
“All Great Neptune's Ocean”. Shakespeare's Invention of Words.

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Three words

One distinguishing feature of literary production during the late 16th century was a remarkable tendency towards lexical innovation. The profusion of neologisms was the linguistic facet of a generalised process of expansion and growth in all areas of English culture and, quite logically, Shakespeare's work has been systematically scrutinised for samples of such creativity. Scholarly debate about the poet's invention of words -a nondescript category sustained in lexicographic records of the first printed appearance of a word- tends to overlook the actual contexts in which Shakespeare cultivates linguistic novelty, as well as the experimental, exploratory circumstances that motivate the introduction of newfangled lexemes or syntagms. It also fails to account for the phonological impact of a neologism on audiences, or the multiple reverberations that link the word to the semantic fields deployed in the play containing it, or even across plays.

This paper offers a reflection about some of the many liberties that the poet takes with the English language. Like his contemporaries, Shakespeare stages stories well known to his audiences; he must, therefore, shift the focus of interest, fundamentally towards linguistic estrangement, in order to problematize the naturalized assumptions about the themes usually associated with these plots. Part of the audacity of his approach to his work as a writer is to be found in the creative tension that he operates on language to counterbalance the absence of novelty in the plots of his works. This is where the innovative force of his creation resides; that which surprises, challenges, interpellates and captivates the intelligence and aesthetic emotion of an audience used to discerning and perspicacious listening.

Three of such postulated neologisms, whose first printed appearance is registered in the play *Macbeth*, are presented and explored here. Each of these instances is briefly contextualised and then considered in terms of the multiplicity of senses catalysed through it, both within the text and in line with other texts evoked directly or indirectly. The resulting semantic tapestry highlights the multilayered nature of these innovations as well as their problematizing function within the Shakespearean text.

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I. "Assassination": Hallucinating the unnameable

Macbeth might be defined as the tragedy of a man of imagination and fear. Its protagonist constantly visualises the future in terms of rapidly succeeding images. He thinks associatively rather than logically and is taken by surprise by his own ideas (Saccio, 1999). His proleptic thinking does not stop at the present; Macbeth inhabits a future that invariably appals him through the impact of the vivid pictures he conjures up to explain it. In turn, this horror propels the creation and staging of new schemes, as if the character were avid to generate and perform situations, all of which only contributes to the further growth of his fear, and so the sequence continues to replicate cyclically. Contrary to received notions, *Macbeth* is not so much a tragedy of ambition as it is a tragedy of fear, of the fruitless search for a feeling of safety that will never be attained, and in pursuit of which the hero will almost compulsively commit the most abominable crimes. The paradoxical process that Macbeth's mechanism of murder sets into motion operates from, and towards, fear, with pangs of horrified guilt prefacing the perpetration of each new crime. This complexity materialises as rhetorical devices that reflect the speed of Macbeth's thought as well as the profoundly visual nature of the imagery defining his speeches. There is also an emphasis on the presence or absence of vision, hinged on an insistence on bodily fragmentation to underline the ultimate wish that the eye should not see the deeds performed by the hand.

The lines under consideration are part of Macbeth's first soliloquy of Act 1 Scene 7, within a festive context from which he absents himself. King Duncan has arrived at his castle as a guest, after a battle in which Macbeth has distinguished himself, earning new honours and a new title. The purpose is to celebrate the victory of the King's forces in a hastily arranged banquet. Macbeth has just withdrawn to ponder in solitude over the possible implications of murdering King Duncan in order to take his place. His powerful imagination unfolds in a rapid succession of visual images and Biblical citations, together with a strong recurrence of polysemy and conceit and the exceptional presence of at least two Shakespearean neologisms, the first of which is offered for scrutiny here.

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly. If th'assassination
Could trammel up the consequence and catch
With his surcease, success, that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all - here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. (I. i. 1-7)

The first two lines in the speech already establish its condition of multiplicity: the use of the participle *done* on three occasions, with *it* as its subject in each of the clauses, suggests two coexisting, equally valid ideas. First, "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well..." may be read as "If this were resolved once it is consummated, it would be well"; i.e., "If I can commit this crime without consequences, it would be very good". "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well/ It were done quickly" might also mean "If this were resolved once perpetrated, then it is best to do it quickly". Besides, the combination of *do* with the adverb *quickly* evokes the verse in the Gospel according to St John, "That thou doest, do quickly" (13: 27). During the Last Supper, Jesus turns to Judas Iscariot -or rather Satan, who has entered into the traitorous disciple- to let him know that He is aware of his scheme of treachery, or perhaps to encourage him to complete it promptly so that Scriptural prophecy can be fulfilled. In some way Macbeth must feel like Duncan's Judas, equally compelled to treason, and, in fact, what is taking place behind the scenes during his soliloquy will actually come to be King Duncan's "last supper". Macbeth is horrified at the idea of betrayal, but he also feels urged to promptness in his perpetration of the regicide.

This Christian semantics is usually addressed by critics inclined to view King Duncan as a Christ figure; however, the implicit comparison at stake seems to be rather between Christ and Macbeth. Both reveal a certain difficulty in enduring the interim; that intolerable interval between awareness of a fact or the plotting of a scheme and its consummation. Another tragic hero expresses the feeling more explicitly: "Between the acting of a dreadful thing/ And the first motion, all the interim is/ Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream" (*Julius Caesar* II. i. 63- 65). Brutus, like Macbeth, is planning a magnicide and he also knows the sleepless interstices of a conscience troubled by anticipatory thoughts.

Perhaps the most important word in these two lines -and the one occurring most frequently- is the pronoun *it*, which refers to that which Macbeth does not dare to name. This soliloquy foregrounds Macbeth's enormous difficulty in bringing himself to utter the word for his crime, and the subsequent attempts to find surrogate terms during the rest of the speech: *it*, *assassination*, *blow*, *surcease*, *deed*, *taking-off*, *horrid deed*. This remarkable catalogue seems to reveal a desire to distance himself, at least lexically, from the crime, by postponing for sixteen lines the mention of his victim's name and rehearsing a novel, exotic way of talking about regicide.

The OED defines the abstract noun *assassination* as "the action of assassinating; the taking the life of anyone by treacherous violence, esp. by a hired emissary, or one who has taken upon him to execute the deed". It is modelled on the French noun *assassin*, which in turn derives from the Arabic *ḥaššāšīn*, or *hashshashin*, "the ones who eat hashish", or "hashish smokers", allusive of the Nizaris, Ismaili Muslims of Persia and Syria during the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries. They were believed to put themselves into hashish- or cannabis- induced trance states as part of a preparation ritual prior to the murder of a monarch or other public figure. This euphemistic, alien term belongs to a decidedly non- Saxon register; it bursts into the third line in abrupt contrast with the monosyllabic, Saxon brevity and concision of the two previous words. It suggests a premeditated lexical search and an effort, neither spontaneous nor improvised, to define the deed in a way that might sound minimally acceptable: Macbeth is so frightened to name what he is planning to do that Shakespeare has to invent a word for him.

Significantly, the word's exotic resonance, which prolongs the polysyllabic alliterative and assonant articulation of its phonemic components, evokes a universe which is completely foreign to the world of the play. *Assassination* constitutes a suggestive metonymy of the Other, the extraneous, the non- Christian, the non- clanic and the non- Celtic. It sibilantly whispers that which somehow invades and intervenes the historical fold layered into the sedimentary strata of a cultural archaeology in which Macbeth's abominable doing claims to find no precedent in his own ethnicity. Jacobean audiences may have found such allusions to Islam rather disturbing, in an era when King James I discontinued all the trade alliances Queen Elizabeth had established with Islamic powers and the Ottoman Empire, in favour of England's return to European alliances, particularly with Spain. The horror of regicide, exacerbated during the Jacobean period, needs, like Macbeth, to distance itself and locate the atrocity outside its own nucleus -of uncomfortable historical experience in the matter- and ascribe it to those Others, the traitors, the king- slayers, consumers of banned substances, who must be mistrusted and who have become a threat once again. It is no coincidence that *Macbeth* and *Othello* should have been composed during this period: Shakespeare's stage transmutes in an extremely subtle way into a daring invitation to reflect on the mechanisms of social and political projection within contexts of manifest xenophobia.

Finally, *assassination* also procedurally refers to the use of narcotics, especially to trance- like states. Indeed, the soliloquy at large -a scrutiny of which exceeds the scope of the considerations proposed here- evokes, in the manner of a cultural compendium, medieval allegories, Biblical

episodes and imagery, and even pictorial representations of the Apocalypse, strung together along a quasi-hallucinatory multimedia chain. There are numerous references to states of trance, spontaneous or substance-induced, which hold with suggestive consistency throughout the text - the mandrake root, the dagger, the voices, the specters, the vision of a (Celtic) walking forest-. The tracing of the delicate thread that subtly weaves them together begs further, much needed, interesting research, as well as the establishment of effective links to similar elements present in Shakespeare's source texts.

Simultaneously, within the plot, an appraisal of the value of these references establishes yet another pertinent connection to the centrifugal movement steering them, in the sense that agentivity is located outside the protagonist, which allows him to disclaim responsibility for what has happened and assign it to effects beyond his will. Such is the case at the beginning of Act II: a few moments before executing his death plan, on his way to the King's bedchamber, Macbeth experiences his first hallucination: "A dagger of the mind, a false creation,/ Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain..." (II. i. 38- 39). He is perfectly aware that this is an imaginary phenomenon, induced by the deed of blood that absorbs him; nevertheless, the experience motivates a reference to witchcraft and an anguished invocation to the earth that she cloak his deed and assuage his terror. The sequence concludes with the transition from thought to action, in which the future accelerates towards the present in a performative statement enunciated in the indicative mood -"I go and it is done" (l. 61)- , immediately superseded by distancing -"the bell invites me"-, whereby Macbeth again delegates accountability for the crime onto an external entity.

The word *assassination* opens a multiplicity of associations that continue to reverberate throughout the play and deliberately problematise the question of agentivity with respect to the mechanism of death unleashed by the hero. That which is unnameable and culturally alien; that which is inconceivable within the clanic structure; that which is suggested almost hypnotically into the psyche; everything refers outwards and towards a future of horrors from which there seems to be no escape. Like a polysemic capsule, the word stretches and expands, while time, action and human experience compound the future with the present, "to the last syllable of recorded time".

II. "The multitudinous seas incarnadine": Bloodstained oceans of History

Once he has murdered Duncan, Macbeth meets his wife in a brief, intense dialogue fraught with speed and tension. The hero's tendency to self-absorption, evident from the beginning of the play, is now incrementally accentuated: Macbeth withdraws into his own tormented thoughts while distancing himself from Lady Macbeth, until he stops communicating with her altogether and their estrangement is inexorable. This scene is defined by two major speeches; the first one about sleeplessness and the second about blood-stained hands, threaded together by the presence of auditory hallucinations: Macbeth thinks he has heard voices anticipating the state of insomnia that will haunt him until the end of the play. His second speech is actually a soliloquy -Lady Macbeth has retired from the scene to finish the "job" he has been unable to complete-, punctuated by repeated knocking at the castle gate, which terrifies him and motivates yet another reflection, transitioning quickly to the visual:

What hands are here? Ha: they pluck out mine eyes.
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No: this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red. (II. ii. 57-61)

The sight of his hands motivates a new sequence of visual images and a remarkable discursive shift. Firstly, there is an iteration of the imagery of dissociated parts of the body acting autonomously, a feature of Macbeth's rhetoric: his hands, momentarily unrecognisable, pluck out his eyes in the eternal present of his visions. This image seems to refer back dialogically to an aside in I. iv, in which he invokes a cosmic darkness that may hide his regicidal desires, and an eye-hand dissociation that impedes one from witnessing the deeds of the other: "Stars, hide your fires,/ Let not light see my black and deep desires,/ The eye wink at the hand. Yet let that be/ Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see." (I. iv. 50-53).

Nevertheless, at this moment, the proleptic logic of his speeches undergoes a curious disruption. Once the regicide has been committed, Macbeth wants to pluck out his eyes, as if in some remote way he wanted to return, in the manner of a film in reverse, to that instant previous to the act, in which the eye refuses to see what the hand is about to perpetrate. Perhaps he would like to return to the exact moment when he invoked such dissociation, when the murder only existed in his thoughts. It might therefore be relevant to detect an allusion to the Gospel passages of Matthew (5: 29 and 18: 9) and Mark (9: 47- 48) about the self- mutilation of eye, hand and foot as preventative against sin and eternal damnation. Simultaneously, his awareness that a regression is impossible instils in him a desire for self- inflicted blindness, to avoid the contemplation of his crime and its effects as well as for self- punishment, à la Oedipus. This particular allusion would have been immediately detected by Jacobean audiences, with all kinds of pertinent associations. The sexual meanings of *pluck* -to have sex and/ or to deflower a virgin- and *eyes* -genitalia-, suggest a rhetoric of emasculation echoing Lady Macbeth and her derisory harrying of an indecisive man's virility. Ocular mutilation thus links together past, present and future within the same clause, with multiple and diverse associations, all of them semantically concurrent.

The lines that follow constitute an instance of *adynaton*, a form of extreme hyperbole frequent in the genre; namely, the concern that all the world's water will be insufficient to wash the blood off the hands that kill. This figure is most probably borrowed from Seneca's *Hercules Furens* and it starts an interesting linguistic turn. The eminently Saxon register of the scene up to this point is abandoned in favour of the Greco- Latin register, signalled by two new words that Shakespeare inserts on the same line: *multitudinous* and *incarnadine*. The reflection has numerous literary antecedents, among them *Hamlet* and Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, itself indebted to Euripides' *The Madness of Heracles* (Bullough, 1957). It is quite remarkable that at this point, having committed the murder, Macbeth should echo Hercules' desperate words when he discovers that he has killed his own wife and children in a state of madness induced on goddess Juno's command:

HERCVLES
 Quem locum profugus petam?
 Ubi me recondam? Quave tellure obruar?
 Quis Tanais, aut quis Nilus aut quis Persica
 Violentus unda Tigris, aut Rhenus ferox,
 Tagusve Hibera turbidus gaza fluens,
 Abluere dextram poterit? Arctoum licet
 Maeotis in me gelida transfundat mare
 Et tota Tethys per meas currat manus,
 Haerebit altum facinus. (1320- 1329)¹

¹ "What place shall I, an exile, seek? Where shall I hide myself, or by what earth shall I be buried o'er? What Tanais, what Nile, what violent Tigris with its Persian wave or fierce Rhine or turbid Tagus flowing with Iberian treasure will be able

The three neologisms under consideration seem to be part of a logical sequence -*assassination-multitudinous-incarnadine*- suggestive of the perpetration of regicide in an altered state of consciousness, like the hashshashin, and the subsequent horror at the verification of the deed. In some sense, the sequence seems to invite the association of Macbeth to Hercules, a demi- god whose power resides in physical strength, who experiences hallucinations, and who wakes up from a spell-induced fury to contemplate the consequences of his murderous actions.

Seneca's lines name several courses of water, an agent of purification now insufficient for Hercules. Shakespeare compounds these, first into the classical reference to Neptune's ocean and then into the adjective *multitudinous*. Modelled on the noun *multitude*, this adjective refers to "the ocean or any mass of water with reference to its great bulk or to its innumerable ripples" (OED), or else to "numerous oceans ('all the world's seas'); many-waved oceans" (Braunmuller, 1999, p. 146). Its five syllables with two main stresses deliberately halt the utterance of the line, emphasising the quantity of water and its paradoxical insufficiency, not to purify, as in Seneca, but to *erase* the traces of the crime from Macbeth's hands and conscience. The reflection pertinently closes on the second semantic focus, another neologism. The verb *incarnadine* is modelled on its homonymous adjective and it means "to dye or tinge with incarnadine; to redden. Properly, to make flesh-coloured or carnation, but from Shakespeare onward associated with the colour of blood" (OED). *Incarnadine* introduces another polysemic play on words: to redden- to make into flesh- to make flesh- coloured (Braunmuller, 1999).

The two words, both Latin- rooted and intellectual in register, suggest rationalisation and premeditation and seem to provide a response to the classical question. Macbeth completes Hercules' reflection by advancing one step further: the ocean is insufficient to wash the blood clean from his hand; but, what is worse, his hand will dye the ocean blood- red. The ambivalent fusion of the semantic nuances of both words implies that the line *Making the green one red* might be read in two ways, depending on the grammatical status and syntactic provenance ascribed to *one*: on the one hand, "making red that which is green", where *one* is a pronoun substituting for *Neptune's ocean*; on the other hand, "dye the green colour of the sea a uniformly flesh- red colour", *one red*, where *one* is a quantifier.

Hamlet, a play pre- dating *Macbeth* by approximately five years, explores a similar anxiety in the words of King Claudius: "... What if this cursed hand/ Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,/ Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens/ To wash it white as snow?" (III. iii. 43- 46). In general terms, Claudius' soliloquy might well be uttered by Macbeth, by virtue of the ideas common to both characters: usurpation, extreme guilt, an incapacity to pray, the absence of a desire to repair the damage due to lack of repentance, and the explicit refusal to renounce the benefits obtained from the crime. Some of these elements seem to recur in Macbeth's rapid association of ideas; added to these is the allusion to the first Biblical murder, equivalent to the murder of a clan member, which reinforces the logical links between *multitudinous*, *incarnadine* and *assassination*. Macbeth's self-perception seems to be that of an irredeemable, guilt- ridden usurper and traitor as well as a superhuman hero whose unhinged psyche is playing tricks on him.

The Jacobean audiences for whom Shakespeare composes *Macbeth* -probably within the context of the private theatre, frequented by social segments of higher intellectual aspirations- will have been alert to this network of associations. Macbeth's question may have the power to activate the collective memory of that other text, inserted within the cultural circuit of a once- triumphant system accompanying the advent and apogee of the Roman Empire. Seneca's work is part of the literature

to cleanse this hand? The Maeotis could pour me out into the northern sea, and all of Tethys herself could rush through my hands, but my deep-seated crime would cling to them." (transl. Erik Robinson, 2019)

of the conquerors, the civilisation that is now the model and historical mirror of the incipient British empire, but Hercules' questions, echoed by Macbeth, are also proposing a more sombre note of warning. The mechanism of death that usually attends imperial expansion processes entails the potential to turn the whole world into a sea of blood, to the point that the very source of life and purification, symbolised by the ocean, is brutalised beyond recovery.

Shakespeare's later works all share this concern about the political, social, cultural and moral bases on which British hegemony is being constructed; a concern embodied in two salient characters of this period: Edmund in *King Lear* and Macbeth. Both plays belong to the group known as the "Celtic Plays"; both are set in transitional periods and both contain subtexts of a cultural clash. The two characters seem to advocate ancient forms of social organisation, much older than the imperial Roman, Christian and patriarchal configuration. At the same time, the conflict in both plots is located at the dawn of hereditary monarchy and the feudal age, in tandem with a socioeconomic system based on primogeniture and the importance of progeny, legitimacy and descendancy.

It is no coincidence that Macbeth -whose historical counterpart ruled Scotland during the decades previous to the Norman invasion (1040- 1057)- should have no children and should be devoted to the extermination of other characters' children and mothers: he is struggling for the survival of a much older clanic law. Elective monarchy, or tanistry, meant that leadership in Celtic Scotland was exerted by the strongest warrior in the clan, who was chosen by an electing body in full assembly, and succeeded by another eligible member of similar qualities. Tanistry was abolished by King Malcolm II -King Duncan's immediate predecessor-, who instituted hereditary monarchy on his accession in 1005. Macbeth, who attempts against the very roots of life, can only be killed by one who has not participated in that cycle in a "natural" way: according to the prophecies, Macduff was not born of a woman, having been extracted by caesarean section from the womb of his dead mother.

The work closes with a scene in symmetry with the opening: once again, there is a distribution of honours and nobility titles after a battle, but this time the titles correspond to the feudal system. They refer to the Norman conquest without naming it, and are defined with an Anglo- Norman nomenclature that replaces the Scottish: "... My thanes and kinsmen, / Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland/ In such an honour named." (V. xi.28-30). The term *thane* denotes a nobility status of special significance in the history of Scotland. The Scottish Thanes were Clan chiefs, equivalent in rank to Earls, on whom the King of Scotland conferred territory together with a title similar to that of a Baron. The word, of Saxon origin, is now replaced in the words of King Malcolm by a new designation that unifies the entire kingdom under a single system of hierarchies and a single language.

The parallelism with the Union of the Crowns and the creation of the United Kingdom in 1603 under the Scottish King James I is more than evident. The end of the tragedy, with the restoration of unity and of political, legal and moral order under a legitimate monarch, is not only indicative of the beginning of a new era; it also raises troubling reservations regarding the price in blood that peoples must always pay for every political process. At the same time, the play firmly claims these concerns as an area of dramatic and poetic interest, almost like an implicit literary statement of principle. It closes with the intimidating echo of *assassination*, *multitudinous*, *incarnadine*, reverberating beyond the last verse, in a lexical, semantic and auditory sea of blood around which Shakespeare editorializes history and propounds his aesthetic manifesto about the nature of poetic creation and its inalienable political and social responsibility.

Words, words, words...

The value of Shakespeare's linguistic audacities lies not so much in the number of words and expressions he may have invented as in the vast, colourful gamut of nuances displayed in the contexts in which he uses them. Shakespeare stretches the expressive capacity of the language; the tool he uses to invite his audiences to a constant questioning of the assumptions crystallized behind the well-known plots of each story he stages. He also invites alertness to that unrestrained expansiveness of the language that he tautens to its utmost.

Each of the words explored here constitutes a microcosm that metonymically anticipates, and participates in, a new paradigm of poetic expression. Both in terms of its form and sonority and of the context in which it is inserted, each neologism draws attention to itself and to the manifold senses that multiply, inwards and outwards, in a polyphony of reverberations that transcend the dramatic event. Simultaneously, in their reception, the echoes that each lexical innovation must have generated in the keen ears of the poet's contemporary audiences are replicated in associations and intersections as innumerable as unpredictable.

Shakespeare's true legacy is to be found in the variety of linguistic resources that he explores, exploits and displays with creativity in the service of poetic imagination (Crystal, 2008). It is the peculiar originality with which the poet manipulates and plays with these resources that interpellates the intelligence and collective memory of his audiences and captivates their sensibilities. An understanding of Shakespeare's linguistic fertility must be an understanding of his multiplicity, and this is where his aesthetic manifesto unfolds: the daring approach to language as a vehicle for ideas and emotion that he systematically proselytizes in his texts and which constitutes the essence of his revolutionary poetic proposal.

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