

# Shakespeare's Transfiguration of Allegory

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## Resumen

Este ensayo propone una nueva lectura sobre los modos innovadores en los que Shakespeare incorporó a sus obras la alegoría, llevando con ello a cabo la gran transfiguración moderna de ella y alcanzando el acaso insospechado estatus de ser uno de los mayores alegoristas de la historia de la literatura.

## Abstract

This essay proposes a new reading of the innovative ways in which Shakespeare used allegory in his works, thereby bringing out the great modern transfiguration of it to achieve the perhaps not enough recognized status of being one of the greatest allegorists in the history of literature.

## Palabras clave

Shakespeare  
Alegoría  
Personificaciones  
Retórica  
Estética renacentista

## Key words

Shakespeare;  
Allegory  
Personifications  
Rhetoric  
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*Shakespeare is rich in wonderful tropes which arise from personified concepts, and would not suit us at all, but for him are entirely in place, because in his time all art was dominated by allegory*  
(Goethe 2006: 759)<sup>1</sup>

In this penetrating sentence Goethe, a passionate and keen reader of the Shakespearean works, has hit upon one of their most striking features. The figurative quality observed in Goethe's remark certainly implies the allegory, a complex subject that involves many aspects –rhetorical, interpretative, and aesthetic– of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Maximen und Reflexionem* 252: «Shakespeare ist reich an wundersamen Tropen, die aus personifizierten Begriffen entstehen, und uns gar nicht kleiden würden, bei ihm aber völlig am Platze sind, weil zu seiner Zeit alle Kunst von der Allegorie beherrscht wurde».

European literary tradition<sup>2</sup>. In Shakespeare's case, it has become a commonly used critical pathway<sup>3</sup>, and there is a considerable literature on particular works or broader issues undertaking this approach<sup>4</sup>. These modes of reading may correspond, in general, to an almost inherent quality of literary language suitable for such critical outlooks (or the verbal power of this specific universe and the mystery of its maker)<sup>5</sup>, and even it may be historically supported by noticeable forms of mediaeval theatrical tradition, such as morality plays (see Helmich 1979; Hoxby 2010), that have influenced the Elizabethan drama. However, even the most superficial comparison between these allegorical forms—or the imaginary world of *The Faerie Queene*<sup>6</sup>—and Shakespeare's plays shows, despite their undoubted relations, notable differences. In the poet's time, and the rising of Protestant aesthetics, there was in progress a deep transformation of the ways of conceiving reality and textuality that also affected substantially the allegory, whose prevalent mode has turned out to be not of hermeneutical but rhetorical nature (see Murrin 1969). However it is hardly questionable, as Goethe pointed out, that allegory remained at the time as a hegemonic mode in art and literature. Then, Shakespeare's singularity and the sense that his work has in allegory's history should be explained with reference to that dominance in decline and to that cultural change in an initial stage of development. An analytical overview of some significant examples of the allegory, in its poetic-rhetorical form, in Shakespearean plays and poetry must try to explain how it is structured and what it means in them, in order to ponder the important role that Shakespeare has played in a complex shift in the history of literature.

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<sup>2</sup> The critical literature on allegory is really vast. See the general monographs of Honig (1982), Fletcher (1975), Whitman (1987), Kurz (1997); and co-authored books of Whitman (2003), Pérez-Jean and Eichel-Lojkine (2004), Copeland and Struck (2010).

<sup>3</sup> This was highlighted in a review of Edwards (1958).

<sup>4</sup> For some examples of studies on this subject, see Bryant (1955), Spivack (1958), Nuttall (1967), Fergusson (1977), Freinkel (2002), Brown (2007), Anderson (2009), and Pascucci (2013).

<sup>5</sup> According to the famous dictum of Keats (1958: 67), «Shakespeare led a life of Allegory; his works are the comments on it» (159, «To the George Keatses», 19 February 1819).

<sup>6</sup> Some allegorical links between the moralities and Shakespeare's villains have been analyzed by Spivack (1958); Anderson (2009: 183-213, 239-258) studies intertextual elements from Spenser.

Firstly, Shakespeare did not exclude entirely very old and stale figurations, but it has almost always happened that when he incorporated them into his imaginary world they appeared somehow transformed. It is obvious at the outset that, nearly without exception («Time, as chorus» in *The Winter's Tale* 4. 1)<sup>7</sup>, there is no way here to employ dramatic personifications, that usually held a fundamental place in the moralities appearing on the stage to interact at the same level of representative reality with other characters. Nevertheless, the personifications do not fail to be present through the speeches of the characters that make multiple mentions of them. By way of example, it can help to look at one of the most topical figures, Death, who appears in various works involving different expressive and meaningful levels. Maybe the least surprising profile is offered in the maledictions of Venus for Adonis's death, stocked with platitudes: «“Hard-favoured tyrant, ugly, meagre, lean, / Hateful divorce of love”—thus chides she death; / “Grim-grinning ghost, earth's worm: what dost thou mean / To stifle beauty, and to steal his breath”» (*Venus and Adonis* 931-934). It is also more or less predictable certain figurative detail that only offers a focused view of its predatory action: «the earthy and cold hand of death» (*1 Henry IV* 5. 4. 83).

But there are, besides, more suggestive cases of variation of some conventional elements. For example, in a less formulaic synecdochal image: «So now prosperity begins to mellow / And drop into the rotten mouth of death» (*Richard III* 4. 4. 1-2). The same figuration appears in another history play developed as follows: «O, now doth Death line his head chaps with steel; / The swords of soldiers are his teeth, his fangs; / And now he feasts, mousing the flesh of men / In undetermined differences of kings» (*King John* 2. 1. 352-355). The poet shapes here into a synthetic form some features of allegories of War, presenting a monstrous projection that makes teeth and claws of weapons and can devour everything, as the infernal beast that swallows the souls in medieval allegories. This common topic is also reflected in some lines that the poet puts in the mouth of King Henry:

The gates of mercy shall be all shut up,  
And the fleshed soldier, rough and hard of heart,  
In liberty of bloody hand shall range  
With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass

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<sup>7</sup> All quotations are taken from the Oxford Shakespeare (1986).

Your fresh fair virgins and your flow'ring infants.  
What is it then to me if impious war  
Arrayed in flames like to the prince of fiends  
Do, with his smirched complexion all fell feats  
Enlinked to waste and desolation?  
(*Henry V* 3. 3. 93-101)

As in the old rhetorical instructions made by Demetrius (1993: 32 [*De elocutione* 99-100]), allegory serves to veil while also enhancing threats. In this case, it has a magnifying and almost overwhelming effect in the dizzying associated images evoked by the King. It can be inferred that the basic operation of the poet is a reversal of the allegorical model of the *pax Augustea*<sup>8</sup>, now changed into a bombastic announcement of releasing the monster War; but this time it is represented by each soldier who makes war, and each one becomes a fearsome and monstrous entity in the abysmal view of his inwardness (the gates of allegorical temples open inwardly) and destructive power, amplifying the pagan allegorical motif with Christian content. Through this interweaving of meanings, the man himself is projected into the superhuman dimension of personifications. A partially contrary poetic procedure offers another passage, also on Death, in the aforementioned history play:

Death, Death, O amiable, lovely Death!  
Thou odoriferous stench, sound rottenness!  
Arise forth from the couch of lasting night,  
Thou hate and terror to prosperity,  
And I will kiss thy detestable bones  
And put my eyeballs in thy vaulty brows,  
And ring these fingers with thy household worms,  
And stop this gap of breath with fulsome dust,  
And be a carrion monster like thyself.  
Come grin on me, and I will think thou smil'st,  
And buss thee as thy wife.  
(*King John* 3. 4. 25-35)

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<sup>8</sup> «The gates of war with bolts and bars of hard steele fast shall stand. / And therewithin on armour heapes sits Batail rage, and wailes / With brazen chaines an hundred bounde, his wrastling not auailles» (Virgil 1987: 14 [1. 271-273]; see Virgil 1969: 112 [1. 293-296]).

In these intense words, paradoxically, Death is animated by the pathos of the invocation; Constance's grief strengthens her call for the execrable figure intertwining herself so deeply to blend with it. It can be said that the poet behind is «invoking» and «animating» the Renaissance topic of Death and the Maiden in a new way, giving to the woman a willing and active participation; the transfigured images correspond, in fact, with those of a bridal role, with her kisses and her worm-rings to finally become «one carrion»<sup>9</sup>; thus the woman in her mournful request may well offer herself as a bride for the dark nuptials of Death. The same motif is suggested in the gloomy imaginations of Romeo, when he sees the fresh beauty of Juliet's «corpse» lying in the crypt: «Shall I believe / That unsubstantial death is amorous, / And that the lean abhorred monster keeps / Thee here in dark to be his paramour?» (*Romeo and Juliet* 5. 3. 102-105). Notice how the flexibility of allegory, that may increase or decrease depending on context, is exploited in all these examples. In a large pendulum swing, Death is both the universal power and each individual death in a human dimension; it is the whole monster reflected in an abstract entity, the individuals who embody and execute its actions, and the private experience of a single destiny.

It is also worth recalling other appearances of the same entity that also respond to unexpected issues; for example, to indicate that death is lurking and stalking in the most unnoticed hideouts: «Being an ugly monster, / 'Tis strange he hides him in fresh cups, soft beds, / Sweet words, or hath more ministers than we / That draw his knives i'th' war» (*Cymbeline* 5. 5. 70-73). There are other significant characterizations; for instance, through its contrast with life, a royal status is granted to Death and then the service of Life like a jester: «Merely thou art death's fool» (*Measure for Measure* 3. 1. 11); or, in another malignant irony, it is presented as the best doctor that will heal the world of the fundamental evil, life: «be cured / By th' sure physician, death» (*Cymbeline* 5. 5. 100-101). It may also be the subject of a «topification»<sup>10</sup>, as the space in which all the paths of men converge: «This world's a city full of straying streets, / And death's the market-place where each one meets» (*The Two Noble Kinsmen* 1. 5. 15-16). So these constructions do not denote only a traditional imaginary code slavishly adopted, but rather a creative adaptation that

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<sup>9</sup> «[...] and they shalbe one flesh» (*The Bible and Holy Scriptures* 1560: 2 [Genesis 2: 24]).

<sup>10</sup> Using Paxson's term: «topification, or the translation of an abstraction into a geographical locus» (1994: 43).

can contextually modify and update old contents in each specific case. Allegory is no longer a mere «commonplace» to turn into a protean place of motifs and images subject to constant transfiguration. In a dynamic representation with multiple facets, both the form and the content are transformed: «Your death has eyes in 's head, then. I have not seen him so pictured» (*Cymbeline* 5. 5. 272-273)<sup>11</sup>. A «sighted Death» reshapes the traditional image (the eyeless skull)<sup>12</sup> outlining its transformation into «something else». It may be said that, in a continuous and complex way, Shakespeare «allegorizes» («says something differently») traditional allegories «to paint» them with his powerful poetic invention as new imaginary figurations.

Such verbal constructions do not have the heaviness and unlikelihood that modern sensibilities usually feel about traditional personifications; they are not anomalous presences materialized in the fictional plane of the stage but evanescent mentions that come and go along with the speech of the characters. A change like this certainly corresponds to the general «rhetorization» of allegory in the Renaissance. However these personifications are not, for sure, in a pejorative sense, «mere rhetoric», but legitimate expressions of a living rhetoric that has the ability of «animating» things to present them in transfigured forms of poetry to the spectators. The drama opens up the fictional space of representation where the characters open in themselves the multiple space of their own words as a virtual stage unfolding on the stage, the theatre of verbal imagination within the theatre. Perhaps this is the natural consequence of a high self-consciousness of drama and language, because words are embodied in characters in the scene where they utter words suggesting realities to the mind of the viewers, in a complex process of outward and inward creation.

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<sup>11</sup> Notably, there is an irregular capitalization of the word «death» by the Oxford editors, as a common name or an abstract personified name (death / Death), in the aforementioned passages where similar functions are resolved in one way or another; this inconsistency can be corroborated in other similar circumstances. An erratic spelling of the personifications apply to various authors, and has been observed, for example, in the cases of Homer and Aeschylus (Moreau 2004: 117-120) or Langland (Mann 2014: 79-81).

<sup>12</sup> E.g. «the Monarke of the earth, / And eiesse Monster that torments my soule» (*Tamburlain the Great II* 5. 3. 217-218) (Marlowe 1988: 154).

Thus, the word of Shakespeare is performative but also «pictorial»; it has an exceptional ability to create animated imaginary pictures through discourse. His works show the highest degree of a verbal quality common to great poets, the *enárgeia* or *evidentia* whose major mode is expressed in this remarkable ability – that could be described as ekphrastic-allegorical– to paint conceptual pictures with words. That is to say, poetry as prolific creator of «moral paintings». Human actions, turned into objects of contemplation, are shaped that way by poet's art<sup>13</sup>. As in the famous meditation of Jaques on the death of a deer: «The melancholy Jaques grieves at that», «But what said Jaques? / Did he not moralize this spectacle?» // «O, yes, into a thousand similes» (*As You Like It* 2. 1. 26, 43-44, 45). The world as a contemplative spectacle becomes «moralized» and «allegorized» since the penetrating moral gaze discovers “encrypted” meanings in its scenes and actors. Allegory is so the vision revealed to the melancholic eye. We are constantly reminded that to look at the events on stage is to look at the theatrical incarnation of moral meanings, synecdoches of concepts that bind each other in the dramatic context echoing topical correlations: «Shake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit, / And look on death itself» (*Macbeth* 2. 3. 76-77). Concrete facts have such semantic density that they seem to become loaded with universal significance. Actions are not just actions: they are also meanings; and that significant stream has the power of contextually illuminating things under its light: «Alone he entered / The mortal gate of th' city, which he, painted / With shunless destiny [...]» (*Coriolanus* 2. 2. 110-112). The poetic allegory becomes also a moral *tinctura* that covers men and objects impregnating them with meaning.

Without making use of them as stage presences, the personifications appear again and again in the speech of his characters with such virtuosity, vigour, and originality that it is valid to consider Shakespeare as one of the most powerful allegorical imaginations. Examples are actually numerous: «Opinion shall be surgeon to my hurt» (*1 Henry VI* 2. 4. 53); «O, war, thou son of hell, / Whom angry heavens do make their minister, / Throw in the frozen bosoms of our part / Hot coals of vengeance!» (*2 Henry VI* 5. 3. 33-36); «And thus I clothe my naked villainy / With odd

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<sup>13</sup> As suggested in the ironic profile made by the Poet in *Timon of Athens*: «I am thinking what I shall say I have provided for him. It must be a personating of himself, a satire against the softness of prosperity, with a discovery of the infinite flatteries that follow youth and opulency» (4. 3. 32-35).

old ends, stol'n forth of Holy Writ, / And seem a saint when most I play the devil» (*Richard III* 1. 3. 334-336); «Come, I have learned that fearful commenting / Is leaden servitor to dull delay. / Delay leads impotent and snail-paced beggary. / Then fiery expedition be my wing» (4. 3. 51-54); (about words) «Windy attorneys to their client woes, / Airy recorders of intestate joys, / Poor breathing orators of miseries» (4. 4. 127-129); «Shall, Antipholus, / Even in the spring of love thy love-springs rot? / Shall love, in building, grow so ruinous?» (*The Comedy of Errors* 3. 2. 2-4); «Time is a very bankrupt, and owes more than he's worth to season. / Nay, he's a thief too» (4. 2. 57-58); (on love) «Or if there were a sympathy in choice, / War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it, / Making it momentary as a sound, / Swift as a shadow, short as any dream, / Brief as the lightning in the collied night, / That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth» (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1. 1. 141-146); «Love is a smoke made with the fume of sighs» (*Romeo and Juliet* 1. 1. 187); «Now old desire doth in his deathbed lie, / And young affection gapes to be his heir» (2. 0. 1-2); «Upon his brow shame is ashamed to sit» (3. 2. 92); «Affliction is enamoured of thy parts, / And thou art wedded to calamity» (3. 3. 2-3); «Old Time the clock-setter, that bald sexton Time» (*King John* 3. 1. 250); «But thoughts, the slaves of life, and life, time's fool, / And time, that takes survey of all the world, / Must have a stop» (*1 Henry IV* 5. 4. 80-82); «We are time's subjects», «I am fortune's steward» (*2 Henry IV* 1. 3. 110, 5. 3. 130); «Love's not time's fool», «the fools of time» (*Sonnets* 116. 10, 124. 13); «Our doubts are traitors, / And make us lose the good we oft might win, / By fearing to attempt», «This would make mercy swear and play the tyrant» (*Measure for Measure* 1. 4. 77-79, 3. 1. 453-454); «Th'expedition of my violent love / Outran the pauser, reason» (*Macbeth* 2. 3. 110-111); «Our reasons are not prophets / When oft our fancies are» (*The Two Noble Kinsmen*, 5. 5. 102-103); etcetera. All these are faultless allegories, and each one of them could easily serve as a *motto* for the engravings of an Emblem book.

By the very force of fantasy and language, Shakespearean allegories become animated and avoid the dry and mechanistic composition of traditional abstract representations. Many of them, both in their late antique and medieval avatars and in the schematic eighteenth-century inventions, usually appear flat and pale to modern taste. Their conceptual density destabilizes the improper form in which they are presented, stressing a radical inadequacy between the one and the other; therefore, in so far they have not been vested with real personality, it could be said



that they were not sufficiently «personifications». Something quite different happens in Shakespeare's allegorical mentions that are endowed with human qualities and oddities attributed to a character. Perhaps as never before in the history of poetry, concepts appear fully embodied in words, figuratively gifted with all the sensible attributes to deploy their various abstract qualities. At times, the concepts are ironically supplied with bodies emphasizing selected features of visible and tangible corporeal members, tongue, ears, nose, hands, and arms: «Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity / In least speak most», «The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve» (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 5. 1. 104-105 and 356); «Piercing the night's dull ear» (*Henry V* 4. 0. 11); «for pleasure and revenge / Have ears more deaf than adders to the voice / Of any true decision» (*Troilus and Cressida* 2. 2. 170-172); «And Liberty plucks Justice by the nose» (*Measure for Measure* 1. 3. 29); Day and Night «shake hands to torture me» (*Sonnets* 28. 6); «For Time is like a fashionable host, / That slightly shakes his parting guest by th' hand, / And, with his arms outstretched as he would fly, / Grasps in the comer. Welcome ever smiles, / And Farewell goes out sighing» (*Troilus and Cressida* 3. 3. 159-163). In this overall embodiment, there are no functional or anatomic restrictions: «Lord Saye hath gelded the commonwealth, and made it an eunuch» (*2 Henry VI* 4. 2. 162-163); «Drunken desire must vomit his receipt / Ere he can see his own abomination» (*The Rape of Lucrece* 703-704); «In the secret parts of Fortune? O, most true, she is a strumpet» (*Hamlet* 2. 2. 237-238); «and as war in some sort may be said to be a ravisher, so it cannot be denied but peace is a great maker of cuckolds» (*Coriolanus* 4. 5. 231-233). Likewise, old topical expressions are literalized (*pinguis Minerva, grosso ingenio*) through an emphasis suggesting their virtual materialization: «Well-liking wits they have; gross, gross; fat, fat» (*Love's Labour's Lost* 5. 2. 268). Or, with different aspects, there are allegories of a moral obsession involving a quasi-physical action in their self-destructive capability<sup>14</sup>. A critical look at this, adopting criteria inherited from

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<sup>14</sup> There are topics on the self-wasting of moral vices expressed in emphatic body metaphors: «He that is proud eats up himself. Pride is his own glass, his own trumpet, his own chronicle – and whatever praises itself but in the deed devours the deed in the praise» (*Troilus and Cressida* 2. 3. 153-156); «Anger's my meat, I sup upon myself, / And so shall starve with feeding» (*Coriolanus* 4. 2. 53). Similarly, though in a positive cancellation: «So shalt thou feed on death, that feeds on men, / And death once dead, there's no more dying then» (*Sonnets* 146. 13-14).

Neoclassical aesthetic, could complain with Leigh Hunt (1845: 73) –and even with greater reason than for Spenser's creations– that in these figurations are «sometimes an excess of flesh and blood»; but veiled by irony and emerging as instantaneous presences within the flow of words they seem totally free from such objections. In any case, it is clear that these figures become different and removed from the aseptic and hieratic entities depicted within an ascetic frame or mounted on a marble pedestal, as they are entirely «humanized» and «contaminated» by life.

It should be noted that these procedures actually involve an advanced stage in the vast imaginary poetic process that determined the creation of personifications; because they were always presumed to represent in «human scale» either cosmic forces or vices and virtues and their real function was to achieve a better expression and a closer meaning with regard to the immediate experience of life. But, in their arrangement, a distinct distance between the content and the adopted form was usually required by their moralizing disposition; one might say that, taking a body, the personifications rendered it abstract to transcend the senses through negative sensible forms. On the other hand, the allegorical personifications of Shakespeare move in reverse order, making the *inversio inversionis* («the inversion of the inversion») of traditional allegory: from an idealization of human life to a humanization of ideas. But perhaps the meaning of the Shakespearean poetic operation is, at bottom, the same: to reveal the substance of men and actions, getting a deep insight into the theatrical events in order to recognize that they certainly are, as any human endeavour, «moral representations».

As a result of that extreme embodiment of traditional abstractions, the distance between them and the immediate reality of men is remarkably reduced. Thus the mixture of elements of «sublime idealization» with others of «low realism»; a good example of this allegorical mode is included in a dialogue of the rebels in 2 *Henry VI*, in which both popular works and functions of the State are intermingled: «Jack Cade the clothier means to dress the commonwealth, and turn it, and set a new nap upon it», «And Dick the butcher—// Then is sin struck down like an ox, and iniquity's throat cut like a calf. // And Smith the weaver—// Argo, their thread of life is spun» (4. 2. 5-7, 27-31). A similar effect is produced moralizing by means of debased figures: «Ha, ha! What a fool honesty is, and trust—his sworn brother—a very simple gentleman!» (*The Winter's Tale* 4. 4. 596-597); these humble mirrors reflect the fall of Virtues and show a modest profile and a trivial circumstance. They are not

distant, but very near to men; contributing to that closeness is the way in which they can be figuratively called as actual personified entities (*fictiones personarum* or *prosopopoiiai*; see Quintilian 1970: 494-495 [9. 2. 29-33]) by the characters: «Welcome destruction, blood, and massacre!», «O preposterous / And frantic outrage, end thy damnèd spleen, / Or let me die, to look on death no more» (*Richard III* 2. 4. 52 and 62-64); «O opportunity, thy guilt is great!» (*The Rape of Lucrece* 876); «O sleep, O gentle sleep, / Nature's soft nurse, how have I frightened thee, / That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down / And steep my senses in forgetfulness?», «Rouse up Revenge from ebon den with fell Alecto's snake» (*2 Henry IV* 2. 4. 8, 5. 4. 37); «Mischief, thou art afoot. / Take thou what course thou wilt» (*Julius Caesar* 3. 2. 253-254); (Life) «Merely thou art death's fool» (*Measure for Measure*, 3.1.11); «Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell. / Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne / To tyrannous hate! Swell, bosom, with thy freight, / For 'tis of aspics' tongues» (*Othello* 3. 3. 451-454); «Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend, / More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child / Than the sea-monster—», «Fortune, good night; / Smile once more; turn thy wheel» (*King Lear* 1. 4. 237-239, 2. 2. 163-164); etcetera. The apostrophe itself usually involves a simulated addressing of an absent receptor, but the absence becomes more noticeable on the stage. The pathos of these expressions intensifies their evocative power in a narrow emotional connection with the characters. At the same time, by addressing their complaints or pleas to a ghostly receptor, the speech produces a semantic dispersion that significantly pervades the immediate situation of the drama; to a certain extent, this serves as the *chiaroscuro* in Baroque paintings to highlight the central figures showing the deep stage of meanings in which they are inserted and, with high contrast, to reveal more precisely the clear-cut profile of their faces. But also the indeterminate talking to imaginary beings builds another subtle bridge with the public in the theatre (in this sense, it is also suitable the warning of the Chorus in *Henry V*: «And let us, ciphers to this great accompt, / On your imaginary forces work», «Prologue» 17-18); at the other side of the fake reality of the stage, the spectators are the virtual recipients of those moral exclamations that invite them to participate in the dramatic creation using their active imagination.

Sometimes, the suggested contiguity may be bidirectional; that is, the figurations of concepts can gain an unusual human density, but also the characters can acquire a profile of personifications: «Pride went before, ambition follows him»

(2 *Henry VI* 1. 1. 178), Salisbury says, after Buckingham and Somerset have departed. Or maybe it is suggested only as a possibility, as in the curses of Suffolk aiming lethally to animate words with the power attributed to a personification: «Could curses kill, as doth the mandrake's groan, / I would invent as bitter searching terms, / As curst, as harsh, and horrible to hear, / Delivered strongly through my fixed teeth, / With full as many signs of deadly hate, / As lean-faced envy in her loathsome cave» (3. 2. 314-319). Explicitly, in Tamora's self-characterization: «And say I am Revenge»; later in the play, Titus calls Chiron and Demetrius Rape and Murder (*Titus Andronicus* 5. 2. 3, 45). Also consider the vessels named in the verbal games of Dromio of Syracuse: «the barque *Expedition*» and «the hoy *Delay*» (*The Comedy of Errors* 4. 3. 38-40). The jauntily satirical prince Harry calls Falstaff: «that reverend Vice, that grey Iniquity, that father Ruffian, that Vanity in Years?» (*1 Henry IV* 2. 5. 458-459). And Orlando and Jaques name poignantly each other «Signor Love» and «Monsieur Melancholy» almost personifying their marked inclinations (*As You Like It* 3. 2. 285-288). Similarly, Achilles is «Sir Valour» (*Troilus and Cressida* 1. 3. 176). The explicit use of these «casual» but characterizing denominations exploits the expressive possibilities of irony. More insidiously, it is remarkable the indirect expression «frailty, thy name is woman» (1. 2. 146) that Hamlet inserts in his bitter meditations as a caustic mirror for Gertrude with clear misogynistic resonances (that will affect Ophelia). Benedick predictably uses the openly sarcastic mode in his verbal skirmishes with Beatrice: «Lady Disdain», «Lady Tongue» (*Much Ado About Nothing* 1. 1. 112-115, 2. 1. 257). Also there is a suggested allegory in Hero's reference to *carduus benedictus*, that subtly plays with the very traditional allegory of names, arousing the suspicion of Beatrice: «Benedictus—why Benedictus? You have some moral in this Benedictus?» (3. 4. 72-73)<sup>15</sup>. Much of these figurative designations are in effect ironies and are therefore also, to some extent, *dissimulaciones*; by means of a fast verbal brushstroke, the characters are subtly and instantly covered with a costume and a mask of «something else», suggesting a sense that they can signify. The Shakespearean allegories are therefore elusive and allusive verbal flashes that, in an instant revelation, can expose another dimension of meaning of the characters.

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<sup>15</sup> Consider also the case of Celia and its significant change of name: «Something that hath a reference to my state. / No longer Celia, but Aliena» (*As You Like It* 1. 3. 126-127).

When Constance is presented as a self-offered bride of Death in *As You Like It*, showing it in a human dimension (the skeleton which is both individual and collective death), the character seems mirrored and even melted into the personification and thus the boundaries that separate the two representative orders, the mimetic and the fantastic-allegorical, are blurred. The physical and the moral concur in the same humanized coalescence that also destabilizes and sublimates the material container that serves as the signifying mediation to psychological content («Set down, set down your honourable load, / If honour may be shrouded in a hearse», *Richard III* 1. 2. 1-2). But the interaction of both orders establishes various complex relationships; by mingling with the characters, the concept can be presented as a rhetorical agent that rules events and actors, whose action is exerted on characters also allegorized: «Confusion now hath made his masterpiece. / Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope / The Lord's anointed temple and stole thence / The life o'th' building» (*Macbeth* 2. 3. 65-68). Likewise, the dimensional flexibility of allegories allows this approach between characters and personifications through an active correlation between each other; for example, Antony says about himself: «Fortune and Antony part here; even here / Do we shake hands» (*Antony and Cleopatra* 4. 13. 19-20); or in the same play, on Caesar: «Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave, / A minister of her will» (5. 2. 3-4). This virtual approximation with Fortune also helps proper magnification of notable historical figures; the topical expression of a «Fortune's friend» is concretized in a handshake, but rejecting for Caesar the antonomasia and introducing a dismissive profile of him as servant of Fortune. In other cases, the character introduces himself to exert the action not directly upon the objects and other characters, but upon abstract entities that serve to explain the meaning of his or her actions from a universal perspective. As Richard Gloucester suggests, there is a double meaning in his words that shapes self-consciously his own role in the manner of an allegorical representation: «Thus like the formal Vice, Iniquity, / I moralize two meanings in one word» (*Richard III* 3. 1. 82-83). Thus Iago's malignant irony, in which iniquity is figured as his servant: «I lack iniquity, / Sometime, to do me service» (*Othello* 1. 2. 3-4); or Macbeth, who has lost the ability to sleep because of his guilty mind, becomes sleep's murderer (as destroyer of the innocence of his soul that foreshadows several of his later heinous acts): «Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more, / Macbeth does murder sleep'—the innocent sleep, / Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care, / The death of each day's

life, sore labour's bath, / Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course, / Chief nourisher in life's feast—» (*Macbeth* 2. 2. 33-38). Naturally, either the infamies of Richard or Iago or Macbeth's personal guilt acquire a greater scope, rising by allegory to get even cosmic and metaphysical resonances.

Sometimes, the allegorical meaning is shown through a character's point of view; for examples: «Yet thou dost look / Like patience gazing on kings' graves» (*Pericles* Sc. 21. 126-127; also: «She sat like patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief», *Twelfth Night* 2. 4. 114-115); «The temple / Of virtue was she; yea, and she herself» (*Cymbeline* 5. 6. 220-221). Through the words of Pericles or Posthumus, Marina and Innogen are outlined as Patience and Virtue. This can also be applied to places, in some cases of possible «topification», as one sketched by Aaron: «The Emperor's court is like the house of Fame, / The palace full of tongues, of eyes and ears» (*Titus Andronicus* 2. 1. 127-128). Whether they be draft similarities or whole proposed identifications, these allegorical figures have once again that allusive and elusive condition that prevents a total fusion between concept and character; the later retains an individual disposition, provided with multiple features, though by these brief indications the possibility of a more complex significant condition remains open. The allegorical allusions are presented as metaphorical —and almost anamorphic— mirrors placed to reflect in them the image of the character in a different light, showing its moral hidden meaning (with a suggestive «translucency» of allegory implying «the instantially viewed universal»: Nuttall 1967: 36). In this way, the game of «allegoricity» does not crystallize in a final determination but remains in a fruitful latency. Thus allegory stands in an almost original condition, which is to suggest its *hypónoia* or «hidden meaning» as a «suspicion» or «guess»<sup>16</sup>. It is true that sometimes this conjectural game, even in an incidental and indirect design, includes a sharp profile and correlated accumulation that prompt to speculate about a likely «allegoricity» or at least some identity between character and concept (Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* as «a lesser incarnation» of Grace, «as a type of the Christ»: Bryant 1955: 205, 214), or a status of «pre-allegorical» figures (as has been proposed for Ariel and Caliban in *The Tempest* and its implications between the subjective and the objective: Nuttall 1967: 159). Consider a scene in

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<sup>16</sup> *Hypónoia* («underlying sense») is the Greek word which was later replaced by the term *allegoría* (see Plutarch 1975: 102 [*Moralia* 19E, *De audiendis poetis* 4]). One of its basic senses is «suspicion» or «guess» (see Aristophanes, *Pax* 993).

the picture showing the fall of Troy (with the old ekphrastic model: *Aeneis* 1. 433-494) seen by Lucrece:

But like a constant and confirmed devil  
He entertained a show so seeming just,  
And therein so ensconced his secret evil  
That jealousy itself could not mistrust  
False creeping craft and perjury should thrust  
Into so bright a day such blackfaced storms,  
Or blot with hell-born sin such saint-like forms.  
(*The Rape of Lucrece* 1513-1519)

Lucrece awaits the return of her husband, and the time of the disclosure of her misfortune and subsequent death, letting her wistful gaze focus on a represented history that is also a «moral painting» and a possible allegory of her own misery also produced by fraud (the ekphrasis has here a fundamental allegorical value in the specular game of contemplative look). The figure described in the quoted lines is, of course, that of Sinon, who, since Virgil, is Deception and Hypocrisy par excellence (see *Aeneis* 2. 58-198; also Seneca 1902: 52 [*Troades* 39: «fallax Sinon»]). The contrast between kind appearance and perverse intention is its most significant feature. No wonder, then, that it is self-applied by Shakespeare's more characteristic villain for this purpose, Iago: «Divinity of hell: / When devils will the blackest sins put on, / They do suggest at first with heavenly shows, / As I do now». (*Othello* 2. 3. 340-43). By his sustained evil duplicity, evidenced in his actions and revealing soliloquies, it can be said that Iago paints himself, with self-conscious and disciplined rigor, almost as «devil Envy» (*Troilus and Cressida* 2. 3. 20) or «that monster envy» (*Pericles* Sc. 15. 12).

Certainly, in the processes of formation of these complex characters are involved possible allegorical backgrounds; like the old role of Vice in the moralities studied by Spivack, transformed into the «hybrid» figure of Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* (1958: 380-381) or taking part in the creation of various persons, such as Iago (Spivack 1958: 28-59, 415-453). If there seems to be, in these and other cases, a conjecturable «particularization of the allegory» (Brown 2007: 111), then a step further in this hermeneutical pathway can even be attempted, adopting topical translations between concepts and Shakespearean characters (Hamlet = Melancholy,

Macbeth = Ambition, Othello = Jealousy, Lear = the betrayed Trust, etcetera), but the audience quite reasonably refrains from making a complete transference of meaning, since the representative practices of the poet do not authorize such an identification. In fact, there is not a total disclosing or full transfer of meaning. Rather, what happens is an infinite *translatio*, a «move towards» the meaning that never is completed nor confined in unit content. The consistency of reality of the dramatic figures—that gives them the condition, as Dr Johnson or De Quincey wanted, of «nature»—repels any attempt to abstract them from their rich human condition; however, paradoxically, it is through this deep singularization that their semantic possibilities remain open to thought. Verily, women and men of Shakespeare are, like those of no other poet, *characters*. But for that very reason, for the accuracy and depth with which Shakespeare «engraves» (*charássei*) them in their personalities, they acquire the peculiar quality that makes them different. Not by their moral condition, but by the masterful drawing of the poet that emulates nature, they are actually «better than the most». Thus they are representative of an *éthos* that acquires at times the value of a *daímon* (see Heraclitus fr. B 119), thereby becoming themselves «demonic agents» (see Fletcher 1975: 40) within the fabric of the drama. But they are, in their own sturdiness, elusive; they are allegories of allegorical representation in *translatio continuata*<sup>17</sup> of their characters that never become entirely «concepts». That movement to infinity makes them manifold and reflective of an undetermined «allegoricity» which is not actual but merely potential. It is therefore validly applicable to Shakespeare what Schelling had said on Homer and mythology: an allegorical possibility is part of the secret of the perennial charm and semantic infinity of his works (Schelling 1859: 409-410).

It should be emphasized that the figurative elaborations in the works of Shakespeare have a recurrent overlap of different orders which shows how allegory is subject to complex metamorphoses. It is remarkable the interaction of the physical and the psychological: «My shame [...] / will hang upon my richest robes» (2 *Henry VI* 2. 4. 108-109). Or in the same multifarious allegorical conjunction: «Thou hid'st a thousand daggers in thy thoughts, / Whom thou hast whetted on thy stony heart / To

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<sup>17</sup> Remember Quintilian's (1970: 472, 498-499) classic definitions of allegory: «Allegoria, quam inuersionem interpretantur, aut aliud uerbis, aliud sensu ostendit, aut etiam interim contrarium. Prius fit genus plerumque continuatis translationibus [...]», «*allēgorían* facit continua *metaphorá*» (8. 6. 44, 9. 2. 46).



stab at half an hour of my life» (2 *Henry IV* 4. 3. 235-237). The thoughts of the prince would find the physical base of a topical metaphor (the «stony heart») to be transformed into a sharpener for those invisible arms against the King<sup>18</sup>. Also the heart can be figured as something material that can be thrown into an emotional pit: «He'll drop his heart into the sink of fear» (*Henry V* 3. 5. 59); or it is «coinable», as in the bitter irony of Timon: «Cut my heart in sums» (3. 4. 90). In turn, the inward generative power of allegories, the *ingenium* or «wit», gains for itself weight and consistency through them: «O, she would laugh me / Out of myself, press me to death with wit» (*Much Ado About Nothing* 3. 1. 75-76). Allegory also serves to produce a paradoxical effect by materializing wit in the very act of disappearing it and thus showing, in a visible and palpable way, its elusive quality: «Make the doors upon a woman's wit, and it will out at the casement. Shut that, and 'twill out at the key-hole. Stop that, 'twill fly with the smoke out at the chimney» (*As You Like It* 4. 1. 153-156). Other allegorical examples should also be pointed out: «And your fair show shall suck away their souls, / Leaving them but the shales and husks of men» (*Henry V* 4. 2. 17-18); «Virtue is beauty, but the beauteous evil / Are empty trunks o'er-flourished by the devil» (*Twelfth Night* 3. 4. 191-192); the negative action of beauty (almost in the manner of a *succubus*) or its insidious presentation involves a psychic emptiness, and such phrases almost become an allegory of allegory representing the physical *cortex* and the spiritual *nucleus*.<sup>19</sup> Or a threat is outlined in a sentence by the continuity of the concrete and the abstract: «for if Hector break not his neck i'th' combat he'll break't himself in vainglory» (*Troilus and Cressida* 3. 3. 251-252); «My mind is troubled, like a fountain stirred, / And I myself see not the bottom of it» (*Troilus and Cressida* 3. 3. 298-299). Remember also: «Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners» (*Othello* 1. 3. 395-396). The material is the immediate aim of the psychological action, but the correlation of both spheres establishes a new dynamic dimension for the concrete and the abstract, where man himself is inhabited by active forces shaping his own reality.

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<sup>18</sup> Remember also: «No doubt the murd'rous knife was dull and blunt / Till it was whetted on thy stone-hard heart» (*Richard III* add. J. 6-7 after 4. 4. 221); «for always the dulness of the fool is the whetstone of the wits» (*As You Like It* 1. 2. 52-53).

<sup>19</sup> Old topic of mediaeval allegorical texts; e.g. saint Jerome, on the Old Testament stories: «aliud in cortice praeferunt, aliud retinent in medulla» (Jerome 1845: 548 [*Epistola* LIII. *Ad Paulinum. De studio Scripturarum*]).

Then a character, while appearing to be a personification, is at once a carrier of personified qualities: «for thou look'st / Modest as justice, and thou seem'st a palace / For the crowned truth to dwell in» (*Pericles* Sc. 21. 109-111). Man is, inwardly and outwardly, a significant being. By those figurative lines, characters are endowed with conceptual values but at the same time an incomplete transfer of value is ensured, hindering a full identification of them as representations of such concepts. The personifications are, at least theoretically, one-dimensional; they have no other function but to embody a single concept and their "otherness" lies only in the anomalous form in which they are presented. By contrast, the characters are constituted not only as bearers of values in the world but as worlds in themselves (as *microcosmi*). Therefore, there is also a mobile characterization of the space where the characters act and interact with each other. In the rapid flight of this transfigured allegory, man is shown as being either content or container: «Fortune brings in some boats that are not steered» (*Cymbeline* 4. 3. 46); «Drink up the monarch's plague, this flattery» (*Sonnets* 114. 2). And yet, a character is the core of signification, the soul of the concept: «O, he's the very soul of bounty!» (*Timon of Athens* 1. 2. 209). In this interior-exterior continuum, the palpable traces of emotions become agents of the purely psychological: «Wash your foul minds with tears» (*Sir Thomas More* add. II. D. 120). The meanings are intimate and internally contemplable by the subject: «Content and anger / In me have but one face» (*The Two Noble Kinsmen* 3. 1. 108-109). But characters have also multiple spaces within their inner world; soul and mind are «places» («Now my soul's palace is become a prison», *3 Henry VI* 2. 1. 74) figuratively inhabited by many beings («O, full of scorpions is my mind»: *Macbeth* 3. 2. 37). Allegory reveals the vastness of interiority in complex configurations of meaningful language («My conscience hath a thousand several tongues, / And every tongue brings in a several tale, / And every tale condemns me for a villain»: *Richard III* 5. 5. 147-149); therefore, an aspect of the soul or an emotion can widen its scope to contain the whole essence of the individual («What, lost in the labyrinth of thy fury?»: *Troilus and Cressida* 2. 3. 1-2). The space of representation facilitates this complex involvement of the objective and the subjective; it is evidenced by the epiphany, «fantasmatic» and empirical, of the play within the play, as an ethereal and experiential trap for the consciousness: «The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King» (*Hamlet* 2. 2. 606-

607). So the characters on stage open windows of words to their inner sceneries to be seen with the eye of imagination.

Significantly, Shakespearean allegories have a marked anthropomorphic emphasis, because man himself is the arrow and the target of this rhetorical acuteness. But the vast imagination that vivifies them also incorporates other traditional forms that appear scattered in numerous passages. Thus, the materialization of phenomena and abstract entities presented in animal or monstrous forms: «the chameleon love can feed on the air» (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* 2. 1. 162-163); «Civil dissension is a viperous worm» (*1 Henry VI* 3. 1. 73); «Light vanity, insatiate cormorant, / Consuming means, soon preys upon itself» (*Richard II* 2. 1. 38-39); «Don Worm – his conscience» (*Much Ado About Nothing* 5. 2. 76); «Though Patience be a tired mare, yet she will plod» (*Henry V* 2. 1. 22-23); «The dragon wing of night o'erspreads the earth» (*Troilus and Cressida* 5. 9. 17); «His delights / Were dolphin-like; they showed his back above / The element they lived in» (*Antony and Cleopatra* 5. 2. 87-89); «Not Afric owns a serpent I abhor / More than thy fame and envy» (*Coriolanus* 1. 9. 3-4); «truth's a dog must to kennel» (*King Lear* 1. 4. 110); «Anger is like / A full hot horse who, being allowed his way, / Self-mettle tires him» (*All Is True* 1. 1. 132-134); etcetera. Of course, the metaphorical transformations into different things take place also: «Hope is a lover's staff» (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* 3. 1. 245); «And poise the cause in justice' equal scales, / Whose beam stands sure, whose rightful cause prevails» (*2 Henry VI* 2. 1. 216-217); «That this his love was an eternal plant, / Whereof the root was fixed in virtue's ground, / The leaves and fruit maintained with beauty's sun» (*3 Henry VI* 3. 3. 124-126); «Give me a staff of honour for mine age» (*Titus Andronicus*, 1. 1. 198); Ford's love that is «Like a fair house built on another man's ground, so that I have lost my edifice by mistaking the place where I erected it» (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 2. 2. 209-211); «Ovidius Naso was the man. And why indeed 'Naso' but for smelling out the odoriferous flowers of fancy, the jerks of invention?» (*Love's Labour's Lost* 4. 2. 123-125); «Thus merely with the garment of a grace / The naked and concealèd fiend he covered» («A Lover's Complaint» 316-317); «This rudeness is a sauce to his good wit, / Which gives men stomach to digest his words / With better appetite» (*Julius Caesar* 1. 2. 300-302); «But 'tis a common proof / That lowliness is young ambition's ladder, / Whereto the climber-upward turns his face; / But when he once attains the upmost round, / He then unto the ladder turns his back, / Looks in the clouds, scorning the

base degrees / By which he did ascend» (*Julius Caesar* 2. 1. 21-27); «Pride hath no other glass / To show itself but pride; for supple knees / Feed arrogance and are the proud man's fees» (*Troilus and Cressida* 3. 3. 47-49); (on men and women) «They are all but stomachs, and we all but food. / They eat us hungerly, and when they are full, / They belch us» (*Othello* 3. 4. 102-104); «The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together. Our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not, and our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues» (*All's Well That Ends Well* 4. 3. 74-77); «Look, he's winding up the watch of his wit. / By and by it will strike» (*The Tempest* 2. 1. 13-14); etcetera. Likewise, these figures can merge into continuous metaphors in which they interact with each other, like a monstrous being who uses another abstraction as its instrument: «But, alack, / That monster envy, oft the wrack / Of earned praise, Marina's life / Seeks to take off by treason's knife» (*Pericles* Sc. 15. 11-14). A universal poetry has the vast world as a supplier of materials for its imaginary compositions, which are richly incorporated into the discourse imprinting in it an indelible stamp. This universe of words and fantasy accomplishes the general animation of beings and things, in a virtual «poetic animism»<sup>20</sup> that breathes life in them for becoming active forces in the plays. Verily Shakespeare is the supreme master of the «best metaphor», the «active metaphor» or «by animation» (*kat' énergeian metaphora*) in which «the inanimate becomes animate» (see Demetrius 1993: 27-28 [*De elocutione* 81-82]; related to Aristotle 1959: 166 [*Rhetorica* 3. 10. 1411b9-10]), a fundamental procedure for allegorical personifications<sup>21</sup>. And the animated images are dramatically functional because they arise from the intentions of the characters, with a flow of energy («Would poison were obedient, and knew my mind!»: *Timon of Athens* 4. 3. 299) that transfigures

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<sup>20</sup> It is well illustrated by the reformulation of an old allegory about the «universal theft»: «The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction / Robs the vast sea. The moon's an arrant thief, / And her pale fire she snatches from the sun. / The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves / The moon into salt tears. The earth's a thief, / That feeds and breeds by a composture stol'n / From gen'ral excrement. Each thing's a thief» (*Timon of Athens* 4. 3. 438-444). Certainly, it came from a Greek source (*Anacreontea* 1984: 17-18 [21. 1-5]).

<sup>21</sup> It is worth quoting Bloomfield: «As a very general definition, it may be said that personification allegory is the process of animating inanimate objects or abstract notions, and that a personification is the animate figure thereby created» (1963: 163b).

them; and this happens in an extremely effective way because his inventor has known the secret of how to vivify words.

For the allegorizing power of this poetry there are no boundaries, nor is there a likely vehicle for the infinity of its creative drive («The sea hath bounds, but deep desire hath none»: *Venus and Adonis* 389); therefore, it runs through all reality. Examples are certainly numerous and in many ways connected with the long tradition of allegorical figurations, as the body of man allegorizing the State (*Coriolanus* 1. 1. 94 ff.) and the State reflected in the human body (*2 Henry IV* 4. 2. 105-109; *Julius Caesar* 2. 1. 63-69). Particularly noticeable and significant are the allegorizations using multi-modally the theatre. It is worth mentioning here those that involve the language and the book: implying political tenets (*Coriolanus* 3. 1. 91-92), illustrating the significant nature (*Julius Caesar* 2. 1. 63-69), as an encrypted book perhaps penetrable to the visionary gaze (*Antony and Cleopatra* 1. 2. 8-9), metaphorizing the expressive power (*Cymbeline* 5. 5. 263-264), as a figure of trust and confidence (*Richard III* 3. 5. 26-27), of love (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 2. 2. 127-128; *Romeo and Juliet* 1. 3. 83-90, 3. 2. 83-84), or acquiring funereal values (*Timon of Athens* 5. 2. 104-107; *All's Well That Ends Well*, 1.2.48-51). In a remarkably fruitful manner, the allegories of book are also applied to explain the moral nature of man (*Richard II* 4. 1. 263-265) and his destiny with many aspects, as a promise (*King John* 2. 1. 102-103), or with a view to his final consumption (*King John* 5. 7. 32-34), or as civilizing symbol to illuminate the transition from peace to war (*2 Henry IV* 4. 1. 47-52, 4. 1. 80-82, 4. 1. 91-92); and, of course, the allegories of the inward books of memory, the soul, and the mind (*1 Henry VI* 2. 4. 101; *2 Henry VI* 1. 1. 97; *Hamlet* 1. 5. 98-104; *Twelfth Night* 1. 4. 13-14; *Troilus and Cressida* 4. 6. 61-62). And man himself is, according to physiognomy, a sort of book in which can be read the characters of vice and virtue (*The Rape of Lucrece* 1394-1400); but he is also a cipher book whose content is not immediately understandable (*Troilus and Cressida* 4. 7. 123-124). The face seems to provide reliable evidence to a keen eye (*Measure for Measure* 4. 2. 155-158) and even be eloquent in silence through its features and expressions (*The Winter's Tale* 5. 2. 13-14; *Sonnets* 23. 13-14; *Othello* 4. 2. 73-74), but there is always the possibility that the actions belie the appearance or that veracity becomes deformed because a misguided suspicion (a false *hypónoia*: *Othello* 4. 2. 73-74). Also striking are the variations of a very peculiar Shakespearean allegory, which involves so inextricably body, language, and death: the eloquent wounds (*1 Henry IV* 1. 3. 94-

96; *Henry V* 4. 6. 13-14; *The Merchant of Venice* 3. 2. 261-64; *Julius Caesar* 3. 1. 262-264, 3. 2. 220-225; *Timon of Athens* 3. 6. 94; *Macbeth* 1. 2. 42, 43-44; *Coriolanus* 2. 3. 5-7)<sup>22</sup>.

All these formulations of the poet are not gratuitous and certainly have consequences in the continuum of his works. Each recurring set of metaphors that cuts across several works configures conceptual-imaginary units mirroring central focuses of semantic tension in this poetic cosmos; they have high density and consistency in themselves in various ways and are open to other similar components in a complex web of significant relationships where poetry represents and thinks itself. The proliferation of such verbal constructions confers certain allegorical texture to the dramas of Shakespeare by the suggestive power of its expression and the recurrence of its usage; those forms are also «*continuatae translationes*» that subtly fold and unfold their meaning impregnating with some «allegoricity» the dramatic actions in which they appear. But this, in turn, allegorizes allegory and makes it to be and say different things with regard to the long tradition to which it responds.

In an overview, it must be noted that there is a fundamental change of *Weltanschauung* in the background of these transformations of allegory in the Renaissance. In the Middle Ages, the personifications were indeed a «component of their experiential world» (Curtius 1993: 112), but its own experience of the world was mainly «spiritual». Then, the specific representation of the psychological and metaphysical entities by way of imitated beings and objects is not distasteful to the contemplative eye, since these images show factually what is even more truthful and real than its physical mediation; an angelic or demonic figure or human souls should have more ontological consistency than any phenomenon of everyday immediacy. But for the modern view that was being developed in the Renaissance, empiricism has become the decisive criterion of truth; it is faithful what is manifest to the bodily eyes and not that other invisible and inaudible reality intended to become visible and audible through figurative resources as allegorical personifications. Then, in an order where the naturalistic realism imposes its epistemic primacy, these ancient forms

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<sup>22</sup> They are also equated with eyes (*1 Henry VI* 1. 1. 87-88; *Julius Caesar* 3. 1. 201-202); or they are used highlighting their funeral sense, like an access to death and a sepulchral figure (*Macbeth* 2. 3. 113-114; *Coriolanus*, 2. 1. 152-153, 3. 3. 50-52; *The Rape of Lucrece* 1809-1810).

have entailed a growing dissonance between form and content that is unpleasant to aesthetic contemplation. At the time Shakespeare wrote his works, such patterns of thought and taste were emerging and the medieval imagination held enough validity and meaning as to be used in new ways.

It can be said with regard to allegory that the great Shakespearean renovation consists in having adopted a substantial part of the metaphorical and imaginary heritage of the allegorical tradition transforming it into a new allusive and psychological allegorism. The Shakespearean characters are thus only potential allegories whose subtle latency only suggests possible hidden meanings (that evocative force can involve a collective and historical dimension: the palaces of the Histories become the *aula animae* of the Englishman, the palace of the soul of England). On this there are only hints or suggestions; even when formulated in a categorical manner, allegories appear only as discourse and not actual representation; they are not visible performances, but verbal utterances. Such figures, placed in the mouth of the characters, are some kind of fleeting representations within the representation, and consequently have a subjective value with respect to the scenic reality. Truly, in the very possibility of these poetic forms are implied a fundamental paradigm shift that alters and transforms the modalities of allegory. Since there was no longer a canonical reading system (as the coded mediaeval levels of the *allegoria quadriformis*) to give sustenance and viability to its figurations, allegory had to change. It is released from a representative canon to deploy multiple imaginary possibilities; such openness involves a rhetorical-hermeneutic turn and gives rise to personal interpretations that take place in the free and protean space of individual subjectivity (the early modern times are in effect characterized by «the combustion of representation» and «the revolution of subjectivity»: Pascucci 2013: 8). By limiting allegories to mere verbal figures of speech, they are actually left to the imagination of the viewer, thereby reinforcing the psychological realm as their proper sphere of reality. Against the background of general weakening of the spiritual view, the poet has transformed the visible into allusive form, the externally objectified concepts into subjective verbal constructions. Shakespeare's drama is also staging a major transfiguration of the modes of representation in the West, from the space of a unified vision of human interiority as a common world (which prevailed in the medieval allegory), to a

representation of individuals revealed as microcosms and filled themselves with multiple meanings.

The processes outlined above imply some key elements of this poetic universe. It is characteristic of Shakespeare the perfect fusion of the material and the psychological domains; the inherent gap that exists between both spheres in the allegory, where the abstract takes a physical body in the representation, is transcended into an accomplished realistic appropriation of the inner world cancelling that fictive violence in order to display, with full efficiency, the inner truth of man deeply conformed to his own corporeality. Then, what is shown is the accomplished objectification of the inner sphere representing it within man himself, in his animated body revealed as the true vehicle for the interior living soul. In this sense, Shakespeare has surpassed, in a superior synthesis, the representative forms of mediaeval allegory and the old theatre's modes of configuration with his powerful art, but using this rich heritage to raise the metaphorization of language to unknown levels in the history of poetry. All those immaterial realities, which were before outwardly represented and embodied as personifications, are emotionally and verbally «devoured» by the characters. Each of them is shown as a microcosm and a «psychological theatre» within himself, in which those entities are not lost but live and take on a new, more powerful significance through the metaphorical language. They are not, therefore, mere residual or archaeological forms carried by poetic language, but dynamic appropriations of complex elements of a long practice which a powerful poetry absorbs and makes them its own, in order to create with them its «other nature» (*natura altera*: see Scaliger 1561: 3D1) recreating and reinventing the ancient tradition of allegory.

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