

Shakespeare, Burgess, and Psalm 46: A Note in Reply to Paul Franssen*

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I figure that I have had my turn at bat, and, if others want to comment on what I say, then they can have their turns. Once one engages in writing replies to responses, then there are rejoinders to the replies to the responses, begetting ripostes to the rejoinders, etc. For months now readers of *TLS* have been watching an endless series of counterstatements on the role of actors' memories in constructing the text of Shakespeare—to such an extent that most have forgotten the original issue.

I did not discover all that business about Shakespeare and Psalm 46, nor did I get it from Anthony Burgess's *Shakespeare* (1970) or *Enderby's Dark Lady* (1984), neither of which I have ever read. The only book by Burgess that I can remember finishing is the novel *MF*, which has a most fitting title for a book about a character with some qualities in common with Oedipus. That play on initials should have made me think about including Burgess—and especially the title *Abba Abba*—in a piece about authors' names.

I cannot remember when, where, or how I first heard about Psalm 46. For decades now, going back into the 1950s, I have been all but addicted to books like Isaac D'Israeli's *Curiosities of Literature* and columns like Martin Gardner's "Mathematical Games" (talk about preserving your initials in a title!) that used to run in *Scientific American*. At any rate, one can pick up a large number of crumbs in a lifetime of idle reading and chat. It's fun to see the reaction to this, for example:

*Reference: William Harmon, "Paronomastics: The Name of the Poet from Shakespeare and Donne to Glück and Morgan," *Connotations* 2.2 (1992): 115-25; Paul J. C. M. Franssen, "Half a Miracle: A Response to William Harmon," *Connotations* 3.2 (1993/94): 118-22.

born on July 21, 1899, in the American Midwest, of parents named Clarence and Grace, becoming a writer of genius in whose life the Caribbean played an important part, death by suicide: all that is true of *both* Hart Crane *and* Ernest Hemingway.

I was at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1967-68 and then left for two years. While I was away, Burgess was writer in residence at that school, where I know he talked with many people that I had also talked with. Then his *Shakespeare* appeared in 1970. It seems as likely that he got the Psalm 46 from me, via common friends in Chapel Hill, as that I got it from him; or, equally, that both of us got it from a common source. (The Kipling story is another matter, since it has been available to the public since 1933 and does not concern Psalm 46 but other parts of the Old Testament, especially Isaiah.)

Once you start down these primrose paths, then everything blossoms at your feet. I am drafting this note while watching a videocassette of Martin Scorsese's *Main Street*.

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