

SHAKESPEARE'S WICKED PRONOUN: *A LOVER'S DISCOURSE* AND LOVE STORIES¹

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This paper analyses Shakespeare's treatment of love from the theoretical vantage point of Roland Barthes's entry on "gossip" in *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. According to Barthes, love narratives are the effect of "gossip" third person counterfeits of a discourse of desire that in its purest form can only be addressed by a first to a second person. As the pronoun of gossip, the third person is the "wicked pronoun". Shakespearean drama displays the dialectics of lover's discourse and love story, the contrast between a discourse *of* desire and a discourse *about* others, desires. This contrast is registered in the transformation of a referential universe which exhausts itself in "I" and "you" (the lover's) into forms of discourse where the lover becomes "he" or "she", a "theme" rather than the subject of desire. Shakespeare constructs a heroics of love whose main feature is the lovers, resistance to be narrated by others. But this resistance usually ends up in the lovers, final yielding to third-person narratives, sometimes told by others, sometimes by themselves. The analysis of pronominal forms in *Twelfth Night* (1601), *Troilus and Cressida* (1602), and *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1607) constitutes the basis for a wider concern with the effects of third-person narratives upon the shaping of erotic identity in these plays.

The happy ending of *Twelfth Night* (1602) bases its dramatic efficacy on a double operation: two characters —the Duke Orsino and the Lady Olivia— must accommodate a third —Viola— within their economy of desire. And each carries

¹ I want to thank Manuel Tirado for snakes and etymologies, and Beatriz Dominguez for a seminar paper she may not even recall.

out the task in different ways. As a matter of fact, the Duke needs only to realise that Cesario, the boy in his service whom he has loved, is indeed a girl whom he can now serve:

[To Viola] Your master quits you; and for your service done him,
So much against the mettle of your sex,
So far beneath your soft and tender breeding,
And since you call'd me master for so long,
Here is my hand; you shall from this time be
Your master's mistress. (5.1.320-25, my emphasis)

The play has endowed Cesario with those same traits of the androgynous lord of the *Sonnets*, and Orsino has concealed his desire for the supposed boy behind a master-servant relation. The transformation of the "Master Mistris" of Sonnet 20 into the "Masters Mistris" of the end of *Twelfth Night* restores the orthodoxy of desire by distributing between two people —Orsino and Viola— the masculine and feminine positions that the mysterious Cesario, and the Fair Lord, retained in one.² One single and problematic object of desire gives way to an unproblematic couple, in which the bonds of servitude are reversible: this master-slave —or mistress-slave— dialectics may envisage an unequal relation between the two sexes, but it may also be the sign of mutuality in courtship and married love.³

Olivia's task looks harder. Still puzzled by the discovery that Cesario is indeed Viola, and that one Sebastian whom she has just met —and who strangely shares with her beloved "one face, one voice, one habit" (5.1.214)—, will soon become her husband, she must make the necessary adjustments to cope with the new situation. And she finds an amazingly simple solution to an extremely convoluted riddle. All she needs is five words: "A sister, you are she", Olivia tells Viola (5.1.325); and in this odd half-line the love plot rounds off its denouement. However, one wonders whether appointing Viola as sister was necessary at all to reach the proper sense of an ending. If the romantic plot has finally achieved its usual end by coupling Orsino with Viola, and Sebastian with Olivia, why is it so necessary for Olivia to find Viola a place as a sister —or sister-in-law— in a world which has already assigned her one as Orsino's wife? Olivia's "A sister, you are she" looks like the compensation for a flow of desire which has no room in the ending of the romantic plot. Such reparation erases unnatural sexuality by re-inscribing affections within the

² The 1623 Folio reading "Masters Mistris" is quoted from Hinman (1996).

³ These options have been variously accounted for by feminist and gender criticism of Shakespeare during the eighties and nineties. According to Marianne Novy, "in his comedies and romances Shakespeare creates images of gender relations that keep elements of both patriarchy and mutuality in suspension" (1984: 6). She discusses *Twelfth Night* on these grounds (Novy 1984: 32-44). For her part, Mary Beth Rose observes that "the erotic teleology of Elizabethan comedy" demands an "imaginative model of desire based on the harmonious resolution of sexual conflict" (1988: 40). A less optimistic reading of this comedy's end is offered by Lisa Jardine (1992: 27-38).

realm of family ties ("sister"): the object is no longer "he" but "she", and accordingly its status as beloved is absorbed within a kinship relation that represses lesbian desire in the name of the incest taboo.⁴

And yet, there exists the possibility of reading these words beyond the sexual taboos of gender —gay and lesbian desire— and kinship —incest. Olivia's sentence banishes the beloved from the realm of desire —the second person— into that of disavowal —the third person. As the girl becomes a sister, she ceases to be "you" in order to be "she": because "she" is no longer the beloved. As Roland Barthes puts it, "the other is neither *he* or *she*; the other has only a name of his own, and her own name. *The third person is the wicked pronoun*: it is the pronoun of the non-person, it absents, it annuls" (1978: 185; last emphasis mine).

Barthes' argument must be understood as part of his reflections on *gossip*. These should at the same time be placed under a wider theory of love narratives which occupy several entries —or *figures*— in his book *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. According to Barthes, the malicious talk about the desires of others transforms the beloved other into "he" or "she". The lover's discourse is a form of "interlocution (speaking to another)"; on the other hand, love stories are acts of "delocution (speaking about someone)" (1978: 184, my emphasis). The lover's discourse is inimical to narrative, since it refuses to integrate desire in a higher structure of meaning.⁵ "This is the *love story*", Barthes writes,

subjugated to the great narrative Other, to that general opinion which disparages any excessive force and wants the subject himself to reduce the great imaginary current, the orderless, endless stream which is passing through him, to a painful, morbid crisis of which he must be cured, which he must 'get over' ('It develops, grows, causes suffering, and passes away' in the fashion of some Hippocratic disease): the love story is the tribute the lover must pay to the world in order to be reconciled with it. (1978: 7)

Barthes imagines a lover's discourse that is caught up inside a dialectics of resistance and submission to the narrative Other, the all-encompassing Aristotelian

⁴ Or, seen otherwise, and this is a different story, she finds in the covert space of the family a place to develop a homosexual and incestuous passion in the name of sisterly love. For an appealing study of homoerotic desire in *Twelfth Night* see Valerie Traub (1992: 91-144). However, Traub says nothing of Olivia's "A sister, you are she". Although the problem of gender in *Twelfth Night* has been widely discussed in the late years, no attention that I know of has been paid to its appropriation within the realm of kinship ties in Olivia's sentence.

⁵ Consistent with his project, Barthes defines the figures of the lover's discourse as instances of "the lover at work" (1978: 4). Instead of providing reifying and structural descriptions of love situations, the figures are "fragments of discourse" which "stir, collide, subside, return, vanish with no more order than the fly of mosquitoes" (1978: 7).

principle whereby the plot —*mythos*— is the soul, the final cause, the end of drama (Aristotle 1932: 6.19-20). Love has a beginning, a middle, and an end; and the latter is nothing else but the suffocation of love's excess. *Twelfth Night* exemplifies the process whereby desire is conveyed to its end as the play reaches narrative closure. The lyrical irresolution of desire's excess found in the *Sonnets* yields here its due to a narrative Other of comic integration by splitting the "Master Mistris" into two correctly gendered subjects. "You are she", for its part, accounts for a taming of desire grounded on estrangement rather than integration, as it performs the exile of an amorous "you" into a distant third person. However, integration and estrangement are two sides of the same coin, two extreme versions of desire's death. Thus the end of *Twelfth Night* epitomises the step from *interlocution* to *delocution*, from unsolved conflict to narrative closure, from the subject's excess to its containment in *mythos*, from the lover's subjective discourse to the objectifying love story.

Not even the *Sonnets* are exempt from paying this narrative tithe. After all, Shakespeare's—or the first editor's— arrangement compels us to read them in the fashion of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* and other Renaissance sonnet sequences. Even when taken individually, a poem like Sonnet 20 sustains that the continuance of the lover's desire is not possible without some kind of renunciation or price to be paid, a price that materialises in the poem's closure:

And for a woman wert thou first created,
Till nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,
And by addition me of thee defeated
By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
But since she pricked thee out for women's pleasure,
Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure. (20: 9-14)

Division takes place again in pronouns: the subject of desire acquiesces to deliver "love's use" to the third person as a means of retaining the second person's "love". A surplus of desire is degraded to mere "use", and thus bestowed upon the great Other, represented not only by those women who can assume love's consummation as a commodity—"their treasure"—, but also by that "nature" which has made "women's pleasure" the final cause of "love's use".

It is in the discursive realm of the third person where desire is tamed, moralised, reviled, contained, or erased. And yet, no matter how destructive the narrative Other appears to the lover, its presence is inherent in the language of love. Despite the aspirations of intellectuals like Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva to theorise—and mime—a lover's discourse which exhausts itself in the field of the first and second person, the love story intrudes into the lover's discourse from the very first formulation of the demand for love, the subject's entrance into the

Symbolic order.⁶ The following discussion intends to find a pattern of desire in the Other's occupation of that discursive universe which the lover aspires to share with the beloved only. In that pattern, the Barthesian "wicked pronoun" is sometimes a real pronoun—a "he" or "she" or "they" in the text—or part of its referential scope—as in the case of "we". But at other times it takes on a wide variety of shapes—a character, a concept, a symbol, a metaphor. All in all, I contend that a study of the multiple ways in which the wicked pronoun entraps the self in *Troilus and Cressida* (1602) and *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1607),⁷ shaping their characters and stories, may throw light on the dramatic and linguistic construction of erotic subjectivity in Shakespearean drama in ways that go alongside issues of gender and status.

The Siege of Troy provided Shakespeare in *Troilus and Cressida* with a narrative framework in which erotic desire is primarily understood not in itself, but as the cause of war. As the Prologue rather bluntly proclaims, "The ravished Helen, Menelaus' queen/ With wanton Paris sleeps — and that's the quarrel" (9-10).⁸ Moreover, the course of events bears a deviant relation to this all-encompassing war framework ever since the Prologue states that "our play/ Leaps o'er the vaunt and firstlings of those broils,/ Beginning in the middle" (26-28). The action develops during a truce, after a seven-year siege, a situation that necessarily hinders expectations of a continued line of epic action. *Troilus and Cressida*, more than any other Shakespearean play, disowns an end—whether comic or tragic—proper to its two protagonists,⁹ and this in spite of the many hints that announce the fall of Troy, or love's disastrous consequences—Helen's teasing remarks to Pandarus

⁶ In this sense, Julia Kristeva contends that 'the experience of love indissolubly ties together the *symbolic* (what is forbidden, distinguishable, thinkable), the *imaginary* (what the Self imagines in order to sustain and expand itself), and the *real* (that impossible domain where affects aspire to everything and where there is no one to take into account the fact that *I* am only a part)' (1983: 7). The narrative Other that Barthes describes as the "wicked pronoun" accounts for the lover's realisation of external prohibitions and limits, and therefore its domain is the Symbolic.

⁷ Since I quote from Michael Neill's edition of the play, I follow his decision of spelling "Anthony" instead of "Antony", except for the cases in which I quote either from a different edition or a secondary source which prefers the latter. On Neill's arguments in favour of "Anthony" see his introduction to the Oxford edition of the play (1994: 134-35).

⁸ Unless otherwise stated, all references to this play are from Muir (1982).

⁹ This issue is directly related to one of the most significant points of textual disagreement among critics. Although both the 1609 Quarto and the 1623 Folio print Pandarus' final Epilogue, critics ever since J. M. Nosworthy's *Shakespeare's Occasional Plays* (1965), have preferred the opinion that this Epilogue was used in the early Inns of Court performances of the play, and it was deleted when the play was staged in the Globe. The inclusion or deletion of the Epilogue is decisive to an understanding of the play as fundamentally satiric or tragic, and thus critics like Nosworthy and later Gary Taylor have contended that the bitter comedy of Pandarus' final speech would be suitable for the free-thinking minds at the Inns of Court, but troublesome to the Globe audience (Taylor 1982). For a new interpretation and critique of Taylor's views, see Jensen (1995: 414-23).

"This love will undo us all" (3.1.15). Whether *Troilus and Cressida* is a story of the end of love and the fall of a city is at least arguable. Not even the more open speeches in defence of teleological history seem to correspond with the play's narrative development. Thus Hector's statement: "The end crowns all:/ And that old common arbitrator, Time,/ Will one day end it" (4.5. 223-25). The effects of Time are beyond the play's own scope, and depend here on our literary knowledge of the Trojan War. As far as Shakespeare is concerned, the play begins and ends in the middle, patiently awaiting "one day" for Time to perform its closure. Refusals to fight, or interrogations of the necessity to continue the fight, pervade the never-beginning and never-ending middle of *Troilus and Cressida*, even when the play insistently poses the threat of an imminent —though protracted— undoing.¹⁰

Making Helen the spokesperson of the potential of love's undoing may not be casual at all. Helen must be at the centre of any fictional re-writing of the Troy War. She is a place to be filled in with narratives that impose a moral judgement upon a foundational act of desire —her elopement with Paris. And yet, this empties desire of any value *per se*. No specific characterisation of her in this play is needed beyond the fact that "she's a merry Greek indeed" (1.2.105). As the Prologue made clear, she is the "quarrel" herself, a prop to narrative development. She is also a constant locus for questioning the need for such a narrative. That is the issue which the Trojans must elucidate when they are offered peace in exchange for Helen. The argument that divides the sons of Priamus is the Queen's *value*:¹¹

HECTOR Brother, she is not worth what she doth cost
The keeping.

TROILUS What's aught but as 'tis valued?

HECTOR But value dwells not in particular will:
It holds his estimate and dignity
As well wherein 'tis precious of itself
As in the prizer. 'Tis mad idolatry
To make the service greater than the god;
And the will dotes that is attributive
To what infectiously itself affects,
Without some image of th'affected merit.

TROILUS I take today a wife, and my election
Is led on in the conduct of my will;
My will enkindled by mine eyes and ears,

¹⁰ I draw here on Patricia Parker's reading of the play's end: "But all references to such a crowning end or fine produce not an 'all's well that ends well' —or even the play's tentative sense of ending— but rather a protracted dilation that is finally only a bloated middle, whose stopping brings with it no sense of culmination or fruition" (1996: 226).

¹¹ For discussions of the notion of "value" in this play, see Barfoot (1988).

Two traded pilots 'twixt the dangerous shores
 Of will and judgement. How may I avoid,
 Although my will distaste what it elected,
 The wife I chose? There can be no evasion
 To blench from this and to stand firm by honour (2.2.50-67)

"Value dwells not in particular will": this is just an apparent source of argument here, since after all both Hector and Troilus agree on denying desire's value. Against Hector's belief in the possibility of discovering the true value of an object essentially independent of an infectious will, Troilus proposes a dogged resistance to change: the object of desire may prove unreliable as it stands on the stormy waters between will and reason; but honour impedes evasion, and it must sustain the will even in defence of one's own error. Even Helen's lover Paris entertains similar thoughts: "There's not the meanest spirit on our party", he argues, "Without a heart to dare or sword to draw/ When Helen is defended; nor none so noble/ Whose life were ill bestowed or death unfamed/ *Where Helen is the subject*" (2.2.156-59; my emphasis). Helen is the *subject* on which the Trojans lay their "attributive" will. In Troilus' words, "she is *a theme* of honour and renown" (2.2.198, my emphasis). It is not strange that in front of the gates of Troy the Greeks share this conception of their lost queen: "All the *argument* is a whore and a cuckold", complains Thersites (2.3.68; my emphasis). And even Menelaus' reproaches to Hector's mention of her insist on the same idea: "Name her not now, sir; *she's a deadly theme*" (4.5.181; my emphasis). It is precisely this status that places Helen in the division between "love" and "love's use". By "beginning in the middle", Shakespeare needn't tell us that she might have fallen in love with Paris, or Paris with her. What needs to be recalled of that beginning is Paris' offer to redress the rape of Hesione by the Greeks, and the conveyance of Helen home:

If you'll avouch 'twas wisdom Paris went—
 As you must needs, for you all cried 'Go, go';
 If you'll confess he brought home worthy prize—
 As you must needs, for you all clapped you hands
 And cried 'Inestimable'; why do you now
 The issue of your proper wisdoms rate,
 And do a deed that never fortune did,
 Beggar the estimation which you prized
 Richer than sea or land? (2.2.83-91)

For the Trojans, Helen is "inestimable estimation". At other moments in the same scene, she is "silks", "viands", "a pearl", to be kept, but also susceptible of being "soiled", worn out by use (2.2.68-70, 80). Paraphrasing sonnet 20, her love's use is the Greeks' and Trojans' treasure, regardless of the fact that her love is Paris', or was once Menelaus'. What remains is that "she's a deadly theme". The wicked

pronoun falls on Helen, and reifies her as a referent, as long as two armies live off building arguments and telling stories about her.

Shakespeare knew the burden of such a narrative framework when he undertook to rewrite the loves of Troilus and Cressida. The importance of being or not being Helen, becomes a leitmotiv from the very beginning: "Because she's kin to me", Pandarus says of his niece Cressida, "therefore she's not so fair as Helen; an she were not kin to me, she would be as fair o' Friday as Helen is on Sunday" (1.1.73-76). Cressida is not Helen as long as she is not the object of the Greeks' and Trojans' "attributive" will. Indeed, Pandarus' will is misplaced from the moment he fails to identify Helen's "attributes":

PANDARUS ... At what request do these men play?

SERVANT That's to 't, indeed, sir. Marry, sir, at the request of Paris, my lord, who is there in person; with him, the mortal Venus, the heart-blood of beauty, love's invisible soul —

PANDARUS Who? My cousin Cressida?

SERVANT No, sir, Helen. Could you not find out that by her attributes? (2.3.27-35)

Helen's "attributes" are not her essential value, but the effect of Barthes' "general opinion", a collective will that is "attributive to what infectiously itself affects". And that is why not being Helen to a woman is like not being loved by Helen to a man. And for this reason Pandarus advertises Troilus to Cressida by stating that Helen "praised his complexion above Paris" (1.2.94).¹² The loves of Troilus and Cressida fall outside the interests of the community's "attributive" will, and it is Pandarus' task to create its value in reference to, and in spite of, a third person —Helen. And on this principle is grounded the first narrative move in their love story: "I cannot come to Cressid but by Pandar", Troilus acknowledges (1.1.93).

The nature of desire in the Trojan world relies on *delocution* as its dominant discursive mode. If Helen is made a subject by the warriors' "attributive" will, Troilus and Cressida, for their part, acquire value as desiring subjects insofar as they are narrated *by* Pandarus, and *against* Helen's "attributes". This explains Pandarus and Helen's meeting in the play, an otherwise marginal scene which, in this light, must be regarded as essential. Agreement is hard to reach when editors come to gloss Pandarus' remark to the queen: "My niece is horribly in love with a thing that you have, sweet Queen" (3.1.92-3). Whatever it is "the thing" Helen has, we know from Pandarus that it is not Paris. Kenneth Muir in the Oxford edition plays with

¹² On Helen's value as model, and the mimetic nature of love in the Trojan world, see Girard (1985: esp. 199-201).

the possibility of the thing being Paris' sexual organ, a reading which is consistent with other uses of the term in Shakespeare.¹³ And yet, one may wonder why Pandarus goes to the Palace with the sole purpose of telling Helen vaguely of Troilus and Cressida's love, and why he ends up singing a song, followed by a barely intelligible repartee on love's definition:

HELEN Let thy song be love. 'This love will undo us all.' O Cupid, Cupid, Cupid!

PANDARUS Love? Ay, that it shall, i'faith.

PARIS Ay, good now, 'Love, love, nothing but love'.

PANDARUS In good troth, it begins so.

[Sings] Love, love, nothing but love, still more!

...

HELEN In love, i'faith, to the very tip of the nose.

PARIS He eats nothing but doves, love, and that breeds hot blood, and hot blood begets hot thoughts, and hot thoughts beget hot deeds, and hot deeds is love.

PANDARUS Is this the generation of love? Hot blood, hot thoughts and hot deeds? Why, they are vipers. Is love a generation of vipers? (3.1.102-26)

That Cressida is in love with a thing Helen has, that Pandarus is "in love to the very tip of the nose", and that love comes to be defined as a "generation of vipers", may or may not be a cluster of Shakespearean nonsense. And, even if it is, there is still the question of why such nonsense needs to be negotiated between Pandarus and Helen. Is the thing Helen has anything other than the position as object of desire Pandarus wants for Cressida? Is it not Helen's place as sexual model that Pandarus requires to negotiate with the Greek queen? And is this not the reason why Pandarus makes public display of his mastery of love's language and sings a song of love? Pandarus is, to use Thomas Lodge's phrase, "in love with curious words", that is, endowed with the ability to rehearse "love's use", to make desire the subject of *delocution*.¹⁴ So is Paris, insofar as his description of the "generation of love" is also a demonstration of literary skill. In Pandarus' understanding of Paris' argument, love is the result of the lover's digestion of dove-meat, whose production

¹³ A frequently quoted instance is Sonnet 20: 'By adding one thing to my purpose nothing' (20.12). Gordon Williams (1997: 306-7) also registers, together with Pandarus' speech, Viola in *Twelfth Night*: 'A little thing will make me tell them how much I lack of a man' (3.4.293). For a list of sexual quibbles on 'thing,' see also Eric Partridge (1968: 199-200).

¹⁴ The phrase "in love with curious words" is borrowed by Malcolm Evans from a sonnet by Thomas Lodge in his sequence *Phyllis*, and used as a starting point to discuss citation as linguistic mediation in English Petrarchism (1988: 119-24). On similar issues in *Troilus and Cressida*, see Freund (1986: 19-36).

of hot blood reaches the brains, heats the lover's thoughts and spurs his "hot deeds". Such a "generation" or genealogy produces love as a "generation" or offspring of "vipers". The twofold meaning of "generation" goes beyond its Biblical source in Matthew 3.7, where the Pharisees are disparaged by John the Baptist as *progenies viperarum*. By which detours of meaning the text moves from the "thing" that Helen has, whether a penis or love itself, to the Pharisees, or just the "generation of vipers", may be impossible to trace logically. The identification of love and lust with some kinds of snake are everywhere in Renaissance literature, and their origins can be traced back to different ancient cultural traditions. The generation of vipers reappears later on in the Shakespearean canon as part of Antiochus' riddle in *Pericles*: "I am no viper, yet I feed/ On mother's flesh which did me breed" (1.1.65-66).¹⁵ The serpent that eats its own mother as a symbol of lustful incest is not far from *King Lear*'s "barbarous Scythian,/ Or he that makes his *generation* messes" (1.1.115-16, my emphasis). And, of course, not conceptually far from the far-fetched image that places love's origin in the compulsive eating of Venus' doves. In a play that uses Ulysses' self-eating "universal wolf" as a powerful controlling image, this verbal display may be far from gratuitous:

Then everything includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite;
And appetite, a universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce a universal prey,
And last eat up itself. (1.3.118-23)

The undoing capacity of "power", "will", "appetite", and "love" are at stake here. But, above all, there are the undoing capacities of language itself. *Troilus and Cressida* makes railing into an art: the devouring power of verbal abuse is the skill of Thersites' "mastic jaws" (1.3.72).¹⁶ Pandarus' language, in his attempt to negotiate with Helen the female's status as object of desire, becomes involved in a snake-like, self-destructive exercise of Barthian *delocution*, whereby the definition of love signifies its own undoing. Love as "a generation of vipers" appears as the

¹⁵ A genuine summary of the symbolic traditions that associate the serpent to evil, lust, and deceit, on the one hand, and fertile or phallic sexuality on the other, can be found, under the entry "snake", in Hall (1979: 285-86). The belief that the viper eats its way out of its own mother's body, found in several classical texts, justifies the Medieval and Renaissance etymology (*vi parere* or "delivery by force"). See St. Isidore of Seville (1911: XII.4.10).

¹⁶ Kenneth Muir, following previous editors of the play, records the O.E.D. sense of 'mastic' as 'gummy,' mastic being a substance used to stop decaying teeth. Muir's discussion of the semantic links between 'mastic' and 'mastix' ('scourge,' as found in titles like *Histriomastix* or *Satiromastix*) is suggestive, for the relation it allows between Thersites and satire (Muir 1982: 71). I suggest the possibility of a connection between "mastic" and Latin "*masticare*" ("to chew", "to gnaw"), a sense which adds to Thersites' satiric bitterness the devouring power discussed above. On Thersites' function as satiric commentator, see also Grady (1996: 70-4).

logical consequence of “this love will undo us all”, that is, desire undermined by a reifying third person —Pandarus the bawd, the moralist, the narrator— who cannot be “in love” unless *through* and *with* curious words.

In a universe doomed by *delocution* —talking about love— one wonders whether there is space for any lover’s discourse proper, for Troilus’ and Cressida’s own language of desire. I want to argue that in such a universe the weight of *delocution* is too heavy to be thrown away, and in spite of it, to combat it becomes the lover’s fate. Thus when, at the sound of distant drums, Troilus complains about the theme of war:

Peace, you ungracious clamours! Peace, rude sounds!
 Fools on both sides: Helen must needs be fair,
 When with your blood you daily paint her thus.
 I cannot fight upon this argument:
 It is too starved a subject for my sword. (1.1.88-92)

The same man that sees in Helen a “starved subject” is the one that later on pronounces her “a theme of honour and renown”. And in that contradiction must we locate Troilus’ own divided self. Helen can be the cause of war; but Troilus fails to understand her value as a model of desire. He is in love with Cressida, and the rest are “fools on both sides”. In spite of the emulation by others of Paris —or Menelaus— in the pursuit of Helen’s love, Troilus aspires to be left alone with the object of his desire, without the intermission of a model or any other form of the wicked pronoun. Troilus claims his right to have a discourse of his own. And so does Cressida, when she refuses to see Troilus through the Other’s eyes: “But more in Troilus thousandfold I see/ Than in *the glass of Pandar’s praise* may be” (1.2.270-71; my emphasis). These are among the few moments when the lovers rehearse the erasure of *delocution*, when they think they have found an authentic expression of desire. But in these very speeches the lovers give themselves over to the great narrative Other of the third person. Cressida’s fall is her attempt to adjust her behaviour to the literary model of the coy mistress:

Yet I hold off: women are angels, wooing:
 Things won are done — joy’s soul lies in the doing.
That she beloved knows nought what that knows not this:
 Men prize the thing ungained more than it is.
That she was never yet that ever knew
 Love got so sweet as when desire did sue.
 (1.2.272-78; my emphasis)

What “I” sees in Troilus must “hold off” as Cressida’s desire is replaced with the knowledge or truth of “that she”. For his part, Troilus must acknowledge

another inevitable truth: "I cannot come to Cressid but by Pandar", affirms the prince:

And he's as tetchy to be wooed to woo
 As she is stubborn-chaste against all suit.
 Tell me, Apollo, for thy Daphne's love,
 What Cressid is, what Pandar, and what we?
 Her bed is India; there she lies, a pearl;
 Between our Ilium and where she resides
 Let it be called the wild and wand'ring flood;
 Ourself the merchant, and this sailing Pandar
 Our doubtful hope, our convoy, and our bark. (1.1.93-102)

"What Cressid is, what Pandar, and what we?" If Cressida is defined in the symbolic order of myth by Daphne's coyness, "Pandar" and "we" pose harder dilemmas for Troilus. The interest lies in the stylistic shift from the "I" of "I cannot come to Cressid but by Pandar" to the first person plural form "we". In theory, "we" is capable of including in its scope of reference both the second and third person, or either of them. "We" may mean here "I", but it could be "I and you", but also "I and you and he/she", or "I and he/she", or "I and they". I contend that Troilus' shift from "I" to "we" is explained by the fact that he cannot come to Cressid but by Pandar. "We" epitomises better than any other word the division of the subject in love, the constitution of the self *for* the other and *in* the Other —the dialectics of *interlocution* and *delocution*: "we" affirms the struggle for isolation of "I and you" (Troilus and Cressida), but also the inherent reliance of the lover's discourse on the wicked pronoun (Troilus and Cressida *by* Pandarus). The lovers' first encounter, deferred until the third act, provides new instances of Shakespeare's contorted grammar of "we":

TROILUS ... What too curious dreg espies my sweet lady in the fountain
 of our love?

CRESSIDA More dregs than water, if my fears have eyes.

...

TROILUS O, let my lady apprehend no fear; in all Cupid's pageant there
 is presented no monster.

CRESSIDA Nor nothing monstrous neither?

TROILUS Nothing but our undertakings, when we vow to weep seas,
 live in fire, eat rocks, tame tigers; thinking it harder for our mistress to
 devise imposition enough than for us to undergo any difficulty imposed.
 This is the monstrosity [*sic.*] in love, lady — that the will is infinite
 and the execution confined; that the desire is boundless and the act a
 slave to limit.

CRESSIDA They say all lovers swear more performance than they are able, and yet reserve an ability that they never perform; vowing more than the perfection of ten, and discharging less than the tenth part of one. They that have the voice of lions and the act of hares, are they not monsters?

TROILUS Are there such? Such are not we. Praise us as we are tasted, allow us as we prove. Our head shall go bare till merit crown it; no perfection in reversion shall have a praise in present. We will not name desert before its birth; and being born, his addition shall be humble. Few words to fair faith — Troilus shall be such to Cressid as what envy can say worst shall be a mock for his truth; and what truth can speak truest, not truer than Troilus. (3.2.61-92).

The pollution of that “we” which identifies Troilus and Cressida is mercilessly carried out in the very first appearance of the pronoun. The “curious dreg” that Cressida spies “in the fountain of *our* love” does not wait to multiply into “more dregs than water”. Shakespeare’s startling metaphor advances a pattern for understanding the complex universe of personal reference that follows. Cressida spies the lees, the residues that disturb the harmonious waters.¹⁷ “Curious” is a problematic adjective here. Onions does not register this instance in his authoritative glossary, and modern editors generally read the term only as “tiny”, “minute”. In the Renaissance, the term could mean “hidden, occult”, which explains the fact that Cressida “espies”; but it could also mean its opposite, that is, the word in its objective sense as something worth being seen, which makes sense when one reads it together with “monster”, that which is worth showing (Lat. *monstrare*).¹⁸ Thus, the tiny or occult mole grows into the visible, monstrous dregs that destroy the enclosure of the first person plural (“I and you”), the fountain of our love. As polluted matter becomes more abundant than clear water, the ensuing uses of “we” cannot remain untouched. Thus Troilus’ next speech, in which “we” excludes Cressida and all women from the realm of lovers: “we” and “our mistress” are now two incommunicable kinds, deprived of individuality: “we” men possess one single, universal mistress, a hostile, over-demanding female, insatiable in her endeavour to “devise imposition”. “Our mistress” banishes Cressida to the space of the wicked pronoun, since, through her identification with such a general mistress, Troilus seals her fate in the play: this is his way of sending her to the enemy’s camp, to be kissed “in general” by the Greek officers (4.5.21).

¹⁷ The Arden editor Kenneth Palmer annotates a possible Biblical source for love’s fountain (*Song of Solomon* 4.12-15): “A garden inclosed is my sister, *my* spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.... A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon” (Palmer 1982).

¹⁸ On other senses of “curious”, see Onions (1986: 65). Onions also points out the Shakespearean use of “monster” as a verb with the sense “to exhibit” in *Coriolanus* (2.2.77): “To hear my nothings monstered”. St. Isidore already registers this etymology (1911: XI.2).

Cressida also excludes herself and all women from the two uses of “they” in her speech: the third person that narrates love and the lovers themselves, who again are gendered male and seen as monstrous in the disjunction of their words from their acts. But what about Troilus’ use of “we” in his final reply? Does “we” mean all lovers, or just Troilus —as editor Kenneth Palmer surmises—, or is “we” again Troilus and Cressida? If the latter is accepted, then Troilus rehearses here a new Barthian erasure of the third person, the lover’s resistance to “general opinion”, the attempt to preserve *interlocution* from *delocution*. And this necessarily conveys a resistance to pre-existent narrative models. Troilus means to resist the inversion that derives from reading one’s individuality as a mere repetition of what has happened to other lovers so many times before. His cry is against “perfection in reversion”, against crowning a bare head before merit is gathered, obtaining “addition” before “birth”. That is the state to which, according to the prince, the third person reduces the lover —an already told tale, an inescapable *mythos* whose end is known beforehand. In his illusory quest for the authentic lover’s voice, the third person is nothing but “envy”, incapable of producing a truth “truer than Troilus”. One doubts again whether Troilus’ truest truth leaves Cressida behind, his self-affirmation a final disavowal of her incapacity to love. Be it as it may, Troilus’ language is trapped in an unsolved dialectic of submission and resistance. Cressida’s declaration of love is not far away from it:

I love you now; but not, till now, so much
 But I might master it. In faith, I lie!
 My thoughts were like unbridled children, grown
 Too headstrong for their mother. See, we fools!
 Why have I blabbed? Who shall be true to us,
 When we are so unsecret to ourselves?
 But, though I loved you well, I wooed you not;
 And yet, good faith, I wished myself a man,
 Or that we women had men’s privilege
 Of speaking first. Sweet, bid me hold my tongue;
 For in this rapture I shall surely speak
 The thing I shall repent. See, see, your silence,
 Cunning in dumbness, from my weakness draws
 My very soul of counsel! Stop my mouth. (3.2.113-26)

Cressida has held off until now, and even when she yields to her feelings she decides to make up a past narrative of avoidance of love (“not, till now, so much/ But I might master it”). The struggle between desire’s subject and narrative control is solved by the recognition of her lie: she has ever loved him immensely, incontinently. And yet, this confession of self immediately breeds a new offspring of the wicked pronoun: “See, *we fools!*” Declaration becomes blabbing, and “I” is again betrayed into “we”. But Cressida’s “we” lacks a stable referent: is “we” in “we fools” the same as “we” in “we women”? The same in the sense that both are effects

of the wicked pronoun. And yet different in another sense. Cressida's "we women" recalls Troilus' literary construction "our mistress". "We fools" is, on the other hand, Troilus and Cressida, although a quite different construction than that made by Troilus in "praise us as we are tasted", or in "the fountain of our love". Troilus saw enclosure, authenticity; Cressida sees vulnerability in her *unsecret* "we", as ready to be infected by the falseness of the Other as it is unable to be true to itself. Less naive than her lover, she has learned to know her *self*: "I have a kind of self resides with you,/ But an unkind self that itself will leave/ To be another's fool" (3.2.138-40). Her self for Troilus and in Troilus is not a "kind" self but just an apparent "kind of self". On the other hand, her "unkind self" is that of "we fools", one that does not "reside" anywhere, since it is sold to "another". This is Cressida's *unsecret* "we", her status as it was reified in Troilus' "our mistress", ready to be kissed "in general" by the Greeks (4.5.21). Thine be my love, and my love's use their treasure, she appears to tell Troilus, thus foreboding her self-abandonment in the Greek camp, the space of the Other.

However, Troilus' affirmation of selfhood in love is also soon sold, as if the lover could not put up with the illusion of authenticity for long. Trysting, the stock-occasion for the lovers to vow fidelity to each other, and therefore, the greatest opportunity for love's interlocution, becomes in this play the definitive undoing of the realm of "I and you", the final absorption of the lovers by the discourse of the Other:

TROILUS ...Two swains in love shall in the world to come
Approve their truth by Troilus. When their rhymes,
Full of protest, of oath, and big compare,
Want similes, truth tired with iteration—
'As true as steel, as plantage to the moon,
As sun to day, as turtle to her mate,
As iron to adamant, as earth to th' centre'—
Yet, after all comparisons of truth,
As truth's authentic author to be cited,
'As true as Troilus' shall crown up the verse
And sanctify the numbers.

CRESSIDA Prophet may you be!
If I be false, or swerve a hair from truth,
When time is old and hath forgot itself,
When waterdrops have worn the stones of Troy,
And blind oblivion swallowed cities up,
And mighty states characterless are grated
To dusty nothing, yet let memory,
From false to false, among false maids in love,
Upbraid my falsehood! When they've said, 'as false

As air, as water, wind or sandy earth,
 As fox to lamb, as wolf to heifer's calf,
 Pard to the hind, or stepdame to her son'.
 Yet let them say, to stick the heart of falsehood,
 'As false as Cressid'.

PANDARUS Go to, a bargain made. Seal it, seal it. I'll be the witness.
 Here I hold your hand; here my cousin's. If ever you prove false to one
 another, since I have taken such pains to bring you together, let all pitiful
 goers-between be called to the world's end after my name — call them all
 Pandars. Let all constant men be Troiluses, all false women Cressids, and
 all brokers-between Pandars! Say 'Amen'.

TROILUS Amen.

CRESSIDA Amen. (3.2.163-96)

Troilus invokes authenticity against the world of literary *inventio* ("truth tired") and rhetorical *elocutio* ("iteration", "similes"). But in his attempt to reform the trite world of literary discourse, he is baited into it. He wants to remain an authentic inscription, a model to be imitated by others; but he is caught in the web of literature, of a narrative that will also tire him with iteration. Cressida's speech is a tale of tragic destruction, a vow of truth subverted to a promise of falsehood, and like Troilus' words, a final yielding up of her subjectivity to the world of literary citation.¹⁹ But Cressida seems to know, and Troilus falls into it unawares.²⁰ The inclusion of Pandarus rounds off the omnipresence of the wicked pronoun in a bargain that should be reserved for "we". The contents of the oath are outrageous enough: *if any of you —Troilus or Cressida— be false, Troilus shall be true, Cressida false, and I a Pandar*. Whatever this means, it leaves no escape from narrative completion. "Amen", say they, and seal the end of their story in its very beginning, in the very first encounter. And this is what Troilus had tried to rebel against some lines earlier: this is exactly "perfection in reversion", or narrative denouement turned upside down and made a beginning, the bare head crowned by its future accomplishments. Crowning is a crucial image of narrative teleology: "Our head shall go bare till merit crown it"; "As true as Troilus' shall crown up the verse"; "the end crowns all". Whatever a crowning end should accomplish, Troilus and Cressida do such a thing at the beginning: the transformation of love into a narrative *treasure*, ready for the Other's use.

¹⁹ On citation as rhetorical device and its significance in this passage see Freund (1985: 24-26).

²⁰ A sound discussion of the different attitudes of Troilus and Cressida to love, based on idealisation/reification (Troilus) versus materiality (Cressida) is to be found in Grady (1996: 74-82).

The intrusion of the Other into the very discursive space of desire is a constant feature of *Troilus and Cressida*. Helen as the model-object of desire, Pandarus as narrator, informer, and go-between, or the lovers' need of a narrative against which they can test the value of their loves, are instances of the diverse shapes that the wicked pronoun takes up. Grammatically, its occurrence as the third person is extended into an invasion of the first person plural, the lovers' enclosed referential universe. Hence, Troilus and Cressida are notorious for lacking a world of their own. Shakespeare's next romantic couple, Anthony and Cleopatra, construct it in spite of and in excess of the narrative burden that threatens to fall upon them. Such construction is their triumph; and the inevitability of the third person their tragedy. The third person's voice, incarnated in Anthony's man, Philo, is the first we listen to in the play:

Nay, but this dotage of our General's
O'erflows all measure: those his goodly eyes,
That o'er the files and musters of the war
Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front; his captain's heart,
Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,
And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gypsy's lust (1.1.110)²¹

Philo's is by no means the only voice of such kind. The play is peopled with commentators of the desire of the main characters: Enobarbus, Caesar, and Lepidus exemplify what the Oxford editor Michael Neill calls in his introduction "the play of perspective", that is, a habit in Shakespearean dramaturgy of "estranging its audience from the central characters in ways that suggest how much they are indeed the products of what others see in them". Neill suggests *Troilus and Cressida* as another instance of Shakespeare's interest in perspective (1994: 89).²² And yet, the differences are clear in respect to the lover's discourse: the loves of Troilus and Cressida are irrelevant to the grand myth of the Troy War, and in their struggle to make their own desire significant, authentic, they are destroyed by the Other. Anthony and Cleopatra's love is the *theme* in the same way as Helen was: above them there are no models but the gods (Mars and Venus, Osiris and Isis), the demigods (Hercules), and the heroes and heroines of ancient epic (Aeneas and Dido). *Troilus and Cressida* made it clear that no effort of characterisation was needed "when Helen is the subject", especially when theme and character are not the same.

²¹ Unless otherwise stated, all references to the play are from Neill (1994).

²² Neill bases his discussion on Janet Adelman (1973). On the use of commentary in the play, see Barfoot (1994: 105-28).

Such a conflation of theme and character is at the basis of the dramatic structure of *Anthony and Cleopatra*. I do not intend to analyse that structure, but one of its effects. My interest is not the distinct universes of commentary (the lovers as theme) and subjectivity (the lover's affirmation of their own world), but their areas of intersection, the ways in which the latter is tainted with the former. If *Troilus and Cressida* presents a constant search for value against indifference in a world where the Other is too busy with Helen, the lovers in *Anthony and Cleopatra* are the Other's main prey, and their endeavour is to dissolve the Other's attempt to signify their difference. This difference is, in Cleopatra's case, her "infinite variety", as Enobarbus puts it:

Age cannot whither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety; other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish. (2.2.242-47)

The "blessèd lottery" (2.2.250) that Octavia is to Anthony provides the necessary contrast. The incontestable virtuous qualities of Anthony's two wives are always gauged against a model which in the Roman mind fluctuates between moral judgement —Cleopatra as a whore— and Enobarbus' fascination. As a *theme*, Cleopatra causes a split in the Other, who presents himself as divided between admiration and envy. For his part, Anthony is the effect of this "variety", the Herculean warrior become effeminate, the argument that turns envious gossip into the voice of truth: his yielding to Cleopatra "approves the common liar who/ Speaks of him in Rome" (1.1.63-64). A railing liar transformed into the spokesman of truth *approves* the Other as it disproves its theme: the function of the Other is again the degradation of desire. The lovers' awareness of the Other's power is omnipresent from the very beginning. Thus Cleopatra imagines Anthony's blush, a cheek that "pays shame" to both Caesar's and Fulvia's "process" (1.1.30). And Anthony scolds the messenger from Rome who ameliorates the voice of "the common liar":

Speak to me home. Mince not the general tongue—
Name Cleopatra as she is called in Rome;
Rail thou in Fulvia's phrase, and taunt my faults
With such full licence as both truth and malice
Have power to utter. (1.2.105-09)

"Truth" and "malice" become the same thing when "the common liar" is approved. Barthian gossip as "the voice of truth" acquires here its supreme literary representation. Its "power to utter ... with such full licence" can hardly be challenged by the lovers' discourse, whose continual attempt to circumscribe themselves into a world of "we" is bound to failure:

ANTHONY Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space.
Kingdoms are clay. Our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man. The nobleness of life
Is to do thus, [*embracing Cleopatra*]

when such a mutual pair
As such a twain can do't—in which I bind,
On pain of punishment, the world to weet
We stand up peerless.

CLEOPATRA Excellent falsehood!
Why, did he marry Fulvia and not love her?
I'll seem the fool I am not; Anthony
Will be himself. (1.1.35-44)

Anthony's geographical fantasy rehearses a macrocosmic collapse, the world's surrender, "on pain of punishment", to the superiority of a "we" tied in a lovers' embrace. The world's humiliated contemplation of this all-powerful microcosmic circle of the lovers' arms is the ultimate display of love's authentic value; but at the same time, the recognition that such triumph necessarily demands the presence of the Other's gaze ("the world to weet"). Kenneth Burke has written about the importance of love's display in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, a theme which finds its verbal epitome in Caesar's welcome speech at Octavia's unexpected return from Anthony's arms:

But you come
A market-maid to Rome, and have prevented
The ostentation of our love; which, left unshown,
Is often left unloved. We should have met you
By sea and land, supplying every stage
With an augmented greeting. (3.6.50-55)

In Burke's analysis, such "excellent formula" —*the ostentation of our love*— emerges as an essential structural motif in the play (1966: 101-02). One needs only to replace Caesar's royal "we" with the lovers' in order to apprehend its power in its full measure. Thus one understands Enobarbus' rehearsal of verbal *enargeia* in his description of the lovers' magnificent first encounter (2.2.195-234);²³ or the visual appeal of Cleopatra's suicide scene. And yet, the suspicions awoken by theatrical display create in the lovers an utter distrust of ostentation. Cleopatra qualifies Anthony's theatrical embrace as an "excellent falsehood". In Cleopatra's accusations to Anthony, Fulvia emerges as her grand excuse for self-pity and self-

²³ For a discussion of *enargeia*, see Parker (1996: 242-44). See also Barbara J. Bono's excellent analysis of Enobarbus' speech —"The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne ..." (1984: 170-73).

aggrandisement. She provides the occasion for a most mesmerising rhetorical question in Cleopatra's reaction to Fulvia's death: "Though age from folly could not give me freedom,/ It does from childishness. *Can Fulvia die?*" (1.3.57-58; my emphasis). As a human being, Fulvia can die; but as the ultimate incarnation of the great Other, her life can never be extinguished while Cleopatra's love exists. Cleopatra's fantasy of an immortal Fulvia is the lover's acquiescence with the contradictory grammar of "we", as it appeared in *Troilus and Cressida*: "I and you" make little sense without declaring their absolute dependence upon the third-person intruder, now in the shape of the rival:²⁴

CLEOPATRA Cut my lace, Charmian, come—
But let it be: I am quickly ill, and well,
So Anthony loves.

ANTHONY My precious queen, forbear,
And give true evidence to his love which stands
An honourable trial.

CLEOPATRA So Fulvia told me.
I prithee turn aside, and weep for her;
Then bid adieu to me, and say the tears
Belong to Egypt. Good now, play one scene
Of excellent dissembling, and let it look
Like perfect honour. (1.3.73-79)

"Excellent falsehood" and "excellent dissembling" are the lessons to be learnt in "the ostentation of our love", the act for which Anthony demands recognition of "true evidence". In love's ostentation —the act of supreme theatricality staged for the Other's eye— Cleopatra finds out that it is the Other that can tell her more than Anthony can. And what Fulvia tells her is a truth about her own identity: "Why, did he marry Fulvia and not love her?/ I'll seem the fool I am not". In ostentation, or *seeming*, the Other becomes the only place where love's show acquires a meaning. And that proves Cleopatra a fool, for reasons other than those why Cressida was a fool, although with the same insistence upon a grammar of "we" that encircles "I", "you" and the Other: "I have a kind of self resides with you,/ But an unkind self that itself will leave/ To be another's fool" (*Troilus* 3.2.138-40).

The lovers' surrender to the Other can be traced throughout a play which again revolves around the *generation* of love. The word does not occur in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, but its conceptual variety —breeding, genealogy, race, offspring— is

²⁴ On the theme of the rival in *Troilus and Cressida*, see Girard (1985: 188-209). Girard's theory of mimetic desire and rivalry was originally developed in his *Violence and the Sacred* (1977). Lately, his writings on mimetic desire in Shakespeare have been compiled in *Shakespeare. Les feux de l'envie* (1990).

crucial to its understanding.²⁵ A first instance is found in the opening scenes, Cleopatra's description of love's ecstasy:

Nay, pray you seek no colour for your going,
But bid farewell and go. When you sued staying,
There was the time for words—no going then:
Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
Bliss in our brows bent; none our parts so poor,
But was *a race of heaven*. They are so still,
Or thou, the greatest soldier in the world
Art turned the greatest liar. (1.3.32-39; my emphasis)

The play's insistence on Anthony's Herculean ancestry, or Cleopatra's identification with Isis and Venus, finds here conceptual ground (Bono 1984: 167-90). The divine, and consequently, tragic stature of the lovers, relies to a great extent on love's energy. An essential aspect of the Renaissance literary discourse of love consists of listing, describing, defining, or finding an image of, the beloved's "parts". The process that starts in the eyes' perception of such parts and culminates in the lips' verbal account of their value as worthy objects of desire explains the power of the lyrical blazon, a rhetorical commonplace which informs, for instance, the Queen's fanciful dream of "an Emperor Anthony" after her lover's death.²⁶ The words that fashion the beloved's parts as "a race of heaven", as offspring of the gods, constitute the subject's accomplishment of an authentic lover's discourse. Cleopatra's ideal "race of heaven" endows the mysterious nature of love and its protagonists with the distinctive qualities they continually seek to prove. And yet, Cleopatra's own speech proves utopian, since love's ecstasy collapses into the paradoxical construction "eternity was in our lips and eyes" —the paradoxical past eternity of a love whose absence needs to be evoked in the form of a finite love story.

But more than any other play, *Anthony and Cleopatra* is about the "generation of vipers". The serpent belongs to the enclosed world of *interlocution*: in the lovers' private symbolic code, the Egyptian queen is called by Anthony "my serpent of Old Nile" (1.5.26). And the play does not waste any occasion to remind the reader of multiple beliefs in the magical breeding, or *generation*, of snakes. Anthony, overburdened by the weight of political events in Rome, uses the metaphor in the justification of his departure from Egypt: "Much is breeding,/ Which, like the

²⁵ On the connections of this issue with the symbolic tradition of fertility in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, see Bono (1984: 167-213). Bono discusses both the Greek and Egyptian mythological traditions.

²⁶ "I dreamt there was an Emperor Anthony—/ O, such another sleep, that I might see/ But such another man! [...] His face was as the heavens, and therein stuck/ A sun and moon, which kept their course and lighted/ The little O o'th' earth .../ His legs bestrid the ocean; his reared arm/ Crested the world; his voice was propertied/ As all the tunèd spheres" (5.2.74-84).

courser's hair, hath yet but life,/ And not a serpent's poison" (1.2.191-93). Later on, a drunken Lepidus converses with Anthony on the exotic oddities of Egypt:

LEPIDUS You've strange serpents there?

ANTHONY Ay, Lepidus.

LEPIDUS Your serpent of Egypt is now bred of your mud by the operation of your sun; so is your crocodile.

ANTHONY They are so.

...

LEPIDUS What manner of thing is your crocodile?

ANTHONY It is shaped, sir, like itself, and it is broad as it hath breadth. It is just so high as it is, and moves with his own organs. It lives by that which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates.

LEPIDUS What colour is it of?

ANTHONY Of its own colour too.

LEPIDUS 'Tis a strange serpent.

ANTHONY. 'Tis so, and the tears of it are wet. (2.7.24-48)

A new tale of the enigmatic generation of serpents is brought forth here. Lepidus, the inquisitive voice of general opinion, may seek no more than a quite harmless confirmation of what he has heard of exotic animals in exotic lands. But after "my serpent of old Nile", the use of the second person genitive cannot go unnoticed here. Anthony's reflexive, tautological replies remain on the surface, refusing to go deeper into the other triumvir's subject. Anthony says little or nothing about the mysterious reptile, but he says enough. The "serpent of old Nile" is his secret, the knowledge of it his triumph over the world, and the keeping of his secret the preservation of the universe of "we". "Who shall be true to us/ When we are so unsecret to ourselves?": Cressida's complaint about an *unsecret we* is what Anthony shuns here, and momentarily he succeeds in hiding his love's treasure—its private symbolic value—from the Other's use.

As a cause of undoing, love in *Troilus and Cressida* becomes "a generation of vipers". This play provided the occasion for a reading of this metaphor which, for its connections with the destructive and self-destructive potentials of the snake, emphasised the power of *delocution* upon the lover's discourse. *Anthony and Cleopatra* unveils another metaphorical side of this topic: the snake also speaks to us of love's fertile capacity for self-generation. Anthony's tautological and reflexive definition of the crocodile supports such a reading: like the crocodile, his love is a strange serpent, of its own shape and colour, bred mysteriously, and capable of transmigrating into different bodies—Cleopatra's "infinite variety". Love aspires to have its own laws, its own discourse. And what is more important, love's

reflexivity does not only affect love as energy but the lover as subject. *Anthony and Cleopatra* is perhaps the best instance in the Shakespearean canon of a lover's discourse as a *generation of subjects*. And in all its reflexive potential, the subject experiences, in Roland Barthes' phrase, "an extreme solitude": his/her discourse offers him/her "a discursive site: the site of someone speaking *within himself, amorously*, confronting the other (the loved object), who does not speak" (1978: 1-3; my emphasis). Kenneth Burke detects in the play "a reflexive pattern", and provides a long though not exhaustive catalogue of linguistic evidence (1966: 113-14). I draw on both Barthes and Burke to affirm that binarisms of solitude and relatedness, self and other —and Other—, reflexivity and reciprocity, unity and division, inform Anthony and Cleopatra's world of discourse, and that it is Cleopatra that carries a great deal of the burden of such world:

Courteous lord, one word:
 Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it;
 Sir, you and I have loved, but there's not it—
 That you know well. Something it is I would—
 O, my oblivion is a very Anthony,
 And I am all forgotten. (1.3.87-91)

He's speaking now,
 Or murmuring, 'Where's my serpent of old Nile'—
 For so he calls me. Now I feed myself
 With most delicious poison. (1.5.24-27)

I'll seem the fool I am not; Anthony
 Will be himself. (1.1.44-45)

These three instances prove that reflexivity is an effect of the lover's reliance on the other, that the construction of identity relies on desire, but also that solitude is ultimately the lover's fate. The first speech declares the lover's rejection of identity in the other; the second, on the contrary, is its affirmation; the third declares necessary division, as a response to Anthony's emblematic description of the lovers' embrace: "when such a mutual pair/ And such a twain can do't" (1.1.39-40).

Self-oblivion, unity, and dividedness are motives that converge in the lovers' suicides, two episodes which, in Burke's opinion, strengthen the play's emphasis on reflexivity (1966: 113). The lovers' suicide has a threefold motivation: first, it is conceived as a tribute to the other; second, it aims to take revenge on the Other (the third person); and finally, it is an act of self-assertion. The immediate cause of Anthony's suicide is Cleopatra's feigned one. His aim is therefore the imitation of her act and its effects, namely, the restoration of personal honour and the revenge upon Caesar. These issues join each other in reflexivity: Cleopatra is "she which by her death our Caesar tells/ 'I am conqueror of myself'" (4.15.61-62). And, in

miming this heroic act of self-affirmation against the Other, Anthony seeks his prize in mutual love: "Stay for me./ Where souls do couch on flowers we'll hand in hand,/ And with our sprightly port makes the ghosts gaze" (4.15.50-52). But even after death, and in spite of its imagined defeat, the third person unmasks its presence: the triumph of mutuality demands the Other's gaze. In the need to tell and stage suicide before Caesar, the "ostentation of our love" is close to becoming, like the love story, another form of surrender of the lover's discourse to the wicked pronoun.

Paradox also informs Cleopatra's suicide, an act caught up between ostentation and escape, self-destructiveness and self-generation. And this paradoxical nature revolves around the viper, which on this last occasion adds to its symbolic meanings its instrumental power as the direct cause of death. By applying the aspic to her breast, Cleopatra rounds off the symbolic process of the "generation of vipers". Her conversation with the Clown that brings to her "the pretty worm of Nilus ... that kills and pains not" (5.2.242-43), already contains, in a humorous tone, all the conceptual complexity of the Shakespearean metaphor. "You must think this, look you", the Clown warns, "that the worm will *do his kind*" (5.2.261; emphasis mine). Michael Neill glosses "do his kind" as "do according to his nature", probably following Ridley, who provides abundant evidence of such meaning in the period.²⁷ And yet, without denying the value of such interpretation, I consider it insufficient. To this sentence, and to the later counsel—"Give it nothing I pray you, for it is not worth the feeding" (5.2.268-69)—Cleopatra responds: "Will it eat me?" (5.2.270). Doing his kind, the serpent will feed on, make love with, and kill his/her own *generation*, Anthony's "serpent of old Nile".²⁸ The image from *Pericles* of a serpent feeding on mother's flesh is invoked later on as Cleopatra awaits death with the aspic in her breast in expectation of meeting Anthony, whom she calls "husband" (5.2.286): "Dost thou not see my breast,/ That sucks the nurse asleep?" (5.2.308-09). The conjoining of image and words invokes conjugal and maternal bliss: the fertile intercourse of Anthony and Cleopatra proves their love to be a generation of vipers. Life and death, breeding and destruction, meet in this image of inversion—a satisfied mother sleeps instead of the milk-fed child. Cleopatra's hopes of mutual love beyond death are rubricated emblematically, as if under the motto *Progenies viperarum*. Her triumphs are her own ostentation of self in death; the performance of death, a tribute and a vehicle to Anthony, and the desire to give the wicked pronoun a final blow. Because, after all, she knows that

²⁷ See M. R. Ridley's footnote to 5.2.262 (1965: 213).

²⁸ On the sexual meanings of "do", see Partridge (1968: 95), who registers 'In the doing of the deed of kind' (*The Merchant of Venice* 4.5). See also Williams (1997: 101-02). On "kind", Partridge writes: 'Kind is in the obsolete sense 'nature', which may come from the obsolete sense 'offspring'; not irrelevant, therefore, is the obsolete French literalism, *la nature*, the pudend, the female *genitalia*. Cf. do the deed of kind' (1968: 130). See also Williams (1997: 177), and Frankie Rubinstein (1989: 141).

Now Iras, what thinks't thou?
Thou, an Egyptian puppet shall be shown
In Rome as well as I. Mechanic slaves
With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers shall
Uplift us to the view. In their thick breaths,
Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded,
And forced to drink their vapour
... Saucy lictors
Will catch at us like strumpets, and scald rhymers
Ballad us out o' tune. The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us, and present
Our Alexandrian revels—Anthony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I' th' posture of a whore. (5.2.207-21)

Come, thou mortal wretch,
With thy sharp teeth this knot intricate
Of life at once untie. Poor venomous fool,
Be angry, and dispatch. *O, couldst thou speak,*

That I might hear thee call great Caesar 'Ass
Unpolicied!' (5.2.303-07; my emphasis)

The actual performance of this grand insult, which is, however, contained within the realm of unfulfilled desire, would be the farthest that the lover's revenge on the Other can ever get.

Most questions raised in this paper concern identity: "What Cressid is, what Pandar and what we?" "What manner of thing is your crocodile?" And when identity is formulated in the form of answers, they come up as rather unsatisfactory ("I'll seem the fool I am not; Anthony/ Will be himself"), cryptic ("A sister; you are she"), or tautological ("It is shaped, sir, like itself"). Pronouns mar definitions of identity here by making them too open. The same we have found when love comes to be defined: in being "a generation of vipers" (both a question and an answer in *Troilus and Cressida*), love transforms the undoing potential attributed to it in its definition as a self-generating force, a locus for the endless and boundless reproduction of meaning. This uselessness of definitions in the lover's discourse is the occasion for Roland Barthes' figure of *atopos*:

The other whom I love and who fascinates me is *atopos*. I cannot classify the other, for the other is, precisely, Unique, the singular Image which has miraculously come to correspond to the specialty of my desire. The other is the figure of my truth, and cannot be imprisoned in any stereotype (which is the truth of others) ...

Being Atopic, the other makes language indecisive: one cannot speak *of* the other, *about* the other; every attribute is false, painful, erroneous, awkward: the other is *unqualifiable* (this would be the true meaning of *atopos*). (1978: 34-35)

Shakespearean love drama traces the struggle between the self and the Other—the struggle between the subject's attempts to make the other *atopos*, and, on the contrary, the Other's reification of the other as *topos* or theme. Anthony's crocodile, "shaped like itself", makes reflexivity, in a marginal scene of the play, the ideal discursive mode for *atopia*. However, reflexivity is almost sacrilegious in a play like *Troilus and Cressida*. Cressida's denial of a true self to her own has been sufficiently accounted for. Troilus is not himself either:

PANDARUS ... Do you know a man if you see him?
 CRESSIDA Ay, if I ever saw him before I knew him.
 PANDARUS Well, I say Troilus is Troilus.
 CRESSIDA Then you say as you may; for I am sure

He is not Hector.

PANDARUS No, nor Hector is not Troilus in some degrees.

CRESSIDA 'Tis just to each of them: he is himself.

PANDARUS Himself? Alas, poor Troilus! I would he were—

CRESSIDA So he is.

PANDARUS Condition I had gone barefoot to India.

CRESSIDA He is not Hector.

PANDARUS Himself? No, he's not himself. Would a were himself!
(1.2.63-74)

Literary *topos* —precisely that which says that a lover loses his own self in love— makes Troilus “not himself” in the hands of the Other. And it is only in the realm of the Other where questions of identity find their answer or definition. Contrary to the lover's desire —to whom “every attribute is false”—, the Other's will —that of “the common liar”— is “attributive”. And in attribution we find the essence of definitions, and consequently, the answers to the question: “What Cressid is, what Pandar, and what we?” Of Cressid, the Other tells us that her attribute is “false”. That is her sealed fate and that is what Troilus finds out. And consequently Cressida must no longer be “you” for Troilus. Since she is false, she is not even “she”, but “not she”:

Let it not be believed for womanhood!
Think we had mothers. Do not give advantage
To stubborn critics, apt without a theme
For depravation, to square the general sex
By Cressid's rule; rather think this not Cressid (5.2.127-31)

Before avowing her “a theme for depravation” (the fate of Helen), Troilus prefers denial: “If beauty have a soul, this is *not she*” (5.2.136; my emphasis). Before exiling her into the realm of the wicked pronoun, Troilus prefers to condemn Cressida to the status of non-being. If Cressid is “not Cressid”, at least Pandar is a pander. And what we? This paper has contended that “we”, because of its infection with the wicked pronoun, becomes a little more than “you and I”.

The tragic reflexivity of suicide signifies, however, a kind of triumph of love and the lover's discourse in *Anthony and Cleopatra*. If we admit that its most perfect symbolic representation is the “serpent of Old Nile”, “shaped like itself” and ready to “do his kind” —the magic *ouroboros* biting its own tail²⁹—, we should

²⁹ The symbolic connections of the *ouroboros* with reflexivity can be traced in the emblematic tradition. Emblem 83 in Thomas Combe's *The Theatre of Fine Devices* (1593) represents a serpent biting its tail and surmounting a pillar with the motto: “It is a point of great foresight/into your selues to

also understand that the ending of *Anthony and Cleopatra* as a love story relies on what happens to the snake. As far as performance goes, one wonders whether a real snake was used on the Renaissance stage or it was just a scenic prop. What should be done with it, among a pile of dead bodies on stage, so that it is not found by Caesar and his men? How should the snake or the prop be removed? Be it as it may, of its presence only the remains must be found on stage:

DOLABELLA Here on her breast
 There is a vent of blood, and something blown—
 The like is on her arm.
 FIRST GUARD This is an aspic's trail; and these fig-leaves
 Have slime upon them, such as the aspic leaves
 Upon the caves of Nile. (5.2.346-50)

The snake's absence is crucial, since it bars the way to Caesar's absolute certainty of Cleopatra's means of committing suicide: "Most probable/ That so she died, for her physician tells me/ She hath pursued conclusions infinite/ Of easy ways to die" (5.2.351-54). And in that denial an audience may read the lovers' triumph over the Other—a lethal aspic lurking somewhere on the stage, threatening the lives of the Romans, or the chance that the slime upon the fig-leaves confirms Lepidus' theory and brings about a spontaneous generation of vipers. Because the never-ending reproduction of meaning that the viper allows—we should recall Barthes' notion of the resistance of love discourse to closed signifying structures—is not compatible with the necessary ending in a love story: "High events like these", Caesar concludes, "Strike those that make them; and their story is/ No less in pity than his glory which/ Brought them to be lamented" (5.2.358-61). Caesar's absolute glory challenges even the world's pity. His is the last word: "he words me, girls, he words me". But Cleopatra "hath pursued conclusions infinite": the aspic's trail proves that the Other's glory does not crown all.

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