Allusions to Edmund Campion in *Twelfth Night*

C. Richard Desper

The Elizabethan Age underwent a continuing crisis of religion that was marked by a deepening polarization of thought between the supporters of the recently established Protestant Church and the larger number of adherents to the Roman Catholic faith. Of these latter, Edmund Campion may be taken as the archetype. Well known as an Englishman who fled to the Continent for conscience's sake, he returned to England as a Jesuit priest, was executed by the English government in 1581 and was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church in 1970.

It has been observed that the author of the Shakespeare plays displays a considerable sympathy and familiarity with the practices and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church.[1] The intent here is to show a link between this English Catholic leader and the writer of the drama, *Twelfth Night,* as revealed by allusions to Edmund Campion in Act IV, scene ii of that play.

A Brief Outline of Campion's Life

Though Edmund Campion (1540-1581) was a scholar at Oxford University under the patronage of Queen Elizabeth I's court favorite, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, Campion's studies of theology, church history, and the church fathers led him away from the positions taken by the Church of England. From Campion's point of view, to satisfy the new orthodoxy of the Church of England, a reconstructionist interpretation of church history was being set forth, one that he found difficult to reconcile with what he actually found in the writings of those fathers.[2] Had the veil been swept away? Were St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom really Anglicans rather than Roman Catholics? Or were the church authorities trimming their sails to the exigencies of temporal policy? Questions such as these dogged Campion, and eventually his position at Oxford became untenable since he could not make the appropriate gestures of adherence to the established church.[3] Instead, Campion retreated from Oxford to Dublin in 1569, where he drew less attention and enjoyed the protection of Sir Henry Sidney, Lord Deputy for Ireland, and

---

Richard Desper, Ph.D., is a physicist and independent Shakespeare scholar.

the patronage of Sir James Stanihurst, Speaker of the Irish House of Commons, who planned to have Campion participate in the founding of what was to become Trinity College in Dublin.[4]

During this period a number of signficant events took place. In 1568, the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots, was driven from her realm into England, where she came under the protection and custody of the English Crown. Immediately after came the rebellion of the northern Earls of Northumberland and Westmoreland in the winter of 1569, who sought to place Mary on the English throne. Then, in the spring of 1570, Pope Pius V issued a *bull* excommunicating Queen Elizabeth and releasing her subjects from their obligation of obediance to her. After the death of Pius V, an inquiry to Rome regarding this bull elicited the response that "as long as the Queen [Elizabeth] remained *de facto* ruler, it was lawful for Catholics to obey her in civil matters and cooperate in all just things... that it was unlawful for any private person, not wearing uniform and authorized to do so as an act of war, to slay any tyrant whatsoever, unless the tyrant, for example, had invaded his country in arms" (Waugh 94-5).

In short, English Catholics were rejoined to follow the path of Sir Thomas More, being the Crown's loyal servant in all matters save religion. However, as Waugh conceeds, "It was possible to deduce from this decision that the [English] Catholics were a body of potential rebels, who only waited for foreign invasion to declare themselves. This was the sense in which [William] Cecil [Lord Treasurer and the Queen's most trusted councillor] read it, for he was reluctant to admit the possibility of anyone being both a patriotic Englishman and an opponent of his *regime*" (Waught 95). The English government then enacted laws more restrictive to English Catholics. In 1570, the year of the Papal Bull, it was made an act of high treason, punishable by death, to bring into the country "any bull, writing, or instrument obtained from the Bishop of Rome" or "to absolve or reconcile" any of the Queen's subjects to the Bishop of Rome (Waugh 117).

In this atmosphere even Dublin became dangerous for Campion. He fled Ireland for Belgium in June of 1572, arriving at the English College founded by exiled English Catholics in Douai. The next year he went on to Rome to join the Society of Jesus. After training in Vienna, he became Professor of Rhetoric at the new Jesuit University in Prague, where he was ordained a priest in the Society of Jesus in 1578 (Waugh 81-4). It was in Prague in 1580 that he received the call to return to England to minister to English Catholics (More 72-3). During his ministry, which lasted from the summer of 1580 to the summer of 1581, Campion traveled from town to town in disguise, passing via an underground network of English Catholics, offering the Mass and other Church sacraments to Catholics. He was arrested in the town of Lyford by

English authorities, with the assistance of a paid informant, in July 1581, and conveyed to the Tower of London.[5]

Since his ministry had attracted a great deal of public attention, the government initially made an effort to persuade Campion to abandon his faith. Failing that, it made a second effort to discredit him. Four times in September, Campion was brought from his dungeon in the Tower for public "conferences," at which scholars and clergymen representing the Crown and the Church of England disputed with him in an effort to best him intellectually. William Cecil (Lord Burghley) and First Secretary Sir Francis Walsingham, Burghley's spymaster, also sought to taint Campion with the brush of treason by maintaining that the primary goal of his mission was to incite the English to rebel against Queen Elizabeth and replace her with Mary, Queen of Scots. While Campion's ministry was in itself, by English law, sufficient for the death penalty (in that he offered Mass and heard confessions), the government preferred to show that his ministry also involved stirring English Catholics to rebellion. Finally, on November 20th, a trial was held in which Campion and seven other Catholics taken with him were charged with treason. Suitable witnesses endeavored to make the label of traitor stick; the trial ended in a guilty verdict, and Campion was executed by hanging at Tyburn on December 1, 1581.[6,7]

***Twelfth Night* and Edmund Campion**

The allusions to Campion are found in a single scene—Act four, Scene two—in which Feste the Clown disguises himself as "Sir Topas the Curate" to harangue the unfortunate Malvolio, who has been shut up in a cellar as a lunatic as the result of pranks engineered by Feste, Sir Toby Belch and Maria. In the following speech by Feste to Maria and Sir Toby, the Campion allusions are highlighted in boldface.

> Clown: Bonos dies, Sir Toby: for, as **the old hermit of Prague,** that **never saw pen and ink,** very wittily said to a **niece of King Gorboduc, "That that is is"**; so I, **being master Parson,** am **master Parson;** for, what is "that" but "that"; and "is" but "is"? (IV.ii.15-19)[8]

In this speech of less than 50 words, which appears to resemble nothing but clownish nonsense, there are no less than five phrases which refer directly to Edmund Campion and his 1580-81 mission to England.

The old hermit of Prague: Prague was Campion's last assignment before his mission to England; indeed, nearly six of his less than nine years on the Continent were spent in Prague. He may be thought of as a hermit in either of two ways: in that hermits were holy men who sought solitude in their quest for holiness, or that Campion's stay in Prague was considered to be an exile not

only from England but from Englishmen. Waugh notes that, while at Prague, "the only Englishmen with whom he appears to have had any contact (besides Father Ware, who was at the college with him), is Philip Sidney [son of the former Lord Deputy for Ireland], who arrived in 1576 as English Ambassador to congratulate the Emperor Rudolph on his succession" (Waugh 81-2).

Never saw pen and ink: This refers to an episode which occurred in the "conference" of September 24, 1581, the third of four such conferences, in which Campion was opposed by one Master Fulke:

> "If you dare, let me show you Augustine and Chrysostom," he [Campion] cried at one moment, "if you dare."
>
> Fulke: "Whatever you can bring, I have answered already in writing against others of your side. And yet if you think you can add anything, put it in writing and I will answer it."
>
> Campion: "Provide me with ink and paper and I will write."
>
> Fulke: "I am not to provide you ink and paper."
>
> Campion: "I mean, procure me that I may have liberty to write."
>
> Fulke: "I know not for what cause you are restrained of that liberty, and therefore I will not take upon me to procure it."
>
> Campion: "Sue to the Queen that I may have liberty to oppose. I have been now thrice opposed. It is reason that I should oppose once."
>
> Fulke: "I will not become a suitor for you." (Allen 15)

In this exchange, we see that Campion, having been deprived of the means of preparing a defense, such as access to books containing the teachings of St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom, seizes upon Fulke's apparent offer of writing materials. Fulke immediately realizes that the has made a tactical error, for the government's plan in no way involves providing Campion with the means to write, since much of Campion's success lay in his writings. First there had been an exposition and explanation of his mission, written by Campion in the summer of 1580 immediately after arriving in England, which circulated throughout the country in handwritten copies, yet comes down in history under the ironic title of "Campion's Brag." In it, Campion disavows any political aspect to his ministry. Then a book bearing the name *Ten Reasons* was published by an underground Catholic press (Edwards 19). It first appeared at the Oxford University Commencement of June 27, 1581, having been surreptitiously placed on the benches of the church at which the exercises took place.

In the exchange quoted above, Campion plainly had bested Fulke in their battle of wits, for Fulke denies Campion the wherewithal to write even though he himself had challenged Campion to do so. Nonetheless, it may be said of Campion with good reason that he "Never saw pen and ink."

Niece of King Gorboduc: Gorboduc was a mythical King of England and

the subject of an early Elizabethan play by Norton and Sackville.[9] Since the play contains no role for a "niece," the allusion is not to be found in the text. Let us look at the issue from another point of view: did Queen Elizabeth I have an uncle who can be identified as a "mythical King of England?" Arthur, Prince of Wales, was the first son of King Henry VII and older brother to Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII. This prince would have become "King Arthur" except that he died before his father, who was succeeded instead by the younger brother, Henry. If you are seeking the niece of a mythical King of England, the niece of a potential King Arthur might do.

A second possible link between Elizabeth and the "niece to King Gorboduc" may be found through one of the dramatists, Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, and later 1st Earl of Dorset. The father of Lord Buckhurst, Sir Richard Sackville, had been a first cousin to Anne Boleyn, Queen Elizabeth's mother.[10] Given the predeliction of people of the time for imprecision in designating family relationships (cousin, uncle or niece was taken to mean almost any blood relationship), it is not farfetched to consider Queen Elizabeth I to be a "niece" of one of the authors of *King Gorboduc.*

"That that is is": Spoken by the Hermit of Prague, this is taken as a religious affirmation, just as Campion's mission to England was a religious affirmation. The reconstructed church history that Campion was expected to embrace at Oxford was, from the Catholic viewpoint, a denial of reality, and his mission was to affirm the truth in the face of official displeasure.

On a deeper level, this could be an allusion to one of the most profound passages in the Old Testament, in which the Lord, speaking to Moses (who had asked what name he should give for the Lord) declares, "I am that I am."[11] This may be interpreted as, "Because I exist, I exist," which very neatly identifies the subject "I" in scholastic logic. In other words, all that exists owes its exstience to a separate Creator, save one, the Creator of all, who is the source of all existence, even his own. The Hermit of Prague is not the Creator; thus, he renders the phrase in the third person, declaring that God Is, because He Is; he owes his existence to no earthly agency, certainly to no King or Queen. To such a Person, Campion owes a higher allegiance than his allegiance to the Crown. Thus, **"That that is is"** is the essence of Campion's position vis-a-vis his God and his Queen.

Master Parson: Robert Persons was a fellow Jesuit who traveled with Campion from Rome to France; the two separated to enter England and, for reasons of security, pursued their ministries in England individually, meeting each other occasionally. Persons, sometimes referred to as Parsons and a former Oxford classmate of Campion's, was in charge of the Jesuit mission to England, including the clandestine press that was used to set forth the Catholic position until its capture.[12] Persons continued his ministry within and without England

for several decades after Campion's death.

The allusions referred to here should not be thought of as topical in being timely references from which the theatrical audience would be expected to recognize and draw delight. Certainly, events during 1580-81 would no longer be timely in 1602, the first production of *Twelfth Night*, as noted in Manningham's diary. Moreover, considering the official attitude toward Campion and his fellow Jesuits, inserting sympathetic allusions to Campion into a play would have been quite risky during the 1580s, and would remain so well into the next century. Nonetheless, one would have needed specific background knowledge about the Campion situation to recognize the allusions, and by 1602, most of the principals in the capture, interrogation and trial of Campion—including Lord Burghley, Sir Francis Walsingham, and the Earl of Leceister—were deceased. Others, such as Anthony Munday, would not have been admitted to a private performance at the Middle Temple intended for members and their guests. Further, we should not expect that the Queen would be in attendance at an Inns of Court performance. (This is deduced from the historical record of the *Gorboduc* performances, in which the Inner Temple performance was followed by a second performance at court.) I think instead that the allusions were intended for posterity, and were written into the text in the hope that the play would some day appear in print.

It should also be recognized that the allusions to Edmund Campion have little bearing on characterizations and allusions outside their immediate context. Thus, Malvolio is identified as a Protestant, specifically as a Puritan, earlier in the play (II.iii.151-56), but in the Campion allusions, he figures as a Catholic priest. This is not a contradiction since the audience for the play was not expected to hear the Campion allusions. Indeed, it could have boded ill for the playwright had they done so. On one level, the dramatist may have been using the Malvolio character as a caricature of the courtier Christopher Hatton, as some have proposed. For one scene, however, the author has Malvolio imprisoned and sees the opportunity for inserting something he has been suppressing for decades: his bitterness over the trial and execution of one he saw as an innocent man. The average audience member was expected to take the allusions as theatrical nonsense and then to forget about them as the next speech was delivered.

Further Allusions to Campion in Act Four, Scene Two

Having established the allusions to St. Edmund Campion in the Clown's opening speech (IV.ii.5-12), the tenor of the remainder of the scene, in the context of Campion's imprisonment, becomes apparent. The Clown is seen assuming the role of the learned man to dispute with the prisoner, just as men of learning brought Campion to dispute at the aforementioned conferences.

The dramatist's attitude is revealed early on by Sir Toby, as the Clown, posing as Sir Topas the Curate, begins his encounter with the prisoner:

Sir Toby: The Knave counterfeits well, a good knave. (IV.ii.21-22)

Thus is established at the outset that the playwright regards the conference to be held, like the conferences Campion was brought to, as a sham, a counterfeit, with a knave posing as a learned man acting as the examiner. "Sir Topas" proceeds to deal with Malvolio as a man possessed and in need of exorcism, even though, as the Clown, he knows full well that Malvolio, whatever his faults might be, is neither insane nor possessed.

Clown: Out, hyperbolical fiend! How vesext thou this man! Talkest thou nothing but of ladies? (IV.ii.29-30)

The irony in the play now develops to match that of the Campion conferences, where Campion was called upon to assent to facts which, from his point of view as a scholar and a Catholic, were not facts at all.

Malvolio: Good Sir Topas, do not think I am mad. They have laid me here in hideous darkness.

Clown: Fie, thou dishonest Satan!... Say'st thou that house is dark?

Malvolio: As hell, Sir Topas.

Clown: Why, it hath bay windows transparent as barricadoes...

Malvolio: I am not mad, Sir Topas. I say to you, this house is dark.

Clown: Madman, thou errest. I say, there is no darkness but ignorance, in which thou art more puzzl'd than the Egyptians in their fog. (IV.ii.33-48)

Next the dramatist shows us the dishonesty of the situation from his own perspective. Malvolio asks for a test of his lucidity, and the Clown asks a question, to which Malvolio gives what would be, to any Christian scholar, the correct answer in terms of the teachings of their faith.

Malvolio: ...Make the trial of it in any constant question.

Clown: What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild fowl?

Malvolio: That the soul of our grandam might haply inhabit a bird.

Clown: What think'st thou of his opinion?

Malvolio: I think nobly of the soul, and no way approve his opinion.

Clown: Fare thee well. Remain thou still in darkness. Thou shalt hold th' opinion of Pythagoras ere I will allow of thy wits... (IV.ii.52-63)

Thus, rather than maintaining the Christian teaching of the resurrection on the last day, the Clown chides Malvolio for not upholding the pagan teaching of Pythagoras concerning the transmigration of souls. Likewise, Campion, first during his days at Oxford and then at his conferences, was expected to provide answers which, by his view, were illogical and indefensible, but which accorded with the needs of the political powers of the day. The playwright thus demonstrates for us a world turned upside down, with clowns passing themselves off as men of learning, while men of learning such as Campion are pressed

to deny what they believe to be true to serve political ends. I think the dramatist's opinion about such proceedings is revealed early on in the scene, when the Clown dons an academic gown for his impersonation of Sir Topas:

> Clown: Well, I'll put it on, and I will dissemble my self in't; and I would I were the first that ever dissembled in such a gown. (IVii.5-7)

Campion's Innocence or Guilt

As noted earlier, the English government wanted to convict Campion not for his religion but for treason against the Crown; specifically, for plotting the assassination or overthrow of Queen Elizabeth I. Despite questioning scores of witnesses under duress, they were unable to show any treasonable aspect in Campion's speech, writing or activities during his English ministry. The first indictment drawn up against Campion stated that he "did traitorously pretend to have power to absolve the subjects of the said Queen from their natural obediance to her majesty," with a blank space left farther down the indictment for the name of a prosecution witness who had been absolved as stated (Waugh 206-7).

No suitable witness could be found to testify against Campion to this effect, however, and so this count of the indictment was dropped. Eventually, witnesses were obtained, the chief being Anthony Munday, a journeyman writer and traveler who had presented himself to exiled Enlgish Catholics as a co-religionist. He accused Campion of having formed a conspiracy in Rome and Rheims in 1580 to assassinate Queen Elizabeth, to encourage a foreign Catholic invasion and also foment a rebellion of English Catholics. The evidence brought forth to support these charges has been found wanting by the *Dictionary of National Biography* and the*Encyclopaedia Britannica.*[13] Campion's own writings deny such a charge. In the previously mentioned Campion's Brag he is "strictly forbidden... to deal in any respect with matter of State or Policy" (Waugh 236). Simpson reports that Campion "determined, therefore, as far as he might, to confine himself to the merely religious aspects of the controversy... and to refuse to make himself an umpire between two high contending parties so far above him as Pope and Queen" (Simpson 274).

Religious Attitudes in *Twelfth Night*

If the passage cited alludes to Edmund Campion, one must also ask in what spirit is the allusion to be taken: as tribute or jeer. To properly answer the question, we should examine the religious leanings of the author indicated elsewhere in the play as well as in the other Shakespeare plays. Mutschmann and Wentersdorf see that "Sir Topas," the pose of the clown Feste in the scene, "is of the same stamp as other Protestant ministers in Shakespeare's plays and was conceived with the deliberate intention of creating an undignified and ludi-

crous impression" (329). The steward Malvolio, protagonist of the play, is portrayed as a Puritan with "overweening" pride, and given to vanity and foppery—all in the most unflattering spirit. In contrast, the priest who secretly marries Sebastian and Olivia, while appearing only in scenes IV.iii and V.i with a single speech, is depicted as someone we can confide in with complete trust. Indeed, the entire drama is steeped in sympathy toward the Catholic faith.

The comic knight Sir John Falstaff is also cited (Mutschmann and Wentersdorf 345-49) as being a caricature of the Puritan type, leading a licentious life but counting himself among the saved. Significantly, the original name gvien to the character was Sir John Oldcastle, a 15th century Lollard who was executed during the reign of Henry V. The author was evidently compelled by authority, in response to objections by Oldcastle's descendants, to change the character's name to that of Falstaff. Interestingly, a rival play, *Sir John Oldcastle,* written by the same Anthony Munday who testified against Campion, was staged in 1599 and portrayed the historical figure of Oldcastle in a much more favorable light. Yet this same Munday is regarded as the author of the play, *Sir Thomas More,* which offers a highly favorable portrait of this Catholic matyr.[14] (In the play, More is condemned for refusing to lend his signature to certain unspecified articles; historically, these constituted King Henry's Act of Supremacy, allowing them to assume supreme power over the Church in England.) Whether Munday wrote the play as author or copyist has been the subject of much debate.[15] One must conclude that Munday's contribution to Sir T*homas More* as author or copyist was made when Munday was an apparent Catholic, before his testimony against Edmund Campion. Indeed, Munday's later publications, including a pamphlet which detailed the execution of Edmund Campion and his companions, were aggressively anti-Catholic.

Campion and *Gorboduc*

The historical record offers other links between *Gorboduc* and the Campion allusions in *Twelfth Night.* There is the coincidence with the title of the latter play, for Gorboduc originally was intended for a single performance on Twelfth Night; that is, January 6, 1562.[16] A second performance was given at Whitehall at the command of the Queen, on January 12, 1562. (The original performance of *Gorboduc* took place in the Inner Temple, one of the four Inns of Court in London.) Remarkably, the only known performance of *TN* during its author's lifetime was at another Inn, the Middle Temple, as reported by Manningham in his diary: "At our feast we had a play called Twelve Night, or *What You Will*" (Neilson and Hill 279). Such a performance would have been a private one, limited to those connected with the MIddle Temple or invited by its members.

Yet another coincidence relates to one of the dramatists of *Gorboduc*—Thomas Norton, listed in the original edition of 1565 as the author of Acts I-

III (Cauthen xxix). Norton played a prominent role on the English government's behalf in the suppression of Catholics, traveling in 1579 as far as Rome, where he sought out damaging information about English Catholics living in the city. In 1581, he was one of the commissioners at the trial of Edmund Campion. The following year he complained to Sir Francis Walsingham about the nickname, "Rackmaster General," that was being applied to him for his part in torturing Catholics (Simpson 266; Cauthen 80).

Concluding Thoughts

During the Feast of the Epiphany in Elizabethan times, which took place on January 6 and was commonly known as Twelfth Day, gifts were exchanged in commemoration of the gifts of the Magi. It was a holiday of feasting, celebration and revelry. This is the tradition usually associated with the origin of the name of the play *Twelfth Night.* On the other hand, if the playwright had allusions to Edmund Campion in mind, then a covert meaning for the title could have been intended. In this regard, one should recall the spirit associated with these revelries: that nothing is what it seems; that meanings are turned inside out. To quote Feste: "Nothing that is so is so" (IV.ii.9). Perhaps this spirit explains the paradox of a play which, on the face of it, is a boisterous, rollicking comedy, yet also contains allusions to that fateful time of Campion's mission, and so serving as the playwright's *Ave Atque Vale* for this tragic figure of the period.

Notes

1. H. Mutschmann and K. Wentersdorf, *Shakespeare and Catholicism.* 1969. 16-21, 329-351. Roland M. Frye, *Shakespeare and Cristian Doctrine.* 1963. Hugh R. Williamson, *The Day Shakespeare Died.* London, 1962. 11-25.
2. Henry More, *The Elizabethan Jesuits: Historia Missionis Anglicanae Societatis Jesu (1660).* Trans. Francis Edwards, SJ. London, 1981. 43.
3. Evelyn Waugh, *Edmund Campion.* London, 1946.
4. *Dictionary of National Biography.* Eds. Sir L. Stephen and Sir S. Lee. Oxford, 1921. III, 851.
5. William Cardinal Allen, *A Brief History of the Glorious Martyrdom of the 12 Revenend Priests: Fr. Edmund Campion and his Companions.* 1584. Ed. H. Pollen, SJ. London, 1908. 10.
6. Francis Edwards, SJ, *The Jesuits in England: from 1580 to the Present Day.* Kent, 1985. 20.
7. Richard Simpson, *Edmund Campion.* London, 1848. 279-313.
8. All quotations of Shakespeare are taken from *The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare.* Eds. W.A. Neilson and C.J. Hill. 1942. 279.
9. Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex.*

1565. Ed. Irby B. Cauthen Jr. Regents Renaissance Drama Series. 1970. iii.
10. DNB, XVII, 585-589.
11. Exodus, III, 14 (King James). The phrase "I am that I am" also appears in Shakespeare's sonnet 121, a particularly poignant verse about a good man unjustly perceived as an evil person. "Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed..."
12. The name "Persons," sometimes rendered as "Parsons" in writings of the day, was pronounced with something of a Irish lilt, the first syllable rhyming with "fair." According to Simpson (387), "Pearsons" might well stand as a modern rendering of the name. Also see DNB, III, 851.
13. DNB, III, 850-854; *The Encylopaedia Britannica.* 1973. 4, 721.
14. The play *Sir Thomas More* survived as a manucript written largely in a hand identifiable as that of Anthony Munday, surfacing in 1727 in the possession of one Alexander Murray and his patron, the 2nd Earl of Oxford (of the Harley creation).
15. *Sir Thomas More.* Attributed to Anthony Munday. Eds. V. Gabrieli and G. Melchiori. 1990. 12-16.
16. *The Diary of Henry Machyn.* 1565. Ed. J.G. Nichols. London, 1848.