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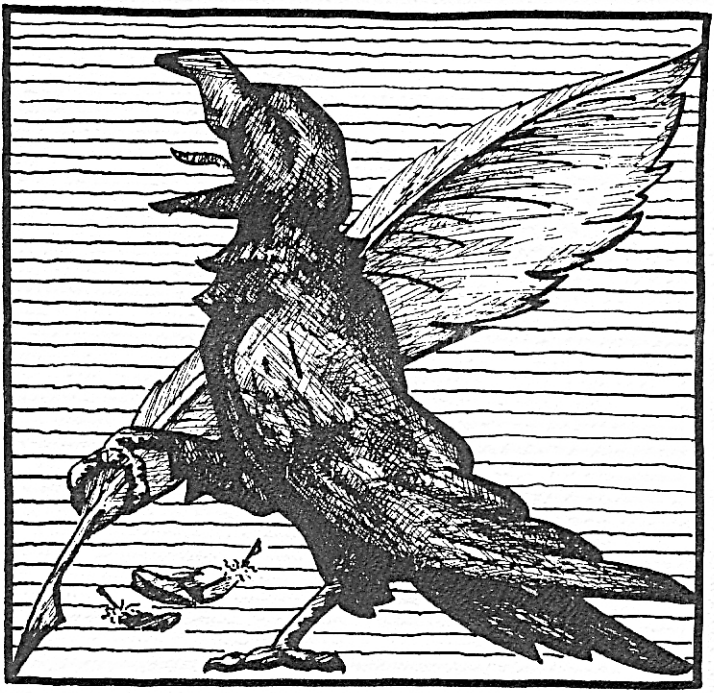

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About anyone so great as Shakespeare, it is probable that we can never be right; and if we can never be right, it is better that we should from time to time change our way of being wrong.

— T. S. Eliot

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

— Walter Pater

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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Contents

Giovanni on Shakespeare

I plant geraniums each Spring. It's not that I am a geranium lover or even a plant lover; it's just that at Spring there should be an acknowledgment of something new, some rebirth, some faith in constant change. I don't particularly like grubs or Japanese beetles; I actually hate flying things. My allergies allow me to plant my tomatoes but not to harvest them. Something about the fuzz that were I willing and able to pay six hundred dollars my dermatologist could explain exactly why I break out when I touch it. I actually don't care. I'm quite content, in fact, to press family and friends into tomato picking service: "It's my allergies, you know."

I'm not a critic though I have been known to write a book review or two. When younger I actually thought my opinion counted. I have since learned. When younger I thought one of the particulars of being *homo sapiens* was to communicate. I have not learned not to though I am cautious when I try. Life is far too serious to take seriously. All the important things happen without our knowledge, consent, or active, conscious participation. We are conceived. We live. We die. We have no opinion on these subjects. Most of us don't even get to name ourselves. We can lie about our ages, but on the Gregorian or Chinese or Islamic calendar we are a certain age. That old, I think they call it a social lie, that "You don't look it or would never have thought you are . . . " takes away one of the crowning achievements of humans . . . that you survived. Of course, some people commit suicide to control the time of their deaths, but the end result is the same. Granting all that, which is, after all, not so much to grant, I support the concept of human life.

Shakespeare is lucky. There is an old African saying, "You are not dead until you are forgotten." Many groups share that; so do some American Indians. The Euro-American must believe it because he works so hard to keep his history alive. It's fine by me. I hope, like Shakespeare, to one day be a Jeopardy! subject. I hope high school seniors quake at the fact that they have to take Giovanni before they graduate. I certainly can see the controversy over who actually wrote my poems; why did I never receive a "major" poetry award? These things get many a professor tenured, keeping many a family fed. One might even win promotion to "Full" with the lucky and unusual dis-

covery of some obscure grocery list proving once and for all, until deconstruction, that I do have false teeth. These things matter.

But I don't think Shakespeare had to worry about it. I think he had to write plays telling the King "You are a fool" while keeping his head upon his shoulders. He had to tell the people who scrimped and saved to see his productions, "you are jealous, small-minded idiots who will kill the one you love." He had to show his public that the savage was more noble than their pretentious societies while making them come back. He had to expose literal mindedness for the foolishness that it is. Shakespeare was a working artist.

How could he have known that five or six hundred years later he would be required? Should he have foreseen this possibility and tempered his judgments to match? Should not he have considered the possibility that his words would be difficult to read and therefore anticipated modern usage? Shouldn't we hold him to the same standards as the Constitution and Bible and bring him "up to date?" I think not. I think we should leave him in the brilliance of this expression. We need, we modern artists and critics, to do exactly what Shakespeare did. Write for now. Think for now. Express ourselves in our best possible vernacular for now. Will we be remembered? I doubt it. Most people are not remembered. And most people who would remember the people are not remembered. We have no true concept of what *homo sapiens* has forgotten though surely some of it was good and some of it was useless.

Shelley or Keats, I always mess up which one, talked about tending his own garden. Or was it Voltaire? I plant geraniums. No one will remember that. I have an allergy to tomato fuzz. No one will care. I write poetry. No one will know me . . . let alone what I thought I did. But while I live, during this all too brief period between birth and death, my life and work has been meaningful to me. All we have is constant change.

Nikki Giovanni
Poet
13 August 1990

Fig. XXIV. Cesare d'Arpino (?), "Patienza," woodcut, from: Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Rome, 1603), p. 381.

Patience as Dramatic Emblem in Shakespeare's Plays: A Study in Typology

by Priscilla S. McKinney

In recent years Peter Daly, John Doebler, Dieter Mehl, John Steadman, and other scholars have made us more aware of the presence and significance of emblem iconography in Renaissance drama.[1] Looking for visual sources in Renaissance emblem books, we seek parallels to iconic imagery rendered verbally in the plays and pictorial versions of what we envision on the stage through dialogue and stage directions. While such pursuits enrich our interpretations of the plays and support Glynne Wickham's view that the stage of Shakespeare's day was indeed an "emblematic" one,[2] we find ourselves struggling to make various distinctions among dramatic emblems, distinctions which can be made only on the basis of whether or not and in what manner these emblems are presented on stage. A primary question is, I think: What is the difference between an "emblematic" image and what is indeed a "dramatic emblem"? Related to this central question are others: Must we look for all the elements in a dramatic emblem that we find in the printed source? Can all verbal references to emblem iconography be staged? And if we can, in fact, define a dramatic emblem, when does it begin and end? Is it distinguishable within its dramatic context? If our search for information on Renaissance staging has not first led us to the study of emblems, emblem-hunting does or should lead, inevitably, to the consideration of staging. My own study of a particular emblem in Shakespeare's plays, that of patience, has not only made me aware of the above questions but also challenged me to formulate some answers. Distinctions become more easily perceived when one focuses on how Shakespeare portrays a single virtue emblematically in various plays.

Before examining a particular group of emblems in Shakespeare's plays, we should first notice in general the way in which a printed or visual emblem transforms into drama. In the printed emblem, the verbal and pictorial elements are equally important; the full meaning of the visual element may be inaccessible without the accompanying words to explain it. Thus virtues and vices are illustrated through the combined effect of *inscriptio*, *pic-*

tura, and *subscriptio*, the words providing moral commentary upon the scene portrayed. In the dramatic emblem, we should expect a similar interplay of the verbal and visual, though as we examine different forms of the "emblematic" in drama, we see that the proportions of these two elements vary. Mehl's classification of dramatic emblems helps us to see these distinctions.[3] The first type he notes is the "veiled emblem," an emblematic image described or alluded to in the dialogue, often expressed as a simile (*Emblems,* 43). Rightly, Mehl questions "whether an emblem that is merely quoted in the text can be called an emblem in the true sense" (*Emblems,* 44). A second form is the allegorical scene or tableau, which provides a pictorial commentary on the action of the play, the dumb show or the masque providing the most striking examples. Here, the emphasis is on the visual, just as in the first type the prevailing element is verbal. The third type combines stage action and spoken word, as Mehl might have added, proportionately and simultaneously. In this case, the use of a stage property may provoke an explanation of its emblematic significance (Yorick's skull serving as a *memento mori* in the gravediggers' scene in *Hamlet*), or the emblematic nature of a character's posture may be indicated by his own or another's interpretive commentary. The character may point to himself or another may point to him as an epitome of a virtue or vice which is recognizable, representative, and worthy of our moral judgment. Mehl regards this third type of emblem as the "most interesting and rewarding" subject of study since it represents the "very nature of Elizabethan drama" (*Emblems,* 51). Most of us would, I think, agree, perhaps acknowledging this form as the true dramatic emblem. A study of emblems of patience in Shakespeare's plays reveals, however, that this type of emblem is often difficult to perceive and define, that the verbal and visual do not always occur simultaneously, and that Shakespeare, especially in the late plays, creates his own iconography, causing us to question whether a dramatic emblem must rely for its definition upon the conventional images.

Emblems of patience, depicted similarly in many emblem books, would, of course, have provided models for dramatists interested in portraying that virtue.[4] Since "patience was a subject that received formal treatment and exposition in sixteenth-century England, both as a subject of humanist moral philosophy and as a theme for Christian discipline and homiletic exhortation,"[5] the theme was often treated allegorically and symbolically in woodcuts, engravings, and paintings, as well as in statuary and emblems; and, as in the case of other abstractions rendered visually, patience was depicted in sev-

eral modes and with various accompanying signs. A common emblem for patience portrayed a palm tree hung with weights, the *inscriptio* and *subscriptio* explaining the message of survival and resurgence after oppression.[6] When patience was personified, it appeared as a woman (or, as Samuel Chew notes, "very rarely" as a man [119]). The feminine character, mature rather than youthful, usually sat on a pedestal or monument, wringing her hands in an attitude of grief and prayer. She might bear a yoke on her shoulders, signifying her compliance with Christ's words, "Take my yoke upon you," or have thorns underfoot, suggesting the discomfort or suffering she is undergoing; and she might be accompanied by a lamb, demonstrating her meekness under duress. Occasionally, Patience would carry a cross or stand on a mound of crosses, a symbol associated with the virtue of Constancy; or she would stand beside a column, a device customarily supporting the figure of Fortitude. Yet Patience usually appeared as a personification distinct from these two related virtues.

Popular as a theme in Renaissance art and literature, patience is also a prominent theme in Shakespeare's plays. Sanderson sees a continuity in Shakespeare's emphasis on this theme from *The Comedy of Errors* to *Pericles* (617); yet even in those plays in which the theme is apparent, we do not always find emblems of patience. The Harvard Concordance records many instances of the word *patience* and its variants throughout the canon, reminding us of the notable examples of impatience, such as Romeo and Othello, and of the models of patience described in brilliant and memorable passages in *Hamlet* and *Timon of Athens*: Hamlet's description of Horatio in the first instance (III. ii. 62-71)[7] and the First Senator's portrait of an ideally patient man in the latter (III. v. 31-35). In each case, however, the verbal description is unaccompanied by visual representation, and allusions to emblems of patience are lacking, here and elsewhere in each play. We move into the gray area of personification in *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Merchant of Venice*, particularly in Luciana's patient chiding when courted by the man she believes to be her sister's husband (III. ii. 1-30) and in the character of Antonio, who "oppose[s his] patience to [Shylock's] fury" during the trial scene (IV. i. 10-11). But personifications are not emblematic, I believe, when there are no allusions to emblems or emblem iconography either within the passages of personification or elsewhere, which is the case in each of these two plays. Finally, we can describe as "emblematic" the prominent images of patience in *Twelfth Night* and *King Lear*: the description by Viola (Cesario) of her lovelorn sis-

ter who "Sat like Patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief" (II. iv. 113-14) and the Gentleman's lengthy description of Cordelia at the news of her father's mistreatment by her sisters, when "Patience and sorrow strove / Who should express her goodliest" (IV. iii. 13-24), her simultaneous smiles and tears recalling the features of the feminine personification found in emblems, paintings, and sculpture. The descriptions are "emblematic" because they allude to the images and iconography of art and emblem books. But since the images created are imaginary rather than realized on stage—the lovelorn sister does not exist, and Cordelia is absent when described—we may, I think, draw the line between description that is "emblematic" (or Mehl's "veiled" emblem) and a true "dramatic emblem," when the visual element must also be present.

It is in the late plays, where the theme of patience is pervasive and dominant, that we find dramatic emblems of patience. The romances (*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*) and *King Henry VIII* (which might be classified as a romance on the basis of its similar theme)[8] contain a variety of dramatic emblems of patience which differ from those in earlier plays in that several are stageable, hence visible to the eye as well as to the imagination. Some of these fit Mehl's description of the third type of emblem in their mutual interaction of verbal and visual components, that is, the simultaneous interplay of the two necessary elements. I find, however, that "veiled" emblems or references to the iconography of emblems of patience earlier in a play, in addition to personifying passages, may prepare us to recognize a dramatic emblem that is otherwise unaccompanied by a specific verbal indicator. I have also found in the late plays that Shakespeare does not limit himself to the conventional image of patience as a feminine personification in a statuesque pose but that he explores the possibilities of dramatic emblems of this virtue by creating personifications that are masculine and, in some cases, scenes that are dynamic rather than static. Moreover, he incorporates iconography not found in the conventional representations of Patience. The use of innovative poses and devices in place of traditional images may, of course, indicate a movement away from emblematic representation altogether—and possibly my inaccuracy in labeling these scenes as dramatic emblems—but the use of allusions and personifying passages leading up to a posture or stance characteristic of patience suggests that we should stretch our definition of the dramatic emblem to include the unconventional pose and unusual devices.

In *Pericles*, the earliest romance, which contains numerous scenes recalling emblem *picturae*, the hero develops the theme of patience through his dialogue with other characters; but it is the feminine protagonists, Thaisa and Marina, who appear as emblems of patience.[9] Creating the daughter in the mother's image, Shakespeare establishes the women's symbolic roles before revealing their distinguishing virtue of patience. In the tournament scene, when Thaisa first appears, her father describes her symbolic function: "[She] Sits here like beauty's child, whom nature gat / For men to see, and seeing wonder at" (II. ii. 6-7). Similarly, at the beginning of Act IV, the narrator Gower describes Marina's skill in music and learning, "Which makes her both the heart and place / Of general wonder" (*Cho.* 10-11). Thus Thaisa and Marina resemble each other: both are personifications of natural beauty to be wondered at. But we come to wonder less at their outward beauty than at their strength in adversity, particularly Thaisa's resignation in becoming a priestess, and at her endurance in maintaining for years presumably the same posture we find her in at the end of the play, as we do at Marina's poise during the brothel scene in resisting the panders and in converting would-be seducers. What is truly worthy of wonder is their inner beauty, which expresses itself in the exercise of almost limitless patience.[10]

We do not equate inner beauty with patience or see Thaisa and Marina as emblems of patience, however, until late in the play. In the brothel, the bawd, using a "veiled" emblem, likens Marina to the weighted palm by saying, "Come, you're a young foolish sapling, and must be bow'd as I would have you" (IV. ii. 79-80). And Pericles, in the recognition scene, finally points to Marina as an emblem of patience. Wondering at the modesty and sincerity of the young girl who would comfort him, and at her beauty, which is so like Thaisa's, he tells Marina that she looks "Like Patience gazing on kings' graves, and smiling / Extremity out of act" (V. i. 139-40). Thus his words, which recall the conventional image of patience, and presumably Marina's pose combine to form the dramatic emblem. Mary Judith Dunbar notes their symbolic separation on stage: "Pericles seated, in sackcloth, apart; Marina, standing away from him after he has pushed her back"—the daughter embodying patient endurance and Pericles symbolizing, as he has since he appeared in dumb show at Marina's tomb, "a figure of grief," a living representation of "king's graves."[11] Because of the previous mirroring of Marina and her mother, we are also encouraged to view Thaisa as an emblem of patience when Pericles finds her in the temple of Diana, also stand-

ing statue-like and patient—even though there is no verbal allusion at the play's end to emblems of patience.[12]

In *Cymbeline*, which develops the theme of patience and contains several "emblematic" scenes, there is only one which obviously points to the heroine as an emblem of patience. Early in the play the Second Lord calls attention to Imogen's patience, praising her for her strength in adversity. He sees her mind as a temple and prays that the "walls" of her honor stand "unshak'd" by her trials, particularly her stepmother's machinations and the exile of her husband (II. i. 53-62). In the cave of Belarius, where Imogen seeks refuge after learning from Pisanio of Posthumous' instructions to kill her, Guiderius and Arviragus notice the heroine's good-natured suffering, pointing to her more explicitly as an emblem of patience. Arviragus first notes that the boy Fidele (Imogen in disguise) "Nobly . . . yokes / A smiling with a sigh," adding that the smile and the sigh are barely distinguishable and that the smile mocks the sigh, which would leave "so divine a temple" to mix with the sea winds (IV. ii. 51-56). Guiderius says that the sigh and the smile signify grief and patience; and Arviragus appeals to patience to grow, "And let the stinking elder, grief, untwine / His perishing root with the increasing vine" (IV. ii. 58-60). The image is apparently a complex one, hearkening back to the lord's comparison of Imogen to a temple and borrowing from a common emblem in its portrayal of the entwined tree and vine. Clearly, Guiderius alludes to emblems of patience while pointing to Imogen, providing the necessary combination of verbal and visual components; but the resulting dramatic emblem is subtle in that the visual element is not explicitly dependent on pose but on Imogen's facial expression and demeanor.

The Winter's Tale resembles *Pericles* in its emphasis on the likeness between mother and daughter and in the statue-like pose of the heroine in the last scene. Yet, while it is obvious that Shakespeare intends for both Hermione and Perdita to be personifications of patience, it is less clear when they are to appear as dramatic emblems. Hermione first suggests her role as a personification when she reacts with courage to Leontes' charge of infidelity, subduing her tears and other outward signs of pain, as the heroines of the two previous plays have done. She says, "I must be patient till the heavens look / With an aspect more favorable," adding that even though she does not cry, she feels "That honourable grief . . . which burns / Worse than tears drown" (II. i. 106-12). Again, in the trial scene, she calls attention to herself as a personification of patience:

> . . . if powers divine
> Behold our human actions, as they do,
> I doubt not then but innocence shall make
> False accusation blush and tyranny
> Tremble at patience.
>
> (III. ii. 27-31)

While she may assume a statuesque posture in these scenes, when, presumably, she stands apart, isolated and rejected, there have not yet been any "veiled" emblems or allusions to prepare us to see her as an emblem.

Perdita's beauty and virtues mirror those of her mother, her true nobility showing in her dislike of artificiality and ostentation. We find patience to be among these virtues when she is willing to accept the king's ban on her betrothal and when, refuting Camillo's opinion that adversity alters one's affection, she declares that "affliction may subdue the cheek / But not take in the mind" (IV. iv. 569-70). These words suggest that she is capable of great patience, and Florizel helps us to imagine her as an emblem of the virtue by adding the appropriate *pictura* ("veiled" emblem) to her *inscriptio*: "But O, the thorns we stand upon!" (578). The resemblance to her mother is verified when Perdita lands in Sicilia (V. i. 226-27; ii. 35-36). Moreover, both mother and daughter, when they appear together, may be viewed as twin personifications of patience. When Leontes and Perdita visit the statue of Hermione, Leontes notices that Perdita is so awe-struck by it that she seems like one herself (V. iii. 41-42); and when Perdita would kiss the statue's hand, Paulina stops her, exclaiming ambiguously, "O, patience!" (46). The many personifying passages, Florizel's allusions to emblem iconography, and the comparison of mother and daughter encourage us to view Hermione as a dramatic emblem in the last scene. Sidney Homan, in fact, describes her as a "silent, motionless emblem," whose pose Perdita imitates.[13] Ironically, just as she breaks out of her static posture, she implicity points to herself as an emblem, telling Perdita, "I, / Knowing by Paulina that the oracle / Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserved / Myself to see the issue" (125-28). Thus her words, which throughout have equated patience with obedience to a divine authority, describe her pose as a symbol for the powerful virtue that has sustained her for sixteen years.

In the last two plays, *The Tempest* and *King Henry VIII*, the emphasis on the theme of patience continues. We find, however, that Shakespeare turns from conventional emblems of patience to innovative ones, perhaps becoming aware, as we have in the course of

examining these emblems, of the difficulty in using actual iconic images on stage—many emblems must be "veiled"—and of the subtlety of posture and facial expressions which might go unnoticed without verbal explanation. In these last plays, the emblems become dynamic, the devices real rather than figurative, and some of the personifications masculine.

The opening scenes of *The Tempest* stress the importance of patience both on the tempest-tossed ship, where Gonzalo alone possesses the virtue, and on land, where Prospero must control his impatient subjects, Ariel and Caliban. Yet it is Ferdinand and Miranda who epitomize the virtue and whose stances form emblems in the course of the stage action. While carrying "thousands" of logs to prove his love for Miranda, with head bent over and logs across his outstretched arms or hoisted to his shoulder, Ferdinand points to himself as an emblem; he tells Miranda, "for your sake / Am I this patient log-man" (III. i. 66-67). The *pictura* he creates, though not present in the emblem books, serves as a serious and appropriate emblem of patience.[14] In Ferdinand the virtue of patience co-exists with obedience—in fact, the two values are nearly synonymous—and Prospero makes clear by his injunction to Ferdinand that a third quality, chastity, is also desirable if Ferdinand is to prove his worth. Thus when Prospero tells Ferdinand to "Sit then and talk with [Miranda]" (IV. i. 32), we may regard the couple's posture and show of conversation as a second emblematic picture: sitting together quietly, they appear as personifications embodying patience, obedience, and chastity, the pre-nuptial virtues apparently espoused by Prospero. These qualities are also adumbrated in the masque staged by Prospero in which Iris, calling forth Ceres "A contract of true love to celebrate" (IV. i. 84), announces that Venus will not be present to cast "Some wanton charm" (95) upon Ferdinand and Miranda. The masque itself, therefore, is an emblem (Mehl's second, primarily visual, type) to illustrate the marriage blessings that will follow from the exercise of patience. And, finally, the couple "discovered" by their fathers playing at chess form a novel emblem of patience which expresses itself in self-restraint and chastity.[15]

In *King Henry VIII*, Shakespeare also emphasizes the necessity for patience, and the characters who "fall"—Buckingham, Katherine, and Wolsey—serve, each in his or her turn, as personifications, first of intemperance, then of patience. In Act I, Buckingham vents what Norfolk describes as "the fire of passion," accusing Wolsey of overweening ambition, of his "subtle" influence on the king, and his "treasonous" design in undermining the articles of the Field of the

Cloth of Gold; and Norfolk responds by advising his friend to "Ask God for temp'rance" (I. i. 124). At his arrest, Buckingham's anger melts to acquiescence; and he succumbs again during the trial when, as one of the gentlemen reports, he "something spoke in choler, ill and hasty" upon receiving his sentence but "fell to himself again, and sweetly / In all the rest show'd a most noble patience" (II. i. 34-36). Prepared by these passages of personification, we regard him as an emblem of patience when he enters from his arraignment surrounded by attendants with tipstaves, axe, and halberds, his vacillation over and his death sentence decreed.

Katherine, too, is normally patient, though her composure is sorely tested during the divorce trial and afterward. Her gentle nature and her obedience to the king's will, apparent during her single appearance before the trial,[16] prevail during the early part of the hearing, recalling Hermione's behavior and circumstances during a similar trial; but Henry's queen departs from her customary humility when Cardinals Wolsey and Campeius try to silence her. Turning "drops of tears . . . to sparks of fire," she rejects Wolsey's urging that she "Be patient yet," instead pronouncing him her enemy and refusing him for her judge (II. iv. 70-82). When she peremptorily leaves the court, stating, "They vex me past my patience" (128), Wolsey, Campeius, and Henry each remark on Katherine's deviation from her usual "meekness saintlike" (136). Again struggling to accept her fate in III. i., Katherine exhibits "rage" against the Cardinals while, almost simultaneously, calling attention to the possession of "an honour" beyond that of other wives, "a great patience" (137). Finally, her ambivalence is visibly demonstrated in an emblem in IV. ii. when, near death, she is attended and physically supported by the character named Patience. When Katherine herself describes her poor condition, saying that her "legs like loaden branches bow to th' earth" (2), she alludes to the palm as an emblem of patience, encouraging us to view her thus. Moreover, we may see the masque that Katherine envisions afterward—a "blessed troop" bestowing garlands—as an emblem, one of Mehl's second type, which serves the same purpose as that in *The Tempest* in demonstrating the rewards of patience.

Whereas Katherine and Buckingham struggle to retain their patience in their "falls," Wolsey must acquire the virtue when Henry repudiates him. Until II. iv. Wolsey manipulates the king and others, "[his] heart . . . crammed with arrogancy, spleen, and pride" (107-08). Yet he is quick to acknowledge his downfall when Henry presents him with the incriminating papers that Wolsey himself has unwittingly provided. While the scene of Wolsey's fall may not form

an emblem of patience, it is clear that the Cardinal has become at least a personification of new-found virtue. Divorced from power and possessions, and in the presence of only his servant, who urges, "Good sir, have patience," Wolsey expresses humility and calm acceptance: "So I have" (III. ii. 458).

Finally, in Act V another character—Archbishop Cranmer—creates another emblem of patience. The portrayal of the churchman is unique throughout in that he appears in full possession of the virtue rather than struggling to retain or achieve it. Even before his impending trial, he indicates his sufferance by telling the king that he will stand or fall on his truth and honesty. Verbal and visual elements combine to form a complete dramatic emblem when the archbishop is summoned to the trial: compelled to wait at the door among pages and footboys, he himself acknowledges that he must "attend with patience" (ii. 19), and Dr. Butts and the king, watching from a window above, comment individually on his humiliating stance. Cranmer's words after Gardiner sentences him to the Tower for heresy again reinforce his symbolic office: "That I shall clear myself, / Lay all the weight ye can upon my patience" (iii. 65-66). That the virtue of patience is perfected in Cranmer prior to being tested and that he avoids his imminent fall suggest his importance in providing an exemplary model of patience to balance the characters who labor imperfectly to achieve it.

Certainly, Shakespeare was concerned with the theme of patience throughout his career. In a number of plays he evokes the emblematic consciousness of his audience by alluding to emblems of patience, by creating personifications reminiscent of those in visual art, and, in the late plays especially, by combining verbal and visual components to create real dramatic emblems. In the early plays Shakespeare uses personification *or* "veiled" allusions to patience but neither of these in combination with a visible, staged posture necessary to the true or complete dramatic emblem (Mehl's third type of emblem). These plays, in which Shakespeare invites the audience to *imagine* emblems of patience, reveal that while a "veiled" emblem can be created by rather minimal verbal detail—at least in the mind of those familiar with emblem books—not all verbal references to emblem iconography can be staged. In the early romances, where Shakespeare apparently becomes more intent on combining posture and action with words to create visible stage emblems, the verbal and visual elements do not always co-exist simultaneously: the dramatic emblems may be prefigured through personification, veiled emblems, and character mirroring. These are, however, true dramatic

emblems, expanding somewhat Mehl's definition of the third type. In the last plays—particularly in the emblems of Ferdinand carrying logs, of Cranmer waiting outside the door of the trial chamber, and of Katherine as she is physically and psychologically supported by the character Patience—we see Shakespeare's desire to expand the dramatic emblem of patience beyond the limits of conventional pose and image; and we realize that the definition of dramatic emblem would be too narrow if it did not allow for this creativity. As Dunbar notes, Shakespeare's stage emblems become "kinetic and complex . . . composed not only of properties, but of costumes, groupings of actors, gestures, and moments of action" (86-87). These innovative emblems of patience are more prominent in the context of the last plays than the earlier traditional emblems of patience, dependent for visual effect on statuesque pose and quiet expression, but the passivity characterized in both kinds may cause these emblems to be submerged in the enfolding dramatic action. (This is certainly the case in the BBC/Time-Life productions.) The subtle quality of a dramatic emblem of patience may limit to a certain extent its usefulness as a model for the study of Shakespearean dramatic emblems, but I think that a study of these emblems helps to reveal Shakespeare's method and development in creating dramatic emblems and perhaps even to define what a dramatic emblem is.

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Notes

[1]For the history and themes of emblem literature, see Rosemary Freeman, *English Emblem Books* (New York: Octagon, 1966); Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1939); and Mario Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1964). Studies focusing on the emblematic nature of verbal and visual imagery in Shakespeare and Renaissance literature are Samuel C. Chew, *The Pilgrimage of Life* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1962); Peter M. Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1979); Peter M. Daly, "Shakespeare and the Emblem: The Use of Evidence and Analogy in Establishing Iconographic and Emblematic Effects in the Plays," in *Shakespeare and the Emblem: Studies in Renaissance Iconography and Iconology*, ed. Tibor Fabiny (Szeged: AUSPEAS, 1984); John Doebler, *Shakespeare's Speaking Pictures* (Alburquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1974); Henry Green, *Shakespeare and the Emblem Writers* (London: Trubner, 1870); Dieter Mehl, "Emblems in English Renaissance Drama," *Renaissance Drama*, NS 2 (1969), 39-57; Dieter Mehl, "Visual and Rhetorical Imagery in Shakespeare's Plays," *Essays & Studies*, NS 25 (1972), 83-100; and John M. Steadman, "Iconography and Renaissance Drama: Ethical and Mythological Themes," *RORD*, 13-14 (1970-71), 73-122. Concerned with emblems of

patience in particular are William S. Heckscher, "Shakespeare in His Relationship to the Visual Arts: A Study in Paradox," *RORD*, 13-14 (1970-71), 5-71; and Gerald J. Schiffhorst, *The Triumph of Patience* (Orlando: Univ. Press of Florida, 1978). For further primary and secondary sources, see Samuel Schuman, "Emblems and the English Renaissance Drama: A Checklist," *RORD*, 12 (1969), 43-56.

[2]*Early English Stages 1300 to 1600.* 2 vols. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963), 2: 155.

[3]Peter Daly offers comparable, though less well-defined, categories: the emblem reproduced as stage property, the emblematic word, emblematic characters and personifications, and the emblematic stage or tableau. He notes, however, the "absence of definition" in studies of dramatic emblems (AUSPEAS 120, 155).

[4]Characters named Patience appear in four non-Shakespearean plays preceding Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII.* See Thomas L. Berger and William C. Bradford, Jr., *An Index of Characters in English Printed Drama to the Restoration* (Englewood, Colo.: Microcard, 1975).

[5]James L. Sanderson, "Patience in *The Comedy of Errors*," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 16 (1975), p. 610.

[6]The cypress, weighted similarly, also signified patience, as did camomile or saffron trodden underfoot.

[7]The source for quotations from the plays is *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969).

[8]One might argue for the inclusion of *King Henry VIII* among the romances on the basis of its breadth of scope, its pageant-like quality, the masque envisioned by Katherine, and its theme of injustice and restitution (necessitating patience). See Northrop Frye, "Romance as Masque" in *Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered*, ed. Carol McGinnis Kay and Henry E. Jacobs (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1978), 11-39.

[9]Thelma N. Greenfield, "A Re-Examination of the Patient Pericles," *Shakespeare Studies*, 3 (1967), 51-61, makes a case for Pericles' shrewdness and circumspection, remarking that scholars overemphasize his patience.

[10]Stephen Orgel, "The Poetics of Spectacle, "*New Literary History*, 2 (1971), pp. 382-83, notes that visual wonder in the late plays reflects on the comparable mystery of "reconcilation and the restoration of losses."

[11]"'To the Judgment of Your Eye': Iconography and the Theatrical Art of *Pericles*," in *Shakespeare, Man of the Theater*, ed. Kenneth Muir, Jay L. Halio, D. J. Palmer (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1983), pp. 90-91.

[12]In this scene Thaisa also recalls her intemperate foil, Antiochus' daughter, who stands similarly in Act I.

[13]*Shakespeare's Theater of Presence: Language, Spectacle, and the Audience* (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1986), p. 81.

[14]Doebler regards Ferdinand as an emblem of *fortezza* or fortitude (pp. 146-48).

[15]See Frank Kermode's discussion of the significance of the chess game, *The Tempest*, Arden, f.n. 171, pp. 122-23. He sees it as symbolic of the gameplaying that is characteristic of "highborn and romantic love."

[16]Katherine seems to personify conscience in the early scenes: I. ii. 143, I. ii. 173-75, and II. ii. 141.

Gabriel Rollenhagen, *Nucleus Emblematum Selectissimorum . . .* (1616), p. 28. Reproduced in George Wither, *A Collection of Emblems, Ancient and Moderne* (1635), p. 28.

Helena: The Will and the Way
by Dorothy Cook

Like most of the heroines in the romantic comedies, Helena, in *All's Well That Ends Well,* creates and resolves much of the action. She establishes many of the principal values in the play. She is different from earlier Shakespearean women because she is initially less successful and generally more fallible. Appropriately, she moves in a realistic world.[1] Helena should therefore not be viewed sentimentally as wholly charming,[2] parochially as a shameless "harpy,"[3] or cynically as a mere "schemer."[4] Rather she is a youthful woman who actively seeks a husband whom she desires. In the first half of the play she makes the mistake of trying to secure Bertram publicly, before she attempts to win him privately. In the second half of the play, however, Helena redeems herself and Bertram, achieving for herself and him sexual fulfillment, greater personal maturity, and a renewal of social purpose. Clearly, Helena provides the play with much spontaneous, humorous, and exciting drama. Shakespeare's sympathetic tone makes Helena's role and function as comic heroine admirable. His focus excludes a textual basis for exaggerated feminist concern with patriarchy, since the King, Lafew, the French Lords, and Bertram hardly constitute oppressive male authority.[5] Nor does the playwright's emphasis on a heroine support the idea of a pattern of "lost independence, initiative, and control" in the "partial, potential, or pretended submission of Diana and Helena."[6] From a purist's viewpoint, Helena's position in the play still requires full appreciation. Her character and contribution to structure and meaning are evident in her formulation of plans and pursuit of them at Court, then in her deft arrangement for the consummation of her marriage in Florence, and finally in her sensitive demonstration at Rossillion of the sincerity of her love. More than simple "comic pointer,"[7] Helena's character is both firmly conceived and fully realized.

Beginning with a private disclosure of her feelings[8] and proceeding to her naming the Count as her husband (II. iii. 104), Helena appears to be governed by "ambition" and by designs in her love (I. i. 90). But in these matters and in staging the surprise announcement of her love for Bertram at Court, Helena is motivated chiefly by impulsive love. In addition, she expects innocently that custom and authority will reward her, not only for the service she performs for

the King but also with Bertram's high regard. From the opening scene on, Helena must actively establish her merits. She contrasts with the prattling dandy, Parolles, and with the impetuous Bertram, whose unquestioned social status make them worthy of attendance at the Court. Because she is the orphaned daughter of a renowned physician and the loved ward of the aged, generous Countess of Rossillion, she might from the start be possessed of confidence, intelligence, and virtue. Helena's confidence is, however, unschooled, and her intelligence must be refined. Her virtue, together with her diligence, is confirmed by the Countess in the opening scene. The old lady observes that the young woman "derives her honesty and achieves her goodness" (I. i. 45). Bertram's mother supports Helena's position as protagonist. Unlike the blocking characters of New Comedy, the older generation of the Countess, Lafew, and the King are allies of this heroine.[9]

Young Helena must nevertheless overcome both her inexperience and her social position. Almost immediately Parolles introduces these difficulties with the sarcastic greeting, "Save you, fair Queen" (106). Upon his apparently random but not less dramatically apt choice of a second subject, virginity, Helena jests abstractedly. She is disarming yet not without decorum, and she is clearly aware that she can answer the foolish Parolles without paying him much attention. Composed less of a duologue than a monologue, this meeting is a kind of interruption of Helena's thinking. In it she muses out loud about her love and the chastity that are her only dowry. "How might one do," she thinks verbally, "to lose her virginity to her own liking?" (150-51). Then she elaborates, largely ignoring Parolles and the sexual temptations that await Bertram at Court. In impugning Parolles' pompous valor, Helena courageously implies that in risking "sighs a plenty," even "endless rue," she might realize her love through the gift of her heart. However unwise, Helena's love is a gift, a lyrical, romantic force, as well as a sexual one. Her virginity is not treated by Shakespeare solely in the negative manner of a Parolles: crudely, as seductive power; shallowly, as idealizing power; or pettily, as domestic power.[10] Helena rightly believes that the braggart, Parolles, is too superficial to be troublesome either to her or to Bertram.[11] He serves principally as a butt for blame, and in this first scene, as an ironic foil to the heroine. Critical of Parolles' cowardice and worried about the vulnerable Bertram, Helena ponders, thinking with sweet irony in Parolles' words, how to get a good husband. Parolles' selfish idea of inequal-

ity, though expressed in jest here, will be seriously countered by Helena in the overall movement of the play.

Since Helena passionately loves a man who seeks independence, she must resolve through calculation the conflict between love's claim and youthful freedom. Her methods are different only in degree from those employed in other Shakespearean comedies. Before she speaks in the play, Helena weeps, but emotion will not win Bertram. An appealing and unusual introduction of a heroine, her genuine feeling is poignant yet almost humorous. It only delays the impatient Bertram. Helena's tears serve to chart her progress from a lonely girl to an admired wife. They are temporarily misinterpreted by the Countess, who, like the King, is ineffectual in her efforts to influence Bertram. At a moment of gentle chastisement of Helena, the Countess is prevented from speaking her words by her ward's honest but enigmatic response, "I do affect a sorrow indeed, but I have it too" (54). The interruption conveys Helena's preoccupation with her love. It further stresses the spirit of the orphan who dares to love a man far above her station. Her wish to prove herself is one way in which Shakespeare dramatically links her with Bertram. His thirst to realize whatever capacities he may have is similar to Helena's desire to fulfill her potential. She is aware of her desires but unsure of how to proceed, whereas the "unseason'd" (71) Bertram acts rashly, without knowing clearly how he might distinguish himself. Because both feel their goals are distant, their future fascinates.

Several critics dispute Helena's central position in the play. At least two have unconvincingly assigned Bertram a moral stature equal to or exceeding hers.[12] Richard P. Wheeler argues in Bertram's defense that the play violates Shakespeare's basic comic pattern by dismissing the questions of the youth's reform and consent. Typically, Wheeler cites Dr. Johnson and Arthur Quiller-Couch. He himself contends that the play is founded on a father-son struggle between the King and Bertram, and he claims that Bertram's marriage is both emasculating and incestuous, Helena being a mother surrogate.[13] Wheeler's psychoanalytic outline of myth and masculine degradation sensationalizes as well as distorts the details of the play. Moreover, the psychological authenticity of the considerable sexual satisfaction and maturity that Bertram owes to Helena is more convincing than Wheeler's belief that because his love is, to the end, compelled, Bertram is the figure who commands sympathy in the play.

Manifestly, Shakespeare places Helena closer to his audience by disclosing with great charm her weaknesses and strengths. Helena

rationalizes about her "idolatrous fancy" (97) when she confides her love. Underneath she finds Bertram's arrogance and restless energy appealing. A physical attraction to his masculinity is evident in her account of herself as "The hind that would be mated by the lion" (91), although these words consciously lament the social obstacles to her love. In addition, the details in her description of Bertram's appearance and of the frustration of living near yet separated from him point realistically to the warmth of her love:

> . . . 'Twas pretty, though a plague,
> To see him every hour, to sit and draw
> His arched brows, his hawking eye, his curls
> In our heart's table—heart too capable
> Of every line and trick of his sweet favor.
>
> (92-96)

Shakespeare does not fault such love, nor does he depict it here as a basis for sheer possession. He explores its power and approves its private right to existence, stressing the lover's confident assumption that in time and with her endeavors, her love will deserve returning. "Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie" (216), Helena soliloquizes: "Who ever strove / To show her merits, that did miss her love?" (226-27). Because she knows that "The Court's a learning place" (177), and Bertram is one who must learn, being so fresh to it—but learn perhaps shame or even lechery—she cannot forebear desiring that her good wishes for Bertram "had . . . a body . . . which might be felt" (181-82). To display Helena's tender anxiety and prepare for the consummation of their marriage later, Shakespeare strongly sanctions Helena's behavior by basing it on her awareness of Bertram's fervor and her own ardor. "The King's disease—my projects may deceive me," she ironically allows, "But my intents are fix'd . . ." (228-29). Probably because it is grounded in impulse and in inexperience, Helena's first plan does disappoint her, regardless of the common practice of arranging marriages by royal prerogative. Josephine Waters Bennet writes cogently that we must not read the play "in the context of folklore or romance." Helena is "a girl hotly in love." Because she pursues a disdainful male, she is "basically a comic figure," but the "resourcefulness, quick wit and intelligence, and the integrity of her passion, save her from absurdity."[14] In fact, these character attributes preclude a condition of ultimate absurdity and assure Helena's humanity.

The second scene in Act I shifts to the Court. Much of it provides for Helena's appearance before and success with the ailing King, as

well as for her initial failure with Bertram. By praising both moral and manly virtues, the King specifically prepares us for the conflict between Helena's love and Bertram's inclination to test himself in war, which rests on the issue of individual preference. To diminish the secondary conflict between their positions in society, the King ironically reveres not only Bertram's father as the model of honor but also Helena's. He cites the elder Rossillion's belief in an individually proven nobility and a consequent acceptance of worthy people from the "ranks" (I. iii. 43) below him. The King quotes the words of Bertram's father on a timeless morality that transcends fashion, the generations, and seems even to exceed battlefield fame. This central theme of personal worth is represented by Helena. Finally, the King is roused by the fervor of his eulogy; he wishes himself both dead and well, protesting momentarily that were "The physician at your father's" alive, he "would try him yet" (70, 73). Still, because he is resigned to "nature," or age, "and sickness" (74) and because he admires personal deeds of valor, Helena will have to win this first man with her own abilities, despite her father's reputation. In directing the focus of the play toward Helena, Shakespeare predisposes the King toward her virtue and her healing capacities well before Lafew thinks of introducing her to the ailing monarch.

Another important preparation for Helena's appearance at Court exists in the Countess' approval of the Clown's marriage to Isbel. Both he and Helena are "poor," in need of "good will," and "driven on by the flesh" (I. iii. 16,18,29). The Clown's song about Helen of Troy and his remarks about the "lottery" of marriage (88) further suggest the rigors to confront Helena. Her love, we recall, has been revealed to us in Shakespeare's depiction of its bittersweet tears. The heartache of the unrequited, even unexpressed love, places Helena in the Renaissance tradition of the appealing lover, expressing his complaint. And Shakespeare has manifestly set it in contrast to the vulgar superficiality of Parolles' remarks on virginity and marriage. That within the conventions of the comedies the Steward should have seen or overheard her expression of love is no surprise. The Countess' motherly recognition of it is also credible. There are no grounds for stripping all obvious dignity from these characters with the cynical suspicion of collusion between the Steward and Helena in an effort to dupe a foolishly sentimental Countess.[15] Plainly, Helena's purpose is encouraged by the Countess. She warns Helena of disbelief at Court, but promises support for her "venture" (247) there. What Shakespeare *stresses* in this scene, then, is not his heroine's intellectual or moral superiority and certainly not cunning

and deceit, but the spontaneity and force of "love's strong passion" (133), which inspires a natural but often premature confidence.

While Helena is planning to win a husband, Bertram is ironically being well primed for those "brave wars!" (II. i. 25). Yet the King forbids Bertram his wish to join the courtiers in Italy. In restraining Bertram, the King singles him out, contributing unwittingly to his subsequent rebellion. Angry and embarrassed, Bertram is taunted, not just by Parolles, but by the noble French Lords, who say here that "There's honor in the Theft" (33) of stealing away to fight. Nevertheless, Bertram decides dutifully to "stay" and attend "the King" (49), and Parolles does no more than innocuously prompt him to "take a more dilated farewell" (57) from the departing soldiers. Then, stripped of choice in marriage, Bertram is saddled with bewildering suddenness and shame. The prospect of the Italian war thus becomes urgently appealing. Shakespeare will qualify Bertram's rationale of honour, but the constant purpose in his life so far has been independence. He must attain freedom before he can relinquish himself. If this rash youth errs in pursuing the sword and the drum, the blame for his mistakes must be borne in part by both the King and Helena, who try to deny him what appears to be a necessary stage of masculine decision and development.

As human weakness governs both the conflict between Bertram and the King, so it prevails in the meeting at Court between Helena and the King. At first self-sufficiently regal, unwilling "to prostitute" himself and his crown to an unknown maid, the King ironically relies on those "most learned doctors" (116) who have abandoned him. Helena is humble yet proud in the honesty of her promise, initially unwilling to compromise herself or her father's knowledge by stopping to argue its effectiveness and her motives. But she readily gives up this reserve and, pleading biblical and divine precedents in which miraculous cures have come from "simple sources" (140), she appeals at last to the Deity. The King responds in kind, saying that he thinks "some blessed spirit speaks" (175). Still he is skeptical. His hopes half raised, he asks shrewdly how soon he will be well (159-60) and takes the politic precaution of requiring Helena's death in return for his, should he die. Once he is himself persuaded to hazard her "skill infinite, or monstrous" desperation (184), he is ready to listen and agree to her reward. She wants a man, "thy vassal, who I know / Is free for me to ask, thee to bestow" (199-200). The shaking of hands upon this quite earthly bargain, together with the King's reiterated promise to deliver the husband whom Helena will command, undercuts, with sharp comic irony, religious faith with

qualified mutual trust. Since readers of *All's Well* have sometimes been perplexed by Helena's use of the bed trick, her youthful expedience in this scene must be clearly confronted. By the end of the play, therefore, she is neither too genuinely virtuous nor too unnaturally prim to be suited to Bertram.

The actual frank election by Helena of that promised gift of a husband, however, is at once selfish and selfless. Supported by the King and Lafew, Helena proceeds with wit, with a growing confidence in the face of uncertainty, and with modesty accompanied by a touch of coquetry. Had she been warmly received, her behavior might have contributed to general ease and a becoming sense of self-respect. But the "youthful parcel of noble bachelors" (II. iii. 52-53) is tense with reserve. "Be not afraid that I your hand should take" (89), she reassures an evidently worried third Lord. Because she is quick, critical, and generous with good wishes, she sounds self-defensive. She is understandably apprehensive as she approaches Bertram. Moreover, Lafew's observation that the Lords "are boys of ice / They'll none have her" (93-94), evinces a general reluctance that strengthens Bertram's position. It also underlines Helena's courage and further defines her zestful venturesomeness.

What Shakespeare has devised is a moment of warmth, a confrontation spiced with anger. Both Helena and the King use the means available to them as they pursue vital love and royal prerogative. In their own way they behave with an excess that arouses insistence in Bertram. Helena's attempt to give up her reward, however, to be "glad" the King is "restor'd" and to "Let the rest go" (147-48) is no mere pretense. The occasion cannot be trivialized by comparing it with a children's birthday party.[16] It at once separates Helena from the men, and it shows an intelligent awareness in her of the problem that her plan has caused. Furthermore, Shakespeare is introducing the comic ordeal, that necessary trial which brings two people together and, because of shared difficulties, helps keep them together. Helena's eagerness and stratagem are the source of the ultimately comic expenditure of energy, in her salubrious contriving and Bertram's deceitful conniving in the second half of the play.

If Helena has been too persistent in her reach for Bertram, she yields when he is repulsed by her. On the other hand, the now healthy King rages regally beyond her influence. Because the single-minded Bertram cannot accept personal or social worth established by what appears to be verbal fiat alone, he tells his sovereign that he "cannot love" Helena "nor will strive to do't" (II. iii. 145). Bertram has heard the word "honor" (156) mentioned repeatedly, but when

he is threatened with "revenge and hate / . . . in the name of justice, / Without all terms of pity" (164-66), he experiences tyranny. Having precipitated a painful kind of male rivalry, Helena finds that her fervor bears but cold comport. At this juncture, Helena's project has not simply affected the King's regeneration. It has also stung Bertram. The potentially destructive release of a ruler's might is both amusing and serious. Helena has made a mistake, but the situation is not irretrievable.

At this point in the play, there is a deepening of thematic emphasis on the movement from the "lying trophy" (139) of the word to the forthcoming trials of the deed.[17] It is consistent with the developing and delicate concern with maturity in both Bertram and Helena. In the first half of the play Helena's instinct not to tell the Countess of her feelings is demonstrated by the modesty in her initial solitude; in her manner of confessing her love to the Countess; in her embarrassment at Court, despite her determination; and in her submissiveness after the wedding. Her action is, of course, externally explained by the social distinction between her and Bertram. Personally, Helena keenly experiences Bertram's harsh repudiation of her, denying her even that longed-for parting kiss. Thus she turns, in the second half of the play, from public claims to private endeavor. She has experienced her own revelation and will profit from it. While Helena acutely feels her plight, she evidently also sees that she must proceed considerately to establish a relationship with Bertram. And since Bertram has learned that stealth will free him from undesirable obligations to his King and wife, Helena will need to move cautiously to retrieve a husband who never wanted her. Clearly Shakespeare employs Helena to stress, not enforced marriage or the patience of a Griselda, but persuasion.[18]

When Helena thinks, rightly or wrongly, that in seeking to preserve Bertram's nobility she may cause his death (III. ii. 112-16), her future seems dark. Yet the Clown's satire on the Court is again reassuring and dramatically supportive. His remarks on the falsity of appearances among the courtiers are consistent with the arrangements of the French Lords, who by exposing Parolles, attempt to teach Bertram. As Joseph C. Price notes, "the exposure of the false soldier anticipates the exposure of the false lover."[19] The immediate failure of Bertram to learn this lesson with his comrades, however, further shifts the interest towards the private efforts of Helena. She will deftly conclude Bertram's education. The significance of the play's action as wife and husband separate includes the alliance between Parolles' empty words and gestures and Bertram's lies and

readiness to sell his "manor for a song" (9). Against this folly Shakespeare pits the misprized virtues of service and love in Helena. These values promise more than simple unmasking; they anticipate mature growth.

Because Helena is unlike Shakespeare's socially secure heroines, who, from the outset, seem to know their men and are rarely shown mistaken in their knowledge, she must labor in novel and apparently unseemly ways for his love. She must undertake a long journey, and she must persuade others to help her attain her love in quietly passive though finally moral ways. Although both the Countess and Helena lament Bertram's flight, their distress is soon replaced by hope and action. After Helena, too, steals away, the Countess concludes that Bertram "cannot thrive" (III. iv. 26) without her. To facilitate Bertram's return, Helena first appears to retreat into a life of religious seclusion. That she does in fact seek Bertram in disguise is basically consistent with her previous actions and the intensity of her love. Religion and its piety are unimportant.[20] Following Bertram's wedding-day harshness, Helena is both stunned and anguished by the "dreadful sentence" (III. ii. 61) of his letter, which conveys his apparently absolute renunciation. As she did when speaking to Parolles in the opening scene, however, Helena withdraws, conversing mostly with herself. In her own self-incriminating letter to the Countess she acts to conciliate Bertram. At the same time she benefits from widespread sympathy in "pitiful" (127) report that inclines the women of Florence toward her. Through parallels with the first half of the play, Shakespeare invites us to believe that a heroine who followed her beloved to "the sportive court," where he was "shot at with fair eyes" (106-07), will not hesitate to follow her husband to the wars, where, shot at with bullets, she will find the risks are greater. Helena sees that she has helped to "chase" (103) him away, and she determines to create the conditions for his return.

After marriage, Helena complies to a husband whose pride has been injured. But she soon responds with the comic subtlety that characterizes many of Shakespeare's women. Considering how noisy Parolles is, how willful Bertram is, and how offended the Widow, Diana, and her neighbor are by his advances, the coincidence of Helena's early meeting with them seems slight. Because he is a war hero, Bertram's affairs are widely known and discussed. What is significant is Helena's second application or another remedy that is again often ironically ascribed "to heaven" (I. i. 217). In France Helena found ready understanding of her virtue in the Countess and Lafew. Here she must elicit sympathy in the young Diana and her

mother, persuading them continually of the benefits and righteousness of her efforts. Thus, even after Helena has revealed her secret identity in Florence, she bargains with the Widow, as she did with the King about his cure. Before the Widow yields, Helena convinces her that she is "great in fortune" (III. vii. 13) and that her "purpose" is "lawful" (29-30). She does, in fact, very largely "buy" the widow's "friendly help" with a "purse of gold." Indeed, she stipulates that after she recovers her husband, she will add an additional "three thousand crowns" (15, 14, 35) to Diana's dowry. To ascribe pejorative meanings to these words and actions is a mistake. The Widow is not greedy, nor is Helena corrupting. Her morality is carefully established in the text. An overemphasis on money alone would unfairly detract from her struggle.

More significant than Helena's purchase is her treatment of the virtues of complex morality in love. Along with the Countess, Helena seems to agree that some "rude boys" (III. ii. 82), perhaps notably the handsome, gallant, and aristocratic ones, must often be actively encouraged to love their wives honestly and to accept willingly the duties of the gentlemanly stations they were born to. Much of the play's humor stems from the implications of this idea of male immaturity and from the what-every-woman-knows theme. Helena does not undertake the saving of Bertram to express feminine dominance, as Parolles is spared "for the love of laughter" (III. vi. 34). She cautiously and apologetically justifies the "wicked meaning" and "sinful fact" (III. vii. 45, 47) of apparent prostitution by directing Bertram's lust to realize the "great prerogative and rite of love" (II. iv. 41), sanctioned by marriage. Actually, the so-called bed trick, or this "deceit so lawful" (III. vii. 38), further emphasizes the crucial quality of Helena's sexuality, as well as her courage.[21] As she previously offered her life for the King's, so she now ventures the reputations of her close companions, the Widow and her daughter. Where another's love cannot be ignored, Shakespeare demonstrates the power of that love.

In further correspondence with the early parts of the play, Diana is depicted engaging Bertram, and Helena is shown with the Widow and her daughter after the bed trick. Both scenes echo the King's substantial praise of Helena's virtues, addressed in II, iii to the rebellious Bertram. There the King concludes, "Virtue and she / Is her own dower" (II. iii. 143-44). Now Diana, the virgin, argues with Bertram the "precepts worthy of note" (III. v. 100-101) that Helena has bestowed upon her. Having sworn "many oaths" without uttering that "plain single vow that is vow'd true" (IV. ii. 21-22), Bertram cannot yet see that a woman's "honor" may be equal to her heritage.

Following Helena's instructions (III. vii. 30-34), Diana says, with mocking seriousness, "chastity's the jewel of our house, / Bequeathed down from many ancestors, / Which were the greatest obliquy i' the world / In me to lose" (IV. ii. 46-49). But Bertram will not recognize that Diana's words break the social barriers that have helped to frustrate Helena's love. Yet in his passion, that most transcendent force of all, Bertram ironically consents to give his ring for sexual pleasure. At least momentarily he accepts the equalizing powers of love and virtue represented by Helena. They neutralize both rank and the niceties of choice.

The results of the midnight encounter mark another stage in the development of Helena's maturity. In contrast with Bertram's lust and deceit, Helena's reaction emphasizes the moral power of love to surpass social distinctions. There is little doubt that Helena would have enjoyed the blandishments, lit by "the quick fire of youth" (IV. ii. 5) that Bertram addressed to Diana. In a mood of awe and moral awareness after their union, she marvels at the "sweet use" men "make of what they hate" (IV. iv. 22). The wife has of course enjoyed the passion of a husband who has been tricked, but who during their stay together seems paradoxically to have tricked himself. Yet beyond gratification there is in Helena's words the predominant sweetness of binding intimacy and of love. As the last act will confirm, she both speaks and behaves as if she now knows what she has always felt, that in time she can elicit a return of her affection from Bertram. Of less importance here and throughout than personal confidence and worth is the exchange of rings, which will signify publicly the consummation of the marriage. Contrasted with the talk of Bertram's nobility and lineage, love's sweetness diminishes the importance of ceremony and rank in society.

Bertram, on the other hand, has seen neither Helena nor Diana as individuals, but merely as women, the one repulsive because he "was compell'd to her," the other attractive because he believes he is compelling her by "love's own sweet constraint" (IV. ii. 15-16). In the context that Shakespeare creates and Helena arranges, the psychology of this trick of substitution is wonderfully plausible. A proud and uninitiated man may believably seek to flesh "his will in the spoil" of the "honor" of a "young gentlewoman . . . of a most chaste renown" (IV. iii. 14-17). The offense is very much mitigated by Bertram's understandable rebelliousness, by his desire, by his willingness in actuality to pay "before" with his ring (230), by Helena's use of "sweet" partly to describe their meeting, and by his enjoyment not of Diana but of his wife. And although his reputation

with Parolles for evading payment "when he does owe it" is justified when he abandons Diana, Bertram is completely unlike the treacherous and icy Angelo.[22] "Anatomis'd," he might "take a measure of his own judgments" (32-33) and pay his "after debts" (226), as the French Lords and, implicitly, Helena hope.

The last scene in *All's Well* is a brilliant conclusion to the play. By admitting that he is the cause of his own misfortunes and by asking Lafew to assist him to some favor, Parolles anticipates the opportunity for pardon and repentance that Helena arranges for Bertram. Specifically, the climactic last scene contrasts with the early reward scene in which Helena says, "This is the man" (II. iii. 104). Although not centrally present on stage, she is the prime mover behind its action and meaning. On the level of plot Bertram's dishonor in Italy is steadily laid bare, as he expresses his dishonesty and anger at Diana in a series of comic reversals and apparent contradictions. The confusion is resolved by Helena's very appearance. The disorder begins with Bertram's giving to Lafew the ring that the King gave to Helena after she cured him. The new match between Bertram and Maudlin, Lafew's daughter, grows out of elegiac appreciation for the supposedly dead Helena. Despite his being "mad in folly" and lacking "the sense to know / Her estimation home" (V. iii. 3-4), Bertram is forgiven. He himself must profess that since losing Helena he has come to love her "whom all men praised" (V. ii. 53). He must accept the deserved reproach of loving afterwards what one hated and perhaps destroyed before. Then the King provides Lafew's daughter as a reconciling replacement for Helena. Because there is no evidence to support it, Bertram's claim to have always preferred Maudlin is simply propitiating.

On the verge of escaping the consequences of deserting his wife and defiling Diana, Bertram is suddenly revealed as a scoundrel. He is suspected of having murdered Helena and taken from her the ring that symbolizes the King's authority. Bertram's unwitting and futile denials accentuate his attempts to keep back her reward. His subsequent excuses, half-truths, and outright lies suggest that Bertram is worse than an "unbak'd and doughy youth" (IV. v. 3). His "Natural rebellion . . . , too strong for reason's force, / O'erbears it, and burns on" (V. iii. 6-8). Bertram remains to a degree immature in a way that those who wish to vindicate him, ironically, do not fully understand. For if he is really to progress there can be no good excuses for his mistakes, as the King indicates there may be. Yet outright confession risks not only humiliation but also irretrievable guilt, both of which are finally unjustified, as Helena knows.

But is justice done? Does Bertram deserve forgiveness? Is he worthy of his wife? Why does Helena still want him after he slanders Diana? And, if she does, will he change? Of all these apparently problematic questions only the last one seems relevant, because of Helena's love. Bertram merely *says* in the last lines of the play, perhaps under the pressure of the King and everyone else, that he will be faithful. We may not trust Bertram, then, since he has yet to prove himself. Nevertheless, Helena behaves convincingly as if all will end well. The apparent ambiguity at the end of this play is overcome by Helena's emphatic self-assurance. After he begs pardon, Helena asks Bertram rhetorically, "Will you be mine now you are double won?" (V. iii. 314). We cannot doubt her ability to "make him know clearly," so that his "if" is hardly conditional. Thus her mention of "deadly divorce" (318) is consistent comic irony. The amazed King expresses cautious hope, but we can be almost certain of Helena's happiness, despite the note of realistic qualification on which the play ends. Why? In following her ordeal we have learned to trust Helena and we respect the careful discretion with which she treats Bertram here. His faults are laid bare for all to see, but Helena knows them already and desires him nonetheless. Her attitude does not fully redeem him, but it assumes that he is redeemable.

Of Parolles the first French Lord *says* to Bertram, "when you find him out," when "his disguise and he are parted," you have him ever after (III. vi. 93, 104). The truth of this observation lies in Parolles' shamelessness. He will not change, but live on, thriving on what he already is. Bertram, on the other hand, has previously shown that he is possessed of some sense of honor, a pride which accounts for the manner in which Diana has been instructed by Helena to confront him. As Helena's agent or second self in this last scene, Diana systematically strips from Bertram his arrogance and deviousness. But she stops short of an indictment that might permanently dishonor or estrange him from Helena. Increasingly, Diana introduces an air of puzzling mystification, which Helena has planned with extraordinary precision. Because of Helena's careful employment of Diana, Bertram's intentions have not been, in the terms of the play, his actual *deeds*.

The result of Diana's inconsistency in her prosecution of Bertram is twofold. On the surface it jeopardizes even her life, so that although virtuous in thought and act, she stands equal with Bertram, unjustly threatened. The same leveling is apparent in Bertram's rise and decline and the frustrated hopes of the King, Lafew, and the Countess. All share a disappointment or disparagement in this scene before the justice and mercy that they merit are administered. Even

Parolles, who is an equivocal, yet revealing witness, stands briefly before the monarch himself. Dramatically, Diana's apparent reversal stresses tolerance of human fallibility. The effect of this grouping and the reminder of common imperfection is to include rather than to exclude Bertram, to lighten the burden of suspicion and accusation that weighs on him. Thus the ups and downs, the confusion and frustration, are knotted by Diana's almost inconsequential riddle. That is Helena's cue.

As virtual author of events in this scene, Helena has apparently believed that Bertram's early humiliation and flight, his valor in war, his gratified lust, his rejection of Parolles, and his confrontation with Diana constitute a checkered progress that implies a basis for moral development. When she herself appears, the King has been chief examiner; his attempt to prosecute and judge has been futile. Helena does not enter to work a miracle; she is tactfully self-pitying and hence accusatory; flattering, explanatory, and gently plaintive; emphatically assertive and loving. In all, Helena is human but supremely and constructively diplomatic. She does not blame Bertram or patronize him. By replying that she is wife in "name" only (V. iii. 308), however, she alludes to the King's previous adjuration, "Thy love's to me religious" (II. iii. 183), as she subtly sounds the depth of loyalty in a man who is hero, husband, and father-to-be.

By describing his unintentional sexual fulfillment of their vows as "wondrous kind" (V. iii. 310), Helena reminds us of the major conflict in the play that she is resolving, the contest of wills. To realize her own passion she has had to learn about and deal with the determined independence and indulgence of his male sexuality. Her choice is clear, and she is devoted. But Bertram has needed time, which as Helena has said, is reviving. She has met Bertram's need to conquer and, paradoxically, honorably to be subdued. And she never suggests that what she has won at last will not have to be won again in the future. His desire to "know . . . clearly" (315) the truth of those words, "wondrous kind," should be taken as a wish to renew an embrace that will bring him to love her. Helena may not yet have wholly reinstated Bertram, but he seems ready to be influenced by her. And she is able.

In addition to the proof of love in the consecration of their marriage, Helena provides proof of her persistence, which confirms her worth. Her request, "Will you be mine . . ." (314), does not so much ask that Bertram accept her, as it gracefully and poignantly makes her irresistible. It evokes his verbal reciprocation of her love. Still, she does not pin her husband to a promise; rather she promises him wit-

tily and reassuringly that she has been faithful. Her last line, a compassionate reunion with his mother, shifts the focus from the pair to his responsibility in the family. As it moves from one kind of obligation to another, it effectively satisfies the Countess' great desire to see her son well married and a vigorous succession assured to preserve a "well-derived nature" (III. ii. 88). Helena has progressed from eager suitor to vital wife.

With the apparent winning of her husband, Helena achieves a larger social purpose as well. As a physician's daughter, her successful treatment of no less than the King suggests that she is a healer who might bring health on a grand scale, perhaps to the realm at large. But Helena's accomplishments are not epical or mythical. The scope of her influence lies within the established hierarchy of society. Now pregnant, Helena not only preserves and strengthens that order as it is exemplified in the House of Rossillion but also brings about the initial command of the King, contributing a silent support to his authority and thus to the coherence of the country. This civilizing effect is stressed by the return of the runaway Bertram to his "home" and heritage (III. ii. 120), as well as by the implicit end to his destructive betrayal of himself (V. iii. 14-15).

To stress Helena's role in solidifying society, Shakespeare concludes *All's Well* with the King's promise to Diana: "Choose thou thy husband, and I'll pay thy dower" (V. iii. 328). Since Diana's experiences with Helena at one time left her saying skeptically that she would "live and die a maid" (IV. ii. 74), her final inclusion in an active social existence, like that of Parolles, further points up how Helena serves the King. He is pleased to say: "all is whole" (V. iii. 37). At the same time Helena's attainments are critical of rigid and snobbish social stratification. Perhaps most of all Helena establishes the morality of her early belief that internal merit requires recognition and confirmation. When social equality is a barrier, then confidence in word and controlled energy in deed must prevail. And no one equals Helena in the actual, modest performance of deeds that demonstrate an eminent endurance, a generous tact, and a persistent love.

Finally, Helena affirms the comic values of sympathetic tolerance, patient resilience, and gracious humility together with the comic method. Her behavior shows that a quiet perseverance and a rigorous maturing experience may correct impetuosity and restore harmony. By looking farther into the future, she expresses the remarkable confidence of the comic heroine. If she is expedient, she is benevolently so, having as her end a larger and embracingly virtuous purpose. She has realistically dressed "virtue's steely bones" (I.

i. 103), not in the frippery of a Parolles, but in the delicate drapery and flesh of a warm woman who combines the better qualities of both Diana and Juno. She reconciles ideals with the real in a manner that assumes human faults yet strives to overbalance them with reliability and virtue. She knows, as the first French Lord says:

> The web of our life is of mingled yarn, good
> and ill together: our virtues would be proud, if
> our faults whip them not, and our crimes would
> despair, if they were not cherish'd by our virtues
> (IV. iii. 71-74).

But her approach to life's complexity is without this man's head-wagging resignation. Helena is tenacious, and she possesses a qualified optimism. She has subtly turned Bertram's "never" (II. iii. 110) to "ever, ever" (V. iii. 316). Her final reference to his letter quietly asks that he now keep his promise. There is also an underlying forgiveness in her references to his kindness and in her asking him to "be mine now you are double won?" (314). If in the past Helena tried to compel his love, she now indirectly asks for his consent. Helena extends and varies Shakespeare's achievement in creating the comic heroine and in broadening his comic pattern here in *All's Well* to allow for a more realistic treatment of humanity. She is earthy and practical in a way that resembles but exceeds those qualities in Rosalind. She contrives, but within definite moral limits, to ensure that the end is the "crown" (IV. iv. 35). Finally, then, Helena's love evokes the dramatically appropriate couplet with which the King closes the play. In substance it describes a major Shakespearean comic pattern:

> All yet seems well, and if it end so meet
> The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet.
> (V. iii. 333-34)

The couplet echoes the credo of "The course of true love never did run smooth" (*MND*, I. i. 134) and "Sweet are the uses of adversity" (*AYL*, II. i. 12).

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Notes

[1]The issue of realism in *All's Well That Ends Well* and its combination with the romantic, the fantastic, and the symbolic has been widely argued and is the main reason many critics terms the work a "problem play." E. K. Chambers, *"All's Well That Ends Well,"* in *Discussions of Shakespeare's Problem Comedies,* ed. Robert Ornstein (1925; rpt. Boston: D. C. Heath, 1961), regrets Shakespeare's "unsmiling mood," p. 41. Peter Ure, *Shakespeare: The Problem Plays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), is typical of those who believe that Shakespeare fails "to bring the two worlds of realism and romance together," p. 18. More recent critics, like Michael Shapiro, "'The Web of Our Life': Human Frailty and Mutual Redemption in *All's Well That Ends Well," JEGP,* 71 (1972), 514-26, try to resolve the supposed duality in the play by seeing it as a transitional piece between a "relatively realistic mode to the predominantly symbolic mode of the final romances," p. 514. Other critics, with whom I tend to agree, conclude that, whatever the setting and circumstances and whatever the references to folktale and cure, the play is largely realistic, so that other surface elements serve as an ironically humorous vantage point from which to view Helena's role more clearly. See, for example, W. W. Lawrence, *Shakespeare's Problem Plays* (1931; rpt. Baltimore, Md.: Penguin, 1969), pp. 62ff., and Robert Grams Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 116. Similarly, Josephine Waters Bennett, "New Techniques of Comedy in *All's Well That Ends Well," Shakespeare Quarterly,* 18 (1967), 337-62, is general but persuasive on Helena's human and spiritual resources, cf. esp. pp. 338, 341.

[2]Hazelton Spencer, *"All's Well That Ends Well," Discussions of Shakespeare's Problem Comedies,* Ed. Robert Ornstein (1940; rpt. Boston: D. C. Heath, 1961), p. 43.

[3]E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's Problem Plays* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1968), p. 113.

[4]Bertrand Evans, *Shakespeare's Comedies* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. 166; Richard A. Levin, *"All's Well That Ends Well* and 'All Seems Well'," *Shakespeare Studies,* 13 (1980), p. 133.

[5]Marilyn L. Williamson, *The Patriarchy of Shakespeare's Comedies* (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1986), pp. 55-56.

[6]Carol Thomas Neely, *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare's Plays* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985), p. 64.

[7]Larry S. Champion, *Evolution of Shakespeare's Comedy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), p. 128.

[8]All textual references are to *The Riverside Shakespeare,* ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

[9]R. G. Hunter, pp. 106-07, 116; R. L. Smallwood, "The Design of *All's Well That Ends Well," Shakespeare Survey,* 25 (1972), pp. 46-47.

[10]Neely, pp 63-64.

[11]M. C. Bradbrook in "Virtue Is the True Nobility: A Study of the Structure of *All's Well That Ends Well," RES,* 11 (1950), 289-330 wrongly places Helena and Parolles on equal levels, as "good and evil angels" on either side of Bertram, p. 31. G. K. Hunter, "Introduction," *All's Well That Ends Well,* 3rd. ed. Arden, (London: Methuen, 1959), concurs, p. xxxiii. But as Roger Warren, "Why Does It End Well: Helena, Bertram and the *Sonnets," Shakespeare Survey,* 22 (1969), 79-92, notes, "The play cannot adequately be called a morality or a debate, because the extraordinarily vivid characterization of both Helena and Bertram forces us to share in their fortunes," p. 79. Moreover, both Helena and Parolles are possessed of both good and bad qualities.

[12]Albert Howard Carter, "In Defense of Bertram," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 8 (1956) 21-31; Shapiro, cf. esp., pp. 52ff.

[13]Richard P. Wheeler, "Marriage and Manhood in *All's Well That Ends Well*," *Buckness Review*, 21 (1973),103-24.

[14]Bennett, pp. 341-45.

[15]Levin, p. 133.

[16]R. G. Hunter, p. 116.

[17]Edward Dowden, "The Role of Helena," *Discussions of Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*, ed. Robert Ornstein (1881; rpt. Boston: D. C. Heath, 1961), well perceives Helena's role in the second half of the play when he writes: "The energy, the leap-up, the direct advance of the will of Helena, her prompt unerroneous tendency towards the right and efficient 'deed' is what interested the playwright." "She does not display herself through her words; she does not, except on the rarest occasion, allow her feelings to expand and deploy themselves; her entire force of character is concentrated in what she does. And therefore we see her quite as much indirectly, through the effect which she has produced upon other persons of the drama, as through self-confession or immediate presentation of her character," p. 35. Contrast this view with Tillyard's unfortunate failure to see that we do learn more about Helena after she has put on her pilgrim's habit, a view which leads partly to his conclusion that Shakespeare never taxed his imaginative powers in the second half of the play, pp. 102, 111. Among more recent critics who stress the importance of Helena's role in the last half of the play and the supporting parallels with the first half is Frances M. Pearce, "In Quest of Unity: A Study of Failure and Redemption in *All's Well That Ends Well*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 25 (1974), 71-88, who writes, "Her career illustrates the positive role of will in achieving the 'destined' happiness, the need for faith and for committed action. . . . Her courage in treading the difficult path of hazardous humiliation is as apparent in the 'bed trick' as in her rash venture to cure the King," p. 86.

[18]Williamson, pp. 58, 72.

[19]Joseph G. Price, *All's Well: The Unfortunate Comedy* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1968), p. 163.

[20]Price, p. 83; G. K. Hunter, p. xxxiii; G. Wilson Knight, *The Sovereign Flower* (London: Methuen, 1958), pp. 131, 156; and Jay L. Halio, *"All's Well That Ends Well," Shakespeare Quarterly*, 15 (1964), 33-43, esp. pp. 36, 42.

[21]Critical views of the bed trick vary, depending on whether a commentator's sympathy lies with Helena or with Bertram, or on whether he wishes to do justice to the "complexity" of this problem comedy. G. K. Hunter cites E. K. Chambers' opinion, which he says is typical of early critics, that the trick is mean. Evans, who is also severely critical of Helena, writes that it exemplifies her single-minded, cunning, and secretive ways, p. 150. Like Tillyard, G. K. Hunter himself thinks that the second half of the play is seriously flawed, but observes that the bed trick is a measure of the spiritual strengths to which instinct of sex has reduced the noblest of women, p. xlix. Tillyard finds it ignoble but factual, p. 117. Recent commentators like R. G. Hunter observe the bed trick is a means of deceiving Bertram into performing his necessary role in the physical regeneration of the dying world of Rossillion (p. 124) and that, as Bennett observes, it is an appropriate way of dealing with Bertram's "adolescent sexuality," p. 351.

[21]Bennett, p. 350.

Getting Comfortable with a Loser: Falstaff

by Saralee G. Fine

Falstaff is admirable because he is a loser. Falstaff is a fallen knight in a society where the values of knighthood have been so debased that being a knight is no longer an honorable profession. By the late sixteenth century, the ethic of knighthood had considerably diminished. Being a knight was merely a noble distinction, an honorific, a societal ornament. But Falstaff is a gentleman of the old school who honors the stable values of feudal society and regrets their decay. Perhaps only a misty anachronism, the "old lad of the castle" (I. ii. 43)[1] is a rebel knight because the basic chivalric code has been demeaned.

Falstaff reflects upon knighthood polluted by passionate personal desires at the highest social levels. Above all, a knight must be able to respect those above him in the knightly hierarchy and be guided by their proper example. What if a powerful senior knight used his warrior powers not to administer God's justice, not to protect the rights of his liege-lord, but to further his lust for personal power? If he used his might to slay his king and have himself appointed king, would the whole hierarchy of knighthood, and indeed the whole fabric of society, beneath him not be corrupted by his example? Such was the case in England which Shakespeare recorded in *Henry IV, Part 1* when Henry Bolingbroke, crowned Henry IV, had murdered King Richard II.

Murdered alongside Richard is the theory of a legitimate king, that liege-lord to whom barons and knights inherently owed duty. Accordingly, knightly values also collapsed. Having usurped the crown, Henry is now forced to uphold that usurpation. Henry's first words show the new king already threatened by insurrection:

> So shaken as we are, so wan with care,
> Find we a time for frighted peace to pant
> And breathe short-winded accents of new broils
> To be commenced in stronds afar remote.
>
> (I. i. 1-4)

As a by-product of Henry's rebellion against Richard, the usual bonds uniting just ruler and loyal baron-knights have been severed, and a spirit of bloody rebellion prevails. Schism replaces unity as the nobles' aggressive appetites grow gluttonous. Feuding lords feast

on the intrigue of plot-counterplot, fatten on revenge, and vomit up warfare. The common man turns soldier and feeds the corpus of rebellion with his life's blood. Society is ravened at all levels. This is "the world of outrage,"[2] the absurdist world of chaos come again that, in *Troilus and Cressida,* Ulysses characterizes as:

> . . . an universal wolf
> So doubly seconded with will and power
> Must make perforce an universal prey
> And last eat up himself.
>
> (I. iii. 121-24)

A reasonable explanation of why Falstaff renounced knighthood can be shown through examining the Latin definitions of *otium* and *negotium. Otium* refers to a state of leisure. *Negotium* is the practice of business, and the "neg" prefix suggests that doing business is an unnatural, negative state of being.[3] Falstaff wisely eschews the negative knightly business of warfare and opts for a natural and positive state of being which is the leisure of *otium.* While King Henry readies himself for war and claims his "hands are full of business" (III. iii. 179), Falstaff holds in his hands a restoring mugful of *otium* at an ideal spot for refreshment, the Boar's Head Tavern in Eastcheap. The Boar's Head provides a sequestered retreat from a brutal world.

In contrast to the tavern as a place of vice such as would be its characterization in a medieval morality, Shakespeare's Boar's Head finds its counterpart in Chaucer's Tabard Inn in Southwark where such various members of society as the Knight, the poor Parson, and the Wife of Bath could meet in fellowship and equality. Both Shakespeare and Chaucer view the tavern as a beneficial catalyst in uniting diverse representatives of the social order.

In *Henry IV, Part 1,* the tavern is a Shakespearean green world and shares common characteristics with other pastoral settings of Shakespeare. Like the green world in *As You Like It,* the Boar's Head provides a deliberate counterpoint to an unjust society from which withdrawal is preferable to participation. Withdrawal becomes virtuous. The Boar's Head also shares characteristics of the forest green world of *A Midsummer's Night Dream* in that celebrants experience a Mardi Gras release not permissible in the prevailing society. Abandon, excess, and even error are allowable in a spirit of joyous experiment. Rejuvenating festivity is the atmosphere at the Boar's Head, a refuge of celebration in a nation gearing up for war.

Falstaff is a colossal figure dominating the celebration at the Boar's Head. A glorious spread of man, he projects the folk hero

robustness of a Robin Hood and the jolly floridity of a Santa Claus. His infectious spirit fills a fellow outcast, Prince Hal, with a renewed sense of joy. Hal too participates in the festive rites of tavern rejuvenation. Hal and Falstaff share the informal good cheer of renewal:

> *Falstaff.* Marry, then sweet wag, when thou are king . . .
> *Prince.* Thou sayest well and it holds well too . . .
> *Falstaff.* By the Lord, thou say'st true lad—and is not my hostess of the tavern a most sweet wench?
> *Prince.* As the honey of Hybla, —and is not a buff jerkin a most sweet robe of durance?
> *Falstaff.* How now, how now, mad wag. What in thy quips and thy quiddities?
>
> (I. ii. 23-47)

In part, Hal is estranged from his father, King Henry IV, because like Falstaff Hal is currently deficient in the warrior spirit. The king wishes Northumberland's son were his own:

> Yea, there thou mak'st me sad and mak'st me sin
> In envy that my Lord Northumberland
> Should be the father to so blest a son:
> A son who is the theme of honor's tongue,
> Amongst a grove the very straightest plant;
> Who is sweet fortune's minion and her pride;
> Whilst I, by looking on the praise of him,
> See riot and dishonor stain the brow
> Of my young Harry.
>
> (I. i. 77-85)

Henry dubs Hotspur the White Knight of Honor while Hal is stained dishonor. A moment earlier, the king had objectified honor as the taking of noble prisoners of war, "an honorable spoil" (I. i. 74). King Henry demonstrates the defect of honorable value which characterizes his rule.

Henry reveres Harry Percy, a potential rebel who obstinately refuses to turn over to his liege-lord, the king, those prisoners captured at Holmedon. Though annoyed at being cheated of such "gallant prize" (75), King Henry excuses youthful "pride" (91), and wishes that Harry Percy and not Hal were his son. Hal has even been ousted from the privy council. The king has applied a crazed set of standards to both honor and the usual kinship bonds between father and son.

This artificial distance between father and son invites an adoptive relationship between royal orphan and fallen knight:

> *Falstaff.* 'Sblood, I am as melancholy as a gib-cat or a lugged bear.
> *Prince.* Or an old lion, or a lover's lute.
> *Falstaff.* Yea, or the drone of a Lincolnshire bagpipe.
> *Prince.* What sayest thou to a hare, or the melancholy of Moorditch?
>
> (I. ii. 76-81)

Jocular openness and spontaneity exist between Falstaff and Hal. Scholar-father compliments student-son: "thou hast the most unsavory similes and art indeed the most sweet young prince" (82-84). At a time when Hal's relationship with his royal father is increasingly distant, formal, and stiff, Falstaff intercedes as permissive father. He endearingly encourages Hal toward the joyous delights of self-expression and affectionately cuts his son in his own fabric as a "sweet wag" (61).

Hal is already a master of the colorful bawdy idiom inherent to tavern life:

> *Falstaff.* Now, Hal, what time of day is it lad?
> *Hal.* . . .What a devil hast thou to do with the time of day? Unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping houses, and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-colored taffeta, I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time of day.
>
> (1-12)

A natural impertinence of expression is a shared value between Hal and Falstaff. Falstaff teaches Hal the quality of interrelationship in a debased world:

> O, thou hast damnable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint. Thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal—God forgive thee for it! Before I knew thee Hal, I knew nothing; and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked.
>
> (94-99)

Falstaff glorifies debasement. One senses "a rich deep-toned chuckling enjoyment circulates continually through all his being."[4] Falstaff's joyous vigor stands in direct contrast to the wan shaken King.

A spirit of Mardi Gras motivates the Gadshill robbery. It is an escapade from the retreat of the green world, a chance to sound the

muddied waters of reality. Gadshill is organized "that the true prince may (for recreation sake) prove a false thief; for the poor abuses of the time want countenance" (I. ii. 158-160). Gadshill is a parody reflecting the rising evil of disorder in the real world that malfunctions outside the tavern. The Gadshill event points mockingly at pomp and dignity. A packet of misfits, rejects from established society and themselves divided in mock counterplot, are able to disarm and rob from a high level of the social order representatives of the king who carry taxes to him. Thievery is, after all, a small vice, robbing one of possessions but leaving the body whole. Stealing taxes from the king's treasury has the added flair of returning taxes to the people in the spirit of Robin Hood.

What must be taken seriously about Gadshill is the visual image of Falstaff as a fallen knight. Horseless and grotesque on foot, he no longer functions as the patrician Oldcastle, and one feels sorry for the miserably Fallen-staff. We laugh, but pathos is mixed with the comedy, and with Hal we lament: "Were't not for laughing, I should pity him" (II. iii. 110-11). This visual portrait of old Jack as a diminished warrior adds a pathetic depth to his personality. His very vulnerability invites empathy.

Falstaff at Gadshill makes one recall with compassion Don Quixote's battle with the windmills. Both Don Quixote and Falstaff function with courage and dignity in a world that no longer reflects their personal visions. Only seemingly comic, their behavior is heroic, because they dare to confront imponderable obstacles. They behave in a manner that exonerates them while making the world they inhabit seem picayune for men of their stature. Somehow their inevitable failings only intensify one's belief in their natural nobility.

Falstaff is not totally diminished on Gadshill, for he outthinks the tricksters. He suspects the emerging counterplot of Hal and Poins even before the robbery begins and quips, "When a jest is so forward—and afoot too—I hate it" (II. iii. 46-47). His horse but not his humor has vanished. Falstaff is the sole spokesperson during the actual robbery and the last to hobble away in defeat. His ultimate indictment of those he robs, "They hate us youth" (II. ii. 85), is an inversion of fact that tickles. In all, he comes off as an exemplary Trojan, "the which for sport sake are content to do the profession some grace" (II. i. 72-73).

In recounting the adventure at the tavern that night, one senses that Falstaff's expansion of the number of his adversaries to eleven is an impassioned overstatement bred equally from the excitement of the day's activity and the imbibing of good sherry sack.[5] What a won-

derful joke! Like Falstaff, Hal also pleasures himself in the use of numerical overstatement to heighten effect when he says: "I am not yet of Percy's mind, the Hotspur of the North; he that kills me some six or seven dozen Scots at a breakfast, washes his hands, and says to his wife, 'Fie upon this quiet life. I want work'" (102-06). With Falstaff, Hal has learned to speak humorously even of his arch rival. The collective product of the excess of humor works toward an understanding of one's fellow man. Hal's portrait of Falstaff, "gross as a mountain, open, palpable" (II. iv. 225), uplifts villainy. One grows to appreciate Falstaff precisely because he has "more flesh than another man, and therefore more frailty" (III. iii. 171-73). We are charmed by a seer with a gross paunch and a puffy red face.

Occasionally, Falstaff's wit borders on wisdom. Such is the case when Falstaff insists that at Gadshill he has been "a coward on instinct" (II. iv. 275). Only seemingly jocular, this explanations sums up the Falstaffian principle that life is worth saving. For Falstaff, bless him, is cowardly by the best of instincts. "Falstaff is nature preserving itself."[6] He senses when to yield to life. He knows when to stick and when to run. Set against the ensuing civil collapse, his values will stand sound.

The tavern retreat assumes the level of fantasy when Falstaff and Hal act out Hal's impending reconciliation with his father. A magic suspension of comic disbelief exists as Hal and Falstaff try on the role of Henry. Working it out through the therapy of comedic role playing, Hal is led to understand his father's position. Falstaff encourages his own villainization as the tool whereby father and son can be reconciled. A grateful Hal, recognizing Falstaff's claim that "there is virtue in that Falstaff" (II. iv. 429), rewards Falstaff for his guidance with a "charge of foot" (III. iii. 192). Foot soldiers are generally termed infantry from the root word infant or youth. In his relationship to Hal, Falstaff has already demonstrated his stewardship of youth. To reward him with the potential of a battalion of youth to lead is apt on Hal's part.

Falstaff's performance as an anti-warrior is his finest comedic role. There is irony already implied in the ex-knight's returning to battle at all, since the battle ethic is contrary to his own life ethic. There is degradation implied in the knight on foot. Despite these hazards, Falstaff admirably triumphs as a war hero. Ignoring the fit and able who will benefit society, Falstaff chooses as troops only those appropriate for battle, a conglomeration of the ragged, the aged, and the unfit. "Now my whole charge consists of ancients, corporals, lieutenants, gentlemen of companies—slaves as ragged as Lazarus in the

painted cloth where the glutton's dogs licked his sores; . . . the cankers of a calm world and a long peace" (IV. ii. 23-31). Many of them are fresh from prison. The rest look even worse than scarecrows. Falstaff describes them vividly: "A mad fellow met me on the way, and told me I had unloaded all the gibbets and pressed the dead bodies" (36-38). Troops are best when chosen for their expendable qualities. Falstaff realizes his men are ". . . good enough to toss; food for powder, they'll fill a pit as well as better" (66-67). Falstaff understands that the process of warfare is likely to convert manpower into fertilizer.

A basically decent human, he has neither the lust nor the appetite for warfare. Falstaff honestly describes his own relationship to fighting as, "Well, to the latter end of a fray and the beginning of a feast fits a dull fighter and a keen guest" (IV. ii. 80-81). He takes one look at the massive war machine that is Shrewsbury and says, "I would 'twere bedtime Hal and all well" (V. i. 125). He is honest about fear and prays, "God keep lead out of me. I need no more weight than mine own bowels" (V. iii. 34-35). He envisions his own death humorously and jokes: "Hal, if thou sees me down in the battle and bestride me, so! 'Tis a point of friendship" (121-22). He maintains a humorous light tone despite the obvious danger of the impending combat and promises Westmoreland that in battle he will be "vigilant as a cat to steal cream" (IV. ii. 59-60).

Unlike Hotspur's father who will not fight at all and Hal's real father who appears only once fighting and has to be rescued at once by his son, Falstaff leads his troops himself and stands loyally alongside his adopted son. At the end of the fray, he can honorably report, "I have led my rag-of-muffins where they are peppered. There's not three of my hundred and fifty left alive, and they are for the town's end, to beg during life" (V. iii. 36-39). Falstaff has accurately assessed the crippled and disillusioned by-products of war.

The noble characters in *Henry IV, Part 1* are obsessed by elegant notions of honor, and they cloak honor in the glamour of poetry. We have already seen Henry IV describe Hotspur as a "son who is the theme of honor's tongue" (I. ii. 80) in contrast to his own son whose brow is stained with "riot and dishonor" (I. i. 84). Hotspur envisions honor as a battlefield ethic and chants, "Send danger from the east unto the west, / So honor cross it from the north to south, / And let them grapple" (I. iii. 192-

> By heavens, methinks it were an easy leap
> To pluck bright honor from the pale-faced moon,
> Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
> Where fanthom line could never touch the ground,

but he covets honor for himself alone:

> And pluck up drowned honor by the locks,
> So he that doth redeem her thence might wear
> Without corrival all her dignities; . . .
>
> (I. iii. 199-205)

While Hotspur's use of poetry is estimable, his concept of honor is far too limited to serve universally. In moving poetic verse, Hal looks forward to war as a way to redeem his lost honor:

> And in the closing of some glorious day, . . .
> When I will wear a garment all of blood
> And stain my favors in a bloody mask
> Which washed away, shall scour my shame with it.
>
> (III. ii. 133-37)

At Shrewsbury, Hal keeps this promise. He emerges covered in the blood and gore of battle and gives physical credence to his poetic vow. The actual sight of Hal as a man of blood is unnerving. It makes warrior honor seem a dubious distinction.

Unlike the others, Falstaff has no illusions about honor or poetry. He speaks in unvarnished prose and has straightforward ideas about honor. Falstaff talks about the fallibility of honor in realistic terms:

> Can honor set a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honor hath no skill in surgery then. No. What is honor? A word. What is in that word honor? What is that honor? Air.
>
> (V. i. 131-35)

Honor pales on the battlefield. Set against the broken bodies of the dying and dead, it becomes as ephemeral as air. Falstaff creates a non-poetic metaphor of the wraith honor who will not allow itself to be grasped by the living or the dead:

> Who hath it? He that died a Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible then. Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living. No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honor

> is a mere scutcheon—and so ends my catechism.
> (V. i. 136-41)

Honor is the sizzle, not the steak. Seeing the body of Sir Walter Blunt, who has died honorably[7] by being mistaken for a king who sends counterfeits of himself to battle, Falstaff reaffirms the value of life over honor: "I like not such grinning honor as Sir Walter hath. Give me life: Which if I can save, so; if not, honor comes unlooked for, and there's an end" (V. iv. 58-61). Falstaff doesn't want or need honor. He makes us understand that honor is a synonym for grinning death in opposition to his own position which glories in the gift of life. It's as if the first directive for order, "Let there by light," had been set straight again in a disjoined world. Falstaff is the most enlightened warrior of them all.

Falstaff's finest moment as an anti-war hero comes at Shrewsbury when he weds his action with his creeds. When threatened with assault by Douglas, who has already butchered Blunt and attacked the king, Falstaff adopts the posture of a pacifist. He lays his Gargantuan figure down before the onslaught of ultimate physical danger, out-brazens the threat of death with a stare, and rises to celebrate life:

> 'Sblood, 'twas time to counterfeit, or that hot termagant Scot had paid me scot and lot too. Counterfeit? I lie; I am no counterfeit. To die is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man; but to counterfeit dying when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed.
> (V. iv. 112-19)

In the execution of valorous discretion, Falstaff has distinguished himself. He distinguishes himself again by staging an anti-war demonstration. He lifts the body of the dead Percy and pierces his still warm thigh. The senselessness of bloodshed is reinforced as Percy's fresh blood drips onto the blood-soaked, body-laden battlefield of Shrewsbury. We are offended by the blood-bath of war and renewed by the realization of our comradery with Falstaff who knows war is hell.

What Hal says of the living Falstaff rings true: "Thou art not what thou seemst" (V. iv. 135). Falstaff is a valiant survivor, a champion of anti-war action, and a serious commentator for peace in the midst of war. Set against the backdrop of carnage causing the heroes to fall, Falstaff has risen. He is more than a justifiably failed knight in a social order where knightly values are impossible. He is more than

a loyal adviser to deteriorating royalty. He has given fresh dignity to being a common man. Falstaff has surpassed nobility, and it is the Henrys and Hotspurs and Westmorelands, now covered in one another's blood, who are debased at Shrewsbury. We come to realize that war is absurd. The real hero respects the gift of life. He holds true to that which empowers life: the sustaining values of a solid meal and a warm bed, *otium* and peace. This Falstaff who shuns the aggressive profile of a warrior and who reveres the blessing of life is not a comedian. Falstaff has only seemed to play the comic because the world has turned buffoon.[8]

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Notes

[1]All quotations from *Henry IV, Part 1* are from the Signet edition of Maynard Mack (New York: New American Library, 1965).

[2]Maynard Mack, "Introduction" in *The History of Henry IV, Part One* (New York: New American Library, 1965), p. xxiv.

[3]Frank Manley, English 711 R seminar notes (Atlanta, Georgia: Emory University, 20 and 27 September, 1984).

[4]A. C. Bradley, "The Rejection of Falstaff" in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1909), p. 261.

[5]Of Falstaff, Maurice Morgann notes: "Everything which he himself says, or is said of him, is so phantastically discoloured by humour, or folly, or jest, that we must for the most part look to the spirit rather than the letter of what is uttered, and rely at last only on a combination of the whole." "An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff" (1777) in *Shakespearean Criticism*, Daniel A. Fineman, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 156. My interpretation attempts this goal. Bradley explains in detail how Falstaff's numerical eleven evolves.

[6]Douglas J. Stewart, "Falstaff the Centaur," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 28 (1977), p. 18.

[7]Sarcasm is here implied. A husky sense of self-identification was endemic to knighthood. A knight's heraldic emblem was proudly emblazoned on either shield or breastplate. Therefore, to die in disguise on the field of battle is less than honorable.

[8]I cite my indebtedness to the precedent already set by scholars on the admirable character of Falstaff, especially to Morgann, Charlton, Bradley, and, more recently, Stewart. In that spirit, I have sidestepped the usually received view of Hotspur as the rash extreme and Falstaff as the cowardly extreme and have written instead an essay in praise of Falstaff.

Political and Poetic Revisionism In *Julius Caesar*

by Barbara J. Baines

A dramatization of the art of rhetoric, *Julius Caesar* depicts the fashioning of political reality through speech.[1] Indeed, no other work of the Renaissance demonstrates more forcefully the power of words to shape the course of history.[2] The poet's power to fashion through words a world on the stage serves here as a paradigm for the politician's power to shape the course of political events. Thus, as John Velz, Thomas VanLaan and more recently Jonathan Goldberg have shown, the major characters conceive of themselves and their world in theatrical terms.[3] In fact, the characters literalize the metaphor of the politician as playwright/player to such an extent that political performance in the Roman world of Caesar mirrors the stage performance that represents this world: "How many ages hence / Shall this our lofty scene be acted over / In states unborn and accents yet unknown!" (III. i. 111-13).[4] A *locus classicus* of the *theatrum mundi* trope, these lines reflect the politician's appropriation of the poet's powers, indeed of his identity. But this appropriation carries with it considerable risk for the politician as well, for inherent in the poet's craft is the danger that resides in the provisional nature of language itself: its propensity to evoke multiple meanings that allow and enable a perpetual re-visioning of intent and event. The "lofty scene" will indeed "be acted over," but in time, place, and accent all too familiar to Brutus. If words, then, are a form of power, to exercise that power is to become simultaneously subject to it. As the various politicians of the play attempt to displace the poet by appropriating his art, they become subject to the instabilities of language, and thus paradoxically they reveal that power, political as well as poetic, is provisional—achieved by and subject to revision.

The politician/playwright never creates *ex nihilo;* instead, he reconstructs the "drama" fashioned by a predecessor or rival. Political events within the world of the play thus consist of a series of lofty scenes that are acted over; that is, rewritten and restaged by a rival player/playwright/politician. Both an aesthetic and a political process, revisionism defines the poet and the ruler—what Jonathan Goldberg has aptly named author and authority.[5] Because revisionism is always an act of appropriation, it denotes not only the creative power but also the vulnerability of both the poet and the ruler. The

ruler's manifest appropriation of authority and authorship subverts the ideology of political absolutism[6] at the same time that it usurps the function of the poet. Thus, in the world of *Julius Caesar*, the vulnerability of the politician—Caesar, Cassius, Brutus, and Antony (standing by the ominous Octavius)—is matched only by the vulnerability of Cicero, Cinna the poet, and the unnamed poet denounced by Brutus. *Julius Caesar* is Shakespeare's dramatization of the precariousness of author and authority. For both, revisioning is not only possible but inevitable because of the non-referential, supplemental nature of language that finally calls all authority, including the reader's, into doubt. Through a persistent pattern of revisionism enabled by the disparity between word and reality, *Julius Caesar* denies the ideologies of political and linguistic absolutism; ruler, writer, and reader are all subject to the revising word.

I.

Revisioning in the play begins with the title character, who has appropriated the heroic image of Pompey and stolen his plebeian audience as well. Caesar's self-aggrandisement leads plebeians and aristocrats alike to anticipate his coronation. To check Caesar's attempt to "soar above the view of men" (I. i. 74), Flavius orders Murellus to "Disrobe the images, / If you do find them deck'd with ceremonies. . . . let no images / Be hung with Caesar's trophies" (I. i. 64-65, 68-69). Similarly, Cassius' resistance emerges from his sense of the disparity between Caesar's physical frailty and the god-like image Caesar creates for himself, that is, from the disparity between reality and a name to conjure with. To perceive the image that Caesar has fashioned is to perceive the potential to revise or refashion that image, or, in Cassius's term, to "redress" it (II. i. 47).

The self-fashioning of Caesar, like the subsequent re-visioning of him by Brutus and Antony, is presented essentially through the metaphors of play-making. His own coronation is the loftiest scene that Caesar might have played. Confronted by two very different audiences—one plebeian, the other aristocratic—Caesar creates two different images and roles for himself and thus two different dramas. According to Casca, Caesar and Antony play before the plebeians a mock coronation scene during the Lupercal festivities. The purpose of the play, again as Casca describes it, is apparently to dramatize the humility and humanity of Caesar and thus to assert a common, empathetic bond with the plebeians. On the other hand, for his aristocratic audience at the Capital, Caesar becomes the image of god-like supe-

riority and disdain. To be divine is to transcend the power of men's words. To be Caesar is to be as indifferent to words of warning as to "sweet words" (III. i. 42). Caesar thus discredits or ignores the warnings of the soothsayer, Artimedorus, and Calphurnia. Playing out his god-like role in the Senate, he declares that he neither needs nor responds to the persuasive power of words:

> If I could pray to move, prayers would move me;
> But I am constant as the northern star,
> Of whose true-fix'd and resting quality
> There is no fellow in the firmament.
>
> (III. i. 59-62)

This deific image of one who has no peer and does not persuade or "pray to move" confirms Antony's earlier image of Caesar as a kind of divine Logos: "When Caesar says, 'Do this,' it is perform'd" (I. ii. 10).

Caesar's god-like command—"Hence! wilt thou lift up Olympus?" (III. i. 74)—preempts the efforts of the conspirators to move him with their words. He thus leaves nothing but the deed to challenge his image of divinity. Deed then replaces the word as Casca delivers the first blow, crying, "Speak hands for me!" (76). Thus the scene of coronation that Decius has invited Caesar to play with his claim that "the Senate have concluded / To give this day a crown to mighty Caesar" (II. ii. 93-94) is suddenly rewritten to become the play of assassination.

As the rival player-playwright who would construct or construe reality, Brutus differs from Caesar in many ways. First of all, Brutus, unlike Caesar, never dismisses or ignores a text; each is important to the role Brutus elects to play and to the way he plays it. His face becomes a text of "hidden worthiness" (I. ii. 57) to be read by Cassius and compared with the frailty of Caesar. His name is a word as fit to conjure with as Caesar's. In Brutus' famous soliloquy (II. i. 10-34), Caesar becomes a text of tyranny written by Brutus in the future conditional tense and subjunctive mood. Shaping the necessity of Caesar's death, Brutus's serpent metaphor supplements his motive.[7] Supplement is essential to this re-visioning, for as Brutus acknowledges, "the quarrel / Will bear no color for the thing he is."

The choice of the word "quarrel" to signify the cause of the conspiracy is significant because of its multiple meanings. As it signifies a heated exchange of words, "quarrel" calls attention to the fact that this cause is shaped subjectively by words. As a verbal text, this quarrel does not suit the deeds of Caesar; it "Will bear no color for the

thing he is." Brutus, therefore, must fashion it—both the thing Caesar is and the cause against him—thus. According to the first definition in the OED, a quarrel is also a weapon: "a short, heavy, square-headed arrow or bolt formerly used in shooting the cross-bow." As Brutus' text reveals the gap between his words and what Caesar is, Brutus' words become weapons to be turned against him. Another text, the letters written by Cassius and thrown in at Brutus' window, reminds Brutus that his family history (the expulsion of the Tarquins by Lucius Junius Brutus) is a pretext that defines the role he should play.[8] As Brutus fashions through the subjunctive mood the necessity of Caesar's death, Cassius fashions the people's mandate through the imperative mood. Brutus repeats the three imperatives—"Speak, strike, redress!"—which constitute a script for the play he will create. As he adopts this script of imperatives, he naively assumes a perfect correspondence between the word, the deed, and the intent.

The word "redress" signifies not only the political goal of the drama Brutus envisions but the crucial artistic procedure. The action—specifically the murder of Caesar—must be re-dressed by the word and by the image that the word creates. The conspirators are thus re-dressed through Brutus' language as "sacrificers, but not butchers," who will carve Caesar "as a dish fit for the gods / Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds" (II. i. 166, 173-74). Brutus knows also that as words shape deeds, deeds likewise prescribe words. He thus assumes that action marked by restraint and remorse will elicit the right words: "We shall be call'd purgers, not murderers" (280). The failure to recognize the difference between being called and being, signifier and signified, is the sign of Brutus' poetical and political inadequacy.

This failure is particularly apparent in the "lofty scene" that Brutus and his collaborators create. The murder is quickly fashioned as a private and a public good. In cutting short the life of Caesar, the conspirators, according to Brutus and Casca have spared Caesar "so many years of fearing death" (III. i. 102) and thus shown themselves "Caesar's friends" (104). The deed is clothed in abstractions first by Cinna ("Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!"), then by Casca ("Liberty, freedom, and enfranchisement!"), and finally by Brutus ("Peace, freedom, liberty!"). In an effort to suit these abstract words and the ideals they signify to the concrete deed of murder, Brutus stages the deed as a ritual and ceremony of purification. The conspirators thus "bathe" and "wash" their hands and weapons to walk in procession to the marketplace (106-11). The ritualized action is also an attempt to validate the earlier definition, "sacrificers, but not

butchers." The disparity here between the bloody deed and the idealizing word not only makes possible but also compels an appropriation by the superior playwright-player. Antony's skill enables him to rewrite Brutus' lofty scene of Rome's liberation. This revisioning then makes possible the final drama of carnage and suicide on the fields of Philippi.

Antony's verbal representation and refashioning begin the moment he appears after Caesar's death. The swords transformed by the conspirators' words into symbols of liberation become for Antony the swords "made rich / With the most noble blood of all the world" (III. i. 155-56). The sense of unity and anonymity created by Brutus in the blood ritual is destroyed by Antony as he names and takes the bloody hand of each conspirator. Turning finally to the corpse of Caesar, Antony replaces Brutus' earlier image of a "dish fit for the gods" with an image of a body hewn "as a carcass fit for hounds." Adopting and transforming the dreaded image of Caesar's corpse as "a carcass fit for hounds," Antony describes the fallen Caesar as the "brave hart."[9] He then applies and puns on his metaphor to fashion a tribute: "O world! thou wast the forest to this hart, / And this indeed, O world, the heart of thee" (207-08). As Antony's words redress the conspirators as "butchers" not "sacrificers" and Caesar as "the noblest man / That ever lived in the tide of times" (256-57), the lofty scene of liberation becomes a savage spectacle indeed.

Antony's political/artistic objective is three-fold: to rewrite the "lofty scene" of the conspirators, to reestablish the image and role of the god-like Caesar, and to set in motion a new scene of revenge. Having achieved the first two objectives with his aristocratic audience, he then must achieve all three with his plebeian audience in the Forum scene (III. ii).

Speaking first in the Forum, Brutus re-presents the lofty scene of liberation.[10] Urging the plebeians to hear him for his cause, Brutus confronts again the "quarrel" that "will bear no color for the thing he is." Aware of the disparity between the quarrel and the thing, Brutus attempts to valorize his words through the mediation of his honor: "Believe me for mine honor, and have respect to mine honor, that you may believe" (III. ii. 14-16). Brutus' failure to substantiate his claim that Caesar "was ambitious" allows Antony to re-present the deeds of Caesar in opposition to the words of Brutus. As M. P. Hoey and E. O. Winter point out, Antony catches Brutus "not in a logical trap but a linguistic one."[11] By discrediting the words of Brutus, Antony discredits the "honor" of Brutus, rendering it a word without a referent. Finally, Antony couples the discrediting of the word of Brutus

with a valorization of his own words and the words of Caesar. He tells his audience, "But yesterday the word of Caesar might / Have stood against the world" (118-19). He presents himself, likewise, as one whose word is truth: "But here I am to speak what I do know" (101). Unlike Brutus, the orator, he is "a plain blunt man" who has "neither wit, nor words, nor worth, / Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech" (217, 221-22). In obfuscating the revisioning power of his language, Antony asserts a logocentric correspondence between word and referent.

The rhetorical device of denying his art serves as a self-aggrandizing tribute to the action and utterance of the scene Antony has just played to "stir men's blood." This drama, replete with the mantle and corpse of Caesar as stage properties, reconstructs the conspirator's "lofty scene." The rents in Caesar's mantle, like the wounds in his body, serve as manifestations of the deed to which Antony fashions his words. So perfectly do these words construct the deed that Antony can claim with conviction that Caesar's wounds speak through for him. His words suit the deed as the rents in Caesar's mantle match his wounds.

Antony's authority derives from his preeminence as author of the unfolding drama. Accordingly, the verbal ineptitude of Brutus marks him as both the failed poet and the failed politician. The final response of the plebeian audience to Brutus is the same as their response to Cinna the poet: "Tear him for his bad verses, tear him for his bad verses" (IV. iii. 30-31). Through the authority of his word, Antony not only deconstructs the drama of the conspirators but revives the royal, god-like image and role of Caesar. The coronation scene that Caesar might have played at the Capital, a scene that was rehearsed by Caesar and Antony on the Lupercal, is in effect revived by Antony in the plebeian cries, "O royal Caesar!" (III. ii. 244). According to Antony's vision and design, the spirit of Caesar "ranging for revenge" (III. i. 270) will speak with "a monarch's voice" (272), and the royal word will be made flesh in the carnage of battle.

As Brutus observes, Antony is "but a limb of Caesar," but with Caesar's death the metonymic part functions for the whole. As Caesar's surrogate, Antony in the Forum scene creates the illusion of a perfect correspondence between his word and reality. Since word and reality are truly one only in the Logos, Antony has succeeded in fashioning himself, as well as Caesar, into a parodic likeness of God. This elevation is apparent when Antony next appears (IV. i), like an indifferent Olympian, arbitrarily meting out death. A kind of uncreating Word, Antony reduces human beings to mere names, and with

less than a word—with a pen prick or blot—he cancels life. Through the power of Antony's words, Lepidus is also uncreated; he is reduced from man to beast of burden or horse to be used "But as a property" (IV. i. 40). The remaining scenes of the fourth act reverse this pattern of self-deification as Brutus and Cassius discover their human frailty in the gap between words and referents. The shift in scene from Antony's camp to Brutus' presents first a radical shift in the assumptions about words and their relationship to reality. For Brutus, words have become unreliable indicators; he therefore attempts to reassess Cassius through his deeds and gestures (IV. ii). In the quarrel that ensues (IV. iii), words become nothing more than a reflection of conflicting subjective perspectives; Cassius' "I am" is countered by Brutus' "I say you are not" (33-34). Disassociated from reality, the words of both men become "threats" and "idle wind" (66-68). Cassius resents what he perceives as Brutus' effort to reduce him to a verbal text, "all his faults observ'd / Set in a note-book, learn'd, and conn'd by rote" (97-98). Rejecting words as unreliable signifiers, Cassius resorts to action or gesture as he bares his breast to the sword that struck Caesar. This action brings not only reconciliation but an acknowledgment of the hiatus between words and reality as each man retracts his words (113-23). Their realization of the inadequacy of their words is punctuated by the interruption of a poet who, like his unfortunate predecessor Cinna, is accused of bad verses. Brutus' impatient response to the poet—"What should the wars do with these jigging fools?"—indicates his awareness of the common failure of words to approximate reality. The encounter of opposing armies at Philippi is the context for a recapitulation and conclusion of the play's exploration of the process of revisioning. The script that Brutus earlier adopted—"Speak! Strike! Redress!"—is played out again but this time by Antony. Antony's appropriation of the script is made possible by the disparity between Brutus' words and the deed of killing Caesar. Antony specifies this disparity in the parley before battle.

> *Brutus.* Words before blows; is it so, countrymen?
> *Octavius.* Not that we love words better, as you do.
> *Brutus.* Good words are better than bad strokes, Octavius.
> *Antony.* In your bad strokes, Brutus, you give good words;
> Witness the hole you made in Caesar's heart,
> Crying, "Long live! hail, Caesar!"
>
> (V. i. 27-32)

As Brutus in the face of defeat contemplates the necessity of suicide, he reveals the crucial error in his earlier verbal fashioning of the necessity of Caesar's death. Of suicide he says,

> But I do find it cowardly and vile,
> For fear of what might fall, so to prevent
> The time of life—
>
> (V. i. 103-05)

Since it was precisely "For fear of what might fall" that he prevented the time of life for Caesar, Brutus' words now, like weapons turned upon their speaker, redefine the killing of Caesar as "cowardly and vile." Implicit in the alternative to suicide is the rejected alternative to Caesar's murder: "To stay the providence of some high powers / That govern us below" (105-06). Again the verb "to stay," meaning both to wait for and to impede, reveals the play of language that Brutus cannot control.

As Brutus and Cassius confront the consequence of their earlier shaping of events, they become increasingly conscious of what Hamlet calls the "divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (V. ii. 10-11). The awareness that he faces death on his birthday suggests to Cassius the high design that determines his beginning and his end (V. i. 70-75). Abandoning his Epicurean philosophy of God's indifference, he now credits "things that do presage" (78) a divine fashioning. He thus calls into question his earlier conviction that

> Men at some time are masters of their fates;
> The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
> But in ourselves, that we are underlings.
>
> (I. ii. 139-41)

The final events at Philippi make clear that Cassius and Brutus are indeed ironically masters of their fates as they shape their own retribution. Defined within the context of their earlier creative endeavors, their ends affirm the justice inherent in divine authority. Like the death of Caesar, the death of Cassius illustrates the disparity between words and reality. As Pindarus inadvertently misconstrues the events of the battlefield, Cassius assumes a perfect correspondence between the words of Pindarus and the reality these words could at best only approximate. Cassius' assumption of this perfect correspondence between word and thing is particularly ironic in light of his earlier awareness of the word's potential to conjure,

seduce and misconstrue. As the words of Cassius and Brutus earlier fashioned the necessity of Caesar's death, so now the words of Pindarus fashion the necessity of Cassius' death. Like the murder of Caesar, the suicide of Cassius is worded as a liberating deed, one that will make Pindarus a free man (V. iii. 37-42). But as the words, "Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!" failed to suit the deed of killing Caesar, so Cassius' words, "Now be a freeman," do not suit Pindarus' sense of participating against his will in Cassius' suicide.

Words again become weapons as they describe to Brutus the suicide of Cassius:

> For piercing steel, and darts envenomed,
> Shall be as welcome to the ears of Brutus
> As tidings of this sight.
>
> (V. iii. 76-78)

But as the word wounds, it also, in the encomium that Brutus offers Titinius and Cassius, redresses:

> Are yet two Romans living such as these?
> The last of all the Romans, fare thee well!
> It is impossible that ever Rome
> Should breed thy fellow.
>
> (V. iii. 98-101)

The disparity between the ideal image these words create and the reality (the mixed nature of Cassius) recalls the similar disparity between the self-fashioned image of Caesar and Brutus' re-visioning image of the serpent in the shell.

Brutus' defeat compels him to answer the deed with the deed; suicide accounts, as the word would not, for the death of Caesar. But as Brutus' suicide answers for his failure to suit words to the deed of killing Caesar, his suicide also becomes the opportunity to stage a closing scene. In his final moments, Brutus reconstructs his earlier "lofty scene" first by changing the action; he substitutes his own suicide for the murder of Caesar. To this revised action he and his rival Antony once again suit their words. As in the Forum scene, Brutus speaks first:

> My heart doth joy that yet in all my life
> I found no man but he was true to me.
> I shall have glory by this losing day
> More than Octavius and Mark Antony
> By this vile conquest shall attain unto.
>
> (V. v. 34-38)

Brutus' idealized representation of the past ("I found no man but he was true to me") and of the present ("I shall have glory by this losing day") illustrates once more Cicero's statement that "men may construe things after their fashion / Clean from the purpose of the things themselves" (I. iii. 34-35).

Despite the disparity between words and reality, Brutus' self-representation is valorized and appropriated by Antony in a final act of re-visioning. Having stripped Brutus of his honor in the Forum scene and in the parley before the battle at Philippi, Antony now with his encomium re-dresses Brutus: "This was the noblest Roman of them all. . . . This was a man!" This revision is hard to reconcile with Antony's earlier image of Brutus as one of the villains who hacked his dagger in the side of Caesar (V. i. 39-40). The disparate images are, nevertheless, both valid to the extent that the former accounts for Brutus' deed, whereas the latter accounts for his intent. The gap between the intent and the deed corresponds to the gap between the fashioning word and what Cicero calls "the things themselves."

II.

At the end of the play, we as readers are no closer than the characters to an understanding of "the things themselves." Because *Julius Caesar* insists on the re-visioning that language compels, the play calls into doubt the epistemological reliability of language. Irony and uncertainty are the effects of increased awareness of the gap between intent and deed, between word and referent. What we do understand is that our comprehension of reality is a subjectivist fashioning through suspect words and that what is fashioned by the word is always subject to revision.

The re-visioning word is thus set in contrast to God's creating word, the Logos, which is inseparable from "the things themselves." As a statement about authorship, the play confirms Marion Trousdale's observation that the Renaissance acquired from Augustine and Erasmus a basic understanding of the difference "between divine and human language. God's word is substance; it is ontologically real. But in man language is accident, not substance."[12] Defined by language, man's fallen nature is the measure of the space between signifier and signified; in Derrida's words, "The sign is always a sign of the Fall."[13] Within the space between signifer and signified occurs the creative endeavor that distinguishes maker from Maker. The difference between the poet's word that approximates and the divine word that is makes possible an inevitable poetic revi-

sionism. Or, to reverse the perspective, revisionism defines the nature of poetry as supplemental and contingent rather than transcendent.

The Renaissance poet's recognition of the fundamental difference between Logos and language and thus of the supplemental and contingent nature of his writing intensified his awareness of both his creative potential and his vulnerability. His best defense or apology, through which he asserted his creativity and accounted for his vulnerability, constituted another act of appropriation. The most eloquent of the apologists, Sir Philip Sidney, valorized the poet's creative endeavor by drawing an analogy between maker and Maker.[14] As the analogy acknowledged difference, it also asserted similarity. Although Sidney insisted in his *Apology* that the poet "never affirmeth,"[15] the analogy between maker and Maker affirms this poet's effort to appropriate for the maker the authority of the Maker. For the dramatist, the analogy that best appropriates authority is the *theatrum mundi* trope: if all the world is a stage, then the playwright is like God. But the ruler, of course, is also like God. And the prevailing device for defining the God-like authority of the ruler is the same as that which defines it for the poet: the *theatrum mundi* trope. Thus, as the ruler resembles the playwright in the play of the world, he also resembles God.

This triangulated analogy becomes politically problematic, however, because the ruler's identity required his assertion of a fundamental difference between himself and the poet. Unlike the poet, the sovereign is God's surrogate, His representative on earth. As such, the sovereign proclaimed his word as Law and Truth. He could do so because, as Jonathan Goldberg notes, "sovereign power affirms itself by claiming that what it enacts is outside itself and transcendent."[16] Within the concept of the divine right of kings, the monarch's authority is absolute because it is not appropriated by him but rather invested in him by God.

The image of the sovereign as playwright/player served the ideological needs of the monarch only to the extent that it did not undermine the concept of the fundamental difference between sovereign and playwright/player. The image became particularly subversive when it revealed that sovereign authority, like the author's, is appropriated. For, if the authority of the sovereign is appropriated, his word merely approximates, and what his power enacts is not outside itself and transcendent. Furthermore, authority that is appropriated can be appropriated; the word that approximates is subject to supplementarity, and the play of state can be rewritten.

When the image of the ruler as player/playwright occurs within the context of revisionism, the difference between poet and prince, so essential to the ideology of absolutism, is erased. The supplementarity of writing makes manifest the supplementarity of ruling.

Appropriation thus cuts both ways in *Julius Caesar*. The politician's appropriation and subsequent marginalization of the poet seems at first glance to present a grim perspective on the role and fate of the poet. The play seems, in fact, to present a rather painful revision of the claims of earlier Renaissance humanist poets for the place of the poet in society. Gone here is Sidney's vision of the poet fashioning a Cyrus to serve as a model for the living ruler. From the perspective of this play, Spenser's conviction that the poet can through his art fashion a nobleman in virtuous and gentle discipline seems an idle dream. But despite the fate of poets within the play's Roman world, what Shakespeare demonstrates here is anything but his own marginalization. As he demystifies political power by defining it as linguistic re-visioning, he reasserts the authority of the poet. His own delineation of the ways in which power and knowledge are limited by the provisional nature of language reclaims a place for the poet in the world of politics.

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Notes

[1]Anne Barton, "*Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*: Shakespeare's Roman World of Words," in *Shakespeare's Craft: Eight Lectures*, ed. Philip H. Highfill, Jr. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 24-27; Gayle Greene, "'The Power of Speech/ To Stir Men's Blood': The Language of Tragedy in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*," *Renaissance Drama*, NS 11 (1980), 67-93.

[2]See John W. Velz's argument "that Rome is a world of speeches to crowds and that the course of Rome's history is a record of what effect speeches had" ("Orator and Imperator in *Julius Caesar*: Style and the Process of Roman History," *Shakespeare Studies*, 15 [1982] 55-75).

[3]John W. Velz, "'If I were Brutus Now. . .': Role-playing in *Julius Caesar*," *Shakespeare Studies*, 4 (1968), 149-59; Thomas F. VanLaan, Role-Playing in Shakespeare (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1978), pp. 152-61; Jonathan Goldberg,' *James I and the Politics of Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 164-76.

[4]*The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). All references are to this edition.

[5]Goldberg, p. 18.

[6]Catherine Belsey (*The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama*, [London and New York: Methuen, 1985], p. 101) points out the fact that this

play raises the issue of absolutism. She observes that "tyranny and sedition are brought into confrontation, with the effect of raising the issue the absolutist texts are compelled to exclude." She does not, however, pursue this point, and her position differs from mine in that she feels that the play's statement on the issue of absolutism is finally ambiguous: "Perhaps the play condemns usurpation rather than tyranny? Or tyranny but not absolutism?" (p. 103).

[7]Gayle Greene (p. 81) notes that Brutus' metaphors constitute a "self-referential linguistic construct that substitutes for reality."

[8]Madeleine Doran (*Shakespeare's Dramatic Language* [Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1976], p. 122) argues that the commitment of the family name to Roman republicanism is "the strongest motive in Brutus' decision to join the conspiracy against Caesar." Ronald Berman ("A Note on the Motive of Marcus Brutus," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 23 [1962], p. 199) stresses the importance of Brutus' desire "to relive the glory of his ancestor."

[9]Lynn de Gerenday, "Play, Ritualization, and Ambivalence in *Julius Caesar*," *Literature* and *Psychology*, 24 (1964), p. 28.

[10]According to John Velz, ("Orator and Imperator in *Julius Caesar*, p. 56), Brutus' Forum speech is no less rhetorically sophisticated than Antony's. "Antony's superiority over Brutus lies as much in his place in the sequence of speakers as in his oratorical method."

[11]"Believe me for mine honour," *Language and Style*, 14 (1981), p. 335.

[12]Marion Trousdale, *Shakespeare and the Rhetoricians* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1982), p. 25.

[13]*Of Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974), p. 150.

[14]*An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973), pp. 99-101.

[15]*An Apology*, p. 16.

[16]Goldberg, p. 16.

Macbeth and Death: Paranoia and Primogeniture

by Rick Bowers

In a subsection of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* entitled "A Digression of the nature of Spirits, bad Angels, or Devils, and how they cause Melancholy," Robert Burton cites the case of "Macbeth and Banquo, two Scottish Lords, that, as they were wandering in the woods, had their fortunes told them by three strange women."[1] Burton elsewhere considers demonic possession to be a "Disease of the Head," but he is generally content to fall back on the convenient explanation of demonism. For Burton's reportage, demonism is sufficient. For Shakespeare, it is only a starting point. He crafts motivation in *Macbeth* as a "complex," a confusion of spiritual and psychological impulses seen in the main character and portrayed within the drama through obsessive desire, premeditated murder, and a deluded sense of immortality. Macbeth would be the great progenitor, all-Father to an endless dynasty of kings: his son and his son's son ruling in an unbroken line forever. But, unlike Banquo or his "real-life" descendant, King James I, Macbeth does not possess a requisite "royalty of nature" (III. i. 49). Instead, his quest for the immortal power of kingship is an exercise in the fascination of self-will, a perverse desire for gratification where kingly concerns such as moral order, social harmony, and good government are irrelevancies at best—at worst, encumbrances.

I submit that Macbeth's incredible aspiration for immortality through the attaining of kingship is a paranoid delusion with powerful implications for the play as a whole. Naturally, Shakespeare was not a codifying psychologist, and the term "paranoia" has come in for much specialized consideration in the twentieth century; but paranoia is a notoriously difficult pathology to measure. It is always more than specific clinical diagnosis, just as *Macbeth* is much more than a study in contemporary theories of demonology. Throughout, I use the term in a general sense because paranoia as a concept is tantalizingly nonspecific. Delusions of grandeur or persecution, bizarre thoughts, obsessive actions, operations contrary to perceived reality—these general notions apply to the complicated nature of paranoia; and more and more they come to apply to Macbeth's character and action within the play.

The horror, revulsion, and self-loathing that are witnessed in eleventh-century Scotland are keyed constantly to the title character himself: a man adept at, eventually addicted to, realizing and perpetrating "strange images of death" (I. iii. 97). The descriptions of his fearless revelry on the battlefield, therefore, do indeed seem like "strange" images of death, when he is confronted by three apparitions, and his response is one of utter terror. This is how the audience first sees Macbeth: a man of self-lacerating introspection. His conscience is smitten by the witches' predictions, and Banquo even describes his partner as "rapt withal" (57). Macbeth is promised the titles Glamis, Cawdor, and King, and his ensuing asides confirm his covetous desire for them. But although the entire episode might seem to be something inspired by his crunching on "the insane root, / That takes the reason prisoner" (84-85), both audience and reader know that the prophecies are already in the supernatural mill. Audience and reader have the advantage of witnessing the weird cabal of the first scene, as well as King Duncan's simultaneous sentencing and recommendation at news of Cawdor's treachery:

> No more that Thane of Cawdor shall deceive
> Our bosom interest.—Go pronounce his present death,
> And with his former title greet Macbeth.
>
> (I. ii. 65-67)

But the title "Thane of Cawdor" is now tainted with treachery. And Duncan's accidental rhyme is significant: death and Macbeth are inseparable from the play's outset. The alluring appeal of the witches' prophecy inspires poetry of extreme self-consciousness, and Macbeth's first soliloquy is representative:

> This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill; cannot be good:—
> If ill, why hath it given me earnest of success,
> Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor:
> If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings.
> My thought, whose murther yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man,
> That function is smother'd in surmise,
> And nothing is, but what is not.
>
> (I. iii. 130-42)

Macbeth finds himself torn between revulsion and desire. His "horrible imaginings" are inspired by some "supernatural soliciting" to which he cannot quite reconcile himself. The very nature of his language here is suggestive, as pointed out by Michael Goldman: "The interplay of meanings suggested by the words reinforces the impression of movement into a tangle, a disturbing density, as does the content of the whole speech."[2] If the greatest amount of "ill" is also the least amount of "good," then his "horrible imaginings" rest in the self-cancelling position of "cannot be ill; cannot be good." How much "ill" is contained in the desire accomplished—the title Thane of Cawdor? At the same time, how much "good" resides in the agonizing prospect of supplanting the King—himself "King hereafter"? The "horrid image" of killing the rightful King paralyzes this military paragon to the point where "Nothing is, but what is not." What Macbeth "is not" is King; but being King is all there "is." Anything else is "nothing." And the death of Duncan, urged in a deed to which Macbeth dare not give a name, is an image that is both incredibly disturbing and incredibly desirable. It is likewise expressed as a paradox: "The King is dead, long live the King"—it is impossible to kill a King. This is the magnificent invincibility that Macbeth seeks.

Macbeth makes a fetish of the supernatural power of kingship and determines to have it for himself, all the while aware of the enormity of his actions:

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

He realizes he is pondering "assassination," though he prefers the referential pronoun "it" almost as if he cannot quite admit "it" to himself. He is chastened by reminders of domestic and military responsibility, retributive punishment, and by a sense of his own place in time. But all this is subordinate to the aura of immutable power to be obtained following the admittedly "deep damnation" of Duncan's euphemistic "taking off" (20). Duncan is constantly associated with divine gentleness and balance. The enormous consequences of Macbeth's contemplated action, therefore, seem to overwhelm him with clusters of mythological and apocalyptic

imagery that reduce themselves to Macbeth alone—significantly, however, not riding in triumph, but thrown dangerously from his mount. R. A. Foakes observes that "the boundary between the fantastical, the imaginary or illusory, and actuality is indeterminate, as Macbeth proceeds to create a new image of death."[3] But Macbeth's image of killing Duncan goes beyond the similes Foakes suggests. "Scaling Everest" or "breaking the sound barrier for the first time" are easy human achievements compared to the divine power attained when becoming King. For Macbeth, the image of murder he contemplates is equivalent in its own kind to *leaping* Mt. Everest, or outrunning the speed of light. His killings on the battlefield meant only triumph. The death of Duncan will mean supremacy.

It is therefore ironic when Macbeth defends his vacillation thus: he says to his wife, "I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more, is none" (I. vii. 46-47). She responds by contrasting him with a "beast," and then goes on with instructions as to how he might become more of a "man." Her sense of distinction is unconsciously correct, but at the wrong end of the spectrum of comparison. Macbeth does not hesitate because of a decline from manhood; rather, he is overawed by the leap of manhood he must make. There is a point beyond which one cannot go and still remain human, a point that can only be approximated in terms of genetics, and a point beyond which Macbeth must go if he is to become King. This is why Lady Macbeth's accusations of unmanliness and inferiority are beside the point. It is true that, as Robert Ornstein puts it, "Macbeth kills because his wife makes him admit that he wishes to kill."[4] But she sees only the exterior surfaces of a military coup. To her, Duncan is a man to be replaced; the crown itself is a precious piece of jewelry that incites desire. To Macbeth, however, kingship represents a set of transcendental principles. The death of Duncan will be, for Macbeth, the death of doubt, the birth of a powerful inner peace conceived through the ultimate in self-assertion.[5]

And yet there is motivation for Macbeth's action that is concrete, if deeply placed within his miasma of desire: sibling jealousy. After Duncan's investiture of his son Malcolm as Prince of Cumberland and, consequently, regal heir, Macbeth's disappointed aside is revealing:

> The Prince of Cumberland!—That is a step
> On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
> For in my way it lies.
>
> (I. iv. 48-50)

His homicidal envy informs his later idea of a "vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself" (I. vii. 27). Macbeth's is a "vaulting" ambition, because it is more than ambition. Ambition is for functionaries. Macbeth aspires with a craving and fear that is beyond language. It is he who is the son of the realm deserving of primogeniture. It is he who deserves to bequeath the immortal royal jelly. Didn't the witches promise kingship to him? Macbeth's disappointment borders on a sense of persecution, and Norman Rabkin's observation on this point is astute:

> It is as if Macbeth decides to kill Duncan out of the rage of a disappointed sibling. Not that the succession or its announcement is the cause of Macbeth's action: he has already felt the attraction of the deed; rather that this moment defines and crystallizes a parricidal emotion that resides already in his deepest being.[6]

Macbeth has already declared his duties toward Duncan as "children and servants" (I. iv. 25), and the extent of his primal identification and outrage is frighteningly suggestive.

Yet the idea of parricide remains indistinct because it is not clear even to Macbeth. Consider, by contrast, Lady Macbeth's ingenuous observation of the sleeping Duncan: "Had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done it" (II. ii. 12-13). But physical resemblance is a paltry distinction. She acquits herself easily, while Macbeth agonizes over inner lacerations of desire, revulsion, and self-destructive audaciousness. The hallucinatory prolepsis of his "dagger of the mind" (II. i. 38) helps him to imagine the atrocity he is about to perform, project himself into the image, and then find himself actually performing the deed. As a result, Lady Macbeth's observation, "He is about it" (II. ii. 4) is a statement of bald simplicity that is unaware of its own consequences. What "it" represents for Macbeth is considerably more than just the death of Duncan—"it" is Macbeth's own realization, accomplishment, fulfillment. Earlier tragedy would have called it his fate. Through the murder of Duncan, Macbeth has dictated reality, has formed the future. Moreover, the nervous off-stage exclamations and panicky stichomythia of this crucial scene maintain the action at a distinctly human level, as Lady Macbeth reproaches the killer for his own painful disquiet. "Consider it not so deeply" (29), she counsels from a position of complicity. Then, the ominous reason: "it will make us mad" (33). But the maddening "it" of her reprimand cuts Macbeth deeply with a sense of his own guilt. He has lived the horror of performing

murder, not just imagined "it"; and his proximity to his main victim—his symbolic Father and revered King—is a terror he cannot reconcile within his conditioned sense of clan loyalty.

Macbeth's grimmest realization, now that he has murdered Duncan and become King himself, is that "To be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus" (III. i. 47). Earlier, he would be King or "nothing." And it is significant to note how Macbeth refers to his new position as being "thus"—something he may state only indirectly, but also a position of actualization, of being; like the divine "I AM" of Exodus (3:14). A consolidation of power in the realm and peace in his soul will make his kingly position perfect, but the very existence of Banquo and his son Fleance, threatens Macbeth's "perfection." He intends to live eternally in the lineal primogeniture of his kingship, but he cannot forget the witches' promise to Banquo: "Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none" (I. iii. 67). The threat is unbearable and fills Macbeth's mind with metaphorical "scorpions" that are too terrible to share even with his partner in crime. And Macbeth is fixated on deathly imagery of attraction and repulsion, even as he coordinates the murder of Banquo and Fleance. His recidivism thus becomes an objective necessity, as noted by Ornstein:

> A more conventional dramatist would have suggested that Macbeth piles murder on murder because his first act of blood brutalizes his nature. Shakespeare gives us a more terrible Macbeth who is driven to kill again and again because he cannot live with the memory of his first crime.[7]

Macbeth thinks that he can achieve "peace" by killing off all apprehended threats. But while his murderous schemes are aimed at securing undisputed power through politic elimination, they signify themselves through Macbeth's own expression as at once beyond his control and yet within his terrible grasp:

> . . . Come, seeling Night,
> Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful Day,
> And, with thy bloody and invisible hand,
> Cancel, and tear to pieces, that great bond
> Which keeps me pale!—Light thickens; and the crow
> Makes wing to th' rooky wood;
> Good things of Day begin to droop and drowse,
> Whiles Night's black agents to their preys do rouse.
> (III. ii. 46-53)

The horrid paradox of Macbeth's contemplations at this point is that "Night's black agents" will rouse themselves against *him* at the banquet later that evening. The parallelism between this crucial get-together and the one that preceded Duncan's assassination is no coincidence. Macbeth must repeat the crime, must "do it right" to gain inner peace and political security. He maintains a public gregariousness as King, clan leader, and host, but is wrenched from within by a ghastly pettiness that tries to earn respect through hatred. His character assassination of his former partner is only a prelude, and Macbeth is all false confidence as he treats his henchmen to a mixture of praise and sarcasm: Banquo's throat has been cut, and his murderer is dubbed "the best o' th' cut-throats" (III. iv. 16). No further "issue" from Banquo can threaten Macbeth's emerging dynasty. He is still one life away from security, however; and while the title "nonpareil" is reserved for the killer of Fleance, no one can claim the dubious honor. The "issue" of kingship is not at all settled; and Macbeth's anguish is intensified when Banquo's mocking ghost confronts him. To the dismay of all present, Macbeth begins a fevered self-acquittal, contending "Thou canst not say, I did it" (49), before exploding into nonsensical hyperbole. His moods shift from terror, to pathos, to angry self-assertion, and swiftly on to cutting discernment in his arch inquiry, "How say'st thou, that Macduff denies his person, / At our great bidding?" (127-28). Muir notes simply, "Banquo being dead, Macbeth is driven towards the next murder" (see III. iv. 127, n.); but this neglects Macbeth's severe distrust of anything he cannot control. Moreover, Macbeth's shifts in mood follow a typical pattern from generalized fear and loathing to personal affront and suspicion. It is Macduff—significantly absent at Scone during Macbeth's coronation, and avoiding his monarch's presence even now—who poses the most immediate threat to Macbeth's increasingly pathological need for security. And the distraught King's paranoid boast, "There's not a one of them, but in his house / I keep a servant fee'd" (130-31), is evocative of the covert and underhanded rule that Scotland now suffers.

Macbeth's reappearance before the witches is a mere extrapolation of his fear. He is determined to know "By the worst means, the worst" (134), as he puts it, and is willing to endure their disgusting rituals so long as they might hold out the hope of even one clairvoyant certainty on which to pin his hopes and policy. It is as much a strategy of desperation as his hiring of "the perfect spy o' th' time" (III. i. 129) to spy even on his own operatives. Though Macbeth assumes authority in the witches' nest, the "infernal masters" of the

place know his desires even before he can articulate them. The apparitions that ensue—the armed head, the bloody child, and the child crowned with a tree in his hand—are telling charms that hint at the future through indirection and symbol. Macbeth, with the tunnel vision of a tyrant, misinterprets these symbols, because he is prepared to grasp only what is positive to him in the paradoxes of birth, death, and succession that he witnesses. His inquiry into Banquo's line, however, is answered by a mortifying procession of regality:

> *A show of eight Kings, the last with a glass in his hand;*
> Banquo *following.*
>
> (IV. i. 111 s.d.)

G. Wilson Knight overstates the case by seeing the show of kings as a suggestion of "the creative process itself," and Macbeth as a countering "symbol of time itself from its death aspect."[8] The vision here is more local and more dangerous, hearkening back to Macbeth's transferral of guilt onto the sons of Banquo through the twisted terms of the *cui bono* defense:

> Upon my head they plac'd a fruitless crown,
> And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
> Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand,
> No son of mine succeeding. If 't be so,
> For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind;
> For them the gracious Duncan have I murther'd;
> Put rancours in the vessel of my peace,
> Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
> Given to the common Enemy of man,
> To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings!
>
> (III. i. 60-69)

It is the iterated "them"—the shadowy figures that haunt a paranoid's mind—on whom Macbeth lays blame. The mirror symbol multiplies the facets of their influence. The fact that the "blood-bolter'd Banquo" now smiles at Macbeth, "and points at them for his" (IV. i. 123-24) further torments the childless king with evidence of his dynastic impotence. Banquo's spiritual "royalty of nature" (III. i. 49) overcomes his physical pain in the complete assurance that "there's husbandry in heaven" (II. i. 4). He is balanced, self-assured, kingly. Macbeth, distraught and acrimonious, is none of these things. As a result, he fulminates with all the frustrated recoil of a demented eugenicist.[9]

Macduff's flight from Scotland at this point is far from clear-cut policy. It does, however, help to refine something of the problematic

nature of Macbeth's tyranny. Macduff seemingly abandons his wife and family; and the scene at Fife Castle shows Rosse trying to console a confused and frightened Lady Macduff. Is her husband a coward? a traitor? Her husband's loyalty would definitely seem to be suspect, and Rosse, so relied upon to read the political barometer, takes his uncertain leave as well. The touching domestic exchange between Lady Macduff and her son only draws out the pathos of the situation, and intensifies the horror of the atrocity about to ensue. The carnage at Fife Castle may therefore be thought of as a common authoritarian police action, a tyrant's attempt to assert meaning and instill fear. It is also a cowardly slaughter that symbolizes the ruin of such clannish virtues as family honor and domestic loyalty in the Scotland that Macbeth now controls. His is a fascistic prerogative—the prerogative of terror that abolishes perceived opposition through extermination. And Macbeth's actions here, though twisted, are calculated to achieve at least two objectives: to secure and eliminate any threat at Fife; and to show Macduff, the Thane of Fife, that there is no place for him to return.

The plan, of course, backfires; and Scotland's army of liberation, led by Malcolm and Macduff, is auspicious. They carry the weight of moral right, and the fact that "their dear causes / Would, to the bleeding and the grim alarm, / Excite the mortified man" (V. ii. 3-5) reinforces a sense of spiritual allegiance with Macbeth's victims: Duncan, Banquo, the slaughtered household at Fife, and the ravaged countryside of Scotland in general. Macbeth, by contrast, is "the tyrant" (11). Though he is popularly considered mad, others "that lesser hate him" (13) are willing to concede some measure of "valiant fury" (14) in his stubborn resolve to defend Dunsinane. Yet the only certainty about his forces is a predilection for mutiny, made clear in Macbeth's own deluded self-assurance as he intones,

> Bring me no more reports; let them fly all:
> Till Birnam wood remove to Dunsinane,
> I cannot taint with fear. What's the boy Malcolm?
> Was he not born of woman? The spirits that know
> All mortal consequence have pronounc'd me thus:
> 'Fear not, Macbeth; no man that's born of woman
> Shall e'er have power upon thee.'— Then fly, false Thanes,
> And mingle with the English epicures.
>
> (V. iii. 1-8)

His fearlessness is really solipsistic disregard as his army slips away. Macbeth no longer credits any intelligence other than his own

deluded sense of invincibility. He sets himself up more as an icon protected against the rot of fear than as a legitimate military leader. And his increasingly foulminded confidence declines toward irrational contempt as well, in the pederastic imagery of "the boy Malcolm," the "false Thanes," and their supposed desire to "mingle with the English epicures." A servant brings news of the invading force, but Macbeth prefers sarcastic ignorance at the expense of this "creamfac'd loon" (11), rather than hear any further reports that might interfere with his introverted apprehensions. In fact, Macbeth seems already self-destructive here, as if "all mortal consequence" were directed solely at him; and his deluded grandeur is completely at odds with the youthful force that swells in number against him.

Macbeth's self-destructive inconsistency is pointed up as he orders "Hang those that talk of fear" (V. iii. 36), and yet implores the Doctor to treat his realm, to "purge it to a sound and pristine health" (52). If a healthy Scotland could be restored by the physician, Macbeth vows, "I would applaud thee to the very echo, / That should applaud again" (53-54). This jaded commendation suggests only empty repetitive tedium, however, a fatalistic resignation that masks a deeper disregard. "Throw physic to the dogs; I'll none of it" (47) represents Macbeth's response to treatment in general, as well as his mechanized lack of caring for Lady Macbeth's equally mechanized somnabulism. Her overt and uncontrolled dementia symbolizes the anguish that Macbeth has consistently repressed. "Fie, my Lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard?" (V. i. 34-35, she scolds to the darkness; but she has never understood the true extent of darkness that Macbeth has perpetrated. He has gone beyond soldiery to effect the overthrow of order, to make his bid for immortality, and then to live sleeplessly with an appalling realization of his actual insecurity. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, fixates only on Macbeth's outward acts of atrocity. Consequently, she hides herself in "slumbery agitation" (11) while Macbeth's insomnia insures his tortured exposure.

Macbeth is now beyond the humanizing effect that fear or conscience would imply. He shouts orders as he arms for battle, and yet pauses to reflect on his own empty annoyance with the shriek of women. His surfeit of agony—"supp'd full with horrors" (V. v. 13)—renders him devoid of concern, and his nihilism is expressed in terms of eternal dissatisfaction that justifiably make up the play's most memorable passage. Macbeth gruffly demands, "Wherefore was that cry?" (15); and, in response to the report of his wife's death, expatiates:

She should have died hereafter:
There would have been a time for such a word.—
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

(V. v. 17-28)

The word "hereafter" is loaded with the witches' promise of kingship, and Lady Macbeth's own first greeting. "Hereafter" is the time when Macbeth would be the undisputed King, his lady would be Queen and together they would establish a golden dynasty of Scottish princes. That time has not—nor will it ever—come. And Macbeth's vaguely annoyed response here is in character with his earlier demand: "Bring me no more reports" (V. iii. 1). Macbeth is as tired of information as he is of life. "I have lived long enough" (22) he declares, bespeaking the extent of his pathological avoidance and dissociation. Yet he continues, despite the realization of his own pointlessness—like the addict who knows that his self-destruction is defined by his search for the ultimate high, the intermeshing of life and the final experience: death. But death on such terms is as meaningless as life, and as elusive as comfort. "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow" evokes an intuition at once nostalgic and beyond hope: Duncan would have departed in peace "to-morrow" (I. v. 60); Banquo's counsel was cleverly postponed until "to-morrow" (III. i. 22); "to-morrow" (III. iv. 30) Macbeth would determine how to deal with the escaped Fleance. Like the schoolboy philosopher who discovers that tomorrow never comes, Macbeth begins to realize that nothing in his experience is now availing. Throughout, he has been one day behind, and this "petty pace" to eternity indicates the extent of his precarious power as well as the futility of all his yesterdays. Macbeth—childless widower, forsaken King, and unrepentant murderer—is left with nothing but himself and an eternal vista of nothingness that renders humanity a mere cast of self-conscious players, and the script of life an idiotic improvisation. The passage is an awesome disclosure of the infinite. The nature of the disclosure—its attendant wretchedness, waste, and ennui—is Macbeth's punishment.

Like Faustus, Macbeth finds hell to be a state of mind. He looks squarely at evil, and chooses it for the sake of a warped sense of power. What Richard Waswo calls "the mystery of iniquity"[10] remains a mystery, even as Macbeth piles crime upon crime. His actions, however, do not take the form of human vice and folly but become increasingly monstrous atrocities, aimed perversely at quelling his internal torment. Yet there is a limit to even the most unconscionable iniquity; and, while Faustus is dragged out kicking and screaming, Macbeth simply no longer cares. Confronted with the intelligence of Birnam wood's seeming march on Dunsinane, he threatens his informant,

> . . . If thou speak'st false,
> Upon the next tree shalt thou hang alive,
> Till famine cling thee: if thy speech be sooth,
> I care not if thou dost for me as much.
>
> (V. v. 38-41)

The prophecy is working itself out with damning insistence, and Macbeth strikes up the battle cry one last time. It is his only way to assert control of the situation. He even proposes to die in soldier's armor instead of the kingly robes that have never quite fit. But all of his outward appurtenances are mere luggage in the face of annihilation.

In terms of actual numbers, the losses are small. "So great a day as this is cheaply bought" (V. ix. 3), observes Siward. Yet audience and reader feel as though a monumental power struggle has taken place: drums have prefixed nearly every scene of the final act, and the scenes themselves shift rapidly to convey a sense of multiform military action. However, on the level of outward warfare, Macbeth has suffered the near-total desertion of his army. The only battle fought here was within Macbeth himself. His tragic singularity was intensified by his declaration of invincibility, his delusions of grandeur a grim complement to his certain overthrow.

Comparisons between Macbeth's paranoia and the confused body politic of Scotland itself readily invite themselves. In fact Macbeth seems to have embodied all the conflicts within this self-destructive country. His head is offered up as a trophy to the new order, but is not this something of a reenactment of the fate of the rebel Macdonwald in Act I? Macduff declares "the time is free" (21), and Malcolm restores order in terms of religious tranquility—but did not the ill-fated Duncan do the same? And what about the witches' prophecy? They have not been wrong yet, and Fleance is still at large. Lest we dismiss him as a mere stripling, it might be remembered that

he was present at the testy interchange between Banquo and Macbeth (II. i. 10-30) just prior to the assassination of Duncan. In any case, even the innocent Young Macduff possessed shrewd and precocious insight into power, when he declared "The liars and swearers are fools; for there are liars and swearers enow to beat the honest men, and hang up them" (IV. ii. 55-57). In Scotland's civil-war environment, they mature quickly. Donalbain is also significantly absent, and vaguely threatening because of it. At Duncan's murder, the elder Malcolm actually looked to his little brother for advice; and Donalbain seemed the sharper of the two in suggesting politic evacuation—as he put it, "There's daggers in men's smiles: the near in blood, / The nearer bloody" (II. iii. 138-39). I do not propose to rewrite the play's conclusion with extraneous circumstances parading as events, but these questions are tantalizingly implicit. Any impartial political observer would be justified in experiencing, as Stephen Booth does, "a vague, free-floating sense that the old cycle is starting over again."[11] With this in mind, we can at least be thankful that the crowning grotesquerie—Macduff's promotion to Thane of Cawdor—does not occur.

The struggles within Macbeth the man are included in the broader forum of *Macbeth* the play. Death is looked to as a means to fulfillment, and then must be returned to again and again to reinforce and consolidate that fulfillment. But who will succeed? A killer's career becomes a struggle with his own tendencies toward self-destruction, even as he attempts to eliminate all heirs but his own. He, of course, "has no children" (IV. iii. 216). But the state of Scotland does and it must discover how to exert control over those children. Consequently, the fragile nature of political security in Scotland calls for something less than optimism. The country has been in a state of civil war since the play's outset. The conflict has shifted variously from outward acts of assassination and terrorism to inward dread in the apalling imagery of night and insomnia. While Macbeth, when living, could not sleep, it might be suggested that Scotland, now "liberated," dare not. For security is a grotesquely elusive concept that promises only madness as the search for it intensifies. The delusions that attend it are like nightmares: they come from nowhere, reside only in the mind, and wake into terror. Death then arrives as, at once, a welcome respite and a monotonous horror. Macbeth has learned it the hard way and lived his terrors throughout the course of his doomed administration. His delusions mesh perfectly with the play's disorder overall with its tor-

tuous unrest, its irreconcilable ambiguities, and its glimpses into the tormented substructure of a paranoid's hell on earth.

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Notes

[1]Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith (1927; rpt. New York: Tudor Publishing, 1955), p. 168. Throughout, I quote Shakespeare from the New Arden *Macbeth*, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen, 1972).

[2]Michael Goldman, "Language and Action in *Macbeth*," in *Focus on Macbeth*, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 142. See also the stylistic analyses of Lawrence Danson, *Tragic Alphabet: Shakespeare's Drama of Language* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974); and John Baxter, *Shakespeare's Poetic Styles: Verse Into Drama* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

[3]R. A. Foakes, "Images of Death: Ambition in *Macbeth*," in *Focus on Macbeth*, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 14. In the same collection of essays see Derek Russell Davis, "Hurt Minds," pp. 210-28, who goes outside the drama to build up something of a psychological "case-report" on the Macbeths and the nature of their crimes. My interpretation is also indebted to Maynard Mack Jr.'s *Killing the King: Three Studies in Shakespeare's Tragic Structure, Yale Studies in English*, 180 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1973).

[4]Robert Ornstein, *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy* (1960; rpt. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975), p. 231.

[5]I agree with King-Kok Cheung that "dread" plays an important part in Macbeth's irrational impulse. But dread is only symptomatic in my reading; and I disagree totally with Cheung's contention that Lady Macbeth "looks beyond the horrid act into the power which will result from it." See "Shakespeare and Kierkegaard: 'Dread' in *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35 (1984), 430-39.

[6]Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 107.

[7]Ornstein, p. 232. Ornstein's comparison of Macbeth and Raskolnikov (p. 231) is both appropriate and revealing. There is a real correspondence of psychological effect in *Macbeth* and some of the dark Russian novels of the nineteenth century—a correspondence that just barely eluded G. Wilson Knight's chapter "Shakespeare and Tolstoy" in *The Wheel of Fire* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1930), pp. 263-72, and has been missed altogether in Lucy Gent's recent comparison of Macbeth and Pip in "The Self-Cozening Eye," *RES*, 34 (1983), p. 423.

[8]Knight, p. 160. Here as in so many places, however, Knight is seminal. On the play's hallucinatory and psychological disorder in general, see D. A. Traversi, *An Approach to Shakespeare*, 3rd ed. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 423-48.

[9]Of course Macbeth's painful vision is salubrious on a historical level. James I was popularly considered to have descended through Banquo's line. See W. G. Boswell-Stone, ed. *Shakespeare's Holinshed* (1896; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1966), pp. 19, 35.

[10]Richard Waswo, "Damnation, Protestant Style: Macbeth, Faustus, and Christian Tragedy," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 4 (1974), p. 67.

[11]Stephen Booth, *"King Lear," "Macbeth," Indefinition, and Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1983), p. 92. Richard Horwich is also astute on this point, seeing Macduff as "a survivor, in a country whose survival is in question," in his essay "Integrity in *Macbeth:* The Search for the 'Single State of Man'." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 29, (1978), p. 371.

"An Enemy in Their Mouths": The Closure of Language in *Othello*

by Sharon Beehler

Although plays usually consist of dialogue which establishes communication between the characters, the success of that communication, whether it achieves mutual understanding between the speakers, is subject to the playwright's and the performers' control, not the efforts of the fictional characters themselves. Hence, when a playwright finds it necessary to have a character lie and be believed in that lie, he or she can do so by having the responding character indicate acceptance of the untruth. The elements of "real life" chance and circumstance do not impinge upon the listening character's required belief. But this does not mean that characters and their dialogue cannot be susceptible through their creator (consciously or unconsciously) to the same problems and eccentricities of language with which we all must cope every day.

In Shakespeare's *Othello* we are given the opportunity to witness scenes in which the words put into play by characters in dialogue slip rapidly from one meaning to another, sometimes with the speaker's awareness and sometimes without it, sometimes with the listener's awareness and sometimes without it. A clear example of such verbal slipperiness occurs in III. iv., when Desdemona seeks information from the Clown concerning Cassio's whereabouts:

> *Desdemona.* Do you know, sirrah, where Lieutenant Cassio lies?
> *Clown.* I dare not say he lies anywhere.
> *Desdemona.* Why, man?
> *Clown.* He's a soldier, and for one to say a soldier lies, 'tis stabbing.
> *Desdemona.* Go to. Where lodges he?
> *Clown.* To tell you where he lodges is to tell you where I lie.
> *Desdemona.* Can anything be made of this?
> *Clown.* I know not where he lodges, and for me to devise a lodging and say he lies here, or he lies there, were to lie in mine own throat.[1]

Here the Clown deliberately puns on the word "lie," causing frustration for Desdemona, not because she *doesn't* understand him but because she *does*. However, despite her understanding, from her point of view this communicative effort is not successful because she cannot get a straight answer to her question. But what exactly do we

mean by a "straight" answer? Apparently, a "straight" answer is one which the speaker offers in a sincere attempt to satisfy the listener's (or questioner's) needs: it travels directly, like the straight flight of an arrow, from the speaker to the listener. In the case of the Clown, who refuses to play by the rules, the answers deliberately call the listeners' attention to their own slipperiness. The Clown does not *deceive* Desdemona; he merely teases her.

In another instance, during the council scene, the unreliability of language to convey a precise meaning is indicated by repeated contradictions which leave the listeners very uncertain about what to believe. The point becomes obvious within the first thirteen lines of the scene:

> *Duke.* There is no composition in these news
> That gives them credit.
> *1 Sentry.* Indeed, they are disproportioned.
> My letters say a hundred and seven galleys.
> *Duke.* And mine, a hundred forty.
> *2 Sentry.* . . . And mine, two hundred.
> But though they jump not on a just account—
> As in these cases, where the aim reports,
> 'Tis oft with difference—yet do they all confirm
> A Turkish fleet, and bearing up to Cyprus.
> *Duke.* Nay, it is possible enough to judgment.
> I do not so secure me in the error
> But the main article I do approve
> In fearful sense.
>
> (I. iii. 1-12)

The speakers here don't seem to know for sure how many vessels comprise the Turkish fleet, and the destination of that fleet is likewise subject to conflicting reports. As soon as the Duke finally assesses that the Turks are bound for Cyprus, word arrives that the Turks are headed for Rhodes, news which immediately receives confirmation by a second messenger who says that a second fleet has rendezvoused with the first at Rhodes. However, the second messenger then adds that both fleets have together headed for Cyprus. The confusion arises not from lies or puns but from partial truths as they become available. Only after all the pieces have been added, all the factors considered, can the picture be interpreted.

When we converse, we normally try to make the interpretive task as easy as possible for our listeners and expect that they will in turn simplify the process for us. Straight answers attempt to accommodate this paradigm. But all language, no matter how carefully chosen, no matter how "straight," carries with it a load of

potential meaning. While it is true that context, convention, and inflection can all contribute toward lessening the amount of extraneous "noise" or interference from unwanted meanings, we must always respect the plurality of meanings inherent in the language we use. To neglect such respect leaves us vulnerable to lies and to the ridicule of others when we miss the point of a joke that relies upon a sense of a word's multiple meanings. The Clown's puns encourage acknowledgement of such plurality while the messenger's reports remind us that even seemingly unambiguous language is variable and needs to be questioned before being interpreted and that even then the truth may not reside in that interpretation. Othello makes the mistake of ceasing to respect the plurality of language, of not pausing to consider varying interpretations of Iago's words and of Desdemona's words, of failing to recognize that the plurality of language can reach as far as the exact opposite of what seems the appropriate, the "straight" meaning, and that lies can seem truth, and truth lies.

This problem of interpretation enables Iago to practice upon Othello. Unlike the Clown whose language play can be readily perceived by his listener, and unlike the Duke's messengers whose language conveys only as much of the truth as they know, Iago conceals the slipperiness of the language he uses with Othello and tells him half-truths despite his knowledge of a much larger truth. Simultaneously, he encourages Othello to regard him as "honest." Iago's scheme involves more complexity than this, however.

Iago's intoxicating influence actually alters Othello's very understanding of the way language works, rendering him unable to engage in satisfactory dialogue, especially with Desdemona.[2] Like a drunkard, Othello soon appears to be living in a world wholly different from the one perceived by those around him. Rational judgments about what he hears and does seem impossible for him as he stumbles from one erroneous assumption to another. Iago anticipates the intoxicating effects of the poisonous words with which he befuddles Othello (as he had previously befuddled Cassio): "I'll pour this *pestilence* into his ear, / That [Desdemona] repeals [Cassio] for her body's lust" (II. iii. 350-51, my italics). Iago likewise perceives that his goal in using such intoxicating language must be to make Othello *change:* "The Moor already changes with my poison, / Dangerous conceits are, in their natures, poisons." (III. iii. 330-31).[3] Such a change involves an altered discourse and an altered perception of the discourse belonging to others: as Cassio while drunk becomes "full of quarrel and offense," so Othello, drunk on Iago's lies, "breaks out to savage madness." By causing such a change in Othello, Iago influ-

ences the Moor to speak a distorted and irrational language, a language consisting of previously unused words and assumptions about words, a language certainly unfamiliar to Othello's chief listener, Desdemona.

When in Act I Iago speaks of Othello's "Free and open nature," he refers, at least in part, to Othello's faith in himself and in those around him, but this openness in Othello's character has other implications. It suggests that Othello is, like Cassio, receptive to others' influence and therefore vulnerable; it also suggests that Othello tends to converse with others by assuming (not unnaturally) that what they say can be readily understood. The weakness which Iago perceives in this naive assumption leads to Othello's misunderstanding of how language functions.

Othello's belief that language can be readily understood means that he is likely to give only casual thought to the multiple meanings of words before interpreting what people say to him. Normally, such a practice would not have dangerous consequences, but when vengeance motivates the speaker (as it does Iago), the listener puts himself at risk by assuming that the "obvious" meaning is the "right" one. But he can be just as foolish if he assumes that the speaker's (e.g. Desdemona's) "obvious" meaning is the "wrong" one. Observations like these about the language we use to communicate have led such critics as Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco to agree that our perceptions of language can be described figuratively as "open" and "closed": words that are thought to convey an actual, single, pristine meaning which has been focused by its context are "closed" but words that are thought to be constantly in flux and therefore never grounded in a single meaning are "open."[4] The continual realigning of interpretive possibilities by both speaker and listener necessitates some awareness that in certain situations the immediate closure of language and the drawing of quick conclusions can be, as they are in *Othello*, fatal.

Iago encourages Othello, who normally (though unconsciously) respects the openness of language, to perceive both Iago's and Desdemona's language as inherently closed and to draw hasty conclusions from that limited perception.[5] Moreover, Iago creates a situation in which Desdemona and Othello *must* communicate openly, but in which it is impossible for them to do so because they are prevented from ever discovering an understanding of each other that *enables* them so to communicate. The absence of such an understanding, together with Othello's altered perception about words, an absence and a perception which leave the characters uncommunicative, makes silence (in this case the silence of death) the inevitable alternative.

For Desdemona and Othello, the discourses with which they have shared their love before marriage are no longer suitable for the marriage relationship. Othello replaces his hypnotically wooing words with the discourse of command, the discourse he knows as a general. In the first act Othello's only words to Desdemona are commanding, and to them she makes no reply:

> Come, Desdemona. I have but an hour
> Of love, of worldly matters and direction,
> To spend with thee. We must obey the time.
>
> (I. iii. 301-03)

Wooing and commanding are familiar discourses for Othello, but marriage requires a new kind of dialogue. The practical concerns of married life demand a new, more intimate style, one which the lovers need time to develop. Time is the one thing they do not have, however. They are immediately thrust into a military crisis which produces the domestic crises of temporary separation and hasty leave-taking. Because they are strangers, virtual foreigners to each other in the new relationship, they do not yet, when they reach Cyprus, possess the comfortable language of wedlock which would allow them to fight together against forces that would seek to disturb their tranquility.[6] Othello's early unguarded confidence in himself and in Desdemona makes it possible for Iago to instill doubt where there is as yet unsubstantiated, because untried, reason for trust.[7]

Because Othello lacks a clear sense of Desdemona as his wife, she becomes for him a curiosity, a figure to be observed in order to be known. Iago's strategy, then, is to provide Othello with an image of "wife," one which limits interpretation of what Othello observes, and thus to beguile him into grasping at that image as an appropriate representation of Desdemona. This preconceived image includes a form of discourse, a language of cunning that makes Desdemona, especially when she speaks, seem even more foreign, more alien, than the new relationship would naturally imply. Subsequently, Othello begins to accept an equally vile image of himself, and this image is not merely the product of Iago's corrupt fancy but is one that already exists in Othello's own mind beneath the cool veneer of the general. This image likewise includes a preconceived language, one that is barbarous and full of animal metaphors. As these two languages become firmly established in Othello's mind, the possibility of successful communication between the newlyweds becomes increasingly slim.

The process by which Iago achieves this predicament is cautious and yet rapid. He knows that speed is crucial in order to prevent love

from finding its own discourse: "Dull not device by coldness and delay" (II. iii. 382), he says to himself. He begins seducing Othello by differentiating between the soldier (Othello) and the civilian (Desdemona). In Act II Othello finds he must account to Desdemona for the soldiers' rowdiness which has brought her from her bed, a rowdiness contrived by Iago: "'Tis the soldier's life / To have their balmy slumbers wak'd with strife" (251-52). Shortly afterwards, Iago implies distinctions between the Moor and the Venetians. Through Iago's agency, Othello sees Cassio and Desdemona in close conversation, implying an intimacy from which Othello is excluded. Desdemona herself unwittingly emphasizes this exclusion when she pleads on Cassio's behalf:

> . . . What? Michael Cassio,
> That came a-wooing with you, and so many a time,
> When I have spoke of you dispraisingly,
> Hath ta'en your part—to have so much to do
> To bring him in!
>
> (III. iii. 70-74)

Such lines revealing Desdemona's previous criticisms of Othello will not now be a comfort to him. Together these two types of difference between Othello and Desdemona (soldier versus civilian and Moor versus Venetian) convince Othello that the knowledge he has as yet had of his wife has been superficial. Iago reinforces Othello's growing insecurity regarding Desdemona by saying,

> Her will, recoiling to her better judgment,
> May fall to match you with her country forms,
> And happily repent.
>
> (III. iii. 243-45)

Iago thus urges the naturalness of such distinctions.

As Othello increasingly feels himself to be inferior to Desdemona and Cassio, not only in his obvious racial distinctions but also in his supposed lack of eloquence ("those soft parts of conversation") and in his advanced age ("the vale of years"), Desdemona, as his wife, becomes for him a "delicate creature," a being wholly alien to his experience. The image of this being which has been suggested to Othello by Iago includes ideas of unfaithfulness and, more importantly for our purposes, duplicity:

> I know our country disposition well;
> In Venice they do let God see the pranks

> They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience
> Is not to leave 't undone, but keep 't unknown.
> (III. iii. 207-10)

As Othello begins to suspect Desdemona's cunning, he also begins to see himself as an unsophisticated and therefore easily duped soldier, lacking the refinements and worldliness of Venetians, and consequently even more gullible than the Venetian husbands to whom Iago refers. Because he accepts these images, he makes the fatal mistake of assuming that the "Cunning" Desdemona has a single "super-subtle" meaning behind her words: he hears her seem to say, "You are a cuckold," even as she utters the words, ". . .'twas that hand that gave away my heart [to you]" (III. iv. 45). Assuming she has given her heart to Cassio, he cannot even consider the bracketed meaning for what she says. Thus, his limitation of her language makes communication between them, communication which ought to rely upon an openminded attitude towards language, impossible.

The need for individuals like Othello and Desdemona to regard language as open when they engage in dialogue has been stressed and explained by the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. Othello's belief that Desdemona has a discourse of her own, one that is "super-subtle," is challenged by Bakhtin's theory of "dialogics" which observes that all languages must be regarded as essentially public because entirely private or personal language would not serve the purpose of language at all, which is to communicate. Speakers, according to Bakhtin, are said to have their "own" discourse only insofar as each brings cultural, historical, and psychological perceptions to bear upon pre-existing linguistic constructs which are already imbued or saturated with meaning. For Bakhtin, "Discourse lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context."[8] Hence, the listener, who provides the "alien context," also influences the communication. If the listener refuses, as Othello does, to participate sincerely in the discourse and respect the openness of language, he exaggerates the "alien context" and consequently distorts the linguistic message of the speaker. Before the message can be interpreted or closed, its plurality must be considered. Under Iago's influence, Othello neglects this stage of openness and moves directly to preconceived interpretations. Were he to recover the sense of language's openness, Iago's plot would fail.

Successful communication thus relies upon a weaving of words, each colored by an infinite plurality of interpretation and each oper-

ating at cross purposes, into a fabric of mutually understood meaning. Both parties sit at the loom; both parties modulate the warp and woof of the discourse. As Bakhtin observes,

> Thus an active understanding, one that assimilates the word under consideration into a new conceptual system, that of the one striving to understand, establishes a series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new elements. It is precisely such an understanding that the speaker counts on. . . . The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on the alien territory, against his, the listener's, apperceptive background.[9]

In other words, the rich complexity of the listener's understanding of language must always be regarded by the speaker who seeks to engage in discourse: it is not enough for the speaker to know exactly what he or she "means"; the range of interpretive possibilities perceived by the listener must also be taken into account. It is in the open space between word spoken and word interpreted that the word's fullness of meaning accrues. It is in the appreciation and respect of this space that communication succeeds or fails.

Othello, instead of trying to accommodate the foreignness or divergence of both his own and Desdemona's words, barricades his territory against the intrusion of her alien and open discourse.[10] He will *not* strive to understand, to acknowledge the open place of interpretation, even while Desdemona assumes that he does. Othello's failure to recognize the "public" or common ground in language, the place of openness which assimilates what is alien, isolates him and removes from him the chance for communicating with his wife. He has already decided what Desdemona's truth is and has closed the meaning of her words; consequently, language no longer has the potential for conveying her sense of truth.

Desdemona's ignorance of Othello's misguided sense of language and her own innocence in the marriage state prevent her from effectively exercising her proper sense of how language ought to work and entrap her as she becomes afraid of Othello's strange manner and his wrath. Her confusion leads her to say what she thinks will calm her husband. Unfortunately, her words are lies which only confirm Othello's preconceived judgment. In the crucial scene during which Othello's anger pushes Desdemona into telling what she no doubt perceives as an inconsequential fib, we can see how far from Bakhtin's ideal their discourse has fallen. The subject is, of course, the handkerchief:

Desdemona. It is not lost. But what and if it were?
Othello. How?
Desdemona. I say it is not lost.
Othello. . . . Fetch 't, let me see't.
Desdemona. Why so I can, sir; but I will not now.
(III. iv. 85-87)

Not only does Desdemona here refuse to obey her husband (despite her earlier insistence, "Whate'er you be, I am obedient" [III. iii. 91]), she also plays into Othello's and ultimately Iago's hands by denying the loss of the handkerchief, a loss which Othello knows to have occurred. Thus, to Othello's ears, she seems to verify Iago's image of her as a cunning creature: her use of language seems intended to deceive and humiliate Othello.

The remainder of the scene consists of impassioned attempts by each speaker to return the conversation to his or her particular concern; quite clearly, both are so immersed in their own thoughts that neither realizes what is happening. Desdemona's fear causes her to seek relief from the subject of the weighty handkerchief in what she regards as the innocuous subject of Cassio, and Othello continues to seek reinforcement for his belief that Desdemona is unfaithful:

Desdemona. Pray you let Cassio be received again.
Othello. Fetch me the handkerchief! My mind misgives.
Desdemona. Come, come!
You'll never find a more sufficient man.
Othello. The handkerchief!
Desdemona. . . . I pray talk me of Cassio
Othello. The handkerchief!
Desdemona. A man that all his time
Hath founded his good fortunes on your love,
Shared dangers with you—
Othello. The handkerchief!
Desdemona. I' faith, you are to blame.
Othello. Zounds!
(III. iv. 91-99)

Neither one is able any longer to respect the open place of discourse.

In addition to providing a source of controversy in the play, the handkerchief also offers a rich image of language itself.[11] It is passed from one person to another, and it invites interpretation. Like Desdemona's language, it has only one meaning for Othello. Both the potential harmony of their discourse and the handkerchief itself are important signs of their love. And just as Desdemona eventually "loses" her voice, so too she loses the handkerchief. Moreover, the handker-

chief is manipulated by Iago, who is also the manipulator of language. As a "magic web," it represents Iago's plot, his "net / That shall enmesh them all," a net of words which entrap even while they themselves remain at large, outside the bounds of imposed meaning. Othello's story of the handkerchief's origins likewise emphasizes this connection between the handkerchief and the nature of language. He says,

> . . . That handkerchief
> Did an Egyptian to my mother give;
> She was a charmer, and could almost read
> The thoughts of people.
> . . . . . .
> There's magic in the web of it.
> A sibyl, that had numb'red in the world
> The sun to course two hundred compasses,
> In her prophetic fury sew'd the work; . . .
> (III. iv. 57-60; 71-74)

The two individuals—a sibyl and an Egyptian sorceress—credited with creating and giving the handkerchief were familiar figures to Elizabethans, being recognized as possessors of truth who told that truth in words whose meanings were anything but closed. In order to understand the messages of such mystics, one had to maintain a strong sense of the openness of the word. Othello's story thus points out the very problem with language that Iago relies upon when weaving his net to catch his prey. Like the sibyl's truth which is woven into language through a plurality of threads, not singly stamped upon its surface, meaning cannot be located in one word (or thread); it magically infuses the texture of the entire product. This "meaning" is always plural and can be "ta'en out," like threads, or diversely interpreted by different "readers."[12]

Othello's own enchanting words about the handkerchief's origins (words similar, no doubt, to his pre-marital wooing that Brabantio considered "witchcraft" but that Othello says Desdemona devoured with a "greedy ear") actually weave a spell which, by seeming to imply that Othello has recovered his sense of language's right usage, a sense which he clearly possessed while courting Desdemona, lures Desdemona into nearly confessing the handkerchief's loss:

> *Othello.* . . . it was dy'd in mummy which the skillful
> Conserv'd of maidens' hearts.
> *Desdemona.* . . . I' faith! Is 't true?
> *Othello.* Most veritable. Therefore look to 't well.
> *Desdemona.* Then would to God that I had never seen 't!
> *Othello.* Ha? Wherefore?

Desdemona. Why do you speak so startlingly and rash?
Othello. Is 't lost? Is 't gone? Speak, is 't out 'o 'th way?
Desdemona. Heaven bless us!
Othello. Say you?
Desdemona. It is not lost; but what and if it were?
Othello. How?
Desdemona. I say, it is not lost.

(III. iv. 76-87)

For a moment it seems as if their communication will be restored because, had she told the truth, Othello's image of her as a liar would have been shaken. But Othello's rough "Ha? Wherefore?" (which again expresses suspicion and preconceived understanding) frightens her into the lie which seals her fate. Instead of allowing his message to be properly influenced by Desdomona's "apperceptive background," Othello forces his own sense of what words mean upon his listener so that she adopts the language (i.e. a lie) he has come to expect from her.

Like the idea of language he has accepted (that words directly convey a single meaning which rests within or behind them), Othello perceives his new self-image, that of a cuckolded barbarian, as his true self that has been disguised by the false exterior of a military hero:

. . . O, now, forever
Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content!
Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars
That makes ambition virtue! O, farewell!
Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, th' ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
And, O you mortal engines, whose rude throats
Th' immortal Jove's dread clamors counterfeit,
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone.

(III. iii. 352-62)

Instead of seeing himself, like language, as a multiple and constantly shifting interplay of emotions, thoughts, and perceptions, Othello discards the nobility he has earlier displayed and closes himself off from the context (i.e. the world) in which he could maintain the full richness of his human identity. The disintegration of his language in IV, i to broken fragments of his earlier eloquence indicates this decay:

Lie with her? Lie on her? We say lie on her, when they belie her. Lie with her! 'Zounds, that's fulsome.—

> Handkerchief—confessions—handkerchief! To confess, and be hang'd for his labor—first, to be hang'd, and then to confess.—I tremble at it. Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shake me thus. Pish! Noses, ears, and lips.—is 't possible?—Confess—handkerchief!—O devil!
>
> (34-43)

Much of the irony of this speech resides in Othello's blindness to the open quality of the very language he himself uses: the puns on "lie" (which echo the Clown's earlier puns), the load of meaning with which he burdens each word, and the infinitely open utterance "Pish!" all testify to the resistance of language, that is, its opposition to closure. Yet, he will not allow this openness to Desdemona's words. And again, it is the handkerchief which runs through his thoughts and his discourse, seemingly giving focus to all his otherwise disjointed expressions.

But it must be remembered that the handkerchief, like language, is without meaning except insofar as that meaning is imposed upon it or woven into it from an outside source. Othello's observation recalls this idea when, referring to Desdemona, he asks,"Was this fair paper, this most goodly book / Made to write 'whore' upon?" (IV. ii. 71-72). Desdemona, like the handkerchief and like the paper and book, is "fair" and "good" (that is, "pure"), but Othello, through Iago's agency, has inscribed upon her the damning epithet. In herself, she is not a "whore"; only appearances would make her so. Such labeling seeks to confine, to identify the supposed essence of Desdemona; it denies the open plurality of her personality (as he has also denied his own) and allows Othello to continue in his wayward understanding of her discourse.

Such waywardness brings them inevitably to the tragedies of the fifth act. The degree to which Desdemona is victimized by Othello's misunderstanding of language, a misunderstanding devised by Iago, becomes evident at the end of Act IV when she turns to Iago for assistance, saying,

> . . . Alas, Iago,
> What shall I do to win my lord again?
> Good friend, go to him; for, by this light of heaven,
> I know not how I lost him.
>
> (150-53)

Here we find Desdemona turning over her powers of persuasion to Iago. By this time, she can no longer speak for herself: she has lost her voice and must rely upon the words of others to speak for her.[13] The scene continues with her ritualistically swearing to her innocence (an action which mirrors the earlier vows of Othello and Iago to revenge her supposed unfaithfulness). She is, as it were, making confession to her enemy, Iago, literally kneeling in order to intensify her sense that her words convey truth. The irony of her pleas is apparent, and Iago ignores her, setting out on the errand which is intended to end with Cassio's death. Cassio, Desdemona later indicates, is her last source of truth, but Cassio, Othello soon tells her, is dead, causing her to lose hope, "Alas, he is betray'd and I undone" (V. ii. 79). Desdemona's undoing is actually a transgression of the plurality of her language: Othello has violated the open space of her discourse. By refusing to listen to Desdemona at all because he believes that he has already "heard" her message, Othello effectively silences her. Clearly, her voice has been effectively smothered long before Othello's violent deed.

Even in their last conversation, however, Desdemona repeatedly tries to find sanctuary from Othello's violence in the ambiguities of his own words:

> *Othello.* . . . I would not kill thy soul.
> *Desdemona.* Talk you of killing?
> *Othello.* . . . Ay, I do.
> *Desdemona.* . . . Then heaven
> Have mercy on me!
> *Othello.* Amen, with all my heart!
> *Desdemona.* If you say so, I hope you will not kill me.
> *Othello:* Hum!
> . . . . . .
> *Othello.* Thou art on thy deathbed.
> *Desdemona.* Ay, but not yet to die.
> . . . . . .
> *Othello.* . . . Thou art to die.
> *Desdemona.* Then lord have mercy on me!
> *Othello.* I say, amen.
> *Desdemona.* And have you mercy too!
> (34-37; 54-55; 59-61)

By calling attention to the openness of Othello's words—that saying "amen" *can* indicate a willingness to be merciful and that being on one's deathbed does *not* mean one must immediately die—she reminds us of the nature of language from which Othello has been separated. But the more she speaks in this dangerous vein (danger-

ous to Othello, for it will undermine his intention), the more he regards her as a liar whose "super-subtle" language would replace "sacrifice" with "murder."

And yet, even as Othello viciously muffles her pleas, Desdemona's voice is not quite silenced. Othello's violence is interrupted by a voice at the door, "My lord, my lord! What, ho! My lord, my lord!" and his next words indicate the blurring of this voice with Desdemona's: "What noise is this? Not dead? Not yet quite dead?" (V. iv. 89-90). Emilia enters with news of Roderigo's death and Cassio's escape, but hears the faint voice of her mistress who declares Othello's innocence even while paving the way for discovery of his crime by turning over her voice to Emilia; she pleads, "Commend me to my kind lord" (V. ii. 130). This plea shortly forces Othello back into a proper understanding of language because Emilia, unlike the gentle Desdemona, has no wifely reverence for Othello, a reverence which prevented Desdemona from speaking with anger in her own defense. Emilia immediately lashes out on her mistress' behalf, and Othello is forced to listen: "Thou dost belie her, and thou art a devil . . . . let them all, / All, all cry shame against me, yet I'll speak" (138; 228-29). He has no incentive to regard Emilia, unlike Desdemona, as the "cunning whore of Venice;" Emilia is an unknown factor, one which must be understood as speaking a different language, a language whose openness must be allowed. Suddenly, Othello faces the possibility that he may have erroneously closed not only Desdemona's language, making it "supersubtle," but also Iago's language, regarding it as "honest." Emilia says of her husband, "He lies to th' heart" (63).

This sudden shaking of his perceptions and his growing awareness of just how much the "erring barbarian" he has become—"O I were damned beneath all depth in hell / but that I did proceed upon just grounds / To this extremity" (142-44)—leads him to suicide, but it also belatedly restores his sense of language to its proper sphere. His final speech, so often quoted for its poetic beauty, is sadly reminiscent of the "wooing words" which won the approval of both Desdemona and the Venetian duke:

> Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
> Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
> Of one that lov'd not wisely but too well;
> Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,
> Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
> Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
> Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdu'd eyes,

> Albeit unused to the melting mood,
> Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees
> Their medicinable gum.
>
> (351-60)

In this speech it is important to recognize the movement towards a noticeably figurative language. Such language by its symbolic nature merely intensifies our awareness of the openness of language in general. How appropriate it is that Othello should make his own death an ambivalent metaphor for his folly. On the one hand, he tells a story in which he implies a similarity between himself and a Turk who has "traduced [or 'misled'] the state," a likeness not made explicit until the moment when Othello stabs himself in the person of "the circumcised dog." On the other hand, the death blow is closely associated with silencing, both because it causes the stoppage of Othello's voice and because he says of the Turk, "I took [him] by the throat . . . / And smote him, thus" (364-65).[14] Lodovico's and Gratiano's familiar answering exclamations also emphasize the sense that language itself is in large part to blame for the tragedy:

> *Lodovico.* O bloody period!
> *Gratiano.* . . . All that's spoke is marr'd.
>
> (366-67)

Othello's open and therefore communicative speech just past is both a literal and a figurative silencing, a withdrawal from the intoxicating effects of Iago's poison. However, it is a withdrawal that on the one hand harmoniously succeeds, but which on the other hand fails tragically.

Thus, we are reminded that the closing of language leads, in fact, to the silencing of voices, the virtual death of potential meaning. Communication becomes impossible. Ironically, meaning can exist only in the free and open places of discourse, not within any closed boundaries we may selfishly attempt to impose upon words. As a playwright, Shakespeare must have been acutely conscious of the public nature of words. He realized that a play, a text made of language which by necessity could not be closed, was public property, open to the interpretive dialogue of readers, directors, and actors.[15] He knew that the linguistic constructs known as "Othello," "Iago," and "Desdemona" had no actual reality behind the words; these were not real people but, like Bakhtin's speakers in novels, were words in search of voices engaged in dialogue with each other and with audiences. Meaning and identity reside only in the interplay of such voices; the words themselves, as isolated phenomena, have no essen-

tial meaning and are essentially silent. What we speak of as "Iago's" duplicity, "Othello's" jealousy, and "Desdemona's" confusion are actually the impressions we derive from the interplay of linguistic constructs or "voices" with our own dialogical responses: in themselves they have no "essence." Thus, we ourselves are as much responsible for the "reality" of these "characters" as Shakespeare.

Were we to assume that "Iago" could be thoroughly identified, could be fully known, by examining the play, we would be making the same mistake Othello makes regarding himself and Desdemona. Whether we concluded that Iago is a devil incarnate, a misled old man, or a sympathetic human being subject to the same flaw as Othello, we would have "identified" or selected only one facet of "Iago's" necessary plurality. For there is no "Iago" which we can know absolutely: the language attributed to "Iago" must remain open, subject always to the richness of interpretation. If it is not, assuming one interpretation is the "right" one, not only do we ignore the fact of language's plurality, but we also deny the living and therefore multiple voices of the texts; as readers we cease, like Othello, to participate effectively in the discourse. Consequently, we prevent the text from continually respeaking to us because we have already determined its absolute meaning; that is, we silence it and, in fact, kill it.

In the end, we must acknowledge that *Othello* demonstrates that words possess an unavoidable slipperiness. The playwright's refusal to treat language as limited, or as most successful in communicating ideas when it is closed, enables the actor, the audience, and the reader to participate in the necessarily collaborative task of creation. The authorial voice remains uncertain, its exact judgments obscure. The continuing and varying responses to this text give convincing evidence of our appreciation of such a technique. In short, the intoxicating effects of the language poured into us and administered so as to conjure us render us compliant to the playwright's will and eager participants in his discourse, so that we, more happily than Othello, fall victim to the language that will "enmesh them all."

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Notes

[1]Lines 1-13. All quotations are from David Bevington, ed., *The Complete Works of Shakespeare,* 3rd ed. (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1980).

[2]The idea of successful (felicitous) and unsuccessful (infelicitous) communication has received substantial theoretical development from the followers of J. L. Austin's

Speech Acts. See especially Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977).

[3]Catherine Shaw's essay, "'Dangerous Conceits Are in Their Natures Poisons': The Language of *Othello*," in *The University of Toronto Quarterly*, 49 (1980), 304-319, treats this idea in passing.

[4]Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco are among the most influential thinkers using these terms. See Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller. (Hill and Wang: New York, 1974), pp. 4-6, and Eco, *The Role of the Reader* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press 1979), pp. 8-10.

[5]Othello's normally open discourse is evident in such lines as these from II. i. 191-196:

> *Desdemona.* The heavens forbid
> But that our loves and comforts should increase,
> Even as our days do grow
> *Othello.* Amen to that, sweet powers!
> I cannot speak enough of this content;
> It stops me here; it is too much of joy.

Here Othello acknowledges the inability of language adequately to convey meaning and ironically supports his understanding of Desdemona's words with the very blessing that later becomes problematic in Act V.

[6]Leslie Fiedler's notion of the stranger sheds other lights on this discussion. See *The Stranger in Shakespeare* (New York: Stein and Day, 1973).

[7]Given Iago's duplicity, time and prior actions are no guarantees of trustworthiness, but in Othello's view they clearly are.

[8]Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, trans. Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), p. 284.

[9]Bakhtin, p. 282.

[10]On this basis it is possible to argue, using Linda Bamber's terms, that Othello is himself as much an "Other" as Desdemona. (See Linda Bamber, *Comic Women, Tragic Men* [Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1982], especially pp. 12-13.)

[11]Robert B. Heilman has observed, "These, then, are the strands of magic in the dramatic web: explicitly, magic as a spell to win unwilling love; magic as the personality that stirs a willing love; magic as the talismanic preserver of love; implicitly, magic as love." (In *Magic in the Web: Action and Language in Othello* [Lexington, Ky.: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1956], p. 212.)

[12]In this context "ta'en out" means "to copy," a procedure which is a kind of "reading." But just as any reading necessarily involves the reader's "apperceptive background" and renders the interpretation different from the source, so too any copying that is performed can never be exactly the same as the original.

[13]This loss of voice is indirectly related to earlier lines in the council scene. Desdemona begs the Duke, ". . . let me find a charter in your voice / T'assist my simpleness" (I. iii. 247-48), and Othello echoes her plea, "Let her have your voice" (263).

[14]Olivier's memorable portrayal of Othello appropriately ends with the Moor slitting his own throat with a concealed wrist blade.

[15]For an interesting discussion of the collaboration which must occur between Shakespeare's plays and his audiences (whether readers or performers), see Philip C. McGuire's *Speechless Dialect: Shakespeare's Open Silences* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985) which recognizes the importance of openness in texts.

The Shaking of the Superflux: *King Lear*, Charity, Value, and the Tyranny of Equivalence

by Mark Koch

While many critics have noted the thematic importance of charity in *King Lear,* very little has been said about the degree to which it forms the essential fabric of the play's action.[1] Too often criticism on the play has offered only the rather vague assertion that this concern with charity is in there—somewhere. This critical haziness can be cleared away, I believe, if charity is considered as part of a larger structure of exchange, and particularly if the play's dramatic action is seen as a conflict between two opposed systems of exchange and valuation.

One of these systems of exchange is suggested when Edgar says to his dying brother, Edmund, "Let's exchange charity."[2] Edgar offers to forgive Edmund's treachery in exchange for Edmund's forgiving Edgar the mortal wounding just delivered him. Such an unexacting, ambivalent reciprocity allows a fluctuation and uncertainty in the measure of "charity" to be exchanged; indeed, any act of "charity" or forgiveness all but demands an imbalanced exchange, a loose give-and-take. Despite the absence of any real material commodities, this gesture suggests a kind of gift exchange in which the very act of reciprocity is more important than the precise value of the gifts.

The structure of such exchanges reveals much about the moral and political nature of an economy and its system of valuation. In fact, the tenets of gift exchange have served as a basis for theories of social relations from the moral philosophy of Seneca (with which Shakespeare may have been familiar) to the economic anthropology of Marcel Mauss and more recent critical theories.[3] Seneca insisted that the principle of uncalculated, liberal reciprocity is "the chief bond of human society."[4] Mauss, who saw almsgiving as a peculiarly religious kind of gift exchange, made much of the social function of gift giving, noting that it is a commerce alive with feeling and personality, one which rejects "pure individual contract, the money market, sale proper, fixed price, and weighed and coined money."[5]

Opposed to charitable, ambivalent exchange—in Seneca, Mauss, and Shakespeare—is a system of exchange which derives value from material equivalence. When Oswald encounters the "traitor" Glouchester, he exclaims, "A proclaim'd prize! most happy! / That

eyeless head of thine was first fram'd flesh / To raise my fortunes" (IV. vi. 223-25). Here Oswald anticipates an exchange characterized by an equivalence with a precise amount of money; the "eyeless head" of Gloucester can be exchanged by the bounty hunter for the "proclaim'd prize." Such a system of equivalent exchange reduces all things, commodities and people, to a measured monetary value, for money is the medium by which the elements of all transactions can be equalized.

These two systems of exchange, then, provide the dramatic conflict in *King Lear*, but they also represent the real social conflicts evident in England in 1605. It has often been noted that Shakespeare presents two ideologically opposed parties in the play, one which is loyal to older feudal values and another which espouses a new, more modern view of human relations. Decaying feudalism is set against emerging capitalism, the hierarchical order of men against ambitious individualism, and orthodox Elizabethan thought against "malignant" Hobbesian philosophy.[6]

Parallel to these conflicts is the opposition of feudal charitable exchange and modern monetary exchange. This conflict was no less vital than the others in Shakespeare's age. Traditional forms of charity were fast being undermined by a new economic system. Indeed, in the century following the reign of Henry VIII, a number of religious treatises appeared in England which, in their instruction on how good Christians should give alms, attempted to resolve the emerging contradictions between the feudal religious duties of liberal charity and modern economic exchange.[7] In *King Lear*, Shakespeare is concerned with these same contradictions. In fact, the whole of the play can be read as a discourse on charity and the problem of valuation.

The images of beggars and the references to almsgiving which appear on the dramatic surface as the play develops compose a motif for Shakespeare's presentation of this dissolution of feudal charity. But even in the first scene, which A. C. Bradley pointed out "discloses the true position of affairs only to an attention more alert than can be expected in a theatrical audience or has been found in many critics of the play,"[8] the playwright dramatizes at a structural level this conflict between charitable, ambivalent exchange and monetary, equivalent exchange. In this opening scene, the threat to such elements of feudal charitable exchange as almsgiving, generosity, hospitality, and gratitude—all that constitutes liberal reciprocity—emerges from the new order of equivalent exchange. It is against this equivalent exchange and its estimation of value that the play's protagonists must struggle. The greater part of this reading shall thus

focus on the general failing of charitable, ambivalent exchange in the play's first scene and on certain characters' reconsideration of charitable values, and almsgiving in particular, in several paralleled speeches later in the play.

I.

Shakespeare begins *King Lear* with a consideration of the nature of the value which derives from equivalent exchange, already suggesting the mechanized inadequacies of such valuations when applied to social relations. The important opening lines raise questions about the worth of man and reveal the first of the unfortunate assessments that will send Lear along his tragic course:

> *Kent.* I thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.
>
> *Gloucester.* It did always seem so to us; but now in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the Dukes he values most; for equalities are so weigh'd that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moeity.
>
> (I. i. 1-6)

With the division of the kingdom and a kind of algebra, Lear's estimation of Albany and Cornwall is made equal. The dukes' shares of the land are of such equivalent worth that they are interchangeable, "that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moeity." Lear's reason for dividing the kingdom equally between the dukes is to prevent "future strife" (43), and, by equalizing their shares of land, achieve a balance of power. But it is also through these shares of the land, these weighed "equalities," that Lear's affection is measured and the dukes' values realized. In this sense, the personal worth of the dukes is quantifiable and equal to the market worth of their moieties. Therefore, the equation runs, if Albany's moiety is equal to Albany's worth, and Cornwall's moiety is equal to Cornwall's worth, and both moieties are equal to each other, the value of Albany and Cornwall must be the same. We might write it: A = M; C = M; therefore, A = C. Their equalities have been weighed and balanced, as if on scales, and Lear values them equally.

This evaluation through the exchangeability of equals is reiterated almost immediately by Gloucester and thus firmly forges the first parallel link in the Gloucester subplot. From the discussion of the dukes' moieties, the opening dialogue turns to Gloucester's bastard son, Edmund. Gloucester acknowledges that Edmund is his illegitimate son and tells Kent, "But I have a son, Sir, by order of law some

year elder than this, who is yet no dearer in my account" (18-19). Gloucester mentions his lawful son, Edgar, as a counterbalance for establishing his estimation of Edmund, as though Edmund can be defined only in terms of Edgar. Again there is an algebra of equivalents at work here: According to Gloucester's appraisal, Ed equals Ed. And just as the assessment of Albany and Cornwall suggests a kind of market price, because their worth is equal to their shares of the kingdom, Gloucester's "no dearer in my account" suggests that his sons' worth is a numerical figure on the page of an account ledger and, hence, a value exchangeable on the common market. This view of the worth of man that Shakespeare presents in the opening scene does not reflect the sixteenth-century belief in hierarchical degree and divine order, but rather looks forward to the material relativism of Thomas Hobbes and seventeenth-century economic thought.[9]

Not much later in the first scene of the play, we see yet another valuation of people and their market price. Here the value of Lear's daughters is to be announced:

> *Lear.* We have this hour a constant will to publish
> Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife
> May be prevented now. The Princes, France and Burgundy,
> Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,
> Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn,
> And are here to be answer'd.
>
> (42-47)

France and Burgundy are to be answered with the extent of Cordelia's dower, the value of which equals, not only her worth in Lear's account, but also her worth in this market of suitors.

These dowers that Lear is to bestow on Cordelia and her sisters are to be bought with an equivalent sum of language. Lear says to his daughters,

> Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
> That we our largest bounty may extend
> Where nature doth with merit challenge.
>
> (50-52)

In exchange for a protestation of love Lear will grant to his daughters an equivalent portion of the kingdom, thus making language a kind of currency. Despite the fact that the partitioning of the kingdom has been apparently predetermined, Lear still demands his words. Indeed, the reduction of language to mere form deadens these words and brings them even closer to the abstract and formal essence of

money. In exchange for this hard, cold flattery, Lear awards his daughters their equal shares of the kingdom.

Yet even before Lear publicly grants Goneril and Regan their dowers, Regan herself balances her worth with her sister's. In her love vow she says, "I am made of that self metal as my sister, / And prize me at her worth" (68-69). In likening herself to a coin of the same denomination as her sister, Regan not only balances her value with Goneril's, but suggests her affinity with the very medium of equivalent exchange—cold and lifeless money. Lear acknowledges Regan's worth and returns to her an appropriate share of the kingdom, "No less in space, validity, and pleasure, / Than that conferr'd on Goneril" (80-81).

Thus, the valuation in these early lines of King Lear is not only determined by balance, but by the kind of balance or equalizing that is characteristic of a market where money stands for all things. Indeed, the image of a set of scales weighing precious metal and the mercantile nature of the language is so prevalent throughout the first scene that it seems more properly set in a market place than a king's court. To his bidding daughters, Lear appears as an auction crier selling pieces of his kingdom. Quite likely it is the very infusion of these market-determined values into the court—and more specifically, into filial relations—that causes the tragedy in *King Lear.* Certainly it is Cordelia's resistance to this equation of human values with market values which skews Lear's scales and sparks the tragic action.

When Lear turns to Cordelia and asks, "what can you say to draw / A third more opulent than your sisters?" (84-85), Cordelia removes herself from this marketplace by refusing Lear the fixed and tidy package of language he demands. She will not objectify her love, cannot, she says, "heave / My heart into my mouth" (90-91). Not only is Cordelia's love for her father unexchangeable with "a third more opulent," but it is incommensurable and, thus, incapable of being translated into words. She answers Lear with "Nothing." Lear's uncharitable response is a balanced equation: "Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again" (89). Again, Lear sounds as if he were haggling on the market. When he does not receive the proper bid from Cordelia, he says, "Mend your speech a little, / Lest you may mar your fortunes" (93-94). In the Hobbesian, materialist spirit, Lear recognizes nothing outside this system of equivalent exchanges and rejects the possibility that something can be created out of nothing.[10]

If Lear's demand for a vow of love seems cold and exacting, Cordelia's words, which were but a moment earlier incapable of expressing her love, suddenly sound rigid and formal: "I love your

Majesty / According to my bond; no more nor less" (91-92). Her efforts to remain outside a system of formalistic language are frustrated when she reduces her filial relation to an inflexible bond. Yet it is Lear who, violating the principles of Senecan reciprocity, has backed Cordelia into a corner and forced her to rely on the coldness of the bond by demanding a love vow. The more Cordelia tries to objectify her love by explaining her bond, the more impersonal it sounds, and the more she is misunderstood by her father.[11] For Cordelia, words cannot be traded for love, and her efforts to speak highlight the difference between language and love. She is in capable, she says, of "that glib and oily art / To speak and purpose not, since what I well intend, / I'll do't before I speak" (223-25). Cordelia does have a bond with her father, but it is not one that can be figured in words or dowers. Her devotion extends beyond language and the market place of exchangeable equivalents and cannot be reckoned by Lear's test. Her first impulse, to "Love, and be silent" (61) is proper for one who holds human values above market values.

It is Kent who first tries to make Lear understand that Cordelia's "nothing" is not nothing:

> Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least;
> Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sounds
> Reverb no hollowness.
>
> (151-53)

Kent, by pointing out the ambivalence of Cordelia's "nothing," challenges the equation of language and love. Later he leaves Regan and Goneril, saying, "And your large speeches may your deeds approve, / That good effects may spring from words of love" (183-84), suggesting again that words are no measure of actions.

Kent's defense of Cordelia's speech ends in his banishment on the grounds, says Lear,

> That thou hast sought to make us break our vow,
> Which we durst never yet, and with strain'd pride
> To come betwixt our sentence and our power,
>
> (167-69)

Lear demands a logocentric validity in language and, more specifically, in the connectedness of "our sentence and our power." Kent threatens the equivalence of "sentence" (signifier) and "power" (signified) with his mediating interference. But there is no place in Lear's market system for a third element threatening the balance of his equations, so it is banished.

By offering "nothing" for something, Cordelia has upset Lear's scales. As a consequence, Lear strips Cordelia of her dower, which is tantamount to revoking his fatherly love; for it is only through the bestowal of his property that Lear's affection can be assessed. Lear announces, "Let it be so, thy truth then be thy dower" (107). The intangibility of truth makes Cordelia worthless on the suitor market. Now when Lear cries her dowry he says,

> . . . Right noble Burgundy,
> When she was dear to us we did hold her so,
> But now her price is fallen. Sir, there she stands:
> If aught within that little-seeming substance,
> Or all of it, with our displeasure piec'd
> And nothing more, may fitly like your Grace,
> She's there, and she is yours.
>
> (194-200)

Again, her personal worth is inextricable from the "price" that Lear gives to her with her dowry. She is no longer Lear's "best object" (213). Without Lear's property she is but a "little-seeming substance" and becomes the nothing that comes of "nothing."

Yet Cordelia is a nothing only in the market system that reigns in Lear's court; outside of this market her worth is incommensurably great. She knows that the poverty in her language in no way reflects a poverty in her devotion to her father:

> . . . Then poor Cordelia!
> And yet not so; since I am sure my love's
> More ponderous than my tongue.
>
> (75-77)

She later explains to France that her disinheritance was caused by a "want of that for which I am richer, / A still-soliciting eye, and such a tongue / That I am glad I have not" (229-31). In the realm of language and the market, Cordelia is a pauper, but it is only by refusing to enter into these exchanges that she establishes a richness inexpressible in words or money.

France also recognizes that Cordelia's poverty allows her to rise above the mercantile values that surround her:

> Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor;
> Most choice, forsaken; and most lov'd, despis'd!
> Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon:
> Be it lawful I take up what's cast away.
>
> (249-52)

That which is cast away has no value and cannot be bought or sold. But that which cannot be bought or sold is also invaluable. France continues:

> Thy dowerless daughter, King, thrown to my chance,
> Is Queen of us, of ours, and our fair France:
> Not all the dukes of wat'rish Burgundy
> Can buy this unpriz'd maid of me.
>
> (255-58)

Cordelia is "unpriz'd" because she has no equivalent, and without an equivalent to act as a counterweight her value cannot be figured.

France's poignant defense of Cordelia's poverty even extends to a brief critique of Lear's system of evaluation: "Love's not love / When it is mingled with regards that stand / Aloof from th' entire point" (237-39). This speech tilts at Burgundy, whose interest in Cordelia fluctuates with the price of her dowry, but it could as easily be directed at Lear. The mingling, or exchanging, of regards that should not bear on love have made love not love. These regards involve both Cordelia's dower and her words; both are irrelevant to France's estimation of Cordelia which denies the relativism of Hobbesian values. He concludes, "She is herself a dowry" (240). Love is not an assessable value, but—as Shakespeare writes in Sonnet 116—"the star to every wand'ring bark, / Whose *worth's unknown,* although his height be taken" (emphasis added).

Finally, all those who challenge Lear's weighings are removed from his now perfectly balanced kingdom. France and Cordelia forgo a dowry for "a better where to find" (260), and banished Kent, unable to make Lear see difference between word and deed, departs saying, "Fare thee well, King; sith thus thou wilt appear, / Freedom lives hence, and banishment is here" (179-80). In allowing true personal loyalties and filial devotion to be usurped by values calculated by the weighing of equivalents, Lear has become a tyrant.

II.

As material equivalence becomes the rule of all things, as property becomes the common denominator of all relationships, Regan, Goneril, and Edmund find that it is economically advantageous to violate such bonds of human society as gratitude, hospitality, and charity. Consequently, throughout the rest of Act I and all of Act II, Lear—now more tyrannized than tyrant—is met with increasing

coldness at his daughters' houses, is stripped of his retinue of men, and is finally completely dispossessed. In fact the play's chief protagonists, Lear, Gloucester, and Edgar (and in the first scene, Cordelia and Kent) all undergo a process of dispossession. Denied by family and state, cast out of doors, and reduced to beggary, their profound experience is at the heart of Shakespeare's examination of exchange, value, and charity.

Edgar, finding himself disinherited and dispossessed, merely extends his condition to its dramatic extreme as a means of disguise:

> The country gives me proof and precedent
> Of Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices,
> Strike in their numb'd and mortified bare arms
> Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;
> And this horrible object, from low farms,
> Poor pelting villages, sheep-cotes, and mills,
> Sometime with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers,
> Enforce their charity.
>
> (II. iii. 13-20)

While this is an extension of his dispossession, it is also a rejection of a propertied world that had cast him away and made him nothing: "Poor Turlygod! poor Tom! / That's something yet: Edgar I nothing am" (20-21). There is a suggestion here, as elsewhere in the play, that even "the basest and most poorest shape / That ever penury, in contempt of man, / Brought near to beast" (7-9) is something yet. It is perhaps this affirmation of humanity that distinguishes *King Lear* from the more cynical *Timon of Athens,* in which man appears no better than a dog.

Edgar, as Tom of Bedlam, demonstrates the extremity to which the dispossessed are driven to seek alms in a country where liberality withers. Acts of charity seem to be rare occurrences in the world of *King Lear:* "Who gives anything to poor Tom?" (III. iv. 50). As a "sturdy beggar," Tom also faces hard legal strictures, being "whipp'd from tithing to tithing, and stock-punish'd, and imprison'd" (131-32). Many in Shakespeare's time, a time of land enclosure and decay of feudal relations, must have observed the well-documented Abraham Men—mad mendicants who were released from the Bethlehem Hospital to beg for their keep, or not-so-mad mendicants who, like Edgar, merely acted the part of the madman to gain sustenance. Thomas Dekker, among others, described such an Abraham Man in his 1608 *Belman of London,* saying,

> You see pinnes stuck in sundry places of his naked flesh, especially in his armes, which pain hee gladly puts himselfe to . . . only to make you believe he is out of his wits.[12]

The Abraham Man, then, was a ferocious dramatic actor, offering a performance of pain and suffering so intense that the distinction between artifice and reality was blurred. Edgar may only be playing Poor Tom, but in many ways he is indeed a beggar, and, like the play of *King Lear* itself, Edgar's performance will strongly affect those who see it.

The meeting with the Abraham Man forces Lear to reassess the worth of man. On his first seeing Tom of Bedlam, he muses,

> Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume.
>
> (100-03)

Lear believes he has found a man who is truly dispossessed—"unaccomodated man." Tom owns nothing and owes nothing, neither buys nor sells at the market, and is thus removed from a system where values are determined by equivalent exchange. Further, like so many beggars before him, Tom possesses a mystical status and is thought to be endowed with a secret knowledge. Lear calls him a "noble philosopher," a "learned Theban," and insists on learning from him the mystery of things, such as, "What is the cause of thunder?" (152).

Intrigued, Lear himself wishes to become an unaccomodated man: "Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here" (106-07). This dramatic gesture of stripping recalls the legend of Francis of Assisi, who, after being publicly disinherited by his father, immediately returned not only his father's money, but stripped himself of the very clothes he was wearing and thenceforth adopted a life of voluntary poverty. Lear, like Edgar and St. Francis, tries to remove himself as far as possible from the property-determined world which brought on his misfortunes and instead seeks its opposite—complete dispossession. In this way, as well as others, Lear also resembles Timon, choosing to become "A dedicated beggar to the air, / With his disease of all-shunned poverty" (*Timon of Athens*, IV. iii. 13-14).

It is through this process of dispossession that Lear achieves some degree of tragic enlightenment. In the opening scene Lear's ego is absolute. But when he stands exposed on the heath, facing the stormy sublimity of Nature, his ego begins to dissolve. He recognizes that it is only through experiencing the wretched otherness which

negates regal superfluity that he can come to some understanding of the rest of humanity. In his prayer to the dispossessed, Lear says,

> Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of the pitiless storm,
> How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides
> Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
> From seasons such as these? O! I have ta'en
> Too little care of this. Take physic, Pomp;
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
> And show the Heavens more just.
>
> (III. iv. 28-36)

Lear is prescribing not just exposure to feel what wretches feel, but almsgiving, a shaking of the "superflux," as a necessary consequence of such exposure. The very phrase, "shake the superflux," suggests the unmeasured, uncalculated expenditure characteristic of charitable gift exchange. Further, the alms are to be given to "show the Heavens more just," a suggestion which (evoking the feudal association of almsgiving and spiritual grace) implies that alms serve as a medium between man and heaven. Strangely though, man is to shake the superflux not, as conventionally believed, to gain grace from an imposing heaven, but to compensate for heaven's deficient justice. Lear thus plays "handy-dandy" in making man responsible for enforcing divine justice. It is perhaps here, and not in this passage's more obvious suggestion of surplus value and a redistribution of wealth, that the depth of Shakespeare's sense of social responsibility is to be gaged.

Dieter Mehl has suggested that modern critics overemphasize Shakespeare's concern for these wretches, saying, "the plight of the poor is not a major concern of the play, or only insofar as it affects the protagonists."[13] And yet, despite such critical tendencies to minimize or overlook the play's references to beggary, Lear's speech, with all of its naked implications about almsgiving and charity, stands at the center of the play and is in fact integral to Shakespeare's concern with exchange. Whatever else *King Lear* may be "about" (filial ingratitude, justice, madness, the gods, Christian hope, existential suffering and despair), it is also about charity, and the "beggars"—Edgar, Lear, and Gloucester—that dramatize this concern. In all of Shakespeare's sources for the play, there is but one beggar, the King of Paphlagonia in Sidney's *Arcadia,* whose usurpation forces him to beg alms. From this figure Shakespeare drew Gloucester and much of the subplot, but

he also extended this beggarly condition to Edgar and Lear and broadened its importance.

In the subplot, Gloucester too is dispossessed and, blinded, comes to beggary. We are told that he is "poorly led" (IV. i. 10), and that Edgar "begg'd for him" (V. iii. 190). Although at times Gloucester seems to be a mendicant, he is also a notable almsgiver. Twice he gives alms to Edgar, whom he takes to be a Bedlam beggar (IV. i. 63; IV. vi, 28). The speech with which he gives away his first purse is remarkably similar to Lear's prayer for the wretches:

> . . . Heavens, deal so still!
> Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
> That slaves your ordinance, that will not see
> Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly;
> So distribution should undo excess,
> And each man have enough.
>
> (IV. i. 65-70)

The elements are the same as those in Lear's prayer. There is a surplus, an "excess," that must be redistributed through the expenditure of almsgiving and would seem to pose some imminent danger if not dispersed. There is the "lust-dieted man," who must first begin to *feel.* The third element is the power of the Heavens—crucial to almsgiving for it allows an exchange to take place between beggar and almsgiver that is not purely material but is instilled with elements of uncertainty and ambivalence, an exchange which is spiritually interested. The "power" felt could not be precisely equivalent to the value of the coin given.

This admonition to feel Heaven's power and to show it more just also extends to the play's more immediate conflicts. In the following scene Albany, learning of his wife's ill-charity toward Lear, states,

> If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
> Send quickly down to tame these vilde offences,
> It will come,
> Humanity must perforce prey upon itself,
> Like monsters of the deep.
>
> (IV. ii. 46-50)

These sea-monsters—these leviathans—recall the hungry wolf, described in Ulysses' famous speech on degree, whose appetite, will, and power, "Must make perforce an universal prey / And last eat up himself" (*Troilus and Cressida*, I. iii. 123-24). Like Ulysses, Albany fears that the feudal notion of degree will be supplanted by an untamed and willful ethic that, like a ravenous beast, refuses to see

the other as itself and, thus, must finally consume itself. Also, like Lear and Gloucester, Albany recognizes the importance of feeling heaven's power in checking these "vilde offences."

In a play in which the gods appear unaware of or indifferent to human suffering, it is not surprising that these characters call upon them to show their presence. But in each of the three speeches cited above, the gods are asked to intercede on behalf of man's relation to man, emphasizing their absence in their earthly, social role in the great chain of being. Indeed, Lear, as previously noted, goes so far as to suggest that it lies within man and his sense of charity to "show the Heavens more just." Man may not need the gods to be able to feel charitable to his fellow man, but he may need a belief in the gods or at least a belief in something which stands outside of the logic of material equivalence.

Whatever the status of the heaven's powers in the play or in Lear's mind, Lear's wanderings in the wilderness instill in him a strong ambivalence where before there were only exacting equations. Not only does this ambivalence allow him to consider the need to "shake the superflux," but it also challenges his previously held logocentric notions about "power and sentence." Words are no longer absolute and infused with an equivalent meaning but contain "matter and impertinency mixed; / Reason in madness" (IV. vi. 172-73). When he is first reunited with Cordelia, Lear says, in words similar to those of Cordelia in the first scene, "I know not what to say" (IV. vii. 54).

Throughout *King Lear,* Shakespeare dramatizes the dangerous effects that a new system of values—a system with property as its base and money as its medium—could have on the more ambivalent, more God-instilled feudal values of charity and hospitality. In an economic system where all values are determined by property, the mendicant can no longer exchange the nothingness of divine grace for alms, for no longer does something come of nothing. All exchanges between men lose their ambivalence and sacredness and, in so doing, they lose their humanity.

Yet if these are the kind of mercantile values that initiate Lear's tragic downfall and cause all subsequent suffering in the play, the reconsideration of these values allows Lear some degree of tragic enlightenment. Just before he dies, Lear, holding Cordelia's dead body, believes he sees her speak:

> Pray you, undo this button: thank you, Sir.
> Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,

Look there, look there!

(V. iii. 308-10)

At the moment of his death, Lear unbuttons—just as he did that night on the heath in his effort to become an unaccomodated man. His dying words recall the play's opening scene and Cordelia's silence. This time, however, Cordelia's *nothing* produces in Lear a brief moment of bliss, and that alone is *something*."

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Notes

[1]Sears Jayne ("Charity in *King Lear*," in *Shakespeare 400*, ed. James G. McManaway [New York: Holt, 1964], 277-88) notes the primary importance of charity in *King Lear*, but defines it as "the desperate need which human beings have for each other" (p. 277), treating charity more as love than as a moral act of liberal reciprocity. Perhaps more interestingly, Stephen J. Brown ("Shakespeare's King and Beggar," *Yale Review* [Spring 1975], 370-95) observes the centrality to the play of Lear's encounter with Poor Tom, but goes on to discuss the beggar-king antithesis as it appears in *Lear* and elsewhere, making little of the theme of charity. C. J. Sisson (*Shakespeare's Tragic Justice* [London: Methuen, 1963], 74-98) gives Lear's prayer to the wretches a similar importance, but one that directly ties to a sense of charity already felt by the play's other heroes. Another typical response to this theme comes from J. Stampfler, ("The Catharsis of *King Lear*," in *Shakespeare Survey* 13 [1960], 1-10), who comments that the bond of nature, "made up at once of propriety and charity," is "the central concept of the play" (p. 6). Many other brief observations have been made in similar, off-handed fashion but, with the exception of Jayne's, the theme of charity has never apparently received a full treatment.

[2]All quotations from *King Lear* are taken from *The Arden Shakespeare* edition, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen, 1972). References to other of Shakespeare's works are based on *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, gen. ed. Alfred Harbage (New York: Viking, 1969).

[3]Translations of Seneca's *De Beneficiis* that appeared in Elizabethan England included Arthur Golding's *Concerning Benefits* (1578) and Nicolas Haward's adaptation, *The Line of Liberality* (1569). The principles of gift exchange that Mauss describes in his classic essay, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton, 1967), are remarkably similar to those discussed by Seneca and are well supported by other anthropological studies. The economic theories of Georges Bataille and Jean Baudrillard, both of which are informed by Mauss' essay, offer perhaps more insight into the bourgeois equivalent exchange than into what Mauss termed "primitive gift exchange." In particular, Baudrillard, while embracing "ambivalence," offers a rather scathing criticism of the logic of equivalence in his *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos, 1981). Bataille's theory of gift exchange and expenditure appears in his essay "The Notion of Expenditure," in *Visions of Excess*, ed. Allan Stoekl, trans. Stoekl, Carl R. Lovitt, and Donald M. Leslie, Jr. (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1985), 116-29. The critique of equivalence is also suggested by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1982), particularly in the essay, "The Concept of Enlightenment," 3-42.

[4]Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *On Benefits*, in *Moral Essays*, vol. 3, trans. John W. Basore, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1935), p. 19.

[5]Mauss, p. 74.

[6]John F. Danby, in his *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature : A Study of King Lear* (London: Faber, 1949), makes the distinction between this "malignant" Hobbesian sense of Nature and a more orthodox Elizabethan view, and between "the medieval vision of society" and "nascent capitalism" (p. 52). Edwin Muir, in *Essays on Literature and Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965), states that *King Lear* is the "mythical drama of the transmutation of civilisation" from the medieval world to the "modern individual world" (p. 35). More recently, Bernard McElroy has, in his *Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), described the play as "a paradigm of the waning of medieval hierarchy confronting the onset of pragmatic materialism" (p. 146), and Paul Delaney, in "*King Lear* and the Decline of Feudalism," *PMLA*, 92 (1979), 429-40, has argued that it presents the decline of feudal values and examines the "philosophical concepts and moral values" of the emerging capitalist economy (p. 432).

[7]See, for example, H. Arthington's *Provision for the Poor, now in Penurie* (1597); Robert Allen' s *The Oderifferous Garden of Charity* (1603); Thomas Cooper' s *The Art of Giving* (1615); John Downame's *The Plea of the Poore or A Treatise of Beneficence and Almesdeeds* (1616); and Richard Bernard's *The Ready Way to Good Works or a Treatise of Charitie* (1635).

[8]A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: MacMillan, 1963), p. 205.

[9]See Hobbes's *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. MacPherson (New York: Penguin, 1968). Hobbes writes,

> The *Value*, or WORTH of a man, is as of all other things, his Price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his POWER: and therefore is not absolute but a thing dependent on the need and judgement of another (p. 151).

Joyce Oldham Appleby, in *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), discusses this developing view of money as the equivalent of all things in the period's economic thought, noting the modern sentiment in such contemporary comments on the function of money as "Everything can be bought with money" (p. 199).

[10]William R. Elton, in *King Lear and the Gods* (San Marino, Cal.: Huntington Library, 1966) examines the theological implications of Lear's equation, noting that Hobbes also stated that "nothing however it be multiplied, will for ever be nothing" (p. 187).

[11]Arthur Sewell, in *Character and Society in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), says, "in the first act, Lear does a terrible thing to Cordelia; he inhibits in her that love which has no need of a bond . . . it is Lear who puts Cordelia in the position of relying merely on the bond" (pp. 113-14). Sigurd Burckhardt, in *Shakespearean Meanings* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), makes a number of observations on the linguistic implications of this scene, saying Cordelia's "nothing is the simple statement of this fact (that no speech is possible), and her following attempt to return discourse to the sphere where it can be true (or false) is condemned from the start to futility" (p. 240). On Kent's role as a mediator between sentence and power, Burckhardt comments, "Lear here tries to banish the inherent 'betweenness' of all discourse" (p. 241).

[12]Thomas Dekker, *The Non-Dramatic Works*, vol. 3, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (New York: Russell, 1963), p. 101.

[13]Dieter Mehl, "*King Lear* and the 'Poor Naked Wretches'," *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, (1975), p. 156.

Cymbeline and the Sudden Blow

by Douglas Bruster

> At the first performance of its latest Stratford revival tonight the audience laughed at the primitive ravelling of the loose ends of a careless plot.
>
> (1962 Stratford Production)

> In 1968 I saw *Cymbeline* at the Oregon Shakespearean Festival in Ashland and the audience disturbed me by laughing as the dozen odd strands of the mingled yarn of the plot were unravelled in the complicated denouement of the play.

> From this point (*i.e.*, the 'headless man' scene) the audience seemed to feel the lid was off, allowing them to laugh freely at any part of the play's remaining scenes . . . . When Jupiter appeared, amid clouds of dense smoke and astride a golden eagle, the theater was in an uproar.
>
> (1970 Ontario Stratford Festival)[1]

As the above accounts of three different productions testify, *Cymbeline* has struck twentieth-century audiences as an unintentionally ludicrous play.[2] The last reviewer cited above goes on to explain this kind of reaction—one he found unsettling—as the result of modern "surprise" and "inattentiveness" in the face of a Fletcherian romance. J. C. Trewin, who also saw Gaskill's 1962 Stratford production, concurred with this reviewer in feeling that "the final act at Stratford drifts into something of a burlesque as Shakespeare rapidly uncovers fold upon fold of narrative . . . ."[3] For Trewin as well, the basis of this rather unfortunate response lies in the nature of the play itself; romance as a genre poses almost insurmountable difficulties for any staging of *Cymbeline:* "In this late romance the absurdities of the plot are insistently obtrusive, and though in the text we can appreciate the craft of the fifth act and its 'cumulated denouements,' it can be hard sometimes to accept it in the theatre." Interpreting *Cymbeline* without regard to its theatrical dimension is a recourse commonly taken by those attempting to bring what Johnson referred to as the play's "folly of . . . fiction" into the fold of a critical tradition that has labored to paint Shakespeare's last plays as the crowning (hence unquestionably somber) phase of his artistic career. This tendency to privilege the text seems almost an understandable reaction: as the above reviews suggest, a study of

contemporary productions of *Cymbeline* is itself an inquiry into directorial and theatrical gymnastics. "How can one make it believable?" is the question which, invariably, everyone must answer—from director to actor, playgoer to scholar. Since Pope, editors have addressed the problem by proposing theories of textual interpolation and/or misattribution. The stilted fourteeners of the theophany—archaic and thus probably the work of another hand, the argument went—were enough to earn its long exclusion from performance texts. Other problematical scenes likewise begged excision: to play *Cymbeline* from an uncut text is to play the ridiculous, to invite laughter from pit and box alike. Only during the last two or three decades has critical dialogue suggested that the self-ironizing humor of the "mingled yarn of the plot" is not only intentional, but actually integral to *Cymbeline*'s dramatic project.

Bertrand Evans in 1960 mentioned almost in passing what he saw as Shakespeare's employment of devices exploiting the audience's "discrepant awareness," but it was Arthur C. Kirsch who first connected the play to the coterie tradition's emphasis on deliberate and even heightened self-consciousness, arguing that the play possesses a tone similar to that of the drama of the private theaters and the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, Jonson and Marston.[4] Not long after this, R. A. Foakes discussed the play's "overt display of theatricality" and concluded that such self-consciousness distances the characters from us enough to assure our experiencing the same kind of reaction that Posthumus undergoes when he receives the revelation from Jupiter: "He cannot make sense of the prophecy, which, whether it springs from dream or madness or whatever, remains inexplicable, yet somehow like the action of his life."[5] F. D. Hoeniger saw *Cymbeline* as carrying on the tradition of mingling irony with romance beginning in England with Sidney, though tracing its roots through Achilles Tatius to Heliodorus.[6] This mixture takes us into "the sphere neither of tragedy nor of comedy but in the world of a genre different from both." Kenneth Muir anticipated Hoeniger's assessment in calling *Cymbeline* "neither a tragedy nor a comedy, nor even a tragicomedy."[7] At least one critic has become so distracted by the conjunction of serious and flippant in the play as to conclude that scenes which create such confusion in the audience "have no place in the world of romance."[8] And in a recent treatment Michael Taylor suggests that "Any adequate answer has to take into account the extent to which *Cymbeline* has from the beginning played fast and loose with the narrative conventions normally governing the lives of young lovers in the romances . . . ."[9] Yet in spite of the fact that

increasingly the critical tendency has become one which admits the existence of *Cymbeline's* parodic strain, many of those who have agreed with such an interpretation have contented themselves with an indication of its presence or have attempted to justify it on the grounds that somehow the self-consciousness works within the boundaries of what one finds in the other romances. But to interpret *Cymbeline* without using *Pericles, The Winter's Tale,* or *The Tempest* as what one might call "crutch" or "preemptive" texts, however, is almost necessarily to discover the predominance of its parodic elements, and to come to grips with the dramatic function of its heightened and multivalent irony. In the following remarks I would like to examine two scenes that seem crucial to any interpretation of the play: Imogen's "headless man" scene and soliloquy (IV. ii. 308-32) and Posthumus' (mis)recognition of and assault on Imogen (V. v. 230). I would offer that Shakespeare uses the horrific comedy of the former to condition his audience's reception of the latter, employing self-conscious irony and its corollary, the spectators' cruel ridicule, as a means of foregrounding for the audience its cultural capacity for violence.[10]

I. Imogen and the Headless Man

The "headless man" scene—where Imogen wakes to find as her pillow Cloten's decapitated body—has often drawn an angry response from male critics eager to defend the character Swinburne called the "immortal godhead of womanhood." Granville-Barker, for instance, was blunt in his appraisal: "It is a fraud on Imogen; and we are accomplices in it."[11] Imogen's own reaction to the situation is one we might expect from the stock pathetic heroine of Renaissance melodrama: immediate horror followed by stern resolution to future action. Examined closely, however, her soliloquy borders on the ridiculous:

> A headless man? The garments of Posthumus?
> I know the shape of's leg; this is his hand,
> His foot Mercurial, his Martial thigh,
> The brawns of Hercules; but his Jovial face—
> Murder in heaven? How? 'Tis gone. Pisanio,
> All curses madded Hecuba gave the Greeks,
> And mine to boot, be darted on thee! Thou,
> Conspired with that irregulous devil Cloten,
> Hath here cut off my lord. To write and read
> Be henceforth treacherous! Damned Pisanio
> Hath with his forgèd letters—damned Pisanio—

> From this most bravest vessel of the world
> Struck the maintop. O Posthumus, alas,
> Where is thy head? Where's that? Ay me, where's that?
> Pisanio might have killed thee at the heart
> And left this head on.
>
> (IV. ii. 308-23)

Shaw saw this scene as nearly impossible for any actress continually to carry off night after night.[12] The reviewer cited last in the trio of epigraphs prefacing this essay recalls how the beginning lines of this passage, when delivered at a 1970 production of *Cymbeline*, "started some tittering, which erupted into torrential laughter when she ended her anatomical journey at his neck . . . ." This parody of the Petrarchan blazon, reversing the usual (descending) movement, renders both speaker and speech open to ridicule. Certainly the actress playing Imogen must in some way touch or even lift each body part as she adds it to her memorial catalogue. In this way the gestic impulse inherent in the lines, embodied theatrically, solicits from *Cymbeline's* audience a horrifying form of laughter.

Then come the rhetorical questions: "Murder in heaven? How?" At this point one might recall Imogen's earlier references to the homonymic "Haven" of Milford Haven and see how, through the same word play which has worked the larger fragmentation in the play, her ideal world has been shattered. The next line serves to strengthen such a reading of the passage: "All curses madded Hecuba gave the Greeks, / And mine to boot, be darted on thee!" Hamlet wisely foreswore any real connection with Priam's wife, but Imogen, via her comic, parenthetical interruption, bathetically rehearses grand tragedy. She is no Senecan matriarch, though here she attempts to sound like one. And in the next sentence, when she charges Cloten with conspiracy in the death of her husband even as she clings to Cloten's corpse, the irony is anything but subtle. If in irony there is always a victim, certainly here and throughout this passage that victim is Imogen.

Her fondness for dilation carries on into the next vituperation, as does the same vein of irony, when she stops in mid-thought to abuse what we know to be one of her only true friends in the court: "damned Pisanio." By this point her speech has become an essay in the ridiculous, even if one generously takes "irregulous" as intentional rather than the malapropism for "irreligious" that it probably is: witness Iachimo's concern with the matter of religion in the wager scene, Aaron's depiction as the "irreligious Moor" in *Titus Andronicus* (V. iii. 121), and the fact that Imogen's is the only known

use of the neologism in the language.[13] Her rhetoric, generally simple and unlearned, here borders on the farcical.

Yet *Cymbeline's* sport with Imogen has not ended. Her lament over "Posthumus" missing head achieves not only a level of grim irony rarely equalled in the rest of Shakespeare, but parodies the pitiful rhetoric of the stock pathetic heroine as well: "O Posthumus, alas, / Where is thy head? Where's that? Ay me, where's that?" "Alas" and "Ay me!" by themselves often represent, in English Renaissance drama, the legitimate anguish of a romance heroine or hero. Shakespeare uses these expressions first in *Titus Andronicus* when Lucius initially encounters the mutilated Lavinia. But Cloten is not Lavinia, nor even, for that matter, is Posthumus.[14] Imogen has made a mistake and with her "Ay me!" becomes the object of a cruel piece of sport.

Shakespeare also used the expression to make light of both Romeo and Juliet. The second cry which comes from Romeo's mouth in that drama is a self-pitying "Ay me! Sad hours seem long" (I. i. 161). The next time we encounter this phrase in the play it is from Mercutio, when he and Benvolio have been deserted by Romeo near the Capulet's orchard. Mercutio shouts for Romeo's return even as he mocks his lovelorn condition:

> Romeo! Humors! Madman! Passion! Lover!
> Appear thou in the likeness of a sigh;
> Speak but one rhyme, and I am satisfied!
> Cry but "Ay me!" pronounce but "love" and "dove" . . .
> (II. i. 7-10)

His catalogue of emotions neatly parodies the type of characterized role binding Romeo to his pathetic history. But a short while later, when Juliet comes to her balcony window, the first phrase to spring to her lips is this same "Ay me!". Those in the audience who remember Romeo's line and Mercutio's mockery of the same are confronted with a tension—what Norman Rabkin has called the "common understanding"[15]—between Mercutio's reading of the phrase and Juliet's.

Mellida's first "Ay me!" in her father's presence in Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* (1599) provokes him into an annoyed reaction: "Blirt on your 'Ay me's!'" (IV. i. 255-256).[16] His annoyance, however, is not enough to keep her from returning to this phrase later in Marston's farce, when Antonio feigns death for the third and last time in the play: "Antonio! ay me! my lord, my love! my—" (V. ii. 212). Like Imogen, Mellida becomes the butt of parody. She and Antonio

are to their play what Imogen and Posthumus will be to theirs. Marston's play, lacking most of the complexity which informs *Cymbeline,* is more easily recognizable as broad parody. In spite of this, however, Imogen's soliloquy, with its "Ay me!", contains all the earmarks of a deliberate send up of the pathetic-heroine romance. It is hard to ignore the fact that *Cymbeline*, to a much greater degree than its companion romances, openly stresses humor and parody at the expense of "seriousness" and solemnity. But if we admit that Imogen is the center to virtually any humanistic or essentialist interpretation of *Cymbeline*, then the task of explaining a marked lack of traditional seriousness in this, the most serious of her near tragic scenes, clearly becomes one of great difficulty. I suggest that this headless man scene functions preparatorily in *Cymbeline*, anticipating in its brutal comedy Posthumus' similar violence toward Imogen.

II. Posthumus and the Sudden Blow

Posthumus' rash wager in the bourse scene (I. iv.) and even hastier anger at Imogen's apparent infidelity (II. iv) work to parody the typical romantic hero who promises to maintain his faith in his loved one forever. Like the "hero" of *Philaster*—written the same year (1609) as *Cymbeline*—he is a pitiful, exaggerated fulfillment of a literary type. A comparison of the two characters, in fact, reveals significant similarities. As Philip Finkelpearl notes, Beaumont was for some time in residence at the Inner Temple, where the young wits often ridiculed the "tendency toward excessive linguistic artifice and fustian speech."[17] Anti-idealistic, anti-Petrarchan, and anti-Ciceronian, "They mocked pedantry and cant, whether of school or court, and employed parody, irony, and burlesque as satiric tools, particularly against linguistic excesses."[18] Like Posthumus, Philaster, very much the out-of-control romantic hero, leaps to conclusions about the chastity of the play's pathetic heroine. In a frenzy of jealousy, he stabs Arethusa, a woman who not only has done him no wrong, but one who is deeply in love with him:

> *Philaster.* Are you at peace?
> *Arethusa.* With heaven and earth.
> *Philaster.* May they divide thy soul and body.
> *(Philaster wounds her.)*
>
> (IV. v. 83-85)[19]

Such mindless callousness characterizes this "hero" throughout the play and is balanced in its excess only by the macabre, masochistic

willingness with which the heroines receive, even desire, his violence. Toward the drama's end, when Philaster seems to have repented of his jealousy, he once more succumbs to the same jealous anger which has him stab Arethusa and later Euphrasia, a woman also in love with him who has disguised herself as a page. Yet Philaster does not escape unpunished. A "Country Fellow" happens upon him in the act of wounding Arethusa and challenges him: "Hold, dastard, strike a woman? Th'art a craven I warrant thee. . ." This enunciates, perhaps, the sentiments of many in the audience: the romantic hero is not behaving according to his type, or perhaps too much so—so that the notion of romance itself is called into question through his excess. The Country Fellow speaks the voice of prosaic and literal common sense:

> *Philaster.* Leave us, good friend.
> *Arethusa.* What ill-bred man art thou, to intrude thyself?
> *Country Fellow.* God 'uds me, I understand you not; but know the rogue has hurt you.
> *Philaster.* Pursue thy own affairs; it will be ill
> To multiply blood upon my head,
> Which thou wilt force me to.
> *Country Fellow.* I know not your rhetoric, but I can lay it on if you touch the woman.
>
> (89-98)

Both Philaster and Arethusa remain locked into the sadomasochistic world of romance, each intent on playing their parts to the hilt—and to the death; the naive, unsophisticated Country Fellow cannot understand this self-destructive ideology. He proposes a remedy: "I know not your rhetoric, but I can lay it on if you touch the woman." Here we have a progression from the rather innocuous parodic strategies of plays such as *Mucedorus* (1590), *Antonio and Mellida,* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607). The Country Fellow speaks of action; in direct contrast to the courtly diction of Philaster and Arethusa, his simple prose reveals the ingenuousness of his perception.

When Posthumus suddenly and irrationally strikes Imogen in the flurry of *Cymbeline's* fifth act (V. v. 229), we are directly confronted with one of the most unsettling moments in the canon. The almost insentient violence brutally foregrounds the romantic conventions which otherwise innocuously dominate the play. That Shaw, in his ending of *Cymbeline,* has Guiderius retaliate by striking Posthumus (much as *Philaster's* Country Fellow retaliates by beating Philaster) and later allows Imogen to voice her discontent over her

situation, possesses a tremendous interpretive significance.[20] Resenting Posthumus' admittedly undeserved fortune at reconciling himself with Imogen in the end, Shaw gravitates toward a union between Iachimo and Imogen before apparently deciding that such a change would be too much. Although in many ways his heavy-handed ending removes subtlety from the drama, Shaw seems to have understood the idea of parody in *Cymbeline* as playwright even where he failed as critic. I suggest that, like Shaw, many of us question not only the callous brutality of the drama's romantic hero, but the ethics of the romance world altogether. *Philaster,* Finkelpearl points out, forces us "to form our own independent judgments, and the ultimate effect of this tactic—seen also in later plays—is to make us question the values of almost everyone in the play."[21] As we have seen in the rural character's critique of heightened court language, romantic-heroic rhetoric, no less than behavior, is problematized in *Philaster.* Posthumus' verbal excesses—even as Iachimo's—seem to undercut the concept of romantic-heroic diction. Certainly his ranting, misogynistic "half-workers" speech (II. v. 1ff.) raises more than a few questions of irony. Like Philaster, he abuses a woman, a woman, in fact, who has not transgressed. That Posthumus and Cloten are frequently doubled is perhaps thematically appropriate: both, ultimately, obey only the whims of their self-centered imaginations; both yearn to work violence against Imogen; both do her harm, either directly or indirectly.[22] Their contorted rhetoric, along with Iachimo's "strange" verbiage, depicts the seamy underside of the romance ethic. It is an ethic *Cymbeline* constantly questions.

Some of the self-conscious theatricality in *Cymbeline* is quite blatant, almost farcical. The range of irony, however, becomes difficult to compress into a single cohesive interpretation. What one reader sees as "bad" drama another might perceive as satire, and might be taken by a third as burlesque: the difference between such terms is not marked by distinct gradients. The play encompasses almost every kind of dramatic irony imaginable, from subtle innuendo to tiring proleptic discourse. That it was played both at the public and private theaters is surely significant, though the politics of reception in the two nations of Jacobean drama remain, for the most part, unknown to us.[23] The past of reception—no less than the historical—is always elusive; the very fine line between belief and scorn, pathos and bathos is different for every age: most probably it varied in individual Jacobean theaters and almost certainly between particular playgoers as well.[24] But at the very least I suggest that we recognize the aura of play, of *ludus,* surrounding *Cymbeline,* and

acknowledge that parody takes on more than a superficial role within the drama, for *Cymbeline* is intent on undercutting the audience's dramatic expectations and idealist assumptions. A play which very openly and purposefully displays its dramatic outrages, *Cymbeline* manipulates the self-satisfied onlooker. At fairly frequent intervals an actor steps forward to acknowledge that he knows he is in a play, that he is uncomfortably struggling with his idealist archetype. Irony, satire, parody, burlesque—all make up a composite that questions the business of received convention. Of *The New Inn's* self-consciously fanciful denouement, Anne Barton remarks: "[it is] a poignant wish dream, a palpable but highly charged fiction that gains strength from the very honesty of its admission that this is how we should all like the world to be, but know it is not."[25] Surely this is not altogether distant from the aesthetic informing *Cymbeline's* mingled achievement. But there is a point where the self-consciousness of Shakespeare's play is anything but private. By playing upon a received body of conventions, *Cymbeline* foregrounds the audience's ideology, and through the dynamic of shared laughter and outrage lays bare an anatomy of common assumptions. Parody (and the interruption of it through added levels of irony) perpetrates a "fraud" on us no less than on Imogen, for when the blow is struck, a world of illusion—one which parody has helped to perpetuate—is shattered. In this way *Cymbeline*, through a complexity of registers, functions on a level that parodic dramas like *Mucedorus, Antonio and Mellida*, and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* never achieve. No longer can Shakespeare's audience sit complacently laughing at burlesque as both they and the dramatic court had in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. With *Cymbeline*, both the court and theater audience is implicated inextricably in the senselessness of the fantasy—indeed, embodying and defining it. Though dramatic closure in *Cymbeline* (as in *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*) stresses acceptance and community, the problems inherent in romance ideology have been, if only temporarily, brought to the fore. Posthumus' violence mocks the facetious tone of the play itself, and chastises the audience for its capacity for fantasy, for wishing the world to be as it is not. If it is the case that such brutality is a "fraud on Imogen," then certainly we have to acknowledge as well that "we are accomplices in it," for the headless man scene has already ensured our complicity. And if, examining *Cymbeline* within the context of parodic representation, we find the plot in some ways to be less "serious" than it was previously, such a reading certainly poses new, even more "serious" questions as to the image of courtly society and gender relations pre-

sented by this melodrama of pre-Christian England. For, located firmly in the dramatic imagination of its Jacobean audience, *Cymbeline* directs its focus upon their social conscience as well.

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Notes

[1]Reviews taken from, in sequential order, Howard Taubman's account of William Gaskill's Stratford-upon-Avon production in the *New York Times* (18 July 1962), p. 21; Louis Marder in "Cymbeline, Romance, and the Modern Audience," *Shakespeare Newsletter*, 20 (1970), p. 27; and Robert F. Willson Jr., "The Audience Reaction to Cymbeline," *Shakespeare Newsletter*, 20 (1970), p. 27. Willson was reviewing Jean Gascon's production.

[2]See also Roger Warren's "Shakespeare at Stratford and the National Theater, 1974," *Shakespeare Survey*, 33 (1980), 169-180, where he finds fault with much of the production's humor: "At other times, he [director Christopher Morley] appeared to be sending scenes up: it is one thing for Cloten to mock 'Hark, hark, the lark', quite another for the musical setting to anticipate him with mindless roulades which distracted him completely from the significance of the exquisite language, thus encouraging the audience to take the whole scene as so much nonsense; but they had already begun to chatter in derisive bewilderment at the extraordinary performance of Iachimo," p. 173. All references to Shakespeare in this essay are to *The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare*, ed. Sylvan Barnett (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972).

[3]"Festival Terms," *Illustrated London News* (28 July, 1962), p. 154.

[4]Evans in *Shakespeare's Comedies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 245-289; Kirsch in "Cymbeline and Coterie Dramaturgy," *English Literary History*, 34 (1967), 285-303. See also Kirsch's "Jacobean Theatrical Self-consciousness," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, 13 (1980), 9-13. Granville-Barker noticed something of this sort in his preface to *Cymbeline* in *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, Second Series, (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1930).

[5]R. A. Foakes, *Shakespeare: The Dark Comedies to the Last Plays* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1971), p. 118.

[6]F. D. Hoeniger, "Irony and Romance in *Cymbeline*," *Studies in English Literature*, 2 (1962), 219-228.

[7]Kenneth Muir, *Last Periods of Shakespeare, Racine, Ibsen* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1961), p. 44.

[8]See Diana Childress, "Are Shakespeare's Last Plays Really Romances?" in *Shakespeare's Last Plays*, Richard C. Tobias and Paul G. Zolbrod, eds. (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1974), p. 51.

[9]Michael Taylor, "The Pastoral Reckoning in Cymbeline," *Shakespeare Survey*, 36 (1985), 99. Taylor suggests that Imogen's experience with Cloten's decapitated corpse is the "manifestation of a particular kind of symbolically appropriate pastoral reckoning," p. 104.

[10]Much criticism of the past several decades has contained a new understanding of self-consciousness and parody in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. Marston's satirical parodies, such as *Antonio and Mellida, Jack Drum's Entertainment*—even, to

a certain extent, *Antonio's Revenge*—have been rescued from the scrap heap to which insensitive readings had assigned them. See R. A. Foakes' "John Marston's Fantastical Plays," *Philological Quarterly*, 41 (1962), 229-239; Michael C. Andrews, "Jack Drum's Entertainment as Burlesque," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 24 (1971), 226-231. Many of Middleton's dramas have also been examined in light of this same self-consciousness, with an eye toward the parodying of contemporary stage conventions. See John F. McElroy, *Parody and Burlesque in the Tragicomedies of Thomas Middleton, Jacobean Drama Studies*, 19 (Salzburg, 1972). *The First Part of Hieronimo*, long taken to be a poor work from the pen of a hack writer, was salvaged from many years of misreading in 1972 by John Reibetanz, who convincingly demonstrated that it is an open burlesque of Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy:* "Hieronimo in Decimosexto: A Private-Theater Burlesque," *Renaissance Drama*, 5 (1972), 89-121. Other equally persuasive estimations of parodic elements in such diverse works as Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and Jonson's *The New Inn* have been offered as well. See Eric Rothstein, "Structure as Meaning in The Jew of Malta," JEGP, 65 (1966), 260-273; David Zucker, *Stage and Image in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Salzburg, 1972), 80-98. Larry S. Champion in *Ben Jonson's 'Dotages': A Reconsideration*, (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1967), 76-103, argues that *The New Inn* satirizes the court's Platonic love cult and consciously parodies the conventions of romantic comedy. It is one of my regrets that length does not permit a comparison here of Shakespeare and Jonson's last works, many of which seem the product of both sentimental longing and, at the same time, detached awareness of the artificialities of (Elizabethan) dramatic convention. For a more complete (if unfriendly) bibliography of criticism of dramatic parody, see Richard Levin's *New Readings vs. Old Plays: Recent Trends in the Reinterpretation of English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979).

[11]Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, p. 340. He calls "the whole business of it" (i.e., the "headless man" scene) "dramatically inexcusable", and later (343) "a pretty damnable practical joke. . ."

[12]July 4, 1897 letter to Ellen Terry. *Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters*, Dan H. Laurence, ed. (New York, 1965), pp. 779-780. The whole of Shaw's correspondence about *Cymbeline* and Imogen, together with Granville-Barker's remarks, make apparent the tremendous obstacles which the play presents to actors and directors.

[13]This did not, however, prevent the editors of the *OED* from constructing an etymology for Imogen's new construction.

[14]Indeed, when compared to the seriousness with which decapitation and dismemberment are handled in *Titus Andronicus, Macbeth*—even *Measure for Measure*, where the audience (presumably) has no real sympathy for Barnadine—the beheading of Cloten shows itself for an indulgence.

[15]Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967).

[16]*The Selected Plays of John Marston*, ed. Macdonald P. Jackson and Michael Neil, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986).

[17]Philip Finkelpearl, "Beaumont, Fletcher, and 'Beaumont & Fletcher': Some Distinctions," *English Literary Renaissance*, 1 (1971), p. 147.

[18]Finkelpearl, p. 148.

[19]John Fletcher, *Philaster*, ed. Andrew Gurr (London: Revels Plays, 1969).

[20]Reading Shaw's privately circulated ending for *Cymbeline*—"as Shakespeare might have written it if he had been post-Ibsen and post-Shaw instead of post-Marlowe"—serves to indicate the hilarious jumble of plot strands left for any reviser. The reaction of Guiderius and Arviragus to Cymbeline and the promise of life in the court is also highly instructive. For text of this ending and a preface to it see

Geneva, Cymbeline Refinished, Good King Charles (London: Constable and Co., 1946), 133-150.

[21]Finkelpearl, p. 154.

[22]Stephen Booth's suggestion that Cloten and Posthumus are doubled ("Speculations on Doubling in Shakespeare's Plays," *Shakespeare: The Theatrical Dimension*, ed. Philip C. McGuire and David A. Samuelson, [New York: AMS Press, 1979], 103-131) has been carried out in recent productions of *Cymbeline*. Don Baker's 1984 production at Lexington, Virginia, for example, drew these comments from a reviewer: "The doubling intensified nicely Shakespeare's contrast of love and lust, true chivalry and macho foolishness" (William W. French in *Theatre Journal*, May (1985), pp. 227-228). But I suggest that we are not to see the doubling as separating the two characters as much as we can perceive through it the fact that they are very much the same. Indeed, Cloten makes a very good replacement for Posthumus during his absence from the stage, such a good replacement, in fact, that the two characters become blurred: Posthumus' ostensible heroism mingles with Cloten's idiotic cowardice. R. G. Hunter (*Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness*, [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1965], 157-172) suggests that Cloten assumes Posthumus'moral degradation during his absence. Of Mike Alfred's 1980 production at Hammersmith, which featured five actors playing all the roles, one reviewer remarked that "his occasionally simplistic changes of identity seem inevitable amid such complexity" (Ned Chaillet, *London Times*, 12 April [1980], p. 8). Booth's discussion of doubling in *Cymbeline* is a brief one, and does not mention that Cloten and Posthumus "trip over each other in the wings" between the third and fourth scenes of Act II. However, as he points out in his essay, such incidents occur in other instances when we may suspect doubling, so their passing each other does not preclude doubling of their roles. The humor of the "duel" between the two of them—of which we are informed in I. ii.—would only be intensified by our realization of its "impossibility," as would Cloten's "His meanest garment?" (II. iii. 157) and, of course, Imogen's lament over the decapitated corpse. David Bevington's discussion of the seventeenth century's reluctance to double parts—in that such practice reflected the unsophisticated nature of Tudor popular drama—has significance for this play in which Shakespeare constantly refers to early, naive drama. *From Mankind to Marlowe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962), p. 112.

[23]The classic study of the "two theaters," of course, is still Alfred Harbage's *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions* (New York: Macmillan, 1952).

[24]On the "characters" of the different playhouses, see the argument Andrew Gurr makes in his excellent study, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987).

[25]Anne Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*, (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), p. 281. Barton disagrees with Champion's assessment of *The New Inn* as parody, while admitting its rather light-hearted moments.

The 1990 Alabama Shakespeare Festival: Achievement, Failure, and Promise

by Craig Barrow

Of the three Shakespeare productions of the 1990 Festival, *Twelfth Night* was a predictable success, *Measure for Measure* more than that, and *Macbeth* was a failure. In the hands of a capable cast and a sane director, *Twelfth Night* is almost above ruin. Usually productions take their generic definition from the handling of Malvolio's threatened vengeance and Orsino's threatened revenge to a disguised Viola. Not much was made of either threat in Kent Thompson's production. Philip Pleasants, still the most talented actor at the Festival, plays Malvolio as a comically rigid character whose anger is merely humorous ill temper at play's end. The production is dominated by the adaptable wisdom of Viola and Sebastian, ably played by Monica Bell and Martin Kildare, as well as by the burlesque antics of Sir Toby, Maria, and Sir Andrew, ably played by Jack Shearer, Laurie Birmingham, and Steven David Martin.

Gavin Cameron-Webb's *Measure for Measure* was a far more powerful production than *Twelfth Night* and a more successful production than *Macbeth*. More than any *Measure for Measure* I have seen in the last twenty-five years, this production created a strong contradictory atmosphere of sensuality and corruption on the one hand and a life denying virtue on the other. The set designed by Henry Feiner does much to create this effect, as does the costuming of Colleen Muscha. Together they create juxtaposed scenes of jail, convent, but most significantly they counterpointed the high steps and austere deliberation of Angelo and his government with a lusty, end of the nineteenth century red light district. The juxtaposition of these scenes is choreographed like cinematic montage. Lucio, ably played by Julian Gamble, recalls a Brechtian narrator or one of the characters from the *Threepenny Opera*.

While Cameron-Webb seems to believe genre is unimportant in theater, his production is dominated by melodrama, often of the cliffhanging sort. The Duke and Angelo are probably the two characters in Shakespeare's play who most determine the generic feeling produced by *Measure for Measure*. In Cameron-Webb's production, one is not certain how wise the Duke is and how able he is to control events from his masked position. Philip Pleasants plays the Duke as a man who works through intrigue to correct problems in his justice

system with little of the wisdom of a Prospero. Since Pleasants appears more conniving than wise, the judgment and punishment of Angelo at play's end is unconvincing. Greg Thornton, a powerful actor in his own right, plays Angelo as a consummate hypocrite, once his passion for Isabella reveals itself. His logic and coldness seem far more powerful than the Duke's counterplots.

Brinkmanship dominates the production, and though the audience enjoyed the play's texture in performance, the end seemed totally unconvincing, from the marriage of Angelo to the sudden renunciation of religious vocation by Isabella to marry the Duke. Frequently productions will find ways to resolve problems in Shakespeare's plays; this production merely exaggerates the disquiet one might feel in reading the play.

While *Twelfth Night* and *Measure for Measure* were successful, *Macbeth* was a major disappointment whose cause seems to lie with the choices of the director, David McClendon, and two actors, Julian Gamble, who played Macbeth, and Greg Thornton, who played Macduff. Capable and sometimes brilliant work was done by Philip Pleasants as Duncan, Alison Edwards as Lady Macbeth, and Anne Sheldon, Robert Browning, and Cindy Gold as the witches.

While McClendon sees the witches as "real," voicing "what is to be" (program notes, p. 26), he believes the Macbeths are free to choose the means of fulfilling these prophecies. Such an approach would appear to foster the choices necessary to tragedy; instead, McClendon undermined Macbeth's irrevocable choice of power and position over loyalty and love by maximizing melodramatic spectacle over language and character. The production began well with nice transitions from the perverted sexuality of the witches, which the casting of Robert Browning helped, to that of Lady Macbeth, but even early in the play, cinematic influences from Polanski's *Macbeth* in the witches' dismembering of the corpses divert the audience's attention away from language to visual spectacle. Symbols as objects on stage also proliferate and divert from language: daggers are everywhere, and the bloodshed is echoed in the red attire of Lady Macbeth.

McClendon's choice of Gamble to play Macbeth rather than Philip Pleasants mystifies, for Gamble plays Macbeth in the manner of the late Lee Marvin—as a heavy. While physical courage is Macbeth's outstanding trait, one that flickers in Act V with Macduff but never goes out, what was missing from Gamble's performance was Macbeth's awareness of lost value in his life, from Macbeth's inability to say "Amen!" in Act II, scene ii to his regret in Act V, scene iii that ". . . My way of life / is fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf; /

And that which should accompany old age, / As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends, / I must not look back to have" (25-29). With Gamble playing Macbeth like an American tough, Macbeth's awareness of the values he sacrificed is minimized. Life, without such value, is indeed a "tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing" (V. v. 29-31).

Just as Gamble missed Macbeth's finer points, so too does Greg Thornton, generally a talented actor, underplay Macduff's. When Ross tells Macduff that his wife and children have been slain, Thornton, playing Macduff, repeats, "My children too?" and "My wife killed too?" (IV. iii. 224, 248) as if he had a hearing problem. This ineptness was only exceeded by the battle scene at play's end which had all the credibility of television wrestling. The movements choreographed by Erik Frederichsen were not the problem, but the slow speed of the swordsmen made it appear as if the actors were desperately trying to remember the steps of a difficult dance. The giggles of the children in the audience may well have been a better gauge of the quality of the production than the applause at the end.

As someone who has gratefully followed the Alabama Shakespeare Festival from its lean beginnings fifteen years ago, I hesitate to criticize what I have been happy to see prosper; however, I believe that the Festival, with its much greater resources in Montgomery, has an obligation to do a better job with the major plays. This has not happened in Montgomery since the 1988 *Hamlet*.

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