

An Answer to Kenneth Muir*

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It is a great pleasure and a great honour to be offered a critical response by Professor Kenneth Muir whom, although not knowing him personally, I have always regarded as one of my teachers in English literature, and an especially congenial one at that. When, as an academic youngster, I dared to treat, in a sceptical vein, the paleo-historicism then in vogue (Lily B. Campbell *et alii*), his pleading for the individuality rather than typicality of Shakespeare's tragedies was a much needed and most welcome support. These memories give an added value to Professor Muir's general agreement with my views on paronomasia in *The Winter's Tale* as, on the other hand, they render even more inexcusable my overlooking his own contributions to the theme.¹ The loss is mine.

In his response, Professor Muir raises three points which I would like to take up: 1) Shakespeare's "small Latine," 2) his manner of composition and artistic perfection (considering the limited reliability of the texts), and 3) the range of paronomasia, especially as regards the grouping of names and characters in the plays.

1) As to the question, did Ben Jonson regard "his great rival with his 'small Latin and less Greek' as fully educated," I find T. W. Baldwin's answer perfectly convincing. Putting the aphorism in its context, Baldwin shows that the names serving as examples of "Latine and . . . Greeke" in these wholly laudatory lines are those of the great tragedians whose works, indeed, did not belong to the grammar-school curriculum of Shakespeare's day. After this initial statement come the two volumes

*Reference: Kenneth Muir, "A Comment on the Naming of Characters in *The Winter's Tale*" *Connotations* 2.3 (1992): 287-89; Inge Leimberg, "'Golden Apollo, a Poor Humble Swain . . .': A Study of Names in *The Winter's Tale*," *ShJW* (1991): 135-58.

full of conclusive evidence that "Sixteenth century schoolmasters had a mountain of erudition"² though only "a mouse apiece" of it is claimed for Shakespeare as well as for Baldwin himself. To quote another revered teacher of mine: "What kind of readers do we make, whom circumstances have intervened to make ignorant of what every literate man once knew?"³ And does not Jonathan Bate, implicitly, attribute that kind of literacy to Shakespeare when he accredits to him corrections of Golding's translation of the *Metamorphoses* by reference to Ovid's original?

Though, of course, German as a mother tongue is a handicap for a student of English literature, there is perhaps some small compensation, for instance the surprise felt at discovering the enormous amount of Latin still alive in the English vernacular, even today, let alone in Shakespeare's England with the grammar school in full bloom and the Vulgate not yet fully replaced by any of the translations, to mention only the most popular sources of influence. Surely to any Elizabethan with a grammar-school education and an ear for languages, reading Latin was a mere matter of course. It was, to all appearances, different with Greek, and I agree that, if Shakespeare had any knowledge of Pausanias, it was probably derivative. But that there were sources for such a derivation is shown, for instance, by Nashe in *Pierce Pennilesse*.⁴ And who can tell whether Sir Andrew Aguecheek's babbling of "Pigrogromitus" was not meant to be a satirical slur on snobs (like Nashe) quoting the *Periegesis* in the original Greek as well as on Barbarians (like Casca or the undersigned) to whom "it was just Greek"?

2) When it comes to Shakespeare's artistic production being intentional or unintentional, that question, to my mind, lies outside the domain of the literary historian because all he has to go on is the canon of texts. But even if this shows "many signs of haste and carelessness," it also contains the perfect poetry so enthusiastically admired by Goethe, to name only the best authority. Late in his life, in "Shakespeare und kein Ende," he attributed his love of Shakespeare to the wonders performed not by the great "Shake-scene" but by the master of poetic composition and verse-music:

Shakespeare's works are not for the eyes of the body . . . [he] appeals, absolutely, to our inner sense . . . It is by means of the living word that

Shakespeare produces his effects . . . There is no higher and no purer delight than listening, with closed eyes, to any Shakespeare play recited (not declaimed) by a naturally congenial voice.⁵

Under what circumstances the masterpieces came into being which produced this magical effect on the sternest of critics, we shall never know. There are, of course, some poetological hints in some plays and sonnets but none of them tells us whether a certain phrase sprang, like Athene, out of the author's mind, or was patiently chiselled out. And if it did come like a flash, who knows anything about "The fine delight that fathers thought"⁶ and about the, perhaps, long time of incubation which followed? Surely such lines as "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought / I summon up remembrance of things past" hint at poetic processes undisturbed by the hustle and bustle of show business. To add an example from a play (and a theatrically most effective one at that): who can tell whether the phrase "Than on the torture of the mind to lie in restless ecstasy" does not bear witness to the spiritual as well as artistic toil which brings just such a phrase into being? Poets who have commented on their own ways of poetic production have always pointed in this direction. ". . . shéer plóð makes plough down sillion / Shine, . . ." ⁷ says Hopkins, and according to Sidney a writer unschooled and untrained as a craftsman will have to wait in vain for the muse to come and whisper in his ear the words which will make us all wonder. He just wouldn't know how to transmit them.⁸

If Shakespeare "Between 1608 and 1613 . . . wrote four or five plays, collaborated in four others, and probably did some revision of others," Johann Sebastian Bach wrote the St. Matthew Passion in half a year (in the spare time allowed by all his unloved commitments), from September 1728 to Good Friday 1729.

3) These general considerations hold true, too, for Shakespeare's use of paronomasia in particular: all the literary historian has to go on is that mythical canon of printed texts. The question: Is what seems an artistic device intentional or not? is a psychological, not a philological one. So, to paraphrase Sidney, let psychologists dispute. The question concerning the literary historian is: What, considering that enormous historical gap, have the words to say and what does the context,

spreading out from each detail like that famous "circle in the water," suggest to the reader-spectator-understander? In other words, the reading of Shakespeare is governed by Shakespeare's own rule "To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit." When a reader so disposed is struck with a chain of variations of a certain sound he begins to sense a connection. The names Apollo-Polixenes-Paulina-Camillo-Mamillius-Autolycus (ollo-oli-auli-illo-illius-oly) are a case in point, and this is where, apart from everyman's playing alphabetic games from the nursery onwards, Shakespeare's grammar school comes in again. In the chapters concerning *iocus et facetiae* in the *De Oratore* (II.liv-lxiv), Cicero makes it very clear how far we are supposed to go in our looking out (or listening) for the telling effects of similarity in single words and word-groups. We may go very far, indeed. One letter is sufficient, let alone such a striking motif as the ollo-illo-olli-sequence in *The Winter's Tale*. Was it intentional? I do not know. Is it effective? Certainly. Does it make for musical coherence? Yes. Is such a coherence considered to be meaningful? Yes. (Ask anyone from the *Cratylus* to Puttenham's *Arte* or from Aristophanes to Dylan Thomas.) However, the meaning is to be looked for on very different levels, beginning with the silly joke and reaching, *via* the flash of wit, to the magical or even sacramental formula. In my own onomastic context the similarity of names appeared to be an index of the constellation of characters.

In his last passage, it seems to me that Professor Muir himself bridges the gap between the psycho-sociological and the philological positions when he says that, in Shakespeare's day, "scholars all wrote verses and . . . poets were all scholars to some degree." How great poets manage to acquire their learning is a mystery. Thomas Mann, for instance, who was one of the most widely read men of the century and, admittedly, held his place with the best of philosophers, or theologians, or Aegyptologists, or, last but not least, musicologists, never took his finals in a school or university nor had any musical training to speak of And this is the light in which I see Shakespeare's knowledge of Plato or the Greek tragedians as known to his age. I am very glad that Professor Muir signals agreement in this respect.

NOTES

¹"The Uncomic Pun," *The Cambridge Journal* 4 (1950/51): 472-85; "The Future of Shakespeare," *Penguin New Writing* 28 (1946): 118-19; *Last Periods of Shakespeare, Racine and Ibsen* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1961) 48-51.

²Thomas Whitfield Baldwin, *William Shakspeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, vol. 1 (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1944) vi and 1-18.

³Rosemond Tuve, *A Reading of George Herbert* (1952; Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1969) 42.

⁴*The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, rpt. ed. F. P. Wilson, vol. 1 (1958; Oxford: Blackwell, 1966) 233, ll. 17-20.

⁵"Shakespeare und kein Ende," *Goethes Werke*, vol. 12 (1953; Hamburg: Christian Wegner, 1956) 287-98 (my translation).

⁶Gerard Manley Hopkins, "To R. B.," *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, fourth ed., eds. W. H. Gardner and N. H. Mackenzie (London: OUP, 1967) 108.

⁷Hopkins, "The Windhover," *The Poems* 69.

⁸See Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry or The Defence of Poesy*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester UP; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973) 132.29-133.3 and *passim*.