

Connotations

A Journal for Critical Debate



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Piers Plowman, Numerical Composition, and the Prophecies

ARTHUR VERSLUIS

I. Gematria and Alliteration in *Piers Plowman*

It is difficult to say just how much the science of sacred numbers permeated medieval literary-religious works, but there is evidence that the Greco-Hebrew understanding permeated not only into the universities, where it was taught in conjunction with scriptural exegesis, but into more “popular” literature as well. There are for instance several extant manuscripts containing the following lyric:

In 8 is alle my love
And 9 be isette before,
So 8 be inclosed above
Thane 3 is good therefore.¹

} IHC

[IHC: Greek abbreviation for Ihesous; H=8, I=9, and C=3]

This makes virtually no sense as poetry, but as gematria-composition it clearly indicates the penetration of Greco-Hebrew number-to-letter transposition into the Christian middle ages, for all of the numbers in the lyric directly transpose to letters, forming the Greek JHESUS—the name of Christ was spelled similarly in *Piers Plowman*. What is more, a variant version of the lyric [Balliol College, Oxford, ms. 354] spells out the name in full, the lyric being:

8 is my trew love;
do before 9;
put therto 5;
so well it wil beseme;
18 twyse told,
20 betwen.²

And if we do not grasp the riddle right off, the author includes the helpful gloss: "this goth by the letters of the abse as the letters stonde in nombre."³ At the very least, these lyrics indicate that gematria transposition in poetry existed in medieval Christian culture. That number-symbolism played a central role in poetic composition has been discussed in numerous studies, particularly of *Pearl*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Beowulf* and Wolfram's *Parzival*.⁴ But there have been no extensive studies of *Piers Plowman* in this respect, probably because Langland's alliterative encoding and his obscure prophecies are so esoteric that they are skipped by the undiscerning reader, and missed entirely by those who read modern translations, which cannot always carry into the present tongue either the constellations of letters that mark the gematria meanings, or the precise nature of the prophecies.⁵ What follows is but a preliminary investigation of the number and letter symbolism in the poem, and of the prophecies with which that symbolism is intertwined.

* * * * *

There are, as is well known, three major versions of *Piers Plowman* in extant manuscripts: the A version, the B version, and the C version, so named because they correspond to the reconstructed order of composition, the rather limited A recension containing only the prologue and twelve passus, just over 2500 lines, being unfinished; the B version containing the most elaborate symbolic images, as well as the prophecies, in twenty passus; and the C version having much of that obscurity removed, replaced by more prosaic or discursive text, in twenty-two passus.

It is something of a commonplace to say that the A version is the most preliminary of the three texts, containing all the aspects of the moral religious life necessary to salvation, but little beyond that, that the C text contains both a moral and a cosmological understanding with its attenuated prophecies and extended discursive text, and that the B text contains the most complex allusions, all the "riddling texts" and the prophecies, as well as the most complete references to the Apocalypse. All this then is generally understood; I should only continue the classification by noting that the A version corresponds

to the most exoteric, the C version to the more esoteric, and the B version to the most esoteric of religious truths, following the schemata of Frithjof Schuon.⁶ This understanding of *Piers Plowman* has two aspects: first, it underscores the religious nature of the poem—for as we shall see, the interwoven net of consonant clusters and prophecies underscores the poem's inseparability from its religious or cosmological meanings—and second, it explains the importance of focussing upon the B text which, as the most esoteric, contains all the essential elements of the others, as well as a cosmological understanding which is only latent within the A and C versions. The analysis which follows is thus based upon the B text, and upon its cosmological implications.⁷

Even the most casual of readers in *Piers Plowman* will note soon enough that the poem is riddled with consonant clusters, appearing in ways which were clearly orchestrated with the consonant clusters in mind, rather than with the sense of the given line. Consider the very first line of the poem: "In a somer seson, whan softe was the sonne." Now clearly "somer" is a "seson"; the word is included for its assonance, not for its sense. And this pattern reappears throughout the poem. The question is: are such patterns merely for alliterative rhythm, or do they have significance in the poem? While certainly there is some truth in both, I should like to argue that the alliteration in *Piers Plowman* is designed to carry esoteric implications for the poem as a whole.

Given the medieval poems to which we referred earlier—in which the lettering of the abse "goth" by numbers—as well as the penetration of gematria into the Christian West in the late middle ages,⁸ and the "tectonic" studies of other medieval works, one naturally wonders whether so prominent a feature of *Piers Plowman* might not have some esoteric significance. Indeed, the poem itself coyly hints at this in passus VII, where we find Piers being asked how he came to be "letted a litel—who lerned thee on boke?" (VII.132) Piers replies:

"Abstynence the Abbese," quod Piers, "myn a.b.c. me taughte,
And Conscience cam afterward and kened me muche more."
(VII.133-34)

This passage has several numerological aspects: it occurs in the seventh passus, which is a pivotal number in the Christian apocalypse

generally, and especially in this poem; it appears furthermore in the 133rd line, 10 and 100 being numbers of perfection, 33 being affiliated with Christ.⁹ Additionally, in the word "Abbesse" we have a pun on the medieval "abse," the term for the alphabet, and the 133rd line has in it three A's, followed in the next line by three C-sounds—"And Conscience cam afterward and kened me muche moore." Each of these is linked to the Trinity, the A's as the three Ones, the three C-sounds that "cam afterward," linked to the mystery of the number nine, with which Dante was so enthralled in his *Vita Nuova*,¹⁰ nine being the Trinity manifested in the "three worlds."¹¹ There are no alliterative B's because the essential mystery here is that of the Three in One, the Unicity of the Trinity.

Now line 136 has the "preest" advising Piers to be a "divinour in divinite, with *Dixit insipiens* to thi teme," to which Piers responds indignantly "Lewed lore!" "litel likestow on the Bible; / On Salamons saws selden thow biholdest—" (VII.137-38). At this point we have moved from the theme of triplicity, to that of fours and twelves: line 136 has three D's which, as the fourth letter, make twelve, leading naturally into the next line—Piers' reiterated L's, including "lewed lore!" Since L is the twelfth letter, we have here a natural transition between the "fallen" world, the world of Zodiacal symbolism, into which the twelve disciples were sent, and then, with the reiterated S's of "Salamons sawes selden thow biholdest," a suggested return to the realm of the sacred, of *spiritus sanctus*.

In this passage alone we can see how complex the meanings of alliteration can be: the symbolism of the letters is almost always possessed of several radiating meanings. The repeated D's for instance are superficially sacred: "divinour," divinite," and "*Dixit insipiens*" all refer to the Divine—but in the full context they imply also the falseness of the "preest's" advice, and an ironic reversal. With the L's here we also have a multivalent implication, the twelve mediating between the celestial and the fallen world—and the S's are linked with the Son, with the sacred, with *Spiritus Sanctus*, but also are linked with the serpentine waxing and waning patterns of the Moon, and with the Serpent.¹² The reference to Solomon, too, possesses a dual symbolism: Solomon is a sacred figure, but the line's implication is that the "preest" is far from truly knowing his "saws," that the

“preest” has something of the serpent about him. In brief: here the alliterative meaning underscores *Piers Plowman’s* indictment of the existing Church while simultaneously reinforcing, and drawing upon, the preexistent and sempiternal sacred, the standard by which one judges.

This kind of dual symbolism is everywhere present in the alliterative letter-number patterns, as when we find the letter F repeated in triple sets. F is of course the sixth letter, so we would naturally expect the patterns of FFF, or 666, to be affiliated with the Anti-Christ, and indeed throughout the poem we find that F is often affiliated with evil, falseness, fear, foolishness and folk. However, six itself is traditionally the *numerus perfectus*, because as St. Augustine and many others have observed, $1+2+3=6$ (“ . . . unum enim et duo et tria sex fiunt”).¹³ Moreover, as Bede points out, following St. Augustine, it was in six days that God created the world.¹⁴ In general, the number six implies cosmological completion or perfection, and in this lies the mystery of the triple F’s, or triple sixes as well—for evil is necessary in order that the apocalypse come about, and the final return to celestial order.

Just as the six days of creation are completed by the seventh day of rest, so too Christ was crucified on the sixth day,¹⁵ while the number seven is associated with Holy Spirit, as in the Christological heptad—*nativitas, baptismus, passio, resurrectio, in inferno descensio, ascensio, Spiritus sancti missio*.¹⁶ Admittedly, seven has at times an “inverted” significance: in Mark 16:9, one finds reference to Mary Magdalene, out of whom Christ had cast seven devils. As Meyer and Suntrup write, “Die Sieben ist Zahl der Gesamtheit (*universitas*) und—in malam partem—Zahl der Sünde (sieben Hauptünden).”¹⁷ Consequently the numbers six and seven—and the letters F and G—possess multivalent, often polarized implications.

Consider for instance the nexus of alliteration encircling line 66 in passus XX, beginning with the line “And a fals fend Antecrist over alle folke regnede.” The ensuing lines read:

And that were mylde men and holye, that no meschief dradden,
 Defyed alle falsenesse and folk that it usede;
 And what kyng that hem conforted, knowynge h[ir] gile,
 They cursed, and hir conseil—were it clerk or lewed.
 Antecrist hadde thus soone hundredes at his baner,
 And Pride bar it bare boldely aboute,

With a lord that lyveth afer likyng of body,
 That cam ayein Conscience, that kepere was and gyour
 Over kynde Cristene and Cardynale Vertues. (XX.65-73)

"Fals fend," "folk," "defyed," "falseness," all reiterate the 666 pattern—but there is yet more going on here. Line 65 contains a repetition of three M's—and M, as we will shortly see, is a letter possessed of a most peculiar symbolism. Suffice it here to say that the M's in this case signal the holy men who, in the midst of the Antecrist's reign, defy that rule. Line 69—"Antecrist hadde thus soone hundredes at his baner"—with its paired H's, the value of which together is 16, sets the stage for the following line, in which we read that Pride, beginning with the 16th letter, "bar it bare boldly about." B, the second letter, is almost always affiliated with duality, hence duplicity, and this is no doubt the implicit symbolism of these repeated B's, which are not necessary for sense.¹⁸ This symbolism is reinforced by the next line, referring as it does to the "lord that lyveth afer likyng of body," which with its repeated L's partakes again of the Zodiacal symbolism of twelve, and attachment to the physical realm.

It is not insignificant that this selection ends with the "Cristene and Cardynale vertues," the virtues being traditionally seven.¹⁹ The poem here focusses on the cosmological battle between the Anti-Christ and the "mylde men and holye," but this struggle is reflected in the life of every believer. Indeed, one of the poem's greatest strengths is the way it conjoins the individual moral effort and the cosmological. In this passage the letter C—the third letter—is repeated four times, in "conforted," "cursed," "conseil," and "clerk"; and again four times, in "cam," "Conscience," "Cristene," and "Cardynale." Here, then, we have $4+3=7$, which is precisely the number of the moral and theological virtues; and the second to the last line ends with "gyour," G being the seventh letter of the alphabet.

This brings us, naturally enough, to the symbolism of the G-alliteration in *Piers Plowman*, and particularly to that symbolism as it appears in the last lines of various passus. But first we should note the curious last line of the prologue: "Al this I seigh slepyng, and sevene sythes more." (Prol. 231) Most modern translations render this along the lines that "all this I saw asleep, and much more beside,"²⁰

which eliminates the S alliteration, as well as the number seven. Why would the poet say that he saw "sevene sythes more?" I will answer this question in detail in the section devoted to prophecies; for now it is sufficient to note the number seven is traditionally linked throughout Christianity with the seven days of the week, the seven days of creation, the seven planets, and consequently with the "completion" of the cosmos. G, the seventh letter, plays a predominant role in the ends of three passus: passus VI, passus XVIII, and passus XX. By examining the ways in which G is repeated in these lines, we find an entry point into the heart of that symbolism.

The first—and most significant—of these end-constellations is that concluding passus VI, not least significant because it concludes one of the most famous and most perplexing of the "riddle prophecies" in *Piers Plowman*, but additionally so because it falls at precisely the passage from the sixth to the seventh passus. What is more, we noted earlier the significance of passus VII.133, with its use of 33; it is therefore not surprising to find that the triple G alliteration concluding the prophecy of passus VI is found in line 330. It is useful to note that the prophecy is of "flodes" and "foule wedres," of "fruytes" that "shal faille," of "famyn" "Er fyve yer be fulfilled" (VI.323-24). The culminating lines are "And Dawe the Dykere deye for hunger— / But God of his goodnesse graunte us a trewe" (VI.329-30).

The constellation of F's, with their connection to 666, underscore the catastrophic here, the reign of the Anti-Christ which ends the sixth age, and marks entry into the seventh, the consummation so to speak of this world-cycle.²¹ One has the Saturnian reign, with the correlate "derthe" as justice, accompanying famine, foul weather and so forth—all followed by the triple G—God granting his "trewe," which is to say, God's grace bringing about the restoration which is the second coming of Christ.

This same pattern—of triple F's, or 666, followed by triple G's—appears in passus XVIII, but this time (as one would expect in the mediate reference) the triple G's are not an expectation of God's grace, but the prevention of the shades, of evil—to wit: "And it afereth the fend—for swich is the myghte, / May no grisly goost glide there it [the cros] shadweth!" (XVIII.433-34). This corresponds with the themes of the poem as a whole—for the reign of the Anti-Christ is

still to come, in passus XX, and hence the Christian can only trust in the protection of the holy Cross. Only with the conclusion of history, of the world-cycle is one freed from the sphere of evil, and then only if one is truly religious, and is granted the Grace of God.

Hence the final line of the poem—line 7277—is: “And siththe he gradde after Grace, til I gan awake” (XX.387). There are many awakenings and sleepings in the poem, but this is the final one, and thus is given exceptional power—indeed, it is the awakening into the unspoken, which is the Eternal. In other words, the pattern which we have noted throughout holds here as well—the poem figuratively moves from Alpha (“God of his goodness”), to an intermediate point, in which the trying takes place (“May no grisly goost glide there it shadweth”), to the Omega, in which there is a return to the Divine by means of Grace. This corresponds to the descent and ascension of Christ, who was above, descending to Earth and even into Hell, from thence rising to sit on the right hand of God the Father. The life of the believer corresponds to this movement, and so too do pivotal alliterative patterns in *Piers Plowman*.

This pattern is also reiterated in the form of the letter M, in which one sees in the center the descent of the Son, on either side the Father and the Holy Spirit; the letter M is in Christianity profoundly sacred, both as a sign of the Virgin Mary, and as denoting one thousand in Roman numerals, signalling therefore the Millennium.²² It is affiliated also with the Magna Mater, and with the Waters, Waters traditionally symbolising plenipotentiality, or in the language of René Guénon, the “compossibilities” of existence.²³ This may be seen in Christian terms in Genesis 1.2: “the Spirit of God moved upon the Face of the waters” prior to Creation, prior even to Light.

There is an extremely interesting, complex and subtle symbolism in the way the letter M appears in *Piers Plowman*, for it does not appear with the regularity of, say, the S's or the F's. But it does appear in absolutely pivotal places. If for instance, we take the traditional connotations of S as “spiritus Sanctus,” and M as connected with the Waters, then in examining the prologue, we find that the S's of the first line hover over the M's of the fifth line: “in a somer seson whan softe was the sonne,” hovers over “Ac on a May morwenynge on Malvern hilles,” this corresponding precisely to the way that the S's

of the Spiritus Deus in Genesis hover over the Mare below. But why the fifth line: why not the first and second? The riddle becomes clearer when we recognise the connection of the number five and the pentangle to the Virgin Mary, underscored for medieval numerologists and exegetes by the fact that Maria, and Virgo are both five letters.²⁴ And this connection was recognised by Dante pilgrim, also, who in his *Paradiso* sees DILIGITE JUSTICIAM QUI JUDICATIS TERRAM displayed in the heaven of Jupiter:

Then in the M of the fifth word arrayed.
 They halted, so that Jove was made to seem
 Silver with patterning of gold inlaid.
 And I saw other lights descending gleam
 On the M's top and come there to a stand,
 Hymning, I think, the Good that draweth them.
 (XVIII.93-100)

The M which is emphasized concludes the fifth word, and indeed becomes the central image of the Canto, so that the Eagles together form that M upon which appears a Lily, and from which the meaning of Justice is expounded.²⁵ The symbolism of M, then, like that of S and F (the latter for instance could be False or Faith), is simultaneously manifold: it stands at once for the Mercy of God, connoted here by the Lily, and for the Judgement day, for Compassion and for Rigour,²⁶ as also for Maria and for Millennium. These connections are woven throughout *Piers Plowman*, as when in passus IV, "Reson" is made to say "by the Rode! I shal no ruthe [mercy] have / While Mede have the maistre in this moot-hall" (IV.134-35). As the passus continues, the struggle is clearly between "Reson" and "Mekenesse" on the one hand, and Mede, on the other. Mede is the anti-type of Maria, the woman in scarlet and gold, the whore of Babylon and the symbol of earthly desires. This conflict is provisionally resolved when "the mooste peple in the halle and manye of the grete / And leten Mekenesse a maister and Mede a mansed [cursed] shrew" (IV.160).

Hence the Kyng "modiliche [wrathfully] upon Mede with myght" "loked," "And gan wexe wrothe with Lawe, for Mede almoost hadde shent [destroyed] it" (IV.173-74). Thematically, this connects precisely with the apocatastatic Restoration represented both in the Revelation of St. John and in the final passus of *Piers Plowman*; both consist in

the simultaneous manifestation of Divine Mercy and Divine Rigour, or "Mekenesse" and "Lawe," in the Last Judgement, Mercy being granted to the meek, the guilty being punished by Divine Justice. And these connections are brought home in the final lines of passus IV, when the King calls upon "seinte Marie my Lady," She being the exact antithesis of the excesses which Lady Mede represents, and which must be counterbalanced, so to speak, at the end of time. This "balance" between these two figures, both turning on the M, is to be found in line 179, when the King says: "Mede shal noght maynprise yow, by the Marie of hevене!" The line begins with the reference to Mede, counterbalanced by the Marie at its end, and between the two is the word "maynprise," meaning "stand surety for." Without stressing this too much, we might note that the form of the line corresponds to the figure of the M, recurring to the "descent of Christ" mentioned earlier—for it is Christ who "stands surety for" all mankind by virtue of his incarnation, and so between the two Ladies stands the word "maynprise," as Christ in Revelation descends into the midst of the seven candlesticks, which are the seven churches, to judge the quick and the dead.²⁷

Likewise, in passus XVIII, in the vision of the harrowing of Hell, one finds the R and the M correlated once again, when we see the words *resurreccio mortuorum*, and near it the following lines:

Ac my rightwisnesse and right shal rulen al helle,
And mercy al mankynde bifore me in hevене.
For I were an unkynde kyng but I my kyn helpe—
(XVIII.397-99)

The *resurreccio mortuorum* is in truth at the center of *Piers Plowman*: as Christ in the End of Time will call all men into judgement, showing his own "kyn" mercy, so too must each individual man call his own life into judgement through Conscience. The return to the Divine Order runs throughout the poem; it lies at the center of the attacks upon the false friars, and of the prophecies, as well as of the tale of Lady Mede and of the discussions of the Anti-Christ. The poem, in other words, simultaneously looks toward the Second Coming, and toward the reformation of the individual here and now.²⁸

And how, concludes Conscience in the last passus, is man to reform himself, to return to the Divine Order? After being attacked by a "mansed preest" of the "march of Irlonde," who counts Conscience no "moore" than "drinking a draughte of good ale!" and who attacks Conscience in a band of "sixty" from that country, shooting "many a sheef of othes, and brode hoked arwes—Goddess herte and hise nayles—" (XX. 221-26) (the numerical symbolism of sixes and four-and-twenty being directly from Revelation)²⁹—in other words, after the attack of Evil itself, reflecting the reign of the Anti-Christ at the end of time—Conscience gathers the "monkes and moniales and alle men of religion," to speak of the Divine Order of Number.

Says Conscience to the worthy Sires:

". . . yow shal no thyng lakke,
 With that ye leve logik and lerneth to loveye.
 For love lafte thei lordshipe, bothe lond and scole—
 Frere Fraunceys and Domynyk—for love to be holye.
 And if ye coveite cure, Kynde wol yow telle
 That in mesure God made alle manere thynges,
 And set it at a certein and at a siker nombre,
 And nempnede hem names newe and noumbrede the sterres:
Qui numerat multitudinem stellarum et omnibus eis &c.

. . .
 Monkes and moniales and alle men of religion—
 Hir ordre and hir reule wole to han a certein noumbre;
 Of lewed and of lered the lawe wole and asketh
 A certein for a certein—save oonliche of freres!

. . .
 Hevene hath evene noumbre, and helle is without noumbre;
 Forthi I would witterly that ye were in the registre
 And youre noumbre under notarie synge, and neither mo ne lasse!"
 (XX.249-56; 264-67; 270-72)

"Hevene hath even noumbre, and helle is withoute noumbre"—here we find the medieval Christian understanding of the cosmos conjoined by number as sign of God's love, a cosmological understanding that is carried to the middle ages by Boethius, and can be traced back into the Pythagorean sources. Hence in Book 2 of the *Consolation of Philosophy* we read that

Love binds together people joined by a sacred bond; love binds sacred marriages by chaste affections; love makes the laws which join true friends.

O how happy the human race would be, if that love which rules the heavens ruled also your souls.³⁰

This is indeed the object of traditional number theory: the return to the world of harmony, the world governed, like heaven itself, by "noubre." It is here that we find the connection between Greek and medieval Christian cosmology. Much had fallen away, with the passage of time, but the essence of Pythagorean number-theory still persisted in *Piers Plowman*, with its recognition that numbers have a moral quality, that order is divine, disorder infernal.³¹ That there is a direct connection here with the Greek cosmology is clear from the following lines of the poem:

Envye herde this and heet freres go to scole
 And lerne logyk and lawe—and ek contemplacion—
 And preche men of Plato, and preve it by Seneca
 That alle thynges under hevene oughte to ben in comune.
 (XX.273-76)

This is a complex passage, as the next line attests:

He lyeth, as I leve, that to the lewed so precheth;
 For God made to men a lawe and Moyses it taughte—
Non concupisces rem proximi tui. (XX.277-79)

Are we to take this as a complete condemnation of the doctrine of "nombres" just preceding? Is this a rejection of Platonic and Pythagorean understanding in favor of the Judaeo-Christian? I do not think such an interpretation is necessary; the line reads, after all, that he lyeth who "to the lewed so precheth." In other words, there is here a division between the "exoteric" and the "esoteric," between the understanding of those schooled in "contemplacion," and the understanding of the "lewed," or uninitiate in the cosmological mysteries of number meaning. Those who are not initiates use the truth to their own ends, bringing about the disorder of the end-times; but the doctrines themselves remain true, endorsed by Augustine, Boethius, and other authorities. Evil arises not from the number-doctrines in themselves, those being endorsed by Conscience, but from their falsification by Envye, correlate to which is the

falsification of the high doctrine that men ought to have all things in common (XX.276) by those who would "maken hym murie with oother menne goodes" (XX.289).

Here we have a kind of mirror-reversal: in the Golden Age men have all things in common, and there is no envy, whereas now, under the guise of that earlier high doctrine, one sees the triumph of envy under the very mantle of those who pay lip service to the holy truth. The holy truth of "nombres" is contradistinguished, then, from its infernal inversion by the "freres" and "fals folk," who take from people by perverting its truths. In the Golden Age, it is true, men have all things in common, but this is no longer the Golden Age, and those who take under the guise of religion signify the precise antithesis of the Golden Age, the end of history rather than its beginning.

This connection between numbers and history is implicit in the works of Augustine, some of which read like a veritable Platonic text, as when in *De libero arbitrio* we find:

If you look at something mutable, you cannot grasp it either with the bodily sense or the consideration of the mind, unless it possesses some numerical form. If this form is removed, the mutable dissolves into nothing; do not, then, doubt that there is some eternal and immutable Form which prevents mutable objects from being destroyed and allows them to complete their temporal course, as it were, by measured movements in a distinct variety of forms.³²

As Langland put it: "Hevene hath even nombre, and hell hath no nombre." In Christian eschatology these two correspond to the paradisaical state at the inception of the world-cycle,³³ and to the numberless infernal state which marks the end of the world-cycle—as is written in Revelation 20:8:

And [Satan] shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

This eschatological connection between numbers and history lies at the center of *Piers Plowman*, and so at the center of the prophecies which it contains. As we have seen, the symbolism of the numbers and letters is multivalent. Yet virtually all of the alliterative gematria

in the poem reinforces the poem's fundamental theme: that each of us takes our place in the moral and cosmological struggle between virtue and vice, between good and evil. The poem exhorts us to wake up, and central to that awakening are the cosmological meanings hidden in gematria, alliteration, and the prophecies. But to see how this is so we must turn to the prophecies themselves.

II. The Prophecies of *Piers Plowman*

There are in *Piers Plowman* three major prophecies, and each of these has borne little scholarly scrutiny; even a work which had as its thesis that Langland was very much influenced by the Joachimite apocalypticism prevalent in the fourteenth century, offered only a footnote on the prophecies.³⁴ And at least one dissertation has been devoted to the opinion that Langland employed the prophecies as a mere satirical device, an assertion for which there is virtually no textual support.³⁵ It is my own argument, in any case, that the prophecies are crucial to understanding the poem as a whole, and that the prophecies reflect a cosmological gnosis analogous to that of Dante, one permeated by Christian number symbolism.

The first of the prophecies appears in the third passus—though there are of course enigmatic passages before that³⁶—after the appearance of Lady Mede and her welcome into the court of the King, and after Conscience reminds the King that "there are two manere of medes, my lord, by youre leve," (III.231) the first of these being "That oon God of his grace graunteth in his blisse," the other being the "mede mesurelees, that maistres desireth," that which "to mayntene mysdoers mede thei take" (III.246-47). In brief: the prophecy is preceded by a reminder of the infinite Mercy of God in his blisse, and also of the incalculable Wrath of God, both being affiliated with the triple M, the Wrath being linked also with the "mesurelees," the numberless chaos which marks Hell itself, and the reign of quantity which is the demonic. The double symbolism of the M, sign both of Maria and of Mede, signifies also the two poles of history, the first being She of Divine purity, hence of the Golden Age in Greek terms,

the second being the "Whore of Babylon,"³⁷ signifying the end of the Iron Age, to use the Greek term, and pointing toward the Apocalypse in Christian terms.

The two poles of the Divine—Mercy and Rigour—correspond to the beginning and to the end of historical cycles in terms of phenomenal manifestation. Rigour, or the Wrath of God, is associated in the Judaeo-Christian tradition with the Prophets: traditionally, the Prophet recalls God's straying flock back into the fold, in order that destruction not be visited upon them by virtue of their own error. In many respects, of course, this is precisely the function of *Piers Plowman* itself: the poem is a Christian call to return to the essential saving truth of Christianity, and an attack on the falsification of the Church by the unscrupulous. Hence it is not surprising that the first of the three major prophecies is prefaced by the Old Testament story of the "vengeance" that "fel on Saul and on his children" (III.260). Indeed, this tale is so profoundly one of God's Wrath that it repels the modern mind: it is that of "Agag of Amalec," who with "al his peple after,/ sholden deye for a dede that doon hadde hire elders" (III.263-64). Says Samuel, the prophet of God:

God hymself hoteth thee,
To be buxom at his biddynge, his wil to fulfille.
Weend to Amalec with thyn oost, and what thou fyndest there—sle it:
Burnes and beestes—bren hem to dethe!
Widwes and wyves, wommen and children,
Moebles and unmoebles and al thou myght fynde—
Bren it, bere it noght away, be it never so riche;
For mede ne for monee, loke thou destruye it! (III.264-71)

Conscience goes on to say that all this Saul did—but he left behind cattle for his people to use in sacrifice, and for this "God hated hym for evere and alle his heires after" (III.279). And then in a coy passage Conscience observes that the messenger is often slain, blamed for ill news, so "the *culorum* of this cas kepe I noght to shewe." This is of course quite ironic, for the conclusion of this passus is nothing less than a bringing home of that Biblical prophecy to the contemporary religious and historical scene. That is: mankind is reminded that "er this fortune falle, fynde men shul the worste," (III.325) the triple F's

here reminding us that we are still in the sixth age (666) and that before the Millennium must there be much tribulation.

But in this first prophecy, the focus is essentially upon the Millennium; there is but this one line relating to God's Wrath, and even this is prefaced by an extended prophecy of that time when "Kynges court and commune court, consistorie and chapitle— / Al shal be but oon court, and oon b[ur]n be justice." No man shall "bere wepene," and "what smyth that any smytheth be smyte therwith to dethe!" (III.320-24). The Biblical verses quoted here attest to this vision being of the Golden Age: Isaiah 2:4 ("Nation shall not lift up sword against nation" and "they shall turn their swords into ploughshares") is traditionally so interpreted.³⁸

It is of course true that the Judaeo-Christian eschatology, particularly as seen in the Revelation of St. John, does not at first seem as though it allows for a cyclical view of history, as existed in the Greek understanding. But as William Anderson writes, whereas certain of the Church Fathers held to a linear view of history passing from creation to Second Coming, split by the Incarnation so to speak, Dante "restored and reunited with their view the cyclical ideas of the classical writers, through the image of *Astraea redux* and the promise of the renewal of the world through the return of the Golden Age."³⁹ Though William Langland almost certainly was not as learned as Dante, he shared with him a more cyclical view of history, one drawing upon the Biblical prophecies of Isaiah and the Millennium of St. John's Revelation. The turning point of this next age, the passage from the sixth to the seventh age, is to be marked "by six sonnes, and a ship, and half a shef of arwes" (III.326), this line directly following that of the triple F's quoted above, and being itself followed by the prophecy of the "turne" of the Jews.

There has been some speculation regarding these lines, especially in the notes to the various editions; Schmidt for instance, along with Bennet, Skeat and Bradley, has observed that this passage is parallel to Habakkuk 3:11, in which the prophet, speaking of God's Wrath against the wicked and of the "trampling of the nations," says "The sun and moon stood still in their habitation, at the light of thine arrows as they sped, at the flash of thy glittering spear." It is difficult to say whether there is a direct correlation between the two passages,

especially given that Langland included no interspersed quotation from Habakkuk, but certainly the perspective both in this prophecy and in that of the Old Testament are closely related.

It would I think be more appropriate to look in the Revelation of St. John for the implications of the prophecies, particularly of this one. In Revelation we find numerous suggestions that the present age is the sixth, and that the seventh is the culmination of the present cycle, as in 17:10: "And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space." Then too there are the seven angels of the seven wraths of God, with their seven vials (15:1 ff.); and the beast with seven heads; and the utterances of the seven thunders (13:1 ff.), in particular the lines: "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets" (10:10).

It is not necessary to connect the "six sonnes" here with the "six ages" of Joachim of Fiore, for both have as their source the understanding (widespread in medieval Christianity, as Schmidt notes) that we are now in the sixth age, and the seventh marks the conclusion of this world-cycle, drawn from Revelation. But it is of interest that Joachim made very much of this shift, both in his complex *Liber figurarum*, and in his *Expositio in Apocalypsim*, though it is not clear whether Joachim's works were familiar to Langland, as they were to St. Thomas Aquinas and Dante.⁴⁰ In any case Joachim has always been on the boundary of orthodoxy, whereas the same framework is also taken up by the very orthodox Austin friar Agostino Trionfo, who in his commentary upon the Apocalypse speaks after Joachim of the seven *tempora* of the Church, going on to say "*In sexta de antichristo et membris eius. In septima de dampnacione impiorum et remuneracione iustorum.*"⁴¹ Given the wide dispersion of this understanding, as well as of the Joachimite and other works dealing with cosmology and temporal cycles during this time, as well as their common basis in Revelation, it is not unreasonable to think the six sonnes of Langland's prophecy refer to the passage from the sixth age to the *remuneracione iustorum*, and to the *dampnacione impiorum*.⁴²

This interpretation is underscored by the next image—that of the ship, which Schmidt, following Bradley, associates with the Church,

drawing upon the etymological connection between *nave* and *navis*.⁴³ Connected with this is the image of the Ark of Noah which continued through the Flood and its destruction; that is, the true Church will pass through the tribulation of the "end of the age," and its members are the "saved" who "seed" the Golden Age.⁴⁴ The ark, the ship and the grail all represent the transmission of the Holy Truth over the Waters of manifestation.⁴⁵

There are traditionally twenty-four arrows in a sheaf, so that half a sheaf means twelve, the number of signs necessary for the Zodiacal Great Year to take place, and hence for a single time-cycle. The six *sonnes*, then, refer to the time of tribulation, the ship to the passage through it, and the twelve arrows to the wholeness which is the aim of that passage, twelve being the predominant number of the City of New Jerusalem in the Revelation of St. John, a number conjunct with the twelve apostles and with the twelve gates of the city. The prophecy as a whole then refers to the Apocalypse, as is supported both within the lines themselves, and by interconnections within the poem as a whole.

The prophecy is prefaced, for instance, by line 318, which asserts that "after the dede that is doon oon doom shal rewarde," this allusion to the Last Judgement itself being prefaced by the references to the Millennium. Then too, the only other reference in the poem to "arwes" is in *passus* XX.226, in conjunction with the Anti-Christ. The dual symbolism of the M's—on the one pole *Mede*, on the other *Maria*—is again here evident: one has the "myddel of the moone [that] shal make the Jewes torne," and additionally "For Makometh [Muhammed] and Mede myshappe shul that tyme; / For *Melius est bonum nomen quam divicie multe*" (III.326-30).

However, the positive significance of the M's is underscored by five M's in the three-hundred thirtieth line, where we find reference to the "*bonum nomen*," which in the context must be Christ. Surely it is not coincidence that this reference appears in the third *passus*, three hundred thirtieth line, the first number connected with the Trinity, the second with the life of Christ. All the same, we are left with questions as to the "myddel of the moone"—to what does this mysterious phrase refer? Bloomfield, in his notes, recalls that in antiquity the moon was linked with judgement; and though we cannot

be certain how learned Langland was, it is interesting at least to recall that Plutarch, himself privy to at least some of the Egyptian Mysteries, said that the moon was the sphere of judgement for the soul, and to note that the medieval scholastic tradition linked the *lex luna* with the reign of the Anti-Christ.⁴⁶ Above all, however, the moon symbolizes cyclical change—precisely what the conversion of the Jews entails.

This symbolism of the moon is reflected in that last line of Conscience in this passus: "The soule that the soude taketh by so muche is bounde" (III.353). That is: to the degree that one accepts payment from Mede, to that degree is one bound, and must pay "to the last penny," "a ful teneful text to him that taketh mede" (III.349). Hence it is Conscience reminds Mede, in the concluding section of this passus, that she is quoting only half a text, for she had not "the leef . . . torned" (III.347). Had she done so, she would have seen the text in full, the turning of the text (and of the moon) here paralleling the "torne" of the Jewes at the end of time: that is, just as Mede, and after her the reign of the Anti-Christ, represent a view of this world without reference to the next, so too her quoting of scripture speaks only half the truth. And when the leaf is turned—the leaf of history as well—we shall find, whatever the apparent triumph of evil, that "Truthe that text made" (III.343). Thus are we exhorted *Quod bonum est tenete*: hold fast to truth. For Judgement day is none other than rectification, the return to Divine Order.

This is also the theme of the second prophecy, that to be found at the end of passus VI, lines 320 ff. This prophecy is exactly ten lines long, and ends at line 330—the number of Christ multiplied by ten—with an alliteration of triple G's, which is to say, 777: "But if God of his goodnesse graunte us a trewe." The prophecy begins with three W's and four H's—"Ac I warne yow werkmen—wynneth whil ye mowe / For Hunger hiderward hasteth hym faste!" H is the eighth letter, W the twenty-third, eight being traditionally affiliated with the sphere of the moon beyond the other seven spheres; twenty-three being one beyond twenty-two, a profoundly sacred number in Qabalism, a meaning taken over into Christianity by St. Augustine and others.⁴⁷ Both of these, then, correspond to excess, which thematically corresponds with the poem at this point: "wastours" shall be chastened by "Hunger," who "shal awake [thorough] water" (VI.322), the waters

being traditionally associated with the sublunary realm and with ignorance, a privation of Knowledge just as Hunger is symbolically a privation of spiritual nourishment in the "final days."

The prophecy has been interpreted here as suggesting that the "flodes" and "famyn" shall take place within five years; but the diction implies rather that after Hunger "shal awake," then ere "fyve yer be fulfilled swich famyn shal aryse: / Thorugh flodes and thorough foule wedres, fruytes shal faille—" (VI.322-24). We note here, not incidentally, that we have again the constellation of F's which in the poem tend to denote the Anti-Christ, F being connected with 666 by gematria.

But let us turn to the prophecy itself:

And so seith Saturne, and sent yow to warne:
 Whan ye se the [son]ne amys, and two monkes heddes,
 And a mayde have the maistrie, and multiplie by eghte,
 Thanne shal deeth withdrawe and derthe be justice.
 And Dawe the Dykere deye for hunger—
 But if God of his goodnesse graunte us a trewe. (VI.325-30)

Five years after Hunger shal awake, then come the signs—famine and flode—sent by Saturn, Saturn being traditionally affiliated with the Golden Age, and with the shift from the Iron Age to the Golden Age. Like virtually all traditional symbolism, Saturn's is possessed of a dual aspect: just as in the Golden Age he is the most beneficent of planets, likewise in the later Iron Age he is the most malefic. And there is here a very striking parallel with Vergil's Fourth Eclogue, which though termed the "messianic" eclogue, and taken by Christian exegetes to be a reference to Christ, focusses on the shift from the Iron age to the new and Golden Age.

Vergil's prophecy begins:

Now is come the last age of the Cumaean prophecy: the great cycle of periods is born anew. Now returns the Maid, returns the reign of Saturn: now from high heaven a new generation appears. Yet do thou at that boy's birth, in whom the iron race shall begin to cease, and the golden to arise over all the world, holy Lucina, be gracious; now thine own Apollo reigns.⁴⁸

It is not necessary I think to make a conclusive link between Vergil and Langland; rather, one need only note that the two passages are

governed by the same two figures—Saturn and the Maid—and that whereas Vergil's prophecy explicitly points to the birth of a boy-Apollo figure, Langland's only allusion to Christ is in the line numbers, the prophecy ending at VI.330.⁴⁹ Regardless of whether Langland was drawing upon the symbolism of antiquity directly or indirectly, it has here parallel functions, pointing toward the shift from one age to another.

It has been suggested that the "mayde [who has] the maistrie," and the mysterious "and multiplie by eighte," refers to some alchemical symbolism—but alchemical symbolism is not directly appropriate here.⁵⁰ Rather we should look first to the most obvious clues, and to those things which we already have discussed. In other words: the line in question contains a repetition of three M's, the symbolism of which we focussed on earlier, noting the way in which the M's within the poem alternated between "Maria" as salvific power, and "Mede" as destructive power. Given the tenor of this prophecy, however, the latter implications weigh more heavily here, and this is amply supported by the connections one can make with medieval prophetic cosmology, and with the traditional numbering of the planets, as well as with the Revelation of St. John.

We noted earlier the prophetic cosmology most generally associated with Joachim of Fiore—particularly that which focusses upon the seven "etates" of the world, and the shift into the "eighth"—as well as the manifold links between *Piers Plowman* and the Revelation of St. John. The "mayde" who has "maistrie" could be taken as referring to the Virgin Mary, in which case the "multiplie by eighte" would refer to the eighth "etas" which follows the final battle against the Anti-Christ, and the Second Coming. It is for this reason in fact that Joachim's *Expositio in Apocalypsım* is divided into eight parts, the eighth *etas* being the *fructificatio* of the third *status*, and the *clarificatio* of the seventh *etas*, being "an era of contemplation, rest and peace, and as such it belongs to the Holy Spirit."⁵¹ But Joachimite cosmology is not essential for this symbolism to be understood: as Hugh of St. Victor noted, the number eight is an instance of *secundum modum porrectionis*, eight beyond seven signalling eternity beyond the mutable realm.⁵² And this is, given the Creation account in Genesis, a quite natural symbolism.

Yet there is another aspect to the symbolism of eight and of the mayde, to which we alluded earlier: that is, the number eight is also traditionally affiliated with the eighth sphere, that of the moon, and consequently with the *lex lunae*, the reign of the Anti-Christ. Plato writes in the *Republic*, when discussing the "spindle" of necessity, with its various spheres: "Now the whole spindle has the same motion; but, as the one revolves in one direction, the seven inner circles move slowly in the other, and of these the swiftest is the eighth."⁵³ The eighth, that of the moon, is pierced by the spindle in its center, and significantly, it is said, the souls who are in the meadow, or intermediate realm, tarry there for "seven days," and on the eighth "are obliged to proceed on their journey."⁵⁴ This links the sublunary realm with mortality, a corroboration of Cicero's observation in the *Dream of Scipio*, transmitted to medieval Europe through Macrobius' *Commentary*, that "Below the moon nothing is divine, with the exception of the souls bestowed upon the human race by the benevolence of the Gods."⁵⁵

Plato, in the *Republic*, observes that the moon is the "fastest" of the spheres, and this too corroborates the connection between the moon and the end of a time-cycle: this connection has been examined in Rene Guenon's pivotal study, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*.⁵⁶ As Frithjof Schuon has pointed out, time traditionally is seen to resemble an hourglass, the grains of which fall all the faster, the nearer the glass is to empty.⁵⁷ Additionally, just as the moon is but a reflection of the sun, so too the Church during the "final days" is but an inverted reflection of the true Church, just as the Anti-Christ is an inverted reflection of Christ.

Given these implications, we can see why it is that some versions of the poem read "Whan ye se the [mon]ne amys, and two monkes heddes," and others read "Whan ye se the [son]ne amys, and two monkes heddes." The first version resonates with the other M's in the line; the second provides a balance: two S's and two M's. In either case, the line implies not a lunar or solar eclipse, as one commentator has suggested but a disjunction in which the "normal" order of the sun and moon is reversed, so that the moon rules; given this cosmological interpretation, either the sun or the moon being amys would be an accurate assessment. The "moon ruling" here refers to

the *lex lunae* mentioned earlier, drawn from Roger Bacon's attribution of the Anti-Christ's rule to the sphere of the moon.

As to the "two monkes heddes," there are several ways one could interpret this, but all devolve from the traditional negative implications of the duality: two is the primordial split, the division signifying the Fall, affiliated with the Knowledge of Good and of Evil. Interestingly, Joachim of Fiore was long credited with predicting "two orders" of monks, later taken by literalist commentators to mean the Franciscans and the Dominicans; but partisan claims aside, Joachim's non-literal work was as usual being bent to literal uses. Originally, his "two orders" were the active and the contemplative; and he had in mind particularly the Revelation of St. John, 11:3-8: "And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and three score days." Moreover, "these have the power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy . . . and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will." Given the tenor of the prophecy in *Piers Plowman*, it is again logical to gloss the poem with the Revelation of St. John, regardless of whether Joachim's prophecy lies behind Langland's work.⁵⁸

The last three lines of the prophecy also require a gloss, that being Revelation 6:8: "And I looked, and behold a pale horse and his name that sat on him was Death And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth." For "thanne shal deeth withdrawe, and derthe be justice." As to the next line: "And Dawe the Dykere deye for hunger—," this corresponds to a passage in the Prologue to *Piers Plowman*, to wit:

Ac I biheeld into the eest an heigh to the sonne,
 I seigh a tour on a toft trieliche ymaked,
 A deep dale bynethe, a dongeon therinne,
 With depe diches and derke and dredfulle of sighte.
 A fair feld ful of folk fond I ther bitwene. (Prologue 13-17)

In this passage we see an analogical cosmology not unlike that of Dante in the *Commedia*: one sees the Divine Sun, the "tour" on a "toft," and below that the "deep dale" with "depe diches and derke and dredfulle of sighte." Significantly, the vision is to the East, symbolic

of Christ's resurrection; one sees here hell, then the "fair feld ful of folk" which is this world, and beyond that the hill and tower which rise toward the Divine Sun. In it we can see at once the progression of history, of a given time-cycle from the "tour" nigh onto the sun, to the "fair feld ful of folk," to the "depe diches of hell;" but as the axial symbolism of the tower might indicate, the power of Christ penetrates through the "derke" of hell itself, this is underscored also in the harrowing of hell appearing in passus XVIII.

In fact, throughout Langland's depiction of the harrowing of hell, one finds exactly the same alliterative patterns: "What for feere of this ferly and of the false Jewes, / I drow me in that derknesse to *descendit ad inferna*" (XVIII.110-11). Or again, when the "maydenes" Mercy and Truthe come out of the East and look Westward, they ask one another "Of the dyn and of the derknesse and how the day rowed" (XVIII.123). And says Christ to Satan: "Thou art doctour of deeth, drynk that thow madest!" (XVIII.365). Finally:

And I am that kyng of kynges shal came swich a tyme
 There doom to the deeth dampneth alle wikked;
 And if lawe wole I loke on hem, it lith in my grace
 Wheither they deye or deye noht for that thei diden ille.
 (XVIII.385-88)

All of these lines refer to the darkness of the Inferno, and insofar as the tribulations at the end of time are the uprising of that sphere into the earthly, culminating in "doomsday" and the Last Judgement, the alliterative D's may be seen to refer at once to damnation or hell, and to the judgement upon which men will either "deye or deye noht for that thei diden ille."⁵⁹ "Dawe the Dykere" dying for Hunger invokes the Hunger with which the prophecy began, but here the famine is not only physical. Given the affiliations with the letter D, and with the "depe diches" which in the prologue and in passus XVIII are affiliated with Hell, we may conclude that "Dawe the Dykere" is mankind caught in the darkness that is distance from God. Thus the final line—line 330, symbolic of Christ—comes as a ray of light, with its reiterated GGG, or 777 signifying the close of the age, the fulfilment of the seven in which Christ appears again, and "God of his goodnesse graunte us a trewe."

This return to Divine Order sets the prophecies of Langland apart from some earlier prophecies, like the ones in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, specifically in the *Prophetiae Merlini*. The images found in the *Prophetiae Merlini* are very much parallel to those in the first prophecy of Langland: there we see in fact precisely those spheres disordered which are disordered in Langland's prophecy. According to Merlin:

The Virgin shall forget her maiden shame, and climb up on the back of the Sagittary. The chariot of the Moon shall disturb the Zodiac, and the Pleiades shall burst into tears and lamentation. None hereafter shall return to his wonted duty, but Ariadne shall lie hidden within the closed gateways of her sea-beaten headland With a baleful blast shall the winds do battle together, and the sound thereof shall be heard amongst the stars.⁶⁰

We can see here the same symbols as appear in Langland's prophecies: there is the Virgo, connected with the Sagittary (Zodiacal sign of the Archer), hence linked with the "arwes"; there is the displacement of the moon which appears in the second prophecy as well, that implying the *lex lunae*, and separation from the Divine Sun; and finally there is the flood, the overflowing Waters with which the "tears" of the Pleiades are traditionally affiliated. But there is a pivotal difference: whereas the *Prophetiae Merlini* refer only to the conclusion of the present age, to the disorder at the end of the present time-cycle, Langland's prophecies, like Vergil's before him, refer to the appearance of a new cycle as well. Indeed, their *raison d'être*, we might say, is to point toward the Divine Restoration that is the Second Coming of Christ, and the return to Divine Order. The Merlinic prophecies are, in brief, a more limited and one might even say secular work, whereas those of Langland, being so interrelated with the Christian revelation, are of a wider, more profound scope.

And this point brings us in fact to the last of the prophecies, the third prophecy which appears in passus XIII.153 ff. This line number—153—is the number of fishes which the disciples caught in John 21:11, and is very much connected with the Greek symbolism of the fishes and the net.⁶¹ The number 153 is also mentioned by St. Augustine as the sum of the numbers from one to seventeen, the number seventeen signifying the decalogue, and the seven gifts of

the Holy Spirit which enables man to realise the decalogue, hence becoming a saint. Accordingly, St. Augustine mentions 153 as the number of saints who will be resurrected at the end of time.⁶²

It is for this last association especially that it is appropriate the prophecy begin on line 153—for the prophecy refers precisely to the beginning and end of the time-cycle, and to the transcendence of that cycle represented by sainthood. The prophecy is prefaced by the following two lines: "With half a laumpe lyne in Latyn, *Ex vi transicionis*, I bere ther, in a bou[s]te, faste ybounde Dowel" (XIII.151-52). This very passage is examined with especial care by R. E. Kaske, and it is in his essay on it that we find the following suggestion. Kaske observes that the "bou[s]te" or "box" is in thirteenth century allegory "patience," which is said to "guard the soul." In the thirteenth century *Dictionarius pauperum* compiled by Nicolas de Byard, we find the admonition that

just as robbers easily have the treasure after they have broken the chest, so the devil has the soul after he has confused a man and stolen his patience, because "the heart of a fool is like a broken vessel, no wisdom at all shall it hold."⁶³

Patience, it is said, is the guard of the other six virtues, enclosing them like a box or an ark, and this idea of an ark, of passage is underscored by the phrase *ex vi transicionis*, (out of the power of transitivity). There is no need to reiterate here what has been said elsewhere; for a discussion of the grammatical allusions in these two lines, and in the prophecy as a whole, the reader is referred to the studies of Kaske, Skeat, Bradley and Goodridge, as well as to the notes provided in the Schmidt edition of the poem.⁶⁴ I should like to emphasize here the connection with the first prophecy, which spoke of the ship. This image is enhanced by the reference to "half a laumpe lyne in Latyn," the "laumpe" being an image of that which is sustained through the darkness, the "half" reminding one of the "half a shef of arwes" which followed the image of the ship in the earlier prophecy.

R. E. Kaske has pointed to the connotations of the "sign of the Saterdag" and of Wednesday in medieval Christian tradition, the implication being Charity in the first instance, Patience in the second.⁶⁵

It is worthwhile to note here, though, that immediately following this third prophecy is the line "It is but a dido," quod this doctour, "a disours tale!" (XIII.172), a reference to the tale of Dido told by Virgil, alluded to also by Dante. This allusion to Greek tradition corresponds with aspects of the prophecy itself, for in Greek tradition it is as we have seen Saturn who is affiliated with the Golden age, that age which began the time-cycle, "sette first the kalender." And the Greek tradition has four ages; transposed into the form of a week, the fourth day is Wednesday, a day affiliated with Mercury as Saturday is connected with Saturn. This connection is supported by the phrasing: "al the wit of the Wodnesday of the next wike after," for Mercury is the God affiliated precisely with wit, with the written text, with writing and hence grammatical puns like "ex vi transicionis." This connection with Mercury is in accord with the references to Dowel also ["I bere ther, in a bou[s]te, fast ybound Dowel" (XIII.152)], for Dowel is the figure of those who "do as clerkes teacheth," (XIII.115) clerks teaching in accord with the orthodox written tradition.

Hence within the prophecy we have at once the Christian terminology conjunct with allusions to Greek tradition; but additionally, we can see in this final prophecy the "solution" as it were to surviving the tribulations at the "end of time," for those very tribulations mentioned in the other prophecies are here said to be overcome by those who have it with them. Writes the poet:

Ne neither hete, ne hayle, ne noon helle pouke,
 Ne neither fuyr, ne flood, ne feere of thyn enemy
 Tene thee any tyme, and thow take it with the:
Caritas nichil timet. (XIII.161-63)

Again we have the theme of "*ex vi transicionis*": by means of this ark which is the *pacientes*, one overcomes all the destructive powers which may reign over the earth, physical and demonic and human alike, for

. . . that pure reson ne shal make thee
 Maister of alle tho men thorough myght of this redel—
 Nought thorough wicchecraft, but thorough wit, and thow wilt thiselve
 Do kyng and quene and alle the comune after

Yve thee al that thei may yyve, as thee for best yemere,
 And as thow demest wil thei do alle her dayes after:
Pacientes vincunt. (XIII.166-71)

It is not witchcraft which bestows transcendence of the tribulations, but wit and "Pacience," wit being the true understanding of these "redels," Patience being the "support" or "container" of the other six virtues. With these two—true understanding, and the saintliness which is realisation of the seven virtues, all bound up in that single Virtue, Patience—one transcends the woes which characterise human life generally, the end of time especially, and for such a one the Golden Age is already present, the Millennium already here.

Thus we read:

If Pacience be oure partyng felawe and pryve with us bothe,
 Ther nys wo in this world that we ne sholde amende,
 And conformen kynges to pees, and alle kynnes londes—
 Sarsens and Surre and so forth alle the Jewes—
 Turne into the trewe feith and intil oon bileve. (XIII.206-10)

These are the words with which the first prophecy characterised the Millennium; it is with this expectation of the time when swords are beaten into ploughshares and all "londes" and "kynges" are at "pees," that the first prophecy was prefaced, and with it that this last prophecy ends. These words are addressed to every man, and for each individual who has "gan awake," as the last line in the poem has it, this time of the Millennium is already come. As this last prophecy-riddle has it, one who truly realises the nature of the "bou[s]te" cannot be harmed by earthly calamities, by fiends from hell, or by any earthly ruler, for such a one has realised the "seventh virtue," Patience, which "contains" the others, and has virtually entered that community of saints (153, said St. Augustine) who shall be resurrected at the end of time.⁶⁶

It is appropriate, then, that this last prophecy is only peripherally a prophecy—by virtue of the lines 206-10 which follow it—being in truth essentially a riddle, to be solved by each for himself, just as each individual can only be saved by turning toward the salvific truth of religion, and actualising that truth in his life. Thus it is that the three

riddles—which together form a unitary prophecy of the Apocalypse, of the Millennium, and of the essential nature of salvation by which the saved *are* saved—are spoken by Conscience, by the author, and by Patience who also has the last word within the entire poem, saying that “By Crist!” he “wole bicome a pilgrym, / And walken as wide as the world lasteth.” So “send me hap and heele, til I have Piers the Plowman! / And siththe he gradde after Grace, til I gan awake” (XX.386-87).

Each individual must gradde, or cry after Grace, stirred by conscience, and only with this turning can the realisation of redemption, of salvation come about. I am not arguing here that the prophecy-riddles, with their intricate connections to Greek and Christian tradition, are essential to the understanding of all aspects of the poem; clearly they are not, since the C version includes only the first of the prophecies, the A version none. Rather, they represent the essential message of the poem: a call for each individual to turn toward the “oon” religion which is not to be found by assuming the appearance of religion, like the false fryeres, but by listening to the warnings of Conscience, by penetrating with the wit into the truth of things, and by patiently realising the seven virtues which mark one’s salvation, these together being the virtual manifestation of the Millennium which is actualised when the present time-cycle reaches its end.

The prophecies are, in other words, esoteric in nature, and their function is to reinforce the meanings of *Piers Plowman* as a whole; they do not so much depend upon gematria, or number-letter permutations, as interconnect with them, the two together making a harmonious symbolic whole. Given the implications we have here sketched—the astrological implications, the interweaving of Greek and Christian references, the relation of the prophecy-riddles to apocatastasis, or return to Divine Order—it is clear at least that the prophecy-riddles are not satiric, but correspond to larger themes within the work as a whole, and may even be regarded, since they are spoken by Conscience, by the author, and by Patience, as a distillation of the poem’s essential message: they demand that we consider eschatology, the true nature of our present world, and our own salvation. These themes may not be especially in vogue at present, but be that as it

may, the prophecy-riddles stand today, as in the Christian middle ages, a reminder of cosmic time-cycles, and of our place within them.

Pacientes vincunt.

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NOTES

¹See *Middle English Lyrics*, Maxwell S. Luria and Richard L. Hoffman, eds. (New York: Norton, 1974) No. 130, p. 121. See also R.H. Robbins, *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1952) 80.

²See Robbins, *Secular Lyrics* 253; see also R. A. Peck, "Number as Cosmic Language," *Essays in the Numerical Criticism of Medieval Literature*, ed. Caroline D. Eckhardt (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1980) 15-64, here p. 64.

³See Robbins, *Secular Lyrics* 253.

⁴The list of studies includes Heinz Meyer and Rudolf Suntrup, *Lexikon der mittelalterlichen Zahlenbedeutungen* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1987), Heinz Meyer, *Die Zahlenallegorese im Mittelalter: Methode und Gebrauch* (München: Fink, 1975), and A. Zimmermann, ed., *Mensura: Mass, Zahl, Zahlensymbolik im Mittelalter*, 2 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1983); for a more general introduction see Ernst Robert Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern: Francke, 1948) and J. A. Huisman, *Neue Wege zur dichterischen und musikalischen Technik* (Utrecht: Kemink, 1950); see also Linda Lattin, "Some Aspects of Medieval Number Symbolism in Langland's *Piers Plowman*, A Text," *Emporia State Research Studies* 14 (1965): 5-13; see also Ernst Hellgardt, *Zum Problem symbolbestimmter und formalästhetischer Zahlenkomposition in mittelalterlicher Literatur* (München: Beck, 1973); Hans Eggers, "Zahlenkomposition und Textkritik," *Mélanges pour Jean Fourquet*, eds. P. Valentin and G. Zink (Paris: Klincksieck; München: Hueber, 1970) 75-84; and Horst Schumann, "Die Zahlenkomposition in der deutschen Dichtung des Mittelalters," *Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 1 (1968): 288-304. On number symbolism in Dante's work, see John J. Guzzardo, "Christian Medieval Number Symbolism and Dante," *DAI* 36 (1976): 6667A; see also Erich Loos, "Zur Zahlenkomposition und Zahlensymbolik in Dantes *Commedia*," *Romanische Forschungen* 86 (1974): 437-44; Eckhardt, ed., *Essays in the Numerical Criticism of Medieval Literature*; Alastair Fowler, ed., *Silent Poetry: Essays in Numerological Analysis* (New York: Barnes & Noble; London: Routledge, 1970); Maren-Sofie Røstvig, *The Hidden Sense and Other Essays* (Oslo: Norwegian Studies, 1963); as well as Thomas Hart, "Calculated Casualties in Beowulf," *Studia Neophilologia* 53 (1981): 3-35; C. A. Robson, "The Technique of Symmetrical Composition in Medieval Narrative Poetry," *Studies in Medieval French Presented to Alfred Ewert* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1961) 26-75; James Cowan, "Sir Gawain's Shield," *Avaloka* 2.1 (1987); D. W. Fritz, "Pearl: The Sacredness of Numbers," *American Benedictine Review* 31 (1979): 314-34. See also Henry and Rene Kahane, *The Krater and the Grail: Hermetic Sources of the Parzival* (Urbana: U of Illinois P,

1965), esp. 104-06, discussing the symbolism of the twenty-five maidens and the numerical symbolism of the procession in relation to the Hermetic "return to the Origin." It is difficult of course to separate the Hermetic from the Pythagorean currents; see on Hermetism Julius Evola, *La Tradizione Ermetica* (Bari: Laterza, 1931); see also René Guénon, "La Tradition hermetique" in *Formes traditionnelles et cycles cosmiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970). On the Pythagorean tradition see *The Pythagorean Sourcebook*, trans. Kenneth S. Guthrie (Grand Rapids: Phanes, 1987). See also W. Wynn Westcott, *Numbers* (London, 1897) and Christopher Butler, *Number Symbolism* (London: RKP, 1970), as well as Vincent Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1938) for more general studies. On the architectural aspects of number symbolism see David Fideler, *The Song of Apollo*, ms. only (1984); see also the works of Keith Critchlow; and see William Stirling, *The Canon: An Exposition of the Pagan Mystery Perpetuated in the Cabala as the Rule of All the Arts* (London: Elkin, 1897). See also John Michell, *The City of Revelation* (London: Garnstone P, 1972). All of these studies treat of the Greek and the Hebrew aspects of the Qabala both. On the permeation of the Hebrew Qabala into medieval Western civilisation see Catherine Swietlicki, *Spanish Christian Cabala* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1986).

⁵This situation is however soon to be partially remedied with the publication of a study by Macklin Smith of the University of Michigan, whose love for *Piers Plowman* inspired this essay—though the author takes full responsibility for whatever "ways of errore" into which he may have stumbled.

⁶See Frithjof Schuon, *L'Esotérisme comme principe et comme voie*, (Paris: Dervy Livres, 1978), trans. as *Esotericism as Principle and as Way* by William Stoddard (London: Perennial, 1981), esp. 7-45, "Understanding Esoterism."

⁷In the following analysis I follow A. V. C. Schmidt, ed., *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Critical Edition of the B Text*, 2nd ed. (London: Dent, 1987); I also consulted *Piers Plowman: The B Version*, eds. G. Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson (London: Athlone P, 1975), and *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman, in Three Parallel Texts*, ed. W. W. Skeat, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1886; rpt. 1954, ed. J. A. W. Bennett). Unfortunately, line numbering is not identical among these editions. I say "cosmological" rather than "metaphysical" here because *Piers Plowman* is, as we will see, much more concerned with the cosmological—with the shift from the present "dark age," from the "final time," to the golden age, in Christian terms the Millennium, which is to say, to the "completion" of cosmological possibilities (using the terminology of René Guénon in *The Multiple States of Being*, trans. J. Godwin [Burdett: Larson, 1982]). This corresponds to the use of gematria, of interwoven encodings which mirror the interwoven nature of the cosmos itself, and indeed to the focus of the Western, Pythagorean and "incarnational" Christian understanding upon the cosmological rather than upon the metaphysical. See, in this regard, René Guénon, *Formes traditionnelles et cycles cosmiques*.

⁸On the Qabala and gematria, see Gershom Scholem, *Kaballah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974) 32-33, 347 ff.; see also A. E. Waite, *The Holy Kabbalah* (1929; New York: University Books, 1960) 35 ff. Writes one of Waite's authorities, incidentally: "The modes by which the Kabbalah educes the secret meaning veiled under the words of the Hebrew scriptures are manifold, extending to every peculiarity of the text. [If a letter is] in any way distinguished, an occult intent was presumed" (36).

⁹On the symbolism of numbers in general, see R. A. Peck's "Number as Cosmic Language," Appendix. See also Butler, *Number Symbolism*, esp. 22-46. The symbolism of seven and of thirty-three are profoundly intertwined with Hebrew and Christian scripture: in terms of *Piers Plowman* especially, seven refers to the "seventh day" and to the "conclusion" of this time-cycle, as thirty-three refers to the years in the life of Christ. Number is inherent in existence and in cosmological cycles: see for instance St. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, trans. Anna S. Benjamin and L. H. Hackstaff (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964) 2.11.126, 2.16.164, 2.16.171, to wit: "The sky, the earth and the sea and . . . whatever in them shines from above, or crawls, flies or swims below" have "form because they have number. Take away these forms and there will be nothing." See also St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, ed. Oskar Piest (New York: Liberal Arts, 1958) XL, 60, and R. Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition during the Middle Ages* (London: Warburg Institute, 1939). See, too, Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* (Migne, PL, 82.156) and Boethius, *De musica* (Migne, PL, 63). See also on the Christianised form of this Platonic understanding, Nicomachus, *Introductio arithmetica*, trans. Martin L. d'Ooge (1926; Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1938), who writes that the science of numbers "existed before all others in the mind of the creating God like some universal and exemplary plan . . . and makes them [all beings] attain their proper ends" (I.4, 187). And again: "Every diagram, system of numbers, every scheme of harmony, every law of movement of the stars, ought to be one to him who studies rightly For there is never a path without these" (I.3, 186).

¹⁰See William Anderson, *Dante the Maker* (New York: Continuum, 1982) 133 ff. Dante met Beatrice when he was nine, and continues to when he was eighteen, *Vita Nuova* being organised on a pattern of threes and nines.

¹¹The three worlds being envisioned as the Hindu *bhu*, *bhuvā* and *svah*, the Hermetic physical, subtle and spiritual, or in Christian terms earth, hell and purgatory, and paradise, hell and purgatory corresponding to subtle realities. See for an Islamic elaboration on this theme Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body, Celestial Earth* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971).

¹²See the entry "Letters of the Alphabet" in J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. Jack Sage (London: RKP, 1962) 174-77.

¹³See Meyer and Suntrup, *Lexikon der mittelalterlichen Zahlenbedeutungen* 443 ff.; see St. Augustine, *De trinitate* (CCL 50) 4.4, p. 169.

¹⁴Meyer and Suntrup 443.

¹⁵See Meyer and Suntrup 450: "Die *aetas sexta* ist die Zeit der Inkarnation und Passion Christi: Wie Gott den Menschen am sechsten Tage erschaffen hat, so hat er ihn im sechsten Weltalter erlöst."

¹⁶Meyer and Suntrup 486. St. Bonaventure, in "The Tree of Life," elaborates the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit from the treasures of Christ. See *Bonaventure* (New York: Paulist P, 1978) 174-75.

¹⁷Meyer and Suntrup 543.

¹⁸This B-symbolism is reinforced in XX.79, in which the "fendes" are aligned with "Beliales children."

¹⁹The four moral virtues are Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance; the three theological virtues are Faith, Hope, and Charity.

²⁰See for instance J. F. Goodridge, trans., *Piers the Plowman* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1959). On the letter G in particular, see René Guénon, "La lettre G et le swastika,"

Symboles fondamentaux de la science sacrée (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), English translation by Alvin Moore forthcoming.

²¹It is certainly possible, but not necessary, that Langland was familiar with the numerical Biblical exegesis of Joachim of Fiore, as Morton Bloomfield, in *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-century Apocalypse* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1961), has argued. See for instance Revelation 17:10, to wit: "And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space." Then too there are the seven angels of the seven wraths of God, with their seven vials (15:1 ff.); and the beast with seven heads; and the utterances of the seven thunders (13:1 ff.), in particular the lines: "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets" (10:10). See also M. Bloomfield, "Recent Scholarship on Joachim of Fiore and His Influence," *Prophecy and Millenarianism: Essays in Honour of Marjorie Reeves* (London: Longman, 1980) 21-52. For a more general placing of Langland's work within medieval Christian theology see Greta Hort, *Piers Plowman and Contemporary Religious Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1937).

²²See J. E. Cirlot 176-77; see also M. Court de Gebelin, *Du Génie allégorique et symbolique de l'antiquité* (Paris, 1777).

²³See René Guénon, *The Multiple States of Being* and his discussion of "The Two Chaoses."

²⁴See on this point Cowan, "Sir Gawain's Shield."

²⁵Curiously, the example upon which Justice turns here is that of the Indian who has not had the benefit of Christian teachings; Dante here, far from condemning those in other traditions, observes magnanimously that those many who today cry "Christ, Christ!" "at the Day of Judgement shall be far / Less near to Him than such as knew not Christ" (XIX.106-09). *The Divine Comedy*, trans. L. Binyon (New York: Viking P, 1947).

²⁶See Leo Schaya, *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbala* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1974), on the meaning of Mercy and Rigour in the Judaic tradition, and in the *philosophia perennis*.

²⁷See Revelation 1:12 and 2:19 ("I know thy works"), and again 3:15: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot."

²⁸These terms will be explained in the next section of the essay, that dealing with apocalypse, prophecy and apocatastasis. For now it is sufficient to say that *Piers Plowman* represents, more than has been generally acknowledged, a union of Greek (specifically Platonic) and Christian Hermetic or Qabalist streams of thought, so that apocatastasis and apocalypse appear simultaneously in the poem, apocalypse being the more limited historical view, apocatastasis being the more cyclical, Greek perspective on time.

²⁹A sheaf of arrows is 24 arrows; see the discussion of the "second prophecy" in the following section. See Revelation 13:18; 19:4.

³⁰Richard Green, trans. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962) 41.

³¹See, on this and related points, Michael Masi's introduction to his translation of *De institutione arithmetica*, published as *Boethian Number Theory* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1983) 40 ff. See also, for a more general discussion of Pythagorean number theory and its dissemination in the West, David Fideler's introduction to *The Pythagorean Sourcebook*.

³²Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, trans. Benjamin and Hackstaff, 2.11.126, p. 64.

³³See Revelation 21:1 ff.: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem . . ." That city, as John Michell has noted, is marked by its numerical symbolism, primarily the symbolism of twelve, 1260, and four.

³⁴See Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth Century Apocalypse* 211-212.

³⁵See Walter Johnson, "The Prophecy of William Langland," *DAI* 38 (1978): 5451A. See also, for a perhaps more sensible view, Ira R. Adams, "Narrative Techniques and the Apocalyptic Mode of Thought in *Piers Plowman*," *DAI* 33 (1973): 3627A-28A.

³⁶See for instance passus I.100 ff., regarding the numerical symbolism of the "profession apertly that apendeth to knyghtes." There is in line 100 a repetition of three A's, and in the next the knyghte is enjoined to "fasten o Friday in fyve score wynter," the latter F making little sense unless examined for the implications of the number five and the repeated F's in the line. On the number five and the quest of the chivalric warrior see Cowan, "Sir Gawain's Shield," as well as Anderson, *Dante the Maker* 284-86 and 330-31. The number five is affiliated with the Virgo and with Mary; it is the "number of love" and is, as quintessence, at once protection for and the goal of the chivalric quest—and hence Gawain wore the pentangle, at the same time seeking to fully realise that which it represented. The references here in Langland's work suggest a connection with the chivalric path which manifests also in Chaucer's "Knight's Tale," and with even greater force in Dante's *Commedia*. On the connections between Dante and the chivalric order of the Templars, see René Guénon, *Dante and Esoterism* (Paris: Gallimard, 1926), as well as William Anderson's masterful work, esp. 361-65, 413-15. See also Langland, passus XV.545-48, on the Templars. In any event, passages like this are not explicitly prophetic, and hence don't enter into direct consideration in this essay.

³⁷On links between Mede and the Whore of Babylon, see passus III.22, Schmidt edition, Commentary.

³⁸See III.305-10 also. On the compatibility of Christian teachings of the Apocalypse with traditional time-cycles as recognised by the Greeks, Hindus and Buddhists, see Martin Lings, *The Eleventh Hour* (Oxford: Quinta Essentia, 1987).

³⁹Anderson, *Dante the Maker* 287.

⁴⁰See in this regard Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1969), chap. VIII, "The Diffusion of Joachimist Works in Later Middle Ages." There were in the fourteenth century many prophetic works dealing with the seven ages, including those in the following collections: MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. Lat 11864, ff. 151-52; MS Rome, Vatican, Lat. 3822; and MS. Paris, Bibl. Nat. Lat. 3595. Included in all these collections is *De septem sigillis* (also *De septem temporibus*); in the last is *De ultimo antichristo* and *Prophetia . . . quedam virgo . . . de teutonicis imperatoribus*.

⁴¹See Reeves 88; see also Beryl Smalley, "Flaccianus, *De visionibus Sibyllae*," *Mélanges offerts à Étienne Gilson* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies; Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1959) 547-62.

⁴²For a discussion of the wide availability of such texts during Langland's time, see Reeves 82 ff. and Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman*, App. I, 157-60.

⁴³*Piers Plowman*, ed. Schmidt, p. 313. We can adduce to this Acts 27:31, "Unless these men stay in the ship you cannot be saved."

⁴⁴See René Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, trans. Lord Northbourne (London: Luzac & Co., 1953) on the "barrier" through which the numberless hordes of chaos cannot pass, but which is no barrier to the saved, for whom the Golden Age is already upon us. There is also a connection between the ark or ship and the grail; all represent transmission of the Holy Truth.

⁴⁵On the symbolism of the Waters, see Adrian Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 220 ff., drawing upon Guénon, *Symboles fondamentaux de la science sacrée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977 ed.).

⁴⁶See on this Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman* 210-11. On Plutarch, see "On the Face in the Moon," and additionally, "De Isis et Osiride." For the Bacon reference, see *Opera hactenus inedita Rogeri Baconi*, fasc. I, ed. R. Steele (London: Alexander Moring, 1905), pp. 43-44, 49-50. Traditionally, the moon was linked with the reign of the Anti-Christ because the moon signifies the subtle realm, within which the Anti-Christ makes his attempt to attain that supremacy that can only belong to the Divine; the moon signifies separation from the Solar divine principle, from the Origin. On the symbolism of the Anti-Christ, see Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*. The moon is also the realm of judgement because, in antiquity, the soul was recognised to rise so far as the sphere of the moon in which it was either purified, or forced to descend to the earthly sphere again. See *Republic* X.616-17. On the symbolism of the Moon in Eastern traditions see A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Collected Works*, ed. Roger Lipsey (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978), "On the Symbolism of the Flood." See also Snodgrass 268 ff. See for instance Bhagavad Gita VIII.23-26, Chandogya Upanisad V.10.1-6, Rg Veda I.72.7. The devayana is the path to the North, connected with the waxing moon and with the Gods; the pitryana is the path to the South, connected with the waning moon and with rebirth. The former is the path of the Comprehensor; the latter is the path of the unregenerate. The "myddel of the moone" is the point between the two.

⁴⁷As René Guénon has pointed out, the number 11, and its multiples, 22 and 33, figure prominently—indeed preeminently—in Dante's *Commedia*, this being an essentially cosmological symbolism referring to the "three worlds." See *L'Esoterisme de Dante* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957) 66 ff. But this symbolism permeates early and medieval Christian cosmology, on which see also A. K. Hieatt, "Numerical Structures in Verse," *Essays in the Numerical Criticism of Medieval Literature*, ed. Eckhardt 72-74. According to Hugh of St. Victor, interestingly, eleven is an instance of *secundum modum porrectionis*, in that eleven beyond ten signifies transgression beyond measure. See *De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris prae-notatiunculae* XV (Migne, PL 175.22-23). Eleven consequently signifies sin, being beyond the Decalogue of the Old Law, but not yet at the completion of the Twelve. Ten is of course the number of wholeness, of the Pythagorean Tetraktys; twelve is the spreading of the Trinity to the four corners of the earth, on which see St. Augustine, *In Iohannis Euangelium tractatus* CXXIV XXVII.10 (CCL 36.275), as well as the prevalence of twelve in the Revelation of St. John, and in the geometry of the New Jerusalem. Cosmologically, eleven represents the excess of ten, the deficiency of twelve; and hence it is naturally the number of that time between the life of Christ, and His Second Coming. See, on this symbolism, Lings, *The Eleventh Hour*. Twelve is the number of the Millennium, of paradise upon earth, because four represents corporeal, three the spiritual realm; and the Millennium by definition is the earthly union of these. See also David Fowler, *The Bible in Middle English Literature* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1984), chap. V, 226 ff. for a discussion of *Piers Plowman* as "an extension of the Bible."

⁴⁸Adapted from *Virgil's Works*, trans. J. W. Mackail (New York: Modern Library, 1934) 274. On the symbolism of Saturn René Guénon makes some interesting connections in his "Sur la signification des fêtes carnavalesques," *Symboles fondamentaux* 163-64. Guénon writes: "Il faut donc y voir bien plutôt quelque chose qui se rapporte à l'aspect "sinistre" de Saturne, aspect qui ne lui appartient certes pas en tant que dieu de l'âge d'or, mais au contraire en tant qu'il n'est plus actuellement que le dieu déchu d'une période révolue." For a more detailed discussion of the shift from one "age" to the next, or in Hindu terms of the *manvantara* cycle, see "Remarques sur la doctrine des cycles cosmiques," *Formes Traditionnelles et Cycles Cosmiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970). For interesting remarks on the symbolism of Saturn, see Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1964; rpt. 1979) 220-21, 329-31.

⁴⁹Langland only alludes to Christ here—certainly the line "God of his goodnesse graunte us a trewe" in a Christian context can only be read as a reference to Christ—because the prophecy only refers to the period before the Second Coming; it is as it were a preface.

⁵⁰See *Piers Plowman*, ed. Schmidt, p. 323, citing Bennett.

⁵¹E. R. Daniel, "De Ultima Tribulationibus," *Prophecy and Millenarianism*, ed. Ann Williams (Burnt Hill: Longman, 1980) 170-71.

⁵²See Hugh of St. Victor, *De scripturis XV*; see also Peck, "Number as Cosmic Language," 58 ff.

⁵³*Republic* X.617.

⁵⁴*Republic* X.616.

⁵⁵Macrobius, *Commentary On the Dream of Scipio*, trans. W. H. Stahl (New York: Columbia UP: 1952), chap. XXI.34 ff., pp. 181 ff.

⁵⁶See in particular the chapter entitled "The Acceleration of Time."

⁵⁷Frithjof Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 1982).

⁵⁸As Marjorie Reeves observes, "Joachim's original conception of an active and a contemplative order was lost, and that of two active preaching orders substituted" (148). For Joachim's use of this text from the Revelation, see *Super hier.* ff. 18v, 40, 58, cited by Reeves.

⁵⁹See Revelation 20:14, "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." Interestingly, the sixteenth line of the Prologue contains four D's, the value of which is sixteen, and P is the sixteenth letter; the letter P is prominent throughout not only this poem, but medieval literature more generally, as seen also in *Pearl* and *Parzival*. P in Christian tradition is affiliated with Patria, Pistis (Faith), Peter, Paul, Prince, Purity, Prudence and Patience (among the virtues) and Pride (among the vices). Hence for instance *Pearl* ends with these lines:

He gef vus to be his homly hyne,

And precious perles unto his pay! Amen. Amen. (CI.1212)

Throughout the poem, Christ is referred to as "Prince." The edition used is that of Sir Israel Gollancz (New York: Coopers Square, 1966).

⁶⁰See Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. S. Evans (London: Dent, 1958), bk. VII, p. 152. See for a much more extensive version of the Merlinic prophecies Lucy Allan Paton, *Les Prophecies de Merlin* (London: Oxford UP, 1926). See also, for a Welsh rescension, John Parry, ed. and trans., *Brut y Brenhinedd* (Cambridge: Medieval Academy, 1937), Appendix B, *Prophetia Merlini Silvestris*.

⁶¹See David Fideler, *The Song of Apollo*, ms., 1984, "The Gematria of the Miraculous Feeding of the Five Thousand: A Preliminary Analysis."

⁶²See Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism* 80 ff. See also St. Augustine, *In Ioannis Euangelium tractatus CXXIV CXXII.8* (CCL 36.673-74).

⁶³(Strassburg, 1518), cap. 85, "De patientia," quoted and translated by R. E. Kaske, "'Ex vi transicionis' and Its Passage in *Piers Plowman*," *Style and Symbolism in Piers Plowman: A Modern Critical Anthology*, ed. R. J. Blanch (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1969) 248.

⁶⁴See W. Skeat, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1886), vol. 2, L394-96, pp. 196-97; Henry Bradley, "Some Cruces in *Piers Plowman*," *MLR* 5 (1910): 340-41; J. Goodridge, trans., *Piers the Plowman* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1959) 299 ff. See also Ben Smith, Jr., "Patience's Riddle, *Piers Plowman* B, XIII," *MLN* 76 (1961): 675-82.

⁶⁵See R. E. Kaske 244 ff.

⁶⁶By saying that such a one has "virtually" entered the community of saints, I mean to say that he is not one of the saints, but has virtually realised that essential truth of which the saint is the manifestation or fulfilment. St. Augustine, with his vast learning, was no doubt aware of the peculiar Orphic symbolism of the fish and the net, the net being the intricate network of the cosmos, the fish being affiliated with the *vesica*, geometrically, [the *vesica* being the conjunction of two realms] and with transcendence of temporal bonds. To say that the 153 fishes represent the 153 saints resurrected at time's end is to say that the saints are freed from cosmological restriction—the focus of this prophecy as well. Those who enter the community of saints virtually are the 144,000 saved; the saints are those who completely realise those virtues which are virtually realised in the saved. It is therefore apropos that the final prophecy or riddle begin on the 153rd line. For more on the geometrical and gematria symbolism of the fishes and the net in Greek and Christian tradition see Fideler, *The Song of Apollo*, and Michell, *City of Revelation*.

Religion in *King John*: Shakespeare's View

ROY BATTENHOUSE

One way of grasping the distinctive quality of Shakespeare's vision is to compare his work with another author's on the same topic. *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* (1591) is either the immediate source of Shakespeare's play (as most critics think) or else a rival author's response to an early John play by Shakespeare (as supposed by Honigmann and Matchett). In any case the two texts have a similar outline yet are substantially different. Shakespeare, for instance, has no parallel to the *Troublesome Raigne's* depicting a visit to a monastery where lecherous friars hide nuns in their chests, nor to another scene which devotes a hundred lines to a friar's conspiring with his Abbot to poison King John and being absolved in advance. Shakespeare has avoided anti-monastic propaganda. But does this mean he has no interest in religious issues? On the contrary, the central event in his play (as likewise in the *Troublesome Raigne*) is a confrontation between John and the papal legate Pandulph, an event which Protestant historians considered to be analogous to Henry VIII's break with the church of Rome.

Shakespeare's treatment of the quarrel, however, is evenhanded. Neither John nor Pandulph is depicted as a villain. But each is shown to be a counterfeiter of religious duty. A recent critic has alleged that Shakespeare "minimizes" the religious issue by not adhering to "the Protestant view of things" which unifies the *Troublesome Raigne*.¹ But I would say, rather, that Shakespeare makes the religious issue all important, by showing us how a corrupting by "commodity" underlies the troubles of King John and his times—and by implication those of the 16th century also. Shakespeare's play exemplifies the universal truth of a maxim in the Bible, that "cupidity" is the root of all evil. Also indicated are the providential means by which cupidity can be defeated.

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I

Whereas the *Troublesome Raigne* regards John as a champion of "Christ's true faith" up until his great sin of attempting the murder of young Arthur, Shakespeare's play rests on other premises. It satirizes the peace won by John from Philip of France in Act II, allowing Falconbridge to term it a "mad" composition by mad kings who have yielded to "commodity, the bias of the world" (2.1.574). And in Shakespeare's version John has been the tempter of Philip, offering him a large bribe to agree to this peace, because John knows, as his mother reminds him, that his own right to the English crown is questionable and needs France's support. John is shoring up a "borrow'd Majesty" (1.1.4).

It is against this background that Pandulph arrives to "religiously demand" of John why he is keeping Langton from his see (3.1.140). The legate's tone is courteous, beginning with the words, "Hail, you anointed deputies of heaven" (3.1.136), and thus is unlike that of the bullying Pandulph of *The Troublesome Raigne*, whose first words are a command to Philip to "joyne not hands / With him that stands accurst of God and man." In the *Troublesome Raigne* it is John who speaks politely, by replying that "as I honor the Church and holy Churchmen, so I scorn to be subject to the greatest Prelate in the world." He will be "next under God, supreme head both over spiritual and temporal." The reply of Shakespeare's John is noticeably more boastful and scoffing:

What earthy name to interrogatories
 Can taste the free breath of a sacred king?
 Thou canst not, cardinal, devise a name
 So slight, unworthy and ridiculous,
 To charge me to an answer, as the Pope.
 Tell him this tale; and from the mouth of England
 Add thus much more, that no Italian priest
 Shall tithe or toll in our dominions;
 But as we, under God, are supreme head,
 So under Him that great supremacy,
 Where we do reign, we will alone uphold
 Without th' assistance of a mortal hand:
 So tell the pope, all reverence set apart
 To him and his usurp'd authority. (3.1.147-60)

While Protestant auditors at the Globe probably delighted to hear the Pope labelled a usurper, the charge is being made here by a speaker whose own title is questionable.² Moreover, his boast of needing no "assistance of a mortal hand" to uphold his rule is highly ironic if one recalls how he has bought the assistance of King Philip's mortal hand. And when in his next speech he proceeds to express contempt for kings who allow themselves to "purchase corrupted pardon" with vile gold, may not an auditor remember John's use of money and English provinces to purchase from Philip an overlooking of John's infringing of Arthur's rights? Just how "sacred" a king is John? Increasingly he will be driven to call on the mortal hand of others to aid him—first, the hand of Hubert, when he secretly authorizes him to murder Arthur, and later Pandulph's political hand, when he begs to be rescued by him from the disasters brought on by John's own policies.

John in Shakespeare's play is capable of enough conscience to recognize murder as a sin, yet he winks at this sin when greedy for his own safety. He repents when he feels the pinch of worldly loss, and even then he is more ready to blame Hubert than to amend his own behavior. When told that Arthur is alive, he values this news for its political usefulness rather than because of any love for Arthur. And he soon reverts, only fifty lines later, to ordering the murder of another innocent, a prophet named Peter who predicts John will forfeit his crown. Blind rage is this John's typical response to any threat to himself. He has no genuine religion to uphold him in times of trouble. He relies on political maneuver, and when this fails he is ineffective. In the battle against his barons he leaves the field heart-sick, wearied by a "tyrant fever" which he says is burning him up. By this image Shakespeare is suggesting a fate in accord with Philip of France's prediction in 3.1.344-45: "Thy rage shall burn thee up, and thou shalt turn / To ashes . . ."

Holinshed had ascribed John's death to a fever brought on by grief over army losses, an emphasis retained by Shakespeare. Holinshed had also mentioned, however, that some writers tell of John's being given poisoned ale by a monk of Swensted Abbey. This story the historian John Foxe amplified into Protestant polemic accompanied by a woodcut picturing six stages of monastic perfidy. But Shakespeare

reduced the poisoning to merely a rumor which Hubert reports to Falconbridge, telling him "The King, I fear, is poison'd by a monk" (5.6.23). Hubert says it was "a resolved villain" (5.6.29) whose bowels suddenly burst out. From this report, one might expect to see a John who likewise dies from burst bowels. But Shakespeare shows us only a John who speaks of a fire in his bosom that is crumbling his bowels, and he makes no mention of a monk's causing this—nor does anyone else on stage.

But whether or not an outsider's poison exacerbated the fever of Shakespeare's John, a sense of fated punishment is suggested when the dying John speaks of being reduced to a module of "confounded royalty" (5.7.58). He dies recognizing his life's failure, and without any rites from a clergyman. This lack of any deathbed piety contrasts with the amendment of life shown earlier by the dying Lord Melun, a Frenchman whose grandfather was an Englishman. And it contrasts also with the kind of death depicted for John in *The Troublesome Raigne*. There John speaks of a catalog of his sins, which he fears are too great to be forgiven, until his companion Falconbridge counsels him to call on Christ. Whereupon John likens himself to the biblical David whose heart "with murder was attaint," then proceeds to prophesy a kingly successor who will build the Lord a house by treading down the Pope, and ends by declaring: "In the faith of *Jesu* John doth die." The faith of Jesus, let us note, is here being identified with a 16th century Protestant faith ascribed implausibly to the historical John. The *Troublesome Raigne's* John is given a faith similar to today's "liberation" theology. But Shakespeare will have none of this. He presents us instead a commodity-minded John whose life, like a ship on fire, is ending with a burning of "the tackle of my heart" (5.7.52).

II

Cardinal Pandulph, the canon lawyer who seeks to discipline John, is presented by Shakespeare as similarly bereft of any true religion. His urbane professionalism makes him like the lawyers in the Bible who opposed Jesus with a version of the law's letter lacking any of

the love central to God's law. This aspect in Pandulph is made evident by Shakespeare in many ways. One is by the prominence given to Constance, who is shown begging for help from the Cardinal and receiving none. Pandulph's focus is on the canonical prerogatives of his office, rather than on the church's mission to cure souls. True, he does not offer (as does the villainous Pandulph of *The Troublesome Raigne*) "pardon and forgiveness of sinne" to anyone who will "murder" John; he promises, rather, the merit of sainthood to whoever "takes away by any secret course / Thy hateful life" (3.1.178). He thereby allows the possibility that "secret course" may mean some work of grace which removes John's hatefulnes; yet the ambiguous phrase insinuates an undercover assassination, a deed Pandulph cannot bring himself to name. Moreover, he intends an enforcing of the church's law by force of arms, and when asking Philip of France to take up arms he is equating this mission with being "champion of our church" (3.1.267). Championing the church comes to mean, thus, not a fulfilling of the law of charity, but rather a supporting of "a mother's curse, on her revolting son" (3.1.257). This phrasing should remind us of Lady Falconbridge, the adulterous mother of the play's initial Act who came on stage to denounce her son for questioning her honor. Pandulph is implicitly a spokesman more concerned to maintain face for "mother church" (whose politics are adulterous) than to fulfil the duty of Christ's faithful servant. Erasmus, we may recall, had satirized a 16th-century pope (Julius) for conducting worldly wars in the name of holiness. In Pandulph the dramatist Shakespeare is showing how religion gets distorted.

A well-known passage in the Epistle of James sums up true religion as a visiting of the fatherless and widows in their affliction and keeping oneself unspotted from the world (James 1:27). Pandulph is shown by Shakespeare to be not only spotted by worldliness but also unconcerned for the welfare of Constance and Arthur, the widow and the orphan of the play.³ Constance is an ambitious mother driven to despair, who asks Pandulph to "Preach some philosophy to make me mad" (3.3.51). He is incapable of any healing word for her plight. Likewise, when France asks Pandulph to devise "out of your grace" some gentle order whereby France and England "shall be blest" (3.1.250-51), he can answer only with a call to war. The Bastard

Falconbridge aptly characterizes this policy as prompted by "Old time the clock-setter" (3.1.324)—i.e., by the zeitgeist rather than the spirit of grace. Then when the battle ends with France's defeat, the comfort offered him by the Cardinal is of a Machiavellian kind. He prophesies that John's cupidity will cause him to murder Arthur, which will cause a disaffection by John's subjects, and thus provide France a wonderful opportunity to profit for himself (i.e. indulge *his* cupidity) by invading England to claim its crown. Pandulph the preacher of power politics is Shakespeare's portrait of a commodity-minded perversion of churchly Holiness.

To spice the portrait Shakespeare has Pandulph give Philip of France an elaborately scholastic justification for breaking his oath with John. The logic of it is beautifully sophistic.⁴ It begins with the premise that "It is religion that doth make vows kept" (3.1.279). But no mention is made of Philip's baptismal vow to serve Christ when Pandulph names as Philip's "first vow" to heaven a championing of the church represented by Pandulph. Philip's peace treaty with John, it is then asserted, goes contrary to his first vow and thus is sworn "amiss," requiring the following correction:

The better act of purposes mistook
Is to mistake again; . . .

[Thus] falsehood falsehood cures, as fire cools fire. (3.1.274-77)

Do two wrongs make a right, and is cure achieved by a doubling of falsehood? The argument has been presented with such a bewildering speed that poor Philip is overwhelmed by it. His hesitation collapses when Pandulph tells him that, if he doesn't yield, "the peril of our curses light on thee" (3.1.295).

The polished Pandulph may be said to be morally akin to the proud Constance who expected kings to "bow to" her will (3.1.74). In Act 5 he will tell King John that since it was "my breath that blew this tempest up," a bowing John will find that "my tongue shall hush again this storm of war" (5.1.17-20). But here it is he who is mistaken, as we see when Lewis the Dauphin refuses to give up the selfish purpose which Pandulph had earlier implanted in him. The providential consequences of tempest in the form of flood and shipwreck are shown by Shakespeare to be the effective cooler of the

fire of the contending parties. The Lincoln washes and the Goodwin sands cool the fire of proud men. Pandulph at the end is not the causer of peace but only a useful messenger between the two camps when their selfish ambition has turned to ashes.

III

The innocent boy Arthur is the play's representative of genuine religious piety. He regards himself as Richard's "offspring," but is never provocative toward King John. He begs his mother to be content with the peace made between John and Philip of France. When imprisoned he declares that "by my Christendom" he would be happy to be a keeper of sheep. He changes Hubert's intention to blind him simply by awakening Hubert's love. This response contrasts with that in the *Troublesome Raigne*. The Arthur of that play responds by immediately denouncing Hubert's warrant as hellish and damnable, and then by arguing that God's command against murder must take priority over a king's command. But this kind of legalistic moralizing is rejected by Shakespeare. Instead, he has Arthur, on being shown the King's warrant, respond with a gentle question, "Must you with hot irons burn out both mine eyes?" (4.1.39) and then with the further question, "Have you the heart?" (4.1.41) as he goes on to prattle about how when Hubert had a headache he comforted him with loving words. Yet now

If heaven be pleas'd that you must use me ill,
Why then you must. Will you put out mine eyes?
These eyes that never did nor never shall
So much as frown on you. (4.1.55-58)

This attitude of non-resistance to evil except through a kindly questioning seems to me to be modeled on the character of the boy Isaac in mystery-play drama.

Particularly notable is Arthur's response when Hubert begins to bind him and takes in hand the iron. Pleading as to a father figure, Arthur cries "O, save me, Hubert" (4.1.72) and at same time he vows to "not struggle" but "sit as quiet as a lamb" without wincing (4.1.76-79). This

is like the attitude of the biblical boy Isaac and also it resembles the loving obedience of Jesus when praying at Gethsemane. It overcomes Hubert's self-serving wish to please John. The hot iron cools in Hubert's hand as his resolution wavers during thirty lines of dialogue which ends with the boy's saying,

There is no malice in this burning coal;
The breath of heaven has blown his spirit out
And strew'd repentant ashes on his head. (4.1.108-10)⁵

The "breath of heaven" has been mediated by Arthur to what he describes as "this iron age" (4.1.60).

The converted Hubert becomes in Shakespeare's play a legatee of Arthur's spirit who influences indirectly some repentances by others. When the French Lord Melun repents on his deathbed a treachery he has sworn to, he tells us that his conscience has been awakened by his love for Hubert. Also we see Hubert make a night visit to the camp of the Bastard Falconbridge to bring him news that saves him from attempting to make himself king. At this moment the Bastard has been acting as John's appointed leader of his forces, and he knows the King is very sick. On recognizing Hubert by his voice coming from the darkness, the Bastard answers his "Who art thou?" by replying:

Thou mayst befriend me so much as to think
I come one way of the Plantagenets. (5.6.10-11)

This implies a bid to be recognized as King Richard's heir. But Hubert replies by addressing him only as "brave soldier" (5.6.13) and saying he has "comfortless" (5.6.20) news to bring: the King has been poisoned. "Who didst thou leave to tend his Majesty?" the Bastard asks (5.6.32). He is then told news that surprises him: "all about his Majesty" (5.6.36) are the returned lords who have brought Prince Henry with them to secure their pardon. The Bastard's response is to invoke "mighty heaven" to "tempt us not to bear above our power" (5.6.37-38). His loss of troops in the Lincoln washes he now regards as an omen from heaven. He must beware of overreaching. Hubert's "news" has helped him beware.

Hurrying to the King's bedside he confesses that only heaven knows how the Dauphin's army can be answered. When John gives no response but dies, the Bastard is quick to declare his dedication to John:

To do the office for thee of revenge,
 And then my soul shall wait on thee to heaven,
 As it on earth hath been thy servant still. (5.7.71-73)

But now he finds no one else interested in revenge. When he calls on the lords to follow him against the Dauphin, he is told that an honorable peace has already been arranged, in which he may *join with them*. Thus, politely, he is put in his place as a subordinate in the new regime and given his cue to join in homage to young Henry the lineal heir.

The concluding moral of the play—"Nought shall make us rue, / If England to itself do rest but true"—is spoken by the Bastard (5.7.117-18). But its meaning does not now point to a being true to the spirit of John. The "old right" which the barons named as their intention when returning to John has become basic to England's remaining true to itself. Professor Honigmann has remarked perceptively, it seems to me, that the "right" which triumphs at the end of the play is a child figure suggestive of "Arthur resurrected as Prince Henry."⁶ The nobles have discovered their need for an allegiance that transcends not only commodity-serving but also revenge. Having been gratuitously rescued from the dangers of revenge they become peace-makers. As such they turn the Bastard to a higher allegiance and thereby complete Hubert's work of intervention after his own conversion by Arthur. Aiding providential "washes," they tame the Bastard's "braves."

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NOTES

¹See Virginia Mason Carr, *The Drama as Propaganda: A Study of The Troublesome Raigne of King John* (Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Englische Sprache, 1974) 118.

²James C. Bryant, in *Tudor Drama and Religious Controversy* (Mercer University Press, 1984) 133, assumes that Shakespeare is simply depicting the historic Anglican position of independence from foreign domination. But this supposition overlooks the chip-on-the-shoulder tone of John's speech and the contextual irony of John's situation.

³Emrys Jones makes this point in his *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: OUP, 1977) 241.

⁴Gerald Greenewald, *Shakespeare's Attitude Toward the Catholic Church in King John* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1938), 121-134, blindly argues that this speech is without any sophistry and "completely in harmony with the Catholic doctrine of oaths" (128).

⁵See Robert D. Stevick, "'Repentant Ashes': The Matrix of 'Shakespearean' Poetry," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 12 (1962): 366-70.

⁶Arden edition of *King John* (London: Methuen, 1954) lxxv.

The "Doubleness" of *The Malcontent* and Fairy-tale Form

BROWNELL SALOMON

This essay rests on the assumption that one of the main characteristics of *The Malcontent* is the extraordinary structural "doubleness" of the play. While working out a fictional plot of the utmost cultural seriousness (a wrongfully deposed duke regains his throne and cleanses society by restoring moral order to his wholly treacherous and venal court), Marston's manner of employing his formal raw materials is so candidly and wittily offhanded, so archly knowing in its artifice, that the resulting serio-comic vision makes the most confounding demands on its audience.

There are no known sources of *The Malcontent* which might help to clear up this structural obscurity. Anthony Caputi observed in 1961, respecting both this work and the author's light comedy *The Fawne* (pr. 1606), that "We have neither Marston's immediate sources for them nor any conclusive evidence that he knew plays or stories that might have furnished him with hints for the disguise plots used."¹ More recently, however, David J. Houser has challenged Caputi's assertion that Marston was the first dramatist to base his two plays on the duke-in-disguise plot. Professor Houser argues for "a possible link to an earlier use of disguise" in *A Knack to Know a Knave* (1592), an anonymous play which he declares "is markedly similar to Marston's plays, sharing with them a specific pattern of events, dominated by a disguised authority figure."² It suffices here merely to attend to the weakness of the claim that *A Knave* is a possible source for *The Malcontent*.

A double-plot play, *A Knave* has a pseudohistorical romance for its overplot and an "estates" morality for the subplot. Houser attaches most weight to the fact that in the subplot a morality abstraction named Honesty is delegated authority by the king to search out knavery in the realm and to punish perpetrators. He concedes the

point that Honesty, unlike Marston's dukes, assumes no single physical identity to enact his role as an undercover royal spy for the duration of the play. Instead, Honesty goes about undetected in various roles and disguises to ferret out representative social evils in the whole of society. Counterargument need not be labored, but even granting a situational resemblance of the most general sort, differences in essentials between the "Honesty pattern" and the plot structure of *The Malcontent* are so profound as to render remote the possibility of influence. Indeed, at least as persuasive as source materials are the long since noted echoes of plot, setting, character, language, and theme of *Hamlet*. Houser's argument is finally undermined, however, by the author's needful admission that he is "aware of no positive evidence that Marston borrowed specifically from *A Knack*" or from any other play sharing common sources with it (996). No adequate basis exists, then, for modifying the long-standing assertion that claims for immediate literary sources or precedents for *The Malcontent* remain inconclusive. Therefore, *The Malcontent* seeming a dramatic composition *sui generis*, the critic does not start from certainties but from the questions raised by the text, the most intriguing being the "doubleness" of its formal and thematic structure.

T. S. Eliot was the first modern critic to observe this two-fold quality of the playwright's drama and to be persuaded that it was a mark of high distinction. Eliot noted "a kind of doubleness in the action, as if it took place on two planes at once," and concluded that "It is . . . by giving us the sense of something behind, more real than any of the personages and their action, that Marston establishes himself among the writers of genius."³ In varying ways later commentators have taken up this notion of Marstonian doubleness, but not all find it praiseworthy.

John Scott Colley, for example, actually quotes Eliot's comment in his own full-length study. But by making doubleness apply to Marston's Calvinistic outlook on the divided and paradoxical nature of man, Colley uses the term to impugn the playwright's artistic integrity.⁴ Even conceding the author's moral and intellectual earnestness, Colley despairs at his "lapsing into caricature or burlesque at the very points he may be stressing an essential dramatic or intellectual truth" (3). *The Malcontent* itself "is not merely trivial or

superficial in its moral concerns" but there is also on Marston's part "some essential lack of conviction in what he is depicting on stage. . . . The play is flawed, ultimately, because Marston was not totally committed to his theme" (120, 128). And Professor Colley has company among the detractors. David L. Frost similarly argues the lack of a sustained vision: "His whole career shows this failure to commit himself wholeheartedly to the work in hand: the symptoms are there not only in variations of tone and inconsistencies of plot or characterization but in Marston's language."⁵ But the leading resentment against the author that underpins the allegations of half-heartedness or disingenuousness is his perceived failure to reconcile an obvious flair for comic theatricalism, on the one hand, with an apparently sincere ethical gravity, on the other:

. . . although the characters sometimes take themselves seriously, they inhabit a sort of cartoon version of a corrupt court, . . . all seem chiefly involved in playing games.⁶

The sense of the theater in Marston is used primarily destructively, to cut down his characters and deflate their actions. . . . he not only undermines the very medium he employs, but makes it appear to be feeding upon itself.⁷

Marston does not have Shakespeare's ability to mingle gloom and gaiety to the advantage of both. . . . The structure of the play is defective, and so is the conception of its chief character, Malevole.⁸

Nevertheless, Marston attracts contemporary admiration from critics endowed with a more generous supply of "negative capability," those capable of sensing that the presence of humor does not necessarily vitiate a genuinely intense disgust with social corruption and the neglect of religion. R. W. Ingram, for example, understands that

Tragic involvement and sardonic detachment are immiscible; and one of Marston's discoveries is that, although this fact is logically true, it can at times be theatrically false. In modern times the absurd can be serious and true.⁹

Jonathan Miller, in the program notes for his own production of *The Malcontent* at Nottingham in 1968, also affirms the more broadminded view of the play's balance of comic and serious tendencies:

The plot is simple, the argument clear. Only the texture is rich. In fact the whole surface of the play glistens with comic invention; darkened throughout by a rich thrilling pessimism.¹⁰

These varying perspectives on Marston's doubleness are a touchstone of the critic's ability to fathom dramatic unity behind opposing modes of authenticity and histrionism in his plays generally and *The Malcontent* in particular. To my mind this double-edged quality is so essential a part of Marston's aesthetic that, rightly understood, it should win new appreciation for *The Malcontent's* achievement. T. S. Eliot's reference to the dramatist's twin planes of action was short on specificity, except that the critic believed they were a function of poetic drama rather than of allegory or symbolism. His insight, however, that Marston is "occupied in saying something else than appears in the literal actions and characters whom he manipulates" (189) is illuminating.

I will now try to flesh it out in concrete terms for this play, proceeding on the assumption that the key to Marston's doubleness is a certain creative discontinuity he achieves between form and content, a tactic most skillfully realized in *The Malcontent*. It is his particular satiric bias to foreground all aspects of dramatic form (genre conventions, characterization, language, and plot structure), highlighting rather than obscuring their status as the familiar semiotic codes of literature. This jocular, often parodistic attitude towards formal elements interacts with the play's dark expressions of fallibility and *contemptus mundi*, not undermining them as some critics argue, but melding both into a pungent symbiosis. Marston's detractors, to their loss, mistake this unexpected ludic collusiveness with the audience for flippancy or tentativeness. One could expect modern readers to be more receptive to this brand of serio-comic moral fable, in view of Samuel Beckett's like-minded method in *Waiting for Godot*.

Genre is the aspect of dramatic form used by Marston with self-conscious paradoxicality throughout his career; it is simply that, in *The Malcontent*, tension between soberness of content and levity of form makes keener demands upon our sophistication. As early as 1598 the intentions of his oxymoronic, serio-comic method were neatly encapsulated in the opening two lines of the proem to Book III of the trenchant verse satire, *The Scourge of Villainy*: "In serious jest and

jesting seriousness / I strive to scourge polluting beastliness."¹¹ Similarly, in the letter to his satiro-comic revenge tragedy, *Antonio and Mellida* (1599), which moreover is addressed to that paradoxical entity/nonentity, "Nobody," Marston confesses that his "humorous blood" inclined him "to affect (a little too much) to be seriously fantastical."¹² With regard to *The Malcontent*, the author's letter to the reader refers to the work as a "Comedy" (l. 31) but the Latin dedication to Ben Jonson describes it paradoxically as his "harsh comedy" (*asperam thaliam*), and indeed, he himself presumably volunteered its oxymoronic genre as "Tragicomoedia" for the Stationers' Register entry on 5 July 1604.

Two prominent genre-straddling actions in the play reveal how the most obvious of comic situations can be endowed with double-layered meaningfulness. Malevole's sudden springing to life ("*Starts up*," V.iv.84 s.d.), several uncertain minutes after Mendoza had apparently poisoned him in cold blood before the audience's eyes and had gloated over the prostrate body in front of a stunned Celso, is a *coup de théâtre* that provides not only an abrupt comic surprise but also a chilling reminder that Mendoza's amoral viciousness might well have been fatal. A second example, occurring in the play's final moments, illustrates that most palpably conventional device of formal closure for comedy, the judgment scene. With the same turn of phrase as that earlier used at the same juncture by Shakespeare's malcontented Jaques in *As You Like It* (1600), the newly undisguised Duke Altofront allots due punishments and rewards to Mendoza, Pietro, Aurelia, and the other courtiers (V.vi.161-65). Yet, counterbalancing this facetious laying bare of comic technique are prominent religious motifs that lend dignity to the climactic moment when Altofront both retrieves his dukedom and attains his highest purpose, to resacralize Genoa under God's providence ("Who doubts of Providence . . . Heaven's imposed conditions . . . the Great Leader of the just stands for me," IV.v.136, V.vi.148, V.iv.91-92; cf. I.ii.23, IV.v.124). His arch-enemy Mendoza is significantly and often referred to as a devil (IV.iii.73, 114; V.vi.8, 17, 39; cf. II.v.106, III.v.31).

The profound implications of these two examples are not undercut by their sportive theatrical form, as some would contend; instead, by virtue of the author's capacity for "serious jest and jesting seriousness"

or the "seriously fantastical," the second plane of action tonally complements the first. Enlightened performers could be relied upon to sustain the tonal balance, not permitting witty histrionism to derogate from genuine moral fervency. However, realization that such evenhanded complementarity could be lost upon the reader, as opposed to an auditor, was likely reason enough for the playwright's self-declared unease: "only one thing afflicts me, to think that scenes invented merely to be spoken should be enforcively published to be read" ("To the Reader," ll. 26-28).

Characterization is yet another formal element Marston uses to establish a firm comic rapport with his audience, building playfully upon familiar character types and conventionalities but investing them with disquietingly serious traits. Malevole, on whom critics have lavished most attention, affords the leading instance of Marston's serio-comic, discrepant approach to characterization. Malevole's comic role-playing as a malcontent, the notoriously "stagey" humour character like Shakespeare's Thersites or Jaques, who would "Cleanse the foul body of th' infected world" (*AYL* II.vii.60), counterpoints his true identity: the disillusioned Duke Altofront who reasons that "Man is the slime of this dung-pit, and princes are the governors of these men" (*IV.v.114-15*). Even the villainous Mendoza displays serio-comic doubleness, but of another sort. In the first two of his seven soliloquies, Mendoza is an innocuous version of an *alazon*, the self-deceived, presumptuous stock character of Greek Old Comedy: ". . . to be a favorite, a minion? To have . . . a stateful silence . . . a confused hum and busy murmur of obedient suitors" (*I.iii.23-26*). Not by accident, nor previously noted, Mendoza's words are a witty paraphrase of Shakespeare's "overweening rogue" Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* (1602), as he fantasizes marriage to the Countess Olivia: "To be Count Malvolio! . . . to have the humour of state . . . Seven of my people, with an obedient start, make out for [Toby]" (*II.v.27-56*). In his five subsequent soliloquies, however, Mendoza emerges as the menacing villain he actually is (*I.vii.82-88 et seq.*). Many minor characters have a similar Janus-faced quality. Aurelia both amuses as the jilted lover of high comedy in her first scene ("I love to hate him; speak," *I.vi.28*) and disaffects in later ones as the murderous hedonist and enforced penitent. Maquerelle and Bilioso, whose literary antecedents are the

stock characters of Roman Comedy, the old procuress and the sycophant,¹³ engage Malevole often in almost playful banter. Yet, their comic aspects never obscure the fact that the garrulous old crone is a "picture of a woman and substance of a beast" (V.ii.9), or that the temporizing gull is really an emblem of depravity—"a fellow to be damned . . . a whoreson flesh-fly" (IV.v.103-05).

Dramatic language, so potent a source of comic energy throughout *The Malcontent*, is nonetheless another formal technique with divided implications. This quality shows most clearly in prose whose syntactical ordering itself invites laughter but whose content makes a dead-earnest ethical point. It occurs in the many instances of patterned speech, the Euphuistic devices of alliteration, assonance, parallelism, and repetition beloved of John Lyly in the 1580s for court comedies like *Gallathea* and *Endymion*. As Marston parodies such mannered eloquence that chimes perceptibly to the ear, he makes it both express mocking wit and signify the decadent order of *The Malcontent's* "Italian lascivious palace" (III.ii.34). The rhetorical schemata *isocolon* and *parison* (like-length and like-form phrases) are especially favored by the immoralists Maquerelle and Mendoza. Thus Maquerelle asserts that Marshal Bilioso "hath all things in reversion: he has his mistress in reversion, his clothes in reversion, his wit in reversion," etc. (V.v.30-34; cf. V.ii.43-47, V.vi.99-103). Mendoza declares hypocritically that women's "words are feigned, their eyes forged, their sighs dissembled, their looks counterfeit, their hair false . . .," etc. (I.vi.88-94, cf. I.v.45-48). Even Malevole lapses briefly into the style ("For as nowadays no courtier but has his mistress, no captain but has his cockatrice, no cuckold . . .," etc.) but breaks off disgustedly in mid-sentence, scorning his own verbal game-playing and the need for deception as symptoms of a flawed world ("[*Aside*] O God, how loathsome is this toying to me!" V.iii.38-43).

Another example of a double semantic nature inherent in what appears to be merely a comic verbal tic is discernible in Mendoza's persistent recitations of cynical *sententiae* (e.g., "*Mischief that prospers, men do virtue call,*" V.v.77) by Machiavelli, Seneca, and others. Modern actors might tend to accent the outrageousness of this clichéd villainy by perhaps speaking such maxims face-front, with raised forefinger, uplifted brows, or popped eyes. But Mendoza is no cardboard

Machiavel, and the heinousness of his ideas is distinctly unfunny; they could well be delivered quietly, deadpan, by a student of evil in the puckish Ricardian mold. That they can, attests further to Marston's penchant for his self-styled "jesting seriousness." The playwright's facility with comic language is therefore always apparent in *The Malcontent*, but a darker vein ever complements the lighter one; the "correct" tonal balance is left to the performers to determine. His darker propensity is corroborated by his disparaging view of human frailty, which reflects an absorption in the Calvinist fideism of Anglican England, making the entire work constitute a rich semantic field of antihumanistic motifs: animalism, scatology, illicit sexuality, and *contemptus mundi* ("World: 'tis the only region of death, the greatest shop of the devil," IV.iv.27-28).¹⁴

Plot structure is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of *The Malcontent's* doubleness. On the semantic level it depicts an earnest nobleman's fortunate counter-intrigue against a usurper whose court has become a "privy" where opportunists "rot and putrefy in the bosom of greatness" (Liv.90, II.i.49). But the form of the overall narrative is one featuring the highest degree of literary stereotypy: the ageless, rule-governed pattern of the Returning Hero tale, replete with archetypal "hero," "villain," and "false hero" roles, and issuing in the determinate happy ending of comedy. The pattern thus described is one that replicates in detail the ageless, universal pattern of the fairy tale. The presence in the play of such a constant factor makes the "doubleness" of *The Malcontent* appear in a different light.

It was the landmark study, *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928; Eng. trans. 1958) by the Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp, which first discerned the unitary morphological system underlying the folktale. In this seminal work Propp submitted all 177 national fairy tales from the well-known A. N. Afanasyev collection to a searching analysis of their form.¹⁵ Amazingly, though the tales differed widely in their incidental details, all possessed a single compositional plan. In one tale, for instance, an eagle flies the hero away to another kingdom, in a second tale a horse carries the hero away to another kingdom, and in a third tale a little boat transports the hero away to another kingdom. Propp recognized in these examples that, while the incidental means of conveyance changed for the several heroes, their basic actions

remained a constant. Observing such stable elements to constitute the fundamental components of the tale, he applied to them the term *function* (a character's action significant for the course of the narrative). Propp found, moreover, that the total number of functions derived from all of the tales was not infinite, but finite (only thirty-one), and that all functions universally occurred in strictly chronological, linear-sequential order. Not all thirty-one of them were present in every tale, of course, and one or more might perhaps be absent from a particular series (e.g. 4-5-7-8 . . .), but without exception there was no deviation in any tale from the irreversible, linear-sequential ordering. Unlike motifs, then, which occur randomly throughout a folkloristic text, functions are simultaneously units of structure and content that occur only in an invariable, concatenated order.

What follows is a pairing of nine consecutive points of narrative-characterological action (Function Nos. 23-32 of Propp's model)¹⁶ with reciprocal events occurring in *The Malcontent* in precisely the identical chronological order, thus establishing the play's structure as that of the fairy tale.

No. 23. *THE HERO, UNRECOGNIZED, ARRIVES HOME OR IN ANOTHER COUNTRY. Here, two classes are distinguishable: (1) arrival home . . . ; (2) he arrives at the court of some king, and serves either as a cook or a groom.*

Duke Giovanni Altofronto, called Altofronto, has returned from banishment to his former home at the Genoese court, where he is unrecognized in his disguise as the eccentric malcontent, Malevole (I.ii.17-31).

No. 24. *A FALSE HERO PRESENTS UNFOUNDED CLAIMS.*

Pietro, the false hero who usurped Altofronto's throne, had left "No strategem of state untried" (I.iv.21) in conniving with the Florentines to claim regency.

No. 25. *A DIFFICULT TASK IS PROPOSED TO THE HERO. [Of every kind, these tasks may involve physical ordeals, riddle-guessing or ordeals of choice, or tests of strength, adroitness, or endurance.]*

Altofronto rejects his friend Celso's proposal of mutiny to regain the throne, urging secret, gradual means rather than desperate ones ("temporize . . . Some way 'twill work," I.iv.28, 42). Indeed, most of the play (I.iv-IV.v) is taken up with the dangerous complications of Altofronto's task, such as his posing as henchman of the villain, Mendoza; enlisting the aid of Pietro the false hero to oppose the villain (III.v) and even pretending to be Mendoza's victim (V.iv.45). Sleeplessness, fear, and self-doubt are constant ordeals (III.ii.1, III.iii.2-3, V.iii.43-44).

No. 26. *THE TASK IS RESOLVED.*

Altofront's attainment of his goal is signalled by the false hero's renunciation of power and vow that his "breast's care shall be, / Restoring Altofront to regency" (IV.v.130-31).

No. 27. *THE HERO IS RECOGNIZED.*

Accepting Pietro's manifestly sincere reformation, Altofront "*Undisguiseth himself*" (IV.v.132 s.d.), ending his role-playing as Malevole.

No. 28 *THE FALSE HERO OR VILLAIN IS EXPOSED.*

During the masque of Mercury, at which Mendoza had intended to celebrate his installation as duke, Altofront and his allies surprise the villain when "*they unmask*" and proceed to "*environ Mendoza, bending their pistols on him*" (V.vi.112-13 s.d.).

No. 29 *THE HERO IS GIVEN A NEW APPEARANCE . . . 2) The hero puts on new garments.*

Mendoza identifies the now unmasked Malevole as Altofront, the event being punctuated by a cornet flourish and the general acclamation, "Duke Altofront! Duke Altofront!" (V.vi.116 s.d.). In performance, such instant recognition is likely abetted by Altofront's letting his white masque robe or cape (l. 68.2 s.d.) fall away to reveal his ducal regalia. The costume reestablishes his authority for the ensuing judgment scene.

No. 30 *THE VILLAIN IS PUNISHED.*

Mendoza's treachery requires the death sentence, but Altofront disdains severe punishment in favor of a comic expulsion: "*(Kicks out Mendoza) Hence with the man*" (V.vi.160).

No. 31 *THE HERO IS MARRIED AND ASCENDS THE THRONE . . . 5) the marriage [of an already married hero] resumes as the result of a quest. . . . At this point the tale draws to a close.*

Having foiled Mendoza's enforced marriage to Maria, Altofront takes his wife to his side (V.vi.164) and reasserts his ducal authority in the play's penultimate line ("I here assume my right," l. 166).

The Malcontent's narrative clearly fits the fairy-tale paradigm to a tee—"fairy tale" being used advisedly here to refer to a special type of folktale. (The looseness of this term, incidentally, has long bothered folklorists, for fairies most often inhabit the legend genre and fairy tales only rarely.) As an earnest personal history, the tale depicts a royal protagonist who passes heroic tests of skill and guile to avenge the wrongful dispossession of his birthright. As an equally consequential social parable, the story allegorizes the purgation of illegitimate,

unethical authority from the duchy and the restoration of rightful, morally enlightened rule. In his introduction to the English edition of the *Morphology* cited earlier, Alan Dundes in fact pondered the relationship of Propp's analysis to the structure of another folk narrative, the epic. In particular, Dundes found it noteworthy that the identical sequence of narrative elements (Functions 23-31) just quoted in connection with *The Malcontent* was "strikingly similar" to the last portion of Homer's *Odyssey* (p. xiv). Dundes' almost offhand surmise proves to be absolutely correct, and it is easily verified by pairing each of the aforementioned narrative elements with the selfsame sequence of events which unfold chronologically, as follows, in Books 16-23 of the *Odyssey*:

No. 23: Odysseus, prince of Ithaca, returns at last to his homeland disguised as an old vagabond; at Eumaeus' home he is unrecognized by Telemachus his son (Bk. 16). No. 24: Odysseus learns to his dismay that the Suitors have assumed control of the household (Bk. 16). No. 25: Now reunited with his son, Odysseus plans to defeat the Suitors (Bk. 16). No. 26: Helped by faithful servants who lock the palace doors, Odysseus confronts the Suitors, kills their leader (Bk. 22). No. 27: Death-threatening at first, the Suitors quake with fear upon recognizing Odysseus (Bk. 22). No. 28: Odysseus binds up Melanthius the goatherd, whom he guesses has armed the Suitors (Bk. 22). No. 30: Odysseus and allies kill the Suitors, hang their mistresses, torture Melanthius (Bk. 22). No. 31: Penelope's test identifies Odysseus as her estranged husband; their marriage resumes (Bk. 23).¹⁷

Thus despite nonessential differences in characterization between the royal protagonists, Altofront and Odysseus, the form and content of their respective disguise-, intrigue-, and comic-denouement plots, are revealed as fully homologous. Furthermore, Propp's work merely supplies systematic corroboration of what folklorists have already observed about the structure of Homer's epic for over a century, which is that the popular and widespread folktale of the Returning Hero provides the *Odyssey's* core narrative, Homer having adopted it to apply to persons he believed to be historical.¹⁸ Accordingly then, this Returning Hero folktale appears not only to have been extant in ancient Greece well before the *Odyssey*, and part as well of an independent body of Russian fairy tales collected by Afanasyev in the mid-

nineteenth century, but also to have been absorbed in toto into the plot narrative of Marston's Jacobean tragicomedy.¹⁹

Marston thus evidences his doubleness, on the level of thematic content, by the authentic pessimism and disgust with which he limns a sin-ridden milieu ("here round about is hell," V.iii.24), and on the level of technique by the unstudied advantage he gains from the optimistic teleology of the fairy-tale form itself, which subconsciously prepares us for its auspicious outcome. To be sure, he also employs form with even surer calculation in the tactically placed foreshadowings that neutralize suspense regarding Malevole's eventual victory: "Now 'gins close plots to work; the scene grows full . . . I find the wind begins to come about."²⁰

In the act of "creating" a narrative spine for *The Malcontent*, Marston had absorbed an already well-established pattern whose recurrence has been proven to be universal, at least among Indo-European nations. Above all, the fairy-tale form permits the work's generous measure of social-satirical episodes (ethically pertinent but narratively digressive) to be integrated into a tightly unified gestalt, a clearly delineated heroic totality. Second, Marston had invented "original" leading characters in Altofront, Mendoza, and Pietro; but when these creations are examined with respect to functions performed in the determinate ordering of a folkloristic text, they are revealed as embodiments of "hero," "villain," and "false hero," the conventionalized dramatis personae of the folktale.

This bent for stereotypy, both in terms of archetypal story-line and characterization, also accords with another of the author's signature techniques. For, even as Marston offers us characters who are quite lifelike, he playfully makes transparent the fact that they are either enacting such theatrically familiar type-character roles or are on occasion deliberate echoes of known Shakespearean characters. In similar fashion, even as the playwright involves us in the genuine dangers and righteousness of Altofront's mission, he structures that experience in a comic form of recognizable "literariness," a form whose origins are locatable in both the stereotypic paradigm of the *Märchen* and in the formularized construction which Greek New Comedy gave to drama and which came to Elizabethans via Plautus and Terence.²¹ I would suggest, then, that the fairy-tale form is the "something

behind, more real than any of the personages and their action," which Eliot sensed in *The Malcontent*.

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NOTES

¹Anthony Caputi, *John Marston, Satirist* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1961) 179. All citations to *The Malcontent* are from the Revels Plays edition, ed. George K. Hunter (London: Methuen, 1975).

²David J. Houser, "Purging the Commonwealth: Marston's Disguised Dukes and *A Knack to Know a Knave*," *PMLA* 89 (1974): 993-1006, 993.

³T. S. Eliot, *Elizabethan Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934) 189-90.

⁴John Scott Colley, *John Marston's Theatrical Drama*, *Jacobean Drama Studies* 33 (Salzburg: U of Salzburg, 1974) 2-3.

⁵David L. Frost, *The School of Shakespeare: The Influence of Shakespeare in English Drama 1600-42* (Cambridge: CUP, 1968) 182.

⁶R. A. Foakes, "On Marston, *The Malcontent*, and *The Revenger's Tragedy*," *The Elizabethan Theatre VI*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (Hamden, CT: Shoe String P, 1977) 69-70.

⁷Arthur C. Kirsch, *Jacobean Dramatic Perspectives* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1972) 32.

⁸John Peter, *Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1956) 238.

⁹R. W. Ingram, *John Marston* (Boston: Twayne, 1978) 85.

¹⁰Jonathan Miller, quoted by Ingram 168n4. Cf. Eugene M. Waith, *The Pattern of Tragicomedy in Beaumont and Fletcher* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1952) 67.

¹¹*The Poems of John Marston*, ed. Arnold Davenport (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1961) 149.

¹²*Antonio and Mellida*, ed. G. K. Hunter, *Regents Renaissance Drama Ser.* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1965), "Letter Dedicatory," ll. 5-6.

¹³George E. Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy: A Study in Popular Entertainment* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1952) 253, 261.

¹⁴Brownell Salomon, "The Theological Basis of Imagery and Structure in *The Malcontent*," *SEL* 14 (1974): 271-84.

¹⁵Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd ed., rev. and ed. by Louis A. Wagner, with an introduction by Alan Dundes (1st ed. 1958; Austin: U of Texas P for the American Folklore Society, 1968). Propp uses the term *volsebnaja skazka* (magical folktale) to refer to this specific class of folktale (Aarne-Thompson tale types 300-749); in English translation the term became "fairy tale." Some confusion was created by Propp's Leningrad publisher, who, with the aim of generating wider interest, misleadingly suppressed the qualifying word "magical" in the title. But in fact later scholars, including Propp himself, have verified the cross-cultural

applicability of his paradigm to the gamut of folk narratives: other bodies of folktale, epic, classical myths, ancient Greek romances, the Biblical story of Jacob, etc. "The Myth Structure and Rituality of *Henry V*," my article forthcoming in *YES*, examines how Shakespeare's play employs an integral heroic segment of it. That essay reviews earlier applications and documents as well as the important point substantiated by many folklorists: that all types of folk narrative (myth, folktale, fairy tale, etc.) are co-identical both as regards morphology and genre, notwithstanding differences in cultural seriousness among them.

¹⁶Propp 60-64.

¹⁷The *Odyssey* has a No. 29 (Odysseus bathes, changes clothing before meeting Penelope), but it occurs after rather than prior to No. 30. For convenience, I paraphrase the excellent synopsis of the *Odyssey* by Lillian Feder, *The Meridian Handbook of Classical Literature*, Meridian Books (New York: NAL, 1986) 284-89.

¹⁸See Denys Page, *The Homeric Odyssey* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1955) 1-2, 18n1, and his *Folktales in Homer's Odyssey* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1973) 3-4, 177n3.

¹⁹It is a moot point whether the Greek epic might have provided direct inspiration for Marston's own plot structure. Two allusions to the *Odyssey* are present in the text (III.ii.47, IV.i.56), but these casual references to Penelope's faithfulness in her husband's absence and to the difficulty of stringing Ulysses' bow are proverbial and available from indirect sources. For the first, see Ovid's imaginary verse epistle, "Penelope to Ulysses," in the *Heroides*, 1.83-86, a work Marston also directly quotes in Latin (II.v.126). For the second, see Tilley B562, The Bow of Ulysses (M. P. Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* [Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1950]).

²⁰I.v.160, III.iii.17; cf. III.ii.50-51, IV.v.148.

²¹Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1967) 163. This comic pattern applies equally to *The Malcontent* and the *Odyssey*. Although ethical seriousness, social implications, and violent incidents are important features in both works (in Homer, numerous usurpers meet their deaths), their underlying form makes comedy the operative genre.

Gematria in *Piers Plowman* (A Response to Arthur Versluis)

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Students of *Piers Plowman* should be grateful to Arthur Versluis for linking medieval gematria—symbolic alphanumeric patterns—to the prophecies. His fruitful reading of the apocalyptic first prophecy, where the three F's in III.325 are probable gematria for 666 and the last days, epitomizes the virtues of his pioneering approach. Although the "cyclical" view of history attributed to Langland, the "Greeks, Hindus, and Buddhists" deserves further study, Versluis's reading helps decode the difficult sign of the "six sonnes, and a ship, and half a shef of arwes" (III.326). He follows previous editors in connecting the six suns with the present age, the ship with the Church, and the half-sheaf of arrows with the twelve zodiacal signs—in other words, the time of tribulation, the passage through that time, and "the wholeness which is the aim of that passage, twelve being the predominant number of the City of New Jerusalem" (120).¹ This is plausible, and the link with gematria persuasive.

With engaging modesty, Versluis calls his groundbreaking study "a preliminary investigation" (104), a wise decision given the open-ended claim that alliterative gematria in *Piers Plowman* have "esoteric implications for the poem as a whole" (105). This modesty bequeaths him considerable advantages. For by conceding the tentative character of his conclusions, he can elide certain evidential responsibilities in developing his argument. However compelling in outline, Versluis's argument is occasionally vulnerable to a second-generation critique of the sort A. Kent Hieatt has recommended:

One of the directions that those interested in [medieval numerical criticism] should follow, I believe, is that of second-generation studies—studies that need not always and exclusively be critiques of what has already been done, but that proceed more temperately in the light of what can now be seen as the mistakes of the past.²

Hieatt, a distinguished numerical critic himself, noted three aspects of "fantasticity" in the field that deserved scrutiny: "a neglect of adverse evidence," "a hydroptic desire for achieved patterns," and "results conditioned not so much by the object of the researcher's study as by his own angle of approach." Prophetic themselves, these three fantasticalities recur in Versluis's study.

First, neglect of adverse evidence. The validity of Versluis's argumentation depends crucially on the lineation of the A. V. C. Schmidt edition of *Piers*. If Book III's lineation has been unproblematic for editors of the poem, this is not true of Book VI: the second prophecy, according to Versluis, "ends at line 330—the number of Christ multiplied by ten—with an alliteration of triple G's, which is to say, 777" (121). But Schmidt's line 330 is line 331 in Kane and Donaldson, line 332 in Skeat. If Versluis's results require this modern edition, that fact should be mentioned. Perhaps Schmidt's lineation is the correct one; but, until such an argument is advanced, readers can justly withhold assent.

Second, hydroptic desire for achieved patterns. Throughout Versluis's study, the method of calculating letter or number significance varies according to local interpretive needs. Just after the reading of the three F's in the first prophecy, the five M's of III.330 are taken as significant. Since these are not initial letters, the notion of alliterative gematria does not come into play: Versluis counts all instances of the given letter in the line, an arbitrary method in the service of a desire for meaningful patterning. The original notion of alliterative gematria then reappears as Versluis argues that the three (initial) W's and four (initial) H's beginning the second prophecy are significant: "H is the eighth letter, W the twenty-third, eight being traditionally affiliated with the sphere of the moon beyond the other seven spheres; twenty-three being one beyond twenty-two, a profoundly sacred number in Qabalism, a meaning taken over into Christianity by St. Augustine and others" (121). Here, however, not the number, but n minus one grounds Versluis's interpretive claims. Elsewhere, n to the second power figures, as in the contention that "the sixteenth line of the Prologue contains four D's, the value of which is sixteen, and P is the sixteenth letter" (note 59). Sometimes it is not letters, but sounds, that are calculated, as when significance is found in the three C-

sounds of VII.134, one of which is represented by the letter K. And sometimes the patterning sought is not calculative, but ideational: the S's in VII.138 are "linked with the serpentine waxing and waning patterns of the Moon, and with the Serpent" (106). A footnote offers support for this claim from Cirlot's *Dictionary of Symbols*; still, no lunar or serpentine imagery occurs in the line.

Third, results conditioned not so much by the object of the researcher's study as by his own angle of approach. Since the number is symbolically important, Versluis finds it "appropriate" that "the [third] prophecy begin[s] on line 153" (128). But since it actually begins on line 151, this piece of evidence seems dictated by the interpretive frame. A similar conditioning occurs in the discussion of VII.133-34, where Piers explains how he learned to read:

"Abstynence the Abbesse," quod Piers, "myn a.b.c. me taughte,
And Conscience cam afterward and kened me muche moore."

Versluis argues that 33 is affiliated with Christ, that three alliterative A's are followed by three alliterative C's, and that "there are no alliterative B's because the essential mystery here is that of the Three in One, the Unicity of the Trinity" (106). But if the alphanumeric data (line 133, 3 A-letters, 3 C-sounds) suggest the Trinity to Versluis, no Trinitarian mystery at all can be detected in the lines themselves. Readers are told that the Trinitarian mystery is "here," a site that can only be the interpretative grid, especially given the fact that these are lines VII.138-39 in the Kane and Donaldson edition of the B-text.

Despite such limitations, enough promising work is found (e.g., the R/M correlation by which *resurreccio mortuorum* is linked with rightwisnesse and mercy in XVIII.397-98) to suggest that further research on gematria in Langland should be conducted. In particular, the *De semine scripturarum* should be investigated:

quite popular in England . . . it was cited by writers like Roger Bacon and John Wyclif, and found its way into a handful of English chronicles and medieval library catalogues. It is based on the unlikely notion that clues to the meaning of history may be found in the letters of the three alphabets of the three languages used on the Cross, Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Each letter is allotted one century and any century can be understood by examining the characteristics of each letter.³

Versluis has made this "unlikely" notion more likely for students of *Piers Plowman*. They should follow the path he has cleared by exploring this strain of prophetic gematria, which was quite influential in the fourteenth century.

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NOTES

¹See notes and commentary in editions of the poem by A. V. C. Schmidt, J. A. W. Bennett, and Walter W. Skeat.

²"Numerical Structures in Verse: Second-Generation Studies Needed (Exemplified in *Sir Gawain and the Chanson de Roland*)," *Essays in the Numerical Criticism of Medieval Literature*, ed. Caroline D. Eckhardt (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1980) 66. The following quotations are found on the same page.

³Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: CUP 1990) 183. Unfortunately, no printed edition of the *De semine* exists. Kerby-Fulton goes on to say that "Most of the prophecy is concerned with H to Z (or the Incarnation to the End of the World) of the Latin alphabet. Here the author surveys the history of the Church and the Roman Empire and the development of the Church is conceived, not surprisingly, as a succession of chastisements and renewals. During K to L, Christ liberated the Church from persecutions and during M from heresy. In the time of Q, simony had begun to penetrate the Church and by the time of X (that is, the century from 1215 to 1315) the author declares the Church to be thoroughly corrupt. At this time Christ will drive out the unchaste and mercenary clergy, as he did the money-changers from the temple. The reformed Church will attract the "Gentiles" into it and all the peoples of the world will be received into the Church in the time of Y, the three arms of Y symbolizing Europe, Africa and Asia. Also under X, the Holy Land, which had been lost to the Saracens during V, is returned to Christian hands, but there will be more suffering, particularly among the clergy, from the effects of war, plundering and general turbulence during the X period. In view of the fact that the writer is (on the basis of internal evidence) probably writing in about the year 1205, it is not surprising that he details his starkest prophecies, no doubt as warning to clerics, for the X (1215-1315) and Y (1315-1415) periods. During the last period, Z, the author expects Antichrist to come—that is, some time after 1415."

Duality in *Piers Plowman* and the Anglo-Saxon Riddles (A Response to Arthur Versluis)

GWENDOLYN MORGAN

The medieval penchant for weaving diverse sorts of symbolism and allusion into a single literary work finds its ultimate expression in *Piers Plowman*. To an already rich set of possibilities for this poem, Arthur Versluis adds a well-supported, detailed study of the number and letter symbolism inherent in its alliterative patterns, explicating in particular the three prophecies of the B text. As he points out, the intricate gematria therein is further complicated by the paradoxical nature of Christian numerology, in which a single number (and hence letter) may carry both positive and negative connotations. To wit: the number twelve, encompassing the material and the spiritual worlds, at once represents universality and the dichotomy between Man's perfect and fallen states; seven symbolizes the Virtues as well as the Deadly Sins, the Sacraments and the Ages of Man; six is both perfection (the Creation took six days) and imperfection, being the number of the Beast and (to thoroughly confuse the issue) one less than seven, the number of spiritual completeness. Thus, numbers and their corresponding letters "possess multivalent, often polarized implications" (107). In short, medieval Christian number symbolism, and its use in *Piers Plowman*, can be summed up in the number two. Standing for duality itself, two connotes Satan (deception) and Christ incarnate as God and Man.

The inherent contradictions in this system intimidate, and perhaps this explains why an author rarely makes use of them. Instead, either (s)he superimposes a number's *complimentary* meanings upon each other, as with the fives of Gawain's pentangle, or draws strictly upon its primary implications to create a monolithic symbol, such as Spenser's Una and Duessa. Why, then, does Langland exploit numerology's dualism? Perhaps, as Versluis suggests, to emphasize that "evil is

necessary in order that the apocalypse come about, and the final return to celestial order" (107), in which case some readers may be excused for feeling pushed to the brink of frustration (if not madness) by what seems to be Langland's literary hyperbole. On the other hand, we might do well to recall the older native tradition upon which the poet also draws.

Piers, of course, stands as a major example of the so-called Alliterative Revival. Yet Langland's debt to the Old English school is not limited to mechanics but extends to the techniques of Anglo-Saxon riddling, itself rooted in folk wisdom despite the obvious classical and early medieval Latin influences evident in certain extant specimens. Versluis seems to recognize this when he terms the prophecies of the B text "riddle-prophecies," and riddles they are, presented without explicit solutions. But more than this, they are specifically Anglo-Saxon riddles, for the key to a full understanding of them lies not only in the gematria which Versluis amply decodes but also in the duality implicit in each number-letter combination. That same duality lies at the heart of a majority of the Exeter riddles, reflecting, I would suggest, the ambivalent character of the Anglo-Saxon world view. A few examples should here suffice.

Some riddles emphasize the significant duality which is the essence of the natural world. Riddle 1, for example, depicts a storm as both a destroyer and a nurturer. The first of these functions is described through martial imagery: the subject becomes a proud, thundering host which ravages crops and burns towns, boding "violent death to men" (*wælcwealm wera*, 1.8).¹ Then, it appears as rain falling upon the woods and bringing new life. But there is more, however, for the subject "bears on [its] back that which once covered earth-dwellers, flesh and spirit, entirely in ocean" (*hæbbe me on hrycge þæt ær hadas wreah foldbuendra, flæsc ond gæstas, somod on sunde*, 12-14a). In this manner, the poet uses storm clouds to recall a time when water covered the earth—in the Great Flood and prior to that, during the Creation before land was separated from the sea (Genesis 1.v-1.ix)—indicating at once God's creation and destruction of the world. Thus, the storm and the deity it reflects exist as combinations of inseparable opposites. Other nature riddles exhibit the same sense of essential paradox. In some the dichotomy is equally

dramatic, as in specimen 29, which describes the cycle of day and night in terms of the sun and moon, complete with many of their traditional (and contradictory) associations. Elsewhere, it is less noteworthy: Riddle 42 ("Cock and Hen") reduces it to the simple distinction between the genders. Nonetheless, basic dualism permeates riddling depictions of the natural world.

Similar to the storm in its capacity for violence and nurture are the subjects in riddles defining various tools and activities of humanity. Riddle 80, usually solved as "A Horn," presents a speaker which may sound a battle charge or entertain with music; it may be handled by a fierce warrior or a gentle noblewoman; it connotes death as the warrior's companion (*fyrdrinces gefara*) and life in its association with growth. (This latter is particularly interesting, for the phrase *hæbbe me on bosme þæt on bearwe geweoƿ* almost suggests a cornucopia image.) Likewise, the subject of Riddle 25, whether "an Onion" as traditionalists would have it or, as Edith Williams convincingly argues², the male sex organ, paradoxically attacks its "slayer" and brings both happiness and tears to women. Even objects which are acted *upon* possess variant possibilities. That designated by riddle 30 (a piece of wood, the Rood, a harp, or whatever) is at once a grove's blossom and a "burned ember" (*bearu blowende, byrnende gled*, l. 4). It may be "troubled" by fire (*legbysig*) or refined by the same (*fyre gemylted*; see religious translations by Alfred and the Cambridge Psalter for this usage).³ And so it continues with shield and sword, book and leather, key and shirt.

For the consciousness permeating the Exeter Book riddles, existence and everything in it appear as essentially dual, contradictory, dark and light. For me, Riddle 74 sums up the idea. One of the more puzzling examples, it has been solved variously as "Cuttlefish," "Water," and "Swan," although most modern scholars, following Krapp and Dobbie, accept Tupper's suggestion, "Siren." Yet a more satisfactory solution presents itself in the poem's contradictions:

Ic wæs fæmne geong, feaxhar cwene,
 ond ænlic rinc on ane tid;
 fleah mid fuglum ond on flode swom,
 deaf under yþe dead mid fiscum,
 ond on foldan stop, hæfde ferð cwicu.

[I was a young woman, a grey-haired wife,
 and a noble warrior in one hour;
 flew with birds and in the sea swam,
 dove under the waves, dead among fishes,
 and on earth walked, had a living soul.]

Lines 1 and 2 seem to indicate images reflected in a mirror or, given the following clues, in water. (Water itself is precluded by lines 3a and 5, and likely by 3b-4b.) They might also be understood as shadows. A shadow will fly, swim, or walk with that which casts it; it exists even on the sea bottom; it is at once dead, since it has no independent existence, and alive, since it is part of and cannot be separated from the "living soul" which it mimics. Or perhaps "Reflection," in its broader sense, is the answer, for it encompasses mirror image and shadow. It may be the outline of a thing or its essence, a facsimile or its obverse. A reflection exemplifies dualism.

That dualism lies at the center of so many riddles is not surprising, for such is the Anglo-Saxon view of human experience and of the cosmos. The narrator of "Wulf and Eadwacer" strains to express conflicting emotions in her anguished cry, "I found some joy in that, I found that loathsome too" (l. 12), while the speaker in "The Ruin" reflects on the glory and on the inefficacy of human accomplishment. The Rood is at once blood-stained and covered with gems, defeated and triumphant. The passage on moderation in "The Wanderer" warns us to be neither too happy nor too sad. All of these, it seems, reflect *wyrd*. As Deor presents the case, "wise God changes often" and will bring some men joy, others "a share of sadness." The poem's refrain reflects the best man can hope: "that passed away, this also may." In other words, *wyrd* may bring good or bad, and ours is not to question how or why but merely to accept.

Riddles are about the mysteries of the universe, large and small. In a world governed by *wyrd*, that means contradictions and opposites running parallel. Yet it also means the possibility of good—solace, glory, happiness—in the midst of evil, and when turned to a Christian purpose a basis for hope. Why, then, should *not* Langland, if he is going to write riddles, exploit this? Archetypal woman may be Medea or Mary, God the Savior or the Judge, Man the redeemed or the doomed. Or perhaps

Langland's was more of a struggle to reconcile what often comes through in the early English temperament as a valiant and vivacious but hopeless and cynical struggle to continue. In drawing upon the native Anglo-Saxon tradition, he appears to have adopted not merely the alliterative technique and a penchant for riddling, but the Janus-like perceptions of his ancestors. In this, he might find relief also from both Anglo-Saxon fatalism and the dichotomies of Christian dogma, offering in *Piers* a basis for redemptive faith.

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NOTES

¹All riddle quotations are from Krapp and Dobbie's edition of the *Exeter Book, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, vol. 3 (New York: Columbia UP, 1936).

²In her article, "What's So New about the Sexual Revolution? Some Comments on Anglo-Saxon Attitudes toward Sexuality in Women Based on Four Exeter Book Riddles," *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, eds. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990).

³These citations are from riddle 30B, the second of the two versions in the *Exeter Book*.

Doctor Faustus and Intertextuality (A Response to Paul Budra and Paul Yachnin)

MARK THORNTON BURNETT

Contributions by Paul Budra and Paul Yachnin to the first issue of *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate* develop in exciting and fruitful ways an understanding of the self-conscious literary qualities of Marlowe's work. Concentrating on the importance invested in books in *Doctor Faustus*, Budra looks at scenes where texts are written, read or exchanged (the volumes of magic, or the signing away in blood of Faustus' soul, for example) and argues that the play "revolves around the text, the reader's manipulation of it, and its manipulation of the reader."¹ In his response, Yachnin extends these observations, historicizing *Doctor Faustus* in terms of its "anxious enactment of the guilty desire on the part of literary culture to appropriate the power of words which had once belonged exclusively to scripture."² Although what these critics propose is not entirely new (there have been studies of writing and reading in Marlowe's plays, and attention has been paid to the theatricality and performative character of his work) they push Marlovian criticism in fresh directions and suggest possibilities for reinterpretation and reassessment.³

If *Doctor Faustus* is imagined as a text about texts, the play's dark corners are illuminated. The textual concerns are apparent from the start, even before the first scene begins. In particular the chorus preoccupies itself with the relationship between books and authority: earlier play-texts are rudely dismissed in the opening lines of the prologue; a later chorus informs the audience that Faustus seeks astronomical secrets "Grauen in the booke of *Ioues* hie firmament" (812); and the epilogue bestows upon Faustus the laurel wreath of the poet (or writer) laureate (1511).⁴ The bookish chorus intervenes to restore an illusion of order at critical moments. And books are used to quell anxieties and to placate resentment, too; when Mephostophilis

offers the gift of a book, he endeavours to dampen Faustus' noisy questions, and one recalls that in sixteenth-century Europe books were exchanged as gifts to cultivate favour, to assert superiority and to initiate a series of social obligations.⁵ It is the historical embeddedness of *Doctor Faustus* that most interests Yachnin who situates the play in the context of post-Reformation scepticism about the efficacy of the "word" of the Bible. Certainly the Renaissance was marked by a fear that, between "word" and "thing," there was a growing divide; semantic shifts were taking place, and the power of language adequately to represent the world was placed in doubt.⁶

I

But it is not the purpose of this contribution to the discussion to offer further examples which will bolster Budra's and Yachnin's conclusions. It is another aspect of the subject that requires investigating. In any appreciation of the textuality of *Doctor Faustus*, the play's multiple textual versions present themselves as an urgent issue. *Doctor Faustus* exists in two, radically different versions, the A-text printed in 1604, and the longer B-text printed in 1616. During the nineteenth century Marlovian scholars generally agreed that the A-text was closer to Marlowe's "original intentions." However, later editors such as F. S. Boas, Leo Kirschbaum and W. W. Greg joined to contend that the A-text was a "Bad Quarto" (or a memorial reconstruction) and that the B-text represented a more authentic version, based (Greg argued) on Marlowe's "foul papers."⁷ Editions followed by John D. Jump (1962), Leo Kirschbaum (1962), Irving Ribner (1963), Roma Gill (1965 and 1971), Sylvan Barnet (1969), J. B. Steane (1969), Fredson Bowers (1973) and E. D. Pendry and J. C. Maxwell (1976), all of which endorse these arguments and use the B-text as copy-text.⁸ In contrast, most scholars would now argue that the A-text stands up well on its own and has integrity, and that B is based on a later edition of the A-text and a manuscript of theatrical provenance censored by a book-keeper, and that it was further changed and added to by Birde and Rowley, two popular dramatists. Accordingly the shelves of bookshops have recently been lined with

a plethora of editions of the A-text. An Australian edition of 1985 prints a modernized text; Roma Gill modernizes and preserves old spelling respectively in her editions of 1989 and 1990; Michael Keefer modernizes in his 1991 Canadian edition which combines theoretical sophistication with bold textual revisions.⁹

To be fair, Budra and Yachnin do acknowledge *Doctor Faustus'* problematic textual status. "The A text does not allow for an inner stage," Budra notes, plotting the possible physical movements of the actor playing Faustus in the opening scene.¹⁰ Yachnin goes further and states: "The fact that there exist two widely different plays called 'Doctor Faustus,' both published after Marlowe's death, and that we continue to talk about Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* as if such a unitary text existed, attests to our persistent need for a myth of presence in order to stabilize the text's authoritative meaning and its supposed attendant power."¹¹ But Yachnin resists building upon these reflections, while Budra cites from Bowers' edition which prints the B-text even though it sees as non-Marlovian Birde's and Rowley's comic additions.

II

A comparison of both texts (A and B) reveals two plays (each with its own flavour and internal logic) which diverge sharply in the suggestions they make concerning intertextuality, reading and writing, and the power of books.

Where the B-text responds to or modifies the A-text, sometimes it is to make more richly ambiguous book-related issues in the earlier play. Faustus' lines in the A-text, when he reads from the Bible in a frustrated inspection of the sacred texts of knowledge, are end-stopped, pointing to finality, resolution and decisiveness. But the B-text hints at openings, flexibility and doubt; the deployment of rhetorical colons suspends the endings of utterances and quotations:

*Ieromes Bible Faustus, view it well:
Stipendium peccati, mors est; ha, stipendium, &c.
The reward of sin is death? that's hard:
Si peccasse, negamus, fallimur, & nulla est in nobis veritas:
If we say that we haue no sinne
We deceiue our selues, and there is no truth in vs. (65-70)*

This is not to imply that the B-text is aesthetically more satisfying; it only presents an alternative perspective on Faustus' preliminary ruminations. Similarly, additional meanings are generated by variant spellings. Whereas Faustus will "write a deede of gift" (475) in the 1604-version, in the 1616-version he is urged to "wright a Deed of Giff" (423)—the B-text introduces a note of legality and authority (punning upon "wright" and "right") and capitalizes letters, lending an official tone to Faustus' satanic negotiations. Legal echoes are heard again in the scene in which Faustus signs away his soul for twenty-four years of whimsical, self-indulgent pleasures. He informs Mephostophilis that he will describe "All articles prescrib'd betweene vs both" (536) in the A-text; the equivalent line in the B-text, however, has a greater forcefulness—"All Couenants, and Articles, betweene vs both" (483)—and alludes both to sealed contracts and to the compact between God and the Israelites.

At other points in the B-text the textual themes of the 1604-version are merely expanded without the play being pushed into a confrontation with ideological contradictions. The Pope scenes gain weight in the transition from A to B, and in the 1616-version Faustus urges Mephostophilis to plague the friars as they turn to their "superstitious Bookes" (922), a request that possibly harks back to Envy's contempt for the literate during the pageant of the seven deadly sins. As the critical hour of reckoning approaches in the B-text, Mephostophilis' eyes light upon his victim: "He and his seruant *Wagner* are at hand, / Both come from drawing *Faustus* latest will" (1912-13). The term "drawing," with its associations of writing, brings to mind Faustus' fatal act of writing earlier in the play, and underscores the fact that no new contract will be sufficiently powerful to turn back the clock.

Part of the slipperiness of the B-text lies with the ways in which it sensitively enlarges upon the A-text and closes down possibilities at one and the same time. Some scenes are imaginatively augmented; others are flattened and reduced, falling prey to doggerel and to slapstick comic routines. Thematic tightness and concision characterize most scenes in the A-text, but the B-text incorporates materials whose distracting qualities do not advance the play's arguments. To the supernatural business at the court of Charles, the German emperor, the B-text adds Benvolio's attempts to be revenged for the humiliation

he suffers at Faustus' hands. The closing scenes of *Doctor Faustus*, the outcome of which is uncertain in the A-text, become crudely predictable in B, and their mechanical inevitability can be traced to their treatment of books. Lucifer, Beelzebub and Mephostophilis enter to oversee Faustus' anguished final moments, and his fate, it seems, is assured. Mephostophilis states:

'Twas I, that when thou wer't i'the way to heauen,
 Damb'd vp thy passage, when thou took'st the booke,
 To view the Scriptures, then I turn'd the leaues
 And led thine eye. (1989-92)

Budra suggests that Mephostophilis' disclosure is sure to "break" Faustus as "he has been betrayed by that which he most covets," but it also needs noting that these B-text additions prevent the escalation of dramatic tensions and foreclose questions about Faustus' racked movements between heaven and hell: in the later version of the play, at least, Faustus' damnation is a certainty.¹²

On close inspection the A-text emerges as the *Doctor Faustus* which most powerfully supports the findings of Budra and Yachnin, and this is surprising as it is Bowers' version of the B-text which is cited by Budra in his article. The textual cruxes which Budra identifies are given a particularly succinct statement in the A-text, pared-down and unadorned with appended developments. At the start of the 1604-version of the play Faustus rhapsodizes about the "Lines, circles, sceanes, letters and characters" (81) of his necromantic books in language which self-consciously suggests theatrical practices. Magical diagrams and dramatic structures are simultaneously alluded to in "sceanes": no such word appears in the parallel line in the B-text. Fussy and petulant behaviour by Faustus towards Mephostophilis in the A-text results in his leaving the stage weighed down with books (Budra opens his discussion with this scene); an impoverished Faustus in the B-text departs with only one book in his hands. An irreverent A-text Faustus happily contemplates burning the "Scriptures" (727) yet is disallowed from countenancing the idea in the B-text with its more pronounced theological severities. Faustus, then, in the A-text is a "Coniurer laureate" (276); in the (probably censored) B-text, he enjoys no equivalent title.¹³

It should be clear that my sympathies are mainly with the A-text which appears as a tauter production with a crystalline subtlety not shared by the B-text; while tending toward the earlier play, I am also aware of the interest which the B-text generates: in the words of Faustus, it goes forwards and backwards in its representation of textual questions. A consideration of the clown scenes will help clarify my argument. Bent upon subduing the maidens of the parish to his inordinate sexual appetite, Robin the ostler enters in the 1604-version with a conjuring book. The sexual references accumulate as the scene unfolds, and the bawdy implications of "chafing" (957), "beare" (967), "turne" (977) and "vse" (980) build towards a sense of degraded lasciviousness. Accompanying the wanton fantasies are exclamations which obliquely reflect Faustus' own predicament. "*Nan Spit*" (979) is a grotesque parody of Helen of Troy (with whom Faustus commits demonality), and Robin's threats—"you are blown vp . . . dismembered *Rafe*" (960-61)—grimly anticipate the doctor's bodily tortures at the catastrophic close. The powerlessness of the books, moreover, indirectly highlights Faustus' growing weaknesses. "Canst thou coniure with it?" (971) asks Rafe, pointing to the magical book, and is obviously disappointed by Robin's boastful assurances: "Our maister Parson sayes thats nothing" (975). As Faustus is held ever more tightly by the forces of darkness, so is it suggested, through comic bombast and bathos, that it will not be in books that his salvation lies.

The parallel (probably misplaced) scene in the B-text is shorter and less suggestive.¹⁴ It broaches a number of issues that cast Faustus' activities into an ironic light—reminders of Dick's "*Maister*" (758) encourage speculation about Faustus' domination by Mephostophilis, and Robin's drunken extravagances look forward to the banquet with the scholars in the final scene—but generally it fails to announce arresting dramatic developments. In his struggle to decipher the letters in his stolen conjuring book, Robin shows himself as a shrunken Faustus, even though the complications attendant upon textual interpretation were declared as part of the play's agenda in the early stages.

A censor's eye may well have passed over the 1604-version of the vintner scene as it differs in several points of textual detail from its reincarnation twelve years later. The A-text clearly specifies that Robin

"reades" (1008) from a book of spells in order to quell the vintner's angry outbursts; Robin seems to have no such book in the B-Text. Tormented by spirits, Robin vows to Mephostophilis: "good diuel / fõrgiue me now, and Ile neuer rob thy Library more" (1018-19). The 1616-version does not contain a comparable line to suggest that Robin selects books as the objects of his thieving tendencies. During the course of its transformation from A to B, the vintner scene deprives Robin of literacy and bibliophilic criminality.

III

Although the A-text would seem to express in a more concentrated and direct form the literary anxieties which are addressed by Budra and Yachnin in their contributions, the singularity of the B-text should not be overlooked. Many editors would now want to maintain that A and B derive from independent copies of *Doctor Faustus* (whether printed or in manuscript), one good reason for recognizing their textual autonomy and separateness. It is also clear that it is becoming increasingly difficult for us to talk about favouring one version or another. What is needed is a new parallel-text edition, updated and with an editorial commentary which allows readers to adjudicate and to make their own, informed choices. Without doubt it will be the work of a Marlovian bibliophile.

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NOTES

¹Paul Budra, "Doctor Faustus: Death of a Bibliophile," *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate* 1 (1991): 2.

²Paul Yachnin, "Doctor Faustus and the Literary System: A Supplementary Response to Paul Budra," *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate* 1 (1991): 75.

³See Mark Thornton Burnett, "Marlowe: An Elizabethan Witness," *L'Artiste, Témoin de Son Temps* (?), ed. Pierre Sahel (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1990) 48-50; Marjorie Garber, "'Here's Nothing Writ': Scribe, Script,

and Circumspection in Marlowe's Plays," *Theatre Journal* 36 (1984): 301-20; Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 193-221. Writing and reading in Shakespeare's plays have been addressed most recently by David M. Bergeron, "Reading and Writing in Shakespeare's Romances," *Criticism* 33 (1991): 91-113.

⁴All references to the A-text cite *Marlowe's Doctor Faustus 1604-1616: Parallel Texts*, ed. W. W. Greg (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1950) and are indicated by line numbers. This edition is also followed for line number citations from the B-Text.

⁵See Natalie Zemon Davis, "Beyond the Market: Books as Gifts in Sixteenth-Century France," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 33 (1983): 69-88.

⁶Mark Thornton Burnett, "Doctor Faustus and the Form and Function of the Chorus: Marlowe's Beginnings and Endings," *CIEFL Bulletin* 1 (1989): 42-43.

⁷*The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, ed. F. S. Boas (London: Methuen, 1932); Leo Kirschbaum, "The Good and Bad Quartos of *Doctor Faustus*," *The Library* 26 (1946): 272-94; W. W. Greg's edition of the play appeared in 1950.

⁸*The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen, 1962); *The Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Leo Kirschbaum (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Company [Meridian Books], 1962); *The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Irving Ribner (New York: Odyssey, 1963); *Doctor Faustus*, ed. Roma Gill (London: Ernest Benn, 1965); *The Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Roma Gill (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); *Doctor Faustus*, ed. Sylvan Barnet (New York: Signet, 1969); *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*, ed. J. B. Steane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969); *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Fredson Bowers, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); *Christopher Marlowe: Complete Plays and Poems*, eds. E. D. Pendry and J. C. Maxwell (London: Dent, 1976).

⁹*Dr Faustus: The A-Text*, eds. David Ormerod and Christopher Wortham (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1985); *Dr Faustus*, ed. Roma Gill, 2nd ed. (London: A & C. Black, 1989); *Dr Faustus*, ed. Roma Gill (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); *Christopher Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus": A 1604-Version Edition*, ed. Michael Keefer (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1991). Keefer's edition is reviewed by Mark Thornton Burnett in *The Dalhousie Review* (forthcoming).

¹⁰Budra 2.

¹¹Yachnin 76.

¹²Budra 7.

¹³For a stimulating analysis of the censorship of the play following the Act of Abuses, see Janet Clare, "Art made tongue-tied by authority": *Elizabethan and Jacobean Censorship* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990) 27-30, 104-06. William Empson discusses censorship in *Doctor Faustus* with customary idiosyncrasy in *Faustus and the Censor: The English Faust-book and Marlowe's Doctor Faustus*, ed. John Henry Jones (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

¹⁴On the arrangement of the clown scenes, see Roy T. Eriksen, "The Misplaced Clownage-scene in *The Tragedie of Doctor Faustus* (1616) and its Implications for the Play's Total Structure," *English Studies* 62 (1981): 249-58.

“If you have tears . . .”: Oxford and Onions

ERIC SAMS

The Oxford editors¹ Gary Taylor and Stanley Wells have spent seven years disintegrating Shakespeare and distributing the pieces among “pirates”² and “collaborators”³. Not even his vocabulary has escaped attack. From the latest edition⁴ of the *Oxford Shakespeare Glossary*, all its eight hundred specific Shakespeare references have been silently excised.

The *Glossary* was originally conceived as the brain-child of the distinguished grammarian and lexicographer C. T. Onions, who served for fifteen years as an editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. His declared intentions were to show how far Shakespeare’s use of vocabulary was idiosyncratic, what special senses it exemplified, and what new usages it introduced into the language.

For these purposes, Onions adapted the *OED* system of illustrative quotations, which avowedly aimed to show the age as well as the source of each usage by citing its first known occurrence. In this exacting task the *OED* had been aided by teams of specialist researchers. Of course their results were neither exhaustive nor infallible, and several antedatings have since been discovered. An Oxford monograph⁵ has been devoted to counselling caution about the validity of *OED* first citations, especially in such disputable categories as hyphenated compounds and participial adjectives. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Shakespeare was a linguistic innovator of the highest and most prolific order, whose immense contribution to the growth and development of English included thousands of new-minted words and expressions, most of which will have been duly documented in the *OED* in accordance with its explicit intention. Its recent second edition⁶ continues to record Shakespeare’s

idiosyncrasies, most first citations of which are preserved unchanged from their earliest printing, up to a century ago.

Such historical data, objectively analysed, should therefore prove an invaluable adjunct to Shakespeare studies, including the attribution of authorship among the accredited apocrypha and indeed all other candidates for inclusion in the canon. Thus if an uncollated play of known or factually inferable date is found to contain words or expressions which the 1989 *OED*'s illustrative quotations ascribe to Shakespeare in later contexts, then the initial hypothesis for testing would be that this play too was written by Shakespeare in a prior phase of his development, during the so-called lost years between 1582 when (*teste* John Aubrey) he first came to London at about eighteen and began to write for the stage, and 1592, when (*teste* Robert Greene) he had become a known playwright.

That strong argument for Shakespearean authorship would apply *a fortiori* to those selected usages which Onions singled out as "not pre-Shakespeare" or even "peculiar to Shakespeare," because the criteria for such categories would by definition be stricter and more positive than those for the earliest known usage. Indeed, the presence of even one word which was truly peculiar to Shakespeare would *eo facto* identify his hand throughout any work of single authorship in which it appeared. Conversely, if a previously unacknowledged play were now to be authenticated as Shakespeare's, then its use of vocabulary defined by Onions in his original *Glossary* as essentially Shakespearean would tend to confirm that Onions was not only on the right track but hot on the scent.

This latter proposition can now perhaps be tested. There is a current academic consensus in favour of one particular candidate for the canon, namely *Edward III*, which was registered for publication in December 1595 and printed in 1596. For the last fifty years, every specialist⁷ who has objectively analysed this play has found good (and widely varied) reasons for assigning it to Shakespeare, in its entirety. Even the Oxford editors,⁸ who steadfastly rejected it for seven years because of its failure to conform with their statistical tests and other preconceived criteria,⁹ have now expressed regret¹⁰ at having omitted it from their so-called *Complete Works*.

No parallel apology has yet been offered for the unfortunate consequence that all such *a priori* assumptions must have been fundamentally mistaken, thus vitiating the entire Oxford edition. This inference has now been further confirmed by the professional mathematician Dr. M. W. A. Smith of Ulster University, who has recently shown that all the Oxford statistical stylometric tests of authorship are misconceived and invalid.¹¹ But Onions, conversely, is corroborated; for his original *Glossary* identifies, as ostensibly Shakespearean, usages which are in fact still first cited from *Edward III* in the 1989 *OED*. So it was the Oxford Shakespeare *Complete Works* and *Textual Companion* which stood in manifest need of comprehensive and drastic revision, not the *Glossary* at all.

The *Edward III* usages in question are worth dwelling upon in some detail. They are readily verifiable by comparison between Onions and an *Edward III* concordance.¹² A preliminary total tally of thirty such *prima facie* Shakespearean usages was reduced by eliminating those with any element of ambiguity in their definition or application. That procedure left no fewer than eighteen clear examples, as follows (with line references cited from Ule¹³ and descriptions from Onions¹⁴):

accent (line 388) = peculiar mode of utterance, "first in S."; *bandy* (2261) = fight, "first in S."; *bury* (2302) = consign to oblivion, "not pre-S."; *character* (674, 2200) = inscribe, "not pre-S."; *civil* (2065) = having proper order, "not pre-S."; *clangor* (2654) = loud resonant ringing sound, "not pre-S."; *content* (1636) = be calm, "recorded only from S."; *cope with* (1411) = have to do with, "not pre-S."; *defiance* (92, 93, 2038) = declaration of aversion, "only S."; *epithet* (388) = term, "S."; *fairly* (215) = courteously, "recorded only from S."; *form* (557) = military formation, "not pre-S."; *health* (2358) = a toast, "recorded first from S."; *honourable* (1906) = decent, upright, "not pre-S."; *lottery* (2103) = what falls to one by lot, "S. only"; *opposition* (988) = resistance, "not pre-S."; *profit* (1872) = something advantageous, "only S."; *reflect* (231) = shine, "not pre-S."

The original *Glossary* explains that "S." means "peculiar to Shakespeare," and that "not pre-S." is used with the same implication. So here *prima facie* are twenty-one separate instances of eighteen special Shakespeare idiosyncrasies being deployed by him in a long lost

play, recently rediscovered and acknowledged, which will well repay serious study. Further analysis of *Edward III* will doubtless disclose other such indicators; and their total tally may gain in evidential value from their juxtaposition in the same passage or line, such as "with epithets and accents of the Scot."¹⁵ Similarly, the identification of such Shakespearisms in other plays, for example *Edmund Ironside*,¹⁶ could also provide pointers to authorship.

Meanwhile a further test can be applied. If the eighteen usages listed above are indeed genuine Shakespeare coinages, as Onions plainly says or implies, then they should continue to appear as first known usages in the 1989 *OED*, which incorporates the carefully-corrected results of a century's further research. If they are absent, conversely, then something is surely amiss with the *OED*'s data or methods. In fact, all eighteen are duly found there. This can hardly be mere coincidence. It speaks volumes for the validity of *OED* first citations and their evidential relevance. It also tends to corroborate all the other original Onions examples of special Shakespearean coinages. This correlation too can be checked. In 1980, Dr. Jürgen Schäfer¹⁷ supplied a list of *OED* main lemmas first cited from Shakespeare. This basic category alone contains some 2,000 items. Some 300 of them had been specifically defined by Onions in such terms as "peculiar to" or "not before" Shakespeare. All 300 continue to figure as first citations, unchanged and unchallenged, in the 1989 *OED* second edition.

Yet the latest edition of the *Glossary* has blindly deleted all of them, together with another 500 of almost equal interest described by Onions more generally as "first in Shakespeare" and hence also very possibly his own identity cards. All this vital evidence has now been destroyed. Yet this ceaseless chopping of Onions has elicited only crocodile tears, and very few of those. His successor Robert Eagleson¹⁸ blandly claims that modern scholarly expertise has "contributed to resolving previous difficulties and clarifying past obscurities." The back-cover blurb is even more self-congratulatory. "Previous interpretations have been altered; earlier problems have been resolved." No evidence is offered for the implication that we now know much more about Shakespeare's personal language than in 1911.

On the contrary, all the positive factual asseverations then made on that subject have been deleted and replaced by such self-

contradictory statements as: "This third edition is based solidly on the earlier editions, and much that Dr. Onions originally prepared remains . . ."; "the original conception of the *Glossary* has been assiduously preserved"; these are the words used by an Oxford editor to indicate that this third edition is totally different from the first two, that all their specific references to Shakespearean usage have been deleted without mentioning the fact, and that the original conception of the *Glossary* has thus been assiduously destroyed.

Knowing one's Onions was once a by-word for competence among Shakespeare scholars and students; and that essence will not be easily dispersed.—On the contrary; it should be collected and concentrated in a new fourth edition, designed to restore every single word and expression first cited from what has come down to us as "Shakespeare." That vital information should be made readily available, not suppressed. Oxford has a duty to give Shakespeare his words back as well as his works.

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NOTES

¹S. Wells, *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Dictionary* (Oxford: OUP, 1978; 2nd ed. 1985); *The Complete Works*, ed. S. Wells and G. Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1986); *A Textual Companion* by G. Taylor and S. Wells, with J. Jowett and W. Montgomery (Oxford: Clarendon P, "1987," recte 1988).

²Held responsible, on no factual evidence at all, for *The Taming of A Shrew* (1594), *The First Part of the Contention* (1594), *The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York* (1595), *Richard III* (1597), *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), *Henry V* (1600), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1602) and *Hamlet* (1603).

³Thus four-fifths of *I Henry VI* are attributed to "Nashe," "X" or "Y"; one third of *Timon of Athens* and substantial sections of *Macbeth* to "Middleton"; two-fifths of *Pericles* to "Wilkins"; and three-fifths of *Henry VIII* to "Fletcher."

⁴C. T. Onions, *A Shakespeare Glossary* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1911; 2nd ed. 1919; many times reprinted 1922-80 with corrections and additions; 3rd ed. 1986, ed. R. Eagleson).

⁵J. Schäfer, *Documentation in the OED* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1980); see also his *Early Modern English Lexicography*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989).

⁶*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., prepared by J. Simpson and E. Weiner (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989).

⁷E.g. A. Hart, *Shakespeare and the Homilies* (Melbourne: Melbourne University P, 1934) 219-41; K. P. Wentersdorf, "The Authorship of *Edward III*," *DAI* 21 (1960): 905-06 (U of Cincinnati); F. Lapedes, "A Critical Edition of *The Raigne of Edward III*," *DAI* 27 (1966): 1788A (Rutgers U); E. Slater, *The Problem of the Reign of King Edward III* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989); *Edward III*, ed. E. Sams (in preparation). See also G. R. Proudfoot, "The Reign of King Edward III and Shakespeare," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 71 (1985): 159-85, and William Shakespeare, *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*, ed. J. Kerrigan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986) 293-95.

⁸See note 1.

⁹Notably Gary Taylor's own "function-word" test, on which the entire Oxford canon is based, and his unsubstantiated assumption (typically stated as a fact) that Shakespeare wrote only a fifth of *1 Henry VI*, the play to which the rare-word vocabulary of *Edward III* is most closely related. See *A Textual Companion* 112-13, 136-37, 217-18.

¹⁰*Shakespeare Newsletter* 40 (Summer 1990): 28.

¹¹M. W. A. Smith, "Statistical Inference in *A Textual Companion* to the Oxford Shakespeare," *N&Q* 236 (1991): 73-78; see also his article "The Authorship of *Timon of Athens*," *Text* 5 (1991): 195-240.

¹²L. Ule, *A Concordance to the Shakespeare Apocrypha*, vol. 2 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1987) 145-173.

¹³See note 12.

¹⁴See note 4.

¹⁵One of several such anti-Scottish gibes, which would no doubt have precluded publication during the reign (1603-1625) of James I of England and VI of Scotland. But of course there are many other possible explanations, such as copyright difficulties, for the absence of *Edward III* (as of *Pericles*) from the 1623 First Folio.

¹⁶The presence of which in other apocrypha should also provide pointers to Shakespearean origin; thus "bury," "content," "defiance," "health," "honourable," and "profit" occur with the same meaning in *Edmund Ironside*. For further detailed comparisons see *Edmund Ironside*, ed. E. Sams (London: Fourth Estate, 1985; 2nd ed., Wildwood House, 1986; Menston: Scholar Press, 1991) and E. Slater, note 7 *supra*.

¹⁷See note 5.

¹⁸See note 4.

More About Laughing at "M.O.A.I." (A Response to Inge Leimberg)

JOHN RUSSELL BROWN

Professor Leimberg has argued persuasively that "M.O.A.I." in *Twelfth Night*, Act II, Scene v, should be taken seriously and not dismissed as any old nonsensical collection of initials or letters; the riddle rivets attention on stage and among the audience. It can't be overlooked, and so we need to work out how the laughter might come. Besides any riddle worth the name, however "fustian" (l. 110), is there to be solved.

In brief, the interpretation offered in the earlier number of *Connotations* is that these letters are initials representing Malvolio's claim that "I'M A and O"—that is "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last." The solution is attractive because Malvolio is indeed full of self-love and self-esteem. Besides, a reference to such ultimate matters as the beginning and end of all things suits well with a comedy which features a Fool who lives "by the church" (III.i.3), catechizes his madonna-mistress about heaven and hell (see I.v.60 ff.), and is familiar with "the whirligig of time" (V.i.375). Such a theological riddle would take its place alongside a counterfeit parson, a reference to the Hermit of Prague, and a doggerel rhyme which calls upon the devil himself (see IV.ii.1-132). Solving the riddle this way would also provide a connection to the subtextual life of the whole comedy, which is haunted by thoughts of perfection and the passage of time. It would chime with the concluding reminder that "A great while ago the world began."

But problems remain. First of all, a good riddle has one solution which is blindingly obvious once it has been found. Elsewhere Shakespeare riddles in this fashion:

I am no viper, yet I feed
On mother's flesh (Pericles, I.i.65 ff.)

So there's my riddle: one that's dead is quick
(All's Well, V.iii.297)

The Sphinx can be confusing, but once her meaning is grasped no further scope is left for argument. Professor Leimberg's solution is not of this kind, but raises further problems and prompts more consideration.

Transpositions are often acceptable in riddles, but here the re-ordering is complex, reversing A and O, as well as I and M, and, as it were, shuffling sequences. Besides, the initials are taken to represent hidden meanings in several different ways, the use of M for an abbreviated "am" being the most obtrusively unusual. The customary "and" or "&" (between Alpha and Omega) is not represented at all.

The most serious problems arise when the riddle with this solution is placed back into its dramatic context. How can we suppose that Maria has the ability to construct such a moralistic and theological teaser, knowing all that the play shows us about her thought-processes? Moreover how does it fit into the sentence of which it is only a part? "I am Alpha and Omega," in any sense, can hardly be said to "sway my life" (121), when "my" is, unquestionably, Olivia. While some of the eavesdroppers on stage may be thought to have understood a part of the message, none of them, as Professor Leimberg shows, can be said to have grasped the whole of this solution.

In the same article, Professor Leimberg provides several other readings of the riddle which rather blunt the edge of her primary solution, rather than supporting it. If "M.O.A.I." also means "M. (i.e. Monsieur) O (i.e. nothing) A(nd) I (i.e. Number One, and I myself)," then how can "O.A." also stand for "Alpha and Omega" without confusing hopelessly the value of A for "and"? If the sequence of vowel-sounds are ludicrous enough, when mouthed ambitiously as Professor Leimberg suggests, to create an animal-like noise for the name of Olivia's steward and supposed beloved, how can any serious meaning survive?

All these problems prompt a further look at the dialogue in which the riddle occurs. Here it is described as a "fustian riddle," which might refer to over-pedantic, almost meaningless jargon, and so, with

some straining, to the riddle as interpreted by Professor Leimberg. But more usual Shakespearian meanings are more to do with sound-and-fury and with the home-spun or frankly coarse. Doll Tearsheet's rebuke of the swaggering Pistol in *II Henry IV* II.iv.184-85, illustrates these more familiar meanings: "I cannot endure such a fustian rascal." Something of the same kind is repeated when the riddle is also called "rank":

Sir Toby. . . . He [Malvolio] is now at a cold scent.
Fabian. Sowter will cry upon't for all this, though it be
 as rank as a fox. (123-25)

"Rank" occurs numerous times in Shakespeare's plays to describe unbridled sexuality: for example, "the rank garb" of *Othello*, II.i.301, "this rank offence" of *Measure for Measure*, III.i.99, and "lust, and rank thoughts" of *Cymbeline*, II.v.176; in *Hamlet* are found "Things rank and gross in nature," "rank sweat of an enseamed bed," and "rank corruption" (I.ii.136, III.iv.92 and 150). Surely we should consider whether a fustian and rank solution may not be at the heart of Maria's riddle, rather than the more learned one proposed by Professor Leimberg.

An alternative solution might start by reading "M" for Malvolio, which is what the victim of Maria's plot and most other commentators have done. Then "O" could stand for O! or Oh!—which is what the eavesdroppers are quick to imply in their comments; here we would hear the Oh! of sexual anticipation, pleasure, and/or surprise. In *Cymbeline*, II.iv.168-69, a supposed lecher is said to have "cried 'O!' and mounted"; but this reading hardly needs supporting texts, for Oh! or O! has occurred countless times, over the years and centuries, in stories, ballads and ordinary life, when sexual encounter is the theme. If this is the primary sense of "O" in this riddle, then Sir Toby's promise of raising another such cry would be spoken with an emphasis on "him," meaning Malvolio as opposed to Olivia (who in the riddle makes the exclamation): "I'll cudgel him," he says, "and make *him* cry 'O!'" (134). The "A" of the riddle would be another exclamation, as resistance or hesitation is overcome: a more positive Ah! The "I" would stand for Ay, as it often did in print and handwriting in this period; and "I" would also represent Olivia giving

her full assent. The whole riddle is thus a covert dramatisation of the sexual fantasy which supposedly drives Olivia and "sways her life." Like the rest of the quatrain in which it appears, this sense could be self-evident if only the letters were read in the right way: "this is evident to any formal capacity. There is no obstruction in this" (118-19). But then, Malvolio never considers how Olivia might be thinking and feeling on her own account; and so he does not catch on.

An ambiguity remains in "Ay" and "I," but this is commonly found in Shakespeare's plays and elsewhere. *Richard II* exemplifies the punning possibilities:

King. Ay, no; no, ay; for I must nothing be.
Therefore no "no", for I resign to thee. (IV.i.201-02)

Here Ay and I are almost interchangeable, as in "I know no I; for I . . . ," or "I, no; no I; for One must nothing be . . . ," or "I no; no; Ay, for I must nothing be" Early printed editions used "I," and not "Ay," as in the modern text quoted here.

Double, triple or quadruple meanings for "M.O.A.I." may be what this opalesque comedy requires, so that a dominant one never fully declares itself, or settles the interpretation one way or another. But the subtitle to the play, "What you Will," should perhaps sway readers and audiences towards a rank and fustian understanding of its message; the sexual connotations of "will" are active in this comedy, the sonnets, and many other Shakespeare's plays. Maria, Sir Toby and Fabian might well be able to hear only this; certainly all that they say in the play about the joke can be taken to imply as much. It may be part of the fun that this (and every other) solution seems to be beyond the reach of Sir Andrew's comprehension; he does not voice any opinion.

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Maria's Theology and Other Questions (An Answer to John Russell Brown)

INGE LEIMBERG

Professor Brown's response contains three parts. First, there is a consideration of the aptness of my hypothesis that Malvolio's motto is "M.O.A.I.", *alias* "I'M A & O." Secondly, there is a discussion of the problems arising out of such an interpretation. Thirdly, Professor Brown offers another hypothesis.

As to the first: reading Professor Brown's summary of my hypothesis, I became aware that I have given Malvolio what seems to me his proper name but have failed to provide him with "a local habitation," in other words, to point out to the reader my idea of the dramatic context. I hope to provide that, if belatedly, and, of course, very sketchily, now.

Of all Shakespeare's comedies, *Twelfth Night* is, perhaps, most aptly called his "Play of Love." In it love and life are shown to be essentially one and the same thing. That union, however, must be put to the test not in "Elysium" but in "Illyria," i.e. not in some idealized nowhere but in the fallen world.¹ Here, in the labyrinth of life, the course of love (whether true or false) nearly always runs crooked, with the lover choosing the wrong person, or the wrong sex, or even a dead person (who is, moreover, the lady's own brother!), or, final outrage, his or her own self. Malvolio, Self-love personified, is the representative of this worst perversion of the ideal to be celebrated. He is, *horribile dictu*, the Everyman of the play and the figure of identification for the spectator. In the comic catharsis all the errors will be cleared up, the true lovers are united and may now live and love in the enjoyment of married chastity. Only the poor self-lover's passion is far from being "spent." The happy lovers, of course, are all for reconciling him, but before we can get to know whether reconciliation really is what Malvolio wills, the curtain, so to speak,

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debleimberg00101.htm>>.

falls, and Feste sings his song of "hey, ho, the wind and the rain" which will blow and fall on every man every day.

This, in the proverbial nutshell, is the context in which, to my mind, the tetragram "M.O.A.I." plays an essential part. And now to Professor Brown's second point, the remaining problems.

(1) ". . . a good riddle has one [obvious] solution." I am not sure that I agree with this maxim but would contend that, especially in Shakespeare, the most intriguing riddles are those which keep us guessing. To give just one example: when, in *Love's Labour's Lost* 3.1.83-95, the goose joins the fox, the ape, and the bumble-bee, the three becomes four, the oddness is made even and, words thus turned into numbers, the pun evaporates, and the "riddle," or "enigma," or "egma" is solved. But, surely, it is only then that the real guesswork begins and that, when Nash's clues are exhausted, Aesop's come to the fore, and so on, preferably *ad infinitum*.

(2) ". . . the re-ordering [of the letters M O A I] is complex." Is it, really? Considering the passion of the period for speaking in alphabetical or numerical or musical or iconographical riddles, the intricacy of a pun or an anagram was felt to be a stylistic virtue, not a vice. Professor Brown here voices a classicist's objection (Pope versus Crashaw) but this is Shakespeare playing the fool and delighting his public by making his riddles just difficult enough for them to be funny. To a veteran solver of cross-word puzzles the question "Australian running-bird with three letters" does not provide much of a thrill. By the way: the original "and" in "M.O.A.I." is very often, or even usually, lacking in iconography, too, and therefore will not be missed.² And if, in spite of the context, the apostrophized M should appear to be a stumbling block, may I offer the [em] of the spelled alphabet, which, surely, is near enough to the "am" of the original formula. (After all, the letters are declaimed, not printed on a screen.)

(3) "How can we suppose that Maria has the ability to construct such a moralistic and theological teaser, knowing all that the play shows us about her thought-processes?" This objection rests on assumptions which, I am sorry to say, are not convincing.

(a) I am sure Professor Brown agrees with me that Maria is indeed a "most excellent devil of wit!" (2.5.206), not a silly fool like her namesake Moria in *Cynthia's Revels*. Why, then, should she not be able to choose the universally known "TM A & O" as an ironical motto for the self-loving Malvolio and shake it up just enough for him to misread it while it is obvious to everyone else? Surely Maria (or any other lady's maid) witnessed or even took part in parlour games in her lady's circle where that sort of thing was practised as a matter of course (witness, for instance, *Cynthia's Revels* 4.3.81 ff.: "For sports sake, let's have some riddles . . .").

(b) The fact that the theo-logical connection of self-love with "TM A & O" is well within the scope of Maria's intelligence is manifested indisputably by her characterization of Malvolio, including the announcement of her plan of action, in 2.3.146-53:

. . . it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him: and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work.

By the way, what about Parolles' theological abilities? Shakespeare does not hesitate to condemn self-love, speaking through the mask of even that fool (*All's Well* 1.1.141-43).

(4) ". . . how does it ["TM A & O"] fit into the sentence of which it is only a part?" The formula "M.O.A.I." occurs four times in *Twelfth Night* 2.5, once in the letter and three times in Malvolio's analysis. Only in the first of the three repetitions does it appear in the syntactical context. The first time, Malvolio quotes it (or rather Shakespeare quotes it, for the benefit of the puzzlers in the pit) only to leave it alone in order to begin with the beginning: "Nay but first . . . 'I may command where I adore'" After having solved, to his own satisfaction, the first part of the riddle, he turns to the last: "And the end: what should that alphabetical position portend?" Regarding this passage retrospectively, one may take the confrontation of "first" and "end" (the latter emphasized by rhyming with "portend") to be a first pointer to A and O, with their traditional meaning of beginning and end. Be that as it may, the "alphabetical position" is now analyzed by Malvolio as well as the eavesdroppers without the slightest regard to the syntactical context in Maria's letter, which is supposed to be taken for Olivia's letter by Malvolio but which, in

contrast to Malvolio's self-loving view-point, is meant to be deciphered and understood by the audience as a mirror held up to *Mala voluntas*-Self-love-Everyman-Malvolio himself. In this context it becomes evident that his rather unappetizing day-dreams are rooted, as such day-dreams are wont to be, in fallen man's claim to be like God.

Thus, as far as I can see, Shakespeare, from 2.5.112 onwards, leaves the "original" syntactical context alone. To such reader-spectators, however, who think differently I beg to offer a suggestion. "I am Alpha and Omega," in any sense, can hardly be said to 'sway my life,' writes Professor Brown. I feel tempted to counter this with a snappy "Why not?" Malvolio has been accused by the conspirators, with much verbal expenditure, of being a Puritan (2.3.140-46). Now, it is a typical trait of the Puritan bugbear of comedy to be called (witness Ben Jonson) by a first name (often a translation of an Old Testament name)³ which contains several components, often forming a whole sentence. "I am Alpha and Omega," seen in the light of persiflage, may be taken for Malvolio's un-Christian proper name and it would, brimful as it is with poisonous irony, fit quite as well into its "original" syntactical context as into the whole argument which fills the rest of the scene.

(5) "If the sequence of vowel-sounds are ludicrous enough . . . to create an animal-like noise . . . how can any serious meaning survive?" Surely this grotesque effect, this simultaneity of tragedy and farce is not only not unfitting but absolutely essential to the archetypal pattern re-enacted in *Twelfth Night* 2.5. Perhaps the most striking instance is Fortune's wheel as prefaced to Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* in Henry Bergen's edition:⁴ the very moment man assumes the highest position and sees himself crowned, he is adorned, too, with a fine pair of ass's ears. Or let us think of *Paradise Lost* X.460, when Satan, returning to Pandemonium from his world-perverting mission, full-mouthedly announces his triumph only to be answered by that famous "universal hiss" (508) which immediately blends with his boast. A third example is the end of the fisherman's wife in the fairy tale: the very moment she lays claim to the throne of God she finds herself sitting once more in the pisspot. Similarly, far from being inimical to the tragic pathos of Malvolio-Everyman's age-old claim to be like God, his degradation

in the scale of being is a necessary adjunct to it, and so is the simultaneity, the ringing dissonance of the ridiculous and the sublime.

As to the multiple meanings, Professor Brown again seems, momentarily, to take sides with the classicists who aim at unequivocal meanings. But these are not at home in the Illyria of *Twelfth Night* and especially in Olivia's household, where Feste is installed as "my lady's corruptor of words." And, if it comes not to words but letters, they are traditionally charged with "a corollary of" meanings. This is what fills them, to the baroque mind (of any age), with such mysterious power and such "infinite jest."

(6) As regards the somewhat "rank" odour and "fustian" character of Malvolio's doings in word and deed: "fustian" (*OED* B.2.) means "ridiculously lofty in expression; bombastic, highflown, inflated, pompous." This could not fit in better with "I am Alpha and Omega," and the same applies to "rank." The self-lover is essentially unchaste. But that is another story, told, mainly, in 3.4.

Finally, the hypothesis offered by Professor Brown ("The whole riddle is . . . a covert dramatization of a supposed sexual fantasy") points in the direction of Malvolio's pathetic day-dreams. Well yes, let the actor playing Malvolio pronounce "M.O.A.I." in a way to suggest sexual encounter; but don't let him do so again and again (or too blatantly) in all the four instances where the formula occurs.

* * * * *

I agree with Professor Brown that "Double, triple or quadruple meanings for 'M.O.A.I.' may be what this opalesque comedy requires," but I beg to differ when he goes on, "so that a dominant one never fully declares itself . . ." Perhaps, for the purpose of discussing the verbal music of such a musical comedy as *Twelfth Night*, musical terms may be helpful. To me, Scene 2.5 seems not dissimilar to a *quodlibet*. Many different "voices" and many different "tunes" are welded together in a partly concordant, partly discordant whole. An interpreter will not do this kind of polyphony justice by singling out one voice and claiming it is the only one that matters, but neither will he do so by avoiding evaluation altogether. In musical harmony,

there is a tenor, and a bass, and a treble. And their functions are essentially different. The tenor makes sense, if need be, without the other two, but not the other way round. Even in the musical caterwauling of a *quodlibet* the different parts are of different value. In the one written by Shakespeare around the subject of "M.O.A.I.," I still claim the "alphabetical position" to be a kind of tenor. Perhaps the next important part (let us say the bass) is the train of sounds and images indicating man's downfall in the scale of being. This being archetypally tragi-comic, some middle voices may provide variations on the animal theme. Finally, let there be some instrument to illustrate the sexual nastiness of the old self-lover, foreshadowing Scene 3.4, when the theme of unchastity will be treated as the tenor.

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NOTES

¹Mr. Philip Craig Bell of the University of Massachusetts has pointed out to me that this pun is already to be found in Apollodorus' version of the story of Cadmus and Harmonia.

²See, for instance, the numerous examples given by F. Cabrol in his article on "A Ω" in the *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1924): 1-25.

³The most prominent example is of course the name of the Lord: "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Ex. 4:14).

⁴4 vols. (Washington: The Carnegie Institution, 1923-27); reprinted for the EETS Extra Series 121-24 (London: OUP, 1967).

On *Puzzling Shakespeare* by Leah Marcus

ROY BATTENHOUSE

My remarks will focus only on the book's treatment of *Measure for Measure*, the Shakespeare play I know best, and on the limitations I find there in the book's critical method.

In *Measure for Measure*, Marcus concludes, Shakespeare accomplished "a theatrical event which could be taken as Stuart propaganda, or as the expression of a contemporary nightmare, or most likely as both together" (209). We are asked to regard the play's portrayal of the Duke and Isabella as "double written" (163 and 197), its meaning inextricable from the deeply divided political passions of its audience in 1604. Marcus would say that on the one hand the text could be easily understood (especially by auditors from the court) as a praising of King James by its mirroring of his most cherished ideas; while on the other hand it could have aroused (especially among Londoners of Protestant sympathies) a "dark fantasy of alien Catholic domination" (164). Meaning varies in accord with the partisanship of the reader.

Now I would not deny that a text can be diversely apprehended and that partisanship can give rise to constructs of its significance. But I do not believe that a Shakespeare text is a nose of wax asking for whatever bending a reader may wish to give it. A play of Shakespeare's, I would say, has a given shape which resists interpretations that distort its shape and design. It therefore seems to me that the double-barrelled topical interpretation of *Measure for Measure* hypothesized by Professor Marcus fails to come to grips with the play's actual design.

Is it accurate to regard Shakespeare's comedy as promulgating "a Jacobean line"? That supposition, Marcus should have noted, was voiced as early as 1779 by George Chalmers and has had recent support from D. L. Stevenson [*ELH*, 1959], who asserts that Shake-

speare intended a eulogy of Stuart Divine-right theory. However, critics such as E. T. Selrt and I have challenged this supposition. Selrt, in his *Vergebung und Gnade bei Shakespeare* (1952) argued that the Duke in *Measure for Measure* embodies a Christian understanding of grace and mercy that cannot be found in the *Basilikon Doron* of King James. And I more elaborately called attention (in *CLIO* 1978) to various significant differences between the two works, arguing that Shakespeare was offering through his Duke Vincentio a better model of the art of government than King James had been able to conceive. The most conspicuous difference, I pointed out, was in Vincentio's use of a Friar's disguise to implement a secret visiting of his people as a charitable watchman, a practice which analogizes the atonement story of Christ's visiting of mankind to save and redeem sinners, a program of social reform that is comprehensively educative. The attitude of King James toward friars had been wholly negative; a Proclamation of his in February 1604 had ordered all monks and friars to "depart out of this land at once." But for Shakespeare the genre of comedy, a poetic medium traditionally assigned the task of depicting "what might be" rather than what historically "is," offered an opportunity not only to model for James's contemplation a mysteriously wiser art of government than James was practicing but also to offer all theatre auditors a fictional model of ideal rulership surpassing that of Whetstone and other poets who had undertaken figurative depictions of the interrelationship of justice and mercy within the art of government.

One wonders why Marcus makes no mention of these considerations, why she bypasses any engagement with critics whose perspective on Shakespeare is other than her own. The explanation, probably, is simply her belief that a Shakespeare text has no unifying essence and her preference for seeking out "patches and glimmers of meaning" (216). These she finds by taking as central, rather than as marginal to the text's significance, various selected details of "local" history known to theatre auditors. For example, since King James had recently made a peace treaty with Spain, she reasons that Shakespeare's play could be understood on the one hand as a celebration of this political achievement and an appeal to Londoners to forgive Catholic enemies; but, on the other hand, since Londoners included many Protestants

uneasy about Jacobean policy and fearful of a return to the 'bloody' times of Philip and Mary (164), the play's setting in a Catholic Vienna could have caused them to see "their worst political fantasies spring . . . powerfully into life" (206).

I would reply that, on both sides, the readings Marcus is stipulating are wide of the mark. The subject of Shakespeare's play is not England's peace with Spain, but rather the reform of a fictional Vienna; and the forgiveness I see the play depicting is toward *all sinners* but especially toward the *Puritan-like* Angelo. The Duke's action of forgiveness, moreover, provides no basis for fearing him as a 'bloody' oppressor. On the contrary, he ends by releasing culprits into marriages instead of death sentences. Since Marcus herself acknowledges that the Protestant-sided reading she offers is a "paranoid" one (197), we can infer she is not advocating it as a fair-minded reading. Why, then, does she so busy herself to "generate" it through "topical" research? She is relying, it seems, on a skeptical premise that fair-minded reading is never possible, and hence that what we call Shakespeare is simply whatever readings various viewers may choose to construct as prompted by their partisan passions. This premise frees her to speculate along lines congenial with her own aesthetic and political tastes, which she describes as gravitating toward "anti-totalizing interpretation" (217).

It becomes evident that Marcus prefers interpretations of *Measure for Measure* that call in question the integrity of its Duke. Let me cite in illustration the following passage, so that I can then comment on what seem to me its distortions:

The "bed trick" by which Mariana is substituted for Isabella to satisfy Angelo's lust was *not* lawful according to the church's new definition of marriage. The precipitous wedding ordered by the Duke between Mariana and Angelo was also uncanonical unless, by some chance, they happened to be married in the parish church of one of them, or unless the Duke's verbal "licence" is taken to cancel out the usual rites. These are small details, perhaps; topicality thrives on what is almost too insignificant to notice. But they suggest that the Duke, insofar as he is identified with James I, can be trusted to respect his beloved canon law no more than Angelo does the statute. That perception unleashes a potential for contemporary deconstruction of *Measure for Measure's* Jacobean line. Like King James, the Duke acts above the law, freely overriding even his own preferred code when it suits his

purpose to do so. Contemporary viewers could surmount the seeming contradiction in the Duke's position by making a "leap of faith" from the law to Christian mercy, by which all legal codes are confounded But to regard the Duke as transcending all law would undermine the play's appeal to the ruler as an alternative and superior source of law. In *Measure for Measure* the rule of law is overthrown by something that may be divine transcendence, but can also look like royal whim, unruly "license," a mere recapitulation of the abuse it purports to rectify. (182)

This argument, I would say, rests on a network of not-small inaccuracies. Chief of these is the notion that "the rule of law is overthrown" by the Duke's licensing of the bed trick. (This contention is not shared by William Bowden, who in *Shakespeare Studies* 5 [1969] surveyed many Jacobean plays that include a bedtrick and judged that audiences were expected to approve the trick whenever it was used for a good end.) What is licensed by the Duke is the law of charity, which seasons justice with mercy and thereby makes possible the good toward which all written codes aim. The Duke, on his first appearance as Friar declares himself "bound by charity" and "blest order." The bedmate substitution he arranges does not recapitulate Angelo's abuse of law but remedies it. To claim that it recapitulates it is simply to fail to see the distinction between Angelo's immoral intention and the Duke's beneficent purpose. Abetting this mistake is the "suggestion" by Marcus that the Duke can no more be trusted than Angelo. He does not respect, she says, his "beloved canon law." But this assertion rests on her supposition that the English canon law of 1604 was beloved by Shakespeare's fictional Duke of Vienna. The play, however, provides no evidence for this supposition. Its Duke simply assures Mariana that Angelo is her husband by a pre-contract which entitles her to accept his sexual embrace without incurring on her part any sin. Such action accords with the marriage law in England in the late sixteenth century (and presumably on the continent too) as described in a well-known treatise on *Spousals* by Henry Swinburne, to which almost all critics have turned for understanding Shakespeare's premises. We know, moreover, from the Duke's giving Angelo scope to "enforce or qualify" laws in accord with conscience, that a principle of equity is implied. It is unfair of Marcus to accuse him of "overriding his own preferred code" when he brings equity to his enforcement of codes. And finally let me comment that Christian mercy does not

involve a leap into unruly whim, even though it may 'look' so to a twentieth-century critic who has preferred to leap into positing the central importance of "local" politics when interpreting a work of great art. Universals may after all really exist and be discoverable by anyone who will consent to some honest digging into the materials and mysteries of traditional theology.

An ignorance of theology, it seems to me, underlies the complaining by Marcus elsewhere (178-79) that Shakespeare's Duke abrogates a local statute when at the play's end "the Viennese statute punishing fornication with death is forgotten." Has she herself forgotten St. Paul's teaching that old law is a "schoolmaster" for leading us to the new law behind it? A rigorous statute serves to condemn sin and name its punishment; but repentance is a *metaphorical death* by which one can pay sin's debt and be released into serving the law of love. Claudio has been guilty of fornication only in the sense that his "true contract" with Juliet has been tarnished by a sinful greed for worldly pleasure (which theologians consider a spiritual fornication, even when it occurs within a marriage bond). When he repents of this greed, as he does after Isabella denounces it as "a kind of incest" and the Friar has sermonized on the miserable benefits of worldly goods, Claudio is ready for release into freedom. The local statute against fornication is not then abrogated, but rather no longer applicable to Claudio's case (and its application to Juliet has been removed by her repentance as supervised by the Friar.) Their pre-contract needs now only the Duke's admonition: "She, Claudio, that you wrong'd, look you restore / Joy to you." No requirement of a bishop's license. True love fulfils the law.

Some performances of *Measure for Measure* in recent years have staged Isabella's silence at the end as signaling a rejection of the Duke's marriage proposal. Professor Marcus thinks that in Shakespeare's times this interpretation could easily have been suggested by having her hold back in her exit to give evidence that she was being conquered against her wishes. But on *what in the play* could such an interpretation be based? Marcus would base it on a context outside the play—namely, that in 1604 the citizens of London who cherished local rights were hesitant about the project of King James for political "Union." At a time when his coronation pageant, Marcus

explains, had called on the city to open its gates to become the submissive "bride" of the monarch, Isabella's "equivocal silence in the face of imperial conquest" could parallel a silence on the part of the city when faced with an incipient "forced marriage" to King James (184). Thus stated, the conjecture may seem plausible. Yet since Marcus has earlier told us that James began his reign by granting to London the privilege of choosing its own Lord Mayor (170), an action which does not suggest imperialistic conquest, I think it doubtful that many Londoners felt like victims of an enforced marriage. And whatever one may surmise regarding the play's historical context, is it not implausible that Protestant Londoners would regard as a symbol of *their* situation an Isabella who has been thinking of entering a Franciscan nunnery?

If we read Isabella simply on the basis of the facts given in Shakespeare's play, I can see no evidence that the Duke's marriage proposal would be resented by her as an imposition. When earlier he has unveiled his identity as a friar-prince "attorneyed" to her service, she humbly asked his pardon for having "pained" his unknown sovereignty (5.1.386-92). When later she prays for Angelo on Mariana's behalf, she is given the wayside reward of a restored brother, along with the Duke's declaring Claudio "my brother too" and asking her to give him her hand and "say you will be mine." His added "But fitter time for that" gives her opportunity to absorb her surprise. Her silence is appropriate to the wonder she must feel while awaiting his follow-up offer. When then his "Dear Isabel, . . . if you'll a willing ear incline" offers a mutual sharing of goods, I detect no nuance of domination. His words invite simply an acquiescent joy and require no verbal answer. His language has echoed Psalm 45, verse 10, "O daughter, consider and incline your ear," a Psalm which tells us (in verse 15) that "With joy and gladness . . . they enter the palace of the king." Any scholar interested in "local" digging can discover that this Psalm was known to Shakespeare's auditors as a "marriage" psalm in the liturgy of the church. Its phrasings are devoid of partisan politics.

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Once More to the Rostra (An Answer to John Morrill)

DALE B. J. RANDALL

Having learned that my essay on *Marcus Tullius Cicero* (1651) in the first number of *Connotations* was considered by John Morrill to have performed "a signal service" to scholars, I have been content to let his less positive observations be weighed by such readers as come upon them. Nevertheless, having been invited to do so, I now offer a response.

To begin at the beginning, I would say that it is indubitably correct to observe that the English theaters were ordered closed in 1642. It is likewise true that techniques deriving from drama crop up in many different sorts of seventeenth-century English writing (regarding this subject, one of the most striking examples, published well before the theatrical ban, would be Prynne's *Histrio-mastix* [1633], a monumental, thousand-page, anti-theater diatribe that is structured in "acts" and "scenes"). It is incorrect, however, to deduce that after 1642 playable dramatic works ceased to be composed, printed, and performed. (The most famous example of pre-Restoration performance, I should think, would be Davenant's *Siege of Rhodes, I*, presented before a paying audience at Rutland House in 1656.) Moreover, it strikes me as unwise to suppose that even unperformed works—provided we could identify them—would necessarily be unperformable. Why should a people accustomed to writing and reading plays be expected to abandon their long-held conventions relating to these activities? I think it more prudent to assume that they might or might not change. Though Morrill does not specify any grounds for thinking *Marcus Tullius Cicero* a playable and therefore earlier play, one might point out, for what it is worth, that stage directions are an interesting element in many dramatic writings of the 1642-1660 period. Burkhead's *Female Rebellion* (ca. 1658), for instance, calls for a setting moon, and

Willan's *Orgula* (1658) tells how a poniard is to be dropped. Whatever arguments Morrill may have in mind, however, it is apparent that closing the theaters did not ensure the unplayability of new dramatic works, and the fact that *Marcus Tullius Cicero* strikes one as playable is inadequate evidence on which to build a hypothesis for its time of composition.

Perhaps the most puzzling objection is that I do not delve more deeply into the suggestion made by Edward Phillips in 1675 that the play was created a half century earlier by Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke (who died in 1628)—though Morrill then goes ahead to show how the play is, as I maintain, relevant to the 1650s. Since my major points have to do precisely with the play's relevance in 1651, naturally I expend my major efforts on them. One could, if time permitted, discourse at length upon the varied implications of "revivals," whether on the boards or in print. (An apposite example here would be Christopher Wase's provocative *Electra* of 1649.) My dismissal of Brooke as the writer of *Marcus Tullius Cicero*, in any case, is scarcely "cavalier," based as it is on the writings of all the Brooke scholars I have consulted, and supported as it is by the no-less-than-nine published sources (spanning over a hundred years) that I cite on the subject—including the fallible but reasonably reliable *British Library General Catalogue* of 1980. Against all of these Morrill would champion a Wing entry in which I have already pointed out and documented two other errors.

Finally Morrill gets down to considering the contemporary context of this play that was—whoever wrote it—published in 1651. Strangely enough, he suggests that in discussing *Marcus Tullius Cicero* I do not "cite any of the works of recent years which examine the 'political' content of plays in the 1620s and 1630s." Obviously he has not had occasion to read my own publications on the subject—*Jonson's Gypsies Unmasked* (1975), in which I delineate in considerable detail the literary conjunction of Jonsonian and Jacobean politics, or *Theatres of Greatness* (1986), in which, on a complex set of politico-historical grounds, I explain how Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* is likely to have originated in the reign of James rather than that of Charles, to which it is generally assigned. Morrill did have the opportunity, however, to notice my citation in the *Cicero* essay of such authors as Barbara

De Luna (1967), John Wallace (1974), J. S. Lawry (1982), Annabel Patterson (1982 and 1984), Alan Roper (1989), and Lois Potter (1990). In closing, Morrill appends a list of "major studies" to which a person ill-informed about the relations between theater and politics might turn for help. At this point I feel obliged to murmur politely that I have read all the titles he cites—as well as a good many more. And what, pray, is gained by his citing of *Censorship and Interpretation* in a list of recommended titles when not only that work but also another by the same author has already appeared in my own bibliography?

Nevertheless, thanks to Morrill, I am pleased to have encountered Blair Worden. Moreover, like Morrill, I should be glad to see someone step forward with new facts that will allow us to identify "a specific English Cicero from 1650-1651" who may help to bring *Marcus Tullius Cicero* into focus more clearly than I have managed thus far. Then again, I would not be perceived as unduly over-anxious for such an identification, since I also believe *Marcus Tullius Cicero* to be most potent—then, now, and whenever—if read as a worldly wise comment upon (or admonition to) whatever incarnation of Ciceronianism may be strutting its brief hour on the stage that currently concerns one.

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