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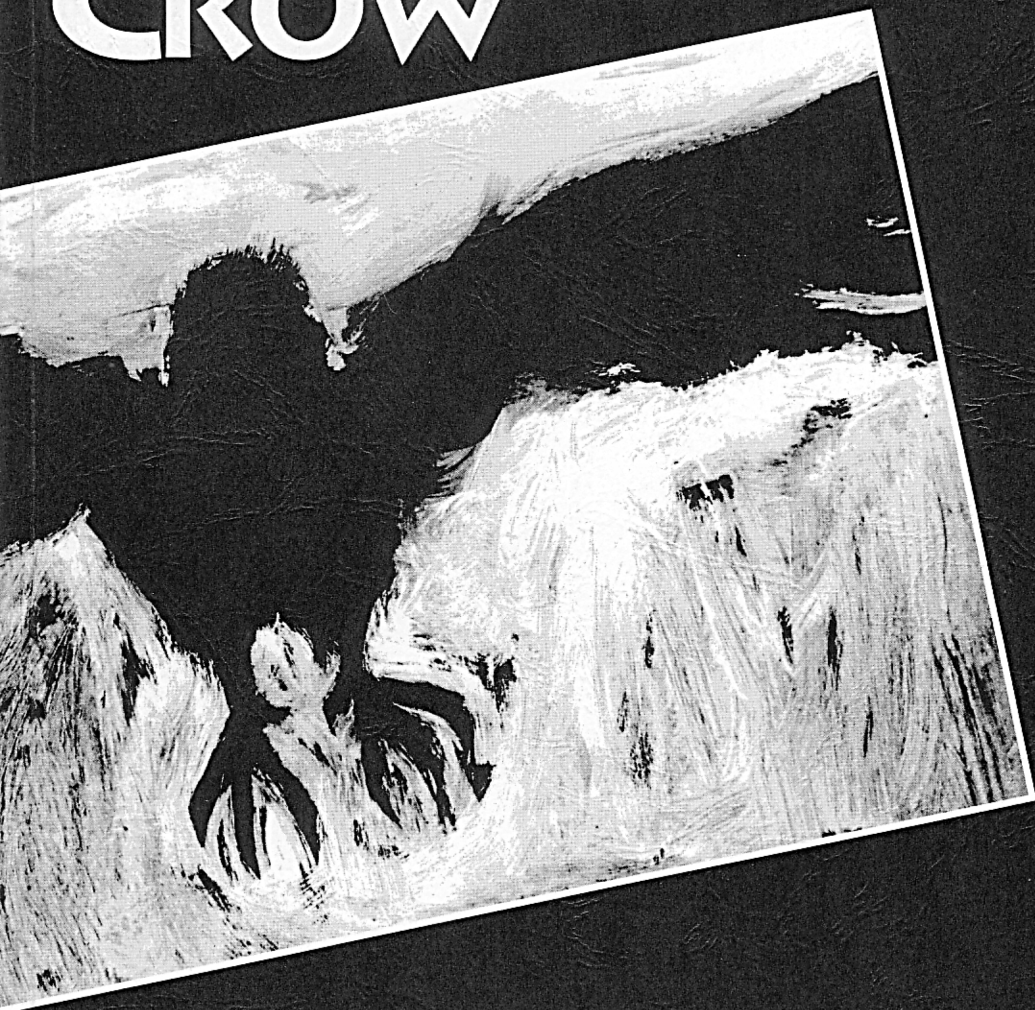

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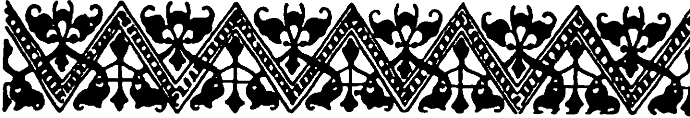

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About anyone so great as Shakespeare, it is probable that we can never be right, it is better that we should from time to time change our way of being wrong.

— T. S. Eliot

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What we have to do is to be forever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions.

— Walter Pater

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The problems (of the arts) are always indefinite, the results are always debatable, and the final approval always uncertain.

— Paul Valery

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# Kit on Will
## by Peter Cummings

Verona, ITAL.
This 24. day of April
1592

*Amico mio, caro* T________,

For the reason of *privacy,* as it is said, and also because I will not lie here long enough for word to come back from you, I give you only *la citta dove sono.* As I have told you, I have long since grown cautious about H. M.'s Privy. (One might say it stinks.) It is also virtued for life and limb, and so it is very dangerous. Some things here both seen and heard can only be told. No full text of events could avoid damnation for its author. Colossal effects ride on small points of one man's whim and vanity. *Sempre cosi?* Walsingham's lessons.

Could you, conveniently I hope, ask after some books I have shipped? I saw them out of Genoa aboard the merchant vessel "Danelaw" bound for Lisbon and London—and Deptford by chance—more than a few weeks ago. I have letters at The Wharf in Deptford to hold them until called for, by you. I list the contents frankly, and invite inspection by the Stationer's office or deputy. There can be nothing amongst these handsome volumes that the powers can find seditious, or worthy to hold back—except it be for their sheer beauty and value to letters.

If an index of the health of a language be the books that are written in it, and then fashioned into palpable works—in a hard Florentine paper, jet black ink, with edging gilt, modest scrolling at the chapter heads, all in tooled and stitched leather—then Italian is the mother tongue. I feel more confident now in knowing what I hear. When I first came I listened for lexicon and syntax and was lost in the speed of street practice. Since, besides reading and otherwise surrounding myself with things Italian, need I say *anche gli Italiani,* I have steeped enough in the culture that I can *prender' il sentimento. La voce di popolo* sounds through the diction and grammar like a refrain. It is vociferous and complex, but it can be heard and read.

But I write as much to say I've met your friend the Crow, young Shakescene. Rare to see a countryman here—save in the markets and harbors—let alone one you've been supposed to see again by all your friends. You know I met him before, in London, now more than three years since, but then I think he'd only done



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the *V and A*, and that not printed yet. We spoke about our equal ages, the use of language in Church and State, and yet again of Ovid—as one does with poets.

I'd gone into that smoky but jovial tavern, *Passaggio* on the outside of the great bend, when he hailed me from an oak and copper table in the corner. Silly as it sounds, heartsickness for home made us very good friends at once.

He's here because the plague has closed the theaters and the central London markets, and to study *dell' arte*. He says the sixteen stocks, with *Cantarina* and *Ballerina*, are enough, with cross-tempering allowed, to make all necessary parts for playing. The types are the essential masks of comedy and history, he says, finally agreeing to a birthday jar of wine (which he had come for), because the light was evening and candles were being lit on the marble window sills. We drank to Italy, and to England, and laughed together. Then he said that tragedy moves or crushes the types into remote, and ruined, individuals . . . and teachers. He thinks about things, this one; I think he's cooked the hair off his dome by the heat of that fussy and restless wit.

Scrupulous, that's how he strikes me. That's what I'd call him, him and his "vanities." They're planned, read on, executed to within an inch of their own forms of life—and they please the crowds, too. He's mightily stubborn about even the smallest points of detail, citing you instance and author, and of so studied an application of virtue in his personal habits that I expect he will live long and do much.

His diction is Latin and country boy at once, but completely besotted with figures. He leaks them like a cracked vessel, oozing pictures. But he has read much, and taken it in like a great sea sponge. His art lies in valuing the word as the highest form of perception. But, he knows too how much even the simplest moral action is complex and how easily we lie. He's writing into poetry how much he and his era have come to con the whole ambiguous and tempestuous design of things. Everything he reads is sacred to him—even the notorious *Principe*—and he intends to mirror the whole spectrum of his years, the very age and body of the time. He is, as I say, scrupulous about this, and, as you know, scruples are sticky things. I'll none of 'em.

About women he has much to say, in several notes, and is amusing but kindly too. I am given to understand that he never had an option with Anne, whose eight year seniority she took for an upper hand. But after some silence, when the talk had paused for a deeper bite on things, he says, "There will be one, of all of those we've made to speak, the world will want to say is most



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ourselves. Which one, for you? For me? For me it is a woman, well-bred, but country and forest taught. Tall, capable, witty, wise before her time, master of men, and happy; not married."

We took some excellent roast of lamb, with garlic and rosemary, and a pot of whole-grain mustard. There was a rich Chianti that tasted of plums and chocolate. Will went on of things Italian—earthy food, deep plots, the softer flow of things, the garden lushness, family webs, the politics of oil and wine, and tales of passion. He says he's struck the gold for story here. *Storia.*

At sometime after ten of the night four or five streetboys came braying and hooting in and called undue attention to themselves, prating and fleering in the front room by the fire. I'd have thought it was a matter of the house's concern, and that not a great issue. But W. S. makes a noticeable end to the talk, and makes excuses for home. I have no defense against his polite but forceful will to go, and so he goes. I mean he *pays*, and goes. *Bella figura!*

I find, by inquiry, that he has very small tolerance for men, and women too, beside themselves with drink, and has he a choice, he won't abide its folly. But, contrary to what already is said about him, he does not hate dogs. Unkempt, raffish, and untrained curs he disdains, but he loves the working breeds, the hunters, shepherds, watchers, rescuers, and friends. He said, direct to me, there is no truer faith than dog's, and the book of Nature can teach us much in the text that is the dog.

In sum, he is a force to be reckoned with, but benign as beech, firmlimbed, stout-trunked, crown of laurel tree. He will overshadow many now great.

*Mille grazie per tutto, e buon' fortuna.*

*—fratello del mondo,*

Chr. Marlowe

*Scritto dopo.* Lest my word *stout* above mislead, he is not "corpulent" as he has slanderously been described. He is halt, from a youthful horseback riding mishap. After which, as he says, he got right back on. "It was not the horse's fault, but mine and mother earth's." His skewed walking thrusts his barrelchested trunk forward, and so he seems more round or gross than indeed he is. But there is a horselike strength about him. It is clear by now that whatever defect his bodily infirmity may be, he has turned it to advantage many ways. Only the broken truly love the whole. He is knowledgeable on horses, can name you parts you had not imagined had names, and is just as familiar and easy with them in the flesh. Benjamin, I mean the Lord Cheshire's man, has told me



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he has seen him on a hunt, between two forays, calming and soothing the incited and short-winded animals with lines of ballad verse, snippets and hummings from songs and airs. He talked and sang, stroked the horses' muzzles and necks, eased their chafing cinches, and wiped their sides till they fell to a great and general rest. To Benjamin it seemed a magic and conjuring voice he had, to soothe so many driven and panting beasts.

**Hobart and William Smith Colleges**



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# "A Losing Office": Shakespeare's Use of Messengers

by Linda Anderson

Readers with even the slightest knowledge of Shakespeare's plays recognize that these works teem with messengers, but the lack of critical commentary on these characters suggests that most scholars have assumed messengers to be merely dramatic devices for providing necessary information to the audience.[1] A close examination of the messengers throughout the canon, however, indicates that Shakespeare used messengers for many other purposes than merely retailing information. Socially superior characters sometimes demonstrate intelligence and apprehension by recognizing what a messenger is about to say from a messenger's look or manner, even before the message is reported in words. Messengers often express fear that they will be punished for bringing bad news, and the way employers treat the bearers of ill tidings demonstrates their magnanimity and self-control or, alternatively, their cruelty, unfairness, and loss of control. Some messengers express views about their social superiors that influence audience opinion about these "superiors." Messengers are not important, however, simply because their interactions with social superiors help to characterize the upper-class characters. Even though most of them are nameless, messengers have their own importance, frequently representing the opinions of common people who are shown to be more insightful and humane than those who employ them. Although they generally play small parts in terms of their number of lines, the messengers in Shakespeare's plays are by no means unimportant or interchangeable characters. In the voices Shakespeare gives them, we can frequently hear echoes of the voices of the powerless people of his time; the words of Shakespeare's messengers, and the reactions they evoke, are often subversive of the idea that the richest and most powerful people are also the most intelligent and virtuous.

Clearly, messengers are useful to a dramatist in various ways. A messenger can be used to report what would be difficult or impossible to stage, as in Biondello's description of Petruchio and Grumio's approach and apparel and Grumio's report of Petruchio and Katharina's journey, which include descriptions of the appearance and behavior of horses (*Shrew*, III. ii. 43-80; IV. i. 54-84).[2] Either in response to questions or by volunteering information, messengers can be used to inform the audience, as well as on-stage



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auditors, about absent characters or characters who have not yet appeared, off-stage plot developments, and other necessary questions of the play.[3] Even the failure of such upper-class characters as Antony and Achilles to listen to messengers can help to characterize them, whether the audience draws its own conclusions about this behavior or accepts the opinions of other characters (*Antony*, I. i. 18-62; I. iv. 7; II. ii. 71-74; *Troilus*, II. iii. 79).

In several instances, Shakespeare's messengers deliver their messages even before they speak them. Bearers of bad news broadcast their messages in their appearance, allowing upper-class characters who are both intelligent and apprehensive to "read" the messengers' looks. The Earl of Northumberland explicitly describes Morton, who has come to report the rebels' loss at Shrewsbury and Hotspur's death, as a text:

> Yea, this man's brow, like to a title-leaf,
> Foretells the nature of a tragic volume.
> So looks the strond whereon the imperious flood
> Hath left a witness'd usurpation . . .
> Thou tremblest, and the whiteness in thy cheek
> Is apter than thy tongue to tell thy arrand.
> Even such a man, so faint, so spiritless,
> So dull, so dead in look, so woe-begone,
> Drew Priam's curtain in the dead of night,
> And would have told him half his Troy was burnt;
> But Priam found the fire ere he his tongue,
> And I my Percy's death ere thou report'st it.
> (*2 Henry IV*, I. i. 60-63, 68-75)

The messenger's appearance, Northumberland tells us (in a reversal of the more usual procedure of getting news from messengers about the upper classes) is as clear to read as a title page, and as natural and obvious as the furrows of a wave-washed beach. Northumberland suggests that the messenger's looks are not merely appropriate for a bearer of disastrous tidings, but part of a tradition stretching back to ancient times. Northumberland might not be so insightful an interpreter, however, were it not for his situation. It is only upper-class characters apprehensive of bad news who are able to read a messenger's appearance. Northumberland has been awaiting news of a battle's outcome; two other characters who interpret a messenger's appearance as heralding bad news, King John and Macbeth, have been experiencing set-backs and are aware of their own guilt and their enemies' hatred (*John*, IV. ii. 106-108; *Macbeth*, V. iii. 11-12).[4] These upper-class characters' ability to interpret a messenger's looks, therefore, may testify less to their intelligence than to an appre-



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hension of deserved disaster.

A messenger's fearful appearance is understandable, since messengers who deliver bad news in these plays are sometimes greeted with curses and threats and occasionally met with violence.[5] The treatment meted out to messengers is sometimes used to demonstrate important differences between upper-class characters. When a messenger reports that the Volscians have beaten the Romans "to their trenches," Cominius responds, "Though thou speakest truth, / Methinks thou speak'st not well" and forces the messenger to justify the time it took to deliver his message (*Coriolanus*, I. vi. 10-21). When Martius appears to announce that Corioles has been taken, Cominius' first thought is "Where is that slave / Which told me they had beat you to your trenches? / Where is he? Call him hither"; Martius, however, defends the messenger: "Let him alone, / He did inform the truth" (I. vi. 39-42). Martius, whose only concern is the truth of the messenger's report, is represented as more admirable than Cominius, who criticizes the report first as unwelcome and later as detrimental to a patrician's or Rome's reputation; Cominius is not unconcerned with the truth, but it is not his only concern. His more complex reaction to the messenger may help to suggest why he is a more successful political figure than is Coriolanus, but his reactions toward the messenger do not suggest that his greater political acumen will necessarily lead to better treatment for the plebeians than they might have expected from Coriolanus. A similar contrast occurs when the tribunes are told that a slave has reported that the Volscians are laying waste "Roman territories" (IV. vi. 37-42). Brutus' response is "Go see this rumorer whipt"; Menenius' reaction, however, is more sensible:

> . . . But reason with the fellow,
> Before you punish him, where he heard this,
> Lest you shall chance to whip your information,
> And beat the messenger who bids beware
> Of what is to be dreaded.
>
> (47, 52-56)

When a messenger enters to report that "some news" has inspired the nobility to assemble, Sicinius responds like his fellow tribune: "'Tis this slave— / Go whip him 'fore the people's eyes—his raising, / Nothing but his report" (58-62). Particularly since the slave's news is quickly confirmed, it is obvious that Menenius' response is more intelligent than that of the tribunes, who wish to deal with the messenger in much the same way that they have dealt with Coriolanus, by rejecting what threatens them, whatever



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the potential cost to Rome. Ironically, it is a patrician, not the representatives of the common people, who seems willing to spare a poor but honest man from unmerited punishment.

Reactions to bad news can be used not only to emphasize differences among characters, but also to demonstrate how a protagonist's nature changes in the course of a play. As noted earlier, Antony begins *Antony and Cleopatra* by refusing to listen to Caesar's messengers; by the second scene, however, he is not only willing to listen, but encourages a reluctant messenger who is aware that "the nature of bad news infects the teller" by saying, "When it concerns the fool or coward. On: / Things that are past are done with me. 'Tis thus: / Who tells me true, though in his tale lie death, / I hear him as he flatter' d" *(Antony,* I. ii. 95-99). When the messenger again hesitates to report his "stiff news," Antony finishes the report himself, acknowledging his faults and revealing that he knows what is said of both him and Cleopatra (100-11). At this point in the play, Antony appears to deserve the departing messenger's reference to him as "noble" (112). When, however, Antony has Caesar's messenger whipped and offers the life of a freed bondman as an exchange for this violation of protocol (III. xiii. 99-101, 147-51), it is obvious that his character has deteriorated. The Antony who, if unable to renounce his faults, at least acknowledged them honestly has become a man who acts out his anger on Caesar, Cleopatra, and himself by torturing helpless social inferiors.[6]

Richard III's treatment of Catesby and Ratcliffe as messengers also demonstrates a deterioration in his character:

> *King Rich.* Catesby, fly to the Duke.
> *Cate.* I will, my lord, with all convenient haste.
> *King Rich.* [Ratcliffe], come hither. Post to Salisbury; When thou com'st thither—*[To Catesby.]* Dull unmindful villain, Why stay'st thou here, and go'st not to the Duke?
> *Cate.* First, mighty liege, tell me your Highness' pleasure, What from your Grace I shall deliver to him.
> *King Rich.* O, true, good Catesby. Bid him levy straight the greatest strength and power that he can make, And meet me suddenly at Salisbury.
> *Cate.* I go. . *Exit.*
> *Rat.* What, may it please you, shall I do at Salisbury?
> *King Rich.* Why, what wouldst thou do there before I go?
> *Rat.* Your Highness told me I should post before.



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> *King Rich.* My mind is chang'd.
> (*Richard III*, IV. iv. 442-56)

Richard, who until this point in the play has controlled every situation, is clearly no longer even in control of his own mind, and although his failure of memory at this point has no immediate effect, it foreshadows his loss of kingdom and life. Similarly, his striking of the Third Messenger later in the scene (507 s.d.) shows a new inability to disguise his feelings and control his behavior, indicative that his end is near; unable to strike Richmond, Buckingham, or the other lords who have deserted him, he displaces his anger onto a helpless messenger (as earlier onto Catesby), ironically one who is bringing him good news. These interactions with messengers represent Richard's first obvious failures (although we later learn what we may already have suspected, that he has failed to convince Queen Elizabeth to woo her daughter for him). Because his previous successes have resulted from his intellectual superiority and ability to conceal his feelings, his memory lapses and emotional outbursts at this point, even with his underlings, demonstrate that Richard is no longer Richard, at least no longer the dominating Richard of the earlier part of the play.

Macbeth also reacts violently to a messenger who appears immediately after he has declared his faith that the spirits have pronounced him invincible and, twice in nine lines (*Macbeth*, V. iii. 2-10), announced his fearlessness:

> The devil damn thee black, thou cream-fac'd loon!
> Where got'st thou that goose-look? . . .
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
> Go prick thy face, and over-red thy fear,
> Thou lily-liver' d boy. What soldiers, patch?
> Death of thy soul! Those linen cheeks of thine
> Are counsellors to fear. What soldiers, whey-face?
> (11-12, 14-17)

His lines after ordering the messenger "Take thy face hence" show a very different attitude than his opening speech: "Seyton!—I am sick at heart, / When I behold—Seyton, I say!—This push / Will cheer me ever, or [disseat] me now. / I have liv'd long enough" (19-22). It is apparently the recognition of the messenger's fear at least as much as the report of the English advance, which Macbeth has been preparing for, that disheartens and distracts him; the anger he displaces onto the messenger, who has done nothing wrong and who cannot reasonably be blamed for his involuntary



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change in color, indicates that Macbeth is controlling himself only with difficulty and prepares us for his inability to complete his thought, his uncertainty, and his recognition that even if he wins the battle, he has lost what makes life worth living.

Macbeth's reaction to the messenger who appears immediately after his speech on the meaninglessness of existence also shows his failing control both of his situation and himself. Although the king demands a quick report, the messenger understandably hesitates; since what he has to report is an impossibility, he may fear being either believed or disbelieved. When he does finally declare that he saw Birnan Wood moving, Macbeth lashes out at him: "Liar and slave!" (V. v. 34). Typically, the messenger defends the truth of his report (35-37). Macbeth's response is a mixture of doubt, despair, and determination:

> . . . If thou speak'st false,
> Upon the next tree shall thou hang alive,
> Till famine cling thee; if thy speech be sooth,
> I care not if thou dost for me as much.
> I pull in resolution, and begin
> To doubt th' equivocation of the fiend
> That lies like truth. "Fear not, till Birnan wood
> Do come to Dunsinane," and now a wood
> Comes toward Dunsinane. Arm, arm, and out!
> If this which he avouches does appear,
> There is nor flying hence, nor tarrying here.
> I gin to be a-weary of the sun,
> And wish th' estate o' th' world were now undone.
> Ring the alarum-bell! Blow wind, come wrack,
> At least we'll die with harness on our back.
> (37-51)

Although Macbeth still professes to doubt the truth of the messenger's report, he realizes what it means if true: he has been tricked and is now trapped in a situation in which his only options are fight or flight, neither of which can save him. His acknowledgment in the final line that death is imminent, however, is a tacit admission that he believes the messenger, who, without understanding the import of his report, has told Macbeth that he is doomed.

The most memorable instance of actual violence against a messenger is Cleopatra's treatment of the messenger who brings her news of Antony's marriage to Octavia. Cleopatra's reaction to the messenger does not show a change in her character, since throughout the play she displays a regal unconcern for controlling her passions, or, as Laura Quinney puts it, "she is from the



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beginning what she will be."[7] Cleopatra's treatment of the messenger, however, does reveal important aspects of her character and situation. After striking the messenger, threatening him with torture, and finally drawing a knife on him, declaring, "Rogue, thou hast liv'd too long" (*Antony*, II. v. 61-73), Cleopatra reverses Antony's transformation, regaining most of her self-control, and even some of her humor, and acknowledging her fault (79-84). When the messenger returns, she continues to threaten and curse him, but she refrains from further violence. She cannot, however, bring herself to thank or reward the messenger, although his protests at her treatment of him—"I have done my duty," "Should I lie, madam?," and "Take no offence that I would not offend you; / To punish me for what you make me do / Seems much unequal" (88, 93, 99-101)—are clearly justified.

Like much of *Antony and Cleopatra*, this scene is complex in its effects. The violence of Cleopatra's rhetoric, though not her actual physical violence, is amusing as well as pitiable: her behavior as queen is ignoble, as she herself recognizes, but her passionate response as a forsaken woman is understandable. The unfortunate messenger is given his own voice, and, however much we sympathize with Cleopatra's anger and grief, we must also sympathize with him, as Charmian obviously does. The threats and beatings inflicted on the messenger suggest both the undeserved misfortunes visited upon innocent servants and how disasters can make great persons forget their duty to behave magnanimously.

The messenger's return in Act III, scene iii to report on Octavia's appearance provides a comic coda to the scene in which he is beaten, but it too is not without a point. Clearly, the messenger has learned that it is the better part of valor to give Cleopatra what she wants; without, perhaps, entirely deviating from the truth, he describes Octavia in less-than-glowing terms[8] and is rewarded. Similarly, throughout this scene Cleopatra's household servants tell her what she wants to hear: Alexas flatters her (2-4), and Charmian repeatedly echoes Cleopatra's self-serving judgments and praises the messenger's perspicacity (15, 22-23, 25, 38, 41, 43-44, 48). Cleopatra, we see, gets the service she demands and deserves, foreshadowing, perhaps, the poor service she will later receive from her navy and the augurers who before the last battle "Say they know not, they cannot tell, look grimly, / And dare not speak their knowledge" (IV. xii. 5-6).

The messenger abused by Cleopatra is one of the few in the canon who we know makes a return appearance. Since most messengers are nameless, it is frequently impossible to determine whether a given messenger appears more than once in a play; in



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addition, since most messengers have few lines and would probably not have been costumed in such a way as to allow the audience to remember them as individuals, it is unlikely that Shakespeare usually intended to represent individual messengers' opinions or attitudes changing in the course of a play. One other exception to this general rule, the herald Montjoy, does change his mode of address in each of his appearances. This change, however, says less about the character of his messages' recipient than about the characters of the French King and nobility for whom he speaks. Montjoy opens his first meeting with Henry V with the contemptuous greeting, "You know me by my habit" (*Henry V*, III. vi. 114); when Montjoy next appears, again asking if Henry will pay ransom rather than fight, he addresses the King as "King Harry" (IV. iii. 79, 126). At his final appearance, however, after the French defeat at Agincourt, Montjoy addresses Henry as "great King" (IV. vii. 70, 81). Henry's gracious responses to Montjoy's original cheekiness, complimenting and rewarding the herald (III. vi. 139, 158), suggest his forbearance and magnanimity, but the more important aspect of the herald's changed demeanor is its indication of the changed attitude of his employers, who have been forced to acknowledge Henry's greatness.

Since the innocent bearers of bad news are most subject to threats and violence from their employers, it is understandable that they sometimes hesitate to report what they know, as the messenger to Cleopatra does, and sometimes ask for pardon before making their reports. The Dauphin's messengers, despite their particularly protected status as ambassadors, seek reassurance from Henry V that there will be no reprisals for rendering their message "freely" (*Henry V*, I. ii. 237-40). Similarly, the Post who returns to Edward IV from King Lewis of France declares that he dares not relate his news until he receives the king's "special pardon" (*3 Henry VI*, IV. i. 84-88). Nor is it only royal servants who fear their employers' anger, since, after reporting Juliet's death, Balthasar says to Romeo, "O, pardon me for bringing these ill news, / Since you did leave it for my office, sir" (*Romeo*, V. i. 22-23). In all of these cases, the messengers are spared their employers' anger, which may suggest the wisdom of asking pardon, but probably also demonstrates that these employers are in command of themselves and their situations, since the two kings are about to lead victorious assaults against their enemies, while Romeo declares that he is about to wrest control of his fate from the stars.

Other fearful messengers use various strategies to avoid their employers' wrath. Messengers who deliver written messages commonly refer the recipients to these, avoiding oral report.[9] A



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messenger from Northumberland, for example, is quizzed by Hotspur, who obtains information about his father's supposed state of health; but when Hotspur asks about Northumberland's military plans, the messenger says, "His letters bears his mind, not I" (*l Henry IV*, IV. i. 13-24). Since Northumberland's letters indicate that he and his forces will not be present at the approaching battle (31-38), the messenger may be claiming ignorance in an attempt to avoid Hotspur's anger. Other messengers also prefer to let the written word deliver bad news. Gower brings the Lord Chief Justice news that the King and Prince of Wales are near and adds, "The rest the paper tells"; the Chief Justice's terse response after reading the letter—"I have heard better news"—may suggest that Gower is discreet, rather than ignorant, since when he is subsequently quizzed on troop movements, he appears to be well informed (*2 Henry IV*, II. i. 134-35, 166, 168-75).

The same tactic is used even by messengers who are delivering news to characters who are their equals or otherwise unlikely to punish them. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Salerio acts as a messenger from Antonio to Bassanio. Before opening his letter from Antonio, Bassanio inquires after his friend, but Salerio replies only that Antonio is "Not sick, my lord, unless it be in mind, / Nor well, unless in mind. His letter there / Will show you his estate" (III. ii. 234-36). After Bassanio reads the letter, he turns to Salerio for confirmation of the news of Antonio's losses, which Salerio gives him, adding a report of Shylock's eagerness for revenge (272-83). Salerio is, therefore, obviously aware of Antonio's "estate," which is desperate, but he is reluctant to break this news to Bassanio. In *As You Like It*, when Silvius acts as a messenger, he is actually duplicitous. Although he knows that Phoebe planned to write "a very taunting letter" in which she would be "bitter . . . and passing short" (III. v. 134, 138), he tells the letter's recipient, "Ganymede":

> I know not the contents, but as I guess
> By the stern brow and waspish action
> Which she did use as she was writing of it,
> It bears an angry tenure. Pardon me,
> I am but as a guiltless messenger.
>
> (IV. iii. 8-12)

Since "Ganymede" is not Silvius' master and is unlikely to be a very intimidating figure, it is improbable that even the "tame snake" Silvius (70) fears Ganymede's wrath; Silvius' reluctance to take responsibility for the "bad news" he bears may therefore be, like Salerio's, evidence of kindheartedness.



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Messengers who have no written message may adopt other self-protective strategies, such as attributing their news to rumor (*Coriolanus*, IV. vi. 65-69; *John*, IV. ii. 121-24). The messenger who reports Alcibiades' approach to the senators, when queried as to the accuracy of his estimate of the army's numbers, says that he has given the lowest possible estimate, although he then adds that an attack is imminent (*Timon*, V. ii. 1-4). Finally, the servant who reports Mamillius' death to Leontes prefaces his news by saying, "O sir, I shall be hated to report it!" and delays using the word "dead"—substituting "gone"—until Leontes asks for clarification (*Winter's Tale*, III. ii. 143-45). Throughout the plays, messengers recognize the force of Northumberland's statement to the messenger who brings him word of Hotspur's defeat and death: "the first bringer of unwelcome news / Hath but a losing office, and his tongue / Sounds ever after as a sullen bell, / Rememb'red tolling a departing friend" (2 *Henry IV*, I. i. 100-03).[10]

Despite their fears, and despite the attempted bribery of such upper-class characters as Northumberland and Cleopatra for favorable, though false, news (2 *Henry IV*, I. i. 87-90; *Antony*, II. v. 68-72), messengers throughout the canon are shown as remarkably loyal to the truth. Even messengers who occasionally deliver incorrect information, such as Lord Bardolph in 2 *Henry IV*, apparently believe the truth of their own reports (I. i. 51-54). Servants who are acting as messengers sometimes make mistakes, such as delivering messages or letters to the wrong person (*Errors* passim; *L.L.L.* IV. i. 53-58; IV. ii. 90-92, 127-40), but messengers rarely lie about the actual facts of what they know, although—as noted earlier—they may try to conceal the extent of their knowledge.

Shakespeare's messengers, however, do more than simply report information truthfully and worry about the consequences of such reporting. When Viola disguises herself as Cesario and takes service with Orsino, she becomes aware, and makes us aware, of some of the complications inherent in the messenger's role as she attempts to deliver a message from her master to Olivia:

> *Vio.* Most radiant, exquisite, and unmatchable beauty—I pray you tell me if this be the lady of the house, for I never saw her. I would be loath to cast away my speech; for besides that it is excellently well penn'd, I have taken great pains to con it. Good beauties, let me sustain no scorn; I am very comptible, even to the least sinister usage.
> *Oli.* Whence came you, sir?
> *Vio.* I can say little more than I have studied, and that question's out of my part. . . . Most certain, if you are



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> [the lady of the house], you do usurp yourself; for what is yours to bestow is not yours to reserve. But this is from my commission; I will on with my speech in your praise, and then show you the heart of my message.
> *Oli.* Come to what is important in't. I forgive you the praise.
> *Vio.* Alas, I took great pains to study it, and 'tis poetical. . . . Good madam, let me see your face.
> *Oli.* Have you any commission from your lord to negotiate with my face? You are now out of your text. . . .
>
> (*Twelfth Night*, I. v. 170-79, 187-95, 230-32)

Although Viola's intended message—most of which she doesn't get to deliver—is perhaps longer and more complicated than those of most messengers, her conversation with Olivia does depict difficulties inherent in the typical messenger's role. Messengers who are not simply delivering letters must learn and remember information and report it accurately to the correct person or persons while dealing with such distractions as interruptions, questions, or other reactions by their auditors. Messengers must do all of these things while respecting the wishes of both the message's originators and recipients. Finally, the messenger is expected by his employers to act merely as a tool for the transmission of information who does not express thoughts or feelings of his own.[11]

Shakespeare's messengers, however, are not only frequently unable to control their physical appearance, as noted earlier, but also unable or unwilling to suppress their intellectual and emotional reactions to the knowledge they possess. The expressions of thoughts and feelings that they append to their messages may lack realism, but they offer Shakespeare an opportunity to influence the audience's reactions to reported information. Although messengers' opinions rarely matter to the upper-class characters, the audience recognizes that the reactions of such truthful, generally disinterested characters are often more reliable than those of their employers. In their brief appearances on the stage, messengers are often depicted as being both intellectually and morally superior to those who employ them.

It is not surprising that upper-class characters who are acting as messengers or ambassadors feel free to append their own opinions to their assigned messages (*John*, II. i. 54-78; *1 Henry IV*, IV. iii. 38-40, 89, 112-13; *2 Henry IV*, IV. i. 30-180); ordinary messengers, however, also frequently express unasked-for opinions. Some such opinions correspond with those of the messen-



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gers' employers, as when the messenger who reports to Claudius the approach of "young Laertes, in a riotous head" calls Laertes' followers "rabble" and criticizes their presumption in seeking to overthrow tradition by choosing their own king (*Hamlet*, IV. v. 100-109). Similarly, the messengers bringing news of Jack Cade's rebellion tell King Henry that "[Cade's] army is a ragged multitude / Of hinds and peasants, rude and merciless" and "The rascal people, thirsting after prey, / Join with the traitor" (2 *Henry VI*, IV. iv. 32-33, 51-52). Although it is possible to interpret these messengers as expressing their personal views, they could be trying to curry favor with their powerful, though temporarily besieged, employers. It is not only royal messengers who have opinions, however; the messenger who brings Cade the news of Lord Say's capture describes two reasons why the rebels hate Say: He "sold the towns in France" and taxed the people excessively (2 *Henry VI*, IV. vii. 20-23). Again, it is impossible to know whether the messenger should be viewed as expressing his own views or attempting to ingratiate himself with Cade.

Other messengers are depicted as willing to risk voicing extremely derogatory opinions about the behavior of their own employers and the ruling class in general.[12] An example is the messenger who reports the English losses in France to the leading English lords and then rejects the Duke of Exeter's convenient suggestion that "treachery" must have caused the losses:

> No treachery, but want of men and money.
> Amongst the soldiers this is muttered,
> That here you maintain several factions;
> And whilst a field should be dispatch'd and fought,
> You are disputing of your generals.
> One would have ling'ring wars with little cost;
> Another would fly swift, but wanteth wings;
> A third thinks, without expense at all,
> By guileful fair words peace may be obtain'd.
> Awake, awake, English nobility!
> Let not sloth dim your honors new begot.
> Cropp'd are the flower-de-luces in your arms,
> Of England's coat one half is cut away.
> (*l Henry VI*, I. i. 69-81)[13]

Soon another messenger appears to describe how the English were beating the French until an English knight disgraced himself and doomed his army:

> Here had the conquest fully been seal'd up,
> If Sir John Falstaff had not play'd the coward.



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> He, being in the vaward, plac'd behind
> With purpose to relieve and follow them,
> Cowardly fled, not having struck one stroke.
> Hence grew the general wrack and massacre. . .
> (*1 Henry VI*, I. i. 130-35)

That mere messengers (and soldiers, if the first messenger is to be believed) hold and express such opinions suggests that even the common people can see what is wrong with the government of England. The noblemen's failure to react to such criticism of themselves and their peers by the common people indicates not only the absence of strong authority but also that the ruling class tacitly acknowledges the truth of these accusations of factionalism and cowardice. The lords cannot deny that they are to blame for England's failures, and the common people know this and are saying so even to their faces. The harm done to England by "the vulture of sedition" is demonstrated throughout the play and explicitly echoed by an upper-class messenger, Sir William Lucy (IV. iii. 47-53; IV. iv. 13-46), but the first characters to alert us to the corruption and failure of authority are these nameless messengers.

In the sequel to *1 Henry VI*, the nobility's dissension continues to destroy England's military capability and a Post continues the pattern of a common man offering advice, as well as news, to his employers:

> Great lords, from Ireland am I come amain,
> To signify that rebels there are up
> And put the Englishmen unto the sword.
> Send succors, lords, and stop the rage betime,
> Before the wound do grow uncurable;
> For, being green, there is great hope of help.
> (*2 Henry VI*, III. i. 282-87)

This advice is immediately followed by another flare-up of the quarrel between York and Somerset, the continued plotting of Suffolk against Gloucester, and a long soliloquy by York detailing his plans to overthrow King Henry. All of this indicates that the Post's advice, though good, is unlikely to be followed, but that is no reason for critics to overlook it, as does Derek Cohen, who maintains: "The poor in Shakespeare's history plays receive short shrift. They tend to be violent, stupid, aggressive, vacillating, sycophantic, vicious, brutal and unkind. Though the rich and powerful are often no better, it is only in their ranks that we find a proportionate representation of complementary virtues. The


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poor appear to need the strong hand of patriarchal monarchy to provide them with moral and intellectual direction and purpose."[14] Cohen's argument is based on the representation of Cade's rebels, and much of what he says does apply to them; but the rebels are not the only representations of "the poor" in the history plays. Since Cohen includes servants within the ranks of the poor at other points of his discussion,[15] messengers presumably fall under that rubric, but these messengers do not fit Cohen's description. Since the *Henry VI* plays are largely devoted to representing the harm done to England by her weak and self-serving rulers, the views expressed by these messengers are dramatically unnecessary except insofar as they show that the common people recognize what is wrong, although they are powerless to correct the situation. These anonymous messengers, speaking, as they do, the truth on behalf of the common people and desiring only the good of England, provide a contrast to the corrupt nobility of the plays.[16]

Messengers are sometimes represented as not only more intelligent and patriotic than their employers, but as more moral and humane. Messengers not only risk their own safety to warn of approaching danger (*2 Henry VI*, IV. iv. 27-37; *Hamlet*, IV. v. 99-109; *Coriolanus*, V. iv. 35-39), but sympathize with the suffering caused by their news and with those whose suffering is their news (*2 Henry IV*, I. i. 105-106; *Richard III*, II. iv. 39). Occasionally, messengers are allowed to express their humanity at greater length, as is the case with the mysterious messenger—from whom?—who arrives (too late) to warn Lady Macduff to flee. As Kenneth Muir notes, "He is a welcome reminder that all have not been corrupted by Macbeth's tyranny."[17] Similarly humane is the messenger who brings Titus Andronicus the heads of his sons and his own severed hand:

> Worthy Andronicus, ill art thou repaid
> For that good hand thou sent'st the Emperor.
> Here are the heads of thy two noble sons,
> And here's thy hand, in scorn to thee sent back—
> Thy grief their sports! thy resolution mock'd!
> That woe is me to think upon thy woes,
> More than remembrance of my father's death.
> (III. i. 234-40)

In these few lines, the messenger demonstrates that an ordinary servant is morally superior to the Emperor and his court, who make the grief and mutilation of an elderly national hero the subject of their mockery. The messenger not only recognizes and



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comments on the inappropriateness and injustice of this behavior by his social superiors, but makes it clear to us that there are humane people left among Rome's citizens, however depraved the Empire's rulers have become. A similar contrast between messengers and their employers appears in *Timon of Athens* when a messenger reports to the senators, "I met a courier, one mine ancient friend, / Whom, though in general part we were oppos'd, / Yet our old love made a particular force, / And made us speak like friends" (V. ii. 6-9). Whereas the Athenian nobility has rejected the generous Timon and is about to descend into civil war, two messengers, though employed on opposite sides, are able to retain their friendship.

Such criticism, explicit or implied, of the upper classes is not easy to reconcile with critical views such as that of Leonard Tennenhouse: "Like the courtier, the dramatist also aimed at ingratiating himself with those in power. An Elizabethan playwright's economic survival depended upon his winning favor through the medium of theatrical performance in a more literal way than did the courtier's. But it was also true that the dramatist had no hope of obtaining membership in the privileged class to which his patrons and censors belonged; he represented their class to them from the viewpoint of the outsider and subject."[18] While Elizabethan playwrights were at the mercy of the ruling class, it is clear that Shakespeare's plays frequently show that class in an extremely unflattering light. Since, however, passages such as those quoted above seem not to have offended Shakespeare's patrons and censors, it would appear that the playwright ingratiated himself less by consistent flattery of the ruling class as a whole than by care not to offend particular members of it. It is also possible that "the outsider and subject" Shakespeare was engaging in a bit of clever class camouflage in placing criticism of the nobility in the mouths of messengers. Messengers, after all, are almost invariably insignificant characters, rarely even deemed deserving of a name. Like modern detective-story writers who realized that the best disguise for a criminal was as a postman, a waiter, or some other necessary but "invisible" functionary, Shakespeare may have recognized that criticism from a "mere" messenger, while it would have dramatic effect, would be ignored or viewed as innocuous by the ruling class of his society, just as it is ignored by the ruling class in the plays. Ironically, many critics continue to imitate the plays' upper-class characters in continuing to overlook these messengers and ignore what they



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say and its importance to the drama's effect on the audience.

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## Notes

[1]An exception to the usual critical obliviousness toward messengers is Ralph Berry, *Shakespeare and Social Class* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988). In a discussion of "stock type" characters, Berry notes that "Even those transparent necessities, Messengers, can transmit something individual. They are not there merely to deliver oral telegrams" (p. xix). Martin Holmes, *Shakespeare and His Players* (New York: Scribner's, 1972), devotes a chapter to "Messengers, and their Function." Holmes points out how significantly performance can affect our reactions: "In printed texts the words 'They fight' or 'Enter a Messenger' occur again and again, because there are not many other words in which one can say so, and we are not encouraged to differentiate one fight, or one messenger, from another. As soon as we see them in performance, however, we see how very different they can be, not only in their natures but in their relation to the story and their effect upon it" (p. 5).

[2]All line references are to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

[3]A few examples among the many possible: the messenger who brings Don Pedro's letter to Leonato and stays to volunteer information and opinions and answer questions provides plot and character background (*Much Ado*, I. i. 1-85); Montjoy informs Henry V that the English have won the battle and tells him the name of the nearby castle (*Henry V*, IV. vii. 83-89); the messenger who reports Alcibiades' approach to the senators volunteers the information that he met a messenger sent to persuade Timon to join Alcibiades' side (*Timon*, V. ii. 6-13); the messenger from Angelo to the Provost says, "My lord hath sent you this note, and by me this further charge: that you swerve not from the smallest article of it, neither in time, matter, or other circumstance. Good morrow; for as I take it, it is almost day" (*Measure*, IV. ii. 102-06).

[4]The Princess of France also anticipates a messenger's news, but this interpretation may be less a result of an ability to read expressions than the other examples, as Marcade is likely to be wearing mourning for the death of the French king, her father and his master, although Holmes insists that the mere wearing of black would not indicate mourning (p. 62); furthermore, the Princess doesn't interpret Marcade's appearance until after he has spoken, saying, "I am sorry, madam, for the news I bring / Is heavy in my tongue. The King your father—" at which point she interrupts with "Dead, for my life!" (*L.L.L.*, V. ii. 718-20). The Princess also differs from the male readers of messengers as texts in not having a guilty conscience. For another kind of "reading" of a messenger, see the nameless Lord's description of Macbeth's "cloudy messenger" (*Macbeth*, III. vi. 40-43).

It isn't only messengers, of course, whose looks may be read by bystanders; King Henry dismisses Worcester, who has criticized and obliquely threatened him, referring to his looks, rather than his words: "Worcester, get thee gone, for I do see / Danger and disobedience in thine eye. / O, sir, your presence is too bold and peremptory, / And majesty might never yet endure / The moody frontier of a servant brow" (*1 Henry IV*, I. iii. 15-19). Although Worcester is not a messenger, he is dismissed with a reminder that, in the king's eyes, he is a servant.



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[5]Even upper-class characters who deliver bad news may, of course, suffer for it, as when Salisbury delivers bad news and Constance hates him for doing so (*John*, III. i. 1-41, 65-69).

[6]Although editors are fond of pointing out Plutarch's reference to Antony's freed bondman Hipparchus as a deserter from Antony's party to Caesar's, it seems improbable that Shakespeare expected most of his audience to be aware of this rather obscure point and thereby justify Antony's behavior. Carol Thomas Neely attributes Antony's anger to "[His] new vulnerability [which] is apparent when, in the messenger scene, he is more enraged and humiliated by Caesar's imagined indirect sexual triumph than he was by his actual military one." See Neely, *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare's Plays* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1985), p. 148.

As Janet Adelman has pointed out, "the number of messengers [in *Antony*] is extraordinary." See Adelman, *The Common Liar: An Essay on "Antony and Cleopatra"* (Yale Studies in English, 181. New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1973), p. 35; see also Holmes, p. 77, and Laura Quinney, "Enter a Messenger," *William Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra": Modern Critical Interpretations*, ed. Harold Bloom (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 151-67, p. 157. Adelman suggests that in this play "the audience is continually bombarded with messengers of one kind or another, not so much to convey information as to convey the sense that all information is unreliable, that it is message or rumor, not fact" (p. 35; see also p. 28). Quinney's interesting discussion of the play's messengers, among whom she includes, as "'messenger-figures,'" such characters as Alexas, the Soothsayer, and the Clown, argues that "the messengers begin as messengers, but end as angelloi; they are at first merely representatives, but, for Antony at least, they finally develop an autonomous presence, ushering in a rapport that is anonymous and otherworldly" (p. 157).

[7]Quinney, p. 165.

[8]Neely, p. 144, suggests that the term "caricature" is appropriate; see also Adelman, pp. 36-37.

[9]Pleas of ignorance aren't limited to messengers who bring written information, however; the messenger who orally reports the arrest of Rivers, Grey, and Vaughan denies knowing why they have been imprisoned (*Richard III*, II. iv. 46-48). Since the imprisonment is presumably the worst of his news, it may be that his ignorance is real, although it is also possible that he realizes that the prisoners are innocent but fears to state this knowledge openly.

[10]Cleopatra, who like Northumberland receives bad news from a messenger and makes an unsuccessful attempt to bribe him to change his story, makes a similar comment on those who deliver unwelcome news: "Though it be honest, it is never good / To bring bad news. Give to a gracious message / An host of tongues, but let ill tidings tell / Themselves when they be felt" (*Antony*, II. v. 85-88).

[11]In discussing "Cesario," Berry points out another problem encountered by some messengers—maintaining their social standing while performing their service function: "Viola/Cesario is shocked at Olivia's attempt to tip her 'I am no fee'd post, lady, keep your purse' (I. v. 268), a gaffe that confuses a Duke's Messenger with a postboy" (p. 73).

[12]Messengers sometimes add praise, rather than blame, to their messages, although such praise often concerns someone not present and is not always appreciated by characters who are present. The messenger who not only reports the arrival of Bassanio's "embassador of love" but extravagantly praises him is merely laughed at by Portia—who, nevertheless, expresses eagerness to see "Quick Cupid's post that comes so mannerly" (*Merchant*, II. ix. 85-100). However,



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the messenger who reports the arrival of Florizel and Perdita to Leontes' court, and who adds to his message his opinion that Perdita's beauty is unequaled, earns a rebuke from Paulina (*Winter's Tale*, V. i. 85-112). The messenger who tells the tribunes that they "are sent for to the Capitol" adds considerable information about Coriolanus and the enthusiastic reception that he has received, which is also unlikely to be welcomed by Brutus and Sicinius, although it only confirms what they already know (*Coriolanus*, II. i. 260-68).

[13]Holmes argues that this speech proves that its speaker is "no subordinate" (p. 59); of course, he also argues that Cleopatra's reference to "the merchandise which thou hast brought from Rome" (II. v. 104) proves that the messenger to whom it is addressed is a "trader" (p. 74).

[14]Derek Cohen, *The Politics of Shakespeare* (New York: St. Martin's,1993), p. 55. Later, however, Cohen astutely notes that "political stability . . . and moral direction are virtually absent amongst the powerful" in *2 Henry VI*, the only history play he discusses at length (p. 60).

[15]Cohen, pp. 45, 77, and 95.

[16]Comic messengers between lovers, such as Juliet's Nurse and Mrs. Quickly, also frequently offer information, opinions, and advice, although what they say is often neither wise nor disinterested (*Romeo*, II. iv. 162-97; II. v. 38-77; III. ii. 37-141; III. iii.79-164; *Merry Wives*, I. iv. 137-60; II. ii. 44-130; III. iv. 77; III. v. 33-54; IV. i. 1-6; IV. v. 121-26). Mrs. Quickly, a rare messenger who actually tells lies, is so generous with her advice that by the middle of the play she comments that even she doesn't know whom, besides herself, she is serving (*Merry Wives*, III. iv. 104-09).

[17]Kenneth Muir, ed. *Macbeth* (The Arden Shakespeare. 1951; rpt. London: Methuen, 1980), IV. ii. 6.

[18]Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (New York and London: Methuen, 1986), p. 39.



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# *The Comedy of Errors* in Context and in Performance

by Chris Hassel

First and last, *The Comedy of Errors* is fun. That is not to say, however, that its romp through characterization and action and theme cannot not be usefully set, with apologies to C. S. Lewis, against the deeper magic, and fun, of the maturer comedies. Again and again, at least as I read *The Comedy of Errors*, I am teased by keys that have not yet found their locks, psychological and thematic shreds and patches that Shakespeare has not yet woven into whole cloth. Themes of madness and confused identity, injustice, impatience and jealousy, wrath, pain and insensitivity cry out in the streets of Ephesus along with its exorcisms and its witchcraft, its crossings and its beads. But if these problems are decried there, they remain with few exceptions out of doors, as external as the plot which is always privileged over them, and which finally overwhelms them in the final scene. One of the best ways then to see how much is there, and how much is not, is to look first, "globally" if you will, at the later plays. What can *Twelfth Night, Much Ado About Nothing, Love's Labour's Lost, A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *As You Like It* tell us about Shakespeare's first treatment of comic error? I will base much of what I say about these plays on my own classroom approach to the mature comedies, especially some of the Christian spins Shakespeare seems repeatedly to put on their deepest psychological and moral dimensions.[1] Having played for a while with these more "global" aspects of Shakespearean comedy, I want us to return to the local by looking first at the text of *Errors*, then at a performance we can all share, the BBC Time-Life videotape. For both tease us with the play's borders with this larger comic world, even as they show us how immensely fun and thoughtful *Errors* can be within its own theatrical territory. But I think I should start with a little illustrative story about my own finest moment of romantic folly.

A long time ago, while I was still in college and courting Sedley, my first and only love, I thought it would be fun one night to play Romeo to her Juliet. I'll admit that it was after a few beers, but the romantic impulse, if not the particular folly of the evening, was and remains independent of that cause. Parking about two blocks away from Sedley's house, I crept through a couple of Richmond's alleys to her back yard, settled just below her upstairs



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bedroom window, and prepared for my performance. First, I needed a Juliet. Because this one did not oblige by coming over to her window, I started peppering her screen, with my usual good aim and with increasingly large pebbles. That apparently failing, I found a water hose and a faucet, turned it on full blast, and shot it against the window. Still no Juliet, no satisfaction, no relief. When would I be able to cry "What light through yonder window breaks?/ It is the East, and Juliet is the sun?"[2] Instead the porch light came on next door, a neighbor whom I had never seen came out with a shotgun I didn't want to see, and this Romeo beat a hasty retreat. About a week later I saw Sedley on campus, and wisecracked "didn't we have a big rain a week ago?" She exploded, showing a "rich anger" Keats had not yet had a chance to teach me to appreciate. Apparently the window had been open; apparently about ten gallons of water had flooded the bedroom and started running down the stairs; apparently Sedley had, from childhood, feared that she would be kidnapped, and knew at that moment that her time had come. She had called the police and the neighbor, and I had just barely escaped a peppering blast, if not arrest from one of Dromio's "devil[s] in an everlasting garment . . . that countermands / The passages of alleys."[3] But Sedley found it in her heart to forgive me this folly, even perhaps to love it, and since then I have found a few of hers to forgive, and love too, in return. To quote a recent country song, "That's the way love goes," in Richmond then, in Nashville now, and apparently too in Shakespearean comedy.

I think Shakespeare chooses, repeatedly but never dogmatically, never even monotonously, to inform comic error, our inevitable imperfections of knowing and doing, with allusions to Christian traditions and Reformation controversies. *Love's Labour's Lost* is a clear and early case. The four lords of Protestant Navarre "vent" their own folly everywhere, in the failed pact of celibacy, fast and study, in the abortive congregation with Armado as priest, in the garden confessions, the absurd Russian disguises, and the pageant of the nine worthies. But never in all of these experiences of their own unworthiness will they in Benedick's words "hear their detractions and . . . put them to mending."[4] Armado, a wiser fool than his betters, volunteers to go "woolward for penance," as was "enjoined him in Rome." But only a formal administration of penance by the four wise and witty ladies of Catholic France provides these obtuse and shallow men with a similar vehicle for repentance and for maturity. Berowne's worried reference to the "penance" of their vows at the beginning of the play, and Armado's at the end, join other pointed allusions to



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cognate Reformation controversies to show us that Shakespeare is playing here with several dimensions of a key Catholic and Protestant difference.[5]

Berowne predicts the inevitable failure of their first pact with one of the most pointed of these allusions:

> Necessity will make us all forsworn
> Three thousand times within this three years' space:
> For every man with his affects is born,
> Not by might mast'red, but by special grace
> (I. i. 146-49).

This is on the surface good Lutheranism, good Augustinianism too for that matter, the *sola fide, sola gratia* center of the Reformation. But because Berowne is so flippantly unaware of the psychological or theological implications of human imperfection, he is one of the best examples of Viola's "wise men, folly-fall'n, [who] quite taint their wit."[6] Repeatedly, Berowne's wit rationalizes their failure in terms of this Reformation debate:

> Let us once lose our oaths to find ourselves,
> Or else we lose ourselves to keep our oaths.
> It is religion to be thus forsworn,
> For charity itself fulfils the law
> And who can sever love from charity?
> (IV. iii. 356-60)

*Romans* 13.10, the hot passage to which Berowne here refers, caused controversialists like Thomas More, William Tyndale, Thomas Fulke and Gregory Martin to write uncharitably about charity throughout the sixteenth century. Was "the fulfilling of the law" *caritas*, "charity," the good works that saved, or was it *agape*, that indwelling spirit of "love" which resulted, through grace, in good works?

The title *Love's Labour's Lost* puns on this issue. The Princess, despite her Catholicism, twits the Forester for praising her merit too much: "See, see—my beauty will be saved by merit / O heresy in fair, fit for these days" (IV. i. 21-22). Longaville corrects Dumaine for writing the love letter, "Thy love is far from charity" (IV. iii. 122). Finally when the Princess describes the King's task, she says "Challenge me by these deserts / And . . . I will be thine." Rosaline tells Berowne, "You must be purgéd too" (V. ii. 795-97, 808). These Catholic ladies are not sanguine about their men's ability to save themselves from themselves without something a lot like the old and also controversial rite of penance. "Twelvemonth and a day" is "too long for a play" (V. ii. 867-68),



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but if the ritual effects the mending they need, then its labours, and the ladies', and the lords', will not finally have been lost. The play touches other Reformation issues like the monastic lifestyle, the right to form small congregations, and the rite of formal confession. But to me it is the need to recognize and acknowledge one's imperfection, to be forgiven for it, and to mend it that almost certainly receives its shape and its definition from this early comedy's use of Reformation controversies about merit and grace, charity and love.[7]

In *Much Ado About Nothing* I think the cognate Reformation paradigm of the five parts of repentance, contrition, confession, faith in forgiveness, and amendment of life usefully informs the parallel but very different conversions and regenerations of Claudio, Benedick and Beatrice.[8] When Don Pedro and Claudio overhear Borachio's confession, they too repent, almost by the book. Contrition is first:

> *Pedro.* Runs not this speech like iron through your blood.
> *Claudio.* I have drunk poison whiles he uttered it.

Claudio then confesses "my sin" to Leonato, and asks of him penance and patience:

> I know not how to pray your patience;
> Yet I must speak. Choose your revenge yourself;
> Impose me to what penance your invention
> Can lay upon my sin. Yet sinned I not
> But in mistaking.

But though the religious metaphor is obvious here, the repentance is far from perfect. Claudio confuses revenge and penance, even hedges about his personal guilt, unlike Borachio, who accepts complete responsibility: "Yea, even I alone." Surely Claudio has sinned against charity in his public abuse of Hero. To his credit, however, Claudio does believe in the father's forgiveness. As a result, he promises to amend his life, die in fact and be born again, like "Old Adam new apparelled" in *Errors*:

> Your over-kindness doth wring tears from me.
> I do embrace your offer; and dispose
> For henceforth of poor Claudio.

Though his expressed and enacted repentance leaves me cold, apparently it satisfies Hero and her friends and family. The play ends with their marriage, a celebration punctuated with quips



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celebrating the place within the ritual of acknowledged and universal human folly. As Benedick says by way of valedictory, "Man is a giddy thing." "There is no staff more reverent than that tipped with horn."[9] Don John's vice is another thing, and it is wisely deferred to another time.

This paradigm of repentance joins a bevy of other religious metaphors to help us understand the richer but often parallel experiences of Benedick and Beatrice. Their initial "pride and scorn" stem, like Claudio's, from too little faith. Both think, like Claudio who will "trust that you see," that seeing is believing; one "can see a church by daylight," the other "without spectacles." Both also believe the other false, fallen, horngivers, "clod[s] of wayward marl." Because their faith is unfaith, both are "obstinate heretics in the despite of beauty." For Beatrice, there is no "man, / How wise, how noble, young, how rarely featured, / But she would spell him backward." For Benedick, "'Till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace." But through the manipulations of their friends, both are "converted" and see with new eyes. Both are truly sorry for their faults, confess them, and vow to change. Benedick defines the change with a paradigm I find central to most of Shakespeare's mature comedies: "Happy are they that hear their detractions and can put them to mending." Beatrice says "Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much? / Contempt farewell, and maiden pride adieu." After all, "The world must be peopled." The Bible tells us so. Their amendment of life especially fascinates us against the flat backdrop of the Claudio-Hero plot. They must bear the scorn of their friends; they must "suffer love" for each other because of their great wit and their great distrust.[10] Against all reasonable expectation and against formidable evidence too they are transformed, and it is not into oysters but into pearls, witty, merry, faithful, loving pearls. The play invites many Christian analogies into that experience, faith and conversion being two of the most obvious. But for me the paradigm of repentance stands behind their relationship in ways that seem best to satisfy, and edify, my students and me.

The lovers enter *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as convinced as Theseus and Egeus that love should be a matter of merit, right, and deserving. At the same time, they are convinced that love should be reasonable, is hateful if it be mad or foolish. Helena and Hermia bear the second misconception most obviously, Lysander and Demetrius the first. Part of their burden and joy is to come to accept what I consider a very different Christian dimension of Shakespeare's comic vision, love's blessed madness, the embrace of a shaping chaos that empowers the imagination, faith, and love.



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Lysander most obviously makes a fool of himself when he says "The will of man is by his reason swayed." Bottom, adorned already with ass' ears, shows at least a glimmer of the opposed wisdom of folly with his assertion that "Reason and love keep little company together nowadays." At the end of their dreams all are poised between dreaming and waking, mountains and clouds, a melting, a dim remembrance, might not merit, a "power" they "know not" but believe, ass' ears and fairy bliss. The lovers and Bottom too charm us with their final acceptance of the miraculous grace and the blessed madness of the imagination and of love. Erasmus is written all over the lover's fine frenzy, and Bottom's words are almost St. Paul's. "Eye hath not seen" such grace, such joy, or is it "the eye of man [that] hath not heard"? Reasonable Theseus is proven, at least for a moment, most wrong. It is easy enough to suppose a bush a bear; it is quite another thing to "apprehend" some " bringer" of transcendent joy.[11] That is the stuff of faith as well as love, poetry and passion, and its blessed madness is close to the center of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

In *As You Like It* the best of the lovers humbly and joyously embrace this blessed madness from the start. Rosalind knows that "Love is merely a madness," and since even "the whippers are in love," it is not likely to be cured. Orlando calls it "a fault I will not change for your best virtue." Their wisdom of folly is one of several reasons Touchstone and Jaques have such trouble plying their fools' trades in Arden. But the play, too, simultaneously parodies and celebrates the necessarily foolish rituals of love and of faith. Touchstone responds to the shepherd's refrain of love's "actions most ridiculous" with a strange parody of the words in the communion service, when he says of Jane Smile, "I remember the wooing of a peascod instead of her, from whom I took two cods, and, giving her them again, said with weeping tears, 'Wear these for my sake. We that are true lovers run into strange capers; but as all is mortal in nature, so is all nature in love mortal in folly.'"[12] Though I fear that all nature in criticism is also mortal in folly, I cannot help but find embedded in Touchstone's words a parody of one of the most precious rituals of the Christian church, the Holy Communion:

> [Christ] took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Likewise after supper he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying . . . drink it in remembrance of me.[13]



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Shakespeare's daring topsy-turveydom makes us connect and also distinguish the madness and the blessedness of romantic and religious observance.

When Rosalind instructs Orlando "who Time ambles withal ... trots withal ... gallops withal," her question-and-answer style parodies religious catechism. Time also dictates my gallop here, so I'll just say that in catechisms, lifeless and formulaic questions are often answered by equally repetitive and unimaginative responses, each also characteristically parsed, as in "How many parts hath the Lord's Prayer," or "Into how many parts dost thou divide the whole confession of faith." "To answer in a catechism" is Celia's reference to this necessary romantic conventionality, and to its theological counterpart. The later four-parted litany to love shares the hyperbolic conventionality and the antiphonal form of the greater litany for Lent and the lesser litany of penance for Ash Wednesday. Who can be so contrite, so devout, as the repeated "Good Lord, deliver us," "Have mercy upon us," and "We beseech thee to hear us good Lord" imply? Who can love another so completely as "I for Ganymede," as "I for Rosalind," as "I for no woman?" Almost no one. But playing such contrition and such devotion helps worshippers approach love and faith, at least for the liturgical moment. Observance, like art, makes the abstract concrete, expresses the inexpressible. "The truest poetry is the most faining." If like Orlando we cannot live exclusively by such thinking and playing, we also cannot live very deeply without them.[14] *As You Like It* is often celebrated as a play that makes fun of everything it also values. The joy here, as in Rosalind's final defrocking, lies precisely in the coexistent inadequacy and necessity of ritual. God bless and forgive us our impulse to express, contain, celebrate, and enact that which is most desired and least understood, the apprehended rather than the comprehended, the longed-for rather than the known.

*Twelfth Night* shares both sides of this comic vision; it also reverberates with motifs of the social and liturgical festival for which it is named. Barbara Lewalski shows us that ill will and self-love permeate Illyria, and oppose the Christmastide values of good will and selfless love which most of the characters will finally achieve, or receive. Discord is finally supplanted by harmony, great darkness by great light, except for the ill-willing of the obdurate if also wronged Malvolio. Marion Bodwell Smith connects this general harmony with the manifestation on Epiphany of the very principle of order and concord, the Prince of Peace. I like to stress the twinned Epiphany motifs of humbling and enlightenment in my teaching of the play.[15] Several of the most


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prideful characters, Orsino, Olivia, Toby, and Malvolio, either find or notoriously fail to find insight, clarification through humiliation, a knock on the head or a blow to the ego. Olivia is my best case. "Too proud," as Viola says, she is humiliated again and again, formally and informally, by professional and amateur fools alike, until she is almost humble enough to love. Malvolio is her negative counterpart because he so stubbornly refuses to concede his own share of human imperfection, be it folly or madness. To John Donne and Lancelot Andrewes this humbling enlightenment is a key focus of Epiphany: "By pride [we] perished . . . then by humbling to be recovered," says Andrewes, and Donne, "find thy savior . . . in his humiliation, and bless God for that beginning."[16]

*Isaiah* 49 and 60, passages prescribed for the Epiphany celebration, were taken to stress Christ's agency in our enlightenment: "Arise shine for thy light is come," for "the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee," upon "the darkness and cloud which covereth the earth and its people." I think Malvolio's prison, "dark as ignorance," "dark as hell," and Sebastian's "glorious sun" all reverberate with the psychological and spiritual meaning of this imagery. As Feste shows us though he fails to show Malvolio, to know oneself "well in my wits" is inevitably to be a fool.[17] That's why I am "the worse for my friends, and the better for my foes." My friends praise me and make an ass of me. Now my foes tell me plainly I am an ass. So that by my foes I profit in the knowledge of myself, and by my friends I am abused."[18] If Epiphany shares this celebrated wisdom of humility, *Twelfth Night* is also closely associated with its topsy-turveydom through the feast of fools and its sometimes Erasmian and Pauline praise of folly.

Toby's self-indulgent merriment and Feste's botching (mending) of prideful souls intriguingly conflates the name of the social festival's Festus or lord of misrule and the spiritual center of the festival occasion, spiritual and secular merriment. And of course the battle of Carnival and Lent, while more obviously a Shrovetide tension, finds a similar dichotomy in Epiphany and Twelfth Night, riotous partying and profound spiritual celebration. Masques like Jonson's *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* and *Love Restored* or Middleton's *Inner Temple Masque* often embody this same dichotomy, in us and in the seasons, and they are as often written for Epiphany as for Shrovetide. Hercules, Plutus, Fasting-Day and Lent oppose Comus, Masquerado, New Year's and Shrove Tuesday as surely as Malvolio opposes Toby in *Twelfth Night*. I am more skeptical than I was fifteen years ago about the neatness of these edifications in the play, especially the severity of Malvolio's debasement and the poverty of Orsino's enlightenment. I am still



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convinced that enlightenment itself, through humiliation, a growth into the knowledge that we all know like fools and act like fools, is a central motif the play shares with the festival of Epiphany and with Shakespearean comedy. Feste's epilogue about putting away the "tiny boy" and putting on "man's estate" reasserts the Pauline basis of such a vision.

I have time to say about *The Merchant of Venice* here only that its self-conscious and self-righteous Christians never seem to get across what I consider the core Christian message of Shakespeare's other comedies, the humbling experience of their limited knowing or doing that leads them to the grace of common imperfection, commonly acknowledged and commonly forgiven. Portia and Nerissa get their proud noses bent a little out of joint during the trial scene, and Bassanio and Gratiano have some discomfort with the business of the rings, but these are brief moments of humiliation, and they don't seem very central to the final festivity. Further, if there is some "give and hazard" in this Christian love, there is more "get" and "gain," desire and deserving. This is true of Antonio's not disinterested love for Bassanio, Portia's sometimes spiteful rivalry for that love, and Bassanio's quest for the "lady richly left." Antonio's outrageous self-righteousness, combined with his perplexing need to play Christ and be recognized for his sacrifice, is another ingredient in these characters' confused recipes of merit and grace. Such compression leaves out hedges and flowers alike, and I apologize for the truncated garden. I have said nothing of the charming and healthy humility of Bassanio and Portia at the height of their love, nothing of the selflessness that is part at least of Antonio's sacrifice; I have said little of Shylock's great humanity and his great villainy, little too of the play's curious muddling of the distinctions between justice and mercy, Old Law and New. But to me the enduring truth of *The Merchant of Venice*, its leaden center, is the Christians' unawareness of their own imperfections and their own undeserving. Their painfully embarrassing anti-Semitism is only part of this false piety. Manna, like Christ's sacrifice, is God's free gift; they seem to think it is something they might have done, or been.[19]

I have tried to focus on a different Christian dimension of each of the comedies, though of course the motifs interact throughout the corpus. For *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Erasmian and Pauline allusions help define and validate the blessed madness of religious and romantic love. For *As You Like It* religious rituals parallel and parody the most feigning and, inevitably, also the most failing artistic or romantic expressions. For *The Merchant of Venice* an ironic distance between Christian precept and practice



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creates an ironic closeness between Shylock and the legalistic and unforgiving Christians who so often abuse and persecute him. *Twelfth Night* shares with its festival namesake the integrated motifs of enlightenment and humility, good will and selfless love, as well as the age's and the festival's repeated oppositions of Carnival and Lent. *Love's Labour's Lost* offers us what I consider Shakespeare's discovery of the comic analogies to such prominent Reformation issues as grace and works, the heresy of might, the need for sacraments, and the relationships between charity and love. And the experience of the lovers in *Much Ado* is based in part on the prominent theological paradigm of the four parts of repentance. I have also tried to put my finger on something more general, something that might be called a Christian attitude towards human imperfection in Shakespearean comedy, although there are many attitudes in the comedies that are not, of course, either necessarily or even vaguely Christian. If my shadows have offended, I hope you will, following Duke Theseus' kind condescension, "[take] it in might, not merit."[20] We are, after all, all fools. Some of us are just better at it than others.

This sort of theological material is broadcast more widely across the surface of *Errors* than of most of these later comedies, but it has not often taken the same kind of psychological and moral roots. Emilia, Adriana and Solinus all cry, like Shylock and Egeus and Isabella too, for "Justice, justice," but usually that theme pertains only on the level of plot. Otherwise there would be somewhere the quality of mercy speech that Isabella and Portia and even Theseus, albeit condescendingly, spread over the ruins of the Old Law. The same might be said of the motifs of acknowledged and repented folly in the play and the theme of madness. Adriana is the deepest of a series of shallow pools. She forgives her husband for his wrath and his wandering eye and acknowledges her own complex motives for this when she says, "My heart prays for him, though my tongue do curse." She also acknowledges, albeit suddenly and briefly, her own share of blame in his disorders. Luciana tries repeatedly to teach her about her "self-harming jealousy," her own "impatience," and her "headstrong liberty," and when the Abbess shrives her at the Abbey door of "the venom clamor of a jealous woman," Adriana concedes some role, and some prior misgivings about it, in her husband's waywardness: "She did betray me to mine own reproof." We are also intrigued with Luciana's fear of the "troubles of the marriage bed," but too little is made of it for us seriously to compare it to Beatrice's fear of a man with (or without) a beard, and her vow that she will not be "overmastered with a piece of valiant dust," a



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"clod of wayward marl." In a way Beatrice is a combination of both women, but she is also much more than the sum of their parts.[21]

Of madness much is said in *Errors*, but again we are seldom asked to take it either as an index of insufficient humility or extraordinary love. The blessed madness of the lovers in *Dream* is approximated only in the plot of *Errors*, where Antipholus, very Sebastian-like, enters a house, if not a relationship, while wondering about his absolute sanity and the woman's absolute reality. Nowhere is there a psychological and moral equivalent of the Malvolio who deserves a dark house, a whipping, and a curate because as Goodman Devil he is so "sick of self-love," and tastes "with a distempered appetite." Antipholus' diagnosis as possessed or mad has less bearing in disoriented character, much more in a situation of mistaking, though to be fair his anger could stand a little psychoanalysis. Pinch is no Feste, however, and except for Adriana no one in *Errors* is given much of a chance to vent or deny his share of universal folly and thus "mend." This absence of a normative humility also makes Antipholus's denial of madness devoid of the negative import of Malvolio's. Even when Antipholus is called choleric, it is mostly to set up Dromio's jokes about the ways dry meat feeds such a humor, and when Dromio laments his beatings ("When I am cold, he heats me with beating, . . . waked with it . . . raised with it . . . driven out of doors with it," etc.) he catches the cadence of Shylock's "When you prick us" sequence, but misses the complex harmonies of his suffering.[22]

Error is pretty consistently distinguished from folly throughout the play, a pointed reminder of its difference from a *Twelfth Night* or a *Much Ado*. Nor would many seriously argue that Antipholus's little "drop of water" speech, or Adriana's later echo of the same image, rivals Angelo's three great moments of agonized self-scrutiny in *Measure*, though we might concede in them the potential of such later moments of threatened identity. When Claudio says he sinned only in "mistaking," we fear it to be a copout, something akin to Berowne's unhealthy rationalization. Because in *Errors* mistaking is almost the whole package, it is hard to credit an underlying seriousness to the motif. "What wife, what ship, what chain, what everything?" Even the sweet reunion of Egeon and Emilia is without either guilt or forgiveness, unlike the Hermione-Leontes sequence at the end of *The Winter's Tale*, or Hero's forgiveness and Claudio's repentance in *Much Ado*. "After so long grief such nativity" is all the joy Emilia knows, and all she needs to know.[23] The issues of merit and grace lurk somewhere in the background of this festive ending; such felicity as the idea of



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the blessed madness of lovers and poets, romantic and religious observance, doesn't even seem a glimmer yet in its author's eye.

Still, Arthur Kinney, Donna Hamilton, and R. A. Foakes are right to remind us of the unusual amount of Christian surface to the play and to explore for us some of its substance too. Cued by the play's many references to Hell and Heaven, devils and angels, Antipholus' line "Now as I am a Christian," Dromio's reference to rosary beads, allusions to Adam and the last judgment, and Shakespeare's change of setting from Epidamnum to the Pauline Ephesus, Foakes and Kinney have suggested central Christian and Christmastide themes: "Bitterness gives way to harmony, celebrated by a feast which marks a new beginning, a new life, a baptismal feast [in which] the characters recover or discover their real identity, order is restored, violence is replaced by mildness and love, witchcraft, evil, and Circean transformation is dispelled." The Prioress, dispensing grace from her temple, overcomes the Duke's legalism and releases Egeon from his bondage to it. Simultaneously, her thirty-three years of grief is superceded by the "felicity" of reunion and deliverance. Kinney adds the possible connections to the "greater felicity" of the mysteries, which repeatedly play out the analogous pattern of fall to redemption, and move like *Errors* from nativity to last judgment. Very much like the Christmastide blessing Smith associates with Twelfth Night, there is at the end peace on earth and general good will. *Errors* is also performed not once but twice in Shakespeare's lifetime on the feast of Holy Innocents, December 28, once at court and once at Grey's Inn, and often seems redolent of its specific as well as its general festival occasion. Holy Innocents marks the beginning of the feast of fools, and its wholesale "Confusion and Errors" are called appropriate by the Grey's Inn recorder during the play's first recorded performance. The readings for Holy Innocents Day also share with the play the motif of separated and reunited families, the human family after the fall, the Innocents who escaped Herod's slaughter, Rachel's family as well as the reunited family of Israel. And though some innocents are sacrificed to Herod's wrath, the Innocent One is saved, to deliver all in thirty-three years. "After so long grief such Nativity" is not a bad tag for this central story of Christianity.[24]

Donna Hamilton has recently argued ecclesiastical contexts in *Errors* just as fascinating as these theological ones. Invited by much of the idiom of the controversies about church discipline in the 1580's and 90's, Hamilton argues that the struggle to reform the church becomes analogous to domestic quarrels in the play. The lockout and the walkout both suggest nonconformity, though



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confusion and misfortune, not ill will, are the main causes in Ephesus. Grey's Inn was also associated with the Puritan movement in these two decades, with its common lawyers opposed to ecclesiastical ones. Ephesus itself was not only a code name in the bible, through the Pauline Epistle, for evil spirits and the relationships between husbands and wives, masters and servants; it was also associated through Paul and Timothy with the proper relationship between bishops and ministers. Ephesus was in fact a virtual map of the controversies of challenged hierarchies, faithfulness and betrayal, authority and obedience. Pitching many of these tensions at the door of the church in the final scene further reveals their relevancy to the Christian context throughout the play. "Brothers" was then as now a code name for equality and against prejudice. And the Marprelate tracts were as full of "fisting language," "hitting idiom," as *Errors* is. "Bruised the faction," "two or three cudgellings," "twenty fists about his ears" are a few examples from the controversialists. The reforming extremists in England and in Germany were also associated with madness and possession as part of the process of their demonizing. It is interesting then that the play ends with all these warring parties becoming reconciled within one church, through forgiveness and humility, amidst the continuing nonconformist idiom of "elder" and "gossip." Curiously, *The Golden Chain* was not only a prop in *Errors* but also a book of conciliatory doctrine by the famous Puritan William Perkins (near neighbor and near contemporary to Shakespeare incidentally). The book was reissued nine times from 1590 to 1594. There is much going on in this play then about the global Ephesus, the Christmas season, and the struggle for control of the English church.[25]

Reconstructing context, even this quickly, reveals a richness in *Errors* that is not immediately accessible either through text or performance. Performance, however, can tease its own complexity out of the play, even enhance our sense of its anticipations of the later comedies. This is especially true of the 1983 BBC videotape directed by James Cellan Jones, which we discussed in some detail for the second and third days of the institute. For one thing, seeing all the cozeners and fortune-tellers of Ephesus firms up our sense of this unique and suggestive place on the globe. The map of the Mediterranean world reinforces this impression, painted as it is on the town square in front of the Abbey, where the play begins and ends. The early pantomime of the births and the shipwrecks suggests both how lightly we should take all of these errors and also how moving they might be as we watch Solinus and others respond hyperbolically to Egeon's sad tale. The fact



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that Egeon has apparently hired this pantomime troupe to dance out his tale also suggests its rich if also blatant sentimentality and theatricality, as do the extravagant sighs, the long looks, and the schmaltzy string music that accompanies all this empathy. We also wondered, though only briefly, if the mime master's enigmatic look at the beginning of IV. i and his apparent direction of the wholesale confusion of Act V suggest that he has assumed some sort of control. Are these actors and we with them puppets in control of an almost frightening playfulness? With a wave and a whistle from the master of the mime, all explodes into a chaos which he obviously revels in, and which prepares us for all of the challenges of order and authority in the final act, as well as its final resolution in great felicity. These metatheatrical things distance and engage us at once.

The BBC production's use of windows and mirrors suggest, probe, and expand the play's slight interest in those psychological and moral dimensions of identity and mistaken identity which so intrigue us in the later comedies. It starts with Dromio before the mirror in the market square, first apparently seeing his own face in an apparent mirror, then looking again and seeing nothing, no reflection, no mirror even. We wonder, though we will only be teased with this image, what either of those glances means. Did he somehow see, or imagine, the other Dromio for a moment? Does the empty mirror then suggest an empty soul, or one that is incomplete? We are in more familiar iconographic territory when Adriana looks at herself in the mirror as she complains that her husband is "the ground of [her] defeatures," even while admiring herself. Dromio similarly looks in the mirroring plate after his image-shattering confrontation with the spherical kitchen wench, his not-wife who wants, he says, to have him "as a beast." These mirrors help highlight for us Luciana's confusing response to Antipholus' mirror images about her "sister's sister" and her own self. Her fine little cross draws our gazes, like that of both Antipholus and earlier his Dromio, to her fine large breasts, even as his apparently incestuous desire repels and attracts her simultaneously, and changes her own self-image. Which, we wonder, the breasts or the cross, refers to "the spring of love"? Such business helps define and complicate the ambiguity of her appeal that he "become disloyalty."[26]

As all of this action goes on, we watch these characters framed in the production by open windows, sometimes being viewed from the outside, sometimes viewing it while hidden within. Once Antipholus even thinks he sees himself, through a window, coming out of a shop in the market square. Prompted into an



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unexpected thoughtfulness by such visual imagery, we then begin to wonder if the Courtesan in IV. iii is not also a mirror of the Luciana who tempts the wrong Antipholus in III. ii, and of the wife the right one wrongly calls "dissembling harlot" and "unhappy strumpet" just after he calls the Courtesan "Satan," "witch" and "fiend," all while Dromio tries to protect them with his own signing of the cross. At the end the camera itself joins in this deception, seeming to show us two Dromios and two Antipholi on the screen simultaneously, while naming only one actor for each pair in the following credits. Lines in the play like "Methinks you are my glass, and not my brother," "calendars of their nativity," and "almanack of my true date" invite such reflective visual trickery, but to my mind and eye the camera is more thoughtful than the play it records at such moments as these.[27]

As much as I love to watch Shakespeare performed, I have often been disappointed, even furious, when a production fails to reveal the play's complexity. How can all of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, say, or *As You Like it*, be taken as mere farce or mere romance? Their romanticism is so much richer when it must reside uneasily in the neighborhood of their burlesque, and vice versa, awe and heehaw, Orlando, Jaques, Touchstone and Silvius sitting together in precarious balance. But the corresponding paradox is the tendency of productions of the farces to "become disloyalty" by transcending the text rather than reducing it. We agreed that this happens in Jones' production of *The Comedy of Errors*, as I think it does so, too, in the reconstructions of context and the "remembrances" of the later comedies that started our discussion. Again I apologize for slighting in this paper the lively thoughtfulness and playfulness of our group's discussions and for overemphasizing the serious in *Errors*. Also to be enjoyed are its foul winds and its ass jokes, the "countries" Dromio found out in Nell, and Antipholus' threat to "set in my staff"; of course, much of the Christian content comes in the form of jokes as well. Feste may joke more profoundly about asses in *Twelfth Night*, and Beatrice about "foul wind" in *Much Ado*, but there is also a point to pointless fun, especially since first and last, *The Comedy of Errors* is fun.

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## Notes

[1]This paper is a draft of a lecture I presented at the NEH Summer Institute for teachers entitled "From Shakespeare's Globe to the Global Shadespeare" directed by Jim Andreas at Clemson University in July of 1996. I discuss these matters more fully in *Faith and Folly in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1980).

[2]*Romeo and Juliet*, II. ii. 2-3, in *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969); subsequent references to Shakespeare cite this edition.

[3]*The Comedy of Errors*, IV. ii. 33-38.

[4]"Vent" nods of course at Feste's making fun of Sebastian in *Twelfth Night* (IV. i. 9-11); *Much Ado About Nothing*, II. iii. 210-11.

[5]*Love's Labour's Lost*, V. ii. 700-01; I. i. 115.

[6]*Twelfth Night*, III. i. 66.

[7]Cf. Robert Hunter's *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1976) on the later comedies.

[8]This formula was widely available to Shakespeare's contemporaries. See, for example, the General Confession in *The Book of Common Prayer*, ed. John E. Booty (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1976), pp. 50-51, and the Homily of True Repentance in *Certain Sermons or Homilies*, ed. Mary Ellen Rickey and Thomas B. Stroup (Gainesville: Univ of Florida Press, 1968), pp. 264-68.

[9]*The Comedy of Errors*, IV. iii. 13-14. *Much Ado About Nothing*, V. i. 232-33; V. i. 258-61; V. i. 251; V. i. 280-82; V. iv. 106; V. iv. 121-22.

[10]*Much Ado*, III. ii. 104; III. i. 108; I. i. 168; II. i. 71-72, 54; I. i. 208-9; III. i. 59-61; II. iii. 20-27, 210-11; III. i. 108-9; II. iii. 221; V. ii. 59.

[11]*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, II. ii. 115; III. i. 130-31; IV. i. 145-98; IV. ii. 208-9; V. i. 20-22. Cf. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, 2.9, and Erasmus, e.g., "In sort that when a little after they come again to their former wits, they deny plainly they wot where they became, or whether they were then in their bodies, or out of their bodies, waking or sleeping: remembring also as little, either what they heard, saw, said, or did than, saying as it were through a cloud, or by a dream" (*The Praise of Folly*, trans. Thomas Chaloner [Oxford: EETS, 1965], p. 128).

[12]*As You Like It*, III. ii. 376-80; III. ii. 267-71; II. iv. 27; II. iv. 46-51.

[13]From *The Book of Common Prayer 1559*, p. 263.

[14]*As You Like It*, III. ii. 294-96; III. ii. 216-17; 5. ii. 79-109; III. iii. 16-17; V. ii. 48. See also Alexander Nowell, *A Catechism*, trans. Thomas Norton, ed. G. E. Corrie (Cambridge: Parker Soc., 1853), pp. 142, 191; *The Book of Common Prayer, 1559*, pp. 68 ff.

[15]Lewalski, "Thematic Patterns in *Twelfth Night*," *Shakespeare Studies*, 1 (1965), 169-77; Smith, *Dualities in Shakespeare* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1966), pp. 115-122; I also discuss the liturgical contexts of *Twelfth Night* and *The Comedy of Errors* in *Renaissance Drama and the English Church Year* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1979), pp. 37-42, 77-86.

[16]From Andrewes, *Ninety-Six Sermons* (New York: AMS. 1967 [1843 rptd.]), 1:206; *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1953-62), 3:360. *As You Like It*, I. v. 236.

[17]From *Twelfth Night*, IV. ii. 45-46; IV. ii. 84-88; IV. iii. 1.

[18]*Twelfth Night*, V. i. 8 ff.

[19]From *The Merchant of Venice*, II. vii. 4-9; I. i. 161; V. i. 294-95.

[20]From *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V. i. 92.

[21]From *The Comedy of Errors*, V. i. 133; V. i. 190; V. i. 197; IV. ii. 28; II. i. 15; II.



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i. 15, 86, 102; V. i. 69; V. i. 90; II. i. 27; *Much Ado*, II. i. 26-27; II. i. 26-27, 53-54.

[22]From *Twelfth Night*, IV. i. 56-59; IV. iii. 1-15; IV. ii. 84-112, 128; I. v. 85-86; *Errors*, IV. iv. 55; IV. iv. 91; IV. iv. 103; II. ii. 62; IV. iv. 27-36; *Merchant*, III. i. 51 ff; cf. *As You Like It*, III. ii.377, where Rosalind says "Love is merely a madness, and . . . deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do."

[23]From *Errors*, I. ii. 35 ff.; II. ii. 124 ff.; V. i. 408; *Much Ado*, V. i. 262.

[24]From *Errors*, I. ii. 77; IV. ii. 32-46; II. ii. 187; IV. iii. 13; V. i. 408. *Gesta Greyorum*, ed. W. W. Greg (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1915), pp. 14-23. See R. A. Foakes, ed., *The Arden Comedy of Errors* (London: Methuen, 1962), pp. xlvii-l, 131-32; Arthur Kinney, "Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* and the Nature of Kinds," *Studies in Philology*, 3(1988), 29-52; and *Renaissance Drama and the English Church Year*, pp. 37-42.

[25]Donna Hamilton, *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1992), pp. 59 ff.

[26]*Errors*, II. i. 97-98; III. ii. 86; III. ii. 59-60; III. ii. 3; III. ii. 11.

[27]*Errors*, IV. iv. 98; IV. iv. 121; IV. iii. 43; IV. iii. 60; IV. iii. 74; I. ii. 41; V. i. 406; V. i. 419.



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# The Patriarchal Uncanny in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*

by David Pollard

> And what I will is Fate.
> God the Father,
> *Paradise Lost*, VII

Freud begins his well-known essay "Family Romances" with the following statement:

> The freeing of the individual, as he grows up, from the authority of his parents is one of the most necessary though one of the most painful results brought about by the course of development. It is quite essential that that liberation should occur. . . . Indeed, the whole progress of society rests upon the opposition between successive generations.[1]

Freud is talking about what we might call "breaking away"; paradoxically his rather somber assertions could stand as a résumé of what is thematized in Shakespearean comedy, with its concerns about fathers and children and the latters' efforts to stand free from the past while simultaneously integrating into and helping to shape a new generation. Freud goes on to say that the process of separation often involves the child becoming disenchanted with his father and repudiating him by imagining another parentage—the child fantasizes that he is the offspring of a different, "grander," more "aristocratic" progenitor. In this there is an element of Oedipal struggle and revenge. Nevertheless, reassuringly Freud adds the claim that any new fantasy parent is actually a nostalgic recollection by the child of his earlier idealization of the true original. "Thus . . . the overvaluation that characterizes a child's earliest years comes into its own again."

On the other hand, as Freud acknowledges in several other contexts, this elaborate reenactment and readjustment in the child's mind can indeed entail "most painful results." For example, one potentially permanent psychical after-effect is a "splitting" of the father-image into "doubles"—ambivalent versions of the same figure as the "good" and "bad" father. It is interesting to note that Freud so emphasizes the potency of this particular "splitting" that he traces to its effects the mental origins of religion. In "A Neurosis of Demonical Possession," Freud sees the oppositional dyad of God and the Devil in Christianity as but transcendentalized



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derivatives of collective humankind's divided response to the father. Thus he states: "If the benevolent and righteous God is a father-substitute, it is not to be wondered at that the hostile attitude, which leads to hate, fear and accusations against him, comes to expression in the figure of Satan. . . . [Moreover] the fact that the figure of the primal father was that of a being with unlimited potentialities of evil, bearing much more resemblance to the Devil than to God, must have left an indelible stamp on all religions."[2] Now it has been put forward that in many ways Shakespeare is Freud's true precursor—that "Shakespeare dramatizes what psychoanalysis theorizes."[3] In the ensuing discussion, at any rate, I plan to explore the implications of the foregoing observations by Freud as they relate to forces everywhere at work in Shakespeare's most intricate and problematized comedy about children breaking away, *The Merchant of Venice.*

Two curious and seemingly extraneous scenes in *The Merchant of Venice,* both involving the rambunctious Lancelot Gobbo, point up anxieties and ambivalences about paternal identity and influence. In Act II, scene ii, debating with himself about fleeing from his master Shylock, Lancelot claims that he is "an honest man's son, or rather an honest woman's son (for indeed my father did something smack, something grow to; he had a kind of taste)."[4] This hint of Oedipal preference reveals Lancelot questioning his father's sexual self-control and marital fidelity. (Ironically it is the clown who is lecherous; we hear from Lorenzo that he is responsible for "the getting up of [a] Negro's belly.") Unexpectedly the old man appears, and Lancelot proceeds to play a cruel practical joke. Old Gobbo, "sand-blind," does not at first recognize his son, and so the young clown tries "confusions" on him. Lancelot pretends to be a stranger and announces to old Gobbo that his son is dead: "for the young gentleman, according to fates and destinies, and such odd sayings, the sisters three, and such branches of learning, is indeed deceased, or as you would say in plain terms, gone to heaven" (II. ii. 50-54). "*Gobbo*: Marry, God forbid! The boy was the very staff of my age, my very prop." The clown's intentions are to territorialize Gobbo, transforming him into a "true-begotten father" (II. ii. 27) by mischievously attempting to manipulate his emotions. But the farcical joke backfires; seeing through the ruse, Gobbo counters forcefully: "I cannot think you are my son." At once, Lancelot grows submissive to his father's authority and gives over the game.

Again, in Act III, scene v, we see Lancelot worrying Jessica over paternal influence: "the sins of the father are to be laid upon the children" (III. v. 1-2). He offers the Jewess the "bastard hope"



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that perhaps Shylock is not her father. When Jessica objects that this slanders her mother, Lancelot airily concludes: "Truly, then, I fear you are damned both by father and mother; thus when I shun Scylla your father, I fall into Charybdis your mother. Well, you are gone both ways" (III. v. 12-14). This is meant to amuse Jessica. On the other hand, Lancelot Gobbo's impudence in varying degrees defames and demonizes the father-figure and thereby adumbrates a disenchantment elsewhere in the drama provoked by the sense of an inescapability from patriarchal containment. Jessica adds (perhaps wistfully) her heart's desire "I shall be saved by my husband; he hath made me a Christian" (III. v. 15).

*The Merchant of Venice* is to an extraordinary degree a play replete with echoes, parallelisms, repetitions, and eerily familiar reduplications. It is also a play with many "doubles." Here Freud's essay "The Uncanny" becomes very helpful. Generally speaking, Freud's thinking tends to be binary; yet as Jonathan Culler's synopsis makes clear, its polarizations contain overlapping and interactive components:

> Freud begins with a series of hierarchical oppositions: normal/pathological, sanity/insanity, real/imaginary, experience/dream, conscious/unconscious, life/death. In each case, the first term has been conceived as prior, a plenitude of which the second is a negation or complication. Situated on the margin of the first term, the second term designates an undesirable, dispensable deviation. Freud's investigations deconstruct these oppositions by identifying what is at stake in our desire to repress the second term and showing that in fact each first term can be seen as a special case of the fundamentals designated by the second term, which in this process is transformed. Understanding of the marginal deviant term becomes a condition of understanding the supposed prior term.[5]

We can see this process at work, for instance, in Freud's doubling of God/Satan. Supposing God to be the prior term, "benevolent" and "righteous," Satan becomes an expression of complicating and undesirable "potentialities of evil" already implicit in this first term. The marginal second term alters our understanding of God (and of man, of course, from whom both reified concepts ultimately stem). When we turn to "The Uncanny," we see that Freud grounds his theory on the psychological impact of unexpected and undesired recurrences—unwanted reappearances of other persons or things, for example; or the disturbing reenactment of similar events. The involuntariness of the recurrence



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tends to induce a feeling of helplessness. It may evoke sensations of the *repetition-compulsion* and as Freud asserts, "whatever reminds us of this inner *repetition-compulsion* is perceived as uncanny."[6] Freud cites with approval Schelling's statement: "'*Unheimliche*' [uncanny] is the name for everything that ought to have remained . . . hidden and secret and has become visible."[7] In short, in psychoanalytic terms, the uncanny is unsettling because it bears a resemblance to the return of the repressed, the *Wiederholung* of what one thought had been "surmounted." Thus, in Freud's view, the emergence of the Satan-figure out of the Godfigure, retrieving elementary fears and thereby reshaping response to the prior Being, must have been experienced by early man as utterly uncanny. In point of fact, Freud actually analyzes E. T. A. Hoffmann's tale, "The Sandman," in which the hero uncannily encounters again and again a figure who appears to be the diabolical "double" of his own father, from whose threat he perceives himself unable to escape.

In *The Merchant of Venice* there are many implied affinities. Lancelot's longings to escape from Shylock parallel those of Jessica. Old Gobbo's difficulties in recognizing his child because of blindness seem an oblique judgment of the insensitive fathering of Shylock. The miserliness of the Jew, of course, connects with the prodigality of Bassanio (both masters of Lancelot), in that, taken together, these traits represent the two contrastive forms of greed. Antonio's vague mood of weary sadness is matched by a similar mood of Portia (I. ii. 1-2). And, as is well-known, the two worlds of the play, "pragmatic" Venice and "idealized" Belmont, are landscapes of ethical values which interactively define each other and which by Act V bear uncanny resemblances to each other; in fact, they largely share the same population. Venice and Belmont are overlapping "doubles," with the distasteful machinations of the former appearing as not altogether foreign to the goings-on in its "green" counterpart.

René Girard has pointed out the symmetry between the venality and vindictiveness of the merchants, Shylock and Antonio. As Girard claims, the Jew becomes most scandalous to the Venetians when he most resembles them. In fact, "in his effort to teach Antonio a lesson, Shylock becomes his grotesque double."[8] For all of his accommodating humanity, when Antonio threatens to call Shylock "dog," to "spit on" and "spurn" him (I. iii. 123), we are witnessing a process of undifferentiation between the two characters whereby hidden, disturbing affinities "become visible." Antonio almost senses this. When Shylock accepts the bond, the merchant exclaims: "The Hebrew will turn Christian, he grows


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kind" (I. iii. 171). In any case, such is the attitude of the two adversaries towards each other that we get a *frisson* of uncanny recognition when Portia asks her impertinent question during the trial scene: "Which is the merchant here and which the Jew?" (IV. i. 170). The matter is, however, much more complicated than this. I suggest that Antonio and Shylock are meant to be seen as "doubles" of the good and bad father. In Shakespeare's source for *The Merchant of Venice*, the character upon whom Antonio is based, Ansaldo, is the godfather of Giannetto (Bassanio). When Giannetto's father dies, the young man goes to his godfather, who "with many tears . . . embraced and kissed" him and "at once . . . entrusted to him the keys of all his ready money. . ."[9] While Shakespeare, for whatever reason, suppresses the name "godfather," I think that the relationship of Antonio and Bassanio is depicted in this spirit of familial affection and generosity. This is indicated by the implied parallel with the parable of the prodigal son when Bassanio asks Antonio for new moneys (I. i. 118-84). Moreover, clearly the breaking away of Jessica from her father is paralleled with the leave-taking of Bassanio.

In Act two, scene eight, Solanio reports with malicious glee:

> I never heard a passion so confused,
> So strange, outrageous, and so variable,
> As the dog Jew did utter in the streets:
> 'My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!
> Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!'. . .
> (II. viii. 12-16)

This is countered by Salarino's report of Antonio's altruistic behavior towards Bassanio in bidding him to pursue his journey to Belmont without concern for the bond: "'Slubber not business for my sake, Bassanio/ But stay the very riping of the time'" (II. viii. 40-41). At this "his eye being big with tears, . . . [Antonio] wrung Bassanio's hand, and so they parted" (47-50). The structured contrast is calculated to enforce the connections (money and the pain of parental loss) between two father-figures even as they are momentarily differentiated. But Shylock is part of another dyad.

In *The Merchant of Venice* the conventions of New Comedy are subjected to a variety of transformations and reconfigurations. For one thing, the Oedipal complications are provided by not one obstructing *senex*, but two. And one of them exerts his influence from beyond the grave! Portia's dead father, whom I will call for convenience's sake "Cato,"[10] is the most powerful absent presence in all of Shakespearean comedy. He is as well this play's commanding exemplification of the good father. As Nerissa reminds



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Portia: "Your father was *ever* virtuous" (I. ii. 23). As such, it is "Cato" who enacts the God-function in *The Merchant of Venice:* his "will" (his desire *and* his testament) is what constitutes both the efficient and final cause of all the action.[11] The play's entire plot, including the bond with Shylock that makes Bassanio's embassy to Belmont possible, derives from "Cato's" setting of the lottery and its terms for Portia's suitors. Moreover, as Nerissa adds, "holy men at their death have good inspirations. Therefore the lottery that he hath devised in these three chests of gold, silver, and lead, whereof who chooses his meaning chooses you, will no doubt never be chosen by any rightly but one who you shall rightly love" (I. ii. 23-27). In other words, "Cato," virtuous and holy, appears to be the heroic father of the Freudian family romance—the valorized super-ego of the play. Thus Portia vows, "I will die as chaste as Diana unless I be obtained by the manner of my father's will" (I. ii. 87).

We know a great deal about "Cato." We know that he is sufficiently an admirer of the ancient virtues to have named his daughter after the constant and courageous child of a noble Roman. We know that he has left a rich inheritance and has taken elaborate precautions to secure his daughter's happiness. We recognize his phallic authority in the identification of Portia with a casket. (Freud says:". . . caskets are also women, symbols of the essential thing in woman, and therefore of a woman herself."[12]) We know also that he is something of a poet and aphorist. We know of his predilections for the number three (gold, silver and lead). And most importantly, we know that he believes that love is demonstrated by risk-taking and generosity. The motto of the correct casket reads, "Who chooseth me, must give and hazard all he hath." All of the "good" characters in *The Merchant of Venice* including Antonio, Bassanio and Portia, embrace a willingness to take chances for love. That is what distinguishes them. Furthermore, like the good analyst, Bassanio is the one suitor able to penetrate the manifest content of the caskets and their mottoes to the latent meaning within—to read the posthumous mind of the analyst, so to speak. Therefore, by the precedent of having hazarded his hopes on the casket lottery, which can be won only by a man of like mind, "Cato" has devised singular means to perpetuate the values of his patriarchal line.

Shylock, of course, is the other *senex*—"Cato's" monstrous "double." What makes Shylock appear like an embodiment of the unlimited potentialities for evil in the father is the indeterminacy of his character. He absorbs even as he eludes essentialist classifications and interpretations. He has been read as comic villain,



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*pharmakos* (scapegoat), the "stranger," "the ambivalent figure of the silver casket," and so forth.[13] To the Christian characters in the play he is simply "the devil" (III. i. 17). Let me add a new classification without necessarily displacing the others. In "Some Character-Types Met With in Psychoanalytic Work," Freud describes a category of persons who, having suffered enough or having renounced basic instincts enough, are unwilling to submit to the disagreeable constraints of civilization. Freud calls these persons the "exceptions." The "exception" is one who sees himself as the innocent victim of earlier painful experiences or injuries which form in his mind entitlement to privileges over others. These include the right to exact retribution. Freud's example of this type is Shakespeare's Richard III, and this is how the analyst paraphrases Richard's opening soliloquy: "Nature has done me wrong in denying that beauty of form which wins human love. Life owes me reparation for this, and I will see that I get it. I have a right to be an exception, to overstep the bounds by which others let themselves be circumscribed. I may do wrong myself, since wrong has been done to me."[14] Freud goes on to say that every member of an audience is likely to see himself as some sort of "exception" and therefore harbor an "inner fellowship" of sympathy with Shakespeare's royal miscreant. If we substitute Jewish gaberdine and its "ancient grudge" for Richard's deformity, I submit that we have located the psychological space of Shylock and the cause of our mixed response to him:

> Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions . . . ? If you prick us, do we not bleed? . . . If you poison us, do we not die? If you wrong us, shall we not revenge? . . . Revenge . . . . The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.
>
> (III. i. 45-57)

Shylock is, therefore, an avenging hero-villain, one who hates music (II. v. 26-35)—the father as "exception" who (unlike Egeus and Baptista in other plays) has uncannily wandered into a romantic comedy about breaking away. He furnishes the extreme term in the opposition of successive generations. And to him are attracted as to a magnet all of the neurotic energies which surround the question of patriarchy in of *The Merchant of Venice*.

"Our house is hell," laments Jessica, in words that resonate across the religious and social distance that divides the Venetian ghetto from Belmont. Jessica's revolt from her father is conscious and direct:



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> Alack, what heinous sin is it in me
> To be ashamed to be my father's child!
> But though I am a daughter to his blood
> I am not to his manners.
>
> (II. iii. 15-18)

Jessica is in several senses the "infidel" (III. ii. 217), the bad daughter whose freeing, however desirable, is accompanied by cruelty, deceit and permanent rupture. In her own case it is she who performs symbolically the trafficking-in-women when from a window in her father's house she passes a "casket" of valuables down to Lorenzo (II. vi. 34). It is she who chooses Christian colonization—she, who wantonly spends her father's money and exchanges his ring (a gift from her mother) for a monkey. Furthermore, to accomplish her transformation into wife, Christian, and inhabitant of Belmont, it is Jessica who enacts the liminal rite of passage by cross-dressing. In her male attire, Jessica says to Lorenzo: "I am glad 'tis night, you do not look on me. / For I am ashamed of my exchange" (II. vi. 35-36). A second time she acknowledges shame, now because of the ambivalent status of her gender. Breaking away is conventionally a male ritual and Jessica can only assume the external signs (as well as behavior) of masculinity: she lacks the essential thing in a man. In other words, transvestite Jessica stands visually forth as the marginal deviant term of her sex, a kind of monster. In that category she remains inescapably her father's child.[15]

One readily appreciates the aptness of Bassanio's enthusiasm over Portia: she is witty, "fair, and . . . of wondrous virtues" (I. i. 161). She is not surprisingly the character who made actress Ellen Terry famous for her vivacity and charm. Nevertheless, numerous parallels indicate that we are meant to construe Jessica as an anamorphic figure upon whom is displaced only a darker, more flagrant version of the romantic heroine's *own* thoughts and impulses. For despite her protestations of filial loyalty, we get many signs that Portia shares in Jessica's chafing discontent: "I may neither choose who I would, nor refuse who I dislike, so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father. Is it not hard, Nerissa, that I cannot choose one and refuse none?" (I. ii. 19-22). Not unexpectedly, there is deep frustration expressed in Portia's acerbic judgments of her various suitors (I. ii.). Later she tells Morocco that her father has "scanted" her and "hedged" her in; and later still, we hear a painful irony in her reference to the right casket as "that wherein *I* am contained" (II. ix. 5). Her house, too, is a kind of hell. Consequently, her pent-up anxiety comes



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urgently to the surface when she implores Bassanio: "I pray you tarry, pause a day or two / Before you hazard. . ." (III. ii. 1-2). She says of the caskets: "I am locked in one of them . . . . To the sea-monster . . . I stand for sacrifice" (III. ii. 40, 57). In the metaphor the sea-monster, needless to say, has to figure Portia's emotionally authentic response to her father's scheme for her future. At this point, therefore, it is hardly possible to misrecognize the unarticulated irrationality of this scheme, comparable, reason suggests, only to that of Shylock's. Hence at this central moment, when Bassanio succeeds in making the right choice, which surmounts even as it fulfills the will of the father, the play presents its most unnerving reversal of fortune. The lovers receive the news of the disaster which has befallen Antonio's ships, and the menace of Shylock and his bond bursts in like an uncanny return of the repressed.

Portia's journey to Venice is familiarly read as the completion of her liberation and the establishment of her authoritative self-empowerment. It also sustains the remarkable resemblance of her life-circumstance and course of action to that of Jessica. As if acknowledging the similarities between them, Portia leaves Jessica behind in Belmont as her surrogate and proceeds in masculine disguise to the deliverance of Antonio and the Christians. Her performance, as the cross-dressed "Daniel come to judgment," however, turns on a discrepancy between outward gesture and ulterior intent as dramatic as the contrast between the outer appearance and inner meaning of "Cato's" three caskets. The trial scene (IV. i.) comprises, I suggest, the focusing enactment of a complex communal reprisal. Portia says to the persistent Shylock:

> Therefore prepare thee to cut off the flesh.
> Shed thou no blood, nor cut thou less nor more
> But just a pound of flesh. If thou tak'st more
> Or less than a just pound, be it but so much
> As makes it light or heavy in the substance
> Or the division of the twentieth part
> Of one poor scruple—nay, if the scale do turn
> But in the estimation of a hair,
> Thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate.
> (IV. i. 320-28)

In this climactic statement, Judaism is again defeated by Christianity; malevolence is bested by superior wit; youth triumphs over age; the dominant social group routs the menacing alien; and ambivalent patriarchy is seemingly stripped of its power. As proxy, Portia completes the spoiling of Jessica's oppressive ori-



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gins. And as Antonio's champion, Portia saves a life and preserves Venetian practices in money-dealing, friendship, and justice. But the jubilant sadism of the entire transaction cannot be overlooked. Gratiano taunts the broken Shylock thus:

> Beg that thou mayst have leave to hang thyself—
> And yet, thy wealth being forfeit to the state,
> Thou hast not left the value of a cord;
> Therefore thou must be hanged at the state's charge.
> (IV. i. 360-63)

Portia does not correct this tone of malice; neither does she express elsewhere in this scene any personal misgivings about the humiliation of Shylock. This is so because here at last she finds a sanctioned opportunity to deflect onto another father the resentments of a disenchanted daughter. In psychological terms, her actions constitute "aggression against the lost object." In other words, Shylock as "Cato's" double, provides Portia with an uncanny substitute for revenge—for an elided and undifferentiated act of evening the score. Equally uncanny, however, is the vision of the comic heroine in male disguise behaving in such a way as to confound Belmont with Venice and to embody, rather than transfigure, the impacted Oedipal values of the latter. Ironically, the trial scene achieves therewith a Brechtian "alienation effect" by irrevocably disorienting our response to the very idea of patriarchy and to all those characters whose personal and social interests its laws serve to privilege and advance.

Act V of *The Merchant of Venice* presents a lingering recessional during which cosmic harmonies are celebrated and the longed-for consummations of love seem near at hand.[16] So too the turmoil of Venice and Shylock seem far from memory. But this is not altogether so. Like a troubled psyche, the text of this play is in the grips of a remorseless *repetition-compulsion.* For instance, before Portia's arrival, we hear the compulsively paralleled retelling of the tales of ancient lovers, including:

> . . . In such a night
> Medea gathered the enchanted herbs
> That did renew old Aeson.
> (V. i. 12-14)

Appropriately, it is Jessica who remembers this mythic event, as it recalls obliquely for the audience in a most ambivalent way the trial and Portia's rescue of Antonio. Medea was after all a sorceress and a witch. The passage too solidifies the identification of



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Antonio as Bassanio's "father." Aeson was the father of Jason the husband of Medea, the mythological figure with whom Bassanio is associated at the outset (I. i. 170). Moreover, although distanced by Lorenzo's reference ("the wealthy Jew"), Shylock indirectly appears at Belmont in his son-in-law's archly superior character sketch:

> The man that hath no music in himself,
> Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
> Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils;
> The motions of his spirit are dull as night
> And his affections dark as Erebus.
> Let no such man be trusted.
> (V. i. 83-88)

Thus returns scarcely concealed, in Lancelot's words, the "very devil incarnation,"(II. ii. 20-21) the patriarch who wanted to stop his "house's ears" against the intrusive sounds of revelry and the wry-necked fife. And to Belmont as well comes the merchant of Venice, a curious mixture of "Cato's" love and Shylock's hatred. Portia's heartfelt welcome of Antonio indicates that a nostalgic reinstatement of fatherhood, chastened and subdued, is acceptable in her new order of things. As if to ensure her enfranchisement, Portia assumes to herself the role of benefactor by the announcement that she has "chanced" upon a letter which tells that *three* of Antonio's ships have "richly come to harbor suddenly" (V. i. 277). Antonio, the play's only "true-begotten father," is reduced to grateful, marginalizing silence: "I am dumb" (V. i. 279). What else, for Portia is as much in control of Belmont in Act V and of who is welcome there, and on what terms, as ever her father was before. This is asserted comically, but emphatically, by her playfully coy sport over the ring. For the one who predominates in Belmont, the place of marriage, is she who will control the ring and its usage. And the ring is Portia's symbol of choice for her own femininity, in implied opposition to the patriarchal caskets. We have witnessed change indeed, but little progress toward genuine liberality. For Portia emerges at the end as a kind of "androgynous" patriarch—a chip off the old block, as it were.[17]

The will of Portia's father is to contain, direct, and sharpen the sexual coming-of-age of his child—to make things "tarry" a while. The plot of *The Merchant of Venice* with its reduplications and surprising complications serves to carry out this very end. For the consummation of Portia's marriage is deferred beyond the confines of the play. Thereby does "Cato's" power, in Lacanian phrase, "le nom/non du pere," elide with that of another "Will."



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*The Merchant of Venice* is a very successful play of a kind that in a sense cannot finally be written successfully. Provided with existence—motive, language, gesture, and action—by "Shakespere," the daughter can never truly break away. Such is the ontological paradox regarding works of art on this theme. Shakespeare is always the uncanny absent presence hidden and secret behind every syllable, impeding or moving the daughters desires toward their unrealized fulfillment: in truth Shakespeare is "Cato," riddling Sphinx-like, whose intent is sufficiently ambiguous as to require repeated attempts at interpretation, but finally, if somewhat mysteriously, getting his own way. For this reason a work of art like *The Merchant of Venice* can only encode an elaborate foreplay for playwright, his characters, and scoptic audience alike which leaves everyone in the end unsatisfied. For fantasies cannot effectively depict satisfaction any more than they can by themselves satisfy. Richard Wagner understood this gap between life and art as well as any creative genius ever has. In 1852, the German composer wrote to a friend:

> I am often now beset by strange thoughts on 'art,' and on the whole I cannot help finding that, if we had *life*, we should have no need of *art*. Art begins at precisely the point where life breaks off: where nothing more is present, we call out in art, 'I wish.' I simply do not understand how a *truly happy* individual could ever hit upon the idea of producing 'art'. . .[18]

I suspect that Shakespeare's play was written under the burden of a similar ambivalence. Can art realize a dream, change one's way of life as parent or child (Shakespeare was both), or correct the ills of any social context? Perhaps the disquieting uncertainties which such questions provoke account for why this comedy about the family romance seems so tortured, so neurotic, and so sad. Perhaps also we can wonder whether *The Merchant of Venice* did not spring up uncannily as some hidden, perturbing, and not altogether welcome *revenant* from the depths of the poet's own soul.

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## Notes

[1]Sigmund Freud, "Family Romances," *The Sexual Enlightenment of Children* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), p. 41.

[2]Freud, "A Neurosis of Demonical Possession," *Studies in Parapsychology* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), p. 105.

[3]David Willbern, cited in Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Litera-*



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*ture as Uncanny Causality* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 190. I wish to acknowledge a general debt to Garber's stimulating book.

[4]This and all subsequent quotations from Shakespeare s play come from the Cambridge edition of *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. M. M. Mahood (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989).

[5]Jonathan Culler, cited in Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice* (New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 138.

[6]Freud, "The Uncanny," *Studies in Parapsychology*, p. 44. A rich secondary literature has grown up around Freud's essay. See especially: Helene Cixous, "Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche*,"*New Literary History*, 7 (1976), 525-48; Neil Hertz, "Freud and the Sandman," *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josue V. Harari (London: Methuen, 1979), 296-321; and Francoise Meltzer, "The Uncanny Rendered Canny: Freud' s Blind Spot in Reading Hoffmann' s 'Sandman,'" *Introducing Psychoanalytic Theory*, ed. Sander L. Gilman (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1982), 218-39.

[7]Freud, p. 27.

[8]René Girard, "'To Entrap the Wisest : A Reading of *The Merchant of Venice*," *Literature and Society*, ed. Edward W. Said (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1980), p. 104. See also Girard, "From Mimetic Desire to the Monstrous Double," *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977), 143-68.

[9]Ser Giovanni Fiorentino, "Il Pecorone," Appendix I, John Russell Brown, ed. *The Arden Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice* (London: Methuen, 1977), p. 141.

[10]"*Bassanio:* Her name is Portia, nothing undevalued. / To Cato's daughter, Brutus Portia" (I. i.164-65).

[11]Max H. James quotes as representative Elizabethan ideology the preacher Robert Cawdry: "Albeit the name of father belongeth properly unto God, as Jesus Christ said: "'You have but one father, even him that is in heaven.' Yet doth he so impart it to that have begotten us, that they being called fathers, do bear the title and image of God." *Our House is Hell: Shakespeare's Troubled Families* (New York: Greenwood Press,1989), p. 42.

[12]Freud, "The Theme of the Three Caskets," *Character and Culture* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), p. 69.

[13] E. Stoll, "Shylock," (1929) rpt. in *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Kenneth Myrick (New York: New American Library, 1987), pp. 157-73; Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 44; Leslie A. Fiedler, "The Jew as Stranger," *The Stranger in Shakespeare* (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), 85-136; and Sarah Kofman, "Conversions: *The Merchant of Venice* under the Sign of Saturn," *Literary Theory Today*, ed., Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990), 142-66.

[14]Freud, "Some Character-Types Met With in Psychoanalytic Work," *Character and Culture*, p. 161.

[15]For an interesting attempt to rehabilitate Jessica, see Camille Slights, "In Defense of Jessica,"*Shakespeare Quarterly*, 31 (1980), 357-68.

[16]See James A. Sieman, "*The Merchant of Venice*: Act V as Ritual Reiteration," *Studies in Philology*, 67 (1970), 201-09.

[17]See Marilyn L. Williamson's strong feminist reading, *The Patriarchy of Shakespeare's Comedies* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 49-51. Williamson views Portia's manipulative treatment of the ring as an attempt to maintain control of her life even after marriage. With the ring episode "the play effectively subverts the ostensible subordination of Portia in her marriage."

[18]*The Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, trans. and ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1989), p. 246.



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# Sons of Eve: Ambiguity and Gender in the First Tetralogy

by Catherine S. Cox

In the *Henry VI* tetralogy, Shakespeare complicates conventional representations of gender identity by means of ambiguously constructed female characters.[1] Joan of Arc and Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester, for example, are shown to exhibit many characteristics of the conventional *virago* types, while Elizabeth provides contrast in her rather bland and perhaps inadvertent acquiescence, as does Anne, so easily is she seduced. And, evolving over the course of the tetralogy, Queen Margaret especially complicates conventional gender identities throughout her various social, political, and economic confrontations. The female characters, Joan and Margaret in particular, supply the tetralogy with culturally and theoretically profound treatments of gender issues that may be explored in relation to literary and theological conventions. In particular, these two female figures exhibit characteristics germane to Renaissance appropriations of early Christian and medieval antifeminist commonplaces of valorization and denigration, the distinction between them rendered ambiguous by the subtle incorporation of competing motifs. In my analysis to follow, I shall explicate the polysemous gender constructions in the *Henry VI* tetralogy in connection with literary-theological traditions. Ultimately, I hope to demonstrate that Shakespeare's radical departure from the limitations of gender and gender stereotypes leads him to favor more ambiguous—and, perhaps, ultimately ambivalent—constructions.

## I.

A brief overview of relevant literary-theological gender labels, categories, and identities will be helpful in situating Shakespeare's work. Despite the institutional religious turmoil affecting England throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many of the basic symbols and metaphors of Christian tradition remain unchanged in themselves, though necessarily recontextualized because of historical transition. These include a wide range of attributes and characteristics owing far more to popular perception and cultural myths than to the tenets set forth by the early Christian and medieval writings as they were received, and indeed the status of woman in Shakespeare's England



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owes much to popular interpretations of both Christian and secular intellectual traditions.

One avenue of exploration that can illuminate gender conflation in Shakespeare's work is the influence of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. In the *Tractatus ad laudem gloriosae Virginis,* St. Bernard refers to those women who have chosen a life of virginity as exiles: "in exsilio filios Evae" [sons of Eve in exile].[2] The description is curious owing to its confusion of gender labels—for, as current representatives of Eve's legacy and lineage, women would presumably be given the label "*filiae,*" daughters, rather than "*filii,*" sons—but this discrepancy may be partly explained by the relative availability of labels in connection with gender identity. By the twelfth century, when Bernard is writing his famous treatise, women are still associated with, and thus bearing the misogynistic brunt of, Eve's perceived legacy of sin. Indeed, even in the fifth century an association set forth in St. Jerome's oft-cited *Epistola ad Eustochium*—"Mors per Evam: vita per Mariam" (Death through Eve, life through Mary)—effectively conflates women and carnal sin, fueling the negative perceptions of Woman throughout the early Christian and medieval eras.[3] The embodiment of carnal concupiscence and subversive disobedience, or at least the potential thereof, women are therefore regarded with mistrust and apprehension: *filiae Evae,* the daughters of Eve.

Identifying "good" women—who acquiesce to patristic standards of virginity and gender appropriate behavior—in laudatory terms, while still acknowledging their essential relationship to Eve's legacy, then, is accomplished by way of Bernard's *filii Evae* label. But while the women remain *Evae,* of Eve, suggests that they have somehow transcended her shameful legacy of sin, albeit cryptically, through their identification as sons, *filii.* In this regard Bernard's formulation echoes Jerome's (if not his wording *per se,* then certainly his ideology), itself drawn off the writings of St. Paul. In Book III of his *Commentariorum in epistolam ad Ephesios,* Jerome makes clear that in his ideal world, the only good woman is not even a woman at all, but an honorary man:

> Quandiu mulier partui servit et liberis, hanc habet ad virum differentiam, quam corpus ad animam. Sin autem Christo magis voluerit servire quam saeculo, mulier esse cessabit, et dicetur vir.[4]
> [As long as woman is for birth and children, she has difference from man, as body from soul. But if she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be woman and will be called man.]



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Jerome's remark here echoes Paul's description in his own epistle to the Galations, that, in an ideal Christian environment, "non est masculus neque femina" (there is no masculine nor feminine).[5] The challenge for Paul, Jerome, and Bernard, then, is to exclude women—the objects of flesh and corresponding revulsion owing to Eve's legacy—from patriarchal hegemony while simultaneously purporting to include all of God's creation in paradigms of God's master plan.[6] Hence the accomplishment of the *filii Evae* label: it encompasses both *virgo* and *virago* overtly in their most positive patriarchal senses while never fully distancing itself from the legacy of corruption and taint derived from the Genesis narrative. The depiction of women in early Christian treatises and in the narratives of those women who exemplify desired patriarchal virtues, then, is thus never too far removed from the underlying anxiety, inconsistency, and sense of paradoxical ambivalence of their authors.

Given that the language of patristic theology is also the language of literary criticism from its early Christian origins into the early modern era (at which time "literary criticism" arguably evolves into a separate and distinct discipline unto itself),[7] we might pause to consider the utility of the *filii Evae* figure in relation to the implications of gender construction and gender(ed) representations in literary works, both religious and secular. Hagiographical narratives, describing in vivid details both the chastity and martyrdom of their heroines, were widespread and popular forms of literature dating from about the fifth century A.D., when Jerome's directives for virginity as an ascetic calling achieved both currency as valorized practice and, inevitably, resistance and violence, the stuff of martyrdom and legend.[8] Widely circulated examples include the lives of Juliana, Catherine, and Cecilia. Indeed, Chaucer provides English literature with its best known example, in the *Invocatio ad Mariam* of the anonymous Second Nun narrator of the *Canterbury Tales*, who prefaces her own hagiographical narrative of St. Cecilia with an address that is as much about her own status as her subject's, referring to herself overtly as the "unworthy sone of Eve."[9] (To what extent these narratives are based on actual lives is, of course, the problem of any literary work that purports to historical basis—the paradoxical genre of "historical fiction" invites us to consider that relationship, well aware that ultimately it is as a work of literature that we regard the text.)

Although the same five or six names recur frequently throughout the known hagiographic canon, the literature and popular culture of the late medieval and early modern eras did not always



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have to look back into the historical past, to the early Christian ascetics, for their heroines. The fifteenth-century French peasant Joan of Arc, for instance, lived a life interpreted by many as fulfilling the patristic directives of virgin martyrdom, and she therefore became a subject of popular legend.[10] In conjunction with her military and political alliances, Joan's spiritual commitment—her calling on other martyred saints during her execution by fire, for instance—helped to create a contemporary legend for fifteenth century devotees, which continued to enjoy widespread appeal during the late sixteenth century, when Shakespeare is writing the first play of his *Henry VI* tetralogy.

We are introduced to Shakespeare's Joan in the first act of *1 Henry VI* by way of the Bastard of Orleans' description, which emphasizes her "holy maid" status:

> A holy maid hither with me I bring,
> Which by a vision sent to her from heaven
> Ordained is to raise this tedious siege,
> And drive the English forth the bounds of France.
> (I. ii. 51-54)

Of course, since this is an English play, written and performed for an English audience, and the character of Joan an enemy of England,[11] the portrait is here extended to include hints of the occult, prophecy and magic; the Bastard's references here are largely benign—i.e., "spirit of deep prophecy" (55)—but they introduce a misogynistic literary convention that had achieved particular currency during the sixteenth century, the association of supposedly "unnatural" women with witchcraft and Satan.[12] The shifting emphasis of the Bastard's speech here is typical of the character Joan's representation throughout: there is a profound and marked ambivalence regarding a woman who, while exhibiting inordinate strength and leadership—the *virago/virgo* topos—is simultaneously impugned with the suggestion that her works are for Satan, not God. The competing images are present throughout the play, and shift along political (i.e., English/French) lines; to Alanson, for instance, she is a "blessed saint" and "sweet virgin" (III. iii. 15, 16), to Talbot, a "damned sorceress," the "Foul fiend of France" (III. ii. 38, 52). In this regard, Joan is the *virago* who transcends gender constraints to fulfill a valiant purpose—for Joan, the military leadership of her people is a cause they believe to be just—and who, as is typical of the hagiographic heroine, will be the subject of rumor, innuendo, and scheming.

Joan describes herself in language that evokes, albeit indirectly, Christian asceticism and the *virago/virgo* "son of Eve"



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topos: "Heaven and our Lady gracious hath it pleas'd / To shine on my contemptible estate" (I. ii. 74, 75); "My courage try by combat, if thou dar'st, / And thou shalt find that I exceed my sex. / Resolve on this: thou shalt be fortunate / If thou receive me for thy warlike mate" (I. ii. 89-92). And when Charles remarks, "Thou art an Amazon" (I. ii. 104), Joan quickly balances the portrait, not by denying the label (which she presumbly knows is fitting), but by complementing it; "Christ's Mother helps me, else I were too weak" (I. ii. 106). Her self-described association with the Virgin confirms her *virgo* identity, and her calling upon the Virgin's assistance in military engagement affirms her position as *virago*. In addition, Joan's being stigmatized and ostracized by those around her—in particular the male adversaries who apparently fear not only defeat in battle but, more terrifyingly, defeat by a woman warrior—underscores her status as "other," a marginalized outsider or, in the language of Bernard, an "exile." Joan's self-imposed exile from cultural norms marks her as "other," and this overt identification will ultimately lead to her demise.

The name associated with Joan, and in fact used by Joan herself, aptly corresponds to the ambivalence inhering in this *virgo/virago* portrait: "pucelle." In boldly proclaiming victory and assigning herself credit for her deed, Joan announces to the Dauphin, Reignier, and Alanson, "Advance our waving colors on the walls, / Rescu'd is Orleance from the English! / Thus Joan de Pucelle hath perform'd her word" (I. vi. 1-3). Meaning "the maid," both in the sense of "the virgin" and "the slut,"[13] the "pucelle" label at once embodies the two extremes of woman's sexual identity, virgin and harlot.[14] Paradoxically, Joan is at once both: virgin in her manifestations of piety and devotion to her cause (hence her "humble handmaid" self-reference [III. iii. 42]),[15] and promiscuous (symbolically, at least) in her divided commitments to France, God, and the men with whom she must interact in order to fulfill her mission. Indeed, Joan's famous "circle" metaphor may be understood as an illustration of the text's own ambivalence regarding her promiscuity:

> Glory is like a circle in the water,
> Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself,
> Till by broad spreading it disperse to nought.
> (I. ii. 133-35)

Whether Joan actually is sexually promiscuous is a matter of debate, since innuendo and rumor abound throughout the play while no concrete evidence is offered.



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Joan's claim of pregnancy at the moment of her execution is similarly unresolved, complicating the character in its twofold, paradoxical insistence upon both virginity and promiscuity:

> Will nothing turn your unrelenting hearts?
> Then, Joan, discover thine infirmity,
> That warranteth by law to be thy privilege.
> I am with child, ye bloody homicides!
> Murther not then the fruit within my womb,
> Although ye hale me to a violent death.
> (V. iv. 59-64)

The claim is further complicated in that Joan is unable or unwilling to identify the father, other than supplying a few cryptic and obviously conflicting remarks: "It was Alanson that enjoy'd my love" (73); "'Twas neither Charles nor yet the duke I nam'd, / But Reignier, King of Naples, that prevail'd" (77-78). Does Joan de Pucelle here provide, as many critics argue, confirmation of her harlotry, a fitting manifestation of her promiscuity in that she herself cannot identify the father from among the many candidates? Or, is it that Joan uses this fib as an attempt to forestall the execution, perhaps to torment and tease the executioners by forcing them to admit that the burning of an unborn child is a morally acceptable wartime practice for them? The text allows no simple answer,[16] but the ambiguity of the episode aptly corresponds to the representation of Joan in the play. Joan is shown, in her own words and actions, to exhibit the positive qualities of the "son of Eve" type. Even if that portrait is compromised by the stereotypical accusations of wantonness that are necessary to construct a villain because of issues of politics and national identity for Shakespeare's audience, Joan manifests the *virago/virgo* topos in both its spiritual and literary senses.

## III.

It therefore is no mere coincidence that Margaret of Anjou enters the play just as Joan de Pucelle is exiting it. Juxtaposed with the burning of Joan is Suffolk's wooing of Margaret, ostensibly on Henry's behalf; just before the "sorceress condemn'd to burn" (V. iv. 1) is brought forth, Margaret declares her own comportment as that which "becomes a maid, / A virgin" (V. iii. 177-78). As the play prepares for Joan's departure, then, it simulataneously prepares for Margaret's entrance, making an overt substitution, as it were, of one woman for another. Indeed, it would not be reading too much into the play to suggest, perhaps, that each woman



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represents one manifestation of a single dramatic presence; the two complement each other and coincide in important thematic and symbolic ways. But the trajectories are reversed—while Joan's virtuous characterization rapidly deteriorates near the end of her presence in the play, Margaret's character is a monstrous conflation of misogynistic stereotypes before the character is arguably given a moral reprieve in her last scene of the final play of the tetralogy. Thus as an image of a feminine ideal in virtue, attractiveness, and decorum, Margaret initially seems to provide a nice balance to Joan's *virago* qualities, though this image is quickly challenged by a more duplicitous and far more complex characterization. Henry is immediately captivated by Suffolk's description of her beauty and character at the end of *1 Henry*—"Her peerless feature, joined with her birth / Approves her fit for none but for a king"—which is, tellingly, elaborated upon successively to sound, ironically enough, much like the French descriptions of Joan: "Her valiant courage and undaunted spirit, / (More than in women commonly is seen)" (V. v. 68-71). Margaret's character will evolve over the course of the three remaining plays, and, like Joan, Margaret will assume the role of agitator and nemesis in the lives of those associated with the English court; her intentions are not always obvious, though her villainy is at times appalling. Still, she is neither wholly reducible to the role of "villain" nor excusable in her actions (by most moral standards)—ultimately her ambiguity prevails.

It is fitting, therefore, that Margaret's first appearance in *2 Henry VI* illustrates the utmost in charm and decorum as she addresses her new husband, the King, in the presence of her ally and paramour, Suffolk—

> Great King of England, and my gracious lord,
> The mutual conference that my mind hath had,
> By day, by night, waking and in my dreams,
> In courtly company, or at my beads,
> With you, mine alder-liefest sovereign,
> Makes me the bolder to salute my king
> With ruder terms, such as my wit affords
> And overjoy of heart doth minister.
> (I. i. 24-31)

—which Henry approves as "grace in speech," language "yclad with wisdom's majesty" (32-33). Her scheming with Suffolk, their desire for power and control, their betrayal of Gloucester—all these activities characterize Margaret as relentlessly self-serving and driven. In *2 Henry VI*, then, Margaret is on the surface a lady,



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quite feminine and decorous; but beneath this affected visage lurks the soul of a corrupted *virago*, characterized by a masculine drive for power that not only provides the motivation for betrayal and civil war throughout the tetralogy, but also forms the tetralogy's thematic core. Indeed, in *3 Henry VI* Margaret's cruelty will show itself as appalling viciousness, most notably in the famous "molehill" scene of York's mocking and death.[17] Here Margaret taunts the hapless York first with a reminder of his son's death—"Look, York, I stained this napkin with the blood / That valiant Clifford with his rapier's point / Made issue from the bosom of the boy" (I. iv. 79-81)—and then with a mockery of his own loss of power: "O, 'tis a fault too too unpardonable! / Off with the crown; and, with the crown, his head, / And whilst we breathe, take time to do him dead" (106-08).

Margaret, the "She-wolf of France," as York describes her, is indeed "ill-beseeming" with regard to her sex, "like an Amazon trull" (111-14), a "tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide" (137). Margaret, then, embodies a relentless, determined cruelty devoid of any hint of compassion or remorse; any manifestation of *pathos*, conventionally gendered feminine, is conspicuous only by its obvious absence. There is little evidence of piety or commitment to an ascetic spiritual *virgo* ideal throughout parts 2 and 3, and indeed Margaret seems far removed from Joan's *filii Evae* topos. The "She-wolf of France" label[18] evokes Joan as well; and the image of Margaret here arguably reflects upon the first play's attempt to denigrate its *filius Evae*, La Pucelle.

But the final play of the tetralogy, *Richard III*, tempers the negative image of Margaret, beginning with Gloucester's exoneration of Margaret's villainy: "I cannot blame her; by God's holy Mother, / She hath had too much wrong, and I repent / My part thereof that I have done to her" (I. iii. 305-07). Richard's swearing by "God's holy Mother" provides a thematic link to the Virgin/*virgo* presence, which assumes additional importance when taken in conjunction with the image of the grieving mother, the *mater dolorosa*, introduced with the Duchess in II. ii and expanded with Margaret's own participation in IV. iv.[19] Here, in IV. iv, we find a triumvirate of grieving mothers, the most definite of which is Elizabeth, lamenting their losses; in addition, we find Margaret, fiesty and sharp-tongued, not only articulating angry criticisms in the form of prophetic curses[20] but also, at Elizabeth's request, instructing her protege to do so as well:

> If ancient sorrow be most reverent,
> Give mine the benefit of seniory,



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> And let my griefs frown on the upper hand.
> If sorrow can admit society,
> Tell over your woes again by viewing mine.
> (IV. iv. 35-39)

The emphasis on child-bearing and loss in Margeret's speeches to the Duchess and Elizabeth is important here in her final scene, for it provides a connection between the various topoi associated with Margaret throughout the tetralogy; Margaret's usurpations of power and her manipulating others have been unnatural, just as it is unnatural for the mother to outlive her son. Coming as it does in a scene of spiritual reconciliation, it perhaps provides a means of exonerating Margaret for her sins. While many readers find that the Margeret offered in *Richard III is* hardly the same character as that inhabiting the texts of the three *Henry VI* plays,[21] the apparent transformation of the character is significant in light of the tetralogy's attention to literary and theological traditions.

The final image of Margaret offers balance; there is no clear-cut, single, definitive portrait of Margaret, nor need there be. She is both masculine and feminine in her behavior and speech, or, we could argue, neither—the competing manifestations of gender exhibited in Margaret's representation effectively cancel each other out, or at least force us to acknowledge her ambiguity.[22] Initally a monstrous illustration of a *virago* in its most unnatural and undesirable sense, she is restored to a more conventional maternal topos in her final appearance. This surprising, perhaps forced, restoration of the more palatable, conventional image likewise invites us to reflect further upon her connections to Joan, La Pucelle, whose feigned pregnancy just prior to her death also renders her final image maternal. The twofold dimension of the *filius Evae* presence, then, is effectively recuperated by way of an ambiguous recasting of Margaret that both reifies and betrays the originary topos.

Shakespeare's use of the *filii Evae* figure is, of course, complicated by the shifting relationship of religion and politics in England during the late sixteenth century. From a cultural perspective, Shakespeare's women additionally reflect a marked change in the masculine power structures that for so long had dominated English rule. The "Virgin Queen" Elizabeth obviously exhibits qualities associated with the *filii Evae* type, and her influence can be felt upon much of England's early modern literature,[23] in which representations of historical figures inevitably betray factual liberties for the sake of pragmatism and drama.[24] Contextualized by literary and theological traditions, the women inhabiting the *Henry*



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*VI* tetralogy offer provocative insights into a volatile and ambivalent world of ambiguity and gender: "this it is," observes Richard, "when men are rul'd by women" (*Richard III*, I. i. 62).[25]

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## Notes

[1]Whether the three *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III* actually constitute a "tetralogy" remains a matter of critical difference; the present essay accepts the position that the four are unified and united despite their respective differences and problems. Herschel Baker, in his introduction to the plays (*The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974], pp. 587-93), indicates that the *Henry VI* plays served as a kind of warm-up for the writing of *Richard III*, "that great event" (p. 593); others see the earlier plays as more integral, despite their relative inferiority. For an overview of the issue, see Robert Ornstein, *A Kingdom for a Stage: The Achievement of Shakespeare's History Plays* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 33-82, esp. pp. 33-35; Phyllis Rackin, "History into Tragedy: The Case of *Richard III*," in *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*, ed. Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1996), 31-53, considers matters of genre distinction; see also Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function*, ed. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), 73-85. All citations of Shakespeare's works will cite the *Riverside* edition, with locations provided in text.

[2]Saint Bernard, *Tractatus ad laudem gloriosae Virginis*, in the *Patrologia cursus completus, series latina* (hereafter PL), ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1844-83, with reprints), vol. 182. The image occurs in other texts, most notably the *Salve Regina's* "exsules filii Hevae" [exiled sons of heaven] and the *Prymer's* "exiled sones of Eue"; texts are *Salve Regina*, cited by Marina Warner, *Alone of All her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Knopf, 1976), p. 115, and *The Prymer* or *Lay Folk's Prayer Book*, ed. Henry Littlehales, Early English Text Society no. 105 (Oxford: EETS, 1895); Latin translations my own here and throughout. The phrase has received critical attention particularly in relation to its presence in the Prologue of Chaucer's *Second Nun's Tale*, to be discussed below. On Bernard's attitudes toward gender, see Caroline Walker Bynum's chapter "Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother," in her *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982), 110-69; for a psychoanalyticial perspective, see Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1987), 151-69; and, in relation to hermeneutics, David Damrosch, "*Non Alia Sed Aliter*: The Hermeneutics of Gender in Bernard of Clairvaus," in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991), 181-95.

[3]Saint Jerome, *Epistolae*, no. 22, PL, vol. 22. Jerome's association evolves into one of the better known typological associations, exemplifying the ambivalence of the theologians in their attitude towards women. Commentary on patristic attitudes toward gender is vast; see, for instance, Margaret Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), pp. 53-77; Elizabeth A. Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends* (New York: Mellen, 1979); Glenda McLeod, *Virtue and Venom: Catalogs of Women from Antiquity*



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*to the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1991), pp. 42-50; Eleanor Commo McLaughlin, "Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Woman in Medieval Theology," in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1974), pp. 213-66; Jo Ann McNamara, "Sexual Equality and the Cult of Virginity in Early Christian Thought," *Feminist Studies*, 3 (1976), 145-58; Monique Alexandre, "Early Christian Women," in A *History of Women in the West, Vol. 1: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints*, ed. Pauline Schmidtt Pantel, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Belknap and Harvard Univ. Press, 1992), 409-44.

[4]Saint Jerome, *Commentariorum in epistolam ad Ephesios*, 3.28, in PL, vol. 26.

[5]Saint Paul, Galatians 3.28, in *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam Clementinam*, 4th ed., ed. Alberto Colunga and Laurentio Turrado (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1965).

[6]Saint Ambrose makes a similar comment in his *Expositio in evangelii secundum Lucam*, ed. M. Adriaen, *Corpus Christianorum series latina*, ed. 14 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1957), 10.161. On early Christian, medieval, and early modern misogyny and its theological underpinnings, particularly with regard to virginity as the ascetic ideal, see Susanna Elm, *"Virgins of God": The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994); John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 5-29; R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991); Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ: Studies* in *Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 1-45.

[7]Eugene Vance, *Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. xi. A broad, but useful, overview of Elizabethan theology and its literary influences on Shakespeare and his contemporaries is supplied by Roland Mushat Frye, *Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), 63-110.

[8]On hagiography and its conventions, see the overview provided by Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988); see also Barbara Abou-el-Haj, *The Medieval Cult of Saints: Formations and Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), 1-60.

[9]Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), VIII. 62.

[10]See Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (New York: Knopf, 1981), for a detailed history and profile of the historical figure and her many literary and popular representations. Simon Shepherd, *Amazons and Warrior Women: Varieties of Feminism in Seventeenth-Century Drama* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), notes, with regard to the term *virago* in the Renaissance, "Heywood explains its semantic origin: 'All these Heroyicke Ladies are generally called Viragoes, which is derived of Masculine Spirits,'" and that Joan of Arc is listed as "ye French Virago" in Gabriel Harvey's *Commonplace Book* (p. 35).

[11]On the historical relevance of Joan to England's sense of nationalism, see Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Sussex: Harvester, 1983), pp. 105-06 and 156-59. Issues of sexual identity in relation to the theatrical tradition of male actors'performing female roles have received productive attention in recent years; although it is beyond the scope of my discussion to address the subject, of particular relevance are Leah S. Marcus, "Shakespeare's Comic Heroines, Elizabeth I, and the Political Uses of Androgyny," in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1986), 135-53; Jean E.



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Howard, *The Stage* and *Social Struggle* in *Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1994); and Jardine, 9-36.

[12]On the association of women and witchcraft and its presence in *1 Henry VI*, see Marilyn L. Williamson, "'When Men Are Rul'd by Women': Shakespeare's First Tetralogy," *Shakespeare Studies, 19* (1987), 41-59, esp. pp. 41-46.

[13]Warner, *Joan of Arc*, notes, with regard to the disputed etymology and polysemy of "pucelle," that the word "means 'virgin,' but in a special way, with distinct shades connoting youth, innocence and, paradoxically, nubility. It is the equivalent of the Hebrew *almah*, used of both the Virgin Mary and the dancing girls in Solomon's harem in the Bible" (p. 22). Hence Talbot's pun in *1 Henry VI*: "Pucelle or pussel, Dauphin or dogfish" (I. iv. 107).

[14]Sexual denigration as a means of tempering or neutralizing the effects of a dominant or at least non-passive woman is nothing new, of course, either in literature or culture; see Catherine S. Cox, "Froward Language and Wanton Play: The 'Commoun' Text of Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 29 (1996), 58-72, for an overview of fifteenth century culture and context. The implications of sexuality and gender in Shakespeare's world are given insightful treatment by Phyllis Rackin, "Foreign Country: The Place of Women and Sexuality in Shakespeare's Historical World," in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994), 68-95, esp. pp. 71-72.

[15]The "handmaid" reference evokes the Virgin Mary's self-identification as *ancilla* in St. Luke's account of the Annunciation (1. 1-56): in response to Gabriel's "Ave gratia plena: Dominus tecum: benedicta tu in mulieribus," Mary responds, "Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum" ("Hail [one] full of grace: the Lord with you: you are blessed among women." "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word."). The role of *ancilla* as child-bearer has its origins in the Hagar-Ismael episode of Genesis, and the term retains its connotations of surrogacy in its New Testament manifestation as phrased by the Virgin herself.

[16]On the vexing nature of the episode, see, for instance, David M. Bevington, "The Domineering Female in *1 Henry VI*," *Shakespeare Studies*, 2 (1966), 51-58, who argues that "Joan is herself a strumpet. Her claim of pregnancy to avoid execution (V. ii) is an outrageous travesty of the Virgin birth" (p. 52); Coppelia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981), critiques Bevington's argument, noting that while Bevington "appears to accept the traditional categories of male and female roles at face value," Kahn herself sees them "as projections of male anxieties, consciously presented as such by Shakespeare" (p. 55, n. ll). Joan's claim may be understood also as a parody of the hagiographic "virgin mother" figure, in that Joan appears to insist simultaneously upon both the miraculous presence of an asexually created child and a series of quite human paternal candidates; for historical and cultural background, see Heffernan, who describes the "virgin mother" topos in relation to hagiography (231-99).

[17]Irene G. Dash, *Wooing, Wedding, and Power: Women in Shakespeare's Plays* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1981), argues that although York is unable to save himself, he does manage to expose Margaret's key weakness, through his "bludgeoning of Margaret for her unwomanliness" (p. 185).

[18]The "She-wolf" label perhaps evokes as well the famous *lupa* of Dante's *Inferno*: "Ed una lupa, che di tutte brame / sembiava carca ne la sua magrezza, / e molte genti fe gia viver grame" (And a she-wolf, who all crawings carried in her leanness, to many people had already brought torment) (49-51), *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Vol. 1: Inferno* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980,



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trans. my own). The image combines the perceived negativeness and threatening nature of the feminine with the overt attribution of bestiality or depravity to women who exhibit such aspects.

[19]Madonne M. Miner, "'Neither mother, wife, nor England's queen': The Roles of Women in *Richard III*," in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1980), 35-55, describes this scene as "the most moving example of women-aiding-women" in the plays (p. 47). On the *mater dolorosa* image in general and its implications for feminist critical theory, see Kristeva, pp. 234-63. On mothers in Shakespeare, see Jeanne Addison Roberts, "Shakespeare's Maimed Birth Rites," in *True Rites and Maimed Rites: Ritual and AntiRitual in Shakespeare and His Age*, ed. Linda Woodbridge and Edward Berry (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1992), 123-44: "For all practical purposes, mature, potentially sexually active women on Shakespeare's stage are perceived as either virgins or whores; and it is the 'whores' who shape the future. This dilemma obviously works to create the crisis for men of the birth trauma and helps to explain the scarcity of mothers in the plays" (p. 131).

[20]Howard Dobin demonstrates in *Merlin's Disciples* that riddles and curses articulated by witches and other conjuring figures were believed to signify political sedition; see citation and discussion in Howard, pp. 135-36.

[21]Bryan Crockett, *The Play of Paradox: Stage and Sermon in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), notes of this scene, "Margaret functions as a sort of Senecan Fury, howling out invectives and prophesying events that inevitably come to pass" (p. 152). Jardine observes, "the intelligent and articulate Queen Margaret, wife of Henry VI and model of female valour, becomes in the final play just such a privileged, carping voice, somewhere between witch and female prophet" (p. 117).

[22]Linda Bamber, *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1982), comments, "If Shakespeare is not consistently a feminist, however, he is consistently an author whose response to the feminine is central to the general significance of his work" (p. 4); see also Shari Benstock, *Textualizing the Feminine: On the Limits of Genre* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1991), who critiques Derrida's and Lacan's correlations of gender and genre (3-22).

[23]A brief but useful bibliographic overview is provided by Lenz, Greene, and Neely (see n. 19, above).

[24]As J. P. Brockbank notes in "The Frame of Disorder—*Henry VI*," rpt. in *Shakespeare: The Histories: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Eugene M. Waith (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1965), 55-65, "Where narrative and play are incompatible, it may be the record and it may be the art that is defective as an image of human life, and in the plays framed from English and Roman history it is possible to trace subtle modulations of spectacle, structure and dialogue as they seek to express and elucidate the full potential of the source material" (p. 56).

[25]A shorter version of this paper was presented at the annual NEMLA meeting on 20 April 1996, in Montreal, at the "Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare" session.



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# Witchcraft and the Theater in *Richard III*

by Richard W. Grinnell

When Shakespeare created Richard of Gloucester, he created a master manipulator of character, one born, it seems, for the dangerous realm of the theater as conceived by Puritan critics. At the end of *3 Henry VI* Richard tells us that he can "change shapes with Proteus for advantages" (III. ii. 192), and at the beginning of *Richard III* that his political aspirations rest upon "the plain devil and dissembling looks" (I. ii. 236).[1] Richard's equation for success seems clear; it is demonic and theatrical. The shape-shifting god Proteus that Richard so confidently invokes is simultaneously the devil—as John Cotta describes him, for example, in his 1616 pamphlet *The Triall of Witchcraft* as "that old Proteus"[2]—and the actor.

For Renaissance England, the ability to change one's shape is a dangerous power. Renaissance England valued the ability to read an individual by his or her surface, and assumed a direct relationship between internal quality and external display. Anxiety over the violation of this relationship erupted in a variety of ways, including formal sumptuary codes that regulated clothing, royal proclamations against improper representation, sermons preached against cross-dressing, and an active and often virulent pamphlet industry that sought to uphold representational codes by demonizing—both metaphorically and often literally—social groups who violated those codes.[3]

Late sixteenth century writers reflect this anxiety over people who do not conform to legal and cultural codes of appearance. For example, Linda Woodbridge, in her *Women and the English Renaissance*, quotes a wonderfully suggestive letter from John Chamberlain in 1620 that addresses one particularly disturbing breakdown in sumptuary expectations.

> Yesterday the bishop of London called together all his Clergie about this towne, and told them he had expresse commaundment from the king to will them to inveigh vehemently and bitterly in theyre sermons, against the insolencie of our women, and theyre wearing of brode brimd hats, pointed dublets, theyre haire cut short or shorne, and some of them stillettaes or poinards, and such other trinckets of like moment; adding withall that yf pulpit admonitions will not reforme them he wold proceed by another course. [4]



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The external appearance of the body is an important site for mediating power in this society. As many social historians have noted, Queen Elizabeth's concern over the representation of her own body was central to her political power; her physical iconography was an active part of her rule. Leonard Tennenhouse tells us, "the features of Elizabeth's body natural were always already components of a political figure which made the physical vigor and autonomy of the monarch one and the same thing as the condition of England."[5] Because social and political power were read on the body, the public theaters became the target of much sumptuary anxiety as well. One of the essential fears driving the Puritan attacks on the theater was the insecurity inherent in a world where anyone could transform identity—both personal and political—simply by putting on a costume.[6] A world in which appearance does not reflect something real, where one can appear to be something or someone that one is not, is a dangerous world. Actors often seemed at the heart of this danger.

For many people in the late sixteenth century, the public theater was inherently a demonic space. John Northbrooke makes that clear in his *A Treatise wherein Dauncing, Vaine Playes or Enterludes . . . are reproved.*

> I am persuaded that Satan hath not a more speedie way and fitter schoole to work and teach his desire, to bring men and women into his snare of concupiscence and filthie lustes of wicked whoredome, than those places and playes, and theaters are; And therefore necessarie that those places and Players shoulde be forbidden and dissolved and put downe by authoritie, as the Brothell houses and Stewes are.[7]

The theater was seen in many quarters as a hotbed of sedition and immorality. Fostering all manner of sin and degradation, the theater violated codes of conduct as well as sumptuary codes, and was presented as a place in which the devil's work was effectively carried on. Northbrooke's treatise is typical of the anti-theatrical literature of the time. From the end of the sixteenth century and into the beginning of the seventeenth the theater was often seen in terms of its wickedness, and its association with the world of the demonic.[8]

In an interesting way, the theater's opponents characterized it in much the same terms as witchcraft was being characterized during this period. The connection between witchcraft and the theater was a semiotic one; for Renaissance England, witches were signs of the violation of cultural rules just as actors were. Though



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witchcraft was a very complex social phenomenon, witches were almost always defined in terms of the taboos they violated, the social boundaries that they crossed, and by their failure to contain themselves within the loosely defined social costume allowed them in their community. Witches were accused of violating the boundaries of their own and other people's bodies, of violating the connection between appearance and reality, of appearing to be one thing, and actually being something else, and of transforming others into different shapes and genders. They were powerless old women, from the most powerless strata of society, who wielded unexpected, and unauthorized supernatural power.[9] Like an actor, the witch could change her shape to suit her needs.[10] She is one who quite literally "changes shapes with Proteus for advantages." The great skeptic, Reginald Scot, writing in 1584, credits witches with the power to change themselves into the shapes of animals, and the shapes of other people,[11] and this malleability of body connects them iconographically with the Renaissance theater and the actors whose business it was to transform themselves every day.

Shakespeare acknowledges the conflation of witchcraft and theatricality, and the dangerous political ramifications of a world in which individuals *cannot* be identified by their exterior surfaces, when he presents Richard, Duke of Gloucester. Shakespeare connects Richard with witchcraft throughout the play: in the iconography of his body; in the language used to describe him by characters who know him; and in Richard's own awareness and use of the damnable power inherent in witchcraft accusations. But whereas Shakespeare had presented stage witches before (Joan la Pucelle and Margery Jourdain are notable in their efficacy and conventional supernatural power), in *Richard III*, witchcraft is no longer a supernatural power.[12] It is a political power, a symbolic and metaphoric power ushered in by the iconography of Richard's body. Though witchcraft is an important part of the iterative imagery that surrounds him, Richard is explained equally by the imagery of the theater as it was constituted by anti-theatrical writers.

Richard's body is at the center of his identity. In his opening monologue he tells us that the shape of his exterior has determined his actions, that his body has determined his soul.

> But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks
> Nor made to court an amorous looking glass;
> I, that am rudely stamped, and want love's majesty
> To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
> I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,



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> Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature,
> Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
> Into this breathing world scarce half made up,
> And that so lamely and unfashionable
> That dogs bark at me as I halt by them;
> Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
> Have no delight to pass away the time
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
> And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
> To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
> I am determined to prove a villain
> And hate the idle pleasure of these days.
> (I. i. 14-31)

Richard tells the audience that his body is to blame for his inability to operate benevolently in the new, peaceful, world, that his appearance has determined a role from which he cannot escape. But even this claim turns out to be an illusion, an act, as we see when, one scene later, he intercepts Lady Anne as she takes the corpse of Henry VI to burial.

Richard's seduction of the Lady Anne, with the corpse of her father-in-law bleeding at their feet, shows the audience that Richard is more than "grim-visaged war" with whom he has associated his misshapen body in the opening monologue. Using the rhetoric of seduction, Richard reinvents himself as a desperate lover. His success in this role shows us that his blasted body is no block to his participation in what he earlier called "this weak, piping time of peace" (I. i. 24). Indeed, his chameleon-like power to be the lover of his adversary's widow marks for both the audience and, in an interesting way, Richard himself, his fitness to survive in a world that judges itself by appearance. In such a world, the demonic Proteus is the figure of the ruler. Shakespeare gives us Richard's exultation as he realizes the extent of the power he wields.[13]

> Was ever woman in this humor wooed?
> Was ever woman in this humor won?
> I'll have her, but I will not keep her long.
> What! I that killed her husband and his father
> To take her in her heart's extremest hate,
> With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
> The bleeding witness of my hatred by,
> Having God, her conscience, and these bars against me,
> And I no friends to back my suit at all
> But the plain devil and dissembling looks,
> And yet to win her, all the world to nothing!
> (I. ii. 227-37)

To win Anne, Richard uses theater. He is no longer trapped by a



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body that shapes him for villainy; instead, he shapes himself to fit his chosen role. Richard moves from arguing that his body shapes his identity, to actively transforming himself theatrically. Once a limiting factor, his body now becomes a fluid ally, shaped by his rhetorical ability into a body capable of playing multiple characters.

Richard's body, then, *is* central to this play, but it is central because it is an actor's body, a witch's body, a body that can be shaped to appear to be anything that he wants it to be. The iconography of Richard's body bears out the dangerous instability in his identity. He is born "like to a chaos, or an unlick'd bear whelp / That carries no impression like the dam" (*3 Henry VI*, III. ii. 161-62), and he tells us in his opening monologue that his body is unnatural, "deformed, unfinished." Richard cannot be controlled because he cannot be clearly defined. As Marjorie Garber has pointed out, Richard is both prematurely born ("sent before my time / Into the breathing world scarce half made up" [*Richard III*, I. i. 20-21], and born overly mature [with teeth in his head, *3 Henry VI*, V. vi. 75]),[14] the nature of his body resisting definition and stability from the start.

Symbolically, then, Richard's body is a body that is not controlled by its physical boundaries; it is a grotesque body, a body that overflows its edges to take on new shapes. Interestingly, women's bodies, as well, were considered transgressing bodies, bodies that did not remain within the boundaries set for them by patriarchal culture. As Peter Stallybrass has argued, for Renaissance England woman is "that treasure which, however locked up, always escapes. She is the gaping mouth, the open window, the body that 'transgresses its own limits.'"[15] Richard's uncontrolled body is iconographically linked to this feminine body. Similarly, Mikhail Bakhtin in his now classic study of popular carnival, *Rabelais and His World*, emphasizes the grotesque, transgressive nature of the lower class mass body, particularly as it is seen from the perspective of dominant aristocratic culture. "The unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and being born) is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects" Bakhtin says.[16] "Scarce half made up," Richard is precisely that unfinished body (*Richard III*, I. i. 21). Richard, then, carries in his own body the symbols of the popular and the feminine, the two distinguishing characteristics of the witch.

The first description that we get of Richard by another character reinforces those semiotics and paints him as a fiend, as a demon conjured from hell. As Richard interrupts the train taking



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the slain Henry VI to burial in the first act of *Richard III*, Anne responds:

> What black magician conjures up this fiend
> To stop devoted charitable deeds?
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
> What do you tremble? Are you all afraid?
> Alas, I blame you not, for you are mortal,
> And mortal eyes cannot endure the devil.—
> Avaunt, thou dreadful minister of hell!
> Thou hadst but power over his mortal body,
> His soul thou canst not have. Therefore be gone.
> *Gloucester*. Sweet saint, for charity, be not so curst.
> *Anne*. Foul devil, for God's sake hence, and trouble us not,
> For thou hast made the happy earth thy hell,
> Fill'd it with cursing cries and deep exclaims.
> (*Richard III*, I. ii. 33-52)

Throughout the play, Richard triggers language that defines him as demonic. In an aside, the banished Queen Margaret says, "hie thee to hell for shame, and leave this world, / Thou cacodemon, there thy kingdom is" (I. iii. 142-43); Richard's reach is compared to "the reach of hell" by Queen Elizabeth (IV. i. 42); Queen Margaret tells the Duchess of York, "from forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept / A hellhound that doth hunt us all to death" (IV. iv. 47-48), and she finally calls him "hell's black intelligencer" (IV. iv. 71).[17] Between the iconographic semiotics of Richard's body and the direct language involved in plot-line descriptions of him, Richard becomes a symbolic witch: dangerous, evil, cloaked in the demonic with an almost supernatural power to change his aspect. But he is never an actual witch in the popular or traditional sense of the word. Shakespeare asks the audience to note the language, to be aware of the witchcraft that seems to run through the play, but in the end Richard himself teaches us how we should read that witchcraft and the illegitimacy that has been encoded in his body.

While Richard's enemies (and indeed his critics) describe him in terms of devils and hell, Richard fashions himself as the victim and the enemy of the demonic, and is careful to locate witchcraft beyond his own sphere of power, in the sphere of his political enemies.

> *Gloucester*. I pray you all, tell me what they deserve
> That do conspire my death with devilish plots
> Of damned witchcraft, and that have prevail'd
> Upon my body with their hellish charms?
> *Hastings*. The tender love I bear your Grace, my lord,
> Makes me most forward in this princely presence
> To doom th' offenders, whosoe'er they be:



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> I say, my lord, they have deserved death.
> *Gloucester.* Then be your eyes the witness of their evil.
> Look how I am bewitch'd; behold, mine arm
> Is like a blasted sapling, wither'd up;
> And this is Edward's wife, that monstrous witch,
> Consorted with that harlot, strumpet Shore,
> That by their witchcraft thus have marked me.
> (*Richard III*, III. iv. 59-72)

Richard is poised at a critical moment in his quest for the throne. All that now stands between him and the crown are the young Princes in the tower and the Queen herself. Here in his council, Richard launches a political attack on the Queen and her followers, including Lord Hastings, the Lord Chamberlain, whom he knows will staunchly support the crowning of Prince Edward as Edward V. Though we have learned earlier, and his council would certainly have known, that Richard's physical defects are congenital and not the result of witchcraft, it is nonetheless an effective and powerful ploy.[18]

> *Hastings.* If they have done this deed, my noble lord—
> *Gloucester.* If? Thou protector of this damned strumpet,
> Talk'st thou to me of "ifs"? Thou art a traitor.
> Off with his head!
> (73-76)

Hastings is linked to the witchcraft of the Queen and Jane Shore, to the destabilizing force that Richard claims is threatening him. Hastings is charged with treason and executed.

Shakespeare's audience knows that this is simply political expediency on Richard's part. Richard has intended to take off Hastings' head since learning that he would not support Richard's bid for the crown. But the charge of witchcraft resonates with the imagery that has surrounded Richard throughout the play, and this moment in which Hastings loses his head to a politically orchestrated witchcraft accusation is a central one to the understanding of Shakespeare's use of witchcraft in this play. Witchcraft is dangerous because it is secret and theatrical. Among other things, it manipulates its appearance in the service of power. Being accused of witchcraft links Hastings to the destabilizing representational power of witchcraft and immediately makes him dangerous. Linking Hastings with witchcraft provides Richard with an excuse for Hastings' removal from the political scene and gives Richard another effective form of theatrical power.

But Richard's use of witchcraft to undermine and destroy Hastings asks us to make one further interpretive move. Richard's



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use of witchcraft as a self-conscious political tool parallels Shakespeare's own use of witchcraft in this play. As Richard connects Hastings to the damned and dangerous witchcraft of the powerful women in his world, so Shakespeare connects Richard himself with the semiotics of witchcraft. Richard forcefully locates Hastings in the demonic realm and has him taken away to be executed. No less forcefully, Shakespeare locates Richard in a demonic position and has him executed at Bosworth field. Both are represented as political uses of a particular kind of coded language which illegitimizes and damns those described in its terms.

Richard's self-conscious use of witchcraft as a tool of power forces us to look critically at Shakespeare's use of witchcraft in this, and other plays. If witchcraft can be, after all, simply a cynical tool for illegitimizing one's enemies, as Shakespeare indicates in Richard's use of it, then the demonic language that surrounds Richard himself, and tangentially, the iconographic signs that Shakespeare uses to make Richard illegitimate, are also simply tools. A mastery of theater enables Richard to condemn Hastings, and a mastery of theater enables Shakespeare to condemn Richard. In *Richard III*, both acts are equivalent. Theater enables the charge of witchcraft and through that charge, reveals itself as a powerful and dangerous force in the world of *Richard III*. As history was considered a glass wherein theater-goers saw themselves, theater reveals itself as an equally powerful and potentially dangerous force in the Elizabethan world through which this play made its way.

By using the language of witchcraft and by demonstrating the semiotic overlap between witchcraft and the theater, *Richard III* acknowledges the political nature of both witchcraft and theater. By demonstrating Richard's use of witchcraft as political and cynical, as metaphor and rhetoric rather than as supernatural power, Shakespeare enables his audience to recognize the application of theater and witchcraft in other social venues. Whether in the Elizabethan court, or the villages of rural England, the language of witchcraft, Shakespeare tells us, is linked to the practice of theater and marks a social and political, rather than a supernatural, struggle.

Describing English culture in the sixteenth century, Jonathan Dollimore has said that "not only manuals of court behaviour but handbooks of rhetoric emphasised culture as theatre, as dissimulation and feigning, advising on the construction of an artificial identity in the service of power."[19] Since Stephen Greenblatt's groundbreaking work, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, scholars have



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acknowledged the inherently theatrical nature of power in Renaissance England.[20] Shakespeare clearly recognized it as well. And though Shakespeare's business was the theater, and he was a master practitioner of it, *Richard III* gives us an ambivalent portrayal of theatricality. "I can add colors to the chameleon, / Change shapes with Proteus for advantages, / And set the murderous Machiavel to school" Richard says (*3 Henry VI*, III. ii. 191-93), and we recognize in him and his ability both a conventional Elizabethan mode of power, and something that is dangerous and potentially evil. In anybody's hands, even the hands of the legitimate governors, theatricality, *Richard III* tells us, has the potential for chaos, disorder and danger.

The language of witchcraft helps to define the dangerous theatricality that underlies Richard's character. In *Richard III* there is no supernatural witchcraft. Instead there are political tools, and language that hides under the guise of witchcraft. This is a change in Shakespeare's use of witchcraft and marks an important moment in his development as a playwright. With the help of the language of witchcraft, we can see in *Richard III* the increasing complexity of Shakespeare's political vision and his acknowledgment that his own profession, like the witchcraft prosecutions in England, was powerful and inherently political. By the time Shakespeare gets to *Richard III*, Joan la Pucelle, Margery Jourdain, and Roger Bollingbroke have disappeared and given way to Richard of Gloucester, and witchcraft has become primarily a political tool in a politics of fear, a cynical, though powerful set of signifiers in a political arsenal.[21] Though witchcraft retains its demonic definition, it is emptied of all but political power. For *Richard III*, the witch is a role one might act in a theater of alienation and damnation, and more importantly, it is a role one might assign, forcibly, to another. Shakespeare draws upon the inherently theatrical nature of historical witchcraft and locates witchcraft and the theater in a demonic, political realm.

Shakespeare borrows language and imagery from the anti-theatricalists and combines it with the language of the witch-hunt to fashion the political language of *Richard III*. In a sense, then, Shakespeare gives us an anti-theatrical argument in *Richard III*, and in the figure of Richard shows us the potential danger in the act of theater. But *Richard III* is not, finally, an anti-theatrical text. Though Richard is constructed of anti-theatrical discourse, Richard does not have the final say in *Richard III*. As many critics have pointed out *Richard III* has, in addition to Machiavellian individualism, a providential shape.[22] Through Richard's agency—political and Machiavellian though it is—Tudor history is written. The



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houses of York and Lancaster are punished for their civil brawls, and the Tudors are ushered onto the throne. This providential impulse ultimately controls the anti-theatrical language that is used to construct Richard and his world. In *Richard III*, theater is dangerous, but ultimately controlled by, and a servant of, providence.

In *Richard III* Shakespeare uses the theater and the language of witchcraft to expose the dangers of theatricality and the political nature of witchcraft persecution in his society. In doing so he also exposes the theatrical and dangerous nature of Elizabethan power itself, a subtle social observation that is hidden by the comforting providential ending of the play. As Tudor providence depends upon the demonizing of Richard III, however, a move that Shakespeare's play demonstrates is political and intentional in nature, the play serves, finally, to highlight the power of language and of theater. In *Richard III*, contemporary witchcraft and theatricality are powerful systems of language and dangerous political weapons. By wrapping them in the controlling assumptions of providential history, he gives us a text that both critiques and affirms Tudor history, while foregrounding the dangerous theatricality of the late Elizabethan age.

**Marist College**

## Notes

[1]All references to Shakespeare's texts are from *The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare*, ed. Sylvan Barnet (New York: Harcourt, 1972).

[2]John Cotta, *The Triall of Witch-Craft* (1616; rptd. in *The English Experience*, 39, New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), p. 92.

[3]Current critical practice has invested the word "demonize" and "demonic" with a variety of meanings. For my purposes, to demonize is to link an individual or practice with the devil (or devils) either metaphorically or actually.

[4]Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1984), p. 143.

[5]Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (New York: Methuen, 1986), pp. 102-03. The relationship between power and display are clearly articulated in Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980) and *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988), in Louis Montrose's *The Purpose of Playing* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996), in Steven Mullaney's *The Place of the Stage* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), in Christopher Pye's *The Regal Phantasm* (New York: Routledge Univ. Press, 1990), and in Theodora A. Jankowski's *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1992) among others.

[6]See Richard Grinnell, "The Witch, the Transvestite, and the Actor: Destabi-



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lizing Gender on the Renaissance Stage," *Studies in the Humanities*, 29(1996), 163-84.

[7]Quoted in Jean E. Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge Univ. Press, 1994), p. 25.

[8]For some discussions of the anti-theatrical argument see Laura Levine's excellent *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-theatricality and Effeminization 1579-1642* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), Jean E. Howard's *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England*, and Louis Montrose's recent *The Purpose of Playing*.

[9]For these definitions of witchcraft see Christina Larner's *Enemies of God: The Witch-hunt in Scotland* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1981) and *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief* (New York: Blackwell, 1984), Joseph Klaits' *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985), G. R. Quaife's *Godly Zeal and Furious Rage: The Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), Alan Macfarlane's *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (London: Routledge Press, 1970) or, for contemporary formulations of the witch, see William Perkins' "Discourse on the Damned Art of Witchcraft," (in *Works*, 3 vols. London: 1616-18), Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584; ed. Montague Summers, New York: Dover, 1972) or the more famous continental treatises on witchcraft, particularly Jakob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer's *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486-87, trans. Montague Summers, 1928; rptd. New York: Dover, 1971) or Jean Bodin's *De la Demonomanie des Sorciers* (Lyon: 1580) among others.

[10]Note that I use the female pronoun here because studies indicate that in England from ninety-five to one hunded percent of prosecuted witches were women (Larner, *Witchcraft and Religion*, p. 85).

[11]Scot, p. 6.

[12]The old Queen Margaret exhibits many witch-like and arguably supernatural behaviors. I discuss her role in the play in note 17.

[13]That the monarch is, essentially, an actor, is borne out particularly by Elizabeth I herself when, as Holinshed reports, she tells her parliament "we princes . . . are set on stages, in the sight and view of all the world dulie observed; the eyes of manie behold our actions" (*Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, 1808; rptd. New York: AMS Press, 1965, vol. 4, p. 934). Critics have actively developed this equation. See particularly Leonard Tennenhouse's *Power on Display*, Christopher Pye's *The Regal Phantasm*, and most recently, Louis Montrose's *The Purpose of Playing* for clear arguments about the relationship between the monarchy and the theater.

[14]Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 32.

[15]Peter Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed," *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson et al. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 128.

[16]Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (1968; trans. Helene Iswolsky, Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984) pp. 26-27. Leonard Tennenhouse summarizes this figure in *Power on Display*: "Bakhtin's twin figures of the grotesque body and the mass body offer us a way of imagining an alternative social formation to our own that has all the features of this essentially anti-aristocratic discourse" (p. 41). Richard of Gloucester is symbolically connected to this anti-aristocratic figure.

[17]Margaret occupies a particularly resonant position in this play. In many ways she is the character most easily recognized as a witch: an older woman who, because of wrongs done to her by her community, resorts to curses that have



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efficacy. Margaret, however, is a tool of the providential history being worked out in this play, a subject of a divine authority that has punished her, and will punish her opponents, and though that does not discount her from witch-ness, it does force us to see her as much in political as supernatural terms. This play is, as we shall see, more interested in political power than the supernatural, and Margaret's apparent witch-ness comes under the play's critique of this power, as will be clear by the end of this discussion.

[18]As Holinshed says: "Herevpon euerie mans mind sore misgaue them, well perceiuing that this matter was but a quarell. For they well wist that the queene was too wise to go about anie such follie. And also, if she would, yet would she, of all folke least, make Shores wife of hir counsell; whome of all women she most hated, as that concubine whome the king hir husband had most loued. And also, no man was there present, but well knew that his arme was euer such since his birth" (in *Holinshed's Chronicle: As Used in Shakespeare's Plays*, ed. Allardyce and Josephine Nicoll, New York: Dutton, 1927, pp. 151-52).

[19]Jonathon Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 179.

[20]As Greenblatt argued in a later book, "Elizabethan power . . . depends upon its privileged visibility. As in a theater, the audience must be powerfully engaged by this visible presence and at the same time held at a respectful distance from it" (*Shakespearean Negotiations*, p. 64).

[21]Shakespeare will not return to witchcraft as supernatural power until *Macbeth*, a play inspired by and in all likelihood written for the new king James I, whose interest in witchcraft was common knowledge in England. James, after all, had been involved personally in high profile witchcraft trials in Scotland in the early 1590's, and was the author of an influential volume on witchcraft entitled *Daemonologie*. Even in *Macbeth*, however, witchcraft is secondary to the human and political passions represented by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

[22]For an almost notorious discussion of Shakespeare's history plays as providential history see E. M. W. Tillyard's *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Chatto & Windus Press, 1961). For discussions of the conflict between providential and Machiavellian interpretations of history, see Phyllis Rackin's *Stages of History* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990) or Mathew Wikander's *The Play of Truth and State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1986) among others.



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# "The rest is silence," Or Is It? Hamlet's Last Words

by Mark Taylor

Playing the dying Hamlet in his celebrated 1948 film of Shakespeare's play, collapsed on his uncle's throne, Laurence Olivier looks into the eyes of Horatio (Norman Wooland) and says, "The rest . . . is silence," closes his own eyes, turns his head to the left, and dies. Nicol Williamson, in the Tony Richardson film of 1969, supported in the arms of the bespectacled Horatio (Gordon Jackson), says, "The . . . rest . . . is . . . silence," and dies. And in the most recent film of the play (1996), Kenneth Branagh, lying on his side on the floor, one arm stretched over his head, says, "The rest . . . is . . . silence," and dies. In these three films the actors convey Hamlet's weakness, weariness, the effort that even four little words call forth. Their voices soften and trail away, the diminuendo appropriate to mortality; but otherwise the pauses are arbitrary, how any dying man might speak, not how this one should speak. I want to argue for another possibility, how the line might be said—how it was said around 1601 we will never know—so that it gives an actor a coherent meaning to project, reflects Hamlet's self-evident final concerns, rehabilitates a neglected rhetorical trope contained within it, and alludes to a commonplace expression perhaps particularly associated with Sir Philip Sidney. I want to argue that Hamlet, having begun to say, "The rest is fame," pauses, changes his mind, and utters thus the words we know: "The rest is . . . silence."

It is necessary to show at the outset, since all the early texts of Shakespeare's play fail to agree, that the words "The rest is silence" do have the best claim to being Hamlet's final statement. These words are from the Second Quarto of the play, published in 1604. In the First Folio of 1623 the expiring prince says, "The rest is silence. O, o, o, o." So little accepted is this reading that in my own experience its existence comes as a surprise even to some professional Shakespeareans. If Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* were true to its vaunted claims to present both folio and quarto readings ("Branagh's version actually is completer than complete," one admiring reviewer writes, "since it conflates the First Folio text with the extensive passages that appear only in the Second Quarto, thus producing something longer than any known version of the play"[1]), it might include this reading of the line on the



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grounds that the folio includes the quarto and thus offers both, but not vice versa; but the film sensibly gives Q2 only. Almost all older editions and respected modern ones, whether they work with a copy text to which all exceptions are argued or silently choose whatever in the editor's judgment seems best between quarto and folio, do not regard this reading as a serious contender. For instance, Dover Wilson notes, "After this [the Q2 reading] F1 ludicrously adds 'O, o, o, o.'"[2] In the new Arden edition (Arden 2) Harold Jenkins accepts Q2 and preserves F only in his textual notes, not indicating that any earlier editor accepted it. Describing his general procedures in his introduction Jenkins writes, "While following Q2's fuller version, I naturally include also anything preserved in F which I take to have been lost from Q2; but all words and phrases in F which I take to be playhouse additions to the dialogue . . . I omit,"[3] regarding the series of "O's" as such an addition. Most other editors make the same decision. The notable exception is the team who, in their perverse quest less to destabilize the text than to destabilize the reader's sense that he knows the text, give us "Oldcastle" (in *1 Henry IV* only; in *2 Henry IV* he reverts to the familiar figure of Falstaff), "Innogen," and "*The First Part of the Contention of the Two Fortunate Houses of Yorke & Lancaster*" (the play formerly known as *Henry VI, Part 2*). Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor accept "The rest is silence. O, o, o, o!" for their Oxford text.[4] Although the new *Norton Shakespeare*, "Based on the Oxford Edition," accepts the F reading, it is noteworthy that G. R. Hibbard, in his one-volume *Hamlet* in the Oxford Shakespeare accepts Q2, notwithstanding his "large debt" to Wells and Taylor.[5]

Editions aside, there is at least one sustained and spirited defense of the Folio's reading that must be addressed: that of Terence Hawkes in the title essay of his collection *That Shakespeherian Rag*[6] (published before the Wells and Taylor edition). It is Hawkes' position that the very nature of the Elizabethan theater precludes anything like a literary text made permanent by its author. Shakespeare's plays are by definition "playtexts," possessed of a "scandalously indeterminate status" (p. 76), "whose only genuine and acceptable realization takes the form of action on the stage . . ." (p. 77). Hawkes does not mention the Jenkins new Arden edition, but he might well agree that the "O's" are a playhouse addition—an addition, however, that makes the play more authentic than when it left Shakespeare's hand, not less. A fixed text is to a Shakespearean play, he argues in a musical analogy, as ragtime is to real American jazz and blues, an attempt to freeze a form whose identity is improvisation. Real jazz is "a performance in which 'interpolations' in and on to the original



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'text' or sequence of chords literally constitute the music and make the player, music and audience simultaneously part of the same momentary whole" (p. 88). And the same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, for a real Shakespearean play. To this impassioned argument for Shakespeare as a kind of living theater, I have no particular objection, but the fact remains that the playwright William Shakespeare wrote *something* himself, and that a goal of textual scholarship is to try to recover that something, much as a goal of performance criticism is to determine what the actors did with that something—even though in practice these goals are not entirely separable. Additionally, my argument below will be concerned with several meanings of "The rest is silence." If an actor utters four "O's" after these four other words, the meanings of the latter are unchanged.

Although not a serious contender as the words Shakespeare actually wrote for his dying prince, the reading of the "bad" First Quarto of 1603 is interesting in relation to Hamlet's final concerns. Hamlet tells Horatio to drop the poison he wishes to drink:

> Upon my love I charge thee let it go,
> O fie *Horatio*, and if thou shouldst die,
> What a scandal wouldst thou leave behind?
> What tongue should tell the story of our deaths,
> If not from thee? O my heart sinks *Horatio*,
> Mine eyes have lost their sight, my tongue his use:
> Farewell *Horatio*, heaven receive my soul.

As in Q2 and F Hamlet is much concerned with what will be thought of him after his death, and the language of Q1, "What a scandal wouldst thou leave behind?" resembles fairly closely that of F and Q2, which almost agree with each other: "O good *Horatio*, what a wounded name / Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me?" (F), or ". . . shall I leave behind me?" (Q2). The agreement of these three substantive texts on Hamlet's concern with his good name would appear to establish that concern as fact, a circumstance that will be important to my argument later. About Hamlet's very last words, however, Q1's "Farewell *Horatio*, heaven receive my soul" differ entirely from their counterparts in Q2 and F, a concern with his eternal destiny replacing an elliptical meditation on rest and silence. Shakespeare's Hamlet almost certainly did not say, "Farewell *Horatio*, heaven receive my soul," but what Q1's Hamlet says is by no means a bad, unlikely, or inappropriate thing for a dying man of some religious instinct to say. As Karl Guthke writes in *Last Words: Variations on a Theme in Cultural History*, a book that offers, I cannot resist saying, almost



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the last word on its subject, "The condition of the soul at the moment of death appears to be all-important in determining its destination in the hereafter." Hamlet's brief prayer is a variation on an accepted formula in the *ars moriendi* tradition extending at least from the late Middle Ages to Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Dying* (1651).[7] As attractive as the words are in this context, however, I accept as established the absence of a "direct manuscript link [of Q1] with what the author wrote"[8] and thus regard them as unauthentic.

Advised by his brother York not to tire himself with further speech, old John of Gaunt says,

> O, but they say the tongues of dying men
> Enforce attention like deep harmony.
> Where words are scarce, they are seldom spent in vain,
> For they breathe truth that breathe their words in pain.
> (*Richard II*, II. i. 5-8)[9]

It is an invitation to listen carefully, and if we do, we are rewarded, a few lines later, by the stunning, paratactic *accumulatio* that starts, "This royal throne of kings, this scept'red isle, / This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars" (pp. 40-41). There is an ancient assumption, Karl Guthke writes, "that what a dying person says in the expectation of imminent death is to be considered infinitely more weighty than virtually anything that was said before this moment of truth."[10] Surely breathing his words in as much pain as Gaunt, Hamlet says, "The rest is silence." Hamlet punned in his first words, "A little more than kin, and less than kind" (I. ii. 65), "kind" meaning "kindly," "agreeable," "sympathetic," how Hamlet pointedly does *not* feel toward his uncle, but also "in the natural order of things," a condition Hamlet believes is undermined by his being twice related to Claudio (as nephew and as stepson). Dying, he puns again. "Rest" means repose [Latin *requies*], hence the sleep of death, but also remainder or residue [Latin *relinquiae*], what is left. George Herbert makes the same pun in "The Pulley" where, from his "glasse of blessings" God gives man strength, beauty, wisdom, honor, and pleasure, and then perceives "that alone of all his treasure / Rest in the bottome lay." This blessing God withholds, lest man "would adore my gifts in stead of me"; "Yet," He says, "let him keep the rest, / But keep them with repining restlessnesse. . . ."[11] For Hamlet one sense of rest, repose, suggests that he no longer possesses fears of the "dreams [that] may come, / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil" (III. i. 67-68), and the other, remainder, suggests an eternity of silence beyond the "Words, words, words" (II. ii. 193)



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of Denmark. This condition he perhaps welcomes.

Hamlet's last words translate, in close paraphrase, the Greek word *aposiopesis*, which means "to be silent" or "to become silent." *Aposiopesis* is, of course, the name of a rhetorical trope in which an utterance is broken off and left uncompleted because the speaker is suddenly silent; thus, the rest (of what he was going to say) is silence. The author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (c. 86-82 BC) claims that "Aposiopesis [Latin *praecisio*, cutting off] occurs when something is said and then the rest [*relinquitur*, remainder, rest] of what the speaker had begun to say is left unfinished. . . ."[12] In *The Arcadian Rhetoric* (1588), Abraham Fraunce writes, "*Aposiopesis, Reticentia*, concealing, is when the course of a speach begun is in some sort staid, that some part thereof not vttred, is neuertheles perceiued."[13] This further qualification, that the auditor understands what is not said, is omitted in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Quintilian, Henry Peacham, and other classical and Renaissance authorities and should probably be regarded as not essential to the production of the trope.[14] Our recognition that "The rest is silence" translates *aposiopesis* prompts the further recognition that Hamlet's life is interrupted, that we do not know what might have been—that "had he been put on," as Fortinbras says, he might "have prov'd most royal" (V. ii. 401-02), and then again, he might not have. We need not revive the old debate over Hamlet's age—whether he is thirty, as we divine from the words of the First Clown (V. i. 141-48), or ten years or more younger, as many readers might otherwise infer—to recognize that in either case a man's life has been greatly abbreviated, that the end of the play shows us a great waste.

Hamlet's very last word is "silence," and the utterance of that word is followed, for him, by silence, the condition the word names. Naming it, and then becoming it, the word "silence" is redundant: had Hamlet said only "The rest is," "is" would still be followed by silence, though not by "silence." This redundancy suggests not only that Hamlet's life is an *aposiopesis* but that his last sentence is, too, that both are interrupted. As a matter of fact, Hamlet's penultimate sentence is also broken off: Fortinbras "has my dying voice. / So tell him, with th' occurents more and less / Which have solicited—" (V. ii. 358-60). Solicited what? This sentence establishes a context for *aposiopesis*. Then Hamlet says, "The rest is silence," but perhaps he started to say "The rest is" something else and could not or did not. If so, his last words ally him with other speakers who were prevented by death from having their last say. One of the most spectacular of uncompleted speeches, if it was in fact spoken as has been reported, is that of



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John Sedgwick, a Union general at the Battle of Spotsylvania, in 1864, in the American Civil War, who, when warned about Confederate snipers, may have said, "Why, they couldn't shoot an elephant at this dist—."[15] Abraham Fraunce would be pleased that Sedgwick's speech, though stayed, is nevertheless perceived. That notwithstanding, Sedgwick's not quite finishing what he wanted to say serves to underline the dramatic quality of any final speech.

Perhaps the best-known *aposiopesis* in Shakespeare is the creation of another general dying in another battle, Hotspur at Shrewsbury, who says,

> . . . O, I could prophesy,
> But that the earthy and cold hand of death
> Lies on my tongue. No, Percy, thou art dust,
> And food for—.
> (*1 Henry IV*, V. iv. 83-86)

Prince Hal famously completes the sentence for him, "For worms, brave Percy"—so famously, in fact, that we naturally assume that Hotspur was on his way to saying "worms." There is no reason to make this assumption and its corollary, that despite its incompleteness, Hal has "nevertheless perceived" Hotspur's speech. Hal's "worms" is thus like Hamlet's "silence," what is said but not necessarily what was going to be said. So if one man can deflect the intent of another and leave him with a kind of epitaph he never chose, cannot another man, Hamlet, deflect his own intent, that is to say, change his mind?

In the National Portrait Gallery in London hangs a large oil painting (reference number 5732; See Figure 1) of a handsome young knight in Elizabethan costume, identified in the upper left-hand corner as "*Philipvs sydneyvs Aetatis*," on the basis of which, presumably, the gallery dates the portrait at "c. 1576," although 1577 would seem to me a better approximation, since Sidney was born in 1554. In the upper right-hand corner of the portrait are the words "*Caetera fama*," followed by the initials "E D," which may stand for the name of the poet Edward Dyer (c. 1543-1607). If this picture does indeed show Sidney in about 1576, ten years or so before his early death, then his great promise was already recognized, his achievements foreseen. This foresight seems consistent with the way his life had developed by this time, according to his recent biographer Katherine Duncan-Jones. "In the two years between his return from the Continent in June 1575 and his departure as an ambassador in March 1577," she writes, "Sidney completed his growing up. His way of life changed radically. He was no longer a peripatetic student, but an up-and-coming English



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courtier, full of 'good hope.'"[16] "Sidney first got to know Dyer well, during the summer of 1575 . . . ," according to Duncan-Jones, and Dyer "was soon to assume a mentor and 'best friend' role in Sidney's life."[17] So, although in 1576 the achievements as writer and as soldier for which Sidney is known today were still in the future, he had arrived: he had attained his majority and traveled widely on the Continent; he was very visible at court; he had become a good friend of Dyer and also of Fulke Greville; he had joined a diplomatic effort to Ireland. He was working hard on his poetry. His father was Henry Sidney, lord president of Wales and then lord deputy of Ireland, and his maternal uncle was Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, the Queen's favorite. He was, we might say, though of course we are aided by hindsight, waiting to be famous. Thus Dyer, though for my purposes it does not matter whether it was Dyer or someone else, might well have written of him, prophetically, "CAETERA FAMA," "The rest is fame." In the portrait these words may be regarded as said about Sidney or *as if* said by him (being above his head, almost in the manner of a cartoon balloon). But Sidney's last words, like Hotspur's, maybe like Hamlet's, although written (in his will), are an *aposiopesis*: "Item, I give to my good friends Sir George Digby and Sir Henry Goodyear, either of them a ring of. . . ."[18]

Although Philip Sidney was every bit the courtier, soldier, scholar that Ophelia calls Hamlet, it is not my intention to suggest any significant identification of the two. The value of the portrait is that, a generation before Shakespeare's play, it appears to demonstrate the currency of the words "The rest is fame," an accurate Englishing of "CAETERA FAMA." Although the phrase is not found in Morris Tilley's *Dictionary of Proverbs*, either in Latin or English, as the terse declaration of a confident conviction about the future, it possesses the epigrammatic force that we associate with the proverb, or sentence. As such it might once have been said often and known well, if not famous last words, at least famous words. Hamlet's last words, "The rest is silence," are not borrowed from any known source. But if he paused before pronouncing the very last of them, it is my conjecture that some in his audience might have anticipated "The rest is fame" and then heard what Hamlet said as a variation on a theme.

The two early quartos and the First Folio of *Hamlet* all show his dying concern with the narrative of his life that will survive him. Should Horatio not live to set the record straight, Hamlet fears the "scandal" that will be left behind, the word of Q1, or more probably, the "wounded name / Things standing thus unknown," of Q2 and F. And in these two versions of the play he goes on to



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implore his friend, "Absent thee from felicity awhile, / And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain / To tell my story" (V. ii. 349-51). Not "tell the story of me," as if that story could possess an objective reality independent of teller, but "tell my story": tell the story of me as I would myself. The consequence of Hamlet's story being told correctly is not merely a passive absence of disgrace but a positive accession to the state of being known, that is, of possessing fame. And fame, as Edward Burns writes, "in European humanist tradition, is the process by which history is made, the process by which the individuals of whose stories history is made up join the 'already known.' It is also the process by which they are defined *as* individuals."[19] The telling of Hamlet's story has guaranteed his fame, beyond that of other literary characters, beyond that of most real people. And such, perhaps, he himself was about to predict before he turned, instead, to silence.[20]

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## Notes

[1]Geoffrey O'Brien, "The Ghost at the Feast," *The New York Review of Books*, 44, 2 (February 6, 1997), p. 15. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the *West Virginia Shakespeare and Renaissance Association* Annual Conference at Marshall University, Huntington West Virginia, in April 1997. I wish to thank Kevin Ewert for a helpful suggestion and Ed Taft for his hospitality.

[2]*Hamlet*, ed. John Dover Wilson, in *The New Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1936), p. 258.

[3]*Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins, *The Arden Shakespeare* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 75. See also p. 62.

[4]William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, Compact Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

[5]*The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 1997), and *Hamlet*, ed. G. R. Hibbard, *The Oxford Shakespeare* (Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987). Hibbard acknowledges his "large debt" to Wells and Taylor in his Preface.

[6]Terence Hawkes, *That Shakespeherian Rag: Essays on a Critical Process* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986).

[7]Karl S. Guthke, *Last Words: Variations on a Theme in Cultural History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992), p. 36.

[8]Jenkins, p. 19.

[9]All quotations from Shakespeare, other than those acknowledged from the quartos and the First Folio, are taken from *The Complete Works*, ed. David Bevington, 4th ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

[10]Guthke, p. 20.

[11]*The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), pp. 159-60.

[12]*[Cicero] Ad C. Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann and Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1954), p. 331.



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[13]Abraham Fraunce, *The Arcadian Rhetoric* [1588] (Menston: Scolar Press, 1969), sig. F6v.

[14]Quintilian, *Institutio Oratorio*, VIII. iii. 85, trans. H. E. Butler, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann and Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1920), 3:259. Henry Peacham is quoted in Sister Miriam Joseph, *Rhetoric in Shakespeare's Time* (New York: Harcourt, 1947; Harbinger ed., 1962), p. 389. See also Demetrius, *On Style*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, rev. ed., Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann and Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1932), p. 367. See also, Mark Taylor, "Voyeurism and *Aposiopesis* in Renaissance Poetry," *Exemplaria*, 4(1992), pp. 267-94.

[15]See Nicci Gerrard, "Duelling to the Death over Aids," *The Observer*, Sunday, July 28, 1996, p. 26. The *Dictionary of American Biography* says nothing of Sedgwick's last words. *The American Heritage Picture History of the Civil War* (1960) tells the story but without the interruption.

[16]Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1991), p. 86.

[17]Duncan-Jones, pp. 103, 101.

[18]Duncan-Jones, p. 301.

[19]Edward Burns, *Character: Acting and Being on the Pre-Modern Stage* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 63.

[20]I wish to acknowledge that part of my title for this paper was preempted by Tom Matheson for an essay in *Shakespeare Survey*, 48 (1995), 113-21: "Hamlet's Last Words." Matheson's subject is the play *Hamlet* as an enduring token of cultural exchange, which continues "to speak across the boundaries of time, place, and culture" (120). He is really not concerned with "The rest is silence" except to "propose an emendation, bibliographically but not historically frivolous": that given the returns and renewals of the play, Hamlet should say (with Arnold Schwarzenegger in *The Terminator*), "not *'the rest is silence'* but *'I'll be back'*" (120-21). Indeed he shall.



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Figure 1: Sir Philip Sidney. Artist unknown. By Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.



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# A Reflective *Hamlet*: The Little Eyases Direct the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express

By William W. French

> There is no mystery to a looking glass until someone looks into it. Then, though it remains the same glass, it presents a different face to each man who holds it in front of him. The same is true of a work of art. It has no proper existence as art until someone is reflected in it—and no two will ever be reflected in the same way. However much we all see in common in such a work, at the center we behold a fragment of our own soul, and the greater the art the greater the fragment. *Hamlet* is possibly the most convincing example in existence of this truth.[1]

As Harold Goddard pointed out years ago, *Hamlet* is built around the mirror image. The central scene of the play consists in the "holding-up of a dramatic mirror in the form of a play within the play."[2] Hamlet's advice to the players, to "hold, as 'twere the mirror up to nature" (III. ii. 21-22)[3] is, as Roland Mushat Frye puts it, "easily the most famous piece of literary or dramatic criticism in English," and the speech "pivots exactly upon the image of drama as a mirror held up to nature."[4] The pattern of reflective imagery, the metaphor of the mirror as an imitation of nature, that informs the play has been recognized for years. In *The Mirror Up to Nature,* Virgil K. Whitaker explores Shakespeare's use of the metaphor, warning, however, against using it to invite an over-simplified verisimilitude, because it should be taken in the meta-phoric sense by which Aristotle would understand *mimesis*.[5]

Frye focuses on "Gertrude's Mirror of Confession" for his discussion of the theme.[6] He connects the mirror image to the idea of conscience which inhabits the play. This idea had descended to Shakespeare through medieval Christianity, from St. Augustine as well as from the Protestant Reformers. Christian teaching generally held up the Holy Scriptures as a mirror for self-exami-nation, showing virtue and vice alike.[7] Shakespeare, inheriting this tradition, has Hamlet repeat the idea (probably needlessly but perhaps also touched with ironic humor) to the actors, imploring them to "to hold, as 'twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image." Later, he will force Gertrude to gaze into the mirror of repentance (III. ii. 22-23).[8]

Shakespeare also inherited a long tradition of secular litera-ture mirroring the human condition.[9] From Sir Thomas North's



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translation of the *Lives*, he certainly knew how Plutarch found in history a mirror. The metaphor was prevalent in the "Mirror for Magistrates" tradition, one of the most popular secular literary forms throughout the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. Based originally on John Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* (which Lydgate himself had borrowed from Boccaccio about 1422), the later *Mirror for Magistrates* enjoyed great popularity during Shakespeare's day and was borrowed from frequently.[10] In short, the mirror was a standard trope for self-examination and the improvement of moral life. Shakespeare's use of the trope as the guiding metaphor for Hamlet's introspection fits, therefore, into a long tradition.

Two scenes in the play that explore conscience in particular and therefore extend the use of the metaphor to a generalized theme are Claudius' prayer scene (III. iii.) and the scene in Gertrude's closet (III. iv). The play within the play (III. ii.) excites Claudius' conscience but fails to work on Gertrude; Hamlet must force her, unwilling as she is, to look into her conscience. The generalized mirror of Hamlet's Mousetrap having failed to work on Gertrude, Hamlet must confront her with a personal mirror of her own soul in order that he may call her to repentance:

> Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge.
> You go not till I set you up a glass
> Where you may see the inmost part of you.
> (III. iv. 19-21)

Frye says that Hamlet's glass is "fundamentally metaphorical,"[11] though it is quite possible that Shakespeare's actors would have used a small hand-held mirror, or possibly a "fan-mirror," a type of looking-glass popular in the day.[12] Furthermore, hand-held mirrors have been used frequently in productions of the play.[13] However, a 1995 production by the "Little Eyases," using the actors of the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, employed a very large mirror and in so doing brought the image out of the metaphoric realm and into the literal and thereby put an interesting twist on this pattern.[14]

This reflective *Hamlet* was staged in a room roughly fifty feet long and thirty feet wide, actually a dance rehearsal room. The space was just large enough to accommodate an audience of about thirty-five spectators plus the eleven actors. Quarters were close, creating a sense of intimacy that pervaded the entire performance. The room provided two entrances: one door on the short side faced the mirror and was matched by a door on the long side opposite. This door opened onto a ramp ending at the other—the



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mirrored—side of the room. Characters entering through the ramp door, therefore, unless they vaulted the metal rail as Hamlet did once, had to walk the entire length of the room to gain access to the playing space.

The notable effect of a character entering by this ramp was secured by the short wall opposite, which was entirely faced by a mirror, floor to ceiling, wall to wall. The audience sat in a thrust or "U" arrangement, a semi-circle of two rows of seats, with the closed end of the horseshoe facing the mirror. Regardless of where you sat, therefore, you saw yourself and your fellow spectators in reverse perspective, and you saw the actors at each moment of action from at least two perspectives. If one actor had a back to you, you could see the front, the face, in the mirror; if in profile, the opposite profile showed in the mirror; if the actor faced you, you saw the back in the mirror. The most remarkable effect achieved by this arrangement was that the faces and bodies of actors and spectators alike were ever present to one's gaze.[15]

Performing in this space put a pressure of intimacy upon everyone present, and upon the audience, a sense of invasion. We shared a small room, the actors penetrating the audience space during their performance. We as audience saw ourselves and the actors reflected in the mirror at the end of the performance room, as if we were all one body, one performing group; we were all therefore compelled to pay strict attention and to locate a reaction within ourselves to virtually every line; we were also compelled to witness the reactions of our fellow audience members, which were just as evident as were the reactions of the actors "on stage." Our responses veered from sympathy to disgust; we flirted almost simultaneously with detachment and compassion, agreement and suspicion, one following the other so quickly that the responses seemed simultaneous.[16]

Intimacy was further enhanced by the actors' use of several forms of direct address. For example, Horatio, upon entering, touched the audience member sitting next to me on the shoulder and gave her a little smile, as if Horatio and she were old friends, he just in from Wittenburg. The supremely political Claudius, dressed in a sharply-pressed business suit, pressed audience flesh on his triumphal entry in (I. ii.), greeting as many in the audience as he could conveniently reach, Polonius smiling grimly, keeping a sharp eye on each of us, as if we might be potential assassins.

This Polonius was no comic: His demeanor serious and threatening throughout, distant and efficient, he did not offer to hug Laertes upon his departure, instead offering his son a courtly handshake. Later, Polonius would set down his leather briefcase



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in the lap of a female audience member and rummage through it for papers, simply presuming that he had the perfect right to do so. This act provided an instance in which a moment of intimate contact had the opposite effect: It alienated (while, of course, amusing) not only the offended audience member, who felt that her private space had been invaded and who finally removed the briefcase from her lap, but the entire audience, who then awaited their turn to be invaded.[17] (The moment also suggested that the minister felt free in a general sense to invade the female body, implying that he had done just that to his daughter.) Later, when Polonius describes to Claudius and Gertrude Hamlet's descent into madness, he moved around the semi-circle, directing phrases of Hamlet's decline ("thence to a . . . ") to different auditors. His pompous manner and smug self-assurance further alienated him from the audience, while amusing them. Following his invasion of the female body in the audience—his use of her body as a desk—his presence posed a constant threat: we as audience never knew when our bodies might be similarly invaded.

Claudius, on the other hand, knew just how to "play" the audience as well as his court. His feints for sympathy from audience were, of course, ironic. But his ploys served for his court. He evoked laughter from them, for example, when he spoke of Hamlet's "unmanly grief," Hamlet glowering and skulking at the rear of the court. But, of course, in this performance, Hamlet was perfectly visible in the mirror to court and audience alike. Philip Lortie playing Claudius made it seem as though his Claudius was just learning how to use the mirror to enhance his image, so he showed right away that he also knew how to play to the mirror, and thereby to the audience. In his response to Polonius' line about how we "sugar o'er / The devil himself, . . . How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!" (III. i. 47-49), he gazed meaningfully into the mirror, his back to us but his face clearly visible, his conscience awakened. Later, following Hamlet's Mousetrap, the mirror seemed to function not as an image enhancement but as a reflection of his growing awareness of guilt. These moments effectively suggested the birth of conscience in Claudius.

Later, during his prayer (III. iii. 36 ff.), he addressed parts of his supplication to individual auditors, as if imploring them as well as God to help him, suggesting that his guilt now made him cry for help. The result was to arouse at least momentary sympathy for Claudius. Near the end of the play another stunning moment in the use of the mirror occurred, when he addressed his aside, "It is the poisoned cup, it is too late" (V. ii. 292) directly into



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the mirror, even as Gertrude drank from the fatal chalice; his horror at his evil is in full flower of recognition, the mirror acting as the icon of conscience.

On the other hand, Michelle Powers' Ophelia avoided peering into the mirror, as if she did not wish to perceive her own soiled nature. She wore a sexy red dress in the early scenes, then for her mad scenes changing into a clinging black dress which Gertrude had worn earlier. This Ophelia also knew how to "play" the audience. As Laertes lectured her in I. iii., she sat in an empty chair, smiling archly and elbowing the audience member seated next to her, at one point throwing her leg across his lap. Her sexuality became obsessive at several points, as when she later grabbed playfully, yet threateningly, at Gertrude's crotch and gave Laertes a suggestive hug in the act of offering him rosemary in IV. v.

Ophelia was well motivated as the creature of her dominating, even brutal, father. If Paul Riopelle's Polonius was cold toward Laertes, parting with a handshake rather than a hug, he did allow Ophelia to hug him and would touch her on occasion. She, on the other hand, approached Polonius deferentially, hungry for his affection. Someone later pointed out that abused children often seek a close relationship with an abusive parent. Polonius treated Claudius and Gertrude with oily deference, though expecting, and receiving, Gertrude's deference to him. Nor was Gertrude an innocent: She wore a sexy costume, caressed Claudius throughout the opening scene, even gazed lustfully at her son, a lust clearly seen in the mirror.

The generally sympathetic Hamlet also knew how to "play" his audience. In his initial appearance, as part of the entourage during Claudius' triumphal entry down the ramp, Hamlet looked for all the world like a stricken deer, an effect augmented when he was by-passed by other courtiers at the foot of the ramp. Soon, however, he moved into a defiant mood. Pushing his audience away: "Who calls me pigeon-livered?" he said sharply, moving about the horseshoe, pointing first to one, then another audience member. Then he regained our sympathy, especially when he took us into his confidence as he conceives the Mousetrap: "I'll have these players / Play something like the murther of my father" (II. ii. 594-95), speaking to individuals in the semi-circle.

Thadd McQuade's Hamlet exploited the mirror in the Closet scene with Gertrude, when on, "You go not till I set you up a glass" (III. iv. 19), he spun Hep Jamieson's Gertrude around on a wheeled office chair, forcing her to face the great mirror. Thus was the metaphoric changed into the literal and recent stage performance



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upset (to excellent effect). At that moment, the backs of both characters faced the audience, but the mirror exposed Hamlet's emotional intensity and Gertrude's dismay at her son's rude behavior as well as her seething conscience. This action provided a wonderful example of Hamlet's theatrical dictum of suiting the word to the action and the action to the word. Clearly, the theatre space invited the staging.

Again in II. iv. McQuade's Hamlet invited us to share his outrage by displaying the photograph of his dead father to several auditors as well as to his mother, bending over each in turn, holding the picture close to their faces, his forefinger pointing to it, he looking at the picture, then to the auditor and back. As the Closet scene progressed, mother and son played consistently to the mirror, backs to the audience, faces reflected in the mirror to both audience and selves. The audience was thus forced to confront themselves as well as Hamlet and Gertrude, both characters and audience confronting self-righteous anger, sexual indulgence, grief, and alienation, even though all might wish their backs turned toward all the others, as the actors actually did have.[18]

In the Gravediggers scene, Hamlet, as if instructing the audience professorially, drew us in by explaining how the "noble dust of Alexander" might stop a "bunghole" (V. i. 203-04), once again bending to several audience members as if we were a bit slow, he intent on our understanding his point, displaying in his hand Yorick's skull. He drew us in again, near the end, just before he collapsed, when he addressed us all as "you":

> You that look pale, and tremble at this chance,
> That are but mutes or audience to this act,
> (V. ii. 234-35)

Mute perhaps but an audience certainly in the sense of being participants. The intimacy thus achieved was fortified following the performance by an intense discussion between actors and audience. The intensity of focus resulted in some measure because actors and audience had been working together for five weeks prior to this performance.

The Little Eyases' use of the mirror, of course, quickly became the focus of the post-performance discussion. We soon became aware that the actors *as actors* were acutely conscious of the mirror and its effects on the other actors and their characters. They had sought to convey the idea that their character *as characters* were aware of the effects of the mirror. The audience was also acutely aware of these multiple effects. Thus, gazing into the mirror often



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forced a character to look inward, as when Claudius kneeled to pray, facing in the mirror his guilt and grief, his anguished ambivalence between his deed and his desire to keep his throne and his queen. The moment clarified one of the chief effects of *Hamlet* mirrored, for it objectified Claudius' inner, spiritual world. The moment became Eliot's "objective correlative," the expression of an emotion or intense inner state in a "set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion." The moment was such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the "emotion is immediately evoked."[19] Here the situation was Claudius gazing into the mirror, his back to the audience as if ignoring us, but the distraught facial expression revealing his guilt to self and all.

This effect was reversed at times by characters unwilling to gaze into the mirror to see their weaknesses reflected. Gertrude, for example, throughout the closet scene with her son refused even to glance toward the mirror; her son had to swivel her chair about, forcing her to look. Nor would Ophelia dare during her mad scenes to face herself, as if she might be suddenly bewitched in reverse and regain her sanity, against her will.[20] The suggestion in these two female characters was that the hyper-sexuality displayed in both resulted from their being victimized and used by the men in their lives, Polonius and Claudius respectively.

Some of the characters gave themselves to watching other characters watching themselves in the mirror, as if seeking clues thereby to their inner nature. Claudius and Gertrude were especially active in probing Hamlet through the mirror, watching him watch himself, both of them intent on getting a clue to his madness, Claudius the Machiavellian seeking the advantage of the knowledge that bears power, Gertrude showing more a mother's concerned, sympathetic gaze. Hamlet himself clearly feared looking at himself in the mirror but forced himself on occasion to do so, displaying thereby a strong moral character. The audience watches itself watch Claudius and Gertrude watch Hamlet watch himself. There is perhaps a hint of narcissism here.

The Little Eyases' use of the mirror may also be understood in a Brechtian sense, as a device of alienation, reminding us that the characters are actors, not real people, but are also a means of reflecting us, the audience, making us uncomfortably vulnerable to our own consciences within the performance context.[21] That is certainly true, though something more, and perhaps a little different, was also being experienced. Eric Bentley makes the point that what Brecht "wishes to do is not flatly either to please people or



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instruct them. It is something closer to waking them up."[22] A "wakeup call" strikes me as a useful way to think about this reflective performance of *Hamlet*, for its intensity made us all, observers and performers alike, acutely conscious of the play in performance. In this sense, the mirror functioned as a way for us all to contemplate the state of our own souls as we gazed upon reflections in the mirror. We spectators were intrigued to see which ones of us were gazing at ourselves in the mirror. The mirror afforded us not only two views of each other, but also the surreptitious view of each other's private but perfectly observable gaze. Sometimes it was easy to see whether a companion was looking at the body of an actor or actors or at their reflections or at their own reflection. Not surprisingly, some faces became very protective and closed off. There is only so much self-observation one can endure.

Indeed, several members maintained stoutly that the mirrored play actually produced less audience interaction than is usually the case with a play performed under universal lighting. The mirrored experience was more internal but also more intense because it was as if the spectators, in this intimate theatre space, were trapped inside the world of *Hamlet*, which became an unnerving experience. Scott Duff's Ghost was an especially threatening appearance because he made strong movements diagonally across the space, entering from the "other" door, the one at the closed end of the "U," which was used only for the Ghost's entrance, he emerging then through the ranks of the auditors, making us feel pinned in, captive to his eerie presence. The play's closing minutes reinforced this effect, when Hamlet cries "let the door be lock'd!" (V. ii. 311) and several actors hurried into positions surrounding the entire room, blocking all entrances. There was, literally, no unguarded way out.

Often, though, it was impossible to tell whether a fellow audience member was looking at a reflection of herself or the reflection of the actors, creating a tension between the "real" and the "unreal." Actors, audience, mirrored reflections became one, and the play became thereby an intense and effective amalgam of then and now. The effect achieved was of barriers broken between actors and audience, between play and "reality," between physiognomy and psyche, between the culture of Shakespeare's day and that of our own. The mirrored and mirroring play erased, at least temporarily, these differences. The play performed in a small mirrored room temporarily confused the sense of vision, blurring image and reality, and thereby complicating the line between "real," "unreal," play, and mimesis. Because the mir-



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rored image was so "real," the image suggested a simplistic notion of imitation, the work of art imitating nature. But here a shaping rather than an imitation was taking place because the players were using the mirror to construe the event in an artful sense. Thus, the performance raised the question, what does the effect of being trapped between the "real" and the "unreal," between bodies and mirrored bodies, have on our understanding of seeing "truth" in a mirror. But it also blurred the distinctions. Therefore, the question, does the mirror effect, undermine, or support our impulse to see what's true, fades: The whole issue is left murky.

Furthermore, the effect of the performance in the mirrored space did not, it seemed to me, come close in any way to violating Whitaker's dictum concerning aesthetic mimesis, turning the play into a stab at cheap, oversimplified verisimilitude. Rather, the effect brought to life the Renaissance trope of the mirror as a means of introspection, the mirror as the birth of conscience, for the entire party of actors, characters, and spectators, effects which would resemble those that Shakespeare inherited from Renaissance writing and exploits in the play.

The tropes combining generated an act of self-examination (and I may here be speaking only for myself) that felt, for those who were not alienated, communal, a moment of the "real" because it was shared, which we might say was inspired, by "unreal" shadows on a wall. If one might say that the mirrored performance induced a narcissistic response, one might offer in rejoinder that it also induced for some a *catharsis*, though I tread very lightly here. The effect may have more to do with the small studio space and the presence of the mirror. Dennis Kennedy makes the perceptive observation that *"The impact of performance in small spaces results from the parity between the performer's body and the spectator's body"* (italics his).[23] Everyone could gaze upon everyone else's face and body at every moment: nothing, not a gesture, not an expression, was missed. The venue gave reception an intensity virtually impossible in a proscenium theatre or even in a chamber lacking the mirror.

The presence of the mirror brought home the generalized concept of the experience of theatre, Hamlet's own idea of the Mousetrap. The illusion of the performance, reflected in the mirror, gave body and perspective to the theatrical illusion, a mimesis drawing together reality and illusion without violating "verisimilitude." I never lost consciousness that this was an aesthetic experience. The constant presence of the mirror never let me forget that I was an audience witnessing a show. But also I never forgot that I was a necessary constituent to the show, as was



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everyone else in the room. Enough of the audience testified to this effect in the post-show discussion that I am persuaded it was a general effect.

The testimony of audience and actors in the post-show discussion also made me aware of how important such moments may be to a theatre historian because observations are articulated that either confirm or deny an individual spectator's response. My own view of the production described it as a post-modern experience, playful, energetic, and daring but not disruptive. Indeed, the production realized in literal terms a major theme of Shakespeare's play and thereby offered a serious reconstruction of it. The Little Eyases made the play new, appealing to a post-modern sensibility. The performance not only *did not* deconstruct the original, but it apprehended and manifested it. Clearly, the same effect could not be achieved in a larger space such as the new Bankside Globe or in a proscenium auditorium.[24]

Finally, the performance realized Shakespeare's theme of the "mirror up to nature." In Appendix A of *The Renaissance "Hamlet,"* R. M. Frye argues that Shakespeare's use of the mirror metaphor turns on the Platonic injunction to "Know Thyself," the motto Socrates presumably took from the Temple of Apollo at Delphi.[25] I take it as a matter of faith, reinforced by the testimony of other spectators during the post-performance discussion, that the reflective *Hamlet* opened most of those present, actors and onlookers alike, to ourselves, though what each beheld was, I am sure, "different," as Goddard says of faces and works of art, from what others saw. But in opening ourselves to each other, it transformed the performance into "proper existence as art" as a communal experience. Being part of the experience, of the anguish and the joy, the alienation and the compassion, the play was brought to life in a way I had never experienced because we were all involved, all a part. The experience was finally uncanny and bewitching.

**West Virginia University**

## Notes

[1]Harold Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 1951), p. 331.

[2]Goddard, p. 331.

[3]All quotations are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

[4]*The Renaissance "Hamlet": Issues and Responses in 1600* (Princeton: Princeton



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Univ. Press, 1984), p. 281. The most thorough treatment of the idea is M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: Norton, 1953); see especially Chapter 2, "Imitation and the Mirror," pp. 30-46. But Douglas E. Green in "Staging the Evidence: Shakespeare's Theatrical Revengers," *The Upstart Crow*, 12 (1992), 29-37. has useful insights into the scene's function in the play.

[5](San Marino, California: Huntington Library Press, 1965). See especially p. 90. Also, Frye points out that mirrors were not common in Elizabethan England. They were imported from Venice at great cost and were therefore available only to the very wealthy (p. 284). Shakespeare's audience probably would have taken the image, therefore, metaphorically rather than literally.

[6]Pp. 151-66.

[7]See Frye, pp. 285-86.

[8]Frye, pp. 285-86 addresses this point fully.

[9]See Roland Mushat Frye, *Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963). John Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme* (1376) is but one example of the use of the metaphor to provide moral instruction in medieval secular literature.

[10]Ed. Lily B. Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1938).

[11]Frye, p. 153. In Appendix A, "The Mirror up to Nature: Artifact, Metaphor, and Guide," pp. 281-92, Frye explores the background for the treatment of mirrors in *Hamlet*. He sees Hamlet's advice to the players as a "definitive statement" of representational aesthetics in all the arts.

[12]Frye, p. 153, reprints a detail from "Lady and Fowler" by Jost Amman, Fig IV23, called "Lady with fan-mirror." The picture shows the sort of mirror Hamlet might have used as a stage prop in the scene.

[13]I am indebted to Alan Dessen for this information, as well as other points throughout this paper.

[14]*Hamlet* was presented by the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express (SSE), Harrisonburg, Virginia, July 5-August 12, 1995. Directed by Ralph Alan Cohen. Fight Choreography by J. D. Martinez. With Scott Duff (Ghost, Player King, Fortinbras, 2nd Gravedigger, Cornelius), Hep Jamieson (Gertrude), Tricia Kelly (Rosencrantz, Bernardo), Philip Lortie (Claudius), Margaret McGirr (Gravedigger, Voltemand, Player Queen, Reynaldo, Captain), Matthew McIver (Guildenstern, Osric, Marcellus), Thadd McQuade (Hamlet), Keith Odums (Laertes), Michelle Powers (Ophelia), Paul Riopelle (Polonius, Francisco, Priest, Ambassador), and Darius Stone (Horatio).

The performance that is the subject of this paper differed in certain important respects from the public run of the play given by the SSE because it was directed by a group of eight scholars who were part of an NEH Institute. For six weeks during Summer 1995, twenty-four college and university teachers studied Shakespearean stage performance at the Center for Renaissance and Shakespearean Staging (CRASS) at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia, under the direction of Ralph Alan Cohen. The Institute, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, allowed the professors to work with the actors of the SSE during their home residence, July 5 through August 12. The SSE repertory that year included *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, and *The Tempest*.

At the outset of the Institute, the group of twenty-four participants was broken down into three groups of eight each; each group worked with the actors on one of the three plays. Each group was to direct an alternate version of "their" play. Each group named itself, the *Hamlet* group becoming the "Little Eyases."

The "alternate" version of the play, as defined by Ralph Alan Cohen, was not to be *too* alternate. The cuts the company directors had already made were to stand; no lines were to be added. Ralph did not want the actors burdened with



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new or different lines. Different concepts for the play or for individual scenes or for characters could be adopted. Blocking could be altered; minimal costuming or set dressing changes could be made; venues other than the performance space the company normally uses could be chosen. The groups faced the problem of being a director with eight heads; a wag christened the groups "octopates."

At the outset of the Institute, Ralph had defined "SSE house style" as the effort to secure what he calls a "Shakespearean dynamic." This means that sets and costumes are minimal: SSE performs in the auditorium of a middle school in Harrisonburg, Virginia. A dark curtain hangs across rear stage. Actors wear t-shirts and jeans and black boots, sometimes changing into white shirts and blouses; a cape (for Prospero) or nightgown (for Malvolio in the cakes and ale scene) or choir robe (for Feste as Sir Topas) may be used to suggest special occasions or role changes.

The word "Express" reflects SSE line delivery, the goal being to keep to *Romeo and Juliet's* "two hours' traffic of our stage"as far as possible. Ralph seeks to "strip the play bare, removing 400 year's worth of theatrical gimcrackery and seeing what's beneath." He says: "We're about believing in the words and believing in an audience's ability to use its imagination and make a play with us." The emphasis is on *with* because SSE does everything possible to draw the audience into the play and make all members feel themselves part of the performance, insofar as possible.

SSE maintains a short rehearsal time (about ten to fouteen days). Their shows run with no intermission. The group uses thrust staging, adapting any performance space to as close an approximation to Shakespeare's Globe as possible. SSE performs in universal lighting and uses many different forms of direct address. The actors are almost always in view of the audience, and almost all costume changes take place in view of the audience.

[15]In his Appendix A Frye points out that the glass mirrors known to Shakespeare's audiences were "small instruments," measuring "no more than a few inches across." Most of these objects were convex rather than plane and so distorted the reflection. Frye reprints the sixteenth century painter Parmigianino's *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* to demonstrate his point (pp. 282-83). By contrast, the mirrored wall in the performance space for the reflective *Hamlet* is strictly a product of modern technology. Its use for this performance did not impress me for the verisimilitude it produced (actually, though, it intensified the reality of the experience) but for its effect in drawing audience and actors into a single experiential field and allowing all participants a series of multiple perspectives on the action. The "action" included us all.

[16]I am using "we" as audience consciously and, I hope, judiciously. I can only assume what others experienced, although I cannot determine that with assurance. This, of course, raises the vexatious problem of trusting the testimony of an eye witness: To what extent do we invest our credence in our fellow audience members? To what extent do we trust ourselves as observers? My position is that we must assume that we must trust those we know to have training and expertise as observers of the material theatre event. This judgment, of course, may not extend to their aesthetic judgment. I see no value in putting too fine a point on this. What is in question is what other audience members experienced. We can rely only on what individuals say they experienced and to a somewhat lesser degree what we think they may have experienced, although, clearly there is some degree of danger here. We may also form judgments from physical evidence; laughter and weeping help us form clear judgments. Bodily postures, facial expressions, gestures and the like provide suggestive clues on which we may formulate judgments.



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[17]SSE "house style," based on Ralph Alan Cohen's insistence that Shakespeare's actors at the Globe used direct address extensively, includes the rhetorical device in numerous forms. The actors of this performance took considerable advantage of the intimacy of the performance space. Consistent use of such address in different forms leads to the interesting question whether use of that technique supports communal judgment or individual judgment: in other words, if audience members are brought into a performance by being "used" by actors as participants, is our ability to judge objectively hindered or helped?

[18]My judgment in this instance may be overwhelmed by the direct address being used and that I was experiencing, extrapolating my personal experience to the others in the audience. Again, whether the use of direct address pulls an audience together and helps them to share a common experience is a question left for exploration. But my sense of it is that the consistent use of direct address draws an audience together and makes it easier for a single observer to posit a group judgment.

[19]T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), pp. 124-25.

[20]Michelle Powers is black and was the only black person in the room, whether audience or actor. Whether her reluctance to face her image in the mirror during this scene was a question of her race as an actress or the madness of the character she was playing remains an open question. The issue did not come upin the post-performance discussion. The presence of the mirror in which she would regard her image reflected juxtaposed with the images of only white people might have made her differentness more acute to her. In that case, the mirror worked to isolate her and thus intensify her acting of Ophelia's madness.

[21]I am indebted to H. R. Coursen for this point, as well as for several other points throughout an early draft of this paper.

[22]*Bertolt Brecht: A Study Guide* (New York: Grove Press, 1995), p. 14.

[23]Dennis Kennedy, "Shakespeare Played Small: Three Speculations About the Body," *Shakespeare Survey*, 47 (1994) p. 4.

[24]Kennedy, pp. 4-7, addresses the issue of the parity between the performer's body and the spectator's body in small spaces.

[25]To Plato a "mirror" would be made of polished metal. This would have been true as well for St. Paul in the first century AD, who speaks of seeing "through a glass darkly." Medieval Christians were fond of using the mirror as a symbol for self-knowledge. See Frye, p. 285.



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# Contextualizing *Othello* in Reed and Phillips

by Peter Erickson

The two most recent novels of Ishmael Reed and Caryl Phillips make a major issue of *Othello*.[1] Both writers surround *Othello* with documentary material whose effect is to place the play's literary stature and cultural status in question. The generic means by which this end is achieved are different. Reed's *Japanese by Spring* (Atheneum, 1993) is an academic novel in which the primary source of contextualizing documentation is the debate known as the "culture wars." As a historical novel, Phillips' *The Nature of Blood* (Knopf, 1997) uses history as its contextual mode. In both cases, the insertion of *Othello* is especially dramatic because it is strategically delayed until the novel's mid-point. One reason for the delay is to build up the larger context and to allow time for this context to make its claims on us. For it is the external context that will counteract *Othello*'s automatic canonical appeal.

## I.

*Japanese by Spring* is situated in the realm of academic politics. Black professor Chappie Puttbutt's designated role as comic "butt" is signaled in a summary of his efforts to gain professional advancement by continuously adjusting to changes in intellectual fashion: "When the Black Power thing was in, Puttbutt was into that. When the backlash on Black Power settled in, with its code words like reverse discrimination, he'd joined that. He'd been a feminist when they were in power. But now they were on the decline, unable to expand beyond their middle-class constituency and so for now he was a neoconservative . . . "(pp. 48-49). The ultimate irony is soon revealed: his infinite malleability is for naught because "He had been denied tenure!" (p. 69).[2] In a further comic reversal by which he suddenly achieves power, Puttbutt's crisis is made to center on *Othello*. Through access to confidential files, he discovers that his earliest work was used against him in the tenure decision: " . . . the Miltonians had been rallied by Crabtree who had fought against Puttbutt's candidacy citing the article he had written many years ago in which he said that Shakespeare's *Othello* was racist. He'd forgotten all about it. It was his master's thesis. Written when he was in his Black Power period" (pp. 93-94).

Thereafter Puttbutt's writing on *Othello* becomes a comic touch-



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stone. This leitmotif is replayed so often (pp. 96-99, 138-39, 153, 180-81) that in the final allusion Reed punctuates the joke by winking over his character's head to the reader: "Oh no, not again" (p. 202). The most fully developed discussion of the play is the first moment, in which Puttbutt, locked in confrontation with the professor who led the opposition to his tenure, is forced to defend his assertion that *Othello* is racist. The novel clearly enjoys the white professor's squirming as his bluff is called and the hollow sententiousness of his protestations is exposed: "'William Shakespeare didn't have a racist bone in his body'" (p. 97). But an underlying ambiguity remains regarding Puttbutt's side of the argument: Is Puttbutt a convincing hero in this moment of triumph, or does he spout his own brand of rote response? To what extent is his interpretation of *Othello* merely a throwback to an oversimplified and misguided Black-Power formula?

It matters whether the critique of *Othello* is valid. But so relentless and omnivorous is Reed's satiric drive that it is hard to know where we stand. Unable to resist a final turn of the comic screw, Reed has Puttbutt insist that Emilia is "a racist feminist" who should be charged with "misandry" (p. 98). The latter term seems so far beyond Puttbutt's capacity that the indictment functions as a mischievously provocative allusion to Reed's personal reputation as the scourge of feminist critics.[3] And how do we take the equation of Othello with Colin Powell (p. 181)? Anything and everything becomes grist for Reed's fast-moving, hit-and-run irony, with the result that it appears virtually impossible to find a point of interpretive stability. The senior Puttbutt's complaint about his son might be applied to Reed himself: "You're all over the place" (p. 180). The introduction of "Ishmael Reed" as a character in the novel exacerbates rather than solves this problem.

Two points of contact outside the novel provide useful external evidence. The first is Reed's introduction to the collection he edited in 1997 called *Multiamerica;* the second is his essay, "Bigger and O. J.," in Toni Morrison's anthology of the same year.[4] Since these two items retroactively address key themes in the novel, the three works can be seen as a group. Reed's direct references in *Japanese by Spring* to actual figures in the culture-wars debate strongly resonate with his project in *Multiamerica.* The novel plausibly summarizes the body of conservative cultural commentary as a set of predictable moves: "Argue that the blacks desired multicultural education because they couldn't cut it with the tough Eurocentric curriculum. Justify the Eurocore curriculum by arguing that American liberal values arise from the West. Wind it up with a plea for a common culture (white) and suggest that any



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deviation would lead to balkanization" (pp. 111-12). This "formula" reads like a plot summary of *The Disuniting of America* by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., whose work Reed tellingly criticizes for its limited historical vision (pp. 125-26).[5]

The crucial move in *Japanese by Spring* is the specific choice of *Othello* as the symbolic point of contention in the struggle over revision of the established literary canon. Reed's own point of view in "Bigger and O. J." is clear from the dismissive characterization of Othello as "a naive patsy" (p. 170). This dismissive tone is carried over into the novel, where Reed's working assumption seems to be that if *Othello* is thoroughly mocked from enough angles, the play will lose the canonical aura that protects it from "serious" criticism. Insofar as Puttbutt's reading of *Othello* involves a revaluation of Black Power, Reed's implied response cuts two ways. On the one hand, Reed has no qualms about rejecting the separatist component of black nationalism in favor of a fully multicultural view of social relations. On the other hand, he affirms the fundamental perception that no scholarly extenuation can make Othello's—and Shakespeare's—treatment of race positive and exemplary. There are no safeguards built into the play strong enough to offset and deter its ultimate racist implications.

Moreover, Reed reinforces the critique of Shakespeare by connecting *Othello* to *The Merchant of Venice* and thus expanding the concept of ethnic prejudice to include Jews: "They could read *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* without taking into account what some of the characters and the language meant to Jews and to blacks" (pp. 98-99). As shall become clear, this pairing is germane for the "taking into account" that Caryl Phillips performs in *The Nature of Blood*, where "blood" evokes both distinct ethnic identity as well as a multicultural vision of common humanity.

## II.

Edited by Caryl Phillips in 1997, *Extravagant Strangers: A Literature of Belonging* compresses *Othello* into the five-line epigraph from which the main title is drawn.[6] Here the act of contextualizing *Othello* is performed by overwhelming it with literary extravagance: Shakespeare's vivid phrase is modified by bringing to bear a more complex set of other authorial voices, including significant numbers of black British writers.

Published the same year as *Extravagant Strangers*, *The Nature of Blood* contextualizes *Othello* in two ways. First, since the *Othello* section does not begin until halfway through the novel, this



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segment is nested in a series of outer layers, to which I shall return. Second, the *Othello* section is itself filtered through the medium of a prose retelling from Othello's point of view. One effect of hearing Othello's story in his own words is to make his attraction to Desdemona not only persuasive but compelling.

But another, deeper, effect is to give clearer expression to his anxious second thoughts. In particular, Phillips adds a dimension not present in the play concerning the African wife whom Othello has left behind and whom marriage to Desdemona will potentially betray. In Othello's consciousness, doubt in this matter is relatively low-key, and his hesitation carries only a slight premonition (pp. 134-35). However, Othello's narrative is literally brought to a stop by a different voice, presumably aligned with the abandoned wife's, that intervenes to pronounce the "harsh judgment" Othello had vaguely feared: "And so you shadow her [Desdemona's] every move, attend to her every whim, like the black Uncle Tom that you are . . . yet you conveniently forget your own family, and thrust your wife and son to the back of your noble mind" (p. 180).[7] After this interruption, Othello does not speak. The rest of his story is withheld. The novel refuses to let Othello's narrative proceed through its familiar course to its tragic conclusion; in effect, Shakespeare's ending is not only suspended but cancelled, as though superseded by the potential for interpretive revision made possible by the interpolation of a new voice.

Like Puttbutt's rejection of *Othello* as racist in *Japanese by Spring*, the status of the voice condemning Othello in *The Nature of Blood* seems mixed. Its absolute righteous anger clears away the sentimental air of canonicity that surrounds the play. Yet some of the anger is fueled by an unattractively narrow black nationalist perspective. The most convincing part of the voice is that which appeals not to separation but to the combination, however arduous, of past and present: "You are lost, a sad black man, first in a long line of so-called achievers who are too weak to yoke their past with their present; too naive to insist on both; too foolish to realize that to supplant one with the other can only lead to catastrophe" (pp. 180-81); "My friend, an African river bears no resemblance to a Venetian canal. Only the strongest spirit can hold both together" (p. 182). Despite the negative tone toward Othello, the prospect implied by "the strongest spirit" stands out as a positive alternative. What makes Othello's position problematic is not his attraction to the present—the interracial love for Desdemona is genuinely affecting—but rather his failure to make any effort to integrate this Venetian present with his African past in an adequately comprehensive vision.



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The motif of comprehensiveness pertains to the novel's second mode of contextualizing *Othello*, which involves the stories that precede the *Othello* section. What explains why the sequence of stories unfolds in this particular order so that we reach Othello only after substantial delay (p. 106)? The two narratives that come before Othello's both concern the oppression of Jews, the first focusing on the Holocaust of our own century and the second on fifteenth-century Venice. This double historical frame not only implies a consistent pattern of anti-Semitism from the Renaissance to the modern period, but also intimates a Shakespearean link between the Venice which constructs the Jewish ghetto and the Venice in which Othello must negotiate his way. This link is made explicit when Othello twice recounts his entry into the Jewish ghetto (pp. 128-31 and 141-42).

Although *The Merchant of Venice* is never named in the novel, its thematic relevance is evident. The novel presupposes our awareness of Othello and Shylock as two ethnic outsiders,[8] and it calls on this awareness not only in relation to early modern Europe but also in connection with contemporary attention to vexed relations between blacks and Jews.[9] Phillips' parallel stories stress their major common bond in the prejudice both have experienced at the hands of white Europeans.

There is a further twist, however. Because Othello's account of his marriage to Desdemona is interrupted and remains unfinished, this narrative thread is indirectly played out in two other relationships that structure the novel's final stages. The first is the ongoing relation between Gerry, the British soldier engaged in liberating concentration camps at the end of World War II, and Eva, the Jewish survivor whose fate the novel has pursued with detailed urgency. Comprising the brief pendant that closes the novel, the second is the relation between Stephen, Eva's uncle who fought to establish the state of Israel as a home for Jews, and Malka, the African Jew who finds discrimination in Israel.

The main feature in all three relationships is the fecklessness of the men. Each attempts to disregard a marital past that nevertheless compromises his capacity to function in the present. When Eva, with Gerry's encouragement, follows him to London, she finds that he cannot fulfill his promise to marry her because he already has a wife. Stephen's sacrifice of his family life to dedicate himself to the military creation of Israel echoes Othello's abandonment of his first wife.

But as the theme of relationship is transferred from the Othello-Desdemona couple to the Gerry-Eva and Stephen-Malka pairs, it is also transformed. The racial other shifts from the male side in



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the case of Othello to the female side in the case of Malka. Eva serves as an intermediary instance who facilitates the shift in that the convention that treats Jewish ethnicity as racial applies to her as well as to her older sister (*"but as you get older your racial character will show,"* p. 175). Through the role of Malka as the representative of contemporary black identity, Phillips completes his four-part historical scheme of Jews and Blacks in both Renaissance and modern periods. The brief contact between Stephen and Malka is not completely renounced: it has a touching aspect. But it is unsustainable principally because of Stephen's implied racism: "But she belonged to another land. She might be happier there. Dragging these people from their primitive world into this one, and in such a fashion, was not a policy with which he had agreed. They belonged to another place" (p. 210). For all its good will, the novel cannot heal this division between Black and Jew. Othello's racial dilemma is perpetuated in the modern era in the new form of Malka's marginalization.

The overall effect of Reed's and Phillips' latest novels is to intensify critical scrutiny of the racial stance of *Othello* by positioning the play in contexts that invite us to consider it from new angles. These vantage points render Shakespearean apologias not only impossible but beside the point.

**Clark Art Institute**

## Notes

[1]Recent contributions concerning African-American cultural contexts for *Othello* include: James R. Andreas, "Othello's African American Progeny," *South Atlantic Review*, 57 (1992), 39-57; Joyce Green MacDonald, "Acting Black: *Othello*, *Othello* Burlesques, and the Performance of Blackness," *Theatre Journal*, 46 (1994), 231-49; and *Othello: New Essays by Black Writers*, ed. Mythili Kaul (Washington: Howard Univ. Press, 1997). In a black British context, see Ben Okri, "Leaping out of Shakespeare's Terror: Five Meditations on *Othello*," in *A Way of Being Free* (London: Phoenix House, 1997), 71-87.

[2]Reed's own tenure denial at Berkeley is discussed in Jon Ewing, "The Great Tenure Battle of 1977," in *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, ed. Bruce Dick and Amritjit Singh (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1995), 111-27.

[3]Reed's commitment to this level of argument is indicated by the defense of his record in his own voice earlier in the novel: "Ringleader Ishmael Reed has never called anybody a traitor to anybody's race and not only hasn't opposed black women writing about black male misogyny but published some of it" (p. 24).

[4]Full citations are: *MultiAmerica: Essays on Cultural Wars and Cultural Peace*, ed. Ishmael Reed (New York: Viking, 1997), and Ishmael Reed, "Bigger and O. J.," in *'Birth of a Nation'hood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O. J. Simpson Case'*, ed. Toni Morrison and Claudia Brodsky Lacour (New York: Pantheon, 1997), 169-95.



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[5]See also the critical discussion of Schlesinger in my essay, "Multiculturalism and the Problem of Liberalism," *Reconstruction*, 2, no. 1 (1992), 97-101.

[6]*Extravagant Strangers: A Literature of Belonging*, ed. Caryl Phillips (London: Faber and Faber, 1997). Against "the mythology of homogeneity," Phillips' Preface insists that "Britain has been forged in the crucible of fusion—of hybridity" and that "English literature has, for at least 200 years, been shaped and influenced by outsiders," the reclaimed strangers of his title (p. x).

[7]These two passages in the novel are consonant with Phillips' statement in *The European Tribe* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987): "There is no evidence of Othello having any black friends, eating any African foods, speaking any language other than theirs. He makes no reference to any family. From what we are given it is clear that he denied, or at least did not cultivate his past" (p. 51). In an interview in *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English*, ed. Frank Birbalsingh (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), Phillips describes Othello as "a man who, whether he liked to or not, continually made references to his origins through the imagery of his speeches" (p. 191). At the same time, Phillips adds the complicating note in the final paragraph of *The European Tribe* that his own origins as a Black raised virtually from birth in England are different from those of Othello: "Unlike Othello, I am culturally of the West" (p. 128).

[8]This conjunction of *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* is present in the two successive chapters, "A Black European Success" and "In the Ghetto," in *The European Tribe* (pp. 45-51 and 52-55).

[9]The current discussion is exemplified by *Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments*, ed. Paul Berman (New York: Delacorte Press, 1994), and *Struggles in the Promised Land: Toward a History of Black-Jewish Relations in the United States*, ed. Jack Salzman and Cornel West (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997). In an interview with Maya Jaggi in *Brick*, 49 (Summer 1994), 73-77, Phillips mentions that his "grandfather was a Jew" (p. 77).



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# Shakespeare's Lost Sonnets: Eleven Examples of the 154 Runic Poems Embedded in the 1609 Quarto

by Roy Neil Graves

No, it was builded far from accident. (No. 124.5)
And so my patent back again is swerving. (No. 87.8)

In an essay published in the 1995 issue of this journal, I have tried to explain the elaborate pattern of suppressed numerological design in the 1609 Quarto text of William Shakespeare's Sonnets, a pattern that gives the 154-poem cycle its overall organizational plan and skeletal architecture, heretofore lost.[1] The present essay builds on that earlier one—and on my research since 1977 into buried, gamelike compositions in early literary texts—to assert a hypothesis that can now be tested by anyone with the time and (perhaps even harder to find) the disinterested will that the project demands: Systematically embedded in Shakespeare's 1609 Quarto text of the Sonnets are 154 lost sonnet-length poems that recycle the Q lines in combinations that are absolutely regulated by parallelism and numerology; these knotty, gamelike "runes" can be read—albeit with difficulties resulting partly from their witty coterie aspects—as authorized lyrics that are coeval and symbiotically interlinked with the Sonnets themselves.

Since the poet's own undergirding scheme of numbers and parallel positioning controls the newfound combinations, Shakespeare's "Runes" are his own compositions, not mine. My role in relation to them is that of discoverer and first editor. In each case I have found my poor powers of mind and rhetoric taxed to the breaking point. I beg the reader's forbearance as I proceed here.

The term "rune" or "round"—roughly equivalent to "verse riddle"—means a "whispering," private communication, or "mystery." (In the context of studying Q, the equation Runes = Perverse "Mistress" = "Perverse Mysteries" provides one guide for understanding the term.) In Anglo-Saxon times, a "rune" was an archaic futhark character found especially in stone carvings in England and throughout Europe; by Shakespeare's day, "to rown" (variously spelled) meant "to whisper" (cf. OE *runian*, to whisper, and OE *run*, whisper, secret counsel, mystery). "Round" had various other denotations, with diverse origins (OED). The coterie sense in which I use "round" is probably not unconnected with the still-extant musical genre designating a playful polyphonic song



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with overlapping voices, group involvement, and potential "endlessness." The term "rune/round," as verb and noun, seems to occur subtextually in various ways in the Sonnets, and I believe that Shakespeare would have consciously resorted to it to describe and allude privately to the kind of writing discovered here. (Presumably the coterie would not have used the term publicly—at least not overtly, in its "private" sense—though I believe that in-group writers punned on it coyly, as in Shakespeare's line "Bare runèd quires [see Q's spelling *Bare rn'wd quiers*] where late the Sweet Bard sang" [73.4]). "Round" in Shakespeare's dialect was pronounced to sound roughly like "rune"—experts say that "gun" in his speech would have sounded like "goon"—so "rune" is the generic designation I have settled on to name lost, embedded coterie compositions in early texts; the spelling "round" might seem "more Elizabethan," but in modern usage it triggers the "wrong" pronunciation. As I have tried to show elsewhere, precedents for Shakespeare's Runes exist both in the Germanic and Romance traditions, and contemporary analogs are to be found as well.

As the Quarto lines regroup in their 154 latent combinations to form the suppressed subtexts, Shakespeare's system of floating stichic units and calculated ambiguity allows new meanings to emerge.[2] The absolute limits of the embedding scheme dictate that the Runes be *unrhymed*, except incidentally.

The newfound Runegame is one that would-be initiates into the poet's coterie (including me) can only learn to play by playing. My approach here will be to introduce eleven examples of the 154 suppressed texts in Q. Despite persistent befuddlements—my own, and probably most readers' too—these eleven paradigms show rather well the general methodology in the Q Runes. Readers who understand the substructure of Q will see that each example here comes from one of eleven structural units—with each unit intricately interwoven in warp-and-woof fashion. Thus these instances collectively illustrate persistent, recurrent patterning in the large design.

The burden of this essay dictates that readers first understand the suppressed formal features in Q that I have already tried to explicate and lack space here to reiterate in detail. Overall, the 1609 Quarto cycle is a Megasonnet construct crammed with 154 "syllabic" units, the most possible in a sonnet. Each of these "numbers" is one whole sonnet. The plan ingeniously imposes implicit organization on the apparently disheveled cycle of 154 numbers, dividing the number string rationally into eleven "sets" (the vertical columns below) comprising fourteen numbers each:



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**Fig. 1. The Numerological Scheme of Shakespeare's Megasonnet**

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| I. | II. | III. | IV. | V. | VI. | VII. | VIII. | IX. | X. | XI. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | 15 | 29 | 43 | 57 | 71 | 85 | 99 | 113 | 127 | 141 |
| 2 | 16 | 30 | 44 | 58 | 72 | 86 | 100 | 114 | 128 | 142 |
| 3 | **17** | 31 | 45 | 59 | 73 | 87 | 101 | 115 | 129 | 143 |
| 4 | 18 | 32 | 46 | 60 | 74 | 88 | 102 | 116 | 130 | 144 |
| 5 | 19 | **33** | 47 | 61 | 75 | 89 | 103 | **117** | 131 | 145 |
| 6 | 20 | 34 | 48 | 62 | 76 | 90 | **104** | 118 | 132 | 146 |
| 7 | 21 | 35 | 49 | 63 | 77 | 91 | 105 | 119 | 133 | 147 |
| 8 | 22 | 36 | 50 | 64 | 78 | **92** | 106 | 120 | 134 | 148 |
| 9 | 23 | 37 | 51 | **65** | 79 | 93 | 107 | 121 | 135 | 149 |
| 10 | 24 | 38 | 52 | 66 | 80 | 94 | 108 | 122 | **136** | 150 |
| 11 | 25 | 39 | 53 | 67 | 81 | 95 | 109 | 123 | 137 | 151 |
| 12 | 26 | 40 | **54** | 68 | **82** | 96 | 110 | 124 | 138 | 152 |
| 13 | 27 | 41 | 55 | 69 | 83 | 97 | 111 | 125 | 139 | **153** |
| 14 | 28 | 42 | 56 | 70 | 84 | 98 | 112 | 126 | 140 | 154 |

"Set I," then, comprises Nos. 1-14; "Set II," Nos. 15-28; "Set III," Nos. 29-42; and so on through "Set XI," Nos. 141-154. (The 154 "numbers" might stand for either Sonnets or Runes, which are concurrent; the boldfaced numbers are those of the runic examples discussed herein.)

As elsewhere explained, the poet's holograph text, the one that by some means became the basis for the Q printing of 1609, must have been a folio-sized booklet comprising *eleven* double-page spreads, scripted in a rather small hand the size of "Hand D" in the *Sir Thomas More* holograph. The arrangement below shows how each of the poet's scripted spreads—when viewed by coterie readers—would have generated visual puns on the sonnet form itself, with its three quatrains and terminal couplet:

**Fig. 2. Set I as a Paradigm of the Page Arrangement of Each of the Eleven Sets**

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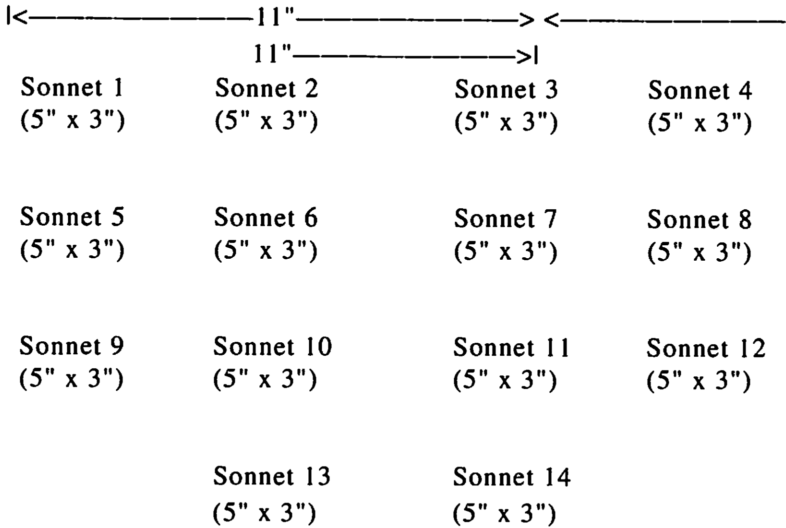


All in all, as I have already argued, the concept of a buried numerological underpinning in Q is credible, not unlikely, because "numbers" meant metrics to the poet; because each sonnet is indeed an untitled "number"; because the sonnet form itself is a rigidly prescriptive numerological framework; because Renaissance artists valued sprezzatura or "suppressed design" as a means of making the hard task look easy, even tossed off and careless; and because, as recently as 1960, the scholar A. Kent Hieatt discovered another complex pattern of numbers, one long hidden in Edmund Spenser's *Epithalamion*, a work roughly contemporary with the Sonnets.[3]

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To see the *prescriptive* nature of what is happening from this point on, one must understand that the runic regroupings within each spread or set depend on the pattern of parallelism that links first lines of sonnets with first lines, second lines with second, third with third, and so on through fourteen. Thus—to use Set I as an example—Rune 1 comprises in sequence the *first* lines of all the fourteen sonnets in the set; Rune 2 comprises, serially, the *second* lines; and so on, thus generating fourteen runic texts, Runes 1-14, from exactly the same stichic matter that occurs overtly in Sonnets 1-14. The other ten sets work exactly the same way, each generating fourteen suppressed subtexts from the stichic matter of the



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fourteen overt sonnets. The synoptic plan of the Folio that I have deduced would have allowed the poet, as he added each new line, to evaluate its function visually both in the *vertical* string (the sonnet) and the *horizontal* string (the rune) where it was intended to function concurrently (and disparately).

My present burden is to show that the newfound strings encode authorized meaning and wit—that the Runes have objective identities, separately and collectively, and are intentionally, consciously crafted. After persistent badgering from artifactual examples, a reader's common sense must eventually acknowledge that happenstance alone cannot explain the profusion of artfulness and meaning that emerges from the eleven sample subtexts. My approach will be to offer an edited text of each rune, along with a paraphrase and brief comment that together might clarify meaning, provoke thought, and illustrate overall methods and patterns. Because the newfound texts are typically hard, as teasing riddles should be, I offer the paraphrases to show, at least, that the lines *can* be construed as meaningful. In the glosses and comments I do not censor out "farfetched" speculations and guesses. (The term is meaningless here anyway.) The runic subtexts characteristically conjure up many alluring side-track options as a reader/player proceeds.

Anyone who compares my reader-friendly editions of the linestrings with Q's originals (e.g., in Booth) will see that—except for the fact that I ignore Q's punctuation, which is unreliably functional in the overt strings but could not possibly have been contrived to work concurrently in the Runes—I am on the whole editorially faithful, no more licentious than editors of the Sonnets typically are. Especially in the Runes, the poet's invasive playfulness and his love of puns not only serve to entertain distractingly—as calculated double entendres do—but also frequently help to advance the witty meaning in a given text.

Except for the fact that I treat one subtext from each of the poet's eleven architectural units or "sets," I have selected the runes below almost at random. Their mates, the other 143 runic regroupings, make sense and offer gameplaying wit in the same general manner as these.

Because the Megasonnet scheme (see above) not only depicts the arrangement of the Sonnets but also works equally well to diagram the overall organization and progression of the Runes, I have heightened in boldface the eleven numbers in the Megasonnet that I introduce and discuss hereafter in this study: Runes 1, 17, 33, 54, 65, 82, 92, 104A,[4] 117, 136, and 153.



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Rune 1 (First lines, Set I, Sonnets 1-14)

From fairest creatures we desire increase°.
When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,
Look in thy glass°, and tell the face thou viewest,
4 "Unthrifty loveliness, why dost thou spend°
Those hours° that with gentle work did frame°?"
Then let not winter's ragged hand deface.
Lo, in the orient°, when the gracious light°
8 Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?
Is it for fear? To wet a widow's eye°?
For shame deny that thou bear'st love to any°!
As fast as° thou shalt wane, so fast° thou grow'st
12 When I do count the clock that tells the time.
O, that you were yourself! But love you are.
Not° from the stars do I my judgment pluck.

[1]*improvement, progeny*
[3]*mirror, drinking glass*
[4]*pass idly*
[5]Q howers; frame: *pass constructively (ME)*
[7]*dayspring (1582)—"when the gray shows light";*
*i.e., when gentlefolk alight (from bed)*
[9]*... for fear to wet a "widow's eye"? (a pundendal pun)*
[10]*pun:... to Annie!*
[11]*puns: A sophist ass ..., etc.*
[14]*pun: Knot (puzzle)*

1. [Knot from the Stars]

Even from the fairest creations we expect better things—
and hope for their progeny.
When the ravages of forty years attack your face and
mind,
look in your mirror (or maybe the bottom of your glass)
and say to yourself,
4 "Wasteful loveliness, why do you idle away
the life you once spent, graciously, in constructive
service?"
Then don't let winter's ragged claw deface you.
Look, when those who have good attitudes toward
life arise at daybreak
8 ready to listen to the music, why do you mope,
downcast and distracted?
Are you afraid? Hopeful of making some widow weep?
Afraid of doing so? Fearful of lovemaking?
Shame on you for denying that you love anyone at all!
(How dare you say you don't love Annie!)
However quickly you may waste away, you grow at



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just that rate
12 at any given point in time—when I'm the one who
measures things.
O, I wish you were more yourself. But really you're
unchanged. You still embody love,
and are beloved.
I don't divine my findings from the stars.

This opening runic text in the Sonnets/Runes cycle echoes in many ways the familiar "situation" of the Sonnets and offers many of the familiar, much-debated ambiguities: The poet addresses an unnamed friend, implies their intimacy, and seems to encourage the auditor to stop moping, curb misanthropy, make love, and reproduce his (or her) beautiful self. The poem both flatters and chides. The nature of the poet's address in this text is so ambiguous that we may even imagine him addressing his own work, or himself. The rune's large opening generality allows many readings—including the idea that the poet's own poems, his "fairest creatures," should "multiply"—as indeed we belatedly witness them doing here!

The pun "For shame deny that thou bear'st love to Annie!" is typical of much unexplored, family-focused humor latent in the Q lines and punctuating the runic texts. The initial-letter acrostic epithet . . . AVON (lines 11-14, using the divided "VV" in Q) suggests complex acrostic wit of a sort that is, I know, rampant in the text of Rune 1 but beyond the scope of this essay. The pun "Knot [Puzzle, Riddle] from the Stars" seems similarly calculated as wit, giving the subtext a suitable rubric. The pudendal pun in "widow's eye" is appropriate to the *carpe diem* theme. Insistent image clusters include those about counting (*increase, forty, unthrifty, spend, wane, grow'st, count*); about clocks (*tell the face, hours, hand, deface, count the clock that tells the time,* and the image of dawn); about military operations (*besiege, ragged hand deface, fear, wane,* and the image of a weeping woman); and about visages (*fairest creatures, brow, look in thy glass, face thou viewest, loveliness, deface,* and *eye*).

Much in the text is ambiguous, but—except for lines 7-8—the rune presents few syntactic or lexical challenges. Line 9 allows the more obvious reading "Is it for fear to wet a widow's eye?" And several "squinting" lines might be read and pointed in ways other that those I select.

My own conjecture—which readers are free to reject without throwing away anything else here—is that the poet may have in mind as auditors, and overall as the "master/mistress of my passions," his daughter Susanna and son-in-law (to be?) John



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Hall; that Hall (and maybe the bright daughter too) were in-groupers in the poet's coterie game; and that the entire Sonnets/Runes cycle may be on some level, at least, an epithalamion group completed during the 1606-09 time frame of the Halls' courtship, marriage, and early life together. In this context the latent pun "O that you were yourself, but lawyer [lower, lover]" (13)—visually insistent in Q's spelling *loue you are* —adds richness to the texture, since Hall was a physician. And the linepun "A sophist ass thou. S. Hall t' win, sophist thou grow'st!" (11, with many variants) makes some sense if addressed to John. But, finally, the biographical situation implicit here remains typically veiled, as if the poet were trying to satisfy several constituencies of readers all at once—perhaps including his old friend and patron Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton, plausibly "Southy," a name easily encoded in Q as "So thy . . ." and in other variants.

Rune 17 (Third lines, Set II, Sonnets 15-28)

That this huge stage° presenteth, nought but shows
And° *Fortify Yourself in Your Decay,*
Though yet—heav'n knows°—it is but as a tomb:
4 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,°
Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,
A woman's gentle heart but not acquainted°
Who heav'n itself for ornament° doth use;
8 But when in thee time's furrows I behold,
Or some fierce thing° replete with too much rage,
My body is the frame wherein 'tis held,
Whilst I°—whom fortune of such triumph bars—
12 To thee° I send this written ambassage.
But then begins a journey in my head
When day's oppression is not eased by night.

[1]*the world, suggesting The Globe*
[2]*pun:* Q ʃhowes/And f ... *(1-2) ="Susan S." (cf. 6)*
[3]*suggesting The Heavens over the stage*
[4]*pun: Rounds/Runes do "Shake." thee, darling butts [targest of humor?] of me*
[6]*a pundendal pun: not "a-queynted"*
[7]*a phallic pun: Waving itself, fore-ornament...*
[9]*a phallic pun*
[11]*pun?: Will Shakespeare [ʃt = name cipher?], I*
[12]*pun: Toothy (cf. 5)*

17. [This Written Ambassage]

That's all this huge stage presents, nothing but froth
or some tedious morality (that maybe your pious mother
would like) about preparing for death,



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though as yet—as the heavens can see—this
  house is empty, this Globe is like a tomb.
4 The same rough winds (or runic texts) that "shake
  May's pretty blossoms"
leave the fierce tiger toothless—
facts of life confronted by everybody except some gentle-
  hearted woman
saintly and innocent enough to ornament the heavens.
8 But when I see time plough even you like a field
or envision some fierce creature full of rage
  ravishing you,
my own body becomes its cage
while I, barred by circumstances from any such
  heroism—I
12 send off this diplomatic letter to you, a carefully
  worded message.
The trouble is that at that point a journey begins
  in my head
as night does not ease the day's oppression, and
  death does not release me

Despite typically undercutting playfulness, this bleak poem comments powerfully on life, mutability, and the poet's isolated struggle. His "huge stage" is The Globe, the world, a progress or stage in life, and (ironically) this little poem—one "stage" of the "journey in my head" (13) that we see unfolding. The absent audience in a house "silent as a tomb" (3) reminds us that no playbill has ever been posted for this "cancelled" performance, the private show we now witness. On one level the "huge stage" also represents the large-scale writing project itself, held within the "frame" of the poet's "body/bawdy" (10). In addition to various images of decay and theatrical activity, gloomy diction about imprisonment dots the poem: *fortify yourself, tomb,* the pun "I be 'holed'," *frame wherein . . . held, bars,* and *oppression . . . not eased.* The references to "heaven" (3, 7) as a place of ethereal escape set up a polar opposite to earthly imprisonment, and the phrase "journey in my head" (13) seems to allude quietly to that idealized alternative. Most literally, the poem invites us to imagine a closeted, dejected writer working late at night, addressing someone remote.

Linked clusters of tropes bring to mind theatrical activity and writing, the poet's main preoccupations in real life—justifying, somewhat, our personal readings of the lines. The initial spill-over eyepun on "Susanne S." (Q *ſhowes/And ſ . . .* [1-2]) leads us to hear the whole poem, on one level, as an apostrophe to the poet's daughter, whose own mother was perhaps pious, who will herself be ravaged by life and time; the absent father thinks of her, wishes



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to protect her, and feels himself estranged, helpless, and frustrated in this and all his work as writer. Meanwhile, the pun "Anne, fortify yourself in your decay/ed hut . . ." (2-3) overlays the text with a misogynistic joke tinged with the poet's sense of his own absence from Stratford. Such family references remain both insistent and elusive throughout Q.

The pun on "Rounds/Runes" (Q *Rough windes*) combines here with a suggestive play on "Shake. theatre" (Q *ſhake the dar. . .*) to exemplify the kind of recurring pun that has led me to assume that the poet used the generic term "round/rune" himself: "Runes do shake thee. . ." In a poem about tigers and the furrowed lines that time scratches on a face, the left-hand acrostic offers us a PAW, following a TATR (cf. "tatter"). The play "Toothy, I send this written ambassage" amplifies the same joke that speaks of "plucking the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws." One suggestion is that the poet's body encases a raging tiger (lines 9-10) who is rendered "speechless" (or toothless), as in these unheard subtexts, but can still write.

Q's form *ſuch* for "such" (e.g., 11) recurs in the poet's typeset lines as a vulgar eye pun.

Rune 33 (Fifth lines, Set III, Sonnets 29-42)

Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow
How many a holy and obsequious tear.
4 Compare them° with the bettering of the time;
Anon, permit the basest clouds° to ride.
'Tis not enough that through the cloud thou break;
All men make faults°, and even I in this°.
8 In our two loves there is but one respect.
For whether beauty, birth, or wealth, or wit,
O, give thyself the thanks if aught in me°.
Even for this°, let us divided live.
12 Then if, for my love, thou my love receivest,
Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won°.
Loving offenders, thus I will° excuse ye.

[4]*my tears ("many" is the antecedent)*
[5]clouds *may be the subject of* permit *with "A nun..." a bawdy pun*
[7]*pun: create fissures, divisions;* this = *my bifurcated project*
[10]*pun: I [Eye] fought enemy (cf.* won *[13])*
[11]*pun: Even [Not odd] 40 is... (l. 12 is from Sonnet 40).*
[13]*pun: ... to be "one"*
[14]*a namepun: I, Will*



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33. [Let Us Divided Live]

Wishing that I were more blessed with hope,
I allow myself to weep freely, though
usually I don't gush
so many reverential tears as are now flowing.
4 See them as indications of better times;
for soon the darkest clouds allow escape. We must take
time to let such clouds pass.
It's not enough for me that you sunder
the heavens, sunlike.
Everybody is similarly divisive—even I, in
this writing project: All of us are "faulty."
8 Our divided affections are still an entity,
singular in aspect,
since any handsomeness, breeding, wealth,
or cleverness
seen in me, I insist, should be credited to you.
Even granting all this, or because of all this, let us
live separately—and let my double-writing
project thrive;
12 thus if you take my love for what it is and also
let me give you something,
you prove yourself gentle and therefore still
susceptible to (and worthy of) wooing and
"oneness."
I love "faulty" people, and so I, Will, will forgive
you and let you go your own way too.

Like many of its fellows, this rune depends for coherence upon strained wordplay—e.g., the pun "won/one" and *faulty* as "sinful" and "fissured." A playfully overworked linkage exists among the words *one* (1), *many* (3), *enough* (6), *All, even* (7), *two, one* (8), *aught* (10), *divided* (11), and *won* (13). The much-used paradox "two can be one" gains interest here because the whole poem alludes coyly to the concurrent linkage and "faulty division" between Sonnets and Runes—which the poet refers to, in one sense at least, as "our two loves" (8). The poem begins as a "hopeless," self-pitying lament but soon lifts its clouds to allow forgiveness, love, and hopefulness to shine forth. A part of the wit in line 7 (the "turning line" in a fourteen-line text) is that the poet has "made a fault" by bifurcating his own attitude—first weepy, then brighter.

As usual, the irreducible question of the poet's auditor is primary here. A reader is hard pressed to tell if the "thou" (6ff.) of the poem is someone else, the poet himself, a general "you," any



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reader, or perhaps the poet's own writing project—objectified as "faulty" because it operates in a bifurcated mode and, of necessity, exhibits a highly flawed countenance. (The apparent "errors" of Q are the end results of the poet's mode.) The image of sunshine breaking through the clouds, of course, is an analog for what we witness here as the "beauty, birth, wealth, and wit" of the poet's previously obscured verses finally shine through. Thus, indeed, do the Sonnets and Runes "divided *live*" (11), demonstrating their capacity to survive. One begins to see how *the act of what the writer is doing* becomes itself a main subject in the Runes—and in the Sonnets as well.

The poem consciously cultivates imagery about enmity and war in *ride, break* [through a *fault*], *divided, won, offenders,* the pun "I fought enemy" (10), and the acrostic FOE (9-11) and FOET (cf. "fought"). Its tone of forgiveness and reconciliation is perhaps connected with the "mystical" number 33, so that Jesus—breaking through the clouding, "gentle," "loving offenders," and responsible for all good in man—may indeed be one primary auditor. The impious idea that the poet "excuses" Christ (who was crucified as an "offender") lurks in line 14, reminding us that one likely purpose which coterie writing served was to allow writers to mutter not just bawdry but various other kinds of indecorous wit—including sacrilege, scatology, and immodest or politically incorrect views. The "fliting" tone of verbal challenge is common in the runic subtexts.

Rune 54 (Twelfth lines, Set IV, Sonnets 43-56)

Through, heavy sleep° on sightless eyes doth stay.
I must attend times' leisure° with my moan
Of their° fair health, recounting it to me°,
4 The clear eyes' moiety, and the dear hearts' part;
And I am still with them, and they with thee,
From whence at pleasure thou° mayst come and part
To guard the lawful reasons on thy part°,
8 More sharp to me than spurring. To his side,
But love, for love, thus shall excuse my jade°
By new unfolding his° imprison'd pride,
And you in° every blessèd shape° we know.
12 Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odors made
That wear this world out to the ending doom,
Return of love, more blest may be the view°.

[1] *i.e., Life over, death...*
[2] *the leisure of present and future ages*
[3] *future ages' (cf.* times *[2]); myself*



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*[6]you, my friend, or you, the reader*
*[7]note exact rhyme 4, 6-7*
*[9]poor horse, fatigue, ?joke (v.* to be-fool *1679)*
*[10]phallic pun: unfold inches...*
*[11]puns: Undoing; ship (cf.* BAOT *[acrostic 10-13])*
*[14]pun: thief, you (cf. Christ's Crucifixion)*

54. [Excuse My Jade]

Life over, death keeps sightless eyes closed.
(I'm awake, but I still seem to see nothing.)
I must keep working to entertain the ages with groanings
about their thriving condition, enumerating them here
to myself in these "numbers,"
4 something for eyes, something for hearts.
Thus I am still with my readers of all times, and
they with me,
in a company that you, my friend, can join or
leave at will
to attend to valid concerns of your own,
8 matters that hurt me to think about more than spurs in
the side. Having declared myself his ally,
only love, then, for love's sake, will justify my weary
pace and side excursions
by newly revealed hidden splendor in this lovingly
pursued work
as well as new revelations of you, my friend—in every
blessed shape known to man.
12 The sweetest lingering essence comes from the fine
deaths of those
who exhaust every possibility in the world until the
very end,
when Love returns, toward the end of making the scene
a happier one.

Though no paraphrase catches all the poem's concurrent possibilities for humor and serious statement, the text seems to cultivate a suppressed conceit, the analogy between the "second comings" of physical love and of Christ—with phallic bawdry prominent, suggested in "new unfolding" (10).

The ambiguous term "jade" (meaning "nag," "fatigue," probably "joke," and—in context—"phallus") seems to set up an implicit, funny contrast between the "mounted" poet and Christ entering Jerusalem on an ass. Particularly, "spurring to his side" (8) and figures of fresh bursts of energy (10, 13) elaborate the "donkey" conceit, while hinting at Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection. Lurking deeply here is the image of a well-endowed donkey "unfolding" itself.

The notion of this or any other "unfolding" or Revelation



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suggests the emergence of what is hidden here from view—the runic text. Indeed, this rune like many others is much about the laborious work that preoccupies the poet. One theme seems to be that he will keep on with his tiresome work because of a sense of affectionate obligation to the future "times" (with a pun on "tie-ms." or "linked writing") or readerships to which he feels connected. Like many other sonnets and runes in Q, this one stresses the poet's preoccupation with immortality through his verses—his determination to "wear this world out to the ending doom" (13), and his approval of the work ethic required to insure eventual fame. Taken "straight," in fact, the rune is remarkable for involving us as modern readers in an action the poet anticipates, since we ourselves are included in the future "times" that have "leisure" (2), need reassurance (3), and seek something in verse for both eye and heart (4). Even if we are not the primary readers addressed as "thou" or "you," when the poet talks of freedom to "come and go" so as to take care of our daily obligations (6) and then speaks of our "contortions" (11), he certainly seems to address us, now that his lost poem has us as his readership. When the poet speaks of "wearing this world out" (13), he means not only exhausting himself but us too, as with great difficulty we "newly unfold" the efforts that he himself put aside four centuries ago. The phrase "recounting it to me" (3) is poignant for showing a lonely poet with nobody to talk to, and the "numbers" metaphor in "recounting" seems calculated.

Sexual and especially phallic bawdry—which reaches a climax at the phrase "new unfolding"—begins to insist on itself with *sightless eyes* (1, suggesting testicles) and persists in the innuendoes latent in *moan, re-counting, part* (thrice, with the pun "hardest part" [4]), *come, new unfolding his imprison'd pride, blessèd shape, know, deaths, odors,* and all the references to "love" and to interesting new "views." My guess, further, is that the letter "I" functioned as needed in Q to suggest a pictographic phallus and that the suggestive *eye/I* interchange was also meant to confound, as it surely does. Similarly, the phonic connections among *heart/hard/art* allow innuendo-laden puns to emerge. Homophile insinuations in the poem lead us to entertain the pun "I must attend time's leisure with my man," where the initial "I" may be a phallicism.

The poem manages the rhymes *me/thee, part/part/part, side/pride,* and *jade/made,* and it has other end words related by assonance. The "shape/ship" pun (11) finds company in the acrostic codeline, where a "Tide aft . . . " (code TIOT AFT. . .) comes not "aft" but "frontally," followed closely by a BAOT. The ironic, deeply buried pun "to the ending doom, / return of flow, you



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moor. . ."(13-14) partakes of this soggy cluster of suppressed wit, hinting at another Flood.

Rune 65 (Ninth lines, Set V, Sonnets 57-70)

Nor dare° I question° with my jealous thought:<br>
Be where° you list°, your charter is° so strong<br>
That I might see° what the old world° could say.<br>
4 Time doth transfix° the flourish° set on youth.<br>
O, know° thy love, though much, is not so great<br>
But when my glass shows me myself° indeed.<br>
For such a time do I now fortify<br>
8 When I have seen such interchange of state.<br>
O, fearful meditation! Where a lack°<br>
And art made tongue tied by authority°,<br>
Why should he° live? Now nature bankrupt° is,<br>
12 In him° those holy antique hours are seen.<br>
They° look into the beauty of thy mind°;<br>
Thou° hast passed by the ambush of young days.

[1]*puns: In order; cf.* say *(3),* tongue *(10),* chatter *(2)*<br>
[2]*pun: Beware;* list = *wish; our pact is*<br>
[3]*confront and accept; suggesting The Globe*<br>
[4]*cut through; rhet. or pen embellishment*<br>
[5]Q no<br>
[6]*note* see *and* old *(3)*<br>
[9]Qalack<br>
[10]*i.e., have made a tongue mute (as in the Runes)*<br>
[11]*that tongue (the writer); stript bare*<br>
[12]*that tongue (pun: hymn);* Q him t *suggests Hamnet*<br>
[13]*pun Th'eye. The line recalls 6.*<br>
[14]*Perhaps the poet, addressing his own image*

65. [Such Interchange of State]

I should never be jealous nor insecure:<br>
Wherever you choose to be, our bond is so strong<br>
that I could stand to hear anything this old world<br>
might say.<br>
4 Time (and my meter) cuts through the undue<br>
emphasis placed on youth.<br>
Oh, be assured that our love, though strong, is strongest<br>
when I face my aging self squarely in the mirror.<br>
Right now I fortify myself against such a time<br>
8 when I witness the reversed condition that<br>
time brings with age (and also when I contemplate the<br>
perversely interlocked condition of these texts).<br>
Oh, what a terrible thought! Where loss<br>
and cosmetics (or artful shrewdness, in the<br>
case of these texts) combine to authorize speechless-



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ness,
why should one's voice go on? Now that nature lacks
resources, is stript bare,
12 one sees in that voice times like those of old—an
age worth revering.
Such times look into the beauty of your mind;
then you, poet or listener, have evaded the ambush of
youth.

Irreducible ambiguities in point of view and statement do not keep this rune from being heard as a moving lyric about aging. The vague opening, perhaps, implies rumination about an absent, younger friend—the dead son Hamnet?—that triggers a consideration of the pros and cons of aging. Loosely related conceits deal with documents, business, diplomatic intercourse, and military or sea skirmishes. Youth and age give the poem its thematic foils.

I do not claim to sort out easily the various "shifting person" possibilities here—a typical feature of sonnets and runes alike. At first the poet seems to be the "I" (1) who addresses some "friend" as "you" (2). The change to "he" (11) creates calculated vagueness, for "he" may mean nature, man, "tongue," or aging poet. "Thou" (13-14) seems, again, to be the unnamed auditor but might also be self-addressed, especially because the poet talks of looking into a mirror (6), thus creating a third-person reflection. Phrases like "*your* charter" (2) and "*thy* love" (5)—which seem to mean "our pact" (or "your claim on me") and "my love for you"—exist in the context of the recurring paradox that love unites the speaker and listener.

One quite personal possibility, suggested by the gapped letterstring *him t* (12), is that the poet addresses his son Hamnet in an attempt to contemplate and rationalize the boy's early death—and perhaps to contrast that with the on-going life of someone, including any current reader, who has "passed by the ambush of young days" (14). The poem, heard this way, is moving. Line 12 encodes the puns ". . . Hamnet, whose wholly antic hours are seen" and "In Hamlet-hose holey, antic hours, our scene [. . . whores are seen]"—with Q's "missing 'n' or 'l'" contrived to admit dual readings, the first of which adumbrates a little boy's short, carefree life.

The comment "art made tongue [to be] tied by authority" (10) summarily describes the mute, authorized Runes. And the potential pun "Time doth transfix [cut through] the flourish set on y'oath" (4) may mean, "Eventually the seal will be cut through, and secrecy will stop thriving."

Like many of the runes, this text maintains a sense of qua-



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trains, octave, sestet, and couplet close—with the parallel "Oh. . ." lines (5 and 9) working strategically. The last two lines both start with "Th. . ." and are both syntactically independent, slowing down the close.

Covert terms such as "The Flourish [Flowery Sh(akespeare?), 'Flower-ish,' etc.] Set on Youth" (4) may be jokingly "authorized" set titles. Several such puns occur teasingly in Q.

Rune 82 (Twelfth lines, Set VI, Sonnets 71-84)

But let your love ev'n with my life decay
And live no more to shame nor me nor° you,
Consumed with that which° it was nourished by,
4 Too base of thee to be rememberèd°.
Save what is had, or must° from you be took,
Spending again what is° already spent
To take a new acquaintance of thy mind,
8 And arts with° thy sweet graces gracèd be—
No praise to thee, but what in thee doth live,
He° of tall building and of goodly pride
When all the breathers of this world are dead;
12 In true plain words, by thy true telling, friend—
When others would give life and bring a tomb°—
Making his style admirèd everywhere.

[2]Q... hame nor: *eyepun "S., Hamnet, minor" [r = t]*
[3]Q hat whi *(cf. Hathaway); pun: which/witch*
[4]*pun: reconstituted part-by-part, like this text*
[5]*i.e., or it must...*
[6]*pun: Anne What-is;* what is... spent *suggests "reusing" the lines, as here*
[8]*(or,* ...mind / And arts. With...*)*
[10]*i.e., the poet*
[13]*pun: tome (big book)*

82. [He of Tall Building]

When I die—and even now as I move toward death—
just let your love for me die
so that it no longer lives to shame either of us,
consumed with the physical life that once nourished it,
4 a thing too worthless for you to think about further.
Hold onto what you have, or you will lose it,
and reinvest what you once spent on our love
in an effort to renew an acquaintance with your intellect
(or to find another intellectual friend),
8 and let the arts be enriched with your
most pleasant attributes,
no thanks to you, but to what lives on in you,
an ambitious architect, a man of strong pride
who will outlast all others who breathe—



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12 thus, my friend, by recounting things
accurately in plain talk
when others aiming at immortalizing him
might actually insure his absolute demise,
making his style universally admired.

In Rune 82 the speaker-poet, "he of tall building and of goodly pride," advises the unnamed listener-friend—perhaps any reader—to forgo "base" and "shameful" physical affection for the poet himself and focus instead on matters cerebral, aesthetic, and ideally permanent. The text may be epitomized: "Forget about me, a mortal, and focus on my eternal art." On one level, the phrase "true plain words by thy true-telling friend" refers ironically to the poet's verses, which are playfully knotty, ambiguous, and consciously deceptive. The closing suggestion that the listener should spread Shakespeare's fame ". . . by thy true telling, friend . . . ," recalls, of course, the dying Hamlet's charge to his friend Horatio: "Draw thy breath . . . / To tell my story" (*Hamlet* V. ii. 359-60). The poet seems to have in mind the question of his own fame, and whether such verses as we read here will be permanently "entombed." The pun "tome" (13) suggests slyly that discursive scholarly treatises intended to immortalize the poet may actually have the opposite result.

My own identification with the "truth-telling" friend whose job it is to make the poet's "style admired everywhere" is—for obvious reasons—almost absolute. The pun "Too base of thee to be re-membered [i.e., re-constituted]" (4) seems to allude to and disparage the "dismembered" Runes, while "Save what is had [odd. . . ; . . . what I shat . . .]" may also be a directive to the contemporary reader/player. ("Odd" means both "bizarre" and "every other one" or "not *even*.") The phrase "He of tall building, and of goodly pride" (10) triggers an automatic connection with the builders of the Tower of Babel—an appropriate conceit for the presumptuous poet whose architecture confounds speech.

The left-hand initial letter acrostic here appears to encode letterstring wit of an extended sort, providing a paradigm for exploring other such strings in the Runes—and in the Sonnets too:

BAC TS ST- AN-H WIWM
Back [Baked]! 'Tis Satany William!
Big [Bag] 'tis, St. Anne-womb.
Be Acts [the biblical book] Satan-whim.
B . . . A . . . C . . . : 'Tis St. Anne whim.

Iconographically, St. Anne was often shown teaching her daugh-



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ter Mary to read; thus the joke in the last reading seems to be that Anne reorders the ABCs to suit herself—as Shakespeare pretty much does, too, in his own lettergame. The connection between a "jumbled alphabet" and the biblical Tower of Babel is relevant and seems authorized. (When any such figurative association occurs to me, I assume that Shakespeare's hyperquick mind would have registered the idea too.)

I believe that Shakespeare routinely used the symbol "ſt" as a coterie name cipher, because the digraph showed the "S"—as it were—"holding" a dagger- or spear-shaped "t" and "shaking" it by its handle. (If so, the pun on "Saint" was surely a witty bonus.) Thus the codeline BAC TS ST ANHW I WM suggests, e.g., "[Stand] back! 'Tis Shakespeare anew, I, William!" The image of the Rune-poet brandishing his "spear" lurks in the joke.

Rune 92 (Eighth lines, Set VII, Sonnets 85-98)

In polished form of well-refinèd pen
Giving him° aid, my verse° astonished;
And so my patent back again is swerving°
4 That thou, in losing° me, shall win much glory.
I will acquaintance° strangle and look strange
To linger out a purposed overthrow°.
All these I better in one general best°;
8 Then that which on thy humor doth depend°
Is writ in° moods and frowns and wrinkles° strange—
Others°, but stewards of their excellence,
Naming thy name. Blesses° an ill report
12 To° truths translated and for° true things° deemed—
Like widowed wombs: After their lords' decease
(Or from their proud lap) pluck them where they grew°.

[2]*him: some man, my patent, "hymn"; verve* (Q verſe)
[3]*pun: Anne S., O, my patent baggage Anne S...*
[4]*eyepun (Q looſing): loving*
[5]*pun: Eye Will, a quaint Anne see....*
[6]*pun: Anne looks strange / (tee!) old, injured, a poor pussy dour there, O;*
[7]*pun: beast*
[8]*puns: Hat-whi chant, high-humor'd... [overlaid: witch]*
[9]*puns: Eye "Sue" written; S.-runes and tricks*
[10]*pun: Oathers (coterie members)*
[11]*v. intr. (its subject is* report*)*
[12]*puns: Two, four;* things*: a phallicism*
[14]*puns: W. H. [Wriothesley, Henry?] earthy grew; "Harry" th' eye grew, etc.*

92. [Wrinkles Strange]



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An experienced and subtle writer's polished structures
helping some unnamed man, my verse attracted
attention and amazed readers.
Here my unique methodology in verse completes
another cycle, and comes back into vogue
4 so that someone, even in my absence, shall gain fame.
I, Will, will not acknowledge any relationship
and will seem remote and aloof
to effect, in the long run, a planned coup.
I will even improve on what I have just outlined by a
larger and superior stratagem;
8 thus my writing, which depends on your disposition
and how you regard it,
is set down to appear as posturings, scowlings, odd
wrinkles of the brow, and strange tricks and quirks—
others, passive caretakers of the skills that my verses
show,
acknowledging you, rather than me, for what you
appear to accomplish, though with my silent backing.
There is usefulness in articulating scandal or
unpleasant fact
12 if its truth can be well applied and honestly
productive,
like widowed wombs: After their masters' deaths—
or maybe right off the top of their masters' erections—
you can show them to be fruitful.

No pointing seems to get at the most obvious sense of the "strange wrinkle" that closes off the text: Widows' wombs can be belatedly productive, even after their masters die. The problems of number and pronoun reference (especially in "their" and "them" [14]) seem irreducible, though "them" may mean "true things" (12) and thus "legitimate offspring." Whether the "proud lap" is the widow's womb or the lord's erection is a conundrum of the poet's own making, generating funny scenarios: Widows trying to revive the dead members of their "lords," cutting off or grabbing those members, indulging in self-stimulation, plucking pubic hairs, or just enjoying their newfound sexual liberation. Line 12, speaking of the "wombs" as "for true *things* deemed," puns on "made to fit rightly-plumbed [i.e., erect] phalluses." "Strange wrinkle" is a pudendal kenning.

Apt to get lost in all of this is the poet's strained moral application: Articulating something scandalously shocking—as I find myself doing here—is useful if it produces truth and reality.

My paraphrase of the text tends toward my own skewed reading of this particular riddle: The poet will use his skill to promote and silently back some unnamed man of a future time—



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say, the 1990's—who can "win much glory" (4) by bringing Shakespeare's suppressed "patent" back into vogue. That man's own "humor" (8) will be strategic in treating the poet's material. "Others" (10) will "name his name" (11) after he comes forward with "an ill report" that nonetheless aims at establishing honesty and truth (11-12). In effect, that man will be extracting new live births from a widow's womb, long after the husbandman is deceased. (Thus—as the poet surely anticipated, too—the question of "whose children these newborn offspring are" seems likely to arise.)

In any case, this poem about the poet's "patented" runic method both describes and rationalizes it. A number of his figures are about military strategy: *giving . . . aid, losing, win much glory, linger out a purposed overthrow, All these I better.* The poet's weapon is a *well-refinèd pen*—with *polished form* suggesting the glitter of warlike metal. The more interesting conceit, the productive widow's womb, actually finds its own generation in *well-refinèd pen* (1), where "pen" is suggestively phallic and "well," pudendal. Exercises in "polishing" the pen, the poet hints, have helped him astound readers. Puns such as "awl," "general beast" (7), "things" (12) and "proud lap" (14) add to the sexual wit here.

Because the initial-letter acrostic IGATITATION T LO suggests "agitation. . . ," the string encodes "Agitation t[oo] low [to be heard]" and maybe "agitation'd loo" or "stirred-up outhouse." The poet would have thought of "agitation" as "mental tossing to and fro," "consideration" (OED 1569), or "mental scheming" (1626). A family nameplay may lurk in the lines ". . . my patent back again is swerving, / That thou, in losing [loving] me, S. Hall, win much glory." In this light, the whole poem may be read as a comment about Sue Hall's marriage, a means by which the poet might regain his "patent" through a grandson and heir, a claim on the future that he lost with Hamnet's death. In this sense the "widow's womb" that has produced him no living son might eventually, and at second hand, be again productive.

The eyepun "verſe/verve" may operate (OED 1697, origin obsc., "special bent, vein, or talent in writing"), and this conventional coterie play might help to explain the origin of the term.

Rune 104A (Sixth lines, Set VIII, Sonnets 99-112)

The lily I condemnèd for thy hand—
In gentle numbers time so idly spent!
Truth needs no color° with his color fixed,
4 When I was wont to greet° it with my lace°.
Look in your glass, and there appears a face°



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In process° of the seasons have I seen,
Still constant in a wondrous excellence
8 Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow—
And the sad augurs° mock their own presage°.
I must each day say o'er the very same°.
Like him that travels, I return again,
12 Askance° and strangely, but by all above°;
And, almost thence, my nature is subdued°
To know my shames and praises° from your tongue.

[3]*puns: choler, collar (cf.* face *[5], the details of 8)*
[4]greet*: (ME) assail;* Q laies, *lays (songs)*
[5]*countenance (cf. 8)*
[6]*pun: in th' [?p=th] row see asses ["s's" — the line has 6]*
[9]*predictions; prediction*
[10]*cf. the tautology in 9*
[12]*Obliquely; i.e., transcendent, guided by heaven*
[13]*pun: ...most thin, see miniatures sub-divided*
[14]*an example of "sub-division"*

104A. [A Wondrous Excellence]

I "executed" a lily to put in your hand—
spending time so idly in overly affected prosody!
Truth needs no added decoration,
4 while I customarily assailed it with lyrics in a decorated style.
Look in your mirror, whatever the season, and there a countenance appears
that I have watched through the passing of the years,
always constant for its amazing excellence
8 of limb, feature, and mind,
so that pessimistic predictions about you prove themselves false.
Every day I have to say the same thing over and over.
Like a traveler, I come back to where I began,
12 indirectly and mysteriously, but transcendent, guided by your perfection—or by heaven—
and, almost there, I am humbled and quiet
hearing you say what you find bad and good in me.

A complex problem in Set VIII needs to be explained here economically (and thus, I fear, without fully adequate elaboration): Because Sonnet 99 has an aberrational, fifteenth line, the poet's careful numbers scheme may seem at first, when a reader/player discovers the excrescence, to be irreparably flawed. The truth, I believe, is that the "extra" line is itself an intentional blip, added as a supernumerary challenge to the player who, by this stage in the process of reassemblage and decipherment, may have



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gotten hubristically smug. The opening line in Sonnet 99 reads "The forward violet thus did I chide," and the early rhyme scheme *chide/smells/pride/dwells/died* indicates that an opening quintet has replaced the usual quatrain and also suggests—as does the line's "prefatory" content—that the *first* line, not some other, is the "extra" one in this fifteen-line text. Puns in line 1 suggest these possibilities:

> The forward violet   thus did I chide
> The "forward violate" [i.e., preface disruptive] thus did I/eye chide.
> The "forward violate" thus did eye see hide.
> The "forward violate" thus did 99 [= IC, a plausible Roman numeral] hide.
> This "*o'er*-word violate" thus did itch [the] hide [i.e., prove perplexing].

The implication here, I believe, is that the poet, rather than "accidentally" adding an aberrational line, is consciously crafting a "violate forward" or "disruptive preface" for the poem—and indeed for the whole structure of Set VIII, since No. 99 is the "forward" text in the entire group.

Clearly a gameplayer confronts a minor dilemma. In the reassembling process, should one "discard" the last line of Sonnet 99? Or should one perhaps discard the first, "prefatory" line? Those seem to be the two options, and neither is fully satisfactory. Somehow *both* lines should fit, and none be lost, if the poet's scheme is to maintain its integrity. (Complex but more tenuous puns toward the end of Sonnet 99 also seem to give clues about extraneousness.)

In short, and after comprehensive trial-and-error manipulation, my conclusion is that Set VIII involves not just a bifurcation between Sonnets and Runes, but also a secondary bifurcation by which two *variants* of each of the fourteen runes in the set can be deduced and recomposed. I call these the "A" and "B" variants and regard them both as authorized options. The "A" runes in Set VIII, exemplified by the runic regrouping 104A, disregard the *last* line in Sonnet 99 and proceed as if it did not exist; the "B" runes disregard the *first* line in Sonnet 99. For purposes of ascertaining which runic lines in Set VIII form parallel groupings, the second decision shifts the position of all the lines in No. 99 upward by one slot, generating variations on the "A" linestrings that differ in respect to one line only. Because of the precarious syntactic relationships in the runes, and because the poet's "forking paths"



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option occurs *initially* in each rune, the small difference of one line sometimes (in any given case in this fourteen-rune set) has a tendency to trigger two somewhat different verse statements.

Rune 104A, then, as shown above, comprises the sixth lines in Set VIII and uses as its first line the actual *sixth* line in Sonnet 99: "The lily I condemnèd for thy hand." Rune 104B, which regards the opening line in Sonnet 99 as the superfluous line, opens with the actual *seventh* line in Sonnet 99: "And buds of marjoram had stol'n thy hair." In combination, this alternate opening produces the following linestring (Rune 104B.1-3):

> And buds of marjoram had stol'n thy hair.
> In gentle numbers time° so idly spent! [*pun: thyme*]
> Truth needs no color with his color fixed. . . .

And so on. The openings of both variants of Rune 104 happen to have rather much the same idea: The poet broaches some prettified, hackneyed conceit to describe his auditor's beauty and then immediately chides himself (again conventionally) for wasting his iambs—because "truth needs no decoration." Neither variant (104A and 104B) seems more artful than the other.

As for Rune 104A, the text is (like many of the Sonnets) an address and tribute to the friend, written in a tone of self-effacement. The poet finds his own "decorative" technique both ineffective and unnecessary, with line 1 suggest "gilding the lily," albeit in reverse; the punning association between "lily" and John Lyly's euphuistic style, here denigrated, seems insistent. Using "foot" ("metric unit") as a connecting pun, the poet finally ties figures about writing verse to the metaphoric notion of travel: *process of the seasons, foot, travels, return, almost thence.*

In a fairly easy lyric that seems both appealing and rather conventional, perhaps the most interesting intrusion is "foot" in the list of features that might appear when the auditor "faces" his hand mirror (5)! Indeed, the intrusive "foot" that mars the friend's "face" prepares us for the rune's ultimate jokeword, *tongue* (14), a shoe part. In retrospect, the pun "my lace" (like a shoelace, 4) joins in this comic image cluster. Thus, even in the process of "saying the same thing over and over," of treading the same dull round, the poet enlivens his material, "askance and strangely," with wit. (A concurrent pun: "Ask Anne, see Anne strangely.") Among the 154 Runes, many individual texts have—like this one—a "punchline" or "key" that needs to be detected or deduced before the poem will unfold itself.

In the phrase "my nature is ſubdu'd" (Q13), the elliptical



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apostrophe encourages the reading "my nature [pun: miniature] is *subdivided*," especially suitable because the texts of Set VIII are doubly bifurcated. Sonnets and Runes, seriousness and wit—here is a mix as complex as the "shames and praises" (14) the poet anticipates from his auditor(s). The poet was smart enough to note, too, that shoes and feet are analogs for the Sonnets/Runes—"twain," progressing in a cooperative effort, each half carrying half the weight.

The rune's acrostic code TIT WLI SOAILAAT suggests "Teat [titty] Willy soiled," "Teat will I so elate," "Teat will I [i.e., I intend], so eye a lady," "Tied, Willy saw a lady [laddie]," "Tide will isolate," "Title isolate," "Title I soilèd," "Tight Will isolate," and so on. "Tight" to Shakespeare meant "water-proof," "smart," "neat," "competent," or "vigorous" (OED). "Tight" might also apply to shoes with tongues and laces, and "tied," "tight," and "soilèd"— suggested in the acrostic codeline—all fit "shoes." The codestring . . . SO AI LAA-T suggests "Sue, a lady," too, with many variants—in linkage with the codestring WL or WLI S—"Will" or "Willy S."

Rune 117 (Fifth lines, Set IX, Sonnets 113-126)

For it no form delivers to the heart°
To make of monsters and things indigest—
But reckoning° time, who's millioned accidents;
4 O no, it is an ever-fixèd mark
That I have frequent been with unknown minds.
Ev'n so, being full of your near-cloying sweetness°,
What wretched errors hath my heart° committed!
8 For if you were by my unkindness° shaken
Fore, why should others°? False, adulterate eyes
O'er at the least, so long as brain and heart°,
Our dates° are brief, and therefore we admire°.
12 No,° it° was builded° far from accident.
Have I not seen dwellers on form° and favor°
(If Nature sovereign) mysteries over-wrack°?

[1]*puns: Fart no form delivers to the art; toothy art*
[3]*Merely plodding through serially; counting*
[6]*cf.* indigest *(2)*
[7]*puns: art, Hath-my-heart, Hath-a-merd*
[8]*cf.* monsters *(2), things "of another kind"*
[9]*pun: ...shaken, / Four wise old "oathers"*
[10]*cf.* minds *(5),* heart *(1, 7)*
[11]*cf.* time *(3); marvel, astonish*
[12]*cf. 1 (it) and 4* (O no, it); *cf.* make *(2),* dwellers *(13)*
[13]form *(cf. 1): appearance; favor: recognition*



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[14]*overthrow, torture excessively, wreck (cf.* shaken *[8], contrast* builded *[12]), cf.* wreak *(give vent to)*

117. [Far from Accident]

Now, it brings nothing stable or substantial to the heart
to dwell on grotesque creations and on things
unassimilated and chaotic—
that's merely marking time, with its millions of trivial
and disorganized occurrences.
4 Quite conversely, it is as an indelible and permanent
point of reference
that I have associated with unnamed future readers and
thinkers.
Even so, my friend, being full of your nearly-cloying
sweetness,
my heart has committed frightful errors!
8 For even if you were affronted, were *shaken* by my
monstrous behavior
in times past, why should anybody else go through
that? Inaccurate and unfaithful onlookers,
finished shortly, lasting only as long as the brain and
heart,
we have only brief lives, and therefore we gaze with
wonder, and also try to astound others.
12 No, this structure was not formed accidentally. Far
from it.
Have I not envisioned readers who dwell on things
formal and attractive
(if the order of things persists as it has) overthrowing
the mysteries?

Despite syntactic ambiguities at the end, this appealing poem offers the poet's ironic aesthetic and may be a comment on his medial position between an absent friend—whom he has already "*shake*n with unkindness" (8)—and the "unknown minds" (5) or "others/oathers" (9), future reader/players who by "dwell[ing] on form and favor" (13) will "overthrow the mysteries." Dichotomizing order and disorder, head and heart, the text implies that the tortured, torturous conceits of the poet's lines are "monstrous" and "unkind"; he also seems—in this another conceit about "building"—to respond to any who ask whether the Runes are intended (12). Punningly, "sovereign mysteries" (14) suggests "Sovereign Mistress," linking the grotesque feminine persona of the Sonnets with the poet's own runic project—particularly with its *hidden* half, the runic subtexts.

The acrostic code FT BOT EWFFOONHI plays insistently on "euphonia" (OED 1591) or "euphony" (1623); one reading of many is "Fit, bawdy euphony"—that is, "a suitable licentious, pleasing



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sound"—with "fit" a pun on "stanza." ("Funny" [OED 1756] is anachronistic, but "fon [fool] I/eye" is not.) The philological sense of "euphony" (1623) emphasized "ease of pronunciation," an ironic meaning here inside the cacophonous Runes.

The initial-*word* series in this poem about "reckoning" and "million'd accidents" puns prolifically on numbers: *Four* (1, 8, 9); *Two* (2); *Zero* (4, 10, 11, as "O . . ."); *Even* (in 6 and 14 [as "If n . . ."], both "even" lines); *Naught* (12, as "No it . . ."); and *Half* (13, as "Have"). I believe that to Shakespeare "O" (and thus "naught," zero) always punned pictographically on "round"—so that his famous epithet "wooden 'O'" had the concurrent coterie senses "crazy rune" and "Globe." Typical plays can be heard in these puns: ". . . Anne therefore we admire / in 'O'. It was builded far from accident"; "'O' [i.e., Round/Rune] know, it is an [I tease Anne] ever-fixèd mark / That I halve . . ."; "Even is 'O', being full. . ."; and "O- [i.e., Round-]knot's Annie [pun: 'anti'-]verse I X'd (cf. '. . . I made into an acrostic')." The character "O" can also have routine pudendal implications in the Q texts.

A postscript to this discussion of Rune 117, which represents the runes in Set IX, is to add that the "empty couplet" of Sonnet 126, the last in that set—where two empty spaces, caught between paired parenthesis marks, occur in Q—is perfectly functional in the poet's numbers scheme. For example, in the recomposed Rune 125 the empty line serves effectively as a "space" for a witness to add a signature; and in Rune 126 the wide-spread pictographic parentheses

(                                                    )

suggest "thy cunt-roll" (Q *thy controule*, Sonnet 125.14, Rune 126.13)—playfully depicting both female corpulence and sexual receptiveness. Even in the apparent text, Sonnet 126, the two "empty" lines are fully functional, pictographically representing both the *Audite* (cf. "oddity") and the *Quietus* that the poet's sonnet lines refer to, as well as the "rendering" (drawing, bifurcation) that he mentions (see Sonnet 126.11-14). Now that we know more of Shakespeare's gamy intentions in Q, his "empty couplet" can be read as an authorized detail rather than as a desperate editorial emendation meant to even out a numerically imperfect text.

**Rune 136 (Tenth lines, Set X, Sonnets 127-140)**

Her° eyes so suited, and they mourners seem;
And situation with those, dancing chips°—
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme.
4 That music hath a far° more pleasing sound:



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A thousand groans°! But thinking on thy face,
O, let it then as well beseem° thy heart.
But then, my friend's heart, let° my poor heart bail,
8 Thou usurer that put'st forth all° to use
And° in abundance addeth to his store°,
Though in thy store's account I one must be—
Which my heart° knows. The wide world's
commonplace;
12 And wherefore say not I that I am old,
Her pretty°? Looks have been mine enemies
And, in my madness, might speak ill of thee°.

[1]*?she*= my poor heart/art *(7, cf. 11)*
[2]chips = *(v.) reduces to little pieces—i.e., obliterates*
[4]*(Q* Muſicke*) pun: That in muse I seek, Hath-afar*
[5]*pun: A thousand grow Annes (cf. "farmer" [pun 4])*
[6]*pun: beseam (cf.* suited, seem *[1])*
[7]*grant temporarily, lend*
[8]*puns: puts forth "awl," that puta's for th' "awl" to use*
[9]*puns: Anne; history, his story*
[11]*pun: art (cf. 6, 7)*
[13]*adj. (sb. 1599), ME clever, crafty*
[14]*pun: ...mine enemy [enema?] is / Anne, John, my maiden ass, my jet's peak aye lofty, etc. (with "ill" a concession to the physician auditor).*

136. [I One Must Be]

Her eyes (or printed "i's," or "Aaaay's"), being garbed
so in black, look like mourners,
and closeness to them cuts down on dancing—
immoderately affecting anyone who knows or has
known or seeks to know them, seeming remote from
any position one takes.
4 A far more musical sound comes from
a thousand groans! But, remembering your face,
Oh, let me imagine it congruent with your sentiments
toward me.
Just at that point, dear heart, post the money to bail out
my poor heart,
8 you usurer, one who lends everything
and, already rich, earns further interest—
even though I must remain only one name in your
ledger,
a fact my heart accepts. Nobody in the world is super-
human,
12 so why do I not admit the physical decline of myself,
the world's plaything? Appearances have worked
against me
and, with me reduced to madness, might



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do the same to you.

This rune that is much about "eyes" and "hearts"—one of the two sample texts explored here that "unfold" from the two Perverse Mistress/Mysteries sets in the poet's grand scheme—seems, like the fourteen sonnets that it shares lines with, to have in mind some kind of inscrutable triangle involving an unpleasant woman, the poet, and a friend whom the writer cares for but is critical of and cannot fully trust. Perhaps the mistress whom the poet playfully denigrates in Q is Anne Hathaway Shakespeare, or is a conceit for his own depressing work, identifiable with his "heart/art" (7, 11). That the poet may be joking about Anne here is suggested by the opening pun in line 2, "Anne S. I too aye shun [ . . . aye twat, I own; . . . aye taught John]. . . ," etc. (Q *And ſituation* . . . ) and also, more insistently, by the initial-letter acrostic HAHTA OBT AT WAHAW, where a pun on "Hahta . . . wahaw" is bifurcated by some kind of play on "obit" (*an obituary notice*, 1459)—perhaps "obit add" or "obit odd"—or on "obiter" (*incidentally, by the way, in passing* 1573). The textual pun "hath a farre" (4) also suggests "Hathaway," since "afar" wittily paraphrases "away." And the linepun "Anne in abundance added to his store [his story, history]" (9) is of the same order. (The pun here, like many other subtextual plays in the Runes, hints that Anne was corpulent—not an unlikelihood for a woman who once bore twins. Q's string ". . .vſe / And in aboundance. . ." suggests ". . .wife Anne, corpulent.")

Without having to resolve questions about the poet's referents, one can appreciate the poem for more overt imagery that concerns madness, money lending, writing, and printing. Diction relevant to "numbers" includes *had, having, . . . to have extreme; far more; thousand; usurer; fourth; all; abundance; addeth; store; store's account; one*; and the pun "here/hear four" (12).

It may be that Shakespeare cultivated "reverse acrostic" codes in the initial-letter strings of some or all the Q texts and subtexts. Here, for example, the *upward* letterstring AHAWTAT BOATH AH suggests "audit both aye," perhaps a directive to the reader/player to "hear and examine" both Sonnets and Runes forever. "Audit [Oddity] be oath aye" is another reading. BOATHAH puns on "body" and "bawdy," helping to generate the play "Audit bawdy," and so on. Trying to measure the limits of intentionality in these ingeniously crafted works, ordinary minds stall.

Presumably that was just the intended effect the merciless Runemaster had in mind.



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Rune 153 (Thirteenth lines, Set XI, Sonnets 141-154)

Only my plague thus far I count my gain.
If thou° dost seek to have° what thou° dost hide,
So will° I pray that thou mayst have° thy Will;
4 Yet this shall I ne'er know°, but live in doubt
I hate (from "Hathaway"°); she threw°
(So shalt° thou) feed° on death, that feeds on men.
Fore, I have sworn thee fair, and° thought thee bright.
8 O, cunning love, with tears thou keep'st me blind!
But love, hate on, for now I know thy mind.
If thy unworthiness raised love in me°,
No want of conscience hold it that I call°,
12 "For I have sworn thee fair!"° More perjured eye
But found no cure°, the bath for my help. Lies
Came there for cure, and this by that° I prove.

[2]*puns: th' "O" (round); halve (cf. count [1])*
[3]*puns: Sue, Will; Swill... [cf. "feed on" (6)]; halve*
[4]*pun: Yet is S. Hall aye near now*
[5]Q hate away; *pun: shit rue...*
[6]*pun: Sue, S. Hall...; eyepun: seed*
[7]*pun: Anne (adressing Susanna?)*
[10]*pun: love-enemy (=[cf. "feed on"(6)]; hate)*
[11]*puns: In "O," wand, cunt-science, holed, phallic "I," etc.*
[12]*pun: "Fore [Previously], I..." (cf. 7)*
[13]*cf.* plague *(1)*, sick *(pun, 2)*, blind *(8)*
[14]*cf. "Anne This-by-that," suggesting obesity that one measures like a room*

153. [Hate Away]

So far my only measurable gain here has been
  a contagious illness.
If you, my friend (and my manuscript), want what
  can't be seen,
I'll pray that you get your Will. (Maybe you
  two can divide me.)
4 Yet, on that point, I'll never know the outcome, but
  live in doubt
that I hate (named after "Hathaway"); she has provided
  fodder
for death—as you will, as men always do.
Earlier, I have sworn that you were fair, and thought
  you bright.
8 O, cunning love, you still blind me with tears!
But love, go on despising me, for now I understand your



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intentions.
If your unworthiness formerly elicited love in me,
don't see it as a lack of conscience now for me to recall,
to assert,
12 that I have affirmed your beauty. Thus my eye
swore further to lies
but found no cure, no healing balm. Falsehoods
came to my eyes to be corrected, and I prove this "will"
of mine on such grounds as those.

The puns, paradoxes, and riddles here admit one kind of rough summary: The poet has gotten only misery for his pains; the manuscript project and unresponsive auditor—and even the wife left back in Stratford—share blame for his misery. His earlier "blindness" in love is still not cured, and this his last will and testament still reflects his own tendency to confuse truth with falsehood. Imagery about illness, eating, "counting," courts, and writing ("wills" especially) adds texture to the poem. (E.g., the *sick/seek* pun reinforces the lexical series *plague, death . . . feeds on men, blind, found no cure, bath for my help,* and [again] *cure.*) The overall focus on illness and its "cure" seems likely to me to be cultivated with Dr. Hall in mind as a principal auditor. The lurking notions of conflicted feelings about "Hathaway," and likely suggestions of her corpulence, enhance the poem inconclusively: One reading of line 1 is "Only my plague thus far [th'huss sour, Q *thus farre*] I count my gay Anne," a reading reinforced by the nearly overt pun "hate away" (Q 5). (Q's *my gaine* hints at both "my gay [m'itch,] Anne" and "megrim/migraine.") The linepun "Fore, I have sworn thee fair, Anne, thought thee bright" (7) seems to be about the poet's marriage, suggesting the wife's "dullness" as one factor in the estrangement the poem contemplates. Alliterative, echoic plays inherent in "count," "cunning," and "conscience" suggest a pudendal focus that is reinforced by suggestive puns in "will," "came," "raised," "hol'd," "but," "know," and "prove" (cf. "prow," Q *proue*).

To some degree here as elsewhere the poet compensates for the rune's "missing" rhyme by craftily connecting endword sounds. Rhyme-surrogate clusters here include *bright/blind*; the couplet *blind/mind; hide/bright/blind/mind/eye/lies,* connected by assonance; the series *men/minde/me,* related by alliteration; and the pair *threw/ proue,* eye-rhymes in Q.

The *upward* initial-letter acrostic string C BF NI B OF SIYS IO may be a phallic joke, or perhaps some variant of the old saw "big as a cow" to describe a fat woman: "See beef nigh? Be of size 10." "Size" also means a glutinous wash applied to paper (OED).



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In Shakespeare's game of ciphers, letters can merge with numbers—including Roman numeral options. The runes encourage such associative speculations, ad infinitum, and in that sense seem calculated to pull a reader/player downward into a swirling infinitude of indefinite potentialities.

*****

My aim in this essay is to provide representative artifactual samples of Shakespeare's "lost Sonnets" so that readers can know of their existence and understand something about how they convey witty meaning. Since I have used my space here to that end, many of my clarifications, conclusions, and theories must seek other venues for their airing.

For the record, let me close by epitomizing several theories that have bases in my studies of the Runes but that cannot be fully argued here, given the limits of the present essay:

1) The Q texts were finished and consciously prepared for publication during the period 1606-09; Sets X and XI were composed earlier, in the 1590s, and were probably revised as a "couplet" coda for the poet's Perverse Mysteries. Q is based on an authorized ms., with jot-and-tittle reliability. In the poet's view, the tour de force Q cycle was a magnum opus, his best chance for lasting fame, prepared during the time frame when his career was closing and his plays (never a sure source of future repute) were still uncollec-ed and largely unavailable.

2) "Southy" (Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton) was one residual "friend" addressed incidentally, but not as the primary auditor, while the poet prepared the Q texts for publication. He was perhaps the intended auditor for Sets X and XI in their original forms.

3) The cycle is an epithalamion group. John and Susanna Hall are, on one level, the poet's Master / Mistress. The event of their marriage was seminal in instigating the Q project. Its cryptic dedication acknowledges not only "Mr. *IN*. [Quarto 'W.'] Hall" but also "Libby," the poet's granddaughter Elizabeth, b. 1608. Dr. John Hall ( and perhaps Susanna ) was prominent among the poet's envisioned coterie of readers, and in one sense he is the "beloved



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friend" whom the early Sonnets encourage toward marriage and procreation. Imagining John Hall—soon be the poet's daily companion and physical caretaker during the declining years—extracting witty meaning from the subtexts helped the poet focus his project, and generated much of its covert humor.

4) A concurrent personal motive in Q was to memorialize the dead son Hamnet, perhaps as a mea culpa gesture—involving a sacrifice of great personal labor. The "twin" Sonnets and Runes, and the "burial" of the latter, are analogous to Judith and Hamnet, the poet's own twins. "Restoring" the poet's "offspring" lines is a common idea unitting the notions of "re-membering" the "buried" Runes and seeing an heir emerge in Susanna's marriage, after Hamnet's death had ended the poet's male line.

5) The "Mistress / Mysteries" is mainly a conceit for the perverse cycle itself, which would have kept the poet closeted in a close love-hate relationship. The poet's "Mysteries"—whose" 'i's' are nothing like the sun" because "i's" are straight and black while the sun is round and bright (like an "O")—show a mutual interest in both the poet and his beloved friend—and with perpetuating their memories. This identification does not rule out others, but it makes them seem unlikely and unnecessary. The "mistress" of Q is partly a red-herring conceit calculated to mask any homophile odor readers might whiff.

6) The "rival poet" is Shakespeare himself—as Rune-poet. The idea is a witty conceit. This identification does not rule out others, but it makes them seem unlikely and unnecessary.

7) The mysterious "friend" is on one level the envisioned recompositor of the runes—younger than the poet because he will necessarily come from some future generation. This identification does not rule out others. In fact, Shakespeare wanted as many readers as possible to imagine themselves as the handsome and beloved friend, just as he wanted readers to speculate about the identities of the "mistress" and the "rival poet."

8) The Runes (and thus the Sonnets) routinely embed family



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niously arbitrary ground rules of the Sonnets/Runes enterprise.

An overriding general truth is that for nearly four hundred years we have read the Sonnets ingenuously.

**The University of Tennessee at Martin**

## Notes

[1] See "Suppressed Design in Shakespeare's Sonnets: Toward Envisioning the Lost 'First Folio'," *The Upstart Crow*, 15 (1995), 115-35. See also the paper with the same title read at the 88th annual meeting of the Tennessee Philological Association, Carson-Newman College, Jefferson City, TN, February 1993, and abstracted in *Tennessee Philological Bulletin*, 30 (1993), 65-66. Some information in the present essay has appeared, in various forms and stages, in these publications and in papers on runic embedding that I have read at the Mississippi Philological Association (Oxford, 1984); the Virginia Highlands Festival (Abingdon, 1984); the Tennessee Governor's School for the Humanities (Martin, 1985); the Muriel Tomlinson Memorial Phi Kappa Phi Lecture (Martin, 1991); the Conference on Christianity and Literature (Shreveport, LA, 1994); and the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (ACMRS) Conference (Tempe, 1995). In 1984, I also discussed the Shakespeare Runes on the John Gilbert Show, CKO News and Information Network (Canada). Cf. also "Shakespeare's Sonnet 126," *The Explicator* 54.4 (Summer, 1996), 203-07, and "Shakespeare's Rune 69: A First Reading of the 'Will-I-am' Subtext in the 1609 Quarto" [abstract], *Tennessee Philological Bulletin*, 34(1997), 79-81.The line arrangements of the eleven primary texts introduced and explicated in this essay are all established and copyrighted in the monograph *Shakespeare's Lost Sonnets* (Martin, TN, 1979). These primary texts and other copyrighted materials—particularly the Megasonnet scheme and sample arrangement of the sets—are reprinted herein by permission.

[2] For one discussion of the slipperiness of meaning in the overt Q texts, see Stephen Booth's *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Edited with Analytic Commentary* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1977), p. xii, where Booth says, "One great problem for both editors and readers of the sonnets is that words, lines, and clauses often give a multitude of meanings—of which none fits a single 'basic' statement to which the others can be called auxiliary." Still, as Booth goes on to note, "simple and obvious" meaning often emerges from this syntactic and lexical complexity. On average, I believe, the Sonnets are much harder than many of us remember from our usual readings of edited versions of the familiar ones. Booth averages 2-3 pages of dense line notes per text and devotes sixteen pages of notes to Sonnet 146. He says of Sonnet 24 that the text "is carefully designed to boggle its reader's mind (make his eyes glaze)." In note 78.3-4 he says that—by not pursuing or commenting on "imperfectly realized connotative networks" of suggestiveness in the overt texts—he has tried to avoid becoming "a Satan tempting his readers to ingenuity and . . . himself be[ing] charged with ingenuity." Booth calls the syntax of 84.1-4 "a stylistic palimpsest" where conflicting punctuation and parallelism generate "confusion and awkwardness" that seems "studied"; and he concludes that, because of its failure to "deliver meaning" consistently, Sonnet 112 may be "an unfinished poem or one that Shakespeare abandoned in frustration" (369). Readers who find the Runes hard, too, can find both confirmation and comfort in such



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observations. Booth's edition, which offers a handy facsimile text showing Q's lineforms, has been an invaluable help to me. On the topic of "gameplaying" details in Q lines, Booth notes that "f" and "long 's'" were visually similar and might have generated confusion (ix); his line note on Sonnet 78.3 discusses, e.g., sexual plays on "pen" in Shakespeare; and his line note to 145.13 (Rune 153.5) credits Andrew Gurr with suggesting that "hate away" puns on "Hathaway." See Gurr's "Shakespeare's First Poem: Sonnet 145," in *Essays in Criticism*, 21 (July 1971), 221-26. In the same note, Booth suggests that "And" in Sonnet 145.14 may pun on "Anne," citing Helge Kökeritz's observation in *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* (New Haven:Yale Univ. Press, 1953), p. 271, that "and" was routinely pronounced "an." If the equation "And = Anne" applies anywhere, of course, it may apply everywhere. (Sonnet 66 is, I believe, an egregious exemplar of "Anne-punning.") Similarly, any pun, once entertained in the mind as likely at a given spot in Q, gains ubiquitous, distracting potentiality in that text. That way lies the slippery slope toward the abyss of punsterism that most editors before now have decided, perhaps wisely, to skirt.

[3] See Hieatt, *Short Time's Endless Monument: The Symbolism of the Numbers in Edmund Spenser's "Epithalamion"* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960; rptd. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1972). See also my essay, expanding the hypothesis: "Two Newfound Poems by Edmund Spenser: The Buried Short-Line Runes in *Epithalamion* and *Prothalamion*," *Spenser Studies*, 7 (1987), 199-238. I am indebted to my colleague Professor Martha Battle for pointing out Hieatt's work and sensing its relevance to my own long-term project.

[4] The "extra line" in Sonnet 99 generates a bifurcation in Set VIII (and thus generates two modestly different variants of Rune 104, variants that I call 104A and 104B). Later in this essay I attempt to explain this crafty aberration.

[5] My publication *Shakespeare's Sonnets Upside Down* (Martin, TN, July 1995) establishes the 154 texts that comprise one of the potential sub-cycles of Q texts not explored in this essay; that monograph also lays the basis for the eventual exploration of the 154 Reversed Runes, another such cycle.



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# The 1997 Alabama Shakespeare Festival

**by Craig and Diana Barrow**

The 1997 Alabama Shakespeare Festival featured three plays by Shakespeare in its six play repertory season mounted on the large 750 seat Festival Stage, while Ibsen's *Ghosts*, Horton Foote's *The Traveling Lady*, and Maugham's *Lady Frederick* graced the smaller Octagon. Though all three Shakespeare productions, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Macbeth*, and *The Merchant of Venice* were quite good, the latter two plays seemed especially so. The prospect of seeing *Macbeth* worried us; not only do we remember films of the play we would sooner forget, but two of the theater performances in our memory banks that did not work were by the ASF in 1984 and 1990. In 1984 a World War I setting and a creaking metal stage apparatus were the causes of despair, while in 1990 Shakespeare's enemy casted a Lee Marvin-like Macbeth. An early ASF production of *The Merchant of Venice* in 1978 was excellent, but frequently directors avoid the play or allow the productions to be warped by political correctness. The setting in these two productions have not been updated for contemporary relevance. Instead, we saw good faith attempts to do Shakespeare well. Of course any good production of a play is going to highlight or frame the action, and ASF's *Macbeth* and *The Merchant of Venice* are no exceptions.

In his "Director's notes, Kent Thompson concieves of the play as a parable of "crime and punishment." Thompson's notion of *Macbeth* as a reinvented morality play is more puzzling. Certainly we have the witches as able substitutes for the Bad Angel of the morality play, but the Good Angel? Banquo might supply some of thes benign insights:

> The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
> Win us with honest trifles, to betray
> In deepest consequence.
>
> (I. iv. 124-26)[2]

Or later in Act II, scene i, when Macbeth promises that deferring talk of the witches "shall make honour" (II. i. 26) for Banquo, he replies,

> . . . So I lose none
> In seeking to augment it, but still keep
> My bosom franchis'd and allegiance clear,
> I shall be counseled.
>
> (II. i. 26-29)



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Of course, Macbeth, before the murders begin to pile up, has an internalized Good Angel arguing against the voice of his ambition when he meditates on killing Duncan and immediately after the deed.

Morality plays usually place more emphasis on the possibility of damnation and an afterlife than we see here, but in *Macbeth* the losses for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are in this life, as he says in Act V, scene iii.

> I have lived long enough. My way of life
> Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf;
> And that which should accompany old age,
> As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
> I must not look to have; but, in their stead,
> Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath
> Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.
> (V. iii. 22-28)

Lady Macbeth also laments the quality of this life she has lost, not the hereafter when she observes,

> Where our desire is got without content,
> 'Tis safer to be that which we destroy
> Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.
> (III. iii. 5-7)

If Kent Thompson is right that *Macbeth* is a "reinvented morality play," then it has some unusual characteristics.

But perhaps the reinvented morality play can be better understood by Thompson's sense of the history in *Macbeth*. He says in his "Director's Notes" that he thinks the "clan-based civilization of Scotland"[3] will be supplanted by English monarchy as Scottish thanes become earls in the play and the English faith, Christianity, supplants Celtic religion. In the production one sees Siward's soldiers clad in white tunics with red crosses supplanting witches unusually busy in the play. Elizabeth Novak's costume design stresses Celtic curves and ornaments that get supplanted by costumes appropriate for Christian Crusaders. Perhaps this costuming is a part of Thompson's redefined morality play.

The witches in the production are good and almost omnipresent. Sonja Lanzener, a twistedly sexy Laura McCord, and many-mustachioed Philip Pleasants do a fine job in weirdly influencing the action. In addition to their normal speaking parts in the play, all or one or two of the witches are on stage most of the time, adding their evil to whatever is occurring in the play. However, the presence of three extra witches and several lines of non-textual



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dialogue in the scene seemed inappropriate. But fortunately for the play, the weight of choice is not removed from the principal characters. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth knowingly destroy themselves.

The acting in the play, particularly for the main characters, was terrific. In our nearly forty years of seeing Shakespeare performed, this production of *Macbeth* may have been the best. Greta Lambert as Lady Macbeth is iron-willed and sexy in persuading Macbeth to murder Duncan, but tender enough in her performance to inspire awe and pity, particularly in the sleepwalking scene. Greg Thorton is gritty enough to show Macbeth's courage and sensitive enough to make clear that, as A.C. Badley wrote, evil is not congenial to his character.[4] One feels in Thornton's performance not only the horror at Macbeth's deeds, but the waste of his potential. Steven David Martin is a warm, friendly Banquo; he effectively mirrors Macbeth's bad choices by his own relatively good ones while still being weak enough to be haunted by the witches' prophecies concerning his royal descendants.

While these three actors and the witches make the play, many others also did fine work. John Woodson as Macduff unfortunately looks like a thug but showed a believable grief on hearing the news from Ross about the slaughter of his wife and children. We have seen many actors stumble in emotionally projecting Shakespeare's lines, but Woodson handled them well. Anne Newhall as Lady Macduff nicely rescued a child who dropped some of his lines while ably handling her own, and Monica Bell as Lady Macbeth's attendant showed the sympathy and criticism of Lady Macbeth necessary for her role. Drama, of course, is a team sport; everyone had a part in this victory.

Charles Caldwell's scenic design for the play was its own sculptured symbol. A portcullis at stage rear became more webbed throughout the production making the stage, whose floor seemed like metal, appear as a trap or prison for Macbeth and not simply a castle or fortress. Three trapdoors proved useful for the scenes with the witches, Banquo's ghost, and the cauldron. The usual psychology of color appeared in the costumes, as Lady Macbeth is dressed in bright red, then white and maroon, then purple, and in her last scene, a white nightgown; Macbeth usually wore brown or tan when not in chain mail. Like the white hats on the good guys in old cowboy movies, the red-crossed white garments of Siward's forces are a visual shock at play's end. While spectacle sometimes distracted in the production, the witches were sometimes too pervasive, and the fight scenes seemed slow and unconvincing, the ASF 1997 *Macbeth* was the company's best effort with this play.



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As good as the production of *Macbeth* was, we believe that the production of *The Merchant of Venice* was even better. The Venetian and Belmont sets were the first clues that Kent Thompson, the director, Susan Willis, the assistant director, and Charles Caldwell, the scenic designer, were presenting other interpretive possibilities of the play than the usual pendulum swing between Shylock as melodramatic victim/hero and Shylock as comic impediment in one of C. L. Barber's festive comedies.[5] The genre of *The Merchant of Venice* has been as troubling as Moliere's *The Misanthrope* with Alceste generating a similar generic ambiguity. The sets and costuming in this production of *The Merchant of Venice* characterized the early Renaissance, insulating the production, to what extent that is possible, from the twentieth century and the Holocaust. A shift occurs in the audience's thinking from what this action means now to what it did mean in the early Renaissance. The production's link to the present is thus through the past.

The Venetian set with its sounds of lapping water featured two archways, one larger than the other, which suggested the scales of justice and an inequity in balance; the floor of the stage was a black and white checkerboard on which ornaments that seemed like piers resembled chess pieces. On a wall in back *RADIX MALORUM EST CUPIDITAS* was written in large letters. Whatever priests, nuns, and ministers were in the audience probably realized that this phrase is from *1 Timothy* 6:10 which the J. B. Phillips' *The New Testament in Modern English* translates as, "loving money leads to all kinds of evil"[6] or in more common usage, money is the root of all evil. English teachers in the audience might see another possibility to the saying on the wall, since Chaucer's Pardoner in his Prologue and Tale makes extensive use of this moral theme in *The Canterbury Tales*; it is the moral of all of the Pardoner's sermons, he says, as well as the moral of his tale.

The tale itself describes three men in a tavern who go out to slay Death. Told where Death is, they find instead bushels of gold florins. The youngest, on the way to town for supplies, determines to kill the others by poisoning their wine, but the other two kill him and to celebrate, drink the poisoned wine. Meanwhile the Pardoner, drinking like the men in his Tale, greedily hopes to sell pardons to his fellow pilgrims, illustrating the very sin his tale frames. All then are guilty in this piece, and Kent Thompson's "Director's Notes," no character in *The Merchant of Venice* is innocent, totally guilty, or totally virtuous either. The Christians in the play:



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> are admirable in their desire for friendship, noble sacrifice, and mercy over justice, but they are also racist (not only do they scorn Jews publicly but they own slaves) and obsessed with wealth and money.[7]

However, Thompson notes, "to conceive of Shylock as a heroic victim seems equally perverse" since, after all, Shylock "wants to kill Antonio."[8]

In the production the audience is made aware of the characters' mixed motives. Bassanio is a charming gentleman in love with a beautiful woman, but he is also risking someone else's dearly borrowed money for a marriage to Portia that will make his fortune. Antonio selflessly lends Bassanio money by getting a loan from Shylock, but he spits on Jews, curses and kicks them, and his attraction to Bassanio has such power for him that he is reputed by Salarino (II. viii. 46) to have wept when Bassanio leaves for Belmont. So strong is Antonio's attraction to Bassanio that Portia finds it necessary to establish her hegemony over her husband by manipulating a new bond for Antonio to pledge Bassanio's faithfulness, as Leslie Fiedler in *The Stranger in Shakespeare* describes in his analysis of Act V.[9] Portia can be seen making fine speeches on mercy during the trial, but she sets up a punishment of Shylock that is crushing. Harold Goddard, whom Kent Thompson quotes in his "Director's Notes" to *Macbeth*,[10] sees Portia not so much in love with justice as with the "spectacular, histrionic, or theatrical."[11] Goddard's view is confirmed by the production's portrayal of Portia.

If the production of *The Merchant of Venice* allows us to see Bassanio, Antonio, and Portia with mud on their feet, it carefully shows us a Shylock who is neither totally a villain nor a victim-hero. Through Philip Pleasants as Shylock and the actors who play Salano, Salarino, and Tubal in III. i., we see the anger of Shylock at Jessica's betrayal and theft being shifted to Antonio. As Goddard has said, when Tubal is giving Shylock the news of his daughter and of Antonio's misfortunes at sea, it is almost as if Tubal "had been trying deliberately to forge a link in Shylock's mind between the infidelity of his daughter and the forfeiture of the bond."[12] While anger at past insults by Antonio motivates Shylock's hatred, the production takes pains to show Shylock proceed from wanting to get the better of Antonio to catastrophic anger. Despite Jessica's statement that when she was living with Shylock, he said he "would rather have Antonio's flesh / Than twenty times the value of the sum" (III. ii. 289-90), the production



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does not show a Shylock with a pre-existing plan to kill Antonio, but rather, as Thompson has written, "a man deeply hurt by his daughter and badly confused about the true distinction between property and children, and money and love."[13]

In the conclusion to his "Director's Notes," Thompson, much like Chaucer's Pardoner, sees the essential conflict of the play between "materialistic value and spiritual worth."[14] Generically this means that the romantic comedy with its three marriages still is skewed by the final crushing judgment on Shylock, the isolation of Antonio from Bassanio at play's end, Jessica's dissatisfaction with Lorenzo and possibly her guilt regarding her father, and Bassanio's and Gratiano's slightly tarnished honor in response to the tricks for power their wives play with the rings.

As with the production of *Macbeth*, the production of *The Merchant of Venice* featured many fine performances. Philip Pleasants' Shylock provided a splendid layering of intensity making clear Shylock's changing motivations, his feelings of betrayal and loss, and his anger. Monica Bell as Portia reveals the brittleness and boredom of her character's class while also clarifying the conflicting appeals to Shylock in the court scene. John Woodson presented a generous but bigoted Antonio, a man who has lost a desire he cannot name. Brian Kurlander as Bassanio revealed the conflicting allegiances to Portia and Antonio, his character's comic plights, and his legitimate grief.

David Douglas as Gobbo, Anthony Lamont as the Prince of Morocco and especially Steven David Martin as the Prince of Aragon were wildly funny, and their humor helped shape Thompson's notion of the central conflict in the play between materialistic value and spiritual worth, as seen in Gobbo's dealings with his father and in the casket scene. Tara Falk as Jessica justified her revolt from her father's Jewish Puritanism and her later dissatisfaction with Lorenzo and guilt regarding her father and her heritage. John Preston as Gratiano and Laura McCord as Nerissa also turned in strong performances.

Unlike last year, when we thought the Festival was less than it should have been, this year's Shakespeare productions showed thoughtful preparation and frequently dazzling results.

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## Notes

[1]Kent Thompson, "Crime and Punishment" in "Director's Notes," program given to the audience.

[2]All Shakespeare quotations in this review are from *The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*, ed. William Allan Neilson and Charles Jarvis Hill (Cambridge, MA.: Houghton Mifflin, 1942).

[3]Thompson, "Director's Notes."

[4]A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Cleveland and New York: Meridian-World Publishing, 1955), p. 289.

[5]C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1959), pp. 163-91.

[6]J. B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English* (New York: Macmillan, 1958).

[7]Thompson, "Director's Notes."

[8]Thompson, "Director's Notes."

[9]Leslie Fiedler, *The Stranger in Shakespeare* (New York: Stein and Day, 1973), pp. 132-36.

[10]Thompson, "Director's Notes."

[11]Harold C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 103.

[12]Goddard, p. 98.

[13]Thompson, "Director's Notes."

[14]Thompson, "Director's Notes."



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The Witches in a scene from *Macbeth* directed by Kent Thompson for the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, summer, 1997.



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Philip Pleasants as Skylock and Ed Hyland as Tubal in Kent Thompson's production of *The Merchant of Venice* for the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, summer, 1997.



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