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Testing the Borderline Between Body and Soul

Macbeth, Anatomy Theatres, and the Semiotics of the Early Modern Skin

In the middle of 2013, passersby in Budapest may have seen three unusual anatomical representations not far from each other on public advertising surfaces in the city, and all three of them had something to do with the theatre. The latest poster advertised the new production of Maladype Theatre, *Macbeth/Anatomy*, which premiered in September 2013 at the Trafó House of Contemporary Arts.[1] The other two had been left over from the previous year, and both advertised the postmodern heir of early modern anatomical theatres: an anatomical exhibition featuring plastinated bodies. Preceded by the first exhibition in Budapest in 2008, two anatomical attractions competed in the capital in 2012. The materials of "The Human Body" and "Bodies 02" exhibitions[2] were almost identical in many respects, the implemented technology was based on a process patented by Gunther von Hagens[3], and after the first anatomical show in 2008, which attracted three hundred thousand people, these new sensations proved to be even more popular. The pervasive postmodern anatomical interest is well illustrated by the curiously simultaneous presence of advertisements for theatrical anatomy and anatomical exhibitions, and it is explained by the epistemological stakes which are very similar in the early modern and the postmodern period. Due to the resonance of our present time with the anatomizing habits of early modern culture, this perspective also appeared on the contemporary Hungarian stage, casting Shakespeare's tragedy in a unique light. The persistent staging of corpo-

1 https://www.maladype.hu/hu/eloadasok/archivum/macbeth-anatomia.html
2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodies:_The_Exhibition ; https://human-bodies.eu/en/ ; https://index.hu/kultur/2012/03/03/test_test_ellen_budapesten/
3 https://bodyworlds.com/ Websites accessed on April 09, 2025.

real inwardness and the dissected body in the English Renaissance public theatre, and the growing presence of dissection and anatomical scrutiny in postmodern productions have been observed and discussed by much critical literature in the past two decades, but we must go back to the emergent semiotic theories of the early modern emblematic theatre to fully account for these practices.

In Shakespeare criticism, performance-centred semiotic approaches gained impetus and started to proliferate after the 1970s. The debate on "word versus image" and "verbal versus visual" in early modern theatre scholarship reached a milestone with the canonization of approaches that examine the material conditions and the representational logic of the emblematic theatre: the logic of the semiotic space for which English Renaissance dramas were specifically intended. I will only mention the most important early research achievements: Glynne Wickham's investigations played a pioneering role in revealing the properties of the emblematic stage and the difference between the emblematic and the photographic logic of representation. (Wickham 1963, 155) Robert Weimann, who "very usefully bridges the gap between historicist literary criticism and studies by performance-oriented critics and theatre historians" (Lin 2012, 26), investigated the legacy of medieval popular traditions of role-playing, and developed insights on the difference between *platea*- and *locus*-oriented characters and action that have remained indispensable ever since. (Weimann 1978, 33, 212)[4] Alan Dessen sought to make Shakespeare's theatrical vocabulary and the structure of contemporary theatrical reception accessible to the modern spectator. (Dessen 1977; 1984; 1995) Andrew Gurr established a comprehensive reconstruction of the Shakespearean stage (Gurr 2009), and Michael Hattaway applied the findings of this theatre history to the interpretation of the acting habits and the extremely self-reflexive signifying practices of the Elizabethan interactive popular theatre. (Hattaway 1982; 2010) New companions and research guides more and more systematically concentrated on the interdisciplinary synthesis of studies in material culture, theatre history, and textual instability.[5] Scholars pursuing this line of research continued to expand on the importance of the stage setting, the

4 Weimann's theory of the difference between *platea* and *locus* had a long-lasting impact on Shakespearean studies, although the binary spatial separation of *upstage* and *downstage* in this theory was later shown to be too strict and artificial. For an appraisal and a revision of Weimann's concepts, see Lin 2012, 23–37.

5 For a lucid and concise survey of the development of these orientations, leading to what she calls the "stage to page" approach, see Stern 2004, 1–7.

theatrical space, and the interactive nature of the playhouses, and emphasized "that the early modern theatre made no simple, clear distinction between onstage and offstage. The structural relation between the main stage and the spaces behind, above and below provided Shakespeare and his contemporaries with a wide range of possibilities for different aural and visual effects". (Ichikawa 2013, 150) The influence arriving from the "spatial turn" in critical cultural studies also had a fruitful impact in the field, and early modern conceptions of space started to constitute a significant aspect in the study of the early modern drama. Space was of great importance in the emblematic theatre not only because it was understood as a microcosmic representation of the larger macrocosm, representing, as the Prologue to Shakespeare's *Henry V* proclaims, a multitude of things "in little place" (16), but also because the contemporary ways of thinking expressed almost everything in terms of space, in relation to space, with metaphors representing space. Thus, in the theatre embodying cosmic space, the actors appearing on stage entered not only the vertical system of connections of the universe and the order of the spatial, hierarchical arrangement of social strata, but also the language conceived as space and place, the discourses and rhetorical rules of the time operating on the basis of cartographies. As Russell West points out, "Early modern modes of codifying knowledge emphasized tangible, concrete qualities of experience, often fixing upon the spatial dimensions of existence. Even more, social ruptures and transformations abruptly cast spatial structures into question, making them more particularly the focus of discursive attention." (West 2002, 12) In this early modern conceptual system, where "the mind participated in the objective order of things, within an epistemological configuration in which subject and object of knowledge were not fully distinct from one another" (West 2002, 13), the theatre functioned as a liminal cultural practice which always acted in and on space. It involved its participants in a continuous redrawing and reconfiguration of social, epistemic and political boundaries, or, as Russell West-Pavlov explains, "In the very functioning of the theatre, intensified by an extraordinary degree of self-reflexive observation, the early modern theatre system constituted its own boundaries and playfully had them oscillate. The theatre marked a line between theatrical fiction and environmental reality, but in the act of autopoetically reasserting that border, never ceased to ingest its own environment, producing out of that digestive process, theatre." (West-Pavlov 2006, 76) Since the early modern public theatre did not observe the authority of the text or that of the director in a way which later came to be characteristic of the bourgeois

photographic, illusionistic theatre, we can define this social theatrical phenomenon, in line with Hans-Thiess Lehmann's observations, as a predramatic theatre (Lehmann 2016, 7), a cultural interface which functioned as a topological node that connected different spatial and temporal dimensions. (Habermann–Witen 2016, 2–3) Historically, this predramatic theatre emerges in the transitory period which leads to the age of the dramatic theatre of modernity (Kotte 2010, 105), and, just as in the Lehmannian postdramatic theatre, the essential dramaturgical elements of modern drama are already present, but theatrical performances, especially those in the public theatre, are not yet defined by the written text and a codified dramatic structure, but by the live semiotic space based on stage-audience interaction, operating with many levels of meaning.

Each of the above orientations leaves no doubt that we must recreate, even if only hypothetically, the original representational logic of these plays. Only with knowledge of this logic is it possible to activate the plot, the symbolic-iconographic network of associations, and the emblematic codes in which these performances were enveloped. The representational logic of the stage is crucial to the interpretation of any drama, since, as a characteristic of the genre, the dramatic text typically withholds a significant amount of information, and these blank spaces are only filled with meaning when the text is staged and actualized in a theatrical performance. This actualization is even more significant in the case of the early modern emblematic theatre, where the standard elements of the stage, the position of objects, and the various directions of space were all part of a system of symbolic associations. Much of the emblematic ambiguity will escape our attention if contemporary iconographic, theatrical, or religious traditions of understanding are not decoded in our reading. This decoding inevitably necessitates consideration of the theatrical space that accommodated the dramatic text in live performance.

The emerging performance-oriented approaches to early modern drama generally considered only the horizontal axis of the stage of the emblematic theatre, which includes the representational logic of the *locus* and the interactive, liminal space of the *platea*; this latter, interactive space was the dimension in which the world of theatrical illusion and the world of actual reality merged, fusing both worlds and, at the same time, questioning the autonomy, the independent existence of both. (Weimann 1978, 212) One example of the complex manifestations of the horizontal dimension is when Puck, at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in his final dream-inducing monologue, amalgamates the world

of the play and the world of the audience into one single cosmos. However, less critical attention has been paid to the equally significant component of the larger theatrical space, the vertical dimension, through which each early modern play was embedded in a cosmic, universal system. In this extension, the plot and the signifying networks of the drama were embedded in a system stretching out between the underworld and the heavens, representing the vertical, analogical world order inherited from the medieval roots of Renaissance theatre. The early modern public theatre itself, based on analogical thinking and the philosophy of microcosm-macrocosm interrelationships, was seen as a powerful emblem of cosmic order and universal harmony. The audience at the Globe Theatre could feel that they were in the microcosmic laboratory of the world, in which cosmic questions were being dissected. At the same time, English Renaissance theatre was able to powerfully represent chaos, disharmony and confusion precisely because it functioned primarily as an emblem of order. The reversal of the verticality of the theatrical space was a frequently recurring technique for foregrounding cosmic and social disorder. This inversion is a characteristic feature of carnivalesque social practices, but it often meant more than just "topsy-turvydom" or chaos. The release of sexual energies on May Day, or the destructive confusion of "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" at the very beginning of *Macbeth*, were indeed visions of chaos, but in my opinion much more spectacular and effective are those cases when positions within the verticality are exchanged, and the topmost metaposition is occupied and usurped by representatives of the underworld. The verticality of the theatre could very powerfully display this kind of inversion, which often led to an all-encompassing tragic irony. One of the best early examples of the reversal of vertical orientation is found in the prototypical English Renaissance revenge drama, Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, where the metaposition of heaven, from which some divine plan might be expected to unfold, is occupied by the Allegory of Revenge and the Ghost of Don Andrea. These two agents of the underworld probably arrived in their place on the contemporary stage moving upwards from below, passing through the trapdoor, presumably to some balcony above the stage. Thus, the representatives of the underworld are placed in the highest metaposition here – the transcendental position of God is disrupted and usurped, but this is not realized by the characters in the play. In the intricate web of revenges, the characters must outwit each other in intrigue and scheming. They strive to rise above the others but are unaware that the place of the supreme avenger, for which they are all fighting, is already irrevocably occupied.

A similar vertical inversion is the building block of the world of many other tragedies. In *Hamlet*, the Ghost is an agent active both below and above, thus denying the possibility of a divine, transcendental reference point – the omnipresence of the Ghost is also often present in postmodern adaptations, such as the one directed both on stage and in a TV film version by the Hungarian visionary Gábor Bódy. In *Titus Andronicus*, Aaron rises from below and later often occupies the highest metaposition, which is also strongly emphasized in Julie Taymor's film adaptation, where Aaron is given the only position that provides a metaperspective that encompasses the entire film. At the beginning of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Vindice presents Gloriana's skull as a representative of the underworld, which, returning from the afterlife, accompanies him to the corrupt royal court; later, after Vindice has clearly elevated it above all else, the skull becomes the driving force of the tragedy. Whenever we read these early modern plays, we must try to stage them in our imagination in order to situate the action in the semiotic space of the theatre, both horizontally and vertically. Gloucester's first soliloquy in *Richard III* will lose its most important implications if we do not imagine him in the position of the Vice, a *platea*-oriented character who acts as a driving force of engagement on the interactive boundaries of the stage, and maintains a continuous, lively relationship with the audience. Vindice is also best imagined at the beginning of the play – again based on the emblematic codes and theatrical traditions of the time – as a representative of the *memento mori* tradition, who at the same time is not only the usual moralizing agent presenting and mobilizing the course of events, but he also places the iconographic skull above everything else, which leads to another example of inversion. The skull, lifted from the grave, that is, from the underworld, is placed at the highest point in the world – only to be demetaphorized in the blink of an eye when, unveiled as the skull of the revenger's beloved former wife, from an emblem saturated with iconographic signifying traditions it turns into a shockingly raw piece of material reality.

Inversion and the confusion that follows are often expressed with anatomical precision and through anatomical imagery in English Renaissance tragedies: new methods were needed to address new questions about knowledge – methods that transcend traditional answers, break through superficial appearances, and uncover the depths of authentic knowledge. Anatomical attention focuses on how the opened human body can reveal the secrets of some previously unknown reality. As Suzan Zimmerman argues, "Caught in a double bind during the Refor-

mation's challenge to Catholic hermeneutics due to its own anthropomorphic imaging, early modern theatre interrogated the properties of the material body, including that of the performer, amid an ideological crisis about that very issue." (Zimmerman 2005, 16) Anatomical theatres and the public theatres that staged these dramas were interconnected, with their development running along parallel historical tracks. Hillary Nunn asserts that "early Stuart playwrights capitalized on the similarities between anatomical and commercial theatres to add new layers of meaning to both the dramatic portrayal of physical mutilation and the act of witnessing such staged violence." (Nunn 2005, 4)

The European history of anatomical theatres dates to the 14th century when the first public dissections were performed. By the 16th century, the public anatomy lesson had become an institutionalized social spectacle throughout Europe, from Leiden and Padua to Bologna and Montpellier, and by the end of the Elizabethan period it was rivalling the popularity of public theatres in London. In 1636, when dissections could no longer be held in the great hall of the barber-surgeons' guild headquarters, the London guild hired the famed architect and stage designer Inigo Jones to design a permanent anatomical theatre. While later anatomical theatres were housed in universities, churches were frequently used for dissections before large academic institutions were established. One of the most famous permanent anatomical theatres was built in the 1580s in Leiden, inside a church. The location was significant because the dissected body, in its complex harmony, was considered a holy temple that illustrated divine creation. It could only be opened for carefully considered reasons, within a ritual framework akin to public repentance.

The anatomical theatre's popularity grew to the point where, alongside public dissections, the exhibited collection – containing exotic animal preparations and human corpses, particularly those of individuals who died under special circumstances – became a major sensation. A detailed catalogue from 1687 describes numerous exhibits, including elephant heads, a rhinoceros, a lute used by lightly armed Cossacks, and, in the circular anatomy room, visitors could also view "rarities" such as the skeleton of a donkey, on which a woman who killed her daughter is sitting, and a man sitting on an ox, executed for stealing a fattening cow. (Schuyl 1687, 3–4) Anatomical theatres, in addition to hosting dissections (sometimes only for brief periods), also functioned as sensational exhibition spaces, resembling the Kunstkammer, Wunderkammer, or Cabinets of Curiosities – precursors to modern natural history museums.

The performances in anatomical theatres were dramatic in nature, with the cadaver, the anatomist, and the viewer all becoming actors. This aligned with the contemporary belief that every human body was a structure capable of dissection, yet within its structure echoed the order of the entire world. It is no coincidence that dramas investigating early modern subjectivity frequently thematized the body, and the emblematic theatres staging these plays mirrored the anatomical theatres, transforming the performances into theatrical anatomy. Public dissections were driven by individual curiosity, but within this curiosity lay the tensions and contradictions of the early modern age: clashing forms of knowledge, power structures, and religious convictions. Religious conservatism and scientific experimentation, superstitions based on beliefs and early empirical science existed in constant tension.

Legal and political considerations also permeated dissections. By law, the body being dissected was always that of a convicted criminal, for dissection was considered part of the punishment, thereby reinforcing the institutionalized presence of justice. This provided justification for violating the religious prohibition on dissection. The complexity of public dissection was further influenced by folk beliefs, such as the superstition that corpses could come back to life. It was widely believed that the dead remained "not completely dead" for some time after death and might even rise from the autopsy table at any moment. These contemporaneous reactions could also be activated in the spectators of the tragedies performed in public theatres, for example, when in the climax of one of the most popular Renaissance plays, *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo pulls back a curtain and reveals the corpse of his son which had been unburied for several days.

Modern audiences may find the extreme or irrational scenes in English Renaissance tragedies perplexing. However, David Hillman suggests that we must "climb back into our own bodies and read as fully embodied readers in order to understand the highly somatic nature of the age and its language" (Hillman 2007, 2) and recognize the connection between identity and visceral knowledge in these tragedies. The self-presentation and self-dissection staged in anatomical theatres find parallels in the early modern tragedy, where the protagonist – the revenger – employs dramatic poetry as a scalpel to penetrate both the body of society and the bodies within it.

Anatomization had overarching epistemological stakes in the period. The whole of early modern culture is characterized by an expansive inwardness: the expression may seem paradoxical, but paradox is a concept that characterizes the

entire era well. This period is marked by new inventions, discoveries, opening epistemological horizons, the omnipresent intention to penetrate the surface of things, to gain insight into the depths that lie behind the facade of the world, to achieve some kind of immediacy of experience, some assurance in times of uncertainty. This ever-expanding inwardness is one of the building blocks of the imagery and dramaturgy of the dramas that Shakespeare and his contemporaries designed for the stage of the time. The breakdown of harmony and order is examined in a world where physical and mental unity is truncated, opened up, torn apart, and dissected. Limbs and other body parts go on a journey, but the all-encompassing inwardness is not limited to the level of the body. As if in a laboratory of consciousness, we can also glimpse again and again the anatomy of mental processes.[6] Early modern drama engages in a double anatomy, physical and mental, testing the limits of meaning, knowledge, and identity.[7] In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, just like in *Hamlet* and *Othello*, we encounter a drama of the mind, in which the imagery of anatomy effectively transforms the play into a continuous live dissection of the protagonist. We witness a self-anatomization filtered, processed and magnified through the consciousness of the early modern subject, but this mental penetration is always accompanied by images of the opened body, flesh, decay, contamination and disease. Jonathan Sawday points out that in the history of Renaissance anatomy there was a shift from public autopsy to a communal spectacle functioning as a dramatic performance, that is, the figurative self-dissection of the anatomist. "The science of the body was to become not something to be performed only on dead corpses removed from the execution scaffold, but on the anatomist's own body." (Sawday 1995, 110) The self-presentation and self-dissection staged in anatomical theatres find parallels in the two-way, mental and corporeal self-anatomy of the protagonist of early modern tragedy.

6 This concentration on mental processes was already observed by John Bayley who argued that three of the four „great tragedies" can be interpreted as tragedies of consciousness. "[...] *Hamlet, Othello* and *Macbeth* [...] all enter and possess the mind and instantly become a part of it. Indeed, immensely realistic as they are, they seem to take place in an area of thinking, feeling and suffering that has taken over from life, in the same way that the area of the play has taken over, while it is in progress, from the lives of the audience. This sense of entrance into mental being, rather than into a world of action and suffering, distinguishes these plays". (Bayley 1981, 164)

7 As Richard Sugg points out, the epistemological stakes and prestige of early modern anatomy were analogous to the demand for an anatomy of the soul, which later found its echo in psychoanalysis with the transformation of the word anatomy into analysis. (Sugg 2007, 210)

With the Maladype Theatre performance, we arrive at a contemporary production in which one of the main organizing principles of early modern tragedy, the double anatomy, is realized, and the dissection of consciousness, which places mental processes at the centre, begins to work together with the radical anatomization of the body. The experimental production *Macbeth/Anatomy* is one of the recent examples of the affinity between the early modern and the postmodern interest in anatomy and anatomical representation. At a dramaturgical turning point in the performance, Zoltán Lendváczky, who could be Banquo, Macduff or Malcolm due to the fusion of roles, enters the stage and throws Macbeth's flayed skin onto the ground next to him. (Figure 1–3) The external covering of his body, with a precisely recognizable replica of his face, is taken by the tyrant into his own lap, and for a long moment Macbeth stares at his own skin.[8]

It seems that, contemplating his own skin-image, he arrives at some final recognition, a point of anagnorisis. I consider this depiction to be a remarkable solution in this bold adaptation of the tragedy, and I am convinced that, when interpreted in the light of early modern anatomical depictions and representations of postmodern anatomical exhibitions (Figure 4), the staging as a whole establishes a meaningful and intriguing production, at least partially refuting the almost unanimously negative criticism that followed the performance.

The Maladype Theatre production took place in front of a packed audience at the Trafó performance space in Budapest, but it was not a success with the critics, and it also thoroughly tired the audience. As the critics unanimously noted, the over-exaggerated symbolism, the original technical solutions that proved to be inoperable on the big stage extinguished the potential meanings of the performance. However, I believe that the critics were not sensitive to the "dermatological" perspective on which the production was built. Tamás Tarján's opinion was that the Maladype performance was not free from contrived artificiality, and the production fell into the trap of misunderstood postmodernism, drowning in the pursuit of self-evident alternativeness (Tarján 2013), while Andrea Tompa thought that the production could not convey either the intellectual or the sensual content that would have filled this contrived form. (Tompa 2013)

8 Maladype Theatre, September 06, 2013, Trafó. Director and set design: Zoltán Balázs; costumes: Mari Benedek; music: Péter Pál Szűcs. Cast: Zoltán Lendváczky, Ákos Orosz, Andrea Petrik, Péter Pál Szűcs, Erika Tankó. I would like to thank the theatre management for making the recording of the performance available to me.

It is undeniable that the Maladype Theatre created a very divisive but extremely powerful and effective performance in which the body was presented ingeniously to a postmodern audience that is so corporeally sensitive. We must, however, note that the "skinning", the flaying of the body, which has come to the fore in both early modern and postmodern anatomical representations, is a general metaphor for the subject's attempt to reach the material beyond the visible, the depth beneath the surface, the reality beneath the appearance of things, the skin. It symbolizes the inward curiosity and anatomical attitude common to early modern and postmodern epistemological crises. The central symbolic stage element of the performance, the giant rat skeleton, creates an anatomical atmosphere in several senses from the beginning, constantly projecting before us the idea of a double anatomy aimed at the joint dissection of consciousness and body. At the same time, the rat skeleton also foreshadows the process by which animalistic, bestial instinctual energies triumph in Macbeth: the passions that the early modern era believed were present in animals as well as in humans. (Paster 2004, 136) As Gail Kern Paster has demonstrated, the characters of Renaissance tragedies cannot yet be held to the psychological consistency that Western thought, based on the concepts of sovereign self-identity and disembodied consciousness, has associated with the category of the individual and consequently the dramatic character after the Enlightenment. The characters of early modern dramas are materially embedded beings based on contemporary ideas about the balance of bodily fluids, in whom the overflow and spillover of passions can easily tip towards the animal pole of existence. (Paster 2002, 45) The prophecy of the Weird Sisters spreads like poison in Macbeth's consciousness, prompting him to engage in role-play and question his identity, until doubts, suspicions, and self-torture finally lead to the gradual disintegration of his consciousness. It is not only ambition, sexual drives, and desire that rise to the surface in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, who ride the rodent's skeleton like wild beasts and then gradually tear it to pieces: the voice of conscience, the command of the bond of kinship, the betrayal of the treacherous apparitions, and the uncertainty of the future gnaw at their brains from the inside, just like rats. "Oh, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!" (3.2.38–39) – says Macbeth, and the play replaces this army of scorpions with the enlarged skeleton of the rat. However, the skin, the glaze, the mask are eventually removed from Macbeth, and he must see that the shell that he has carried through his various roles is actually empty, consumed by the spread of the ulcer of corruption, melted away from within by the decay of his own subjectivity, just

as the constantly present, live rats used in the play's stage set finally gnaw away Macbeth's severed, caged head. The performance is not content with dissecting the mind, it also performs the bodily anatomy that appears as a metaphor in the argument about tragedy in Philip Sidney's treatise on poetics: "So that the right use of Comedy will, I think, by nobody be blamed, and much less of the high and excellent Tragedy, that openth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue." (Sidney 1962, 432) All of this unfolds in a transmedia space where traditional acting is mixed with movement theatre, pantomime, vaudeville, circus show and puppetry, and where experimental, cult rock music constantly shocks and makes viewers see things from a different perspective.

The skin, the outer covering that must be removed in order to reveal the truth, plays a prominent role not only in the depiction of dissection but also in English Renaissance tragedies in general, and *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are notable examples of this. To understand Maladype's performance, we need to delve deeper into the early modern semiotics of the skin.

During the scene in the queen's bedroom, almost as if educating his mother, Hamlet uses a visual metaphor of spiritual corruption, which interestingly includes one of the most frequently employed body images of early modern tragedy: the ulcer.

> Mother, for love of grace,
> Lay not that flattering unction to your soul
> That not your trespass but my madness speaks.
> It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
> While rank corruption, mining all within,
> Infects unseen.
> (3.4.141–46)

In the early modern cultural imagery, the ulcer becomes a metaphor for the innermost infection, the corruption at the bottom, hidden by the social mask of self-fashioning and pretence – this mask is the "skin and film" that Hamlet mentions. Let us recall, however, the healing process of tragedy, which, according to Philip Sidney, consists precisely in the operation of removing this membrane, breaking it, opening the surface, in order to reveal the infection and to expose the inner falsities in the individual, and the thickened moral or political corruption in the body of society. Sidney, discussing the role of tragedy, also uses the image

of the ulcer: the violation of the social skin of masks aims at exposing the ulcer in both the collective and the individual body. In what follows, I will concentrate on the tissues and the skin that cover the ulcer.

From this anatomical and representational perspective, Hamlet attempts at the individual level what tragedy also aims at on the community level: healing the soul, opening wounds, removing the tissue that provides concealment. However, if the skin is the physical envelope that covers the body with its physical ailments, then we can wonder what the outer layer of the soul could be? What covers our spiritual essence, if there is one? What is the skin of the soul, what forms the surface layer, the "film" on the spirit? In the period of the dawn of the emerging early modern subjectivity, amidst the Protestant debates about the presence or the possible absence of the innermost, untainted spiritual essence of the human being, the question arose with increasing intensity. Historically specific representations of the penetration of the skin often work as cultural expressions of epistemological uncertainty. The number of these representations increases in historical periods facing an epistemological crisis, when the nature of the self, of subjectivity, becomes questionable. The early modern anatomical corpuses with their skin flapping and the characters with their skins opened in tragedies thematize the same recognition that makes the corpuses of postmodern anatomical exhibitions exciting for today's audience: the skin is a boundary between the outside and the inside, the non-self and the self, the opening of which can reveal to us the hidden secrets of human identity, the inner mysteries of the temple of the material body which was housing, through a divinely crafted architecture, the spiritual soul. With the testing of the dermatological envelope, early moderns were probing the threshold that had always excited the human being: they were testing the borderline between body and soul, life and death, earthly and otherworldly.

This is why English Renaissance tragedy is characterized by an obsession with the phenomenon of the skin. As Caroline Spurgeon noted in her groundbreaking study of the imagery of Shakespeare's plays, "Shakespeare pays special attention to the texture of the skin" (Spurgeon 1952, 82). In early modern tragedy, transgression often means not simply the violation of social or political norms and laws, or the mutilation and dissection of bodies, but primarily an act that penetrates behind the surface of things and seeks the depths beneath the surface as an epistemological endeavour, attempting to test and challenge the boundaries that separate traditional pairs of opposites such as the living and the dead, the

mortal world and the afterlife, the outside and the inside. The skin of the human body began to appear as a general metaphor for the new frontiers of knowledge, and the popularity of public dissection and the anatomical theatre was surpassed only by the popularity of the great public theatres by the early 17th century: in both, the body covered in skin was the protagonist.

The interest of early modern tragedy in the skin and its repeated opening has been examined by a number of critics. Maik Goth analysed the practice of the "performative opening of the carnal envelope" in great detail, listing numerous examples of murder, mutilation, stabbing, daggering, fighting, and slaughter as forms of penetration into the skin in Renaissance tragedy. (Goth 2012, 141) Indeed, early modern culture systematically stages "the violent but calculated transgression of the outside into the vulnerable interior of the body" (Goth 2012, 144) in order to reveal, in Norbert Elias's phrase, what the envelope of the human being is and what is enclosed within it – what is the case, the container in which the *homo clausus* is located. "Is the body the vessel which holds the true self within it? Is the skin the frontier between 'inside' and 'outside'? What in the human individual is the container, and what the contained?" (Elias 2000, 472). I would like to add, however, that this penetration into the skin is always a metaphor for the new habits of seeing and observing, and for an inward-turning attention. It carries an epistemological and semiotic stake in an age when the emerging *homo clausus*, the foundation of early modern subjectivity, is being formed simultaneously by the discourses of a dislocated medieval world model, the often traumatic reforms initiated by Protestantism, and an emerging new world model anticipating modernity. This change comes with a general loss of transparency, both at the social and the individual level, and a new understanding of the skin as a barrier between inside and outside. David Hillman explains that "this loss of transparency, the perception of an 'invisible wall' between the inside and the outside of the body – 'as if this flesh which walls about our life / Were brass impregnable' (*Richard II*, 3.2.167–8) – is in good measure an invention of the Renaissance, one without which it is hard to imagine the concept of the disciplined, privatised individual. It is by the same token inseparable from the interiorising movement of Protestantism, with its emphasis on inner conviction and private prayer." (Hillman 2005, 167) Embedded in the typically anatomical images of revenge tragedies, the violation and opening of the skin brings to the fore the unpredictable nature of reality and the anxiety with which the early modern subject strives to recognize what is on the other side of the skin. Andrea Ria Stevens draws at-

tention to the fact that in Shakespeare's time there was no real difference between "industrial" paints and cosmetic materials (Stevens 2013, 3). In the early modern emblematic theatre, therefore, the audience of the time saw the same materials on the stage canvases and props as on human bodies, which is why stage painting could not create a "natural" effect, but rather concealed its own artificial, stage character and directed attention to the presence and role of surfaces. To understand the general early modern attention to the visuality of surfaces, we must also take into account what Eric Mercer describes as the rapid spread of the use of colour and paint: the fashion for painting interiors boomed to an unprecedented extent in the Elizabethan era, and almost every square inch was covered with paint, sometimes even the windows: "Throughout the greater part of the period the only reason for leaving anything unpainted seems to have been the physical impossibility of reaching it with a brush." (Mercer 1953, 153)

It is worth recalling that there are many other occurrences of ulcers and the opening of the skin in early modern tragedy. To take but one example, Sidney's and Hamlet's ulcers are curiously echoed by Vindice's words in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, when he promises to increase the prince's suffering with the double anatomy of physical and mental torture:

> Yes! It is early yet; now I'll begin
> To stick thy soul with ulcers, I will make
> Thy spirit grievous sore: it shall not rest,
> But like some pestilent man toss in thy breast.
> (3.5.170–173)

The horrifying sight of Hieronimo without a tongue in *The Spanish Tragedy*, the thought of Faustus torn to pieces by devils in *Doctor Faustus*, the systematically mutilated Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*, the idea of Regan to be dissected alive in *King Lear*, the entry of Antonio with the heart of his lover soaked in blood in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* all indicate the incessant anatomization of the body in English Renaissance tragedy. Double anatomy is at work in two senses in these dramas: on the one hand, it is about the fact that tragedy always dissects the physical and spiritual, corporeal and psychical structure of the subject at the same time, foregrounding the insight that the human being as a social entity always exists as a heterogeneous psychosomatic structure. At the same time, a double anatomy is also taking place on another level, since the avenger, on the one hand, anatomizes

and dissects his enemies, and on the other hand, the process inevitably leads to his own self-dissection and, ultimately, to his own elimination. The revenger arranges the anatomy of his opponents, but the retaliatory anatomy lesson gradually becomes his own self-dissection, during which he strips his own personality to the bone, until he loses himself, for it is in this self-loss that he will be the most capable of mastering the roles that the task of revenge has necessitated. "Man's happiest when he forgets himself" (4.4.85), says Vindice, and the explanation of this seemingly paradoxical *ars poetica* is that Vindice is actually carrying out the Neoplatonist, typically Renaissance program of self-realization, but in the opposite, negative direction: he is bringing the destruction of himself to perfection. In order to fulfil the human being's capacity for endless transformation through infinite metamorphoses, the art of self-anatomy and self-loss is necessary, which then allows the revenger to perform the anatomy of his enemies. In other words, to master the art of revenge, the avenger must step out of his own identity, literally step out of his skin.

Returning to *Macbeth*: this play is not traditionally considered a revenge tragedy, although it is built on the same metatheatrical dramaturgical framework as revenge tragedies. Michael Neill argues that not only *Hamlet*, but also *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* can be read as revenge tragedies, or rather as different versions of a dramatic structure whose main component is not revenge, but rather the relationship to time and memory. "Typically, it seems to me, revenge tragedy involves a struggle to control and dispose of time: the opponents in this struggle are the politician (tyrant or usurper) and the revenger. The first is a new man whose drive to possess the future requires that he annihilate or rewrite the past: the second is a representative of the old order, whose duty is to recuperate history from the infective oblivion into which his antagonist has cast it. He is a 'remembrancer' in a double sense – both an agent of memory and one whose task it is to exact payment for the debts of the past." (Neill 1983, 36) I agree with this statement, and I myself believe that this is the reason why, from our present interpretive horizon, we are able to read so many early modern dramas as revenge tragedies or at least revenge dramas, but I attach much greater importance to the metadramatic – metatheatrical structure in this dramaturgy, which also runs consistently throughout the long line of English Renaissance dramas. In this structure, the protagonist sets himself a goal (justice, revenge, the throne, the recovery of the dukedom), the achievement of which presents him with two great challenges. The first is that he must fight time, and in two ways: on the one hand, he must

gain time to develop and execute his plan, and on the other hand, he must cope with the constant temptation of the past in his mind, the ongoing task of remembering, or even the command to remember ("And thy commandment all alone shall live / Within the book and volume of my brain" [1.5.103–4] – says Hamlet), because the goal must not be lost sight of. This results in a constant oscillation in the character's consciousness between the past and the future time of the task, which carries the risk of his mind disintegrating. The other challenge is that the task requires total role-playing: the character must assume identities, roles that are alien to his original personality: Hieronimo is not a killing machine marching at the head of the devils, Hamlet is not a strongman of a feudal, militaristic state, Macbeth is not a regicide. Within the metatheatrical framework of role-playing, when the protagonist is actually playing out how well he is suited to acting and what clever strategies he can use to deceive those around him, the masks, the roles, after a while grind down the original identity: the risk again is that the protagonist's mind disintegrates, and there is no return to the original self-identity. The skin that is supposed to envelope the essence of the revenger turns out to be empty in the end.

How completely Macbeth identified with the role he assumed, and how much he managed to destroy his original identity, is symbolized with shocking intensity in the Maladype Theatre performance in the moment when Macduff throws the tyrant's empty, vacuous skin at his feet. To understand this scene, I will discuss the early modern cultural semantics of the skin in more detail.

The ideas about the nature of the skin as the most important of surfaces underwent significant changes in the Tudor and Stuart eras, but the image of the skin was almost always emphasized in anatomical treatises. The flayed skin of a corpse also appears in earlier surgical manuals, the predecessors of real anatomy books. These manuals were initially written mainly for battlefield surgeons and barber-surgeons, but we know, for example, the French Henri de Mondeville's *Chirurgia* from 1306, in which the section on skin is introduced by a human figure stripped of its outer covering, who carries its own skin, complete with the crown of hair, on a pole slung over his shoulder like a flag. (Ghosh 2015, 311; Hartnell 2018, illustration 22) We find several stages of the self-flaying process in Juan Valverde de Amusco's *Historia de la Composicion del Cuerpo Humano* (Rome, 1556, Figure 5–6) as well as in the work by Giacomo Berengario da Carpi (Berengarius): *Commentaria cu[m] amplissimis additionibus super anatomia Mu[n]dini* (Bologna, 1521, Figure 7–8). The Italian anatomist Berengario was

the first to publish an illustrated anatomy book based on his own dissections. In this work, he comments on Mondino's 14th-century anatomy, anticipating Vesalius's more richly and precisely illustrated but later work of 1543. In one of his representations (Figure 8), we see a pregnant woman with an open uterus, and although the exposed and discarded skin is not spectacularly presented here, in its place there is a veil emphasizing the act of revelation, the act of removing the cover of truth, from under which the result of anatomical knowledge emerges.

By the early 17th century, the skin, which had previously been thought of as porous and defenceless based on the teachings of the classical authority Galen, had transformed into a strong protective shield of great significance, a fortress that enclosed valuable organs and the human soul. (Pollard 2004, 115) However, Stephen Connor, in his monograph on the history of the skin, argues that during the period of the growing popularity of anatomy and the spread of social and theatrical dissection practices, the skin did not receive more attention than it had previously in Galenic medical discourses. (Connor 2004, 13) For the anatomist it was merely a disposable outer layer, an appendage that was not even considered in the dissection. I challenge this position in light of the representational strategies and thematic imageries of English Renaissance drama and the anatomical imagery of the period. Connor argues that the recurring images of the self-flaying man in anatomy books are merely examples of the way in which the skin was a disposable surplus for the anatomist. In my view, however, the enduring presence of the stripped skin and the epistemological gaze that is woven into the act of revealing the body indicate the increasing importance of the skin as a revelatory element in the process of dissection: the emphasis on the initial act of unveiling the body through the removal of the skin turns the anatomy into an allegory of the search for reliable knowledge amidst the uncertainties of the epistemological crisis. What was at stake in this search, among other things, was the question whether we can locate the long-sought essence of the human being, whether we can identify precisely the dwelling place of the soul.

Later, in the new cultural imagery of modernity, this presence and cultural image of the anatomical body is suppressed and replaced by the abstraction of the ego and the identity-constructing function of language. After the anatomical discourses that in the Renaissance had penetrated the surface of the human body with constant effort, the human corpus had to be completely covered with a new ideological skin in the early modern era, that is, with the newly formed discourses of rationalism and the Cartesian ego. However, this process only gained ground

in the 18th century, with the spread of the "error" of Descartes who introduced a more and more radical separation of body and mind. (Damasio 1994, 249)

From a historical perspective, then, we are witnessing an early modern process in which the anatomical, bodily reality of the human is revealed beneath the skin. This transitional, epistemologically experimental period leads us over into a new era in which the operation of the abstract, Cartesian ego, that is, the cognitive and linguistic capacity of the sovereign subject becomes the new skin covering the subject and its corporeal reality. After the early modern anatomy, the subject of modernity is clothed in a new, opaque, discursive skin, or, to use Norbert Elias's expression again, this subject will be enclosed in a new case which does not allow the heterogeneous body to shine through.

Macbeth was born and staged in the dissective, revelatory phase of this historical process. What Macbeth must realize towards the end of the tragedy, and what the Maladype Theatre production portrayed with such brutal visuality, is that his original identity, which was presumably hidden behind the skin on the surface, has been completely disintegrated by the role-playing, the masks he was compelled to fashion, and the passions he was unable to master. Neither self-identity nor any innermost essence, human core, remains in him, he himself has become the ever-growing ulcer, which is finally revealed by the anatomical work of the tragedy.

Just as the giant rat skeleton that forms the centrepiece of the stage setting, so Macbeth, too, is torn to pieces by the tragedy. By revealing the instincts, passions, conscious and unconscious urges, by peeling back the layers of the onion that make up Macbeth's personality, the tragedy penetrates behind the skin, and the skin that metaphorically symbolizes the tyrant's ego collapses like a balloon, an inflated and deflated leather bladder. In the meantime, the performance also penetrates under the skin of the audience watching Macbeth confronting his own skin and face. It is not only the seam on Macbeth's skin that gets split open. The ideological suture that holds the viewers' subjectivity together, the illusion of a sovereign, homogeneous, self-identical viewer-identity, is also torn apart by the power of the scene, since the sight of Macbeth confronting his own skin-image compels us, the viewers, to take stock of what lies behind the image communicated to the outside world through our own skin-ego.

The most serious epistemological, philosophical, and theological question of this anatomizing tragedy, similar to the grand questions of postmodern antiessentialism, becomes whether such an innermost identity ever existed in Macbeth:

is there a central, inalienable human essence in the human being, or is it always only social role-playing and ideological interpellation that constitutes our subjectivity? In other words, with Norbert Elias' metaphor again: the early modern age, amidst anatomical experiments and their theatrical representations, arrives at a peculiar and, at the same time, extraordinary and frightening realization which also makes anatomical exhibitions exciting for today's viewers. The body behind the opened skin does not actually function as a case, it is not a container for the soul or some kind of essence or intact, non-changing core identity. Much rather, it is the human foundation itself, from which the social environment shapes a person, and this foundation is inseparable from our subjectivity, the self as a participant in social actions. The Maladype Theatre's production places great emphasis on tragic irony, which questions the typically early modern problematic of human self-identity and self-determination. Whether deeply tragic or ironically pathetic, Macbeth's face looks at us like the face of the fallible Other, in whom we can discover our own, and which calls on us to feel responsible for the Other.

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