

CHAPTER 24. NEEDIE NOTHING TRIMMED IN JOLLITY

Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks....

--Hamlet

W.H. Auden captures the elusive character of the great comic symbol of the Shakespeare canon, Sir John Falstaff -- sometimes thought to be a mere Lord of Misrule -- when he calls him at heart "a comic symbol for the supernatural order of charity" (1962 198). Roy Battenhouse, pursuing Auden's insight, asserts that the traditional image of Falstaff as inveterate trickster is "more mask than inner man." The inner man, maintains Battenhouse, reveals depths of wisdom concealed beneath the libidinous braggadocio of his exterior display of anti-heroism:

The Sermon on the Mount enjoins Christians to show charity through a secret almsgiving. Could this be a clue to the enigma of Falstaff's behavior? Perhaps so, I think, provided we put beside it Lord Raglan's intuition that Falstaff's vocation in the public world is that of court fool and soothsayer. Such a double hypothesis, in any case, seems to me to warrant a trying out and testing. For it could mean that while as "allowed fool" Falstaff is shamming vices and enacting parodies, his inner intent is a charitable almsgiving of brotherly self-humiliation and fatherly truth-telling.

(1994 303)

Battenhouse's perception of the division between Falstaff's public role as "court fool and soothsayer" -- an "allowed fool" to Prince Hal as Feste is to Olivia -- and his covert identity as a holy almsgiver seems eminently plausible to this writer. That many details which confirm this impression, perhaps the most vivid and memorable ones, are delivered in comic fashion need not be any deterrence to the theory. On the contrary, the paradox is implicit in Auden's analysis of the character, for whom nothing -- and therefore everything -- is sacred. Battenhouse even discovers the scriptural basis for Falstaff's peculiar claim that he was "born about three of the clock in the afternoon" in the passage from Mark 15.39 in which the Roman Centurion, at three o'clock in the afternoon, cries out "Truly, this man was a Son of God." As Battenhouse goes on to indicate, moreover, the two identities -- the "son of God" and the "tun of tallow" -- coalesce in Falstaff's subtle moralizing against the courtly hypocrisy of heroic figures such as Hotspur, Hal or Henry IV. Comparing himself to Pharaoh's fat kine, he intimates "that England under King Henry is comparable to an Egypt of spiritual darkness under a troubled Pharaoh, and that [he] embodies within his English-Egypt a God-given plenty that could save England from the famine figured in the lean Prince Hal" (Battenhouse 306).

However, like the other "allowed fools" who constitute a definite Shakespearean type -- Touchstone, Feste, Lavache or even the twin Dromios of *Comedy of Errors* -- the comic holy man Falstaff frequently runs short of cash. He embodies the principle of the supernatural order of charity, *in comic fashion*, by never having any money to give away. If he had anything, Falstaff would give. But when his thieving confederates try to rob him they can only find an IOU for unpaid bills to the tavern hostess Mistress Quickly.

Like de Vere, Falstaff begs a thousand pounds from the state to underwrite his dramatic activities in the Boar's Head tavern. Consider the scene with minute care: In the first act of *II Henry IV*, Falstaff asks the Lord Chief Justice, who has come to question him about the Gadshill Robbery, to lend him "a thousand pound to furnish me forth." The Lord Chief Justice, who has been cross-examining Falstaff about his impecunious condition, refuses with these words: "Not a penny, not a penny, you are too impatient to bear crosses" (1.2.222-226). This exchange between Falstaff and the Lord Chief Justice is not only emblematic of Shakespeare's well-known cavalier attitude toward worldly wealth, but even parodies the specific circumstances surrounding Edward de Vere's 1000 pound grant, previously discussed in chapter four. Furthermore, the passage can be *directly linked* to the de Vere Bible; it parodies the exchange between Jesus and the rich young man seeking salvation at Mark 10.21¹, in which

Jesus instructs the man to "sell all that thou hast, and give to the poore...and come followe me, and *take up the cross*" (G). This verse, like many others on economic themes, is marked in de

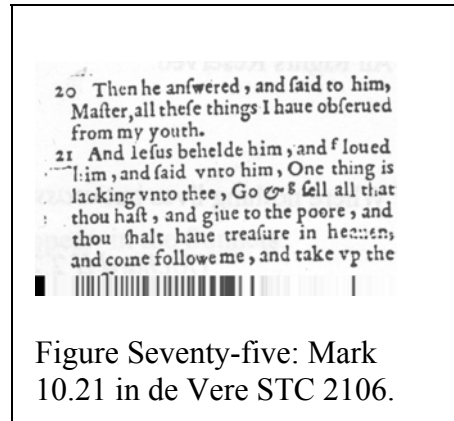


Figure Seventy-five: Mark 10.21 in de Vere STC 2106.

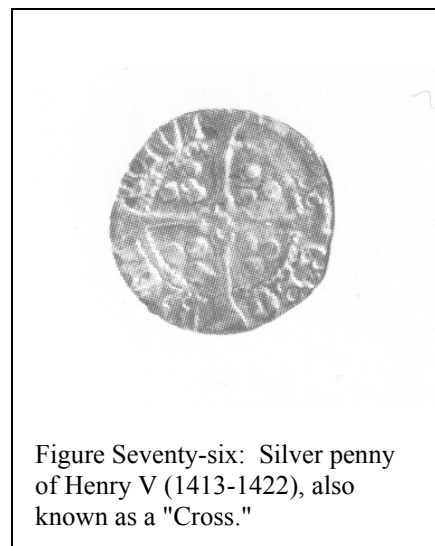


Figure Seventy-six: Silver penny of Henry V (1413-1422), also known as a "Cross."

¹ Both Noble (1935 176) and Shaheen (1987 158) prefer Luke 14.27, "whosoever beareth not his crosse, and cometh after me, can not be my disciple" (G), as the proximate source. Shakespeare's verb, "bear," apparently does connect the passage to Luke 14.27, the only one of six gospel parallels (Matt. 16.24, 10.38; Mark 8.34, 10.21; Luke 9.23 and 14.27) which has "bear" in place of "take up" or "taketh up." This variation, which reflects the different wordings of the Greek texts, which use the imperative verb "αρατω" or the finite form "λαμβάνει" in every case except for Luke 14.27, which reads "οστις ου βασταζει" originates with Tyndale and is still preserved in The New English Bible which, however, translates "βασταζει" as "carry". Modern textual scholars have now rejected the textual basis for the phrase "take up the cross" at Mark 10.21. The phrase remained in the authorized translation of 1611 but has subsequently been removed from standard editions of the Greek New Testament and from English translations.

Despite the lexical basis for linking the passage to Luke 14.27, the structural and thematic reasons for suspecting a connection of a more profound nature with Mark 10.21 are, in the opinion of the present writer, compelling. Mark 10.21 is the only one of the six gospel parallels in which the context of Jesus' admonition is explicitly economic. Only in this verse is Jesus explicitly addressing a rich young follower who is asking how to become one of his faithful followers. It is clear from the context of the Lord Chief Justice's remark that Falstaff is parodying this request when he asks for a thousand pounds.

Vere's Geneva Bible (figure seventy-five). Conclusion? In a single short passage in *II Henry IV* we discover a stunning triangulation of evidence, in which awareness of de Vere's 1000 pound annuity and the traces of his Bible reading combine to enliven and charge the comedy with topical point.

The Chief Justice, however, responds to Falstaff's impecunious request for indulgence with the harsh medicine of Jesus in the Gospel. This response actually *reverses* the real life complaint of de Vere, in his 1602 Danvers Escheat letter to Robert Cecil, that he is obliged to "earnestly solicit her [Majesty] for the report, which I should not have needed to do, *if gospel had been in the mouths of the Lord chief Justice and the Attorney...*" (Fowler 652-53). The author of *Henry IV* has put "gospel in the mouth of the Lord chief Justice" -- but the joke, as we might expect, is self-reflexive. Falstaff mocks himself, and his creator. Here is one of those "immortal jests" for which Tom Nashe praised his literary mentor and for which Falstaff remembers himself, not many lines previously, as "not only witty, but the cause that wit is in other men" (*II Henry IV* 1.2.10). Curiously, the literary historian W.J. Courthope would eventually remember Edward de Vere, in turn, as "not only witty in himself, but the cause of wit in others" (1897 II: 313).

Falstaff's affinity to the author has been noted by a number of Shakespeare critics, among them Frank Harris who observes in this connection that Shakespeare's own irrepressible wit sets him apart "not only from Coleridge and Keats, but also from the world-poets, Goethe, Dante and Homer" (149). Falstaff may be Shakespeare's most complete embodiment of this principle of wit. As Harold Goddard has remarked of Falstaff, he is the quintessence of *play*: one who

goes through life playing. He coins everything he encounters into play, often even into a play. He would rather have the joke on himself and make the imaginative most of it than to have it on the other fellow and let the fun stop there.

(Goddard I: 184)

Even Falstaff's obesity can become a symbol for a precocious, metonymic wit which bears an unmistakable and intimate affinity to authorial consciousness: "I have a whole school of tongues in this belly of mine, and not a tongue of them all speaks any other word *but my name*" (*II Henry IV* 4.3.18-20: emphasis added) -- which potently recalls the famous "Oxfordian" line from the Sonnet 76 that "every word doth almost tell my name." No matter how one examines the hypothesis of Falstaff as author Oxford, from the deconstructed etymology of the name False-Staff=Shake-Speare, to the self-conscious playfulness of the character who "would rather have the joke on himself and take the imaginative most of it than to have it on the other fellow and let the fun stop there," the identification evokes a congress of confirmatory insight.

Oxford's reputation, both for comic wit and fiscal improvidence, is consistent with the portrait of the impecunious fat knight which emerges in the Henriad and *Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Like Sir John, he thought of himself as one "as poor as Job...but not so patient" (*IHV* 1.2.127). Like Sir John, he lived in "great infamy" (1.2.139) because of his prodigal improvidence and his rapier wit. Like Sir John, he was known for having run away from battles -- preferred to fight with words and tall tales. Like Sir John, he begged a thousand pounds from the Elizabethan state to supply his improvidence and underwrite his punster wit. Like Sir John, his own sins were the chief source and whetstone of his irrepressible wit.

By the period of the early 1590s to which the plays allude, his means were indeed "very slender" (1.2.140); he could with some reason, both for his advancing years and his declining fortunes, be compared to "a candle, the better part burnt out" (1.2.157). And declining his fortunes were. During the fourteen years between his marriage to Anne Cecil in 1571 and the granting of the privy seal warrant in 1586, Oxford sold not fewer than forty-nine estates. On December 2, 1591, having failed to raise cash by commuting his annuity into a lump sum payment of 5000 pounds in May, he finally alienated the ancestral estate of the de Veres in Essex, Castle Hedingham, to his three daughters and Lord Burghley. Ward, commenting on Oxford's quixotic attempt to exchange his thousand pound annuity into a lump sum of only five times that amount, observes that his financial imprudence "seems most extraordinary" and proposes that Burghley "who knew by bitter experience his son-in-law's complete ignorance of the value of money" (306), must have shrugged his shoulders in dismay.

Oxford's lifelong preoccupation with financial troubles like those which perplexed Sir John Falstaff is very evident in the annotations in his Geneva Bible. Indeed, the word "poor" is the most frequently occurring word written in the margins of this Bible. Some fifty-one verses in the Bible, almost all of them marked in red ink, concern economic topics such as Jubilee (Deut. 1-4, 7-14), almsgiving (Ez. 18.7; Eccus. 7.10, 14.13, 41.12; Tobit 4.7-11, 16-17; Matt. 6.1-4; Hebrews 13.16; II Corinthians 9.1-15), usury (Ex. 22.25, Lev. 25.36-37; Ez. 18.8) and the radical Christian ideal of poverty (Matt. 5.3, 6.19-21, 19.21; Mark 10.21; Revelations 3.17-20). Among these marked verses is the intriguing example, demonstrating not only the annotator's close interest in the scriptural foundation for acts of charity, but also his knowledge of variant translations even of apocryphal chapters of the Bible, of Eccus. 14.13 (figure seventy-seven).

In the Genevan translation, the verse exhorts the giving of alms to "thy friend." The annotator's correction of the pronoun "him" to

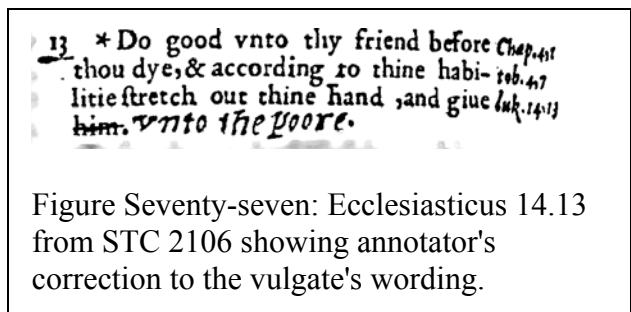


Figure Seventy-seven: Ecclesiasticus 14.13 from STC 2106 showing annotator's correction to the vulgate's wording.

"unto the poore" reflects the wording of the Vulgate Bible, which reads in this place "da pauperi"

(Gramatica 1913). The distinction is of course significant not merely for semantic reasons. There is a profound difference between charity offered to one's "friend" and that given to "the poor"².

Although a very large number of marked verses on economic themes exhibit influence of one kind or another in "Shakespeare," Mark 10.21³ remains of special interest, both for the immediate relevance of its moral to de Vere's situation and because of its frequency of pointed reference in Shakespeare. Although de Vere may have felt as poor as Falstaff, from another point of view he was as rich as Dives, the wealthy man who was tormented in hell while the beggar Lazarus was taken up into the bosom of Abraham in another of Christ's parables (Luke 16). When composing comic characters such as Falstaff, into whom he projected the persona of the court fool, he seems to have frequently recalled the moral of Mark 10.21. Although Shaheen cites five references to the theme of taking up or bearing the cross from the histories⁴, and two more prominent citations are found in the Sonnets⁵, the most intriguing additional reference to the verse is found in *As You Like It*, when the clown of Arden forest, Touchstone, quips back to the tired Celia after she begs him to "bear with me":

For my part, I had rather bear with you, than bear you. Yet I should bear no cross if I did bear you, for I think you have no money in your purse. (2.4.11-14)⁶

As in the example from *II Henry IV*, the economic pun links the passage indisputably to the marked verse in the de Vere Bible, as well as further illustrating Shakespeare's preoccupation with the dilemma of the rich Christian.

Of like significance is the statement of the Clown LaVache in *All's Well that Ends Well*, citing Mark 10.23⁷ or the parallel of Lazarus at Luke 16.20-24 (Noble 196; Shaheen 1993 207):

No, madam, 'tis not so well that I am poor,
Though many of the rich are damned. (1.3.16-17)

The theme, paradoxically for Stratfordians, is pervasive in Shakespeare. Shaheen cites three references to Luke 16 in the tragedies (1987), seven in the histories (1989), and two in the comedies (1993), making it one of Shakespeare's most prominent topoi of Biblical reference.

² This distinction is elaborated at great length, for example, in the 1596 special Homily on Charity, "set forth by Authority" in response to outbreaks of famine and food shortages, entitled *Three Sermons, or Homilies, to Moove Compassion towards the Poore and Needie in These Times* (London: I. Windet for Andrew Maunsell): "Againe, Christ teacheth us here what is true liberalitie, and perfect charitie: nowe to entertayne them that are able to entertaine thee againe, it may be civil courtesie, but this is not true and perfect charitie, it may be recompensed at the handes of men now presently, but it shall not bee rewarded of God in the resurrection of the iust, therefore saith Christ, if thou wilt doe a worke of true charitie, When thou make a feast call the poore" (C-C2: type variation original). This discussion of the distinction between Christian charity, given to "them that never deserve it," and mere exchange of gifts, is elaborated for several pages in the tract.

³ The episode is also found, though without the line about "taking up the cross," in Mt. 19.16-30 and Lk 18.18-30. In Luke the young man is called "a certain ruler" (*τις αυτων αρχων*).

⁴ See the Shakespeare Diagnostics list for a complete survey. To Shaheen's list I add *I Henry 4* 2.1.36-37).

⁵ Sonnets 42.5, 11-12 and 34.9-14; see the previous note for details.

⁶ Shaheen (1993) 162.

⁷ "How hardly do they that have riches, entre into the kingdome of God?" (G).

When Falstaff looks upon Bardolph's red nose he can't help but be reminded of "hell-fire and Dives that liv'd in purple" (*I Henry IV* 3.3.32). The same passage recurs to Falstaff in the next act when he needs a metaphor to capture the essence of his conscripts, who are like "slaves as ragged as Lazarus in the painted cloth, where the glutton's dogs lick'd his sores" (4.2.25). Here Falstaff is apparently unaware of the irony of the comparison of his recruits to Lazarus, since by implication he himself becomes the rich Dives who lived a prodigal existence, untroubled by leprosy or licking dogs, but after death was condemned to the flames of hell.

As Roy Battenhouse observes, Falstaff is habituated to the Dives allusion and "cannot let [it] alone" (309). In *2 Henry IV*, when "Master Dumbledon" refuses to provide him with clothes, Dives is at the tip of his tongue once more:

Let him be damned, like the glutton! Pray God his tongue be hotter.
A whoreson Achitophel! (1.2.34-35)

The problem which Falstaff treats in jest through his iterated references to the parable of Lazarus becomes a primary source of the emotional torment felt by King Lear in another of Shakespeare's great dramas. When Lear cries out on the heath against the injustices of nature he wonders

Poor naked wretches, wherso'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your looped and window'd raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? (3.4.28-32)

A monarch, a man of wealth, power and privilege like Lazarus in Falstaff's tapestry, Lear has suddenly been brought face to face with the radical challenge of Jesus' admonition to give up all that he has in order to follow the Christian path of humble submission to the cross. Considering the fate of hovel-dwellers such as Mad Tom, he rebukes himself for failure to consider the obvious:

I have ta'en
Too little care in this! Take physic, pomp,
Expose thyself to what wretches feel,
That thou mayest shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just. (3.4.32-36)

When the blinded Gloucester hands over his purse to his own son Edgar, disguised as Mad Tom, he explicitly recalls the moral implied in Lear's words, found in another marked verse in the *de Vere Bible*:

Here, take this purse, thou whom the heav'ns plagues
Have humbled to all strokes. That I am wretched
Makes thee the happier, heavens, deal so still!
Let the lust-diet man,
That slaves your ordinance, that will not see,
Because he does not feel, feel your pow'r quickly;

So distribution should undo excess,
And each man have enough.

(4.1.64-71)

Gloucester's synonym for charity -- *distribution*--is drawn, as Judy Kronenfeld has noted -- from Hebrews 13.16 (figure seventy-eight).

The marked admonition appears to have left a deep imprint on the spiritual imagination of the author of King Lear. He remembers it again when Lear tells

Cordelia: "Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia, the gods themselves throw incense" (5.3.20). Roy Battenhouse declares that Lear's words "clearly echo St Paul's words in Hebrew 13.16" (452).

But the most profound manifestation of these verses occurs in the Sonnets, in which the radical Christian admonition to poverty found in verses such as Mark 10.21 or Revelation 3.17-20 has become justification for the erasure of his own name from his works. In Sonnet 146 we read the spiritual confession of a man whose rebel body has been clothed in the finery of the English aristocracy, while the soul "pines within" and "suffers dearth":

Poore soule, the center of my sinfull earth,
My sinfull earth these rebbell powres that thee array,
Why does thy pine within and suffer dearth,
Painting thy outward walls so costlie gay?
Why so large cost having so short a lease,
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?
Shall wormes inheritors of this excesse,
Eate up thy charge? Is this thy bodie's end?
Then soule live thou upon thy servant's losse,
And let that pine to aggravate thy store;
Buy termes divine in selling houres of drosse:
Within be fed, without be rich no more,
So shalt thou feed on death, that feeds on men,
And death once dead, there's no more dying then.

A number of commentators have discerned in the contrast between "outward walls" painted "so costlie gay" and the invisible soul which "pines within and suffers dearth" and "lives upon thy servant's loss" a reference to the Pauline neo-

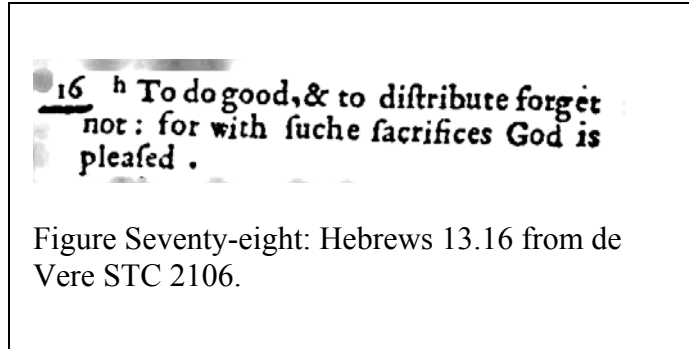


Figure Seventy-eight: Hebrews 13.16 from de Vere STC 2106.

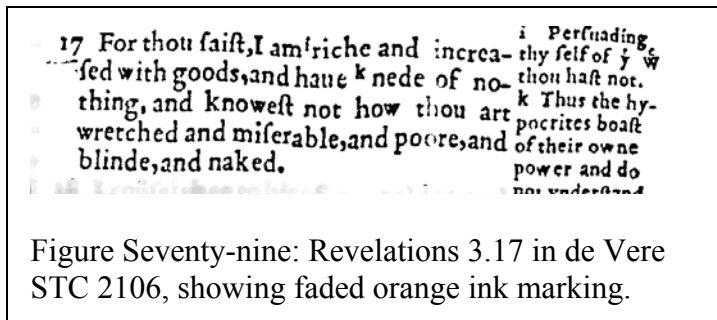


Figure Seventy-nine: Revelations 3.17 in de Vere STC 2106, showing faded orange ink marking.

Platonism of such verses as I Corinthians 4.16⁸ or II Corinthians 5.1-10⁹, both of which are marked in Edward de Vere's Geneva Bible. But the Sonnet also stands in dense figurative relation to the marked verse Revelation 3.17 (figure seventy-nine), one of the "spiritual poverty" series. In both cases the speaker is one who is perceived by others as wealthy and "in need of nothing," but feels himself to be among the poor.

In the Genevan STC 2106, this verse is accompanied by note "i" which reads "Persuading thyself of yt we thou hast not." It is this note which has apparently suggested Sonnet 66, a list of the author's complaints of things which he "has not":

Tyr'd with all these for restfull death I cry,
As to behold desert a begger borne,
And needie Nothing trimd in iollitie,
And purest faith unhappily forsworne,
And gilded honor shamefully misplast,
And maiden vertue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgrac'd,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And arte made tung-tide by authoritie.
And Folly (Doctor-like) controuling skill,
And captive-good attending Captaine ill.
Tyr'd with all these, from these I would be gone,
Save that to dye, I leave my love alone.

The phrase "needie nothing trimmed in jollity," expresses in lapidary form the paradox enlarged upon in Sonnet 146: this is the esoteric, tragic literature of a writer such as Falstaff, an "allowed fool" carrying out the Christian injunction to "show charity through secret almsgiving" (Matthew 6.16-19). *Needie nothing*, rings distinctive, apparently intentional, variation on the marked verse's "needing nothing." The transference incarnates a purely Shakespearean, and profoundly true, sentiment: "needing nothing" and "needie nothing" are, actually, the same thing. But we have already encountered the thought in the self-abasing phrase of the "great-souled" writer in Sonnet 136: "for nothing hold me."

⁸ Carter 224.

⁹ Carter 224; Booth 503; 506.