The Transformation of the Protagonist's Personality in the Tragedy of *King Lear*

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Introduction

When Bloom (1998) claims that Shakespeare invented our sense of personality, he appears to be chiefly referring to a characteristic inwardness which underlies a constant process of personal change that finds in Shakespearean characters not only its first dramatic representation but also its most comprehensive one. We may add something more to Bloom's appreciation and say that all Shakespearean characters are not just individually different from each other, having their own particular personality traits, but also exhibit a range of different personalities within their personalities as they fulfil roles as parents, siblings, spouses, rulers and subjects. It is not difficult to observe that such roles would immediately imply relationships between characters and, in this way, the aforementioned inwardness is enriched and balanced with a constant presence of *the other* as the alternative force behind dramatic action.

The main interest of the present paper is to show the development or configuration of the personality of the tragic hero[1] in Shakespeare's tragedy *King Lear*, and especially in what has to do with the two facets just outlined, that is, the inward aspect as well as the relational one. To achieve this objective I will be mainly assisted by the aesthetic theory of M. M. Bakhtin as propounded in his essay "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity". Central to Bakhtin's thought is the idea of *relational identities*, with such couples as *I-for-myself*, *I-for-the-other* and *other-for-me*, which are in permanent interaction and where the formative force of *the other* is of paramount importance to the constitution of the aesthetic self.

Este artículo se recibió en noviembre 24, 2009 y fue aceptado para publicación en marzo 28, 2010.

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[1] To avoid confusion I would like to clarify that throughout this paper I will exclusively use the label of *tragic hero* or just *hero* when referring to the main character, namely, Lear. With this, I do not intend to ignore the tragic condition of other characters or their possible heroism, but since this is not the main purpose of my analysis I do not consider it relevant to dwell on what makes tragic or heroic any given character. Any comment in this respect will be accordingly reserved for Lear.

Following Bakhtin, I will start from the basic assumption that the hero is an aesthetic object contained within certain boundaries (spatial, temporal) and whom we, as the contemplators and owners of an *outsideness* (Bakhtin, 1998) that allows us to appreciate this object in relationship with its surroundings, complete and *consummate* at least in three correlated aspects: as a spatial form, owning both an inner and an external body; as a temporal entity or *soul* trapped between a beginning and an end; and, finally, as a complete and finished unity of sense. These three aspects will essentially guide the analysis of the hero who, as *the other* for us, will offer in his totality an integral and comprehensive image of man. In this sense, I will simultaneously look at the surroundings and external appearance of the hero, his spatial form, and the way in which they "dress" (or "undress" [see Bakhtin, 1998, p. 27]) him; at the hero's way of acting, in act and speech, as the factor that reveals his inner stance; and at the potential meaning behind the dialogues with other characters and the attitudes of these towards the hero.

In my analysis, I will follow the line of the plot, focusing on and taking as starting points what I consider to be three meaningful moments in terms of characterization: the exposition of the play, the storm scenes, and the reunion of the hero with Cordelia. I will try to demonstrate that throughout these moments there will be a transit from an individuality that is mainly defined by its external or conventional appearance and where the value attached to *the other* is essentially weak, to a point where the individual can only find his realization thanks to the permanent presence of *the other*.

First Part: Personalities in conflict

Dispelling "The Artifice of Rank"[2]

The elements that compose the first part of the exposition in *King Lear* are there to emphasize, as Harbage has pointed out (1964, p. 113), the ceremonial tone of the scene and the centrality, within the ceremony, of the character of Lear. Among those elements, there is one symbolic object that cannot possibly be missed, namely, the map. We can agree with Brayton (2003) that human authority in the opening scene is portrayed in terms of the domination of space, to which we could add that Lear's majesty, his superiority of degree and the nature of such superiority, is utterly contained in the map and the control over it, hence its

[2] This phrase is taken from Daiches (1960, p. 278).

indispensable character. Furthermore, the hero's domination over space at this point should be specified and understood as the mastery over *external* space, something that is perfectly enacted when the map is spread in front of him and he proceeds to apportion and describe the abundance of a land that no one can actually behold; the map's referent is outside and Lear's kingly authority accordingly spreads outward.

The map, we have said, also signals the nature of the hero's privileged position which is, fundamentally, social. It is the king who arranges a ceremony and summons his advisors, who gives commands to his attendants, who has the power to control and give away his realm. The space that has been configured from the beginning (both the actual surroundings and those symbolised by the map) serves to dress Lear for his role as king. Nonetheless, the king evidently has no problem in introducing the private topic of filial love into a social act:

> *Lear.* […] Tell me, my daughters, / (Since now we will divest us both of rule, / Interest of territory, cares of state) / Which of you shall we say doth love us most? / That we our largest bounty may extend / Where nature doth with merit challenge. Goneril, / Our eldest-born, speak first. (1, 1, 48 – 54)

Here, what we can regard as abnormal, so to speak, and as the source from which the whole tragedy stems, is precisely how the main character is unable to make distinctions between his role as king and his role as father. The unexpected need of Lear to be told how much his daughters love him does not suit the occasion, or any other for that matter, as long as he clings to his royal persona; following Dodd (1999), the alienation introduced thus would imply that if the daughters want to be successful, then, they will have to cease being daughters and answer their king, and not their father, from their social stance, that is, as citizens. Any attempt to do the opposite, that is, to answer the question genuinely, will certainly bring the hero's underlying fault to light. As it is, the two things actually happen.

Lear's question is in itself charged with royal prerogative and with a language of superlatives and absolutes that translates into words the value attached to the extension of external space as the measure of power. The two elder daughters follow suit as they configure their speeches to the interaction proposed by the king and resort to strings of "purposeful flattery" (Muir, in Shakespeare, 1964, p. liii.) that certainly secure them portions of the kingdom. Cordelia, on the contrary, refuses to compromise and so starts to challenge the assumptions on which the royal identity of her father rests. She is clearly at odds trying to

reconcile her private role as daughter with her public sphere and so cannot find any other way of expressing her filial obligations than that of social legal terms (cf Dodd, 1999):

> *Cor.* Good my Lord, / You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me: I / Return those duties back as are right fit, / Obey you, love you, and most honor you." (1, 1, 95 – 98).

It is not that Cordelia is unable to express her filial love and sound less cold; the situation, we have seen, is so alienating that it does not allow her to speak genuinely without sounding as rehearsed and ceremonial as her sisters, or as unconvincing. She goes further to demonstrate that in the public-private framework set up by the king, the notion of absolute love is, if anything, inadequate because it denies the natural disposition of individuals to create new relationships with their implied new duties, something that her sisters have evidently overlooked when they claimed to love their father totally:

> *Cor.* Why have my sisters husbands, if they say / They love you all? Happily, when I shall wed, / That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry / Half my love with him, half my care and duty: / Sure I shall never marry like my sisters, / To love my father all. (1, 1, 99 – 103)

Obviously, Lear, dressed in his "most forbidding role" (Dodd, 1999, p. 495) as absolutist monarch, also overlooks the reason behind Cordelia's words which he instead interprets as an attempt to be put second place in the eventuality of Cordelia's marriage. The inability to separate personalities continues to run its course and it is Lear the King who punishes the daughter's recalcitrance with the severance of the parental bond, as though the natural relationship between father and daughter could be broken with the force of kingly law like any other conventional contract.

The hero's over-reliance on his social role also affects the way he sees his future, his personality unfolding through time, and the notion of this future can likewise be termed absolute and predetermined. We see the king at the beginning confidently delineating the image of his remaining days: he will give to others the troubles of ruling while he "Unburthen'd crawl[s] toward death" (1, 1, 41). The contingency introduced by Cordelia, however, constitutes the first (and definite) hindrance to the fulfilment of such a future and, therefore, the king's original plans have to be roughly replaced with rash decisions that aim at leaving the kingly honour unscathed: Goneril and Regan will "digest" (1, 1, 128) Cordelia's third and the wish of Lear to "set his rest under [Cordelia's] kind nursery" (1, 1, 122) changes

into the inconvenience of having to alternate abode on a monthly basis between the other two daughters.

It turns out to be rather paradoxical that, despite a marked regard for the control of outer space, the main character ends up possessing none, not even the homely space where his favourite daughter would indefinitely perform an adoring love for her father. In the confusion of roles, both spaces- royal and fatherly- have been effectively divided. We could argue that there are still two daughters, Goneril and Regan, and that they will answer, as promised, their father's need for filial love. We must remember, however, that the promise, apart from being an evident exercise of meaningless rhetoric, was made at a moment when the daughters were not actually acting as daughters; they were just following a command from the king and since the king has now disappeared we should expect the same thing to happen to the promise[3].

Lear's unconscious social self-demotion starts to become apparent even before we see him in the first stop of his monthly procession, Goneril's palace. We are warned, as early as the closing of the opening scene, that Goneril does not want her father to "carry authority with such disposition as he bears" (1, 1, 304-5). This is just the manifestation of the hero's new reality, a reality where he is no longer seen as holding the image of authority (Danby, 1968). The retinue, that last concrete symbol of the king's former power, becomes the target of Goneril's next attack. In what is the second meeting of the play between Goneril and Lear, the daughter speaks to her father in an altogether different tone from the oily language that earned her a portion of the kingdom; the point of her new discourse is also different: this is not about accumulating things but about reducing. Goneril accuses Lear's "insolent retinue" (1, 4, 210) of bringing quarrel to the place and "breaking forth / In rank" (1, 4, 211), an oblique reference to her father that ranks have clearly changed. In between these exchanges there come the comments of the Fool that directly translate, apparently for us because Lear and everybody else on the stage appear deaf to his words, what is behind Goneril's discourse: that the king basically is now just his own shadow. That is to say, the reduction implied by Goneril is not only numerical but also the actual reduction of the hero's erstwhile social personhood; it is the manifestation of the death of the king.

[3] The disappearance of the king can be briefly explained resorting to one phrase by Danby (1968) derived from Elizabethan belief: the actual king "must express in act the King every man is in potency" (p. 170). When Lear divorces himself from the performative function of his role then he becomes like any other man, that is, a king in potency. This tendency to disregard the actions attached to his role is more clearly manifested in the fact that the hero trusts in words more than in acts and this guarantees Goneril and Regan's success.

Lear is forced to re-examine his concept of ingratitude when it is this daughter, who has pledged to love him and has received her reward accordingly, overtly disrupting his authority and his manly honour. At this point, the main character seems to reveal for the first time his inner state, in terms other than anger, when he exhibits feelings of regret ("Woe, that too late repents" [1, 4, 266]) and the realization, in what can be seen as a fleeting attempt at self-examination, of his poor judgment which led him, as he now appears to see, to misunderstand Cordelia:

> *Lear.* […] O most small fault, / How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show! […] O Lear, Lear, Lear! / Beat at this gate, that let thy folly in, [*Striking his head*] / And thy dear judgment out! (1, 4, 275 – 281)

The hero is also implicitly starting to see that he cannot do anything as the king; his regal word has been deprived of any authority and so he is no longer able to expel his elder daughter. Instead, he is the one who goes out to seek comfort in his second daughter, Regan. Goneril manages to easily dismiss half of Lear's followers "at a clap" (1, 4, 302), and thus, when he abandons Albany's palace he is in reality half the man that came in, taking into account that when he did so, he was already landless and powerless.

The meeting between Lear and Regan does not even take place in Regan's palace but instead at Gloucester's castle where the situation of the former king as a mere guest is somehow more marked. Here, the dynamics of displacement find a more manifest and callous continuation when the king arrives and sees his messenger (Kent in disguise) tied to the stocks; a punishment reserved for the "basest and contemned'st wretches" (2, 2, 143). When Lear learns that Regan has something to do with this "violent outrage" (2, 4, 24) his inner space is shaken once more, only this time hot anger and hurt manly pride are replaced by a motherly "climbing sorrow" that starts to break free from the boundaries that contain it:

> *Lear:* "O! how this mother swells up toward my heart; / *Hysterica passio!* Down, thou climbing sorrow! / Thy element's below. Where is this daughter?" (2, 4, 56 – 58)

In what follows, and after Goneril's arrival, the two daughters are united in their effort to put an end to any vestige of their father's authority and through their "auction of diminishment" (Taylor, 2003, p. 34), an inverted version of the competition of accumulation staged at the opening of the play, they ironically and rapidly reduce the king's retinue to naught while persistently implying that the ability to command does not reside in his hands

any more. Thus, the "cartography of dispossession" (Brayton, 2003, p. 401) instituted by the king himself when he had the "power to determine who exist[ed] where" (ibid., p. 409), now rebounds on Lear. In his transit towards social nothingness, it is the main character who on this occasion becomes a "little seeming substance" (as he speaks of Cordelia in 1, 1, 198), not being respected either as a king or as a father; and since in the world inherited by the daughters "'nothing' becomes 'nowhere', or, at least, 'not here'" (ibid., p. 408), Lear has to perform his own banishment. When he decides to "abjure all roofs / To wage against the enmity o' th' air" (2, 4, 210-11) he extricates himself, so to speak, from that external space valued for its profit and comfort. The background where he has to move cannot be more barren and more hostile; a meaningless and foreign external space that will force the hero to look inwards and discover things that may have been forgotten due to the artifice of rank but which are somehow more permanent and more telling of the hero's personality.

Self-discovery and Natural Disposition

In *King Lear*, the hero's fall from *social* grace is directly represented in the dramatic change of this character's surroundings. Dispossessed of former privileges and almost completely isolated, Lear in act 3 is thrown into the middle of an apocalyptic-like storm where even his anguished outcry for personal justice seems feeble against the potent noise of the elements. We are immediately invited to establish a contrast with the situation at the opening of the play and although we are likely to encounter plenty of apparent differences, these are underlined by what may be seen as a kind of *distorted similarities* which give foundation to the working ironies in this part of the play and provide expression to the somehow inverted world instituted from the beginning of the tragedy. In keeping with the surroundings, the heath where "for many miles about there is scarce a bush" (2, 4, 303) basically constitutes the concrete representation of a land that has been previously symbolized by the map. Nevertheless, the fact that we do not see the pleasant meadows so lavishly described in the ceremony of apportionment emphasizes the impression that everything that was important at that point, at least to the configuration of individual identity, was essentially mere appearance. And while the exposition of the play can be summarized, as Brayton (2003) suggests, as a social act of map-reading from which, paradoxically, there is an "evacuation of the social" (p. 406), the storm scenes appear to be devised exclusively to serve as the background for human

activity, the heath being actually inhabited by Lear and his scant company and all other men protected in their palaces implicitly compared to the savage beasts that keep their caves.

As for the hero, the initial moments of the storm scenes show him, as Ribner (1971) notices, still clinging to some of the traits with which we first identified him, that is, a manifest shortage of self-knowledge leavened with an abiding streak of egotism. Despite their passion, the speeches where the main character directly addresses the storm can fundamentally be regarded as the outpourings of a hurt and formerly inflated ego that wonders about the particular injustice he suffers and yet is unable to appreciate his own share of guilt.

Soon, however, Lear's "wits begin to turn" (3, 2, 67) and in the process, the theme of delusion that has been running its course as a false image of self-importance starts to change into a concrete, gradual loss of reason. During the storm scenes, the mounting pressure in the hero's inner world is what becomes the new source of delusion. Paradoxically, this time the former king shows signs that he is, for the first time, truly aware of his fellow being, not as a subject answerable to his authority but as a subject with whom he shares a common feeling:

> Lear. My wits begin to turn. / Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold? / I am cold myself. […] Poor Fool and knave, I have one part in my heart / That's sorry yet for thee. (3, 2, 67-69 […] 72)

This awareness necessarily springs from an awareness of himself, of both his physical and inner states, which rapidly continues until he finally "comes in his madness to acknowledge his own responsibility for the evil of his daughters: 'Judicious punishment! 'twas this flesh begot / Those pelican daughters' (3, 4, 76-7)" (Ribner, 1971, p. 118). Furthermore, as he recognises the coldness of the Fool and tries to prevent it, the hero is unconsciously regaining, or perhaps learning for the first time, the relationship of kindliness that lies at the foundation of paternal love. This will soon grow into a more general understanding of the plight of others which he expresses in his spontaneous prayer for the "Poor wretches" (3, 4, 28-36).

In the middle of this new appreciation of others there appears Poor Tom, Edgar's impersonation of a beggar, whose exposed figure prompts in Lear the destruction of the last material remains of his former social personality, his regal clothes: "Off, off, you lendings! Come; unbutton here [Tearing off his clothes]" (3, 4, 11). This gesture appears to have universal resonance in the world of the tragedy as the point where not only the main character's erstwhile ego wanes but where all social symbols seem to lose their value as the

fundamental elements defining personality. Outside, in the blank space of the storm and the heath, this aspect is evident: there are no hierarchies with their social labels, or external additions, or tokens of authority; and yet the characters here are tied by an inner impulse to protect each other and to ease their common pain. On the other hand, and as we already suggested, those elements are not enough to attenuate our sense that inside the walls of civilization there is a space fraught with cruelty and selfishness (the space that Lear is now leaving).

In the conflict between personalities that we have tried to expound, the hero, after the storm, "learns for the first time in his life to see 'naturally' as a man rather than artificially as a king" (Daiches, 1960, p. 278). With the "'natural' vision of madness" (ibid., p. 279), Lear becomes the "natural fool" (4, 6, 92) of the world and as such, takes on the characteristic insolence of the truth teller who comments on the vices of society which are hidden under layers of appearance. Consequently, it is in this crazed condition that the hero paradoxically becomes conscious of the kind of life he used to be immersed in, a life surrounded by fake demonstrations intended to make him believe he was divine when, after all, he is no more than just a man plagued with limitations:

> *Lear.* […] They flattered me like a dog, and told me I had the white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To say "ay" and "no" to every thing that I said! "Ay" and "no" too was good divinity. […] Go to, they are not men o' their words: they told me I was every thing; 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof. (4, 6, 97-106)

Immediately after this recognition Lear seems to recover the sense that he is potentially a king ("Ay, every inch a king" [4, 6, 110]) but not as someone who is to be flattered but as someone who transforms such potentiality into the act of administering justice; and in a world where "all are equally guilty" (Daiches, 1960, p. 279), even, as implicitly acknowledged, the king himself, the most consequential verdict of natural justice is for him to forgive all: "None does offend, none, I say, none" (4, 6, 170).

Nevertheless, such confidence is soon replaced by the genuine uncertainty the main character has of his very existence when he awakens in a tent where he is to be reunited with Cordelia: "I will not swear these are my hands: let's see; / I feel this pin prick. Would I were assur'd / Of my condition!" (4, 7, 55-56). The task of reassuring Lear as to his condition rests on Cordelia, as we shall see later, but the images of hell and heaven suggested in the hero's

words, at the beginning of act 4 scene 7, reinforce the idea that he is being born into a new life. Lear's character at this point is evidently dissimilar to the loud, rash, controlling, ignorant king of the beginning. His notion of space, and the control over it, completely disappears so that he does not stop to ponder about the extensiveness or comfort of the space where he is to live with Cordelia: they will just live in a "wall'd prison" (5, 3, 18). Once Lear fully grasps this reality he starts to give to his life the sense that it had lost and he does so by repairing the damaged bond between father and daughter and recovering the original wish to spend his remaining days under the kind nurture of Cordelia. The difference, however, is that this time the relationship is truly reciprocal and truly familial and all social artifice is replaced by natural disposition. No mention is made of the main character attempting to recover his kingdom, he is now noticeably unconcerned about that; in fact, we could argue that Lear was not, at any point, an archetypal king, either because he was too unwise or because he lacked authority: his social role has always been an illusion. Ultimately, however, the hero's surviving personality is that of a father and this is what perhaps prompts Bloom (1998) to regard this character, more than anything else, as "an emblem of fatherhood" (p. 493).

Second Part: Rediscovering the Space of *the Other*

The Manipulative Use of *the Other*

Dodd (1999) quotes Francis Jacques to clarify that "individuals exist before the relation that grows upon them. But the same cannot be claimed for their personal identity" (p. 480) which is given shape thanks to a "relation of mutuality" (ibid.) between individuals. In the absolutist world presented at the beginning of *King Lear,* such a relation of mutuality is severely hindered and any attempt at claiming an independent position is tyrannically erased. The introduction of the topic of love – "the interpersonal relationship in its most pristine, democratic form" (Dodd, 1999, p. 488) – in a political act can be seen as the wish "to sugar the pill of absolutism by mystifying it as a system based on love rather than coercion" (ibid. 489). However, coercion, in the form of bribery, underlies the act of giving away pieces of land in exchange for declarations of love, using the daughters "as means instead of interacting with them as persons" (ibid. p. 488). The two elder daughters let themselves become absorbed in Lear's egotistical need to be told how lovable he is in order to obtain a particular gain and thus, they mirror his logic of interpersonal relationships as they, too, use their father as a

means. Ironically, the same does not happen with the one favourite daughter who has the most to lose. Cordelia, with two contrastive short asides in the midst of Goneril and Regan's bombastic answers and their father's spacious descriptions of their newly acquired dowries, is who prepares the audience to witness her opposition to her father's request:

Cor. What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent.

[…]

> *Cor.* Then poor Cordelia! / And yet not so; since I am sure my love's / More ponderous than my tongue. (1, 1, 62 […] 76 – 78)

Cordelia's asides, apart from raising anticipation in the audience, produce the effect of "foregrounding her person" (Dodd, 1999, p. 491), setting her apart from the somewhat rehearsed and artificial rhythm of Lear's public ritual so that she appears ready to "claim independent space" (Taylor, 2003, p. 32) in what evidently is a "manipulative interaction" (Dodd, 1999, p. 492). Cordelia, the play tells us, represents the voice of plainness and sincerity. It is just an expected consequence of such sincerity that when she is required to speak, as we have suggested before, all the implicit faults in the characters of both Lear and the older sisters are forcibly brought to light. The king, in his one-way absolutist view of personal relationships, is unable to accept Cordelia's truth and so he, wizard-like, calls on supernatural agents to bear witness to the severance of the paternal bond:

> *Lear.* Let it be so; thy truth then be thy dower: / For, by the sacred radiance of the sun, / The mysteries of Hecate and the night, / By all the operations of the orbs / From whom we do exist and cease to be, / Here I disclaim all my paternal care, / Propinquity and property of blood, / And as a stranger to my heart and me / Hold thee from this for ever. (1, 1, 108 – 116)

This act of estrangement is at the basis of what can be defined as a distorted "magic of expulsion"[4] whereby Cordelia and what she represents are completely removed from the space controlled by her father.

All of Lear's first actions point to what can be seen as a marked disregard of *the other*. Nevertheless, it is important to clarify here that such disregard basically stems, as we have

[4] This phrase is taken from Duvignaud (1966, p. 24) who uses it to explain the process whereby a community aims to strip an individual who has trespassed on a common law (i.e. a criminal) of all those aspects that make him/her, as it were, normal. The individual is isolated and expelled to protect the community against impending disorder; s/he is taken out from the discourse of society. Lear, in his role as king, clearly bestows the label of criminal upon Cordelia, something that is essentially unfair as she does not violate any common law but only fails to please her father's whims.

seen, from the delusion of the main character's social role and not from an innate amoral disposition to be willingly cruel to others. Quite the contrary, the hero does attach some importance to others or else he would never have divided his realm in the first place, or set up a competition of declarations of love, or kept a hundred retainers. Again, the king's mistake lies in his use of people as means, although the end is far from being reproachable as he merely wants to project a good image of himself and be respected under no other conditions but his name. As a matter of fact Lear turns out to be, even from the beginning, quite fond of *the other* and this is best understood in his appreciation of Cordelia. Although the disproportionate reaction to the daughter's reticence can be regarded as a direct response to the thwarting of Lear's plans, it also paradoxically somehow shows how much he cares for Cordelia; if "anger is the intuition not merely of a wrong, but, more specifically, the intuition of a wrong which is at once a violation of expectations" (Keeping, 2006, p. 478), the king's expectations of his daughter and his emotions towards her must be particularly high for him to tear apart the primal relationship of parenthood. The hero's passion and his love are so great that he stifles any demonstration of affection stated in any terms different from his own.

What is important to notice at this point is precisely the fact that Lear is not immune to feeling emotions for other people and this is what essentially prompts what some commentators would call his learning in old age, learning which, for us, is chiefly about recognizing the independence of *the other*. While this process really gets under way we see Lear asking time and again for his Fool, or loving Caius – Kent in disguise – because he serves him, or defending his retinue against Goneril's accusations, or objecting to the way Kent is treated when he is put in the stocks by Regan and her husband, or, perhaps more significantly, when he reveals for the first time his battered conscience and the memory of Cordelia comes to mind mingled with a feeling of regret.

The condition basically set down by the tyrannical king is that, in order to participate in some sort of exchange, *the other* has to, as it were, debase him or herself discarding all possibilities of a democratic interaction and accepting such submission by being an agent who solely performs a meek obedience. Nevertheless, *the other* always has the choice to do more than simply obey when faced with a moral dilemma, which can be said to be the manifestation of Cordelia's logic. Goneril inherits the narrow oppressive view of personal relationships that so far characterises her father, and so, when they meet in act 1 scene 7, we witness for the first

time the collision of two egos that essentially share that same view. On this occasion, however, the hero is made to occupy the space of *the other*, with all the disadvantages that this entails in a manipulative interaction. When Goneril enters, Lear is immediately confronted with the iciness of her complaints and with the prospect of having to acquiesce in an exchange where he is basically asked to surrender his rights. Lear strives to gain control of the conversation by stressing his importance as a father first ("Are you our daughter?" [1, 4, 227]) then, implicitly, as a king ("Your name, fair gentlewoman?" [1, 4, 244]), but neither strategy seems to work with Goneril who instead underscores the insignificance of her father by obliquely commenting on his ignorance, his oldness, and his childishness:

> *Gon.* I would you would make use of your good wisdom, / Whereof I know you are fraught; and put away / These dispositions which of late transport you / From where you rightly are. […] This admiration, Sir, is much o' th' savour / Of other your new pranks. I do beseech you / To understand my purposes aright: / As you are old and reverend, should be wise. (1, 4, 228-31 […] 245-48)

Lear, somehow like Cordelia in the first scene, stubbornly refuses to compromise his sense of himself and, accustomed as he is to giving commands rather than accepting demands, takes Goneril's intervention as a direct attack on his honour ("I am asham'd – he later says to her – That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus" [1, 4, 305-306]) and as the ungratefulness of a daughter that blatantly violates the conditions under which she was allotted a part of the kingdom. His response is to find a way of somehow devaluing Goneril's personality and he does so by resorting to his intimate role as father from which he summons fruitful goddess Nature to bring barrenness and contempt to this ungrateful daughter:

> *Lear.* Hear, 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 honour her! If she must teem, / Create her child of spleen, that it may live / And be a thwart disnatur'd 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! (1, 4, 284 – 298)

This is no longer a demotion of social identity; instead, just as Lear thinks his manhood harmed, he resorts to a language intended to cancel that which is innate to Goneril's womanhood, namely, her ability to procreate. Here, the curse of sterility is particularly

suitable as an analogy of how inherently unproductive and impoverishing the space of the absolutist interaction is for the development of personality.

In the end, if Lear wants to live under his daughters' roofs, the world turned up-side down, he is to meekly accept his insignificance and the uselessness of his age, obey his daughters without protest, let himself be ruled by them like a child, and be satisfied with the very basics of life. As we have seen, the daughters are clearly intent on leaving their father with nothing and so, without those superfluous needs that allow him to have a dignified existence, Lear disappears from the world inherited by his daughters. In this world of individualists, we have seen, *the other* is utterly denied his/her independence.

Common Existence and the Order of Dialogue

Pain, represented in both the afflictions of the body and the mind, is what fundamentally starts to make all the difference for the tragic hero as regards the constitution of meaningful and comprehensive relationships with other characters, and therefore, the appearance of a genuine and enduring personality. "Nietzsche - Bloom (1998) reminds us - taught that pain is the authentic origin of human memory" (p. 11). When Lear faces the storm, his body exposed to the elements, his mind fraught with feelings of regret, impotence and injustice, he, apart from being painfully aware of his mistakes, seems to recover the latent memory of his great affection and need for others, so much so, that his path towards self-recognition begins, specifically, in his recognition of the pain of *the other* ("O' I have ta'en / too little care of this" [3, 4, 32-33]); this rediscovery, however, takes place under the strain of approaching madness. It seems almost necessary that Lear be at the brink of madness if this previously powerful self-centred overbearing man at the pinnacle of society is to embark upon a process of self-recognition *in* the other. When the hero recognizes how cold the Fool is before considering his own discomfort and offers a space in his heart for this "poor Fool and knave" (3, 2, 72), he puts an end to that manipulative and absolutist way of dealing with human relationships; his actions at this point implicitly reveal the ultimate purpose of the storm and the heath. Here, outside, there are no external elements setting the characters apart, no social hierarchies differentiating them: in the maddeningly obtrusive and hostile environment of the storm and the heath all characters are made equal and a background is provided that facilitates the search for common humanity and the exercise of kindness.

At what most certainly is Lear's peak of conscious anguish he conjures up what can be regarded as a hierarchy of feelings which expressly illustrate his innate isolation. For nowhere else before is the hero shown more excruciatingly isolated as when he tries to make plain to Kent the difference between the physical pains of the body and those of the mind. Such a difference is now sharply clear to Lear: his inner storm proves to be more intense than that of the outer cosmos:

> *Lear. [To Kent]* Thou think'st 'tis much that this contentious storm / Invades us to the skin: so 'tis to thee; / But where the greater malady is fix'd, / The lesser is scarce felt. […] When the mind's free / The body's delicate; this tempest in my mind / Doth from my senses take all feeling else / Save what beats there – filial ingratitude! (3, 4, 6-9 […] 11-14)

And his battle against such isolation leads him not only to perform the practical act of exposing his body to the storm, but also to think of the pain of others, as if he wanted to find instances of human suffering that are as intense as his. And now that he is conscious of pain, and is able to locate it in others, he would rather do something to stop it or correct it, and this necessarily entails a defined moral sense.

Lear starts by perceiving, in the Fool first and then in Kent, a common strand of suffering but he also eventually thinks of those wretches with their "houseless heads and unfed sides" (3, 4, 30). At this point, we see the main character differing in moral stature from the characters next to him. Up until the prayer, Lear's reactions do not vary much from those of the Fool and Kent's in that all these three characters try, in their own particular way, to ease the distress of the sufferer. In the case of the poor wretches, however, there is no direct referent and the help cannot go beyond an intangible desire to "shake the superflux to them, / And show the heavens more just" (3, 4, 35-36). What Lear does not seem to appreciate, now that his anguish makes him remember those faceless inhabitants of his kingdom who were conspicuously absent from his ceremony of map-reading, is that by kneeling down and caring about them he appears more just and more kingly, just as he appears more fatherly when he feels sorry for his Fool. It takes an altogether new level of moral awareness for this tragic hero to go out of himself, grief-stricken as he is, and find that suffering is not something private but that it is almost the universal condition characterising humankind, and here is where the greatness of his spirit truly stands out.

Then, Poor Tom makes his entrance. And the sympathy Lear feels towards Tom can be seen as the continuation of his newly discovered regard for others, a mark of his moral growth. The fact that Lear is the only one that truly takes heed of Tom already marks an attitudinal difference with regard to the other characters. It is as if the hero has finally found a true companion in grief, someone who suffers, not similar, but the same pains of the body and of the mind. And such identification goes further from the mere personal level on to a more universal scale where Tom stands for man in general, an instance of human nature worthy of examination; *the other* acquires an importance as the representation of man in its absolute and fundamental basics:

> *Lear.* Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here's three on 's are sophisticated; thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come; unbutton here. *[Tearing off his clothes]* (3, 4, 105-12)

Here is where the hero's former identity disappears, offering a space for the new sense of identity that has been gradually arising to finally emerge; Lear's abandonment of the egotism that used to characterise him comes to the point that his own self no longer appears as important as that of *the other*, a change that is represented in the way he stops projecting himself onto *the other* and instead attempts to actually become *the other*, to transform into "the thing itself". In the process, the main character first disposes of the material dimension, the outward additions, but not to throw them upon *the other* but rather to get rid of that which prevents him from achieving his objective of being, at least physically or externally, like *the other*. And when Lear names Tom his "philosopher" (3, 4, 158) it is as if he wants to grasp *the other* internally as well so as to answer the implicit query that seems to puzzle the hero from the moment he first sees Tom: how man, dispossessed of everything and owning nothing more than an inconveniently unfit and fragile body, would rather answer the extremity of the skies than be in a grave. Behind this way of proceeding, Lear might think, there must be some kind of natural wisdom, a different approach to reasoning. And since such is the reason that the king now wishes to apprehend, he loses, as he did with his clothing before, that reason to which his erstwhile ego belonged. Small wonder, then, that Lear for the first time tries to become actively involved in a genuine and democratic conversation with his "good Athenian" (3, 4, 184). Through this dialogue the hero wishes to understand, in short, the philosophy of

endurance, what makes man resist, without noticing that by building his little community with Tom he is partly unravelling the mystery.

Nevertheless, the conditions for the constitution of an articulate and meaningful discourse are still fundamentally denied to the main character. Between the incoherent babbling of Tom, the restlessness of a night that is likely to "turn us all to fools and madmen" (3, 4, 79), and even the constant interruptions Lear suffers to his wish of having a private word with his philosopher, the entire situation becomes rather exasperating. Certainly, at least for Lear, "that way madness lies" (3, 4, 21) since his shattered inner world is not only introduced in the chaotic context of the storm but his exchanges with others do not go beyond mere fragmentary attempts at a conversation: no defined personality can arise under such circumstances.

It is not until the re-appearance of Cordelia that the hero is likely to find a space where his fragmented mind can recover its unity. Cordelia, we have seen, becomes the utmost representative of true exchange and with her "singleness and integration" (Danby, 1968, p. 133) she is to be figured out as perfect *otherness*, not in the sense of strangeness (as Lear himself wanted to see her in the first scene) but more or less in the Bakhtinian sense of the term, that is, as that other self who, from her loving stable position can complement her father's personality from the outside, giving shape to an inner world that would otherwise be submitted to the vagaries of uncontrolled emotions.

We know from Kent that Lear has become aware of "his own unkindness" (4, 3, 43), which makes him feel a "sovereign shame" (ibid) that "Detains him from Cordelia" (4, 3, 48); and it is precisely the nature of this shame which tells us that he is now ready for his encounter with the youngest daughter. For Lear is clearly no longer concerned about his own particular conception of himself; instead, his embarrassment stems from an acute moral understanding of his actions and the uncomfortable effects that these may have on others.

The meeting between Lear and Cordelia in act 4 scene 7 is, obviously, not configured as the formal reunion of two social individuals, of king and subject, and we might even add that the initial moment of this meeting does not resemble the genuine family encounter of father and daughter. Behind Lear's painful awakening and Cordelia's soothing words is the enactment of something akin to that primal and pure relationship of motherhood whereby the child learns to grasp for the first time a sense of his/her person through the loving words of the

mother (Bakhtin, 1998). In a play where mothers are conspicuously absent or where the references to motherhood are mingled with allusions to sterility and adultery, or even to disturbances of the body, Cordelia comes to embody the ultimate manifestation of motherly love when it is she who reassures "this child-changed father" (4, 7, 17) concerning his lost identity: "How does my royal Lord? How fares your majesty?" (4, 7, 44). Lear, we have said, appears to be brought back to life at hearing Cordelia's questions, which are already an open invitation for a dialogue. And as "we […] come back to the true pattern when the daughter asks to have the father's hand held over her in blessing" (Lawlor, 1968, p. 156), the father transforms his shame into the act of kneeling down; intention and performance are thus unified: "O! look upon me, Sir, / And hold your hand in benediction o'er me. / No, Sir, you must not kneel." (4, 7, 57-59). It is from this penitent and humble position that Lear confesses what he has essentially learned (or remembered) through his moments of painful isolation: he is now aware of his foolishness, his consciousness of himself underscored by the exact account of his years, and somehow, as he did during the storm, he proceeds to recognise *the other,* in this case his daughter, not without acknowledging his own human condition:

> *Lear.* Pray, do not mock me: / I am a very foolish fond old man, / Fourscore and upward, not an hour more or less; / And, to deal plainly, / I fear I am not in my perfect mind. […] Do not laugh at me; / For, as I am a man, I think this lady / To be my child Cordelia.
> *Cordelia.* And so I am, I am (4, 7, 59-63 […] 68-70)

With this confirmation Lear is effectively reintroduced in the world of family relationships ("Confirming herself, [Cordelia] confirms this abused 'man' as father and king" [Holahan 1997, p. 409]) and Cordelia, with her characteristic economy of words, goes further to grant utter absolution to her father's battered conscience:

> *Lear*. Be your tears wet? Yes, faith. I pray, weep not: / If you have poison for me, I will drink it. / I know you do not love me; for your sisters / have, as I do remember, done me wrong: / You have some cause, they have not.
> *Cor.* No cause, no cause. (4, 7, 71-75)

Throughout this brief conversation we see Lear gradually recovering his identity as a person, as a king, and fundamentally, as a father. Humility, rather than submission, is what permeates this whole exchange; for Lear needs such humility to accept his errors and to value *the other* as an independent person who has his/her own point of view but with whom he

shares ties of kinship as s/he, overall, suffers similar emotions and pains. And by creating permanent and democratic relations with others, the hero not only finds, through the acts of help and absolution, a suitable release for his inner pressures, but he is also able to expand his understanding of the human condition and, therefore, his understanding of himself.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation we have tried to demonstrate that the protagonist of the play moves in the two main categories of the self introduced by Bakhtin, namely, *I* and *the other*, and that the interaction between those categories and the emphasis given to one or the other at any particular moment is what fundamentally configures the different manifestations of the hero's personality. In consonance with Bakhtinian philosophy, the process of interaction between the categories of the self is, in essence, singular, and differences in the background where the interaction takes place are what dictate the role that the participants take at any given moment. And it appears that the play wants to stress the possible dangers or anomalies produced in the interaction when the tragic hero mixes personalities.

From this point of view, we could argue that Lear's mistake at the beginning, and the manifestation of his lack of knowledge, not only lie in the fact that he appears to be fully unaware of the importance of *the other* as someone who can invest his person with a value utterly unattainable by himself, but also in the fact that he narrows his world exclusively to the space of his social role. This, echoing Bakhtin, fundamentally represents an impoverishment for both the categories of *I* and *the other* since by fusing *the other* with the *I*, as Lear implicitly does, he eliminates the productive difference of "two consciences that do not coincide" ("*dos conciencias que no conciden"* [Bakhtin, 1998, p. 28]) and thus he denies *the other* the possibility of defining him from another perspective, transforming him/her, at best, into a dependent entity that obediently reproduces Lear's particular sense of self-importance.

The fundamental change occurs with the transformation of the external surroundings of the hero. When the entire world around him accentuates his anguish (just as the world at the beginning accentuated his majesty) and his self seems to lose all previous securities, he has to look for something, albeit still fairly unconsciously, that gives to his existence a new sense. His first attempt is to hide, as it were, within himself, and in doing so he experiences his inner feelings even more acutely to the extent that he can eventually find a relationship between his

own emotions and those of *the other* and with this there is a temporary willingness to take advantage of the privileged position outside *the other* to help release his anguish; thus Lear establishes a fleeting relationship of *I-for-the-other*. Nevertheless, although this recognition appears to signal the path towards restoration, the general situation does not offer a normal environment for the interaction of *I* and *the other*, Lear becomes more absorbed by his inner world and, therefore, more isolated. Then he exposes his body to the storm and, now that he perceives that suffering is all around him, he does the opposite of what he did with the Fool and tries to find instances of human pain that somehow can relate to his own and thus diminish his sense of isolation: it is the enactment of the category *other-for-me*. But since the pain of those characters near him is just perceived by Lear on the physical level, he thinks of the pain of those who are dispossessed by law of birth, who may somehow prove to be fitting examples of endurance and who, in a world of universal suffering, are therefore worthy of admiration. It is at this point that the entrance of the dejected figure of Poor Tom plunges Lear into a state of utter identification whereby, this time, he is the one who wishes to fuse with *the other*, thus mirroring the elimination of the productive difference of the two consciences that we saw during the ceremony of apportionment. This “contamination” (Bakhtin, 1998, p. 31) with the suffering of *the other* damages all unity of the category *I-for-myself* within Lear as he abandons the uniqueness of his location in the world for *the other*. The subsequent fragmentation of his self is manifested in a loss of reason.

The mad lapse of the hero is characterised by a cynical view of the world of men devoid of all moral observance, unjust and corrupt. It is in this condition that Lear recognises his vulnerability as an ordinary man and the illusion in which his former self used to be immersed. These realisations form part of those memories produced by the exposure to pain and, among them, perhaps the most important is the memory of *the other* which is expressed in the gradual appearance inside Lear of a feeling of shame. What this fundamentally indicates is that in the inner world of the main character *the other* has already a prominent space that guides the moral response of the self. In this sense, we know that Lear is now ready to participate in a genuine interaction with *the other* whereby both selves guarantee, through what can be defined as a constant democratic process of action and reaction, the negotiated formation of each other’s personalities.

The reunion of Lear and Cordelia is fraught with actions, in act and speech, that validate *the other* and his/her importance to locate the *I* on a completely new level of values that ultimately enrich his/her personality. We can take the kiss Cordelia gives to her sleeping father (4, 7, 26-29) as the archetypal instance of validating actions; this, following Bakhtin, can only be performed by Cordelia upon *the other*. Apart from the obvious physical impossibility behind the idea of Lear kissing himself on the forehead, there is the much finer impossibility of sense as the kiss is to be transformed by the self who receives it into the language of inner sensations and this is what, in turn, gives meaning to the notion of feeling him/herself loved by *the other*. As for validation in speech, we can look at the penitent attitude that Lear takes and at his moment of confession which shows, as we saw, a deep understanding of himself and his moral progress. The words of the confession, as Bakhtin says, are uttered for *the other* and it is only *the other*, from his/her unique position, who can grant absolution (p. 58). Throughout this exchange, all the categories that result from the interaction of *I* and *the other* are finally in perfect balance; the two consciences of the participants occupy their independent spaces and create a relationship that is more in agreement with the principles of Bakhtin as there is a reciprocal aesthetic process (with a moral undertone) whereby those consciences consummate each other.

As a matter of fact, we can agree that the whole play is built around the fundamental need of the *I* to be consummated in *the other*. Characters are mainly defined in their relationships with other characters and as for the tragic hero, he certainly "requires the constant physical presence of, and emotional support provided by, other people" (Collington, 2001, p. 250). Social and moral identities can only be asserted by *the other* and the human society depicted by the play is fundamentally not one of ranks and conventions but rather one of mutual help and affection.

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