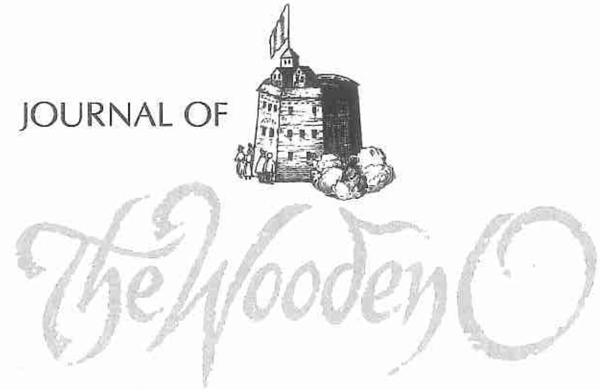

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Shakespeare's Problem Wars

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> We go to gain a little patch of ground
> That hath in it no profit but the name
> (*Hamlet*, 4.4.18-19)[1]

Shakespeare's representations of war and peace have been the object of much critical debate, but it was difficult, until recently, to find a study that tackled the problem as a whole. There seemed to be two trends that have tried for an overall analysis: one, expressed by Paul Jorgensen, which claims that "it is war rather than peace that is the clear dominant force" and that "the philosophy of war and peace that we now refer to as pacifism is espoused by not a single admirable character in Shakespeare";[2] the other, represented above all by Theodor Meron and Steven Marx, finds in Shakespeare's works a development leading essentially to pacifist positions.[3] Meron identifies a trend towards "the pacifist scepticism about war and its motivations" as early as *Henry V*,[4] while Marx sees a change in Shakespeare's positions, particularly in the years between 1599 and 1603, reflecting a change in English foreign policy culminating in James I's accession to the throne, which brought with it a "pacifist" culture. In this

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view, it was partly the close relation Shakespeare's company enjoyed with the new king that dictated the choice of a work like *Troilus and Cressida*—significantly, from 1603—which questions the lofty justifications for war, bringing out all its futility and corruption.

It may be possible to identify as early as this first cycle some utterances on military action that were to be developed in the later plays, which suggest that "the endless violence of factious emulations, challenges, and warfare is ultimately meaningless."[5] In the last decade the question of Shakespeare's representation of war has attracted new attention, and two new studies have approached the issue from the point of view of the "just war theory": Paola Pugliatti, in *Shakespeare and the Just War Tradition*,[6] dedicates the first half of her book to the history of this tradition from its Christian roots and the second half to Shakespeare's depiction of war in his plays, with special emphasis on *Henry V*, proposing acute parallels with doctrines current in our times. Franziska Quabeck provides an extraordinarily detailed analysis of the various plays focusing on the evaluation of just and unjust wars and refusing the idea that "it is possible to decide between pacifism and realism, between an absolute rejection of violence or glorification of war,"[7] claiming instead that interpreting the Shakespearean canon through the lens of just war theory offers new insights into the plays. Reflections on "just war" seem an appropriate starting point for an approach to Shakespeare's wars.

In *De Civitate Dei*, St Augustine raises the question of the "just war," arguing that warfare is legitimate when it acts as a corrective to injustice, a punishment for sins, and a means of restoring equity and peace and, with it the moral order that has been violated. War in these cases is authorized by God, or, rather, becomes the expression of the divine will, on condition that there is a just cause: "And therefore those men do not break the commandment which forbiddeth killing, who do make war by the authority of God's command, or being in some place of public magistracy, do put to death

malefactors according to their laws, that is, according to the rule of justice and reason."[8] A just war, however, also requires those who wage it to behave justly, which means there should be no gratuitous violence, murdering of prisoners, women and children, and that the defeated should be treated with mercy. For Augustine, then, the *jus ad bellum* requires a corresponding *jus in bello:* once the legitimacy of a war has been established, the legitimacy of the conduct of the war should be respected too.

Augustine's theories were taken up by Aquinas, who regarded the just war as a means of punishing those who deserved it and of retrieving what had been unjustly taken away, while those who took up arms without just cause would be punished with eternal damnation.[9] A Christian tradition at that time absolved those who resorted to violence to right injustice, fighting in God's name, and we shall see that it is precisely in God's name that Shakespeare's Henry V, the "mirror of all Christian kings" (Chorus 2.6), declares war on France."[10]

The debate on the legitimacy of war was central to the humanist movement with a distinction between martial and more peace-loving positions. Militarists like Machiavelli invoked an ideal of the prince as a soldier whose activity was essential both for his personal ends and for achieving social order, while "pacifists" like Erasmus or More condemned recourse to arms as immoral and irreligious. This debate not only conditioned the attitudes of sovereigns, but also influenced works of art in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[11]

War, as we know, has a place, to a greater or lesser extent, in most of Shakespeare's works, and we shall attempt to trace a development in its representation. In the first cycle of history plays, though there are critical positions on acts of war, a substantially heroic vision of war emerges, partly designed to support the patriotic cause of the Tudors. A tendency to scepticism emerges in the second cycle—with

Falstaff mocking martial honor and Hotspur exaggerating its importance—to the point that the validity of the very grounds for war is questioned, with an emphasis on the cruelties that inevitably derive from it. With *Troilus and Cressida,* the noble reasons behind the recourse to arms are in the end described as futile and unjustifiable, and the depiction of war shifts from the epic to satire. We might speak in broad terms of a transition from a realistic, Machiavellian conception to an idealistic, Erasmian one.

As is generally known, the three parts of *Henry VI,* written around 1592, open with the funeral of Henry V, whose history is dramatized by Shakespeare around six years later. As Steven Marx notes, we are witnessing a "glorification of chivalric battle and English victory over France,"[12] partly dictated by the enthusiasm of the populace for their country's military capacities, a result of their victory over the invincible armada and of the ongoing campaign in France, in which the English forces were fighting under the command of the Count of Essex. But, though "the *Henry VI* plays hardly touch on the religious debate about the nature of war,"[13] as early as *1 Henry VI* (presumably written after the two other parts), which presented the clash between English and French mainly through the figures of Talbot and Joan of Arc, we see both sides claim God's blessing on their victories: Talbot tells the king that he "Ascribes the glory of his conquest got / First to my God and next unto your grace" (3.4.11-12), and the French Reignier asks his men to "feast and banquet in the open streets / To celebrate the joy that God hath given us" (1.6.13-14)—expressions that, though uttered in very different contexts and atmospheres, already invite us to wonder with Troilus, "When right with right wars who shall be most right!" (*Troilus and Cressida,* 3.2.173). In *2 Henry VI* we also find expressions that indicate a variety of different positions on the justification for war: "O war, thou son of hell, / Whom angry heavens do make their minister,"exclaims the young Clifford, a member of the House of Lancaster,

recognizing, as Jorgensen notes, "both the divine sponsorship of war and its diabolical aspects."[14]

War in these three works is, above all, the civil War of the Roses, and we witness a gradual breakdown in family relations, contrasted with the power struggles that will lead to *Richard III,* whose protagonist immediately decides to get rid of his elder brother Clarence. It is above all in this light that we should interpret the poignant scene in *3 Henry VI* in which a soldier recognizes his victim as his own father, while another, uncovering the face of the enemy he has killed, realizes he has murdered his only son and, wracked with grief, exclaims, "What stratagems, how fell, how butcherly, / Erroneous, mutinous, and unnatural, / This deadly quarrel daily doth beget!" (2.5.89-91). The deliberate emphasis on the cruelty of the *jus in bello,* like the questioning of its theoretical justifications, may not be foregrounded, as it is later in *Henry V,* but it indicates a desire to present a celebratory vision of the English cause and military action as merely heroic in a more problematic light.

King John deals with historical events that took place between 1199 and 1216, long before the events covered by the two cycles. Its dating is uncertain, but it was presumably written between 1591 and 1598, perhaps around 1595.[15] It contained themes dear to Elizabethan audiences, such as the struggle with the papacy, the dangers of invasions, and the debate over the legitimacy of the sovereign. The most memorable character is the Bastard, Faulconbridge, a sort of positive version of Edmund in *Lear,* who ends up embodying the authentic spirit of the English nation, and in this sense seems to echo the figure of the noble, courageous Talbot in *1 Henry VI.* The theme of the just war authorized by God can be seen in the words of the Duke of Austria, who is fighting in France for the rights of Arthur, King John's nephew ("The peace of heaven is theirs that lift their swords / In such a just and charitable war" [2.1.34-35]), and also in those of the king himself, who presents himself as "God's wrathful agent"

(2.1.87), though it is immediately clear that individual interests take precedence over noble patriotic causes.

This is the theme of the Bastard's monologue on "commodity": it is only out of interest and personal advantage that King John renounced most of his French possessions and that the French, in turn, decided to switch "From a resolved and honourable war / To a most base and vile concluded peace" (2.1.585-86). Jorgensen observes that generally "treaties of peace have a curiously unpleasant role in Shakespeare's plays, being almost always viewed as deceptive or humiliating";[16] but in this case it is purity, "honorable war," that Faulconbridge regards as superior to the snares lying in negotiations and agreements born out of words, to the "policy" that is usually a negative feature of those who speak up for it. The Bastard's pragmatic ideals are contrasted with the opportunism and speciousness of the arguments of the English and French courts, but the horrors of war burst in, imposing their own reclassification. The episode in which the Bastard enters with the Duke of Austria's head is an "emblem of the brutal violence of warfare" that "exposes the horrific limitations of a preference for war over diplomacy."[17]

A work that begins with grand dynastic claims justifying recourse to arms ends with "an awareness of the hypocrisy and meaninglessness of claims of a just war,"[18] but we do not yet find theoretical reflections on what makes warfare legitimate. It is, above all, with *Henry V* that the relations between power and war are examined more deeply and become more complex, but already in the two parts of *Henry IV* the conduct of war and the honor linked to it come to the fore. As Foakes puts it, it is as if the Bastard Faulconbridge split in two, becoming two separate figures: Hotspur on one side and Falstaff on the other.[19]

The second cycle of history plays was written between 1595 and 1599, a period in which the English military campaigns successfully carried out by Essex created an atmosphere of enthusiasm. Essex became a "glorious and

chivalrous youth . . . the personification of England at war . . . the people's darling."[20] The sense of public adulation for the person of the brave conqueror is staged in the two parts of *Henry IV*—in the exaltation of Hal's victory over the rebels in the first part, and in the coronation scenes in the second, for example—and above all in the speeches of the Chorus in *Henry V.* But, alongside the glory that accompanies military conquest, there is also a stronger and more theoretical criticism of acts of war than anything we have seen so far. Towards the end of the second part of *Henry IV,* the dying king stresses to his son his sense of guilt at how he acceded to the throne—a guilt that has accompanied him throughout his reign—and expresses the hope that this guilt will not fall on his successor. To distract the populace's attention from the fact that his crown bears the weight of his usurpation, he advises Hal to "busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels, that action hence borne out / May waste the memory of the former days" (4.5.212-15). The technique of declaring war on foreign countries to distract attention from problems at home—one that has lost none of its topicality—can also be found in other works by Shakespeare, but, as Jorgensen notes, it may be significant that only Henry IV, "Shakespeare's master of *Realpolitick,* actually formulates the principle in words. Others may silently put it in action; he alone seems to understand it as a philosophy."[21] Clearly a justification of this kind—one we might call "utilitarian"—is far from the idea of war as just and authorized by God to re-establish a violated order; at the opening of *1 Henry IV,* too, the king proposes to expel war from his land in an attempt to put an end to the rebellions and civil wars, and yet during the work he will find himself exclaiming: "And God befriend us as our cause is just!" (5.1.120).

As we have said, the theme of war is linked to the idea of honor—central in *1 Henry IV,* where it takes on various meanings: for the arch-warrior Hotspur it is identified with success on the battlefield, for King Henry it represents the

wellbeing of the people and the legitimacy of the sovereign, while for the amoral Falstaff honor is no more than an empty word that is no use in saving one's life: "What is honour? A word. What is in that word honour? What is in that honour? Air . . . Honour is a mere scutcheon" (5.1.134-41). Prince Hal, the future Henry V, is at first associated with dishonour by his father, who sees "riot and dishonour stain the brow / Of my young Harry," contrasting him with Hotspur, who is "the theme of honor's tongue" (1.1.84-85, 80). As we know, Hal spends his time in Falstaff's company, carousing, merry-making, and ignoring his duties. He is redeemed by his transformation into a warrior: he saves his father's life and finally kills Hotspur in the battle of Shrewsbury. We might want to say that honor is identified with success in war, and in this sense defines it, but we should not forget that Hotspur at times seems to become almost a caricature,[22] with his excessive eagerness for battle—"O, let the hours be short / Till fields and blows and groans applaud our sport" (1.3.301-2)—and that Falstaff's actions and words, wholly lacking in military spirit, also act as a background to the events. When Falstaff rises after feigning death in battle, he says, "The better part of valour is discretion, in which better part I have saved my life" (5.4.119-20).

Significantly, the discourse on war in *2 Henry IV* develops in some ways around the figure of Falstaff. Though Hal has taken over Hotspur's honour, he does not take part in any combat here and we do not see any battles on stage. Falstaff, however, has become an officer with the job of enlisting men to fight for the king. If this reflects a similar episode in the previous play, in which Falstaff humorously described how those men were picked who did not have enough money to corrupt him, here it is staged through the acute presentation of the wretchedness of war for ordinary people who know nothing of the rivalries of the great.[23] When Hal becomes king he must further dissociate himself from his former companion if he is to offer himself as the model of a

sovereign, while "the very idea of war may be contaminated by associating it and valour with Falstaff."[24]

Freed of his bad company and purified of his vices, the "warlike Harry" (*Henry V,* Chorus 1.5) is presented by the Chorus of *Henry V* as the model of chivalry. Long regarded and used as the play *par excellence* celebrating English nationalism, more recent critics—especially New Historicists and Cultural Materialists—have brought out the ambiguity of Henry V himself and the "ideological discourse" intrinsic to the work as a whole.[25] Here, more than in any other work, the question of the *jus ad bellum* is repeatedly posed in the terms described above—as a war that is an expression of divine will. Now that the conflicts between Church and State have been settled in the previous works, King Henry, who is described by the two archbishops in the first scene as so true to the church as to make one wish he could become a priest, turns to them for reassurance over his intention to make war on France: "May I with right and conscience make this claim?" (1.2.96). His "right" is sanctioned by the complex explanation of the Salic law given by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who guarantees the king's right to claim the French throne. Henry then asks Canterbury to absolve him of any blame for the bloodshed that he knows will be the result of his campaign, and, once he is convinced, defines his mission as authorized by God; in his dialogue with the French ambassadors he constantly insists on "by God's help," "by God's grace," "within the will of God" (1.2.223, 264, 290). It is therefore Canterbury, invested with the authority to give the war moral and legal justifications, who makes this "just" war a Christian war. Yet, Shakespeare, following his source Holinshed, displayed the motives of the archbishops in the previous scene: we know that opportunistic reasons are hidden behind these reassurances, as they fear that a proposed law that is about to be applied will strip the church of important possessions and weaken it economically. The archbishops have therefore planned strong financial support

for this war as well as morally legitimizing it for the king, with a view to preventing this law being applied. The "just cause" endorsed by the prelates, to which Henry appeals in every phase of his military expedition, is therefore put under strain by these personal interests.

In *King John* Austria had spoken of a "just and charitable war," but the question of what determines if a war is just or not was not considered; here Henry tells us, "We doubt not of a fair and lucky war" (2.2.184), suggesting that, if it is "fair" it will also be victorious ("lucky"), as, in consulting the church's highest representatives, he has already made sure there could be no doubt over his claims. The *jus ad bellum* is, then, examined theoretically, except that, as we have just seen, behind the detailed arguments the real ends were wholly personal. Once again, alongside the justifications for the English prerogatives presented by Exeter in the name of King Henry to the King of France and corroborated by a genealogical tree demonstrating the English rights on French soil, images of war as it is fought come powerfully to the fore, images of blood and of a "hungry" war that devours and destroys. If the French do not accept Exeter's ultimatum, what awaits them will be "the widows' tears, the orphans' cries, / The dead men's blood, the privy maidens' groans, / For husbands, fathers, and betrothed lovers / That shall be swallowed in this controversy" (2.4.106-9). Henry himself repeats these images even more vehemently in his speech before the Battle of Harfleur:

> The gates of mercy shall be all shut up,
> And the fleshed soldier, rough and hard of heart,
> In liberty of bloody hand shall range
> With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass
> Your fresh fair virgins, and your flowering infants.
>
> * * *
>
> The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand
> Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;
> Your fathers taken by the silver beards,

And their most reverend heads dashed to the walls;
Your naked infants spitted upon spikes,
Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confused
Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry
At Herod's bloody-hunting, slaughtermen.
(3.3.10-14, 34-41)

It is true that he is trying to convince the French to surrender, avoiding the loss of human life, but what has become of the *jus in bello* that, as we have seen, was part of Augustine's theory and that so concerned Henry in his speeches to the archbishops? Legitimate conduct in war precludes maltreatment, pillage, and the massacre of the innocent, and requires mercy for prisoners; here we have images of the old and the young butchered and virgins raped. Dollimore and Sinfield observe, "Here and elsewhere, the play dwells upon imagery of slaughter to a degree which disrupts the harmonious unity towards which ideology strives."[26]

Although the massacre announced here is avoided (unlike in the sources), the English king will later order his soldiers to kill their prisoners, falling short of another principle of the "just war." But on other occasions he seems to be quite clear as to the need for ethically exemplary behaviour: he thinks it right that his friend Bardolph has been executed for a theft in a church and then insists to Fluellen, "We give express charge, that in our marches through the country there be nothing compelled from the villages, nothing taken but paid for, none of the French upbraided or abused in disdainful language; for when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner" (3.6.107-12).

One of Henry V's characteristics noted above is that, though, as we have seen, he is particularly concerned with the problem of responsibility and the legitimacy of his actions, he is actually always trying to "shift the burden—to Canterbury, for inciting him to war; to the Dauphin, for sending him the tennis-balls; to the French king, for resisting his claim; to the citizens of Harfleur, for presuming to defend their town."[27] These elements seem to justify an overall vision of *Henry V* as

a work that undoubtedly celebrates martial heroism, offering itself as a flag-waving epic, but also show that these claims contain objections to the idea of a just, noble war and actually undermine from within the very principles that they seem to be propounding.[28] A further example of this uncertainty we can find in the dialogue between the disguised king and the soldiers Williams and Bates: when, on hearing Henry's declaration that the English king's war is "just and his quarrel honourable" (4.1.128), the two ask him what will happen if the cause proves not to have been just, Henry can only repeat his claim that the war is God's will: "War is His beadle, war is His vengeance" (4.1.169). The Battle of Agincourt would seem to confirm God's protection, as it is won by the English, despite their disadvantage, with just twenty-nine dead against 10,000 French losses, a disparity Shakespeare wanted; Holinshed, though he gives this figure, also says that other sources mention around 600 English dead. With such a discrepancy in casualties, this battle also seems to be a divine pardon for the sins that Henry is burdened with after his father's usurpation: "Not today, O lord, / O not today, think not upon the fault / My father made in compassing the crown" (4.1.293-94), he had prayed before battle, and, on winning it, he proclaims himself several times as God's agent: "O God, Thy arm was here!," "Take it, God, / For it is none but Thine," "take that praise from God / Which is His only" (4.8.106, 111-12, 115-16).

The conflict will bring peace, a peace that is also sanctioned by marriage between the English king and the French princess, but whose costs are still established by Henry, and they too are, in his view, "just," as were his motives: "You must buy that peace / With full accord to all our *just* demands" (5.2.70-71, my italics). Apart from the inevitable bloodshed, which is described with a wealth of detail and bloody images, the real costs of the war are perhaps expressed by Burgundy in a calmer, more reasoned speech on the virtues of peace:

Why that the naked, poor and mangled peace,
Dear nurse of arts, plenties, and joyful births,
Should not in this best garden of the world
Our fertile France, put up her lovely visage?

* * *

Even so our houses and ourselves and children
Have lost, or do not learn for want of time,
The sciences that should become our country,
But grow like savages—as soldiers will
That nothing do but meditate on blood—
To swearing and stern looks, diffused attire,
And everything that seems unnatural. (5.2.34-37, 56-62)

War, even when it is noble and just, has effects on the arts, on the education of one's children, and on the sciences; the soldier becomes barbarous and thinks only of blood, and war is something "unnatural." As we shall also see later, it is often when war is mentioned in broader contexts that the criticism of it is apparently less harsh, but actually illustrates the long-term effects of the upheaval it brings.

Even the enthusiasm of both sides for the marriage between King Henry and the French princess Catherine, which will ensure an heir who is sovereign of the two countries, is subverted by the words of the Chorus in the epilogue:

Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crowned King
Of France and England, did this King succeed,
Whose state so many had the managing
That they lost France, and made his England bleed.
(Epilogue, 9-12)

The heir's reign is not destined to last long; the peace that has been bought with so much blood will not guarantee long-term stability and wellbeing, and England—as we have seen in the short analysis of the three parts of *Henry VI*—will soon become a battlefield once more.

Meron claims that "Shakespeare's patriotic play served the cause of Essex's mobilization for the campaign against

Ireland. But even in this play, the war excitement is balanced by the Chorus' allusion to the loss of France during Henry VI's infancy, and thus to the futility of this bloody war,"[29] while Foakes considers, more generally, that "Shakespeare was troubled by issues that remained unresolved for him."[30] Steven Marx offers an interpretation of this work that concentrates on the glorifying, celebratory aspect of war, while recognizing, following Greenblatt, its "pragmatic rationales for war, not to attack militarism itself, but to support it with pragmatic rationales for war that recognize, answer, and contain the pacifist objections that keep cropping up."[31] In the light of what has emerged so far, I think we can see a growing interest on Shakespeare's part in the foundations of the theories of the *jus ad bellum* and the *jus in bello,* filtered through the speeches of the various characters, particularly in *Henry V,* theories that end up expounding the contradictions between what is most opportune politically and what is ethically desirable. While it is true that political calculation proves effective only in the short term and that warlike rhetoric is tainted by the descriptions of the injustices that beset ordinary people, it is equally undeniable that the "pacifist" objections are contained in a framework that, if only verbally, presents recourse to arms as a wholly legitimate action that transcends personal pain and suffering by virtue of a common good, for which the sovereign is, or should be, responsible; the "justice" that is being fought for seems to him, in the last resort, a divine emanation.

Though Jorgensen sees no real change in Shakespeare's attitude towards war with James I's succession to the throne—"the year 1603 marks no radical change in Shakespeare's attitude toward war and peace"—he admits that "it is only natural that he should have paid tactful heed to one of his sovereign's most deeply felt convictions" and that the work *Troilus and Cressida* offers "the most disagreeable picture of war to be found in Shakespeare."[32] In analyzing the transition from *Henry V* to *Troilus and Cressida,* Marx observes, "Instead

of glorifying, it condemns war and those who make it . . . In reducing war from a providential tool to an instrument of chaos, he [Shakespeare] inverts the rhetorical strategies of *Henry V* and also shrinks the proportions of epic to the distortions of satire."[33]

Usually regarded as a "problem play," *Troilus and Cressida* is difficult to classify: it contains tragic elements that mark in particular the long speeches of the Greeks and Trojans, but the events we are shown, including the death of Hector—killed not by his antagonist, but by a band of killers—are presented in a way that comes close to satire. The satirical aspect is emphasized by the figure of Thersites, whose comments on war and its combatants ("All the argument is a whore and a cuckold," [2.3.73]) emphasize the mood of corruption and disintegration, while the action moves towards an essentially sterile ending. The great Homeric heroes are ridiculed and ideals reduced to personal motives dictated by the urge for conquest or vengeance. The rules of knightly honour that had inspired the late-medieval and modern versions of the story of Troy on which Shakespeare had drawn are here negated, and from the prologue on, the value of the subject is disavowed, a mood of uncertainty and instability conditioning the play.

The question of the *jus ad bellum,* which Henry V had discussed at length and in detail with his Council, seeking the foundations for his warlike intentions in the complex Salic law which justified his claims on the French throne, is also tackled by the Trojan Council, which discusses the validity of its own cause: the advisability of keeping Helen, who has been seized by Paris from her legitimate husband Menelaus. Hector seems certain at first, and, following Priam's speech repeating the assurances of the Greeks that if Helen is restored the war can be brought to an end at last without reprisals, expresses himself in these terms:

> Let Helen go.
> Since the first sword was drawn about this question,
> Every tithe soul 'mongst many thousand dismes

> Hath been as dear as Helen; I mean, of ours,
> If we have lost so many tenths of ours,
> *To guard a thing not ours, nor worth to us,*
> Had it our name, the value of one ten,
> *What merit's in that reason which denies*
> *The yielding of her up?*
> * * *
> Brother, *she is not worth what she doth cost*
> *The keeping.* (2.2.17-25, 51-52, my italics)

Troilus, who had initially declared to Pandarus that he could not "fight upon this argument: / It is too starved a subject for my sword" (1.1.96-97), questions his brother's case, claiming that it is the king's honour that should prevail, rather than Hector's materialistic considerations; and even in the face of the objections of his other brother, Helenus, who supports Hector's arguments and accuses Troilus's of being essentially "empty," insists on the advisability of keeping Helen and continuing with the war. Actually, though, personal reasons alone make Troilus enter the battlefield after his Cressida is courted by the Greek Diomedes. Surprisingly, though Hector insists on the total lack of any *jus ad bellum* in the Trojan cause, he agrees with the majority and accepts the continuation of the war. His words, however, bring out all the absurdity of this political decision and it seems beyond doubt that the just war here is the one conducted by the Greeks: seeking to get back property or persons taken by the enemy and demanding reimbursement or restitution enter into the criteria of the just war. To his brothers Troilus and Paris, Hector says,

> The reasons you allege do more conduce
> To the hot passion of distempered blood
> Than to make up a free determination
> 'Twixt right and wrong; for pleasure and revenge
> Have ears more deaf than adders to the voice
> Of any true decision. Nature craves
> All dues be rendered to their owners. Now,

> What nearer debt in all humanity
> Than wife is to husband?
> * * *
> If Helen, then, be wife to Sparta's king,
> As it is known, *these moral laws*
> *Of nature and of nations speak aloud*
> *To have her back returned. Thus to persist*
> *In doing wrong extenuates not wrong*
> *But makes it much more heavy.*
> (2.2.168-76, 183-88, my italics)

The war between Greeks and Trojans will continue until Cassandra's prophecy comes true and Troy is defeated; but, as Meron observes, "In Homer, the malice of the gods frustrates the settlement; in Shakespeare, it is the foolishness of men."[34] It is clear, then, that what we are shown here is the fragility of the principles of the just war; these principles are expounded clearly and coherently, only to be overturned for reasons that are anything but moral. As Quabeck observes, "Hector's convincing argumentation makes it impossible to regard this as one of the greatest wars of all time."[35]

The Trojans are also less than perfect with regard to the *jus in bello*. In their meetings with the Greeks and in the duels they seem to be following a knightly code, and the noblest of them, Hector, spares a tired Achilles during battle. He thinks nothing, however, of killing a Greek warrior simply because he is attracted by his armor. Achilles repays Hector's chivalry by avoiding a direct clash and having him brutally killed by his myrmidons. Even before this act, Achilles is shown in an utterly anti-heroic manner, preferring to loll in his tent with Patroclus than go into battle, while Ulysses and the other Greeks set about scheming to encourage him to take up arms again, creating a climate of rivalry with Ajax, who is presented in the play as vain and obtuse. The scurrilous commentator on the action, Thersites, plays the role of a satirical chorus, and his offensive, irreverent remarks debunk the classical Greek heroes. Thersites declares in the last act,

"Lechery, lechery! Still wars and lechery! Nothing else holds fashion" (5.2.193-94), linking the theme of war with that of lust. Indeed, the images in this play are all linked to infection, contagion, corruption, rotten food, and disintegration. If the religious mythologies of military cultures show war as a struggle against chaos in the attempt to give order and protect the value of sense,[36] a pacifist culture associates war with the loss of sense and the triumph of chance. As Marx, too, observes, "This process of metaphysical decomposition is a central preoccupation of *Troilus and Cressida*,"[37] a decomposition and uncertainty that is also expressed in the very form of the play, where neither the battles nor the stories of love and vengeance seem to proceed straightforwardly or have genuine resolutions precisely because they reflect this decay and the underlying futility of their basic causes. This is a further reason, as we have said, for the "problematic" nature of this work, which "marks a new departure in Shakespeare's treatment of war, one that echoes Hamlet's meditation on Fortinbras' expedition to Poland to fight over a worthless patch of ground 'for a fantasy and trick of fame.'"[38]

While the English history plays still recognized a Machiavellian order in which warfare seemed necessary and justified, both to consolidate the role of the sovereign and to establish social order (however fragile and precarious that order might be and however cruel the process might be), in the only work Shakespeare took from Homeric epic, in which the heroes and their wars had become legendary, he chose to highlight precisely the lack of valid principles to justify the continuation of the war between Greeks and Trojans, as well as behaviour by the main characters that is very far from the ideals of martial heroes. Jacobean drama in general contains many works displaying critical and sometimes satirical attitudes towards militarism, partly, as Jorgensen observed, out of respect for the "pacifist" convictions of the new king, but also, perhaps, because the fall of Essex left the English less certain of their military capability. This climate encouraged

the circulation of the works of Christian humanists such as Erasmus, More, and Castiglione, who condemned military action as immoral and irreligious. War, however, continued to be a feature of Shakespeare's works, but, as is well known, particularly from the great tragedies onwards, attention shifts towards the personality and inner life of the characters, their inner conflicts and their uncertainty as to what they should do. It is true that *Antony and Cleopatra* and, above all, *Coriolanus*, for example, present battles and deal with questions of power, including military power, but I cannot see in them any theoretical reflection on the validity of the causes behind the decisions to go to war or not, at least in the sense we have seen so far.

Caius Marcius, who went down in history as Coriolanus after the conquest of the Volscian city of Corioli, is presented by Plutarch as naturally bellicose and as having handled weapons from boyhood. Unlike his source, Shakespeare makes his mother, Volumnia, responsible for Coriolanus's warlike disposition: she sent him when young "to a cruel war" (1.3.14) to guarantee him a worthy fame, which, in her view, could be obtained only on the field of battle. She says to Coriolanus's wife, "Had I a dozen sons, each in my love alike, and none less dear than thine and my good Martius, I had rather had eleven die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeit out of action" (1.3.23-27). Shakespeare's Coriolanus has been subject to various interpretations—by conservative critics as an attack on the mob who destroy a noble patrician out of mere selfish opportunism, and by more progressive critics as a denunciation of the aristocracy for its exploitation of the proletariat. However, there is no doubt that for Coriolanus war represents an end in itself, the one true means of obtaining honour, and right from the start we are immersed in a world in which the state of war is a given, a natural state of affairs. Coriolanus becomes a genuine war machine, permanently drenched in blood, who kills as "butchers killing flies" (4.6.96) and, as Wilson Knight

observes, "War is here violent, metallic, impactuous . . . it is very much a thing of blood and harshness" and "His wars are not for Rome: they are an end in themselves."[39] War as an expression of a code of honour can blind men to other values and be actually preferable to peace.

A servant of Aufidius speaks the following words: "Let me have war, say I. It exceeds peace as far as day does night. It's sprightly, walking, audible, and full of vent. Peace is a very apoplexy, lethargy; mulled, deaf, sleepy, insensible; a getter of more bastard children than a war's a destroyer of men" (4.5.231-36). But, as Marx observes, they are words attributed "to characters who, if not villains, evoke the least of the audience's sympathy,"[40] and they are part of a context in which a frenzied glorification of militarism produces satirical effects. Foakes observes, "The play contains Shakespeare's most powerful critique of the heroic code and of war."[41] *Coriolanus* is a historical and political play, often staged for purposes of propaganda, and at the same time it contains a personal tragedy[42] that arouses interest for the character of the protagonist, who acts "to please his mother and to be partly proud" (1.1.39-40)—this mother-son relation having been seized on by modern psychoanalytic criticism.[43] In the world of this play, war has no need of justifications, and peace, too, which is finally obtained by Coriolanus's conversion, is presented as the result of his mother's insistence rather than as a political decision.

As we have already noted, war also accompanies the great Shakespearean tragedies without being their focus. In *Macbeth* the image of blood, real or imagined, permeates the whole work, and Macbeth himself is presented as a warrior who seems to enjoy the violence inflicted on the enemy. Still, we are a long way from the reflections on the *jus ad bellum* or *jus in bello* we looked at earlier, and in *King Lear* the English soldiers who go to Dover to face the French threat are of little interest in the tragedy. The experience of war has a certain value in Othello's personal history, when in his speech to the

Senate he excuses himself for his unsophisticated language, explaining,

> For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith
> Till now some nine moons wasted, they have us'd
> Their dearest action in the tented field;
> And little of this great world can I speak,
> More than pertains to feats of broil and battle (1.3.83-87)

The martial virtues and experiences on the battlefield are Othello's world, the only terrain on which he is able to move with certainty; and, as he himself says, it was the accounts of his exploits that conquered Desdemona. But this very past which has formed his identity proves wholly inadequate when he has to deal with Iago's lies and understand the innocence of his wife. In the civilian world in which he now finds himself, Othello has no weapons that allow him to understand duplicity, envy, and hypocrisy, and the great military hero is manipulated and tricked, partly because he is extraneous to this society.[44] At the moment of his suicide he recalls the services he has performed and the killing of the Turk who threatened the Venetian republic, almost as if he wanted to make his personal tragedy one with his public role. We might conclude, with Marx, that the defeat of the military hero comes about "not through the triumph of superior arms, but through failures of insight, compassion, and self-control attributable to an identity forged in battle."[45]

For Meron, "Of all the plays, *Hamlet* unquestionably offers the most powerful statement of the futility of war."[46] War, or rather its symbol, makes its entry in the first scene via the Ghost of the former king, dressed in the very armor he wore when he fought against the King of Norway and the Poles. The world of Hamlet *père* was one of violent wars, but Denmark is in danger now, too, threatened by the young Fortinbras. The armor of Hamlet's father not only takes us back to the past, but marks the cultural difference with his son, a student in Lutheran Wittenberg, called back to the court by his father's death. It is Hamlet himself who insists

on this difference, idealizing his father as a warrior king and seeing him as a classical divinity compared with his uncle Claudius, his mother's husband, "so excellent a king that was to this / Hyperion to a satyr" (1.2.139-40). Notoriously, Hamlet often meditates on his failure to carry out the revenge his father's ghost has ordered; in the fourth scene of act 4, the captain of Fortinbras's army, questioned by Hamlet on the mission of the soldiers who are crossing the kingdom, answers in these terms:

> Truly to speak, and with no addition,
> We go to gain a little patch of ground
> That hath in it no profit but the name.
> To pay five ducats, five, I would not farm it.
> Nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole
> A ranker rate should it be sold in fee. (4.4.17-22)

It is a war for a piece of land of no value that is fought only for a principle and that will lead, as Hamlet himself observes, to the death of men. In the soliloquy that follows he naturally recognizes even more his own inadequacy in bringing to completion his mission of revenge, comparing himself to these brave soldiers:

> Witness this army of such mass and charge,
> Led by a delicate prince,
> Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed,
> Makes mouths at the invisible vent
> Exposing what is mortal and unsure
> To all that fortune, death, and danger, dare,
> Even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be great
> Is not to stir without great argument,
> But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
> When honour's at stake. How stand I, then,
> That have a father killed, a mother stained,
> Excitements of my reason and my blood,
> And let all sleep, while to my shame I see
> The imminent death of twenty thousand men
> That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,

> Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
> Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
> Which is not tomb enough and continent
> To hide the slain?

Hamlet, like the other tragedies we have mentioned, does not have war as its central theme, either in its futile or its glorious aspects, and yet they all speak of war. This soliloquy clearly poses the problem of killing for reasons of honor: 20,000 men will die for "a fantasy and trick of fame," while he is unable to act in accordance with honor. But, as Meron concludes, "Hamlet's shame lies in failing to kill Claudius for honor's sake, not in being a part of a world that kills for honor alone."[47] Hamlet's words on war are nevertheless extremely severe: men die for a useless piece of land, an eggshell. One of the dilemmas that torments Hamlet is precisely the difficulty of killing for revenge, of believing that this would re-establish a violated order. After his death it will be Fortinbras, a prince and military leader, a representative of this world which Hamlet has been unable to become a part of, who treats him as a soldier—"Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage / . . . and for his passage / The soldier's music and the rites of war / Speak loudly for him" (5.2.403, 405-7)—including him in his culture of war and violence, a culture associated with Hamlet's father rather than with the young prince himself.

In *Othello* and *Hamlet*, then, the experience of war has negative connotations: in one case a life spent on the battlefield has helped incapacitate Othello from understanding problems in the social and private sphere; in Hamlet's case, however much he may admire the soldiers' bravery, he brings out the futility of the enterprise.

It is now a commonplace to consider Shakespeare's works as being in some way "open." As Manfred Pfister, among others, observes, "The structural openness and indeterminacies of Shakespeare's texts and their self-deconstructing potential have been a crucial prerequisite for their transcultural and European canonization";[48] and it is unfeasible—as well as

unnecessary—to identify Shakespeare's point of view on war as on almost anything else. As we have seen, the history plays certainly pose the question, theoretical and otherwise, of the legitimacy of war, but it is hard to deduce a favoured position from this. Perhaps, among the plays analyzed, only *Troilus and Cressida* shows us a war that is the expression of values that are now tainted without offering a real glorious counterpart. But, though the signs do not point in one direction alone, we have seen, as indicated at the outset, a development in which, with the passage of time, "pacifist" considerations strengthened and increased. And in the tragedies mentioned, in which Shakespeare does not need to pose questions of the *jus ad bellum* and the *jus in bello,* we can notice attitudes that see war and its effects not as something ennobling, but harmful for the individual and the common good.

The last Shakespearean king, Henry VIII, is presented as the bearer of pacifist values. In the play bearing his name—which was probably written in collaboration—the rebels are not killed, but pardoned. Cranmer's prophecy that concludes the work, celebrating the birth of the future Elizabeth I, foresees a serene and peaceful future: "In her days every man shall eat in safety / Under his own vine what he plants, and sing / The merry songs of peace to all his neighbours" (3.5.33-35). This is seen by Jorgensen as a simple ideal, unattainable and actually unacceptable, just like Gonzalo's speech in *The Tempest,* which imagines a place without "treason, felony, / Sword, pike, gun or need of any engine" (2.1.161-62).49 They are essentially utopias or ideals that recall the words of Burgundy cited above in *Henry V,* in which he denounced the barbaric effects—social, artistic, and otherwise—of war. But it is also true, and perhaps superfluous to recall, that in the last plays, the theatre of war is replaced by images of fertility and prosperity, which in iconographic tradition are associated with Irene, the Greek goddess of peace.

Notes

1. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Cyrus Hoy (New York: Norton and Company: 1992), 4.4.18-19. Line references to *Hamlet* are from this edition.

2. Paul A. Jorgensen, *Shakespeare's Military World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), 176, 197.

3. Theodor Meron, *Bloody Constraint: War and Chivalry in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), see p. 46 in particular; and Steven Marx, "Shakespeare's Pacifism," *Renaissance Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (1992): 49-95.

4. Meron, *Bloody Constraint*, 21.

5. R. A. Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 43.

6. Paola Pugliatti, *Shakespeare and the Just War Tradition* (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2010).

7. Franziska Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars in Shakespeare* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 9.

8. St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* [The City of God], trans. John Healey, 2 vols. (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1945; rept. 1973), 1.21); see also 7.30 and 12.19. On Augustine and the problem of war, see R.S. Hartigan, "Saint Augustine on War and Killing: The Problem of the Innocent," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27, no. 2 (1966), 195-204.

9. See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, secunda secundae, quaestio XL, *De Bello*. For an exhaustive account of the theory of the just war, see Pugliatti, *Shakespeare and the Just War Tradition*.

10. *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. B. Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974). Except as noted, all Shakespeare quotations and line references are from this edition.

11. Two examples are Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532), particularly the opening of Chapter 14 on the duties of the Prince in military matters, and Erasmus's *Querela Pacis* (1517), which claims that the most unjust peace is still less harmful than the most just war. On this subject, and on Erasmus in particular, see *La pace e le guerre. Guerra giusta e filosofie della pace*, ed. Annamaria Loche (Cagliari: CUEC, 2005), especially Marialuisa Lussu, "Erasmo: la pace come valore assoluto," 23-43.

12. Marx, "Shakespesare's Pacifism," 63.

13. Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 50.

14. Jorgensen, *Shakespeare's Military World*, 191.

15. For questions of the dating of *King John*, see Giorgio Melchiori, Introduction to *Re Giovanni*, in *Teatro completo di William Shakespeare, I drammi storici*, I Meridiani, vol. 3 (Milan: Mondadori, 1991), 3:3-4.

16. Jorgensen, *Shakespeare's Military World*, 174.

17. Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 87.

18. Meron, *Bloody Constraint*, 36.

19. Foakes, Shakespeare and Violence, 90.

20. J. E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (New York: Jonathan Cape, 1934), 355.

21. Jorgensen, *Shakespeare's Military World*, 185

22. See Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars in Shakespeare*, 209-11.

23. Giorgio Melchiori, Introduction to *Enrico IV, Parte II, in Teatro completo di William Shakespeare, I drammi storici*, I Meridiani (Milan, Mondadori, 1991), 1:528.

24. Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 96.

25. See Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 33-62; Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), particularly the chapter "Invisible Bullets," 21-65; Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, "History and Ideology: The instance of *Henry V*," in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis (London: Methuen Publishing, Ltd., 1985), 206-27.

26. Dollimore and Sinfield, "History and Ideology," 226.

27. Alexander Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Political Drama* (London: Routledge, 1988), 133.

28. See Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations;* and Marx, "Shakespeare's Pacifism."

29. Meron, *Bloody Constraint*, 28.

30. Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 105.

31. Marx, "Shakespeare's Pacifism," 68.

32. Jorgensen, *Shakespeare's Military World*, 200, 207.

33. Marx, "Shakespeare's Pacifism," 70-71.

34. Meron, *Bloody Constraint*, 69.

35. Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars in Shakespeare*, 186.

36. See J. A. Aho, *Religious Mythology and the Art of War: Comparative Religious Symbolism of Military Violence* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1981), 9-11.

37. Marx, "Shakespeare's Pacifism," 73.

38. Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 171.

39. G. Wilson Knight, *The Imperial Theme* (1931; London: Routledge, 1989), 157, 161.

40. Marx, "Shakespeare's Pacifism," 81.

41. Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 180.

42. See Richard Ambrosini,"*Coriolanus*: dalla storia alla tragedia," *Memoria di Shakespeare 3*, ed. Agostino Lombardo (Rome: Bulzoni, 2003), 141-56.

43. See, for example, Janet Adelman, "'Anger's My Meat': Feeding, Dependency and Aggression in *Coriolanus*," in *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytical Essays,* ed. Murray M. Schwartz and Coppelia Kahn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 129-50.

44. See Ros King, "'The Disciplines of War': Elizabethan War Manuals and Shakespeare's Tragicomic Vision," in *Shakespeare and War,* ed. Ros King and Paul J. C. M. Franssen (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 18-19.

45. Marx, "Shakespeare's Pacifism," 78.

46. Meron, *Bloody Constraint,* 38.

47. Ibid, 40.

48. Manfred Pfister, "'In States Unborn and Accents Yet Unknown': Shakespeare and the European Canon," in *Shifting the Scene: Shakespeare in European Culture,* ed. Ladina Bezzola Lambert and Balz Engler (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 62.

49. See Jorgensen, *Shakespeare's Military World,* 170, 197.

A Natural Transformation: Shakespeare's Reimagining of Fairies as a Social Critique and an Observation of Ecological Anxiety

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The figure of the fairy[1] dances through the literary and oral history of the British Isles: goblins writhe around tithes to the Devil, and children battle fairy kings for freedom. Listed in Middle English law alongside witches, fairies took the blame for the inexplicable or unspeakable acts of humans and natures. These dark, demonic fay, not the kindly flower fairies or the petulant pixies popular in current children's media, peppered the tales of rural England into the Early Modern Period, and here William Shakespeare likely first encountered the magical, liminal creatures. As Shakespeare moved from rural life to the urban stage, he brought the fairies with him and turned their devilish deeds to human-like antics, replacing menace with merriment and ill omens with good will. In his works, Shakespeare consistently returns to the folklore and legends of his youth, leaving "hardly a play which does not have allusions to some branch of folklore."[2] In many of his works, Shakespeare employs witches and the occult, as characters metamorphosize and omens shape

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