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“Jupiter . . . appointed his majesty as judge”:

Classical Gods and the Performance of Monarchy

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Classical gods and goddesses have a long history in medieval and early modern performances at court, in Britain as elsewhere in Europe. In England, from at least the mid-fourteenth century, Roman and planetary deities had a presence in disguisings and combat games, interludes and revels, as well as in royal entries, tapestries and visual arts. In the 1350s, for example, they featured in theatricalised letters of invitation to jousting. These adjuncts to tournament encounters were written as if from exotic imaginary ladies recommending combatants to the court of Edward III.¹ So Penthesilia, Queen of the Amazons, writes to the lady presiding over a joust, probably Queen Philippa, from “our Castle of Maidens, in which Venus often takes her ease”, while another letter comes from “our Kingdom of Joyfulness” where kings Mars and Phoebus are part of the company. By 1401, in another set of jousting invitations, Phoebus himself writes to the princess Blanche, the nine-year-old daughter of Henry IV, who was presiding over a tournament at Eltham in honour of the visit of the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaeologus.² Phoebus congratulates “your royal court which is the fountain of nobility” and asks Blanche’s permission to send “our dearly beloved child Ferombras” to join the joust. The gods do not themselves appear to be represented at these festivities. But they open a channel of communication with the court, enhancing the performance by acting as peers of the royal hosts and patrons of the jousters.

In the 1430s the gods begin to have a more tangible presence. One disguising, with a prologue written by John Lydgate, introduces a pursuivant sent directly from Jupiter (Lydgate,

¹ These letters are to be found in Edinburgh University Library, MS 183.

² See Anglo, as well as Barker, pp. 97-98. For the translations, see Priestley, pp. 133-38.

“Mercers”). This Twelfth Night event, presented to Mayor Estfield of London by the guild of Mercers, opens with an evocation of Jupiter, and the Mediterranean geography associated with Mars, Venus, Pallas, the Muses, Bacchus and Bellona. The prologue then describes in detail the pursuivant’s exotic and arduous journey from Syria to London, bearing letters from the god. Lydgate’s speeches also survive for a Christmas mumming “tofore the Kyng and the Qwene” at Eltham, in which Bacchus, Juno and Ceres send envoys to present symbolic gifts of “wyne, whete, and oyle” (Lydgate, “Eltham”, l. 5) to honour the court. While the gifts are formally presented “by marchandes that here be”, the speeches seem to imply that the gods themselves may also be silently present in the performance. While their role is to act as divine patrons from afar, their theatrical presence is becoming a more fully realised and more active part of the proceedings.

From the early sixteenth century we find the deities making more elaborate personal appearances. In 1527 Cardinal Wolsey, a promoter of classical entertainments, held a revel for Henry VIII in which a performance of Plautus’s *Menaechmi* was followed by an elaborate pageant of Venus and Cupid (Streitberger, pp. 122-24). According to an Italian observer, Venus sat on a stage with her damsels “forming so graceful a group for her footstool, that it looked as if she and they had really come down in person from heaven” (*Calendar of State Papers, Venice*, no. 2 [p. 2]). Cupid was then drawn in, in a pageant car, and delivered “a most elegant Latin oration” in praise of a band of elderly lovers who were led at his wheels. This pageant, giving more spectacular and scripted parts to the gods, is clearly more self-contained than previous appearances of the deities, presenting a neo-classical, humanist spectacle rather than any direct engagement with the members of the court. As Streitberger points out, while earlier courtly revels, including Henry VIII’s own, were “principally oriented toward a celebration of chivalric virtue and courtly love”, Wolsey’s are closer to Italian court entertainments, including “classical plays ... *intermezzi* of mythological and classical characters” (pp. 123-24). The gods take an important role, but one that seems subtly different from earlier performances.

In spite of Wolsey’s innovations, it appears that the earlier tradition of the classical gods remained strong at the royal court. Venus and Cupid were joined by Mars for an elaborate triumph for the young Edward VI on Twelfth Night 1553 (Streitberger, pp. 201-2). From Revels’ records we know that Mars and Venus were each borne in, in an elaborate “chaire trivmfall” (Feuillerat, ed., p. 93). Venus and her ladies rescued the child Cupid from a “Marshall”, while Mars’s followers were to be dressed in “theire owne armure”, perhaps suggesting a combat game of some kind. We have no indication that the two gods had speaking parts, but the form of the triumph does suggest a confrontation, and so possibly a debate. This certainly seems to have been the case when Queen Elizabeth watched Juno and Diana debate the pros and cons of marriage in 1565. The Spanish ambassador Guzman de Silva reported watching “the representation of a comedy in

English. The plot was founded on the question of marriage, discussed between Juno and Diana, Juno advocating marriage and Diana chastity. Juno gave the verdict in favour of matrimony” (*Calendar of State Papers, Spain*, p. 404).³ Famously, this comedy was also clearly understood as a direct engagement between the goddesses and the chief spectator. Guzman goes on to report that “The Queen turned to me and said ‘This is all against me’”. In more decorative mode, later in the same year at the wedding of Mary Queen of Scots with Lord Darnley, ten gods and goddesses, including all seven planetary deities, came to congratulate the couple (Buchanan). On this occasion the deities had clearly settled into a role developed from their earliest appearances, of celebratory visitation to congratulate and honour the court.

This selection of examples suggests how acclimatised the classical gods became in courtly entertainments. Mostly what they show seems primarily decorative. The gods flattered the knowledge of educated audiences; they would be familiar from both classical and courtly vernacular literature. They acted as patrons or appeared in person, lending heightened spectacle, dignity, sometimes even a degree of comedy to court revels. They played into the taste for mythology and antiquity that is evident from the late Middle Ages onward, running into and through the popular mythographies of the fifteenth century and the humanist revival of classical learning. But in the sixteenth century we begin to find evidence of some rather different roles for the deities in court shows. Alongside the largely decorative and spectacle-enhancing appearances are some more complex theatrical encounters. The gods may be drawn upon to act as figures of identity for the monarch, to represent or stand for the sovereign; or they may engage directly with the monarch, offering or seeking advice, or inviting a shared exercise of power. These are the performances that will be considered further here, exploring the sorts of issues such entertainments articulated, and how the gods they presented were conceived and developed to address questions of monarchy. Underlying this is perhaps a broader question: why was it that the classical deities were used for this purpose? Were there particular benefits to playwrights in drawing on these mythological figures in plays for and about the monarchs?

I

Although some gods seem perennially popular, different deities were used to address different monarchs through the sixteenth century. In the 1520s and early 1530s, Henry VIII was represented as Jupiter; Edward VI was reflected in his coronation revels by Orpheus, bringer of harmony. Mary Tudor appears as Nemesis on her accession, while Elizabeth was most often addressed on the subject of her marriage, by Juno and Diana, Pallas and

3 See Doran, pp. 264-65.

Venus. Later in the century, in a fragment of a masque composed by James VI himself in 1588, the young king seems to take self-conscious charge of the now well-established trope. James opens his masque, in a presenter's speech apparently designed to be spoken by himself, by negotiating directly with the gods, asking for their favour, "If euer I ô mightie Gods haue done you seruice true / In setting furth by painefull pen your glorious praises due" (James VI, ll.1-2). He is reassured by Mercury, who enters to reply: "I messenger of Gods about am here vnto yow sent / To schowe by prooffe your tyme into there seruice well is spent" (ll. 35-36). This masque was recorded in manuscript as designed for the wedding of two of the young James's favourites, the Earl of Huntly and Henrietta Stewart, the daughter of his beloved deceased cousin Esmé Stewart, Seigneur d'Aubigny and Duke of Lennox.⁴ Apparently it was never completed, and although two manuscripts of the fragments are carefully preserved, there is no record that it was actually performed. But it offers a striking finale to the tradition: it is now the king who initiates the encounter with the gods, presenting himself as their suitor, even as his masque by its existence tacitly defines and demonstrates him as their creator.

Of all these events which create direct theatrical encounters between monarchs and gods, this paper will concentrate on two: the shows addressed to Henry VIII and to Mary Tudor. These performances introduce different gods, and were markedly different in kind: in elaborate triumphal revels staged in May 1527, it is Jupiter who sends to request Henry to take his place in judging a debate between Love and Riches. Just a few years later, in 1533, the King of the Gods makes a personal appearance in John Heywood's *The Play of the Wether*, offering a richly ambiguous representation of the king. A very different deity is chosen as a dramatic figure for Mary Tudor in 1553. The political morality *Respublica* brings in the goddess Nemesis, who is explicitly introduced as a personification of the queen. Despite the differences in deity, genre and tone, these are all entertainments which engage audiences directly with topical issues of royal identity and rule.

By the sixteenth century, theatre had long been a mode through which kings and kingship might be examined. From the play of *Rex Vivus*, "King Life" (now known as *The Pride of Life*), which was probably written down in the late fourteenth century, through to Shakespeare's history plays in the late sixteenth century, the nature and practice of monarchy constituted a common dramatic topic. But performances presented at court, whether addressed directly to the monarch or to the wider courtly community, are clearly subject to rather different stresses, and might wish to say rather different things, from those designed for audiences beyond the court circle. Performance at court, in particular the spectacular disguising entertainments developed in-house, will always have

4 For analysis of this masque, see Rickard, pp. 54-56.

an investment in celebrating and complimenting the ruler. Other kinds of performance, often including plays, were at times brought in from outside performers rather than developed by the Revels Office. But however far these, or any sort of court drama, might seek to offer counsel, or even some level of criticism, the performance context would require at least an overtly positive representation of the ruler. This might put a certain limitation on what devisers and creators of court entertainment could express, or at least prompt the development of different dramatic strategies, which might offer less direct and explicit means of opening up questions of monarchy.

This may suggest one reason for choosing the pagan gods for important roles in these shows. In a discussion of Renaissance visual art, Malcolm Bull points out that “Christian imagery was ... low on positive images of secular power” (p. 382). Christian representations of kings and rulers, whether biblical, historical or allegorical, tend to focus on the necessary subordination of human power to God, and the dangers of pride or of the abuse of power. The representations of monarchs in plays that stick to overtly Christian forms, such as John Skelton’s Prince in *Magnyfycence* or David Lyndsay’s King Humanity in *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, do indeed show faulty or vulnerable rulers who must suffer falls before recovering their sovereignty. For shows which are looking to stage positive images of sovereignty to compliment a monarch, the classical world provides richer resources.

The pagan-ness of the classical gods is also itself paradoxically significant. Although long-established as poetic symbols, in strictly theological Christian terms these gods were clearly false deities, condemned by the Church as idols.⁵ Partly for this reason, the burgeoning fascination with classical mythology focused increasingly on the allegorical qualities which the gods and their deeds were understood to represent. This is clearly reflected in the many mythographies that developed through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, following from Boccaccio’s *De genealogia deorum gentilium* (Bull, pp. 15-36). These linked the pagan gods with literary reflections on the nature of poetic allegory. Poetry is not itself true, but it can reveal truth through its fictions; likewise, the classical deities are false, but can express truths through their falseness. Boccaccio had defined his own aim as being to

explain the meaning wise men had hidden under the outer layers of these inane fables. ... [for] these ancient poets, despite not being Christians, were gifted with such prudence that no creation of human genius was ever veiled in fiction more cleverly. (Boccaccio, p. 21)

5 A foundational text on this issue in Christian theology is St Augustine’s *The City of God*: see Books 2-4.

Tudor monarchs, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, had relatively few Christian role-models for positive images of human power; nor could they safely be supernaturally represented as figures of Christian divinity. But to represent Henry VIII as Jupiter, or Mary as Nemesis, is neither blasphemy nor hubris, since Jupiter and Nemesis are not true gods. Nonetheless, these divinities can act as poetic figures for true qualities of absolute power and justice, while their supernatural status serves to enhance and glorify the human monarch. Another benefit of introducing them as fictive images of the sovereign is in allowing a certain distancing from the actual monarch. This gives scope not only for some degree of critique, but even at times for a playful humour around these flamboyantly fictional deities. They can represent, and yet remain separate from, the observed or observing monarch.

II

Jupiter's association with Henry VIII seems to peak in the late 1520s and early 1530s.⁶ The first entertainment we know of which links the two, in 1527, is very much in the mode of decorative compliment that had come to characterise the gods' appearances in courtly revels. But without breaking that pattern, it establishes and develops the theatrical relationship between the divine and human kings in ways that are more significantly suggestive. The evening of revels on 6 May 1527 celebrated an important, if short-lived, treaty of alliance, orchestrated by Cardinal Wolsey, between England and France.⁷ It took place in a newly-constructed revels chamber, "the long hous", which was "ordayned and maad for pastyme and to do solas to strangers".⁸ This new building was magnificently decorated for the occasion; it was dominated by a roof with internal hangings designed by the king's astronomer, Nicholas Kratzner, and painted by Hans Holbein. These represented a map of the world; but the earthly geography was enhanced by a further special effect, described in careful detail in Edward Hall's *Chronicle*:

By a connyng making of another cloth, the zodiacke with the .xii. Signes ... apered on the earth and water compassing the same ... and above this were made the seuen planettes, as Mars, Jupiter, Sol, Mercurius, Venus, Saturnus, and Luna, euery one in their proper houses made according to their properties, that it was a connyng thing and a pleasant sight to beholde. (Hall, p. 723)⁹

⁶ For extensive discussion of Henry as Jupiter, especially in *The Play of the Wether*, see Walker, *Plays of Persuasion*, pp. 144-53, and *Writing under Tyranny*, pp. 105, n. 14, and 112-18.

⁷ For the full entertainment, see Streitberger, pp. 124-29, and Rawlinson.

⁸ Richard Gibson's day-book TNA SP2/Fol. C, fol. 106, as quoted in Streitberger, p. 125.

⁹ Hall describes the venue and the evening in great detail, suggesting that he was either an eyewitness or working from an eyewitness report. Unlike our other eyewitness he does not, however, specifically identify the gods among the characters of the show.

This ceiling thus established the astrological universe, with its seven planet gods, as the setting for the entire event, enfolding the audience as well as the performers of the entertainment. The revels chamber had become the house of the classical deities.

This was confirmed in the opening moments of the show. Hall reports:

Then entered a person clothed in cloth of golde, and ouer that a mantel of blew silke, full of eyes of golde, and ouer his hed a cap of gold, with a garland of Laurell set with beries of fine gold. (p. 723)

The account of Gasparo Spinelli, the Venetian ambassador's secretary, who was present at the event, echoes Hall's closely, but gives a fuller interpretation of some of the elements of the entertainment. He explains that this actor was "in the guise of Mercury, sent to the King by Jupiter" (Spinelli, p. 59). So the messenger of the gods opened the evening's proceedings by bridging the astrological heaven of the gods and the earth of the revels. Mercury then

announced that Jupiter, having frequently listened to disputes between Love and Riches concerning their relative authority, and that being unable to decide the controversy, he appointed his Majesty as judge, and requested him to pronounce and pass sentence on both of them. (p. 59)

Jupiter himself does not appear, except on the ceiling; but he is actively present in his messenger, inviting Henry to take on his power as judge of all. While retaining his own person and presence, Henry is invested with Jupiter's role, not only as his equal but even as his superior, to judge an issue that Jupiter has not been able to resolve.

From the accounts we have, it is not entirely clear whether the king did actively take on Jupiter's role as arbiter of the debate that followed. It was performed by teams of choristers, led by figures representing Love and Riches, while, according to Spinelli, "in the centre walked one alone, in the guise of Justice". When they failed to reach a resolution in argument, the issue was referred to combat, with a staged contest at barriers. That was also apparently inconclusive, and Hall claims the debate was finally resolved by "an olde man with a siluer berd, and he concluded that loue & riches, both be necessarie for princes (that is to saie) by loue to be obeyed and serued, and with riches to rewarde his louers and frendes" (p. 723). So the dynamic conjunction of Henry and Jupiter may have dissolved as the debate concluded; Henry does not appear to have proclaimed a judgement himself, although in the context of the performance his presence was perhaps understood as validating the enacted resolution. In any case, although not quite fully exploited, the identification of the king with the god opened very interesting possibilities for the complimentary enacting of the king's sovereignty.

III

This was much more richly exploited a few years later in John Heywood's *Play of the Wether*, performed, it is now largely believed, at court in 1532/3 (Heywood, ed. Axton and Happé, pp. 50-52). This is a more fully developed drama, which presents a much fuller and more complicated fictional conflation of Henry with Jupiter. Again the King of the Gods is seen in his role as universal arbiter, this time deciding between conflicting requests for weather that are brought to him by a wide variety of petitioners. The relationship to Henry is never spelled out explicitly, but as recent scholarship and dramatic reconstruction has suggested, it seems clear that Jupiter provides a complimentary, but also comically ironic, figure for the king in a highly topical satirical play.¹⁰ The fiction presents Henry through the person of Jupiter, rather than in encounter with him, with Jupiter's judgements in the play standing for those recommended to Henry. *The Play of the Wether* thus inverts the previous show, where the king was invited to replace Jupiter, recommending decisions to him.

The relationship between the two kings is complex and many-layered. Jupiter's mythological embodiment of supreme power, fire and light, his "jovial" support of pleasure, youth and life, all compliment Henry. But the god's mythical history of promiscuous, and sometimes embarrassing, amorous escapades is also incorporated into the parallel, especially in light of Henry's developing relationship with Anne Boleyn, which seems to have come to a head at this period. It is explicitly and comically referenced, with Anne's promise as the "new moon" contrasted to the wasted and leaking "old moon" of his wife Katherine (ll. 795-814). It is not clear whether such daringly irreverent and open allusions imply a performance without the personal presence of the king, or whether they were included in the expectation that Henry would himself be in the audience. Either way, however, they would seem to suggest a confidence that the king would not object to the parallel being drawn. Jupiter's reputation for vigorous sexuality acts at least in part as a comic celebration of Henry's own virility.

However, the lightly satiric touch with which the characters and situation are handled, and the performance of the play largely, we believe, by boys of the chapel royal, also allow for a degree of critical deflation of Jupiter. Although formally complimentary, this is clearly not a wholly reverential portrait of Henry. Insofar as Jupiter is a god, and a supernatural symbol of power, he aggrandises the king, while flattering him towards the mild and even-handed political decisions Heywood's play recommends; but as a pagan fiction he can also offer a comic distance on kingship. The figure of Jupiter encourages Henry, or those around him, to recognise the practical limitations and weaknesses of

¹⁰ See Walker, "Jupiter".

secular human authority; but the classical, pagan context in which the god exists means that neither play nor audience are under a Christian obligation to condemn them.

Of the many qualities that Jupiter was held to stand for, there is one central power that both of these entertainments depend upon: that is, Jupiter's role as absolute arbiter in the cases of warring or foolish petitioners. This is an aspect of special significance for an earthly ruler, whether offered as compliment or as advice. Yet while both shows foreground this role for the god, stories of Jupiter's arbitration do not in fact feature heavily in the key episodes of his mythology. However, there is one literary source, popular at the time, which presents telling parallels to the role designed for Jupiter in these shows: the Aesopian fables. Collections of the fables were regularly printed through the early sixteenth century, with some ten editions appearing between Caxton's first printing in 1484 and the date of *The Play of the Wether*.¹¹ Caxton's collection provides several telling examples of Jupiter receiving and passing judgements on suitors who approach with short-sighted or unwise requests: the frogs ask for a king; the bee asks to be able to kill honey-thieves with her sting; the camel seeks for horns. In all the woodcuts illustrating these fables, the god is shown as a king enthroned in judgement, echoing the iconography of the secular ruler.¹² In each case, the dilemma or request is solved by Jupiter turning the request against the petitioner: he either gives them what they have asked for, to their detriment; or he reverses the request, allotting the opposite of the suitor's improper wish; or he decides on the status quo as the best outcome. This rarely works out as positively as it does for the suitors in Heywood's genial play; but in each case it demonstrates how Jupiter, as wise king, can see further than his petitioners and makes his judgements apparently in the light of a greater good.

In the well-known fable of the frogs, Jupiter first gives the frogs a log of wood to be their king. When they beg for a replacement for this passive monarch, he gives them instead the heron, who eats them. He then refuses to replace this tyrant, telling them that "the kynge whiche ye haue demaunded shalle be your mayster".¹³ While the frogs are given exactly what they have asked for, the bee's request is reversed. When she asks Jupiter for her sting to kill the honey-thief, she is told that it will instead kill herself; the lesson here is that "men ought not to demaunde of god / but suche thynges that ben good and honest" (p. 172). When the camel, who is mocked for her ugliness, asks the god for horns in order to become more attractive, he not only denies her the horns but also removes her ears, explaining that "by cause that thow demaundest that / whiche thow oughtest not

¹¹ *The English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC)* records ten editions in English and in Latin between 1484 and 1535.

¹² See, e.g., Aesop, fols xlii^v, ciii^r and cix^v.

¹³ Aesop, ed. Lenaghan, p. 90; subsequent references are to this edition.

to haue I haue take fro the that whyche of ryght and kynd thou ou3test to haue” (p. 181). The Tudor playwrights clearly do not borrow the example of Jupiter’s harshly comic judgements themselves, which all seem savage in comparison with the benign arbitration between Love and Riches, or the positive treatment of the petitioners of *The Play of the Wether*. But they do adopt the figure of Jupiter as a supernatural model for the secular exercise of kingly authority, personifying in comic fiction a monarch who makes judgements that go beyond the limited perception of the petitioners. Both as compliment and as advice, they draw on the fables of Jupiter to present Henry with an image of himself as the all-wise judge. As Caxton himself pointed out in the introduction to the fable of the frogs, “fable is as moche to say in poeterye / as wordes in theologie” (p. 89), though he also reminds his readers that such theology is couched in comedy which “shalle aguyse and sharpe thy witte and shal gyue to the cause of Ioye” (p. 74). As a pagan god, Jupiter has the poetic distance to represent Henry with comic wit, while nonetheless dramatising serious truth.

IV

Respublica is a play written some twenty years later, celebrating the accession of Henry’s daughter Mary in 1553; like *The Play of the Wether*, it personifies the monarch by means of a classical deity, but in very different ways and for different ends. Most of this political morality play is satirically and comically directed against the abuses of the previous administration of Mary’s brother Edward VI.¹⁴ The deft comic routines of the Vices which occupy most of its action are vividly used to represent the economic and political corruption that has resulted, “yls whche long tyme have reigned vncorrecte” (l. 51). Mary, arriving as saviour of the nation, is represented by the late classical goddess Nemesis; she appears only at the end to resolve the play as judge, so taking a similar role to Jupiter. The Prologue tells the audience right at the start that

Marye our Soueraigne and Quene

 is oure most wise *and* most worthie Nemesis
 Of whome *our* plaie meneth tamende *that* is amysse. (ll.49-54)

The theatrical identification of the queen with the classical deity is thus much more explicit than that of Henry with Jupiter, and the figure of Nemesis is accordingly less open to playful irony. Mythologically, Nemesis was a narrower and less ambivalent figure than Jupiter: in visual media she is represented emblematically as a winged figure standing on

¹⁴ For fuller analysis, see Walker, *Politics of Performance*, pp. 172-95, and Carpenter.

a wheel and carrying a bridle or other instruments of control.¹⁵ This is clearly how she was envisaged in the play. Truth, one of the Daughters of God who brings her on stage, explains:

Hir cognisaunce . . . 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 things in everye Lande. (ll. 1792-95)

When Nemesis/Mary speaks, it is as this emblem of universal authority.

However, there is a significant difference from the *Play of the Wether* which complicates *Respublica's* presentation of monarchy: unlike Heywood's play, *Respublica* combines the classical deity with Christian figures of divinity. Before the arrival of Nemesis, the fifth act opens with the appearance of the Four Daughters of God—Mercy, Truth, Justice and Peace—who intervene to protect the exploited Lady Respublica from the corrupting Vices of Avarice, Insolence, Oppression and Adulation. The Four Daughters then re-enact, in this political setting, the popular Roman Catholic redemption allegory of the Parliament of Heaven; their debate on the consequences of the Fall was first imagined as performed before God, and resulted in the Incarnation as the means to redeem fallen mankind.¹⁶ Introducing these figures and their allegorical parliament into the play tacitly asserts Mary's renewed allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church, following her brother's Protestant reforms. The Four Daughters directly represent the power and purposes of God, suggesting that heaven intervenes to support the nation of England. But there is no space within the allegory of the Parliament of Heaven for the figure of Mary as the queen of England: she cannot herself be a Daughter of God, nor can she represent the Sovereign Father. But if she were incorporated in the play alongside the widow Respublica, as one of the recipients of God's grace, she would lose the role of her own sovereign power, which the play is designed to celebrate.

Intriguingly, another role for Mary in the allegory is perhaps obliquely hinted at by the staging of the episode. Jean-Paul Débax points out that the Parliament of Heaven in the earlier play of the N-Town cycle moves directly into the Annunciation, and by doing so incorporates the Virgin Mary into the divine process as the means toward redemption.¹⁷ This association between the Four Daughters and the Virgin is in fact widespread:

¹⁵ See Twycross.

¹⁶ For the theological background to the allegory, see Traver.

¹⁷ See Débax, "Mary — Fourth Person of the Deity?"; in the present volume.

a variety of visual and literary representations bring the two together.¹⁸ So in *Respublica*, when the Four Daughters conclude their initial debate and turn to bring in a new figure of divinity with authority to resolve the nation's problems, the audience may well be primed to expect the entrance of the Virgin. This way of extending the allegory would bring the Queen of Heaven and the Queen of England into at least imaginary conjunction, both of them recuperated from years of neglect, and re-established in glory.

However, whether for religious, political or dramatic reasons, the playwright tellingly chose not to realise this latent possibility. The dilemma of balancing Christian divinity with human and political power is instead addressed by casting Mary as the figure of Nemesis. As a classical deity, an accepted fiction, the personification does not carry any blasphemous connotations. She stands outside the Christian allegory of the Four Daughters; but emblematically she can be subsumed into it. So once the Daughters have exposed the ill deeds of the Vices, Verity (Truth) explains:

the punishment of this
 Muste be referred to the goddesse Nemesis
 She is the mooste highe goddesse of correccion
 Cleare of conscience *and* voide of affeccion . (ll. 1780-83)

Verity then continues by conflating the Christian and pagan allegories. Nemesis, she says, has been sent by God:

she hath power from above, *and* is newlie sent downe
 To redresse all owtrages in cite *and* in Towne
 She hath power from godde. (ll. 1784-86)

The classical goddess has been co-opted into the Parliament of Heaven; like the Four Daughters themselves, she becomes a symbolic representation of an aspect of the Deity. This integration of the two supposedly conflicting kinds of divinity is made easier by the nature of Nemesis and how she was understood. Unlike the Olympian gods, such as Jupiter, she was not a goddess around whom narrative myths had collected.¹⁹ From the beginning, she was more significant for the ideas and forces she represented than for

18 A foundational sermon by St Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1120) and the influential pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (translated into Middle English by Nicholas Love as *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*), on which many literary versions are based, also present the Parliament of Heaven as leading directly to the Virgin Mary and the Annunciation; for visual representations of the Four Daughters with the Virgin Mary, see Chew, pp. 60-62. I am grateful to Richard Hillman for pointing out the tacit but suggestive allusion to the Virgin in this staging.

19 For Nemesis's qualities, see Brumble, pp. 241-42.

her mythical personal history, and this meant she could sit more comfortably within a Christian context.

Nonetheless, in this play she is primarily used as a figure for secular monarchy, rather than for divine power. Her judgements fall on the Vices, who personify political rather than spiritual opponents. Her role is also precisely directed towards the political and governmental situation, and the purposes of a play which was designed for performance at Mary's first Christmas in power, following hard upon the overthrow and execution of her brother's chief minister, the Duke of Northumberland. Popular modern understanding of the concept of Nemesis now tends to focus almost solely on ideas of violent vengeance and terrifying doom, which might lead us to expect the goddess to present a severe and punitive model for Mary's power. The playwright of *Respublica*, however, is clearly following scholarly sixteenth-century notions of the goddess, and while destructive vengeance is one part of her role, her power is significantly more nuanced and corrective than this suggests. Nemesis was seen as especially bringing down those who proved arrogant in success, while equally restoring those who had suffered injury. As one Elizabethan commentator explained:

Nemesis ... [was] held and taken to bee the goddesse, to whom only it belonged to punish and castigate the offences of the wicked and malefactors, afflicting them with paines and torments, according to the qualitie of their sins; and also rewarded the vertuous and well-liuers with aduancements, honour, and titles of place and dignitie: and that she did know and see all things euen into the darkest and most priuate corner of the world. (Linche, sig. Aa4^v)

She was associated both with Fortune, and importantly with Justice, as the widely circulated definition in Thomas Elyot's *Dictionary* makes clear:

Nemesis, a goddesse, whiche was supposed to take vengeance on malefactours. Some tyme it sygnifieth fortune, also iustyce, also reproche. (Elyot, s.v. "Nemesis")

Nicholas Udall, who is thought to have been the author of *Respublica*, also includes comments on the figure of Nemesis in his translation of Erasmus' *Apothegms*. She is, he reports, "y^e Goddesse of takyng vengeance on such as are proude & disdeigneful in tyme of their prosperite ... [and] no such persone may escape hir handes" (Erasmus, fol. 329^v). When Verity introduces Nemesis in *Respublica* she outlines very similar qualities:

To hir office belongeth the prowde toverthrowe /
And suche to restore as iniurie hath browght lowe.
Tys hir powre to forbidde and punishe in all eastates
All presumptuous immoderate attemptates. (ll. 1788-91)

As with Jupiter and Henry VIII, the qualities of the chosen classical god seem to be carefully matched to the exercise of monarchical power appropriate for the contemporary situation. In the opening months of her reign, Mary was preoccupied with dealing with her brother's collapsed administration, whose members were blamed for the economic and social difficulties of the realm. Nemesis's judgement of the corrupt Vices, enabling restoration of the afflicted *Respublica*, fulfils her allegorical function as defined in scholarly tradition; but it also specifically reflects this political crisis. Mary is presented as purging the corruption of the earlier government; the Vices of the play represent, in general terms, those who had dominated Edward's council and are presented as mismanaging the economy, exploiting the nation and profiting for personal gain. These were the kinds of accusation that had been levelled against the previous administration, and the four Vices embody the particular ills that Erasmus had identified as the targets of Nemesis: "such as are proude & disdeigneful in tyme of their prosperite".

Nemesis enacts her role by overthrowing Avarice and Oppression. But as with Heywood's Jupiter, the absolute judgements of the goddess are moderated for the practicalities of secular sovereignty. Henry-as-Jupiter was offered a model of benevolent exercise of authority, rather than the severely witty judgements of the fables, while Mary-as-Nemesis does not simply destroy, but invokes the processes of civil justice in dealing with the damage caused by the Vices. Proclaiming that "neither all nor none, shall taste of severitee" (l. 1874), she judges each on individual merit. Adulation is given a second chance and pardoned, on promise of future reform. Avarice, the chief Vice, is sentenced to restorative justice, returning to the commonwealth the vast wealth that he had extorted. But he is not handed over for popular vengeance: when People, Avarice's exploited victim, offers to take responsibility for his punishment, Nemesis commands, "Naie, thowe shalte deliver hym to the hedd Officer / which hath the Authoritee Iustice to mynister" (ll. 1908-9). Insolence and Oppression, similarly, are to be delivered into safe custody until "the tyme maie serve texamine *and* trie their cause / ... and Iudge them by the lawse" (ll. 1918-19). Nemesis's last words in the play are not of punishment at all, but of affection and redress to *Respublica*, and the play ends on the wish "to mainteine Comonwealthe" (l. 1937). While Nemesis is a complimentary, even adulatory personification for Mary, her role is very carefully pitched to offer a hopeful direction to the Queen's own policy.

V

Jupiter and Nemesis present some obvious differences in these court shows. They are from different orders of classical gods, supernaturally representing different kinds of qualities. They appear in different genres of entertainment, offering different balances between compliment and counsel. Yet underlying their immediate theatrical aims, which are clearly directed to the topical circumstances of performance, are deep-rooted similar-

ities. Each is introduced as a direct theatrical representation of the possibly spectating monarch. They present specific powers of secular kingship, dramatising arbitration and justice, recommending decisively authoritative but even-handed and conciliatory judgement. Both also draw on the particular metaphorical faculty of classical gods: they can compliment and aggrandise the monarch, but without hubris or Christian over-reaching. By deploying this powerful but transparently fictional metaphor, playwrights also open up a space between monarch and god which enables a critical as well as adulatory vision of sovereignty.

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