

Notations on *Connotations* 3.1

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First, I note that all notations (or notes, or replies, or responses) hitherto published in *Connotations* have to do with specific contributions. Maybe that is quite enough, for the sake of concentration. But now I feel inspired by the excellence of the various contributions to 3.1 to contribute this pot-pourri of my own, not just on their variety but as they achieve a certain unity round the name of Shakespeare.

1. The fascinating article of John Steadman deals indeed with Chaucer's *House of Fame* (1-12); but in his suggestion of a "burlesque treatment of . . . mediaeval allegoresis" (4)—while Chaucer himself remains committed to the method of allegoresis in principle—I find an analogy with Shakespeare's burlesque treatment of the tendency to see "figures in all things" in the comic character of Fluellen in *Henry V* 4.7. This instance of burlesque has been interpreted (notably by Richard Levin in *PMLA*)¹ as a blanket criticism of all allegorical interpretation of Shakespeare's plays. But, as we see in Chaucer's case, *abusus non tollit usum*; or rather, may we not see in such burlesque a typical form of humour at one's own expense in each author?

2. Then, descending as it were from the sublime to the ridiculous, may I add one more item of interest to Robert Collmer's "Collection of Toothpicks" (13-25)? It is not only Shakespeare's witty beggar Autolycus or Cervantes' Moor who ridicules the affectation "of the fallen well-born" in "making his toothpicker an hypocrite" (18); but also here in distant Japan we have the similar saying "*Bushi wa kuwanedo takayoji*"—The samurai uses his toothpick even when he has had no meal. Only here the connotation is one not of ridicule but of admiration for one who keeps up appearances even in poverty.

3. A propos of William Harmon's "discussion of Shakespeare's potential involvement in the shaping of Psalm 46 for the so-called 'King James'

translation," W. F. H. Nicolaisen (44-47) challenges him to strengthen his case by showing "the Bard's hand . . . elsewhere in the psalter" (44-45). I don't know why he has to restrict his challenge to the psalter when it is a question of the Authorized translation of the Bible as such. For I myself have found quite a number of Biblical echoes in the "four great tragedies" (to speak of them alone) that seem to correspond with the language not of any existing Tudor translation but only of the Authorized version.

To give some examples: from *Hamlet* 3.1, "a weary life" (Job 10:1: "My soul is weary of my life"), 4.6 "words to speak . . . will make thee dumb" (Dan. 10:15: "spoken such words . . . I became dumb"), 5.2 "heaven ordinant" (Job 38:33: "ordinances of heaven"); from *Othello* 4.2, "hell gnaw his bones," (Zeph. 3:3: "they gnaw not the bones").

Some of these verbal similarities may, I admit, be no more than that; but I find them interesting and calling for further investigation—especially considering that Shakespeare was presenting his great tragedies in London during the years the Authorized Version was actually in progress, leading up to its publication in 1611 (when the Bard was for a time precisely 46 years of age). I might add that I came across these similarities by accident as I was working on my survey of *Biblical Influences in Shakespeare's Great Tragedies* (Indiana UP 1987).

As for "the temptation to pun on one's own name" (45), it must have been very strong in one for whom the pun was notoriously his "fatal Cleopatra." Yet apart from the famous "Will" sonnets, we hardly find puns on the more obvious surname, not even in the form of shaking a spear. Only on an examination of the 150 occurrences of "shake," we find the verb followed twice by "sword" (*All's Well* 2.5, *Timon of Athens* 5.1) and once each by "weapon" (2 *Henry VI* 4.8) and "blade" (*Lucrece* 505), not to mention "beard" (*King Lear* 3.7) recalling the variant form of Shakespeare's name as "Shaxberd." These are not so convincing, though a case might be made out for them on closer examination; but I would like to propose the more obvious name of Falstaff, which breaks up into the two parts of "false+staff" on a very rough analogy with "shake+speare."

4. I really must take issue with Robert Crosman's reference (48-51) to the Tudors as "the last native dynasty" in contrast to the succeeding

Stuarts (49). By my computation the last native dynasty of England was the Saxon line of kings that ended with the death of Edward the Confessor. Since that time the poor English have been ruled by a succession of foreign rulers: Normans, French (Angevins), Welsh, Scots, Dutch and Germans. I see it as a sign of Shakespeare's patriotic attitude to the Welsh Tudors, who naturally aimed at replacing the designation of "England" with "Britain," that in the whole of *King Lear*, though we learn from the *Dramatis Personae* that the scene is "Britain," there is no mention of his kingdom by name—in striking contrast to the frequency of its mention (some 30 times) in *Cymbeline*. No doubt, as an Englishman, like his Falstaff, he had a patriotic dislike for the Welsh Tudors, who would, among other defects, have made "fritters of English" (*Merry Wives* 5.5). 5. Again, I must take issue with Robert Crosman in his other Reply (52-55), where he refers to the long speech of the Archbishop in *Henry V* 1.2 as an ideological justification of Henry's invasion of France, in which both the dramatist and his Elizabethan audience took an evident interest (53). No doubt, it is exceedingly tedious; but surely it is meant to be tedious and to send Henry himself with his courtiers to sleep (as in not a few productions of the play)! Such long-winded circuitous genealogical argument is surely self-defeating, especially for the purpose of justifying the aggressive war with France on which both the King and the Archbishop have determined for various reasons of their own. So far from being a somewhat naive expression of Shakespeare's presumed ideology, the speech is rather to be interpreted as a satire on Henry's ideology, which is all too frankly Machiavellian.

As for Henry's subsequent conversation with the three English soldiers on the eve of Agincourt, so far from this being a "clash of temperaments and world-views" (54), it is rather a question of the morality of this particular war of aggression against France. The English soldiers, especially the young Michael Williams, state the question very pointedly: "But if the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make" (5.5)—to which the Welsh-born Henry notably fails to make any convincing reply, as he is himself unconvinced of his own right whether to invade France or to rule England. All he can do is to shift the burden of responsibility off his own on to their shoulders, when it comes to dying in battle.

Then, as for the phenomenon of the "rash of prose" into which "Shakespeare's plays broke out . . . from about 1595 to 1601" (55), I would attribute it not only to Falstaff—though admittedly he had a large share in it—but more generally to the double incursion of comedy into history leading up to *Hamlet* and of the sub-plot of low life into the aristocratic main plot. It is, in other words, an incursion of the spirit of comedy, incarnated (if you will) in Sir John Falstaff, into the more serious action of the plays whose conventional medium is verse, according to the axiom enunciated by Puck, "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" But then this spirit is quenched not so much by Henry V at his coronation as by Prince Hamlet with his melancholy—or rather by the spirit of melancholy which Hamlet and (at that time) his dramatic creator have in common.

6. Finally, it seems to me that "the impression, eloquently created by Brown, that Hamlet is constantly holding back," so far from being refuted by Maurice Charney or Holger Klein (57), is more than an impression created by any scholar: it is the dominant motif of Hamlet himself, and of Hamlet's creator. It begins with his paradoxical utterance (for all his prolixity of speech), "But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (2.2). It continues in that "something in his soul," noted by Claudius, "o'er which his melancholy sits on brood" (3.3), and in the feeling "how ill all's here about my heart" that Hamlet himself confides to Horatio (5.2); also in his challenge to Guildenstern to "pluck out the heart of my mystery" (3.2). So it comes to an appropriate climax in his dying words, "The rest is silence" (5.2)—which may well be paraphrased in Klein's words, "All that remains for me to say must be unspoken." Yes, Hamlet may indeed be taken, together with his creator, as one of those "secret people" (of England) featured in a poem by G. K. Chesterton. What, then is this mystery over which his soul may be seen as still "on brood"? Ah!

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NOTE

¹Richard Levin, "On Fluellen's Figures, Christ Figures, and James Figures," *PMLA* 89 (1974): 302-11; cf. my reply in the Forum, *PMLA* 90 (1975): 118-19.