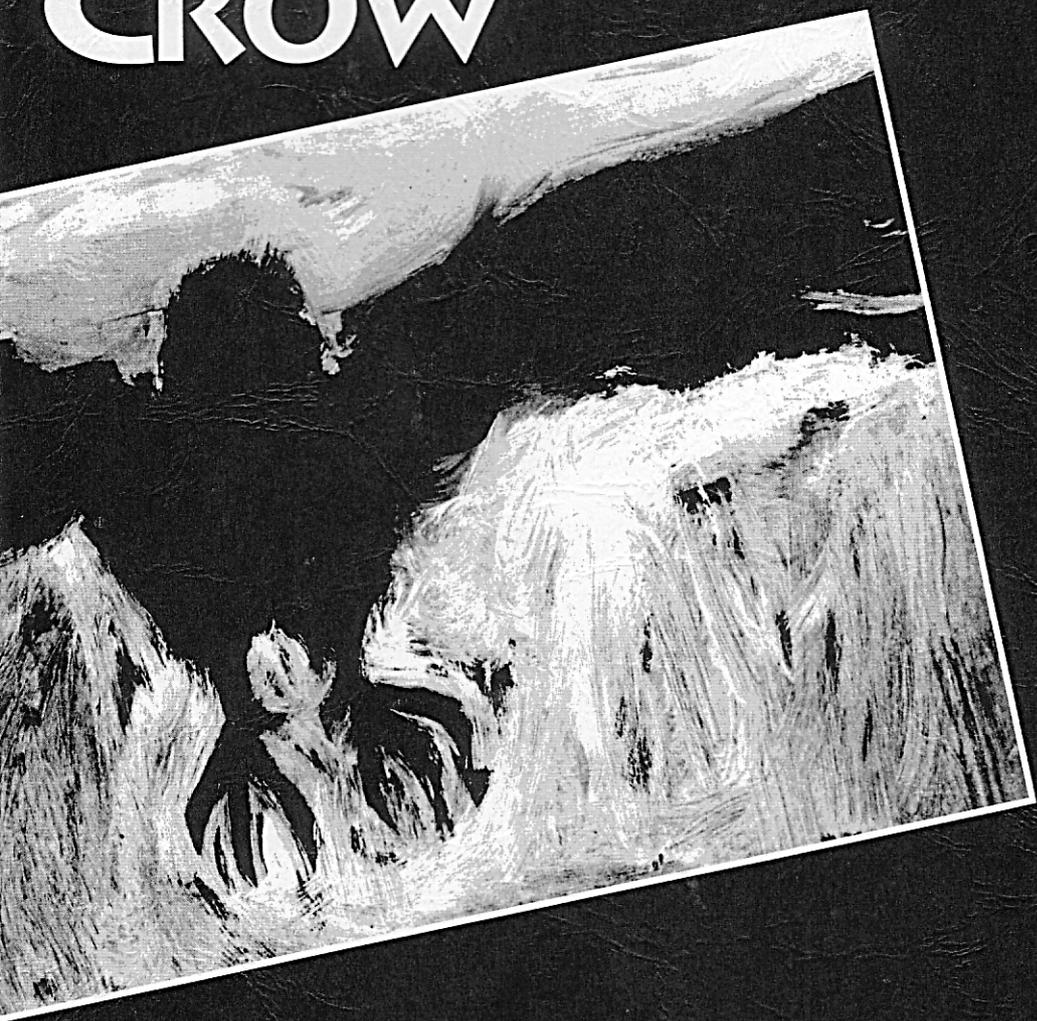


# THE UPSTART CROW



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

— T. S. Eliot

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

— Walter Pater

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

— Paul Valery

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## Lear in the Country Near Dover by Peter Cummings

"You are a spirit, I know; when did you die?"  
*King Lear*, IV. vii. 48

Wind in the whitethorn and the knobby scrub  
whines like a badger cub snagged in the hedge.  
Low scudding clouds coil up and out to sea  
like the dark project of my vanity.  
No, stay. I dry my eyes of tears and rain,  
lest shame for anger be a new excess.  
Slow dawn is creeping through the stubble corn—  
the little ones, the little ones, to me.  
She was my least; she was my last pure joy.  
Sweet face, Cordelia . . . .

I do attend,  
most grave and eyeless sir. I know you well;  
you are my Gloucester; we are kin in grief  
and rage for children. More, we were in sin  
and wrong past seeing we could fail,  
and so we wandered heartless through our days.  
But see, look there, the wind abates its press,  
and morning strikes a ray against the night,  
and we'll be warm.

Must I remember?

It must be said at last; I was misled  
by power and by awe. Who cared what bond  
we broke or what convention we transgressed?  
It was enough that what we spoke was law,  
what we desired supplied, what dreamed of, got.  
So we assumed as fiat that our strength  
was fast as earth, as long as time itself,  
and now I am grown old.

Ha-ha! you parrot,  
think you to bandy with a jest? How's that?  
He was just here, the silly ape. He must  
be put down truant in the master's roll,

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lo, even without the walls. We're in the school  
of nature now, and she's a stern demand.  
Call Fool again, I pray.

I am a proof  
of time and tears, of eat or be the food  
of history. . . and still I would be free  
from this to see her once again at last,  
a while released from that last debt I owe,  
a weak and weary breath given up for all.  
What meant the sway and size without her love?

What scent of smoke? The foot-tramp of marching  
tremors the earth and makes me recollect.  
Pull down that vanity, I say, pull down!  
What have I wrought? My powers now could help,  
had I the way or will to muster troops.  
Call in the mounted pikemen! Cook the pitch!  
Curdle the blood with warhoops, flare the nostrils  
with the lust of the charge! Now Gloucester, hear.  
Lift your keener sense, and smell me out  
the enemy, which way he mires the ground  
with sin and death.

It is past all remorse  
that I can feel or force. This sorrow fails  
to heal my grief or wash away the stain  
of my ingratitude for her dear life,  
who sought alone to check my angry will.  
I shall be gentle, tame, and meek; I will  
do anything to have her in my eye,  
to ask her on my knees what she forgives,  
and what she asks as penance or as pay  
for debts against the heart.

Old Gloucester, sir,  
your wisdom was my counsel many years;  
now counsel me, in ruin and in age—  
upwards of yours—that now I feel full well.

## Lear in the Country Near Dover

He's here again? My boy, come sing a song  
to cheer my mind, a merry ballad verse.

"Sing a song of sixpence,  
A pocket full of rye. . . ." Gone again?  
Tell me, my wiser mind, how best to seek,  
how best to find what now is all my life,  
that dearest daughter whom my sin outcast  
with nothing, and with no one of her own.  
I will be patient. . . .

Yes, that is the thing,  
there is no other way, but to await  
how power will seek out the former power,  
and come to where we are, without our stir.  
We have some voice as long as breath abides,  
and she will be my constant suit and term,  
in every stragem they might devise  
to wrest from me what yet they might conceive.  
I'll yield it all for her.

You are a spirit . . .  
come boy, be well; I'll keep your courage up.  
All pain subsides in time. We learn to brace  
our sides against the terrors of our hearts,  
as to that mindless battery of the wind.  
No, stay! She waits for us, and you must cheer  
her temper, which I know must turn awry,  
discordant with my abuses, with my wrath.  
In boy, go first. See, here she comes, look there!  
You gods, pray fool me not so much to think  
I have much time. None to squander, or repeal.  
O every syllable she speaks, a world  
of stunning grace come down upon my head,  
here, brightest angel of my bursting heart!

**Hobart and William Smith Colleges**

## Shakespeare on Film and Television

### by H. R. Coursen

This commentary, delivered at the Clemson Shakespeare Festival in March of 1995, accompanied a sequence of snippets from several productions: the strangling of Desdemona by Othello in the 1922 silent film with Emil Jannings; the transformation of Bottom (James Cagney) in the 1935 Reinhardt/Dieterle *Midsummer Night's Dream*; the entrance of Romeo (Leslie Howard) into the Capulet courtyard in the 1936 Thalberg/Cukor *Romeo and Juliet*; the transition from the oration of Brutus (James Mason) to that of Antony (Marlon Brando) in the 1953 Houseman/Mankiewicz *Julius Caesar*; three television sequences: the opening of Trevor Nunn's 1974 *Antony and Cleopatra* (with Janet Suzman and Richard Johnson), the condemnation of Bushy and Green by Bolingbroke (Jon Finch) in David Giles' 1979 *Richard II*, and the transition from the first scene in *King Lear* to Edmund (Michael Kitchen) in Jonathan Miller's 1984 production for BBC-TV; two contrasting versions of *Lear* and Cordelia going off to prison in V. iii (the Kozintsev and Brook films); two contrasting Agincourts (the Olivier and the Branagh films); and the rejection of Falstaff in Orson Welles' *Chimes at Midnight*. The commentary should be considered in conjunction with the performance materials.

The medium conditions its content. The dimensions of film, for example, are greatly reduced on television. Television has a field of depth that reaches to the back of the picture tube. Furthermore, color flattens depth. Color television must be a close-up medium. Film can use close-ups, of course, but can also employ deep-field shots, particularly in its black-and-white manifestation. Good examples are Olivier's *Hamlet* and Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*. Even color film will mute its colors when it uses deep-field shots—like the opening of Polanski's *Macbeth* or Olivier's Bosworth Field in *Richard III*. Television's advantage over film in presenting Shakespeare is that it is a more linguistic medium than film, evolving as it does from radio and requiring words to augment images low in sensory data. Film comes from the silent screen and can still incorporate long stretches of silence which television cannot tolerate.

These observations are obvious, of course, but are necessary as a preliminary to any response to a Shakespearean script as performed in any medium. The space—stage (and type of stage, size of auditorium), film, television—defines what can occur within it.

## Shakespeare on Film and Television

We must put the script against the space. *Julius Caesar*, for example, runs into massive problems with television, since the medium cannot handle large scenes. The husband and wife scenes, however, seem to have been written for television's three camera format—two-shot, close-up, and reaction shot (sometimes an over-the-shoulder shot).

We live in the post-modernist era of multiple responses, an era at enmity with what are called totalizing myths. For Shakespeare that is a good thing. Most critical theories will find a home in Shakespeare. The question is no longer what does the play mean? It has never been that in production. The question has been, what do we find here on which to base our production? In other words, how does the script create meanings? A script is a set of incomplete signals—words on a page—awaiting interrogation by the imaginations of actors and spectators within a theater. Different conceptual spaces—film and television—impose challenges for the script. How does it create meanings in a black-and-white silent film? A color film? A transmission bombarding a cathode ray tube with electrons? A cassette? I will offer some examples and a few brush strokes of answers to these questions.

In the 1922 silent *Othello*, language gets in the way of action. Those title cards should give poor Desdemona plenty of time to get out of there. Language always gets in the way of action, of course, but does so invariably on film which demands a moving image. We understand why the early filmmakers liked a scene which is the staple of films even today—the chase scene, with its uninterrupted sequences and its opportunity for cross-cutting from chaser to chasee and back again. And it may be, as Jim Andreas has suggested to me, that “the Elizabethan flow of action, unimpeded as it is by acts or scenes, anticipated and perhaps helped to precipitate the concept of cinematic montage.”

With the advent of sound, fewer Shakespeare films were made than previously. Sound films were expensive and, again, the language gets in the way. John Collick makes this point in discussing Olivier's *Henry V*: “On the one hand the intricate visuals of the film need little of the text to compliment their implicit reiteration of the spectacular tradition and the mythology of British wartime culture. On the other hand, Olivier and the producers of the movie definitely perceive the text as the idealized source of meaning and so the speeches are delivered with the precise and measured enunciation of a BBC radio broadcast.”<sup>1</sup> The sequences in two great early sound films—Bottom's translation in the Reinhardt-Dieterle *Midsummer Night's Dream* (1935) and Romeo's entrance into the Capulet Orchard in the Cukor *Romeo*

*The Upstart Crow*

*and Juliet* are not silent, but they use very few words, letting the image do the talking. That is not to say that the films were not controversial. Sam Crowl, for example, objects to Bottom's awareness of his transformation in that reverse-narcissism when Bottom sees his face in the pond. "Bottom's beauty is his obliviousness; his absolute lack of self-consciousness is his most stunning quality. The film's translation of Bottom is ass-backwards."<sup>2</sup> And certainly the *Romeo and Juliet* has been cursed forever by its casting of a 36 year old Juliet (Norma Shearer) and a 42 year old Romeo (Leslie Howard). The 1953 *Julius Caesar* places the orations against a cliff-like set of steps that suggests how far power seems to be from the person in the street and that pulls the long shadows of history from the speakers. In front is the crowd. James Mason's Brutus handles it all quite well, quite rationally, even absorbing into his agenda the crowd's gasp as Antony enters with the corpse of Caesar on the word "death." But even if we do not know the play, we know the crowd hasn't heard enough as Brutus exits by himself. And we see Antony close to the crowd that he will invite even closer as he devolves them to a mob. The steepness of the steps makes Antony look like a malign creator above the seething sea of the mob.

Film, as we see, can create special effects. Mickey Rooney can become a hound and, unfortunately, not stay a hound. In a film, a donkey can be scared off by a fraternity brother. A moonlit night with ornamental pool becomes at once real and surreal as the camera tracks beside Romeo. Monumental Rome is suddenly inhabited by people and by our imaginations as well. Notice that these are all black-and-white films. Black and white creates depth and forces us to fill in the colors—if we so desire. With more time, I would illustrate that point further by looking at Olivier's *Hamlet*, shot in a deep-field format and featuring a long-range love scene between Hamlet and Ophelia.

The television selections are in color. The *Antony and Cleopatra* begins in a golden haze. It does not matter that the eye is stopped by the first color it contacts. Television is not trying for depth of field. The depth that the screen allows is literally a couple of feet, as opposed to the cinema screen, which angles back through the Sears tire-patching facility to the J. C. Penney shoe department. But, notice the micro-acting that television demands. Richard Johnson gives a public speech about Rome's dissolution—the politician revels in the undercutting of his own position. He tries to figure Cleopatra out—"Last night you did desire it." But she has changed her mind and keeps insisting that Antony hear the messengers. The actors work superbly at role-reversals. The great

## Shakespeare on Film and Television

public man must grovel. The courtesan exposes his irresponsibility. In the *Richard II* sequence, York (Charles Gray) responds to the brutal executions of Bushy and Green as Bolingbroke (Jon Finch) talks of a kinder, gentler policy towards the soon-to-be-deposed Queen. A film director might have wanted to show the executions—as Branagh did with Bardolph in the film of *Henry V*. But on television, David Giles permits what is happening just off camera and what is being said on camera to create a zone for our response—what used to be called irony. Television is a linguistic medium. It comes from radio, as a few of us may recall.

The competition between Goneril (Gillian Barge) and Regan (Penelope Wilton) is beautifully delineated. They have always been rivals, it seems, perhaps once for Daddy's affection, in what seems to have been a motherless household, but now gloating, each in turn, about who must endure his visits in the months to come. The older sister here is the more physically controlling and the more insistent. The subtexts reflect the place of each sister in the birth-order hierarchy. The scene is a rack shot, with Edmund out of focus until the end. They notice him and he inclines slightly. The sisters look at him, speculatively, and at each other. The future triangle is predicted. Edmund looks at the map, specifically at Gloucestershire. Television, carefully done, can give us language, subtlety, and relationship. It has no long distance and little middle distance, but when close-up is the right medium, television can be effective. One reason that it so seldom is, of course, is that we expect so little of it. Our expectation is part of what can occur in any given medium.

Television tends to domesticate its content—as the examples I have shown suggest—that is, to accommodate to our space, our *domestic* space. That is a limitation when it comes to Shakespeare, but a skillful director can give us the bigger scenes—those at court, for example—by giving us a sense of the speakers and of the reactions of the listeners, through close-ups, two and three person shots, and a quick glimpse of the larger space in which the conflict is occurring. On television, if a scene does occur in a space larger than a kitchen—early television plays were “kitchen table dramas”—the larger area is suggested rather than shown in detail.

The scope of the Kozintzev *King Lear* is enormous. It was filmed originally in a 70 millimeter format—and I recall being overwhelmed by the film when I first saw it in that format. The sequence I have selected shows Cordelia and Lear being captured—the soldiers are suddenly confused when a king and a queen turn up in the line of those surrendering. It is not just that Lear is oblivious to the danger his daughter is in and perhaps reimposes

*The Upstart Crow*

the agenda of the opening upon her, but that Edmund cannot understand what he is seeing. Lear and Cordelia “walk,” says Kozintsev, “past the ranks of men armed to the teeth—like conquerors. This is the beginning of Edmund’s defeat.”<sup>3</sup> Edmund stares. Don’t they know they’ve lost? His sudden vehemence is motivated against the subversive thesis that Lear expresses. Men are as the time is, Edmund insists. Still puzzled, Edmund goes into combat with Edgar, and gets nailed. Kozintsev shows how one scene is at once powerfully itself and the motivation for an entire sequence of action. Brook drains the same praxis of positive meaning. A bucket with a hangman’s noose sits behind Lear and Cordelia. The bucket can do nothing against the fire but the noose will take care of Cordelia. Lear talks of firebrands but ignores the fire that is there. He says that he and Cordelia will not be separated. They are. Edmund, momentarily in power, simply reacts in a rage as he incarcerates those he perceives to be his enemies. He has no motive—unless the paranoia that sometimes accompanies unearned or ill-earned power is a motive. The camera moves as if it were hand-held by a combat camera person at ground level who feels that Lear is important, even if the camera cannot get his face in the center of the frame. The off-center and disconnected shots contrast with Kozintsev’s beautifully composed crane shots. We are not, then, detached from what is happening but close to it, implicated in it, in the manner of Artaud’s “theater of cruelty.” At the same time, however, the intentional awkwardness of technique alienates us—that is, it calls attention to itself and our attention to, what Anthony Davies calls “the film’s failure to achieve the orchestrated fluidity of conventional cinematic expression.”<sup>4</sup> We can hardly indulge in any sentimentality here. There is nothing redemptive about it. It is brutal, documentary, and Edmund will get his quickly enough for no particular reason in a cosmos that does not respond to our hopes for its reflection of our own sense of justice. Brook sets out, says Davies, to “strive to disturb an audience in the same way that his insight into the play disturbs him.”<sup>5</sup> We are not given a coherent or stable point of view here—contrast, for example, Olivier’s use of the camera in *Henry V*. It is conventional, often fixed, suggesting a normative view of history that Brook, obviously, rejects in his version of *King Lear*. The Brook and Kozintsev films, made at the same time—the very early 1970’s—create a wonderful context for the exploration of *contrast* and for the asking of the question—what are the options for a filmmaker who translates a Shakespeare script to a medium for which Shakespeare did not write? And, of course, are those options the same as they would be in 1995?

We see the Olivier *Henry V* better through the lens of the Branagh version. We know that Olivier's film is stylized—a Henry V goes to Disneyland—and we expect that, while his Agincourt has mud—as history suggests it did—we won't linger long in the mire. The French charge in an elegant tracking shot. A low angle shot shows Henry's decisive arm about to drop. It is, Jack Jorgens suggests, "a detached overview" of the battle.<sup>6</sup> Branagh shows us a grimy English force looking at the French charge as if it were a tidal wave. The English archers do not send their arrows off like so many miniature Spitfires, but seemingly willy-nilly, into friend and foe alike—the odds suggesting that they are much more likely to find a Frenchman than a Brit. Perhaps to suggest the randomness of battle, we watch one hapless soldier die twice, an arrow in his back each time. Cutpurses ply the muck and are themselves dispatched. Branagh provides a brief allusion to Olivier. The latter had shown the grimacing mouth of a horse. Branagh shows a horse's frightened eye. The director moves to slow motion—an alienating device that insists on a fiction *and* a technique that suggests a nightmare—specifically, the Somme in 1916. Each film is a vivid rendering of a king and the history he dominates at a moment in history. Olivier's "personality is already complete at the start," as Peter Donaldson says.<sup>7</sup> Branagh is finding out who he is, as the film sequences suggest. Olivier's film is framed—it begins at the Globe and ends there, as we discover that all that we have seen had been controlled by the conventions of theater with perhaps a bit of improvisation as the actor-king woos Katherine. Branagh's film conveys a more provisional tone, appropriate to the discoveries his character is making about himself as man and king. Olivier had to find a space free of the wreckage of Henkels and Dorniers in which to film. D-Day—another invasion of France—was about to begin. Branagh's version effortlessly absorbs attitudes shaped by Vietnam. It may even be that, as one critic has charged, that Branagh's Henry is "a literary Ollie North who has deliberately shredded vital documents provided by the text. [He is] at the heart of an establishment coverup."<sup>8</sup> Regardless of how we interpret them, each film is a kind of history lesson—the history being our own past fifty years, plus a couple.

Finally, Welles' Falstaff smiles at King Henry, whom Falstaff has mistaken for an oxymoron known as "King Hal." What does Welles' smile say? The film shows Falstaff breaking through rank after rank of guards and attendants, all the layers of symbolic and actual power around a king. That includes the liturgical music which Welles uses as a function of film as opposed to just a

*The Upstart Crow*

reinforcement of meanings. Finally, nothing stands between Falstaff and the new King—except Hal's intention from the first. "I know you all"—the "you" signaling familiarity—to "I know thee not"—the "thee" conveying contempt. As Hal had measured Hotspur's grave—"two paces of the vilest earth"—he measures Falstaff's—"The grave doth gape / For thee thrice wider than for other men." Falstaff begins to counter—"May not young men die as well as old?"—but is cut off. And without language, he is powerless. His smile is that of the teacher who recognizes how well his student has mastered the lesson. This powerful scene shows that the new king has learned how to translate an obscene disturbance into the high point of his coronation, a public lecture to his kingdom. And he learned how to do that from Falstaff. Falstaff exits in the direction opposite to the flow of history. We learn what the scene is all about from the maker of the film.

## University of Maine

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>*Shakespeare: Cinema & Society* (Manchester: Univ. of Manchester Press, 1989), p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>*Shakespeare Observed* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1992), p. 66.

<sup>3</sup>*Shakespeare 1971: Proceedings of the World Shakespeare Congress* (Toronto: Toronto Univ. Press, 1972), p. 199.

<sup>4</sup>*Filming Shakespeare's Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), p. 148.

<sup>5</sup>Davies, p. 149.

<sup>6</sup>*Shakespeare on Film* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977), p. 131.

<sup>7</sup>"Taking on Shakespeare: Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 41 (1991), p. 68.

<sup>8</sup>"A Tale of Two Branaghs: *Henry V*, Ideology, and the Mekong Agincourt," *Shakespeare Left and Right*, ed. Ivo Kamps (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 260.

### Resources

Here is a list of *recommended* films and television versions for the plays most frequently taught. None is recommended, however, without a student's having a grasp of how the medium itself frames and controls the content of the inherited script.

## Shakespeare on Film and Television

*Julius Caesar*

Mankiewicz (1953). Brando, Gielgud, Mason. A powerful b/w film with a documentary effect.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Reinhardt/Dieterle (1935). Wonderful special effects to Mendelssohn's overture. James Cagney, Mickey Rooney, Joe E. Brown, Olivia De Havilland, Victor Jory, Richard Powell. It is greatly underrated.

Hall (1969). Royal Shakespeare Company. A rainy summer in Warwickshire. Intentionally disconcerting camera work. Diana Rigg, Barbara Jefford, Ian Holm.

BBC-TV (1980). Directed by Elija Moshinsky. With Helen Mirren as Titania. A "painterly" approach to the scenes.

Papp (1982). Tape of an actual production. Some awful big-city acting, but a fine Helena from Christine Baranski and a hilarious "Pyramus and Thisby."

*Romeo and Juliet*

Cukor (1936). Shearer and Howard are too old by two decades, but the b/w shots are often splendid. See my chapter in *Shakespeare in Performance: Whose History?* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1996).

Zeffirelli (1968). A film for the 1960's. Wonderful duel scene. Michael York as Tybalt. A "high Renaissance" patina. Zeffirelli invariably provides richness of texture and depth of color, both elements superbly appropriate to this script. His lovers, Olivia Hussey and Richard Whiting *are* young, and the camera picks up their unwrinkled plasticity. The duel scene, taken with a hand-held camera, is sweaty, dusty, and powerful. The conflict between the generations—a huge issue in the late 1960's—is tellingly depicted. This is a beautiful film and very moving, largely because experience is so new and so final to the young lovers.

Stratford, Ontario (1992). Megan Follows. The acting is uneven in this televised stage production, but the Festival Stage shows to good advantage and provides a generic contrast with the film versions. (Available from The Theatre Store, Stratford, Ontario N5A 6V2, Canada.)

*Hamlet*

Asta Nielsen (1920). This German silent film has the great Danish star, Asta Nielsen, playing Hamlet as a woman, disguised at birth because of the need for a male heir. Of course, Hamlet falls in love with Horatio, Horatio with Ophelia, and of course Hamlet is only fragilly capable of even holding a sword. But this is *Twelfth Night* without a twin brother roaming around and ultimately righting things. This is Hamlet trapped in her disguise until death parts her from the role. A powerful film features a magnificent performance by Nielsen.

Olivier (1948). Intense psychological study in b/w with deep-field camera work. Jean Simmons cruises down the river.

*The Upstart Crow*

Richardson (1969). Nicol Williamson, Marianne Faithfull. A close-up color version of the Roundhouse stage production. Oh yes—that's Anthony Hopkins as Claudius and Gordon Jackson as Horatio.

BBC (1980). Most complete and longest of available versions. Derek Jacobi is superb. Patrick Stewart plays Claudius and Claire Bloom, Gertrude.

Zeffirelli (1990). Vivid. Helena Bonham Carter's Ophelia is superb. Many of the other minor characters are brilliantly depicted. The Yorick scene is excellent.

*Othello*

Olivier (1965). He parodies "black" style for the Venetian Senate, an element in his performance easily misunderstood today. Maggie Smith as Desdemona. Frank Finlay as Iago. Derek Jacobi as Cassio. Film based on a stage version.

Welles (1952). Some powerful Eisensteinian b/w camera work.

Thames (1989). RSC production directed by Trevor Nunn originally at The Other Place. A splendid production. Ian McKellen (Iago), William Wight (Othello), Imogen Stubbs (Desdemona), Zoe Wanamaker (Emilia).

Suzman (1988). With tribesman John Kani as Othello. Uneven performances, but a powerful production, as we watch Othello fight against Iago's insinuations.

Bard (1985). William Marshall is often good as Othello. Ron Moody plays a cerebral Iago. Jenny Agutter as Desdemona.

BBC (1981). What father-in-law could object to Anthony Hopkins' handsome Moor? With no racial subtext, Bob Hoskins has no place to go but into unmotivated sociopathology.

*King Lear*

Brook (1969). Paul Scofield: Lear. Irene Worth: Goneril. An "absurdist" view of the script in which even the camera is off-center at times—suggesting that there is no coherent or stable point-of-view. This is a brutal, "existential" world, devoid of pity or cosmic benevolence. Even "moral" decisions cut no cake with whatever powers there are or are not. Brook's uncompromising vision was condemned by a lot of critics—"night of the living dead," Pauline Kael called it—but the film gains power through its narrow focus and seemingly undisciplined technique.

Kozintsev (1970). One of the great Shakespeare films. This huge film, shot in 70mm Sovscope, achieves the scale of the script. Kozintsev is particularly effective in contrasting the power of frailty versus the impotence of brutality. The camera work is powerful and reminiscent of the terrifying films that the Nazis made during their invasions of Poland in 1939 and the Soviet Union in 1941. The film would be even better without subtitles. It loses a lot on cassette.

BBC (1983). With Michael Hornden. Groupings of characters sometimes show relationships, sometimes resemble a football huddle. Set in late 17th century.

## Shakespeare on Film and Television

Olivier (1984). Directed by Michael Elliot. Homage to Olivier. Set in Stonehengean Britain. Intrusive music.

*Macbeth*

Thames (1979). McKellen, Dench, Rees. Remake of Nunn's Other Place production. Unabashedly theatrical.

Polanski (1970). Over-violent, but it has its moments, like the observation by Macbeth's head of the celebration of his fall.

BBC (1982). Nicol Williamson makes mincemeat of the poetry.

Welles (1948). Uneven, often unintentionally amusing. The three weird ones at the end, holding their crooks and gazing at the castle, look like three hockey players sitting out a long penalty.

*Throne of Blood* (1957). Kurosawa's brilliant translation of the theme of ambition to medieval Japan. It is worthwhile in its own right, regardless of its links to Scottish Play. Sometimes the best version of Shakespeare is the least literal. In this case, Shakespeare's imagination has fired Kurosawa's, who relocates the myth of ambition in medieval Japan. Lady Macbeth ("Asaji," as played by Isuzu Yamada) and the finale, in which a hundred arrows barely suffice to kill Macbeth ("Washizu," as played by Toshiro Mifune) are particularly brilliant. *Freedom* from language helps reveal the archetypes.

*Henry V*

Olivier (1994). Disney goes to Agincourt. This is a 1944 film and must be understood within the confines of its *zeitgeist*. Its opening—London, the Globe Theatre, Olivier becoming Richard Burbage becoming Henry V—is probably the best of any Shakespeare film. Olivier unfortunately cuts the great scene with the traitors, but the battle scenes are superb. It is no doubt a case of Shakespeare as a captive of propaganda, but the "message" is stirring and D-Day had yet to succeed when the film was made. Olivier often views his material from a fixed camera, suggesting that history is static or easily decoded into simple categories.

Branagh (1989). This is "Platoon" as opposed to Olivier's great international army, but the tavern scenes are wonderfully ratty, the battle scene a mass of mud (which is historical), the hanging of Bardolph a powerful extra-textual inset, the scene with the traitors really gut-wrenching, particularly in Henry V's indictment of Scroop, and the flashbacks to Henry's former life really telling—they show something in him wishing for a time when he *wasn't* king. Branagh's camera is usually in motion, suggesting that history is not a fixed position. Emma Thompson is a very plain French Princess, effectively a pawn in the games men play.

*Chimes at Midnight* (1965). Welles. The film should end with Falstaff saying, "I will be sent for soon at night," but Welles drags it on so he can have his piano case coffin lugged to the graveyard. But the b/w scenes in which the breath of the characters can be seen even inside are powerfully elegiac. The Battle of Shrewsbury is a mucky, bloody sequence of sheer carnage, contrasting vividly with Olivier's battles in *Henry V* and *Richard III*.

## The Upstart Crow

The BBC-TV series was panned, but the *Measure for Measure* (with Kate Nelligan), *Richard II* (Derek Jacobi, Jon Finch, Charles Gray), and *2 Henry VI* are excellent examples of how the inherited scripts can be shaped to accommodate to television. Olivier's *Merchant of Venice* (with Joan Plowright) is another good television production—but beware the editing, which simplifies the script by making Shylock's motivation "clear." The Branagh film of *Much Ado* is often very popular with students, even if it is a somewhat sentimental, sun-drenched "Hollywood" reduction of the script. Perhaps the best television version of any play is Trevor Nunn's *Antony and Cleopatra* (a remake of his early 1970's Royal Shakespeare Company production, with Janet Suzman, Richard Johnson, Patrick Stewart, and, in a very small role, Ben Kingsley).

In times of breaking of budgets, it will come as a happy surprise to some that many of these cassettes are inexpensive. The latest Writing Company catalogue shows, for example, the Cukor and Zeffirelli *Romeo and Juliets*, the Olivier *Merchant*, the Branagh *Much Ado*, the Polanski and the Welles *Macbeths*, the Zeffirelli and Richardson *Hamlets*, the Nunn *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Olivier and Branagh *Henry V's* all available for under \$20.00 each. The Olivier *Lear* is listed at \$29.95 and the Welles *Othello* at \$22.50. The BBC tapes cost \$99.95, but the *Hamlet* provides 222 minutes on two cassettes. The *Othello*, also on two tapes, runs for 208 minutes.

The Writing Company  
10200 Jefferson Blvd.  
PO Box 802  
Culver City, CA 90232-0802

Not all of the productions I have listed are currently available, but some, not listed by The Writing Company, can be obtained from:

Films for the Humanities  
PO Box 2053  
Princeton, NJ 08543-2053

Films for the Humanities markets John Barton's excellent "Playing Shakespeare" series, which is a good bridge between the literary and the dramatic qualities of the scripts.

## Other Resources

The bibliography in this field is growing, suggesting that it is a valid scholarly field in itself and should provide some arguments for the acquisition of primary materials. Here are some of the many books available.

Robert Hamilton Ball. *Shakespeare on Silent Film*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968. The classic study of these films. Includes splendid stills of films now lost.

James Bulman, editor. *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance*. London: Routledge, 1995. A series of brilliant essays on performance in all modes. The essays bring recent theory and production into useful juxtapositions.

## Shakespeare on Film and Television

James Bulman and H. R. Coursen. *Shakespeare on Television*. Hanover, N. H.: Univ. Presses of New England, 1988. This book has essays on the media, on individual productions, and selections from reviews. Deals mostly with the BBC series.

John Collick. *Shakespeare: Cinema & Society*. Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1989. Probing cultural materialist approaches to the cultural and ideological premises of Shakespeare's films, with emphasis on Kozintsev and Kurosawa.

H. R. Coursen. *Watching Shakespeare on Television*. Cranbury, N. J.: Associated Univ. Presses, 1994. Examines the issues inherent in translating the plays to television and looks at the Nunn *Othello*, the Epstein *Dream*, Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*, and the future of Shakespeare on television.

Samuel Crowl. *Shakespeare Observed*. Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1992. Crowl observes astutely: the Reinhardt/Dieterlie *Dream*, Welles's *Chimes at Midnight* and *Othello*, Polanski's *Macbeth*, Branagh's *Henry V*, etc.

Anthony Davies. *Filming Shakespeare's Plays*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988. Useful analyses of how Shakespeare's films occur within spacial dimensions that define how the films mean, with focus on Olivier, Welles, Brook, and Kurosawa.

Anthony Davies, editor. *Shakespeare and the Moving Image*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994. Cogent essays on film and television versions of the plays. Robert Hapgood's piece on Kurosawa is excellent, as are many of the other essays.

Peter Donaldson. *Shakespearean Films Shakespearean Directors*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990. A probing look at Olivier, Kurosawa, Welles, Liz White, Zeffirelli, and Jean-Luc Goddard's films from the vantage point of psychological readings.

Eckert Charles W. editor. *Focus on Shakespearean Films*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972. A very useful compilation of essays and reviews of sound films made between 1948 and 1966.

Jack Jorgens. *Shakespeare on Film*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977, reissued in 1991 by Univ. Presses of America, Lanham, Maryland. The classic study of films up to the mid-1970's.

Bernice W. Kliman. *Hamlet: Film, Television, and Audio Performance*. Cranbury, N. J.: Associated Univ. Presses, 1988. A detailed examination of many manifestations of this script.

James Lusardi and June Schlueter. *Reading Shakespeare in Performance: "King Lear."* Cranbury, N. J.: Associated Univ. Presses, 1991. Contrasts specific interpretations of the script as depicted by the BBC and Granada productions and includes further useful essays in an appendix.

Roger Manvell. *Shakespeare and the Film*. New York: Praeger, 1971. Very useful background on the major sound films made up to the late 1960's.

## *The Upstart Crow*

Jo McMurtry. *Shakespeare's Films in the Classroom*. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon, 1994. The book lists the available materials, provides cast lists and brief evaluations, and addresses of suppliers. Indispensable for anyone using film and television in teaching Shakespeare.

Kenneth S. Rothwell and Anabelle Henken Melzer. *Shakespeare on Screen*. New York: Neal-Schumann, 1990. A comprehensive listing of the Shakespeare that has been done on film and television. Includes comments and reviews. Invaluable.

Michael Skovmand, editor. *Screen Shakespeare*. Aarhus: Aarhus Univ. Press, 1994. Like the Davies anthology, a series of very useful essays that examine past films and some recent offerings, like Branagh's *Henry V*, Stoppard's *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern*, and Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*.

## Journals

*Shakespeare and the Classroom* (Ohio Northern University, Ada, Ohio 45810). Reviews work on film and television as well as all books relating to the teaching of Shakespeare. \$8.00 a year for two issues.

*Shakespeare Bulletin* (Lafayette College, Easton, Pennsylvania 18042) contains essays on productions and reviews of major productions in the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, and elsewhere. It incorporates what used to be *Shakespeare on Film*. \$15.00 a year for four issues.

*Literature/Film Quarterly* (Salisbury State University, Maryland 21801) often has an issue devoted to Shakespeare, as in the case of the excellent issue of 1992 (vol. 20, no. 4) with essays on Branagh's *Henry V* and other film and television productions.

**Mother's Word and *The Comedy of Errors*:  
Notes Toward a Shakespearean  
Constitution of Patriarchy  
by Douglas Green**

**I. Mommy's Dearest**

To begin with, we live in a situation in which the *consecrated* (religious or secular) representation of femininity is subsumed under maternity. Under close examination, however, this maternity turns out to be an adult (male and female) fantasy of a lost continent: what is involved, moreover, is not so much an idealized primitive mother as an idealization of the—unlocalizable—relationship between her and us, an idealization of primary narcissism.<sup>1</sup>

In Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, Antipholus of Syracuse expresses the loss of self to which his alienation from the family, as well as the general family dispersal, has given rise: "So I, to find a mother and a brother, / In quest of them (unhappy), ah, lose myself."<sup>2</sup> Joel Fineman suggests the significance of the wandering twin's condition, of his lament and anxiety: "the duality of brothers that generates singularity, along with the mirroring complexity of dual reflexiveness and defused images of the discrete self, is the masculine rephrasing of the original relationship of son and mother, of son and his discovery of an outside world from which he is separated and to which he is attached."<sup>3</sup> But of course the Syracusan Antipholus merely articulates a condition applicable to his Ephesian brother as well. Though Antipholus of Ephesus believes he knows himself and has apparently relied on his connection to the Duke's Corinthian uncle Menaphon, presumably as adoptive father (V. i. 367-68), to ensure his place in the city he calls home, his orphaned state—marked primarily by the missing mother—belies the certainty with which he assumes his share of what these city fathers bestow. His separation—should we say alienation?—from his mother and hence his ignorance of several basic relationships, soon to enter into play, undermine his self-knowledge and his presumption of a secure place in the world. Whereas the Syracusan brother is errant, the Ephesian one is erring.

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The Ephesian Antipholus, knowing neither father nor mother, founds himself on the patriarchs (Solinus and Menaphon) and their law; thus, for this merchant and his society, such fatherhood is presumably as valuable as biological paternity. However, as his Syracusan brother's doubt attests, this patrimonial currency is rather inflated. From the very first scene in which he appears the security of his familial and social position is called into question: "What art thou that keeps me out from the house I owe?" (III. i. 42). The Ephesian Antipholus does not yet know what ails him—the uncertainty that gnaws at all his worldly relations. On the other hand, though Antipholus of Syracuse knows his father, this twin looks for and to his mother to resolve his self-doubt but is, "like a drop of water / That in the ocean seeks another drop," confounded by the world (I. ii. 35-38). Indeed, Coppelia Kahn notes "that he wants to make a mirroring mother" of the brother he is seeking.<sup>4</sup> It is as if he, like Engels, senses that only a mother knows for sure: "In all forms of group family, it is uncertain who is the father of a child; but it is certain who its mother is."<sup>5</sup> Though the family in Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* is not the "group family" described by Engels, the notion that fatherhood is a far less certain matter than motherhood has been a central preoccupation of Western society. Until quite recently, proof of paternity has really depended on a woman's faithfulness and, more to the point, on a man's faith in a woman and her word. In a sense, the far-flung offspring of the monogamous union of Egeon and Emilia are subject to an analogous anxiety about identity: Where did I come from? Who am I?

In this play only the appearance and the word of the mother are able to constitute and confirm the identities of father(s-to-be) and sons, husbands, and brothers. In fact, the play opens with the father as alien and alienated, outcast and doomed. Egeon himself acquiesces in his fate: "Hopeless and helpless doth Egeon wend, / But to procrastinate his liveless end" (I. i. 157-58). Later when he mistakes Antipholus of Ephesus for the twin he had raised in Syracuse, Egeon feels the rejection of a father who has lost his station as head of the family: "perhaps, my son, / Thou sham'st to acknowledge me in misery" (V. i. 321-22). The son's denial casts doubt, albeit in a comic framework, on the "natural" bond between father and son, on the possibility of some "natural" recognition and affection between them. Patriarchal authority and paternal claims to respect are thus subtextually suspect.

Emilia's appearance as *deus ex machina* in the final scenes provides the maternal link, the key to the family history, the solution to the family plot. She distinguishes twin from twin;

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instructs all, including her daughter-in-law Adriana, in proper conduct; and, as abbess, sanctions all relations with a godly authority and "gossips' feast" (V. i. 406). Above all, she restores Egeon to his place in society—as husband and father: "Whoever bound him, I will loose his bonds, / And gain a husband by his liberty" (V. i. 339-40). Emilia re-establishes and corroborates—even in the case of the Syracusan son he has raised—Egeon's paternal function; without her, he has no assurance of any family tie.

Perhaps what is most telling in her final appearance (V. i. 330-407) is the effect Emilia has on the two men who might claim some authority, familial and political, over her: they are, in her presence, surprisingly hushed. The "most mighty" Duke Solinus and the amazed Egeon defer to her: the first to corroborate the parallel between Egeon's story and hers; the other to inquire about his long lost son. But in marked contrast to the opening of Act I, they are much quieter; whereas Egeon's interminable tale of woe dominates the opening, the abbess' presence dominates the crucial, albeit mercifully shorter, denouement. In resolving this play's errors, Emilia's word alone can "make full satisfaction" (V. i. 399)—sexual, social, and theatrical.<sup>6</sup>

## II. Circe's Cup (V. i. 271)

The mother is never just one person (Freud's error), nor is she ever simply a *person*.<sup>7</sup>

The young boy is trained in puberty to the point of near madness to live his whole life within the structure of a fictitious before-and-after construct. 'Once I've had a woman—the woman—then. . . .' This 'then' covers everything: guilt, fear, uncertainty, feelings of inferiority will all vanish; life will begin; I will be strong; I will defeat my father; I will leave him; my potential will unfold; SHE will belong to me, and I will protect her.<sup>8</sup>

We began with the Syracusan Antipholus' fundamental self-doubt, the remedy for which lies in recovering his mother and, through her, his twin or other self and that other other-self, his wife. But this errant twin, this wandering Syracusan, strays from his intended goal, the search for his maternal origin and mirror image; in *The Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare digresses from the plot of the original Roman comedy into a romantic love plot. In relying on Plautus' *Amphitruo* for the doubling of the servants, Shakespeare seems also to have seen the possibility of expanding the role of the wife from *Menaechmi*<sup>9</sup> and highlighting the flirtation

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with infidelity, incestuousness, and, through the introduction of Luciana, love. But this digression is also a repetition, a doubling of another sort. For in the confusion surrounding Adriana's claims on him and his own attraction to Luciana, the Syracusan Antipholus again experiences a loss of self. When he falls in love with Luciana, his words to her suggest that he is willing to surrender any claim to—and any responsibility for—himself: "Are you a god? would you create me new? / Transform me then, and to your power I'll yield" (III. ii. 39-40). Perhaps the most complex moment of attraction occurs when, having called Luciana "mine own self's better part" (III. ii. 61), the Syracusan Antipholus compounds the confusion about which sister he should love by asking Luciana to "Call thyself sister, sweet, for I am thee" (III. ii. 66). In addition to giving himself—like that drop of water in the ocean—over to her, this Antipholus's words transform for an instant his (supposed) sister-in-law into his own sister and, through a nearly simultaneous evocation of the marriage bond, himself into her. As Theweleit notes,<sup>10</sup> desire for the sister is commonly substituted for or associated with desire for the mother. In effect, the love plot and the search for the mother are different versions of the nostalgic yearning for pre-Oedipal union with the mother.

The Ephesian Antipholus' frustration with Adriana—tellingly corroborated by his brother—and his ready substitution of whore('s body) for wife('s body) suggest one aspect of the conflation of sister and mother, of lover and mother, of all women to one woman: the Ephesian twin bases his encounters with all women—and, if his irascibility is any indication, with the world—on what he lacked from one woman, his mother.<sup>11</sup> In a related but distinct way, the Syracusan brother responds to love ultimately by suspecting the woman to whom he has surrendered himself—and the whole Ephesian society—of witchcraft: "There's none but witches do inhabit here" (III. ii. 156). The Syracusan Antipholus' alienation from his mother and the basic social and natural bonds she embodies manifests itself in a desire for engulfment, most clearly expressed to Luciana: "Spread o'er the silver waves thy golden hairs / And as a bed I'll take thee, and there lie" (III. ii. 48-49). Yet anxiety about such self-loss, even in love, results in suspicion of Luciana and, by extension, of all women and social entanglements, from the threat of which this twin then seeks to extricate himself: "her fair sister, . . . / Hath almost made me traitor to myself; / But lest myself be guilty to self-wrong, / I'll stop mine ears against the mermaid's song" (III. ii. 163-64).

### III. Make Room for Daddy's

The most highly evolved and effective form of encoding the earth's body as the body of infinite womanhood seems to consist in the even narrower conceptualization of the body of all women as the body of the mother—incest as a substitute for further exploration.<sup>12</sup>

So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies.  
He that loveth his wife loveth himself.<sup>13</sup>

To draw the 'homosocial' back into the orbit of 'desire,' of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted.<sup>14</sup>

As the comically befuddled Dromio of Syracuse runs from Luce/Nell, he encounters his master and asks: "Am I Dromio? Am I your man? Am I myself?" The Syracusan Antipholus replies affirmatively to all three queries, but the master's answer just doesn't satisfy the man: "I am an ass, I am a woman's man, and besides myself" (III. ii. 73-76). As the parodic potential of the names Luce and Luciana suggests,<sup>15</sup> Shakespeare burlesques in this Dromio's predicament the male paranoia and frustration that characterize the Antipholi, especially in their relations with women. But we also have something more: in a comic inversion of Antipholus' idealizing words to Luciana, which make her "my sole earth's heaven, and my heaven's claim" (III. ii. 64), Dromio makes of the kitchen wench's body a "globe," another earth to be explored. In his subsequent banter with his master, the Syracusan Dromio claims that he "could find out countries" in Luce/Nell's body. His joke exposes the problem of otherness posed by women (or located in them by men), here figured fundamentally and ultimately in maternal terms,<sup>16</sup> and also manifests the male response to the problem: territorialization, subjugation, exploration, colonization of the female body—and mind. Though a comic servant might have to succumb to the "monstrous" body of a kitchen wench, free men and aristocrats face no such fate.

The complex interplay between male anxieties about the world and about women is most notable in male control over the bodies of women through servitude, prostitution, Pauline marriage, and religion—all of which methods figure in the play. Ironically, in this play Emilia herself reestablishes and fosters familial, social, and even commercial bonds<sup>17</sup> in accordance with male homosocial

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desire: she reproduces the social fabric that reflects their interests; she even restores the possibility of free trade between Syracuse and Ephesus. (We might wonder if she is the "Elizabeth" of Ephesus, an Elizabeth who at about fifty will suddenly—and thankfully—turn out to have [had] a husband and a doubled offspring: indeed the play may mask an anxiety about succession, figured in the unremarked problem of twin heirs; as John M. Mercer reminds us, the play's first audience may have been the lawyers of Gray's Inn, who "were fascinated by twin-like characters, presumably because of the legal implications of mistaken identity, and fostered a long tradition of plays involving such characters."<sup>18</sup>) Particularly noteworthy in respect to Shakespeare's construction of masculinity is the way in which Emilia has the power to confer identity on the male doubles by turning the women, who are singular despite their sisterhood, into good wives (and mothers—of their new husbands' identities and future offspring). As abbess, she appears endued with divine authority so great that it overwhelms the temporal (and theatrical) power of the Duke. But from whence that authority? From the ultimate Father? And to what end(s)? Finally, unlike the queen, she transfers her submission from God to a husband; thus her powers are subtly circumscribed—not, as in the later case of Prospero, strictly by herself, but by her subjection to another.

The Abbess' near-usurpation of the Ephesian Duke's civil function does suggest that the role of the good wife and mother may be essential to a healthy state—that motherhood precedes and supersedes the state's patriarchal care and may in fact make it possible. In V. i Emilia instructs her daughter-in-law Adriana (and by extension Luciana, who is present) how to bring together the woman's role as wife and as worthy object of sexual desire; she chides Adriana's shrewishness, blames the wife for the husband's "madness" and faults, and counsels patience. But in so doing, she erases all but the bodily differences among all the ("respectable") women in this play: they are all reduced to good Pauline wives (and eventually mothers). On the other hand, Emilia fosters the differences among the doubled men (their [future] wives' different bodies become the Antipholi's distinguishing feature), makes them individual, and restores them to their father. As with many women, Emilia's role as mother implies significant participation in patriarchal structures. As Arthur F. Kinney shows in an analysis of the play's debt to native medieval drama, Emilia may temper the structures of "Justice" and Law with "Mercy"<sup>19</sup> (we may well ask for whom), but she does not undo them.

#### IV. Men, Mothers, and the Last Word

What the comedies demonstrate, then, is that in sexuality as in all other cultural constructs, societies are not monologic, but full of ideas, some old or new, some dying and some just born.<sup>20</sup>

At the heart of all restrictions on human behavior is the institution of marriage and the family, and farce provides an outlet for our deep yearnings to see that institution desecrated. . . . In short, farce is not a moral genre—except in so far as it allows an audience to enjoy a vicarious release in a safe, healthy, and acceptable way.<sup>21</sup>

Whereas comedy is concerned with unity, adaptation, purposiveness, and harmony, farce is committed to the discontinuous and the dysfunctional.<sup>22</sup>

Hennings says of *The Comedy of Errors* that it is not a farce but a comic "celebration of marriage and the family," particularly the Anglican doctrine of "affectionate marriage."<sup>23</sup> Certainly as constructed in this play, Emilia's role and function, though vital, do not constitute a feminist position; even at her most powerful, Emilia serves the ends of male homosocial desire. In fact, there are hints of anxiety about her power, especially the power of her word: the Duke is on hand to corroborate her story's relation to Egeon's and to ratify her resolution of the play's "errors" by agreeing to "gossip at this feast" (V. i. 407); moreover, the last word goes not to the abbess, but to the Dromios. Though their lack of a mother prevents certainty about their origins (which is the elder?) and hence underscores the power of the Antipholi's mother in this play, the final scene privileges the bonds between "brother and brother" (V. i. 425). On the one hand, the shift undermines the Abbess' resolution by slipping almost imperceptibly from the re-constitution of the familial and social order to a world of twin identities and social indeterminacy: "Methinks you are my glass and not my brother" (V. i. 417). As Barbara Freedman has suggested, "*The Comedy of Errors* proliferates meanings as a means of escaping containment and at the same time generates narratives that seek to effect closure."<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand (and yet in line with Freedman's paradox), the conclusion's shift in focus from the abbess to the Dromios may alleviate subtextual anxiety, most evident perhaps in the ambivalence that might well have attended the use of a Catholic figure to resolve the plot, especially if, as Kinney notes, the Abbess and the priory are transformed versions of the courtesan and the

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Porpentine.<sup>25</sup> But if the Elizabethans would take this transformation of courtesan into nun into (good Anglican?) wife as a series of divine displacements, it is hard for us not to see in it the resolution/repression of a nightmare. (In this respect the play may look forward to *Measure for Measure*, with its Duke-cum-friar and wife-to-be nun.) The all-male mode of production in this comedy, though it does not foreground the boy-actors' cross-dressing, may nonetheless provide some further relief from the theatrical image of female authority. Indeed, behind the staging of *The Comedy of Errors* may lie theatrically inexpressible fears and wishes about an aging, unmarried queen with no undisputed heir.

The problematic centrality of the mother in this play—the constitution and elision of so powerful a female agency—belies the typically unproblematic descriptions of Emilia, like that of Janet Adelman, as “the benign and purified mother . . . , in whose presence masculine identity and the family can be safely reconstituted.”<sup>26</sup> Rather, in the Abbess of *Comedy of Errors*, who is both present and absent, both powerful and, as Adelman would say, “occluded,”<sup>27</sup> we find hints of the contradictions surrounding maternity in early modern England; as Mary Beth Rose argues, “motherhood was very slowly beginning to be construed as a problematic status, and . . . the perceived conflicts center on parental power and authority.”<sup>28</sup> This early comedy's strange, elliptical representation of motherhood, however positive on the surface, may help to account for the anxiety surrounding subsequent mothers in Shakespeare: Tamora, Gertrude, Lady Macbeth, Volumnia, and Hermione. These figures are impugned because their power, associated in various ways with maternity, somehow contradicts or otherwise unsettles their crucial function (biological, social, theatrical) in a presumably patriarchal social fabric—a function acknowledged, yet only ostensibly celebrated, in *Comedy of Errors*.

Augsburg College

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Julia Kristeva, “*Stabat Mater*,” in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986), 99-118. I quote from p. 99.

<sup>2</sup>William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*, The Arden Edition, ed. R. A. Foakes (New York and London: Methuen, 1962), pp. 14-15. References to this edition are hereafter cited parenthetically by act, scene, and line numbers, as follows: I. ii. 39-40.

<sup>3</sup>Joel Fineman, “Fratricide and Cuckoldry: Shakespeare's Doubles,” in *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays*, eds. Murray M. Schwartz and

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Coppelia Kahn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 70-104; the quotation is from p. 104.

<sup>4</sup>Coppelia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981), p. 201.

<sup>5</sup>The quotation is taken from p. 99 of the selections from Friedrich Engels' essay on "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State," in *Feminist Frameworks*, eds. Alison M. Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg Struhl (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), pp. 97-107.

<sup>6</sup>On the play's "commercial vocabulary," see Russ Macdonald's "Fear of Farce," in *"Bad" Shakespeare: Revaluations of the Shakespeare Canon*, ed. Maurice Charney (Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 77-90, especially pp. 85-86.

<sup>7</sup>Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 1, *Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Stephen Conway, with Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota, 1987), p. 367.

<sup>8</sup>Theweleit, p. 376.

<sup>9</sup>For background on the sources, see Foakes' introduction to the Arden edition, pp. xxiv-xxxiv, and appendix I, pp. 109-15.

<sup>10</sup>See Theweleit, p. 377.

<sup>11</sup>See Theweleit, pp. 367-68.

<sup>12</sup>Theweleit, p. 299.

<sup>13</sup>*Ephesians* 5:28.

<sup>14</sup>Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 1-2.

<sup>15</sup>See pp. 99-101 of Thomas P. Hennings' "The Anglican Doctrine of the Affectionate Marriage in *The Comedy of Errors*," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 47 (1986), 91-107.

<sup>16</sup>See the passage from Theweleit, p. 299, quoted at the start of this section.

<sup>17</sup>See Macdonald, pp. 82-84.

<sup>18</sup>See p. 25 of John M. Mercer's "Twin Relationships in Shakespeare," *The Upstart Crow*, 9 (1989), 24-39.

<sup>19</sup>See Arthur F. Kinney's "Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* and the Nature of Kinds," *Studies in Philology*, 85 (1988), 29-52, especially p. 48.

<sup>20</sup>Marilyn Williamson, *The Patriarchy of Shakespeare's Comedies* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1986), p. 182.

<sup>21</sup>Hennings, p. 93.

<sup>22</sup>Barbara Freedman, *Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis, and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991), p. 105.

<sup>23</sup>See Hennings, p. 93 and *passim*.

<sup>24</sup>Freedman, p. 112.

<sup>25</sup>Kinney, p. 44.

<sup>26</sup>Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, "Hamlet" to "The Tempest"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 9-10.

<sup>27</sup>Adelman, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup>The quotation is from p. 296 of Mary Beth Rose's "Where Are the Mothers in Shakespeare? Options for Gender Representation in the English Renaissance," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42 (1991), 291-314.

## The Psychology of Primacy and Recency Effects Upon Audience Response in *Twelfth Night* by James H. Lake

Recent psychological studies of the "primacy" and "recency" effects upon human memory indicate that the mind retains not a complete sequential experience but the first ("prime") and last (most "recent") events in the sequence, at the expense of those events in between. I shall use this insight to explore early modern and postmodern audience responses to the incongruities of comic revenge in *Twelfth Night*. I shall argue that Shakespeare, cognizant of his original audience's complex semantic revenge prototype, capitalizes upon that prototype at rhetorically strategic *loci* specifically to demonstrate the affective power of his drama.

Revenge in *Twelfth Night* is central to the play's subplot, where it is conceived out of conflict within the household of the Lady Olivia; it becomes central to the main plot as well when Malvolio swears revenge upon everyone present. One of the key interpretive questions in this play, then, as Stanley Wells puts it, is "how seriously should we take Malvolio's plight?"<sup>1</sup>—and by extension, his threat. The answer, of course, depends upon (a) whether or not an audience is predisposed to hate Malvolio, and upon (b) the staging of scenes that potentially can draw sympathy for him. That is, if Malvolio is viewed as a scapegoat or as a devil figure and the prison scene, for example, is set below stage so that he is identified as a demon in hell, the audience is likely to find little pathos in his entrapment and imprisonment.<sup>2</sup> Such an interpretation depends upon our accepting Malvolio as merely a "blocking character,"<sup>3</sup> who does not participate in the carnival atmosphere of Olivia's household, and who therefore at the end must be excluded. James Frazer describes the prototypic rejection of one such folk type, the King of the Bean, who during the season of *Twelfth Night*<sup>4</sup> is put to death: the one "who played the part . . . enjoyed . . . privileges for a season, and then died . . . by his own or another's hand."<sup>5</sup> In a similar activity during another season, according to Frazer, young girls might arm themselves with sticks to "beat every corner of the house and yard, saying 'we are driving Satan out.'"<sup>6</sup> With the Malvolios of life chastened and expunged, such accounts seem to suggest, we may feel that love and festival will be enhanced, if not insured.

*Twelfth Night* allows for other interpretive options, however, that do not respond to primal memory but speak more directly to

the "age and body" of our present time. Postmodern audiences may well recoil from Malvolio's protracted imprisonment, if not his gulling. The "tender hearted" Charles Lamb is famous for having found pathos in Malvolio's plight.<sup>7</sup> Yet to agree with him is not to take issue with those who find Malvolio repellent. To say that Malvolio is "an unpleasant individual,"<sup>8</sup> in fact, is to understate his case as a classic study in narcissism and repressed hostility.<sup>9</sup> Character flaws, however, even clinical ones, do not justify chained imprisonment, emotional torment, and public humiliation. Malvolio is professionally competent, moreover, cranky as he may be, and he has the respect of his superiors, Olivia and Orsino, who agree that "he hath been most notoriously abus'd" (V. i. 366).<sup>10</sup> But the dark side of Malvolio, "sick of self-love" (I. v. 82), nevertheless prevails and at the end intrudes upon the main plot. Driven in ambitious pursuit of his mistress, Malvolio, thwarted, will be driven in pursuit of revenge.

*Twelfth Night's* tenuous ending results, however, not merely from Malvolio's oath to revenge, but from an unsettling atmosphere that pervades the subplot. Stephen Booth, in a 1985 Shakespeare Association conference paper, spoke of the "discrepancy between our responses" to the play "and those that we feel are expected of us";<sup>11</sup> that is, no character central to the intrigue of the comedy's subplot is really attractive, yet we feel compelled to ally ourselves either with the disagreeable Malvolio or with his adversaries. It may well be that it is this dilemma of choice between negative polarities in *Twelfth Night* that unsettles audiences otherwise responsive to being manipulated by the shifting dynamics of character, plot, or point of view.

The polarities that force our response in this play are represented, on the one hand, by the English Great House, a microcosm of the Elizabethan state, built upon custom and degree, directed under Malvolio's rigorous Puritan stewardship; and, on the other, by the undisciplined world of Toby, Andrew, and Maria, whose disregard for order is insidious because they are part of the familial structure they threaten to subvert. Revenge is the *topos* that interlocks these polarities.

Revenge held special fascination for Elizabethans but evoked ambivalent responses because of opposing social codes of honor and morality. Upon the English stage the revenge play genre<sup>12</sup> included at least three stock figures: (1) The "hero-revenger," such as Hamlet or Hieronimo, who evokes audience sympathy because he is honorable, though driven by forces beyond his control to perform actions contrary to his nature; he seeks retribution for the loss of a family member or a friend or for personal or

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family honor and acts against inclination, as Romeo does when he kills Tybalt; (2) other, less-heroic revengers, such as Vindice, who lose audience sympathy as they become mired in the means they embrace to effect revenge; (3) "villain-revengers," such as Iago, Edmund, or Richard of Gloucester, who alienate audiences early on; these revenge for thwarted ambition or imagined slights; they are paranoids, practitioners of "policy" associated with, if not drawn from, Machiavelli.

Malvolio's "disguise," his "madness," his isolation are elements associated with revengers in general. Other characteristics identify him more precisely with the villain-revenger: he is ambitious and courts Fortune (II. v. 226), studies "politic authors" (II. v. 147), presumably Machiavelli, is narcissistic (I. v. 82), and has delusions of grandeur. If his ambitions are frustrated, he is the type, like Iago or Edmund or Richard, to take revenge. Moreover, like Iago or Richard, he is associated with Satan (II. iii. 131; III. iv. 90; III. iv. 107; IV. ii. 30). Yet Malvolio has a sympathetic dimension which keeps us from viewing him as merely a villain-revenger or as a comic parody of that figure. This dimension, alien to such stock types, results from the justice of Malvolio's cause. As humiliated steward, he demands and receives the sympathy and respect of his superiors in the main plot and thus also that of the audience.

Malvolio's place as steward in the Great House obliges him to keep order. His commission comes from Olivia (I. iii. 4-5; I. v. 115; II. iii. 65; II. iii. 86), a mistress who opposes revelry perhaps as much as he does. As a Puritan<sup>13</sup>, Malvolio sees himself as one of God's elect; committed to the order, civility, and, when necessary, the redemption of his household. The longstanding misconduct of Toby and his friends would not be perceived by early modern Malvolios merely as excessive "cakes and ale" (II. iii. 105) but would signify, in the words of the divine, James Gifford, the excesses of "beastly Epicures, following their own fleshly mind . . . and giving the swing unto the raging lustes of the fleshe."<sup>14</sup> Such drunkenness and discord in a household under his charge would move any Puritan steward to safeguard the social if not the spiritual health of the estate. Malvolio is so moved.

*Malvolio.* My masters, are you mad? or what are you? Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do ye make an ale-house of my lady's house, that ye squeak out your coziers' catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice? Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you? . . .

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Sir Toby, I must be round with you. My lady bade me tell you that, though she harbours you as her kinsman, she's nothing allied to your disorders. If you can separate yourself and your misdemeanors, you are welcome to the house. If not, and it would please you to take leave of her, she is very willing to bid you farewell.

(II. iii. 86-101)

Even in his most ambitious reverie, however, while deluding himself with visions of power, Malvolio plans no harsher action against Sir Toby than that proposed by King Henry V for Falstaff at the end of *2 Henry IV*; that is, that the miscreant "amend . . . drunkenness" (II. v. 72) and regard time (II. v. 76), a precious commodity for Puritans.

There is pathos, in fact, in Malvolio's thwarted hope for advancement through marriage. "Social mobility," as Jean Howard says, "was a fact of the period";<sup>15</sup> a "class jumper"<sup>16</sup> like Malvolio, in fact, keeps company with the tragic Duchess of Malfi's Antonio. Sir Toby is enraged, moreover, not because Malvolio is a social inferior but because Olivia, as Bertram Joseph notes, is expected to "condescend to him; she must make the first move."<sup>17</sup> In any case, such unions were not uncommon. Deceived and dishonored in romantic and social aspirations, Malvolio is credibly motivated for revenge, even before he is imprisoned.

This conflicting image of Malvolio—satirized villain-revenger and dishonored Puritan steward—for Elizabethans would constitute a kind of chiasmatic "two-fold truth," a paradox to which they responded with what S. L. Bethhell calls "multiconsciousness."<sup>18</sup> That is, Elizabethans would simultaneously ridicule and pity Malvolio, as they might Falstaff or Shylock.<sup>19</sup> This difficulty for postmodern audiences is compounded because we must apply "multiconsciousness" also to Maria and her cohorts, who initiate the revenge plot.

Malvolio easily assumes the complex prototype of revenger. Maria does not. She is a witty trickster, not a wronged maiden or a narcissistic "over-reacher." Yet the cruel intrigue is hers. She and Sir Toby and Sir Andrew exact retribution far in excess of the crime, as is customary for villain-revengers; then they gloat over Malvolio's suffering with the relish of machiavels. "I have dogged him like his murderer" (III. ii. 73), brags Maria. Their motivation is simply that Malvolio is "a kind of puritan . . . a time-pleaser; an affection'd ass . . . so cramm'd, as he thinks, with excellencies that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him" (II. iii. 151). It is for this "vice" in him, says Maria, that her revenge will find "notable cause to work" (152). The pettiness of this motive

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constrains us, as does the harshness of the gulling, to pity the victim, to view him, as "a man more sinn'd against than sinning" (*Lear*, III. ii. 58-59), "hounded"<sup>20</sup> in suffering. The effect, of course, is that the sympathy Malvolio's plight elicits from Orsino and Olivia—and begrudgingly from the audience—is the antithesis of what Malvolio's adversaries would wish for him.

Malvolio as victim barely gains our lukewarm allegiance when he asserts himself in the more natural and ambivalent role of revenger, swearing pervasive retribution just at the moment when the main plot and subplot should be joined, we feel, in a joyous conclusion. In the theater of the mind, where the play lingers hypothetically, Malvolio's revenge, far-reaching, as he swears, and far greater than his gulling, threatens the destruction of the Great House and its society. This is conjecture, of course, built upon the line: "I'll be reveng'd upon the whole pack of you!" (V. i. 365). The line—too ominous to reconcile, too serious to dismiss—forces us to project a discomfoting ending<sup>21</sup> that is incongruous to comedy, especially to one promising to be "What You Will." It is the memory of this ending that we take with us from the theatre.

Studies of the "primacy" and "recency" effects upon memory, as I have said, can help explain the phenomenon of our experience at the end of *Twelfth Night*. In experiments with serial retention, according to Elizabeth Loftus, "the items at the beginning and at the end of the list are remembered well, while items from the middle . . . are remembered poorly."<sup>22</sup> In Roediger and Crowder's study involving 159 Yale and Purdue students, for instance, when "subjects were asked to recall . . . the presidents of the United States,"<sup>23</sup> they tended to remember, as in Loftus's findings, names from the beginning and ending of the sequence, while forgetting those from the middle. This tendency to best remember the first and the last at the expense of the middle extends, however, beyond serial retention. Experiments with eyewitness testimony in law cases, for example, suggest that "information received after the initial perception often replaces the original information in our memories, and that we are prepared to swear that the second impression is the only one."<sup>24</sup> It seems integral to human nature to privilege our earliest and most recent experiences.

This tendency in audiences has been used to advantage by orators since antiquity. In postmodern public speaking courses students are still advised that since "information presented first and last is more likely to be remembered; . . . if you want your listeners to take some action . . . tell them what you want them to do at the end of your speech."<sup>25</sup> This is the same advice that early

modern orators read in *De Oratore*, when Cicero, writing about the appeal to emotion, suggests that “the rule be kept to reserve one’s outstanding resources to the actual peroration,”<sup>26</sup> or in *Institutio Oratoria*, when Quintilian says that “it is in the peroration . . . that we must let loose the whole torrent of our eloquence”<sup>27</sup> because “It is at the close of the drama that we must really stir the theatre.”<sup>28</sup> Familiar with these ancient strategies, Shakespeare knew, even as do those now interested in the recency effect, that “the end crowns all” (*Troilus and Cressida*, IV. v. 255)<sup>29</sup> and that when Malvolio closes *Twelfth Night* with a promise to revenge, the audience will remember that ominous promise, at the expense of the play’s comic vision; just as Marc Antony knows that the Romans, who forgot Pompey when Caesar appeared, will forget Brutus when Antony speaks and, following the advice of rhetoricians, strategically places his appeal to *pathos* at the close of his speech (III. ii. 170-98).

The discomfort that we feel at the end of *Twelfth Night* results then not merely from the inclusion of a disruption or an incongruity, but from an obscuring of this festive world that we naturally want to remember.<sup>30</sup> The revenge prototype ignited by Malvolio’s threat is magnified, through the *primacy* effect, by our association of that threat with Maria’s earlier revenge plot. The two plots—“prime” and “recent”—become fused in the dark memory that preoccupies us and that is reinforced by Feste’s epilogic song about recurring storms and the inexorable passing of time.

Shakespeare’s first audiences must have felt some of our discomfort in the play’s last-minute eclipse of comedy, even equipped as they were with “multiconsciousness.” Their responses, however, would have depended upon culturally-received revenge prototypes. Members of postmodern audiences from certain European cultures and from other ethnic groups retaining a strong sense of family might be expected to have prototypes permitting responses to revenge for family or for personal honor that would more closely approximate those of Shakespeare’s audience than do the responses of most Americans. Early modern responses would have been influenced also by varying degrees of sympathy for the religious convictions that feed Malvolio’s anger and by the philosophical mindset that condemned revenge on principle but that would have recognized if not anticipated the logic of Malvolio’s foresworn action. Whatever discomfort Shakespeare’s audience felt would have been substantially alleviated, in any ease, by a sympathetic participation in the dramatist’s artifice. Such an audience, delighting in paradox and incongruity, would marvel that in seeking to illustrate the power of his me-

dium a playwright could jockey emotions even beyond the confines of the theatre.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Stanley Wells, "John Barton's *Twelfth Night*, 1969-72," *Royal Shakespeare: Four Major Productions at Stratford-upon-Avon*, (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1977), p. 43.

<sup>2</sup>John H. Astington, "Malvolio and the Dark House," *Shakespeare Survey*, 41 (1989), pp. 55-62.

<sup>3</sup>Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 167.

<sup>4</sup>Henk K. Grass suggests that early modern audiences may not have associated the play with the season of *Twelfth Night* but instead with midnight. See Grass, "Direct Evidence and Audience Response to *Twelfth Night*: The Case of John Manningham of the Middle Temple," *Shakespeare Studies*, 21 (1993), 109-54.

<sup>5</sup>Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, abr. ed. (New York: MacMillan, 1960), pp. 678-79.

<sup>6</sup>Frazer, p. 674.

<sup>7</sup>Charles Lamb, "On Some Old Actors," *Essays of Elia in The Life and Works of Charles Lamb*, vol. 2, ed. Alfred Ainger (1899), rptd. in *Discussions of Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies*, ed. Herbert Weil, Jr. (Boston: Heath, 1966), pp. 9-10.

<sup>8</sup>Verna Foster, "The Dramaturgy of Mood in *Twelfth Night* and *The Cherry Orchard*," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 48 (1987), p. 184.

<sup>9</sup>Lacy Baldwin Smith, following Lawrence Stone's lead, describes the kind of plotting and paranoia exhibited by Malvolio as characteristics of an endemic early modern neurosis that in *Every Man in His Humour* Jonson calls the "black poison of suspect." See Smith's *Treason in Tudor England: Politics and Paranoia*, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup>All line references are to *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, 4th ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

<sup>11</sup>Stephen Booth, "Getting Into the Spirit of *Twelfth Night*: The Audience as Malvolio Again," unpublished paper presented at the Shakespeare Association of America Conference, Nashville, 1985. I am grateful to Professor Booth for generously providing me with a copy of this paper.

<sup>12</sup>For discussion of the genre see Linda Anderson, *A Wild Kind of Justice: Revenge in Shakespeare's Comedies*, (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1987); Fredson Thayer Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy: 1587-1642*, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1940); Charles A. and Elizabeth S. Hallet, *The Revenger's Madness A Study of Revenge Tragedy Motifs* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1980); Harry Keyishian, *The Shapes of Revenge: Victimization, Vengeance, and Vindictiveness in Shakespeare* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995); Eleanor Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1967).

<sup>13</sup>Margo Todd defines "Puritans" as "a self-conscious community of protestant zealots committed to purging the Church of England from within of its remaining Romanish 'superstitions', ceremonies, vestments and liturgy, and to establishing a biblical discipline on the larger society, primarily through the preached word. They are distinguished not by adherence to a particular

form . . . but by intensity of evangelical concern and vocal commitment." See Todd's *Christian Humanism and The Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), p. 14.

<sup>14</sup>Martha Tuck Rozett, *The Doctrine of Election and the Emergence of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), p. 55.

<sup>15</sup>Jean E. Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 10.

<sup>17</sup>Bertram Joseph, *A Shakespeare Workbook: Tragedies* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1980), p. 28. See also Ralph Berry, *Shakespeare and Social Class* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1988).

<sup>18</sup>S. L. Bethell, *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (1944), rptd. ed. (New York: Octagon, 1970), p. 26.

<sup>19</sup>Malvolio is not like Falstaff and Shylock in that (1) Malvolio is totally unloved, whereas Falstaff is loved by Hal and Shylock has been loved by Leah; (2) Malvolio is unresolved at the end, whereas Falstaff is provided for by Henry V and Shylock is allowed to retain a portion of his wealth, while agreeing to the terms imposed upon him.

<sup>20</sup>Jonathan Bate draws attention to the use of bearbating and to the Acteon myth, concluding that in the final scene Malvolio's reaction to his adversaries may be represented as that of one besieged by hounds: "the educated audience reads Malvolio as Acteon and simultaneously the illiterate spectator . . . sees him as a bear." See Bate's *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), p. 147. See also Ralph Berry, "Twelfth Night: The Experience of the Audience," *Shakespeare Survey*, 34 (1981), 111-19, and Stephen Dickey, "Shakespeare's Mastiff Comedy," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42 (1991), 255-75. Berry and Dickey both show how knowledge of early modern audiences' interest in bearbating helps to elucidate the play.

<sup>21</sup>Several scholars have commented upon the play's postponed ending. Stephen Dickey writes that "Malvolio foretells his return to the same arena of defeat and self-defeat he now escapes" (p. 266); David Willbern notes that "As Malvolio departs, he leaves behind an unresolved conclusion to the play, taking with him the key to any clear resolution"; see Willbern's "Malvolio's Fall," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 29 (1978), p. 88. C. L. Barber, thirty-five years ago, drew attention to the irony that in 1642, when the Puritans closed the theatres, Malvolio finally achieved revenge; see Barber's *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1959), p. 257. If "the whole pack" to which Malvolio refers in his final invective includes the audience, as Ralph Berry argues, then the promise of far-reaching revenge would diminish audience sympathy for Malvolio while enforcing the ending's bitterness: see Berry's "Audience," p. 118. Postponement of an ending is not in itself unique. Dennis Kay finds suspended endings, in fact, in eleven Shakespearean plays, though he does not include *Twelfth Night*; see Kay's "'To hear the rest untold': Shakespeare's Postponed Endings," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 37 (1994), p. 207. Elder Olson showed long ago how Shakespeare manipulates audience response by causing us to look first on a character "with some disfavor, and subsequently . . . to revise our opinions radically," thereby intensifying "our emotions to an enormous pitch." See Olson's *Tragedy and the Theory of Drama*, (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1961); Shakespeare achieves this effect with Lear, as Olson observes, and seems to be working toward the same end with characters such as Venus or Cleopatra or Richard II; with Malvolio, however, Shakespeare develops a character who maneuvers our emotions even through the last scene.

<sup>22</sup>Elizabeth Loftus, *Memory* (Reading, Mass.: Addison, 1980), p. 24.

<sup>23</sup>Henry Roediger, III, and Robert G. Crowder, "A Serial Position Effect in

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Recall of United States Presidents," *Bulletin of Psychonomic Society*, 8 (1976), pp. 275-78, rptd. in *Memory Observed: Remembering in Natural Contexts*, ed. Ulric Neisser (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1982), pp. 233-34.

<sup>24</sup>Diane E. Papalia and Sally Wendkos Olds, *Psychology*, (New York: McGraw, 1985), p. 218-19. See also Elizabeth F. Loftus and James M. Doyle, *Eyewitness Testimony: Civil and Criminal*, 2nd. ed. (Charlottesville, Virginia: The Michie Co., 1992).

<sup>25</sup>Steven A. and Susan J. Beebe, *Public Speaking: An Audience-Centered Approach*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice, 1994), p. 382.

<sup>26</sup>Cicero, *De Oratore*, trans. E. W. Sutton, Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979), vol. 2, 78. 314.

<sup>27</sup>Quintilian, *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. H. E. Butler, Loeb Classical Library, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1985), vol. 2, VI. 1. p. 51.

<sup>28</sup>Quintilian, VI. 1. p. 52.

<sup>29</sup>This proverb is expressed variously: "The force of the piece is . . . left to the shutting up." John Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, 10 vols., ed. G. R. Potter and Simpson, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1953-1962), vol. 2, p. 41, cited by Kay, p. 222; "The end declareth all," Erasmus, *Proverbs*, trans. Tavener, cited by Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of Proverbs in England in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1950), p. 185; "Let the end try the man" (*2 Henry IV*, II. ii. 47); "The end is the renown" (AWW, IV. iv. 35). See also citations in R. W. Dent, *Shakespeare's Proverbial Language* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981). For discussion of early modern mnemonics, see Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966); for discussion of memory as part of the triad of the soul, see Ruth Leila Anderson, *Elizabethan Psychology in Shakespeare's Plays: University of Ohio Studies: Humanistic Studies*, vol. 8, no. 4 (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1927), pp. 17-18; 38-39. See also C. A. Patrides, *Premises and Motifs in Renaissance Thought and Literature*, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 75-76.

<sup>30</sup>To ensure a conclusion more satisfying to postmodern audiences, a director may rework Shakespeare's text. Maria may be given a credible motive or Malvolio may appear consistently clownish, so that his final exit projects no threat. Michael Kahn's 1990 Shakespeare Theatre production, set in British India, privileged a theme of class conflict, casting Malvolio as a racist whose cruelty to servants made Maria's desire for retribution more credible; see Miranda Johnson Haddad's review of Kahn's production: "The Shakespeare Theatre at the Folger, 1989-90," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 41(1990), pp. 508-511. Stage directions in Orson Welles and Roger Hill's 1930's Mercury-Theatre production text indicate that "A very changed Malvolio—hatless, hair rumpled, dress mussed, a paper half crushed in his shaking hand . . . stumbles out [with] Feste, Fabian, Maria, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew in derisive pursuit," as in the folk rejection of Satan described in *The Golden Bough*. See Welles and Hill, eds. *Twelfth Night, The Mercury Shakespeare* (New York and London: Harper, 1934), pp. 67-68.

## *Measure for Measure* and Law Reform in 1604 by Alan Powers

The reader of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama meets with many plots turning on condemnations and arbitrary reprieves, *Measure for Measure* being an example *par excellence*. Both the plots in this play depict bums (the onomastic Bum, Pompey, and the epithetical one, Angelo) who manipulate the laws through their contrasting positions as savvy marginal and moralistic adjudicator. Both plots, like Elbow, “do lean upon justice” (II. i. 48), a justice that appears stagey and theatrical, the very stuff of fancy. But the standard justice of the Jacobean period was theatrical in conception (exemplary punishment) and arbitrary in practice—for example, James’ 1603 reprieve on the scaffold of Cobham, Grey, and Markham, and of course Raleigh who watched from his cell. In what context could such a theater of law function? What must the flawed lawmaker Angelo in *Measure for Measure* know in order to master, as Duke Vincentio asserts he has, “our city’s institutions, and the terms / For common justice”?

Many scholars have taken the Viennese setting to heart and argued continental canon law, as does Margaret Scott.<sup>1</sup> But even if the good Duke Vincentio is not a thinly veiled King James,<sup>2</sup> the court, the constabulary, the law (both civil and canon), the proclamations and prison system are English, and since the text foregrounds issues such as the reformation of morals and the change of reign after years of neglect—issues appropriate to James’ early reign—we are discussing not Vienna, but London in the year at whose end *Measure for Measure* was first performed. Let us fill in what the Duke in his first line omits, “Of [English] government the properties to unfold. ”

What would Angelo have to know about Jacobean justice? He should know where to issue proclamations (to some 351 market towns), how statutes are made, how many justices in the assize courts (Bacon used the fact that no English court has but one judge to argue against certain canon courts), the methods and expectations of exemplary punishment (including the complicity of the convicted), which capital crimes one may plead clergy to (this privilege of literate males was eroding in this period), which crimes are capital (beginning with grand larceny—anything over 15 shillings, such as the lace tablecloth taken by Elizabeth Shave of Ware), and the precise days when the quarterly sessions at Easter, Trinity, Michaelmas, and Epiphany Terms began.<sup>3</sup> In 1604, Michaelmas Term began on September 16th; the narrowest read-

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ing of “terms” makes this all Angelo would need to know. Would Angelo also have known, as James I apparently did not, that Commons should be summoned for his opening speech on March 19th, which therefore had to be repeated the following day?

James issued forty-eight proclamations in the first two years of his reign, from his accession in March, 1603, until he prorogued Parliament at the end of 1604, two days before *Measure For Measure* was performed at court on St. Steven’s night. Two of that first summer’s statutes dealt with “reformation of great abuses in Measures,” measures both of the weights and grain varieties (June 1st and July 5th).<sup>4</sup> Scholars emphasizing the title allusion to *Matthew 7:1* have usually neglected to plumb this more leaden but still weighty meaning of “measure. “A year later, Parliament even pressed by the close of its session, has taken upon itself reform of commodities abuses, as on Saturday June 16th, “An Act for the true Measuring of Oats, etc. in *England* and the *Marches of Wales*: Thirdly read, and, upon Question, Passed.”<sup>5</sup> Because of the same summer epidemic which delayed James’ coronation, several of his proclamations fall under the category of plague and crowd control: separate edicts deferring St. James Faire and Bartholomew and Sturbridge Faires (July 11th and August 8th, 1603), adjournments of parts of both Trinity and Michaelmas court terms (June 23rd and September 16th, 1603), and most interestingly for our purpose, two September proclamations in 1603 that simply enforced previous, Elizabethan legislation.<sup>6</sup>

Writing from Woodstock the week after the plague reached its worst stage (ca. 1900 died that week), on September 16th, King James issued the twenty-fifth proclamation of his reign, “against Inmates and multitudes of dwellers in strait Roomes and places in and about the Citie of London: And for the rasing and pulling down of certain new erected buildings.” The very next day he issued his twenty-seventh edict, an order “for the due and speedy execution of the Statute against Rogues, Vagabonds, Idle and dissolute persons.” Both these edicts bear upon the plot of *Measure for Measure*, the first very specifically. Against “strait Roomes” where “strait” means scanty, inadequate or narrow (as in the modern phrase “straightened circumstances”), it orders the razing of buildings, as does the proclamation in the second scene of *Measure for Measure*.

*Pompey.* You have not heard of the proclamation, have you?

*Mistress Overdone.* What proclamation, man?

*Pompey.* All houses in the suburbs of Vienna must be plucked down.

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*Mistress Overdone.* And what shall become of those in the city?

*Pompey.* They shall stand for seed: they had gone down too, but that a wise burgher put in for them

*Mistress Overdone.* But shall all our houses of resort in the suburbes be pulled down?

*Pompey.* To the ground, mistress.

*Mistress Overdone.* Why, here's a change indeed in the commonwealth!

(I. ii. 85-96)

How often during the first two years of James' reign would the average informed Londoner have felt, after waiting vainly for changes in the last decade of Elizabeth's rule, "here's a change indeed in the commonwealth!" Not least of James' changes were his expanding the aristocracy through sale of knighthoods (the "forty pound knights") many to his Scottish countrymen, and his replacing with trusted Scots such men as Raleigh who headed Elizabeth's Horse Guard. Not only was he fired, but soon he was tried. During that November trial in 1603, Raleigh might surely have felt, "a change indeed," as he defensively spelled out his sanguine hopes for Elizabeth's successor; Raleigh considered the change from Elizabeth to James a move from "a Lady whom Time surprised" to an "active King."<sup>7</sup>

Although many Englishmen other than Raleigh welcomed the peace negotiations with Spain, most of James' innovations were not the changes Englishmen eagerly awaited. S. R. Gardiner reminds us, "Questions of reform which had been left untouched during the life of Elizabeth, were now ripe for discussion" (I. 170). And discussion ensued from the very first business day in Parliament, Friday March 23, 1603-4, when such major irritants as wardship, inclosure, canon courts, patent monopolies, and royal purveyance all arose. I quote from the *Journals of the House of Commons*,

Sir Robert Wroth, from Essex, "That Matters of most Importance might first be handled; and to that Purpose he offered to the Consideration of the House these Particulars; viz.

1. Confirmation of the Book of *Common Prayer*.
2. The Wardship of Mens Children, as a Burden and Servitude to the Subjects of this Kingdom.
3. The general abuse and Grievance of Purveyors, and Cartakers, etc.
4. Particulars and private Patents, commonly called Monopolies.
5. Dispensations in penal Statutes.
6. Transportation of Ornance.

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7. The Writ of, *Quo Titulo ingressi*, etc. Abuses of the Exchequer, etc.

This Motion, for the time, passed with Silence; and Sir Edward Montague, one of the Knights for Northamptonshire, proceedeth in another; expressing three main Grievances of his Country; and praying some Care to be had of Remedy for them; *viz.*

1. The Burden, Vexation, and Charge of Commissaries Courts.
2. The Suspension of some learned and grave Ministers, for Matters of Ceremony, and for preaching against Popish Doctrine.
3. Depopulations by Inclosure.<sup>8</sup>

The very next day, the eve of the new year which began on Lady Day, Commons worked their usual Saturday and discussed a bill of interest to all those incarcerated in our play, "The Bill authorizing Justices of the Peace to deliver certain Prisoners out of Gaol; and for the Placing and Settling of poor Prisoners after their Delivery" (*Journals*, 150). Throughout their session innumerable bills suggest the world of *Measure for Measure*: from the bills on morals reform to the bills regulating civil and especially church courts, to those regulating inns and alehouses, to bills such as the one near the end of the session, on April 21, "L. 3. B. To secure *Sympton's Debt*, and save harmless the Warden of the *Fleet*" (180). In the last scene in *Measure for Measure* the Provost is at first dismissed because no such special legislation has allowed his action in peremptorily beheading Claudio on Angelo's command. The Duke asks, "Had you a special warrant for the deed?" (V. i. 462). Then the Provost, like the Warden of the Fleet, is "saved harmless" because Claudio was not so executed after all.

In our play statutes which have been ignored for fourteen years (according to the Duke in I. iii. 21) or nineteen years (according to the condemned Claudio in I. ii. 157) are awakened under the new head of state. "Fourteen years" is a provocative number suggesting the final period of Elizabeth's reign, the years (from roughly 1590) that saw a growing discontent amplified by the anxiety of an indeterminate succession. Queen Elizabeth herself worked to keep it indeterminate. For instance, when Peter Wentworth raised the issue of succession in the Commons in 1593, and then published on this, he was promptly consigned to the Tower where he died four years later.<sup>9</sup> The successor on stage, Angelo, is an ambiguous figure embodying the worst trait of puritan or "precisian" moral reform, hypocrisy, but himself caught in the need for a broader reform, that of the competing canon law

and common law—and, we may add, the competing nostalgia for Elizabethan justice. *Measure for Measure* shows that nostalgia for those earlier “most strict statutes, and most biting laws,” is at best a chimaera.

Now consider the language of the vagabond proclamation regarding the lack of enforcement of existing statutes.

At Parliament at Westminster in the 39th yeere of the Reigne of his Majesties late deare Sister deceased Queene Elizabeth, a profitable and necessary Law was made for the repressing of Rogues, Vagabonds and idle and disolute persons, wherewith this Realme was then much infested, by the due execution of which Lawe, great good ensued to the whole Common weale of this Realme, but now of late by the remissenesse, negligence, and connivancie of some Justices of the Peace, and other Officers in divers parts of the Realme, they have swarmed and abounded every where more frequently than in times past, which will grow to the great and imminent danger of the whole Realme . . . if by God and execution of this said Law the same be not prevented.<sup>10</sup>

For its chiding severity of tone, and for its nostalgic attitude toward earlier statutes, Angelo could have written this document. Those familiar with both Elizabeth’s reign and the Stuart capacity for *contretemps* may be amused that James begins his rule with a matter-of-course reaffirmation of a statute from one of Elizabeth’s darker periods: her 39th year was, according to the numerology of the period, her “great climacteric” (7 × 9), her sixty-third year of life, a particularly ill-humored period for her.<sup>11</sup> Less amusing, though typical for a Renaissance monarch, the Stuart king perceived vagrancy (or “homelessness,” to use the modern American word) not as an economic or social problem, but as a failure of duty by his civil officers. They failed to suppress the poor. The Elizabethan statute provided that they should be whipped and sent to the town of their birth.<sup>12</sup>

James’ Privy Council added that certain places of exile be established, places that are amusing and humbling in light of the Columbian Quincentenary. The proclamation denominated, “that the places and partes beyond the Seas to which any such incorrigible or dangerous Rogues shall bee banished and conveyed according to the said Statute, shall be these Countries and places following, *viz.* The New-found Land, the East and West Indies, France, Germanie, Spaine, and the Low countries, or any of them.”<sup>13</sup> The Privy Council saw this problem as a practical matter, “partly for that there hath beene no Suite made for assigning some place

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beyond the Seas, to which such incorrigible or dangerous Rogues might be banished." And they warned that every officer of the Crown do his duty,

... his Highnesse Privie Councill have by their Order assigned places and parts beyond the Seas, unto which such incorrigible or dangerous Rogues should according to the same Law be banished and conveyed. . . : his Maiestie pur-posing (for the universall good of the whole Realme) to have the same Law duely and fully executed, doth by advise of his Privie Councill require all Justices of Peace, Maiors, Bay-liffes, Hedboroughs, Constables, and other Officers whatsoever to whom it appertaineth, to see that the said Law be in all the parts, and branches of the same carefully, duely and exactly executed, as they and every of them will answeere the contrary at their uttermost perils.

This document assumes the presence of resistance or real incompetents, real Elbows, among the "Bayliffes, Hedboroughs and Constables" of the Jacobean criminal justice system, as we now style what was then a loose concatenation of judges, lawyers, prison wardens and cops. J. S. Cockburn documents the difficulty of assembling a literate and competent assize jury in "Twelve Silly Men?"<sup>14</sup> Nor, turning to fiction, need we ponder long on why an Elbow or Dogberry might be loath to whip the homeless. Mercy probably held an element of self-interest for lower officers as well as the monarch. In such an authoritarian but error-riddled system, the 1603 reprieves on the scaffold of Cobham, Grey, and Markham, and Raleigh, drew applause from the onlookers or witnesses, whom the reprieve transformed into an audience. If this was exemplary punishment, it demonstrated the new King's mercy, not to mention his skill as director-impresario.

Contrast the example set in other treason trials, and recall the familiar image of capital punishment in Visscher's engraving of London where little lollipop-like heads sit on pikes on London Bridge's "stoulpes" at Southbank. It is estimated that in the decade when *Measure for Measure* was performed, London witnessed about seventy executions per year. In *Measure for Measure*, Claudio stands so condemned. The best eye-witness account of "exemplary punishment" in treason occurs over fifty years later, in the execution of the regicides. Laura Lunger Knoppers quotes from *The Travels of Peter Mundy* in her article, "'This So Horrid Spectacle.'"

They hang near half quarter of an houre while the hangman strips them stark naked and cutts them downe,

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then presently, while they are hott, (I say not alive) cutts off(f) their privities, casts them first into the fire, the[n] opens them and disembowells them, casting their entrails into the fire also, lastly holding up their hearts in hand one after another, cries to the people—‘See the heart of a traitor.’ It is don alike to all.<sup>15</sup>

Were Angelo a judge, or even a citizen of London, he would have known how a traitor is executed.

The Mundy passage from the Restoration is validated for the Jacobean period by a passage from Coke in which, Harry Keyishian shows, the jurist moralizes each of the horrific elements of the customary punishment for high treason. The condemned person:

being hanged up by the neck between heaven and earth, as deemed unworthy of both, or either; as likewise, that the eyes of men may behold, and their hearts contemn him. Then is he to be cut down alive, and to have his privy parts cut off and burnt before his face as being unworthily begotten, and unfit to leave any generation after him. His bowels and inlay’d parts taken out and burnt, who inwardly had conceived and harboured in his heart such horrible treason. After, to have his head cut off, which had imagined mischief. And lastly his body to be quartered, and the quarters set up in some high and eminent place, to the view and detestation of men, and to become a prey for the fowls of the air.<sup>16</sup>

This is Attorney General Coke’s peroration to his denunciation of the Gunpowder Plot conspirators in their 1606 trial. Harry Keyishian notes that Coke’s speech was justifying the King’s “admirable clemency and moderation”!

Death—in the form of capital punishment and also, probably, the plague of 1603—hangs (pun unintended) over *Measure for Measure*, as does the issue of wrongful imprisonment. Shakespeare personally knew one man recently released from prison on a charge of treason: his patron, the Earl of Southampton. Released in one of James’ early acts of exemplary mercy, Southampton awaited his possessions and rights, not fully reinstated until a year later. The *Journals of the House of Commons* for March 31, 1604, read:

L.I.B. Of Restitution of Henry Earl of Southampton.  
L.I.B. Of Restitution of the Son and Two Daughters of Robert, late Earl of Essex. (160)

In *Measure for Measure*, however, Claudio, is imprisoned not for treason, but for transgressing the marriage laws, which were

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newly encoded in the Canons of 1604, numbers 99-108.<sup>17</sup> In Jacobean England, Claudio's case should have come before a canon court, but civil courts were claiming marital jurisdiction, and canon courts themselves were under pressure to reform. We have seen that the very first day of parliament Edward Montague objected to "The Burden, vexation, and Charge of Commissaries Courts" (*Journals*, 150). A month later the matter came up again in a bill, "For the Reformation of certain Abuses in ecclesiastical Courts and Causes"<sup>18</sup> The session also saw several other bills demanding better recordkeeping in the Leets, and other court improvements.

During the Jacobean and Caroline periods, competition between the common law courts and the church courts grew until the suspension of episcopal courts in 1641. As Brian Levack puts it,

During these years the conflict between the common lawyers and the civil lawyers over the extent of their respective jurisdictions reached critical proportions, and the civilians [canon lawyers] found it necessary to appeal to King James to protect their professional interests.<sup>19</sup>

So many were the discrepancies between the two systems and abuses within each system, that one example must suffice. Let us take "benefit of clergy," the legal exemption from trial outside canon court for literate males. Ben Jonson was the most famous example of a man released from a murder trial because he was literate—no question in his case—although he had not completed a baccalaureate. (He was punished, branded on the thumb with the "Tyburn T" which in his case was evidently an "M.") By the 1590's, benefit of clergy had extended to all men literate enough to read the Bible, the "neck verse," to prove their literacy. But it was a privilege under attack.

Men appealed to the literacy exclusion by the following process. The malefactor (or as Elbow has it, "benefactor") was brought to trial, entered a plea ("benefit of clergy"), and was given a reading test, not unlike entering freshmen at many colleges. The Renaissance reading test was of course a passage from the Bible; often the same passage was used, so an informed suspect with a good memory could cheat. The main difference between the Renaissance and modern reading tests was this: Since benefit of clergy was commonly pled in capital crimes, if you flunked under Elizabeth, you died. Of course, at that time there were many more capital offenses: e.g., grand larceny or theft of anything valued over fifteen shillings, such as a lace tablecloth. Even court documents for such cases can achieve poignancy, as in the *Calendar of*

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*Assize Records; Hertfordshire Indictments, James I.* Since she was a woman, Elizabeth Shawe of Ware, accused of stealing Thomas Studdard's tablecloth, hat, and neckerchief on February 2nd, 1607, could not plead benefit of clergy to remand her sentence: "Guilty; to hang" (*Calendar*, 34). On the other hand or rather, gender, Charles Seawell of Royston did plead clergy when accused of stealing three cows. His sentence reads, "Guilty; claimed clergy but unable to read; to hang" (146). (Imagine the scene. The Bible brought to Charles. He concentrates his eyes. Maybe he needs glasses. At any rate, he is inadequate to the task.) Illiteracy and oral culture pervade *Measure for Measure* from Claudio's oral spousal to Lucio's slanders (two legal cases that would be brought to canon courts) to Elbow's incorrect legal terms.

The literacy exemption derived from the distinction between church law and common law; the "civilian" lawyers trained in Roman law at university, while the common lawyers trained at the inns of court. The eighteenth century jurist Blackstone devotes an entire chapter in his *Commentaries* to *privilegium clericale*.<sup>20</sup> A man who graduated with a baccalaureate, a seminary degree in England at least until 1872 (at Oxford and Cambridge), could legitimately plead clergy, which necessitated trial in canon courts. Blackstone says that by the late sixteenth century these trials before the bishop in person or his deputy included a "vast complication of perjury and subornation of perjury, in this solemn farce of a mock trial."<sup>21</sup> The *dramatis personae* of this solemn farce—the real-life court being a broader comic form than *Measure for Measure*, the problem play—were twelve compurgators "who swore they believed he [the accused] spoke truth; then, witnesses were to be examined upon oath, but on behalf of the prisoner only; and lastly, the jury were to bring in their verdict upon oath, which usually acquitted the prisoner: otherwise, if a clerk, he was degraded, or put to penance."<sup>22</sup> This ceremonial travesty was abolished in Elizabeth's eighteenth year, when *18 Eliz. c. 7* enacts that after burning in the hand, "he shall forthwith be enlarged and delivered out of prison; with proviso, that the judge may, if he thinks fit, continue the offender in gaol for any time not exceeding a year."<sup>23</sup> So the outrageous inequity of complete freedom upon pleading clergy grew out of the more outrageous travesty of justice that bishop's court trials had become in the partisan mid-sixteenth century. The bishops' trials in *privilegium* had become a ceremonial advocacy of the accused; the reading test alone replaced ceremony with individual responsibility, or enacting ritual symbols with construing verbal symbols.

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Without other records, notably the executioner's, it is impossible to tell whether the above sentences of Shawe and Seawell were carried out. We know what happened when the pimp Pompey, untrained in his executioner's office, tried to entice Barnadine to the block. Barnadine knew his theological rights, the required confession and complicity of the convicted. Of course, Charles Seawell probably never went to school, and Elizabeth Shawe certainly did not. Because benefit of clergy was only available to men, Elizabeth's only hope in the justice system was pregnancy, although help was on the way. Eighteen years after her trial, the statute 21 *Jac. I. c. 6.* allowed

that women convicted of simple larcinies [sic] under the value of ten shillings should, [not properly have the benefit of clergy, for they were not called upon to read; but] be burned in the hand, and whipped, flogged, or imprisoned for any time not exceeding a year.<sup>24</sup>

In the 1690's, the gender bias was eliminated when women "guilty of any clergyable felony whatsoever. . . were allowed to claim the benefit of the statute, in like manner as men might claim the benefit of clergy" (3&4 *W.&M. c. 9* and 4&5 *W.&M. c. 24*). At that point, literate women, peers, and commoners were discharged in clergyable felonies, but "those men, who could not read, if under the degree of peerage, were hanged."<sup>25</sup>

Blackstone remarks that soon opinion shifted, so that "education and learning were no extenuations of guilt, but quite the reverse: and that, if the punishment of death for simple felony was too severe for those who had been liberally instructed, it was, a *fortiori*, too severe for the ignorant also." After 5 *Ann. c. 6.*, benefit of clergy was granted to all those who were *entitled* to ask it, without requiring them to read.

Besides law reform, the reformation of morals and opposition to it provide ongoing drama during the Parliament of 1604. According to Ralph Houlbrooke, pressures to reform sexual morals continue growing into the 1620's, with increasing prosecution of ante-nuptial fornication. Even Conrad Russell, no magnifier of parliamentary resistance, keys such resistance under James I to morals reform, "the resistance to bills for the reformation of morals should not be underrated."<sup>26</sup> An example of such a bill early in the reign may be the one read on April 25, 1604, "*L. I. B.* To restrain all Persons from Marriage, until their former Husbands or Wives be dead."<sup>27</sup> Towards the end of the 1604 parliamentary session, another reformation in behavior is attempted. "*L. I. B.* For Reformation of the common Sin of Swearing and

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Blasphemy." This is on a Wednesday in June (the 27th), *Dies Mercurii*. The previous Saturday, thirteen bills have been sent up, including one against the multiplicity of Bishops Leases, another "Act against Resi[d]ance of Masters of Colleges with their families, an Act against scandalous and unworthy Ministers, and An Act touching Rogues and Vagabonds."

In addition to the proclamations on vagrancy and straight rooms, bills on morals reform, reform of weights and measures, and bills on court reform, a great number of other parliamentary bills in the 1604 session relate to *MFM*, from those "For the Relief of Prisoners" and "Touching Alehouses, Taverns, Inns and common Brewers" and another "For the avoiding the superfluous Number of Alehouses" (21 April, 1604), to that "For the taking away the Benefit of Clergy for some kind of Manslaughter;— Preferred by Mr. Bond, and Speech used by him and others, that some Project and Provision be thought on, to prevent Quarrels." Although I have not yet discovered the appropriate cases, Mr. Bond's preventing of quarrels probably refers to ethnic fights between Scots and English over the Union issue which ran throughout the records of this and following sessions. See especially the debate on what to call the new, united country; it took a century for the name "Great Britain" to be enacted under Queen Anne in 1707.<sup>28</sup>

In sum, *Measure for Measure* depicts a society which has suffered under benign neglect for some fourteen to nineteen years. Enter the precisian reformer (recall that "Lord Angelo is precise," I. iii. 50), who awakens the old statutes such as the Elizabethan statute on Rogues and Vagabonds.<sup>29</sup> With his typical caution, Shakespeare makes Angelo an ambiguous figure, an advocate of moral reform who himself becomes the object of legal reform. In the context of 1604, *Measure for Measure* shows that nostalgia for those earlier, Elizabethan "most strict statutes" is at best a chimaera. Better, much better, was James' theater of mercy, especially since many of the parliamentary bills suggested a substantial populace displaced by inclosure, plague, and a difficult economy. Like Rip Van Winkle, who sleeps through the American Revolution and awakens to find a different world, the audience of *Measure for Measure* confronts with a jolt an altered world due to the change of reign and its unrealistic expectations, the ravages of the plague, the tremors of Puritan reform, the confusions of canon and civil law, the regulation of alehouses and the razing of "strait roomes," the regulation of the suburbs and "liberties" such as Southbank itself, and even the dearth of simple honesty in mea-

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sureing oats. Here's a change indeed in the commonwealth! But the play warns against the nostalgia of even Angelic reform.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Margaret Scott, "'Our City's Institutions': Some Further Reflections on the Marriage Contracts in *Measure for Measure*," *ELH*, 49 (1982), 790-804. This essay benefited from presentation at the "Classified Documents" session of the Shakespeare Association of America 1994 Meeting and from the participants in the two sessions on "Shakespeare and the Law" led by Constance Jordan. Research support from the National Endowment for the Humanities allowed me access to the Folger Library and especially to Professors Thomas Greene and Annabel Patterson. For an argument connecting Shakespeare's composition to non-plague periods, see Leeds Barroll, *Politics, Plague and Shakespeare's Theater* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup>J. W. Lever, ed. *Measure for Measure* (London and New York: Methuen, 1966, p. xlviii).

<sup>3</sup>*Calendar of Assize Records; Hertfordshire Indictments, James I*, ed. J. S. Cockburn (London: Her Majesty's Stationer's, 1975), p. 34.

<sup>4</sup>Larkin and Hughes, eds. *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

<sup>5</sup>*Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. 1, *From November the 8th 1547, in the First Year of the Reign of King Edward the Sixth, to March the 2nd 1628 in the Fourth Year of the Reign of King Charles the First*. Printed by Order of the House of Commons, 1800, p. 240.

<sup>6</sup>Larkin and Hughes, *Stuart Royal Proclamations I*.

<sup>7</sup>S. R. Gardiner, *The History of England from the Accession of James I to the Outbreak of the Civil War: 1603-1642*. 10 vols. (New York: AMS Press, 1965), vol. 1, p. 129.

<sup>8</sup>*Journals of the House of Commons*, p. 150.

<sup>9</sup>Bright, Curt, "Realpolitik and Elizabethan Ceremony: The Earl of Hertford's Entertainment of Elizabeth at Elvetham, 1591," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 45 (1992), p. 37.

<sup>10</sup>Larkin and Hughes, vol. 1, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup>For this insight, and for many others throughout, I am indebted to Annabel Patterson and her NEH seminar at Breadloaf in 1990. At least James reaffirmed an existing statute, whereas his Aunt Eliza had claimed she was enforcing "the good law of my father" on women's dress, whereas no such law existed, according to Claus Buechman.

<sup>12</sup>For Elizabeth's impressment of vagabonds, see Curt Bright's forthcoming book.

<sup>13</sup>Richard Bancroft, in a sermon at Paul's Cross, similarly recommended exiling religious dissidents to "India, Kataia and Afrika" to "delight themselves in novelties." Australia had not yet been discovered. *James I Proclamation Ordering the Transportation of Rogues and Vagabonds to America, 1603*. The Folger Library.

<sup>14</sup>J. S. Cockburn "Twelve Silly Men? The Trial by Jury at Assizes, 1560-1670," in *Twelve Good Men and True* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990).

<sup>15</sup>Laura Lunger Knoppers, "'This So Horrid Spectacle': *Samson Agonistes* and

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the Execution of the Regicides," *English Literary Renaissance*, 20 (1990), 487-504.

<sup>16</sup>For this passage I am indebted to Professor Keyishian's paper, "Punishment Theory in the Renaissance: The Law and the Drama," for the Shakespeare Association of America, 1994, session on "Shakespeare and the Law," directed by Constance Jordan. Many other improvements in my essay derive from the participants in that seminar. *Cobbett's Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors* (London: T. C. Hansard, 1809), vol. 2, p. 184.

<sup>17</sup>*Constitution and Canons Ecclesiastical*, 1604, ed. H. A. Wilson, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), Q3 recto ff.

<sup>18</sup>Here follow 37 names, including Sir Francis Bacon, Sir Wim. Strode, Sir Geo. Moore, Mr. Solicitor, etc.—"To meet on *Tuesday*, in the Exchequer Chamber" (April 25, 1604).

<sup>19</sup>Brian P. Levack, *The Civil Lawyers in England 1603-1604* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 5.

<sup>20</sup>William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, rptd. from the first edition, 1769 (London: Dawson of Pall Mall, 1966), vol. 4, ch. 28.

<sup>21</sup>Blackstone, vol. 4, p. 361.

<sup>22</sup>Blackstone, vol. 4, p. 361.

<sup>23</sup>Blackstone, vol. 4, p. 362.

<sup>24</sup>Blackstone, vol. 4, p. 362.

<sup>25</sup>Blackstone, vol. 4, p. 364.

<sup>26</sup>Conrad Russell, "English Parliaments 1593-1606: One Epoch or Two?" in *The Parliaments of England*, ed. D. M. Dean and N. L. Jones (London: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 193.

<sup>27</sup>*Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. 1, p. 184.

<sup>28</sup>*Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. 1, p. 177.

<sup>29</sup>See also: J. Leeds Barroll, *Politics, Plague and Shakespeare's Theater* (New York and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991). N. W. Bawcutt, ed. *Measure for Measure* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). Brian Gibbons, ed. *Measure for Measure* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), Ralph Houlbrooke, "Death, Church and Family," in *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, ed. Ralph Houlbrooke (New York: Routledge, 1989), R. Malcom Smuts, *Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition in Early Stuart England* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), and *Statutes of the Realm* (London, 1810), vol. 4, part 1 (1547-1585).

## Chaucer in Shakespeare: The Case of *The Nun's Priest's Tale* and *Troilus and Cressida* by Lewis Walker

Books by Alice Miskimin, Ann Thompson, and Talbot Donaldson<sup>1</sup> have opened up several intriguing possibilities for exploring Shakespeare's appropriation of Chaucer. It is natural that analyses of the relationship between the two poets should focus on pairs of works that treat the same (or nearly the same) story, like *The Knight's Tale* and *Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Troilus and Cressida*. In addition, there has been considerable mining of the Chaucerian lode for less refined ore. Donaldson, for example, has argued that the play of Pyramus and Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is "the moral equivalent—an inspired re-creation—of Chaucer's *Tale of Sir Thopas*."<sup>2</sup> It has also been claimed that *Troilus and Criseyde* made a substantial contribution to the conception of the fragility of earthly love in *Romeo and Juliet*;<sup>3</sup> that the community of pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales* bears a number of resemblances to the community in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*;<sup>4</sup> and that Katherina in *The Taming of the Shrew* may reflect Shakespeare's recollection of the old hag in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, discussion of Chaucerian influence on Shakespeare need not depend on identity of subject or exact or lengthy verbal parallels. The assumption of the studies mentioned above is that Shakespeare read Chaucer with great care, and responded in his own complex way to the complexities of his predecessor.

Despite the apparent freedom bestowed on scholars by this assumption, investigations of *Troilus and Cressida's* indebtedness to Chaucer have been confined to discussions of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Without discounting the obvious and enormous importance of the latter work, I would like to propose *The Nun's Priest's Tale* as another source. Within the tale, there are three allusions to the Trojan War—Chauntecleer's reference to Hector and Andromache in his discourse on dreams, the Nun's Priest's comparison of the fox to Sinon, and the Priest's comparison of the din raised by the hens upon Chauntecleer's capture to the lamentations of the Trojan women at the fall of the city. These have been noted separately by various commentators, but no one has attempted to disentangle a Trojan strand from the richly textured fabric of the *Tale*,<sup>6</sup> a thread Shakespeare might have woven into his play.

By far the most important reference to the story of Troy in *The Nun's Priest's Tale* comes near the end of Chauntecleer's discus-

sion of dreams. He cites Hector's refusal to heed Andromache's premonitory dream to the effect that "the lyf of Ector sholde be lorn, / If thilke day he wente into bataille."<sup>7</sup> This is intended to be the climactic example in Chauntecleer's refutation of Pertelote's skepticism about dreams. It is the last authority he cites, and it takes up some ten lines. Given this apparent significance, it deliquesces curiously as it brings Chauntecleer closer to the moment of decision, where he must apply his examples and take some action. Noting that the heedless Hector was slain by Achilles, Chauntecleer seems to lose interest in his story at the very point where its moral could be driven home most vividly and emphatically. One might expect a more particular account of Hector's death and its effect on Trojan morale. Instead, Chauntecleer suddenly seems bored with the whole thing: "But thilke tale is al to longe to telle, / And eek it is ny day; I may nat dwelle" (3149-50). It is as if, having outscored Pertelote, citing seven authorities in support of his argument to her one,<sup>8</sup> Chauntecleer finds himself unwilling to spend any more time on the past, even if it means abandoning the contest at his moment of triumph. The story of Hector, he says, would take too long, and, besides, it is near daybreak, when one's attention must be devoted to matters of the present. After a weak summation of his case for this significance of dreams—"Shortly I seye, as for conclusioun, / That I shal han of this avisioun / Adversitee" (3151-53)—Chauntecleer devotes four lines to a vigorous denunciation of laxatives. Although he has not entirely forgotten the point of his ponderous exempla,<sup>9</sup> he finishes the argument by turning it into an anti-digestive tract.

It is nothing new to point out this kind of deflation in *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, but in the context of the present argument I think it is helpful to note how Chaucer seems particularly to relish undermining the high seriousness of Hector's example. The author of *Troilus and Cressida* appears to have found this approach to the story of Troy especially congenial: his characters—some of whom are used in exempla, apostrophes, and similes in *The Nun's Priest's Tale*—deliver themselves of a variety of impressive languages—of chivalry, of love, of heroism, of knowledge, of power—that are undercut because they are detached from the ends toward which they aim.<sup>10</sup> In Chaucer, characters from the war are mentioned by speakers (Chauntecleer, the Nun's Priest) whose reliability is brought into question because their ancient examples cannot be made to fit the barnyard antics of Chauntecleer and company. In Shakespeare, the Greeks and Trojans speak for themselves, and, for the most part, deflate themselves or are

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deflated by the action, though the comments of Thersites and Pandarus are also subversive of the high aspirations of others.

Shortly after reaching his inconclusive conclusions about dreams and laxatives, Chauntecleer engages in one of the most stunning tergiversations in literature—and I believe Shakespeare recalled it when he was composing II. ii, the Trojan council scene, in which Priam and his sons debate the return of Helen to the Greeks. Chauntecleer, having set aside all his philosophizing about dreams, turns to the present moment:<sup>11</sup> “Now let us speke of myrthe, and stynte al this” (3157). He manages a few courtly terms as he describes the “beautee” of “Madame Pertelote,” and then, in order to justify dalliance with her, mistranslates the familiar comic definition of woman *Mulier est hominis confusio*<sup>12</sup> as “Womman is mannes joye and al his blis” (3166). Here Chauntecleer goes beyond simple boredom with the story of Hector and an anticlimactic expression of disgust for laxatives: he cites a proverbial Latin tag—preceded by *In principio*, the two words beginning St. John’s Gospel and probably intended to make the apothegm about woman sound even more authoritative<sup>13</sup>—and cavalierly reverses its sentence. He is now disposed to treat dreams with the same dismissive attitude that a few lines earlier he displayed toward laxatives; in fact, he uses the same word—“diffye”—to express his contempt for both. This undercutting of authority in which Chauntecleer participates reflects, among other things, a tension between various male attempts to organize and control the world (especially through military valor and intellectual dogmatism) and the emotional and sensuous requirements of courtly love.<sup>14</sup> It is clear from the Nun’s Priest’s description that Chauntecleer is both a “mighty warrior” and a “great lover,”<sup>15</sup> but in order to demonstrate his amatory prowess, he must make himself vulnerable by coming down from his perch of intellectual consistency. The barnyard he inhabits, we discover, is one in which authorities are cited only to be ignored, maxims and morals are advanced only to be contradicted or withdrawn, and “relativity and uncertainty” prevail.<sup>16</sup>

Chauntecleer’s breathtaking volte-face, I believe, is embedded in Shakespeare’s Trojan council scene, and is especially pertinent to the character of Hector. Priam opens the scene by reporting the Greeks’ offer to call off hostilities if Helen is returned, and Hector delivers himself of much eloquent reasoning to persuade his hot-headed brothers Troilus and Paris to “Let Helen go.”<sup>17</sup> As he says, she has no value in herself, and “’Tis mad idolatry / To make the service greater than the god” (II. ii. 57-58). He goes on to characterize his brothers as “not much / Unlike

young men, whom Aristotle thought / Unfit to hear moral philosophy" (II. ii. 166-68). At this moment we may hear an echo of Chauntecleer's voice, citing a classical example just before ignoring its significance. Shakespeare, unable to have his characters cite classical precedent honestly because they are classical precedent,<sup>18</sup> has Hector commit this anachronism in the desperate search for something more authoritative than the story in which he is imprisoned. The editor of the Arden text calls this "an obvious (and trivial) anachronism,"<sup>19</sup> but I think it does more than simply alert the audience to Hector's use of ideas from the *Nichomachean Ethics*.<sup>20</sup> It shows Hector attempting to establish a spurious relationship to the past in order to escape from the all-consuming presentness that many critics have found in the play.<sup>21</sup> No matter how strenuously the characters of *Troilus and Cressida* endeavor to distance themselves from the chaotic meaninglessness of the moment—by assertions of valor, vows of love, and here the historicization of a philosopher—they are inevitably and quickly swept away again by the flux of the quotidian. Like Chauntecleer, Hector cites a "classical" authority, and also like Chauntecleer he "mistranslates" it. Having won the argument with two youthful hotheads, he abandons the apparent moral high ground he has gained with authority's help, admitting it was all just a rhetorical exercise. Here is Hector reasoning and reversing himself:

If Helen then be wife to Sparta's king,  
As it is known she is, these moral laws  
Of nature and of nations speak aloud  
To have her back return'd: thus to persist  
In doing wrong extenuates not wrong,  
But makes it much more heavy. Hector's opinion  
Is this in way of truth: yet ne'ertheless,  
My spritely Brethren, I propend to you  
In resolution to keep Helen still  
For 'tis a cause that hath no mean dependence  
Upon our joint and several dignities.

(184-94)

Our Trojan hero is perhaps more self-aware than our erudite fowl (perhaps not),<sup>22</sup> but the pattern of building up an argument with great learning, capping it with an especially apt classical example, then knocking the props out from under the argument by refusing to apply the example, and thus justifying a course of action that the argument was intended to oppose in the first place, is the same in both cases. Moreover, in both instances the authorities collapse because the characters using them cannot keep their minds on the

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past or the lessons to be gained from it: in each case, there is an almost indecent haste to return to the amusements of the present.

At first glance, it might appear that Hector differs from Chauntecleer, since his reversal does not, strictly speaking, involve uxoriousness. After all, later in the play (V. iii), Hector's downfall comes when he willfully ignores Andromache's warning. But we should listen to his final speech in the debate scene:

I am yours,  
 You valiant offspring of great Priamus.  
 I have a roisting challenge sent amongst  
 The dull and factious nobles of the Greeks  
 Will strike amazement to their drowsy spirits.  
 (207-11)

In allying himself with Paris and Troilus, he agrees to see the world through their love-dazed eyes, and as if to confirm this he reminds them (and us) of the challenge he sent to the Greeks in I. iii; as delivered by Aeneas, it committed Hector to single combat in the cause of love:

Hector, in view of Trojans and of Greeks,  
 Shall make it good, or do his best to do it,  
 He hath a lady wiser, fairer, truer,  
 Than ever Greek did couple in his arms;  
 And will tomorrow with his trumpet call  
 Midway between your tents and walls of Troy  
 To rouse a Grecian that is true in love.  
 (272-78)

Even in V. iii, when Hector seals his fate by discounting the prophecies of Cassandra and Andromache's dream, he does so in order to fulfill his commitments to meet several Greeks in chivalric single combats. Despite his pretensions to rationality, Hector, like Chauntecleer, is a creature of courtliness. Or, to put it another way, Hector is rational and courtly, strenuously heroic and courteously chivalric by turns, embodying the contradictions that plagued his fowl forebear, and just as incapable of resolving them.

Of course, I would not want to claim that Chauntecleer is the chief, or only, model for Shakespeare's Hector. I would, however, like to suggest that in composing his play about the Trojan War, Shakespeare was drawn to a tale of Chaucer's that deploys extraordinary learning at the same time that it examines critically the authority embodied in that learning.<sup>23</sup> The dramatist, seeking to problematize history's greatest war for his own age, caught some of the Nun's Priest's spirit when he portrayed Trojan and Greek heroes, themselves emblematic authority figures, being

frequently undercut by the weight of their own learned debates.<sup>24</sup> More specifically, Shakespeare recalled that one of his principal characters had been cited in an example by Chaucer's rooster at a crucial moment in his argument on dreams. Noting the failure of Chauntecleer to profit by Hector's story, Shakespeare gave his Hector a touch of Chauntecleer's characteristic weakness. Hector is not subservient to his own wife, to be sure, but he collaborates with his love-sick brothers in serving the courtly code.

Besides Chauntecleer's citation of Hector's example, the two other references to the Troy story in *The Nun's Priest's Tale* come from the Nun's Priest himself. In the apostrophes to famous traitors to whom the "col-fox, full of sly iniquitee" (3215) is compared, the betrayer of Troy is given pride of place:

O newe Scariot, newe Genylon,  
 False dissymulour, o Greek Synon,  
 That broghtest Troye al outrely to sorwe!  
 O Chauntecleer, acursed be that morwe  
 That thou into that yerd flaugh fro the bemes!  
 (3227-31)

Not only is Sinon's name accorded the bad eminence of being the climactic third in this trio of dissemblers, but he is given two lines explaining his treason, whereas Judas and Ganelon, whose sins remain unelaborated, are rudely huddled together in a single line. Nothing is made of Sinon in *Troilus and Cressida*, but the prominent position given his name in *The Nun's Priest's Tale* provides another reason for urging that Shakespeare detected a Trojan subtext in Chaucer's poem. Looking back from the allusion to Sinon, we note that the description of the poor widow's yard, "enclosed al aboute / With stikkes, and a drye dych withoute" (2847-48), which has been interpreted by critics as a version of the Garden of Eden and as a feudal castle with a moat,<sup>25</sup> can as readily point us toward an image of the walled city of Troy. The fox, who the very night before Chauntecleer makes his near-fatal misjudgment,

. . . thurghout the hegges brast  
 Into the yerd ther Chauntecleer the faire  
 Was wont, and eek his wyves, to repaire.  
 (3218-20)

is further evidence that the *Tale* can be given a strong Trojan coloring. That is, the "hegges" seem to be another protective barrier, like the ditch and the sticks mentioned earlier, around the widow's yard; and the penetrator of these defenses is compared in

most emphatic terms to Sinon. The potential is certainly there for a Trojan reading of Chauntecleer's experience, and I believe that Shakespeare gave the Tale such a reading. His Prologue, for example, lays heavy stress on the protection offered by the walls of Troy for courtly dalliance. Troy is described as a city "within whose strong immures / The ravish'd Helen, Menelaus' queen, / With wanton Paris sleeps" (8-10). The word "wanton" suggests that the real threat to the city is perhaps the pursuit of "joye and of solas" (*The Nun's Priest's Tale*, 3170) within.

In his description of the despair in the barnyard over Chauntecleer's abduction, the Nun's Priest makes one further Trojan reference, this one to the laments of the Trojan ladies when the city was lost:

Certes, swich cry ne lamentacion  
Was nevere of ladyes maad whan Ylion  
Was wonne, and Pirrus with his streite swerd,  
Whan he hadde hent kyng Priam by the berd,  
And slayn hym, as seith us *Eneydos*,  
As maden alle the hennes in the clos,  
Whan they had seyn of Chauntecleer the sighte.  
(3355-61)

The allusion here is to a time later than anything covered in Shakespeare's play, but it once again shows how important the Trojan background is to *The Nun's Priest's Tale*. The passage can be used to highlight a feature that I believe Shakespeare took note of—the constant deflation of both subject matter and style. This happens in the line "As maden alle the hennes in the clos." The five lines previous to this one have focused on the high events of Troy, but now we are suddenly reminded that these are being amplified and applied to chickens. And as Helen Cooper has pointed out, the yoking of "*Eneydos*" and "in the clos" by rhyme forces a confrontation between high and low styles that undermines the former without negating it.<sup>26</sup> As noted earlier, Shakespeare's characters often deflate themselves, like Hector in the debate scene, or each other. The Prologue of *Troilus and Cressida*, the voice most nearly analogous to the narrator's in *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, sustains throughout his speech a tension between high and low styles that exalts the war and mocks it at the same time.<sup>27</sup> He opens with a blunt announcement—"In Troy, there lies the scene" (1)—but follows it with a lengthy and pompous statement about "The princes orgulous" (2) who have come from Greece to take the city, within whose strong "immures" (8) Helen sleeps with Paris. The end of this statement falls back into the low stylistic register, punctuated by an impatient informality:

“and that’s the quarrel”—what one critic has gone so far as to call “a satirical sneer.”<sup>28</sup> It is as if the Prologue feels obligated to treat this most important of ancient wars in a style to which it has become accustomed, but is skittish under the discipline. He knows that present urgencies call him away from otiose expatiation, and at several points he yields to the temptation to offer painfully brief and reductive summations.

Thersites, the most purely reductive speaker in *Troilus and Cressida*, that is, the most unrelenting subverter of attempts to conceive and describe the actions as noble, seems to have caught part of his tone from one of the Nun’s Priest’s voices, the one that punctures the pomposities of his other voice about the cosmic significance of Chauntecleer’s experience. Thersites serves a similar purpose in keeping the audience rhetorically off balance, counterpointing the learned dignity of Ulysses and others.<sup>29</sup> The generally dignified debate about the return of Helen, discussed above, is sandwiched between two scenes that feature Thersites prominently. In II. i., before the debate, he heaps abuse on Ajax, Patroclus, and Achilles, departing with the comment that “I will keep where there is wit stirring, and leave the faction of fools” (120-21). After the debate, he appears alone to deliver a curse: “After this, the vengeance on the whole camp—or rather, the Neapolitan bone-ache; for that methinks is the curse depending on those that war for a placket” (II. iii. 18-21). In particular, the scurrilous Greek delights in formulating absurdly short and insulting epitomes of the action—much in the spirit of the Nun’s Priest when, after discussing Chauntecleer’s mishap in terms of destiny, predestination, simple necessity, and conditional necessity, he brings the reader up short with “I wol nat han to do of swich mateere; / My tale is of a cok, as ye may heere” (3252-51). Thersites’ reduction of the war’s action to fighting for a placket is near to this, but even nearer is his later comment to Achilles: “All the argument is a whore and a cuckold” (II. iii. 74-75). In each case, the lendings of philosophy, rhetoric, and myth are stripped away, and we are momentarily confronted with unaccommodated man in an unadorned plot.

I would like to close by touching briefly on some more global similarities between the two works. As a number of Chaucer scholars have pointed out, *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale* is unique in providing a retrospective and skeptical view of the tales that have preceded it, both in Fragment VII and in the entire *Canterbury Tales*.<sup>30</sup> Most obviously, *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale* spoofs *The Monk’s Tale*, with its solemn, old-fashioned notion of *de casibus* tragedy:<sup>31</sup> Chauntecleer falls from Fortune’s wheel like one of the Monk’s

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examples, but then rises again,<sup>32</sup> thus shortcircuiting the narrator's extravagant attempt to cast his fate as a tragedy.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Shakespeare's play takes a critical look at its author's earlier works, especially the history plays of the 1590's. The Prologue invites comparison with the Chorus of *Henry V*, who, "prologue-like,"<sup>34</sup> introduces the play by pleading with the audience to cooperate with the dramatist in imagining the true heroic proportions of the scenes to follow: the "two mighty monarchies" (20); the multitudes involved in battle ("Into a thousand parts divide one man" [24]); the nobly martial horses, "Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth" (27); the leaps through time and space to keep up with the pace of great actions (29-31). This Chorus confidently assumes that the audience is eager to collaborate in recreating the great military triumphs of King Harry. For *Troilus and Cressida*, on the other hand, the Prologue not only refuses to ask the spectators for help; he affects an indifference about whether or not they will like the play: "Like, or find fault: do as your pleasures are" (30). Instead of trusting in a commonly received vision of heroism, he confuses the beholders by introducing the high style and then subverting it, and by alluding to the *in medias res* epic convention. He informs the audience

. . . that our play  
Leaps o'er the vaunt and firstlings of these broils,  
Beginning in the middle, starting thence away  
To what may be digested in a play.  
(26-29)

He begins in the middle, but not as a matter of choice: it is as if he finds himself in front of an audience during a lull in the combat, and is forced to introduce the play with no greater imaginative grasp of the action than any of its other participants. Thus the audience glimpses some of the means by which heroic stories are customarily conducted, but is denied the assurance that the epic poet is in firm control of the story through these means. Instead of being the comfortable signal for orderly deployment of a heroic plot, for example, the *in medias res* convention here raises doubts about the possibility of creating an epic at all. *The Nun's Priest's Tale* and *Troilus and Cressida*, then, are generically problematic, teasing their respective audiences with promises of epic and tragic glory that are never fulfilled.

Both *The Nun's Priest's Tale* and *Troilus and Cressida* begin as interruptions. In the former, the Knight objects to the Monk's interminable catalogue of tragedies: "'Hoo!' quod the Knyght, 'good sire, namoore of this!'" (2767). The Host joins the Knight in demanding something more gamesome. He complains that the

Monk's tale "anoyeth al this compaignye. / . . . For therinne is ther no desport ne game" (2789-91), and orders the Nun's Priest to "Telle us swich thyng as may oure hertes glade" (2811). The *Tale* is thus a response to an interjected request for more playfulness, though of course its toying with intellectual fashions and generic expectations is perhaps more serious than the Host has bargained for. In *Troilus and Cressida*, the armed Prologue, escaping momentarily from the heat of battle, enters with what must be one of the shortest inductive sentences in drama: "In Troy, there lies the scene" (1). He proceeds with a mocking, even abusive, enactment of what it means to be in the middle of this military action and of this epic representation of the action. He emphasizes that he is breaking in on the audience's conventional expectations about the War and about epic in general. Each work thus opens by dramatizing the accidental and contingent nature of literary productions.

The scenes of chaos evoked near the ends of *The Nun's Priest's Tale* and *Troilus* are analogous: Shakespeare, in scenes iv-ix of act V, presents a series of brief encounters of the most undignified kind, including Thersites'scurrilous comments on nearly everybody (iv), Hector's pursuit of the Greek in sumptuous armor (vi), and Achilles' murder of the unarmed Hector (viii). The fragmentation of the epic action into a collection of noisy private vignettes is similar to the cacophonous disturbance in the farmyard when the fox seizes Chauntecleer. In their disordered pursuit of the fox (3375-3401), the widow and her household may have suggested to Shakespeare a pattern of disjunction for the ending of his play.

Contributing to the inconclusiveness of each work is a bawdily reductive afterthought. In the Nun's Priest's Epilogue, the Host implicates the priest in Chauntecleer's extravagant and impulsive sexuality: "But by my trouthe, if thou were seculer, / Thou woldest ben a trede-foul aright" (3450-51). As the Host goes on to imagine that the priest, in Chauntecleer's place, would need "moo than seven tymes seventene" hens (3454), we wonder retrospectively about the fine balance we might have thought the narrator of the *Tale* achieved between mockery and sympathy: maybe the Nun's Priest was of Chauntecleer's party all along. Pandarus' final speech, addressed epilogue-like to the audience, constitutes a similarly shocking revision of what we have just seen. Pandarus seems to limit his remarks to "Good traders in the flesh" (V. x. 46) and "Brethren and sisters of the hold-door trade" (52), asking for their tears "at Pandar's fall" (49). We are teased, then, with the possibility that the story of Troy comes down to the tragedy of a pimp and that we, as audience, need to regard ourselves as pimps

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and bawds in order to respond appropriately to this recounting of it.

Each work challenges the intellectual fashions of its day. *The Nun's Priest's Tale* holds up to satirical scrutiny man's tendency to look for a moral everywhere,<sup>35</sup> to intellectualize about everything.<sup>36</sup> In *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare attacks perhaps the most important form of intellectualizing: he offers a radical critique of the idealizing process of mythmaking itself. The audience is thus led to be skeptical about the possibility of creating myths to embody civilized values—and in particular about its own myths of "personal and social order."<sup>37</sup>

It is obviously impossible to provide a conclusive demonstration for this kind of relationship; but I believe that Shakespeare had absorbed the skepticism of *The Nun's Priest's Tale* by the time he came to write *Troilus and Cressida* and that, at some level, he recognized, no doubt prompted by the Trojan allusions in Chaucer's poem, that this little tale of a cock and a hen was profoundly relevant to the generically indeterminate, anti-mythologizing play he had in hand.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Alice Miskimin, *The Renaissance Chaucer* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1975); Ann Thompson, *Shakespeare's Chaucer* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978); E. Talbot Donaldson, *The Swan at the Well: Shakespeare Reading Chaucer* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985).

<sup>2</sup>*The Swan at the Well*, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>Thompson, pp. 94-99.

<sup>4</sup>Judith J. Kollmann, "'There is noon other incubus but he': *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Falstaff*," *Chaucerian Shakespeare: Adaptation and Transformation*, "Medieval and Renaissance Monograph Series 2," ed. E. Talbot Donaldson and Judith J. Kollmann (Michigan Consortium for Medieval and Early Modern Studies, 1983), 43-68.

<sup>5</sup>David M. Bergeron, "The Wife of Bath and Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*," *University Review*, 35 (1969), 279-286.

<sup>6</sup>For example, S. S. Hussey, *Chaucer: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 193, lists Sinon among "other deceivers" in the Nun's Priest's *exclamatio*, and the fall of Troy as one of the events to which "the riotous chase after the fox" is compared. Hussey does not single out either of the two references for special consideration, nor does he link them.

<sup>7</sup>*The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), VII. 3144-45; all subsequent Chaucer quotations will be from Fragment VII of *The Canterbury Tales* as printed in this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text by line number.

<sup>8</sup>Hussey, p. 189.

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<sup>9</sup>Helen Cooper, *The Canterbury Tales*, "Oxford Guides to Chaucer" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 348.

<sup>10</sup>G. K. Hunter, "Troilus and Cressida: a Tragic Satire," *Shakespeare Studies*, 13 (1974-75), 1-23.

<sup>11</sup>Alfred David, *The Strumpet Muse: Art and Morals in Chaucer's Poetry* (Bloomington and London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1976), p. 231, comments that Pertelote's appearance "helps us and Chauntecleer to forget about Hector and Andromache and all the remembered wisdom of the past that he has so learnedly recited only to ignore it for the beauty of the present moment."

<sup>12</sup>Correctly translated as "woman is man's ruin." Susan H. Cavanaugh, in her explanatory notes to *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 939, points out that the definition was "so widely known that it was almost proverbial."

<sup>13</sup>Cavanaugh, pp. 938-39.

<sup>14</sup>Paul G. Ruggiers, *The Art of "The Canterbury Tales,"* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 192, claims that in Chauntecleer's translation the Nun's Priest offers two definitions of love that "threaten to cancel each other out" and that no resolution is provided for their ambiguous relationship; Priscilla Martin, *Chaucer's Women* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1990), p. 4, views the two attitudes toward women as complementary, neither being invested with final authority.

<sup>15</sup>David, p. 226.

<sup>16</sup>Donald R. Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1974), p. 286.

<sup>17</sup>*Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Kenneth Palmer, "The New Arden Shakespeare," (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), II. ii. 17; all subsequent quotations from the play will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>18</sup>It is important to note here that the entire play is an appeal to ancient authority, or rather a blurred image of that authority.

<sup>19</sup>*Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Palmer, p. 166n.

<sup>20</sup>Palmer argues for the influence of the *Ethics* in appendix III (pp. 311-20) of his edition.

<sup>21</sup>Perhaps the most perceptive of these is John Bayley, "Time and the Trojans," *Essays in Criticism*, 25 (1975), 55-73.

<sup>22</sup>Depending, to some extent, on whether or not Chauntecleer's mistranslation of *Mulier est hominis confusio* is deliberate.

<sup>23</sup>David, p. 225, comments that "*The Nun's Priest's Tale* is in some respects the most learned of all the Canterbury tales because it is a satire on human learning."

<sup>24</sup>*Troilus and Cressida's* unusual emphasis on learned debate has led many scholars to suppose it was originally composed for an audience of young intellectuals at one of the Inns of Court. V. M. K. Kelleher, "Troilus and Cressida: Shakespeare's Vision of Fallen Man," *Unisa English Studies*, 11 (1973), 8-14, maintains that the intellectual audience at one of the Inns would have been well suited to understand Shakespeare's ironic treatment of classical (heroic) and medieval (courtly) materials.

<sup>25</sup>John Speirs, *Chaucer The Maker* (London: Faber, 1951), pp. 185-92.

<sup>26</sup>Speirs, p. 353.

<sup>27</sup>Elias Schwartz, "Tonal Equivocation and the Meaning of *Troilus and Cressida*," *Studies in Philology*, 69 (1972), 304, describes the Prologue as "unequivocally mock-heroic," arguing that the "Homeric names and 'grand' phrasing are undercut persistently by abrupt descents into colloquialism." Claire M. Tylee, "The Text of *Cressida* and Every Ticklish Reader: *Troilus and Cressida*, The Greek Camp Scene," *Shakespeare Survey*, 41 (1988), p. 63, maintains that the Prologue "pointedly debunks his own high-flown eloquence" about the princes fighting the war.

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<sup>28</sup>Alice Shalvi, "'Honor' in *Troilus and Cressida*," *Studies in English Literature*, 5 (1965), p. 285.

<sup>29</sup>Robert Kimbrough, *Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida" and its Setting* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), p. 139.

<sup>30</sup>Howard, p. 283, lists a number of "backward-looking references" to *The Knight's Tale*, *The Prioress's Tale*, and *The Monk's Tale*.

<sup>31</sup>Traugott Lawler, *The One and the Many in "The Canterbury Tales"* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1980), p. 100.

<sup>32</sup>David, p. 224.

<sup>33</sup>Winthrop Wetherbee, *The Canterbury Tales*, "Landmarks of World Literature" (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 116-117.

<sup>34</sup>*Henry V*, ed. John H. Walter, "The New Arden Shakespeare" (London: Methuen, 1954), Prologue 1; all subsequent quotations from the play will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>35</sup>David, p. 229.

<sup>36</sup>Howard, p. 285.

<sup>37</sup>Douglas Cole, "Myth and Anti-Myth: The Case of *Troilus and Cressida*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 31 (1980), p. 78.

## Anti-Theatricalism and Revolutionary Desire in *Hamlet* (Or, The Play Without the Play)<sup>1</sup> by Grace Tiffany

. . . Last but not least was the growing crisis of confidence in the integrity and moral worth of the holders of high administrative office, whether courtiers or nobles or bishops or judges or even kings.

Lawrence Stone, *Causes of the English Revolution*<sup>2</sup>

The Puritans' disapproval of Renaissance theater has been extensively discussed, most helpfully by Jonas Barish, who finds the origin of Puritan anti-theatricalism in Platonic and Neoplatonic recoil from dramatic poetry.<sup>3</sup> Barish demonstrates that, like Plato and others whom the Puritan reformer William Prynne called "the very best of Pagans,"<sup>4</sup> most Puritans viewed numerous types of cultural role-play as intrinsically deceptive and hence immoral. A widespread puritanist distrust of theatrical "show" both in the playhouse and in the larger arena of English religious, social, and political life was increasingly evident in the sermons, books and pamphlets, and even (ironically) plays delivered and produced in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Yet few have examined the celebrated anti-theatricality of Shakespeare's most famous character, Hamlet, with regard to this growing social disgust. While scholars from Dover Wilson to Michel Foucault have linked Hamlet's melancholy to a specifically Lutheran dismay at social and religious corruption,<sup>5</sup> the implications of Hamlet's oft-noted likeness to that great arch-Puritan warrant further examination. In sixteenth century England, the radical Protestantism inspired by Martin Luther gradually acquired certain recognizable rhetorical forms, all of which constituted verbal weaponry that could be aimed at the depraved social theater of London life. As I will shortly demonstrate, chief among these verbal strategies were the language of satiric condemnation of cultural vanities, the discourse of personal removal from the corrupt world, and the Biblically undergirded call for militant resistance to and purgation of that world. All of these puritanist forms of speech aptly characterize Hamlet's language.

It would, of course, be false to reduce the bafflingly complex Hamlet to a set of principles neatly defining "the puritanist mindset," itself an artificial construct. Healthy challenges to our received notion of Puritans as a unified body of anti-theatrical, anti-celebratory, pinched-faced malcontents are gaining strength in contemporary New Historicist scholarship,<sup>6</sup> and these chal-

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lenges have rendered it increasingly clear that Renaissance religious reformers were a diverse group expressing a range of attitudes towards various political and social practices. Nevertheless, a general attitude of disgust with spiritual decadence masked by virtuous pretension, and a suspicion of the playhouse as the frequent locus and breeding-ground of human perversity, were hallmarks of virtually all Puritan reformative discourse of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The popularity of the angry, socially critical Hamlet—attested to by his reflection in later seventeenth century plays like Tourneur's (or Middleton's) *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Marston's *The Malcontent*, and Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*—seems to register the puritanist temper of his age in all its paradoxical obsession with and repulsion by theater. Like the Puritans, Hamlet is fascinated by theater but, even in his idealistic "mirror up to nature" speech—which comments on the ubiquity of bad acting (III. ii. 16-45)<sup>7</sup>—exhibits a profound distrust of drama's ability to reflect rather than veil truth. To Hamlet it is "monstrous" (II. ii. 551) that a man reciting "Aeneas' [tale] to Dido" (II. ii. 446) can act a non-existent grief while his own real grief defies performative expression; his anguish at the success of the traveling player merges with his anger at the success of the royal players, Claudius and Gertrude, who "may smile, and smile, and be . . . villain[s]" (I. v. 108). Hamlet's ultimate "execution" of Claudius in the play's last scene has its dramatic aspects—Hamlet has rehearsed it in imagination behind the kneeling king (III. iii. 73-75), and the court forms an audience—but the execution's freedom from duplicity renders it signally *non*-theatrical in puritanist terms. In its relative spontaneity it differs not just from Claudius' own veiled murder methods but from the "hidden knife" performances characteristic of the Renaissance stage revenger (e.g., the weapon-wielding masque celebrants at the close of Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*). Indeed, Hamlet has by act five created the conditions conducive to an unscripted revenge action, free from contrived performative tactics: through staging "The Mousetrap" before Claudius, he has alerted Claudius to his knowledge of Claudius' guilt and put this "king of shreds and patches" (III. iv. 102) on the offense. He has smoked him out, tempted his attack, and enabled Hamlet's own soldierly defense, which annihilates the Danish royal family and clears the way for a new government. Thus, in enlisting the traveling players in his effort to purge Claudius' degraded royal performance, Hamlet has turned play-acting against itself. As did the social discontent registered in Renaissance anti-theatrical tracts, Hamlet's anger at his culture's histrionic depravity finally culminates in the authentic medicinal action of public revolution.

Hamlet's use of the tropes of performance to *combat* illicit performance parallels a paradoxical strategy which, as I will show, proved useful in the published pamphlets of Puritan reformers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Disclosing these and other likenesses between the anti-theatrical suspicion generated by *Hamlet* and the reformative yearning expressed by Puritan writings of the mid-to-late Renaissance may increase our understanding, not only of *Hamlet*, but of the evidently popular desire for social and political purgation—a pre-revolutionary consciousness—in Renaissance England.

Between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, the growing Puritan displeasure with the theatrical forms of power operating within and without the playhouse was manifested in three distinct, though overlapping expressions of discontent. The first was an initiatory condemnation of theatrical dress and ceremonial language as misrepresentations of human identity in various arenas of life: the clerical, the secular, and the political. The second, an escapist discourse, was the expressed yearning or call for withdrawal from a world characterized by vainglorious show. The third was a call to arms, demanding the unleashing of a militant purgative energy for the total, cathartic toppling of a rotten state. In the world outside the playhouse, these verbal expressions of discontent were ultimately accompanied by additional forms of political action: the religious Separatists' self-imposed exile in the North American wilderness and the war between Parliamentarians and Royalists at home. But prior to both of these radical social movements, the discourses that inspired them had found their paradoxical expression on the Renaissance stage. My purpose here is to disclose the structural centrality of these prophetic anti-theatrical discourses to the great "anti-play" of *Hamlet*.

Anti-theatricalism was integral to Puritanism's basic intentions, as is evident in the movement's origin in mid-sixteenth century criticism of the Anglican clergy's unnecessary costuming in surplice and cassock.<sup>8</sup> As Puritan writings in England proliferated in ensuing decades, they extended the attack on church vestments to criticisms of theatricalism in other areas of English society, including the deceptive use of ritual language by power-seeking princes "failing in their oath and promises . . . that they would rule and govern justly."<sup>9</sup> These Puritan critiques contributed to a growing perception of clerical and royal "theater" as distraction and excess: wasteful departures from the serious business of worship, governance, and virtuous living. As Steven Mullaney points out, a spreading public distaste for theatrical excess inspired support for the Puritans' cry for radical reform.<sup>10</sup>

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Even the conservative historian Holinshed criticized the “gorgious and costlie apparell” of Richard II’s court, in terms easily transferable to Elizabeth’s: such “new fashionings” were superfluous costumings which worked “to the great hinderance and decaie of the commonwealth,” largely by obscuring the social identity of their wearers (even “[y]eomen and groomes were clothed in silkes”).<sup>11</sup>

But the most vociferous “anti-theatrical” critiques were the attacks on the London stage itself. The Puritans found many things to hate in the theater—its incitements to lewdness through the staged and real presence of prostitutes was a frequent complaint<sup>12</sup>—but the fundamental accusation they levied against the stage was that it embodied deceit. Over and over in Puritan pamphlets and sermons references occur to the theater’s dishonesty: its attempt to hide spiritual reality from the minds of the audience. Anthony Munday speaks of players’ “imitations of dishonest things” through “filthie speech,” “vile motion,” and “beastlie gestures,” and their representation of sins which may not “honestlie . . . be named.”<sup>13</sup> Stephen Gosson questions whether the players “be fitte Schoolmasters of honestie,”<sup>14</sup> and John Rainolds, the Puritan president of Oxford’s Corpus Christi College during Elizabeth’s reign, preached against the “dishonestie” which “accompanies commonly that trade” (play-acting).<sup>15</sup> Theatrical deceit was not straight lying, but a complex visual and auditory conspiracy to substitute seductive images and sounds for moral truth, whose only genuine manifestation was virtuous action (what Gosson calls a “holinesse and singleness of life”). Thus in *Histrion-Mastix*, William Prynne, mingling his attack on stage-plays with a condemnation of histrionic social behavior, broadly indicts:

... fantastique costely apparell . . . Dicing, Stageplayes, lascivious Pictures, wanton Fashions, Face painting, Healthdrinking . . . womens curling, pouldring [powdering], and cutting of their haire . . . amorous Pastoralls, lascivious effeminate Musicke . . . luxurious disorderly Christmas-keeping, Mummeries, with sundry suchlike vanities which the world now dotes on.

The Puritans’ perception of ubiquitous theatrical temptation inspired a related discourse of spiritual flight, withdrawal, or removal from these evils. Munday’s treatise against theater is titled “A Blast of *Retrait* from Plaies and Theaters” (my emphasis); Prynne urges on Christians the scriptural reminder that they are “taken out of this World, and made men of another World.” The early seventeenth century New England Separatists, of course, literally removed themselves to a wilderness they construed as an

unfallen Eden where (to quote John Winthrop) "God [will] delight to dwell among us"; this location was to be a real "shelter and . . . hiding place" from the "Affliction" soon to fall "upon this lande [England]." <sup>16</sup>

But a this-world-focused, militaristic discourse of violence often accompanied the language of spiritual withdrawal. Munday's call for retreat is also a "Blast" against plays; in it (quoting Romans) he argues that filthy players and theater-goers "are worthie death." John Rainolds' title calls for not just the avoidance but "Th'Overthrow of Stage-Playes," and Prynne, whose "*Histrion-Mastix*" means "The Player's Scourge," urges his readers to "put on the armor of Light" against devilish entertainments.

Although the call to arms seems strangely at odds with the simultaneous call for holy retreat, this militaristic language resolves a separate paradox in Puritan anti-theatrical discourse: namely, that discourse's investment in tropes derived from the playhouse it so angrily condemns. For example, Stephen Gosson's anti-theatrical treatise is itself structured like a play and "*Confuted in Five Actions*"; similarly, Prynne's full subtitle is "*The Player's Scourge or, Actor's Tragedy*." This theatrical language, however, always simultaneously describes physical conflict. Gosson's "actions" turn out to be imaginary military actions, and Prynne's "Actor's Tragedy" is the actor's own scourging, or public whipping—suggesting that the only legitimate "theater" of which the Puritans could conceive was the theater of holy war, wreaking shame and destruction on all forms of playhouse vanity. For such "action," the spiritual "armor of Light" was the only legitimate costume.

These three discursive elements—social disgust framed in anti-theatrical terms, explicit longing for withdrawal into an as yet unrealized world, and a call for authentic military action to purge the present rotten state—are as integral to *Hamlet* as they were to Puritan rhetoric of this period. Hamlet enters his play sharply distinguishing between his own spiritual state which "passes show" (dutiful mourning for a dead father) and the histrionic behaviors inadequate for its representation: the "forms, moods, [shapes] of grief," mere "actions that a man might play" (I. ii. 82, 84). Hamlet's "inky cloak," which cannot "[denote him] truly" (I. ii. 77, 83), is thus less a mourning habit than a sign of his puritanist refusal to don the ceremonial garb worn by Gertrude, Claudius, and the rest of the court assembled to celebrate the illicit ritual of Gertrude's and Claudius' wedding. Hamlet's initial disavowal of acting's representational ability is followed by a soliloquy rejecting all the world's "uses" (ceremonies) (I. ii. 134), arising from his memory of the deceptive theatricality of his mother's

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mourning at his father's funeral (147 ff); this language of theatrical disenchantment, as in Puritan reform literature, is accompanied by the expressed longing to flee this depraved state for some other where. Hamlet's frustrated desire to return to Wittenberg (symbolically important to the Elizabethans as the originating site of Reformation discourse) is replaced by a vaguer desire to be "taken out of this world" (recalling Prynne's phrase), also expressed in his first soliloquy (and repeated in his third).

Here and throughout the play, Hamlet defines himself through his persistent scorn for deceptive performance. Although the "antic disposition" Hamlet assumes is to some indeterminable degree "put . . . on" (I. v. 72), Hamlet's resistance to theatrical deception is yet evident in his celebrated rejection of the conventional modes of tragic behavior, including murderous intrigue. His summons to action by the Ghost (I. v. 24 ff) is followed by his recalcitrant refusal to initiate the expected revenge plot; indeed, most of Hamlet's subsequent action and language appear only tenuously related to his avowed revenge project. Instead they further an obsessive puritanist agenda, exposing and repudiating the perverse theatrical modes of the rotten Danish court in terms recalling Munday and anticipating Prynne. For Hamlet even includes in his contempt for Claudius' monarchical pose the more general criticisms Puritan reformers launched against theater audiences' decadent and hypocritical social behaviors. His harsh condemnations of the court's excessive drinking, of marriage vows "as false as dicers' oaths" (III. iv. 45), and of women's cosmetics, dancing, and lechery look forward to Prynne's litany of social evils:

This heavy-headed revel east and west  
 Makes us traduc'd and tax'd of other nations.  
 They clip us drunkards. . . .

(I. iv. 17-19)

I have heard of your paintings well enough.  
 God hath given you one face, and you make  
 yourselves another. You jig and you amble, and  
 you [lispl], you nickname God's creatures and make  
 your wantonness your ignorance. . . .

(III. i. 142-46)

Mediated through Hamlet's language, diverse forms of social "play" are thus rendered synonymous with hollowness, deficiency, and evil.

This resistance to illicit social theater ultimately taints Hamlet's response to the traveling players, despite the glad welcome he

gives them upon their arrival in Elsinore (II. ii. 421). Although the players might be assumed to be *Hamlet's* only honest actors, since they alone admit that they *are* actors, their skill serves mainly to remind Hamlet of the invalid performances of Claudius and Gertrude, and of his own failure authentically to enact his rage. I have noted Hamlet's torment over the traveling player's skill in what Munday calls the "imitation of dishonest things": the actor's ability "in a fiction, in a dream of passion" to weep "for nothing / For Hecuba!" (II. ii. 550ff). The performance of false suffering, Hamlet suggests, only exacerbates the real suffering of the listener. This second soliloquy, where Hamlet responds to the player's rendition of "Aeneas' tale to Dido" with an ecstasy of rage at Claudius ("bloody, bawdy villain! / Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!" [580-81]), runs curiously parallel to two passages in Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, oft quoted by Puritans in condemnation of playhouses (see, for example, the preface to Prynne's *Histrion-Mastix*). Of his prodigal days, Augustine writes, "Stage plays . . . carried me away, full of images of my miseries, and of fuel to my fire," and asks, "what more miserable than a miserable being who commiserates not himself; weeping the death of Dido for love to Aeneas, but weeping not his own death for want of love to Thee, O God[?]." <sup>17</sup> For Hamlet as for Augustine and the Renaissance reformers who quoted Augustine, interest in theater's seductive power coexists with distrust of its veils and distractions. Stage-play fruitlessly involves actors *and* audiences with the griefs of imaginary characters, to the neglect of legitimate business:

What's Hecuba to him, or he to [Hecuba],  
That he should weep for her? What would he do  
Had he the motive and [the cue] for passion  
That I have?

(II. ii. 559-62)

Hamlet's subsequent speech to the players lambastes histrionic falsity from another perspective. Though the speech begins with praise of the ideally "tempera[te]" actor (III. ii. 7), its ensuing lines are substantially devoted to criticism of a second type of theatrical dishonesty: of actors' failures to "[s]uit the action to the word, the word to the action" (III. ii. 17-18), a phrase advocating something like the "singleness" of being and speaking advocated by Gosson. In contemporary theater as in the Danish court, false actors "o'erstep . . . the modesty of nature" (19) and speak parts that were not "set down for them" (39-40). The line thematically supports the play's larger issue of false royalty (we recall, for

example, Claudius' hypocritical address to the court in I. ii). In fact, Hamlet's criticisms of immodest stage behavior and of "abominabl[e]" imitators of humanity (35) adumbrate his later insults to Gertrude concerning Claudius: in marrying this "Vice of kings" (III. iv. 98), he tells her, she has performed "Such an act / That blurs the grace and blush of modesty" (III. iv. 40-41), and has chosen "a mildewed ear" in place of the "man" that "was [her] husband" (64, 62-63). Hamlet alike condemns illicit stage-play and the illicit royal drama being performed by the new king and queen of Denmark in an arena where the depraved Danish audience—like the groundlings who are "capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise" (III. ii. 11-12)—acquiesces in the immoral show.

Hamlet's refusal to participate in such play, evident in his first scene, is, as earlier noted, accentuated by his and the play's resistance to traditional tragic plot structures. In *Hamlet*, conventional plot-lines are introduced only to be relegated to the arena of vanity which Hamlet, standing aloof, has claimed Denmark to be. These plot "possibilities" are shunted quite literally to the margins of the stage, while Hamlet, the recalcitrant anti-protagonist, controls the center. For example, the *de casibus* tragedy intrinsic to the story of Claudius and Gertrude is reduced to the partially performed "Mousetrap," many of whose lines (some "dozen . . . or sixteen" of which are Hamlet's [II. ii. 540-42]) reiterate vows of undying fidelity spoken by the Player Queen representing Gertrude to the Player King representing Claudius—vows which we know to be specious. Thus, in a rather dizzying inversion, the only "real" play in *Hamlet* is used solely to expose the utter falsity of the scene it portrays: to merge fully, as it were, the images of play-acting and royal treachery, whose linkage Hamlet has earlier suggested. When, as Hamlet has hoped, Claudius—"frighted with false fire" (III. ii. 266)—interrupts "The Mousetrap," Hamlet happily discards the aborted *de casibus* play, and reclaims center stage to criticize Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's feigned friendship (345ff). "Mousetrap's" *de casibus* drama with the regicide at its center impinges once more on Hamlet's personal "plot" in the curious scene where Claudius, in soliloquy, confesses his guilt and divided conscience; here again, as in the "Mousetrap" scene, *Hamlet's* "center of gravity"<sup>18</sup> momentarily shifts, resulting in the play's tilt towards a more normative tragic form. However, the scene soon becomes Hamlet's again: Claudius' subsequent tormented soliloquy is (for the audience) interrupted by Hamlet, whose standing, speaking presence overshadows that of the kneeling, silent Claudius. Something similar happens in IV. vii, when

an authentic revenger—Laertes—temporarily appropriates the stage, and engages in some conventional plotting (“I bought an unction of a mountebank. . . I’ll touch my point with this contagion” [141, 146-47]). But immediately after Laertes’ plotting scene, the play again returns us to Hamlet’s “anti-play”: his mediation of Ophelia’s funeral ritual, including his criticism of Laertes’ histrionic display of sorrow (“What is he whose grief / Bears such an emphasis? . . . Nay, and thou’lt mouth, / I’ll rant as well as thou” [V. i. 254-55, 283-84]). Thus within or immediately after all these scenes, normative tragedy quickly reverts to Hamlet’s anti-theatrical agenda.

The brief glimpses *Hamlet* affords us into conventional *de casibus* or revenge action give us the strange impression that Hamlet is “a work with the wrong protagonist,” to quote Franco Moretti<sup>19</sup>—and the still odder sense (ingeniously recaptured by Tom Stoppard in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*) that a “real” play is taking place somewhere just off-stage, only occasionally intersecting with the play of Hamlet, who observes and rejects it. Yet partly because of the terms by which Hamlet rejects this alternative play, and partly because of this alternative play’s revealed content, we begin to see this “real” alternative play as unreal, its authentic drama as nothing more than vanity and seeming: a “Vice of kings” kneeling penitently, but not repenting; a “ranting,” “mouthing” revenger with a poisoned foil, pretending to fight fair. In contrast, Hamlet’s stubborn non-play, composed so largely of anti-theatrical satire, emerges with the superior claim to truth.

Hamlet’s great paradox, of course, is that his disgust with theatrical vanity seems to stem from his fascination with the power of dramatic representation. He can think of no better means to reveal Claudius’ guilt than to stage it: to try, despite the perverse uses of which drama is capable, to “hold . . . the mirror up” to a degraded nature. Yet here, as in the puritanist pamphlets that used the language of play-acting to damn play-acting, the contradiction is more apparent than real. Like St. Augustine’s, Hamlet’s deepest self-criticism is delivered against his own corruption by the court play-world, including the antic disposition with which he postures and “peak[s] / Like John-a-dreams” (II. ii. 567-68) but performs no legitimate curative deeds. His outrage against the disease of subterfuge is the more bitter for the fact that he perceives himself to be infected. Therefore, in a ploy reminiscent of Gosson’s confutation of plays “in Five Actions,” Hamlet determines to invert theatrical tropes, using revelatory play to end his uncle’s—and his own—play of concealment. “The Mouse-

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trap," performed in concert with Hamlet's frequent interruptions, constitutes anti-theatrical theater, employing role-play to blast role-play: to disclose not only Claudius' but Hamlet's own hidden self. This "concert" warns Claudius of Hamlet's intended regicide: "This is one Lucianus, nephew to the king," Hamlet even tells Claudius, as the play-murderer enters with poison (III. ii. 244). This and Hamlet's other obnoxious interruptions convert false theater to real life, as, "as good as a chorus" (III. ii. 245), Hamlet redirects audience attention from the play-murderer to himself: a man with a real "motive and . . . [cue] for passion" (II. ii. 561). By the very obviousness of "The Mousetrap" and his conspicuous reference to the murderous *nephew* (not brother),<sup>20</sup> Hamlet announces his awareness of Claudius' guilt and his plan to punish it, almost as though he intended to allow his uncle the chance to face him openly: to confess or in some other public way respond to his challenge. As "Lucianus" (light-bringer), Hamlet deploys drama to "tent" (II. ii. 597) or whip the Vice-King Claudius into forsaking the false fire of theatrical pretense for the daylight of self-revelation, and to do the same for himself. "The Mousetrap" is, in fact, a "player's scourge" or "actor's tragedy"—a play confuted in two actions.

It almost works. Claudius' halting of the play with the cry "Give me some light" (III. ii. 269) must be interpreted, in light of his subsequent prayerful soliloquy, as a response to Hamlet's call to repentance and conversion—for Claudius' "occulted guilt" to "itself unkennel in one speech" (III. ii. 80-81). Indeed, in his soliloquy and in an earlier aside, Claudius discloses a puritanist sensibility remarkably like Hamlet's, characterized by a horror of the theatrical aspects of illicit rule and a longing to flee the play. Claudius's observation in III. i that

The harlot's cheek, beautied with plast'ring art,  
Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it  
Than is my deed to my most painted word.  
O heavy burthen!

(50-53)

prefigures Hamlet's attack on women's face-painting later in that scene (142ff). In his post-Mousetrap soliloquy, Claudius again links his guilt with the guilt of a painted scene or actor, picturing his disguised criminality as "Offense's gilded hand" which may "[shove] by justice" (III. iii. 58). Claudius imaginatively counterpoises the *theatrum mundi*, in which "gilded" show seems real, against Heaven, where the guise of virtue must fail: "there the action lies / In his true nature" (III. iii. 61-62). Here, in a remark-

ably Calvinist expression of corrupt and helpless will, Claudius enacts the "limed soul's" entrapment in the seductive play-world, where (for him, anyway) power is dependent on the mere pose of kingliness, while his "bosom black as death" is shrouded by the costumes of office (III. iii. 67, 68). His failure or refusal to repent in this prayer signals and precedes his closer embrace of the deceptive strategies intrinsic to his tragic role ("[I am t]hy loving father, Hamlet" [IV. iii. 50]).

Thus Claudius' moment of choice is presented as an opportunity to discard or retain theatrical behavior. In his soliloquy scene, he consciously chooses to maintain a costumed, stage-"painted" self rather than to express an underlying and (hence) genuine one. Hamlet, in contrast, acts puritanistically, using play only to reject play: more specifically to reject the conventional revenge behaviors of plotting, feigning, and backstabbing (an inexplicit but important aspect of his choice not to kill the praying Claudius). What Hamlet craves, and what the mail-clad Ghost prefigures, is overt military action: authentic performance in the genuine theater of war, in which spontaneous, self-revelatory action is alone possible. Thus the last external "play" which impinges on Hamlet's anti-drama—Fortinbras and his armies, marching across stage in IV. iv—is recognized by Hamlet as legitimate action, for its obviousness, its unscriptedness, and its destructive potential (the armies march "unsure" toward an "invisible event" involving the "imminent death of twenty thousand men" [IV. iv. 51, 50, 60]). The sight releases the Pyrrhic spirit animating Hamlet, whose sword had "seem'd i' th' air to stick" above Claudius earlier, like that of the "painted tyrant" of the traveling player's speech (II. ii. 479-80). For action to acquire legitimacy within the painted unreality of Hamlet's world, it must be overtly and extensively destructive. Logically, then, Hamlet's ultimate revenge puritanistically inverts the conventional deceptiveness of Claudius' and Laertes' murderous designs: Hamlet kills Claudius openly, non-theatrically, and *spontaneously* only when all "deep plots" (V. ii. 9) have been disclosed; in so doing (himself dying) he completes the total extermination of a corrupted order. At the play's close, Fortinbras enters to link Hamlet's action with the honor of the "field" (V. ii. 402), again gesturing toward an arena of legitimate military achievement outside the fantastic revenge theater of Denmark. This, Fortinbras implies, is Hamlet's proper sphere. Four captains "Bear Hamlet like a soldier" to that "stage" (396), located somewhere outside the Globe's playing space.

Thus the final action of *Hamlet* reinforces its anti-protagonist's initial distinction between a recalcitrant reality and a rank play-

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world incapable of its representation. Bequeathing his “dying voice” to Fortinbras (V. ii. 356), Hamlet confirms his final detachment from an illicit culture and merges with the Pyrrhic revolutionary spirit of the alien invader.

The *total* corruption of the Danish court is, of course, an effect of Hamlet’s particular perception. As audience, we see that his truth is partial: that Ophelia’s dishonesty is pardonable; that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are less than Horatio, but more than “spunge[s]” (IV. ii. 12); that Claudius feels love, not mere lust, for Gertrude, longs to repent, and is a man with choices rather than “a thing . . . of nothing” (IV. ii. 28ff). Through Hamlet’s privileged mediation, however, we are drawn into the puritanist temper of Shakespeare’s time, characterized by the binary, oppositional perception of self and social world enabled by literalist readings of the Bible. (As Prynne would write, true Christians are “taken out of this World, and made men of another World.”) Like Renaissance puritanist discourse, Hamlet’s rhetoric and action bespeak a mood of the age: an unwillingness to negotiate with a culture whose institutions were perceived as fundamentally corrupt, and an increasing preference for the alternatives of flight or purgative destruction.

Viewing Hamlet as a mouthpiece for the Renaissance puritanist temperament may allow for further inquiries into Shakespeare’s representation of characteristic Puritan values, as well as into our own critical representations of Renaissance thought. In other plays, Shakespeare fashions socially marginalized characters—sometimes literal aliens—to embody strengths presented as missing from their surrounding culture. Othello, the military man whose blunt obviousness contrasts with “super-subtle” Venetian social practices (*Othello*, I. iii. 356), and Shylock, the scripture-quoting disciplinarian who rejects a culture of masque-going “fools with varnished faces” (*The Merchant of Venice*, II. v. 33), are characters whose complex moral valences might better be understood with reference to the strengthening anti-theatricalism of the age that produced them. Through their satirical gibes at the false world, and even through their unpardonable excesses—e.g., Othello’s uncompromising purgative violence, and Shylock’s intransigent literalness—these tragic “puritan” figures disclose other characters’ deficiency of regard for straight, “unvarnish’d” discourse (*Othello*, I. iii. 90), for the value of being what one seems, and for the observance of both written and spoken contracts. Yet the extremity of the purifiers’ disappointment with cultural decadence leads them into a reductive binarism by virtue of which all women—or (for Shylock) all Gentiles—appear irredeemably evil,

and the reformer himself uniquely virtuous. Shakespeare, of course, was not the only mid-Renaissance playwright to stage the zealous reformer's paradoxical enactment of the roles of moral spokesman and vengeful madman. Revenge plays such as Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Tourneur's or Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*, and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* all dramatize the connection between embittered moralism and unfeeling destructiveness, and the inadequacy of interpretive paradigms that assume the unimpeachable moral correctness of the reforming subject and the unmitigated villainy of the enemy.

Our readings of Renaissance revenge drama might benefit from a closer attention to this puritanist-revenge dynamic and to the play's arguments regarding its intrinsic moral and perceptual limitations.<sup>21</sup> We might also examine the losses we, as critical adherents of various methodological schools, sustain when we relegate the complex and various political attitudes of both Renaissance and contemporary writers—indeed, of each other—to artificial binary categories. How, we might ask, does this binary reflex cloud our own understanding of movements to reform language, teaching, entertainment, and politics during the Renaissance? And now?

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The adjective "puritanist" has been intentionally substituted for the word "puritanical" in what follows, because of the intensely negative, often misrepresentative significations which "puritanical" has acquired in recent decades.

<sup>2</sup>Lawrence Stone, *Causes of the English Revolution: 1529-1642* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 116.

<sup>3</sup>See Jonas Barish's *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981).

<sup>4</sup>William Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix: The Player's Scourge or, Actor's Tragedy* (New York: Johnson Reprint Co., 1972).

<sup>5</sup>Commenting that "contemporary Denmark was known as a bulwark of the Lutheran church," Dover Wilson goes on to explore Hamlet's connection to Lutheran ideas (see *What Happens in Hamlet* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1951], p. 68). Lutheranism in *Hamlet* is also discussed by Harry Levin in *The Question of Hamlet* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959) and by Roland Frye in *The Renaissance "Hamlet": Issues and Responses, 1600* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984). For a summation of their viewpoints and an expanded discussion of how Hamlet's "mind plays on the issues raised by Luther" (p. 30), see Raymond B. Waddington's "Lutheran Hamlet," *English Language Notes*, 27 (1989), 27-42). For alternative readings of Hamlet's radical Protestantism, see Alessandra Marzola's *L'impossibile puritanesimo de Amleto* (Ravenna: Longo, 1985) and Kenneth S.

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Rothwell's "Hamlet's 'glass of fashion': Power, Self, and the Reformation," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutmar, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 80-98.

<sup>6</sup>An admirable refusal to accept facile constructions of Puritan reformatory consciousness was evident in the conversation in the 1994 Shakespeare Association of America session, "The Dramatic Origins of the English Revolution," chaired by Barbara Bono in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Papers which offered revisionist interpretations of Puritan thought included Kristen Poole's "Saints Alive! Falstaff, Martin Marprelate, and the Staging of Puritanism" now in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 46 (1995), 47-75, and Kathryn Murphy Anderson's "Negotiating a Vocation Among Rhetorics of Satire and Praise Inside and Outside *The Alchemist*," among others. For a discussion of Puritan experiments with alternative theatrical forms, see also Paul W. White's *Theater and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup>This and all other quotations from Shakespeare are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

<sup>8</sup>Francis Murphy, introduction to William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (New York: 1981), p. x.

<sup>9</sup>Robert Parsons, *A Conference About the Next Succession to the Crown of England*, quoted in Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare, Politics, and the State* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 99.

<sup>10</sup>Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 51.

<sup>11</sup>Raphael Holinshed, in Geoffrey Bullough's *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1957-75), pp. 407, 409.

<sup>12</sup>Anthony Munday writes that by means of the theatrical "representation of whoredom, al the people in mind plaie the whores" (p. 3), and also that patrons may find in the playhouses real "harlots, utterlie past al shame: who presse to the forefront of the scaffoldes, to the end to showe their impudencie and to be as an object to al mens eies" (p. 89). See Munday's *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters* (New York: Johnson Reprint Co., 1972).

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup>Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (New York: Johnson Reprint Co., 1972).

<sup>15</sup>John Rainolds, *The Overthrow of Stage-Plays: By the Way of Controversy between D. Gages and J. Rainolds* (New York: Johnson Reprint Co., 1972).

<sup>16</sup>From the speeches and writings of John Winthrop, in *The American Puritans: Their Prose and Poetry*, 2 vols., ed. Perry Miller (New York: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 78, 467.

<sup>17</sup>Book 3, p. 36, and Book 2, p. 20, from *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. Edward B. Pusey (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1961).

<sup>18</sup>The phrase is Franco Moretti's, from "'A Huge Eclipse': Tragic Form and the Deconsecration of Sovereignty," *Genre*, 15 (1982), p. 28.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>I leave Hamlet's claim that the murderer-nephew "gets the love of Gonzago's wife" (III. ii. 264) to Freudians to interpret.

<sup>21</sup>Moretti's "'A Huge Eclipse,'" cited above, and Andrew Ross' "Tragedy and Concrete Universals," *Genre*, 18 (1985), 235-55 are seminal New Historicist explorations of Renaissance tragedy's critique of social and political structures, although neither article focuses on the puritanist aspects of the critique.

## **“The Heart of My Mystery”: Emblematic Revelation in the *Hamlet* Play Scene**

**by Walter L. Barker**

Although critics generally regard the *Hamlet* play scene as the drama’s center of significance, no widely accepted strategy has emerged to describe either the scene’s coherence or the thematic function of *The Murther of Gonzago* masque insert.<sup>1</sup> A promising approach may be found in the investigation of Shakespeare’s extensive use of emblems and masques. The use of emblems as guides for reading Shakespeare has gained increasing attention as scholars have expanded our understanding of the enigmatic trope.<sup>2</sup> Their studies, particularly those relating Elizabethan emblem usage to Sidney’s mimetic and didactic theories in *The Defense of Poetry* and to Neoplatonism’s macrocosmic-microcosmic model of nature, help corroborate the conclusion that Shakespeare and his contemporaries worked in the widespread Renaissance mode of emblematic discourse.<sup>3</sup> As Glynn Wickham asserted in 1966, English drama in the decades of Shakespeare’s finest work was dominated by an emblematic concept of theater, “. . . literally, a theatre which aimed at achieving dramatic illusion by figurative representation.”<sup>4</sup>

To explicate the coherence of the *Hamlet* play scene and the function of *The Murther of Gonzago*, I propose a description of the scene in the context of emblematic theater. The conventions of emblematic discourse that Shakespeare weaves into the play through Hamlet’s comments to the visiting Players in II. ii and III. ii, the Pyrrhus-Priam-Hecuba narrative,<sup>5</sup> and *The Murther of Gonzago* performance demonstrate that Shakespeare’s original audiences regarded his reflexive use of the theater as a vehicle of figurative representation crucial to their interpretation of *Hamlet*.

The uniqueness of an emblem—whether in its graphic, poetic, or theatrical form—lies in the complex way it both represents some phenomena or human experience and interprets it in the context of Neoplatonic truths, patterns, principles, etc., which the Elizabethans in general held to be universal.<sup>6</sup> As a theatrical emblem, the Renaissance masque brought this meaning to bear on human experience through allegorical personifications, elaborate scenery, poetry, music, and dance. Kevin Sharpe describes the relation between Neoplatonic thought and the genre’s representation and interpretation process in his study of the Caroline court

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masque. His comments, Jerzy Limon observes in his own study, apply not only to the Caroline but to all Renaissance masques.<sup>7</sup>

Neoplatonic philosophy postulates an ascent of cognition from the plane of senses and material objects to a loftier stratum of knowledge of forms and ideas, of which objects were but an imperfect material expression. The Caroline masque enacted that philosophy in the transition from antimasque to masque. The world of sense and appetite was represented in the masque by images of nature as an ungoverned wilderness, threatening, violent, ignorant and anarchic; the sphere of soul was depicted as nature ordered and governed by the patterns of the forms. So in the Caroline masque the transcendence is most often a transformation of nature—from chaos to order and from disjuncture to harmony—through the understanding of the philosopher-kings.<sup>8</sup>

The complexity of a masque insert varied in Elizabethan drama from the simple revel to elaborate productions replete with mechanical props and audience participation. Because dramatists wrote for both the court and the public theaters, they adapted their masques to the needs of each setting, retaining enough of the court trappings for their audiences to identify the genre.<sup>9</sup> Although *The Murther of Gonzago* is interrupted before its conclusion and is more abridged than the court model, it contains the basic masque characteristics described by Sharpe. The Players perform it in a court setting before royalty, its personages are themselves a Philosopher King and Queen, and their dialogue explicates human experience.

A masque insert is critical to a play's meaning because it provides an author with a powerful tool for mediating thinking. It effectively doubles a scene's number of performances and audiences, thereby generating a tension between stage audience and theatrical audience perspectives. In this way the masque insert functions as a playhouse equivalent to poetry's interplay of limited and omniscient points of view. As we shall see, Shakespeare exploits these perspectives in *Hamlet* to provide his theatrical audience with an interpretive context for the stage audience's behavior in both the play scene and the drama as a whole.

*The Murther of Gonzago* masque has two distinct components: the dumb show and the dialogue between the Player King and the Player Queen (hereafter referred to as PK and PQ). These components function as dramaturgic equivalents to the graphic emblem's visual and verbal elements, the *pictura* and the *subscriptio*. The key

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to interpreting emblematic art lies in an allegorical reading of its details, a process, Michael Murrin notes, Renaissance readers were much more skilled in than moderns.<sup>10</sup> They tended to process emblems in three analogous contexts: the literal, the tropological, and the allegorical. These contexts, derived from the method medieval exegetes used to interpret oral poetry and Holy Scripture, relate to the particular, general, and universal levels of emblematic meaning.

On the literal level the reader identified the particular subject matter or human experience depicted in the emblem's visual and verbal details.<sup>11</sup> On the tropological the reader construed these details in the context of microcosmic human nature. In shifting from the literal to this level, the reader reformulated the emblem's details into the general pattern of the *psychomachia* opposition in human nature between rational, moral, and social norms which guide human behavior and the daemonic pressure of passions which threaten to violate them. On the allegorical level a Renaissance reader discovered the correspondences linking the particular human experience to a precise transcendental form, idea, pattern, or principle immanent in both macrocosmic nature and microcosmic human nature from which the experience derives.

## II. Emblematic Theater

The *Hamlet* play scene can be divided into six episodes. The thematic motif unifying them is the *psychomachia* opposition of reason and passion and their relation to the cognitive issues of comprehension and perceptual blindness. In this sense the entire play scene is an extended analog to the I. iv trope where Hamlet describes passion as a blind and unseen ". . . mole of nature . . . breaking down the pales and fort of reason . . ." (24-28),<sup>12</sup> to the *Theatrum Mundi* opposition between "apprehension" and blindness (II. ii. 295-308), as well as to Horatio's concluding summation of stage audience misperception as a series

Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,  
Of deaths put on by cunning and [forc'd] cause,  
And in the upshot, purposes mistook  
Fall'n on th' inventors' heads.

(V. ii. 382-85)

The play scene's reason-illumination/ passion-blindness motif is evinced in a theatrical context formed by (1) Hamlet's differentiation between disciplined and histrionic acting styles in his advice to the Players, (2) his description of Horatio's rational control

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before the entrance of the court audience, (3) *The Murder of Gonzago* performance, (4) the behavior of stage audience characters during the performance, (5) Hamlet's ensuing theatrical critique with Horatio (271-95), and (6) his indignation at Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for attempting to understand his behavior(" . . . you would pluck out the heart of my mystery" [365-66]).

Shakespeare's initial conflation of this motif with theatrical performance occurs in Hamlet's discussion of theater with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in II. ii. The discussion is important because it clarifies the didactic function of emblematic theater which Shakespeare develops as an interpretive context for the play scene. Hamlet begins the discussion by embedding his particular experience in the commonplace *Theatrum Mundi* (II. ii. 295-308), Shakespeare's most expansive theatrical allusion.

I have of late . . . lost all my mirth . . . ; and indeed it goes so heavily with me that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension . . . ; and yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?

The literal references of the first sentence pull the fictional Elsinore setting into an associative field with London theater ("canopy") and Neoplatonism's macrocosmic heavens ("majestical roof. . . golden fire"). The references of the second sentence posit a relation between Hamlet and the mind-body opposition of microcosmic human nature. By establishing these analogies, Shakespeare momentarily transforms the actor playing Hamlet into a emblematic Everyman on the world stage, acting out the struggle between a rational potential for "angelic apprehension" and the tendency of passions and this world's ". . . foul and pestilent congregation of vapors" to impede human understanding. These sustained correspondences—linking Hamlet's particular experience, the *psychomachia* pattern of human nature, transcendental meaning, and theater—make the audience conscious that some universal principle of illumination and blindness is immanent in both human nature and Hamlet's experience, and that emblematic theater functions to make these correspondences explicit.

Shakespeare develops this concept in the discussion's next segment (315-61) where he delineates the particular responsibilities of authors, actors, and audiences in emblematic theater by

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contrasting the visiting Players with the youthful actors of the popular stage. The contrast reinforces by negation the rational and didactic purposes of emblematic theater. Because the emblematic theater's "purpose of playing" is, in Sidney's terms, to "teach and delight," the author's role is primary. He creates a play's "foreconceit" from a clear perception of a universal concept operative in human affairs and composes the precise words and images of the dramaturgic "invention" needed to convey the concept. The actor is required to subordinate his own professional proclivities and passions to the author's "invention" so that he may "figure forth" the "foreconceit" in the imagination of an audience. The audience in turn participates in the act of knowing by using its full rational faculties and powers of concentration to comprehend through the "foreconceit" the author's illuminating "question" and "argument." Shakespeare's terms, "question" and "argument," which he uses in the play scene as well as here, are derived from medieval and Renaissance philosophical discourse. They correspond to Sidney's "foreconceit" and "invention" as well as "interpretation" and "representation," the functional terms of emblematic discourse. Their separate provenances notwithstanding, each set denotes an interpretive context and its validating demonstration.

The popular theater Rosencrantz describes undermines the emblematic function of authors, actors, and audiences. He notes how its actors excite an audience's passions and compel distracting applause. The uproar, combining with the actors' shrill voices, drowns out the author's "question" and "argument" ("... there is, sir, an aery of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of the question, and are most tyrannically clapp'd for't" [II. ii. 339-41]). Through parodic and satiric attacks the actors intimidate their audiences and drive them from the theater ("These are now the fashion, and so [berattle] the common stages . . . that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose-quills and dare scarce come thither" [II. ii. 341-44]). The crucial "argument" of the play is lost to the passions of greed and rage as dramatist and actors clash over control of the play's meaning ("There was for a while no money bid for argument, unless the poet and the player went to cuffs in the question" [II. ii. 354-56]). The upshot of this playhouse anarchy is rational disorder and the perceptual blinding of authors, actors, and audiences alike ("O, there has been much throwing about of brains" [II. ii. 358-59]).

Shakespeare begins the play scene with an incremental repetition of these themes. In emblematic terms the subject matter of Hamlet's advice to the Players—the relation of the reason-illumi-

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nation/passion-blindness motif to author, actor, audience responsibilities—functions as an emblematic *inscriptio* to delineate important distinctions between the orderly performance of *The Murther of Gonzago* and the irrational behavior of its stage audience. Hamlet's advice is divided into three segments. In the first (III. ii. 1-14) he counterpoints a disciplined performance ("Speak the speech . . . trippingly on the tongue . . .") with the distractions of frantic gestures ("the whirlwind of your passion"), overacting ("O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags . . ."), and loud voices (" . . . to spleet the ears of the groundlings . . ."). In the second segment (III. ii. 16-35) he states his admiration for an actor who can subordinate his words and actions to theater's

. . . purpose of playing  
whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold  
as 'twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her  
feature, scorn her image, and the very age and body of  
the time his form and pressure.

As Hamlet makes clear, emblematic theater explicates human experience by making explicit (i.e, holding "the mirror up to nature") the universal principle operative in a precise configuration of human nature which compels and shapes some particular human experience. The *psychomachia* pattern of human nature is manifested in its invisible struggle between rational values ("form") and passion driven impulse ("pressure") as well as its visible display on human faces ("to show virtue her feature, scorn her image").<sup>13</sup> Hamlet ends this segment by again censuring irresponsible acting, this time ridiculing undisciplined players as "strutting" and "bellowing" "clowns" whose arrogance traduces rational norms of human behavior. This emphasis on clowns continues in the third segment (III. ii. 38-45) where Hamlet deplores the way their improvised humor deflects audience attention from the author's "question."

. . . for there be of them that will themselves  
laugh to set on some quantity of barren spectators to  
laugh too, though in the mean time some necessary  
question of the play be then to be consider'd.

The contrasting acting styles Hamlet develops are important because they define the theatrical context of the scene's reason-illumination/passion-blindness motif and they clarify its counterpointing of performance rationales: Hamlet's and Shakespeare's. As Hamlet intends the Players' "purpose of play-

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ing” to be seen from a limited perspective, he foresees a disciplined portrayal of *The Murther of Gonzago* evoking from Claudius “the form and pressure” of his guilt. As Shakespeare intended the scene’s purpose to be perceived from an omniscient point of view, *The Murther of Gonzago* “figures forth” the illumincating context of the *Psychomachia* through which the theatrical audience “apprehends” the universal meaning immanent in Hamlet’s blind and passion driven subversion of the scene’s author, actor, and audience responsibilities.

## III. Stage Audience

Speaking to Horatio after the Players’ temporary exit, Hamlet defines his crucial audience responsibility in the *psychomachia* terms of rational control (“Give me that man / That is not passion’s slave, and I will wear him / In my heart’s core . . .”) and disciplined observation.

Give him heedful note,  
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,  
And after we will both our judgments join  
In censure of his seeming.

Despite this clear statement of intent, Hamlet’s control breaks down almost immediately in the ensuing fanfare of trumpets and kettledrums as virtually everyone in Elsinore who has hurt, angered, or betrayed him comes onto the court stage. For the rest of the scene he contravenes his advice to the Players and enacts before an astonished stage audience just the kind of spontaneous performance he expected from Claudius.<sup>14</sup> Hamlet’s sudden shift from inconspicuous observer (“I must be idle; / Get you a place.”) to a “slave” of his own angry passion is marked by the diverting parody and sarcasm he had deprecated in the child actors.

*King.* How fares our cousin Hamlet?  
*Hamlet.* Excellent, i’ faith, of the chameleon’s dish: I eat the air, promise-crammed—you cannot feed capons so.  
*King.* I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet, these words are not mine.  
*Hamlet.* No, nor mine now.

In the following thirty-seven lines before the dumb show, Hamlet mocks Polonius about his portrayal of *Julius Caesar* and lashes out at Ophelia and Gertrude. Still as angry at Ophelia as he was in the previous scene when her attempt to return his letters evoked

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his abuse, he derides her sexually ("That's a fair thought to lie between maids' / legs") and snarls at his mother's ability to look so "merry" when his ". . . father died within 's two hours." Hamlet's temporal distortion, which Ophelia quickly corrects ("Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord"), is itself a symptom of the blinding anger building in him.

Hamlet's passion driven tirade following the dumb show clashes repeatedly with both the decorum of the Danish court and the Players' disciplined acting. Responding to Ophelia's question about the dumb show's significance ("What means this, my lord?"), he exults over the new intent he is investing in it ("Marry, this' [milching] mallecho, it means / mischief"). He is so annoyed by the Prologue's disciplined pace that he scoffs, "Is this is a prologue, or the posey of a ring?" Ophelia's helpful response, "'Tis brief, my lord," provides him another opportunity ("As woman's love") to snap at the betrayal of love he has "seen" in her and his mother.

Hamlet's anger toward Gertrude, Ophelia, and Claudius becomes so intense in the scene that he gradually intrudes into the Players' performance. The PQ's first commitment to love evokes only a quiet grumble ("That's wormwood"), but upon her final vow of fidelity (" . . . If once I be a widow, ever I be a wife!"), he snaps the disciplined "rivet" holding his eyes to Claudius' face to focus on Gertrude's for signs of her guilt ("If she should break it now!"). A few lines later he interrupts the performance to mock her publicly, "Madam, how like you this play?" And when Claudius follows with a question about the masque's "argument," he turns to taunt him, ". . . they do but jest, poison in jest—no offense i' th' world." So avid is Hamlet to have Claudius make the damning connection and "proclaim" his guilt, that when the King asks for the play's title, he "tells all" by revealing his own intent ("The Mouse-trap") and screaming the connection himself ("Gonzago is the duke's name, his wife, / Baptista. You shall see anon"). He proceeds to punish Claudius with sarcasm (" 'Tis a knavish piece, / of work, but what of that? Your majesty, and we that / have free souls, it touches us not"), rush the performance by identifying Lucianus for the stage audience, and then interrupt it by countering Ophelia's compliment ("You are as good as a chorus, my lord") with a caustic reference to a sexually explicit puppet show. When she praises his acuity ("You are keen, my lord"), he retorts, "It would cost you a groaning to take off / mine edge." Ophelia's comments and questions, both here and during the performance, accentuate the difference between them as rational audience in one play and passion driven actor in another.

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Increasingly impatient to see guilt on Claudius' face, Hamlet breaks into the Player's performance as an unwitting author and actor of an antimasque, threatening to pull both the King and Queen of Denmark into the stage's new chaotic center. Suiting his improvised actions and words to vengeful purpose, he tears "a passion to tatters, to very rags": "Begin, / murtherer, leave thy damnable faces and begin. Come, / he croaking raven doth bellow for revenge." And finally, when Lucianus pours literal poison into the ear of the Player King, at the precise moment when Claudius should "unkennel his guilt" and "proclaim" his secret "malefaction" to the court, Shakespeare has Hamlet, not Claudius, leap to his feet to scream a "whirlwind" of his own figurative poison into Claudius' ears:

A poisons him i' the garden for his estate. His name's Gonzago, the story is extant, and written in very choice Italian. You shall see how the murtherer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.  
*Ophelia.* The King rises.

Only then, as Ophelia's line makes explicit, does Claudius rise. Calling for lights, the King scatters with the court audience before Hamlet's crescendo of anger, which culminates in the chilling declaration, "Now could I drink hot blood." In an extraordinary subversion of intent, the *The Murther of Gonzago* performance—which Hamlet plotted to evoke the King's passion of guilt, festering just beneath his controlled public image—unleashes instead Hamlet's blinding rage, latent just beneath his self-assigned role as a rational and disciplined audience. In terms of Hamlet's advice to the Players, his passion has transformed him into a "clown" who "struts and bellows" on the court stage before a startled audience. In terms of Hamlet's description of emblematic theater responsibilities, his passion has metamorphosed him into an undisciplined child actor whose "tyrannic" assault of an audience deflects their attention from the author's "question" and "argument" and drives them from the theater. In the words of Horatio's summary at the play's conclusion, Hamlet's plan has ". . . fall'n back on the inventor[']s head."

#### IV. The Dumb Show

As an emblematic masque *The Murther of Gonzago* represents and interprets the *Hamlet* stage audience by "figuring forth" in its dumb show images and PK-PQ dialogue the pattern of microcosmic human nature and the macrocosmic principles which compel their individual and collective behavior. That Shakespeare had in

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mind the literal, tropological, and allegorical contexts of masque explication for interpreting *The Murther of Gonzago* can be demonstrated by the characters' comments on the masque. Hamlet links the performance's literal events to Elsinore with his selection of the play ("I'll have these players / Play something like the murder of my father. . . ." II. ii. 595-96) and with his remarks to the Players (III. ii. 16-24). Its tropological context is evinced in Hamlet's moral censuring of Gertrude, Ophelia, and Claudius throughout the performance. And its allegorical context can be seen in the comments of Ophelia and Hamlet following the dumb show:

*Ophelia.* Belike the show imports the argument of the play.

*Hamlet.* We shall know by this fellow. The players cannot keep [counsel], they'll tell all.

*Ophelia.* Will 'a tell us what this show meant?

*Hamlet.* Ay, or any show that you shall show him.

These lines restate Shakespeare's focus on the didactic function of *The Murther of Gonzago* by directing theatrical audience attention to the dumb show *pictura* as representation ("argument") and to the dialogue as the interpretive *subscriptio* which reveals ("tell all") the universal significance ("question") of the dumb show details. Murrin notes that Renaissance allegorists often cued their readers like this to lead them through the interpretive process.<sup>15</sup>

As an emblem *pictura* moving through time, *The Murther of Gonzago* dumb show represents its stage audience in the form of a pattern of abstract human nature embedded in their chaotic behavior. The literal terms of the pattern are provided by Shakespeare's text.

*Enter a King and a Queen [very lovingly], the queen embracing him and he, her. [She kneels and makes show of protestation unto him.] He takes her up and declines his head upon her neck. He lies him down upon a bank of flowers. She, seeing him asleep, leaves him. Anon come in another man, takes off his crown, kisses it, pours poison in the sleeper's ears, and leaves him. The queen returns, finds the King dead, makes passionate action. The pois'ner with some three or four [mutes] come in again, seem to condole with her. The dead body is carried away. The pois'ner woos the queen with gifts; she seems harsh [and unwilling] awhile, but in the end accepts love.*

Seen whole, the dumb show contains five episodes depicting a field of associative responses to lost love. Its subject matter is evinced by the movement of the PQ from committed love with one

man, through loss, to committed love with another.<sup>16</sup> The pattern is cyclic: from stasis, to change, to reformulation of relationships, and to stasis again with bodies embracing, poisoning, dying, suffering, and consoling. The change at the dumb show center is characterized by the oppositions of loss and gain as well as poisoning and grief. In the first episode the PK and the PQ mime the action of committed love in its vowed ("show of protestation") and nurturing manifestations ("He takes her up and declines his head upon her neck"). In the next episode a second man enters and responds to lost love with possessive ("takes off his crown, kisses it"), loving, and poisoning actions. Returning in the scene's third episode to find the PK dead, the PQ expresses love's loss as "passionate action." The Poisoner and other mutes then mime "condolement" to her, after which the dead body is carried away.

In the fourth episode the PQ and the Poisoner present an image of love's engagement which Shakespeare describes in dissonant terms. The courtship term "woos" so quickly follows upon "passionate action" and "condole" that the episode suggests seduction as well as courtship. Following some initial annoyance and hesitation ("she seems harsh and unwilling awhile"), the Poisoner and PQ conclude the dumb show with a fifth episode miming love offered and accepted. Like the courtship-seduction episode, this one is also ambiguous. In relation to the dumb show's first episode, the PQ's acceptance of second love seems to be a betrayal. Yet in relation to the word "condole" she seems to be responding to human need. The literal meaning of the complete dumb show pattern with these ambiguities can be expressed in the following syntax: love committed-nurturing/possessing-poisoning/passionate action-"condolement"/courtship-need/seduction-betrayal/love accepted.

These dumb show ambiguities are partially resolved, however, when their visual details are reconfigured in the topological context of emblematic discourse and the Players are viewed as figurative representations of human nature rather than stand-ins for specific members of the stage audience. On this level the dumb show pattern illuminates a structural opposition of reason and passion underlying the behavior of its three primary figures. When the dumb show syntax is read with a focus on the normative terms of the *Psychomachia* conflict (love committed/possessing-poisoning/courtship-seduction/betrayal), the PQ and the "other" move through the successive violations of social, rational, and moral values related to the gain and loss of love. The "other" gains love through poisoning and seduction and the PQ moves from committed love with one man, through love's loss, toward

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love with the "other" in an act of betrayal which evokes the theatrical audience's condemnation. Yet when the syntax is read with a focus on the passion-driven images of the Players' bodies (nurturing/poisoning/"passionate action"/"condolement"/need/love accepted), it reveals a pattern in which the PQ's avowed love and rational control are temporarily violated by the passions of horror and grief, after which she passes from love's loss, through "condolement," toward new love offered and accepted. This line of reading the dumb show clarifies the PQ's passion-driven behavior by connecting her suffering from love's loss to a compensatory human need for consolation in the arms of an "other," consequently evoking the theatrical audience's empathy. In emblematic terms, *The Murther of Gonzago* dumb show represents and interprets stage audience behavior by delineating a *psychomachia* model of human nature which compels the interplay of value oriented and passion driven responses to lost love in all human beings.

### V. The PK-PQ Dialogue

The emblematic purpose of the PK-PQ dialogue is to complete the interpretation of the dumb show by reconciling its contradictory pattern of human nature with the archetypal form of Love from which human nature and particular human responses to lost love proceed. The dialogue is structured as a polemic in which the PQ illuminates human nature's value-oriented reactions to lost love and the PK its passion-driven responses. Their contention is presented in the context of *Virtus* and *Fortuna*, a commonplace emblem subject in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Derived from classical and medieval sources, the polemic usually portrayed Virtue as humanity's recourse to Fortune's destabilization and reversals. Although many emblems depicted a harmonious relation between them, Rudolf Wittkower has noted that the Virtue-Fortune formulaic relationship varied, depending on artistic preference and thematic need, and that "the main trend of Renaissance thought conceives the relation of these two forces as an irreconcilable feud."<sup>17</sup>

As allegorical "speaking pictures" the PK and the PQ "figure forth" rhetorically from the Neoplatonic heavens of archetypal forms onto the world stage of emblematic theater. The spatial pattern of their descent, from pure being into the celestial plane of the visible heavens and then to the earth, replicates the vertical line of the Great Chain of Being binding the macrocosm and microcosm and making them one. Their language, an ideal fusion of Love's words and thoughts, reflects the beauty and harmony of

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the eternal Truth it elucidates. The diction is elegant and ceremonial, its formality enhanced by stately cadence and courtly eloquence. Shakespeare emphasizes the rational content of their lines by structuring them primarily as a series of rhymed and endstopped couplets, each statement progressing logically from those preceding. The PK's first lines point to the intrinsic link between their marriage and the harmonious dyads which constitute Love's unity in the macrocosmic time-space continuum. The 30 years and 360 months of Hymen's "sacred bands" function as time's analogs to the macrocosm's spatial ordering of sun and moon, heaven and earth, Tellus and Neptune.

Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round  
 Neptune's salt wash and Tellus' orb'd ground,  
 And thirty dozen moons with borrowed sheen  
 About the world have times twelve thirties been,  
 Since love our hearts and Hymen did our hands  
 Unite comutual in most sacred bands.

As the PK and PQ devolve into earthly time and space, the cosmic unity exemplified by their marriage gives way to conflicts between reason and passion, Constancy and Mutability, Virtue and Fortune, life and death, and individual and communal experience. The PQ denotes Love as a timeless value analogous to the eternal planets. ("So many journeys may the sun and moon / Make us again count o'er ere love be done!") The PK, conversely, construes love's commitment as a transitory value analogous to planetary motion ("Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round . . .") and the human cycles of life and death ("Faith, I must leave thee, love, and shortly too; / My operant powers their functions leave to do").

The PQ's response to lost love is separated into four segments which demonstrate how the principle of universal Love, in conjunction with Virtue and Constancy, is manifested in human identity, passions, vows, volition, and communal life. The loving relation between man and woman is ordered for her by the marital "husband" and "wife," which link identity to the passions of love and fear. In the first segment the PQ illuminates how these passions complement each other and bear on the welfare of the person loved. The more she loves the PK, the more she fears his possible loss; and the more she fears his loss, the more she loves him—a cycle of passions in the service of Constancy's commitment.

But woe is me, you are so sick of late,  
 So far from cheer and from [your] former state,

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That I distrust you. Yet though I distrust,  
 Discomfort you, my lord, it nothing must,  
 [For] women's fear and love hold quantity,  
 In neither aught, or in extremity.  
 Now what my [love] is sized, my fear is so.  
 Where love is great, the littlest doubts are fear;  
 Where little fears grow great, great love grows there.

The PK's announcement of his imminent death marks Shakespeare's shift of focus from the inner dynamics of the PQ's model to its display in the morally reductive values of communal life. Outraged by her husband's assumption that she will remarry after his death ("Honor'd, belov'd, and haply one as kind / For husband shalt thou . . ."), she responds:

O, confound the rest!  
 Such love must needs be treason in my breast,  
 In second husband let me be accur'd!  
 None wed the second but who kill'd the first.

.....  
 The instances that second marriage move  
 Are base respects of thrift, but none of love.  
 A second time I kill my husband dead  
 When second husband kisses me in bed.

Showing "virtue her feature, scorn her own image," she characterizes a woman who would move from a husband's death to remarriage and the bed of another man as a seducer-betrayer. Such a woman uses sexuality for gain rather than love, is guilty of an act equal to "murder" and "treason," and merits her own damnation. The PQ's repugnance toward remarriage defines through implied contrast her own imperatives. Because Love is absolute in relation to Virtue and Constancy, her vows denote unwavering commitment and loyalty to one person forever.

The PK disavows the PQ's conviction because his principle of Love is linked to Mutability's and Fortune's governance of passion, time, and moral purpose. He portrays human response to lost love as an autonomous process of human nature beyond the PQ's belief and volition. His thirty line rejoinder contains five six line segments. In the first he demonstrates "the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" by describing how passion's "pressures" undermine Virtue's vows and purposes.

I do believe you think what now you speak,  
 But what we do determine, oft we break.  
 Purpose is but the slave to memory,  
 Of violent birth, but poor validity,  
 Which now, the fruit unripe, sticks on the tree,  
 But fall unshaken when they mellow be.

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The PK suggests that belief in moral purpose is possible only when the powerful enabling force of passion forges a continuum of identity, vow, and purpose and makes it a felt conviction. Yet the passion which generates Constancy's vows in human nature is subject to Mutability's governance. Just as the macrocosm's cycle of seasons moves inexorably through a tree, causing ripened fruit to fall to the ground, so too do passions' cycles of intensity and abatement pass through all human beings, shifting values and needs. Consequently, human beings move through Mutability's time and change from one vowed relation to another, abandoning to memory's subjugation moral purposes no longer felt.

The PK's second set of six lines is marked by a shift in tone from loss to an unexpected compensatory pattern discovered in the discontinuities of passion, purpose, and action.

Most necessary 'tis that we forget  
To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt.  
What to ourselves in passion we propose,  
The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.  
The violence of either grief or joy  
Their own enactures with themselves destroy.

Since acting out either of love's complementary passions—joy and grief—obliterates its force as well as its attendant vows and purpose, the temporarily excluded passion reclaims its human debt. Thus joy's vow and purpose, which end with the loss of love, give way to grief's purpose to seek redress in the arms of another person, which in turn gives way to the return of joy's vow and purpose. Through the agency of Mutability's cycles of passion, time, and change, the PK suggests, human beings are able to "condole" love's grief with love's joy and to balance love's value-oriented ideals of altruism and sacrifice with complementary creature needs.

In the third segment the PK stresses the perceptual blindness and imponderable mystery which accompany humanity's unexamined assumptions about love and life.

Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament;  
Grief [joys], joy grieves, on slender accident.  
This world is not for aye, nor 'tis not strange  
That even our loves should with our fortunes change:  
For 'tis a question left us yet to prove,  
Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love.

He describes how joy and grief, Love's most implacable and irreducible passions, temporarily blind human beings by "breaking down the pales and forts of reason," thereby frustrating

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volitional orderings of love and life and leaving human beings vulnerable to Fortune's disarray. So thoroughly can these passions dominate perception that while a person is experiencing one, he or she is blind to the cycles of change which engender the other. Thus, in love's change of partners during the dance of life, humans are forever left with the mystery of whether Fortune compels a needing human being to the person, time, and place where love is found or whether Fortune provides the person, time, and place which evoke the need for love. In the PK's response the human need for love is primary, not, as in the PQ's, the person loved.

In the fourth section the PK's comments shift from personal to communal experience where the disruptions of love and Fortune are even more pronounced and the consequences more destructive. He describes how Fortune's Wheel rolls through the community as a catalyst for the destabilizing cycles of behavior human beings act out as they feign, break, betray, and reforge the communal bonds of love, loyalty, and friendship.

The great man down, you mark his favorite flies,  
 The poor advanc'd makes friends of enemies.  
 And hitherto doth love on fortune tend,  
 For who not needs shall never lack a friend,  
 And who in want a hollow friend doth try,  
 Directly seasons him his enemy.

The PK's final segment emphasizes again the perceptual blindness undermining human volition and thought.

But orderly to end where I begun,  
 Our wills and fate do so contrary run  
 That our devices still are overthrown,  
 Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own:  
 So think thou wilt no second husband wed,  
 But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead.

The PQ responds by disclaiming his admonition. Willing the austere regimen of a religious recluse, she vows to sustain Virtue's Constancy by punishing recalcitrant human need with denial and subjugating joy to the grief of endless disappointment.

Nor earth to me give food, nor heaven light,  
 Sport and repose lock from me day and night,  
 To desperation turn my trust and hope,  
 [An] anchor's cheer in prison be my scope!  
 Each opposite that blanks the face of joy  
 Meet what I would have well and it destroy!

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Both here and hence pursue my lasting strife,  
If once I be a widow, ever I be a wife!

The PK's retort, "Tis deeply sworn," underscores the impermanence of human vows uttered in the flux of Mutability. The PK and PQ end the dialogue as they had begun, as voices for the conflicting principles through which transcendental Love shapes the *Psychomachia* responses to lost love in human nature. Her principle of Love is incompatible with humanity's passion-driven nature, and his threatens the integrity of her value-oriented norms.

### VI. *The Murther of Gonzago: Emblematic "Mirror to Nature"*

By "figuring forth" the universal principles which compel the *psychomachia* model of human nature, the PK-PQ dialogue invests the dumb show with its motifs. In doing this the dialogue resolves two crucial issues in the dumb show pattern. First, it rationalizes the seduction-betrayal/need-courtship ambiguity by delineating the opposing principles of Love which produce it: the PQ explicates the pattern's value oriented reactions and the PK model its passion-driven responses. Secondly, it illuminates a radical blinding and poisoning experience in human nature because of the way each principle induces a fixed and fragmentary reading of self and others. In this sense the dumb show images of possessing, poisoning through the ear, and "passionate action" are analogs to the entire vicious "mole of nature" pattern in I. iv, where Shakespeare links perceptual blindness to lost virtue, slander, and poison ("His virtues else . . . Shall in the general censure take corruption . . . : the dram of [ev'l] / Doth all the noble substance of a doubt / To his own scandal" [I. iv. 33-38]).

As a figurative mirror of macrocosmic principle and microcosmic human nature, therefore, *The Murther of Gonzalo* masque delineates the variable pattern of moral reductiveness, "passionate actions," and slanderous misreadings in which all human beings, individually and collectively, act out blind and poisoning responses to lost love. The PK and PQ initiate the cycle by expressing love's commitment and joy in the complementary responses of fixed values and human need. This action unknowingly poisons some "other" with the grief of real or seeming loss of love, who then responds possessively by construing the threatening relationship in reductive moral terms (seduction-betrayal) and then seeking consolation and/or courtship with some "other." This second relationship unknowingly poisons still an "other" with the grief of real or seeming loss of love, who in turn responds

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possessively by also reading the threatening relationship in reductive moral terms (seduction-betrayal) and then pouring this slanderous poison into the ears of yet some "other." This newly poisoned "other" responds to lost love with grief and/or moral outrage and then seeks consolation and/or courtship *ad infinitum*, an unending concatenation of poisoned poisoners; broken vows; violated norms; reductive judgments; inversions of joy, grief, and need; perceptual blindness; and slanderous communication at work in human and communal cycles of love and loss, life and death.

It is in relation to this general pattern of human nature that *The Murther of Gonzago* functions emblematically as an omniscient context for the individual and communal responses to lost love exhibited by Hamlet's two families, whose Fortune tossed lives are so tragically intertwined. Blind to the opposition and coalescing of Love's two principles in each other, they move through the play as poisoned poisoners, validating the PK's philosophic conclusions that "This world is not for aye" and "Our wills and fates do so contrary run." In an extraordinary litany of variations on motifs from *The Murther of Gonzago* in Act I, Gertrude, Claudius, and Hamlet, collectively wounded by the loss of love, journey their separate ways toward recommitment in the arms of some "other." Claudius, driven by the passions of greed and love ("... those effects for which I did the murther: / My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen" [III. iii. 54-55]), pours literal poison into the ear of his brother-King, only figuratively to poison himself and the entire Danish community with grief. Gertrude responds to lost love by moving from grief, through Claudius' "condolement," to a new bond of committed love. Her action in turn poisons Hamlet with the "passionate action" of grief for a collapsing moral order ("How [weary], stale, flat, and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world") and outrage at Gertrude for her "seeming" betrayal of Old Hamlet. Reading his mother's behavior in the reductive language of moral values, he slanderously concludes that she is a "beast who wants discourse of reason."

As a newly disillusioned and poisoned griever, Hamlet seeks "condolment" and the reestablishment of morally sanctioned love in his courtship of Ophelia ("... he hath importuned me with love / In honorable fashion" [I. iii. 110-11]). However, the value system he encounters in Polonius' household is based on the relation of love to fear, virtue, moral identity, and the subordination of human need to duty, social conformity, and obedience. Consequently, Hamlet's need for Ophelia poisons Laertes and

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Polonius with a “seeming” threat to her virtue. Reacting with fear and dark suspicion, they display their love for Ophelia in poisoning and possessing words. Laertes slanderously discredits Hamlet’s purpose as “unmastered importunity” and points to the threat posed by her own passions and needs (“Be wary then, best safety lies in fear: / Youth to itself rebels, though none else near”). Polonius continues his figurative possessing and poisoning of Ophelia by reducing her to a dependent object (“... think yourself a baby”), using her to protect him from “calumnious strokes” (“... you’ll tender me a fool”), and by slandering Hamlet’s courtship commitment as the words of a seducer-betrayer (“Do not believe his vows, for they are ... mere [implorators] of unholy suits”). Ophelia responds to this seeming loss of love and threat of slander by vowing to stop meeting Hamlet privately (*Polonius*. “I would not . . . / Have you so slander any moment leisure.” *Ophelia*. “I shall obey, my lord”).

Variations of the poisoned poisoner motif are developed in subsequent scenes. In I.v the Ghost pours into Hamlet’s ears an incitement to vengeance (“Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder”), a slanderous denunciation of Claudius and Gertrude as seducer-betrayers (“So to seduce!—won to his shameful lust / The will of my most seeming virtuous queen”), and the horrific details of his own literal poisoning. Responding passionately to his own figurative poisoning, Hamlet screams the blinding and reductive labels he uses to read Gertrude and Claudius for the rest of the play (“O most pernicious woman! / O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!”) and registers his own moral disgust with the world’s “. . . pestilent congregation of vapors” (“meet it is that I set it down / That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain!”).

In Hamlet’s next two encounters with Ophelia and Polonius (II.i; III.i), the first off-stage and reported, they counterpoint blind responses to the loss of the other’s love. Poisoned by Ophelia’s abrupt refusal to see him again, Hamlet intrudes into her room and poisons her with fear. Her description of Hamlet’s demeanor (II.i) is itself an analog of the dumb show pattern: a mute and passion driven response to lost love, interrupted only by the sound of “passionate action,” (“He rais’d a sigh so piteous and profound / As it did seem to shatter all his bulk / And end his being”). Polonius, quickly shifting his invidious reading of Hamlet as a seducer-betrayer to the equally slanderous conclusion that he has been driven mad by love, pours the poison of “seeming” lunacy into the ears of Ophelia in this scene and Claudius and Gertrude in the next.

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In III. i the intent of Claudius and Polonius to stage an encounter between Ophelia and Hamlet in order to test Polonius' new hypothesis foreshadows the play scene's subversion of author, actor, and audience responsibilities. Their use of a religious book for a theatrical prop unexpectedly poisons both men with guilt (*Polonius*. "We are oft to blame in this . . .") (*King*. "O, 'tis too true! / How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!" [48-49]). Forty-one lines later Ophelia and Hamlet confront each other as poisoned poisoners, again misreading the "other" as the seducer-betrayer of their courtship. Grieving the loss of love, she attempts to return the letters of "honorable" love he affirmed with ". . . all the holy vows of heaven" (I. iii. 114). Poisoned in turn by this apparent betrayal, Hamlet poisons her with the slanderous details of seductive intent ("I have heard of your paintings. . . . You jig, you amble. . . , you make your wantonness [your] ignorance"). The encounter ends with Ophelia in tears, concluding that Hamlet's passion driven tirade confirms her father's slander ("O, what a noble mind is here o'thrown!") and grieving the violation of love's vows ("And I, of ladies most deject and wretched, / That suck'd the honey of his [music] vows"). The scene's motif of poisoned poisoners blindly slandering each other continues to the end as Claudius, now threatened by Hamlet, accepts Polonius' reductive judgment ("Madness in great ones must not [unwatch'd] go").

In the play's pivotal scene *The Murther of Gonzago* "figures forth" Hamlet's interpretive "mirror to nature" while the stage audience validates its pattern through their value oriented and passion driven misreadings of each other. The pattern is reflected in the Hamlet-Polonius encounter before the masque as they scan each other for "evidence" that the "other" is bereft of reason. As he had twice in II. ii (171-219; 381-420) and again at the end of this scene (373-87) Hamlet ridicules Polonius as a foolish old man ("It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there"), and Polonius continues to look for evidence that Hamlet has been driven insane by love ("O ho, do you mark that?"). The pattern also mirrors Hamlet's passion driven responses of Gertrude and Ophelia as seducer-betrayers as well as their "condoling" responses to him as a wounded human being. Specifically, Hamlet, poisoned by Gertrude's remarriage, interrupts *The Murther of Gonzago* to taunt her for betraying her husband ("Madam, how like you this play?"). She, who has grieved the loss of love, affirms the inevitability of passion's need propelling a woman toward condolence in the arms of an "other" ("The lady doth protest too much, methinks"). Similarly with Hamlet and Ophelia: each, still grieving the loss of love, continues to misread and poison the

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"other" as the seducer-betrayer of their courtship. Hamlet expresses his passionate response in the slanderous language of seduction ("It would cost you a groaning to take off / mine edge"), and she, as an empathic victim, misreads his remarks as the "passionate actions" of an insane person ("Still better, and worse"). Neither Gertrude nor Ophelia grasp the connection between Hamlet's abuse and a "seeming" loss of love, and he remains blind to their "condolement."

The variable pattern of *The Murther of Gonzago* also provides a coherent view for reading stage audience encounters after the play scene. In III. iii, Claudius and Hamlet act out their value-oriented and passion driven responses to the Players' performance. Kneeling in the hope of forgiveness and mercy for killing his brother, Claudius utters the discontinuities of purpose, word, and act ("My words fly up, my thoughts remain below: / Words without thoughts never to heaven go") while Hamlet—misconstruing what he sees, and barely containing the anger which fuses revenge's vow, purpose, and action—decides to wait for the moment he can send the King to hell ("Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent"). Rushing from this misreading, he bursts into his mother's closet where he misreads the motion in the arras and kills Polonius without remorse ("Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell"). Turning back toward Gertrude, he poisons her with the guilt of the seducer-betrayer he insists she is ("O Hamlet, speak no more! / Thou turn'st my [eyes into the very] soul, / And there I see such black and [grained] spots" [88-90]). Pouring a torrent of blind, possessive, and poisonous responses to lost love into her ears, he demands that she subordinate her human need to moral values ("O, throw away the worser part of it, / And [live] the purer with the other half") and quit the bed of Claudius. Deeply wounded again by the loss of love, Gertrude responds to Hamlet's attempt to eviscerate her need for Claudius' "condolement" with a "passionate action" of grief ("O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain").

In IV. v, Ophelia, rendered insane by the disintegration of life and love around her, echoes in her meandering comments and songs several motifs of *The Murther of Gonzago* pattern. She laments the inability of visual images to distinguish love's commitment from love's betrayal ("How should I your true-love / know / From another one? / By his cockle hat and staff"). She intones love's loss ("He is dead and gone, lady, / He is dead and gone") and grief ("I cannot choose but weep to think they would lay / him i' the cold ground"). She chants the ambiguities of courtship, seduction, and betrayal in the St. Valentine lyric ("Quoth

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she, 'Before you tumbled me, / You promis'd me to wed'"). And she returns later in the scene to mourn in the emblematic meaning of flowers the discontinuities of love's memory ("rosemary"), thoughts ("pansies"), betrayal ("fennel," "columbine"), suffering ("rue"), and grief ("daisy," "violet").

Act V contains two particularly sad permutations of *The Murther of Gonzago* pattern, each depicting blind and loving human beings who are dying yet struggling to kill other blind and loving human beings who are also dying. Both events are framed by the graveyard's *memento mori* context of death and burial in the world's communal history from the day Adam dug Abel's grave to the present moment, and by the *ubi sunt* homily of the Gravedigger and Hamlet. In the latter the aspirations, values, and achievements of the great and the ordinary—those of Alexander and Caesar from ancient history; a lover, politician, courtier, lawyer, and Yorick in the recent past; and Ophelia in the present—are all "equivocated" by nature's inexorable cycles of time and change, youth and age, and death and disintegration. In the first event, Laertes and Hamlet, poisoned alike by the loss of love and the incitement to vengeance, attempt to kill the "other" while grappling within the grave of the young woman each has loved, poisoned, and unknowingly betrayed. The final variation on the pattern of human responses to lost love, which figuratively has blinded and poisoned *Hamlet's* two families throughout the play, is staged appropriately as a *dance macabre* of literal poisonings—by sword and cup, by intent and mischance, feigned and overt, forced and accidental, single and double—in which the characters complete their tragic destruction of each other.

As a context of meaning through which Shakespeare mediates his audience's understanding of *Hamlet*, *The Murther of Gonzago* challenges three long held assumptions about the play. It demonstrates that *Hamlet* does contain an omniscient point of view which provides a coherent perspective of the play scene and the entire drama. It implies that *Hamlet's* revenge theme is subordinate to the play's larger pattern of disordered love and perceptual blindness. And It indicates that the behavior and conflicts of its characters flow from variations of the Neoplatonic *Psychomachia* model of human nature rather than from psychological elements unique to each of them.

Seen historically, Shakespeare's use of *The Murther of Gonzago* masque demonstrates that he thought and wrote in the modes of emblematic and Neoplatonic discourse that dominated Elizabethan art and sensibilities, and that he was very good at it. And further, because the masque's themes exist independently of stage

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audience awareness, they draw theatrical audiences and readers into Shakespeare's own thinking about the human condition. To this end *Hamlet* presents a rich and provocative manifestation of the transcendental mystery from which all human life, love, and tragic experience proceeds.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Roland Mushat Frye, *The Renaissance Hamlet: Issues and Responses in 1600* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press 1984), p. 311. For reviews of critical responses to the scene, see Lee Sherman Cox, *Figurative Design In Hamlet: The Significance of the Dumb Show* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press 1973), pp. 3-15 and Harold Jenkins, ed., *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare: Hamlet* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 101-03 and 449-512.

<sup>2</sup>See especially Peter M. Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1979) and Tibor Fabiny, ed., *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila Jozsef Nominatae: Papers in English and American Studies*, vol. 3, *Shakespeare and the Emblem: Studies in Renaissance Iconography and Iconology* (Szeged: Department of English, 1984).

<sup>3</sup>Forrest G. Robinson, *The Shape of Things Known: Sidney's Apology in Its Philosophical Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972); S. K. Henninger, Jr., *Touches of Sweet Harmony: Pythagorean Cosmology and Renaissance Poetics* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1974).

<sup>4</sup>*Early English Stages: 1300 to 1600*, vol. 2, part 1 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1966), p. 155.

<sup>5</sup>The narrative's figurative meaning has been explored by Harry Levin, *The Question of Hamlet* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) and Arthur Johnson, "The Player's Speech in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 13 (1962).

<sup>6</sup>See Rosemary Freeman, *English Emblem Books* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), p. 23, and Daly, pp. 151-64. Although Dieter Mehl declined to categorize the dumb show as an emblem in his influential 1965 study, *The Elizabethan Dumb Show: The History of a Dramatic Convention* (London: Methuen, 1965), pp. 14-15, he did so subsequently in "Emblems in English Renaissance Drama," *Renaissance Drama*, N. S. 2 (1969), p. 46.

<sup>7</sup>*The Masque of Stuart Culture* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1990), p. 80.

<sup>8</sup>*Criticism and Compliment: The Politics of Literature in the England of Charles I* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), p. 199.

<sup>9</sup>Marie Cornelia, *The Function of the Masque in Jacobean Tragedy and Tragicomedy*, "Jacobean Drama Studies," ed. Dr. James Hogg, *Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur* (Salzburg, Austria: Universität Salzburg, 1978), p. 9.

<sup>10</sup>*The Veil of Allegory: Some Notes Toward a Theory of Allegorical Rhetoric in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 102-03.

<sup>11</sup>See Murrin, pp. 98-166, and Daly, pp. 32-53 on allegorical interpretation.

<sup>12</sup>Shakespeare citations are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). Daly notes Shakespeare's use of the mole as an icon for blindness. "Shakespeare and the Emblem: The Use of Evidence and Analogy in Establishing Iconographic and Emblematic Effects in the Plays," Fabiny, pp. 140-41; also n. 21, p. 178.

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<sup>13</sup>Francis Ferguson notes the three levels of allegorical meaning in this passage in *Shakespeare: The Pattern in the Carpet* (New York: Dell, 1958), p. 5.

<sup>14</sup>I follow here Herbert Coursen's close reading of Hamlet's behavior in the scene: "The Rarer Action: Hamlet's Mousetrap," *Literary Monographs*, vol. 2, eds. Eric Rothstein and Richard N. Ringler (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 59-97. My focus is different from his since my purpose is to demonstrate the relation between stage audience behavior and the emblematic masque.

<sup>15</sup>pp. 102-03.

<sup>16</sup>Alastair Fowler's study of the dumb show ("The Plays Within the Play of Hamlet," ed. by John W. Mahon, *Fanned and Winnowed Opinions: Shakespearean Essays Presented to Harold Jenkins*, (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 170, is one of few which have attempted to incorporate all its visual properties.

<sup>17</sup>Rudolf Wittkower, "Chance, Time and Virtue," *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols*, "Journal of the Warburg Institute," vol. 1, 1937-38 (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977), p. 103.

## ***Othello's Bianca: Climbing Out of the Bed of Patriarchy*** by Nina Rulon-Miller

Until recently, *Othello's* Bianca has not received much attention in Shakespeare criticism. As Timothy Murray has observed, "Shakespeare's literary solicitors either forget Bianca or cite her as yet another example of the tragic whore."<sup>1</sup> Murray has given us a wonderfully innovative interpretation of Bianca in his article "Othello's Foul Generic Thoughts and Methods," but his brief summary of Bianca criticism is not quite accurate. Bianca certainly was forgotten by most early *Othello* critics, but those who remembered her did not usually see her as a "tragic" whore. Rather, she was merely a *cheap* whore for these critics, inspiring either a furtive titillation or censure and disgust. Furthermore, those who wrote of Bianca at all treated her only as a foil to Desdemona or as a means to explicate Cassio. However, recent critics have begun to view Bianca as a strong, independent woman rather than as a complement to the play's main characters or as a "tragic whore"; indeed, for some recent critics, Bianca may not be a whore at all.

The word "whore" appears in *Othello* twelve times, more than in any other play by Shakespeare.<sup>2</sup> Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca are all named whores in this play, where female sexuality is scrutinized again and again and inevitably incites the epithet "whore." As a woman who expresses and lives her sexuality, Bianca may be a whore, at least in the world of *Othello*. She is described or addressed in this play as "whore" (IV. i. 176), "strumpet" (IV. i. 97, V. i. 78, V. i. 121), "customer" (IV. i. 120), "trash" (V. i. 85), "fitchew" (IV. i. 145), "monkey" (IV. i. 128), "caitiff" (IV. i. 109), "rogue" (IV. i. 112), "huswife" (IV. i. 95), "creature" (IV. i. 96), "bauble" (IV. i. 134), and "mistress" (V. i. 125). However, Iago is the only person in the play who calls Bianca a "whore," and only he and Emilia name her "strumpet," which means about the same thing in Shakespeare's lexicon.<sup>3</sup> For Iago, Bianca is also "trash" (V. i. 85), and his word for her independent life-style is "whoring" (V. i. 116). Cassio, who seems to be genuinely fond of Bianca, greeting her with "my most fair Bianca" and "sweet love" (III. iv. 170-71), uses most of the other, somewhat less derogatory terms.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, the indeterminacy of language is one of Shakespeare's continuing preoccupations. When he gives Iago the lines, "What you know, you know" in the last act (V. ii. 311),

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Shakespeare reminds us of the theme that dominates *Othello*: the dilemma of not knowing, not being able to understand and to trust, arises continually in this play. We first encounter it at the very beginning of the play, in the subplot of the war at Cyprus as the Duke and senators try to make sense of the dispatches they are reading. The “news” is contradictory, “disproportioned,” and with “no composition” (I. iii. 1-6). Soon, a messenger appears with a report that seems calculated to keep them “in false gaze” (I. iii. 20), and, shortly after this, a dispatch from Montano arrives, accompanied with his plea that the Duke and senators “believe him” (I. iii. 43). The second act opens with Montano’s “What can you discern at sea?” The answer is “Nothing at all” (II. i. 2), and the conclusion, “It is impossible to bear it out” (II. i. 20). Clearly it is difficult, if not impossible, to believe what you read, see, and hear in the world of *Othello*. As the play continues, we will watch Iago orchestrate what people know—and what they *do not* know. Indeed, along with his fellow characters, Iago has ensnared most of the play’s critics in his web of words: although generations of readers have detected the irony in the ensign’s epithet, “honest Iago,” most have accepted unquestioningly Iago’s construction of Bianca as “whore.”

Bianca criticism begins in 1904 with A. C. Bradley, who mentions her briefly in his second lecture on *Othello*. He describes her as “a woman of more than doubtful reputation,” presumably his euphemism for “prostitute.” For Bradley, Bianca’s presence in the play merely serves to explicate Cassio’s character: Cassio is “too easy-going” and “weak head[ed]”: “he amuses himself [with Bianca] without any scruple. . . . He is loose, and we are sorry for it.”<sup>5</sup>

After Bradley, we do not hear of Bianca again until 1946, when Harley Granville-Barker wrote about her in his *Prefaces to Shakespeare*. Granville-Barker argues that Shakespeare created Bianca’s “frailty” as a contrast to Desdemona’s “innate chastity” and Emilia’s “coarser honesty” in order to present an “enlarged” “pattern of womanhood.” For Granville-Barker, Bianca’s primary function in *Othello* is to show what Desdemona “is *not*” (Granville-Barker’s emphasis): Bianca is a “little hussy,” “a trull, no better, and ill-behaved at that.” Granville-Barker finds Bianca’s speech at her entrance in Act III full of “affectations” and “stale artifice.” He scolds when she “pursues her lover in the streets, makes scenes there, flies into tantrums, [and] turns as jealous as her betters,” although he clearly enjoys her “pretty clinging to Cassio” and her “pretty impudence.” Like Bradley, Granville-Barker uses Bianca to explicate Cassio: “He is a gentleman, and she, as the phrase

goes, is no better than she should be." Cassio's remark, "Well, I must leave her company" (IV. i. 143), leads Granville-Barker to suggest that Cassio intends to end his relationship with Bianca. However, he regrets that the "weakness which lets [Cassio] drink . . . is matched by his broken resolve to break with [her]": Bianca's "fit of tantrums to come and sup with her that same night or see her no more" was all that was needed to change Cassio's mind.<sup>6</sup> Although Granville-Barker concludes, "The gallant Cassio . . . treats [Bianca] as such creatures must expect to be treated," he grants that Bianca is "shrewd, witty," and "plucky" and admits that she "may even love her lover in her disreputable way." Granville-Barker does understand that Bianca is Iago's "scapegoat," but she gets no sympathy from him since she is a "creature" "no better than she should be" with no right to expect anything but mistreatment by her "betters."<sup>7</sup>

The next well-known critic to write about Bianca was M. R. Ridley, in the 1958 Arden edition of *Othello*. Ridley reports that he "retained F's description of Bianca" for his *Dramatis Personae*, "since the usual 'Mistress to Cassio' implies a more permanent relationship than anywhere implied in the text" (Ridley's emphasis).<sup>8</sup> However, if we are to understand "courtesan" as prostitute and "mistress" as loyal, monogamous lover,<sup>9</sup> Ridley's choice is problematic. He forgets, it seems, that *somewhere* "implied in the text," Bianca's relationship with Cassio is more "permanent" than one of courtesan or whore. If we take Bianca at her word, surely "implied in the text" is her description of herself and Cassio as "lovers" (III. iv. 174) and her indignant assertion to Emilia that she is "no strumpet" (V. i. 122). As we have observed, the only person in the play who describes Bianca as "whore" is Iago, and he uses this word only when he speaks to Othello.

Certainly Cassio and Iago imply that Bianca is a prostitute during Iago's performance for the eavesdropping Othello (IV. i. 104-44); however, when Cassio speaks of Bianca here, he seems more interested in engaging with Iago in the age-old male pastime of disparaging women than in speaking the truth. Furthermore, Iago's descriptions of Bianca during this conversation are surely tinged with his incessant sexual disgust. I would argue that Iago's remarks during this staged conversation are entirely contrived, part of his project to conflate Bianca and Desdemona in Othello's mind as sisters in whoredom.

Leslie Fiedler is the next prominent critic to write of Bianca. His *The Stranger in Shakespeare* (1972) devotes an entire chapter to Othello, "The Moor as Stranger." One of Fiedler's concerns is "woman as stranger," and another, the pernicious "double stan-

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ard." However, it does not occur to Fiedler to apply either of these insights to his interpretation of Bianca. Rather, he finds Bianca "no lady," but "a whore in love; which is to say, a joke by definition." For Fiedler, Bianca is a "casual whore," a "foolish whore," "weak and false," and "[h]er very name, 'Bianca,' is an irony. . . ."<sup>10</sup> Like Granville-Barker, Fiedler finds it quite natural and acceptable that Cassio mocks her.

Two years after Fiedler's *The Stranger in Shakespeare* was published, Julian C. Rice's "Desdemona Unpinned: Universal Guilt in *Othello*" appeared in *Shakespeare Studies*. Like Bradley, Rice uses Bianca's presence in the play to illuminate Desdemona's character, but, rather than contrasts, Rice finds similarities:

The presence of Bianca in the play suggests that all women are sisters. Desdemona shrinks with horror from, or "abhors," the word "whore" [IV. ii. 163-64]. The obvious pun also suggests that she shrinks from the reality of the whore within her, the potential whore which exists within all women.<sup>11</sup>

This appalling remark eventually elicited an indignant response from W. D. Adamson in the 1980 volume of *Shakespeare Studies*. However, as we shall see below, Adamson's concern was not Bianca: her essay focuses on Desdemona.

In 1978, four years after Rice's comments on Bianca and Desdemona, Carol Thomas Neely's "Women and Men in *Othello*: 'What should such a fool / Do with so good a woman?'" was published. Neely, a feminist critic, also views Bianca and Desdemona as "sisters" but, of course, is preoccupied neither with Rice's "universal guilt" nor with "the potential whore" in "all women." Neely finds that when Bianca, "though jealous, agrees to copy the work" of the handkerchief for Cassio (III. iv. 202), she demonstrates her "willingness to be 'circumstanc'd'," "a flaw which all the woman share." Neely observes that the men in *Othello* "persistently misconceive the women, [and] the women fatally overestimate the men. Each sex, trapped in its own values and attitudes, misjudges the other":

Desdemona projects her own lack of jealousy onto Othello. Emilia attributes to Iago her own capacity for empathy. . . . Bianca, because she does not view herself as a whore in her relationship with Cassio, is surprised that he should treat her as one.

But, as we have seen, Bianca does not appear to "view herself as a whore" at all: "I am no strumpet," she declares (V. ii. 122). Although Neely does not elaborate on her remark that "The play's

humanization of [Bianca] . . . underlines the folly of the male characters who see her as merely whore," she seems to suggest that she herself does not view Bianca as a prostitute.<sup>12</sup>

Changes in *Othello's Dramatis Personae* in the 1980's indicate a tendency to modify Ridley's choice for Bianca's character description. David Bevington's 1980 Bianca is "a courtesan [and mistress to Cassio]."<sup>13</sup> The 1984 *New Cambridge Shakespeare*, edited by Norman Sanders, lists Bianca as "'a courtesan', mistress of Cassio," explaining, "The descriptions of characters, here appearing in quotation marks, are those of F, which have been amplified following the practice of Rowe and later editors."<sup>14</sup>

Along with such modifications in her *Dramatis Personae* listings, the 1980's produced a flurry of innovative commentary on Bianca. An essay by June Sturrock appeared in 1984; Julia B. Holloway's, Kezia VanMeter Sproat's, and Timothy Murray's in 1985; and Karen Newman's and Eamon Grennan's in 1987. June Sturrock's "*Othello: Women and 'Woman'*" was published in *Atlantis*. Once again, Bianca, Desdemona, and now also Emilia, are seen as sisters. However, for Sturrock, the play is about love: "[T]he women of the play are dramatic contradictions of Iago's . . . distorted view of human nature because they are concerned with love," Desdemona's love for Othello, Emilia's love for Desdemona, and Bianca's for Cassio. Sturrock finds all three women "faithful and courageous lovers," although she considers Bianca "foolish, inarticulate and ridiculous," and belittles her love for Cassio for its "absurdity and its jealous tendency." Sturrock would prefer that Bianca refrain from using "the standard lover's hyperbole," which she finds "appropriate enough in [sic] the lips of a Juliet but not on those of a whore."<sup>15</sup> This is a surprisingly harsh, indeed, anti-feminist stance for a women's studies journal. Although Bianca is praised for her courage and fidelity, these admirable qualities are erased by Sturrock's closing remarks. We are left with a whore who is not even tragic, simply "foolish, inarticulate, and ridiculous." There is even an echo of Granville-Barker here: Sturrock, too, finds Bianca attempting to imitate "her betters" and failing pathetically.

However, after Sturrock, Bianca criticism makes a subtle turn as feminist critics working to recover women from the margins of canonical texts begin to take Bianca seriously as a significant, independent character. A year after Sturrock's essay, Julia B. Holloway's "*Strawberries and Mulberries: Ulysses and Othello*" was published in *Hypatia*. Although Holloway follows traditional criticism's penchant for viewing Bianca as a "whore" and as a foil for Desdemona, she finds it odd that the two women are merged:

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"Desdemona's purity is echoed strangely in the whore Bianca's name." However, Holloway's main topic is Shakespeare's enduring fascination with the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, a subtext which, according to Holloway, several critics have recognized in *Titus Andronicus*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, but have either ignored or shied away from in *Othello*. Holloway works "to untangle the Thisbe tale from *Othello*, rather than evade its terror." She then names Bianca a proto-feminist critic, saying, "This [untangling] is a task for feminist criticism. Like Bianca, 'I must take out the worke' (IV. i. 171)."<sup>16</sup>

Kezia VanMeter Sproat also follows her earlier counterparts, using Bianca to illuminate Cassio's character in her "Rereading *Othello*." However, Sproat's essay continues and further develops the feminist approach that we have seen beginning to emerge in Bianca criticism in the eighties. In her reading of Cassio, rather than Bradley's "too easy-going," "weak head[ed]," yet "gallant" character, Sproat finds an ambivalent and hypocritical one, a man who "shares the basics of Iago's and Roderigo's cynicism about women." Sproat's essay opens the theme of *Othello*'s male abuse of women that will characterize mid-eighties Bianca criticism: "As Iago derides Emilia in II, i, so Cassio will soon deride Bianca behind her back (IV. i. 109-51), yet remain quite willing to exploit her affection. . . ."<sup>17</sup>

Karen Newman, in her 1987 "'And wash the Ethiop white': Femininity and the Monstrous in *Othello*," also follows earlier critics, seeing Bianca as a foil for Desdemona and as a means to approach Cassio. Yet, like Sproat's, Newman's remarks reveal the growing influence of feminist criticism, and now also post-structuralism, on Bianca commentary:

Cassio's mocking rehearsal of Bianca's love is not the sight/site of Desdemona's transgression, as *Othello* believes, but its representation; ironically this theatrical representation directed by Iago functions as effectively as would the real. Representation for *Othello* is transparent. The male gaze is privileged; it constructs a world which the drama plays out. The aptly and ironically named Bianca is a cipher for Desdemona whose "blackened whiteness" she embodies.<sup>18</sup>

The final essays of the 1980's to be discussed in this summary of Bianca's critical reception are Eamon Grennan's and Timothy Murray's. Theirs are the only ones from this period that focus on Bianca as a significant, independent character, rather than as a contrast to Desdemona or an opportunity to write about Cassio.

Eamon Grennan, whose "The Women's Voices in *Othello*" appeared in a 1987 *Shakespeare Quarterly*, finds Bianca "an indispensable element in the dramatic design" of the play:

As a prostitute she intensifies our sense of the predominantly sexual nature of this world. As a woman conventionally scorned, desired, used, and abused by men, she underlines the theme of female abuse at the heart of the play. . . . Her own speech portrays her as a passionate, spontaneous, and honest human being. . . . [I]n many ways she is the most *outspoken* character in the play. . . . When jealous, she speaks her jealousy straight out. . . . Far from being the object men have made of her in their speech . . . her own verbal energy . . . constitutes a danger to men's sense of propriety and order in their world. [Grennan's emphasis]

But, as Grennan observes, Bianca's "speech is to be twisted against itself and its own truth." Before she is "swallowed up in silence," Bianca makes her "memorable assertion" to Emilia: "I am no strumpet, but of life as honest / As you that thus abuse me." Grennan argues that in giving Bianca these lines, Shakespeare "has embodied a feeling that would give . . . adequate expression to her identity. . . . [H]er speech is a moral reality that brings into sharper focus the moral deficiencies of the world that would condemn her."<sup>19</sup> Although, for Grennan, Bianca remains a "tragic whore," "swallowed up into silence," there is a new tone in this criticism. Bianca as speaker has moved from Granville-Barker's "hussy" of "affectation" and "temper tantrums" and Sturrock's "ridiculous and inarticulate" "whore" to a new, "passionate" and "spontaneous" woman, whose speech is imbued with a "verbal energy" that exposes male abuse and shatters male propriety.

Timothy Murray's 1985 "Othello's Foul Generic Thoughts and Methods" takes Bianca criticism as far as it will go in the 1980's. His reading of Bianca is radically feminist. Murray, like Holloway, finds in Bianca a burgeoning feminist critic. Indeed, Murray's Bianca is a feminist *deconstructionist* critic who offers an astute commentary on the play:

There remains at the conclusion of the play a concealed but radical woman's vision of things, maintained by Bianca, the true whore missing from the tragic loading of the bed. The traces of this vision derive from Bianca's public disclaimer of the patriarchal social structure. . . . In Act IV, scene i, Bianca refuses Cassio's demand to take out the work of the handkerchief and issues him an ultimatum—that he visit *her* on *her* terms or have no

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woman at all. . . . [Bianca thus] changes the scene of whoredom [of 'gendering'] from her public displays on the streets to the discovery of her own place and space. Her subjective existence, moreover, is no longer contingent on her penetration and occupation by phallic heroes. . . . Bianca is the *only* woman in the play to proclaim openly and publicly her indifference to patriarchal beds and the magnetic webbing of heroic representation. . . . [Bianca discovers] a female life 'as honest' to her self. . . . But, tragically, Bianca's indifference to man's vision of truth and subjectivity provokes a classic response. In the play, the male reaction displaces Bianca nominally and generically from her rightful home to their legal confines. Iago's final command to Bianca, 'I charge you go with me' once again forces her to lie in the bed of patriarchy. [Murray's emphases]<sup>20</sup>

We have come a long way from Granville-Barker's "disreputable" Bianca of "affectation," "stale artifice," "fit of tantrums," and "scandalous infatuation." Yet Bianca is still a whore for Murray, the only "true whore" in the play. Indeed, she is once again a "tragic whore," "tragically" "displaced," forced back into "the bed of patriarchy."

My bibliographical searches for material on Bianca have yielded nothing new since Newman and Grennan in 1987. However, Jane Coles' 1992 *Cambridge School Shakespeare* edition of *Othello* may foreshadow a continuing change of opinion of Bianca for the present decade. Coles begins by making a striking alteration in Bianca's *Dramatis Personae* listing: Coles' Bianca is described as simply "in love with Cassio." Furthermore, in her commentary to the play, intended for high school and undergraduate college students, Coles encourages readers to examine the play's attitudes towards sexism. For instance, on a study page entitled "It's a Man's World!" students are asked to respond to the question, "How are . . . women represented in the play?" and "What are their roles and how restricted are they by their society?" Another study page, accompanying Act IV, scene i, challenges the traditional presentation of Bianca as a prostitute:

According to Iago, Bianca is a 'housewife' . . . or hussy who sells her 'desires' to earn a living. He goes on to make his meaning clearer by calling her a 'strumpet' [a whore]. Many editors of *Othello* assume that Bianca is a prostitute, and call her that in the list of characters at the beginning of the playscript. Yet how accurate is Iago as a judge of women? Can we take his description at face value? . . . Talk [with your classmates] about what

difference it makes to a production of the play if Bianca is quite unequivocally presented as a prostitute.<sup>21</sup>

Coles here turns all previous Bianca criticism completely on its head. At the most, we might have wondered what difference it would make to a production of the play if Bianca were *not* presented as a prostitute, but Coles begins with the assumption that Bianca is no whore in the first place. Even Murray and Grennan assume that Bianca is a prostitute. But Coles is right: when we ask, "How accurate is Iago as a judge of women?," we should again recall Iago's final pronouncement, "What you know, you know" (V. ii. 311); Iago has worked throughout this play to make certain no one knows anything for sure. And when we remember that Iago is the only person in the play to name Bianca "whore," we realize that we must revise our reading of this woman.

In the quayside scene, Iago reveals his penchant for describing—and inscribing—women, and Emilia and Desdemona both seem to understand that he would author their texts. Emilia, perhaps from bitter experience, attempts to censor him: "You shall not write my praise," she says (II. i. 116). Desdemona, on the other hand, continues her flirtatious badinage with Iago,<sup>22</sup> fatally encouraging him write her as she asks, "What wouldst thou write of me?" (II. i. 117). We will soon watch the bewildered Othello striving to read the writing Iago has inscribed onto Desdemona as Othello asks, "Was this fair paper, this most goodly book, / Made to write 'whore' upon?" (IV. ii. 71-72).<sup>23</sup>

After Desdemona's request, Iago at first pretends to demur, but he soon presents himself as both an author and a literary critic. He even claims the support of a muse who helps him generate his text: "I am nothing if not critical. . . . But my muse labors, / And thus she is deliver'd" (II. i. 119, 127-28). In his ensuing conversation with Othello, Iago writes Bianca. Let us deconstruct his text. After instructing Othello to "withdraw" to listen to his conversation with Cassio, Iago soliloquizes:

Now will I question Cassio of Bianca,  
A huswife that by selling her desires  
Buys herself bread and clothes. It is a creature  
That dotes on Cassio as 'tis the strumpet's plague  
To beguile many and be beguil'd by one.  
(IV. i. 94-100)

And, after Cassio has left the scene, Iago speaks to Othello:

*Iago.* And did you see the handkerchief?  
*Othello.* Was that mine?

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*Iago.* Yours, by this hand. And to see how he  
prizes the foolish woman your wife! She gave it him,  
and he hath giv'n it his whore.

(IV. i. 172-76)

In his soliloquy Iago appears to be planning his tactics for the abuse of Othello's ear. He selects his words to describe Bianca in the following order: "housewife"/ "creature"/ "strumpet," thus transforming her from a woman who keeps house to a dotting creature, and, finally, to a strumpet, or whore.<sup>24</sup> In his subsequent conversation with Othello, Iago slides from "foolish woman"/ "wife," to "she"/Desdemona, to Bianca/"whore," cleverly conflating his sensual sister-women. Iago needs the word "whore" in his Bianca-text because it enables him, as he reports to Othello the transfer of the handkerchief from Cassio to Bianca, simultaneously to engineer the transfer of the epithet "whore" from Bianca to Desdemona.

I find it curious that no recent critic has mentioned female desire when discussing Bianca. Indeed, Iago gives us our cue when he asserts that Bianca "sells her desires" (IV. i. 95). Furthermore, there is an additional curious silence in feminist criticism when it comes to Desdemona's apparent attraction to Lodovico. No one has touched her problematic lines about the handsome lieutenant in years,<sup>25</sup> despite the ground-breaking work of feminist writers Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, who have taught us to proclaim and celebrate women's desire.<sup>26</sup> Nor has any recent criticism commented on Emilia's gratuitously vicious line to Bianca, "O, fie upon thee, strumpet!" (V. i. 121). Emilia has become a feminist hero for many critics, but they usually write only about her diatribes against men and her valiant attempt to save Desdemona's posthumous honor. Emilia's line in V. i. 121 is a travesty to feminine solidarity, but her critics seem reluctant to ask what this woman can be doing denigrating a feminist cohort, indeed, a "new feminist," for her independent life-style.

Many critics consider *Othello* one of Shakespeare's most pessimistic plays. For instance, Edward A. Snow calls it one of his "most cynical," where "neither transcendence nor catharsis" relieves us. Perhaps this play, which so relentlessly resonates with "pathological male obsessions,"<sup>27</sup> in which none of its three female characters survives to triumph, two of them murdered and the third silenced and hauled back to the patriarchal bed, has little appeal for feminists who would recover and celebrate marginal women in the canon.

However, it seems to me more likely that *Othello's* women are an embarrassment to mainstream feminist criticism. Although

women who choose prostitution as a career are beginning to receive some serious attention and validation in radical feminist commentary, celebrating female desire in a woman almost universally typed as a whore must surely be troublesome for mainstream feminism. Who would want to be accused of harboring a "whore within" by attempting to validate Bianca? We are well aware that we are still struggling with Ensign Iago's, Julian Rice's, and their many cohorts' slander against women. Furthermore, Bianca's love for the fatuous Cassio is not much cause for celebration. Even Bradley and Granville-Barker are, at best, lukewarm about him, and, after them, Cassio usually does not get rave reviews.<sup>28</sup> Emilia, too, is an embarrassment to mainstream feminism: we must tolerate a certain discomfort if we attempt to keep this woman on a pedestal when she insists on vilifying the emerging "new feminist" Bianca.

Celebrating Desdemona's desire seems acceptable when it comes to her love for Othello,<sup>29</sup> but, as we have observed, there is an awkward silence in feminist criticism today about her remarks in Act IV on Lodovico's good looks and skillful way with words. The last feminist commentary on Desdemona's Lodovico lines appeared in 1980 in *Shakespeare Studies*: Ann Jennalie Cook's "The Design of Desdemona: Doubt Raised and Resolved" and W. D. Adamson's "Unpinned or Undone?: Desdemona's Critics and the Problem of Sexual Innocence." Both writers seem compelled to ameliorate and finally to erase Desdemona's apparent late longing for Lodovico. Indeed, it is almost comic to watch these critics scramble to "resolve doubts" about any adulterous fantasies and to prove Desdemona's "absolute moral innocence,"<sup>30</sup> not allowing her even to think about any sexual attraction to the handsome lieutenant. Adamson and Cook seem to have left all subsequent feminist criticism no option but an uncomfortable silence.<sup>31</sup>

At the quayside Desdemona accuses Iago of "slander" against women (II. i. 113). His "birdlime" (II. i. 126) certainly is sticky; we have seen it above in Julian Rice and surely don't have to look far to find it all around us today. As Dymphna Callaghan argues, we must remember that Shakespeare's "play-texts themselves, the original site of their production, and the sites of reception or representation in the twentieth-century literary critical tradition . . . are ideologically rather than logically separate." Callaghan urges feminist critics to "interrogate notions of tragedy so that it does not remain ensnared in the limitations of masculinist criticism."<sup>32</sup>

Naomi Scheman's reading of Timothy Murray's "Foul Generic Thoughts" led her to conclude,

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[Murray's] argument comes down to a tension at the heart of feminist theory: are *women* "free-floating signifiers" or do we "have an essence which is independent of the fantasies surrounding us?" It's not a tension I think we can—or should try to—resolve: we need both to explore the terrifying extent to which we have been reduced to men's dreams and theories of us *and* to hold on to our deeply felt, though perhaps unaccountable, untheorizable conviction that we are something other than those dreams and theories. [Scheman's emphases]<sup>33</sup>

Scheman, in turn, inspires my own conclusion. It is time for feminist criticism to break the chain that binds Desdemona, Bianca, Emilia, and, indeed, all women, as sisters.<sup>34</sup> We must re-read *Othello's* women, interpreting them from what they say and do within the text rather than from their androcentric critics' analyses, Iago included. None of these women is available for any sanctifying feminist pedestal. They are simply portraits of human beings with human strengths and human flaws. It is finally becoming a commonplace that Granville-Barker's "pattern of womanhood" is wonderfully varied. Women do not need to be "accountable" or "theorizable": there is no generic Woman. And, like Bianca, women are becoming increasingly indifferent to masculinist inscription, censure, and distaste. We may still find ourselves lying in the tragic patriarchal bed from time to time, but, unlike the unfortunate Bianca, we are also finding that we can step out of it at will.

It is time to ignore Lodovico's command, "Let it be hid" (V. ii. 374). Avoiding *Othello's* women's many, but merely human faults has reduced us to silence. When we resist the urge to defend or sanctify them, we can read these women more realistically: Bianca is a passionate woman who is hopelessly in love with a man who exploits her; Emilia is a woman co-opted into patriarchy who will betray her beloved mistress to please her husband and jump at the chance to demean a lower-class woman; and Desdemona is a sensual, desiring woman who enjoys an occasional flirtatious badinage. It has been almost four hundred years since the silencing of Bianca, but the tragic patriarchal bed is finally beginning to lose its hold on women. Let us cease conspiring with the loading of *Othello's/Othello's* bed. We can begin by opening up the critical commentary on the women in this play.

**Drew University**

## Notes

I have borrowed the phrase in my title, "the bed of patriarchy," from Timothy Murray's "Othello's Foul Generic Thoughts and Methods," *Persons in Groups: Social Behavior as Identity Formation in Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, Papers of the Sixteenth Annual Conference for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, vol. 36, ed. Richard C. Trexler (Binghamton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1985), p. 76. My citations from *Othello* are from *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1980).

<sup>1</sup>Timothy Murray, "Othello's Foul Generic Thoughts," pp. 75-76.

<sup>2</sup>Next is *Troilus and Cressida*, which contains ten. There are seven in *Timon of Athens*, and from there we find no more than three, and, more often, none in any other play.

<sup>3</sup>See Alexander Schmidt, *Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary*, Gregor Sarrazin, 1901 (New York: Dover, 1971). Schmidt defines "strumpet" as "prostitute." See also Eric Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy: A Literary and Psychological Essay and a Comprehensive Glossary* [1947], rev. 1955 (London: Routledge, 1956). For Partridge, a "strumpet" is either "a prostitute" or "a [very] wanton woman."

<sup>4</sup>Cassio does refer to Bianca as a "customer" (IV. i. 120) (a "prostitute" [Schmidt] or "common whore" [Partridge]), during this conversation. However, he speaks in response to Iago's teasing him about his possible intention to marry Bianca (IV. i. 116). Cassio is a man who is embarrassed merely to be seen with a woman ("[I] think it no addition, nor my wish, / To have [Othello] see me woman'd" [III. iv. 195]); to be accused of wanting to marry one may have provoked him to belittle his relationship with Bianca.

<sup>5</sup>A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on "Hamlet," "Othello," "King Lear," "Macbeth"* [1904] (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 221.

<sup>6</sup>Again, this is dubious, since Cassio makes his "resolve" while bandying with Iago about his relationship with Bianca (IV. i. 143).

<sup>7</sup>Harley Granville-Barker, "Othello," *Prefaces to Shakespeare* [1946] (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), vol. 4, 122-252.

<sup>8</sup>M. R. Ridley, ed., *Othello*, Arden edition (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup>In Shakespeare, "courtezan" means prostitute (Schmidt) or "a better-class whore" (Partridge).

<sup>10</sup>Leslie Fiedler, *The Stranger in Shakespeare* (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), pp. 142, 167-68.

<sup>11</sup>Julian C. Rice, "Desdemona Unpinned: Universal Guilt in *Othello*," *Shakespeare Studies*, 7 (1974), p. 219.

<sup>12</sup>Carol Thomas Neely, "Women and Men in *Othello*: 'What should such a fool / Do with so good a woman?'" *Shakespeare Studies*, 10 (1978), pp. 151, 148, 140.

<sup>13</sup>David Bevington, ed., *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*.

<sup>14</sup>Norman Sanders, ed., *The New Cambridge Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984).

<sup>15</sup>June Sturrock, "Othello: Women and 'Woman,'" *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal*, 9 (1984), pp. 6-8.

<sup>16</sup>Julia B. Holloway, "Strawberries and Mulberries: *Ulysses* and *Othello*," *Hypatia: Essays in Classics, Comparative Literature and Philosophy*, eds. William M. Calder, Ulrich K. Goldsmith, and Phyllis B. Kenevan (Boulder, Colorado: Associated Univ. Presses, 1985), pp. 127, 129.

<sup>17</sup>Kezia VanMeter Sproat, "Re-reading *Othello*, II, 1," *The Kenyon Review*, 7 (1985), p. 49.

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<sup>18</sup>Karen Newman, "'And wash the Ethiop white': Femininity and the Monstrous in *Othello*," *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, eds. Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 153.

<sup>19</sup>Eamon Grennan, "The Women's Voices in *Othello*: Speech, Song, Silence," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 38 (1987), pp. 282-83.

<sup>20</sup>Timothy Murray, "Othello's Foul Generic Thoughts," pp. 75-76.

<sup>21</sup>Jane Coles, ed., *Othello, Cambridge School Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 230, 150.

<sup>22</sup>Several critics have found Desdemona's flirtatious behavior with Iago and Cassio at least inappropriate, and more often, suspect. See, for instance, M. R. Ridley, ed., *Othello*, p. 54, n. to lines 109-66.

<sup>23</sup>See also Dymna Callaghan, *Woman and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy: A Study of "King Lear," "Othello," "The Duchess of Malfi," and "The White Devil"* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1989), p. 78:

Desdemona is a *tabula rasa* in a most curious sense. She is pure, white, and also blank . . . and, since blank, open to any inscription, and therefore, in a sense, undecipherable. Othello's judgement of her as whore is the inscription she must bear. . . . Condemned to silence, she is to be read and not to speak herself. She has become Othello's text even if the reading of it is not a stable activity.

<sup>24</sup>Of course these words, too, support different meanings. I would argue that Iago's project is to conflate them all. A "huswife" could be simply a woman who keeps house, the meaning Iago seems to imply at II. i. 112 in his notorious quayside slander of women. But there too he slides slyly from the innocuous to the incriminating, from "huswifery" ("management becoming the mistress of a family" [Schmidt]) to "huswives" (here, most likely Schmidt's second meaning, "huss[ies]"). Furthermore, a "creature" could connote anything from "a living being" to "a servant" or "dependant" (Schmidt), to a "harlot" (Partridge), to a being something less than human.

<sup>25</sup>I refer to Desdemona's lines in IV. iii. 37-40, which created quite a stir in *Othello* criticism from Ridley to Rice, but about which there is now a curious silence:

*Emilia*. Shall I go fetch your nightgown?

*Desdemona*. No, unpin me here. This Lodovico is a proper man.

*Emilia*. A very handsome man.

*Desdemona*. He speaks well.

In 1980 two articles commenting on these lines appeared in *Shakespeare Studies*, discussed in this essay on page 11 and in note 31. See also S. N. Garner, "Shakespeare's Desdemona," *Shakespeare Studies*, 9 (1976), 233-52.

<sup>26</sup>See, for instance, Hélène Cixous' celebration of woman's desire in her "The Laugh of the Medusa" [1975], *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1991), 334-49; and the jouissance of Luce Irigaray's polymorphously erotic woman in "This Sex Which Is Not One" [1977], *Feminisms*, pp. 350-56.

<sup>27</sup>Edward A. Snow, "Sexual Anxiety and the Male Order of Things in *Othello*," *English Literary Renaissance*, 10 (1980), pp. 387, 384.

<sup>28</sup>In contrast, see W. D. Adamson, "Unpinned or Undone: Desdemona's Critics and the Problem of Sexual Innocence," *Shakespeare Studies*, 13 (1980), p. 180. Adamson argues that Cassio understands and accepts female sexuality: she finds in him the play's "spokesman" for Desdemona as "a natural alternative to 'saint or strumpet.'" However, Adamson, too, "forgets" Bianca. Most recent commentators agree with Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, "Hamlet" to "The Tempest"* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 278, n. 64:

Cassio and Iago . . . participate in Othello's idealization and debasement of women, the split that makes Desdemona's warm sexuality intolerable to him: as has often been noted, the contrast between Iago's and Cassio's greetings to Desdemona [II. i. 81-87; II. i. 118-60] is virtually a textbook illustration of the two processes; and the same split is enacted in Cassio himself, who reserves Desdemona for idealization and Bianca for debasement.

<sup>29</sup>Karen Newman and Naomi Scheman write about Desdemona's desire, but only in regard to her relationship to Othello. Both critics find that woman's desire is her undoing in patriarchy. See Newman, "'And wash the Ethiop white,'" pp. 152, 157-58: "Desdemona is punished for her desire"; she "suffers . . . the conventional fate assigned to the desiring woman"; and Scheman, "Othello's Doubt/Desdemona's Death: The Engendering of Scepticism," *Engenderings: Constructions of Knowledge, Authority, and Privilege* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 61: "Acknowledgement of female desire . . . and of male desire for that desire . . . raises the fear of cuckoldry. Genuine, autonomous desire—the only sort worth desiring—is uncontrollable by its object."

<sup>30</sup>W. D. Adamson, "Unpinned or Undone?: Desdemona's Critics and the Problem of Sexual Innocence," *Shakespeare Studies*, 13 (1980), pp. 192, 179.

<sup>31</sup>Adamson, "Unpinned or Undone?" pp. 169, 180, discusses the "lamentably polarized" opinion of Desdemona in *Othello* criticism over the years and attempts to transcend Iago's "false dilemma," the play's saint-or-strumpet dichotomy. However, both Adamson and Cook unwittingly reproduce Iago's "false dilemma." See also Ann Jennalie Cook, "The Design of Desdemona: Doubt Raised and Resolved," *Shakespeare Studies*, 13 (1980), p. 192. Cook notes that Shakespeare uses "the epithet of the 'virtuous Desdemona' . . . over and over again" from the third act through the rest of the play, for Cook "a clear signal for audience opinion." As her title indicates, Cook concludes that any "doubt raised" about Desdemona's "virtue" is finally "resolved" at the end of the play. See also Adamson, "Unpinned or Undone?: Desdemona's Critics and the Problem of Sexual Innocence," pp. 172, 174-75, 179. Adamson warns readers to avoid the trap of "the diseased conviction of woman's generic frailty," but falls into it herself. Like Cook, Adamson is enmeshed in the net of *Othello's* rhetoric, bound by the terms "innocence" and "virtue." She must preserve Desdemona's "innocence"; oddly, her only alternative is to find Desdemona "a villainous fraud." Adamson believes that Shakespeare intended to portray Desdemona as "a normally sexed woman" but wonders, "[W]hat then? Must 'normally sexed' imply 'potentially unfaithful'—or even 'naturally promiscuous?'" (Adamson is citing Julian Rice, who finds Desdemona, and, indeed, all women, "naturally promiscuous" and "potential whore[s]." Rice's essay, "Desdemona Unpinned," is discussed above on p. 4.) For Adamson, the "real critical issue" in *Othello* is neither the question, "Is it right to call an

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unfaithful wife a whore" nor, "Is Desdemona a normally sexed woman" but, "Is Desdemona innocent?—legally innocent of adultery, morally innocent of idly considering it, and psychologically innocent of even being capable of it." She warns against "temporizing from the irrelevant [and to Shakespeare inconceivable] perspective of our own era's very different valuation of sexual fidelity," and, repeatedly finding Desdemona "innocent" and "virtuous," concludes that she is a woman of "absolute moral innocence." I would argue that "our perspective" is far from "irrelevant." I propose that the "real critical" questions are: What exactly is "our era's valuation" of women's sexuality? Why is "sexual innocence" a "problem" in the first place? Why are these critics unable to come to terms with feminine desire, incapable of imagining a Desdemona who is tired of her bombastic, sexually tormented husband and looking for, even just *thinking* about looking for, a more suitable man to love?

<sup>32</sup>Dympna Callaghan, *Women and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy*, pp. 3, 65.

<sup>33</sup>Naomi Scheman, "Othello's Doubt/Desdemona's Death," p. 53, n. 69.

<sup>34</sup>I have borrowed the phrase "break the chain" from Naomi Schor's *Breaking the Chain: Women, Theory, and French Realist Fiction* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985).

## Suppressed Design in Shakespeare's Sonnets: Toward Envisioning the Lost "First Folio" by Roy Neil Graves

No, it was builded far from accident . . . .

—No. 124. 5

The lack of apparent organization or satisfying thematic progression in the unique 1609 Quarto text of William Shakespeare's Sonnets is one of the many baffling aspects of this 154 poem sequence that scholars have long puzzled over. In fact, reorderings of the Sonnets by those who have wanted to find or create more structure in the cycle have not been uncommon. Such reorderers—and I am assuredly *not* one of them—have worked on the assumption that the Quarto text is unauthorized or bungled, or both. Other critics have found thematic unity in certain clusters of the poems in Q, thus rationalizing piecemeal the 1609 arrangement without detecting plausible order in the whole numeric string. Generally speaking, I believe, a sense persists among Shakespeareans that the Q cycle is disorderly in a troubling way. It follows, then, that the discovery of form, order, and a convincing underlying plan in Q would allow us to deal more confidently with the poems, helping to alleviate our bedrock puzzlement: Why would the self-described poet "of tall building, and of goodly pride" (No. 80.12) construct an edifice that looks so rickety and ramshackle?

My purpose here is to unmask hidden architecture in the Sonnets and show inherent numerological order, both simple and ingenious, in the Q cycle. This plan, I argue, was the operative one that Shakespeare himself devised and imposed on his materials. In its practical operation, it would have prescribed in precise ways the poet's division of material—and even the page arrangements in his holographic manuscript. In brief, this Ur-text structure would have directed that Shakespeare write his 154 poems on 11 large double-page leaves, with each spread housing 14 "numbers" laid out in 4 horizontal rows of texts, in a 4-4-4-2 arrangement that wittily mirrored the sonnet's own structure of 3 quatrains and a couplet.

I admit here at the outset that I did not reconstruct what I believe is the original plan of the Sonnets in quite the neat, sequential way that even this imperfect exposition may imply. Also I admit that I bite my tongue, especially toward the end, to keep from saying more than I do about undetected patterns in the Sonnets—leaving other audacities for other contexts. Some of the

puns that I broach here do venture boldly beyond the conventionally acknowledged wordplays in the verses of our greatest punster; I hope that these do not derail readers who might otherwise keep moving along the main track of my argument. Readers will need to try to recreate a Renaissance mindset that respects playfulness, artful dissimulation, wit, visual puns, and number schemes—and that retains residual in-group attitudes fostered even into the Renaissance by the craft guilds or “mysteries,” which jealously guarded their secrets. Another challenge for readers will be to curb their scholarly biases or pet theories and keep absolutely open minds and disinterested hearts until this unfamiliar line of argument can have its say.

As I have stated, my hypothesis here is that the 154 Sonnets must have originally appeared in the form of an oversized handwritten booklet comprising 11 “sets” of 14 poems each, with each set arranged synoptically and symmetrically on one large double-page spread, so that a total of 22 pages housed all the texts. This arrangement would have made both poet and original inner-circle reader aware of form—and, surprisingly, of a good deal of meaning—that has not been detectable in Q. Particularly this “First Folio” arrangement would have given the cycle not only an ingenious overall structure but also 11 functional subdivisions of equal size and shape, each with a certain independence.

The printed Quarto version that appeared in 1609, of course, shows none of these formal features—neither the overall nor the subsectional arrangements. Perhaps the obfuscation was purposeful, if the poet or his publisher or printer wanted to perpetrate a far-reaching trick on general readers. In any case, the witty original plan can now be observed in what this essay recreates—both in the patterns that are apparent in each holograph “set” (that is, each page spread or “leaf”) and those we can see in the larger, governing numerological design of the whole cycle. Thus, in my view, we can now regard the Q sequence as very carefully built rather than randomly pieced together.

Readers who might mistakenly discard my argument to the extent that it is “from numbers”—a fact, incidentally, that rationalizes my use of numeral symbols throughout this essay, even for short numbers—should recall that each sonnet in Q is itself an untitled “number” that has one of the identifying numerals 1-154 positioned over it. (Sonnet 116 is quirkily “mis-numbered” in Q as 119—as if the 6 were altered by being flipped over—in a sonnet that warns the auditor against “altering” one’s affection “when it alteration finds” and that concludes with a suggestive hint: “. . . this [may] be error, and upon me proved.”)

More basically, we know that skill at numbers in Shakespeare's day meant metrical competence, and that the sonnet form itself has no existence apart from its rigidly prescriptive number system. Though many, many other numerological analogues and precedents might be adduced, we should be especially encouraged to think that a great Renaissance work might be coyly undergirded with an elaborate lost system of numbers by remembering A. Kent Hiatt's modern discovery of the complex and long-undetected numerological scheme in Edmund Spenser's *Epithalamion*, a plan that is central to the structure and even pertinent to the substance of the composition.<sup>1</sup> The numbers that Hiatt found are wittily appropriate in context because they are relevant to the calendar and its subdivisions; those that I show here also betray fitting topical relevance—to the defining numerological features of the sonnet form itself.

Most readers of this essay will recall, too, that Renaissance aesthetics favored *sprezzatura* or suppressed design, artfully hidden and often painstaking subtextual strategems that allowed a creative work to appear almost tossed off when, in fact, much calculation had gone into its crafting. What then could have been more appropriate or formally satisfying than for Shakespeare to impose, *sub rosa* and in a form that until this day has lain undetected, the sonnet's own scheme of numbers on the larger structure of his cycle, and concurrently on its subsections?

## I.

Without being facetious, let us assume first, for thoroughness' sake, that William Shakespeare (1564-1616) of Stratford and London is indeed the William Shakespeare who, sometime between about 1590 and 1609, wrote the 154 sonnet texts published and attributed to him in Q. Whether or not he composed the poems sequentially in the order that Q shows, let us also assume for now that Q's numeric string of 154 texts represents the order Shakespeare himself finally settled on. For it is this order in which we hope to discover a functional plan—thus, in circular fashion, helping to confirm our original assumption. The critic Paul Ramsey surely must speak for many when he says that a "web" of connection among the Sonnets argues "for the unity of authorship," and that it is probably more plausible to assume that Q's order is Shakespeare's than someone else's.<sup>2</sup>

Let us assume next that, at some point before the 1609 printing of Q, Shakespeare drafted at least one handwritten copy of the

Sonnets, reflecting his final arrangement of the 154 texts, and that the typesetter/printer in George Eld's shop had access to the poet's authorized sequence in some form or other. Let us assume, purely for simplicity's sake, that Shakespeare penned a single holographic copy of the Sonnets—a discrete Ur-text, if you will. A main purpose in this essay will be to try to adduce evidence that will help us to imagine what this holograph looked like, and exactly what form it took. Our concern here is mainly with the sequencing of the Q cycle, so that for now the question of whether the Q texts show jot-and-tittle authorization is not primary.

In the 1609 Quarto, which of course is a small format book, the 154 printed sonnet texts are single-columned and take up 64 pages and part of the 65th.<sup>3</sup> On average, each page in Q contains 2 and a half sonnets or so, with random beginning and ending points for the texts. Somehow, I think, this small-format arrangement in Q has led us collectively, without examination, to imagine some sort of small-format or single-columned holograph—maybe even a little booklet with one sonnet text per page. But let us now try hard to envision something quite different. In a creative leap over what is perhaps the largest chasm in the terrain of this essay, let us imagine that the Ur-text of the Sonnets was not a small booklet at all, but rather that it comprised much larger, “folio” sheets, with pages more or less the size of those used in printing the King James Bible (1611) or the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays (1623). Although the exact page dimensions are not absolutely strategic, let us guess that Shakespeare's holograph used folio sheets with dimensions approximately 22 x 17 inches—a common traditional size 4 times as large as the familiar 8 1/2" x 11" sheet.<sup>4</sup> When Shakespeare folded one of these large sheets vertically down the middle of its wide dimension to bundle it with others, it would have made four 11" x 17" pages. Stacked, folded in this way, sewn along the spine, and perhaps bound with something heavier than paper (such as vellum) for protection, 6 large folio leaves would have combined to create a thin 24-page booklet.<sup>5</sup>

To what purpose would Shakespeare as his own scribe have used exactly this number of oversized pages, rather than a larger number of smaller ones? How would he have used this “First Folio” arrangement to accommodate 154 sonnet-sized holograph texts?

The best hypothesis, I think, starts with cognizance of the handwritten text of the incomplete play *Sir Thomas More*—particularly the 3 sheets (147 lines) of this text in “Hand D” that, as many scholars now agree, seem most likely of any existing textual sample to represent Shakespeare's handwriting.<sup>6</sup> If Shakespeare

did not pen the 3 pages of *More*, then some contemporary did—in a hand remarkably similar to his—and the patterns that this rather small, cramped handwriting reflects would surely not have been beyond Shakespeare's range of use.

Assuming that Shakespeare wrote his holographic Sonnets in a script about the size of Hand D in *More*, 14 contiguous lines of blank verse—exactly the size of a sonnet—would have occupied a surprisingly small block of space, roughly 5" wide x 3" high (the size of a small note card), with the right margin ragged; the maximum width of any line in Hand D is about 5 and 1/2 inches, but almost all are shorter, and many of the lines are in the range of 4 to 4 and 1/2 inches wide. Having once adopted a plan that called for each sonnet text to fit a 5" x 3" space, the poet/scribe could easily have squeezed a line horizontally here and there as needed, the way all writers do to make handwritten lines fit between set margins, or else "doubled up" the line endings, as the Q typesetter does occasionally (see, e.g., Nos. 28.13-14, 99.2-3, 102.1-2, etc.).

We need to consider next the specific number patterns inherent in the sonnet form itself, looking in particular at the numeric implications of 154. For a principal purpose in this examination is to show that what seems like an arbitrary "last number" in Q was actually chosen, indeed *calculated*, with great care. Had Shakespeare stopped his cycle at No. 140, readers before now would surely have detected the glaring association not only with the number 14 but also with the conventional "sonnet dimensions," which can be expressed as an easy equation: 14 lines x 10 syllables = 140 syllables per "normal" sonnet. Less overt, however, is the implicit equation "14 lines x 11 syllables = 154 syllables." That is to say, a perfectly regular Shakespearean sonnet with "weak" or "feminine" line-endings (and thus with the longest lines conventionally possible) would contain 154 syllables, the exact number of sonnets in Shakespeare's cycle. Because "syllable" since the Middle Ages has meant "the least portion or detail of speech or writing (or of something expressed or expressible in speech or writing) [OED]," one sees how ingeniously fitting it would be for Shakespeare to have chosen a jam-packed sonnet of 154 syllables as the numerological paradigm for the structure of his cycle—with each sonnet in Q acting like a single syllable in a Giant Sonnet scheme.

The "Megasonnet" in Fig. 1 graphically illustrates this formal idea—a pictographic numerological conceit that gives Shakespeare's cycle "sonnet dimensions." Each numeral in the figure, 1-154, represents a "number"—that is, one of the numbered sonnet texts in Q.

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

In particular, the necessary interconnection between the suppressed numerological design shown in Fig. 1 and an equally clever division of materials into "sets" of contiguous "numbers" (seen in Fig. 1 as 11 vertical columns or panels comprising 14 numbers each) supports the conclusion that this numbers scheme is the one that uniquely governed the creation of Q. For the Megasonnet chart not only correlates each sonnet text with one "syllable" in the poet's large design, it also divides Q's material up into 11 composition units that stand independently as further analogues to the sonnet form, because each has 14 main component parts.

The Megasonnet chart, giving us a pictographic overview of the organization of the Q cycle, helps us (for one thing) to see how the last 2 sets of sonnets—the last 2 vertical columns of "numbers," standing for the "Perverse Mistress" poems—appear as a witty coda, in effect a kind of vertical couplet tag. I do not know whether the feminine (or weak) line endings of a hypothetical sonnet with 154 syllables would have had any associations in the poet's mind with something (like the Dark Lady) both feminine and perverse—perhaps for being formally aberrational, or for seeming a weak afterthought. In any case, the Megasonnet does appear to end on its righthand side with a wittily perverse, thematically discrete upright couplet that both turns and caps the cycle's content, violating what has come before it in much the

same way that a couplet in an English sonnet text often reverses what has been said earlier. A calculated part of the poet's witty perversity, I think, is that the Megasonnet must be read left-to-right. Thus its "couplet" lines are not paired horizontally at the bottom of the scheme, where they might seem "normal"; rather, they stand upright, like two legs positioned on a "ground" and ready to walk off (see No. 130.12).

Even while a latent formal analogy between each "number" in Q and one "syllable" in the Megasonnet can be deduced, the 11 subsections of the Megasonnet (each comprising 14 numbers, aligned in Fig. 1 in a vertical column) show their own formal beauty and numeric wit. (Several subsections have formal eccentricities, such as lines that are extra or missing, long or short.) For convenient discussion, these 11 subsections or "sets" can be identified with the rubrics I-XI, so that Set I = Nos. 1-14, Set II = Nos. 15-28, Set III = Nos. 29-42—and so on, through Set XI.

The working assumption that each of these 11 sets occupied the equivalent of one folio leaf (i.e., two full pages) in the ms. is compatible with two ideas already proposed: that the poet used large sheets, and that he wrote a small hand. Not much space on the page is wasted in the specific format for the sets that I suggest in Fig. 2, and envisioning it as "right" makes everything fall into place—however unscientific that may sound. Readers will probably sense that my theory and its details are end results of trial and error experimentation rather than straight-line deduction. Since historical evidence is missing, the validity of my argument must be judged by evaluating the quality of what it reveals: impressive inventiveness, an apt and witty *sprezzatura*, an orderly plan in a work that has seemed chaotic, a delightful sense of structure where none has been seen before.

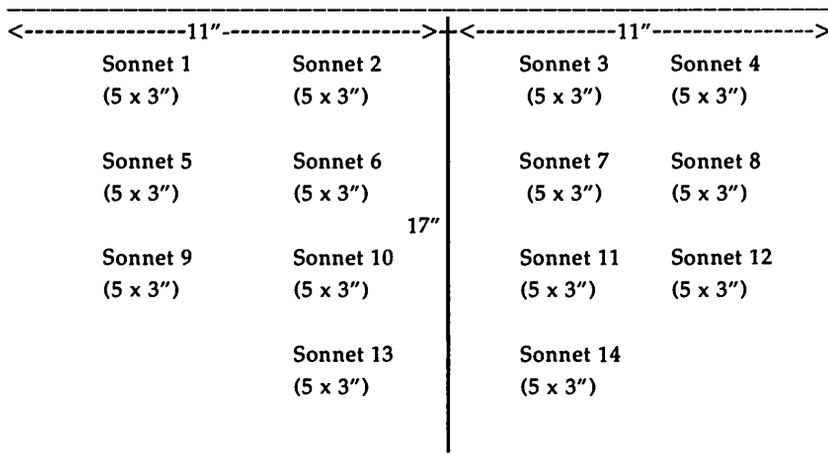
I adopt the term "set" quite deliberately, and in fact rather conventionally, to designate the formal unit that I am suggesting as medial in the poet's design of *sonnets*, *sets*, and *sequence* (or cycle). A set, in the case of the Q cycle, is as I have suggested a composition group of 14 poems that would have been synoptically arranged on one spread in the holograph Folio. The word "set," as editor Stephen Booth notes, occurs in Q at Nos. 15.10 (notably, in the first sonnet of Set II), 16.6, 60.9, and 89.6. Whether Shakespeare himself thought of his subgroups as "sets" is not highly strategic, but certain puns hint that the term may be authorized: e.g., "Sense seldom coming in 'The Long Year [Longer, Languor] Set', / Like stones of worth . . ." (No. 52.6-7); and "Ay me, but yet thou might'st my Set [Q]eate IV bare" (No. 41.9)—the latter a pun that occurs just before Set IV opens. (Perhaps the "Longer Set" means

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Set VIII, with its "extra" line of text in No. 99.) The term "leaf" (cf. "leaf / leave / leaves," frequent in Q, and L. *folium*) may have greater textual authority than "set" as a designation for a composition group, especially since the poet obviously toyed much with this figure. But "leaf" as "page" does not clearly designate a single page, a double page, or a folio-sized sheet of paper—which in the bound holographic booklet would not have been the same as a double-page spread except in the natural spread that occurred halfway through (at Set VI).

A rudimentary paradigm of Set I (Sonnets 1-14) appears in Fig. 2, serving to represent the arrangement of each of the other 10 holographic sets as I reconstruct them. Given the page proportions and size of handwriting that I have assumed, the pattern on each of the 11 spreads would have shown 4 vertical panels and 4 horizontal rows of sonnets, arranged as in the figure.

Fig. 2. Set I as a Paradigm of the Page Arrangements of the Sets  
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Attentive readers will see that the total of margin and division strips add up to about 2" horizontally and 5" vertically. Although this may seem disproportionate because the texts are squeezed more horizontally than vertically, a pasteup using 14 simulated ragged-right, 5" x 3" blocks of text will show that each double-page spread is rather well balanced, particularly because many textual lines are short enough to leave white space to the right, so

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that the spread does not appear crowded in either dimension. For anyone interested in lab-testing my theory, actual-sized 14-line blocks photocopied from the Hand D section of the *More* facsimile will work perfectly for making a set pasteup.

Though the 2 bottom-row sonnets in the set-paradigm in Fig. 2 might be pushed left or right, or might be split or staggered, my best guess is that almost automatically Shakespeare would have chosen the arrangement I propose for its neat terminal symmetry—with the gutter a vertical axis, and each page effectively mirroring the other. It seems likelier to imagine the last 2 poems “mirrored” in the middle, rather than in opposite bottom corners, particularly because the bound “couplet” as well as its conventional indentation—which is indeed a feature of Q’s arrangement of the Sonnets—are thus mimicked in an emphatic, oversized visual analogue. If the 2 holograph pages of each set did mirror each other as the poet penned them, then all the images and conceits in Q that are concerned with “glasses” now seem likely to encode lost significance—*meaning* that the poet conceived of but we have not understood. This seems doubly true because the first such example of mirror imagery that occurs in the Q cycle, “Look in thy glass . . .” (No. 3.1), occurs at the precise point where the top righthand page of Set I begins to “mirror” the left. Other examples of the “glass” conceit—e.g., in Set II (No. 22.1), Set VI (No. 77.1), and Set IX (No. 126.1-2)—tend toward the conclusion that the poet was conscious of the relevance of mirror imagery to his arrangement of materials on the page, and that he hoped to call his first in-group readers’ attention to it, lightening up their reading experiences. Here as in many places elsewhere in Q, I believe, the poet’s content alludes, *sotto voce*, to the formal process of building his original text and of laying the poems out on the page.

Assuming such an arrangement for each set as the set-paradigm in Fig. 2 illustrates, one sees—more importantly—how the poet’s first, private readers, every time they turned his pages, would have appreciated the redundant reiteration of a witty conceit based on the form of the sonnet. Insistent are the visual analogues to 3 quatrains (the 3 rows, each comprising 4 textual units) and a terminal couplet (the bottom group of 2 texts). If one chooses to see them, parallels with octave and sestet are also noticeable—as least as much so as they are in any sonnet text superficially observed, and in fact somewhat more assertively.

A summary at this point finds two main numeric patterns coexisting in Q, and in the holographic First Folio that my hypothesis re-creates, to give Shakespeare’s cycle an innate, intricate formal structure: Most immediately, the perceived arrangement

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of numbers on each double leaf suggests to the reader one kind of visual pun on the sonnet's number system, with emphasis on the form's 14 verses and their quatrain and couplet combinations. Meanwhile, the poet's larger numbers scheme—to the reader, a conceivable unseen construct—emphasizes the sonnet's syllable count, its pictographic shape, and (a bit more conjecturally) the witty reversal of statement that its "couplet" can effect. In the overall Megasonnet scheme, it seems particularly calculated that Shakespeare chose the most *expansive* shape possible—the one with the most "syllabic" utterances allowed by convention, 154, without breaking the boundaries of the form licentiously.

Each basic structural unit or "number" in the cycle, then, concurrently plays 2 conflicting roles in the poet's larger plan: Because each sonnet is analogous to a "line" in its 14-unit set, while the same sonnet is like a "syllable" in the whole 154-unit Megasonnet, an in-group reader senses ironic tension—a formal double entendre, if you will—operating persistently in the cycle.

Following our assumptions, we can see now that Shakespeare's holograph booklet would have required only 6 large folio leaves, stacked and folded, to yield the 24 pages he needed. The first page would probably have been his cover sheet or title page, or perhaps, even in the holograph, the page for the famous, cryptic dedicatory to "Mr. W. H." (The "signature" initials "T. T." on that page in Q are not conclusive evidence that the wily poet did not write that himself, especially in a context where so much else seems intended to confuse or elude the poet's eventual general readers.) Beyond that conjecture, the organization shown in Fig. 3, precisely dictated by the Megasonnet design, would hold.

Fig. 3. The Contents of the Pages of the Ur-Text

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Pages	Set	Sonnet Numbers
1		[title page or cover sheet]
2-3	I.	1-14
4-5	II.	15-28
6-7	III.	29-42
8-9	IV.	43-56
10-11	V.	57-70
12-13	VI.	71-84
14-15	VII.	85-98
16-17	VIII.	99-112
18-19	IX.	113-126

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<u>Pages</u>	<u>Set</u>	<u>Sonnet Numbers</u>
20-21	X.	127-140
22-23	XI.	141-154
24		[back page or blank endsheet]

Perhaps the unused bottom corners of each leaf (into which, in two instances, the extra-long lines at Nos. 28.14 and 140.14 spill) gave the poet a place to pen the Roman numeral set number, or even to inscribe some other notation (such as a humorous or serious “set title,” for example) that was ignored when the cycle was set in print in 1609 in the Quarto, whose format had no gaps. Thus one can imagine the inscription “Set II: The [This?] Inconstancy Set” (see the pun at No. 15.9)—or “Set IV: The Long Year Set” (see No. 52.6)—in its appropriate bottom corner. Similarly, the deprecating pun “The vacant leaves thy mind’s imprint will bear [bare], / End of this book . . .” (No. 77.3-4) may be a joking reference to the two empty bottom corners on the sheet—or, more likely, to the endsheets, page 24 in the Folio and the “vacant” inside back cover that was its righthand companion. For Shakespeare to imagine a bifurcated *tabula rasa* as an ironic, comically denigrating conceit for the twin halves of the auditor’s brain—as the “mind’s imprint”—would not have been beyond him. One’s own relative mental vacuity in the face of such wit as the Sonnets afford helps to illustrate the aptness of the conceit.

## II.

Subject matter in some of the Sonnets, especially toward the first and the last of Q, offers further, internal evidence that Shakespeare (and not I) first conceived and then developed the Megasonnet plan. The correlations between Set I and the “exhortation to marry” poems and between Sets X-XI and the “perverse mistress” numbers are the most obvious instances of what I have in mind. Though my canvass of what I call “prior sightings of the sets” by certain critics remains spotty and is not requisite in my argument, it does add *content* to *form* as aspects of Q that I have tried to take into account to test my theory. However, because introducing thematic matters into the heavily numerological argument here threatens in itself to rouse many pet biases about what the Sonnets mean or do not mean, I proceed with caution, hoping not to lose dissenting readers. My minimal purpose at this stage is to demonstrate that, among some critics who have known nothing of sets or number patterns in Q, there already exists a

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sense that there is unified or distinctive material in groups of poems that correspond to those divisions, the sets, that I have deduced by separate means.

One underlying assumption in parts of the following discussion of form and substantive meaning in the Q texts is a rhetorical commonplace: Beginnings and endings of units of writing (such as paragraphs, essays, sets of poems, sonnets) are apt to call forth something emphatic from the writer or scribe. Without attention to substance or content, the sonnet itself offers formal examples—including the oversized initials (as seen in Q) that traditionally open sonnets, and the couplet rhymes (and frequently observed couplet indentions, as in Q) that round them off.

The most apparent "argument from content" begins with what everyone who studies the Sonnets sees, the change of subject matter in Q that cuts off the last 28 poems from the rest. This separate thematic block, occurring after the odd hiatus of No. 126.13-14 (ending Set IX), is now perceptible as 2 linked, terminal sets of 14 sonnets each—Set X (Nos. 127-140) and Set XI (Nos. 141-154). G. P. V. Akrigg, a biographer of Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton, even finds a thematically consistent unit to occur in Nos. 127-141,<sup>7</sup> a grouping that is closely congruent with Set X. It may also be true that the poet introduced the notably conventional, allusive content of Nos. 153-154, closing Set XI, in order to shift topics and thus generate a sort of "couplet close" for the whole Megasonnet. This terminus (Nos. 153-154) is visually discrete on the Set XI leaf.

A related detail is that No. 126, which we may now see as the last poem in Set IX and thus the last one before the Dark Mistress coda, is unique in Q because of its own odd close. Editors usually take note of the ending of No. 126 by ignoring it, judging the poem "incomplete," and assuming that the empty parentheses in Q that comprise its "couplet" reflect somebody's unauthorized effort to regularize the number of lines in what appears otherwise to be a truncated 12-line poem. (Booth notes that the poem "probably accidentally" mentions a "quietus," and he attributes the parentheses to Q's printer.) But, I contend, the special, terminal position of No. 126 in Set IX that is now detectable argues for the special authorization of its unusual close, particularly because the text itself not only speaks of a quietus but actually puns on the "quietuses two" that may be not only the empty couplet parentheticals we see but also the two holes of empty space at the bottom corners of the double-page leaf. One reading of the punning line 126.12 is, "And her [i.e., Nature's] Quietuses Two rendered he!"—where "rendered" suggests something not only

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"pictured" but "bifurcated," cut in two on the leaf the way the two non-lines are, and the way the two poems (and two blank bottom corners) are separated. The paradoxical irony is clear if complex, since two quietuses that are "not heard" are said to be "drawn"—that is, pictured for the eye to see.

Even at the risk of losing modern readers impatient with such far-fetched puns, this aberrational and strategically placed non-couplet seems worth investigating further for what it suggests about the poet's plan, his governing suppression of design, and the playful tone in which, I argue, his sets were articulated. The poem's two parenthetical non-statements occur just after the line "And her [in context, 'Nature's'] quietus is to render [i.e., torture, as if by 'cutting' or excising, etc.] thee" (No. 126.12), where "Quietus" in Q is italicized. Latent puns proliferate to amplify the wit of the line: "And here [or 'hear,' an ironic word] quietuses two render thee"; "Endure quietuses to render thee"; "And here Quietuses Two rendered [i.e., 'drawn,' represented on the page], hee!"; and so on. Line 126.11 seems similarly to pun ironically on "audit" (*Audite* in Q)—originally something "heard"—and concurrently on "oddity." Thus plays like these are implicit: "Here oddity, though delayed, answered must be"; "Here oddity thought-laden sword [for 'rendering' or cutting?] must be"; and so on. A buried pun on "Herod . . ." presages a lurking play on "sword" (Q . . . *fw'er'd*) and strained wit in "to render [i.e., cut] thee." The concurrent pun "Enter Quietuses two. . .," pointing to the airy couplet, sounds like a stage direction in a morality.

My own deduction, then, is that in the context of No. 126—which ambiguously mentions "she," "fickle whore," "sovereign mistress," and "Nature," and which speaks of the female figure as one who "controls" and "renders"—the 2 empty couplet lines are, first, a fully conscious and calculated part of the poet's wit, and of his overall scheme, and that, second, they may partly be meant as an ironic signal of the "onset" of the 2 ensuing sets of texts that play a couplet-like role in the poet's grand scheme. At any rate, the empty-couplet number, 126, appears in an emphatic position in the set where it occurs, suitably closing off the group. Other analogues, as I have said, may have been in the poet's mind, such as the 2 terminal blank spots at the bottom of each double-page spread; a reader of the holograph might have seen such humor, but no basis remains in Q's arrangement for allowing us to perceive it. The connection of the quietly perverse, "rendering" female of Sonnet 126 to the Dark Mistress of the terminal sets also seems likely to be calculated.

Another aberrational incident somewhat like the "missing" terminus of Set IX occurs—but in a doubly obverse form, because

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it comes *first* and involves *superlineation*—in the opening line of the first text in Set VIII. (In this sense, I think, Nos. 99 and 126 are antiphonal.) Here, in the 15-line Sonnet 99, the potential punning reference to a “forward [fore-word] vile” or “. . . violate” helps assure us that what looks like another mistake is really conscious wit that acknowledges a “numbers” infraction: Without too much of a reach in a punning context, a “forward violate” is a preface that in some sense violates or disrupts the order of things. In a cycle based on an overriding numerological conceit, the poet’s starting out the first poem on the leaf with a gross numerological or formal error and a pun about something “forward” (OED in a bad sense “presumptuous, immodest” 1561) seems likely to be a part of his in-group wit and numbers game.

In Q’s line “The forward violet thus did I chide” (No. 99.1), in fact, lie such numerologic puns as “The ‘forward violate’ [disruptive preface] thus did eye chide” or “. . . thus did I/eye see [= c] hide.” Though the pun “. . . thus did itch [the] hide [cf. vellum]” has its own wit, the joke “The ‘forward violate’ thus did IC hide” is more interesting here for its numerologic content, because “IC” forms a plausible Roman numeral for “99,” the very number of the sonnet, to generate the play “The ‘forward violate’ thus did [No.] 99 hide.” Other incidental puns on “Anne” seem to occur, in the form of “et” = “and” = Anne: e.g., “The forward vile ‘Anne’, th’ huss did I chide,” “. . . did itch hide,” “. . . did [No.] 99 hide,” and so on.<sup>8</sup>

Minimally, I argue, the line pun “The ‘forward violate’ thus did IC [i.e., No. 99] hide” occurs as a part of the poet’s joke about disrupting the numerology of his plan—much in the same way that “numeric” wit about “quietuses two” that are “rendered oddities” merges with the missing-couplet joke in Sonnet 126. Other distractingly concurrent puns, probably authorized in the same spirit as these main ones, enrich the wit of the lines—even as they make my “proof” harder.

To summarize the main point here, one finds internal evidence that each of the last 4 sets, VIII-XI, has some discernible features of demarcation, and also that the 4 sets represent 2 linked groupings: Set VIII, with its quirky supernumerary start, and Set IX, with its numerically deficient terminus, together provide eye-catching opening and closing texts and an imprecise kind of numeric “compensation,” countering a formal excrescence with formal stinginess. Sets X and XI encompass 28 poems with common subject matter. Finally, the 2 terminating poems in Set XI comprise a couplet-like close for the set itself, and for the poet’s large overall design as well.

Traversing the Q cycle to examine the remaining 7 sets, the ones toward the front, for content and other features, one notes that reputable commentators unaware of the embedded Megasonnet scheme have already found various kinds of thematic cohesion within the sets I describe.

This is notably true, first, of the opening poems that seem to encourage procreation and marriage. Though critics sometimes emphasize the thematic unity in Sonnets 1-17 or 1-18, the scholars Kenneth Muir, Hilton Landry, and C. Knox Pooler have all concluded that the first 14 sonnets form a separate and discrete thematic group, with No. 15 beginning something new. Pooler has suggested that Sonnet 15 is the first to treat the theme of immortalizing the poet's friend through art. And Muir similarly finds consistency in the first 17 numbers but notes that "in the last three sonnets of this group there is a change" as the theme of immortality through "the permanence of great poetry" takes over and that of encouragement to marry fades.<sup>9</sup>

Muir also unknowingly describes a terminal feature of Set II in the Megasonnet scheme when he concludes that Sonnets 27-28 "form a single poem"; editor Booth separately notes linkages between these two sonnets.<sup>10</sup> Seeing Nos. 27 and 28 closing Set II on the page in their couplet position helps us understand better the function of this thematic or syntactic bonding. Perhaps examination of the couplet pairs in all the sets may discover other instances of unity tending toward the kind that has already been noticed in the ending pairs in Sets II (Nos. 27-28) and XI (Nos. 153-154). Booth also notes that Nos. 40-42 are linked "by topic."<sup>11</sup> These three texts—including one "couplet" pair—can now be observed closing Set II in the Megasonnet plan.

Since Muir sees Sonnet 43 as introducing a new group (and finds thematic coherence in Sonnets 43-58), and A. L. Rowse, rather similarly, sees significant connections among the Sonnets "from 43 to 55,"<sup>12</sup> both critics come within a poem or two of concluding that Set IV (i.e., Nos. 43-56) demonstrates unity of subject matter. (Though a new start for each set may have been the poet's rule of thumb, serving from his vantage point to add variety of content to the cycle based on "leaf" divisions, it would of course have been quite understandable for Shakespeare to have used early sonnets in some sets to effect thematic transition. Such an approach by the poet would explain why Akrigg is led to link No. 141 with the 14 texts in Set X. Quite reasonably, some adjacent sets might also be expected to show more continuity than disparity, as Sets X and XI do.)

Since critics unaware of my argument about hidden structure and sets in Q have already found emphatic unity in Sonnets 27-28

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and have said that Sonnet 43 introduces a coherent thematic grouping of 14 or so poems, they also seem to have pinpointed—as if by default—a passive or latent association among the texts in Set III (Sonnets 29-42). Their comments invite us to think of Set III as a negative space outlined on either side by the two lighted silhouettes, Sets II and IV, that they have unconsciously already moved toward identifying and describing.

Muir detects another coherent group in Sonnets 71-74, where the poet “anticipates his own death, urging his friend not to grieve. . . .” These, we now see, are the 4 poems that are strung across the top of the spread that comprises Set VI. Booth similarly finds Nos. 71-72 to be topically interrelated.<sup>13</sup> Thus both critics see coherence of subject matter where in fact a new compositional group, Set VI, starts. In shunting aside the poems *between* No. 58 and No. 71, Muir unknowingly makes an approximate gesture toward Set V (actually Nos. 57-70) as still another “passive” group that is effectively linked by default.

A cursory perusal of some critical discussions of thematic clusters in the Sonnets, then, shows that reputable analysts have moved toward detecting a number of the sets I have found and described; such analysis suggests that, once the sets are visually discrete before us in the reconstructed format of the First Folio, we may be able to see in individual sets other emergent elements of unity that the overall profusion of materials in Q has tended until now to obscure. The unusual or emphatic features of several beginning and ending texts in the sets, as I have tried to show, also help draw boundary lines between the 11 formal units that comprise the poet’s plan. Certain sets, too, gain delineated boundaries just by being sandwiched in between others where defining features have been detected. Though not every set shows a clear beginning and ending point, varied accumulated evidence can be epitomized to support the conclusion that the sets not only exist, but also tend to have formal and/or substantive individualities:

- Set I (Nos. 1-14): Shows a thematic focus on “marriage and increase”;
- Set II (Nos. 15-28): Begins with a new theme, “immortality through verse,” and ends with 2 poems that are like one text—and also with an unusually long line (28.14);
- Set III (Nos. 29-42): Gains definition for being sandwiched between the emphatic pair (Nos. 27-28) and the new subject matter at No. 43ff. Nos. 40-42 are topically linked.
- Set IV (Nos. 43-56): Nos. 43-55 show a new thematic emphasis on the poet’s “absence” from the primary auditor;

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- Set V (Nos. 57-70): Interconnectedness of Nos. 71-72 or 71-74 suggests a possible terminus at No. 70;
- Set VI (Nos. 71-84): First 2 or 4 poems are thematically connected;
- Set VII (Nos. 85-98): Closes just before the "forward violate," No. 99;
- Set VIII (Nos. 99-112): opens with the aberrational 15-line "forward";
- Set IX (Nos. 113-126): Ends with a perverse "empty couplet" in a poem that speaks of a female who "renders" the auditor—in various witty ways anticipating the upcoming "couplet" sets;
- Sets X (Nos. 127-140): The first of 2 "couplet" sets about the Perverse Mistress, opening with new subject matter, and ending with an extra-long line (140.14);
- Set XI (Nos. 141-154): Substantively paired with Set X, though Akrigg detects new materials from 142 onward. The set closes with a pair of conventionally allusive texts that forsake Dark Lady material and suggest an ultimate terminal couplet in the cycle.

Though one agrees with Booth that thematic connectedness in the Sonnets offers no absolute approach to "grouping" the texts,<sup>14</sup> measures of cohesion do seem to be detectable in the various sets of the Megasonnet, as I delineate and describe them.

Three or four examples seem instructive to illustrate the many further puns in the Sonnets that may be read as comments on the Megasonnet plan and its execution. First, the rather odd line "To side this title is impannelled" (Sonnet 46.9) can now be seen to have exactly the sense it asserts in Q as one of its playful meanings. Though editor Booth sensibly renders the problematic line contextually as "To 'cide this title is impannellèd," glossing it for discussion, readers with Set IV before their eyes will see also that No. 46 occurs in a top righthand position on the page, and will thus understand why the poet/scribe would think of the text as "set in a panel to [the] side" (OED panel = "slip of parchment" 1440, "distinct portion of some surface, etc., usu. contained in a frame or border" 1489, or "a list . . ." 1575). Shakespeare has reached the edge of his page, and is indeed setting his "title" atop the vertical panel that runs along the righthand edge. The phrase "outward part" and the pun "my art's right [of] th' air inward" in the same title (No. 46.13-14) playfully suggest 1) "marginal segment" and 2) an artful lyric placed to the right of its neighboring "air."

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A similar kind of relevant playful meaning may be heard in the adjacent title, No. 45, where the pun "life/leaf" allows the play "My leaf being made of 4, with 2 alone, / Sinks [cf. 'S. inks'] down to death . . ." (No. 45.7-8). The line may be the comment of a poet writing at the top of his spread, thinking of how he arranges his "leaf" (and concurrently any sonnet text) in groups of 4's and 2's, moving always downward.

As I have suggested, the long lines at No. 28.13-14 and No. 140.13-14—both of which hint that the poet is playfully conscious of running over his space—may also be Shakespeare's comments on his own scribal activity. Minimally the evidence that the lines offer is consistent with the hypothesis that the poet was used to working within constricted margins. Further, both long lines occur in bottom-right and thus terminal positions on the spreads and are modest parts of the poet's apparent tendency to close off his sets with unusual lineation gestures; in these ending spots on the leaves, the lines would have had plenty of space to the right—in itself, perhaps, an incentive to "go wide" licentiously, and thus a stimulus to make the lines comment on doing so.

## III.

If we imagine the poet at work on his holographic text and are sensitive to such lost puns as these few examples illustrate, we will, I think, begin to hear in a new way the plethora of references in Shakespeare's Sonnets to writing, pencils, "antic" pens, ink, blackness and vacancy, quills and feathers, books, papers, leaves, forms, frames and racks and other terms suggesting printing, errors, marks, blots, lines, "returns," "rows"/rose, "rn'wd quiers [cf. quires]" (Q's spelling, 73.4), notes, sides, bindings—and even such puns as "creasures" (suggesting either parchment or the gutter of a book) in "creatures" or "ink erase/inker aye see" in "increase" (see No. 1.1). Indeed, all the details and puns about writing, scribal activity, and printing in Q now tend to come to the fore, so that a reader with the image of the holograph and its scribe in mind finds it hard *not* to see something of a governing theme in the poet's collective use of such recurring conceits, especially as they join with diction about meter (including "time"), feet, muses, songs and hymns, rhyme, tiresome work with an uncertain outcome, "rival" poets, fame and immortality accomplished through writing, and other details suggesting the very activity the poet was engaging in as, playing the scribe, he wrote his poems. From the first line onward—where the "fairest creatures" that the poet hopes will "increase" are in one, primal sense his own poems—the

act of writing, I propose, is very much one of Shakespeare's main themes in the Sonnets.

A further conclusion here is that we may do well to read the Sonnets—more closely than we have, at least—for their comedy, playfulness, cleverness, wit, and gamesmanship. The poems on "Will and his will," I think, are not embarrassing deviants but are rather main-line exemplars of one kind of punning entertainment the poet was about as he carried out his plan.

Rediscovery of the sets and their primacy in Q should indeed have the general effect of encouraging thematic revaluation, not only of the whole cycle but also of each individual set, in light of its newfound divisibility from the rest. Such studies seem likely to lead us in time to new and fuller understandings of Shakespeare's own views on his materials. In the Megasonnet scheme, each sonnet has new neighbors, quite literally up and down, right and left, as it assumes its unique, fixed position in the gridwork of the 11 sets; a poet who seems to be alluding to the process of writing and of creation on the page may well have calculated relationships among the poems that have to do not only with their numeric sequence but also with their clustered positions and acrostic alignments. Surely, then, various lost "syntactic" relationships affect the discrete parts of the poet's total statement in ways yet to be made clear. To a mind as incredibly nimble as Shakespeare's, the starlike linkages of texts and symbiotic warp-and-woof of lines on each spread must surely have been suggestive of subject matter as he successively filled his leaves with sets of interconnected "syllabic" utterances. The 4 emphatic initials that start the last 4 poems in Set I and spell out ". . . AVON" (see No. 11.1-No. 14.1)—these offer a tiny, tantalizing instance of what I mean. Eugene Gant's reference in *Look Homeward, Angel* to the "woven density" of the Sonnets—texts that Gant finally gave up on because they were so hard<sup>15</sup>—is apt not only for its suggestion of puzzling "knottiness" but also for its prescience in sensing a latent warp and woof, one of many conceits that the interlaced lines and rows of the 11 sets now suggest to a reader's eye. Ramsey's "web of connectedness" is another metaphor with much the same drift.

The lost numerological patternings in the Sonnets have, it seems, the near-magical capacity of teaching us how to reconstruct the poet's original text, envision its main details, and begin to read it afresh. Such "increase"—itself a mathematical notion—from the "fairest creatures" of William Shakespeare's 1609 Quarto will, I hope, reassure us that indeed we do have the poet's own order, and will spur us anew to reexamine what is perhaps our most perplexing text, by our most inscrutable poet. Whether or

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not Shakespeare intentionally suppressed much of his creative cleverness by deciding to publish his Sonnets in a quarto format (perhaps trusting his future readers to be clever enough themselves to play the game, read the clues, and restore the text) or whether doing so was merely his pragmatic decision (perhaps to produce a smaller, cheaper volume) or one made for him by others, I believe that it is now possible for us to re-create an artifactual facsimile of his ingenious lost book—a construct that evinces both the beauty and the precise kind of order that mathematics can impose—and to begin to examine its mostly humanistic implications.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>See Hieatt, *Short Time's Endless Monument: The Symbolism of the Numbers in Edmund Spenser's "Epithalamion"* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960; rptd. Port Washington, N. Y.: Kennikat Press, 1972), pp. 3ff. See also my essay "Two Newfound Poems by Edmund Spenser: The Buried Short-Line Runes in *Epithalamion* and *Prothalamion*," *Spenser Studies*, 7 (1987), 199-238. I remain indebted to Professor Martha Battle, formerly of The University of Tennessee at Martin, for pointing out the parallels between Hieatt's discoveries and my own work. An abridged version of this paper was read on February 26, 1993, before a session of the Tennessee Philological Association, meeting at Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City.

<sup>2</sup>Ramsey, *The Fickle Glass: A Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New York: AMS Press, 1979), esp. pp. 6, 8, 12.

<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., the reproduced facsimile of the 1609 Quarto text (Huntington-Bridgewater copy) in Stephen Booth, *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Edited with Analytic Commentary* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 1ff. Booth provides a useful summary of "facts and theories" about the Sonnets in Appendix 1 (pp. 543-49) and is in many other ways helpful.

<sup>4</sup>See, e.g., *Art of the Printed Book: 1455-1955* (New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1974). After trimming, a single page in the KJB was 10 5/8 x 15 3/8 inches (27 x 39 cm.)—a size that would also have served Shakespeare's needs. *Webster's 3rd* defines "folio post" as "a certain size (as 17 x 22 inches) of a sheet of esp. writing or ledger paper." Traditional paper sizes ran as large as 74 x 50 cm. (about 40 x 30 inches).

<sup>5</sup>Marchette Chute, in *Shakespeare of London* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1949), p. 158, helps us envision the likely form of the holographic booklet in her comment about one of the poet's dramatic manuscripts: "Shakespeare's original [play] script . . . seems to have been used [by the company] just as it was, except that the loose sheets were stitched together and enclosed in some kind of wrapper. Any kind of wrapper would do, from a medieval manuscript to an expired law paper, just so that it was capable of standing hard wear." If (as I believe) Shakespeare thought of the Sonnets as his *magnum opus* and best chance for posthumous fame, the holographic Sonnets might have been more finely bound as they circulated among early coterie readers.

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<sup>6</sup>See Sir Edward Maunde Thompson, *Shakespeare's Handwriting* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916; rptd. Folcroft Library Editions, 1970), where the relevant pages occur in facsimile. Thompson, a paleographic expert who examined the "Hand D" addition in Harleian MS. 7368 (British Museum) and compared it with Shakespeare's known signatures, concludes, "Personally we feel confident that in this addition . . . we have indeed the handwriting of WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE" (p. 54). Editor G. B. Harrison, in *Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), p. 1658, says, "The case for Shakespeare's penning the lines in Hand D] has been argued hotly for many years, and though not proved, yet most scholars who have examined the evidence agree on a verdict of 'most probable.'" Paul Ramsey reaches a more skeptical conclusion in his recent investigation into the *More* controversy: "The Literary Evidence for Shakespeare as Hand D . . .," *The Upstart Crow*, 11 (1991), 131-55.

<sup>7</sup>*Shakespeare and the Earl of Southampton* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), p. 104.

<sup>8</sup>Booth's note to Sonnet 145.13 ("I hate, from hate away she threw"), commenting on earlier speculation by Andrew Gurr about a pun on the poet's wife's name, observes that "And" may pun on "Anne" in 145.14. Such puns, I think, are literally rampant in the Sonnets: e.g., "For shame deny that thou bear'st love to Annie!" (No. 10.1); "Anne, what is't but mine own [my nun, my noun] when I praise thee?" (No. 39.4); and "Anne, aging love, loves not to have years told" [cf. ". . . 'ear' stole," a latent pudendal joke] (No. 138.12). Thousands of such familial puns lie in wait in the lines of Q, collectively affording an overdue rebuttal to anti-Stratfordian claims.

<sup>9</sup>See Muir, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), p. 45, and Landry, *Interpretations in Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Westport, Conn., 1964, rptd. 1976), p. 144. Landry attributes to C. Knox Pooler's Arden edition the original idea that Sonnet 15 is the first in the cycle to mention immortalizing the friend.

<sup>10</sup>Muir, p. 45; Booth, p. 546.

<sup>11</sup>Booth, p. 546.

<sup>12</sup>Muir, p. 62; Rowse, p. 167. If Shakespeare meant to call Set IV the "Long Year [Longer? Languor?] Set" (see No. 52.6), that title neither confirms nor contradicts Rowse's guess that these poems were written when the poet was touring or otherwise away from London.

<sup>13</sup>Muir, p. 68; Booth, p. 546.

<sup>14</sup>See Booth, Introduction (esp. p. xi) and p. 546.

<sup>15</sup>See Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel: A Story of the Buried Life* (New York: Collier Books/Macmillan, 1957), p. 278. I am indebted to my colleague Professor Anna Clark for pointing out this phrase to me.

**Montague or Capulet?**  
***Romeo and Juliet*: III. i. 184**  
**by Robert W. Witt**

In Act three of *Romeo and Juliet*, after Mercutio and Tybalt have been slain, Benvolio explains to the Prince that Tybalt started the fight and killed Mercutio; Romeo, then, to avenge Mercutio slew Tybalt. Lady Capulet immediately calls for Romeo's death to avenge Tybalt, but the Prince questions who should pay the price of Mercutio's blood. Montague protests,

Not Romeo, Prince, he was Mercutio's friend;  
 His fault concludes but what the law should end,  
 The life of Tybalt.<sup>1</sup>

Not only has Tybalt killed Mercutio, he also started the fight—an act which, according to the Prince's earlier edict, would require his death. Montague's defense of Romeo is thus reasonable and fair minded. In most modern editions, at least, it is Montague who speaks in defense of Romeo. In the second quarto, by general agreement the version closest to what Shakespeare wrote, it is Capulet who thus defends Romeo. The speech prefix was changed in the fourth quarto, and most editors since have kept the change. It seems unlikely, of course, that Capulet would speak in Romeo's defense after Romeo has killed one of his kinsmen and especially so with Lady Capulet calling for Romeo's blood. The fourth quarto, however, has no manuscript authority, and there is reason to believe that Shakespeare intended for Capulet to speak in Romeo's defense. By showing that Capulet is favorably inclined toward Romeo, even at that crucial point, Shakespeare focuses more clearly on the haste of the lovers as the cause of the tragedy.

Although many commentators see *Romeo and Juliet* as purely a tragedy of fate and some consider it untragic, many see it as a tragedy of character, not different in kind from the later tragedies only different in degree. The protagonists themselves bring on their destruction by making a tragic error or mistake. In this view the error is the haste or impetuosity of the lovers. Brents Stirling, for instance, views the play this way: "The unguarded haste of youth as a tragic motive of both Romeo and Juliet appears repeatedly in their lines and in those of characters who describe them." Stirling presents a careful analysis of the haste theme as expressed through "character, choric commentary, and action."<sup>2</sup> To say that haste is the tragic motive, though, is not to say that the lovers are

marred by a "tragic flaw." As Irving Ribner says, and as we all know, "impetuosity, haste, carelessness . . . are the normal attributes of youth." Nonetheless, haste can be seen as a mistake though not necessarily the result of a flawed character. Ribner also describes the lovers as uncertain and their plans as foolish.<sup>3</sup>

Franklin Dickey also regards the play as a tragedy of character. For him it is primarily Romeo's impetuous nature that leads to tragedy. "Fortune and hatred," according to Dickey, "threaten to turn the lovers' bliss to ashes, but the immediate cause of their unhappy deaths is Romeo's headlong fury and blind despair." Dickey takes Romeo's defiance of fate (II. vi. 3-8) as "one more indication that Romeo's impetuous nature will result in catastrophe." Furthermore, Shakespeare emphasizes that it is Romeo's "disregard of the Friar's reasonable counsel rather than the turning of fortune's wheel" which brings the lovers to a tragic end. Even at the end of the play, while the Friar is "still working to save Romeo from himself, . . . Romeo's haste prevents his foresight."<sup>4</sup> Even a critic who does not view the play as "tragedy fully achieved," admits that haste can be seen as the cause of the lovers' destruction: "The immoderateness and rashness the Friar rebukes seem . . . to lead . . . to the lovers' destruction."<sup>5</sup>

Haste, though, can be the fatal error only if Shakespeare has shown that Capulet and Montague could have been reconciled and that Capulet would have been willing to accept Romeo as his son-in-law. And indeed the play contains a great deal of evidence to suggest that such was possible. Many commentators have observed that both Capulet and Montague seem weary of the feud and would, perhaps, welcome some excuse for ending it. Shakespeare, of course, has made changes in his source to make this idea evident. Harley Granville-Barker goes so far as to say that Capulet and Montague would most likely be thankful to wake one morning and learn that Romeo and Juliet are married.<sup>6</sup> Brooke offers no suggestion of this idea in the poem. David Bergeron has shown that the physical maladies referred to in the play collectively "add to the tragic tone and epitomize a world infected and in need of healing."<sup>7</sup> We might even say a world ready to be healed. Romeo and Juliet's marriage, rather than their deaths, quite possibly could have healed that world had they not acted in such haste. Friar Lawrence certainly thinks of that as a good possibility.

Capulet seems inclined to be fair minded about Romeo. He not only restrains Tybalt at the ball, but he also speaks in praise of Romeo:

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'A bears him like a portly gentleman;  
 And to say truth, Verona brags of him  
 To be a virtuous and well-govern'd youth.  
 I would not for the wealth of all this town  
 Here in my house do him disparagement.

(I. v. 66-70)

Indeed he might well entertain the idea of accepting Romeo as son-in-law if he learned that Juliet is in love with him. Capulet, at first, tells Paris that he will consent to his marriage with Juliet if Juliet agrees (I. ii. 16-19). In other words, he seems willing enough at this point to allow Juliet to choose her husband. He, furthermore, nowhere in the play condemns Romeo nor in any way speaks disparagingly of him, not even when he refers to Tybalt's death. Capulet also is the first to speak and offer his hand in reconciliation at the tomb after the Friar has told of Romeo and Juliet's marriage.

If, then, Capulet is fair minded about Romeo in other parts of the play, it is conceivable, at least, that he would be fair minded after Tybalt's death. And if he is willing to be fair minded at that point, there is little doubt that he could have been reconciled with Montague and would have accepted Romeo as Juliet's husband. This, of course, makes the haste of the lovers tragic—their deaths so easily could have been avoided. Many commentators see the haste as the tragic error, and thus it is possible that Shakespeare intended to suggest the idea, especially since he has made changes in his source which clearly imply that Montague and Capulet, particularly Capulet, are weary of the feud and would gladly end it if there were some reasonable excuse for doing so. It follows then that Shakespeare well may have intended to make the idea very clear by showing that Capulet is willing to defend Romeo even after Romeo has killed Tybalt. Most editors, of course, use the second quarto as their basic text. They should allow the speech prefix at III. i. 184 to stand as it is.

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<sup>1</sup>III. i. 184-86. All quotations are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

<sup>2</sup>*Unity in Shakespearean Tragedy* (1956; rptd. New York: Gordian Press, 1966), pp. 10-25.

<sup>3</sup>*Patterns in Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Methen, 1960), pp. 28, 30.

<sup>4</sup>*Not Wisely But Too Well: Shakespeare's Love Tragedies* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1966), pp. 102, 109, 111-12.

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<sup>5</sup>Clifford Leech, "The Moral Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet," *English Renaissance Drama*, eds. Standish Henning, Robert Kimbrough, and Richard Knowles (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 71-73.

<sup>6</sup>*Prefaces to Shakespeare* (1946; rptd. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), IV, p. 41.

<sup>7</sup>"Sickness in Romeo and Juliet," *College Language Association Journal*, 20 (1977), p. 358.

## William Kemp as "Upstart Crow" by Winifred L. Frazer

I suggest that Robert Greene's "upstart Crow" beautified with the playwright's feathers (*Groats-worth of Wit*, 1592) was William Kemp, who after Richard Tarlton's death in 1588, was the most self-aggrandizing clown on the British stage. A ballad assigned to the earlier clown, "The Crow Sits Upon the Wall," with its chorus of "Please one and please all," no doubt resulted in some crow-like pantomime and jiggling in honor of and also, as some verses show, in derogation of the ladies.

As a playwright Greene would logically have been angered by this kind of clown, who danced and shouted and shook the stage and ad-libbed lines of his own and was a "Johannes factotum" in general, encroaching on the playwright's artistry. Although by the time Kemp got the entire nation's attention by doing a morris dance from London to Dulwich and writing the account in *Nine Daies Wonder* (1600) Greene was long dead, the playwright would probably have felt doubly justified in his death-bed epithets for such a publicity-seeking actor. He calls the type "apes," "puppets," "cleaving burrs," "antics garnished in our colors," "rude grooms," "peasants," and "painted monsters," the worst of whom has a "tiger's heart" and is so conceited he thinks he is the only "shake-scene" in the country, and is an "upstart Crow."

This unflattering view of actors is illustrated in the lengthy story related in *Groats-worth*. Roberto is a poor playwright, persuaded into the profession by an unscrupulous actor, who thereafter deserts the impoverished playwright. In the famous epilogue containing advice for his playwrighting friends (whether modified by Henry Chettle or not), which appropriately corresponds to the story of the dying Roberto, the playwrights are called "gentlemen" of "rare wits" and "with lives like lighted tapers."

There is no crossing of the line between actors and playwrights: the cawing crow is condemned; the playwright is praised. The "crow" could not be *playwright* Shakespeare and according to available evidence, "gentle" and "honey-tongued." Shakespeare could not have been that kind of actor. The name "Shakespeare" or "Shake-speare" never appeared in print as that of a playwright until six years later, when in 1598 Francis Meres in *Paladis Tamia* fortuitously listed the names of an even dozen plays—six comedies and six tragedies—as by William Shakespeare. The plays of

Shakespeare previous to that date had appeared anonymously. (Even as the dedicator of *Venus and Adonis*, 1593, and *The Rape of Lucrece* 1594, the name first appeared one or two years after *Groats-worth*.) Contemporary readers who perused the short passage at the end of Greene's tale of the unfortunate playwright, Roberto, presumably could not have associated the name of Shakespeare with a cawing crow or a stage-shaker or an ape of an actor or a plagiarist of Greene's lines or in any other connection.

On the other hand, complaints about actors like Kemp may have been commonplace. Hamlet (III. ii) complains about the "clowns" who speak "more than is set down for them" and who "set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh," even while "some necessary question of the play be then to be considered." Using somewhat less derogatory epithets than Greene, Hamlet nevertheless, sees such clowning as "villainous" and showing "a most pitiful ambition in the Fool that uses it." Shakespeare would seem to agree with Greene that the disruptive actor who believed his own bombastic blank verse was superior to the playwright's, was a self-deluded fool.

In a recent article Max W. Thomas, writing of Kemp's "deorgatory jests," and "exaggerated gestures," as well as his "improvising beyond the role assigned him," and his perhaps "upstaging his fellow actors," points out that he was replaced in the Lord Chamberlain's Company in 1599 by Robert Armin, "who emphasized verbal and conceptual dexterity rather than Kemp's physical knavishness."<sup>1</sup> Far from *being* the "upstart Crow," Shakespeare, we assume, like Greene, *condemned* such a performer and might have played a part in having him replaced.

In the broadside ballad of 1592, "A Pretty New Ballad entitled The Crow Sits Upon the Wall," signed "RT," Richard Tarlton, according to Joseph Lilly in *Black-Letter Ballads and Broad-sides* (London 1867), the refrain urges men to please all women no matter what they ask: "Please one and please all. / Be they great, be they small, / Be they little, be they lowe, / So pypeth the crowe, / Sitting upon a wall,—/ Please one and please all." In a twentieth century Johnson facsimile reprint, the ballad is combined with "Tarlton's Jest" and Kemp's "Nine Daies Wonder," indicating an association of the ballad with Tarlton and Kemp, and making it seem logical that if Tarlton did some crow-like pantomiming in connection with the ballad, Kemp might well be the "upstart" crow who succeeded him. In the epilogue to *Nine Daies Wonder*, Kemp addresses the "witles beetleheads," the "Ballad-makers and their coherents," as "notable Shakerags." If Kemp's vitriol regarding writers in print is typical of his on-stage performance,

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Greene seems justified in designating Kemp a "shake-scene," as well as an "ape," "puppet," and "crow."

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup>*Kemps Nine Daies Wonder: Dancing Carnival into Market,* *PMLA*, 107 (1992), p. 511. See also Winifred Frazer's "A Renaissance Scene-Stealer," her response to Thomas in *PMLA*, 108 (1993), p. 335.

## The "Upstart Crow" Reclaimed: Was it Kemp, Wilson, Alleyn, or Shakespeare?

By Robert F. Fleissner

In recent years the issue of whether the allusion in Robert Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit* (though some think it was Chettle's) to the "upstart Crow" as duly "beautified with our feathers" refers in fact to the newcomer from Stratford has been once again in the public eye. The most publicized short comment has probably been Winifred Frazer's published correspondence,<sup>1</sup> in response to Max W. Thomas' recent article on Will Kemp,<sup>2</sup> in which she opted for Kemp as the true bird; lengthy responses to her (including, it so happens, one of my own) did occasion a rejoinder from her then, but the editorial staff decided not to publish these letters apparently owing to what they designated "space limitations."<sup>3</sup> Then Frazer had an article on the subject almost the same time Thomas' article appeared<sup>4</sup> (also referring to him). Her note to *The Upstart Crow* was her last article before she died.<sup>5</sup>

Her main contention was that Kemp was the one who represented "the object of Robert Greene's scorn," her chief piece of evidence being a broadside ballad published the same year as the *Groatsworth* (1592), "The Crow Sits Upon the Wall," which constituted one of Richard Tarlton's "jigs," her point being that when Tarlton died in 1588 the alternate clownish figure who took his place, Will Kemp, constituted in effect the true "upstart" in question. If so, the familiar allusion to "an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers hart wrapt in a players hyde*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you," followed by reference to "an absolute *Iohannes factotum*" and "the onely Shake-scene in a countrey," would appear to be rather to the innovative Kemp than to Shakespeare. She provided then as supportive evidence the provocative clue that the puritanical Malvolio alludes to the "Crow" ballad in *Twelfth Night*, III. iv, almost as if Shakespeare himself were to endorse the identification with someone else. The key phrase the steward uses, "Please one, and please all," also appears in the Tarlton ballad shortly before the phrase "So pypeth the crow. . . ." The question remains, nonetheless, whether such an apothegm would not easily have been a commonplace already at that time, as it clearly is today. Further, it is not totally out of the question whether Malvolio's making the allusion would corroborate an inferential reference to Shakespeare rather than Kemp insofar as the puritan steward might indirectly, or ironically, reflect back on

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Shakespeare's father having been likewise puritanical, the *-volio* in the name plausibly connoting a voluntaristic meaning also in the playwright's own Christian name (Will-).<sup>6</sup>

All this information is arresting enough, surely, and her case grows on the reader if he or she reads Frazer's reviews of her two new books relating to her subject:<sup>7</sup> Carroll's edition of the *Groatsworth* (1994)<sup>8</sup> and Hoster's earlier, shorter monograph entitled *Tiger's Heart* (1993).<sup>9</sup> In these commentaries she summarizes beliefs concerning how the "upstart Crow" reference was received over the years (notably discerned in Carroll's book), ones which largely came to a climax with his recollection of J. Dover Wilson's familiar charge in 1951 that it meant Shakespeare had indulged in some literary pilfering from Greene. Her main critical comment was that "one cannot help wondering if the name 'Shakespeare,' never having appeared in print by 1592, is surely the subject of the pun 'Shake-scene,'" particularly because the accompanying *Tygers hart* allusion was first registered in print anonymously only three years later (finally printed in *3 Henry VI* in the First Folio).

She then cited Carroll's three references to "possible scene-shakers": Marlowe, Wilson, and Kemp. Actually the candidacy of Kemp was first seriously brought to the fore by W. H. Chapman in his *William Shakespeare* (1912), as she asserted, though he also had allowed for the possibility of a reference to Robert Wilson. Following her review of Carroll, she noted how Hoster found that yet another candidate is the famous actor Edward Alleyn. In this context, the term "Shake-scene" would allude to "an actor who shakes the stage—perhaps the buskin-shod hero striding across the boards"—notable even in the fact that "Alleyn's heavy-footed style had once caused a stage to crack"! Such a physical interpretation differs from the older position that the shaker of a scene was rather the playwright whose sudden creativity was such that it was enough alone to bring the house down, namely the Stratfordian himself, but then that *entrepreneur* was also an actor, presumably in his own plays, among others, whereby a double meaning could have been intended with reference to him as well. Lastly Frazer's article submitted to *The Upstart Crow* deserves passing attention, though it offers nothing especially new this time.

True, at first glance the evidence against "Shake-scene" as an allusion to the name of Shakespeare does appear to build up. Frazer noted that similar verbal associations with the idea of shaking had appeared in *Arden of Faversham* (as with the name of Shakebag there), *King John* (with the phrase "shake the bags"), and, most curiously she thinks, in Kemp's *Nine Daies Wonder* (with the reference to "Shakerags"). As for the *Tygers hart* reference, it

could allude to Alleyn's possibly having performed in *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York* and thus having recited the phrase then. The point is that if the allusion were to Shakespeare's having written the play, it would have fallen largely on deaf ears (or blind eyes), for *3 Henry VI* with its use of the reference appeared so much later. Speculation is next provided as to why Greene (or Chettle?) would have wanted to stigmatize Alleyn in this way. So Frazer summed up Hoster's work with this challenging rebuke of the orthodox position: "Whether Hoster has discovered the object of Greene's ire in *Groatsworth* may be uncertain, but one admires his questioning the orthodox view of Shakespeare as the 'upstart Crow.'" How so? Is a would-be revolutionary, in such a speculative respect, always so admirable?

Frazer did reluctantly concede that the popular view that the Crow and "Shake-scene" allusions refer instead to the Stratford newcomer may be too established "to be popularly dislodged"; anyway, she deserves a certain credit for at least opening the door to other options, however dubious, and mainly to her own favorite, Will Kemp. Yet what then of the arguments still favoring Shakespeare? Did she come to terms with them sufficiently? Let us examine this aspect in more detail now.

She certainly did not deal with a leading one, namely the fact that the "upstart Crow" is specifically described as "beautified" with others' feathers (often taken as a charge of plagiarism, though it could allude at the same time to Shakespeare's acting skills in reciting lines from other dramatists). The key issue here is that a major Shakespearean topical reference, one in *Hamlet*, is customarily found as alluding to this allegation: namely, "'beautified' is a vile phrase" (II. ii. 111).<sup>10</sup> Evidently, then, the tragedian took this playful castigation by the old counsellor Polonius seriously enough by turning it into an oblique reference to his own feelings about having been criticized in the *Groatsworth*. (He would scarcely be alluding to the phrase so strongly, as "vile," if it referred topically only to Kemp or Alleyn.) As such, the term *beautified* itself is hardly a "phrase," so that fact, let us say, provides indirectly further evidence that he had an earlier *context* (not merely a word in itself) in mind as well. The notion that he could have been thus standing up for Kemp as a close associate of his seems remote, for we have no other evidence elsewhere to point to such stalwart allegiance.

Another verbal conundrum worth even stricter attention than is the "Shake-scene" / "Shakerags" connection, the latter term being a quizzical reference in Kemp's *Nine Daies Wonder* about his jiggling that has enlisted different readers' reactions. For instance,

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one view has it that the "rags" allusion was to his tattered garments resulting somehow from his nine-day sprint, yet such a presumed tie-in would appear rather to be stretching more than just the clothes. The capitalization of the key term "Shakerags" preceded by "My notable" would appear instead to be an endearing word referring to a close associate, in this case probably to the Stratford genius because of two distinct factors: the allusion to the previous wordplay upon the surname in "Shake-scene" and another to further name-play with the character Shakebag in *Arden of Faversham*, generally considered the best of the Shakespeare Apocrypha.

The point here is that Kemp's own cognizance of the *Arden* association could have meant that he himself played the other Will in the Faversham play, acted the part in his earlier career, thus amounting to the so-called "Black Will" closely linked with George Shakebag (who might well have been enacted by Shakespeare, presumably born on St. George's Day). If so, that would correlate with the "Crow" allusion in the *Groatsworth* even in terms of wordplay on skin color (*Black / Crow*). Admittedly a problem does exist in that whereas *Arden of Faversham* has been closely linked with the Queen's Men, Kemp is not known for having had any specific connection with these players. This difficulty, however, can be resolved in that even as Kemp toured the provinces with Strange's Men under Alleyn, so it has been now poignantly suggested that the Queen's Men were an offshoot of Pembroke's, who were themselves an offshoot of Strange's.<sup>11</sup> Finally, Shakespeare himself was linked with the Queen's Men at first, as is now generally conceded, and for that matter so was Robert Greene himself. That correlation led an early commentator in the present century, Thomas H. McNeal, to provide a pertinent gloss on the "upstart Crow" passage: "Greene's banished heroines masquerading in men's clothes, his villain-heroes, his faithful clowns, his charming outdoor scenes—all this paraphernalia of romantic comedy Shakspeare went on borrowing as though Greene had not died with 'Stop thief!' on his lips."<sup>12</sup> Consider, for example, his later use of Greene's *Pandosto* in *The Winter's Tale*.

In any event, whether or not Kemp was alluding indirectly to Shakespeare in the role of Shakebag with his "Shakerags" reference—a distinct possibility, at least, because of the reprinting of the play the previous year, in 1599—it is clear enough that he had the master dramatist somehow in mind then in his work about his nine-day sprint, if only because of the concurrent reference there to a certain "Macdobeth," so obviously a variant of "Macbeth."<sup>13</sup>

So we might consider once again some of the prime arguments favoring Shakespeare's candidacy for the "Crow" label and see if

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they have truly been undercut by the new evidence produced by Frazer. First, the mere fact that Shakespeare's name had not appeared in print by 1592 is hardly cogent negative evidence when his name was most probably so well known on the boards of the stage. Second, it might be worth noting that some readers find the ornithological allusion flippant to begin with and hence better underplayed, though presumably the editor of *The Upstart Crow*, for one, would be rather inclined to disagree. The main factor indubitably is how Shakespeare appeared suddenly in London as a genius out of nowhere, although one still reliant upon the writings of others for the bulk at least of his raw material, for he had to depend on sources a great deal. Whereas mainstays like Marlowe and Jonson had standard university training, this Stratfordian would seem not to have had much or any and for that reason could be easily re-christened an "upstart."

One other piece of new evidence in favor of Shakespeare as the bona-fide "upstart Crow" can be adduced, though admittedly it is so self-evident that someone most likely could have come upon it before: Greene happened to compose something else that also has a well-known "upstart" allusion in fact in its very title, namely *A Quip for an Upstart Courtier* (once again appearing in 1592). In this work he accosted Gabriel Harvey, who, though not a playwright on his own, did collaborate with one (Thomas Nashe) and certainly had thereby a more "literary" reputation than did Kemp (the latter's little *Nine Daies Wonder* notwithstanding). This association provides at least a sort of precedent germane to the proper applicability of such a label as "upstart" in the *Groatsworth* context.

Whether for sentimental reasons or not, most readers' predictions, as Frazer has had to admit, are to retain the "upstart" tag for England's leading dramatist, whereby Shakespeare can indeed now be seen as also being more of an upstart than has hitherto been seriously entertained. And, after all, he is still generally considered a romantic, even as part of the talent of Romantics has universally been taken to be their ability to become individualistic geniuses. Hence, though it seems ungracious to say that the leading dramatist in world literature was somehow a purveyor of other men's goods, he can be allowed to have indulged in at least a considerable amount of early *accommodation*, as it were, transforming what he thereby "inherited." His relative lack of background certainly prevented him from being smug and most probably led to his being more communicative with the common man than other playwrights were. Frazer's argument that Shakespeare was not known as a playwright by the masses at the time of the

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*Groatsworth* (1592), so that the “Shake-scene” allusion, if to him, would have been lost on most readers, ignores the distinctive possibility that the reference was intended as an elitist one to begin with (or was meant to be understandable mainly to an “in-house” readership); it also avoids the probability that even though the “tiger’s heart” allusion was *printed* much later, it could easily have been more popularly known just the same; further, and most intriguingly, in my estimation, it ignores notably Shakespeare’s plausible involvement in *Arden of Feversham* the same year—perhaps as a fellow actor-playright, if this was indeed originally an “actors’ showpiece.”<sup>14</sup>

Finally, this summary was put together to liquidate the “iffy” views of Frazer and Hoster, but not in every respect—for other crows could easily have flown about too, in their own way—though some severe qualification is still requisite. With luck, the right cawing crow can now be properly reclaimed and not declawed in the process.<sup>15</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Editor, *PMLA*, 108 (1993), p. 335.

<sup>2</sup>“*Kemps Nine Daies Wonder: Dancing Carnival into Market*,” *PMLA*, 107 (1992), 511-23.

<sup>3</sup>It was gratifying, nonetheless, to receive a personal copy of her rebuttal from the MLA offices, even though, in point of fact, Frazer did not come to terms with any of my points but simply added more material of her own in support of her thesis and without mentioning counter-arguments.

<sup>4</sup>“William Kemp, Shakespearean Clown,” *Shakespeare Newsletter*, 43(1993), p. 10.

<sup>5</sup>The note is included with my rebuttal.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Lat. *malum-volo* (“I desire or will evil”). This association is corroborated through Malvolio’s own wordplay on the letters in his name apropos of “M. O. A. I” (II. v. 103-127) as well as in his vulgar comment on other lettering: “These be her very C’s, her U’s, and [=N] her T’s; and thus makes she her great P’s” (II. v. 80-82).

<sup>7</sup>“Two Studies of Greene’s *Groatsworth*,” *Shakespeare Newsletter*, 43 (1994), pp. 48, 56.

<sup>8</sup>D. Allen Carroll, ed., *Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit: Bought with a Million of Repentance* (1592); attributed to Henry Chettle and Robert Greene (Binghampton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1994), p. 12.

<sup>9</sup>Jay Hoster, *Tiger’s Heart: What Really Happened in the Groat’s-worth of Wit Controversy of 1592* (Columbus: Ravine, 1993).

<sup>10</sup>Alfred Harbage, gen. ed., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, rev. ed. (New York: Viking, 1977). All Shakespearean quotations are taken from this Pelican ed.

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<sup>11</sup>See David George, "Shakespeare and Pembroke's Men," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 32 (1981), 305-23. In several recent articles on this play I have reverted to the original, historical form and spelling because of possible hidden wordplay therein, notably in my "M. Arden of Feversham as a Mystery Play," *Shakespeare and History*, eds. Holger Klein and Rowland Wymer, *The Shakespeare Yearbook*, 6 (1996), 383-94, and "On Retaining M. Arden of Feversham: The Question of Titular Resonance," *Analytical and Enumerative Bibliography*, NS 6 (1992), 208-15.

<sup>12</sup>"Studies in the Greene-Shakespeare Relationship, Part I," *Shakespeare Association Bulletin*, 15 (1940), 210-18.

<sup>13</sup>See G. B. Harrison, ed., *Kemps Nine Daies Wonder* (New York: Dutton, 1923), pp. 30-31. Cf. "do Macbeth" anagrammatically.

<sup>14</sup>In correspondence with me, a leading *Arden* specialist, MacDonald P. Jackson, has corroborated this distinct possibility. See also Keith Sturgess' edition in his *Three Elizabethan Domestic Tragedies*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 25 ("This is, in fact, very much an actor's play").

<sup>15</sup>Having shared Frazer's arguments with a Greene specialist, James Seay Dean, I can report that he agrees with the position in this paper that Frazer's views represent circumstantial or inconclusive evidence. In correspondence with me (27 July 1995), he specifically cites several examples such as the following: "From WF's *PMLA* letter (1993), Kemp 'may have been the object,' Shakespeare 'would seem to have agreed with Greene' about disruptive actors, and 'if Tarlton, who died in 1588, engaged in crowlike pantomime . . . Kemp . . . would be Greene's 'upstart crow,'" and 'if Kemp's vitriol in regard to writers is typical of his onstage performance, he seems a likely target of Greene's insults.' There is much speculation here" (quoted with permission). He finds the same in Frazer's second *PMLA* letter (not printed), as in her *SNL* piece. Liking her reviews rather better, he finds that their real value, though, is in showing "just how dicey the 'evidence' for a revisionist view really is." For further support of our position, see David Chandler, "'Upstart Crow': Provenance and Meaning," *Notes and Queries*, 240 (1995), 291-94.

## "For There Is An Upstart Crow"

### by D. Allen Carroll

Yes trust them not: for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes fac totum*, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a country.

In the whole course of my twenty years' work on an edition of *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit*, I never found serious cause to doubt that the "upstart Crow" is William Shakespeare.<sup>1</sup> I did question whether Robert Greene wrote the pamphlet and thus, presumably, the attack—and concluded that Henry Chettle must have had the major hand in it, though the sentiments expressed were almost certainly those Chettle knew could be taken as Greene's. And I did question whether the actor (Crow) is attacked either for undeserved pride (lines bringing him fame and wealth having been written by someone else and for turning his own hand to writing) or else for pilferage (passing off as his own what had been written by others)—and concluded that the charge was pride even if there did hover over the passage, blurring its focus, almost certainly unintended, enough of the second of the two crows in the fabular tradition, the one charged with pilferage, forever to shadow the attack with ambiguity. But nothing in the text or in the four hundred years of comment on it led me to question the near-universal assumption that this Crow is Shakespeare.

It was thus without comment, simply for the record; that I included the nominations by W. H. Chapman (1912: Will Kemp or Robert Wilson), C. E. Sanders (1928: Christopher Marlowe), and Winifred Frazer (letter in *PMLA*, 1993: Kemp), relegating them quietly to a footnote (p. 131). Now, belatedly and with regret for what may appear to have been an oversight (Professor Frazer being diseased), I offer some reasons why, in my judgment, Kemp is not the Crow. There is no evidence that Kemp attempted to compose serious verse, which is the significant point of the attack; and it is highly unlikely that he, a comic, would have rendered blank verse in performance, the medium of serious roles, even extemporally, except derisively and incidentally. Kemp thus represented no real professional threat to Greene's friends. Further, if in fact he did pantomime the crow, following Tarleton or what ever, as Frazer suggests, there would be no satiric point to labeling him a "crow." The bite, the vicious innuendo, would be totally

lost—Kemp was born and bred to the role. We are forced, moreover, to believe that Chettle did not know Kemp (“[w]ith neither of them that take offense was I acquainted” [preface, *Kind-Heart’s Dream*]), which, while possible, is highly unlikely, and that the compliment, the handsome praise Chettle offers in apology, would have been recognized as describing Kemp: “my selfe have seene his demeanor no lesse civill than he exelent in the qualitie he professes: Besides, divers of worship have reported, his uprightnes of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writting, that aprooves his Art.”

The clinching evidence for Shakespeare *in the text*, and generally recognized as such, is the epithet “Shake-scene” (capitalized in the quartos): a distortion calculated to suggest the name of the actor-playwright. Earlier, “thou famous gracer” is designed to suggest *Christopher Marlowe*, the first playwright addressed: *gracer* for *Chris’er* (or *grace* for *Chris*). And “S. George” (in distinct font in sequent quartos) is designed to suggest *George Peele*, the second playwright. Specialists of long experience know the value of such codes. Frazer, an Americanist by trade, came to the field late, I am told, in consequence of a a fascination with and subsequent commitment to the anti-Stratfordian cause. The best gloss on “Shake-scene” remains Ben Jonson’s dedicatory wish in the First Folio that he could call forth the “thund’ring” tragic dramatists (he did not mean actors) of old “to heare thy Buskin tread, / And shake a Stage.” No other gloss is required.

Much more interesting than Frazer’s case, though also wrong, I think, is the book-length argument for Edward Alleyn recently made by Jay Hoster in *Tiger’s Heart: What Really Happened in the “Groat’s-worth of Wit” Controversy of 1592*.<sup>2</sup> Hoster’s grand dismissal of centuries of opinion by the best in our business has about it the charm of the audacious. But what is truly refreshing about his book is the theatrical scene with which he chooses to draw comparisons—Hollywood. The “Tygers hart” line was intended as a jibe against the actor who rendered the line, he thinks, not necessarily its composer. From the 1986 Academy Awards presentation Hoster quotes the expressed gratitude of an Oscar winner for Best Original Screenplay: “As for the vision of the Academy, all I can do is repeat the words of Humphrey Bogart, ‘Here’s looking at you, kid.’” Alleyn, according to Hoster, would have played the role of York, who spoke the line. And Hoster informs the whole book with the record of disrespect by studio officials and film actors for the lines written by the greats, by Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and so on, which they willfully recast, and with the writers’ sense that by writing for films they were prostituting

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their talents. He quotes Fitzgerald to screenwriter Nunnally Johnson: "Listen, Nunnally, get out of Hollywood. It will ruin you. You have a talent—you'll kill it here." It is a bold, suggestive way to approach the material and most interesting reading.

But the whole point of the *Groatsworth* attack is that some actor has turned seriously, professionally, as it were, to *composing* blank verse—"supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you"—*not* that he can deliver the lines to some effect or incidentally makes revisions. It is a literary, not theatrical matter. Alleyn, he speculates, would "tinker with the scene of a play," shaking up the scene, which included, presumably, rewriting it more or less, in order "to bring down the house." And yet Hoster supplies insufficient evidence that Alleyn was enough of a writer to have the point of the *Groatsworth* attack score. Further, Chettle could hardly claim, in the preface to *Kind-Heart*, that he did not know the man Hoster calls "the most powerful figure in the theatre of 1592." To judge by the manuscript of *Sir Thomas More*, Chettle may already have devoted much of his career to playwriting. If he were not already a part of that industry, he must have had a mind to it. The Crow was surely someone new, or relatively so, on the scene. The threat offered to Greene's friends is being revealed to them as though not evident before, or not sufficiently so, is newly at work, is revealed as the consequence of recent successes in the theatre (one of which is quoted from), and is a cause for particular concern at the moment of its utterance to Greene and should be to his friends. Whatever Alleyn was, he had been, successfully so, for several years already. There could have been no urgency to it.

It is only with the greatest of efforts and patience that those who study Shakespeare in our time entertain the possibility that someone else is the Crow. Shakespeare fits the description better than anyone else. All the evidence suggests that by the end of 1592 he was an actor and a successful playwright, one who must have had something to do with the play alluded to (*3 Henry VI*). A few years later he would be identified as its author. Not only that, this outburst against the Crow, despite the slight ambiguity of the significance of the beast reference, perhaps because of it, seems peculiarly, oddly right for the entrance of the great dramatist into the public record. We learn from *Groatsworth*, from Chettle speaking for Greene, that Shakespeare aroused the envy of one who, because it was his own craft and because his own interest was at stake, was uniquely capable of intimations, accurate and therefore bitter ones, of what Shakespeare's advent meant in the theatrical world.

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup>*Greene's Groatsworth of Wit* (Binghamton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1994).

<sup>2</sup>Columbus, Ohio: Ravine Books, 1993.

**The 1995 Alabama Shakespeare Festival  
Production of *Henry VI, Part 1*  
by Craig Barrow**

From the security of our studies we can regard as axiomatic the need for a Shakespeare company to do all of Shakespeare. It would probably be another matter for us if we had to finance productions of *Titus Andronicus* or the *Henry VI* plays ourselves. The 1995 ASF production of *Henry VI, Part 1* is not the sort of gamble Wall Street or Broadway would like to hazard money on—the play is confusing to an American audience that seldom knows its own history let alone that of the English. In over thirty years of watching Shakespeare productions I have seen the play only twice before. Even with doubling and the use of students from the ASF MFA program, approximately 40 parts need to be filled. If one stages the play on the 750 seat Festival stage, the production would steal revenue from other plays one might more profitably mount in the same space; if one mounts the play in the 200 seat Octagon as happened, one courts financial disaster and crowds the play. Also, one would not like to poison the minds of first time Shakespeare theatre audiences with *Henry VI, Part 1*—too many characters cause problems of emotional identification; too many death scenes of English heroes make even the death of Talbot seem a cliché. Yet the play has many good moments—Talbot attempting to persuade his son, Young John, to flee the battle that overwhelms both; Joan's persuasion of Burgundy to quit the English and join the French forces; Joan's attempt to avoid being burned at the stake; the rivalries of Winchester and Gloucester for power during Henry VI's minority; and the beginning of the War of the Roses with the rivalries of Somerset and Richard Plantagenet. If one takes on *Henry VI, Part 1*, a major effort at generic modeling must occur to shape audience response, to make some connection between our times and the action of the play. Like the later plays, *Richard II, Parts 1 and 2* of *Henry IV*, and *Henry V*, a central character provides some coherence to the play in Talbot's model of self-sacrificing patriotic heroism, but he dies in Act IV. What to do?

In the "Director's notes," John R. Briggs provides some clues to his solution when he describes the "petty bickering and self-serving ambition" following the death of Henry V as similar to the problems of our own day, so that

as you watch the play and listen to politicians of Henry VI's era wrangling righteously for power; as you see the armies slaughter one another in the name of the same God; as you see the corruption of both church and state for personal gain; as you see the effect of such strife on England's ability to maintain its position as a national power, think about the wrangling within our House of Representatives and Senate. Think about the growing number of state militia as an answer to governmental inadequacies and the blur of clarity between interpretations of religious fundamentalism and the teachings of their religions. Think about the simplistic righteousness that could justify the bombing in Oklahoma City.

Simply dramatizing the intrigue in *Henry VI, Part 1* does not solve the possible generic confusion, however. The death of Talbot needs to be the result of the intrigue; in this case, it is the result of the rivalry of Somerset and York that leads to Talbot's defeat and death in the play and the major loss of English possessions in France. The corruption of Henry VI's innocence through Suffolk's machinations favoring Margaret of Anjou, nicely dramatized by the contrast of the two marriage proposals, is also important in showing the fall of a nation. With no ethical center or vision, the internal conflict of the War of the Roses is the result. What the play succeeds in doing is to provide an emotional direction to historical events, to help us feel a tragedy of political experience in terms of cost, consequence, and emotional vision.

Too much spectacle, Aristotle's least favorite dramatic element, largely in the form of battles, nearly overwhelms the production. The set, part of which resembles the moving parts of a fire escape, wraps around half of the audience and is on two levels. I shuddered when I saw it, since I recalled an ASF *Macbeth* in Anniston partially ruined by a creaking, groaning metal stage. This metal platform creaked as well, but only during battle scenes, not during major speeches. Costumes were color coded: red for English, blue for French, and green for the untrustworthy—with the exception of the churchmen such as Winchester. This helped the audience group characters and action, and some attempts were made to strengthen connections between diverse actions—shifts of power and strategy on the battlefields are repeated in the English court, and attempts are made by the tricks of performance to contrast scenes of honor and death; Talbot and his son, Joan and her father, and York and his uncle Mortimer show through contrast and comparison different character responses to similar events.

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Several fine performances grace this production. Richard Elmore as Talbot is the glue that holds the production together, since his conduct and values are the measuring rod for all others in the play. Greg Thornton as Gloucester and Max Jacobs as Winchester handle their rivalry well; Jacobs is especially good as the slimy Winchester whose true calling is unapologetic self-aggrandizement. John Preston as Richard Plantagenet and Michael Booth as Somerset develop their enmity well, and make the sacrifice of Talbot, once they are appointed to their interlocked French commands, a probable necessity. McElroy does a nice job in projecting Henry VI's frailty and his idealistic misreading of political differences. Caroline Shaffer played Joan of Arc well. The shrewdness of Joan's maneuvering, her ability to gain the confidence of the French and Burgundy, her persistent appeals for her life when captured, and her roles as warrior, mistress, and demonic priestess are all well handled. Few performances were weak; the woodenness of Danny Robinson Clark's Regnier was irritating but not fatal to the play.

While the production of *Henry VI, Part 1* was not exceptional, it was competent and did what it could to make sense of a play that is not one of the strongest in the Shakespeare canon. I give the ASF credit for doing the play and for helping the audience understand it. Since the series of the Henry VI plays is not scheduled to be continued next year in ASF's twenty-fifth anniversary season, I hope that the Festival resumes the series the following year.

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