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# *Why War? – Psychoanalysis, Politics, and the Return to Melanie Klein*

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- ed. Max Horkheimer and Samuel H. Flowerman (New York: Harper and Row, 1960; Science Editions, 1964), vol. 2, p. 228.
- 60 Ibid., p. 50; compare, however, the last lines of the book: 'If fear and destructiveness are the major emotional sources of fascism, eros belongs mainly to democracy' (p. 976).
- 61 Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 1, trans. Stephen Conway in collaboration with Chris Turner and Erica Carter (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), pp. 208, 219.
- 62 Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer, *The Lust to Kill* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987): 'We insist that there can be a vision of the future in which desire will be reconstructed totally' (p. 176).
- 63 Barbara Ehrenreich, Foreword to Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, p. xii.
- 64 Julia Kristeva, *Histoires d'amour* (Paris: Denoël, 1983), p. 121n; trans. Leon S. Roudiez, *Tales of Love* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).
- 65 *Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, *Daily Mail*, *Independent*, 23 November 1990.
- 66 Colin Hughes, 'The Woman who Transformed Britain', *Independent*, 23 November 1990; Ross McKibbin, 'Diary', *London Review of Books*, 6 December 1990, p. 25; Hughes, 'Woman who Transformed Britain'.
- 67 'The End of an Error', Editorial, *New Statesman*, 5 July 1991, pp. 4-5.
- 68 Hughes, 'Woman who Transformed Britain'.
- 69 Eric Hobsbawm, 'What Difference Did She Make?', *London Review of Books*, 23 May 1991, pp. 3-6.
- 70 'End of an Error'.
- 71 R. W. Johnson, 'The Human Time Bomb - Is the Former Prime Minister Going off her Rocker?', *New Statesman*, 22 March 1991, p. 10.

## Part II The Death Drive

### 3 'Where Does the Misery Come From?' Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Event

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A classical political dichotomy, not without relevance for feminism, is captured by the question Wilhelm Reich placed at the heart of his dispute with Freud in a conversation with Kurt Eissler in 1952: 'From now onward, the great question arises: *Where does that misery come from?* And here the trouble began. While Freud developed his death-instinct theory which said "The misery comes from inside," I went out, out where the people were.'<sup>1</sup> We can immediately recognize the opposition that is central to Reich's complaint: between a misery that belongs to the individual in her or his relation to her- or himself, which is also, in Freud's theory of the death instinct, a species relationship, and a misery that impinges on the subject from the external world and that therefore refers to a social relationship. Here, the dynamic is not internal to the subject, but passes between the subject and the outside, an outside that has direct effects upon psychic processes, but is seen as free of any such processes itself. And we can see too the easy slide from that opposition to another that so often appears alongside it in political debate: the opposition between misery conceived as a privatized, internalized *Angst* (the product of a theory that, like the psyche it describes, is *turned in on itself*) and the people, 'out where the people were,' – that is, where it is really happening, with the people.

These people who are outside, the place from which Reich claims to speak, have, therefore, two different meanings. They are outside psychoanalysis, seen as a socially delimiting and self-blinding institution, but also – and this second meaning follows from the first – they themselves only *have* an outside, since whatever they are and suffer is a direct effect of a purely external causality and constraint. Reich's question to Freud, with its dichotomy between inside and outside, thus contains within it two more familiar versions of the opposition by means of which politics is pitted against psychoanalysis: the opposition between public and private (the people versus analytic space) and between social and the psychic (social oppression versus the drive to death).<sup>2</sup>

In Reich's case, as we know, these views resulted in the gradual repudiation of any concept of psychic dynamic and the unconscious in favour of the notion of a genital libido, dammed up or blocked off by a repressive social world, a natural stream that 'you must get back into its normal bed and let it flow naturally again' (p. 44). This essentially pre-Freudian and normative concept of sexuality reveals the most disturbing of its own social consequences in Reich's attacks on perversion, homosexuality, Judaism, and women, together with the inflation of his own sexual prowess which accompanied them: 'It is quite clear that the man who discovered the genitality function in neurosis and elaborated the orgasmic potency question could not himself live in a sick way' (p. 104). This moment lays down the terms of the most fundamental political disagreement with psychoanalysis, which then finds one of its sharpest representations in a much more recent and more obviously feminist political debate in relation to Freud, whose underlying issue perhaps becomes clear only through a comparison between the two moments. Kurt Eissler has the distinction (dubious, fortunate, or unfortunate, depending on which way you look at it) not only of having conducted that

interview with Reich in 1952, but also of later becoming the key figure within the analytic institution in what has come to be known as the Jeffrey Masson dispute, personally giving Masson access to the archives through which he mounted his critique of Freud. Masson's critique – in which he challenges Freud on the relinquishment of the seduction theory of neurosis in favour of fantasy and the vicissitudes of psychic life – is expressed quite unequivocally in terms of the same dichotomy between inside and outside: 'By shifting the emphasis from an actual world of sadness, misery, and cruelty to an internal stage on which actors performed invented dramas for an invisible audience of their own creation, Freud began a trend away from the real world that, it seems to me, is at the root of the present-day sterility of psychoanalysis and psychiatry throughout the world.'<sup>3</sup> If the dichotomy appears this time as a feminist issue, it is because the aggression of the outside world has been stepped up and sexually differentiated, and is now conceived of in terms of seduction, mutilation, and rape.

The similarities between these two moments are, I think, striking. We can point to the inflated view of sexual prowess, which in relation to Masson – the famous and now legally contested reference to his thousand and one nights<sup>4</sup> – merely mirrors in reverse the grotesque image of masculinity which runs through the whole book. What the two have in common is the utterly unquestioned image of sexual difference whose rigidity is, I would argue, the real violence and, in Masson's case – with a logic to which he is of course totally blind – leads directly to it. Reich also had his image of sexual violence, only the other way round: the misogyny-cum-vampirism worthy of Henry James's *The Sacred Fount* which can be detected in his observation that he has frequently observed couples in which the man is 'alive', the woman 'somehow out', inhibiting then drawing off, by implication, his vitality and power (p. 117). But most important

is that we can detect behind these two moments (the Reich and Masson disputes) this question of violence, which presents itself today as an explicitly feminist political issue, but which was already there in the dispute over the death drive at the centre of the earlier political repudiation of Freud.

It is this issue of violence, and with it that of the death drive, which has become a key issue for any consideration of psychoanalysis in relation to feminism today. Clearly, the question of sexual violence is crucial to feminism (violence is, of course, also a political issue in a much more global sense). It is central to the discussion of pornography, to take just one instance. Reich himself spoke of the pornographic drives, although for him they were not part of genital sexuality but the effect of a deviation from it. But Masson's book can, I think, be read as a key pornographic text of the 1980s, as well as a text on pornography, much the same way as we can, or have to, read Andrea Dworkin's writing on pornography, a form of feminism to which Masson now explicitly claims allegiance.<sup>5</sup>

For isn't the argument finally that psychoanalytic theory, by ignoring the pressing reality of sexual violence, becomes complicit with that violence and hands women over to it? Isn't the argument therefore that theory itself can cause death? And isn't that merely one step on from Reich's insistent relegation of all death to the outside, which then, in a classic inversion, leads directly to this persecutory return, for which psychoanalysis is held accountable? Reich himself was clearly operating in some such terms as these: '[Freud] sensed something in the human organism which was deadly. But he thought in terms of instinct. So he hit upon the term "death instinct." That was wrong. "Death" was right. "Instinct" was wrong. Because it's not something the organism wants. It's something that happens to the organism' (p. 89).

Where to locate violence? This was the question sensed in all its difficulty in that earlier political debate. It is worth looking back at that moment to see how it was played out. What then emerges is that violence is not something that can be located on the inside or the outside, in the psychic or the social (the second opposition, which follows so rapidly from the first), but rather something that appears as the effect of the dichotomy itself. I want to suggest that feminism, precisely through its vexed and complex relationship with psychoanalysis, may be in a privileged position to recast this problem, refusing the rigid polarity of inside and outside together with the absolute and fixed image of sexual difference which comes with it and on which it so often seems to rely. But I also want to suggest why the feminist undoing of this polarity needs to be different from other deconstructions that might be, and have been, proposed, especially because of the form of feminism's still, for me, necessary relationship to psychoanalysis itself.

So where does violence go if you locate it on the outside? In Reich's case, in a structure reminiscent of foreclosure, it returns in a hallucinatory guise. His insistence on the utter health of the subject brings murder in its train:

In order to get to the core where the natural, the normal, the healthy is, you have to get through the middle layer. And in that middle layer there is terror. There is severe terror. Not only that, there is murder there. All that Freud tried to subsume under the death instinct is in that middle layer. He thought it was biological. It wasn't. It's an artefact of culture. It is a structural malignancy of the human animal. Therefore before you can get through to what Freud called Eros or what I call organotic streaming or plasmatic excitation, you have to go through hell. . . . All these wars, all the chaos now – do you know what that is to my mind? *Humanity is trying to get at its core, at its living, healthy core. But before it can*

*be reached, humanity has to pass through this phase of murder, killing and destruction.* (p. 109)

This is apocalyptic — a kind of hideous, born-again anticipation of that vision of a necessary hell put forward by some of the most extreme proponents of the New Right. It expels terror into the outer zone, and then brings it back as a phase of human development, a catharsis whose purgatorial nature is not concealed by the concept of cultural artefact through which Reich tries to bring it to ground. Horror in Reich's argument operates at two levels: it is the product of culture (something that happens to the organism), and it is part of a vision (something his own language so clearly desires). But that link between two absolute outsides — one relegated to something called culture and the other to the nether depths of all humanity and all history — is not, I suspect, unique to Reich.

Against these rigid extremes, what Reich could not countenance was contradiction — the contradiction of subjectivity in analytic theory and the contradiction that, if it has any meaning, is the only meaning of the death drive itself. For a theory that pits inside and outside against each other in such deadly combat wipes out any difference or contradiction on either side: the subject suffers, the social oppresses, and what is produced, by implication, is utter stasis in each. At one level Freud's concept of the death drive was also about stasis — the famous return to the inorganic which indeed hands the concept over to biology and determinism alike. But if we follow the theorization through, deliberately avoiding the *fort-da* game through which it is most often rehearsed, it is the oscillation of position, the displacement of psychic levels and energies, which the concept of the death drive forces on the theory, the problem it poses in relation to any notion of what might be primary or secondary, which is striking. Challenging Freud on the con-

cept of masochism, Reich commented: 'When I asked him whether masochism was primary or secondary, whether it is turned-back sadism or aggression or a disturbance of aggression outward, or whether it's a primary death instinct thing, Freud, peculiarly, maintained both' (p. 89). The ambiguity of the concept is the concept itself. In the chapter 'The Classes of Instinct' in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud addressed the question of whether ambivalence — the transposition of love into hate and its reverse — throws his new dualism of the life and death instincts into crisis. Doesn't the shifting of one form of affect into another suggest a form of energy characterized by nothing other than the form of its displacements? And doesn't that in turn throw into question our understanding of the instinct as such: 'The problem of the quality of instinctual impulses and of its persistence throughout their various vicissitudes is still very obscure.'<sup>6</sup>

What Reich therefore misses in his biology/culture opposition is that the theorization of the death instinct shows the instinct itself at its most problematic. For it gives us Freud articulating most clearly the concept of the *drive*: that is, a drive that is only a drive, because of its utter indifference to any path it might take. Freud uses the erotic cathexis and its indifference to the object as the model for this dynamic; but in a twist that mimics the very process he describes, the reference to eros leads him straight into the arms of death:

[This trait] is found in erotic cathexes, where a peculiar indifference in regard to the object displays itself. . . . Not long ago, Rank published some good examples of the way in which neurotic acts of revenge can be directed against the wrong people. Such behaviour on the part of the unconscious reminds one of the comic story of the three village tailors, one of whom had to be hanged because the only village blacksmith had committed a capital offense. Punishment must be exacted even if it doesn't fall upon the guilty.<sup>7</sup>

This utterly random *drive to punishment* links up with the concept of a *need for punishment*, the very concept Reich so criticized because it contradicted the earlier libidinal theory, which had stated that sexual desire does not seek punishment but fears it (the theory of repression). It was this concept of a need for punishment which upset Reich's conception of a purely extraneous causality (suffering as an external event). Freud summed it up in his observation in 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', written immediately after *The Ego and the Id*: 'It is instructive, too, to find, contrary to all theory and expectation, that a neurosis which has defied every therapeutic effort may vanish if the subject becomes involved in the misery of an unhappy marriage, or loses all his money, or develops a dangerous organic disease.'<sup>8</sup> Of course, if it weren't all so deadly serious, what is most noteworthy about this, as with the story of the village tailors, is the utter comedy of it all.

In following these arguments, I should make it clear that I am not suggesting simply that the psychic dimension be prioritized over the cultural and biological determinism of Reich (which turn out finally to be the same thing within Reich's own theory, since the concept of cultural repression depends on that of a pre-ordained genital drive). For to argue in these terms leads almost inevitably to the reverse dualism of Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel and Bela Grunberger's book on Reich, which opposes to Reich's refusal of internal factors, psychic processes that they directly and with unapologetic reductionism make the determinant of social life. Also, although they insist on the difficulty of the internal factors and on that basis criticize Reich's glorification of the id, they do so in terms of a reality-differentiating ego, which has to succumb to the constraints on instinct offered by the real world; they thereby hand the concept of psychic conflict over to that of adaptation to reality – which might explain the defence of maturation, Oedi-

pus, and sexual difference, not to mention the dismissal of all politics as reality-denying, which seems to follow.<sup>9</sup> The book ends with two quotations '*Wo es war soll ich werden*' ('Where id was, there ego shall be': Freud) and '*Wo ich war soll es werden*' ('Where ego was, there id shall be': roughly Reich), the first the much contested, much interpreted statement presented unproblematically as the 'goal of the analytic process' (p. 237). The statement '*Wo es war soll ich werden*' was of course the phrase retranslated by Lacan from Strachey precisely because of the normative ethics of ego and adaptation it implied.<sup>10</sup> The implication is that Reich wanted to replace ego with id, whereas the objective of analysis should be the reverse. Faced with this, one might concede that Reich had an important point.

But what emerges instead in looking at Freud's theory of the death drive is precisely the impasse it produces in Freud's own thought around this very issue of location and dualism, to which I would want to assign both more and less than Derrida, who makes of it in *La Carte postale* the exemplary demonstration of the impasse of theorization itself (of metalanguage, knowledge, and mastery),<sup>11</sup> thereby evacuating the specific dynamic – of masochism, punishment, and the drive to death – which has historically been, and still is, I would argue, the point of the political clash. For the failure to locate death as an object, the outrageous oscillation which this failure introduces into causality and the event, signals for me something that has a particular resonance for a feminism wishing to bring the question of sexuality on to the political field: and that is that a rigid determinism by either biology or culture, by inside or outside – an outside that then turns into man posed in his immutable and ahistorical essence as man – simply will not do. Wasn't it precisely to bypass both these causalities (of culture and biology) that Juliet Mitchell turned to psychoanalysis in the first place?<sup>12</sup> Then the question was

posed in terms of how to understand the origins of femininity and sexual difference (where does sexual difference come from?). To which I would merely add that the question of determinism reveals itself today as the issue of violence and its location (determinism also as a form of violence).

Like Reich before him, Masson insists on the externality of the event, only this time he calls it 'man'. He is perhaps useful only to the extent that he anthropomorphizes the inside/outside dichotomy, turning it unmistakably into an issue of whether it is our (women's) or their (men's) fault. It seems to be the inevitable development of the basic dichotomy, since a reality split off into a realm of antagonism cannot finally be conceptualized as anything other than violence, or perhaps even rape. But to ask for a language that goes over to neither side of this historical antagonism, and to suggest that we might find the rudiments of such a language in the very issue of the death drive, is merely to point to something that is in a way obvious for feminism – the glaring inadequacy of any formulation that makes us as women either pure victim or sole agent of our distress. The realm of sexuality messes up what can be thought of in any straightforward sense as causality. Precisely, then, through its foregrounding of sexuality, feminism may be in a privileged position to challenge or rethink the dualities (inside/outside, victim/aggressor, real event/fantasy) which seem to follow any rigid externalization of political space.

There is, however, another discourse, with its own relation to feminism and to psychoanalysis, which has quite explicitly addressed this polarity of inside and outside, aiming to undo these polarities in which it also locates a violence. This is a violence not against women but against something that can be called 'the rhetoricity of language', in so far as the binary is always the point at

which, under the impact of an impulse to mastery and control, the oscillation and randomness of language is closed off. Not only in Derrida's writing, but also in Shoshana Felman's book on madness and the literary thing, Barbara Johnson's essay on Poe, Lacan, and Derrida, and Samuel Weber's reading of Freud, the specific polarity of inside and outside appears as the stake of their discourse. One quotation from each of the last three can serve as illustration:

To state that madness has well and truly become a commonplace is to say that madness stands in our contemporary world for the radical ambiguity of the inside and the outside, an ambiguity which escapes speaking subjects who speak only by misrecognising it. . . . A discourse that speaks of madness can henceforth no longer know whether it is inside or outside, internal or external, to the madness of which it speaks.<sup>13</sup>

The total inclusion of the 'frame' is both mandatory and impossible. The 'frame' thus becomes not the borderline between the inside and the outside, but precisely what subverts the applicability of the inside/outside polarity to the act of interpretation.<sup>14</sup>

The specific problem posed by anxiety is that of *the relation of the psychic to the nonpsychic*, or in other words, *the delimitation of the psychic as such*. But if anxiety poses this problem, its examination and solution are complicated by the fact that anxiety itself both simulates and dissimulates the relation of psychic to nonpsychic, of 'internal' to 'external.' . . . [Freud's attempt] is intended to put anxiety in its proper place. But his own discussion demonstrates that *anxiety has no proper place*. . . . The psychoanalytic conception of the psychic can neither be *opposed* to the nonpsychic nor *derived* from it; it cannot be expressed in terms of cause and effect, outer and inner, reality and unreality, or any other of the opposing pairs to which Freud inevitably recurs.<sup>15</sup>



And at the conference on feminism and psychoanalysis held at Normal, Illinois, in May 1986, Barbara Johnson said in discussion: 'For pedagogy, aesthetics, therapy, you have to have a frame, and if you have a frame, what you get is pedagogy, aesthetics, therapy (which doesn't mean that you can do without one).' Now there are obvious differences among these statements and of course among the individual writers; but, none the less, a number of important links – both among them and in relation to what I have been describing – can be made. First, the problem of externality, delimitation, as a problem that encompasses the object – whether madness, literary enunciation, or anxiety – also includes the very theorization through which that object can be thought. The impossibility of delimiting the object becomes, therefore, the impossibility for theory itself of controlling its object – that is, of knowing it. Felman asks, 'How can we construct the theory of the essential misprision of the subject of theory?' (p. 221). Barbara Johnson: 'If we could be sure of the difference between the determinable and the undeterminable, the undeterminable would be comprehended within the determinable. What is undecidable is precisely whether a thing is decidable or not' (p. 488). And Weber: 'Such a *reality* [the "real essence of danger"] can never be fully grasped by theoretical "insight," since it can never be seen, named or recognised as such' (p. 59).

Second, and as an effect of this, the characterization of the object shifts into the field of its conceptualization or the impossibility of its conceptualization, so that, in Felman's case, for example, madness becomes precisely *la chose littéraire*, the very *thing* of literature (not a literary thing), because literature is the privileged place in which that tension between speaking madness and speaking of madness, between speaking madness and designating or repressing it, which is also the distinction between rhetoric and grammar, is played out. The object becomes

the very structure of representation through which it fails to be thought, the impasse of conceptual thinking itself. The classic and dazzling instance of this theorization has to be the moment when Barbara Johnson reads Oedipus as a repetition of the letter purloined from the abyssal and interminable interior of Poe's story, instead of seeing the letter as a repetition of an oedipal fantasy it necessarily and always reproduces (the basis of Derrida's critique of Lacan, in whose reading of the Poe story he locates a classic psychoanalytic reduction) (p. 488).

Third, the shifting of the object into the very form and movement of representation brings with it – cannot, finally, avoid – its own meta-psychology. This appears in the category of grammar that Felman sets against rhetoric: the misrecognizing subject that thinks – has to think in order to speak – that it knows itself, has to ignore, as she puts it, that radical ambiguity between inside and outside that madness gives us today. But it is in the theorization of the death drive, the vanishing-point of the theory, that the meta-psychology of this reading of psychoanalysis becomes most clear. In Weber's reading of Freud's key text on the death drive, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), what turns out to be driving the very impulse to death is narcissism, the binding and mastery that Weber identifies not only in the concept of the death drive but also in the very process through which Freud tried to formulate it, 'the narcissistic striving to rediscover the same: an aspect of speculation Freud was ready to criticize in others, but which he sought to justify in his own work' (p. 129). It is this emphasis on narcissism which saves the death drive from that intangible, generalized, and ultimately transcendent realm of the unfathomable to which the insistence on the failure of conceptualization could so easily assign it. Against this possible reading, which he attributes to Gilles Deleuze, Weber sees in the death drive 'just another form of the narcissistic language of the ego' (p. 129). It

is a kind of self-accusatory ego psychology, one that laments and undoes its own categories and status even as it gives them final arbitration over psychic life.

Something similar goes on in Derrida's own reading of this same text by Freud (Derrida and Weber refer to each other<sup>16</sup>) through the concept of the '*pulsion d'emprise*,' '*pulsion de puissance*'. At a key moment in Derrida's speculation on this most speculative of Freud's writings, this drive emerges as being for Freud the very motive of the drive itself: 'The holding, appropriating, drive must also be the *relation to itself* of the drive: no drive not driven to bind itself to itself and to ensure its self mastery as drive. Hence the transcendental tautology of the appropriating drive: the drive as drive, the drive of drive, the pulsionality of the drive.'<sup>17</sup> The concept appears in a term Freud offers almost as an aside in his discussion of the *fort-da* game: *Bemächtigungstrieb*. Freud's 'transcendental predicate' for describing the death drive is for Derrida, as for Weber, the term through which Freud's own meta-conceptual impulse is best thought.<sup>18</sup>

The concept of the death drive has of course been central to Derrida's reading of Freud since 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', when it hollowed out Freud's theory at its weak points of binarism through its *unheimlich* presence (as binding and repetition) inside the very process of life. We could in fact say that it is through the theorization of the death drive that Derrida ultimately thinks the relationship between the proper and that *différance* which subverts any causality, any dichotomy of inside and outside, all forms of language mastery in which he locates the violence (his word) of the metaphysical act.<sup>19</sup> Barbara Johnson, too, draws 'The Frame of Reference' to a close through the categories of narcissism and death (the inverted message that forces the subject – and reader – up against an irreducible otherness) (p. 503). Let's call deconstruction, for the moment

at least, another way of dealing, another '*savoir-faire*', with the death drive itself (using and reformulating Catherine Millot's description of psychoanalysis as a *savoir-faire* with the paternal metaphor) that manages over and over again to assert itself at the heart of theoretical and political debate.<sup>20</sup>

Let's note too, for all the distance between them, how the two very different articulations in relation to the death drive that I have been describing come uncannily close; how Derrida seems to pick up, or rather produce from within his own theorization, something of the terms present in Reich and, later, Masson: narcissism as phallogocentrism and the hymen as counter-image, with the relation between them formulated as rupture. Couldn't this also be seen as a grotesque recasting of the world (now Western metaphysics) under the sign of a massive violation, if not rape? 'Perpetual, the rape has always already taken place and will nevertheless never have been perpetrated. For it will always have been caught in the foldings of some veil, where any or all truth comes undone.'<sup>21</sup> No rape because the hymen is the point where all truth is undone; but always already rape, because always truth, logos, presence, the violence of the metaphysical act.

The act is metaphor or figuration for Derrida; for Masson, figuration, or fantasy, is the act (fantasy is a denial of the reality of the act). The difference can be seen in the opposite political effects: deconstruction of a sexual binary in language, which then seems, in Derrida's discourse at least, condemned to repeat it, or refusal of language itself in favour of the event. For what is at stake in Masson's rejection of fantasy if not representation as such, the idea of a discourse at odds with itself with no easy relation to the real? And isn't that also the key to the radical feminist critique of pornography, which sees the image as directly responsible for the act? But by setting figuration against the act in my own

discourse, I am only too aware of the risk of reintroducing that inside/outside dichotomy which is so often the guarantor of political space. It is a question that has of course been put many times, not least by feminists, to deconstruction itself:

This raises an important question which should not be overlooked although we haven't the space to develop it to any extent here: the complicated relationship of a practical politics to the kind of analysis we have been considering (specifically the 'deconstructive' analysis implicit in your discussion). . . . Just how one is to deal with the inter-relationship of these forces and necessities in the context of feminine [*sic* – I think this should be 'feminist'] struggle should be more fully explored on some other occasion. But let's go on to Heidegger's ontology.<sup>22</sup>

The slip – 'feminine' for 'feminist' – is beautifully expressive of the problem being raised: the absorption of the political (feminist) into the space of representation (feminine). Or, as Derrida would insist – as indeed he goes on to insist in the same interview – with reference to a concept like 'hymen' or 'double-chiasmatic invagination of the borders', these terms are present in his own writing as a trope not reducible to the body of the woman as such, at once anchored in and taking off from the recognizable historical reference they inevitably invoke (p. 75).

Crucially however, in both these positions, the problem of how to locate violence and the act brings with it – is inseparable from – the question of how to locate sexual difference. It needed feminism, of course, to make the point.

In three stages, therefore, feminism has returned to and recast the controversies at the heart of the 1920s and 1930s political debate with Freud<sup>23</sup>: first, the issue of phallogentrism, which came originally from within the

analytic institution and, in its largely clinical formulation, was at that time marked by the total absence of any political consciousness or critique (it was this criticism that was remade for radical feminism by Shulamith Firestone and Kate Millett in the late 1960s); second, the attempt to use psychoanalysis as a theory of ideology, which had characterized the political Freudians of Berlin.<sup>24</sup> The key figure here is Otto Fenichel, who tried to use psychoanalysis in relation to Marxism without losing, like Reich and the culturalists, the unconscious and sexuality; without sacrificing, like the Vienna and British orthodox analysts, the political challenge to social and sexual norms (Juliet Mitchell's intervention in 1974 is almost an exact retranscription for feminism of this aim). And finally now, the issue of the death drive, of a violence whose outrageous character belongs so resolutely with its refusal to be located, to be simply identified, and then, by implication, removed (possibly the only meaning of the persistence, or immutability, of the death drive of which it has so often been politically accused). Perhaps one reason why this issue has returned is that, faced with the hideous phenomenon of right-wing apocalyptic and sexual fantasy, the language of interpellation through which we thought to understand something about collective identification is no longer adequate. At the point where fantasy generalizes itself in the form of the horrific, that implied ease of self-recognition gives way to something that belongs in the order of impossibility or shock.

That this is now a key issue for feminism can be read across the very titles of two texts of contemporary feminism: Andrea Dworkin's *Pornography: men possessing women*, with all that it implies by way of a one-sided (which means outside of us as women) oppression, violence, and control, and the Barnard papers on sexuality, *Pleasure and Danger*, whose ambiguity allows us at least to ask whether the relation between the two terms is one of

antagonism or implication, whether there might be a pleasure *in* danger – a dangerous question in itself.<sup>25</sup> In her opening essay, the editor, Carole Vance, puts the question like this: ‘The subtle connection between how patriarchy interferes with female desire and how women experience their own passions as dangerous is emerging as a critical issue to be explored’ (p. 4). In this formulation, although danger is still something that comes from outside – patriarchy makes female desire dangerous to itself – the terms of femininity, passion, and danger have at least started to move. If the deconstructive way of undoing the sort of dichotomy I have outlined leaves me unsatisfied, therefore, it is not just because of the return of the basic scenario of difference, but because I cannot see how it can link back to this equally pressing question for feminists – which is how we can begin to think the question of violence and fantasy as something that implicates us as women, how indeed we can begin to dare to think it at all.

It is the problem increasingly at the heart of Kristeva’s work, the concept of abjection (already posed as horror and power), which has led inexorably to the question of feminism and violence, ‘to extol a centripetal, softened and becalmed feminine sexuality, only to exhume most recently, under the cover of idylls amongst women, the sado-masochistic ravages beneath’.<sup>26</sup> In Kristeva’s case, this difficulty has produced in turn the no less problematic flight into a paternally grounded identification and love.<sup>27</sup>

The question then becomes: what could be an understanding of violence which, while fully recognizing the historical forms in which it has repeatedly been directed toward women, none the less does not send it out wholesale into the real from which it can only return as an inevitable and hallucinatory event? How can we speak the fact that violence moves across boundaries, including that of sexual difference, and not only in fantasy. For

only by recognizing that boundaries already shift (not *can* be shifted – the flight into pure voluntarism) can we avoid the pitfalls of a Masson (women as utter victim to the event). And only by seeing this as a problem for subjects who recognize and, in so doing, misrecognize themselves and each other as sexual beings can we seize this problem at the level of what is still for feminism an encounter between the sexes. For psychoanalysis, this difficulty is precisely the difficulty of sexuality itself, or of the death drive, which might be a way of saying the same thing. It is a point of theoretical and political difficulty still unresolved today.

#### NOTES

Originally presented at subsequent references are ‘Feminisms and Psychoanalysis’, a conference held in Normal, Illinois, 1986, published in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Judith Root and Richard Feldstein (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

- 1 Wilhelm Reich, *Reich Speaks of Freud. Conversations with Kurt Eissler*, ed. Mary Higgins and C. M. Raphael (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1967), pp. 42–3, (subsequent references are cited in the text).
- 2 The key text in which Freud introduced the concept of the death drive is *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachery (London: Hogarth), vol. 18.
- 3 Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth, Freud’s Suppression of the Seduction Theory* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1984), p. 144.
- 4 In 1983 Janet Malcolm interviewed Jeffrey Masson, and used the material as the basis for two articles published first in the *New Yorker* and then as a book, *In the Freud Archives* (New York: Knopf, 1984). Masson subsequently sued Malcolm. The reference here is to his statement that he had slept with a thousand women.

- 5 Chris Reed, 'How Freud Changed his Mind and Became a Chauvinist', *Guardian Woman*, *Guardian*, 20 February 1985. Masson had also published a long article in the radical feminist journal *Mother Jones*.
- 6 Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, in *Standard Edition*, vol. 19, p. 44.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 8 Freud, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism,' in *Standard Edition*, vol. 19, p. 166.
- 9 Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel and Bela Grunberger, *Freud or Reich? Psychoanalysis and Illusion*, trans. Claire Pajaczowska (London: Free Association Books, 1985), see esp. p. 10.
- 10 Freud, 'The Dissection of the Psychical Personality,' in *New Introductory Lectures*, in *Standard Edition*, vol. 22, p. 80; Jacques Lacan, 'L'Instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient; ou, La raison depuis Freud,' in *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 524; trans. Alan Sheridan, 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious; or, Reason since Freud,' in *Écrits: a selection* (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 171.
- 11 Jacques Derrida, *La Carte postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980) trans. Alan Bass, *The Post Card: from Socrates to Freud and beyond* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987).
- 12 Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (London: Allen Lane, New York: Random House, 1974).
- 13 Shoshana Felman, *Writing and Madness*, trans. Martha Noel Evans and Shoshana Felman (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 12–13; originally published as *La Folie et la chose littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1978) (subsequent references are cited in the text).
- 14 Barbara Johnson, 'The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida,' *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977), p. 481, (subsequent references are cited in the text).
- 15 Samuel Weber, *The Legend of Freud* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 50, 58–9 (subsequent references are cited in the text).
- 16 Derrida, *La Carte postale*, p. 400n.; Weber, *Legend of Freud*, p. 172n.
- 17 Derrida, *La Carte postale*, p. 430 (my translation).
- 18 *Ibid.*, pp. 430–2. Although very close, there does seem to be a difference between Weber's and Derrida's theorization here. For Weber the death drive becomes a manifestation of the drive to mastery; for Derrida the '*pulsion d'emprise*' is the category through which the death drive is thought by Freud, but it is always exceeded by the death drive, 'at once the reason and the failure, the origin and the limit of power'. Hence in Derrida's commentary, the last word, so to speak, is given to rhythm: 'Beyond opposition, the rhythm' (pp. 432, 435).
- 19 Derrida, 'Freud et la scène de l'écriture', in *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), pp. 293–340; trans. Alan Bass, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 196–231.
- 20 Catherine Millot, 'The Feminine Super-Ego', *m/f* 10 (1985); pp. 21–38.
- 21 Derrida is commenting on Mallarmé: Jacques Derrida, 'La Double Séance', in *La Dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 260; 'The Double Session', trans. Barbara Johnson, in *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 292.
- 22 Jacques Derrida and Christie V. McDonald, 'Choreographies', *Diacritics* 12 (Summer 1982), pp. 66–76.
- 23 For a fuller discussion of this history, see Jacqueline Rose, 'Introduction – Feminism and the Psychic', in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986), pp. 1–23.
- 24 See Russell Jacoby, *The Repression of Psychoanalysis: Otto Fenichel and the Political Freudians* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
- 25 Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: men possessing women* (New York: Perigree, 1981); Carole S. Vance, *Pleasure and Danger: exploring female sexuality* (Boston and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).
- 26 Julia Kristeva, *Histoires d'amour* (Paris: Denöel, 1983), p. 349.
- 27 I discuss these shifts in Kristeva's work more fully in 'Julia Kristeva – Take Two', in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986), pp. 141–64.

#### 4 Shakespeare and the Death Drive

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The conference at which the paper that forms the basis of this chapter was first presented had the title 'Shakespeare and Eros', and I chose to talk about Shakespeare and death. If this should seem perverse, it is a perversion which, in relation to both the field of sexuality and the writing of Shakespeare, has as I will be arguing, an inner logic. *Measure for Measure* is one of the plays by Shakespeare which brings the two instances (of eros and death) forcefully together, although not in the perhaps familiar and more predictable sense of death as a facet of eroticism – that is, an eroticism tinged with an intrinsic violence and morbidity because it belongs to the realm of excess (a reading associated with the great 'erotic' drama of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and to some extent with *Romeo and Juliet*). In *Measure for Measure*, the association between eros and death is more complicated, passing as it does through an explicit discussion of the enactment of just and unjust law. What is at stake in *Measure for Measure* is not a fusion of the two terms, but their interchangeability, a question precisely of *measure*: whether death and eros can be exchanged for each other; whether, finally, either of them can be put in the scales.

The question of exchangeability is there of course from the very beginning, when Claudio's death is the

punishment for a sexual offence, and then immediately again in the barter that Angelo tries to establish between that death and the sexual act with Isabella. But that basic exchange (death for sex and sex for death) is rapidly confused with a number of others, which force the relation between the two way beyond the terms of the central and structuring dramatic event. If illegal sexuality *leads to* death as its legitimate punishment, death is also, in the form of illegitimate violence or murder, its *equivalent*. Angelo justifies the sentence on Claudio in these terms:

It were as good  
To pardon him that hath from nature stolen  
A man already made, as to remit  
Their saucy sweetness that do coin heaven's image  
In stamps that are forbid.

(II. iv. 41–45)<sup>1</sup>

The illicit and illegitimate production of life is the same as the illegitimate taking of it, which lines up death on the side of life, as well as inadvertently drawing together – since Claudio is to be executed – the law's enactment of violence and murder. In this context, the problem of justice in the play is no longer that of just measure (the *mean* of its fair application), but is rather that of the symbolic basis and contradictions in the concept of legal justice itself, of the paradox, as Freud put it, that 'civilisation hopes to prevent the crudest excesses of brutal violence by itself assuming the right to use violence against criminals'.<sup>2</sup> To put it another way, Angelo is guilty long before the emergence of his desire for Isabella, because the law is only ever the embodiment – and enactment – of a collective guilt, or crime.

This reversibility, or mutual implication, of terms which propose themselves as opposites comes to be at the heart of Freud's theorization of the death drive.<sup>3</sup> It is also, through the principle of demonic and unpleasurable

repetition, what leads him to a recognition of its force. The death drive is identified by Freud in that moment when the child seeks to master absence by staging the recall of the lost object, but finds it can only do so by first making the object disappear. This locks the child into the structure of representation, but, more crucially, allows the child to achieve its aim only by repeating the very moment it is designed to avoid. This process of uncanny and self-defeating repetition Freud opposes to eros; but commentators have been quick to point out that it contradicts the most fundamental psychoanalytic understanding of sexuality to try and preserve eros from these effects.<sup>4</sup> Pleasure and unpleasure, for example, are inseparable in psychoanalysis because, through repression, what was once desired comes to be feared. That reversal can then be seen as not radically distinguishable from the game of the infant in which what is most feared becomes the object of a demonic repetition and desire.

In Freud's account the death drive comes increasingly to stand for that contradictory repetition, a drive whose object is finally indifferent, subordinated as it is to the force of the mechanism itself. Nothing illustrates the perversity of this mechanism more clearly than the unconscious relation which can hold between punishment and crime:

Not long ago, Rank published some examples of the way in which neurotic acts of revenge can be directed against the wrong people. Such behaviour on the part of the unconscious reminds one of the comic story of the three village tailors, one of whom had to be hanged because the only village blacksmith had committed a capital offence. Punishment must be exacted even if it doesn't fall upon the guilty.<sup>5</sup>

If we take these two statements of Freud together – that the law embodies the very crime it punishes, and that it may strike at random even where there is no crime –

then the law starts to look uncannily like that principle of blind repetition which characterizes the death drive itself. Such a definition is effectively proposed in Barnaby Riche's *The Adventures of Brusanus, Prince of Hungary*, given by Bullough as one of the sources of the play:

They make themselves guilty of great injustice, who beeing appointed of God to persecute the wicked with the swoorde drawne, will yet keep their handes cleane from bloude, whereas the wicked in the meantime commits all manner of sin, and that uncontrolled: and it is no less cruelty to punishe no offence, than not to forgive any.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, in this instance any seeming extravagance is cancelled by being placed within the framework of what would be an ideal administration of the law. *Measure for Measure* also, through the trajectory of the narrative, defines the problem in terms of an ideal standard, turning it into an encounter between different moral subjects so that what are being examined are the qualities that make an individual the fitting bearer of justice. But what if the problem is not moral, but formal? If it is fundamentally irreducible to something which can be managed by a benign statehood, indicating that there is something wilder at play? Then we might start to see how the contradictions at the heart of the very definition of legality spread across the play's whole field of signification, constantly confounding, even as it establishes, the precious distinctions which the law orchestrates and arbitrates into place. The law can be narrativized, but, like death and sexuality, there is always something which escapes.

I want to come at this question now through a consideration of the explicit discussion of death in Shakespeare's play. One of the most striking things about *Measure for Measure* is the way that it seems to bring

about something which could be called a 'putting into discourse' of death. If I wanted to talk about 'Shakespeare and the Death Drive' in the context of a conference on eros, it is also because the question of sexuality has been so privileged over that of death in both traditional and more radical readings of the play. But in *Measure for Measure*, sex is not just set against death, it is wedged into a discussion of the morality of death which is of equal importance to, and is finally inseparable from, the representation of sexuality itself. In fact, death takes on the status of a desired object no less than sexual pleasure. Thus, while the narrative is driven by the attempt to forestall the death of Claudio (a death which is felt to be excessive), death insists across the whole fabric of the drama (not just *this* death as excessive, nor death *as* excess, but a kind of superfluity of death). Juliet describes her life as a 'dying horror' when she is told that Claudio is to die; Isabella comments when told the story of Mariana: 'What a merit were it in death to take this poor maid from the world'; Angelo threatens Isabella that, if she relents, Claudio's death will be drawn out 'to a ling'ring sufference' (an added piece of viciousness which, as J. W. Lever comments in his Introduction to the Arden edition, is nowhere in any of the sources of the play).

Alongside this morbidity, we can place the status of death as object of exchange, not just between Claudio, Angelo, and Isabella, but in its comic, or low, version in the transition of Pompey from 'unlawful bawd to lawful hangman', which echoes the point about legality, sexuality, and murder that I have already made. It is as if death can be avoided only in the form of its repetition, which means – in psychoanalytic terminology – that death becomes an object of desire. Isabella states this most clearly, in a speech which has caused some awkwardness for those insisting (whether for or against) on her sanctity:

... were I under the terms of death,  
Th'impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,  
And strip myself to death as to a bed  
That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield  
My body up to shame.

(II. iv. 99–103)

Lever comments: 'The image is more obviously suited to an Antony or Claudio than to the chaste Isabella, but its occurrence here is psychologically revealing', meaning – we gather from the Introduction – that it reveals that 'strongly sexed ardour and impetuosity' which will find its 'true destiny' in her marriage to the Duke.<sup>7</sup> Lever is right, of course, that the passage is extraordinary, and indeed that it appears out of place. More crucially, it also produces a dramatic confusion of the alternatives which it seems to propose. The passage seems to say that Isabella would prefer death to sexual dishonour, but the choice is in fact between sexual dishonour and the sexualization of death. Like Angelo producing proximity (between the administration of justice and murder) where there should be antagonism, Isabella manages to confuse the opposition between honourable death and dishonour on which she stakes her moral ground. This constant destabilization, and the central place of death within it, suggests that even if, technically, the central act of barter is a body for a life (that of Claudio), it is simultaneously a body for a death. Furthermore, as we will see, death and the body are not always, or necessarily, opposed. As Erasmus puts it, citing St Paul, in the *Ars Moriendi*, 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'<sup>8</sup>

Before going on to discuss the two famous speeches in Act III in which this crisis of representation in relation to death is most manifest, a number of other points should be made. For there is another fundamental contradiction on this subject of death which runs right across the play. In the struggle over Claudio, death is punishment, and the basic argument is that this punishment



is unreasonable. Claudio should not have to relinquish his right to life. In the case of Barnardine, however, there is no questioning of the sentence, but the problem of execution is that Barnardine is not ready for death. Neither Barnardine nor Claudio 'deserve' to die, but that 'deserve' has two different and potentially contradictory meanings: worthiness (implying death as something noble) and refusal (implying death as something one has the right, for as long as possible, to resist). The Duke, as we will see, will try to resolve this contradiction by preparing Claudio for death, but he can precisely do so only by a form of generality which brackets out any distinction between death as fair or unfair. At the same time, Barnardine is busily signalling that very distinction by his presence elsewhere in the play. Clearly, at one level the difference between Claudio and Barnardine turns on the question of readiness for death, but it is too easy simply to oppose them in these terms. 'Unfit to live or die', Barnardine represents together what are meant to be two mutually exclusive terms, since the story which revolves around Claudio implies that you merit one or the other, but not both. The law, and the dynamic of Shakespeare's drama in so far as it precisely narrativizes the law, would in fact be pointless if there was no absolute distinction between the granting and the withholding of human life.

The question then emerges as to *which* death is at issue, or what could be a specification of death. 'No need of a signifier', writes Lacan, 'to be dead or to be a father, but without the signifier there would be no knowledge whatsoever about either of these two states of being'.<sup>9</sup> Rereading (he called it returning to) Freud's oedipal myth, Lacan sees in its symbolic staging of the death of the father the basic tie between death and paternity as the unavoidable indices of the structure of symbolization itself. That which can *only* be signified turns the subject '*en abîme*' into the endless flight of

signification. According to this reading, it is language that drives the subject to death. *Measure for Measure* does not, therefore, only *signify* death (a contradiction in terms, as well as being the classic psychoanalytic reduction); it *stages* it. To see Shakespeare's play in this way is to see it as one discourse – psychoanalysis is another – in which the necessity and impossibility of naming death are played out. Death and sexuality come together again here in relation to this concept of representation in so far as the sexual drama between Isabella and Angelo takes the form of, or is precipitated by, a putting of sexuality into speech. For it is the speech of the woman which is represented in the play as the initial and dangerous sexual act.<sup>10</sup>

It is worth grounding these remarks in contemporary discourses by looking at some of the theorizations of death at the time when Shakespeare was writing, not least because some of these are so explicitly and strangely evoked in the famous speeches about death in Act III of the play. Chapter 1 of 'The First Book of Death' in Coverdale's *Treatise of Death* – 'Declaring What Death Is' – lists the four types of death to which man is subject as:

natural death which separates the soul from the body; spiritual unhappy death when the grace of God 'for our wickedness's sake is departed from us'; ghostly blessed death here in time when 'the flesh being ever, the longer the more, separated from the spirit, dieth away from his own wicked nature'; everlasting life and everlasting death.<sup>11</sup>

The second and third – 'spiritual unhappy death' and 'ghostly blessed death' – are in turn contrasted with ghostly blessed life and ghostly unhappy life, the first living unto God, the second being the continual and wilful breaking forth of the flesh. Rather than going into the theological issues at stake here, I simply want to point to this cataloguing, naming, distributing, and

redistributing of death. What we are presented with can only be called a combinatory, where a number of terms circulate around a set of fixed points (this is precisely what death *is*). The point of the combinatory is at once to set up distinct oppositions and to move the terms around. The principle is that anything can be exchanged for or compared with anything else, but the distinctions between the various states are absolute. The possibility of sliding from one to another is then interpreted as the moral trajectory (ascent or descent) of man.

We can contrast ~~this account with~~ Erasmus's *Ars Moriendi* or *Preparation for Death*, which belongs to a whole discourse on the art of dying well, on which – it is generally assumed – Shakespeare based the Duke's speech.<sup>12</sup> In the *Ars Moriendi* – Erasmus's and more generally – the opposition between spiritual and natural death takes a different form. There is a similar classification of four types of death, with a 'transmuting death' which involves, like Coverdale's 'ghostly blessed death', a dying away from the flesh. Preparedness for natural death is precisely such a transformation; but in Erasmus's text, it becomes the basis for a total denegation of life. This is preparedness rather than preparation, although Sister O'Connor sees the genre as a practical guide to the business of dying, 'a method to be used in that all important and inescapable hour'.<sup>13</sup> Erasmus's text makes it clear, however, that something far more dialectical is at stake, in which to be ready for death is to refuse life, and even to be repelled by it. Preparedness, at least, is as much as a positive looking forward, a totally negative rereading or looking back. This has the effect of asserting, by way of negation or refusal, the intense physicality of life:

Let us recollect throughout all the stages of life, the uncleanness of our conception, the hazards of the womb, the pangs of birth, the many ills of infancy, the accidents to which childhood is liable, the vices which defile youth,

the cares which harass manhood, the wretchedness of old age.<sup>14</sup>

Death is, in fact, everywhere in the very life to which it seems to be opposed (death is not unforeseen because 'it lurks on every side'); it is also present in man's daily self-deception when he sees as pure something abominable in the eyes of the Lord. Death is therefore imperfect vision, the failure of representation as well as the failing and repulsion of the flesh. Finally, death is the very significance of the human: 'Nay the very name of *man* recalls the very idea of death, so that *man* and *mortal* signify the same thing.'<sup>15</sup> This, then, is the form of discourse on death which Shakespeare puts right into the middle of the play. We should note that this 'putting into discourse' of death is something which appears nowhere in any of the sources in which (this is the case in both Cinthio and Whetstone) the sister relents finally in the face of the argument of her brother (it is therefore assumed by implication that death is a greater ill than sexual dishonour, although other forms of calculation on keeping it secret and the possibility of marriage also come into play). But nowhere else is there a discourse on the *desirability* of death. Shakespeare therefore completely muddles the moral stakes, not just by having Isabella refuse Angelo, but by introducing immediately prior to the scene with her brother a speech which makes the spiritual case for death. Critics who castigate Isabella for her sexual inhumanity (that's putting it mildly) could usefully have borne that in mind. The issue of Isabella's sexuality is therefore packed around with a debate about the very value and meaning of human (meaning sexual) life.

Let's now look at the Duke's speech and at Claudio's reply:

Be absolute for death: either death or life  
Shall thereby be the sweeter. Reason thus with life:

If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing  
 That none but fools would keep. A breath thou art,  
 Servile to all the skye influences  
 That dost this habitation where thou keep'st  
 Hourly afflict. Merely, thou art Death's fool;  
 For him thou labour'st by thy flight to shun,  
 And yet run'st toward him still. Thou art not noble;  
 For all th'accommodations that thou bear'st  
 Are nurs'd by baseness. Thou'rt by no means valiant;  
 For thou dost fear the soft and tender fork  
 Of a poor worm. Thy best of rest is sleep;  
 And that thou oft provok'st, yet grossly fear'st  
 Thy death, which is no more. Thou art not thyself;  
 For thou exists on many a thousand grains  
 That issue out of dust. Happy thou art not:  
 For what thou hast not, still thou striv'st to get,  
 And what thou hast, forget'st. Thou art not certain;  
 For thy complexion shifts to strange effects  
 After the moon. If thou art rich  
 For, like an ass whose back with ingot bows,  
 Thou bear'st thy heavy riches but a journey,  
 And death unloads thee. Friend hast thou none;  
 For thine own bowels which do call thee sire,  
 The mere effusion of thy proper loins,  
 Do curse the gout, serpigo, and the rheum  
 For ending thee no sooner. Thou hast nor youth, nor age,  
 But as it were an after-dinner's sleep  
 Dreaming on both; for all thy blessed youth  
 Becomes as aged, and doth beg the alms  
 Of palsied eld: and when thou art old and rich,  
 Thou hast neither heat, affection, limb, nor beauty  
 To make thy riches pleasant. What's yet in this  
 That bears the name of life? Yet in this life  
 Lie hid moe thousand deaths; yet death we fear  
 That makes these odds all even.

(III. i. 5-41)

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;  
 To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;  
 This sensible warm motion to become

A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit  
 To bath in fiery floods, or to reside  
 In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;  
 To be imprison'd in the viewless winds  
 And blown with restless violence round about  
 The pendent world: or to be worse than worst  
 Of those that lawless and incertain thought  
 Imagine howling, - 'tis too horrible.  
 The weariest and most loathed worldly life  
 That age, ache, penury and imprisonment  
 Can lay on nature, is a paradise  
 To what we fear of death.

(III. i. 117-31)

This is Lever's commentary, which is worth giving in full:

Superficially the Duke's homily to Claudio, 'Be absolute for death', might seem to be a statement of 'doctrine' by Holy Church in the guise of a friar. Its catalogue of the vanities of life recalls the spiritual exercise of the *ars moriendi*. Similarly Claudio's reflections on the afterlife, 'Ay, but to die', suggest the *contemplatio mortis* which formed the second part of the exercise. Considered more closely, both speeches are subtle distortions, and the 'doctrine' is to be found in neither. The Duke's description of the human condition eliminates its spiritual aspect and is essentially materialistic and pagan. By Christian teaching, man's breath, far from being 'Servile to all the skye influences', came to him from God. His nobility and valour, happiness and certainty, were not 'nurs'd by baseness', but were spiritual qualities permeating natural life. The self was no Lucretian amalgam of 'grains / That issue out of dust', but an immortal soul. Even on the natural plane, though riches, health and friendship may prove illusory, offspring was to be seen as a consolation and blessing. Moreover, Claudio's reflections form an equally heretical counterpart. Lucretian in its concept of both soul and body resolved after death into the four elements, it adds to this the pagan

superstition, derided by Lucretius, of the afterlife as a state of eternal affliction. Reacting against the call to be 'absolute for death' out of disgust for life, Claudio is 'absolute for life' through horror of the world to come.<sup>16</sup>

Lever continues, however, that none of this should be taken as the 'expression of ultimate cynicism or despair', since neither speech, he insists, provides an objective viewpoint for judging the events of the play. At this point in the play, 'when all principles seem to be lost and the significance of authority, virtue and life itself is called into question, the Duke intervenes'. What Lever is arguing here – and in this he is merely following the play's own narrative logic – is that the Duke is there to bring about not only a dramatic, but also a symbolic, resolution. This is also taken to imply a reconciliation of the mortal and immortal life of man which falls somewhere between the extremes of these two speeches, although such a concept is nowhere articulated in the play. Lever's increasing judgement on Isabella (her 'strongly sexed ardour and impetuosity', her 'hysterical diatribe') appears in this context as at least partly a transposition on to her moral trajectory of the disturbance posed to harmonious interpretation by the play's extravagant discourse on death. If, as Lever suggests, what is put into crisis by Act III of the drama is the 'significance of authority, virtue and life', then the end of the play restores the first two to their socially and symbolically appropriate position but in fact says absolutely nothing about the third.<sup>17</sup> This may be because what is released by that moment in Act III is not susceptible to this (to any) dramatic resolution.

The problem of the speeches is not only, it seems to me, a violation of doctrine to be lifted out of the content of what they appear to say, but also resides in the movement of the language and their form. If the discussion of death is finally unmanageable and has to be forgotten,

it is because what it generates is not so much heresy as illegibility. Or, to use the words of Angelo at another point of the drama, it speaks against the thing it says.

Let's take the proposition of the Duke's speech to be, as Lever puts it, a 'contempt of death through a contempt of life'. Let's also note that it takes the form of a judicial argument whose structure corresponds to the rhetorical principles laid out in Tully's *Ad Herennium*, described by T. W. Baldwin in *Shakespeare's Smalle Latine and Lesse Greeke* as a 'complete outline of the formal oration at its most formal as applied to judicial causes'.<sup>18</sup> The Duke therefore speaks dramatically as friar, formally as rhetorician or even lawyer. The argument for death passes through the defiles of legal speech. We can see the Duke's speech as a condensation of legal and religious discourse in which death is demonstrated as pure rhetoric, even as the possibility of holding death to the formalities of language is being put to the test.

Both the Duke's and Claudio's speeches talk of death, one 'for', the other 'against' – that is, one on the side of death, the other on the side of life. Both can only make the case for death or for life however, in terms of the element to which it is opposed, and in both cases the second element could be said to usurp the place of the first. The Duke argues for the superiority of death over life (a relation of comparison implying difference), but does so in terms of the presence of death inside life (a relation of identity or identification). But if death is present to life, thereby turning life into an always already of death, then we should also expect to find that life is there in the place of the very death that appears so utterly to negate it. This will be the indirect logic of Claudio's speech, but not before the Duke has also demonstrated something of its self-defeating perversity.

'Be absolute for death', the opening proposition of the Duke that the rest of his speech will set out to demonstrate or confirm: 'absolute', glossed by Onions as 'positive,

perfectly certain, decided', but which also carries the meanings of 'unconditional or unrestricted', as well as 'complete, finished, perfect'. What the proposition proposes, therefore, is a totality of being, unconditionally and perfectly on the side of death. But the clause which follows, 'either death or life / Shall thereby be the sweeter', is immediately ambiguous as the correct formulation for the logical meaning would be 'or . . . or', signifying 'both of the two', not 'either . . . or', signifying 'one or the other'. It must be both if the Duke succeeds in his case, which is to demonstrate the desirability of death to the subject who lives now – that is, the desirability of death to life. Both death and life must be the sweeter if the Duke's speech is to do its work, not one or the other which allows their re-differentiation, the possibility that life will assert itself – against such a logic – as precisely sweeter than death (the whole point of Claudio's speech, whose possibility has therefore already been released in advance here).

Note then that the Duke does not only reason, he instructs his addressee *how* to reason; that is, the *ratio* of his discourse takes the form of a lesson in oratory in which it is not Claudio who is to be persuaded of the argument, but life itself ('Reason thus with life'). The discourse therefore shifts: from Claudio as the one addressed to Claudio as the hypostasized subject of speech, who is thereby absorbed into its enunciation and already differentiated from (more than or greater than?) life because it is life that he is presumed to address. That 'I' –, 'If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing / That none but fools would keep' – is the Duke first, but, more important, already Claudio as 'man', privileged syntactically by his distance from the object 'life', which precisely only 'fools' would keep. These lines Baldwin classifies as the 'Reason' of the argument, which, according to Cicero, 'by means of a brief explanation subjoined, sets forth the causal basis for the proposition, establishing the truth of what

we are arguing', for which he gives the example of Ulysses' motives in killing Ajax: 'Indeed he wished to rid himself of his bitterest enemy, from whom, with good cause, he feared extreme danger to himself.'<sup>19</sup> The Duke's opening, we could also argue, has established the terms of an opposition, if not enmity, between life and man. Life is that which man is well rid of, meaning both that he does not in fact possess it and that he is better off without it – propositions which could be said to cancel each other out, but which the confirmations of the rest of the speech will then set out to prove.

It is the body of the confirmations which Lever concentrates on in his account of the speech as excessive (pagan, heretical) in its total denegation of life. In the very first of these confirmations there is another potential slippage, since the sentence is syntactically ambiguous. Either 'skye influences' is the subject of the verb 'afflict': this is the meaning one lends most readily to the sentence: life is a breath servile to all the 'skye influences' hourly rained down upon human habitation. Or breath is the subject of 'dost afflict', at the mercy of 'skye influences', but also active and hourly afflicting human habitation in its turn. This second meaning makes life the persecutor of life. As do the later lines:

For thine own bowels which do call thee sire,  
The mere effusion of thy proper loins,  
Do curse the gout, serpigo, and the reheim  
For ending thee no sooner,

which seem to start as a list of the body's effusions, cursing the illnesses that afflict it, before turning in that last line to reveal that 'bowels' signifies offspring who wish their parent dead. That concentrated repulsion of the body to itself then leaves the sacrilege of the infant suspended over a body which would already seem to have no possible reason to live.

It is the gist of these meanings that Lever lifts out of the speech – what he calls its pagan and materialist slant: breath subject to ‘skyeey influences’ rather than to God, all the accommodations of life as ‘nurs’d by baseness’, without spiritual worth, the self a mere amalgam of grains issuing out of dust with no soul, and finally offspring as a curse. Note too that to say that death is *no more* than sleep is to go way beyond the familiar trope of death as the *image* of sleep. It is, as Baldwin puts it, an ‘Abominably unChristian sentiment’, and he describes the lengths to which critics have then had to go to absolve Shakespeare of such a charge.<sup>20</sup> All this in the mouth of a friar (who is of course no friar but a Duke in disguise). We could say that the force of this rhetorical persuasion – the utter repulsion it engenders in relation to life – is finally self-defeating. For it there is no spiritually redeeming aspect to life itself, then from where can the repudiation of life in the name of the spirit be spoken? How can what is valuable and preferable in death itself be known if death already and so totally subordinates life to its cause? Be ‘absolute’ for death, reasons the Duke, because death is *already* absolute, a tautology which abolishes the condition of reason itself.

Yet the contrary message is also allowed for in the speech; that is, that life and man are inseparable, and it is one at least suggested by the form of its enunciation. Gradually and imperceptibly the words of the Duke shift back to addressing not life but Claudio, or at least man – man unvaliant and afraid, who shuns and fears death, strives for what he has not got and forgets what he has, borne down by riches he has to discard at the end of his journey, and cursed by his child. And if it is possible to slide from life into man according to an almost imperceptible and unmarked elision, then hasn’t the whole discourse drawn life and man back together, producing their structural inseparability, even as it drives the contrary message to death? This is man-in-so-far as he lives,

holding – against all the odds – on to life. And the address of the speech, moving from life to man, passes us along the lines of a similar identification. Choose death over life, because life is so worthless; but who can argue and who receive such a case? Either death absorbs life, putting life beyond all reason, or life as man will continue to set his face against death. The Duke concludes:

What’s yet in this  
That bears the name of life? Yet in this life  
Lie hid more thousand deaths; yet death we fear  
That makes these odds all even.

If I read this (following Lever) as death the great equalizer between men, it is only because the other meaning – that death is the great equalizer between life and death – cannot work, since death is itself one of the two uneven terms. Rhetorically, the question remains at least suspended as to whether, in the wager of life and death, the ratio of odds and evens can ever be made to come out.

Briefly, then, on Claudio’s speech, the speech on the horror of death which comes in delayed reply to the Duke (Claudio’s immediate response is to concur), but also in response to Isabella’s horror of sexual shame. Claudio has therefore to make his horror worse than that horror, as well as to make death more repellent than anything that can be charged against life. The problem again is that the horror of death can be described only from the position of a sentient and knowing consciousness whose palpable self-presence to the death it fears makes that death both more and less total in its effects. F. R. Leavis praised this speech for its ‘vividly realised particular situation . . . the imagined experience of a given mind in a given critical moment that is felt from the inside – that is lived – with sharp concrete particularity’.<sup>21</sup> What the speech gives us precisely is Claudio

*living* his death. Thus Leavis makes of death the emblem of poetic vividness and the self-achievement of aesthetic form. Taking this one step further, death becomes the most vivid of representations because, as that which can by definition subsist only within representation, it always signals the self-referentiality of art. Thus death comes to stand for that moment when the category of fiction most fully recognizes itself – like Claudio invoking the ‘worse than worst’, imaginings of a ‘lawless and incertain thought’ – imaginings which he thereby classifies as aberrational, even as he projects himself so totally into their place. Between the vivid particular and the lawless ‘incertain’ (Leavis of course omits the second), we can grasp something of what is involved in Claudio’s (in any) representation of death.

I want to go back to Freud at this point for two reasons. First, because it seems to me that *Measure for Measure* plays out so graphically the inseparability of the two principles Freud himself tried to differentiate under the headings of eros and death. But it does so by first positing their antagonism via the operations of the law. Second, because the repeated failure of that differentiation (which the speeches of Act III give us in a particularly acute form) reveals itself as a property of discourse; that is, of a constant destabilizing of language for which death itself may well be the ultimate signifier (since there can only ever be a signifier for death), but which inheres in the very structure and process of all language in so far as it endlessly produces its objects with reference to itself. According to this reading, death is not only the end of life but is also figured (it is above all figured) in this internal hollowing out of language which only ever rests on so ‘lawless and incertain’ a base.

*Measure for Measure* has always called up an anxiety about representation or aesthetic form. Leavis himself was involved in a dispute about the play in the pages of the English literary journal *Scrutiny*, which tried in the

1930s and 40s to capture the very meaning of culture for the literary high ground.<sup>22</sup> Faced with that play by Shakespeare which Coleridge described as the ‘most painful – say rather, the only painful’ – part of his works, Leavis went to great lengths to establish the non-ambiguity of the work, the utter resolution of all its terms. To argue anything different, he wrote, would be to suggest that ‘Shakespeare shows himself the victim of unresolved contradictions, of mental conflict, or uncertainty’.<sup>23</sup> The defence of Claudio’s speech was made in the context of a critique of the equivalent speech by Beatrice in Shelley’s *Cenci* (‘nothing but wordy emotional generality’), as part of a demand, therefore, that language should always root itself in the particular if it is not to take off into an extravagant surplus of words.<sup>24</sup> Walter Pater also, in his essay on *Measure for Measure*, sees in the play a problem of aesthetic purpose, something lacking in the expected *finish*, while also arguing that the whole has the ‘unity of a single scene’. For Pater, the tension of the writing leaves the reader suspended, looking out for the traces of the nobler hand which leaves ‘its vestiges, as if accidentally or wastefully, in the rising of the style’.<sup>25</sup> In both cases, *Measure for Measure* threatens something by way of supplementarity, excess, or waste, throwing into question, if only momentarily, the critic’s attempts to locate in Shakespeare – as the greatest of English writers – the self-fulfilment of aesthetic form. *Measure for Measure* shows the literary institution destabilized by too much play of the signifier, by something which is not containable finally by the necessary cohesion of high art.

Neither death nor sexuality escape from these effects. (One could argue – psychoanalysis does argue – that they are in turn only ever produced by them.) In *Measure for Measure* the presence of both death and sexuality as the subjects of the drama constantly bind back the language into the apparent referentiality of theme. But they

do so only partly, and only ever with momentary success. This binding back could also be described as one of the chief objectives of the State, which uses its measuring out of death and sexuality to blind its subjects to the arbitrary foundation of the law. 'Any statement of authority has no other guarantee than its very enunciation', writes Lacan, 'and when the Legislator (he who claims to lay down the Law) presents himself to fill the gap, he does so as an imposter.'<sup>26</sup> The State may constitute its deviants in order to legitimate its authority – there is no concept here of sexuality as inherently transgressive – but to make this important point (as Jonathan Dollimore does in his critique of a potentially Bakhtinian reading of the play<sup>27</sup>) runs the risk of setting up the State as the originator and arbiter of all the effects of the signifier itself. If the transgressors are products of the State's endless need for the renewal of its authority, the logic also works the other way around – transgression is an intrinsic property of the State.

Finally again on eros. It is of course the positive term of the binary I have operated with here. Separated from its opposite, it becomes the term of festivity, the celebration of humanness which, in conjunction with Shakespeare, becomes the celebration of a culture that knows its own endurance, its perpetually self-renewing worth. For that reason I have introduced the other concept of repetition that Freud located in the demonic insistence of the drive. And I have tried to describe the perversion of a language that would repress that demonism into the articulation of artistic form. Which is to say that the fiercest, and in some ways primary, repression aims not for eros, but for death. That repression, I would argue, has been carried out particularly fiercely in relation to Shakespeare, who has been required over and over again to bear the weight of a culture which continues to validate its objects, not wishing to see in them just one rendering of the precariousness (the imposture) of institu-

tions, nor that of the subjects who recognize themselves in those institutions, nor that of the language through which all of this seems to be secured – above all, not wishing ever to see a possible end to our persistent validation of Shakespeare (and of course I have to include myself in that here), which would indeed signal for a whole literary establishment nothing short of a symbolic death.

## NOTES

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- 1 All references are to the Arden edition of *Measure for Measure*, ed. by J. W. Lever (London: Methuen, 1967).
- 2 Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, 1930 (1929), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth), vol. 21, p. 112.
- 3 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920, in *Standard Edition*, vol. 18.
- 4 See Moustapha Safouan, *Echec du principe de plaisir* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), and Jacques Derrida, *La Carte postale, de Socrate à Freud et au delà* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980) trans. Alan Bass, *The Post Card* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987).
- 5 Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 1923, in *Standard Edition*, vol. 19, p. 45.
- 6 Barnaby Riche, *The Adventures of Brusanus, Prince of Hungaria*, 1592, in G. Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 528.
- 7 Lever (ed.), *Measure for Measure*, pp. 60n., xciv.
- 8 Erasmus, *On Preparation for Death* trans. Jacob Henry Brooke Mountain, (London: Joseph Masters, 1866), p. 8.



- 9 Jacques Lacan, 'D'une question préliminaire à tout traitement possible de la psychose', in *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 556; trans. Alan Sheridan, 'On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis', in *Écrits: A Selection* (London: Tavistock, 1977), p. 199.
- 10 I discuss this in 'Sexuality in the Reading of Shakespeare: "Hamlet" and "Measure for Measure"' in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis, New Accents (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 95–118.
- 11 Coverdale, *Treatise on Death*, in *Remains*, ed. Parker Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1846), pp. 47–8.
- 12 See also Christopher Sutton, *Disce Mori (Learn to Die)*, reprinted from the first edition of 1600 (London: SPCK, 1846); and William Caxton. *The Book of the Craft of Dying, and other early English Tracts Concerning Death*, ed. Frances M. M. Comper (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1917); Lever gives a list of related works on p. lxxxvii of his Introduction to *Measure for Measure*.
- 13 Sister Mary Catherine O'Connor, *The Art of Dying Well* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), p. 5.
- 14 Erasmus, *On Preparation for Death*, p. 22.
- 15 Ibid., pp. 41, 61.
- 16 Lever, Introduction to *Measure for Measure*, pp. lxxxvii–lxxxviii.
- 17 Ibid., pp. lxxxviii, lxxx, xciv, lxxxviii.
- 18 T. W. Baldwin, *Shakespeare's Smalle Latine and Lesse Greeke*, (Urbana, Ill. University of Illinois Press, 1944), vol. 2, ch. 33, 'The Rhetorical Training of Shakespeare: Tully's Rhetoric', p. 96.
- 19 Cicero, *Ad C. Herennium*, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 108–9.
- 20 Baldwin, *Shakespeare's Smalle Latine*, vol. 2, pp. 601–2.
- 21 F. R. Leavis, 'Shelley', in *Revaluation* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959), p. 226.
- 22 L. C. Knights, 'The Ambiguity of "Measure for Measure"', *Scrutiny*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1942), pp. 222–33, and F. R. Leavis, 'The Greatness of "Measure for Measure"', pp. 234–47. For a full historical account of Scrutiny, see

- Francis Mulhern, *The Moment of 'Scrutiny'* (London: New Left Books/Verso, 1979).
- 23 Leavis, 'Greatness', p. 240.
  - 24 Leavis, 'Shelley' p. 227.
  - 25 Walter Pater, 'Measure for Measure', in *Appreciations* (London: Macmillan, 1922), p. 171.
  - 26 J. Lacan, 'Subversion du sujet et dialectique du desir dans l'inconscient freudien', in *Écrits*, p. 813; trans. 'Subversion of the subject and dialectic of desire', in *Écrits: A Selection*, p. 311.
  - 27 Jonathan Dollimore, 'Transgression and Surveillance in "Measure for Measure"', in *Political Shakespeare, New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985 pp. 72–87).