed to say what you please'.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 149

Distilled from the tension of these oppositions and from the power struggle at the heart of the performance is the latent expectation which powers the drama. Some of the forms which this potential takes have already been discussed, but there is one further component of this ritual; the potential for revelation, and it is worth noting that in this my stance varies slightly from that of Sawday whose analysis of the 'View of the Leiden anatomy theatre' leads him to the conclusion that:

The confrontation which had taken place outside the anatomy theatre, on the gallows, was transformed once the body had been taken inside the theatre. Instead of being a mere object of investigation, the criminal corpse was invested with transcendent significance.⁶⁶

I have no quarrel with Sawday's earlier comments on the Leiden scene in which he finds 'an elaborate reworking of the symbolism of the last supper' but the above quotation nevertheless represents a somewhat Procrustean devaluing of death in order to privilege its consequence i.e. the resultant corpse. The 'confrontation ... on the gallows' cannot be associated exclusively with 'a mere object of investigation' (although it would clearly suit Sawday's argument if it could) for a mere curiosity would not induce the crowd to return time and time again. The 'transcendent significance' which Sawday would have us associate only with the anatomy theatre is in fact present - albeit in latent form - on the gallows, just as it is on the scaffold. The notion that the proximity of death may allow for the disclosure of a truth more universal, profound and meaningful than any other is emphasised by the cultural significance attached, in both Renaissance and modern society, to final words. According to Kastenbaum: 'Both Eastern and Western traditions

⁶⁶ Sawday, 75.

accord a special status to words uttered in near prospect of death ... [they are regarded] as somehow more meaningful than messages that are conveyed in more mundane circumstances.⁶⁷ (Compare Ionesco's ironic treatment of the theme in *The Chairs*: 'It's a sacred duty. You've no right to keep your message from the world. You must reveal it to mankind, they're waiting for it ... the universe waits only for you.'⁶⁸). The implicit supposition, therefore, is that the mere proximity of an (individual) death will precipitate the manifestation of the essence of (universal) death.

And so exists an uneasy and unstable equation. The individual, on one side, constantly attempts to gain control over his final moments through the personalising of his context, i.e. the appropriation of the ritual of which he finds himself the centre. The state, on the other hand, must continually attempt to drag the emphasis away from this highly personalised type of significance, and towards the 'universal truth', for it is the promise of this which - in combination with Laqueur's 'carnivaleque moment' - ensures the presence (and therefore the control and repression) of the crowd. And so, once again we find ourselves returning - this time on a larger scale - to the notion of potential; it is not for nothing that Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, draws the distinction between what **has** happened (history) and what **might** happen (poetry) and concludes that it is the latter in which we are more likely to find anything by way of universal truths:

From what has already been said, it will be evident that the poet's function is not to report things that have happened, but

⁶⁷ Kastenbaum, 270, 273.

⁶⁸ Eugene Ionesco, *Four Plays*, trans. Donald M Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc, 1958), 120.

rather to tell of such things as might happen ... Thus the difference between the historian and the poet is not that the historian employs prose and the poet verse ... rather the difference is that one tells of things that have been and the other of such things as might be. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history, in that poetry tends rather to express the universal, history rather the particular fact.⁶⁹

I have already characterised potential ('such things as might be') as an essential component in scaffold drama, but when this potential combines with what Kastenbaum terms 'the special status accorded to words uttered in near prospect of death' then Sawday's 'confrontation ... on the gallows' surely comes very close indeed to assuming the 'transcendent significance' which he would have us associate purely with the anatomy theatre. In these scaffold rituals the crowd are permitted to witness that which comes to us all, albeit in different ways, actually coming to one individual, and yet this in itself is not the heart of the matter, for the extreme interest in the literature of the scaffold shows us that it is not simply the death of the individual that is of interest, but perhaps more importantly, the reaction of the individual to the approach of death. Writing approximately two hundred years later, Charles Lamb declares:

... the things aimed at in theatrical representation, are to arrest the spectator's eye upon the form and the gesture, and so to gain a more favourable hearing to what is spoken: it is not what the character is, but how he looks; not what he says, but how he speaks it.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ James Hutton (trans.), *Aristotle's Poetics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 54.

⁷⁰ Charles Lamb, "On The Tragedies Of Shakespeare," in *English Critical Essays (Nineteenth Century)*, ed. Edmund D Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 87.

So, in the 'True Relation' of Ogilvie's death, the narrator recounts how the condemned 'said that he died for religion, but uttered this so weakly, as scarce he was heard by them that stood by upon the scaffold' (34). It is obvious then, that the manner of the condemned's utterances carries a weight at least equal to that of their content. Moreover, this is clearly a point of some considerable importance to the account in general, as Spottiswoode repeats it - presumably for added emphasis - twice in the following two paragraphs:

... hee kissed the Hang-man, and said, *Maria, Mater gratiae, ora pro me, Omnes Angeli orate pro me, Omnes Sancti, Sanctaeque orate pro me*: but with so low a voice, that they which stood at the ladder foote had some difficultie to heare him.

The Executioner willed him to commend his soule to God, pronouncing these words unto him, *Say, John, Lord have mercy on mee, Lord receive my soule*: which hee did, with such feeblenesse of voice, that scarcely hee could be heard ...
(34)

Indeed, the title page of the 1649 account of Charles I's execution declares the contents to be 'His speech Made Upon the Scaffold ... With a Relation of the Maner of his Going to Execution'. Moreover, this element of display is emphasised in the importance attached to the witnessing of the act, almost to the point where it is privileged with greater significance than the act itself. When it appears as though Charles I intends to make no further comment upon 'affections to Religion', Doctor Juxon reminds him 'it may be expected that you should ... say somewhat for the world's satisfaction'. The King, meanwhile, continues to play his allotted role and 'thanks [him] heartily ... for that I had almost forgotten it.'. (7). This is, however, a dynamic drama rather than a statically staged performance, and the balance of power continually shifts while constantly remaining within an overarching framework which is both actual and ideological.

In actual terms it is apparent in the context of the performance itself - the mock stage upon which this power struggle is enacted, while in more abstract terms we find the ideological battle lines clearly drawn for us on the opening page of the account proper (and here we see once again the importance of considering such events as both performances and texts which can actively illuminate each other regardless of the possible factual inaccuracies contained in the literature):

... the Charge may be read unto Him, which the Clerk then read, as followeth;

That the said CHARLS STUART being admitted King of England, and therein trusted with a *limited Power*, to Govern by, and according to the Laws of the Land, and not otherwise; And by his Trust, Oath, and Office, being obliged to use the power committed to him, *For the good and benefit of the People*, and for the preservation of their Rights and Liberties; Yet nevertheless out of a *wicked Design*, to erect, and uphold in himself an unlimited and Tyrannical power to rule *according to his Will ... (3)*

The key here is perhaps to be found in the movement from 'limited power' to 'unlimited and Tyrannical power'; the inference being that in a sense the very presence of the Sovereign on the scaffold is representative of the completion of the reversal of this pattern. The almost Faustian striving to obtain and exercise a power which somehow transcends accepted limits is therefore seen to be punished through the removal of all elements representative of power (and associated with the King) on the scaffold. This process will of course culminate in the removal of his head, with all the attendant and previously discussed implications this carries, but it also encompasses disempowerment through the removal of clothes (which can be associated with the cloaking of

one's true intentions - as in *Macbeth*), as well as being carriers of identity through their ability to immediately signal social status:

The King then said to the Executioner, is my hair well: Then the King took off his Cloak and his George, giving his George to Dr Juxon, saying, Remember *------. Then the King put off his Dublet, and being in his Waistcoat, put his Cloak on again, then looking upon the Block, said to the Executioner, You must set it fast. (7)

Moreover, the sense of being literally stripped of power finds its counterpoint in the metaphorical usage of such terms for Bolton, echoing perhaps *Isaiah* 61:10:⁷¹

Bolton. But my Lord, when you are cloathed with the righteousness of another, you will appear glorious, though now sinful in yourself. The Apostle saith, *I desire not to be found in my own righteousness*, and when you are cloathed with another, the Lord will own you, ...(27)

The clearest indication however, of the association of clothing and power/control is to be found in the self-referential juxtapositioning of these notions with terms linked to the condemned's body:

Holland

Here, my friend, let my Clothes and my Body alone, There is Ten pounds for thee, that is better than my Clothes, I am sure of it. (34)

Capel

There is Five pound for thee; and truly, for my clothes and those things, if there be anything due to you for it, you shall be very fully recompenced, but I desire my body may not be stripped here, and no body to take notice of my body but my own servants. (41)

⁷¹ 'I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh *himself* with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth *herself* with her jewels.'

And now we have come to the crux of the matter. The condemned consciously attempts to resist the fracturing of essential identity which the state is already working to produce even before the beheading has taken place. If, as in *Macbeth*, all that is left for the condemned is the literal body, then this assumes great significance, and control over its fate becomes all important. Moreover, this exercising of control over the body is itself subsumed in the struggle to retain a sense of coherent and autonomous identity. The blurring of the essential boundary of life/death through the extension of the condemned's will into the temporal period following his death ('I desire ... servants') mirrors the attempt to blur the body/self (head) dichotomy which the state is attempting to establish, maintain and eventually confirm through literal removal of the head for, as was noted earlier, the power which a sense of embodiment would imply is being consciously stripped from the offender. The notion of control over this body therefore becomes pre-eminent, for if the sense of a coherent and influential self can be seen to transcend the secular boundary of death, then the state's manufactured dichotomy will have been undercut in advance (one recalls Cleopatra's 'I am marble constant' (V, ii, 239)), and the imposition of the condemned's 'will' will have come to represent - even after his death - the ultimate victory of the individual ('self') over the state's fragmented 'body'.

The notion of 'will' is clearly central here, but this should hardly surprise us as the state itself has shown an acute awareness of this fact all along. We recall the previously quoted section from the first page of the official account of Charles I's execution where the charge was that of '... unlimited and tyrannical power to rule according to his will'. As Coddin has astutely highlighted, this notion is no less prevalent in the stage drama of the period, and so we find ourselves returning once again to the Duchess's words of Act IV Scene ii: 'Dispose my breath how please you, but my body /

Bestow upon my women, will you?' (IV, ii, 233-4)⁷² where the imposition of her will takes place, somewhat paradoxically, via her extreme passivity.

Such passivity is a luxury that the condemned in this instance cannot afford (indeed it would not suit the state if they could), and so they must actively promote - and be seen to promote - a sense of a coherent and autonomous self which crosses the boundary of life and death as well as that of body/head (identity), thereby encompassing, and as a result undercutting in advance, the state's created dichotomy which will come up to a head (literally) in the beheading itself. And so, in order to present a front of superficial autonomy, the lead actor in this theatre of death must in one sense play into the hands of the state - as director - for it is the very presentation of such a unified and authoritative presence which lends credence to the scaffold speech, and, as we have already noted, it is partly the potential for revelation within this which guarantees the presence (and subsequent control and political repression of the crowd). This is why the state appears - on first reading - to needlessly create an unnecessary power struggle:

Executioner:- [*Speaking to Holland*] Will your Lordship please to give me a Sign when I shall strike? And then his Lordship said, You have room enough here, have you not? and the executioner said, Yes.(34)

and why the 'puppet on the scaffold' is not its ultimate aim.

It is this equilibrium of control which Webster deliberately disturbs for dramatic effect in Cariola's death scene: 'You are deceiv'd sir, / I am not

⁷² It is worth noting in passing here the way in which this point is underlined by the keen distinction which the Duchess makes between breath (which is to be 'disposed') and body (which is to be 'bestowed').

prepar'd for 't. I will not die,'. The notion of being 'prepared for death' is a privilege which almost all condemned prisoners were granted. Indeed, Spottiswoode is at pains to point out that Ogilvie: 'After judgement was given ... remained in the place where he was convicted, having leasure granted to him to prepare himself for death'. (33). Clearly Cariola's attempt to delay her execution utilises this part of what would have been, for a contemporary audience, a familiar ritual. More revealing, however, is the remarkable phrase which follows this, for with the Duchess already dead, and Bosola's henchmen waiting vulture-like in the wings, Cariola valiantly announces: 'I will not die.'

It would be easy to dismiss this line as simply another component of what I have already termed the 'sham-comedic death' of Cariola; part of a deliberate contrast created by Webster between the death of the Duchess and that of her maid, in order to emphasise and underline the tragic stature of the former. However, there is greater significance to be found in the line, and it centres upon the simple fact that this is the closest that the character of Cariola comes, in the whole of the play, to the type of self-construction that I characterised earlier (with the assistance of a quote from Catherine Belsey) as being typical of the Renaissance tragic hero. No-where in the text does she declare 'I am Cariola still' or 'I am Cariola the waiting woman', and we would be struck by, above all else, the absurdity rather than the drama of the gesture if she did. 'I will not die', then, may not be a dramatic self-assertion to rival that of Hamlet, Macbeth, or the Duchess, but it is nonetheless of vital significance within her death speech, for it prefigures what will follow a few lines later:

BOSOLA Come, dispatch her -
 ...Delays: throttle her.
 EXECUTIONER She bites and scratches.

apparent to a contemporary audience intimately acquainted with the rhetoric of scaffold deaths. The self-controlling 'mark' that is given by Holland, Capel, Charles I, and the Duchess (whether it be by gesture of hand, or actual utterance), finds its equivalent for Cariola in Bosola's: 'Delays: ... When!'. Bosola gives the mark, for his is the only sense of coherent self which is present in the face of this particular death, and through this fact he truly comes to exert the directorial control which he has battled to attain all along. What Bosola therefore removes from Cariola is the right to dictate the precise moment of her own death, to say when she truly is 'prepar'd for 't [death]', and thereby assert the last semblance of a coherent self through the imposition of her will. In combination with the lack of any real attempt at dramatic self-construction by Cariola (either here or elsewhere in the play), this absence turns Bosola's theatre of death into - in one sense - a mere comedy of death, for there is no 'universal truth' to be found here.

Cariola's death, then, is much more than a simple contrast with that of the Duchess; it is in itself testament to the bizarre and at times almost comedic lack of significance which can result if the complete negation of self (which death in secular terms represents) is not simultaneously countered by some form of dramatic self-assertion - self therefore becomes an empty hollow, without substance in its own right (recall Macbeth's previously discussed lack of both present and presence in his Act V, Scene v soliloquy). The fact that Cariola's death is so completely lacking in this means that we, as either readers or spectators, can draw no meaningful or profound sense of significance from it. That she is not the tragic heroine of the play is, in itself, insufficient explanation for this, since surely the sensitive modern reader does not measure human worth against an Aristotelian list of pre-requisites for tragic stature.

This process of wringing meaning from on-stage theatrical deaths by consciously placing them against their non-fictional counterparts of the period can be both instructive and illuminating; however, generalisations drawn from this symbiotic relationship must be carefully qualified for it is necessary to draw a fine distinction between that which is truly 'dramatic', and that which is simply 'theatrical':

Theatre depends on both believing and not believing that actors mean what they say; and when, as is generally the case in executions, stage action is 'real', the meaning of performances becomes still more hopelessly poignantly ambiguous. Neither contemporaries nor historians know whether the condemned meant what they said, however they chose to die.⁷³

This, of course, is tapping into a much wider and more fundamental problem; the relationship between reality and (re)presentations of that reality. This is the notion exploited so fully in texts such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and perhaps most obviously, *Hamlet*:

More than anything else [Marvell's 'Horatian Ode'] calls to mind Shakespeare's exploration of power politics and political theatre in his history plays as that runs on into *Hamlet's* meditation on what it means or might mean to play the king.⁷⁴

The essential theatricality of these scaffold deaths, however, resides entirely on the strong sense of spectacle deliberately evoked by the state as director, and this is the case whether we consider such events as texts or performances.

⁷³ Laqueur, 319.

⁷⁴ Donald Mackenzie, *The Metaphysical Poets* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1991), 114.

There is no over-arching pre-ordained dramatic structure which must be adhered to and this unpredictability is, as we have noted, central to the potential which drives this 'real performance'. The most commonly noted - and most overtly theatrical feature - of the whole event is clearly the stage-like nature of the scaffold itself:

... the Scaffold was erected, between Whitehall-Gate, and the Gate leading into the Gallery from St. James's: The Scaffold was hung round with black, and the floor covered with black, and the Ax and Block laid in the middle of the Scaffold. There were divers Companies of Foot, and Troops of Horse placed on the one side of the Scaffold towards King street, and on the other side towards Charing-Cross, and the multitudes of people that came to be Spectators, very great.

(Trial and Execution of Charles I, 3-4).

Indeed, the importance of this 'sense of place' (even on a larger scale) cannot be underestimated, but its significance is far from exclusive to the state. Sharpe highlights the execution of John Marketman who 'on his bended knees did beg as a last request of the judge', that rather than being executed elsewhere he 'might be brought up to the town where he did perpetrate the wicked act'.⁷⁵ Moreover, this is one element of the theatricality of the scaffold which we can clearly see paralleled in the stage drama - one thinks for example of Marlowe's wandering heroes such as Faustus who after twenty-four years of roaming the universe returns to Wittenberg to meet his fate, and of course Tamburlaine of whom Greenblatt uses the phrase 'transcendental homelessness'.⁷⁶ As ever though, the most important evidence is to be found in the mouths of those who stood upon the scaffold itself, whether as the condemned, or as representatives of state justice:

⁷⁵ Sharpe, 144-5.

⁷⁶ Greenblatt, 197.

Holland ... yet I trust that I shall be carryed into that mercy,
that God will receive my soul.

Bolton, I doubt not, my Lord, but as you are a Spectacle,
and of pity here, so you are an object of God's mercy above.(32).

Once again a consideration of the performance as text provides important clues as to the ideological underpinnings of these events, for the most obvious point of which we become immediately aware is surely the structure of Bolton's response: '... as you are a Spectacle, and of pity here'. The splitting of this section into two distinct phrases takes its place amongst the other devices of theatricality prevalent in the account as a whole, for the sentence is not, we note 'You are a spectacle of pity', where the use of a single phrase to carry semantic meaning would place the emphasis firmly on the noun 'pity'. The use of the seemingly insignificant conjunction 'and' clearly signals two distinct phrases and the point is underlined by the comma following 'spectacle' which effectively splits both the phrases and the sense of the line. The result is that the emphasis falls squarely on the term 'spectacle', once again undercutting in advance any attempted self-construction on the part of the condemned, through the privileging of the crowd (as witnesses of this act) and by extension, the state (as both producer and director).

This theatrical rhetoric continues to work on two levels throughout these accounts; firstly in the vocabulary employed by those actually present upon the scaffold - we think, for example, of Doctor Juxon telling Charles I:

There is but one Stage more. This Stage is turbulent and troublesome; it is a short one: But you may consider, it will soon carry you a very great way: it will carry you from Earth to Heaven; and there you shall finde a great deal of cordial joy and comfort. (7)

and of Holland, who, in the face of death, cuts an almost Chorus-like figure stepping forward to address the spectators:

... And then going to the front of the Scaffold, he said to the People, God bless you all, and God deliver you from any such accident as may bring you to any such death as is violent, either by War, or by these accidents, but that there may be Peace among you, and you may finde that these accidents that have hapned to us, may be the last that may happen in this Kingdom. (35)

but it also permeates the manner of reporting, with the narrator of the account of Charles I's death not only providing an account of what was said, but adding 'stage directions' (supplied in the margins of the texts) regarding complementary physical gestures: 'Turning to some Gentleman that wrote' (5), 'Pointing to D Juxton' (7) etc., as well as interpreting particular actions for his readers, ('Meaning if he did blunt the edge [of the axe]' (6)).etc.

In general terms then, the 'performance' is framed by two fundamentally opposing forces; the state (as producer and director) constantly attempts to shift the equilibrium in the direction of universality through the dissolution of the sense of individual and coherent self associated with the condemned. Ritual, the implicit promise of a universal revelation concerning the 'essence of death', and the usurpation of individual power (culminating in the fragmentation of identity that is the literal beheading) are among the means by which this is attained. The condemned, on the other hand, must constantly pull in the opposite direction, attempting always to move towards the appropriation of the ritual in order to affect a significance which is, in the truest sense, personal, and thereby create a homogenous and consistent sense of individual identity. The rhetoric of the scaffold speech, the extension of 'will' into the period following death - when, in secular terms, this 'self' will no longer exist - and the power to dictate the precise moment of death, are

among the methods employed to this end. There is, however, a chiasmic structure of ideological interdependence which runs through the performance as a whole. The scaffold speech - commonly considered the preserve of the condemned - is also essential for the state; the revelation of the 'essence of death' requires an authoritative, homogenous and coherent 'self' as a medium through which it can be revealed, just as the ceremonial ritual - which is, of course, the creation of the state - is central to the condemned, for any process of appropriation presupposes something to appropriate. Both parties therefore have, so to speak, a foot in each camp, and it is this fact which both drives and frames the dynamic equilibrium of power I have described.

One obvious question remains, however; if the claim for a symbiotic relationship between the on-stage deaths of the Renaissance theatre and those of the scaffold is a justified one, why should extreme passivity lie at the core of the Duchess' triumphant control over her own death scene, when I have repeatedly declared its unsuitability for those upon the scaffold?

To find the answer we must first return briefly to the notion of a fundamental distinction between theatre and drama which is - in the context of staged and actual deaths - the difference between life and art. The Duchess is a tragic heroine and her death must therefore confirm her stature. If there is any valid basis for the modern critic Mary Lamb's assertion that women of the period were denied access to the 'traditionally heroic' modes of death, then clearly another method had to be found; for the Duchess this method is verbal. Female models of death then, simply circumnavigate the restrictions placed upon them and seek out an alternative point of entry to the same set of constructs by which a 'good' male death is judged and measured. It is not so much an alternative mode of death as an alternative point of entry coupled with a different medium of assertion (verbal rather than physical). This is one

of the reasons why I have already attempted to extricate the Duchess' death from the strongly 'female/patriarchal' context in which so much recent criticism has chosen to consciously place it.

The second, and perhaps more directly relevant strand of the answer to this question is to be found in the notion - for which I have claimed absolute centrality - of a dynamic equilibrium of power. If the concept of a 'discourse of death' (political, theatrical, ritualistic or otherwise) is vital to the Renaissance performances of both the street and the playhouse, then the idea of dialogue is clearly crucial. Bosola is therefore the fulcrum on which the Duchess' heroic stature is precariously balanced, for his presence allows for the 'dialogue with death' which will ultimately enable her to attain the control he himself so badly wants. In the Fourth Act of Webster's play it may be Bosola's henchmen who physically perform the execution, but we are in no doubt as to the architect of the plan. Bosola is therefore a living embodiment of the reason she will face death. Compare this with the situation in state executions where, as before, it is a lackey of the state⁷⁷ who will perform the act itself, but in this case, the agent of death is pure abstraction; 'the state'. There is therefore no personification of death in the scaffold scenes and it is impossible to enter into any kind of dialogue with an abstract entity. The constantly shifting dynamism of the equilibrium of power is the non-verbal equivalent of this dialogue.

H. L. Le Chatelier was a nineteenth-century French chemist who formulated a scientific principle stating that any enclosed and balanced

⁷⁷ Eagleton uses the phrase 'slow-witted lackeys of the state' to refer to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in *Hamlet*. Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1990), 72.

chemical system, when subjected to disturbance by an external influence, will shift the equilibrium within the system in order to reduce the effect of the influence and thereby maintain internal dynamic balance. In the case of state executions this analogy is a useful one, for it is the overarching structure of chiasmic ideological interdependence which serves as a framing device and ensures that there is a dynamic yet ultimately balanced interplay between the state and the individual. If this were not the case the potential which is central to the performance would cease to exist and the state's display of political power would be, relatively speaking, impotent.

The equilibrium of power is no less present (albeit in a different sense) in the stage drama, and the effects of its disturbance have already been considered in relation to Cariola's death. For the Duchess, however, it is perhaps more appropriate to consider Bosola's presence as analogous to that of a negative feedback loop within the equation, for his presence serves to ultimately counteract its original intended effect. It is only his persistent questioning - in order to attempt to gain control over the scene as a whole - which affords the Duchess the opportunity for her 'Not a whit...' speech. Bosola's scheme, then, loops back upon, and ultimately undercuts itself (just as the Duchess throws his own rhetoric back at him only now converted to suit her own ends), for it is only his presence - designed to strip her of the heroic stature rightfully hers - which allows his victim the opportunity to rise to the extreme heights of the verbal and passive heroic death which, if we are to believe Lamb, would otherwise have been denied her.

The primary aim of the literature of the scaffold then, is (from the point of view of the state) not simply the dissemination of information, but more accurately the dissemination of a politicised discourse of death, filtered, as this is, through a rhetoric of power which is at times theatrical in nature and

frequently fragmentary in intention. This scaffold drama forms a symbiotic relationship with that of the theatre, each simultaneously drawing from, and feeding the other; the theatre in order to increase 'realism' and thereby come as close as is humanly possible to a naturalistic rehearsal of death, and the scaffold in order to enhance the essential theatricality of the actual death on show. The point of the latter was to encourage political and cultural conformity through a dramatic display of the power of the state. And so, we return once again (this time on a larger scale) to the issue of control. The state draws on the theatre in order to demonstrate political control, while the theatre draws on state executions in order to move ever closer to bridging the gap between reality and representation. As I pointed out earlier, this is important in any literary context, but it is particularly relevant here, for it is only by actively finding some means to close this gap that Renaissance culture can go some way towards a true 'rehearsal of death', a dress rehearsal that is vital, for without it how is death to be mastered or even prepared for?

The public theatre, of course, occupies, by this time, an uneasy cultural and ideological position, and the precariously frangible conditions of life at the Elizabethan court are mirrored in the uncertain social position of the theatre as an institution. The introduction of a system of public payment in order to witness a theatrical spectacle, in combination with the prevalent ambivalence towards the players, caused great instability. All over Europe the playhouses were gradually being handed over to and placed under the control of the professional troupes. And so against this turbulent backdrop Renaissance theatre takes its crucial place in society at large. The 'play within a play' technique - exploited so fully by Shakespeare, and arguably taken to its most extreme in 'The False Servant' of Massinger's *The Roman Actor*, - feeds into the commonplace baroque metaphor of 'life as theatre' which will, of course, inevitably find its logical corollary in the notion of 'death as theatre',

an idea which will always strain at the limits not simply of representation, but also of credibility. It is this precarious position at the cutting edge of drama which affords such potential for self-definition, but it also allows for the kind of over-enthusiastic and uneasy comedy which can characterise such deaths as Cariola's in *The Duchess of Malfi*. The desire to fully exploit both the dramatic potential of, and the public interest in, the subject of death - influenced as we have seen by the actual executions and scaffold speeches of the period - can ultimately carry the drama in the opposite direction, with the final result tending towards sensationalist melodrama rather than psychological realism. This is the type of melodrama which Frye finds in the conclusion of Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*:

... the theme is brother-sister incest, and the sister's nurse, a harmless and amiable old woman who has connived at the incest, first has her eyes put out and then, as an act of justice applauded by the whole cast, is sentenced to be burned alive. This is the kind of audience response condemned by Blake when he remarks how, at a tragic scene, "The soul drinks murder and revenge and applauds its own holiness."⁷⁸

Aristotle tells us a tragedy must be serious. It achieves this seriousness by imitating the calamities of life. While he is not entirely consistent in his categorising of tragedies, Aristotelian tragedy proper does, like the *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*, represent calamities, and these are revealed to its characters in moments of *anagnorisis*.⁷⁹ Melodrama is certainly not comedy

⁷⁸ Frye, 79.

⁷⁹ It is worth pointing out here that Aristotelian theory has been somewhat misrepresented by many literary critics who have taken the comments in Ch. 13 of the *Poetics* in isolation rather than in conjunction with those of the following chapter. On the relationship between tragedy as a genre and philosophy see Walter Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979).

(just as it is not tragedy) but it is, in one sense, more than halfway there. It would be reassuring to think that such notions did not in any way impinge upon the drama of the scaffold; that this was at least one respect in which the staged and real deaths of the period retained a degree of autonomy. This, however, is not the case:

Last-minute or too-late pardons, even if they were, as Douglas Hay has argued, part of an elaborate system of patronage and control, also poised every execution on the brink of comedy. The condemned might show up on the scaffold looking foolishly unprepared because he had expected a pardon. The audience was constantly titillated by the possibility of sudden reversal. One broadsheet, for example, comments on 'the long suspense in which the whole of the capital convicts are kept', as of course was the public, until the very end. The failure of the expected pardon to arrive on this occasion presumably contributed to making the parting of friends especially melodramatic ...⁸⁰

Comedy is, of course, rarely entirely absent from the tragedies of the Renaissance - we think, for example, of the so-called 'comic relief' which can characterise even the most sombre and serious of texts, or the tendrils of comedy which seem to wind themselves around the core of plays such as *Antony and Cleopatra*, surfacing so frequently at key moments in the drama:⁸¹

One should remember ... that it is comedy alone - the comedy of death which Cleopatra, prompted by an ill-inspired

⁸⁰ Laqueur, 325.

⁸¹ Bergson's theory of comedy is interesting in this regard considering the weight it places upon the individual in society (a concept clearly central to much Renaissance tragedy). However, A. P. Rossiter's 'Comic Relief,' in *Angel With Horns: Fifteen Lectures on Shakespeare* (New York: Longman, 1989), 274-293 is more directly relevant to Shakespeare.

Charmian, plays for the benefit of Antony because she is afraid of facing his anger after betraying him at Actium - that brutally provokes the first tragic dénouement, Antony's suicide, and logically determines the second, Cleopatra's own death.⁸²

It is perhaps ironic then, that the inherent potential for comedy in Renaissance tragic drama can be seen at its most acute in a pseudo-Renaissance text (which was, in fact, first published in 1967). In Act II of Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Guildenstern is having a conversation with 'the player' - head of The Tragedians, (the players of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*). In answer to Guildenstern's question 'You [the players] die so many times; how can you expect them [the audience] to believe in your death?', the player responds with a naive enthusiasm, profoundly unaware of the real cultural significance of his reply:

On the contrary, it's the only kind they do believe. They're conditioned to it. I had an actor once who was condemned to hang for stealing a sheep - or a lamb, I forget which - so I got permission to have him hanged in the middle of a play - had to change the plot a bit but I thought it would be effective, you know - and you wouldn't believe it, he just *wasn't* convincing! It was impossible to suspend one's disbelief - and what with the audience jeering and throwing peanuts, the whole thing was a *disaster!* - he did nothing but cry all the time - right out of character - just stood there and cried ... Never again.

... GUILDENSTERN No, no, no ... you've got it all wrong ... you can't act death. The *fact* of it is nothing to do with seeing it happen - it's not gasps and blood and falling about - that isn't what makes it death. It's just a man failing to reappear, that's all - now you see him, now you don't that's the only thing that's

⁸² Jean Fuzier, "Antony and Cleopatra's Three-Stage Tragic Structure," *Cahiers Elisabethains* 13 (April 1978): 71.

real: here one minute and gone the next and never coming back - an exit, unobtrusive and unannounced, a disappearance gathering weight as it goes on, until, finally, it is heavy with death.⁸³

This is art imitating life taken to its most extreme, but it does effectively illustrate the potential result of the process of constantly eroding the boundaries between the two which the Renaissance 'theatre of death' (both on the scaffold and the stage) consistently indulged in. The essential point, to quote Laqueur again, is that 'theatre depends on both believing and not believing that actors mean what they say'. This is the fact which lies at the problematic core of the drama of the scaffold, and which the above speech takes to an almost ridiculous extreme. As the cultural obsession with death - inherited from the Middle Ages - combines with the demands of Renaissance Humanism, Foucault's self-obsessed 'confessing society' demands that emphasis be placed not simply upon experience, but also upon absolute and complete control over that experience. Death, therefore assumes a position of great importance on the very boundary between that which is within the scope of secular control and that which is profoundly and totally beyond it, and it is this which, in one sense, lies at the very heart of its attraction. The uncertainty of what lay beyond death could be minimised through the application of absolute self-assertion at the very moment the self was undergoing a process of complete negation in secular terms. It is the 'acting out' and externalising of this notion which we find time and time again in a variety of different guises on the Renaissance stage. As secular drama rose to previously unattained heights the rhetoric of the theatre and that of the scaffold began to borrow from one another, each in their own way paying testament to the

⁸³ Tom Stoppard, *Rozencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 62.

particular strand of Humanism which they represented, but each one also betraying (whether consciously or otherwise) the undeniable fact that their dominant ideologies were becoming increasingly intertwined, almost in some instances to the point of interchangeability:

The theatre and the scaffold provided occasions for communal festivities whose format and ends emerge as remarkably similar ... the influence of the scaffold may also account for a general dramatic fascination with the spectacle of death evident throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In fact, the close alliance between theatre and public punishment frames the great age of drama in England; ... ⁸⁴

Self-construction then, whether through ritual, ceremony, or theatricality, is always about a presentation of essential identity, and as such, it links victim and murderer (these terms are used here in the broadest sense for in the case of actual executions the 'murderer' is the state, not the literal executioner). In suicide these elements are, of course, simply opposite sides of the same coin, and this is partly why Cleopatra's and Othello's deaths are so very 'staged'; the construction of identity is by themselves, for themselves, and in relation to themselves. With the possible exception of ourselves as readers/spectators there is no real 'other' to stand in opposition to this, and there is certainly no-one to battle for directorial control.

The externalisation of identity always has been, and always will be, a fundamental problem. Writing on the appropriateness (or otherwise) of Shakespearean tragedy for the stage, Charles Lamb states: ' ... I am not arguing that *Hamlet* should not be acted, but how much *Hamlet* is made

⁸⁴ Molly Smith, "The Theatre and the Scaffold: Death as Spectacle in *The Spanish Tragedy*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 32 (1992): 220.

another thing by being acted'⁸⁵, and his comment has been echoed (albeit in many cases indirectly) in innumerable critical works on the play since then.

Eagleton in 1990 writes:

Hamlet has no 'essence' of being whatsoever, no inner sanctum to be safeguarded: he is pure deferral and diffusion, a hollow void which offers nothing determinate to be known. His 'self' consists simply in the range of gestures with which he resists available definitions, not in a radical alternative beyond their reach.⁸⁶

Such comments have become almost a commonplace of *Hamlet* criticism, but in his association of these problems with the issue of stage representation, Lamb strikes at the heart of the matter, for the very attempt to externalise what Eagleton refers to as Hamlet's 'essence of being ... His 'self' inevitably imposes upon that self a matrix of limitations, beginning with the human body itself, and moving through the confines of the theatre or page, to eventually focus on the basic relationship (which has so long been the fascination of allegory) between word and meaning.⁸⁷

And if there still persists some residual doubt as to the significance of death for the self-constructing Renaissance protagonist, then we need look no further than Eagleton's 'hollow void', the 'quintessence of dust' whose one triumphant proclamation of homogenous and coherent identity is delivered, quite literally, from the grave:

What is he, whose grief

⁸⁵ Lamb, 86

⁸⁶ Eagleton, 72

⁸⁷ For the relevance of this notion to Spenser, see Waller, 186.

Bears such an emphasis? whose phrase of sorrow
Conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand,
Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,
Hamlet the Dane.

Hamlet (V, i, 263-67)⁸⁸

For Foucault's 'confessing society' death may have been beyond mastery, but
it was certainly not beyond manipulation.

⁸⁸ Sara M. Deats writes of line 263 as: '... reverberating with thematic implications ... not only does Hamlet for the first time publicly accept his royal duty, but ... for the first time [he] confesses his love for Ophelia ... Rising from the grave thus symbolizes Hamlet's re-integration and adumbrates the steadiness of purpose and resolute detachment Hamlet the Dane will exhibit in the final scene of the play.' Sara M. Deats, "Shakespeare's *Hamlet*," *The Explicator* 39.3 (1981): 32.

Section Two:

Interiorising the Self:

Rhetorics of Context and the Cartography of Death

I. Introduction

In a universe without absolutes tragedy is impossible.
Leonard Cabell Pronko¹

The previous Section saw death, in general terms, as a secular limit, and considered the implications of this liminary status for the discourse of power which can be seen at work in the rhetoric of many Renaissance tragic death scenes. 'Tragedy' writes Paul S Fiddes in his book *Freedom and Limit: 'suggests that to die well, in a way that summons up those values by which one wanted, but failed, to live is to make death serve one.'² My stance here has already been argued, and I would certainly propose a more complex and finely balanced situation than this perhaps suggests, but Fiddes' statement does bring to mind Frye's previously quoted notion of death as that which 'defines the individual' by marking him off from 'the continuity of life that flows indefinitely between the past and the future.' Fiddes, however, eschews Frye's parabolic template for the tragic vision, choosing instead to promote a 'line of tension':³*

Tragedy consists, not so much in a fall from greatness to disaster, as in a failure to live successfully in the tension between self and society. [Shakespeare's] tragic heroes are people who have a certain freedom over against their environment, in perceiving some truth or value which challenges custom. They have a vision of how things are which

¹ Leonard Cabell Pronko, *Avant-Garde: The Experimental Theatre in France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), 205. Quoted in Charles I. Glicksberg, *The Self in Modern Literature* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1963), 202.

² Paul S. Fiddes, *Freedom and Limit: A Dialogue between Literature and Christian Doctrine* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 80.

³ *Ibid.*, 81.

contradicts appearance and convention, and they create friction in their surroundings for a while; but they are unable to hold to the vision they glimpse, or to build anything substantial upon it. They cannot hold the balance between their freedom and their limits. Like Hamlet, they may have the uneasy feeling that they should be acting on their insight that 'the time is out of joint' (*Hamlet* I.5.189), but they never really make their own decisions to get started. Like Lear, they may not question the system at all until it is too late to do anything but learn from being reduced to absolute zero. Having required his daughters to quantify their love for him, he now protests against a widespread ethic based upon mere calculations: 'O *reason* not the need ...' (*King Lear* II.4.266).⁴

The baseline upon which Fiddes maps his literary patterns - covering *en route* writers as diverse as Blake and Murdoch - is that of 'Christian Doctrine', but it is apparent from the above quotation that there are other 'limits' whose relevance remains, here at least, largely unaddressed; other equally definitive 'absolutes of tragedy', and Fiddes hints at these (without exploring them for they are outwith the remit of his text) in his use of the phrase 'freedom over against their environment'. It is the significance of geographical limits and the importance of the concept of 'place' (in its broadest sense) that I address in this Section, and I take as a starting point Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* for here we have a text built upon the foundations of two distinct - yet not unconnected - ideas of place. The setting of Wittenberg has been the subject of critical attention from writers such as Empson and Davidson, and I begin with the significance of this before addressing the play's other concept of place which centres upon the tension between contradictory representations of hell as geographical location or internalised state(s) of mind.

Continuing with this theme of interiorised contexts I consider the effectiveness (or otherwise) of microcosmic constructions in another

⁴ Ibid., 77.

Renaissance text for which the 'Protestant' location of Wittenberg carries significance, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.⁵ It is my contention that the interiorised contexts in both *Hamlet* and *Dr Faustus* are prevented from becoming fully realised by the secular 'absolute' of death, which is central to the genre.⁶ This formulation clearly implies that a fully realised microcosmic context and Renaissance tragedy are mutually exclusive, and the remainder of the Section illustrates why, of all the texts discussed so far, Shakespeare's *King Lear* comes closest to reconciling the two.

⁵ For the influence of Reformation theology upon Shakespeare's characters see John W. Draper, *The Hamlet of Shakespeare's Audience* (London: Frank Cass, 1966). A general overview of the relationship between these texts and Catholicism is provided in H. Mutschmann and K. Wentersdorf, *Shakespeare and Catholicism* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1952).

⁶ We have already noted in Section One that the death of the tragic hero is not a prerequisite for Classical tragedy, but I am referring here to Renaissance tragic drama only.

II. The Renaissance Des Res: 'Nutshell' or 'infinite space'?

i). Interiorised Contexts

In Act One, Scene One, of Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus*, the Chorus declares:

Now he is born, of parents base of stock,
In Germany, within a town called Rhode:
At riper years to Wittenberg he went,
Whereas his kinsmen chiefly brought him up;
(I, i, 11-14).

And so, in the very first speech of the play the backdrop of Reformation theology, which is of course to prove so important, is clearly signalled. Harry Levin remarks: 'It is not just a historical coincidence that Hamlet and Faustus were both alumni of Martin Luther's university, Wittenberg; in other words, their consciences had been disciplined within the *feste Burg* of Protestantism'.⁷ Clifford Davidson has argued convincingly for the thesis that Marlowe is, throughout the play, dramatising Lutheran doctrine. He begins his article as follows:

Although the man behind the Faustus myth is said to have lived at Wittenberg where he was known to Philip Melanchthon, the Wittenberg location for Christopher Marlowe's dramatization seems to mean more upon examination than one would at first expect. Wittenberg is of course known by everyone as the university town where Martin Luther and Melanchthon, leaders of the Evangelical Reformation, lived during the sixteenth century. It is therefore of immediate interest that the Chorus which speaks the prologue to *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus* makes Dr Faustus not only a recipient of a doctor's degree

⁷ Harry Levin, *The Overreacher: a study of Christopher Marlowe* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), 132.

from the University of Wittenberg but also, like the Reformers, a teacher there. Thus Faustus is directly associated with an intellectual milieu which definitely must have meant something to Marlowe and to at least the more intelligent viewers of the play as it was produced during the sixteenth century.⁸

This is all well and good. The man behind the Faust myth did indeed live (at some point) in Wittenberg, but there is also reliable evidence which places him, at various points in his life, in towns as diverse as Gelnhausen, Kreuznach, Erfurt, Bamberg, Ingolstadt, Nuremberg, and Freilburg, and it is 'quite probable that Heidelberg was his alma mater'.⁹

While it is certainly not my intention to question in any way the accuracy of this Faustus/Luther (Wittenberg) association, it does seem to be a point worth noting that while Marlowe's Faustus may indeed share a common academic background with the Reformers, examination of Luther's comments in the *Tischreden* demonstrates that the association is not as clear-cut as Davidson perhaps implies:

Much has been said of Faustus, who called the devil his brother-in-law and let himself be heard from. If I, Martin Luther, had done no more than extend my hand to him, he would have destroyed me. But I would not have wanted to shy away from him. I would have stretched out my hand to him in the name of the Lord, God being my protector, for I believe that many poisons were prepared to harm me.¹⁰

⁸ Clifford Davidson, "Dr Faustus of Wittenberg," *Studies in Philology* 59 (1962): 132.

⁹ William Empson, *Faustus and the Censor: The English Faust-book and Marlowe's Dr Faustus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 6.

¹⁰ Luther, Martin, "Incredible Tales of Sorcery and Magic Between June 18 and July 28, 1537," in *Martin Luther: Complete Works*, ed. and trans. T. G.

The key notions of Marlowe's drama then can be traced further back than the German and English Faust books, but their origins are to be found less in the life of Faust¹¹ than in Luther's writings on the subject. Melanchthon, who is known to have come into contact with Faust, and is cited by Empson as being responsible for the propagation of the subsequent legend, shares Luther's opinion. Indeed, Empson points out that Faust found his warmest welcome in the Catholic middle classes of Germany. Moreover, not only did the historical Faust never actively associate himself with Reformation theology, but Marlowe (or his collaborator)¹² inverts the relationship between Luther and Faust by making them stand theologically side by side in their shared anti-papal prejudice.

Tappert, vol. 54, 'Table Talk' (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 241.

¹¹ It would appear from letters and chronicles dating from 1507 to 1540 that a notorious dealer in the black arts, named Faust, lived in Germany between 1480 and 1540. Soon manuscript collections of Faustian deeds appeared in the universities and such manuscripts were the source of the first 'Faustbuch' which was compiled by a Lutheran divine and printed in 1587. A great success (eighteen editions in ten years), it was translated into French, Dutch and English (printed by Thomas Orwin and translated by 'P.F. Gent', this is the text now known as the *English Faust Book*).

¹² There is, of course, extensive critical debate surrounding the authorship of many of the comic scenes of the play. Kocher credits Thomas Nashe with the prose scenes. P.H. Kocher, "Nashe's Authorship of the Prose Scenes in *Faustus*," *Modern Languages Quarterly* 3 (1942): 17-40., while Greg is more tentative. W.W. Greg (ed.), *Marlowe's 'Dr Faustus' 1604-1616: Parallel Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1950). Tydeman and Thomas simply point out that: 'most scholars are now agreed that the scenes in Act III with the Pope and Saxon Bruno, which appear to have been suggested by a passage in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, are not by [Marlowe]'. V. Thomas and W. Tydeman (ed.), *Christopher Marlowe: The Plays and their Sources* (London: Routledge, 1994), 171.

What we have here then is - as in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* - a deliberate yet nonetheless problematic use of an obviously 'Protestant' location. It is clear from the outset that the idea of place is significant for this play as the Wittenberg setting is unequivocally established even before we set eyes upon the tragic hero. It does not take long, however, for the text's other 'location' to surface, and when it does it casts a vast and profound shadow over the remainder of the play:

FAUSTUS: Where are you damned?

MEPHOSTOPHILIS: In hell.

FAUSTUS: How comes it then that thou art
out of hell?

MEPHOSTOPHILIS: Why, this is hell, nor am
I out of it ...

(I, iii, 73-6).

Various literary representations of hell will be considered in the following Section, but for now let us confine ourselves to the question of why it should be that the idea of hell holds such 'appeal' for dramatists like Marlowe, Webster and Shakespeare. Arthos points out the lack of 'particulars' which tend to typify such descriptions and prevent us from forming any kind of detailed image:

Even in *Hamlet* when we are led to picture a place beyond the reach of the living, the drift of what we are told keeps us from imagining the particulars of Hell or Purgatory. In the pain the dead are said to suffer we recognise the same pain living persons know, and this in itself is enough to provoke the thought of lasting punishment since pain by its very character carries the threat of the interminable. But what it is that would be punishing, and how it would be functioning as punishment, we cannot know even when we are told divinity has arranged a system of rewards and penalties.¹³

¹³ John Arthos, *Shakespeare's Use of Dream and Vision* (London: Bowes &

This is clearly true and yet it does not explain why much Renaissance tragedy seems to gravitate in this direction. I would suggest that it is connected at least in some way to the fact that the vocabulary and imagery of traditional notions of hell lends itself far more readily to Renaissance micro/macrocosmic shifts than does that of salvation or heaven, and part of the explanation for this is surely to be found in the fact that the two primary concerns in such a context are time and space, and it is essential to many visions of damnation that they are oppositional. This is to say that many conventional ideas of hell are constructed as ultimately confining in spatial terms, yet infinitely expansive in temporal terms, meaning that the damned are denied the possibility of escape, and that they are sentenced to remain there, suffering in torment, for eternity.¹⁴ This requirement of spatial confinement and temporal expansiveness holds a natural appeal for late Renaissance drama for it is patently open to appropriation by a cultural milieu which is fascinated - if not obsessed - by the idea of micro/macrocosmic representations. Contrast with this conventional notions of heaven in which this type of tension is simply not present; there may well be a rhetoric of eternity at work but it is certainly not cheek by jowl with a sense of claustrophobic entrapment (or for that matter, confinement in any sense) for why should those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life wish to abandon an eternity of blessedness? For Dante's vision of hell, on the other hand, (whose influence extended well beyond the Middle Ages) this idea of confinement is absolutely central and its

Bowes, 1977), 137-8.

¹⁴ Although the eternal nature of the punishments of hell is not by any means characteristic of all versions, it is certainly common to the vast majority. Origen maintained that no-one (even devils) would be condemned to suffer eternally, but his doctrine was denounced in the sixth century by the Second Council of Constantinople. The construction of hell in Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, however, clearly involves eternity: 'Oh, no end is limited to damned souls.' (V, ii, 183).

importance is powerfully underscored by the progressive pattern of graduated entombment that we find in the carefully structured concentric rings. For Dante, hell is described as a geographical location, but Marlowe, writing at the close of the sixteenth-century, is reluctant to wholeheartedly embrace such an approach:

FAUSTUS : First I will question with thee about hell.
 Tell me, where is the place that men call hell?
 MEPHOSTOPHILIS : Under the heavens.
 FAUSTUS : Ay, so are all things else; but whereabouts?
 MEPHOSTOPHILIS : Within the bowels of these elements,
 Where we are tortured and remain forever.
 Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
 In one self place. But where we are is hell,
 And where hell is there must we ever be.
 And to be short, when all the world dissolves
 And every creature shall be purified,
 All places shall be hell that is not heaven.
 (I, v, 118-29)

This section of text has received more than its fair share of critical attention, but few commentators seem willing to acknowledge the extent to which the dismissal of hell as location is undermined by its own rhetoric. The first and most obvious problem is the rather curious phrase with which Mephostophilis prefigures his description of the 'whereabouts' of hell. For any dramatist intent upon advancing the concept of an unlimited and infinitely expansive hell, the phrase 'within the bowels of ...' would appear to be the least appropriate starting point imaginable. Mephostophilis continues with his definition of a supposedly internalised hell which seems to pivot precariously upon the phrase 'one self place'. This in itself is an intriguing, ambiguous, and potentially fruitful term and yet it is never developed in any real detail at any point in the proceeding text. Indeed, having opened a dramatic can of worms which he is clearly incapable of closing again, Marlowe immediately initiates a process of back-peddalling and begins to draw the explanation to a

somewhat premature conclusion: 'And to be short ... All places shall be hell that is not heaven.'. Once again, the text appears here to be undercutting itself from within, for if 'hell as location' is being discarded as redundant then the choice of the word 'places' is unfortunate to say the least. Moreover, there are, it would seem, some kind of limits - geographical or otherwise (although the drawbacks of the term 'places' now become apparent) - which restrict this hell, for there is in fact something which it is incapable of encompassing; 'heaven', and where heaven begins hell must necessarily end. The devil's answer therefore is clearly no answer at all, and while it is obviously possible to argue that this is precisely the point (Compare Faustus' later: 'Well, I am answered' (II, i, 69)) it is not, in this case, Faustus whom Marlowe is swindling; it is ourselves. The dramatist may have Faustus blatantly change the subject a few lines later: 'But leave this, let me have a wife', but the issue has merely been gestured towards, never comprehensively dealt with, and this remains the case until - and indeed throughout - the admittedly impressive closing soliloquy. There is a sense therefore in which critics such as Marjorie Garber have had the wool pulled over their eyes when issuing such confident declarations as: 'the man who sought to transcend limits finds himself forever enclosed by a hell that has none'.¹⁵ Statements such as these have become a commonplace of Marlovian criticism and yet the dialogue of *Dr Faustus* does not at any point address this issue in anything other than superficial terms, and the explanation for this is, I would suggest, to be found in the profoundly inadequate development of the concept of self. The three sections of text which are most frequently pointed to by critics intent on celebrating Marlowe's 'hell within' are Mephostophilis' two 'answers' in the first act and

¹⁵ Marjorie Garber, "'Infinite Riches in a Little Room": Closure and Enclosure in Marlowe," in *Two Renaissance Mythmakers: Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson*, ed. Alvin Kernan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 12.

the tragic hero's closing soliloquy in the last, but in all three instances the dialogue is shot through with a vocabulary which clearly and unequivocally supports the simplistic and distinct notions of body and soul.

Despite this Garber is clearly on the right track, for Faustus is undoubtedly a man condemned both by limits and his own consistent desire to transcend them (or at the very least continually defer their impingement upon him). This dynamic is the driving force for both character and plot but the most significant limit which shapes the text as a whole is more mundane than the question of 'self' and more secular than the issue of hell, for as the opening soliloquy is at pains to point out, Faustus is a man, not a deity, and is as such bound on every level by his own humanity. Garber herself acknowledges this but I do, nonetheless, have reservations regarding her parting shot, for she chooses to conclude what has been at times a highly perceptive essay by painting a picture which shows Marlowe as the all-powerful dramatist with the last laugh:

Behind the Icaruses and the Phaetons who dominate his drama ... looms the Daedalian figure of the dramatist ... For as Marlowe encloses, he discloses; as he cages and entraps his characters, so he opens up meaning to his audience.¹⁶

This may be correct when taken in isolation but it is still only half the picture for Garber is so intent upon looking through one end of the telescope that she ignores the option of inverting it. If the dramatist does have the last laugh it is not by entrapping his characters and thereby opening meaning to us, it is by deceiving his readers - and critics - into believing that he has supplied

¹⁶ Garber, 21.

something which is clearly absent from the text. Marlowe does not 'open meaning' to us in any real sense; what he does is throw us a few scraps and gloss over the fact that the real meat of the argument is missing. Garber and critics like her fill in Marlowe's blanks from their twentieth-century perspective and then praise the dramatist in the highest terms for allowing them the privilege of doing so. It may well be the case that Marlowe imposes limits upon his characters, but he is himself equally limited by his own inability to develop an effective or even adequate replacement for that which he dismisses as excessively simplistic. Hell, he makes clear to us, is not a static location, but the rhetoric of self which could facilitate the replacement of this concept by allowing for the advancement of a truly internalised 'hell within', is never developed by his text. Addressing the issue of individuality in both the Faust myth and Marlowe's re-working of it, Ian Watt writes:

Logically, the idea that the soul is an independent entity contradicts the central assumption of individualism; the derivation of the word means >>that which cannot be further divided.<< Faustus is damned because he really did not believe that the unalterable terms of the human condition included the presence of an invisible stranger within the self, the immortal soul ... Marlowe's play thus affirms, as Locke was later to imply, that the full autonomy of the individual cannot coexist with the possibility of eternal damnation.¹⁷

There may well be something of value here but this kind of comment is unfortunately both simplistic and vague, for Watt is availing himself of the benefits of a highly developed rhetoric of 'self' (which was not available to Marlowe) and not simply assimilating it into his own criticism, but actively

¹⁷ Ian Watt, "Faust as a Myth of Modern Individualism," in *Faust through Four Centuries*, eds. Peter Boerner and Sydney Johnson (Tubingen: Max Niemeyer, 1989), 49.

contriving to make it central to Marlowe's text. Watt's comments therefore pose larger - and more complex - questions than they are able to provide answers for. What, for example, is the nature of this 'self' that Watt so readily posits as the location of 'the immortal soul'?, and perhaps more importantly, what is its relationship to what he terms 'the full autonomous individual'? While Marlowe, who is writing as a dramatist in the 1590s, may well have valid historical and literary justification for glossing over the questions of 'self' which his text raises, the same latitude cannot be afforded Watt as a critic of the twentieth-century.

If we concur therefore with Garber's stance that Marlowe, in enclosing his characters, opens meaning to us, we perhaps give him more credit than he deserves. What Marlowe's text does achieve is a highlighting of the questions which inevitably attach themselves to the issue of damnation, what it does not provide is a solution for these problems. In the next Section we shall see how Milton's *Paradise Lost* can be read as completing what Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* can only begin, by linking a more fully developed concept of selfhood to the rhetoric of an infinite and interiorised hell. In these terms then, Marlowe's greatest achievement is that he opens wide the gates of possibility for a later - and greater - writer to do what he could not. Part of the title of Professor Garber's essay reads: 'Closure and Enclosure in Marlowe'. Were I to write a response it would be entitled: 'Closure and Self-Enclosure in Milton', for (as we shall see in Section Three) what Marlowe, and as a consequence Garber, omit is, in effect, the key to the whole issue. In binding his tragic hero to the restrictive rhetoric of body/soul the dramatist effectively prevents his character not simply from transcending his boundaries, but more importantly from even approaching them. Writing in a different context Alexander Leggatt states: 'Art, like love, is a limited and special vision; but like love it

has by its very limits a transforming power'.¹⁸ *Dr Faustus*, of course, is primarily concerned neither with love nor art, but what is relevant about Leggatt's statement is the explicit acknowledgement of the transformative potential inherent within any sense of limits, and this is precisely what Milton will seize upon and develop to such effect in *Paradise Lost*. *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus* resolutely refuses to abandon the notion of an eternal soul housed within a temporally limited body, and Faustus himself, while happy in the early acts of the play to posit the concept of 'hell as fable' is profoundly unable or perhaps unwilling to fully embrace an Epicurean system of belief which strenuously denies the validity of any post-death existence for the human soul. The tragic hero therefore embarks upon what is, to use Watt's term 'a twenty-four-year postdoctoral sabbatical',¹⁹ but it is ultimately a voyage entirely without discovery for his now damned soul has become the troublesome hand-luggage; 'the dark care which will not quit ... and rides behind the horseman.'²⁰

The destination of Faustus' journey is ultimately hell but the gateway to damnation must necessarily be his Wittenberg study, for just as he embarked upon and concluded his twenty-four years of meaningless freedom as a man (rather than a deity), so the location too must underscore the circular futility of his travels. Wittenberg, however, is not the only location

¹⁸ Alexander Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love* (London: Methuen, 1974), 115.

¹⁹ Watt in Boerner and Johnson (eds.), 49.

²⁰ Horace, *Odes* III, i, lines 34-6. '... sed Timor et Minae / scandunt eodem quo dominus, neque/decedit aerata triremi et/post equitem sedet atra Cura.'. Conington translates this - perhaps too loosely - as: '... but fierce Alarm / Can clamber to the master's side: / Black Cares can up the galley swarm, / And close behind the horseman ride.' John Conington, *The Odes and Carmen Sæcularae of Horace*, 7th ed. (London: George Bell & Sons, 1877), 64.

aspiration for escape into salvation ("rise, rise againe ... That Faustus may repent, and saue his soule").²¹

while Garber makes essentially the same point in terms of the transcendent aspirations of Faustus' language:

In Faustus' despairing cry, "O I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?" (5.2.138), we can count not ten but eleven syllables; at the very moment that he aspires most fervently to escape damnation, his language aspires to escape the formal strictures of the verse.²²

This is undoubtedly true, and it is interesting to note the similarities between Marlowe's linguistic technique here and that adopted by metaphysicals such as Donne who uses enjambment in his religious poetry to overcome the strait-jacket rigidity of the sonnet form. Susan E Linville writes (in terms strikingly similar to those utilised by Garber) of the Donnean 'expansion into the infinite' in Holy Sonnet 7 ('At the round earth's imagined corners'): '[Donne] moves from a line as short as "From death, you numberless infinities," to the expansive list that constitutes lines six and seven ... Near annihilation of the normal metric pattern becomes a stunning metaphor for what is beyond number, measure, or time.'²³

At the round earth's imagined corners, blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go,
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,

²¹ Johannes H. Birringer, *Marlowe's Dr Faustus and Tamburlaine: Theological and Theatrical Perspectives* (Frankfurt: Verlag Peter Lang, 1984), 208.

²² Garber, 20.

²³ Susan E. Linville, "Enjambment and the Dialectics of Line Form in Donne's *Holy Sonnets*," *Style* 18.1 (Winter 1984): 80.

All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
 Despair, law, chance, hath slain, and you whose eyes,
 Shall behold God, and never taste death's woe.

Impressively expansive this may be, but Linville has surely overplayed her hand when she goes on to speak of the 'vast upheaval and apocalyptic boundary shattering of the octave', for the poetry undoubtedly lacks what we now recognise as the vastness of the Miltonic vision. What Linville has apparently neglected is the fact that lists - no matter how metrically boundless - are always in one sense reductive, for they carry an inherent tendency towards categorisation. And this is precisely why we are never truly in any danger of being overwhelmed by the unimaginable ('numberless infinities'), for they are neatly pigeon-holed in the subsequent lists of the octave's final lines. The move towards the 'quieter more contemplative mode' of the sestet has in fact begun long before line nine, and the profoundly personal (indeed almost intimate) sense that emanates from the final line of the sonnet is the culmination of a movement from abstract to concrete which began in line four with the shift from 'souls' to 'bodies'. However, despite these similarities of rhetorical technique, it is to the differences that we should, for the purposes of this Section, attend, for unlike Donne's speaker, Faustus is, in this speech, simultaneously in time and out of it, just as Mephostophilis is neither in hell nor out of it. Placed against the spiritual backdrop of eternal damnation Faustus is unable to transcend the temporal limitations not only of his original pact with the devil (now twenty-four years in the past), but also of its consequences which will continue indefinitely into the future. His closing speech therefore situates him firmly at the centre of a temporal continuum from which the possibility of escape is non-existent, and the more Faustus' rhetoric attempts to free itself from these confines, the more it calls attention to its own inability to do so. Some boundaries cannot be crossed because they can never be reached: 'O, no end is limited to damned souls!'. In one of his

Sermons, Donne refers to 'the whole compasse of time - past, present and future' (VII, 53)²⁴, a phrase which would surely be at home in any description of this soliloquy. Reaching back almost one thousand six hundred years to encompass Christ's sacrificial blood (line 157),²⁵ while extending indefinitely forward into a future without end, the formal internal structure of these lines weaves a complex pattern of criss-crossing, self-undercutting contradictions. Just as each 'naming of Christ' is balanced by a plea to Lucifer, each promise of repentance is undermined by a prayer to the devil, and each reference to immediate and impending death finds its corollary in the horror of eternal damnation. In the midst of such antithetical rhetoric and contradictory phrasing, it is difficult to discern and isolate any dominant trend or pattern in the soliloquy as a whole, and yet there is, I believe, a basic underlying structural principle upon which the speech is grounded, and it is this, as much as the lurching and oppositional rhetoric, which allows it to function so effectively.

Despite Birringer's 'swelling rhetoric' one of the main organisational features running through the soliloquy is the striking clock which cleverly allows time to 'contract' for there is less dialogue in the second half of the speech than there is in the first, yet both supposedly represent the passing of thirty minutes. This contracting of time is combined with a striving on

²⁴ Quotations from Donne's Sermons are from *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R Potter and Evelyn M Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962).

²⁵ It is also interesting to note here the spatializing element in this section of the soliloquy where the image of Christ's sacrificial blood serves both a temporal function, reaching back almost one thousand six hundred years, and a spatial one: 'stream[ing] in the firmament'.

Faustus' part towards an expanding spatial context in terms of both body and - more importantly - soul:

... Then will I run headlong into the earth.
 Earth, gape! Oh no, it will not harbour me ...
 Now draw up Faustus like a foggy mist
 Into the entrails of yon labouring cloud, ...
 Now body turn to air, ...
 Oh soul, be changed into little water drops
 And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found.
 (V, ii, 165-6, 169-70, 193, 195-6).²⁶

Not only is this overarching pattern of spatial expansion coupled with temporal contraction precisely the opposite of what we assume awaits him on the other side of the secular boundary that is death,²⁷ but it is also at least partly responsible for leading some commentators to place the tragic hero of the closing soliloquy *already* within an interiorised hell: '[T]here is no visible threat,' writes Joel B. Altman 'but Faustus is clearly enclosed in the hell of his own mind'.²⁸

²⁶ Prieto-Pablos attributes Faustus' use of third-person formulas when referring to himself in this speech to his defencelessness: 'The sense of inferiority that derives from Faustus's defencelessness is illustrated in other third-person formulas in which the diminishing qualifier may be assumed to be implicit. This occurs in situations in which Faustus's role is reduced to what other participants may be willing to do to/with him, especially in V.ii, when he must beg to be saved from death'. Faustus is, in fact, not begging to be saved 'from death', but rather from damnation, but the point regarding third-person constructions still stands. Juan A. Prieto-Pablos, "'What art thou Faustus?' Self-Reference and Strategies of Identification in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*," *English Studies* 74.1 (1993): 76.

²⁷ For the moment at least, I am taking Faustus' 'death' to mean the moment at which he is carried 'quick to hell' by the devils, although the significance of this is something to which I will return.

²⁸ Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 386, quoted in J. T. McNeely, "The Integrated Design of *Dr Faustus*: An Essay in Iconoclasm," *Cahiers Elisabethains* 41 (1992):

This is interesting and yet to me, it begs a fundamental question, for is the point of Mephostophilis' First Act dialogue with Faustus not that since hell is an interiorised and subjective concept,²⁹ the external observer cannot possibly ever know with any real certainty whether an individual - other than himself - is, or is not, truly damned? When Mephostophilis appears on stage in Faustus' study we simply assume that because he is a devil, he is damned, and accept his presence when it is explained by the concept of a 'hell within', but the central point is that Faustus cannot tell simply by looking. What Marlowe cleverly does is to extend Mephostophilis' concept of an 'interiorised hell' (from the First Act) by making it applicable to Faustus in his final speech before he is actually damned, i.e. before the secular boundary which is death following his twenty-four years of freedom. However, because it is prior to death, the overarching pattern is that of a mirror image (in temporal and spatial terms) of conventional notions of hell.

Marlowe takes the temporo-spatial oppositions inherent to many conventional visions of hell and maps it back onto Faustus before his body and soul have been formally claimed by Lucifer. And so, as we have already noted, the final soliloquy displays an awareness of a contracting temporal context coupled with an expanding spatial one, which is, of course,

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²⁹ I am taking subjective/subjectivity simply to denote a character's perception of 'reality', which may, or may not, correspond to 'reality' independent of that perception. (It is unnecessary to concern ourselves here with views such as Berkeley's which actively erode the distinction between the two). Olson invests subjectivity with a 'reflexive property': ... it is the recognition of one's own and others' mental states as mental states'. For my purpose, however, it is sufficient simply to think of it - as Olson does in a later formulation - as 'tied ... to consciousness of mind'. David R. Olson, *The World on Paper: The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writing and Reading* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 234.

oppositional to most conventional depictions of hell. It is this inverted temporo-spatial rhetoric of damnation with its micro/macrocosmic shift which leads critics such as Altman to confidently declare that Faustus is already in 'the hell of his own mind' which is surely another way of saying 'damned'. This is all well and good, but the question must surely be, in a text which is at such pains to demonstrate the unreliability of appearance as an indicator of infernal identity, can we really accept Faustus' words and actions alone as proof of his damnation? I would suggest that the answer must be 'no', for if Faustus cannot tell that Mephostophilis is in hell simply by looking (or listening) in the First Act, then there is no reason why Altman or any other critic should be able to confirm that Faustus is, simply by looking or listening to him in the Final Act. As Bauckham³⁰ has pointed out, from the Medieval mystery plays onwards, theatricality and the ability to alter outward appearance has been associated with Satan and Antichrist, and this notion is firmly underscored by Marlowe's Mephostophilis when he is first summoned by Faustus:

I charge thee to return and change thy shape.
 Thou art too ugly to attend on me.
 Go, and return an old Franciscan friar:
 That holy shape becomes a devil best.
 (I, iii, 23-6)

³⁰ Richard Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse* (Abingdon: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1978), 105. On the psychology of Mephostophilis' First Act dealings with Faustus, Puhvel states: 'Reading his intended victim like a book, he intends, it would seem, to heighten the stirrings of megalomania in Faustus and inflate his ego by giving him the opportunity to feel superior to 'great Mephostophilis'. And the hubristic scholar falls into this trap ... '. Martin Puhvel, "Mephostophilis's Manipulation of Faustus," *English Studies* 71.1 (1990): 2. The idea of theatricality as it is linked with Satan/Antichrist is something to which we will return in Section Three.

As in Foxe's *Christus Triumphans*, (to which we will return in Section Three) the ability to manipulate external appearance is part and parcel of devilish guile, but in a very real sense the guile belongs here to Marlowe, for in investing Faustus' closing soliloquy with a vocabulary and rhetoric which leads us to consider the possibility that he may already be in a 'hell within' he subtly underlines once again, in the finest and most powerful speech of the whole text, the notion that an entirely interiorised context may indeed be possible. The fact that the existence of such a context cannot ever be 'objectively' disproved is exploited fully by Marlowe, and when commentators cite the absence of stage props as further evidence of the tragic hero's hellish imprisonment they are merely repeating that tragic hero's own folly from the initial encounter with Mephostophilis, taking externals to be indicative of inner states.

In one sense Marlowe has, throughout the play, hedged his bets with regard to hell, never actually denying the existence of a geographical hell while simultaneously positing the notion of a 'hell within'. Indeed, as we have already seen, the interiorised hell is, at times, couched in the inverted rhetoric of more conventional and traditional notions of damnation. However, in the midst of this uncertainty over hell, self, and interiority, there remains one absolute, the presence (or otherwise) of which is not open to manipulation, and that is the body.

'Everyone knows that there are no real bodies in literature' states Leslie A. Adelson, before going on to appropriate the rhetoric of these absent entities for a feminist critique of 'contemporary' West German prose:

The fact that human bodies in literature are not concrete but "mere" images is, however, more problematic than the

realization that a chair, a weapon, or a torrential downpour is not real or even referential. For any notion of a subjective agent in history is necessarily housed in images of the human body, and these images are in turn intrinsically related to concepts of subjectivity. If we think this body away from the literary text, all other images are rendered meaningless. Biases thus reveal themselves in terms considered highly suspect in poststructuralist circles: subjective agents, history, meaning. To these terms accrue no permanently or metaphysically fixed identity or authority.³¹

Adelson cites Elaine Scarry's introduction to *Literature and the Body* in which the latter states 'the human body is at the present moment a special site of attention and concern'³² and it was surely no less so in the Renaissance period. Marlowe's text clings emphatically to the idea of a body/soul dichotomy from start to finish and this re-invests the tragic hero's death with a liminary quality which the foregrounded notion of an immortal soul suffering in hell for eternity had undermined.

The First Act leaves us in little doubt that it is Faustus' soul which Lucifer seeks:

MEPHOSTOPHILIS. ... when we hear
 one rack the name of God,
Abjure the scriptures and his saviour Christ,
We fly in hope to get his glorious soul ...

But tell me, Faustus, shall I have thy soul?
And I will be thy slave and wait on thee,
And give thee more than thou hast wit to ask.
FAUSTUS Ay, Mephostophilis, I'll give it

³¹ Leslie A. Adelson, *Making Bodies, Making History: Feminism and German Identity* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 2.

³² Elaine Scarry (ed.), *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), xx. Quoted in Adelson, 131.

thee.

MEPHOSTOPHILIS Then, Faustus, stab thy
arm courageously,
And bind thy soul ...

FAUSTUS Lo, Mephostophilis, for love of
thee
I cut mine arm, and with my proper blood
Assume my soul to be great Lucifer`s ...
Why streams it not that I may write afresh?
`Faustus gives to thee his soul`: ah, there it
stayed!
Why shouldst thou not? Is not thy soul thine
own?
Then write again: `Faustus gives to thee his
soul` ...

MEPHOSTOPHILIS Oh what will not I do to
obtain his soul!
(I, iii, 47-9, v, 45-50, 53-5, 65-8, 72)

and yet when Faustus signs the pact with his own blood the phrase `body and soul` is repeated three times:

Here, Mephostophilis, receive this scroll,
A deed of gift, of *body and of soul*: ...

I, John Faustus of Wittenberg Doctor, by these presents, do give both *body and soul* to Lucifer, Prince of the East, and his minister Mephostophilis, and furthermore grant unto them that four and twenty years being expired, and these articles above written being inviolate, full power to fetch or carry the said John Faustus, *body and soul*, flesh, blood or goods, into their habitation wheresoever.

(I, v, 88-9, 104-13).
Italics added.

It is clearly this which is being picked up on in line 192-3 of the closing soliloquy: `Now body turn to air, / or Lucifer will bear thee quick to hell`. Both the conventions of the genre and the religious climate of the period demand that the tragic hero is seen to `die` at the play`s conclusion. The physical act of Faustus being carried bodily from the stage by the devils is

obviously designed to fulfil such requirements, but it also points up a fundamental contradiction within the text, for Faustus' concern over his body being carried 'quick to hell' (V, ii, 193-4) is surely at odds with the scene which greets the Scholars in the cold light of day:

SECOND SCHOLAR Oh help us, heaven!
See, here are Faustus' limbs,
All torn asunder by the hand of death.

THIRD SCHOLAR The devils whom Faustus
 served have torn him thus:
For twixt the hours of twelve and one,
 methought
I heard him shriek and call aloud for help,
At which self time the house seemed all on fire
With dreadful horror of these damned fiends.

(V, iii, 6-12)

The stage directions indicate that the devils 'exeunt with him' and this is certainly in keeping with the terms of the contract which gives Lucifer and Mephostophilis 'full power to fetch or carry the said John Faustus, body and soul, flesh, blood or goods into their habitation wheresoever'. Where then do the 'mangled limbs' - to which the Scholars intend to give 'due burial' - come from, and what are their implications for the play's construction of an interiorised hell? I would suggest that they turn it once again into a problematic issue. Faustus' fear of being carried 'quick to hell' would seem to support the theory that it is possible to be simultaneously mortal and damned. Indeed this is precisely what critics such as Altman suggest when they place Faustus in the 'hell of his own mind' during his closing soliloquy. It has already been made clear to us that Lucifer is interested only in Faustus' soul (and not body), so why should it be necessary to scatter the stage with mangled limbs at the play's conclusion? The pact which has been signed by Faustus neatly side-steps the 'particulars of hell' by stating that Faustus is to be carried to the devil's 'habitation wheresoever'; but the fact remains that if

Faustus is to be carried there (whether dead or alive) then whatever else it may be, it is not a purely interiorised context.

The fact is that whether critics such as Garber like it or not, the text of Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* is unable to dismiss entirely the traditional idea of hell as a geographical location, because it is unable to offer a fully realised and viable alternative. The terms of Faustus' contract grant Lucifer the tragic hero's soul, but make no mention of actually killing him. And yet Faustus not only dies, he does so - we are led to believe - in the most spectacular of circumstances. In so doing, however, he radically undermines the play's construction of a fully realised 'hell within', for if he were truly damned in his final speech, his death would not have been necessary. In the end, the text seems to suggest - intentionally or otherwise - that it is in fact not possible to be simultaneously mortal and damned. The significance of death as an important boundary is thereby underlined, for we can see - just as we will when we come to look at *Hamlet* - that death emerges as the limiting factor on a purely internalised and interiorised context. Intentionally or otherwise, this play closes on a note which re-establishes (in spite of its focus upon Faustus' immortal and eternally damned soul) death as a definitive secular limit. The mangled limbs which scatter the stage underline this firstly by re-emphasising the physical and temporally finite body, and secondly by sending us back to the play's opening scene in which Faustus' mortality and humanity are underlined time and again:

Yet art thou still but Faustus and a man.
 Couldst thou make men to live eternally,
 Or being dead, raise them to life again,
 Then this profession were to be esteemed.
 ... Emperors and kings
 Are but obeyed in their several provinces.
 Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds.
 But his dominion that exceeds in this

Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man:
 A sound magician is a demi-god.
 Here, tire my brains to gain a deity.
 (I, i, 23-6, 56-62).

Mephostophilis' nebulous definition of an interiorised hell is designed to privilege subjectivity, to link hell intrinsically with 'self' and turn it into an interiorised and internalised state of mind: 'In one self place is hell'. And yet this idea of self cannot be explored by Marlowe's text because it is tied, partly by the constraints of the genre, to the vocabulary of a body/soul dichotomy. Faustus must not only be damned, he must be seen to be damned in order that the Chorus can deliver its moralising epilogue and the requirements of the genre of tragedy are fulfilled. The only means of achieving this is by recourse to externalised, outward appearance, i.e. the physical body. And yet the *raison d'être* of Mephostophilis' words regarding the 'whereabouts' of hell is to illustrate the fact that outward appearance and damnation are not necessarily related. This is why the dialogue of the play appears, at times, to be at odds with itself, unable to completely dismiss the significance of the mortal body or the idea of hell as a geographical location, but simultaneously attempting to propose a theory of damnation based upon interiority.

In the end Marlowe finds himself in an impossible situation, for his text must demonstrate and 'prove' the viability of a theory whose success is, by definition, unverifiable in externalised terms. The text struggles throughout to somehow make Mephostophilis' interiorised hell applicable to a living Faustus, but his eventual death, which is, ironically, required as 'proof' of this damnation, only serves to leave us with the impression that in order to be truly in hell, one must first be dead. Faustus' 'hell within' can never be fully realised while he is alive, and so the interiorised context is, in the final analysis, limited by death.

II.ii): 'Let me question more in particular...'

Discussing the means by which an 'impression of interiority' is produced in the tragedy of the period, Catherine Belsey finds the answer mainly in the formal development of the soliloquy:

As the literal drama discards allegory and morality personifications give way to social types, concrete individuals, the moral conflicts externalised in the moralities are internalised in the soliloquy and thus understood to be confined within the mind of the protagonist. The struggle between good and evil shifts its centre from the macrocosm to the microcosm.³³

This is undoubtedly true on one level, and yet the point is perhaps overplayed slightly; the internalised conflict which Belsey describes so convincingly within the minds of Faustus, Macbeth, The Duchess of Malfi, and so many other Renaissance tragic protagonists is surely not a replacement for, but a reflection of, macrocosmic disorder or instability. It is for the very reason that the formal soliloquy is by necessity an interiorizing device, that we can so easily lose sight of the wider context in which it exists and on which it draws for its intensity of dramatic power. The micro/macro, interior/exterior boundaries of such speeches are marked precisely by their fluidity, an effect Belsey goes on to touch upon in her use of the term 'internalised

³³ Belsey, 43. Compare John Boni's similar, yet distinct stance here: '... [the Good and Bad Angels] resemble the *psychomachia*, that medieval depiction of the soul in conflict ... To show Faustus approaching the decision to conjure, Marlowe employs soliloquy. To represent the internal conflict, Marlowe employs externalised embodiments of Faustus' mental debate.' John Boni, "From Medieval to Renaissance: Paradigm Shifts and Artistic Problems in English Renaissance Drama," *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association*. 3 (Jan. 1982): 52.

psychomachia', but we can see that a formulation which has 'the struggle between good and evil shift[ing] its centre from the macrocosm to the microcosm' is only partly true, for it is the complex interplay between the two which is responsible for the overall effectiveness, and Belsey's misleading absolutism regarding inner/outer, microcosm/macrocosm allows no room for the importance of this. David Young perhaps comes closer to the mark - at least in relation to Hamlet's soliloquies - when he contrasts their 'reflexive and concentrated quality' with the 'structural capaciousness' of *King Lear* by way of illustration of the range which Shakespearean tragedy is capable of encompassing:

...When Hamlet says, "What a piece of work is a man," by way of launching his thoughtful expression of ambivalence about his own species, he seems to articulate the feelings of Renaissance humanism, both its confidence and its doubt. But he speaks from within a curiously bounded setting, referring to the very theatre he stands in (frame, canopy, ornamented roof) and underlining the personal meaning of his comments: "And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me." The enlarged perspective reduces itself to a focus on this melancholy prince, an actor in a theatre who is about to learn of the arrival of some "players" and to say, "He that plays the king shall be welcome." The reflexive and concentrated quality of the moment is thrilling, but it is markedly different from the effect that comes our watching Lear in the storm saying of Poor Tom, "Is man no more than this?" or asking in the farmhouse, "Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" or, for that matter, our hearing Edgar tell his father that men must endure their going hence, even as their coming hither. These questions, rhetorical and otherwise, occur in dramatic contexts that expand, rather than contract, their implications. They are centrifugal in intention and effect, moving outward from the particulars of the dramatic action to a resonant representation of human experience in strongly generalized terms.³⁴

³⁴ David Young, *The Action to the Word: Structure and Style in Shakespearean Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 85-6.

Quite so, and yet it is perhaps necessary to delve a little deeper than this into the dynamics of certain key speeches in *Hamlet*, and to identify the qualities which make them not simply 'thrilling' and 'concentrated', but actively 'reflexive', for it is surely in this last term that their intensity lies. I intend to argue that two key moments of the play - the first of which is Hamlet's Second Act conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and the second the soliloquy of Act III, Scene i, 'To be, or not to be ...' - must be read in conjunction with each other, and that the resultant pattern of association which emerges from such a process draws firm and important links between death and the construction of 'self' and 'context' as they are represented throughout the text:

... What news?

ROSENCRANTZ None, my lord, but that the world's grown
honest.

HAMLET Then is doomsday near. But your news is not true.
Let me question more in particular. What have you, my good
friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune, that she sends you to
prison hither?

GUILDENSTERN Prison, my lord!

HAMLET Denmark's a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ Then is the world one.

HAMLET A goodly one; in which there are many confines,
wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one o' th' worst.

ROSENCRANTZ We think not so, my lord.

HAMLET Why, then, 'tis none to you; for there is nothing
either good or bad, but thinking makes it so. To me it is a
prison.

ROSENCRANTZ Why, then your ambition makes it one; 'tis
too narrow for your mind.

HAMLET O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count
myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad
dreams.

GUILDENSTERN Which dreams indeed are ambition; for
the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a
dream.

HAMLET A dream itself is but a shadow.

The first point of which we become aware is that this important section of dialogue begins with the seemingly superfluous phrase 'Then is doomsday near'. The speed with which the following conversation proceeds to other concerns: 'But your news is not true. Let me question more in particular ...' in combination with the immediate context (Hamlet's 'madness' has been stressed - lest we should have missed it - only a few lines earlier in Polonius' aside of II, ii, 204 'Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.') may lead us to dismiss this as an insignificant prelude to the key lines which follow, and yet this would be to miss an important point, for the eschatological reference serves to associate the subsequent dialogue with death and also with possible damnation, and as we shall see, both of these links are vital. The association of dreams with death in this speech will be picked up again and expanded upon in the soliloquy of Act III, Scene i, but the implicit link here with judgement and damnation is equally significant for it works in conjunction with the changes in perspective upon which Hamlet's speech relies for its impact and dramatic power. As in Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, the idea of an interiorised context ('I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space') is couched in the rhetoric of damnation with its oppositional requirement of temporal expansiveness and spatial confinement. It should be no surprise then to discover in Hamlet's speech a vocabulary of dungeons, prison, and inescapable entrapment, for this is associated with both the eschatological reference which begins this section of dialogue, and with the micro/macro perspectival shifts through which the idea of context - as it relates to existence and consciousness - is worked out. It is clearly to this idea of context that we must now turn.

due to our inherent fear of the unknown. This is not necessarily what the soliloquy focusses on, but if the 'dread of something after death' (line 70) is read in direct relation to the opening 'To be, or not to be' then a corresponding 'dread of nothing after death' is certainly implied. Running through the soliloquy as a whole then is a peripheral element of 'better the devil you know' for the lines can be read as asserting that while death may well be the gateway to a purely cerebral or intellectual existence, free from mortal pains and limitations, it could just as easily lead to the disappearance of consciousness and the absence of existence in any form whatsoever, in a word, nothingness.

James L. Calderwood's analysis of how a 'conceptual absence' is manifest in the play's rhetoric draws a contrast with the imprisoned Claudio's deliberations on death in *Measure for Measure*:

To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;
 This sensible warm motion to become
 A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
 To bathe in fiery floods or to reside
 In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
 To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,
 And blown with restless violence round about
 The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
 Of those that lawless and incertain thought
 Imagine howling - 'tis too horrible.

Measure for Measure. (III, i, 120-132).

Calderwood writes:

... in his famous speech to Isabella [Claudio] first says 'Ay, but to die, and go we know not where' and then graphically shows that he *does* know where ... Claudio's imagination is

well stocked with images of death. Hamlet's, on the other hand, is prodigal toward life.³⁶

This is a conveniently neat comparison, but is the point of Claudio's speech not that the 'images' with which it is so 'well stocked' represent - as they would for us all - possibilities and not certainties? It is the very fact that he does *not* know the accuracy of any one of them which both necessitates and drives the speech - a traditional case of the terror stricken imagination verbalising its most fearful and Cimmerian thoughts. The fact that death is, for Hamlet (and for that matter elsewhere in Shakespeare),³⁷ explicitly associated with a vocabulary of sleep is in many ways unsurprising, for sleep, in its capacity as a state of consciousness distinct from 'normal' (i.e. waking) awareness, is perhaps as close as it is possible to come to death short of actually experiencing the event itself. (I do not intend to go into the relatively modern phenomena of near-death experiences and trance-like states for they are irrelevant in this context). Later in the Section we shall see that in *King Lear* these two ideas are fused together to form the 'dreamscape of death' that is the interiorised map of Gloucester's Dover Cliff, but for now it is enough to note the way in which Hamlet's soliloquy establishes the basic analogy of sleep and death, but has, within the space of a few lines, shifted the emphasis away from 'sleep' and onto 'dreams': 'To die, to sleep- ... To die, to sleep; / To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub;'. The verse structure here

³⁶ James L. Calderwood, "Verbal Presence: Conceptual Absence," in *New Casebooks: Hamlet*, ed. Martin Coyle (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, 1992), 72.

³⁷ For example *A Midsummer Night's Dream* III, ii, 363-5: '... And from each other look thou lead them thus, / Till o'er their brows death-counterfeiting sleep / With leaden legs and batty wings doth creep.', *Macbeth* I, vi, 67-70: 'When in swinish sleep / Their drenched natures lie as in death, / What cannot you and I perform upon / Th' unguarded Duncan?'

supports this transfer by framing the phrase 'To sleep, perchance to dream.' in the same manner as the first two occurrences of 'To die, to sleep' (marked off by a strong medial caesura on one side and end-stopping punctuation on the other), and if there is still some residual doubt as to the significance of the dream, its importance is underlined by the immediately following 'Ay, there's the rub;'. The association of sleep and death will outlive the tragic hero and eventually resurface in Horatio's 'Good night sweet prince' delivered over the body of the now dead Hamlet, but what is interesting here is the way in which the rhetoric of the unknown which represents the potentially dark and fearful side of death is explicitly associated specifically with dreams: 'For in that sleep of death what dreams may come, / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, / Must give us pause.'

The bottom line then is that death may well solve the problems inherent within corporeal existence, but it is just as likely to represent the trading of one set of difficulties for another. 'To be, or not to be' can be read either as the deliberation of a tragic hero on the verge of suicide, or as a speculation as to what being (or not being) after death may (or may not) entail. Nicholas Brooke disagrees, however, arguing for the structure as 'the general shape of a disputation' and thereby concluding:

... we do not make the right comment by looking ahead [from the first line: 'To be, or not to be - that is the question;'] and finding that Hamlet speaks of whether there is a life after death, and say (with Samuel Johnson) that *that* is the question; or (with Malone) that Hamlet discusses suicide, and therefore that *that* is to be or not to be; or (with Dowden) that Hamlet discusses action, and so it is active revenge which is to be or not to be. All these things (after-life, suicide, action) are debated in the speech, all on the lines of the opening formula, and all have a bearing on Hamlet's dramatic affairs; but no one of them is immediately conveyed in the opening phrase,

any more than Hamlet's dramatic affairs are the *immediate* matter of debate.³⁸

Debate formula or no, the idea that we should not read the speech in context is patently dubious, and I extend this to encompass both individual lines and the soliloquy as a coherent whole. There is no valid reason why the rhetoric and imagery of the first line of any given soliloquy should not be picked up and expanded upon later in that same speech, or for that matter, why we should not be intentionally sent back to that initial line and encouraged to re-read and re-assess it in the light of what followed. If we did not allow ourselves this latitude we would be in danger of losing the essential element that we define as 'poetic' in so much Shakespearean drama. Wolfgang Clemen seems to realise this instinctively when he writes that: '... poetic drama, such as Shakespeare shapes it - with its rhythmic sequence of movement and halting suspense, of outer and inner drama - must give space to the monologue.'. But it is not only the delicate balance between microcosmic and macrocosmic conflict that Clemen highlights, for he goes on to astutely insist upon the primacy of what he chooses to term 'proper framework':

... The total effect of a soliloquy does not depend on the existence of certain conventions. It derives rather from the whole context in which various factors combine to produce a convincing effect ... The test is not the rational and psychological analysis to which scholars may submit the soliloquy afterwards, but the test must be the credibility of the soliloquy within its proper framework.³⁹

³⁸ Nicholas Brooke, *Shakespeare's Early Tragedies* (London: Methuen, 1968), 193.

³⁹ Wolfgang Clemen, "Shakespeare's Soliloquies," in *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art: Collected Essays* (London: Methuen, 1972), 149.

It seems to me that the most effective means of 'reading' soliloquies such as this one is to selectively adopt elements from both of these approaches. A certain amount of 'rational and psychological analysis' is essential to any detailed study of a Renaissance soliloquy - indeed it is perhaps the mark of a coherent soliloquy that it is able to stand up to such analysis - but if we can perform this task always with one eye upon 'proper framework', and actively assess the speech in terms of both its immediate and wider context then we will have bypassed the dangers inherent to reading it purely in terms of its 'conventions'. In this case the immediate context in which the soliloquy must be taken is its relation to Act II, Scene ii, for if the terrain of the 'undiscover'd country' is, put simply, too risky a crossing to undertake voluntarily then the only alternative means of escaping the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' is by recourse to one's own independently created and purely intellectual context; to escape the pains of physical absolutes by means of mental relativism. And this is precisely what the previously quoted conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern represents - an attempt to engender a purely cerebral and entirely abstracted context, one in which the physical necessarily plays second fiddle to the intellectual; a context in which, in short 'there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.'. Bradley's influential characterological criticism in the early part of this century defined the tragic world as one of action, and action as '... the translation of thought into reality'⁴⁰, but there is a sense in which Hamlet is

⁴⁰ A. C. Bradley, "The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy," in *Shakespeare: The Tragedies: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Clifford Leech (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 45-6. In my use of the term 'characterological' in relation to Bradleyism, I am not in any way advocating the: 'curiously persistent notion that *Shakespearean Tragedy* dates from the nineteenth century and treats Shakespeare's tragedies as psychological novels.' S. L. Goldberg, *An Essay on King Lear* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 39., but simply acknowledging that much

striving in the Act II, Scene ii dialogue not for the translation of thought into reality, but rather that of reality into thought, and the subsequent creation of a time and space governed purely by that thought.

If such a context were truly possible there would be no need for Hamlet's Third Act deliberations, for the conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern takes place in the immediately preceding act. But the point, of course, is that the successful creation for Hamlet of this cerebral context founded purely upon relativity is not possible, for he, like Marlowe's Faustus, is bounded always by his own mortality, and the kind of imagined existence driven and controlled only by thought for which he longs can never be a plausible reality for, as we shall see, it is always limited by death. However, his ill-fated attempt to create such a context should not come as too much of a surprise, for - as John Hunt argues - much of Hamlet's behaviour throughout the text is characterised by '... a violent attempt to free himself from corporeality, resulting paradoxically in a deep immersion in it':

Hamlet's violent, and ultimately futile, ambition to transcend bodily weakness can be seen not only in his dealings with Ophelia, but also in all of his attempts to respond adequately to the death of his father. In his first speech of the play, while manifestly acting the part of a mourner, he disdains dramatic action as being limited by the opacity of the flesh. No physical 'show', he insists, can adequately convey the immensity of his grief. His black clothes and the expressive corporeal actions that accompany them fall short of the indescribable state of suffering that resides within him.⁴¹

of Bradley's attempt to revise Hegelian theories of tragedy is structured around an ethical baseline which constantly (and necessarily) foregrounds the primacy of character.

⁴¹ John Hunt, "A Thing of Nothing," in *New Casebooks: Hamlet*, (ed.) Coyle, 183.

Hunt argues that this aversion to corporeality permeates the text as a whole, and he is very possibly correct, but it is no-where more apparent than in the conversation of the Second Act in which we have already seen the significance of the prison and confinement rhetoric, especially in relation to the eschatological reference which precedes it. It is in this vein that Hamlet launches his intellectual assault upon Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the 'slow-witted lackeys of the state'⁴² establishing the 'Denmark as prison' metaphor before embarking upon a sequence of imagery which moves rapidly from contraction to expansion and back again. The 'prison' (line 241) occupied by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern begins as Denmark then expands to fill 'the world' (line 244), before undergoing the successive contraction of 'confines, wards and dungeons' (line 245) and finally coming full circle to end once again as Denmark. This type of spatial patterning, lurching as it does from the vastness of 'the world' to the claustrophobic confinement of a 'dungeon', obviously brings to mind the kind of shifts in perspective already discussed in Faustus' closing soliloquy,⁴³ and the 'doomsday' line would certainly underline this association by bringing the idea of a temporal shift once again into play. It is against this backdrop of sliding scale that Hamlet voices the first of what are the two key utterances of the scene: 'Why, then, 'tis none to you; for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison.'. In response to Rosencrantz' protest against the

⁴² Eagleton, 72.

⁴³ Davidson finds what he terms 'spatial dislocation' in the tragic form in general, but argues that it is overcome in such scenes as the Duchess of Malfi's death: 'We obtain a sense of perfectly aligned verticality here, for the terror of *space* for her is overcome by the realization that she is at the point in her life where the human soul comes into contact with the divine and eternal'. Clifford Davidson, "Renaissance Dramatic Forms, Cosmic Perspective, and Alienation," *Cahiers Elisabethains* 27 (April 1985): 6.

relativity of what has gone before ('We think not so, my lord!'), he is presented with more of the same, and yet, rhetorically clever though Hamlet's lines may be, there is clearly a fundamental problem with the philosophical stance being assumed here, for if no act or entity has any pre-existing inherent moral value (in other words its status as 'good or bad' is defined solely by the thoughts which we accord it) then there is no reason for Hamlet to languish in the prison that Denmark is to him, for if he thought of it as otherwise, it would not be so. In attempting to undermine the concept of absolute and fixed values as static points of reference, Hamlet's line inadvertently underlines their existence, for why would he voluntarily think of Denmark as a prison if there were no good pre-existing reason to do so? Obviously there is an as yet undisclosed fly in the ointment of Hamlet's self-constructed context, something which is capable of preventing this purely cerebral and intellectual world from becoming viable, and it is revealed in the second of the two key sections of text only one line later: 'O god, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.'

The first point we notice here is how dramatically different the tone is from much of what has come before. Gone is the underlying playfulness (at the expense of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) of the previous exchanges, for there is a profound sense not simply of resignation, but of real unease in the monosyllabic starkness of the final phrase: '... were it not that I have bad dreams.'. The interplay of 'bounded in a nutshell' and 'infinite space' sums up in a single line the dialogue of the preceding twenty in the same way that Faustus' 'O, I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?' condenses the plight of Marlowe's tragic hero into a few despairing words. And this marked change in tone is entirely appropriate for these 'bad dreams' lie at the very heart of Hamlet's problem. They are what make the first section of the line, (the creation of infinite space within the bounds of a nutshell),

conditional, for this final phrase radically alters both the tone and sense of what has come before. Why then should mere dreams be invested with the kind of power capable of scuppering Hamlet's self-created interiorised context?

In the text the answer does not come until the following act and the 'To be, or not to be' soliloquy in which, as we have already seen, the association between 'dreams' and 'death' is made explicit. 'Were it not that I have bad dreams' can therefore be read as synonymous with 'were it not that I fear death', (or perhaps more accurately 'were it not that I fear the possible consequences of death'), and, as we have noted in Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, the power of death to limit the effectiveness and restrict the viability of an interiorised context is not unique to *Hamlet*. There is a sense in which death is as much the 'undiscovered country' for Faustus as it is for Hamlet, despite the foreknowledge that he is to be damned eternally, for while Mephostophilis' shifting definitions of the early acts of the play ('this is hell, nor am I out of it' etc.) certainly open the possibility of an interiorised hell, they are, at the end of the day, as nebulous as the 'region beyond the realm of the living' that Arthos cites as typical of Shakespearean tragedy.

Once again then, as in Section One, we find ourselves returning to the limitary quality of death. The landscape of Hamlet's 'undiscover'd country' is the ultimate limiting factor upon the universe of relativity which he seeks to create for himself, one in which there is nothing beyond the reach of his intellectual control for there is 'nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so'. This section of dialogue and the Third Act soliloquy combine to illustrate, however, that the controlling power of the intellect is not absolute, and that just as death limits life, physical absolutes will always necessarily impinge upon any imagined and interiorised context, even when it attempts so

emphatically to abstract itself from them. And so, ironically, Hamlet's attempt to create a purely cerebral and intellectually controlled context, entirely free of physical absolutism, ends up confirming not his own assertion that 'thinking makes it so', but rather that of Bolingbroke in *Richard II*, who pointedly asks:

O, who can hold a fire in his hand
 By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?
 Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite
 By bare imagination of a feast?
 Or wallow naked in December snow
 By thinking on fantastic summer's heat?
Richard II, (I, iii, 294-9).⁴⁴

Bearing in mind then firstly the ability of death to limit internalised and microcosmic contexts, and secondly the necessity of death for the genre of tragedy, is there any Renaissance tragedy which can effectively create and sustain such a context, and if so, how?

It is my contention that of all the texts mentioned so far, *King Lear* comes the closest to achieving this, and it does so, paradoxically, not by attempting to somehow transcend or overcome the liminary quality of death, but rather by actively embracing it. The interiorised context with which we will be dealing neither belongs to the tragic hero nor is constructed in soliloquy, and yet Gloucester's Dover Cliff of the Fourth Act does share with the traditional Renaissance soliloquy a fine balance between microcosmic and

⁴⁴ Robert Crosman compares Hamlet's line with that of Bolingbroke as well as Puck's closing speech from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Robert Crosman, "What is the Dream in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?" *Connotations* 7.1 (1997/8): 16.

macrocosmic representations. Young refers to 'Edgar's map'⁴⁵ and it is the idea of mapping in relation to interiorised contexts which I will explore in the remainder of this Section.

⁴⁵ Young, 95.

III. Gloucester's Dreamscape of Death.

Writing on sixteenth-century exploration, Richard Mackenney states:

Exploration in the Middle Ages was, on the whole, eastward and overland - we need only think of Marco Polo - while in our period [the sixteenth century] the most significant discoveries were Westward and oceanic, even when they sought a route to the east - the Portuguese explored Atlantic sea routes which came to extend as far east as Nagasaki ... Perhaps there is a sense in which startling novelty and obvious tradition operated in harness, for while the frontiers of Europe were shifted in a new direction, the motivation for extending frontiers remained substantially the same.⁴⁶

Attempts to document such 'shift[ing] frontiers' resulted in the production of a vast quantity of Renaissance maps which varied enormously in both quality and accuracy. By the 1590s such documents were no longer the preserve of those concerned with exploration or geography, for as the quantity of maps in circulation rose so did the interest of the literate public in them:

The heroic years of the Age of Exploration - the not quite two centuries that lie between the first Portuguese voyages along the West coast of Africa in the 1430's and the rounding of Cape Horn in 1616 - witnessed the discovery of innumerable new lands and a quantum leap in the quality and quantity of map production. It is usual to connect the two developments, if not as cause and effect, certainly as parallel and mutually dependent phenomena ... The output of printed maps leapt from a handful to hundreds per year, and by the end of the sixteenth century the interest in maps had spread to embrace a general public of educated men.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Richard Mackenney, *Sixteenth Century Europe: Expansion and Conflict* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1993), 38.

⁴⁷ Juergen Schulz, "Maps as Metaphors: Mural Map Cycles of the Italian

It would be a mistake, however, to view such maps - or for that matter, any maps - as in some way neutral, free from bias, or inherently lacking any 'agenda' of their own. Terence Hawkes rightly reminds us that:

Maps may purport to be objective, impartial in character but, as our own century knows to its cost, they inevitably turn out to be extensions and implementations of specific political and moral positions. Maps, in short, are never innocent.⁴⁸

While work has been done on the undoubted influence of Renaissance advances in cartography upon the dominant drama of the period,⁴⁹ the difficulties - within such a context - of dissociating the concerns and consequences of geographical expansion from those of contemporary cartography are fairly self-evident. It is, however, a distinction which, for the purposes of this Section must be made, and in this I take my lead from John Gillies, whose recent text *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* devotes two chapters to what is at times a useful and highly suggestive consideration of the Globe Theatre as map and the possible implications of its relationship with the cartography of the time when considered as a collective and dynamic entity. Central to the thrust of Gillies' text as a whole is the concept of the Shakespearean 'other', and his stance here is defined very much in opposition to Leslie Fiedler:

Renaissance," in *Art and Cartography: Six Historical Essays*, ed. David Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 97.

⁴⁸ Terence Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1992), 123.

⁴⁹ See for example John Gillies (ed.), *Playing the Globe*.

For Fiedler - I think it is fair to say - Shakespeare's vision of the stranger and his vision of geography are not necessarily related. For me, they *are* necessarily related ... But what of Shakespeare's relationship with the new geography *per se*, particularly its most characteristic artefact, the map? ... I will suggest that the issue can be considered in much broader terms than traditionally understood if the Globe Theatre itself is thought of as a map, and if Renaissance maps are considered less as individual scientific documents than as a collective and evolving cultural text characterised as much by their pictorial (and often ancient ethnographic) symbolism as by their geographic content ... What did Shakespeare actually know about the new cartography (as distinct from the new geography)? ... If Shakespeare's 'geographic imagination' is to be thought of in quasi-cartographical terms (as a 'mental map'), should this entity be thought of in the singular or the plural?⁵⁰

Here we find a potentially fruitful point of departure from which to 'map' the ground which the remainder of this Section will cover, for while I have no intention of attempting to answer the questions Gillies poses, I would like to extract and explore the significance of what are, for my purposes, the two key terms: 'geographic imagination' and: 'mental map'.

Shakespeare's use of maps is not in any sense genre-specific and Gillies is quick to highlighting that maps play a significant role in texts as diverse as *1 Henry IV*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Henry V*, *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night* and *King Lear*.⁵¹ The last of these, however, receives

⁵⁰ John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference*, 45. On the Globe and *Hamlet* see Andrew Gurr: 'Alert like his creator to every nuance of situation and language, [Hamlet] captures in a single pun [his head as 'distracted globe'] all three of the central features of the play.' Andrew Gurr, *Hamlet and the Distracted Globe* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press for Sussex University Press, 1978), 9.

⁵¹ Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference*, 45.

surprisingly little attention, with Gillies preferring to address the mature tragedies primarily through *Macbeth* and *Othello* (with less space afforded *Hamlet* where his concerns are markedly different from my own). In terms of *King Lear*, this omission could perhaps have been anticipated; there is already a vast and comprehensive body of criticism covering the First Act three-fold division of the kingdom, most of which concerns itself with First Scene/Final Scene comparisons, addressing *en route* shifts in focus and rhetorical style with regard to questions of role, family and kingship. While it will certainly be necessary to review some of this existing work, I hope to assimilate it into what is, in the end, a very different issue - one which has received far less critical attention to date. And now we come to the relevance of the two key terms of the Gillies passage - 'geographic imagination' and 'mental map' - for I will primarily focus not upon the material map of the opening scene of *King Lear*, but rather upon the abstract and metaphorical cartography of Gloucester's Dover Cliff. To this end I propose a modification of Gillies' first term from 'Shakespeare's geographic imagination' to 'Gloucester's imaginative geography'.

In modern terms this distinction between traditional and imaginative geography may not be as clear cut as we assume for it has, in recent years, undergone a process of erosion which has resulted in the boundaries being characterised by fluidity rather than rigidity:

... we can always tell maps and landscapes [paintings or pictures] apart by their look. Maps give us the measure of a place and the relationship between places ... while landscape pictures are evocative, they aim rather to give us some quality of the place or of the viewer's sense of it ... Or at least that is how it was until recently. We are witnessing a certain weakening of these divisions and the attitudes they represent ... A distinguished geographer put the change this way: ... "the

geography of the land is in the last resort the geography of the mind."⁵²

In the Renaissance, however, things were markedly different; cartography stood apart from the world of the mind. It was a science and as such required visible proof:

It seems entirely suitable that it was an optical development, the telescope, that radically changed the Renaissance world view ... by the beginning of the seventeenth century Italian artists and scientists had come to understand sight as the proving sense.⁵³

But what happens when one is forced to construct a 'world view' without sight - to imaginatively survey a landscape of darkness from the depths of two hollow eye sockets? The answer is that we become concerned with the notion of 'mapping' in its broader sense i.e. as a process of representation; a defining and organisational means of comprehending an environment (which could be real or imagined, actual or abstract). I intend to relate this working definition of 'mapping' to *King Lear* via the concept of the 'dreamscape'.

We have already seen how Hamlet's soliloquy formed a metaphorical link between death and dreams, but while Hamlet's 'undiscover'd country' represents the potentially dangerous cartography of death and thereby limits the viability of his interiorised context, the whole purpose of what I will term

⁵² Svetlana Alpers, "The Mapping Impulse in Dutch Art," in Woodward (ed.), 51.

⁵³ Madeleine Hilding Burnside-Lukan, *Alberti to Galileo* (Ann Arbor, MI: Xerox University Microfilms, 1979), 185-6.

Gloucester's 'dreamscape of death' is to facilitate his suicide. And this 'makes all the difference', for the fact that Gloucester is actively seeking death means that it no longer serves in the same way as a limiting factor upon the 'reality' of the imaginatively created environment that is his Dover Cliff. The interiorised context of Gloucester's cliff *becomes* the dreamscape of death, and so what is for Hamlet the limiting factor, is for Gloucester, convergent with the interiorised geography that exists only by 'thinking it so'. This is not to say to say that death is no longer - in the widest sense - a limit, but since he is actively seeking it, death can no longer be considered a constraint to him at that point in time. It is precisely this absence of limiting factor upon Gloucester's interiorised context which makes its reality, for him at least, both absolute and total.

In order to trace precisely the mechanism by which this takes place it is firstly necessary to establish the significance of the term 'dreamscape of death'. The idea of landscape serving a significant function (which is to say operating as something other than simple setting or backdrop to the action) is fairly common and certainly not unique to the Renaissance. Hardy writes, in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, of 'the horizons and landscapes of a partly real, partly dream country'⁵⁴ although he never actually uses the term 'dreamscape' (interestingly enough Sylvia Plath does: '...the waking head rubbishes out the draggled lot / Of sulphurous dreamscapes'.⁵⁵). The text

⁵⁴ Thomas Hardy, "Hardy's Preface," in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, New Wessex Edition (London: Macmillan, 1974), 39. A very different construction of 'mental landscape' can be found in De Quincey. See Emily Salines "The Opium Landscape in Translation: Baudelaire's *Un Mangeur d'opium* and De Quincey's Autobiographical Writings," *New Comparison* 21 (1996): 32.

⁵⁵ Sylvia Plath, "Departure of the Ghost," *The Sewanee Review* LXVII (1959): 446.

which springs most immediately to mind in terms of 'dreamscape', however, is surely *The Faerie Queene*, and Spenser's allegorical romance has naturally accrued a substantial amount of criticism from commentators interested in the landscape of the dream.⁵⁶ For Shakespeare also, there are numerous books and articles documenting the use and importance of dreams,⁵⁷ but the significance of the 'dreamscape' for *King Lear* remains (at least at the point of writing) untouched.

G. Wilson Knight departs from his 'normal practice of direct interpretation' in order to proffer a reading which sees Gloucester's leap as '... a remarkable dramatization in terms of earthly action of what everyone experiences at death.'⁵⁸ (Since Knight is presumably not writing from beyond the grave, the question of how he is able to speak with quite such authority on the experience of death remains unanswered):

The old man's blindness is as the blindness of us all when we regard death as a fall into nothingness. Edgar's long, and otherwise scarcely relevant, speech describing the mind's dizziness in looking down on the sea creates an analogy to the bottomless nothing of death, as usually apprehended. But it is all false; we who watch know that there is no cliff or sea. Cliff,

⁵⁶ For an overview of dreams and Spenser see Rupprecht's entry under 'dream' in *The Spenser Encyclopedia* ed. A.C. Hamilton (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1990), 227, or *Contemporary Thought on Edmund Spenser: with a Bibliography of Criticism of The Faerie Queene, 1900-1970* ed. Richard C. Frushell and Bernard J. Vondersmith (Carbondale: South Illinois University Press, 1975).

⁵⁷ See for example Marjorie Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare: from Metaphor to Metamorphosis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), Kay Stockholder, *Dream Works: Lovers and Families in Shakespeare's Plays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), and Arthos.

⁵⁸ G. Wilson Knight, "Gloucester's Leap," *Essays in Criticism* 22 (1972): 280.

sea, and dizziness were similarly used in *Hamlet* (I, iv) in association with the Ghost, madness, and presumably death, Horatio's phrase 'some other horrible form' corresponding to the horrible fiend described by Edgar.⁵⁹

The categorising of Edgar's speech as 'scarcely relevant' (other than in relation to the 'nothingness of death') is surely spurious for, as we shall see, its structure and vocabulary are carefully organised. And yet there is something of real value to be drawn from the above quotation, for in aligning the 'leap' with the process of dying, Knight invests it with a liminary quality, and there can be no doubt that Gloucester is 'on the edge' of something in both physical and metaphorical terms. Knight's comments associate Edgar's words (which 'create' his father's environment), with the act of death, but I intend to take the process one stage further and combine this idea with the yoking of death and sleep/dreams which we have already observed in *Hamlet*, for I believe that Gloucester's Dover Cliff is best understood not as a 'landscape of suicide', but as a 'dreamscape of death'.

We recall that Hamlet's cartography of death limited his imagined context, but when we turn to Gloucester we find that his dreamscape has entirely the opposite effect for it opens possibilities to him, firstly the potential for death (through his own 'suicide') and secondly the ability to re-embrace life and 'bear affliction'. Despite the fact that he is not actually asleep as he stands upon his imagined precipice there is a decidedly dream-like quality about his situation for he finds himself contextualised by an environment which exists purely within the mind of the person occupying it and is consequently entirely inaccessible to everyone else. The association with

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 280.

sleep, moreover, is underscored by the fact that Gloucester loses consciousness during his 'fall'.

This episode is preceded by Cordelia's seemingly unconnected questioning of the Doctor as to possible cures for her father's recently reported madness:

CORDELIA ... A century send forth;
Search every acre in the high-grown field,
And bring him to our eye.

 What can man's wisdom,
In the restoring his bereaved sense?

He that helps him, take all my outward worth.

DOCTOR There is means, madam.

Our foster-nurse of nature is repose,
The which he lacks; that to provoke in him
Are many simples operative, whose power
Will close the eye of anguish.

CORDELIA All blest secrets,
All you unpublish'd virtues of the earth,
Spring with my tears; be aidant and remediate,
In the good man's distress. Seek, seek for him;
Lest his ungovern'd rage dissolve the life
That wants the means to lead it.

(IV, iv, 6-19).

The first thing we notice here is the repeated 'eye' vocabulary: 'bring him to my eye ... the eye of anguish ... spring with my tears' which underlines the link between Gloucester and Lear. The parallels between main and sub-plot⁶⁰ are so well known as to not require reiteration, but the positioning of this

⁶⁰ As Robert Miola points out, there are few modern critics who would concur with Tolstoy's dismissal of: 'the utterly superfluous characters of the villain Edmund, and unlikelike Gloucester and Edgar'. Robert S. Miola, "New Comedy in *King Lear*," *Philological Quarterly* 73 (1994): 335-6. For recent analysis of the significance of the sub-plot see David M. Bergeron "Deadly Letters in *King Lear*," *Philological Quarterly* 72 (1993): 157, and Tony Perrello "Anglo-Saxon Elements of the Gloucester Sub-Plot in *King Lear*," *English Language Notes* 35 (1997): 10.

exchange between the Doctor and Cordelia is of particular significance for it falls only fifty lines before the beginning of Gloucester's 'ascent'. The two events are separated by the forty lines of Act IV, Scene v in which Regan declares 'It was great ignorance, Gloucester's eyes being out, / To let him live' (IV, v, 9-10) and her words carry more weight than even she realises for Gloucester's 'suicide' plays a vital part in Lear's emergence from the madness of the heath. Cartwright too attributes Lear's 'transformation' to 'the mystery of ... perhaps the most affecting scene in Shakespeare':

The first two panels of the scene, Gloucester's attempted suicide and Lear's interlude, forge an experience of transformation, the sense that we have arrived at a place unforeseeable, a place where all that has happened until now, all the assigning of rights and wrongs, sinned-against and sinning, no longer matters. Before Lear has spoken a word, the audience knows that his mad entrance will not launch just another mad scene. Why so? Gloucester's suicide attempt makes possible Lear's transformation.⁶¹

Lear stands on the heath and questions the meaning of life ('Is man no more than this?'), while Gloucester leaps (at least in his own mind) from Dover Cliff to certain death. So while Gloucester seeks death but finds the will to live, Lear seeks the meaning of life and finds only his mapped other, Gloucester:

GLOUCESTER O ruin'd piece of nature!
 This great world
 Shall so wear out to nought. Dost thou know
 me?

⁶¹ Kent Cartwright, *Shakespearean Tragedy and Its Double: The Rhythms of Audience Response* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 216.

LEAR I remember thine eyes well enough.
Dost thou squiny at me? No, do thy worst,
blind Cupid; I'll not love. Read thou this
challenge; mark but the penning of it.

GLOUCESTER Were all thy letters suns, I
could not see one.

EDGAR [*Aside*] I would not take this from
report. It is,
And my heart breaks at it.

(IV, vi, 134-42).

Edgar's aside here 'I would not take this from report. It is, / And my heart breaks at it.' strikes a heart-rending note of resigned pathos into the chaotic absurdity that is the conversation between a deranged king and his blinded nobleman newly returned from an attempt to leap from a non-existent cliff, for in Edgar's words there is a deep recognition of the fact that certain experiences are fundamentally irreducible. The structure of the lines themselves feeds into the overall effect here with the two consecutive heavy stresses in terminal position in line 141 marked off by the preceding full stop and the comma which follows. 'It is' declares Edgar, providing a single and unified voice-over for the bizarre and polyphonic exchange unfolding before us, and there is a sense in which his seemingly superfluous words are entirely appropriate, for if the conversation between his father and the tragic hero proves nothing else it surely shows, positioned as it is immediately after the former's 'suicide', that some things cannot be reduced to, or by, mere intellectual relativism - thinking does not make them so; they simply are.

When Edgar asserts that he 'would not take this from report' the primary meaning is perfectly clear: were he not present to witness the scene he would not believe it possible, and yet the text also establishes him here as a kind of controlling spin doctor, cleverly refusing to be hoist by his own petard, for 'take it from report' is precisely what he successfully persuaded his own father to do as they climbed the non-existent Dover Cliff:

GLOUCESTER When shall I come to th`top
of that same hill?

EDGAR You do climb up it now; look how
we labour.

GLOUCESTER Methinks the ground is even.

EDGAR Horrible steep.

Hark, do you hear the sea?

GLOUCESTER No, truly.

EDGAR Why then, your other senses grow
imperfect

By your eyes` anguish.

GLOUCESTER So may it be indeed.

(IV, vi, 1-6)

In one sense this is the kind of scenario Hamlet always longed for - the perfect triumph of mind over matter as Gloucester becomes increasingly convinced that the flat terrain on which he stands is in fact a precipice. Obviously we know better - we are, along with Edgar, 'in on the act' - and yet the particular way in which the illusion is created is of greater significance than we may initially realise:

EDGAR ... How fearful
And dizzy `tis to cast one`s eyes so low!
The crows and choughs that wing the mid-way
air

Show scarce so gross as beetles. Half-way
down

Hangs one that gathers samphire - dreadful
trade!

Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
The fishermen that walk along the beach
Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark
Diminish`d to her cock; her cock, buoy
Almost too small for sight. The murmuring
surge

That on th` unnumb`red idle pebble chafes
Cannot be heard so high. I`ll look no more;
Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight
Topple down headlong.

GLOUCESTER Set me where you
stand.

EDGAR Give me your hand. You are now

ever-increasing discrepancy between the items themselves and their appearance when viewed from the clifftop (the crows are 'as beetles', the samphire gatherer 'no bigger than his head' and the fishermen 'like mice'). This technique is impressive indeed, successfully investing Edgar's summit with a frightening sense of altitude, but in order to fully appreciate this description it is perhaps necessary to compare it with another passage of text, written over two centuries later, but similar nonetheless in intent:

... this "little cliff" arose, a sheer unobstructed precipice of black shining rock, some fifteen or sixteen hundred feet from the world of crags beneath us ... To the right and left, as far as the eye could reach, there lay outstretched, like ramparts of the world, lines of horridly black and beetling cliff, whose character of gloom was but the more forcibly illustrated by the surf which reared high up against it its white and ghastly crest, howling and shrieking for ever.

Edgar Allan Poe
*A Descent into the Maelstrom.*⁶³

And the primary difference now becomes clear; while the second quotation describes in impressively vertiginous terms the state of things *as they are*, the Shakespearean text focuses upon setting out things *as they appear to be*, and this is underlined by the subjectivity of the vocabulary: the crows '*show ... as beetles*', the samphire gatherer '*seems* no bigger than his head', and the fishermen '*appear* like mice'.⁶⁴ As we have previously noted, subjectivity is always necessarily encoded within any representation, but it is, nonetheless, foregrounded here to a remarkable degree and this is clearly linked to the fact that it describes an imaginatively created and interiorised context which is

⁶³ Edgar Allan Poe, "A Descent into the Maelstrom," in *Great Tales of Horror*, ed. Davis Sohn (New York: Bantam Books, 1964), 98-9.

⁶⁴ Emphasis added in all cases.

devoid of material existence. In this respect Gloucester's dreamscape bears a striking similarity to the very modern phenomenon of 'virtual reality', a computer generated environment which seems, to the person experiencing it, to be entirely real, but is in material terms (and therefore to everyone else) non-existent:

Virtual Reality (VR) systems create a 'cyberspace' where it is possible to interact with anything and anyone in a virtual land. In these bizarre worlds, conventional laws of space and time need not hold - anything can be simulated, so long as it can be programmed ... some VR systems ... provide each user with a personal view of the virtual environment using an HMD [head mounted device] which visually isolates them from the real world ... What is important is that the user experiences a 'first person' view of the VE, which opens up totally new interaction modalities.⁶⁵

Gloucester does not need an HMD - he is already 'visually isolated from the real world', and Edgar takes full advantage, throwing the 'conventional laws of space and time' to the wind and programming an environment which is actively structured around his father's 'first-person view'. The fact that Gloucester is positioned *within* this landscape is inextricably linked to the subjective vocabulary which describes - and thereby creates it. (M. K. Bradby writes: 'There is often no clear difference in the dream consciousness between the idea and act, subject and object').⁶⁶ Edgar describes it *for* Gloucester, but by the act of this description Gloucester becomes a necessary component of his own environment, for without an internalised point of reference to act as a

⁶⁵ John Vince, *Virtual Reality Systems* (Wokingham, England: Addison-Wesley, 1995), 1, 5.

⁶⁶ M. K. Bradby, *Psycho-analysis and its Place in Life* (London: H. Frowde, 1922), viii, 88.

The sea, with such a storm as his bare head
 In hell-black night endur'd, would have buoy'd
 up

And quench'd the stelled fires.
 Yet, poor old heart, he help the heavens to rain.
 If wolves had at thy gate howl'd that dern time,
 Thou shouldst have said 'Good porter, turn the
 key'.

All cruels else subscribe, but I shall see
 The winged vengeance overtake such children.
 CORNWALL See't shalt thou never. Fellows,
 hold the chair.

Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot.
 GLOUCESTER He that will think to live till
 he be old,

Give me some help! - O cruel! O you gods!
 REGAN One side will mock another; th' other
 too.

CORNWALL If you see vengeance -
 1 SERVANT Hold your hand, my
 lord.

I have serv'd you ever since I was a child;
 But better service have I never done you, ,
 Than now to bid you hold ...

3 SERVANT Go thou. I'll fetch some flax and
 whites of eggs
 To apply to his bleeding face.

(III, vii, 49-73, 105-6).

The patterning of 'sea ... head ... buoy'd' (lines 58-9) is recycled in Edgar's:

Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
 The fishermen that walk along the beach
 Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark
 Diminish'd to her cock; her cock, buoy
 Almost too small for sight. The murmuring
 surge ...

while his later 'You are now within a foot / Of th' extreme verge' along with his father's response 'Let go my hand' functions as an echo of Cornwall's earlier instruction to the first servant 'Fellows, hold the chair. / Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot.' (III, vi, 66-7) and the despairing servant's advice to Gloucester 'Hold your hand, my lord' (line 72). This master/servant

relationship is echoed again in Edgar's words to his father at the base of the cliff, 'Thou'dst shiver'd like an egg; but thou dost breathe,' (line 51) recalling this time the third servant's 'I'll go fetch some flax and whites of eggs / To apply to his bleeding face.' (III, vi, 105-6).

What we have here then are two scenes linked by plot, and sharing a common vocabulary, but while in the first it is bound up with the gritty and brutal physicality of Gloucester's blinding, in the second it facilitates the establishment of an interiorised and imagined context. After Edgar has described - and thereby in a sense created - the cliff, his father asks to be positioned at its edge before attempting to cast himself over. Pointing out the inherent element of pantomime here Jan Kott writes:

... Gloucester's suicide attempt ... is merely a circus somersault on an empty stage. Gloucester's and Edgar's situation is tragic, but it has been shown in pantomime, the classic expression of buffoonery ... Gloucester's suicide has a meaning only if the gods exist. It is a protest against undeserved suffering and the world's injustice. This protest is made in a definite direction. It refers to eschatology. Even if the gods are cruel, they must take this suicide into consideration. It will count in the final reckoning between gods and man. Its sole value lies in its reference to the absolute.

But if the gods, and their moral order in the world, do not exist, Gloucester's suicide does not solve or alter anything. It is only a somersault on an empty stage.⁶⁸

Kott is surely correct in highlighting the significance of 'the absolute' although I would want to shift the emphasis specifically towards (individual)

⁶⁸ Jan Kott, *Shakespeare our Contemporary*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (London: Methuen, 1967), 119.

death rather than the end of the world. 'Pantomime' and 'buffoonery', however, are only half the story for the overall effectiveness of this scene stems from its ability to successfully play off the elements of exteriorised action and interiorised context, and in this bringing together of the microcosm and macrocosm the scene functions in a manner not dissimilar to that of many Renaissance soliloquies. In this my stance differs from that of Cartwright, whose marked differentiation between soliloquy and Gloucester's cliff revolves around the idea of audience response:

Edgar's description from the extreme verge, then, like his later images of the ten-mast height (53-54) and the "shrill-gorged lark" (58), enrolls the audience as much as (even more than) Gloucester. Unlike a soliloquy, where the actor becomes momentarily somewhat like the audience and steps partially into its world, here the actor, with technical focus and concrete imagery, gathers the audience into the world poetically imagined. The spectator participates actively.⁶⁹

I certainly have no quarrel with the idea that some form of active audience participation is fundamentally central to the success of the scene, but the kind of generalisation which sees soliloquy associated with the world of the audience, and Edgar's description associated with that of the play, is surely too superficial to be of much real use. Belsey's formulations on the Renaissance soliloquy, while not without problems, do point us in the right direction by highlighting the delicate balance between internal and external, microcosmic and macrocosmic. It is by applying these kind of insights to Gloucester's cliff that we will come to a better understanding of precisely why Edgar's description is so effective and the resultant action so moving. The verbal intricacy of Edgar's created cliff combines with (or is perhaps

⁶⁹ Cartwright, 218.

counterbalanced by) the simple physicality of his father's blind leap from its summit, and this 'somersault on an empty stage' brings home to us at one and the same time both the completeness of this landscape for Gloucester and the stark reality of its non-existence for us.⁷⁰ It is this biting incongruity which lends the scene its tragic edge, and in sharing the perception of the character who is the agent of the deception, we too are drawn into the cruel gulling of a blind old man.

Gloucester's stance here contrasts sharply with the self-conscious attempts of Hamlet (and in a different way Faustus) to actively exclude any sense of physical or material reality. Context is based upon time and space and if we recall their key lines we find Hamlet attempting to dissociate himself from reality in spatial terms ('I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space') and Faustus desperately trying to extricate himself from the temporal continuum ('Stand still you ever-moving spheres of heaven / That time may cease and midnight never come'). Their attempts prove futile, however, because they fear death - or more accurately its consequences - but for Gloucester there is no need to self-consciously attempt to exclude all external elements firstly because he is deliberately seeking death and secondly because he does not believe that the interiorised dreamscape which he inhabits is anything other than reality. Of all the Renaissance tragedies which we have looked at so far *King Lear* is arguably the one which handles its imagined contexts most effectively because it never

⁷⁰ For a comprehensive discussion of the staging of Edgar's speech and of Gloucester's fall see Alvin B. Kernan, "Formalism and Realism in Elizabethan Drama: The Miracles of *King Lear*," in *Renaissance Drama*, ed. S. Schoenbaum, vol. 9 (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 62., and Alan C. Dessen, "Two Falls and a Trap: Shakespeare and the Spectacles of Realism," *English Literary Renaissance* 5 (Autumn 1975): 291-307, both of which are footnoted in Cartwright.

refuses to acknowledge the problematic reality which is largely responsible for their creation:

LEAR No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to
prison.
 We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage;
 When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel
down
 And ask of thee forgiveness; so we'll live,
 And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
 At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
 Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them
too -
 Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out -
 And take upon's the mystery of things
 As if we were God's spies; and we'll wear out
 In a wall'd prison packs and sects of great ones
 That ebb and flow by th' moon.
(V, iii, 8-19).

Even Lear's idealised vision of prison is constructed in terms which foreground an imagined and continuous contact with the outside world ('... and we'll talk with them too'), a far cry from the dark isolation which characterises the (actual) dungeon of Richard II, a king who comes to share with Lear a hard-earned understanding of all that the term 'nothing' may or may not entail:

KING RICHARD I have been studying how I
may compare
 This prison where I live unto the world;
 And, for because the world is populous
 And here is not a creature but myself,
 I cannot do it. Yet I'll hammer it out.
 My brain I'll prove the female to my soul,
 My soul the father; and these two beget
 A generation of still-breeding thoughts,
 And these same thoughts people this little
world,
 In humours like the people of this world,
 For no thought is contented.
... Then crushing penury

Persuades me I was better when a king;
 Then am I king'd again; and by and by
 Think that I am unking'd by Bolingbroke,
 And straight am nothing. But whate'er I be,
 Nor I, nor any man that but man is,
 With nothing shall be pleas'd till he be eas'd
 With being nothing.

Richard II (V, v, 1-12, 34-41).

But if part of the effectiveness of Gloucester's dreamscape of death comes from its successful combining of the microcosmic and macrocosmic - or the verbal and the physical - then how does this channel into the play's other process of 'mapping' which sees Gloucester established as Lear's 'mapped other'?⁷¹ In order to answer this question we must turn our attention to the only other map scene of the text, Lear's initial division of the kingdom:

LEAR Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.
 Give me the map there. Know that we have divided
 In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent
 To shake all cares and business from our age,
 Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
 Unburden'd crawl toward death. ...
 Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
 With shadowy forests and with champains rich'd,
 With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
 We make thee lady: to thine and Albany's issues
 Be this perpetual ...

(I, i, 35-40, 62-6).

It is in this opening scene that the bonds between Gloucester and Lear begin to form and I am not referring here simply to the well documented parallels of plot, but rather to a specific process of association which links Lear's map to Gloucester's dreamscape of the Fourth Act. The opening exchanges between

⁷¹ In this sense the mathematical or scientific concept of 'mapping' (sometimes termed 'function') is useful as it sees one element of a set linked by a specific and pre-determined formula to one (and only one) element of a corresponding set.

Lear, Goneril and Regan have received more than their share of critical attention down the years, but such commentaries have tended to focus primarily upon the contrasting styles of the highly ornate structure and Latinate vocabulary of the opening scene, and the plainness of diction which characterises the last.⁷² More directly relevant to my argument, however, is John Gillies' highlighting of the 'ecphrasis (or verbal and gestural indication)'⁷³ in Lear's response to Goneril's declaration of love:

Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
 With shadowy forests and with champains
rich'd,
 With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
 We make thee lady:

(I, i, 62-5)

Gillies is quick to point out that 'there is no explicit direction for a map to be brought on stage'⁷⁴, nevertheless, most productions have Lear standing over a table at this point with a map outspread before him. The careful symmetry and intricate vocabulary of Lear's response mirror Goneril's preceding lines,

⁷² See for example James O. Wood, "A Special Cadence in *King Lear*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 12 (1961): 465-7., Emily W. Leider, "Plainness of Style in *King Lear*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 21 (1970): 45-53, Stephen Booth, *King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, and Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

⁷³ 'According to Svetlana Alpers (*Art and Cartography*) the rhetorical figure of ecphrasis was the conceptual basis of the Renaissance idea of cartographic 'description'.' Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference*, 200. It is worth noting that Gillies' reading of maps and their spatial significance in *King Lear* as a whole varies from that of F. T. Flahiff who finds in the text: 'the replacing of spatial by human relationships.' F. T. Flahiff, "Lear's Maps," *Cahiers Elisabethains* 30 (Oct. 1986): 19. Gillies, however, contends that: 'space is engaged throughout the play.' Gillies (ed.) *Playing the Globe*, 45, and I would align my own interpretation more with the latter.

⁷⁴ Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference*, 45.

despair of a grief beyond bearing. Without the theatrical panache of Hamlet's death, the drama of mortal combat afforded Macbeth, or even the ambivalence of Othello's final words, the landscape which Lear mapped so meticulously at the play's beginning has come to an abrupt halt in front of his eyes; there is now, quite simply, nowhere left to go. By the time Lear kneels over the body of Cordelia, Gloucester's death has already been reported by his son, and yet, even now the vocabulary recalls his Dover Cliff. 'This feather stirs; she lives' (V, iii, 265) declares Lear, desperately searching for life in his dead daughter, while in the previous act the living Gloucester lay at the foot of his cliff requesting of his son 'Away, and let me die' only to be told 'Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air ... Thou'dst shiver'd like an egg; but thou dost breathe' (IV, iv, 48-9, 51).

It is no accident then that Lear stands over a map when he declares in the First Act that his intention is to 'Unburden'd crawl toward death'. His journey is not completed in real terms until the Final Act, but in one way it has already been prefigured - although it is important to note not undercut - by Gloucester's leap of faith that is his journey into the imagined darkness of Dover Cliff. And it *is* a leap of faith, for he has placed his belief not only in the pagan gods to whom men are 'as flies to wanton boys' (IV, i, 36) but also in the geographical reality of a landscape which truly exists only in the words of the son who describes it, and the father who stands, poised for death, upon its edge. This is why the two map scenes (Lear's in the First Act, Gloucester's in the Fourth) must be read firstly in relation to each other, and secondly in terms of death as an 'absolute' of the genre. When Lear divides the kingdom between Goneril and Regan he has in front of him geographical limits which he attempts to utilise in order to quantify or somehow 'make real' an abstraction (love). When Gloucester stands upon a flat stage in the Fourth Act all he has is the abstraction, an imagined location within his mind, and what

Edgar attempts to do is 'make real' the geography of it. On one level then Lear attempts to map an abstraction onto geography while Edgar attempts to map geography onto his father's abstraction. And yet there is a sense, albeit a very limited one, in which Gloucester's cliff is every bit as 'real' as Lear's kingdom, for what Lear has in front of him in the First Act is not the kingdom itself, but merely a cartographic representation of it. The kingdom then is no more 'real' in the sense of being present than is Gloucester's cliff. Granted, we assume that it exists elsewhere and not in front of Lear at that particular point in time, but could the same not be said of Dover Cliff? Lear's map in the First Act is every bit as symbolic and representative as the landscape which Edgar sketches for his blind father. The authenticity - for Gloucester - of the cliff cannot be in doubt, if it were he would not cast himself forward, prepared to die. His geography then is, for him, as real and present as he is himself. And yet can the same be said of Lear's map, for the only reality of which he can be sure is that which he sees in front of him, and what he sees is a symbolically represented (which is to say re-presented) kingdom. The Collins English dictionary defines 'real' as 'that which occurs in the physical world, not imaginary, fictitious, or theoretical', but at the point of distributing the kingdom can Lear say with absolute certainty that the entity represented by the map is not imaginary, fictitious, or theoretical?

The difference between the two scenes, of course, lies in the fact that Lear's perception of his location corresponds precisely with our perception of his location. He sees his reality to be that of the court, as do the other characters, and our own perception - disregarding for the moment at least the issue of the stage itself - corresponds to this.⁷⁸ In Gloucester's case, however,

⁷⁸ The relationship between Gloucester's cliff as an imaginatively created entity within the world of the play, and that world of the play as an imagined location upon the stage, is an interesting - and complex - question inevitably

there is substantial slippage between the two. While he 'sees' himself positioned above a vast precipice, Edgar and ourselves view him standing upon a flat stage. And yet despite these differences Gloucester's dreamscape and Lear's map are bound together in a double-helix arrangement which forms the 'genetic template' of the text until its culmination in the penultimate act:

GLOUCESTER I know that voice.

LEAR Ha! Goneril, with a white beard! They flatter'd me like a dog, and told me I had white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To say 'ay' and 'no' to everything that I said! 'Ay' and 'no' too was no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me once, and the wind to make me chatter; when the thunder would not peace at my bidding; there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are not men o' their words. They told me I was everything; 'tis a lie - I am not ague-proof.

GLOUCESTER The trick of that voice I do well remember.

Is't not the King?

(IV, vi, 95-107).

Following Gloucester's successful negotiation of Dover Cliff we find that the previous situation has, in fact, been reversed, for it is now the blind Gloucester who accurately perceives his surroundings almost immediately, while Lear imagines himself to be addressing a bearded Goneril and does not utter any kind of recognition of his companion's identity for a further seventy-two lines: 'I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloucester.' (line 178). Having emerged from the interiorised geography of his dreamscape Gloucester's perception of his environment now corresponds precisely with our own, and so we take it to be 'real'. Since the same can no longer be said

invoking issues of representation as they relate to the 'reality' of theatrical presentation. Obviously more work has been done regarding this issue in relation to *Hamlet*, but, in terms of *King Lear*, it is a question for another day.

of Lear - at least for the first part of the conversation - the original situation has been reversed, and the catalytic agent of this change is death. When Gloucester emerges from his dreamscape having found not death, but in fact, the will to live, he returns once again to a 'reality' which corresponds to that of the other characters (with the obvious exception of Lear). His geography becomes once again actual rather than abstract, for in re-embracing life he imposes upon himself once again all the limitations inherent to the human condition, the most profound of which is death. He also re-imposes upon himself an existence 'Irrecoverably dark ... Without all hope of day'⁷⁹, for while his dreamscape may not have furnished him with vision, it nonetheless invested him with a visionary quality. Surveying his interiorised dreamscape Gloucester could 'see' what others could not; now, once again, that situation is reversed, and so there is a sense in which the failure of his 'suicide' can - like Milton's waking at the conclusion of the sonnet - only serve to 'bring back his night'.⁸⁰

'Be absolute for death' advises the Duke in *Measure for Measure* (III, i, 5) where the implication is clearly that Claudio should cast aside all hope of pardon, but it is the significance of death *as* absolute which we must address if we are to ascertain the true extent of what Fiddes refers to as a character's 'freedom over against their environment'. The relationship between Pronko's 'absolutes of tragedy' and setting/contextualisation is a complex and at times uneasy one because any 'interiority of place' is always made problematic by

⁷⁹ Milton, 'Samson Agonistes' (80, 82), in *John Milton: Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey (London: Longman, 1992), 347.

⁸⁰ It is not coincidental that Lear's first words upon waking in Act Four are: 'Fair daylight?'. Obviously the 'sight' and 'madness' themes are developed in parallel and in many ways they form the spine of the play, but I hope to have shown that the interaction between them is more complex than the frequently proposed 'insight in blindness, clarity in madness' formulation suggests.

the secular limit of death. Hamlet *could* be bounded in a nutshell and count himself a king of infinite space, but his speculation can never be more than a conditional hypothesis, for death will never be less than an irreducible certainty. In this Section we have seen how a fully realised microcosmic context can be rendered unviable by death in its capacity as an 'absolute' of the genre; it is to the consequences of removing this limit (and to the greatest epic in the English language) that we must now turn.

Section Three

Ne Plus Ultra: Milton's Rhetoric of the Abyss

I. Introduction.

It is often conceded, especially in French film theory, that monocular perspective in Renaissance painting is not only an artistic procedure but an ideologically determined mode of representation, embodying a bourgeois conception of the individual subject's relation to visible reality.¹

The dual development of Impressionism and Surrealism in cinema of the 1920s/30s serves to neatly highlight the radical extremes of opposition to which avant-garde styles can be driven through the systematic overlaying of antithetical interpretations of human perspective upon the cinematic *mise en scène*. The Impressionistic attempt to assert and establish absolute artistic independence for the filmic medium, and the Surrealist insistence upon eclecticism can both be viewed, albeit in discordant ways, as being fundamentally anti-narrative, and yet, while the importance of subjectivism for the former is a long settled and undisputed fact, it is perhaps in the (at times) dizzying rebellion against causality of the latter that we find the most radical manipulation of perspective for aesthetic effect. Bordwell and Staiger are quick to point out the limitations of Jean-Louis Comolli's theory² ('Cinema's construction of depth is reduced to 'Renaissance perspective' (itself a slogan for several perspective systems)' and 'bourgeois ideology' is made static for: 'three centuries'), but the association of 1920s film theory

¹ D. Bordwell and J. Staiger *et al*, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1988), 250.

² 'As an Althusserian Marxist, Comolli sees every technological innovation as torn by contradictions among economic pressures, ideological demands, and signifying practises ... Where Comolli breaks new ground is in insisting that both style and technology are causally determined by ideological processes.' Bordwell and Staiger, 247, 250.

with Renaissance modes of representation is, nonetheless, a valid one. The extreme aestheticism of works such as Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*, 1928) highlights the influence of the Surrealist artist Dali (who co-authored the project) but it is worth remembering that much of Dali's distinctive iconography was inspired by the imagery of High Renaissance art such as Bosch's phantasmagoric *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (Prado Museum, Madrid), probably painted between 1505 and 1510.

The triptych-like association in the Renaissance period of perspective, subjectivity and representation, though imbued with a degree of complexity at times difficult to unravel, is not some kind of artistic closed-circuit operating independently of its socio-historical context. The system of thought which this Section documents begins in the 1390s with a concerted attempt to justify and confirm the cultural validity of the painter's work, and progresses through the art, science, architecture, and anatomy that constitutes the intellectual and cultural lattice work of the Italian High Renaissance, to arrive, in the sixteenth century, at a matrix of conviction in the humanities at large which firstly views and organises the world in terms of the human body, and secondly links this notion of body with that of text. The proportion in High Renaissance art is designed to privilege the body; we are intended to 'read' our environment through this body and find its perfect proportion mirrored in architecture. This *liber corporum*³ is both a text and a medium; it represents identity and provides a method of interpreting one's surroundings. When we look forward to the seventeenth century and writers such as Milton, however, we find the gradual de-emphasising of this mode of thought and the concurrent emergence of a more fully developed concept of self. The rejection of the essentially

³ Sawday defines 'liber corporum' as 'the book of the body written by God'. Sawday, 135.

Medieval body/soul dichotomy - in favour of a concept of selfhood - had begun to find expression in earlier texts such as Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, but as we have already seen this was not without its problems. By the mid-seventeenth century Milton is able to achieve what Marlowe could not through a complete rejection of the 'body as text' metaphor of the High Renaissance. 'Body' is not now privileged, it is no longer something to be 'read' which can thereby provide clues as to the nature of reality; 'self' is now pre-eminent and this 'self' is not compatible (as 'body' was) with text. It stands, in fact, in radical opposition to this - self as con(tra)text. This Section will therefore propose a method of reading *Paradise Lost* which sees Milton finding 'self' in 'context' rather than 'text' in 'body'.

In *Paradise Lost* the character of Satan bears the burden of Milton's conceptualised 'self', and in its development Milton is both innovator and historian. The concept of interiorised context can be thought of in relation to Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, while the notion of the centrality of place can be fruitfully considered alongside a much earlier text, Foxe's Latin comedy *Christus Triumphans*. It is important to be clear here that this Section is not positing a stance on Milton's intention - since Milton was an erudite scholar it would be reasonable to assume he had encountered these texts and that any rhetorical echoes or similarities/developments in themes are deliberate, but that is not my argument here. Nor, for that matter, is it my aim to comment on Miltonic ideology at large. Rather, I hope to outline a method of interpreting *Paradise Lost* which allows us to view the Satanic 'self' of the text - as its author may or may not have intended us to - in relation to the ideas of selfhood which appear in two earlier Renaissance dramas. Viewed in such terms *Paradise Lost* overcomes the inadequacies of its predecessors through an infinite process of rhetorical contextualisation which I have termed 'the

Milonic rhetoric of the abyss'. The remainder of the Section is therefore structured as follows:

II. The '*liber corporum*'. High Renaissance art, architecture and anatomy.

Privileging of 'body' as a means of 'reading' the world at large.

III. Contextualisation - Place versus space: a few preliminary points.

IV. Definitions of hell - the foundations of Milton's 'dungeon horrible'.

V. *Ne plus ultra* - Milton's rhetoric of the abyss.

VI. Conclusion - the bigger picture: Milton and Traherne.

For convenience I have enclosed copies of most of the paintings, sculptures and illustrations referred to in Section II.

II. High Renaissance Art - the 'liber corporum'.

In the 1390s the artist Cennino d'Andrea Cennini produced a painter's manual which opened with a justification of his art based heavily upon its scientific and theoretical origins:

... [following the Expulsion from Paradise] Man afterward pursued many useful occupations ... and some were, and are, more theoretical than others; they could not all be alike, since theory is the most worthy ... an occupation known as painting ... calls for imagination, and skill of hand, in order to discover things not seen, hiding themselves under the shadow of natural objects, and to fix them with the hand, presenting to plain sight what doe [sic] not actually exist. And it justly deserves to be enthroned next to theory, and to be crowned with poetry.⁴

This association of art with theory prefigures by approximately thirty years the development - in the early fifteenth-century - of the systematic organisation of three-dimensional space which would come to be known as linear perspective. In terms of artistic progression this is a step of monumental importance for it not only provides the potential for a less simplistic representation of space and context than had hitherto been possible, it also paves the way for the illusionistic treatment of the human form which would so mark the painting of the following two centuries. The impact of Florentine architect Brunelleschi's codification was both dramatic and immediate. Within five years it had been put to innovatory use by the painter Masaccio who masterfully combined these formulations with chiaroscuro - a technique involving the manipulation

⁴ Cennino d'Andrea Cennini, *The Craftsman's Handbook*, trans. Daniel V. Thompson Jr. (New York: Dover, 1960), 1-2. Quoted in Victoria C. Gardner, "Homines non nascuntur, sed figuntur: Benvenuto Cellini's *Vita* and Self-Preservation of the Renaissance Artist," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 28.2 (1997): 451.

of light and shadow - to achieve, for the first time in Western art, the striking combination of illusionistic space and naturalistic treatment of the human body. [Figure 1]. Artists such as Andrea Mantegna (a forerunner of the German painter and engraver Durer) were now fully exploiting the potential of the new systems of perspective, *trompe-l'oeil*, and illusionism. In the last of these flowing imagery transgressed the boundaries that distinguish ceiling from wall, domes were made to appear infinite in their expansiveness, and the manner in which the 'frame' of any work was respected or infringed upon became central to the piece as a whole. In his emphatic stretching of the limits of naturalistic representation - evident in many of his paintings but particularly marked in the dramatic foreshortening of his *Dead Christ* (Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera, [Figure 2]) and the striking manipulation of depth of the *Painted Oculus* (Mantua, Palazzo Ducale, [Figure 3]) - Mantegna undoubtedly pre-figured the trends of sixteenth-century Mannerism, but even during this period of rapid scientific development and surging perspectival experimentation, we can clearly see the ultimate significance of the human form. With reference to the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel [Figure 4], art historian Celestine Dars writes:

... many artists used perspective only in order to achieve a certain degree of illusion. This is the case with Michelangelo's ceiling ... where the 'architecture' that provides the composition's structure is purely illusionistic. Had Michelangelo decided to leave the figures out, he would have achieved a complete *trompe-l'oeil*. This was obviously not his purpose and the addition of figures prevents us from being mistaken.⁵

⁵ Celestine Dars, *Images of Deception: The Art of Trompe-L'oeil* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1979), 18.

It is perhaps unsurprising that in tandem with such sweeping progress in spatial depiction should come an increased interest in subjectivity. Indeed, as early as 1434 Netherlandish art, by now noted for its intense fascination with perspective and dimension (aerial perspective is a development generally accredited to the Dutch and Flemish masters of the High Renaissance), was already beginning to invert the subject/object relationship by actively structuring its images around a representation of the artist himself. Jan Van Eyck's *Giovanni Arnolfini and His Wife* (National Gallery, London, [Figure 5]) depicts the Italian banker and his new bride against the unexpected backdrop of a convex mirror which, in turn, sends back into the room a reflection of the painter at work. Dual perspective (simultaneously that of subject and object) has thereby been introduced into the framed image, and the prominently displayed signature and date - conspicuously placed above the mirror rather than at the bottom of the portrait - further underlines the point.⁶

During this period art came to be more and more closely associated with both science and mathematics, and Cennini's late fourteenth century yoking of the realm of theory with the 'occupation known as painting' was being revealed as both perceptive and prophetic. Geometry, measurement, and proportion were, according to Durer, the fundamentals upon which all Italian art was based, and his *Four Books on Human Proportions*, when published posthumously in 1528, tapped directly into the spirit of the early sixteenth century. This is the period of Leonardo's 'Perfect Man', arms and legs outstretched, framed by a circle which is in turn framed by a square.⁷

⁶ Other examples of this type of technique include Parmigianino's early sixteenth century *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 1524).

⁷ This Vitruvian emblem can also be seen as relevant to some poetry of the seventeenth century. Norford writes 'I believe that the emblem of the circle in the square is the key to "Upon Appleton House"'. Don Parry Norford,

Leonard Barkan writes: 'Luca Pacioli, the mathematical friend of Leonardo, found in the head and body of man the "two most principal figures without which it is impossible to create anything," the perfect circle and the square.'⁸ Various fifteenth century artistic trends and concerns reach their culmination in Leonardo's work which is entirely the product of the age yet simultaneously well ahead of its time. Despite such dramatic intensification, however, it is not until 1543 that the systematic study of anatomy is able to break free from the restrictive chains which the Greek physician Galen had placed upon it more than a thousand years earlier with the formulation of a theory based solely upon animal dissection. The radical 're-structuring' of the body that Vesalius' seven volume *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* came to represent, evoked, perhaps unsurprisingly, furious controversy, but in a pattern which would come to be typical of early sixteenth-century developments, Leonardo's work had already blazed the trail.

It is probably fair to say that had Leonardo's anatomical writings been published and disseminated during his lifetime they would have revolutionised the contemporary study of the human body. This would have been radical in itself, and yet these drawings would have achieved even more than this, for they would have prefigured by approximately thirty years the deliberate emphasis upon the 'human figure "in context"'⁹ which was to become integral to the work of artists and architects such as Tintoretto and

"Marvell's "Holy Mathematicks"," *Modern Language Quarterly* 38 (1977): 245.

⁸ Leonard Barkan, *Nature's Work of Art: the Human Body as Image of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 128. Quoted in Norford.

⁹ Kenneth Keele and Jane Roberts, *Leonardo Da Vinci: Anatomical Drawings from the Royal Library Windsor Castle*, (Metropolitan Museum of Art: New York, 1983), 8.

Palladio.¹⁰ As early as the winter of 1507-8 Leonardo was undertaking a complete gross dissection. Like his successor Vesalius, he considered the representation of a third dimension in his anatomical drawings to be nothing less than essential and this was, in itself, a substantial step forward from the two-dimensional lifelessness of comparable Medieval efforts. There is one sense, however, in which Leonardo's work arguably suffers rather than benefits from being so far ahead of its time, for it is this persistent interest in context which is perhaps the downfall of many of these drawings. A constant desire to somehow unravel the intertwined strands of perspective and subjectivity (clearly evident in the sketches of the eye), finds its natural corollary (in the work upon the body) in the absolute insistence that each organ, skeletal structure, and discrete section of musculature must be shown within its complete immediate anatomical context in order that its true function be discernible. Such attempts at all-encompassing inclusivity often result in problematical ill-defined areas, the product of an anatomist who, put simply, strives to show too much in the quest for a complete and total process of representation. Kenneth D. Keele writes:

Leonardo's early explorations into human anatomy focused on the nature of "experience" and in particular of perspectival experience ... [his] many studies of the eye ... are aimed at a deeper understanding of the nature of the subjective side of "experience" as obtained from all the senses, not only the eye. In parallel with this he was attempting to analyse the nature of the objective observation of natural phenomena .¹¹

¹⁰ The importance of this in the grand scheme of things is perhaps more immediately apparent if considered alongside the fact that it is the theatrical expansiveness and dramatic manipulation of both space and perspective (so characteristic of these artists) which formed the basis for the Baroque style when it was later taken up and developed by pioneers such as Rubens and the Carracci family.

¹¹ Keele, 11.

The folly of this type of excessively ambitious project was one of the pitfalls which Vesalius would later astutely avoid by exercising the discipline and self-restraint necessary to deliberately limit both the scope and complexity of the diagrammatic representations of his endeavours at the dissection table. Leonardo, however, despite his insistence upon the ultimate significance of proportion and context, remains dedicated to the fundamentally Medieval dichotomy of body/soul. Alongside one of his views of the human skull can be found a series of notes which clearly indicate - with scrupulous mathematical precision - the location of 'senso commune'.¹² The precise whereabouts of the human soul is therefore meticulously located by the intersection of two perpendicular lines superimposed upon a sketched cranium.

But while the science of anatomy attempted to make sense of the world by focusing upon microcosmic interiors, architects such as Andrea Palladio and sculptors such as Giambologna were demonstrating not simply that the proportions of the human form were applicable to externals, but more importantly that the concepts of drama and dramatic space were no longer the sole preserve of the playhouse.

Giambologna's *Rape of a Sabine* (1581-2, Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence, [Figure 6]) typifies the transitional nature of much art and sculpture of the late sixteenth century. The centrality of the notion of a unified whole is powerfully underscored by the inextricable intertwining of the three figures

¹²'Senso commune' - literally 'meeting place of the senses'. However, as Keele points out, Leonardo explicitly refers to it on another occasion as 'the seat of the soul'. Keele, 48.

and, if the point requires further confirmation, it is provided in the fact that the piece is fashioned from a single section of solid marble. And yet despite the almost overwhelming sense of integrity and solidity which emanates from this sculpture, it is virtually impossible not to be struck by the dynamic verticality and drama of the work, for a strong feeling of movement is encoded in its acknowledgement of the primacy of perspective:

... [Giambologna] created a statue that not only offers multiple viewing possibilities but requires that the spectator circle it to understand it fully. It is a paradigm of the *figura serpentinata*, a form that began with Leonardo, was explored by Michelangelo, and was brought to full realisation by Giambologna. This form, pointing to the changed relationship between viewers and works of art at the end of the sixteenth century, gave viewers a part to play in the "narrative" of a work of art; no art demanded their participation more insistently than sculpture. Multifaceted sculpture, a topic much discussed during the sixteenth century, is related to the new connection between viewer and work of art. In the mid-sixteenth century the issue was a significant part of the *paragone* debate whether painting or sculpture was superior ... Giambologna, in works such as the *Rape of the Sabines*, not only took up again the challenge of the *paragone* controversy and ostensibly re-established the supremacy of sculpture but, more importantly, created a new link between viewer and work of art.¹³

And so each change in spectatorial position takes us further into the drama of the piece and, as with the architecture of Palladio, we must actively move through the 'text', for the effect of the work cannot successfully be separated from the subjectivity of its observer. It is interesting to note here the way in which the painting of the first half of the sixteenth-century had already paved the way through artistic techniques such as anamorphosis, the most famous

¹³ Mary Weitzel Gibbons, *Giambologna: Narrator of the Catholic Reformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 3-4.

example of which is undoubtedly the skull in the foreground of Holbein's *The Ambassadors*. This is one of a variety of methods by which painting attempts to emulate the multiplicity of perspective which is automatically encoded in any multifaceted sculpture. As we shall see, many of the great illusionistic ceilings of the seventeenth-century strive towards this kind of dynamic interplay between spectator and work by actively challenging boundaries and contradicting Brunelleschi's rules of perspective. The desired effect may vary from piece to piece, but what we can say in general terms is that such works aim to encompass in two dimensions the impression of movement and dynamic interplay between viewer and work that sculpture and architecture achieve by fully exploiting the potential of depth.

Architectural historians are currently entrenched in debate as to the precise significance of the high Renaissance adherence to the Greek harmonic system and other mathematical ratios of proportion (such as those employed by Wittkower) to Palladio's work, with much recent critical opinion tending towards a metaphorical stance: 'He subscribed to the ancient *topoi* that the macrocosm of the world was reflected in the microcosm of man and that the rules of architecture refer to the rules of nature, but there is very little evidence that Palladio treated such concepts as more than metaphors.'¹⁴ What is beyond dispute, however, is that geometrical figures such as the circle and square - whose position as 'principal figures' was determined in relation to the human form - remained central to Palladio's structural designs, and the *Villa Rotunda* (or *Villa Capra*), 1550-1, outside Vicenza (probably his most famous work) is perhaps the most obvious example of such a technique in practice. This also goes some way towards explaining the fact that English country

¹⁴ Bruce Boucher, *Andrea Palladio: The Architect in his Time* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 239.

houses built in the Palladian style - such as Chiswick House which was designed by Lord Burlington following a trip to Northern Italy - often exhibit a cubic quality in terms of spatial organisation. The human body moves through these 'dynamic spaces' and finds mirrored there its own 'perfect' proportions. The subject therefore experiences a process of contextualisation whereby its environment is an externalised representation (in proportional terms) of itself:

Vasari, describing the qualities of a well-proportioned building, said that it should 'represent' the human body both as a whole and in all its parts. The facade should have the symmetry of the human face, the door placed like the mouth, the windows like the eyes, and so on. Vasari develops the comparison in elaborate detail: staircases, for example, are the arms and legs of the building. In effect, this is an allegorisation of the original Vitruvian analogy (pointing towards a conception like Spenser's House of Alma), animating it far beyond an abstract doctrine of proportion.

Palladio, discussing the planning of palaces and villas, compared their lay-out to that of the human body, some parts of which are noble, some mean and ugly, but all of which need each other. Implicit here is Menenius's fable of the body politic from Livy.¹⁵

The infiltration of the concept of 'dramatic space' into the realm of architecture was facilitated yet further when the theatre of the period began to look to the world of architecture for stage sets, and this is arguably the direction in which Palladio would have channelled his remaining energies had he lived beyond 1580 (one of his final designs was a stage set for the Teatro Olimpico, Vicenza). In general terms, however, it is probably fairest to

¹⁵ John Peacock, *The Stage Designs of Inigo Jones: The European Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 121.

characterise Palladio as transitional, standing as he does somewhere in the nebulous border region between high Renaissance Classicism and Mannerism. Throughout this period it is almost impossible to dissociate painting, sculpture, architecture and anatomy, for they are each actively powered by the others, forming a quincuncial arrangement the fifth - and central - component of which is the human body. Just as Leonardo's work in the early part of the century links art and anatomy by making the principles of one applicable to the other, so architects such as Palladio take Leonardo's 'human figure in context' and combine it with Vitruvian traditions to arrive at structural designs whose spatial organisation contrives to privilege subjectivity and create a dramatic space capable of rivalling that of the theatre of the period. (If a concrete example of such influence was sought one could do worse than look to the designs of Inigo Jones, but such a task is unfortunately outwith the remit of this thesis.) Under such a system even the apparently disparate disciplines of architecture and anatomy could find something akin to common ground. Sawday writes of Vesalius' text (*De Humani Corporis Fabrica*) as 'deploy[ing] an architectural mode of analysis in that it envisaged the body as 'constructed', and it sought to replicate this construction (in reverse order to that chosen by Crooke) by gradually building up the various detailed segments into an organized whole.',¹⁶ and also provides a detailed and impressive analysis of the famous title page of Vesalius text, pointing to the strong element of theatricality and interestingly likening one member of the entranced audience to 'the iconic image of the poet Dante, contemplating the souls of the damned in hell'.¹⁷ I have included this illustration [Figure 7] and its relevance is fairly self-explanatory, but since Sawday has already supplied

¹⁶ Sawday, 132.

¹⁷ Ibid., 67.

such a comprehensive 'dissection' of the piece, I do not propose to go into what would only be pleonastic detail here. More suggestive and directly relevant as a prelude to my own work is his discussion of two images [Figures 8 and 9] each of the body and text, the first of which dates from the 1200s, the second from almost the dawn of the sixteenth century (1493). Comparing the figures Sawday states:

The super-imposition of the body on top of the text, as in the thirteenth century figure, disappears, to be replaced by an intervention of text *within* the body ... In the 1493 image ... the key transformation was the banishment of the text from the border-lines ... The body exists in its own dissociated space.¹⁸

Sawday points to such a shift in emphasis as 'anticipat[ing] later Vesalian and post-Vesalian depictions of the body', and I would certainly concur. However, I would like to extend the significance of this line of thought a little further and attempt to relate it directly - as Sawday does not - to Milton's construction of a Satanic 'self' in *Paradise Lost*, for the key terms in the above quoted passage are, I believe 'border-lines' and 'space'. The move which Sawday charts from a 'super-imposed body' on text to 'text within body' is the initiation of a process of boundary-blurring which Sawday himself picks up in the 'banishment of text from the border-lines'. While initially body was contextualised by text, in the later image text is contextualised by body. In any instance where there exists a strong interplay between an entity and that which surrounds it, limits inevitably assume a central role, for any alteration to, or even challenging of, these limits will automatically have crucial consequences. The expulsion, therefore, of text from the definitive 'border-lines' in the 1493 illustration anticipates a wider

¹⁸ Ibid., 134.

and more significant dissipation of confidence in the abilities of text to adequately express or represent the (as yet unexplored) potential within the human form. This is, in one sense, a seminal form of what would metamorphose, over a century and a half later, into Milton's profound and complete rejection in *Paradise Lost* of the 'body as text' metaphor. My method of interpreting the Satanic 'self' of the epic finds the importance of body displaced by the significance of self, and the accompanying alternative proffered for 'text' is context, or 'con-tra-text'.

Where context is concerned, limits retain their importance, and part of their vast potential power is located within their ability to radically alter that which comes into contact with them. If we sought an artistic analogy therefore for Milton's Satanic analogy in *Paradise Lost* of 'self as context' I would suggest we look beyond the early *trompe-l'oeil* to the latter part of the seventeenth century and works such as Antonio Verrio's *Heaven Room* of Burghley House (1696) [Figure 10], or to the great illusionistic ceilings which came to dominate the art and architecture of the later sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century. It is seemingly paradoxical to speak of a ceiling as 'laying foundations' and yet in many ways Michelangelo's work in the Sistine Chapel did precisely that. This 'seething, angular mass of dimensional contradictions' [Figure 4] is described by Mastai as 'illusionism raised to the metaphysical plane'¹⁹ and it is not difficult when we look at such a work to discern the elements which are picked up and developed - almost to the level of grotesque hyperbole - in some of the work at the turn of the seventeenth-century and beyond. The architect and painter Pietro da Cortona takes the dimensional intensity of Veronese's *Triumph of Venice* (Venice, Palazzo

¹⁹ M.L. d'Otrange Mastai, *Illusion in Art: Trompe l'oeil. A History of Pictorial Illusionism* (New York: Abaris Books, 1975), 112.

Ducale 1583) and combines it with multiple viewpoints - five - to emerge with a ceiling for the Palazzo Barberini (*The Triumph of Divine Providence*, [Figure 11]) which is, to its observer, almost overwhelming. When carried to its extreme, illusionism becomes precisely that - overwhelming - and by the close of the seventeenth-century this has become so much the case that the 'masterpiece of Jesuit illusionism'²⁰, Andrea Pozzo's *The Apotheosis of St. Ignatius* [Figure 12] is required to stipulate a specific viewpoint on the floor from which it is to be perceived in order that the figure of Christ does not appear to be upside down:

...the viewer is thus made aware that the painted scene is merely an incentive to his own imagination. Far from being passive, he must place himself not only in the right spot, but in the right frame of mind. This covenant between artist and viewer has always been implicit, whether or not the public was directed to a special vantage point. No great illusionistic scheme ever truly deceived, or attempted to deceive. The artist's function was to fling open the illusionistic portals into the domain of imagination, that those who were worthy might enter.²¹

As we shall see later in the Section, Milton's *Paradise Lost* shares several common features with such works:

- an interest in perspective and vast, panoramic dimensions.
- a general disregard for the 'absolute' nature of boundaries or limits, and an interest in the creative/transformational power of the consequences of challenging and/or transcending such limits.

²⁰ Ibid., 126.

²¹ Ibid., 11.

- an appreciation of the two key concepts in the above passage; 'imagination' and: 'passivity'.

This is not to say, however, that Milton's development of 'self' is the sole reason for the comprehensiveness of scale in *Paradise Lost*; this is well known to be a traditional (if not defining) feature of epic.²² What I am suggesting is that its value as an established trait of the genre is not the only significance that the cosmic scale of the poem carries, for it takes its place as part of a wider collection of techniques which Milton utilises in order to define self by devaluing body and privileging context. A visual representation of the human form is not difficult, but any artistic or literary rendering of 'self' requires a transfer into an objective reality of that which is profoundly subjective and intangible, and as we have already seen in the previous chapter this is a problem which can never truly be circumnavigated. There is therefore a sense in which we are always proceeding by negatives. It may not be possible to truly define self but body can be devalued and no longer permitted to stand as a reliable text through which we 'read' our realities.

When we look then at the art, architecture, sculpture and anatomy of the high Renaissance, and trace it - in general terms - into the sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century, what we find is a spider's web of differentiated yet interdependent disciplines, but the movement within each individual one can be seen to parallel that of its neighbour, for when reduced to its simplest terms it usually involves a shift away from that which is tangible and visible to the naked eye and towards that which is abstracted or in

²² While the cosmic scale of *Paradise Lost* may be unique to Milton, Classical epic also displays a certain vastness - Odysseus wanders the Mediterranean, and both he and Virgil's Aeneas descend into the underworld.

some way hidden. As the gross anatomy of the sixteenth-century gives way to the development of the compound microscope in the seventeenth, Milton's epic actively displaces the notion of 'body as text' in favour of 'self as context', so while in 1599 Shakespeare could write of 'the body of your discourse' (*Much Ado About Nothing* I, i, 287), almost half a century later Milton is referring to 'that book, within whose sacred context all wisdom is infolded' (*Ch. Govt. Pref.*).²³ It is to this notion of 'context' then, that we must now turn.

²³ John Milton, "The Reason of Church-government Urg'd against Prelaty. The Preface," in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 747.

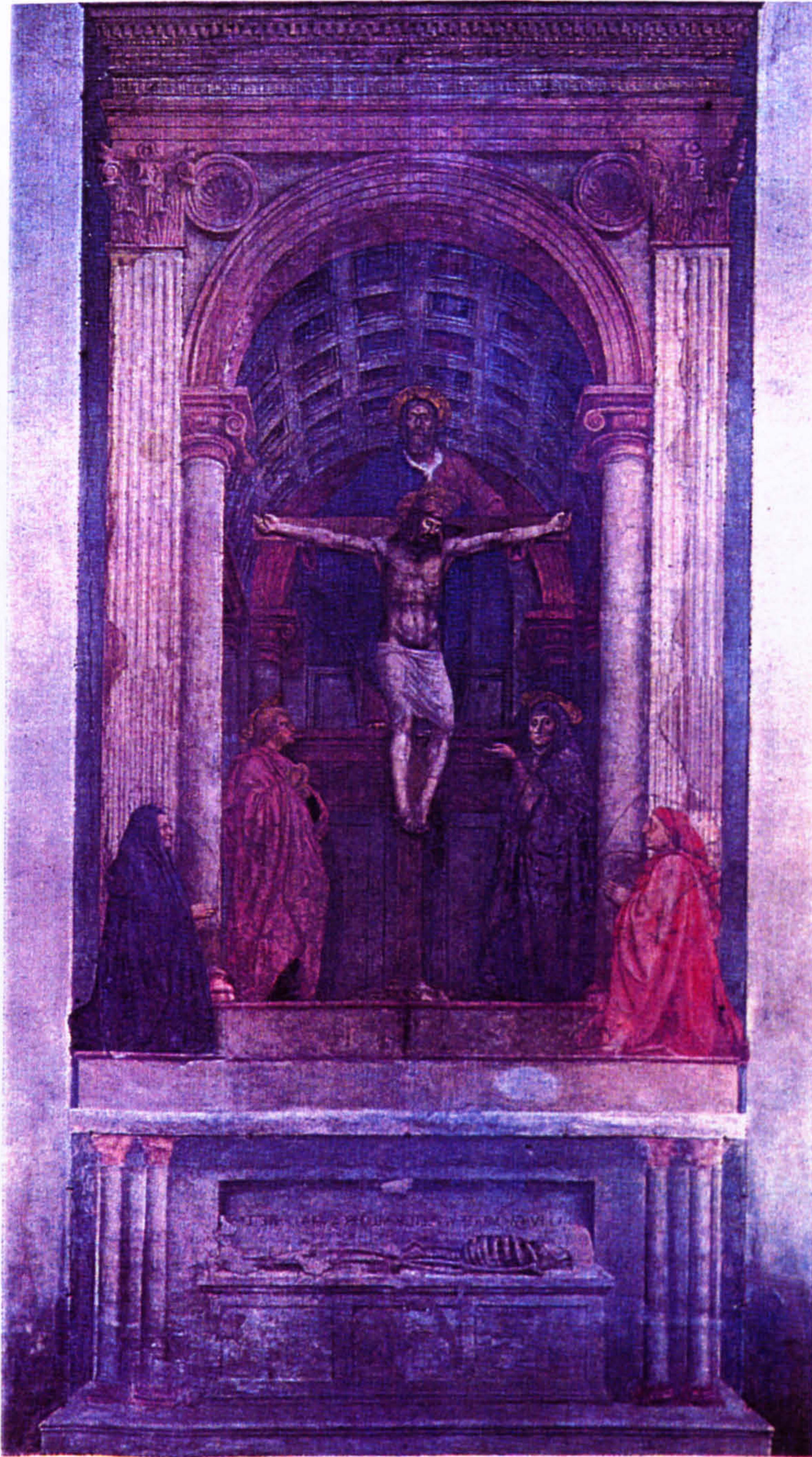


Figure 1
Masaccio's *Trinity Fresco* (1427)



Figure 2
Mantegna's *Dead Christ* (1506)

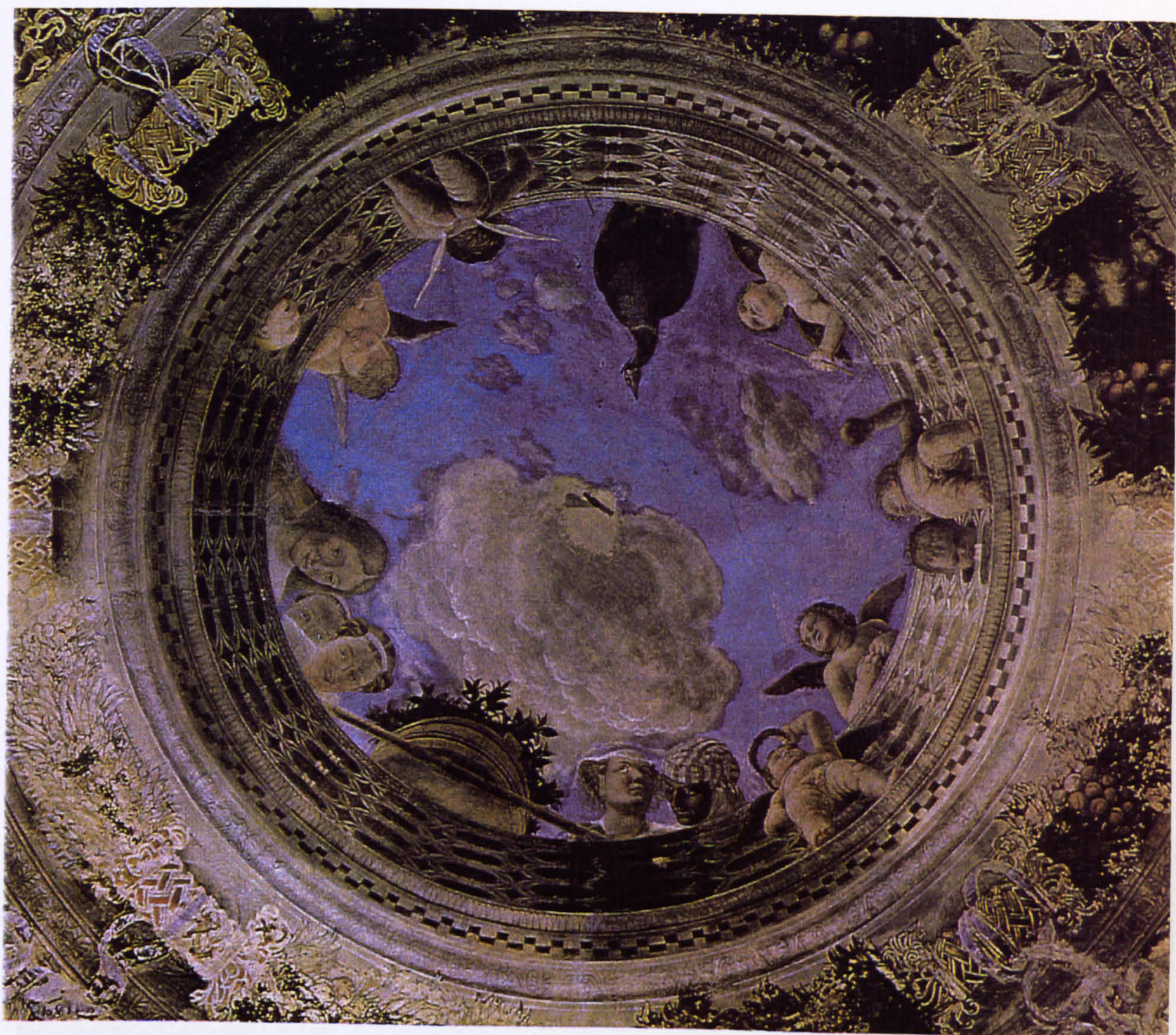


Figure 3
Mantegna's *Painted Oculus* (1473)

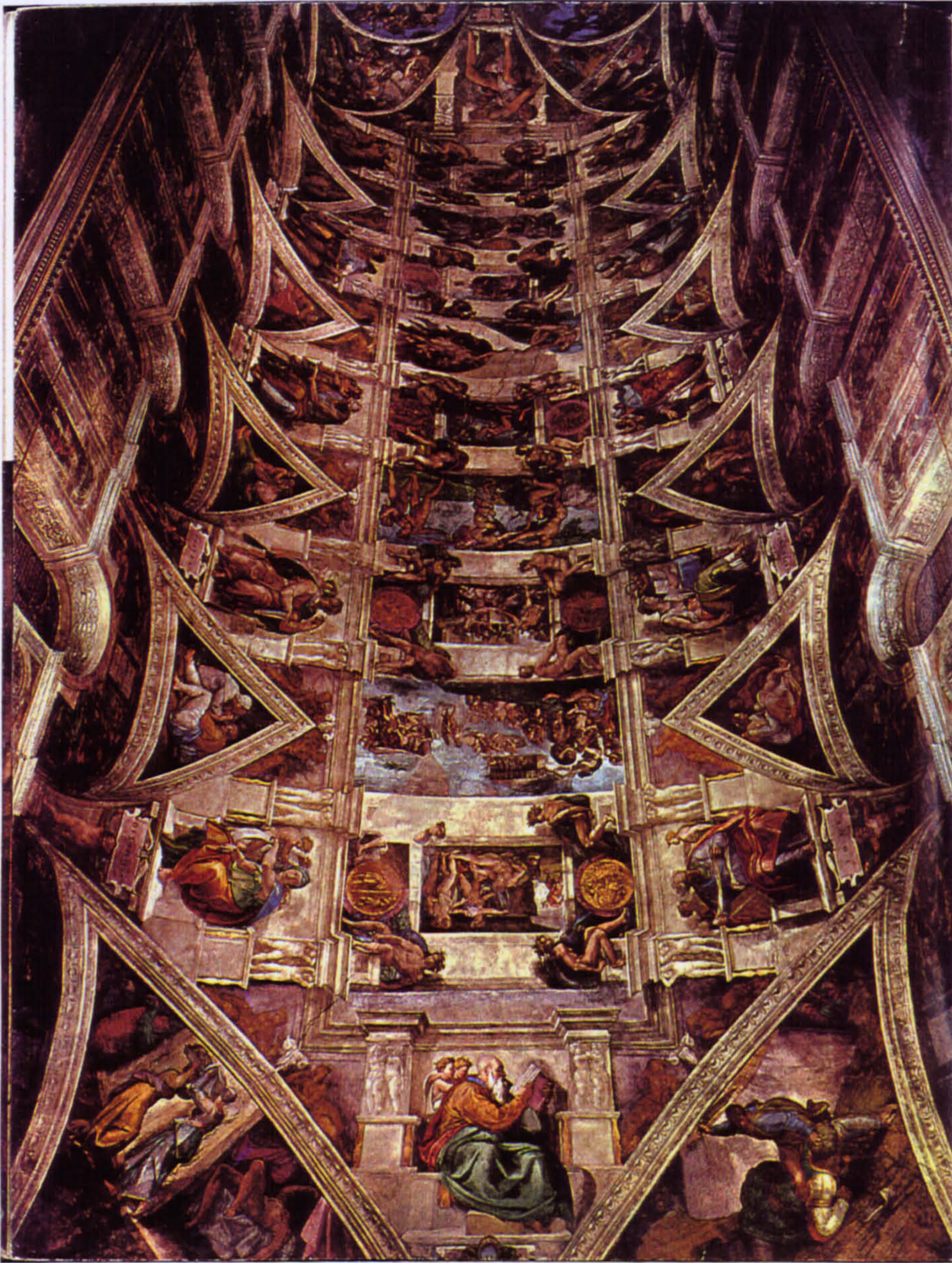


Figure 4
Michelangelo's *The Sistine Ceiling* (1508-12)


Figure 5
Jan Van Eyck's *Giovanni Arnolfini and His Wife*
(1434)



Figure 5
Jan Van Eyck's *Giovanni Arnolfini and His Wife*
(1434)



Figure 6
Giambologna's *Rape of a Sabine* (1581-2)



ANDREAE VESALII
BRUXELLENSIS, SCHOLAE
medicorum Patauinae professoris, de
Humani corporis fabrica
Libri septem.

CVM CAESARAE
Maieſt. Galliarum Regis, ac Senatus Veneti gra-
tia & privilegio, ut in diplomatis eorundem continetur.

Figure 7
Vesalius' *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543)

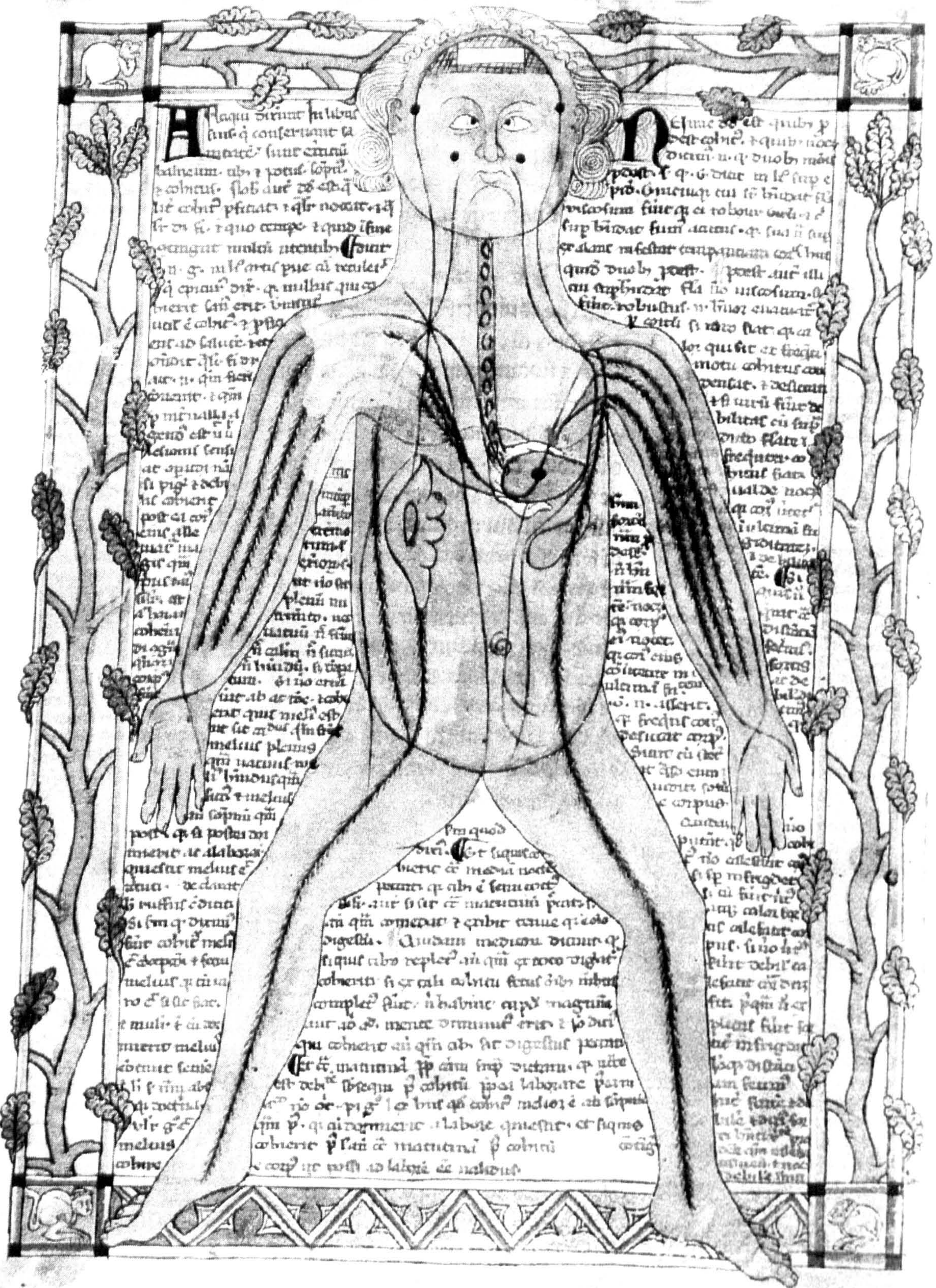


Figure 8
Arterial figure (thirteenth century)



Figure 10
Antonio Verrio's *Heaven Room* (1696)

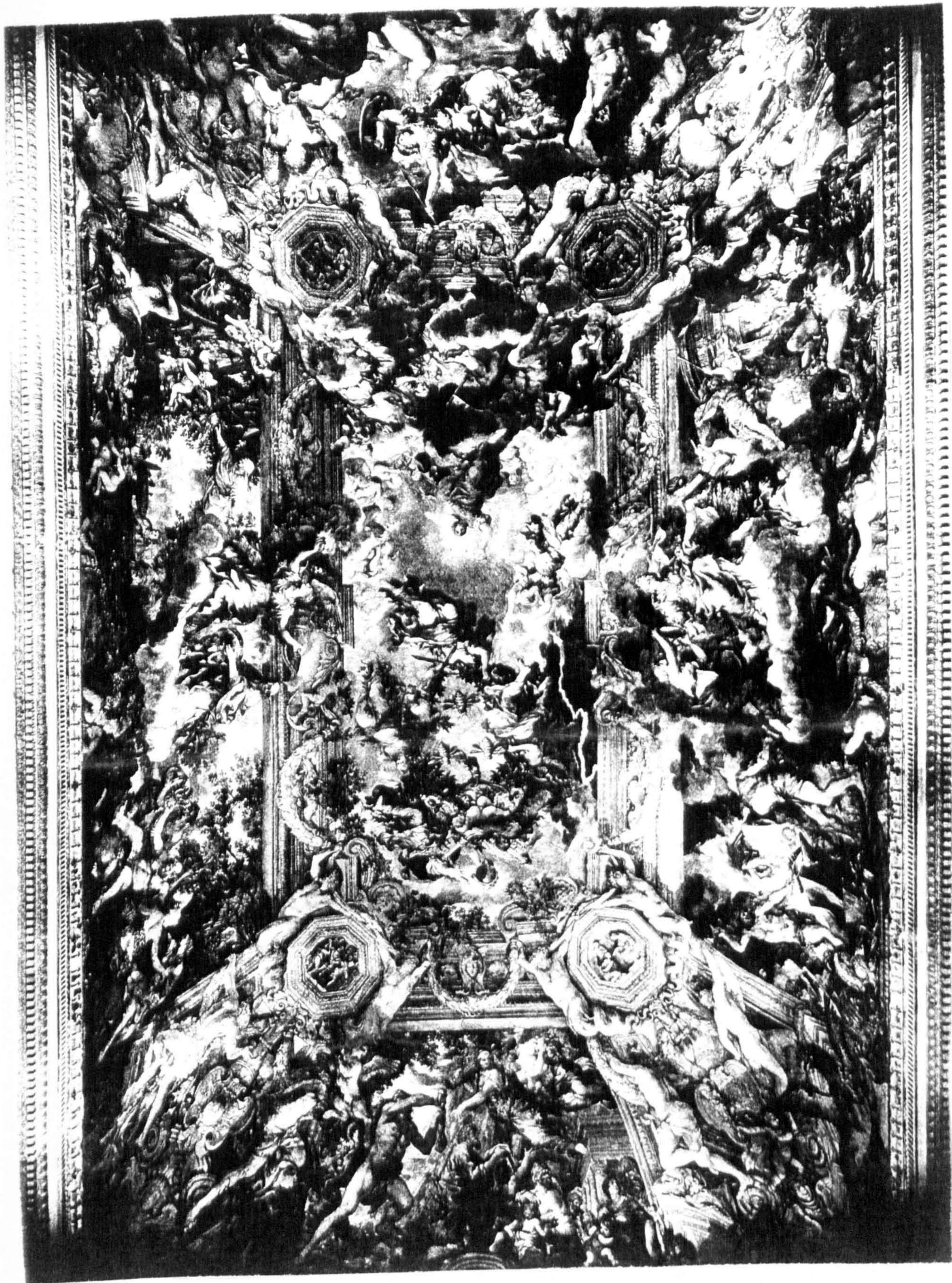


Figure 11
Pietro da Cortona's *Triumph of Divine Providence*
(1633-39)

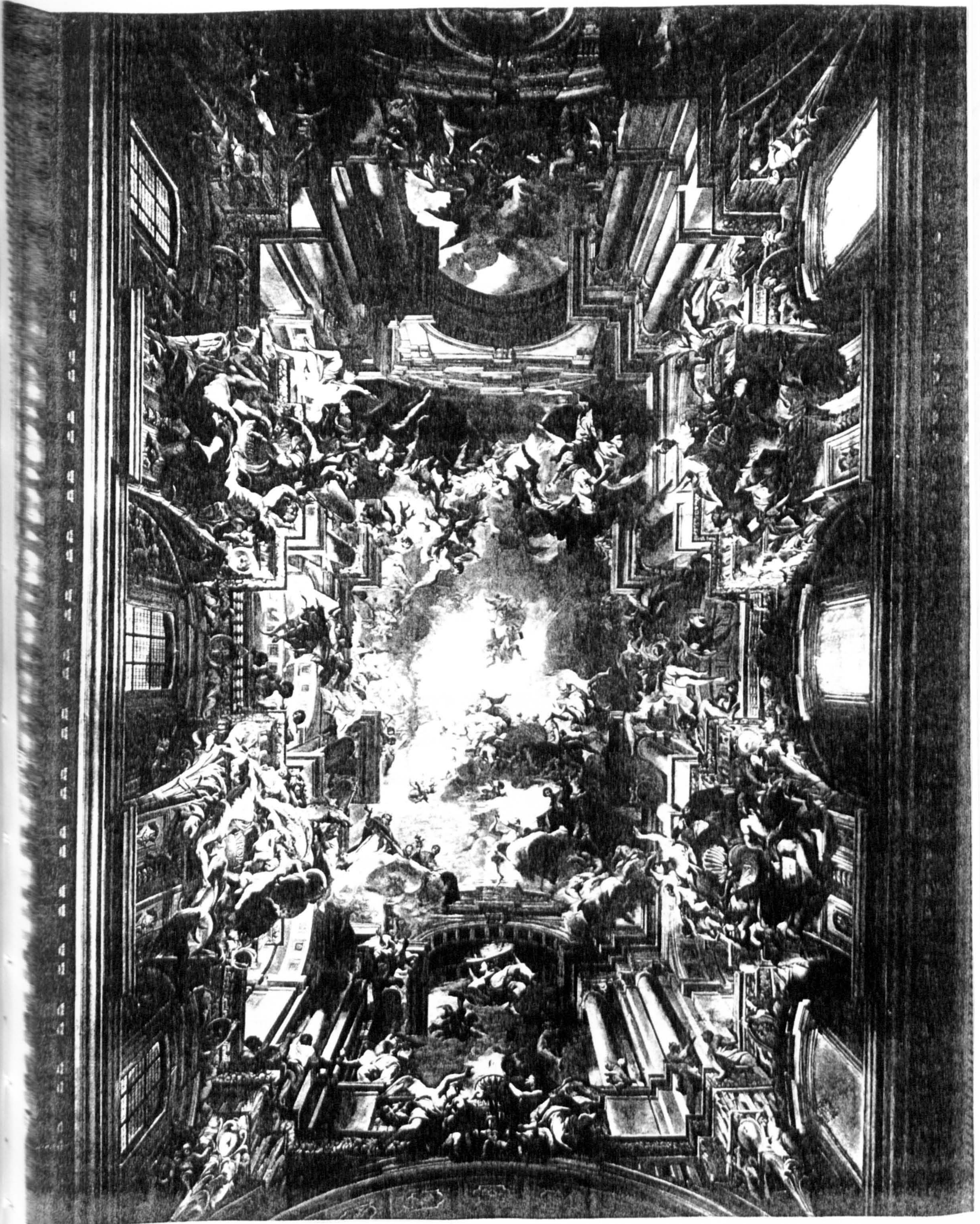


Figure 12
Pozzo's *The Apotheosis of St. Ignatius* (1691-94)

III. Contextualisation: 'Place' versus 'Space'

In Ted Hughes' poem 'The Jaguar' a wild animal is vividly described repeatedly pacing its personal prison (a cage in the zoo). This process of endlessly striving motion will continue, we are led to believe, until the end of the day when the jaguar will eventually sleep. Each time the animal encounters the wall of its cage it turns, a split second before contact would have been made with the boundary between itself and the world which lies beyond the confines of its prison. The poem concludes as follows:

... He spins from the bars, but there's no cage to him

More than to the visionary his cell:
His stride is wildernesses of freedom:
The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel.
Over the cage floor the horizons come.²⁴

The long, open vowel sounds of the penultimate line ('world', 'rolls', 'long', 'heel') in combination with the use of the word 'thrust' create a clear sense of forceful and expansive motion, but the careful pattern of end-stopping throughout the stanza effectively fences this in, until, that is, the dramatic yet ambivalent final line.

The horizon is, for us all, the limit of our experience. So it is for the jaguar whose experience - apart from within the confines of his own imagination - is limited to the cage. The horizons come over his cage floor; that is the extent of his experience. The stanza quoted above is a remarkably effective portrayal of dynamic spatial enclosure - claustrophobic entrapment

²⁴ Ted Hughes, "The Jaguar," in *The Hawk in the Rain* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 12.

of a creature filled with latent power and striving dynamism. The urgency of the linear movement is hammered home through the careful placing of the word 'horizon', the appearance of which in the final line should, theoretically at least, widen the poem and create an unrestricted and expansive sense of (imagined) freedom. The jaguar's horizon, however, is no longer the fixed and static point of reference which we commonly take it to be; it is moving, and not simply moving, but closing in upon the subject. That which traditionally recedes from our grasp at a rate equal to that of our approach is, in this case, actively moving towards the jaguar. The fact that this is occasioned by the jaguar's continual movement serves to make the process both cyclical and self-perpetuating; the animal paces the cage because he strives for freedom yet it is this very pacing which brings his horizons ever closer to him.

In general terms, techniques of enclosure and limitation have always played a defining role in contextualisation. A staple of the horror genre for generations, claustrophobic entrapment - particularly that associated with the grave - has been utilised to considerable psychological effect in settings as diverse as Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado*, Ridley Scott's *Alien*, and television's *The X-Files*. The product of such enclosed contextualisation is almost always dramatic - a suffocating and all-consuming terror intended to envelope reader and protagonist alike. It is, however, in the profound sense of unease engendered by lines such as Andrew Marvell's that we are perhaps able to locate one of the most disturbing elements of this technique:

And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song: then worms shall try
That long-preserved virginity:
And your quaint honor turn to dust;
And into ashes all my lust.

The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.

'To His Coy Mistress', 23-32.

The vastitude and grandeur of 'thy marble vault' may be finely counterpointed by the 'worms' of the immediately following line, but surely more subtly unnerving is the juxtapositioning in lines 31-2, for the near soporific lilt of 'fine and private place' sits very uncomfortably indeed with the explicitly stated location - 'grave'.²⁵ Marvell cleverly accentuates the impact of this couplet through the maintenance of a slow and deliberate pace; twelve of the fourteen words are monosyllabic but any potential accumulation of speed or increase in momentum is effectively prevented by the absence of enjambment in combination with the carefully positioned syntax. As the only two disyllabic words 'private' and 'embrace' are married in a union ill at ease with the sense of this section of text, but the reduction in pace and climactic positioning at the close of the section discount any possibility of our hurrying over these lines, preceded as they are not simply by end-stopping, but by a strong pause in the form of a full stop; there is a great deal more than simple incongruity in this couplet and its effect is not to be lost on us.

The creation of context then, is necessarily structured around boundaries, and these boundaries hold the potential to be simultaneously the outer limit, or end, of one context, and the beginning of another. Gregory of Nyssa - whose writings on the quest for perfection we shall briefly return to later - states that '... every good is by its very nature unlimited, and is

²⁵ The same incongruous relationship between superficial form and buried content can be seen at work on a larger scale in Book I, Canto 9 of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, where RedCrosse is being gradually lulled towards death by the rhythm and tone of Despair's rhetoric.

bounded only by the presence of its contrary'.²⁶ In the definition of any given entity then, its outermost limit which, by necessity, marks the boundary between that which the entity is, and that which it is not, becomes of critical importance. In concrete terms - a description of the human body, for example - the process of definition is relatively simple. However, if abstractions - such as the seventeenth-century development of a concept of 'selfhood' - are introduced into the equation, matters become markedly more complex. As rigidity gives way to fluidity boundaries become blurred and limits are driven back, their effectiveness impaired. The transcendence which obliteration of such limits inevitably entails is, however, ultimately no less restrictive than the limitations themselves, and the subsequent imploding dissolution of 'self' which is, in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the result of the stretching of these boundaries to breaking point is in the final analysis as fundamentally reductive as the containment of 'self' which it sought so emphatically to counter.²⁷ Thomas Traherne makes the point succinctly in his *Centuries*:

It is a stranger Paradox yet, That Power limited is Greater and more Effectual, than Power let loose; for this importeth, that Power is more infinite when bounded, than Power in its utmost liberty.²⁸

²⁶Gregory of Nyssa, *From Glory to Glory. Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*, Trans. and ed. Herbert Musurillo, S.J. (London: John Murray, 1962), 81.

²⁷ Greenblatt relates this idea to Marlowe's 'ironic world', stating that the 'desperate attempts at boundary and closure produce the opposite effect, reinforcing the condition they are meant to efface.' Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 198.

²⁸ Quoted in Rosalie L. Colie, "Thomas Traherne and the Infinite: The Ethical Compromise," *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 21 (1957/8): 79.

while Margaret Atwood's ever-diligent Aunt Lydia provides a twenty-first-century translation of his theme, dutifully reminding her charges in the futuristic Republic of Gilead of the two types of freedom: 'freedom to' and 'freedom from', before going on to stress - somewhat unsurprisingly - the advantages of the latter.²⁹

The remainder of this Section will address the consequences of such 'freedom' and consider the repercussions of exercising the power of self-contextualisation. While Marlowe's Mephostophilis stands before Faustus in his study to pronounce that neither is this hell nor is he out of it, Milton's Satan rises from the burning lake, surveys his surroundings, and declares not that this is hell and he is in it (as we might, under the circumstances, expect), but rather that this may indeed be hell, but it is, nonetheless, in him. The previous Section looked briefly at why the idea of hell held such attraction for late sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century tragedy, but to explore fully the significance of Satan's statement we must, in a sense, go back a step and consider precisely what is meant, in literary terms, by 'hell'.

²⁹ 'There is more than one kind of freedom, said Aunt Lydia. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it.' Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Virago Press Ltd., 1987), 34.

IV. Depictions of Hell

'I am puzzled about hell' declares Bosola in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, and with definitions such as those of the Act IV madmen in circulation, it is hardly surprising:

Doomsday not come yet? I'll draw it nearer by
a perspective ... Hell is a mere glass-house,
where the devils are continually blowing up
women's souls on hollow irons, and the fire
never goes out ...

(IV, ii, 73-4, 77-9)

Christian literature throughout the ages has frequently indulged in dramatic hyperbole based only loosely upon the dark and sombre Gospel metaphors derived from the burning rubbish-heaps in the valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) outside Jerusalem. Such depictions are as varied as they are numerous and since this Section is based around the significance of the concept of 'place', it seems only appropriate to acknowledge that this is certainly not the place for a comprehensive survey of such texts. However, since such representations are as far from homogenous as the religion from which they are developed, it would seem only sensible to preface any discussion of the Miltonic hell with a brief overview - in generic terms - of the main schools of thought on the subject which dominated Medieval and Renaissance Europe.

Anglo-Saxon religious poetry, despite at times focusing heavily upon the rhetoric and imagery of apocalyptic visions, tends to be vague in terms of geographical and physical descriptions of hell as location, choosing instead to consistently concentrate upon the corporeal torments of the damned:

There can be no speech on earth to recount in any sort of story the miserable torments, the foul places of burning in the abyss, which there were in the grim torture in hell. Mingled together there by way of affliction are the smoky flame and the rigours of ice, extreme heat and cold in hell's midst. At times the eyes weep there inordinately because of the furnace's blaze - it is quite full of things noxious. At times too the teeth of the people there gnash because of the great cold. This horrible alternation will go on happening to the wretches in there in an aeon of aeons, between bedarkened black nights and the misery and the smoke of seething pitch. There no voice stirs except violent weeping and lamentation - nothing else. Nor is there seen the face of any being except of the executioners who torture the wretched. Nothing is encountered therein except fire and cold and loathsome foulness: with their nose they can savour nothing except an overabundance of stench. There lamenting lips will be filled with the flame-spewing blaze of loathsome fire, and deadly fierce worms will shred them and gnaw their bones with fiery fangs.

'Judgment Day II'

A similar picture is painted in 'Christ III' (The Judgment), and even texts such as 'The Descent into Hell' display a striking absence of objective physical/geographical detail.³⁰ The reasons for focusing upon the bodily agonies of hell's inhabitants are fairly obvious but it is nonetheless worth contrasting such passages with contemporary accounts of the pleasures of Paradise:

There heaven-kingdom's portal is often open ... It is a delightsome plateau. There the green woodlands, spacious beneath the skies, not rain nor snow, nor breath of frost nor scorch of fire, nor falling of hail nor drizzle of rime, nor heat of the sun nor incessant cold, nor torrid weather nor wintry shower may spoil a whit, but the plateau remains perfect and unmarred. That noble land is abloom with blossoms. There

³⁰ Since both 'Christ III' and 'The Descent into Hell' form part of *The Exeter Book* they can be palaeographically dated with reasonable accuracy to the second half of the tenth century. 'Judgment Day II', while drawn from a different manuscript - Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 201, pp. 161-5 - is probably more or less contemporaneous. The translation used here is *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, ed. S.A.J. Bradley (London: Everyman, J.M. Dent, 1991).

stand no mountains nor steep hills there, nor do rocky cliffs rear aloft as here with us, no valleys nor dales nor ravines, hillocks nor dunes, and there lies there never a scrap of rough ground, but this noble plateau burgeons beneath the heavens, abloom with delights.

That radiant land, that region, is higher by twelve fathoms ... than any of the mountains which rear aloft, luminous beneath the constellations, here with us ...

'The Phoenix'

And so the Edenic vocabulary is continued in similar terms over the next two pages. What we become immediately aware of, however, is the way in which a technique which is perhaps best described as a curious thematic variant of the grammatical figure of synecdoche is made to function in the above passage. While there is certainly no lack of adjectives there is no mention of any feeling/emotion/physical sensation experienced by the inhabitants. Rather, the geographical and physical description of landscape is used to encompass, convey, and actively represent the experiences of the Paradise dweller. Moreover, if we return to the previous description of the torments of hell we find an antithetical version of the same technique. So, in the vision of hell the absent locale is essentially contained within suffering, while the implied pleasures of Paradise are assumed to be encapsulated in the aesthetic beauty of the setting.

By the Medieval period this reluctance to construct a literary model of hell founded upon visible and geographical constructs was perhaps less prominent, and regardless of how selective one chooses to be, mention must nonetheless be made of Dante's 'Inferno' and 'Purgatorio' in *The Divine Comedy*. The most obvious literary influence is naturally Virgil, the guide on the journey, although the structure of purgatory is derived from the views of St Thomas Aquinas, and the classification of sins in hell falls into line with Aristotle's *Ethics*. The influence of Dante's vision of hell extends well into

the Renaissance and Reformation period where it re-surfaces in the work of artists such as Bernadino Poccetti and the engraver Jacques Callot whose tiered, circular structure places the figure of Satan centre stage, devouring idolaters and surrounded by those who have committed the sins of pride, avarice, gluttony, lust, envy, sloth and anger.³¹ Also clearly depicted are limbos for the forefathers of the Old Testament, and for unbaptized infants. The ever-expanding nature of this multi-levelled location is powerfully underscored by the presence of Charon constantly ferrying in the new arrivals, but it was to be purgatory - situated immediately outwith the walls of hell in Callot's engraving - which would prove to be one of the most problematic areas, ultimately being rejected by the Reformers as fundamentally incompatible with any Protestant faith.³²

³¹ Compare the Last Judgment scene 'Life Everlasting' from Melanchthon's Protestant Catechism - published in 1549 - with Christ at the centre: 'By insisting on the majesty of the Christ-judge any illusion of sentimental closeness to the deity is prevented ... Thus the artist creates an extremely stern judgment scene, devoid of medieval intimations of mercy and glory.' Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 149-50.

³² A typical example of the type of arguments - and counter-arguments - which were proposed in this debate can be found in the text of *Bishop Latimer's Arguments Against Purgatory, with King Henry VIII's Answers*. '... As touching purgatory' declares Latimer 'I might, by way of disputation, reason this against it : God is more inclined to mercy than to justice. He executeth justice upon those that be damned, mercy upon those that be saved. But they that be damned, as soon as the soul is separate from the body, goeth straight to hell. Ergo, if God be more inclined to mercy, them that be saved, as soon as the soul is out of the body, goeth by and bye to heaven. Of these there is no puragatory.' To which Henry replies: 'This is a false argument, and also a wrong example. For God is as merciful and indifferent in this world to him that may be damned as to him that may be saved ; yet the obstinacy of the man lets not : whereby one may perceive that his justice and mercy dependeth on the will of the creature, and as you, in a text before, allege the merits of the person.' *Sermons of Hugh Latimer, sometime Bishop of Worcester, Martyr, 1555*, ed. George Elwes Corrie for the Parker Society, Vol. 2 Sermons and Remains (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844-5), 249.

Medieval drama meanwhile fought shy of neither a concrete and tangible staged hell nor the scenes of explicit physical torture which inevitably accompanied it. Or rather it may be more accurate to say that such plays 'talked a good fight' for, as Cynthia Foxtan - writing in the context of Medieval French drama - is quick to point out:

The fact is that, taking all surviving texts together, soul-claiming scenes with indications of prolonged practical torture are considerably outweighed by scenes in which, during or just after the journey back to Hell, the devils *talk* about torment, without any sign in the script that they actually carry out any of their threats in any but 'token' form, or at all.³³

While scenes of physical torment were occasionally enacted (with dummies rather than actors) it would seem fair to say then, that in these French texts the emphasis has shifted - at least in comparison with the Anglo-Saxon passages quoted earlier - towards a more objective and geographically defined representation of hell, and props such as cauldrons and the traditional dragon-jawed portal were frequently employed both here and in contemporary English mystery cycles:

As the final play in most English cycles, the Judgment or Doomsday play required an elaborate stage on which all three major settings - heaven, earth, and hell - had to be represented ... While the staging at Wakefield cannot be documented, the records of the Mercers attest that the York Doomsday play was performed on a pageant waggon ... There was a separate hell-mouth which was apparently set up on the street and another, smaller waggon, after 1463, 'mayd for the sallys to ryse out of' (Johnston and Rogerson, 'The York Mercers', 18). The

³³ Cynthia Foxtan, "Hell and the Devil in the Medieval French Drama: Vision of Damnation or Hope for Salvation?" in Jane H.M. Taylor (ed.), 73.

Towneley Judgment play appears to have required a similar stage.³⁴

E. Konigson describes the 1547 set built specifically for the *Passion à Valenciennes* as follows. (The translation into English is my own):

... item en Enfer souvrant le gouffre sortoit feu et fumee avecq diables doribles formes et lucifer seslevat hault sur un dragon iectat feu et fumee par le goeulle puis on voigt boullir la chaudiere plaine de damnez. daultres aussi en des roues tournantes.³⁵

(... as the abyss opened up there emerged fire and smoke with horribly shaped devils and lucifer sitting high upon a dragon spitting fire and smoke through its mouth, then you could see the boiling cauldron full of the damned and others being tortured on the wheel.)

but by now theologians such as Jaquelot and Calvin were beginning to vigorously promote the notion of 'hell as deprivation' i.e. the pain of loss that accompanied the forfeiting of the vision of God and the joy of Heaven. Calvin's stance on the matter is clearest - unsurprisingly - in his commentary on *Isaiah* 30:33:

For Tophet *is* ordained of old; yea, for the king is prepared: he hath made *it* deep *and* large; the pile thereof *is* fire and much wood; the breath

³⁴ Martin Stevens and A.C. Cawley, (eds.). *The Towneley Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for The Early English Texts Society, 1994), 635.

³⁵ E. Konigson, *La representation d'un mystere de la Passion à Valenciennes en 1547* (Paris: Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1969), 39. Quoted in Foxton, 71.

of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth
kindle it.

By "Tophet" he unquestionably means Hell; not that we must fancy to ourselves some place in which the wicked are shut up, as in a prison, after their death, in order to endure the torments which they deserve; but it denotes their miserable condition and excruciating torments ... it is evident how foolish and absurd the sophists are, who enter into subtle arguments about the nature and quality of that fire, and torture themselves by giving various explanations of it ... we know that the Prophet speaks figuratively; and in another passage (Isaiah Ixvi.24) we shall see that "fire" and the "worm" are joined together.³⁶

Calvin returns to the inextinguishable fire and ever-gnawing worm in Book III, Chapter XXV of the *Institutes*, explaining that such 'corporeal things' are only necessary as 'language cannot describe the severity of the divine vengeance on the reprobate',³⁷ but the most obvious reason for concluding the *Isaiah* 30:33 commentary with this point is that the frequent occurrence of the fire and the worm in the same passage was the source of what D.P. Walker terms 'serious scriptural difficulties'³⁸ for any figurative interpretation. Walker goes on to quote from Bishop Bilson whose *Survey of Christ's Sufferings* (published in 1604) serves to illustrate the type of opposition which faced advocates of a metaphorical reading of such sections of Biblical text:

³⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah*, trans. Rev. William Pringle (Edinburgh: Printed by T. Constable for The Calvin Translation Society, 1851), 386, 388.

³⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion Book III, Chapter XXV*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1863), 629.

³⁸ D.P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1964), 61.

If God will have Brimstone mixed with Hell Fire to make it burne not onely the darker and sharper, but also the lothsommer, and so to grieve the sight, smell and taste of the wicked, which have here been surfeited with so many vaine Pleasures, what have you or any Man living to say against it?³⁹

It is clear then that the topic of hell was, in many ways, a contentious issue to say the least. Aquinas and Origen were quoted frequently in the continuing debate surrounding the *poena sensus* versus the *poena damni*, a question which itself channels into the dispute over the internal/external nature of hell. By the 1590s Marlowe has made the interiorisation of suffering central to his re-working of the Faust myth and with this shift in emphasis comes a corresponding movement away from the kind of visual crutch such as stage props upon which the dialogue of Medieval drama had been able to lean so heavily. J. T. McNeely assesses Faustus' closing soliloquy as:

... undoubtedly one of the most powerful speeches in the play ... made memorable in part precisely because of its minimal use of spectacular stage effects, so that the quality of the verse itself must carry the full weight of the passage's meaning. Joel B. Altman, among others, has pointed out in a recent work the obviously deliberate omission in this passage of those visible manifestations of the supernatural that are never otherwise missed in the whole play.⁴⁰

McNeely goes on to radically disagree with Altman's premise (quoted in Section Two) that this can be taken as confirmation of the protagonist's enclosure 'in the hell of his own mind'. As we have already noted, there are

³⁹ Thomas Bilson, *The Survey of Christ's Sufferings for Man's Redemption* (London, 1604). Quoted in Walker, 62.

⁴⁰ J.T. McNeely, "Dr Faustus," *Cahiers Elisabethains* 41 (April 1992): 12.

fundamental problems with the Marlovian text, but regardless of one's stance on this issue the fact remains that it was not to be the genre of drama which would ultimately realise the full potential of such a technique for any literary construction of self. Rather, this task would fall to epic poetry for the somewhat paradoxical reason that it, more than any other branch of literature, is the natural home of the vastly expansive and endlessly protracted panoramic vision.

This brief survey has been necessarily selective, but the text with which I have chosen to conclude this prelude to the discussion of Milton's hell does not immediately precede it in chronological terms, nor for that matter is it particularly pre-occupied with hell. Rather, its significance in this context is to be found in the way in which it privileges the concept of 'place', actively foregrounding it as the pre-eminent feature in the process of identification that will mark the Antichrist. John Foxe obviously shares with Milton the common thread of Protestantism but in many ways the similarity ends there. Had the epic poet been born half a century earlier than he was, it would still be difficult to imagine a text such as *Titus et Gesippus* emanating from his pen. And yet the work of Foxe is nonetheless a potentially fruitful point of departure, for despite the fact that one could easily quote from a plethora of Renaissance dramatic texts for which the notion of 'place' is in some way central, *Christus Triumphans* is arguably the most directly relevant to Milton's Satan. Foxe's Latin comedy may be very different in tone to Milton's classical epic but there is, nonetheless, a curiously ironic template to be found in this text for the character of Milton's opportunistic Satan who would follow one hundred and eleven years later:

In Asia minime modo sumus.
Vt locus ita cum loco mutanda consilia.
Illic ui, hic astu rem tractabimus affabre.

Primum habitus hic, cum nomine, ponendus est:
 Vetesque, quam ueste tego, tegam me, tectius
 Vt fallam ...

SATAN. Ornamenta haec capite.
 ADOPYLUS. Quid tum?
 SATAN. Meoque
 Exemplo facite. Iam ego Satan haud sum, lucis at
 Me uos decetis angelum. Tu, Psychephone,
 Hypocrisis esto hoc sub Francisci pallio.
 Tu, Thanate, Martyromastix re et nomine sies: ...
 (V, i, 6-11, 13-19).

... We aren't in Asia now. As the place changes, so must plans be changed along with it. There we proceeded by force, but here we'll manage our business cleverly and by guile. First I have to put aside this garb along with my name: to cloak more effectively how I conceal myself in a cloak, I'll conceal myself in a cloak ...

SATAN [*giving them costumes*]. Take these costumes.
 ADOPYLUS. What then?
 SATAN. Do as I do. [*He puts on a costume.*] Now I'm not Satan, but you'll say I'm the Angel of Light. Psychephonus, you be Hypocrisis under this cloak of Francis. ---Then, Thanatus, you be Martyromastix in deed and name: ...⁴¹

The prototypical conversion here of force into guile can clearly be read as foreshadowing Milton's adaptation of the Biblical text in the shift from the military combat of the war in Heaven to the rhetoric of the debating chamber in Hell, but while the physical body of mortal combat may have been bartered for the intellectual body politic of Pandemonium, the all-pervasive emphasis upon location as a defining feature remains as significant as ever: 'As the place changes, so must plans be changed along with it'. With specific reference to this text in what is an impressive survey of the various Renaissance notions associated with the idea of Antichrist, Richard Bauckham

⁴¹ John Foxe, "*Christus Triumphans*," in *Two Latin Comedies by John Foxe the Martyrologist*, ed. and trans. John Hazel Smith (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1973), 336-7.

notes in passing the apparently intrinsic link here with the concept of theatricality, clearly stemming from the Gospel according to Mark (13:22):

Though the theological surface of the idea was barely scratched in sixteenth century thought, its theatrical potential is somewhat obvious and had already been exploited in the medieval antichrist plays. Antichrist's facility for adopting various disguises prompted Tyndale's use of [the] dramatic metaphor: ... 'his nature is ... to go out of the play for a season, and to disguise himself, and then to come in again with a new name and new raiment.'⁴²

And of course Milton's Satan does indeed 'go out ... disguise himself ... and come back in again' throughout the epic, gliding with a consummate ease bordering at times upon theatrical panache through a range of costumes of which the average Elizabethan playhouse would have been understandably proud. From 'Arch-Fiend' to 'stripling cherub' to 'monstrous serpent', the one thing which Satan can always be relied upon to do - voluntarily or otherwise - is play the part, but it is not his ability to alter what he is that so interests the Protestant epic poet of the seventeenth-century, but rather his ability to transform where he is. Location has now assumed precedence over entity, for it is the key feature in the list of distinguishing characteristics which, according to Foxe's Hierologus, will mark 'the Antichrist':

EUROPUS. Incredibile dictu, Hierologe,
Et monstri simile, Pseudamnum te dicere
Antichristum esse?
HEIROLOGUS. Non ficus est ficus magis.
EUROPUS.
Qui scis?
HIEROLOGUS. Res, tempus, uita, doctrina arguunt
Et locus ipse.

(V, i, 29-33)

⁴² Bauckham, 105.

EUROPUS [to Hierologus]. That's incredible, Hierologus, it's monstrous! You say Pseudamnus is the Antichrist?

HIEROLOGUS [to Europus]. A fig tree is not more a fig tree.

EUROPUS [to Hierologus]. How do you know?

HIEROLOGUS [to Europus]. The circumstances, the timing, his life, his doctrine, and even his office prove it.

Bauckham finds fault - quite rightly I believe - with Smith's translation of line 33 'Res, tempus, uita, doctrina arguunt / Et locus ipse.', stating in an endnote that 'locus' may refer to the scriptural text, or more probably to Rome/Babylon as the seat of the papacy.' 'Office' he dismisses as 'improbable'⁴³ and he is surely correct in preferring 'place', yet despite quoting from both of the above passages as well as highlighting the apparently intrinsic association with theatricality, he fails to draw the process to its logical conclusion by extending the connection to encompass the fact that the two passages are yoked not simply by proximity, but also by rhetoric and by sense.

In fairness to Smith, 'locus' can frequently carry the meaning 'office or position', and one could certainly take the view that there is supporting Biblical precedent for Smith's translation here: 'And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea ... and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority ... and power was given unto him to continue forty *and* two months.' (*Revelation* 13:1-5). Bauckham's choice of the primary sense ('place or location') seems the more appropriate, however, and he undoubtedly has the balance correct in taking 'ipse' (literally 'self' i.e. 'itself') to be 'especially' as opposed to Smith's 'even', for the climactic phrase of the sentence is surely intended to be accentuated, not de-

⁴³ Ibid, 111.

emphasised. And yet there is one further point to be borne in mind when considering the Latin text and in this sense the endeavours of both translators fall short for neither sees fit to highlight the existence of a secondary sense for 'locus': 'a place or seat in the theatre, circus or forum'.⁴⁴ Its significance for Foxe's text, however, is to be found not in its value as a literal translation, but in its potential as an effective bridging device between the two quoted passages.

Within the opening five words of line 7 'Vt locus ita cum loco mutanda consilia' the word 'locus' appears twice in quick succession, and while Smith's translation ('As the place changes, so must plans be changed along with it') certainly captures the semantic sense of the Latin line, it unfortunately eclipses this vital repetition. Since 'mutanda' agrees with 'consilia' and not 'locus', the least awkward English construction would seem to be 'Plans must change according to place'. However, a clumsier - but arguably more accurate - translation would be my first choice under the circumstances: 'Place changes, and with place must change plans'. Precision has perhaps, for Smith, been sacrificed in favour of accessibility, but the double occurrence in the Latin - once in nominative, once in ablative - is not coincidental, for it acts as a link with the key phrase ('Et locus ipse') which follows only 26 lines later. The deliberate emphasis on 'place' created by the anaphora in the first passage is designed to act as a foreshadowing device, the significance of which becomes fully clear only when the term is picked up again in the subsequent section of text where it is now established as the defining feature of Antichrist's identity. Theatricality therefore works on

⁴⁴ See William Smith and Theophilus D. Hall, *Latin-English Dictionary* (London: John Murray, 1866), 645. Smith and Hall cite examples of such usage from both Cicero and Livy.

different levels to bridge the gap between the two passages. This begins with the explicit reference to 'cloaks' and 'guile', continues through the anaphora and secondary meaning of 'locus' in line 7, and finally culminates in what is perhaps the most subtle of the methods at work here - the movement spanning lines 7-9 which sees the associative focus for 'place' shift from 'plans' to 'identity', for 'nomine' and 'loco' are the only two ablatives present in the passage as a whole.

'Locus' therefore begins in nominative (line 7) before moving through a process of association by case (with: 'name' 'cum loco ... cum nomine') only to emerge once again as nominative in the climactic line of the second quoted passage ('Et locus ipse.') where we now subconsciously link it with identity despite the fact that it is not, at this point, explicitly mentioned. This intuitive association underscores of course the sense of the second passage as a whole, for it has already been unequivocally established that both name and appearance may be assumed or cast off at will: 'First I have to put aside this garb along with my name: ...'. 'Place' is therefore isolated as the sole remaining currency of truth, the only true indicator of identity and, by extension, the only valid and reliable secular litmus test for evil. It is not for nothing then that the final appearance of 'locus' is immediately followed by the word 'ipse' for, in this particular context, the tendrils of identity which bind 'place' and 'self' inextricably together simultaneously form the foundations upon which the entire characterisation of Pseudamnus is built.

'Place' is therefore, in Foxe's text, one of the few secular features which exist beyond the sphere of Antichrist's control. Moreover, not only is he unable to exert influence upon it, but it holds the potential to actively dominate him, shaping his actions and re-writing his plans. As such it is the one distinguishing characteristic which will indisputably mark him, and while

theatricality and disguise provide the possibility of cloaking both name and appearance, 'place' remains resolutely beyond the realm in which Antichrist's power is able to function. Its strength as an ultimate and definitive independent landmark is one of the few truly secular absolutes in Foxe's world of demonic theatrical relativity. It is in this capacity as a fixed, stable and static point of reference that Milton embraces the concept of 'place' as his touchstone of Satanic identity in *Paradise Lost*, for if his 'Arch-Fiend' can be endowed with a potency of evil which has harnessed the ability to encompass 'place' and actively alter context, then the characterisation of the rebel leader of the fallen angels will have been taken to a hitherto uncharted dimension - a new level of vastly expansive malevolent power the like of which is unprecedented in the poetry and drama of the previous century.

V. *Ne Plus Ultra*: Milton's Rhetoric of the Abyss

The 'biblical authority for Milton's location and description of hell' is outlined in Book I, Chapter XXXIII⁴⁵ (De glorificatione perfecta: ubi de secundo Christi adventu, et resurrectione mortuorum, huiusque mundi conflagratione) of *De Doctrina Christiana* where he appears, superficially at least, to align himself with Le Clerc, offering a definition of the suffering of the damned which is couched in terms of both 'deprivation' and of 'sense':

The second death, or the punishment of the damned, seems to consist partly in the loss of the chief good, namely, the favor and protection of God, and the beatific vision of his presence, which is commonly called the punishment of loss; and partly in eternal torment, which is called the punishment of sense ... The place of punishment is called HELL; "Tophet," Isa. xxx.33 ... Hell appears to be situated beyond the limits of this universe ... it does not seem probable that hell should have been prepared within the limits of this world, in the bowels of the earth, on which the curse had not yet passed. This is said to have been the opinion of Chrysostom, as likewise of Luther and some later divines. Besides, if, as has been shown from various passages of the New Testament, the whole world is to be finally consumed by fire, it follows that hell, being situated in the center of the earth, must share the fate of the surrounding universe, and perish likewise; a consummation more to be desired than expected by the souls in perdition.⁴⁶

It is interesting to note the way in which the above passage is at pains to deliberately and repeatedly associate the location of hell with (the negation of)

⁴⁵ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Scott Elledge, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 10. All *Paradise Lost* quotations, unless otherwise stated, are from this edition.

⁴⁶ John Milton, "De Doctrina Christiana," in *The Works of John Milton*, ed. James Holly Hanford and Waldo Hilary Dunn, vol. XVI (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 371, 373, 375.

wander beyond all limit and satiety'. The mind is, by this definition, an independent entity, capable of transcending all limits imposed upon it, but what then is the relationship between this independent mind and the Miltonic 'self'? The above passage from *Paradise Lost* poses fundamental problems for critics and editors alike, for line 254 can be quoted as it is above 'The mind is its own place, and *in itself*' or as 'The mind is its own place, and *in it self*'.⁴⁷ Either way the ramifications are significant, for the first construction attributes the power to create one's own context to 'the mind' (which is 'its own place') while the second attributes it to 'self' (which is 'in it', where 'it' refers to 'the mind'). The most frequent critical response to all of this seems to be to simply throw a blanket over this distinction and maintain that, in general terms, we are dealing with two separate entities existing on two separate planes; that the whole *raison d'être* of this section of text is to highlight the existence of two possible but radically differing constructions of context, one of which is physical and geographical, one of which is mental and abstract, and which exist entirely independently of each other.⁴⁸ And yet such a reading is not unequivocally supported by the wider context of the lines themselves i.e. the text as a whole. That the character of Satan is pivotal (perhaps too much so) to the central dynamic of the epic has been so long a settled and undisputed fact that it hardly requires re-iteration, for if the Romantic critics - to whom we shall return later - placed both Milton and his 'arch-fiend' upon a pedestal then more recent commentators closer, in

⁴⁷ John Milton, "*Paradise Lost*," in *The Works of John Milton*, gen. ed. Frank Allen Patterson, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia, 1931), 17.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Leonora Leet: 'Milton's depiction of a physical hell can thus be viewed ... as a metaphor for the psychological state of those alienated "from God and blessed vision" (V, 613) ... This metaphorical conception of hell is not contradicted by the physical personification of hell'. Leonora Leet Brodwin, "The Dissolution of Satan in *Paradise Lost*: A Study of Milton's Heretical Eschatology," *Milton Studies* 8 (1975): 174.

chronological terms at least, to home, have certainly made no attempt to remove either.

G. K. Hunter writes of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* villains as impressive in their context, but unable to function effectively when removed from it:

The brilliantly realised evil characters - Duessa, Archimago, Busirane, Malegar, Despair - have extraordinary functional strength, and are capable of stirring our deepest sense of the malice hidden in ordinary experience; but clearly they draw their sustenance from particular contexts and fade if our imagination transfers them to another world.⁴⁹

Hunter goes on to contrast with these allegorical characters Milton's Satan who:

... though he may momentarily assume this iconic power (as when he lies on the burning lake, or leaps over the wall of Paradise or, in Book X, turns into the infernal serpent), operates more often and more forcefully when he seems to be the independent creator of his own meanings and the transformer of his own contexts.⁵⁰

Satan's soliloquy which opens Book IV is clearly a key moment of deliberation and subsequent resolve. That the rhetoric of the speech here is designed to remind us - in a fairly self-conscious manner - of that of the opening books is barely concealed:

... horror and doubt distract
His troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stir
The hell within him, for within him hell

⁴⁹ G.K. Hunter, *Paradise Lost* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980), 74.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

Milonic passage clearly pick up less on this than on Faustus' long overdue (if somewhat qualified) recognition of his own part in his damnation: 'Cursed be the parents that engendered me! / No, Faustus, curse thyself, curse Lucifer, / That hath deprived thee of the joys of heaven.' (V, ii, 190-2), with the issues of free will, pre-destination, and providence central to both texts.

Mephostophilis' famous definition of hell 'Why this is hell, nor am I out of it', may be suggestive as a forerunner of Milton's Book I description, but it is also essentially reductive, with its nebulous juxtapositioning of advancement by negatives and vagueness of phrase. Marlowe is not able to envisage the complex contextualisation that marks the Milonic vision, but he is able to foreshadow the intense claustrophobia (in terms of body) that Milton will carry to its most extreme (in terms of self):

Homo fuge! Whither should I flie?
 If unto heaven, he'll throw me down to hell.
 My senses are deceived: here's nothing writ!
 Oh, yes, I see it plain. Even here is writ
Homo fuge. Yet shall not Faustus fly.
 (I, v, 76-80).

The above passage clearly parallels Milton's 'which way shall I fly ...' (Book IV, 73), and yet the differences are perhaps of greater significance than the similarities, for Marlowe attempts to 'solve' the problem of the self by reducing it to a contained entity which can be contextualised to the point of claustrophobia and thereby - unlike the hell to which it must stand in radical opposition - limited.

We recall how in the previous Section the expansive element of the closing soliloquy for Marlowe's Faustus was likened to the technique employed by Donne in Holy Sonnet 7 'At the round earth's imagined corners' but it is to the equally important element of compression in the Marlovian text

that we must now turn. For the despairing Faustus the Act V soliloquy is indeed his 'play's last scene' so it is dramatically appropriate that it is in this Sonnet which Linville finds a corresponding movement, this time towards compression (which is, of course, echoed in Faustus' soliloquy): 'the crescendo of "last pace ... last inch ... last point," and Donne's restriction of line four to nine syllables sharpen further our sense of compression and of death's imminence.'⁵² For both Faustus and Donne's speaker the effect is not unlike the 'entropic decay of the speaker's horizons'⁵³ which Docherty highlights in lines five and six of Sonnet 1 'Thou hast made me'. Since I will be referring to the overall structure it is worth quoting the Sonnet in full:

Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?
 Repair me now, for now mine end doth haste,
 I run to death, and death meets me as fast,
 And all my pleasures are like yesterday,
 I dare not move my dim eyes any way,
 Despair behind, and death before doth cast
 Such terror, and my feeble flesh doth waste
 By sin in it, which it towards hell doth weigh;
 Only thou art above, and when towards thee
 By thy leave I can look, I rise again;
 But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,
 That not one hour I can myself sustain;
 Thy Grace may wing me to prevent his art,
 And thou like adamant draw mine iron heart.

The parallels with the previously quoted Milton passage ('which way shall I fly? / Infinite wrath and infinite despair') are obvious enough and yet, once

⁵² Linville, 78. Linville is quoting here from Helen Gardner's *Donne: The Divine Poems* (2nd ed., rev. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) in which line four reads: 'My spans last inch, my minutes last point,'. A. J. Smith, however, quotes the penultimate word of the line as 'latest'. Smith's reading will, of course, take the line back to ten syllables, but Linville's general point regarding 'compression' in the Sonnet as a whole still stands.

⁵³ Thomas Docherty, *John Donne, Undone* (London: Methuen, 1986), 134.

again, it is the differences which speak more loudly, for the claustrophobic contextualisation that we encounter in both texts works towards an entirely different end in each.

Louis Martz has argued convincingly for Milton's 'poetry of exile', drawing on vocabulary such as that of the Book III Proem ('find no dawn', 'shady', 'veil'd' etc.) as an autobiographical reference to blindness⁵⁴ while Donne's carefully contextualised 'dim eyes' are clearly intended to indicate both physical inadequacy and spiritual weakness. Even more suggestive, however, is the deliberate yoking of this moral or spiritual deficiency with the realm of the secular ('feeble flesh'). Docherty invokes Zeno's paradox in relation to Sonnet Six but it is also relevant here, for Milton effectively imprisons Satan by taking the Donnean techniques of enclosure to their most extreme and then, when they can be taken no further, radically inverting them. Entrapment is therefore constructed, somewhat paradoxically, through the expansion, rather than reduction, of context.

In Donne's Sonnet the horizontal patterning of line six functions via the systematic reduction of all spatial and temporal commodities associated with the speaker.⁵⁵ That this enclosure is affected by the conscious positioning of abstractions ('Despair behind and death before ...') around the poetic 'I' serves to heighten the already dominant sense of inevitability - it is difficult to escape, or even avoid, that which is both invisible and intangible. The fact that the limits are set by the use of non-concrete nouns therefore

⁵⁴ Louis Martz, *Poet of Exile: A Study of Milton's Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 79.

⁵⁵ 'Horizontality (before, behind) is translated into verticality ... The poem begins to make the human body or the organization of human space an embodiment of the cross itself ...'. Docherty, 134.

channels into the radical reduction of the speaker's immediate context which is itself created by means of an increase in the wider context, for if the poetic 'I' is x , then its spatial dimensions are always $1/(x+1)$ of the total (immediate) context. In other words, if you are placed in a room five times as large as you then you become one sixth of your context, and the greater your context becomes the smaller you become in relation to it. This inversely proportional relationship is of course central to Renaissance humanism as a whole, for this is precisely the problem posed by Galileo's invention of the telescope in combination with Copernicus' expanding, heliocentric universe (the Polish astronomer was published by 1543 but debate continued to rage until after the turn of the century). It is this sense of insecurity which is exploited and taken to its most extreme in Milton's re-working of the notion approximately a century later, for if we carry the equation to its logical conclusion - as Docherty does in the case of one of Zeno's paradoxes in relation to Sonnet Six - then the result is not only problematic in mathematical terms ($\infty+1$ cannot ever be calculated), but also leads to the complete disappearance of the subject, 'I' - the utterances of which have brought the whole discourse of context into being in the first place. The subject then, by cognitive logic, cannot be allowed to disappear, yet if an infinite context is created around it then it is, by extension, reduced to nothing, for $1/\infty$ will always be non-existent. This problem - or perhaps more accurately Milton's response to it - pinpoints precisely the distinction between the Donnean abstract ('Death and despair') and the Miltonic infinite ('Infinite wrath and infinite despair') for the epic poet now inverts the process and takes it to its opposite extreme. After expanding the context in order that the subject be reduced to nothing, Milton now re-creates and dramatically expands his (non-existent) subject to fill the infinite context: 'Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell; ...'. The previously emphasised vastness of context which has already been utilised in the reduction of the speaker to nothing is now being made to serve a dual purpose,

for that speaker has now enveloped and filled this infinitely vast context to the extent that he is actively defined in terms of and in relation to it (and, of course, it in relation to him). This then, is not simply the subject creating its own context: 'The mind is its own place ...'; it is in fact the subject becoming its own context; 'myself am hell ...', and the ultimate sense of entrapment has now been constructed, paradoxically, through the creation of an infinitely vast context which has then - via a radical and complete inversion of the subject/context relationship - been reversed to ensure that subject and context are, in the final analysis, co-incidental. Such rapid and extreme reversals bring immediately to mind the contradictory movements from Faustus' closing soliloquy, but perhaps of more significance is Traherne whose description of an 'unconfind, Illimited' Thought 'From Nothing to Infinity it turns, / Even in a Moment ... Tis such that it may all or Nothing be'⁵⁶ bears a striking thematic similarity to Milton's text. However, while the epic poet's portrait of evil is made all the more impressive by its open-ended lack of corporeality, his contemporary feels the need to tritely take care of the loose ends, neatly alleviating the potential danger inherent within such abstractions by tying them firmly to the concrete 'Creatures' whose ends, we are left in no doubt, they exist to serve.

In its simplest terms then, the structural pattern which this section of Milton's text enacts:

- establishment of subject
- destruction of subject
- re-creation of subject

⁵⁶ Thomas Traherne, 'Thoughts. III,' in *Poems, Centuries and Three Thanksgivings*, ed. Anne Ridler (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 68.

can be seen as analogous to that of Donne's Holy Sonnet 1 'Thou hast made me', with the principal distinction lying in the fact that the creative (or re-creative) power which Donne assigns exclusively to God, the poet who sets out to 'justify the ways of God to men' assigns at least in part to himself. Satan may be the creator - or to invoke Hunter's term, the transformer - of contexts, but it is the epic poet who is, in this section of text, responsible for the obliteration and subsequent re-creation of the speaker.⁵⁷ It is precisely because Satan is characterised in terms of self, and not, as Donne's subject is, in terms of body, that such sustained manipulation of self, text, and context becomes possible.⁵⁸ And so, having drawn this discourse of absolutes to its dizzying conclusion, Milton now shatters it from within, grasping the rhetoric of contextualisation and turning it inwards upon itself:

"And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide,
To which the hell I suffer seems a heav'n.
O then at last relent: is there no place ... "

⁵⁷ Malpezzi (writing on Donne) places this pattern in the wider context of Christian history: 'Created by God, unmade by sin, restored by his maker, Donne's speaker exemplifies the repeated creation/fall/recreation pattern of Christian history and of each Christian's earthly existence.' Frances M. Malpezzi, "The Weight/lessness of Sin: Donne's "Thou hast made me" and the Psychostatic Tradition," *South Carolina Review* 17 (1987): 75.

⁵⁸ Donne probably comes closest to this type of reversal not in his poetry, but in his prose, although even here he does not take the technique as far as Milton. The best example comes perhaps from *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (Meditation 4) where the standard macrocosm analogy is turned on its head (man becomes a giant, the world tiny in relation to him). Donne, however, is quick to qualify his paradox, stating in the opening line ' ... Except God, Man is a *diminutive* to nothing.' Fourth Meditation, *Medicusque vocatur* (The Physician is sent for). *John Donne: Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. Anthony Raspa (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 19.

There are now no absolutes; everything is relative; 'in the lowest deep a lower deep ...'. The self of this text then, can itself be contextualised or 'devoured' by a still greater context. All attempts at contextualisation are themselves contextualised; the process is therefore infinitely expansive yet entirely self-enclosed ('Myself am hell'), for the self at its centre is simultaneously the independent creator of its own context, and in constant danger of being devoured by that context. Ultimately then, there is in fact 'no place' for this self, for it is, unlike Donne's 'feeble flesh', both internal and external to itself. And so, in our continued search for a definitive context all we are left with is a reductive return to comparatives. This may be far from satisfactory, but it is, in the circumstances, the best we can expect, for if this hell cannot be defined via that which it stands in relation to (i.e. self) then the only recourse left is by means of that to which it stands in opposition: 'To which the hell I suffer seems a heav'n'.⁵⁹

The text then (*Paradise Lost*), is capable of providing neither an actual 'place' nor a fixed and stable form for this 'self'. Body and text may have been (at times) for Shakespeare an acceptable alliance,⁶⁰ but with the Miltonic

⁵⁹ This notion of an ever expanding hell 'and in the lowest deep a lower deep' makes an interesting contrast with Dante's depiction which deliberately creates a narrowing effect, working through the concentric circles to position Satan at the centre. Milton's technique here has been echoed in a modern science-fiction context by David Lindsay whose *A Voyage to Arcturus* not only constructs its 'worlds' in a similar fashion, but establishes the character Crystalman as a counterpoint to Satan: 'in the Hebrew meaning of the word - the Divider, or Separator ... perpetrat[ing] his own existence and produc[ing] - not creat[ing] - the universe.'. E. H. Visiak, "The Arcturan Shadow: A Complement to Milton's Satan," *Notes and Queries* (1940). Reprinted in David Lindsay, *A Voyage to Arcturus* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946), 8.

⁶⁰ See for example *Cymbeline* III, iii, 55-8: 'O, boys, this story / The world may read in me; my body's mark'd / With Roman swords, and my report was once / First with the best of note.'

Protestant 'self', 'text' is incompatible, for 'self' now stands in radical opposition to the sense of fixed and stable meaning which 'text' can imply; it is, in fact, con(tra)text for the only acceptable counterpart for the instability of the 'self' is the constantly shifting, profoundly illegible and, for Milton, ultimately self-consuming, notion of 'context'.

The first line of the above quoted passage, 'And in the lowest deep a lower deep' recalls perhaps the agoraphobic descriptions of the Book II journey through the abyss, where the vast emptiness of chaos proves trying terrain even for Satan.⁶¹ J. D. Hainsworth has pointed out the careful patterning of metrical stress here, and the overall impression is that of a character entirely dwarfed by, and completely at the mercy of, his environment:

Satan's fall and rise here are communicated in a manner that, for Milton's poetry, is unusually physical: trochaic words ('Fluttering', 'pennons', 'thousand', 'Fadom', 'falling') impart a sense of falling, while words which are iambic in rhythm ('rebuff', 'tumultuous', 'Instinct', 'aloft'), give a sense of rising again.⁶²

⁶¹ Newman's 'The Dream of Gerontius' (which was, of course, set to music as an oratorio by Sir Edward Elgar) makes an interesting counterpoint here in the way it cleverly ties the 'vast abyss' to movement through 'The solid framework of created things,'. Since Newman is drawing on the theology of purgatory the context is admittedly different, but the absence of corporeality: '... even less than that the interval / Since thou didst leave the body;' makes an interesting follow up to the Milton. John Henry Newman, *Verses on Various Occasions* (London: Burns, Oates and Co., 1883), 324, 336.

⁶² J.D. Hainsworth, "Ups and Downs in *Paradise Lost*," *Essays In Criticism* Vol. 33 (1983): 99-100.

Although the word 'abyss' occurs several times in this particular section of the text (Book II, 917, 956, 969, 1027) the closest association with hell is much earlier in the book at line 519 '... the hollow abyss / Heard far and wide, and all the host of hell / With deaf'ning shout, returned them loud acclaim.' The phrasing here, however 'And in the lowest deep a lower deep' is clearly intended to invoke and mirror the relevant etymology (from the Greek 'abyssos' meaning 'without bottom' - compare the first occurrence in the poem, Book I, line 21, with *Genesis* 1:2: 'And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep'⁶³). Such rhetoric of the abyss is far from unique to Milton, however, and was even picked up and utilised by less well known writers of the period. John Collop, for example, was a contemporary of Milton's, and the one hundred and twenty eight poems of *Poesis rediviva* (1656) are in the direct Anglican tradition. As with all resurrection literature, Collop's 'On The Resurrection' is necessarily comprehensive, the superficial tone of joyful celebration naturally counterpointed by the submerged presupposition of death:⁶⁴

Abysses on Abysses call;
 Who God denies
 First to him flies;
 Where fiends could dwell,
 And make an hell.
 The first sees heav'n of all:
 Abysses on Abysses call ...

⁶³ See Elledge (ed.), 8.

⁶⁴ The counterpointing of life/death in Collop here makes an interesting parallel for the 'double perspective' which Jeanne Clayton Hunter identifies in Satan's (previously quoted) monologue: '[Satan] argues his case in the rhetoric of the Covenant of Grace, a doctrine of salvation especially emphasized in seventeenth-century Puritan theology. Satan is, so to speak, in Christ's corner without knowing it. That which he rejects - obedience, gratitude, goodness - he ironically celebrates.' Jeanne Clayton Hunter, "Milton's *Paradise Lost*," *The Explicator* 40.4 (1982): 21.

Come, thou Abyss of sweetness, come!
 Come my dear Lord,
 Say but the word
 Unto my Soul,
 I shall be whole.
 Thou for thy self mak'st onely room;
 Come, thou Abyss of sweetness, come!

(Stanzas 2 and 6).⁶⁵

There is, nonetheless, an unusual vastness about this particular example for the delicate interplay between the quoted second and final stanzas surely draws as much upon the Forty Second Psalm (7: 'At the noise of thy waterspouts / deep unto deep doth call') as from the New Testament Gospels. And yet, despite the shared vocabulary of the 'deep abyss' Milton's text works in a fundamentally different way and this fact cannot be attributed exclusively to the genre in which he is writing. While Marlowe can begin the process of removing man's essential identity from the confines of the body, he has not yet explored the possibility that not only may hell contextualise self while self, at one and the same time contextualises hell, but that each of them may be simultaneously in danger of being 'devoured' by a hell or self which always was and always will be contextualising them. This is why Satan's previously quoted Book IV soliloquy can be read not simply in relation to the Book I speech, but also as the most significant statement in Milton's 'rhetoric of the abyss' through which the Satanic 'self' of the text both contextualises and is contextualised. When Satan volunteers to venture forth beyond the limits of hell he is not only established as a parallel and counterpoint to Christ (who volunteers to redeem mankind), he is also endowed with a strong element of Faustian striving. What Milton draws then, from his Marlovian predecessor is

⁶⁵ John Collop, *The Poems of John Collop*, trans. Conrad Hilberry (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962), 151.

this Faustian striving which is so central to his epic as a whole. And this is precisely why hell does, and indeed must, have limits which are defined for us in no uncertain terms, for such Faustian drive is reduced to a hollow motif drained of all meaningful significance unless it is supplied with some form of tangible boundary to actively push against and define itself in relation to.

This is in fact the real reason why the previously discussed problems surrounding context in Milton's Book I definition of hell cannot be resolved simply by splitting the dilemma into component elements of physical and mental. If a sense of Faustian striving is central to the character of Satan (as it clearly is), then it is, by extension, inextricably bound up with what Hunter chooses to term 'Satan's iconic power', which is, in turn, bound up with his ability to actively 'transform his own context'. As this Faustian striving requires physical and geographical as well as internal and abstract limits against which to drive (for example, Book IV, 795 '... escaped the bars of hell') then these too must be, by definition, linked to Satan's 'iconic power' as a creator of contexts. To argue anything else would be, put simply, to attempt to have it both ways.

The essential difference then between Marlowe's Dr Faustus (who begins the process) and Milton's arch-fiend (who draws it to its spectacular yet ultimately self-dissolving conclusion) is that Faustus attempts - unsuccessfully - to push back his boundaries (of orthodox knowledge) while Satan triumphantly transcends his (of both mental and geographical location) by reducing them to a set of mutually framing but simultaneously self-enclosed contexts which actively work to resist any attempt to fix stable meaning upon either themselves or the self/text they represent. Read in these terms, we can interpret the Miltonic text as enacting a retroversion of the endless striving which is the pursuit of perfection as described by Gregory of Nyssa:

... He is infinite virtue. Now since those who have come to know the highest good, desire completely to share in it, and since this good is limitless, it follows that their desire must necessarily be coextensive with the limitless, and therefore have no limit. Thus it is absolutely impossible to attain perfection; ... For that perfection consists in our never stopping in our growth in good, never circumscribing our perfection by any limitation.⁶⁶

And so the rhetoric of absolutes which stemmed from the insistent association in *De Doctrina Christiana* of 'hell' and 'limits' has been not simply undermined, but actively inverted:

"So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear,
Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost;
Evil be thou my good; by thee at least
Divided empire with heav'n's King I hold
By thee, and more than half perhaps will reign;
As man ere long, and this new world shall
know."

(Book IV, 108-113).

just as the boundaries of interior/exterior, self/context have been. There can now be no concept of place - some external and objective reality in which Satan can consciously position himself and thereby create a sense of self-fixity in relation to context - just as there can be no concept of body - a frame through which we can view our context and thereby 'read' our environment. The body (taken by the High Renaissance as one of the keystones by which we organise our perception of 'that which is'), has, in Milton's text, been radically destabilised and therefore devalued:

⁶⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, 82, 84.

VI. Conclusion

The issues which this Section has sought to address are, of course, not in any sense new; corporeality - or at times the lack of it - has long since been considered a problematic area by commentators upon Milton's epic. The Augustan Samuel Johnson defines the problem as follows:

Another inconvenience of Milton's design is, that it requires the description of what cannot be described ... he has unhappily perplexed his poetry with his philosophy. His infernal and celestial powers are sometimes pure spirit, and sometimes animated body. When Satan walks with his lance upon the *burning marle*, he has a body; when, in his passage between hell and the new world, he is in danger of sinking in the vacuity, and is supported by a gust of rising vapors, he has a body; when he animates the toad, he seems to be mere spirit, that can penetrate matter at pleasure; when he *starts up in his own shape*, he has at least a determined form; and when he is brought before Gabriel, he has a *spear and shield*, which he had the power of hiding in the toad, though the arms of the contending angels are evidently material.⁶⁸

All of this is, however, a far cry from many of the Romantics who, by contrast, found in Milton both a 'precedent and a vocabulary for the daring - and danger - of the poetic soul's adventure into the unknown from the known, the safe, the normal.'⁶⁹ The point can be taken still further, however, for the critics and poets of the early nineteenth-century also recognised in their Reformation predecessor the first real and complete rejection of the centrality of the body to definitions of human identity, and a simultaneous move to

⁶⁸ 'Milton' in *Lives of the English Poets*, Vol. 1., Cowley - Dryden, ed. George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: Calrendon Press, 1905), 184.

⁶⁹ John Woolford, "Wordsworth Agonistes," *Essays in Criticism* 31 (1981): 27.

Milton's allegory of Death may remind us in a superficial way (the repeated use of the word 'seemed' for example, or the fact that it immediately follows the description of Sin which is so clearly drawn, at least in part, from Spenser's *Error*) of the only other great epic of the English Renaissance, but here the similarity surely ends. In a masterful piece of verse which draws its frighteningly expansive power more from what is omitted than from what is mentioned, Milton is truly ahead of his time, for he is utilising to devastating effect what a modern film critic would immediately recognise as the basic premise around which almost every example of the science-fiction/horror genre is organised. Marjorie Hope Nicolson points out that such a technique has a long and distinguished history in prose horror also ('Ambrose Bierce, *The Damned Thing*, or some parts of *Dracula*')⁷². Pertinent though her point may be, it is ultimately a mere paraphrasing of Coleridge's eloquent distinction between poetry and painting. The Romantic critic's famous commentary on the 'fine description of Death in Milton' (which his Augustan predecessor Johnson had already dismissed as 'undoubtedly faulty'⁷³) is worth quoting in full:

I have sometimes thought that the passage just read might be quoted as exhibiting the narrow limit of painting, as compared with the boundless power of poetry: painting cannot go beyond a certain point; poetry rejects all control, all confinement. Yet we know that sundry painters have attempted pictures of the meeting between Satan and Death at the gates of Hell; and how was Death represented? Not as Milton has described him, but by the most defined thing that can be imagined - a skeleton, the driest and hardest image that it is possible to discover; which, instead of keeping the mind in a state of activity, reduces it to the merest passivity, - an image,

⁷² Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *A Reader's Guide to John Milton* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), 216.

⁷³ Johnson, 185.

compared with which a square, a triangle, or any other mathematical figure, is a luxuriant fancy.⁷⁴

The distinction drawn here between that which is finite and clearly represented, and that which exceeds these limitations by virtue of its lack of definition, is central to Milton's construction of both self and body in *Paradise Lost*. And yet the implied parallel of poetry versus painting, with imaginative activity versus stultifying two-dimensional imagery is surely a generalisation too sweeping to be of any real use other than as a suggestive starting point.

That Milton's (necessarily) allegorical representation of Death draws its power from its emphatic blurring of boundaries is abundantly clear, and this technique functions on various levels from the stylistic to the psychological. The character then, is not the only element lacking in definition, for the description itself begins not - as did the immediately preceding section of text describing Sin - with a new line, but rather half way through line 666, tagged, almost as we may have expected an insignificant afterthought to have been, on to the end of the 'night-hag' description which had begun five lines earlier. While the physical description of almost every other character in the epic, allegorical or otherwise, commences with a line devoted solely to the subject in hand, and never run-on from the previous one, Death must make do with a mere medial caesura. Moreover, the first three lines effectively camouflage themselves within the passage of text as a whole; a run of thirteen consecutive monosyllabic words in combination with enjambment at the end of line 667 build a momentum which counteracts in advance the potential slowing over the polysyllabic 'distinguishable'. This

⁷⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Seven Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton," in *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), 2.138-9.

combines with the repeated use of the 'sh' sound (' ... shape ... shape ... shape ... distinguishable ...') to ensure that the opening word of line 668 is, ironically, not marked off in any significant way whatsoever from those around it. The only comparative opposition (substance/shadow) which is established in this section of text, falls at what is approximately the mid-point of the description, but this attempt to supply even the flimsiest of textual skeletons is immediately undercut through the pronounced dissolution of differences in the immediately following line; 'For each seemed either ...'. There is to be no structurally formative spine to this description, just as there is none to that which it describes.

Coleridge's dissatisfaction then with the 'narrow limit of painting' is, in this context, simultaneously suggestive and entirely beside the point. 'How was Death represented in the work of [sundry painters]?' he asks, and responds immediately to his own question with 'Not as Milton has described him'. The point, surely, is that Milton has not, in fact, described him at all, and this is precisely the source of the distinction between the two modes of representation which, in Coleridge's opinion, elevates the 'boundless power of poetry' far above its rival art form. It is, moreover, entirely fitting that Milton's allegorical personification of this abstraction should be entirely without shape and form, or put another way, without any distinguishable body. Aside from the obvious point that death cannot be described because it cannot ever be known by those who are not yet dead, there is a further layer of significance here, for in providing us with a personification without person Milton has effectively removed the last remnant of relevance attributed to the physical body. If embodiment without a body is - at least in literary terms - now possible then the importance of that body has undergone the ultimate process of devaluation, and the boundaries which mark this entity are as fluid as those of Satan's independent and self-created context. Section One of this

thesis considered the significance of death in terms of the creation of a self-image: 'Identity is a theatrical invention that must be reiterated if it is to endure ... Each hanging or disembowelling was theatrical in conception and performance, a repeatable admonitory drama enacted on a scaffold before a rapt audience'.⁷⁵ We have already seen the way in which Foxe's *Christus Triumphans* can be read - albeit anachronically - as a 'springboard' text; a stepping stone which facilitates the shift in associative focus for identity away from theatricality and onto place, and the point is further underscored here where death is linked not with identity and the ultimate creation of a self image, but rather with the absence of any distinguishable form or definitive feature: '... what seemed his head / The likeness of a kingly crown had on'.

However, while Milton's manipulation of 'self' and 'context' is perhaps more systematically comprehensive than that of any other writer of the period, it is, like his rhetoric of the abyss, exclusive neither to him nor the epic genre. Traherne's *Centuries*, for example, also display a sustained interest in the idea of a contextualised infinite space:

This Moment Exhibits infinite Space, but there is a Space also wherein all Moments are infinitely Exhibited, and the Everlasting Duration of infinite Space is another Region and Room of Joys.⁷⁶

The paralleling of Milton's theme is evident across the board in Traherne's poetry, but perhaps of particular relevance here are 'Insatiableness' and 'My Spirit'. The spatial ambiguity at the close of the former typifies a poetic

⁷⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, "Marlowe and Renaissance Self-Fashioning" in Kernan (ed.) *Two Renaissance Mythmakers*, 50, 51.

⁷⁶ Ridler (ed.), 55.

technique which is, at its best, capable of combining esoteric obscurity with all-encompassing generality:

Till I what was before all Time descry,
 The World's Beginning seems but Vanity.
 My Soul doth there long Thoughts extend;
 No End
 Doth find, or Being comprehend:
 Yet somewhat sees that is
 The obscure shady face
 Of endless Space,
 All Room within; where I
 Expect to meet Eternal Bliss.
 (Lines 21-30).

The structure here, funnelling as it does towards the defining 'No End' of line 24 before expanding again into the 'endless Space' which is the open-ended ambiguity of the poem's climax, reminds us at first glance of the type of formal control exhibited in so many of Herbert's shaped poems from *The Temple*. Moreover, form is, in this particular example, brought further into the service of content through the deliberately placed punctuation of the final stanza; line 24 is both semantically and formally endless (enjambment carries it into line 25). It does, however, have a distinct beginning (it is not only marked off from the previous line through end-stopping, it is emphatically set up by the anticipation created by the semi-colon). Thus the key line of the final stanza is effectively made to mirror the sense of the poem as a whole - 'The World' it is made clear to us, does have a 'Beginning' but if we search for an end we find only the 'Eternal Bliss' of the final line.⁷⁷

⁷⁷Anne Ridler suggests two possible solutions to the ambiguity of the poem's close in relation to the phrase 'All Room within' of line 29: 'it could mean that endless space is suggested by all finite space, as M thinks; or possibly 'Room' might mean 'the dimension, or scope, of the whole universe'. Ridler (ed.), 133.

Traditional late Renaissance wordplay involving the 'I/eye' pun surfaces once again in this poem, but while much critical time and effort has been expended analysing the significance of this to Traherne's vision of infinity,⁷⁸ considerably less space has been afforded considerations of the relationship between Traherne's infinite/self, and that of Milton:

In the neo-Platonist tradition, the eye is a serene mirror of the soul, testifying to the existence of a divine centre towards which its beams converge. With Traherne, the eye becomes a symbol of insatiability and endless desire. The eye is the metaphorical support of a world without end as much as of a verbal paradise where freedom of play, puns, and ambiguities of meaning become possible. Of the eye/I homophony, common in Renaissance poetry, Traherne makes liberal use. Both the eye and the I are perceived as insubstantial, and yet, somehow, as 'supersubstantial'.⁷⁹

The term 'supersubstantial' is of course drawn from 'My Spirit' a poem which, by its final stanza has made synonymous 'Wondrous Self' and 'a World within'. More revealing, however, is the explicit association of this 'World within' with the 'Deep Abyss' of line 77, a phrase which occupies a similarly commanding stanzaic position to that of 'No End' in 'Insatiableness'. Perhaps the most fruitful point of departure for a comparison of Milton and Traherne though, is not to be found here in the fairly obvious

⁷⁸ See, for example, A. L. Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), Richard Douglas Jordan, *The Temple of Eternity: Thomas Traherne's Philosophy of Time* (Washington: Kennikat Press, 1972), and Stanley Stewart, *The Expanded Voice: the Art of Thomas Traherne* (San Marino, Cal.: The Huntington Library, 1970), particularly Chpt. VI "Infinite Center"; *The Lyric Voice*, 139-69.

⁷⁹ Marie-Dominique Garnier, "The Mythematics of Infinity in The Poems and Centuries of T. Traherne: A Study of its Thematic Archetypes," *Cahiers Elisabéthains* 28 (Oct. 1985): 62.

superficial echo of Satan's rhetoric, but in the second stanza description of Spirit which:

... doth not by another Engine work,
But by it self; which in the Act doth lurk.
Its essence is Transformd into a true
And perfect Act.
(Lines 23-6).

Purity of action; perfected dissociation of subject and verb, but Traherne is in fact attempting to locate the 'essence' of this spirit/self not within some 'perfect Act', but rather, in grammatical terms, within an imperfect one. Whenever this 'Act' becomes situated exclusively within the confines of the past (perfect) tense, it instantly loses its relevance to the continuing existence of its implied - but absent - subject in the present tense. 'Self ... lurk[s]' within 'Act'; abstract noun exists within verb, but does this then mean that by extension 'self' ceases to exist as an independent entity when severed from action? Passivity of self is, by Traherne's definition, a difficult - or at least grammatically and metaphysically awkward - concept. If we return briefly to the opening of our discussion of the Miltonic 'self', we recall that what Hunter found most remarkable about Satan was neither the strong Faustian striving which permeates the epic nor the subtlety of characterisation which makes us, at times, almost sympathise with the enemy of mankind, but the potential within the rebel leader of the fallen angels to actively and independently create his own context. And now we have come to the relevance of the term 'within', for where precisely is this dissenting self located? The text of this Section to this point would surely lead us to the conclusion 'within context', and yet it has become necessary to refine this response, and the only possible revised answer must be: not within context *per se*, but within the act that is the creation of that context. Moreover, this is the case regardless of what this act may entail, which is to say that within the term

'act' is encoded not simply the possibility of action, but also the potential for passivity:

Thus repulsed, our final hope
Is flat despair: we must exasperate
Th' almighty victor to spend all his rage,
And that must end us, that must be our cure,
To be no more; sad cure; for who would lose,
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,
Those thoughts that wander through eternity,
To perish rather, swallowed up and lost
In the wide womb of uncreated night,
Devoid of sense and motion?

(Book II, Lines 142-151).

This is perhaps one of the clearest indications of the distance (in terms of the concept of 'self') that has been travelled in the interim between Shakespeare and Milton. For Hamlet (III, i, 64-88) the question to be wrestled with involves the possibility (and/or implications) of a disembodied and purely cerebral post-death consciousness. Belial's speech on the other hand, does not share this concern. While Shakespeare frets over the shift from corporeal to intellectual, Milton's anxiety concerns the transition from 'intellectual being' to nothing. The 'wide womb of uncreated night' may initially seem a curious phrase (we might have expected the claustrophobic sterility of 'tomb' rather than the latent fertility of 'womb'),⁸⁰ but it is, in the circumstances, entirely appropriate. The Miltonic self exists not purely in the perfect tense as an object, but simultaneously in the present tense as a subject, for it is, as Satan

⁸⁰ Compare the play on 'womb/tomb' in the opening lines of Crashaw's 'Easter Day': 'Rise, Heire of fresh Eternity, / From thy Virgin Tombe' where Crashaw too invests his text with a certain vastness or cosmic quality this time through the impersonal language and sustained absence of any first person singular. Donne, of course, also works with the 'womb/tomb' analogy in *La Corona*, but this section of Milton's text is probably intended to prefigure the explicit association later in the same Book of: 'womb' and: 'grave': 'Into this wild abyss, / The womb of Nature and perhaps her grave ...' (Book II, 910-1).

so ably demonstrates, not simply something created, it is something with the potential and ability to actively create, to transcend boundaries and fashion its own existence through either '... doing or suffering' (Book I, 158), a phrase which Frye invokes in his definition of the 'counter movement of being that we call the heroic'.⁸¹ In the face of such awesomely transformative powers, the only means of truly ending the existence of pure consciousness is by recourse to its polar opposite; if the strength - and self - of this ultimately cerebral being lies in its ability to create, then it can only be contained, contextualised and consumed by that which is, as yet 'uncreated ... devoid of sense and motion'. And so Milton's *Areopagitica* minds can wander, dissociated and disembodied, through their unlimited context, but Satan's great strength lies in his recognition of the very fact that they are free radicals, bound to no particular entity and as such entirely open to appropriation of the type he proffers. 'To suffer, as to do, / Our strength is equal' (Book II, 200-1) declares Belial later in the same speech, anachronistically lending credence (albeit with radically opposing implications) to T. S. Eliot's dictum from *Murder in the Cathedral* 'action is suffering, and suffering is action'. Frye's definition of the heroic then, allows us to come full circle having now formed the bridge between the element of Faustian striving which is so fundamentally central to Satan's self-contextualised hell, and the somewhat paradoxical active passivity of suffering that, in one sense, constitutes the essence of this 'self':

...What though the field be lost?
 All is not lost; the unconquerable will,
 And study of revenge, immortal hate,
 And courage never to submit or yield:

⁸¹ Frye, 4. Interestingly, Frye goes on to speak of this 'heroic energy' in terms of 'burst[ing] the boundaries of normal experience' although he places this type of transcendence in the context of the romance genre.

which runs through the play as a whole has been more than adequately documented), but Coriolanus is, nonetheless, a man defined for the better part of the text by role. Eagleton summarises the point well: 'Whereas Hamlet falls apart in the space between himself and his actions, Coriolanus is nothing but his actions'.⁸⁴ And once again we can see with a fair degree of clarity the inversion worked by Milton, for if Coriolanus is effectively created almost entirely by his context, Satan's context is effectively created almost entirely by him; while the 'self' of this Shakespearean tragic hero is defined by its actions, Satan's created context is, to a great extent, defined by his 'self'. However, while Milton boldly structures his shackled notions of 'infinity' and 'self' around Satan, his contemporary Traherne adopts as his keystone the rhetoric of the Deity. Satan is here dismissed in a fairly offhand manner: 'No Aloes or Dregs, no Wormwood Star / Was seen to fall into the Sea from far. / No rotten Soul, did like an Apple, near / My Soul approach. There's no Contagion here.' ('Silence', 57-60), for a frightening vision of vastly expansive evil is unacceptable both to Traherne's religion and to his text:

Infinity of space was [Traherne's] image of God's goodness; only by understanding and accepting infinite space could man approach ultimate union with the infinitely infinite God. In logic, Traherne's tautology may be nonsense, but in the language of the imagination his notion could be expressed in no other way.⁸⁵

Not all of Traherne's contemporaries, however, regarded this 'infinity of space' as a concept to be embraced with unequivocal enthusiasm. 'Le

⁸⁴ Eagleton, 73.

⁸⁵ Colie, 81-2.

Satan stands determinedly - but not without trepidation - on the verge of the abyss, and what he casts into utter darkness is the profoundly inadequate rhetoric of a body/soul dichotomy which has been weighed in the balances and found wanting. To fill the *tabula rasa* that remains Milton too stares deep into the bottomless chasm, searching in vain for a non-existent nadir, but emerging instead with a concept of selfhood which proved almost two centuries before the birth of Nietzsche that 'if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you'.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ 'He who fights with monsters should be careful lest he thereby become a monster. And if thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee.' Friedrich Nietzsche, "Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future (IV. 146)," in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Helen Zimmern, vol. 12 (Edinburgh: T. N. Foulis, 1909), 97.

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