

Camusian Revolt and the Making of Character: Falconbridge in Shakespeare's *King John*

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If thou didst but consent
To this most cruel act, do but despair,
And if thou want'st a cord, the smallest thread
That ever spider twisted from her womb
Will serve to strangle thee. A rush will be a beam
To hang thee on. Or wouldst thou drown thyself,
Put but a little water in a spoon,
And it shall be as all the ocean,
Enough to stifle such a villain up. (IV.iii.125-33)¹

These words of Falconbridge to Hubert register a moment of Camusian revolt in which we hear a transformation of mere speaker into character. This paper will set out to argue that assertion by attempting to pin down a moment of mimetic transformation of persona, or speaker, into something we recognise as having interiority and depth. To do that it will propose Camusian revolt as a way of interpreting dramatic character and as a pattern of dramaturgical craft. Granted, it may seem anachronistic to apply a mid-twentieth century concept to Shakespeare's plays. However, Camus' metaphysical revolt is itself both a re-stated appeal to classical moderation, the Hellenic "tradition of *mesure*,"² and a secularisation of prior religious attitudes, thus reflecting what is inherent in the writings of earlier times. That, at any rate, is the line I will pursue in the following discussion. Firstly, a sketched summary of Camusian revolt will seek to establish a pattern or model which can be applied to the mimetic creation of fictional 'character.' Secondly, some critical responses to Falconbridge as a 'character' will be briefly reviewed. Thirdly, Camusian concepts will be applied to the figure of Falconbridge. Finally, an interpretation of

the nine lines quoted above will show why this moment of Falconbridge's utterance marks his birth as a character.

At the threshold of the post-modern era, Albert Camus' *L'Homme révolté* (1951) makes a reasoned argument for a common morality and a traditional concept of the stable self, which he designates by the constantly repeated word 'integrity.' A few years after the hallucinatory horror of the Nazi Armageddon, and the only too real results of an overdetermined mass application of cruelty, Camus is moved to think about what it is that people must do to avoid a repetition of the disaster of saying 'yes' to the seductions of mass ideological manipulation. This seems to me not something that belongs only to the last century, arising from Camus' personal mood of disillusion and an "attempt to understand the times I live in," but rather eminently topical, indeed pressingly so. We are poised on the edge of a war made for the ideological purposes of a Western plutocracy and its super-rich acolytes and about which many people have instinctive feelings of repugnance and revulsion. Perhaps we need urgently to rethink rebellion and the possibilities of saying 'no.'

Camus' advocacy of limit, measure, personal borderline and so on, is fundamentally an appeal to human nature—a concept now formally obsolescent among certain academic élites, although able to return in various guises and forms when called upon."³ An analysis of rebellion" writes Camus, "leads us to the suspicion that, contrary to the postulates of contemporary thought, a human nature does exist, as the Greeks believed."⁴ What an investigation of Camusian rebellion enables us to see is that, whether human nature exists or not, a pattern of portraying and evaluating human character is disclosed by the structure and process of rebellion which Camus describes in *L'Homme révolté*. Whether any continuities in evaluation, structure and process between the mimesis of character and the character of a real person experiencing Camusian rebellion argue for an essentialist continuity of human nature, recognisable both as a real phenomenon and a metaphysical postulate, is not the present object of investigation. However, in the following paper one thing that emerges very strongly

is that the pattern of Camusian revolt can be applied to dramatic characters produced in previous ages (and probably in any age although that needs to be investigated), giving it an ahistorical, supracultural quality. Camusian revolt can contribute to solving a problem of character and characterisation which has been noted by critics, especially critics of Falconbridge, and that is why I advocate it here, as a tool for analysing the representation of dramatic character and, secondarily, as a reminder that at times of ideological coercion there always remains the possibility of saying 'no.'

Saying 'no' is the initiatory act we find at the beginning of *The Rebel*:

What is a rebel? A man who says 'no' but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says 'yes' as soon as he begins to think for himself. A slave who has taken orders all his life, suddenly decides that he cannot obey some new command. What does he mean by saying 'no'. He means, for instance, that 'this has been going on too long, 'you are going too far,' or again 'there are certain limits beyond which you shall not go.' In other words his 'no' affirms the existence of a borderline. He rebels because he categorically refuses to submit to conditions that he considers intolerable and also because he is confusedly convinced that his position is justified [...]. In every act of rebellion the man concerned experiences not only a feeling of revulsion at the infringement of his rights but also a complete and spontaneous loyalty to certain aspects of himself. Thus he implicitly brings into play a standard of values so far from being false that he is willing to preserve them at all costs. (19)

For the rebel, gaining integrity is an assertion of shared values:

The slave asserts himself for the sake of everyone in the world when he comes to the conclusion that a command has infringed on something inside him that does not belong to him alone but which he has in common with other men [...]. (22)

Revolt is therefore not just an egotistical act but projected towards the establishment of common ethical values. The rebel makes contact with "something inside," (quelque chose en lui) "the integrity of one part of his being," a personal "borderline" (une frontière) and realises that "there are certain things in him which are worthwhile [...] and which must be taken into consideration" (19). He discovers "a stan-

dard of values [...] he is willing to preserve [...] at all costs" (19). Camusian revolt is a limit-experience in one other important aspect: revolt contains within it a secular form of martyrdom.

If an individual actually consents to die, and, when the occasion arises, accepts death as a consequence of his rebellion, he demonstrates that he is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of a common good which he considers more important than his own destiny. (21)

The question then arises, what connection can be established between Camusian revolt and the character of Falconbridge in *King John*? As suggested earlier, Falconbridge is recognised by many as Shakespeare's first 'character'; an individual with a personality, a psychology and an affective life. Some critics see Falconbridge as undergoing a process of maturation or ontological formation in the play. In the view of Larry S. Champion, he develops from a "cynical observer of a Commodity-driven world" to a spokesman "for the body politic in the face of foreign invasion."⁵ William Matchett sees him as changing from a "naïve enthusiast," merely following chance, "to a man of mature ability and insight."⁶ James L. Calderwood sees Falconbridge arriving at full maturity in the final moments when he withstands the temptation to usurp the right of the legitimate heir, Henry.⁷ Harold Bloom sees Falconbridge as the first Shakespearean character, a character who "possesses a psychic interior" and is the inaugurating figure of Shakespeare's "invention of the human."⁸ This is too bold for Frank Kermode who nevertheless sees him as a "complicated figure made up of incompatible elements, suggesting not a type but an individual."⁹

What all these critics seem to agree on is that Falconbridge has an incipient individuality insufficiently differentiated to free him up from the background of the play and make him stand out three-dimensionally as Hamlet, or Othello do from their tragedies, or even some of the lesser characters whom we regularly think and write about as having pre- and post-text existence. Unlike them, Falconbridge begins and ends in the play, and is of substance and interest

only there. This may have partly to do with trammels of medieval dramatic convention in the early scenes.

As a piece of theatre writing, Falconbridge can be seen as a vestigial medieval vice figure, associated in the early scenes with mad-cap hilarity and self-confessed calculation, delivering "Sweet, sweet, sweet, poison for the age's tooth" (I.i.213). In the opening scenes he seems to belong to an earlier drama, taking on the role of a comic character, the disruptor. In II.i, Austria asks Falconbridge: "What the devil art thou?" (II.i.134) as if recognising the features of an earlier drama. If not a Devil, he is a Minor Vice, a cracker, a boaster. The whole unwieldy scene is destabilised by the uncertainty of Falconbridge's comedy as it is criss-crossed with elements of proverb, baby-talk, song, jocular aside and slapstick.

While the exposition scenes fail to 'expose' Falconbridge's character, they are off-set by later episodes in which Falconbridge is highly individuated. One example is IV.iii where action and lines anticipate what is to come in the later tragedies. In this scene Falconbridge intercedes to break up a fight with the authority of an Othello: "Your sword is bright, sir; put it up again," (IV.iii.179) echoed, as Frank Kermode points out, by Othello's: "Keep up your bright swords for the dew will rust them" (I.ii.59). I will deal with this scene more fully later. But if we are seriously in search of character we have to start with soliloquy. Falconbridge's longest soliloquy is the famous Commodity speech:

Mad world, mad kings, mad composition!
 John, to stop Arthur's title in the whole,
 Hath willingly departed with a part,
 And France, whose armour conscience buckled on,
 Whom zeal and charity brought to the field
 As God's own soldier, rounded in the ear
 With that same purpose-changer, that sly devil,
 That broker that still breaks the pate of faith,
 That daily break-vow, he that wins of all,
 Of kings, of beggars, old men, young men, maids—
 Who having no external thing to lose
 But the word 'maid'—cheats the poor maid of that—

That smooth-faced gentleman, tickling Commodity.
 Commodity, the bias of the world;
 The world, who of itself is peisèd well,
 Made to run even upon even ground,
 Till this advantage, this vile-drawing bias,
 This sway of motion, this Commodity,
 Makes it take head from all indifferency,
 From all direction, purpose, course, intent.
 And this same bias, this Commodity,
 This bawd, this broker, this all-changing word,
 Clapped on the outward eye of fickle France,
 Hath drawn him from his own determined aid,
 From a resolved and honourable war,
 To a most base and vile-concluded peace.
 And why rail I on this Commodity?
 But for because he hath not wooed me yet.
 Not that I have the power to clutch my hand
 When his fair angels would salute my palm,
 But for my hand, as unattempted yet,
 Like a poor beggar railleth on the rich.
 Well, whiles I am a beggar, I will rail
 And say there is no sin but to be rich,
 And being rich, my virtue then shall be
 To say there is no vice but beggary.
 Since kings break faith upon commodity,
 Gain, be my lord, for I will worship thee! (II.i.562-98)

Clearly Falconbridge does not say 'no' to Commodity. However, in Camusian terms, he registers a conviction about "the absurdity and sterility of the world"—"Mad world, mad kings, mad composition." In other words he begins the speech with a process of thought resulting in a conviction about the world. It is from just this point that Camus sees the spirit of rebellion starting:

Meanwhile we can sum up the initial progress that the spirit of rebellion accomplishes in a process of thought that is already convinced of the absurdity and apparent sterility of the world. (28)

Falconbridge's soliloquy goes on to observe a pattern of behaviour, recognising that the "vile-drawing bias" of the world—Commodity—infests every social level and renders an otherwise well 'peisèd' world

"Mad" as it takes "head from all indifferency, from all direction, purpose, course, intent." Falconbridge rails on Commodity yet his concluding remarks point towards a connivance with its practices. But, while seeming to embrace Commodity in his words, he rejects it in the action of the play. His action in the play does not develop out of the apparent inclination to embrace Commodity in the speech. He seems to be insufficiently formed as a character either to embrace it or reject it outright. The speech is inconclusive in that the character does not work through an inner *agon* towards a decision or a plan of action. Instead of rising to a decisive project for future action, the later stages of the speech drift from image to image toward the four rhyming lines at the end which seem to be more intent on delivering the cue for a scene change than in defining a plan of action for the character. I don't at this stage see Falconbridge as a 'character' in the sense of Ker-mode's 'individual' or an integrated self, but rather more as a locus of possible characters which is also reflected in the variety of his designations: Philip Falconbridge, Bastard, and Sir Richard Plantagenet.

According to Aristotle, character is revealed when a person makes an unobvious decision:

Character is that which reveals personal choice, the kinds of things a man chooses or rejects when that is not obvious. Thus there is no revelation of character in speeches in which the speaker shows no preferences or aversion whatever.¹⁰

Strong characters make unobvious decisions throughout Shakespeare's tragedies: Macbeth to murder Duncan, Othello to murder Desdemona, Lear to give away his entire Kingdom, Brutus to kill his friend, Hamlet not to take revenge. Falconbridge reveals very little character in the soliloquy in Aristotle's tragic sense. The speech ends not with a strong unobvious decision but rather a velleity, a drift, an inclination. While the convention assures us that he is telling the truth, insofar as he perceives it, there is little sense of *anagnorisis*, of discovery in the character, or a discovery of the character to us. So, if Falconbridge has insufficient 'character' to stand and say 'no' in a key soliloquy, how can there be any suggestion of Camusian revolt?

In order to make the Camusian connection we have to begin at the Arthur/Hubert scene (IV.i). John has indicated to Hubert that he wants the child Arthur killed. Later it appears that the sentence has been reduced. Arthur is to be blinded. The stage is, literally, set, the burning coals and instruments are brought in. What we are asked imaginatively to face is the malicious torture of a child, perhaps the murder of a child.

Here we come to a horrendous topos. It is the one Dostoevsky took as his primary example of the incomprehensibility of theodicy in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Cruelty to children, asserts Ivan, who were never occupants of the Garden of Eden and did not eat the apple, is a 'fact' which cannot be compensated for by any promise of eternal life or acquisition of truth. "The entire universe of knowledge is not worth the tears of that child. I say nothing of the suffering of the grown-ups, they have eaten the apple and the devil with them, the devil take them all. But the children!"¹¹

To Ivan it presents an obstacle to understanding, an impediment to access to the truth:

And if the sufferings of children have gone to replenish the sum of suffering that was needed in order to purchase the truth, then I declare in advance that no truth, not even the whole truth, is worth such a price.¹²

It is the topos that engaged Camus as he responded to Dostoevsky's writings¹³ and perhaps most famously it is the one Camus used in speaking to a group of Dominicans at the Monastery of Latour-Maubourg in 1948 on problems of faith.

The insurmountable barrier [to faith] does seem to me to be the problem of evil. But it is also a real obstacle for traditional humanism. There is the death of children, which means a divine reign of terror, but there is also the killing of children which is an expression of a human reign of terror.

It is the topos Camus used in *La Peste*, the suffering and painful death of Othon's child cannot be defended by Paneloux as a working out of the divine plan—of the divine reign of terror—which God

executes on Oran. The critic Ray Davison sees *La Peste* as designed to refute the idea of divine justice and to promote Doctor Rieux's own form of secular humanism. Yet even that humanism is challenged by the human reign of terror executed in a world where children are murdered.

The topos is a limit for each of them. The unbearable limit on which the gates of heaven shut for Ivan, the "insurmountable barrier" for Camus. The limits suggested here are moral and imaginative but also, more precisely, limits of mental function. In the case of Camus limits are set to a *volition* of the mind—faith; for Ivan/Dostoevsky limits are set to a *capacity* of the mind—understanding. Such an interior limit, such a personal borderline (*une frontière*) is what the rebel must reach in order to stand and say 'no.' In other words his 'no' affirms the existence of a borderline (*En somme ce non affirme l'existence d'une frontière*).

The 'no' is not then a *creating* moment of the limit but an *affirming* moment of what has already been sensed. The pressure of the limit forces 'something inside' what may be called 'character' or integrity, to cohere into a stance that says 'no.' Here, I would recall some earlier quotations which have to be constantly borne in mind: "In every act of rebellion the man concerned experiences a complete and spontaneous loyalty to certain aspects of himself" (19). At the moment of revolt, the rebel not only has a "confused conviction that his opinion is justified," but he "refuses to submit to conditions that he considers intolerable" (19). And again: "He is fighting for the integrity of one part of his being" (23).

What is involved in this refusal to submit, as the rebel's opinions and judgements come into play, seems to be a departure from a pre-set script, from a prior subscription of beliefs in an ideology, a cultural dogma or thought-world, and from a discourse that sets their terms. For Camus the script from which he is departing, and is indeed antagonistic to, is Christian theodicy. For Ivan/Dostoevsky the script is Russian orthodox faith. In a moment I will put forward the view that there is a similar moment of departure from script in Falconbridge

which foreshadows the rebel's stance. But to arrive at that point Falconbridge has to develop by way of interaction with Hubert.

We first learn about Hubert's character from the decision he makes in the scene of Arthur's blinding. Affected by the boy's pleading he decides not to go through with it: "Well, see to live. I will not touch thine eye" (IV.i.121). And even to embrace Arthur's cause: "Much danger do I undergo for thee" (IV.i.133). Of course, an alternative view would be that this is not an unobvious choice which reveals character, in Aristotle's sense, but that this scene is simply too horrible to be enacted. In that case Hubert's mind-change would not reveal character but rather indicate a necessary limitation of the action. The action of the scene, as it were, says 'no' to the topos. There are grounds for seeing Hubert more precisely as a rebel who fits the Camusian pattern, largely because of the resonant way in which King John speaks of him as a 'slave.' I will return to this later after examining the crucial interaction between Falconbridge and Hubert which occurs at the scene of Arthur's death (IV.iii). The boy was not murdered but tried to escape his prison by jumping from a wall and died in the fall. Falconbridge and the barons who come across the child's body suspect Hubert. They all appear to think he has murdered the child. One of them, Salisbury, turns to Falconbridge, struggling to put his thought into words:

Sir Richard, what think you? You have beheld,
 Or have you read, or heard, or could you think,
 Or do you almost think, although you see,
 That you do see? Could thought, without this object,
 Form such another? This is the very top,
 The height, the crest, or crest unto the crest,
 Of murder's arms. This is the bloodiest shame,
 The wildest savagery, the vilest stroke,
 That ever wall-eyed wrath or staring rage
 Presented to the tears of soft remorse. (IV.iii.41-50)

Salisbury refers to Falconbridge as Sir Richard, his knightly name, as if appealing to their shared status and ideological viewpoint. He seems to be assuming that Falconbridge will make a similar interpre-

tation of the scene, leading to an equally false judgement. It is an appeal for the same sort of endorsement and collaboration that Pembroke and Bigot give. To Salisbury, Hubert is obviously guilty and deserves to be executed on the spot. But Falconbridge doesn't react like Salisbury and his peers. He doesn't react like a *noble* as Salisbury expects, but like an *individual*, reaching his personal borderline while bringing his own opinions and judgements into play. His distinct individuation from the other characters in this scene, is marked in several ways:

- He does not participate in the superlative-laden language of Salisbury and the nobles.
- He does not speak to Hubert directly, in presence of the other characters.
- He is cautious where they are precipitate; he leaps to no conclusions.

But what is more striking is his comparative silence in this scene. Out of a total of 159 lines he has only 17. For a character who is given more lines than anyone else in the play, including King John, this can be heard as reticence. Falconbridge is silent on stage for a considerable period. Is this silence an indication of depth of character, of existential complexity? In this regard, it is interesting to note the way in which Sartre writes about silence in Camus.

In his essay of 1943, *Explication de L'Etranger*, Sartre invents the phrase *la hantise du silence* and quotes Heidegger's dictum that silence is the authentic mode of speech.¹⁴ *L'Etranger*, he suggests, demonstrates Camus's mode of keeping silent. And he quotes Camus' own remark from *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* that "a man is more of a man by the things he leaves unsaid than by the things he says."¹⁵ Sartre is associating silence with a mode of being: authentic, essentially augmented. Camus also sees silence as a prior condition of the moment of rebellion:

To keep quiet is to allow yourself to believe that you have no opinions, that you want nothing, and in certain cases it really amounts to wanting nothing. Despair, like Absurdism, prefers to consider everything in general and nothing in particular. Silence expresses this attitude very well. But from the moment the rebel finds his voice—even though he has nothing to say but 'no'—he begins to consider things in particular. (20)

With this in mind the silence of Falconbridge in this scene might be considered to signify the potential disclosure of character. When Falconbridge at last addresses Hubert directly he begins by taking up the language of the departed barons, adhering to the pre-set script of shared status and ideology to which Salisbury had appealed by calling him Sir Richard:

Beyond the infinite and boundless reach
Of mercy, if thou didst this deed of death,
Art thou damned, Hubert. [...]
Thou'rt damned as black—nay, nothing is so black—
Thou art more deep damn'd than Prince Lucifer.
There is not yet so ugly a fiend of hell
As thou shalt be, if thou didst kill this child. (IV.iii.117-24)

One might say that the silence of potential character has foundered in conventional utterances taking their tone from the script of Christian vocabulary and the superlative locutions of the barons. But then there is a startling modulation in Falconbridge's language when he speaks again:

If thou didst but consent
To this most cruel act, do but despair,
And if thou want'st a cord, the smallest thread
That ever spider twisted from her womb
Will serve to strangle thee. A rush will be a beam
To hang thee on. Or wouldst thou drown thyself,
Put but a little water in a spoon,
And it shall be as all the ocean,
Enough to stifle such a villain up. (IV.iii.125-33)

What happens in this language is crucial in terms of character. The speech signifies that a limit has been reached, there is a turning away,

a saying 'no,' a departure from the script as we hear a new and individual utterance—a voice has been found.

Falconbridge's language rushes away from the monstrosity of the presumed murder by inverting the proportion between the immense evil of the act and the reduced terms of expression. The result is a kind of inverted hyperbole, referring in extravagant conceptual terms to small, light and tiny objects: the spider's web, the reed, the spoon. These most insignificant things are imbued with repugnance of an act which outrages all order and justice. Although the verbs do not go as far as to suggest will and passion in the objects, they establish a kind of collaborative agency among them, brought together in the proleptic justice of "stifl[ing] such a villain up." But, noticeably, the abstract concept of Justice is absent. "Stifling" the villain foresees a specific end, asphyxiation, a choking-off of life, not anything done in the name of Justice. Although the speech begins with a string of abstracts familiar to Christian discourse: damnation, hell and Prince Lucifer, it then modulates to the pre-lapsarian, Adamic language of naming things: the thread, the beam, the cord.

Since the play as a whole treats religion as a mere instrument of political expediency, religious language would be inadequate to express the limit that Falconbridge has reached. In order to find an expression of moral power at this point Shakespeare borrows from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* vocabulary of spider's webs and reeds, of humble, rustic, mechanical objects: the beam, the thread, the cord, the rush, and renders it in terms that are pagan and magical, not Christian. If there is a religion here it is the pagan religion of *genii loci* rather than Christian doctrine.

This speech spurns orthodox language, renounces transcendent concepts and turns ethical thought empirically towards things, concrete, particular things. Having found his voice, then, Falconbridge is beginning to 'consider things in particular.' Thought is attached to particular objects: small, insignificant, common objects, inherently real and true. We do not at this point hear any more of God than we would hear from an easy atheist like Sartre or an uneasy one like Camus.

Christian concepts and abstractions give way to *genii loci*, the world will take its own revenge in the minutiae of things rebelling, not the divine *justitia*.

The speech implies 'revolt' in the sense that Falconbridge discovers something in himself which issues in individual utterance. He has encountered 'la frontière,' 'quelquechose en lui,' the limit which forces character to appear. This is the point which corresponds to the first movement of Camusian revolt, laying claim to the integrity that enables the rebelling subject to say 'no'—to find a voice. The integrity, individuality or 'character' is heard in Falconbridge's individuated language renouncing the pre-script of Christian abstraction and the lexicon of the nobles. Similarly, revolt forces an integration of self in the Camusian rebel, as a solid ground on which to take the stance of saying 'no.' These elements work to suggest that there is a correspondence between the moment of revolt in the Camusian rebel and the disclosure of 'character' in the fictional representation.

The scene is also interesting in terms of the Aristotelian definition of character. By the end of the interaction with Hubert, Falconbridge seems to have made an unobvious decision, unobvious certainly to Salisbury, Pembroke and Bigot, unobvious in terms of his ideological position as one of the nobles. He decides not only to let Hubert go but commands him to 'take the body up'—a charge he would hardly give to a man suspected of implication in the murder; in fact an exonerating charge. He has made the unobvious decision that Hubert is not guilty. The guilt, or not, of Hubert is also of interest to King John later in the play. Referring back to the moment when Hubert had perfectly understood his unspoken intentions, King John, like Henry IV at the end of *Richard II*, tries to dissociate himself from political assassination.

The mutual compact of thought is symbolised by the finely crafted division of a line:

King John: Death.

Hubert: My lord?

King John:

A grave.

Hubert: He shall not live. (III.iii.65-66)

Later King John denies the palpable intention behind the semantics of this line by claiming that he did not mean what he implied. In exonerating himself, John throws the blame on to Hubert whom he casts in the pre-rebellious role of 'slave.'

It is the curse of kings to be attended
 By slaves that take their humours for a warrant
 To break within the bloody house of life,
 And on the winking of authority
 To understand a law, to know the meaning
 Of dangerous majesty, when perchance it frowns
 More upon honour than advised respect. (IV.ii.208-14)

At this point John, convinced that Hubert carried out his orders, rebukes his servant for acting when he should have refused to act. This scene is a reverse parallel, or chiasmic inversion, of the episode between Pompey and Menas in *Anthony and Cleopatra*. Menas, observing that Pompey has the opportunity to do away with Anthony and Octavius at a stroke, by cutting the cable of the ship on which they are feasting, then slitting their throats, suggests the plan to Pompey who replies: "Ah, this thou shouldst have done / And not have spoke on't: In me tis villainy; / In thee 't had been good service" (II.vii.74-76).¹⁶

Here the servant is rebuked for not acting on his own initiative. So, the most loyal servants, whether failing to act without orders or being understood to have acted on orders, equally fail to please the superiors to whom they are loyal. Unfortunately for Hubert, his failure to carry out the killing of Arthur is not material to events for the boy dies accidentally and with him John's chances of survival. Nevertheless, Hubert's decision not to carry out orders, his revulsion at a scene of cruelty, his saying 'no' to participation in it and, tellingly, John's later reference to 'slave,' all indicate elements of Camusian rebellion which suggest 'character' in Hubert, indicating an inner life of thought and judgment. Hubert said 'no' to the slave's way of taking "humours for a warrant" which marked his moment of rebellion. We can assume that, under the pleading of Arthur, he 'thought for himself' and 'considered things in particular' which disclosed his 'integrity.' This is

Hubert's way of saying 'no' and equally of "say[ing] 'yes' as soon as he begins to think for himself" (19). For, although he can continue to serve John, he has found a point at which his 'no' becomes operative, when he reaches his personal borderline. Hubert and Falconbridge, the two characters who most exemplify Camusian elements, are the two most developed and complex characters in the play. Their shared penultimate scene (V.vi), though not profound, mostly consisting of reportage and commentary, is fraught with the background of human characters plunged into a shaky camaraderie on the edge of a 'Mad world.' They do not renounce this world, however, but remain actively engaged, *à l'existentialisme*, having succeeded in wresting from it some personal integrity.

In the final scene, something of the earlier Falconbridge is glimpsed. Less a character than a spokesman for England, a stock figure of reassurance, welcoming in the new order and uttering defiance, he fails to carry his 'character' to the end of the play, much less beyond it. In the final speeches, 'inwardness' lapses into Everyman or Epilogue; there is no complexity, little of that 'character' which had come to a climax in the scene with Hubert (IV.iii). But what broke through in that scene was something which numerous critics have recognised as new to Shakespeare, true interiority of character. Falconbridge's status as a character is crystallised in this scene and proceeds from the various factors discussed: silence, the collapse of abstract and transcendent language, a renunciation of a pre-set script, and a recourse to a referential system grounded in particulars: the reed, the spider's web, the spoon, the beam, the thread. In the constellation of these elements we glimpse the inwardness of Falconbridge as he arrives at the character-generating moment of the Camusian limit.

To develop this idea a little further: can a principle of characterisation be discerned here, a limited but recognisable instrument of character creation? Certainly a similar, but not exact, example is to be found in *Richard III* in a recurrence of the topos that haunts Dostoevsky and Camus: the murder of children. In IV.ii Gloucester, now King Richard, proposes to the Duke of Buckingham that the young

princes should be murdered. "Say, have I thy consent that they shall die?" Buckingham answers by keeping silent: "Give me some breath, some little pause, my lord / Before I positively speak herein: I will resolve your grace immediately" (IV.ii.24-26).¹⁷ We never know what Buckingham decides. Later on Richard cuts off his "My lord, I have considered in my mind / The late demand that you did sound me in" (IV.ii.84-85) with the dismissive "Well, let that pass" (86). However, we can note that silence surrounds Buckingham's decision, suggesting that he had to pause for a moment to consider 'the authentic' Buckingham. We cannot say his decision is an unobvious character-revealing decision because we do not ever know what he decides. But we can note the proximity of silence, in both Falconbridge and Buckingham, to the topos of child-murder. Buckingham does not get as far as the critical limit which forces 'something inside' (we may call it 'integrity' or 'character') to stand against the drift of unexamined moral actions, or what might be called unstructured interiority. In the rebel, prior unstructured interiority is forced to integrate itself into a principled structure that says 'no.' While we cannot say that happens to Buckingham, who distinctly fails to take his rebellious stand, there are clear indications that he has come within a hair's breadth of reaching a limit.

Some of the elements are present in *Othello* where, again, we find the topos of cruelty, the murder of an innocent. Emilia revolts against Othello: "I care not for thy sword—I'll make thee known" (V.ii.164).¹⁸ She will maintain her values at all costs. When she says of Iago "'Tis proper I obey him, but not now" (V.ii.195), the suggestion is that *now* she has brought her own opinions and judgments into play. She is no longer a Camusian 'slave' but has reached a moment of integrity. Now she finds a voice and an urgent need to speak: "I will speak as liberal as the north; / Let heaven, and men, and devils, let them all, / All, all cry shame against me, yet I'll speak" (V.ii.218-20).

Emilia is constructed from several of the elements:

— A topos of cruelty initiates her rebellion.

- A visceral revulsion causes her to find an individual voice.
- She displays a readiness to preserve her values at all costs—Iago offers violence so she is clearly in a perilous position 'au milieu des périls,' but she goes through with her rebellion, in defence of her new-found values.
- The values she 'brings into play' can be seen as common values in the sense that they are 'for the sake of everyone in the world,' i.e. the playworld is a better place because of her qualities.

Cornwall's servant in *King Lear* is a superb miniature version of a rebel. After a long period of silence, during which he witnesses the putting out of the first eye of Gloucester, the servant reaches his limit: "I have served you ever since I was a child, / But better service have I never done you / Than now to bid you hold" (scene 14, 70-72).¹⁹ 'Hold' is an activist version of 'no.'

Like Emilia, he makes a stand for everyone in the world, that is to say that the playworld is a better place because of his rebellion, since it leads to the sole *act* of heroism in a play full of passive suffering. He is not gaining anything for himself—he is really consenting to die. Even if he cannot foresee that Regan will stab him he must know that his insubordination invites the severest punishment. This is the 'slave' of Camus who has encountered the borderline, 'quelque chose en lui,' and has found a voice and taken his stance.

It seems that Camusian rebellion is an enormously efficient way of generating the mimesis of depth and interiority of character, to which an audience can readily respond with sympathy. It is efficient, elegant and economic. Great effects can be gained from a small expenditure of dramaturgical effort whenever the elements of rebellion are concentrated. What is required is a topos of cruelty, frequently preceded by silence, followed by saying 'no' and a willingness for the character to hold on to new-found values 'au milieu des périls.' Although speaking only a few lines in the play, Cornwall's servant is produced by a high concentration of the elements and in this way a small-scale but complete character is created.

NOTES

¹Quotations from the play *King John* are taken from the Oxford World's Classics' edition. William Shakespeare, *The Life and Death of King John*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller (Oxford: OUP; 1994).

²Herbert Read, foreword, *The Rebel*, by Albert Camus, trans. Anthony Bower (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971) 9.

³What is the human thing that Human Rights are grounded in? It must be something we all share as humans. If not human 'nature' is it something more like human artifice and an endless capacity for metamorphosis and construction? If so one can always say that is in the nature of human beings to be artificers of culture and self.

⁴Camus, *The Rebel* 22.

⁵Larry S. Champion, "The 'Un-End' of *King John*: Shakespeare's Demystification of Closure," *King John, New Perspectives*, ed. Deborah T. Curren-Acquino (Newark, Delaware: U of Delaware P, 1989) 178.

⁶William Matchett, ed., *King John, The Signet Classic Shakespeare* (New York: New American Library, 1966) xxxi-xxxii.

⁷James S. Calderwood, "Commodity and Honour in *King John*," *Shakespeare: The Histories*, ed. Eugene M. Waith (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965) 85-101.

⁸Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999) 52.

⁹Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language* (London: Allen Lane, 2000) 35.

¹⁰T. S. Dorsch, ed., *Classical Literary Criticism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) 41. Or again, "Character will be displayed [...] if some preference is revealed in speech or action" (51). Aristotle is discussing good and bad character, but the Greek is open to the interpretation that he is suggesting that the less obvious the preference, the more character will be revealed.

¹¹Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. David McDuff (London: Penguin, 1993) 278.

¹²Dostoevsky 282.

¹³I'm following Ray Davison's line that Camus was working out his ideas in a close dialogue with Dostoevsky, the thesis of his book *Camus, the Challenge of Dostoevsky* (Exeter: U of Exeter P, 1999).

¹⁴Jean Paul Sartre, *Explication de L'Etranger, Situations I* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1947).

¹⁵Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris : Gallimard, 1942) 102. My trans.

¹⁶Shakespeare, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, ed. Stanley Wells (Oxford: OUP, 1994).

¹⁷Shakespeare, *Richard III*, ed. John Jowett (Oxford: OUP, 2000).

¹⁸Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. Norman Sanders (Cambridge: CUP, 1984).

¹⁹Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*; ed. Jay L. Halio, (Cambridge: CUP, 1992).