

Outstanding **WA D** Dissertations

4



KATARZYNA BURZYŃSKA

The early modern (re)discovery  
of "overhuman" potential:  
Marlowe's and Shakespeare's  
over-reachers in the light  
of Nietzsche's philosophy

WYDAWNICTWO NAUKOWE UAM

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FACULTY OF ENGLISH  
ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY IN POZNAŃ

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Poznań 2016

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This book presents an analysis of selected characters from Christopher Marlowe’s and William Shakespeare’s dramas in the light of Friedrich Nietzsche’s key philosophical ideas. The characters under scrutiny may be seen as “overreachers” – exceptionally ambitious figures who relentlessly aspire to power. The indomitable and excessively ambitious characters have a lot in common with Nietzsche’s conception of “the overman”, who is characterized by the strong will to power. This parallel becomes a point of departure for a rereading of the “overhuman” potential in the English Renaissance drama and the identity of an early modern human being.

KEY WORDS: Nietzsche, Marlowe, Shakespeare, overman, the Renaissance, the early modern

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## Introduction

A Renaissance explorer who dreamt of discovering previously unknown lands needed to plan his journey beforehand. He knew full well that when he set out from his homeland, he needed a map. He took a compass and a sextant to position himself in relation to the objects he would pass on his way. However, above all he knew that in order to find new paths, he first had to follow the well-trodden ones. So too, a cautious scholar in humanities also knows that he/she needs a frame of reference for his/her academic journey. Interdisciplinary research resembles an ambitious project of geographical discovery in more ways than one. One needs to explore the arcana of respective fields, following in acclaimed researchers' footsteps. Yet in combining the fruits of their intellectual inquiry with one's own academic instinct, a young scholar attempts to unveil the remote and yet unspoiled plains of investigation. The academia of modern day humanities is a rough and dangerously deep ocean. Any scholarly work that tries to explore the depths of the literary and philosophical visions of a highly influential and additionally heavily researched writer like William Shakespeare or a thinker like Friedrich Nietzsche is burdened with substantial risk. One can be submerged under the powerful waves of theory or lost in the maze of paths that ever cross in endless allusions and parallels made possible by the intellectual wealth of both Shakespeare and Nietzsche. If a scholar additionally asks more general questions about the political, social and cultural circumstances surrounding the creation of the works in question, in other words, if he/she wants to explore the great minds of the various epochs, the task becomes even more ambitious. The main goal of this dissertation is to set out on a voyage of discovery through this rough sea, combining the fruits of Nietzsche's rich philosophical output, the modern theoretical basis, the source material, as well as Shakespeare's and Marlowe's dramas – in an attempt to investigate in detail the identity of their ambitious characters. The spark of inspiration behind this research project was ignited by an instinctive feeling that there exist numerous parallels between Renaissance figures of intense aspiration and a Nietzschean conception of an extraordinary human being towering over the rest of humanity – *der Übermensch*. My assumption is that analysis in the light of Nietzsche's philosophy may shed new light on the so called "great" Renaissance men and women, hopefully bringing insights into the already heavily researched area of early

modern identity. Mentioning Nietzsche's *Übermensch* – “overman” – it seems most apt to refer to Walter Kaufman's succinct, but most accurate definition of Nietzsche's key philosophical creation. *Der Übermensch* is an extraordinary individual “who overcomes himself, sublimating his impulses, consecrating his passions and giving style to his character” (Kaufmann 1974: 312). The premise of this dissertation is the strong belief that the strong-willed characters of Marlowe and Shakespeare follow this Nietzschean pattern of development in the process of their identity-building. Moreover, I also assume that these exceptional figures are products of the atmosphere of their period. They reflect the positions of those Renaissance men and women who fulfil their urge to give style and form to their identities against the backdrop of frequently limiting or almost stifling ideologies. I assume that the English Renaissance is driven by strong personalities characterized by ambition or a will to strive, to overreach or, to use Nietzsche's terminology, to overcome. As hinted, the area of the early modern identity has already been an object of academic scrutiny, thus, I first intend to present the rationale behind my project of utilizing Nietzschean thinking and so justify the necessity to yet again undertake the topic of identity in the Renaissance.

Despite the existence of the substantial body of works dealing directly or indirectly with the question of ambition in the early modern period, I would like to argue that ambition is the most crucial ingredient driving the formation of the so called identity of the Renaissance man/woman. The works of William Shakespeare and his contemporary Christopher Marlowe are to be treated as one of the most successful literary manifestations of the early modern self. Obviously, the very idea of a distinct Renaissance identity characterized by acute interiority, and a realization of one's singularity and individuality often treated as a springboard into modernity, has already been both praised and contested in the contemporary scholarship. Stephen Greenblatt (1980: 1-2) in his preface to *Renaissance Self-fashioning* admits that he wanted to write a book about Renaissance individualism. Yet in the course of his reading of contemporary texts he realized that a human being in the early modern period was really more of a slave to the social and the communal element rather than a full-fledged individual. Jonathan Dollimore in his *Radical Tragedy* strengthens his cultural materialist line of argumentation by a reference to Greenblatt's interesting observation. Dollimore (1985: VIII) also uses it as legitimization of his view that man or “culture does not (cannot) transcend the material forces and relations of production”. Thus, Shakespearean or Marlovian characters cannot be treated as independent specimens of individuals but rather as products of their societies and surrounding circumstances. Greenblatt's new historicist and Dollimore's Marxist rereading of identity in the Renaissance are two of numerous questionings of early modern subjectivity. I would like to postpone a detailed discussion on the theoretical

background of this dissertation until the first chapter, where I present my methodological premises. However, I am referring to these two exemplary stances to demonstrate the fact that, in a sense, theory has come full circle as the concept of early modern identity has been seemingly dismantled by the subsequent waves of Marxism, deconstruction, new historicism and cultural materialism. Yet the newest book by Stephen Greenblatt, *The swerve* (2011), is one of the most assertive praises of the Renaissance as the period which gave birth to modern sensitivity through its rediscovery of the Ancient Epicurean singularity and the cult of the individual. To my mind, Greenblatt's book is the boldest statement of the distinct nature of the Renaissance identity since the publication of Jacob Burckhardt's *The civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860) which indeed paved the way for subsequent scholarship on the Renaissance. Greenblatt's book is definitely a manifestation of, or a step back to, the deeply ingrained belief, long felt in educational institutions, that the Renaissance or the early modern period is seen as separate from the Middle Ages for a reason. The rediscovery of the ancient texts where human singularity is regularly under scrutiny and the expansion of the world is seen as a consequence of the great geographical discoveries are factors referred to whenever the Renaissance is approached. The apparent questioning of the Burckhardtian framework performed by e.g. cultural materialists like Alan Sinfield, Catherine Besely or Jonathan Dollimore through their thorough reinvestigation of source texts looking for signs of the enslavement of the marginalized groups like women, native inhabitants of the new colonies, religious minorities etc. was an absolutely necessary and fruitful step, dismantling the all-too optimistic, imperialist and, above all, idealistic vision of the early modern period. Yet books like *The swerve* by Greenblatt make a repeated gesture towards the concept of subjectivity pointing to the vitality of such a way of seeing the period. What the reader is left with, then, is a source of slight confusion, as some distinguished scholars attack the concept of the Renaissance singularity while others reiterate its validity for research and educational purposes. None of the sides is, in my opinion, entirely right or wrong, as the naïve belief in the omnipresent spirit of modern individuality infusing the period seems to be more than fantastical, while the tyrannous workings of ideology behind the Renaissance states seem by now to be an established fact. It is hard not to agree with the notion that a text of a play is always a result of its political and social circumstances. However, it is also difficult to deny the immensely popular theatre its individualising potential. So, as it seems, theatre and literature cannot be entirely free from their ideological and conforming limitation, yet its subliminal message is that of acute individualism. When approached in this way, Renaissance subjectivity is a theme both highly complex and still worth exploring.

This tension was very well felt by Burckhardt in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in his instinctive perspectivist approach to the Renaissance. Burckhardt (2004: 99) saw the Italian Renaissance as a period driven by extraordinary personalities when he wrote that “[d]espotism, as we have already seen, fostered in the highest degree the individuality not only for the tyrant or *condottiere* himself, but also of the men whom he protected or used as his tools – the secretary, minister, poet and companion.” Though he mentions the development of the high interiority of “the private man”, he focuses mainly on the great men of politics. The development of art and culture expressing intense individuality is for him a direct consequence of the rule of despots. So Burckhardt’s (2004: 98) observation on the reawakening of the Renaissance “human consciousness” as entirely separate from the Middle Ages, later picked up by the advocates of the (early) modernity of the period, is neither politically naïve, nor optimistic, nor ideology-free. However, it obviously takes the perspective of a handful of men in possession of power. And here is where the near contemporary of Burckhardt, a philosopher of powerful individuality, great perspectivist and reader of human psychology – Friedrich Nietzsche – enters the stage of the Renaissance interpretation. I would like to argue that Nietzsche’s open minded and illusion-free attitude to human nature and morality makes him a viable alternative to overly optimistic readings of the early-modern on the one hand, and slightly outdated, yet still popular, interpretations of Marxist origin on the other. That is exactly why his perspectivism and genealogy of morality are chosen as interpretative keys to the dissertation on ambitious figures in Shakespeare and Marlowe. The need to reconsider ambition as a crowning feature of early modern identity arises from my already signalled dissatisfaction with the current state of theory on the Renaissance singularity, which cancels and validates it at the same time. As mentioned, I believe that new historicist and cultural materialist interpretations constitute invaluable contributions to our knowledge of the period. Yet I also instinctively feel that in their anti-essentialist edge and their insistence on the ubiquity of enslaving ideology, they run the risk of becoming wasted and reductive. I strongly believe that the philosophical reading of texts and the recourse to the works of distinguished thinkers does not have to be conflicted with the historical analysis of source texts. I can also see no reason why one should assume that reading philosophically could possibly blur the interpretation. Again, I would like to refer the reader to a detailed discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of philosophical analysis in the following chapter. However, at this stage I want to state that with the present state of Shakespeare studies after Theory the right time has come to seek ways of combining the best practices of post-Marxist critics and philosophers or critics practicing philosophical analysis. Among many other more specific goals, the pursuit of a more effective and insightful methodology motivates this dissertation

as well. Behind this pursuit lurks a question that must bother all readers of Shakespeare and other Elizabethan or Jacobean playwrights: what drove a Renaissance ambitious mind and how similar is the face of this ambition to our modern understanding of the phenomenon? In other words, a scholar wants to unveil how much modernity can one really find in early-modernity. I am of an opinion that Nietzsche's philosophy, heralding a very modern notion of individuality, can help to pursue these questions in Shakespeare's and Marlowe's plays.

Reading early modern dramatists through the lens of Nietzscheanism, itself a very diverse and disunited philosophical direction, has other important implications. Nietzsche's philosophy directly and indirectly found its way into the works of many distinguished interpreters, thinkers and literary critics. Along with Kierkegaard, he is the key influence on the development of the existentialism of Jean Paul Sartre or Martin Heidegger. Through Jean Paul Sartre's literary enterprises, the impulses of Nietzschean origin found their way into mainstream literature, while thanks to Michel Foucault's or Giles Deleuze's indebtedness to Nietzsche, his ideas indirectly resonated in literary theory too.<sup>1</sup> Occasional references to Nietzsche's philosophy that can be found in Terry Eagleton's or Jonathan Dollimore's books make it possible to couple Nietzsche's ideas with Shakespeare studies and the developments in the literary theory in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Eagleton (2000: 85-86) sees Nietzschean ethics behind an individual as "his or her own autonomous measure, self-generating and self-delighting" that features in such Shakespea-

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault's entire canon seems to be indebted to Nietzsche. It is worth looking at "Creation of values" (206-213). in *The order of things* (Foucault, Michel. [1966] 2003. *The Order of things – an archaeology of human sciences*. London and New York: Routledge). Besides, in an article entitled "Nietzsche, genealogy, history" which appeared in *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite* (Foucault, Michel. 1971, "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire" [Nietzsche, genealogy, history], in: S. Bachelard (ed.). *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. 145-72.) Foucault traces the sources of his development. Speaking of Giles Deleuze one should refer to his influential, though highly personal book *Nietzsche and philosophy* (Deleuze. Giles. [1962] 2002. *Nietzsche and philosophy*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson. London and New York: Continuum).

<sup>2</sup> Terry Eagleton's background in Marxism is a well-known and established fact (e.g. see: Eagleton, Terry. [1986] 2002. *Marxism and literary criticism*. London: Rutledge.). Still, he is capable to insert elements of a Nietzschean perspective in his interpretations. For instance, he interprets Antony and Cleopatra through "aristocratic reading". This perspective is obviously very Nietzschean. Eagleton writes: "[i]n this aristocratic or Übermensch ethic, each individual becomes his or her own autonomous measure, self-generating and self-defining, not to be compared with others or subdued to a mean" (85-86) (Eagleton, Terry. [1986] 2000. *William Shakespeare*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.). Jonathan Dollimore's Marxist readings of early modern literature also pledge an alliance with a Nietzschean strand of thought. Dollimore takes up Nietzschean genealogy from Foucault to develop his idea of the "Decentred Subject" (Dollimore 1984: 269).

rean plays as *Antony and Cleopatra*. Dollimore (1984: 20) parallels the internal contradictions and anxieties of the Renaissance scepticism with Nietzsche's nihilism. In the immense wealth of texts treating of Shakespearean plays there seem to be only two articles available that directly connect Shakespeare and Nietzsche by discussing Nietzsche's vision of Shakespeare. Scott Wilson's "Reading Shakespeare with intensity: a commentary on some lines from Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*" is an interpretation of Nietzsche's passage on *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*. In the article Wilson (2000: 89,98-100) places the words of Nietzsche within a greater context of his philosophy using Deleuze's concept of "intensity" as well as Klossowski's Freudian reading of the same passage, where Nietzsche is identified with the supposedly Oedipus-like Hamlet.<sup>3</sup> Peter Holbrook's article "Nietzsche's *Hamlet*" also takes up the topic of *Hamlet* in the context of Nietzsche's focus on individualism and moral or intellectual independence. Here Nietzsche's philosophical outlook, but also his personal life choices, are coupled with Hamlet's reflective battle with his weakness and his eventual emergence as a self-reliant individual who chooses his own path and makes his own decisions. In Holbrook's (1997: 172-173) analysis Hamlet becomes a Nietzschean synecdoche for the problems of modernity in the battle with the pitfalls of nihilism. Helpful as these reflections might be, it is important to note that both these articles employ Nietzsche's views and his texts *on* Shakespeare to talk *about* Shakespeare. Despite belonging to the realm of Shakespearean criticism, they provide readers with explications of Nietzsche's opinions *on* Shakespeare. Thus, they are not Nietzschean analyses of Shakespeare's plays *per se* but the opposite – they are rather commentaries on Nietzsche and his philosophy. This is also not to mention the fact that they are limited to somewhat one-sided readings of the aforementioned works; *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar* seen through the respective isolated passages in Nietzsche. So on the basis of the above examples, one can see that Nietzsche features insignificantly in modern literary theory, while in the interpretations on Renaissance playwrights his presence is scant if not totally non-existent.

Taking into account the almost limitless corpus of analyses of Shakespeare's plays one can see that the intersection of Nietzschean philosophy and Shakespeare or, to put it more generally, the early modern, constitutes a research niche that calls out to be filled. The references I have mentioned are either very scant or, if more detailed, shift the attention to Nietzsche himself rather than the Renaissance. Except for the 'trace elements' of Nietzsche in the most well-known explications of Shakespeare's plays or early modern drama in general, so far there has been no scholar who would attempt to

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<sup>3</sup> I will come back to Wilson's article in more detail when I discuss *Julius Caesar* in Chapter 4.

plunge Shakespeare and his contemporaries into the depths of Nietzschean philosophy. The near-absence of a wider Nietzschean perspective should be even more surprising as there exists a relatively bigger plain where the philosophy of Nietzsche's near contemporary – Danish philosopher – Søren Kierkegaard is utilized.<sup>4</sup> Kierkegaard features prominently in Małgorzata Grzegorzewska's readings of Shakespeare and ancient tragedy. For instance in *Kamienny Ołtarz* [The Stone Altar] she starts her analysis with a reference to Kierkegaard's *Fear and trembling*, which becomes a point of departure for the discussion on Macbeth's accountability and the Weird sisters' role in his downfall (Grzegorzewska 2007: 24). Kierkegaard's (2006: 73) provocative statement that "Greek tragedy is blind" becomes a springboard to a fascinating debate on moral responsibility in both ancient Fate-driven tragedy as well early modern tragedy where freedom of choice is granted. Grzegorzewska (2007: 22-25) suggests that in Shakespeare, Kierkegaard's philosophy comes to life and becomes a commentary on "existential" blindness. Speaking of an "existentialist" strain in Kierkegaard, it is worth reminding that both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are seen as philosophers of intense individualism. They used to be coupled together as the fathers of existentialism, though there are evidently more differences than similarities in their philosophical outlook, with Kierkegaard being a devout and pious Christian by instinct while Nietzsche was an ardent critic of Christian morality and a self-anointed Antichrist. Paradoxically, it may be exactly for this reason that Kierkegaard often becomes an interpretative path for Shakespeare's plays while Nietzsche has remained almost untouched. The saturation of literary theory with Christian morality and Christianity-derived valuations, so ingrained that it goes almost

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<sup>4</sup> It seems necessary to refer to Małgorzata Grzegorzewska's two important books *Kamienny Ołtarz – horyzonty metafizyczne w tragedii antycznej i dramacie Williama Szekspira* [The Stone Altar – metaphysical horizons in ancient tragedy and William Shakespeare's drama] and *Scena we krwi – Williama Szekspira tragedia zemsty* [The stage in blood – William Shakespeare's revenge tragedy]. Grzegorzewska makes Kierkegaard an ever present point of reference in her analyses, though it is important to note that her Kierkegaardian analysis is by no means the only one. Michael G. Bielmeier's *Shakespeare, Kierkegaard and existential tragedy* testifies to the popularity of Kierkegaard as a methodological basis for analysis. In chapter 1 of his work Bielmeier (2000: 1-26) presents "A synthesis of Kierkegaardian literary applications" where he points to the highly literary quality of Kierkegaard's philosophy which makes Kierkegaardian reflection a conducive interpretative environment. Next to Grzegorzewska's and Bielmeier's books one may also enumerate articles which employ Kierkegaard as a methodological tool by other authors for example: Bennet, William E. 1984. "Shakespeare's Iago: a Kierkegaardian Aesthete", *The Upstart Crow – a Shakespeare Journal* vol. 5. 156-159. Or Cheung, King-Kok. 1984. "Shakespeare and Kierkegaard – 'Dread' in *Macbeth*", *Shakespeare Quarterly* vol. 35. 430-439. And finally: Palfrey, Simon. 2004. "Macbeth and Kierkegaard", *Shakespeare Survey* 57. 96-111. I will be coming back to some of these analyses in my readings of Shakespeare's plays in the spirit of Nietzsche's philosophy.

unrecognized, makes Kierkegaard a more intuitive first choice in western criticism – that is after all built on the Christian tradition. Yet, as mentioned, Nietzsche overshadows criticism and literary theory, even if his presence is unacknowledged. Whenever a literary character's choices demand a more complex moral framework, whenever the traditionally-conceived boundaries between good and evil collapse, Nietzsche's philosophy becomes an invaluable axiological weapon. In my opinion, in the sphere of the early-modern studies his interpretative potential is more than desired. Hence, this dissertation sets a goal of performing a full-fledged analysis of selected plays by William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe using the whole wealth of Nietzsche's texts – a much wider spectrum of his thought, not only selected aspects. The rationale behind this project does not only concern arguments of novelty but is to demonstrate the full workability of the philosophy against those who would profess irreconcilable contradictions or gaps in Nietzsche's line of argumentation. The ubiquitous influence of Nietzsche on literary theoreticians and thinkers, yet his scant presence in analyses of early modern drama, call for a more detailed reconsideration of his philosophy as an interpretative framework. One may suspect that in the world of literary studies, the stigma of fascism still attaches to the name of Nietzsche. Despite the fact that in the philosophy departments of universities across the world the exploitation and gross misuse of Nietzsche's philosophy has been long exposed while his name has been restored to the canon of history of philosophy, literary critics have been rather reluctant to refer to Nietzsche's works. Thus, another goal of this dissertation is to introduce Nietzsche into the mainstream literary analysis as a first-hand interpretative tool, and not just as a source of catchy quotations embellishing discussions on immorality or nihilism thanks to its aphoristic aptness. Nietzsche's influence on the history of philosophy is profound, while his impact on the Anglo-American thought inadequately and insufficiently acknowledged. His genealogy of morality, criticism of Christian morality, as well as his cult of extraordinary personalities and finally his conception of *der Übermensch* ("the overman") seem very appropriate tools to reevaluate the idea of Elizabethan and Jacobean ambition. Nietzsche's penetrating and instinctive feel of human psychology may be used to infiltrate the minds of early-moderns through the meticulous reading of source texts and analysis of their plays. It also seems of utmost importance to combine the fruits of Nietzsche's life reflections with the developments in modern literary theory on a much more equal basis, deeper and more detailed than a selection of passing allusions and parallels. It is also interesting to cast a cursory glance at the way Nietzsche himself saw the Renaissance and to what extent his vision could be coupled with our modern understanding of the period.

The reevaluation of the early modern ambitious figures and an attempt to glance at the formation of their identity through their aspirations and de-

sires using Nietzsche's psychology, seems to be itself the most important aspiration of this dissertation. Yet if I may refer to the sea journey metaphor once more, I would like to reiterate that plunging into the sea of a philosophical analysis requires sound preparation ahead. Thus, in order not to drown in the sea of theory and texts, one needs to cautiously sketch one's own roadmap, step by step. Before the "Nietzschean" background of the period is introduced I would like to rework the methodological map of the thesis. A well-thought methodological framework is absolutely necessary to set the intellectual aims of the dissertation and limit its scope. Such is the goal of the first introductory chapter to the dissertation, whose key explorative notion is a Renaissance human being marked out by his/her extraordinary ambition. I propose my own methodological basis, which attempts to combine the best practices of classical philosophical analysis with the fruits of cultural materialists and the new historical method. Because this dissertation aims at incorporating Nietzsche within the body of theory currently used in the reading of early modern drama, it seems necessary to refer to the main tenets of the theory in question and to draw parallels with Nietzsche's own views. Hence, in the first chapter I will discuss the rationale behind new historicist and cultural materialist readings and their implications for this dissertation. Moreover, as the thesis attempts to employ philosophical analysis using Nietzsche as a framework, it also seems reasonable to enumerate advantages and disadvantages of such a procedure. The discussion of these seemingly separate stances on literature analysis will hopefully lead to a proposal of an effective methodology for the present work. At the closing of the chapter, I intend to present my proposal for a methodological framework that takes into consideration the shortcomings of the approaches under scrutiny while minimising them and combining them with the best practices of these stances. The last section of Chapter 1 is my grappling with the heritage of Nietzscheism; itself a separate and huge field of study in the history of philosophy. By means of this brief discussion I also want to give the reader insight into the face of Nietzsche I myself utilize later on in the analytical chapters. Chapter 2 is my first attempt to utilize the methodology presented in Chapter 1. I wish to investigate the activity of the potential historical "overmen" of the English Renaissance in the respective fields of philosophy, politics, science and the widely understood adventure where their overhuman potential is realized. The goal is twofold as I wish to outline the historical and cultural background to my further analysis of the dramatic texts but also couple the early modern with the Nietzschean to draw further parallels and substantiate my argument.

The last part of my dissertation is devoted to a detailed analysis of Marlovian and Shakespearean overhuman figures. Chapter 3 presents Marlovian overreachers – Tamburlaine from both parts of *Tamburlaine, the Great* – and Barabas, the protagonist of *The Jew of Malta*. Marlowe's heroes explode the

accepted standards of Elizabethan morality and subversively undermine the existing social order. The plays grow out of the post-reformatory atmosphere of the 1580s in England and simultaneously they seem to communicate scepticism, if not atheism. They present the success stories of men who, against their limiting circumstances, overcome their underprivileged positions. Both Barabas and Tamburlaine are proud to the point of conceit, self-confident and sure of their superiority. In order to win their positions of power, they also employ means which are morally dubious. Though often cruel and conventionally evil, they succeed and manage to stir admiration or fear among their enemies. In a Nietzschean perspective they embrace and follow their instincts in order to overcome their circumstances. They are also characterized by ingenuity and inexhaustible energy – turning themselves into manifestations of a blind and uncontrollable life force itself. Hence, in their vicious greatness they seem perfect candidates for overmen. Whether they actually succeed in sublimating themselves into Nietzschean overmen is the topic of the chapter. Next, I turn my attention to Shakespearean potential overmen. I discuss three characters – the protagonist of the tragedy of *Macbeth*, Brutus, for most critics the “right” tragic hero of the tragedy of *Julius Caesar*, and Edmund, a seemingly minor character in the tragedy of *King Lear*, who is actually the driving force of the key tensions in the play. These men are connected by their bold leaps at power in which they break the natural progenitors’ bonds. They also overcome their circumstances which relegate them to secondary roles. In order to launch their project of self-overcoming, they also have to embrace, rather than repudiate, an intense urge to topple the progenitor. Though equipped with more interior reflection than Marlowe’s vicious life affirmers, Shakespearean overmen are neither more principled or less cruel. Filtered through the dictates of conventional morality, they also appear as very problematic. Despite their morally questionable conduct, their strong wills to power are admirable, while their attempts at self-overcoming testify to their life energy – reminiscent of the Nietzschean life affirmation. Both Shakespeare and Marlowe offer a plethora of captivating and strong male characters who demonstrate a will to power and act it out in their self-overcoming. Thus, one may have an impression that the discussion of the overhuman potential and hence singular identity is an exclusively male dominion. In order to prove otherwise, in the last chapter I intend to discuss the overhuman potential of Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s female characters. Nietzsche’s philosophical treatment of femininity is notorious due to its supposed misogyny, while the concept of *das Überweib* (overwoman) is absent in his philosophy. Perversely, as I would like to argue, it is this notoriety that makes his philosophy such a viable tool for the discussion of the early modern conceptualizations of gender and femininity. It seems to be a well-established fact that in recent years his philosophy has come within the orbit of feminist criticism, though it has never been utilized in the service of the studies on early

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modernity. In my view, Nietzsche's negative comments on women to a certain degree mirror early modern misogyny and, hence, may provide a springboard for an analytical deconstruction of the early modern notions of womanhood. In Chapter 5 I investigate Zenocrate from Marlowe's *Tamburlaine, the great* whom I contrast with Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth from *Macbeth* and the sisters from *King Lear*; Regan, Goneril and Cordelia. I believe that Marlovian and Shakespearean women, like their male counterparts, also launch their projects of self-overcoming. They too demonstrate that they are "blessed" with the primeval instinct of the will to power, though the Elizabethans would deem them monstrous or unnatural – as it seems their processes of self-negotiation are frequently more complex as they have to build their overhuman identities against the backdrop of their demanding fathers and/or husbands, as well as the expectations Elizabethan patriarchal society imposes on them. Like in the case of the dramatic overmen, living up to Nietzschean requirements turns out to be a difficult process. Hence, some women are able to utilize their overhuman potential better and approximate Nietzsche's perspective, while others fail in their self-overcoming. Nietzsche (2006c: 212) himself believed that the Renaissance, obviously the way he knew and understood it, was "the last great age", when both men and women lived more passionately and more intensely, embracing their instincts rather than quietening the whispers of their wills to power. As it seems, the "greatness" of Renaissance exceptional figures did not lie in their moral considerations but their aesthetic appreciation of life energy. Having in mind Nietzsche's amoral perspective on the Renaissance, it seems, then, justified, or actually very tempting, to seek Nietzsche's overmen among Marlowe's and Shakespeare's dramatic men and women.



## Chapter One

# Philosophical Shakespeare, philosophical Marlowe – on the question of theory

As indicated in the introduction, in order for the journey through the sea of Nietzschean philosophy and the early modern identity to commence, one first needs a proper map and some advanced planning. Hence, in the opening chapter of my dissertation I propose an account of the existing theories and interpretative tools that will be useful for the project of combining Nietzsche's intellectual output with the concept of the early modern identity. I wish to propose my own methodological framework that would utilize the best practices of the new historical or cultural materialist paradigm and the more traditional philosophical analysis. Because this dissertation is heavily based on the works of philosophy, a brief outline of the possible intersections between the fields of literature and philosophy seems to provide a reasonable introduction to the analysis proper. As Shakespeare studies are currently dominated by materialist analysis, I feel there is a burning need to justify a return to the more conventional tools and perspectives provided by philosophical analysis. Moreover, as the field of inquiry concerning Nietzsche himself has grown substantially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a choice of the right "face" of Nietzsche is also necessary, especially that Nietzscheism is not a homogenous philosophical school or movement. Finally, a brief account of Nietzsche's own views on the Renaissance may provide a bridge to a Nietzschean analysis of the English Renaissance in Chapter 2.

### 1.1. New philosophical analysis after the Theory

The investigation of intersections between the dramas of Shakespeare and philosophy has a very long tradition. Out of numerous works one can enumerate analyses with a historicist edge which discuss the contemporary philosophical background in which Elizabethan authors were immersed and which might have inspired Shakespeare too. In this respect scholars focus on biblical allusions, ancient Greek and Roman sources (e.g. the sceptics, Epicureans, Horace

or Ovid etc.) as well as contemporary thought (e.g. Montaigne or Machiavelli). One could refer here to a classic book by E.M.W. Tillyard's *The Elizabethan world picture* (1942) which aims at a systematic classification of Elizabethan beliefs or more recent accounts engaging more with recent developments in theory like Hugh Grady's *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne: Power and subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet* (2003). Next to the source studies there are more detailed interpretations which utilize the philosophical systems of Shakespeare's near contemporaries e.g. Francis Bacon, David Hume or Thomas Hobbes. Farhang Zabeeth, the author of *Shakespeare – the philosophical poet* (1990) – who himself attempts to read Shakespeare in the spirit of semiotics and pragmatics, makes an interesting classification of a long standing tradition of Shakespearean philosophical readings. There seems little point in going into the details of these analyses yet it seems reasonable to summon up the most interesting titles to have an instinctive feel of the wealth of the tradition of the philosophical analysis. Zabeeth enumerates the following titles: *A philosophical analysis of Shakespeare* by William Richardson (1774), *The philosophy of the plays of Shakespeare unfold* by Delia Bacon (1857), *An inquiry into the philosophy and religion of Shakespeare* by W.J. Brich (1848), *The philosophy of Shakespeare* by K.J. Spalding (1953) and *The lion and the fox* by Wyndham Lewis (1927) (Zabeeth 1990: 28). Despite this very long tradition of philosophising Shakespeare or the early modern, since the publication of the groundbreaking books of Stanley Cavell (*Disowning knowledge in six plays of Shakespeare* 1987) and Martha C. Nussbaum (*Love's knowledge essays on philosophy and literature* 1992) philosophical criticism came to a sudden and unexpected halt. It seems that the growing radicalization of literary criticism which came to be coupled more and more often with politics and ideology pushed philosophical criticism as politically naïve to the very margins of literature studies.

One could feel that since the publication of *Political Shakespeare* (1985), unquestionably a *manifesto* of the new *school*, the early modern has been forever chained to the “material forces and relations of production” (Dollimore 1985: VIII). As Sinfield and Dollimore argue “a combination of historical context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual analysis offers the strongest challenge and has already contributed substantial work” (VII). Nevertheless, in spite of brilliant contributions to the Renaissance studies, in the most recent years a conviction of the exhaustion of new historicist and materialist readings as well as a feeling of disappointment in the hopes for a more lasting impact on Shakespeare studies have been more and more often felt among critics. The most serious accusations levelled at post-Marxist theories are of its growing irrelevance in the present political environment, its rapid ageing and finally its institutionalisation (Sinfield 2006: 1-2). Hugh Grady in his excellent article entitled *On the need for a differentiated theory of (early) modern subjectivity* criticizes the cultural materialist obsessive antagonism to essentialism and modern subjectivity. He points to

the pitfalls of the main tenet of cultural materialism and, to an extent, of new historicism, namely, the imprisonment of potential subjectivity within the unbreakable walls of social determinants and political circumstances. A point of departure for most cultural materialists is a famous passage from Karl Marx (1907: 5), which says that: “Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth! He does not make it out of the conditions chosen by himself, but out of such he finds close at hand.” This means that authors, consciously or unconsciously, are always bound by the ideological environments they produce in. It is hard not to agree that man can never live in a vacuum and is constrained by the conditions of his life. However, I would totally agree that an exaggerated dependence on the belief in the total un-freedom of man’s actions seems to have driven literary criticism into a corner. As Grady (2000: 40) writes:

[t]he great weakness of both Foucault and Althusser is their tendency to make subjectivity a purely passive outcome of determinate social forces, thereby paradoxically replicating positivist social science. Here, I think the Marxist tradition’s own overdetermined blindspots – its reductionist, systematizing tendencies – contribute to the problem, reinforcing Foucault’s and Althusser’s failures adequately to theorize the possibilities of critical rationality, of subaltern communities of resistance, and of utopian thinking and action. Thus it will be necessary for renewed materialist theories of subjectivity to create an account of agency, of the potentially creative, power-resisting activity of the self within the world – without at the same time regressing to myths of complete individual autonomy from the social.

I do believe that Grady calls for a “differentiated theory of (early) modern subjectivity” because he seems to instinctively feel that despite being politically and ideologically informed, Elizabethan and Jacobean texts are products of individuals and always expressions of a partially or fully realized singularity, which should not be lost in the over-intense debate on the all-too powerful ideology. I also believe that radical cultural materialist readings underestimate human capacity for resistance and creativity, thus generalizing and oversimplifying complex meanings implicit in the texts of both Shakespeare and Marlowe. I take the twilight of Marxist theories in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and Alan Sinfield’s elaborate defence of them in *Shakespeare, authority, asexuality – unfinished business in cultural materialism* (2009) as an indicative of their shortcomings.<sup>1</sup> Similarly the shortage of works practicing classical philosophical analysis demonstrates the ineffectiveness of the method in dealing with Shakespeare and the early modern in the age post-Theory. Since there seems little new material that would account for the philosophical as well as political/ideological load of the Elizabethan texts, I do believe that the combination of the best practices may prove a viable alternative. However, before

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed arguments in defence of cultural materialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, see: Sinfield (2009).

such a combination can be proposed I suggest casting a glance at both attitudes in order to fully grasp their potential. For these reasons I intend to discuss the cultural materialist/new historical paradigm in the following sections as well as classical philosophical analysis in the next sub-chapter.

## 1.2. Cultural materialism and new historicism

Those whose names have been associated with either new historicism or cultural materialism (or both in some cases) often unanimously agree that the tools or practices employed in their analyses were not meant to form a pattern or a formula to read literature. For instance, Alan Sinfield (2009: 6), the co-author of *Political Shakespeare*, speaking of cultural materialism, claims that: “[i]t has never aspired to become a movement, or a programme; yet it is not content to be a formula for processing literary texts. It is an array of interlinked preoccupations, involving history, ideology, culture, textuality and political struggle”; while Stephen Greenblatt (2000: 1), calling himself a new historicist openly states that so far new historicism has not been sufficiently theorized but, as it turns out, its main characteristics actually resist “systematization”. In his opinion “‘new historicism’ at first signified an impatience with American New Criticism, an unsettling of established norms and procedures, a mingling of dissent and restless curiosity” (Greenblatt 2000: 2). I would like to argue that in the insistence on the scholars’ opposition to stiff systematization, both new historicists and materialists bear an affinity with Nietzscheism as Nietzsche himself was a problem- rather than a system-thinker. Greenblatt (2000: 6) sees the process of understanding as “the encounter with the singular, the specific, and the individual” as opposed to “the extraction of an abstract set of principles, and still less on the application of a theoretical model.” Nietzsche’s body of thought, deeply ingrained in historicism, is also unquestionably the philosophy of the individual written against the premises of any system. As if in response to Grady’s accusations about the cancellation of subjectivity, Greenblatt (2000: 16) points out: “[b]ecause of this very lack of a given set of objects, new historicism becomes a history of possibilities: while deeply interested in the collective, it remains committed to the value of the single voice, the isolated scandal, the idiosyncratic vision, the transient sketch.” So one can conclude that the spirit of new historicism reflects the spirit of Nietzschean inquiry in its experimental nature, its aphoristic or anecdotal style. However, the similarities are not only stylistic. The closeness seems to lie in the common object of inquiry, namely culture, which is seen in terms of conflict and creative tension between dependence and independence.

Despite the anti-systemic edge of the Theory, it seems a well-established fact that new historicism and cultural materialism treated as literary trends of

more or less common origin brought about an unprecedented change. Before the advent of the Theory, Shakespeare along with the Renaissance seemed still instilled within the myth of the universal values, ungraspable greatness and systemic order expressed in the scholarly work of the previously mentioned E.M.W. Tillyard and A.C. Bradley. Both scholars represent a radically different attitude to scholarship, but they are equally severely criticised by post-Marxist researchers. It would seem that Tillyard's *Elizabethan world-picture* (1942) or his *Shakespeare's history plays* (1944) on the surface resemble new-historical works as they are close to the source texts and history-oriented, yet as Wells (2009: 186) points out in Tillyard's view the plays "reflected a belief, supposedly universally held in Elizabethan England." Tillyard sees the Elizabethan culture and politics as a unified and unquestionable system widely supported and accepted by the majority of society. Not only do his books communicate the idea of a universal system, but also they support the illusory unity and legitimacy of "the Tudor myth". In this sense Tillyard's works, despite being based on source-texts, become hostages of ideology, ignorant of marginalized and isolated social groups. On the opposite spectrum of Shakespearean criticism one finds the Bradleyan criticism, at the core of which lies the tragic hero as if suspended in an interpretative vacuum. Bradley's *Shakespearean tragedy* (1904) sees the essence of the tragic in the motivation and behaviour of the tragic hero inexorably chased by decrees of fate. Jonathan Dollimore (1984: 54-55) attacks Bradley's "providentialism" or "an ultimate order of things" along with, ill-judged in his opinion, attempts to inscribe a Hegelian system within the structure of Jacobean drama. The most grave accusation levelled at Bradley is obviously his essentialism, which Dollimore (1984: 58) calls "the telos of harmonic integration as a dominant critical ideal, sometimes in uncompromisingly formalist terms (Eliot) but more usually as an aesthetic reflection of the eternally true, the unchanging human condition (Bradley, later Eliot)." Indeed, both aforementioned scholars assume the existence of some universal and uncontested moral or political order which functions in accordance with unchanging human nature. It seems that the most important lasting value of the new historical and materialist studies is their intense questioning of thoughtless universalism and their demolishing of systems. As Alan Sinfield (2009: 2, 20) underscores "the goal of political responsibility in literary and cultural studies" is crucial as literature is "to dislocate and disturb, laying bare the implicit ideological assumptions of established practices." In this sense, the aims of materialism overlap with Nietzsche's intense scepticism towards universals. Nietzsche made it his utmost goal to "philosophise with a hammer" in order to unmask the hypocrisy of human morality, which makes groundless claims upon human nature. <sup>2</sup> As Greenblatt (2000: 5) writes about the goals of his studies:

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<sup>2</sup> This is naturally a reference to Nietzsche's *Twilight of the idols* (1889) whose sub-title

[t]here is no longer a unitary story, a supreme model of human perfection, that can be securely located in a particular site. Any individual culture, no matter how complex and elaborate, can express and experience only a narrow range of options available to the human species as a whole, a species that is inherently – that is, abstracted from any particular historical manifestation of its being – without qualities.

Greenblatt (2000: 5), following Johann Gottfried von Herder, believes along with him in claiming that humans, extracted from their culture contexts, have almost no instincts. Here Greenblatt's line of thinking diverges from the Nietzschean spirit as Nietzsche would never agree to the idea of a human being devoid of their instincts. However, I would argue that ultimately Nietzsche as a proponent of self-overcoming and transfiguration is not an essentialist who would limit the wealth of human potential to claims of uniformity.

The anti-systemic and anti-essentialist attitude to human nature is not the only element worth comparing between the Nietzschean and neo-historicist/materialist understandings of culture. As mentioned, Nietzsche valued conflict as the driving force of the development of culture. He first demonstrated his views in *The birth of tragedy* where he dismantled the illusory idea of the so called Greek serenity. He argued that the most valuable works of the ancient Greeks were products of the clashes between powerful, often destructive, forces (Nietzsche 2006d: 42-44). Cultural materialists, following the ideas developed by Raymond Williams in his *Problems in materialism and culture: Selected essays* (1980), also argue for a multiple understanding of culture, believing that there can never be one monolithic culture in operation. New cultural constructs emerge in the struggle between dominant culture and emergent as well as residual cultures in the course of constant transformation, adaptation (Sinfield 2006: 7). Such a conceptualization of the cultural process is a basis for the criticism of scholars like Tylliard who insisted on the existence of a unified world-picture (Sinfield 2006: 7). Cultural materialists would also base their argumentation on the study of sources, because for them history and culture are encapsulated in the text, though the meanings that can be read in between the lines are by no means easily determined or universal. As Sinfield (2009: 17) writes:

[c]ultural materialists understand that 'the text' is not a stable entity that can simply be invoked to establish this or that authoritative reading. They know that the conditions through which a Shakespearean play reached an audience or readership in his lifetime were both haphazard and constrained. Today the conditions are different but no more reliable. Even so, cultural materialists want to comment on (for instance) the relations between king James and the monarch in Jacobean plays, and for this they are going to

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is "or, how to philosophize with a hammer". The book belongs to Nietzsche's substantial canon and, along with *Genealogy of morality*, *Beyond good and evil* and *The Antichrist*, it aims at deconstructing misconceptions about human morality, especially Christian morality.

quote from diverse documents, noting connections and disjunctions. These operations do not need to suppose that the text is autonomous, or has a unified effect. On the contrary, cultural materialists are inclined to regard the text and its context as a site of struggle – riven with conflict and contradiction, sustaining alternative as well as oppositional elements, and emergent elements alongside the dominant ideology.

Yet it is important to note that as powerful as these cultural conflicts can be, there are always individuals behind them. As Dollimore (1984: 8-9) points out, the ideology that informs the texts lives within the people who create them, while certain Jacobean tragedies disclose the very historical transitions which gave birth to them. The early moderns must have been able to grasp the extent of despotism under which they lived. Likewise, they were capable of issuing nuanced criticism of it exactly like we moderns can (Sinfield 2009: 12). Ultimately, sensitivity to the aforementioned nuances as well as the focus on ‘muffled’ decentralized voices seem to be the strongest assets of the new historicism and cultural materialism. It can be seen that new critical directions constitute a substantial advantage over the more traditional and older ‘schools’ by freeing criticism from the shackles of naïve universalism. Above all, they seem to do it in a truly Nietzschean style. However, as I have already signalled, anti-essentialism can be really a blessing in disguise. Jonathan Dollimore, an arch anti-essentialist among cultural materialists, insists that the source and basis of human knowledge was a particularly urgent issue in the Renaissance. This intense epistemological reflection led to a crisis of faith and knowledge in the form of the Renaissance scepticism.<sup>3</sup> Dollimore (1984: 70) compares this phenomenon to an acute feeling of Kierkegaardian anxiety. The realization of human contingency and accompanying dread, similarly to Kierkegaard’s body of thought, is also a substantial share of Nietzsche’s philosophical heritage, though both of these near contemporary philosophers propose radically different ways of dealing with despair. Kierkegaard was himself an advocate of intense self-examination, which made him a proponent of subjectivity as a source of truth (Martin et al. 2006: 193). Nietzsche, on the other hand, was notoriously suspicious of subjectivity as a potential source of self-deception and illusion, and instead he proposed the examination of the historical process as a source of knowledge (Martin et al. 2006: 194). So, in a sense, the mechanisms which Dollimore examines are more Nietzschean than Kierkegaardian. Though in Nietzsche’s view subjectivity cannot be fully trusted, it is never cancelled, rather it is seen as a historical fact accompanying the development of human morality. It is strong personality that drives the Renaissance in Nietzsche’s vision.

Dollimore’s (1984: 100-105) epistemological diagnosis of the Renaissance, which, according to him, can be demonstrated in the works of influential figures, from Godfrey Goodman and Richard Hooker to John Calvin, consists of the disin-

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<sup>3</sup> The phenomenon of Renaissance scepticism will be discussed in detail in the second chapter.

tegration of the providentialist belief in favour of mutability, the decay of nature and obsession with chaos. It makes him (1984: 153) claim that: "the essentialist concept of 'man' mystifies and obscures the real historical conditions in which the actual identity of people is rooted." Nevertheless, the acute realization of these forces among Renaissance men is not for Dollimore a piece of evidence for the emergence of subjectivity. On the contrary, he argues for the "decentering of man" and follows Michel Foucault in the belief that man does not possess power but it is power that possesses man. In this understanding of a subject, he/she can only be defined in terms of their social relations. Anti-essentialists go as far as to suggest that the idea of the individual was a much later invention. The early 17<sup>th</sup> century supposedly could not understand the concept of the individual outside his/her social construction. Essentialist humanism, which has long been an interpretative framework for the Renaissance, is apparently an Enlightenment invention attached to the Renaissance later on (Dollimore 1984: 154-155). The sudden reawakening of singularity advocated by 'optimistic' humanists and the belief that Renaissance people were in possession of the key to the essence of human nature seems indeed ludicrous. Yet to my mind the anti-essentialist line of argument has some logical faults as the lack of control over the circumstances of man's existence does not rule out the awareness of his singularity. I would also argue that the idea of the decentering of man underscores rather than cancels his subjectivity. Anxiety is a deeply individualist emotion which even when shared with fellow men is after all experienced by an individual in his singularity. Anti-essentialists, obsessively dismantling any notions of universalism, confuse, in my opinion, the very existence of subjects with the claims of their nature as unchanging and universal. The realization that human nature is not solid and unchanging has, to my mind, little to do with the very awareness of having a singular nature in general. Moreover, the great paradox of this unfortunate and confusing terminology overlapping, is that the challenge of the essentialist world-picture is at the same time the most assertive expression of individualism. The arrival of sceptical tendencies and the phenomenon of the theatre, as I will argue, are demonstrations of subjectivity. The disintegration of the preconceived essence in Man performed by cultural materialist analysis is incorrectly equal to the total obliteration of the concept of the individual being. Man is construed only in the context of his relations in society, in accordance to Marx's views. It is undoubted that man is entangled in social relations but he is not a sum of them. Human nature (if there is indeed such a phenomenon) is not built in the process of a mathematical operation. Man may be a product of his environment but one cannot deny the singularity of emotions like suffering, love or hatred. Dollimore (1984: 156) ventures to support his anti-essentialist argumentation by claiming that before the year 1690 the word "individual" was only used to mean "eccentric". This linguistic example is, in my opinion, by no means a piece of evidence in favour of anti-essentialism because even the literal meaning of "eccentric" points to the instinctive feel of what a subject

really is. Nietzsche can be seen to be as suspicious as Dollimore of fixed or universal natures, yet he would claim that men share common instincts which are to be overcome and transfigured in numerous ways. Dollimore, again following Foucault, claims that Nietzsche is one of the philosophers who saw the problematic nature of individualism. He (1984: 159) understands that for Nietzsche identity was understood as a process of transcendence. Yet he fails to see that the realisation of transcendence was for Nietzsche only a point of departure. He also seems to fail to understand the fact that man's nature may not be fixed but he must operate within a common framework of instincts, for which Nietzsche proposes an umbrella term of *the will to power*. The subjectivity of Nietzsche is thus anti-essentialist but enclosed within a "human, all-too human" frame of physiological drives.<sup>4</sup> The awareness and embracing of personal will to power becomes a mark of individuality. This element is then the only universal that has to be taken into account when speaking of the Renaissance or any other period. Dollimore (1984: 169-174) definitely does not account for this single universal when he interprets figures like Machiavelli, Hobbes, More, Montaigne and Bacon as anti-essentialists. He reads conventionally understood individualism as an effect of misunderstanding the political and social mechanism for expressions of singularity when he says:

[i]ndividualism has become a notoriously problematic term, used indiscriminately to cover a wide range of concepts and theories. The confusion surrounding its use is especially prevalent in relation to the Renaissance, one reason being that far-reaching material and ideological changes in Elizabethan and Jacobean England – in particular the breakup of hierarchical social structures with a corresponding increase in social mobility – have been erroneously interpreted in terms of Enlightenment and Romantic conceptions of individuality. (Dollimore 1984: 175)

The strong personal and individualist strain in the works of thinkers like Machiavelli or Bacon is evidently problematic for him, but he sticks to the anti-essentialist paradigm at all costs – even when it does not fit the beliefs of the authors in question. Of "conventional" Renaissance individuals he (1984: 177) says: "even the amoral 'individualist' of the drama possesses not a fixed identity but a chameleon one". Robin H. Wells, when criticising the anti-essentialist readings of the Renaissance, says:

Jonathan Dollimore examined a number of representative Renaissance writers who, he claimed, evinced a thorough-going distrust of essentialist notions of humanity. But his analyses were based either on selective quotation, omission of counter-example or simple misreading. To claim, for example, that Machiavelli was a radical anti-essentialist is to make nonsense of his entire philosophy of history. For Machiavelli the past has a lesson for the present because human nature is fundamentally the

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<sup>4</sup> The quotation "human, all too human" refers to the same title of Nietzsche's book.

same in all ages [...]. Even Montaigne, who left few areas of contemporary social and philosophical thought unchallenged, recognized the existence of a universal human nature. (Wells 2009: 193)

Wells' statements could be located on the totally opposite pole as they embrace an elemental universal nature but one can easily see sense in his arguments. I do believe that the key to the reconciliation of anti-essentialist and essentialist claims is the Nietzschean understanding of human nature as unfixed and unstable but sharing the potential of common instincts. This potential, to my mind, can also be unveiled in what Wells names "fundamentally the same" in human nature. Man/woman is thus a multiple being but marked by the existence of their will to power, which is shared not only with the whole of mankind but the entire Universe and which cannot be cancelled by any anti-essentialist claim.

Hopefully, the above presented debate demonstrates sufficiently enough the strengths and weaknesses of the cultural materialist/new historical paradigm. It seems that its recognition of the debate between source texts as an important factor unravelling ideological nuances behind their creation is its most important advantage over other critical paradigms. It is undoubted that new historicists and cultural materialists forever free literary criticism of the burden of political naïveté. Their critical closeness to source texts as well as their political commitment will be also utilized in the course of the present journey through the Nietzschean waves of the early modern ocean. The greatest weakness of historicism/materialism seems to be at the same time its strength. Anti-essentialism makes the paradigm creatively sceptical; it points to the contingency of the human being and the instability of meaning inscribed within a written text. Its failure to account for shared instincts, as hopefully demonstrated, can be easily resolved by the employment of the Nietzschean will to power with regard to the reading of so called human nature. It is crucial, however, to remember that the impossibility of self-knowledge in philosophical terms does not rule out and cancel the discussion on individualism, because, conversely, the intense questioning of human intellectual independence becomes a most definitive mark of the Renaissance individualism. Intense questioning of Hamlet makes him a modern figure which appeals to the minds of the moderns. The instability of the self so intensely inquired by the 20<sup>th</sup> century existentialists is also the core of Nietzsche's and Kierkegaard's questioning. But, as I would argue, it goes back to the spirit of the Renaissance.

### 1.3. Philosophical analysis

The very initial dilemma faced by anyone interested in reading literature philosophically concerns the interdisciplinary nature of such a project. The scholar, whether he/she is a philosopher or a literary critic, usually must first ask crucial questions concerning the end product of his/her attempted analy-

sis; to whom is the work directed and whom does such an analysis ultimately serve? Literary scholars, even with historicist interests in mind, usually know that their work will be scrutinized by other literary scholars or possibly students of literature. With interdisciplinary studies the range of potential readers is widened. Stanley Cavell (1987: 2) opens the discussion on the potential recipient by saying:

I become perplexed in trying to determine whether it is to addicts of philosophy or to adepts of literature that I address myself when I in effect insist that Shakespeare could not be who he is – the burden of the name of the greatest writer in the language, the creature of the greatest ordering of English – unless his writing is engaging the depth of the philosophical preoccupations of his culture.

Tzachi Zamir (2007: 44) observes that philosophical literary criticism is frequently a way of invigorating stiff and highly abstract discussions in the departments of philosophy at universities across the world. This vitality that literary questions bring into the realm of traditional philosophy is a reason for the growing popularity of philosophical analysis within the circles of professional philosophers. Martha Nussbaum or Stanley Cavell, as will be demonstrated, discuss literary subjects as a way of philosophizing. In the realm of literature theory the situation is more complicated, as literary critics “sense that there is an anachronism” in such an approach (Zamir 2007: 44). Though Zamir (2007: 49) tries to illustrate that philosophical criticism is not an alternative or a competing field but rather a supplement to the existing sets of tools, there still seems to be much mutual hostility and distrust. He (2007: XIII) summarizes the existing situation by saying: “Aesthetes worry that philosophical readings are reductive and ignore literary merits. Others dislike the way philosophical interpretations plead for one cause or another, thereby obliterating the borders between philosophy and education. Many distrust the chiselling out of general meanings from their material, ideological, or historical context.” As can be seen, these mutual expressions of distrust indeed complicate the question of the potential audience of philosophical analyses. Moreover, the complexity of the relationship between literature and philosophy does not only depend on the possible receiving end of the analytical outcomes but, more importantly, on the ultimate purpose of the endeavour. In other words, we may ask whether literature is to contribute to philosophical reflection, serving it as kind of laboratory where literary characters function as specimens under scrutiny, or the other way round. It might be also that it is philosophy that is supposed to help unveil meanings which otherwise would not be easily discernible. I would argue that both ways are really possible depending on the intention of the author and the direction his research takes. The only problem that one has to meet head-on is one’s own mental flexibility in the pursuit of one’s academic goals as well as the relative rigidity of philosophy and literature departments.

As Cavell (1987: 2-3) underscores, in the Anglo-American context, until recently philosophy and literature were treated as separate fields. Martha Nussbaum (1992: IX) also speaks of a problematic “disciplinary location” when she heralds her interdisciplinary approach, which is intended to blur the very idea of field affiliation. From Cavell’s (1987: 2-3) line of argument one learns that the separation of the fields is neither necessary nor singularly proper for both fields. Examples from continental philosophy where literature has been often intertwined with philosophical reflection demonstrate that the attitude of both disciplines to one another does not have to – and should not – be hostile. Cavell (1987: 2-3) invokes German philosophy as being particularly literature-infused. Nietzsche’s philosophical heritage could be definitely used as an example of Cavell’s statement, as world literature is a source of examples as well as an underlying intellectual framework of Nietzsche’s line of thinking. Starting with *The birth of tragedy* where he traces the sources of Greek tragic feeling using numerous examples from Ancient literature, Nietzsche never ceases to support his ideas with literary or literary/philosophical examples of diverse origin e.g. Goethe, Montaigne or even *The book of Manu*. When one looks at *Thus spoke Zarathustra* one may stop and wonder with admiration at the perfect fusion of the deeply disturbing philosophical load and the literary, stylistic merit that Nietzsche offers to his readers.<sup>5</sup> Pondering upon the effect that Nietzsche tries to achieve in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, making his book both a philosophical treatise and a worthwhile literary endeavour, it is possible to see yet another point of contention in the debate on the intersection of literature and philosophy. For both formal philosophers and conservative literary scholars this seeming fusion of boundaries may paradoxically be a reason for the insistence on the divisions between the disciplines. Martha Nussbaum (1992: 19) suggests that the problematic nature of the relationship stems from the traditionally conceived formal expectations that we attach to the respective fields. Conventional philosophical discourse is based on the clarity of style and formal transparency in the imitation of the language of science. It is literature that seems to have an exclusive right to formal experimentation. Some would posit that Nietzsche’s *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, allegory and aphorism-based, causes more confusion than it presents merit – as instead of logical argumentation it offers intensely allusive and Bible-derived archaic language. An opposite scenario is equally plausible. There are literary works which create an impression of being philosophical treatises in disguise. For instance, Dostoevsky’s parables inserted within the conversation-based action of his *The idiot* make one forget for a while about the preoccupations of the key characters and plunge into the abstract sea

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<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed appreciation of the literary and stylistic merits of Nietzsche’s writing in the context of his philosophizing, see: Kofman, Sarah. 1993. *Nietzsche and metaphor*. (Translated by Duncan Large). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

of reflection on the nature of human existence. So both Nietzsche's and Dostoevsky's works more than often make one stop and ask: is the work more literature or is it more philosophy? Of course the weightiness of the question really adds up to the total value of these works, as paradoxically the message of *Thus spoke Zarathustra* is enclosed within the allusiveness of its language, while the literary value of *The idiot* in its philosophical load. Yet for a deeply conservative researcher such a way of understanding philosophy/literature dynamics might be an unnecessary burden and a reason to raise arguments against the stylistic wealth or philosophical message respectively.

Despite the aforementioned complexity of the relationship between literature and philosophy, there seems to exist a solid basis on which philosophical analysis can be built. Tzachi Zamir, the author of *Double vision*, an exemplary study using moral philosophy in the service of literary interpretation, attempts to categorize the functions in which philosophy may serve literature and vice versa. His main aim, as he (2007: XIII) claims, is to present the ways in which philosophy facilitates literature, rendering any criticism or mistrust irrelevant. Whether his goal is fully met is a question for a more extensive debate, yet his book presents one of very few attempts to revive "philosophical criticism", as Zamir calls the philosophical analysis of literature, since the works of Cavell and Nussbaum. At the same time, Zamir takes into account accusations from new historicists and cultural materialists levelled at the potential pitfalls of *philosophising* literature. For the purposes of the present dissertation, it seems very useful to review and discuss some of Zamir's ideas. In the most general sense, the basis for the relationship between the two fields is, according to Zamir, of an epistemological and moral basis. Speaking of epistemic, or in other words the knowledge-yielding functions of both philosophy and literature, one turns his/her attention to philosophy first. Zamir recalls quite an instrumental role of literature as a source of examples for any philosophical argument. As he (2007: 4-5) argues, philosophy needs literary examples to be functional and convincing. Life, itself very often turns out to be a too multiple and diverse phenomenon for specific reflection, while literature, presenting accumulated, particularized slices of human existence, becomes a potent well of behaviours or motivations. What is more, literary experience, especially taken from classic or well-known literature, has a greater chance of universally appealing to readers across cultures or social groups for the sole reason of its ubiquity. This might be part of the reason why Shakespeare features in the philosophies of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, or Goethe, but also Benjamin or Derrida.<sup>6</sup> In the function that Zamir

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on well-known philosophers writing about Shakespeare, see: Kottman, Paul. A. 2009. *Philosophers on Shakespeare*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. This book is a useful anthology of texts by the most acclaimed philosophers who express their stances on the works of Shakespeare.

analyses, it is literature that can facilitate systematic philosophical reflection. However, in a far more general sense, literature (e.g. reading experience) is necessary in the formation of beliefs and opinions not only of those who “professionally” seek truth, but most probably a substantial part of mankind (Zamir 2007: 6). Philosophising seems to be part and parcel of life on a very basic level. On this most primeval plain, literature simply becomes a form of philosophising, a springboard for reflection on existence. For a scholar this very basic level might seem too crude or too obvious to mention, yet such an embrace of literature seems to be most fundamental to people’s instinctive feel of literary functions. Any reader of literature when asked what, in his/ her opinion, literature stands for, is bound to answer that it helps him pursue questions about life itself. So next to the provision of entertainment and relaxation, literature answers to the intellectual needs that are part of social life. As Zamir (2007: 10) summarizes: “[l]inking philosophy and literature is thus not some closed endpoint but rather a method, a mode of philosophizing not necessarily limited to moral questions but potentially applicable whenever contingent claims or first truths need be supported.” On top of this, the incorporation of literature in philosophizing is knowledge-yielding, but also it is “itself an inquiry into the structuration of knowledge” (Zamir 2007: 16).

Next to the epistemological function of literature, there is also a moral dimension of the intersection under our scrutiny, which is, to a degree, an extension of the epistemic realm. By the moral function of literature Zamir (2007: 20-21) does not exactly mean the “moralization of literature”, which, in his view may lead to “interpretative vulgarity”. Obviously, there is no question that certain forms of literature serve didactic purposes. If they do intend to bring about a social correction or condemnation of certain behaviours, they also become forms of axiological discussions. Even the most evident form of didacticism always delegates literary criticism into the realm of morality or social correctness. This seems exactly what Zamir is trying to point our attention to, though he fears any overzealous moralization which may limit the scope of inquiry. Instead he praises literature as a powerful incentive to moral reflection. On the surface, one may think that there is an overlap between the epistemological and moral dimensions. After all, both are to inspire philosophical reflection. Yet the moral dimension of literature differs from its epistemological function in the fact that it does not only ask about life but also about the valuations of its phenomena as well as human activities. Zamir (2007: 33), following in the footsteps of Martha Nussbaum, sees literature as moral philosophy and believes that literature has a capacity of freezing singular experiences e.g. of private suffering, and communicating them to the reader – and thus inciting moral reflection. Nussbaum also insists on the moral underpinnings of literary endeavours. For her (1992: 4-5), the moral message of literature is intertwined with its form as there is “an organic connection between its form [the text’s] and its content”

and that is why e.g. a paraphrase will not do when one wants to render the meaning of a good piece of writing. For Nussbaum (1992: 5), literature is indeed moral reflection because “certain truths about human life can only be fittingly and accurately stated in the language and forms characteristic of the narrative artist.” Nussbaum’s line of argument concerns mainly novels, but her theory on philosophical criticism seems to fit more literary forms than just narratives. There is no reason to think that drama, especially when treated as text, is any different in terms of its epistemological and moral functions from narrative works. Nussbaum’s passing remarks on the philosophical message implicit in Ancient drama and their communication through the medium of the theatre lead us to believe that drama can indeed be also a form of philosophising, just like any narrative text. For a very long time ancient literature has been seen as a “popular background” to the work that philosophers did (Nussbaum 1992: 14). This is why many significant texts were not an object of investigation for philosophers but rather the classical philologists. Nietzsche’s dissatisfaction with such a treatment of classical heritage may be seen in his texts, but also in his radical movement from philology to philosophy marked by the publication of *The birth of tragedy*. It seems that his acute judgement and open-minded approach could not stand the strait-jacket of philology. So one can see that yet again Nietzsche anticipated the ideas of later thinkers, including Nussbaum who so strongly criticizes the artificial, in her view, division of the texts of Antiquity into literary and philosophical. Instead, she (1992: 15) proposes a term “thinker-poets” to designate those who easily cross the boundaries later set by scholars. It seems that one may carry on this term of a “thinker-poet” further to account for Shakespeare too. Even if Shakespeare himself, due to the nature of his business in the theatre, did not see himself as an artist or a poet *per se*, he did earn this reputation in the course of the interpretative history of his works. A wealth of studies treating Shakespeare as a philosopher appears to testify to this idea.<sup>7</sup> Already William Hazlitt in his 1817 book *Characters of Shakespeare’s plays* ([n.d.], loc. 838-839) wrote: “Shakespeare, who was as good a philosopher as he was a poet [...] knew that the love of power, which is another name

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<sup>7</sup> To see a more extensive list of titles, see page 15. Speaking about Shakespeare – the philosopher it is worth mentioning K.J. Spalding’s *The philosophy of Shakespeare*, where the author compares Shakespeare to Aristotle in his aim “to reveal to men the real nature of ‘man’” (Spalding 1953: 1). It is worth mentioning a recent account of philosophical ideas in Shakespeare by Colin McGinn’s *Shakespeare’s philosophy: Discovering the meaning behind the plays*, which announces that “an avowedly philosophical approach to Shakespeare can reveal new dimensions to his work, and that this work can contribute to philosophy itself” (McGinn 2007: 1). One of the most recent works on the intersection of Shakespeare and philosophy is Stanley Stewart’s *Shakespeare and Philosophy* (2009), with a chapter on Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. Stewart’s earlier book (1992) *Nietzsche’s Case: Philosophy as/and Literature* (co-authored with B. Magnus and J.-P. Mileur) should definitely be added to the list.

for the love of mischief, is natural to man.” Hazlitt’s description of Shakespeare does not only designate him into the realm of general philosophy, but more specifically capitalizes on the Nietzschean potential of his works. What also seems worth mentioning is that even if Shakespeare saw himself rather as a member of a creative, collaborative enterprise, his near contemporary, Ben Jonson, already felt himself to be an individual and single artist – a kind of “thinker-poet”.<sup>8</sup> However, coming back to Nussbaum’s (1992: 15) line of argument, what seems most significant about Ancient literature is that for e.g. ancient Greeks, disciplinary separations were unnatural. As she (1992: 15) stresses: “form was itself a statement, a content.” The form of Ancient theatre, so different from our modern conception of theatre, made it a forum for the discussion of ethical issues. Again, though Nussbaum herself does not say it, the idea seems also true for Elizabethan theatre, where form was also inextricably connected to the message communicated. Similarly, Elizabethan theatres were platforms where contentious political and social issues were being acted out. For this reason, the understanding of Elizabethan drama as an investigation of current moral dilemmas seems more than justified.

As presented, what appears most crucial about philosophical analysis is the fact that it helps to investigate the implicit moral load of a literary work. As Nussbaum insists, form and style contribute to the communication of the moral message. In both Ancient and Elizabethan drama the aforementioned form was of crucial importance. Nussbaum suggests that certain moral issues are communicated more effectively through artistic or literary creations precisely thanks to the literary form they take. She (1992: 3) claims: “[s]tyle itself makes its claims, expresses its own sense of what matters. Literary form is not separable from philosophical content, but is, itself, a part of content – an integral part, then. Of the search for and the statement of truth.” Though one instinctively feels that this might be exactly so, it does not seem entirely obvious why should form contribute to the moral message. After all, philosophy based solely on rationality and the strength of logical argument should be capable of a successful interrogation of human morality by itself. Here Nussbaum offers a seemingly banal yet brilliantly insightful parallel. She recalls an educational method of teaching children fractions. As she (1992: 6-7) explains, it is obviously possible to teach children mathematics in abstract terms but, as most teachers know, it is far more effective to compare apparently abstract fractions to the very real pieces of a cake. This is exactly how the moral basis of literature could be explained too – both when literature serves as a mere illustration for the other-

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<sup>8</sup> The publication of Jonson’s luxurious 1616 Folio is often seen as a ground-breaking event that changed the perception of theatre and drama as it paved the way for seeing both as art. The publication of the collected works in a folio format by the author himself seems to be also quite an explicit statement of the artist’s individuality. For more information on Jonson’s Folio, see: Hadfield (2012).

wise plain and logical argument in a philosophical treatise, and when one reads a highly philosophised literary text that communicates its moral message through its action or characters. In both cases – mathematics and philosophy – an instance taken from “real” life becomes a model for the decision making process. It seems that the procedure is effective because it is freed from the constraints of the abstract and delegated to the realm of the affective impulses. Just as the conception of the pieces of an imaginary cake lets the child free its mind from the potentially unimaginable abstractness of mathematical discourse, so too an illustration resembling an authentic dilemma extends one’s imaginative capabilities to account for an ethical problem. Without going into details concerning various theories of mimesis, one can assume that the imaginary cake inspires strong emotions in a child. Likewise, an imitation of a moral problem becomes an incentive for moral reflection. Also, this incentive might be stronger than the one expressed in the potentially stiff, academic discourse of philosophical departments. Nussbaum’s (1992: 7) comparison leads us to a conclusion that certain emotions cannot be stated or understood by intellectual activity only. The form of a literary work communicates powerful emotions, and these are determinants for the power of the communicated moral message. As suggested, these moral underpinnings seem to work both ways – for “literary philosophy” or “philosophical literature”. This also means that not only do the boundaries between literature and philosophy come tumbling down but also those for psychology. When one looks at Nietzsche’s intellectual heritage, bearing in mind the fact that Nietzsche is predominantly a philosopher of morality, one immediately sees that he had an instinctive grasp of what Nussbaum tries to theorize. Nietzsche’s most powerful and memorable ideas are usually first presented in the forms of literary illustrations. The death of God is heralded in *The madman parable* in *The gay science*, while the theory of the eternal return in the form of a fictional narrator’s dream or rather a nightmare (Nietzsche 2007b: 119-120, 194-195). Nietzsche, great psychologist as he was, must have been aware of the effectiveness of his compact scenes, which are undeniably meant to appeal to the affective side of human nature. He was one of the first philosophers acknowledging human instincts as key in the development of morality. Pre-dating Freud, he realized that human conscious (or rational) intellectual activity is always blurred by powerful emotions. Nietzsche’s instinctive feel of the powerful intersection between philosophy and literature also heralds later theoreticians like Martha Nussbaum, but also Stanley Cavell.

In *The avoidance of love: a reading of King Lear* Cavell identifies psychology as an important aspect of his interpretative premises. Indeed, psychology emerges as crucial for the analysis of the plays where characters, if not *real* people, are models for people, in other words specimens in psychological analysis. In a sense Cavell places an equation sign between philosophy and psychology like Nietzsche, seeing psychology as a philosophy of the human mind. He (1987: 39-

40) openly condemns a shift in criticism from characters to words and a frequent interpretative assumption that “characters are not people”. The shift Cavell has in mind is most probably formalism and new criticism, with its characteristic and exclusive focus on the literary form and aesthetic merits of literature. So, in his philosophical reading of Shakespeare Cavell challenges formalist paradigms as being insufficient to account for the vast phenomenon which literature amounts to with its epistemological and moral communicative load. Interestingly enough Cavell’s challenge is reminiscent of the new historical and cultural materialist approaches which also attack formalism on pretty much the same grounds. However, this parallel should not really be taken for granted as there are many accusations against philosophical criticism which new historicists and cultural materialists make. In order to work out a balanced and reliable account of philosophical analysis, it seems necessary to look at those criticisms as well.

The very first feature of the body of works of philosophical criticism that strikes one as problematic is its exclusiveness. Philosophers or philosophical critics do not form a coherent movement or school, though this in itself does not seem to be a serious shortcoming. After all, many philosophical trends or developments in theory do not initially attempt to form any lasting “interpretative alliances” yet with time they do transform into more or less coherent stances. This is the direction which eventually new historicism took, of which Greenblatt’s and Gallagher’s book *Practising new historicism* (2000) is a piece of evidence. Likewise, Sinfield’s *Shakespeare, authority, sexuality – unfinished business in cultural materialism* (2006) demonstrates the crystallization of cultural materialism as a unified practice. Yet with philosophical criticism one cannot really speak of such a crystallization. This is partly due to the very vastness of philosophy as a field of inquiry. Each and every philosopher attempting to read literature through philosophy finds himself amidst schools, movements and stances. To give just two examples; while Nussbaum (1992: 36) chooses “the Aristotelian ethical view” as an interpretative framework for her study, Cavell (1987: 3) claims to write within a widely understood tradition of scepticism. Nevertheless, the divisions do not end here, as they both do not seem to agree on more fundamental issues. Nussbaum, as mentioned, sees literary form as fundamental to the communication of ethical issues. Cavell, on the other hand, underlines the importance of the psychological interrogation of literary characters. So the greatest paradox of philosophical criticism is that though most philosophical critics plead for the obliteration of boundaries between philosophy and literature, they often do stick to traditionally conceived field divisions in philosophy. Obviously, one could claim that the success of literary criticism does not lie in the agreement between the critics but rather in the multiplicity of voices which add up to the general debate on philosophical matters implicit in literary works. Yet, as it seems, philosophical criticism, in its extensive multiplicity, offers no guidelines or more or less unified theoretical premis-

es for those who would like to plunge into its depths. One needs to first tackle the sea of theory in order to find his/her own way of approaching philosophy/literature dynamics. Moreover, the available material has its faults, which become even more visible when juxtaposed with the newest research fruits of the new-historicists and materialists.

As mentioned, Martha Nussbaum suggests the form consciously chosen by the author is inextricably linked to the intended philosophical load of the work. As she (1992: 5) writes “life is never *presented* by a text; it is always *represented* as something”. Thus, the aim of philosophical analysis should be the uncovering of these intended meanings. Yet such a notion seems to be more than anachronistic. It is nowadays almost fantastical to suggest that the role of literary theory is to uncover the design of the author. The author’s intentions or even the intended message do not seem fundamental to the ultimate meaning the work communicates. What emerges as more important is either to try to trace the conception of the literary work as it was seen and understood by the author’s contemporaries, or to investigate the meaning that could be possibly communicated for the modern man/woman. In her musings on literary form, Nussbaum (1992: 8-9) eventually discredits the idea of the author’s intention as fundamental for the interpretation of the text, yet she then implies that the communicability of literature depends on some universal message encapsulated in the text. At the same time, Nussbaum (1992: 9) is bold enough to say that reading of a literary text is like: “seeing shapes in the clouds, or in the fire. There the reader is free to see whatever his or her fancy dictates, and there are no limits on what she may see.” For an ordinary reader, the encounters with literature may indeed resemble telling fortunes from clouds or fire, though I would not personally venture to offend readers of literature by limiting them to fortune-tellers. However, the implications of such a conception of literature for literary scholars may be disastrous. Complete relativity of meaning for both readers and scholars seems to diminish the role of literature as a source of knowledge or teacher of moral attitudes. On the other hand, the naïve insistence on the universality of certain texts strips them of their historical and cultural context, cancelling their ideological and historical relevance. It seems that the insistence on the universal meaning of certain texts and context-free interpretation, supported only by abstract philosophical terms, is the most serious problem philosophical criticism has always faced. With the advent of new historicism such an accusation becomes even more poignant. For instance, though Cavell attempts to reinterpret Shakespeare as a sceptic, he barely touches upon the influences of Montaigne on Shakespeare. He (1987: 4) does acknowledge that such an intellectual interchange between these two Renaissance minds might have taken place, yet he claims that Shakespeare was a sceptic intuitively. Cavell (1987: 20-21) heralds the advent of scepticism in the Renaissance as a defining feature of modernity when he says:

[t]he catastrophe I anticipate, controversially, is of course the event of skepticism, conceived now as precipitating not alone a structure each individual is driven by, or resists, but as incorporating a public history in the modern period, in principle awaiting a historical explanation for its specific onset in, say, Shakespeare and Descartes.

He (1987: 21) also sees scepticism as a springboard for the development of singularity when he claims: "I want to say that with the birth of skepticism, hence of modern philosophy, a new intimacy, or wish for it, enters the world; call it privacy shared (not shared with the public, but from it)." Despite these insightful observations, his analysis of e.g. *King Lear* has no support in contemporary sources which could substantiate his arguments. Nussbaum's readings of literature, though interesting at certain points, also do not recourse to the contemporary conceptions of ideas she touches upon. In my opinion, this context-free study of literature is burdened with serious consequences. Along with the severing of history-and culture-specific meanings, having no recourse to source texts might turn literary criticism into a barren exercise in erudition. I would argue that the pursuit of parallels between various texts, as well as a detailed study of the aesthetic and formal features of texts, is not sufficient a role for literary theory. For the same reason I believe thus that plain philosophical analysis brings little value into literature studies. For example, if one looks at a fairly recent book of A. A. Ansari entitled *Shakespeare – the existentialist* (2009), one can be amazed by the wealth of parallels the author finds between Shakespeare's works and certain existentialist ideas. However, as much as I agree with Ansari that Shakespeare's plays invite the possibility of an existentialist analysis, I also do believe that the discussion of e.g. *Twelfth Night* without any reflection on the status of cross-dressing in the Elizabethan England blurs essential meanings of the play. I also do find the treatment of existentialism as a unified and coherent philosophical movement very problematic. There are, after all, divergences between Sartre and Heidegger or Jaspers and Camus, not to mention the fact that each philosopher associated with existentialism either denies his affinity with the *movement* or has a very specific perspective on the idea of existence. When one ponders on the position of Shakespeare in such a philosophical reading, one sees him as a single and individual author torn out of the circumstances in which his plays were created. Of course, I am not suggesting that there is no place for such an analysis within the sphere of literary criticism at all, but my feeling is that such studies perform slightly different functions; instead of trying to reach the minds of early moderns, they open our own minds to previously unknown intertextual pathways and build new intellectual bridges. Yet ultimately they do not teach us anything new about the period of which the texts they try to interpret come from. Hence, one is left with a very illusory idea that Shakespeare was a monument of individual and single genius, cancelling at the same time the collaborative and highly inspirational environment

which gave birth to Shakespeare, and of which Marlowe, Shakespeare's *shadow* precursor, was also a part. Obviously, such a perception of Shakespeare is still tempting to numerous scholars and highly appreciated by readers of their books as the popularity of e.g. Harold Bloom's *Shakespeare – the invention of the human* (1999), an astonishing piece of idolatry heralding Shakespeare as the father of humanity, beautifully testifies to. Despite the success of Bloom's book, which undoubtedly is due to Bloom's own brilliance of style and immense creative instinct, one should be aware of the shortcomings of announcing Shakespeare as a single and only genius. Not only does such an attitude force one into an epistemological void but also it risks rendering Shakespeare's contemporaries empty of all merit. Frahang Zabeeth's attempt at a philosophical account of Shakespeare is not entirely independent of the Renaissance context as he attempts to read Shakespeare along the lines of his contemporary as well as more modern philosophers. Nevertheless, by singling out Shakespeare as the bard, he runs into a trap of essentialism. In *Shakespeare – the philosophical poet* he posits:

[t]he Bard, to use Aristotle's idea of an ideal man, is *magnanimous*, a great-souled man. He is a Renaissance figure, surpassing by far his erudite contemporaries in his use of language, the music of words, in his enchantment with music, "the food of love", and in his understanding of human nature and culture those non-professional philosophers, the Italian Giordano Bruno, Erasmus of Rotterdam and Sir Thomas More of England, and those professional, talented and university educated playwrights and poets, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Philip Sidney and Robert Greene. Moreover, the internal evidence indicates the Bards' awareness of certain thoughts of Femocritus, the laughing philosopher [...], of Plato, the Sceptics, the Epicureans, and Machiavellians, even of Galen's medical theory and of Euclid's parallel axiom as well as the works of Erupides, Cicero, Plutarch, Seneca, Virgil, Horace, Ovid and Montaigne. (Zabeeth 1990: 5)

It seems that Shakespeare's extensive knowledge of contemporary and ancient literature and philosophy that Zabeeth is referring to is one of the convincing arguments in favour of seeing him as a philosophical poet. Yet what Zabeeth is doing, quite on purpose as it seems, is undoubtedly an act of pure bardolatry. To my mind, seeing Shakespeare as a solitary, unerring and almighty genius, by far surpassing his contemporaries, is a politically and ideologically naïve interpretative procedure. This is not to mention the fact that passing all-too confident a judgement on the genius of the author does not exactly belong to the sphere of literary criticism. In this dissertation I will be arguing for the perception of the Renaissance as a period of strong personalities, but I do believe that the strong individuals in both Shakespeare's and Marlowe's plays are the products of the period rather than some genius stroke of luck. Yet reading Shakespeare's works through the dominant intellectual trends of the period seems a reasonable basis for a philosophical analysis. In this sense Zabeeth is proposing an interpretative

procedure of more value than just pure philosophical analysis in the vein of Ansari. For this reason, I do value Zabeeth's (1990: 4) ambition to "exhibit these issues in detail", namely, Shakespeare's philosophical preoccupations like: "the concept of time", "Platonic division of the soul and the conflict of reason, passion and the will" etc. Yet in its abstraction it is a work which might very well come under the severe criticism of modern literary critics for the same reasons Zamir enumerates in his account of philosophical criticism.

The aforementioned vision of Shakespeare as a single genius as well as the illusion of the absolute universality of his works frequently emerge as the suspect elements of philosophical criticism which Tzachi Zamir points to. Philosophical readings by the virtue of pleading the truths of the chosen philosophical systems perpetrate the idea that humans have always been limited by universal, constant and unchangeable values. For instance, the application of a 20<sup>th</sup> century trend like e.g. existentialism in the case of Ansari, might be problematic because it suggests that the people contemporary to Shakespeare had exactly the same preoccupations as we moderns have. To use Zamir's (2007: 51) words: "[t]he philosophical critic errs by choosing a superficial framework for analysis, which is itself the outcome of ideological forces that the critic is compelled to strengthen." As Zamir underscores, this very myth of the continuity of values and traditions was dismantled by cultural materialists or new historicists (Zamir 2007: 50). Zamir underscores the accusations that anti-essentialists have long levelled at more traditional criticism. Philosophical analysis without recourse to context, history, or the philosophy of the times seems dry and redundant. As mentioned, it can often turn into an astonishing albeit irrelevant display of the author's erudition, a flexible but inconclusive play with methodologies and theories. As Zamir (2007: 51) aptly points out, even seemingly "universal" concepts like "love, honesty, truth, loyalty, parenting, obedience guilt and other notions [...] have been reflected upon without taking into consideration diffused conceptual and ideological networks." In other words, philosophers use "faulty morality" in order to uphold this "powerful cultural deception" (Zamir 2007: 52). It is hard not to see sense in the arguments Zamir recalls, especially in that they follow the anti-essentialist line of thinking already presented in the above paragraphs. However, if these arguments be true, then the discussion on the efficacy of philosophical analysis remains open. Zamir does not reject philosophical criticism on the grounds of which anti-essentialists talk. On the contrary, he follows Nussabum's idea of understanding literature as moral philosophy. I would definitely agree with him that finding faults in philosophical criticism is not a sufficient argument for its total abandonment. Rather it is a sign that an improvement or a correction of certain methods is necessary. An outward dismissal of philosophical analysis on the grounds of its political and ideological naiveté, to my mind, would be itself a sign of an enslavement to ideology. It would also signal that philosophers in general are not capable of seeing the

subtleties of anti-essentialist stances, that they apparently do not understand the complexity of the historical process and rely on the very banal and naïve idea of the so called *universal* values. I would argue that there is actually no one better equipped and prepared to unfold this complexity than a professional philosopher. The highly influential body of Marxist literary criticism, after all, can trace its beginnings within the philosophy departments. This too is not to mention the lasting influence of existentialism on world literature, which had also stimulated the development of literary theory long before the advent of new historicism and cultural materialism. Existentialists had pointed out the contingency of human beings before anti-essentialists realized the inevitability of ideological imprints on human existence. One can be critical of Ansari or Za-beeth, but the fact that some philosophers would be tempted into the lure of the universal is not a sufficient argument against philosophical analysis in general. I strongly believe that it is of crucial importance to make philosophy serve not only purely literary analysis but culture and history investigation too. So, in other words, as I will be frequently highlighting, in this analysis the aim is not to show how Shakespeare's or Marlowe's works illustrate the workability and functionality of Nietzsche's philosophy in the task of describing human nature, but rather how Nietzsche's philosophy combined with historicist or cultural investigation can be used to unfold mechanisms and schemata behind the Elizabethan and Jacobean minds, in the midst of the systems they functioned in. Just as new historicism and cultural materialism are not exhausted as interpretative methods, there is still space and, more importantly, a need for a philosophical analysis of Shakespeare's works – but a new method should be proposed, a method that does not relegate Shakespeare to some philosophical desert of his own genius, cancelling the contribution of his contemporaries (such as Marlowe) in the development of this collective phenomenon of the Renaissance. The method should account for the context of the period and simultaneously be more politically viable. In the following paragraphs I want to ponder on the possibility of combining philosophy and literature in this wider project of reading Shakespeare and Marlowe through Nietzsche.

#### 1.4. "New historical philosophising" – a combined method

As I have outlined above, both anti-humanist stances and philosophical criticism have their pitfalls. As Zamir (2007: 49, 55) points out, cultural materialism has an "anti-philosophical stance" because philosophy cannot answer to the forces implicit in literary works, while new historicists fail to "provide existential coordinates." Consequently, the hopeless flight from ideology results in the dismissal of the moral engagement of literature (Zamir 2007: 55). As already mentioned, literature for philosophical critics is a form of moral philosophy.

The basis of the appeal of such an attitude does not have to be universalism. There seems no reason to believe that the *dogma* of universal human nature absolutely explains the continuity of literary values. Anti-essentialists may be very right in their claims that the continuity of human perception and feeling is just an illusion. The belief in an intangible flame of God's being encapsulated in the human soul or a more rationalist claim of the existence of some Kantian categorical imperative that is common to mankind may for some constitute the anachronistic remains of the metaphysical guise of literature. This belief always halts one at the brink of reason, when one may look down at the chasm of metaphysics. Yet, as I would argue, if there is absolutely no continuity to human experience, one should wonder why plays written more than four hundred years ago still appeal to so many. That is exactly why I will insist, following Zamir, on the existence of a "trans-historical" element to human nature. If there were no such dimension to mankind, if mankind were indeed totally contingent, the comprehensibility between literatures and cultures of the past to us – moderns – would be lost forever. We do not keep on looking for new ways of recreating Shakespeare or the Renaissance experience because we do not understand them. On the contrary, people, when asked about Shakespeare, often claim that his plays touch at the very core of what to be human means. We need to recreate and reread the Renaissance exactly because we feel it to be human and thus appealing to our nature.

Zamir (2007: 58-59) suggests that this "trans-historical" element concerns our ability of feeling the personal suffering of those whom we see or read about. He (2007: 49, 55) claims that: "[l]iterature is sometimes a branch of moral philosophy. And when it is seen in this way, it can, in unique ways, further a detailed understanding of the suffering of the weak. It can create an experimental understanding of the workings of power and the limitations of self-articulation that power creates." Indeed, it might be so that certain texts do stir more intense feelings as the tragedy's primeval function is to awaken fear and pity. However, arousing empathy does not seem to be literature's exclusive function. Firstly, this is because the sufferers are not always weak, while power does not always belong to those entirely evil. Secondly, empathy cannot be possibly a sole moral function of literature as morality is not only empathy-driven. I do see such a notion as wishful thinking, which moreover delegates us into Kantian dialectics again. The apparent "universal" or "trans-historical" empathy would not exactly explain why we find Iago, Macbeth or Tamburlaine so fascinating. The source of our fascination does not seem to stem from our feeling for their victims but rather from the very core of their *evil* passions. So, to my mind, this "trans-historical" dimension of literature goes beyond the feelings of pity or empathy, it rather encapsulates the whole plethora of emotions comprehensible to humanity. There may be no universal understanding of truth, honesty and even love as these might be ideologically and socially determined. Such values

can be conceptualized differently across cultures and ages. However, the emotions of fear, pain, suffering, as well as joy, longing and desire are undeniably shared by all human beings. The social or political circumstances of their expression as well as reasons behind them might again be predetermined, yet the instincts themselves remain a common human denominator. Their explanation is by no means metaphysical but rather physiological. Already Charles Darwin devoted *The expression of emotion in man and animals* (1872) to the discussion of the evolutionary nature of emotions. What seems most crucial is that Darwin combined the expression of human emotions to man's descent from other creatures, thereby making emotion a common feature of virtually all existence. He wrote that:

[n]o doubt as long as man and all other animals are viewed as independent creations, an effectual stop is put to our natural desire to investigate as far as possible the causes of Expression. By this doctrine, anything and everything can be equally well explained; and it has proved as pernicious with respect to Expression as to every other branch of natural history. With mankind some expressions, such as the bristling of the hair under the influence of extreme terror, or the uncovering of the teeth under that of furious rage, can hardly be understood, except on the belief that man once existed in a much lower and animal-like condition. The community of certain expressions in distinct though allied species, as in the movements of the same facial muscles during laughter by man and by various monkeys, is rendered somewhat more intelligible, if we believe in their descent from a common progenitor. (Darwin 2012, loc. 228-234)

Nietzsche, as Darwin's near contemporary, was familiar with his works and grappled with Darwin's discoveries in the realm of the natural history of man in his own philosophy. Nietzsche might have seen the evolutionary theory as a potential source of a great crisis of man, but he never openly questioned its scientific validity. Yet he was also very conscious of the political/ ideological determinations of human morality and thus he came up with his own explanation of the drives that push both man and other life creations to action. In the case of man, Nietzsche's will to power explains both his social as well as more biological functions. So Nietzsche's theory of the will to power might be seen as an umbrella term for those emotions or instincts that seem to be shared by humans now and back in the past. This widened perspective accounts for the universal which anti-essentialists fear so intensely, but it also makes room for an acute realization of the ideology behind social behaviours. Thus, it seems to be a more effective tool of literary analysis than the notion of universality Zamir seeks. Nietzsche's will to power is also, in my opinion, a potential point of intersection between philosophical criticism and the more recent ideology-oriented developments in theory. For instance, Raymond Williams' (1989: 22) idea of "structures of feeling" provides also an umbrella term with "a relation between social

and literary facts". Williams (1989: 21-22) sees certain "mental structures" within the works of groups of writers and artists as demonstrations of behaviours collectively created by individuals. Williams' vision of individuals within society, precursory for cultural materialism, though of Marxian origin, turns slightly into a Nietzschean direction. His perception "both of alternative and of oppositional culture" being a product of the struggle between emergent and residual elements resembles the Nietzschean Dionysian/Appolonian dichotomy. So as can be seen, Nietzschean perspectives build intellectual bridges between chiefly materialist ideas as well as philosophically motivated analyses.

The reconciliation of properly edged universalism in the form of a commonly shared instinct – the will to power with an awareness of the political/social limitations of an individual – is not only possible but actually captured by Nietzschean philosophy. Nietzsche might agree with Dollimore's (1984: 251) "materialist conception of subjectivity, on which, in so far as it retains the concept of essence, construes it not as that which is eternally fixed but as social potential materialising within limiting historical conditions". Obviously this "essence" would not be understood in metaphysical, Kantian terms but exactly as a potentiality, a possibility to overcome, transfigure and transcend. The core of the anti-essentialist argument seems to trace back to an earlier existentialist tenet, inspired by Nietzsche. According to Jean Paul Sartre (1966: 289, 290), a human being really lacks any stable preconceived essence, just like anti-essentialists claim. Yet for Sartre, like for other existentialists, man is what he makes of himself. So the lack of essence is inextricably linked with transcendence, which is the process of making oneself. Nietzsche calls for this creative transfiguration of oneself when he says: "*What does your conscience say?* – 'You should become who you are'" (Nietzsche 2007b: 152). In their obsessive fear of universalism, anti-essentialists very often forget about the potential of "becoming" as universally human. In the idea of transcendence, understood as a potential for ever becoming anew, a basis of the will to power, I see the constancy which philosophical critics should seek when approaching the moral dimension of literature. The experience of ever becoming is a shared human element which, when successfully portrayed, makes good literature appealing, even in the face of the passing of time or moving across cultures. The same transcendence is no barrier to the reading of literature amidst the political and ideological awareness of its production. On the contrary, it is in the sphere of human social relations where over-coming takes place, so the historical/social and political context is necessary in order to grasp transcendence itself. Nietzsche focuses on the potential of the individual and this is an element, as I will be arguing, that approximates him to the Renaissance experience. For instance, when one looks at Machiavelli's conception of *virtù*, a dynamic drive shaping a successful individual as presented in his *Prince*, one has a feeling that the passing parallel which forms in one's head might bear more of an affinity to Nietzsche's will to power than actually meets the eye. So one may observe that Nietzsche's

philosophical load makes it a solid basis for a new interpretation of the period and its key texts. Hugh Grady, in his article entitled *On the need for a differentiated theory of (early) modern subjectivity*, calls for a proposal of a new method in the light of the insufficiency of the existing methodologies. He wants to remind scholars that:

every self is an outcome of complex psycho-historical processes, and while the selves of specific cultures and societies share socially constructed discourses and ideologies, they are by no means identical or interchangeable, differing significantly through both historical change and individual variations within historical epochs. Our accounts of the history of the self should accordingly be nuanced and open to the complexity of historical and individual differences. (Grady 2000: 41)

Because a combined method, in its historicism, emerges as sensitive to ideological nuances, but at the same time lends itself to the investigation of morality, it seems to have the potential of bringing new insights into the study of the early modern and thus Shakespeare and Marlowe.

The combined method I would like to propose will incorporate the ideas from the vast body of Nietzschean philosophy. However, I intend to capitalize on the key notions of Nietzscheism, namely: the will to power, self-overcoming, *amor fati*, the eternal return and, finally, the conception of *der Übermensch* (the overman). I see these notions as most appropriate in the investigation of the Renaissance identity marked by ambition. The Nietzschean genealogy of morality will provide a mental framework for my understanding of Shakespearean and Marlovian characters. The valuations of certain Shakespearean and Marlovian characters can be, in my opinion, traced back to an element that is beyond reason. After all, Shakespearean tragedies like *Macbeth* or *Othello* thrive on a single excessive passion that burns the protagonist and leads him to his downfall. Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* is undoubtedly also pushed by an unexplained drive towards further conquests. Because, as mentioned, this dissertation is supposed to be historically and politically sensitive, I am determined to read the aspirations of these characters through the lens of contemporary source texts. Finally, as there seem to exist some intersections between Nietzsche and the materialist line of thinking, I want to exploit these relations to the advantage of my analysis. For these reasons I deem the fruits of materialist analyses of such distinguished scholars like Raymond Williams, Jonathan Dollimore, Catherine Belsey or earlier Michel Foucault or even Karl Marx well worth incorporating within my line of thinking and collating with Friedrich Nietzsche. This is why I see Williams' (1989: 22) "structures of feeling" as well as his conception of culture as very useful. The same applies to a paradigm of subversion/containment featuring in Stephen Greenblatt's (1985: 292) writings. Martin Warner (2010: 115), recalling Plato's banishment of poets from his *Republic*, speaks of "opening an incipient divide into a gulf." By this gulf he means obviously the division that has arisen between philosophy and litera-

ture, a gulf which turned them into separate disciplines whose meetings always have to be negotiated in the form of such lengthy methodological essays as this one. However, as has been demonstrated by numerous examples, the divide between these branches frequently emerges as superficial. I would suggest that it is a divide between the methodologies of their respective studies that often appear irreconcilable. This dissertation attempts to change this perception by its widely-understood interdisciplinary edge. In the era when philosophical criticism heads more into a direction of linguistics (what the fruits of analytic philosophy of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the proposals of philosophers of language in the second half best demonstrate) I am more interested in such a wide perspective that becomes both the reading of culture and philosophising at the same time.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, I would like my dissertation to take a mixed stance of “philosophical cultural materialism” or “philosophical historicism”. In the simplest words possible, it is to be a linear equation in which philosophy, literature and a wider context of history and politics constitute constants. The solution of this equation hopefully emerges as a deepened and new perspective on Renaissance valuations in the plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe. It is maybe a misnomer to refer to the language of mathematics, its being a science of precision resulting in no loose ends. It seems the case that with disciplines that are more elusive, like literature and philosophy, it is different. As Nietzsche jotted down in one of his notebooks during his long reflective walks: “[a]gainst that positivism which stops before phenomena, saying ‘there are only facts’, I should say: no, it is precisely facts that do not exist, only interpretations...” (Nietzsche, as quoted in Kaufmann 1988: 458). Since there are indeed no facts but only interpretations, especially in the realm of philosophy and literature, Nietzsche is right in naming his approach “perspectivism”. The combined method that is intended, also possibly termed as “new historical philosophising”, is to welcome a whole spectrum of interpretative angles. Hence I see it as an expression of Nietzschean perspectivism, which I would like to make a crowning feature of my own investigation. Nietzsche was no systematic thinker but rather an experiment-loving inciter. Doubting the effectiveness of a system as an interpretative method, I also commit this work to the power of literary experiment. Though the aim of this dissertation is not to incite, the interpretative experiments I propose will hopefully bring new perspectives on the issues under scrutiny. Once more, I deem it significant to reiterate that combined experimental analysis, tailored to political sensitivity and historical context, has a greater chance of capturing the very delicate equilibrium of what is shared and common to human experience between what is now and the Renaissance. Speaking of

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<sup>9</sup> For more details on the past and present state of philosophical analysis, see: Warner, Martin. 2010. *Philosophy and literature: yesterday, today and tomorrow*, in: Schroeder, Severin (ed.). 2010. *Philosophy of literature*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell. Warner, unlike Zamir, focuses solely on the intersection between literature and philosophy. He presents a very systematic account of influential stances.

Nietzschean perspectivism, it now seems necessary to turn our attention solely to Nietzschean thought for a moment. Just like the intersection of literature and philosophy emerges as a varied and sometimes confusing body of thought, so is Nietzsche's philosophical heritage. Hence, this spectrum also requires a short introduction before the plunge into the early modern may be possible.

### 1.5. "Whose Nietzsche?" – on the multiplicity of nietzschanisms

"New historical philosophising" – or the combined method that I have proposed as a methodological path taken for this dissertation – is intended to limit the vast scope of inquiry which opens up whenever one encounters the intersection of literature and philosophy, on the one hand, and broadly understood studies on the early-modern, on the other. The so-called "Nietzschean philosophy" is meant to provide a philosophical background to the analysis. Nevertheless, the idea of exploiting Nietzsche as an interpretative key poses some difficulties. First of all, the term "Nietzschean philosophy" is by no means clear when one bears in mind the troubled history of Nietzsche's texts. Naturally, the instability of Nietzschean works poses problems for scholars not only due to technical or historical mishaps but also because of the elusiveness and original style of his philosophy, so indebted to the power of metaphor and aesthetic expression. This specific highly metaphorical depth produces a multiplicity of responses on the part of scholars and philosophers. So on top of down-to-earth scholarship problems, one also has to bear in mind the fact that Nietzschean philosophy is no longer equal solely to Nietzsche's philosophy as the term nietzschanism (alternatively Nietzscheanism, Nietzscheism) encompasses both the body of interpretations of Nietzsche, and independent reflections inspired by Nietzsche's writings of such diverse authors as Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray or Sarah Kofman. All these elements call here for a brief consideration. It seems that an encounter with the "dynamite" Nietzsche must be a plunge into an ocean of texts. Any creative use of these oceanic waves first requires making decisions as to the selection of directions and authors.

Nietzsche's works, the so called "Nietzsche canon", constitute several published works of substantial length which he published himself, works finished before his breakdown in 1889 but suppressed for some time and published posthumously, a substantial book *Wille zur Macht* [Will to power], edited and compiled from Nietzsche's notes by his sister, and finally his so called *Nachlass* – a huge jumble of notes accumulated over the years, some used in rewritten forms in his published works while others were abandoned in the creative process (Kaufmann 1974: 76). The precedence and importance of these texts has long been an object of hot debates between scholars. Some scholars

give precedence to the published material (e.g. Kaufmann, Hollingdale) while others turn their attention to the unpublished notes (e.g. Heidegger, Klossowski). Some study both, or make an informed selection of notes or quotes for their own particular philosophical ends (e.g. Derrida). It is thus not difficult to see that one can speak of a certain dispersion of meaning in the Nietzschean texts. David Pickus (2007: 6) summarizes this situation by saying that: “[f]rom the standpoint of the twenty-first century, when Nietzsche is securely established as a scholarly subject, it is easy to forget how unstable ‘Nietzsche’ was to the reading public in the first half of the twentieth century, as he was, more often than not, ‘packaged’ in a way that was not conducive to concentrating on his writings as a whole.” The instability of Nietzschean texts partly stems from the highly non-academic activity of his sister Elizabeth, who after his break-down became his sole guardian and an exclusive owner of Nietzsche’s manuscript notes.<sup>10</sup> She withheld unpublished though finished works like *The Antichrist* and *Ecce Homo* until 1895 and 1908 respectively. Instead, with the help of Nietzsche’s friend and secretary Heinrich Köselitz (known as Peter Gast), she presented her own selection of Nietzsche’s notes (which he himself by the way discarded) as his opus magnum – *The Will to Power* (1901). As Kaufmann (1972: 7) claims: “[t]he publication of *The Will to Power* as Nietzsche’s final and systematic work blurred the distinction between his works and his notes and created the false impression that the aphorisms in his books are of a kind with these disjointed jottings.” Moreover, it seems that it is Frau Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche who is responsible for inciting the growth of the Nietzsche legend and further misappropriations of his works (Kaufmann 1972: 4). Though the name of Nietzsche has been already disassociated from the connections with Nazism by the efforts of Kaufmann, Jaspers, as well as French philosophers like Georges Bataille or Giles Deleuze, while his *Nachlass* was published in its entirety in a joint project to publish the complete works of Nietzsche by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, the “instability” of his texts remains a crucial aspect of Nietzsche scholarship.<sup>11</sup> This might be so because Nietzsche’s distinctive style, despite its vivid imagery and biting directness, more often covers rather than reveals meanings – hence the multiplicity of responses.

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<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note that the instability of Nietzsche’s texts slightly resembles the instability of Shakespearean drama, which on more than one occasion exists in numerous textual versions. Of course, the circumstances are radically different. The distortion of Nietzschean works is partly due to the efforts of his sister and partly to the selective and biased attitude of some of the ideologists willing to appropriate his philosophy to political ends. Shakespearean textual instability stems from the nature and role of Elizabethan theatre, in which a text of a play was not considered a literary achievement, nor was the position of the single author recognized as important.

<sup>11</sup> For more details on the Colli/Montinari project, see Hollingdale, R.J. 2001. *Nietzsche*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 294-298.

This hardly graspable nature of Nietzschean philosophy is aptly summarized by Jacques Derrida in an interview with Richard Beardsworth entitled *Nietzsche and the machine*, where Derrida (2002: 218) claims that: “[t]he closer one is to ‘Nietzsche’, the more one is aware that there is no such thing as the Nietzsche-text. This text demands interpretation in the same way that it argues that there is no such thing as an entity, only interpretations – active and reactive – of that entity.” If, indeed, as Derrida claims, there is no single core to the Nietzschean body of texts, the multitude of interpretative efforts on the part of scholars should not be a source of any wonder. Yet, knowing that philosophy, as a founding branch of science, usually seeks systematized and more definite conceptualizations of beings and phenomena, the instability of Nietzsche’s output is often a source of frustration for scholars and thinkers. Even such avid readers of Nietzsche as Pierre Klossowski at moments yield to this philosophical despair resulting from Nietzsche’s elusiveness. Klossowski (2005: 67) reads Nietzsche as a first modern philosopher, who returns philosophy to the bodily experience. In a sense, he suggests that Nietzsche cannot be ultimately interpreted or understood completely, as even seemingly reasonable processes are also merely impulses of the body. Beings, as accumulations of their impulses, need to accept their “opacity”. The very title of Wolfgang Müller-Lauter’s book *Nietzsche: his philosophy of contradictions and the contradictions of his philosophy* (1971) suggests that such an “opacity” exists within the body of Nietzsche’s text. Yet Müller-Lauter does not suggest that the wealth of perspectives, often seen as insurmountable contradictions in Nietzsche, is a barrier in the pursuit of philosophical meaning. Ciano Aydin explains that Müller-Lauter’s reading of Nietzsche is important because:

it made room for many other, diverse Nietzsche interpretations. His account of the meaning and worth of the multiplicity and struggle in Nietzsche’s philosophy prompted many authors not only to come up with a different and better Nietzsche interpretation but also to elaborate further on themes that Nietzsche introduced. Furthermore, Müller-Lauter’s insight that we should not take Nietzsche on his ‘word’ but should understand his views within the particular context in which they are used has greatly contributed to a more adequate reading of Nietzsche’s texts. Many presumed irregularities in Nietzsche’s philosophy often seem to be the result of the equation of concept with word. (Aydin 2011: 101)

So, as one can see, when dealing with Nietzschean text one cannot take words at their face value as they form a dense mesh of metaphor built with allusion, allegory and symbol, but also, on top of all the others, ancient topoi requiring erudition. What is more, beside the allusions and metaphors one finds that Nietzsche’s style is teasing and sometimes almost obnoxiously direct. His provocative stylistic manner lets some forget that Nietzsche aims at a reevaluation and thus his message is often based on the reversal of what is actually being

said. Unlike most modern-day scholars who have “redeemed” Nietzsche, Leo Strauss (1988: 57) blames this intentionally allusive but simultaneously often obnoxious language of contempt, that is so characteristic for Nietzsche, for the exploitation of his concepts. To my mind, Strauss seems to be saying that, in a sense, Nietzsche himself invited misunderstanding of his philosophy. Strauss himself had researched medieval Jewish and Arabic philosophy whose authors resorted to esoteric writing. As Mathew Sharp and Daniel Townsend (2011: 133) write: “[t]he premise of esoteric writing is that the author writes multi-layered texts. On the surface of an esoteric text are edifying teachings available to all readers who stumble upon the book, teachings which accommodate the author’s positions to the prejudices of the age. However, this esoteric layer serves to conceal the author’s true, and often heterodox, views.” If Strauss rightly sensed Nietzsche as an esoteric writer, as Sharp and Townsend would have us believe, then even the subtitles of e.g. *Thus spoke Zarathustra – a book for all and none* or *Human all too human – a book for free spirits* – are not surprising at all. They themselves herald the esoteric content of the books. However, when speaking of the esoteric Nietzsche one sees that the surface structure is far from “edifying teachings”, it is rather built on biting criticism. Only behind the veil of loathing hides the actual energy and affirmation of life. Yet the problem is that many would not go beyond the surface and would remain forever in the sphere of loathing. So in this sense I agree with Strauss that Nietzsche is partly at fault when it comes to the understanding of his writings. Very often Nietzsche criticizes, using bitter *ad hominem* arguments, but at the same time gives few testable or viable alternatives. Then again, it is also worth observing that the lack of alternatives does not cancel the righteousness of Nietzsche’s criticism as such.

As can be seen, the confusing nature of Nietzschean scholarship emerges already at the very basic level of approaching the texts. The instability of Nietzsche’s writing along with his elusive style make an attempt at a unified and single reading of his body of thought really problematic. On the other hand, though, for the inquisitive minds of philosophers and scholars Nietzsche constitutes an irresistible temptation and an ambitious challenge. So for professional and experienced thinkers Nietzsche becomes an intellectual imperative. No wonder, the number and significance of these respective nietzschanisms is growing rapidly. However, though the field of potential inquiry widens constantly, for someone who wants to methodically utilize the heritage of nietzschanism, the situation might emerge as the infinite cosmic black hole. In the midst of such varied interpretations one is faced with a need to make a choice – or, in other words, an academic commitment. Ashley Woodward gives a very telling and apt title to the introduction to the collection of articles on the interpretation and reception of Nietzsche’s philosophy – *Interpreting Nietzsche*. Woodward (2011: 1) opens her discussion on the multiplicity of nietzschanisms by posing a question: “Whose Nietzsche?”. This title question captures the es-

sence of conflicting emotions that anyone approaching Nietzsche for academic purposes inescapably feels. Having realized that there is indeed no single Nietzsche, one has to choose whose Nietzscheanism to follow. So there is no wonder that for a young scholar investigating the early modern period and an *upstart* philosopher, the multiplicity of stances and diversity of Nietzscheanisms is a source of wonder but also a kind of a scholarly angst. A crucial question looms on the horizon: how can one put nietzscheanism through a creative sieve in order to choose what benefits the study of Shakespeare? In order to make an informed methodological choice, it seems necessary to cast a cursory look at various relationships scholars have developed with the Nietzschean text.

Numerous scholars who approach Nietzsche are themselves philosophers of their own right who creatively tackle his philosophy by challenging it and *improving* it or, in other words, building up on what is left unfinished or unexplained in his writings. In these cases Nietzsche often becomes a philosophical companion or a springboard for further, deepened reflection. Georges Bataille (1976: 640) claimed that Nietzsche was his “main company on earth” and thus Bataille’s philosophy is, in many respects, more than just an explication of a Nietzschean text but rather a continuation of Nietzsche’s thought. Giles Deleuze’s seminal *Nietzsche and philosophy*, though very systematic, is nonetheless hard to grasp for non-expert readers. As Jon Roffe (2011: 67) explains “it’s often difficult to know exactly who is speaking. In the case of *Nietzsche and philosophy*, for example, is it Nietzsche himself (that is, is Deleuze merely presenting Nietzsche’s own views)? Is it Nietzsche refracted through a Deleuzian lens? Or perhaps Deleuze’s own views, dressed in a Nietzschean framework?”. So, as can be seen, both Bataille’s and Deleuze’s readings are intensely personal. As it seems, both philosophers aim at a better understanding of Nietzsche’s philosophy but, at the same time, they provide their own interpretation of his works. Their philosophical output, similarly to other nietzscheanists like Jacques Derrida or Luce Irigaray, constitutes a creative metamorphosis of Nietzsche which often serves further and separate philosophical goals. Philosophers of Derrida’s, Bataille’s or Irigaray’s standing often approach Nietzsche in order to tackle his controversial heritage. One could even suspect that, more than often, they personally attempt at surpassing the power of his philosophy. As David Pickus (2007: 5) suggests, following Nietzsche’s own “psychohistory”, the history of philosophy and its scholarship, including secondary literature on Nietzsche, are also subject to the mechanisms of human psychology and thus expressions of the will to power. Anyhow, the works which aim at going beyond Nietzsche, insightful as they can be, do not seem systematic enough to constitute a solid methodological basis for the use of Nietzscheanism as a functional tool in literary analysis. As it appears one should be on the look-out for those monographs that aim specifically at Nietzsche explication with maximum objectivity.

When the methodological field of inquiry is thus limited three names of distinguished philosophers/scholars come to mind, namely, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers and finally Walter Kaufmann. These three authors form, as opposed to French thinkers like Derrida or Bataille, what I would call, the German wing of Nietzscheanism. Heidegger and Jaspers were both independent philosophers linked with existentialism and they definitely read Nietzsche in the spirit of existentialism. Martin Heidegger will definitely forever remain the first thinker who heralded Nietzsche a philosopher (Ryan 2011: 5). As Sean Ryan (2011: 5) writes: “[w]ith Heidegger’s interpretation, Nietzsche no longer appears solely as a psychologist, moralist, and cultural critic, as he was to previous thinkers such as Wilhelm Dilthey, not a precursor to the ideologies of National Socialism, as he was to official Nazi interpreters such as Heidegger’s contemporary Alfred Bäumler, but a thinker of the same rank as Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Hegel.” So, the world owns the reintroduction of the Nietzschean canon to the mainstream of philosophy to Martin Heidegger, who himself confronted and tackled Nietzsche throughout his entire career as a scholar and philosopher. Heidegger (1998: 9) grounds the complexity of Nietzschean philosophy in its affinity with the plight of modernity and he is the first to recognize the pitfalls of mythologizing or, quite the contrary, defaming Nietzsche without the proper understanding of his thought. Heidegger’s main line of thinking about Nietzsche concerns the question of metaphysics.<sup>12</sup> Heidegger reads Nietzsche as the last great metaphysician, thus initiating a long-standing debate on whether Nietzsche still belongs within the sphere of metaphysics, is ranked somewhere in between or is long past metaphysics. Though ground-breaking, Heidegger’s position has been numerously contested by other scholars. This is partly due to Heidegger’s vision of metaphysics in Nietzsche, but predominantly because of his controversial choice of material to work on. In the beginning of his two-volume book on Nietzsche, Heidegger (1998: 9,13) announces that his aim is to describe the basic stance of Nietzsche (*Grundstellung*) on the Western history of thought, at the same time suggesting that this Nietzschean stance never assumed its final shape as Nietzsche did not manage to formulate his opus magnum. For this reason, Heidegger treats the unpublished notes of Nietzsche as a basis of the hidden, not fully conscious message of the Nietzschean text. This unfortunate decision on the part of Heidegger is a source of the greatest criticism levelled at the philosopher, whose take on Nietzsche is thus treated as “a singular misreading” (Ryan 2011: 5). I would argue that such an attitude does

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<sup>12</sup> For more details, see: Heidegger, Martin. [1961] 1998. *Nietzsche tom 1* [Nietzsche vol. 1]. (translated by Andrzej Gniazdowski, Piotr Graczyk, Wawrzyniec Rymkiewicz, Mateusz Werner, Cezary Wodziński) Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN. The Part entitled *Will to power as art*, Chapter: *Nietzsche as a metaphysical thinker* (7-11) and Part entitled *Will to power as knowledge*, Chapter: *Nietzsche as a thinker of fulfilling metaphysics* (475-482) (translated by me from the Polish version of Heidegger’s book).

not do justice to Heidegger though I do agree with Ryan (2011: 9) when he claims that: “the decision to treat as pivotal a collection of notes not published during Nietzsche’s lifetime is a refusal to take seriously neither Nietzsche’s achievement as a writer nor the general problems for philosophy of the question of style.” It does not seem right to treat as central the notes that Nietzsche himself discarded in order to work on other subjects. Also, knowing Nietzsche’s almost obsessive attention to details when it comes to stylistic choices it seems highly improper to give precedence to notes that Nietzsche kept on revising and rewriting. Despite its shortcomings, Heidegger’s monograph nevertheless constitutes a helpful commentary on the unpublished material and opens a discussion on the unrealized potential of the Nietzschean philosophy. In a sense it starts the on-going dialogue with Nietzsche, later taken up by Jaspers and Kaufmann.

It indeed seems interesting to look at Kaufmann’s and Jaspers’s monographs together as their two “big books” were forever linked through a personal strife between the authors.<sup>13</sup> Kaufmann’s *Nietzsche: philosopher, psychologist, Antichrist* published in 1950 and Jaspers’s *Nietzsche: Einführung in das Verständnis seines Philosophierens* [Nietzsche: An Introduction to the understanding of his philosophical activity] from 1935, despite their relative age, remain among the most influential, still currently used, monographs. Their advantage over other works on Nietzsche lies in the fact that, as Pickus (2007: 5) writes, they “challenged the reader not to settle for anything less than a full *Auseinandersetzung* with Nietzsche’s work and personality”. As mentioned, Heidegger’s work places Nietzsche predominantly in the sphere of metaphysics, the area that was especially close to Heidegger’s heart.<sup>14</sup> Jaspers and Kaufmann “clearly played decisive roles in allowing Nietzsche to be studied as a whole” (Pickus 2007: 6). Moreover, as Pickus (2007: 8) highlights: “Jaspers and Kaufmann [...] although certainly philosophers in their own right, aimed to balance their own philosophical horizons with efforts to let Nietzsche speak directly. Their books, consequently, have a different character than Heidegger’s”. Their books are living proof of the immense work both scholars devoted to ordering

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<sup>13</sup> To trace the details of the conflict between Kaufmann and Jaspers concerning reading and understanding Nietzsche, see: Pickus, David. 2007. “Wishes of the heart: Walter Kaufmann, Karl Jaspers, and disposition in Nietzsche scholarship”, *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, No. 33, 5-24.

<sup>14</sup> As a basic introduction to the Heideggerian vision of metaphysics it is worth recommending his short essay entitled “The way back into the ground of metaphysics” that was translated into English by Walter Kaufmann and published in his anthology of existentialist texts *Existentialism – from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. See: Heidegger, Martin. [1949] 1966. “The way back into the ground of metaphysics”, in: Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism – from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books. 206-220. Kaufmann’s anthology is one of the first and most influential works of this kind introducing existentialist texts to the English-speaking reader.

and organizing the Nietzschean canon, including making amends to it after years of exploitation and distortion, as well as efforts to elucidate the key aspects of Nietzschean philosophy. As Pickus (2007: 5) claims: “[w]ithout the efforts of Karl Jaspers and Walter Kaufmann, serious Nietzsche scholarship could have been set back at least a generation”. However, it has to be noted that the two books constitute “rich, yet conflicting, readings of Nietzsche’s work” (Pickus 2007: 6). So, the status of both monographs inescapably underscores the elusiveness of Nietzsche’s writing. The authors very well knew about it and warned their readers about the deceptive accessibility of Nietzsche’s writings. Kaufmann (1974: 72) famously posited that:

Nietzsche’s books are easier to read but harder to understand than those of almost any other thinker. If we ignore for the moment the symbolism of Zarathustra, we find that practically every sentence and every page of his writings presents far less trouble than the involved and technical periods of Kant, Hegel, and even Shoupenhauer. Not even the British Empiricists would seem to have written more lucidly. Yet grave difficulties are encountered when one tries seriously to follow Nietzsche’s thought. As soon as one attempts to penetrate beyond the clever epigrams and well turned insults to grasp their consequences and to coordinate them, one is troubled.

Kaufmann quite explicitly warns against a too hearty and uncritical embrace of Nietzsche’s writings, and keeps on reminding his readers to try to see Nietzsche globally by meticulously reading his entire output in the original chronological order. Jaspers (1997b: 9) seems to agree with Kaufmann when he compares Nietzsche’s works to a mighty rock wall blasted into more or less hewed stones, yet lacking signs of any monument being erected out of these stones. The fact that the Nietzsche canon lies thus like a huge mountain of debris does not mean, according to Jaspers, that it lacks building potential. The bits and pieces can form a whole though they connect ambiguously (Jaspers 1997b: 9). Jaspers (1997a: 4), like Kaufmann, tries to persuade his readers to read Nietzsche as a whole rather than “yield to the fascination of the almost countless details, or capriciously and fortuitously select this or that item”. However, Jaspers insistence on Nietzsche’s ambiguity is one of the points of contention between him and Kaufmann.

Jaspers (1997b: 365), in the conclusion to his book, compares Nietzsche’s sentences to a mosaic that one can play with endlessly and with a degree of tendentious bias. Though Jaspers (1997b: 365) points out that there is a limit to this endless appropriation of Nietzsche as there is a potential for a coherent whole, he nevertheless seems to suggest that the very whole itself lies beyond Nietzsche’s text and is something that philosophers and scholars, in their collective work, can achieve. In other words, according to Jaspers, Nietzsche’s body of thought alone is wrought with deficiencies and internal contradictions. Consequently, it can easily be misused, which is actually what happened in the case of Nazi appropriation.

Though Kaufmann (1980: 304-307) himself also partly blames Nietzsche's style for the misuse of his philosophy, he could never agree with Jaspers that Nietzsche's works were contradictory. It is this "self-contradictoriness of Nietzsche", as Pickus (2007: 9) puts it, that becomes the bone of contention between the two scholars. In an insightful chapter entitled "Jaspers' relation to Nietzsche" in his seminal book *From Shakespeare to existentialism* Kaufmann develops biting and passionate criticism of Jaspers, rejecting both his fundamental premise and his research method. As Kaufmann writes:

[...] Jaspers admittedly discounts Nietzsche's philosophy as opposed to his 'philosophising'; he refuses to take seriously overman and recurrence, will to power and sublimation, or any other definite concept. [...] Jaspers fails, his intention notwithstanding, to introduce us to Nietzsche's philosophising because he employs an untenable method. He makes no distinction, either in his references or in his evaluation, between Nietzsche's finished works and his fragments and notebooks scribbblings; generally he makes no distinction between early or late passages either, but disregards the dates and thus necessarily also Nietzsche's intellectual development. (Kaufmann 1980: 311)

So, as Kaufmann (1980: 305-306) puts it, Jaspers intentionally "sets us whirling". However, this "whirling", according to Kaufmann is not Nietzschean but rather Jaspersian in nature. As it seems, Jaspers' fascination with Nietzschean supposed "ambiguity" might be driven back to Jaspers' own background as an existentialist, or to be more precise the *Existenz* philosopher.<sup>15</sup> Kaufmann (1980: 305) observes that existentialists were in general fascinated by the contingency of existence and its inherently contradictory nature, and thus ambiguity became Jaspers' own premise to investigate Nietzsche. So, according to Jaspers' research method one should dig deep into Nietzsche to uncover the necessary contradictions which are inescapably part of life itself. In this light, Kaufman emerges a more reliable Nietzschean scholar, who, being also an important theoretician of existentialism, is capable of distancing himself from the texts under scrutiny. So, being an outsider, Kaufmann remains relatively objective, always leaving out his own philosophical stance. Thus, in my opinion, despite the passage of time and the arrival of new studies of Nietzsche's philosophy, it is his monograph that remains an authoritative secondary source. Obviously, if, following David Pickus, monographs on Nietzsche are indeed always written within a hidden agenda, then Kaufmann's books are not fault-free.

Alexander Nehamas (1985: 15), an author of a fairly recent study *Nietzsche – life as literature* – points out that Kaufmann was "determined to

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<sup>15</sup> For more information, see: Jaspers, Karl. [1941] 1966. "Existenzphilosophie", in: Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism – from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books. 131-205. The essay provided in Kaufmann's anthology constitutes a comprehensive yet accessible introduction to Jaspers' own philosophy of *Existenz*.

show that Nietzsche's aphorisms are ultimately unified, that behind them 'there is a whole philosophy.' [...] Kaufmann's is an effort to find an underlying unity, at least of method and attitude". Hence, Kaufmann's methodological premise is fundamentally opposite to Jaspers and other existentialists. His aim at a communication of the total coherence of the Nietzschean message seems to result in his negligence to cater for certain unclear aspects like e.g. the feminine in Nietzsche, as well as a degree of relative idealization of certain Nietzschean concepts.<sup>16</sup> Kaufmann's Nietzsche eventually emerges a refined humanist, which, when reading Nietzsche, at moments seems to be counter-intuitive. Scholars of the second half of the twentieth century, including Nehemas, more often contest the neat and ordered vision of Kaufmann. Nevertheless, for an unprofessional philosopher and reader of Nietzsche Kaufmann's book provides necessary structure and order for the huge ocean of Nietzschean texts. Being aware of Kaufmann's slight idealization, a responsible and cautious reader will make the most of his elucidation of Nietzsche. Simultaneously, having scrutinized the highly diversified plain of Nietzschean scholarship and having realized the multiplicity of potential responses and relations philosophers and scholars develop with Nietzsche, one always comes back to Kaufmann's organizing principle ruling his Nietzsche monograph. For this reason I do believe that it is best to make Kaufmann's *Nietzsche: Philosopher, psychologist, Antichrist* as a "prime" secondary source to Nietzsche's philosophy. To those who may still feel unconvinced by my choice, I would like to highlight that Kaufmann is the most important translator of Nietzsche's as well as other existentialists' texts in the twentieth century. Along with R.J. Hollingdale, he translated the Nietzschean canon, and thus introduced Nietzsche to the English-speaking reader. Kaufmann's and Hollingdale's English translations made Nietzsche's philosophy accessible to virtually the whole world, turning a German philosopher into a really global philosophical phenomenon.<sup>17</sup> I strongly believe that the intense engagement that is required for the process of translation makes a good translator also a reliable critic of the work he/she undertakes to translate. To my mind, this is true both about Kaufmann and Hollingdale, who first worked with the original Nietzsche in order to produce their translations and later their respective monographs on his thought. So, it is the sense of structure and internal order as well as an intense closeness to the Nietzschean text that make Kaufmann and Hollingdale the most appropriate candidates for methodological guides into

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<sup>16</sup> The female/feminine question in Nietzsche emerges as one of the most complex, controversial and, at the same time, potentially contradictory aspects of his philosophy. The body of research on the topic has grown substantially in recent years. The topic definitely deserves a fair and exhaustive treatment. For this reason, I would like to suspend the discussion of "female" Nietzsche until Chapter 5 – which is devoted to the "overwomen" in Shakespeare and Marlowe.

<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, Nietzsche's inclusion into the widely-understood body of popular culture is reminiscent of Shakespeare's global import as an international commodity.

Nietzsche. Hence, Kaufmann's line of argument will be the underlying structuring principle behind my elucidation of Shakespearean and Marlovian "overmen" and "overwomen". Hollingdale, the author of a brilliant philosophical biography of Nietzsche, will be used to extend or support the main line of argumentation.<sup>18</sup> When referring to the Nietzschean text, I will mostly be focusing on a brilliant series of *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy* under the general supervision of Karl Ameriks and Desmond M. Clarke, which provides professionally and academically edited recent translations of Nietzsche by such distinguished scholars and translators as Judith Norman, Carol Diethe or Adrian Del Caro. In certain cases where there arises a risk that a translated text may not give full credit to the original by Nietzsche, I intend to support my argument by references to the German versions from the collected edition of Nietzsche's works by the already mentioned Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari.<sup>19</sup> For the needs of the present thesis, which is after all a study of the English Renaissance drama not a philosophical treatise, the above arrangement seems to be most reasonable – especially given the already discussed "instability" of Nietzsche's philosophy.

At this stage, having gone through the above lengthy exposition of the Nietzschean scholarship, one may wonder why such a detailed outline should even be necessary if the final choice is limited to two or three well-known Nietzschean scholars. I would argue that the afore-presented introduction does not only serve for "navigation" purposes. The long Nietzsche-reception involves a great deal of distortion or evasion; however, there is no question about the vastness and importance of the field. Through the engagement with various faces of Nietzschean scholarship one experiences the expansion of possible fields of inquiry and realizes the ever-progressing growth of Nietzsche as a potential

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<sup>18</sup> For a good biography, see: Hollingdale, R.J. 2001. *Nietzsche*. (translated by Władysław Jeżewski). Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy. An introduction to Nietzsche's philosophy worth recommending is Hollingdale, R.J. 1973. *Nietzsche*. London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

<sup>19</sup> See: Colli, Giorgio and Mazzino Montinari (eds.). 1980. *Sämtliche Werke: kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag Walter De Gruyter. For the original Nietzschean text, on-line sources are also highly recommended e.g. <http://www.nietzschsource.org/> where the entire Colli/Montinari edition can be found as well as digitalized versions of all documents from *the Weimar Archiv* established first by Nietzsche's sister. It seems noteworthy to quote a fragment from *the Nietzsche Source* mission statement: "*Nietzsche Source* is a web site devoted to the publication of scholarly content on the work and life of Friedrich Nietzsche, under the editorial and scholarly direction of Paolo D'Iorio. The content of the site and its internet addresses are stable and can be freely consulted and used for scholarly purposes. The website is managed by the Association HyperNietzsche, a non-profit organisation hosted at the *École normale supérieure* in Paris. The Association HyperNietzsche is a growing scholarly community of leading experts from different countries. It promotes research on Nietzsche through conferences and scientific events. Its main purpose is to continue work on the edition, commentary and interpretation of Nietzsche's work" (<http://www.nietzschsource.org/documentation/en/home.html>).

methodological tool. As seen, there is nowadays no single Nietzsche – if indeed there ever was such a unified portrayal of his thought. The immense dispersion of Nietzscheanism may be roughly ordered by a working division into the German, French and Anglo-American wing of Nietzscheanism, but within these sub-groups scholars and philosophers are driven by different “wishes of the heart” (*Herzenswunsch*), while their research fruits go beyond solely philosophical reflection (Nietzsche, as quoted in Pickus 2007: 6). German philosophers like Jaspers or Heidegger developed intimate relations with Nietzschean philosophy that became the seed of existentialism, which, in turn, also travelled into, shaped and transformed literature of the twentieth century, starting from Jean Paul Sartre, through Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter to even John Fowles – all in some or other way linked to the existentialist thought. “The French Nietzsche”, in the guise of Derrida, Deleuze or Bataille, became a springboard for intensely personal philosophising. The Nietzsche-infused French philosophising inspired the development of the Theory, whose chief exponent Michel Foucault is unquestionably Nietzschean in spirit. So, as can be seen, Nietzsche’s thought, despite its elusiveness (or maybe paradoxically thanks to it!), finds its way into the study of the early modern. The in-depth inquiry into the meanderings of modern theory unveils Nietzsche’s, so far unacknowledged, however, firm position. One may risk stating that behind each and every influential theoretician of literature there lingers the gloomy shadow of Nietzsche’s majestic philosophical persona. The thinkers are either haunted or obsessively fascinated by his contentious thought and stylised language. Some are frightened, some repelled – nonetheless, they feel compelled to engage with the heritage of his thought, even if only in an attempt to surpass it. Faced with such a conflicting yet rich heritage, one feels that there is a burning need to give back to Nietzsche what is really Nietzschean. If indeed the giant Nietzsche stands next to most of the acknowledged literary scholars, it is not enough to just acknowledge his presence there. Rather it seems more important to go back to the roots of the original Nietzschean thinking – or in other words – to perform a Nietzschean literary analysis. Ultimately one may hope that the analysis serves “both parties” – it deepens and expands the analytical possibilities encapsulated in Nietzsche as well as brings in a new perspective to the study of the early modern. The aim of this dissertation is to apply Nietzsche’s ideas to the study of ambition in the early modern plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe. However, knowing that Nietzsche was a very erudite and multi-perspective thinker, he naturally held views on the Renaissance and Shakespeare. Having finally worked through one’s way towards a fairly stabilised method, it seems worthwhile to cast a glance at the vision of the Renaissance and Shakespeare that Nietzsche presented in his own writings. It is important to note that for Nietzsche literature as much as life constituted a kind of laboratory for the psychological analysis of human motivations and behaviours. Nietzsche occasional-

ly makes insightful comments on the Renaissance, which often run parallel to his philosophical reflections. Moreover, in *The birth of tragedy* he emerges as an innovative theoretician of tragedy. For these reasons it seems necessary to investigate the vision of the Renaissance that Nietzsche himself held.

## 1.6. The Nietzschean vision of the Renaissance and Shakespeare

Nietzsche begun his academic career as a classical philologist, and even long after he had moved into the practice of philosophy it was Ancient Greece which provided him with an ever inspiring ideal of a creative singular existence as well as an “agonistic” social structure far surpassing, in his view, the modern model of social relations. Nevertheless, Nietzsche, being an erudite and naturally inquisitive thinker, ventured to comment on historical periods as well as literatures other than the Ancient. In the extensive Nietzsche canon one can find several instances where Nietzsche discusses acclaimed early-modern figures e.g. Martin Luther, Michel de Montaigne, Francis Bacon and William Shakespeare. In comparison with other figures and periods prominent in the aphorisms, the Renaissance does not necessarily stand out. Nonetheless, the firmness and decisiveness in Nietzsche’s comments on the early modern make one believe that he had a well-established belief on the significance of the Renaissance in the cultural history of Europe. It is important to note, however, that Nietzsche’s views on the Renaissance to an extent were, unlike many of his later original insights, a product of his personal acquaintance with Jacob Burckhardt and a part of a wider phenomenon present in Germany at the close of the nineteenth century.

From 1869 onwards Nietzsche worked at the University in Basel where he developed an acquaintance with Jacob Burckhardt, a much older professor and the author of a ground-breaking book *The civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. As Julian Young (2010: 103) suggests, Burckhardt hugely influenced Nietzsche who “came to worship him, not only as a towering intellect but also as a great teacher and great human being.” Though Nietzsche obviously longed for intimacy with Burckhardt, the latter seems to have treated him with relative distance. There is no question about the substantial degree of psychological influence that Burckhardt exerted on Nietzsche. In terms of intellectual development, however, the issue seems to be slightly more complicated. As Kaufmann suggests, it is really hard to say who actually influenced whom. He (1975: 28) summarizes the dilemma by saying that: “[t]his problem has never been solved conclusively – but it is hardly very important: for it appears that neither of them was detracted from his own path or greatly helped by the other, and the ideas of each can be explained in terms of his own background.” So, as Kaufmann posits, looking globally at the Nietzsche canon it seems that Burckhardt

had little impact on the thinker's development. However, when one looks closely at Burckhardt's book on Renaissance Italy and compares its message with some of Nietzsche's views, the picture does not seem to be that clear any longer. Referring to the Renaissance, there exists substantial material to suspect a degree of mutual influence.<sup>20</sup> Also, in terms of their opinions on Ancient Greece, the minds of Burckhardt and Nietzsche ran parallel. Jacob Burckhardt, along with the historian Jules Michelet, is believed to be responsible for the popularization of the term "Renaissance" first proposed by Giorgio Vasari to speak of a group of Italian artists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Walter-Busch 2012: 196). With the publication of the 1860-book *The civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Burckhardt is credited for the proposal of the notion of Renaissance subjectivity, which set the tone for the studies of the Renaissance for almost an entire century to come. Even nowadays when attempting to dismantle subjectivity as illusory, the critics refer to the most-often quoted passage from the book, where Burckhardt heralds the re-awakening of human individuality in Italy from its medieval slumbers. He writes:

[i]n the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness – that which was turned within as that which was turned without – lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen as clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation – only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an *objective* treatment and consideration of the state and of all the things of this world became possible. The *subjective* side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual *individual*, and recognized himself as such. (Burckhardt 2004: 98)

It is crucial to note that Burckhardt's notion of subjectivity has nothing to do with the serene vision of the Italian Renaissance as the epoch of artists and a peaceful revival of Ancient patterns. Quite the contrary, in his book early-Renaissance Italy is a seat of constant, bloody squabbles for power and influence between viscous noble family members, as well as a sudden rise of the

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<sup>20</sup> Detailed accounts of the possible mutual interdependencies between Jacob Burckhardt and Friedrich Nietzsche worth recommending are: Von Martin, Alfred. 1942. *Nietzsche und Burckhardt*. München: Verlag Ernst Reinhardt. or Walter-Busch, Emil. 2012. *Burckhardt und Nietzsche im Revolutionszeitalter*. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag. Walter-Busch's book is an interesting work as it is based on the newest research in the topic. The author points out that the previous authors writing in the 1930s and 1940s lacked sufficient freedom of expression to pursue the topics at liberty. For instance, Von Martin saw Burckhardt's humanism as a counterbalance to the misunderstood Nietzschean philosophy. This idea did not escape the notice of the Gestapo who in 1943 burned his two books about Burckhardt (Walter-Busch 2012: 8).

*condotierre* “who, whatever may have been his origin, raised himself to the position of an independent ruler” (Burckhardt 2004: 30-31). Burckhardt sees the viscous political circumstances as requiring the utmost adaptability skills and energy from the ruler himself, but also his circle. He revels in the descriptions of gory acts of barbarity on the part of Italian princes and lords, but at the same time he sees these extreme conditions as fertile ground for the development of human singularity and, thus, as the seed of artistic creativity. He calls the state “the object of art”, and in his narrative, ruthless politics goes hand in hand with individualism. As he points out:

[d]espotism, as we have already seen, fostered in the highest degree of individuality not only of the tyrant or *condotierre* himself, but also of the men whom he protected or used as his tools – the secretary, minister, poet and companion. These people were forced to know all the inward resources of their own nature, passing or permanent; and their enjoyment of life was enhanced and concentrated by the desire to obtain the greatest satisfaction from a possibly very brief period of power and influence (Burckhardt 2004: 99).

In his account, a certain vision of moral relativity is conducive to the increase of power and creativity.

Burckhardt’s portrayal of moral relativism in the Italian Renaissance, understood as an epoch of the strong, is reminiscent of the Nietzschean vision. In one of the fragments in Nietzsche’s *Nachlass* one reads: “Was macht denn die Überlegenheit der Kultur gegen die Unkultur aus? Der Renaissance z.B. gegen das Mittelalter? – Immer nur Eins: das große Quantum zugestandener Immoralität” (Nietzsche 2013).<sup>21</sup> In Nietzsche’s view, it is a degree of immorality that decides on the creative potential of a person or an entire period. The “quantum of immorality” or the positioning of one “beyond good and evil” stirs greater energy and enables one to grow. So Nietzsche, possibly following Burckhardt, also credits the Renaissance for the introduction of individualism when, in *Human, all too human*, he idealizes the period by saying:

[t]he Italian Renaissance contained within it all the positive forces to which we owe modern culture: liberation of thought, disrespect for authorities, victory of education over the arrogance of ancestry, enthusiasm for science and the scientific past of mankind, unfettering of the individual, a passion for truthfulness and an aversion to appearance and mere effect (which passion blazed forth in a whole host of artistic characters who, in an access of moral rectitude, demanded of themselves perfection in their work and nothing but perfection); indeed, the Renaissance possessed posi-

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<sup>21</sup> The passage could be roughly translated as follows: “What then accounts for the superiority of civilization against barbarism? The Renaissance, for example, over the Middle Ages? – Always only one: the great quantum of the acknowledged immorality” (My translation KB).

tive forces which have up to now never reappeared in our modern culture with such power as they had then. All its blemishes and vices notwithstanding, it was the golden age of this millennium. (Nietzsche 2005a: 113)

Naturally as was already presented, the research of the second half of the twentieth century, including the contributions of new historicism and cultural materialism, would contest such a vision of the Renaissance. Acts of disobedience would be read as subversion, contained by the workings of the established system. The individual would be lost to the social processes and overpowering ideology. However, at the turn of the nineteenth century Renaissance subjectivity as presented in Burckhardt's book was a new and fresh take on the period. The highly acute individualism attributed to Italian despots was also intriguing for Nietzsche when, in a truly Machiavellian manner, in *Beyond good and evil*, he praises Cesare Borgia as a fusion of lowly and sophisticated impulses. In a similar tone Burckhardt (2004: 28) sensed the Italian circumstances of moral relativity when he says that:

[g]ood and evil lie strangely mixed together in the Italian states of the fifteenth century. The personality of the ruler is so highly developed, often of such deep significance, and so characteristic of the conditions and needs of the time, that to form an adequate moral judgment on it is no easy task.

Both for Burckhardt and Nietzsche the moral assessment of the Renaissance is inconclusive. Nevertheless, the conditions of wild competition and power struggle prove culturally fertile. Nietzsche seems to share Burckhardt's ideas on individuality and he potentially borrows them and weaves them into his structure of *der Übermensch*. Similarly, Nietzsche's belief in the creative potential of conflict seems to be of Burckhardtian origin. Burckhardt naturally connects the flourishing quality of Italian art with the revival of Ancient texts. He writes:

[t]o the discovery of the outward world the Renaissance added a still greater achievement, by first discerning and bringing to light the full, whole nature of man. The period, as we have seen, first gave the highest development to individuality, and then led the individual to the most zealous and thorough study of himself in all forms and under all conditions. Indeed, the development of personality is essentially involved in the recognition of it in oneself and in others. Between these two great processes our narrative has placed the influence of ancient literature because the mode of conceiving and representing both the individual and human nature in general was defined and coloured by that influence. But the power of conception and representation lay in the age and in the people. (Burckhardt 2004: 199)

So as can be seen, in Burckhardt's terms, the ancients profoundly influenced the development of individualism, but the creativity was inherent in the people amidst the conflicts and struggle of their times. Such an embrace of conflict as a source of intense creativity is an underlying motif of Nietzsche's *The birth of*

*tragedy*, where one encounters the clash of Dionysian and Apollonian elements as the source of power in Ancient Greek tragedy. In later Nietzschean texts the creative potential of the *Agon* – a state of competition between the most noble Greeks – is praised; however, it is *The birth of tragedy* where the motif is especially prominent. Interestingly, the book was written in the Basel years of Nietzsche's life, during the time when he might have been under the spell of Burckhardt's brilliant intellect.<sup>22</sup> As Kaufmann (1992: 297) summarizes the ultimate message of *The birth of tragedy*: tragedies "suggest to us that life and the world are beautiful in spite of all the suffering, cruelty, and terrors of existence. [...] We are made to feel that suffering is no insuperable objection to life, that even the worst misfortunes are compatible with the greatest beauty." Nietzsche fuses Ancient Greek tragedy with the power and energy of individual existence, which is best communicated through suffering. At the same time, he sees competition and conflict as life powers that drive creativity. The Ancient Greeks, in his vision, were not peaceful and idyllically cultured citizens, but rather rough warriors sublimated into men of culture. Similarly, Burckhardt's Italian despots, though placed beyond moral codes, emerge as the cultivators of higher culture. Surprisingly, Nietzsche's book was met in an atmosphere of scandal. In the introduction to Nietzsche's unfinished *Philosophy in the tragic age of the Greeks* Marianne Cowan (1998: 4) writes that:

*The Birth of Tragedy* presented a view of the Greeks so alien to the spirit of the time and to the ideals of its scholarship that it blighted Nietzsche's entire academic career. It provoked pamphlets and counter-pamphlets attacking him on the grounds of common sense, scholarship and sanity. For a time Nietzsche, then professor of classical philology at the University of Basel, had no students in his field. His lectures were sabotaged by German philosophy professors who advised their students not to show up for Nietzsche's courses.

In this context, it is more surprising that Burckhardt's book on the Renaissance, after all communicating an illusion-free vision of the Renaissance, was a huge success and never went out of print. Of course, Nietzsche's book is actually his first philosophical work, thus ignoring the accepted procedures of academic research in the field of classical philology. Burckhardt's *The civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* is unquestionably a historical handbook following contemporary academic guidelines. It is, however, important to note that it does communicate a philosophically-stirred message of the creative potential of con-

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<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that Burckhardt himself was a great admirer of Ancient Greece. He also wrote a book on the Greek culture, which was posthumously published as *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*. According to Kaufmann, the book was written much later than Nietzsche's. In some of the parts Burckhardt acknowledges the influence of Nietzsche. For more details, see: Kaufmann, Walter. 1974. *Nietzsche – philosopher, psychologist, Antichrist*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. p. 27-28.

flict. Its insistence on the birth of individuality in the Renaissance Italy is also unquestionably a premise of historical philosophising rather than just a pure record of facts. The fact that Burckhardt's book was more easily "swallowed" by the public may be partly explained by Burckhardt's more optimistic or positivist outlook, realized in his focus on humanism. His message is, in a way, softened and tempered, and in such a form it becomes a basis for further idealization of the period by the contemporary reading public. However, it is definitely the spirit of individuality, power struggle and moral relativity that connects Burckhardt's and Nietzsche's understanding of the Renaissance.

As mentioned, the revived interest in the period of the Renaissance, which can be seen in Nietzsche's commentary on the period becomes eventually a part of a bigger phenomenon. As Emil Walter-Busch (2012: 196-197) points out already around 1841 Heinrich Heine wrote with nostalgia about the Renaissance and longed for a new rebirth. However, it is Jacob Burckhardt and Jules Michelet who authorized the term "Renaissance" and inaugurated a change of atmosphere around the period. Around the turn of the century one could already speak of a certain "Renaissancecult" in German-speaking countries, expressed in the use of a new term "Renaissancismus", an amalgam of "Renaissance" and "Klassizismus" [Classicism]. So Heine, whom Nietzsche (2006c: 91) extols in *Ecce Homo* as the one who "provided [him] with the highest concept of lyric poetry" is partly responsible for the birth of the cult. Surprisingly, next to the aforementioned acclaimed historians – Burckhardt and Michelet – the name of Friedrich Nietzsche becomes associated with the new fashion circling round the revival of Renaissance ideals. As Walter-Busch underscores, Nietzsche was deemed "a prophet of 'Renaissancismus'" (Walter-Busch 2012: 196). Combining Nietzsche with the new trend can obviously be linked with the growth of his "mythology" after his mental breakdown. Nonetheless, the above discussion demonstrates that Nietzsche had a firm and decisive view of the period of Shakespeare – partly shaped by his acquaintance with Jacob Burckhardt, partly a product of his own philosophical reflection. In the course of his psycho-historical reflection he deemed the Renaissance the period of strong individualities born in the friction of extreme conditions and in the midst of an internal and external struggle for power. As it seems, Nietzsche's vision of the Renaissance runs parallel to his more general reflection on human nature. After all, he praises the same qualities of the Renaissance men he would generally be in favour of, namely, free-spiritedness, mental strength in the face of suffering, intellectual independence etc. This in turn, makes a Nietzschean analysis of Shakespeare's and Marlowe's plays even more justified as one may suspect that the circumstances of the English Renaissance would suit Nietzsche's vision of the Renaissance in general. In other words, the aspects of his vision on the individual in general go hand in hand with his reflection on the early modern. Obviously, the accuracy of Nietzsche's reading of the period is a matter for another lengthy theoretical discussion; nevertheless, having read Nietzsche, one may be

sure that he himself believed the Renaissance a conducive environment for the development of the Overman. It is now our task to carry his reflection further and seek the “overman” or “overwoman” in Shakespeare or Marlowe. However, before that is done, it seems also interesting to cast just a cursory glance at Nietzsche’s utterances devoted specifically to Shakespeare. It is rather improbable that Nietzsche knew other Elizabethan or Jacobean playwrights, neither was he an expert on the English Renaissance. Yet, being an avid reader, he definitely knew Shakespeare’s tragedies as well as Shakespeare’s sonnets – as the selection of his aphorisms demonstrates. The material where he refers to those Shakespearean works seems worth investigating as, to my mind, it may unveil clues as to the Shakespearean overhuman potential encapsulated in Shakespeare’s plays as well as analogous to this – Marlowe’s *Übermensch*.

## 1.7. Nietzsche about Shakespeare

Just as in the case of the aphorisms devoted to the Renaissance, the number of direct references to William Shakespeare is not astonishing in the hugeness of the Nietzsche canon. Nevertheless, what Nietzsche had to say about Shakespeare is, in its entirety, rather of a praising nature. Knowing Nietzsche’s sceptical and often biting critical method, one may say that the Shakespeare-aphorisms are rare instances in Nietzsche’s writings where he openly expresses praise. What is also crucial to note is the fact that the modest number of references to the Renaissance or Shakespeare is no proof for Nietzsche’s lack of interest in the period or the author. Succinctness of the published fragments would rather serve to demonstrate that Nietzsche had a well-thought out view of Shakespeare. Along with Julius Caesar, Napoleon and Goethe, Shakespeare belongs to those figures who constantly recur in Nietzsche’s reflection, proving Nietzsche’s undying fascination with the Bard. A relatively bigger number of instances where Nietzsche calls Shakespeare’s name forward in his unpublished notes also suggests that the playwright and his works presented Nietzsche with a riddle, a kind of an enigma that haunted him throughout his philosophical life. Nietzsche mentions Shakespeare as early as Autumn 1869, in connection with his reflections on Ancient tragedy. One of the last mentions of Shakespeare can be found in his philosophical autobiography *Ecce Homo*, prepared for publication and dated the second of January 1889 (Nietzsche 2013).<sup>23</sup> The beginning of

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<sup>23</sup> There are in total 91 fragments where the name of William Shakespeare is mentioned in the *Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Friedrich Nietzsche, Digital critical edition of the complete works and letters, based on the critical text by G. Colli and M. Montinari, Berlin/New York, de Gruyter 1967-, edited by Paolo D'Iorio)*. The majority of references come from *Nachlass* (the so called *Nachgelassene Fragmente*), unpublished notes collected by

January 1889 is also the time of Nietzsche's mental break-down from which he never recovered and which ultimately led to his death. So it is evident that Shakespeare accompanied him from the very beginning of his philosophical path up to the very end.

With his characteristic disarming megalomania, in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche documents his artistic and philosophical development. Trying to get down to the bottom of his intellectual roots he refers to the literature, music and art that shaped him and accompanied him throughout his life. Nietzsche (2006c: 89) confesses that literature has an alleviating and healing role as it "recuperates" him from his "seriousness". Among the few books that travelled with him he enumerates Shakespeare, whom he calls "a wild genius" (Nietzsche 2006c: 90). I would argue that from the few instances where Nietzsche does comment on Shakespeare or his works, one may sense an existence of a creative bond between him and the playwright. Nietzsche seems to be pleading an artistic brotherhood with Shakespeare when he prophetically fears his own "greatness". In *Ecce Homo* (2006c: 143-144) he writes:

I know my lot. One day my name will be connected with the memory of something tremendous – a crisis such as the earth has never seen, the deepest collision of conscience, a decision made against everything that has been believed, demanded, held sacred so far. I am not a human being, I am dynamite. – And yet I am not remotely the religion-founding type – religions are the business of the rabble, I need to wash my hands after coming into contact with religious people... I do not want any 'true believers', I think I am too malicious to believe in myself, I never speak to the masses... I have a real fear that someday people will consider me holy: you will guess why I am publishing this book beforehand; it is supposed to stop any nonsense as far as I am concerned... I do not want to be a saint, I would rather be a buffoon... perhaps I am a buffoon... [original German word: *Hanswurst*]

As can be seen, Nietzsche understands the appealing nature of his works but, at the same time, he knows how easily misunderstood his words can be. For this reason he frames himself as "the buffoon", partly to discourage all-too hasty believers, partly to alleviate the profoundness of his own message in the final attempt at an affirmation of life. Shakespeare's works definitely emerge for him as the highest forms of the love of life he himself professes. So he weaves in his own future greatness with that of Shakespeare when he claims:

[w]hen I look for the highest formula for Shakespeare, the only thing I can find is that he conceived the type of Caesar. You cannot guess at this sort of thing, – either you are it or you are not. Great poets create only from their own reality – to the point where they cannot stand their work anymore afterwards... Whenever I glance

through my Zarathustra, I walk around the room for half an hour, sobbing uncontrollably. – Shakespeare is the most poignant reading I know: how much suffering does it take for somebody to need to play the clown [original German word: *Hanswurst*]! – Have people understood Hamlet? It is no doubt, it is certainty that drives people mad... But you need to be deep, an abyss, a philosopher, to feel this way...<sup>24</sup> (Nietzsche 2006c: 91-92)

One can see that Nietzsche places himself on an equal level with Shakespeare – but the common denominator is not only the greatness of his and Shakespeare's works but also a shared anguish that finds its vent in the transfiguration of thought into art. Moreover, Nietzsche does not only see Shakespeare as an artist but predominantly as a philosopher, who builds his intellectual empire on the debris of his personal suffering. Having a little knowledge on Nietzsche's personal life, one is tempted to suggest that he identifies his own fate with the presumably suffering and overly sensitive artist-philosopher. For Nietzsche Shakespeare poses a mystery – he inquires about the man that lurks behind genius. In Shakespeare he senses rivalry with “his bad angel” or a battle with his own weaknesses, which are both inherent in the process of artistic creation. When Nietzsche performs his “psychoanalysis” on Shakespeare, at the same time admiring the character of Brutus from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, one can read in-between the lines about his own intellectual battles for independence. He exclaims:

[w]hat is all of Hamlet's melancholy compared to that of Brutus! And perhaps Shakespeare knew the latter as he knew the former – through – first hand experience! Maybe he also had his dark hour and his dark angel, like Brutus! But whatever such similarities and secret references there may have been: before the whole figure and virtue of Brutus, Shakespeare threw himself to the ground and felt unworthy and distant – he wrote the evidence for his own tragedy. (Nietzsche 2008: 94)

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<sup>24</sup> In both quotations I am referring to, Nietzsche uses the same word *Hanswurst* (clown, fool but also a popular comic figure presented by touring theatres of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries), so it is indeed a strange choice on the part of the translator to use two different equivalents within the space of the same work where Nietzsche evidently aimed at a connection between the two thoughts. He both sees Shakespeare-the-playwright and Shakespeare-the-actor as well as himself as “Hanswurst”. Moreover, in the context of the present dissertation a note on the word seems reasonable as the character of “Hanswurst” relegates us to the world of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century popular theatre in the German-speaking world. “Hanswurst” was traditionally a coarse type of a character providing the audience with crude humour. Johann Christoph Gottsched and Friederike Caroline Neuber “banished” the character from the stage in order to refine comedy, but their attempts met with resistance. However, it is believed that the dispute marks a shift from improvised popular comedy to a more ‘fixed’ bourgeois theatre (Jürs-Munby 2007: 125). To read more see: Jürs-Munby, Karen. 2007. “Hanswurst and Herr Ich: Subjection and Abjection in Enlightenment Censorship of the Comic Figure”, in: *New Theatre Quarterly* 2, vol. 23. 124-135.

Kaufmann sees Nietzsche's admiration for Brutus in Shakespeare as being indicative of his personal battle for intellectual independence.<sup>25</sup> It may seem naïve to try to read Nietzsche's philosophical journey through his own personal upheavals; nonetheless, the tempestuous relationship and subsequent break with Richard Wagner, often interpreted as the father-figure for Nietzsche, in Kaufmann's view, provide an interesting interpretative key for Nietzsche's passionate engagement with this particular play (Kaufmann 1974: 36). However, in the context of Nietzsche's project the two – life and philosophising – are indivisible. For Nietzsche, philosophy is life, while life is philosophy-incarnated. So Kaufmann's track of thought is most probably correct, though without it Nietzsche's vision of Shakespeare is also philosophically clear and direct. It can be read within a wider context of Nietzsche's body of thinking that, after all, revolves around the significance of the personal development of the individual. Hence, one may say that Shakespeare's highly individualised protagonists serve as a working laboratory for the shaping of Nietzsche's acute individualism.

Nietzsche's insistence on the independence of the individual is inextricably linked with his theory on moral valuations. An individual in order to grow must be placed beyond good and evil and allow himself to listen intently to the wild sound of his instincts and passions. No wonder, then, that what Nietzsche admires in Shakespeare's plays is the intensity with which the playwright portrays the characters' emotional lives. In *Daybreak*, commenting on *Macbeth*, Nietzsche (2006a: 141) writes that poets "especially Shakespeare, are enamoured of the passions". Later in the same work he (2006a: 221) claims: "if one is Shakespeare, one is satisfied only with being dissolved into images of the most passionate life". In *Human, all too human* Nietzsche observes an intellectual parallel between the works of Shakespeare and Montaigne. He again attributes Shakespeare's ability to capture the storm of passion to the author's own supposed intensely passionate life. What is more, he acknowledges Shakespeare's capacity to infuse his characters with a philosophical reflection that is a product of an intensely emotional life. Nietzsche states that:

Shakespeare reflected a great deal on the passions and from his temperament probably had very intimate access to many of them (dramatists are in general somewhat wicked men). But, unlike Montaigne, he was incapable of discoursing on them; instead of which he placed observations about the passions into the mouths of impassioned characters: a practice which, though counter to nature, makes his plays so full of ideas they make all others seem empty and can easily arouse in us a repugnance to them. (Nietzsche 2005a: 91)

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<sup>25</sup> The notion of intellectual independence (or free-spiritedness) proves profoundly important in Nietzsche's philosophy. I will pay more attention to this issue as well as Nietzsche's conceptualization of the Shakespearean Brutus in my analysis of *Julius Caesar* in Chapter 3.

So, as evidently seen, Nietzsche sees Shakespeare's superiority over other dramatists in Shakespeare's portrayal of convincing, passionate lives. In his aphorisms Nietzsche praises the construction of such "impassioned characters" as Macbeth, Othello and Brutus (For instance: Brutus in *The gay science* Book II Aphorism 98, Macbeth in *Daybreak* Book IV Aphorism 240, Othello in *Human, all too human* Section three: "Religious life" – Aphorism 125). In each instance, Nietzsche uses Shakespeare's protagonists in order to render or support his line of argumentation. Apart from the plays, in *Daybreak* Nietzsche also proves his knowledge of the Shakespearean *Sonnets*, when he takes advantage of the poems to communicate his philosophical message. He (2006a: 45) admires "the courage of Shakespeare to confess his Christian gloominess". In his handling of the *Sonnets*, Nietzsche takes up a motif characteristic for himself of the Christian supposedly pious denial of bodily passions. Throughout his entire philosophical career Nietzsche bashes Christianity for its counter-intuitive rejection of natural instincts such as sexual desire, which so often is seen as an evil temptation instead of a source of energy and inspiration. In Nietzsche's vision, the cold, emasculated, and finally sick Christian morality breeds "gloominess" and "diabolizes" Eros, making it a part of a famous trinity of human earthly enemies; the world, the Devil and the flesh. Nietzsche writes:

[t]he passions become evil and malicious if they are regarded as evil and malicious. Thus Christianity has succeeded in transforming Eros and Aphrodite – great powers capable of idealisation – into diabolical kobolds and phantoms by means of the torments it introduces into the consciences of believers whenever they are excited sexually. Is it not dreadful to make necessary and regularly recurring sensations into a source of inner misery, and in this way to want to make inner misery a necessary and regularly recurring phenomenon in every human being! (Nietzsche 2006a: 45)

According to Nietzsche, Shakespeare through his cult of bodily passions in the *Sonnets* makes his readers acutely aware of this "Christian" gloominess. In his immediate context, such a depiction of the passions requires the utmost courage from Shakespeare, which Nietzsche so appreciates. Shakespeare emerges as a free spirit who is implicitly capable of criticizing the limiting circumstances of his existence. Hence, in the eyes of Nietzsche (2005a: 68), Shakespeare belongs to an artistic hall of fame, along with Aeschylus, Aristophanes and Goethe – the poets – who all poetically and aesthetically revelled in their portrayal of the guardians of morality – the Gods – but who themselves must have been "profoundly unreligious". According to Nietzsche, great poets, or great artists in general, see popular belief as "horrible superstition" (Nietzsche 2005a: 68). By reading Shakespeare as an atheist, or at best as a sceptic, Nietzsche opens up a precursory discussion on the moral message of Shakespeare's plays outside Christian valuations. Nietzsche's atheistic perception of Shakespeare is taken up later by Kaufmann (1980: 4), who seems to be echoing Nietzsche when he says:

[w]e have been told that Shakespeare was a Christian. Some say that he was a Protestant; others he was a Catholic. Some say that he extolled the Christian virtues. Faith? Hardly. Hope? Certainly not. But love, of course. In the end, the whole suggestion is reducible to the absurd assumption that a man who celebrates love must have been a Christian. [...] Shakespeare is closer to Goethe than he is to Luther, Aquinas, or the Gospels – and still closer to Sophocles. (Kaufmann 1980: 4)

Contrary to the views held by the new historicists or cultural materialists Kaufmann capitalizes on the earth-bound message of Shakespeare's plays that, above all, celebrate life in its entirety – including both suffering and pleasure. In this respect, Nietzsche would also agree to count Shakespeare into the ranks of life affirmers. As Kaufmann summarizes:

Shakespeare is – at this point, too – far closer to Socrates and Nietzsche, to Aristotle and Goethe than he is to the evangelists or St. Augustine, to Aquinas, Calvin, Kierkegaard, or T.S. Eliot. His work stands as a monument of a tradition that is frequently forgotten today, and it celebrates the riches of the world without God. (Kaufmann 1980: 22)

The absence or silencing of God in Shakespeare's plays and poetry is not necessarily a consequence of the appraisal of passions. It seems to be the other way round; it is the questioning of the moral metaphysical imperative that brings about the embrace of the earthly emotions. As Nietzsche would hint in his reflections on Shakespeare, there is an entirely separate moral dynamics behind the great artistry of the Elizabethan playwright.

A closer analysis of the "Shakespeare aphorisms" allows one to see that it is not only the portrayal of the passions in Shakespeare that makes Nietzsche praise the poet and the playwright so much. Nietzsche seems to be admiring Shakespeare's investment in the passions on a far more philosophical level. An indebtedness to active instinct-driven existence is indicative of a free-spiritedness, while the latter is a measure of the individual's greatness. The creative transfiguration of the instincts requires going beyond the accepted codes of conduct – so the characters of Shakespeare who let themselves be carried away by their passions are driven by an entirely different morality. This different moral outlook seems to be pushing one into a conflict with the accepted modes of behaviour held by the majority, but it is the hot-temperedness of the great man that lets him be devoured by passion. Reflecting on Shakespeare's *Othello* and Sophocles' *Ajax*, Nietzsche (2005a: 43) comments: "[p]assion will not wait; the tragic element in the life of great men often lies not in their conflicts with their age and with the lowness of their fellow men, but in their inability to put off their work for a year or two years; they cannot wait." Nevertheless, from Nietzsche's conceptualization of greatness, including Shakespeare's genius, one reads that the ingredients of an affirmative character are: free-spiritedness, the embrace of the passions and going beyond the accepted moral

codex. However, transgression in Shakespeare does not have an easily sensed “cheap” didactic purpose – it does not serve as a warning or does not contain a clear-cut moral judgement. It might be indeed guilt caused by the transgression (e.g. of *Macbeth*) that drives the action of the tragedy, yet as Nietzsche (2006a: 140) claims: “[h]e who is really possessed by raging ambition beholds this its image with joy; and if the hero perishes by his passion this precisely is the sharpest spice in the hot draught of this joy.” Transgression, even with its consequences, is a source of freedom and thus energy and creativity. For this reason the so called “evil” characters in Shakespeare like *Macbeth* or *Edmund* seem, nonetheless, most captivating. I would argue that it is because, as Nietzsche only hints, the plays seem to be driven by a different moral outlook that does not draw lines between good and evil that easily. This suspension of a too-hasty and simplistic moral judgement is a basis of life affirmation, which eventually encapsulates the essence of the tragic catharsis. Nietzsche (2006a: 140-141) summarizes his comment on “the morality of the stage” in Shakespeare’s England (or maybe rather “immorality”) by saying that:

[t]he tragic poet has just as little desire to take sides against life with his images of life! He cries rather: ‘it is the stimulant of stimulants, this exciting, changing, dangerous, gloomy and often sun-drenched existence! It is an adventure to live – espouse what party in it you will, it will always retain this character!’ – He speaks thus out of a restless, vigorous age which is half-drunk and stupefied by its excess of blood and energy – out of a wickeder age than ours is: which is why we need first to adjust and justify the goal of a Shakespearean drama, that is to say, not to understand it.

Kaufmann, in his reappraisal of Shakespeare, again echoes Nietzsche by saying: “Shakespeare’s poetry is the poetry of abundance. There is laughter in it and despair but no resentment or self-pity” (Kaufmann 1980: 3). So, not only do Shakespearean plays espouse the cult of a passionate existence but also, paradoxically, the restraining and limiting morality of the Renaissance seems to emerge as fertile ground giving birth to resistance and newly-inspired creativity. In this judgement Nietzsche seems to be echoing Burckhardt by capitalizing on the Burckhardtian Renaissance individualism. However, Nietzsche builds on Burckhardt’s optimistic vision by reading Shakespeare as belonging to the “wickeder” period where resistance erupts in an excess of cruelty. This excess is a positive outcome, despite the negative side-effects, as it is a monument to life itself. Such is a context in which one should read *Macbeth* or *King Lear* through Nietzschean philosophy. Naturally, Nietzsche’s interpretation of Shakespeare and the Renaissance is a product of his own theory on moral valuations, as Nietzsche reads supposedly “evil” affects as stimulants to life. But as can be seen, Nietzsche uses examples from the Renaissance to illustrate the dynamics of his revaluation of morality, where the individual outside morality is the measuring standard.

Nietzsche's focus on the greatness of the individual runs parallel with his views on the exclusiveness of moral judgements, as opposed to the universality of morality. Nietzsche's ideas on the importance of rank and aristocratic dignity make him a contentious critic of democracy and the notion of equal rights. Recent scholars like Frederic Appel criticise the attempts at the utilization of Nietzschean philosophy in modern political science. For Appel (1999: 5-6) Nietzsche emerges as the philosopher of privilege and rank, so the cause of the defence of democracy seems to be totally out of Nietzsche's philosophical perspective. Appel's "aristocratic" reading of Nietzsche is critical of contemporary efforts to make the philosopher an apostle of equal rights. Yet if one is to apply Nietzsche to the reading of a highly stratified and hierarchical early-modern society his vision seems to be fitting just all right. Knowing Nietzsche's admiration for royalty, rank and self-discipline, Nietzsche's interest in the Shakespeare authorship controversy should not really be surprising at all. With all the aforementioned admiration that Nietzsche held for Shakespeare, he did have doubts whether it was indeed the son of a glover from Stratford upon Avon that grew into the giant of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. In his writings there are at least a couple of instances where he refers to the fashionable theory at the time and his views on the matter. Around the time of writing of *The twilight of the idols* (1889) Nietzsche was interested in Francis Bacon and, as Kaufmann (1974: 265) suggests, he suspected Bacon to be the author of Shakespeare's texts. These suspicions were also expressed in some of his unpublished notes which found their way into *The will to power*. In some of the notes from the Spring-Fall 1887 Nietzsche praises authors who are able to be "classical" and possess certain "loftiness" but at the same time communicate ideas contrary to popular morality. For Nietzsche (1968: 447), Shakespeare was exactly such an author but only on the condition that he was really Lord Bacon. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche (2006c: 92) seems to be less certain, but he nevertheless says: "[w]e are all afraid of the truth... and to confess, I have an instinctive certainty that Lord Bacon was the author, the self-torturer of animals who is behind the uncanniest type of literature." Interestingly enough, despite his 'aristocratic' views, Nietzsche never associates Bacon's potential role as the author of Shakespeare's texts with his position, status or aristocratic bearing. He strongly believes that Bacon might have been Shakespeare because the Lord was an apt and ambitious philosopher, with horizon-stretching philosophical goals. So it is ambition and vision that make him an appropriate candidate to communicate Shakespeare's philosophy-infused plays. Of course, one could reproach Nietzsche for the very fact of doubting Shakespeare's authorship, yet one has to bear in mind a reservation. At the time – at the peak of Victorianism in England – the conspiracy theory was indeed gaining ground, so Nietzsche's interest can be partly excused by the fashionable status of the *conspiracy*. Obviously, one may also see Nietzsche's own slightly snobbish and megalomaniac views on the

“aristocracy of the spirit” as responsible for his interest in the matter in the first place. Nevertheless, I do not think there is any reason to believe that Nietzsche deemed the original, historical Shakespeare as an inappropriate author for the great tragedies. Nietzsche’s musings on Bacon and Shakespeare rather pose evidence for Nietzsche’s general interest in the Renaissance as well as his admiration for ambition and striving for over-reaching goals, which were memorable qualities of Lord Bacon himself. In *Ecce Homo*, with his characteristic megalomania, Nietzsche (2006c: 92) concludes his remarks on the authorship theory by saying: “And damn it, my dear Mr Critic! If I had published my Zarathustra under a different name, ‘Richard Wagner’, for instance, the collective acuity of two hundred years would not have been enough to guess that the author of *Human, all too human* was the visionary of Zarathustra.” So, as can be seen, though there is a lot of material suggesting that Nietzsche believed Bacon to have been Shakespeare, one may assume that he held the critical debate on the identity of the author as potentially incorrect. Nietzsche evidently doubts the fruits of the analysis of his contemporary literary critics and the conclusion that one may eventually draw is that the exact name of the author is beside the point.

It is worth pointing out that, according to Nietzsche, great individuals are to be met where the greatest resistance is to be faced. Striving after one’s goals, whether political or philosophical, is always a form of the will to power. Thus, one should not be surprised that Nietzsche found the ambitious Lord Bacon a fascinating figure. Some critics suggest that Nietzsche’s theory of *Wille zur Macht* can be derived from his study of the early modern philosophy. Both Kaufmann and Hollingdale mention Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes as potential sources of inspiration.<sup>26</sup> The will to power is inextricably connected to the human need to seek truth but, for Nietzsche, an egalitarian or pragmatic attitude towards the notion of truth distorts and misshapes the very idea. If Nietzsche was ever inspired by Renaissance philosophy, it must be underscored that his conception of power eventually radically deviated from Bacon’s and Hobbes’s ideas – on the level of this fundamental motivation of truth. As Kaufmann (1974: 360) explains:

To Bacon, knowledge meant power over nature, and truth could thus be utilized as a means to new comforts. For Hobbes, too, power was essentially a tool, an instrument, a means for security. Nietzsche, on the other hand, values power not as a means but as the state of being that man desires for its own sake as his own ultimate end. And truth he considers an essential aspect of this state of being. Self-perfection

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<sup>26</sup> Hollingdale distinguished between Hobbes’ and Nietzsche’s theory of power. To read more see: Hollingdale, R.J. 2001. *Nietzsche*. (Translated by Władysław Jeżewski. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 144-145, 161. Kaufmann compares all three: Bacon, Hobbes and Nietzsche. For more details, see: Kaufmann, Walter. 1974. *Nietzsche – philosopher, psychologist, Antichrist*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 360.

and ultimate happiness are not compatible with self-deception and illusion. Petty pleasures may depend on illusions, and truth may spell discomfort and suffering – but renouncing truth for that reason would be a sign of weakness and preclude our attainment of that state of being short of which we can never find lasting and surpassing happiness.

So there seems little wonder when Nietzsche (2006c: 92) in *Ecce Homo* claims that we all fear truth, for truth very well might be a source of disappointment or, even worse, suffering. Yet it is in the resistance and over-coming of suffering that an individual is born. Shakespeare's plays, regardless of whose plays they really are, pose for Nietzsche the perfect tragic expression of this fierce individualism that will go beyond what is considered good and evil in order to attain its independence. One may only suspect that Marlowe's mighty "amoral" figures could have captivated Nietzsche's imagination too.

In the light of the above presentation, the rationale of the present dissertation is hopefully clear by now. As I have argued, Nietzsche's embrace of Burckhardtian individualism, with his own moral twist on the notion, strongly suggests that if Nietzsche himself had known Marlowe, he could have incorporated Tamburlaine or Barabas into the canon of his overhuman figures along with Julius Caesar or Cesare Borgia. The same applies to Shakespearean figures whom Nietzsche himself uses as literary examples for his philosophical reflections. In this context, the reversed project to read Shakespeare and Marlowe through Nietzsche's uncompromising unsheathing of traditional morality seems to be well-grounded. I do strongly believe that, before one can plunge into the depth of the literary analysis of the plays by Marlowe and Shakespeare, it seems necessary to turn one's attention to the philosophical, social and political conditions in which the plays were written and performed.

## Chapter Two

# The awakening of early-modern subjectivity: ambition, aspiration and over-reaching in the Renaissance

As outlined in the previous chapter it is the experience of transcendence that renders the cancellation of subjectivity in the early-modern impossible. It is this common philosophical condition of existence that firstly forces a reevaluation of our research premises, and secondly makes us constantly go back to the solid foundation the individual represents. The Renaissance has always been and, I am sure, will always be distinguished from the Middle Ages by the acute and intense rebirth of individualism, interiority, subjectivity, and finally a sudden sense of intellectual freedom, resulting in the human need to aspire and over-reach. With the tool of a combined method in hand – new historical philosophising – I want to turn the attention to the creative historical and cultural background of Shakespeare and Marlowe. So this chapter addresses ideas on the individual, or “overhuman”, to use Nietzsche’s term – their potential – and tries to re-evaluate some early-modern views in terms of their “individualizing” or “overhuman” power. In a period so rich and diversified, in the creative blend of the vestiges of the Middle Ages and the rebirth of Antiquity, the arrival at a definitive vision of what really constitutes the Renaissance man seems to be an ill-judged and futile attempt. The aim of this dissertation is not to attempt arriving at such a totalizing and limiting in its totality picture. Walter Kaufmann (1974: 285) writes of Nietzsche’s philosophy as communicating “aristocratic” values, thus pointing to the exclusiveness of the Nietzschean overman. Overhuman potential is not something shared by all, but rather a small handful of those capable of over-coming their weaknesses. Building on this notion, one can say that the Renaissance is not a period of individuals, though notions of individuality are implicit in numerous Renaissance texts. Yet, due to certain historical and cultural circumstances the period has more “specimens” of such individuals to offer. As Nietzsche (2006c: 4-5) himself suggests in *The Antichrist*, overmen appeared in history, espe-

cially during the Renaissance, as a consequence of some favourable conditions. The goal of this chapter is exactly to scrutinize those conditions in order to investigate sources of overhuman potential. Moreover, as it appears, a further analysis of dramatic overmen also deserves grounding in the proper historical and cultural background. One instinctively feels that these overhuman protagonists have their origins in the creative ferment of the English and European Renaissance. Thus, I intend to scrutinize the views of key intellectual forces whose philosophical output resonated with, what I would cautiously call, “proto-Nietzschean” notions. I wish to focus on the writings of such influential philosophers as the Ancient philosopher Lucretius, rediscovered in the Renaissance, Pomponazzi, a religious philosopher and a precursor of scepticism, and early-modern sceptic Montaigne. Then I move onto the discussion of the political theory, focusing mainly on Machiavelli’s texts, and finally discuss central notions of aspiration and ambition. Although seeking Nietzschean ideas in the intellectual output of the Renaissance men of letters may seem risky, I strongly believe that the combined method I proposed enables one to build a comprehensive matrix for further analysis.

## 2.1. Individualism and the early-modern

### 2.1.1. Philosophical and religious reflection

In line with Nietzsche’s *Antichrist* I would like to open the discussion on individualism by looking at the realm of social activity which shapes the development of individuals (or rather societies, as post-Marxist materialists would insist) from early stages of their social engagement. Therefore, as a background to the analysis of Shakespeare’s and Marlowe’s dramatic overmen I deem it reasonable to start with the early-modern, vastly understood, intellectual life. On the surface, the importance of religion and the Church in the lives of early-moderns does not seem to have changed significantly since the Middle Ages. However, the Renaissance was the period of great upheavals in the Catholic Church, which changed the face of Christendom once and for all. The central position of religion cannot be disputed even if the essence of this centrality is seen through reformatory conflict and counter-reformatory struggle rather than stability and unity. Yet within the general attempts to maintain conformity and medieval tradition, many men swam against the current, questioning the foundations of existing morality or the intellectual status quo. Therefore, I want to start my discussion on “intellectual overreachers” by having a look at influential thinkers who shaped the development of self-hood in the Renaissance.

### 2.1.1.1. Early-modern death of God: Renaissance scepticism

Eric S. Mallin, the author of a recent analysis of Shakespeare's plays in the light of atheism, recalls in his book *Godless Shakespeare* his conversation with Stephen Greenblatt, in which the latter expressed his doubt of the possibility of atheist stances in the Renaissance. Greenblatt is believed to have said: "But doesn't every gesture of unbelief articulate itself within the frame of a sectarian structure that determined it?" (Greenblatt as quoted in: Mallin 2007: 2). To formulate it differently, what Greenblatt had in mind was the suggestion that any act of subversion realizes itself against the backdrop of a social structure which it resists. Mallin (2007: 3) goes on to reformulate this idea by asking: "isn't the idea of Renaissance unbelief artificial at best, in that it only arises within the conceptual borders of religion itself – as a heresy, a perversion, or some other already summoned, negated, and reviled possibility?" His book, however, appears to attempt to refute this idea, being an innovative and daring interpretation of Shakespeare's characters, who "dwell in a universe not presided over by a knowable deity" (Mallin 2007: 1). Thus, Mallin's vision seems to admit a self-sufficient or interiorized atheism, which grows out of an individual, as opposed to Greenblatt's idea of disbelief as a product of resistance towards the containing society. Whatever is the source of disbelief or doubt in the Renaissance, there is no question that these phenomena surfaced in the period. Greenblatt's argument in the conversation with Mallin prompts one to ponder upon the nature of Renaissance disbelief. Though Mallin's book tries to prove otherwise, one cannot escape the urge to ask oneself whether atheism is even a possible conceptualization in the mind of a Renaissance man as, after all, the Renaissance world, burdened with the heritage of the Middle Ages, is so intensely infused with religion. Maybe it is indeed true that Renaissance scepticism or atheism are only cracks on the monumental block of orthodoxy? I personally believe the opposite; denying the early-moderns mental capacity of harbouring and construing religious disbelief is equal to depriving them of their early-modernity. It may be true that for the majority of Renaissance people religion provides the only imaginable conceptual framework within which they can function. Nevertheless, for the exceptional few, scepticism becomes a vista to a new and fresh vision of the Universe and the individual within it, to a deeper, more intense, but sometimes sadder appreciation of life and human capacity for greatness. In order to fully understand this notion, it is necessary to look at the European and English sources documenting disbelief.

When speaking about Renaissance scepticism, one needs to realize that the foundations of the atheistic and sceptical outlook were already laid by the Ancients. The Renaissance, being a period extensively drawing on newly rediscovered Ancient philosophy, revives old dilemmas in the completely new circumstances of the Orthodox Church, on the one hand, and fervent waves of the

Reformation on the other. George T. Buckley, the author of a classic work entitled *Atheism in the English Renaissance*, highlights that the influence of the ancients cannot be overestimated in shaping Renaissance views on disbelief. Mediaeval scholars worked very hard on the task of appropriating authors of Antiquity such as Aristotle, Plato, Seneca or Cicero to the theology of Christianity, but as Buckley (1965: 2) writes: “the pagan writers who could not be reconciled to Christian thought were, as minions of Satan, to be accursed and damned and if possible run to earth and slain”. Therefore, many suspect and free-thinking authors such as the Pre-Socratic Democritus or materialist Epicurus were subsequently forgotten and revived only at the dawn of the Renaissance. It is the heritage of ancient freethinkers, then, that is partly responsible for the outburst of Renaissance individualism.<sup>1</sup> And, as seen above, though Greenblatt at some point questions the plausibility of early-modern atheism, he makes Poggio Bracciolini’s rediscovery of Lucretius’ deeply sceptical poem *On the nature of things* a vehicle of modernity in the Renaissance. Greenblatt’s most recent book *The swerve – how the world became modern* seems to combine the Burckhardian belief in the sudden awakening of mental capabilities with the typical for himself preoccupation with the suspect and the subversive. However, as it seems, this fervent outburst of human individuality in the Renaissance is inextricably coupled with the dawn of scepticism, or even atheism, even if Greenblatt (2011: 1-13) does not state it explicitly. The phenomenon of the Renaissance scepticism has been an object of numerous critical treatises – though, as far as I have observed, no critic has attempted to combine Renaissance thinkers’ ideas with the fruits of Nietzsche’s philosophical endeavours. Nietzsche himself seems to have been more preoccupied with the ancient, rather than the Renaissance, philosophy. However, if Nietzsche’s initial impulse to question metaphysics goes back to his fascination with the Pre-Socratics, while the Renaissance “modernity” is born out of the contact with rediscovered works of the Ancients, the parallels that emerge are striking. These parallel planes when combined, might prove more than illuminating, especially when applied to Shakespeare’s and Marlowe’s overreachers. Among the most acclaimed Renaissance sceptics, which might have influenced both Elizabethan playwrights, Sukanta Chaudhuri, the author of the study of Shakespeare’s and

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly enough, in the course of his academic career, Nietzsche, a classical philologist, dealt with Pre-Socratic philosophers. His admiration for Greek freethinkers must have had a profound influence on the development of his aversion to Plato’s metaphysics and consequently let him shape his criticism of Christianity. Here it is worth mentioning his unfinished work *Philosophy in the tragic age of the Greeks* where he dealt with Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides and Anaxagoras. On Nietzsche’s criticism of metaphysics, see: Kuderowicz, Zbigniew. 1979. *Nietzsche*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna p. 57-65. To learn more about the “ancient atheist”, go to BBC Religions: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/atheism/history/ancient.shtml> (date of access: 29 April 2014).

Marlowe's plays in the light of scepticism, analyses the works of Cornelius Agrippa, Rabelais, Montaigne, Neo-Platonists e.g. Pico della Mirandola as well as some theologians – both scholastic and protestant. Out of his analysis there does not seem to emerge a consistent portrait of the Renaissance scepticism but rather a plethora of diverse authors whose views move down the spectrum from more devout to less intensely religious, and from more optimistic to more profound in their world-pictures. What these authors all have in common is their distrust towards absolute knowledge and an intense preoccupation with the individual, both being crucial themes in Nietzsche's philosophy. Some of the authors analysed by Chaudhuri recognize the illusion of the infinite potential of man and thus call for blind faith (Agrippa), while others herald human weakness as the reason to overcome and as an element of human divinity (Mirandola). Some like Rabelais, when faced with the vanity of human endeavours, indulge in the fullness and pleasure of life, while others advise to put oneself at the mercy of God's grace (Chaudhuri 1981: 5-51). A detailed explication of all forms of scepticism and their comparison with Nietzsche's views far exceed the limits of this dissertation. Nevertheless, it seems necessary to look at the views of those thinkers who had the most profound impact on the English Renaissance, and thus more or less directly might have also influenced Shakespeare and Marlowe. According to Buckley (1965: 20-25), the spirit of doubt permeated from Antiquity to the early Renaissance Italy and later France through the Arab translations and appropriations of ancient texts by Averroes and his circle. It seems that it was the Arab philosophers who initiated an Aristotle-based discussion on the question of the immortality of the soul which was later taken up by Pietro Pomponazzi, an Italian father of scepticism. In France, one of the most influential sceptical thinkers would obviously be Michel de Montaigne, influenced heavily by, already mentioned, Lucretius and his poem *On the nature of things*. Along with them one could enumerate Italians – Cardano and Vanini – as well as the French Charron and Bodin.<sup>2</sup> Yet again for reasons of expediency a thorough analysis of all the aforementioned thinkers is not possible, but I am strongly convinced that a juxtaposition of the three most acclaimed personages, namely, Pomponazzi, Montaigne and Lucretius with Nietzsche's philosophical tenets can sufficiently demonstrate the Nietzschean quality of the Renaissance free-thinking. I decided to discuss Pomponazzi because his writing unveils a dynamite content, taking into account the circumstances of their creation.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> To read a detailed analysis of the Italian and French Renaissance atheists, see: Chapter 2 (28-74) and Chapter 3 (75-110) in: Allen, Don Cameron. 1964. *Doubt's boundless sea – scepticism and faith in the Renaissance*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press.

<sup>3</sup> Pietro Pomponazzi (1462-1524), being a precursor of the Renaissance, did not live to see the creation of the The Roman Inquisition and, thus, luckily did not share the tragic fate of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) who was found guilty of heresy and burned at the stake for views, in my opinion, far less contentious than Pomponazzi's. Pomponazzi's book *De Immor-*

Montaigne seems to be an obvious choice for his extensive influence on Shakespeare and possibly Marlowe. Lucretius' free-thinking message resonates in Montaigne and, as Greenblatt (2011: 244) suggests, even in Shakespeare. In my opinion, this trinity, unified by a common energy and mental interdependencies, also best represents ideas close to Nietzsche's heart.

### 2.1.1.2. Lucretius: existentialist sceptic

In the eyes of Stephen Greenblatt, it is Titus Lucretius Carus, the Roman poet, who is the father of the Renaissance sceptics. Moreover, as the cover of *The Swerve* announces, Lucretius seems to take the role of the father of the Renaissance and, thus, it is possible to risk claiming that indirectly the father of modernity and implicitly – individualism too. Lucretius' only poem *De rerum natura*, better known as *On the nature of things*, is a lyrical explication and a direct statement of Epicurus' philosophy. As Buckley (1964: 4) posits: "it can be said with confidence that the sceptics of classical antiquity were one of major sources of religious disbelief in sixteenth-century England." So it is no wonder that Lucretius's poem as well as Epicurean philosophy is seen as carrying dynamite and a highly subversive message.<sup>4</sup> According to Greenblatt, in Italy this free-thinking message is responsible for leading Giordano Bruno to the scaffold. However, as Greenblatt (2011: 242) writes: "silencing Bruno proved far easier than returning *On the nature of things* to the darkness. The problem was that, once Lucretius' poem re-entered the world, the words of this visionary poet of human experience began to resonate powerfully in the works of Renaissance writers and artists, many of whom thought of themselves as pious Christians [...] And before long the ideas surfaced as well far from Florence and Rome". Interestingly enough, it is worth remembering that Bruno spent a creatively fruitful period of 1583-1585 in England, where he met for example Sir Philip Sydney and some of the people from John Dee's circle. Now, since the influence of Lucretius' poetry on the development of Renaissance individualism cannot be overestimated, it seems reasonable to cast a glance at Lucretius poem first and try to read it through Nietzsche's philosophy.

The thematic extent of *On the nature of things*, like Nietzsche's philosophy, is indeed astounding – as Lucretius is more than a poet and a philosopher;

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*talitate Anime* [Immortality of the Soul] was burnt in Venice in 1516 but he himself avoided death, though he had to write *Apologia* in which he philosophically tried to explain some of his ideas. For more information see: Perfetti, Stefano, "Pietro Pomponazzi", in: Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/pomponazzi/> (date of access: 29 April 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Allan (1964: 5) ironically refers to Epicurus as "impious" and calls him a "patron-saint of medieval heretics".

he takes up a challenge of a scientific explanation of the Universe. He opens his poem with an invocation to Venus, the goddess of sensual and physical love, by which he already signals the direction of his philosophical enterprise. He is, like Nietzsche, mostly interested in the realm of physicality and, though his goal to explain the nature of phenomena is incredibly ambitious, he wants to reach it without the recourse to metaphysics. In his invocation Lucretius points to the petty condition of humans but at the same time he warns against superstition and all-too easy answers, as he says: “[w]hilst human kind/ Throughout the lands lay miserably crushed/ Before all eyes beneath Religion— who/ Would show her head along the region skies,/ Glowering on mortals with her hideous face” (Lucretius 2008, loc. 62-63). One cannot escape realizing that in his harsh assessment of religion, whose persona carries a “hideous face”, Lucretius points to the essential hypocrisy of religious belief and his reluctance to acknowledge metaphysical reality as a potent answer to pending questions about the Universe. As an alternative to blind faith Lucretius proposes reason, to which he frequently refers e.g. when he says: “I own with reason: for, if men but knew/ Some fixed end to ills, they would be strong/ By some device unconquered to withstand/ Religions and the menacings of seers” (Lucretius 2008, loc. 89-91). Obviously, as can be seen, Lucretius understands that it is insufficient knowledge and fear that paralyzes and diminishes Man. Yet he praises a brave Greek who was bold enough to overcome this paralysing fear:

[a] Greek it was who first opposing dared  
 Raise mortal eyes that terror to withstand,  
 Whom nor the fame of Gods nor lightning’s stroke  
 Nor threatening thunder of the ominous sky  
 Abashed; but rather chafed to angry zest  
 His dauntless heart to be the first to rend  
 The crossbars at the gates of Nature old.  
 And thus his will and hardy wisdom won;  
 And forward thus he fared afar, beyond  
 The flaming ramparts of the world, until  
 He wandered the unmeasurable All. (Lucretius 2008, loc. 63-67)

The “angry zest” and “dauntless heart” are undoubtedly the same key features Nietzsche praises in his writings. Following the dictates of reason, Lucretius calls for the overcoming of fears and sets about dismantling the world as known and understood by the Greeks and the Romans.

The founding principle out of which Lucretius’ argument arises is: “[n]othing from nothing ever yet was born” (Lucretius 2008, loc. 104-105)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> It is hard not to recall a mirroring line of Shakespeare’s, namely Lear’s response to Cordelia’s silence in *King Lear* Act 1.1 and Act 1.4, when he says “[n]othing will

This idea is a point of departure for Lucretius' belief in eternal matter as a basis for all animate and inanimate bodies. The Universe is built of "Procreant atoms, matter, seeds of things,/ Or primal bodies, as primal to the world" (Lucretius 2008, loc. 78-79). The diversity of these particles as well as their potential mutability decide upon the abundance of life forms and variety of matter formations. For Lucretius also the nature of the human mind and soul are of material origin. Along the particles of matter the second ingredient of the Universe (as seen through the eyes of Epicurus and recorded poetically by Lucretius) is "the Void" or, in other words, insubstantial emptiness in which the atoms revolve and swerve. These accidental movements underscore the random nature of earthly and universal occurrences. So in the poem "[b]odies of solid, everlasting frame—/ The seeds of things, the primal germs" are contrasted with the volatile changeability of their forms (Lucretius 2008, loc. 262-263). Lucretius – the scientist who embraces the diversity of life forms and conceptualizes their descent as a long and gradual process – seems to fore-run Darwin, Nietzsche's near contemporary. It seems also that both Lucretius and Nietzsche would not share the superficial enthusiasm of Darwin's contemporaries, who would embrace the "scientific" dethroning of God and the rejection of his grand plan.<sup>6</sup> Both in the nihilistic Nietzsche as well as the sceptical Lucretius the clash of infinite, mutable matter and contingent human existence is not only an acknowledgement of anxiety but also a call for the overcoming of fear. Lucretius in his treatment of the random swerves of atoms in the void is more than a scientist – he actually emerges almost as an existentialist philosopher, in the vein of the 20<sup>th</sup> century existentialism, of which Nietzsche was a precursor. After all, his "place intangible, a void" is reminiscent of Jean Paul Sartre "nothingness" that devours life and prays on human anxiety and dread (Lucretius 2008, loc.186).<sup>7</sup> Yet neither Nietzsche nor Lucretius let themselves be engulfed by the despair caused by the silence of the deaf Gods (or non-existent God for that matter). Just like Nietzsche, Lucretius sees the deafness of the Gods as an unavoidable human

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come of nothing, speak again". One may suggest that this sole sentence is no evidence for Shakespeare's knowledge of Lucretius but it is an interesting and tempting notion to believe that Shakespeare was acquainted with the poem, be it directly or through other thinkers (e.g. Montaigne).

<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that Nietzsche embraced Darwin's evolutionary theory but unlike his many contemporaries saw its dynamite potential and its possible negative consequences. When criticising David Strauss in his first *Untimely meditation (David Strauss, the confessor and the writer)* he doubted Darwin's place as "as one of the greatest benefactors of mankind" Section 7 (Nietzsche 2007a: 29). Just like the "enthusiastic" atheism of his age, blind embrace of Darwin's discoveries was not for Nietzsche a source of smug optimism but rather a sign of a great crisis of humanity and a call for "overcoming" of these "philistine" tendencies.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Paul Sartre devotes his opus magnum to the idea of Nothingness. For more details see: Sartre, Jean Paul. [1943] 1965. *Being and Nothingness*. New York: The Citadel Press.

condition with which Man has to come to terms. Lucretius takes his time to explicate the material nature of the human soul, mind and body as well as their inseparability. In the context of this view “the folly of the fear of death” becomes more apparent as he says: “[t]herefore death to us/ Is nothing, nor concerns us in the least,/ Since nature of mind is mortal evermore” (Lucretius 2008, loc. 1525-1526). Thus, one needs to realize that religion is a source of primordial fear that can only be overcome when confronted with an intellectual realization of the pettiness of the fear. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that the “overcoming” in question has eventually a slightly different hue in Nietzsche and Lucretius. While the latter sees the rejection of metaphysics as a reason for calm and informed withdrawal from hectic life in the vein of Epicurean teachings, the former would never accept a repudiation of the primitive instincts, even those lurking in the darkest corners of the human mind. Lucretius holds these primordial fears of death or the Gods responsible for the human drive to accumulate riches and power, but he seems to see these drives as potentially evil when he says: “[d]riven by false terror, and afar remove,/ With civic blood a fortune they amass,/ They double their riches, greedy, heapers-up/ Of corpse on corpse they have a cruel laugh” (Lucretius 2008, loc. 1172-1174). The realization of the “true” nature of things makes one want to withdraw from these human occupations and struggles. For Nietzsche, the seemingly negative impulses are an inseparable part of life and provide a basis for a creative transformation into a being of higher nature.

Despite the differences between Nietzsche and Lucretius concerning their outlooks on human instincts, one sees that the spirit of intellectual freedom and a free-thinking attitude is a common quality of both thinkers. In his evolutionary portrayal of life and his atomistic vision of the Universe, Lucretius seems to emerge as a fore-runner of the modern perception of reality. Though the “scientific” world-picture he devised, following Epicurus, is at points incomplete or distorted, it is unquestionably an astounding piece of poetry expressing the cult of the lonely individual faced with the contingency of his being. The details of Lucretius’ world-picture if scrutinized by modern-day scientists, would most probably be contested, but as Greenblatt (2011: 185) writes: “many of the work’s core arguments are among the foundations on which modern life has been constructed”. So, as a whole, the poem deals with surprisingly modern human maladies similar to the ones Nietzsche addressed in his philosophical quests. Knowing that Lucretius’ poem was retrieved and popularized in the Renaissance, one can yet again suspect that its ideas penetrated the minds of the early moderns. Greenblatt enumerates distinguished Renaissance figures who were familiar with the contents of *On the nature of things* or even owned a copy of the text. Among them were the already mentioned Giordano Bruno but also Michel de Montaigne and Ben Jonson, whose private copy of the text is nowadays kept in Houghton Library at Harvard. Those who, according to Greenblatt

(2011: 185, 243), were interested in “Lucretian materialism” include Machiavelli, Galileo and on the English soil Spenser, Donne, and Bacon. Now if Ben Jonson was familiar with and had a copy of Lucretius’ work we can only speculate whether, in the spirit of the creative collaboration of the Elizabethan theatre, he shared his knowledge with other playwrights of his time. The question whether Shakespeare or Marlowe knew Lucretius’ philosophy forever remains suspended in the realm of speculation. What is certain is the fact that Shakespeare experienced Lucretius through his favourite Michel de Montaigne and his essays. We may yet again speculate that Marlowe, being a well-educated author, was familiar with Montaigne and, thus, indirectly with Lucretius. What is also noteworthy is that the manuscript of Lucretius’ text was discovered by Bracciolini in 1417. So, by the year 1516 when Pomponazzi, an Italian precursor of Renaissance scepticism, published his tract on the immortality of the human soul (or to be more precise “mortality”), Lucretius’ text had been long in circulation, radiating its “subversive” energy in Italy, which was apparently still at the crossroads of scholasticism and free-thinking impulses.

### 2.1.1.3. Pomponazzi: moral relativity

Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525) seems to have been caught between this twilight of medieval scholasticism and the dawn of Renaissance humanism. He appears to have grown discontented with the contemporary readings of Aristotle and was determined to reach Aristotle’s original message (Perfetti 2004). In his passionate interest in astrology he seemingly kow-tows to superstition, but his insistence on the scientific approach to the topic truly testifies to his precursory contribution to the development of the Renaissance philosophy. As Antonino Poppi (1988: 654) writes: “Pomponazzi seems [...] to have had the single aim of eliminating any supernaturalism whatsoever, so as to be able to ascribe everything to natural forces.” And despite the grounding of his whole philosophy in the metaphysical framework of Christianity, Pomponazzi emerges as a key sceptic of his period, questioning the fundamental premises of Christianity, namely, the immortality of the soul in his contentious *Tractus de immortalitate animae* (1516), or doubting the existence of angels and demons in his *De naturalium effectuum causis sive de incantationibus* (1556). I would like to argue that the individualist strain in Pomponazzi’s philosophy as well as the sceptical nature of his inquiry makes his philosophy to an extent reminiscent of Nietzsche’s and thus to illustrate the Nietzschean nature of Renaissance thought.

The assumption of the impossibility to know fully oneself is a starting point for Pomponazzi. It is an intellectual spark that makes him question the notion of the immortality of the human soul. As Allan (1964: 34) explains, Pomponazzi’s line of argument is based on the assumption that man can only

learn about his nature through direct experience, in other words, through the knowledge of the other. Consequently, the individual or personal soul must be mortal if it is inextricably linked with earthly experience. The human soul, as it is equipped with intelligence and reason, can instinctively feel the universal, but is capable of comprehending only its representation. It is possible to risk a statement that in this sense Pomponazzi distantly heralds Shopenhauer's will and representation, but to my mind, the experimental, scientific nature of his philosophising makes him a Nietzschean philosopher as well. According to Pomponazzi, with his limited vision man is a creature suspended between more ideal and baser beings combining materiality and immateriality in one. As he (1600: 48) writes: "anima humana simpliciter materiale et secundum quid immateriale [...] humanus intellectus est immaterialis & materialis."<sup>8</sup> This statement in itself can be easily inscribed within a more general body of Renaissance thought. However, Pomponazzi's boldness in affirming the mortality of the human soul is, in my opinion, a perfect piece of evidence for the philosopher's free-thinking spirit resembling Nietzsche's denial of metaphysical reality. And though Pomponazzi, like other Renaissance sceptics, eventually relies on divine grace as the only sure thing in human life, his intellectual acuity is far ahead of his piety, especially when he unveils his cold calculations concerning religions. In a very witty passage from *Immortalitate animae* Pomponazzi suggests that if there are three major religions (Christ's, Moses' and Mohammed's), then the whole world is cheated when all three are in error. Possibly one of them is true – then it still means that a greater part of the world lives in error as the other two are wrong (Pomponazzi 1600: 107). Pomponazzi's resort to reason in his evaluation of religion unveils a multiplicity of "truths" and invites yet again a comparison with Nietzsche's perspectivism. Pomponazzi also resembles Nietzsche in his down-to-earth attitude towards morality. For instance, he openly states that people are virtuous for fear of punishment or that patriotism is driven by self-interest or ambition (Allan 1964: 34-35). What is more, Pomponazzi, like Nietzsche, questions the idea of accountability for one's actions. As Allan (1964: 40) underscores, in Pomponazzi's philosophy moral judgements turn out to be absurd. He seems to unveil man's "illusion of interior freedom and of making his own decisions" (Poppi 1988: 655-656). Obviously, as he frequently underscores in his writings, he writes as a philosopher and scholar, possibly trying to distance any accusations of heresy. Nevertheless, in his book *De naturalium effectuum causis sive de incantationibus* he undertakes a risky task of deconstructing the belief in supernatural phenomena such as angels, demons and miracles. In his pursuits he is able to advance even more subversive ideas, sug-

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<sup>8</sup> Pomponazzi's paradoxical statement "simpliciter materiale et secundum quid immateriale" can be rendered as "simply material and relatively immaterial" though Allan (1964: 34) translates it as "unqualifiedly material and relatively immaterial".

gesting even the contingency of religious systems in general. Concerning supernatural agents, Pomponazzi does not attribute the occurrence of seemingly transcendental events to supernatural interventions, but rather wants to see them as perfectly natural and explainable by scientific means. In his view, the miraculous aura of certain occurrences can be attributed to their rarity, as Pomponazzi (1600: 294) writes himself: “Non secundum communem naturae cursum, sed in longissimis periodis.” Speaking of religions, he also surprises the reader with his open-mindedness and a very modern quality of his scepticism. In his reason-permeated vision, he sees the history of mankind in the context of “an undulation, a rise and fall”. This sine wave of the Universe is true for Christianity as well, which is apparently in the state of crisis (Allan 1964: 44). Yet again a comparison with Nietzsche seems more than welcome. In a sense Pomponazzi’s understanding of the contingency of the Universe resembles Nietzsche’s version of eternal recurrence in its insistence on the cyclical nature of things.

As shown in the above analysis, Pomponazzi, a leading representative of Renaissance scepticism, has a great deal in common with Nietzsche’s philosophical vision. There are no records to prove that the Italian sceptic was familiar to either Shakespeare or Marlowe, which naturally does not exclude the possibility of the intellectual affinity between these great minds. As Buckley (1965: 26) suggests, both Italian and French sceptical philosophers’ influence was getting stronger and stronger in England from Elizabeth’s ascension to the throne onwards. England had been lagging behind in sceptical reflection due to its reformatory conflicts, which prevented such reflection. The first mention of the issue of the soul’s immortality, which is after all a key question in Pomponazzi’s philosophy, can be found in the *Fourth sermon* of Hugh Latimer, delivered as early as 1549 (Buckley 1965: 30). So, one may suspect that the ideas developed in Pomponazzi’s treaties directly or indirectly reached England. Therefore, though this cannot be anything more than a pure conjecture, one may risk a statement that apart from a mere intellectual proclivity for scepticism that could be attributed to Shakespeare and Marlowe, there might have existed authentic knowledge of the texts on the part of both dramatists. There is no doubt that the writings of the most acclaimed French sceptic, Michel de Montaigne, were available in the England of Shakespeare, and were known to the dramatist. Thus, it seems more than reasonable to now move on to the analysis of Montaigne’s writings.

#### 2.1.1.4. Montaigne: active nihilism

The affinity of the key French Renaissance sceptic Michel de Montaigne and Nietzsche is multifaceted and multi-layered, both on the level of form as well as content. In my opinion, just as Montaigne and Shakespeare have been fre-

quently identified as kindred spirits, so could Nietzsche be seen as Montaigne's successor in many respects.<sup>9</sup> Just a cursory look at the aphoristic, experimental style of Nietzsche and Montaigne's *Essays* enables one to instinctively see this affinity, but a more thorough analysis of Montaigne's writings unveils a well of similarities. As Piness and Lockyer (1990: 18) suggest, Montaigne's coinage "essais" accurately expresses his philosophical method as "essais" are exactly "tests, trials attempts, or samplings". In this sense Nietzsche's aphorisms serve the same function, as they are, above all, philosophical experiments which are aimed at an arrival at certain conclusions.<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche, critical of totalizing systems like those of Hegel's or Kant's, never attempted to build one, instead he decided to approach single problems from various angles. He never started with a hypothesis because that would, in his view, force yielding specific results defending that hypothesis. Like Socrates he was a question and problem-oriented thinker. As Richard Schacht (2005: IX) suggests, Nietzsche was impressed by Montaigne's and La Rochefoucauld's style and decided to imitate their style. So one sees that not only did he know and admire the works of Montaigne but also he emulated his style of writing and methods of reaching his philosophical goals. However, just as Nietzsche is Montaigne's follower on the level of form, so too is, as far as I am concerned, Montaigne Nietzsche's philosophical precursor on the level of content.<sup>11</sup>

Montaigne is one of the most acclaimed Renaissance sceptics as in his *Les Essais* he underscores the human inability to reach absolute knowledge, and the relativity of human experience and opinion.<sup>12</sup> If one looks at one of his most famous essays – *Of cannibals*, which interestingly enough is believed to have inspired numerous passages in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* – one sees how modern and open-minded Montaigne really is in the face of the changing world in which he lived – in the midst of great geographical discoveries. Montaigne (1990b: 2011) rejects the unsubstantiated fears of the other by calmly stating:

I find (as far as I have been informed), there is nothing in that nation [the natives of Brazil] that is either barbarous or savage unless men call that barbarism which is not

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<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche is of course more than just that as he is a thoroughly original thinker whose philosophy eventually deviates into directions and spheres unimaginable to Montaigne. Nevertheless, early Nietzsche, who has just realized the power of the succinct aphorism and revels in his new found philosophical energy in *Human, all too human* (1878) unquestionably resembles Montaigne.

<sup>10</sup> To read more on Nietzsche's experimental and aphoristic style see: Hollingdale, R.J. 2001. *Nietzsche*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 140-141.

<sup>11</sup> In *Human, all too human*, volume II *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* Nietzsche (2005a: 299) poetically acknowledges his indebtedness to Montaigne in his aphorism *Descent into Hades* (408).

<sup>12</sup> See: e.g. Chapter XVIII *Of the uncertainty of our judgement*, XXV *Of the education of children* or the most famous of Montaigne's writings *An apology of Raymond Sebond*.

common to them. As indeed, we have no other aim of truth and reason than the example and idea of the opinions and customs of the country we live in.

Montaigne points out a crucial characteristic of the early-modern European way of thinking as he observes that the Europeans assess other civilisations by their own standards, which they see as absolute and final. But at the same time, he reviles the European intellectual and moral conceit and its superficiality. The diversity of civilisations as well as variety of customs, cultures and moralities of the world, serves his project to unveil the contingency of morality, which is by no means a universal code but rather a mere human construct. Relativity of morality or, in other words, morality as custom and habit, is one of the most significant fruits of Nietzsche's philosophical reflection, the beginning of his battle with Christian morality. In the course of his experiments in *Human all too human* and *Beyond good and evil*, Nietzsche arrives at the realisation of the superficial nature of human morality and in *The genealogy of morality* he exploits this idea in order to present his theory on the development of morality and its functions in general.<sup>13</sup> Though Montaigne never grows as infuriated with his contemporaries as Nietzsche does, nevertheless his "optimistic" scepticism in many respects reminds one of Nietzsche's "active nihilism".<sup>14</sup>

Montaigne's optimism lies in the fact that, despite seeing man as a "miserable and wretched creature", he manages to find value in life itself (Montaigne 1990b: 28). In this respect he is also very Nietzschean as Nietzsche frequently highlights human wretchedness as opposed to life abundance and energy. According to Nietzsche, human life is scarred with suffering, which is an indispensable ingredient of happiness. Nietzsche (2007: 192) ironically writes: "Oh, how little do you know of the happiness of man, you comfortable and good-natured ones! For happiness and misfortune (*Glück* und *Unglück*) are two siblings and twins who either grow up together or – as with you – remain small together!". Montaigne would definitely agree with this statement of Nietzsche. With similar irony Montaigne (1990b: 28) also criticizes human delusions and misunderstandings as well as the illusory belief in limitless capabilities when he writes:

[p]resumption is our natural and original infirmity. Of all creatures man is the most miserable and frail, and therewithal the proudest and disdainfullest. Who perceiveth and seeth himself placed here amidst the filth and mire of the world, fast tied and nailed to the worst, most senseless, and drooping part of the world in the vilest corner of the house and fartherst from heaven's cope with those creatures that are the

<sup>13</sup> To read more about Nietzsche's experiments on moral/immoral stances, see: Hollingdale, R.J. 2001. *Nietzsche*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy . 142-148, 163-170, 210-222

<sup>14</sup> To read more about "active" versus "passive" nihilism, see: Kuderowicz, Zbigniew. 1975. *Nietzsche*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 57-65.

worst of the three conditions and yet dareth imaginarily place himself above the circle of the moon and reduce heaven under his feet. It is through that vanity of the same imagination that he dare equal himself to God, that he ascribeth divine conditions unto himself, that he selecteth and separateth himself from out of the rank of other creatures; to which his fellow bretheren and compeers, he cuts out and shareth their parts and allotteth them portions of means or forces he thinks good. How knoweth he by the virtue of his understanding the inward and secret motions of beasts? By what comparison from them to us doth he conclude the brutishness he ascribeth unto them? When I am playing with my cat, who knows whether she have more sport in dallying with me than I have in gaming with her? We entertain one another with mutual apish tricks.

Here Montaigne dismantles the idea of the great chain of being and one is struck with the affinity of the lines in *Thus spoke Zarathustra* where Nietzsche speaks of man as “a laughing stock or a painful embarrassment” to the overman (Nietzsche 2006c: 6). Montaigne’s famous reference to his cat, where he wonders if it is he who plays with the cat or maybe the cat who actually plays with him, seems to be the ultimate expression of relativity, bordering on Nietzschean perspectivism. Montaigne, though he always acknowledges divine grace as a prerequisite of human existence, is bold enough to imagine a godless reality when he says: “[l]et us now consider man alone without other help, armed but with his own weapons and unprovided of the grace and knowledge of God...” (Montaigne 1990a: 27). Obviously, his conclusion is that without God’s grace man is nothing and, thus, it is necessary to lean on the belief in God’s wisdom. In a perverse sense, Montaigne’s fantastical invitation to imagine life without God is a harbinger of Nietzsche’s “death of God”. Montaigne prefigures Nietzsche as for Nietzsche godless reality is also a source of hopelessness and misery. Montaigne offers his vision as a warning against excessive pride and ambition of man, while for Nietzsche it is a beginning of man’s over-coming of suffering and a point for departure to build a new morality. In *The apology of Raymond Sebond* Montaigne gets close to Nietzsche’s over-coming when he quotes Seneca, who in *Natural questions*, book 1, says: “Oh, what a vile and abject thing is man, unless he raise himself above humanity” (Seneca as quoted in: Montaigne 1990a: 32). Knowing of Nietzsche’s admiration for the Stoic philosophers, it is hard to imagine a more telling expression of man’s over-coming in the search of the overman. Nevertheless, Montaigne stops short of granting man the opportunity of raising himself above mere humanity as for him this notion appears absurd and is an expression of unthinkable bravado, especially in the light of the relativity of knowledge and man’s limited vision. So, though the ends seem different, the point of departure for both philosophers is similar. Montaigne’s intellectual boldness is also, in my opinion, an unquestionable proof for the existence of a deeply existentialist strain in his philosophy as well

as evidence of his modernity. Though, as Allen (1964: 80) suggests, Montaigne rejects Seneca's ideas, he arrives at the realization of relativity. So, his "death of God" never goes beyond a dangerous proposition, a warning against ambition. As it seems, it is Nietzsche who carries this idea further and this chapter of philosophy belongs to Nietzsche.

The affinity between Montaigne and Shakespeare is nowadays a well-established fact in the academia.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly enough, this affinity seems to have been analysed academically for the first time during Nietzsche's lifetime by Jacob Feis in his book *Shakespeare and Montaigne; an endeavour to explain the tendency of 'Hamlet' from allusions in contemporary works*, published in 1884. According to Feis (1884: 67, 107), Shakespeare renders all the complexities and contradictions of "Montaigne's complex being" in *Hamlet*. In a very lengthy essay Feis meticulously traces Montaigne's thoughts, using John Florio's translation, the one that Shakespeare most probably used, in the character of the Danish Prince.<sup>16</sup> Whether Nietzsche knew Feis' book is highly debatable, but, what is crucial is the fact that roughly in the same temporal frame (1887) Nietzsche himself also recognized the intellectual closeness of Shakespeare and Montaigne, though he capitalized on the differences in the presentation of ideas by both authors. In *Human all too human* (1887) Nietzsche (2005a: 91) speaks of Montaigne as the author who presented "serious ideas in a polished form", while of Shakespeare as a playwright who "placed observations about the passions into the mouths of impassioned characters". The effect is that despite the totally different form, Montaigne and Shakespeare seem to speak the same voice through totally different media, Montaigne through his essays, while Shakespeare through his theatre. Indeed, the indebtedness of Hamlet's speeches to Montaigne has been numerous pointed out by critics. The most famous example of the Montaigne-rooted scepticism of Shakespeare is probably Hamlet's speech starting with the words: "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in/ reason, how infinite in faculty!" and ending in: "And yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust?" (*Hamlet*, 2.2.285-300). Though Marlowe's connection to Montaigne's *Essays* has not been so intensely researched as Shakespeare's, there seems no reason to doubt in Marlowe's familiarity with the French philosopher, given the fact that he was a Cambridge University graduate. Thus, as

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<sup>15</sup> Next to the book of Jacob Feis (described above) another classic source on the topic is John M. Robertson's *Montaigne and Shakespeare and other essays on cognate questions* from 1909 (London: Adam and Charles Black). From fairly recent analyses it is worth looking at Tetsuo Anzai's *Shakespeare and Montaigne Reconsidered*. 1986. Tokyo: The Renaissance Institute Sophia University Shinkoshasyoku Printing Co. Ltd. Stephen Greenblatt also investigates the relation between the two in *The Swerve*, 243-249.

<sup>16</sup> For more details, see: Feis, Jacob. 1884. *Shakespeare and Montaigne an endeavour to explain the tendency of 'Hamlet' from allusions in contemporary work*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co.

shown, it is possible to draw lines connecting the most prominent Renaissance sceptic with Shakespeare and Marlowe. What is more, as it appears, the views of all three in many respects turn out to be surprisingly Nietzschean.

### 2.1.1.5. Atheist/sceptical stances in England

As has hopefully been demonstrated, the influences of the Ancient and Renaissance sceptics were permeating the English intellectual circles from Italy and France as early as 1530. As Buckley (1965: 61) suggests, though there are no written records of openly atheist stances, the sustained wave of texts opposing atheist and sceptical notions gives us ample evidence of the existence of individuals who must have held such subversive and dangerous views. This situation illustrates the already mentioned subversion/containment tension, as apparently these free-thinking agents were infiltrating the body of the English orthodoxy from inside out, threatening and undermining conformity. Having in mind the dynamite qualities of certain views, it is no wonder that, apart from rumours, no texts survive. It is also quite understandable that since scepticism was not a desirable world-view, the term "atheist" came to be more often a slander term or as Allan (1964: 1) phrases it, "a majestic term of reproach and condemnation". Thus, for those who could easily become objects of such slanderous attacks, because of their positions of power and influence, it was safe and desirable to fence off any such potential suspicions. Among such figures one can enumerate Sir Walter Raleigh or Sir Francis Bacon.

Raleigh had been frequently an object of attacks in which "the atheist" card was pulled. He was rumoured to have been a host of the "school of atheism", of which Marlowe was supposed to be a member too. In the Catholic pamphlet entitled "The Advertisement" one reads that "unbelievers" were tutored in "Sir Walter Rawley's school of atheism" (Honan 2005: 239). It is also believed that the "Schoole of night" mentioned in the King's speech to Biron is a reference to Raleigh's atheist discussion group. Park Honan (2005: 239) himself questions this conjecture as, according to him, the word "schoole" might very well be a printer's mistake, who mixed up the words "school" and "style". Also the context of the speech does not seem to be in favour of the reference (Honan 2005: 239). Honan's doubts seem to underscore the gossipy nature of the accusations against Raleigh (and Marlowe too). Buckley (1965: 145) claims that the texts Raleigh wrote in his lifetime give little clue on his religious views and none of them communicates openly atheist ideas. The two essays *The skeptic* and *Treatise of the soul*, rather show, which might seem interesting, that Raleigh might have had a philosophical attitude towards religion, which was manifested in his taste for discussions or disputes (Buckley 1965: 146, 149). Buckley (1965: 151) suggests that Raleigh spent six years in France (1569-75) at the height of its

speculative hype on “atheism” so he must have heard the discussions and was familiar with the arguments. Greenblatt (1973: 7), on the other hand, underscores the theatricality of Raleigh’s behaviour e.g. during his trials. He (1973: 7) points to “artifice” as a defining quality of Raleigh’s identity. This, in turn, suggests that he might have been willing to dismiss the accusations by hiding his true feelings and through cunning political self-fashioning. Yet, as it seems, any attempt to ascribe sceptic or atheist views to Raleigh always delegates researchers to the realm of speculation, as the written records leave no evidence on the actual ideas held by him. Still, the rumours surrounding his persona testify to the diffusion of the sceptical thought in the Elizabethan society.

Sir Francis Bacon’s response to atheism seems to be yet another example proving scepticism had penetrated early modern minds. Bacon’s *Essay of atheism* is one of many English Renaissance texts which try to demonstrate the falseness of doubt and unbelief. Yet paradoxically it is also a defence of the free-thinking spirit. Bacon’s line of argumentation is conventional and reminiscent of other texts critical of atheist tendencies. He sees the diversity of life and complexity of the Universe as evidence for the existence of the divine architect and his divine plan. As he writes: “[a]nd therefore, God never wrought miracle, to convince atheism, because his ordinary works convince it. It is true, that a little philosophy inclineth man’s mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion” (Bacon 2009, loc. 601-602). What is interesting is that in order to support this view he calls upon such names as Epicurus, Cicero and Plato. Epicurus, the greatest influence on Lucretius and other sceptics, is called by Allan (1964: 5) a “patron saint of medieval heretics”. Bacon, who, after all, sees disbelief as plain stupidity, unexpectedly praises Epicurus’ words as “noble and divine” (Bacon 2009, loc. 615). The point I am trying to make is not that Bacon may be counted as a Renaissance sceptic along with Montaigne or Pomponazzi, but rather that even in his apparently conventional essay the seeds of subversion lurk. Bacon, being a distinguished man of letters, obviously belongs to the enlightened and open-minded elite of his period and, thus, is able to appreciate the beauty of Ancient texts. The author of *The advancement of learning* is aware of the creativity and the intellectual fervour of his age. Within the bounds of academic dispute, he is bold enough to praise authors and texts of sceptic content. And in a perverse and paradoxical way he can use them as evidence of divine presence and as a tool to praise God’s works. Hence, despite his critical attitude to scepticism *per se*, Bacon partly unawares emerges an eulogist of free-thinking.

It is important to notice that in the Elizabethan England not only the distinguished courtiers and politicians in the services of the Monarch engaged in sceptic/atheist debate. Among the noble section of society, the somewhat dubious world of theatre also led ferocious and heated exchanges. As it seems, within the closely-knit community of University Wits, “atheism” was an all-too

frequently used word of abuse and an effective tool in unfair competition. The group of playwrights engaged in different ways with the question of atheism includes: Gabriel Harvey, Robert Greene, Thomas Nashe and Christopher Marlowe. As Buckley (1965: 80) writes: "Harvey repeatedly accused Nashe and others, tossing the charge about in a reckless way; Greene was a confessed atheist on his death-bed and accused Marlowe; and Nashe himself wrote a stirring attack on atheism, giving its causes and minute directions for its suppression." It is hard to escape the impression that in the squabbles of the playwrights there is an element of personal jealousy and of self-fashioning on the part of the writers. There seems also little point in going into a detailed analysis of *The repentance of Robert Greene* (1592) or Nashe's *Pierce Penilesse* (1592) or *Christs teares over Jerusalem* (1593) as these texts capitalize on the conventional condemnation of atheism as a source of moral decay and degeneration. There is, in my opinion, also no point in discussing the occurrences surrounding Marlowe's accusations of atheism and his mysterious death, as the content of the so called *Baines note* is widely known. Further conjectures always involve speculations and do not fundamentally affect the meaning and force of Marlowe's works.<sup>17</sup> Marlowe himself openly never took part in the debate or responded in any way to the accusations, unlike his fellow playwrights such as Nashe or Greene. What is, however, crucial is the fact that these texts and occurrences all testify to the subversive element present within the texture of the Elizabethan society, while e.g. the personal note of Greene's pamphlet manifests ambition, albeit clumsily concealed. In the larger context, the pamphlets pointing out Epicurus or Machiavelli as supporters of debauchery and loose morals, signal a far more significant phenomenon. They, yet again, underscore the contemporary friction between free-thinking impulses and conformity, between a crypto-rebellion realized in the overcoming of conformity and this philistine conformity itself. One may say that in the midst of these cultivated "cultural philistines" like Nashe or Greene, the figures of Shakespeare and Marlowe stand out.<sup>18</sup> Though Marlowe

<sup>17</sup> For a brief but very informative account of facts and speculations see: Hopkins, Lisa. 2008. *Christopher Marlowe – Renaissance Dramatist*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Hopkins makes a very important point in the conclusion of her chapter on Marlowe's life, underscoring the subversive element in Marlowe even further. She says: "attempts to argue for an orthodox Marlowe are essentially as desperate as arguments for a heterosexual one" (Hopkins 2008: 22).

<sup>18</sup> "Cultural philistine" is obviously a term taken from Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditation 1*, where he defines the new type of man emerging among his contemporaries. He writes: "[t]he cultural philistine, however – the study of whom, and the hearing of whose confessions when he makes them, has now become a disagreeable duty distinguishes himself from the general idea of the species 'philistine' through a superstition: he fancies that he is himself a son of the muses and man of culture; an incomprehensible delusion which reveals that he does not even know what a philistine, and the antithesis of a philistine, is: so we shall not be surprised to find that usually he solemnly denies he is a philistine" (Nietzsche 2007a :7). The comparison

was dragged into (or dragged himself into – one cannot be certain) the atheist/sceptical debate with quite spectacular and gory consequences, there is no reliable record of his active involvement in the bickering of others. His works on the other hand are undeniably the fruits of a free-thinking and maybe even wild and untamed spirit who openly espouses human instincts and looks down on conformity. Shakespeare's non-presence in the squabbles may have various explanations but could be summarised by the words of John Aubrey, who described him as the one who "wouldn't be debauched" (Aubrey as quoted in: Ackroyd 2005: 162). At the same time, Shakespeare's works also testify to the openness of his mind and illustrate the frictions between the over-coming of conformism and free-thinking impulses.

### 2.1.1.6. Shakespeare, Marlowe and the Elizabethan world-picture

The positioning of Shakespeare and Marlowe within the religious and philosophical framework of their period is a tricky task taking into account the complex circumstances accompanying forms of worship, their political underpinnings and current philosophical thought. As Greenblatt argues in his numerous writings, the mechanisms stirring character motivations in the plays of both dramatists are subject to the subversion/containment opposition.<sup>19</sup> The processes identified by Greenblatt and further analysed by Hansen have much in common with the motivations expounded by Nietzsche in his genealogy of morality. If this indeed be true, both the Shakespearean and the Marlovian "Nietzschean overreaching" is a consequence of the religious and intellectual climate of the period and cannot be analysed outside this climate. The analysis of their plays within the context of the period seems to be more than justified. However, when one is fully aware of the complex and often contradictory nature of the intellectual scene in the Elizabethan period – burdened with a dynamite mixture of theology, free-thinking and politics – the task of seeing Shakespeare's and Mar-

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of Nashe and Greene to Nietzsche's "cultural philistines" is, I am afraid, burdened with negative connotations that the term itself carries, but still the parallel is more than tempting as both Greene and Nashe go hand in hand with the spirit of conformism that is permeated in the period. On the opposite pole I would position Shakespeare and Marlowe.

<sup>19</sup> For a more detailed description of mechanisms of subversion and its containment, see: Greenblatt, Stephen. 1985. "Invisible bullets" in: Erickson, Peter and Coppélia Kahn. 1985. *Shakespeare's 'Rough Magic' – Renaissance essays in honour of C. L. Barber*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 297-298. On Marlowe's subversion, see: Greenblatt, Stephen. 1984. "Marlowe and the will to absolute play", in: *Renaissance self-fashioning*. 1985. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 193-222. On a parallel mechanism of discovery and its resistance, see: Hansen, Elizabeth. 1998. *Discovering the subject in Renaissance England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2-3.

lowe's characters as over-reachers, over-coming and transforming the heritage of Judeo-Christian morality, becomes more problematic. Numerous critics over the years have been investigating the connections between Shakespeare's drama and religion. The outcomes of their inquiry yielded very different results because Shakespeare's works have been both read as intensely religious as well as sceptical, if not even atheist.<sup>20</sup> Marlowe's religious identity has been under similar critical scrutiny though his more daring characters have been more often identified with the atheist stance. It is, however, undoubted that Marlowe's atheist identity has been notoriously attributed to him due to rumours and accusations surrounding his life. For instance, the analysis of *Dr Faustus* without recourse to Marlowe's biography leaves one at a loss as how to interpret the ultimate message of the play. The morality play pattern and its religious preoccupations enable Christian interpretation, but the explicit criticism of institutionalized religion as well as the personage of the great scholar yield atheist interpretation equally convincing. One could say the same thing about Shakespeare's *King Lear* which might be read as a play about existentialist despair but also as a reinvention of the Christian Book of Job. Shakespeare's and Marlowe's possible familiarity with the works of Renaissance sceptics and the way their ideas directly or indirectly found their way into their works renders them plausible candidates for a convincing analysis in the spirit of scepticism.<sup>21</sup> One then, might say, following Alison Shell (2010: 19), that a great dramatist is "supremely interested in exploiting past and present religions for intellectual and emotional effect." This dramatist grows out of the religious and intellectual background of his times and is influenced by the processes shaping the climate of worship, but he treats it all as material for creative transformation. Shell (2010: 19) summarizes this line of argument by saying:

where religion and aesthetics start pulling apart is where a creative artist, without necessarily forswearing religious matter, sees religion not as something that artistic endeavour should serve, but as raw material like anything else. Shakespeare's writing draws upon Christianity, but does not concede to it, or to any of the other religions he uses. All are subsumed to the specific demands of the aesthetic artefact, raising the earthly creator to a position where he jockeys for position with God – or, as some would see it, is made into a god himself.

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, on Shakespeare and Christianity, see: Shaheen, Naseeb. 1999. *Biblical references in Shakespeare's plays*. Newark: Delaware University Press/ London: Associated University Press., Marx, Steven. 2002. *Shakespeare and the Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press., Hunt, Maurice. 2002. *Shakespeare's religious allusiveness: its play and tolerance*. Aldershot: Ashgate. On Shakespeare and atheism, see: Mallin, Eric. *Godless Shakespeare*. 2007. London: Continuum. Or a classic book on atheism: Buckley, George T. [1932] 1965. *Atheism in the English Renaissance*. New York: Russell & Russel.

<sup>21</sup> A perfect example here would be Stanley Cavell's sceptical analysis of the five plays by Shakespeare in his *Disowning Knowledge*.

Shell's conclusion might very well be applied to Marlowe too, while her appraisal of the dramatist's creative powers runs parallels with Nietzsche's admiration for creative strength and over-human potential. The authors are able to creatively transform not only religion but also the philosophy of their period and reconcile often conflicting positions. In this sense both Marlowe's and Shakespeare's plays eclipse Nietzsche's perspectivism as their plays constitute kaleidoscopes of religious and philosophical ideas; each and every turn renders completely new but symmetrical figures. Moreover, it is undeniably true that the works of Shakespeare and Marlowe explore moral questions, becoming in this way forms of philosophising. The intense questioning of moral stances in Shakespeare, and the more "rough" morality of Marlowe, as I will try to demonstrate, have both a Nietzschean basis. Nevertheless, in the intricate creative arena of the Elizabethan stage it is not only religion and philosophy that influences the playwrights. Politics, driven by Nietzschean impulses, also enters the plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe.

### 2.1.2. Political theology, political theory and political reality

As mentioned, the task of combining the Elizabethan world with Nietzsche's philosophy is tricky for several reasons. One of the less conspicuous is the indebtedness of great Elizabethans to the world of politics. The intersection of the realm of politics and Nietzschean philosophy has always been an object of a heated debate. In his writings Nietzsche frequently condemns political activity as being creatively void and even vulgar.<sup>22</sup> Kuderowicz (1975: 139) argues that Nietzsche's overman is more of an artist, rather than a politician. He is supposed to be a human being of the greatest creativity. Kaufmann (1974: 308-310) mentions such creative overmen as Goethe, while Hollingdale (2001: 124-125) underscores the importance of Shopenhauer for Nietzsche's formation of *der Übermensch*. Despite his apparent aversion to politics, Nietzsche himself attributes overhuman potential to skilful, though often controversial, politicians like Julius Caesar, Cesare Borgia or Napoleon.<sup>23</sup> So it is no wonder that numer-

<sup>22</sup> E.g. when in *The gay science* he ponders on politics as no longer being practised by noblemen and potentially turning into "prostitution of the spirit" (Nietzsche 2007b: 52-53).

<sup>23</sup> Caesar is mostly prised in *The twilight of the idols* while Borgia's overhuman potential is acknowledged in *Beyond good and evil* and later elaborated on in *The twilight of the idols*. I develop the argument of "overhuman" Caesar in the chapter on Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Cesare Borgia as a potential "overman" is discussed in the following sections of the present chapter. Napoleon features frequently in *The will to power* (though sometimes also in a critical vein) e.g. when Nietzsche (1969: 65-66) writes: "The two great tentative ones, made to overcome the eighteenth century: *Napoleon*, by awakening again the man, the soldier, and the great fight for power – conceiving Europe as a

ous scholars want to read his philosophy through the political dimension.<sup>24</sup> It is crucial to note that Nietzsche in his preoccupation with human psychology, though suspicious of definitive truths, attempted to unveil the mechanisms behind human behaviour – hence he was interested in the totality of human experience, not excluding aspects of political life. Moreover, in the Elizabethan period where the life of great men is inextricably linked with the court, everyone is willy-nilly a politician. So, in the reality shaped by courtiers, these aristocrats and the clergy as well as playwrights dependent on their patronage become culture sculptors. In this world, politics and culture are one because they are shaped by the same Renaissance figures. Though this group of culture sculptors, having the means and independence required in their pursuits, may seem to be an exclusive elite, important but rather small, these are people who actually have a prerogative to shape politics and culture. In this sense, Marlowe, the playwright and the alleged spy for the Queen's Privy Council, as well as Shakespeare, the author of *Richard II* and the panegyric sonneteer writing for his patrons, are both unwilling courtiers and politicians on the stage of life – the shapers of culture. And obviously it is this culture, understood by the totality of human creative endeavours, that is for Nietzsche the most important aspect of human life. One can thus suspect that had Nietzsche known more about the Elizabethan reality, he most surely would have marvelled at the extent of fascinating material for his psychological observation. He might have also suggested that it was the will to power that pushed these “artists-politicians” to greatness. The political arena of the Elizabethan and Jacobean England, as I would like to argue, just like the sphere of religious and theological investigation paradoxically *promotes* Nietzschean over-reaching and strengthens overhuman tendencies. The very ideological proximity of religion and politics, that was already underscored, makes one suspect that similar mechanisms drive both these spheres. In order to illustrate that the Elizabethan and Jacobean State in a perverse manner supports Nietzschean impulses, I would like to yet again lean on the subversion/containment paradigm. The body of the prevailing contemporary political theory on kingship and leadership equips the monarch with superhuman qualities through its divine underpinnings and at the same time, in a

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political unit; *Goethe*, by imagining a European culture that would harvest the full inheritance' of *attained* humanity.”

<sup>24</sup> One has to do with what Ted Sadler (225) calls, “the postmodernist politicization of Nietzsche” when Nietzsche is used as a frame of reference for various political agendas. This also includes e.g. the project of modern democracy. Frederic Appel in his *Nietzsche contra democracy* strongly opposes this idea, basing his line of argument on Nietzsche's “aristocratic” morality, while Lawrence J. Hatab (2002: 132) tries to re-open the discussion on the intersection of Nietzsche and democracy in his exploration of “a democratic agon” e.g. 225-243. For more information on Nietzsche and political theory, see: Ansell-Pearson, Keith (ed.). 1997. *An introduction to Nietzsche as political thinker*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

very propagandist manner, condemns the ambition and aspiration of the common man. The popular metaphors of the macrocosm and microcosm interdependency as well as the great chain of being serve to remind each and every subject of their rightful place and the bleak consequences of any over-reaching attempts. Yet again the current political events of the period such as the aforementioned numerous plots to depose Elizabeth or the Essex rebellion demonstrate that ambition in the Renaissance could not be easily curbed. Thus, the available historical material shows that the attempts at conformity frequently erupt in subversion. Robin Headlam Wells (2009: 198), who in his *Shakespeare's politics* tries to point to the weaknesses of the subversion/containment paradigm, claims that: "Elizabeth I and James I had no need to provoke dissidence: it was an ever-present threat. That threat was not of their own making, but was the inevitable fallout of Henry VIII's Reformation." Wells is unquestionably right in attributing Henry's Reformation with the seeds of conflict but, in my opinion, his argument only strengthens the ideological credibility of the discussion. It seems that it is not really the point of whose making the conflict was, but rather what lasting consequences it had. As I see it, these are mainly connected with the mental transformation of the Renaissance individual, who is made capable of seeing his singularity.

As Andrew Hadfield (2004: 1) writes: "the over-riding political issue of the time was the question of sovereignty and the legitimacy of the monarch. While it is undoubtedly true that most people – some historians would argue all – accepted the need for a sovereign as ruler, the question of which sovereign was a thorny one." Hadfield definitely raises a crucial aspect of the English early-modern political discussion, namely, its subversive potential. The body of political thought in the Renaissance predominantly capitalizes on the legitimacy of the ruler currently yielding the sceptre. The most recognizable political theory of such a kind would definitely be the "body politic" theory famously expounded in the *Reports* by Edmund Plowden (2009: 136) who writes:

The King has in him two bodies [...] a body natural and body politic. His body natural (if it be considered in itself) is a body mortal, subject to all infirmities that come by nature or accident, to the imbecility of infancy or old age, and to the like defects that happen to the natural bodies of other people. But his body politic is a body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of policy and government, and constituted for the direction of the people and the management of the public weal, and this body is utterly void of infancy and old age and other natural defects and imbecilities which the body natural is subject to. And for this cause, what the king does in his body politic cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any disability in his natural body.

The "body politic" theory, in other words, equips an otherwise mortal and weak human monarch with an "overhuman" political body that can go far beyond the limitations of the all-too human body. As Kantorowicz (1957: 13) writes: "this

'incarnation' of the body politic in a king of flesh not only does away with the human imperfections of the body natural, but conveys 'immortality' to the individual king as King, that is, with regard to his superbody." Thus, in a slightly superficial sense, the Elizabethan political theory approximates the Nietzschean overman theory in its key mystical conception of the divine monarch. Nietzsche's conception of the overman transcending weakness is not entirely a full-fledged philosophical construct and remains in his philosophy an unfulfilled aspiration of the incapable humanity, a kind of a longing which becomes a starting point and a call for "over-coming". The mystical "body politic" theory, called by Kantorowicz (1957: 5) "that kind of man-made irreality", when applied to authentic legal situations often yields absurd results.<sup>25</sup> Also, as it seems, the recourse to this theory by e.g. Elizabeth, unveils its subversive load, as it actually underscores the singularity of the monarch as a mortal being. The arguments of the theory, after all, prevent Elizabeth from recovering the lands given away by the under-aged Edward. When Elizabeth addresses her troops at Tilbury in the crucial year of 1588 – the year of the Armada – she says: "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king – and a king of England too" (Elizabeth I 2009: 33). In this case, as Elizabeth tries to illustrate, the heart of the King (the body politic) cannot be hindered by the body natural. However, the question concerning the disunity of the two bodies was a hotly debated one, especially by those who would disfavour the monarch. So the subversive crack of the whole theory lies in the very division of the monarch's body because the failing or unsuitable physical body may be replaced if such a need arise. Thus, on the one hand the theory equips a living monarch with superhuman qualities but, on the other, by dividing his/her body into the everlasting and all-powerful body-politic and the mortal human body, it underscores the subversive message that the King/Queen is replaceable. The existing body of propagandist texts condemning rebellion and disobedience seems to prove the existence of this lurking subversion. Among these texts one can enumerate Richard Hooker's *The laws of ecclesiastical polity* (1593) or the Homilies of the Church of England e.g. *Against disobedience and wilful rebellion*, dating back to the times of Henry VIII (1547) or James I's texts e.g. *The speech to parliament regarding monarchy* (1610) or *The true law of free monarchies* (1598).<sup>26</sup> In James' speech to Parliament (1610) the King says: "[t]he

<sup>25</sup> For more details on the application of the theory in the legal environment, see: Kantorowicz, Ernst H. 1957. *The King's two bodies – a study in mediaeval political theology*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press or Axton, Marie. 1977. *The Queen's two bodies – drama and the Elizabethan drama*. London: Royal Historical Society. In order to pursue outcomes of newer research, see: Rolls, Albert. 2000. *The theory of King's two bodies in the age of Shakespeare*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press.

<sup>26</sup> To refer to the texts, see: Pinciss and Lockyer "Homilies", 35-43 or Richard Hooker, in: Aughterson, 102-104.

state of monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth. For kings are not only God's lieutenants upon earth and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself they are called gods" (James VI and I 2009: 36). It seems that in his insistence on the divine role of the King as an anointed servant of God upon Earth James is referring to a long-standing tradition dating back to the Middle Ages. Yet his speech appears to go one step further, as he frames himself no longer as a servant but God himself equal to the one in heaven. He goes on by adding: "kings are called gods, and so their power after a certain relation compared to the divine power [...] And lastly, kings are compared to the heads of this microcosm of the body of man" (James VI and I 2009: 36). So the King inscribes himself within a widely accepted and traditional perception of kingship but he adds a new layer to it by equipping himself with the overhuman potential of a metaphysical (and thus unquestionable) significance. I would, however, argue that James' actual attribution of divine power borders on blasphemy and hence is tinged with an atheist overtone as it shifts the centre of gravity from the metaphysical realm to the purely physical one. Wells argues that both Elizabeth and James were moderate and tolerant rulers in comparison with the tyrant Henry VIII. According to Wells (2009: 8), Elizabeth and James "adopted ruthless measures when national stability was at threat." Still, reading James' speeches makes one wonder if he had overhuman or maybe tyrant leanings, especially when in *The true law of free monarchies* (1598) he says: "the king is overlord of the whole land, so is he master over every person that inhabiteth the same, having the power over the life and death of every one of them" (James VI and I 2009: 140). In the closing of his text James adds a crucial line, which, in my opinion, is quite accidentally very subversive. He claims: "a good king, although he be above the law, will be subject and frames his actions thereto, for example's sake to his subjects, and of his own free will, but not as subject or bound thereto" (James VI and I 2009: 141). Despite the focus on the King's independence of the law, James raises two key issues, namely, the idea of "free will", and the subjects' well-being. By referring to his will, James acknowledges his human singularity and inherent in it – his fallibility. More importantly, by underscoring the subjects' sake, probably unwillingly, he establishes *raison d'état* as society's prerogative. So one may yet again risk claiming that subversion often lurks at the very heart of attempts at the enforcement of conformity. As it seems, even in the Monarch's speech the veil of divinity can be unwillingly dropped and the workings of the state uncovered. In his writings Nietzsche, a great critic of the state, often unveils such mechanisms. Already in his early work *Human, all too human* (1878) he mirrors Marx by uncovering the role of religion as a cynical tool in the hands of the government.<sup>27</sup> In a lengthy aphorism entitled *Religion and government* he writes:

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<sup>27</sup> It is, however, important to note that for Nietzsche the struggle for power is not an ef-

For religion quietens the heart of the individual in times of loss, deprivation, fear, distrust, in those instances, that is to say, in which the government feels unable to do anything towards alleviating the psychical sufferings of the private person: even in the case of universal, unavoidable and in the immediate prospect inevitable evils (famines, financial crises, wars), indeed, religion guarantees a calm, patient, trusting disposition among the masses. Wherever the chance or inevitable shortcomings of the state government or the perilous consequences of dynastic interests force themselves upon the attention of the knowledgeable man and put him in a refractory mood, the unknowledgeable will think they see the hand of God and patiently submit to instructions from above (in which concept divine and human government are usually fused): thus internal civil peace and continuity of development is ensured. The power that lies in unity of popular sentiment, in the fact that everyone holds the same opinions and has the same objectives, is sealed and protected by religion, apart from in those rare cases in which a priesthood cannot agree with the authorities as to the price of its services and enters into conflict with them. (Nietzsche 2005a: 170-171)

It seems that the attempt of the English Renaissance monarchs to attribute divine sanction to their regimes illustrates the same propagandist mechanism that Nietzsche discusses in his analysis of the interdependency of religion and the state. In this take on the matter, the case in which a disagreement occurs between the clergy and the monarch always means a highly volatile situation. Knowing the complex and delicate nature of religious agreement in the aftermath of the English Reformation, there seems little doubt that both Elizabeth and James had to recourse to what Nietzsche terms the “unity of popular sentiment”. The divinity of the monarch can be, thus, seen as such a unifying concept. To summarize this argument, it is worthwhile looking at the concluding passage by Nietzsche (2005a: 172-173) in the same aphorism, where he says:

[t]o repeat in brief what has just been said: the interests of tutelary government and the interests of religion go hand in hand together, so that when the latter begins to die out the foundations of the state too are undermined. The belief in a divine order in the realm of politics, in a sacred mystery in the existence of the state, is of religious origin: if religion disappears the state will unavoidably lose its ancient Isis veil and cease to excite reverence.

The inextricable unity between religion and politics in the Elizabethan and Jacobean regime has already been articulated, but it seems important to capitalize on its crypto-subversive message. To my mind, the speeches of James illustrate how the self-interested state in its attempt at enforcing conformity actually undermines its very foundations. As it seems, this happens by a subliminal utterance of personal singularity and individuality of the monarch, which paradoxi-

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fect of class divisions but rather a result of an instinct – natural to all humans “the will to power” – *Wille zur Macht*.

cally may become the articulation of the individuality of every single subject in the realm. Historical events seem to testify to such an interpretation as the already mentioned numerous attempts to dethrone Elizabeth as well as the notorious Gunpowder Plot during James' reign prove that some early moderns were bold enough to raise their hand to hit the "divine" monarch in an attempt to defend their "intellectual freedom".<sup>28</sup> So, one may suggest that this politically dangerous idea was planted in the minds of the English subjects despite intense propagandist attempts to curtail its spread. Apart from the political theology expressed in the body politic theory there can be found more material that capitalizes on the idea of individuality and fuels expressions of singularity. Machiavelli's works do not only seem to subliminally communicate the aforementioned valuations of human potential but rather they lay bare the instincts of the human will to power.

### 2.1.2.1. Niccolò Machiavelli – will to power and overhuman potential

It seems undoubted that Machiavelli, the author of *The prince* and *Discourses on the first ten books of Titus Livy*, more widely known simply as *Discourses*, is one of the most influential political theoreticians of the age, and at the same time one of the most controversial Renaissance figures. Machiavelli's notoriety in the period can be best summarized by the words of Buckley (1965: 31), who claims:

[p]oets, diviners, scholars, pamphleteers – all expressed themselves with remarkable unanimity of opinion. Machiavelli was for them the arch-atheist, the devil who had taught men to use religion for political ends, who had corrupted France and brought about St. Bartholomew's Day, who taught simple Englishmen to be atheists, and who, unless his works were put down or effectively combated, would certainly be the ruin of Christendom. His name, Niccolò ("Old Nick"), at the time became and has ever since remained a synonym for the devil.

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<sup>28</sup> Such a treatment of the events is more than controversial as the plots against the monarchs can be seen in the words of Wells (2009: 8) as "extreme counter-measures" or in modern understanding as terrorist attacks threatening the stability of the state. Yet, all these plots have as their origin a break with the ancient Catholic faith. Thus, in a sense all are driven by conviction or as a response to brutal treatment of Catholics in England. So one may risk stating that in the minds of the plotters they were seen as rightful acts of necessary rebellion in the name of "intellectual freedom". I have written "intellectual freedom" in inverted commas as a passing reference to Nietzsche's treatment of such a rightful rebellion in his *Twilight of the idols* (1889). For more details, see the chapter on Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in the present work or Nietzsche's *The twilight of the idols* (1889).

This highly exaggerated portrayal can be at least partly attributed to the influence of Innocent Gentillet's *Contra-Machiavel* (1576), a misused exploitation of Machiavelli's text, through which the original was mostly known. Nevertheless, even when one pushes aside the misreadings and abuses of the original Machiavelli, still one cannot oversee his deeply rooted subversive message, that so outraged his contemporaries. It seems that the inherent subversion of Machiavelli's *The prince* does not lie in its political pragmatism but rather in the author's immaculate grasp of human psychology. Machiavelli, unwillingly heralded as the Antichrist of his time, bears much resemblance to the self-proclaimed Antichrist of the nineteenth century – Friedrich Nietzsche. Both unquestionably emerge as acute observers of human psychology and skilled commentators on human nature.

Machiavelli's practical guide for rulers makes a crucial differentiation as it offers advice on politics to hereditary princes as well as new princes who established themselves as monarchs through their own ingenuity, or in Machiavelli's (2009: 141) own words

those who by wicked means have attained to a principality." This distinction is of great significance as evidently Machiavelli does away with the mystical or theological justification of the divine rule of Princes. He admits and even justifies a "usurper" on the throne. What is more important, Machiavelli does not rule out the "usurper's" potential to become a successful ruler. As it turns out, his Prince may very well emerge as a product of self-overcoming and sublimation, as he says "the usurper thereof ought to run over and execute all his cruelties at once, that he be not forced often to return to them.

In Machiavelli's vision, like in Nietzsche's, cruelty is permitted as long as it is only incidental, in this case a by-product of power struggle and not pure calculation. Thus, just like Nietzsche, Machiavelli seems to cultivate a complete man who embraces both his lower and higher instincts, while his Prince is an effect of self-overcoming and sublimation of impulses, in other words a self-made man – or even overman. In the light of such an understanding of a complete man, there is no wonder that for both Machiavelli and Nietzsche Cesare Borgia, traditionally a figure condemned and held in much contempt, received close inspection and even admiration. As Pincess and Lockyer (1990: 98) note: "of all political leaders Cesare Borgia (1476-1507) receives the closest attention in *The Prince*, for he had many of the qualities Machiavelli most admired." He writes:

Cesare Borgia was accounted cruel, yet had his cruelty redressed the disorders in Romania, settled it in union, and restored it to peace and fidelity – which, if it be well weighed, we shall see was an act of more pity than that of the people of Florence who to avoid the term of cruelty suffered Pistoia to fall and destruction. (Machiavelli 1990: 98)

Here Machiavelli's attitude perfectly illustrates how cruelty can be creatively used for good ends. In this sense, Nietzsche's attitude is similar. It would be a misunderstanding to claim that Nietzsche unquestionably admired Borgia but, as Kaufmann (1975: 224) explains, he believed "that there was more hope for the man of strong impulses than for the man with no impulses." In aphorism 197 in *Beyond good and evil* Nietzsche makes a comparison between types of climate and human nature. Cesare Borgia is for him a "tropical man" – a man of heat, passion – totally opposed to other "temperate zones". These "temperate zones" stand for all those that are incapable of evil – not thanks to their strong moral backbone, but because of weakness and "timidity" (Nietzsche 2002: 84-85). In *The twilight of the idols* Nietzsche (2006c: 211), in response to criticism of his seeming "abolition of all decent feelings" through the praise of Cesare Borgia, claims that the modern age has not really become more moral as his contemporaries would like to believe but rather "weaker, more sensitive and, more vulnerable". For Nietzsche, incapacity for evil is not equal with a moral imperative because morality only begins when man overcomes his impulse to commit an act of cruelty. As Nietzsche (2006c: 211) writes of his contemporaries:

[i]f we were to abstract from our sensitivity and maturity, our physiological ageing process, then our 'humanizing' morality would immediately lose its value too – morality never has an inherent value –: it would even conspire our contempt. On the other hand, we should be under no illusion that Cesare Borgia's contemporaries would not laugh themselves to death at the comic spectacle of us moderns, with our thickly padded humanity, going to any length to avoid bumping into a pebble.

According to Nietzsche, the moderns had lost their vitality, which is inextricably combined with natural instincts. These were still being utilized by such people like Cesare Borgia in order to reinforce his own power but also, as Machiavelli argues in *The prince*, to yield some greater good in the form of the restoration of peace, law and order. The Renaissance, which gave birth to such figures as Borgia is, then, "the last great age" as opposed to "a weak age", in which "virtues are conditioned and prompted by our weakness" (Nietzsche 2006c: 212). Machiavelli himself does not venture to comment on the nature of his age, but like Nietzsche, he is a skilful psychologist who comments on the nature of humanity, in which he senses the division of men into those who embrace their impulses and those who, out of fear or scruple, stop short of utilizing their potential. In his *Prince*, Cesare Borgia emerges as a figure who has an instinctive grasp of what humanity really is and makes the most of this knowledge. His actions are ultimately better, albeit cruel, because their outcome is far more positive.

It may be, then, suggested that Machiavelli's Prince emerges as an insatiable creator who is fully aware of his nature and is not afraid to acknowledge it. He might resort to necessary cruelty but his actions can be redeemed if they are part and parcel of the creative process. The most serious of accusations le-

velled at Machiavelli are actually calculation and cynicism, but when one looks at his theory of power in the context of Nietzsche's theory of morals, one sees that Machiavelli is more of a realist than a cynic. As Pinciss and Lockyer (1990: 94) write in their introductory remarks on *The prince*, Machiavelli's treatise "neither offers a theory of government nor assumes a belief in natural law." If it is indeed less of a political treatise on the nature of government, one may read it as a philosophical investigation into the depths of human nature. By rejecting a comfortable belief in the existence of the inherent and universal moral code, Machiavelli lays the foundations of the genealogy of morality that would be later recreated by Nietzsche in his writings. Machiavelli (1990: 97) ruthlessly tears off the veil of hypocrisy from human morality by saying:

I know that everyone will confess it were exceedingly praiseworthy for a prince to be adorned with all these above-named qualities that are good. But because this is not possible, nor do human qualities admit such perfection in virtues, it is necessary for him to be so discreet that he know how to avoid the infamy of those vices which would thrust him out of his state and, it is be possible, beware of those also which are not able to remove him thence.

The political implications of Machiavelli's view on the nature of human beings seem to be well-known. However, the pioneering basis on which he builds his theory is, in my opinion, underestimated. Not only does Machiavelli account for the low and primitive aspects in human nature, but he also embraces and takes advantage of these instincts. What is more, by acknowledging "the evil" in human nature Machiavelli, similarly to Montaigne in his *Essays*, points to a very Nietzschean notion concerning morality, namely, the fact that moral codes are a result of custom, tradition and, thus, subject to evolution and transformation. In the chapter of *Human, all too human* entitled *On the history of the moral sensations* Nietzsche (2005a: 51) posits:

He is called 'good' who does what is customary as if by nature, as a result of a long inheritance, that is to say easily and gladly, and this is so whatever what is customary may be (exacts revenge, for example, when exacting revenge is part of good custom, as it was with the ancient Greeks). He is called good because he is good 'for something'; since, however, benevolence, sympathy and the like have throughout all the changes in customs always been seen as 'good for something', as useful, it is now above all the benevolent, the helpful who are called 'good'. To be evil is 'not to act in accordance with custom', to practise things not sanctioned by custom, to resist tradition, however rational or stupid that tradition may be; in all the laws of custom of all times, however, doing injury to one's neighbour has been seen as injurious above all else, so that now at the word 'evil' we think especially of voluntarily doing injury to one's neighbour.

As it seems, Machiavelli implicitly underscores a similar notion of moral relativity. In the spirit of Nietzschean perspectivism, Machiavelli (1990: 97) claims:

I say that all men, whensoever mention is made of them, and especially princes, because they are placed aloft in view of all, are taken notice of for some of these qualities which procure them either commendations or blame. And this is that some one is held liberal, some miserable – miserable, I say, not covetous, for the covetous desire to have though it were rapine, but a miserable man is he that too much forbears to make use of his own; some free givers, others extortioners; some cruel, others piteous; the one a league breaker, another faithful; the one effeminate and of small courage, the other fierce and courageous; the one courteous, the other proud; the one lascivious, the other chaste; the one of fair dealing, the other wily and crafty; the one hard, the other easy; the one grave, the other light; the one religious, the other incredulous, and suchlike.

In this lengthy passage Machiavelli evidently testifies to the unlimited diversity of human nature, which in turn requires numerous attitudes and approaches in its handling. If human morality is a mere man-made construct and human nature an unknown and moody ocean, then the notions of right and wrong, justice or, more importantly, accountability for one's actions all become blurred and hard to outline. Nietzsche who would recapitulate such ideas in the nineteenth century would call for the revaluation of all values in order to account for the fickle human nature. Machiavelli also seems to teach new morality; however, he applies his new ethics to the ruler, who, as Buckley (1965: 32) writes, would need to profess "*Real-Politik*, a subordination by a prince of everything, even, religion, to his good and that of the state." In a similar vein, Nietzsche would also place his over-man beyond the restraints of conventional morality. Obviously, in my comparison of Nietzsche and Machiavelli I am not taking an anti-essentialist stance by claiming, following the cultural materialists, that Machiavelli absolutely rejected any claims of the universality of human nature. I partly agree with Wells (2009: 193) saying: "to claim, for example, that Machiavelli was a radical anti-essentialist is to make nonsense of his entire philosophy of history. For Machiavelli the past has a lesson for the present because human nature is fundamentally the same in all ages." However, it is crucial to qualify Wells' statement with a note that a common denominator of human nature stems from all the instincts that traditional morality condemns. So, in other words, what makes humans human are the impulses lurking in the darkest corners of the mind, whose existence preachers and moralists simply fear to admit.

For Nietzsche this aforementioned denominator of human nature would be the will to power, the underlining and general feature of human nature. Machiavelli does not enclose human nature within one driving force like Nietzsche, yet he underscores the existence of human instincts and the free will which may control them. In the chapter entitled *How great power fortune hath in human*

*affairs, and what means there is to resist it* Machiavelli opposes classical views on the inevitability of fortune which shapes human existence. Machiavelli, similarly to Nietzsche, evidently praises the individual who takes his fate into his own hands and shapes his life according to his own devices. As Pinciss and Lockyer (1990: 102) summarize: “fortune gives a man of ability the occasion to prove himself; if he is lucky enough to have the chance, a leader with intelligence and drive (*virtù*) can achieve success.” So, in his analysis of human nature he holds a deeply existentialist conviction that the external world in its essence is chaotic and hostile towards man, but at the same time acknowledges the human capability to over-come adversity. Machiavelli (1990: 104) claims:

not to extinguish quite our own free will, I think it may be true that fortune is the mistress of one half of our actions, but yet that she lets us have rule of the other half or little less. And I liken her to a precipitous torrent, which when it rages overflows the plains, overthrows the trees and buildings, removes the earth from one side and lays in on another. Everyone flies before it; everyone yields to the fury thereof, as unable to withstand it; and yet, however it be thus, when the times are calmer, men are able to make provisions against these excesses with banks and fences so that afterwards when it swells again it shall all pass smoothly along within its channel, or else the violence thereof shall not prove so licentious and hurtful. In like manner befalls it us with fortune, which there shows her power where virtue is not ordained to resist her, and thither turns she all her forces where she perceives that no provisions nor resistances are made to uphold her.

Nietzsche would claim that nature (also human nature) and man are essentially constantly in a state of flux, in a never-ending process of over-coming. As Kaufmann (1975: 260) summarizes: “nature and life are not stable norms but dialectical forces: they are, as Nietzsche sees them, processes of self-differentiation and self-overcoming. In that sense, living ‘according to nature’ means trying to overcome nature.” Thus, as one can see, this tension or a dialectical relation between fickle Fortune and the human will, demonstrated in Machiavelli, is also present in Nietzsche. What is more, both Nietzsche and Machiavelli promote the attitude of boldness and force in the handling of Fortune’s moods. Machiavelli (1990: 105) concludes his chapter with a valuable statement, albeit tinged with with a sexist or misogynist overtone: “it is better to be heady [headstrong, bold, impetuous – Pinciss and Lockyer] than wary because fortune is a mistress, and it is necessary to keep her in obedience, to ruffle and force her. And we see that she suffers herself rather to be mastered by those than by others that proceed coldly.” Machiavelli’s insistence on assertiveness and courage in the face of destiny reminds one of Nietzsche’s focus on self-mastery, which in his writings emerges as a significant measure of the strength of character. The principal drive which Machiavelli develops in his writings, encapsulated in the Italian word *virtù*, might be read as reminiscent of

Nietzsche's will to power, especially in its emphasis on the strength of the individual's will. This aspect, in turn, becomes a crucial element in the development of tragedy in the Elizabethan period (Pinciss et al. 1990: 104). Though *virtù* is not a universal principle, it is portrayed as a drive to overcome and over-reach, both of which become essential in Shakespeare's great tragedies of ambition and Marlowe's tragedies of great individuals.

### 2.1.2.2. Shakespeare, Marlowe and political theory

So, as can be seen, despite the fact that Nietzsche was not intentionally a political thinker but rather a teacher of new morality, it is possible to seek parallels between his views and Machiavelli's political treatise. This can be done mostly because Machiavelli turns out to be so much more than just an architect of a sly political theory. He emerges as an acute and realistic observer of human nature and in this aspect he fore-runs Nietzsche and his theory of the overman. Machiavelli's influence on his contemporaries is profound and, thus, his impact on both Shakespeare and Marlowe cannot be overlooked. As Andrew Hadfield (2004: 11) writes:

Machiavelli's legacy and influence is complex and controversial. He was studied in Renaissance England as an advocate of oligarchical, republican government, which he argued was the best and most stable form of political existence (*Discourses*), as well as a sly adviser to princes, telling them how to circumvent traditional ethical restraints and pursue their own interests in the name of *realpolitik* (*The Prince*).

The very fact that Machiavelli was skilled enough to defend and substantiate both of these positions is, to my mind, yet again very telling about his open-mindedness and realism. Moral relativism was frequently attributed to the author of *The prince* back in the Renaissance as well as nowadays. Yet in the Renaissance, Machiavelli's mental flexibility was seen as a sign of moral depravity and decay. Numerous, sometimes dubious, figures of the Elizabethan theatre world e.g. Robert Greene, refer to him as a corrupting and dangerous influence (Buckley 1965: 81). However, when seen at the backdrop of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ruthless attack by Nietzsche on the hypocrisy of religion and government, Machiavelli emerges as a precursor of Nietzsche's moral relativism in its insistence on the realistic approach to power relations. The struggle for power and its maintenance are undoubtedly important themes both in Shakespeare's and Marlowe's plays. The presence of the character of Machiavel in *The Jew of Malta* proves that Marlowe knew and utilized the works of Machiavelli, even if only through the eyes of Gentillet. The strong individuals who are always at the heart of Marlowe's plays testify to his deep interest in the theme of over-coming and growing in might. As Hadfield (2004: 11) suggests Shakespeare most

probably knew Machiavelli, while his plays manifest an interest in both strong leadership as well as republican leanings. Shakespeare's intense preoccupation with the idea of kingship and the legitimacy of the regime (Histories but also e.g. *Julius Caesar* etc.) prove his intense interest in the matter of politics and morality too. It seems that Machiavelli's works functioned as a catalyst for those who harboured great aspirations and had the courage and the means to realize them. The preoccupations of Shakespearean or Marlovian characters encapsulated in their works also constitute living proof of the authentic struggles and tensions that fuelled the powerful and the ambitious. The plays of the two playwrights under consideration very often function as the sole material to work on when considering ambition in its more vibrant and implicitly subversive guise.

## 2.2. Ambition in early-modern England

Machiavelli's *The prince* was a work designed as a practical guide for rulers, and thus, "intended only for the eyes of the ruler" (Pinciss et al. 1990: 94). One of its functions was to teach those in positions of power how to manoeuvre to maintain their own influence and curb the ambition of others. In its purpose *The prince* emerged then as a double-edged sword because, in its highly subversive nature, it turned out to be also a manual for those nurturing their personal dreams of greatness. Thus, in Machiavelli's *The prince*, in its reception, its use and misuse, yet again a tension between subversion/containment or discovery/resistance can be manifested. It seems, hence, that the dawn of Machiavelian thinking reinforced the already strong state propaganda against overreaching and excessive ambition. The wealth of source texts on the so called "orthodox view of ambition" is indeed immense. Martin Esler (1966: 24-50), in his brilliant book *The aspiring mind of the Elizabethan younger generation*, analyses these numerous documents by categorizing them into perspectives on ambition conceived as "a social evil, a religious sin, an unnatural rebellion and a futile passion". The texts in question range from homilies and sermons, through political treaties to ancient texts. There seems little point in going into a detailed analysis of these sources because they mostly express an explicit and strict condemnation of overreaching or ambition. Yet, out of the most well-known, it is worth enumerating the already mentioned *Mirror for magistrates*, employing the all-too-powerful Elizabethan metaphor of the fickle wheel of Fortune, or sermons praising the virtue of obedience and dismissing rebellion as beastly and unnatural e.g. sermons of the "Elizabethan best-selling preacher" Henry Smith e.g. *A memento for magistrates, The pride of Nebuchadnezzar* (Esler 1966: 32, 35). Of course, what is most crucial about such texts is that, though they warn governors and kings against tyranny and pride, foremost they reinforce the legitimacy of the existing social order in the highly stratified class

society. That is why even the notorious fallen angel of the Elizabethan theatre world Robert Greene, in his play *A pleasant conceyted comedie of George A Greene, the pinner of Wakefield* (1599) makes his protagonist George decline a knighthood from King Edward out of humility and fear of unnecessary social climbing. The conversation between George and the King perfectly reflects the propagandist overtone implicit in it:

Edward: [...] Kneele downe, George.

George: What will your Maiestie do?

Edward: Dub thee a knight, George.

George: I beseech your grace, grant me one thing.

Edward: What is it?

George: Then let me liue and die a yeoman still:

So was my father, so must liue his sonne.

For tis more credite to men of base degree,

To do great deeds, than men of dignite. (*A pleasant conceyted comedie of George A Greene, the pinner of Wakefield* 5.1.1191-1199, 216-217).

The stance taken by Greene's protagonist of common origins sets an example for other Elizabethans. The above fragment underscores the intended total immobility of the class system and constitutes a strong voice against ambition, which was supposed to be imprinted in the minds of the Elizabethans. Nietzsche would later claim that such an imprint is not really hard to achieve as it already belongs to human nature. In his criticism of convictions in *Human, all too human* he says:

one usually prefers to surrender unconditionally to a conviction harboured by people in authority (fathers, friends, teachers, princes) and feels a kind of pang of conscience if one fails to do so. This tendency is quite comprehensible, and its consequences give us no right to any violent reproaches against the way human reason has evolved. (Nietzsche 2005a: 200)

It seems just this embryo of an idea in his early work that would later develop in his writings into what he termed the "herd instinct" or "herd morality" (Kudrowicz 1979: 114-120). In Nietzsche's (2005a: 202) view, only few people have what he terms an "instinctive mistrust of devious thinking" which seems a necessary defence technique against "the fire of convictions". Yet the early-modern England seems to provide an interesting plain where the containment techniques of the aforementioned propagandist imprints succeed only up to a limited degree, because, after all, it is a period of intense mobility, both social and spacial. In the creative ferment of the early-modern period, the desperate attempts at containment very often fail as ambition becomes the hallmark of the so called great Elizabethans.

The Elizabethan and Jacobean England is a fascinating paradox in its handling of the question of ambition, be it for power, riches or knowledge. The body of mainstream texts, as exemplified above, presents an outward condemnation of ambition. Yet the biographies of many distinguished Elizabethans tell us a quite another story. Anthony Esler notices this fascinating contradiction internalized in the minds of the early modern ambitious men. He points out that men like Sir Robert Cecil, Robert Devereux (the infamous Earl of Essex), Francis Bacon or Sir Walter Raleigh all constitute a seemingly irreconcilable amalgam of a materialistic and often cruel drive to power together with an idealistic nobility of mind and certain mental loftiness. He goes on even to suggest that the high ambition of these men becomes a kind of "secular religion" (Esler 1966: 161-163). As he (1966: 184) writes: "this generation of Elizabethans possessed a unique capacity for merging the crudest of material goals with the loftiest idealistic aims. The most gallant Elizabethan cavaliers looted Spanish churches; the most unscrupulous Elizabethan political schemers were capable of poetry". It is enough to collate Francis Bacon's biography with some of his essays to see this paradox with all its perplexing clarity. For instance, when Bacon (2009, loc. 1365-1367) opens his essay *On ambition* he declares: "Ambition is like cholera; which is an humor that maketh men active, earnest, full of alacrity, and stirring, if it be not stopped. But if it be stopped, and cannot have his way, it becometh adust, and thereby malign and venomous." It seems hard to look for a more orthodox opinion on ambition than Bacon's statement. He acknowledges the heightened mobility and a more acute vision of aspiring minds, yet he perceives these qualities as morbid or pathological at best. In his essay, he seems to excuse only those who have "the ambition to prevail in great things" but even in them ambition appears a subversive quality (Bacon 2009, loc. 1386). As Esler (1966: 184) points out, Bacon's brilliant political career, his meticulous and gradual climb towards the highest offices, all pose quite a riddle for those who would like to see him mostly as a noble thinker and author of *The great instauration*. Yet, even if one puts aside Bacon's participation in the vicious scheming of the fraction-ridden court life, his works themselves speak of his immense ambition. *Instauration Magna*, the sweeping revolution in science or its rebirth, is, after all, meant to be an imitation of the divine creative act. The work is subdivided into six parts like the six days of creation. The process is meant to lead up to the creation of *The college of the six days' works* or *The Solomon's house*, a founding institution of the new science, of which Bacon writes in the *New Atlantis* (Bacon as quoted in: Bruce 1999: 151, 183). As Benjamin Farrington (1964: 22) writes, *The Great Instauration* is: "explicitly named with reference to the divine promise in *Genesis* of dominion over all creatures." Bacon undoubtedly embeds his ambitious project within a biblical framework; still, his work testifies to an immense desire to overreach and is an expression of his personal ambition to frame himself as the father of modern science who dares to imitate, if not improve God's creative acts. One is really only just short of saying that Bacon's need

to “serve” mankind is a veiled expression of his strong will to power. What seems clear is that Bacon’s grand plan along with his ruthless political career make him a suitable candidate for the title of “Tamburlaine of the Mind”, which Anthony Esler (1964: 181) rightly attributes to him. However, a man who would resemble Tamburlaine in his grand dreams of exploration and conquest, even more closely is obviously Sir Walter Raleigh.

Outwardly, as already mentioned, anything Raleigh ever wrote (or to be more precise what is attributed to him) bears no signs of the subversion and blasphemy of which Raleigh was accused of and tried for (Buckley 1965: 145). Yet, as Esler (1964: 170) suggests: “Sir Walter Raleigh was the Marlovian mind *par excellence*”. There is no question about the fact the Raleigh was a man of great ambitions, wild passions, and additionally, acute vision. Just as Bacon’s attempt to reinvigorate scientific inquiry can be counted as one of the “grand Elizabethan schemes, impossible to accomplish”, so can Raleigh’s search for El Dorado, or the Guiana Project (1595 and the second voyage) can be seen in the same light (Esler 1964: 165). In the figure of Raleigh the aforementioned materialistic drives and noble ideals also clash to form almost a paradigmatic model of the Elizabethan ambition. Raleigh’s amazement with the beauty and abundance of life mix with his incessant pursuit of and undying obsession with the gold and riches of the famed El Dorado. In *The discoverie of Guiana* he (2006: 6) writes: “Many years since, I had knowledge by relation, of that mighty, rich, and beautifull Empire of Guiana, and of that great and Golden City, which the Spanyards call El Dorado.” Though Raleigh failed to find his dream city of gold, his account is infused with longing for it. With reverie and often unconcealed envy Raleigh recounts Spanish conquests and seems to set the Spaniards as examples for his own pursuits. He says:

If *Peru* had so many heapes of Golde, whereof those *Ingas* were Princes, and that they delighted so much therein, no doubt but this which nowe liueth and raigneth in *Manoa*, hath the same humour, and I am assured hath more abundance of Golde, within his territorie, then all *Peru*, and the west Indies. (Raleigh 2006: 203)<sup>29</sup>

Raleigh’s description is undoubtedly downright pragmatic, yet it is also permeated with a sense of aristocratic superiority when he claims that “those *Ingas*” could be actually Princes. As Joyce Lorimer (2006: LXIII), the editor of the manuscript, points out:

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<sup>29</sup> *Manoa* is an imaginary kingdom full of riches and gold which Raleigh was in search for. For more details see: Lorimer, Joyce (ed.). 2006. “Introduction to Sir Walter Raleigh’s *Discoverie of Guiana*”, in: Walter Raleigh. 2006. *Discoverie of Guiana*, in: Lorimer, Joyce (ed.). 2006. *Sir Walter Raleigh’s Discoverie of Guiana*. Aldershot Hants or Burlington: Ashgate for The Hakluyt Society London. XVII-XCVII.

it is difficult to reconcile Raleigh's views. His expressed efforts to form alliances with indigenous leaders, and to ensure that none of their peoples were offended by assaults or thefts committed by his men, 'sorted ill' with his concluding characterization of Guiana as the kind of place where 'the meaner sorte' might well eat, drink, smoke and womanize to their hearts' content and find gold for the asking.

Yet, as Greenblatt (1993: XIV) underscores: a "conjunction of apparently contradictory impulses is no accident; it is built into the structure of much of the period's colonialist discourse." Therefore, Raleigh's description is at points full of fascination and astonishment for the world of Guiana, testifying to his aesthetic sensitivity and mental loftiness. On the other hand, Raleigh's plans of conquest and exploitation are also made pretty clear. So Raleigh (2006: 49), like Bacon, also fuses the Elizabethan mental sophistication with a ruthless embrace of quite lowly instincts. In his account, the recurring image of the natives' naked bodies sprinkled with gold dust "shinning from the foote to the head" indulging in drinking and merry making, arouses almost atavistic longings. One cannot escape an impression that the natives emerge almost as Dionysian satyrs. Thus, as I would argue, in Raleigh the intellect blurs with atavistic instincts, which the speaker desperately tries to sublimate and transfigure into a higher value. Almost a decade later, Greenblatt (1973: 158) points out: "[i]mages of the New World haunted Raleigh in the Tower" as the descriptions of Eden in *The history of the world* are modelled on his memories from Guiana. In section VIII: *Of their opinion that seat paradise under the equinoctial: and of the pleasant habitation under these climates* (Chapter III) of Book I he writes:

Now we find that the hottest regions of the world seated under the equinoctial line, or near it, are so refreshed with a daily gale of easterly wind, [...] that there is any inconvenience or distemperate heat found thereby. [...] I know no other part of the world of better, or equal temper [...] But (for the greatest part) those regions have so many goodly rivers, fountains, and little brooks, abundance of high cedars, and other stately trees casting shade, so many sorts of delicate fruits, ever bearing, and at all times beautified with blossom and fruit, both green and ripe, as it may of all other parts be best compared to the paradise of Eden. (Raleigh 1829: 89)

Yet, despite the fact that Raleigh seems to have found the garden of Eden in Guiana, resting on the laurels of this aesthetic and also intellectual discovery was not enough for him. It is rather the Machiavellian *virtù*, understood as the "heroic strength of will that strong men exercise to oppose envious fortune" that was closer to his heart and pushed him forward in his incessant pursuit of the golden city (Greenblatt 1973: 159). Raleigh's admiration for the extent of the Spanish overcoming in their conquests is expressed in *The history of the world* e.g. Book V, Chapter I when he (1829: 114) says:

Here I cannot forbear to commend the patient virtue of the Spaniards: we seldom or never find that any nation hath endured so many misadventures and miseries as the Spaniards have done, in their Indian discoveries; yet persisting in their enterprises with an invincible constancy, they have annexed to their kingdom so many goodly provinces, as bury the remembrance of all dangers past.

Raleigh's argument is followed by a long list of obstacles that had to be overcome, but what emerges as the most crucial is the "invincible constancy" of the Spanish, which Raleigh definitely wants to imprint as a crowning quality of his own character. The moral implications of the Spanish and the English colonial ambitions are, of course, quite another matter. However, it is undoubted that Raleigh's rhetoric expresses his Nietzschean in spirit longing to transfigure and overcome in order to frame one's own greatness. Thus, Sir Walter Raleigh, along with Francis Bacon, deserves the title of the Tamburlaine of his age.

As portrayed, the great men of the Elizabethan and Jacobean England are ridden by internal contradictions and tensions, between ennobling and degrading instincts. In my opinion, in their embrace of seemingly mutually exclusive impulses they become model specimens of Nietzschean overhuman potential, as they do not repudiate their passions but rather attempt to transfigure them into tools of creation. The apparently irreconcilable dissonances between their biographies and works seem to make their attempts at self-overcoming more authentic. Their ambition to outshine and tower over their contemporaries is unquestionable, while their engagement with the rough reality of court politics approximates them to the Nietzschean vision of Renaissance "overmen". It seems reasonable to suspect that just as Nietzsche (2002: 85) idolized Cesare Borgia as a complete Renaissance man, so would he praise Raleigh or Bacon as "these healthiest of all tropical monsters". What some people perceive as internal contradiction at the heart of the nature of these passionate men, in Nietzsche's vision becomes merely "nature". It seems that Renaissance men, not only Raleigh or Bacon, but also Shakespeare or Marlowe, lived in accordance with different "harsh and horrible ethics", which for Nietzsche (2006c: 212) is a "consequence of a surplus of life"; and because Elizabethans lived in a reality in which "a lot can be risked, a lot can be challenged, a lot can also be squandered" (Nietzsche 2006c: 212). Yet, where risk and challenge are everyday ingredients of life, creativity thrives – as the works of these men testify. Bacon's *Instauratio Magna*, and Raleigh's *The history of the world* or Guiana project, are only a few of the many fruits of Elizabethan creativity.

In this light, Elizabethan theatre and its literature becomes also the voice of its period. As Esler (1966: 146) argues:

For a clear understanding of the forms of power as the Elizabethan younger generation conceived of them, the most useful sources of data are not to be found in the lives of this generation, but in their artistic creations. Source material on the real at-

itudes of Elizabethans toward political power is extremely limited; for unlike the semi-legitimate ideal of honour, power was not something one generally discussed even in private. If we are to comprehend the forms which the lust for dominion assumed in the minds of these ambitious young Elizabethans, it will therefore be advisable to focus our attention, not on men, but on literary stereotypes.

Of course, the figures Esler has in mind are for example Marlowe's Tamburlaine or even Shakespeare's Macbeth. And though Esler seems to be talking solely about very down-to-earth political power, this Elizabethan will to power he points to may very well refer to a wider phenomenon of over-reaching which is prevalent in the period and of which literature is so often a faithful portrayal. Marlowe's mighty Tamburlaine thunders on stage and delivers his credo on "aspiring minds" (*Tamburlaine, the great part 1*, 2.7.11-29). Macbeth reaches his crown through his "vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself," (*Macbeth*, 1.7.25-28), while George Peele's Tom Stukley proclaims outwardly:

My chiefest companie shall be with kings,  
And my deserts shall counterpoise a kings,  
Why should not I then looke to be a king?  
I am the marques now of Ireland made,  
And will be shortly king of Ireland,  
King of a mole-hill had I rather be,  
Than the richest subject of a monarchie,  
Huffe it brave minde, and never cease t'aspire,  
before thou raigne sole king of thy desire" (*The Battle of Alcazar*, 2.2.459-467).

A cry: "never cease t'aspire,/ before thou raigne sole king of thy desire" unquestionably expresses *Zeitgeist*, which resonates much further than only the aristocratic circles. It is hard to imagine a more assertive and confident act of the self-definition of an individual. At the same time, Peele's statement is an overt invitation to Nietzschean over-coming, almost a Zarathustran imperative: "I teach you the overman. Human being is something that must be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?" (Nietzsche 2006b: 5). Thus as it seems, it is ambition and aspiration, a deeply Nietzschean desire to transfigure one's *physis* and overcome its short-comings, that becomes a medium of establishing singularity. The already well-established idea of Renaissance mobility, both social and special, can be read as one of many examples of the contagious nature of Elizabethan over-reaching. The ambition and pride of exceptional individuals are means and ends of over-coming, which resurfaces as a more mature expression of individuality. One could seek in vain those among Elizabethan overmen who would declare war on their passions and cravings. Elizabethan "aspiring minds" would not try to repudiate them, they would thrive on them. Thus, they would encapsulate Nietzschean complete men with their lowly instincts and lofty aspirations

moulded into singular, only seemingly contradictory existences. Functioning in the stiflingly conformist state, they would have to acknowledge the subversion inherent to their natures and struggle with external attempts at its containment. The excess, extravagance and pride of these Elizabethan and Jacobean overmen would be an outward demonstration of their free-thinking impulses. And I deeply believe that it is exactly in this explosive tension between the risk of losing and desire to gain, the tension between required conformity and lurking subversion, that the Nietzschean spirit of the age is expressed. Nietzsche, despite his slightly idealized vision of the Renaissance, saw this seeming paradox with all its clarity.

Hopefully, as demonstrated, the Nietzschean reading of Shakespeare's and Marlowe's period opens a new vista that might capture the very *discordia concors* inherent to the early-modern mind. I strongly believe that Nietzsche, in his vision of the Renaissance, reached the crux of the early modern morality. In *The twilight of the idols* he deemed the Renaissance "the last great age", not because of its harmony and serenity, but because of its "might is right" morality (Nietzsche 2006c: 212). With an acute feeling for human psychology and the historical process Nietzsche sensed the brutal and stifling reality of the early-modern life when he idealized figures such as Cesare Borgia, who would not stop short of cruelty or barbarity. Yet, in people who would embrace their passions and use them to their advantage, Nietzsche saw specimens of the greatest health and strength. His vision of the Renaissance is based on the material that was available to him at the time, namely, the famous *Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860) by Jacob Burckhardt. However, as I have argued, his perspective is translatable to the reading of the Elizabethan and Jacobean England as well as the interpretation of key conflicts inherent in the plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare. It happens to be so because it is in the oppressive nature of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period that the greatest creativity lies. The philosophical contributions of key Renaissance thinkers e.g. Montaigne, Pomponazzi or Machiavelli unveil the raw physicality of human instincts, while the speeches of those in power try to utilize and take advantage of this previously unacknowledged singularity. Nietzsche's philosophy becomes a path that leads one through the meanderings of the early-modern tensions as he is one of the first philosophers in the history of modern philosophy who acknowledges the barbaric or the demonic as a subversive, albeit creative, element of human nature. He dismantles the illusory idea of Greek serenity when discussing ancient Greek culture in *The birth of tragedy*, arguing that the development of culture is predominantly based on conflict. Had Nietzsche been more interested in the studies of the early modern period than those of Antiquity, possibly he would have embarked on a voyage against a faulty portrayal of the Renaissance as a period of the peaceful revival of the Ancient learning and a smooth project of the discovery of the world, just as new historicists and cultural materialists did in the

early 1980s. For this reason, I venture to say that in his instinctive feel for the early-modern ethics of struggle, tension and conflict he pre-dated the writings of Greenblatt or Dollimore. Nietzsche undoubtedly saw the state as an arch-enemy of human individuality and creativity. Yet, he also understood that human action requires suffering and limitation to over-come circumstances, transfigure them, and emerge stronger. Thus, Elizabethan creativity is born in the struggle between subversion and containment, discovery and suppression. Just to quote a few examples, Raleigh's *History of the world* was produced during the author's containment in the Tower. After its publication it was soon suppressed "for divers exceptions, but especially for being too saucy in censuring Princes" (*Dangerous ideas* 2009). The author himself, just like his contemporary Francis Bacon, was steeped in the struggles of contemporary politics and threatened by their pitfalls. Yet their free-thinking impulses found vent in their grand schemes – scientific, intellectual and explorative in nature. In the given circumstances, these men, in the course of embracing their natures and their over-coming, emerged as close to the Nietzschean overmen.

Nevertheless, even those who would profess independence of the contemporary political struggles were also, often unwillingly, dragged into the midst of the raging fire. In the heart of the post-reformation paranoia of torture, persecution, rake and stake, some had to sacrifice a lot in the defence of their intellectual freedom. Though in my analysis I focus mostly on sceptics from the outside of England, as I have tried to show, these thinkers had the most profound impact on the development of the English sceptical and atheist thought. The English scepticism, as shown, is often veiled as a ferocious and aggressive attack on the indecency of free-thinking, or in other words, it rather constitutes a response towards the external influx of the foreign body of thought. This can be seen in the violent response towards Machiavelli's *The prince* or numerous aforementioned attacks on the free-thinking or atheist stances. Thus, the English scepticism is born out of the friction between the intellectual free-thinking discovery, and indignation at its subversive nature. This phenomenon in itself seems to be deeply Nietzschean as yet again one can witness culture as a fruit of bitter conflict. For these reasons, I would risk a statement that the Elizabethan and Jacobean England is indeed a battlefield driven by the Nietzschean "harsh and horrible ethics" (Nietzsche 2006c: 212). The war that ensues is finally a "consequence of a surplus of life" rather than its degeneration (Nietzsche 2006c: 212). This vitality becomes food for the further creativity of which Elizabethan drama might be arguably the finest example. As I would argue, in the following chapters the similar deeply Nietzschean mechanism functions in the works of both Shakespeare and Marlowe. Drama of the period is the first-hand voice of the period, it grows out of it and at the same time it shapes its own environment. It becomes a living monument to the living Elizabethan over-men and becomes an inspiration for the new to be born. As I argued before, Nietzsche's

idealization of the Renaissance is really a so called “negative idealization”, because it often becomes an outward cult of barbaric creativity and cruel individuality. There is no escaping from the encounters with such mighty, but often also frightening, figures in both Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s plays.

## Chapter Three

# Vicious greatness: Tamburlaine and Barabas

Christopher Marlowe and his plays seem to be at the very heart of the Renaissance subversion. With his ground-breaking essay “Marlowe and the Will to Absolute Play”, Stephen Greenblatt (1980: 222) established Marlowe as the arch-overreacher of the English Renaissance when he claimed that: “Marlowe sees identity established at those moments in which order – political, theological, sexual – is violated.” Even when one casts a glance at the bunch of contradictory and inconclusive facts surrounding his semi-criminal and controversial life, one sees the aptness of Greenblatt’s definition. Obviously, Marlowe – the playwright was as much “over-reaching” as Marlowe – the man, which Greenblatt’s “will to absolute play” perfectly captures. Interestingly, Greenblatt’s term “the will to absolute play” is a pun on Nietzsche’s idea of “the will to power”, an overwhelming force, both destructive and constructive, shaping existence and giving it its poignancy. Though Greenblatt himself does not acknowledge Nietzsche as a source of inspiration or a methodological tool in his investigation of Marlowe and other early modern figures, the parallel does seem to suggest itself. In a truly Nietzschean spirit, Marlowe’s plays question dogmas and demolish existing political and religious orders. At the same time, they respond to the early modern crisis of identity in the reality of budding imperialism and consumerism. Both parts of *Tamburlaine* as well as *The Jew of Malta* constitute strong statements of singular identities, where the protagonists – Tamburlaine and Barabas – assert their singularity in unprecedented circumstances as the plays dissect what for the Elizabethans were contentious political and ideological matters. Tamburlaine’s conquests of vast and exotic lands address the newly-emerging imperialist aspirations of the key players on the political arena of early-modern Europe e.g. Catholic Spain – an ever more threatening enemy to England in the 1580s and 1590s; while *The Jew of Malta* adds a fresh dimension to political struggle in the form of new challenges in the early capitalism. With the introduction of the Turks, as a substantial political force, into the intricate fabrics of the plays, both works also act out religious tensions underscored by the clash of Christianity and the ever increasing influence of The Ottoman Empire. Turkish religious “otherness” is not merely a touch of exoticism that

permeates Marlowe's plays, but a reflection of an authentic European mood at the dawn of the Islamic rise. Moreover, Marlowe's exploitation of cultural and religious stereotypes, rather than affirming their currency, actually contests them. The widening of possible religious perspectives as well as the instrumental use of religion in the political struggle underscores Renaissance scepticism and/or Marlowe's moral relativity. In the plays under my scrutiny, the protagonists seem to be aliens in their capacities – removed from the surrounding reality, yet simultaneously so steeped in the circumstances of their existences. Tamburlaine, originally a shepherd of modest means, fashions himself into the most powerful ruler of the East, while Barabas, a Jew surrounded by corrupt Christians and threatening Turks, emerges as the master of puppets on the island of Malta. They seem to function within, at the same time contesting, the established social make-up: the patriarchal system of rank and privilege, a set of expected religious practices and, finally, supposedly natural moral laws – all this in the pursuit of their individual aspirations. Finally, Marlowe's evaluation of their moral conduct is more than inconclusive as their deaths do not seem to be inscribed within a providentialist framework.

For these reasons, Marlowe's Tamburlaine and Barabas appear to be appropriate candidates for Nietzsche's overmen. It is hardly plausible that Nietzsche ever heard about Marlowe and his plays but, in my opinion, it is safe to say that he would have applauded Marlowe's protagonists as substantial statements of individuality, if not egoism. He would have been gripped by their daring and aspiring natures as well as their chaffing at conventional morality. Their inherently sceptical natures constitute a basis for their rampant individualism, very much in line with Nietzsche's insistence on self-creation. I would also argue that Tamburlaine's incessant and stubborn pressing in his further conquests is a demonstration of his substantial will to power. Similarly Barabas's hunger for, first, vengeance and, then, control is also a demonstration of Barabas's embrace of primeval instincts. However, though communicating moral relativity (also a crucial Nietzschean tenet), I see Marlowe's plays as lacking in moral reflection. Unlike Shakespeare, Marlowe rarely lets his protagonists ponder on the consequences of their actions. Thus, his characters, being self-created and self-asserted singular identities lack the heightened interiority of Shakespeare's mature tragic heroes e.g. Brutus or Macbeth. Yet the dimension of the social interchange of Marlowe's protagonists is quite substantial; they are, in a way, terrifying children of the oppressing systems in which they live. Finally, I would even venture saying that they emulate Nietzschean "Antichrist" figures in their megalomania and disregard for socially-constructed morality. Such are the general directions my analysis – in the spirit of Nietzsche's philosophy – follows. However, before I embark onto a full-fledged discussion of Marlowe's notorious protagonists, I first intend to address the existing body of criticism on Tamburlaine and Barabas. Because the question of Marlowe's highly individualist characterization has already been frequently addressed

by scholars, such a procedure seems reasonable. Hence, each analysis is preceded by a short section in which I critically evaluate the interpretative paths explored so far in an attempt to emulate the best practices and possibly combine relatively “old” criticism (e.g. Levin, Steane) with the fruits of more contemporary research (e.g. Bartels, Shepherd). This procedure is also in line with my aim to find a golden mean between the “idealized” cult of Renaissance individualism by early twentieth-century critics and the “decentred” subject chained to limiting ideology promoted by cultural materialists. Lastly, because this is the first out of the three analytical chapters utilising Nietzscheism (or its compromised version worked out in Chapter 1, to be more precise) in the analysis of Shakespeare’s and Marlowe’s drama, I will occasionally deviate from my main line of argument in order to explain certain pertinent Nietzschean tenets e.g. “self-overcoming” or “sublimation” etc. Later on, as these notions become clearer, I will leave them without additional commentary, instead I will use them as analytical tools or contrast their meaning with typically early modern conceptualizations. Within my Nietzschean framework, source material is also incorporated in order to open discussion on the tenability of Renaissance overhuman potential, and more specifically its demonstration in Marlowe’s astounding protagonists. There have been numerous critical responses to Marlowe’s controversial morality, but it seems that the complexity of the plays welcomes yet another rereading, one that would attempt to free Marlowe’s subversive vision from the burden of widely-accepted ethical frameworks. As I will be arguing, the plays, despite being a product of the Elizabethan mind, seem to be driven by a different philosophy, perplexing to both early-modern and modern audiences. Having in mind Nietzsche’s perspectivism and the claim that the existing morality is by no means universal or untimely (Kaufmann 1974: 81, 114), I open my analysis with a look at Tamburlaine. I believe that within a totally opposite frame of mind – that of a Nietzschean perspectivist stance – Tamburlaine’s towering ambition, pride and insatiable hunger for power emerge as overhuman qualities.

### 3.1. Tamburlaine (*Tamburlaine, the great*)

#### 3.1.1. Critical responses to *Tamburlaine, the great* and interpretative paths

The Prologue to the first part of *Tamburlaine, the great* proscribes the audience to “[v]iew but his picture in this tragic glass” (*Tamb. 1*, The Prologue 7). Yet, the opening already signals that one has not encountered a typical tragedy, as one is expected to “applaud [Tamburlaine’s] fortunes” (*Tamb. 1*, The Prologue 8). So one is indeed more than perplexed at the closing of Part 1 when the mighty Tamburlaine leaves the stage unconquered with his captive wife now Queen of

Persia and his empire stretching “from the bounds of Afric to the banks/ of Ganges” (*Tamb.* 1, 5.2.456-457). Despite Tamburlaine’s sudden death closing Part 2, the play is undoubtedly a story of personal success and military glory. Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* diptych has long perplexed and confused critics not only because it is a presentation of persistent victory and almost inexhaustible vitality, but because this unfailing energy and glory belongs to someone who, by traditionally-conceived morality standards, both early modern and modern, appears as an evil figure, worth condemnation. As mentioned, *Tamburlaine* poses numerous troubles for critics. As J.B. Steane (1970: 62) aptly points out “the essential working of the drama impels admiration for the super-humanity of one who by Christian values is detestable as subhuman.” The deeds of Tamburlaine that appear detestable to Steane obviously include the merciless killing of the virgins of Damascus or the cruel treatment of Bajazeth and his wife Sabina. In the course of his analysis, Steane (1970: 62-64) underscores the moral ambiguity of the play, but at the same time he claims that the play constitutes an important debate on morals. For instance, he believes Zenocrate, the wife of Tamburlaine, to be a moral counterbalance to his rough and uncontrollable character, forgetting somewhat that Zenocrate is after all a faithful companion in most of Tamburlaine’s deeds (Steane 1970: 82). It is worth underscoring that even, faced with a train of massacred dead bodies with her former betrothed King of Arabia dying at her feet, when moral reflection stirs her indignation at Tamburlaine’s murderous deeds she remains passive and, above all, loyal to him (Part 1 Act 5 scene 2). Pointing to the moral ambiguity of Marlowe’s protagonist, Steane’s analysis remains inconclusive. Among major studies of *Tamburlaine, the Great*, the analysis by Roy Battenhouse also seems worth consideration as it links Marlowe’s play with Renaissance moral philosophy. Battenhouse believes that it is absolutely necessary to look at the play with the eyes of the Elizabethan audience. Legitimate as this claim seems to be, he nevertheless sees *Tamburlaine* as a didactic piece in which the death of the protagonist can clearly be seen as a punishment for his sins. Battenhouse (1941: 2-3) accuses other scholars (e.g. Boas, Ellis-Fermor, Ingram) of “romanticizing” Tamburlaine by reading his energetic striving for power as an expression of Marlowe’s “modern” spirit. He himself insists on a close reading of the Elizabethan circumstances of the play’s production, namely, a close reading of the source material. However, his interpretation is as yet a far cry from the cultural materialist project as he sees the Elizabethan condemnation of ambition as a universally and unquestionably accepted fact. My discussion of “overreaching” personalities in Chapter 2 hopefully demonstrated that despite the “official” propagandist perspective on ambition as an arch-sin, the English Renaissance cultural and political arena swarmed with ambitious men and women who challenged the existing order with their subversive stances, while plays such as *Tamburlaine* testify to this phenomenon. Battenhouse (1941: 16, 12), insisting on the affinity be-

tween the didactic mode of *Mirror for magistrates* and Marlowe's purpose, resolves to present Tamburlaine as a play whose aim is "to combine the morality play with the dramatization of history." Indeed, he studies Renaissance source texts along with Marlowe's own sources with the utmost diligence but, in his stubborn insistence that Tamburlaine is a tragedy with a moral lesson, he seems to oversee the fact that Marlowe's plays subvert rather than confirm dogmas presented to the Elizabethans as "moral philosophy". As I will try to show, Marlowe evidently rejects the moralism of his sources e.g. Fortescue or Whetstone by skipping details that undermine Tamburlaine's overhuman potential. Although Battenhouse justifiably points to Renaissance humanism as a source of Tamburlaine's strong individuality, it seems doubtful that the immense popularity of the play stemmed from the fact that it communicated fear and promoted humility, especially that, as mentioned, it is a story of the ever-repeating cycle of victory in battle and the glory of power. The idea of Tamburlaine's death as a punishment for his sins also seems to be wide of the mark because his death seems sudden, accidental and it is not preceded by any substantial suffering that could entail punishment. After all, the passing away of Tamburlaine is felt by his companions as the end of a great era, and it is imbued with the atmosphere of unrivalled loss as Amyras says: "For earth hath spent the pride of all her fruit, /And heaven consum'd his choicest living fire! /Let earth and heaven his timeless death deplore, /For both their worths will equal him no more!" (*Tamb.* 2, 5.3.250-4). George Whetstone, who adapted Pedro Mexía's *Silva de Varia Le Leci3n* (1540), originally a Spanish historical account of Tamburlaine's life and conquests, in *The English mirror* (1586) presents his version of Tamburlaine's rule in a didactic tone and clearly aims for it to be an exemplar. Vivien Thomas and William Tydeman (1994: 74) identify *The English mirror* as the key source text for Marlowe and term it "a kind of prose *Mirror for magistrates* in which the blessings of the Elizabethan polity were extolled." Whetstone (1994: 91, 96) raves at Machiavelli and his "policy un[be]seeming of a Christian prince", yet he praises Tamburlaine because it is "by his cruelty that God raised him to chasten the kings and proud people of the earth." Nevertheless, the lack of military and political skill in Tamburlaine's sons leads to the fall of his empire to the sons of those Princes that Tamburlaine had himself first subdued (Whetstone 1994: 95-96). Sir Thomas Fortescue in *The forest or collection of histories* (1571), possibly Marlowe's source and also an adaptation of Mexía, does not directly refer to Tamburlaine as a tyrant, but underscores a similar mechanism to the one mentioned by Whetstone. He announces that tyrants, who fashion themselves as "the ire of God" will be themselves punished by God (Fortescue 1994: 82-83). He also mentions the disintegration of Tamburlaine's empire due to the discord of his sons (Fortescue 1994: 89). Finally, John Bishop (1994: 141) in *Beautiful blossoms* (1577) colours the story of Tamburlaine by claiming that before his death Tamburlaine saw the ghost of Ba-

jazeth, or the Devil himself, who said: “[n]ow it shall not be long, villain, but thou shalt worthily be paid for thy manifold outrages, and I too shall be revenged for the wearisome wrong that thou diddest to me, making me to die unto a beast in mine own dung”. Marlowe, who might have known or used all these sources, rejects the typically Elizabethan providentialism inherent in them. With a very Nietzschean spirit, he deprives Tamburlaine of any deeper metaphysical reflection, and instead makes him focus on the earthly domain. He lets Tamburlaine die a natural and a peaceful death, unconquered, surrounded and revered by his companions and sons. His death is nothing like the sudden and violent death of the King of Persia in Thomas Preston’s *Cambises*, a kind of theatrical model for Marlowe. In Preston’s play, the King suffers “odious death by gods justice appointed” (Preston 2007). Marlowe gives Tamburlaine a good death which should not be read as a retribution for his deeds (Rutter 2012: 25). Moreover, he does not leave the audience even with a hint of possible future discord. Instead, being “a drama of empire”, as Bartels (1993: 53) points out, it communicates a sense of melancholy that there is still “all the world” to conquer (*Tamb.* 1, 5.3.124).<sup>1</sup> So, as one can see, moralistic accounts of the *Tamburlaine* plays do not give justice to the originality of Marlowe’s message – that actually stands out from the midst of early modern didactic tracts condemning ambition or pursuits of power and influence.

One of the few early critics who actually attempted to approach Marlowe’s plays in a totally new light was Harry Levin, the author of an influential study *Christopher Marlowe – the overreacher*. Levin seems to have been the first critic to fully realize the “over-reaching” nature of Marlowe’s characters, or in other words, their subversive and original nature that escapes conventional moralities. As Levin (1961: 43) writes about Marlowe:

[h]is protagonist is never Everyman, but always *l’uomo singlore*, the exceptional man, who becomes king because he is a hero, not hero because he is a king; the private individual who remains captain of his fate, at least until his ambition overleaps itself; the overreacher whose tragedy is more of an action than a passion, rather an assertion of man’s will than an acceptance of God’s.

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Bartels puts forward the thesis of *Tamburlaine* being an expression of England’s early imperialist leanings and aspirations. The play fuels the early modern audience’s imagination with visions of imaginary conquests of ‘other’ worlds. Bartels (1993: 3) writes: “This preoccupation with the ‘other’, coming as and when it does, is no accident. For Marlowe’s representations respond to an increasingly dominant cultural obsession with foreign worlds and peoples, emerging with England’s nascent imperialism. As society attempted to come to terms with competing cultures and to establish its place beside and above them, it produced a discourse of difference, a discourse that interrogated and enforced the crucial, self-affirming distinctions between self (Europe, England, ‘representative man’, the status quo) and other foreign cultures, nonconformists, alternative values.”

It is actually Harry Levin (1961: 48), in his influential *Overreacher*, who contrasts *Tamburlaine, the great* with, the already mentioned, *Mirror for magistrates* and openly declares:

[Marlowe's] heroes make their fortunes by exercising virtues which conventional morality might well regard as vices. For the most part, they are self-made men; and, to the extent that they can disregard the canons of good and evil, they are supermen. They are continually active and, up to a point, incapable of suffering.

Levin, writing against the background of such critics as Battenhouse, capitalizes on the “immorality” of Marlovian protagonists, hitting at the very core of their subversion. However, having acknowledged Marlowe’s “overreaching” potential, he does not seem to seek reasons for Marlowe’s subversion. He sees that Marlowe does not fit the didactic and providentialist strain of writing yet he never ventures to investigate deeper the geo-political context of Elizabeth’s reign in the 1580s and 1590s. The political climate obviously heavily influenced cultural life and, to my mind, a look at the central political directions as well as prevalent beliefs helps to draw a plethora of suggestive parallels and tensions. Recent materialist critics of Marlowe have resolved to do just this when they have again immersed *Tamburlaine* into the circumstances of its production. As it seems, the plays’ immediate context is the freshly emerging need for geographical expansion of the English, where *Tamburlaine* stands as the original colonist. The play was written when the first English settlers were establishing the colony of Virginia in the new world (Rutter 2012: 33). Explicit expressions of ethnic and racial prejudice uttered by both *Tamburlaine* and his opponents capture the colonial stance of superiority taken for granted by the first colonizers. For many critics the racial labels represent “nations colonized by or traded with by the Elizabethans” (Burnett 2004: 130). Ethnic tensions are played out by the shifts between centrality and marginality as well as monstrosity communicated by the themes of barbarity and otherness (Burnett 2004: 129-130). Exploiting further the theme of otherness, *Tamburlaine, the great* also manifests unclear standpoints on religion, as the Christian-Muslim relations appear more than troubled (Burnett 2004: 135). Marlowe’s plays seem to reflect certain double-dealing concerning the perception of the Turks in England. On the one hand, as critics point out, the increasing power of the Ottoman Empire was a source of great concern for the Christian Europe. In 1453, the Turks conquered Constantinople and, as a consequence, they found themselves very close to Europe – posing a constant threat. On the other hand, the emergence of the new power on the political arena provided the English with a potential ally against the Spanish as well as it initiated more intense trade relations and an increased interchange of goods and services (Rutter 2012: 32). If one follows a negative and prejudiced perspective on the Turks as “infidels” who pose a danger to Christendom, then *Tamburlaine*’s fashioning into “the scourge of God” can be

read positively as it is him who is the enemy of the threatening Turks (Rutter 2012: 32). However, it is worth noticing that Tamburlaine, though instrumentally using various notions of God or gods for his political aims, is himself no Christian, but rather Muslim. With his aspirations to whole-world conquest he also communicates a subversive idea and may be read as a threat to both Christianity and European civilisations. Simon Shepherd also at length explains the issue of double “Turkishness”, where the word “Turk”, depending on the context, connotes positive and negative values. As “non-Christians” and a military threat to Europe, they were imbued with cruelty and barbarity. As Shepherd (1986: 142) writes, “[t]he idea of cruelty was probably produced by the Turks’ distant foreignness combined with an absence from their lives of comprehensible Christian ethics, but more importantly by their military threat [...]” However, England, being a Protestant country, was characterized by a long-standing enmity towards Catholic Spain. Elizabethan propaganda shaped the Spaniards as “infidels” who posed an equal danger to the “real” faith just as the Islamic Ottoman Empire. At the same time, seeing the Turks as a viable political and military counterbalance to Spain, the Queen was willing to oversee religious differences between the Turks and the English, or actually underscore possible similarities.<sup>2</sup> So, as Shepherd (1986: 145) aptly points out:

[c]learly the two senses of the word ‘Turk’ were far apart: while Leicester fought ‘Turkish’ Spaniards in the Netherlands, he had dealings with the court at Constantinople (and Turks encouraged the Netherlands’ resistance to Spain). In the word ‘Turk’ there was a potential contradiction of meanings which, if consciously articulated, could lead to a knowledge of the discursive operation of ‘faith’ and ‘infidel’ within material economic and political practices.

So as can be seen, Tamburlaine’s victory of the Turks can very well be seen as emulating the victory over the Spanish. Nevertheless, this is by no means equal with Marlowe conforming to the dominant ideology and Elizabethan propaganda as, subliminally, the play undermines rather than strengthens its tenets. The Anglo-Spanish crisis evoked a deep need for national heroes while the fight with them was seen as a holy crusade (Shepherd 1986: 149). As Shepherd (1986: 150) claims:

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<sup>2</sup> Shepherd (1986: 145) gives a quite concrete example when he writes: “By insisting on the corrupt Catholic religion as the fundamental enemy a useful, ideologically justifiable, rapprochement between Islam and Protestantism could be constructed: in 1577 Elizabeth’s ambassador to Morocco, Edward Hogan, said the king bore ‘greater affection to our nation than to others because our religion, which forbiddeth worship of idols’ [...]” It is interesting to note that, at the beginning of her reign, when the Queen was determined to keep good relations with Philip of Spain, she frequently made attempts to oversee doctrinal differences between Protestantism and Catholicism so her use of religion in her policy was very much like that of Tamburlaine – very instrumental.

[w]ith the uncertainty about succession and Elizabeth's policy of pacifying where possible, the ideology of protestant aggression produced the need for heroes: Leicester tried for the role with his processions and acceptance of governorship in the Netherlands, and under his wing he had Essex, on whom many hopes were fixed after Leicester's death in 1588.

However, all these potential heroes, with their supposedly righteous aims and nationalistic stances, were more of a threat to the stability of the realm rather than guarantors of the peace that Elizabeth so desperately tried to protect. They grew into authentic threats to the Crown. Elizabeth, who was getting older and had by this time no chance for an heir, was in a precarious position. Obviously Essex's failed coup gave substance to all her anxieties. If looked at from this perspective, Tamburlaine fits the description of such a hotly-sought hero – a never failing conqueror – who dismantles “Turkish” tyranny. Yet, it is worth noticing that Tamburlaine deconstructs the Elizabethan world-picture at a deeper and more basic level. Historical claimants to the role of national heroes and possibly builders of a new order may be said to have had some right in claiming their positions. Men like Leicester or later Essex, being privy councillors, aristocrats and close confidantes of the Queen, basking in her favour and serving her faithfully, must have cherished hopes of their bright future in the event of the Queen's death. None could be presented as the demolisher of the old order. In other words, none could really claim the path of success from a shepherd to King as Tamburlaine does in Marlowe's play. Tamburlaine's singularity does not only abolish the medieval theory of the divine rights of kings (a key tool in the creation of the Tudor myth) but it undermines Elizabethan hierarchical order as a whole. The play corroborates class orthodoxies realized in Tamburlaine's “gentrification” or, in other words, his ascent from a simple shepherd to the King (Burnett 2004: 29-30). In my opinion, having in mind the intransgressible hierarchy of Elizabethan society, Tamburlaine is no hero. He may be admired by his closest followers but it is crucial to note that the world he conquers hates him unanimously. They capitalize on his lowly background and sneer at it. As M.T Burnett points out, Tamburlaine's unclear ethnicity (“Scythian”, “Tartarian”) is meant to “appear synonymous with racially adverse slurs” (Burnett 2004: 130). One may assume that attempts at demeaning Tamburlaine are a reaction to his real power. In Nietzschean terms it seems a typical reaction of the weak towards the strong. Tamburlaine gives his opponents as good as he gets in terms of verbal racially-tinged assaults. However, what seems crucial is the fact that seen as a source of evil, a demolisher of the existing order and a relentless conqueror, he emerges more of a Nietzschean overman rather than an Elizabethan hero. It is true that Marlowe's plays respond to the hero ideology, that Shepherd mentions, as well as the appeal of the imperialist project, that Bartels capitalizes on, but I would argue that the plays feed on the

subversive effect these phenomena might possibly have on the Elizabethan audience. As presented, the *Tamburlaine* plays are at the very heart of Elizabethan propagandist and political tensions, but they both corroborate and subvert them, to which the indeterminacy of the perspective on the Turks as well as on Tamburlaine himself testify. As it seems, these background traces in the plays do not present a universal key to their message but rather “generate ideological irresolution and confusion” (Burnett 2004: 130). I strongly believe that the ideological and moral indeterminacy of Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* constitutes its Nietzschean potential and its utilization enables a perspectival combination of the old critical stances and the new. Even critics of a materialist or new historical background, professing the decentralization of early modern identity, grant Tamburlaine his exceptional urge in self-fashioning. The already mentioned Greenblatt but also Bartels refer to this urge as some form of a Nietzschean will to power, though neither of them acknowledges Nietzsche as a source.<sup>3</sup> Thus, I will be arguing for Tamburlaine as a potential overman driven by an intense form of the will to power. His will to power is, in my view, an identity-shaping process. Tamburlaine embraces his most lowly instincts at the background of other “exhausted” seats of power. He emerges as a reaction to a crisis of a metaphysical dimension. This does not mean that he is any more cruel than his opponents, but he willingly acknowledges his barbarity – unlike those who claim to belong to a “stable” and “civilized” order of things.

Tamburlaine’s acknowledgment of his intense desires are acted out in his relentless conquest and his speeches voicing his supposed fury. *Tamburlaine, the great* is, according to Levin (1961: 48), “a resonant fanfare and a pictorial spectacle, pure action uninhabited by passion.” From other characters of the play one learns that it is Tamburlaine’s fury or wrath that is his driving force. In Act 1, Scene 2, Theridamas says: “His looks do menace heaven and dare the gods,/ His fiery eyes are fixed upon the earth, as if he now devised some stratagem” (*Tamb. 1, 1.2.155-159*). Later in Act 2, Scene 7, Meander complements Theridamas portrayal of Tamburlaine by hinting at some supernatural powers that played a role in the “creation” of the protagon-

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<sup>3</sup> Such a procedure underscores my argument in Chapter 1 that some of Nietzsche’s tenets (e.g. the will to power) are so engrained in the philosophical and literary discourse that many scholars take them for granted or in certain cases do not identify them as Nietzschean at all. By using covertly Nietzschean terminology Greenblatt (1980: 193) and Bartels (1993: 61) also underscore the idea that Marlowe’s plays are inherently Nietzschean in spirit. As mentioned, Greenblatt terms Marlowe’s self-fashioning as the “will to absolute play”, while Bartels calls his relentless striving “a desire for empire”. Bartels (1993: 61) also points out the elusive nature of Tamburlaine’s desire when she says: “Though he is obviously driven by a desire for empire, each time he articulates the desire behind the desire, he articulates it differently, embracing successively a series of all-consuming ends [...]” The way in which his desire can be so variously expressed and presented under so many guises proves, to my mind, that it is the will to power manifested in its manifold forms.

ist: "Some powers divine, or else infernal, mixed/ Their angry seeds at his conception:/ For he was never sprung of human race,/ Since with the spirit of his fearful pride,/ He dares so doubtlessly resolve of rule,/ And by profession be ambitious" (*Tamb. 1, 2.7.9-14*). Finally, Agydas, trying to warn Zenocrate against Tamburlaine, speaks of: "the fury of his heart" (*Tamb. 1, 3.3.73*).<sup>4</sup> Tamburlaine's anger might seem to be well-staged but is inextricably coupled with his life energy, or will to power, that seems to be a direct reason for his unflagging success (*Tamb. 1, 3.3.73*). Tamburlaine's "valour and excess of strength" definitely approximate him to the ideal of the "overman" (*Tamb. 1, 2.1.28*). Tamburlaine's identity, almost entirely built on military expression, makes the comparison slightly risky as the overly militaristic interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy oversimplifies the subtlety and grandeur attributed to his *Übermensch*. However, it is necessary to highlight again that those impulses conventionally deemed negative, or even evil, gain a totally new dimension in Nietzsche's philosophical works. Already in *The birth of tragedy* Nietzsche (2000: 19) repudiates the so called "concept of Greek serenity", in favour of the ever-lasting struggle and conflict of the Apollonian and Dionysian forces. Although still tied to the duality of these senses, Nietzsche (2000: 27) already speaks of "an existence in which everything is deified, regardless of whether it is good or evil", thus suspending moral valuations in the realm of aesthetics and pointing to the creative potential of conflict. For Nietzsche (2000: 38) "only as an aesthetic phenomenon are existence and the world justified to eternity". In *Tamburlaine, the great* barbarity and cruelty are turned into a story of glory, aesthetic values often prove to be sufficient excuse for violence, while old values turn out to be a sham emptied of their meaning. In this context Tamburlaine's deeds, traditionally deemed evil as well as his wrathful heart, do not rule out the overhuman potential. On the contrary, only through this "amoral" lens is this potential fully realized.

### 3.1.2. "And in his eyes the furies of his heart/ That shine as comets, menacing revenge" – Tamburlaine (*Tamb. 1, 3.2.72-73*)

Throughout the play Tamburlaine presents himself as "the Scourge and Wrath of God" (*Tamb.1, 3.3.44*). His words are repeated so frequently by him and his opponents as to make them almost synonymous with his first name. "The scourge of God" becomes thus a shortcut for his identity. Though Marlowe's

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<sup>4</sup> It might be noted here that anger, expressed in a pompous and lofty language, is carefully staged and seems to be symptomatic of the Elizabethan love for spectacle and sensation.

plays are loosely based on the historical accounts of the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Asian conqueror Timur and his contemporary Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I, many critics have identified influences of earlier plays associated with allegorical morality patterns e.g. Robert Wilson's *The three lords and ladies of London* (1590). Tamburlaine's insistence on limiting his identity to the single character trait expressed in a notion of "the scourge of God", which in Rutter's (2012: 23) view communicates "military valour and destructiveness", enables one to treat Tamburlaine as if he "personified a concept". In this sense, Marlowe's play emulates the allegorical tradition of a morality play. However, despite Marlowe's indebtedness to the early tradition, it quickly becomes clear that in spite of this "concept personification", Tamburlaine does not communicate the prevalent moral message. As hinted, the notion of the "scourge of God" was mentioned in Marlowe's sources to the play. Both Fortescue (1994: 82) and Whetstone (1994: 92) recall an anecdote from the life of the historical Tamburlaine: when asked why he treated his prisoners so cruelly, he answered that it was his due as "the ire of God". Tamburlaine's cruelty was hence meant to be a safeguard against the sinfulness of the other nations he subdued. His wrath is presented in source texts as a reserved retribution that should be borne with God-fearing and humility. This should, however, be done with a reservation that Tamburlaine (or any other cruel tyrant) will also be severely punished in the afterlife by mighty God. So, the moralism of Marlowe's sources is quite straightforward. The retribution motif clearly belongs to slave morality or the morality of the weak as Nietzsche would term it. In his view, the weak thrive on a hopeless belief that their wrong doers will be punished, exposing at the same time the hypocrisy of their religion as love, which in reality is a hunger for bloody vengeance. Marlowe's Tamburlaine, though a self-anointed "scourge of God", is free from the moral message communicated by the source texts. As mentioned, never is Tamburlaine sufficiently "punished" for his cruelty. Neither are his opponents forced into silent acceptance of their plight and God-fearing humility. On the contrary, Bajazeth and Zabina roar with open hatred, even when their positions are totally hopeless. Moreover, I would argue Tamburlaine styles himself as a God himself, rather than a mere tool in God's hands. Interestingly, Tamburlaine fashions himself as "the scourge of God" against the Turkish Emperor Bajazeth in Part 1 and his son Callapine in Part 2. Perversely, in a providential historical framework it was the Ottoman Empire that was initially termed "the scourge of God" in the Christian Europe. As Simon Shepherd (1986: 143) writes: "Historians saw the European divisions as a sign of the decay of Christendom which the Turks had been sent – as the scourge of God – to punish: thus Luther (at first) recommended only passive resistance to them." Marlowe's 'reversed' portrayal, in which it is Tamburlaine who scourges 'infidels', might be seen as Elizabethan wishful thinking, especially

in the light of Turkish military might. As Shepherd (1986: 143-144) points out, contemporary sources mentioning the Turks e.g. *A short treatise upon the Turks' chronicles* (1546) or Greville's *A treatie of wars* (1633), demonstrate that regardless of their religion, they thrived militarily, which was a source of concern for the rest of Europe. So, Marlowe's play rather than acting out a fantasy of bringing the Turks to their knees (as Tamburlaine does when he humiliates Bajazeth), communicates a dangerous sceptical tenet of moral relativity. As it seems, God does not shower the faithful with his favour but those who are skilful, apt and ruthless enough to claim their title to might and glory. In the light of such a subversive meaning implicit in Marlowe's plays, there seems little surprise that the plays were charged with atheism. Numerous critics recall Robert Greene's dismay at Marlowe "daring God out of heaven with that Atheist Tamburlan" (Greene as quoted in: Thomas and Tydeman 1994: 69).<sup>5</sup> Tamburlaine fashions his identity in relation to the "generic" God or Gods present in the text of Part 1 and 2, either by allying himself with or distancing himself from him/them. Bartels points out that it is not only Tamburlaine who claims to have been graced by God. Others also try to legitimize their deeds by appealing to the Absolute. As she writes at length:

It is impossible to know from these and similar examples precisely where misprision stops and manipulation begins; yet either way, these evocations of divinity stand out as obviously self-serving. Though critics have railed like Robert Greene against *Tamburlaine's* atheism, overturned here is not the authority of god (of any particular sort) but such self-authorizing appropriations of that god. And what gets subverted and brought down to earth along with them are Tamburlaine's claims to divine right and purpose, which no longer mean anything in a world where everyone – and consequently no one – has dibs, conveniently if not strategically, on such sanction. (Bartels 1993: 76)

If indeed the appeal to divinity is truly devoid of meaning, then Tamburlaine is a seat of a great metaphysical crisis. This may be indeed so as all the seats of actual power turn out to be ineffective e.g. Mycetes is a weak king who is supplanted by his brother, and Bajazeth and later Callapine are crushed by

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<sup>5</sup> In an introduction to the anthology of Marlowe's sources, Vivien Thomas and William Tydeman (1994: 69) write: "Certainly by 1588 Robert Greene, in the letter prefacing his *Perimedes the Blacksmith*, could allude to Marlowe 'daring God out of heaven with that Atheist Tamburlan', a far less ambiguous reference to the scene in which Tamburlaine follows the murder of the Governor by ordering the destruction of the Koran and defiantly daring Mahomet to come down and punish him for impiety." Tom Rutter (2012: 26) also refers to Greene's accusations of atheism directed at Marlowe's Tamburlaine plays. Writing about the real charges of atheism Marlowe himself had to face Bartels (1993: 12) says: "Though such charges were made to stand alone, together they expand Marlowe's subversiveness into uncertain but limitless proportions, making one thing perfectly clear: that Marlowe was outrageously other."

Tamburlaine's forces. I would not quite agree with Bartels that all authorizations of godly power are meaningless as Tamburlaine's fashioning into a godly figure is ever successful. However, Tamburlaine's divine appropriation is different to the one practiced by his opponents. He does not 'use' God in order to legitimize the existing world order as others do; on the contrary, he wants to demolish it. Hence, like Nietzsche's overman he needs to dismantle the old law in order to propose the new one, whose only author he will be. In this sense he is a representative of Nietzschean experimental atheism.<sup>6</sup>

In *The gay science*, in the "Madman" parable, "the death of God" is equalled with madness as it brings a radical devaluation of human life and loss of all meaning (Kaufmann 1974: 101). However, simultaneously, Nietzsche's proposal opens up his mind for his central aim which is "to establish values that are not based on any supernatural sanction" and consequently to grant these values to the "overman" (Kaufmann 1974: 102). In this sense, Marlowe's subversive protagonist approximates Nietzsche's ideal as he himself becomes a dialectical and Godless experiment. In the play, Tamburlaine frequently refers to God or the gods; however, his attitude has nothing to do with traditional Christian humility or humbleness. As Steane (1970: 78) suggests, the only God that is present in the play "is the god who made the disruptive Nature of which Tamburlaine is a triumphant part." In Part 2 Tamburlaine is even more radical as he says: "[t]here is a God full of revenging wrath,/ From whom the thunder and the lightning breaks,/ Whose scourge I am, and Him will I obey" (*Tamb. 2*, 5.1.181-183). Although in this particular fragment Tamburlaine professes obedience to the god of war and wrath, a few lines later he mocks Mahomet as unworthy of any worship and only "a godhead to adore" (*Tamb. 2*, 5.1.198). This statement in itself would not have to be necessarily equal to the rejection of the

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<sup>6</sup> The turning point in Nietzsche's philosophising is his well-known proclamation of the death of God, first presented in *The gay science* (Nietzsche 2007b: 120). Nietzsche's philosophy appears atheistic in spirit, but it is important to differentiate Nietzsche's atheism from Descartes' rationalism or the atheism of the Enlightenment. It is crucial to see Nietzsche's godless philosophy in the context of his philosophical method to fully understand the philosophical ramifications of the death of God. It seems that the radical questioning of the Absolute emerges as the very first step towards the creation of the "overman" and thus it is justifiable to compare Nietzsche's "experimental" atheism with the alleged atheism of Tamburlaine, who is frequently referred to in the text of the play as "the scourge of God" (*Tamb. 2*, 1.3.44 or 4.3.9). As Walter Kaufmann (1974: 100) highlights, Nietzsche would not build his entire philosophy on the premise that God did not exist as his method was rather to question all ready-made assumptions. Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God is, therefore, not equal with straightforward atheism. It is an invitation to philosophical experimentation, which, according to Hollingdale (2001: 133) was Nietzsche's greatest strength. By his philosophical *Versuch* he proposed "dialectical experimentation" with various points of view (Hollingdale 2001: 132). I strongly believe that such is also Marlowe's method in his plays.

Absolute as such if it was not for the following lines of Tamburlaine, ultimately questioning its existence. After all Tamburlaine says: “The God that sits in heaven, if any god” (*Tamb. 2, 5.1. 199*). The “if any god” qualification seems to be Tamburlaine’s expression of his radically compromised faith. Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that, although Tamburlaine seems to be more and more radical on the question of his faith as the play progresses, the general message is that of a constant intellectual pushing and shoving in the style of Nietzsche’s philosophical method. On the one hand, Tamburlaine frequently presents himself as God’s ally e.g. when he speaks about himself as “crowned and invested by the hand of Jove” (*Tamb. 2, 4.1.149*) or “termed the Scourge and Wrath of God” (*Tamb. 1, 3.3.44*). By means of such statements, he legitimises his military success and his growing power by the might normally attributed to the Creator. On the other hand, Tamburlaine evidently wants to present himself as God’s equal, which does not only appear blasphemous but also atheistic. His mentioning of God’s might is always compromised by a reaffirmation of his own power e.g. “Nor am I made arch-monarch of the world” (*Tamb. 2, 5.1.147*) or “The only fear and terror of the world” (*Tamb. 1, 3.3.45*). When Tamburlaine invites Theridamas to join his forces, and consequently to betray his own King, he says: “May we become immortal like the gods” (*Tamb. 1, 1.2.201*). It seems that by measuring himself equal with the Gods, Tamburlaine renders them redundant and superfluous. He literally seems to propose himself as a viable alternative to the traditional way of embracing reality – as a potential overman he basically takes their place and seems to echo Nietzsche’s (2006b: 27) words: “Ah, brothers, this God that I created was humans’ – work and – madness, just like all Gods!”. So, Theridamas is definitely right when he says that “His looks do menace heaven and dare the Gods/ His fiery eyes are fixed upon the earth” (*Tamb. 1, 1.2.157-158*). Simultaneously, he points to an important aspect of Tamburlaine’s behaviour, namely, his focus on earthly glory. Tamburlaine’s *atheism*, which emerges as his celebration of earthly power, constitutes the core of his subversion as it disrupts the Elizabethan world picture and its accepted notions.

Tamburlaine’s actions and his self-authorization is plagued within internal paradox, which must have been felt by the Elizabethans. If indeed Tamburlaine’s aim is to propose himself as an alternative to divinity, the only way to do that is to invest himself with an earthly crown. For the Elizabethans the closest one can possibly get to divinity is actually to be King – God’s representative on earth. Elizabeth’s (as well as James’s) official policy promoted their divine rights of Kings. However, their Godly invested position of an anointed Prince was based on the continuity of royal lines. The Tudors in particular made efforts to legitimize their reign by deriving their origin from King Arthur and New Troy; “a rule blessed by Christ and permanent as nature, always already there” (Shepherd 1986: 148). In a rapidly shrinking and changing world their absolutist reigns, though resembling other European regimes, sharply contrasted with e.g. the Tur-

kish political system. To the utmost surprise of the contemporary observers (e.g. Bodin or Smith) the Turks did not have “inherited rights of property” (Shepherd 1986: 147). Theirs was a system based on “human decisions, where the form of government is shaped by economic and social needs” (Shepherd 1986: 148). Shepherd (1986: 148) writes, supporting himself with a quotation from Cambini (1562), that “[t]he successful Turkish empire could manage without kings, for they ‘appointed to every faction and country his governor, and in this sort governed for a long time, having among them neither king nor any man endued with title of sovereignty other than of captain’”. One could say that Tamburlaine, who fights the Turks, simultaneously makes the most of their political style as he also chooses his faithful companions to govern the subsequent kingdoms and lands he subdues with their help. However, in his pursuits he promises the glory of the crown to his faithful companions whom he lures with his rhetorical questions “Is it not brave to be a king [...] Is it not passing brave to be a king [...]?” (*Tamb. 1, 2.5.51-53*). He himself capitalizes on the mystical qualities of the earthly crown as he frames himself as “the monarch of the East” (*Tamb. 1, 1.2.185*). So, one could say that in his politics he is in-between, choosing those aspects of respective systems that fit his imperial project. Tamburlaine’s effective argumentation, by means of which he wins Theridamas, might then be seen as either Nietzschean experimentation or a rhetorical game, cunningly calculated to bring political gains. Either way, not only his deeds but also his speeches are extremely effective and make him appear like a God himself. Theridamas confirms this claim by saying: “Not Hermes, prolocutor to the gods, Could use persuasions more pathetical” (*Tamb. 1, 2.3.25*). As M.T. Burnett suggests: “[t]he implication is that Tamburlaine is beyond even the most rhetorically skilled of the deities and thus functions as a type of god himself” (Burnett 2004: 128). Tamburlaine, as mentioned, toys with divinity as it pleases him, but he takes full advantage of the deified condition of an earthly Prince. Elizabeth I (1998), who frequently underscored her regal authority, nevertheless said in her famous “Golden Speech” (1601):

I know the title of a King is a glorious title, but assure yourself that the shining glory of princely authority hath not so dazzled the eyes of our understanding, but that we well know and remember that we also are to yield an account of our actions before the great judge. To be a king and wear a crown is a thing more glorious to them that see it than it is pleasant to them that bear it. For myself I was never so much enticed with the glorious name of a King or royal authority of a Queen as delighted that God hath made me his instrument to maintain his truth and glory and to defend his kingdom as I said from peril, dishonour, tyranny and oppression.

Elizabeth, in her firm belief in the righteousness of her position, demanded obedience and loyalty from her subjects but she was realistic about the daily drudgery of kingship as well as her necessity of serving her people in the execution of the law. The nature of Tamburlaine’s kingship has nothing to do

with any service towards the people. Actually those who could theoretically fulfil the role of Tamburlaine's subjects become an inconvenient burden to be disposed of e.g. the inhabitants of Damascus. His fantasy of kingship is realized through a ceaseless conquest of nations, who are really deprived of any voice in Marlowe's play, while Tamburlaine's position places him beyond any notions of law or morality. Both Elizabeth's and Tamburlaine's visions of kingship are grounded in earthly glory, but the moral justifications behind them are radically different. Elizabeth assumes a role of God's servant, legislator and guardian for her people – ultimately with peace and stability in mind. Her sovereignty is guaranteed by and executed through God's legitimization. Tamburlaine, "fixed upon the earth", is mainly interested in the here and now, in the actuality of his existence, abandoning the belief in the transcendent reality traditionally coupled with religious faith. The grounding of Tamburlaine in the actuality of the "here and now" and his substitution of God for himself, seem to push Tamburlaine to the deeds that are morally questionable, if not wholly condemned. However, his soaring self-esteem makes him believe in his moral superiority and his "godly" condition as, in the scene of killing his unfaithful son, he says: "That I might move the turning spheres of heaven,/ For earth and all this airy region/ Cannot contain the state of Tamburlaine" (*Tamb.* 2, 4.1.116-118). Interestingly enough, within the space of the play, other characters seem to provide moral justification for Tamburlaine's amoral deeds by referring to his Godly condition. Usumcasane says: "To be a king, is half to be a god" to which Theridamas replies:

A god is not so glorious as a king:  
 I think the pleasure they enjoy in heaven  
 Cannot compare with kingly joys in earth  
 To wear a crown enchased with pearl and gold,  
 Whose virtues carry with it life and death,  
 To ask and have: command, and be obeyed:  
 When looks breed love, with looks to gain the prize.  
 Such power attractive shines in princes' eyes" (*Tamb.* 1, 2.5.56-64).

Not only do Tamburlaine's companions give the reader a confirmation of his deified condition, but they also shift the centre of gravity yet again to earthly life, dismissing metaphysics once and for all. Just as Elizabeth would recourse to metaphysics for the repeated legitimization of her reign, in the reality of Tamburlaine "Jove's investiture" ultimately emerges as an empty rhetorical embellishment. One of the reasons why Nietzsche condemns religion was that, in his opinion, dual metaphysics seeks values beyond actual reality (Kuderowicz 1979: 58). In other words, faith always entails the belief in another, better world beyond the reality of the senses, which always leads to the negligence of earthly life that is, after all, the only life a human being knows

for certain. In *Thus spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche (2005b: 28) ironically expresses his criticism by saying: "But the 'other world' is well concealed from humans, that dehumaned unhuman world that is a heavenly nothing; and the Belly of Being does not speak to humans at all, except as a human." The Elizabethan world picture at its foundations is undoubtedly a reality of dual metaphysics; however, I would argue that Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays heavily compromise it. Both *Tamburlaine* and his companions are evidently not interested in the "other world", while their longing for earthly power testifies to their life affirmation rather than any religious underpinning.

Marlowe's earlier critics suggest that the strong emphasis on the individual as well a shift towards individual existence may be directly linked to the philosophical atmosphere of the English Renaissance. For instance, Harry Levin highlights the influence of early modern philosophers, who esteemed individual existence and its inherent value on Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. Levin recalls, for instance, Sir Philip Sidney and his term *Arkitekttonike*, the highest type of knowledge man can acquire, mentioned in his *Apology for poetry*, or Sir Francis Bacon and *The advancement of learning*, which also places great emphasis on personal intellectual cultivation. The texts, pointed out by Levin, are strongly grounded in the ideals of humanism, which shifts interest from God to human matters. However, it needs to be reiterated that this shift by no means equals the belittlement of God. So, as important as the Renaissance background may be for the creation of *Tamburlaine, the great*, the inherent message of the play goes beyond its philosophical source, in a way becoming a precursory vision for future philosophical enterprises. Therefore, Levin deems the content of *Tamburlaine, the great* heretical by early modern standards. He summarizes his analysis of Theridamas' appreciation of the King's life, by pointing out that "whereas, a heavenly crown was the pious hope of every Christian, an earthly crown is the notorious emblem of worldliness, heterodoxy, and pride of life. In short, it is not bathos but blasphemy" (Levin 1961: 57). The comparison of Theridamas's ideas on monarchy with Elizabeth's evaluation of her role as Queen, also underscores the disruptive nature of ideas implicit in *Tamburlaine*. Thus, in my view, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* is not so much Renaissance in spirit but rather Nietzschean with its "experimental" atheism, appreciation of earthly power and human vitality. Elizabeth's policy throughout her reign demonstrated her appreciation of the Apollonian values of order, stability and rank, while Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* is really an unruly Dionysian Barbarian. Though he professes the Apollonian glory of kingship, in his actions he disentangles its effective value, diminishing the role of a King to raw might. However, this parallel is by no means a springboard for a theoretical discussion over points of view as the plays in reality touch politically contentious issues. The Tudor regime, as mentioned, was built upon a supposedly natural and primeval order and hierarchy while Marlowe gave his Elizabethan audiences a "Scythian shepherd"

who made himself a King. As Rutter (2012: 31) aptly points out: “The two Tamburlaine plays make the radical suggestion that rather than monarchs being made by God, a commoner can make himself a monarch through military valour, tactical acumen and sheer power of will (as well, as the weakness of his adversaries) [...]”. Knowing that Elizabeth’s rule was seen as unlawful by some (e.g. the Pope) and remembering numerous plots to depose her with a view of placing Mary, Queen of Scots on the throne, it becomes evident that the Tamburlaine plays are indeed driven by sheer subversion (Rutter 2012: 31). Despite the ideology of the divine rights of kings promoted by the Queen, the idea of “making” kings must have been particularly captivating for the Elizabethan minds in the light of the English unsecure succession. By the 1580s it became a particularly hotly debated issue as there were no natural heirs to the throne and so “[...] the institution of a ‘personal’ monarchy could be ensured only by compliance of its officers, and the ‘natural’ royal line continued only by negotiation over the rights and suitability of possible candidates” (Shepherd 1986: 157). The Elizabethan reality thus presented the same paradox as that captured in Marlowe’s plays. Tamburlaine is not the only character that violates the sanctity of kingship, as one remembers Cosroe who deposes his own brother and takes the throne or Theridamas who breaks the allegiance to his king in order to become Tamburlaine’s companion. Hence, Marlowe’s plays are a ground where individual choice, up to a certain degree, decides upon self-assertion and self-determination. However, it is important to note that self-assertion, in a very Nietzschean spirit, becomes a privilege of the strong, while the weak are stripped of this individualizing will. Elizabeth held tightly to her throne and avoided war at all costs. As Shepherd (1986: 151) points out, her propaganda was successful in peace but, being a woman, she could not lead her own army. The prospect of the Spanish invasion as well as Catholic plots aimed at her deposition unveiled her vulnerability and the weaknesses of her political self-fashioning. Moreover, perversely even those who were there to strengthen her position could equally weaken it. Armed gentry who vowed to protect her position as well as noblemen fighting for her “undermined her strategy for absolutism” (Shepherd 1986: 151). When looked at from this perspective, Marlowe’s centralization of the earthly crown voices internal paradoxes of the Elizabethan accepted political standards: a king may be a near-deity, but it is nevertheless a human-made king – sacred yet all-too human.

As hinted, the subversive, very Nietzschean nature of the plays, lays in the questioning of the widely accepted world picture. I strongly believe that Marlowe seems to be communicating a disruptive and revolutionary idea that the Elizabethan world order is painfully human rather than divinely underpinned. This is also encapsulated in Tamburlaine’s rise from a simple shepherd to a king, where in the process he also undermines the Elizabethan hierarchical order – believed to be ordained by God and hence natural. When speaking about “kingly joys in

earth", more glorious than those of gods, Tamburlaine's men do not only blaspheme but also capitalize on the aristocratic dimension of the might in question (*Tamb. 1, 2.5.59*). The ideals of humanism appear to highlight human potential in general, while Nietzschean philosophy emerges as deeply elitist. One could suggest that Elizabethan society blends these two modes into a seemingly coherent whole. On the one hand, by medieval precepts all men of Christendom as God's creations are equal before the Almighty; on the other, everyone has his immovable station outlined by rank and status. The paradox is dexterously weaved into a theory of the Great Chain of Being; with the same relations reflected in macrocosm and microcosm. Those who dare transgress their position outlined for them within this intricate social structure are bound to be severely punished. Such a fall, in turn, would be conceptualized by a swift turn of the wheel of fortune. However, as Rutter (2012: 25) aptly points out: "the same logic, however, does not seem to apply to Tamburlaine, whose journey on fortune's wheel is only upwards." Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* explodes this seemingly coherent order of things as it presents a story of an exceptional individual, of humble origins, who sets ambitious goals and, despite adversaries and obstacles on the way, reaches them with success. Tamburlaine's story of success presents almost a modern, rather than early modern, pattern. However, Marlowe's characterization does not support the view that Tamburlaine's potential is inherent in every human being. Quite the contrary, one learns that Tamburlaine has "the face and personage of a wondrous man", while "Nature doth strive with Fortune and his stars/ To make him famous in accomplished worth" (*Tamb. 1, 2.1.32-34*). So, Tamburlaine's qualities are special, while in the eyes of his enemies he is even a non-human creature. As Meander says "he was never sprung of human race" (*Tamb. 1, 2.6.11*). Tamburlaine's ascent deconstructs the old order, where hereditary aristocracy rules for the sake of the new elite of the mighty and militarily savvy. Obviously, within this new aristocracy he is *primus inter pares*. One might risk a statement that Tamburlaine is a representative of the Master Race. Nietzsche's dynamite theory of the *Übermensch* and the Master Race, contrary to popular opinions, is not racist or biological, but it definitely is aristocratic (Kaufmann 1974: 285). Nietzsche renounces the idea of equality between people as he believes that only some have it all in them to become "overmen". In *Tamburlaine, the Great* this notion is testified to by Theridamas. When he presents his Godly vision of a King, Tamburlaine asks him: "Why say Theridamas, wilt thou be a king?"; to which he answers: "Nay, though I praise it, I can live without it" (*Tamb. 1, 2.6.65-66*). His answer seems to underscore the plays' underlying message that glory is not everyone's fate. Also, by his own moving into the shadow, he leaves the stage for the only *Übermensch* in the play – Tamburlaine.

Tamburlaine's rejection of God's supremacy and the plays' alleged atheism might be treated as an opening to an analysis in the context of Nietzsche's theories. Nevertheless, in order to reinterpret Tamburlaine as an overman, it is

necessary to look at the way he presents himself and how he is perceived by other characters in the play. Unlike in Shakespeare's plays, Marlowe does not grant his audience any "private" insight into the mind of Tamburlaine as the play lacks soliloquies such as Shakespeare would later use in his "overhuman" plays e.g. *Julius Caesar* or *Macbeth*. So it is through his relations with others that Tamburlaine's persona is constructed. The opening scenes unveil Tamburlaine as a figure of towering ambition with no regard for class limitations. His enemy Meander calls him a "sturdy Scythain thief" (*Tamb. 1, 1.1.36*), while he introduces himself to Zenocrate by announcing: "I am a lord, for so my deeds prove,/ And yet a shepherd by my parentage:/ But lady, this fair face and heavenly hue/ Must grace his bed that conquers Asia:/ And means to be a terror to the world" (*Tamb. 1, 1.2.34-38*). Techellas complements his words, saying: "Methinks I see kings kneeling at his feet/ And he with frowning brows and fiery looks,/ Spurning their crowns from off their captive heads" (*Tamb. 1, 1.2.55-57*). So, on the basis of the text, it is possible to say that Tamburlaine, despite his low birth, has an air of dignity and power that instantly wins people over. As Steane (1970: 65) suggests, the play "intensifies admiration for the man who without advantage of birth has achieved so much". From the start Tamburlaine is racially and socially marked as inferior. He is referred to in the text as a "Scythain thief" (*Tamb. 1, 1.1.36*), while his train as "Tartarian rout" (*Tamb. 1, 1.1.71*). As mentioned, Nietzsche's concept of the overman is not constructed on a racial, biological or class basis. Its elitist or "aristocratic" dimension is founded on the idea that only selected individuals are mentally and physically powerful enough to "overcome" their infirmities and weaknesses in order to tower over the rest of the petty and the weak. As Nietzsche (2005b: 233) writes in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, "the human is something that must be overcome". Along with the rejection of the divine sanction of morality and Christian morality as such, the so called *Überwindungsmotif* constitutes a crucial step in the creation of Nietzsche's overman. *Überwindungsmotif* is inextricably linked with Nietzsche's will to power, a basic force underlying and stirring any activity in the Universe, which in humans manifests itself under the guise of various instincts e.g. libido or an aspiration to self-mastery. Over-coming, in his view, then, is the proper channelling of one's instincts, by sublimating them instead of extirpating them (Kaufmann 1974: 223). As it seems, Marlowe's Tamburlaine effectively overcomes the drawbacks of his birth, class and low social standing. Actually, to follow Steane's line of argument, he uses them to his advantage, as he turns these faults into stepping stones marking his ambition and pride. This is exactly why Theridamas exclaims in admiration: "Tamburlaine?/ A Scythian shepherd, so embellished/ With nature's pride, and richest furniture" (*Tamb. 1, 1.2.154-156*). However, Tamburlaine's overcoming does not stop at the achievement of his position and wealth. As Christopher G. Fanta (1970: 16) observes, "Marlowe as yet admits no split between the aspiration and the achievement; and in the end, as Tamburlaine wins both the Queen of beauty [Zenocrate] and the crown of war, one is left with a

sense of wonderment at this celebration of mortal man's indomitability." Tamburlaine's aim is to rule the world and he gradually achieves his aims, getting rid of the obstacles on the way. However, as a prototypical overman he appears to be well-equipped to reach his goals. Nietzsche's idea of "self-overcoming" also refers to the mental and physical strength "the overman" accumulates in the process. As Nietzsche (2007c: 72) announces in *The twilight of the idols*: "First principle: a man must need to be strong, otherwise he will never attain it", which, in other words, means that one has to be strong in order to become stronger. So, as it seems, physical fitness is an element that accompanies shaping overmen and, in this respect, Tamburlaine definitely reflects Nietzsche's way of thinking. Just as Nietzsche testifies in his writings to his fascination with masculine hardness and virility, so too does Marlowe. It seems that in no other character under my scrutiny is physical fitness so heavily underscored as it is in Marlowe's Tamburlaine. For instance, when Shakespeare invites other characters to speak of Macbeth, they focus on his military valour. However, the valour is coupled with a sense of honour and prowess. The overhuman potential of Tamburlaine is encapsulated in the raw physicality of Tamburlaine's body that resembles a godly stature and demands admiration for its sheer perfection.<sup>7</sup> The very first longer description of Tamburlaine by Menaphon to Cosroe testifies to this notion. One learns that Tamburlaine is:

Of stature tall, and straightly fashioned,  
 Like his desire lift upward and divine,  
 So large of limbs, his joints so strongly knit,  
 Such breadth of shoulders as might mainly bear  
 Old Atlas' burden;—'twixt his manly pitch,  
 A pearl, more worth than all the world, is placed,  
 Wherein by curious sovereignty of are  
 Are fixed his piercing instruments of sight,  
 Whose fiery circles bear encompassed  
 A heaven of heavenly bodies in their spheres,  
 That guides his steps and actions to the throne,  
 Where honour sits invested royally:

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, Marlowe's descriptions celebrating the beauty of Tamburlaine's body expressed by other male characters may be read within the intricate homoerotic and homosocial framework of the relations between them. The world of Tamburlaine is definitely a realm of homosocial bonds between males as some critics have demonstrated in their analyses. Kate Chedgzoy (2004: 245) analyses Marlowe's plays in the light of the "all-male preserve". To read more about the possible links between Marlowe's alleged homosexuality and his status in the Elizabethan society it is worth looking at Jonathan Goldberg's article "Sodomy and society: the case of Christopher Marlowe", where the author scrutinizes the notorious Baines' note and the possible reception to the accusations made against Marlowe (Goldberg 1999: 54-61).

Pale of complexion, wrought in him with passion,  
 Thirsting with sovereignty and love of arms;  
 His lofty brows in folds do figure death,  
 And in their smoothness amity and life;  
 About them hangs a knot of amber hair,  
 Wrapped in curls, as fierce Achilles' was,  
 On which the breath of Heaven delights to play,  
 Making it dance with wanton majesty.—  
 His arms and fingers, long, and sinewy,  
 Betokening valour and excess of strength;—  
 In every part proportioned like the man  
 Should make the world subdued to Tamburlaine (*Tamb. 1, 2.1.7-30*).

Though this laudatory description is quite lengthy, it is worth recalling in its entirety as it seems to be a hymn celebrating Tamburlaine as an Alpha male equipped with super-human physical attributes. It is the bodily perfection and its potential that decide on his majestic ambition. Also, Tamburlaine's over-human potential fuses animalism with godliness as Tamburlaine is both like a bear and Achilles, while his features invoke heavenly vitality and death at the same time. In a truly Elizabethan spirit, he blends the beastly with the godly "in every part proportioned like the man". However, in a very subversive manner, within him this combination of a beast and an angel decides upon his success rather than degeneration or sin. Just as other elements of Tamburlaine's characterization may leave one with a sense of indeterminacy, his outward appearance of strength and energy is a visible and tangible proof for his overhuman potential.<sup>8</sup> Marlowe evidently wanted Tamburlaine to thrive on the potential his admirable physique unfolds before him as he passed over the fact that the historical Tamburlaine was most probably lame (hence his other recorded name – Timur, the Lame). John Bishop's (1994: 139) *Beautiful blos-*

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<sup>8</sup> As I have already hinted, Tamburlaine lacks the interiority characteristic of the great heroes of Shakespeare's later tragedies. Critics have thus often concluded that his persona may be interpreted in terms of self-fashioning, a Greenblattian famous Renaissance procedure of self-creation and self-identification (Greenblatt 1984: 195). Emily Bartels (1993: 60) capitalizes on the incompleteness of Tamburlaine who veils "inwardness" under the "outward habit". She writes: "Importantly, too, although he presents his selves as self-interested and self-sustaining, what determines the shape of his 'outward habit' is, to a significant degree, his audience. For Tamburlaine tailors his image to the needs and expectations of his contenders, answering their desires and outdoing their resistance. To those who would be wooed and whom he would woo, he displays divinity, and wealth; to those who would destroy and whom he would destroy, barbarity and ire" (Bartels 1993: 62). There might indeed be little inwardness in Tamburlaine to build a "modern" identity. However, I personally believe his singularity is played out on an *instinctive* or *affective* plain. His physicality is a living material with which he realizes his affects and makes a 'singular' statement.

soms (1577) explains the etymology of the name “Tamerlane” by capitalizing on the physical infirmity of “lameness”. Though he claims it had no bearing on Tamburlaine’s luminous career as “he came to be Lord of all the Orient and a terror unto the whole world”, it anyway was his distinctive feature (Bishop 1994: 139). It seems that contemporary historians were more willing to grant such individualizing touches to the “all too human” Tamburlaine, while Marlowe fashioned his hero into an overman – a paragon of masculine values.<sup>9</sup> It seems that the decision to free his Tamburlaine from physical imperfection also underscores Marlowe’s a-moralism. On an Elizabethan stage a visible infirmity of a character would implicitly reflect his moral shortcoming.<sup>10</sup> Though frequently blasphemous in his vision and morally dubious in his actions, Marlowe’s Tamburlaine towers over all others anyhow. Subliminally his robust health and strength seem to underscore the righteousness of his project of overcoming. Bartels suggests that the extent of Tamburlaine’s self-fashioning actually serves his enemies, because by extenuating his might they also prove their own power. As she claims:

For while he builds his own incontestable singularity out of and against their predilections, they prove their own supremacy by imposing their own constructions of difference upon him. Circumscribed thus, he becomes not just an imperializing subject of Orientalist discourse but also its imperialist object, a convenient other whose godlike or fiendlike nature can justify his competitors’ triumphs or defeats and testify finally to their, rather than his, power (Bartels 1993: 67).

I do not quite agree with Bartels’s argument. Tamburlaine may indeed be an object of others’ “imperializing” discourse, while the audience might have little insight into his inward self. Nevertheless, it is hard not to see that in this game of the empire it is Tamburlaine who defeats countless armies and conquers new lands. Even Tamburlaine’s bitter enemies admire his success and, possibly, they do so in order to minimise the impact of their own defeats un-

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<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, if one were to follow Nietzsche’s understanding of strength more closely, a lame Tamburlaine conquering the world might have actually satisfied him better. For Nietzsche the real extent of strength was manifested in the ability to overcome weakness. Therefore, Nietzsche admired Julius Caesar, who despite his physical infirmities (Nietzsche had Caesar’s epilepsy in mind) managed to emerge as a great conqueror and military man (see: *The twilight of the idols* IX 38). I will also return to this argument when I discuss Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* in Chapter 4.

<sup>10</sup> Characters presented as evil were very often scarred with severe physical infirmity with their illness or handicap underscoring God’s punishment for their sins. Shakespeare’s Richard III is a perfect example here as his crookedness perfectly reflects his evil character. Middleton’s and Rowley’s Deflores in *The changeling* is also constructed with this prejudiced Elizabethan (or actually medieval) view in mind. I will return to this argument when I discuss Edmund and his “bastard” status in Chapter 4 as some of the theatrical bastards are also burdened with a physical infirmity reflecting their presumed moral shortcoming.

der his strength. Yet physically it is Tamburlaine who draws new boundaries on the map of the Far East and it is his physical strength that reflects his mental indomitability and majestic bearing. However, Menaphon's speech, to a degree legitimizing or justifying his own inability to measure against his opponent, shows that it is not solely Tamburlaine's strength or his military skill that makes him such a powerful and persuasive figure.

The extent of Tamburlaine's self-overcoming is manifested through his insurmountable ambition. It is his aspiration, bordering on bravado or even insanity, that fills others with awe. In Act 2, Scene 7 Tamburlaine presents his most famous and most frequently quoted speech of "aspiring minds", which, to my mind, can be seen as his "overman" manifesto (*Tamb. 1, 2.7.12-27*). Tamburlaine's celebration of nature, specifically human nature, demonstrates that he is, above all, a man of immensely wide intellectual horizons besides being the rough barbarian others would like to see. Michael Goldman (1977: 22) reads the infinite appetites of Marlowe's characters in terms of "ravishment". As he writes: "[t]he ravished man's desire swells beyond any specific goal, though all the time seeming to promise a surfeit of pleasure of broadly enough achieved" (1977: 22). Indeed, Tamburlaine's understanding of nature is unspecific as it centralizes on relentless striving forward in one's goals and "climbing after knowledge infinite" (*Tamb. 1, 2.7.22*). Against the backdrop of the theory of humours, Tamburlaine seems to be celebrating giving in to natural appetites – in Nietzschean terms, listening to the whispers of the will to power. Yet again subversively he combines the beastly and the angelic, where the two are interdependent and both necessary. The Elizabethan thinkers would definitely proscribe the rejection of the beastly in the pursuit of the angelic, whereas for Tamburlaine both are crucial. His speech appears to be a subversive combination of Machiavellian yearnings for power and an oracle of the most noble humanist ideals. In the first part of his speech Tamburlaine, within a divine frame of reference, declares it completely natural that the young and powerful take over positions of power. In his belief he seems to prefigure Shakespeare's Edmund who would also raise his hand against his father and brother, breaking the primal laws of progenitors. Yet again, he frames himself as a god-like figure by recalling the example of Jove. The beauty of Marlowe's poetry starkly contrasts with the fact that the words are delivered over the body of Cosroe who, mortally wounded, is dying at Tamburlaine's feet. Here is a Nietzschean fusion of the lowly instincts and aesthetic beauty at its fullest – encapsulated in Tamburlaine's cruel and amoral celebration of the human. Goldman (1977: 31) aptly points out that critics often interpret this passage as if it were a soliloquy, though Tamburlaine speaks to the man in agony. The speech seems to function as a soliloquy because it gives more insight into Tamburlaine's mind. It appears less calculated and less performative than any other. Yet because in reality there are listeners present, what it actually unfolds is the extent of Tamburlaine's

immorality. The pursuit of knowledge is a means to amass power and might. His praise of the daring take-over of power seems to allude to Machiavelli's *Prince*, while his affirmation of truth appears to emulate the style of Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the dignity of Man*.<sup>11</sup> In this dynamite mixture, Tamburlaine seems to embrace his low instincts and aesthetically transform them into something of greater worth, namely, the value of his "aspiring mind". In his credo he seems to echo Nietzsche's cult of self-realization. Zarathustra says: "Once I have overcome myself in that, then will I overcome myself in something even greater; and a victory shall be the seal of my perfection!" (Nietzsche 2006b: 140). These words parallel Tamburlaine's manifesto, but he aims even higher as his internal voice says "never rest". Marlowe's Tamburlaine mirrors the Nietzschean *Übermensch* as he definitely shares his dignity, pride and overcoming potential. Nietzsche does not offer in his writings a cult of physical strength for the strength's sake. His vision of a mighty overhuman is always coupled with creativity and mental capabilities. Nevertheless, it is the ultimate towering over others that is the aim, as Nietzsche does not seem to proscribe equality between great minds but always being the first among the mass. Tamburlaine celebrates human faculties, but he leaves no illusions as to the methods of self-realization and its ultimate end when he sees "[t]hat perfect bliss and sole felicity" in "[t]he sweet fruition of an earthly crown". (*Tamb. 1, 2.7.12-27*). The body of Cosroe, as Goldman (1977: 31) observes, becomes "a sight of power – the trash above which, from which, Tamburlaine's bliss is rising." This partly explains the "soliloquy" confusion, as Tamburlaine's speech is such a strong statement of singularity that the others' presence is made redundant. Tamburlaine establishes his superiority over all the spectators present to his performance, but it is important to note that his companions willingly take up the imperialist project he offers to them. Nietzsche (2007c: 71) believes that the truly strong people do not need to prove their might just as they do not need to maintain their power artificially so "[t]he highest type of free man would have to be sought [...] five paces away from tyranny on the very threshold of the danger of thralldom.". Although frequently referred to as a tyrant by his enemies, paradoxically Tamburlaine seems to be quite willing to share his "excess of strength" with his followers, provided that they are loyal to him (*Tamb. 1, 1.2.28*). He openly invites Theridamas as well as his other companions to share his glory (e.g. Act 1, Scene 2. 155-250 or Act 2, Scene 5.50-105). Also, unlike his enemies, Tamburlaine does not associate material wealth with power. On a couple of occasions he proves he is not interested in the gold that his enemies offer either to delude him or to buy themselves out of captivity (e.g. Meander who plans to present camels laden with gold to distract Tamburlaine's soldiers in battle, his plan fails obviously *Tam. 1, Act 2, Scene 69-73* or Bajazeth who offers gold to

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<sup>11</sup> The link with Mirandola can also be found in Rutter (2012: 35).

buy himself out of captivity *Tam. 1*, Act 3, Scene 3, 261-265). Tamburlaine ceaselessly pushes forward in his fantastical vision of ruling over the whole world when he announces: “So from the East unto the furthest West/ Shall Tamburlaine extend his puissant arm./ And by this means I’ll win the world at last” (*Tamb. 1*, 3.3.244-260). On the map of his empire there is Africa, Persia and even Mexico. However, the un-changing stamp of singularity on the ever changing map is his leadership.

Tamburlaine’s almost stifling over-presence is carried into Part 2, where further battles and conquests again bring success to Tamburlaine. Bartels suggests that the multiplication of arms, people and lands is finally brought to such an excess that numbers becomes meaningless. As she writes:

[i]nstead of measuring power, the seemingly infinite numbers of men and nations that Tamburlaine and his opponents continually display no longer mean anything, because of their commonality, the variability of how they are perceived, and their arbitrary relation to triumphs and defeats. The rhetoric of power emerges as just that, a *rhetoric* of power, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing – or at least nothing singular. (Bartels 1993: 174)

Indeed, in the midst of the masses singular identity is devoid of all meaning. However, this does not apply to Tamburlaine, who seems to be still the same “scourge of God”, as he features in the conversations of his opponents equally prominently. I would suggest that against this mass of meaninglessness, Tamburlaine’s singularity is actually underscored even further. Yet, though Tamburlaine’s presence is equally overbearing, Part 2 brings a change. As Rutter (2012: 38) observes: “[...] the ascending movement of Part One gives way to a sense of limitation and the constriction of possibilities.” This time not everything bends to Tamburlaine’s indomitable will. He may still be successful on the battlefield, but this time he cannot force his will onto the undisputable existential facts e.g. the death of his wife, his son’s insubordination, and finally his own illness and death. In Nietzsche’s vision it is the project of self-overcoming that enables one to shape and create the self in the face of life’s inherent suffering. The extent of Tamburlaine’s self-overcoming can be seen in his perseverance in fighting inherently human weaknesses. However, having overcome the difficulties of Part 1 and having emerged successful in his project of self-creation, he needs to recreate discomfiture and inflict pain on himself. Although the deed might seem sensational and exaggerated, the scene in which Tamburlaine inflicts a wound by cutting his arm illustrates his desperate and almost obsessive need to prove himself in over-coming physical pain in order to prove his overhuman qualities. Tamburlaine says: “A wound is nothing, be it ne’er so deep;/ Blood is the god of war’s rich livery” (*Tamb. 2*, 1.2.115-116). Tamburlaine realizes Nietzsche’s ideal of pain as a factor stimulating strength, rather than draining it. This ideal is best captured in Nietzsche’s (2007c: 5) famous aphorism from *The twilight of the*

*idols* when he says: “that which does not kill me, makes me stronger” and thus underscores the importance of suffering in the creation of the overman. Nietzsche (2004: 12) also declares in *Ecce Homo*: “to an intrinsically sound nature, illness may even constitute a powerful stimulus to life, to a surplus of life.” Moreover, as it seems, Tamburlaine believes his wounds ennoble him and grant him even more grandeur. This is a lesson he tries to teach to his sons, albeit emerging for the first time not entirely successful. Tamburlaine’s over-human potential is put to the test when he has to face the death of Zenocrate. This time the pain is no longer self-inflicted or a consequence of one’s own project. M. T. Burnett (2004: 136) suggests that Tamburlaine’s attitude towards Zenocrate is artificial as he “fetishizes” Zenocrate and she is presented as one of his many military conquests and gains. Burnett is definitely right in saying that Tamburlaine’s perception of Zenocrate is a consequence of his “rhetorical devising”; however, Tamburlaine’s expression of suffering after her unexpected death seems genuine.<sup>12</sup> In his famous speech over Zenocrate’s dead body Tamburlaine orders the burning of the entire city in which they currently dwell, as it is the seat of her death and his suffering. On the surface, it may seem as a desperate act aimed at a hopeless expatriation of suffering, which is at this moment impossible to be beaten. However, his act of destruction is an expression of the will to power, as Tamburlaine yields to his lowest instinct of revenge and fury. Perversely, seemingly unnecessary destruction becomes simultaneously the act of aesthetic creation and thus his further self-overcoming. Levin (1961: 58) claims that Tamburlaine is a figure incapable of suffering as he is “aesthetically – [...] not morally – sensitive”. This may be true, but his aesthetic sensitivity does not exclude genuine suffering in the face of the aestheticized object’s loss. Tamburlaine’s suffering is expressed in a way known only too well to him, namely, by means of military destruction. However, paradoxically the act is aesthetically creative as Tamburlaine orders the building of “a pillar in memory of her” (*Tamb. 2, 3.2.125*). On the pillar there is a caption saying that the town was burnt down by Tamburlaine, who forbids to rebuild it. The order to embalm Zenocrate’s body also underscores his attempt at transforming her into an eternal, aesthetically-touching object. So, although the town is destroyed, her body is eternalized and it remains a living sign of his immense sorrow and a place of remembrance, and in Tamburlaine’s imagination also a future destination of pilgrims, who would arrive only to cast a glance at the beauty of Zenocrate (*Tamb. 2, 3.2.25-450*). I would suggest that Tamburlaine’s *Eros* and *Tanathos* is an effort at Nietzschean sublimation, the channelling of low instincts into more creative and artistic powers. The destruction of the city is undoubtedly an

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<sup>12</sup> This is a topic that certainly deserves more attention, and so I will come back to Tamburlaine’s relationship with Zenocrate in Chapter 5 when I discuss Marlovian and Shakespearean “overwomen”.

act of violence and hence a realization of the lowest impulses possible – hate and fury. On the other hand, such emotions are more than natural according to Nietzsche (2005b: XVIII), as “the way to overcome the human is to acknowledge and emulate the non-human nature [...] of which we consist...” Moreover, it appears that the act of destruction turns into an act of creation. What is crucial is that the death of Zenocrate does not mark the end of mighty Tamburlaine. He overcomes his suffering and treats it as a springboard to further conquest. Once violence is transfigured into creativity, he is ready to welcome a new challenge: “But now my boys, leave off, and list to me,/ That mean to teach you rudiments of war” (*Tamb.* 2, 3.2.3-4). Tamburlaine wants to pass on his energy and vitality onto his sons who would fight with him and continue his project later on. By smoothly shaking off his suffering, Tamburlaine yet again seems to echo Nietzsche (2005b: 97), who through his prophet Zarathustra says: “How did I make use of and overcome such wounds? How did my soul rise again from these graves? Yes, something invulnerable, unbriable, is within me, something that explodes rock: that is my will...” As it seems, Tamburlaine’s will to power is strong enough to lead him ever further. This time he invests a lot of trust in his sons, whom he desperately wants to see as an extension of himself. As it appears, his failure to make Calyphas a mirror image of Tamburlaine proves Nietzsche’s point that “overhuman” potential is not a question of birth or heredity but rather self-realization or, in other words, self-overcoming. Calyphas is a total opposite of Tamburlaine. His lack of interest in “the rudiments of war” would not be such a stain on Tamburlaine’s honour if he was not such a petty figure in general. Calyphas wants to take advantage of Tamburlaine’s success, but he has no will to contribute to it in any way. He seems to manifest his pacifist feelings only to veil his lack of courage. For his lack of loyalty, in an act of ultimate fury, Tamburlaine stabs his own son. Even though Calyphas emerges as a particularly despicable character, Tamburlaine’s deed strikes one as horrifying. This time it is hard to speak of any sublimation or aesthetic creativity as the murder appears way beyond justifiable. However, it demonstrates the extent of Tamburlaine’s self-assertion that will not accept any questioning of his empery. In the world of Tamburlaine, sacrifice, even of your loved ones, seems necessary for the sake of the ultimate face of the “overman”. As Nietzsche (2007b: 93) writes in *The gay science*, ultimate sacrifice is necessary to achieve independence of the soul. It is important to note that it does not mean that Nietzsche prescribes cruelty or violence as a means to shape the overman. What he is saying, is just that in some cases suffering or sacrifice is incidental in the process (Kaufmann 1974: 194). For Tamburlaine, the stabbing of his son appears as a necessary step in getting rid of the weakest link in his limitless vision. He sees Calyphas’ “folly, sloth and dammed idleness” as dangerous, and only when this danger is removed may he say again to his sons and indirectly to his enemies “Now you shall feel the strength of Tamburlaine, / And by the state of

supremacy,/ Approve the difference ‘twixt himself and you” (*Tamb. 2, 4.1.124, 133-135*), trying to ultimately highlight the necessity of killing Calyphas. In his process of building the “self” and ever overcoming of this “self” “[g]ood and evil, and rich and poor, and high and lowly, and all the names of values: weapons [...] shall be and clashing signs that life must itself overcome again and again! Into the heights life wants to build itself with pillars and steps...” (Nietzsche 2005b: 87). In other words, those impulses and deeds normally deemed despicable find their place in the reality of Tamburlaine. It is interesting to note that Barabas, like Tamburlaine, will also turn out as a stiflingly patriarchal overman who would not let anyone undermine his meticulously crafted position of power.

As it seems, Tamburlaine, whose position in the Elizabethan world picture actually explodes its seemingly stable foundations, bears much resemblance to the “overman”, a crowning conception of Nietzsche’s philosophy. However, the question whether Tamburlaine fully encapsulates the ideal of *Übermensch* still remains pending. As presented, Tamburlaine is definitely an immensely strong and powerful personality with an ever “aspiring mind”. However, it is important to bear in mind the fact that he realizes his aspiration through political and military conquest. In his writings Nietzsche frequently underscores that political power is a form of barbarism and he condemns it altogether (Kaufmann 1974: 197). Although he highlights the necessity to embrace low instincts, he is in favour of channelling the individual will to power into the creative realm of human existence. Though one can occasionally see Tamburlaine’s aesthetic and more sensitive side, especially in his treatment of Zenocrate, there is no question that he is, above all, the god of war. Nietzsche’s style of philosophizing is characterized by his strong emphasis on the concept of war, struggle and military vocabulary, but one has to remember that he values the overman as the embodiment of artistic creativity. Marlowe’s Tamburlaine appears to possess the overhuman potential realized in his ambition. His horizons seem limitless and, many a time, he proves that his conception of power has nothing to do with the accumulation of goods and material power. Nevertheless, his cruel treatment of his political opponents (e.g. Bajazeth and Zabina) emerges as unnecessary cruelty – a wild performance of boasting triumph and “sensational” staged fury. Tamburlaine is definitely a figure who embraces his low animal impulses and, at times, tries to creatively transfigure them into higher ends. For this reason I see him as the first character who opens the canon of the Nietzschean “beasts of prey”, men who first have to stoop to their lowest “natural” affects in order to open their project of self-overcoming.<sup>13</sup> In

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<sup>13</sup> Here I refer once again to the passage from *Beyond good and evil* where Nietzsche “defends” Cesare Borgia, who emerges for him more of a human being than his contemporaries. I believe this passage perfectly illustrates the power dynamics driving Marlovian protagonists as well as some Shakespearean characters.

the Nietzschean vision such men, “these healthiest of all-tropical monsters”, are infinitely better than those who would hypocritically veil or try to expatriate their impulses (Nietzsche 2002: 84-85). Tamburlaine may not be a fully sublimated individual who lacks interior reflection, but he does yield to his exuberant and blind will to power. Barabas, the protagonist of *The Jew of Malta*, resembles Tamburlaine in his will to power. Moreover, here Marlowe gives us a protagonist who reflects more intensely on his process of self-creation.

## 3.2. Barabas (*The Jew of Malta*)

### 3.2.1. Critical responses to *The Jew of Malta* and interpretative paths

*The Jew of Malta*, like Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays, portrays an outstanding and attention-gripping figure that fits Levin's classic expression “an over-reacher”. Though Barabas never becomes King *per se*, he indeed reaches the highest position on his home island of Malta and successfully pursues all his goals until his inexhaustible ambition overleaps itself. His robust and imposing vitality is reminiscent of Tamburlaine's intense “ambitious” singularity and so are some of the crucial tensions implicit in the play. Despite the intricate mesh of religious interdependencies and theological complexities, the play emerges not only as sceptical but actually adamantly critical of Christianity, if not religion in general, rendering the message of the play atheistic. Moreover, like the *Tamburlaine* diptych it celebrates the protagonist, who by all conventional moralities is a wicked and despicable character, hardly inspiring any pity in the audience. Marlowe's Barabas thrives on his pride, ambition and his villainy. As I will be arguing, Barabas, like Tamburlaine, in his rejection of traditionally-conceived morality, proves to be an antecedent of Nietzsche's overman, while in his cult of life he encapsulates the Nietzschean life affirmation. However, it is important to note that the characterization of Barabas is clearly a development on the part of Marlowe, as not only did he introduce an element of the comic and inward reflection, but also even further he nuanced the background against which Barabas's singularity flourishes. Although Barabas is no warrior but a prosperous merchant, he does conquer Malta using the means of capitalist exchange and trade. Bartels (1993: 83), implicitly referring to Nietzsche, points out that “the will to profit” is stronger in this play than “the will to power” as “Marlowe couples imperialism more explicitly to profit [...]” This seems only partly true, however, as Barabas revels in his machinations and ability to trick, in his view, the far intellectually inferior inhabitants of Malta, who clearly lack his enterprising nature and business acumen. To complicate matters further, Marlowe makes his morally dubious protagonist Jewish. Indeed, it is not only

the clash of imperialism and capitalism that complicate Barabas's Malta, but also its contentious religious environment – steeped in early-modern prejudice and the stereotype of the unknown other. Bartels (1993: 97) aptly observes that “what *The Jew of Malta* dramatizes is not the criminal history of a diabolical Jew in a less diabolical Christian society, but rather the strategies of negotiation and domination in an international marketplace, where imperialism and capitalism inevitably collide.” In Marlowe's play, the discourse of religion indeed hypocritically becomes a tool in self-fashioning, though it is not only Barabas that indulges in such self-creation. As I will be arguing, his initial victimization is inextricably connected to his Jewishness but, in his overhuman self-definition he distances himself from it, rather treating it as a first step in his self-overcoming. In its complex religious relations *The Jew of Malta*, like *Tamburlaine*, also takes advantage of the fear the Ottoman Empire inspired in Renaissance rulers as well as the popular imagination. It presents the Turkish power as a threatening element emerging to destabilise the seemingly orderly social relations on Malta.<sup>14</sup> Although the events in the play are fictional, they seem to allude to the unsuccessful siege of Malta in 1565, when the Turks attempted to gain control over the Mediterranean sea (Rutter 2012: 62).<sup>15</sup> Their bold attempt must have still been fresh in the memory of European powers. Had they been successful, the balance of power in Renaissance Europe would have been radically different, as they would have gained upper hand in trade and defence (Bartels 1993: 88). On top of that, there was a prevalent belief that Jewish bankers aided the Turks financially in the siege of Malta (Ide 2006: 260). Marlowe's Barabas represents values widely rejected as evil, but what makes his figure even more contentious is the fact that it is the Jew that is the villain.<sup>16</sup> The poetical ingenuity and the lasting influence of Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*

<sup>14</sup> As Shepherd observes, plays with a “Turkish”/ Arab theme were in fashion on Elizabethan stages (Shepherd 1986: 142). The vogue seems to have started with Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, though there are earlier examples like the aforementioned *Cambyses, King of Persia* by Thomas Preston. Post-Tamburlaine plays, partly trying to emulate its style and repeat its success include, among many, *The battle of Alcazar* (1594) attributed to George Peele, *Selimus, Emperor of the Turks* (1594) attributed to Robert Greene and Thomas Lodge, or Robert Greene's *Alphonsus, King of Aragon*.

<sup>15</sup> Arata Ide (2006: 260) suggests that Marlowe might have encountered accounts of the 1565 siege of Malta when he was researching the character of Tamburlaine and his fight with the Turkish Bajazeth.

<sup>16</sup> If one then takes into consideration the historical distortion of Nietzsche's philosophical tenets, the matter becomes even more delicate. Although Nietzsche's philosophical legacy has been already cleansed from the unfortunate and totally abortive affiliations with Nazism by the professional philosophy academia, for a reader unfamiliar with Nietzsche's writing the mental link seems to be still very vivid. Recalling the name of Nietzsche often stirs the feeling of discomfiture, but so does Marlowe's play *The Jew of Malta*. In my opinion, the clash of these two problematic domains makes the whole issue call for an interpretative intervention.

(as well as Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*) have made critics like James S. Shapiro (*Shakespeare and the Jews*) or Stephen Greenblatt (*Marlowe, Marx and Anti-Semitism*) feel obliged to address the issue of apparent anti-Semitism implicit in Marlowe's portrayal.

In his essay *Marlowe, Marx and Anti-Semitism*, Stephen Greenblatt (1999: 141) suggests that Marlowe's villain – the Jew – is really “a powerful rhetorical device” or “a 16<sup>th</sup> century trope” and consequently “a way of marshalling popular hatred and clarifying its object.” So, the prejudice is not religious but rather social, while the choice of the figure of the Jew is pretty accidental. Marlowe uses “mass psychology” by framing a semi-mythical figure that stirs the popular imagination (Greenblatt 1999: 142).<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, numerous critics point to *The Jew of Malta* “as a key contribution to European representations of the Jews” (Lupton 2004: 144). Julia Reinhard Lupton (2004: 149) traces the Jewish position of exclusion from various European communities to the symbolical meaning of the name Barabas, who is seen as “the one-who-did-not-die-in-the-place-of-Christ, the one who was not substituted for Jesus” like his Biblical counter-part Barabbas. Against Greenblatt's view that the prejudice was more of a social phenomenon, Bartels catalogues stereotypes associated with the Jews that were powerfully present in the popular imagination, many of which were clearly and inextricably linked with their religion. She writes that:

When religion was called into play, Jews were of course demonized as the Antichrist or devil, and accused of carrying out ritual murders, especially of Christian children, desecrating the Christian host, blaspheming, and the like. On the economic front, they were criminalized as usurers; on the social front, they were assigned a variety of vices and misdemeanours, such as cheating, or having a peculiar smell (*Foetor Judaicus*). (Bartels 1993: 84)

These stereotypes were reinforced through the Elizabethan stage as well as popular and widely circulated pamphlets. Stephen Gosson in his pamphlet

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<sup>17</sup> In a footnote to his main line of argumentation, Greenblatt adds that Anti-Semitism can never be merely a trope or a device as it is always inextricably linked with irrationality and bad faith. He underscores Marlowe's immense cruelty in the presentation of the Jew. For more information see: Greenblatt, Stephen. *Marlowe, Marx and Anti-Semitism*, in: Wilson, Richard (ed.). 1999. *Christopher Marlowe*. London and New York: Longman. 140-158. It is worth mentioning that the Jew-baiting found its real expression in the condemnation of Rodrigo López, the Queen's physician, Jewish by origin, though a converted Christian. López was accused of being entangled in the conspiracy to poison the Queen. She herself was not entirely sure of his guilt and waited with the execution, but she yielded under pressure. Lopez was most probably innocent and a faithful servant to the Queen, but his protestations of his innocence only strengthened the belief in his guilt due to his supposed power of dissimulation. For more information see: Weir, Alison. 2008. *The life of Elizabeth I*. New York: Random House Inc. 416-419.

*The schoole of abuse* (1579) spares no effort in criticizing the revels of theatrical plays as causing social unrest. However, he does exempt plays with a moral point and here he gives an example of a play he himself saw at The Bull which centralized the characters of an evil Jew. The play supposedly condemns “the greedinesse of worldly chusers, and bloody mindes of usurers” (Gosson 1841: 30). Of course, by presenting the Jew as the greedy usurer Gosson proves the anti-Semitic sentiment of the Elizabethan society.<sup>18</sup> George Whetstone’s *English mirror* (1586), Marlowe’s source for Tamburlaine and, hence, possibly for *The Jew of Malta* also perpetrates anti-Semitic prejudice. However, Bartels’s insightful investigation of source texts e.g. Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, demonstrates that in reality there was no unified portrayal of the Jews or Judaism in the early modern England. This applies also to the portrayals on stage, where positive representations also occasionally happened (Bartels 1993: 84-85). One could refer here to the already mentioned Robert Wilson’s *The three ladies of London* (c. 1584), which offers an interesting reversal of moral dynamics as Gerontius, the Jewish moneylender, emerges as a kind-hearted fellow, albeit slightly gullible. The play partly testifies to the uneven attitude towards Jewishness, which Bartels (1993: 87) summarizes by observing that “[t]hough England’s historical record does not and could not erase the more diabolical socioreligious profile disseminated beside (and in some paces within it), it nonetheless displays the Jews as the offended and as offenders, used by as well as using the state in ‘gréevos’ and ‘wicked’ ways”. Marlowe’s Barabas, though evil by accepted morality standards, is free from the traditional stereotypical traits of “Jewishness”. The audience is expected to laugh *with* him when he tricks his opponents rather than laugh *at* him. As Shepherd (1986: 175) claims:

The self-presentation as racial stereotype is marked as performance: Abigail is told to behave ‘like a cunning Jew’ The audience is not privileged to watch an ignorant alien unwittingly conforming to stereotype, but the fictional character looks back at them when he consciously performs a role they expect: the stereotype is thus not naturalised but acted.

Finally, Greenblatt (1999: 146) points out that “Barabas’s avarice, egotism, duplicity, and murderous cunning do not signal his exclusion from the world of Malta but rather his central place within it”. This obviously does not “signal a turning away from Jew-baiting”, but Marlowe’s portrayal of social relations intensifies the hostility towards Christians as well (Greenblatt 1999: 146). So, as it seems, Marlowe never openly rejects anti-Semitism but he paints Christians in the same light, portraying them as equally corrupt. Barabas himself

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<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, Gosson (1841: 30) includes the plays which portray the “treachery of Turks” into a section subtitled “tolerable at sometime”.

comments: "Some Jews are wicked, as all Christians are" (*Jew*, 1.2.112). Christopher G. Fanta's (1970: 23) words round up Barabas's comment as he says: "Marlowe exempts neither Turks nor Christians nor Jews from the sin of avarice." All in all, Marlowe rather paints a gloomy picture of the universal wickedness inherent in every human being, and such a presentation approximates him to Nietzsche's illusion-free vision of man. Sadly accepting Darwin's theory evolution, Nietzsche's (2005b: 11) Zarathustra speaks to people: "You have made your way from worm to human, and much in you is still worm. Once you were apes, and even now the human being is still more of an ape than any ape is." Indeed, one gets an impression that the characters of *The Jew of Malta*, regardless of their religious affiliation, are predominantly driven by primitive instincts; first of all – survival – and second of all – the accumulation of material wealth. This is why the Turks attack and demand money while the Governor robs the Jewish community of half of its wealth to save the city, while the Jew who loses all, takes bloody revenge. Both the Christian Friars and Muslim slave Ithamore blackmail the Jew to extract money from him. So, none of the characters follow the ethical codes as outlined in their sacred books, be it *The Bible* or *Quran*. It is against this intricate backdrop that Barabas's villainy is acted out. Barabas is not any more villainous than any of his opponents, but he is definitely more clever and cunning. As Ide Arata (2006: 259) observes: "[h]is remarkable dexterity as a player of roles transforms Barabas from a Jewish merchant into a superhuman villain." Barabas indulges in, what Goldman (1977: 32) calls, the "infinite richness of deception". However, as I will be arguing, it is not the power of Barabas's deception or his material wealth that make him a potential overman, but his sense of intellectual superiority. I would suggest that Barabas expresses Nietzsche's megalomania par excellence as he seems to be equipped with the most subversive of Nietzschean qualities such as contempt for religion and herd instincts implicit in it, and the sense of utmost superiority and egocentrism. Therefore, despite the grounding of the play in the religious context of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the play seems to explode the ethical core these three religions share. Thus, my assumption is that, just like in the case of *Tamburlaine, the great*, *The Jew of Malta* is driven by a totally different morality framework that is truly Nietzschean in spirit. Naturally, the protagonist can be inscribed within this framework too as, to my mind, in his actions he goes far beyond his "Jewishness". In Marlowe's spectacle of wickedness, Barabas "sparkles" as a "good devil", "the man you love to hate and hate to love – though with the other side of your mind you do that too" (Steane 1970: 175) and you would feel exactly the same if you ever met Nietzsche's overman. Undoubtedly, Barabas, in spite of all his wickedness, stirs simultaneously admiration and hate just like Nietzsche's *Übermensch*.

### 3.2.2. “Barabas is born to better chance,/ And framed of finer mould than common men” – Barabas (*Jew*, 1.2.218-219)<sup>19</sup>

As mentioned, the events of Marlowe’s play unfold a pretty bleak reality of materialist society in which “ideology is clearly subordinated to considerations of profit” (Greenblatt 1999: 145). If Greenblatt (1999: 145) be right in saying that in the play “the dominant mode of perceiving reality is contempt”, then Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* communicates an almost existentialist despair and the utmost contingency of human life, probably only fully sensed by the innocent Abigail who observes: “But I perceive there is no love on earth,/ Pity in Jews, nor piety in Turks (*Jew*, 3.3.52-53). Except for a sad reflection on humanity in general, Abigail’s comment points to the implicit criticism of the religions in question. Abigail as a victim of her Jewish father’s and his Muslim slave’s plotting, turns to Christianity just before her premature death. However, it is undoubtedly true that in Marlowe’s vision Christians are painted equally unfavourably as the Jews or Muslims. I believe that, even more than *Tamburlaine, the great*, the play communicates a scepticism pushed to the extreme as it emulates a subversive, unacknowledged atheistic spirit. Paralleling Nietzsche’s (2007b: 120) famous maxim, Marlowe presents a reality where “God is dead”. This underlying atmosphere of the play is encapsulated and first signalled in the Prologue presented by stage-Machiavel (Machevill or Machevil depending on the edition), as numerous critics have observed – a metaphorical heir to the philosophical legacy of Machiavelli’s famous *Prince* and simultaneously a reworking of and development on the morality character of Vice (cf. Rutter 2012: 61, 65). As Rutter (2012: 61) points out, the modified spelling of the Italian thinker’s name becomes a pun in English as “Machevil” is actually a contraction meaning “Make-evil” or “Much-evil”. This intended misspelling underscores the notorious reputation of being an immoralist and atheist that the real Machiavelli had in the Renaissance England. In the Prologue, Machiavel presents Barabas, the Jew, as his follower although Barabas does not seem interested in the political power as outlined in Machiavelli’s *Prince*. Nevertheless, as he suggests, the rich Jew “favours” him (*Jew*, 1.1.34). Rutter claims that Marlowe’s Machiavel, instead

<sup>19</sup> An earlier version of my reflections on Marlowe’s Barabas can be found in: Burzyńska, Katarzyna. 2014. “Barabas is born to better chance, and farm’d of finer mould the common men’: The analysis of Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* in the light of Friedrich Nietzsche’s ideas on morality”, in: Liliana Sikorska, Anna Chudzińska-Parkosadze, Joanna Jarzab and Marta Frączak. *Clash(es) and new beginnings in literature and culture*, Poznań: Wydział Anglistyki, 95-104. Since the publication of the article my analysis has been enriched by an in-depth reading of source texts, which can be seen in the present volume.

of recalling Machiavelli's *Prince*, actually speaks Innocent Gentillet's anti-Machiavellian words from his 1576 treatise (Rutter 2012: 61). I myself believe that Marlowe's irony goes much deeper than that. There are, in my view, two levels on which the character of Machiavel (and hence Barabas too) can be read. On the surface, Machiavel emerges as an exaggerated and almost ridiculous bogeyman whose role is to scare the public with his outrageous "atheist" ideas, and such is also Barabas's subversive role in the seemingly ordered society of Malta. In this sense, they are both more the incarnations of medieval Vice figures from morality plays rather than followers of Machiavelli. In his direct and joyously malicious address to the audience, Marlowe's Machiavel reminds one of the allegorical figure of Vice in *Mankind*. So does Barabas, who plays tricks on other characters and enjoys watching his success, while inviting the audience in sharing his malicious joy (Rutter 2012: 65-66). Thomas and Tydeman (1994: 299) identify the allegorical character of Avarice in the Tudor political morality *Respublica* attributed to Thomas Udall (c. 1553) as the antecedent of Marlowe's Barabas, who similarly to him also clutches lovingly his bags of gold. The parallel is indeed quite striking when Avarice addresses his gold by saying: "Come on, sweet bags of gold, come on good will,/ I on you so tender and ye so forward still?/ Come forward, I pray you sweet bags" (*Respublica*, 3.4.1-3). Having recovered his wealth with the aid of Abigail, Barabas exclaims: "My gold, my fortunate, my felicity,/ Strength to my soul, death to mine enemy!" (*Jew*, 2.2.47-48). One could be deceived for a second that Barabas means his daughter had not he been simultaneously hugging his bags of gold instead of her. This seems to be Barabas at his most despicable and at the same time the most exaggerated allegorical guise of Avarice. However, the parallels do not end here as Avarice presenting itself for the first time to the audience announces: "My very true unchristian name is Avarice,/ Which I may not have openly known in no wise;/ For though to most men I am found commodious/ For those that use my name is odious" (*Resp*, 1.1.13-16). The covert way in which Avarice establishes a rapport with the audience as well as his position of a figure both loved and hated, admired and feared, very much resembles Machiavel's introductory speech in *The Jew of Malta*. An allegorical Vice figure in a morality play has such a double reception. It is a despicable and condemnable figure but also a source of most of the comic load in an otherwise harshly didactic morality play. Machiavel sets the scene for Barabas who later on acts his part of a Vice figure, who is, to use Nietzsche's expression, "schadenfroh" – maliciously proud of his subversive and demolishing control over the island of Malta (Nietzsche 2007a: 141).<sup>20</sup> In

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<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche uses the German term "schadenfroh" (malicious or gleeful in the face of others' failures) a couple of times. For instance, in one of the aphorisms from *The gay science* when he announces: "Laughter. – Laughter means: to gloat, but with a good con-

other words he acts as a buffoon; a role Nietzsche himself frequently assumed (e.g. in *Ecce Homo* or *Thus spoke Zarathustra*).<sup>21</sup> However, as already outlined, Nietzsche's laughter or bitter irony is many a time a response to the deep metaphysical crisis of his age. Recalling Barabas's abilities of dissimulation, one sees that the parallel with the Nietzschean buffoonery mask is two-fold. Barabas mocks the hypocrisy of his environment, deconstructs the values on which it is built and proposes himself as a viable alternative to the surrounding decay. In this superficial stage Machiavel role, he remains the buffoon of the play but his circumstances and the way he overcomes them do stir admiration for a man who holds all values as nothing – mainly because these values are indeed devalued.

It is on this other, more Machiavellian level, that the Marlovian Machiavel signals the aforementioned crisis of metaphysics that permeates the play. In his speech, Machiavel briefly presents his philosophical agenda and says "I count religion but a childish toy,/ And hold there is no sin but ignorance" (*Jew*, 1.1.14-15). With these words he seems to be communicating Nietzsche's godless reality and at the same time dismissing religion as the realm of superstition and benightedness. According to Nietzsche, metaphysics constitutes the negation of the world of phenomena, the only one that humans have access to and the only one that can be empirically checked (Hollingdale 2001: 193). Since this is the only empirically viable reality, anything man tries to infer about the "other" world is always a mere representation. Then it seems a grave mistake to attribute values to reality beyond human reach, namely, beyond the actual physical reality (Kuderowicz 1979: 58). Machiavel apparently emerges as a critic of this metaphysical duality and an opponent of tearing "physis" into "the physi-

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science" (Nietzsche: 2007b: 141). The original by Nietzsche is as follows: "L a c h e n – Lachen heisst: *schadenfroh* sein, aber mit gutem Gewissen" (In *The Nietzsche source* marked as: eKGWB/FW-200 – Die fröhliche Wissenschaft: § 200. Erste Veröff. 10/09/1882. at <http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/FW-200>) (date of access: 29 March 2014). Josephine Nauckhoff translated the passage by changing the structure of the whole sentence. Hence, she did not maintain the adjectival quality of "schadenfroh" – instead changing it into an infinitive "to gloat". The option, successful as it is, does not seem to capture fully the meaning of "schadenfroh" which, in my opinion, perfectly illustrates the Nietzschean side of the Marlovian Barabas who does not gloat over the failure of others for gloating's sake but himself is a cunning and successful agent. The one who utilises his instincts in the pursuit of his goals may feel his conscience too good.

<sup>21</sup> In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche (2007d: 88) famously claims: "I don't want to be a saint, and would rather be a buffoon... Perhaps I am a buffoon... And nevertheless—or rather *not* nevertheless, for till now there has never been anyone more hypocritical than saints—the truth speaks from me.—But my truth is *terrifying*, for *lies* were called truth so far.—*Revaluation of all values*: that is my formula for the highest act of self-reflection on the part of humanity, which has become flesh and genius in me." It is hard not to notice that on Marlowe's Malta lies have been so far called truth and it is Barabas who seems to be the first to openly acknowledge the hypocrisy of Malta's reality.

cal” and “the metaphysical”. Paradoxically, as much as Machiavel might condemn duality, his speech “sets the pattern of dramatic doublethink” as he speaks with the egoism of a villain and at the same time with the dignity of a hero (Steane 1970: 173). He condemns ignorance, simultaneously underscoring the importance of the Renaissance cult of knowledge and the aspirations of science. His vitality is highlighted by his implicit irony and pride, fused to present “the paradox of the ‘good devil’” whom Barabas later seems to mirror (Steane 1970: 173-175). Machiavel’s words belittling religion seem to constitute quite a straightforward opposition to metaphysics, but the play is also rich in numerous implicit criticisms of religious institutions. The first hand example is obviously the “theft” of Barabas’s fortune. In an exchange with the Govenor, Barabas asks: “Is theft the ground of your religion?” to which Ferneze answers “No, Jew; we take particularly thine,/ To save the ruin of a multitude:/ And better one want for a common good,/ Than many perish for a private man” (*Jew*, 1.2.96-99). In his answer, Ferneze evidently presents the most basic tenet of Christian morality which is the pursuit of the so called “common good”, but somehow one cannot escape the impression that his motives are not fully altruistic and one feels pity for Barabas – who loses everything. What is, then, the reason for this uncomfortable feeling that is stirred by this seemingly necessary intervention to rescue multitudes of innocent people? Nietzsche’s adamant criticism of Christian morality seems to provide one with an answer to this question. First of all, the governor’s reaction poses a plain negation of the worth of an individual for the sake of the community. As Nietzsche (2006c: 5) observes in *The Antichrist*:

You should not beautify Christianity or try to dress it up: it has waged a war to the death against this higher type of a person, it has banned all the basic instincts of this type, it has distilled ‘evil’ and ‘the Evil One’ out of these instincts – the strong human being as reprehensible, as ‘depraved’. Christianity has taken the side of everything weak, base, failed, it has made an ideal out of whatever contradicts the preservation of instincts of a strong life; it has corrupted the reason of even the most spiritual by teaching people to see the highest spiritual values as sinful, as deceptive, as temptations.

For Nietzsche it is absolutely unacceptable to blindly try to attribute universal value to the “herd” at the cost of an individual. Barabas appears a successful merchant and businessman, the embodiment of an enterprising and independent character. It seems that he is punished for his success. Obviously the real reason is veiled by a doctrinal explanation as the Govenor – a truly Pilate-like figure – dismisses his responsibility by saying: “Excess of wealth is cause of covetousness:/ And covetousness, O, ‘tis a monstrous sin” (*Jew*, 1.2.122-123), while the knight adds “‘Tis not our fault, but thy inherent sin” (*Jew*, 1.2.109). Taking the side of the weak in itself would not be a real prob-

lem, but the premise of the decision appears dishonest. Nietzsche's point is that the automatic higher valuation of the community is a mistake as it is purely arbitrary. Since God is dead, while metaphysics cancelled, it seems evident that the morality system of a given community is a result of custom or tradition, not a universal God-given code of conduct. Nietzsche (2006a: 105-106) explains his view in *Daybreak: thoughts on the prejudices of morality*:

[m]oral fashion of a commercial society. – [...] 'moral actions are actions performed out of sympathy for others', I see the social effect of timidity hiding behind an intellectual mask: it desires, first and foremost, that all the dangers which life once held should be removed from it, and that everyone should assist in this with all his might: hence only those actions which tend towards the common security and society's sense of security are to be accorded the predicate 'good'.

The complex socio-economic life in the city seems to testify to this. Although "the prevailing morality is that of Al Capone's Chicago", it is tuned to provide at least an illusion of security (Steane 1970: 169). The Nietzschean (2006a: 106) "tyranny of timidity" turns out to be true for Barabas, as the authorities' references to sin are obviously a mask for their own weakness and baseness. This weakness is presented as a universal prescription, "supreme moral law" to use Nietzsche's words, when Ferneze says: "If thou rely upon thy righteousness,/ Be patient, and thy riches will increase" (*Jew*, 1.2.120-121). In the spirit of Nietzschean individuality, Barabas strongly opposes "the tyranny of timidity" by saying: "Why, I esteem the injury far less, To take the lives of miserable men/ Than be the causers of their misery. You have my wealth, the labour of my life, The comfort of mine age, my children's hope; And therefore ne'er distinguish of the wrong" (*Jew*, 1.2.146-151) Nietzsche's immoralism is even further underscored by Barabas's final comment: "Your extreme right does me exceeding wrong", also pointing out the relativity of moral choices (*Jew*, 1.2.153). Marlowe's play abounds in numerous situations similar to the one that drives the "revenge tragedy" potential of the play. Among them one may enumerate the nuns comments on not wanting to get involved with "the multitude" ("The better; for we love not to be seen/ 'Tis/ thirty winters long since some of us/ Did stray so far amongst the multitude") (*Jew*, 1.2.306-308) or the Friars attempting to blackmail Barabas using their knowledge gained during confession (Act 4 Scene 1). One may argue that Marlowe's implicit critical remarks on the institutions of the Catholic Church might be connected with the Anti-Catholic sentiment predominant in post-reformatory England. As Lupton (2004: 154) remarks: "The public theatre is given a Protestant frame – the same frame that allows Marlowe to couch his corrosive representation of Christian hypocrisy under the neutralizing rubric of anti-Catholic satire. These Christians might be nasty, but after all, they are Spanish Catholics, not English Protestants..." This is of course true; however, I would still

argue that Marlowe's rebuttal of Catholicism is a part of a more large-scale project of the denunciation of Christian morality. When Barabas says to Abigail "for religion/ Hides many mischiefs from suspicion" he refers to religious practice in general, not only Catholicism (*Jew*, 1.2.283). All in all, in *The Jew of Malta*, religion, and consequently the values inherent in it, emerge as a plain, on which human corruption is even strongly realized as the moral codes laid down by it become a mask to hide falsehood. Moreover, religion provides each group in the play with a moral prerogative to tyrannize others e.g. the Turks harass the Christians, in turn the Christians harass the Jews, while the cunning Jew decides to take revenge on all of them. In the face of such a value crisis, his *schadenfroh* attitude of a Vice figure seems to be the only reasonable reaction. Bartels (1993: 92) believes that as an heir to the teachings of Machiavelli

Machevill's prologue is in some ways a 'false start', its exclusive rights to the Jew denied. Malta is filled with hard-core policy-making Machiavels, as critics have noted, and Barabas stands out as the least Machiavellian among them, having little or no interest in the citadels, Caesars, and public/political policies that interest Machevill.

It is indeed true that Barabas is not interested in purely political power, dismissing it as primitive.<sup>22</sup> At the closing of the play he is all-too powerful, but he plans to relinquish his hold over Malta and negotiates with the governor. However, it is crucial to note that he only does relinquish power being in its full possession. So, one can see that he is only satisfied with a position of an ultimate master of puppets. His generous act of relinquishing power is unfortunately not accepted as such by Ferneze, who decides to get rid of Barabas, proving to be a truly Machiavellian politician.<sup>23</sup> Barabas, on the other hand,

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<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, this makes him even more Nietzschean as Nietzsche did not seem to hold politics and politicians in high regard. For instance, in *Beyond good and evil* he implicitly criticises "great politics" and patriotic leanings as hostile to truly great individuals (Nietzsche 2002: 131-150).

<sup>23</sup> Arata Ide (2006: 265) in her brilliant article "*The Jew of Malta* and the diabolic power of theatrics in the 1580s" couples the Governor's hypocritical Machiavellian techniques with the workings of the Elizabethan regime in the persecution of "Jesuits' shape-shifting". She associates Barabas's self-fashioned persona with the Catholic priests who came to England in disguise, while the Governor's appeal to providentialism in the face of Barabas's fall she parallels with the hypocrisy of the Elizabethan government that supposedly also utilized the "theatrical" tricks of deception in its anti-Catholic propaganda (Ide 2006: 268). Ide (2006: 269) aptly observes: "The government itself, in creating anti-Catholic discourse, actually applied the same theatrical strategy as that of common playwrights and seminary priests by manipulating the public with dexterous fictions in order to uphold the national polity. While highlighting the diabolic power of theatrics in resonance with popular anxiety and outwardly endorsing divine retribution against protean Barabas,

emerges more of a Nietzschean rather than Machiavellian figure though one may, at points, sense the overlap between the two. However, the conclusion seems to be that “all these motives, whatever exalted names we may give them, have grown up out of the same roots as those we believe evilly poisoned; between good and evil actions there is no difference in kind, but at the most one of degree” (Nietzsche 2005a: 58). Even those human impulses considered empathic, might be a veil for the human drive towards mastery, or in other words – the will to power. Once humans understand that goodness is only a sublimated form of evil, they might free themselves from the shackles of false moralities and start over-coming them. In Marlowe’s play the one character who instinctively seems to sense this idea is Barabas, who becomes “the breaker, the lawbreaker”, demolisher of the current morality who “can give [himself his own] evil and [his own] good and hang [his] will over [himself] as a law”. (Nietzsche 2005b: 21, 55).

Men who are great in Nietzsche’s (2008: 11) view can be described as “the noble, the mighty, the high-placed and the high-minded”. Undoubtedly, pride is one of the characteristic features of Nietzsche’s dignified over-men. In this respect, in the opening scenes Barabas approximates Nietzsche’s ideal. In his vivid speech in Act 1, Scene 1 he speaks of his “infinite riches” (*Jew*, 1.1.7), but one can sense that the money Barabas celebrates is really a mental short-cut for his control, influence and the power he holds over the island of Malta. He mocks Christian piety and identifies himself with the chosen people, or in his particular understanding “the Master Race”. It is important to note that Barabas explicitly identifies himself with the doctrine of Judaism as long as he is successful. His subsequent choices, already when he has lost everything, morally exclude him from the Jewish community. As Bartels (1993: 93) points out: “[a]lthough Barabas first appears as a greedy Jew, fondling his money bags, his career is initiated by an event that sets him in the middle of the ensuing imperialist competition between Christians and Turks and makes clear that this “tragedy of a Jew” is not about a Jew.” He emerges as a stereotypical Jew only to subvert the stereotype in the course of the play. Barabas is proud of his success and perfectly aware of the jealousy his wealth might stir in other people as he says: “Who hateth me but for my happiness?” (*Jew*, 1.1.111). Steane (1970: 174) observes that in this comment he mirrors Machiavel, who also points out: “Admir’d I am of those that hate me most” (*Jew*, Prologue 10). Machiavel also poses a crucial question about Julius Caesar: “What right had Caesar to the empery?/ Might first made kings, and laws were then most sure” (*Jew*, Prologue 20). It seems that a parallel question could be posited

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Marlowe seems to throw doubt obliquely on the legitimacy of the English Protestant nation by disclosing that the same power facilitates the nation in forging an image of a divinely sanctioned regime.”

about Barabas – what is the legitimate reason that makes him a representative of a higher class? He himself points to his Jewishness, but I would argue that it is his enterprising nature and insurmountable ambition that makes him tower over others. Just like Tamburlaine who presents his “overman” manifesto in Act 2, Scene 7, when he speaks of “aspiring minds” and “the wondrous architecture of the world” (*Tamb. 1, 2.7.12-27*), so does Barabas present the extent of his ambition in his own assertion of power and control in Act 1, Scene 1 (*Jew, 1.1.2-47*). Barabas is himself overwhelmed by the wealth he has accumulated, but he quite explicitly says that he finds counting the money tedious when he says: “Fie; what a trouble ‘tis to count this trash” (*Jew, 1.1.7*). His money is ultimately “trash”, which quite clearly points to the fact that it is not the mere accumulation of funds that brings him joy, but the possibilities his wealth opens before him. As he says: “Beauteous rubies, sparkling diamonds, [...] / May serve in peril of calamity / To ransom great kings from captivity” (*Jew, 1.1.27-32*). So it is rather the possibility to buy a King out of captivity that is more exciting than the diamonds or rubies themselves. In the case of Barabas his wealth is a measure of his immense will to power and his success in exercising it. Barabas’s great merchant fleet literally holds control over the entire Mediterranean sea, transporting precious stones and commodities. “Spanish oils and wines of Greece” travel on Persian ships from Arabia to Egypt (*Jew, 1.1.5*). It seems that the entirety of the known world is encapsulated in the hands of Barabas so that he can enclose “[i]nfinite riches in a little room” (*Jew, 1.1.37*). One expects a portrayal of a pity miser, but to my mind, the dazzling enumeration of exotic places and fantastic treasures expresses the intellectual horizons Barabas is not afraid to reach. Thus, one encounters a man of an “aspiring mind” who revels in the growth of his power and control just like Tamburlaine, the Great.

As already hinted, in one of the initial soliloquies Barabas links his life’s success with his Jewish origin. He inscribes himself within the framework of “the chosen people”, but as soon as the first signs of trouble loom on the horizon and his fellow Jewish citizens arrive at his house to inform him of the need to appear at the meeting with the city authorities, he instantly disassociates himself from his Jewishness by saying (in an aside): “If any thing shall there concern our state, / Assure yourselves I’ll look – unto myself” (*Jew, 1.1.172-173*). His individuality is underscored by him saying: “Ego mihimet sum semper proximus”, which could be translated as “I am my own best friend” (*Jew, 1.1.188*). In his project of revenge, Barabas goes beyond his Jewish origin even further, rejecting the morality of Judaism and instead turning more into the realm of Nietzschean morality or rather immorality. Paradoxically, it is his Jewish background that metaphorically crams him into the role of the relentless avenger. As Steane (1970: 168) observes: “Barabas is the most successful representative of a materialist society which also victimises and condemns him.” The official reason for his condemnation is naturally

his Jewishness. However, as it seems, Barabas's reaction is not "Jewish" in spirit. Barabas turns out to be an active agent already during his meeting with the governor. Unlike his humble Jewish companions, he adamantly opposes the obvious injustice that befalls his community. For his act of defiance he is punished by confiscation of his fortune. Barabas demands a reciprocal reaction from his fellows as he says: "Why stand you thus unmov'd with my laments?/ Why weep you not to think upon my wrongs?/ Why pine not I, and die in this distress? (*Jew*, 1.2.171-173). He bitterly reproaches the other Jews' passivity by saying: "Why did you yield to their extortion?/ You were a multitude, and I but one:/ And of me only have they taken all" (*Jew*, 1.2.177-179). Though evidently Barabas's verbal rebellion against the governor's decisions is driven by his egoistic impulses, it nevertheless proves his mental courage to resist injustice and to go against the flow, unlike his humble or, rather one should say, weak friends. In his resistance Barabas, possibly unintentionally, frames himself as the commander of the community. As Nietzsche (2006b: 89) posits:

commanding is harder than obeying. And not only that the commander bears the burden of all obeyers, and that this burden easily crushes him: – In all commanding it seemed to me there is an experiment and a risk; and always when it commands, the living risks itself in doing so. Indeed, even when it commands itself, even then it must pay for its commanding. It must become the judge and avenger and victim of its own law.

These words definitely prove right for Barabas as he himself solely bears the burden of his commanding. In the aforementioned scene Barabas definitely consolidates the dividing line between his strong Nietzschean individuality, his "master" spirit and other weak and petty men. Naturally, the other Jews suggest the teachings of the Scriptures as a recipe to deal with the situation. The humbleness of Job, his patient and unquestioning passivity in the face of adversity, seems to them a role model of behaviour they recommend to Barabas. For Barabas, Jewish by origin but Nietzschean in spirit, his suffering is a great stimulant to act and creatively transform his unhappiness. As Walter Kaufmann (1974: 276) writes, for Nietzsche happiness is supposed to be the process of conquering your own suffering. Barabas seems to be aware of the creative potential of his suffering as, when he is left alone, in his, what I would call, "second overman" manifesto, he celebrates his urge to action and he announces his superiority over those who cannot creatively embrace adversity:

See the simplicity of these base slaves,  
Who, for the villains have no wit themselves,  
Think me to be a senseless lump of clay,  
That will with every water wash to dirt!  
No, Barabas is born to better chance,

And fram'd of finer mould than common men,  
 That measure naught but by the present time.  
 A reaching thought will search his deepest wits,  
 And cast with cunning for the time to come;  
 For evils are apt to happen every day (*Jew*, 1.2.215-223).

For Nietzsche, the true measure of individual power is not entirely linked with his worldly might, or worldly success, as these might “cloak the most abysmal weakness” (Kaufmann 1974: 280). The more authentic power of the individual is measured by his ability to overcome adversity, so it seems that the formation of Barabas as the “overman” actually begins with his lost fortune. He does not decide to follow Job’s example as that would mean resignation of the control he had possessed so far and embracing a degenerated and weakened form of life. Instead, he seems to creatively embrace the bitter ingredient of life – the adversity that befalls him. Instead of patient acceptance, he chooses revenge. Adversity then becomes a springboard for action and the process of self-overcoming. In his conversation with Abigail he resists succumbing to despair by saying:

You partial heavens, have I deserv'd this plague?  
 What, will you thus oppose me, luckless stars,  
 To make me desperate in my poverty?  
 And, knowing me impatient in distress,  
 Think me so mad as I will hang myself,  
 That I may vanish o'er the earth in air,  
 And leave no memory that e'er I was?  
 No, I will live; nor loathe I this my life:  
 And, since you leave me in the ocean thus  
 To sink or swim, and put me to my shifts,  
 I'll rouse my senses, and awake myself.— (*Jew*, 1.2.260-269)

For Barabas the heavens seems to be silent, while the stars “luckless”. However, this is no reason to despair. Suicide is out of the question as Barabas is too proud to die without leaving a heritage testifying to his greatness. In this respect he is again very similar to Tamburlaine who is equally determined to leave a testimony of greatness behind. Just as Tamburlaine resolves to overcome the circumstances of his lowly background, Barabas distances himself from his Jewishness and the constraints of Jewish morality in the face of adversity. Barabas’s speech illustrates a Nietzschean life affirmation, namely, the approach realized in the acceptance of life’s inherent suffering and happiness stemming from the over-coming of suffering. In his philosophy Nietzsche promotes the idea of life affirmation by referring to *Amor fati*, or in other words, the love of fate. It is an attitude which embraces life as a whole with everything that is happy and sorrowful, as well as good and evil in it. Nietzsche (2007b: 157) calls himself in *The*

*gay science* “a Yes-Sayer” and he announces: “I want to learn more and more how to see what is necessary in things as what is beautiful in them – thus I will be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love from now on!”. By “seeing what is necessary” Nietzsche also wants to communicate that what people consider evil and ugly in other humans is inescapable, as it belongs to human nature. Nietzsche seems to promote a more faithful and illusion-free picture of humanity. I would argue, that so does the reality of *The Jew of Malta* as it leaves the spectator with no illusions as to the “inherent” goodness of people, after all here “Every one’s price is written on his back” (*Jew*, 2.3.3). In this sense, Barabas is the exponent of *Amor Fati* as he is fully aware of the dangerous human potential as well as the chaotic and contingent nature of existence. It is not enough just to drift in these wild waters. The only way to deal with bleak reality is to live your life to the full and that, in turn, means to gather more power and might even at the cost of overturning the existing order of illusory values.

As Levin (1961: 79-80) suggests, *The Jew of Malta* inscribes itself thematically within the pattern of a revenge tragedy, at least at the opening of the play. Barabas appears a character ennobled by his suffering and justified in his revenge project; however, his subsequent deeds transform him into a villain rather than strengthen his moral right to revenge. Although avengers in revenge tragedies seem to desire relatively more blood and more suffering than they themselves incurred – for Levin (1961: 80), Barabas still emerges as “the very incarnation of sin, the scapegoat sent out into the wilderness burdened with all the sins that flesh inherits.” As Levin (1961: 80) claims, Barabas is “more consistently and more superficially diabolical.” What Levin seems to be trying to say is that Barabas’s plan of revenge gets out of hand, that its cruelty is qualitatively disproportional to the offence. Barabas’s actions are not driven so much by passion but rather calculation and opportunism. It seems that if the revenge impulse is not acted out instantly with one swift thrust of a dagger, once it becomes a meticulously crafted policy, once the urge is unnaturally stretched in time, the vividness of injustice, at least in the audience’s eyes, becomes blurred and consequently the revenge is no longer justified. Though Hieronimo in the classic revenge tragedy by Thomas Kyd *The Spanish Tragedy* stretches his revenge plan in time, his wounds after the death of his son seem fresh enough. Barabas launches his revenge plan when he is yet again a rich and an influential citizen, so the justification of vengeance is qualitatively and quantitatively diminished. Thus, within the Christian framework of reference, his actions seem indeed diabolical. However, if one stops seeing Barabas as an avenger but rather a man of soaring ambition who consistently acts upon his impulse to strengthen his will to power, Barabas suddenly becomes an overman in the making. Barabas seems to share potential qualities with the overman such as his aforementioned intelli-

gence, ambition and pride, the ability to embrace life even in the face of adversity, the strength and determination to expose the falsehood of the current morals and, above all, his lack of esteem for any rules whatsoever. Barabas's consecutive actions may be seen in the light of his meticulous revenge or his individual ambition to tower over those whom he despises or maybe the combination of the two. Regardless of one's interpretation, the grand scale of Barabas's plan to punish the despised governor astonishes with its immense scope. In the course of the play, the list of casualties gets longer and longer. It includes all the nuns living in Barabas's old house, his daughter Abigail, the Arab slave Ithamore (whom Barabas at one point adopts as his own son), the two Friars who tried to blackmail him, the whole Turkish army and many more who more or less accidentally get caught in the way. Out of all these deaths, the one that strikes one as particularly cruel is the death of Abigail. Barabas decides to poison her, and along with her the whole nunnery, when she turns Christian. Barabas's killing of Abigail resembles the murder of Calyphas by Tamburlaine. In an act of fury Tamburlaine kills his own child. However, as much as Tamburlaine's son Calyphas emerges as an openly despicable character, there is no doubt that Abigail is a pure and innocent figure who does not seem to deserve to die in such gory circumstances. Nevertheless, in this respect Barabas strongly reminds one of Tamburlaine, who also demands ultimate loyalty. After all, Abigail, despite her best intentions, proves disloyal to her father as she goes to the nunnery and, additionally, on the verge of her death, confesses her father's sins to the friar. According to the Christian moral code, her behaviour may be seen as immaculate, but one needs to bear in mind the truth about the brutal reality of Marlowe's Malta. For Barabas, Abigail's behaviour emerges as an act of dishonesty and disobedience. It is possible to risk a statement that, by Nietzsche's standards, her death is a necessary sacrifice in the name of Barabas' mental independence. In a somewhat perverse way Barabas simply gets rid of his weakest link. His daughter provides the last connection with the values he eventually dashes to pieces, namely, compassion, mercy and forgiveness. When Ithamore becomes his servant, he instructs him by saying: "First, be thou void of these affections,/ Compassion, love, vain hope, and heartless fear;/ Be mov'd at nothing, see thou pity none" (*Jew*, 2.3.171-173). The lesson Barabas teaches Ithamore seems to be his own credo – the credo of an immoralist. As Nietzsche (2006a: 10) writes: "The free human being is immoral because in all things he is determined to depend upon himself and not upon a tradition: in all the original conditions of mankind, 'evil' signifies the same as 'individual', 'free', 'capricious', 'unusual', 'unforeseen', 'incalculable'." The other deaths to which Barabas leads seem to testify to him acting upon his basic instincts and they seem to be purely incidental in the course of his project. The exposure of the falsehood of existing morals and their denunciation is for Nietzsche a first

step to the creation of new ones. The Nietzschean overman, in the face of the relativity of current morality, is supposed to be an individual value-maker. Thus, a crucial question comes to mind, whether Barabas is actually a value-maker. He definitely is a demolisher of the existing order. His notorious life history that he presents to Ithamore during their first meeting testifies to both his ingenuity and his destructiveness. Barabas confesses to killing the sick and poisoning wells, but also to some medical experiments, a career as a physicist, usurer, servant to Charles V, as well as some engineering experience (*Jew*, 2.3.177-202). Some critics see the instruction as an element of a farcical construction of the play or Barabas's gradual shift into the realm of caricature.<sup>24</sup> Bartels sees his extravagant credo of an immoralist as part of his self-fashioning as an "evil Jew". As she observes: "Barabas's career is thus shaped by a series of performances in which he plays the Jew (as Tamburlaine plays the barbarian/hero) his spectators want and need to see, a Jew who ironically tells us more about them than about him" (Bartels 1993: 106). To this selection of guises that Barabas offers his audience belongs also his fake death, which is "a supreme and supremely manipulative fiction that works through alienation to overcome and overthrow" (Bartels 1993: 104). Bartels sees Barabas in a similar light to Tamburlaine. Barabas appears as a constructed public self, or a series of selves where the possibility of ever reaching his true, inner self is cancelled. It may be, as Bartels believes, a project of self-fashioning that Barabas carries out – or a Nietzschean self-overcoming. Whatever one wishes to call his identity building process, one thing remains constant – the fact that he makes himself into what he becomes. Regardless of its function, the exaggerated and bombastic enumeration of his crimes presented to Ithamore is, nevertheless, a declaration of a brilliant but definitely morally twisted mind. Hence, Barabas, to my mind, possesses overhuman potential, though its full realization is a debatable question. On the one hand, he seems to be an embodiment of a free mind as he rejects the accepted morality standards and chooses the professions that suit his individual needs for self-realization. On the other hand, in numerous deeds he is evidently a source of unnecessary cruelty. According to Nietzsche, a truly powerful human being has no need to cause pain, while Barabas seems to derive pleasure from cruelty. As Nietzsche (2006a: 169) writes: "The evil of the strong harms others without giving thought to it – it has to discharge itself; the evil of the weak wants to harm others and to see the signs of the suffering it has caused." So, if a strong man causes pain, it is only out of necessity or accident but never for the sake of

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<sup>24</sup> For more information on *The Jew of Malta* as a farce, see J.B. Steane's *Christopher Marlowe – a critical study* or consult Eder, Katharina T. S. *Eliot, The Jew of Malta: Farcical and symbolical elements, anti-Christian elements, anti-Muslim elements, dramatic technique*.

seeing suffering. In Barabas's actions one senses not only a will to tower over others, but also the disturbing pleasure derived from inflicting pain. Though eventually shunning "real" politics, throughout the play Barabas seems to be promoting a two-faced policy, in the spirit of Machiavelli's *Prince*, for instance when he says:

We Jews can fawn like spaniels when we please;  
 And when we grin we bite; yet are our looks  
 As innocent and harmless as a lamb's.  
 I learn'd in Florence how to kiss my hand,  
 Heave up my shoulders when they call me dog,  
 And duck as low as any bare-foot friar;  
 Hoping to see them starve upon a stall. (*Jew*, 2.3.20-26)

Paradoxically, in this speech Barabas cancels his individuality by inscribing himself yet again within the stereotypical presentation of the Jewish community. At the same time, on the level of an inherent moral message, Barabas's speech mirrors Machiavelli's heavily quoted passage where he recommends to resort both to human and beastly means in one's actions. Machiavelli (2006, loc. 1026-1028) writes:

so it is necessary for a prince to know how to make use of both natures, and that one without the other is not durable. A prince, therefore, being compelled knowingly to adopt the beast, ought to choose the fox and the lion; because the lion cannot defend himself against snares and the fox cannot defend himself against wolves. Therefore, it is necessary to be a fox to discover the snares and a lion to terrify the wolves.

As much as Nietzsche would call for the embrace of the beastly in one's nature, he would not advocate political opportunism, condemning hypocrisy whenever possible. Nietzsche's overman, full of pride and dignity, could never stoop so low as to herd instincts as Barabas does. The core of the Nietzschean overman is, above all, self-overcoming and the creative sublimation of impulses. Nietzsche promotes his concept of "the blond beast" which is not constructed racially but directly alludes to the colour of the lion, symbolically the bravest of all animals (Kaufmann 1974: 225). So for Nietzsche, if the man must be an animal, then he should definitely be a lion rather than a fox. Unlike Tamburlaine, who is not only politically conscious, but also aesthetically sensitive, Barabas unfortunately falls short of fully realizing his creative potential. He seems to share overhuman potentiality but stops at the level of embracing his lowest instincts. As Kaufmann (1974: 224) underscores: "Nietzsche believed that a man without impulses could not do the good or create the beautiful any more than a castrated man could beget children." Thus, the acknowledgement of human primordial impulses and acting upon

them might actually lead man to greatness. But that can only be possible when man learns to sublimate his instincts, only then can they be creatively transformed. With Barabas, as it seems, this process never begins. Although he is ready to relinquish his ultimate power over the city of Malta when he finally reaches it, his motivation seems to be driven by his survival instinct rather than the “overhuman” excess of power. Paradoxically, he himself falls prey to his own scheming and dies a terrible death. Although his death does not stir sorrow like the death of Tamburlaine, neither does it bring relief as one feels that those who are left among the living are hypocrites and criminals who veil their natures under the guise of the so called morality. In *The will to power* Nietzsche (1967: 530) says:

the greater and more terrible the passions are that an age, a people, an individual can permit themselves, because they are capable of employing them as *means, the higher stands their culture*; the more mediocre, the weaker, the more submissive and cowardly a man is, the more he will posit as *evil*: it is with him that the realm of evil is most comprehensive. The basest man will see the realm of evil (i.e. of that which is forbidden and hostile to him) everywhere.

His words seem to provide an apt comment on the reality of Marlowe’s Malta, which appears a mediocre and weak place after all. Barabas may not be fully a Nietzschean overman but he sparkles in his world as he seems a man of intense instincts who is not afraid to embrace them.

As it appears, neither Barabas nor Tamburlaine may be seen in terms of finished overmen as Nietzsche would conceptualize his *Übermensch*. However, as shown, they both definitely expose many overhuman qualities – like pride and insurmountable ambition, wide intellectual horizons, as well exuberant ingenuity. In the gloomy reality of Malta Barabas is undoubtedly the most brilliant of characters – uncouth, but witty and intelligent. Unlike other characters, he consciously rejects the morality that limits him and openly embraces his newly found “immorality”. Tamburlaine also surpasses others in his military acumen and charismatic bearing. He, too, subversively undermines and later overcomes his limiting circumstances. Moreover, though Marlowe never grants us access to his interior self, Tamburlaine emerges as an aesthetically sensitive “barbarian” who attempts to sublimate his instincts, albeit not entirely successfully. Barabas turns out to be more of an inward man. Yet his manifold guises may confuse the audience as to his real intentions and motivations. The deeds of both characters are morally dubious, though they willy-nilly stir admiration even in their opponents and enemies. They emerge as formidable fathers, each of such strong character that any opposition or disobedience on the part of their children is met with ruthless reaction. Their robust individuality would not accept any acts of self-assertion from those who are expected to be ultimately loyal and obedient. The break-

ing up of filial relations seems to underscore the subversive moralities of Marlowe's plays. Although the patriarchal make-up of the plays would justify the demands of loyalty and obedience, both Tamburlaine's and Barabas's individualities are so stifling that the sympathy moves to the side of the wronged children. Barabas and Tamburlaine are, above all, explosions of an immense will to power. They are men of instinct, to which their numerous and exceptional mental faculties are subjected. They are principally driven by the will to power, which is not equal to blind passion. After all, they are calculating and reasonable, but their reason is subjected to the project of ever surpassing and overcoming. However, their projects of self-overcoming are not coupled with deeper moral reflection, which means that, being demolishers of existing moral orders, they never emerge as builders of new moralities. Their singularity may be exorbitant, but they remain Nietzschean "beasts of prey" (Nietzsche 2002: 84). Shakespearean candidates for overmen, as I will be arguing, possess similarly intense wills to power. However, being equipped with more developed interiority, their Nietzschean potential is enriched with deeper and more profound moral reflection. This does not mean that they are morally superior to the Marlovian protagonists as their deeds are frequently as morally questionable as Barabas's or Tamburlaine's. Yet, with Macbeth, Edmund or Brutus, it is self-interrogation that becomes the vehicle of action. The Shakespearean will to power is, thus, interiorized and rationalized. Interestingly, just as Marlowe's overmen are domineering fathers who do not stand opposition, Shakespeare offers a new type of *Übermensch* – a son (or daughter) who raises his (her) hand against the stifling father. Shakespearean overmen, as I will be arguing, will raise their hand to hit their real or symbolic fathers and break the original progenitor's bonds in their process of self-overcoming and self-realization.



## Chapter Four

# Breaking the bonds of progenitors: Brutus, Macbeth and Edmund

It is common knowledge that Shakespeare was under the spell of Marlowe's "mighty line" as well as his mighty characters. He himself frequently resorted to a presentation of equally ambitious characters. However, Shakespeare deepened the psychological load of his overmen by burdening them with consciences. If Nietzsche's overcoming of impulses is meant to be a conscious effort on the part of the overman, Shakespeare's characters may well indeed constitute far more interesting specimens of overhuman potential. In this chapter I intend to look at three of his ambitious men: Brutus as an instance of Shakespeare's relatively early tragic hero, as well as Macbeth and Edmund who belong to Shakespeare's more mature tragedies. The three men, as I will be arguing, share degrees of quite an intense will to power which is demonstrated in their ambitions to topple mighty patriarchal figures. They all have to overcome their circumstances of subservience to their metaphorical or real fathers in an act of self-determination and eventually self-creation. In an act totally "beyond good and evil" they decide to circumvent the laws of their progenitors. I will follow these general interpretative directions in my subsequent analyses of Brutus, Macbeth and Edmund. However, each analytical section will be preceded by a brief account of previously utilized analytical tools. I intend to address existing criticism on these three characters in order to compare and contrast it with my view of the plays. Also, such a procedure seems reasonable in the light of the wealth of critical responses to Shakespeare's plays, some of them being almost classical interpretative loci. The critical accounts of the plays help me also to work a critical edge for each of the characters. Analyses per se employ the matrix of Nietzschean thought as presented in Chapter 1 and 2, along with the appropriate source text backbone. Though I maintain that all three characters represent specimens of overhuman potential, each is defined in the light of a different key feature. Brutus, who opens my discussion, is caught up in the midst of an agonistic competition in a supposedly "brotherly" community; the interpretative key to Macbeth's failed political ambitions lie in his highly phi-

losophical nature; while Edmund struggles against an oppressive and limiting environment that stigmatizes his bastardy. What brings all these characters together is their burning need to top their progenitors in the pursuit of mental liberty and the right to self-determination.

#### 4.1. Brutus (*Julius Caesar*)

##### 4.1.1. Critical responses to *Julius Caesar* and interpretative paths

*Julius Caesar* is traditionally seen as the first “great tragedy” opening the Shakespearean canon, believed to be immediately followed by *Hamlet*. Both its thematic as well as tragic scope seem grand. The play portrays events of great historical import, well known to the Elizabethan audience yet surely inflaming the imagination through their politically subversive potential. At the same time, the play marks Shakespeare’s growing interest in an intensified investigation of human interiority and the emotional load implicit in it. Critics have often seen it as a work heralding the fully-fledged internalized reflection of *Hamlet*, as well as the first play exploring profound moral dilemmas.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the events as well as dramatic techniques Shakespeare uses in *Julius Caesar* prefigure some of the crucial themes later to surface in *Macbeth* or *King Lear*. At the same time, as it appears, *Julius Caesar* is a play that stirs different, often contradictory emotions for a couple of reasons. First of all, the reader stumbles upon the well-known problem of the tragic hero – supposedly Julius Caesar, who is killed in scene 1, Act III. Shakespeare’s ambiguous presentation of Caesar raises the question of the legitimization of Caesar’s power and it calls for reference to the contemporary Elizabethan understanding of the presented dilemmas. Finally, the righteousness of the murder itself and the *raison d’état* of the conspirators surface as the key tensions of the play. The existing analyses of the play are often heavily influenced by the readings of the historical figure of Julius Caesar. So, as Henryk Zbierski (1988: 373-374) points out, there is no other Shakespeare play that divides critics, readers and theatrical audiences so strongly into two opposing camps as *Julius Caesar*. The two groups could be roughly identified as “against Caesar, for Brutus” and “against Brutus, for Caesar”. David Daiches (1976: 9) refers to these divergences of opinions by drawing a sharp line

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<sup>1</sup> This as well as other issues I am referring to in the introduction to my analysis of the play are addressed in detail in David Daniell’s “Introduction” to *Julius Caesar*, the newest Arden Shakespeare edition of the play (Daniell 2006: 1-3). For more information see: Daniell, David. 2006. “Introduction”, in: David Daniell (ed.). *Julius Caesar*. London: The Arden Shakespeare. 1-147.

between the Medieval and Elizabethan interpretations of the figure of Caesar. He says: "On the first view, Caesar was a hero and Brutus and Cassius, his murderers, were deep-dyed villains [...]. On the second view Caesar was a tyrant and his murderers were liberators." Paradoxically, with Shakespeare's neutrality, both views could be more or less substantiated by examples from the text of the play. This slightly crude critical division gives one insight into the play's moral and political complexity. It seems difficult to embark upon the analysis of *Julius Caesar* without first casting a cursory glance at some of the problems inherent in the play itself. For this reason, I intend to briefly sketch the key critical questions that give rise to an ever hot debate concerning *Julius Caesar*.

Though Shakespeare used historical material to present his version of the twilight of the Roman Republic at the brink of civil war, critics have often sought source material for the play in Elizabethan England rather than Rome on the eve of Caesar's assassination. The Elizabethan England of 1599, the year when *Julius Caesar* was most probably written, was a country suffused by political anxiety, where the ageing and childless Queen had to rule her faction-ridden court with a rod of iron. Robin H. Wells points out the resemblances between the volatile Roman politics and the situation in England at the time of the play's performances. He writes:

[w]ith its ailing, autocratic ruler toppled by a Machiavellian rebel who looks back to an heroic age when men were more war-like (1.3.80-4), and its talk of a group of 'noblest-minded' aristocrats (121) 'factious for redress of [personal] griefs' (117), *Julius Caesar* would inevitably have put contemporary audiences in mind of the beliefs and ideals of the Sidney-Essex alliance. Essex's querulous *Apologie* – written at a time when rivalry between the two main factions in the Privy Council was at crisis point – was published only just before Shakespeare wrote *Julius Caesar*. (Wells 2002: 210)

Wells (2002: 210) sees a striking parallel between the envious Cassius and Essex who, as he writes, "was a man with a grievance". Essex's deeply personal grudge against the Queen and his excessive ambition made him build his power base with the help of other disenchanting noblemen who also wanted to throw off the yoke of supposed tyranny and customarily used "honour" and "virtue" as an excuse for their militant attitude (cf. Wells 2002: 211). Despite these striking parallels, Shakespeare maintains his neutrality and never lets his private opinions be visible. However, he does illustrate a mechanism, that he will also later exploit in *Macbeth*, namely, "that an action designed to deflect a feared event hastens that very outcome"; thus, though not disclosing his own views, he seems to be illustrating the consequences of unconstitutional actions (Wells 2002: 211-213). In *Julius Caesar* desperate attempts to save the republic from the supposedly tyrannous Caesar first plunge it into a civil war and later inevitably turn it into an empire ruled by other Caesars. However, Shakespeare's vision, as critics demonstrate, is far from historical Providentialism. Quite the opposite, the play

seems to favour a very Nietzschean historical perspective, where perspectivism rather than providentialism emerge as underlying meaning carriers.

For Hugh Grady, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* belongs to the so called "Machiavellian moment". The play does not only present a plethora of characters who might have possibly been inspired by Machiavelli's prescriptions from *The Prince* concerning power, but also shows the world "where the hand of Providence is seemingly absent", thus communicating "the new ideas of non-Providential history" (Grady 2011: 124-126). The play explores "[t]he motif of a time out of joint", that will later be developed in *Hamlet*, where the characters are presented by impossible moral choices (Grady 2011: 129). Brutus prefigures Hamlet in his soliloquies. He is, like Hamlet, and later also Macbeth, facing the moral despair of necessary patricide. According to Grady (2011: 132), in his Roman plays Shakespeare presents "all-too-human figures drawn from an adoption of the secular-humanist historiography of Machiavelli, Tacitus, and (here) Plutarch." As it seems, taking a Machiavellian perspective of moral relativity enables Shakespeare to combine a sceptical notion of limited human capabilities with a call for self-assertion in action. Grady (2011: 134) suggests that *Julius Caesar* captures these two presumably contradictory visions: the "recognition of the fatality of chance, and more importantly, the opening up of a limited but real opportunity for political agents to change history." I would follow Grady in his argumentation and perception of the play as Machiavellian in this sense. Though, to my mind, such a perspective is not only Machiavellian but truly Nietzschean. In his writings Nietzsche frequently dismantles the myth of human free will in the face of universal contingency. Yet Nietzsche's stance does not yield to existentialist despair but rather constitutes a strong individualist assertion and a call for self-creation despite limiting circumstances. Such is also my take on the tragedy of *Julius Caesar* as I strongly believe that, like *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, this play also communicates radical scepticism, at the same time being a strong mark of early modern interiority and singularity.<sup>2</sup> Grady (2011: 135) pessimistically concludes that "[t]he Machiavellian world of objectified power depicted in the play is not glorious but empty." I would perversely claim that it is both glorious and empty. It elaborately stages a profound clash of great politics and a very personal, highly interiorized dimension of emotions. This human element played out at the backdrop of the political game blurs moral priorities as political obligations get mixed up with down-to-earth affects.

As it seems, in this combination of the two supposedly contradictory elements, *Julius Caesar* emerges as Shakespeare's first experimental tragedy. Before the Roman tragedy Shakespeare wrote the so called "restitutional" plays

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on scepticism in Shakespeare's plays, see: Bell, Millicent. 2002. *Shakespeare's tragic scepticism*. New Haven: Yale University Press. It is worth looking at the last part devoted to the Roman plays entitled "Epilogue: The Roman Frame", 241-278.

where characters' identities were subsumed under communal duties while their actions brought necessary moral restitution and restored the imbalanced sense of belonging. As Andreas Mahler (2005: 193) observes: "[t]he tragedy of *Julius Caesar* is Shakespeare's first attempt to deconstruct his very own masquerade of Tudor absolutism as universal 'brotherhood'." The initial premise on which the play seems to be built is indeed the idea of brotherhood, yet its "restitutional characters" like Caesar or Brutus are flawed (Mahler 2005: 182, 190). Both the faulty protagonist of the play – Caesar as well as his *tragic successor* – Brutus, break free from their obligations towards their brothers. As Mahler (2005: 190) underscores

[t]his discrepancy between restitutional agent and individual action is much more fundamental than the discrepant punctuation of the underlying plot system into two complementary versions of the same story; it reveals an intrinsic doubleness in the play's plot structure itself. What it negotiates is the question of agency in the face of an increasing disintegration of providentialist belief. It addresses the problem of the early modern subject.

I totally agree with Mahler, who believes that the play is Shakespeare's early instance of grappling with subjectivity. Caesar, though not a fully developed character, is an example of powerful self-assertion. His identity is marked by his exclusion from a band of brothers, which manifests Nietzsche's belief in self-creation as a solitary enterprise. Brutus, according to Mahler (2005: 192), is a "typical 'in-between' character" as he functions in between his interiorized self and a public servant in the process of the restoration of brotherhood. However, as I will be arguing, his reasons to kill Caesar are deeply personal, while his resolve manifested later on is also an expression of his newly-emergent identity, entirely separate from brotherly concerns. As it seems, the moral relativity combined with Brutus's emerging asserted selfhood gave rise to numerous critical responses concerning his motivations, decisions and, above all, his moral outlook. Caesar might indeed be "a cardboard figure in the play", as Grady (2010: 23) calls him, yet it is only against him that the overhuman potential of Brutus can be measured. For this reason, I intend to investigate both of these figures in terms of their Nietzschean potential. After all, even in the aftermath of Caesar's death, both Rome and Brutus still have to grapple with the mighty spirit of Caesar. It is also against this structural function that Brutus's identity is shaped and his interiority played out. As David Lucking (2010: 120) aptly observes:

*Hamlet* is by no means the first of Shakespeare's works to focus on the element of the imponderable residing in human conduct, and more especially on the impossibility on occasion of specifying the reasons for acts that might have the most far-reaching consequences. In *Julius Caesar*, in particular, the issue is dramatized in terms that closely anticipate those of the later play, one of the more perplexing problems it poses being

that of whether any full coherent account of human motivation is possible whatsoever. As is only to be expected in a work that is deeply interested in the ambiguous of political action, discrepancies between real and professed motives, between covert intention and overt justification, are evidenced in a number of personages who conceal personal or caste interests beneath a veneer of public commitment.

It seems that *Julius Caesar* is a work where authentic motivations are veiled by political fashioning. In the play, where the words “reason” and “cause” are constantly repeated, while demands for clarification multiply, real motivations behind characters’ actions remain obscure or at best unsatisfactory (Lucking 2010: 122). Though the behaviour of several characters raises questions concerning their real motivations, it seems that the enigmatic load of the tragedy focuses predominantly on the mind of Brutus. Indeed, the sheer scope of critical responses to Brutus’s motivation is astounding. Traditionally, Brutus is read as an honourable and noble figure, though easily manipulated, as his relationship with Cassius demonstrates. Moralistic accounts would hold his position as morally dubious and based on misguided illusions. For instance, A.A. Ansari (1985: 20, 27) calls Brutus “a divided being” but rejects his moral outlook as a “a sham to cover up self-delusion”. Grady (2010: 19) calls Brutus “a figure of good intentions gone tragically wrong”. It is indeed worth noticing Brutus is by no means a successful politician. All his political decisions following Caesar’s assassination turn out to be disastrous. William R. Bowden (1966: 60) suspects a mental shortcoming of Brutus when he boldly asserts that “[s]omething more than mere bad luck is necessary to account for a man’s being so consistently wrong.” For all his political failures, Brutus is nevertheless tainted with an aristocratic snobbery – and there seems to lie his willingness to yield to Cassius’s allurements. Jan Blits (1981: 158) aptly observes that “[m]en such as Brutus are ambitious for love. They wish to be loved rather than to love because being loved closely resembles being honoured. Both are tributes of esteem. Love between such men is therefore jealous; like honour, it is ardently sought and only begrudgingly given.” In Blits’s opinion, Brutus’s character is far from that of a disinterested servant of the Republic. In him the conflict between a sense of brotherly duty and personal aspiration for honour rage and eventually bring about his failure. For this reason, Brutus’s moral indefiniteness invites a Nietzschean analysis. Brutus faces a moral dilemma that requires a reversed moral outlook, as an act of assassination is otherwise worth moral condemnation. Yet, in his mind there are “higher” reasons to justify the means. Brutus is forced to overcome the overpowering influence of Caesar. He attempts to build a sense of brotherhood between himself and his fellow conspirators. The conspirators develop a shared sense of belonging, yet, in the course of the play, the “love” they share is exposed as an illusion. From the start the sense of brotherhood is imbalanced by Caesar’s elevated position. The attempts to restore

“brotherhood” under Brutus’s leadership turn to dust despite Brutus’s attempts to rebuild it. As I will be arguing, the dynamics of the relationship between the men in the play has definitely more to do with agonistic politics rather than affection understood as mutual care for the welfare of the other party. Agonistic relations emerge in *Julius Caesar* as a point of contact between the ideals of the ancient Rome, Nietzschean concepts, as well as early modern conceptualizations of the social. It is also the concept of the agon that inspires Caesar’s and subsequently Brutus’s overhuman potential.

It is Coppélia Kahn, in her excellent article entitled “‘Passion of some difference’: friendship and emulation in *Julius Caesar*”, that draws attention to parallels between the ancient concept of the agon and values communicated in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. She writes that: “[t]he Republic as an ideology is intricately bound up with the basically agonistic, highly competitive nature of the Roman ruling elite” (Kahn 2005: 273). Kahn (2005: 271) defines the jealous love between e.g. Cassius and Brutus, as “emulation (from Latin *aemulari*: ‘to rival’)”, which “is the central motif of the Greco-Roman heroic tradition called the agon, that ‘zero-sum game’ of rivalry through which the hero wins his name by pitting himself against his likeness or equal in contests of courage and strength.” Brutus and Cassius seem to be linked by a common aim, yet, they also compete with each other. Friendships between men in the play are marked by inescapable rivalry. For this reason, the idea of brotherhood between the conspirators is a faulty one. As Kahn (2005: 275) aptly observes: “the conspirators’ assumption that all Romans are brothers, united by their shared belief in the Republic, is flatly contradicted by an equally Roman spirit of emulation.” This would mean that the play by Shakespeare presents men striving to fulfil their personal ambitions under the guise of republican values. I believe that it is not only the relationship of Brutus and Cassius that is agonistic in nature but also Brutus’s attempt to overcome Caesar’s spirit. The characters in the play are driven by varying degrees of the Nietzschean will to power, that is unveiled in its sublimated forms. As Lawrence J. Hatab (2002: 134) expounds Nietzsche’s understanding of the agon:

[...] Nietzsche maintains that civilization is not something separate from nature but a modulation of more vicious natural drives into less destructive forms. In the light of Hesiod’s distinction between a good and bad Eris, Nietzsche distinguishes between a brutal drive to annihilate and a modified drive to defeat in a competition, what the Greeks called an agon. The proliferation of contests in ancient Greece represented both a sublimation of cruel instincts and a setting for the production of excellence, since talent unfolds in a struggle with a competitor [...]

The Greek agon, as Kahn herself maintains, was emulated by the Romans and evidently understood by the early modern audience. Nietzsche’s key philosophical concepts as the will to power or self-overcoming can be driven back to his

background as a classical philologist. It is no wonder then that Nietzsche held the historical Julius Caesar in great admiration. It also no surprise that the Shakespearean *Julius Caesar* seems to have been Nietzsche's favourite play. One may assume that it is this agonistic spirit, pointed out by Kahn, that drew Nietzsche towards this particular play by Shakespeare. So, as it seems, apart from the sceptical attitude towards human epistemological potential that the play seems to be communicating along with its agonistic model of manly relations, Nietzsche's own admiration for the play adds one more argument in favour of a Nietzschean analysis of Shakespeare's tragedy of *Julius Caesar*. Thus, in my analysis, I follow Kahn's assumption of the Roman agon portrayed by Shakespeare, which I intend to combine with Nietzsche's later conceptualizations, also having their origin in the very idea of the agon. Because *Julius Caesar* is one of the few examples of Shakespeare's plays Nietzsche actually expressed his view on, I also incorporate these thoughts into my interpretation along with other comments on the historical Caesar that are also scattered in Nietzsche's writings.

#### 4.1.2. "I love/ The name of honour more than I fear death" – Brutus (*Julius Caesar*, 1.2.88-89)

The opening scene of the play in a very subtle yet complex way introduces the themes that will become central to the Nietzschean analysis of *Julius Caesar*. Flavius and Murellus express their dismay at the joy of Rome's inhabitants who have taken to the streets to celebrate Caesar's victorious come-back. Despite the celebratory atmosphere, the two men scorn the chaos that unfolds as a consequence of the people unlawfully taking a holiday. Quite significantly the scene already prefigures the aftermath of Caesar's assassination as it illustrates how impressionable the mob of Rome really is. The attitude of contempt towards this the two patricians have seems also to herald the way Brutus will totally misunderstand crowd psychology and will politically underestimate the power of the plebeians. His aristocratic snobbery will turn out to be his political naiveté that will not let Brutus see the danger of herd instincts. What also seems crucial is the fact that, like *Macbeth*, the play opens with a very shaky sense of order. It is worth noticing that Caesar's victory overshadows the fall of another great man, the son of the Republic – Pompey. Murellus is shocked at the ease with which the Romans come to terms with his fall and asks disbelievingly: "Knew you not Pompey?" (*Caesar*, 1.1.38). The fall of Pompey coinciding with the rise of Caesar does not only underscore the agonistic spirit of Roman politics but also encloses the play within the vicious circle of its contingency as it is subject to the whims of the mob whose favour has to be richly bought. The commoners are of "basest mettle" as Flavius terms them, and so they do not

hold any individual opinions but can be guided by a skilful manipulator (*Caesar*, 1.1.62). It is Caesar that now moves the crowds, though Flavius and Murellus want to minimise his influence by trying to remove his ubiquitous presence by throwing off his images and driving away “the vulgar from the streets” (*Caesar*, 1.1.71-72). They seem to believe that by cancelling the crowds that function as Caesar’s extension they can arrest Caesar’s influence. Flavius claims that: “These growing feathers plucked from Caesar’s wing/ Will make him fly an ordinary pitch,/ Who else would soar above the view of men/ And keep us all in servile fearfulness” (*Caesar*, 1.1.74-76). His sinister tone points to the potential consequences of Caesar’s power seizure and to his supposed excessive ambition, which eventually become the main reason for his assassination. Despite popular support, for the patricians Caesar emerges as highly dangerous, a source of evil and a potential demolisher of existing order. Flavius’s remark, though tinged with fear and envy, yet clearly shows that Caesar indeed flies high. In spite of the atmosphere of impending doom already felt in the air, one has a feeling that it is Caesar who is the first hand candidate for an overman in the play.

The figure of the historical Caesar has long been an object of an intense “tyrannicide debate” in which poets and historians have been trying to decide whether Caesar had actually been a tyrant prior to his assassination, and so determine if the course of events was necessary and, more importantly, justified.<sup>3</sup> In the light of the inconclusive material, the debate is still open, while the historical events remain subject to interpretation. Shakespeare is equally ambiguous in his treatment of Caesar, and for this reason critics have not reached any consensus concerning the supposed tyranny of Caesar. It is certain that the notion of excessive ambition was anathema to the Elizabethans and it is the arch-sin that other characters in Shakespeare’s play attribute to Caesar. Yet, what many critics point out is that Brutus’s first soliloquy does not communicate Caesar’s ambition as a fact but only as a dim possibility. In the following scenes of the play one learns about Caesar from other characters who themselves are frequently driven by their particular interests. If one is to learn about Caesar’s imperial aspirations, one should focus on the subtle clues Shakespeare’s gives in Caesar’s own words that actually betray his intentions. Scene 2, where Caesar makes his first appearance, opens with a conversation about a religious ritual Calphurnia is to undergo in order to be cured of her infertility. The way Caesar brutally unveils his wife’s supposed barrenness gives one some insight into his dynastic ambition. Since he has no legitimate heir, he is unable to pass on his heritage. Caesar’s wish to “shake off [Calphurnia’s] sterile curse” expresses his primordial masculine desire to extend his patriarchal influence beyond his own existence (*Caesar*, 1.2.9). Antony’s comment – “When Caesar says ‘Do this’, it is performed” (*Caesar*, 1.2.10) – does

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<sup>3</sup> For more details on “the tyrannicide debate”, see: Daniell, David. 2006. “Introduction”, in: David Daniell (ed.). *Julius Caesar*. London: The Arden Shakespeare, 29-38.

not only underscore Antony's blind and servile attitude towards Caesar but also aptly summarizes Caesar's self-creating ability. He seems to be charismatic enough to make others believe that he indeed always has things his way. This impression is further underscored by his scoffing at the Soothsayer's warnings when he dismisses them by saying "He is a dreamer. Let us leave him. Pass" (*Caesar*, 1.2.24). The underlying message is that Caesar himself is not a dreamer but a maker or a creator who would cancel metaphysics as an unnecessary burden. With all this apparent veil of invincibility, one quickly learns that, as Grady aptly puts it: "He is hyper-conscious of his appearance as a political actor, and everything that he says and does in the play is in service to his image of unshakable self-confidence and self-sufficiency" (Grady 2010: 22). The public persona that Caesar emulates is that of a god. Critics have frequently drawn similarities between this fashioned sense of immortality and Queen Elizabeth's meticulously controlled appearance at the twilight of her reign. As David Daniell (2006: 25) points out: "[e]ven elementary knowledge of Queen Elizabeth's policies in the years up to her death allows parallels between herself and a tyrannical Caesar. Queen Elizabeth, as age advanced, put herself out as immortal, not only as the eternally enduring Faerie Queen or Gloriana". The Shakespearean Caesar professes his permanence when he says to Cassius: "Caesar doth not change" (*Caesar*, 3.1.27), or when he delivers his statement of stability and resistance to any change as he refuses to let Cimber come back from his banishment:

But I am constant as the Northern Star,  
Of whose true fixed and resting quality  
There is no fellow in the firmament.  
The skies are painted with unnumbered sparks;  
They are all fire, and every one doth shine.  
But there's but one in all doth hold his place.  
So in the world: 'tis furnished well with men,  
And men are flesh and blood, and apprehensive.  
Yet in the number I do know but one  
That unassailable holds on his rank,  
Unshaked of motion; and that I am he  
Let me a little show it. (*Caesar*, 3.1.66-76)

Interestingly enough Queen Elizabeth's motto was "Semper Eadem" ("Always the same") which was also meant to underscore the stability of her rule and her nature as a just monarch who is not ruled by her whims.<sup>4</sup> Changeability and

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<sup>4</sup> The motto was previously used by her mother Anne Boleyn. For more information on the circumstances of its adoption, see: Weir, Alison. 2009. "The concubine's little bastard", in: Alison Weir. *The Lady in the Tower: The fall of Anne Boleyn*. London: Vintage. 378-396.

proneness to whims was seen as a defining feature of a tyrant. For the conspirators, Caesar's act of resistance is seen in the opposite way – it seems to be as yet another argument that Caesar – merciless and unbent – is actually a tyrant.<sup>5</sup> As it seems, the parallel between the Shakespearean Caesar and Queen Elizabeth I does not resolve the tyrannicide debate because the perception of Elizabeth as a tyrant is also a contentious issue and an open-ended question. Cristina León Alfar (2003: 61), writing specifically about Elizabeth, points out that within the complex framework of early modern politics the dividing line between a tyrant and a just monarch is very flimsy as “[...] depending on the policy, one's subject tyrant is another subject's just monarch.” The issue of tyranny was indeed a contentious one during the English Renaissance and there is a wealth of source texts where the boundaries between a just rule and tyranny is touched upon. In an early text, the famous *An homily against disobedience and wilful rebellion* from the *Book of sermons* (first edition 1547), the absolutist monarch is portrayed as a King anointed by God, total obedience to him is required, while questioning of his will is seen as a sin against God. Alfar (2009: 120) claims that this text blurs justice and tyranny as the king has a sacred position regardless of being merciful or merciless towards his people. It seems that the turn of the epochs at the end of Elizabeth's reign brought about even more voices where the notion of tyranny was taken up. For instance, in Fulke Greville's verse treatises the notion is frequently recalled as a great peril to the country and to be avoided. Greville points to the central position of the monarch, but he underscores a crucial role of nobility functioning as checks and balances of the political system and monarchical control. In the part of *A Treatise of monarchy* (never completed and posthumously printed in 1633) entitled “Of Nobility” he writes that “From whence nobility doth of creation/ A secret prove to kings and Tyranny:/ For as the stamp gives bullion valuation,/ So these fair shadows of authority/ Are marks for people to look up unto,/ And see what princes with or Earth can do” (Greville 2006: 122). Such could be, then, the role of the conspirators' plot, who decide to stop the tyrannous aspirations of their fellow aristocratic patrician. At least these are their professed aims – to protect the republic from tyranny. However, Greville in his works also expresses a popular sentiment concerning democracy, namely, the ease with which it may turn into a tyrannous oligarchy. The very title of the verse tract *The excellency of Monarchy* gives a clue as to the message of the entire work as it is a laudatory treatise on the superiority of monarchy over other political systems. In the last part “The Excellency of Monarchy compared with Aristocracy and Democracy Jointly” Greville (2006: 228) writes:

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<sup>5</sup> Following this line of argument, one could also add that Caesar's insistence on permanence as opposed to change is also deeply un-Nietzschean. The project of self-creation in self-overcoming requires constant change in response to ever new challenges.

Now, though I know our books are fill'd  
 with praise  
 Of good men's vertues, freedoms popular:  
 Yet he that will not audit words, by ways,  
 And over-look the dreams of Time with care  
 In smart succession: he shall clearly find  
 No long liv'd State hath been of either kind.

In the next stanza he develops his argument by adding that: "For whatsoever stile these men affect/ Of OPTIMATES, of DEMOCRACY,/ Their courses basely practice, and effect/ A servile OLIGARCHICAL TYRANNY;/ As well in laws as in establishment;/ Like ill mixt humours, never will content" (Greville 2006: 228). Greville seems to be saying that despite the virtue of the people forming a democratic state, the system is flawed and so it invites misuse and the abuse of power. People when given sovereignty can very easily turn to the misuse of power. So this is the other side of the coin and a different conceptualization of tyranny. In just such a way one could read the events presented in *Julius Caesar*, as the best intentions of Brutus are eventually subverted and the conspiracy, instead of averting, actually inspires the feared course of action. So, monarchy emerges a far more superior system with its power centralized in one individual's hands. The ideas of the divine rights of kings gained momentum with the ascension of James I who had a firm belief in his sacred position, which he also expressed in his treatises on the power of kings. Even after the civil war, works like Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarchia* defended the divine rights of Kings. In this sense, Shakespeare's play expresses the anxious atmosphere of its period as it renders the ambiguity of Caesar's position and leaves the question securely unresolved, underscoring the inherent relativity of political stances and theories. The perception of Caesar's tyranny is flimsy. He remains an ambiguous political agent, who is supported by the plebeians and resented by the patricians.<sup>6</sup> His godly status is politically construed, as the ensuing scenes make clear.

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<sup>6</sup> There are indeed many critical responses to the question of Caesar's tyranny and many readings supported by source research concerning early modern political thought. It is impossible to refer to all of them, neither would this discussion be purposeful for this dissertation. However, it is worth pointing to Barbara L Parker's article "From Monarchy to Tyranny: *Julius Caesar* among Shakespeare's Roman Works". Parker sees Caesar's tyranny in terms of his servility to the mob. She writes that: "In addition to mirroring the ruler's ills, the state also mirrors his political temperament; and Caesar's tyranny is paralleled by that of the populace. For it is not Caesar who rules; it is the mob [...]" (Parker 2005: 119). Her view, in my opinion, is not in accordance with the early modern ideas on monarchy as the Renaissance tyrant would above all be against his people, while Caesar seems to be a servant of his plebeians. However, Parker captures the essence of Nietzsche's perception of tyranny. Servility towards the herd would definitely be out of Nietzsche's "overhuman"

What renders Caesar a dramatic enigma and what frustrates any attempts at a unified perspective on him is the fact that one gets to know Caesar mostly through other characters' statements. Cassius is driven by jealousy and deep resentment, which renders many of his comments highly subjective. In his eyes, the would-be monarch emerges as a sickly man, deaf in one ear and suffering from wild bouts of epilepsy. For Cassius, who had once saved Caesar from drowning in the Tiber and seen him shaking and groaning in fever, it seems unthinkable that "a man of such a feeble temper should/ So get the start of the majestic world/ And bear the palm alone" (*Caesar*, 1.2.129-131). Cassius desperately tries to deconstruct Caesar's political persona and expose him to Brutus as a sham. Brutus is evidently worried by the unfolding events when he says: "Vexed I am/ of late with passions of some difference, Conceptions only proper to myself" (*Caesar*, 1.2.39-41). However, he never picks up on any of the sarcastic utterances about Caesar. I would argue that this is because part of the professed love Brutus's holds for Caesar is his reverence of his greatness. For Brutus, Caesar's poor health is no reason to believe he is any less great a man than Caesar tries to present himself as. Brutus responds to arguments about honour, which he understands in terms of the agon. Cassius's lengthy exposition about Caesar behaving "as a sick girl" do not impress Brutus (*Caesar*, 1.2.128). However, he is moved when he hears the flourish and the people shouting, which, to my mind, underscores that Brutus sees the power and influence heaped on Caesar as the reason to overcome him. Cassius's words "honour is the subject of my story" are an invitation to an agonistic competition, but his argumentation is really worthy of slaves' morality, to use Nietzsche's rhetoric (*Caesar*, 1.2.92). Brutus's initial wavering at the ideas Cassius intends to divulge is a piece of evidence for Brutus's deeply personal attitude to the upcoming confrontation with Caesar. Brutus asks Cassius: "Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius,/ That you would have me seek into myself/ For that which is not in me?" (*Caesar*, 1.2.63-64). This question is really a supposition, as it shows that the conflict is already there playing out in Brutus's head. However, I would insist that Cassius's and Brutus's understanding of the figure of Caesar are totally different. In his naïve and intellectually primitive insistence on equality between the patricians, Cassius unveils his self-delusion. His mockery is aimed at undermining Caesar's position on the basis of his physical inferiority. One could assume that Cassius tries to manipulate Brutus by appealing to his vanity, but

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perception – this being another argument against Caesar as an overman. David Hawkes in his article "Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: Marxist and Post-Marxist Approaches" connects Caesar's elevation into an idol with Renaissance Puritanism, which had as its main aims "the eradication of idolatry" (Hawkes 2005: 210). In his view the play presents republican sentiments by its implicit criticism of idolatry (Hawkes 2005: 210). One can assume that the blind and unreasonable idolatry of Caesar by the mob would also be something that Nietzsche too would criticize as idolatry.

as I was trying to show playing on petty jealousies does not really stir Brutus. He already carries the need to better or overcome Caesar, while this yearning stems from respect rather than envy as Brutus says “yet I love him well” (*Caesar*, 1.2.82). Cassius’s contempt really unfolds the extent of Caesar’s greatness as he is the one who inspires the lowliest of instincts like envy, pride, and murderous desire. As David Willburn (2005: 215) writes: “[i]n Freudian terms, Caesar is an ego-ideal to which others either aspire to or conspire against. Caesar’s famous constancy is his *virtù*, an ideal of virility and ethical integrity.” In Nietzschean terms, Caesar embodies much of what the overhuman potential is. For people holding on to the existing order of affairs he emerges as the source of all evil as he is about to demolish that order. Brutus seems to understand this mechanism. Knowing that he loves Caesar, he nevertheless desires to top him.

As mentioned, Caesar’s poor health, highlighted even more by Casca’s description of his collapse in front of the Senate after declining the crown in Scene 2, Act I, does not necessarily rule out his potential as *Übermensch*. Quite the contrary, the essence of Nietzsche’s *Überwindungsmotif* lies in the ability of an individual to overcome his infirmities. Caesar, despite his physical weaknesses, is perceived by the masses as a victorious leader who deserves the crown. From Cassius’s speech one learns that “this man/ Is now become a god, and Cassius is/ A wretched creature and must bend his body/ If Caesar carelessly but nod on him” (*Caesar*, 1.2.115-118). Nietzsche frequently underscores the importance of strength and health for the over-man. However, one should bear in mind Nietzsche’s special understanding of health, as health is seen not as the lack of diseases but as the ability to overcome disease (Kaufmann 1973: 131). In a classic maxim from *The twilight of the idols* Nietzsche (2007c: 5) says “that which does not kill me, makes me stronger” and thus underscores the importance of suffering in the creation of the over-man. In this sense, these “individualizing touches”, as David Daiches (1976: 8) calls Caesar’s physical impairments, only prove his overhuman abilities to overcome illness and emerge even stronger. Interestingly enough, Nietzsche himself when speaking about his *Übermensch* tried to support his arguments by referring to historical figures that came close to his ideal. Among them he enumerated Goethe, Napoleon and Julius Caesar.<sup>7</sup> What is important, just as in Napoleon, Nietzsche did not admire the military or political prowess in Julius Caesar. As Walter Kaufmann (1974: 316) writes, Nietzsche saw Caesar as “the embodiment of the passionate man who controls his passions: the man who, in the face of universal disintegration and licentiousness, knowing this decadence as part of his own soul, performs his unique deed of self-integration, self-creation and self-mastery.”

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<sup>7</sup> For more details on the examples of historical overmen proposed by Nietzsche look in Walter Kaufmann’s (1974: 307-317) *Nietzsche – philosopher, psychologist, Antichrist*. or in Zbigniew Kuderowicz’s (1979: 137-143) *Nietzsche*.

Nietzsche (2007c: 64) admired Caesar, who “preserved himself against sickness and headaches [by] heavy marches, the simplest mode of living, uninterrupted sojourns in the open air, continual hardships.” As can be seen, in the historical Caesar Nietzsche underscored the qualities that Shakespeare only possibly hinted at in his portrayal of his Caesar. One learns that, despite his serious ailments, Caesar “doth bestride the narrow world/ Like a Colossus, and we petty men/ Walk under his huge legs and peep about/ To find ourselves dishonourable graves”, as one learns from Cassius (*Caesar*, 1.2.135-138). There is a sharp contrast between the charismatic personality of Caesar and “petty men” as painted by Cassius. The trait of Caesar’s character that will not be accepted is his apparent ambition, which threatens Rome with tyranny – as Cassius says: “[...] let Caesar seat him sure,/ For we will shake him, or worse days endure” (*Caesar*, 1.3.310-311). However, in Act 1, scene 2, he declines the crown, not once but three times. Despite the dissatisfaction of the masses, he refrains from seizing absolute power. One can conjecture that this act approximates him to the Nietzschean over-man. As Nietzsche (2007c: 71) writes on great individuals:

[t]he highest type of free man would have to be sought where the greatest resistance has continually to be overcome: five paces away from tyranny, on the very threshold of the danger of thralldom. This is psychologically true if, by the word ‘tyrants’ we mean inexorable and terrible instincts which challenge the maximum of authority and discipline to oppose them – the finest example of this is: Julius Caesar [...]

As can be seen, an over-man is someone who is powerful enough to be able to gain ultimate control over others but who, thanks to his intellectual integrity, does not yield to his tyrannical potential. So, as Walter Kaufmann explains: “tyranny over others is not part of Nietzsche’s vision, though the failure to indulge in it is no virtue unless one has the power to become a tyrant and refrains deliberately” (Kaufmann 1974: 316). It seems that the powerful Caesar, in the act of declining the crown, may be proving his dignity and mastery. He seems to act not out of pity, but out of “the excess of his power” (Kuderowicz 1979: 116). However, as demonstrated, Shakespeare’s Caesar is a good political actor so his refusal of the crown might very well be seen as an act of political self-fashioning rather than Nietzschean self-overcoming, especially in the light of his change of heart in Act 2, Scene 2<sup>8</sup>. He first decides to stay home when he hears the prophetic dreams of his wife but later is encouraged by Decius to change his mind

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed debate on self-fashioning versus self-overcoming in *Julius Caesar* I refer the reader to my earlier article on Shakespeare’s Roman play where I focus on the juxtaposition of the two key characters in the play. For more details see: Burzyńska, Katarzyna. 2015. “Man is something that should be overcome”: Self-Fashioning versus Self-Overcoming of Shakespearean Over-Reachers as Seen through the Lens of Friedrich Nietzsche’s Philosophy”, in: *CURRENTS. A Journal of Young English Philology Thought and Review*, 1, 12-26.

and go to the Senate. It seems that he only changes his mind when he hears that “the Senate have concluded/ To give this day a crown to mighty Caesar./ If you shall send them word you will not come,/ Their mind may change” (*Caesar*, 2.2.93-96). His change of heart proves that, despite his earlier refusal to take the crown, he is now determined to accept it. In the light of the present turn of events, his earlier refusal appears to have been a purely political act, a cunning element in his skilful political career. Unfortunately, Shakespeare does not give one any insight into Caesar’s mind that would substantiate a Nietzschean perspective on him. Shakespeare’s portrayal is distanced and filtered through the eyes of those who have already deemed Caesar a tyrant. The idea of self-mastery that Nietzsche apparently admired in the historical Caesar, in Shakespeare’s play may merely be a conjecture. However, the yearning for self-overcoming realized in “self-creation” and “self-mastery” is, in my opinion, reflected in Brutus, whom Shakespeare burdens with an essentially Nietzschean dilemma.

As mentioned, Cassius in his lengthy rhetorical manipulations finally strikes a note that inspires Brutus to further consideration. He says: “O, you and I have heard our fathers say/ There was a Brutus once that would have brooked/ Th’ eternal devil to keep his state in Rome/ As easily as a king” (*Caesar*, 1.2.157-160). Cassius refers to the historical figure of Lucius Junius Brutus, who is Marcus Brutus’s great ancestor. This original Brutus changed Rome from a monarchy to a republic (Berman 1972: 197). So, presumably Cassius is referring to the republican values that Brutus holds as dear as his own honour. Yet his words have a double and quite subversive meaning because the original Brutus is recalled as someone who had such a powerful influence that he actually held Rome in his own monarchical power. He toppled the power of the old system in order to create a new one, but he himself simultaneously rose in might to tower over others. So, as it seems, the reference to republicanism is really a metaphorical veil for a fierce battle between influential individuals. Cassius’s words are meant to appeal to Brutus by invoking his great paternal ancestor and at the same time make him raise his hand against the new mighty patriarch – Caesar. However, this intricate paternal metaphor opens a new, and highly personal dimension of Brutus’s yearning to topple Caesar. Brutus, following the example of his original progenitor, is to break the bond between him and the new progenitor – Caesar. What is even more crucial is that the patriarch might actually be Brutus’s real father. Though Shakespeare does not explore Plutarch’s hint that Brutus might have been Caesar’s illegitimate son, as some critics have pointed out, he does drop some clues and leaves them unexplored, possibly to strengthen the effect, knowing that his audience could have been acquainted with Plutarch’s record of Caesar’s and Brutus’s life (Fleissner 1997: 109-110). Plutarch in his *Lives of noble Grecians and Romans* explains that Caesar had mercy over Brutus after the defeat of Pompey because of his previous intimacy with Brutus’s mother. In Chapter 63, on Marcus Brutus, Plutarch writes that:

[i]t is said that Caesar had so great a regard for him that he ordered his commanders by no means to kill Brutus in the battle, but to spare him, if possible, and bring him safe to him, if he would willingly surrender himself; but if he made any resistance, to suffer him to escape rather than do him any violence. And this he is believed to have done out of a tenderness to Servilia, the mother of Brutus; for Caesar had, it seems, in his youth been very intimate with her, and she passionately in love with him; and, considering that Brutus was born about that time in which their loves were at the highest, Caesar had a belief that he was his own child. (Plutarch 2012)<sup>9</sup>

Shakespeare never explicitly refers to this passage from Plutarch though he otherwise follows his story-line quite faithfully. However, as R.F. Fleissner observes, he does mention that Brutus gave Caesar “the most unkindest cut of all” (*Caesar*, 3.2.181). Also, Caesar is made to say “Et tu, Brutè?”, which could be rendered as “And you, son?” (Fleissner 1997: 109). The pain caused by Brutus’s wound has a double significance. Not only is this the deadly blow but also a blow from a natural son. Fleissner (1997: 110) writes that:

[u]npleasant though such a gross association may be, at least it can prompt the valid view that Brutus was somehow paying his natural father back for the ‘gift’ of bastardy (a terrible stigma, in Renaissance times at any rate). What other significance could logically emerge? In answer, consider the underlying meaning that because the son was Brutus, his stab was therewith psychologically the most brutal as well. Or, better, these two meaning would have been conflated, enriching the overall effect.

If indeed Shakespeare would like us to believe that Brutus was an illegitimate son of Caesar, the nature of Brutus’s sacrifice has an even deeper meaning. Literally as well as metaphorically Brutus has to overcome the influence of his powerful father and free himself from it in order to emerge a self-determined identity. Freud who heavily exploited the idea of sons’ primeval desires to tower over their fathers was by no means the first one to capitalize on Oedipus’s story. Nietzsche, in his insistence on masculine self-sufficiency frequently alluded to the need to break fatherly bonds in the pursuit of individual independence. Interestingly enough Nietzsche himself chose Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* in order to illustrate his idea of self-overcoming and striving for mental independence. In *The gay science* he expressed his admiration for Shakespeare’s Brutus. Nietzsche (2007b: 93) calls *Julius Caesar* the greatest of Shakespeare’s tragedies “still called by the wrong name”. What Nietzsche admires the most is exactly Brutus’ self-overcoming, captured in his realization of the necessity for the final sacrifice. Nietzsche (2007b: 93-94) writes:

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<sup>9</sup> I am using fragments from Plutarch’s *Lives* translated by John Dryden available at: The University of Adelaide South Australia (<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/p/-plutarch/lives/>) (date of access: 21 Feb. 2014). Shakespeare was most probably using Sir Thomas North’s translation from 1579. Fragments of this version of Plutarch can be found in the Appendix to The Arden Shakespeare Edition of *Julius Caesar* (2006), 323-371.

[i]ndependence of soul! That's what at stake here! No sacrifice can be too great for that: one has to be capable of sacrificing even one's dearest friend for it, even if he should be the most marvellous human being, the ornament of the world, the genius without peer – if one loves freedom as a freedom of great souls and this freedom is endangered because of him [...]. The height at which he places Caesar is the finest honour he could bestow on Brutus: only thus does he raise Brutus' inner problem to immense proportions as well as the strength of mind that was able to cut this knot!

In his soliloquies, sleepless Brutus shows that he suffers an ordeal due to Caesar's planned murder yet, for Nietzsche the extent of his greatness lies in his ability to cut the knot tying him to mighty Caesar whose imposing presence, as long as he lives, can never allow Brutus's own self to flourish. The essence of Nietzschean self-overcoming is encapsulated in a desire to make oneself anew so passionately that even filial bonds cannot impede its intensity. I would argue that Nietzsche's perspective on the Shakespearean Brutus is a very convincing theory though Nietzsche does not support his interpretation with textual evidence.

Critics have pondered upon Brutus's motives to kill Caesar, for whom he constantly professes love and devotion. They either have not been satisfied with the explanations uttered by Shakespeare's characters or have taken Brutus's references to "the general good" for granted (*Caesar*, 1.2.85). One has to observe that "the general good" Brutus supports himself with is frustratingly undefined, while the abstract term "Rome" is hard to grasp. So, one could very well see that "the general good" easily turns into "my good", which the aforementioned subversive words by Cassius also illustrate. As Jan H. Blits (1981: 165) aptly summarizes:

Brutus' thoughts center on himself. He imagines his fame and glory as his alone, neither blurred nor obscured by any fellow Roman. More importantly and surprisingly, however, he sees personal victory undiminished and perhaps even enhanced by his country's collapse. His "life's history" somehow stands above and apart from Rome.

From the very opening of the play one learns that Brutus is a highly respected Roman citizen. Brutus's moral integrity is underscored numerous in the play by Cassius, but also by Cinna and Casca. The conspirators want Brutus to take part in Caesar's murder because "that which would appear offence in us/ His countenance, like richest alchemy,/ Will change to virtue and to worthiness" (*Caesar*, 1.3.158-160). Outwardly, Brutus's involvement would legitimize the act, but it would not automatically make it virtuous. Brutus's personal dimension of the sacrifice and its moral ramifications would be the same. Cassius expresses his admiration for Brutus' supposed virtue by saying:

I know virtue to be in you, Brutus,  
As well as I do know your outward favour.  
Well, honour is the subject of my story:

I cannot tell what you and other men  
 Think of this life, but for my single self  
 I had as lief not be as live to be  
 In awe of such a thing as I myself.  
 I was born free as Caesar, so were you (*Caesar*, 1.2.90-97).

Though Cassius speaks of equality, he actually capitalizes on singularity as he invokes the “single self”. Cassius’s words cancel out the notion of virtue as communal good, instead they point to a personal integrity that is in conflict with conventionally understood virtue. Cassius reflects an essential aspect of Brutus’s task as he rightly assumes a role of a mirror of his desires. He points to the vitality of the individual’s independence and freedom of thought. As mentioned, his lengthy exposition of Caesar’s weaknesses is not necessary as it is the *virtue* of individual independence that rebels in Brutus against Caesar. Brutus may be virtuous in theory, but in practice he turns out to be a hopeless embodiment of Nietzschean egocentrism or egoism. His later arguments with Cassius when he chaffs at his bribery but at the same time demands the money extorted by illegal means, illustrates that his high-mindedness is much overstated (*Caesar*, 4.3.74-90). As David Hawkes (2005: 205) aptly observes: “Brutus’s snobbery prevents him from condescending to appeal to the lower classes for money, which he again terms “trash”. Instead, he demands it from Cassius as the rightful due of personal friendship.” So, as can be seen, he is not really thinking about the common good. The welfare of the citizens of Rome is never properly uttered by him, while a very personal notion of “honour” is evoked. One could ask what one has really to do with the other? Brutus’s and the other conspirators’ egoistic sense of honour brings only civil war to Rome. What is also worth pointing out is that ultimately the play portrays the disaster of republican values, underscoring rather that power is won by the strong-willed.<sup>10</sup> Both Brutus and Antony belong to such people, yet political victory

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<sup>10</sup> This is an important argument in a debate about Shakespeare’s presumed republican leanings presented in *Julius Caesar*. If, as some critics believe, the play shows republicanism in a favourable light, it is a highly politically contentious work for early modern standards, as it goes against the mainstream of contemporary political thought – that would see absolutist monarchy as the perfect system. Yet, despite any admiration for Brutus’s supposedly disinterested love for the Republic, one can see that the play shows the catastrophic consequences of desperate attempts to cling to the old system. The system itself also seems to be ineffective as Caesar’s growth in power perfectly illustrates. Barbara L. Parker observes that: “The Roman Republic perfectly illustrated the perils of monarchic collapse, as well as the constitutional decline such collapse incurred” (Parker 2005: 112). She refers to Fulke Greville’s popular work “Of Monarchy”, where the expulsions of kings in Rome is portrayed as a disaster (“many headed power”). She also gives an example of Elyot’s works. She writes that: “Elyot articulates what was conventionally considered the fatal flaw of republicanism: multiple sovereignty. As survival lay in unity, so ruin lay in plurality, which

belongs to those who do not make their contempt for herd instincts clear but rather capitalize on them i.e. Marc Antony. Like Macbeth, Brutus is a political failure, though a potential overman. The arguments Brutus has with Cassius also underscore Brutus's agonistic nature. As Kahn suggested, in the relationship of Brutus and Cassius even love emerges really as a contest, where Brutus wants to present himself as a better son of Rome than anyone else – supposedly the best republican. Kahn (2005: 278) writes that: “Republican principle has become the stakes in a contest of emulation in which Brutus competes to distinguish himself as the Roman most devoted to the Republic.” The paradox of Brutus's cause lies in the fact that his striving to better all others cancels the very point of republican equality and a sense of brotherhood between the conspirators. Brutus's friendship with Cassius does not seem to be based on reciprocity or mutual care. In this sense it is Nietzschean, as it involves a degree of servility and due admiration towards Brutus on the part of Cassius.<sup>11</sup>

Brutus is burdened with a typically Nietzschean trait of egocentrism that is manifested in his indulgence in solitary reflection. His first soliloquy, as Willburn (2005: 219) points out: “[...] is remarkable for itself and for its position as one of Shakespeare's earliest dramatic models of private thought, or intrapsychic process, or the influence of emotion upon reason.” Willburn is right in pointing out that it is the emotional load that influences Brutus's decision to join the conspiracy. What is also crucial is the fact that, though the soliloquy is meant to provide reasoning for and against the deed, it starts with a conclusion; “It must be by his death” (*Caesar*, 2.1.10). One can see that in Brutus's head the deed is already performed. What follows is, in Willburn's (2005: 220) words, a “‘rationalization’ – or the use of commonplace and intellect to justify a choice made of unacknowledged emotion, or wish.” Walter Reinsdorf (1982: 84) claims that:

Brutus, recognizing from the start Caesar's imperial assumptions, grants unhesitatingly that he must die, a decision both political and personal. Caesar devours himself to become a god – the progenitor of all subsequent imperial deities. Soon he will devour others. Knowing that he must act quickly, Brutus never debates the assassination before, and never regrets it after.

I would argue that this statement is only partly true. Caesar's tyrannical potential, as mentioned, is not entirely clear and this is also visible in Brutus's first

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ensured faction (precipitating the sundering of the state), a struggle for supremacy, and thus perpetual strife” (Parker 2005: 112).

<sup>11</sup> Hatab explains the Nietzschean perspective on the exclusive nature of the agon, and thus on its bearing on friendship between the competitors, by saying that: “Nietzsche recognized the political purposes of the agon [...], but he clearly took it to be an aristocratic activity, in which the few talented types would compete for cultural and political status” (Hatab 2002: 134). Brutus definitely sees himself as such an aristocratic type and, what is more, he sees himself as superior even to his fellow conspirators.

soliloquy. Caesar might be indeed fashioned into a deity and emerge a progenitor, but his position as such is a reflection of Brutus's own deep desires and longings. Brutus deceives himself by saying: "And for my part/ I know no personal cause to spurn at him,/ But for the general" (*Caesar*, 2.1.10-12). If it were indeed so, the argumentation that follows it would have been more convincing, whereas Brutus leaves his motives undisclosed. He fears that Caesar might change his nature, but there is little reason to believe that this will indeed happen. Brutus says: "to speak truth of Caesar,/ I have not known when his affections swayed/ More than his reason" (*Caesar*, 2.1.19-21). Brutus seems to be basing his line of argument on a very orthodox vision of ambition. Knowing him to be ambitious himself, there is really no wonder he is not very convincing when he says: "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. So Caesar may" (*Caesar*, 2.1.21-27). Caesar may or very well he may not. Brutus's words are a conjecture based on circumstantial evidence. In his speech his need of emulation, or unrealized will to power, mixes with typical early modern illustrations of the evils of excessive ambition. He uses popular images from early modern iconography e.g. "the adder", "young ambition's ladder" or "serpent's egg". All these images are to be seen as harbingers of the fall of the overly ambitious. Even Montaigne, following his contemporaries in orthodox views on ambition, wrote in Chapter IX of his *Essays* that ambition is "the defect [...] intolerable in those who take upon them public affairs" (Montaigne 2006, loc. 1237-1238). However, as mentioned, despite the compelling imagery, Brutus's accusations of excessive ambition on the part of Caesar lack substance. They are part of Brutus's own construction of reality, based on his experience but fuelled by his emotions. Not only is the real motive veiled but the one put forward emerges as a construct. The world of *Julius Caesar* is, as a whole, a construct built of human interpretations rather than facts. In Act 1, Scene 3 Casca describes frightening supernatural occurrences e.g. tempests of fire, lions in the streets, men burning in flames that have been seen by the Romans. Cicero summarizes Casca's revelations by saying: "Indeed, it is a strange-disposed time./ But men may construe things after their fashion,/ Clean from the purpose of the things themselves" (*Caesar*, 1.3.33-35). Cicero does not only dismiss these metaphysical anxieties but captures the meaning of Nietzsche's perspectivism. The word "construe" is here crucial as it underscores the inherent relativity of Shakespeare's Rome. Brutus's truth is construed as much as Antony's later on when he slyly manipulates information over Caesar's dead body to stir the mob. In the reality of this ubiquitous relativity Brutus also seems to be bending existing experience to serve his purpose, to illustrate his version of future events. Even the movement of the Sun seems to be an object for a debate as the seemingly

insignificant squabble between the conspirators in Brutus's orchard proves (*Caesar*, 2.1.100-110). The manipulation of facts (or to be more precise interpretations) manifests the contingency of knowledge. It is not only an expression of Renaissance scepticism that the play is infused with but also a Nietzschean perspectival vision in which life itself is a subject to interpretation.<sup>12</sup> Real motivations are unutterable, possibly because they are consigned to instincts rather than rational responses. The characters of Caesar, Antony and even Brutus can never be fully graspable because the material provided about them and by them is subject to multidirectional reading.

The full extent of Brutus's mind is never disclosed by Shakespeare as he, like his later protagonists, remains partly enigmatic. Like Macbeth and Hamlet, Brutus too is a character of a deeply reflective nature. Similarly to Macbeth, his "active" reflectiveness is metaphorically encapsulated in his sleeplessness and solitude. Nietzschean self-overcoming is a never ending process of sublimating one's will to power. Shakespearean overmen, having welcomed their challenges, are condemned to perpetual vigilance. Brutus, too, is left alone face to face with the challenges his mind fashions: "Boy! Lucius! – Fast asleep? It is no matter./ Enjoy the honey-heavy dew of slumber./ Thou hast no figures nor no fantasies/ Which busy care draws in the brains of men./ Therefore thou sleep'st so sound" (*Caesar*, 2.1.228-232). He seems to be indicating here that real men do not sleep as they always remain ready and vigilant. Brutus also has to face his challenge of self-overcoming on his own, and so he does not only distance Lucius but also his wife Portia. He is very unwilling to share his innermost thoughts with her as if he was sure that the extent of his overcoming is only his responsibility. Brutus is shaking off the influence of the surrounding characters: Caesar, Portia and even Cassius. Interestingly, Montaigne claims that solitude is the curse of ambitious men when he says: "Let us tell ambition that it is she herself who gives us a taste of solitude; for what does she so much avoid as society?" (Montaigne 2006, loc. 4618). Nietzsche's project of self-creation is similarly a solitary enterprise. Although, as mentioned, the assassination is meant to be an act confirming brotherly values, due to Brutus's decision not to require an oath from each conspirator, he cancels the subjectivity of all the others conspirators. He renders himself an unofficial leader of the conspiracy, turning all the others into a nameless mass. Thus, his rampant subjectivity is confirmed, while the

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<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche's perspectivism is rendered in a most apt and brief way in an aphorism found in his notebooks dated around the end of 1886 or beginning of 1887 that goes: "Gegen den Positivismus, welcher bei dem Phänomen stehen bleibt „es giebt nur Thatsachen“, würde ich sagen: nein, gerade Thatsachen giebt es nicht, nur *Interpretationen*..." ([http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1886,7\[60\]](http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1886,7[60])). Kaufmann in his *Portable Nietzsche* renders the same fragment as: "Against that positivism which stops before phenomena, saying 'there are only facts,' I should say: no, it is precisely facts that do not exist, only interpretations..." (Nietzsche as quoted in: Kaufmann 1982: 458).

brotherhood is really turned into an illusion. Brutus's specific Nietzschean individualism is later confirmed in his speech during Caesar's funeral. David Daiches (1976: 21), in his study on *Julius Caesar* suggests that Brutus' main character quality is his tendency to extreme abstractness. He claims that Brutus' speech is governed by some extremely abstract logic, which "does violence to the realities of human existence and human relationships" (Daiches 1976: 37). I would add that this abstractness is a consequence of Brutus's individualized treatment of morality, which is against the so called general good he initially refers to. In his public speeches he cuts himself away from the gory and bloody business of the murder by its abstract ritualization. He says: "Let's be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius./ We all stand up against the spirit of Caesar/ And in the spirit of men there is no blood./ O, that we then could come by Caesar's spirit/ And not dismember Caesar!" (*Caesar*, 2.1.166-170). If his decision is finally made in the name of his mental independence, his abstractness does indeed violence to the reality of human moral relations. Through his words he demonstrates that ecstatic freedom of the mind that is exactly the essence of the Nietzschean will to power – the creative force of the strong-minded. The abstract reasoning in Brutus' speech when he justifies his decision seems to be symptomatic of "the self-overcoming of the will to power" (Kaufmann 1974: 235). This means nothing else than reason sublimating impulses. As Walter Kaufmann (1974: 235) writes:

[b]oth impulse (passion) and reason (spirit) are manifestations of the will to power; and when reason overcomes the impulses, we cannot speak of a marriage of the two diverse principles but only of the self-overcoming of the will to power. This and only this basic force has first manifested itself as impulse and then over-comes its own previous manifestation.

So, first Brutus, in pain and sheer suffering, over-comes his natural inclinations to love and loyalty and decides to sacrifice his dear friend in the name of independence and freedom from his tyranny. Later, the ritualization of the murder emerges as the Nietzschean sublimation of the lowest of impulses. The love that Brutus holds dear is first channelled towards his yearning for freedom and then transfigured into the fight against "the spirit of Caesar", understood as mental tyranny or intellectual slavery. As Zbigniew Kuderowicz (1979: 142) writes, the Nietzschean overman is born in pain and suffering. However, when he eventually is shaped he emerges a far more powerful man. Walter Kaufmann (1974: 244) points out

the powerful man is the rational man who subjects even his most cherished faith to the severe scrutiny of reason and is prepared to give up his beliefs if they cannot stand this stern test. He abandons what he loves, if rationality requires it. He does not yield to his inclinations and impulses and is willing to give up even his relatives and friends, if intellectual integrity demands it.

This definition seems to suit the character of Brutus very well. Once he makes the decision to kill Caesar, he revels in his new found freedom and power. He is the decision-making authority who directs the whole event, assigning roles and devising the plan of action. He is the one who consoles Cassius in the moment of panic, when the threat of failure appears. When the deed is done, he also naturally assumes the role of the leader as he says: "Stoop, Romans, stoop,/ And let us bathe our hands in Caesar's blood/ Up to the elbows and besmear our swords./ Then we forth, even to the market-place,/ And waving our red weapons o'er our heads/ Let's all cry, 'Peace, freedom, and liberty!'" (*Caesar*, 3.1.105-110). Brutus's new found reserves of energy and enthusiasm can be sharply contrasted with his sulkiness before the murder. It does not only befit a definition of the Nietzschean self-overcoming overhuman but also a Baconian vision of ambition from his *Essays*. Francis Bacon believed ambitious men to be hungry for action. In roused activity they find vent for their excessive energy. If deprived of a possibility to rise, they become dangerous. It is worth recalling the words of Bacon in his essay *Of ambition* when he writes that:

AMBITION is like choler; which is an humor that maketh men active, earnest, full of alacrity, and stirring, if it be not stopped. But if it be stopped, and cannot have his way, it becometh adust, and thereby malign and venomous. So ambitious men, if they find the way open for their rising, and still get forward, they are rather busy than dangerous; but if they be checked in their desires, they become secretly discontent, and look upon men and matters with an evil eye, and are best pleased, when things go backward; which is the worst property in a servant of a prince, or state. (Bacon 2009, loc. 1365-1369)

One may wonder if the call for overcoming in Brutus has a similar underpinning, as his bitterness and anxiety about Caesar transforms into exhilaration and energy in the aftermath of his murder. So, Brutus is both Baconian and Nietzschean. He initially may seem to be a character split into his private self and a public persona; but these two are finally merged in the process of self-overcoming and sublimation in order to create the Nietzschean over-man. He merges his public persona with his personal cause.

Nevertheless, despite the strength of his will to power and his abilities of self-overcoming, Brutus is eventually crushed by the Triumvirs. He is faced with Antony, "a skilled and unscrupulous manipulator of others' feelings for his own purposes" (Daiches 1976: 38). As it appears, Brutus' hubris is his inability to correctly estimate the power of the Roman masses, which, when skilfully manipulated, turn out to be uncontrollable. In his "over-human" egotism he seems to have overestimated the crowds' abilities to comprehend his deed as the act of bestowing freedom onto them. His funeral speech is not only abstract, as Daiches claims, but above all Nietzschean. Its abstractness is expressed in its amoral character. There is no wonder that the masses do not understand the nature of

Brutus's sacrifice as it is absolutely beyond conventional morality to kill someone that one loves deeply, as Brutus holds he loved Caesar. He claims:

not that I loved Caesar less,  
 but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Caesar  
 were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar were  
 dead, to live all free men? As Caesar loved me, I weep  
 for him. As he was fortunate, I rejoice at it. As he was  
 valiant, I honour him. But, as he was ambitious, I slew  
 him. There is tears for his love, joy for his fortune,  
 honour for his valour, and death for his ambition. (*Caesar*, 3.2.21-28)

His reasoning captures the very essence of the Nietzschean agon where one respects and even loves his opponent at the same time, being ready to slay him when necessity arises. Brutus excuses himself by a non-defined notion of Rome, yet the briefness of his speech, its emotional detachment, as well as Brutus's leaving off demonstrates that, in his overhuman conceit, he does not feel obliged to explicate his deeds in detail. However, in the world of political self-fashioning, his magnanimity is totally misconstrued by his political opponents and misunderstood by the easily manipulated masses. This is no wonder, because as Kuderowicz (1976: 138) writes, "for the proponents of the existing morality the over-man occurs as the embodiment of all evil".<sup>13</sup> If Brutus is the over-man, then he towers far beyond the comprehension of his contemporaries. Just as his speech demonstrates his overhuman potential, Antony's is "human, all too human" as it is designed to stir pity, fundamentally a herd instinct. At the peak of his emotional appeal he says: "You are not wood, you are not stones, but men:/ And, being men, hearing the will of Caesar,/ It will inflame you; it will make you mad" (*Caesar*, 3.2.143-145). He capitalizes on Caesar's love for the people as opposed to Brutus's abstract "Rome". Above all, he gives tangible evidence for this love in the form of Caesar's will that provides for the people of Rome. His quite opposite reading of the past events underscores even further the relativity permeating the whole play. The perspective depends totally on the emotional load implicit in the words of the speaker. Antony's perspective approximates the dictates of conventional morality, where pity is seen as a natural emotion as opposed to singular pursuit in the agon. Thus, it seems little wonder that his highly manipulative, emotion-based speech stirs herd instincts and incites the mob to rise against the conspirators. In the face of political scheming, Brutus's solitary enterprise of self-overcoming turns out to be disastrous. However, Brutus, who demonstrated a stoical attitude even in the face of his wife's death, remains so when his project is halted by circumstances. It seems that in his stoicism and in his postponing of suicide until the very last moments,

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<sup>13</sup> The translations of quotations from Kuderowicz's book are mine.

until the opposing army is about to capture him, he demonstrates, what Nietzsche would call, *amor fati*.<sup>14</sup> *Amor fati* or the “love of fate” is Nietzsche’s recipe for life affirmation in the face of its inherent suffering, it is his ultimate “yes-saying” (Kaufman 1974: 243). In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche (2007d: 35) says: “[m]y formula for human greatness is amor fati: not wanting anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity. Not just enduring what is necessary, still less concealing it – all idealism is hypocrisy in the face of what is necessary – but loving it...”. In the face of death, Brutus says: “My heart doth joy that yet in all my life/ I found no man but he was true to me./ I shall have glory by this losing day/ More than Octavius and Mark Antony/ By this vile conquest shall attain unto” (*Caesar*, 5.5.34-38). In these words Brutus seems to be saying his very last “yes” to life with all its suffering as well as the joy that one attains only by conquering oneself. However, in his love of fate Brutus does not demonstrate resignation as his suicide emerges as his final act of defiance. Kahn (2005: 281) aptly observes that: “Essentially, suicide is the final stage of emulation, because it is understood primarily as a means not merely of avoiding defeat, but of defeating one’s rival by depriving him of his expected triumph.” Even in death Brutus does not give up his agonistic nature because, in a very Roman style, he will not let others deprive him of his honour, understood as the right of self-determination. So, one could say that Brutus’s Roman suicide is also his final attempt at Nietzschean self-overcoming.

Although instinctively one would point to Julius Caesar as the first-hand candidate for an over-man in the play, in the course of the analysis, it turns out that he can be seen a negotiator of identity, who in his political self-cancellation loses his over-human potential. Ultimately, it is Brutus, the overreacher and the violator of the progenitors’ bond, who emerges as the over-man in the play. From the point of view of traditionally conceived morality, his deed is unquestionably murder and hence worth condemning. Nevertheless, there is no denying that his yearning to transcend and attain intellectual independence is somewhat admirable. Regardless of one’s personal assessment of Brutus’ deeds, it seems that he can be inscribed into Nietzsche’s philosophical vision and serve as an instance of the realization of Nietzsche’s over-man. Nietzsche’s had a deeply personal attitude to this particular play as he apparently identified himself with Brutus. The relation between Brutus and Caesar, as portrayed in Sha-

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<sup>14</sup> In a note on the philosophical background, R.J. Fleissner claims that Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* was inspired by neo-stoical ideas, rather than classical stoicism. In neo-stoicism suicide was not seen in a favourable light and so should be read Brutus’s suicide (Fleissner 1985: 344). The fact that the act can be read in numerous ways proves, to my mind, the argument that the play communicates Nietzsche’s perspectivism in the multiplicity of its possible interpretative directions. In order to read more on ancient philosophical influences in the play, see: Auffret, Jean. 1974. “The Philosophic Background of Julius Caesar”, in: *Cashiers Elisabethains* 5: 67-92.

Shakespeare, might be compared to Nietzsche's turbulent relationship with Richard Wagner. Nietzsche initially saw Richard Wagner as his intellectual father and mentor. However, he quickly started feeling suffocated by Wagner's intellectual imperialism that, as he evidently felt, blocked his own philosophical development. Their ways finally separated, but Nietzsche for a long time struggled to free himself from Wagner's influence, both academically and mentally.<sup>15</sup> As Kaufmann (1976: 36) observes:

[i]n the man whose passion for philosophy was praised even by the ancients, in Brutus whose Stoic persuasion Nietzsche, who called himself 'the last of the Stoics' [...], stressed persistently, in the hero who sacrificed Caesar though he himself had been Caesar's adopted son (and, according to Plutarch, perhaps actually Caesar's natural son) – Nietzsche (as he himself says of Shakespeare) finds the 'symbolism' of a 'dark event and adventure out of his 'own soul of which he wants to speak only in signs'.

As can be seen, Nietzsche's praise of Brutus adds yet another argument in favour of Brutus being seen as a Nietzschean overman. Nietzsche himself sensed Brutus's yearning for independence and his deep need to overcome. He read this need as symptomatic of Brutus's overcoming of the will to power and sublimation. However, as my analysis hopefully illustrates, Nietzsche's personal attitude towards *Julius Caesar* stems from the fact that the play indeed illustrates concepts that became crucial for the philosopher. In his creative unrest and primordial will to power Brutus approximates other Shakespearean characters who also share degrees of overhuman potential – like Macbeth and Edmund.

## 4.2. Macbeth (*Macbeth*)

### 4.2.1. Critical responses to *Macbeth* and interpretative paths

It seems safe to assume that, next to *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* is probably the most heavily analysed play in the Shakespearean canon. Its charismatic, yet mysterious and gloomy protagonist has been an object of new historical, materialist, philosophical and psychoanalytic criticism. The profusion of *Macbeth* analyses indisputably underscores its inexplicability and, paradoxically, invites Nietzschean analysis as one of the so far uncharted paths. In order to work out the interpretative direction for this intensely criticised play, I feel obliged to briefly touch upon the existing body of thought concerning the tragedy of *Macbeth* before I move onto my analysis in the spirit of Nietzsche's philosophy. For a very long time, the play had been seen as a moral parable illustrating the orthodox view of ambition and the pitfalls

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<sup>15</sup> For more information, see Walter Kaufmann. 1974. *Nietzsche-Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. e.g. p. 36.

of overreaching. Recent studies, immersed deeper in the circumstances of the play's production, demonstrated that *Macbeth's* moral message as well as the behaviour and the decisions of the protagonist frequently subvert rather than support the official political line of thinking. As I will be trying to argue, *Macbeth* is a play about morality as well as power or to be more precise about the interdependence of the two. It is this thematic core centring around the ethical dimension of power that makes the play intensely Nietzschean, even more than *Tamburlaine*, *The Jew of Malta* or *Julius Caesar*. In Marlowe's characters, who are above all self-asserted all-powerful statements of singular identity, ethical reflection is barely existent. In *Julius Caesar*, Brutus's interiority, though very personal, nevertheless revolves around the political matter of *raison d'état*. In *Macbeth*, the statement of the will and its consequences realized in intense moral deliberations unite to create a fuller and deeper experience of 'overhuman' potential, where animal instinct is coupled with all-too human contemplation. *Macbeth* is unquestionably a play with morality as its central preoccupation; however, it is by no means a moralistic story, which I will also try to demonstrate in my short account of the play's criticism.

As R.A. Foakes (1982: 7) aptly observes, *Macbeth* is the last play in Shakespeare's canon to present the fall of a great man who over-reached himself and was brought down by the uncompromising wheel of fortune. Consequently, as he himself points out, the play had been often seen as "a morality" (Foakes 1982: 10). In such a reading the play is seen as "the presentation of the two contending forces, the forces of good and evil", where the concentration of evil is encapsulated in the character of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth (Ghosh 1983: 2). The "metaphysical" interpretation of the play, willy-nilly, partly pushes the responsibility for the criminalization of Macbeth's soul onto the female agents, Lady Macbeth and the witches, while the protagonist, essentially "good and noble", suffers through the ordeal of a peculiar psychomachia (cf. Ghosh 1983: 3). P. G. Ghosh (1983: 4) tries to demonstrate that the witches constitute "an essential factor in setting off and accelerating the criminal process in Macbeth's soul and, incidentally, the great spiritual struggle within it." Lady Macbeth who breaks down and goes mad under the burden of her conscience represents "a pyrrhic victory", while Macbeth's tragedy culminates in "the defeat of the moral will" (Ghosh 1983: 6-7) As the author writes:

[e]vil had decisively overcome the moral will and turned the rich life of the hero into a desert, taking Shakespeare's vision of evil-haunted reality to a dead end, to an impasse of impenetrable contradiction. *Macbeth* is the last Shakespearian tragedy typifying the titanic struggle of good and evil that had made its first appearance in *Hamlet* (Ghosh 1983: 20).

What is missing in this account of Macbeth's character is the observation that the very "rich life", that the author is referring to, originates in this supposed

“evil”. One has to realize that Macbeth would have never reached his utmost philosophical depth without his transgression and subsequent acts of violence. Also the claim of Macbeth’s essential goodness seems much exaggerated in the light of his cruelty on the battlefield. Lady Macbeth speaks with contempt of “the milk of human kindness” that is apparently inherent in Macbeth’s character (*Macbeth*, 1.5.17). Yet it is not this quality that guarantees his success. Macbeth is neither praised by his wife for his kindness nor by his warrior companions who rather extol his acts of atrocity against the rebel. Mercy and pity, in a very Nietzschean spirit, are seen as signs of weakness. In quite an opposite evaluation of the play, Marilyn French (1992: 15) claims that:

[a]t the conclusion of this tragedy, we accept without demur the judgement that Macbeth is a butcher. In fact, however, he is no more a butcher at the end than he is at the beginning. Macbeth lives in a culture that values butchery. Throughout the play manhood is equated with the ability to kill. Power is the highest value in Scotland, and in Scottish culture, power is military prowess. Macbeth’s crime is not that he is a murderer: he is praised and rewarded for being a murderer. His crime is a failure to make the distinction his culture expects among the objects of his slaughter.

In French’s analysis, the reason behind this failure is Lady Macbeth’s and the witches’ temptation that stands for the supernatural intervention that misguides the protagonist. As I will be trying to prove in my analysis, Macbeth’s impulse to kill Duncan stems from his internal urge to over-come and over-reach his limiting circumstances. The influence of his wife is indisputably crucial, but Macbeth’s decisions are guided by his need to over-come the influence of both Duncan and Lady Macbeth. I also believe that both Ghosh’s and French’s analyses, though constituting extreme oppositions, force *Macbeth* into the straitjacket of simplified moral valuations. In my view, the play frustrates moral expectations rather than confirms orthodox visions. Yet as R.A. Foakes accurately observes: “This way of regarding *Macbeth* as an exemplary play displaying the degeneration of a great criminal [...] has satisfied many, although it does not account for a sense that somehow, in spite of everything, Macbeth retains an heroic stature at the end [...]” (Foakes 1982: 10). I follow Foakes (1982: 10) in his view that “[m]oralistic accounts of the play” are plagued by contradictions and “are torn between condemning [Macbeth] as a criminal and rescuing a grandeur, integrity, even virtue for him at the end.” As I have frequently repeated concerning both Marlovian and Shakespearean characters, the moral imperative in them is frequently missing or heavily compromised, yet the audience’s or the readers’ sympathy unconditionally supports them. In the case of *Macbeth*, the orthodox pattern condemning the excessively ambitious is only superficially met. The deep structure of the play celebrates Macbeth’s overreaching.

Recent criticism seems to share this morally complex view of the play, as the simple “Jamesian” reading of the play is more and more often called into

question. For a very long time it was unquestionably believed that *Macbeth* was Shakespeare's attempt to flatter James I, written in the aftermath of The Gunpowder Plot (Davidson 2000: 181-183). Clifford Davidson (2000: 183) poses a crucial question whether the play is indeed a demonstration of flattery if it presents the deposition of a virtuous King and unveils the vulnerability and dangers of the monarchical position. Macbeth's exploitation of spies and his merciless use of violence in the elimination of his potential political opponents resembles the tyrannical espionage both in the Elizabethan as well as Jamesian regime (Davidson 2000: 186-189). Of course, one can assume that James saw himself as a righteous monarch whose position was divinely inspired, whereas the play presents a tyrant in the figure of Macbeth. In *The true law of free monarchies* (1603) James sees the role of the King as an all-powerful, albeit just and merciful father. He writes:

[t]he King towards His people is rightly compared to a father of children, and to a head of a body composed of divers members. For as fathers, the good Princes and magistrates of the people of God acknowledged themselves to their subjects. And for all other well ruled commonwealths, the rule of *Pater patriae* was ever and is commonly used for Kings" (James VI and I 2011: 143).

James's vision of kingship characterized by wisdom but also pity, seems to be encapsulated in the character of Duncan who "Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been/ So clear in his great office, that his virtues/ Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued..." (*Macbeth*, 1.7.17-19). In *Basilikon Doron* (1603) James seems to be even more precise in his vision of kingship as he explicitly makes a distinction between a good king and a tyrant, a differentiation between legitimate and illegitimate King, that the tragedy of *Macbeth* also supposedly presents. One can safely assume that in appearance James would have officially identified with Duncan, though his (as well as Elizabeth's) rule might have very well approximated Macbeth's. This divide between appearance and reality seems to define the play's inherent subversive nature, especially because, as mentioned, the spotlight and sympathy falls on the tyrant – Macbeth. Cristina León Alfar (2003: 119-120), following Alan Sinfield, also questions the Jamesian reading, claiming that there is no difference between Macbeth's rule than other contemporary European monarchs, while the events in the play might promote "the deposition of all tyrants – legitimate and illegitimate." As she writes: "The spectral nature of legitimate and illegitimate rule [...] haunts Shakespeare's tragedy and suggests that the violence of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is subject to a more complex set of circumstances than moral denunciations of them allow" (Alfar 2003: 120). Analysing the text of 1570 *An homily against disobedience and wilful rebellion*, Alfar demonstrates that the dividing line between a legitimate and illegitimate kingship is really very intangible. Alfar (2003: 120) claims that:

[i]f Macbeth is read in light of the Homily's notions of divine right, then the legitimacy of Macbeth's reign, at least insofar as it is viewed as a reign ordained by God, is secure. Neither Duncan's nor Malcolm's reigns may be assumed as either legitimate or less tyrannous. And neither Macbeth and Malcolm can escape their roles as traitors. For in the Homily the differences between the tyrant and the king, the loyal subject and the rebel, become slippery.

What I would add to Alfar's very apt remarks is the observation that *Macbeth*, in its subversive message, underscores the relativity of the social order and forcibly unveils it as a human construct. Similarly to *Julius Caesar*, the visions of power and its legitimacy are painstakingly constructed by men in order to secure their singular positions. Davidson seems to echo Alfar's comments by highlighting that:

[t]he orthodox Tudor and Jacobean political doctrines are part of the intellectual milieu of Shakespeare's plays. Nevertheless, it is absolutely true that there is much more than a mere display of the official party line to be seen in a play such as *Macbeth* or in Shakespeare's history plays, for the playwright's inherent interest in the consequences of the urge to power displays the futility of ambitious acts and the anxiety with which power will be accompanied. (Davidson 2000: 191)

It is exactly this human dimension of ambition that occupies the central place in the tragedy of *Macbeth* and also disrupts the "official" moral and political order. The focus on the protagonist's urge to over-come also opens up the Nietzschean path in the analysis of *Macbeth*.

The quality of ambition as a leading trait of Macbeth's character can again be driven back to Bradley's *Shakespearean tragedy*. Bradley (1992: 308), in a very Nietzschean spirit, aptly identifies ambition as Macbeth's identity building tool when he posits that Macbeth

[...] was exceedingly ambitious. He must have been so by temper. The tendency must have been greatly strengthened by his marriage. When we see him, it has been further stimulated by his remarkable success and by the consciousness of exceptional powers and merit. It becomes a passion. [...] On the other hand, his passion for power and instinct of self-assertion are so vehement that no inward misery could persuade him to relinquish the fruits of crime, or to advance from remorse.

Not only does Bradley identify Macbeth's relentless urge to act as "ambition", but also he points out Macbeth's moral relativity. The issue of "ambition" becomes central in both psychoanalytical as well as philosophical studies of *Macbeth*. Studies that profess Freudian origins would identify Macbeth's "desire for a new self as a figuratively Oedipal desire, since it implies the incestuous re-use of the mother's womb to usurp the father's procreative authority" (Watson 1984: 4). In a psychoanalytical analysis the play becomes a seat of powerful desires played out in between the influences of father and mother figures. In the

case of *Macbeth* the powerful father-figure is taken by Duncan while the role of a “seductive mother” is filled by Lady Macbeth (cf. Hogan 1983: 391). As Robert N. Watson (1984: 4) explains: “[i]ncestuous physical gratification, from this viewpoint, is not the ultimate goal of the Oedipal impulse, but rather the fantasized means toward an autogenous identity.” I am myself sceptical towards the supposed “universality” of Freudian readings as I do strongly feel that psychoanalysis reduces Shakespearean characters to stock figures or fixed composites of essentialist drives, yet I speak one voice with Watson when he sees Macbeth’s actions in terms of a symbolical “self-birth” – already proposed by Nietzsche long before Freud. Watson (1984: 3) believes that in order: “[t]o escape both the constraints of their natural births and the artificiality of a manufactured self, Shakespeare’s ambitious protagonists often attempt to enforce a symbolic re-birth, through which they can become the children of their own desires or ideals.” This statement is true for Marlowe’s protagonists like Tamburlaine and Barabas, as well as Shakespeare’s Brutus and, above all, Macbeth.

Macbeth’s innermost desires have also been filtered through the lens of philosophical analyses with the help of another of Nietzsche’s near contemporaries, namely, Søren Kierkegaard. A Kierkegaardian analysis sees Macbeth’s “ambition” as symptomatic of “dread”; a mixture of fear, indefiniteness and fascination (Cheung 1984: 433-434). As King-Kok Cheung (1984: 434) explains: “Macbeth seems a captive spectator in the theatre of his mind, shielding his eyes from the bloody scenes, yet aroused by them.” Kierkegaard, like Nietzsche, saw individual identity always suspended in “this peculiar supra-temporality” (Palfrey 2004: 110). For Kierkegaard himself Macbeth is “the existing subject in the moment” (Palfrey 2004: 100). I am inclined to believe that Nietzsche could have seen Macbeth’s singularity in just such a way. Simon Palfrey (2004: 96) identifies Shakespeare and Kierkegaard as “pioneers of inwardness”. To this short list I would also add the name of Nietzsche, whose philosophy is notoriously, almost solipsistically, individualist. Interestingly enough, what Kierkegaard himself observes is that Shakespeare’s drama, including *Macbeth*, does not engage in deeply religious dilemmas. Shakespeare “does seem to presuppose a more profane model of selfhood than Kierkegaard’s God-ordained hybrid of finitude and eternity” (Palfrey 2004: 99). I could not agree more with this statement and for this reason I believe that *Macbeth*, though plagued with existentialist dread, seems much closer to Nietzschean rather than Kierkegaardian ideals. Cheung (1984: 439) writes that:

[d]read haunts both Macbeth and his spectators. Under the spell of Shakespeare’s poetry, we too are startled by the witches, we too are fascinated by horrid images, we too are amazed by Lady Macbeth. While the scene of infanticide etched by her is inhuman and morally revolting, its graphic imagery is captivating.

To my mind, it is not only the poetry that is so captivating, it is the sudden and ecstatic Nietzschean realization that we too are taken in by immorality. When Macbeth finally reaches the decision to carry out murder, we do not gasp and say “No!”. Rather we live through the intensity of the deed, the chill of immorality – of going beyond good and evil, yielding to our innermost instincts. So it is Macbeth’s immorality that constitutes his Nietzschean potential. This has already been partially touched upon in psychoanalytical and philosophical readings which, when combined, render the two-fold vision of the play

its corporeal and slightly animalic edge with profound reflection. These two paths, when they cross, culminate in a Nietzschean perspective. Writing against such a rich background of *Macbeth* criticism I intend to utilize the fruits of these analyses, at the same time giving my analysis a new Nietzschean edge. Both interpretative directions, though not decisive, leave a trace in my reading of the play. The tenability of Kierkegaardian analyses persuades me further of the immense potential in a Nietzschean analysis, while certain psychoanalytical ideas like “self-birth” go hand in hand with Nietzsche’s concepts and substantiate my point of view. I will be reading Macbeth’s “black and deep desires” as manifestations of his strong will to power, while his philosophical deliberations as the realization of the eternal return (*Macbeth*, 1.4.58). In my view, Macbeth’s motivation stems from the need to overcome the influence of first Duncan, and later Lady Macbeth in his personal self-growth. I live behind moralistic accounts of the play, following Nietzsche’s assumption that such readings would be fundamentally “against life”. Nietzsche’s contempt for all-too hasty moralising can be found in his brief comment on Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, which I would like to make a point of departure for my analysis. Nietzsche (2006a: 141) writes in *Daybreak*:

[w]hoever thinks that Shakespeare’s theatre has a moral effect, and that the sight of Macbeth irresistibly repels one from the evil of ambition, is in error: and he is again in error if he thinks Shakespeare himself felt as he feels. He who is really possessed by raging ambition beholds this its image with joy; and if the hero perishes by his passion this precisely is the sharpest spice in the hot draught of this joy. Can the poet have felt otherwise? How royally, and not at all like a rogue, does his ambitious man pursue his course from the moment of his great crime! Only from then on does he exercise ‘demonic’ attraction and excite similar natures to emulation – demonic means here: in defiance against life and advantage for the sake of a drive and idea.

One cannot be as certain about what Shakespeare himself believed about ambition as Nietzsche in this fragment is, yet, as my account of *Macbeth* criticism hopefully illustrates, it is this moral relativity that drives the play. In the spirit of Nietzschean relativity thus I wish to open the discussion on the question of Macbeth’s “joy” in his immorality.

#### 4.2.2. “Blood will have blood” – Macbeth (*Macbeth*, 3.4.152)

The subsequent chaotic and destructive events are already heralded by the appearance of the weird sisters in the opening of the play when one of them utters a famous pun “Fair is foul, and foul is fair”, later echoed by Macbeth in his conversation with Banquo (*Macbeth*, 1.1.12). This memorable and highly enigmatic sentence reverberates throughout the play, being an apt mental short-cut for the atmosphere of moral relativity that suffuses the tragedy of *Macbeth*. However, as I will be arguing, this bleak world, thrown-off balance, is not a portrayal of medieval perspective but rather early modern reality plagued by the curse of radical scepticism. At its very opening the play invites a “reversed” reading of its content and, in a very Nietzschean style, it signals not to take anything at its face value. The presence of the witches is traditionally attributed to the newly revived interest in witchcraft shared by James VI and I, to which he gave his vent in e.g. *Daemonologie* (1597). Critics have often identified the subversive role of the witches in the play, seeing them as agents threatening the given world order. Yet quite perversely, as Peter SALLYBRASS suggests, they do not constitute “residual medieval ‘superstition’, but at least in part, the potent construction of some of the foremost intellectuals of the time, including Bodin” (SALLYBRASS 1982: 191).<sup>16</sup> So, according to SALLYBRASS, the weird sisters function as an expression of the newly born ‘modern’ intellectual vanguard. Dymrna CALLAGHAN (1992: 368) also echoes SALLYBRASS by claiming that James’s diabolism was an expression of modern scepticism, since witchcraft persecutions employed “a profoundly scientific, empirical method in many respects, one of which the female body is the principle object of knowledge.” It is, indeed, true that the revival of witch hunting had a new and supposedly “scientific” side yet, to my mind, the weird sisters’ presence has also a wider philosophical meaning as it opens up space for a deeper metaphysical crisis, in which all, so far reliable, sets of values and rules disintegrate. Scepticism seems to be a defence reaction to the expansion of horizons; or the growth in knowledge which inescapably brings lack of security. The more one knows the less sure one is of one’s place in the universe and consequently one feels less secure. Macbeth’s reaction to the witches’ prophecy is indeed quintessentially sceptical as he ‘attacks’ them with

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<sup>16</sup> SALLYBRASS reads Jamesian witchcraft paranoia politically as one of the useful tools to uphold a patriarchal system that ignores difference and ‘deviance’. He writes that: “Witchcraft accusations are a way of reaffirming a particular order against outsiders, or of attacking an internal rival, or of attacking ‘deviance’. Witchcraft in *Macbeth* [...] is not simply a reflection of a pre-given order of things: rather, it is a particular working upon, and legitimization of, the hegemony of patriarchy” (SALLYBRASS 1982: 190). I agree with his line of argumentation, though, as I am showing in my analysis, there are wider and deeper preconceptions concerning the revival of the interest and more specifically the prominent position of the witches in *Macbeth*.

his questions: "Say from whence/ You owe this strange intelligence or why/ Upon this blasted heath you stop our way/ With such prophetic greeting. Speak, I charge you" (*Macbeth*, 1.3.78-1). He asks about the source of knowledge, its utility, and the reasons for its disclosure. In quite an opposite manner Banquo sees the prophecy as "the instruments of darkness" and the words of "the devil" (*Macbeth*, 1.3.136, 113). As Bernhard Taureck (1996: 154) suggests, Banquo's interpretation of the witches' prophecy is medieval. Taureck (1996: 154) writes that: "His interpretation remains entirely medieval, while Macbeth has a completely different perception. In his view, there is a crisis of metaphysical knowledge, a crisis that can be used as a vacuum of foundation in order to create oneself. That creates the very impact of modernity in the play." So Taureck (1996: 155) sees the presence of the witches and Macbeth's reaction as a response to a wider "crisis of metaphysical knowledge." The metaphysical anxiety and the deconstruction of valuations, symbolically encapsulated in the witches, creates space for a Nietzschean self-overcoming and self-creation. When Macbeth echoes the witches by saying "So foul and fair a day I have not seen", he makes a truly perspectivist statement of his own identity (*Macbeth*, 1.3.39). This short and enigmatic sentence is also a self-assertion in which the conventional duality of good and evil falls apart in order to be moulded into a whole that is both foul and fair. In the figure of Macbeth these categories become blurred.

Unconventionally the tragedy does not open with a vision of relative order, but rather *in medias res*, in the midst of a raging battle. Though, as one learns, the ultimate chaos is averted by Macbeth, the opening of the play presents a vision of a revolt. The goddess Fortune, heralded as a whore, was on the side of the rebel Macdonwald who could have won were it not for "brave Macbeth [...] / [d]isdaining Fortune" who beats him in a mortal duel. The captain records that Macbeth "with his brandished steel, / Which smoked with bloody execution, / Like valor's minion, carved out his passage" (*Macbeth*, 1.2.19-21). This introductory speech turns out to be brutally ironical as it is exactly Macbeth who, like Macdonwald, takes fate into his own hands and "carves out his passage" to power and position. Macbeth's first soliloquy already unfolds his intentions of "conceiving political self-creation", which Taureck mentions as a reaction to the metaphysical vacuum (Taureck 1996: 153). For a moment Macbeth also admits the same attitude to the prophecy as Banquo does when he says: "If chance will have me king, why, chance may / crown me / Without my stir" (*Macbeth*, 1.3.157-158). He ponders upon leaving off all his actions to the decree of fate, yet once the possibility of self-overcoming opens up, as a fantastical imagining it transforms into an inescapable actuality. Potentiality mixes up with execution and "nothing is but what is not" (*Macbeth*, 1.3.155). At the same time, despite the horror Macbeth feels at the idea of the "fantastical" murder, he feels every sensation in his body more intensely and acutely (*Macbeth*, 1.3.152). He claims: "that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair / And

make my seated heart knock at my ribs" (*Macbeth*, 1.3.147-149). For Cheung (1984: 437) the feeling that "Shakes so [Macbeth's] single state of man" is exactly the Kierkegaardian 'dread', the realization of the evil nature of the deed and simultaneously the hopeless fascination by the possibility (*Macbeth*, 1.3.153). I would argue that Macbeth's heightened sensitivity and his awoken virility has more to do with his awareness of his will to power, the possibility of self-overcoming that unfolds before him and, finally, a realization of the need to embrace the instinct rather than repudiate it. As much as Macbeth understands the moral duplicity inherent in the deed, he refuses to hold it as any serious consideration. He frequently pushes the thought away e.g. when he dismisses his doubts by saying: "Come what come may", which, to my mind, clearly suggests that at this stage he is resigned to any eventuality (*Macbeth*, 1.3.163). I believe it is not exactly "dread" that causes Macbeth's uneasiness as his mind specifically identifies the fear with the necessity to commit the murder of Duncan. As critics suggest, killing itself should not be a problem for Macbeth because he is a brilliant and effective soldier. The memory of extreme brutality with which Macbeth dealt with the rebel Macdonwald is still fresh in our minds. I believe that Macbeth is so shaken because he realizes that this act of murder would be his first step towards his self-identification. The murder would be his first act of his singular and individual will, requiring taking responsibility for himself. In Nietzschean terms, Macbeth stares into the abyss and realizes that it stares back at him.<sup>17</sup> This is the moment of the realization of his single identity separate from his communal duty towards his war companions, his King or his country. The prospect of murder creates the space of potential independence and is an expression of free-thinking. At the same time it is a source of great discomfort because Macbeth still belongs to the past. He is, as yet, not a modern man who "feels responsible only for what one wants and does, and finds one's pride in oneself" (Nietzsche 2007b: 115). Nietzsche (2007b: 115) writes about such men of the past: "To be alone (allein), to experience things by oneself (einzeln), to neither obey nor rule, to represent an individual (ein Individuum bedeuten) – that was no pleasure back then, but a punishment; one was sentenced 'to be an individual (Individuum)'. Freedom of thought was considered 'discomfort itself.'" These are the feelings stirred in Macbeth by this horrible glimpse into the abyss. However, this new unknown dimension of existence "beyond good and evil" brings a new insight into his awoken identity. The "horrid image" that makes his heart pound is awoken "against the use of nature" (*Macbeth*, 1.3.148,150). I would argue that the word "use" is crucial as it points to the su-

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<sup>17</sup> I am referring here to Nietzsche's aphorism from *Beyond good and evil* which, in my opinion, aptly captures the nature of Macbeth's identity awakening. Nietzsche says: "Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself. And when you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss stares back into you. (Nietzsche 2002: 69).

perfidiality of the so called “natural” order of things. This contentious idea also slowly dawns on Macbeth. Its subversive potential stirs discomfort, but also fascination. Nietzsche seems to be right in his assessment of the discomfiture caused by the newly found singular identity as Macbeth’s heightened awareness of his will for the early modern standards appears to be a pathological condition. In Robert Burton’s *The anatomy of melancholy* (1621) “will” is described as inferior and secondary to reason. Yet one wills only when reason first comprehends and approves the object of the will. As Burton (1998: 146) explains: “[w]ill is the other power of the rational soul, which covets or avoids such things as have been before judged and apprehended by the understanding.” If this does not happen so, one has to do with a morbid condition. Human will and reason used to be in perfect union which is now disrupted and, hence, “will” or “this appetite is many times rebellious in us, and will not be contained within the lists of sobriety and temperance” (Burton 1998: 147). In his view, giving in to “head-strong passions, violent perturbations of the mind” and numerous ailments are consequences of our appetite (Burton 1998: 147-148). Macbeth realizes his indomitable will and, in Burton’s vision, he seems to approximate a dangerous morbid condition. In a Nietzschean perspective, he emerges as an antecedent of a future man in the circumstances of the past.

Macbeth’s will to power invites a comparison with Marlowe’s Tamburlaine, whose relentless striving has no limits. As Foakes (1982: 7) points out, Shakespeare was under the influence of Marlowe, who paradoxically “had broken the moralising pattern of such stories as mirrors of magistrates by showing Tamburlaine striding on to even further conquests, and endowed with a mind aspiring to beauty and poetry as well as to power and an earthly crown”. Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is definitely closer to Marlowe than to his contemporary moralists who would condemn ambition as the arch-sin. Yet Macbeth, as Foakes (1982: 8) also aptly observes, approximates Dr Faustus in the creation of his own hell. Perversely, even in his most atrocious acts of butchery Macbeth remains a philosopher of life, albeit growing gloomier and more profound. Macbeth, despite his intense will, differs from Tamburlaine – who may be speaking about beauty in astonishing verse, but would not really stop to ponder on the meaning and ramifications of his actions. Macbeth not only reflects, he masochistically dissects his condition. However, this dissection egocentrically revolves around his person, rendering his moral outlook very Nietzschean. As Morris (1982: 32) observes: “Macbeth is moved to mediate on life and death, but his vision is limited to the earthly realm. The poor player, who struts and frets his hour upon the stage, is then ‘heard no more’.” Morris suggests that *Macbeth* is not only opposite to simple moralism but almost atheistic in its message. As he writes: “The point is, surely that the presentation of goodness and holiness in *Macbeth* is muted and peripheral. The tyrant is eventually overthrown by human powers, in hand-to-hand combat, where the presence of

God is neither invoked nor declared, though it may be assumed" (Morris 1982: 33). Simultaneously, one sees that because the Absolute is pushed to the very margins, the centre of gravity shifts to the powerful and "wilful" protagonist. Once Macbeth realizes the full shape of his project of self-overcoming, he starts seeing Duncan's murder as a challenge to his self-identification. I follow Foakes (1982: 15) in his assessment of the murder as "breaking through the sound barrier for the first time." Discomforting as it may be, the extent of one's individual will, the very excitement of finding the individual self, makes the temptation irresistible. Foakes (1982: 17) observes that: "[...] his full sense of the terrible nature of the murder he is about to do also makes the over-coming of his scruples, of the horror he feels, of all the large part of himself that rebels against it, so much the greater challenge." The challenge to the budding singular individuality has both a moral and a very personal dimension as Macbeth has to raise his hand to hit a "Supreme Father".

The fact that Duncan functions as a fatherly figure has been pointed out by numerous critics.<sup>18</sup> In the play the idea seems to be confirmed by Lady Macbeth's words: "Had he not resembled/ My father as he slept, I had done't" (*Macbeth*, 2.2.16-17). However, the role of a father in the early modern circumstances may have indeed very little to do with affection, but rather power dynamics. Lady Macbeth's statement is tinged with apprehension as for her, like for Macbeth, the father-figure remains the locus of authority that curbs individual aspirations. The patriarchal ideal, strengthened with James's ascension, gives ultimate justification for the condemnation of ambition and trampling of personal liberties. The virtues of obedience and loyalty to the King, the earthly representative of the Divine Father, are extolled by James himself in the aforementioned *The true law of free monarchies* (1603). However, the ideas of the divine rights of Kings survive well after James's reign. Robert Filmer's *Patriarchia, or the natural power of kings* (1680), written already after the English Civil War

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<sup>18</sup> This interpretative path is typical for psychoanalytic critics who "have emphasised the patricidal character of the regicide" (Hogan 1983: 385). Patrick Colm Hogan (1983: 385) makes a short summary of this interpretative tradition. Interestingly, for Rick Bowers Macbeth's ultimate motivation is: sibling jealousy, while "[...] the idea of parricide remains indistinct because it is not clear even to Macbeth" (Bowers 1980: 58-59) Janet Adelman makes the idea of patricide a point of departure for gender analysis. She writes that: "In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare had constructed the Fall as the death of the ideal father; here, he constructs a revised version in which the Fall is the death of the ideally androgynous parent. For Duncan combines in himself the attributes of both father and mother: he is the centre of authority, the source of all nurturance, planting the children to his throne and making them grow. He is the father, an androgynous parent from whom, singly, all good can be imagined to flow, the source of a benign and empowering nurturance the opposite of that imagined in the witches' poisonous cauldron and Lady Macbeth's gall-filled breasts. Such a father does away with any need for a mother: he is the image of both parents in one, threatening aspects of each controlled by the presence of the other" (Adelman 1992: 53).

and the Protectorate, provides the political legitimization for the restored monarchy, but also proves the social vitality of the earthly “Supreme Father” idea. Additionally, this vitality underscores the “unnaturalness” of Macbeth’s ambitions, which even eighty years later would have seemed pathological. Filmer’s justification of monarchical rights has, as if, an evolutionary basis and is derived from biblical sources – where Adam is seen as the first patriarch, ordained by God himself. Filmer (2013: 11) writes:

[c]reation made man Prince of his Posterity. And indeed not only Adam, but the succeeding Patriarchs had, by Right of Father-hood, Royal Authority over their Children. Nor dares Bellarmine deny this also. That the Patriarchs (saith he) were endowed with Kingly Power, their Deeds do testify; for as Adam was Lord of his Children, so his Children under him, had a Command and Power over their own Children; but still with subordination to the First Parent, who is Lord-Paramout over his Childrens Children to all Generations, as being the Grand- Father of his People.

It may seem that Filmer’s vision of kingship only continues the ideas already present in James’s writings. However, Filmer writes against a slightly different background, whose roots, to my mind, one can already find in *Macbeth*, namely, the notion of personal freedom. Filmer writes of liberty that: “It is hard to say whether it be more erroneous in Divinity, or dangerous in Policy” (Filmer 2013: 7). At the same time he claims that: “the greatest Liberty in the World (if it be duly considered) is for a people to live under a Monarch” (Filmer 2013: 9). In his vision, the feeling of independence residing in an individual is a morally dubious and politically dangerous notion. No wonder Macbeth feels the exhilarating chill first at the very thought of realizing his singularity and then at the possibility of following this liberating impulse. Just as early modern orthodox views on ambition assume that ambition is solely a pursuit of status and power, Macbeth’s desires are more than that, since they are coupled with his fatal realization of his singularity and the actuality of his existence – that only get stronger and stronger as the play progresses. The sensation is new to Macbeth who up till now has always been in the position requiring loyalty and servitude, which at the same time have been understood by him as the greatest possible honour. The act of killing Duncan is one thing for him but living afterwards, taking full responsibility for his new position, is something quite new and challenging. So Macbeth says:

[i]f it were done when ‘tis done, then ‘twere well  
It were done quickly. If th’ assassination  
Could trammel up the consequence and catch  
With his surcease success, that but this blow  
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,  
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,  
We’d jump the life to come. (*Macbeth*, 1.7.1-7)

The position the murder would place Macbeth in, a position of a self-determined individual, is full of uncertainty. Were it not for this anxiety of being oneself, of living up to one's own vision of oneself, the challenge would be no challenge at all. Taking responsibility for one's self-overcoming is equal to welcoming a project of perpetual uncertainty, of forever overcoming oneself. Macbeth himself does not fear the moral consequences of Duncan's murder but he is perfectly aware that the moral right will be on Duncan's side as he claims that: "[b]ut in these cases/ We still have judgment here, that we but teach/ Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return/ To plague th' inventor. This even-handed justice/ Commends th' ingreience of our poisoned chalice/ To our own lips" (*Macbeth*, 1.7.7-12). He knows that the act can backfire not because he believes that a "heaven's cherubin" will descend from above to judge him, yet he sees that people believe so and they will be moved by pity in case his guilt is known. It is interesting that pity is thus coupled with potential grievous punishment (*Macbeth*, 1.7.22). This Nietzschean mechanism presents pity as a perversely empowering feeling that assumes the right to judge and punish. Macbeth seems to be speaking with contempt of this popular support, which blurs single individuality into one blind, punishing hand. He says:

[b]esides, this Duncan  
 Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
 So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
 Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against  
 The deep damnation of his taking-off;  
 And pity, like a naked newborn babe  
 Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin horsed  
 Upon the sightless couriers of the air,  
 Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,  
 That tears shall drown the wind (*Macbeth*, 1.7.16-25).

Duncan's kingship is marked with "meekness" and virtue, while at the same time his kingdom is plunged into the chaos of rebellion. So, the effectiveness of his rule might very well be called into question. He seems to be a man who is unable to commit a violent deed, and so the safety of his realm depends on men like Macbeth.<sup>19</sup> One sees that Duncan's trustworthiness puts the realm in danger as he "built an absolute trust" on Macdonwald, who subsequently led a rebellion against him (*Macbeth*, 1.4.15-16). His further reliance on Macbeth also proves his lack of political instinct and complete inability to predict other peo-

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<sup>19</sup> By Machiavellian standards an effective prince should assert his will aggressively (Riebling 1991: 275). Riebling (1991: 275), following Machiavelli, observes that "[...] a prince cannot maintain his power by relying on the *virtù* of another; like the goddess, the state belongs to the man who wins her by force."

ple's intentions. Duncan himself admits his shortcoming when he says: "[t]here's no art/ To find the mind's construction in the face" (*Macbeth*, 1.4.13-14). Barbara Riebling (1991: 276), in her brilliant analysis of *Macbeth* in the light of Machiavelli's *The prince*, observes that: "[...] Duncan, however admirable a man, is by Machiavellian standards a dangerous king – a ruler whose gentle and trusting character has invited treason, civil war, and foreign invasion. By being a perfect Christian, Duncan succeeds in becoming a perfect lamb – a sacrificial offering on the altar of real-world politics". By Nietzschean standards, Duncan embodies "mediocrity", that characterizes "emasculated" men whose "failure to do evil is to be ascribed merely to [their] inability to do evil" (Kaufmann 1974: 224). For Nietzsche it would be rather Duncan who represents a morbid condition, where all instincts are silenced in favour of "morality as timidity", to use Nietzsche's (2002: 85, 86) expression. As opposed to Duncan, Macbeth, who is acutely aware of his desires, represents "the healthiest of all tropical monsters" (Nietzsche 2002: 85). He says: "I have no spur/ To prick the sides of my intent, but only/ Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself/ And falls on th' other—" (*Macbeth*, 1.7.25-28). Macbeth may not be a perfect psychologist when he identifies the tempest of his desires as "[v]aulting ambition", but he fully comprehends the intensity of his affects and a burning need to live by their whispers. He seems to be more apt when he announces: "Stars, hide your fires;/ Let not light see my black and deep desires./ The eye wink at the hand, yet let that be/ Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see" (*Macbeth*, 1.4.57-60). On hearing that Duncan appoints his elder son as his heir, Macbeth is more aware of being pushed forever to the position of dependency and under the threat of never being able to realize his inner call for over-coming. It is a deep desire to assert one's identity, contempt of weakness and mediocrity as well as jealousy and, finally, ambition that are raging in Macbeth's heart. Primordial instincts fuse with an intense reflection to form Macbeth's will to power, which he himself globally dubs as ambition because even to him it seems a dangerous and morbid affliction. Macbeth, essentially more a philosopher rather than a politician, also turns out to be an ineffective monarch, but he must first open his project of eternal self-overcoming to learn this. The impossibility of his position lies in the need to overcome the fatherly Duncan and the moral heritage encapsulated in his kingly position. As I have argued, Macbeth's reflection on Duncan's meekness is tinged with contempt, and possibly communicates his doubt in the divine underpinning of the monarch's position. It is not Duncan's authority or his command of power that make his position legitimate and hence "divine", but rather the social conceptualization of his role and position. These are the aspects Macbeth capitalizes on in his second soliloquy. These are the arguments that "speak" in Duncan's favour. Macbeth weighs his arguments when he says: "[h]e's here in double trust:/ First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,/ Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,/ Who should against his murderer shut

the door./ Not bear the knife myself" (*Macbeth*, 1.7.12-16). The arguments remain in the sphere of custom and tradition. It is wrong to raise your hand on your guest, your kinsman and your king, especially a merciful king. Though he does not seem to be a successful ruler, he is loved thanks to the virtue of his meekness. The very same virtue that makes him a failure as a King provides a "divine" legitimization for his rule. In his soliloquy Macbeth unveils that he is painfully aware of the popular morality and its hypocritical superficiality. Like in the case of Caesar, popular support is on Duncan's side. Communal pity that "[s]hall blow the horrid deed in every eye" is conceptualized as a "like a naked newborn babe", a symbolic portrayal of helplessness, weakness, but also supposedly innocence – though in his dissection of love for Duncan Macbeth effectively proves that it really is a herd instinct (*Macbeth*, 1.7.24, 21). It is interesting that when Macbeth's resolve melts back into his previous dependency, it is Lady Macbeth who boosts his confidence, recalling a strikingly similar image of a tender love towards a baby she herself had given suck to (*Macbeth*, 1.7.62-63). With the shocking image of the babies' dashed brains, Lady Macbeth reminds Macbeth of his own vision of pity stripped naked to a mere herd instinct. Jack D'Amico (1986: 33), in his Machiavellian analysis of the play points out the weaknesses of Duncan's rule as well as Macbeth's awareness of the social construction behind supposedly "good" impulses. He aptly points out that "[i]t is Macbeth who sees conscience as the product of social rather than natural forces. The way to change human nature is to change what man controls, not the body but the state" (D'Amico 1986: 34). It seems that in this respect both Machiavelli and Nietzsche speak one voice as they believe that one should not curb one's instincts but rather creatively apply them in the project of self-creation, if necessary against the precepts of popular morality. As D'Amico observes, the conventional notion of conscience seems to be absent in Machiavelli's works, while Shakespeare has a lot to say about it in *Macbeth*. D'Amico (1986: 31-32) believes this, even though indistinctly one can discern a construct of political conscience in Machiavelli. This idea supposedly overshadows Macbeth's decisions. I would argue that it is, indeed, conscience that is speaking through Macbeth, though it is neither a moral or political conscience, so much as an intellectual one. Intellectual conscience, according to Nietzsche (2007b: 29-30), is something that is lacking in most people who take for granted all the values that life is built upon and unquestionably live by.<sup>20</sup> Lack of Macbeth's moral conscience,

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<sup>20</sup> The call for an "intellectual conscience" seems to be a mark of free-thinkers who dare to question moral valuations. It is Nietzsche's first step in his reevaluation of values. In *The gay science* Nietzsche (2007b: 29-30) writes: "[e]veryone looks at you with strange eyes and goes on handling their scales, calling this good and that evil; nobody as much as blushes when you notice that their weights are underweight – nor do they become indignant with you; perhaps they laugh at your doubts. I mean: to the great majority it is not contemptible to believe this or that and to live accordingly without first becoming aware of the final and most

to my mind, is expressed in his stubborn attachment to his crown once he has attained it through criminal means. Even in the most hopeless position Macbeth never renounces his deeds or expresses any remorse. Being ultimately an unsuccessful politician, profoundly uninterested in the fate of his country, but obsessively focused on himself, to my mind, Macbeth is much closer to the Nietzschean philosophical overhuman rather than a shrewd Machiavellian politician. This means that he is burdened with an intellectual conscience that makes him incessantly question his motivation, his decisions and their outcome. However, this intense questioning has little to do with godliness or fear of God, but rather with the human deconstruction of moral affects and phenomena. Macbeth's "pathological" free-thinking sees through the artificiality of the divine rights of kings but simultaneously sees the "transcendental" influence it holds over its subjects. Filmer (2013: 15) writes in *Patriarchia* that:

[i]n all Kingdoms or Commonwealths in the World, whether the Prince be the Supreme Father of the People, or but the true Heir of such a Father, or whether he come to the Crown by Usurpation, or by Election of the Nobles, or of the People, or by any other way whatsoever; or whether some Few or a Multitude Govern the Commonwealth: Yet still the Authority that is in any one, or in many, or in all these, is the only Right and natural Authority of a Supreme Father. There is, and always shall be continued to the end of the World, a Natural Right of a Supreme Father over every Multitude, although by the secret Will of God, many at first do most unjustly obtain the Exercise of it.

Filmer explicitly sanctifies the position and the role of a King, who remains the Supreme Father to the nation regardless of his origin. So strong is Filmer's opposition to social liberties that he even exempts a monarch who has gained the crown through usurpation. In this way Filmer welcomes an internal paradox into his vision of the divine rights of kings. On the one hand, the King's position is holy and untouchable. On the other, usurpation opens the way for those who want to attain this state of unquestionable authority. This supposed divinity of a king is thus a flimsy defence against the ambition of potential usurpers. This viscous circle is inherent in Macbeth's position. He sees that only in kingship can one fully realize one's personal liberty, and so being a King is the only possibility to fulfil his rampant will to power. Unlike Brutus, Macbeth does not even bother to fashion himself as a champion for social liberties or the rights of a republic. He sees the crookedness of dogmas and wants to take advantage of them. It seems that he wants to leap to the transcendental state of reverence so that his will is asserted and never questioned again. Bowers (1980: 58) claims that "[t]o Macbeth [...] kingship represents a set of transcendental principles.

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certain reasons pro and con, and without even troubling themselves about such reasons afterwards: the most gifted men and the noblest women still belong to this 'great majority'."

The death of Duncan will be, for Macbeth, the death of doubt, the birth of a powerful inner peace conceived through the ultimate self-assertion". Bowers (1980: 58) believes that Macbeth fetishises kingship. I believe that he is, as yet, not fully aware that the process of his self-overcoming has no conclusion, being a perpetual process of ever asserting one's identity.

For Macbeth, his deep intellectual conscience that forces him to ever question himself eventually becomes his curse, as he deeply longs for certainty and closure. The Nietzschean project of self-overcoming excludes such a possibility. In *The gay science* Nietzsche (2007b: 152-153) poses a list of questions and answers to his fellow free-thinkers. He writes:

[w]hat do you believe in ? – In this: that the weight of all things must be determined anew. [...] What does your conscience say? – ‘You should become who you are. [...] Where lie your greatest dangers? – In compassion. [...] What do you love in others? – My hopes. [...] Whom do you call bad? – He who always wants to put people to shame. [...] What is most human to you? – To spare someone shame. [...] What is the seal of having become free? – No longer to be ashamed before oneself.<sup>21</sup>

The nature of Nietzsche's questioning perfectly expresses Macbeth's intense reflection, while the contents of the questions and answers reflects Macbeth's dilemmas. Macbeth believes that his over-coming lies in his hands. The failure of his plan could be brought by the whispers of compassion or reawakening of his moral conscience that could bring shame. The only way to go on is to reject any qualms. Morris (1982: 48) writes that: "Just as the king has 'two bodies' so Macbeth has two minds: the prosaic, unpolitical military intelligence, and the powerful, creative visionary imagination, fuelled by guilt. In the one, he acts; in the other, he is tortured." When Macbeth's public and private selves thus strike in conflict, it is Lady Macbeth who rekindles Macbeth's hushed desires because what Macbeth loves most about himself, following Nietzsche's question-answer diagnosis, are his hopes, which only Lady Macbeth's reflects, being gifted with an equally intense will to power.<sup>22</sup> It is she who most explicitly verbalizes and orders the tumult of Macbeth's desires. When Macbeth's resolve wavers, he says to her: "I dare do all that may become a man./ Who dares do more is none (*Macbeth*, 1.7.51-52). To which she replies: "What beast was 't,/ then,/ That made you break this enterprise to me?/ When you durst do it, then you were a man;/ And to be more than what you were, you would/ Be so much more the man" (*Macbeth*, 1.7.53-58). What remains indistinct in Macbeth's soliloquies becomes solidly expressed in Lady Macbeth's insistence that Macbeth should become more than a man. Lady Macbeth's challenge becomes an open invita-

<sup>21</sup> These are questions and answers posed in *The gay science* in aphorisms: 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275 (Nietzsche 2007b: 152-153).

<sup>22</sup> For a more detailed analysis of Lady Macbeth's overhuman potential see: Chapter 5.

tion to the project of self-overcoming or giving birth to Macbeth's doing so as an overhuman. She angrily attacks Macbeth by referring to a beast, that incited him to conceive the plan of murder. However, her term of address is heavy with meaning. By drawing a parallel between Macbeth and a beast, Lady Macbeth seems to be expressing a very Nietzschean notion: in order to become an overman, one has to be a beast first. For Renaissance theologians such a notion would sound fantastical as early modern men seemed to be caught in a severe conflict of passions and reason (Tillyard 2011: 75-76). They would claim that a human being is a creature suspended in between a beast and an angel. One can either aim higher or degenerate into a beastly state. In order to aspire to the heavenly grace, one is obliged to turn one's back on the beast that is part of one's nature. As, for instance, Sir John Hayward in *David's tears, or an exposition of the penitential psalms* (1622) writes:

[c]ertainly, of all the creatures under heaven which have received being from God, none degenerate, none forsake their natural dignity and being, but only man. Only man, abandoning the dignity of his proper nature, is changed like Proteus into divers forms. And this is occasioned by the liberty of his will. And as every kind of beast is principally inclined to one sensuality more than to another, so man transformeth himself into that beast to whose sensuality he principally declines. Thus did the ancient wise men shadow forth by their fables of certain persons changed into such beasts whose cruelty or sottery or other brutish nature they did express. (Hayward as quoted in: Tillyard 2011: 74)

So in Hayward's account of human nature "the liberty of [man's] will", like in Filmer's *Patriachia*, is also a subversive quality. To the freedom of will Hayward attributes man's degeneration. Lady Macbeth seems to be aware of the complex nature of man's condition. She acknowledges Macbeth's beastly side, but she tries to persuade him that, as part of his nature, it is necessary to utilize its potential. A parallel with Nietzsche's "beasts of prey and men of prey" is yet again hard to avoid (Nietzsche 2002: 84). For Nietzsche (2002: 84-85), men who embrace their beastly instincts are real pictures of health. Those who see essential evil in them seem to misunderstand human nature, which thrives on instincts or affects. Lady Macbeth succeeds to persuade Macbeth using this veiled Nietzschean argument because once he makes a final decision to carry out the assassination he is "settled" and will "bend up" (*Macbeth*, 1.7.92). Having decided, he is, like Brutus, determined and consistent. When asked by Banquo about the witches' prophecy, he does not lie when he says: "I think not of them", because from now on he is no longer dependent on anyone else than himself and he knows that his fate is in his own hands (*Macbeth*, 2.1.27-28). In his next soliloquy his whole being is so intensified that the plains of fantasy and reality blur. It is "[a] dagger of the mind" that leads him to Duncan's chamber (*Macbeth*, 2.1.50). The deed is not yet performed but Macbeth is so determined

that in his head, in his “heat-oppressed brain”, he is already past the challenge (*Macbeth*, 2.1.51). The murder had to take place in his head first in order to be materialized. That is why he can say: “I go, and it is done” (*Macbeth*, 2.1.75). Once it was decided, it was already done for Macbeth – the very act of killing seemed a mere formality.

Macbeth desperately sought self-assertion and believed that Duncan’s murder would be a gate to realize his will to power. Yet already minutes after the murder it starts to dawn on him that the murder was no rite of passage. In a highly symbolical moment of recognition Macbeth utters the most surprising words: “I could not say ‘Amen’” (*Macbeth*, 2.2.39). It seems perversely ironic that he wanted to conclude the act of murder with a holy word that otherwise closes prayer. Shaken and disbelieving, Macbeth asks Lady Macbeth: “But wherefore could not I pronounce ‘Amen’?/ I had most need of blessing, and ‘Amen’/ Stuck in my throat” (*Macbeth*, 2.2.42-44). The unutterable word “Amen”, meaning “so be it!”, would indeed signify closure and the fulfilment of a challenge, while in reality Macbeth opened the way for a permanent action where one challenge will follow another. Macbeth has not become an overman, but only begun the process of becoming one. He has not fully grasped his position when he says: “Methought I heard a voice cry ‘Sleep no more!/ Macbeth does murder sleep” (*Macbeth*, 2.2.47-48). The imperative “Sleep no more” becomes Macbeth’s curse, his own eternal return to the horrible. The moment strikingly parallels Zarathustra’s recognition when he himself sees the unavailability of every moment inexorably and eternally repeating. One day he wakes up and exclaims:

[u]p, abysmal thought, out of my depths! [...] Here there is thunder enough to make even graves learn to listen! And wipe the sleep and all that befogs and blinds you from your eyes! Hear me with your eyes too: my voice is a remedy even for those born blind. And once you are awake, you shall remain awake eternally. [...] Zarathustra summons you, the godless one! I, Zarathustra, the advocate of life, the advocate of suffering, the advocate of the circle – you I summon, my most abysmal thought! Hail to me! You are coming – I hear you! My abyss *speaks*, I have unfolded my ultimate depth to the light! Hail to me! Here now! Give me your hand – ha! Let go! Haha! – Nausea, nausea, nausea – oh no” (Nietzsche 2006b: 173-174).

For Zarathustra, as for Macbeth, the moment is as liberating as it is nauseating and threatening it can possibly be. Sleep may appear as well a deserved rest or a symbolic expression of inaction and passivity. Macbeth chose a path that requires constant vigilance and ever-lasting testing. He shrinks from the thought, and that is why he refuses to go back to Duncan’s chamber to leave the daggers there. He hopelessly confesses: “I’ll go no more./ I am afraid to think what I have done. Look on ‘t again I dare not” (*Macbeth*, 2.2.65-67). He is unwilling to relive his deed though he already instinctively knows he will literally and meta-

phorically repeat the murder eternally. At the same time, the intensity of his senses is so heightened that he attains a higher level of feeling as he says: "How is 't with me when every noise appals me?" (*Macbeth*, 2.2.76). This increased vigilance can be contrasted with one of the final scenes when Macbeth says something radically opposite:

I have almost forgot the taste of fears.  
 The time has been my senses would have cooled  
 To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hair  
 Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir  
 As life were in 't. I have supped full with horrors.  
 Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,  
 Cannot once start me. (*Macbeth*, 5.5.11-17)

From the moment of murder onwards Macbeth oscillates in between extreme emotions from wild bravado through resignation and despair to regained energy and motivation. In his fluctuation of moods Macbeth turns out to be painfully human as he himself constantly questions his overhuman potential and his suitability for the course of action he himself chose. In response to a demon who whispers to one's ear the suggestion of eternal return, Nietzsche prophesies a similar reaction of despair or liberated rejoicing.<sup>23</sup> Macbeth seems to go through both of these emotions alternating in the course of the remaining action.

In the aftermath of the murder, though initially thrown off-balance, Macbeth comes to terms with his new position of ever answering to new challenges. He announces that: "[t]o be thus is nothing,/ But to be safely thus" (*Macbeth*, 3.1.52). With this in mind, he plans the murder of Banquo and Fleance, as well as Macduff and his entire household. The execution of the first murder also marks the beginning of the end in intimacy between Macbeth and

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<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche (2007b: 194-195) introduces the notion of the eternal return in the form of a parable in *The gay science* (aphorism number 341): "The heaviest weight. – What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!' Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: 'You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.' If this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, 'Do you want this again and innumerable times again?' would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight! Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to long for nothing more fervently than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?"

Lady Macbeth, without whom the murder might have not taken place at all. Being an overpowering influence on Macbeth and a great aid to him in crisis situations, it seems unjustified that she is gradually pushed away and excluded from his further plans. If one is to see Macbeth as a Nietzschean figure, his movement in the direction of further exclusion and solitude should not come as a great surprise. Having overcome the influence of Duncan, Macbeth seeks to free himself from Lady Macbeth, whose control over the murder plot was indeed substantial. He wants to prove to himself as well as her that he can meet further challenges on his own without her help. His self-overcoming involves the overcoming of powerful influences. As Fredrick Appel (1991: 82, 81) aptly puts it, Nietzsche professed “noble self-sufficiency” in his “repeated praise of the therapeutic effects of solitude and his insistence on intensely personal, inimitable paths to ethical-spiritual development.” In search of solitude, Macbeth withdraws from any company when he announces that “To make society/ The sweeter welcome, we will keep ourself/ Till suppertime alone” (*Macbeth*, 3.1.45-47). It seems to be self-sufficiency that Macbeth wishes to attain, though it is disputable whether it is indeed noble, or quite the opposite, especially that he is more and more unable to welcome his society sweetly. He appears to develop more and more contempt towards humanity in general. Macbeth gives vent to it in his conversation with the three murderers hired to assassinate Banquo and his son. In his speech Macbeth compares different types of men to breeds of dogs. By choosing such a measurement scale he seems to be articulating his bitterly ironical assessment of mankind:

[a]y, in the catalogue you go for men,  
 As hounds and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels,  
 curs,  
 Shoughs, water-rugs, and demi-wolves are clept  
 All by the name of dogs. The valued file  
 Distinguishes the swift, the slow, the subtle,  
 The housekeeper, the hunter, every one  
 According to the gift which bounteous nature  
 Hath in him closed; whereby he does receive  
 Particular addition, from the bill  
 That writes them all alike. And so of men. (*Macbeth*, 3.1.103-113)

One could argue that Macbeth’s speech expresses his own sense of superiority over the seemingly primitive cut-throats, though as it seems, his words are to summarize people’s qualities in general. It is also possible to assume that Macbeth is expressing a Renaissance social sentiment that would take hierarchy and rank for granted. Yet there seems to be a deeper, Nietzschean contempt for communal existence inherent in Macbeth’s words. As Appel (1991: 82) explains, for Nietzsche “[t]he dependent type of person cannot bear the thought of exis-

tence without the warmth generated by close proximity to other herd animals.” In the light of Macbeth’s recognition of his constant overcoming, he appears to look down on any forms of such “warmth”, while his exclusion of Lady Macbeth from his circle of trust is dictated by his deep need to prove himself. Finally, what also emerges as crucial is Macbeth’s own anguish at a prospect of not being able live up to his own vision of himself. Macbeth wonders whether he really is a pedigree hound or a mere mongrel.

As I would like to argue, this conflict between the overhuman vision Macbeth holds of himself and his doubt about his suitability for it lie at the very basis of his final fall. Macbeth conceived his fantasy of self-birth.<sup>24</sup> Yet, his project of actively living up to it, in a perpetual vicious circle of eternal return, turns out to be greater than himself. Fatally for Macbeth he falls back into the dependency he tried to over-come in the first place. He clings to his fantasy, simultaneously abstaining from his further self-overcoming. The first signal for his great crisis of faith in himself comes with his panic attack during the banquet. With the appearance of Banquo’s ghost he exclaims:

[b]lood hath been shed ere now, i’ th’ olden time,  
 Ere humane statute purged the gentle weal;  
 Ay, and since too, murders have been performed  
 Too terrible for the ear. The time has been  
 That, when the brains were out, the man would die,  
 And there an end. But now they rise again” (*Macbeth*, 3.4.91-96).

In his words Macbeth’s previous atheistic resolve disintegrates and he yields to the metaphysical forces he so far saw as no impediment in his bloody business. Now, as it seems, Macbeth starts believing that it is not enough to behead a man to get rid of himself, as dead bodies come back to plague him. In a highly anti-metaphysical Nietzschean discussion of overhuman potential, the presence of otherworldly creatures like ghosts or the witches, as well as their power and influence over the events in the play, might seem a little problematic. However, to my mind, it seems off-topic to ponder upon their nature. It is of little consequence whether one sees them as expressions of the early modern belief in otherworldly apparitions or simply Macbeth’s psychological projections as some modern critics have suggested. What is more crucial is the fact that Macbeth’s

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<sup>24</sup> Both on the level of terminology as well as content I am very much indebted to Janet Adelman’s article entitled “Born of woman’: Fantasies of maternal power in *Macbeth*”, in: Alan Sinfield (ed.) *New Casebooks – Macbeth*. Houndmills: Macmillan, 53-68. Adelman suggests that *Macbeth* is structurally based on the fantasy of self-birth, which is equal to the radical exclusion of the female from the play. I personally believe that Adelman’s vision of the play parallels the Nietzschean idea of self-birth, though Nietzsche himself often strongly capitalizes on the maternal influence. I will come back to the issue of self-birth when I discuss Lady Macbeth as well as Lear’s daughters in Chapter 5.

growing dependence on them manifests his wavering belief in his power to control his process of self-overcoming. Whether the returning dead bodies are really ghosts or metaphorical figures of speech signifying political consequences of Macbeth's actions seems unimportant. The fact is that with Macbeth's crisis after Banquo's murder, he decides to go back to the witches to demand the disclosure of his fate. Thus, Macbeth who so far relied on his own initiative pushes his desperately-won independence back into the hands of forces that lie outside himself. His command to butcher Macduff's entire household seems to be his last independent action, though it turns out to be futile and politically unreasonable. From this moment onwards he starts relying on the prophecy, waiting passively for it to come true, whereas previously he actively tried to transform its decrees. His withdrawal into passivity makes him surrender to the bondage of the metaphysics he had first rejected. His situation emerges particularly precarious as the play, toying with the notion of eternal return, offers a powerful alternative to Macbeth's overhuman potential in the figure of Malcolm. Riebling (1991: 279) believes Malcolm to be a perfectly Machiavellian character. She claims that:

[a]t the beginning of the play, Duncan 'rules' by the rules; later his son will 'rule' by breaking them. These opposing images of the good king frame the portrait of Macbeth and his criminal regime, and it is Malcolm's politic practice that emerges as the normative standard against which both Duncan and Macbeth are measures. (Riebling 1991: 274-275)

In his conversation with Macduff, Malcolm indeed presents political dexterity and Machiavellian slyness. He expresses a typically Machiavellian notion of the two-faced nature of political activity when he says that: "Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell./ Though all things foul would wear the brows of/ grace,/ Yet grace must still look so" (*Macbeth*, 4.3.27-30). Though treading cautiously in order to check Macduff's intentions, he expresses a surprising thought by admitting to his profound hunger for power: "It is myself I mean, in whom I know/ All the particulars of vice so grafted/ That, when they shall be opened, black Macbeth/ Will seem as pure as snow, and the poor state/ Esteem him as a lamb, being compared/ With my confineless harms" (*Macbeth*, 4.3.61-66). What Malcolm seems to be saying is that, in comparison to the blackness of his own soul, Macbeth will seem a petty offender. What is more, he confesses his limitless lust: "[b]ut there's no bottom, none./ In my voluptuousness" (*Macbeth*, 4.3.73-74). I would argue that Malcolm's admittance serves to illustrate that the will to power is not an exclusive instinct, but rather a universal mechanism. It seems that all people share degrees of the will to power, though their overhuman potential is a question of their readiness to utilize their instincts in the pursuit of their growth in power. Malcolm, as mentioned, is equipped with an immense potential that emerges as particularly menacing in the light of

Macbeth's state of resignation. When Macbeth says: "[b]ring me no more reports. Let them fly all", he seems to be giving himself up to fate (*Macbeth*, 5.3.1). He later admits that he no longer feels fear. On the surface, one could read this as a sign of his courage, but Macbeth discovers that he actually feels nothing and he longs for the past when the intensity of his feeling was such that he felt it pounding in his breast. Nietzsche frequently underscores in his writings that it is better for a man to feel supposedly evil affects rather than feel nothing, as that is equal to emasculation (Kaufmann 1974: 224). For Macbeth, the lack of such a basic instinct as fear means the death of all his intense passions. Macbeth's emotional desert may be starkly contrasted with Malcolm's attitude, seething in lust and hunger. On a more global level, one could risk a statement that the tragedy illustrates the eternal return in operation. The circulation of energy and power drives the play as this power moves from the individual to the individual, depending on their skill and resolve. Life energy bursts out now in Malcolm, but one could conjecture that this will change with time and also bring desolation, marking the eternal return of all things.

As mentioned, the perspective of the eternal return is understandably threatening and nauseating for anyone who realizes it. However, despite the dread stirred in anyone who faces the notion, Nietzsche proscribes a renewed fight with circumstances in the process of self-overcoming. In *Macbeth* the resolve weavers and disintegrates. His resignation seems to be culminated in his famous speech delivered in the light of the news on Lady Macbeth's death. Macbeth says:

[s]he should have died hereafter.  
 There would have been a time for such a word.  
 Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow  
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
 To the last syllable of recorded time,  
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
 And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
 Signifying nothing. (*Macbeth*, 5.5.20-31)

Here is Macbeth's most nihilistic face. There seems no life energy, no will to power or any will at all left in this man, only bottomless existential despair. Unlike Brutus or Edmund, in the face of his death Macbeth seems to be burning in anguish rather than manifesting a Nietzschean love of life energy. Indeed, this final soliloquy might persuade one to believe so – were these the final words uttered by Macbeth. However, eventually Macbeth refuses to succumb to despair and, in his

final moments, tries to take his fate yet again into his own hands. I would argue that his statement of *amor fati* is even stronger than Brutus's. After all, Macbeth announces: “[w]hy should I play the Roman fool and die/ On mine own sword? Whiles I see lives, the gashes/ Do better upon them” (*Macbeth*, 5.8.1-3). Macbeth is saying that as long as the last breath lingers in his breast, he is ready to oppose the fate to which he only seems to have succumbed. The last of what one sees of Macbeth are the glimpses of his old energy and will to power, while his very last words are: “I will not yield” (*Macbeth*, 5.8.32). So maybe life in itself is indeed “a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing”, but that still is no reason to discard it (*Macbeth*, 5.5.29-31). Life, in Nietzschean terms, is a sum of what one makes of it, while the tragedy of Macbeth is a story of a man who tries to create himself. Life energy roars in his veins and to life energy Macbeth is ultimately committed.

At the conclusion of the analysis of Macbeth's overhuman potential, it seems interesting to come back to Nietzsche's own assertion about the character of the Scottish King. Nietzsche believed that Macbeth, like anyone “possessed by ambition”, revelled in his passion (Nietzsche 2006a: 141). As I have been trying to demonstrate, Macbeth's passions are really fuelled by his sceptical and highly reflective nature. Next to Hamlet, he seems to be the most philosophical of Shakespearean tragic heroes. To such figures Nietzsche dedicates the preface to *The gay science* and writes:

[w]e philosophers are not free to separate soul from body as the common people do; we are even less free to separate soul from spirit. We are no thinking frogs, no objectifying and registering devices with frozen innards – we must constantly give birth to our thoughts out of our pain and maternally endow them with all that we have of blood, heart, fire, pleasure, passion, agony, conscience, fate, and disaster. Life – to us, that means constantly transforming all that we are into light and flame, and also all that wounds us; we simply can do no other. [...] Only great pain is the liberator of the spirit [...] Only great pain, that long, slow pain that takes its time and in which we are burned, as it were, over green wood, forces us philosophers to descend into our ultimate depths and put aside all trust, everything good-natured, veiling, mild, average – things in which formerly we may have found our humanity. I doubt that such pain makes us ‘better’ – but I know that it makes us deeper.[...] one emerges from such dangerous exercises in self-mastery as a different person, with a few more question marks, above all with the will henceforth to question further, more deeply, severely, harshly, evilly, and quietly than one had previously questioned. The trust in life is gone: life itself has become a problem. Yet one should not jump to the conclusion that this necessarily makes one sullen. Even love of life is still possible – only one loves differently. (Nietzsche 2007b: 6-7)

This lengthy exposition seems to be a perfect summary for a Nietzschean analysis of *Macbeth*. The Scottish King, as presented, conceives his self-birth and

welcomes the challenge accompanying its fulfillment. On the way, in the course of his constant questioning, he realizes the process requires meeting challenge perpetually. The thought nauseates and threatens to engulf him. Yet even with his trust in life diminished, he eventually emerges as a life-affirmer. Morally, all Macbeth's decisions are dubious or for some even worth condemning so it is hard to believe that Macbeth grows "better" in the course of the play, but it is unquestionable that he eventually is more profound. A similar mechanism takes place in the case of Edmund from *King Lear*, the last character under scrutiny.

### 4.3. Edmund (*King Lear*)

#### 4.3.1. Critical responses to Edmund and interpretative paths

On the one hand, Edmund, the bastard son of Gloucester – textually a relatively minor character in the tragedy of *King Lear* – perfectly fits the tradition of the Renaissance over-reachers. He is gifted with the energetic rhetorical flamboyance characteristic of such over-reachers like Tamburlaine. His self-confident commitment to the powers of nature, his taste for subversion and unlimited vision expanding along with emergent opportunities make him an appropriate candidate for a Nietzschean overman. As opposed to his grim and far gloomier brother Edgar, he frequently acts as a voice of unrestrained life-energy. Just as Edgar might possibly be read as an existentialist – commenting on the contingency of human existence in *King Lear*, Edmund seems to be more of a life philosopher, like Brutus and Macbeth, also embracing the Nietzschean *amor fati*. On the other hand, Edmund's callous indifference to the suffering of his fellow creatures and his gradual submerging into isolation make him a life force more to be dreaded than admired. Edmund's problematic overhuman potential stems from his, traditionally highlighted by critics, supposed villainy as well as his minor position in Shakespeare's text. When faced with the "noble Brutus", whose moral integrity and republican cause has been frequently extolled by critics, Edmund may indeed seem a downright petty villain. Also, his presence in the text where the multiplicity of other themes and imposing figures steals the attention of the reader or spectator cannot be compared to that of e.g. Macbeth, who is the protagonist and the tragic hero. Edmund's textual contribution to the tragedy of *King Lear* may seem insignificant when one compares him to the Marlovian mighty figures of Tamburlaine or Barabas who dominate the plays both text-wise and plot-and action-wise. Yet it is undeniable that he is the driving force in the sub-plot and he emerges as the prime force in the self-destructive love triangle with the elder sisters – Goneril and Regan. If one were to moralize the message of the play taking into account the orthodox Elizabethan views on ambition, one would be bound to observe that Edmund's exces-

sive ambition is ultimately punished just as Goneril's and Regan's lust is. Critics have long acknowledged Edmund's significant role in the play against his relative insignificance in the text. However, he has been traditionally labelled as a villainous character, even if somewhat interesting due to his exuberant individualism. It is his supposed "delay" in exposing the information concerning Cordelia's and Lear's whereabouts in the last scene of the play (which eventually brings about the deaths of the key characters) that seems to have fuelled the critics' imagination most frequently, especially in the context of Edmund's villainy. It appears that in criticism Edmund combines the two important traditions that read him as a signpost of either medieval Vice, pointing to the inherently Christian nature of the play, or newly emerged Renaissance individualism, acknowledging Edmund's free-spiritedness.<sup>25</sup> It seems worth recalling some of these interpretative directions before plunging into the Nietzschean reading of Edmund, the bastard.

When flattened to a mere elaboration on the medieval allegorical character of Vice from morality plays, Edmund may be very well called "a shallow opportunist" (McNeir 1968: 215). Though Waldo McNeir (1968: 214) never mentions the character of Vice, he insists on reading Edmund through the Christian pattern of redemption when he speaks of Edmund's "sequential workings of repentance, slow and laborious, in a mind inadequate to the effort demanded of it." MacNeir seems to relegate Edmund to the canon of hellish and inherently evil characters for whom there is no hope, and who ultimately prove themselves worthless. As he claims, rather unjustly and with no recourse to textual evidence, Edmund "lacks Aaron's bravura, Tybalt's fire, Cluadius's efficiency, Iago's ingenuity, Octavius Caesar's cold calculation, and Aufidius's admiration of what he hates" (McNeir 1968: 215). I would argue for the opposite, however, as Edmund possesses all these qualities and even more, which is the topic of the present analysis. In Edmund's hesitance to reveal his orders concerning Lear's and Cordelia's fate, McNeir sees the slowness of mind characteristic of the inherently evil, and obstinate to the workings of Godly grace. As McNeir (1968: 208) writes: "Edmund's mind labors and stirs against the inertia of its own immorality. It has stirred three times, moved by feelings associated

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<sup>25</sup> For an interesting reading of Edmund as Vice see: Findlay, Alison. *Illegitimate power: bastards in Renaissance drama*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. Findlay is interested in Edmund's bastardy as a prime motivation for his behaviour, but she senses the complexity of his character when she poses a crucial question: "Is Edmund inherently wicked because of his base birth or is he only playing the part of Vice? The text remains tantalisingly ambiguous" (Findlay 1994: 72). Interestingly, Findlay interprets the inherent "wickedness" of other Renaissance bastards in the context of the Vice tradition on stage. "The majority of adult bastards are villains. Sometimes they are part of a demonic environment, related to witches or devils or to the Vice of the morality tradition" (Findlay 1994: 39-40).

with true repentance – confession, contrition, and compassion; but each time the effort has been followed by a pause.” The author tries to prove that Edmund fails due to “moral weakness” (McNeir 1986: 215-216). Yet to my mind, such a hasty condemnation seems to be an all-too human judgement. It is unquestionable that the character of Edmund has long baffled and puzzled the critics. A lengthy analysis which culminates in the pronouncement of the inherent evil encapsulated in Edmund seems to be not only overly simplistic, but also inexhaustible. I would argue that it leaves us with more loose ends than tangible answers, including the very fundamental ones concerning human nature. If Edmund is inherently evil, why is it so and why is he so resistant to grace? If he is irrevocably depraved, does it mean that Cordelia is inherently good, pure and innocent? What is the source of evil and what of goodness then? Finally, we are tempted to ask whether the boundaries between good and evil can be so clearly drawn, especially in the context of the notion of a very doubtful poetic justice in *King Lear*? Fundamentally these questions are theological dilemmas encapsulated in the play. Forcing both Edmund and the whole play into a narrowly defined Christian pattern of redemption cancels the validity of the discussion. McNeir’s (1968: 191) article also seems to capitalize on a very orthodox association of atheism and free thinking with moral degeneration. “Edmund’s ethic of the survival of the fittest” is supposed to be a sign of moral depravity. Such a view may be in accordance with the Elizabethan popular perception of atheism, but it does not seem to be a serious and objective premise for the entire analysis, especially taking into account the reality of Elizabethan and Jacobean political life.<sup>26</sup> Neither is the claim of Edmund’s opportunism convincing as it is evident in the text that Edmund creates opportunities for himself and is entirely a self-made man. It is interesting that McNeir (1968: 189) calls Edmund “a prime mover” in the play at the same time accusing him of swimming with the flow. For these reasons, I believe that the pronouncement of Edmund as a chief sinner, along with the evil sisters, kills the psychological and interpretative potential of the whole play. After all, the tragedy of *King Lear* is a monument to the complexity of human nature, where Lear is initially an utterly contemptible figure while Gloucester a gullible and ignorant opportunist. They both undergo a radical transformation from blindness to insight and it is undoubtable that Edmund has indeed a crucial role in this change, even if he is one of the prime sources of the “purifying” suffering.

Naturally, a Christian reading of the character of Edmund goes beyond enclosing him within the pattern of the allegory of Vice. Some critics acknowl-

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<sup>26</sup> The character of Edmund may indeed be read as a portrayal of a contemporary Elizabethan ‘atheist’ in the vein of the Marlovian Machiavel from *The Jew of Malta*, but McNeir does not acknowledge such an interpretative direction. He rather takes Edmund’s “moral depravity” for granted.

edge Edmund's villainy, yet they are more generous in granting him redemption. In his close reading of the last scene, Richard Matthews (1975: 25) insists that "Edmund's delayed conversion" received too little "critical attention" as it is one of many mysterious or unexplained events in a highly "puzzling play". In his vision, the last scene also presents the pattern of Christian redemption, but here it is brought to a success as: "At last, the bastard acts to save the lives of others. In his instructions, Edmund attempts to work the same miraculous change on nature and inanimate objects that love worked on him; he tries to convert the instruments of evil into the instruments of good" (Matthews 1975: 27). Matthews (1975: 29) believes that Edmund reaches "Atonement and Redemption by a Mediator", which means that his soul is saved through the sacrifice of Cordelia and Lear. I personally feel that just as Edmund's presumed change of heart dictated by the saving grace of love is an example of interpretative sentimentality, it also does not seem plausible to believe that the desire both sisters shared for Edmund had much to do with Christian love as much as it does not seem likely that Edmund loved them. To my mind, it is sheer naiveté to attribute such sentimentality to Edmund, who is otherwise so calculating and coldly reasonable. In the context of Cordelia's brutal death Matthews (1975: 27) posits a crucial question: "May the good die foully?", which he reverses in the context of Edmund's final scene: "May the foul die well?". If one were to look at the way Edmund dies through the lenses of the Christian pattern of redemption, it almost turns into a portrayal of medieval *ars moriandi*. However, it is crucial to bear in mind that it is a thoroughly un-Christian man that is dying. As I will be arguing, Edmund is far closer to a downright encapsulation of a Nietzschean Antichrist, dying in the spirit of Nietzsche's *amor fati*, rather than a converted Christian. Following on the idea of the love that supposedly permeates the texture of *King Lear* I would like to refer to one more article about Edmund where the idea is carried even further, as Edmund's villainy is explained through "love's failure" (Summers 1977: 225). Claude J. Summers (1977: 225-228) acknowledges Shakespeare's indebtedness to the traditions of "the familiar stage-Machiavel and the Vice figure from medieval drama", but she also capitalizes on Edmund's psychological make-up in which lack of love is of a profound impact. Next to the appreciation of "his intelligence, his daring and his individuality" Summers (1977: 225) points to "a significant relationship between villainy and victimization". She is also probably the first critic to point out Edmund's illegitimacy as a highly significant aspect in the formation of his character and motivation. Though I see Summers' insistence on the lack of love as slightly sentimental, I follow in her footsteps concerning bastardy as the key to learning more about Edmund's over-reaching tendencies. Hopefully, it is also clear by now that I find the traditional ways of reading Edmund insufficient. Neither the condemnation of Edmund as a blatant villain, nor an attempt at his conversion and salvation, seem to be exhaustive as they do not account for the appeal Edmund often holds

for the critics and the audiences. As G. Wilson Knight (1964: 125) writes in his classic article on *King Lear* entitled “*King Lear* and the comedy of grotesque” Edmund is the “wittiest and most attractive of villains”. There is much to Knight’s observation, as Shakespeare had an incredible ability to make his villains morally dubious but also irresistibly appealing rather than “didactically” off-putting. This turns out to be true e.g. for Iago, as well as Edmund. This appeal, as I would argue, is hardly due to Edmund’s crypto-Christian stance but rather his energetic revelling in his immorality, his wit and calculating reason. Though the depth of Shakespeare’s tragedy admits multiple interpretative directions, it is painstakingly difficult to see *King Lear* through the lens of Christian hope and mercy. I strongly believe that the aforementioned Christian readings of Edmund are not only counter-intuitive, but really missing the point. The Christian perspective on *King Lear* seems to be a desperate attempt at an alleviation of the terrible message of the play culminating in despair and anguish. Kaufmann, who would like to see Shakespeare as a precursor of existentialism, writes of Shakespeare that:

suffering and despair were to his mind not revelations of the worthlessness of this world but experiences that, if intense enough, were preferable to a more mediocre state. ‘Ripeness is all’, not faith, hope, even charity, but that maturity of which love, disillusionment, and knowledge born of suffering are a few important facets. (Kaufmann 1980: 4-5)

It is in Edmund that these intense emotions, that Kaufmann points to, find their vent. In the midst of raging suffering, one finds a character who lives by life-affirmative impulses – beyond mere mediocrity. In his own twisted way Edmund brings in this life affirmative power to the play – besides him there is no one and nothing – only gloomy existentialist despair.

#### 4.3.2. “Thou, Nature, art my goddess. To thy law / My services are bound” – Edmund (*Lear*, 1.2.1-2)

In the light of the existentialist contingency in *King Lear* Edmund just like Tamburlaine, Barabas or Macbeth, calls for a different moral outlook. As he is also a subversive force bringing down the stale existing order, it seems evident that he lives by a different morality – like a Nietzschean overman. Thus, in order to bring new insight to the reading of Edmund, one requires a reevaluation of the traditionally-conceived valuations, at the same time plunging Edmund into the discussion of Renaissance subjectivity. As Robert J. Bauer (1968: 359) writes: “Edmund in his speeches and behavior exemplifies Renaissance individualism par excellence and that nature to him means a life force that thrives so long as he strives.” Bauer is definitely right when he highlights Edmund’s

individualism, as he is indeed exceptionally strong-willed. The distance he keeps from the rest of the characters as well as the subversive nature of his enterprise encapsulate Edmund's singularity. The sense of his interiority and intense self-examination is evident in his famous speeches. One can see this in the concentration of the pronoun "I" which, as it seems, Edmund uses quite frequently when discussing his situation but also for commenting on the external events. He memorably exclaims: "I grow, I prosper" (*Lear*, 1.2.21). Edmund makes himself a point of reference on top of all the others e.g. when he comments on Gloucester's gloomy observations on "these late eclipses in the sun and moon" (*Lear*, 1.2.103). Gloucester remains a detached observer of the gloomy reality when he observes that: "Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father" (*Lear*, 1.2.106-109). It is of course brutal irony on the part of Shakespeare that Gloucester is blind to the dawning problems in his own household; however, the contrast between his passive observance and Edmund's active self-referencing is noticeably striking. When alone, Edmund chaffs at Gloucester's anxieties while focusing his entire energy on himself. He claims: "Fut! I should have been that I am had/ the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing" (*Lear*, 1.2.131-133). For Edmund the macrocosm, that Gloucester marvels at and fears, shrinks and folds into the microcosm of his own individuality. The nihilistic crisis Gloucester repines at is for Edmund "the excellent foppery of the world" and "an admirable evasion of the whoremaster man" who can "lay his goatish disposition on the charge of a star" (*Lear*, 1.2.118, 126-128). If it is not the star that can be blamed for his disposition, it is his own choice that makes him what he is. Edmund's rejection of the "spherical predominance" is at the same time an act of self-definition or self-creation in the vein of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*. Edmund's emphasis on the self-creating power of choice and decision when he says: "I should have been that I am" is reminiscent of Nietzsche's question in the sub-title to *Ecce Homo*: "Wie man wird, was man ist". Nietzsche's (2007b: 152) appeal to "become what you are" ("Du sollst der werden, der du bist"), taken from the poet Pindar, first appears in *The gay science* and is of great bearing on the Nietzschean philosophy of subjectivity.<sup>27</sup> Alexander Nehamas (1983: 385) claims that it is the "most haunting of Nietzsche's haunting aphorisms". Babette E. Babich (2003: 29) calls it "dissonant and yet intrinsically inspiring". Indeed, it is both haunting and inspiring as it encapsulates the Nietzschean insistence on the signifi-

<sup>27</sup> The whole aphorism is a two-liner: "What does your conscience say? – 'You should become what you are'" (Nietzsche 2007b: 152). As the translator of *The Gay Science* informs, Nietzsche took the aphorism from Pindar's *Second Pythian Victory-Ode*. In Pindar's poem the line has rather a limited, strongly contextual meaning, whereas for Nietzsche "the saying had deeper implications of self-discovery and self-realization" (taken from the translator's note Josephine Nauckhoff p. 152).

cance of the individual as well as his/her active process of forming and shaping. Edmund undoubtedly expresses a similar sentiment as he is dissonant in his subversive and explosive ambitions but intrinsically inspiring in his resolve. However, one should notice that Edmund's ambition strikes one as both modern and early-modern. Robert J. Bauer (1968: 359-360) sees his "rampant individualism" as a product of Ockham's nominalism as much as Montaigne's scepticism. Interestingly, he combines these philosophical influences with the Nietzschean will to power when he professes that he does not

use the term 'individualism' to refer to the Christian man whose unique spiritual soul is highly regarded in the divine scheme, but rather to that ego fascinated by his own power, that singular being who, in the light of nominalism, scepticism, and moral empiricism, stands untrammelled by real relations to others; that solitary figure so keenly aware of his sovereignty and self-sufficiency that he must assert the superior value of himself in the face of all circumstances, laws, opponents. This individual retains his integrity so long as he contends against the external; he thrives by a kind of Bergsonian *élan vital* or even a Nietzschean *Wille zur Macht*. (Bauer 1968: 359)

As can be seen, Bauer encloses Edmund's identity within the early modern conceptions of identity, but at the same time he sees the seeds of the modern subjectival perception. It also becomes clear that some critics instinctively feel the overhuman potential in Edmund though, to my mind, the direction "beyond good and evil" is still left unexplored.

As presented, the interpretative paths concerning Edmund revolve around his "nature" whether seen as plainly villainous and irredeemable or redeemed in the act of atonement. It seems entirely comprehensible to follow this line of thinking as Edmund himself, in his self-asserting manifesto in Act 1, Scene 2, professes his commitment to the goddess of Nature (*Lear*, 1.2.1-22). Also, it seems clear that the question of nature is very much problematized in the tragedy. Shakespeare problematizes the supposed naturalness of family relations at the backdrop of social and political conflicts. Here I believe lies the core of the issue as the question of nature is inextricably steeped in social constraints so ingrained in the minds of the characters that they go almost unnoticed, and, as seen, often also unexplored by critics. For these reasons it is necessary to read Edmund's *nature* in the context of his social circumstances, namely, his illegitimacy. As I believe, Edmund's bastardy, seen also in a wider light of Elizabethan and Jacobean perspectives on primogeniture, undoubtedly influences and shapes his ambitions and motivations of the subversive individualist. Within this socially construed nature, bastardy can be read in a wider context of the stifling workings of the patriarchal system. As I will be arguing, *King Lear*, along with other early-modern texts, obsessively demonizes bastardy as a social threat. Moreover, it problematizes an interdependent trinity that always echoes female sexuality: the threat of bastardy, the threat of adultery

and, finally, the threat of female sexuality.<sup>28</sup> The tragedy of *King Lear* is, to my mind, a seat of stifling repression that swells until it bursts in an uncontrollable vicious circle of fury. As cultural materialists repeatedly underscore, the plays of Shakespeare undermine the ideological circumstances of their production, at the same time being steeped in them. The circumvention of these ideological implications takes place through agents who are driven by an entirely different moral outlook. In the case of Edmund, the moral underpinnings of his actions are highly problematic while he is undeniably a fruit of the repressive and limiting patriarchal environment. Thus, in this sexually paranoiac condition, an overhuman Edmund is pushed to action.

In order to fully grasp how the mechanism of repression influences the emergence of Edmund as a potential overman, it is necessary to trace his presence in the text of *King Lear* from the very beginning, namely, from the very opening of the play when he is an almost silent witness to the conversation of Gloucester and Kent before the arrival of Lear on stage. The majority of critics focus on Edmund's own rich and philosophically intense soliloquies, which provide us with most data on his motivation. Yet it is crucial to note that the first appearance of silent Edmund on stage is fraught with consequences, as it sets the tone for the future developments and draws the background concerning his status and position at the court. The very first mention of Edmund is, highly symbolically, Kent's question: "Is not this your son, my lord?" (*Lear*, 1.1.7). Ironically, this opening question must echo in the minds of the readers or spectators when Edmund's crimes against Gloucester resound in their utmost cruelty. However, at the same time, this opening question marks Edmund's inferior and confused status of Gloucester's bastard son, as the embarrassed Gloucester replies: "[h]is breeding, sir hath been my charge. I have so often blushed to acknowledge him that now I am brazed to't" (*Lear*, 1.1.7-9). By means of this and the following explication of the circumstances surrounding Edmund's conception, birth and growing up, Gloucester introduces the rhetoric of shame and repression, which further envelops the entire play. One learns that "this young fellows's mother could; whereupon she grew round-womb'd, and had, indeed, sir, a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her bed. Do you smell a fault?" (*Lear*, 1.1.12-15). Summers (1977: 226) claims that in publicly embarrassing Edmund in front of Kent, Gloucester magnifies "the feeling of exclusion" that must already be strong due to Edmund's illegitimacy. Though Gloucester claims that he harbours affection to both his sons in equal measure, by referring to his other son as being begotten "by order of law" Gloucester underscores his reverence for the oppressing system that inescapably relegates his bastard son

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<sup>28</sup> Speaking about Edmund, I will focus on the idea of bastardy – while the questions of adultery and female sexuality will be discussed in the next chapter when I fill focus on the women in *King Lear*.

to a lower caste of society (*Lear*, 1.1.18). Edmund emerges as a “knave” and “whoreson”, whose bringing to the world “was good sport” (*Lear*, 1.1.20,22). However good-humoured or affectionate Gloucester’s words might be read, it is unquestionable that the chasm between the two sons as well as between the son and the father is turned into an abyss. As it is later proved, “the abyss stares back” – to use yet again Nietzsche’s metaphor.<sup>29</sup> Gloucester acknowledges the fairness of Edmund’s mother yet instrumentally objectifies her into a plaything. Edmund, in turn, is a living evidence of Gloucester’s transgression and a reminder of a guilty and shameful pleasure of which the fruit – ‘the whoreson’ – “must be acknowledged”, though evidently reluctantly (*Lear*, 1.1.22-23). In the light of the degradation and further absence of the mother figure, there seems little wonder Edmund commits his energy and strength to the Mother Nature. In his insistence to redeem his “impurity” he metaphorically wishes to redeem his absent mother. In Edmund’s appeal to nature there almost seems a Freudian fantasy to top the father in the marriage with this metaphorical mother. Coming back to the shame-ethic that opens *King Lear*, Gloucester, despite his protestations of care and love towards both his sons, implicitly signals his repudiation of the bastard son when he says: “He hath been out nine years, and away he/ shall again” (*Lear*, 1.1.31-32). One can evidently see that the presence of the living proof of his shame is offensive to Gloucester, which is manifested in Gloucester willingness to hastily send Edmund away. Gloucester’s stance on the origin of Edmund as well as his legal status resulting in his illegitimacy illustrates the Elizabethan double standard on the nature of sexuality.

This double standard is built on the oppressive and consequently repressive treatment of human instincts in Christianity, which is unquestionably a basis for the legal standards that provide dictum on the position of illegitimate children in society. In the 1562-text *An homily on the state of matrimony* one reads that:

[t]he word of Almighty God doth testify and declare whence the original beginning of matrimony cometh and why it is ordained. It is instituted of God to the intent that man and woman should live lawfully in a perpetual friendly fellowship, to bring forth fruit, and to avoid fornication. By which means a good conscience might be preserved on both parties, in bridling the corrupt inclinations of the flesh within the limits of honesty. For God hath straitly forbidden all whoredom and uncleanness and hath from time to time taken grievous punishments of this inordinate lust, as all stories and ages hath declared. (*An homily of the state of matrimony* 2011: 301)

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<sup>29</sup> From the famous aphorism in *Beyond good and evil* (nr 146) “Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself. And when you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss stares back into you” (Nietzsche 2002: 69). Following up on Nietzsche’s metaphor one can also see that indeed Edmund turns into a monster of tyranny such as he initially fights.

So, from the homily one learns that adultery is by nature impure and punishable by God. By virtue of analogy, the fruit of fornication must obviously be of the same defiled nature. As Michael Neill (1993: 278-279) explains: “[i]n Latin *adultero* meant not only ‘to commit adultery’ but also ‘to pollute or defile’, a pollution which once again seems to have been understood as the consequence of inadmissible mixture, since *adulterium* (adultery) also referred, for example, to the grafting together of different varieties of plant.” Illegitimate children are, as a result, not only impure but also they constitute dangerous and disruptive mixtures against the God-ordained order of things. Neill (1993: 278) writes that: “Bastards are un-whole because they are the offspring not of ‘one flesh’ but of two bodies: there is an inherent and sinister doubleness about their begetting (one may think of Iago’s ‘beast with two backs’) which renders them neither one thing nor the other, at once indeterminate and duplicitous.” This indeterminate status of the “whoreson” – Edmund – makes Gloucester inclined to send him away according to a Christian logic that “if a part of your body ‘offend thee’ you should ‘cut it off’ (Mark 9: 43 as quoted in: Kaufmann 1974: 223). This logic of “abnegation, repudiation and expatriation of the passions” constitutes the bulk of Nietzsche’s criticism of Christianity (Kaufmann 1974: 223). As I see it, Gloucester is reminded of his illicit sinful passion for the anonymous fair lady through the image of his son Edmund. His attempts at the repudiation of both the passion and its fruit is concordant with Nietzsche’s criticism of repudiation in Christianity and also illustrates the logic of Elizabethan scorn for excessive sexual passion. With his characteristic vehemence Nietzsche (1967: 207) explains his attack on “religious morality” in *The will to power*:

[a]ffect, great desire, the passion for power, love, revenge, possessions –: moralists want to extinguish and uproot them, to “purify” the soul of them. The logic is: the desires often produce great misfortune, consequently they are evil, reprehensible. A man must free himself from them: otherwise he cannot be a *good* man – This is the same logic as: ‘if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out.’ In the particular case in which that dangerous ‘innocent from the country’, the founder of Christianity, recommended this practice to his disciples, the case of sexual excitation, the consequence is, unfortunately, not only the loss of an organ but the *emasculation* of a man’s character – And the same applies to the moralist’s madness that demands, instead of the restraining of the passions, their extirpation. Its conclusion is always: only the castrated man is a good man.

The circumstances of Edmund’s begetting – namely great desire and passion – are for Gloucester reasons for shame, not only in the light of moral considerations revolving round the supposed essential impurity of such affects but also in the light of obedience to the legal authority, which is challenged by the disruptive energy of the passions. The idea of the blood purity is a significant element in the smooth functioning of the patriarchal state based on the patrilineal rules

of inheritance. Yielding to uncontrollable passions outside of marriage is an act of disobedience against the system and, thus, poses an authentic threat to the stability of the state. At a first glance, this may not seem to be so as the system of primogeniture systematically ignores illegitimate children. However, as the example of Edmund demonstrates, by ignoring bastards, the Elizabethan state paradoxically “breeds” unwanted subversion in the very core of its bosom.

Within the patriarchal system a bastard son is termed *fillius nullius*, which denotes his legal invisibility equal almost to that of women, who have neither inheritance rights nor any developed legal identity in the Elizabethan and Jacobean society. As Neill (1993: 273) explains at length:

[i]n its origins ‘bastard’ had been a relatively neutral descriptive term. Apparently deriving from Old French *bast* (‘pack-saddle’), it distinguished the placeless pack-saddle child from the established offspring of the marriage-bed. Social historians are generally agreed that while the medieval period saw a gradual hardening of such distinctions, with the bastard being formally defined as *fillius nullius* by the end of the twelfth century, the definition carried no particular stigma; rather it served, within patriarchal system of primogeniture, simply to mark off the children who were entitled to inherit from those who were not. The *fillius nullis* (as the rules of heraldic cadency imply) was not so much the son of nobody, as the *heir* of nobody. Even in the latter Middle Ages, when church attitudes were becoming more censorious, an allegation of bastardy was primarily a weapon in struggles over inheritance, rather than a slur on character and reputation. Historians generally argue that the condition of illegitimacy began to incur a significant degree of publicly articulated moral opprobrium only towards the end of the sixteenth century, when it attracted the attention of Puritan reformers on the one hand and of Poor Law administrators, keen to protect the parish from the charge of unwanted infants, on the other.

As can be seen, the gradual victimization or criminalization of bastards is inextricably linked with the post-reformation tightening of morals based on abnegation from extramarital sex as impure and sinful. These sentiments seem to be expressed in the status of Edmund as well as the traits of his character. The core of Edmund’s rebellion against “the plague of custom” stems from his feelings of injustice as to the impossibility of inheriting title and land (*Lear*, 1.2.3). Michael Neill points out the bitter irony of Kent’s reply to Gloucester’s embarrassed acknowledgment of the whore’s son (Neill 1993: 283). Kent jokingly says of Edmund: “I cannot wish the fault, the issue of it being so proper” (*Lear*, 1.1.16-17). The piquancy of this remark lies in the very fact of Edmund being “fundamentally improper” as the being proper in the early-modern reality is equal to the possession of land property (Neill 1993: 283). Edmund’s legal status as unfit for inheritance turns him into an “unpossessing bastard” (*Lear*, 2.1.67). It is Margreta de Grazia (1996: 21) who seems to have coined the term “propertied individualism” that defines the Renaissance identity through possession. She

illustrates her proposition by the example of Lear, who is stripped of his identity as a king once he relinquishes the control over his lands to his daughters. Yan Brailowsky (2009: 198) extends Grazia's definition to all the other characters in the play when he makes an observation that: "[i]n *King Lear*, land is the basis for property, and landed property is what defines men: one has a Christian name only when one is not a landowner – all other characters are known by their toponym." This is indeed true in the case of Edmund, who is introduced in Act 1, scene 1 by his first name among such characters as Gloucester, Kent, Burgundy or France. In the context of the early modern "propertied individualism" Edmund is not only a *fillius nullius* but also a *persona non grata* in the system that neither acknowledges nor needs him. However, his undefined position creates an ever-expanding void that calls to be filled with a new conceptualization of identity – based on personal wit and skill. Edmund frequently underscores his ability to circumvent the unfairness of the system e.g. when he claims "[l]et me, if not by birth, have lands by wit,/ All with me's meet that I can fashion fit" (*Lear*, 1.2.181-182). For the modern standards, the first name address is a strong statement of personal or singular identity. Shakespeare's Edmund, to my mind, is thus a precursor of quite a modern conceptualization of identity – of a self-made man. His unregulated legal status of an outcast socially relegates him to the sphere that is beyond good and evil. John Donne in his *Ivvenilia or certain paradoxes and problems* (1633) remarks that the legal ostracism of bastards frees them from the mainstream legal environment and thus contributes to their wickedness or alternatively their greatness. In an answer to his problem question "Why haue Bastards best Fortune?" Donne (2003) writes:

either then it must be that the *Church* hauing remoued them from all place in the *publike seruice* of *God*, they haue better meanes than others to bee *wicked*, and so *fortunate*: Or else because the two *greatest powers* in this *world*, the *Diuell* and *Princes* concurre to their *greatnesse*.

Michael Neill (1993: 284) summarizes this emergence of such a paradox when he writes:

[t]he 'unpossessing bastard' of the drama, displaced from the narrative of history by the circumstances of his begetting, is cast loose to locate and possess himself by whatever invention he can contrive, discovering in his illegitimate condition something of the outlaw's paradoxical freedom. He becomes a perfect figure for that spirit of ambivalent individualism, at once restlessly ambitious and full of the bitterness of displacement.

What Neill calls "the bitterness of displacement" seems to be a crucial ingredient of Edmund's psychological make-up. When he resentfully exclaims: "[w]hy bastard? Wherefore base?/ When my dimensions are well compact and my shape as true/ As honest madam's issue?", his indignation is quite apparent

(*Lear*, 1.2.6-9). Edmund's forced relegation to the lower caste of the Elizabethan property caste-order is a source of bitterness for Edmund. Yet it does not open the gate of *resentment* as Nietzsche conceives it because Edmund is far from being a *Chandala* (untouchable) of the early-modern caste-system. I would risk claiming that being a fruit of a defiled intercourse he is being forced into a position of an untouchable – branded with “baseness”, where the word “base” resounds with immense force in his rebellious, self-defining soliloquy in Act 1, scene 2 (*Lear*, 1.2.10). Yet his soliloquy is more than an expression of indignation at the unfairness of circumstances; it is rather a resolution calling for action and thus a step beyond the limiting environment.

I let myself draw a parallel between Nietzsche's conception of the law of Manu he develops in *The twilight of the idols* and *The Antichrist*, and the Elizabethan “natural” order of things as conceived in the Great Chain of Being, as the English early-modern social system manifests an interesting, albeit paradoxical, class exclusiveness with a morally Christian underpinning.<sup>30</sup> Though the Elizabethan social structure based on the essentialist chain of being is grounded in Christian theology, it retains a strict and immovable caste structure that is reminiscent of the Nietzschean Manu law in its strictness and strong focus on nobility. The patrilineal system, with its oppressive sexuality, is really far from the tenets of equality and divine justice preached in the Gospels. Actually both the ideology of the state and Church preach of the God-given order in which the elements of the macrocosm reflect the microcosm, which is manifested in the early modern source texts e.g. *Homily of obedience* (1547) or *Homily against disobedience and wilful rebellion* (1558).<sup>31</sup> In the latter, one can read a credo of the Renaissance essentialist vision of “perfect felicity”: “[His Majesty] not only ordained that, in families and households, the wife should be obedient unto her husband, the children unto their parents, the servants unto their masters” (*Homily against disobedience* 2011: 59). Nietzsche's explication of Manu law, where the strict division of functions, roles and behaviours is proscribed, is very reminiscent of the Elizabethan order.<sup>32</sup> As Nietzsche (2006c: 185) quotes from Manu: “the chandalas are the fruits

<sup>30</sup> By drawing this parallel I refer strictly to Nietzsche's vision of *The book of Manu* as I do not profess any specialist knowledge on either Hinduism or Buddhism. For this as well as the reason of expediency I am focusing solely on Nietzsche's views and how his perspective influenced his critique of morality.

<sup>31</sup> To read more on the macrocosm and microcosm correspondence, see: Chapter 7 “Correspondences”, in: Tillyard, E.M.W. [1943] 1998. *The Elizabethan world picture*. London: Pimlico, 87-100.

<sup>32</sup> For specific fragments on *The book of Manu* in Nietzsche, see: *The twilight of the idols* “Improving' humanity” Aphorisms nr 4, 3, 5 or *The Antichrist* Aphorism 56 and 57. For Nietzsche (2006c: 184), the New Testament in comparison with the Book of Manu is steeped in “the atmosphere of disease and dungeon”. It is common knowledge that Nietzsche abhorred the idea of equality as being weakening and emasculating for the development of the individual. Christianity, which professes equality, is such an emasculating

of adultery, incest and crime” and such an early modern *chandala* cloak is forced onto Edmund along with other dramatic bastards like e.g. Spurio from *The revenger's tragedy* or Caesar Borgia from *The Devil's charter*. The chandalas, as Nietzsche (2006c: 185) explains, due to their exclusion and victimization, are those who hate the present life the most, and harbour a hatred for life and humanity which eventually turns into religion. At this point in his argument Nietzsche (2006c: 185) turns back to his criticism of Christianity and calls it “the victory of chandala values” and “the eternal vengeance of the Chandala as a religion of love.” The Elizabethan social system seems to be a pinnacle of such Christian hypocrisy as it retains an artificial social caste system at the same time professing equality in the face of God. In such a system the bastard is a disruptive and subversive element driven by his lust for either revenge or power. The former can be found in Spurio, who exultingly announces: “[a]y, there's the vengeance that my birth was wrapp'd in;/ I'll be reveng'd for all. Now hate begin;/ I'll call foul incest but a venial sin” (*The revenger's tragedy*, 1.2.168-170). The latter finds its expression in demonic Caesar Borgia who claims:

[n]ow Caesar Muster vp thy wittes together.  
 Summon thy sences and aduance thy selfe,  
 Ware and Earth haue interpos'd their bodies,  
 Betwixt the worldes bright eye and this blacke murther.  
 Sweete silent night (guarded with secret starres)  
 Keepe silence, and conceale this Tragedie:  
 Saturne is lord ascendant of this hower,  
 Propitious patron of assassinated  
 Of murthers, Paracides, and massacres:  
 Lord of my birth, auspicious to my life,  
 This is my first degree to domination.  
 Who can, or (if they could) who dare suspect,  
 How Caesar Borgia kild his brother Candie?  
 This is infallible, that many crimes  
 Lurke vnderneath the robes of Holinesse:  
 And vnderneath my Purple tunicle (*The Divil's charter* 3.5.1672-1686).

Edmund partly conforms with the portrayals of other Elizabethan and Jacobean bastards. To a degree, he shares Spurio's monstrous lust in his double commit-

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religion. The advantage Indian morality has over Christianity is the existence of the chosen caste of poets and philosophers. Though Nietzsche (2006c: 58) evidently flirts with the idea of the caste system as potentially fuelling the formation of the overman, he acknowledges the brutality of the Manu Law with its deterministic and ultimately contingent nature. Ultimately, both systems are based on a lie as they claim divine provenance, which undermines life itself. And a goal of “every holy lie” is to turn a human legal or moral system into “nature”, or in other words, into a set of universal and unquestionable premises.

ment to both sisters Goneril and Regan. He also seems to resemble Caesar Borgia in his ambition and resolve. Edmund's self-defining soliloquy in Act 1, scene 2, like Caesar's, shares a typical over-reaching language and is a harbinger of self-prophesised dominion. Edmund announces: "Edmund the base/ shall top the legitimate" (*Lear*, 1.2.20-21). In a very similar manner the Borgia-bastard extolls his illegitimacy as a marker of skill and ability. To spite all those who would believe otherwise he claims: "*Caesar o nullo* written on my guydon,/ When with my troopes victoriously I ride on" (*The Devil's charter*, 4.2.1980-1981). However, what seems to distinguish Edmund from Spurio or Caesar Borgia is the fact that he initially does not plan to resort to cruelty or murder. He does capitalize on his wit when he says: "Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit", but he never intentionally hurts Edgar (*Lear*, 1.2.181). Unlike Caesar Borgia – a truly Cain-like figure – who commits an act of fratricide – Edmund rather plays on Edgar's and Gloucester's gullibility to create an opportunity to his advantage.<sup>33</sup> Both Spurio and Caesar make it their aim to either avenge cruelly or gain power bloodily. Cruelty and the propinquity to tyranny is, as if, an inherent part of their bastard characters stemming from the "impurity" and sinfulness of their birth. Their spitefulness is something they are born with – like an original sin. That is why they with "the eternal hatred [...] of this 'humanity'" are the epitomes of *Chandala* (Nietzsche 2006c: 185). For Edmund, cruelty becomes a by-product of his process of growing in strength and greatness. Like in the case of Marlowe's Tamburlaine or Barabas the severing of family relations becomes a necessary element of one's personal growth. Though marked as impure and misbegotten, he decides to transcend the circumstances of his birth. Yet it is important to note that his criticism of the system has also little to do with any universal claims of justice or equality that he could poten-

<sup>33</sup> In a side remark, it is worth saying that the ease with which Edmund is capable of persuading first Edgar of his father's disfavour (or rather fury, which requires his escaping) and then Gloucester of his son's betrayal is a significant hint as to the already shaky and distant relationship the two share. Of course, it is a mere speculation but it seems that in a situation of such a discord both the son and the father would seek some more evidence confirming the situation. To my mind, Gloucester's swift reaction confirms his fear of the potential betrayal on the part of his son. Though he does express doubt about Edgar's 'unnaturalness' he yet falls into anger quite uncontrollably ("Abhorred villain! Unnatural, detested, brutish villain!" etc. 1.2.76). Edgar's fear of his father also suggests that Gloucester might have been a very strict and demanding father, stirring more fear than love. It is also possible to claim the opposite, namely, that Gloucester's family is based on total trust and loyalty which Edmund brutally tramples on. However, as I have already argued, pushing the blame onto Edmund's inherent spite resulting from his bastardy simplifies his very complex psychological make-up. It is also important to remember that one is looking at the early modern family relations among nobles, where the intense and intimate relationships between parents and children could not be taken for granted (for more information, look e.g. at the way Elizabeth I described her family relations Chapter 2 "Family" p. 6-16, quotation in: Starkey, David. 2001. *Elizabeth: apprenticeship*. London: Vintage Books.).

tially claim for others in similar circumstances. As Neill (1993: 274) points out, from the end of the sixteenth century onwards there was a sudden rise of illegitimate births recorded in England, with the peak years between 1600-1620. This rise within the authentic social structure resulted in “the emergence of the adult bastard as a type of subversive irregularity” in drama (Neill 1993: 274). Thus, Edmund is one of “a distinct sub-species amongst the swarm of attractive villains who populate late Elizabethan and Jacobean drama” (Neill 1993: 273). The source texts I mentioned also seem to illustrate the same trend. In Edmund’s manifesto, as mentioned, Edmund focuses on himself and only at one point does he shift from the first person singular to the plural (“Why brand they us/ With base? *Lear*, 1.2.9). This is, to my mind, done for the sake of rhetorical effect as he immediately shifts back to the singular pronoun when he says: “I must have your land” (*Lear*, 1.2.16). For this reason, I believe that Edmund cannot be deemed a social rebel as his manifesto is a statement of his own individuality. Edmund may profess a link with the plight of other bastards, but his aim is to improve his own standing rather than change the victimizing system. There is, then, little socialist impulse in Edmund as he emerges as a self-reliant and highly individualized bastard – a perfect candidate for an overman.

As can be seen, Edmund *does* seem to confirm the popular portrayal of the bastard in the early modern drama, but only to a certain degree. He is bitter and full of indignation, but he turns his bitterness into wit and skill. He wants to gain power and control, but he is not driven by desire for revenge. And finally he does not seem to revel in extravagant cruelty. Despite his seeming proximity to Spurio, he is not “the cheating bastard”, “an epitome of counterfeit”, to use Neill’s (1993: 282) terminology. Neither is he “the monstrous bastard” whose misshapen physique would reflect his twisted mind like Thersites in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* (Neill 1993: 284). If this be true, there arises a perverse question whether Edmund might possibly be a virtuous bastard. Consequently, one has to ask whether a notion of a virtuous bastard could be conceived and accepted by the early moderns. As a matter of fact, Henry Peacham in his famous manual *Compleat Gentleman* (1634) discusses the possibility of bastards’ nobility. In chapter 1 entitled “Of Nobility in Generall” he says:

I proceed further, to remove certaine doubts, which as rubs clog the cleare passage of our discourse; and the first concerning Bastardy, whether Bastards may bee said to bee nobly borne or not [...] Yet it is the custome with vs, and in France, to allow them for Noble, by giving them sometimes their Fathers proper Coate” (Peacham 1906: 9).

Peacham (1906: 9) then follows this up with a long list of famous illegitimate sons that were made legitimate and later proved their worth and virtue. What is interesting in Peacham’s explication is exactly this dynamic relation between nobility as opposed to nobleness, which presumably go hand in hand but can also go awry. He discusses “nobility” both literally as a social status of belonging

to a higher class and more metaphorically as a certain trait of character defined by dignity and refinement. As he writes:

[a] fecond queftion arifeth, whether hee that is Noble defended, may by his vice and bafenefle lofe his Nobility or no. It is answered, that hee that is ignoble and inglorious, may acquire Nobility by Vertue: the other may very well lofe by his Vice. But fuch are the miferable corruptions of our time, that Vices goe for prime Vertues: and to be drunke, fweare, wench follow the fafhion, and to do juft nothing, are the attributes and markes now adayes of a great part of our Gentry. (Peacham 1906: 9-10)

In his remonstrations on the contemporary times where values disintegrate, Peacham reminds Gloucester saying: “[w]e have seen the best of our time./ Machinations, hollowness, treachery and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves” (*Lear*, 1.2.112-114). Gloucester like Peacham points out the disintegration and decay at court and the houses of noblemen where like in Gloucester’s family “there’s son against father” (*Lear*, 1.2.110). Yet Peacham’s observation has a very Edmundian tinge as it allows for the rise of the “ignoble and inglorious” into the positions of nobility. So one may risk saying that Shakespeare’s Edmund whose “dimensions are well compact” and whose mind is “generous” and shape “true” arrives as an over-reacher or a Nietzschean over-man who can transcend the customs of the supposedly “natural” system, which actually breeds only corruption. Interestingly enough, Peacham (1906: 9) links bastardy with superhuman qualities when he lists the exceptional illegitimate sons:

[w]ho are more famous than Remus and Romulus, who laid the firft ftone of Rome? more couragious and truly valiant, than Hercules, Alexander, our King Arthur of Britains, and William the firft?”. Peacham concludes his deliberations on the question of bastardy and nobility by saying: “I willingly produce thefe examples, to confirme our cuftome of ennobling them; and though the Law leaneth not their fide, yet ftand they in the head of the troopes, with the moft deferving, yea, and many times (according to Euripides), proove better than the legitimate. (Peacham 1906: 9)

The underlying, Nietzschean in my opinion, message of Peacham’s discussion is that the overmen are born in the struggle to over-come their circumstances. In order to confirm this Nietzschean mechanism it is enough to compare Peacham with Nietzsche and to quote again Nietzsche’s (2006c: 213-214) famous passage about freedom and tyranny:

[h]ow is freedom measured in individuals and in peoples? It is measured by the resistance that needs to be overcome, by the effort that it costs to stay on top. Look for the highest type of free human beings where the highest resistance is constantly being overcome: five paces away from tyranny, right on the threshold, where servitude is a danger.

To my mind, Edmund perfectly encapsulates this dynamic relationship between tyranny and servitude. In his attempt to subvert “the plague of custom” he rebels against the tyrannous system but, in his relations with e.g. Cornwall or the sisters, he is also capable of manoeuvring between servitude and independence, becoming a Machiavellian epitome of a fox and a lion.<sup>34</sup> However, if he is indeed a Machiavellian figure, then the comparison to e.g. Alexander, the great, supposedly a virtuous bastard according to Peacham, does not seem tenable any longer. One could argue that it is exactly Edmund that is a source of corruption that Peacham as well as Shakespeare’s Gloucester are anxious about. I strongly believe that both interpretations hold ground as Edmund is, from the start, at the very heart of the subversion. His bringing to the world in a supposedly “unnatural” extramarital relationship stigmatizes and marginalizes him and pushes him to over-come this forced victimization. Yet his striving is instinctive rather than premeditated. According to Nietzsche (2006c: 176), the belief in a totally free will is one of “the four great errors” that humanity keeps on deceiving itself with. Without being deterministic, Nietzsche (2006c: 181) deconstructs the idea of free will and deems it a social construct invented in order to punish and discipline. Thus, in the Nietzschean vision a man is an infinite sum of his circumstances and his instincts. Edmund frequently actively takes advantage of the evolving events, which he also confirms in what he says. For instance, when he learns about Regan’s and Cornwall’s visit to Gloucester’s house he says: “[t]he Duke be here tonight? The better – best! / This weaves itself perforce into my business” (*Lear*, 1.5.15-16). The adverb “perforce” is key here as it points to the urgent nature of the circumstances. Gloucester’s exposure of the letter about the upcoming invasion brings about a similar reaction from Edmund as he says: “This seems a fair deserving and must draw me / That which my father loses, no less than all. / The younger rises when the old doth fall” (*Lear*, 3.4.22-24). At the same, Edmund’s manifesto is addressed to the goddess of Nature (“Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law / My services are bound” *Lear*, 1.2.1-2) while on his deathbed he yet again binds his previous deeds with his ‘nature’. He says: “I pant for life. Some good I mean to do, / Despite of mine own nature” (*Lear*, 5.3.241-242). What he also realizes is that any act of kindness on his part is against his “instinctive” nature. Edmund seems to be conscious of his existence

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<sup>34</sup> To quote from Machiavelli’s (2006, loc. 1023-1028) *Prince*: “Therefore it is necessary for a prince to understand how to avail himself of the beast and the man. This has been figuratively taught to princes by ancient writers, who describe how Achilles and many other princes of old were given to the Centaur Chiron to nurse, who brought them up in his discipline; which means solely that, as they had for a teacher one who was half beast and half man, so it is necessary for a prince to know how to make use of both natures, and that one without the other is not durable. A prince, therefore, being compelled knowingly to adopt the beast, ought to choose the fox and the lion; because the lion cannot defend himself against snares and the fox cannot defend himself against wolves.”

as a mixture of circumstance and impulse. When seen through a Nietzschean context, it is very hard to read him within the tradition of virtuous bastardy though he does possess certain desirable qualities. Edmund subverts the tradition at the same time being steeped in its manifestations. Shakespeare's portrayal is possible, as it seems, due to positioning Edmund beyond the early modern conception of virtue.

What is certain about Edmund is the fact that, despite these fixed traits of early modern villainy, he is a far more complex and intriguing character than other dramatic bastards. Critics then often ask about the source of his "attractiveness" and investigate the basis of his superiority over villains of his sort. It seems to be a combination of Edmund's impulsiveness, his urge to action and his proneness to philosophical reflection that make him stand out. Though, as mentioned, he is a rather minor character, he manages to be the source of a bulk of intriguing philosophical comments in the play. Yan Bralinowsky (2009: 201) calls Edmund "the world-weary philosopher, providing the audience with instruction". Edmund's language, so rich in puns and metaphors, is in turn seen as a "bastard language" and, along with Edmund's deepening moral depravity, provides evidence for the general "bastardization of language" in the play (Bralinowsky 2009: 201-204). To my mind, not only is Bralinowsky's comment politically incorrect and insensitive, it is also textually hard to defend as it is rather Gloucester and, above all, Edgar that are the source of the most pessimistic, and thus "weary" philosophy. Of course, one could say that they, being dispossessed and betrayed, have the right reasons to be disillusioned with life. However, it is worth remembering that Gloucester presents such a "weary" and anxious stance at the opening of the action, when he delivers his prophetic words: "[t]hese late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us" (*Lear*, 1.2.110). Gloucester, from the start, represents a very nihilistic attitude towards life, while his speech provides a more general reflection on a severe crisis of his age. This crisis stems from the disintegration of the supposedly natural order society is built on. In contrast to Gloucester's nihilistic reflection, Edmund's attack on "the foppery of the world" is far from being "weary" (*Lear*, 1.2.118). By saying "we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon and the stars" and by mocking "heavenly compulsion" and "spherical predominance" Edmund rejects the metaphysical grounding of human existence and, more generally, metaphysics as a basis and explanation of the universe. In his rational condemnation of Gloucester's foreboding Edmund emerges a very modern figure, though his chaffing at astrology can very well be read within the tradition of Renaissance scepticism of e.g. Pomponazzi or Montaigne. What seems more important is the fact that, fundamentally, Edmund does not question the crisis itself. He rather laughs at naïve attempts at rationalizing or, to be more precise, spiritualizing what to him is the dynamics of coincidence on the one hand, and human choice on the other. In this Edmund is truly Nietzschean. In the *Untimely Meditations II*, long before

the announcement of the death of God, Nietzsche senses the great crisis of his own age. Yet for him the answer to the crisis of morality is not the so called “world-process” which so much interests his contemporaries, but the focus on the individual. He writes:

[t]he time will come when one will prudently refrain from all constructions of the world-process or even of the history of man; a time when one will regard not the masses but individuals, who form a kind of bridge across the turbulent stream of becoming. These individuals do not carry forward any kind of process but live contemporaneously with one another; thanks to history, which permits such a collaboration, they live as that republic of genius of which Schopenhauer once spoke; one giant calls to another across the desert intervals of time and, undisturbed by the excited chattering dwarfs who creep about beneath them, the exalted spirit-dialogue goes on. It is the task of history to be the mediator between them and thus again and again to inspire and lend the strength for the production of the great man. No, the goal of humanity cannot lie in its end but only in its highest exemplars (Nietzsche 2007a: 111).

Nietzsche’s comment seems to strike at the very heart of Edmund’s character and his motivation. Edmund is a living enactment of going beyond a Nietzschean proscribed movement, beyond the nihilism of his own age. Moreover, he offers himself as an answer to this crisis his age is going through. With his energy and motivation he seems to provide a counterbalance to the gloomy philosophy of Gloucester (e.g. “As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,/ They kill us for their sport” *Lear*, 4.1.38-39) and Edgar’s patient Job-like acceptance of suffering (“And worse I may be yet; the worst is not/ So long as we can say “This is the worst”” *Lear*, 4.1.29-30). In his rejection of metaphysics and movement beyond nihilism Edmund becomes a value maker, but he also emerges as the sole measure of his values. The key to Edmundian philosophy, quite consciously driven by the Nietzschean will to power, really lies in Edmund’s first soliloquy, when he invokes the goddess of nature.

Critics and scholars have long been perplexed by the paradoxical and double status of nature as encapsulated in the character of Edmund as well as the whole tragedy of *King Lear*. Robert J. Bauer (1968: 360) points to a crucial tension that is inherent in the construction of the play, namely, the Pre-Socratic division into “*nomos* – nature as law – and *physis* – nature as vital force”. Interestingly enough, this very same tension lies at the core of Nietzschean philosophy – also indebted to Pre-Socratics. As it may seem, the nature Edmund is bound to is of course *physis*, which stands for the uncontrollable vital force – so crucial for Nietzsche’s conception of the overman. Edmund angrily asks: “Why brand they us/ With “base,” with “baseness,” “bastardy,” “base,” “base,”/ Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take/ More composition and fierce quality/ Than doth within a dull, stale, tired bed/ Go to th’ creating a whole tribe of fops/ Got

‘tween asleep and wake?’ (*Lear*, 1.2.9-16). Edmund sees himself as a natural child because he is a fruit of passion, as opposed to the legalized Edgar who was begotten in the marital intercourse that, in the context of Elizabethan and Jacobean nobility, was rarely based on affection but was rather a duty accompanying the business transaction of marriage. This brings back the idea of repressed emotions and the aforementioned Elizabethan double standards on nature as Edmund, a child of adultery, is denied legal status but also, as the opening scene demonstrates, respect. Yet passion, as a result of unnatural repression erupts in Edmund with double force and thus he gives himself entirely to *physis*. For Bauer (1968: 363), Edmund, in his rebellion against the system, his political shrewdness and sceptical nature, is an enactment of both Montaigne’s and Machiavelli’s ideas. I believe he is also a very Nietzschean figure. His yearning to transcend, or to use Nietzsche’s term, to utilize his will to power is indeed immense. He initially wants the lands of his brother. Once he has the upper hand over Edgar, he takes away the father’s title and position. Having that, he has the appetite for the crown. He stirs passion in both sisters. Once they are infatuated with him, he is unable to decide which one he wants. So as can be seen, in his insatiability Edmund is like Tamburlaine, while his cunning reminds one of Barabas. Yet Nietzsche, in his appraisal of the affects, proposes an idea of “transfigured *physis*”.<sup>35</sup> Already in *Untimely Meditations* Nietzsche (2007a: 122) speaks of the need to learn how “to organize the chaos” of one’s passions “the way ancient Greeks did”. This idea is carried further and finds its refinement in the concept of the overcoming of the will to power and sublimation. When looking at Edmund, one is left with a fundamental question: is Edmund the one who transfigures his *physis*? He does succeed in transforming the circumstances of his position, yet in the process he “sacrifices” his brother and father. One could suggest that, just like in the case of Shakespeare’s Brutus, the sacrifice is a necessary step in gaining independence. On the other hand, the sanctity of bonds between close family members – brothers as well as children and parents – has always been deeply ingrained in western society. For Elizabethan society (just as for modern society) family, unquestionably a social construct, was perceived as the essentially natural unit. Thus, any transgression against the communal identity within the family was considered an appalling crime against nature. For this reason the act of fratricide in *The Devil’s charter* is indicative of Caesar Borgia’s utmost moral depravity, along with other abhorred crimes like licentiousness or incest. Yet in the Nietzschean vision, so sensitive to even the most subtle symptoms of *nomos*, the individual will to power might be far stronger in some than any claims of communal morality. Neill (1993: 285) summarizes Edmund’s supposed “nature” by saying that:

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<sup>35</sup> The term is borrowed from Kaufmann, Walter 1974. 1974. *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. See: e.g. page 161.

“[t]he naturally unnatural character of the bastard makes him into a living exemplar of those ironic mechanisms by which nature revenges itself on the perpetrators of vicious and unnatural acts.” So, as can be seen, Edmund is double – natural and unnatural at the same time. This is true for both his social standing as well as his character, as his individualism does not only surpass filial and brotherly bonds, but also socially accepted, moral codes of conduct. On the surface such an acknowledgment of an individual over any morality might be a recipe for a catastrophe. Indeed, this is what happens in *King Lear*. A long trail of dead bodies that is left at the play’s closing may be traced back to Edmund’s robust individualism. It is even possible to risk a statement that *King Lear* as a whole problematizes an impossible tension between one’s own singularity realized in the individual will to power, and family identity, where one’s position may be heavily compromised. Yet it is impossible to blame Edmund’s yearnings for all the evil in the play, especially in the light of his last attempt at saving Lear and Cordelia.

For many critics Edmund’s death has been one of the most perplexing scenes in *King Lear* due to Edmund’s supposed delay in the exposure of the information about Lear and Cordelia. There seems little point in going through various readings of Edmund’s and Edgar’s last conversation in which Edmund urges Edgar to “speak [...] on” (*Lear*, 5.3.200). It suffices to say that critics’ responses range from the utter condemnation of Edmund’s prolonging of his confession to visions of Edmund’s redemption and absolution.<sup>36</sup> I personally believe that the very insistence on the occurrence of any “delay” is grounded in a naïve belief in human capabilities to control the reality whilst in this deeply existentialist play the space for maneuvering is really very limited. Not only is the death of Cordelia inscribed within Shakespeare’s brutal pattern of the tragic, but it also communicates the existentialist as well as a very Nietzschean sense of limitation that the individual being is caged in. There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the brothers’ reconciliation or Edmund’s rush when he says: “Quickly send – /Be brief in it – to the castle, for my writ/ Is on the life of Lear and Cordelia;/ Nay, send in time” (*Lear*, 5.3. 241-244). Edmund refers to the

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<sup>36</sup> A.C. Bradley seems to have inaugurated the discussion on the “delay”. For him Edmund might be “sunk in dreamy reflections on his past” (Bradley 1992: 264). Bradley blames Edmund’s “unexplained delay” for the death of Cordelia. Quite plainly he also relegates Edmund, along with Goneril, Regan, Cornwall and Oswald to the evil forces in the play (Bradley 1992: 264, 284). Matthews believes that Edmund’s repentance is slow but he finally recognizes the power of love (Matthews 1975: 27). McNeir believes that Edmund’s redemption is inauthentic due to his moral weakness (McNeir 1968: 215-216). Bauer, on the other hand, claims that the scene illustrates Edmund’s “ultimate integrity and sense of responsibility” (Bauer 1968: 365). He also suggests that: “It is tantamount to a recantation of *physis* and a concession to *nomos*” (Bauer 1968: 365). I personally believe that Edmund does not reject *physis*. He rather recognizes that it requires “ordering” or a Nietzschean sublimation in order to be utilized creatively.

necessity of hurrying up three times in one sentence which, to my mind, underscores the honesty of his intentions. Edmund's delay does not seem to be calculated or spiteful. However, bearing in mind his individualism, it does not seem surprising at all that in the moment of his own death he focuses on the figure of his opponent – who brought his own rise to greatness to a sudden halt. Edmund's acknowledgment of the trick that fate has played on him has more to do with a stoical acceptance of "the wheel of Fortune" rather than Christian contrition. Even in his last moments Edmund asserts his being when he confidently says: "The wheel is come full circle. I am here" (*Lear*, 5.3.172). The acknowledgement of love when he says: "Yet Edmund was beloved" is also turned into a final statement of the self as throughout the play Edmund's commitment towards the sisters is never defined (*Lear*, 5.3.238). What seems to be of great importance is the fact that in his overhuman isolation Edmund never unambiguously acknowledges his affection to anyone. Hence, the assertion of his singularity is pushed to the extreme. The answer to the question about Edmund's capabilities of organizing the chaos of his passions may be sought in his final attempt at saving Lear and Cordelia. It is in this moment that Edmund not only embraces his *physis* but also tries to transfigure it as he acts "despite of [his] own nature" (*Lear*, 5.3.241). At no point does he ever express his regret though he shows he is not without any feeling. In his final act of "goodness" he shows himself as a Nietzschean life affirmer. Thus, similarly to Brutus and Macbeth, he dies in the awareness of his strength, in the spirit of the Nietzschean *amor fati*. Of course, the moral evaluation of his actions as well as the social tenability of his outlook on life may fuel endless axiological debates, yet it is unquestionable that his rampant individualism grows out of his overhuman potential. As mentioned, Edmund is far from the hatred-driven rabble of the Nietzschean *chandala* to which his circumstances force him to surrender. Edmund, the bastard, has to make or remake himself from scratch as originally he has no comprehensible identity. This status of being an outcast, outlaw and fundamentally a rebel builds his overhuman potential, which arises from his denial of the tyranny of the system. As a self-proclaimed overman he does not only see the hypocritical face of the system that claims a monopoly on nature but also refuses to be a cog in the machine. He is life-energy incarnated and this energy, like a wild sea wave, ultimately subsumes even itself.

Shakespeare's innovative characterization opens up a possibility of a redefinition of nature and consequently morality. In the light of this concept, newly redefined human identity becomes an object of analytical scrutiny. As hopefully demonstrated, Shakespeare's characters indeed lend themselves to an analysis in the spirit of Nietzsche's philosophy. Like Marlowe's protagonists, Shakespeare's overhuman figures can be characterized by their strong will to power, which they employ in the process of overcoming. Brutus represents Shakespeare's early instance of singular identity, where solitary reflection becomes

a springboard for an identity-building process. Brutus's singularity goes hand in hand with the cancellation of the so called "brotherly" values in agonistic competition. Self-overcoming as a solitary enterprise is even more strongly portrayed in *Macbeth*, where the protagonist's "rampant" reflectiveness is underscored by his need for solitude. Macbeth, like Brutus, kills a parricidal figure and shakes off the influence of all those who threaten his process of self-creation. Edmund emerges as an elaboration of the stage Machiavel into an incarnation of Nietzschean vitality and the cult of life. Similarly to Brutus and Macbeth, he is also determined to overcome limiting circumstances even if this requires taking unethical steps. His choices are indeed morally twisted but he is, nevertheless, utterly captivating. Shakespearean figures, despite deepened moral reflection, do not really follow the orthodox Renaissance condemnation of ambition. The moral reflection of Brutus, Macbeth and Edmund does not culminate in remorse or regret, but rather in the total subjection to the life force and energy. Despite the tragic inherent in Shakespeare, his characters communicate a Nietzschean love of fate. Ambition emerges as a vista to self-overcoming in an eternal process of identity formation and rebuilding. One may wonder if the three characters under my scrutiny actually become overmen *per se*. In each instance there are some reservations. However, one has to bear in mind that Nietzsche's philosophical project was halted by his premature breakdown while his style is notoriously elusive. For this reason, the definition of overhuman potential may at points seem frustratingly ungraspable. Hence, Shakespeare's characters as witnessed by those I have scrutinized may also appear unfinished overmen. Yet if singular existence is indeed an eternal self-overcoming, maybe a precise conceptualization of the overhuman identity is beyond our reach, while Shakespeare's characters have eternally something new to tell and illustrate. The elusiveness of the overhuman, thus, means that the potential does not have to be exclusively male. Nietzschean perspectivism opens a possibility of looking for an overman, or to be more precise, overwoman among Shakespeare's and Marlowe's female characters. Having analysed powerful male figures, I will now move on to a more detailed analysis of female figures, making Nietzsche's thought again a guiding matrix. The task appears more difficult as a female subject is not taken for granted in early modern drama, while Nietzsche himself is also heavily entangled in the highly complex gender relations of his age. However, to my mind, the sheer challenge of the task makes it academically tempting and worthwhile.

## Chapter Five

# *Das Überweib* in Shakespeare's and Marlowe's plays: Lady Macbeth, Zenocrate and Lear's daughters

In her famous speech to the troops at Tilbury, Elizabeth I (1998: 102) addressed her soldiers by saying: "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have a heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too."<sup>1</sup> Like the other successful fruits of Elizabeth's rhetorical skills, this famous statement of courage "in the midst and heat of battle" has been frequently analysed by both historians and literary scholars – and, as it seems, the speech is a rhetorical pearl, as Elizabeth takes full advantage of the implicit Renaissance misogyny present in it. Her speech constitutes the embrace and, at the same time, denial of the traditionally conceived idea of femininity or the female nature. By acknowledging her physical and physiological constitution, she underscores her intellectual capacity, at the same time making the masculine a point of reference. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at the height of the Wilhelmine patriarchy in Germany, Friedrich Nietzsche (2006c: 105) writes in *Ecce Homo*: "Oh, what dangerous, insidious, subterranean little beasts of prey they are! And so pleasant into the bargain!... – Woman is incomparably more evil than man, cleverer too; goodness in woman is a form of degeneration..." Nevertheless, I would like to argue, contrary to those who see Nietzsche as a

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of the present chapter have already been printed in a volume published by Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego [Łódź University Press]. For more details see: Cieślak, Magdalena and Agnieszka Rasmus (eds.). 2015. *Multicultural Shakespeare* 12, 9-165. (<http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/mstap.2015.12.issue-27/issue-files/mstap.2015.12.issue-27.xml>) (date of access: 17.09.2015). Łódź University Press kindly agreed to a republishing of the text in a slightly modified and expanded version in this book. *Multicultural Shakespeare* (12) features my article entitled "Re-gendering of the Nietzschean Übermensch in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* – the Case of Lady Macbeth and Zenocrate". It includes the introduction to the present chapter, the section on Nietzsche and the feminine, the Renaissance and the feminine as well as substantial parts of the analysis of Zenocrate and Lady Macbeth.

blatant misogynist, Nietzsche in his statement is actually paying women a compliment, and his statement is only seemingly a sexist slur. Nietzsche's reasoning and its conclusions, including his revaluation of values, are based on "Rückschluß, or conclusion *a posteriori*" (Babich 1996: 27). Not only must one try to grasp the whole context of his words, meaning the entirety of his thought, but one should also never take his words only at their face value. Knowing that his philosophy opens up to the absolute reversal of human valuations, placing value "beyond good and evil", one should reconsider the Nietzschean stance on the feminine indeed. Elizabeth's Tilbury speech, but not only this one, makes recourse to a similar reversal of roles and functions, which demands a reversal of reading. It is what is weak and feeble in you that ultimately becomes the very heart of strength. It is this intellectual parallel that can be drawn between the Renaissance Queen and the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher that I would like to make a point of departure for a rereading of the early modern royal women in Shakespeare and Marlowe. First of all, I will focus on the comparison of roles and functions of the two dramatic Queens – the Shakespearean Lady Macbeth and the Marlovian Zenocrate – in the context of both the early modern conception of femininity and Nietzschean ideas on overhuman potential. Secondly, I will draw attention to Shakespeare's *King Lear* in the pursuit of the overhuman potential among Lear's daughters. I want to scrutinize the same texts that have already been under my investigation when I analysed the overhuman potential of male characters. Such a decision is driven by my intention of discussing the plays more thoroughly by comparing and contrasting both the male and the female perspectives. As Juliette Dusinberre (1975: 308) writes

Shakespeare [...] did not divide human nature into the masculine and the feminine, but observed in the individual woman or man an infinite variety of union between opposing impulses. To talk about Shakespeare's women is to talk about his men, because he refused to separate their worlds physically, intellectually, or spiritually.

This statement might not be entirely true for Marlowe. Yet I believe here too it is impossible to talk about Tamburlaine's overhuman potential without Zenocrate, as it is her presence that gives artistic substance to many of his decisions and actions, as I have partly already pointed out when speaking about Tamburlaine's "vicious greatness". In the course of my analysis I would like to find out whether Nietzschean overhuman potential may be of a female nature and if yes, in what respects it approximates and differs from the male perspective. As Carol Diethe (1996: 77) writes, the notion of the *Überweib* in Nietzsche's writing is "conspicuous by its absence." Nevertheless, as feminist readings of Nietzsche by Sarah Kofman, Kelly Olivier, Luce Irigaray or Carol Diethe demonstrate, the female question cannot be overlooked when speaking about Nietzsche's philosophy. Joan Kelly-Gadol (1977: 176) in her famous

article entitled: "Did women have a Renaissance?" answers her title question negatively by saying that: "there was no renaissance for women – at least, not during the Renaissance." By pointing out changes in sexuality and sex/gender roles, she highlights the gradual stifling and oppression of women within the patriarchal family and domestic roles. The under-developed Marlovian female characters as well as Shakespearean fatal women can be partly inscribed within this pattern – something that Kathleen McLuskie (1985: 89) posited long ago when she heralded Shakespeare as "the patriarchal bard". However, both playwrights do grant their female characters a limited space and field of activity, with different focuses and quite different consequences. Nietzsche, in his period was known as a "hater of women" ("Frauenhasser"), "despiser of women" ("Frauenverächter"), "enemy of women" ("Frauenfeind"), and "Anti-feminist" (Helm 2004: 64). With all his apparent female-hate and misogyny, Nietzsche is, nevertheless, credited for the reintroduction of the body into the mainstream of Western philosophy – and as a consequence the appraisal of female sexuality against the backdrop of the Wilhelmine "legendary" cult of *Hausfrau* (cf. Helm 2004: 74-75, Dieth 1996: 73). In this context, the intersection of Nietzschean overhuman potential and the early-modern femininity emerges, in my opinion, as even more tempting. Nietzschean insights into the feminine may help to reread early-modern drama, adding a new moral edge to the plays while the reinvestigation of the philosophical significance of the feminine within the Nietzschean canon helps to explore an as yet unrealized possibility – a possibility of an overwoman.

### 5.1. Nietzsche and the feminine, the Renaissance and the feminine

As mentioned, the relationship between Nietzsche and the feminine is more than contentious. In order to get an instinctive grasp of just how far Nietzsche's supposed misogyny could go, it is enough to recall the famous whip passage from *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, where Nietzsche (2006b: 50) declares: "You go to women? Do not forget the whip!"<sup>2</sup> Apart from this, probably the most shocking example, there are yet other aphorisms in the Nietzsche canon where the

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<sup>2</sup> Here, like in the case of other statements on women, a too-hasty condemnation of Nietzsche as a misogynist is far from being objective. As Peter J. Burgard (1994: 4) explains, in order to give justice to the whip-passage one has to render it with proper punctuation, namely, double quotation. It is part of Zarathustra's conversation with the old woman and, to be precise, the statement is uttered by the woman. So the words are not only doubly removed from Nietzsche, but also belong to the narrative of "a fictionalized philosophy". On top of that, the sentence ends with an exclamation mark, which, according to Burgard (1994: 5) is "at least potentially a mark of irony".

philosopher is, euphemistically speaking, critical of women. As Peter J. Burgard (1994: 2) suggests, there are two ways of approaching “Nietzsche’s sexist tirades”. The first one is to ignore Nietzsche’s attacks on femininity and focus on other aspects of his philosophy. The second option involves a more creative and deeper engagement with Nietzscheanism. The former is actually the attitude so far taken by the majority of scholars, going back to the seminal scholarly works on Nietzsche by Walter Kaufmann (Burgard 1994: 2). Kaufmann (1974: 84) in his influential study claims that “Nietzsche’s writings contain many all-too-human judgments – especially about women – but these are philosophically irrelevant.” As Burgard suggests, Kaufmann’s dismissal of the significance of the female question was not only ill-judged on the part of Kaufmann, but also “has seriously hindered the advancement of our understanding of Nietzsche” (Burgard 1994: 3). Despite Kaufmann’s immense contribution to the study of Nietzschean philosophy, I must admit that I am rather of Burgard’s opinion. It seems that the closing of Nietzsche’s philosophy on women is too easy an option, especially that, paradoxically, it was Nietzsche’s writing that drove the development of feminism in Germany, as the works of early German feminist writers like Hedwig Dohm or Helene Stöcker demonstrate.<sup>3</sup> The engagement of early German feminists with Nietzsche shows, to my mind, that the rejection of his philosophy on the basis of its seeming misogyny would be an act of intellectual cowardice. Modern-day feminist writers appear to share my feelings, as there appear/are appearing more and more works tackling the feminine in Nietzsche. The newly-emerging canon is opened by Luce Irigaray’s love letter written to Friedrich Nietzsche entitled *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Frances Opiel (1993: 79) aptly observes that: “[t]his amorous sexual relationship seems unlikely; what, after all, is a subtle feminist, who until this point stressed the pleasures of lesbian love-making, doing in a relationship of amorous sexuality with a moustachioed misogynist like Nietzsche?” Irigaray seems to be taking the position of mockery, on the one hand. On the other, however, in her “love letter” to Nietzsche she engages intimately in Nietzsche’s thought. By mocking Nietzsche she approaches the exclusion of the feminine from the discourse of Western philosophy and the appropriation of the female body; and her intense investigation of his thought uncovers Nietzsche’s fascination with pregnancy, motherhood and hence “an affirmation of woman”. Yet as Ansell-Pearson (1993: 40) observes, through Irigaray one learns that “Nietzsche affirms woman as the source of life only by denying to woman her independent reality and experience of the world.” So Nietzsche seems to be condoning patri-

<sup>3</sup> To learn more about early German feminists and their responses to Nietzsche’s misogyny, see: Helm, Barbara. 2004. “Combating misogyny? Responses to Nietzsche by turn-of-the-century German feminists”, *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 27: 64-84, or Diethel, Carol. 1996. “Nietzsche and the early German feminists”, *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 12: 69-81.

archal order while at the same time questioning it. Kelly Olivier (1995: 17) in her *Womanizing Nietzsche* asks a very crucial question: "As a woman, how can I read Nietzsche's text?" I would build on this question and ask: How can I creatively transform and utilize the heritage of Nietzsche to speak of female experience? In a sense, following in Irigaray's and Olivier's footsteps, I suggest that one should use Nietzsche's own weapons against him. I strongly believe that when combined with Elizabethan and Jacobean source texts, Nietzsche's apparent aversion can be creatively used to expose the past conditions of oppressive systems and historical patterns of misogyny.

As already mentioned, Nietzsche himself wrote against an oppressive system, in the conditions of a strongly stratified, hierarchical society and restricting Lutheran morality. His writings often shocked the public, but as Carol Diethe (1996: 72) points out: "Nietzsche was certainly not dynamite when he attacked socialism, feminism, or for that matter, democracy: he was mainstream conservative." The issue whether one should expect more insight into the matter of women from such an otherwise insightful thinker as Nietzsche is a matter for another discussion. Nevertheless, as can be seen, Nietzsche's assessment of women is rather a product of his period and, more generally speaking, the tradition of Western philosophy. Kelly Oliver (1995: 17) writes that Nietzsche's outlook is original and innovative as it "opens up the discussion of representing the other." However, it still "closes off the possibility of representing the feminine other. He opens up the possibility of interpreting otherwise, but he excludes woman from the process of interpretation" (Olivier 1995: 17). As it seems, this long tradition of exclusion, so strengthened by the Hegelian model, goes back to the Renaissance. Cartesian rationality, so often seen as the founding principle of the early modern (and later modern) subjectivity, is undoubtedly a stepping stone in the history of philosophy. Yet one has to remember that it is a philosophy in which the masculine subject is always the point of reference. A huge body of early modern texts, both pre-Cartesian and post-Cartesian, present a woman as "an incomplete man" (Augtherson 1998: 419). For instance, it is enough to cast just a cursory look at John Calvin's (1998: 440) works to learn that: "the woman taketh her original from the man, by order therefore she is the inferior or the latter." In the famous *Homily of the state of matrimony* one learns that the greatest value of a good wife is that she bends her will to the will of her husband (*Homily of the state of matrimony*, 1998: 435). The research fruits of cultural materialists and new historicists have already demonstrated that the idea of Renaissance subjectivity, if not totally illusive, is definitely enslaved by the oppressive workings of ideology, and hence a far more complicated, exclusive rather than inclusive, phenomenon. It is however, important to note that the Renaissance discovery of a thinking subject is often attributed to Jacob Burckhardt, Nietzsche's contemporary and a great inspiration to the philosopher. Burckhardt (2004: 98, 250) capitalizes on "the

development of the Individual” but at the same time he underscores the equality of men and women in Renaissance Italy. As mentioned, there is ground to suspect that Burckhardt’s cult of individuality found its way into the Nietzschean conception of the over-man. The Burckhardian fascination with the primeval instincts of the Italian despots fighting ruthlessly for power, their “raw” manliness, is, to my mind, something that might have stirred Nietzsche’s imagination and led to the conceptualization of the overhuman potential. Nietzsche’s Burckhardt-infused vision of the Renaissance makes me believe, despite Nietzsche’s misogynist innuendoes, that the overhuman potential does not have to be exclusively masculine. Therefore, I see Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth as a first-hand candidate for the *Übermensch*, or *Überweib* to be more precise. Nietzsche might have not believed that women could have overhuman potential and that is why I believe that Marlowe’s Zenocrate, on the other hand, is closer to the ultimate Nietzschean vision of what a woman should be. Lear’s three daughters share overhuman potential but, as I will be arguing, they realize it on different plains and with separate means and aims. However, all these women are products of gendered discourse and thus subliminally communicate some Renaissance gender stereotyping.

## 5.2. Critical responses and interpretative paths on Lady Macbeth and Marlowe’s women

Before I plunge into the depths of a more detailed analysis of Shakespeare’s and Marlowe’s overwomen, I would like to address the existing body of criticism on two of the aforementioned women: Lady Macbeth and Zenocrate. This seems crucial as the interpretative paths explored so far either relegate these women to secondary and passive roles or, if grant them overhuman activity, evaluate their actions and decisions as evil or unnatural. The impression seems to be particularly strong in the case of Lady Macbeth, to whom critical responses seem to be so numerous that they have grown into a separate locus in Shakespearean studies. The figure of Zenocrate has spurred relatively fewer critics to into a response. So far she seems to have been inscribed within a wider reflection on the portrayal of women in Marlowe’s plays. In the following paragraphs, I intend to engage in polemics with both of these critical directions. Analyses of Lady Macbeth frequently seem to be motivated by either indignation at the violence of her motivation and deeds, or revolve around attempts at alleviating her share in the brutality pictured in the play. Lucy Brasher (1980: 14) points out that Lady Macbeth is subject to two popular interpretative visions, namely, that of a “wicked wife” image and that of a “terrible mother” stereotype. Marvin Rosenberg’s (1978: 160-195) record of possible attitudes to her also captures a similar spectrum: from a monstrous woman, to a wife who is full of care and sexually appealing. It is important

to note that all these possibilities assume a fixed and solid set of expectations concerning the “right” enactment of femininity and masculinity as well as a strict separation of female and male prerogatives. As long as one engages in the investigation of the early modern conceptions of male and female roles and their bearing on the constructions of the characters in *Macbeth*, such an attitude seems to be justified. Yet what many critics do is carry these misconceptions to their “modern” conclusions about Macbeth and his wife, assuming that these ideas are universals – rather than specimens of gender performativity.

Sometimes even those critics that seem to perceive the artificiality of gender essentialism nevertheless end up upholding its tenets. For instance, Carolyn Asp (1981: 153) writes that “Lady Macbeth consciously attempts to reject her feminine sensibility and adopt a male mentality because she perceives that her society equates feminine qualities with weakness.” For Asp (1981: 154), unlike Macbeth, Lady Macbeth rejects and frustrates her nature. Marilyn French (1992: 23) in her classic article “*Macbeth* and masculine values” attributes Lady Macbeth’s tragedy to the rejection of the so called “feminine principle”. While Macbeth is seen, at the closing of the play, as a traitor, Lady Macbeth emerges as downright evil. French (1992: 17) writes: “Her crime is heinous because it violates her social role, which has been erected into principle of experience: she fails to uphold the feminine principle. For her, as for Goneril, this failure plunges her more deeply into a pit of evil than any man can ever fall.” This means that just as Macbeth violated the moral law, his wife offended the natural law (French 1992: 16). In response to these accusations, I can only pose a rhetorical question that also responds in the same vein as Nietzsche’s philosophy: What is really nature and why do we usurp the right to know its judgements? I strongly believe that Shakespeare problematizes, rather than essentializes, gender construction and the notion of nature. I also believe that both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are driven by separate wills to power, as the will to power is a human instinct, and so it can be both feminine and masculine. For the same reason, I find criticism – that underscores binary oppositions – quite problematic. Critics often see Lady Macbeth as a text function that is introduced to “bring out the character of Macbeth” (Yüksel 2005: 65). With the action unfolding and Macbeth’s growing bravado, her presence is radically diminished (Yüksel 2005: 73). Yet her subsequent mental disintegration does not, in my opinion, cancel her intense motivation and action in the opening scenes. It seems that the tradition of seeing Lady Macbeth strictly as a binary opposition to Macbeth goes back to Nietzsche’s near contemporary, Sigmund Freud, who believed that it is impossible to read the couple’s characters separately. Following Ludwig Jekels, Freud (1992: 44) suggests that Lady Macbeth might not be a separate figure, but rather a complementary element of Macbeth’s personality. Freud (1992: 44) claims that: “In that case it would of course be pointless to regard her as

an independent character and seek to discover the motives of her change, without considering the Macbeth who completes her.” Yet Freud (1992: 42) seems to be reading Lady Macbeth’s resolve and motivation as a clinical symptom of some malady arising from her childlessness, assuming that it is a pathological condition for a woman to remain childless. Freud’s remark carries a lot of the 19<sup>th</sup> century misogyny that also erupts occasionally in Nietzsche’s remarks on women. As I will be demonstrating, this misogyny is reminiscent of the early-modern patriarchal conception of feminine identity. Thus, Nietzsche’s (like Freud’s) ideas help to illuminate the workings of the early modern perception on female identity.

Yet even some of the contemporary critics believe that Lady Macbeth’s murderous determination is a sign of mental instability. Christine Couche (2010: 137) analyses Lady Macbeth’s language and behaviour as an expression of postpartum or postnatal psychosis. In her first soliloquy, Lady Macbeth supposedly presents “a bizarre invocation of supernatural forces which reflects a manic sense of being all-powerful” (Couche 2010: 141). Convincing as some of Couche’s arguments may be, the assumption that Lady Macbeth is unstable from the start is a matter of pure conjecture. This conjecture does violence to Shakespeare’s text as the feeling of power and might is central to both Macbeths’ aims and aspirations. I personally marvel at the ease with which some people are determined to label immorality as a consequence of a mental shortcoming. An all-too-hasty judgement that there must be something wrong with Lady Macbeth’s head because she demonstrates incredible agility and resolve in her actions, seems to kill the very beauty of her inexplicability. Though A.C. Bradley (1992: 322), in a slightly Freudian vein, does not distinguish between Lady Macbeth and her husband, capitalizing rather on their similarities, he seems to be right when he heralds Lady Macbeth as among “the most-awe inspiring figures that Shakespeare drew”. The awe that Bradley has in mind stems exactly from Lady Macbeth’s determination, or to use Nietzsche’s terminology, from her strong will to power. Bradley sees Macbeth as a tragedy of ambition, and for once I totally agree with his labelling. He writes:

[t]hese two characters are fired by one and the same passion of ambition; and to a considerable extent they are alike. The disposition of each is high, proud, and commanding. They are born to rule, if not to reign. They are peremptory or contemptuous to their inferiors. They are not children of light, like Brutus and Hamlet; they are of the world. We observe in them no love of country, and no interest in the welfare of anyone outside their family. (Bradley 1992: 306)

Hence, as can be seen, Bradley senses the same Nietzschean egoism in Lady Macbeth as the one defining also Macbeth. If then Macbeth, as I have been trying to demonstrate, is a potential overman, his wife, at moments so much more determined than him, is obviously a potential overwoman. To read her

simply as a degenerate witch or a madwoman, who leads her husband astray, is to deny Macbeth his aspiration and determination to reach his goals. On the other hand, seeing her only as his complementary element diminishes her own will to overcome obstacles that stand in their way for their common glory. It might be true that, as some critics point out, Lady Macbeth has no ambition of her own. As Cristina León Alfar (2009: 114) frequently observes, Lady Macbeth is foremost a seat of Macbeth's desire. As in the case of Lear's daughters, her role is to reflect Macbeth's aspirations. For this reason, she becomes "Shakespeare's parodic depiction of a wifely duty" (Alfar 2009: 113). Alfar's argument seems very apt as, indeed, Lady Macbeth's actions all contribute to Macbeth's success. Nevertheless, even if she fuses her husband's glory with her own resolve, one cannot deny that it is she who actively helps to fulfil his dreams. Even if the aims of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are common, their wills to power are separate. Thus, it is Lady Macbeth's singular process of over-coming that brings her own sense of achievement, even if what is actually achieved belongs to her husband. It seems unjustified to read Lady Macbeth as a text function, and this argument is true for other "problematic" women in Shakespeare's canon – unlike in the plays of Marlowe, where women's psychology seems by far inferior to that of Shakespeare.

Until the publication of Simon Shepherd's ground-breaking book *Marlowe and the politics of Elizabethan Theatre* (1986), there has been very little critical attention devoted to Marlowe's dramatic women. His female characters had been largely dismissed by critics as "one-dimensional and wooden", to use Emily C. Bartels' (1993: 25) phrase. Against the critical grain of seeing them as such, Bartels (1993: 25) herself observes that Marlowe's heroines are rather "two-dimensional and contradictory because they reinscribe a difference that they simultaneously resist." In recent years, with this new niche opened up by Shepherd's and Bartels' analyses, there has been more interest in Marlovian female characters. Nevertheless, as Bartels (1993: 25) points out, they still remain "problematic". There is no denying that in Marlowe's plays women occupy secondary or even third-rate positions. Dido, the only leading heroine of Marlowe, ends her existence in very piteous circumstances; this is not to mention the fact that her monarchical position is taken advantage of by Aeneas to further his imperial aspirations. All the other women too are overshadowed by all-powerful and charismatic masculine figures. Joanna Gibbs (2000: 164) explains that this happens partly due to Marlowe's thematic devotion to physically strong and powerful masculine figures. He indeed demonstrates very little interest in the feminine nature or agency. As Kate Chedgzoy (2004: 249) points out: "[i]t is becoming clear that in Marlowe's dramatic worlds women are conceptualized as the objects and medium of power rather than its agents: these are plays which both expose and participate in the subjugation and objectification of women by men." The women become objects in transactions conducted by men, as hap-

pens in the case of Zenocrate, whose marriage to Tamburlaine serves to legitimize his conquest of Asia and add splendour to his newly-acquired kingly disposition. As Shepherd (1986: 180) observes women serve as a “fetishising of objects within gender relations”, while the plays are “trying to foreground the male gaze, to show specifically the male control of stage space.” Not only is Zenocrate “fetishized” into an object but also Helen of Troy is summoned by Dr Faustus to be looked at and admired (*Doctor Faustus*, 5.2.88-103). Abigail is literally equalled with material goods when Barabas exclaims: “O my girl/ My gold, my fortune, my felicity!” (*Jew*, 2.1.46-47). As can be seen, female characters are granted some agency, but only if their actions serve men’s interests, as happens in Abigail’s case. She serves her father dutifully, but her act of resistance is severely punished by her death. Female determination, if it occurs infrequently, serves the annihilation of the agent e.g. when Olympia tricks Theridamas into stabbing her in the neck (*Tamb.* 2, 1.3.1-98). For her, the only way to escape Theridamas’ forced advances is to take her own life. As she herself claims:

[d]istress’d Olympia, whose weeping eyes,  
 Since thy arrival here, behold no sun,  
 But, clos’d within the compass of a tent,  
 Have stain’d thy cheeks, and made thee look like death,  
 Devise some means to rid thee of thy life,  
 Rather than yield to his detested suit,  
 Whose drift is only to dishonour thee. (*Tamb.* 2, 1.3.1-7)

Her cunning stratagem with the use of “magical” ointment that supposedly guarantees iron-hard and blade-resistant skin ironically plays on the central topic of Tamburlaine plays, namely, the masculine fantasy of invincibility. This vision of immortal power is exactly what Tamburlaine fashions himself into. However, as demonstrated, the female agency falls under the pressure of masculine desires. Yet as Gibbs (2000: 164) argues:

[i]n Marlowe’s plays women often are allowed to make inroads into male space and actively engage in statesmanship. What is more, those of Marlowe’s women who do make authoritative interventions adopt attitudes at odds with the critical conception of them as inclining to privacy and harbouring feelings relating to matters of the heart to the exclusion of issues of policy.

This argument seems to be true in the case of Isabella, Edward II’s wife, who skilfully manoeuvres between politics and affection. Gibbs (2000: 165-166), following Shepherd, observes that Isabella senses that the love bestowed by the King on those close to him is really more of a political tool that enables him to maintain position and security rather than an expression of an emotional need. Yet I would argue that even in Isabella’s case it is impossible to say that she overcomes the limitations of gender expectations in patriarchy, rather she

makes the most of these limitations to enact a role that only “invisibly” subverts the system and enables her survival. She is first able to secure her place at the court by appealing to Edward's and later Mortimer's feelings. In the face of the unfolding events, unlike her lover Mortimer, she stays alive, but her survival is hardly an example of overhuman potential, especially in that she can only make it through by internalizing the gender-specific expectation of herself as a weak, unstable and excessively passionate tool in the hands of men.

Critics often observe that Marlowe's female characters are not all the same. As Gibbs (2000: 175) claims: “[d]ifferentiating between women – some of whom seek subversively to reinscribe themselves within patriarchy while others acquiesce to it, or simply misunderstand it and suffer accordingly – Marlowe does more than reduce women to apolitical vessels of feeling who are nothing but adjuncts of his male characters.” I believe my brief record of Marlovian heroines illustrates this point. Hopefully, at the same time, it demonstrates that there seems little ground for the pursuit of overwomen in Marlowe's plays. The female presence in his plays rather serves to emphasize the overhuman potential of the male characters. For this reason, I decided to include the analysis of Zenocrate, especially as a counterbalance to Lady Macbeth who, to my mind, is a very influential and imposing figure, characterized by her overhuman potential. Marlowe himself might have not been insensitive to female experience. However, I believe that he was fairly uninterested in women, which is confirmed by the relatively small textual contribution of his female characters as well as their secondary positions. This means that Marlowe's women are closer to a Nietzschean vision of a woman as man's companion, wife and mother, rather than an independent *Überweib*, which becomes a key element in my reading of Zenocrate and her role. Bartels (1993: 25) aptly points out that: “[e]ven as Marlowe exposes male dominance as male dominance, he presents women who, despite initial acts of resistance, are willingly complicitous in enforcing its terms, and who are unaware or indifferent to the limitations that we see in their circumscribed situations.” Such is exactly Zenocrate's attitude as her initial defiance towards Tamburlaine turns into absolute loyalty, even at the cost of previous family ties and personal entanglements. Lady Macbeth's loyalty and support for her husband's desires is of equal measure, but frequently too it is she who stands at the helm of their marriage vessel.

### 5.3. Lady Macbeth and Zenocrate

I would like to open my discussion on Zenocrate and Lady Macbeth by a reference to Carol Diethe (1996: 70) who very aptly summarizes the Nietzschean attitude towards women by calling it “a procedure [...] of the typical middle-class male, who simultaneously idealized and feared woman in equal measure, and solved the

conflict by dividing women into two types, the Eves and the Madonnas.” Yet, according to Dieth (1996: 70), for Nietzsche all women are, in a sense, Eves. In this assessment, Nietzsche is not far from the popular portrayal of women in the Renaissance, which sees a woman as the seed of the original sin – the ultimate inciter and the temptress. In the popular misogynist poem by C. Pyrrye (1996: 429) entitled *The praise and dispraise of women* (1551) one reads: “Also as Eve from joyful place,/ (alas, alas the while)/ Her posterity did deface,/ and cast into exile.” This essentialist dual picture of female nature is also inscribed within the fabrics of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. Just as Lady Macbeth could be read as a proverbial Eve, so can Zenocrate be seen in terms of an unsexed Madonna. Both of these women share some common features. They are both companions to their excessively ambitious husbands. The relationships with their husbands are very intense and passionate, though the nature of these passions seems to be quite different. So too is the nature of their respective companionships and relations with the men. The first encounter with Lady Macbeth informs us of a relative equality between the spouses as well as quite a substantial degree of intimacy between them. In the fatal letter which apparently infects Lady Macbeth’s mind with ambition and a temptation to murder Duncan, Macbeth calls her his “dearest partner of greatness” (*Macbeth*, 1.5.11). In the following reflections of Lady Macbeth on her husband she expresses her doubt in Macbeth. She says: “yet do I fear thy nature;/ It is too full o’ the milk of human kindness/ To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great;/ Art not without ambition; but without/ The illness should attend it” (*Macbeth*, 1.5.16-20). In her vision, he might be too soft for the future roles she would like to see him in. Interestingly, Lady Macbeth never questions her own strength of will in the pursuit of power. She says: “[h]ie thee hither, That I may pour my spirits in thine ear; And chastise with the valour of my tongue” (*Macbeth*, 1.5.25-27). So, from the start it is visible that she frames herself as the architect of the future order of things. The first encounter with Zenocrate, on the other hand, is quite different. As we know, her passage through the lands conquered by Tamburlaine is halted by his army. As a consequence, she is held hostage and, as Shepherd (1986: 179) calls her, she becomes “part of the loot of an ambush”. In the first conversation between Tamburlaine and Zenocrate he more or less plainly informs her of his intentions. Initially Zenocrate, the daughter of the sultan of Egypt, disdains Tamburlaine. Her contempt seems to have a class difference underpinning it as she says: “Ah, shepherd, pity my distressed plight!/(If, as thou seem’st, thou art so mean a man,)/ And seek not to enrich thy followers/ By lawless rapine from a silly maid” (*Tamb.* 1, 1.2.7-10). Zenocrate is understandably not happy with the prospect of becoming a concubine or even wife to the shepherd warrior. What is more, she seems to hate the idea of being a trophy wife, a kind of an ornament and legitimization for Tamburlaine’s conquest, to make it even worse – taken by force. Yet despite this, she nevertheless downgrades herself by calling herself “a silly maid”. Having no other alternative, she

yields to Tamburlaine and says: "I must be pleas'd perforce,— wretched Zenocrate!" (*Tamb.* 1, 1.2.258). Her first meeting with Tamburlaine almost coincides with the arrival of Theridamas, with whom Tamburlaine parleys to make him join forces. Zenocrate is a witness to the conversation and her aristocratic presence, in a sense, seals the deal. Interestingly enough, once Zenocrate stops being part of the bargain she undergoes a surprising change of heart. From Scene II in Act III, when in her conversation, she announces: "Ah, life and soul, still hover in his breast,/ And leave my body senseless as the earth,/ Or else unite you to his life and soul,/ That I may live and die with Tamburlaine!" (*Tamb.* 1, 3.2.21-24), she becomes passionately, almost blindly, loyal to Tamburlaine and she becomes his ever present companion.

Unlike the relationship of Lady Macbeth and Macbeth, Zenocrate's and Tamburlaine's relation is, at least originally, non-sexual. Though Zenocrate is often deemed Tamburlaine's "concubine" by his opponents (Agydas, Zabina etc.) she herself mentions only "[h]is talk much sweeter than the Muses' song" (*Tamb.* 1, 3.2.50). When Tamburlaine first meets the Sultan, her father, he says of Zenocrate: "[a]nd for all blot of foul in chastity,/ I record heaven, her heavenly self is clear" (*Tamb.* 1, 5.1.489-490), which clearly suggests that the expression of affection among them is limited to this almost chivalric game of wooing with beautiful words. Shepherd (1986: 183) points out that "[h]ere the feeling for Zenocrate, especially the fetishising of her chastity, fits into place in the imperial project." What is also important is the fact that Tamburlaine speaks poetry to a woman who evidently has no other choice than to listen to it, while this "talk much sweeter than the Muses' song" is used by him to cover up authentic power relations (Shepherd 1986: 184-185). In *Macbeth* the situation is quite the opposite. There is no poetry to obscure the power relations. The power dynamics evidently demonstrate Lady Macbeth's self-confidence as well as the passionate nature of their marriage. She challenges Macbeth: "Art thou afeard/ To be the same in thine own act and valor/ As thou art in desire?" (*Macbeth*, 1.7.43-45). Of course, her words might be read twofold, but I would argue that Lady Macbeth contrasts Macbeth's sexual capacity and his virulent libido with his political naiveté and meekness. In her vision of manhood political caution or obedient conservatism are equal to emasculation. In a very Nietzschean way Lady Macbeth clearly wants to channel or transfigure Macbeth's libido into a more effective will to power. However, as mentioned, she fears Macbeth's nature burdened with "the milk of human kindness", or in Nietzschean terminology – mediocrity. Nietzsche would see that, more than often, the so called "good" impulses are really sublimated low instincts (Hollingdale 2001: 144-145). This is why Lady Macbeth senses fear in Macbeth's softness and pity. Following Nietzsche (2002: 84-85) in *Beyond good and evil*, one could say that Lady Macbeth is a "tropical" woman – a kind of a Cesare Borgia figure, in Nietzsche's aphorism deemed a "man of prey", the "healthiest of all tropical monsters". Lady Macbeth has a very acute sense of human instincts, both her

husband's as well as her own. She wants to embrace them and take advantage of them. This, in Nietzschean terms, is a sign of health and strength.<sup>4</sup> However, despite the sexual tension and intimacy that is implicit in the conversations of Macbeth and his wife, it seems to be clear that she resents Macbeth for his qualms. She keeps on questioning his manhood and tries to change this "temperate man" into more than a man (Nietzsche 2002: 85). She tells him: "[w]hen you durst do it, then you were a man;/ And, to be more than what you were, you would/ Be so much more the man" (*Macbeth*, 1.7.56-57). Lady Macbeth puts Macbeth in the chains of a very limiting, essentialist definition of manhood and one has a feeling that the more she pushes him to "greatness", the less respect she can muster for him. After all, she is the one who plans the murder and carries out her plan – using Macbeth more as her tool rather than treating him as a partner in this transgression. She explicitly demands relinquishing all control over the enterprise from Macbeth for the sake of her command when she claims: "and you shall put/ This night's great business into my despatch;/ Which shall to all our nights and days to come/ Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom" (*Macbeth*, 1.6.79-82). So, one can see that in the case of Macbeth there is a reversed mechanism as compared to Tamburlaine. The intensity of passion between Macbeth and his wife shrinks rapidly together with the increase of their power. This is, in my opinion, due to the misguided expectations the spouses have of one another. Lady Macbeth's constraining ideal of masculinity far exceeds Macbeth's capacity to live up to her vision. Macbeth also seems astounded by her energy and managing skills. Lady Macbeth, to my mind, does not only exceed the expectations of Macbeth, she generally does not fit in with the pattern of Renaissance femininity defined by total obedience and subjugation to the husband. At one point Macbeth resolves not to kill Duncan when he says: "We will proceed no further in this business" (*Macbeth*, 1.7.34). Faced with quite a firm decision to give up the plan, she responds with a bitter attack on Macbeth's manhood. Such behaviour is far beyond the traditionally conceived Renaissance wife's obedience. However, as mentioned, this reversal of roles as well as the rise in power results in the disintegration of their intimate union. In *Tamburlaine*, the opposite takes place – the more power Tamburlaine gains, the more Zenocrate feels inclined to fall for him.

If, as mentioned, it is not physical intimacy that brings Tamburlaine and Zenocrate together, one may ask what fuels Zenocrate's change of attitude towards Tamburlaine. I believe it is exactly Tamburlaine's increase of power and influence that Zenocrate finds so appealing. Tamburlaine seems to be aware of this mechanism. For this reason, he waits with the wedding until his position as the ultimate ruler of the East is secured. I would also argue that it is his manliness defined as the animalic drive towards mastery that

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on "tropical men", see: *Beyond good and evil* (aphorism 197) and Nietzsche's elaboration on the topic in *The twilight of the idols* (IX 37).

makes him such a charismatic figure both for his companions and Zenocrate. Agydas, Zenocrate's servant, is totally perplexed when he finds out that Zenocrate, initially so dismayed at Tamburlaine, feels strongly attracted to him. He exclaims in total shock:

[h]ow can you fancy one that looks so fierce,  
 Only dispos'd to martial stratagems?  
 Who, when he shall embrace you in his arms,  
 Will tell how many thousand men he slew;  
 And, when you look for amorous discourse,  
 Will rattle forth his facts of war and blood,  
 Too harsh a subject for your dainty ears. (*Tamb. 1, 3.2.39-45*)

Yet for Zenocrate, obviously in love, Tamburlaine is "fair". In warfare he has absolutely no brakes, his ambition sees no limiting horizon, because he is the "Horizon-stretcher."<sup>5</sup> But in love he has only "sweet words" for Zenocrate. So Tamburlaine is an artist clad in the robes of a barbarian or, the other way around, he is a barbarian with artistic leanings. Anyhow this explosive mixture forms his overhuman potential that wins also Zenocrate's heart. Nietzsche (2006b: 28), in his highly poetic style, famously announces: "Courageous, unconcerned, sarcastic, violent – thus wisdom wants us: she is a woman and always loves only a warrior" – though Nietzsche uses his woman-metaphor here to speak about wisdom rather than women. His comment perfectly illustrates the Tamburlaine-Zenocrate dynamics. Shepherd (1986: 184) believes that Marlowe portrays Zenocrate as a woman who "has no desires", which supposedly proves that the text does not only show a sexist ideology, but is openly sexist. As far as I agree that Tamburlaine is downright misogynist in his appropriation of Zenocrate, I also believe that she is genuinely attracted to him. Zenocrate's not aware of the controlling "male gaze", that Shepherd points out, in her conversation with Agydas, so there is no need to doubt the authenticity of her falling for Tamburlaine. Once in love with her rough warrior, she also finds in herself previously unknown reserves of cruelty and excessive indulgence in power. In her treatment of Zabina she matches Tamburlaine in her exaggerated display of violence. Of course, in everything she does she always stays in the shadow of Tamburlaine. In this she does not only fulfill an early modern role traditionally cut out for women, but she also approximates a very Nietzschean ideal of womanhood. In *Beyond good and evil* Nietzsche (2002: 69) claims that: "[c]omparing man and woman overall, you could say: woman would not have a genius for finery if she did not have an instinct for the *secondary* role." One can

<sup>5</sup> In her newest account of Marlowe's drama Lisa Hopkins calls Marlowe "the Horizon-stretcher". To read more, see: Hopkins, Lisa. 2008. *Christopher Marlowe – A Renaissance dramatist*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 106.

feel indignation reading Nietzsche's comments on women, especially because of their inescapable essentialism, which is otherwise criticized in Nietzsche's philosophy. However, there is no escaping an observation that in the case of Zenocrate a "secondary" role is something that she embraces willingly, taking advantage of the "finery" that is implicit in it. What is more, the Zabina/ Zenocrate dynamics also underscore the early-modern (as well as very Nietzschean as it seems) division of women into two ideologically-constraining categories of Eves and Madonnas. As Shepherd (1986: 189) writes: "Tamburlaine singles out Zabina for particular humiliation, specifically insisting that other women mistreat her, just as he singles out Zenocrate for particular veneration." So, one can see that "the ideological opposition passionate/chaste woman is inflected by the male conqueror [...]" Zenocrate passes her loyalty test through her chastity. She encapsulates the Nietzschean vision of the feminine also in other aspects where Lady Macbeth apparently fails, namely, in her maternal duties.

Zenocrate is a mother of three sons, who in the dreams of Tamburlaine follow in his footsteps to become "the scourge and terror of the world" (*Tamb.* 2, 1.3.59). Having fulfilled her most significant role of bringing sons to the world, Zenocrate is asked by Tamburlaine to: "rest [...] like a lovely queen" (*Tamb.* 2, 1.2.16). And from now on her role is pretty much limited to being "lovely" – if indeed her role was ever anything other than that. Tamburlaine continues to venerate her chastity even when she is his wife and the mother of his children. As Burnett (1991: 34) writes: "[t]he aestheticizing of Zenocrate is also, of course, robbing her of any sexual threat; Tamburlaine is controlling her by situating her in an environment of frosty inaccessibility. It is, then, an act of appropriation or colonization: Tamburlaine is marking the extent of his empire." So, it is visible that his focus on her chastity is an extension of his will to tower over others, including his wife. When speaking about his sons he says: "[b]ut that I know they issued from thy womb/ That never looked on man but Tamburlaine" (*Tamb.* 2, 1.2.31-32). Mary Stripling (2007: 216) sees "the womb as a locus of control". Zenocrate through Tamburlaine's obsessive control is turned into the impossible embodiment of a virgin and a mother (Stripling 2007: 214). This in turn seems to be an extension of Tamburlaine's plan of self-divinization. Yet, perversely with the fulfilment of this profound transformation into a Virgin Mother, her power is believed to have increased (Stripling 2007: 214). If indeed Zenocrate holds any power at all, it is encapsulated in her motherhood or the influence she can exert on her children. Stripling sees the realization of the power crisis under Tamburlaine's roof in the scene when Tamburlaine expresses his disappointment that his sons resemble their mother too much. He says: "When these, my sons, more precious in mine eyes,/ Than all the wealthy kingdoms I subdued,/ Placed by her side, look on their mother's face:/ But yet methinks their looks are amorous,/ Not martial as the sons of Tamburlaine" (*Tamb.* 2, 1.2.18-22). Stripling suggests that Tamburlaine's dis-

may is an expression of his deep anxiety over the power that seems to be slipping from his hands. She writes that: "Tamburlaine, in his mind, has created his own (Oedipal) nightmare; by crowning a queen who has given birth to princes, he has made himself obsolete" (Stripling 2007: 216). I personally believe, however, that Zenocrate's potential influence is much exaggerated. Despite the mysterious power her mothering skills may hold, her authentic authority is limited to next to nothing. Her response to Tamburlaine's doubt seems to confirm this argument as she says: "My gracious lord, they have their mother's looks,/ But, when they list their conquering father's heart" (*Tamb.* 2, 1.3.35-36). Zenocrate seems to be relinquishing any claims to her sons and the ensuing conversation proves that both the wife and the sons are subjected to the mighty will of the father. The subsequent outbursts of anger at the "femininity" of Calyphas and finally the murder of the cowardly son by Tamburlaine prove that he will annihilate anyone who stands in the way of his project. In the face of his extremely radical execution of obedience and loyalty it is actually Zenocrate's great achievement that she can at least protect her sons as long as she herself lives. Her fulfillment of maternal duties merely guarantees her and her sons security, but is hardly an expression of any authentic power.

According to early modern standards, a woman attains salvation through child-bearing (Augtherson 1998: 419). Zenocrate's metaphorical fashioning into a Virgin Mother seems to at least secure her a veneration of her husband that moves far beyond the grave. Contrarily Lady Macbeth's barrenness subliminally seems to go hand in hand with her moral and mental disintegration. The question of the progeny of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth has long perplexed critics. Their responses range from the downright dismissal of the importance of this issue to more detailed analyses of the protagonists' personalities in connection with their failed family relations.<sup>6</sup> I believe that the question of children or rather their lack in *Macbeth* is an issue of profound importance, both on the level of structure and style as well as character moti-

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<sup>6</sup> One could refer to the famous discussion started by L. C. Knights (1964) in his article "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth? An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism", in: *Explorations*. New York University Press. 15-54, where the author dismisses character analysis in the vein of A.C. Bradley. Obviously he does not really focus on the question of children, but he generally criticizes the idea of even posing such questions. Knights claims that "the only profitable approach to Shakespeare is a consideration of his plays as dramatic poems, of his use of language to obtain a total complex emotional response" (20). More recent critics tend to go back to the motivations and possibilities implicit in characters' speeches and their influence on behaviour. Michael D. Bristol in his article entitled "How many children did she have?" goes back to this question in order to analyse the motivation of Lady Macbeth (in: Joughin, John J (ed.). 2000. *Philosophical Shakespeares*. (18-33) London: Routledge). In his view, her behaviours might be connected with an unexplained trauma connected to her failure to actually produce progeny (Bristol 2000: 32-33).

vation and the entire message the play communicates. Macbeth, just as Tamburlaine, expects male progeny from Lady Macbeth when, astounded by her energy and initiative, he says: "Bring forth men-children only; For thy undaunted mettle should compose/ Nothing but males" (*Macbeth*, 1.7.83). So, it is not only Lady Macbeth who defines the masculinity of her husband through the animalic drive towards mastery. Also Macbeth forces his wife into an essentialist definition of femininity which predominantly sees her as the carrier of his sons. In other words, in a very Nietzschean vision, Macbeth frames her as the mother of his "overhuman" progeny. However, for the early-modern standards, Lady Macbeth emerges as a complete degeneration of nature when she delivers her most controversial anti-maternal credo: "I have given suck, and know/ How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:/ I would, while it was smiling in my face,/ Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums/ And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you/ Have done to this" (*Macbeth*, 1.7.63-51). It is this seeming perversion of her "natural" instincts that Macbeth finds shocking yet irresistible. Some critics believe that Macbeth's yielding to his wife's persuasion lies in the threat of "maternal malevolence" that is first eclipsed in the witches' temptation (Adelman 1992: 55). As Janet Adelman (1992: 57) writes:

[t]he image of murderously disrupted nurturance is the psychic equivalence of the witches' poisonous cauldron; both function to subject Macbeth's will to female forces. For the play strikingly constructs the fantasy of subjection to maternal malevolence in two parts, in the witches and in Lady Macbeth, and then persistently identifies the two parts as one. Through this identification, Shakespeare in effect locates the source of his culture's fear of witchcraft in individual human history, in the infant's long dependence on female figures felt as all-powerful: what the witches suggest about the vulnerability of men to female power on the cosmic plane, Lady Macbeth doubles on the psychological plane.

This all means that Macbeth is vulnerable to Lady Macbeth as she metaphorically attacks him in her famous speech. The attack on his masculinity is equal to the attack on his deeply ingrained infant dependence on the mother. Yet connecting Lady Macbeth to the supernatural evil embodied in the witches is more than risky than it seems, as it pushes the responsibility for the committed crimes solely to the female agents. Seeing Macbeth as a good son who trespasses under the temptation or even threat of this supposed transgressive "maternal" force does violence to the play. It counterfeits both Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's desires. It is important to remember that Lady Macbeth has power over Macbeth predominantly because he desires the crown, as much as she wants him to have it. It is he that first kindles the thought of murder in his head, when he ponders on the valuation of the prophecy. He says:

[i]f good [prophecy], why do I yield to that suggestion  
 Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,  
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
 Against the use of nature? Present fears  
 Are less than horrible imaginings:  
 My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
 Shakes so my single state of man, that function  
 Is smother'd in surmise; and nothing is/ But what is not. (*Macbeth*, 1.3.147-155)

Lady Macbeth only instructs him on the necessity of sacrificing “fatherly” bonds of primogeniture. In her famous speech reversing nurturance she is like Tamburlaine, whose hand did not waver for a second when he raised his knife to kill his own son. Lady Macbeth is ready to sever the most sacred connection that a mother has with her child when circumstances of necessity arise. She wants to demonstrate to Macbeth that “over-coming” is a process where the greatest sacrifice is necessary as well as that she is capable of such an act and so should he be also. This requires trampling on the supposedly natural obligations. If she is able to sacrifice her bond with a baby, he should overcome his duty towards the fatherly figure of Duncan. At the same time she turns the prospect of kingship into an absolute imperative in their growth. Power is thus a duty that dignity requires, the only way to overcome circumstances. Lady Macbeth thus holds a position of moral relativity, where she attempts to deconstruct social bonds that are veiled with claims of nature. In her vision, the individual emerges as the only measurement scale for action.

If one is to embrace such a radically Nietzschean perspective on the individual and reads Lady Macbeth as its embodiment, her allegedly close relationship with the witches becomes even less tenable. I am of Alfar's (2009: 117) opinion that: “Lady Macbeth's relationship to the witches [...] is more tenuous than is often assumed. Their representation as spectral apparitions sets them apart from Lady Macbeth, whose role in the tragedy is circumscribed fundamentally by the material conditions governing gender, economic, and hierarchical relations.” The witches are “otherworldly” and “phantasmatic” (Alfer 2009: 117). In Nietzschean terms, one could say that just as Lady Macbeth, with her energy and determination, stands for the uncontrollable life force, the witches represent degeneration. They belong to different plains of existence and, as it seems, have different aims. Lady Macbeth always means well to her husband e.g. when she helps him to devise the plan of murder and carry it out, as well as when she rescues him from any suspicion during the banquet. The witches present Macbeth with a prophecy – which is only a handful of hints. Faced with the prophecy, Macbeth is free to act as he wishes. The witches themselves either mean harm or at best are indifferent to Macbeth. In Dymna Callaghan's (1992: 358) interpretation, they stand for

the same perverse maternity that Lady Macbeth professes as they represent “the threat of matriarchy”. Callaghan (1992: 358) believes that: “[f]emale rule, rather than being merely an element of demonism, becomes its very embodiment.” The equation between Lady Macbeth and the witches serves to work the ideological effect of demonising female power. As Callaghan (1992: 358) writes: “[i]n order to negate the symbolic threat of matriarchy, a number of deft ideological manoeuvres were required to subsume the threat of female power amid a wider preoccupation with the legions of hell.” However, as I have been trying to illustrate, Lady Macbeth’s maternal sacrifice is an expression of her overhuman potential or her ultimate will to power. The witches, whose potential aim is to wreak havoc, are naturally an expression of the early modern fear of malevolent female power. However, Lady Macbeth’s and the witches’ actions cannot be equated to one another for the very reason of the intentions behind them. If the witches’ role is to manipulate Macbeth into an “unnatural” transgression, I believe they succeed to trick both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Now, Lady Macbeth’s will to power cannot be reduced to the simple desire of political authority. Unlike the Queen in Holinshed’s *Chronicle*, that served as a basis for the play, Lady Macbeth never expresses her private ambition to hold authority. So her will to power realizes itself in action and “overcoming”, if not self-overcoming, then Macbeth’s overcoming – whom she entices to create himself anew through rejecting “natural” bonds. Yet it is her that assumes the position of agency and control, at least in the opening scenes of the play. Thus, as I intend to show, she ends up being a paradox, realizing and subverting the Nietzschean gender order.

In Nietzsche’s imagined gender relations *The Macbeths’* bickering over the right course of action in the initial scenes of the play illustrates: “the natural state of things, the eternal war between the sexes” (Nietzsche 2006c: 105). In a metaphorical sense, the opening scenes of the play portray a conflict between the seemingly natural definitions of masculinity and femininity as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth force one another into the strait jackets of gender essentialism. Nietzsche (2006c: 105) would summarize such a conflict by saying:

[w]oman, the more of woman she is, fights tooth and nail against rights in general: after all, the natural state of things, the eternal war between the sexes, gives her the highest rank by far. – Did anyone have ears for my definition of love? It is the only one worthy of a philosopher. – Love – its method is warfare, its foundation is the deadly hatred between the sexes.

After all, in this conflict it is Lady Macbeth that has the last word. However, whenever one thinks of the overhuman potential of Lady Macbeth, as the architect of events in the play, as the ultimate driver of action – one always stumbles on the fact that it is she who eventually breaks down and commits suicide. If one were to follow a Nietzschean interpretation and at the same

time an early modern vision of femininity, one could suggest that it is exactly the perversion of nature that leads to Lady Macbeth's insanity. For this "deadly hatred between the sexes" Nietzsche (2006c: 105-106) gives only one solution: "– Did anyone hear my answer to the question how to cure – 'redeem' a woman? Give her a baby. Women need children, the man is only ever the means: thus spoke Zarathustra." In *Thus spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche (2006b: 48) already gives a similar definition of womanhood: "[e]verything about woman is a riddle, and everything about woman has one solution: it is called pregnancy. A man is for woman a means: the end is always the child." As can be seen, in Nietzsche's vision the profundity of a woman's role is encapsulated in her potential to bring children to the world. His maternalism is also seen as a biological imperative and thus women who lack this basic instinct or, even worse, repudiate it emerge as unnatural. In Nietzsche's philosophy, the repudiation of instincts leads to *resentiment*, while a rejection of an instinct on which the survival of the species is dependent, in the eyes of Nietzsche, appears as something catastrophic. For this reason Nietzsche fears feminism so much. For instance, when he speaks of:

– '[e]mancipation of women' [as] the instinctive hatred of *failed* women, which is to say infertile women, against those who have turned out well, – the fight against men is only ever a means, pretext, tactic. By elevating *themselves* as the 'women *an sich*', as the higher women, as the 'idealists' of women, they want to *lower* the rank of women in general; there is no surer means of doing this than secondary education, trousers, and the right to belong to the political herd of voters. Emancipated women are basically anarchists in the world of the 'eternal-feminine', people in bad shape whose bottom–most instinct is revenge... (Nietzsche 2006c: 105-106)

One cannot escape thinking that when it comes to feminine roles, Nietzsche combines a long tradition of misogyny dating back to the Renaissance with post-Darwinian ideas on the naturalness of the maternal instinct. Following Nietzsche's line of argument, in the case of Lady Macbeth this instinct is repudiated and this results in an unexpected role reversal, where it is a woman who assumes a position of power. However, this must be "unnatural" as her own words testify:

[c]ome, you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here;  
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full  
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,  
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,

And take my milk for gall, your murdering ministers,  
 Wherever in your sightless substances  
 You wait on nature's mischief! (*Macbeth*, 1.5.47-50)

The wish to become “unsexed” is of course crucial as it implies that for a woman to be cruel always involves going beyond feminine nature. This “unsexing” realized in the assumption of power and the emergence of a woman as an active subject, automatically cancel the possibility of being a mother. The above speech coupled with Lady Macbeth's aforementioned “anti-maternal” credo constitutes the core of a paradox in a Nietzschean reading of her character. Lady Macbeth's readiness to overcome obstacles and her determination to sacrifice constitute her overhuman potential, but the object of her sacrifice and its end make her unnatural. The maternal instinct in a woman should be her prime driving force. In her it gives way to a masculine will to power. On top of all Nietzsche's (2002: 69) misogynist statements, he also claims that: “[w]hen a woman has scholarly inclinations, there is usually something wrong with her sexuality. Even sterility makes her prone to a certain masculinity of taste; man is, if you will, ‘the sterile animal’.” One could ask if Lady Macbeth's political “inclinations” become the source of her “sterility” and “masculinity of taste”, or is it the other way round that her “sterility” pushes her into the traditionally masculine sphere of power? Anyhow, following Nietzsche, there must be something wrong with her if she denies her maternal duties for the sake of political success, even if it is the success of her husband. If we indulge in a little make-believe and imagine Lady Macbeth as a man, we may see her as a perfect Nietzschean “overman”. She is characterized by excessive ambition and creativity. In order to pursue her goals, she goes beyond good and evil – treating the evil as incidental or necessary in the process of overcoming. She wants to get rid of remorse as an emotion that burdens one unnecessarily, especially when one can do nothing about the consequences of one's actions. However, despite all this, she falls short of realizing overhuman potential as it is her that breaks down, burdened with the pricks of conscience. In the early modern conceptualization of Lady Macbeth's mental disintegration one could explain it by saying, following the words of a very popular *Homily of the state of matrimony*, “she is the weaker vessel, of a frail heart” (*Homily of the state of matrimony* 1998: 437). Embracing Nietzsche's cult of instincts one could summarize her condition as a consequence of denying her maternal instinct. Nevertheless, both of these stances let biology condition and define what is understood as the feminine.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche's conceptualizations of the feminine seem to predate Freudian definitions of womanhood, where a woman is defined by lack (e.g. penis envy). The continuation of this line of argument is provided by Jacques Lacan in his “The Meaning of the Phallus”. For more details, see: Lacan, Jacques. 1982. “The meaning of the Phallus”, in:

As can be seen, Lady Macbeth's overhuman potential in a strictly Nietzschean perspective cannot be fully realized because she allegedly repudiates a fundamental instinct that shapes her as a woman. Woman's will to power must be demonstrated in the form of a maternal instinct, otherwise it is a perversion of nature. Yet if one frees the core of Nietzsche's thought from his misogyny, one can see that Lady Macbeth is characterized by a will to power that could be attributed to male Shakespearean or Marlovian characters. She is as Nietzschean as Macbeth, Tamburlaine or Barabas. If, as mentioned, her will to power is manifested in intense agency over events, her break-down is a direct consequence of Macbeth's shutting her out of his decisions and plans in Act 3. This is obviously his own attempt at shaking off her overpowering influence and taking over his own self-overcoming that she initially inspired in him. After the period of her intense engagement in his business, Macbeth suddenly excludes her from it by saying: "[b]e innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,/ Till thou applaud the deed" (*Macbeth*, 3.2.51-52). His words relegate her to the role devised for a woman by early modern pamphleteers and moralists. For instance, William Gouge in his marriage guide *Of domestical duties* (1622) recommends "submission in yielding to her [the wife's] husband's mind and will" which bring "contentment in resting satisfied and content with his estate and ability" (Gouge 1995: 91). However, as it turns out, Lady Macbeth cannot be satisfied with the growing disparity between her and Macbeth. She is left now in a position of immobility and inaction, which cancels the possibility to give vent to her exuberant will to power. In her sleep-walking scene, as Alfari (2009: 129) points out, she "painfully reenacts her closest moment with her husband, when she was effective at remasculinizing him and consoling him." Indeed, Lady Macbeth relives the moments of her greatness, her most intense tautness of the will to power when she says: "[f]ie, my/ lord, fie, a soldier and afeard? What need we fear/ who knows it, when none can call our power to/ account?" (*Macbeth*, 5.1.38-41). And a moment later she calls Macbeth: "Give me your/ hand. What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to/ bed, to bed" (*Macbeth*, 5.1.70-72). In her mind she goes through the moments when her influence over Macbeth had a healing and at the same time inspiring quality. So, as it seems, with the grow-

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Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds.) *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*. (translated by Jacqueline Rose). New York: Norton. 74-85. Lacan believes that a woman can have a phallic function, but it is connected with the denial of her desires and the appropriation of man's desires (Lacan 1982: 79-84). However, going back to the origins of early modern misogyny, a view of a woman seen as an incomplete man seems to have biblical origins, as God carved Eve out of Adam's rib. The early modern period appears to follow this vision of womanhood where female physical weakness in contrast to man's strength becomes a standard for seeing a woman as inferior in virtually all capacities.

ing independence of Macbeth, his sacrificing of their mutual trust, Lady Macbeth withers away. It is Lady Macbeth's forced confinement in the narrow definition of femininity that backfires and makes her overhuman potential redundant and eventually wasted. Thus, she is, as if, "forced" to confirm both early modern and Nietzschean misogyny.

To my mind, both Shakespeare and Marlowe embrace the very radical maternalism that can be found in Nietzsche's philosophy and that is also a predominant ingredient of the early-modern definition of femininity. The implications of this maternalism are different for both plays. Lady Macbeth emerges as a passionate and sensual woman who wants to push her husband towards greatness. Yet in the pursuit of power she becomes an active agent – a political animal or a female version of Tamburlaine. However, the assumption of the reversed role might be interpreted as a reason for her break-down and ultimately her death. Zenocrate is closer to the patriarchal ideal of a woman – a loyal companion and a mother of three sons. In a sense, she inspires Tamburlaine to further conquest by becoming his ever-present admirer. She herself also becomes an asexual object of art worthy of admiration, and even in her death she remains so. The deaths of both wives leave their husbands rather unconcerned, which even further limits their potential roles as carriers of energy and creativity. Macbeth, when informed of Lady Macbeth's death is already too engrossed in his own mad attempts to hold on to the crown, while Tamburlaine throws himself madly into the sea of further destruction and conquest and thus shakes off his grief pretty quickly. Both plays repeat the pattern of a strong man accompanied by a weaker woman, but the "weakness" of these female figures has a different background. While Zenocrate resigns herself to the role of Tamburlaine's admirer, Lady Macbeth is suddenly and unexpectedly stripped from her control and relegated to the position of a passive observer. One can either accuse Marlowe and Shakespeare of perpetrating early modern misogyny and dismiss their portrayals of women altogether, or one can try to embrace a wider perspective and say that neither Shakespeare nor Marlowe are any more misogynist than Nietzsche is. As Sarah Kofman in her famous article "Baubô: Theological Perversion and Fetishism" suggests, there is no one definitive vision of a woman implicit in Nietzsche's texts – nor is there of a man for that matter. Kofman highlights that there is no essential construct known as "woman as such" in Nietzsche's philosophy. "Woman *an sich*" is one of the petty attempts of turning one perspective into an absolute truth. Thus, woman is an affirmation of her own mystery. The attempt of establishing absolute truth about woman is also a sign of weakness, of *resentiment*. The same applies to the vision of a man. Kofman (1991: 191) writes: "'woman' is neither castrated nor not castrated, any more than man retains control (*détient*) over the penis." So, obviously, neither Lady Macbeth emerges as an ultimate failed woman defined as the

lack of the right instinct, nor Macbeth can be read as a complete “overman” embracing his impulses. They both fall short of their potential. It really takes a thick skin to become an overhuman being, whether man or woman. Tamburlaine and Zenocrate seem to form a Nietzschean overhuman couple, but their relationship is deprived of a life affirmative passion and sensuality. The characters presented in *Macbeth* and *Tamburlaine* seem to possess overhuman qualities, but very often they emerge as human, or to use Nietzsche's terminology, “human, all too human”. Nietzsche's texts, taken in their entirety, present a multiplicity of stances and attitudes on women and men, both affirmative and non-affirmative. So do the texts of Shakespeare and Marlowe, of which their characters constitute a fraction of the possible multiple perspectives on the feminine and masculine. Against Nietzsche's explicit reluctance to see women as carriers of overhuman qualities, I would like to carry forward the discussion on overwomen, taking Lear's daughters as specimens for my investigation. I believe that in *King Lear* Shakespeare created exceptional female figures that all share overhuman potential. Just as the elder sisters' assumption of positions of authority resemble Lady Macbeth's reversal of conventional male/female roles, Cordelia brings a totally new dimension into a conceptualization of an overwoman, such as even Nietzsche could have not anticipated in his body of thought.

#### 5.4. Critical responses to Lear's daughters and interpretative paths

With its inherent questioning of the boundaries between morality and immorality, nature and degeneration, the tragedy of *King Lear* is a potent space where the overhuman potential may develop, as my analysis of Edmund demonstrates. *King Lear*, through its morally inconclusive ending, even more than *Macbeth*, realizes a very Nietzschean in spirit revaluation of conventional valuations. Thus, it frustrates “dogmatist's reverse logic, Rückschluß, or conclusion *a posteriori*”, to refer to Babette B. Babich's (1996: 27) notions. Instead, it calls for an extended rereading looking beyond traditional perspectives. As I have already hinted, the dynamics of power, sexuality and gender seem to drive *King Lear* in its entirety. The aforementioned triad of obsessive anxieties within the patriarchal culture – the threat of bastardy, the threat of adultery, and finally the threat of female sexuality – inform and infuse the structure of the play. *King Lear* offers three powerful female figures who, each in her own right, strive to assert and shape their individuality against the backdrop of the male patrilineal culture. As I will be arguing, all three daughters of Lear seek authority and are driven by some form or other of the will to power. Their respective attempts to overcome the systemic limitations forced

onto them through the stiff conceptualizations of feminine roles and expected behaviours turn each of them at some stage into a freak of nature. Though traditionally critics tend to split the daughters, hailing Cordelia as a paragon of virtue while Goneril and Regan as incarnations of monstrosity, there are crucial similarities between them. They all frustrate Lear's expectations concerning their decisions and conduct, for which each and every one is, at some stage, "bastardized" and charged with a perversion of nature. This supposed degeneration of the natural order of things stems from the independence and monarchical authority, believed to be solely masculine, that these women acquire and master against the "nature" expected of them. In the case of each daughter, Lear's frustrated conceptions of filial gratitude and obedience turn into his brutal, misogynist attacks on their womanhood, sexuality and maternal potential. Thus, the portrayal of female power becomes inherently fused with female sexuality. Nietzsche's crooked and unstable conception of womanhood becomes a backdrop for the analysis of the three daughters' overhuman potential as, on the one hand, it corroborates the early modern essentialist notions of femininity, while on the other, it praises the creative potential of passion and sexuality encapsulated in femininity. Nietzsche's admiration for and, simultaneously, fear of womanhood, his undying fascination with the mystery of motherhood and the cult of pregnancy, coupled with his hopeless slips into essentialist maternalism and biological determinism emerge as a springboard for the analysis of overhuman womanhood in *King Lear*.

As it seems, the supposedly instinctive divide between the eternally noble Cordelia and the essentially evil Goneril and Regan drawn so far by critics has fossilized Shakespearean criticism of *King Lear* into a fixed set of widely accepted interpretative "facts". Interestingly enough, according to this line of thinking, Cordelia emerges as disinterested, morally righteous and loyal towards her father. Despite her act of disobedience in the love contest which has frequently been interpreted as an expression of her moral straightforwardness and integrity, she has frequently been read as pure, innocent and simply too good for the brutal reality of the tragedy. Her elder sisters, mostly due to their acts of violence and cruelty, have been thus read as ultimately malicious, calculating and downright evil. It is enough to quote from the classic *Shakespearean tragedy* by A.C. Bradley to get the feel of the dichotomy which is so often interposed on *King Lear*. Along with other characters Bradley (1992: 224) allots the sisters to two groups representing Love and Hate. Cordelia stands for the former while the elder sisters for the latter. Cordelia's "assertion of truth" inspires "devotion", while Goneril expresses "atrocious wickedness", in which her sister Regan can outstrip her only through her "venomous meanness" (Bradley 1992: 260-261, 276). Not only are they monstrosities-incarnated but their actions are "abnormal" and "absolutely contrary to nature" (Bradley 1992: 226). Obviously, the idea that the nature expected and frustrated in Shakespeare's play might be a social and, moreover, a highly stifling

construct never crossed Bradley's mind. In Shakespearean criticism of *King Lear*, the conventional binary opposition, dating back to Aristotle, of good and evil, reason and passion, male and female, hangs heavily and often blurs Shakespearean attempts at a deconstruction of such crude antitheses. Even in the more recent and more subtle criticism of Marvin Rosenberg (1972: 56) in *The masks of "King Lear"* Cordelia "is the first to reveal her private self, her inner conflicts", appearing thus vulnerable and innocent. The elder sisters "are concerned with their own convenience" and emerge as calculating and plotting against Lear from the very start (Rosenberg 1972: 82). It was not until the publication of the seminal article "The patriarchal bard: feminist criticism and Shakespeare: *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*" (1985) by Kathleen McLuskie that the gendered conditions in which Shakespearean heroines operate, and thus the three sisters in *King Lear*, were uncovered. In the spirit of cultural materialist analysis, McLuskie (1985: 98) contests Williams' belief in the existence of "permanent, universal and essentially unchanging human nature" in *King Lear* underscoring that this assumed order is a masculine and patriarchal construct. In other words, for the play to be emotionally effective, it calls for an assumption that the daughters have burning obligations towards their fathers and if they fail to fulfil these duties, the audience grows shocked (McLuskie 1985: 98). As she explains, the "generalised vision of chaos is presented in gendered terms in which patriarchy, the institution of male power in the family and the State, is seen as the only form of social organisation strong enough to hold chaos at bay" (McLuskie 1985: 99). McLuskie (1985: 98) is most probably the first author to pinpoint "patriarchal misogyny" in the treatment of Goneril and Regan. Yet even she in her revolutionary analysis dares not to attempt at redeeming the elder sisters, as she seems afraid of "associating feminist ideology with atavistic selfishness and the monstrous assertion of individual wills" (McLuskie 2006: 62). If one remembers that for the proponents of conventional morality the overman (or in this case an overwoman) may seem as an embodiment of all evil, the rampant individualism of the elder sisters, like that of Edmund, makes them closer to the Nietzschean ideal (Kuderowicz 1979: 138). However, as I will be arguing, all three sisters share degrees of the overhuman potential and are driven by varying forms of the will to power. Yet, before that can happen I would like to go back for a moment to McLuskie's assessment of the tragic effectiveness in *King Lear*, supposedly based on patriarchal assumptions. I strongly believe that the artistic excellence of this play goes beyond any mere patriarchal basis. Of course, the sisters function within this pattern – where obedience and subservience are required – but they habitually frustrate the expectations of their father, taking over political roles, not only the domestic roles to which females were normally restricted. If we read Goneril and Regan only as daughters, wives and potential mothers within the domestic circle, we indeed stumble upon their violence and cruelty as unnatural. However, once we see them as monarchs, certain motivations become clearer while their relation with Lear, a

father and a monarch, also becomes more problematized. This is a stance taken by Cristina León Alfar in her excellent study of Shakespeare's "problematic women". Alfar (2003: 26) frequently calls for the need to reread women like Goneril, Regan and Lady Macbeth in a political, rather than domestic context. I believe that Cordelia also goes beyond her role of a daughter when she assumes a political role – as a leader of an invasion. So the core of the conflict lies in the explosive mixture of expectations concerning power, sexual limitations, gender roles and family relations. Critics, with few exceptions, have failed to notice the complexity of the sisters' positions, very often limiting the events of the play to a family squabble.

### 5.5. Goneril, Regan and Cordelia

Indeed, as it appears, criticism treating on Lear's daughters, maybe with the exception of Cordelia, seems to be rather scant. As Cristina León Alfar (2003: 17) aptly observes: "troublesome female characters such as Goneril and Regan are among the most neglected of Shakespeare's women in the academia." Despite a slight change in the attitude towards "evil" women in Shakespeare, in the recent years to which the publication of Alfar's own book *Fantasies of female evil* has fortunately contributed, it still seems necessary to devote a detailed analysis to the powerful women in *King Lear* without the exclusion of Cordelia, who, to my mind, counts as one. Even McLuskie perpetrates the tradition of keeping the elder sisters and Cordelia apart as being fundamentally different and driven by separate impulses. Alisa Manninen (2009: 98-99), in her psychological analysis of the three sisters, pleads for the interchangeability between Goneril and Regan, who are so often treated as one evil force as opposed to Cordelia. The truth is, however, that, as sisters and daughters of the same father, they share similarities but also differ in certain respects. Following her line of thinking, I also believe that the analysis in the spirit of Nietzsche's philosophy calls for an individualist treatment of the sisters. It seems that the rift between the elder sisters and Cordelia, exploited by critics so far, first establishes during the love contest in the opening of the play and it is here I would like to begin my investigation of the overwomen. Though the behaviour of the sisters during the contest may seem as strikingly different, for all of them it might actually be an opening of the path to authority. I believe that Cordelia as opposed to the elder sisters chooses different means of self-assertion. However, I am of the opinion that what they are all eventually for is the establishment of their singularity.

The love contest, the reasons behind it as well as the reactions of the daughters in the wake of unfolding events have bothered critics for quite a long time. Scholars have frequently wondered whether Lear's actions are premeditated. As Henryk Zbierski (1988: 431) notes, the contest should be read as a public cele-

bration of the most official tone, where private feelings and state business intermingle. Indeed, the use of the royal "we" by Lear seems to underscore the public and formal occasion of the state division procedure. Being a public event, the contest is thus sanctioned by the authority of the state and its law, of which Lear is an embodiment. If one were to see the contest within such a legal framework, one should remember that the characters function within the system of primogeniture, with patriarchy as its most crucial ingredient. Hence, it is no surprise that Lear first addresses his "loving" sons, husbands of his elder daughters, informing them of his intentions in "publishing" his "daughters' several dowers" (*Lear*, 1.1.40-43). At the same time, in his opening speech Lear announces that he wishes "to shake all cares and business from our age,/ Conferring them on younger strengths, while we/ Unburdened crawl toward death" (*Lear*, 1.1.38-40). So, one can see that he decides to relinquish his power and royal authority, which he underscores in his other announcements when he says that he "will divest [himself] both of rule,/ Interest of territory, cares of state" (*Lear*, 1.1.49-50). Into this political game of throne and authority Lear quite unfortunately introduces a very private measurement scale of emotions. His real motivations behind the semi-political and semi-emotional division of the kingdom have posed a serious problem for the critics. Rosenberg (1972: 17-18) even made a simplified list of major critical directions concerning Lear's reasons. Yet, whatever Lear's reasons may be, his decision to divide the kingdom has profound consequences for his daughters as it forces them to take a stance against the humiliating performance which weighs love against potential political power. Just as the question of Lear's motivation has been a frequent object of critical debates, the legal and emotional implications of the contest for the daughters have not occupied critics that intensely. Legally speaking, in early modern England a dowry apportioned to a woman on entering marriage is the only financial asset over which she has, under strict regulations, any control whatsoever (Alfar 2003: 47-48). In the play, the daughters' dowries include landed property but along with it monarchical authority and power, which Lear promises, but, as the following events demonstrate, is really unwilling to part with. Yet at the opening of the play one can see that power and the royal privileges are to be won. It is interesting to note that Lear breaches the law of primogeniture and instead of passing the crown automatically to his eldest daughter (or to be more precise her husband) decides to divide the Kingdom in respect to a barely measurable love scale (Zwierlein 2009: 67). By breaching the normal custom, he opens a possibility of winning power in a game. Of course, the rules of this game are morally very dubious as Lear demands public demonstrations of affection, changing his daughters into objects of a transaction. What is even more unfair in the deal he offers is that honesty does not pay off, as the example of Cordelia proves. Lear's contest seems to pose a central paradox and hence it emerges as an impossible patriarchal market of exchange where women are far from subjects. I believe that the daughters' situation can be summarized by the words of

Luce Irigaray (1985: 85) who in *The sex which is not one* aptly claims that: “[a] woman ‘enters into’ these exchanges only as the object of a transaction, unless she agrees to renounce the specificity of her sex, whose ‘identity’ is imposed on her according to models that remain foreign to her.” The situation is paradoxical as, on the one hand, the proverbial ideal of feminine subservience and obedience is required so that an expression of affection can be taken for granted. On the other, against the early modern requirement of female silence in the public sphere, the daughters are to speak of their obligations towards their fathers. In other words, the daughters, as mirrors to the righteousness of the patriarchal system, are forced to reflect Lear’s own vision of himself. In *The gender trouble* Judith Butler (1999: 57) says: “women reflect [...] masculine power and everywhere reassure that power of the reality of its illusory autonomy.” Nietzsche, with his characteristic misogyny, also saw women in such a mirror-function when his Zarathustra claimed that: “[t]he happiness of a man says: I will. The happiness of a woman says: he wills” (Nietzsche 2006b: 49). In this sense, Lear very much resembles the Nietzschean Zarathustra, who believes in the ennobling force of obedience which supposedly accompanies love. Yet Zarathustra’s words provide a brutal and ironic commentary on the subsequent events. He prophetically announces: “[a]nd a woman must obey and find a depth for her surface” (Nietzsche 2006b: 49). Knowing that each daughter eventually frustrates Lear’s expectations, the belief that a woman is merely a surface that may be deepened through the stifling (possibly unrequited) experience of paternal “love”, is more than illusory. Following on in the spirit of Nietzschean misogynistic rhetoric, Lear’s daughters indeed turn into “dangerous playthings” as they subsequently free themselves of his overpowering influence (Nietzsche 2006b: 48). In his essentially unfair market of love/authority exchange, he requires his daughters to assume a “mirror” function in order to confirm his own “meaning-constitutive” power. They emerge as dangerous players because they, as Manninen (2009: 103) believes, fail to reflect his opinions. Initially, this concerns Cordelia only, but subsequently Lear grows estranged from his elder daughters too. Each of them is accused of being unnatural whenever they seem to truly speak their mind.

As mentioned, they are to assume conventional feminine roles, which confirm the powerful masculine positions and shape the women as seats of “natural” love and kindness. For this reason, Goneril claims to love her father with “grace, health, beauty, honour” while Regan is “alone felicitate/ In [his] highness’ love” (*Lear*, 1.1.58, 1.1.75). As most critics agree and as the following events in the play demonstrate, the elder daughters’ responses to their father are a pose enacted in accordance with the requirements of the situation. It might be safely assumed that Goneril and Regan are indeed driven by the power that can be won in the aftermath of the love contest. I strongly believe that there also seems to be no reason to hold that against them. They accept the unequal rules of the game which forces them into the essentialist feminine

roles of obedience and subservience, so why bash them for the enactment of the expected "femininity". Luce Irigaray (1985: 84) comments:

in fact that 'femininity' is a role, an image, a value, imposed upon women by male systems of representation. In this masquerade of femininity, the woman loses herself, and loses herself by playing on her femininity. The fact remains that this masquerade requires effort on her part for which she is not compensated.

As I have been trying to prove, the contest is a "masquerade of femininity" and such a role is indeed imposed on the daughters. What is also crucial is that they are not compensated for their dutiful enactment of the role as any attempt at claiming their newly acquired authority is met with Lear's brutal attacks on their nature and femininity. For instance, a careful analysis of the first squabble between Lear and Goneril shows that Lear will not accept any questioning of his conduct. Goneril complains of "men so disordered, so debauched and bold/ That this our court,/ infected with their manners,/ Shows like a riotous inn. Epicurism and lust/ Makes it more like a tavern or a brothel/ Than a graced palace" (*Lear*, 1.4.233-237). Goneril's arguments seem very reasonable, while her complaints justified, and again there seems little ground to doubt the truthfulness of them. Also, Goneril does not say anything offensive or cruel to her father. She tries to appeal to his age and experience, which should be indicators of his wisdom (*Lear*, 1.4.231). Yet it seems evident that Lear's unruly train does not only abuse her hospitality but also undermines her royal authority. That she assumes her political function can be observed in her use of the royal "we". Lear ignores her appeals and immediately questions his paternity of, in his view, such a disobedient daughter. He asks, with disbelief: "[a]re you our daughter?" – also appropriating the royal "we" (*Lear*, 1.4.209). So, he evidently wants to exert both his paternal and monarchical power while Goneril attempts to perform her authoritative function. Lear's treatment of Goneril underscores the early modern exclusion of women from the sphere of political activity. He sees her remonstrations as an attack on his manhood and he punishes her with curses (*Lear*, 1.4.289). Here he also wants to bring a matter of political urgency back to the realm of purely domestic concerns. His staged love contest had a similar dimension, fusing political and private spheres. In the contest the elder daughters, driven by acute political instinct, are capable of enacting the required model of femininity that leads them to the acquisition of authentic power, which in turn gives them authority to question Lear's judgement. Cordelia does exactly the same thing without accepting the abuse of patriarchy.

As indicated, the love contest is a means to the acquisition of future authority, which the elder sisters assume immediately after Lear's supposed "abdication". Though humiliating and requiring the enactment of a role, it opens the way to authentic power. That this is true one learns from Goneril's conversation with Oswald when she says: "Idle old man/ That still would manage those au-

thorities/ That he hath given away. Now, by my life,/ Old fools are babes again and must be used/ With checks as flatteries, when they are seen/ abused" (*Lear*, 1.3.17-22). While one could suspect insincerity in Goneril's and Regan's protestations of love straight away, this private conversation of Goneril and Oswald makes one sure of their true motives. In the subsequent scenes Goneril demonstrates her acute political instinct when she doubts the effectiveness of her authority as long as Lear commands his army of one hundred knights. She claims: "[t]his man hath had good counsel. A hundred/ knights!/ 'Tis politic and safe to let him keep/ At point a hundred knights! Yes, that on every/ dream,/ Each buzz, each fancy, each complaint, dislike,/ He may enguard his dotage with their powers/ And hold our lives in mercy" (*Lear*, 1.4.340-347). This, as well as the other scene when one sees her pleading with Lear about the knights, demonstrates that she does not only want to protect her power and authority but also guard her kingdom against potential chaos and disorder. Regan's behaviour, very often a copy of Goneril's, shows that she may not have the political vision of her elder sister, but she is intelligent enough to imitate her. Regan's rashness and propensity for violence may be indicative of her shaky confidence in her feel of the political situation. Yet like her sister, once she holds onto her power, she perfectly realizes the need to guard it against anyone wishing to undermine it. The sisters are embodiments of Machiavellian morality, which corroborates the *Realpolitik*. Their stance might be morally dubious but it is politically highly successful as they seem to instinctively feel that they are capable of holding on to their power effectively as long as they collaborate. The enactment of the traditionally female roles leads them to the possession of real authority and from this moment onwards the attempt at reading them through the conventional model blurs their political intent. Alfar (2003: 26) writes:

[b]ecause the gender prescriptions they ostensibly fracture have never been adequately explored in relation to the dynamics of gender and power that inform their tragedies, they are read within their designated domestic roles as daughters and wives. Consequently, the political context of their actions is ignored in favour of a reinscription of obedience, mercy, and compassion as natural and appropriate feminine behaviours. Their transgressions of orthodox feminine conduct, in this regard, have been commodified by a literary tradition that itself constructed to sustain conventional moral boundaries.

So, one can see that both Goneril and Regan try to transcend the moral boundaries that are ascribed to their sex as their ambition pushes them beyond given standards. However, if the elder sisters are driven by a politically motivated form of the will to power, that enables them to get hold of authority, what should one make of Cordelia's silence, which does not only bring any political gain but also costs her the father's affection? It is hardly plausible to attribute her with political naiveté. Cordelia very well knows that the path towards politi-

cal authority leads through flattery but it does not grant independence of decision and action. Goneril's and Regan's love statements may bring the political upper hand but it forever weaves them into the viscous circle of patriarchy. Once they assume the straitjacket of early modern femininity, any action that subverts it costs them accusations of unkindness, ingratitude and finally monstrosity. As Catherine Belsey (1991: 149-150) points out:

[f]emale subjectivity in the early modern period was defined through the subjection to sexual and economic ideologies. Devoid of power over their lives or their bodies, owned rather than owning, and constantly scrutinized for violations in conduct, women were controlled by an intricate system of patrilineal laws and gender naturalizations.

Such is exactly the position of Goneril and Regan, but it is only Cordelia's stance in the love test that ultimately underscores its impossibility for the daughters as women. It demonstrates how little they have to deem control over. Cordelia has got only her love and family commitment, a traditionally female and the only available domain that can be bargained. She is willing to reason these values for the sake of reserving her right to assert her singularity. She memorably says: "I love your Majesty/ According to my bond, no more nor less" (*Lear*, 1.1.101-102). In this statement she delineates the border between her own independence and Lear's influence over her. His demand of absolute loyalty and obedience cannot be met as this would mean her mental incapacitation. With cold calculation she announces: "[g]ood my lord,/ You have begot me, bred me, loved me./ I return those duties back as are right fit:/ Obey you, love you, and most honour you" (*Lear*, 1.1.105-108). Here she seems to be giving substance to her very Nietzschean claim for her mental independence, which she evidently holds more dear than the momentary comfort of her father, whom she will not stop short of humiliating. She seems to be saying that her dedication to him has a limit. Though she reserves the portion of her love for her future husband, it is her decision to do so. When Lear asks her with disbelief: "[b]ut goes thy heart with this?" (*Lear*, 1.1.116). She confidently answers: "[a]y, my good lord" (*Lear*, 1.1.117). I would argue that she emerges as a female version of Brutus, because she is capable of literally sacrificing her father like Brutus who sacrifices Caesar. She does not only subvert the required ideal of obedience by which she goes beyond the patriarchal model of femininity, but emotionally she distances herself from her father. Assuming that she sees through her sisters' true intentions, her display of firmness, encapsulated in her resounding "Nothing, my lord", is an act of rampant egoism (*Lear*, 1.1.87).<sup>8</sup> Her personal principle becomes the measure

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<sup>8</sup> One may be sure that she is perfectly aware of the situation. After all she confidently says: "The jewels of our father, with washed eyes/ Cordelia leaves you. I know you

of her identity, from which anyone else is excluded. Her behaviour is an act of self-assertion, because she does what *she* wants, not what her father expects or the custom requires. At the same time, it quickly becomes evident that she has no political scheme or a reasonable backup plan. She seems to be thriving on a Nietzschean dictum – “live dangerously” (Nietzsche 2007b: 161). As yet, she may not be a fully conscious “overwoman” but she definitely thrives on her newly-established independence. I would argue that she is like a Nietzschean “preparatory human being” who will not stop short of “living dangerously” manifesting “the signs of a more virile, warlike age approaching that will above all restore honour to bravery” (Nietzsche 2007b: 160). In *The gay science* Nietzsche (2007b: 161) heralds the coming of

human beings who know how to be silent, lonely, determined, and satisfied and steadfast in invisible activities; human beings profoundly predisposed to look, in all things, for what must be overcome; human beings whose cheerfulness, patience, modesty, and contempt for great vanities is just as distinctive as their magnanimity in victory and patience with the small vanities of the defeated.

Cordelia seems to perfectly fulfil this Nietzschean portrayal, as through her isolated and obstinate silence she overcomes the overpowering influence of her father but also attempts to overcome the tyrannous, mercantile nature of the patriarchal agreement thrown at her. In this market of patriarchal “love” Lear says that, in the wake of her “untenderness”, “her price has fallen” (*Lear*, 1.1.198). He denounces his paternal duty towards her and leaves her “with those infirmities she owes,/ Unfriended, new-adopted to our hate,/ Dowered with our curse and strangered with our/ oath” (*Lear*, 1.1.231-234). Again, like in the case of Brutus or even Edmund, the overhuman potential is awoken and realized on the brink of tyranny.

As demonstrated, the rules of Lear’s contest from the start force his daughters to fight a lost battle, and so Cordelia’s defiance emerges as an act of courage as well as a statement of individualism pushed even to the limit of egoism. Critics have stumbled upon Lear’s rash reaction to Cordelia’s behaviour. Her banishment seems to constitute a structural element of the tragedy as it begins Lear’s journey from his error of judgement – his miscalculation of the situation and blindness – to insight through suffering. Yet, I do believe that Lear’s fury arises from more than just a miscalculation of the situation – and rather from an intricate framework of expectations he has concerning his daughters. As mentioned, Lear wishes his daughters to reflect his opinions and

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what you are,/ And like a sister am most loath to call/Your faults as they are named. Love well our/ father./ To your professèd bosoms I commit him;/ But yet, alas, stood I within his grace,/ I would prefer him to a better place./ So farewell to you both” (*King Lear* 1.1.311-319). This fragment does not only prove that she sees through her sisters, but also that she knows she is leaving him at their mercy.

such an attitude is in accordance with the early modern conception of womanhood, which sees a woman as mostly a corporeal creature while a man as a seat of reason. In a famous pamphlet by Juan Luis Vives (1995: 137) entitled *Instruction of a Christian woman* (1529), the author mocks any woman that would question her husband's judgement as the one "which turneth backward the laws of nature, like as though a soldier would rule his captain, or the moon would stand above the sun, or the arm above the head". Such a conceptualization of female irrationality finds its justification in early modern ideas on female physiology. Aristotle (1995: 46), whose works provide a "scientific" basis for Renaissance scholars, writes in *The generation of animals* that "the male provides the 'form' and 'the principle of the movement', the female provides the body, in other words, the material." In Galen's (1995: 47) *On the usefulness of the parts of the body* one reads that "the female is less perfect than the male". Thus the stereotype of a woman as a formless corporeity defined by lack, is carried onto the Renaissance texts. One finds similar conceptualizations in e.g. Helkiah Crooke's *Microcosmographia*. Though he opposes Aristotle's view that a woman is "an error or a monster in nature", he maintains "that females are more wanton and petulant than males, we think happeneth because of the impotency of their minds" (Crooke 1995: 55). Finally, as can be seen, the belief in female physiological inferiority results in the social, political and economic victimization and overriding early modern misogyny. Lear demonstrates such misogyny in his treatment of all his daughters, but, as I have been trying to demonstrate, the very basis of the contest is misogynist. This inherent misogyny commodifies the women and Cordelia seems to be aware of this process. The result of the contest and Lear's fury can be summarized by Luce Irigaray's (1985: 84) words about patriarchy:

[i]n our social order, women are 'products' used and exchanged by men. Their status is that of merchandise, 'commodities'. How can such objects of use and transaction claim the right to speak and participate in exchange in general? Commodities, as we all know, do not take themselves to market on their own; and if they could talk...

Cordelia indeed can talk, and it is her apt reasoning that spurs Lear's anger. It is crucial to note that Cordelia's silence first brings encouragements – "Speak again" (*Lear*, 1.1.90) and then threats – "How, how, Cordelia? Mend your speech a little, / Lest you may mar your fortunes" (*Lear*, 1.1.103-104). Such an emotional blackmail is met with Cordelia's clear and reasonable outlining of the limits of her duties towards her father. It is only then that Lear is pushed to anger. In the case of Lear and his daughters the conventional binary opposition of reason and passion is reversed as it is Lear that is mostly driven by highly affective responses. Yet his anger seems to be fuelled by exactly this reversal. Joseph Swetnam, the author of a famous anti-feminist pamphlet

entitled *The arraignment of lewd, idle, froward, and unconstant women or the vanity of them, choose you whether, with a commendation of wise, virtuous, and honest women, pleasant for married men, profitable for young men, and hurtful to none*, when heralding his aggressive and supposedly reasonable argumentation, claims that his critique of women will most probably be met with inconsistent blubbing from the weaker sex, which should be ignored as an offence to reason. He writes:

I refer myself to the judgment of men which have more experience than myself, for I esteem little of the malice of women. For men will be persuaded with reason, but women must be answered with silence. For I know women will bark more at me than Cerberus, the two-headed Dog, did at Hercules when he came into Hell to fetch out the fair Proserpina... (Swetnam 2006)

In Shakespeare's tragedy exactly the opposite procedure takes place, as it is Cordelia who answers first with silence and then with reasonable clarity while Lear "barks at her" and in his passionate speech he refers to e.g. "the barbarous Scythian" (*Lear*, 1.1.117). Interestingly, it is not only Cordelia that offers her father reason-infused argumentation. As mentioned, the first challenge to Lear by Goneril is also based on solid reasoning. In Act 2, Scene 2 both sisters try to renegotiate the terms of Lear's stay at their houses by limiting his train. Again, it is Goneril who provides intelligent reasoning when she says: "[h]ear me, my lord./ What need you five-and-twenty, ten, or five,/ To follow in a house where twice so many/ Have a command to tend you?" (*Lear*, 2.2.299-302). Regan echoes her by saying "What need one?", to which Lear emotionally cries out "O, reason not the need!" (*Lear*, 2.2.303-304). So as can be seen, the questioning of Lear's authority is based on a reversal of traditional gender roles – where each daughter fills a role of reason and abandons intellectual timidity (Hoover 1984: 61). In the words of Nietzsche (2002: 128) one could say that "[s]he forgets her *fear* of man: but the woman who 'forgets fear' abandons her most feminine instincts." Here Nietzsche's (2002: 128) misogyny seems to go hand in hand with the early modern conceptualization of womanhood, as for Nietzsche the rejection of female modesty is equal to the process of female degeneration. The excessive intellectualization of women leads to their abandonment of their seemingly natural roles for the sake of political independence, like in the case of Goneril and Regan, or mental self-reliance, in the case of Cordelia.

As it seems, such is Lear's understanding of his youngest daughter's rebellion. Lear announces: "I loved her most and thought to set my rest/ On her kind nursery" (*Lear*, 1.1.137-138). His words yet again hit at the very core of patriarchal tensions as it is "her kind nursery" that is a designated female role Lear has imagined for Cordelia. As Claudette Hoover (1984: 60) claims, the core of Cordelia's defiance lies in "her refusal to participate in a ritual

based on the myth of the 'eternal feminine', the nurturing female who is surrendering, selfless, changeless and mothering..." Indeed, Lear seems to be fashioning his daughters into the models of maternal love, of which "kind nursery" seems to be a crucial ingredient. The failure to enact this form of love is read as a denial of any bonds of love, hence the accusation of being "so untender" (*Lear*, 1.1.118). Nietzsche (2005a: 151) similarly conceptualized female love when he wrote that: "in every kind of womanly love there also appears something of motherly love." Yet, against early modern misogyny, Nietzsche would couple maternal love with immense energy and instinctive intellect which can only be attributed to a woman. In a sense he professes a reversed form of gender essentialism, which may be seen in the Lear-Cordelia tension. In *Human, all too human* he explains:

[t]he intellect of women reveals itself as complete control and presence of mind and the utilization of every advantage. She bestows it on her children as her fundamental quality, and the father adds the darker background of the will. His influence determines as it were the rhythm and harmony with which the new life is to be played; but its melody comes from the woman. – Expressed for those who know how to interpret: women possess reason, men temperament and passion. (Nietzsche 2005a: 153)

If one were to follow on the metaphor of Cordelia as a kind and loving mother into which Lear wishes to fashion her, the above description perfectly encapsulates their reversed dynamics. She is reason-incarnated while he stands for the uncontrollable and the chaotic. Yet even such a reversed gender dynamics can be driven back to its patrilineal model – that remains to be a point of reference. Lear's emotional outbursts, despite their aggression, may be justified by the supposedly natural "darker" will, while Cordelia's "intellect" remains a perversion of nature when it is not utilized in the service of her "maternal" duties. After all, following Nietzsche, it is the man that provides "the rhythm and harmony". The woman, bringing in melody, becomes an ornament and thus is forever an instrument played by a man. Hence, Nietzsche seems to be paying women a compliment by attributing the power of possibly superior intellect to them though still relegating them to secondary roles. This seems to be exactly what Lear does. He functions as a wielder of authentic power while his daughters are to ennoble authority with demonstrations of affections. Knowing now that Cordelia seems to explode both the early modern and Nietzschean notions of womanhood, the question of her overhuman potential is still pending. If Nietzsche could ever conceptualize a woman as *Überweib*, he would seek the "overwoman" potential in the female embrace of her biological functions. As Derrida (1997: 57) suggests, out of different portrayals of women in Nietzsche's texts the one that he praises is the so called "affirming model" of femininity. Keith Ansell-Pearson (1993: 34-35) explains that "the 'affirming woman' signi-

fies the self-overcoming of the will to truth and the will to illusion; she is the Dionysian force which abandons all foundations and certainties, “the original mother”. Cordelia, paradoxically by speaking the truth, which in the vein of Nietzschean perspectivism is really *her* truth, overcomes the will to absolute and essential truth. That in turn is an embodiment of the overcoming of the will to illusion that so aptly characterizes Lear. Cordelia shatters both, but also she evidently rejects the maternal function weaved for her by Lear. For these reasons, I believe that she emerges as a Nietzschean overwoman. She is the incarnation of the overhuman potential that maybe even Nietzsche, in his stubborn biological essentialism, might have overlooked. Cordelia speaks against the early modern stiff femininity that forces her into a denial of the “instinct of freedom” that roars in her blood. At the same time she rejects blind and forced maternalism. I believe that her attitude might be summarized by a quotation from Luce Irigaray’s philosophical “love letter” to Friedrich Nietzsche where she contests Nietzsche’s reading of the female. Like Cordelia she rebels and asserts herself by saying:

I am no longer the lining of your coat, your – faithful – understudy. Voicing your joys and sorrows, your fears and resentments. You had fashioned me into a mirror but I have dipped that mirror in the waters of oblivion – that you call life. And further away than the place where you are beginning to be, I have turned back. I have washed off your masks and make up, scrubbed away your multi-coloured projections and designs, stripped off your veils and wraps that hid the shame of your nudity. I have even had to scrape my woman’s flesh clean of the insignia and marks you had etched upon it. (Irigaray 1991: 4)

I believe that Cordelia, through her obstinacy and defiance in the love contest, undergoes a similar transformation. She cancels her entire forced identity as Lear “disclaim[s] all [his] paternal care,/ Propinquity and property of blood/ And as a stranger to [his] heart and [him] hold[s] [her] from this forever” (*Lear*, 1.1.114-117). By this obliteration of a forced identity she arrives at the newly-found identity that is entirely hers. Gönül Bakay (2005: 309) suggests that: “[w]ith Cordelia, Shakespeare aimed to create an androgynous character possessing both the age’s accepted virtues for man and woman: uniting man’s strength, power and steadfastness of purpose with woman’s integrity, silence, wisdom and pity.” Tempting as this idea really is, if it be true, then with the character of Cordelia Shakespeare is really perpetrating Renaissance misogyny by claiming that these respective qualities are essentially masculine or essentially feminine. The power of Cordelia, to my mind, lies in her inexplicability. She indeed fuses traditionally masculine and feminine features, but she obliterates their gender affiliation to build herself anew. Her last speech seems to be a final confirmation of her overhuman potential:

I yet beseech your Majesty—  
 If for I want that glib and oily art  
 To speak and purpose not, since what I well  
 Intend  
 I'll do 't before I speak—that you make known  
 It is no vicious/ blot, murder, or foulness,  
 No unchaste action or dishonored step  
 That hath deprived me of your grace and favor,  
 But even for want of that for which I am richer:  
 A still-soliciting eye and such a tongue  
 That I am glad I have not, though not to have it  
 Hath lost me in your liking. (*Lear*, 1.1.257-268)

Though her honesty costs her the place next to her father, she is perfectly sure of the righteousness of her rebellion. Thus, at the opening of the play one gets a glimpse of her profound will to assert identity against any “glib and oily art” that is the illusion of absolute truth.

Cordelia's indomitability earns her the awe of the king of France, who claims not only his love but also respect of such magnitude that he himself cannot fully comprehend the power she has over him. He says: “[t]is strange that from their cold'st/ neglect/ My love should kindle to enflamed respect.—/ Thy dowerless daughter, king, thrown to my chance,/ Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France” (*Lear*, 1.1.294-299). Hence, as I would argue, Cordelia leaves the stage stronger, towering over all other characters. Like her sisters she arrives at the position of authority but, as I hinted, her path towards authority leads through absolute loyalty towards herself and nobody else. For this reason, I would also dread to compare Cordelia to a Christ-figure as her loyalty to herself borders on egocentrism and in this respect she is most Nietzschean. In the scene of the reconciliation with Lear she can kneel in front of him and ask his blessing, as she knows that she had been in the right from the very start. When Lear humbles himself in front of her and says that she has a good cause for not loving him, it is her who says magnanimously “[n]o cause, no cause” (*Lear*, 4.7.86). Again, she can say this because Lear has never managed to bring her down or truly hurt her as her conviction in the righteousness of her own path could never be questioned. Cordelia's invasion in the name of her wronged father has been mostly read as a statement of her immense and disinterested love towards Lear. This, of course, might be read as quite so, but one should not overlook the transformed power dynamics between them in Act 4 when they meet again. Even in his early philosophy Nietzsche tries to see through seemingly altruistic motivations and uncover an ulterior motive behind them. In his mature philosophy the whole plethora of human impulses will be read as numerous forms of the will to power, but already in *The gay science* Nietzsche

(2007a: 40) sees various faces of love as “a craving for new property” or “unconditional and sole possession”. In such a way, one could also interpret Lear’s obsessive, patriarchal need to control or even “posses” his daughters. Cordelia frees herself from this stifling love, and through her independence reverses the power dynamics. When she comes back to redress her father in the moment of the greatest crisis, she is an all-powerful overwoman who can afford to share the excess of her power. By excluding women from the conceptualization of the *Übermensch* Nietzsche himself seems to have overlooked the potential of such mighty figures as Cordelia. However, as Keith Ansell-Pearson (1993: 31) explains:

Nietzsche’s thinking contains an emphasis on ambiguity, on plural identity, on the affirmation of the constructed self in terms of an artistic task in which one freely gives ‘style’ to one’s character, all of which can be useful for articulating a kind of feminist mode of thought which seeks to subvert an essentializing of human identity, whether female or male, and which would simplify and efface ‘difference’(s).

Such a power of subversion is encapsulated in Cordelia. For this reason she is so reminiscent of Irigaray’s lover of Nietzsche. Her ability to transcend through constancy of will turns her into the embodiment of ‘overhuman’ potential. If one again moves back to the opening scene of the play, one sees that Cordelia’s steadfastness as well as her newly-won authority make her also speak to her sisters with condescension. Their last meeting, as Rosenberg (1972: 81) suggests, is not only a harbinger but an actual beginning of war between them. In my opinion, the elder sisters left now as they are with their gendered and thus crooked authority, have only to begin their battle for their right to self-determination.

As indicated, what Lear expects from his daughters is subservience and hence a forced form of maternal love. Cordelia rejects the straitjacket of forced maternalism. Yet the phantom of the absent mother and the failure of maternal love overshadow the interpersonal relationships in the tragedy as is visible not only in the Lear family but also in Gloucester’s household. It is significant to note that it was Coppélia Kahn in her seminal article “The absent mother in *King Lear*” that pointed out the painful absence/ presence dynamics of the mother in *King Lear*. Kahn (2003: 63-64) writes that:

[t]he aristocratic patriarchal families of Gloucester and Lear have, actually and effectively, no mothers. The only source of love, power, and authority is the father – an awesome, demanding presence. But what the play depicts, of course, is the failure of that presence: the failure of a father’s power to command love in a patriarchal world and the emotional penalty he pays for wielding that power. Lear’s insistence on paternal power, in fact, belies its shakiness; similarly, the absence of the mother points to her hidden presence.

For Kahn, the identification with the mother takes place when he succumbs to madness. As I have already tried to demonstrate in my discussion of the character of Edmund, the entire patriarchal paranoia infusing the play can be driven back to this phantom of the absent mother, while this metaphor extends even further beyond the character of Lear. As already hinted, the threat to the stability of the patriarchal system and primogeniture always lies in the female, while the fear of female sexuality contributes to the construction of female evil. As Alfar (2003: 23) explains:

[f]emale evil is produced by male fears of female desire, and therefore by masculinist beliefs in women's power over childbirth. But such fears are, inevitably, finally about inheritance, about the right of men to transmit their wealth to legitimate heirs. For if women are the only ones who know a child's paternity, then men cannot be said to contain women at all, and in fact women may not be said, with any comfort, to be inferior. The threat to male sovereignty and property rights that women pose, thus, makes women inherently duplicitous and untrustworthy, and produces the concept of feminine evil.

These fears can all be visible in Lear's treatment of his daughters, while the overhuman potential of Goneril and Regan is downplayed through Lear's attempts to diminish their authority. The issues of power, sexuality, bastardy and motherhood all clash in the frustrated attempts of Goneril and Regan to overcome Lear's influence and realize their own overhuman potential. As mentioned, Cordelia defies Lear's paternal, unequal game of love and loyalty, as a result of which she becomes "bastardized" by Lear who disclaims his paternity over his youngest daughter. One can see, the failure to repay an obligation in the form of maternal love that Lear requires results in the disgrace of the whole female line – the daughter and consequently the mother. Cordelia's failure to comply triggers the viscous circle of an obsessive and sinister fear of female power encapsulated in and symbolized by the mystery of motherhood. These fears are manifested in the treatment of Goneril and Regan. If women are "inherently duplicitous and untrustworthy", as Alfar writes, then power in their hands emerges as particularly dangerous.

As already indicated, the elder daughters set about executing their authority straight away and in doing so they demonstrate rationality, determination and effectiveness. As Alfar (2003: 91) points out, their first conversation after Cordelia's and Kent's banishment demonstrates "a sense of caution" rather than any wish to plot against their father. With an acute sense of vision Goneril observes Lear's infirm judgement. The sisters agree that it is their responsibility to protect their power because, as Goneril aptly puts "[i]f our father carry authority with such/ disposition as he bears, this last surrender of his will/ but offend us" (*Lear*, 1.1.351-353). Against Lear's impulsivity they plan ahead their actions. Again their rationality and eloquence, like that of

Cordelia's, when contrasted with Lear's emotionality, disrupts the early modern perception of required gender dynamics. John Knox (1995: 138), writing against the rule of Mary Queen of Scots, in *The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women* (1558) announces that:

[a]nd first, where I affirm the empire of a woman to be a thing repugnant to nature, I mean not only that God, by the order of his creation, has spoiled woman of authority and dominion, but also that man has seen, proved, and pronounced just causes why it should be. Man, I say, in many other cases, does in this behalf see very clearly. For the causes are so manifest, that they cannot be hid. For who can deny but it is repugnant to nature, that the blind shall be appointed to lead and conduct such as do see? That the weak, the sick, and impotent persons shall nourish and keep the whole and strong? And finally, that the foolish, mad, and frenetic shall govern the discreet, and give counsel to such as be sober of mind? And such be all women, compared unto man in bearing of authority. For their sight in civil regiment is but blindness; their strength, weakness; their counsel, foolishness; and judgment, frenzy, if it be rightly considered.

It is so ironical that in Shakespeare's tragedy the unfolding events prove contrary to what Knox professes. After all, weakness and infirmity push Lear to relinquish his authority, while the very act is burdened with blindness and foolishness. Just as these qualities are manifest in him, his daughters constantly prove "sober of mind". However, Shakespeare's perversity goes even further because it is Lear who frequently accuses his daughters of depraving nature. In his obsessive, habitual dependence on authority, Lear fears the power of his daughters whom he had given this power. Female power appears so monstrous as it does not only threaten male dominion but, in a more general sense, it renders men superfluous. It is the creative and at the same time subversive potential of motherhood that threatens to make men redundant. Derrida (1997: 31) proclaimed Nietzsche a philosopher of pregnancy. Indeed, the metaphor of pregnancy as a mental shortcut for intense creativity and ultimately a root of all life energy permeates Nietzsche's thinking, but it is important to note that his undying fascination with motherhood also lies at the foundation of Nietzsche's misogyny.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the notion of pregnancy, contrary to what Derrida

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<sup>9</sup> In Nietzsche's numerous texts, pregnancy is equalled with budding ideas – while giving birth signifies giving literary or stylistic shape to thoughts e.g. in *The gay science* Nietzsche (2007b: 6) writes: "[w]e philosophers are not free to separate soul from body as the common people do; we are even less free to separate soul from spirit. We are no thinking frogs, no objectifying and registering devices with frozen innards – we must constantly give birth to our thoughts out of our pain and maternally endow them with all that we have of blood, heart, fire, pleasure, passion, agony, conscience, fate, and disaster. Life – to us, that means constantly transforming all that we are into light and flame, and also all that wounds us; we simply can do no other". In *Thus spoke Zarathustra* the idea

believes, is not merely a stylistic device but rather a lasting thought construct with significant bearing on Nietzsche's vision of femininity. It is enough to mention yet again the passage from *Thus spoke Zarathustra*: "[e]verything about woman is a riddle, and everything about woman has one solution: it is called pregnancy. A man is for woman a means: the end is always the child" (Nietzsche 2007c: 48). In the Nietzschean vision the mystery of female creative power is her maternal potential. A man becomes a tool for the fulfilment of her profound maternal instinct, once it is realized man's role is radically diminished. Simultaneously a mother becomes a self-reliant, self-defined and all-powerful creator. Such a conceptualization of female power results in the obsessive necessity to control women and the need for men to guard themselves against them. Thus, Nietzsche's perspective is to a degree a continuation of early modern misogyny based on the fear of female sexuality and female supposed duplicity – that also permeates the tragedy of *King Lear*. The aforementioned phantom of the absent (and again potentially subversive) mother resurfaces and rekindles in Lear when he "bastardizes" Goneril. In response to her rationality and authority, Lear is now more specific as he maliciously calls out: "[d]arkness and devils! [...] Degenerate bastard" (*Lear*, 1.4.260-263). However, Nietzsche adds a new layer to sinister womanhood, which actually may contribute to the turning of his maternalism to the advantage of feminist studies, namely, his fascination with and appreciation of female instincts, as well as their creative potential. Commenting on Irigaray's *Marine lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Keith Ansell-Pearson (1993: 41) explains that "Zarathustra's/ Nietzsche's greatest affliction is that he suffers from an envy of the womb. In his desire to achieve the impossible, namely to give birth to himself, Nietzsche expresses a fundamental resentment towards that which he feels ardour for and most esteems – maternal creativity." Such seemingly contradictory tensions are also realized in the character of Lear. Because he fears maternal or female self-sufficiency and power, he brutally attacks Goneril. He curses his second daughter for her defiance by saying:

[h]ear, Nature, hear, dear goddess, hear!  
Suspend thy purpose if thou didst intend  
To make this creature fruitful.  
Into her womb convey sterility.  
Dry up in her the organs of increase,  
And from her derogate body never spring  
A babe to honor her. If she must teem,

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of pregnancy recurs as "the higher men" give birth to themselves in the pain of self-birth (Nietzsche 2006b: 236-237). Finally, in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche (2007d: 7) announces: "[t]he fortunate thing about my existence, perhaps its unique feature, is its fatefulness: to put it in the form of a riddle, as my father I have already died, as my mother I am still alive and growing old."

Create her child of spleen, that it may live  
 And be a thwart disnatured torment to her.  
 Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,  
 With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks,  
 Turn all her mother's pains and benefits  
 To laughter and contempt, that she may feel  
 How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is  
 To have a thankless child.—Away, away! (*Lear*, 1.4.289-303)

The transfer of power has already shown Lear that Goneril is a determined and competitive authority. In the face of her power he craves to regain his lost authority in a desperate verbal assault on her body. In Nietzschean terms, the attack on Goneril's fertility hits at the very core of her potential for self-overcoming and self-creation. Lear's wish for Goneril's sterility is an expression of his paranoid fear of the mother as an all-powerful life force. A birth of a "disnatured" child, that Lear prophesies for her, would make a mockery of her maternal might. It would cancel her as an agent of life energy and power. Hence, Lear seems to be combining primordial womb envy with an obsessive fear of the power encapsulated in this organ. As Coppélia Kahn (1981: 11) aptly observes in her book *Man's estate: Masculine identity in Shakespeare*: "[t]he critical threat to identity is not as Freud maintains, castration, but engulfment by the mother [...] men first know women as the matrix of all satisfaction from which they must struggle to differentiate themselves." Lear indeed fears being devoured by his daughters, and Shakespeare's reversed rhetoric fuels this anxiety as they are deemed "pelican daughters" (*Lear*, 3.4.82). His term captures his fear of being engulfed, but it also underscores the wild energy of the maternal instinct that will stop short of nothing for the sake of new life. Albany's exclamation "[t]igers, not daughters" plays on a similar sentiment as it combines the female with the beastly that cannot be tamed (*Lear*, 4.2.49). Again, as Nietzsche (2006c: 183) would see it, an untamed beast is still better than an "improved" human being burdened with "morality" or conscience. Such a creature may start a project of sublimating the impulses while an "improved" man or woman is devoid of them at all.

It is important to observe that paradoxically next to the fear of creative motherly potential, Lear is also burdened with a desperate need to return to the womb. Goneril's remark that "Old fools are babes again" provides an ironical framework for Lear's craving of maternal love, but his numerous appeals to the "motherly kindness" of the daughters demonstrates a deep emotional longing for such care (*Lear*, 1.3.20). For instance, Lear appeals to Regan: "[t]hou better know'st/ The offices of nature, bond of childhood,/ Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude" (*Lear*, 2.4.200-202). Yet, as can be seen, Lear's demand of love, even at moments of great emotional strain, always has a

threatening dimension. This seems to be a resultant of his fear of being relegated to the position of dependence, devoid of authority and authentic power over the lives of the daughters. His primordial fear of the mother is demonstrated for the third time when he talks to Regan. With his characteristic tinge of threat, he answers Regan's polite expression of gladness at seeing him: "[i]f thou shouldst not be glad,/ I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb,/ Sepulch'ring an adult'ress" (*Lear*, 2.4.145-147). Again the threat of bastardy is combined with the demand for love. When faced with both sisters Lear rails at Goneril, to which Regan justifiably reacts: "[o], the blest gods!/ So will you wish on me/ When the rash mood is on" (*Lear*, 2.4.190-191). Critics often point to Goneril's "superior intelligence" that can be contrasted with Regan's "dullness", which she covers up by "exaggerated brutality" (Booth 1987: 59). Yet Regan also shares political cunning, which prompts her to follow her slightly more active and prudent sister. It is this political instinct and ability to anticipate future developments that makes both sisters sly and effective political animals. Lear tries to force his daughters into his expected vision of femininity that involves due control and authority from him. As can be seen, the elder daughters also share overhuman potential that becomes manifest when they contradict Lear. They seem to follow Nietzsche's "improved" dictum from the Gospel according to Luke (18,14): "[h]e that humbleth himself wants to be exalted" (Nietzsche 2005: 48). However, following Hollingdale (2001: 144), who sees Nietzsche's will to power as a deep psychological need, I would posit that the sisters, like Cordelia, wish to overcome the influence of their father. Yet in order to do this they take over a monarchical authority that is coupled with ruthless and blind political might. In this sense they are driven by a Nietzschean will to power, but their power has a very Hobbes-like dimension. In his famous political tract *Leviathan* Thomas Hobbes, predating Nietzsche's notion of the will to power, claims that every human being is fuelled by a primordial desire to grow in might. He announces:

[s]o that in the first place, I put for a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death. And the cause of this, is not alwayes that a man hopes for a more intensive delight, than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more. (Hobbes 2009, loc. 1817-1820)

As Hobbes expounds, in the state of so called "nature" individuals clash in "an endless escalating competition for power" (Patton 1993: 147). For this reason, it is necessary for all people to yield to an absolute and all-powerful sovereign who can keep strife at bay. Though the daughters' yearning for power might have a psychological and hence a Nietzschean dimension, the outward appearance it assumes is of Hobbes' style. They shape themselves into female

versions of Hobbes' Leviathans – visions of sovereign authorities. Hence, their failure to overcome Lear's expectations and transfigure and shape themselves anew. As Alfar (2003: 22) repeatedly points out, "The tragedies say more, then, about the nature of power than they do about the nature of women. Or if they say anything about the nature of women, they seem to say that women are as likely to perform power in orthodox, that is masculine, modes as men." However, these portrayals are untenable because they enclose these female Leviathans within masculinist models of wielding power and authority. As a consequence, the elder daughters only become copies of the tyrannous models provided by Lear's patriarchy. Thus, eventually there is no question of Nietzschean self-overcoming, instead one is presented with the embodiments of the rule "might is right". Subsequent acts of violence, starting from Gloucester's blinding, through Regan's murder, to Goneril's suicide are all demonstrations of the failure of this model. Within these stifling standards the only way to hold one's power is to eliminate competition. Regan memorably tells Lear: "[h]ow in one house/ Should many people under two commands/ Hold amity? 'Tis hard, almost impossible" (*Lear*, 2.4.275-277). She seems to be saying to him that there will only be one authority in the house. However, ironically this prophetic sentence applies to the sisters as it is the conflict between them that brings their rule to a halt.

The intensity of the desire that the sisters develop for Edmund is quite astounding, as it clouds the judgements of these so far focused and determined women to such a degree that their attempts to hold and defend their authority totally recede into the background. Alfar (2003: 98-99) believes that:

Goneril's and Regan's attraction to Edmund is symptomatic of the authority that both women need in order to rule. As women, they do not possess power in any culturally constructed sense but are subject to their culture's definition of femininity as weak and subservient. [...] Edmund possesses the masculinist ruthlessness that Goneril and Regan need to rule.

As I have been trying to demonstrate, the sisters struggle against these culturally imposed definitions by the assumption of masculine models of power execution. By commodifying these models, they fight Lear's overpowering influence and try to emerge as self-reliant and independent. Yet their attempts at self-determination clash with the "moral" considerations from surrounding characters. Albany exclaims to Goneril: "[s]ee thyself, devil!/ Proper deformity shows not in the fiend/ So horrid as in woman" (*Lear*, 4.2.73-75), while Lear calls his daughters: "unnatural hags" (*Lear*, 2.4.319).<sup>10</sup> Surrounded

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly enough, though these terms of address are to offend the women, perversely they underscore their overhuman potential. Albany's comment puts Goneril beyond the accepted moral codes of conduct, while Lear's reference to "hags" also capita-

by characters who try to undermine and question their authority, they meet someone who shares their overhuman ambition. It seems that Edmund's own overhuman potential is responsible for their sudden and disastrous infatuation. Edmund's bravado, his flippancy and positioning beyond good and evil, combined with his determination to overcome the limits of the tyrannous system barring him access to power and wealth, matches the sisters' ambition to wield authority. Simultaneously, his lack of moral brakes reflects their Leviathan-like execution of sovereignty, hence, Goneril's besotted exclamation: "[o], the difference of man and man!" (*Lear*, 4.2.33). Her conversation with Albany, laced with early modern gender stereotyping, also gives one a clue as to the expectations Goneril has of a man. When she calls Albany "milk-livered man" her rhetoric reminds one of Lady Macbeth who also fears her husband's tender conscience and craves for staunch determination. Having in mind the late Cornwall's ruthlessness one may assume that Regan's vision of masculinity resembles that of Goneril. Paradoxically, the lust the two women have for Edmund's overhuman leanings automatically cancels their own potential and leads to their downfall. Goneril memorably declares: "I must change names at home and give the distaff/ Into my husband's hands" (*Lear*, 4.2.20-21). It soon becomes clear that the distaff is forced back into her own hands.

By succumbing to his energy and appeal, the sisters seem to give up their chances to transcend. Instead of sublimating their instincts, they give in to them. As a consequence, their unbent individuality blurs and disintegrates. As Claudette Hoover suggests, next to the classical Senecan model of "a masculine woman" Shakespeare's construction of Goneril and Regan exploits an early modern anti-feminist stereotype of "female insatiability" (Hoover 1984: 50). The tradition goes back to early Christianity and the philosophy of the Church fathers who propagated the idea of women being ever sexually inexhaustible, which unescapably meant male degradation and fall (Hoover 1984: 58). St. Jerome hailed against all women in general when he said:

[i]t is not the harlot, or the adulteress who is spoken of; but woman's love in general is accused of ever being insatiable; put it out, it bursts into flame; give it plenty, it is again in need; it enervates a man's mind, and engrosses all thought except for the passion which it feeds. (St. Jerome 1892: 368)

In the Middle Ages, the image reappears in e.g. *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487) where lustful women in order to fulfil their unquenchable desire give in to devils (Hoover 1982: 62). The tradition is still strong in the Renaissance as

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lizes on "supernatural" abilities, as the etymology of the word "hag" suggests. "A hag" may mean "a witch" or "a fury" but also "a goddess" or a "powerful supernatural woman" (Online Etymology Dictionary <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=hag>) (date of access 30.12.2013).

the pamphlets of e.g. Swetnam or Vives perfectly prove. In *The arraignment of women*, Joseph Swetnam enumerates biblical and mythological women who brought their husbands down through their lust. For instance, he emphatically asks “Did not Jezebel for her wicked lust cause her husband’s blood to be given to dogs?” (Swetnam 2006). Vives who sees chastity as the only saving grace for women, in *The instruction of a Christian woman* brutally attacks widows deciding to remarry. He writes:

[a]nd she, enflamed with viscious lust, forgetteth her own womb: and she that late afore sat mourning among her children, that perceive not their own loss and harms, now is picked up a new wife. [...] Confess thine own viciousness. For none of you taketh a husband but to the intent that she will lie with him, nor except her lust prick her” (Vives 1995: 74).

Indeed, Shakespeare seems to be inscribing Goneril and Regan within the tradition treating of female insatiability. However, he also seems to adopt it with a twist because the sisters’ lust seems to contribute mostly to their own disaster. Their desire for Edmund becomes stronger than their individual will to power. Regan says to Edmund: “I never shall endure her. Dear my lord,/ Be not familiar with her” (*Lear*, 5.1.18-19) while Goneril declares in an aside: “I had rather lose the battle than that sister/ Should loosen him and me” (*Lear*, 5.1.21-22). The drawing of Goneril’s and Regan’s sudden falling for Edmund might be indeed an illustration of the misogyny deeply ingrained in the Christian culture. However, the myth of female insatiability travels far beyond Shakespeare’s times as Goneril’s and Regan’s skirmishes could very well be summarized by Nietzsche’s essentialist aphorisms on women. Nietzsche would claim that “women want to be loved without competitors” (Nietzsche 2005a: 153). The sisters, once taken possession of by their desire, devote all their energies to possess Edmund. In their attempts to win him over they try to entice him by a promise of further dominion and power, completely forgetting their own project of holding onto authority. Goneril appeals to his masculinity, while Regan announces: “[w]itness the world that I create thee here/ My lord and master” (*Lear*, 5.3.91-92). So, one can see that all the attempts at establishing self-asserted and self-determined authority on the part of the sisters collapses. Nietzsche (2005a: 152) writes that: “[w]omen in love come to be just as they are in the image that the men by whom they are loved have of them.” This is exactly what seems to be happening with the sisters, as they now willingly inscribe themselves within the pattern of patriarchy they had first subverted. Finally, Nietzsche (2005a: 154) writes:

[i]n a state of hatred women are more dangerous than men; first and foremost because, once their hostility has been aroused, they are hampered by no considerations of fairness but allow their hatred to grow undisturbed to its ultimate conse-

quences; then because they are practised in discovering the wounded places everyone, every party possesses and striking at them: to which end their dagger-pointed intellect renders them excellent service.

If one now recalls Goneril's act of fratricide, one can see that she will not accept surrendering Edmund to her sister; thus, following Nietzsche, she indeed is hampered by no considerations of fairness in their competition. In Nietzsche's philosophy of self-creation, libido is just one of numerous manifestations of the will to power. However, what is of utmost significance is the fact that the transfigured and sublimated will to tower is always a far stronger and sophisticated creative power than the raw bodily instinct. This mechanism does not work in the case of the sisters as they appear too engrossed by the competition over Edmund. They stop short of self-overcoming and eventually come to confirm both the early modern and Nietzschean misogyny.

When Edgar intercepts Goneril's letter with her plotting against Albany, he exclaims: "[o] indistinguished space of woman's will!" (*Lear*, 4.6.300). His condemnation of the woman's will, in Nietzschean terms, could very well be a praise of the strong will to power. Yet in the play the wills of the elder sisters, unlike that of Cordelia, actually turn out to be wavering and rickety. Alfar, following Belsey's ideas on female suicide, claims that Goneril "acts to guarantee her self-definition as a monarch against the state that would control her by defining her uses of power as immoral" (Alfar 2003: 103).<sup>11</sup> Goneril's suicide could be read as a final and desperate attempt at self-overcoming or at least self-assertion, though one cannot escape feeling that the attempt is aborted in the wake of other gory events. Thus, the sisters' subjectivity is awoken only to be extinguished. Goneril and Regan, like Cordelia, definitely have the overhuman potential, but it seems to melt away in the course of the action. As indicated, because they have acquired authority under the veil of supposed female modesty, any subversion of this model of femininity results in accusations of the perversion of "nature". The attempts to supersede the given model is also doubly more difficult. It seems that their viciousness matches their intensified need to overcome Lear's expectations of them as they first appear to have willingly assumed the roles weaved for them. Though they later try to subvert them, eventually they are unable to give style to the chaos of their passions, to use Nietzsche's rhetoric. It is hard to change the psychological load of the tragedy as it eventually victimizes the initially demanding patriarchal father. Nothing will blot out Goneril's and Regan's acts of violence, yet I do hope that the investigation of their overhuman potential

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<sup>11</sup> Catherine Belsey (1993: 124-125) writes: "[s]uicide re-establishes the sovereign subject [...] As the crowning affirmation of the supremacy of the self, and the extinction of finitude [...] In the absolute act of suicide the subject is itself monetarily absolute. As an individual action, therefore, suicide is a threat to the control of the state."

partly unfolds their victimization and the tyranny of the circumstances they operate in. In such circumstances it is only an overwoman that has the nerve to reject everything offered to her for a price of her independence. Now it seems tempting to once more refer to Nietzsche (2005a: 150), who opened his discussion on women in *Human, all too human* by saying that “the perfect woman is a higher type of human being than the perfect man: also something much rarer.” This is yet again a little piece of Nietzsche’s subjective “truths”; this time a specimen of “reversed” misogyny. However, speaking of Cordelia as a perfect “overwoman” one is almost obliged to refer to it. It seems that within the space of the tragedy she indeed emerges as “the perfect woman” and simultaneously “overwoman”, possibly the only truly “overhuman” specimen in the tragedies under my scrutiny. Just like her sisters emerge as “castrated/castrating women”, she arrives as an “affirming woman”.<sup>12</sup> Nietzschean self-creation requires sacrifice, even of those most loved. For the sake of her own individual need of growth, her principles and truthfulness to oneself first and foremost, Cordelia “sacrifices” her father. Yet, unlike for Goneril and Regan, her brutal act of cutting the umbilical cord saves her the futile combat with Lear. Though this idea might be critically contentious, to my mind she emerges as an embodiment of a Nietzschean self-creative egoism that thrusts Lear and the sisters into their own vicious circle of anxiety and struggle for their own identity. When Cordelia comes back, she leads an army to redress her “punished” father and she eventually lets Lear “set [his] rest/ on her kind nursery” (*Lear*, 1.1.138). She welcomes the role of a nurturer that Lear so craved for from the start. But now that also Lear is transformed, he sees that she turns into the embodiment of maternal power and love willingly. Nietzsche (2002: 127) writes:

[s]o far, men have been treating women like birds that have lost their way and flown down to them from some height or another: like something finer, more vulnerable, wilder, stranger, sweeter, more soulful, – but also like something that has to be locked up to keep it from flying away.

Nietzsche’s and Shakespeare’s imagery forms a beautiful parallel. When Lear unites with Cordelia, he memorably says: “[c]ome, let’s away to prison./ We

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<sup>12</sup> I am here referring to Derrida’s enumeration of female types in the Nietzsche canon (Derrida 1997: 57). Derrida treats the question of woman as a question of style in Nietzsche, so he reads female types as rhetorical tools in Nietzsche’s thought. Though such an instrumental treatment on the part of Derrida has been met with sometimes quite severe criticism (see: Ansell Pearson 1993: 35-37), his differentiation comes in handy when describing the three daughters in *King Lear*. To my mind, “his” women constitute quite an interesting parallel with Lear’s daughters. They are daughters of one father like the women in “pregnancy and birth- obsessed” Nietzsche, as Derrida sees the German philosopher.

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two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage./ When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down./ And ask of thee forgiveness" (*Lear*, 5.3.9-12). Paradoxically, though they both await their time in prison, at this stage Lear already knows, while Nietzsche only instinctively feels, that there is no need to fear maternal love, nor is there any justification for keeping women in cages of patriarchy. Against Nietzsche's instinctive but unexplored feeling, Irigaray (1991: 23) writes: "[i]f from her you want confirmation for your being, why don't you let her explore its labyrinths? Why don't you give her leave to speak? From the place where she sings the end of your becoming, let her be able to tell you: no." Cordelia is an encapsulation and statement of creative and all-powerful female negation. From this negation the overwoman or overhuman is born – an iconoclast of the old order and a value-maker. Of course, like in the Nietzschean vision, the inherently chaotic and existentialist world of the tragedy is not ready for her, at least not yet.



## Conclusion

Having concluded my voyage through the rough sea of Nietzschean philosophy and the early modern conception of identity, I do hope I have reached my planned destination. The spark of inspiration that incited me to explore the possibility of combining Nietzscheism and early modern singularity partly stemmed from my dissatisfaction at Nietzsche's absence, or his scant, often unacknowledged presence, in the studies of the early modern. Though Renaissance identity has been an object of intense academic debate, Nietzschean subjectivity has so far not served the investigation of early modern ambitious and highly aspirational identities. So there existed uncharted area that required mapping. Moreover, the clash of the giants – of modern philosophy – Friedrich Nietzsche – and of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage – Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare – seemed particularly tempting. My goal was, of course, not solely to demonstrate the utility of Nietzsche's philosophy as a methodological tool or as a gesture of academic recognition for the Nietzschean heritage but, above all, to present a new take on early modern singularity. Thus, I have attempted to immerse both Nietzsche and the two Elizabethan playwrights in a combined analysis that included elements of philosophizing and the close reading of source texts. In chapter 1 presented advantages and disadvantages of both classical philosophical analysis and the new historical or cultural materialist paradigm. Having examined the strong points and weaknesses of these analytical approaches I proposed my framework – intended to combine the best practices. In the course of my "new historical philosophizing" I first turned my attention to the historical and cultural background of the English Renaissance. At the heart of early-modern subversion, one can find Renaissance sceptics, philosophers, adventurers and finally the playwrights of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. The English stage reflects the creative ferment of its period and provided a forum to discuss the all-too-often subversive topics. As it seems, in its self-overcoming of limiting and stifling attempts at a containment, the stage emerges thus as a life-affirming force, while the intense will to power of men presented on the stage testifies to a very Nietzschean spirit of the English Renaissance. So, ambition seems to be an outward manifestation of the internal will to power – a pure and wild life force. It gives shape and form to human singularity and provides a basis for the building of identity in the project of self-overcoming.

This is why it is limitation and containment that inspires further subversion. This pattern is reflected in both Marlovian and Shakespearean characters.

Having outlined the background and investigated the identity-building pattern in the Renaissance, I moved on to incorporate this Nietzschean framework into the selected plays by Marlowe and Shakespeare. The first analytical chapter is devoted to Marlowe's overmen – Tamburlaine and Barabas. As presented, both Marlovian protagonists are initially limited by their confining circumstances, but they overcome these and emerge literally as masters of puppets in their respective environments. Tamburlaine, marked as inferior due to his humble shepherd roots, fashions himself into a King, subduing all his opponents. Barabas is disadvantaged due to his Jewishness and victimized by the community of Malta. Tamburlaine, though the vanquisher of the Turks, emerges as a subversive leader exploding any notions of aristocratic hierarchy and supposedly divinely sanctioned "natural" laws. Barabas, in his distancing from his roots and applying a subversive moral outlook also threatens the seeming stability of Malta. Both characters profess their mental and aesthetic superiority by inscribing themselves into the Nietzschean master/slaves rhetoric. Their ruthless and cunning actions testify to their ingenuity, but also demonstrate that they are characterized by particularly strong wills to power. Tamburlaine and Barabas create themselves from scratch in the process of self-overcoming and, by asserting their strong wills, they manage to tower over other characters. They succeed because they never shun from cruelty and violence as, in a Nietzschean style, they embrace their primeval instincts. They do not only outplay their enemies but also cancel possibilities of self-assertion for those who through filial relations seem close to them. These imposing fathers, who will not accept challenge to their authority, are willing to sacrifice their children for the sake of their continual ascent in power. As I tried to demonstrate, by centralizing and implicitly praising the strong individualities of his protagonists Marlowe's plays communicate scepticism or even atheism. Being driven by subversive moralities, they also seem to encapsulate the pitfalls of Nietzschean immoralism. In their following of a Nietzschean pattern, the plays emerge as vehicles in the criticism of religion, and herd instincts coupled with faith. Simultaneously through the criticism of the herd instinct they become celebratory statements of Renaissance individual self-assertion. However, the Marlovian protagonists still fall short of their overhuman potential. Tamburlaine seems to be aesthetically sensitive, but Marlowe gives us little insight into his inner thoughts. Though Tamburlaine attempts sublimating his cruelty into aesthetic beauty, his transformation is not coupled with any deeper moral reflection. Barabas, an heir of the stage Machiavel, is more of an inward man, though his interiority often demonstrates his malicious relish in the failure of his enemies. In him interior reflection is clearly not equal to moral reflection. As much as these

characters creatively embrace their impulses, they seem to fail in sublimating them. In other words, the rejection of old morality does not necessarily lead to the revaluation of values. In their failure to transfigure their lowly instincts into a more nuanced sensitivity, they remain rough appreciations of an un-sublimated life force. According to Nietzsche, such “beasts of prey” are still infinitely more superior to the emasculated, weakened slaves of conventional morality. Nevertheless, they clearly cannot be seen as fully-fledged overmen. Shakespeare seems to be offering more reflective “inward” men, who also share the overhuman potential of energy and intense aspiration. I thus devoted the remaining part of my analysis to Shakespearean figures.

Chapter 4 investigates three ambitious characters – Brutus from *Julius Caesar*, Macbeth, the protagonist of the tragedy of *Macbeth*, and Edmund from *King Lear*. These three figures are connected by their intellectual and actual rebellion against their symbolical or real fathers. As can be seen, a reversed pattern to the one found in Marlowe unfolds, as in Shakespeare the sons raise their hands against seemingly all-too powerful fathers. Marlowe’s protagonists resist any challenges to their self-realization, denying the process to anyone else, while in Shakespeare’s the original progenitor’s supposed invincibility is shaken. From the start Brutus, Macbeth and Edmund manifest an interiorized and deeply engrained urge to topple their original progenitors. Their intense wills to power seem to be dictated by their pride, ambition and an acute sense of superiority. Both Macbeth and Edmund feel that they have the right to seize power because they are intellectually and physically fit to rule. Even Brutus, who professes noble reasons behind the murder of Caesar, actually turns out to be a deeply egocentric man, who abhors “the herd”. In order to begin their respective processes of self-overcoming, the three men have to first overcome their limiting circumstances. Brutus and Macbeth need to reject moral considerations and decide to sacrifice their symbolical “fathers”, while Edmund defies the victimizing system that “bastardizes” and relegates him to an inferior position. He betrays and sacrifices his biological father. The three characters are, in my opinion, characterized by Nietzschean egoism as they do not shun from ultimate sacrifice in the service of their self-realization. Having realized their will to power, they seize its grasp, overcome limiting circumstances and sacrifice those close to them in an attempt to assert their transfigured identities. So, they also appear as highly subversive agents threatening the status quo. All three have to reject divinely-sanctioned laws believed to be laid down by nature. In their trampling on these supposedly “natural” rights, they actually manage to expose them as socially constructed and ideologically driven. What seems to differentiate them from the Marlovian protagonists is their full awareness of the process. Through their reflection they realize their own ‘unnaturalness’ and the “unnaturalness” of their deeds. Despite their more developed inte-

rriority and reflectiveness, manifested in their soliloquies, these Shakespearean characters do not really emerge as any *better* in the light of *universal* Christian morality. However, as Nietzsche would probably put it, they are *more profound*. For this reason, they appear to be “men of prey” rather than “beasts of prey”. The question whether they actually fully emulate the Nietzschean ideal of overmen is still pending. Bearing in mind the fact that self-realization in Nietzschean terms is a never-ending process of self-overcoming, one could risk a statement that they closely mirror *Übermenschen*. They clearly are figures who could have captivated Nietzsche’s imagination (as Brutus actually did).

Finally, the last analytical chapter of the dissertation brings the discussion of potential *Überweiben* – overwomen – a in both Marlowe and Shakespeare. The attempt goes against the grain of Nietzsche’s philosophical output, which did not cater for female development or feminine sensitivity. Nietzsche, as demonstrated, clearly reserved secondary positions for women. However, as demonstrated, though Nietzsche himself did not make room for *das Überweib* in his canon, a Nietzschean analysis of the ‘overhuman’ potential of women does not only turn out to be possible but actually brings some positive results. The concept of the female over-human potential emerges as particularly tempting in the period overshadowed by the reign of an exceptionally crafty and powerful woman – Queen Elizabeth, who was also frequently forced to recourse to both feminine and masculine rhetoric in defence of her suitability as monarch. As it turns out, overhuman potential is evidently not exclusively a male domain, though, like in the case of men, some women are able to utilize it, while some are powerless in the face of the necessity of perpetual self-overcoming. Marlovian and Shakespearean women are doubly disadvantaged as they have to overcome the overpowering influence of their fathers or husbands in order to separate their identities from them. Early modern women are denied separate identities, so they truly create themselves anew from scratch. Both Lady Macbeth and Zenocrate may appear as shadows behind their excessively ambitious husbands, aiding them in their lustful pursuits of power. However, they both demonstrate their active and often cruel faces in acts which seem to demand the denial of traditionally-conceived Renaissance femininity. Zenocrate’s potential to question and undermine Tamburlaine’s authority is eventually crushed by his uncompromising bearing. She is denied any voice and she remains passive in the face of Tamburlaine. So she comes to encapsulate a Renaissance and also more Nietzschean ideal of womanhood. She emulates Nietzsche’s own misogynist vision of a woman in a secondary role, providing aid and consolation for a man. Lady Macbeth clearly does not adhere to this portrayal as she frequently demonstrates more resolve and energy than her husband. Yet for all her “perversion” of her “natural” instincts she is punished, as she does not seem capa-

ble of adhering to her own vision of the overwoman she fashions for herself. Lear's daughters also function in the same male-dominated world which demands denying traditionally-conceived Renaissance feminine roles. Goneril and Regan seem to emerge as Machiavellian political animals, yet it is Cordelia who leads the French invasion to redress her father. As I have demonstrated, the "evil" sisters are not any more evil than their e.g. Marlovian male counterparts, yet they too are frequently hailed as "unnatural". A detailed analysis of their overhuman potential also exposes this "nature" to be a social and ideological construct – meant to victimize and exploit those who have enough daring to be strong and to oppose. It is this fake nature that relegates these women back into the vicious circle of male representation. The analysis of Cordelia as the closest encapsulation of Nietzschean *Übermensch* (or *Überweib*) finishes off my discussion on overhuman potential in Shakespeare's and Marlowe's texts. I hope my line of argumentation hailing Cordelia, so far critically acclaimed as encapsulating the virtues of obedience and loyalty, is convincing enough to make one believe that Nietzschean exceptional figures do not have to be exclusively male. I realize that, as a woman, I may be biased in my choices of interpretative decisions, yet to anyone wishing to pass such a judgment I wish to remind them that Cordelia indeed exposes overhuman qualities of dignity, pride and resilience in the face of rejection and tyrannous attempts to trample on her singularity. She truly overcomes her condition without compromising her moral initiative. She comes to rescue her father not in an act of mercy, but out of the excess of her mental strength, emerging thus as the closest realization of the Nietzschean ideal in the Shakespearean canon. In the second meditation Nietzsche (2007a: 111) famously asserted that: "[i]t is the task of history to be the mediator [...] and thus again and again to inspire and lend the strength for the production of the great man. No, the goal of humanity cannot lie in its end but only in its highest exemplars." I would risk stating that this brief quotation on the significance of reading and interpreting history for the formation of a better humanity is also an apt comment for the present dissertation. I have humbly taken upon myself a role of mediator between the early moderns in the age of Shakespeare and the modern perspective in search of, what Nietzsche's calls, the "highest exemplars". Following Nietzsche's belief that the overhuman potential is really an ahistorical phenomenon, while great men were scattered around the centuries, I sought these overmen and overwomen in the dramas of Marlowe and Shakespeare. Nietzsche (2006a: 140) saw the Renaissance as "a restless, vigorous age which is half-drunk and stupefied by its excess of blood and energy." As it seems, the analysis of Marlowe's and Shakespeare's plays prove his comment right, just as the plays prove to be a field where great energy, the cult of life and overhuman potential are intensely acted out.



# Reinterpretacja „nadczołowieczego” potencjału w Renesansie: jednostki o wyjątkowo silnej ambicji (ang. „overreachers”) w dramatach Marlowe’a i Szekspira w świetle filozofii Nietzschego.

## Streszczenie

Głównym celem niniejszej pracy jest analiza wybranych bohaterów dramatów Williama Szekspira i Krzysztofa Marlowe’a w świetle kluczowych koncepcji filozofii Fryderyka Nietzschego. Analizowane postaci, określane w języku angielskim jako „overreachers”, charakteryzują się wyjątkowo silną ambicją i niejednokrotnie bezkompromisowo dążą do władzy i panowania. Niezłomni i ambitni bohaterowie dramatyczni dzieł Szekspira i Marlowe’a mają wiele cech wspólnych z nietzscheańskim nadczołowiekiem charakteryzującymi się silnym napięciem woli mocy. Ta analogia staje się punktem wyjścia do reinterpretacji „nadczołowieczego” potencjału w angielskim dramacie renesansowym, a także przyczynkiem do ogólniejszej refleksji na temat tożsamości człowieka renesansu. Połączenie nietzscheanizmu ze studiami nad angielskim dramatem siedemnastowiecznym jest niewątpliwie niszą badawczą, gdyż do tej pory nietzscheanizm nie stanowił narzędzia metodologicznego w dyskusji nad tożsamością człowieka odrodzenia. Zatem wykorzystanie potencjału filozoficznego nietzscheanizmu służy zarówno próbie odczytania na nowo pojęcia jednostkowości człowieka renesansu, jak również praktycznemu wykorzystaniu refleksji niemieckiego filozofa w interpretacji literackiej. Praca składa się z pięciu rozdziałów, z których dwa pierwsze są rozdziałami teoretycznymi, a trzy kolejne analitycznymi.

Ponieważ dysertacja ma na celu połączenie klasycznej analizy filozoficznej z owocami najnowszych badań w dziedzinie szekspirologii i studiów nad renesansem angielskim pierwszy rozdział stanowi wprowadzenie do założeń tych dwóch głównych kierunków interpretacyjnych. Przedstawione są wady i zalety obu metod, następnie zostaje wypracowana baza metodologiczna do dalszej analizy tzw. metoda łączona („newhistoricalphilosophizing”), która ma na celu wykorzystanie najlepszych praktyk. Rozdział drugi stanowi wprowadzenie historycznego i kulturowego tła angielskiego renesansu, a także miejsca pojęcia

ambicji w światopoglądzie człowieka epoki nowożytnej. Mimo powszechnego potępienia ambicji w renesansowej polityce i światopoglądzie, szczegółowa analiza w duchu nietzscheańskiej dekonstrukcji konwencjonalnej moralności ukazuje, że politycy i mężowie stanu to często ludzie ambitni, popychani do działania osobistymi aspiracjami. To nietzscheańska wola mocy objawiająca się w różnorodnych formach definiuje wyjątkowe jednostki angielskiego renesansu. Odgórne próby stłamszenia działalności wywrotowej paradoksalnie sprzyjają rozkwitowi renesansowego indywidualizmu. Kluczowi indywidualiści to sceptycy, filozofowie, a także dramatopisarze za rządów Elżbiety I, a potem Jakuba I. Angielski teatr odzwierciedla twórczy klimat epoki i staje się swego rodzaju forum, gdzie nowe idee zostają poddane dyskusji. Angielska scena teatralna służy przede wszystkim nietzscheańskiej afirmacji siły życiowej, a silna wola mocy bohaterów tragicznych świadczy o nietzscheańskim duchu epoki. Zatem ambicja jest zewnętrznym przejawem wewnętrznej woli mocy, która wyraża się w nieograniczonej sile życiowej. Energia życiowa, którą Nietzsche opisał w swoich dziełach ponad dwieście lat później pozwala opisać proces tworzenia tożsamości człowieka renesansu w toku „samo-przewycięzania” (ang. „self-overcoming”). Dlatego też próby ograniczenia działalności wywrotowej na gruncie polityki i filozofii w rzeczywistości inspirują dalsze akty sprzeciwu i oporu. Kolejne rozdziały dysertacji mają na celu ukazanie tego schematu w sztukach Marlowe’a i Szekspira.

Pierwszy rozdział części analitycznej pracy poświęcony jest „nadludziom” w dramatach Krzysztofa Marlowe’a – Tamerlanowi i Barabaszowi. Obu bohaterów początkowo ograniczają okoliczności, ale w procesie „samo-przewycięzania” wyrastają na niezależnych i potężnych kowali własnego losu. Tamerlan, mimo swoich pasterskich korzeni, pokonuje wszystkich swoich przeciwników i zostaje potężnym władcą całego wschodniego świata. Barabasz ze względu na swoje żydowskie pochodzenie również wydaje się być na przegranej pozycji w homofobicznej społeczności Malty, ale potrafi zdystansować się od swoich korzeni i przyjąć nową wywrotową moralność, która zagraża iluzorycznemu porządkowi na wyspie. Tamerlan, pogromca Turków, staje się nietuzinkowym władcą, który obala starą arystokratyczną hierarchię a wraz z nią „naturalne” prawo – rzekomo usankcjonowane przez samego Najwyższego. Obaj mężczyźni są głęboko przekonani o swojej wyższości zarówno na gruncie możliwości mentalnych jak i wrażliwości estetycznej, a ich wypowiedzi przyjmują nietzscheańską retorykę moralności panów i niewolników. Bezkompromisowe wybory i moralnie wątpliwe zachowanie bohaterów dowodzą ich ambicji, ale także ogromnej inteligencji, która nieprzypadkowo jest powiązana z nietzscheańską koncepcją woli mocy. Tamerlan i Barabasz tworzą samych siebie z niczego w procesie samoprzewycięzania i dzięki swojej woli mocy górują nad swoimi wrogami. Postaci te dowodzą swojego nadludzkiego potencjału, dlatego że nie boją się odwołać do najbardziej pierwotnych instynktów. Nie tylko udaje się im przechrzyć swoich wrogów, ale także zamykają możliwość

samoprzezwyciężania i kształtowania charakteru tym, którzy są im najbliżsi. Obaj się surowymi ojcami, którzy nie znoszą sprzeciwu i są gotowi poświęcić dobro swych dzieci, aby nieustannie pięć się w górę na drabinie władzy i wpływu. Rys charakterologiczny bohaterów Marlowe'a pozwala twierdzić, że jego sztuki są przesycane sceptycyzmem lub nawet ateizmem. Wydaje się, że ich znaczenie zależy od niekonwencjonalnej moralności, która jest budulcem dla silnych osobowości tytułowych bohaterów. Wywrotowa moralność Marlowe'a jest niemal lustrzanym odbiciem nietzscheańskiego immoralizmu. Sztuki Marlowe'a jak gdyby napisane w duchu nietzscheizmu stają się motorem krytyki religii, instynktu stadnego i wiary, tym samym będąc wyrazem renesansowego indywidualizmu i samostanowienia jednostki. Jednak głębsza analiza ukazuje, że protagoniści Marlowe'a nie realizują w pełni swojego „nadczołowieczego” potencjału. Tamerlan wydaje się być estetycznie wrażliwy, ale pozbawiony głębszej moralnej refleksji. Nie udaje mu się w pełni wysublimować okrucieństwa. Czytelnik ma szansę poznać wnętrze Barabasza, ale ukazuje ono człowieka, który czerpie dziką radość z cierpienia innych. W obu przypadkach odrzucenie tradycyjnej moralności nie jest równoznaczne z przewartościowaniem wartości. W nietzscheańskiej wizji bohaterowie ci pozostają „drapieżnikami”. Taki stan jest zaledwie wstępem do kształtowania nadczołowieka.

Rozdział czwarty przedstawia trzech ambitnych bohaterów kanonu szekspirowskiego: Brutusa ze sztuki *Juliusz Cezar*, tytułowego Makbeta i Edmunda z tragedii *Król Lear*. Tych trzech bohaterów łączy bunt przeciwko metaforycznym lub prawdziwym ojcom. Odwrotnie niż w sztukach Marlowe'a, to synowie u Szekspira podnoszą ręce na swych potężnych ojców. Władczy protagoniści Marlowe'a tłamszą ambicje swych dzieci, podczas gdy bohaterowie szekspirowscy dekonstruują autorytet patriarchów. Makbet i Edmund są głęboko przekonani o swoim potencjale, który usprawiedliwia wyciągnięcie ręki po władzę. Brutus, mimo wyznawania szlachetnych ideałów okazuje się być również człowiekiem niezwykle ambitnym, który gardzi „stadem”. Każdy z bohaterów słucha podszeptów swojej wybujałej woli mocy i jest gotowy poświęcić swojego ojca w procesie kształtowania własnej „nadludzkiej” tożsamości. Występując przeciwko „boskim” prawom wypowiadają posłuszeństwo „naturze”, która w głębszej analizie okazuje się być tylko społecznym i ideologicznym konstruktem. W świetle tradycyjnej moralności ich czyny i decyzje są godne potępienia, ale w toku analizy nietzscheańskiej ukazują się być potencjalnymi nadludźmi. Bohaterowie szekspirowscy niekoniecznie są moralnie lepsi od postaci Marlowe'a, ale są na pewno wzbogaceni o refleksję etyczną zbliżoną do nietzscheańskiego eksperymentu „poza dobrem i złem”, burzącego granice konwencjonalnej moralności.

Ostatni rozdział części analitycznej podejmuje temat kobiecego „nadludzkiego” potencjału w sztukach Marlowe'a i Szekspira. Choć sam Nietzsche w swojej wizji filozoficznej nie stworzył miejsca dla *dasÜberweib*

(„nadkobiety”), nietzscheańska analiza sytuacji kobiet w renesansie wydaje się być konieczna zwłaszcza, że epoka Szekspira jest też czasem panowania Królowej Elżbiety, jednej z najbardziej rozpoznawalnych i potężnych monarchiń w historii Europy. Królowa Elżbieta sama niejednokrotnie wykorzystywała zarówno konwencjonalnie męskie lub żeńskie zabiegi retoryczne w obronie swojej pozycji jako monarchy – roli tradycyjnie zarezerwowanej dla mężczyzny. Przegląd krytyki feministycznej, jakiej poddana została filozofia Nietzschego pokazuje, że „nadludzki” potencjał to nie tylko i wyłącznie domena męska. Z kolei, analiza sytuacji kobiet renesansu dowodzi, że ta grupa społeczna jest podwójnie pokrzywdzona. W ideologicznym klimacie epoki kobieta z założenia nie ma autonomicznej tożsamości oddzielnej od mężczyzny. Ponadto bohaterki dramatów są zmuszone przewyżczać wpływ wyjątkowo dominujących mężów i/lub ojców. Szekspirowska Lady Macbeth i Zenocrate ze sztuki Marlowe’a zdają się stać w cieniu swoich głodnych władzy mężów. Jednak obie ukazują swoje okrutne oblicza podejmując decyzje, które są sprzeczne z tradycyjnym renesansowym pojmowaniem kobiecości i roli kobiety w społeczeństwie. Zenocrate nie jest w stanie realizować swojego nadludzkiego potencjału w obliczu bezkompromisowości Tamerlana. Ostatecznie, staje się symbolem typowo renesansowej i równo-cześnie nietzscheańskiej, mizoginicznej koncepcji kobiecości. Lady Macbeth jest zupełnym przeciwieństwem Zenocrate, jednak za „wypaczenie” instynktów uważanych za naturalne w renesansie kobieta ta zostaje symbolicznie ukarana. Córki Leara również odrzucają tradycyjnie kobiece role, gdyż funkcjonują w świecie polityki zdominowanej przez mężczyzn. Goneryla i Regana zdają się być skutecznymi „zwierzętami politycznymi”, ale ich makiaweliczne decyzje są odbierane jako wypaczenie tzw. „naturalnych” ról kobiecych i męskich. Dokładniejsza analiza w duchu nietzscheańskiego przewartościowania moralności ukazuje społeczne okoliczności budowania moralności, a tzw. „natura” okazuje się być wyłącznie ideologicznym konstruktem służącym represjonowaniu kobiet. Interpretacja Kordelii jako postaci najbliższej nietzscheańskiej wizji nadczłowieka zamyka rozdział piąty i ukazuje, że potencjał nadludzki nie musi być wyłącznie cechą męską. Szekspirowską Kordelię cechuje poczucie dumy i godności, a także wierność własnym ideałom nawet w ekstremalnych okolicznościach. Wbrew dotychczasowym analizom odczytującym Kordelię jako ideał kobiecej pokory analiza nietzscheańska ukazuje, że Kordelia jest bohaterką wywrotową, której nieoczekiwane zachowanie dekonstruuje konwencjonalną rolę kobiety w społeczeństwie.

Nietzsche wierzył głęboko, że historia wcale nie ukazuje linearnego i kierunkowego rozwoju ludzkiej cywilizacji (Nietzsche 2007a: 111). To oznacza, że w dziejach ludzkości po Ziemi chodziły już wybitne jednostki, które nosiły znamiona nadludzi. To przekonanie przyświecało projektowi poszukiwania takich właśnie indywidualności w angielskim renesansie

i w jego najdoskonalszej artystycznej odsłonie – dramacie epoki nowożytnej za rządów Elżbiety I i Jakuba I. Zdaniem Nietzschego ludzie współcześni mają za zadanie być mediatorami między wiekami minionymi, a dniem dzisiejszym w szeroko zakrojonym projekcie dekonstruowania starych wartości i budowania nowych. Dysertacja ta podjęła próbę odczytania na nowo tożsamości wybitnych jednostek angielskiego renesansu w duchu nietzscheańskiego przewartościowania oraz odrzucenia zastałych i niejednokrotnie skostniałych interpretacji. W toku analizy wykazano, że twórczy ferment poszczególnych jednostek renesansu angielskiego rzeczywiście okazał się być przyczynkiem do ewolucji indywidualizmu, który cechuje wieki współczesne. Sztuki Szekspira i Marlowe'a wydają się być najtrafniejszymi dokumentami tegoż kreatywnego fermentu, który nadaje znaczenie i tożsamość jednostce oraz afirmuje często okrutną, lecz estetycznie potężną siłę życiową.



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