

To See or Not to See: Ideology and Spectatorship

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A photograph posted on the London Government website of the last mayor, Ken Livingstone, showed the Olympic torch being carried for the final leg of its journey from Beijing to London (“Dame Kelly Holmes”). Though the mayor of London has changed in the interim, the central section of that photograph, cropped on all margins and with greater zoom, is still available on the London 2012 website. In its most recent form, even greater focus falls upon the torch, upon Dame Kelly Holmes, who is carrying it, and on her immediate escort of Chinese, with UK police back-up, but even its earlier version excluded the original spectators to the event, in effect making the viewer the only spectator.

To anyone who knows the real circumstances in which the torch was relayed, the ideological saturation of this image is revealed by the studied sportiness of the Chinese escort, seemingly track-suit-clad athletes there to pass on the torch from the last nation to the next, but actually security to protect it from pro-Tibet supporters, and by the natty cycling helmets of the British police behind, recalling the nostalgic song line about “bobbies on bicycles, two by two”. But it is revealed most clearly by the image’s defensiveness in the face of the spectator. What cropped those edges, and excluded the turbulent and contested reality of the event, was probably fear

of the spectator, both of the immediate spectator and of others, unknown but figured, who might see the image in the future. In my view, this image excluded the original spectators from its content because those whose website sponsored its publications were afraid of what future spectators might infer from those original spectators' behaviour. How unlike the early modern maps and city-scapes, in which the foreground contains contemporary men and women confidently placed as potential viewers of the scene and so internally reflecting the real user of the picture.¹ But, of course, there are distinct analogies to be drawn nevertheless between the London Olympic image and the ideological control of early modern spectatorship.

Though many early modern records are silent about actual spectators' responses to plays or other theatrical events, they are *indirectly* eloquent about them, in somewhat the same way as the London image is, because they record attempts to control what could or could not be seen. When Charles I was expected for his first royal visit to Scotland in 1633, the Linlithgow council wanted to promote positive images: a new unicorn for the cross-head had to be purchased in Edinburgh; there were new silk gowns for the baillies. But the records disclose an equal fear that the king and his entourage of courtly spectators might see the wrong images: the town's thatch was to be replaced by slate, and the traditional Scots clothing of blue bonnets and plaids was prohibited on pain of confiscation of the said items of clothing and punishment of the body that wore them:

In respect that his maiestie is to come to this bruth and considering how wndecent it is to weir plaidis and blew bannettis THairfoir it is statuit and ordainit THat no persone ather in brugh or landwart [countryside] weir ony bannettis nor plaidis duiring his maiesteis remaning in this his ancient kyngdome And that none resort in the towne with bannettis or plaidis Wndir the paine of confiscatione of thair plaidis and bannettis and punichment of thair persoune. (*Linlithgow Town Council Minute Book*, p. 266)²

While the record implies that the dignity of the ancient Scottish kingdom was to be maintained by these means, its cultural cringe reveals that the council were already viewing that kingdom through the eyes of their anglicised and more

- 1 See, for example, the Braun and Hogenburg map of Edinburgh from the *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (1582).
- 2 I am grateful to my colleague and co-editor, Dr. Eila Williamson, on whose archival research for the *Records of Early Drama Scotland* I depend for several of the cases mentioned in this paper.

fashionable visitors. National antiquity could be valued in the abstract; but to be avoided were visible traditions which might indicate poverty or a largely rural population, or which might announce Scotland's distinctness in the now-united monarchy of Britain. This is no more than an early modern equivalent of contemporary London asserting its vigorous post-imperial right to participate in simulated equalities of global harmony by choosing an ennobled black woman (Dame Kelly Holmes) as its final torch-relay Olympic representative, while editing out of the image pro-Tibet supporters, and hence occluding the very democratic freedoms by which the UK has traditionally defined itself. What is distinctive in both the early modern Linlithgow record and the modern London image is the close connection between power and shame, and the role of the spectator in connecting these two forces.

It is in the control of spectatorship that existing ideological anxiety is most strikingly perceptible, for those in power have to imagine the judgements and preferences of the future spectator in order to provide that spectator with a spectacle which will carry the right meaning. An ideology thus has to identify its own potential shamefulness in order to defend itself. In this process of imagining, an institution projects onto the potential spectator its own fears about itself—the vulnerabilities which it must disguise or for which it must compensate by the scene it provides (or prevents). The management of public spectacle thus implies losses which have *already* occurred, failures which are already becoming clear, ideals which can no longer be assumed but are now held self-consciously, instabilities in belief which need to be shored up. Whether or not those in power are themselves conscious of frailties in the ideology which sustains them, frailties can nevertheless be inferred by scholars from the administrative records of actions by which those in power attempted to support the ideology. Central among these are controls on public performance, which provide *ipso facto* records of spectatorship—not records of spectators' *actual* responses but, in a more ideologically revealing manner, records of what responses were *imagined* by the planners of events. Thus the ambivalent meaning of Charles's visit to Scotland is reflected in the Linlithgow record: a son of Scotland was in a sense "coming home" through visiting his father's first kingdom, but, since this was a son who had never been in his ethnic homeland, native concerns about what kind of place Scotland truly was surfaced whenever organisers imagined how the visitor might see it. The record of preparation thus shows a tension between pride in the ancientness of the Scottish kingdom, which is explicitly mentioned, and fear that its civic life

had not progressed sufficiently far from its origins—a tension which had probably been growing since the monarchy went south thirty years previously.

Although the examples I have given show anxiety about future spectatorship, a powerful element in the nexus of spectatorship and ideology is actually memory. The modern British painter David Hockney said recently, “Seeing is memory and memory is now” (cited Dougary), and this is as true for those who spectate as it is for artists. Anyone who organised public displays in the early modern period, whether of drama or not, must have known that audiences saw such events with eyes already trained up by past experience. This was part of the problem for the Linlithgow council, who knew that King Charles had no memory of Scotland to give a rosy tint to his spectatorship and permit him to see the burgh’s less sophisticated aspects as endearingly homely.

That we see through the lens of memory and that what we see will create the lens of memory for future sights mean that those who wish to supply *new* visual experiences for political purposes are engaged in a necessary negotiation with the past (the past which the spectators already carry with them). However, the reward for managing that negotiation successfully is that the new images may in turn become established so as to determine the norms of future spectatorship, and hence of future judgement. Early records reveal a constant appreciation in Scottish culture that spectacle thus marked the moral intersection of time past and time future. Implicit in this was the understanding that spectating is seeing *as an action*; it has social significance. The world one allows oneself or others to see is implicitly the world one permits—hence, those moments in the records when people take exception to others’ clothing or even to another person being in their eye-line (“away—out of my sight”), or when presbyteries advise their Elders on public behaviour.³ Such rejection or admonition is essential because, in this spectatorial sense, seeing is an action which is itself seen and consequently alters the canons of normality. If one sees something, and implicitly permits it to happen, one gives example to others to do the same. One might as well say, “in my view, the world is allowed to look like that!” Furthermore, when one *chooses* to view something, one tacitly, even if only provisionally, licenses it; in the slightly old-fashioned English phrase which helpfully joins the notion of “spectating” to “permitting”, one “countenances” it.

3 For examples of this, see McGavin, chap. 1 (“The Public Scene”; pp. 15-40).

At the most practical level, this could take the form of communities maintaining their rights and identities through public ceremonies, such as beating the bounds of their parish, at which they would insist that the next generation of citizens were present to watch and thus carry the knowledge forward, as in the Linlithgow 1627 Riding of the Marches:

the ryding of the merches of the *commoun* landis to be riddin on Tuyisday the xxij day of Maij according to the auld forme wseit thairanent [for that purpose]. And the burgesses eldest sounes to accomanie the Baillies and help the merches as they go by thame And that they may knaw the saidis merches. (*Linlithgow Town Council Minute Book 1620-1640*, p. 134)

When, in 1601, Stirling council realised that the stones defining the shore area where the town could go cobble fishing had been removed, probably by the neighbouring landowner, it demanded that all the inhabitants of the burgh should attend the re-laying of the stones:

And for that effect ordinis [ordains] the haill inhabitantes of this burgh to be warnit this day eftir none be sweshe [drum] or Bell to accompany the saidis baillies & counsall In setting and placing of the saidis stanes agane In maner foirsadis of the shore. (*Stirling Burgh Records: Council Records, 10 Oct 1597-19 Apr 1619*, 28 April 1601 [unfoliated])

Here public spectacle was a practical means of preserving economic rights, but also of performing the identity of the burgh as one distinct power among others, and insisting that that identity was re-established for the future. The memory with which inhabitants had previously viewed their surroundings had been disrupted; it had to be re-instated by spectacle, so that they could see with that memory reinvigorated.

When a challenge to the *status quo* emerged, it characteristically expressed itself in terms of spectatorship, through either providing new elements of spectacle or denying traditional elements. Each approach was designed to control the gaze of future spectators, and, by implication, each carried ideological claims about what was legitimate in society. For example, in 1635 we find the crafts of Linlithgow prohibited from spending money from their Common Good fund on election ceremonies and public ridings of the marches (*Linlithgow Town Council Minute Book 1620-1640*, p. 329). The ostensible reason was that they should spend more on the poor, but, in effect, their capacity to provide spectacle, and their own visibility as spectacle for other inhabitants of the burgh, was being curtailed. An even more overt struggle between power groups over spectacle culminated in Stirling in 1616,

The wording of the record shows the kirk's really quite complex engagement with the relative status of image and word. Although it says that funerary monuments draw the eyes and minds of the people from the hearing and learning of the Word to the beholding of monuments, its desire is not apparently to replace the eye with the ear. It objects to these *particular* sights as expressive more of noble rank ("gentility") than Christian religion, and it says that the Gospel of Christ is the only banner which should be displayed in the church. There is certainly a metaphorical rebalancing of church aesthetics towards the word rather than the image, but at the same time the kirk session members are not discarding the notion of the church as a place for the eyes. Indeed, I think they do literally want the physical Bible to be the focus of spectatorship without distraction. It's not so much a banishing of spectatorship as a change in what properties will be visible within this divine theatre. When the presbytery met with substantial local opposition from the family and a friend who was himself a minister of the church, the presbytery decided that either all funerary decoration must be removed (something which they knew they were not going to achieve) or panelling should be put up to prevent the congregation having sight of all such secular monuments until a permanent wall could be built to separate off a part of the building for funerary purposes.⁵ The reality of aristocratic commemoration in the church could not be stopped, but spectatorship could be controlled; the presbytery evidently decided that it would permit the power of the "absent" monument to remain in the minds of some spectators because, over time, the memory of what was behind the wall would fade, and the church's control of the visible scene had been asserted. Attending St. Ninian's Kirk did not cease to be a visual experience; instead, one's sight lines were changed and, if anything, one's spectatorship was even more intensely focused to permit the Word of God to have central place in the experience.

If what one permits to be viewed one implicitly permits to exist, any reformation is of necessity aesthetic, and part of what drove the Reformation *ab initio* may have been a need to discover and then to establish new ways of seeing, as well as new ways of believing. It is evident from early modern Scottish records that visual acculturation was a vital aspect of social life in the contest for reformation: at stake was not only the ending of past traditions or the relative powers of religious and secular forces in the present, but also the spectatorship of chil-

5 See *Stirling Presbytery Minutes 1589/90-1595/96*, 5 December 1592 (unfoliated).

dren as yet unborn. With what eyes would *they* see? When they saw with their memory, what patterns of seeing would that memory supply to them? When these future Scots came to revisit their own pasts in their mental theatres, what scenes would they contemplate? The spectatorship of individual and communal memory is the prized goal of image-makers, whether they are working in literary genres such as plays or chronicles or in the *Realpolitik* of the public scene.

In one respect, the strangest intersection of ideology and spectatorship in the communal theatre of church and state was the act of excommunication itself. The terms in which it was announced to potential victims make this clear. They were always invited to attend the church “to hear and see themselves” judged to be excommunicate.⁶ In other words, they were invited to participate as spectators in the congregation at the very ceremonial by which they would be excluded from that community of spectators. If anyone accepted this paradoxical invitation, such persons must have felt the doubleness of the roles they were invited to perform. The complex transferral of the role and power of spectator between different individuals or groups in a given public event is, if not absolutely distinctive of Scottish culture, certainly very characteristic of it in this period, and seems to attract many records, not least because in this dramaturgically intense society, people were constantly thinking of how others might be seeing them.

A good example of the contested nature of public spectatorship is provided by the following record from Stirling in 1630:

On this day, Harry Balfour ... is fined £20 for abusing and injuring John Cunningham of Drumwhassle yesterday evening by exclaiming and crying out of the Tolbooth of Stirling where the said Harry is currently in prison ... Elizabeth Preston, wife to the said Lord of Drumwhassle, when she was going and coming to the church, on the way there and back from afternoon prayers—in the company of her servants and various other persons, neighbours as well as strangers—uttering various imprecations and curses against the said Lord of Drumwhassle [and] wishing that the malediction, curse and plague of God should fall upon him. (*Stirling Burgh Records, Court Book 1627–1633*, 3 February 1630 [unfoliated]; text modernised)

One might think that Harry Balfour, presumably framed in the window of the Tolbooth, was the chief object of gaze on these two occasions, but the situation is more complicated: the reason this came to court is that Balfour had

6 This was also the form used in burgh government, when someone would be invited to hear and see himself deprived of his freedom of a burgh. See, e.g., *South Queensferry, Town Council Minutes 1634–1661*, fol. 133^v.

made Elizabeth Preston into a public spectacle. What is especially interesting is the recorder's careful designation of the *spectators* here: she was in a public place among those whom she commanded, those with whom she enjoyed friendship and social intimacy, and those "strangers" who did not know her at all, and who therefore had no way of knowing the truth of the matter. All these categories of people were made spectators of *Elizabeth Preston* through Balfour's intervention. The case claims that the injury was done to the Laird, and the curses were directed at him, but the injury was committed through the proxy of his wife being made a public spectacle, with the meaning of that spectacle provided both by what Balfour said and by his visible image in the Tolbooth: supposedly, the visible image of her husband's injustice. Balfour had therefore also turned himself into a spectacle to transfer that role to Drumwhassle's wife. He became the meaning of the spectacle which he forced her to provide. The court decided that if he did this again, he would be chained in a dark corner of the Tolbooth where he could neither see out nor others see him. He had wrested control of spectatorship, making it serve his purpose. In other words, the court's response to this abuse was to threaten loss of the privilege of spectating and of being seen.

Such issues also have thematic force in certain early Scottish histories. The issue of what should not be seen, the moral imperatives about whether, how and when one shows oneself to possible spectators, the shame culture of the visible, which is fundamental to the ideology of reform, are all prominent in Calderwood's *History*, where they are corollaries of his fascination with the real and counterfeit in performance. Here he is on Mary Queen of Scots in 1567 after the murder of her husband, Lord Darnley, which took place supposedly with her connivance:

The queen, according to an ancient custom, should have kept herself forty dayes within, and the doors and windows should have been closed, in token of mourning; but the windows were opened, to let in light, within the fourth day. Before the twelfth day, she went forth to Seton, not regarding what the people either thought or said; Bothwell never parting from her side. There she went out to the fields, to behold games and pastimes. (Calderwood, II: 347)

The windows are metonyms of the viewing eye here, but whose eye? Certainly the queen's, whose metonymic eyelids open to let in light before she goes out physically to gaze at the spectacle of the world. The closed curtains are a licit spectacle for others, signifying proper values, but opened up, they disclose a different spectacle to the viewer—the spectacle of a queen shamelessly exposing

her lack of grief at her husband's death, her indifference to tradition, her willingness to be seen—and they do this regardless of whether she appeared in the window or not. The spectator's eyes are metaphorically opened by this spectacle, and the shame of the queen, which is, of course, her *lack* of shame for her faults, is manifested to the populace. What underlies this is the implied equation between being in the world and sight (both seeing and being seen), an equation which held good in Scottish society until the last quarter of the last century, when the sight of neighbours' curtains closed during the day no longer implied that some disaster had befallen them, which had been a sure inference hitherto.

If one considers an English reformist play like the mid-sixteenth-century *Nice Wanton*, which firmly imagines its events as occurring within a local community of neighbours, and purports to reform the public manners of parents and children along Protestant lines, one finds that the real punishment for sin is not the devil or hell, but “Worldly Shame”—the character who gleefully tells the errant mother that *everyone* knows and reports that her daughter has died of the pox caught in brothels and her son has been hanged for theft, and that “Men will taunt . . . and mock” (ed. Tennenhouse, l. 474) her as the cause of this. In fact, the neighbours who are in a position to know this are the audience members themselves, who are metatheatrically implied by this threat of public shame. For the reformist, hell truly is “other people”, and the play is itself a means by which spectators can be educated to think of themselves as others see them: the spectator now will provide the spectacle later. Thus the ultimate goal of the play is not to tell the audience that drinking, whoring, swearing, and playing truant are bad, or even that parents have to exercise authority over their children to prevent such abuses; it is to educate the audience in a sense of the public matrix of spectatorship within which they exist. In this play, reforming ideology reveals itself as intrinsically spectatorial in nature.

But the intersection of ideology and spectatorship went much deeper for early modern Scots than the ethics of the small town, however prominent these are in Scottish kirk and burgh records. In reformed theology, proof of salvation is only inner; inner conviction is necessary for feeling hope of salvation. One might expect that if spiritual conviction were the best guarantee of salvation, the value of external action would be correspondingly reduced, but the opposite is the case. It is only through public behaviour, and such ceremonial attestations as occurred at the induction of a minister or public penance or sober walking or sober clothing, that a good conscience could be demonstrated

and consequently the likelihood of one's elect condition be indicated to others, and to oneself. A song at the end of *Nice Wanton* does not stop with asking where one can get a pure conscience from, but asks what "practice" is associated with it (ed. Tennenhouse, p. 99, l. 13). In other words, a religious ideology which promoted inner conviction created the need for the outward signs of that inner state—I suspect as much for the individual's own reassurance as to confirm their status in the community of believers.

Reformation in its Calvinist form, as it was experienced in Scotland, played brilliantly to a nation in which the theatre of public action was already the principal form of theatrical display. Since there was no public ceremony by which one could *effect* certain salvation, salvific reassurance had to be gained by the individual and by society through a constant iteration of those modes of public behaviour which might *imply* salvation to one's fellows and to oneself, acting as the self's own spectator. The lack of effectual ritual (in the sense of Catholic ceremonies by which the priesthood binds and looses on earth what will be consequently bound or loosed in heaven) demanded constant supplementation by modes of behaviour which thus acquired a quasi-ritualised character, implying a spiritual reality to the viewer through an accepted "language" of behaviour. Spectatorship was thus deeply embedded in the very ideology which had denied salvific efficacy to outward shows. Eventually, one hopes to live in the mansions reserved for the elect, but until then, one has to cope with the anxiety of living with neighbours, with the possibility that one will do—or has already done—something shameful, with the uncertainty of conviction. The only way of allaying these fears is to *act the part*, and hope that, as well as convincing one's spectators and reassuring oneself, these outward signs are truly evidence of an inner grace.

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The Croxton Play of the Sacrament: *Paradox and Scandal Made Spectacle*

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This paper discusses a play which, sometimes seen as a crudely didactic and unaesthetic tract, has also been labelled anti-Lollard or anti-Jewish.¹ It takes into account various evaluations insisting on the play's positive aspects and, concentrating on relatively undernoticed points, argues that this highly original dramatic and theatrical elaboration, of some cultural and artistic complexity, well deserves a complement of critical attention and numerous stage productions to boot. My re-reading first examines its argumentative line, in the hope of showing that the play-text largely belies some of the views expressed by previous critics and possibly points in a fairly different direction. Then, in a second section, I turn to elements which, intimately linked to the subject-matter of the play, arguably produce its spectacular efficacy.

An Ideological Issue Shaped by Contrast and Paradox

My observations derive from Iuri Lotman's fundamental remarks on the artistic text as structured by contradiction (pp. 407-12), views related to the

1 For two contradictory assessments of the play, see Cutts and Nichols.

Bakhtinian notion of heteroglossia and dialogism, *i.e.*, irruptions and disruptions competing with the normative text. Such dialogical apparent contradictions are part and parcel of the argumentative strategy of this play. They essentially concern the respective status of the two merchants, who, though traditionally viewed as equivalent (even if antagonistic) figures, may be shown to be strongly differentiated from their first appearance, with the contrast kept to the fore throughout as the semantic and functional basis of the play.

The initial speeches of the two merchants, Sir Aristorius the Christian and Jonathas the Jew, trading, respectively, between the eastern and western shores of the Mediterranean, Syria (“Surré” [l. 251]) and Spain (“Arigon” [l. 267]), have been mainly regarded as two pieces of boasting in the tradition of medieval comic tyrants. Yet their comparable length (sixty-seven and forty-seven lines) and the near-identity of topic conceal a substantial difference in structure and meaning. Aristorius Mercator (a high-sounding name, whereas Jonathas is called the Jew Master) characteristically speaks first, devoting most of his forty-seven alliterative lines to the description and praise of his commercial empire. In a way that would be strongly linked in audience memory to tyrannical assertions of secular power in the cycle plays, his speech recalls his territorial influence with a complacent outspokenness evocative of the Temptation scenes or of Herod’s ranting bouts. Immediately introducing himself by name (ll. 89-94), as good tyrants do, Aristorius has a long stretch of lines of perfect syntactic and syntagmatic regularity, which assert his activity, reputation and authority over lands and peoples. Beyond this, the circular structure of the speech, opening and closing on his triumphal sense of owning an imperial dominion, confirms the restricted moral sense which afflicts the master of such a boundless world. The other striking semantic element is the assertion that Aristorius lords it over the religious world, which Presbiter the chaplain at once confirms (ll. 125-32). Apart from a conventional sense of glee, the only flicker of emotion comes from the exhilarating rounds of alliterated commercial places he commands, plus perhaps two incipient images (ll. 102 and 116) adding just a touch of poetical vision to what had hitherto read rather like a no-nonsense business balance-sheet.²

In contradistinction, Jonathas the Jew begins by voicing in twelve lines his love for Mahomet, his firm desire to abide by Mahomet’s laws, and his thanks

2 L. 102 possibly alludes to “fresshe ... flower[ys]” decorating his ship-hulls and/or sails, whereas, in l. 116, the two alliterating monosyllables “set” and “sale” forcefully evoke these ships’ presence throughout the *oikoumene*.

for the prodigious wealth this god has “sent” (l. 157) and “lent” (l. 159) him (the pointed rhyme reinforcing the effect). The initial recognition by the devotee that his god owns everything in this world qualifies in advance the sense we might get that the Jew possesses these treasures, which he describes in one long sentence sprawling over four stanzas (ll. 160-88). The affirmation “I have”, repeated four times only, nearly disappears in the paratactic piling-up of direct objects (sumptuous jewels, fragrant spices, luscious fruits and exotic perfumes) evocative of the wonders of the East (ll. 161-88). This keeps the owner’s presence to an unobtrusive minimum. The Jew here speaks much more in the spirit of the Wakefield Adam, walking in wonder through the garden of Eden, spelling out in his litany a tribute to the Almighty’s divine splendour, than in the tone of Everyman the miser, viewing his Goods piled up in coffers and bags in the eponymous play (ll. 414-34). Finally, the contrast sharply distinguishing the two merchants’ religious and moral stances is thematically emphasized by the Jew’s carefully distancing his superfluity of gems and spices from any idea of terrestrial and geographical possession. Except for one mention of his laden ships (l. 174), his wealth is as much delocalized as it is exoticized, totally estranged from the geographical world. Described in ways that evoke shape, size, colour or fragrance, it is offered to contemplation and desire for the sole enjoyment of the inward eye. What structurally crowns the difference is that Jonathas, contrary to Aristorius, mentions his name and mastership over four servants only at the very end of his speech.

It is difficult not to think that this pointed disjunction of the two merchants’ ways of thinking, and of their traditional religious and racial images, is meant to estrange the audience from an automatic approbation of the Christian and rejection of the Jew. To me, the obvious result of such a splitting-up of the two stereotypes (making the familiar Christian a greedy materialist bloated with pride, and the despicable Jew a provider of beauty and luxury) is to “defamiliarize” them in audience minds, thereby inducing an ambivalent feeling of attraction and repulsion for the two figures. This conclusion may seem less far-fetched when one notices that the splitting-up is maintained throughout the play. Instantly shifting (l. 196) from public address to an appeal to his four servants, Jonathas tells them of his insistent doubt as to whether Christ may actually dwell in a consecrated host. This will lead him to submit a consecrated wafer to a new Passion in an attempt to disprove the central Catholic tenet: Christ’s redemption of mankind (ll. 205-28) and its main consequence, Christ’s spiritual presence in any consecrated

host. The perfect knowledge of Christian dogma displayed by the Jews strengthens the impression of Jonathas' appeal for believing Christians. By contrast, in the next scene, the Christian merchant's exquisite scruples are unable to resist the Jew's offer of a hundred pounds, readily counted down on the spot (ll. 315-22), as a bribe for pilfering a host in church overnight. When Aristorius invites his chaplain home to a supper of *bread* and good Romney *wine* (ll. 338-55), this parody of the Last Supper is as much of a blasphemy as the sacrilegious Passion the Jew inflicts upon the host. Indeed, it is distinctly worse in being part and parcel of Aristorius' simoniac programme. In clear contrast, Jonathas' sacrilegious attempt is insistently presented as springing from spiritual unrest.

Thus renewed at every significant point of the traditional fiction, as revamped by the apparently East Anglian playwright, this chiasmic dissociation of the two religious merchant figures is finally pointedly recalled in the parallel but distinct verdicts passed upon the two culprits by Christ's representative, the bishop Episcopus. After Aristorius explicitly acknowledges his fault for what it is, namely, the precise reiteration of Judas' crime ("I sold yon same Jewys owr Lord full right / For couytyse of good, as a cursed wyght" [ll. 853-54]; "I have offendyd in the syn of couytys: / I sold owr Lordys body for lucre of mony" [ll. 901-2]), the bishop's sanction is precisely meted out to fit it: "Euer whyll pou lyuest good dedys for to done / And neuermore for to bye nor sell" (ll. 914-15). Like the eponymous hero of the nearly contemporary play *Everyman*, Aristorius is a member and representative of the active and affluent bourgeois middle class, so that the play's severe indictment is seemingly levelled too at that social category, if not at the increasingly lay-minded society then flourishing in England and Northern Europe. Though coloured by the anti-Jewish prejudices of the day, Christ's verdict (in the bishop's words) is just as precisely suited to the nature of Jonathas' fault. Once christened in church (ll. 952-59), the Jew is carefully confined to the outskirts of Christian society and invited to roam about, while spiritually earning his new status as a Christian.

In keeping with the increasingly blatant irony of Aristorius' name and the ecclesiastical sanctions thus neatly tailored to the social status of the two culprits, another dimension of the continued contrast between the two merchants must finally be highlighted. While theatrically re-enacting the pivotal article of dogma—transubstantiation—so dangerously shaken by the thinking of Wyclif and his successors, *The Croxton Play* makes it clear that the antithetical roles of the merchants (split up by the initial dialogism) eventuate in what must be seen as

a spiritual, as well as a cultural, paradox, reversing the current doxa about the two categories. More precisely, however, the paradoxical garb dresses up what truly ranks as scandal.

Although commonly reduced in lay usage to the sense of morally shocking behaviour, or the report of such, the term “scandal” retains in its biblical and religious context the original meaning of an unmoveable obstacle unexpectedly tripping up the spirit and numbing, or thwarting, its response. Lay dictionaries often ignore the ambivalence.³ But sources such as the *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique* and *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de la Bible* show greater sensitivity to the dual inner mechanism associated with “scandal” in the theological context. In that context, the phenomenon necessarily involves a criminal twosome: he who sets the trap, and the victim who fails adequately to respond.⁴ It should therefore be recognised that in a fiction astutely combining two crimes into one plot, the two merchants are similarly linked in the scandalous process.⁵ If the archetypal Other, the Jew, first envisages the desecration of the host, the scandal can be realised only by the compliance of a “nominal” Christian whose dormant avarice is roused by the Jew’s doubt. In such a reading, the Jew might be much more than a bugbear and an archetype of the European medieval fears, the threatening figure of the Other, as Walker suggests in a carefully enigmatic phrase, reading his function as a “useful index to prevailing anxieties about racial and religious difference in medieval English culture” (Walker, ed., p. 213). I would argue that, beyond that essentially atmospheric function, Jonathas comes to the fore, not only as a caricatural and eminent figure of fun, but also as the finally defeated and ridiculed, yet nevertheless pivotal, agent that bears the load of the whole plot up to its potentially tragic close, and additionally provides most of the spectacle through his maddening propensity to excess.

3 Translated from the Hebrew *mikshôl* by the Greek *skandalon* in the Septante Bible, the *scandalum* of Christian theology is fraught with an ambivalence that lay dictionaries hardly reflect, as is obvious in the *OED* (s.v. “scandal”, 1a and b).

4 *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique* and *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de la Bible* both gloss the term. The latter more clearly lists two main series, those proceeding from Satan, and those born from the very teaching of God, or Christ, whose salvation design from Incarnation until Ascension is misunderstood by man. Hence: “l’épreuve où Dieu met son peuple ou son enfant, ... envoyant le Christ pour être un scandale pour l’homme”; and, quoting Christ: “Heureux celui pour qui je ne suis pas un scandale” (Mat. 11-6) (pp. 1199-1202).

5 Davidson is one of the very few critics to openly acknowledge the link (*Festivals*, p. 7).

Beyond Paradox: Scandal Made Spectacle

While essays by David Bevington, David Mills and Clifford Davidson have provided generally influential readings of the play, which are willingly acknowledged here, it is Ann Eljenholm Nichols' and Janette Dillon's fine studies that have particularly fed and closely influenced my own commentary. Dillon, in a bold comparison with contemporary body-art, throws a new light on various aspects of the play. To begin with, she emphasizes the potent contrast (described as *confrontational presence*) between a material reality constantly insisted upon and a spiritually significant invisible unendingly sought after (Dillon, pp. 169-70). Of the four points I would like to go into in this second section, the first and third owe much to her views.

I. Contradiction as a Structural Element

This principle, as argued from the first, is embodied by the contrasting images of the two merchants. Aristorius deliberately confines himself to acts of material exchange and mercantile values (hence his symbolic resemblance to Judas), whereas Jonathas—a Thomas-like figure, in Davidson's parlance (*Festivals*, p. 73)—obsessively digs at the Christian dogma, searching for a response to the spiritual and rational contradiction he resents. Davidson's suggestion can even be pushed a bit further, since that Thomas-figure is recurrently busy in late medieval English drama in the similar function of professional doubter, one who, reputedly close to his master's thought, often plays the honest broker under his, at times, scandalous guise, hastening, through his obdurate questioning, the shocking recognition of Christ's teaching.⁶

But contradiction emerges as even more obviously structural by way of the inset piece, which, suspending the main plot, obliquely reflects and distorts it in burlesque replica. Mills propounded such a view years ago, insisting that the episode (ll. 525-652) establishes another time-space universe, distinctly dividing the drama into two play-areas: the scaffolds where the main plot is enacted, and the *platea*, which is successively invaded by Colle, the quack doctor's man, and

6 Davidson insists that "The English playwright has . . . made the Jews in his play to be doubters, like 'Doubting' Thomas, whose belief was revived by the miracle of seeing and touching the risen Christ . . . (John 20:24-29)" (*Festivals*, pp. 73-74). For the functions of the doubter in the English medieval plays, see my "Elements of a Persuasion Strategy", pp. 150-56.

Master Brundyche of Brabant himself.⁷ Readily following Dillon’s supplementary proposal that such an interruption is no chance addition but a minutely-timed commentary (Dillon, p. 175), I also fully subscribe to her repeated suggestion that the play moves between alternating tones of burlesque and reverence.⁸ In that respect, she excellently describes the brief visual exchange opposing, during the closing moments of the inset, two very different forms of physical presence: the image of Jonathas on his scaffold, “severed from his dangling hand”, and that of “the disruptive doctor and his man, attempting physically to invade the scaffold of the sacred fiction” (Dillon, p. 173). I would further suggest, however, that, excellent as this single image is, the core of the contrast is essentially between the business of the two frauds and what passes in the main fiction at the moment of its interruption when Jonathas runs away (ll. 501-15), only to return when they are beaten out of the *platea* (ll. 653-75). At this point, Jonathas, obviously in the grip of some insane fear at seeing the normal rules of material life suspended and abnormality warp each of the Jews’ acts, exclaims, “I wyll go drenche me in a lake. / And in woodnesse I gynne to wake! / I renne, I lepe ouer þis lond” (ll. 501-3), whereas the stage direction says, “Here he renneth wood, with þe Ost in hys hond” (l. 504 SD). After the two quacks’ departure, he says again, “For dowte of drede what after befall! / I am nere masyd, my wytte ys gon; / Therfor of helpe I pray you all” (ll. 654-56).

When the Jew master confesses to being momentarily estranged from his rational self at this moment of maximised emotion—very probably sensed as such by the audience—the bracketed episode of the burlesque pair opens, proposing in derisive denegation the genuine vulgarity of quack remedies, which are mechanically rattled off in grandiloquent patter as cures for petty ailments and ills. Here is precisely the point the Croxton playwright wants to make; he maximizes the distance between the two levels of reality—one everyday and only too visible, the other clerically asserted (and possibly yearned for by some), but invisible, baffling to reason and in hot dispute. By this means, the Croxton playwright for a few moments mentally suspends his audience between two incompatible worlds, allowing spectators to share, ever so briefly, the demented extravaganza of the Jewish hero. Likewise, by imposing upon his rural audience

7 Mills evokes “a structure which is based on a dual consciousness of time” (p. 147).

8 After noting, as her starting point, that “the play is centred on the notion of the real and the true, ... but the location of the real is slippery” (p. 169), Dillon remarks on the play’s paradoxical effect: “being a call for reverence” and concurrently “offering the thrill of outraging taboo” (p. 171).

ing the meaning of the play, as well as enhancing its theatrical effectiveness. It proceeds from the insistent presence of the two antagonistic isotopies of sight and blindness, which are linked to the two distinct fictional levels: that of the material reality which Aristorius serves and Jonathas investigates, and that of the spiritual truth which affronts that outer reality. The way in which the Jew's boast dwells specifically on the visual splendour of the gems he traffics in (ll. 81-92), and of other oriental luxuries (ll. 93-106), may at first pass unnoticed, but it will be noticed when right afterwards Jonathas broaches the theme of the incredible mystery of the Christian host with the complaint that "it makes us blynd" (l. 123)—and later again: "make us thus blind" (l. 388).

Davidson usefully reminds his reader (*Festivals*, p. 73) that Nichols, in her groundbreaking re-examination of the play, had previously drawn attention to the pictorial and linguistic frequency in the Christian tradition of the reproach addressed to the Jews about their spiritual and theological blindness, and that they were "proverbial for demanding signs" (Nichols, p. 127). Thus the thematic contrast helps to insert the play in the long chain of renditions of a legendary fiction. Much more importantly, it also emphasizes the enduring link established in Christian practice, from the prophets to the Apostles (Mat. 13:14-17, Luke 24:25-35), between vision and faith—the link so soberly celebrated in the *Visitatio Sepulchri* plays in a mere few words. While late medieval religious mores so exaggerated the conflation of vision and devotional emotion as to make late nineteenth- and twentieth-century criticism reluctant to interpret it as other than morally degrading, its prevalence, conclusively demonstrated, has finally been critically acclimated.¹¹ Regarding *The Croxton Play*, Davidson, again citing Nichols, underlines the nearly co-substantial link late medieval Christians made between seeing and eating, with whole congregations often taking communion just by gazing at the Host at the moment of the Eucharist (*Festivals*, p. 65). The suggestion undoubtedly sheds light on the ocular empathy potentially triggered among the audience of such a play, with the gory images of host and cauldron continuously kept centre-stage, even at the moment of the Jews' reverent communion.

Finally, the contrastive isotopy supports the governing paradox of the discerning Outsider, who, in the person of the evangelical Publican, proves more

11 Robinson may well be one of the first Anglo-Saxon critics to read that topic in the Late Middle Age cultural perspective. Various well-documented studies on popular devotional mores in Northern Europe, including Marrow's *Passion Iconography* (1979), echo Alphonse Dupront's magisterial ruminations on the breadth of *la sphère sacrée* in vernacular European cultures.

are similarly commented on, mostly by Jonathas. The commentary here seems to have a triple virtue. First, given the fairly wide play-area, such verbal duplication heightens the visibility of each action for most of the audience. Secondly, in focussing their attention, it binds their eyes to the mix of images and words thus emphasized. Thirdly, the paradoxical nature of the drama staged, as used by the playwright for doctrinal purposes in that mix of dialogue and commentary, obviously favours a close intrication of the two antinomic dimensions of the realistic action staged and of its supernatural significance. Hence, the simultaneous effort to bolster two antagonistic effects in audience reception: the rational impulse which is in ordinary minds to cling to appearances, and, close upon its heels, the concurrent amazement (possibly welling up into feverish dismay) when some stronger force seems to pervert the laws governing the real and play havoc with normality.

This is especially the case in the successive rounds of descriptive commentary on the acts carried out by Jonathas' four servants after the end of the inset and the appearance of the image of the Christ-child, wounded (l. 713). In that interval, the contrast is maximized between the expected normality of each casual act carried out in execution of the master's orders and its ensuing result. Thus, Jasdon's and Maspbat's last lines (ll. 668 and 672) in their respective speeches (ll. 661-68, 669-712), carefully pointing out the result to be expected by a public thoroughly familiar with the acts described, are strikingly belied in the event. Instantly proclaimed, such a discord magnifies and spectacularises the bizarre response of the most casual things. It should be noted that two additional factors further heighten the effect: the four men under Jonathas' authority alternate action and commentary from dramatic agent to agent, adding a sort of contagious effect. These fluctuations of faith and disbelief about *what is there* spread from one participant to another, as if weakening their individual resistances. That this finally works upon the gazing crowd I take to be noticeable in the increasingly daring emphasis which the playwright places upon the distance between appearances created and factual reality. Thus Dillon usefully points out (p. 174) the increasingly patent divorce in the stage directions between spurious semiotic fabrications and matter-of-fact props. Though such a discord is, or course, inaccessible to spectators, these notations (obviously instructing the players in what they should achieve) at least suggest the audience reactions thereby expected.

It must finally be pointed out that this constant flickering of audience minds between two referential levels (from semiotic subterfuge at the level of

the fiction staged to the underlying myth, and back again to the immediate reality) is akin to what may be regarded as the basic phenomenon of spectacular reception. By thus glossing the actually visible present (divine gore bubbling in the cauldron, the infant Christ floating above the stove, Jonathas' maiming and recovery), but also obliquely referring to a possible unseen, the playwright astutely broadens the spectacular "now" to include the past and future of myth and desire. One may also lastly suggest that such an intricate blending of direct and indirect exchanges, constantly trying to direct and redirect audience attention, may emotionally involve spectators more deeply than would constant exchanges between the characters staging the fiction with less attention paid to audience reactions.

IV. Taboo and Excess: A Neglected but Capital Question

Because it lies at the core of her comparison between *The Croxton Play* and Franko B's show of body art, *I'm Not Your Babe*, Dillon repeatedly evokes the question of excess, which is intimately linked to the breaking of the religious taboo in the East Anglian play, and yet never frontally discusses it. Before her, in a lucid essay centring on the totally different issue of the fifteenth-century climate of Eucharistic piety, Nichols had strongly emphasized the "the emotionally-charged affective tone" colouring what she called the "narrative movement" of the play. She then studies its relation to late medieval popular devotion before returning to the theme at the close of her second section, analysing that "intensively affective tone" as intimately linked to the "liturgical metachronology" which, in her view, suffuses the second part of the narrative, after the Jews return and light a fire under the cauldron" (Nichols, pp. 117-18 and 126). Apart from those two recent voices, rare indeed are critical allusions to, or sustained analyses of, the topic. Given such constant silence, one may wonder whether Anglo-Saxon critics of the late twentieth century have not felt embarrassed at discussing a question so redolent of papist superstition, and tacitly confined it to the subordinate function of a mere spectacular frill. There is no doubt, in any case, that Jonathas, as the pivotal character, should be recognised for what he is: a well of *energy*. Whether one takes the Greek term *energeia* in its basic sense, as referring to the brilliancy of a rhetorically emphasized object, or adopts the modern semantics of *dynamic force*, the term unmistakably fits Jonathas to perfection. As the most visible actor in the cast, he may also be said to propel the play forward from start to finish, thanks to his obsessive refusal of Christian dogma's founding article:

the principle of Incarnation, with its inference that divine essence is miscible in human nature. Such incapacity to accommodate such a belief into his thinking he expresses as early as lines 201-4, whereupon his four acolytes repeat it *ad lib* (ll. 205-20), then while rehearsing the whole disquieting fable, from Incarnation to Resurrection (ll. 385-456).

What is striking indeed for us today in that essentially notional attitude is the intense affectivity which pervades it. Nowadays, in this self-styled age of rationality, we tend to oppose affectivity and reason as two antagonistic forces actuating the human psyche, with a premium naturally accorded the latter. After Robinson's pioneering article on the subject and Davidson's ensuing studies, Nichols convincingly emphasized that affective intensity, demonstrating its close relation to the emotional physicality of late medieval popular devotion. The critical current she thus countenances proposes that, in opposition to our modern stand-point associating extreme iconic susceptibility with sex rather than with the after-life, for the contemporaries of *The Croxton Play*, rational activity and emotional intensity may be in a direct ratio to one another where religious life is concerned. For Jonathas and the pack of Jews serving him, the insuperable intellectual contradiction is between the materiality of the host, seen as a vulgar piece of bread or "cake", and its capacity to encapsulate anything like divine essence. That contradiction, inherent in the new mental paradigm proposed by Wyclif, is steadily refused acceptance as a paradoxical mystery by the five Jews, and that refusal brings about their decision to submit the ambiguous but potentially terrific object—the consecrated host—to the test of a new Passion. In this way, the Croxton playwright only achieves anew what the Cycles do time and again when developing, in their episodes related to the Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection and Salvation, characters of energetic doubters who chemically precipitate the process of conversion.

It may well be, however, that the extension of the representation of the gory miracle to a nearly one-thousand-line episode, together with the conjunction (to us paradoxical) of the two crises of intellect and emotion and, to crown it all, the explicit assigning to a Jew of the testimonial function, gives *The Croxton Play* a highly specific spectacular impact.

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A Daring Game: The Handling of Political Issues by Tudor Playwrights

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Ever since medieval times, playwrights had been key figures in English society, endorsing religious principles and espousing the major issue of their time, namely the salvation of the soul. Plays were openly designed with one main aim upheld by all: to urge spectators onto the path of righteousness. Subsequently, during the Tudor period, although the nature of playmaking had radically changed, playwrights maintained an influential position in society, and the most prominent amongst them became involved in one of the principal concerns of the time: the politico-religious shake-up which, to all intents and purposes, dominated the sixteenth century. Such involvement was, of course, facilitated by the newly-evolving theatrical form which was Tudor Hall drama, sponsored by royal or noble patrons and adapted, by its very nature, to the expression of divergent views.

It is a well-documented fact that a number of prominent playwrights espoused the new religious—and consequently political—positions which began to emerge during Henry VIII's reign and took them firmly on board, whilst other dramatists favoured the *status quo* or, at best, wished only for minor reforms. In the case of some playwrights, their dramatic writing cannot be dissociated from their particular political and religious ideolo-

gies, and a number of them are remembered quite as much for their ideological stances as for their dramaturgical skills. However, expressing their opinions could be a perilous undertaking, and therefore the play-texts of the Tudor corpus are, to say the least, not always entirely explicit concerning their authors' views. At the time the plays were written and first performed, Tudor playwrights were on hazardous ground, and we know of only a certain number of them, such as John Bale or John Heywood, who felt strongly enough to risk the stringent sanctions which were never more than a step away. Such playwrights may have even enjoyed the exhilaration of courting danger, and a number of them played a daring allusive game, which was no doubt also entered into by contemporary spectators well practised in the art of decoding. This game has been seized upon throughout the centuries by scholars eager to seek out veiled allusions and oblique references in order to bring to light the playwrights' true design.

The first objective of this paper is to evoke the main sources of contention and the fluctuating patterns of censorship and sponsorship across the Tudor reigns through which, alternately helped and hindered, aspiring playwrights needed to weave their way carefully. Then, I shall evoke three prominent Tudor playwrights—John Bale, John Heywood and Nicholas Udall—casting a brief glance at the ideologies they were known to espouse and attempting to shed light on the extent to which they were willing to express them in their plays. I shall look at the obstacles standing in their way and consider how these could sometimes be worked around—for example, with the support of like-minded powerful nobles. The aim is to determine how far they were able to find a way (or not, according to the flavour of the day and the monarch in power) of slipping into their plays some indication of their beliefs. If overt expression of one's theories in a play could obviously not be without consequence, even covert hints were a risky business, as they might be deciphered by foes as well as friends. The final part of the paper will examine a few of the possible effects that these circumstances seem to have had on the artistic qualities of Tudor drama and consider to what extent they may have actually shaped major aspects of the Tudor dramatic corpus in general.

The contentious subjects requiring careful handling during this period obviously included primarily the royal divorce, the royal supremacy, the break with Rome and the Reformation. These necessarily involved matters of religious doctrine and practice, which included questions of transubstantiation, the celibacy of priests, the virgin birth, the worship of Mary and the authority of the Bible

or the “true word” over the rules of the Church. Also highly volatile were points of Catholic rite and practices such as the veneration of images and relics and the sale of pardons or indulgences. According to the auspices of a play and to the sympathies of the audience, players could be applauded for expressing their opinions on these subjects. However, in the wrong place and with the wrong audience, the playwright could risk his life or, at best, his career. Although there was never an attempt actually to eradicate all theatrical activity (because of its obvious value in spreading what were felt to be the “right” messages), a number of measures were put in place in order to monitor it. Initiatives were taken during each of the Tudor reigns to control players and their repertoires and to attempt to purge what was considered “seditious sentiment” (Westfall, p. 136), whereas drama flattering to the sovereign and his or her beliefs was allowed to flourish, or indeed was actively nurtured. This was therefore basically a struggle between censorship and sponsorship, which would intensify and change boundaries with each successive monarch, when, to put it simply, everybody swapped sides, so to speak.

The switch from sponsoring to censoring the same plays can be clearly observed in the case of the medieval Catholic cycle plays, which were alternately banned from performance and reinstated with each succession until their final demise during Elizabeth’s reign. A similar alternation may be observed concerning the humanist revival of Greek and Latin texts. Although no measures were actively taken against the teaching of Latin, and indeed the scholarly value of the language continued to be appreciated in a general way, it did tend to be frowned on during Protestant régimes for its connections with papism and all it symbolized to Protestant reformers: the antichrist, superstition and idolatry. On the other hand, Greek, the original language of the gospels, was exalted by Protestants as the fountain of truth. Therefore, during periods of Catholic dominance, the opposite preference was espoused.

Henry’s reign was a particularly hazardous time. The king’s uncertainty about the Reformation is legendary, and his sudden backward steps could be tragic for Catholics and Protestants alike. His long list of victims included the playwright and printer John Rastell. The king’s programme of censorship was active. By means of royal proclamations issued in 1527 and 1531, Henry clamped down on itinerant troupes by reactivating the old statute of 1285 enacted to curb vagrancy. This meant that independent strolling players could be arrested as vagrants and beaten or sold as slaves (Westfall, p. 136). Further statutes and proclamations in 1543 and 1544 banned interludes containing elements contrary to the

teachings of the Church. Even plays considered free from sedition were to be performed in certain households only (Happé, ed., Bale, p. 10). Henry also drastically curtailed amateur playmaking by reducing the number of saints' days considered as public holidays, on which plays were usually performed.

Within the framework of legislation, individual performances could be attacked, as occurred with a morality play performed at Grey's Inn during the Christmas season 1526-27, in which Cardinal Wolsey claimed he perceived a less than flattering depiction of himself. As the play-text has not survived, it is unclear as to whether or not this portrayal had been actually written into the text. It was possibly an example of a play in performance filling in the gaps left by the written text. Despite the absence of any detailed eye-witness account of this particular performance, we might conjecture that certain features common to the Tudor corpus were at work here: the visual impact, the power of theatrical delivery, intonation, gesture, facial expressions, the use of a mediating character as a link with the audience—these are all elements which would get the intended meaning across, leaving no room for doubt. In this particular case, the playmaker, John Roo, was committed to the Tower, and one of the actors fled overseas to join Tyndale (Marie Axton, ed., *Jacke Jugeler*, p. 4). Some years later, in 1537, a similar case was noted. This time a play performed during the May Game of Suffolk went flagrantly beyond what had been set down in the written text, and the whole May Game was banned when an enraged Henry ordered justices to enforce the regulations. In this particular instance, it was not the playwright but one of the actors who got the blame.

On the other hand, certain performances were actually encouraged, for, side-by-side with such measures, a full pro-Reformation programme of sponsorship was carried out under the aegis of Cromwell and Cranmer. To quote Bevington, "The Archbishop's genius for inspiring literary propaganda in the Drama was no doubt supplemented by Cromwell's genius for production and distribution" (p. 97). As part of his campaign to prepare the nation for the dissolution of the monasteries, Cromwell commissioned plays from a number of dramatists, one of whom was the fiercely and scathingly anti-papist John Bale. Bale's moralities, taken on tour by a small troupe, were designed to spread Protestant influence to a wide audience. Honoured by an invitation to stage his *King Johan* in Cranmer's house during the 1539 Christmas festivities, Bale was, however, shortly to fall out of courtly favour. After Henry VIII's reversal of policy and Cromwell's execution in 1540, Bale was forced into exile, and his work went from being officially

sponsored to being officially censored when it was condemned by proclamation on 8 July 1546. Similar changing fortunes befell *Pammachius*, Thomas Kirchmayer's fiercely anti-Catholic play, which was nonetheless written in Latin. Dedicated to Cranmer in 1538, its performance in 1545 at Christ's College, Cambridge, incurred the wrath of Bishop Gardiner, who conducted a zealous inquisition and thereafter imposed severe limits on the university's dramatic activity (Marie Axton, ed., *Jacke Jugeler*, p. 4; Happé, ed., Bale, p. 10).

Such incidents show clearly that the State had become a serious rival to the Church as censor of plays. This was formalised by an Act of Parliament in 1543, which banned interpretations of the Bible "contrary to the doctrine set forth . . . by the King's majesty". In 1546, the City of London joined the battle, claiming the right to control theatrical activity within the city boundaries. This municipal, parliamentary, state and church struggle was to affect the next three Tudor reigns.

Even though the doctrinal positions of Edward, then Mary, were more constant and, in this respect, less perfidious than Henry's, their measures were, if anything, even more stringent. During Edward's reign, the performance of pro-Catholic interludes was restrained, and it is to be suspected that many dramatic texts were burned, as most of the surviving interludes of the time are of Protestant inspiration. In 1548, the York mystery cycle was purged of the plays devoted to the Virgin Mary (Happé, ed., Bale, p. 5). Queen Mary's accession brought the immediate revival of any remaining Catholic plays, whilst the regime attempted to eradicate Protestant drama, which nonetheless continued surreptitiously. In August 1553 the government issued a warning against all plays and books of a seditious nature (Bevington, p. 114). The infamous burning of hundreds of heretics during Mary's reign indicates the strength of her resolve in general and must necessarily have acted as a deterrent or at least as a challenge to playwrights espousing the opposite persuasion.

Concerning sponsorship during these two periods, Protestant interludes thrived during Edward's reign, especially those, such as the anonymous play *Nice Wanton*, which concerned the education of children, whereas, as well as drama favourable to Catholicism, Mary seemed to appreciate plays devoid of polemical or doctrinal content. A champion of the cause of Latin, she particularly enjoyed those, such as Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister*, which were inspired by the Roman comedies of Terence and Plautus.

As for Elizabeth, although she promoted an atmosphere of moderation and tolerance, she was extremely strict and unbending about bringing this

about and did not flinch from resorting to extreme and even violent measures. In her heart of hearts, she did not wish to persecute ordinary Catholics for their beliefs as long as they made a semblance of observing Protestant rites. She took a harsher line, however, after 1570, when she felt that Catholics were becoming too great a threat. It was during her reign that all but the most oblique politico-religious polemic was finally stamped out. For example, she issued a series of stern proclamations in April and May 1559, warning magistrates not to license performers of plays concerned with either religious or political issues. By 1572, all plays for performance were subject to the stringent control exercised by the Master of the Revels. Despite the severity and the obstinate recurrence of royal measures, passions ran high in Tudor times. The playwrights and actors closest to the political sphere were used to living dangerously and consequently found ways of circumventing the censorship. Subversive playmakers could be motivated either by a doctrinal, philosophical or political commitment, or simply by the desire to please audiences by means of topical plays “tinged with danger and perhaps sensational in their potential for slander and scandal” (Westfall, p. 137). Such plays could also, of course, prove efficient money spinners.

Noble patronage was a system of sponsorship which helped playwrights to express their ideologies whilst managing, when possible, to elude official censorship. First, on a purely practical level, the legal status acquired by players who were attached to a noble household meant that they could no longer be endangered by the vagrancy laws. Furthermore, the social standing of their patron meant that they could be invited to other noble households and thereby maintain a channel of communication, possibly with seditious intention, between the great houses of the political elite. In such private venues, it would be illusory to imagine that players performing to audiences of the same persuasion as their patron would not be tempted to flout the censorship legislation. Similar licence could also have been indulged in during plays performed at the various Inns of Court, where like-minded members of the legal profession assembled.

It is probably this system of sponsorship by noble patrons which led to the weakening of the Crown’s position on censorship and to the frequent and seemingly desperate need to reiterate proclamations and reactivate statutes. Suzanne Westfall evokes the dilemma of local magistrates as to whether or not to enforce the law. Should they, for example, “tolerate the activities of a Protestant nobleman’s troupe in an area of strong Protestant sentiment, risking insult and public

outcry, simply because the Queen was Catholic?" (Westfall, p. 137). Wasn't the royal wrath a more remote threat than that of the patron in question?

If the sponsors of Great Hall drama therefore seem on the whole to have provided a relatively safe haven from royal censors, it would appear logical to assume, as do a number of critics, that Hall plays would have been subject to another source of censorship: that exercised by the patron himself. For example, Steven Mullaney believes that Tudor household drama was "fully circumscribed by the structures of authority and community" (p. 48). But according to Walker, virtually the opposite was true, and the players were allowed full latitude to act as good counsellors and to confront their noble audiences "with often quite brutal criticisms, seemingly with impunity" (*Politics*, p. 1). It was in the lord's interest to accept graciously and thereby enhance his reputation as a wise ruler (p. 3).

The idea of powerful men being wise enough to accept counsel from certain knowing subordinates is suggested in Thomas Preston's play, *Cambises*. In this somewhat extreme case, once the king stops taking the proffered advice, there is nothing to halt his descent into wickedness.

This theory of Good Counsel is given further credence by two closely connected aspects of Tudor culture: the first is the Tudor playmaker's widely recognized stance as a moral teacher. This emerges clearly from the majority of interludes, the particular lessons offered by the plays often being spelled out in pedagogical tones through prologues and epilogues; the second is the great spate of literature designed to advise and, where necessary, to admonish princes and nobles. The prime example is, of course, Thomas Elyot's *The Boke Named the Governour*, but the vogue for "mirror" literature also reached the Tudor stage. Plays such as *Cambises*, *Apus and Virginia*, *Virtuous and Godly Susannah* and *Jocasta* explored the nature of tyranny and defined the qualities of the ideal prince by negative example (Bevington, p. 156). In this cultural context, the theory of household players unhampered by censorship and able to go as far as to rebuke their patron is therefore perfectly credible. Throwing all caution to the wind in this way could, however, be a dangerous business when troupes performed away from home. Even if official censorship did not always have the far-reaching effects aimed at by the Tudor monarchs, it nevertheless remained a threat, a fact which a number of impudent and imprudent players chose to ignore. Lulled into a false sense of their immunity by the system of patronage, they were often tempted to overstep the mark. Such was the case when the Earl of Oxford's unruly troupe could not be deterred, either by local magistrates or by Bishop Gardiner himself, from putting

on a play on the day of Henry VIII's funeral. Gardiner was finally forced to appeal to the highest authority in the land, Protector Somerset (Westfall, p. 137).

Despite the amount of subversive material which slipped through the net, it is important to remember that we are considering a period when, far from being a mere concept, the metaphorical axe wielded by the censor could become chillingly real if transferred to the hands of the executioner. Playwrights therefore ran great risks. Certainly, the playmakers closest to the seat of power were those courting the greatest danger. Remaining in favour across the different reigns was no simple task, and the least error of judgement could be fatal. Playmakers had to gauge the fluctuating mood and to decide—according to their own priorities—just how far they could go. Between the options of blatantly expressing their own doctrinal and political position at their peril, or playing safe by being totally supportive, Tudor dramatists could choose to further their cause discreetly by being artfully subversive, and this is possibly where, theatrically speaking, they were at their most inventive and creative.

As to whether playmakers opted chiefly for self-promotion or self-preservation, we can detect varying degrees—almost a scale in fact—of a kind of self-regulated censorship. Comparing the positions, on this imaginary scale, of three major Tudor dramatists—Bale, Heywood and Udall—at degree zero we find John Bale (1495-1563), who, despite his fluctuating fortunes, as noted above, continued to take no precautions at all in his play-texts. He boldly set out to flout all forms of censorship, and to flaunt Protestant doctrine. He chose to endure periods in exile during Henry's and Mary's reigns rather than make any concessions. But far from reducing him to silence, his time abroad left him free to write prolifically. If anything, he became even more of a loose cannon and, in Walker's words, was able "to bombard the realm with polemical pamphlets" (*Plays*, p. 170). John Bale was, of course, totally frank and forthright, but his outspokenness on paper seems to be the exception rather than the rule amongst playmakers. Other Tudor playwrights had strongly marked ideologies, which, in less dangerous circumstances, would no doubt have figured more extensively and, above all, in a more apparent manner in their play-texts. But they opted for caution.

One such playwright was Nicholas Udall (1505-56), whom we may situate at the opposite end of the scale from Bale. Prudent to the last, and seemingly unwilling to brave his successive monarchs' displeasure, this discreet supporter of Protestant reform kept any incriminating polemic resolutely out of his most prominent plays. This is understandable because much of his work, whether

formally attributed to him, like *Ralph Roister Doister*, or presumed to be his, like *Jack Juggler*, *Thersites* or *Respublica*, was written to entertain the Catholic court of Queen Mary, where it would have been almost suicidal to openly promote his own beliefs.

Between these two extremes on the scale, we find John Heywood (1497–1578). If, during the periods most dangerous to him, Bale wrote his scathing polemic from a sensible distance abroad and Udall played it safe in Mary's court, Heywood took the risk of composing his complete corpus and staging his plays in the centre of the Royal Household, right under Henry VIII's nose. It is hardly surprising, then, that he could not be completely outspoken about his conservative Catholic beliefs and his reservations about the king's policy. Heywood's plays, discreetly but nonetheless daringly, defied the stepped-up censorship to express the principles for which Sir Thomas More was martyred. The ideology in his plays does not jump out from the page, but is allusive and requires careful interpretation. That he meant business in promoting his beliefs was proved by his participation in the abortive Prebendaries' Plot, in 1543, to overthrow Cranmer. But his legendary wit and humour helped him to side-step both the executioner's and the censor's axe and to maintain his privileged position at court throughout much of the century (Reed, p. 63).

If, as suggested above, patterns of sponsorship and censorship to some degree determined the type of plays featuring in the extant Tudor corpus, they also contributed to the overall shape and form, and, indeed, to the quality of the drama. For example, the decline of amateur playmaking, the rise of the common player and the intensive activity of the professional travelling troupes, which so extensively shaped Tudor theatre, can be at least partially attributed to the curtailment of religious feasts and the reinforcement of the vagrancy laws. In the same way, the alternating periods of discrimination against Latin and Greek seem to have somewhat hampered the development of classical influences on Tudor drama. As things stood, espousing the humanist trajectory became dangerous, and much playwriting talent was ploughed back into the development of traditional forms. If this entailed missing out on features such as the classical stage-set and the brilliantly intelligent and manipulative valet, it did mean that vernacular drama was allowed to thrive. In fact, even when classical elements were incorporated in plays like *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, they did not dominate the play and rather became anglicised. The global effect was that vernacular drama

was bolstered and enriched, acquiring the intrinsic Englishness for which plays of this era were renowned.

Furthermore, coping with polemic and dodging the censor must also have contributed to shaping the plays' actual contents and forging the dramaturgical skills and techniques of the playwrights. This is far too vast and complex a subject to be gone into at any length here, but some aspects can be mentioned. Direct involvement in polemic was, for example, a great stimulus for John Bale to sharpen his dramatic skills. It was certainly his driving force, and Peter Happé has observed how plot, structure, location, costume and stage properties were all carefully orchestrated to "make Protestant theology triumph" in Bale's plays (Happé, ed., Bale, pp. 4 and 7). This impetus and its attendant dangers certainly inspired Bale's personal style of invective, but also his contribution to the general characteristics of the Tudor dramatic corpus. Other playwrights who adopted a less direct stance than Bale employed techniques which were particularly honed to skirt round the censorship and which, in some cases, provided a seemingly innocent context for potentially seditious content. These include allegory, satire and transposition of time and space.

The fact that such techniques were resorted to as a coded way of expressing potentially dangerous opinions meant that they became characteristic features of the Tudor corpus, enhancing its literary value. Featuring such renowned political allegories as John Skelton's *Magnificence* and Nicholas Udall's *Respublica*, the Tudor drama is also noted for its handling of satire and innuendo. Such was John Heywood's skill in this domain that in *The Play of the Wether*, according to Richard Axton and Happé, he was able, with impunity, to prance around such volatile issues as Henry VIII's divorce. This play, performed at the royal court, daringly evokes the king's relationship with Anne Boleyn. Roberta Mullini has spoken of the way Heywood subliminally embedded his Catholic point of view in his plays and of how skillfully he used the art of innuendo.

Similarly, in the case of the transposition of time and space (that is, masking subversive intent by giving a play a historically remote setting and a pagan context), recourse to this technique for prosaic reasons led to the refinement of the theatrical poetry it could produce. In most cases, straight transposition was eschewed in favour of a technique belonging to a staging phenomenon inherited from the medieval theatre, which André Lascombes calls *diaphore*.¹ Entirely

1 See Richard Axton and Happé, eds., pp. 13 and 24-27. For an extended discussion, see Lascombes, pp. 699-735.

dependent on theatrical illusion, this particular form, which was an important means of acculturation, involves the foreshortening and distortion, or anamorphosis, of space and time. Thus the settings in plays like *Cambises* or *Apius and Virginia* are indeed foreign, yet also unmistakably English. They are not neat transpositions or simple analogies. They do not switch from one setting to the other but simply *are* intrinsically both at once. In Thomas Preston's play *Cambises*, for example, we find a sequence between two characters supposed to be Persian peasants. But in fact everything is done purposely to make them recognizable as thoroughly English rustics with the homely names of Hob and Lob. They are shown supposedly in a Persian setting but are actually plodding along to the market in York, carrying their baskets of English-sounding fare and complaining about *their* monarch, the Persian tyrant Cambises, whom Lob describes as "a zhrode lad" (l. 770). This type of anomaly is recurrent in the corpus and cannot be the result of carelessness or ignorance. Consequently, when the contemporary spectator perceived the dramatised worlds, complete with despotic rulers, featured in such plays, he also received subliminal images of his own world and his own monarch. Therefore, much more than providing a "distant and therefore safe" location for the action, this technique was a far cleverer way of filtering through the censorship than certain critics have allowed. Indeed, such transpositions are generally considered to be merely straightforward foreign-based analogies.² Moreover, getting the play past the censor was not the only virtue of such transpositions. This intermittent dual perception must have provided a thrilling aesthetic experience for the contemporary spectator, an enactment of the exhilarating power of the theatre. We may therefore conclude that, although politico-religious polemic was not its main *raison d'être*, its obvious advantage for such purposes may well have been one of the reasons why this particular form of *diaphore* thrived and continued to be a source of theatrical magic and aesthetic satisfaction on the Tudor stage.

As well as direct or oblique involvement in polemic, wary avoidance of it was also a factor in shaping Tudor drama. Nicholas Udall's work is surely a case in point, for although prior to Mary's accession he was a confirmed reformer, he subsequently remains silent about it in his dramatic texts. On the other hand, as Walker's analysis of *Respublica* shows, Udall's harsh and extensive critique of

2 This seems to be the opinion of Bevington, for instance, who, in such cases, puts the accent essentially on the remoteness of the setting. However, he does at least admit that there is a "lack of direct analogy" (p. 157).

the Edwardian economic policy seems perfectly sincere.³ Still, I should like to emphasize the fact that this was criticism of a Protestant regime in a play intended for a newly instated Catholic queen. Udall was therefore risking nothing in this instance. On the contrary, this play could only increase his credit with Mary, especially as she was flatteringly represented in the allegory by the character Nemesis. Furthermore, although Udall criticizes ecclesiastic organisation from a financial point of view, he keeps entirely quiet about the issues apparently closest to his heart, namely Protestant doctrine and spirituality, preferring not to engage in such a daring game under a Catholic monarchy. Since other plays of which he is assumed to be the author—*Ralph Roister Doister* and *Jacke Jugeler*—seem devoid of any potentially polemical material, one could say that, in devoting much of his dramaturgical skill to pleasing his Catholic sponsor, Mary, Udall endowed the Tudor corpus with his rich and inventive contribution to neo-classic comedy in the vernacular. In *Jacke Jugeler*, Udall communicates very clearly through the Prologue that he believes the era is too dangerous to be able to risk engaging in polemics—the “tyme is so quesie” (l. 66)—and that priority will therefore be given to charmingly harmless “mirthe and recreacion” (l. 16). As the kind of genteel merriment this implies is distinguished from the obscene jesting to be found in the majority of Tudor plays (ll. 42–48), Udall also steers clear of another kind of censorship: the increasing attacks on the supposed immorality of Tudor drama. These, of course, were to develop into formal Puritan opposition.⁴

In conclusion, although what could almost be described as a struggle between censorship and sponsorship indubitably left its mark on pre-playhouse drama, it obviously did not totally inhibit theatrical creation. Indeed, as we have seen, it appears to have shaped at least the following three characteristics of Tudor theatre: the organisation of prolifically creative professional troupes, the development of particular dramaturgical skills and the unique English quality of the plays. Indeed, as we saw earlier, there had been some classical influences, but these had been absorbed almost seamlessly into plays such as *Gammer Gurton’s Needle*, which, despite the Latin-style features mentioned earlier, stands out far more for its intrinsic English rural character. In the moral or ethical domain, censorship was largely left to the playmakers’ own discretion. Even in the more sensitive politico-religious field, its attacks were sporadic—highly dangerous to

3 See Walker, *Politics*, pp. 163–93.

4 See Brockett, p. 193.

individual playwrights, but often neutralised by sponsorship and never really cohesive enough to represent a threat to the theatre as a whole.

Obviously, though, as the century wore on, this situation was to change radically. As politico-religious polemic faded into the background, the drama came increasingly under Puritan attack for its so-called bawdiness and generally immoral nature. In the battle which had been raging since the Reformation, control of the theatre was slipping inexorably from the royal grasp. In 1642 came the final surrender to Parliament, and the theatre as a whole was reduced to silence by the ultimate censorship: the closing down of the playhouses.

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“For eche of you one tale shall tell”: Religion, Debate and Spectacle in John Heywood’s The Foure PP

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When I started reading John Heywood’s plays, many years ago, I felt uneasy about the structure of his interludes, given their debate-like “format”. All this in spite of valuable criticism—such as Joel B. Altman’s—which studied them from the point of view of their hermeneutical content and their intellectual stance. When, though, I had to enact the Friar in my students’ performance of *The Pardoner and the Frere* in 1998, I fully realised how powerful a theatrical means debate can be, when joined to the skill of such an expert man of the theatre as Heywood.

Later, I also wrote about the debate structure, because the paradox of a type of theatre where nothing seems to “happen” is not easily acceptable (Mullini, “Dialogue and Debate in John Heywood’s Plays”; see also *Mad merry Heywood*). And here I am once again, this time limiting my scope to one of the so-called “farces”—*The Foure PP*—which reveals itself to be much richer in its theological and religious intent than expected, while appearing perhaps the dullest of all Heywoodian products from a theatrical point of view, notwithstanding its genre label.

The Religious Debate

The play, printed around 1544 but probably written in the late 1520s (or early 1530s, according to Axton and Happé, pp. 41, 45), has no plot proper, but is merely the “transcription” of a four-character dialogue about which of the protagonists is superior, for the length of 1243 lines. Three of the four protagonists, a Palmer, an Apothecary (“Potycary”) and a Pardoner, take long turns in the first part of the play in showing their individual superiority,¹ until the Pedler—the last to arrive on stage—decides that the controversy will be decided on the basis of a lying contest, which in the end he declares won by the Palmer because of the latter’s apparently inconspicuous and (ironically) misogynistic comment about women:

Yet in all places where I have ben,
Of all the women that I have sene,
I never sawe nor knewe, to my consyens,
Any one woman out of paciens. (ll. 1000-3)

Before and after the contest (the theatricality of which will be discussed later), the characters debate about the best way to obtain salvation. The Palmer defends his going on pilgrimages, the Pardoner his selling of relics, the Potycary his ambiguous and sometimes deadly remedies, which send souls to heaven. The Pedler appears to be extraneous to the argument, since he declares that he has joined the company only to earn “Some money for parte of the ware in my packe” (l. 215). After the Palmer’s victory, the Pedler starts talking about individual talents and virtues (ll. 1137-86), exhorting his companions to overcome all differences because “One kynde of vertue to dyspyse another / Is lyke as the syster myght hange the brother” (ll. 1185-86). At the very end of the play, the Palmer prays that God will guide all people “In the fayth of hys churche universall” (l. 1234).

It is evident that much more than the ending of a playful interlude is at stake, not only in the words quoted, but also in the text as a whole. The topical relevance of *The Foure PP* has often been highlighted: when the play was probably written, King Henry VIII was resolute on his divorce from Catherine of Aragon (and in January 1533 he had married Anne Boleyn), thus going well

1 The interlude is not divided into sections; for the sake of analysis, I propose a division into three parts: the first leading up to the lying contest (ll. 1-698), the second including the two tales of wonder till the end of the ensuing strife (ll. 699-1136), the third extending from the rounding-off of the initial situation to the end (ll. 1137-234).

beyond the breaking point with the Pope and the Catholic Church. It is interesting to note that Heywood uses the English adjective “universal” instead of the more common (but at the time abhorred by the Protestant party) “catholic”, very probably in order, on the one hand, to avoid the immediate accusation of taking sides with the Pope in the divorce cause, but, on the other, to stress his faith in the old religion, here presented as the only possible one in opposition to all heresies, once abuses have been removed. Therefore, the interlude obliquely includes controversial themes, both political and religious, once more showing how its author was able to offer his “conservative” plays by “subliminally” embedding his catholic orthodoxy in them.² It is clear, then, that Heywood was deeply indebted to the Catholic polemical production of the time, especially to his wife’s uncle, Sir Thomas More.

Candace Lines has argued that “The intensity of the salvation debate in *Pardoner* [published in 1533 by William Rastell] is never reached in *The Foure PP*, however. Instead the debate quickly turns ludicrous”, so that we see “the transformation of the controversial into the comic” (pp. 415-16). Despite the nearly total uncertainty about the dates of composition of Heywood’s plays, *The Foure PP* may be supposed to have been written after *The Pardoner and the Frere*, at least considering the elaboration of the pardoner figure from *Pardoner* to *The Foure PP*. This might explain a more virulent attack on abuses in the former play, which was likely composed before More concluded his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529, revised 1531), when things royal appeared perhaps still subject to change and the dispute with the Roman Church seemed capable of being brought by “persuasion” to a less bloody conclusion. Critics have always stressed the presence of More’s influence in Heywood’s drama, finding it, however, in different works. Analysing *The Foure PP* and reading it in the light of *Utopia*, Alcuin Blamires argues that More and Heywood shared “the same cross-currents: satirizing the superstitious abuse of Catholic practices by ecclesiastical hypocrites” (p. 53). In his turn, Altman—who hypothesises that the play was written in 1520-22—perceives a relationship with More’s *Responsio ad Lutherum* (1523), because, in his opinion, the play “seems to have been an attempt to address the same problem”—the refutation of Luther’s attack against the king—“with the intent of defusing the potency

2 See Walker’s interpretation of Heywood’s *The Play of the Wether* in *Plays of Persuasion*, p. 167. For an analysis of orthodoxy in *The Pardoner and the Frere*, see Caputo (I thank the author for sending me her article).

of the Lutheran attack on ecclesiastical abuses” (p. 249). Altman also cites the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* in relation to *The Foure PP*, but, given his attribution of the play to the early 1520s, he does not acknowledge any connection between the two, and he calls More’s work an “abortive fiction” written when “the situation had deteriorated”, too late “for this vision to carry much conviction” (pp. 249–50). Axton and Happé, on the other hand, conclude their presentation of the sources of the play by saying that “The defence of pilgrimage and the dramatic authority given to the Palmer’s final utterances align Heywood’s point of view with that of More in *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* and indicate [a] roughly contemporary date of composition c. 1528–30” (p. 45).³ Lines agrees that *The Foure PP* “echoes the orthodox position More asserts in the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*” (p. 420).

The religious discourse of the interlude is introduced chiefly by the Palmer and by the Pedler in the third part of the text, after the lying competition, but also—before the “tales of marvel”—by the Palmer’s self-presentation and by the Pardoner’s display of his fake relics. In the former case, religion is clearly the main, and serious, topic of discourse; in the latter, it surfaces through the embedded satire against the superstition linked to the veneration of saints’ shrines and to the selling of pardons. (Catholic) Christian tolerance is highlighted in the Palmer’s speeches at the end of the play, after the severe but jocular satire of the first part. It is here, actually, that Heywood’s Catholic stance and alignment with More’s position are at their most evident, since abuses are displayed and attacked at the same time, thus showing the playwright’s oblique way of presenting a contrast with the Protestants’ accusations, while advocating reforms from inside the Catholic church.

Heywood shows all his skill when doing this. Thus, after the Palmer has pronounced his monologue listing all the places of his pilgrimages, the Pardoner sceptically intervenes to deflate his interlocutor’s praise of pilgrimages: “And when ye have gone as farre as ye can, / For all your labour and gostely entente, / Yet welcome home as wyse as ye wente” (ll. 64–66). In the same way, as soon the Pardoner presents himself, saying, “Truly I am a pardoner” (l. 106), the Palmer comments:

Truely a pardoner that may be true
 But a true pardoner doth nat ensew.
 Ryght selde is it sene or never
 That treuth and pardoners dwell together. (ll. 107–10)

3 See also the notes to the text of the interlude, pp. 247–62.

And when the Potycary joins the company, he soon extols his own way of sending people to heaven, commenting to the Pardoner: “If a thousande pardons about your neckes were teyd, / When come they to heven yf they never dyed?” (ll. 189–90).

When talking to his fictional guest, the Messenger, in the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, More discusses the practice of pilgrimage at length in the third chapter of Book One, which ends with the following exhortation: “Now maketh your reason, as I said, no more againste pilgrimages, than against every chirch. For god is not bounden to the place, nor our confidence bounden to the place, but unto god (though we reckon our praier more pleasant to god in the chirch than without, bicause hys hygh goodnes accepteth it so) in likewise do not we reken our lord bounden to the place or image where the pilgrymage is, though we worship god there, because hymself lyked so to have it” (p. 123, col. 1).

All the chapters of Book One from Three to Nineteen deal with pilgrimages. More’s general position can be summed up by the words introducing Chapter Fifteen: “*The author sheweth that if of those miracles that are told and written to be done at divers pylgrimages and commonly believed for very trew, we certaynlye knew some falsely fayned, yet were that no cause to mistrust the remenaunt*” (p. 136, col. 2; italics in the original). The parallel with the Palmer’s attitude when defending his participation in pilgrimages and, in the third part of the play, when asking for tolerance and acceptance of diversity, is evident. More’s later discussion of the need to have faith in the Church’s teaching turns out to be similar to the Palmer’s ending lines: “And now sith ye graunt, and I also, that the church can not misseunderstand the scripture to the hinderance of the right faith, in things of necessity [to salvation], and that ye also knowlege this matter to be such, that it must either be the right beleve and acceptable service to god or els a wronge and erronious opinion and plain ydolatrie, it foloweth of necessite that the church doth not misse understand [*sic*] those textes that ye or any other can allege, and bryng foorth for that purpose” (p. 149, col. 1).

The discussion about images, relics, and pilgrimages continues in Book Two of the *Dialogue*, and here again More’s words about the despicable behaviour of pilgrims, as related by his guest, resound in favour of the abolition of abuses, but certainly not of the Reformation as such: “For if it [praying to saints, going on pilgrimage and worshipping relics and imagves] maye bee wel done, then though many wold misseuse it, yet doth al that nothing minishe the goodnes of the thyng self. For if we should, for the misseuse of a good thinge and for the evilles

that grow sometime in the abuse thereof, not amend the mysseuse but utterly put the hole use awai, we should then make marvailous chaunges in the world” (p. 198, col. 2).

Similarly, Heywood undermines the danger represented by the abusive Pardoner by getting him to accept the Pedler’s offer of reconciliation:

Pedler. For his and all other that ye knowe fayned,
Ye be nother counceled nor constrayned
To any suche thyng in any suche case
To gyve any reverence in any suche place.
But where ye dout, the truthe nat knowynge,
Belevynge the beste, good may be growynge.
In judgynge the beste no harme at the leste;
In judgynge the worste, no good at the beste.
But beste in these thynges it semeth to me,
To make no judgement upon ye.
But as the churche doth judge or take them,
So do ye receyve or forsake them.
And so be sure ye can nat erre,
But may be a frutfull folower.
Potycary. Go ye before and, as I am true man,
I wyll folow as faste as I can.
Pardoner. And so wyll I, for he hath sayd so well,
Reason wolde we shulde folowe hys counsell. (ll. 1203-20)

The Spectacle

Introducing his analysis of story-telling in John Heywood’s plays, Richard Axton observes that “the longest of these in-set stories takes about fifteen minutes to perform and requires the actor to impersonate voices and gestures of characters who are never seen by the audience: their presence is a collaborative act of imagination” (p. 43).

Here I would also like to discuss this position, which I broadly share, in the light of Jean-Paul Débax’s view that, in Heywood’s plays, “nothing happens on stage” and that “practically everything is narrative, and the dialogue has nothing to do with action” (pp. 35-36). The two critics do not actually say very different things; indeed, their positions as to the role of long narratives in the interludes result in a major (for Axton) and a minor (for Débax) stress on the relevance and importance of theatrical action vs. dramatic action. My personal stance is

that the way in which embedded narratives are constructed and the theatrical richness they display enhance, in the audience's eyes, the dramatic action itself. The most striking examples of this effect are to be found in the Potycary's and the Pardoner's tales during the lying contest in *The Foure PP*.⁴

First of all, one must keep in mind that lengthy speeches in drama may cause the spectators' attention to slacken, since dialogue seems to stop and give way to something absolutely less active.⁵ However, as John McGavin suggests, there are factors that affect the audience's toleration of long speeches, for example,

the location of the speech, e.g. whether or not it is technically outside the action of the play, such as the opening address of a Prolocutor or closing remarks of an Interpreter ... Some subjects traditionally receive lengthy treatment ... Other subjects permit length because of their generic affinities: sermons and proclamations are obvious examples ... spectators expect a variety of generic affinities stretching out from what is seen and heard, and are prepared to adjust their framework of response constantly to cooperate with this. (p. 91)

These preliminary remarks are necessary in order to stress that in *The Foure PP* the long speeches pronounced by the Potycary and the Pardoner find their full justification in the lying competition. They are located neither at the beginning nor at the end of the play, but in what I consider the second part, and are artfully introduced, so that the audience are ready to listen to the tales, the taller and the longer the better. Their expectations are raised by the Pedler's words, "eche of you one tale shall tell" (l. 700), which dispose of all other possible speech genres and signal a break with the previous repartee, thus soliciting the speakers to start and preparing the spectators to listen.

The Potycary's Tale

The tale of "mervell" required by the Pedler (l. 701) immediately becomes a tall tale, because the contextual frame devised by the speaker sets the events "no lenger ago / But *Anno domini millesimo*" (ll. 708-9). This beginning undercuts the

- 4 No Lover Nor Loved's speech in *A Play of Love* about his past love affair would also be worth analysing, but in this essay I shall focus only on the tales present in *The Foure PP*. I have dealt with No Lover Nor Loved's monologue in *Mad merry Heywood*.
- 5 Shakespeare shows that he realizes the theatrical weakness of long narrations when, for example, he makes Prospero interrupt his speech to Miranda in *The Tempest*, I.ii, with such phrases as "Dost thou attend me?" (78) and "Dost thou hear?" (106).

speaker's reliability yet obtains exactly what he wants, that is, his tale is to be interpreted like a lie. At the same time, the Potycary takes care that his internal audience (the other three protagonists of the interlude) and the spectators at large should be aware of the novelty of what he is going to say: "suer the most parte shall be new" (l. 707). This procedure seems similar to the beginning of jokes, when a person starts to recount "the latest" one—a joke which, presumably, is still unknown and therefore tellable.

The story told by the Potycary evolves up to line 768, developing an increasingly hyperbolic account of the effects produced by the "glyster" ministered to a young woman suffering from "fallen syknes". The sexual innuendoes of both illness and remedy are clear, especially when the Potycary declares that it was difficult for him to bring the girl to health because her mother suffered from the same disease: in other words, both mother and daughter were prostitutes. But soon after being mentioned, the sexual meanings are left aside, because what the speaker is more interested in is the scatological details to follow. The "glyster" becomes a "thampyon" (l. 732), which explodes "as it had thonderd" (l. 740), causing the total destruction of a castle ten miles away. The grotesque and gargantuan effects of the blown-up castle fill the river around it with stones, so that "who lyste nowe to walke therto, / May wade it over and wet no shoo" (ll. 758-59). The remedy, nevertheless, has been efficacious, and the girl is said to have recovered so well that, adds the Potycary, "I left her in good helth and luste— / And so she doth contynew, I truste" (ll. 767-68).

In his speech, the Potycary uses indirect discourse exclusively, without ever letting the "ill" girl say anything. This detail seems to reveal that the speaker's main interest consists, not in the presentation of a specific character as the protagonist of his story (even if, actually, he "creates" her at the beginning of his tale), but in the description and accumulation of the consequences of his cure: that is the "mervaylouse thyng" (l. 705) he wants to tell his listeners. That the focus on the audience is always very strong is witnessed by three very brief references and addresses to his onstage spectators at three crucial points of the tale. At line 717, after explaining that the "fallen syknes" was hereditary, the Potycary adds that, for his medical art, this caused his task to be "more harde ye may be sure". After some fifteen lines, on the point of naming the exact remedy administered to the girl, he calls for the audience's attention with, "Syr, at the last I gave her a glyster" (l. 731). And still later, after working on the spectators' expectations about the results of his cure and comparing them to those provoked by

the explosion of gunpowder, the Potycary manoeuvres the audience's attention explicitly with "now marke, for here begynneth the revell" (l. 742). With his first appeal, the Potycary seems to tease the medical competence and curiosity of his listeners; with the second, he appears to call for attention at the very climax of the "dirty" joke; with the third, he wants to prepare them for the extraordinarily hyperbolic event of the girl's recovery. The rhetorical procedures employed by the Potycary, therefore, rely not only on a skilful orchestration of the *dispositio* of his narrative material (of course, a worthy *inventio* must be taken for granted because of the general purpose of the marvellous tale), but also on an attentive *elocutio*, which is able to profit from the moments when the interaction with the audience is pragmatically more effective.

To the rhetorically rich texture of the Potycary's speech one must also add the physical presence of the actor's body, *i.e.*, the similarly ample gestures, which go hand-in-hand with the words. We cannot imagine such a speech being delivered by a stiff actor; on the contrary, the actor must mimic what he is saying with his whole body, so that the episode of his story-telling becomes a theatrical moment of high comedy, where "something happens", even if offstage and mediated by the speaker's evocative phrases.

The Pardoner's Tale

The Pardoner's tale is much longer than the Potycary's, extending from line 771 to line 976. Indeed, because of its complexity and beauty, it has been considered "an example of 'the short story' in early English literature" (Southern, p. 253).

As soon as the Potycary has finished telling his story, the Pedler comments on it for two lines; then the Pardoner starts, saying, "Well, syr, then marke what I can say" (l. 771). This speaker's attitude is that of a person who is well aware both of his own skill and of the value of the contest. Up to line 796, he narrates the ante-facts, so to speak: a friend of his died when he was away from home, so that he was not able to facilitate her way to heaven with his pardons; very sad and sorry for this, he decided to go on "thys journey for her sake" (l. 796). In this cataphoric way, his audience are invited to expect a travel story, but they cannot yet define what travel the narration will describe. The following line directly requires the spectators' attention (already invoked by the narrative programme of "thys journey"), since the Pardoner says, "here begynneth the story" (l. 797). And in fact the tale starts with "From hens I went to purgatory" (l. 798), a

phrase which contains a fleeting, but powerful hint of the genre of the Pardoner's story: the audience are now expecting a tale about the underworld, possibly a "vision" of the type so well-known throughout European medieval culture. The Pardoner says that he carried with him the sack with his pardons, because in the underworld they might also be of use. Purgatory is provided with gates—*of course*, according to the traditional iconography of the time—but Margery Coorson's soul (the name will be pronounced only at l. 932) is not there, and, since he knew that she was far from being a saint when alive, there is only one other possibility: "Alas, thought I, she is in hell!" (l. 810). Then he moves towards hell. There are gates in hell, too, but the infernal lodge does not strike any terror: "All hayle, syr devyll", says the Pardoner with a curtesy (l. 825), and he is welcomed by the porter devil. The two of them even turn out to be old acquaintances: "Thys devyll and I were of olde acqueyntaunce, / For oft in the play of Corpus Cristi / He hath played the devyll at Coventry" (ll. 830-32).

At this point, the audience have succeeded in situating the Pardoner's story, not among the straightforward medieval visions of hell, but rather among parodies of such visions, and are therefore entitled to expect something extraordinary and marvellous, although along the lines of this first merry infernal encounter. Parody necessarily goes beyond the transposition of infernal visions into comic tales, because it also touches the mystery cycles, in particular the episode of the "Harrowing of Hell". But everything here appears reversed in comparison with the powerful dread and majesty of hell in the mysteries: the newcomer is certainly not Christ; the first words pronounced in front of hell's gates are not "Attollite portas inferi" (actually, as has been seen, they do not sound like a terrible order to the devils but like a deferential greeting); and the devil at the gate is not struck by terror on seeing the visitor. Everything is turned upside down with a comic and carnivalesque perspective which promises further merry marvels.⁶

In fact, soon afterwards the "good mayster-porter" (l. 836) reassures the Pardoner that he has arrived on the right occasion:

For thys daye Lucyfer fell,
Whiche is our festyvall in hell.
Nothyng unreasonable craved thys day
That shall in hell have any nay.

6 On the use of parody in this episode and in Heywood's plays in general, see Mullini, "Better to be sott Somer then sage Salamon".

But yet be ware thou come nat in,
Tyll tyme thou may thy pasporte wyn.
Wherfore stande styll, and I wyll wyt
Yf I can get thy save condyt. (ll. 841-48)

It is no less than the anniversary of the foundation of hell, a time of feasts and benevolence, but, as in any powerful court, one needs a safe-conduct to enter, a sort of invitation to the festival. Soon afterwards, in fact, the porter-devil gives the Pardoner a “passport” written and signed by Lucifer himself. The “letter patent” is certainly one of the climactic points in the tale, and if, instead of summarising it, the text repeats it word by word, this is perhaps because it also parodies similar documents released by the offices of Henry VIII’s court.⁷ The Pardoner addresses his audience, just before reciting the content of the letter-patent, by saying that the words contained in the “passport” were exactly “as ye shall here” (l. 851). The paradoxical beginning—“Lucyfer, / By the power of God chyefe devyll of hell” (ll. 852-53)—is paralleled by the similarly absurd “God save the devyll!” (l. 868) with which the Pardoner in hell welcomes Lucifer’s demonstration of benevolence.

With his passport in his hands, the Pardoner heads to where the feast takes place, and there he finds the most striking parody of medieval pictures of hellish torments, as if in the painting of a Hieronimus Bosch merrily gone crazy. All the devils, in their Sunday suits, are in full magnificence:

Theyr hornes well gylt, theyr clowes full clene,
Theyr taylles well kempt and, as I wene,
With Sothery butter theyr bodyes anoynted—
I never sawe devyls so well appoynted.
The mayster devyll sat in his jacket,
And all the soules were playnge at racket;
None other rackettes they hadde in hande,
Save every soule a good fyre brande,
Wherwith they played so pretely
That Lucyfer laughed merely,
And all the resedew of the feendes
Dyd laugh full well togytther lyke frendes. (ll. 877-89)

7 For the political meanings of this episode, see Lines. Heywood’s treatment of king-like characters is dealt with in Bevington, pp. 64-70; Walker, *Plays of Persuasion*, pp. 133-68; and Happé, “Spectacle in Bale and Heywood” and “Images of Kingship in Heywood and Bale”.

There are no suffering yells in this hell, only laughter; the souls are neither being devoured nor tortured by the devils: on the contrary, they play tennis with rackets fit for the place (fire-brands); the devils themselves do not appear so dreadful, since they do not resemble the roaring and dishevelled creatures appointed to the infernal furnaces, but are clean and well-behaved monsters. Lucifer only, watching the tennis game, is still a powerful figure, to whom the visitor bows as “low as I coude”, as he says (l. 893). It is at this point that the Pardoner portrays Lucifer in a more traditional way, even if the picture is comic once more, given the initial words of the description: “He smyled on me well favoredly” (l. 896). In fact, Lucifer has bushy ears, huge eyebrows and gigantic eyes; he gnashes his teeth and vomits fire from his nostrils (ll. 897-901). In front of such a character, the Pardoner—kneeling down—manifests all his paradoxical admiration for what he sees by exclaiming, “O plesant pycture, O Prince of Hell” (l. 904).

Now the Pardoner uses direct speech to reproduce his dialogue with Lucifer, aiming to obtain Margery’s deliverance from hell. The misogynist traits of the Pardoner’s tale reach their climax at this point, because the devil, instead of refusing to set the woman free, declares all his happiness at the prospect of her departure:

For all we devyls within thys den
 Have more to do with two women
 Then with all the charge we have besyde.
 Wherfore, yf thou our frende wyll be tryed,
 Aply thy pardons to women so
 That unto us there come no mo. (ll. 937-42)

The misogyny is still stronger in the devils’ peals of laughter when the Pardoner and Margery leave and cross the borders of hell (ll. 963-66). Before this, however, the narrator does not forget to explain to his audience where he found the woman: because “many a spyt here hath she turned” (l. 955), she is found “bysely turnynge of the spyt” (l. 954) in the infernal kitchen, where her sexual activities in life turn to images of the world of Cockaigne.

The final details of the story are summarised by the narrator with the introductory phrase, “lacke of tyme sufferyth nat” (l. 969), which allows all listeners to close the long parenthesis of the Pardoner’s story and to resume the threads of the play’s principal narrative, weak as it is. The closing formula is similar to that used by the Pardoner; that is, it brings the effects of the past events of

the story into the present of the protagonists of the interlude, thus paradoxically authenticating the absurdity of the story itself: the Potycary ended with “And so she dothe contynew, I truste”, and the Pardoner finishes with “Who lyste to seke her, there shall he fynde her” (l. 976).

In both tales, and particularly in the Pardoner’s—given its more elaborate form and the presence of speaking characters in a decidedly fascinating “hellscape”—what narration contributes on behalf of action in the play consists in a dilation of the limits of the debate: the narrators acquire extra-scenic depth which enriches the dimension of the characters themselves (the Potycary has “cured” somebody; the Pardoner takes care of the souls), even if all this happens during a lying contest which underlines their abuses. The play’s theatricality is thus enhanced, and not reduced, by the engrafting of divers stories, by the introduction of the characters of the narratives, who are different from the speakers of the debate, and by the lively body language the actors have to use to match their words. In this case, telling really contributes to showing, to spectacle.

The Foure PP thus succeeds in transmitting its message to its coeval audience through a blend of doctrine and comedy, which also helps us understand its playwright’s “tightrope-walking” in his controversial time.⁸ Viewing the play in the context of contemporary polemics shows that Heywood’s drama was not simply conservative, but actually strove to influence events. Its plea for understanding and tolerance, and the veiled discussion of issues perilous at the time, show the author’s resistance and his engagement in contemporary dialectics. As Greg Walker writes, “In the circumstances of the early 1530s . . . the demand for reconciliation was itself a shrewd political tactic, an attempt to continue the defence of orthodoxy by other means” (*Writing under Tyranny*, p. 102).

8 Axton affirms that Heywood, during his career as a courtier and playwright, walked “a tightrope between harmless foolery and capital treason” (p. 55).

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Early Tudor Drama and the Arts of Resistance

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The study of early modern drama and history has been revolutionised in the last two decades, benefiting in equal measure from developments in historical and literary scholarship. The entrenchment of various forms of historicism at the heart of literary studies has made for fruitful synergies between the analysis of dramatic texts and historical contexts, while among early modern historians there has been a less obvious but nonetheless significant change in the ways that literary sources have been approached and understood. In particular, a greater appreciation of the role played by counsel as the organising principle of courtly culture has led to new ways of looking at political discourse, freer of the obvious dichotomies of “loyalty” or “opposition”, power or resistance, subversion or containment that constrained earlier debates. This has allowed Tudor historians, once mired in the “strong king” *versus* “plaything of faction” debate about Henry VIII—its protagonists being primarily George Bernard (*King’s Reformation*) and Peter Gwyn for the strong king, *versus* David Starkey, Eric Ives and Sir Geoffrey Elton (“King or Minister?”, *Reform and Reformation*) for the plaything of faction)—to think of individuals and groups as attempting to persuade a strong king rather than simply to “bounce” a weak one into decisions. They have thus begun to

think of poems, plays and prose tracts aimed at the king as political texts, worthy of attention alongside statutes, chronicles and correspondence as evidence of the political process. At the same time, the “historical turn” has allowed literary scholars to take seriously the espousals of principle and morality in courtly verse, to see neglected forms such as panegyric, eulogy and mirrors for princes as something more than simply prince-pleasing or ideological window-dressing for a Machiavellian monarchy. Hence there is a more general agreement among scholars that any text or performance that the king might witness, read, view or merely hear about may have had a bearing upon political conduct, and thus on the history of the reign.

New interpretations of Henry VIII’s personality and governmental style have also been conducive to fresh understandings of the role of literature and drama in the period. Historians such as Bernard and Gwyn have argued that Henry VIII was a primarily pragmatic ruler for much of the first half of the reign. Before 1530, at least, he was open to debate, and encouraged contrary counsels as both a political virtue and a pragmatic resource, a means both of keeping options open and of deflecting criticism of policy towards bad advice—“evil counsellors”—when the need arose. He was clear in his long-term strategic aims, but inclined to leave as many tactical options open as possible for as long as possible. Hence negotiations with the Pope over the “Great Matter” of annulling his marriage to Catherine of Aragon were not broken off until well into the 1530s, years after the concept of an independent “Imperial” sovereignty had first been articulated. More recently, Bernard has argued that Henry followed an essentially Erasmian path in religious reform, condemning the abuse of images and pilgrimage rather than the practices themselves, aspiring to create a church free from corruption and the “superstitious” accretions of centuries of lax practice rather than a doctrinal revolution along Lutheran or Zwinglian lines.¹ Taken together, these traits meant that, throughout the 1530s, advocates of orthodox religious positions or of reconciliation with Rome might continue to hope for policy to shift back in their favour, and work towards that end, trying to counsel and persuade the king towards moderation, even as evangelicals were seeking to prompt him towards further reform. And literature and drama had roles to play in that debate alongside more obvious forms of political lobbying.

1 See Bernard, *King’s Reformation*, *passim*.

Both the conventions of late medieval political theory and the particular personality of the king thus connived in these years to create a culture ripe for “counsel” in all its forms to flourish. And research has begun to reflect upon the significance of this fact for our understanding of literary texts. Appreciating how a broad range of literary and visual works and performances might contribute significantly to political debate and culture as examples of advice or lobbying has led to a rethinking of how those texts might be read, not as vehicles for propaganda or flattery, but as part of a more complex dialogue with power over policy and strategy. The ideal of good counsel thus created a kind of benevolently despotic literary culture in which the vocations of the writer, the poet or the scholar might be both sanctioned by the monarch and valued as a significant contribution to national well-being. Such a culture gave poets and playwrights a role in the state and created an environment in which subjects were empowered to speak and monarchs enjoined to listen, without the former seeming presumptuous or the latter losing dignity.² It was a subtle and flexible system, and when it worked, it worked well, offering something useful to each side in the conversation, and allowing the discussion of otherwise dangerous topics to take place in a controlled environment.

To cite an obvious example, celebrating Henry as a new King David, whether in portraiture, tapestries, book-dedications or psalmic paraphrase and translation, glorified the king, and so offered opportunities for royal propaganda, but it also potentially humbled him—opening up a discourse of sin, guilt, repentance and redemption through which writers and artists could address him more or less obviously in the bold terms of admonition used by the Prophet Nathan to his biblical forebear.³ King David was the slayer of the papal Goliath, the father of his people, the priest-king who offered Henry a model of sacerdotal imperial kingship, but he was also an adulterous sinner who sacrificed political virtue and sanctioned murder in pursuit of a desirable woman: aspects of a chequered career that opened up space for a covert discussion of issues central to the campaign for an annulment of Henry’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon and his pursuit of Anne Boleyn at a time when a more open discussion would have been unthinkable. The royal conscience—a notion intensely politicised by Henry’s public use of it in justifying the divorce,⁴ and fiercely contested by his critics abroad—might

2 See Walker, *Plays*, *passim*.

3 For the use of the “Story of David” in tapestries, see Campbell, especially at pp. 182–87 and 233–34.

4 See Pollito, p. 131, and Sharpe, pp. 70–71.

thus be, if not exactly “caught”, in Hamlet’s sense, then at least poked a little, and paraded in public by artists, poets and playwrights intent upon exposing the foundations of Imperial Kingship for discussion.

Other literary forms similarly provided Tudor writers with ways of thinking about—and vehicles for thinking through—social, cultural and political issues that other forms of writing or action could not offer. Sir Thomas Wyatt translated the satires of Alamanni and Horace and the psalms in the 1530s, not because they provided a useful metaphor for a series of already formulated political points that he wanted to publicise, but because those texts were for him, at that time and in that place, the readiest and most appropriate means by which he could apply his mind to the issues that concerned him and voice his thoughts among a circle of like-minded readers—his enforced marginality from court, his distress at the direction of current policies, and his frustrations with his own dilemmas over compliance or non-compliance, service or exile.⁵ These texts, and the range of subject-positions, stances and registers that they both sanctioned and structured, provided him with a means of struggling with the complexities and contradictions of his own position, as well as a vehicle through which to articulate (in both strong senses of the word) his views for his intended community of readers. His poems were thus not vehicles for propaganda but work in progress, a record of a process of internal debate and potentially of a new kind of subjectivity in the making. And court drama, I would argue, could work in much the same way. Producing interludes at court which mocked partisan claims for supremacy and lauded the virtues of reconciliation and toleration of difference provided John Heywood with a means of articulating anxieties about the drift into tyranny he was witnessing in the early 1530s in a form that cued his audiences to reflect upon conventional pieties about good government and the just society in a new and urgent context.⁶ But they also allowed him to explore both the potential advantages and disadvantages of increasing royal power at a time of national crisis, and perform that exploration before the king himself. The particular ways in which literature and drama operated in the late medieval and early modern royal courts (providing an invaluable dialogue with power in a culture in which such opportunities were rare and always circumscribed) thus

5 See Walker, *Writing*, pp. 279–376.

6 See Walker, *Writing*, pp. 110–19.

make these texts especially valuable for historians and amenable to interdisciplinary analysis.

In the exploration of literary texts as nuanced contributions to political discourse, scholars of the poetry and prose have so far rather led the field, with drama studies trailing a little in their wake. Prevailing historical accounts of the Henrician drama have still tended to try to fit it into an overly simplistic model in which plays might function as either propaganda—a message *from* the king *to* the political nation (or that proportion of it that was present to witness the performance, or who might read the printed script after the performance)—or protest—a message from “the people” *to* the king or the political nation, offering an alternative, oppositional view in a direct challenge to royal policies or the socio-political *status quo*. And, it is true, there is contemporary evidence of drama performing each of those roles—or aspiring to—in the Henrician period. A number of the plays that were performed at court before foreign ambassadors and dignitaries, especially those produced during celebrations marking a significant political event such as the negotiation of a marriage treaty or the sealing of an alliance, were indeed of a broadly propagandistic nature. But, as we shall see, this was at best only half of the story.

As William Streitberger has suggested, the period from 1516 to the mid 1520s was a particularly busy one in terms of major conferences and treaty negotiations on English soil, and Henry and his ministers were adept at using the accompanying revels, tournaments, disguisings and plays, “not only as a tactic of prestige diplomacy but also to advance his political positions” (Streitberger, p. 94). To this end, Streitberger suggests, “formal spectacles, which relied on visual allegory and which included sustained dramatic components were required” (p. 94). A play such as that devised by William Cornish and performed before the Emperor Charles V at Windsor on 16 June 1522, for example, in which a group of allegorical personifications representing Amity, Prudence, Might and (perhaps) Policy strove to bridle a wild horse, representing Francis I of France, would clearly fit this description. Designed to endorse the Anglo-Imperial alliance and promote Henry and Charles’s claims to be allying against Francis only to curb his aggression and bring him to a peaceable amity, the play evidently made its points with bold, simple, visually arresting gestures.⁷

7 See *Calendar of State Papers, Spanish*, II: 437; Hall, fols. lxxxxviii^r-lxxxxix^r; Streitberger, pp. 114-15; and Anglo, “William Cornish”, pp. 348-60.

The Latin play dubbed by Streitberger *Cardinalis Pacificus* performs a similar role. Performed at Greenwich before the French ambassadors on 10 November 1527, it was commissioned by Cardinal Wolsey to promote his mission to France to gain a temporary mandate to represent papal authority during Clement VII's incarceration by Imperial troops following the Sack of Rome (and, not incidentally, to use that mandate to settle Henry's Great Matter in the King's favour). It was evidently designed as a fairly straightforward articulation and celebration of Wolsey's aspirations, as Edward Hall's account of its contents suggests:

When the King and Queen were set [in their seats], there was played before them by children in the Latin tongue in manner of a tragedy, the effect wherefore was that the Pope was in captivity and the church brought under the foot, wherefore St Peter appeared and put the Cardinal in authority to bring the Pope to his liberty, and to set up the church again, and so the Cardinal made intercession to the King of England and of France that they took part together, and by their means the Pope was delivered. Then in came the French King's children and complained to the Cardinal how the Emperor kept them as hostages and would not come to no reasonable point with their father, wherefore they desired the Cardinal to help them for their deliverance, which wrought the Emperor to a peace and caused the two young princes to be delivered. (Hall, fol. clxvi)⁸

As Hall (admittedly, no friend to Wolsey and writing after his fall) suggests, however, the simplicity and audacity of such plays of “projection” (to borrow Streitberger's term) might not always have worked in their favour with more sophisticated audiences. “At this play”, Hall records, “wise men smiled and thought that it sounded more glorious to the Cardinal than true to the matter indeed” (Walker, *Plays*, pp. 17-19).

It was a very similar “projectional” use of drama that the reformer Richard Morrison recommended to Cromwell in the later 1530s, arguing that an effective way to promote religious reform in the wider nation would be to challenge the orthodox religious cycles of urban centres such as York, Chester and Coventry with reformist plays and pageants critical of catholic dogma and practice.⁹ And some attempts do seem to have been made to produce such plays, whether under Cromwell's direction, or independently by radical writers hoping for his patronage. We might include a number of John Bale's plays in this category, as

8 Even these seemingly straightforward plays might have addressed more than one overlapping agenda, however, as I have argued elsewhere (see Walker, *Plays*, pp. 17-19).

9 See Streitberger, p. 146, and Anglo, “Early Tudor Programme”, pp. 176-79.

well as more obscure works such as the anti-Catholic plays of Thomas Whylley, the vicar of Yoxford (*A Reverend Receiving of the Sacrament as a Lenten Matter* and others, all now lost¹⁰), although even here, as we shall see, things are not quite as simple as the “propaganda” model might imply.

Alternatively, there were clearly instances of drama being used for oppositional, critical purposes—or at least of people in authority fearing that it was being so used—at various points in the reign. One might think of the well-known examples of John Roo’s play at Gray’s Inn in 1526–27, to which Cardinal Wolsey took such exception, or the “May game” concerning “a king how he should rule his realm”, played in East Anglia on May Day 1537, during which the actor playing the part of Husbandry seems, Hamlet-like, to have added a speech or two of his own devising (“many things more than was in the book of the play”) in criticism of gentlemen. These added speeches were obviously sufficiently incendiary in their implications to prompt the Duke of Suffolk to scour the countryside searching for the actor, who had seemingly gone into hiding after the performance.¹¹ (What Suffolk would have made of the opening speeches of *The Second Shepherd’s Play* from the Towneley manuscript, were he to have seen the pageant, is an interesting question, as they seem to do precisely the same thing, albeit with both a script and official civic sanction for their licence.)

The Gray’s Inn play offers a still more interesting example of the opportunities that drama offered for individuals and groups to contribute to political debates in and around the court, and of the problems that might arise in trying to interpret such interventions—for contemporaries and modern commentators alike. Performed by and before lawyers at one of the influential Inns of Court over Christmas 1526–27, the play, as Edward Hall (himself a Gray’s Inn man), describes it, seems to have been another relatively straightforward political allegory:

The effect of the play was that Lord Governance was ruled by Dissipation and Negligence, by whose misgovernance and evil order Lady Public Weal was put from governance, which caused Inward Grudge and Disdain of Wanton Sovereignty to rise with a great multitude to expel Negligence and Dissipation and to restore Public Weal again to her estate, which was so done. This play was so set forth with rich and costly apparel, with strange devices of masks

10 See *Calendar of Letters and Papers*, vol. XII, pt. i, item 529, and Streitberger, p. 146.

11 See *Calendar of Letters and Papers*, vol. XII, pt. i, item 1212.

and morrishes that it was highly praised of all men, saving the Cardinal, which imagined the play had been devised of him. (Hall, fol. cliii^v)¹²

Indeed, so “furious” was Wolsey that he summoned the producer, the sergeant-at-law, John Roo, “took from him his coif”, and sent him to the Fleet prison, along with one of the actors, Thomas Moyle.

Hall uses this story to illustrate what he claims was Wolsey’s paranoia: “This play sore displeased the Cardinal, and yet it was never meant to him . . . wherefore many wise men grudged to see him take it so heartily” (Hall, fol. cliii^v). Hall’s point is that the play could not have been intended as criticism of Wolsey because, as Roo claimed, he had “compiled” it “for the most part . . . twenty years past and long before the Cardinal had any authority”, so there was no cause to complain. But this is, of course, disingenuous. Revising an old play in new circumstances can have as powerful contemporary resonances as performing a new work commissioned for the purpose, as the Earl of Essex’s supporters understood when they prompted Shakespeare’s company to revive *Richard II* in 1601.¹³ Thus, even if Roo was speaking the truth when he said that his play had been originally devised two decades earlier, this would not rule out the possibility that it was performed in 1526–27 with mischievous political intentions. Any play that dealt with the corruption of governance by characters named Dissipation and Negligence, and which raised the spectre of popular insurrection, would always have a powerful political charge in an early modern monarchy. And this would have been still more the case in 1526–27, less than two years after the ignominious collapse of the Amicable Grant, a supposedly voluntary tax imposed on the nation to support a military assault against France, which the government had been forced hastily to withdraw after encountering widespread popular resistance. Indeed Hall’s own discussion of the Grant (whose burden “was so grievous that it was denied, and the commons in every place were so moved that it was like to have grown to a rebellion” [Hall, fol. cxxxix^v]) echoes with the very terms that inform his account of Roo’s play. When Wolsey failed to persuade the civic leaders of London that they had committed themselves to pledging their support for the Grant, Hall suggests, the citizens “departed . . . sore grudging at the

12 I have tried to tease out through capitalisation which of the qualities Hall describes seem to have been characters in the play. See also Streitberger, p. 136.

13 See Walker, *Plays*, pp. 33–35, for further discussion along these lines.

lying of the Cardinal and openly saying that he was the very cause and occasion of this demand, and would pluck the people's hearts from the King". Elsewhere, in Kent, the commons "in this grudge . . . evil entreated Sir Thomas Boleyn at Maidstone", while, in East Anglia, "men that had no work began to rage and assemble themselves into companies" and confronted the Duke of Norfolk, claiming that Poverty was their captain, "for he and his cousin Necessity hath brought us to this doing" (Hall, fols. cxlv-cxli^r).

To forestall the complaints and prevent further civil unrest, the king backed down, and in a carefully stage-managed performance before a Great Council held in Westminster, he, appearing "sore moved", denied ever requesting so exacting a tax, and demanded which of his councillors had ordered it, saying that it touched his honour that they should have done so behind his back. When no one spoke, Wolsey stepped forward and conceded that, although the demand had been imposed with the consent of the whole council, yet "I am content to take it [the responsibility] on me; and to endure the fame and noise of the people for my good will toward the King and comfort of you, my lords, and other the King's councillors". With this the King pardoned the protestors and withdrew the tax. Nevertheless, Hall notes, this was "not an end of inward grudge and hatred that the commons bore to the Cardinal and to all gentlemen which vehemently set furth that commission and demand". And such grudges were only exacerbated the following December, when the king, fleeing an outbreak of the plague, kept a frugal Christmas at his house in Eltham, while Wolsey celebrated in quasi-regal style with plays and disguisings in the former royal palace at Richmond, "which sore grieved the people, and in especial the King's servants, to see him keep an open court and the King a secret one" (Hall, fols. cxli^v-cxlxx^v and cxlvi^r).

To perform a play such as Roo's so soon after these events, in which notions of "inward grudge", popular risings, governmental negligence and ministerial extravagance had been part of the political lexicon, and when the tax resisters themselves had employed the language and tropes of allegorical drama to justify their deeds, was clearly no innocent act, whatever Roo claimed to the contrary. Indeed, another surviving source for the story suggests that the actors knew very well that their production was likely to arouse official ire. John Foxe's account in his *Acts and Monuments*, although unreliable in some of its details, suggests a plausible narrative, in which none of the actors, aware that the play contained "partly matter against Cardinal Wolsey", "durst take upon them to play that

part which touched the said Cardinal”, until the young evangelical Simon Fish “took upon him to do it” (Foxye, IV: 657). Fish’s motives, Foxye implies, were precisely to embarrass Wolsey and so to advance the evangelical cause, and the first of these objectives, at least, he seems to have achieved.

But let us pursue the suggestion that the play was a revival of an earlier work a little further. Hall’s report of Roo’s claim that it was conceived “for the most part twenty years before” is sufficiently vague to allow for a number of readings; but it would seem to place the play’s conception in the latter years of Henry VIII’s father’s reign, or at the very beginning of his own, another period when high taxes and governmental demands would have given it very clear and particular political resonances. In the context of Henry VII’s notorious bonds, recognisances and other fiscal measures, imposed upon his principal subjects through the agency of his ministers Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley, the play’s use of two evil counsellor figures, Negligence and Dissipation, might have seemed particularly pointed. Had it been performed at Gray’s Inn, or conceived for performance there—Hall does not say that the play was actually *staged* in the earlier period—while Empson and Dudley were at the height of their influence, then the play would potentially have been very radical indeed in its implied critique of the regime. Had it been conceived a year or two later, at the advent of Henry VIII’s reign, then it would have been equally timely, albeit with a rather different political impact. At this time it would have found a ready place among those works, such as More’s eulogy for Henry VIII (“Carmen gratulatorium”) or Skelton’s “Laud and Praise” for the new king,¹⁴ that celebrated the virtues of the new monarch by contrasting them favourably with the rapacity and abuses of the old—abuses for which Empson and Dudley provided ready scapegoats. At such a moment, the play would have been still more obviously topical, but much less implicitly critical of the current regime. But even here the implication that governmental maladministration might provoke inward grudge and disdain of wanton sovereignty (secret disaffection among the political elites?) and popular rising, and that these things might even be in the best interests of the commonweal in the long term, would have been difficult for any monarch to regard with complete equanimity. If, then, Roo was indeed reviving an old production—or an old idea for an as-yet-unrealised production—he was reviving one with a clear power to address contemporary political conditions and with a pedigree as

14 “A Laud and Praise Made for our Sovereign Lord the King” (Scattergood, ed., pp. 110-12).

a vehicle for criticism of royal ministers. By reviving such a play, and inserting it into the sort of composite revels that Hall's account suggests (masques and "morrishes", disguisings and dances), he would surely have expected his audience to have drawn contemporary parallels from it of the kind which Wolsey himself drew from the event.

One can, then, find evidence of Henrician plays that exemplify both the "propaganda" and the "protest" models of political engagement. But these instances, striking and engaging though they are, do not account for all of the drama that survives from the period. Indeed, the model that allows only for propaganda or protest is probably incapable of accounting for the *majority* of plays that survive from the reign. Alongside the kind of highly symbolic, spectacular allegorical dramas described by Hall, there was (as the surviving texts attest) another tradition of less visually impressive, more argumentative, rhetorically sophisticated and playful comic interludes, played at court on less diplomatically pressured occasions. These plays took a far less reverent attitude to royal policies and aspirations, neither celebrating nor opposing them, but rather subjecting them to wry, often sceptical scrutiny and mockery. One thinks, perhaps naturally, of the kind of playful, provocative interludes that John Heywood produced at court throughout the period of Henry's Supremacy, from *Witty and Witless* of c. 1527 to *The Parts of Man*, performed before Archbishop Cranmer c. 1545-49. These were hardly works of propaganda: they were too ironic, interrogative and inconclusive for that. But neither were they exactly protests, although they often treated royal policies with seemingly mocking amusement, and advanced positions on tolerance of religious difference and support for the established church which did not accord readily with current governmental positions.¹⁵ Similarly, plays such as the anonymous *Godly Queen Hester*, *Hick Scornor*, or even Bale's *King Johan* also sit rather awkwardly in the "propaganda or protest" model, as we shall see. Any analysis of Henrician court drama thus needs to take account of this more playful, dialogic tradition, too—a tradition that seems to reveal the court as not so much "projecting" a concerted image of itself and its sovereign to visitors and the wider political nation, as talking (and arguing) self-reflexively to *itself* in, as it were, its spare time. What such plays suggest is that court drama was not always a strictly controlled tool of royal image-making, but rather that it, like the court itself, might (at times at least) offer an arena for the discursive

15 See Walker, *Politics*, pp. 76-116, and *Writing*, pp. 100-19.

exercise of a range of ideas, not all of which were officially endorsed or approved of, which might be aired in the spirit of good counsel, with the licence that this concept allowed the loyal subject to air controversial issues before the king.

Theorising the Culture of Counsel

How might we begin to theorise such a nuanced, flexible form of political engagement? One possible model is offered by the work of the political anthropologist James C. Scott, whose notions of the “hidden transcript” and “everyday forms of resistance”, explored in two seminal studies written in the 1980s, *Weapons of the Weak* and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, seem to offer a helpful way into understanding the range of political roles performed by literary and dramatic productions in the early Tudor period.

In *Weapons of the Weak*, a close study of the behaviour of peasant rice-farmers in a modern Malaysian village, Scott suggests how evidence of class and community conflict and political resistance to the interests of the local landowners might be found, not in overt forms of protest or violent opposition (of which there seemed to be very few), but in what he calls “everyday forms of resistance”:

Here I have in mind the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on. These Brechtian—or Schweikian—forms of class struggle have certain features in common. They require little or no coordination or planning; they make use of implicit understandings and informal networks; they often represent a form of individual self-help; they typically avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority. (Scott, *Weapons*, p. xvi)

Now, there is obviously a good deal here that is specific to the kind of rural, agrarian, economic and class-based social situations peculiar to Scott’s chosen case study. But, as a number of early modern historians have suggested,¹⁶ there is also much that is transferable about his general model of a form of resistance that avoids direct confrontation and so often fails to register *as* resistance in the minds of those historians looking for more direct modes of political activity. And, for our purposes, it does seem to have a degree of applicability to the courtly cultures of the early sixteenth century, another period for which the relative lack of evidence of outright opposition to political pressure and change has troubled scholars.

16 See Braddick and Walters, *passim*.

Among Tudor historians, there has been a tendency to assume that, if the majority of English men and women, from counsellors, courtiers and ministers, poets and playwrights at court to rural landlords and their tenants in the provinces, failed to articulate their resistance to the demands of Tudor royal power in ways that modern scholars can recognise as oppositional, then this must be because they were effectively reduced to consenting (however unwillingly) to the crown's hegemonic control of ideology. Scott summarises this essentially Gramscian position:

By creating and disseminating a universe of discourse and the concepts to go with it ... [elites] build a symbolic climate that prevents subordinate classes from thinking their way free. (*Weapons*, p. 39)

But Scott's model of "everyday" resistance neatly reverses the classic New Historicist reformulation of Gramsci—that apparent resistance is always already contained by the power it seems to resist—arguing instead that apparent consent need not always imply the absence of resistance. Indeed, apparent consent is often the mode by which real resistance registers itself and achieves its ends. What one needs to do, Scott argues, is thus to read beyond what he terms the "public transcript" of compliance to uncover the "hidden transcript" that is almost invariably kept offstage (his frequent use of theatrical metaphors is, for our purposes, surely significant) by both sides in any negotiation. "The fact is", he argues,

that power-laden situations are nearly always inauthentic: the exercise of power nearly always drives a portion of the full transcript underground. Allowing always for the exceptional moments of uncontrolled anger or desperation, the *normal* tendency will be for the dependent individual to reveal only that part of his or her full transcript in encounters with the powerful that it is both sage and appropriate to reveal. (Scott, p. 286)

Because open defiance would almost certainly provoke a violent response from those in power and minimise the chances of winning any "real" gains they might be seeking, Scott argues, subordinate groups will frequently strive to exercise resistance in ways that mimic or imply conformity rather than seek "to contest the formal definitions of hierarchy and power" (*Weapons*, p. 33). Meanwhile, those in positions of authority also have a vested interest in minimising the acknowledgement of resistance, as to do otherwise would reveal their own unpopularity and potential weakness. Thus the public transcript of landlord-tenant relations

(like that of courtier-sovereign relations, perhaps) tends to display “a kind of complicitous silence that all but expunges everyday forms of resistance from the historical record” (*Weapons*, p. 36).

Behind and beneath this self-interested silence, however, conflicts of interest are negotiated as passionately as ever, not as struggles between rival symbolic orders and definitions of virtue and legitimacy, but over the ability to define aspects of a single, agreed definition of those things. Thus, as Scott observes, in Malaysian village life, one sees a struggle not about “work, property rights, grain and cash”, but

over the appropriation of symbols, a struggle over how the past and present should be understood and labelled, a struggle to identify causes and assess blame, a contentious effort to give partisan meaning to local history. (*Weapons*, p. xvii)

Thus, to take one of Scott’s best examples, no one openly contests the image of the good landowner as a figure of legitimate authority, a fount of liberality and employment; rather, what is contested are the implications of that ideal for the conduct of given individuals in particular circumstances:

Because the poor tenant knows that the rich farmer considers offers of work and/or loans as aspects of his liberality—“gifts”, help, assistance, or charity [rather than obligations or the “rights” of the poor]—the poor man uses this knowledge to pursue his concrete ends: he approaches [the landowner], using all the appropriate linguistic forms of deference and politeness, and requests his “help” and “assistance”. In other words, he appeals to the self-interested description that ... [the landowner] would give to his own acts to place them in the most advantageous light. ... If he wins, he achieves his desired objective (work or a loan) and in the process he contributes, willy-nilly, to the public legitimacy of the principles to which he strategically appealed. Just who is manipulating whom in this petty enterprise is no simple matter to decide. It is best seen, perhaps, as a reciprocal manipulation of the symbols of euphemization. (*Weapons*, p. 309)

To reduce the idea to its simplest form, then, when someone says, “Yes sir!”, for example, they need not mean either “yes” or “sir”; we need to appreciate the tone, the timing, the context and the consequent events, if we are to understand the cultural work that these words might be doing in that particular situation.

Here the analogy with the early modern poet or playwright addressing or performing before the sovereign seems most obvious and useful. The fact that almost all of the courtly writing in this period—indeed, almost all overtly politically engaged writing produced from within the political nation—tended to fall

into the modes of praise or loyal counsel has led critics to condemn it as, at worst exercises in sycophantic prince-pleasing, at best the result of ideological complicity or entrapment. But this is to ignore the degree to which its own symbolic economy might be read as a series of degrees of euphemisation. What Scott's work suggests is how we might understand the literature and drama of good counsel as signalling not only compliance but also disagreement, criticism or resistance, and in ways that were tacitly understood by all parties, while any sense of open resistance was kept out of the public transcript of history, leaving the dominant ideological architecture and symbolic order apparently unscathed. (To return to my earlier example: everyone agrees that Henry VIII can be addressed legitimately as another David, but they are free to pursue different agendas over what that might mean in practice for his current and future behaviour.)

The "crucial point", as Scott discusses it, lies in the fact that

the very process of attempting to legitimate a social order by idealising it *always* provides its subjects with the means, the symbolic tools, the very ideas for a critique that operates within the hegemony. For most purposes, then, it is not at all necessary for subordinate classes to set foot outside the confines of the ruling ideals in order to formulate a critique of power. . . . The dominant ideology can be turned against its privileged beneficiaries not only because subordinate groups develop their own interpretations, understandings and readings of its ambiguous terms, but also because of the promises that the dominant classes must make in order to propagate it in the first place. (*Weapons*, p. 338)

So, in a Tudor context, the way was laid open by the very terms in which justifications of monarchy were couched for critics of any given monarch to insist that he or she live up to the high ideals to which those justifications appeal. And the more extravagant the claims that apologists of monarchy made, the greater were the opportunities for such appeals. Hence, as Erasmus noted, the peculiar applicability and power of the panegyric as a literary form in this period, as it laid before the sovereign precisely that challenge to live up to those ideals for which he was being praised.¹⁷

17 "Those who believe panegyrics are nothing but flattery seem to be unaware of the purpose and aim of the extremely far-sighted men who invented this kind of composition, which consists in presenting princes with a pattern of goodness, in such a way as to reform bad rulers, improve the good, educate the boorish, reprove the erring, arouse the indolent, and cause even the hopelessly vicious to feel some inward stirrings of shame. . . . [They] exhort rulers to honourable actions under cover of compliment" (Erasmus, p. 81).

In Scott's terms, then, "good counsel" was the means by which the subject and sovereign might tacitly lay out their rival claims within a euphemistic discourse of collaborative hierarchy—the lubricant that allowed a potentially unstable and intractable machine to run smoothly. It was, in Scott's phrase, the public transcript—the language in which each speaker could speak as near to honestly as the system allowed them, without either threatening the hegemonic position of the king or surrendering the capacity of the subject to register an alternative view. Thus a playwright such as Heywood might offer his critiques of current royal policy as entertainment for the king and his court, thereby implying that Henry was magnanimous enough to patronise such plays and to watch them with a tolerant, self-critical mind. In so doing, the playwright was contributing to the public transcript that celebrated royal maturity and affability, even as he tacitly warned Henry against what he saw as the king's increasing foolishness and partisanship. In return, the king tacitly undertook to behave affably, to listen to the play and the implied criticism it contained, and receive it in the spirit of well-intended good counsel from a valued member of his extended *familia*.

The Limits of the Public Transcript

Scott offers, then, a useful way of thinking about—and thinking into—the subtle ways in which plays and other literary texts might contribute to political debates at the Henrician court. One problem with his model of artful resistance, however, at least in so far as it might be applied in a Tudor context, lies, predictably, in its inability to address the fine detail of the courtly political situation. It relies, it must be said, upon a rather monolithic notion of the sources and operation of power, drawn as they are from behaviour in a fairly simple rural society dominated by a single landowning elite. Scott, and those historians who have adopted his model for work in the early modern period—notably those published in Michael Braddick and John Walters' collection, *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society*—have thus tended to look at dialogues between the powerful and the powerless in very sharply defined, binary terms, rather than acknowledging the complexity of the negotiations between *and among* those with differing degrees of power and influence that characterised early modern courtly culture.

The very idea of *resistance*, indeed, while it helpfully complicates the simplifying implications of the less helpful word, *opposition*, still does not do full justice to the variety and shades of "powerful" behaviour evident in Tudor political cul-

ture or to the degrees of drag, slide, curve or spin that might be put on political force by those who are variously subjected to it. Indeed, the idea of “power” itself, like the institutions with which it is usually associated—the State, Crown, Court or Government—misleads if it suggests a simple, unified authority with a clear will and agenda of its own. The political Centre (another quasi-institution usually granted an initial capital letter) was in reality an amalgam of constituent institutions: the monarch himself, his Council, his less formal circle(s) of counsellors and advisors, the various members of the royal household, the fluctuating body of courtiers, the secretariat and the myriad other, often rival, administrative offices, which were themselves multiple and complex, each a distinct and to a degree internally conflicted entity. In the Tudor body politic, the left hand very rarely knew exactly what the right was doing, and even when it did could not always be relied upon to approve of it or wholeheartedly promote its initiatives. Thus the idea of a completely loyal, obedient, political class, which either selflessly or through fear carried out the sovereign’s wishes without objection or qualification seems untenable.

And in the differences of principle and practice that distinguish and separate *power* from *authority*, and the subtle divergences of agenda between king, court, counsel, government, law, parliament, nobility and gentry, lie all-important distinctions of personnel, attitude, competency and ultimate aim. Thus *resistance*, in all its possible forms, from active sabotage to the indifferent, slipshod implementation of a policy or action, might occur at the source of an initiative, as well as at the point of delivery. Even propaganda of the sort advocated by Morrison and practised under the patronage of Wolsey or Cromwell was the product of a variety of different processes, institutions, agencies and individuals, each of which might have their own subtly different take on the ostensibly shared agenda. The ideological ball thus frequently left the monarch’s hand already spinning, and not always towards its intended target.

Kevin Sharpe’s magisterial study, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*—a dazzling examination of the performance and representation of royalty across a range of forms from portraits, frontispieces, coins, seals, and medals, to statutes, proclamations, speeches and literary exercises—suggests that Henry VIII was a consummate publiciser of his own royal person, who “from the beginning of his reign . . . displayed a recognition of the power of the word and of print in a determination to deploy publication as a medium of sovereign utterance” (Sharpe, pp. 83–84). But, as Sharpe acknowledges, this claim risks affording the king too great a degree

of control over the words spoken and written and the likenesses circulated in his name. It is always important to ask precisely who it is we are really hearing when Henry VIII speaks, whether *ex cathedra* or seemingly in person.¹⁸ The words of counsellors, advisors, secretaries, even scribes have a role to play in accenting and articulating the royal voice—as Thomas More’s input into “Henry’s” *Assertio septem sacramentorum*, Edward Foxe and his team’s into *A Glass of The Truth*, or Thomas Cranmer’s into the Bishops’ Book and King’s Book testify.¹⁹ Thus it is perhaps safer to say, burlesquing the oft-cited verse of Ecclesiastes (8:4), that “Where the Word of the King is, there is . . .”, not “power”, but more frequently a committee, a dialogue, a *process*. As Louis Montrose has recently argued of Elizabeth (Montrose, *passim*), Henry was probably as much the creature of the Henrician image as he was its creator, as rival counsellors jockeyed to persuade him that their version, their vision of the monarch was the one that he should adopt as his public persona.

And drama had a variety of roles to play in this complex, fragmented political ecosystem that was the Henrician court. A courtly interlude was in reality the work of many hands, and thus of many potentially distinct initiatives, needs and agendas. It was commissioned ultimately by the crown, but was actually initiated by one of the king’s officers or companions and overseen in practice by others. In the early part of the reign, for example, the role of the overall supervisor or master of the revels was frequently played by Henry Guildford, the Comptroller of the royal household, while the practical arrangements were overseen by Richard Gibson, the one-time tailor of the Great Wardrobe, who was an officer in the Office of the Tents.²⁰ Plays and interludes formed only one part of the complex, multiform events that constituted the royal revels, and might well be sub-contracted to writers and performers either within the household (members of the King’s Players or of the Chapel Royal) or beyond it (the children of St. Paul’s School or any number of visiting companies), and were funded and provisioned by departments as various as the Council, the Chamber, the Greater or Standing Wardrobe or the Office of the Tents, with possibly only limited scrutiny and supervision from the major court officers or the monarch himself.²¹ Thus a

18 See Sharpe, pp. 87 and 127, and Walker, “Henry VIII”, pp. 72–98.

19 See Sharpe, pp. 103–7, and Bernard, *King’s Reformation*, pp. 476–88.

20 See Streitberger, pp. 69–73.

21 Streitberger (pp. 7 and 47) argues for close scrutiny of the preparations for plays and revels, either by the king himself or those who knew his mind, but the available evidence suggests that it was almost always masques and disguisings in which he himself would play a part rather than plays he might watch that interested Henry in their preparatory stages.

play like Heywood's *Weather* might represent—and need to reflect—a number of overlapping but distinct agendas in the way it addressed and represented royal policy and the attitudes and person of the king. By associating current royal policies with the divine figure of Jupiter, it contributed to a public transcript which identified Henry as a new Jove, a figure of judgemental wisdom and authority above the petty divisions and jealousies of his subjects, able to intervene decisively to end their disputes and restore the realm to harmonious and productive order.²² Thus far it reflected Henry's own claims to be able to determine religious policy in his own realm. But by presenting its particular representation of the god-king as a distinctly pompous and ambivalent figure, and his crucial intervention into mortal disputes as a deliberate sleight of hand designed to leave matters exactly as they always have been (as the Vice figure, Merry Report, declares, "Sirs, now shall ye have the weather even as it was" [*Weather*, l. 1240]), the play also contrives both gently to mock Henry's newfound claims to Imperial authority and to suggest that radical religious and social reform are not what is needed to end the disputes opened up by the Reformation Parliament and the advent of the Royal Supremacy.²³ It thus uses the language of reform and supremacy to cast doubt on those same ideas, in practice raising questions about things that it seemed to be asserting as truths.

Indeed the play's very form, as a comic interlude played at court, effectively challenged Henry's claim to novel and elevated royal status. By tacitly asserting the right to laugh with Henry at the hollow boasts of a player god-king—who was probably played by a child actor and so provided a self-evidently risible example of quasi-divine authority—Heywood and his actors subtly suggested a playful temporary affinity with the king that itself resisted royal claims to absolute exclusivity. As Scott, quoting Alexander Herzen, claims, "laughter contains something revolutionary", something that denies the distinctions on which hierarchies are based; hence,

The serfs are deprived of the right to smile in the presence of the landowners. Only equals may laugh. If inferiors are permitted to laugh in front of their superiors, and if they cannot suppress their hilarity, this would mean farewell to respect. (Scott, *Domination*, p. 172; source of quotation not given)

22 For the association of Henry himself with Jupiter, see Skelton, *Speke Parott*, ll. 399 and 405-10.

23 See Walker, *Writing*, pp. 100-19.

By inviting the court and king to laugh at the preposterousness of Jupiter's pretensions, and those of the actor attempting to represent them, Heywood, while remaining abundantly respectful, pushed the boundaries of political toleration to enter an objection to current policies into the public transcript of the reign.

In a very different vein, John Bale's *King Johan*, first performed in 1538, offers a similarly marked contribution to the public transcript of Henrician politics. As I have argued elsewhere, the play suggests, in its narrative of papal usurpation of royal prerogatives and the triumphant appearance of the figure of Imperial Majesty, a supportive contribution to Henry's self-promotion as a reforming monarch purging the realm of popish superstition. Similarly, its representation of the papacy as Usurped Power and its vices as traditional Roman clerics added weight to the governmental campaign of anti-papal vilification that followed the Royal Supremacy and the break with Rome. By performing aspects of the Roman rite and Catholic practices on-stage in parodic fashion, it seemingly endorsed the warnings against idle superstition contained in official pronouncements such as the Ten Articles of 1536, the Bishops' Book of 1537 and the Articles and Injunctions of 1538, while its repeated identification of monks, nuns and friars with financial and sexual abuses and sedition furthered the contemporary royal campaign to purge—and ultimately dissolve—the monasteries.²⁴ Yet in doing so it also advanced an agenda of its own, associating Imperial Power with evangelical reforms in some cases distinctly more advanced than those the king himself had sanctioned, and suggesting that Roman religion and orthodox practices were so intertwined with theatricality, performance and deceit that they could never be successfully purged of their “idolatrous” elements and hence needed to be extinguished entirely, along with the class of “juggling” clergy who had made them their own.²⁵ Thus, while contributing vocally to the public celebration of Henry as a reforming monarch, Bale's drama was nonetheless attending to the hidden transcript of evangelical disappointment at the king's failure to embrace

24 See, e.g., ll. 186–88 (“I am Sedition plain: / In every religious and monkish sect I reign, / Having you princes in scorn, hate and disdain”) and 256–59:

King John. Look where I find thee, that place will I put down.

Sedition. What if you do chance to find me in every town

Where as is founded any sect monastical?

King John. I pray God I sink if I destroy them not all!

See also ll. 334–37, 516–17. (All quotations from the play are taken from Happé, ed., with spelling modernised by the present author.)

25 See Walker, *Plays*, pp. 169–221.

a fully reformed liturgy on Continental lines, and was seeking to push him further in that direction though its association of traditional beliefs and practices with the Vice-figures Dissimulation, Treason and Seditious—a symbolic vocabulary that played explicitly upon Henry's own notorious doubts about the loyalty of "his" clergy.

Culture, Counsel and Crisis

The early modern culture of counsel thus licensed a forum in which playwrights like Heywood and Bale might use their work to lobby, at times quite forcefully, for changes of policy or political emphasis, while remaining studiously deferential to royal authority and supportive of the careful balance of courtly decorum. It similarly allowed monarchs to listen to the suggestions and criticisms of their subjects within a framework that did not require them to respond to those criticisms either immediately or directly, and so neutralised the potential for confrontation that such implied criticisms might otherwise present.

Like all finely calibrated systems based upon the delicate balance of interests, nuance, inference and indirection, however, the culture of counsel only worked well when the path ahead was smooth, when the monarch was alert to the signals—the twitching in the web of cultural allusion—and willing to respond to them in the same spirit in which they were offered. The difficulty arose, of course, when the king became so convinced of the rightness of what he was doing that he refused to listen to counsel, however subtly it was coded or however loyally it was intended, as Henry did once he became settled on the Great Matter of his divorce. What happened in those circumstances was a wholly different story. I have recently been exploring the literature of this period in which the limits of the model of literature as counsel were most powerfully felt. In *Writing Under Tyranny* I tried to chart the temporary collapse of the culture of counsel—and of the dispensation it supported—and the roles for writers it encouraged, justified and licensed. In a culture in which the conventional course for an author wishing to address the state of the realm was to contribute to the public transcript, offering a work of supplication or counsel to the monarch, how did they react to the realisation that the public transcript was no longer shared or negotiable, that the king was not just unsympathetic to their complaints but actually the source of the problem? In Heywood's case, the answer was that he kept writing, performing and counselling, well after the point when,

in retrospect, the cause seemed clearly to have been lost. His commitment to his self-image as a court entertainer, part of the same community as the sovereign he criticised, was perhaps too ingrained for him to do otherwise. His sense of his duty as a member of civil society to use humour to expose the hypocrisies of Henrician rule and the anxious divisions opened up by the king's actions kept him within the bounds of civil discourse, writing and laughing *with* as well as *at* the immoderation of the reign, contributing conspicuously to the public transcript of monarchy while quietly pursuing the hidden script of criticism.

Heywood's story suggests, perhaps, both the flexibility and potency of the culture of good counsel and its limitations. It suggests the flexibility of continuing to contribute to the public transcript of courtly good humour in the face of tyranny—its capacity to accommodate itself to power's demands, yet always with an ironic acknowledgment of its own collaboration, which exposes those demands to mocking scrutiny.²⁶ But, conversely, it also suggests the limits of upholding the public transcript in the absence of royal reciprocity, the inability of the good counsellor to do more than beat a graceful retreat before the advancing tyrant, scorching the earth as he goes to highlight the nature and direction of the monster's advance. In the end, of course, Heywood lost: the Royal Supremacy was not employed to restore traditional practices and civil order, and the reformation was not reversed. Toleration was not adopted as the way of diffusing political and religious tensions. But in his own way Heywood nonetheless exposed the brutalities, the hypocrisies and idiocies of Henrician tyranny to public scrutiny, and through his courageous refusal to join or sanction the growing intolerance of the reign, registered his resistance to it in ways which we should acknowledge and, while acknowledging their limitations, perhaps even celebrate.

26 See Walker, "Folly".

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Dramatising Ideology: Monarch, State and People in Respublica and Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis

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Christmas 1553 and August 1554 saw the productions of two highly topical political plays in England and in Scotland. *Respublica*, attributed to Nicholas Udall, was written for performance at the court of Mary Tudor in London; David Lyndsay's *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* was played on the public playfield in Edinburgh before an audience which included the Queen Regent, Mary of Guise. In spite of a difference in scale, with *Respublica* a relatively brief interlude and the *Thrie Estaitis* a day-long production, in content, structure and many of their production circumstances, these two almost contemporaneous plays seem intimately similar. Both were performed close to and probably in direct association with the accession of a Roman Catholic female ruler to a nation troubled by political and religious controversy. The plays are both openly propagandist, addressing contemporary issues concerning national government and church reform. They share a common allegorical action of sixteenth-century political drama: in each a misgoverned state is oppressed by vices of political power disguised as virtues but is finally rescued, in part by divine intervention. Within this action, too, both plays present a particular triangle of personified figures: each includes characters representing the monarch, the state, and the common people.

This is to emphasise the undoubted similarities between the two plays. But equally interesting, in plays which initially seem so very like, are the differences that underlie or play through the surface resemblance. With the same structures, themes, theatrical traditions and conventional political vocabularies, the two plays nonetheless clearly address different political situations and audiences.¹ They also reveal rather different assumptions about the structures and dynamic of government. In part, these differences are openly articulated. The *Thrie Estaitis* is vehement and energetic in its criticism of the Church, while *Respublica*, supportive of the Church, steers away from explicit religious engagement and gives more eloquent attention to the problems of corruption and avarice on the part of government ministers. But equally, if not more, interesting are the more tacit differences that are expressed, not directly or verbally, but through the imaginative and theatrical creation of the dramatic personifications and their relationships. The ways in which the figures representing Monarchy and the State are imagined, the stage relationships they engage in with other characters, their roles in the material presentation of performance—visual, proxemic, kinesic roles—all these can be as semantically revealing as what these characters actually say, or what is said about them.

It is in these that we perhaps encounter the real ideologies expressed through the two plays. These are the implicit imaginative representations of the institutions of State; they reveal underlying assumptions, rather than reasoned arguments, about the relationships between monarch, state and people. The stated opinions and political views of the characters are clearly important; we might see them as carrying the primary purpose of each play. But the imaginatively theatrical representations of ideas present a powerful shaping of political consciousness. An audience can easily choose to agree or disagree with the explicit arguments put forward by a Lady Respublica or a John the Common-Weill; it is harder to evaluate and debate the political implications of the theatrical representation of these personifications as characters. It is the tacit ideology expressed in these images that this paper addresses. Most particularly, I will explore how the two plays dramatise the complex and overlapping triangular relationships between king, commonwealth and people.

1 For analysis of each play in its political context, see Bevington, Walker, Hunt, Rutledge, Edington and Graf.

It is worth first considering what the two plays share, since recognising their similarities not only is revealing in itself but gives a clearer basis for exploring difference. Detached from their specific contexts, they are both mainstream examples of what by the 1550s had become a traditional pattern of political morality drama.² In each, a realm is attacked by Vices understood as especially dangerous to good government: Avarice, Adulation, Insolence and Oppression in *Respublica*; in the *Thrie Estaitis*, Flattery, Falsehood and Deceit (later joined by Covetise and Public Oppression). In keeping with their natures, all these Vices disguise themselves as virtues, infiltrating unrecognised into roles of power; once there they act on principles of private profit and exploitation, enriching themselves at the expense of the good governance and prosperity of the country. After a period of disorder and suffering, the machinations of the Vices are finally exposed and overthrown, restoring good order and justice to the nation.

This pattern of action had been established and explored in various plays since the beginning of the century. We see it crisply outlined in the account of the Gray's Inn Christmas interlude of 1526, supposedly attacking Cardinal Wolsey. The chronicler Edward Hall explains how John Roo, Sergeant at Arms, had compiled a play in which

Lord Gouvernaunce was ruled by Dissipacion and Negligence, by whose misgovernance and evil order, lady Publike Wele was put from governance: which caused Rumor Populi, Inward Grudge and Disdain of Wanton Sovereignete, to rise with a greate multitude, to expell Negligence and Dissipacion, and to restore Publike Welth again to her estate. (Hall, p. 719)

With some variations of emphasis and direction, this core of action is found in a range of political allegorical drama, plays such as Skelton's *Magnyfycence*, Bale's *Kynge Johan*, the anonymous *Albion Knight* and the lost play performed at Cambridge in 1553, *Anglia Deformata and Anglia Restituta*.³ At root it is derived from the earlier morality tradition, in which a generalised figure of Mankind is similarly attacked or seduced by vices until rescued and restored to virtue. It offered a fruitful, strongly narrative, deep structure, which could be adapted to numerous different political situations. But *Respublica* and *Thrie Estaitis* share more particular features of this common pattern. Both, like Roo's play, though not all examples of the form, include a personification of the nation or state itself: Roo's Lady

2 See Potter, pp. 78-104.

3 For *Anglia Deformata*, see Nelson, ed., p. 187. A non-dramatic parallel is found in Robert Crowley's *Philargyrie*.

Publike Wele is echoed in Lady Respublica and John the Common-Weill. These figures of the State champion personifications of the common people: People in *Respublica* and the Poor Man in *Thrie Estaitis*. In both plays, a character representing Truth is introduced in opposition to the Vices, working to expose their deceit. In both, a royal Virtue is sent directly from God to initiate reform in the abused commonwealth: Nemesis in *Respublica* and Divine Correction in *Thrie Estaitis*.

These parallels of form echo similarities in the production auspices of the two plays. *Respublica* was composed for performance at Christmas 1553, apparently at court, following Mary Tudor's coronation in September after the death of Edward VI in July.⁴ Mary had won popular support for her accession, in spite of the attempts of her Protestant brother and his chief minister, the Duke of Northumberland, to keep her from the throne, and had immediately begun moves to restore Roman Catholic practice in England. *Respublica* offers an attack on the corruption of the previous administration and a celebration of the new regime. In Scotland, Mary of Guise was invested as Regent for her young daughter Mary Stuart in April 1554, in succession to the Duke of Châtelherault, who was known as a Protestant sympathiser.⁵ On 12 August she attended a public performance of the *Thrie Estaitis* on the playfield in Edinburgh. The production was financed by the burgh council, who paid "for the making of the Quenis grace hous on the playfeild"; although it is not directly recorded as such, the performance may well have been associated with her assumption of the Regency.⁶ As well as their structural similarities, the two plays are both linked to the recent accession of female, Roman Catholic rulers who may well have been their chief spectators.

These are interesting and suggestive parallels; yet closer exploration of the similar dramatic forms and occasions also demonstrates differences in the conception of polity. In theatrical terms, it is perhaps most striking to look at the characters representing the State or Nation: the Lady Respublica and John the Common-Weill. Apart from anything these characters specifically say or do, they offer us a lively stage contrast in gender, in appearance, social class, manner and role. Respublica is a poor but noble widow, "our greate ground Ladie mother / Noble dame Respublica" (ll. 91-92), as the Vice Avarice (sardonically) refers to her

4 See Walker, pp. 168-72.

5 See Ritchie, pp. 90-95.

6 See *Works*, ed. Hamer, IV: 139-42. Records suggest a sudden increase in public drama in the months following Mary's assumption of the regency; see record evidence in Mill, pp. 180-83.

before we ever see her. She enters alone with a dignified soliloquy, speaking with educated eloquence; she presents a figure of suffering innocence who trusts to find good in all who approach her and cannot see through the machinations of the Vices. She is protective of her people, especially the poor, but seems to have no capacity to act on her own behalf. John the Common-Weill, on the other hand, bursts into the action of the play, pushing through the audience and leaping over (or into) a ditch, after a formal call for complainants to the Parliament. He is a rough and at first ragged masculine figure; although he is articulate, and respectful towards true royal authority, he is colloquial and assertive, critical and forthright in describing his troubles and identifying those who oppress him. He confidently and energetically proposes action to improve his own situation, and that of the Poor Man whose case he supports.

These two figures clearly make such very different impressions in performance that we might well ask whether they are intended to represent the same concept. We should not be distracted by the difference in name. The prologue of *Respublica* makes very clear from the start that the protagonist's Latin name is simply an educated form of the vernacular "common weal". The prologue explains:

the Name of our playe ys Respublica certaine
oure meaninge ys
.....
To shewe that all Commen weales Ruin and decaye
from tyme to tyme. (ll. 16-20)

Respublica herself makes the same identification in her introductory soliloquy. She points out that, without good governors,

Comon weales decaye, and all thinges do goe backe.
what mervayle then yf I wanting a perfecte staigh
From mooste flourishing welth be fallen in decaye? (ll. 456-58)

Finally, People makes the synonym comically clear: "Whares Rice pudding cake? .../... alese dictis [*alias dictus*] comonweale" (ll. 636-37). Like John in the *Thrie Estaitis*, Respublica is clearly defined as the *common weal*.

What, then, are the connotations of this idea of the commonweal in the 1550s? Discussion of the concept of commonweal was very active in the first half of the sixteenth century. Whitney Jones points out that

the concept of the commonwealth . . . was at the centre of the discussion of the social and economic, as well as the religious and political, problems of society which came to a climax in the disturbed middle decades of the sixteenth [century]. (p. 1)

The term was originally, as Jones says, used simply as “a synonym for ‘body politic’ or ‘realm’”; but in the developing debate it came, “far more significantly, to describe the welfare of the members of that body and to imply the duty of government to further that welfare” (pp. 1-2). Jones lists a substantial body of contemporary English texts which address and develop this notion of the common good and prosperity of the realm, perhaps most famously the *Discourse of the Common Weal of this Realm of England*, attributed to Thomas Smith and thought to have been written around 1549. Jones’s English examples are paralleled in Scotland in works such as David Lyndsay’s *The Dreme* or Robert Wedderburn’s *The Complaynt of Scotland*.

By the mid 1550s, the “commonweal”, then, referred to the prosperity or welfare of the realm as a whole. It was subject to complex political discussions, but a couple of dominant ideas shape and underlie the debate. Theoretical works tend to stress the inclusive nature of the commonweal. Early images or metaphors imagine it as a tree shading and protecting all around, as a garden or a ship, or, famously, as a body, the *body politic*, which is made up of mutually interdependent organs.⁷ Such images all express social inclusion. *The Discourse of the Common Weal* is set as a dialogue between five representatives of different classes, emphasising both the importance of their different kinds of wisdom in addressing the welfare of all, and what Smith asserts as the peculiarly human recognition that “we be not borne to our selves but partly to the use of oure countrie” (p. 14). As Latimer urged in a sermon of 1552, “consider that no one person is born into the world for his own sake, but for the commonwealth sake” (p. 156).⁸ *The Complaynte of Scotland* describes how the cloak of the personification of commonweal, in this case the afflicted Dame Scotia, is made up of the Three Estates of the realm. The central sense of the sixteenth-century concept of commonwealth, then, is this embracing of the realm as a whole and all of its members as one. This all suggests that *Respublica* and John the Common-Weill, different as they seem in specific characteristics, are both intended to be recognised as composite and universalis-

7 See, e.g., Dudley, *Tree of Commonwealth*, pp. 31-32; the image of the body is fully explored in Christine de Pisan’s *Body of Polycye*.

8 Cf. Boece, *Scotorum Historia*, Preface (1527), for a similar formulation.

ing figures for the nation. *Respublica* may appear on stage as a noble and educated virtuous lady, John as a forthright member of the common people. But we should not take them as representing or personifying these restricted social identities. They are offered as figures for a much broader sense of national identity, although their particular theatrical characterisations certainly tacitly enact varying assumptions by the authors about how such national identity might be characterised and understood.

Another dominant strand of sixteenth-century discussion of commonweal addresses the social and economic problems which beset society.⁹ The prosperity of the commonweal is envisaged importantly in economic terms, although these are generally understood as inseparable from moral and religious concerns. Issues of poverty, and those of productivity, trade and taxation dominated. Anxiety was directed not only toward the absolute poverty of the common people but to the relative depression of landowners, merchants and craftsmen, and to the consequent difficulties in supporting the functioning of the realm and the wealth and welfare of its inhabitants. In the mid-century there is increasing debate about social and economic processes, and the relative responsibilities of the crown, the nobility, the church and the merchants in promoting employment and prosperity and alleviating distress. Discussion of commonwealth is dominated by such social and economic concerns.

These issues are crucial in both of these plays. They are not presented as plays *about* social and economic hardship, but rather about wider-reaching issues of government, church and state. But poverty and social welfare are pointedly dramatised as providing an index of the state of the commonweal: the hardship suffered by the common people is vividly presented in both plays, through the tragicomic figures and complaints of *People* and the *Poor Man*. So, in *Respublica*, *People* complains of the exorbitant prices of basic commodities, while *Avarice* delights in his corrupt dealing with leases and rents, benefices and bribes, the appropriation of church property, sale of counterfeit goods and the export of “grayne, bell meattall, tynne and lead” (l. 877). Many of these were issues flagged up by Mary’s Privy Council at the beginning of her reign as requiring immediate attention.¹⁰ In the *Thrie Estaitis*, the *Poor Man*, supported by John the Commonweill, draws attention to the problem of work-refusers in all classes, the unequal

9 The following discussion draws on Jones, chaps. 1 and 2 (pp. 1-23).

10 See the “Remembraunce of thynges worthie examinacon for the quenes maiestie”; also Walker, pp. 172-84.

and corrupt administration of justice, and especially the unjust imposition of church dues and the real suffering caused by the sequestration of goods. While both *Respublica* and John the Common-Weill are clearly differentiated from the representatives of the poor, these topical issues of economic and fiscal management are singled out as threatening the characters' own political and spiritual, as well as material, welfare. This is materially and visually demonstrated in each play by the same device: both characters initially appear in poor and tattered clothing, which is replaced, when abuses are righted, by magnificent costume (*Respublica*, ll. 1425-26, 1482-83; Lindsay, *Thrie Estaitis*, ll. 2445, 3802).

Through their plays' attention to these central current ideas about the shaping of commonweal, *Respublica* and John the Common-Weill again clearly share an identity. But once more, differences in theatrical presentation suggest different ideologies of state underlying their common concerns. The two figures both suffer from and are damaged by the same problems. But *Respublica* does not herself understand or even fully recognise those problems. On stage, things are done to her by the deceiving Vices that she can neither perceive nor control: she accepts their false reassurances, their manipulations, telling Avarice, "I will putt miselfe whollye into your handes" (l. 499). People, for all his comic-yokel stage presence, is a shrewder observer of the political process she is subject to than she is herself. John the Common-Weill, on the other hand, presents an incisive diagnosis both of the problems that affect him and of their causes. Although he is not able to put these problems right himself, he recognises what needs to be done and inspires and insists on action from those with authority.

Respublica and John the Common-Weill are therefore shaped by shared and traditional formulations, but they embody contrasting political conceptions of the status and function of the commonweal. One is an entity we see acted upon, an image of innocent and passive suffering, the other a theatrically active agent in pursuit of its own well-being. This sense of difference in figuring the state is reinforced by equally, if not more, marked differences in the ways the two plays represent monarchy, and the relationship between monarchy and the commonweal. As with *Respublica* and John, it is not so much what is said by the personified characters involved, as what is seen and done in their action and gestures in performance that expresses the differing ideologies of kingship involved.

Respublica is quite explicit about its representation of monarchy. The play concludes with the triumphant intervention of the goddess Nemesis, who passes judgement on the Vices and leaves her "dearling *Respublica* . . . in tholde

goode eastate” (l. 1922). Before the action ever begins, the Prologue explains to the spectators:

Marye our Souveraigne and Quene
.....
She is oure most wise and most worthie Nemesis
Of whom our plaie meneth tamende that is amyssse. (ll. 49-54)

Mary I, newly crowned and sweeping away the corruption of her brother Edward’s government, is thus explicitly identified with the figure who, we are told, “hathe powre from godde all practise to repeale / which might bring Annoyaunce to ladie comonweale” (ll. 1786-87). Her authority is over the constituent parts of the commonweal: “tys hir powre to forbidde and punishe in all eastates / all presumptuous immoderate attemptates” (ll. 1790-91). But the stage presence of Nemesis is perhaps even more revealing of the nature and scope of her power than are these explanations. She is ceremonially brought in by the Four Daughters of God in the final scene of the play to judge the Vices and deliver them to restitution or punishment. The descriptions that precede her entrance make it clear that she is costumed as a highly emblematic personification:

hir cognisaunce therefore is a whele and wings to flye,
in token hir rewle extendeth ferre and nie.
A rudder eke she beareth in hyr other hande,
as directrie of all thinges in everye Lande. (ll. 1792-95)

This suggests a visually dominating and elaborate figure, but a static one unlikely to engage in kinetic action. In fact, we are even alerted to her choreographed stance and gesture, which reinforce the impression of an almost otherworldly, greater-than-human quality: “than pranketh she hir elbowse owte vnder hir side, / to keape backe the headie and to temper their pride” (ll. 1796-97). Through the identification of Mary with Nemesis, monarchy is seen to function as the *deus ex machina* who emerges to right wrongs and to distribute absolute judgement sanctioned by—indeed almost identified with—the power of God himself.

Monarchy is a far more contested notion in the *Thrie Estaitis*. As Greg Walker has pointed out (pp. 140-43), the play abounds with figures of kingship: King Humanitie and Divine Correction are both characterised as kings, the Poor Man usurps the image of kingship by climbing into the empty throne, and he and John the Common-Weill himself frequently appropriate the role with their

repeated statement, “War I ane king . . .” (ll. 2592, 2846, 2961, 3015). Not only are the audience presented with these apparently multiple sources of royal authority, but the exercise of government in the play is itself diffracted. King Humanitie is ruled by Divine Correction, the two of them staging a twin model of kingship; John the Common-Weill greets the pair: “Gude day, gud day, grit God saif baith your Graces. / Wallie, wallie, fall thay twa weill fairde faces!” (ll. 2440-41). These twinned kings proceed to operate not directly but through a parliament, in consultation with the Three Estates, advised by Gude Counsall and receptive to the complaints of Common-Weill. So the position, role and power of the monarch, his relationship to the institutions of government and to the state of the commonweal itself are complex and composite. This power relationship between the various bodies is not discussed or commented upon directly, but the theatrical presentation and choreography of the place-and-scaffold staging we find in this 1554 production demonstrate the conciliar and interactive process of government. Power relations can be made sharply apparent in proxemic groupings, as characters move between scaffolds; for example, there is a revealing stage direction during the final judgements of the parliament on the Vices: “Heir sal the Kings and the Temporal Stait round [whisper] togider” (l. 3734). The audience see how the next royal judgement emerges from this silent consultation between King Humanitie, Divine Correction and Temporality. The single, static, almost superhuman figure of Nemesis is replaced by this diffuse, partial, interactive performance of royal power.

Other aspects of the action of the two plays reinforce this contrast. The Vices in each play represent political shortcomings, the moral failings of the administrators of government which damage *Respublica* and John the Common-Weill. In *Respublica* these Vices attack and deceive *Respublica* herself, and it is with her that we watch them interact. The monarch, Nemesis, encounters the Vices / ministers only to deliver ultimate judgement and control. In the *Thrie Estaitis*, however, it is King Humanitie who is seen to be attacked by the Vices; he is manipulated first by the follies of youth, who tempt him into the arms of Sensuality, and then by the more serious agents of political corruption. It is John the Common-Weill who, like *Respublica*, is shown to suffer the evil effects of these political Vices; but in the stage action, the audience watch them manipulating not him but King Humanitie. The two figures of monarchy thus have contrasting stage interactions with the Vices, suggesting different kinds of engagement with the processes of government. This difference is heightened by the monarchs’ relationships to

the agents of God's judgement. In the *Thrie Estaitis*, Divine Correction is sent by God as a superior King to awaken King Humanitie to his shortcomings and then to support him in his rule. But Nemesis, the "goddesse of correccion" (l. 1782) in *Respublica*, is identified with the queen herself, with the effect of emphasising the role of the monarch as God's representative on earth. These conceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the monarch, the powers and limitations of kingship, are not openly discussed, but they are embodied and performed as markedly different in each play.

There are some obvious contextual reasons for these striking differences in the performed portrayal of royal power. The plays are designed for very different audiences. *Respublica* seems to be a Christmas court performance by a boys' company, probably drawn from the Chapel Royal. The public Edinburgh production of the *Thrie Estaitis* played to an audience which drew together court and burgh, ranging across all classes. It is hardly surprising that the view of royal power in the Edinburgh performance is more complicated and qualified than the more univocal celebration and reverence of the London court. Beyond their overt similarities as newly invested Roman Catholic female rulers, the different positions of the two queens are also influential. Mary Tudor came to the throne on a wave of popular support as the rightful heir, with a clear personal commitment to restore Roman Catholic practice to a country that was technically Protestant. Mary of Guise had won the regency from the Earl of Arran only after long and careful negotiation, and was reigning as proxy for an absent child monarch, in a country where religious reform was not yet official and shades of opinion were divided and often unclear.

But arguably, what we see embodied in the two performances is not just these specific contextual circumstances, but what had become broader formulations of ideologies of monarchy in the two countries. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century discussions of kingship shared many conventional positions about the powers and responsibilities of the monarch in relation to God and to the State. Traditionally, the prime duties of the king were to protect the realm, to administer justice and to govern for the good of his people. His allegiance should be to God, from whom he derived his power, but he should accept the importance of good counsel. During the first half of the sixteenth century these basic tenets remained central, but they came to be rather differently inflected in England and in Scotland. In England, largely in response to the personal and constitutional strategies of Henry VIII, increased emphasis was placed on the primary

and undisputed power of the king over Church, State and subjects. Images and ideas of royal supremacy and sovereign right were increasingly developed and promulgated.¹¹ In Scotland, alternatively, there is evidence of developing theories of “contractual” kingship. Roger Mason (pp. 1-7 *et passim*) reminds us how sixteenth-century Scottish writers from John Mair (1521) to George Buchanan (1579) argued for the accountability of monarchs to their people, and the right to resist tyranny. The *Thrie Estaitis* does not itself explicitly present or support such a radical position. But its enactment of the qualified power of kingship, the forceful role of the commonweal, and the latter’s relative equality with the king in stage encounters is revealing of an underlying ideology that seems very different from the unquestioning reverence accorded to the monarch in *Respublica*.

The two plays appear to offer us very similar fables of national recovery, in which personifications of parallel political and constitutional qualities act on and with each other in comparable ways. But if we look at the visual stage action, the embodied characterisation and the tone, style and gesture of performed encounters, we come away with very different imaginative conceptions of the relationship between monarch and state. *Respublica* presents the State as the feminine, passive recipient of the grace of a supreme monarch, protected and nurtured by an absolute and quasi-divine power. John the Common-Weill represents the State as an active and equal partner who provokes the monarch to action. In a graphic bit of stage action, he is finally drawn into the centre of government: “*Heir sal thay claith Johne the Common-weil gorgeouslie and set him down amang them in the Parliament*” (l. 3802). We might argue that of the two definitions of “commonweal” cited earlier—the body politic itself, and the welfare of that body politic—*Respublica* is closer to the first and John to the second. She is the nation in which the audience live and to which they owe their duty; he is the state of common and mutual prosperity to which the audience aspire.

It is clear that in both these plays ideology is projected not just through the spoken text, but through the experience of performance. Ideas about government, kingship, the state and the people are all tacitly but vividly asserted through stage image and action. But the theatrical experience does not just enact differing ideologies of state and kingship. Spectators are prompted to very different theatrical responses to these performed characters, and through these responses are led to understand their own relationship to the commonweal,

11 See, *e.g.*, essays by Mayer, Hoak and King.

their own position as subjects and as citizens, rather differently. The courtly audience watching *Respublica* is invited to respond with admiration, but also with anxious tenderness, to the suffering Lady Respublica, and with awe and reverence to the spectacular Nemesis. The mixed audience of the *Thrie Estaitis* is drawn into humorous but spirited comradeship with John the Common-Weill, and broadly respectful but critical evaluation of King Humanitie and his parliament's proposed solutions. By engaging their audiences in different experiences of spectatorship, the plays also offer them different roles as subjects and citizens. In the end, it is differing ideologies not only of kingship and commonweal, but also of citizenship itself, that are performed; and they are performed in both theatrical and political senses, not only embodied on the stage but also brought into being beyond it.

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“No debate, please, we’re British”: Circumventing and Reinventing Politics on the Early English Stage

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Let me begin (as is not necessarily my wont) with a Bible reading, Psalm 85:10: “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Authorised Version). The verse is the inspiration, and the authorisation, of a venerable exegetical tradition of debate between the divine attributes, figured as God’s Daughters—a tradition which the French miracle plays pervasively exploit by bringing Justice and Miséricorde on stage. By curious contrast, however, such debate is extant on the English side only in *The Castle of Perseverance*, which probably would have brought the kitchen sink on stage (well before John Osborne had the idea) if edifying dialogue could have been invented for it. The scarcity of such debate in the surviving English medieval drama may, of course, be due to the vagaries of textual transmission, but it happens to herald a more thoroughly documentable parting of the ways in the drama of the sixteenth century. That divergence is my subject here.

The French Humanist dramatic tradition regularly brings the heavenly abstractions in question down to earth and attaches them to contrary interlocutors in concrete political situations. This is to fuse medieval practice with the classical inheritance, as it was then interpreted. The procedure is so routine that Gillian Jondorf, in

Robert Garnier and the Themes of Political Tragedy in the Sixteenth Century, perspicaciously identifies the “clémence / rigueur” debate as a standard recurrent feature—certainly ideological, but also rhetorical, the equivalent of the hummable tune one waits for in opera. (Presumably, in a way that tends to elude modern tastes, the choice of stichomythia as the usual medium had something to do with hummability.) The ultimate model was the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia*, where the philosopher reads a lesson in leniency to his rather resistant pupil Nero—a lesson that will finally prove to be, one might say, thoroughly in vain.

Aesthetic appeal may go some distance towards explaining why these debates do not lead to conclusive resolutions, any more than they do in the scholastic tradition, or in that modern descendent, the debating society, which itself is not without theatrical affinity. The device’s popularity, however, is surely more than aesthetic, and it likewise seems merely glib to cite the stereotypical French fondness for abstraction and theory, intellectual thrust and counter-thrust. More pertinent is the fact that such debate turns on political situations which, however distanced, most of the time, by their antique or biblical settings, had obvious topical application in a country torn by religious civil warfare. Particularly insistent as an echo of contemporary political discourse is the problematic juxtaposition of the human impulse to vengeance with the divine prerogative, as in Garnier’s *Porcie* (1568) and *Cornélie* (1574). (That Thomas Kyd translated the latter work is hardly surprising from this point of view.) In *Porcie*, at least, human vengeance is pretty clearly depicted as the mainspring of the infinitely self-reproducing human tragedy. Even Brutus’ aggrieved widow wishes that Julius Caesar had not been killed, for the sake of “le commun repos [general tranquillity]” (l. 554), although she implicitly leaves room for vindictive divine intervention—a position made explicit by the philosophising Cicero at the outset of *Cornélie*. And so the medieval privileging of celestial solutions to human impasses is indirectly brought to bear once again.

So it is directly, in fact, in one truly exceptional play (my personal favourite) that proves the rule, not least by serving up a conclusive resolution. François de Chantelouve’s *La tragédie de feu Gaspard de Coligny* (1574) stands out for combining Humanist trappings with medieval dramatic devices and an explicitly topical subject, the St. Bartholomew’s massacre. That glorious triumph of divine justice is celebrated with such unabashed enthusiasm that Jondorf, in her study of the French “Dramatic Word” published some thirty years after her work on Garnier, explicitly refused to deal with the play because she was so “repelled” by its poli-

tics (p. 5)—a persuasive recommendation of its interest, in my perhaps perverse view. (Indeed, if we applied rigour and not mercy to the political correctness of our textual heritage, we might find ourselves with precious little to write about.) In any case, in Chantelouve’s propaganda piece, the Dramatic Word is filtered through two distinct “clémence / rigueur” debates involving the tender-hearted Charles IX and his more pragmatic Council (impersonated by a single character), which of course the King, being far from a tyrant—as is precisely the point—inevitably heeds. At the outset, after some to-ing and fro-ing, Charles takes the calculated risk of giving the diabolical Admiral a chance to prove his peaceful intentions. Later, however, once the evidence of Coligny’s murderous conspiracy is manifest, the same interlocuteurs resolve on punishment, with the Council using the argument that a king must enact his function as God’s deputy by denying mercy to the incorrigible and applying justice without pity:

Dieu pardonne à celuy qui se repend ainsin.
 Il vous aprend de faire, & le meschant sans f’in [sic]
 Il damne, vous monstrant qu’à l’obstiné rebelle
 Devez aussi donner punition cruelle;
 Que si vous plaignez plus un meschant indonté
 Que nostre sang & Dieu, alors la Pieté,
 De vostre Sceptre un plant, sera boule-versée,
 Et l’autre (lequel est Justice) renversée.

[. . . God pardons one who his offences would mend—
 So he teaches you—and the evil without end
 He damns, showing you that rebellious intent,
 Persisted in, deserves a cruel punishment.
 But if you give a man of hard iniquity
 More grace than to our blood and God, then piety,
 One tender off-shoot of your sceptre, shall be blighted,
 And the other, which is justice, thoroughly spited.]

(Chantelouve, ed. Cameron, ll. 1095–1102 [Act V]; trans. Hillman)

Lest we doubt the Council’s estimation of divine judgement in this case, the dice have already been dramatically loaded by way of a supernatural intervention, in which God’s decision to eliminate the reprobate by inciting him to reveal his true nature to the King is authoritatively reported. (The ironic result, incidentally, whether intended or not, is to show the arch-Calvinist hoist with his own predestinarian petar.)

As I have suggested, all this debating in the French tradition ultimately bears on the question of who was and who was not a tyrant, including the especially tricky point of deciding when what might look like tyrannical behaviour to human eyes might be justified by higher imperatives. Such issues were obviously of pressing concern in the highly charged politico-religious climate—witness the plethora of controversial pamphlets dealing with them, some of which, notably those produced by the so-called monarcho-machs, move well beyond propaganda to stand as innovatory treatises in political science. (An especially notable instance is the *Vindiciae contra tyrannos: sive, De principis in populum, populi in principes, legitima potestae* [1579], which claims as its author one “Stephanus Junius Brutus” and is variously attributed to Philippe de Mornay, Théodore de Bèze or Hubert Languet.) What is striking from my limited point of view here is simply that while these were urgent and weighty (not to say heady) questions, with which the English also had every reason to be preoccupied—and demonstrably were, as Greg Walker and others have abundantly shown—their theatre eschews bringing them into the open.

“Open” is the operative word. There is hardly any lack, as we know, of indirect approaches to the staging of political morality in England. But when it comes to tyranny in particular, formal or even semi-formal debate—indeed, explicit discussion of any kind—would seem to be excluded. Rather, various mechanisms of deferral and displacement prevail, beginning with the very beginnings of secular theatre. From this point of view, even the most mordant social satire—that of Sir David Lindsay, for instance, to shift the ground northward for a moment—may be counted as evasive. Where tyranny is actually depicted, as it lavishly is from *Cambises* to *Richard III* and beyond, it is distanced by extremity verging on caricature—not debatable, hence safely out of discursive reach. More broadly, it is personalised—a practice supported by English drama’s relative penchant for characterisation—and to this extent abstracted from the political arena. This is a technique that *Macbeth* practices so smoothly as nearly to give the illusion, by way of the protagonist’s *conscientious* debating within himself, that the stakes are somehow actually political; the fitfully remorseful Claudius provides another instance.

By the same token, in those relatively rare English instances where a debate structure as such is introduced into the dramatic form, that is, with characters presenting an argument for divergent intellectual positions on an issue, the political content again tends to be, at most, indirect. A case in point is

the encounter between Polixenes and Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*—a telling case because Polixenes would make, at the moment, a credible prospective tyrant, who will shortly be launching characteristic threats against the supposed shepherdess and her family. But instead of giving us, say, a formal exchange of views on *clémence* versus *rigueur* between him and the compassionate counsellor Camillo (an obvious potential interlocutor), Shakespeare shifts the ground from ideology to comparative horticulture. (I realise there is a connection, but that is precisely the point.)

Along the same lines, in what must be the most prominent example (both an early and a distinctive one) of the English debating on stage in a vigorous, sustained, and self-conscious way, the controversy concerns—the weather. John Heywood's exuberant comedy is a send-up of a number of things, doubtless including late-medieval scholastic practice, and it ostentatiously sends up Jupiter himself, if only by placing him above and beyond debate as a solipsistic and pretentious judge (“we ourselfe shal joy in our owne glory” [185]), who can finally only reaffirm the free-market *status quo*: all sorts of weather for all sorts of consumers of meteorological products. In so far as he cannot reconcile the competing claims of his petitioners, his distance from the God who presides over the mystical union of Justice and Mercy is highlighted, hence his affinity (if any reminder were needed) with the flesh-and-blood presiding genius of the English court of the 1530s. In this context, the combined absurdity and necessity of debating the weather, as opposed to politics, surely becomes part of Heywood's subtle art.

I hope I haven't given the impression of supposing that the French early modern theatre is more politically daring and engaged than the English. Just in case I have, I turn now to putting the contrary argument. The first point in line is that the debates on the French side, however encoded with more-or-less decipherable material messages, remain formulaic and anodyne, thanks largely to the omnipresence of the CM-factor (“CM” for “celestial mystery”). True, they evoke the issues of the day, but they also keep their distance and renounce, by subordinating, human solution-seeking. Such renunciation is regularly abetted by the reflex assumption of the nation's collective punishment for sinfulness—an ecumenical attitude, amply documented in non-dramatic forms, which is also not alien to English thinking, whether or not it is taken to extend to the Big Tillyardian Picture.

Even this common ground, however, helps us to delineate differing national dramatic landscapes. As early, and in such an emblematic exercise, as *Gorboduc*,

expressions of humanity punished by the divine for its failings and crimes tend in English to take on greater specificity, on the one hand, less Christian certainty, on the other:

These are the plagues, when murder is the mean
To make new heirs unto the royal crown.
Thus wreak the gods when that the mothers wrath
Naught but the blood of her own child may swage. (Sackville and Norton, V.ii.238-41)

Thus when, across the Second Tetralogy, we see the blood of English manuring the ground, it is not as clear as Tillyard would have us think whether the Bishop of Carlisle's prophecy is being fulfilled, or whether, in the sphere of politics as in other natural arenas, the human worm is simply doing his kind.

Such a movement from external to internal determinism—from *Gorboduc en route* ultimately to *The Wild Duck*, as it were—offers a view of what also happens to the motif of political debate when it crosses the Channel. English plays talk about and represent politics all the time, of course, even if they rarely debate political issues. And in the few instances I can think of where the debate structure as such is deployed or evoked in a political context—they all happen to be Shakespearean, but doubtless colleagues can add to my list—that context dominates and complicates the meaning. It does so to the point where debate tends to shade into argument and conflict—a related but a different matter (and one which happens to be the very heart of drama). Paradigmatic in this respect is the case of the disguised Henry V debating royal responsibility with the common soldier Williams (*H5*, IV.i.134 ff.) only until anger further clouds the already murky issue.

We may also think of the exchange between the King and his councillor Warwick in Act Three, Scene One (45 ff.) of *Henry IV, Part 2*. The abstract issue at hand is the nature of prophecy, and behind it lurks the vast question of determinism vs. free will: do we make history or does history make us? The concrete case of the late Richard II's prediction of Northumberland's double treachery casts a very particular shadow, however—one that deepens Henry's despondency and brings the metaphysical ambiguity interpretatively down to earth: the problem of the mechanisms of history energises Shakespeare's finely poised ambiguity about the relative claims of Richard and Bullingbrook. The debate, then, is ultimately less about counselling and statecraft than about cheering up a king whose defeatism threatens his supporters, and on this level the carrying power of Warwick's argument is notably limited. He insists on Richard's sheer

perspicacity (“might create a perfect guess” [87])) as the cause of his accurate prediction, but the King responds to the expression “necessary form” (87) by sinking into a deterministic gloom that his stoical resolution only sets off: “Are these things then necessities? / Then let us meet them like necessities” (92-93). Here is another instance, then, of a non-debate whose citation of debate form effectively calls attention to highly charged questions of theme and character.

The use of debate structure as a characterising device, rather than a means of subsuming character into ideology, also makes a point of contrast between English and French practice. Here, once the notion of debate within the self is admitted into the picture, examples on the English side become legion, and are certainly not confined to Shakespeare. Indeed, the pattern goes back at least as far as (again) John Heywood, whose ineffectual Johan Johan debates inconclusively with himself about beating his wife. To continue with Richard II, however, the king he once was never debated anything—a sign, in retrospect, of absolutist investment of the private self in the public, the body politic’s hegemony over the body natural (and most impolitic). Notoriously, Richard’s unique soliloquy, which opens the fifth act of his tragedy, stages the emergence of a complex subjectivity, and it does so by way of an inner debate that, not just with regard to Scripture, but in multiple inward fashion, sets “the word itself / Against the word” (R2, V.i.13-14). Such debating matches the beginning and ending soliloquies of Faustus, whose starting point, ironically, is his contempt for scholastic exercises (“Is to dispute well logic’s chiefest end?” [Marlowe, I.i.8]) and whose final inner debate over his last chance for salvation even more ironically refashions his subjectivity in the form of a damned soul. In the case of the uncrowned Richard, openness to self-questioning is discursively signalled during the deposition scene in the presence of Bullingbrook, as Richard renounces direct response (the question being, “Are you contented to resign the crown?” [R2, IV.i.200])—an invitation to debate if there ever was one) in favour of solipsistic ambivalence: “Ay, no, no ay” (201).

It seems useful to bring this modest survey to an explicitly comparative conclusion by setting side-by-side a French and an English play that stage the same historical event. Garnier’s *Porcie* takes as its main occasion for debating the relative claims of *clémence* and *rigueur* the proscription organised by the Triumvirs following the assassination of Julius Caesar. The philosopher Arée is charged with putting the case for mercy, in opposition, notably, to Octave César, whose discourse with regard to his enemies perfectly illustrates the human propensity

for self-righteously fusing vengeance with justice: “Nulle vengeance peut égaler leur offense [No vengeance can match their offence]” (l. 844). Arée’s argument is based on the CM-factor (the gods would expend all their thunder—apparently a non-renewable resource—if they punished all offenders), but his position is later echoed in terms of Aristotelian ethics by Marc Antoine, who finds vengeance repugnant to his “magnanime cœur [magnanimous heart]” [l. 1233]). The debate thereby makes a particularly intriguing response to, and deviation from, Plutarch, who, in the *Life of Cicero*, insists that the Triumvirs had at least their cruelty in common:

Such place tooke wrath in them, as they regarded no kindred nor blood: and to speak more properly, they shewed that no brute or sauage beast is so cruell as man, if with his licentiousnes he haue liberty to execute his will. (p. 880)

Indeed, Antony’s vindictive cruelty towards Cicero, whom Octavius had sought to save, is singled out by Plutarch. His order that the slain orator’s head and hands be set up in public view elicits reprobation: “This was a fearefull and horrible sight vnto the *Romaines*, who thought they saw not *Ciceroes* face, but an image of *Antonius* life and disposition” (p. 882). Incidentally, the narrative concludes with evidence (effectively underlined by the translation) that the CM-factor is hardly an exclusive Christian prerogative: “So Gods iustice made the extreame reuenge and punishment of *Antonius* to fall into the house of *Cicero*” (p. 882).

In aligning Marc Antoine, however partially, with the case for mercy, Garnier, it seems, felt the need to provide an example of relative clemency in the wielding of power. He was perhaps already anticipating the sympathetically tragic capacities with which he would later endow Antoine, as opposed to Octave César, in his third and final Roman play, *Marc Antoine* (1578). He was also doubtless counting on, and perhaps countering—good Catholic and loyal monarchist as he was—the heavily loaded application of this episode from Roman history promulgated by French Protestants. For at the head of the faction that had provoked the first civil war in 1562 by their extreme persecutions were three intransigent advocates of Catholic exclusivism who, putting their differences aside, had joined together in highly symbolic fashion at Easter 1561: François, Duke of Guise; the Constable, Anne de Montmorency; and Jacques d’Albon, maréchal de Saint-André. They were re- (or de-)christened the “Triumvirs” by the Huguenots, on the grounds that, as Louis de Bourbon, Prince of Condé, put it, they resembled “Auguste, Marc Antoine et Lépide, quand par leur Triumvirat

meschant et infâme ils suvertirent les loix et la République Romaine [Augustus, Marc Antony, and Lepidus, when by their wicked and contemptible Triumvirat they subverted the laws and the Roman republic]” (cited Jouanna *et al.*, eds., p. 113). The name stuck and passed into widespread use. Now Garnier himself had stigmatised the Roman Triumvirs in his first published work, the 1567 *Hymne de la Monarchie*, citing the ravages of “ces trois Tyrans, ces Tygres affamés [these three tyrants, these famished tigers]” (Chardon, ed., p. 266 [sig. Ci^v]) as an instance of the cruelty to which the rule of “quelque doux Prince”—Charles IX, to take a far-from-random instance—is infinitely preferable. But he was hardly likely to leave the door open to a militantly Protestant and republican reading of his play. In the dramatic context, the “clémence / rigueur” debate functions, like the partial softening of Antoine, at once to signal and to muffle political engagement.

By contrast, the brief proscription sequence that opens Act Four of *Julius Caesar* makes one of the most chilling scenes in Shakespeare, especially as it follows the grotesque display of the mob’s irrational cruelty towards Cinna the poet. The dramatist pulls no punches in developing Plutarch’s picture (and borrowing his examples) of the Triumvirs as respecting “no kindred nor blood”. Indeed, Octavius’ historical defence of Cicero is omitted, so as to leave all three demonstrating their *rigueur* not only mercilessly, but ostentatiously:

Antony. These many then shall die, their names are prick’d.
Octavius. Your brother too must die; consent you, Lepidus?
Lepidus. I do consent—
Octavius. Prick him down, Antony.
Lepidus. Upon condition Publius shall not live,
 Who is your sister’s son, Mark Antony.
Antony. He shall not live; look, with a spot I damn him. (*JC*, IV.i.1-6)

They do so, self-discreditingly, not merely in the spirit (*mutatis mutandis*) of boys engaged in a pissing-contest, but in the cause of sealing an alliance whose dissolution is already in the cards displayed at the end of the scene, when Antony and Octavius discuss the elimination of their partner, with Antony pressing the point. The fulfilment must wait for *Antony and Cleopatra*, where, ironically, Antony is himself menaced by the initiative taken by Caesar, who offers the excuse that “Lepidus was grown too cruel” (*Ant.*, III.vi.32). This casual dropping of the second shoe, with its rare passing mention of cruelty, is very much to the point. Typically, it is precisely on condition of withholding commentary and reflection in the abstract that ruthlessness is allowed to make its impression as the stock-in-trade

of political behaviour, if not of human nature in general, as Plutarch comes close to claiming. And even within *Julius Caesar*, the Triumvirs have no monopoly. Their cynicism may be counterbalanced by Brutus' republican idealism, but however the latter takes on the tinge of mercy, it remains deeply impregnated with a concern for appearances ("Our course will seem too bloody" [*JC*, II.i.162]) and a consciousness of manipulative signification: "Let's be sacrificers, but not butchers" (166). These ambivalences, too, are allowed to flourish by the absence of debate about the place of bloodshed on the political stage, and they foreground the fact that even Brutus' self-conscious debate within himself over the killing of Caesar turns, self-deceptively, on a foregone conclusion: "It must be by his death . . ." (II.i.10). And so, once again, debate structure comes into its own as a device for characterisation.

That it so seldom rises (or sinks) in the English drama to the level of the abstractly political may, of course, have something to do with the greater centralisation and efficacy of the censorship, hence with the self-censorship that theatrical companies practised habitually, if not uniformly. Obviously, both stage and book production in France as well attracted the anxious interest of authorities, and *privilèges* had to be obtained, but the centres of production were far more numerous, the mechanisms of authority more scattered and divided, if not virtually non-existent in various places during the more anarchic moments of the civil wars. Yet Garnier, at least during the period of his active dramatic career, was very much the king's man, and this points back to the essentially anodyne nature of political debate in his work. A comparison might be made with the Stuart court masque, where ideological positions are certainly foregrounded, but hardly with the intention of fostering real debate about them—on the contrary. Whether, as seems likely, the English public-stage tendency to forego debate resulted from (self-)censorship, it is arguably linked to the development of alternative, less direct but potentially far more subversive forms of political commentary: circumlocutions, in fact, that produced some of the most ingenious, resourceful and powerful dramatic practices of the age.

Still, on the premise that I've earned the right to indulge in a touch of national stereotyping after all, I also find it tempting to take the eschewing of debate between the claims of Mercy and Justice as testimony to the famous British spirit of empiricism. After all, the cosmic smooching of these contraries, while straightforward enough doctrinally, remains stubbornly resistant to common sense, not to mention human imitation. In what it must endlessly amuse God

to hear us call the “real world”, the two are endlessly opposed. Choices are constantly being made by both kings and clowns between versions of letting the Other live and putting him/it to death, a choice that it usually suits us to present in terms of deserved punishment or gracious pardon—whether it’s a question of our stepping on a pesky bug or of somebody bigger finding us pesky enough to step on. This is a tough lesson so integral to the mechanisms of English drama that no censorship could ever have hoped to expunge it—except that applied by Parliament in 1642.

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Gorboduc, Early Elizabethan Seneca and the Religious Settlement

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In the years following Elizabeth's accession to the throne there was a sudden "vogue" for Senecan plays in performance and in print. Undoubtedly, Elizabeth's personal penchant for Seneca had something to do with this.¹ But the resonance of many of the plays with the violence of recent political history must also have been a factor.² And it is certainly also worth noting that the Theban legend features very prominently in productions and published translations in this early period of Elizabeth's reign. In only the second Christmas of her reign (1559-60), Andrew Oxenbridge staged a production of *Oedipus* in Trinity College, Cambridge. Again at

- 1 Jasper Heywood writes in his dedication of his translation of *Troas* to her: "I thought it should not be vnpleasant for your grace to se some part of so excellent an author in your owne tong (the reading of whom in latten I vnderstande delightes greatly your maiesty) as also for that none may be a better iudge of my doinges herein, then who best vnderstandeth my author" (Heywood, sig. A3^r; cited Winston, pp. 45-46).
- 2 Winston observes (p. 40): "Like Seneca, the translators lived at a time of quick and dramatic shifts in leadership—three changes of monarch in little over a decade—an unsettled and contested succession, and, with each new reign, the repeated and growing threat of tyranny. As Seneca did with his Greek sources, the early Elizabethan translators looked to the Roman tragedies for a compelling set of fictions that could reflect the crises and uncertainties of their time".

Cambridge, Thomas Browne probably produced his *Thebais* in the same Christmas season as *Gorboduc* (1561-62).³ Alexander Neville's translation was printed in the same year. *Jocasta* was performed in the year following the first (bad) printing of *Gorboduc* (1565). There was a *Destruction of Thebes*, which was probably never staged, planned for the visit to Oxford of the Chancellor, Robert Dudley, with Cardinal de Chatillon in May 1568-69 (Elliot, Nelson *et al.*, eds., I: 150, II: 848). William Gager's *Oedipus* was then performed at Magdalen in Oxford in February 1581-82 (Elliot, Nelson *et al.*, eds., I: 175; II: 992 and 848), just after the reprint of Neville's translation (1581)⁴ and in the same year as Thomas Watson's *Antigone* was printed. The Theban legend surely struck some thematic chords for those living under Elizabeth, particularly in the first ten years of her reign, and *Gorboduc* must be read as a part of this broader trend.

On 18 January 1561-62, a performance of *Gorboduc* was staged for Queen Elizabeth I at Whitehall (Cauthen, ed., Sackville and Norton, p. xii). The play had been performed first at the Inner Temple as part of the Templars' Christmas celebrations on Twelfth Night, but such was the content of the play that it aroused her curiosity, and she commanded a royal performance of it. This command, perhaps spurred by reports of the contentious matter that the play deals with, has led to extensive scrutiny of the political implications and arguments of the play. Generally, critical readings have focussed on the succession of the royal line. The traditional approach (exemplified by Marie Axton) considers Catherine Grey as being the appropriate heir and finds the suggestion that King Gorboduc's fatal error in dividing his kingdom between his two sons might be repeated in England if Catherine is not formally announced as the heir to the throne (Axton, "Robert Dudley", pp. 365 ff.). Foremost in the minds of those who adopt this reading must be the failed plot to place the Protestant Lady Jane Grey on the throne of England on the strength of Edward VI's alteration of the succession in her favour in his death-bed will (the will is reprinted in Nichols, ed., pp. 89-90). The message would be that such plotting and the upheaval that followed might be avoided in future by decisive and early acknowledgement of a firm Protestant line of succession.

3 The evidence is not entirely conclusive, but he is credited with a production of *Thebais* during his short time at Cambridge, and he did receive a payment from King's College in 1561-62 for expenses for a play (Nelson, ed., II: 933 and I: 213).

4 In Thomas Newton's complete English translations of Seneca, published as *Seneca: His Tenne Tragedies*.

Alternatively, but similarly in terms of a clearly-arranged succession, Susan Doran, among others, looks at the potential marriage proposals under consideration by Elizabeth. That the play took place first at the Inner Temple, where Robert Dudley (who is generally acknowledged to have been her main romantic interest at this time) was “Christmas Prince” of the Temple’s festivities, adds weight to and complicates these readings. In these readings, the play is seen as his argument in favour of his own marriage suit. In this line of criticism, James and Walker read the play as explicitly responding to the proposed match with the King of Sweden. Their discovery of an eye-witness account of the play provides persuasive evidence that the play was read by a contemporary audience as a direct engagement of the politics of the competing claims of Robert Dudley and the King of Sweden to the hand of the Queen (James and Walker, esp. p. 118).

The play, though often referred to as the “first English tragedy”, is not without a dramatic tradition that also seems regularly to have engaged the issues surrounding succession. As Jessica Winston has recently suggested, the tradition of Senecan performance and printing by the scholars of the two universities and the Inns of Court has relatively unexplored political implications. Senecan tragedy, Winston surmises, “provided a vehicle for men at the universities and Inns—as individuals and as members of an intellectual, ambitious, and politically savvy group—to represent anxieties about the nature of kingship” (p. 53). Her argument focuses upon the published translations of Jasper Heywood and Alexander Neville and on the politics of their immediate circles. In dealing with much the same material, although focussing on the performance of Seneca at the universities and Inns of Court, I will argue for a more broad-reaching and religiously-engaged political reading than Winston provides.

The first legislative alteration to the Tudor succession was Henry VIII’s Succession to the Crown Act, which passed through Parliament in March 1534. The act removed his first-born, Mary, from the line and made the Princess Elizabeth the heir presumptive (reprinted in Tanner, ed., pp. 382-88). The act was not purely a matter of inheritance, though, but was directly related to the state religion, as it included the oath recognising the King’s supremacy and independence from Rome in religious matters.

The other Henrician act that has a bearing on this tradition is the slightly earlier Appeals Act of 1533. Stewart Mottram has argued that the language of the act reflects an ongoing project whereby Henry sought to establish England’s independence from Rome by reference to “sundry old authentic histories and

chronicles” (reprinted in Tanner, ed., pp. 40-46; citation p. 40). The act, on the vague assertion of historical sources, attempts to trace the “empire” of Britain, and hence Henry’s supreme authority over it, back to Brute and beyond to the fall of Troy (Mottram, pp. 8-12).⁵ Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historiae Regum Britanniae* (1136) was one such chronicle, fitting aptly into Henry’s agenda. It is also the historical source for *Gorboduc*, and a similar nationalistic, or anti-papal, agenda may also be involved. Sackville and Norton take pains to stress the Trojan and then Roman heritage of Britain in the establishment of the kingdom by Brute. Philander, Eubulus, and Dordan each reference Brute by name at various stages before Philander draws the line even further back to the fall of Troy:⁶ “the mindful wrath of wreakful gods / (Since mighty Ilion’s fall not yet appeased / With these poor remnants of the Trojan name)” (II.ii.75-77). *Gorboduc* also picks up the theme:

O cruel fates, O mindful wrath of gods,
 Whose vengeance neither Simois’ stained streams
 Flowing with blood of Trojan princes slain,
 Nor Phrygian fields made rank with corpses dead
 Of Asian kings and lords can yet appease;
 Ne slaughter of unhappy Priam’s race,
 Nor Ilion’s fall made level with the soil
 Can yet suffice; but still continued rage
 Pursues our lives and from the farthest seas
 Doth chase the issues of destroyed Troy. (III.i.1-10)

What *Gorboduc*’s speech makes clear is that the arrival of Brute in England brought, not only the foundation of Britain with the issue of the near-devastated Trojan line, but also the curse unleashed by the gods against that line.

However, Sackville and Norton’s theatrical model is, like the ancient founder of the isle, also Roman. The play is a subtle reworking of Seneca’s incomplete *Thebais*. Unable to share rule, two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices, fall to strife and destroy each other, and in the process the family line. In *Gorboduc*, these two sons are replaced by Ferrex and Porrex, Thebes becomes Britain, their mother Jocasta is replaced by Videna (who is a sort of anti-Jocasta, in that she

5 See also Maley, pp. 31-44.

6 Philander makes reference to “forefather Brute” (I.ii.165), Eubulus to “The mighty Brute, first prince of all this land” (I.ii.270). Dordan more ominously says, “I fear the fatal time now draweth on / When civil hate shall end the noble line / Of famous Brute and of his royal seed” (II.i.194-96).

aggravates the strife rather than attempting to quell it), and, finally, their blind and cursed father, Oedipus, is replaced by the aging and foolish Gorboduc.

In 1566, George Gascoigne and Francis Kenwelmersh produced the Gray's Inn play *Jocasta* for another audience including the Queen. Essentially, *Jocasta* is a translation of Euripides' *Phoenissae*, his version of the *Thebais* story. This, filtered through Dolce's Italian translation, is then "cast", as John W. Cunliffe puts it, "into the form of Seneca" (Cunliffe, p. 9). As such, it is again the story of Eteocles and Polyneices, the warring sons of the incestuous Oedipus. In the final scene of the play, Oedipus is brought forth from a "darkesome denne" (V.iv.1). The stage entrance is not specific, but even if he does not come up from beneath the stage through a trap, it is at least made clear that he is the physical manifestation of the family curse that has been lurking beneath the house and the city. Axton has identified this figure as "a 'blind' Elizabeth", arguing that the play sets out to show her "the dangers of her metaphorical marriage with the realm and by implication to urge a real marriage" (Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*, p. 54). However, if Elizabeth's subjects are anxious about their future ruler, then it must be because they can see back into the recent past and the uncertain successions that have occurred as a consequence of Henry's multiple marriages. In this light, it seems more appropriate to look at Elizabeth as akin to one of the remaining sons of a flawed king or to his unmarried daughter, Antigone. In this instance, the sexes are reversed, and instead of two sons and a daughter, there were two daughters and a son. The internal conflict that ensued was not so much a civil war between equal claimants to the throne as a struggle between two religious factions contending for the realm at the end of Edward's minority.

Elizabeth's first legal act as queen was to restore the state religion in The Act of Supremacy (1559). As with Henry's Act of Appeals, this act evokes an historical empire, specifically "the imperial crown of this realm the ancient jurisdictions, authorities, superiorities, and pre-eminences", in opposition to any foreign interference, implicitly Rome. And it refers explicitly to Henry's own Act of Succession (1534) and to Mary's repeal of "said good laws" (reprinted in Tanner, ed., pp. 130-35; citation p. 130).

Those "good laws", however, were not without complication for her position on the throne. Henry's succession act of 1534 had determined "the marriage heretofore solemnised between [Henry] and the Lady Katherine [to be] against the laws of Almighty God" (reprinted in Tanner, ed., pp. 382-88; citation p. 382). Though the marriage between Henry and his brother's wife Katherine had been

granted a dispensation from Rome, the act of 1534 declared it incestuous. The Succession Act of 1536 annulled Henry's marriage to Anne, also on grounds that, as Bruce Thomas Boehrer has observed, "included incestuous adultery" (Boehrer, p. 44).⁷ Effectively, because Anne had supposedly been committing fornication with her brother (among others) prior to her marriage to Henry (and was potentially already pregnant with Elizabeth), their marriage was illegal. The Succession Act of 1543 reinstated both Mary and Elizabeth in the succession behind Edward.

In this context, Mary and Elizabeth could both potentially be viewed as the products of incestuous relationships. Obviously, Elizabeth's presence on the throne implicitly refutes any suggestion that she is a bastard. However, Catholics waiting in the hope that Mary, Queen of Scots' declaration of herself as Queen of England would come to fruition might see the situation otherwise. Even for her supporters, though, in returning to those "good laws" made by Henry that separated England from Rome as an Imperial State, Elizabeth was forced to rely on a legal tradition that contained the suggestion that Mary was the child of incest, and that she herself was the child of a king guilty of incest.

The appeal of the Oedipus legend in this light would be irresistible. In terms of the Senecan drama generally, succession is almost always an issue because an essential element of the plays in the tradition, including *Gorboduc*, is that they depict the fall of a noble family in its entirety, and not just of a single Aristotelian tragic hero. In the Oedipus legend specifically, that fall is depicted as the direct result of incest. The secondary effect is that the children of these marriages fall to civil war, primarily because of the curse brought down by the taint of incest, and because a side-effect of that is the lack of clarity of succession. In England after Henry, that civil war becomes a metaphor for the religious division between Protestantism (under Edward and Elizabeth) and Catholicism (under Mary).

A number of other critics have noted the prevalence of incest motifs in Renaissance tragedy. Among them, Zenón Luis Martínez takes a fairly loose Freudian psychoanalytic interpretation of incest that allows him to include a chapter on *Gorboduc* and *King Lear* ("Plots of Tyrants and the Place of Desire: *Gorboduc* and *King Lear*" [pp. 98-169]), although neither play contains any actual incest. Charles Forker looks at special environmental factors more proximate than the Oedipal archetype to account for the particular proliferation of incest

7 See also Menon, pp. 158-59, and McCabe, pp. 159-61.

stories and figures of speech on the Elizabethan stage. The most important of these intellectual and sociological pressures may be attributed to the humanistic literary tradition, the emotional climate within the family, and recent dynastic history (with the related theological debates concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage). (Forker, p. 142; cited Martínez, p. 15).⁸ Forker's separation of "humanistic literary tradition", "the Oedipal archetype" and "recent dynastic history" is, I would argue, artificial. From the start of Elizabeth's reign, theatrical productions at Cambridge were already looking at these issues of incest, succession, and, by extension, religion.

The first recorded Senecan play performed during Elizabeth's reign was *Oedipus* itself. It was produced by Andrew Oxenbridge in Trinity College in the Christmas season of 1559-60, the second of her reign (Nelson, ed., I: 208). It opens with a lament about the stress of reign:

Does anyone find joy in kingship? So deceptive a good, hiding so many evils behind its seductive appearance! As the high ridges always catch the winds, and as a rocky crag that cleaves the vast deep is battered by waves however calm the sea, so supreme power lies open to Fortune's blows. (ll. 6-11)⁹

The passage in its general theme is very similar to a passage that Elizabeth translated out of Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus* and may seem conventionally appropriate for a state with a new monarch.¹⁰ But of course in *Oedipus* this lament is not simply against kingship but against the twisted and incestuous lineage that the king has sired. The lament, "Unhappy ties of kinship!" (l. 19), might as easily have applied to Elizabeth, whose ties to her sister, as I have stressed, were deeply complicated. *Oedipus* goes on to describe the plague that is wracking the city. An informed audience will know that he is the cause of the pollution that the realm suffers from, and an English audience would be well aware that the idea of a plague as divine scourge for sin is not unique to the Greek or Roman gods.

8 Martínez sees Forker as having opened up a new trend of scholarship by diminishing "the relevance of psychoanalysis and cultural anthropology" and promoting "the necessity for tackling the historical and dramatic specificity of incest in early modern drama" (Martínez, p. 15).

9 Except where a particular Elizabethan translation is explicitly indicated, all quotations of Seneca are taken from the Loeb translations of Fitch.

10 Elizabeth I's translation of *Hercules Oetaeus*, ll. 600-99, is reprinted with the Latin text in Walpole, pp. 102-9.

When Alexander Neville published his translation of the same play three years later (1563), he seemed to find it difficult to distinguish the plague and depravity of Thebes from his view of England. In his “Preface to the Reader” he writes,

Mark thou . . . what is meant by the whole course of the history, and frame thy life free from such mischiefs wherewith the world at this present is universally overwhelmed: the wrathful vengeance of God provoked, the body plagued, the mind and conscience in midst of deep devouring dangers most terribly assaulted, in such sort that I abhor to write; and even at the thought thereof I tremble and quake for very inward grief and fear of mind, assuredly persuading myself that the right high and immortal God will never leave such horrible and domestic crimes unpunished—as in this present tragedy, and so forth in the process of the whole history, thou mayst right well perceive. (Neville, p. 3)

In the best tradition of *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1559), Neville is holding up the mirror of this tragic house to the gaze of those living under Elizabeth’s reign. Winston deals with this translation in some detail and, drawing connections between Neville and the Inns of Court authors (including Sackville), suggests that the popularity of *The Mirror for Magistrates* is one of the main factors in the subsequent interest in translating and performing Seneca.¹¹ However, she makes no connection between Oedipus and Henry VIII, and she reads the translations, for the most part, as warnings against both an uncertain succession and tyranny in general. But Neville’s concern does not initially seem in any way connected with marriage (beyond Oedipus’ incestuous one), nor is there even much indication that succession is his concern. He is deeply concerned with the “wrathful vengeance of God” plaguing a realm for the sin of incest in a family. This may have seemed particularly relevant in a plague year, when the Queen herself had fallen ill from smallpox.¹²

The fate of the universities had been for centuries bound to that of the state, as the chief advisors to the crown traditionally took up the chancellorships of the two institutions. At Cambridge, where as many as four Senecan plays were

11 Sackville contributed a section for the new edition of *Mirror* in 1563. See Winston, pp. 40–42.

12 In contrast, in the aftermath of her illness, Alexander Nowell, Dean of St Paul’s, told the Queen that her lack of succession was precisely the issue that proved a plague to the nation. In a sermon preached at the opening of parliament on 11 January 1563 and printed as an appendix to Nowell’s *Catechism*, he said that her sister’s reign had been “a terrible plague to all England . . . so now for the want of your marriage and issue is like to prove as great a plague” (Nowell, p. 228; cited McLaren, p. 283).

to be performed within the first three years of Elizabeth's reign, the Succession Act of 1534 had the side-effect of removing the Chancellor of the University, Bishop John Fisher, from his post. He would be executed less than a year later for refusing to swear the first Oath of Supremacy. He was replaced at the University by Thomas Cromwell, who proceeded to impose the oath and for a while quelled any disputes on the matter, making dismissals where he deemed it necessary (Patterson, p. 53).

During Edward VI's brief reign, while a number of further religious changes took place at the university, it became a place where debate was fairly open. In 1549, a disputation took place "on the question whether Mass were the Lord's Supper"; two German reformers, Martin Bucer and Paul Fagius, were invited by Archbishop Cranmer to the chairs of Divinity and Hebrew, respectively; and "a royal visitation" of the university under the leadership of Bishop Ridley ended in a heated debate over transubstantiation and an accusation of heresy against Bucer from one of the scholars, Dr. Young (Patterson, p. 54).

Under Queen Mary, things took a slightly more violent turn. Bucer and Fagius had died before she took the throne, although they were not to remain at rest. Stephen Gardiner was reinstated to the chancellorship. The Vice-Chancellor under Edward's protectorate, Edwin Sandys, was practically dragged from his chair by a Catholic mob and had to be restrained from using his dagger by the master of Trinity College, William Bill. All but one of the masters of the college were changed, Sandys resigned, and the mass was reinstated. Things got much worse when Reginald Pole, Archbishop of Canterbury, took over as university chancellor and began his purge of the institution. In 1556, John Hullier, a former Scholar of King's College, became the only martyr at the university when he was burned on Jesus Green. On 6 February 1557, the corpses of Bucer and Fagius were dug up, brought out to the marketplace, tied to stakes and burned.

Rather fittingly, Reginald Pole died just hours after Queen Mary. Undoubtedly, the university prepared itself for more upheaval. Many presumably feared harsh reprisals. Elizabeth made William Cecil chancellor of the university. "In January, 1559, the Oath of Supremacy was again imposed upon all graduates and wholesale evictions of Catholic Heads of Houses and Fellows ensued" (Patterson, p. 58). It was in this atmosphere that the Elizabethan college productions of Seneca were performed, and these productions often seem specifically chosen to counsel against overly aggressive treatment of defeated par-

ties, the university men perhaps fearing a return of, and violent response to, the type of bloodshed seen at the beginning of Mary's reign.

The first play, *Oedipus*, deals mostly with the incestuous relationship of a king. But the king's reason for pursuing the truth about that relationship is his discovery that the previous king was murdered and has not been afforded proper burial rites; nor has his murder been investigated. If burial and the proper treatment of corpses are a minor aspect of this play, the next play, *Troas*, is about little else.¹³ William Hudson was responsible for staging it, again in the Christmas season at Trinity College, the following year, 1560–61 (Nelson, ed., I: 211).

Later portions of the Trojan myth, generally recognized as being pertinent to Elizabeth, were staged by the university in 1563, when a *Dido* play (now lost) was performed for the Queen's visit. Deanne Williams makes a strong case for the association of Elizabeth with Dido in the "Sieve Portrait" of 1575 but admits that "most discussions of it emphasize the connection between Elizabeth and Aeneas, not Dido" (Williams, p. 41). The connection, quite simply, stresses the duty to state above romantic affairs. In 1575, the suggestion must be that the Queen's choice of virginity and refusal to marry constitute a wise dedication to her fate as leader of the realm (like Aeneas' dedication to his fate as founder of Rome, and unlike Dido's neglect of responsibility to the state). In 1563, Robert Dudley and Lord Burleigh held the prompt books on the scaffold, "to signifye their good wille" (Nelson, ed., I: 231). In this earlier context, the myth must have provided a warning against the romantic scandal involved in the affair with Lord Robert, who, like Dido, had already been married.

If, in 1563, the scholars of Cambridge were associating the destinies of Aeneas as founder of Rome and Elizabeth as ruler of England, then it is highly probable that the association was also current when they staged *Troas* two years earlier. *Troas* begins at the end of the ten-year-long Trojan War and deals with

13 The later part of the myth that becomes the subject of Sophocles' *Antigone* (a translation of which was printed by Thomas Watson in 1581) is also about the treatment of corpses. After the war that sees the two brothers destroy each other, Creon decrees that Polyneices (for raising an army against Thebes, whatever about his claim to the throne) should not receive proper burial, but should instead be left as carrion for crows. Again, there is a question of marriage in this play, as Antigone is left with the choice to marry Haemon, Creon's son, and submit to his will regarding her brother's corpse, or to oppose it, bury her brother, and effectively (and poetically, in Sophocles' rhetoric) marry death. She chooses the latter, and in the context of Elizabeth's marriage question, it would be quite tempting to see her as analogous to Elizabeth, who chose rather to wed England than any of her many suitors.

the aftermath of the conflict between the Greeks and the Trojans. It is Seneca's version of the story dramatised by Euripides in *Hecuba* (which was performed the previous year in the same college along with *Oedipus*). If the Trojan heritage of Britain was by now a well-established tradition, and one that had been particularly adapted to those who insisted on England's independence from Rome, then the staging of *Troas* in the context of a reformed university should be read as a lament for those who have fallen under the Catholic oppressors during the attempt to stamp out Protestantism in England and the purge of the university under Mary's reign. *Troas*, moreover, in the Astyanax plot (the part unique to Seneca's play, as opposed to Euripides') is about the Greeks' attempt to kill off the final male heir of Hector. That Elizabeth survived her sister's reign and was able to take the throne must have seemed similar to Aeneas' escape from Troy and his descendent Brute's eventual ability to establish Troy Novant at London, and by extension the British nation.

However, at a university that had already seen human sacrifice and the desecration of corpses in its grounds by the ruling faction, *Troas* would just as likely have been taken as a sympathetic look at the defeated party and a plea for leniency in victory. The play opens with a warning, as well as a lament for the destruction and death that have occurred. Hecuba says, "Anyone who trusts in royal power, anyone who rules supreme in a great palace without fear of the fickle gods, anyone who surrenders his trusting heart to happiness, should look upon me, and upon you, Troy" (ll. 1-4).¹⁴ The initial mourning of the Trojan faction is ended by Achilles' ghost, who demands further sacrifice. The Trojan princess, Polyxena, is his promised bride, and he insists on the marriage in the form of a sacrificial marriage-in-death. His brutal son Pyrrhus insists on adhering to his father's ghost's demand, but the Greek captain, Agamemnon, voices a call for moderation in victory that in 1560-61 may have sounded a warning note to those newly reinstated at the heads of the University, and in the state at large:

First one should understand what actions the conqueror may rightly take, and the conquered endure. Power used violently is held by no one for long; used with restraint, it lasts. The higher Fortune raises and exalts human might, the more the fortunate should humble themselves and tremble at shifting circumstance, fearing overly favourable gods. (*Troas*, ll. 256-63)

14 Fitch, in his edition of Seneca, notes (p. 66) that these lines are echoed in Marlowe, 1 *Tamburlaine*, "Those that are proud of fickle empery / And place their chiefest good in earthly pomp— / Behold the Turk and his great emperess!" (V.ii.353-355); and in Thomas Storer, *Life and Death of Thomas Wolsey*: "Never did Fortune greater instance give / In what frail state proud magistrates do live" (ll. 13-14).

In the play, of course, his pleas fall on deaf ears, and both Polyxena and Astyanax are butchered.

While I have focussed on Cambridge University, where Seneca was performed, the Oxford scholar and Catholic, Jasper Heywood, was contemporaneously publishing translations of *Troas*, *Thyestes*, and *Hercules Furens*. His first two plays are worth a moment's consideration in a Catholic context. In Heywood's first translation, *Troas* (1559), Winston notes an embellishment of the suffering of Hecuba and a consequent accentuation of the sympathy she evokes. She further sees a potential identification of Hecuba and the Trojan women of the play's title with Mary and "Catholics such as Heywood, whose fate was, like the women of Troy, subject to a new leader" (Winston, p. 46).¹⁵ That the Cambridge scholars chose to follow Heywood in producing *Troas* the year after indicates not only the popularity of his translation but also a certain sympathy with his position.

Heywood's *Thyestes* (1560) in its turn dramatises a conflict between two brothers (Atreus and Thyestes), who are incapable of sharing the rule of one city. The root cause of the problem is again an ancestral sin (that of Tantalus), and the statutory incest between Thyestes and his brother's wife is also a factor (one of the motives for Atreus' vicious revenge in feeding Thyestes his own sons). Once again, the focus on warring royal siblings must bring to mind Elizabeth and her late sister Mary. The primary victims of the play are the innocent children of Thyestes, and Heywood must have seen himself and his fellow Catholics shadowed in these innocent victims caught in the crossfire. Since his first translation, Heywood had been ejected from Merton because of his religious belief. At the same time, he was awarded a Fellowship at All Souls, but he was not allowed to keep it very long because he refused to recant his faith. He moved very briefly to Gray's Inn in 1561, but at last fled to Rome, where he became a Jesuit priest (Spearing, pp. 437-38). While his translations contained appeals for leniency towards Catholics, his scholarship could not, in the end, protect him.

If Seneca's *Thebais* is a dramatic model for Sackville and Norton, then it has a feature that proved beneficial to those adapting the material at this stage in the tradition: as an unfinished play, it offers those who adapt it the opportunity to write their own ending. Effectively, in Elizabeth's reign the association of the

15 She also postulates that Hecuba may also "shadow" Elizabeth, as a monarch who must be wary of "capricious fortune" and "who had to maintain the fragile political consensus that had brought her to power" (Winston, pp. 45-46).

myth with the Tudor line is incomplete. How authors complete their adaptations of *Thebais* will reflect their interpretation of the current political situation. In 1566, the authors of *Jocasta* choose to end the play, not with the Sophoclean ending, which sees Antigone sentenced to death, but with a five-scene act that is like a miniature version of Sophocles' *Antigone*, with the heroine threatening to defy Creon and bury her brother, refusing a marriage alliance with Creon's son Haemon, but then electing to go into exile with her disgraced father. In Gascoigne and Kenwelmershe's version, then, there is a suggestion that there is something wicked in Antigone's refusal of the marriage alliance offered, most pointedly in her threat to kill Haemon if the marriage is forced upon her. Gillian Austen looks at some of the political implications of this play, and in particular the final act. She again highlights the problem of the succession (and of Elizabeth's "absolute and arbitrary power over the succession" [Austen, p. 61]) and also notes the "threat of civil war", which she sees as the "overriding fear associated with an unsettled succession" (p. 56). She sees in Oedipus a figure of Death, brought forth by Jocasta, whom she sees as Truth (a figure adopted by Elizabeth). But if Oedipus represents Death here, then within the Senecan tradition, that figure recalls the other dead characters who are summoned forth from the "darkesome denne" of the underworld, like Tantalus in *Thyestes* or Thyestes in *Agamemnon*, haled forth by furies to prophesy the continuation of the curse and the repetition of their sins. In *Jocasta*, the civil war has already happened; what follows is not civil war but the reign of a tyrant, Creon (moulded here out of Sophocles' *Antigone*, not Seneca). From a Protestant perspective, Henry's sin in allowing the Catholic child of incest, Mary, a place in the succession might be repeated if Elizabeth fails to take action and remove the threat posed to the line by the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots.

Gorboduc is a slightly different story, at least in its conclusion, and the threat of civil war is presented as more immediate. In the aftermath of the deaths of Ferrex and Porrex, the realm is made literally devoid of leadership: "The people loe forgetting trouth and loue, / Contemning quite both law and loyall hart, / Euen they haue slaine their soueraigne lord & queene" (V.i.5-7). The murder of Gorboduc and Videna by this lawless mob seems pointless, as the heirs of the house are already slain, but the popular revolt does not stop there:

Euen yet they cease not, caryed on with rage,
In their rebellious routes, to threaten still

A new bloud shed vnto the princes kinne,
To slay them all, and to vproote the race
Both of the king and queene. (V.i.9-13)

This popular uprising in the play may recall the actual Protestant rebellion in Scotland, aided by Elizabeth in 1559, against Mary of Guise. This rebellion was religious in nature and was waged against a female ruler.¹⁶ The ambiguity of the scene most likely reflects the ambiguity felt by English Protestants, who supported the general cause of this Scottish revolt but may have seen in it the spectre of another potential future uprising against their own queen, Elizabeth, by Catholic forces who had the support of a foreign queen (*i.e.*, Mary Stuart).

The remaining counsellors of Gorboduc's former realm, the nobility, consider policy and rhetoric as a means of suppressing the revolt, but (significantly for the Master of the Horse, Robert Dudley) they determine to prepare

Such band of horsemen as ye may [prepare].
Horsemen (you know) are not the commons strength,
But are the force and store of noble men,
Wherby the unchosen and vnarmed sort
Of skillesse rebelles, whome none other power
But nombre makes to be of dreadfull force,
With sodeyne brunt may quickly be opprest. (V.i.100-6)

They determine with this armed force to wreak "such slaughter" (110) that future generations will be filled with "horror of reuenge" (112) at the thought of rebellion. If this rebellion against the ruling faction is suggestive of a potential Catholic revolt, then this passage seems to counsel allowing Robert Dudley to pursue a more vigorous suppression of Catholicism than the Act of Uniformity currently allowed.¹⁷ This type of violent pursuit of recusants seems to have been exactly the kind of response that the university men at Cambridge must have expected when they performed Seneca's sympathetic *Troas* a year earlier.¹⁸

16 See McLaren, p. 273.

17 The act is sometimes referred to as Act of Religious Settlement and is reprinted in Tanner, ed., (pp. 135-39).

18 Zim resists any religious reading of Sackville's contribution to this play (which includes this final act). She reads a religious moderation throughout his career that indicates that he was less concerned with public religious statement (as opposed to private belief) than with political expediency and peaceful moderation. However, the one exception to this trend that she observes (pp. 913 ff.) is when religious matters threaten political concerns.

The critical consensus is that succession is the issue at the heart of *Gorboduc*. James and Walker have shown conclusively that this was originally understood by a contemporary audience in terms of the competing offers of marriage from Robert Dudley and the King of Sweden. The play also portrays a realm that, by association with Brute's kingdom at the end of his reign, lacks a clear male line and by extension is effectively acephalous. This headless realm is incapable of defence against the foreign threat of the Duke of Albany (Scotland) in Gorboduc's time, or of Mary, Queen of Scots in Elizabeth's. It is a realm that has not the stomach to put down with violence the potential threat of Catholic rebellion or plotting from within. If the Cambridge plays counsel a *via media* rather than violent revenge in the change of religious regime, then *Gorboduc* implies that Elizabeth's measured approach leaves her open to the threat of religious civil war. The play certainly recommends that she settle the succession, perhaps by marriage, perhaps by announcing her heir, but it does so by implying that her family has caused civil discord throughout the realm that she as a monarch has failed to deal with, with the result that the realm is now open to invasion or internal unrest.

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Offence and Appeal: A Marlowe Paradox?

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Even if the Baines libel and Kyd's evasions be only partly true—and there's quite enough circumstantial evidence to suggest that there's smoke, if not absolute fire—Marlowe's writings give evidence of a disposition to confrontation. He is bent not just on subverting traditional views but on proceeding along alternative lines, scurrilous or blasphemous or even treasonous as these might appear to less adventurous spirits. Dominant cultures always offer themselves to challenge, especially from the up-and-coming generations. Thus, while the fact of Marlowe's youth might be raised in his defence, since rebellion is its concomitant, I see it as a necessary element in any assessment of him. Whatever his age or immaturity, we must never forget that Marlowe was a lead member in a revolution in theatre writing and performance. So my essay will explore how far Marlowe's image as the *enfant terrible* of the early English stage may be deserved and some of the ways in which he challenged the values of the elders. In pursuit of this I will treat of two plays, *The Tragedy of Dido Queen of Carthage* and *The Tragicall History of Dr Faustus*, regarded as early and late productions of the playwright, and seek some contiguous cultural and ideological issues out of two recent performances, the production of *Dido*

given by the Royal National Theatre in Spring of 2009 and my own production of *Dr Faustus* in December 2008.

The Royal National Theatre's production of *Dido* received a mixed reception. In *The Guardian*, Michael Billington welcomed "a straight, sober rendering of an unfamiliar work" that "forced us to listen to the text" and found it "inspiring to see a forgotten dramatic landmark rendered with such style and dignity". Dido's journey through the play was indicated first by "tender compassion" succeeded by "fierce eroticism", and in the final moments she was "close to madness in her moment of desertion". It had, for Billington, "the authentic whiff of tragedy". In contrast, Charles Spencer of the *Telegraph*, under the influence of a previous "sprightly promenade performance" that "achieved a fine tragic intensity", found that the RNT actors made "a messy, three course dog's dinner of the blank verse". The love relationship he saw was "without sexual spark", and Aeneas "a prolix bore". The "painfully slow and lack-lustre production" was "no way to treat a difficult but potentially rewarding classic". Kate Kellaway in *The Observer* was surprised that this "dazzling, unwieldy, rarely performed tragedy" was "also brimful of comedy". She also responded to Dido's "awakening" to love and her second awakening to anguish at Aeneas's apparently heartless abandonment of her. Such mixed messages invite response and, above all, the question remains as to what the Elizabethans might have made of the play.

It is indeed true that *The Tragedy of Dido Queen of Carthage*,¹ thought of as the earliest of Marlowe's plays, is a mixed experience in reading as well as in performance. First, it is an adventure in dramatic adaptation: either through straight translation or close paraphrase, Marlowe makes direct use of forty percent of his source in Books One, Two, and Four of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Thus he borrows energy and vital characterisation from the original. Secondly, in spite of this dependency upon his source text, Marlowe's script exhibits an independent and sharp understanding of dramatic writing. Finally, his thematic choices contain signs of original and indeed challenging emphases.

As far as dramatisation is concerned, take, for example, the extended story of the Fall of Troy to which Virgil gives over the whole of Book Two, about 800 lines of densely expressed verse. Marlowe skilfully contracts that into 170 lines and builds a dramatic tension with his own interpolations. At a great feast to entertain this fabled hero, Dido first drinks to Aeneas's "better fortune" (II.i.98)

1 All references to *Dido* derive from the edition of Oliver.

and then invites him to tell the story of the battle and his escape from Troy. At first Marlowe's Aeneas is overcome with emotion—he cannot bring himself to speak. A tension is thus created in the audience—both on and off the stage—already keen to hear the details. Aeneas then begins, but very soon succumbs again to grief. Kate Kellaway remarked how, in the hands of a skilful actor, the story appeared “almost too painful to tell”. Dido, intent and by this time absorbed in the story, curious as to what may follow, voices, perhaps, what an audience might feel—“Nay, leave not here; resolve me of the rest” (II.i.160)—and Aeneas is encouraged to continue and so perseveres. At different points in the narration, however, Marlowe gives Dido interjections: “O, Hector, who weeps not to hear thy name!” (II.i.209); “Ah, how could poor Aeneas scape their hands?” (II.i.220). The playwright thus consciously varies the tempo and plays on the emotional tension in the spectators. As the story intensifies, Dido suddenly voices a painful unease, with “O end, Aeneas, I can hear no more!” (II.i.243). The interruption is momentary, and on this occasion Aeneas presses forward to the climax of his account, in which he describes most graphically Pyrrhus's gross treatment first of Hecuba, who is flung over the walls, and then of Priam, whose hands are cut off. Aeneas tells how he took his father on his back, how he lost his wife in the *mêlée*, how he left Cassandra “sprawling in the streets”, how he failed to save Polyxena, who was “after, by that Pyrrhus, sacrificed” (II.i.288). All of which compels Dido at last to cry out, “I die with melting ruth; Aeneas, leave!” (II.i.289)—and so he does. He claims that sorrow has tired him out.

Thus it may be seen how Marlowe both does justice to his source and at the same time vibrantly transforms it for the theatre. He makes it possible for an actor to manage what otherwise would be a truly extensive monologue, and he prompts his audience to share in the rising tension, as the events of the story grow to a climax. The emotional parabola of the scene is excellently controlled. Finally, the audience is let down gently from the emotional heights of the tale, and Dido ends the scene with an invitation to find “some pleasing sport, / To rid us from these melancholy thoughts” (II.i.302-3).

Indeed, it could be said that Marlowe's approach to adaptation in this early work is surprisingly mature. Aeneas's account of the fall of Troy, taken from Book Two of the *Aeneid*, fills out most of Act Two. The scene that completes the act, however, Venus's plan to substitute her own son Cupid for Aeneas's son Ascanius, belongs to Virgil's Book One. While the main plot for Acts Three, Four and Five derives directly from Book Four of the *Aeneid*, nevertheless Marlowe

works to adapt his source to meet his dramatic needs. For instance, in the *Aeneid* Hermes visits Aeneas twice, once in person and once in a dream. Marlowe reverses the order of these occurrences in support of his other major change to Virgil, which is to make Aeneas's departure from Carthage not a single, determined action but rather a hesitant two-step affair. The reversal of these two events enables Marlowe to develop the substance of his hero's hesitation in betraying Dido. Aeneas's first attempt to leave is reflected in the speech that begins:

I fain would go, yet beauty holds me back.
To leave her so and not once say farewell
Were to transgress against all laws of love;
But if I use such ceremonious thanks
As parting friends accustom on the shore,
Her silver arms will coll me round about
And tears of pearl cry, "Stay Aeneas, stay!"
Each word she says will then contain a crown,
And every speech be ended with a kiss.
I may not dure this female drudgery:
To sea, Aeneas, find out Italy! (IV.iii.46-56)

Despite this apparent decision to set off for Italy, the subsequent encounter with Dido goes exactly as Aeneas has imagined. Marlowe intensifies the situation by having Dido seduce him with the sovereignty of Carthage. She invests him first with the Punic crown and sceptre. Aeneas's passionate response expresses both gratitude for her help and intense love:

O Dido, patroness of all our lives,
When I leave thee, death be my punishment!
Swell, raging seas, frown, wayward Destinies;
Blow, winds; threaten, ye rocks and sandy shelves!
This is the harbour that Aeneas seeks,
Let's see what tempests can annoy me now. (IV.iv.55-60)

Dido then hails him "Carthaginian King" and invites him to join her. "Speak of no other land, this land is thine", she says, "Dido is thine, henceforth I'll call thee lord" (IV.iv.83-84).

Marlowe develops the space thus gained into scenes and avowals of love between his two protagonists that reinforce the audience's impression of a fulfilled love story. It is possible that some of the intensity of these exchanges between

the lovers derives from a reading of Ovid's *Heroides*. However, the playwright has prepared a trap for his audience. Aeneas's acceptance of the loving invitation to become lord and creator of a new imperial Carthage will founder in face of the message that Hermes brings in person. It is abrupt and unequivocal: "I tell thee thou must straight to Italy / Or else abide the wrath of frowning Jove" (V.i.53-54). And thus the events that Virgil has recounted ensue; Aeneas departs and Dido immolates herself. The will of the gods triumphs but at the cost of a life, a theme I will return to shortly.

My main point so far is that this apparently early play reveals a startlingly capable talent in terms of dramatic invention and structuring. Furthermore, there is maturity in the shaping and music of the language, the skills of rhetoric confidently applied to the lively representation of character through interactive speech. The blank verse has that life and flexibility that feed off the rhythms and stresses of the spoken language. Virgil's evocative poem was itself an inspiration, but here it is most successfully animated into drama. If this was his first performed play, then Marlowe really had arrived in spectacular fashion.

But perhaps the greatest departure of all from his source resides in Marlowe's treatment of the gods. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil offers a picture of the behaviour of the gods in direct and often bad-tempered conflict with each other over the destinies of their chosen heroes. He does so apparently without irony or criticism. Yet Virgil's gods are revealed as a dysfunctional family, whose governance of mortals is conditioned by their own appetites, preferences, hates and loves. Marlowe, it would appear, perceived the absurdity of this situation, responded directly to it and ran with it in his own imagination. So the play opens with Jupiter shown in the company of Ganymede. Marlowe here takes the opportunity to subvert any established view of an almighty god by representing him as in thrall to a catamite—a rent boy, as it were. Ganymede complains against Juno, whose daughter Hebe he has supplanted as cup-bearer to Jupiter, for smacking him round the head—the action of a deeply affronted goddess who has not only lost out to Venus in the Judgement of Paris but also finds insult in Jupiter's preference for this boy. Jupiter, who is utterly besotted with Ganymede, responds to this as a personal affront, at first angrily complaining against Juno, and then, more weedlingly, to the boy himself:

What is't, sweet wag, should I deny thy youth,
Whose face reflects such pleasure to mine eyes

As I, exhal'd with thy fire-darting beams,
Have often driven back the horses of the night,
When as they would have hal'd thee from my sight?
Sit on my knee, and call for thy content,
Control proud fate, and cut the thread of time.
Why, are not all the Gods at thy command
And heaven and earth the bounds of thy delight? (I.i.23-31)

That this spoilt brat should be enticed into sexual favours with the gift of absolute power in heaven given away at the whim of the almighty represents an anarchic situation. As Dena Goldberg has suggested, it would appear that “Indirect satire of Christian providentialism . . . figures largely in *Dido Queen of Carthage*” (Goldberg, p. 578). Marlowe seems here to be asking how it is possible to take seriously any idea of the gods’ care for human beings. Furthering this impression, Venus enters and berates Jupiter for favouring “that female wanton boy” while her poor little boy, her son Aeneas, “wanders on the seas, / and rests a prey to every billow’s pride” (I.i.51-53). She then goes on to blame her sister, “false Juno”, for Aeneas’s shipwreck troubles. Thus, however much the gods may appear to be concerned about the individual lives of mortals, their own conflicts, rivalries, and jealousies get in the way. Goldberg draws especial attention to the speech in which Venus blames her father for allowing Juno to raise the storms that trouble Aeneas:

False Jupiter, rewards’t thou virtue so?
What, is not piety exempt from woe?
Then die, Aeneas, in thine innocence,
Since that religion hath no recompense. (I.i.78-82)

A similar denial of the gods’ interest occurs at the point where Aeneas is about to leave Dido. He excuses himself by stating that he must not “gainsay the Gods’ behest”. Dido’s reply delivers a further resounding blow to faith:

The Gods? What Gods be those that seek my death?
Wherein have I offended Jupiter
That he should take Aeneas from mine arms?
O no, the Gods weigh not what lovers do:
It is Aeneas calls Aeneas hence (V.i.128-32).

Having shown us the gods’ own wilfulness and irresponsibility, Marlowe takes a step further in allowing his eponymous heroine to deny the gods’ interest in human affairs altogether. Through this, responsibility is shifted to the human

sphere—a perspective that is echoed in each of Marlowe’s other plays, most graphically, of course, in *Tamburlaine*. Framed in the absurd manner that it is in *Dido*, it is a perspective that suggests that experience, especially of misfortune, as in Dido’s case, may be attributed to human rather than divine influence, and that this casts real doubt upon the efficacy of the divine. It is easy to hear how such ideas resonate with the Baines libel, where Marlowe is reported as querying “If there be any god or any good religion, (etc, etc)” and “If he were put to write a new religion” (Honan, p. 374), as if the existing religious sensitivities, engaged in the process of the Elizabethan Reformation, were open to such “ifs” being asked, as we know they were not. Dido dies a blameless victim of misplaced love that has been engineered by Venus to assist Aeneas in pursuit of his destiny. The gods are not even-handed in their distribution of blessings.

Even the choice of the story of *Dido and Aeneas* was not without its implications in the 1580s. As is well known, Tudor royal portraits were fashioned to carry emblematic meanings that were underpinned by ideological premises. The viewer was invited to read the representation of an imperial crown, for instance, in the famous “Armada portrait” of Queen Elizabeth of 1590, as an index of her burgeoning imperial status in relation to the world at large. In the less well-known “Sieve portrait” of ten years earlier, an imperial crown is also pictured. In this earlier portrait, the crown is less dominant, appearing only as a motif on a decorative column set behind the Queen. However, it shares space on the column with engravings of nine episodes from the story of Dido and Aeneas. The juxtaposition of the crown imperial, the classical narrative and the sieve held by Elizabeth carries a weight of signification that is directly applicable to Elizabeth’s situation in the early 1580s. It is a period when English seamen like Francis Drake, encouraged by the Crown, are venturing in earnest and seeking to extend British rule, as well as trade. As significantly for our case, around 1580 Elizabeth revived a courtship between herself and the Duke of Anjou. It was carried on with an extravagant chivalric courteousness on both sides but played out against a political background in which it is clear that Anjou was seeking an influential marriage with a view to gaining an ally in his war against the Spanish in the Netherlands. On her side, Elizabeth was responding to pressure at home to marry and have children to carry on the succession. As it was often interpreted at this time, the story of *Dido and Aeneas* might be said to have a direct bearing on this situation. In her *Astraea*, Frances Yates expresses the interpretation succinctly: “Pious Aeneas, the Trojan ancestor, through Brut, of the British Imperial line of which Elizabeth is the descendant”, rejected the

love of Dido in pursuit of his imperial destiny to found the city of Rome (Yates, p. 115). The sieve as emblem of the Vestal Virgin, Tuccia, who appears in Petrarch's *Triumph of Chastity*, supports and confirms Elizabeth's role as "Gloriana", the Virgin Queen. "The message is clear", as Roy Strong writes: "Elizabeth, descended from Aeneas, has also spurned the wiles of love to found an empire, this time a British one. And this message is rounded off by the globe that sits in the lower corner of the painting showing ships voyaging forth to colonise new lands from the island of Britain" (Strong, p. 12).

With all this emblematic luggage associated with the story of *Dido and Aeneas*, one might ask under what conditions a young and inexperienced poet was commissioned in the early 1580s to dramatise this same story for the Children of Her Majesty's Chapel. Was it, for instance, intended for performance before her majesty? If so, then the play that emerged from Marlowe's pen was clearly unorthodox in one significant way. From the evidence of the adaptation, Marlowe clearly empathises deeply with the predicament of his heroine. He places Queen Dido at the centre of the tragedy and cuts down Virgil's representation of Aeneas drastically. The playwright develops the scenes of Aeneas's hesitation so that his final departure appears even more reprehensible as a betrayal of his own and his lover-queen's feelings. Dido's hyperbole expresses her genuine passion:

If he forsake me not, I never die,
For in his looks I see eternity,
And he'll make me immortal with a kiss. (IV.iv.121-23)

Her final speech carries a devastating condemnation of the man:

Now, Dido, with these relics burn thyself,
And make Aeneas famous through the world
For perjury and slaughter of a queen. (V.i.292-94)

Marlowe chooses to foreground the passionate wronged love, rather than the purity of the imperial destiny. But what might the queen have made of this—she who on another occasion could recognise herself in the character of Richard II? She, who can on one day say publicly to the French ambassador, "You may write to your King: that the Duke of Anjou shall be my husband", and at the same moment turn to Anjou and kiss him on the mouth, is the same person who next day can tell the Duke of Anjou that she cannot marry him after all—her people would not approve (Weir, p. 340). Seated at the play, would she be inclined

to identify herself with the desperate Dido—rumour had it that she was amorously engaged with the Duke of Anjou, the courtship has been interpreted as more than just a flirtatious political game—or would she identify herself with the figure of Aeneas, the betrayer? If with the betrayer, would she be able to go further and compliment herself on her good judgement in escaping from a compromising situation? Her emblematic portrait, commissioned, some think, by her favourite Christopher Hatton, might suggest this, but if her sympathies did lie with Dido, would she not mourn a lost opportunity to find fulfilment through love? History has lent us little to confirm or deny such speculation, but in so far as plays, like portraits, were open for interpretation, Marlowe's emphasis in *The Tragedy of Dido Queen of Carthage* reflects at the very least an alternative inflection of his classical source. It indicates a perceptive imagination at work that sets its own terms for representing the world.

Turning, then, to *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus*,² ostensibly one of his most popular pieces and one which most people think they know as Marlowe's, we find, in the first place, that the texts we read raise a number of awkward questions about their provenance and reliability. Eric Rasmussen's detailed study of the texts (*A Textual Companion to Doctor Faustus*) has shown that in so far as one can tell, the 1604 Quarto may be seen to be the result of a collaboration with a second writer who was largely responsible for the comic scenes, while Marlowe produced the central plot of Faustus's conjuring, his compact with the devil and his eventual end. The second text taken to be authoritative, the 1616 Quarto, can be shown to represent the 1604 version with some editing, but also with some censoring and considerable additions. Now I have been involved with three productions of the play, first playing Mephistopheles and then later the Chorus, and most recently as director. The production in which I played Mephistopheles in 1960 was based on a hybrid text that took some of A and some of B and cut swathes of both to accommodate a central dance drama reflecting Faustus's dreams of omnipotence and his failure. Although the central history of Dr Faustus was very like that of the 1604 version, it incorporated elements from 1616 that assumed that the devil had guided Faustus into his transgression:

When thou took'st the book
To view the Scriptures, then I turned the leaves
And led thine eye. (B-Text, V.ii.93-95)

2 References to the text will be based upon the dual version edited by Bevington and Rasmussen.

This was made more obvious by having Mephistopheles present and performing just that action during Faustus's first speech. Thus represented is a clear case of temptation deriving from a malevolent source, in which the need to enlarge Lucifer's kingdom becomes paramount. Such determinism serves to enhance the tragic nature of Faustus's position—his hubris was the *hamartia* that led him into a forbidden place. He had not the power then to escape his destiny. In this case, perhaps, for the devil read the agent of a Christian god concerned with preserving what in ancient Greece was known as *diké* and, for Faustus, the protagonist who strives against his fate but who must inevitably take the consequences of his false pact with the devil.

In the production where I played the Chorus in 1967, the 1616 version was performed in full, and I was asked to play the role as if it was the “atheist” Marlowe. The heavy irony of this approach makes Faustus's “fiendful fortune” (B-Text, Epilogue, 5) an example of an heroic attempt to outface the existing and limiting ideologies of the church and state—a very late 60s stance, you might say. My own production in 2008 was based firmly in the 1604 text, a version that on the face of it attempts to represent Faustus's acts as hubristic and maybe misguided but also as deserving of some sympathetic understanding. As a central conceit, the production offered the audience the image of a Faustus already in hell, whose eternal torment was repeatedly to play through his life choices and his progress to damnation. Thus, for a twenty-first century audience, for whom the whole idea of summoning the devil belongs more with computer gaming than with a soul's ultimate destiny, the story was presented in an objective fashion that invited questions. Even though Faustus's hellish predicament is already established, such a frame focuses attention both on Faustus's own journey, a retrospective view, and the devil's case, as it ostensibly remains.

These three productions with their different emphases illustrate well how for present day audiences the play eludes certainty and as such offers the widest variety of approaches to interpretation. Nor is the dating of these different productions insignificant, as they reflect in part the cultural moments at which they were realised. One of the key elements, however, in the issue of interpretation is the questions surrounding the texts that survive: the A-Text of 1604 and the very different B-Text of 1616. Despite Eric Rasmussen's detailed and clearly argued piece, the deeper question about which is closer to Marlowe's original is, of course, incapable of absolute resolution, not least because the A-Text was published at least ten years after the play was first written and performed, and the

B-Text ten or so years after that. The picture is further complicated by Henslowe's note of payments to Samuel Rowley and William Burde in 1602 for "additions in *Dr Fostes*" (Henslowe, p. 206), raising the spectre of Marlowe's original play even by 1604 having become a palimpsest of versions in which the purity of Marlowe's contribution has become obscured.

While the textual issue of priority may not be resolved, it remains clear that the A- and B-Texts do inflect the story differently, and it is worthwhile briefly to consider these differences in more detail. While Acts One and Two in each version are similar and exhibit only minor, mainly verbal, differences, most of the additional material in the B-Text is contained in Acts Three and Four. For instance, the anti-papal scenes are more developed than in A, where we have just a knock-about episode that attempts to disparage the papal court and to reveal a level of superstitious terror amongst the attendant friars. In this A follows the *English Faust Book* closely. B, without abandoning this scene, offers a more complex though somewhat anachronistic version of the intrigues and evils of imperial Catholicism. This addition has facets that link it ostensibly to Samuel Rowley, who, as elsewhere, seems to have relied to some extent on John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* as a source. Likewise, the Emperor scenes are expanded to include the Knight's revenge, and extensions are made to the Horse Courser and Clown scenes that dovetail with the Vanholt episode to increase the comic effect.

These scenes may in themselves add decoration and extend the comic element, but far more significant differences occur through Act Five in B. In the *Faust Book* (Chap. 48), Faustus takes dinner with an Old Man, a neighbour, who exhorts him to repent. In A, the Old Man takes up the theme of "flagitious crimes and heinous sins" (A-Text, V.i.44), and invites Faustus to turn to Christ, acknowledge God's mercy and Christ's sacrifice of atonement. He sees an angel hovering over Faustus's head "with a vial full of precious grace" (A-Text, V.i.54). In B, different elements from the same source have been tailored to a different set of values. It is more of an appeal to Faustus's reason as a man. The Old Man has "hope that this my kind rebuke, / Checking thy body, may amend thy soul" (B-Text, V.i.50-51). The A-Text Old Man suggests a hieratical authority and ritual comforts associated with the "old religion", whereas the B-Text Old Man speaks evenly, though magisterially, in a style that might be associated with a minister of the "new religion".

Approaching the final moments of the play, however, the B-Text develops a sensational series of actions that serve to rack up the audience's sense of

Faustus's sin and to present all the horror of his future in hell. The B-Text brings Lucifer, accompanied by Mephistopheles and Beelzebub, onto the scene at V.ii to observe and to gloat over their victim in his final agonising moments of freedom. Their speeches deliberately shape the audience's perception of sinful consequences. Beelzebub says that they will sit in Faustus's study, "To mark him how he doth demean himself" (B-Text, V.ii.10), to which Mephistopheles replies,

How should he but in desperate lunacy?
Fond worldling, now his heart-blood dries with grief;
His conscience kills it, and his labouring brain
Begets a world of idle fantasies
To overreach the devil. But all in vain.
His store of pleasures must be sauced with pain. (B-Text, V.ii.11-16)

Both texts then reproduce the very affecting scene with the scholars, who show real concern for Faustus, a scene derived very particularly from the *English Faust Book*. While A then proceeds directly to the final great speech, B adds uniquely the moment in which Mephistopheles tells of his guiding hand in the process of temptation. B then provides a further interlude reintroducing the Good and Evil Angels, who show respectively "the joys of heaven" (B-Text, V.ii.177) that Faustus will miss, manifest in a splendid descending and ascending golden throne, and the terrors and torments of hell for which he is destined, in a hell mouth revealed and the sententious line, "He that loves pleasure must for pleasure fall" (B-Text, V.ii.135). It is an added moralising spectacle clearly intended to impress the audience yet again with the dire nature of Faustus's transgression and the contrast between his punishment and his loss of bliss.

Faustus's final agon before he is taken by the devils is rendered similarly in both texts, but once again B adds in material before the final chorus. The scholars re-enter the room to discover, literally, the bits and pieces of Faustus—teeth and brains and limbs—scattered about, another direct borrowing from the *English Faust Book*. It is a ghoulish moment, as they gather up the body parts for a proper burial.

This demonstrates further that the additional material of B seems both to appeal to an audience's appetite for sensation while attempting to impose a moral fear upon them—a very Jacobean kind of ethos. I would have to agree with those who suggest that this detracts from the drama as represented by the A-Text, which I would assert offers a simpler but no less affecting finale just because the response is most in the imagination. While Marlowe was no stranger

to sensational effects, nevertheless the direct appeal of the man, Faustus himself, in the A-Text, hallucinating devils in the presence of the scholars, finally facing up to the consequences of his bond with the devil, seeing Christ's blood streaming in the firmament in the long lonely hour of his personal torment before the end, tells us movingly of the pain of anticipation and foregrounds the sheer terror of death and damnation without any added machinery of fantasy or threat. Indeed, as the action progresses in the A-Text, Faustus has become more and more afraid of the immanent prospect of physical dismemberment, of being torn in pieces by devils and of eternal torture and pain. In this, I would argue, Marlowe is invoking a familiar image and, in light of his own "risky" career as a special agent, one of which he himself has some reason to be genuinely afraid. In Elizabethan England the rack awaited the heretic, the atheist, the non-conformist, as did the prospect of hanging, drawing, quartering and sometimes even fire. The audience, too, would be only too familiar with the state rituals of such merciless public punishments. Faustus's terror at the end, for all his arrogance and foolishness, for all his pursuit of appetite and self-aggrandisement, could strike a sympathetic chord, in spite of everything. The speech still has power to invite sympathy for the protagonist without making Faustus easily attractive or without blame. The very human predicament in the face of metaphysical absolutism seems fraught with such crosscurrents, and the play, I think, especially through its A-Text, poses the question directly as to whether this is either a just or necessary, let alone a desirable or believable, outcome. It seems that here in *Faustus* we have a reworking of the *Dido* question regarding the dependability of the gods and their supposed goodwill towards mankind. Most audience members in the 1590s would undoubtedly have agreed that magic was an illicit means of gaining power and that Faustus was at fault. But we are dealing with an age of deeply held beliefs that there is another contiguous world of "influences", even "spirits", that can interfere for good or ill in your life. If Alleyn feels he must take out insurance against the possible effects of conjuring a devil on stage—the white surplice with a pronounced cross upon it—what of the spectators' anticipation of that possibility? Sure enough, they had seen devils a-plenty on the popular stage, but had they not generally been presented in the margins as essentially comic—an element that the comic scenes in *Faustus* certainly exploit. But in this play, when the devil is conjured and appears as a ferocious dragon to fright the people, he has to be dismissed to appear in a more acceptable shape. He then appears in the personable and all too human figure of Mephistopheles,

who assumes a hauntingly manipulative role through the remainder of the play while disguised as a friar.

One thing above all that Marlowe's contemporaries would have seen in Faustus was a man exhibiting hubris: "swoll'n with cunning of a self-conceit, / His waxen wings did mount above his reach" (A-Text, Pro.20-21). Once summoned, Mephistopheles makes clear the analogy by reciting the circumstances of Lucifer's fall. And the conversation turns upon Mephistopheles' answers to Faustus's apparently naïve assertions regarding hell: "I think hell's a fable". "Ay, think so still", comes the reply, "till experience change thy mind" (A-Text, II.i.130-31). In spite of that response, Faustus goes on to assert: "Think'st thou that Faustus is so fond / To imagine that after this life there is any pain? / Tush, these are trifles and mere old wives' tales" (A-Text, II.i.136-38). He seems not to hear Mephistopheles' response: "But Faustus, I am an instance to prove the contrary" (A-Text, II.i.139). Faustus is overweeningly confident in his intellectual ability to meet all consequences of his actions. His challenge to Mephistopheles throughout his first meetings with him is essentially atheistic. Most puzzling of all their exchanges, however, is Mephistopheles' reply in answer to Faustus's question, "How comes it then that thou art out of hell?" (A-Text, I.iii.77):

Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.
Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?
O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,
Which strike a terror to my fainting soul! (77-83)

This utterance resonates with the yearning cries of Adam and Eve as they depart the Garden. In it is contained the profound sense of loss that characterises sinful man and that animates the promise of the Christian myth. And Marlowe writes it in the voice of the devil and has his human representative dismiss the message. The statement smacks of profound Christian orthodoxy, while the enemy of Christ pronounces it. The sentiment that it conveys no doubt registers a truth with believers. It is nevertheless freighted with pathos that must arouse a sympathetic response to the character of this devil. But the speech does point to an orthodox view of the world, a view that is then represented by Mephistopheles in his discourses with Faustus. None of John Donne's New Philosophy enters into the debate to cast doubt, and Mephistopheles is revealed as bound by the limits of

safe traditional thought—the freshmen’s suppositions that Faustus dismisses as the realm that Wagner inhabits. The devil, then, cannot escape the mindset of the world into which he has been written, while Faustus is shown as an unbeliever. The play thus may indeed suggest that Faustus’s yearning for release may be heroic, but that existing ideological certainties contain his ambition. The gradual perception of this dichotomy brings with it a sense of tragedy, a sentiment that some at least of Marlowe’s audience would have shared. But of course the rack awaits such forward wits—Elizabethan culture is not ready for such enlightenment. So whether the Christian deity, the absent presence in this whole story, exists or not, the society at large remained convinced of its validity. There was no immediate future for the free thinker unless he was prepared to face mortal consequences. His own premature death may have spared Christopher Marlowe just what he envisaged in the climax to his play. For us, the character of Faustus retains its fascination not least in its final dynamic but desperate cry to be spared the pain and suffering of torture, to stop time, to escape death and consignment to eternal suffering.

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Shakespeare's Memorial Drama: History, Memory and the Re-rehearsing of Ideology on the Shakespearean Stage

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Obfuscation, indirection, ambiguity or indeed hybridity are words which spring to mind whenever one tries to identify the ideological veins running through Shakespeare's works. To these qualities I would add an extraordinary ability on the part of the playwright not only to stage some of the religious and political tensions of his time, but also to use the dramatic medium in a *timely* fashion. By timely, I mean that Shakespeare, like other dramatists who wrote ideologically charged plays (I am thinking of Marlowe, Chapman or Jonson), seemed to have an acute sense of the moment.

Little in the way of an "Elizabethan world picture" was available for the vast majority of Shakespeare's contemporaries, those in particular who did not have privileged access to large historiographical enterprises such as Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, which sought to bring the threads of an ideologically multifarious nation together. Thus, Shakespeare, to some extent, wrote for "those that have not read the story", as the Chorus in *Henry V* would have it (V.0.1).¹ Thomas Heywood, who owed much of his livelihood to the chronicles he pillaged to pro-

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all references to Shakespeare's works will be to *The Complete Works*, ed. Wells and Taylor.

duce his own works, wrote famously that “playes . . . taught the unlearned the knowledge of many famous histories, instructed such as cannot reade in the discovery of all our *English Chronicles*” (Heywood, sig. F3^r).²

Yet the plays inspired by the work of historiographers were not simply trivial and popularized versions of a more serious type of discourse, nor were they didactic exercises. It seems rather that Shakespeare and some of his fellow dramatists were well aware that they had a crucial social role to play. Their drama might have been closely inspired by the work of chroniclers; it was, however, highly conscious of the difficult, or indeed sometimes impossible ideological mix which these chroniclers tried to produce. Shakespeare was writing at a time when history was beginning to be less local and more concerned with telling a national story. But, at the same time, that national story could only be told at some considerable expense. For English or British history to emerge, there were a number of stories produced by various communities which had to be, if not silenced, at least subdued. Because drama feeds partly on antagonism, conflict and debate, dramatists seized upon the contradictions of historical discourse. They aired opposed views, when historians tended to look more for continuity and coherence, and they often created alternative scenarios and interpretations by staging invented scenes.

Theatre is also fundamentally an art of remembrance, or, to use Marvin Carlson’s apt phrase, a “memory machine”, which recycles the past, transforms it, memorizes it, re-rehearses it, and lets audiences build connections to their past.³ Drama is, I argue, particularly sensitive to the “battle of memories”, that is, to the competition between the different communal stories to impose their truth, their version of history above the others’. It seeks, likewise, to make its audiences conscious of the way memory is turned into history.

Shakespearean drama often plays on the memorial string to establish an almost emotional bond with its audiences. Possibly because he wrote plays over a period of more than twenty years, Shakespeare managed to create a truly impres-

2 See Wright, pp. 287–93.

3 See Marvin Carlson’s seminal book, *The Haunted Stage*, esp. pp. 1–5, 11, 13–14, 17. The links between the arts of memory and Renaissance theatre are beyond the scope of this essay. For an investigation of their relationship, see Frances A. Yates’s classic study, *The Art of Memory*. Other more recent works tackle the question of memory mainly from a thematic angle and do not explore Shakespearean memorial networks in any great detail; see Barish, Sullivan and Holland, ed. However, Holland’s essay (“On the Gravy Train”) in this last collection adopts a perspective which is not far from mine.

sive network of memorial elements which not only allowed his audiences to connect to his work, but also enabled individuals to reawaken their memories both as spectators of Shakespeare's plays and as human beings caught up in time. For Shakespeare, memory is a powerful ideological and cultural matrix, a protean entity, which enables individuals to build a frail but crucial relationship with a past which is gone but survives in so many stories, objects, or places.⁴ However, memory can be tyrannical also. It can seek to govern history entirely and to abolish time, particularly when it is used by characters for whom memory is an instrument of domination, a way, as we shall see, of imposing a selective memory on a nation which they wish to maintain in an eternal commemorative present.

In *Hamlet*, one senses that remembrance can become a burden for the living, but also how much memory is intimately tied to the theatrical medium—theatre being the locus of memory. Shakespeare's wordplay is particularly effective when Hamlet uses "globe" to refer to his mind, in which the memory of his late father will remain ("while memory holds a seat / In this distracted globe" [I.v.96-97]). For the audience, of course, "globe" also alludes to the Globe theatre, where the play was probably performed. Thus, the pun leads us to reflect on the power of theatre to conjure up the remembrance of things past. Allusions to the Globe Theatre are fairly frequent in Shakespeare⁵—they are always a way of creating a powerful link between the audience's remembrance of the play and the place where it was staged. Not only do these allusions point to drama's ability to produce memory, but they also show how theatre is a place where a reflection on the social and cultural role of memory can be initiated.

There are times also when Shakespeare himself elaborates a subtle memorial mix to lend greater social and political relevance to his theatre. In the Chorus to Act V of *Henry V*, for instance, he blends memories of ancient history with the story of the medieval king and with allusions to more recent political events. Indeed, the history of Henry V is haunted for a moment by Julius Caesar's ancient Rome and by events which many no doubt had in mind when they watched the play—the departure of an army for Ireland to curb a rebellion. The play superimposes these perspectives and uses an ancient example (the return in triumph of Caesar) to suggest the repetition of this example in the medieval past, even while

4 On these issues, see Ricœur, p. 106 *et passim*. I am much indebted to Ricœur's work throughout this essay.

5 See, for instance, *Tro.*, I.iii.113; *Oth.*, V.ii.109; *Tmp.*, IV.i.153.

anticipating its repetition in the near future. Through the association of different political figures—Julius Caesar, Henry V and probably Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex (“the General of our gracious Empress”)—Shakespeare manages to give the illusion that his theatre can have an effect on political reality:

But now behold
In the quick forge and working-house of thought,
How London doth pour out her citizens.
The Mayor and all his brethren, in best sort,
Like to the senators of th’antique Rome
With the plebeians swarming at their heels,
Go forth and fetch their conqu’ring Caesar in—
As, by a lower but high-loving likelihood,
Were now the General of our gracious Empress—
As in good time he may—from Ireland coming,
Bringing rebellion broachèd on his sword,
How many would the peaceful city quit
To welcome him! Much more, and much more cause,
Did they this Harry. (V.0.22-35)

The effect sought by the Chorus was heavily dependent on its audience’s memory and imagination—the reception of this passage no doubt varied from one person to the next.⁶ Be that as it may, the Chorus’s manipulation of memorial elements could certainly act as a reminder of how an audience’s sense of the present, and also its sense of future events, are relentlessly informed by the return of memorial elements which are constantly recycled and reinterpreted.

Theatre continuously seeks to perfect its representation of past stories, which are re-rehearsed and replayed endlessly in a present that modifies them, but which they also help to transform. In its workings, drama comes to mimic the fate of memorial elements, which are likewise recycled and reappropriated. After Caesar’s murder in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, Cassius explicitly describes this process of endless rehearsing of the same historical event:

Stoop, then, and wash.
They smear their hands with Caesar’s blood
How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over,
In states unborn and accents yet unknown! (III.i.112-14)

6 The Chorus’s expectations were to prove very wrong—the Earl of Essex returned from Ireland in disgrace in late September 1599.

The memory of the historical murder acquires a terrifying dimension when it is conceived as something that will be “acted over”, re-rehearsed. While Caesar’s death may have been inglorious (“no worthier than the dust”), the repeated staging of his murder by actors will make that event enter the world of symbolic representation:

Brutus. How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport,
That now on Pompey’s basis lies along,
No worthier than the dust! (III.i.115-17)

As soon as the recycling begins, the murder enters the world of representation and the “battle of memories”—the struggle between different interpretations of the same event—can begin. What may happen too is that representation itself can be hijacked and made to serve specific ideological agendas. This is clear in Cassius’s manipulative and biased answer to Brutus’s genuine fear of representation:

Cassius. So oft as that shall be,
So often shall the knot of us be called
The men who gave their country liberty. (III.i.117-19)

Memorial stories made up and imposed by victors can be cruel, and they can certainly distort events. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the defeated queen of Egypt worries about how she will be staged by Roman actors. Nonetheless, her words betray another anxiety which Shakespeare’s theatre tries to defuse through humour. Indeed, the “squeaking” boy actor of Elizabethan theatre may not be worthy of what he seeks to represent:

The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us, and present
Our Alexandrian revels. Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I’th’posture of a whore. (V.ii.212-17)

Shakespeare draws his spectators’ attention here to the fact that memory can always be ideologically distorted, but also signals that there is an incompleteness at the heart of representation. To some extent, representation and memory have similar drawbacks—both are plagued by gaps or imprecision, and they can both be made to serve specific ideological agendas.

The similarity between memorial elements and theatrical representation is something Shakespeare seems to have had in mind when writing. Critics often overlook the fact that the dramatist played repeatedly on audience's memories of past performances of his plays. These traces of older performances are a testimony to his relentless reinterpretation both of history *and* of his own plays. By awakening his spectators' remembrance of his plays, Shakespeare would inevitably draw their attention to the often disconcerting but always fertile return of the past in the present—a past which comes back transformed and with a capacity to alter the present. Shakespeare may also have used these cross-references to tie the different parts of his creation together and build an *œuvre*. But what is more certain is that the Shakespearean “memory machine” helped his audiences establish an intimate relationship to his works, as well as a personal connection to the memorial elements on which these works relied.

Hence, it is not purely by chance that in the first scene of *Hamlet* (1600–1601), Horatio brings back to the spectators' minds the memory of *Julius Caesar* (1599) by alluding to the events which led in the latter play to the murder of the archetypal father of the nation. Horatio manages to create a particular climate in this scene by referring to the series of ill omens which had preceded the assassination of Caesar: “In the most high and palmy state of Rome / A little ere the mightiest Julius fell . . .” (I.i.112–13).⁷ Later on, the associations between the two plays become even more precise, especially for those who had actually seen Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* on stage. Indeed, the following dialogue between Polonius and Hamlet was even more significant for the members of the Elizabethan audience who remembered which actors had played the parts of Caesar and Brutus in 1599:

Polonius. I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed i'th' Capitol. Brutus killed me.

Hamlet. It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there.—Be the players ready?

(III ii.99–102)

It is highly probable that the actor playing Polonius (John Heminges) had played Julius Caesar a year or two before, whereas Richard Burbage (who no doubt played Hamlet in this scene) had acted the part of Brutus.⁸ Through these memorial associations, Shakespeare awakes in this scene of *Hamlet* the ghosts of Caesar and Brutus, two figures who could remind audiences of the sacrificial

7 This passage is not in Q1 or in F1. The edition cited here is *Hamlet*, ed. Thompson and Taylor.

8 See Thompson and Taylor, eds, p. 304, n. to III.ii.99–102.

murder of the father of the nation on the Capitoline hill (*cf.* “to kill so capital a calf there”),⁹ an act which is about to repeat itself in the play. But of course this act repeats itself differently (Hamlet kills Polonius by mistake, thinking he is killing his step-father). History never repeats itself exactly; it is only our imaginary perception of facts and the symbolic value we lend to them which give us the impression of an eternal return of history. This is one truth that drama, which relies so much on repetition and recycling, never ceases to provide.

The ghost of Caesar haunts other plays also. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Pompey alludes to Caesar’s spectral presence in his evocation of the political past (“Julius Caesar, / Who at Philippi the good Brutus ghosted” [II.vi.12-13]), and Marc Antony uses words close to Julius Caesar’s when describing Cassius: “The lean and wrinkled Cassius” (III.xi.37).¹⁰

In *Cymbeline* (1610), the Roman Caius Lucius comes to England to tell its king that the country has failed to pay its debt (financial, but also symbolic) to Rome. What better way of reminding the country of its debt than to evoke the memory of Julius Caesar, whose image lives on, according to Lucius. It is true that the Elizabethan theatre was still haunted by him:

Lucius. When Julius Caesar—whose remembrance yet
Lives in men’s eyes, and will to ears and tongues
Be theme and hearing ever—was in this Britain . . . (III.i.2-4)

However, Lucius’s reminder brings another association from the past to the fore, namely Augustus Caesar (Octavian in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*). Indeed, Lucius is an emissary sent by Augustus Caesar, who himself was Caesar’s great-nephew and adopted son. Augustus’s reign was relatively stable politically and has been long known as the age of the *pax romana*. Interestingly, the semi-legendary king Cymbeline concludes a peace treaty with Augustus at the end of the play and agrees to pay England’s debt to Rome. Cymbeline’s peacemaking may have reminded some Jacobean spectators of the political aspirations of their own sovereign—James I—who liked to be known as *Jacobus Pacificus*. Moreover, in the second half of the play, the importance given to Milford Haven, a port in the south-west of Wales, might have called distantly to mind the arrival of

9 Historically, Caesar was assassinated in the Senate, which is just below the Capitoline hill. Shakespeare (or Polonius) is confused here.

10 This is an echo of “Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look” (*JC*, I.ii.195).

another unifier, Shakespeare's Earl of Richmond in the play *Richard III*,¹¹ that is to say, the future Tudor king Henry VII, from whom James I's two parents descended directly. There is in *Cymbeline* a certain memorial logic which seems to lead characters naturally towards this symbolic port, which the play revisits. To quote *Cymbeline*'s daughter, Innogen, "There's no more to say: / Accessible is none but Milford way" (III.ii.81-82). Innogen also widens the protectionist perspective adopted by *Cymbeline*'s queen and in so doing develops ideas which were undoubtedly dear to James I. Great Britain (no longer England) should not, according to Innogen, fear to seek alliances well beyond its boundaries: "T' th' world's volume / Our Britain seems as of it but not in't, / In a great pool a swan's nest. Prithee think / There's livers out of Britain" (III.iv.138-41).

This blend of memorial and of topical allusions is produced by a series of minor details and never quite adds up to a fully-fledged political allegory. Shakespeare may have been a prominent member of the King's Men, but there were still limits to how much he could push the political allegory in a play where, after all, *Cymbeline*'s immediate entourage (the Queen and her son Cloten) were cast in a negative light. There is reason to believe also that, even if Shakespeare flirted at times with political allegory, he and his company were more interested in exploring the subtle links between ideology and memorial reconstructions of the past.

Even in such a seemingly nationalistic play as *Henry V* (1599), there are a number of elements which show clearly that Shakespeare was well aware that memory could go astray and become burdensome. This was especially the case when memorial stories were made to serve political ends and were thus imposed on the nation. As Paul Ricœur writes in *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, in these cases "un pacte redoutable se noue ainsi entre remémoration, mémorisation et commémoration" (p. 104).¹² There is perhaps no better example of the way memory can be manipulated than Henry V's speech to his troops at the battle of Agincourt on St. Crispin's day:

Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot,
But he'll remember, with advantages,

- 11 Shakespeare may still have had his *Richard III* in mind when he wrote (almost twenty years later) the part of Buckingham for *Henry VIII*. Buckingham in *Henry VIII* remembers his father's fatal destiny and regrets that history should repeat itself: "thus far we are one in fortunes" (*H8*, II.i.122).
- 12 "a terrifying deal is struck between remembrance, memorizing and commemoration" (my translation).

What feats he did that day. Then shall our names,
 Familiar in his mouth as household words—
 Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter,
 Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester—
 Be in their flowing cups freshly remembered.
 This story shall the good man teach his son,
 And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by
 From this day to the ending of the world
 But we in it shall be rememberèd,
 We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.
 For he today that sheds his blood with me
 Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile . . . (IV.iii.49-62)

This speech makes the feeling of belonging to a community and to an almost egalitarian brotherhood (“For he today that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother”) conditional on the repetition of a story which will be part and parcel of a future commemoration. Projecting himself into the future and even beyond (“to the ending of the world”), Henry builds his communal project well in advance. He anticipates the repeated remembrance of the feats accomplished on St. Crispin’s Day in order to make that moment part of an eternal commemorative present. His speech almost manages to dispense with history and force Elizabethan audiences to commemorate the victory through the agency of drama. Indeed, drama both maintains and repeats the remembrance of these events for the benefit of the community of spectators. The magic seems to work wonderfully—and yet there is a hitch: Elizabethan audiences knew full well that the victory of Agincourt was no longer celebrated on St. Crispin’s Day. Thus, Henry’s promise turns out to be false in the end, and those among the audience who had Catholic leanings would no doubt be able to spot the tricks Henry had been up to, as well as their latent irony: it is obvious that Henry appropriates a religious feast, in the same way that the Elizabethan government had appropriated the feast of St. Hugh of Lincoln and turned it into a national day of celebration (the queen’s Accession Day).¹³ The appropriation meant that another memorial story had to be silenced—the story of Crispin and Crispianus, two brothers who had fled Rome to evangelize the French. These two Catholic martyrs had become the patron saints of cobblers and had converted the poor to the

13 On this subject, see Jonathan Baldo’s important essay, “Wars of Memory in *Henry V*”, esp. p. 155. This section of my article is partly indebted to Baldo’s analyses.

Christian faith by providing them with shoes.¹⁴ One is of course immediately struck by the implicit irony of the appropriation—Henry’s English troops were hardly there to evangelize the French!

Even if relatively few spectators could perceive the ironical return of an otherwise silenced memorial story, many knew why the battle of Agincourt was no longer celebrated in Elizabethan England. The English had to forget whatever reminded them of the bitter loss of their last French territory—the town of Calais—the year before Elizabeth I’s rise to the throne.¹⁵ So the commemoration which Henry had in mind could not quite work. The endless repetition of the memorial event is stalled by the theatre’s will not to condone the manipulation. An imposed memory can certainly not pass as history. Indeed, it is particularly telling that Shakespeare ends his play with a *historical* reminder:

Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crowned king
Of France and England, did this king succeed,
Whose state so many had the managing
That they lost France and made his England bleed,
Which oft our stage hath shown—and, for their sake,
In your fair minds let this acceptance take. (Epi. 9-14)

Whereas Henry imagined that his imposed memorial story would be repeated to the point of making history, Shakespearean drama reminded its audiences time and time again (“Which oft our stage hath shown”) that such fabricated memory was in no way prophetic. But the supreme irony of this conclusion is that *past* performances inform the future of *Henry V*. Shakespearean drama’s “memory machine” operates fully here by discarding ideology in the end and letting the theatrical and historic past come back to challenge the present.

14 See Duchet-Suchaux and Pastoureau, p. 96.

15 On the ironic return of French otherness in Renaissance theatre, see Hillman, *passim*.

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The Representation of Conflicting Ideologies of Power in Some Jacobean Roman Plays

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“Here is Rome at the crossroad”. This brief statement by Vivian Thomas in *Shakespeare’s Roman Plays* summarises Julius Caesar’s Rome as shown in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. According to this critic, the commitment to political life in this play epitomises the most important value of the Roman world. However, this particular “objective involves conflict with the popular leadership of an outstanding individual who embodies Roman greatness or destiny” (Thomas, p. 2). This “outstanding individual”, namely the historical figure of Julius Caesar, was portrayed in several early Jacobean plays staging his life and his death with a focus on different episodes, such as his quest for power, his rivalry with Pompey, and his murder. In addition to *Julius Caesar* (1599), which revolves around the varied aspects of the conflict opposing the mighty Caesar and the conspirators, two Jacobean plays shed a different light on the conflict of ideologies inherent in Shakespeare’s play by highlighting the rivalry with Pompey. The anonymous *Tragedie of Caesar and Pompey*, probably written and performed in 1607, explores a broader period, since, as the title suggests, this play opens on the rivalry between Caesar and Pompey and draws to a close with Caesar’s murder. *Caesar and Pompey*, the only Roman play written by George Chapman, who was more preoccupied with French

history, was apparently never performed but was published in 1631. The whole play is structured around the struggle between Caesar and Pompey and ends with Caesar's victory. Through the historical and literary figure of Caesar, who embodied tyranny and the danger of political idolatry, these three plays explore the construction of an ideology of power and the dramatization of political ideas. While Chapman and the anonymous author lay more emphasis on the struggle between Caesar and his rival Pompey, by staging two ideologies of power in debate and at war, Shakespeare threw light upon the end of Caesar's life, the plot of the conspirators and his assassination, so as to bring to the fore the conflicting perspectives on Caesar's personal dramatization of his own power and ego.

The first acts of George Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey* hinge upon a dual structure, alternating scenes representing the two rival sides, Pompey against Caesar, as if this constant alternation between the two eponymous triumvirs enhanced the struggle between them. Halfway through the play, the tense atmosphere of rivalry is altered by the miracle in Tralleis Temple, which apparently foreshadows Caesar's victory:

For in Tralleis
Within a Temple, built to Victory,
There stands a statue of your forme and name,
Neare whose firme base, even from the marble pavement,
There sprang a palm tree up, in this last night,
That seemes to crowne your statue with his boughs,
Spred in wrapt shadowes round about your browes. (Chapman, III.ii.59-65)

The growing tree whose branches apparently offer a crown to Caesar's statue anticipates Caesar's victory over his enemy. It also announces the fate of Caesar, who, once a consul, is to be offered a crown in the Roman senate, an episode not shown in Chapman's version but recounted in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (I.ii). However, this idealised vision of Caesar's quest for power stands in sharp contrast with the last scenes of the play, in which Rome's future tyrant's victories are built by shedding the blood of his most faithful followers. In Act Four, Scene Three, Crassinius enters on stage with a sword stuck in his face. This horrifying image of Crassinius' disfigured body is heightened by Caesar's words: "O looke up: he does, and shewes / Death in his broken eyes" (IV.iii.3-4). No sooner has Crassinius passed away than Caesar promises to build a funeral monument to honour his memory:

Ever ever rest
 Thy manly lineaments, which in a tombe
 Erected to thy noble name and virtues,
 Ile curiously preserve with balmes, and spices,
 In eminent place of these Pharsalian fields,
 Inscrib'd with this true scroule of funerall.
Epitaph:
 Crassineus fought for fame, and died for Rome
 Whose publique weale springs from this private tombe. (IV.iii.10-18)

The idealised vision of the funerary statue contrasts with the mutilated body of the actor on stage. This paradoxical representation of the dead body announces the death of Caesar's closest friend. In the final scene, Cato kills himself on stage with a sword. This suicide is even more dramatic than Brutus's in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, as Cato takes his entrails out before dying on stage ("*He thrusts him [Cleanthes] back and plucks out his entrails*" [V.ii.175 SD]). This scene of self-dismemberment is heightened by the arrival of soldiers who bring Pompey's head. The last scene thus ironically fulfils Cato's prophecy in the opening scene:

Now will the two suns of our Romane Heaven

 With their contention, all the clouds assemble
 That threaten tempests to our peace and Empire
 Which we shall shortly see poure down in bloud. (I.i.1-5)

The violent struggle between the two suns has spread chaos and confusion and ends in bloodshed. Nevertheless, Caesar rejects this world peopled with mutilated bodies and wishes to build his new empire on solid stony funerary monuments:

And by the sea, upon some eminent rock,
 Erect his sumptous tombe; on which advance
 With all fit state his statue; whose right hand
 Let hold his sword, where, may to all times rest
 His bones as honor'd as his soule is blest. (V.ii.220-24)

Through the historical rivalry between Caesar and Pompey, Chapman offers a cynical representation of power. The rivalry between two opposed ideologies of power closes on images of bloodshed and sterile funerary monuments.

Even though thirty years earlier Shakespeare chose not to dramatise the conflict between Caesar and Pompey, some secondary characters allude to this

particular episode of Roman history to denounce Caesar's tyranny. In Act One, Scene Three, of *Julius Caesar*, Cassius, one of the conspirators, regards Caesar's Rome as a dark suffocating prison in which men's freedom has been fettered: "Nor stony tower, nor walls of beaten brass, / Nor airless dungeon, nor strong links of iron, / Can be retentive to the strength of spirit" (I.iii.92-94). The images of walls, of dungeons, are evocative of the rigid political system imposed by Caesar. This particular image of Rome as a stony cage seems to be at variance with the idealised image of a free Rome ruled by Pompey:

Many a time and oft
Have you climbed up to walls and battlements
To towers and windows, yea to chimney tops,
.....
To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome. (I.i.37-42)

When Pompey was still alive, the Roman people were not confined to "wall[s] of beaten brass" or an "airless dungeon". The image of Romans climbing up the walls or towers symbolises an open and free Republic, which has turned into a terrifying prison under Caesar's rule. These allusions to former events reveal that this old rivalry between Caesar and Pompey has created resentment among some Romans, thus leading to a new conflict between Caesar and the conspirators, who perceive the aging Caesar as a tyrant who must be brought down.

In Shakespeare's play, the eponymous protagonist enters the stage for a few minutes only in Act One, Scene Two, as he walks across the stage to the senate, located behind the scenes. He is followed by Brutus and Cassius, who both remain on stage once he has left. The dramatic action has moved from the main character to secondary characters, who are soon to plot against Caesar. This change in focus hints that the audience is to hear another point of view on the consul of Rome. As both characters and the public hear shouts offstage, suggesting that the Romans encourage Caesar to accept the crown, Cassius attempts to convince Brutus that Caesar is unfit to govern. Before revealing his personal vision of Caesar, Cassius uses the well-known metaphor of the mirror: "I, your glass / Will modestly discover to yourself / That of yourself which you yet know not of" (I.ii.68-70). However, the reflection of this new mirror highlights only one aspect of Caesar's multi-faceted character. Cassius claims that he saved Caesar from drowning (I.ii.112 ff.) and saw him on the verge of dying (119-31). He regards Caesar as an ordinary man: "Ye gods, it doth amaze me / A man of such

feeble temper should / So get the start of the majestic world / And bear the palm alone!" (130–33). Nevertheless, this unflattering portrait on stage stands in sharp contrast with the Romans' shouts, which can be heard offstage. The reflection of the mirror is distorted to redirect the audience's attention to another facet of Caesar's personality. The enthusiasm voiced offstage endows Cassius' portrait with an ironical tone and supplies an opposite perspective on Caesar's ability to rule Rome. The ironic dialogue between what takes place onstage and offstage highlights the conflicting points of view on Caesar as a man of power. The implicit debate between the two ideologies about Caesar's power prompts Cassius to take the Romans' point of view into account:

Why, man, he doth bstride the narrow world
Like a Colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves. (I.ii.136–39)

This image alters Cassius' former portrait of Caesar, as he acknowledges that Caesar has become a new god, a colossal man idolised by the Roman people. This new image of Caesar first enables the audience to visualise the scene offstage: Caesar could well be standing on a platform, while the people standing below encourage him to accept the title of king. However, the contrast between the new Roman Colossus and the Roman people ("we petty men"), as well as the narrowness of the world, draws attention to the image the people of Rome have built of Caesar as a man of power—a new mighty idol that can rival the Roman gods. This image of power has become real in Caesar's mind: he compares himself to Olympus before he is struck down ("Wilt thou lift up Olympus?" [III.i.74]). However, as Samuel Daniel underlined in his historical poem, *The Civile Wars Between the Two Houses of Lancaster and Yorke* (1595), when he described Richard II's fall, every Colossus remains fragile:

Like when some great *Colossus*, whose strong base
Or mightie props are shronke or sunke awaie,
Fore-shewing ruine, threatning all the place
That in the danger of his fall doth stay,
All straight to better safetie flocke apace
None rest to helpe the ruine, while they maie
The perill great and doubtfull. The redresse
Men are content to leave right in distresse. (II.6.49–53 [p. 23])

Thus, once Shakespeare's Caesar has been stabbed to death, his gigantic glorious body turns into ruins: "Thou art the ruins of the noblest man / That ever livèd in the tide of times" (III.i.259-60). Indeed, he is to be dismembered by the conspirators, who dream of organizing a cannibal banquet: "Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods, / Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds" (II.i.173-74).

The differences in perspective on Caesar's destiny shown in Shakespeare and Chapman are further enhanced in the dramatization of Caesar's death in the anonymous play. The enactments of Caesar's assassination in *Julius Caesar* and in *The Tragedie of Caesar and Pompey* reveal two different dramatic interpretations of Plutarch's text, the main source of inspiration at the time, which was available in English thanks to the well-known translation of Sir Thomas North:

But when he sawe Brutus with his sworde drawne in his hande, then he pulled his gowne over his head and made more resistaunce, and was driven, either casually or purposely by the counsell of the conspirators, against the base whereupon Pompeys image stooode, which ranne all of goare-bloode till he was slain. Thus it seemed that the image tooke just revenge of Pompey's enemie, being throwne downe on the ground at his feete and yielding up his ghost there, for the number of wounds he had upon him. (Plutarch, p. 794)

The author of *The Tragedie of Caesar and Pompey* seems to have faithfully followed Plutarch's description. If Calpurnia's prophetic dream is not mentioned, as it is in Plutarch's text, Caesar is stabbed by the conspirators before the statue of Pompey, lying at its feet. No stage direction suggests that the statue on stage is soiled with blood, as is described in Plutarch. Still, the underlying irony in Plutarch's text ("Thus it seemed that the image tooke just revenge of Pompey's enemie") is taken up, for the contrast between Caesar's mutilated bleeding body and Pompey's statue is clearly underlined by one of the characters:

How heavens have justly on the authors head,
Returnd to guiltless blood which he hath shed,
And *Pompey*, he who caused thy Tragedy,
Here breathless lies before thy Noble Statue. (III.vi [sig. G1^r])

Conversely, in Shakespeare's version, the irony of Pompey's post-mortem revenge seems to have been subdued, even though the actor embodying Caesar is probably lying before Pompey's statue, as Brutus underlines the fact that the former Colossus of Rome is nothing but dust: "How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport, / That now on Pompey's basis lies along, / No worthier than the

dust” (III.i.115-16). The absence of irony in Shakespeare’s version aims at drawing attention to the rivalry between Caesar’s heirs—on the one hand, Antony, the spiritual son, and on the other, Brutus, the conspirator who killed his spiritual father.

Caesar’s dead body gives rise to two conflicting interpretations of his power and of power in general. After Caesar’s assassination, Brutus attempts, in Act Three, Scene Two, to convince the Roman people that the assassination was justified by showing that Caesar was nothing but an ambitious man. His long rhetorical speech is then interrupted by Antony’s dramatization of the assassination, as he enters with Caesar’s dead body. This new perspective creates a sharp contrast between Brutus’s rhetoric, based on words, and Antony’s rhetoric of image. After giving his speech in the pulpit to honour Caesar’s memory, Antony steps down from the platform and invites the plebeians to gather around Caesar’s corpse: “Then make a ring about the corpse of Caesar” (III.ii.159). Antony’s visual rhetoric is enhanced by the subtle use of Caesar’s mantle and the analysis of the holes in it. The shredded mantle metonymically embodies Caesar’s mutilated body. This new perspective on the assassination of Caesar convinces the people and paves the way for the second conflict of ideologies in Shakespeare’s version, which opposes Caesar’s faithful followers and the conspirators.

In *The Tragedie of Caesar and Pompey*, the author focuses on the rivalry between the two eponymous characters, alternating scenes of funerals and descriptions of funerary monuments. Hence, when Caesar hears about Pompey’s death, he decides to build a monument to honour his memory:

But yet with honour shalt thou be Intomb’d,
I will embalme thy body with my teares
And put thy ashes in an Urne of gold,
And build with marble a deserved grave
Whose worth indeede a Temple ought to have. (II.iii [sig. Dr’])

This honourable thought is not to save Caesar from death—he is stabbed in front of Pompey’s statue in Act Three, Scene Six. Act Four opens on Caesar’s funeral, where his coffin is followed by a devastated Calpurnia. Their son Octavius promises to build a temple in memory of his father:

Now on my Lords, this body lets inter:
Amongst the monuments of *Roman Kinges*,
And build a Temple to his memory:

Honoring therein his sacred Deity. (IV.i [sig. G3^v])

This image is ironically reminiscent of the temple Caesar wanted to build to his old enemy's memory. This perfectly symmetrical parallel is endowed with a cynical tone, when Cassius underlines the vanity of funerals and of tombs:

The spoyles and riches of the conquered world
Are now but idle Trophies of his tombe.
His laurell garlandes do but crowne his chaire
His sling, his shilde, and fatal bloody speare,
Which hee in battell oft 'gainst Rome did beare
Now serve for nought but rusty monuments. (IV.ii [sig. G4^r])

This scepticism concerning funerary monuments is evocative of another contemporary tragedy written by Ben Jonson, *Sejanus His Fall* (1603), where Tiberius (ironically) affirms that tombs cannot honour the memory of the dead unless virtuous deeds are also remembered:

These things shall be to us
Temples, and statues, reared in your minds,
The fairest, and most during imagery:
For those of stone, or brass, if they become
Odious in judgement of posterity
Are more contemned, as dying sepulchres
Than ta'en for living monuments. (I.i.484-90)

This particular quotation setting at variance “dying sepulchres” and “living monuments” offers a highly ironical conclusion to this study. The idea that collective memory epitomises the only monument that can truly honour a man's memory undoubtedly figures in the broader debate between sculptors and poets which is exemplified by Shakespeare's Sonnet 55, whose last lines affirm that the value of a man can live on in people's eyes and judgements: “So till the judgement that yourself arise, / You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes” (ll. 13-4). Likewise, in the opening scene of *The Tragedie of Caesar and Pompey*, Brutus underlines the fact that Pompey's virtue is enshrined in the people's collective memory: “O what disgrace can taunt this worthinesse / Of which remaine such living monuments / Ingraven in the eyes and hearts of men” (I.i [sig. A3^v]).

Thus, the true living monument raised to Caesar is built on the collective memory, which is sustained by literature, more particularly drama. It should be

remembered that, according to Thomas Nashe, historical plays have the power to revive historical figures at each new performance: “valiant acts, that have lain long buried in rusty brass and worm-eaten books, are revived, and they themselves raised from the grave of oblivion” (p. 113). The same might be claimed for past ideologies. Accordingly, during each theatrical performance the figure of Caesar, with his complex, multi-faceted character, lives and relives in the audience’s mind, as their eyes capture his shadowy embodiment on stage.

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The Older Woman on the Early Modern English Stage: Fixed Stereotype or Mobile Signifier?

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Most of the roles assigned to the older woman on the early Tudor stage are unattractive. These range from old drunkard hags along the lines of Skelton's gossips in "The Tunning of Elinour Rumminge" (1517) to the witches, fortune-tellers, lecheresses, bawds, go-between nurses, and garrulous scolds of dozens of plays, including a number by Lyly, Gascoigne, Udall, and Shakespeare. This essay purports to investigate the extent to which the staged stereotype of the older woman is made a subject of debate in the early modern English drama, and to what extent the stereotype becomes a mobile signifier. This figure inherits the negative characteristics built into the patriarchal culture, often in an exaggerated form verging on caricature. Most of these characters are only superficially developed and serve as agents to move the plot along, but a brief survey will reveal how, in spite of obvious distortions, the drama of the period illustrates a number of different prevailing attitudes toward the older woman.

In George Gascoigne's *Supposes*, translated from Ariosto, drunkenness, scolding, a turn for invective, gossiping, are attributed to Psiteria, the "old hag", as she is described in the *dramatis personae*. At various points in the play, she is insulted as "rotten whore ... olde witche" (IV.ii.1), when greeted by Crapino, a servant; as "olde

kallat . . . tatling huswife”—the same word, of course, as “hussy”—[V.vi.1-2]) by Damon, the father of Polynesta. Indeed, her tattling in the streets almost causes harm. Damon dismisses her from the play with the following threat: “In at dores, olde whore; I wil plucke that tong of thine out by the rotes one day” (V.vi.23-25). Here we see how this character belongs to a long tradition of women stigmatised for being out of the house, on the move, independent of men, outside male control and likely to cause trouble.

Marianne Hester reminds us that scolding appears in the criminal courts of Tudor times as a specifically female offence (p. 299). “Scold” was a strongly negative term, in destructive impact second only to “whore” as a pejorative label applied to women. It was also redolent of female strength and power, as it was traditionally supposed that a scold was capable of outfacing the devil. The cluster of insults hurled at Psiteria makes it easy to understand how the stereotypical old hag could develop into the fully-fledged witch figure of plays of the late sixteenth century, a period when witchcraft persecutions were on the increase.

Again in *Supposes*, Balia the nurse (incidentally, one of the forerunners of Shakespeare’s Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*) is portrayed as an elderly bawd arranging for her charge to have a “supposed” servant-boy as a lover. When accused of accepting bribes and rewards for doing this by Polynesta, she maintains that she did it as “a deede of charitie to helpe the miserable yong men, whose tender youth consumeth with the furious flames of love” (I.i.50-53). All we hear of her later on in the play is that she is given over to scolding and cursing, and that she has called Psiteria “too bade” names and was incapable of keeping secret the visits paid by Dulipo to Polynesta. For this Psiteria insults her, calling her “baude” (III.v.23-26). She remains a lightly sketched character, who helps resolve one of the plots involving “supposed” identities.

Examples of older women portrayed in a favourable light in the early Tudor drama are relatively few. *Misogonus*, however, shows that the stereotype had the capacity to cater for more wide-ranging dramatic functions. The elderly Alison actually becomes the play’s instrument of redemption, providing as she does the essential information regarding the existence of a unsuspected son and heir. This does not mean that the conventional characteristics of the scolding wife are discarded. We relish the interpolated scene of a stereotypical squabble between her and her husband Codrus, in which he insults her in standard terms, referring to her sporadic scolding moods and hurling insults such as “crow-trodden whore” “bomination gom” (abominable old woman) and “jade” (III.i.200, 202, 205). She,

in turn, seems capable of giving him a duster: “Ay, li’est thou me, cuckoldly knave? I’ll ha’ thee in my memorandum. / I may chance make thee lie i’th’ dust ere long for thy lying” (198-99). In *Alison*, then, we find a character who is capable of standing up for herself and who knows her rights, threatening to report her husband to the officials (203). This play presents the husband as the talkative “fool” whose “bolt is soon shot”, whereas *Alison*, the one-time midwife, pursues her tale of her “mistress’ deliverance” (213), thereby restoring to Philogonus a vital aspect of his lost identity, his elder son. She does so, nevertheless, against her will: her desire was to keep the secret that she had solemnly sworn to maintain, as goes contrary to the stereotype of the loose-tongued woman. The “gossips” (245) that will confirm her story, moreover, are not like those of Noah’s wife in the *Wakefield pageant*, but “true and trusty” (253).

One of these gossips is the stereotypically named Madge Mumblecrust, who, like her companion Isbell, also behaves generally in the expected scolding manner. Again, a scene (IV.i) is inserted to make the point. Yet these gossips were capable of keeping their mouths shut regarding the crucial information. Indeed, once her toothache seems to be palliated by the Vice Cacurgus, Madge reaffirms her determination to keep the secret, which she swears she will never disclose, “and’t were to th’ Great Turk” (III.ii.232). It is notable, too, that in *Madge*, even the conventional image of the tooth-troubled old woman is lent a subjectifying force by having her convincingly communicate the pain of her toothache. She experiences and transmits something about herself across this cultural marker. Her name thereby becomes self-reflexive: this old woman becomes a mobile signifier, then, not something static and fixed.

It is tempting to see in this development a precursor of the broad phenomenon described by Jean Elisabeth Gagen as the emergence of a “new woman” in early seventeenth-century English drama. This “new woman” insists on the right to study, to think for herself and to make decisions without what Gagen calls “constant surveillance of a male overlord” (p. 10). The misogynistic representation of women tends to be mitigated, possibly because of the success of Elizabeth as a ruler, especially as acknowledged in retrospect. Already in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Shakespeare had shown a gossip-like relation between women as a positive force, one which came to the defence of social order. Then again in *The Winter’s Tale*, the young shrewish Paulina, who is quite the opposite of the Paulinian ideal of the silent obedient woman, undergoes a sea-change whereby, over the sixteen years that follow Hermione’s supposed death, she becomes the mechanism of

redemption in the play. Her unruly tongue, which forbids the penitent Leontes to remarry, is the instrument of restoring order. As with Alison in *Misogonus* or the Abbess in *The Comedy of Errors*, in a kind of inversion of the traditional stereotype, it is the older woman who performs a role similar to that of a mid-wife in bringing to the light of day what was shrouded in ignorance, obscurity and the shadow of death. In the case of *Epicoene*, it is knowledge of a different kind that characterises the “new woman” on the stage. In Jonson’s city comedy, even though the author, as usual, adopts an ambiguous stance and has it both ways, there is as much satire at the expense of misogynistic stereotypes as there is at the expense of the new learned women represented by the Collegiate Ladies, who set themselves up as social leaders and arbiters of taste and fashion.

The association of old women with witchcraft is a constant in many cultures, and the Tudor drama offers numerous examples of this. Indeed, it is to John Bale’s *Comedy Concerning Three Laws, of Nature, Moses, and Christ* that George Lyman Kittredge turns for a stereotype in *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, expressing gratitude to Bale for the “explicit” and “abundant” (p. 34) information that he gives on the subject of what an old witch of the times was like. The character named Idolatry is to be “decked lyke an olde wytche”, as Bale instructs in the notes about the costumes of the vice-characters at the end of the play. The exact nature of the costume is a thing for conjecture nowadays, but various woodcuts of the day, and verbal descriptions of and allusions to the physical ugliness of elderly women assimilated to witches, enable modern readers to picture Bale’s Idolatry in a loose gown and “thrumm’d hat” made of coarse cloth, like the clothes worn by the “Witch of Brainford” (that is, Brentford) to whom Mistress Page and Mistress Ford refer when disguising Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (IV.ii.75-78). Like many an opponent of Roman Catholicism, Bale conflates it with witchcraft: Roman Catholic prayers and rituals in his plays are equated with the magical charms and practices supposedly used by witches.

Bale’s old witch Idolatry can boast of having a long list of occult powers. She can tell fortunes; by saying her Ave Mary, which is likened to “other charmes of sorcerye” (l. 414), she can stop toothache, cure men of the ague and pox, recover lost property, fetch the devil from hell, draw drink out of a rotten post—all this “Without the helpe of the holye Ghost” (l. 423), we are told by her partner Sodomismus, who stresses the fact that “in workynge she is alone” (l. 424). Idolatry is a good midwife and can protect children from harmful spirits with her charms, use holy oil and water for all kinds of devious ends, work wiles in battles,

keep corn and cattle from thriving, kill poultry and make ale in the vat lose its head and body. If she wishes, she can also cause unsuccessful baking, make wells dry up, trees and plants wither. If she is not crossed, she will use her powers to speed the plough and make the cows produce abundance of milk. She will not interfere with the functioning of the mill, the cradle or the mustard-quern, if she is favourably disposed. She boasts of playing tricks like turning the tables, and can make stools dance and earthen pots prance just by throwing down her glove. Folk practices of curing and cursing animals and human beings are listed, many of which involve using the formulas of the traditional religion and calling upon certain saints. Such practices become associated with sorcery, showing how easily paganism and Roman Catholicism, with its rites and incantations, became conflated in the scurrilous minds of playwrights like Bale. (The latter may have taken his lead from an earlier poet: Chaucer's Wife of Bath seems to have thought along similar lines when beginning her tale in *Canterbury Tales*; she speaks with a kind of primitivist nostalgia of the days of King Arthur, when the land was full of fairies, and not the present-day "lymytours and othere hooly freres ... / Blessynge halles, chambres, kichenes, boures", who have replaced the elf as the "incubus" that lay in the bushes threatening to dishonour passing women (ll. 857-81).

Furthermore, as Gillian Tindall reminds us, the word "witch" denotes different things in different eras: "'Witchcraft' is whatever the standard, established cult is *not*" (p. 31). Witches in the ancient world were not persecuted for their participation in local fertility cults, since they were part of the established religion. The truism that the god of one religion becomes the devil of the next applies here, since Idolatry shows the signs of being the god of an older religion, transformed by Bale into the devil of the new. Tindall even suggests that witchcraft might be viewed as "a decayed version of an older faith" (p. 35); however, she adds the cryptic remark that the faith was fairly corrupt and meant no good to anyone. Inevitably, Christianity, being an ascetic and antiphallic religion, tried its utmost to get rid of fertility cults. "White witchcraft" (which should more accurately be called "folk medicine") was also considered unacceptable during the seventeenth century, when the peak-period for persecution was reached, since deliberate witchcraft became associated with blighting and making barren, sterility replacing fertility as the goal.

Significantly, Idolatry is also guilty of sexual transgression, in that, as *Infidelitas* tells us, she was once a "he" (l. 425), working in close partnership with

Sodomismus, who works outwardly at defiling humanity as an image of the Divine, whereas Idolatry aims at inward perversion of the soul. The gender discourse of the period perceived women as more likely to be sexually deviant than men: the age-old construction of women on the model of Eve was still intact.

Bale's allegorical figure is both a white witch and a black one, depending on whether one enjoys her favour or attracts her hostility, and the attributes given her accord with experience and with the everyday beliefs of the populace. She functions in the play as an agent of the devil, and as an instrument of Bale's anti-Catholic propaganda. By amalgamating the black and white witch, Bale makes his point more strongly about the corruption of all superstition and its association with Roman Catholicism. We find other elderly female characters portrayed as black or white witches in the Tudor drama, but none combine in one single figure all the characteristics of Idolatry, and, furthermore, none are painted in such a derogatory manner, with even their health-promoting talents being condemned as evil practices.

On the contrary, there is at least one example of a highly sympathetic witch-figure. Mother Bombie, the well-known fortune-teller of John Lyly's eponymous play, may even be based on a real or legendary person known to Lyly, who grew up near the character's supposed home-town of Rochester. When the idiot girl Silena consults her to have her fortune told, we learn that, while old Mother Bombie is generally called a witch, she prefers to be called a "cunning woman" (II.iii [p. 256]), the equivalent of a white witch, which at various stages in the culture was not necessarily considered to be an evil status. When the servants Halfpenny, Lucio and Dromio consult her to have their bad dreams interpreted, they stand back at first, scared by her appearance. Halfpenny exclaims, "Cross yourselves, look how she looks", and Dromio counters this by advising them not to make her angry for fear of being turned into an ape (III.iv [p. 265]). When they leave the old woman, they express gratitude for the predictions that she makes. It is notable that these are all in doggerel, which serves to enhance the magical aura that surrounds the soothsayer, who, as she herself says, takes "no money, but good words. Rail not if I tell true; if I do not, revenge" (III.iv [p. 267]). Lyly recuperates even the magical spells that white witches, including midwives, were wont to employ in their non-malefic art. Another elderly character in the play, Vicinia, the nurse who substitutes her own idiot children for the children of her master Memphio, points out the beneficial influence of Mother Bombie's witch-like powers of clairvoyance, which prevent the incestuous match of Accius and

Silena, the idiot children of the elderly nurse Vicinia, from taking place. In the final act of the play, Mother Bombie is in fact endearingly referred to by Vicinia as “the good old woman Mother Bombie” (V.iii [p. 282]).

While Mother Bombie is portrayed as a positive character, Lyly’s aged sorceress, Dipsas, in *Endimion* is quite the opposite. This malefic enchantress uses her art to send Endimion into a death-like sleep from which he cannot be awoken. She is ascribed a plethora of loathly characteristics in the parodic love story told by the braggart soldier, Sir Tophas. Supposedly inspired by Ovid’s *De Arte Amandi*, which causes him to break out into Latin verse, Sir Tophas spouts an anti-blason in honour of his loathly lady, in which all the normally negative aspects of old age are transformed into erotic attractions:

Oh what a fine thin hair hath Dipsas! What a pretty low forehead! What a tall and stately nose!
What little hollow eyes! What great and goodly lips! How harmless she is, being toothless! Her
fingers fat and short, adorned with long nails like a bittern! In how sweet a proportion her
cheeks hang down to her breasts like dugs, and her paps to her waist like bags! What a low
stature she is, and yet what a great foot she carrieth! How thrifty must she be in whom there
is no waste! How virtuous is she like to be, over whom no man can be jealous! (III.iii [p. 167])

Lyly’s treatment of Dipsas pokes fun at the didactic role usually assigned to the ugly old hag, that of discouraging amorous desire by a horrific evocation of all that’s most sordid and repellent about an ageing female anatomy. At the same time, Lyly provides a parodic illustration of Circean unmanning. This *miles gloriosus* lays down his armour at the feet of the enchanting old hag, whose powers of seduction make him lose his mind.

Circean seduction was viewed as a form of rebellion in the witchcraft treatises. This is because the word “seduce” in Tudor times was used with its primary political sense: “to persuade (a vassal, servant, soldier, etc.) to desert his allegiance or service” (*OED*). Circean transformation, rebellion, threats to male ordering, dominance and rationality all form part of witchcraft’s language of inversion and misrule. In the late sixteenth century, at a time when Protestant propaganda was rife and as witchcraft persecutions were on the increase, the older woman was cast in more and more plays as a witch. However, as Diane Purkiss points out, instead of strengthening belief in the existence of real witches, the more witches there were on stage, the more sceptical the London populace became (p. 181). The sensational witch stories that sceptical dramatists transformed into plays

gradually played a part in transforming the figure of the witch into a “muddled signifier” (p. 207), as Purkiss aptly describes the early Jacobean stage type.

In Middleton, Dekker and Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton*, for example, Elizabeth Sawyer, modelled on the real-life witch of that name, while retaining the conventional traits of her predecessors, is presented as a victim of her community. She illustrates the pattern outlined by Keith Thomas in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, whereby recourse to witchcraft was provoked by the devil’s seductive offer of success, revenge, sexual gratification, an easier life if poor, or just a promise of food in cases of extreme poverty (Thomas, pp. 519-26). Witchcraft seemed to many to be a seductive alternative to a hard Christian way of life. The stage role becomes more consequential, and the suffering of the victimised, marginalised old woman is presented in a less misogynistic way. Elizabeth Sawyer’s motive for reluctantly taking on the ready-made role of witch constructed for her by the community of Edmonton is presented in the play as a means of recuperating some measure of power over her persecutors, albeit at her own expense.

Finally, Purkiss’s “muddled signifier” is perhaps better termed a mobile one, and it joins the other manifestations I have identified of stereotypes of older women that are complicated in ways that serve to enhance dramatic functionality. Pre-existing misogynistic attitudes interact with new social and religious developments, and the old stereotype is opened to debate and undergoes many transformations resulting in more fully rounded characters, who, true to their real-life counterparts, play more determining parts in the action.

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Something of Great Constancy: Representing and Reading Fairies on the Tudor Stage

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Son Altesse ne se plaignit en aucune façon de la mauvaise réputation dont elle jouit dans toutes les parties du monde, m'assura qu'elle était, elle-même, la personne la plus intéressée à la destruction de la *superstition*, et m'avoua qu'elle n'avait eu peur, relativement à son propre pouvoir, qu'une seule fois, c'était le jour où elle avait entendu un prédicateur, plus subtil que ses confrères, s'écrier en chaire: « Mes chers frères, n'oubliez jamais, quand vous entendez vanter le progrès des lumières, que la plus belle des ruses du diable est de vous persuader qu'il n'existe pas! » (Baudelaire, p. 52 [« Le Joueur généreux »])

According to François Truffaut, who was interviewing Alfred Hitchcock about *North by Northwest*, the director had eschewed notions of cause and effect: the MacGuffin had been boiled down to its purest expression: nothing at all. The espionage that drove the plot did just that: it drove the plot.¹

Belief

I began by thinking I wanted to talk about belief. In fact, my paper was going to be called, “I don’t believe in fairies”: had I used that, you might have thought, “Ay, ay: the Peter Pan of the academic world”.

¹ See Truffaut, *passim*.

I seem to have grown up a bit recently. Why? The problem of belief never disturbs audiences watching *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in a playhouse. Why is that?

First, because the notion of the play as a dream is not only proclaimed in the play's title but also infused throughout the play. In a dream, according to Philip Goodwin, who was writing in about 1657, "men deceive themselves if they take the signs of things for the natures of things, mere shadows for substance. In a dream are thoughts of things, not the things thought" (Goodwin, pp. 11-12; cited Clark, *Vanities*, p. 302). Fairies in a dream are obviously fictitious. Second, because there are as many truths or realities as there are productions. Third, belief in what? The signifiers or the signified? Are fairies, by their nature, both signifiers and signifieds?

It follows that it is difficult to relate a theatrical experience involving the supernatural, where a text may be reproduced in a myriad of ways, to our sense of what might have been the ideological contexts for magic and religion. Does this mean that we cannot use a playtext like this to test, say, a central thesis of Max Weber concerning modernity? He argued in "Science as a Vocation" (1918-19) that "the fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the disenchantment of the world" (Weber, p. 155). Is the distance between cultural history and cultural theory, on the one side, and antiquarianism, on the other, unbridgeable? More generally, it is extremely difficult for us to eschew regressiveness, shed our dominant and reductive attitudes, marinated as they are in nineteenth-century scientific rationalism and current models of evolutionary development, and recover the ways in which popular magic was regarded in the age of Shakespeare, assuming that it *was* an informing context for the play.

A defining example: at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Oberon, king of the fairies, blesses the chambers of the house, presumably Theseus' palace (V.i.379-400²). How might we read this? How, in Shakespeare's time, was it performed on stage? The speech describes what was termed a sacramental: in pre-Reformation England such a blessing would customarily have involved holy water to drive away demons, and this, sprinkled on the marriage-bed, was supposed to promote fertility. However, Thomas Cranmer disliked the blessing of objects, and this blessing, along with all other sacramentals, did not appear in

2 *MND* is cited in the New Cambridge edition of Foakes.

The Book of Common Prayer of 1549. (Hardly surprising: a clergyman had prescribed holy water as a specific against piles [Duffy, pp. 281-82, 439, 465-66].) Would godly Protestants in the audience discern either sinister shades of papistry (Oberon's consecrated field-dew as sham holy water), or an example of popular magic, open to demonic opportunistic interference? Only a couple of years later, in 1597, the future James I was to argue (in *Daemonologie*) that fairies such as Diana and her wandering court were demons (3.5 [p. 74]). Is this moment at the end of the play just charming, in the colloquial sense, or might the ceremony of charming have generated a *frisson* in performance?

In an analogous sequence in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, contemporary with the *Daemonologie*, the Queen of Fairies commands her “elves” (V.v.49) and “nightly meadow-fairies” (58) to “scour” (54) the whole of Windsor Castle with herbs and flowers, consecrating it to the ritual of the Garter. (Perhaps this use of sacramental flowers survives in the well-dressings of Derbyshire.) The stage action seems to have shunned that shred of the specific Catholic sacramental of holy water, which remains in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and replaced it by a less contentious ritual.

Overall, however, it is impossible to postulate a definitive interpretation of that earlier sequence in the *Dream*. The problem is paradigmatic: it is impossible to recover key details of practically any early *mise en scène*, any locating tone, any full meaning for parts of the play like this.

To turn now to the fairies themselves. The first significant fairy in the canon is conjured by Mercutio, but of course his Queen Mab does not herself appear. When describing her, was Shakespeare invoking a residual popular belief, in order for Mercutio, witty and agnostic (?), to mock it with attitude? And, by contrast, in Shakespeare's next play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where the fairies are the *donné*, central to the action, was the author *affirming* traditional fairy-lore, offering a “retractation” (Spenser's word [Epistle to “*Fowre Hymnes*”, ed. Oram *et al.*, p. 690]) of that implied mockery?

There is a further problem: *when* might fairy-lore have become residual? Well before the sixteenth-century Reformations, fairies had been associated with the olden days. In her tale, Chaucer's Wife of Bath begins thus:

In tholde dayes of the Kyng Arthour,

 Al was this land fulfild of fayerye.
 The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye,
 Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede. (ll. 857-61)

The Wife goes on to tell how fairies, practisers of heathen magical rituals, had been searched out and destroyed by limiters and friars of an unreformed Catholic church. Later, we have been told, Protestants separated magic from religion, so that, after the Reformation, fairies were hauled out of that siding of *false religion* in order to be hitched up to that same Catholic church which, two hundred and fifty years before, had supplied their inquisitional persecutors. This is all registered in the first part of a ditty by Richard Corbett (1582-1635), written during the reign of James I,³ who brilliantly evokes a world purged of magic, only to dismiss both fairies and their exorcism by his witty and disbelieving tone:

A Proper New Ballad, Entitled The Fairies' Farewell . . . To be Sung or
Whistled to the Tune of The Meadow Brow by the Learned, by the
Unlearned to the Tune of Fortune [My Foe]

Farewell rewards and fairies,
 Good housewives now may say,
For now foul sluts in dairies
 Do fare as well as they;
And though they sweep their hearths no less
 Than maids were wont to do,
Yet who of late for cleanliness,
 Finds sixpence in her shoe? . . .

Witness those rings and roundelays
 Of theirs which yet remain,
Were footed in Queen Mary's days
 On many a grassy plane;
But since of late Elizabeth
 And later James came in,
They never danced on any heath
 As when the time had been.

By which we note the fairies
 Were of the old profession,
Their songs were Ave Marias,
 Their dances were procession;
But now alas they all are dead
 Or gone beyond the seas,
Or further from religion fled
 Or else they take their ease. (Corbett, pp. 47-48)

3 See Simpson, p. 740.

By naming two tunes, Corbett creates two perspectives on his text, one for the elite and one for rustics or the unlearned. Nevertheless, there *are* locating tones here: perhaps Shakespeare and Corbett were quietly mocking the Calvinist position that men, having fallen, were peculiarly vulnerable to the snares of papistry. They might have been thus tempted to have recourse to antique supernatural forms to explain what Lafew in *All's Well That Ends Well* called the “modern and familiar” (Shakespeare, *AWW*, ed. Hunter, II.iii.2). Spenser, after all, had desperately claimed that the words “elves” and “goblins” were derived from Guelphs and Ghibellines, the warring factions of Papist Florence.

So, if late medieval and early modern writers were aware that times were changing, it is almost impossible to fix dates for the changes. Titania enters Shakespeare’s play from classical antiquity, Robin Goodfellow, the Puck, from an oral tradition, which, it is claimed in a ballad, derives from the Middle Ages. Here is the last stanza of a poem called simply “Robin Good-Fellow” (it was once attributed to Jonson):

From hag-bred Merlin’s time have I
 Thus nightly revelled to and fro;
And for my pranks men call me by
The name of Robin Good-fellōw.
 Fiends, ghosts, and sprites,
 Who haunt the nights,
The hags and goblins do me know;
 And beldames old
 My feats have told;
So *Vale, Vale*; ho, ho, ho!

We have to conclude that we are dealing with literary *topoi* with a long shelf-life, another reason for concluding that any certain engagement with ideology is almost impossible. Or it might be that appearances of fairies or evocations of fairyland in texts, signs of nostalgia and associated with nature as they are, are themselves indices of a sense of cultural change.

Perhaps, however, these excavations in the soil of text and folklore do reveal more specific ideological fault-lines. I have tentatively suggested that Shakespeare bowed to the pressures of Protestant thinking and rejected anything supernatural, anything akin to a miracle. More generally, was he happy with residual beliefs or, alternatively, disenchanted and, living in the dawning of an age of scepticism, seeking to expose them? Did he write from the position of

intellectual elitism, or did he assume that, if his audiences were content with the quaint practices of popular magic, so was he?

By contrast, sixty odd years later, the goddess Reason had obviously snatched Samuel Pepys into her grip:

This day my oaths of drinking wine and going to plays are out, and so I do resolve to take a liberty today, and then to fall to them again. To the King's Theatre, where we saw *Midsummer's Night's Dream*, which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life. I saw, I confess, some good dancing and some handsome women, which was all my pleasure. (Pepys, p. 56 [29 September 1662])

I presume Pepys was thinking primarily about the fairies. Some fifty years after that, well into the Enlightenment (Baudelaire's "[l]es lumières"), Alexander Pope was prepared to deploy fairy-like creatures, the sylphs that figure in *The Rape of the Lock*. He spelt out his intentions in the dedicatory letter to Arabella Fermor:

The machinery, Madam, is a term invented by the critics, to signify that part which the deities, angels, or dæmons are made to act in a poem: For the ancient poets are in one respect like many modern ladies: let an action be never so trivial in itself, they always make it appear of the utmost importance. These machines I determined to raise on a very new and odd foundation, the Rosicrucian doctrine of spirits. (Pope, ed. Butt, p. 217)

Pope therefore saw the use of spirits as a quaint rhetorical device, serving to make claims for significance. More interestingly, he also, impishly, links belief to gender. But might not ideological maps drawn by those who read as women indeed be different from those drawn by men? Were the fairies in Shakespeare originally perceived, by metropolitan or courtly elites, as being associated with rusticity, and old wives tales? Were they incorporated only to be used for amusing insets, singing and dancing, as in Greene's *James IV* and Jonson's *Oberon*? In both these texts they are described as "antics", a splendid word that has connotations of the antique, of revelry, and of the monstrous. However, there are no stage directions to give us a sense of their appearance.

Alternatively, one could invoke a distinction between believing *in* and believing *that*. Theseus in the *Dream* thinks one should be able to *believe in* the action of a play, thinking that any product of the poet's imagination was an airy nothing. I would postulate that Shakespeare gave us a cue in Hippolyta's rejoinder to her husband-to-be: the dramatist believed that he and his audiences could engage in a collective enterprise, *believing that* something of great constancy could

be generated by *thinking with* fairies. (The same sort of observation could be made about the deities in court masques. Oberon in Jonson's 1616 masque of that name is obviously an idealized version of Prince Henry.) The fairies in the *Dream* are functional, a way of marking patterns of the progression of love, from the infatuations of first sight, through confusion, to the rituals of betrothal and wedding, into the forgeries of the married state. Oberon and Titania offer a way of thinking *about* Theseus and Hippolyta: the link has been made visible in modern productions by the practice of doubling, and may have been similarly foregrounded in productions from the early modern period.

Having sketched the problems of relating texts to the forms and pressures of Shakespeare's time, I want to move further into *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. My argument is that Shakespeare was treading very carefully: I think I have detected traces of explosive and Catholic beliefs, which Shakespeare carefully defused. In the Queen Mab speech, Shakespeare is also musing upon (but not wholly endorsing) supernatural agency; in the *Dream*, counter-intuitively—because the whole plot is driven by the fairies—intention is invisible, nothing comes of nothing, and any interpretation we place upon the play's MacGuffin belongs in our age, not in Shakespeare's. It follows, perhaps, that they and the fairies in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* carry a much lighter ideological burden than the less important fairy in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Romeo and Juliet

Might we get a fix on Mercutio's Queen Mab speech that is firmer than any we can attach to the *Dream*? First, what is Queen Mab, and what is her function? Mercutio, in this instance a kind of witch-finder, claims she had appeared to Romeo in a dream. Dreams, of course were much discussed in the early modern period. The matter is too complex to set out here, but Mercutio's scenario suggests that this is a true dream, one that will come true as Romeo is afflicted by his love and Juliet's sexuality is kindled, a dream which, according to Homer, Virgil, and Macrobius, may have come through the Gates of Horn. Protestant thinkers accepted this distinction and then rehearsed the ancient categories of natural, divine, the demonic: so, if this is relevant, Queen Mab is a demon.

Now we need to look at two Jacobean dream-bringing Fairy Queens, much less known, who are far more sensational, presumably because they were associated not with anything religious but with magic and could therefore be coupled

with papist practices. The first is from the unpublished and untitled dramatic romance of about 1611 about Tom a Lincoln, the Red Rose Knight. Thomas Heywood may have written it, and the author seems to have internalised the King's opinion of fairies:

Enter Cælia, the Fairy Queen in her night attire
Cælia. Murder's black mother, rapine's midwife,
Lust's infernal temptress, guide to foulest sin;
Fountain of all enormous actions, night
Horrid, infernal, dern [evil] and ominous Night,
Run not, oh run not with thy swarfy steeds
Too fast a course; but drive Light far from hence.
What is't that hates the light, but black offence?
And I abhor it, going now to tempt
Chastest Hippolytus to hell-bred lust,
To thoughts most impious, actions most unjust. (*Tom a Lincoln*, pp. 43-44)

What Queen Mab might do to young men is very explicit in a later text, Drayton's *Nymphidia* of 1627:

And Mab, his merry queen, by night
Bestrids young folks that lie upright [on their backs, supine].
(In elder times the mare [nightmare] that hight)
Which plagues them out of measure. (sig. Q1^v)

I take it that this is a *monde renversé* image: females on top must be agents of effemination. This sexual demon may not appear, but Puck ominously says that, after the play is resolved, "The man shall have his mare again and all shall be well" (III.ii.463).

Shakespeare, however, chose not to include such topics of malefice and sexual practice. Moreover, Mercutio's tone is quite different, although, ultimately, equally misogynistic. Much of the speech comprises the description of Mab's person, a listing of the dreams she brings to others, and it concludes with a brief reflection upon her apotropaic aspects, the malefice she performs. What does it add up to?

First, the catalogue of dreams. Keith Thomas has written recently (*The Ends of Life*) on the way the political and religious assumptions about vocation made self-fulfilment difficult in the early modern period: careers only seldom lay open to talents. The dreams Mab brings are of fantasies, not only idle but also strait-

jackets to self-refashioning. All men might do is labour in their vocation: their vocation is their destiny. This little woman is a dead weight for young men clambering on the slippery tops of advancement.

Or we might say that Mercutio is simply indulging himself with an excessive feast of invention, at least in his description of the Queen's person, which feels pretty innocent. He goes "off on one": it's as though someone had invoked Murphy's law ("if anything can go wrong, it will"), then amused his mates with a fantastical description in the manner of an Irish tinker or bar-room pundit. Anything demonic *seems* to have been purged away. I suspect, however, the speech is best explored in the context of laddish relationships and the ideology of gender.

To do this I leap back to 1450 and 1451, when bands of Kentish protesters, out to poach the deer of the Duke of Buckingham at Penshurst, painted on their faces with black charcoal, calling themselves servants of the queen of the fairies, intending that their names should not be known (Purkiss, p. 67). Diane Purkiss intelligently asks how we should read this detail: to her suggestions I would add another—that these breakers of the king's peace were offering insult to injury, impugning the masculinity of the Duke, who could not stand up to puny creatures like fairies.

Mercutio also stresses that Mab is very small. It used to be thought that Shakespeare had invented the diminutive fairy (*MND*, ed. Foakes, p. 8; ed. Brooks, pp. lxxi-lxxv), of which there is a plethora of images in later books of fairy tales, but there are, in earlier texts, many references to small creatures, particularly elves, along with reports of the sighting of very small fairies, although Purkiss may be right to say that the notion that fairies are small comes far more from literary culture than from popular folklore (p. 6). (At the end of the play Oberon bundles together "elf and fairy sprite", also presumably Robin Goodfellow, the play's Puck [V.i.371].) Shakespeare seems to have playfully given the fairies names that suggest smallness, while requiring the parts to be played by non-dwarfish players, whether boys or adults we do not know. In Greene's romance-play, *James IV*, of 1590, five years earlier than the *Dream*, Oberon's attendants are dismissed as puppets by the bluff Bohan, who mocks King Oberon's image (Induction). However, there is evidence from a seventeenth-century droll that these roles were doubled with those of the Mechanicals, parts that obviously demanded adult actors (*MND*, ed. Holland, p. 24).

Shakespeare's Mab is all too obviously gendered: she performs what would, if the trivial (Pope's word) acts had been enacted by Puck, have been called knavish tricks, but which here are either omens of misfortune (I.iv.91) or have to do with female sexuality. Concerning Fortune, the speech does not seem to be choric; at its end Shakespeare seems, as always, careful not to impute *agency* to a supernatural being, as did the choruses in Greek tragedy: all Mab can do is create signs that bode misfortune. In this respect, she resembles the witches in *Macbeth*: *inclinant sed non urgent*—they sway but do not compel.

Basically, the speech is an insult to Romeo, implying that he has been unmanned by his infatuation with Rosaline and become superstitious, believing in his dream in the way that the dreams of women might make something of nothing. ("Queen" might have punned with "quean", a slut or hussy.) Mercutio, exposing Romeo's credulity, must have scored a palpable hit, for in Act Three, just after his friend has been killed by Tybalt, Romeo laments:

O sweet Juliet,
Thy beauty hath made me effeminate,
And in my temper softened valour's steel. (III.i.103-5)

In the same way, Troilus feels his heroic self has been destroyed by his love for Cressida. Like so many womanisers, Romeo and his friends seem to be misogynistic.

There are further misogynistic details: the word "midwife" signals a female target, but here is used figuratively for someone who helps to bring something into being. That is *OED*'s definition, and its first instance is recorded as occurring two years later, in *Richard II*: "So, Greene, thou art the midwife to my woe" (II.ii.62). There, too, the word is used between men who seem homo-erotically bonded.

The state of midwives was an index of the state of a commonwealth. In "Mad-caps Oh the merrie time", Nicholas Breton evokes a golden age,

When Gammere Widginne would not lose a lamb
And Goodwife Goose would see her chickens fed,
And Mother Midwife kindly where she came,
With merry chat would bring the wise a-bed,
And take the child and softly close the head:
Then take the babe and bring it to the mother,
God make you strong, to work for such another. (ll. 456-62)

However, a few years later, in Robert Anton's "The Philosopher's Fifth Satire, of Venus", we hear of "the bawdy midwife, and the pifering nurse" (p. 53).

The direction of Mercutio's speech alters at its end with a couple of Puck-like instances of mild malefice, plaiting the manes of horses and tangling the hair of sluts. The first is widely recorded in folk literature (Thompson, ed., F366.2.1) and the second was associated with elves and, in Russia, with *domovoi*s. Mab's most important function is to induct maids into sexual practice, even engendering that disturbing phenomenon of female desire which effeminises any man who reciprocates.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Given that fairies could be categorised as demons, subject to ideological control, it is significant that Shakespeare's texts do not seem to have drawn the attention of the censorious. Despite the precedent set by Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, he obviously thought they might have done:

Puck. My fairy lord, this must be done with haste,
For night's swift dragons cut the clouds full fast,
And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger,
At whose approach, ghosts wandering here and there,
Troop home to churchyards. Damnèd spirits all,
That in crossways and floods have burial,
Already to their wormy beds are gone,
For fear lest day should look their shames upon,
They willfully themselves exile from light
And must for aye consort with black-browed night.
Oberon. But we are spirits of another sort.
I with the morning's love have oft made sport,
And, like a forester, the groves may tread
Even till the eastern gate, all fiery-red,
Opening on Neptune with fair blessèd beams,
Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams. (III.ii.376-95)

These fairy spirits can be more than harmless, in fact benign: the mother of the Indian boy, a "votress of [Titania's] order" (II.i.123), was happy to confide her new-born son to Titania, the goddess of childbirth, a reversal of the topic of the changeling, a deformed baby substituted for one the fairies had snatched away. (As Diana, the same goddess had a habit of exiling or killing any votary who got

herself pregnant [Purkiss, p. 178].) On the other hand, they or at least their actions can be frightening: the translation of Bottom, which sends the Mechanicals running from the stage, may be an index of the fear engendered by unpeopled spaces, in particular the wild wood. After punning on the word “shadows” (actors and spirits), Robin as Epilogue disowns and hands to the *audience* the responsibility for conjuring fairies, banishing them from the land of fairy in the woods into a land of dreams—was this a safety precaution?

If we *shadows* have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended:
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear;
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream. (V.iii.401-5, emphasis added)

Where Shakespeare had gone, others followed: recollections of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, along with the name Queen Mab and other details of Mercutio's speech, appear in Jonson's *Entertainment at Althorpe* (1603) and also, as we have seen, in Drayton's *Nymphidia*: in both texts Mab appears as Queen of the Fairies, but in Jonson she resembles Puck, whereas in Drayton she is the wife of Oberon.

Rather than being agents, Shakespeare's fairy monarchs and their crew are markers, deftly evoking various kinds of transgression. They would be dangerous if they were abrogating laws of nature, raising tempests or blighting crops. They are not folkloric versions of the classical Fates, although the word fairy is said to derive ultimately from the Latin *fatum*. Perhaps we should not engage morally with the fairies: they are there to demonstrate something about human behaviour (Purkiss, p. 8).

Again Shakespeare treads delicately: when we hear of the climate change goaded by the actions of Oberon and Titania, we realize that the speech is rhetorical, setting out the limits of fairy power: “on old Hiems' thin and icy crown / An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds / Is, as in mockery, set” (II.i.109-10) deploys the trope of what R. W. Scribner calls a moralized universe. “Pre-Reformation religion . . . believed that certain human actions could provoke supernatural intervention in the natural world, either as a sign or a punishment”, and Scribner argued that this nexus came more forcefully to the fore after the Reformation (pp. 485-86).

The actions of Oberon and the mistakes of the Puck also reveal to us the fragility of constancy. Casting spells upon the eyes of the lovers alerts us to the fact that Helena's couplet, "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, / And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind" (I.i.234-35), may explain the iconology of the love-god, but it also implies that love *does* in fact originate in sight. Not only do Titania's spell-bound eyes make her into a kind of succuba for Bottom, but it is also notable that, after the men have been enchanted, Oberon calls after Helena, "Fare thee well, *nymph*" (II.i.245, emphasis added): if Shakespeare is "playfully [absorbing] the lovers into a quasi-mythological world" (Foakes, ed., n. to II.i.245), part of the game is the use of a word that was applied to those who were alive but doomed to die and to man-snatchers like Calypso (Purkiss, pp. 38-46)—and also applied to prostitutes. When he awakens, Demetrius addresses Helena with the same word (III.ii.137), and Helena echoes it by when recalling the moment to Hermia (226)—these are the only instances of the word in the play. We might well believe that fairies serve to make everything seem double.

To end where I began: *pace* Baudelaire, the devil may have been dealt with, but the MacGuffin lives on.

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The Art of Declining Invective in Ben Jonson's Poetaster

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In the play he called *Poetaster*, first performed in 1601, Ben Jonson indulged himself in a not-so-covert attack upon two of his fellow playwrights and one-time collaborators, John Marston and Thomas Dekker, coming as close to outright invective in his representation of them as those censorious times would allow.¹ Despite his feisty persona as the self-styled and sanctimonious champion of high poetic culture against the pretensions of upstarts and hacks, Jonson had to proceed with caution, for the authorities had recently clamped down on satiric libel,² the theatre was under scrutiny, and his opponents were far from helpless, having a play of their own ready for the boards in which he was to be “untrussed”. *Poetaster* represents the ultimate salvo on Jonson's side to secure his own name and reputation following a three-year exchange of theatrical badinage

- 1 The play was entered into the Stationers' Register on December 21, 1601 by Matthew Lownes. Jonson was no doubt looking for early publication to confirm his position in the feud and to further induce readers to his side, recognising, perhaps, that print is the more natural medium for invective.
- 2 Following a spate of cankerous satires in the 1590s, the Privy Council, in the spring of 1599, decreed that such writings were a menace to the state. On 1 June, John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London, issued a list of scurrilous books to be publicly burned, titles that included writings by Thomas Lodge and John Marston.

referred to by Dekker as the “poetomachia”, and by theatre historians as “the war of the theatres”, the events of which have been anatomized in considerable detail.³ It all began, in Jonson’s words, when Marston “represented him on the stage” (*Conversations with Drummond of Hawthornden*, p. 27). Jonson boasts in that same entry in his *Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden* that already he had “had many quarrels with Marston”, had beaten him and taken his pistol from him, the irony of it all being that in the ostensibly offending portrait of Chrisoganus, taken for Jonson, in Marston’s *Histrion-mastix* (1599), he had intended to pay his fellow writer a compliment.

In extending the feud, rival acting companies realized the commercial advantage in staging raillery that involved combatants of little interest to the state, so long as they kept the point-counter-point confined to theatrical mud-slinging under the guise of fictional characters. Yet with Jonson, such containment was never sure, for he had already killed an actor in a duel,⁴ and in *Poetaster* itself, his reputation is called to memory by Purgus, who warns the others concerning Jonson’s *alter ego* in the play, “take heed how you give this out, / Horace is a man of the sword” (IV.vii.16-17). This is also a reminder of how closely invective is related to honour combat and physical assault even to the death. For Jonson, satire may represent his great vision for the improvement of society, but invective, within that satiric enterprise, is never far removed from his dangerously pugnacious instincts. Jonson was touchy about his humble origins and his apprenticeship to his step-father’s trade of bricklayer—a favourite topic of his enemies—and he was sensitive to the likes of Marston, who had a family coat of arms and openly claimed gentry status. Jonson’s deprecatory language in the

3 A concise history may be found in Brock, pp. 292-93. But the history of the “war” can be said to begin with Penninman’s *The War of the Theatres* (1897), to continue with Small’s *The Stage-Quarrel Between Jonson and the So-Called Poetasters* (1899), and to arrive at documentary exhaustion in Omans’s Ph.D. thesis, “The War of the Theatres: An Approach to its Origins, Development and Meaning” (1969). The subject is treated by Herford, Simpson and Simpson in their monumental edition of Jonson’s works, and by all of his biographers, such as Barton (pp. 58-91, *passim*). Noteworthy is the fact that most of the plays were presented by child actors: Marston wrote for Paul’s Children and Jonson for the Children of the Chapel at Blackfriars.

4 The victim was Gabriel Spencer, an actor in the company of Philip Henslowe. The duel took place in Hoxton Fields in September of 1598, thus about the time the “War of the Theatres” began. The cause of the feud is unknown. Jonson was imprisoned in October, was tried and confessed, but managed to escape hanging by pleading benefit of clergy. His goods were confiscated and he was branded as a malefactor on his thumb. Jonson says he was also wounded during the quarrel, and that Spencer’s sword was 10 inches longer than his. See Brock, p. 259.

play may target a poetaster whose diction smells of the inkhorn, but in proving himself the better dramatic orator, he also assaulted the personhood of the character representing Marston, including his self-esteem, physical appearance, *parvenu* social ambitions, pedigree, trivial ethics, and political influence. Claiming never to name persons but only to censure the vices of the age, Jonson nevertheless delivers broadside invective by sharing out the tactics of assault among the characters and ventriloquizing his own voice through the satires of the Roman poet, Horace, who, by convention, is merely himself in the play. Having used up his credit with the law, Jonson dared no more physical bullying, but, claiming extreme provocation, he was prepared to stretch the conventions of the theatre to their limits, under his high classicizing strain, to wield language as a weapon in murdering at least the integrity and reputation of his opponent.

Jonson's evasive design was to disguise the society in which he embedded himself and his opponents as a humanist fantasy, in which Augustan Rome is brought to the stage in a portrait of high society, including the Imperial court. The great writers from Ovid to Virgil and their famous patrons, figures familiar to Renaissance scholars and schoolboys alike, are assembled and placed in their pecking order, in accordance with Jonson's critical predilections and their general reputations among humanists. Just as Jonson legitimizes his own aggression by adopting the Horatian voice and persona as his own, he also realizes a fantasy in that same persona of assigning himself to the inner circle of the court, if only the Augustan court, where Caesar, as Virgil's patron, places the epic writer in a chair above his own to recite from the *Aeneid*, surrounded by the poetic luminaries of that age. At the same time, this distinguished circle is called upon by Caesar to function as a law court to sit in witty judgement upon the talentless intruders and false witnesses. Marston, meanwhile, is assigned to the character Crispinus, a despised philosopher who appears in Horace's satires. With a touch of poetic license, he is also made to serve as the boor who provokes Horace to invective after dogging him in the streets in search of the great man's critical approbation and a share in the largesse of his patron.⁵ Dull, but not ultimately indifferent to Horace's withering scorn, to revenge himself he turns false informant, accusing

5 The "blear eyed" Crispinus is mentioned by the scholiasts as an "aretalogus", one who babbles of virtue and writes trivial verse, a stoic despised by Horace; see *Satires*, I.3.120, I.3.139, I.4.14, and II.7.45. He is combined with Maevius, the poetaster of Epode 10 cursed to die of shipwreck. Dekker's character, Demetrius, is derived from Satire I.10.78-80, where he tortures Horace by carping at him behind his back.

Horace of treason. This was Jonson's greatest ploy in disguising his imprecatory purposes, for in displacing his action to the ancient world, the play takes on the ethos of an era in which poets upheld the glory of the state and Cicero's high indignation against traitors and malefactors rang out in the tribunals. His own persona was not only the Horace of the epodes and satires, but the Horace who was the excellent and true judge of poetry by an interior assurance that Jonson authorizes with the words, "because he knew so" (*Discoveries*, Herford, Simpson and Simpson, eds., VIII: 642 [l. 2594]). As David Riggs suggests, Jonson was looking for the "license granted to classical authors" (p. 58). He wanted to recover his own assumed entitlement to speak truth in relation to the public good. Such a play might then pretend to the highest of social purposes, which was nothing less than the reification of Roman standards in his own times, making poetry and critical discourse the choicest instruments in the maintenance of civility and the urbane life. In such an ideological order, invective was merely the acknowledged instrument whereby the ideal state was protected from the polluting effect of the envious and malicious in their failure to distinguish between true virtue and their own vanity. In this way, like Horace, he sought to defend the necessity of his own art, in which truth is asserted in the place of libel, even though in doing so he appeared to contravene the laws, for, as he declares in the play, "I will write *satyres* still in spite of fear" (III.v.100).

His noble ideology as satirist and public benefactor notwithstanding, Jonson was on a barely controlled rampage in the spirit of the invective endorsed and practiced by ancient orators and rhetoricians. His own *amour propre* indubitably wounded, Jonson was out for a kind of revenge, not only in styling his principal opponent as a salon crawler and boor turned informant, but in creating dramatic confrontations in which the man is condemned to hearing himself abused to his face with a round of epithets and name-calling parceled out to Horace and others, including Tucca, the bluff, braggart soldier, who abuses indiscriminately anyone he can verbally domineer. Each occasion provides Jonson with an opportunity to turn wit into injury. In the end, Crispinus finds himself arraigned by an impromptu court made up of the received poets of the age. Their notion of poetic justice for a transgressor reduced to a poetaster is to administer to him an emetic with the peculiar property of forcing him to retch up the contents, not of his stomach, but of his pseudo-poetic mind, in the form of ludicrous neologisms and pompous diction. Such a purge pretends to be a cure, but it serves rather as the ultimate gesture of humiliation, in which, if style is

the man, the man has been reduced to vomit. In the words of the indictment read out by Tibullus, “You are, before this time, jointly and severally indited, and here presently to be arraigned, upon the statute of Calumny, or Lex Remmia”—Crispinus as “Poetaster and plagiarist”, Demetrius as “play-dresser, and plagiarist” (V.iii.214-20). Of the thirty-four terms disgorged, only fifteen may today be found in Marston’s works, confirming still that Marston alone was intended by the portrait. Moreover, theory holds that the remaining nineteen were expunged during the revision for subsequent publication of such plays as *What You Will*, the originals of which have been lost (Herford, Simpson and Simpson, eds., IX: 578-79). Presumably, Marston learned something from this harsh experience. Among the hard words were “glibbery”, “lubricall”, “magnificate”, “snotteries”, “turgidous”, “ventositous”, “prorumped”, and “obstupefact”, words we may rejoice to have been eliminated by Jonson’s censorious ear. The administrators of the purge, poets all, emphasized the egregiousness of such verbal confections by repeating them and commenting upon how hard it was to get them up. Such was the dramatic climax to a play that promised a knock-out blow to those who had gotten under Jonson’s skin, thereby provoking his most vitriolic muse. It was perhaps as much as a troupe of boy actors could be brought to play after so many acts of name-calling and vituperation. But while to some it may seem too timid and too late, for others it was altogether juvenile and excessive. For John Enck, it was little more than “horseplay that offends by its pseudo delicacy”, a “grim business, which extends to sadistic lengths”, like “the bullying humility of a fifth-former beating his fag into conformity” (p. 80). But even as “horseplay”, its intent is clear, which is, through the strategies of invective, to demolish Marston’s reputation as a poet, gentleman, and intellectual through an assault upon his verbal judgement. Drama demanded a dramatic solution, an enactment, an emblematic transaction, such as the purge scene, that serves in the place of pure verbal assault. But the power of invective remains because the audience, in tune with the *comédie-à-clef*, saw the historical man in the character hailed before a court, not only as a reprobate and enemy to the state, but as a poet of puff-paste intelligence.

That Jonson was building consciously and cogently upon the tradition of humanist invective is substantiated by his disclaimers in the “apologetically Dialogue” (*Poetaster*, p. 317 [l. 3]) appended to the play as an address “To the Reader” (pp. 317-24). This was a wound-licking exercise following the production of Dekker’s *Satiromastix*, in which, for one last time, Jonson was abused in

a stage portrait. The dialogue was given one airing in the theatre before it was suppressed by the authorities, although it was surreptitiously reinserted at the time of the publication of his plays in 1616. Jonson profiles himself as the pouting but defiant “Author” of *Poetaster*, the innocent victim of three years of libel and abuse, which had at last stung him into action. In the dual attitude characteristic of the maker and receiver of invective, he professes himself above the malice of their “blacke vomit” (p. 318 [l. 37]), yet hears from his interlocutors how he had been veritably hit and injured. He returns to name-calling, referring to the makers of *Satiromastix* as “the barking students of Beares-Colledge, / To swallow vp the garbadge of the time / With greedy gullets” (p. 318 [ll. 45-47]). He professes to have told the truth in all he said of them in taxing their crimes, while for their part, they merely indulged in plagiarism, filth, and excrement. But the war was clearly over, because Jonson had no heart to try to outdo his own performance or theirs; he was reconciled to the fact that Virgil and Horace had their detractors, and that as Horace *redivivus* in the play, he could go no further. Yet in the spirit of pure invective, he boasts of what he might have done if “Arm’d with Archilochus fury”, writing such iambics as “Should make the desperate lashers hang themselves”, and of how he might “Rime ’hem to death, as they doe *Irish* rats / In drumming tunes” (161-64), before leaving them to the whips of their own guilty consciences. This is the Horace still of the imprecatory satires and epodes—one of those epodes about a former slave, another about a libeler who had attacked one of his friends, and the last about Maeuius, the poetaster cursed to die at sea. Archilochus is, of course, the celebrated seventh-century B.C.E. Greek satirist, who turned his withering iambics upon Lycambes when the latter refused him his daughter in marriage. So terrible was the force of his words that, after they were read out at the festival of Demeter, both father and daughter hanged themselves.⁶ More will be said below of the power of words over things as though imbued with magic, and of the imprecatory curse that is self-fulfilling in the imaginations of those targeted. Jonson displays such weapons, together with a clear knowledge of their traditions, uses, and efficacy in relation to a play that had been calculated to kill as well as to purge, for, as Enck concludes, “With Jonson, in whom nothing is proportionally life-sized, the attack on poetasters carried more invective than usual” (p. 70).

6 See Elliott, p. 7.

In a further allusion, he places himself at the very heart of the classical invective tradition, refusing to waste more time “With these vile *Ibides*, these unclean birds, / That make their mouthes their clysters, and still purge / From their hot entrails” (219-21). “*Ibides*”, without doubt, refers to the literary quarrel from Alexandria involving Callimachus, who cursed his enemy, Apollonius of Rhodes, under the name of Ibis, not only because the bird ate garbage around the Egyptian markets, just as Apollonius was said to feed off the scraps of Homer, but more scatologically because the bird possessed the remarkable ability to purge itself by shoving its water-filled beak up its own fundament.⁷ In the play, Jonson reduces this to an emetic, taking his cue from the *Lexiphanes* of Lucian, in which a rhetorician’s surfeit of words is cured with a vomit administered by the physician Sopolis.⁸ Nevertheless, the Ibis allusion ties Jonson’s thoughts to a literary feud of classical standing having features resembling his own situation. Ovid, too, wrote an “Ibis” poem, an exercise in erudite invective, in which he speaks of the verbal savagery of the Thracians, who went so far as to murder their guests (*Ibis*, ll. 381-82, 401-2). In these poems, as with the Jonson-Marston feud, the injuries redressed were often trivial, but the intent of the words was brutal. Such disputes were, simultaneously, occasions for rhetorical display of a highly entertaining nature, confirming Northrop Frye’s astute observation that “invective is one of the most readable forms of literary art, just as panegyric is one of the dullest” (p. 224). We enjoy hearing people denounced and fools exposed as part of our own pleasure-seeking natures, provided there is a modicum of wit and invention. We enjoy them as finer expressions of our own complex social instincts for managing the survival of the self within groups through the adverse verbal construction of the conduct of rivals and threats. These tactics are never practiced without risk—hence, the particular delight we take in watching the writer of invective establish his own integrity and security as he makes the case against his opponent.

To the extent that *Poetaster* really is about poetry, it assumes a place in the humanist tradition of invective against those deemed to be abusers of the art. Callimachus had a falling out with a former associate, leading to conventional complaints concerning borrowing and plagiarism, matters of influence, and the failure to achieve a noble and independent social vision. The themes are redeveloped at length by Antonio da Rho in his *Philippic against Antonio Panormita*,

7 See Watson, p. 123.

8 This reference was first noted by James Upton in his pamphlet, *Remarks on Three Plays of Benjamin Jonson* (1749, p. 3); see Herford, Simpson and Simpson, eds., IX: 577-78.

a feud which, as with Jonson and Marston, arose between two men backing rival professional positions and which led by degrees from misunderstanding to blatant verbal assault. By 1429, Rho had Latin poems in circulation denouncing Panormita, followed by letters, leading to an all-out literary war. In the *Philippic* he then denied writing any preliminary provocations. Rho, like Jonson, stood up for his personal values and standards, styling himself the modest, humble, sincere man, esteemed by his friends, the innocent victim of the other's malignity. The similarities need not be evidence of influence, but may merely testify to the *sui generis* defence tactics of the rhetorical mind preoccupied with similar professional circumstances.⁹ Correct Latin style and the "oratio inepta" were constantly under scrutiny amid the accusations. Rho's target was, elsewhere, Lorenzo Valla, who began in a light-hearted way to point out the Latin errors of the other until feuding broke out through insult and invective. Again, rivalry and professional envy played a part, as each looked askance at the *succès d'estime* of the other and made accusations of plagiarism. This led Rho to a peroration in the form of a beast fable, in which he assigns himself the role of the lion, while relegating his opponent to that of the ass (*The Apology of Antonio da Rho . . . against a Certain Archdeacon and his Loathsome Sycophant Accomplices*, ed. Rutherford, p. 241). The degree to which Jonson's engagement in the War of the Theatres was conducted as an active and conscious production in Renaissance literary invective is a moot point. But that the profiles of those feuds all seem to follow a common course and psychology is reason enough to urge comparison, not so much at the level of literary genre as at the level of generic human strategizing within competitive verbal environments.

One scene in *Poetaster* that epitomizes Jonson's skills at invective is the first of Act Three. It is a dramatized re-enactment of Horace's Satire I.9, throughout which Jonson taxes Crispinus as a tedious and pedantic poet, not only for his solecisms and "worded trash", but also for his sartorial foolishness and affected manners, while professing his own "tame modestie". As a character in the play, Horace's sober disdain highlights the enacted portrait of Crispinus as a prating poet, singer, and idle talker, indifferent even to the death of his own father, who concludes by demanding that Horace share his patron Mecoenas (III.i.253). The exchange allows Jonson to include such epithets as "base grovelling minds", styling his assailant as a "Land-Remora", the fish described by Pliny for its sucking

9 See Rutherford, ed., *passim*.

mouth by which it attaches itself to the bottoms of boats in great numbers, slowing their progress. Trebatius, the lawyer and Horace's friend, joins in the execration, while the dullness of Crispinus, meanwhile, incites the satirist to ratchet up his attack. It is a clever exercise in humanist poetics and Renaissance *imitatio*, a way of declining to speak in his own voice while performing an act of appropriation that serves in its stead, having behind it all the authority of classical invective.

Crispinus boasts of being a gentleman born (II.i.88), which sets him up for ridicule. Chloe makes mention of his shortness of stature, stating that true gentlemen have little legs. Meanwhile, in a mock description of his family coat of arms, Crispinus draws further attention to his class pretensions (II.i.95). Thus, by spontaneous discovery, or by design, the play touches upon the received categories of classical invective set out by Cicero and the rhetoricians. Under the category of *res externa*, such matters as a man's birth, education, citizenship, ancestry, status, manners, names, friends and associates, and occupation come under attack. Under the heading *res corpus*, there follows the denigration of a man's health, stature, deformities, debauchery, immorality, affected dress, and eccentric personal tastes. Finally, *res anima* covers his intrinsic character, corrupt or diminished intelligence, judgement, motives, and such traits as avarice, cowardice, vanity, shamelessness, cruelty, or superficiality, so that, by degrees, the unfavourable description of the parts constitutes a thoroughly depraved portrait. The final effect is a kind of hermeneutic loop, in which nature, style, and temperament explain the inevitability of criminal, antisocial, or debauched conduct, just as the conduct reveals the essence of the person. A favoured method for bringing truth to the portrait is to turn a man's own words against him through quotation. Such apparent truths are difficult to gainsay and work to devastating effect. Not surprisingly, Jonson hits Marston under all these headings, discrediting his judgement as a poet by discrediting his judgement as a person in several aspects of his social life, while having his own words witness against him in the purge scene. Always, we are mindful of the slights of rhetoric, the ambiguity of words, the tendency to hyperbole, the excesses of libel, the animus of the maker, the licence taken with dramatic portraits, and the faint of make-believe in the creation of such invectives. Without wit they are nothing, but if overly witty they become merely artistic creations and exercises in the resources of language. In his *Poetaster*, Jonson employs the conventions of the theatre to displace the properties of direct invective, but his purpose remains all along to profile an obnoxious and misguided socialite and poetiser with all the force of Cicero's demolition of

traitors in the name of the state. His own smug sense of superiority might have brought him to decline invective altogether, or so he would have us believe, until the outrageous lies put upon him necessitated the counter-attack. But even that ploy is part of the posture of the mode. He would urge that right poetry, if true and perfect, moulds the state, making men brave and ready to fight and die for the *patria* (V.i.17). It is a brilliant deployment of the myth of the Augustan age in justifying his own self-representation as Horace and his assault upon a Roman poetaster and corrupter of manners. Yet all along, it was pure spleen, as it was on the other side. Dekker's *Satiromastix* was still to come, perhaps to be written with Marston's collaboration, and Jonson knew it. In his preface "To the World" (*Satiromastix*, pp. 309-10), Dekker professes his own right to the law of talion, in the sense that those who offend in language should be punished in kind. Not surprisingly, Jonson is anatomized in an equally comprehensive and unflattering way for his manners, arrogance, and ambition, his envious and scrapping nature, his corpulence and his pock-marked face, compared with the lid of a warming pan full of holes for the escaping heat. Pretend as Jonson might to reticence through historicizing his setting and fictionalizing his portraits, the intended victims confirm their identities in their acts of retaliation. Read without these identifications, the play maintains a modicum of interest as a representation of Augustan Rome interpreted by a humanist scholar interested in the regulation of the social life of the state through a culture of high poetry. As a barely disguised invective, however, the play's hold upon readers vacillates between academic drama and epigrammatic assault, that assault itself divided between humours performed, exposed and ridiculed, and language tending toward the curse.

The economy of invective, including its power as a weapon of attack and self-defence, is the invention of man the speaking animal, who, through language, regulates social politics and pecking orders. It is a component of gossip, which is the quintessential activity whereby, through verbal communication, members of the collectivity protect themselves through an exchange of information from all individuals suspected or selectively proven to hold hidden agendas deemed detrimental to the survival of the group. Gossip is the counterpart to reputation, for reputation is the abstract quantification of the working esteem of the individual in relation to collective standards and expectations. All individuals must therefore seek to maintain a positive response from others and a sense of self-esteem.¹⁰

10 See Flyan, p. 10.

Because that esteem is established essentially through gossip, individuals within groups seek to assert positive information about themselves and run constant damage control through the micro-management of opinion. The contortions of invective writers pertain to just such exercises on a larger and more combative scale of name-clearing and counter-attack. Invective thereby seeks to do unto others what one most dreads to have done unto oneself, for it seeks to assassinate through language in order to reconfirm one's own social entitlements as a person of received integrity and worth.

The cause of the criminal lawyer, in mastering the art of invective, is to diminish the entitlements of a man not only presumed guilty of a specific crime, but more broadly demonstrated to be corrupt to the core, untrustworthy, a repeat offender, a perverted mind, a psychopath. Through a notion of correspondences, it was thought that a man's nature was as readily interpreted out of his physiognomy as from the report of his deeds. Hence, the assessment of character according to physical traits in the demonstration of crimes. The vying of two playwrights with one another for the place of prestige in the competitive environment created by rival theatrical companies would appear to be of an entirely different order, yet the verbal tactics were much the same. Perhaps to these men their places in the playwright's pecking order seemed like a matter of survival, one that depended not only upon their comparative talents, but upon their reputations and moral integrity as well. The "poetomachia" was more than a talent match; it was a form of gossip, in which the measure of talent was made to depend upon the full measure of the man—a little piece of the humanist mind-set run wild. Or it may simply be a law of society that, where there is equality among men, a process will arise whereby echelons and hierarchies will be constructed, through which the bullying alpha male is simultaneously the alpha dramatist.¹¹ This is in keeping with Northrop Frye's assessment of invective as "militant irony", a mode which, in fact, has little irony about it. Invective purports to be fact, assaulting the target directly, often with the risk of being too concise and direct, in an effort to make that person mutually loathed. An acquiescent audience joins in collusion with the calumniator, as in gossip clatches, in mutually descending an individual deemed a nuisance to the public or common good.¹² As with gossip, there must be an audience, as well as a speaker and an

11 See Riggs, p. 79.

12 See Frye, p. 223.

intended victim. Invective is the most aggressive form of news, whereby, in the name of the group, the reporter-as-prosecutor seeks to expose all that is hypocritical, parasitic, or undisclosed in the intentional states of the targeted individual through clear, forceful rhetorical profiling. But the economy is a dangerous one, because wit itself may be a devious means for gaining cruel advantage by playing upon the vulnerable imaginations of auditors, despite its careful appeal to truth and objectivity. Jonson's *Poetaster* works its measures in precisely this ambiguous economy.

What, then, of the power of words themselves to kill with all the efficiency of a verbal firing squad in the vein of Archilocus or the rhyming of Irish rats? This has to do with the power of invective not only over the imaginations of auditors, but over the imaginations of the victims themselves, insofar as each individual, in a sense, calibrates social currency according to a psychological Fort Knox of self-esteem. If invective guts the Federal Reserve, for those so sensitively inclined, despair may seem the only option. Invective takes its toll upon those carefully attuned to their own dependency upon social approbation. It may constitute an art of portraiture so powerful that a sense of comprehensive worthlessness appears beyond all countermanding. It is an instance in which *le mot* becomes *la chose*, when the power of the imagination becomes omnipotent, making defamatory naming tantamount to physical injury.¹³ Honour is a vital compulsion, a by-product of our gregarious natures and survival strategies. Insofar as language has achieved the power to create provisional versions of reality capable of invoking the most powerful of emotions and fears, language itself takes on the qualities of ritual magic, given the close alignment between signs, intentional states, beliefs and the unfolding of the material world. Invective seeks mastery over others, as opposed to inclusiveness, working as it does through public opinion to exclude, placing the destructive force not in the words but in the power of groups to ostracize. Yet it shares in intent with the curse, through which language is granted ritual power over the forces of chance and destiny, to the extent that victims believe superstitiously in the power of imprecation to harness and control destiny. That interplay between invective and cursing is seen in Horace's Epode 5, in which the victim vows that his tormentors will in turn be visited by the nightmare and suffocated, pelted to death by stones, then eaten by dogs and carrion birds. It may well be said that sticks and stones can alone break bones,

13 See Neu, p. 124.

while words are inoffensive. Yet the social dynamics of self-esteem and ritual fear of the magical power of words argues otherwise. Just as sorcerers might invoke devils by conjuring with words and signs, or priests might pronounce the magic words whereby wafers and wine are transubstantiated, so the writer of invective may conceive of the imprecatory effect of words upon the imagination of the victim not only as insults but as spells in control of the forces shaping the future.

In his *Poetaster*, Jonson indulges his voice of invective as in no other play, oriented as it is in the traditions of ancient Rome, displacing his own rancorous voice as he may in adopting the vocabulary of Horatian satire—the vocabulary of a man who, in his own times, had confronted envy and verbal assault. Formally, Jonson declines the role by adapting the conventions of the theatre to his ends, in a sense reducing invective to satire through the dissimulation of identities, the displacement of slanderous voices, and the transposition of setting. Moreover, he knew only too well that invective is dialogic, and that unless he could disguise his intentions, if not sting his victims into silence, the combat would continue until wits ran dry or the audience lost interest. Ironically, too, despite his outcry against cowardly or opportunistic informers, anonymous complaints over this very play were lodged with Chief Justice Popham, which might have led to very real corporal punishment, given that Jonson had already exhausted the patience of the law with his truculence and verbal brinkmanship.¹⁴ To decline invective was the greater part of valour. Jonson studied to have it both ways, yet he was never certain that he had avoided subsequent wrath or that he had seized the final word in his play. His apprehension is made clear in the “apologeticall Dialogue”, in which Polyposus reports of him, “O, vex’d, vex’d, I warrant you” (p. 317 [l. 15]). Jonson’s worry was not that he was guilty of all that he had been accused of in Dekker’s *Satiromastix*, but that the world was only too ready to believe it of him. Dekker was not without his power to hit, and now Jonson’s own imagination worked upon him in a way that spelled defeat in his own mind, making him, curiously, the biter bitten, despite his own blustering self-righteousness. Clearly, by then he had lost his taste for invective, for when his friends in this dramatic postlude ask if he will answer the libels, he declines, whereupon they declare

14 Herford, Simpson and Simpson, eds., IV: 201. The reference in the Preface is to the Chief Justice, to whom Jonson boldly dedicates the play in an effort to solicit his acquiescence to the play’s necessary strategy by a man more sinned against than sinning, abetted by the representation within the play of Horace’s own friendship with a leading Roman lawyer.

him to be undone with the world. It is then that he boasts of what he might have done but would not do, cursing them like Archilocus, rhyming them like rats, or purging them in the manner of the ibis, preferring rather to withdraw from society in defeat to devote himself to historical tragedy “high, and aloofe, / Safe from the wolves black jaw, and the dull asses hoofe” (238-39), in hopes that time and a different muse might restore where invective against his enemies had been deemed to fail.

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