

If and It and the Human Condition: Considerations Arising from a Reading of The Merchant of Venice^{1*}

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In the Myth of Er at the end of Plato's *Republic* we are told how the spindle of necessity, turned in the womb of eternity, produces the turning of the spheres²; the cosmic implications make it quite clear that in this case "necessity" does not mean compulsion but lawfulness.³ The daughters of necessity are the fates, and in the womb of Lachesis (the fate of the past) there are lots from which the unborn souls are told to make their choice; they are admonished to choose the middle way and avoid excess.

It would not be far wrong to say that *The Merchant of Venice* is a variation on this theme, since having to choose one's law is the paradigmatic *conditio humana* set forth in this play.⁴ *Conditio* derives from *condo*, meaning *I do* or *put together* (e.g., the parts of a contract).⁵ In Cooper's large selection of English denotations of *Conditio* we find, coupled together as if the terms were offered to Shakespeare on a plate: "Election or choice. A covenant, law." The last word is left, as nearly always in Cooper, to Cicero: "Conditio humana. Cic. The state or condition of."⁶

In *The Merchant of Venice* "choice," "covenant" (or *bond*), and "law" are as closely related thematically as the words *lego* and *lex* are related etymologically (they really are, it is not a wishful etymology of Cicero's own making).⁷ Playing his part on the stage of life and destined to have much ado with learning to know himself, man enters into bonds of friendship or love or commerce, and doing so he cannot but choose⁸ his law and make all his further choices according to it.

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debleimberg0221.htm>>.

Trying to approach the problem of an existential condition involving law and choice, the reader most readily takes hold of the fact that *condition* has a linguistic meaning. The word looms large in the indexes of grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Since Shakespeare expressed his ideas in the language of poetry (not music or painting), perhaps the linguistic denotation of *condition* might be considered to be the “literal” one. The conditional clause is what would very probably have sprung first to the mind of someone educated in an Elizabethan grammar school, who would be conscious of the syntactical intricacies entailed but very probably unaware of the formidable mass of learning that “condition” incorporates. Boethius’s booklength study *De hypotheticis syllogismis* is an outstanding example.⁹ In a more episodic manner the term occurs in a source I feel increasingly sure to have been a favourite of Shakespeare’s: in Plutarch’s *The E at Delphi* one of the manifestations of the oracular “E” is the “εἰ” (*if*), the conditional conjunction of logical syntax. And this is Plutarch’s commentary:

Certainly in logic this copulative conjunction has the greatest force, inasmuch as it clearly gives us our most logical form, [...] the hypothetical syllogism [which] no creature other than man apprehends. (386f-387a)¹⁰

Plutarch’s attribution of “the greatest force” to the εἰ foreshadows Touchstone’s dictum “much virtue in If” (AYL 5.4.90-101). And Shakespeare and Plutarch also think very much alike with regard to the specific meaning of the powerful *if*. In Plutarch’s philosophical reasoning it summarizes the hypothetical syllogism, which is reserved exclusively for man’s intellectual activity. In Shakespeare’s poetry it occurs in phrases like Portia’s “If you do love me, you will find me out” (MV 3.2.41), and Rosalind’s “I’ll have no father, if you be not he” (AYL 5.4.120). In both cases the conditional conjunction marks a human being’s existential choice, that is to say, a choice that implies choosing a law. When Portia encourages Bassanio to make his choice, she repeats her initial choice, filial piety, because, as I will show later on, the assurance she gives Bassanio is based on her father’s benevolent will. Rosalind, choosing her father, chooses her heritage, to which

she is bound by the laws of nature as well as by the religious law of filial piety. In these two instances (characteristic ones for Shakespeare, it seems to me) choice and law are made to agree as perfectly as in Cooper's series of English equivalents of Latin *conditio*: condition, choice, and law. The Myth of Er comes to mind, too, as an archetype of this kind of choice, and the virtue of Plutarch's *if* in *The E at Delphi* is fully confirmed.

Reading *The Merchant of Venice*, we come across *if* again and again, often in situations where a choice has to be made on condition that a law is chosen and, consequently, obeyed. Let us follow the most significant *ifs* in this play, and thus nearly all of them for there are very few insignificant ones.¹¹

1. *IF*

The series begins with Antonio telling his friend that his "extremest means" are at his disposal, but only, "if it stand as you yourself still do, / Within the eye of honour" (1.1.136-37). Deciding whether to help Bassanio, Antonio makes a clearly defined moral choice. "Honour" is the word. We, the audience, know that Antonio's choice is heedless and must lead to disaster, for more than just that one law ought to have been selected for consideration.

The next very arresting phrase beginning with *if* is Portia's "If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do" (1.2.12). Here, too, the conditional clause expresses a choice concerning a moral law. Virtuous action is the law that has to be chosen and will, indeed, be chosen by Portia; even, she says, "If I live to be as old as Sibylla" (1.2.102), and she will stress the religious significance of her decision when she tells Bassanio that he must not make the wrong choice, for "if you do, you'll make me wish a sin" (3.2.12).

Skipping some slight but charming examples,¹² we are struck with the *ifs* of the bond scene. Firmly convinced that taking usurious interest is not stealing, Shylock has chosen his usurer's lot long ago, once and for all. That was bad enough but might be allowed for since he, as

a Jew, was excluded from all other professions; he was free, however, to choose what kind of usurer he wanted to be. A good or a bad one...

So much for Shylock's moral choice within the precincts of the Law Merchant. Religiously considered, taking usurious interest is always wrong, and the decision Shylock now makes, and the "lot" he now chooses, is not only morally but religiously disastrous, from a Christian as well as from a Judaic perspective. When he says (in soliloquy): "If I can catch him once upon the hip, / I will feed fat the ancient grudge," and "cursed be my tribe / If I forgive him!" (1.3.41-42 and 46-47), he denounces not only his nation but the God of Israel, who, as Shylock ought to know, is a forgiving God who reserves vengeance to Himself.¹³ Shylock repeatedly and in rapid succession uses *if*¹⁴ and will do so again when the development of the action is nearing its climax.

In the second Act some *ifs* are employed to mark Morocco's and Aragon's choosing their lots (2.7.27 and 2.9.5-15) and, finally, Bassanio's arrival at Belmont (2.9.101). In the meantime Bassanio uses the word politely (2.2.138), Gratiano uses it loudly (2.2.181), and Launcelot uses it wittily (2.2.72, 105-08, 150). But with Jessica *if* clearly denotes a choice to be made under the auspices of the law of love: "O Lorenzo, if thou keep promise, I shall end this strife, / Become a Christian and thy loving wife!" (2.3.19).¹⁵

It is not long before we see Jessica's father again, seething with anger and choler, and craving for his pound of flesh: "if it will feed nothing else," he says, "it will feed my revenge" (3.1.47-48). He has chosen his law of retaliation once and for all, and now it has him in its grip:

[...] if you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us do we not revenge?—if we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge! If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example?—why revenge! (3.1.58-64)

Shylock's use of *if* reveals his personal dilemma. In the pattern observable in the Myth of Er, and in Cicero's stoical reasoning and ety-

mological deductions, and in Plutarch's Delphic syntax, the human condition is defined as a choice of law. From Plutarch we took the hint that the *if* of logical syntax might be taken to be a kind of cypher (grammatically denotative and mystically connotative at the same time) of the human condition. A geometrical emblem comes to mind, *if* as the hypothetical syllogism condensed into a short monosyllable that forms the crossing point of the two coordinates choice and law. But in Shylock's use of *if* no choice is left, only law. The whole Court Scene will ring with this word by which Shylock is literally possessed.¹⁶ After he has chosen the *lex* of retaliation, it has him in its grip. To him *if* is no longer a conditional conjunction at all but a strictly causal one,¹⁷ serving the purposes of a brutal, mechanistic causality which leaves no room for a moral choice. Once this *if* is stated as a premise, the consequence is a forgone conclusion.¹⁸ There is *much harm* in this kind of *if*, instead of "much virtue."

But the *if* of love that denotes the service of perfect freedom follows soon. "One half of me is yours," Portia says to Bassanio, "the other half yours, / Mine own I would say: but if mine then yours, / And so all yours" (3.2.16-18). Portia has chosen the law of love and trust, and therefore she can assure Bassanio:

If you do love me, you will find me out. (3.2.41)

This statement is the counterpart of a former one of Nerissa's:

Your father was ever virtuous, and holy men at their death have good inspirations,—therefore the lott'ry that he hath devised in these three chests of gold, silver, and lead, whereof who chooses his meaning chooses you, will no doubt never be chosen by any rightly, but one who you shall rightly love. (1.2.27-32)

Shakespeare made Nerissa use a trick by making her speak slightly incorrectly, or at least by making her indulge in poetic licence. Instead of saying *but one whom you shall rightly love* or *but one who shall rightly love you*, she let the words tumble and form a kind of sentence that covers both meanings. She knew exactly what she was doing. Explain-

ing the paternal will Portia has to follow, she was dealing with the *issues of death*,¹⁹ with a virtuous man's *holiness* and "inspirations," in short, with matters touching on religious mysteries. Portia, a critical spirit if ever there was one, found nothing to object to in Nerissa's interpretation of her father's will which promises mutual love to the union effected by the right choice. Portia trusts in her father's benevolence and thus can encourage Bassanio to venture the choice, saying "If you do love me, you will find me out." And yet, being not a paragon but a real woman, she is full of anxiety as regards the outcome of Bassanio's choice. She makes her own most daring choice (choosing the law of love) when she calls out "go Hercules!" (3.2.60), telling him to follow the example of that hero's famous choice, which means little less than telling him outright to choose the leaden casket.

Portia's lawful choice is a paradigm of the human condition because it is charged with a tension hard to bear. It includes not only firm trust and virtuous action, but also a moral fortitude that rebels when obedience threatens to dwindle into obsequiousness, and, above all, it is full of anxiety. Portia is desperately anxious: "Live thou, I live—," she says, "with much much more dismay, / I view the fight, than thou that mak'st the fray" (3.2.61-62). At this moment she envisages the possibility of a tragic ending that might turn the hopeful "Live thou, I live" into an inevitable *Die thou, I die*. And that is where the *if* of musical harmony comes in:

Let music sound while he doth make his choice,
Then if he lose he makes a swan-like end,
Fading in music. (3.2.43-45)²⁰

The unreal conditional clause "if he lose" reminds us that Bassanio's choice is a "lott'ry," after all, and this raises the question whether the person who may possibly be a loser is quite identical with the chooser. Syntactically he is the subject of choosing and losing; but what about his subjectivity beyond syntax? Certainly "he," Bassanio, has to do the choosing; but in the losing another agency is implied, for instance, the contingency that ruins a benevolent plan (as, e.g., in the case of Friar

Lawrence in *Romeo and Juliet*), or Fortune, or Fate, that is to say, some mysterious agency that sometimes makes a man “lose,” choose he never so wisely. The *if* in the phrase “Then if he lose” has indeed a Delphic ring, indicating that uncertainty and perhaps even mystery is an essential part of the human condition. And so, of course, is music.

In his treatise *On the Generation of the Soul in the Timaeus*, Plutarch meticulously explains (following Plato) how the human soul has been created according to the laws of musical mathematics. According to Kepler, there would be no harmony if the human soul did not produce it.²¹ The work in which Shakespeare has shown most clearly how much he agrees with both is *The Phoenix and Turtle*. There the tragic, mysterious, and musical note Portia strikes when she says, “if he lose,” rules throughout, nor is a “death divining swan” wanting, who functions as “the priest in surplice white / That defunctive music can” and gives the funeral rites their “right” (13). There also is a wonderful harmonious *if* in the poem, praising the human condition of true love, in spite of fate and loss and death. Having witnessed the death and departure of the Phoenix and the Turtle, Reason was so much moved by “their tragic scene”

That it cried, How true a twain
Seemeth this concordant one!
Love hath reason, reason none,
If what parts, can so remain. (45-48)

Portia will not have to part from Bassanio and will be happily united with him. But there is this moment of impending tragedy charged with anxiety and mystery and music. And its linguistic and symbolic indicator is an *if*.

After Portia’s three *ifs* (“if mine then yours,” “If you do love me, you will find me out,” and “Then if he lose he makes a swan-like end”) we are in for a surprise. In the casket-scene proper (Bassanio’s choice and its happy outcome) just one single, fairly inconspicuous “*If*” is to be found (3.2.135). But, perhaps, this is just as it should be, for there is no *if* about Bassanio’s choice. The condition “If you do love me” has been

fulfilled. He does love Portia, and thus cannot but find her in his heart where, *teste* Plato, the “semblance of [his] soul” belongs (3.4.20)²² and in her, his “heart of heart” (*Ham.* 3.2.73), he will find himself as well as the law of his life. We have that on the authority of the Psalmist, who sings “O my God: yea, thy Law is within mine heart” (Ps. 40:8; cf. also Jer. 31:33).

But now, for a while, the law of Venice and the law of the bond will dominate the play.²³ It is the lawyer’s turn to read the law (*legere legem*) rightly and make a lawful choice. The *if* is needed for this, and Shylock makes ample use of it. With him the particle denotes, again, his self-chosen compulsions. The idiosyncrasies which have led to his neurosis of hatred and revenge rest on an *if* that does not allow for alternatives but enforces an automatic reaction: “What if my house be troubled with a rat [...] / Some men [...] are mad if they behold a cat,” he says, and comes to the conclusion that people so molested “of force / Must yield to such inevitable shame” (4.1.4-57). The same causal automatism holds good for the law he *stands for*: “If you deny me, fie upon your law!” (4.1.102).²⁴ That the “If” is echoed here by such a pejorative palindrome as “fie” may be a hint at Shylock’s perverted, one-track use of the conditional.²⁵

Portia turns Shylock’s *if* upside down when she chooses one of two “contrary laws”²⁶ to let him have all the justice he deserves and more than that. First she tries to make him consider that “if” he insists on his “plea” Antonio must be condemned (4.1.198-201). When Shylock does insist, the contrary law becomes effective: “if” he (Shylock) sheds one drop of Christian blood he loses his possessions (105-08), and “if” he takes the least bit more than a pound of flesh, he must die (322-28). Shylock, since he would take the pound of flesh at his peril, does not take it; and yet there is still more justice meted out to him by the laws of Venice: “If it be proved against an alien, / That [...] / He seek the life of any citizen,” then his only chance is to kneel down and “beg mercy of the duke” (344-59).²⁷

This very serious parody of Shylock’s causal use of the conditional clause in the trial is parodied again by Bassanio and Portia in the

mock-trial of the last Act. "If I could add a lie unto a fault," says Bassanio (5.1.159), who, as we all know, can and will not do so. The other *ifs* in this context all follow the same pattern²⁸; they are completely different not only from Portia's final *ifs* in the trial but also from Shylock's causal *ifs* and from Portia's and Jessica's *ifs* of love and trust (3.2.41 and 2.3.20); they are *ifs* of mockery in a play within a play and to be followed by a happy ending.

To sum up this survey of the *if* in *The Merchant of Venice*, it seems that the word is as multivocal to Shakespeare as the word "Conditio" is in Cooper's series of English equivalents.²⁹ This is confirmed by a famous contemporary's argument. John Donne, who was a young man about town when *The Merchant of Venice* was initially performed, interpreted an *if* for us when he had become Dean of St. Paul's. In a Sermon on 1 Pet 1:17 ("And if ye call on the Father") he lectures on the theme of *if*; very nearly quoting Shakespeare (and Plutarch). Touchstone states, laconically, "much virtue in If" (AYL 5.4.102),³⁰ and Donne augments: "there is much more force in this particle *Si, If*"; then he offers a brief grammatical dissertation on the additional "force" of the particle *if*. The conjunction has been used by the Apostle as a

Si concessionis, non dubitationis, an If that implyes a confession and acknowledgement, not a hesitation or a doubt, That it is also Si progressionis, Si conclusionis, an If that carryes you farther, and that concludes you at last, If you doe it, that is, Since you do it [...]. (3: 277.125-29)

When Donne wrote this he might have had the finest of the *ifs* in *The Merchant of Venice* in mind, Portia's "If you do love me, you will find me out" (3.2.41); his criteria fit perfectly. Portia does not hesitate or doubt, instead she promptly accepts Bassanio's wisdom, confesses her love, acknowledges her father's benevolence and, finally, trusts in a progress that will lead to a happy conclusion. Moreover, in both cases the same crucial condition is made: the *if* can prove its "force" only on condition of something *done*, which, in terms of *The Merchant of Venice*, goes very closely together with something *given*.³¹ Therefore, this summery of the *ifs* turns into a mere transition to another aspect.

2. IF AND GIVE

There exists an age-old affinity between the words *if* and *give*. In Chaucer “yif” (meaning *if*) and “yif” (meaning *give!*) still look and sound alike.³² Moreover, the glossary provides the northern dialect “gif” (meaning *if*), which, in the sixteenth century, was also spelled *giue*.³³ Given this cluster of words, a syllogism materializes: when *if* resembles *gif*, and *gif* resembles *giue*, then *if* resembles *give*.

Shakespeare often makes use of this verbal affinity. He is fond of the phrase “if (I, you, etc.) give way” (*passim*); in addition to this he often couples the words *if* and *give* in close conditional juxtaposition, for instance:

Then, if [...], I'll give [...]	LLL 5.2.820
I'll give [...] If ever [...]	AYL 1.1.150
If he [...] will give [...]	2.4.61
If [...] thou canst give [...]	Rom. 4.1.52
And if thou dar'st, I'll give [...]	76
If you will [...] and give [...]	Cym. 4.4.44
Nay, if the devil have given [...]	MM 3.2.29
if you give me [...], give me [...]	Shr. in.2.6-7

To conclude this random series with an example that sounds like a declaration of love to language: Snug the joiner wanting to know, is there a written text of the lion's part, urges Peter Quince:

if it be, give it me. MND 1.2.62-3

In *The Merchant of Venice*, *if* is the syntactical quintessence of the *conditio humana* not only because it joins law with choice but because it is closely connected with *give* and thus with the give and take that belongs to the commerce (or usury) of friendship, love, and mercy. The final link in Donne's syntactic chain of reasoning in the sermon on “And if ye call on the Father” is, implicitly, man's doing what has to be done; in *The Merchant of Venice* the importance of doing what is good is explicitly stated (cf. 1.2.12), nor can there be any doubt that doing is giving and vice versa. Therefore, in this play Donne's “*Si concessionis*,” and “*progressionis*,” and “*conclusionis*” are joined by a *si*

liberalitatis and *beneficentiae*. The law of choice can be identical with the law of distribution, i.e., the law of equity that gives everyone his own, *suum quique*, and the *if* that serves this beneficent law is a “peacemaker” (AYL 5.4.101). The *if* of causal mechanism and determinism serves the law of retaliation, the returning of evil for evil unto the bitter end: “If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his / sufferance be by Christian example?—why revenge!” (3.1.63-64). Portia teaches Shylock what happens when this *if* is in full force: “if thou dost shed” and “if thou tak’st,” then “Thou diest” (4.1.305-28). But Portia does not pass a sentence dictated by the *lex talionis*. Far from it. Shylock’s life is not forfeit but “lies in the mercy / Of the Duke”; and the Duke *pardons him his life before he asks it*, and Antonio can and does *render mercy* to his enemy and, what is more, that enemy does not tear himself apart in a white rage like Rumpelstilzkin, but accepts his former debtor’s merciful offer and is “content” (4.1.351-89).

Thus the quality of mercy that “blesseth him that gives, and him that takes” is finally put into practice by Shylock.³⁴ Without his taking the mercy offered to him, all Portia’s efforts to save the “semblance of her soul,” the sinner in the dock, would have been completely in vain. The taking is quite as important as the giving.³⁵ The apparent opposites *give* and *take* are in fact the components of a dual structure that gives them their meaning. They are a “concordant one” (*PhT* 46), and their meeting is symbolized in the handclasp. But giving is doing, and doing goes together with being done unto, as the Golden Rule tells us. And man must choose his law, and *lego* and *lex*, apparently so different, if not opposite, in meaning, are etymologically related, and the soul chooses its lot from the womb of necessity. The human condition has a polar structure, or, in the words of the Sonnet: “Thou single wilt prove none” (8.14).

Portia touches on this dual structure when, confronted with possible tragedy, she says: “Then if he lose he makes a swan-like end” (3.2.44). Just for a moment she leaves aside Bassanio’s doing the choosing and envisages his (and her) suffering the losing, not giving a name, however, to what (or who) it may be that brings about the loss. *Nescio quid* is the age-old answer to that kind of question.³⁶ This great common-

place is paraphrased in the first lines of *The Merchant of Venice*, as if it were a motto for the human condition, and the *quidditas* looked for in vain is signified by the pronoun *it* repeated seven times in three lines.

If and *give* have much in common, and so have *if* and *it*. They share a vowel, and they fit into rhythm as short monosyllabic words. They both are mere particles of syntax but they are as comprehensive in meaning as small in size. There is “much virtue” in both of them.

3. *IT*³⁷

When the play begins the gentleman standing centre-stage tells us *who* he is by his mere presence; he is the Merchant of the title, soon to be called Antonio. But when it comes to the next question in the classical series of interrogatives, “*quis, quid, cur, ubi, quando, quem-admodum,*”³⁸ the Merchant gives a somewhat dark, tautological answer. The *quid* or *quidditas* or *what it is* he has to deal with in his efforts to come to an agreement with himself has no proper name. A pronoun, i.e., a pro-nomen, must do.³⁹ The *what* (or rather “*why*”) is an “*it*,” and a syntactically unrelated one at that. The whatness of Antonio’s “*it*” is an open question:

Ant. In sooth I know not why I am so sad.
It wearies me, you say it wearies you;
But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
I am to learn. (1.1.1-5)

It is a pronoun, and such a word “is named pronoun,” says Isidor, “because it is used instead of a noun so that the noun will not grow tedious by repetition.”⁴⁰ In Antonio’s self-introduction there is no noun, instead he uses the word *it*. And when his companions try to give “*it*” a name he says *no* to all of them. Perhaps, in a garrulous manner, Solanio comes nearest to the meaning of Antonio’s *it* when he says: “you are sad / Because you are not merry” (1.1.57-58).⁴¹ Mixing nonsense with profundity, the proverbial jingle declares Antonio’s *it* to be something that cannot be explained logically.

He told us the truth when he said: "In sooth I know not why...." In his anxious self-examination *it* and *why*, *quid* and *cur*, *factum* and *causa*⁴² are identical: *It* is the *cause*. Coming to this result in our grammatical-rhetorical analysis of *it*, we cannot but realize that we have been inadvertently quoting *Othello*: "It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul! / Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars, / It is the cause" (5.2.1-3). Strangely enough *Othello*'s phrase is identical with the one a schoolboy would have had to memorize as a rhetorical cliché. But surely *Othello*'s heartbreaking utterance goes far beyond rhetoric, and it also goes much farther than Antonio's "It wearies me." Where does it go?⁴³

We moderns envy Shakespeare's audience their chance of hearing and seeing his plays when they had never been staled with the stage. But we have one advantage over them, we know what was to come and can draw comparisons within the whole canon. If we are in luck, we perhaps find some hints as to how he developed a theme and thus commented himself, indirectly, on the text we are reading and riddling. Certainly the *Merchant of Venice* and the *Moor of Venice*, in their statements concerning *it*, have something in common. They share the feeling that they are up against something profoundly or, in *Othello*'s case, desperately disturbing. But *Othello* is a long way off from *The Merchant of Venice*; the tragic overtones of "It is the cause" as well as the rhythmically identical "It is too late" mark some of the darkest moments of the very darkest of the love tragedies. Antonio is driven only to weariness by "it," not to distraction and murder. Let us look for examples nearer *The Merchant of Venice* in genre and period, which may, perhaps, throw some light on that unexplained "it" of Antonio's self-introduction.

One of the great Shakespearean texts where the *it* comes into its own is Sonnet 116, the crowning perfection of the old lyrical stereotype "*Quid sit amor*."⁴⁴ The first pair of the speaker's definitions of love is: "it is an ever-fixed mark / [...] It is the star to every wand'ring bark." In *Cymbeline*, decades after the *Sonnets*, Bellarius will tell us that "Guiderius had / Upon his neck a mole, a sanguine star; / It is a mark of wonder" (5.5.364-66). Taken as a grammatical substitute, *it* is differ-

ently related in each of the two texts; but taken in itself *it*, from the beginning to the end of Shakespeare's career, retains its characteristics: it is *a mark* and *a star*; and the musical charm of the "wand'ring bark" is echoed by a "mark of wonder."⁴⁵

At the end of *Henry IV, Part 2* Shakespeare makes his spokesman Falstaff say: "It is a wonderful thing [...]" (5.1.61). Falstaff has to say more. His *it* is "a 'provisional' or 'anticipatory' subject," followed by "an infinitive phrase,"⁴⁶ and yet the actor playing Falstaff ought to stress the "It" just enough to make it appear a real subject. Shakespeare is fond of this *double entendre* and often uses it in phrases beginning "It is [...]." In the speech quoted above, which is full of ominous hints at Falstaff's rejection, the dictum "It is a wonderful thing" is followed by two more such phrases: "It is certain [...]" and "O, it is much [...]."⁴⁷ The whatness of the "it" in these two phrases is also explained, but let each of them stand, for a moment, for itself as a definition of "it"; let the "it" be a subject meaning something so wonderful and so certain and so overwhelming⁴⁸ that names like *fate* or *fortune* are too conventional for it, and how strikingly do the phrases reveal the situation of the marvellous old fool stumbling with great expectations toward the rejection that is the fulfilment of his career.

In *As You Like It*, where the "It" contributes to the mysterious simplicity of the title, Rosalind, referring to the anonymous author of sylvan poetry, asks: "Is it a man?" Celia answers, evasively: "It is a hard matter for friends to meet." Rosalind insists: "[...] who is it?" but Celia keeps procrastinating: "Is it possible?" Rosalind urges her: "[...] with most petitionary vehemence, tell me who it is," but Celia still goes on playing her game: "O wonderful, wonderful. And most wonderful wonderful! And yet again wonderful!" This draws a final "who is it" from Rosalind, and Celia confesses that "it" is "a man." Then the "it" is for once transformed into "he": "Is he of God's making?" But the "he" is merely episodic and immediately replaced by the "it" when Celia stops procrastinating and finally answers: "It is young Orlando" (3.2.172-208).⁴⁹

No doubt Shakespeare is playing with the word, and if we do not consider two meanings of Rosalind's *its*, a relative one and an independent one, we miss the point. Rosalind is not only eager to find out who wrote the doggerel verses pinned to the trees, she also wants to know whether her dream of love is going to come true. Has all that matters for her, has the whatness, the *it* of her life really become personified in the man she loves? Yes, it has. "You are my all-the-world," says the speaker of the *Sonnets* (112.5), and "It is young Orlando," says Celia to Rosalind.

Our three examples have been of some help. They have shown what an important part the *it* plays in Shakespeare's poetry, and they have provided some interpretive criteria that may lead us to a better understanding of the *its* in *The Merchant of Venice*.

All-the-world is a likely definition of *it*; for what is there that is not denoted by *it*? In *The Merchant of Venice*, *it* signals the wisdom of the ages in proverbs,⁵⁰ and moreover stands, to give a few examples, for the world (1.1.75), for money,⁵¹ the bond (3.2.315-16), the pound of flesh,⁵² Antonio's bankruptcy (3.1.93 and 106), Shylock's idiosyncrasies,⁵³ Jessica's elopement (3.1.29), and Leah's turquoise (3.1.100); but it also stands for music,⁵⁴ fancy (3.2.67), beauty (3.2.88-100), for the ecstasy of joy and love (3.2.113), and for time, as in such seemingly commonplace statements as Portia's "It is almost morning" (5.1.295).⁵⁵ Finally, it stands for itself in sheer indefiniteness, for instance in Gratiano's conclusive "Let it be so" (5.1.300).

In Nerissa's and Gratiano's discussion of the "ring," *it* is made to behave throughout as a pronoun according to Isidor's definition⁵⁶; the pronoun, *it*, is used by the dozen instead of the noun, *ring*, so that the noun may not become tedious or, in this case, even morally offensive by too many repetitions of the ambiguous word "ring."⁵⁷ The use of "it" in this dialogue is a classic *pronominatio* according to Quintilian's definition: "Antonomasia" (i.e., *pronominatio*),⁵⁸ "quae aliquid pro nomine ponit." Well, if "aliquid" is to be used "pro nomine," then there could not be a more adequate replacement than by a *pronomem*, especially if such a word is regarded as "a wonderful thing," and

Shakespeare certainly did regard it as such or he would not have given it the poetic status it has in Portia's praise of mercy.

If her speech is compared with the dialogue centred on the ring in Act 5, a syntactic difference is obvious. In Portia's pleading, *it* is used throughout as a subject, coupled sometimes with a predicate complement, while in the ring-sequence it functions, with very few exceptions, as a grammatical object. Accordingly, Portia's *it* always heads a phrase and, often, a line, while Nerissa's and Gratiano's *it* is always placed at the end of a phrase and, often, at the end of a line. Portia tells us what *mercy* and, in place of *mercy*, *it*, either does or is. Nerissa and Gratiano tell us what has happened to the ring, replacing "ring" nearly always by "it." But the two *its*, however different as subject and object, beginning and end, fact and sign,⁵⁹ have something in common. They are both part of statements that denote giving and taking. The *it* that replaces the *ring* is given as a sign of love and trust by a woman to a man who takes it in the spirit in which it is given. The *it* that replaces "The quality of mercy" gives and is given in giving itself, that is the initial act; having given itself and having been taken, it is given again to others.

In the initial lines of the play the *it* is present as subject as well as object but its whatness is altogether cryptic, and once again Rumpelstilzkin comes to mind: find out the goblin's name and you have it in your power. But it is only the Poloniuses of this world who believe in the power of definition.⁶⁰ They are convinced that, following the rules of popular rhetoric and describing a phenomenon or situation "What it is,"⁶¹ they can easily put it in its place. And certainly it is easy enough to classify this or that object indicated by "it." But when the question *What is it?* is taken literally, when *it* functions as *factum ipsum* and not as a substitute and, accordingly, gets the main stress, Antonio's attitude is the only intelligent and sensitive one. What is IT? We do not know. We are to learn, but not from Polonius. The old "nescio quid" attributed to Cicero as well as its French sequel "je ne sais quoi" come to mind.⁶²

In Shakespeare we read: "It is a mark of wonder," and "It is the star to every wand'ring bark," and "It is young Orlando," and "It is a wonderful thing," and "It is the cause," and "It is a tale told by an idiot," and "It is an attribute to God himself."⁶³ That is how these phrases reside and "echo in the memory." If we did not take the "It" in them *per se* we should be quite as mistaken as if we neglected the function of "It" as a pronoun referring to an antecedent noun. In Portia's speech "It" stands for "mercy" and for itself:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
 It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
 Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest,
 It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes,
 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes
 The throned monarch better than his crown.
 [...]
 But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
 It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
 It is an attribute to God himself; (4.1.180-91).

The poetry of these lines suggests that Shakespeare drew inspiration from the English Bible. There the *it* stands not only for the tree of life and for the earth out of which God made man but for God's work during the six days of creation and for all things and beings he made; the single acts of creation are sealed, again and again, with the words "it was so" and "it was good."⁶⁴ Since *it* replaces the *world* and the *works* it cannot but replace the *Word*, for

All things were made by it, and without it was made nothing that was made. In it was life, and that life was the light of men. And that light shineth in the wilderness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not. (John 1:3-5)⁶⁵

But when it comes to the divine Word speaking for Itself, the *it* is raised to an even higher degree: once the disciples saw Christ walking on the water and they "were troubled, saying, It is a spirit, [...]. But straightway Jesus spoke vnto them, saying, Be of good comfort; It is I" Matt. 14:26-27).⁶⁶ The absoluteness (and grammatical intricacy) of the

statement "It is I" is shared by His final words on the cross: "It is finished," or "It is done" (John 19:30).⁶⁷

Here one might say "Let it suffice,"⁶⁸ or "It is enough."⁶⁹ But it is far from enough. At least two more great formulae must be mentioned. The best known tale from the Bible begins with the words "And it came to pass" (Luke 2:1, 15, and 23). Another very well known one is dominated by the phrase "It is written" (Luke 4:4, 8).⁷⁰ There is also an apocryphal example I find irresistible. Reading the Bible we read poetry, and it must have been Donne's poetic fury that made him contribute an onomatopoeia to the poetry of the Bible. In his last sermon, "Deaths Duell," he gives his congregation the exact wording of the cock's crow that called Peter to repentance. It is: "[D]oe it now, [...] / [...] doe it now" (*Sermons* 10: 246.621-247.622).⁷¹

Let Shakespeare's words reverberate within a biblical context, and Othello's heartrending "It is too late" as well as Macbeth's outrageous "If it were done, when 'tis done [...]"⁷² both echo the final "It is finished," or "It is done" in John's Gospel. Portia's statement "It is an attribute to God himself"⁷³ (meaning mercy) comes very near Christ's mystical self-definition "It is I." When, in the anagnorisis of *The Winter's Tale*, Paulina intones the formula "It is requir'd / You do awake your faith" (5.3.94-95), she quotes St. Paul *verbatim*.⁷⁴

Falstaff undoubtedly speaks in his maker's name when he says, "It is a wonderful thing." In the one passage in which Shakespeare mentions the word "pronoun," young William's Latin exercise in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, he connects the grammatical term with mercantile images. "What is it, William that does lend articles?" asks Sir Hugh Evans, and William replies in kind: "Articles are borrowed of the pronoun [...]" (4.1.33-36).⁷⁵ This recalls Shylock's indirect question "Me thoughts you said, you never lend nor borrow / Upon advantage," and Antonio's laconic answer "I do never use it" (1.3.64-65).

In the *commercium linguae*, pronouns "lend" and "borrow" articles. *It*, Shakespeare's great favourite among the pronouns, is indeed like a coin or banknote that lends itself or that may be borrowed to replace every imaginable object or notion, or even person great or small, high

or low, good or bad. It may indicate the whole world or it may indicate nothing, but, what is more, it lends itself to fill the gap left open by speechless perplexity and wonder or terror. This happens when the conventional question *what is it?* is turned upside down so that it is not the *is* but the *it* that is stressed, and the answer is not *it is this or that* but something like "It is a wonderful thing," or "It is a tale told by an idiot," or "It is an attribute to God himself." Seen in the light of these statements, Audrey's direct question "Is it a true thing?" (AYL 3.3.16)⁷⁶ as well as Rosalind's indirect question "If it be true" (AYL Ep. 3)⁷⁷ lose their triviality and make us feel like Antonio saying "In sooth I know not."

"If and it and the Human Condition" is our theme. It came our way when, reading *The Merchant of Venice*, we were told by the words that choosing one's law is a necessary condition of man's life. This interpretation was immediately corroborated by such consanguinous patterns as the existential relation of necessity and choice in the Myth of Er, and the etymological relation of *lex* and *lego*, and the lexical interpretation of *law* and *choice* as synonyms denoting Latin *conditio*. Plutarch in the *E at Delphi* provides the connection of the hypothetical syllogism with *conditio humana* and of the conditional conjunction being a variant of the letter E and thus of the pentagram represented by the fifth letter of the alphabet. All this made us focus on *if* in *The Merchant of Venice* (and elsewhere in Shakespeare), and *if* made us focus on *it*. Now, what do they say?

Serio ludere! they say. *It* is a pronoun and *if* is a conjunction, and the genius who by joining the words coins the phrase "If it be give it me" is a "joiner."⁷⁸ And "it" the existence of which is called in question by "If" is the Lion's part in writing. Or is it? How delightful! Papageno tootling on his magic flute comes to mind, together with the opera of that name, not only because of its inherent charm but because of its specific interpretive value. In Mozart's music we find exactly the same compositional tension called "childlike" and "esoteric" by Thomas Mann⁷⁹; an easy amiability that transcends all intellectual and social barriers but is charged with a mysterious structural austerity that claims our keenest intellectual and emotional awareness. "I am never

merry when I hear sweet music?" Jessica says, and Lorenzo answers, "The reason is your spirits are attentive" (5.1.69-70). Surely, the kind of hearers who, to Hamlet, "o'erweigh a whole theatre of others" (*Ham.* 3.2.27-28) will not only be spontaneously amused and delighted by Snug's dictum, but will appreciate it as the specimen of metaphysical poetry it really is, and begin to wonder how *if* and *it* affect each other as well as their hearers' "spirits" when they are joined in this Mozartian manner. But I must not go into this now (however fascinating I find the problem), for I have to go on with my summary. So let us forget about *The Midsummer Night's Dream* (and *The Magic Flute*) and focus on *The Merchant of Venice* (which, being Shakespeare's most musical play and having strong affinities to the morality play, has something in common with *Don Giovanni*).

In *The Merchant of Venice* (and elsewhere) Shakespeare employed both *if* and *it* as words charged with "much virtue." In Shakespeare's *World of Words*⁸⁰ every word has to be regarded as a microcosm of macrocosmic scope, for, as Timon's good Steward says "the world is but a word" (2.2.156). Surely this is an ambiguous dictum; but in our context it reminds us, willy-nilly, of *The Midsummer Night's Dream* again, where "[t]he poet's eye" is compared with a globular mirror reflecting the world (5.1.12-17), that is to say, macrocosm and microcosm, the created universe and the creature of the sixth day, man, who is gifted with a rational soul and gives names to things. Man exists in the world, physically bound up with the laws of nature, and socially and intellectually and spiritually involved with various codes of law which, regarded philosophically, are hardly less mysterious than the natural laws ruling the cosmos. This crucial relation of man, that "little world made cunningly" (Donne, *Complete Poems* 533), and the universal world (naturally, morally, and spiritually considered), is pointed out in an especially arresting manner by the two words *if* and *it*. Both are linguistic indicators of man's chance and obligation to choose his lot and his law and, at the same time, of a mysterious "je ne sais quoi" that is instrumental in the uncertainty of the outcome. For the unavoidable choice includes the happy ending as well as the tragic

catastrophe, and such verbal utterances as “If you do love me” and “Then if he lose,” as well as “It is young Orlando” and “It is too late.”

If and *it*, in *The Merchant of Venice* and elsewhere in Shakespeare, indicate the mystery of the human condition. Both particles approach the E at Delphy in runic sparseness as well as in mysterious signal-ity.⁸¹ None of them being a *nomen*, they do not give a name to things either seen or unseen, they are literally “insubstantial” (*Tmp.* 4.1.155), mere joiners and substitutes of syntax, and widely open to interpretation. That is why they suggest themselves as signs of the human condition, that is to say, of man having to make his existential choice,⁸² confronted with an uncertainty too extreme for verbal de-nomination. But, to adapt, very freely, another poet’s conclusion: “Not unto nomination / The Cherubim reveal—.”⁸³

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NOTES

¹See Inge Leimberg, “What may words say?” *A Reading of The Merchant of Venice*.—I thank Frank Kearful for revising my English syntax and style, and Matthias Bauer for providing the critical debate that led to my final revision of this essay.

²See *Republic* 616b-619e, and cf. *Laws* 818b-d.

³Cf. *Timaeus* 47e-48a; cf. also *Phaedo* 74e.

⁴For a detailed analysis of this theme, see Leimberg 36-39, 43-48, and 113-60.

⁵The word derives from *dico* and was originally spelled *condicio*. For differences in spelling of English *condition* see *OED*.

⁶Cooper probably refers to *Tusculan Disputations* 3.25.60.

⁷“[L]ex est ratio summa insita in natura [...] eadem ratio cum est in hominis mente confirmata et confecta, lex est. itaque arbitrantur prudentiam esse legem, cuius ea vis sit, ut recte facere iubeat, vetet delinquere; eamque rem illi Graeco putant nomine a suum cuique tribuendo appellatam, ego nostro a legendo; nam ut illi aequitatis, sic nos dilectus vim in lege ponimus, et proprium tamen utrumque legis est,” *De legibus* 1.5.18-19, and see n1; the editor seems to doubt the etymological derivation of νομος from νεμω, which is, however, correct. So is, of course, the derivation of *lex* from *lego*, which is repeated, e.g., *De legibus* 2.5.12. Cf.

Varro 6.66: “from *legere* ‘to pick,’ [...] the *leges* ‘laws,’ which are *lectae* ‘chosen’ and brought before the people for them to observe.”

⁸Shakespeare very often uses the word “choose” in this modal, negative form.

⁹See, e.g., the edition translated by Luca Obertello. The editor and translator provides a most informative introduction.

¹⁰The praise of the *if* and of the hypothetical syllogism as the epitome of logical conclusiveness is set off by the antithetical statement that it “contains an optative force” which defies logic, see 386c.

¹¹In this case, as in several others, the traditional grammatical value judgments are interesting only as a historical foil. See, e.g., Donawerth 19 and n21: “only the noun and the verb are truly significant; all other parts of speech are ‘consignificant,’ signifying only in conjunction with significant words.”

¹²These include, for example, Portia’s *ifs* concerning Morocco, 1.2.121-25, and Bassanio’s invitation of Shylock, 1.3.28.

¹³See Leimberg 60-64.

¹⁴Cf. 1.3.159-60, 163-64, and 192.

¹⁵Lorenzo answers this in religious terms in 2.4.33-34.

¹⁶Cf. 4.1.35, where Shylock uses the word in involuntary irony.

¹⁷In Probus’s *Instituta artium* “*si*” is listed exclusively as a causal conjunction; see 144.1-7: “De causali. [*sic*] causalis speciei coniunctiones sunt [...] *si* simplex [...]” See also 598-99, Index rerum et verborum, “coniunctiones.” But see, by contrast, Lily’s *Shorte Introduction*: “Of a coniunction [...]. Causals: as Nam, namque [...]. Conditionals: as Si, sin [...]” (25). And see Cooper: “*Si*, Coniunctio, quanda res facta significatur, finitiuis iungitur. *If*: though [...] Virgil [...] *If* Orpheus coulde, as he did indeede, etc. Subiunctiuis iungitur, quoties conditionalis & incertus est sermo: veluti, *Si* facias, *Si* faceres. Cic. *If* thou doe it.” See also Menne.

¹⁸See Börger and Barnocchi: “Boethius differentiates between material implication, i.e., a conditional statement *secundum accidens* [...] and an unparadoxical causal relation *habens naturam consequentiam* the truth of which is based on necessary relations which deduce the conclusion from the premise” (266; my translation). The authors refer to Boethius, *De syllogismo hypothetico* 835b-c.

¹⁹I borrow the expression (Ps. 68:20) from John Donne’s farewell Sermon, see *Sermons* 10: 230.

²⁰Matthias Bauer reminds me that, in the Myth of Er (*Republic* 620a), Orpheus selects the life of a swan.

²¹See *The Harmony of the World* IV.I, IV.II and IV.III.

²²Cf. also, e.g., *Meno* 81d-e.

²³See also the minor though not at all negligible *ifs* 3.3.28, 3.4.5-21, 3.5.22, 26, and 71-73.

²⁴Cf. also 3.3.26-29 where Antonio expresses (not quite but nearly) the same thought in nearly the same words.

²⁵See *MV* 4.1.44 and 48, and see above, ref. to Cooper's definition "conditionalis et incertus est sermo." The ruthless mechanism of cause and effect that rules in these remarks of Shylock's shows the author's strong dislike of any ideological determinism.

²⁶See Leimberg 191-95 for an interpretation of 4.1.302-08.

²⁷See also the *ifs* in Bassanio's, Antonio's, and Portia's remarks 4.1.209, 276, and 440.

²⁸See 199-205 and 231-33.

²⁹"A keping vp: also condition, place, fortune, state, maner, waye or meanes. A propertie or nature. Election or choise. A covenant, law, or offer conditional." That Shakespeare was very much aware of the "conditional" character of *if* is proved by the juxtaposition of the words "condition" and "if" in *MV* 1.2.129 and 5.1.74. Cf. also *2H6* 5.1.64.

³⁰There is also a musical side to the virtue and force of *if*. Many songs and madrigals begin with "If." See the index of Fellowes' collection and note, especially, William Byrd's fondness for the initial "If."

³¹In English the *do* of *I do* is identical with Latin *do*, I give. See also *OED*, "give" *v.* B. 4. and 4.b., 6.b., and 9. For the theme of giving in *MV* see Leimberg, Index, "give," and see also Danson.

³²Cf., e.g., *Troilus and Criseyde* 2.1063 and 4.1103.

³³See *OED*, "gif" *conj.*, "Sc. and north. dial. [...] 6 giue [...] [An alteration of ME gif, If. [...]] 1. Introducing a condition: = If." See also *OED*, "give" *v.* 32., on the past participle, with reference to "given" *ppl.* a. (In both these cases the *OED*, including the *Supplement*, is not particularly informative.)

³⁴See John R. Cooper.

³⁵See Leimberg 200-07 for an interpretation of 4.1.370-453.

³⁶See Leimberg 23n8.

³⁷Shakespeare scholars have focused mainly on the second person pronoun (especially in the *Sonnets*), not on the *it*. A linguistic study that focuses on the criteria *referential it* and *dummy it* is Seppänen. I thank Frank Kearful for reminding me of John Ashbery's frequent, thematic use of the *it*.

³⁸Who, what, why, where, when, how (my translation); see, e.g., Lausberg § 328.

³⁹The rhetoricians do not mention pronouns but prefer epithets and appellatives in their examples.

⁴⁰My translation of *Etymologies* 1.8.

⁴¹See Leimberg 216-19 for an interpretation of 5.1.69.

⁴²See, e.g., Lausberg § 329.

⁴³See the editor's note to 5.2.1-3: "How characteristic of Othello, that he does not define the cause (= chastity? Purity? The good of the world in general?)" This seems to me an erroneous inference due to the conventional reading of *it* as a substitute for a meaningful noun, and not as a linguistic cypher charged with a meaning of its own. The dictum is clearly foreshadowed by Venus cursing love after the death of Adonis. In a sequence of six stanzas "love" is replaced by "it" throughout, so that the meaning of the pronoun becomes more and more independent; cf. *Ven.* 1135-64. See also *Macbeth* 5.5.26-7: "it is a tale / Told by an idiot"; of course the phrase is syntactically related to "Life" (24), and yet it has a pathos of its own, especially when it is seen in relation with the use of "it" elsewhere in the play. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth nearly always use *it* instead of a noun naming their outrage. To give only one example: "If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well/ It were done quickly" (1.7.1, but cf. also 1.5.14-17, 34, 47, 52; 1.7.36-38, 49; 2.1.48, 62-63; 2.2.3-4, 29, 33, 55).

⁴⁴What is love? See the Latin verses appended by Thomas Watson to No. XCVIII of his *Hekatompathia*.

⁴⁵*Son.* 116.5 and 7 and *passim*. Note the most telling independent "it" in line 12 and the internal rhymes "admit" (2) and "writ" (14). Cf. also *Son.* 124. It is also remarkable that in the great definition and vituperation of lust in *Son.* 129 not a single *it* occurs.

⁴⁶See *OED*, "it" *pron.* 4.

⁴⁷See *Harvard Concordance* for these and other colloquial phrases like 'tis true, and 'tis wonder, and 'tis marvel.

⁴⁸The words "wonderfull" and "fearfull" are mentioned in one breath by John Donne, *Sermons* 6: 69.76-77.

⁴⁹Cf. 3.2.178, 184, 187. Cf. also *AYL* 3.3.12-16. In *MV*, cf. 1.2.115: "Por. Yes, yes, it was Bassanio."

⁵⁰See 1.2.6-7 and 14-15, and 2.2.73-4. For the scores of Latin proverbs beginning with "Est" see Walther 7248a-8018, and Tilley A94, A45, A320, A363, A364, D40, D204.

⁵¹See 1.3.127, 130, 152, and 4.1.333 and 341.

⁵²See 3.1.46, 4.1.100, 296, 299, 305, and 323.

⁵³4.1.38, 43, 46, and 52.

⁵⁴3.2.48-50, and 5.98 and 101.

⁵⁵See also *OED*, "it" *pron.* 3.b.

⁵⁶See above, n40, my reference to *Etymologies* 1.8.

⁵⁷For the avoidance of obscenities by periphrasis see, e.g., Lausberg § 592 (with reference to Quintilian 8.2.1-2).

⁵⁸Quintilian 8.6.29; see also Lausberg § 580 (with ref. to *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.31.42); and also Sonnino 149-50.

⁵⁹Matthias Bauer argues that the *it* as a subject is a sign, too, and I agree with him.

⁶⁰Cf. *Ham.* 2.2.93-95; cf. also *LLL* 1.2.89-90.

⁶¹See Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* 87-88, and cf. also 6-7.

⁶²See above, interpretation of 1.1.1-7, n36.

⁶³For the phrase "It serves" see *Harvard Concordance*, e.g., *Cym.* 3.2.14 and 3.5.128, *2H4* 2.2.35, *H5* 4.8.69, *2H6* 2.1.102 and 3.1.119, *Cor.* 1.1.91, and *JC* 1.3.109 and 223.

⁶⁴Cf. Donne, *Sermons* 6: 154.129-35, and *passim*.

⁶⁵Cf. the play on the words "Worde" and "worldes" in the introductory note of the Geneva Bible.

⁶⁶The Authorized King James Version has "ghost" instead of "spirit" and "cheer" instead of "comfort."

⁶⁷The version "It is done" is preferred by Lancelot Andrewes, see *Sermons* 2: 113, and cf. also 1: 26.

⁶⁸Cf. Deut. 3:26 in the Geneva Bible, "Let it suffice thee," and "sufficit tibi" in the Vulgate. Cf. also the two versions of John 14:8. Shakespeare nearly always uses the "it" in this formula, which testifies to the sympathetic correspondence of English to Latin. English *suffice it* literally imitates Latin *sufficit*.

⁶⁹Elijah said so just before the Angel came to feed him, 1 Kings 19:4.

⁷⁰In verse 10 it is Satan who speaks the words "For it is written," actually *quoting scripture* (cf. *MV* 1.3.93).

⁷¹Nature speaks the language of man. One thinks of Ovid's metamorphosis of Hyacinthus, 10.215: "et AI AI / flos habet inscriptum."

⁷²For a grammatical analysis of the phrase see Hope 13-15.

⁷³In English translations of such neo-platonic philosophers as Plotinus, Dionysius the Areopagite, and Johannes Scotus Eriugena, the Godhead (which was to unfold itself into the Trinity and create the world) is uniformly called *It*, which gives the reader the impression that *It* is one of the *Divine Names*, and an essential one at that.

⁷⁴See also 5.3.96 and 97. Paulina not only quotes the initial formula of 1 Cor. 4:2 but relies on Paul's preaching in 1 Cor. 4 throughout.

⁷⁵Cf. also 4.1.66-67. Apart from this grammatical denotation *article* in Shakespeare is always used in a legal sense.

⁷⁶Even if taken in its merely relative meaning, Audrey's "it" is not trivial since it refers to poetry, and Touchstone will answer the question *en philosophe*; he will tell us in the Plutarchan manner that the truest poetry is the most feigning. Whoever wants to think is given much food for thinking by Audrey's seeming naiveté. See Plutarch, *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry* 15c-d.

⁷⁷This follows so closely on Hymen's "If truth holds true contents" (5.4.128) that, to the more thoughtful members of the audience, it sounds far from trivial.

⁷⁸Cooper's English equivalent of Latin *coniunctio* is "A ioyning together."

⁷⁹"[D]ie kindlich feierliche Esoterik der *Zauberflöte*" ("the childlike, solemn esotericism of *The Magic Flute*"; *Doktor Faustus* IX.108; my translation).

⁸⁰The title of Florio's Italian-English Dictionary.

⁸¹I borrow the word "signality" from Sir Thomas Browne's *The Garden of Cyrus*, I.133-36.

⁸²See above, n8.

⁸³Emily Dickinson, poem no. 1126, "Shall I take thee, the Poet said / To the propounded word?"

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