УДК: 811.111Ф – 2.091 (=111Ш)

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Difference versus sameness in Shakespeare and Fletcher's Palamon and Arcite: A study in characterization

Волчанов Джордже. **Відмінність versus подібність шекспірівсько-флетчерівських Паламона і Арсіти: аналіз образотворення.**

У статті спростовується загальноприйнята думка, що саме слово «подібність» є ключовим у характеристиці Паламона і Арсіти – героїв п'єси «Двоє шляхетних родичів», написаної Вільямом Шекспіром у співавторстві з Джоном Флетчером. Натомість стверджується, що їхні особистості є відмінними протягом усієї п'єси, та що саме Шекспір був тим, хто задавав тон у вибудовуванні цих образів. Попри вагання Флетчера, родичі постають на сцені як енергійні, послідовні і явно відмінні один від одного персонажі. У них немає тотожних рис, але майстерність співавторів у підтримці балансу між нашими симпатіями до того чи іншого героя робить їх для нас вельми схожими.

Ключові слова: *Вільям Шекспір, Джон Флетчер, п'єса «Двоє шляхетних родичів», Паламон, Арсіта відмінність, подібність, імітування, співавторство.*

Shakespeare's last play, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, co-written with John Fletcher in 1613, is a rewriting of "The Knight's Tale" from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which, in turn, is based on Boccaccio's *Teseida*. Although the plot is set against the mythological background of an age inhabited by Athenian heroes (Theseus, Hippolyta, Pirithous), the protagonists featured in the title are to be found "nowhere in the Greek body of myth", as they "are creations strictly of

the mediaeval romancers (…), mediaeval knights, brave, noble, chivalrous beyond all qualification, and devoted to one another"[1]. As exemplars of ideal friendship, Palamon and Arcite also belong to a tradition of "sworn brotherhood, which sometimes emphasize[s] the almost identical appearance of two men, also hinted at in the common plot device of one friend fighting in another's armour. The tale of Titus and Gysippus emphasizes the interchangeability to the point where one man can marry the heroine in the place of the other"[2]. In Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakespeare and Fletcher alike, the story ends precisely with a marriage in which the appointed bridegroom is replaced, by a swift twist of fate, by another man. And this marriage is preceded by the vacillations of the maid whose love is at stake in the competition between the two kinsmen turned rivals.

The heroes' literary genealogy and the maid's indecision about the man she should choose ("… having two fair gauds of equal sweetness / Cannot distinguish, but must cry for both," IV.2.53-54) has long made critics to discuss the characterization of Palamon and Arcite in terms of *sameness* rather than difference. Theodore Spencer set the trend in 1939, when he wrote that both Shakespeare and Fletcher realized that for the story to work at all, Palamon and Arcite would have to be "colourless and indistinguishable"; Spencer drew the conclusion that Shakespeare was "no longer interested in the development of character (…) no longer fully interested in what he was doing"[3]. Decades later Talbot Donaldson claimed that the "differences [in characterization] Chaucer wrote in or inherited from Boccaccio the dramatists wrote out. They did this largely, I suppose, to prevent our taking sides in the

[1] Cf. Isaac Asimov, *Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare*, Vol. 1, New York, Wings Books, 1993, p. 60.

[2] Lois Potter, (ed.), Introduction to *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series, London, Thomson Learning, 2002, p. 55.

[3] Theodore Spencer, *"The Two Noble Kinsmen,"* in *Modern Philology 36*, 1939, pp. 255-276.

quarrel and thus being distracted from the more important issue of the sad destruction of friendship"[4].

Michael Bristol likewise contributed to the critics' consensus about the *sameness* of the kinsmen, when he rejected the "attempts in interpretive literature on this play to discover differences between the two principal characters. These readings evidently assume that allocation of individuality would somehow make the play stronger, or more aesthetically satisfying. However, any attempt to differentiate between Arcite and Palamon would be to deny what I take to be the essential narrative and dramatic premise, namely that the two cousins are exact sociological twins and that this exact social duplication is logically necessary to the depiction of social violence"[5]. Bristol referred to the kinsmen's "exact social equivalence" in the light of René Girard's *Violence and the Sacred*, in which the French theorist argued that the existence of twins or duplicates creates a highly explosive problem of social classification: "Two individuals appear, where only one had been expected, and they share a single personality"[6]. Interestingly, Bristol did not build his argument on the basis of his own close reading of the play itself, choosing instead to take a French theory book as the premise of his interpretation. In the second part of this article I shall refute Bristol's method and stance arming myself with hopefully more convincing arguments derived from the two co-authors' text and from various text-oriented approaches to it. According to Bristol's bizarre method, the truth is not to be found, after all, in Shakespeare and Fletcher's play but in a French theorist's abstract speculations that validate the Shakespearean fictional world. I have exposed the

[4] Talbot Donaldson, *Swan at the Well: Shakespeare Reading Chaucer*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985, p. 56.

[5] Michael D. Bristol, "Shakespeare and the Problem of Authority," in Charles Frey, ed., *Shakespeare, Fletcher, and The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1989, pp. 88-89.

[6] René Girard *apud* Michael D. Bristol, *loc. cit.*, p. 89.

shortcomings of such "postmodern" approaches to Shakespeare's plays in the bulkiest chapter of my doctoral thesis and I have criticized the often servile attitude of British and American academics keen to season their writings with the latest French flavours for the sake of their seeming updated and "well-read". I have dubbed this servile attitude *the French complex* of English literature[7]. And I share Harold Bloom's opinion, frequently reiterated throughout his monumental *The Western Canon* and *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, that Shakespeare does not need theoretical models to be interpreted insofar as he precedes all theories in his profound knowledge of the individual, society, and mankind.

The flip side of my allegiance to Bloom's general views on Shakespeare and the Parisian "Resentniks" is that Bloom himself, in discussing *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, takes at face value Theodore Spencer's arguments about the kinsmen's characterization and jumps to conclusions, readily accepting that while in Chaucer "Palamon and Arcite are virtually indistinguishable", in the introduction of Palamon and Arcite in Act One, Scene Two "Shakespeare wastes no art in rendering them at all distinct from each other; they seem, indeed, as inseparable cousins, to share the same high, somewhat priggish moral character, and to exhibit no personality whatsoever"[8].

Ironically, the nearly general consensus on the kinsmen's *sameness* seems to have led to rather comical slips of the pen made by distinguished critics and academics. Charles Frey, the very editor of the best collection of articles and essays written on *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, makes an incredible blunder when he writes: "When Arcite dies, Palamon says to

[7] See George Volceanov, "Chapter 10: Shakespeare in the light of postmodern criticism," especially subchapter "Shakespeare à la Française", *The Shakespeare Canon Revisited*, Bucureşti, 2005, pp. 100-132.

[8] Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, New York, Riverhead Books, 1999, pp. 698, 701.

Emilia: 'To buy you I have lost what's dearest to me' (V.3.112)"[9]. But anyone who has read the play knows that these words are uttered by Arcite in the aftermath of his victory over Palamon, when Theseus greets him as a victor in the tournament and gives him Emilia's hand. In fact, these words foreshadow Palamon's later lament, when, at Arcite's death, he tells Emilia: "That we should things desire which do cost us / The loss of our desire!" (V.4.110-111).

Donald K. Hedrick makes a similar slip of the pen in the same volume, when he writes about the Jailer's Daughter's cue "Did you ne'er see the horse he gave me?" (V.2.45) and then claims that her imaginary horse "is nicely contrasted to the pair of horses given by Emilia to Palamon and intended for military collaboration"[10]. Hedrick obviously refers to the horses Emilia actually gives Arcite, mentioned by the latter in his monologue opening Act Three, Scene One.

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In the remaining part of this article I shall try to substantiate how damaging to the overall interpretation of the play it is to narrow down the characterization of Palamon and Arcite to the idea of their sameness, especially to the detriment of the differences between them. Differences are inevitable as long as we accept that, in fact, in this collaborative play, we have two pairs of characters to compare and to contrast: Shakespeare's Palamon, Fletcher's Palamon, Shakespeare's Arcite, and Fletcher's Arcite. Ideally, each of the two Palamons and each of the two Arcites concur to the rounded characters that are ultimately reduced to the one psychic and social entity bearing the name of either Palamon or Arcite. But as the story is not the original invention of the

[9] Charles Frey, "Collaborating with Shakespeare: After the Final Play," in *Shakespeare, Fletcher, and The Two Noble Kinsmen,* ed. cit., p. 41.

[10] Donald K. Hedrick, "'Be Rough With Me': The Collaborative Arenas of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*," in Charles Frey, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 64.

playwrights, a diachronic survey might shed some light on the way in which the two authors refashioned, reinvented and brought to the stage characters with a long literary history. *Difference*, *distinction*, *contrast* are key words in Lois Potter's analysis of the changes the two heroes undergo from one age to another, from one author to another: "If Boccaccio's portrayal of the kinsmen was weighted towards Arcite, and Chaucer's towards Palamon, the dramatists seem to have attempted to differentiate them yet retain a balance of sympathy. The character distinction does not begin until II.2, but thereafter both Shakespeare and Fletcher seem to envisage them in terms of the conventional but effective contrast between a calm man (Arcite) and a passionate one (Palamon). This later becomes a contrast between the influences of Mars and Venus, comparable to what one finds within Othello or the Antony of *Antony and Cleopatra*"[11].

Ann Thompson likewise advances a diachronic analysis of the whole play and minutely scrutinizes the way in which in following, or deviating from, Chaucer the two co-authors did, or did not, construct the two kinsmen as coherent characters. The co-authors' different treatment of the source text sometimes produces variations within the character of one and the same hero. And yet these variations are less significant than the overall coherence of the characters, which makes it obvious that Shakespeare and Fletcher wrote as true collaborators, not competitors.

Ann Thompson emphasizes the fact that Act One, Scene Two is not in the source texts, but is added by Shakespeare in order to introduce Palamon and Arcite[12]. The scene is not strictly necessary to the plot and, according to Thompson, the kinsmen "are not strongly differentiated in this scene, and do not reveal the characteristics that the plot and Fletcher are later

[11] Lois Potter, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

[12] Ann Thompson, *Shakespeare's Chaucer*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1978, p. 176.

to give them"[13]. The truth of the latter statement is arguable. In introducing the two kinsmen, Shakespeare touches in passing one of his favourite themes: *imitation.* Here Palamon strongly asserts his personality in his will to preserve his "self" untainted by useless imitation.

What need I
Affect another's gait, which is not catching
Where there is faith? Or to be fond upon
Another's way of speech, when by mine own
I may be reasonably conceived? (I.2.44-48)

Palamon's wish to preserve his independence in the face of fashion might serve as a lesson to a certain brand of present-day academics. (Alexander Pope would later tackle this topic as well in *An Essay on Criticism*). Palamon is reminiscent of the Antony of *Julius Caesar*, who rightly looked down on Lepidus on the following grounds:

A barren-spirited fellow; one that feeds
On abjects, arts, and imitations,
Which out of use and staled by other men,
Begins his fashion. (IV.1.36-39)

Palamon also seems to echo the old Duke of York of *Richard II*, who likewise criticized the "tardy apish nation" that "limps after in base imitation" of fashions and manners imported from Italy (*Richard II*, II.1.21-23). I strongly believe that in Palamon's strong rejection of imitation, dissimulation, and dissembling Shakespeare sets up the first implicit contrast between the two characters. Unlike Palamon, Arcite will turn out to be one of the countless "actors" that populate Shakespeare's plays. He will later enjoy playing a different *persona* at Theseus' court in Act Three. And his whole career seems to have been a gratuitous play-acting when, in his dying speech, he removes his mask and acknowledges, "I was false / Yet never treacherous" (V.4.92-93). *False* here may refer to his acting, to his falling in love with Emilia at first sight only

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 177.

in mimicry, and *spite*, of Palamon. Richard Abrams endorses this view and sees Arcite's love for Emilia in II.2 arising out of the desire "to spite" Palamon[14]. Theseus' lines uttered immediately after Arcite's death ("His part is played and, though it were too short, / He did it well", V.4.102-103) describe the dead hero's career in metadramatic terms: they should be interpreted as a *mise en abîme* or as Shakespeare's dramatic irony.

In Act One, Scene Two, when Palamon complains about the unhappy fate of misused veterans, Arcite turns out to be the keener, more alert observer of social phenomena. He is the one who criticizes the rule of appearance (evil in disguise) over normal behaviour. It is Arcite who sees Thebes as a stage on which only those who play their parts well are rewarded by authority. His description of Thebes echoes the poet's dissatisfaction voiced in Sonnet 66:

> *...where every evil*
> *Hath a good colour; where every seeming good's*
> *A certain evil; where not to be e'en jump*
> *As they are here were to be strangers… (I.2.38-41)*

It is presumably easier for one to put on a mask and participate in the game of social conventions if one already is keenly aware of what is going on around him and needs no "training" for the occasion. And this partly explains Arcite's protean personality in contrast with Palamon's constancy throughout the play.

The next scene in which the two kinsmen return to the stage is Act Two, Scene Two. Ann Thompson's commentary on Shakespeare and Fletcher's use of Chaucer again underlines the "contrast set up between the more rational, realistic Arcite, and the passionate Palamon"[15]. In the following scene, written by Fletcher, Arcite is highly consistent with Shakespeare's plot device of *Pericles*, where

[14] Cf. Lois Potter, *op. cit.*, p. 100.
[15] Ann Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

disguise and the victory in a tournament offer a rapid advancement of the hero[16]. And in Act Three, Scene One, when the cousins accidentally meet in the woods, and Palamon accuses Arcite of treachery to Theseus, the "distinction between the cousins [Arcite's calm contrasted with Palamon's anger] continues throughout the scene"[17]. Arcite's following cue may be considered a prologue to the French art of conversation that was to flourish in the second half of the seventeenth century; he displays the typical features of the *homme honnette*:

> *Pray be pleased*
> *To show in generous terms yours griefs, since that*
> *Your question's with your equal, who professes*
> *To clear his own way with the mind or sword*
> *Of a true gentleman. (III.1.53-57)*

Arcite's "calm" ought to be interpreted as a good actor's main asset. While Palamon always remains "himself", Arcite is able to control his emotions and to appear either as a perfect gentleman or as a dreadful warrior. The latter hypostasis may be just the interpretation of a different part, the one suggested by Henry V at Harfleur, when he asked his soldier to "imitate the action of a tiger" (*Henry V*, III.1.6). Arcite's "Yet pardon me hard language" (III.1.106), his refusal to speak and act in anger has been compared by Lois Potter with Brutus' similarly self-possessed manner displayed in *Julius Caesar*[18]. "Content and anger / In me but have one face" (107-108) might be read as a subconscious confession of Arcite's acting skills, of his ability to check himself in given situations. (See also Arcite's

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 185. Arcite is here one of those typical Shakespearean characters with a penchant for disguise and dissimulation. (See, in this respect, my article "Mimicry, Dissimulation, Disguise: Jesuitical Strategies of Survival in Shakespeare's Plays" printed in this book. In defying Theseus' order to leave the country and in penetrating his court, Arcite acts, indeed, like a Jesuit sent on a secret mission).

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 189.

[18] Lois Potter, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

ability to trick Theseus and his friends in the scene wherein he wins the sports contest disguised as a rustic.) By now both Shakespeare and Fletcher seem to have drawn a clear-cut distinction between the two kinsmen, with Fletcher seemingly taking over Shakespeare's initial contrasts.

Act Three, Scene Three offers the only instance of discrepancy in the characterization of the kinsmen by the two dramatists. Here Fletcher famously deviated from, and contradicted, Shakespeare's conception of the kinsmen's character. The originally innocent cousins suddenly start boasting about their earlier sexual life: the masculine solidarity in their discussion of women seems to wipe out the previous contrasts between the two of them. *Sameness* can be applied to the kinsmen's characterization in this scene, but even so, Ann Thompson contends that "again Arcite is more sympathetically treated, seeming calmer, more generous and less suspicious"[19].

Act Three, Scene Six, the central scene of the play, in which the kinsmen prepare for their single combat in the woods, "keeps up the distinction between the reckless Palamon and the more rational Arcite" in the latter's suggestion that they should postpone the duel rather than be caught red-handed by Theseus[20].

The kinsmen are absent from the stage throughout Act Four. However, in Act Four, Scene Two Emilia's monologue sets up strong contrasts between the two of them. Fletcher keeps the balance and does not allow the maid to have a bias. Balance again does not mean sameness. Arcite's portrait is built in conceits that compare him to Ganymede and Cupid, he has a "sweet" (IV.2.7) and "smiling" (14) face, while Palamon's betrays a melancholic of "still temper" (28), "heavy eyes" (27) and "bold gravity" (42). The differences in physical traits sustain the kinsmen's distinct temperaments,

[19] Ann Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 191.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

and here Fletcher seems to share Shakespeare's much discussed knowledge of Galenic medicine and theory of humours. Later on, in Act Five, Scene Three, which is attributed to Shakespeare, Emilia refers to Arcite's "manly courage" (V.3.43), which is contrasted to Palamon's "melancholy" (49). "Arcite's mirth" (50) is also opposed to "Palamon's sadness" (51). The lines 41-65 corroborate the idea that Shakespeare, unlike Fletcher, was careful about being consistent with what his collaborator wrote. Both dramatists emphasize, in Emilia's description of the two cousins Palamon's melancholy.

The difference in the characterization of Palamon and Arcite reaches its climax in Act Five, Scene One, where "Shakespeare's Arcite says little about love but specifically requests to be 'styl'd the lord o' th' day' (60)", while "Palamon's prayer (…) concentrates on the theme that love is painful, irrational, and undignified. (…) Both [Chaucer and Shakespeare] contrast the efficient and optimistic soldier (Arcite) with the tormented lover at this point"[21].

The end of the play, which coincides with Arcite's death and the disillusionment of the survivor, who finds himself commenting on the shattered dreams of his happy union with Emilia, somewhat levels the two kinsmen and erases some of the most important contrasts in that both of them experience a painful sense of loss: first, Arcite, when he knows that Palamon is to die on the scaffold, and then Palamon, when he sees Arcite die in his presence. They both feel as if they had awakened after yet another midsummer night's dream only to face the horror of the real world. But the heroes' mutual sense of loss and their arriving at the same pessimistic conclusion should not deflect our attention from their distinct personalities, behaviours and allegiances.

In Shakespeare's plays every voice has its counter-voice and in Shakespeare criticism things occur likewise. While

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 200-201.

previous editors simply skipped the issue of the kinsmen's characterization, focusing rather on issues like male friendship[22], Lois Potter seems interested not just in the kinsmen's characterization as suggested by the text but in the way in which several directors did represent Palamon and Arcite on stage in terms of sameness or difference. In the 1985 production directed by Julian Lopez-Morillas for the Berkeley Shakespeare Festival, "the two men were strongly contrasted. Lopez-Morillas took the view that each lover prayed to the god who represented the qualities he most needed: thus the courtly Arcite asked Mars for help while the wiry, aggressive Palamon prayed to Venus"[23]. In the 1986 Royal Shakespeare Theatre production by Barry Kyle, "the casting of a black actor as Arcite recalled the film cliché where the non-white hero dies heroically just in time to evade an awkward plot complication"[24]. In Nagle Jackson's 1994 Oregon Shakespeare Festival production at Ashland "the men's youth, their naïve charm, and the resemblance created by their hairstyles emphasized the problem of deciding between them"[25]. But even in a production that took sameness as its point of departure, in the art director's reading of the play there was a moment of truth when the audience had to shift its sympathy towards one of the characters, "as Arcite took on the frightening qualities of the god he worshipped. His shouted

[22] Eugene M. Waith, ed., *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, The Oxford Shakespeare, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 46-57. In her Arden Shakespeare edition Lois Potter counters the importance assigned to this type of friendship and argues that at times the kinsmen behave in a way that make one feel "tempted to see the play as a parody of friendship literature". Professor Potter refers to the moment in Act Three, Scene Six, when they "not only try to kill each other, but, when Theseus is about to sentence them, Palamon actually asks to see his friend die first, 'That I may tell my soul he shall not have her' (III.6.179)" (*op. cit.*, p. 57).

[23] Lois Potter, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

[25] *Ibid.*

prayer to Mars contrasted with Palamon's gentle appealing address to Venus (helped, admittedly, by careful cutting)"[26].

Lois Potter has taken the pains to produce some interesting statistics about the two kinsmen. In the notes accompanying the *dramatis personae*, Professor Potter shows that "with 589 lines, [Palamon] has the largest part in the play", while Arcite "has 514 lines, the second-largest role"[27]. Elsewhere in her critical apparatus, Professor Potter also refers to "the choice of pronouns" (Palamon and Arcite's use of the pronouns "thou" and "you" – the former prefers "thou", while the latter mostly uses "you") as "a characterization device, consciously used by both authors"[28]. I shall take Lois Potter's argument a step further and claim that the main difference between the two kinsmen resides in Palamon's being at times too loquacious contrasted with Arcite's tight-lipped demeanour. I have never seen the play in performance, and had I seen it, the impression I would have got might have been distorted by the usual cuts in performance, but as a reader and translator of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* it has occurred to me that Palamon talks, indeed, too much. And one may wonder whether this is a manly or a womanly feature.

In Thomas Howell's *Devises*, published in 1581, there is a six-line poem whose title, "Women are words, Men are deeds", may suggest further distinction between Palamon and Arcite. Russ McDonald, speculating on Shakespeare's late style in the romances, mentions that the misogynist attack on women was often a simultaneous attack on language. Ever since St Augustine, verbal signs had been considered feminine. Words connoted corruption and impermanence, and were linked with the body, specifically with the female

[26] *Ibid.*
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 136.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

body[29]. Some years ago I argued that in literary texts whose topos is *carpe diem* men are both words and deeds. Their words (rhetoric) precede their deed (the act of seduction)[30]. Palamon, of the two kinsmen, being the more verbose, seems to be the more effeminate.

During the Renaissance melancholy was frequently associated with effeminacy. Falling in love was equated with becoming a woman. Romeo admits in *Romeo and Juliet*, "O sweet Juliet / Thy beauty hath made me effeminate" (III.1.113-114). Bruce R. Smith points out that effeminacy cannot be relegated to a social type, as it haunts even the hyper-masculine heroes of Shakespeare's Roman plays[31]. For other critics, effeminacy does not carry a negative connotation. Jill Mann, in her discussion of Chaucer's Troilus (yet another hero Shakespeare borrowed and refashioned for the stage), argues that the male hero is a *feminized* hero and his unreserved surrender to the force of love is for Chaucer not a sign of weakness but of generous nobility[32]. Jill Mann underlines the idea that "feminized" is not to be equated with "effeminate"[33]. Whether effeminate or feminized, Palamon, the loquacious kinsman, turns to Venus for help (he is a man-child in love with a woman, begging a goddess' help) while the manlier Arcite, whose horsemanship (a fact reiterated over and over again in the text) carries the connotation of controlled or uncontrolled passion, unbridled desire, but also blatant virility, asserts his allegiance to Mars.

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[29] Russ McDonald, "Late Shakespeare: Style and the Sexes," in *Shakespeare Survey 46, Shakespeare and Sexuality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 97.

[30] George Volceanov, "*Carpe Diem* and the Innocent Seduced: Two Sides of the Same Coin," in *Analele Universităţii "Spiru Haret,"* Seria Filologie, Limbi şi literaturi străine, Nr. 2, 2000, pp. 125-132.

[31] Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 207.

[32] Jill Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, Second edition, 2002, p. 128.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

The kinsmen's cast of mind differs from one another in the telling scene of their falling in love at first sight. Arcite notoriously makes the difference when he spites Palamon with his claim:

I will not [love her] as you do, to worship her
As she is heavenly and a blessed goddess.
I love her as a woman, to enjoy her. (II.2.163-165)

Arcite's worldly views are later sustained by a surprisingly mercantile vocabulary. In his passionate soliloquy at the opening of Act Three, Scene One, he describes Emilia's beauty in words that almost turn her into a commodity. For him, Emilia is "sweeter / Than [May's] gold buttons on the bough, or all / The enamelled knacks o' th' mead, or garden" (III.1.6-7), "the jewel o' the wood, o' th' world" (10-11). Shakespeare's clusters of metaphors strangely combine the freshness of the green world with the mercantile trade of jewellery. The "economics" of Arcite's male discourse are again conspicuous in Arcite's speech as victor in the tournament:

To buy you I have lost what's dearest to me
Save what is bought, and yet I purchase cheaply,
As I do rate your value. (V.3.112-114)

Shakespeare seems to draw his audience's attention to the fact that acquiring a bride is not just a social contract; it is an economic one as well. The same idea is strongly emphasized by Prospero in *The Tempest* in his famous warning: "Then, as my gift and thine own acquisition / Worthily purchased, take my daughter…" (IV.1.13-14). The commercial terms used by Arcite and Prospero seem to indicate that Shakespeare's man, whether a father or a suitor, shares the attitude of what might be termed a *homo economicus* long before the appearance of Defoe's individualist bourgeois characters[34].

[34] For a more detailed discussion of Emilia viewed as a commodity by the men in *The Two Noble Kinsmen,* see my earlier article "Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The*

Back to Lois Potter's statistics, I shall briefly discuss the distribution of lines between Palamon and Arcite, or among each of the two cousins and other characters on stage, and see whether statistics are telling or not in terms of the protagonists' characterization.

Of the two dramatists it was Shakespeare who emphasized the loquacity / brevity dichotomy in characterization. In Act One, Scene Two, Arcite has the opening and ending cue, but Palamon's 65 lines, contrasted to Arcite's 41, are a clear indicator of the kinsmen's distinct character.

In the first part of Act Two, Scene Two (1-115, before Emilia's entrance), as Theseus' prisoners in Athens (II.2), the two cousins' speeches are almost equally long: Palamon is allotted 57 lines, while Arcite utters 58. As usual with Fletcher, he tends to disregard Shakespeare's outline of the kinsmen's characterization and make Arcite equally loquacious. Needless to say, in this part of the scene both heroes are bombastic: the recollection of their past deeds and of their heroic feats is expressed in words cascading in a competition of rant. Next, Fletcher completely overthrows Shakespeare's character delineation as he allots Arcite 41 lines and Palamon 33.5 during their voyeuristic encounter with Emilia. There are two possible explanations of this fact: either Fletcher is a terribly careless collaborator, spiting his senior-fellow's directions, or Arcite's unusual verbosity is, indeed, used to suggest that, as Richard Abrams has pointed out, he actually is overdoing it just to spite his cousin. (And I have already discussed that in the final scene he himself will somehow refer to this very idea in his dying speech, when he concedes that Palamon is justly entitled to have Emilia as his bride.) The third part of the scene, which begins with the

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Two Noble Kinsmen – A Prologue to the Patriarchal Politics of the Restoration Theatre?," in *Living in Between and on Borders*, Iaşi, Universitas XXI, 2003, pp. 312-318.

Jailer's entry, has Palamon utter 45 lines in expression of his grief at the news that Arcite will be released while he is removed to another room, which precludes him from seeing Emilia thereafter. Arcite, in tone with his character as portrayed by Shakespeare, speaks only half a line at the news of his release.

In the following scene Fletcher seems to come to terms with Shakespeare's handling of Arcite's character. Here Arcite has a monologue of 24 lines in which he complains about his banishment from Athens and about Palamon's happier position. But then, once again in Shakespearean fashion, he becomes tight-lipped and utters only 4 lines during his encounter with the five rustics. By now he has assumed the mask he will wear in Athens up to Act Three, Scene Six. As a dissembler, he speaks in brief speeches that betray nothing about his real identity. The scene concludes with another monologue (9 lines) in which he explicitly sets forth his strategy, reminiscent of Edgar in *King Lear* and Caius Marcius in *Coriolanus*: "I'll venture / And in some poor disguise be there" (II.4.81-82).

Arcite's next entry occurs in Act Two, Scene Five, when, disguised as a countryman, he is honoured as the victor in the wrestling and running contest. Out of the 64 lines spoken in this scene, 37 seven are allotted to Theseus and Arcite (19.5 lines per each of them). Even so, Arcite appears to be carefully tight-lipped in a scene in which he asked, in Homeric fashion, details about his whereabouts and he cautiously builds the image of a man of volatile identity. Moreover, in these lines Arcite also manages to speak to more than one character (he is at the centre of everyone's attention), to be appointed Emilia's servant, and to accept the fatal gift (the pair of horses). Manliness and brevity are his dominant features throughout the scene.

The treatment of the two kinsmen in Act Three, Scene One corroborates Shakespeare's authorship. The scene opens

with Arcite's soliloquy overheard by Palamon. After the 29.5 lines of Arcite's monologue the scene turns to dialogue, and the distribution of lines between the cousins points out Shakespeare's view of a loquacious Palamon versus Arcite, the man of few words. Arcite speaks only 41.5 lines in reply to Palamon's 53 lines. Arcite once again displays an infinite dignity in his rejection of Palamon's recriminations. His "Yet pardon me hard language" (106) clearly shows his refusal to speak in rude terms. Self-possession and self-conscious linguistic behaviour may be considered two essential traits in Arcite's construction of identity in the given context (his being overheard, and then exposed as a traitor, by Palamon). Arcite's brevity and anti-rhetorical stance is obvious in his repeated advice about Palamon's useless rant: "And talk of it no more" (116).

The next two scenes in which the kinsmen are brought to the foreground have been attributed to Fletcher. In Act Three, Scene Three, as well as in Act Three, Scene Six, Fletcher seems to have come, at long last, to terms with Shakespeare's delineation of the kinsmen, even though in both scenes he allots Arcite more lines than Palamon (32 lines versus 21 in the former, and 64.5 versus 50.5, respectively, up to Theseus' entry, with 16 more lines allotted to Palamon in the opening soliloquy of the latter scene) as if to write, once more, against the rules set up by his senior colleague. Here Arcite is thoroughly consistent with his Shakespearean counterpart in his rejection of rant, as in the following examples:

No more of these vain parleys; let us not,
Having our reputation with us,
Make talk for fools and cowards. (III.3.10-12)

Defy me in these fair terms, and you show
More than a mistress to me, no more anger,
As you love anything that's honourable!
We were not bred to talk, man. (III.6.25-26)

The last line is almost proverbial in its content, reminding Palamon that men are deeds, not words! Although Fletcher's Palamon speaks much less than Shakespeare's, there is a certain consistency in his delineation by Fletcher as well. Shakespeare's Palamon is always keen on having the last word in any dialogue with anyone, as apparent from his cues introduced by "But this one word" (III.1.116) and "Nay, pray you – ", and so is Fletcher's. Fletcher's Palamon has the same verbal tics and the same attitude towards his interlocutor when he counters Arcite's "Is there aught else to say?" (III.6.93), uttered before the beginning of the duel in the woods, with "This only, and no more" (94). In this brief introduction to a pretty long speech (94-101) the two Palamons created by Fletcher and Shakespeare merge together into one human entity.

At times, Palamon seems to be paranoid in his treatment of his interlocutors: even when he is caught duelling by Theseus and branded by the latter as a "malicious traitor" (132) he has the gall to demand the ruler's attention instead of letting him proceed with his speech. Palamon's abrupt and quite rude interruption, "Hold thy word, Theseus" (136), points out that, for him, he himself is the centre of the universe and the man to be listened to by anybody else. And he has the guts to go on for 20 more lines in which he wickedly exposes Arcite's scheming. Arcite's explanation of their trespassing law is shorter: it has only 14.5 lines in which the self-conscious warrior inserts a brief remark clearly pointing to his preference for fewer words: "Let me say thus much" (161). In the remaining part of the scene, the cousins' cues are scattered among the other characters' speeches, but Palamon clearly appoints himself spokesman for both of them. His cues are made up of 8-7-2-0.5-0.5 lines (all in all, 18 lines), while Arcite's remaining cues consist of 4.5-2-0.5 lines (a sum total of 8 lines). And, as a self-appointed spokesman, it

is Palamon who assures Theseus, "We dare not fail thee, Theseus" (305), having once again the last word.

Interestingly, in writing the passages preceding the duel proper, when the cousins arm each other and remember their past feats, Fletcher seems to have hit the nail on the head when he made Arcite confess: "Yet a little I did / By imitation" (80-81). This either self-conscious or unwitting remark perfectly dovetails with the earlier Arcite envisaged by Shakespeare, with the protean hero that falls in love with Emilia only to spite (and imitate!) his best friend. Arcite acknowledges Palamon's lasting influence on him and his attempt to emulate Palamon: "you outdid me, cousin / I never saw such valour" (73-74); "you outwent me, / Nor could my wishes reach you" (79-80). A simple reading of these lines might suggest that Arcite the protean hero is always an imitator, a dissembler, and / or an actor that is able to adapt himself to any given situation and put on any possible mask, while Palamon is the constant *self* that refuses any social role-play and aims at preserving his own integrity in any given circumstance. A subtler reading, however, may imply that while Arcite imitates Palamon's conduct and *persona* in erotic matters, it was, in fact, Palamon who may have imitated Arcite's military skill and stamina. But, of course, Palamon would never acknowledge any such indebtedness, and Arcite is not aware of this possibility either. Such a reading obviously disagrees with Lopez-Morillas' aforementioned stage version, in which a courtly Arcite is opposed an aggressive Palamon, but it also shows that the text accommodates infinite textual interpretations. And yet, such moments when Shakespeare and Fletcher seem to share the same views in character portrayal make me wonder whether the older dramatist had a word to say in revising his younger collaborator's stuff.

Hereafter, the two cousins that take the plot further are Shakespeare's characters again. As usual, Palamon is the first

to speak in Act Five, Scene One, when the cousins address Theseus and then exchange farewell speeches before the tournament. Palamon takes the lead with 10 lines versus Arcite's 6.5 lines. Once in a lifetime, Palamon concedes, "You speak well" (V.1.30). Arcite's 35-line prayer to Mars is negligible compared to Palamon's 68-line prayer to Venus. Paradoxically, Emilia speaks much less than Palamon, contradicting the proverb according to which "women are words". In a totally patriarchal world, women are neither words nor deeds. They become silent, in accordance with the meekness men expect from them. Harold Bloom quotes Palamon's entire soliloquy in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (and then quotes again shorter passages from it) to reach a self-contradictory conclusion that refutes his earlier allegation about the kinsmen's indistinguishable characters: "Suddenly Palamon is endowed with personality, and is radically distinguished from Arcite and from the male audience (…). Palamon is wholly admirable, but he does not quite know what he is saying, and only an authentic exemplar of the chivalric code could speak with his peculiar authority and not sound absurd"[35]. In his lengthy discussion of Palamon's speech, Bloom minutely analyzes the paradox of Venus praised as a guiltless and flawless goddess, notwithstanding her destructive influence on men of all ages. For Bloom, the paradox can be explained as a Shakespearean confession made to himself and a few confidants[36]. At this point, I diverge from Bloom's view and rather interpret the reference to the old man suffering from "the aged cramp", with fingers knit by gout "into knots", and "torturing convulsions" in "his globy eyes", who "had by his young fair fere a boy" (V.1.110-116), as a cryptic allusion to Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham and Lord Admiral, the patron of Philip Henslowe and Edward Alleyn's theatrical troupe, The

[35] Harold Bloom, *op. cit.*, p. 710.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 711.

Lord Admiral's Men. A widower at the age of sixty-seven, in 1603, the Earl soon married again. His wife, aged nineteen at the time, bore him several children. Such marriages invite ribald responses and Howard was never free of ribaldry for the rest of his life. He was eighty-one when his wife bore their last child. There were rumours that the true father of the child was a young page in whose company the Countess of Nottingham spent much time. A year after the Earl's death, the dowager countess married the page[37].

In Act Five, Scene Three, Shakespeare gives up the idea of physical violence represented on stage (with which his audience was familiar from *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*) in favour of reported action; the innovation is strange and foreshadows the French neo-classic tragedy in which *all* the major events occur offstage. Arcite makes a brief appearance towards the end of the scene, and either his sheer exhaustion or his realization of the absurd price he has to pay in the competition between him and Palamon makes him utter the famous three-line cue that critics have so often commented on (V.3.111-114), a cue which also anticipates Palamon's similar remark on the heavy loss represented by Arcite's death.

In the last scene Palamon once again proves to be Arcite's perfect opposite with his tireless loquacity. The first part of the scene, up to the arrival of the messenger and Pirithous, is a discussion among five characters: Palamon, the three knights, and the Jailer. A sixth character, the Executioner, "seems superfluous", as Eugene Waith has put it[38]. Palamon utters 28 of the 40 lines uttered by the five

[37] I first advanced this conjecture in "*The Two Noble Kinsmen:* Theseus' Athens in Shakespeare's London," in *Infinite Londons – Proceedings of the International Meta-conference "Representations of London in Literature and the Arts,"* Sibiu, 19-21 October, 2001, The British Council and "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, pp. 17-30, on the basis of historical facts discussed by Peter Thomson in *Shakespeare's Professional Career*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 160.

[38] Eugene M. Waith, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

participants in the discussion. He speaks a lot and yet he has undergone a subtle change: he is no longer the quarrelsome, aggressive paranoid of the previous scenes. He is a stoic who has accepted his fate and is prepared to face death with a serenity derived from the comfort of a short life opposed to the miseries of old age. And yet, one may sense Shakespeare laughing up his sleeve when he makes Palamon say: "Adieu, and let my life be now as short / As my leave-taking" (V.4.37-38). By now both readers and spectators have grown accustomed with Palamon's verbosity and his patronizing manners. His leave-taking has not been *that* short, and his wish will soon materialize when the Messenger and Pirithous come to announce that his execution is cancelled and he is, in fact, to marry Emilia. His life will actually be as brief as his speech, i.e. much longer than he has ever hoped.

When Palamon meets the dying Arcite he will naturally be the one that speaks more. He is the first to speak, and he asks Arcite, "Give me thy last words" (89). One might suspect him of a shade of cynicism in his confession, "I am Palamon, / One that yet loves thee dying" (89-90). It is easier to love a "dying" enemy than a live, troublesome and belligerent opponent. Arcite's sole speech in this scene, his five-line dignified dying speech is one of the most moving moments in all of Shakespeare's plays, and if I were to make a confession in Harold Bloom's manner, I would admit that when I translated it, it was the only moment in my entire career as a literary translator when I could not help weeping for the death of a fictional character.

Palamon's moment of truth, his famous remark upon the "dear love" one can reach only through "the loss of dear love" closely echoes Arcite's similar remark made earlier in the previous scene. It is somewhat weird to note that Palamon, the man who obstinately refuses to speak and act like other people, turns out to share Arcite's non-romantic, but rather materialist, or economic, jargon in expressing his appraisal of

love and friendship. He speaks about "things" which "do cost us"; and the way "naught could buy / Dear love" (110-112) closely echoes Arcite's rhetoric. Shakespeare seems to ultimately suggest that all men, whether in the guise of a melancholic lover, or in that of a straightforward warrior, are alike in their attitude towards the *object* of their love. In fact, Palamon's mercantile vocabulary is a reminder of his earlier sense of ownership expressed in terms of colonial discourse earlier in the play:

I, that first saw her; I, that took possession
First with mine eye of all those beauties
In her revealed to mankind. (II.2.169-171)

For Palamon, the woman is reduced to the status of possession, while the man fulfils, in turn, the roles of explorer, colonist, and owner of the newfound realm. These lines are partly reminiscent of John Donne's famous Elegy XIX, opening with "License my roaving hands", in which the mistress is metaphorically described as a Newfoundland, a kingdom, empire, and mine of precious stone waiting to be explored, populated and exploited. That the play occasionally echoes Donne's poetry should not surprise us: as editors of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, both N. W. Bawcutt (in The New Penguin Shakespeare edition of 1977) and Lois Potter[39] draw parallels between the play and several Donne poems.

The conclusion to this brief examination of the two kinsmen's characterization by Shakespeare and Fletcher is that for the most part of the play the heroes are portrayed as distinct, opposite personalities. In constructing two strongly differentiated personalities, the two dramatists did their best to keep the readers' / spectators' sympathy in balance; hence, the illusory lack of distinction between Palamon and Arcite. There

[39] Lois Potter, *op. cit.*, pp. 108, 142, 157, 180, etc. Professor Potter also remarks upon Marco Mincoff's taxonomy of English literary styles, which opposes Ben Jonson and Fletcher, with their classical, correct style, to Donne, Webster, and "late Shakespeare", who wrote in a difficult, "metaphysical" style (pp.108-109).

are two moments in which, notwithstanding the differences in their characterization, the cousins think and act alike. Love and death, or rather the *object* of their love, and imminent death (expected, in Palamon's case, or inevitable, in Arcite's case) are the great levellers of their distinct features: they both betray the patriarchal side of their personality in the way they speak about Emilia, and they both regret the (potential or real) loss of their greatest friend / arch-enemy. In both situations they combine emotion with mercantile jargons. But these rare instances of overlapping character are the exception that proves the rule.