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Article abstract

Cet article place *The Whore of Babylon* de Dekker et *le Cymbeline* de Shakespeare dans la tradition de la tragi-comédie apocalyptique. Cette catégorie générique offre une façon de considérer ces deux pièces de théâtre comme des exemples du drame apocalyptique jacobéen, un genre qui, d'une part repose sur le dualisme inhérent à l'apocalypse, et d'autre part pointe vers une résolution du conflit en dehors du temps lui-même. La tragi-comédie apocalyptique s'est développée chez les auteurs protestants du XVI^e siècle tels que John Fox, qui considérait l'apocalypse comme une tragédie pour les damnés, mais comme une tragi-comédie pour ceux qui seraient sauvés à la fin des temps. La popularité de ce genre au début du XVII^e siècle peut non seulement être mise en lien avec la politique de Jacques et avec les changements esthétiques de goût en matière de théâtre, mais peut également être mise en lien avec un renouvellement de l'intérêt pour l'apocalypse, en particulier après la Conspiration des Poudres. Dekker et Shakespeare soulignent le modèle de la tragi-comédie, en se concentrant sur deux aspects centraux du genre : l'exégèse apocalyptique et la lecture de l'histoire. La différence de leur approche se trouve dans le fait que Dekker insiste sur la fin des temps, alors que Shakespeare refuse d'aller au-delà de la confusion apocalyptique caractérisant le passage d'un temps vers l'autre.

Apocalyptic Tragicomedy for a Jacobean Audience: Dekker's *Whore of Babylon* and Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*

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Cet article place The Whore of Babylon de Dekker et le Cymbeline de Shakespeare dans la tradition de la tragi-comédie apocalyptique. Cette catégorie générique offre une façon de considérer ces deux pièces de théâtre comme des exemples du drame apocalyptique jacobéen, un genre qui, d'une part repose sur le dualisme inhérent à l'apocalypse, et d'autre part pointe vers une résolution du conflit en dehors du temps lui-même. La tragi-comédie apocalyptique s'est développée chez les auteurs protestants du XVI^e siècle tels que John Fox, qui considérait l'apocalypse comme une tragédie pour les damnés, mais comme une tragi-comédie pour ceux qui seraient sauvés à la fin des temps. La popularité de ce genre au début du XVII^e siècle peut non seulement être mise en lien avec la politique de Jacques et avec les changements esthétiques de goût en matière de théâtre, mais peut également être mise en lien avec un renouvellement de l'intérêt pour l'apocalypse, en particulier après la Conspiration des Poudres. Dekker et Shakespeare souligne le modèle de la tragi-comédie, en se concentrant sur deux aspects centraux du genre : l'exégèse apocalyptique et la lecture de l'histoire. La différence de leur approche se trouve dans le fait que Dekker insiste sur la fin des temps, alors que Shakespeare refuse d'aller au-delà de la confusion apocalyptique caractérisant le passage d'un temps vers l'autre.

We project ourselves—a small, humble elect, perhaps—past the End, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle.

—Frank Kermode¹

In *Henry V*, as the Hostess recounts Falstaff's dying words, she concedes that he "did in some sort, indeed, handle women," but adds that at those times "he was rheumatic, and talked of the Whore of Babylon."² As the sixteenth century drew to its close, the humorous image of Falstaff ranting about the Whore of

Babylon might seem a fitting end to the serious apocalyptic talk that had characterized so much of the English Reformation. Yet in 1603 England inherited a monarch who had already written a commentary on the book of Revelation and who was deeply appreciative of its power.³ The literature of the first decade of James's reign is likewise rife with apocalypticism. Shakespeare was never to mention the Whore of Babylon again after *Henry V*, but the apocalyptic elements in many of his Jacobean plays (especially *Lear*, *Antony & Cleopatra*, *The Tempest*, and *Cymbeline*) have long been noticed, though they seem far removed from the religious context of the previous century's interest in the apocalypse. Thomas Dekker, on the other hand, not only mentioned the Whore of Babylon, but entitled a play after her in 1607. This play can easily be seen as an inheritor of the Protestant apocalyptic tradition, resurrecting some of its most polemical characteristics for a Jacobean audience.

Although Dekker and Shakespeare, at first blush, seem to be engaged in entirely different dramatic enterprises, they were concurrently writing a genre that could be termed "apocalyptic tragicomedy." While much has been said in recent years about the extremely diverse umbrella of tragicomedy,⁴ I would like to focus on how a certain strain of this genre is closely connected to the apocalyptic tradition established by English Protestants in the sixteenth century. Seeing *The Whore of Babylon* and *Cymbeline* as apocalyptic tragicomedies enables us to focus on how such Jacobean plays rely upon the dualism inherent in apocalyptic struggle, while also gesturing toward a resolution that is outside of time itself. In order to understand how Shakespeare and Dekker worked with this genre in characteristically different ways, it is necessary first to trace the origin of apocalyptic tragicomedy, both as an imaginative concept and as a kind of drama that inevitably engaged not just with theology, but with politics.

The sixteenth-century apocalypse

Toward the end of the book of Revelation, the wicked see the destruction of their city, crying, "Babylon the great is fallen" (Rev. 18:2).⁵ This lament for the destruction of earthly realms has always placed Revelation in an uneasy relation to monarchical powers. The fact that apocalypticism became so important to English Protestants was thus undoubtedly related to the political mood of the Henrician and Marian exilic communities, for the centrality of the Apocalypse in

the English Protestant tradition found its strongest articulation in exiles such as John Bale and John Foxe.⁶ However, it would be a mistake to assume that apocalyptic rhetoric is entirely at odds with monarchical powers. Bale's *The Image of both Churches* (ca. 1545), written during the Henrician exile, predicts the coming apocalypse with absolute faithfulness, though it does conclude with praise for the king, who "hath so sore wounded the beast."⁷ As long as the monarch could be co-opted as part of the eternal struggle between the forces of good and evil, the symbols of the Apocalypse resonate with full force. Yet these mysterious symbols, as John of Patmos himself learns, are stubbornly resistant to exegesis.

The Apocalypse is associated with the end times, but its primary preoccupation is the reading of signs (the literal "unveiling" that this word means). The main directive of this reading, for English Protestants, was the proper interpretation of history—specifically, the history of two diametrically opposed communities. One of the clearest models of such apocalyptic thinking appears on the frontispiece to John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, first published in 1563 (see Figure 1). Two phrases from the gospel of Matthew's 25th chapter form the top of the page, indicating the fates of the saved and the damned: "come ye blessed" on the left, and "go ye cursed" on the right. The bulk of the picture is situated in two columns, which are best read from bottom to top; they are labelled "the persecuted church" and "the persecuting church," paralleling the saved and the damned respectively. At the bottom left, the believers faithfully read Bibles and listen to the Word of God; at the bottom right, the Catholics engage in superstitious ceremonies with rosaries. At the next level, the believers are pictured as martyrs tied to the stake, yet resolutely blowing trumpets toward heaven. The unbelievers opposite blow trumpets as well, but these are directed at the raising of the Eucharistic host. At the next level, the martyrs from the left panel have become saints, crowned on a cloud and continuing to blow trumpets and wave palms toward heaven (as in Rev. 7:9). On the right side, a disordered array of demonic creatures (most of them tonsured) aims its trumpets downward. The image's dualism is discontinued at the top panel, where Christ sits in judgment over both sides—showing that this harsh discord and opposition which characterizes the history of both churches is ultimately part of a single providential plan. In this one picture we see the salient features of Protestant apocalyptic: a reading of history that shows diametrically opposed churches (one faithful and persecuted, and the other devilish and persecuting), along with a belief that the division is only a by-product of time, because everything is ultimately

controlled by the unifying force of God. Thus, although history itself is divided, and these divisions are in a sense made permanent by the eternal fates of the saved and the damned, when seen from the End sacred history is in fact absolutely unified, containing the damned as a necessary category. This vision is post-apocalyptic in the sense that it takes the viewers beyond time, showing a divine perspective that subsumes any notion of division.⁸ This is the dramatic view of the apocalypse that gained the most imaginative power for English Protestants, and it is absolutely characteristic of the works that grew out of the mid-sixteenth century and continued into the Elizabethan period.

My primary interest here is in how this apocalypticism is both imagined as drama and staged as drama. Repeatedly, theatrical metaphors emerge to describe apocalyptic history, as is the case with Thomas Beard's *The Theatre of God's Judgments* (1597), in which he imagines the inevitable justice meted out on the wicked at the end of time in dramatistic terms.⁹ Yet several decades earlier, both Bale and Foxe were not just *imagining* the apocalypse as drama, but *writing* it as one. While much could be said about how Bale's dramas are infused with the apocalypticism that we would expect from the author of the *Image of both Churches*,¹⁰ I would like to use Foxe's more sustained apocalyptic play, *Christus Triumphans*, as the best example of apocalyptic tragicomedy in the sixteenth century.

When Foxe wrote *Christus Triumphans* in 1556, he sought to trace all of ecclesiastical history, from the apostolic church to the present.¹¹ The main character of this drama is Ecclesia, the true church. The play follows the careers of Peter and Paul and their accompanying struggles at the hands of Nomocrates (law) and Diocetes (a persecutor of Christians); then Ecclesia explains that after the time of Constantine the church enjoyed relative peace for 1,000 years. The bulk of the drama takes place after this millennium, when Satan is released; at this point he immediately calls forth Pseudamnus (false lamb), whose job is to imitate Christ while secretly furthering Satan's agenda. His partner in crime is Pornapolis, the Whore of Babylon. Despite the initial success of these agents of evil, they eventually lose ground because, as Pornapolis laments, "The dregs of the people are starting to be wise now. What's more, they're even weighing our traditions in the scales of the gospel" (5.3; 347). Once the people's eyes are opened, Ecclesia's cause gains ground, and she is able to be united with her children, Africa and Europus. At the end of the play, a chorus of virgins dress Ecclesia for her wedding and sing an epithalamion to celebrate the coming nuptials.

Foxe published this Latin play in Basel, possibly intending it for a university performance, and he termed it an “apocalyptic comedy.”¹² This was an apt moniker because of Foxe’s view of history: despite the periods of trial that the church has endured since its inception, the apocalyptic promise assures a happy ending at the end of time itself, when the divisions of history eventually dissolve in favour of a single providential vision, as is outlined on the frontispiece of *Acts and Monuments*. The bulk of *Christus Triumphans*, however, focuses on the times of trial before this resolution; because of its emphasis on the disordered and divided nature of history before the final judgment, the play is more of an apocalyptic *tragicomedy* than a comedy.

When Sidney first commented on tragicomedy in his *Defence of Poesy*, he was referring to the “mongrel” combination of tragedy and comedy, of which he certainly did not approve.¹³ While Sidney would not have had Foxe in mind, *Christus Triumphans* self-consciously combines such elements, intentionally engaging in what we might term generic hybridization. In addition to the mixing of tragedy and comedy, the play also crosses other generic boundaries; as Richard Bauckham notes, “Allegorical figures, superhuman spirits, good and bad, and historical personages freely converse together and interact ... with no sense of incongruity.”¹⁴ The mixing of character types, like the mixing of genres, seeks to open up all history into a *totalizing discourse*.¹⁵ More and more examples are gathered as evidence to replay the same plot: the struggle between the two churches that will end only with time itself. In this way, all other discourses are subsumed under this one story.

This generic mixture is typical of apocalyptic works in the late Elizabethan period as well. In both Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* and Thomas Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* we see a mixture of styles and codes, a murky world where reading is difficult, and a preoccupation with the right reading of history (especially of England’s central role in it). Frank Ardolino sees a parallel between *Christus Triumphans* and Kyd’s drama because “In its combination of mystery, morality, and chronicle, of classical, medieval, and Renaissance forms, of biblical, church, and English history, and of historical and allegorical characters, Foxe’s *drama novum* exerts a direct influence on the syncretistic nature of *The Spanish Tragedy*.”¹⁶ If we take *The Spanish Tragedy* as an instructive parallel, we’ll notice that it is particularly interested in the divine gaze, which is provided by the character-spectators, Revenge and the ghost of Don Andrea. Thus, these dramas all provide an apocalyptic “bird’s eye” view that enables the audience

to put the tragedy into a larger perspective. Nonetheless, such a perspective is necessarily imperfect when given to mortals.¹⁷ Put another way, the clarity on Foxe's frontispiece to *Acts and Monuments* is a clarity provided only by the divine gaze. The rest of us, to varying degrees, find our vision blurred because of our inability, as Kermode writes, "to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle."¹⁸

Given the myopia of humans, apocalyptic dramas engage in teaching their audience members how to interpret history correctly. For instance, in *Christus Triumphans*, when Pseudamnus attempts to imitate Christ, the members of the true church must struggle to discern truth from fiction—such correct exegesis, in fact, becomes a matter of eternal salvation or damnation. This play has a strongly didactic function, leading the audience members in lessons of proper interpretation so that they will be better equipped to make their way through the confusing entanglements of a world on the edge of the end times, but not yet clearly delineated.

The Jacobean apocalypse

As I have been demonstrating up to this point, the sixteenth-century apocalypticism that was characteristic of Bale, Foxe, and others was by its very nature tragicomic, and this imaginative space for apocalyptic tragicomedy continued to resonate in later Elizabethan texts. Nonetheless, it has long been recognized that the genre that we know as tragicomedy is largely a Jacobean phenomenon, so I would like to return to the question of how the sixteenth-century notion of apocalyptic tragicomedy was translated into the Jacobean period. The best place to begin this exploration is, paradoxically, with another Elizabethan text—a commentary on chapter 20 of Revelation, written in 1588 by James VI of Scotland himself. In this work, *A Fruitful Meditation*, James focuses specifically on this section of Revelation in order to provide a reading of apocalyptic signs that outlines the trials of the true church from the release of Satan until the present day. Unapologetically embracing the Protestant exegetical tradition, James writes: "The Pope is Antichrist, and Poperie the loosing of Satan, from whom proceedeth false doctrine & crueltie to subvert the kingdom of Christ."¹⁹ As he carefully traces his interpretation from the words to their meaning to what should be learned, James consistently emphasizes the contrast between

the false and true churches, which is also the contrast between those who besiege and those who are besieged.²⁰ Thus his exegesis is an assurance to the persecuted flock that eventually their sufferings will end (after the “unhappy success” of Satan following his brief reign).²¹

James’s interest in the Apocalypse did not die once he became the king of England; in fact, a complete commentary on Revelation was part of the *Workes* he published in 1616.²² In both the 1588 and the 1616 expositions of Revelation, James’s view was very much in keeping with other apocalyptic thinkers; he believed that Revelation was the key to interpreting all of Scripture as well as distant and more recent events: “of all the Scriptures, the Booke of the REVELATION is the most meete for this our last aage” (*Meditation*, 73). For James, Revelation is of paramount importance because it points the way to an exegesis that is dependent only upon the Scriptures, because “the greatest part of all the words, verses, and sentences of this booke are taken and borrowed of other parts of the Scripture” and thus “we are taught to use onley Scripture for interpretation of Scripture” (*Meditation*, 80). This view anticipates his steadfast belief that the Scriptures are sufficient in themselves and should not be cluttered with marginal references as in the Geneva Bible.²³ But if Scripture is going to be sufficient, it also must be understood, or unveiled, which is why interpreting the Apocalypse is particularly necessary.²⁴

Although Sidney, as we noted earlier, referred to tragicomedy as a literary genre (a tradition going back to antiquity), it is interesting to note that the first recorded usage of the word in English occurs in Sir Thomas North’s edition of Plutarch (1595), in order to describe a particular life’s history: “His acts...may plainly shew, that all that was but a Tragi-comedy ceremoniously ended.”²⁵ In this case, individual lives can be read as part of a larger tragicomic plot; such a totalizing reading, importantly, leads to a moral lesson. King James likewise used the term to articulate a providential reading of the Gunpowder Plot. It was, he explains, “Tragedie to the Traitors, but Tragicomedie to the King and all his trew Subiects.”²⁶ At this moment James embodies what we identified as an integral part of sixteenth-century apocalypticism: to read history from a long perspective, acknowledging the tragedy for the damned, but the ultimate tragicomedy for the saved. The Puritan clergyman Richard Bernard made the same point in his commentary on Revelation, the *Key of Knowledge* (1617): “The Lord by certain formes, shapes, and figures, as it were Images and picture, did lively represent the whole Comickall tragedie, or tragicall Comedie, that was

from the time of the revealing of the Revelation to be acted upon the stage of this world by the Church militant.”²⁷ Bernard goes on to explain that this biblical book gives us a key to history “till all be fulfilled, and this tragicall Comedie bee ended.” The repeated use of “tragical comedy” to describe the apocalypse illustrates a continuity with the previous century. As was the case with Beard’s *Theatre of God’s Judgements*, the metaphor of drama and the tragicomic scope of apocalyptic history appear together.

Staging the apocalypse as Jacobean tragicomedy

But what of the tragicomedy that was not just a dramatic metaphor, but an emerging dramatic genre in the first decade of James’s reign? It is my contention that the links between apocalypse and tragicomedy are carried into the staged drama of the seventeenth century, in both overtly Protestant works such as Dekker’s *Whore of Babylon* and secular dramas like *Cymbeline*.

Apocalyptic drama focuses upon moments of crisis—thus Foxe’s *Christus Triumphans* was written in response to the Marian exile, and Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* to the Spanish Armada. In both cases, of course, the writing of the work is late enough to offer a celebratory perspective. If the defeat of the Spanish Armada was an apt moment for English Protestants to combine their interest in apocalyptic history with their praise of the monarch,²⁸ the analogous event in the Jacobean period was undoubtedly the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot. To look at Thomas Dekker’s *The Whore of Babylon* (ca. 1607) is to see this connection made explicit. Though a Jacobean play with several allusions to the Gunpowder Plot, Dekker’s *The Whore of Babylon* is a sprawling historical allegory that depicts the reign of Elizabeth as a series of events that embody the struggle between the forces of good (Titania, or the Fairie Queen) and those of evil (the Empress, or Whore of Babylon). This Elizabethan setting lays the foundation for a historical apocalypse that is simultaneously about Elizabeth’s reign and about James’s.²⁹

The play opens with a dumb show in which bishops and cardinals mourn at a dead queen’s hearse while her bereft councillors sing in Latin. Truth awakes and pulls the veils from the councillors’ eyes, and then they follow Titania, the Fairie Queen, who is attended by Truth and Time. As she kisses a book, her attendants cheer, brandishing their swords and “vowing to defend her and that

book.”³⁰ The rest of this apocalyptic play gives an episodic account of the trials of Elizabeth’s reign using the allegorical framework of a struggle between the Empress and Titania. By depicting the machinations of the triple-crown-wearing Empress and her followers, which involve many attempts on Titania’s life, *The Whore of Babylon* traces the struggle between the true and false churches.³¹ Titania is modelled on the woman clothed with the sun (also known as the woman in the wilderness) from Revelation 12, and Dekker shows how she and the Whore of Babylon embody diametrically opposed models of femininity. Both women are cast as mothers, but whereas Titania’s maternity is nurturing, the Empress’ is poisonous. One of the kings suggests that he and his fellows should “Fly to our Empress’ bosom: there suck treason, / Sedition, heresies, confederacies...” (1.2.280–81).³² Each plot to destroy Titania is foiled in turn, and the play’s ending shows the defeat of the Spanish Armada and the triumph of Titania, with the accompanying lament of the Empress: “Great Babylon thus low never did fall” (5.6.160)—a direct allusion to Revelation 18, and a comic resolution to the struggle between the two churches.

Although Dekker does not announce *The Whore of Babylon* as this genre, it seems to follow, as Julia Gasper has argued, in the tradition of *comoedia apocalyptica* that Foxe established in his earlier play.³³ Once again, however, a more precise description of these dramas would be “apocalyptic tragicomedy,” because Dekker emphasizes the periods of trial before the resolution for the faithful. While Revelation, especially as viewed by the radical Protestants, might have the tendency to evoke division and call in question the efficacy of earthly powers, Dekker’s interpretation elucidates how it was possible to carry on Elizabethan assumptions about the apocalypse while highlighting the tragicomic framework that celebrated the end of division through the glories of James, the Phoenix “of larger wing, / Of stronger talon, of more dreadful beak,” chosen to be the one who could have “so large of grip / That it may shake all Babylon” (3.1.252ff). James himself becomes the unifying force who will bring about the end of all historical division; in this sense, his power is not just monarchical, but divine, and his rule is fashioned as one that oversees the apocalypse and presides over the millennial peace.

This allegorical apocalyptic drama might seem worlds away from Shakespeare’s oeuvre, especially if we consider it next to Jacobean plays such as *Macbeth* or *Antony & Cleopatra*. However, as Dekker’s drama was playing at the Fortune Theatre, the work of Shakespeare’s that was enjoying success across the

river at the Globe was *Pericles*. This episodic world of tragedy, mystery, magic, and reunion owes much to classical models, as do all of Shakespeare's Romances. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that the medieval Christian dramatic tradition provided an influential model as well, especially given the tragicomic preoccupation with providential order and metaphors of rebirth and resurrection.³⁴ Shakespeare's plays take their characters through tragedy to a rebirth and a comic resolution, while focusing on providential direction through protagonists such as Prospero or surprise visitors such as Jupiter in act 5 of *Cymbeline*.

During this period Shakespeare found use for apocalyptic elements that fit naturally with the tragicomic structure and enhanced the imaginative landscapes of the plays. In *Cymbeline*, the most striking of these is reflected in the peregrinations of Imogen. Like Ecclesia in *Christus Triumphans* or Una in the *The Faerie Queene*, Imogen is an innocent lamb who flees into the wilderness to avoid a wicked pursuer and is eventually restored, by providence, to her rightful role as a bride.³⁵ In Revelation, this period of darkness is the necessary trial for the faithful before they are restored to their rightful place, which in the mean time has been usurped by the beast and the whore. In the interstices, apocalyptic texts focus on the problem of hermeneutics.

Apocalyptic exegesis

Because the book of Revelation is not just about the end of the world, but about the unveiling of signs, exegetes invariably focus on the proper reading of these signs. In Revelation, John of Patmos watches as mysterious symbols appear before his eyes and he is guided by various angels to a correct interpretation of these symbols. We even see him making errors, bowing down when he shouldn't, and receiving lessons. The opening dumb show of *The Whore of Babylon* foregrounds this idea of "unveiling" when Truth removes the veils from the councillors' eyes and they realize that they have been following the wrong queen and wrong religion. Later we learn that the character Plain Dealing was one of the misguided, for he once looked on Falsehood as "the goodliest woman that ever wore forepart of satin" (4.1.68–70). In order to educate him, Truth and Time help him interpret the dumb show at the beginning of act 4. Despite the resemblance between Truth and Falsehood, Plain Dealing learns that the latter has a spotted face and is riddled with venereal disease.

This lesson about duplicity and false appearances is central to *The Whore of Babylon*, which focuses on the danger of betrayal from within. When King James wrote his commentary on Revelation, he followed the traditional Protestant interpretation of Gog and Magog as representative of the open and the hidden enemies of the church respectively, for “Satan shall in the latter times rule a new ouer the world, who shall stirre vp the nations vnder the banners of these two enemies to God, the hypocriticall and open, to spread themselues in great multitudes vpon the earth” (*Meditation*, 75). Following in the English Protestant tradition that associates these open and hidden enemies with the Turks and the Catholics respectively, Dekker dismisses the threat of the Turk with the humorous comment that “the Great Turk is a very little fellow” (3.3.29), focusing instead on the greater threat from the hypocrites. In Dekker’s play these hidden enemies are the Jesuits, who are called “[Antichrist’s] last and most pernicious vermin,” and the Catholic minions Campion and Lopez, to whom the Empress gives orders to “Work underground and undermine your country” (3.1.166). In addition to invoking the underground nature of the true church’s enemies, this reference to traitorous moles is one of several passages that situate the play not in Elizabethan times but in Jacobean, because the allusion is clearly to the Gunpowder Plot.³⁶ What the Gunpowder Plot added to Dekker’s apocalyptic rhetoric was a particular focus on betrayal; although the Spanish continued to function as a stock enemy, their tactics now involved corrupting Britain *from within*. The reason that all of these plots ultimately fail, Dekker’s play suggests, is that betrayal has been overcome by a providentially-directed lesson in proper interpretation (much like that which Plain Dealing received). Such a message is completely in keeping with James’s own point that the Gunpowder Plot was discovered precisely because of his interpretive skills:

When the Letter was shewed to me...wherein a generall obscure aduertisement was giuen of some dangerous blow...I did vpon the instant interpret and apprehend some darke phrases therein, contrary to the ordinary Grammer construction of them, (and in another sort then I am sure any Diuine, or Lawyer in any Vniuersitie would haue taken them) to be meant by this horrible forme of blowing vs vp all by Powder...whereas if I had apprehended or interpreted it to any other sort of danger, no worldly prouision or preuention could haue made vs escape our vtter destruction.³⁷

Hermeneutic anxiety and betrayal serve as our entrance point into Shakespeare's staging of Britain's past in *Cymbeline*. Posthumus, like the Red Cross Knight, believes he has been betrayed, but in fact he is the betrayer. Without Truth and Time to guide him, Posthumus makes horrible mistakes, but he is not unique in this respect, for in *Cymbeline* "Life...seems an unfathomable riddle—a difficult text, resistant to every effort at reading and understanding."³⁸ These riddles are apocalyptic in their complexity, and Shakespeare brings us even closer to the original genre by intertwining prophecies and letters. The transmission of the message in the Bible's last book is notoriously confusing not only because of the dense symbolism, but because multiple messengers and Christ serve as intermediaries, often leaving John uncertain about the hierarchy of divine beings. Furthermore, Revelation itself is a letter sent to the seven churches of Asia Minor; like the other signs in Revelation, the nature of the epistles also begs to be unveiled as part of the hermeneutic imperative of the apocalypse.³⁹ In *Cymbeline*, letters attempt to close the gap created by absences, but the play shows the irreducible emptiness of such epistles. Thus, early in the play Posthumus fixates upon a violent image for his reading of a love letter from Imogen: "with mine eyes I'll drink the words you send, / Though ink be made of gall" (1.1.100–01).⁴⁰ The imagery was prescient, for the two love letters we subsequently see are both from Posthumus, and both full of gall: one in which he patently lies about Iachimo in order to test Imogen's fidelity, and another in which he orders his servant Pisanio to slit her throat because of this supposed infidelity. Like the handkerchief in *Othello*, the letters in *Cymbeline* cause an unease of signification as they are handled by no fewer than six of the characters. The love letters which Imogen believed would stand as a testimony to the religious perfection of Posthumus's love for her—"The scriptures of the loyal Leonatus"—are, she laments, "All turned to heresy" (3.4.81–82). Lying next to the headless corpse whom she assumes to be Posthumus, Imogen can only conclude that this event has come about because of a conspiracy of forged letters, and thus she understandably pronounces, "To write and read / Be henceforth treacherous!" (4.2.317–18). Such horrible transmutations are inevitable in an apocalyptic world where so many letters circulate, having become divorced from their origins, and thus from any stable exegetical framework.

The letters give way to other signifiers, such as the bloody cloth that Posthumus takes as a sign that Imogen has been killed as he ordered, and the multiple moments of changing clothes, all of which show the same inability to

discern the truth. Yet Shakespeare returns us to the apocalyptic promise through the motif of laying the body bare. For Derrida, apocalyptic unveiling is “the disclosure that lets be seen what until then remained enveloped, withdrawn, held back, reserved, for example, the body when the clothes are removed.”⁴¹ In *Cymbeline* all of the interpretive uncertainty seems to be suppressed by a magical ending that seeks to undo the previous moments of hermeneutic anxiety. Once all things are revealed, the redemption comes through the marks that are written upon the unveiled human body—specifically, moles that testify to birthright and scars that testify to an entrance into history. Belarius remarks that his story can be read because his “body’s marked / With Roman swords” (3.3.56–57). His body is, in essence, a record of his own history; without these scars, Guiderius and Arviragus are a blank text, omitted from the annals. When Guiderius is able to combine his birthright (exemplified by his birthmark) with the scars that he receives in the battle with the Romans, his entrance into history is complete. Like the marks on the foreheads of the believers and unbelievers alike in Revelation, these corporeal marks are the surest signs of loyalty—if only the viewers can be taught to interpret them correctly.

Reading history

In the *lectori* at the beginning of *The Whore of Babylon*, Dekker defends himself against those who would charge “that I falsify the account of time, and set not down occurrents according to their true succession” because “I write as a poet, not as an historian” (ll. 24–27). Indeed, the events in the play are largely out of chronological order, which has caused some critics to misunderstand Dekker’s approach to history, attempting to explain the play’s “idiosyncrasies” or to apologize for its convoluted allegory that mixes abstractions and historical individuals.⁴² The complicated allegory fuses elements of apocalyptic struggle (true and false churches/kingdoms) with abstractions such as Truth and Time and historical characters such as Parry and Leicester (not to mention dumb shows, battles, and the homey monologues of Plain Dealing). Once again Foxe paved the way for Dekker, because the historical “idiosyncrasies” are of a piece with the generic hybridization. The totalizing discourse of Dekker’s apocalyptic drama uses anachronism, generic hybridization, and repetition to show that there is nothing outside the providential confines of this drama.

Dekker employs such diverse tools in order to welcome all information and divide it into the dualistic apocalyptic scheme. As he does so, however, the multiplicity of the genre itself suggests a unity—a sort of post-apocalyptic truth modelled on the new Jacobean order (James's vision ultimately paralleling God's). By depicting these disparate threads as part of a larger paradigm of history, Dekker shows a portrait of unity that seems to be in keeping with James's irenic aims. Drawing upon the hysteria caused by the Gunpowder Plot, Dekker could appeal to James's notion that all divisions can in fact be subsumed, but the lesson of the play is that the only way to move toward such a resolution is to embrace the dualism as part of a macro picture of history. The point is that James cannot achieve such unity unless he accepts the damned as part of the play and sees himself as ruling over a Britain that has survived the apocalypse.

Our ability to glimpse this divine drama is made possible when the playwrights set up a dual vision—when “The certainty of the execution of divine vengeance as revealed in the Apocalypse results in two perspectives on history, one from above which views all events as predetermined, and the other from the earth which sees everything as the result of Fortune.”⁴³ This is the distinctive vision of the Jacobean masque as well, which was constructed in order to pay tribute to James's godlike gaze. Dekker's dumb shows in particular imitate the masque form by privileging the monarch's perspective while also creating a space in which the audience can imagine themselves as part of the divine hermeneutics as they witness the struggles of the human characters from the perspective of God.

The Whore of Babylon establishes historical dualism only to move beyond it to something much more unified, thus embodying the tragicomic structure of the apocalyptic. It is my contention that *Cymbeline* is informed by this same basic trajectory, but also directs attention to the myriad ways in which the dualisms collapse into such profound uncertainty throughout the course of history that they frustrate attempts at a comic ending. *Cymbeline* presents a dualistic paradigm that is at least somewhat relevant (hence the death of the two only truly unredeemable characters, Cloten and the Queen), but the tangled world of the play undermines such simplistic models as soon as they are set up (hence the moral ambiguity of characters such as Iachimo and King Cymbeline). In a manner that would have made sense to Foxe and Dekker, *Cymbeline* unabashedly combines the allegorical and the historical with no respect to consistency—consider, for example, the simultaneous presence of a

Renaissance Italian, a classical Roman, and an evil stepmother out of folklore in one drama. Not surprisingly, however, Dekker's gesture beyond dualism results in an inclusive vision that celebrates the monarch and comforts the militant Protestants, whereas Shakespeare seems inclined to revel in the mixture itself, listening to its inherent contradictions without providing a happy resolution in the form of a univocal "Amen." Thus the complexity of *Cymbeline* arises from two simultaneous impulses—the commitment to post-apocalyptic unity on the one hand, and, on the other, an obsession with the disordered mixtures that haunt the *middle* of the apocalyptic genre.

Nowhere do these contradictory impulses display themselves more strongly than in the nuanced reading of history that *Cymbeline* presents. In the first instance, the play seeks to support a view of foreign policy that combines Britain with the rest of the world rather than isolating it. The isolationist sentiments of Cloten and the Queen are part of their wickedness, whereas Imogen laments that Britain is like a page that has been torn out of a divine book: "Britain seems as of it but not in't" (3.4.139). This impulse to align Britain with the larger scope of world geography and history is distinctively Jacobean. Glynne Wickham connects the move toward tragicomedy to this political context:

the drift away from revenge tragedy and toward regenerative tragic-comedy in the first decades of James's reign...has its true origins in the political consciousness of the British peoples saved from foreign invasion and civil war by the peaceful accession of James I in 1603 [and] by the timely discovery of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605....There followed from [Shakespeare's] pen a succession of plays which, if obliquely and en passant rather than directly, reflected the fulfillment of prophecy in the advent of a second Brutus in new Troy.⁴⁴

Posthumus Leonatus, himself a cipher who is Roman and British by turns, is the meeting point of the play's vision of history. At his lowest moment he falls asleep and is visited by divine messengers. While he remains confined to the world of earthly interpretation, we as the audience have a chance to see the divine plan: Jupiter explains the reason for this tragicomedy, affirming "Whom best I love, I cross, to make my gift, / The more delayed, delighted" (5.3.195–96). This dream functions much like the Jacobean masque, providing a double-vision that privileges the role of the monarch (as Jupiter).⁴⁵ The play does of course go

on to a resolution that is difficult not to read as an artificially neat one. Jupiter's vision becomes one with King Cymbeline's (and echoes James's), implying the same sort of post-apocalyptic unity that is the characteristic denouement of the other apocalyptic tragicomedies I have been discussing. In these respects, then, *Cymbeline* seems to support the political reading articulated by Wickham, which also allies it with the main objective of *The Whore of Babylon*.

As I mentioned above, however, there is another current in *Cymbeline* which cuts against this reading, and it centres upon the play's obsession with the disordered mixtures that haunt the interstices of the apocalypse. The control taken by Jupiter in act 5, scene 3 seems relatively unproblematic, but the *deus ex machina* here is complicated by the other characters in this dream: the ghosts of Posthumus's family. Posthumus's name indicates that he is an orphan who never knew his relatives; nonetheless, the ghosts of his parents, along with two brothers who have died in wars, appear in this dream and plead with Jupiter. Although the angry god tells them "No care of yours it is, you know 'tis ours" (l.194), the very presence of these ghosts is a key moment in this drama which frustrates its teleological thrust. Like the ghost of Hamlet's father that inspires Derrida's notion of *hauntology*, these ghosts arrive from the past to direct the future, creating a rupture in time. In another famous study of *Hamlet*, de Grazia describes this phenomenon's way of upsetting linear time: "Instead of a telos at the end of a teleological continuum, there is an eschaton visible from the space of rupture."⁴⁶ Although I would never argue that the wooden ghosts of Posthumus's family haunt the play with the same power as Hamlet's "old mole," I am suggesting that seeing them as another example of hauntology enables us to understand better the crucial difference in Shakespeare's apocalyptic view. In addition to upsetting linear time, the ghosts' appearance also reminds us that this central character has a name—Posthumus—which designates him as one whose entire life is an experience of living past the end. The proliferation of temporality and meaning caused by such an event in act 5 allows a profound focus upon the problem of hermeneutic uncertainty and deferred endings.

In order to signify their troubling presence more sharply, the ghosts lay a tablet from Jupiter upon Posthumus's breast, and when he awakes he finds a book containing a prophecy about his own and Britain's future.⁴⁷ At this moment, Shakespeare is once again quite close to the Apocalypse of John itself, where the prophecy's logocentrism is signified by a particular little book that John is directed to swallow to indicate his complete ingestion of the eschatological vision.⁴⁸

The prophecy that is in Posthumus's book is about a "lion's whelp" (Posthumus) uniting with a "piece of tender air" (Imogen), and through this union the play allegorizes the Roman-British alliance and Britain's entrance into history. This is, in Jacobean terms, also an absorption of Britain's mythical past—in particular, the *translatio imperii* that christened Britain as the New Troy. Yet this prophecy remains obscure and unstable, not the least because the Soothsayer's exegetical skills are called into question. Earlier he had interpreted a vision as signifying a Roman victory (4.2), but now he "revises" his interpretation to include a British victory followed by a Roman-British voluntary partnership. In other words, we have reason to doubt that the "official" reading of Jupiter's book is the last word on the subject. Posthumus had originally seen this prophecy as "senseless speaking, or a speaking such / As sense cannot untie" (5.3.241–42), and the play's conclusion does not entirely depart from this view.

Revelation ends with an "Amen" that promises an imminent positive outcome for the faithful, yet the epistle itself must conclude before the final resolution which it has just described, thus deferring the promised end. Similarly, before John was directed to eat the scroll, he heard the voice of seven thunders, brought upon by the lion-like voice of the angel (Rev. 10:4), but was directed not to write down what the thunder said, because some things must be sealed up until the end of time. The brief appearance of the Leonatus ghosts likewise defers the eschatological imperative of *Cymbeline*, focusing on the troubling uncertainty of letters written by those who are always already absent. The ambiguities of such an ending might call into question the unified divine gaze of Foxe's God or of Britain's James, but more strikingly, Shakespeare's apocalypse refuses to see history from a point beyond history.

Cymbeline shows that the enormous weight of any apocalyptic vision is that we never fully free ourselves from the veils through which we must look as part of our being in time. Foxe and Dekker looked not just to the promised end, voiced by the "It is finished" of John's gospel (John 19:30), but to the synchronic "was, and is, and is to come" of Revelation (Rev. 4:8), which sees past the end of history and assures readers of the knowability of the divine perspective. For Shakespeare, however, the most compelling aspect of Revelation was "what the thunder said"—the tantalizing prospect that eschatological hermeneutics will always remain shrouded in mystery. While Dekker and Shakespeare both found apocalyptic tragicomedy fertile ground for reflections upon history and exegesis, the divergence between the two plays occurs in the way that Dekker

uses the genre to reinscribe the godly/kingly vision for a Protestant agenda, whereas Shakespeare will not let us pass out of the apocalyptic uncertainty, instead inhabiting *Cymbeline* with ghostly voices that repeatedly frustrate the eschatological imperative and render history ultimately unreadable.⁴⁹

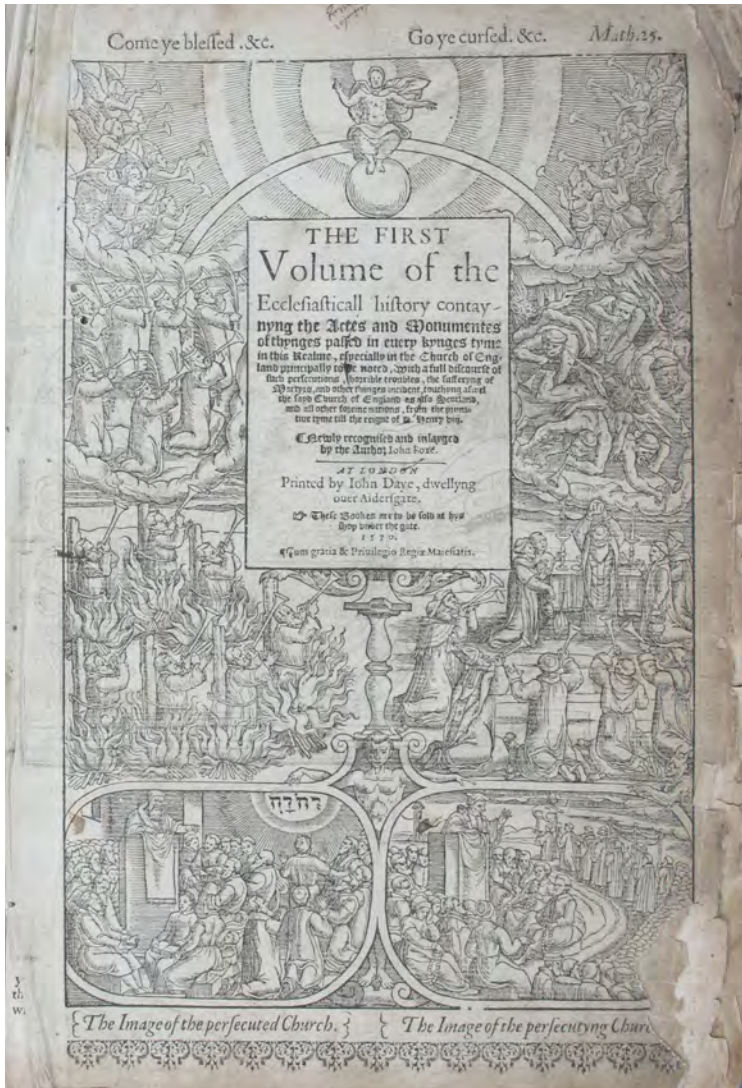


Figure 1: The frontispiece to the second (1570) edition of John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*

Notes

1. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (1966; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 8.
2. William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, ed. Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), act 2, scene 3, lines 33–35.
3. James's *A Fruitful Meditation containing a Plaine and Easie Exposition, or laying open of the VII, VIII, IX, and X verses of the 20 Chapter of the Revelation, in forme and maner of a Sermon* was first printed in Scotland in 1588 and reprinted in England in 1603 as well as in James's 1616 *Workes*.
4. Some essay collections exploring tragicomedy: Nancy Klein Maguire, ed., *Renaissance Tragicomedy: Explorations in Genre and Politics* (New York: AMS, 1987); Gordon McMullan and Jonathan Hope, eds., *The Politics of Tragicomedy: Shakespeare and After* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); and Subha Mukherji and Raphael Lyne, eds., *Early Modern Tragicomedy* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007).
5. Scriptural references are from *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
6. Bale's commentary on Revelation, *The Image of both Churches* (ca. 1545), was the most influential articulation of this theory, which was later carried on in the works of John Foxe, especially *Christus Triumphans* (1556) and the *Acts and Monuments* (1563). The best study of sixteenth-century English apocalypticism is still Richard Bauckham's *Tudor Apocalypse: Sixteenth-Century Apocalypticism, Millenarianism and the English Reformation* (Appleford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1978).
7. 1548 edition of *The Image of both Churches*, printed by Richard Jugge (ESTC 1297), p. Rr8^v.
8. Throughout this paper I am using the term "post-apocalyptic" in a literal sense—occurring after the biblical apocalypse, and thus after human history—rather than in its current popular usage as a period following a catastrophe such as nuclear war. The intersection between theological and political aspects of tragicomedy has a tendency to suggest that a monarch such as James could have the privilege of reigning "beyond time."
9. *The theatre of Gods iudgements: or, a collection of histories out of sacred, ecclesiasticall, and prophane authours, concerning the admirable iudgements of God vpon the transgressours of his commandements. Translated out of French and augmented by more than three hundred examples, by Th. Beard* (1597). ESTC 1659.

10. See, for instance, Brian Gourley, "Carnivalising Apocalyptic History in John Bale's *King Johan* and *Three Laws*," in *Renaissance Medievalisms*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2009), pp. 169–89.
11. In the draft copy of the play Foxe called it a "history," and the historiographical framework certainly drives the play's organization. See John Hazel Smith, ed., *Two Latin Comedies by John Foxe the Martyrologist: Titus Et Gesippus and Christus Triumphans* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973). Parenthetical references are to act and scene, followed by this edition's page numbers.
12. In 1562, Foxe's friend and fellow exile Laurence Humphrey asked Foxe's permission to perform *Christus Triumphans* at Magdalene College, Oxford, to which the author readily consented. We have record of a performance at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1572. See Ruth H. Blackburn, *Biblical Drama under the Tudors* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 116.
13. *Defence of Poesy* (1595) sig. K2. This is the first OED citation used to describe "tragicomedy" as a literary genre. See *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), s.v. "tragic-comedy."
14. Bauckham, p. 76.
15. Averil Cameron defines totalizing discourse as a "totalizing interpretation in which secular discourse could be subsumed and brought within the universal Christian interpretive field." Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 57–58. Cameron developed this term for late antiquity, but the idea is relevant to the generic hybridization that I am discussing here. By co-opting every historical period, literary mode, and allegorical symbol, Protestant discourse such as Foxe's takes up all available space, leaving no room for any Roman Catholic utterance.
16. Frank Ardolino, "'Now Shall I see the Fall of Babylon': *The Spanish Tragedy* as Protestant Apocalypse," *Shakespeare Yearbook* 1 (1990), pp. 98–99.
17. John of Patmos himself shows the shortcomings of mortals, for he repeatedly bows to the wrong entities and does not understand what is being revealed to him.
18. Kermode, p. 8.
19. *A Fruitful Meditation* in *The Workes of the most high and mightie Prince, James...* (1616), p. 78. All quotations from James's works are taken from *The Workes*.
20. *Meditation*, p. 79. This is the parallel that is most famously displayed on the frontispiece to Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, which depicts "the image of the persecuted

- church” next to “the image of the persecuting church.” Each church is defined by its orientation towards martyrdom.
21. James’s *Fruitful Meditation* is organized according to the three stages of Revelation 20: the loosing of Satan, his doings while he is loosed, and the “unhappy success” (i.e., failure) of these actions.
 22. *A Paraphrase vpon the Reuelation of the Apostle S. IOHN*. James’s interpretation of Revelation (including the anti-papal rhetoric) had not essentially changed from 1588, though this is a much expanded version providing a paraphrase on the entire book.
 23. In the Geneva Bible, Revelation had some of the most extensive margins, largely descendents of John Bale’s interpretive legacy. Edmund Becke’s Revelation commentary notes for a Bible printed by Stephan Mierdman for John Day in 1549 (ESTC 2077) rely exclusively on Bale’s interpretation in *The Image of both Churches*. This commentary was reprinted verbatim in the Matthew’s Bible of 1551 (ESTC 2085), and much of this material survives in the Geneva Bible.
 24. For James, translation itself is a sort of apocalyptic unveiling: “there is nothing so covered, that shal not be revealed, neither so hidde, that shall not be known: and whatsoever they have spoken in darkenesse, should be heard in the light” (“To the Reader,” preface to *Basilicon Doran*). By bringing to light the darkness of the Word that was previously occluded, James’s Bible enacts the apocalypse and positions readers in a blissful state of post-apocalyptic assurance (the counterpoint to the “unhappy success” of Satan).
 25. Quoted in the *OED*, “tragi-comedy” *n.* 2.
 26. *A Discourse of the Powder-treason*, p. 245.
 27. Quoted in Judith E. Topping, “‘Like this insubstantial pageant, faded’: Eschatology and Theatricality in *The Tempest*,” *Literature & Theology* 18, no. 4 (2004), pp. 371–72.
 28. “What makes [the Armada victory] a specifically militant Protestant view is that it is presented in apocalyptic terms. It is not simply a national victory, like the battle of Agincourt...but a spiritual and ideological victory, which is part of an international apocalyptic war.” Julia Gasper, *The Dragon and the Dove: The Plays of Thomas Dekker* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), p. 87.
 29. No doubt Dekker was using Elizabethan history in an attempt to encourage the crown (perhaps especially Prince Henry, as Krantz suggests) to follow the path that Elizabeth blazoned, by being more severe in his treatment of the Catholics. See Susan E. Krantz, “Thomas Dekker’s Political Commentary in *The Whore of*

- Babylon*,” *SEL* 35, no. 2 (1995), pp. 271–91. Jacobean plays which drew upon Elizabethan (and Foxean) history were common; see Judith Doolin Spikes, “The Jacobean History Play and the Myth of the Elect Nation,” *Renaissance Drama* 8 (1977), pp. 117–49.
30. All quotations from this play are taken from *The Whore of Babylon: A Critical Edition*, ed. Marianne Gateson Riely (New York and London: Garland, 1980). Parenthetical references are to act, scene, and line number.
 31. The Empress makes reference to her crown, which is “closed...strongly with a triple arch” (1.1.15–16). Popular Protestant depictions of the Whore of Babylon since the time of Luther had contentiously shown her wearing a three-tiered crown as a direct allusion to the pope.
 32. Here, as elsewhere, there are obvious connections to *The Faerie Queene* (in this case, Book 1, in which Error’s children nurse at her poisonous breasts). Throughout the play the *Whore of Babylon* is described as a fornicator, prostitute, and enchantress of earthly kings, and even a “Mannish woman-devil” (5.2.4).
 33. Gasper, pp. 62–80. Her chapter on the Whore of Babylon is the most complete analysis of the play.
 34. See Mimi Still Dixon, “Tragicomic Recognitions: Medieval Miracles and Shakespearean Romance,” in *Renaissance Tragicomedy: Explorations in Genre and Politics*, ed. Nancy Klein Maguire (New York: AMS Press, 1987), pp. 56–79.
 35. This relationship is the subject of an entire dissertation: William David Fitts, “*Cymbeline* and the Woman in the Wilderness: The Twelfth Chapter of the Apocalypse as a Source Study” (Texas A&M University, 1985).
 36. The problem of betrayal is foregrounded as the play focuses the bulk of its time on such characters who break Titania’s heart because “the children / Whom we have nourished at our princely breast / Set daggers to it” (4.2.13–15). For more on the *Whore of Babylon* as a direct response to the Gunpowder Plot, see Gasper, pp. 96–108 and Krantz, pp. 271–91.
 37. James’s address to Parliament in 1605 (*Workes*, p. 502).
 38. David M. Bergeron, *Reading and Writing in Cymbeline* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996), p. 166. Another piece by Bergeron is also relevant to this topic: “Images of Rule in *Cymbeline*,” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 1, no. 2 (1987), pp. 31–70.
 39. As Derrida and others have noted, there are deep connections between the epistolary and the apocalyptic, because John transmits a disembodied message that has been given to him by an angel, which is originally the testimony of Jesus; the

voices become confused in this epistolary tangle, and “as soon as one no longer knows who speaks or who writes, the text becomes apocalyptic.” See Jacques Derrida, “On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy,” in *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida*, ed. Peter Fenves (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 56. I owe some of this Derridian material to Russell Samolsky’s article, “Ghostly Letters: Hamlet, Derrida and Apocalyptic Discourse,” *Oxford Literary Review* 25 (2003), pp. 79–101. However, while Samolsky focuses (like de Grazia and Derrida himself) on *Hamlet*, I am concerned with how the epistolary and apocalyptic are more appropriate to tragicomedy.

40. Alan Stewart notes that ink really *was* made of gall; see *Shakespeare’s Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 48. Quotations from the play are taken from *Cymbeline*, ed. Roger Warren (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
41. Derrida, “Apocalyptic Tone,” p. 121.
42. Perhaps the most striking example of the misunderstanding of Dekker’s allegory is the insistence that when Titania agrees to execute the “Moon” who has plotted against her, one specific historical person must be meant. (See Gasper and Krantz on the theories about Essex and Norfolk in particular). However, the allegory is certainly elastic enough to admit a both/and option, encompassing any number of traitors against Elizabeth.
43. Ardolino, p. 95 (speaking of *Christus Triumphans* in particular).
44. Glynne Wickham, “From Tragedy to Tragi-Comedy: ‘King Lear’ as Prologue,” *Shakespeare Studies* 26 (1973), p. 36.
45. Topping notes that “there is a marked difference between the functions of the ‘rev-elations’ afforded by masque and Apocalyptic. The Apocalypse reveals a transcendent reality that is yet to come, and therefore effects in the readers not complacent celebration, but eros or longing” (p. 373).
46. Margreta de Grazia, “Teleology, Delay, and the ‘Old Mole,’” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (1999), p. 265. See also Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), where he defines *hauntology* on page 10. Late Derrida has become particularly popular in recent studies on Shakespeare and religion. For compelling discussions of these connections, see the introductions in Ewan Fernie, ed., *Spiritual Shakespeares* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) and Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, eds., *Shakespeare and Religion: Early Modern and Postmodern Perspectives* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011).

47. Jupiter directs the ghosts to lay a "tablet" (5.3.203) upon his breast, but Posthumus describes it as a "book" (l. 227) that can be opened.
48. Revelation 10.
49. "Repetition *and* first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost.... Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *hauntology*.... After the end of history, the spirit comes by coming back [*revenant*], it figures *both* a dead man who comes back and a ghost whose expected return repeats itself, again and again" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 10).