

Anglistentag


1999 Mainz

Proceedings

edited by

Bernhard Reitz

Sigrid Rieuwerts

 Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

Language and the Suspension of Reality in *Cymbeline*

1. Language as Reality

When, to my honour and delight, I was asked to take part in the *Anglistentag* section on Jacobean Drama, my attention was focused on the religious poetry of the Metaphysicals, whose concern for words manifests itself in their searching for and inventing (in the literal sense of *finding*) the reflection of divine truth in human language. To the Metaphysicals, the very shapes and sounds of letters and, more generally speaking, the material substance of language may, however imperfectly, represent the divine reality providing the coordinates of the speaker's earthly life.¹ Jacobean Drama is contemporaneous with Metaphysical Poetry, but at first sight differences (most obviously for reasons of genre) seem to overshadow similarities. Thus the implicit views on language in a play like *Cymbeline*, written around the same time (1609-10)² as several of John Donne's *Holy Sonnets* (and some time after his secular poetry)³ appear to be quite different. The atmosphere of the wonderful or supernatural so strongly to be felt especially in the latter part of the play⁴ suggests a relationship between language and reality characterized by fairy tale and magic rather than religious mystery and metaphysical truth. When one tries to listen closely to what is said about language in *Cymbeline*, however, and has a closer look at how language is shown to work, one may begin to ask oneself whether the supernatural dimension of speech is not perhaps a case in point of its general role in this play. And this is marked, as will be seen, by the influence on or transformation of reality by language or even by language as reality. In this perspective, an affinity to Metaphysical Poetry becomes

¹ See Bauer for this kind of iconic representation.

² Roger Warren, in his recent Oxford edition of the play (1998), argues for 1610 (Introduction 63-67); J. M. Nosworthy, in the Arden edition (1955), more or less agrees with the date 1609 as the one that "has been generally accepted" (Introduction xiv). The Arden text, based like the Oxford and other modern editions on the First Folio, is cited in this essay, since it keeps for instance the Folio form of the name "Imogen," changed by Oxford into "Innogen."

³ See Gardner's introduction (e.g., xlii, xlvii-1) to her edition (1952) of Donne's *Divine Poems*. Gardner dates the *Songs and Sonnets* between 1599 and 1607 (see her edition [1965] of *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets*, e.g., lviii).

⁴ See for instance Auberlen, ch. 2, especially 88-100.

visible.⁵ Keeping strictly within the limits prescribed to religious subjects on the Jacobean stage by the Act of Abuses,⁶ Shakespeare does not have his characters expatiate on the Divine Word and its relation to human speech. But the very fact that language is presented as being more than a medium in this play, taken together with the verbal intervention of a (pagan) deity,⁷ is related to the view of language as a common ground of the human and the divine. The suspension of disbelief required by the audience of *Cymbeline* might thus go hand in hand with the quite serious suggestion of a belief in the possible faculty of language to make listeners participate in a spiritual reality beyond, albeit closely connected with, the realities of their material lives.

More specific questions of genre seem not entirely irrelevant when it comes to the way in which language is shown to influence reality. From Aristotle onwards, it has been stressed that *mythos* or action is the business of drama. Accordingly, the relationship of language and reality in drama will become manifest as a relationship of words and deeds, and if language is not simply a tool or a medium this will be seen from the way in which it is related to action. The particular form of drama to which *Cymbeline* belongs emphasises this relationship. As Eugene M. Waith put it in his classic study on *The Pattern of Tragicomedy in Beaumont and Fletcher*, "the dramatic conflict becomes almost exclusively verbal, so that language in some measure supplants rather than expresses action" (42). Waith says this with reference to *A King and No King*, which he expressly treats, however, as the example of "a new and sophisticated form of dramatic entertainment." He is not concerned with Shakespeare, but his emphasis on action provides a key term for the discussion of language in *Cymbeline*. Shakespeare's play, participating, as Peggy Simonds and others have shown,⁸ in quite a number of dramatic traditions, is closely linked to this "new and sophisticated" version of the tragicomic genre (which at the same time may be regarded as an archaic form, as it features, for example, allegory and pastoral). If the reality of a dramatic work (or "entertainment") is characterized by action, the fact that language may supplant action has a far-reaching effect on the representation of reality. As regards *Cymbeline*,

⁵ This is but one aspect of the vast (and by no means fully explored) subject of "Shakespeare and the Metaphysicals." To give just one other example, Anne Barton has drawn attention to the fact that „Metaphysical' is a term frequently invoked to describe the stylistic peculiarities of the Romances," (145) a description supported by her own observations.

⁶ Cf., e.g., Auberlen 88. For the reference to the time when Christ was born implied in Shakespeare's choice of *Cymbeline* as eponymous figure of his play, see Garber 113, who quotes from Spenser's *Faerie Queene* 2.10.50.

⁷ For the syncretistic connection of 'multiform' Jupiter with the Christian God of the Trinity, see, for example, Book 3, ch. 10 of Agrippa (423-27 in Compagni's edition). Cf. also Wind 252-53 (on a woodcut by Conrad Celtes in which Jupiter assumes the position of God the Father). For the Christianization of Jupiter, see also Sez nec, e.g., 161-63 and index.

⁸ See especially ch. 1 in Simonds (29-65, "*Cymbeline* as a Renaissance Tragicomedy").

language and action are closely linked, even though I would qualify Waith's alternative of "supplanting" or "expressing" action. I would rather speak of language being at one with action or generating it.

2. Words and Action

A look at the specific way in which the relationship of language to action is reflected in *Cymbeline* may help to throw some new—or at least characteristic—light on a question vigorously debated in recent Shakespeare criticism, namely the precedence of either text or performance.⁹ A statement like Peter Hall's, who claims that *Cymbeline* is "an actor's play, for acting" (Warren 127), need not contradict the demand for paying attention to the language of the play. Close reading or, rather, close listening is not an alternative to performance but only another aspect of one and the same process. Thus in *Cymbeline* language is shown to be worth the "skill in the construction," as Posthumus Leonatus says (5.5.434), as well as to be the source of action, and, accordingly, the basis of the performance. For one thing, this is to be seen—to borrow terms from speech-act theory—in the number of illocutionary (response-inviting) or perlocutionary (immediately effective) utterances such as vows and prayers.¹⁰ When Guiderus tells the story of his killing the Queen's son, Cloten, he knows that his words in all probability mean his own death. "I would not thy good deeds should from my lips / Pluck a hard sentence" says the King (5.5.288-89), "prithee, valiant youth, / Deny't again." But Guiderus insists on the identity of word and deed and simply answers "I have spoke it, and I did it"—which means that "by [his] own tongue" he is "condemned" (5.5.298): the King's words, "thou'rt dead" (5.5.299), are, as we must assume at the moment, identical with their (and Guiderus's own) execution. The audience are soon to learn that this speech act is not *Cymbeline*'s final word in this matter, but it is worth noting that Guiderus does not give Cloten's action of attacking him with his sword, witnessed by the audience earlier on, as the reason for his deed but Cloten's words: "he did provoke me / With language that would make me spurn the sea, / If it could roar to me" (5.5.293-95). Cloten's words bring about Guiderus's reaction more or less like a natural force, just as the force of the law is the immediate and apparently inevitable consequence of Guiderus's own words.

⁹ For a fairly balanced view see Berger, esp. part one ("Against New Histrionicism"). On the recent debate see Rosen, who in note 7 lists pertinent contributions.

¹⁰ Different kinds of speech acts in *Cymbeline* have been discussed perceptively by Glazov-Corrigan, even though I would hesitate to share the author's view that "The central descriptions of *Cymbeline* consistently refuse to be static in a manner which sharply contrasts with those of the tragedies and comedies" (389). I am not so sure, for example, that in *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* locutions are "finalized within a static reference" (390).—A seminal study for the use of speech-act theory in Shakespeare criticism is that of Elam, who does not, however, include *Cymbeline* among the works analysed.

Still, all these are speech acts, i.e., words instrumental to or identical with the actions of the characters who control them. In *Cymbeline*, however, words may also coincide with or even determine those actions of their own accord. (Or it may be difficult to decide whether language or character is in control.) When Posthumus awakes from his dream in which he has a vision of his parents and brothers interceding with Jupiter on his behalf, he finds a tablet on his breast which contains the oracle later to be “construed” by the soothsayer. For the time being, it is an incomprehensible yet meaningful text:

’Tis still a dream; or else such stuff as madmen
Tongue, and brain not: either both, or nothing,
Or senseless speaking, or a speaking such
As sense cannot untie. Be what it is,
The action of my life is like it, which
I’ll keep, if but for sympathy. (5.4.146-51)

There is an inner, substantial connection, a “sympathy” (*OED* 1.a.) between the writing and the action of Posthumus’s life, which is all the more remarkable since the tablet is also called a “label” (5.5.431). In Shakespeare’s time, a label as a piece of writing primarily meant “A small strip of paper or parchment attached to a document by way of supplement to the matter contained therein” (*OED* †2).¹¹ Accordingly, the sympathy consists in the fact that Posthumus Leonatus himself may be regarded as a text to be supplemented or explained by another text which in turn has to be explained or construed. Shakespeare’s theatrical self-reflection of men and women being (merely) players here assumes the related and yet distinctive form of linguistic self-reflection: the actions of human lives are to be understood as or like verbal utterances—which implies that lives are not just ends in themselves but are signs; and, furthermore, that the meaning of these signs is not at all easy to “untie.” In the soothsayer’s performance at the end of the play, the audience is presented with a model of reading¹² and of establishing connections between the form of words and their meaning, which deserves attention as an example of immanent language theory:

Luc. Read, and declare the meaning.
Sooth. [*Reads*] When as a lion’s whelp shall, to himself
unknown, without seeking find, and be em-
brac’d by a piece of tender air: and when from a
stately cedar shall be lopp’d branches, which,
being dead many years, shall after revive, be
jointed to the old stock, and freshly grow, then

¹¹ The “chief current sense” (7.a.) of *label*, namely “A slip of paper, cardboard, metal etc. attached to an object and bearing its name, description or destination” is documented only from 1679 onwards.

¹² See Garber 106 on Jupiter’s riddle as a parallel to the “reading” of characters required on the part of both actors and audience in *Cymbeline*.

shall Posthumus end his miseries, Britain be fortunate, and flourish in peace and plenty.
 Thou, Leonatus, art the lion's whelp,
 The fit and apt construction of thy name,
 Being Leo-natus, doth impart so much:
 [To *Cymbeline*] The piece of tender air, thy virtuous daughter,
 Which we call *mollis aer*; and *mollis aer*
 We term it *mulier*: which *mulier* I divine
 Is this most constant wife, who even now,
 Answering the letter of the oracle,
 Unknown to you, unsought, were clipp'd about
 With this most tender air. (5.5.435-52)

For all its magic and even fantastic atmosphere, the scene emphasizes a method of understanding which, in the context, cannot but be taken seriously. Commentators have come to the conclusion that Shakespeare here expresses distrust of language because the soothsayer's deriving *mulier* from *mollis aer* is incorrect.¹³ But this seems to me hardly an adequate reaction to the scene and in fact an oversimplification. For modern etymological standards are not to be applied to the early seventeenth century when the method of exploring the meaning of words by means of their supposed stems or components, as it was practised by Varro and Isidore and many others, was still largely considered valid.¹⁴ Shakespeare's Philarmonus, the soothsayer, is doing with Jove's tablet exactly what, for example, Lancelot Andrewes and other preachers of the time were doing, in all sincerity, with the word of God in their exegetical sermons. When we look at the *mollis aer* etymology itself, the usual reference to Varro and Isidore¹⁵ has to be qualified. They¹⁶ derive *mulier* from *mollis*, soft, but do so in a context suggesting the deficiencies of the female sex and its *imbecillitas* as opposed to male *fortitudo* (Isidore 11.2.19). Medieval etymologists such as Rupert of Deutz included the imperfection of the female soul (and not just the weakness of the body) in this derivation (Klinck 78).

3. Answering the Letter: *mulier*, air, and peace

Several things are remarkable with respect to Shakespeare's use of the *mollis/mulier* etymology. In the first place, it is not entirely correct to call it wrong, even to modern

¹³ See, for instance, Glazov-Corrigan 388 ("all the etymological roots which the soothsayer offers are, in fact, false derivations"), who refers to Solway 621. In general, the shortcomings of language as presented in *Cymbeline* are emphasized by Hunt (e.g. 326—the failure of Posthumus's words to do justice to Imogen).

¹⁴ For a general background, see Elsky (e.g., chapter 5).

¹⁵ Nosworthy, in his note to 5.5.449, points out the attribution to Varro by Tertullian, Lactantius, and Isidore of Seville. See, for instance, Isidore 11.2.18 ("Mulier vero a mollitie, tamquam mollier, detracta littera vel mutata, appellata est mulier").

¹⁶ The etymology was ascribed to Varro by Isidore and others.

standards, for according to Walde's and Hofmann's etymological dictionary *mulier* is indeed derived from a supposed comparative of *mollis*;¹⁷ thus, even apart from historical considerations, it seems hardly possible to say, as T. W. Baldwin does, that Philarmonus's interpretation is an example of "fanciful etymologies"¹⁸ or that for its very absurdity it indicates a distrust of language. Furthermore, Shakespeare changes the context of female deficiency¹⁹ by including *aer* or *air* in the derivation. He obviously did not invent this air-element,²⁰ even though there seem to be no classical examples, but he uses it for his own purposes as an example of etymology as "true speaking" or "soothsaying" or *veriloquium*, as Cicero renders the Greek word *etymologia* (*Topica* 35). Again, twentieth-century scholars are not quite correct when they quote Renaissance sources such as Henry Stephen's *A Worlde of Wonders* to show that the etymology was considered "grotesque" at the time. Both those sources²¹

¹⁷ See the entry for "mulier"; Furness, in his New Variorum edition of *Cymbeline*, points out (without giving references): "The derivation of *mulier* from the comparative *mollior*, of *mollis*, is now accepted as the true one."

¹⁸ Baldwin 1: 720, quoting Stephanus (1531), Calepine and Baret (1580), who derive "Mulier . . . à mollitie."

¹⁹ This is not the only one: cf. Klinck 78 on *molliens herum* ("softening the Lord").

²⁰ Without indicating the page, Nosworthy in his *Arden* annotation refers to Caxton's *Game of Chess* as an early source of the etymology. It is to be found in Book 3, ch. 5, p. 123 in Caxton's *Game and Playe of the Chesse*, 1474. Interestingly, the context is a psychosomatic one: in this chapter on the pawn that "signefyeth the phisicyen / spicer and Apotyquare" (118), the physiological effects of joy are described, which "hath as moche power to departe the sowle fro the body / as hath the thondre" (123), especially in women: "But this is not so grete meruaylle of women as is of the men / For the women be likened vnto softe waxe or softe ayer and therfor she is callid mulier whyche Is as moche to saye in latyne as mollis aer." There is no question of fanciful etymologizing here, for the word is quite simply regarded as the result ("therfor") of an obvious physiological phenomenon. Caxton, by the way, strongly recommends that the physician should "knowe the proporcions of lettres of grammayre" (119). Axon, in his introduction (lxviii), makes a reference to *Cymbeline*. Furness (note on 5.5.531) cites F. C. Birkbeck Terry in *N&Q* 7.4 (1887): 105 for the Caxton parallel.

²¹ Baldwin quotes Dowden's first *Arden* edition, in which a certain Dr. Aldis Wright is quoted quoting from *A World of Wonders*: "the ancient Latinists . . . had no good dexteritie in giving Etymologies of Ancient Latin words; witness the notation of *Mulier, quasi mollis aer*." If Baldwin had looked up *The World of Wonders* itself, he would have found the opposite: on the page in question, Henrie Stephen writes of the "subtil and curious Etymologizing" of the names of saints to be found in such books as *The Golden Legend*: "If any shall reply and say, that it is not to be wondered that the ancient Latinists neuer mentioned these *Etymologies*, considering the names were not then in vse; I answer, that they had as good dexteritie in giuing *Etymologies* of ancient latin words; witness the notation of *Mulier, quasi mollis aer*" (emphasis mine; "they" probably refers to the later writers of books like the *Legenda Aurea* rather than to the "ancient Latinists"). Stephen,

and the context of *Cymbeline* itself contradict such a view. For the air with which Imogen is identified by Philarmonus transforms the (at least potentially) misogynistic *mollis/mulier* etymology into something entirely appreciative: “which *mulier* I divine / Is this most constant wife, who even now, / Answering the letter of the oracle, / Unknown to you, unsought, were clipp’d about / With this most tender air.” Furthermore, the air contributes to the linguistic self-reflection in this scene, for it is the medium ensuring that the action of the characters’ lives (and of the actors on the stage) develops from language.²²

Action means “answering the letter” of a text written by some higher power; living is the unspoken response to a word that must be probed for its ‘literal’ sense (the sense of its sounds and letters) in order to be understood. And this literal sense is transmitted by air, as the *mulier / mollis aer* etymology itself demonstrates: when the text of the tablet is spoken or sounded, i.e., endowed with breath or air, it imparts its meaning. This agrees, by the way, with the definition of the letter as (the sign of) a sound in the grammatical tradition of Donatus and Priscian.²³ The closing scene of the play, in which the soothsayer’s construction of meaning takes place, drives home the function of the air as the medium of sound in yet another way: Imogen is the “piece of tender air” by which Posthumus, unknown to him, is to be embraced or “clipp’d about” before the country will flourish again in “peace and plenty.” (This airy reunion mirrors Posthumus’s own melting “from / The smallness of a gnat to air” [1.4.20-21] when he takes leave from her.)²⁴ The somewhat unusual collocation “piece of air” draws

the humanist scholar-printer of Geneva, in a vein not unlike Erasmus’s in the *Laus Stultitiae* (section 54, 142-56 in Welzig’s edition), makes fun of the “subtill notations, as cannot sufficiently be wondered at” to be found in Roman Catholic authors. All the same, the very extent to which he quotes these etymologies shows genuine delight being mixed with depreciation, an attitude also to be found in Erasmus as well as Agrippa (see Borchardt 422; on the Estienne family, see for instance Starnes 7-15).—The reference to Wright (*N&Q* 7.2 [1886]) and Stephen is also made by Furness (note on 5.5.531), where Stephen is quoted correctly but abridged in such a way that “they” is made to refer to the “ancient Latinists.”

²² See, for instance, Agrippa Book I, chapter 6, 96.

²³ Cf. Donatus’s *Ars grammatica*: “Littera est pars minima vocis articulatae” (Keil 4: 367). Cf. Ben Jonson’s definitions in *The English Grammar*: “A *Syllable* is a perfect sound in a word, and consisteth of one, or more *Letters*. (e) A *Letter* is an indivisible part of a *Syllable*, (f) whose *Prosody*, or right sounding is perceiv’d by the power; the *Orthography*, or right writing by the forme. (g) *Prosodie*, and *Orthography*, are not parts of *Grammar*, but diffus’d, like the blood, and spirits through the whole.” (Jonson 8: 467)

²⁴ On the passage, see Habicht 310. Seen against the background of such a poem as Donne’s “A Valediction: forbidding mourning,” Posthumus’s turning into air at parting seems the precondition of the lovers’ reunion. In Donne the lovers taking leave of each other “endure not yet / A breach, but an expansion, / Like gold to aery thinnesse beate.”—For

attention to the 'air' or sound of "piece" and "peace," which makes the ears of the audience ring: the "piece of tender air" (438) is followed by "peace and plenty" (443), then comes the "piece of tender air" again (447), then once more "peace and plenty" (459) and Cymbeline's announcement "My peace we will be begin" (460), the soothsayer's statement that "The fingers of the powers above do tune / The harmony of this peace" (467-68), the King's resolution "Publish we this peace" (479) and "Our peace we'll ratify: seal it with feasts" (484) and his affirming that "Never was a war did cease / (Ere bloody hands were wash'd) with such a peace" (486)—with which word the play ends.

The contexts in which the word *peace* is used here all point to the relation of language and action or text and life foregrounded by the oracle: "peace" is something that has to be done ("My peace we will begin"), while it is also described in terms of writing: it is to be published as well as ratified and sealed. Furthermore, when an actor at the end of a play and in the context of a constant use of the homophones *peace* and *piece* speaks of "this peace," he surely evokes a reference to *this piece*, namely the play itself which ends, like the action of the war, when the peace and the feast begin but which may well be published in manuscript or print like the peace.²⁵ (*Cymbeline* was not printed before the first Folio, but of course might have been.) The play itself as a sequence of spoken words is a piece of air (we think of Prospero's "insubstantial pageant" melting into "thin air"), which fits into the musical context of "peace" evoked by the soothsayer: a man called Philarmonus declares "The harmony of this peace" tuned by the powers above. A little earlier in the scene, Imogen, that "piece of tender air," was expressly connected with music by Cymbeline's recognizing "The tune of Imogen!" (237). If melody and harmony come together here, the reference is also to the vocal art of language performed on the stage. The air is a common denominator of music and speech; *air* metonymically signifies melody or piece of music²⁶ and at the same time refers to the medium in which spoken language works and reaches the

the possible influence of the country's "air" or climate on Iachimo, see Zacharasiewicz 209-12.

²⁵ The inner connection between "peace" and language is, at least *e negativo*, suggested by the dictionary. See, for example, the sequence of entries in Pelegromius's *Synonymorum sylua* (also suggesting the proximity of *peace* and *piece*): "to make Peace, vide to Pacifi; to houle his Peace, to keepe Silence; a Pearle; a Peece, or Morsell"; the connection between *peace* and "mollis aer" is suggested by the presence of the Latin synonym *mollire* under the heading "to Pacifie, to Mitigate, to Assuage." Under "a Woman," Pelegromius has the (by now familiar) "Mulier à mollitie dicta."

²⁶ Cf. *OED air* 19.a. *concr.* ". . . a piece of music . . . to be sung or played as a 'solo,' " first ref. 1604 and quotation from 1880 *Grove*; see also Strahle, whose entry on *air* begins, on the one hand, with Florio's Italian-English dictionary of 1598 ("*Aere*, . . . Also a tune, a sound, a note, or an ayre of musicke or any ditty") and, on the other hand, with Morley's *Plaine and Easie Introduction* (1597, p. 180: "these [ballette] and all other kinds of light musicke sauing the *Madrigal* are by a generall name called ayres").

listener's ear ("or any air of music touch their ears," as Lorenzo has it in *The Merchant of Venice* 5.1.76).²⁷ The tune of Imogen is also, almost tautologically, the tune of "this piece of tender air" or—especially in the context of the soothsayer's "fit and apt construction" of names (445)—the tune of "Imogen."²⁸ This name is *not* explained by Philarmonus, however; it remains a mystery and for this very reason shows its affinity to music. Its tune is evocative (of 'innocence', for example, or of 'innocent birth' or even of the primrose with which she is associated [4.3.218]), but like a genuine piece of music it is not to be entirely rationalized or semanticized.

The audience is expressly treated to this tune before Cymbeline calls it so. Posthumus, who still thinks he has killed his wife, in his despair and remorse exclaims that

. . . every villain
 Be call'd Posthumus Leonatus, and
 Be villainy less than 'twas. O Imogen!
 My queen, my life, my wife, O Imogen,
 Imogen, Imogen! (5.5.223-27)

The sound of the name here indeed seems to work like a magic invocation, for Imogen herself answers it and brings about the final anagnorisis. Dramatic tension is heightened for a last time by the fact that Posthumus does not recognize her tune but strikes the supposedly "scornful page" who, he thinks, makes a "play" of his emotion. Ironically, it is Leonatus himself who "plays" and with the words "there lie thy part" performs an act of violence when he should have listened to Fidele-Imogen's asking him to listen: "Peace, my lord, hear, hear—" Imogen's first words in the scene strike, as it were, the key notes both of her own person as the oracle represents it and of the harmonious ending as a whole: her "Peace . . . hear, hear" anticipates the sound and meaning of the "piece of tender air" as well as of the peace that is to begin when the action is done.

4. Language as the *mean* of Matter and Spirit

Trying to outline the idea of language that informs these sounds and invocations and speech acts on the stage, one might say that the function of the word and in particular of the proper name (as the epitome of the word)²⁹ is embodied or enacted by Imogen.

²⁷ My attention was first drawn to this connection between spirit, music, air and ear by Leimberg, especially 195. Leimberg refers to Ficino's "aereus auris spiritus" (as quoted by Walker 7-8) as a paronomasia echoed and augmented by Shakespeare's.

²⁸ For the importance of 'fitting' names in *Cymbeline*, cf. also Lucius's comment on Fidele's name ("Thy name well fits thy faith; thy faith thy name"; 4.2.381). Characteristically, however, like *mulier/mollis aer* this assumed name functions as an epithet or appellation, whereas Imogen's 'proper' name remains unexplained. The obvious parallel to this procedure is of course the Divine Name.

²⁹ Cf. Ben Jonson's *Grammar* again, in which the word is defined as that "whereby a thing is knowne, or called."

A brief look at the intellectual context will perhaps make clearer that both her designation as tune or air and as peace or harmony implies linguistic self-reflection. We have seen that, in the soothsayer's etymological construction of meaning, sound is the source of sense. This goes together with the assumption that there is a motivated connection between signifier and signified, following the method exemplified in the *Cratylus*. Over and above that, however, the sound of words and names is presented as the source of meaning also in the dynamic sense of a power or influence upon people's lives and actions. This reflects a Neoplatonic tendency of endowing with a force of its own the characteristic function of language as a kind of intermediary between the material and the intellectual or rational world. Thus in Neoplatonic concepts of emanation the similarity or analogy between the different levels of being becomes dynamic, and accordingly the sensual part or body of language not only represents or reflects meanings or ideas but actively transmits their virtues or powers.³⁰ To Ficino, the "verba, cantus, soni"³¹ together assume an exact middle position in his seven-stage concept of a vertically structured nature (between the lowest bodily and highest intellectual forms). In this position, the sounds of language may assume a power influencing physical reality when they are used in accordance with the cosmic (celestial) harmonies.

Especially in Agrippa, whose *Occulta philosophia* is indebted to Ficino and other Neoplatonists, this verbal power is integrated in a view of *parens natura*, which (or who) by means of air sees to it that the sounds reach the listener and may have their proper effect.³² Air is the life-giving medium of exchange par excellence and is thus closely related to the Neoplatonic *spiritus mundi*, which marks the exact point of connection between the material and the intellectual sphere.³³ Imogen being a piece of

³⁰ For this brief summary, I am indebted to Klein 145-46.

³¹ Quoted by Klein 146 from chapter 21 of Ficino's *De vita caelitus comparanda*.

³² See Agrippa, Book I, ch. 69 ("De sermone atque virtutibus verborum") 231-32; Klein 147. It may be an additional (however coincidental) connection between *De occulta philosophia* and *Cymbeline* that Agrippa a little earlier mentions a soothsayer named Posthumius (Book 1, ch. 55, 201; his source, according to Compagni's note, is Augustine's *De civitate dei* II.24). Another interesting analogy to *Cymbeline* and its *mulier* etymology consists in the fact that Agrippa's argument for the superiority of women is based on the etymology of the name of Eve (see Borchardt 422). On the function of the air, see also Book I, chapter 6 ("De admirandis aquae et aëris ventorum naturis"), e.g., 96 where the air is called the "medium et glutinum" connecting the different elements, acting as a divine mirror that carries with it the shapes of things and speeches ("rerum . . . et sermonum quorumcunque species") when it enters the bodies of men and animals through the pores, from where it proceeds "ad phantasiam et animam." On the relationship of the (magician's) word to the Christian Logos in Agrippa, see Keefer 337-38.

³³ The whole subject of pneumatology comes into view at this point, but of course cannot be dealt with in such brief remarks as these. It may just be mentioned that air or breath or

tender air may thus be said to represent the medium that makes all meaningful intellectual exchange physically possible. Her repeatedly being called "angel"³⁴ is an additional sign of her spiritual nature; the close connection between "air" and "angels" is familiar from Donne's poem, where the soul must take limbs of flesh and "else could nothing doe" ("Air and Angels" 8). Imogen is literally the means or middle or *tertium* whose 'rebirth' at the end of the play brings about a harmonious or meaningful constellation.³⁵ This is oxymoronically pronounced by Cymbeline, who says, upon Imogen's awakening and immediately before he listens to the "tune of Imogen:" "If this be so, the gods *do mean* to strike me / To death with mortal joy" (5.5.234-35, emphasis added). Imogen, the air, is the means by which the gods, as it were, 'do' their meaning. Thus, to a certain extent, the play reflects or allegorizes the working of language as a possible means of creating harmony.³⁶

spiritus connecting the body and the soul in the form of *spiritus animalis* or psychic pneuma plays an important role in Galen's physiology (see, for instance, *On the Natural Faculties* 2.6.97). For a recent survey of "Pneumatic Magic," see chapter 5 of Couliano.

³⁴ E.g., Belarius's reaction when he first sees Imogen-Fidele: "By Jupiter, an angel!" (3.7.15) and Arviragus's exclamation: "How angel-like he sings!" (4.2.48). Even Iachimo acknowledges Imogen's angelic nature: "I lodge in fear; / Though this a heavenly angel, hell is here" (2.2.49-50). The fear/here rhyme (which could still rhyme with *air* at the time, see Dobson e.g. § 126n5) as it were includes the "air" of Imogen, alluding to the topical connection of *air* and *angel*. The link between angel and singing reinforces this connection.

³⁵ Cf. the connection with *Cymbeline* made by Duncan-Jones in her commentary on the first of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (line 4), where the "tender heir" implies both the male offspring desired from the addressee and the wife giving birth to the son. Imogen is not only the "tender air" but also (before Guiderius reappears) "the heir" (1.1.4) of Cymbeline's kingdom. For the link between spirit and inheritance (*air* and *heir*) see for instance Donne, *Sermons* 5: 58-76 (on Rom. 8:16), in which he explains different kinds of air or spirit and points out that the true spirit "is the spirit of Regeneration, by which man is a new creature, a spirituall man" (65) so that "we are *heires*, and *heires* so, as that we are *Co-heires* with Christ Heires of heaven, which is . . . an universall primogeniture" (75). On the political aspect of the heir in *Cymbeline*, see also Wickham: "Tender air, moreover, in the form of the south wind, Zephyrus, is a role in which Samuel Daniel elects a few months later to cast Prince Charles (alias Cadwal-Aviragus [sic]) in the masque of *Thethys Festival*" (105). In this thematic and stylistic context, it may be more than mere coincidence that the word *primogeniture*, as Inge Leimberg points out to me, contains or encloses the name of Shakespeare's heroine.

³⁶ For a similar verbal-musical effect in *The Winter's Tale*, see Cerny. For the general context of music and magic, see for instance Walker (especially Part I) and Hart (especially chapter 6, "Musical Harmony and Pythagorean Palaces"). Walker 8-9 translates from Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* (c. 28): "Musical consonance occurs in the element which is the mean of all [i.e. air], and reaches the ears through motion, . . . But musical sound by the movement of the air moves the body: by purified

In this connection it is also worth noting that the only 'really' supernatural element in *Cymbeline* is the label on Posthumus's breast. The appearance of the Leonati and even of Jupiter himself may be rationalized as insubstantial elements of Posthumus's dream; the written text, however, with its generative riddle-words, is actually there to be found by Posthumus after his awakening. Thus, in a clearly vertical scheme, the writing which is handed down from Jupiter via the shadows of the interceding Leonati to Posthumus forms the connection between the world of dream and myth and providence and the world of material reality.

But (and, without butting too many buts, this *but* is essential in Shakespeare's tragicomic romance) there is no guarantee for success when it comes to language and its power to influence physical reality.³⁷ There is no verbal magic in the sense of *abracadabra*.³⁸ A scene in *Philaster* serves well to illustrate this point, as it makes clear the limits of 'literal' verbal power also to be noticed in *Cymbeline*. In Act 4 (scene 4) the King peremptorily commands his subjects to bring him his daughter Arethusa, who has disappeared in the forest, but he has to meet with a noble gentleman's fearless objections. Only if he commands "things possible and honest" (35), Dion says, is the King to be obeyed. Besides the topical political aspects of this objection, the linguistic ones are remarkable, for the King continues:

'Tis the King / Will have it so, whose breath can still the winds, / Uncloud the sun, charm down the swelling sea, / And stop the floods of heaven. Speak, can it not? / *Dion*. No. / *King*. No? Cannot the breath of kings do this? / *Dion*. No, nor smell sweet itself, if once the lungs / Be corrupted (44-51).

The King claims for himself a verbal magic power based on the quality of the air involved, namely his kingly breath. Dion's answer to this is simply "no," but when the King insists he expatiates a little on this: the key word of his answer now is "corrupted." Apart from the fact that, even for a King, the influence of language upon reality is limited by natural laws, the moral state of the speaker influences the quality of the air and, accordingly, the effectiveness of his words. Later, when the King is morally reformed and repents of the wrongs done to *Philaster* and his own daughter,

air it excites the aerial spirit which is the bond of body and soul: by emotion it affects the senses and at the same time the soul: by meaning it works on the mind: finally, by the very movement of the subtle air it penetrates strongly . . ." In his chapter on the "General theory of natural magic," Walker stresses the close connection between *vis musices* and *vis verborum*, the latter relating to the former like melody to harmony (80-81).

³⁷ The negative view of language in Shakespeare's Romances has been stressed by Solway, albeit without the close textual and contextual reading that might have made this viewpoint carry conviction.

³⁸ The effect of language in *Cymbeline* is thus to be distinguished, for example, from most of the paradigms given by Ferry in her chapter on "Magical and Miraculous Language" (125-33).

Philaster appropriately answers: "Mighty sir, / I will not do your greatness so much wrong / As not to make your word truth" (5.3.181-83).

In *Cymbeline*, a similar influence of the speaker's or listener's spiritual state upon the power of words is to be seen in Posthumus's description of the battle-scene. He reports that, by word and deed, Belarius and the two young princes stopped the Britons' flight and turned the tables upon the Romans: ". . . with this word 'Stand, stand,' / . . . more charming, / With their own nobleness, which could have turn'd / A distaff to a lance" they "gilded pale looks" and made fear give way to courage. The charm or magic effect of the word is enhanced by the speakers' "nobleness" and further "Accommodated by the place": the spoken word, participating in the material world as well as the intellectual one, can change reality, but it can only do so if the place (and, implicitly, the time) and the spiritual disposition of speaker and listener agree.³⁹ For just as the speaker's nobleness as a spiritual state (rather than social position) endows his or her words with charm, the listener's or reader's spirit conditions the construction of meaning. The soothsayer, who first gives a wrong or imperfect reading of the eagle's flight, himself points this out when he says that he is right "Unless my sins abuse my divination" (4.2.351). After all, it is Posthumus's distrust of Imogen's word (and, accordingly, a breach of his own) that triggers off the nearly catastrophic action of this tragicomedy.⁴⁰ Similarly, the repentant Iachimo speaks of his "false spirits" (5.5.148) which led him to doubt ("Made scruple"; 182) Posthumus's words in praise of Imogen.

This is where, in a certain sense, this talk comes full circle. If it is a characteristic feature of the tragicomic genre in its Jacobean form that language may supplant action, and if in the tragicomic romance of *Cymbeline* it determines and generates action, it never does so in an automatic sort of way. Even if *Cymbeline* is not openly concerned with religion in its Christian form, it is related to concepts of the word reflected and expressed by the Metaphysical poets and preachers. John Donne, for example, speaks of the Logos as "*Actus purus*, all action, all doing" (*Sermons* 8: 179) and says to his audience that since it is "working upon thee, by speaking to thee, Be thou *Verbum* too, A Word, as God was; A Speaking, and a Doing Word, to his glory, and the edification of others" (8: 52). But whereas in Donne's sermons and the poetry of the Metaphysicals the religious basis for a certain trust in the word is never entirely absent, this

³⁹ See Walker's section on Pomponazzi (107-11) for the importance of the speaker's and listener's spiritual disposition when the power of words is at stake. For instance, prayer "must come from the depths of the heart and be fervent; for thus are the spirits more strongly affected and more powerful in their effect on matter" (Walker 108, translating from *De Incantationibus* [Basle 1556] 255). In *Cymbeline*, cf. also the evil spirit of Imogen's father intervening "like the tyrannous breathing of the north" (1.4.36) before Imogen can set her parting "Betwixt two charming words" (35).

⁴⁰ "I will remain / The loyal'st husband that did e'er plight troth. . . . And with mine eyes I'll drink the words you send" (1.2.26-27, 31).

is far more doubtful in *Cymbeline*. The divine institution in the garb of Jupiter is archaic and openly theatrical.⁴¹ At the same time, it is far more 'modern' than the Divine Word of the devotional poets in that the "new and sophisticated" and yet ancient generic costume, with its historical eclecticism and manifold ironies, mirrors the loss of trust in a personal God who sees to it that words are "doing" all right in the end. In *Cymbeline* words participate in a higher sphere but are nevertheless, as it were, very much on their own. The idea of language put forward in this play is not one of general distrust. However, the way in which words are materially and spiritually effective is shown to be a mystery, and accordingly there is every reason for wonder when they succeed in bringing about a happy ending.

References

Primary Sources

- Agrippa, Cornelius. *De occulta philosophia libri tres*. Ed. V. Perrone Compagni. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992.
- Beaumont, Francis and John Fletcher. *Philaster or Love Lies a-Bleeding*. Ed. Andrew Gurr. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1969.
- Caxton, William. *Game and Playe of the Chesse, 1474: A Verbatim Reprint of the First Edition*. Introd. William E. A. Axon. London: Elliot Stock, 1883.
- Cicero, Marcus Tullius. *De inventione, De optimo genere oratorum, Topica*. With an English trans. by H. M. Hubbell. London: Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1960.
- Donne, John. *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets*. Ed. Helen Gardner. Oxford: Clarendon, 1965.
- . *The Divine Poems*. Ed. Helen Gardner. Oxford: Clarendon, 1952.
- . *The Sermons*. Ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson. 10 vols. Berkeley: U of California P, 1953-62.
- Erasmus, Desiderius. *Ausgewählte Schriften*. 8 vols. Ed. Werner Welzig. Vol. 2: *Morias Enkomion sive Laus Stultitiae. Carmina selecta*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975.
- Galenus, Claudius. *On the Natural Faculties*. With an English trans. by Arthur John Brock. 1916. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1979.
- Isidorus Hispalensis. *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*. Ed. W. M. Lindsay. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989.
- Jonson, Ben. *The English Grammar. Ben Jonson*. Ed. C. H. Herford, P. and E. Simpson. Vol. 8. Oxford: Clarendon, 1965. 463-553.

⁴¹ Cf. Gibbons's remark that "what is striking is how the perspective of Paganism itself is given its own rights at the end of *Cymbeline*, and the crisis of the individual, the family and the nation can be understood in terms other than Christian" (99). For a related view, see Lewis (361).

- Keil, Heinrich, ed. *Grammatici Latini*. Vol. 4: *Probi Donati Servii qui feruntur de arte grammatica libri*. Leipzig: Teubner, 1864.
- Pelegromius, Simon. *Synonymorum sylua*. Redacta par H. F. London: J. Harison, 1603.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedie of Cymbeline*. Ed. Horace Howard Furness. The New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1913.
- . *Cymbeline*. Ed. J. M. Nosworthy. The Arden Shakespeare. London: Methuen, 1955.
- . *Cymbeline*. Ed. Roger Warren. The Oxford Shakespeare. Oxford: OUP, 1998.
- . *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones. The Arden Shakespeare. 1997. London: Thomas Nelson, 1998.
- Stephen, Henrie [Henri Estienne]. *A World of Wonders: Or an Introduction to a Treatise Touching the Conformitie of Ancient and Modern Wonders*. London: John Norton, 1607.

Secondary Sources

- Auberlen, Eckhard. *Das Unglaubliche in Shakespeares späten Stücken*. Diss. Frankfurt, 1967.
- Baldwin, T. W. *William Shakspeare's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke*. 2 vols. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1944.
- Barton, Anne. "Leontes and the Spider: Language and Speaker in Shakespeare's Last Plays." *Shakespeare's Styles: Essays in Honour of Kenneth Muir*. Ed. Philipp Edwards, Inga-Stina Ewbank and G. K. Hunter. Cambridge: CUP, 1980. 131-50.
- Bauer, Matthias. "Iconicity and Divine Likeness: George Herbert's 'Coloss. 3.3.'" *Form Miming Meaning: Iconicity in Language and Literature*. Ed. Max Nänny and Olga Fischer. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1999. 215-34.
- Berger, Jr., Harry. *Imaginary Audition: Shakespeare on Stage and Page*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1989.
- Borchardt, Frank L. "Etymology in Tradition and in the Northern Renaissance." *JHI* 29 (1968): 415-29.
- Cerny, Lothar. "Music and Magic: The Restoration of Hermione in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*." *Anglistentag 1992 Stuttgart: Proceedings*. Ed. Hans Ulrich Seeber and Walter Göbel. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993. 223-35.
- Couliano, Ioan P. *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*. Trans. Margaret Cook. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.
- Dobson, E. J. *English Pronunciation 1500-1700*. 2nd ed. 2 vols. 1968. Oxford: Clarendon, 1985.
- Elam, Keir. *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse: Language-Games in the Comedies*. Cambridge: CUP, 1984.
- Elsky, Martin. *Authorizing Words: Speech, Writing and Print in the English Renaissance*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989.
- Ferry, Anne. *The Art of Naming*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988.
- Garber, Marjorie. "Cymbeline and the Languages of Myth." *Mosaic* 10.2 (1977): 105-15.
- Gibbons, Brian. "Fabled Cymbeline." *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* (1987): 78-99.
- Glazov-Corrigan, Elena. "Speech Acts, Generic Differences, and the Curious Case of Cymbeline." *SEL* 34 (1994): 379-99.
- Habicht, Werner. "'And Mock Our Eyes with Air': Air and Stage Illusion in Shakespearean Drama." *Aesthetic Illusion: Theoretical and Historical Approaches*. Ed. Frederick Burwick and Walter Pape. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990. 301-12.
- Hart, Vaughan. *Art and Magic in the Court of the Stuarts*. London: Routledge, 1994.

- Hunt, Maurice. "Shakespeare's Empirical Romance: *Cymbeline* and Modern Knowledge." *TSSL* 22 (1980): 322-42.
- Keefer, Michael. "Verbal Magic and the Problem of the A and B Texts of *Doctor Faustus*." *JEGP* 83 (1983): 324-46.
- Klein, Wolf Peter. *Am Anfang war das Wort: Theorie- und wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Elemente frühneuzeitlichen Sprachbewußtseins*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992.
- Klinck, Roswitha. *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*. München: Fink, 1970.
- Leimberg, Inge. "Shakespeares Komödien und Sidneys 'Goldene Welt.'" *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* (1969): 174-97.
- Lewis, Cynthia. "'With Simular Proof Enough': Modes of Misperception in *Cymbeline*." *SEL* 31 (1991): 343-61.
- Rosen, Alan. "Impertinent Matters: Lancelot Gobbo and the Fortunes of Performance Criticism." *Connotations* 8 (1998/99): 217-31.
- Seznec, Jean. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*. Trans. Barbara F. Sessions. 1953. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972.
- Simonds, Peggy Muñoz. *Myth, Emblem and Music in Shakespeare's Cymbeline*. Newark: U of Delaware P; London: Associated UPs, 1992.
- Solway, David. "Intoxicated Words: Language in Shakespeare's Late Romances." *Sewanee Review* 95 (1987): 619-25.
- Starnes, DeWitt T. *Robert Estienne's Influence on Lexicography*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1963.
- Strahle, Graham. *An Early Music Dictionary: Musical Terms from British Sources 1500-1740*. Cambridge: CUP, 1995.
- Walde, A. and J. B. Hofmann. *Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. 5th ed. 2 vols. Heidelberg: Winter, 1982.
- Walker, D. P. *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*. London: The Warburg Institute, 1958.
- Warren, Roger. *Cymbeline (Shakespeare in Performance)*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1989.
- Wickham, Glynne. "Riddle and Emblem: A Study in the Dramatic Structure of *Cymbeline*." *English Renaissance Studies Presented to Dame Helen Gardner in Honour of her Seventieth Birthday*. Ed. John Carey. Oxford: Clarendon, 1980. 94-113.
- Wind, Edgar. *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*. Rev. ed. Oxford: OUP, 1980.
- Zacharasiewicz, Waldemar. *Die Klimatheorie in der englischen Literatur und Literaturkritik von der Mitte des 16. bis zum frühen 18. Jahrhundert*. Wien: Braunmüller, 1977.