# SHAKESPEARE ON ERROR

Shakespeare enlightens us on the subject of error beginning with the very etymology of the word itself. In his early play, *The Comedy of Errors,* he touches upon the very origin of the word itself. *Error* comes from the Latin word meaning *to wander*. Hence, we speak of a *knight-errant* or wandering knight. Antipholus of Syracuse says (in Act IV, Sc. 3):

> This fellow is distract, and so am I:
> And here we wander in illusions:
> Some blessed power deliver us from hence.

The line "And here we wander in illusions" expresses well the origin of the word *error*. When the mind is in error, it is wandering. The word *wander* applied to the mind signifies the disordered movement of reason. Error is the result of a disordered movement of reason. The disordered movement of reason ends in an error. One could compare the disordered movement of reason to that disordered movement of the planets to which Ulysses in *Troilus & Cressida* attributes many plagues upon this earth. In his famous speech (Act I, Sc. 3), Ulysses says:

> but when the planets
> In evil mixture to disorder wander,
> What plagues and what portents!

Likewise, the disordered movement of reason results in all kinds of diseases or errors of reason. In another scene of *The Comedy of Errors* (Act IV, Sc. 2), Antipholus of Syracuse, in speaking to Luciana, speaks of error in regard to wandering:

> Teach me, dear creature, how to think and speak;
> Lay open to my earthy-gross conceit,
> Smother'd in errors, feeble, shallow, weak,
> The folded meaning of your words' deceit.
> Against my soul's pure truth why labour you
> To make it wander in an unknown field.

Reason errs when it wanders in an unknown field. But, if you know the play, Luciana is not labouring to deceive Antipholus.

If there is an art of deceiving, it would seem to belong in some way more to the bad than to the good. For it is the bad that want to deceive. Hence, Aristotle names the art of deception in logic *the sophistic art* from the sophist whom, he says, differs from the philosopher by his choice or bad will. The philosopher would rather be wise than appear wise while the sophist desires more the appearance of wisdom than wisdom itself. The sophist clearly has a bad or disordered will, putting the appearance of wisdom or the glory of appearing wise before wisdom itself. Of course, the philosopher studies the art of the sophist because he wants to avoid being deceived. Yet this art of deceiving is named from the sophist, not from the philosopher. But in Christendom, when we want to talk about the art of deceiving, we go back to the father of lies himself, the devil, who wants to deceive us much more than the sophist does. The devil is, as Christ says (In *John*, Chapter 8, v. 44), "a liar and the father of lies." Hence, Thomas Aquinas divides the causes of error in his commentary on the words of St. Paul in the *Second Epistle to Timothy* where St. Paul (In Chapter II, vv. 24-26) says:

> But the servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle towards all, ready to teach, patient, gently admonishing those who resist, in case God should give them repentance to know the truth and they recover themselves from the snares of the devil.

Shakespeare is also in this Christian tradition. So we must turn to his play which is the closest to presenting deception by the devil for his division of the causes of deception. This play is, of course, *Macbeth*. Deception by the devil is, of course, in Shakespeare's sources for this play. Thus we read in Holinshed (quoted in the Yale Shakespeare edition of *Macbeth*, Appendix B, p. 136):

> In the beginning of his reigne he accomplished manie woorthie acts, verie profitable to the common-wealth (as ye have heard), but afterward by the illusion of the diuell, he deformed the same with the most terrible cruelties.

The devil, by reason of his great natural intelligence and his hatred for all mankind, is above all suited to practice the art of deception. Macbeth himself calls the devil (in Act II, Sc. 1) “the common enemy of man.” *Macbeth* opens with the words of the three witches, those instruments of hell. The whole of Act I, Sc. 1 is devoted to their conversation in twelve lines ending with the couplet which expresses with the brevity and beauty of Shakespeare, the two errors we can make about the good and the bad and touches upon the two sources of those errors. This is the couplet:

> Fair is foul, and foul is fair
> Hover through the fog and filthy air.

But before we unfold all this reason, we should concentrate our mind upon the words by looking at the poetic devices of Shakespeare here - for there is rhyme as well as reason in these words.

The lines, of course, rhyme (fair and air) and there is much alliteration beginning with the letter f (fair and foul, foul and fair, fog and filthy). Trochaic meter (enclitic) is used here by Shakespeare as he often does for unfamiliar creatures like witches or fairies rather than the iambic meter closer to daily human speech.

The first line touches upon the two possible mistakes about the good and the bad. One can think that the good is bad, the fair is foul; or that the bad is good, the foul is fair. If one can make the first mistake, one can also make the second. And vice-versa.

The second line touches upon the two sources or causes of the above errors. For the cause of error is either on the side of the mind, and this is signified by the word *fog*, or on the side of the heart, and this is signified by the word *filthy*.

Shakespeare emphasizes these words fair and foul and the possible confusion of the fair and the foul when he has Macbeth, just before he and Banquo meet the three witches, say (Act I, Sc. 3):

> So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

And after the witches have hailed Macbeth with present and future titles, Banquo says (ibid.):

> Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear
> Things that sound so fair?

We have said that by the word *fog*, Shakespeare signifies metaphorically the cause of error on the side of the mind. This is made explicit in the hilarious scene from *Twelfth Night* where the simile of fog is used. Malvolio has been locked up and treated as a madman as a result of the prank played upon him in the sub-plot of the play. Malvolio is locked-up in a darkroom and has the following conversation with the Clown impersonating Sir Topas through the door (Act IV, Sc. 2):

| | |
|---|---|
| Malvolio: | I am not mad, Sir Topas; I say to you<br>this house is dark. |
| Clown:<br>(imp. Topas) | Mad man, thou errest. I say there is no darkness<br>but ignorance, in which thou art more puzzl'd<br>than the Egyptians in their fog. |

Similar images are used by Shakespeare in the following passage from the *Tempest* where he speaks of darkness and ignorant fumes in the charm that Prospero had cast upon Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio (Act V, Sc. 1 Prospero is speaking):

> .....The charm dissolves apace,
> And as the morning steals upon the night,
> Melting the darkness, so their rising senses
> Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle
> Their clearer reason.

Shakespeare's words "the ignorant fumes that mantle their clearer reason" clearly confirm that fog or something like it signifies the cause of error on the side of reason or the mind.

We have said that the other alliterating word used in the couplet from Macbeth, the word *filth*, signifies the cause of error on the side of the heart or

the ability to desire. When the heart becomes vicious or we acquire a moral vice, our reason is blinded by this filth of our heart. And that I am not making a wild guess about the meaning of the word *filth* in this couplet from Macbeth can be seen from a magnificent passage in *Antony & Cleopatra* where Shakespeare again uses the word *filth* in describing how reason is blinded and led into error. Antony is the speaker in Act II, Sc. 11:

> But when we in our viciousness grow hard -
> O misery on't - the wise gods seel our eyes,
> In our filth drop our clear judgments; make us
> Adore our errors; laugh at's while we strut
> To our confusion.

The first line ("when we in our viciousness grow hard") speaks of us when, by repeated bad acts, we have acquired the habit of moral vice. For habit, being a disposition that is difficult to change, is suitably described by the word *hard*. The next words ("o misery on't") suitably precede the description of the process by which we come to "Adore our errors" (as is said in the fourth line) since (as Thomas Aquinas observes in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*) error is a great part of misery. The line "the wise gods seel our eyes" is suitable because he who does not live in accordance with reason is suitably punished by being deprived of the act of reason. The next part, "in our own filth drop our clear judgments; make us Adore our errors", should be contrasted with the phrase above from the *Tempest*, "the ignorant fumes that mantle their clearer reason." "Ignorant fumes" is one the side of reason or the knowing powers while "our own filth" refers to the viciousness in our heart or desiring powers. When our clear judgments have been dropped in our own filth, we proceed to the absurd conclusion of adoring our own errors and making ourselves laughable as we proceed to our own confusion. Confusion here is the opposite of glory.

The above passage from *Antony & Cleopatra* seems to speak of the filth of our heart as the cause of the error whereby we think the foul is fair or the bad is good. There is another passage in Shakespeare where the filth of the heart is spoken of as the cause of the reverse error where the good seems bad or the fair to be foul. This is in *King Lear* (Act IV, Sc. 2) after Albany has upbraided his evil and unnatural wife Goneril:

Goneril: No more; the text is foolish.

Albany: Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile.

Filths savor but themselves.

If you want a contemporary illustration of what Shakespeare is saying in the witches' couplet, you could not take a better example than that of the errors about abortion. Those who support abortion are trying to say that what is foul is fair. And when they attack those who oppose abortion, they are saying that what is fair is foul. But notice the fog that surrounds their position. Pro-abortion is called pro-choice; the painful murder of the unborn, termination of pregnancy; and those who are opposed to abortion are said to be interfering with the rights of women. Anything to avoid calling a spade a spade. The fog is so thick that it would take the knife of reason to cut it. Such a smoke-screen is thrown up before the eyes of the public so that, in the words of the *Tempest*, "ignorant fumes...mantle their clearer reason."

Likewise, on the side of the heart or desiring powers, there is the filth of two of the capital vices in which to "drop our clear judgments." The most fundamental vices, the vices that draw other vices and sins into the service of their ends, are divided according to the goods of man. Pride is concerned with the good of the soul, lust and gluttony with the good of the body, and avarice with exterior goods. The force behind abortion, like that behind the hard pornography run by the Mafia and the more insidious pornography pushed by Hollywood, involves the union of two capital vices - avarice and lust. There is avarice on the part of those who perform the abortions and lust behind those who have them (and sometimes avarice in those who kill their offspring to avoid having to stretch the pay check to provide for another mouth). In the union of two capital vices then, there is more than enough filth in which to "drop our clear judgments." If we add the inane glory of the politicians who seek abortion lobby money, we have a union of three capital vices, covering the whole spectrum of human goods.

There is another place where Shakespeare touches upon the division of the causes of error into those on the side of the mind or knowing powers and those on the side of the heart or desiring powers. This is in the casket scenes in *The Merchant of Venice*. The suitors to the beautiful and rich Portia are bound by the will of her father to choose between three caskets or chests. One of them contains her picture and the one who chooses this will win her in marriage. One chest is gold and bears the inscription, "Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire." The second is silver and bears the inscription "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves." The third chest is lead and bears the

inscription “Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.” The third chest is the right one and contains the picture of Portia. But it is an error to chose the gold or the silver chest. And in their color and descriptions are contained two kinds of causes of error, one on the side of the knowing powers and the other on the side of the desiring powers. The Prince of Morocco chooses first in the play (Act II, Sc. 7) and chooses the gold chest. When he opens the chest, he finds a skull and in its empty eye a scroll with these words:

> All that glisters is not gold -
> Often have you heard that told.
> Many a man his life hath sold
> But my outside to behold.
> Gilded tombs do worms infold.
> Had you been as wise as bold,
> Young in limbs, in judgment old,
> Your answer had not been inscroll’d.
> Fare you well; your suit is cold.

The cause of error is here on the side of the knowing powers. Man’s knowledge begins with the senses and the senses know the outside of things. The next two suitors, the Prince of Arragon (in Act II, Sc. 9) and Bassanio (in Act III, Sc. 2) both avoid this error. And both see the cause of this error in judging things by their outside or outward appearance. Arragon says this in rejecting the golden chest (Act II, Sc. 9):

> What says the golden chest? Ha, let me see!
> “Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.”
> “What many men desire.” That “many” may be meant
> By the fool multitude, that choose by show,
> Not learning more than the fond eye doth teach;
> Which pries not to th’interior, but, like the martlet,
> Builds in the weather on the outward wall,
> Even in the force and road of casualty.

Bassanio also rejects the gold casket and, again, because of the deception due to our judging things by their outward appearance. he says in rejecting this in Act III, Sc. 2:

> So may the outward shows be least themselves;

The world is still deceived with ornament.
In law, what plea so tainted and corrupt
But, being season'd with a gracious voice,
Obscures the show of evil? In religion,
What damned error but some sober brow
Will bless it, and approve it with a text,
Hiding the grossness with fair ornament?
There is no vice so simple but assumes
Some mark of virtue on his outward parts.
How many cowards, whose hearts are all as false
As stairs of sand, wear yet upon their chins
The beards of Hercules and frowning Mars;
Who, inward search'd, have livers white as milk!
And these assume but valour's excrement
To render them redoubted. Look on beauty,
And you shall see 'tis purchas'd by the weight,
Which therein works a miracle in nature,
Making them lightest that wear most of it.
So are those crisped snaky golden locks
Which make such wanton gambols with the wind
Upon supposed fairness often known
To be the dowry of a second head,
The skull that bred them in the sepulchre.
Thus ornament is but the guiled shore
To a most dangerous sea; the beauteous scarf
Veiling an Indian beauty; in a word,
The seeming truth which cunning times put on
To entrap the wisest. Therefore, thou gaudy gold,
Hard food for Midas, I will none of thee.

The close friend of Bassanio, the Merchant of Venice, Antonio, had already made an observation on this cause of error in the first Act. He observes to Bassanio (Act I, Sc.3):

The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.
An evil soul, producing holy witness,
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
A goodly apple rotten at the heart.
O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!

Reason is deceived about things because it does not know what they are or because it does not know very well what they are. Reason begins from what is sensed and the senses know things only in an outward way. Hence, reason lacks its own object, the *what it is* of things sensed or imagined. Hence, Heraclitus said that nature loves to hide. He could have added that nature loves to hide from us. Reason must read within things to get the truth about them and this is not easy for reason. The words *outward* and *sensible* are used as synonyms in English sometimes (as in the old definition of sacrament in which it is called an outward sign) and this is a sign of the senses knowing things in an outward way, with the result that our reason is in need of considerable discourse to arrive at the what it is of things.

But although the Prince of Arragon avoids the error made by the Prince of Morocco in choosing the gold chest, he does make the error of choosing the silver chest rather than the lead chest. Is the cause of this error on the side of the knowing powers or on the side of the desiring powers? The cause of the Prince of Arragon's mistake would seem to be his pride and is, therefore, on the side of the desiring powers. That he is proud is shown both by his words at the end of his discourse rejecting the gold chest and perhaps by his name. He says in continuance with the words quoted above:

> I will not choose what many men desire.
> Because I will not jump with common spirits
> And rank me with the barbarous multitude.

And his name fits for *Arragon* reminds us of *arrogant*, a synonym for proud. And the inscription on the silver chest aims at appealing to pride for it says, "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves." Arragon thinks he deserves Portia and the inscription is saying that only the man who deserves her should get her. When he opens the silver chest, he exclaims:

> What's here? The portrait of a blinking idiot...
> Did I deserve no more than a fool's head?
> Is that my prize? Are my deserts no better?

If we compare the causes of error here with those in the couplet from the witches' speech in the beginning of Macbeth, we find the same order. The

causes of deception on the side of the knowing powers (there fog and here outward appearances) are put before those on the side of the desiring powers (there filth and here pride). Is this a coincidence? I do not think so. The causes of error on the side of the knowing powers are more known to us than those on the side of the desiring powers. A sign of this is found in the discourse of Bosanko when he chooses rightly the leaden chest. This discourse occupies 35 lines of blank verse, in which Bassanio expands on why he is not choosing the outwardly promising gold chest for 30 lines and in 1 & 1/2 lines passes over the silver chest to the lead one. It is not at all clear why he passes over the silver chest. He simply says:

> Nor none of thee, thou pale and common drudge
> 'Tween man and man.....

It is also interesting to note that The Philosopher and The Theologian gives these causes in the same order as The Poet here. When Aristotle is giving the reasons why some men possessing political rhetoric think they have political wisdom, he first assigns a cause on the side of the knowing powers (*apaideusia*) and then one on the side of the desiring powers (boasting, a form of pride). (See *Rhetoric*, Book I, Chapter 1, 1356a). Thomas Aquinas also gives the causes of error *ex parte intellectus* before those *ex parte appetitus* when he is dividing the causes of error in his commentary on the *Second Epistle to Timothy* of St. Paul (*II Ad Timotheum,* II, Lectio IV, n. 87)

We have seen then that Shakespeare touches upon the causes of error or the division of the causes of error in the witches' speech in *Macbeth* and in the casket scenes in *The Merchant of Venice*. Some are on the side of the mind or the knowing powers and the others are on the side of the heart or the desiring powers.

But what is the main cause of error on the side of the mind according to Shakespeare? Is it the senses that know things in an outward way? But the senses are not deceived about the outside of the gold chest; the Prince of Morocco is not deceived about the outside of the gold chest. He is deceived or in error about the inside. It is not the senses that tell us about the inside of the chest before we open it - it is our imagination that does so. There are many places where Shakespeare indicates that it is the imagination rather than the senses that is the cause of error. For example, in *Hamlet*, Marcellus and Bernardo have told Horatio about having seen the ghost of Hamlet's father.

Horatio does not believe them and says it is their imagination or fantasy. Marcellus then has invited Horatio to watch with them and see if it is but imagination. In Act I, Sc. 1, Marcellus says:

> Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,
> And will not let belief take hold of him
> Touching this dreaded sight twice seen of us.
> Therefore I have entreated him along
> With us to watch the minutes of this night,
> That if again this apparition come,
> He may approve our eyes and speak to it.

Shortly thereafter the ghost walks again and Horatio sees it with his own eyes and Bernardo taunts him:

> How now, Horatio! you tremble and look pale.
> Is not this something more than fantasy?
> What think you on't?

And Horatio replies:

> Before my God, I might not this believe
> Without the sensible and true avouch
> Of mine own eyes.

Notice how Horatio couples "sensible and true." It is not the senses that are the cause of those ignorant fumes that mantle reason. In the passage from *The Tempest* also, it is the senses that chase away those ignorant fumes. Here it is again:

> .....The charm dissolves apace,
> And as the morning steals upon the night,
> Melting the darkness, so their rising senses
> Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle
> Their clearer reason.

In this passage, ignorant fumes are distinguished from both the rising or awakening senses that chase them and from clearer reason. Ignorant fumes

refer to the imagination or fantasy which is between the sense and reason. There is another place where Shakespeare uses the word fumes when speaking of the imagination. In *Cymbeline*, when Imogen awakes in a strange place and situation after she has taken the sleeping-potion, she does not know whether she dreams or not. She says (Act IV, Sc. 2):

> .....I hope I dream;
> For so I thought I was a cave-keeper,
> And cook to honest creatures; but 'tis not so,
> 'Twas but a bolt of nothing, shot at nothing,
> Which the brain makes of fumes. Our very eyes
> Are sometimes like our judgments, blind. Good faith,
> I tremble still with fear; but if there be
> Yet left in heaven as small a drop of pity
> As a wren's eye, fear'd gods, apart of it!
> The dream's here still; even when I wake, it is
> Without me, as within me, not imagin'd, felt.

We can see in this passage that Shakespeare well understands that the sense of touch is the sense of certitude. It is the sense of touch that tells Imogen that her situation is not just a dream, but real - that it is outside her as well as inside her. It is for the same reason that Lear pricks his finger with a pin when he recovers from his madness and sleep (*King Lear,* Act IV, Sc.7):

> I will not swear these are my hands. Let's see.
> I feel this pin prick.....

But when Imogen thinks it is only her imagination, she says:

> .....but 'tis not so,
> 'Twas but a bolt of nothing, shot at nothing,
> Which the brain makes of fumes. .....

One is struck by how often Shakespeare speaks of *nothing* in comparison to the imagination and of *fumes or air* which seem to be without substance. In *Romeo and Juliet*, after Mercutio speaks of Queen Mab and dreams, Romeo says (Act I, Sc. 4):

Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace!
Thou talk'st of nothing!

And Mercutio replies:

True, I talk of dreams
Which are the children of an idle brain,
Begot of nothing, but vain phantasy,
Which is as thin a substance as the air
And more inconstant than the wind.....

A dream is nothing we say or about nothing, begot of nothing, unless of fumes or air which are like nothing substantial. In the play which has dream in its title, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare gives the reason why he as a poet understands so well these things (Act V, Sc. 1):

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.....
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination.

The words "airy nothing" here can be compared with the words above "Begot of nothing, but vain phantasy, Which is as thin of substance as the air". The reason why the imagination is the cause of error rather that the senses is because the senses are in the presence of objects but the imagination in their absence. And the reason why the imagination rather than reason is the main cause of error on the side of the knowing powers is because reason is apt to have a reason for what it says (except when it blindly follows the imagination) while the imagination is free to imagine without any reason or cause for what it is imagining. As Shakespeare notes in his early work, *Venus And Adonis* (lines 897-898):

'tis a causeless fantasy, And childish error

The last line in the passage quoted above from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Act V. Sc. 1) is significant for Shakespeare's awareness of the imagination as the cause of error: "Such tricks hath strong imagination." This line is followed by two examples:

> Such tricks hath strong imagination
> That if it would but apprehend some joy,
> It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
> Or in the night, imagining some fear,
> How easy is a bush suppos'd a bear.

*Trick* is the common word for deception. To say that imagination tricks us is to say that it deceives us. When Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* is being deceived by the letter, but does not think he is being deceived, he says (Act II, Sc. 5):

> Daylight and champian discovers not more: this is open...I do not now fool myself, to let imagination jade me, for every reason excites to this, that my lady loves me.

The words "to let imagination jade me" mean "to let imagination trick me." (A *jade* was a worthless nag or horse that would cause one to stumble.)

There is also an order to be seen in what Shakespeare says about the causes of deception on the side of the heart or desiring powers. We have seen that filth, or our own moral vices, are a cause of deception on the side of the heart. And in the *Merchant of Venice*, we have seen that pride in particular among the vices is a cause of error. There are other places where Shakespeare singles out pride, notably in the sub-plot of *Twelfth Night* where Malvolio is deceived because of his pride or self-love (in the bad sense of self-love). Malvolio is the steward of Olivia and early in the play she notes his dominant vice (Act I, Sc. 5):

> O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and
> taste with a distemper'd appetite.

The name *Malvolio* also (in accordance with the practice of comic drama) hints at the defect of his will. And it is upon this vice of pride or self-love that Maria says she will build the great deception and disgrace of Malvolio. Speaking of him in Act II, Sc. 3, as she opens her plot to her companions in the trick to be played on Malvolio, she says about him:

> The div'l a Puritan that he is, or anything constantly but a time-pleaser, an affection'd ass, that cons state without book and utters it by great swarths. The best persuaded of himself, so cramm'd (as he thinks) with excellencies that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him: and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work.

Pride has a special place among the vices and hence among the causes of deception on the side of the heart. For pride is the queen of the vices as Gregory taught us. And that Shakespeare saw the special place of pride is shown in the place where he most explicitly speaks of the representation of virtue and vice by the dramatist and actor. This is in the advice which Hamlet gives to the players (*Hamlet*, Act II, Ac. 2):

> o'erstep not the modesty of nature: for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

Instead of saying "to show virtue her own face, vice her own image". Shakespeare says *scorn* instead of *vice*. Now scorn, as can be seen in many passages of Shakespeare, refers to pride, being an effect of it. Thus instead of saying vice, he puts the queen of the vices, pride, (by a metonym or using the name of the effect for the cause), whence we can understand also its subjects, the other moral vices.

One last point can be made about these two chief causes of deception, imagination (or false imagination as Thomas calls it) and pride. They seem to come together and reinforce each other and to be, as it were, one cause of error, in fact the beginning of error in man. There is one very striking passage of

Thomas Aquinas where, following Dionysius, he speaks of the *principium*, the beginning or source of error in man, as being *phantasia proterva*. The passage is in the *Quaestio Disputata De Anima* (Art. 19, Ad 8):

> malum hominis est secundum tria (scilicet phantasiam protervam, quae scilicet est principium errandi.....

*Phantasia* from the Greek can be carried over into English by the word *imagination*. *Proterva* is translated in Cassell's by trampling upon, violent, bold, impudent, shameless. I would choose here the word *bold* which tells us that we should not admire bold thinkers. Boldness seems to be tied to pride so that bold imagination touches upon the knowing powers and the desiring powers.

When we look again at the casket scenes from *The Merchant of Venice*, we see that Shakespeare in both errors – the error of the Prince of Morocco and the error of the Prince of Arragon – has actually touched upon bold imagination in both cases, even though in comparison to each other the gold chest involves more the cause on the side of the knowing powers and the silver chest, that on the side of the heart. When Bassanio passes over the silver chest, he does so for somewhat the same reason as he does the gold chest. Both appeal to men in an outward way and, hence, one is led to imagine the interior to be in accord with the exterior. But the gold is more deceptive in this way – that is, on the side of the knowing powers – than is the silver chest. But when the Prince of Morocco opens the gold chest, he is chastised for his boldness. Listen again to the words on the scroll in the eye of the skull which he finds (alas!) instead of the portrait of Portia:

> All that glisters is not gold –
> Often have you heard that told.
> Many a man his life hath sold
> But my outside to behold.
> Gilded tombs do worms infold.
> Had you been as wise as bold,
> Young in limbs, in judgment old,
> Your answer had not been inscroll'd.
> Fare you well; your suit is cold.

The first part touches upon the cause on the side of the knowing powers and the line "Had you been as wise as bold" on the side of the heart. This boldness or audacity is opposed to that fear of mistake which makes us go forward

slowly and carefully so as to avoid error. The Prince of Morocco, like the Prince of Arragon, is deceived by bold imagination.

The reason why pride and false imagination cooperate so closely and become, as it were, one cause is that the object of pride and empty glory is a *bonum imaginatum* or imagined good as Thomas points out in many places. Hence, in the scene where Malvolio takes the bait, Fabian says (*Twelfth Night,* Act II, Sc. 5):

> O. peace! Now he's deeply in. Look how imagination
> blows him.

Thus the pride of Malvolio makes him trust his imagination while the imagination inflates him with pride. The proud man is apt to imagine (falsely) himself to be greater than he is and this increases his pride by its object.

We can also see from the beginning of error in us, bold or proud imagination, why the poet can be so important a witness to the causes of error. For a man is a poet most of all by his imagination and the pride of a great man is tragic as Sophocles has taught us while the pride of a man like Malvolio or Parolles is laughable and comic.

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