Abstract

This paper attempts to place Shakespeare's early comedy in the homiletic tradition both of the mystery cycles and of medieval exegetical commentaries on Genesis 4. It seeks to demonstrate that *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* can be instructively viewed, not just as an example of the new Renaissance drama, but as an elaborate, highly symbolic (and parodic) extension of the medieval Cain and Abel play.

The discussion first proceeds to point up some plausible allusions and image/motif parallels between the scriptural and play texts: for example, the early linking of Valentine with shepherdry (a la Abel), the male protagonists' love letters (which I propose to be symbolic substitutes for/equivalents to the offerings of their biblical precursors), the women (especially the mysterious Silvia—i.e., in emblematic terms, Who *is* she?) as figures of divine love/favor, and the symbolic/rhetorical killings (in despite of the comic context). Thereafter, a deeper assessment is made of the gentlemen's contrasting characters (selfish versus selfless, carnal versus spiritual, etc.) and their antithetical moral progress (Proteus declining into increasingly intense subjectivity and violence culminating in his attempted rape of Silvia; Valentine ascending the platonic ladder toward loving union with Silvia and his Christ-like act of intercession for the gentlemen outlaws). Finally, it is hoped, through this admittedly unusual approach (i.e., rarely have Shakespeare's light comedies been deliberately mined for medieval/homiletic content), a clearer and more vivid sense of the play's moral economy and under-acknowledged depth will be achieved, as well as an increased appreciation for both the prevalence and extreme potency of the Cain and Abel paradigm and "primal eldest curse" theme in Shakespeare's dramatic consciousness.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona: Shakespeare's High-Gothic Typological Re-Telling of Genesis 4?

By Tom Flanigan

The Two Gentlemen of Verona has the reputation of being one of Shakespeare's weaker efforts—an apprenticeship play, an early experiment in the romantic comedy genre that he would subsequently master in *As You Like It* and *Much Ado about Nothing*. The setting and the story, as compared to what we find in those later greater plays (or in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* for instance), seem more pedestrian, less imaginatively transporting. The text itself appears, again comparatively, to rely more heavily on the conventional rhetoric and situational stereotypes of that most hackneyed of Renaissance topos—youth in love. In spite of its occasional *problematic,* even jarringly dark motifs (e.g., Proteus's near-rape of Silvia and subsequent swift repentance, Valentine's apparent peace-offering of Silvia to Proteus just prior to the comic resolution), the play has often been, in effect, dismissed as not much more than light entertainment—which it incontestably is. Still, I would argue, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* has more depth than its urbane, airy surfaces immediately betray or than its critics have, historically, tended to allow. It is a depth achieved less intrinsically than we are perhaps used to in Shakespeare—that is, less by the direct textual means of profoundly expressive language, or creative potency of image, and more (according to the medieval emblematic method of appeal to a larger extrinsic frame of reference) by symbolic suggestiveness, mythic reverberation, and what may finally amount to subtle, cryptic allegory. In particular, it is my purpose here to explore what I perceive to be one central vein of the play's figurative potential: I shall attempt to place it in the tradition both of the mystery Cain and Abel pageants and of medieval and Renaissance exegetical commentaries on Genesis 4.

I am fully aware that, given my subject text, the approach I am proposing may seem highly unorthodox and counter-intuitive. Indeed, rarely have Shakespeare's light comedies been mined for medieval/homiletic content, and probably for good reason. Nor do I wish to imply that my quirky interpretation represents the only, or even a primary, way in which the play *should* be read. It is only my hope that, regardless of the legitimacy of my approach (and I will leave you to decide whether the Proteus/Cain Valentine/Abel correspondences I draw really *exist* outside my imagination), by viewing *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* not just as an example of the new Renaissance comedy, but as an elaborate, highly symbolic (and frequently, parodic) extension of the medieval Cain and Abel play, something of its underlying and under-acknowledged serious moral and psychological content may be made more accessible and apparent.

Admittedly, at a glance, the likenesses and parallels between the biblical Cain and Abel story and Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* may not seem very striking. The latter contains no heinous act of fratricide, nor do the bard's courtly Italian lovers, Proteus and Valentine, sort well with the archetypal "tiller of the ground" and "tender of sheep" of Genesis 4. At a strictly literal level, and upon casual view, one may see in Shakespeare's gents and the Bible's primordial brothers only two pairs of intimately bonded men, separated by immense gaps of time and culture. When the texts are more thoroughly and systematically searched and compared, however, and particularly when the allegorical dimensions of the play are considered in light of medieval and Renaissance biblical commentaries—when the play is read in the context of the typological tradition that still held significant sway over the mind of sixteenth-century man, a pattern of highly speculative and unwieldy but nonetheless provocative similarity may begin to emerge.

That the Cain and Abel narrative held some special degree of interest for Shakespeare, and that he recognized its immense dramatic potential as a mythic paradigm, seems evident enough from his fairly numerous allusions to it in other plays. Of these, Claudius's soliloquy of self-rebuke in *Hamlet* ("O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven; / It hath the primal eldest curse upon 't, / A brother's murder" [3.3.36–38]) is only the most conspicuous; but one might just as easily recall the opening of *Richard II,* wherein Henry Bolinbroke, accusing Thomas Mowbray of having murdered the Duke of Gloucester, remarks that the latter's "blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries . . . to me for justice" (1.1.104–106); or later in the same play, when the now crowned Henry IV says, in banishing Exton, Richard's executioner:

"With Cain go wander through shades of night" (5.6.43).[1] In fact, if one accepts my (I-trust-not-too-unreasonable) premise that Proteus and Valentine are fraternal in mythic/archetypal terms, fraternal (though not literally) at least in spirit, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* stands as just the first of several Shakespearean dramas to make sustained and substantive use of the good brother/bad brother theme. A short list of later Cain and Abel figures might include Don John and Don Pedro from *Much Ado about Nothing* and the double pairings of Duke Frederick and Duke Senior and Oliver and Orlando from *As You Like It* and Sebastian and Alonso and Antonio and Prospero from *The Tempest.* And then there is the Edmund/Edgar dynamic in *King Lear!* But that's the subject for a paper all by itself.[2]

Of course, Shakespeare was not the first writer to find the highly compressed, remarkably spare account of Genesis 4 intriguing. Throughout history biblical commentators had puzzled (as they continue to puzzle today) over God's seemingly random preference of Abel's ritual sacrifice.[3] Since the original biblical narrative simply states—without explanation—that Abel's offering was acceptable to God, while Cain's was not, much of the subsequent Christian material inspired by it sought to provide the absent rationale. In folk tradition, the explanation frequently focused on the brothers' respective gifts: the Corpus Christi plays invariably make much of Abel's immediate and enthusiastic offering of the best fruits of his labor—the "firstlings of his flock," and Cain's just as predictable grudging (and tardy, i.e., "in the course of time") surrender of an "vnthende sheff"[4] (i.e., poor sheaf) or two. But to more scholarly writers from very early on, Cain's gift of the "fruit of the ground" did not seem innately unworthy; hence, the assumption arose in the learned theological tradition that the deficiency lay not in Cain's "offering," but rather in Cain *himself*—that Cain's nature was somehow inferior to that of his brother. Thus "Luther . . . writes that materially the sacrifices of both Cain and Abel were the same. The difference lay in Cain's heart. His sacrifice was a mere outward act, not seconded by interior righteousness."[5]

In the more sophisticated and philosophical treatments of the story, then, the emphasis fell not on a discrepancy in the literal worth of the gifts, but on dualistic character development—the deliberate association of Abel (or the Abel figure) with specific virtues and Cain (or his equivalent) with specific vices—reflecting, of course, the moral standards (and serving the homiletic purposes) of the particular writer. Abel thus became the archetypal innocent, the prefigurement of Christ as a sacrificial victim, and the prototype of spiritual man. Cain, on the other hand, because of his envy and his act of violence, became a type of carnal, bestial man, debased by sin, prone to idolatry and heresy, or (at his worst) explicitly subject to Satan. The attempt to define the essential righteousness of Abel and the unrighteousness of Cain often led to extended discourses on the true nature of virtue, love, or religious devotion on the one hand and the attitudes and/or life views that promote sin and apostasy on the other. In short, from the pre-Christian Jewish exegetes to the Church Fathers to the Protestant theologians, the story and its characters had served to inspire and underscore a rich and far-ranging body of moral commentary. In the following analysis of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* as an extension of this homiletic tradition, I will refer occasionally to seminal notions of earlier writers on the subject that Shakespeare might well have inherited as a vocabulary of ideas.

Without further ado, let me begin to point up what I hope to be some plausible allusions and image or motif parallels between the scriptural and play texts:

"Now Abel was a keeper of the sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard" (Genesis 4.1-2; RSV).

Throughout the play, evidence for perceiving Proteus as a husbandman is admittedly slight, but Valentine's emblematic association with shepherdry a la Abel is clearly established in the opening scene dialogue on servitude between Proteus and Valentine's page, Speed:

> *Speed:* He is shipped already,
> And I have played the sheep in losing him.
> *Proteus:* Indeed, a sheep doth very often stray,
> And if the shepherd be awhile away.
> *Speed:* You conclude that my master is a shepherd
> then, and I a sheep?
> *Proteus:* I do (1.1.72–78).

This early reference to Valentine as a shepherd is significant also in that it foreshadows his later transformation into the Christ-like figure who orchestrates the play's comic resolution. Of course, the typological association of Abel with Christ was common in sermons and religious tracts from earliest medieval times to Shakespeare's era and beyond.[6]

But to continue our pursuit of possible imagery correspondences: The sheer number of references to letters in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* suggests that they are of weighty, though elusive, significance. As Frederick Kiefer has observed, "No other Shakespeare comedy contains so many letters; no other devotes so many scenes to the composition, delivery, and reception of love letters."[7] Indeed, a concordance search reveals that the word *letter* or *letters* appears thirty-two times in the play.[8] In relation to Genesis 4, it is tempting to perceive Proteus's and Valentine's love letters and tokens as metaphorical substitutes for the respective *offerings* of Cain and Abel. Such a symbolic displacement, logically extended, projects the female principals (awkwardly, no doubt) into the God-like role of receiver (and judge?) of mortal gifts.

In Silvia's case, at least, there seems to be some textual basis for perceiving her as a quasi-divine being (after all, as the song would have it, "She excels each mortal thing" [4.2.49]), although her precise symbolic identity seems ever-shifting and finally indeterminable. At various stages she might be said to suggest divine love or grace (as when Valentine's letter reads "My herald thoughts in thy pure bosom rest them, / While I . . . / Do curse the grace that with such grace hath blessed them" [3.1.144–146]), or salvation (when Valentine finally offers her to the repentant sinner, Proteus), or an angel ("Yet let her be a principality" [2.4.149], Valentine insists, after Proteus, playing devil's advocate, fails to confirm his friend's claims for her divinity), or in her final union with the Christ-like Valentine, perhaps even the Church; hence, the appropriateness of the song, "Who is Silvia?": she remains—clearly by authorial design—one of the play's central enigmas.

Returning to the gents, though, Proteus's first letter is coldly received by Lucetta, and torn to pieces by Julia herself. More significantly, when his affections are later transferred to the "holy, fair, and wise" Silvia, Proteus's offerings of a dog, a letter, and a ring are rejected in turn. This pattern of frustrated gift-giving, based loosely on the biblical Cain's experience, is comically amplified by repeated scenes of palpable friction between Proteus and his servant/couriers—first Speed and later Launce—each of whom, in one way or another, fails to deliver.

Silvia's response to Valentine's (Abel's?) letter/offering in act 2, scene 1, may seem scarcely more favorable, initially. She had requested him to write on her behalf to a "secret, nameless, friend," and Valentine's complaint that "it came hardly off" prompts her to return the letter along with an apparent rebuke. "Do not you like it?" asks the concerned suitor, to which the hyper-scrupulous mistress replies: "Yes, yes. The lines are very quaintly writ. / But since unwillingly, take them again" (2.1.113–114). Silvia seems to be requiring of Valentine a remarkably selfless standard of love here, something suspiciously akin to religious devotion, involving complete and unconditional surrender of the will—total, immediate, unquestioning obedience—qualities for which the biblical Abel was perennially celebrated. Silvia (whoever she is) would not have Valentine's partial affection or his half-commitment. Nor would she have him serve her out of a sense of duty, but rather out of love—pure and free, unselfish and absolute. In the end, Silvia's return of Valentine's letter proves to be not a rejection, but rather an affirmation of providential acceptance and care. Offerings that are selfless, and thus, worthy, become (paradoxically) self-reflective; pure unconditional love directed outward (in a world informed by grace) rebounds upon the lover.

Putting letters aside, the relinquishment of *self* (i.e., Christian self-sacrifice) in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* might be perceived as a symbolic equivalent to Abel's acceptable offering. Each of Shakespeare's principal characters (with the notable exception of Proteus) denies the self in overtly stated, ritualistic fashion; and the gesture, while it threatens the individual's immediate status and security, proves clearly constructive in the long-term context of his/her quest for social reintegration and reunion with the beloved. Thus Julia, in her loving pursuit of Proteus, not only assumes a new male identity, but endeavors, very much against her selfish will, to further Proteus's errant suit of Silvia. In act 4, scene 4, she states:

> I am my master's true confirme`d love,
> But cannot be true servant to my master
> Unless I prove false traitor to myself (101–103).

Here, one may also note, Shakespeare employs in his comic subplot a method reminiscent of the Wakefield Master's in *The Second Shepherd's Play*. The relationship of Launce and his dog (see especially Launce's report of his intercession for Crab's sins, 4.4.1–36) at once parallels and parodies the more serious plot of Christian self-sacrifice presented in the actions of the lovers.

Conversely, when Proteus lapses into a course of treachery, deceit, and rank infidelity, discarding Julia (and Valentine) for Silvia, he defends his action as a means to find or retain his *self*:

Julia I lose and Valentine I lose.
If I keep them, I needs must lose myself;
If I lose them, thus find I by their loss:
For Valentine, myself; for Julia, Silvia.
I to myself am dearer than a friend, . . .
I cannot now prove constant to myself,
Without some treachery used to Valentine (2.5.19–23, 31–32).

While the word *self* in this play often carries connotations of "selfishness" (especially in relation to Proteus), it also appears occasionally in a positive context, perhaps indicating the best part of the individual, the divine likeness or soul, as when Valentine responds to his sentence of banishment from Milan and necessary separation from Silvia:

And why not death rather than this living torment?
To die is to be banished from myself.
And Silvia is myself; banished from her
Is self from self, a deadly banishment (3.1.170–173).

Of course, this use of the word *self* implies "selflessness"—or, at least, a process of locating the self outside the self—i.e., in the object of devotion.

In any case, Shakespeare's deliberate association of his Cain and Abel figures with selfishness and selflessness respectively follows an ancient tradition. The first century Alexandrian Jewish exegete, Philo, who has been credited with "foster[ing] . . . the allegorical . . . [tradition] of Cain [and Abel] for the Judeo-Christian Middle Ages and beyond, maintain[ed] that [Cain] symbolically represents an evil tendency in humankind to turn away from God and toward the self, a tendency embodied even in Cain's name ('acquisition,' according to folk etymology . . .). His mind was unstable, and to achieve continuity in his life he made a 'city' of his thoughts by erecting false dogma."[9]

Thus Abel—whose name, Philo says, "means 'one who refers [all things] to God'— . . . [reflects] the 'God-loving principle' in mankind, while Cain is said to symbolize the principle of self-love."[10]

The motif is reiterated by most of the Church Fathers, including St. Ambrose who remarks that "Cain means 'getting,' because he got everything for himself. Abel, on the other hand, did not, like his brother before him, refer everything to himself. Devotedly and piously, he attributed everything to God, ascribing to his Creator everything that he received from Him."[11]

Again, what I mean to do here, through reviewing these themes of accepted and rejected offerings and selfish versus selfless natures, is simply to place the play in a tradition that employs the Cain/Abel dichotomy as a means to talk about serious human and moral issues. Of course, discourse on the nature of ideal or faulty religious devotion in the exegetes becomes, after Shakespeare's gentle secularization, discourse more generally on the nature of real or faulty love, but the basic methodology seems to me somewhat comparable.

Indeed, *love* (like *self*) is a pivotal term in this play, as in all Shakespeare comedies, which, chameleon-like,[12] may carry positive or negative connotations depending on the context in which it appears, or more particularly the nature and/or state of mind of the character to which it refers. When it is applied to Proteus, love usually suggests an earth-bound, reason-confounding emotion. His *cupiditas* is consistently pitted against the relative *caritas* of Valentine, as in the play's opening scene which, significantly, depicts the parting of the two friends and establishes their moral disparity. The free-spirited, adventurous Valentine sets out "to see the wonders of the world abroad" (1.1.6), while his bosom companion, Proteus, fettered by his love for a fair young woman of Verona, remains behind in the culturally isolated environment of the homeland.[13] Proteus's initial love for Julia is thus presented as an obstacle to his social, intellectual, and moral growth. "Home-keeping youth hath ever homely wits," warns Valentine in the second line of the play, and the affectionate, but frank, rationalist goes on to lecture Proteus fruitlessly on the destructive, enslaving effects of earthly love. Viewing the scene symbolically, one might be tempted to draw broad parallels here with the Augustinian paradigm, which identified Cain as fatally restricted to the ephemeral city of man, while exalting Abel as a "pilgrim and stranger in the world, belonging as he did to the City of God. . . . predestined by grace, and chosen by grace, by grace a pilgrim below, and by grace a citizen above."[14] Indeed, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, with its frequently shifting and uncertain locales, has been termed a "wandering play,"[15] and its basic movement—both narrative and geographical—does seem driven by the pilgrimage of Valentine, with the other more earthbound characters—Proteus, the servants, and even Julia—following in his wake.

"Cain said to his brother, 'Let us go out to the field.' And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him" (Gen. 4.8; RSV).

There are, of course, no actual killings in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Proteus turns against his *brother*, but in his role as informer and arranger of Valentine's banishment he resembles (on the surface) more a Judas than a Cain. Still, his plot succeeds: Valentine *is* (upon penalty of death) banished, thus effectively separated from Silvia—a fate which our proposed Abel-figure all but equates with death in the passage already cited above (3.1.170–173) and in these additional lines:

> She is my essence, and I leave to be,
> If I be not by her fair influence
> Fostered, illumined, cherished, kept alive.
> I fly not death to fly this deadly doom:
> Tarry I here, I but attend on death,
> But, fly I hence, I fly away from life (3.1.182–187).

In any case, one obvious motive for Proteus's crimes is envy, an emotion almost invariably attributed to Cain by the commentators.[16] Hints of envy, germs of the full-blown passion, are evident from the very start: for example, when Proteus, in his first brief soliloquy, compares himself unfavorably with his friend ("He after honor hunts, I after love. / He leaves his friends to dignify them more; / I leave myself, my friends, and all for love" [1.1.63–65]). Later, it seems significant (a kind of glimmer of suppressed self-knowledge?) that Proteus should include amid the speculative list of reasons for his inexplicably intense attraction to Silvia—Valentine's glowing praise of her ("It is mine eye, or Valentine's praise . . . / That makes me reasonless to reason thus" [2.4. 193–195]). Clearly, Proteus (like Cain) removes his counterpart (whom he finally perceives as a bitter rival) because he would have that divine favor (i.e., Silvia's love) which the latter enjoys:

> Methinks my zeal for Valentine is cold,
> And that I love him not as I was wont,
> Oh, but I love his lady too too much,
> And that's the reason I love him so little. . . .
> I will forget that Julia is alive,
> Remembering that my love for her is dead,
> And Valentine I'll hold an enemy,
> Aiming at Silvia as a sweeter friend (2.4.200-203; 2.6.27–30).

Again, Valentine and Julia do not actually die as a result of Proteus's increasingly malevolent envy and covetousness, but that Proteus slays them both in his mind cannot be easily denied. In act 4, scene 2, with Julia watching from the shadows, an outraged Silvia rejects Proteus's suit while imploring him to "Return, return, and make thy love amends" (line 99). The following exchange ensues:

> *Proteus:* I grant, sweet love, that I did love a lady,
> But she is dead.
> *Julia [aside]:* 'Twere false, if I should speak it,
> For I am sure she is not burie`d.
> *Silvia:* Say that she be; yet Valentine thy friend
> Survives, to whom—thyself art witness
> I am betrothed. And art thou not ashamed
> To wrong him with thy importunacy?
> *Proteus:* I likewise hear that Valentine is dead.
> *Silvia:* And so suppose am I, for in his grave
> Assure thyself my love is burie`d.
> *Proteus:* Sweet lady, let me rake it from the earth.
> (4.2.105–115)[17]

The final line above is one of the most conspicuous in the play because it so pointedly indicates the degree of Proteus's moral descent from simple inconstancy (which, in retrospect, he later identifies as a kind of root of all evil[18]) to envy and aggressive covetousness, idolatry, and finally violence. Here, indeed, is something like the degenerate, diabolical Cain of medieval exegetical tradition unmasked, revealed in all his primitive ugliness, identified for the first time (albeit obliquely) as a tiller of the ground. The line has been propitiously anticipated by Proteus's continual, though indirect, association with dogs.[19] The image of an animal digging futilely has never been more brilliantly evoked.[20]

Proteus remains Cain-like until his symbolic humiliation and repentance (after his attempted rape of Silvia) in the play's frenetic final scene, but the repentance, of course, makes all the difference. This is a comedy, after all, and in this context we should not expect that Cain can remain Cain forever. The Valentine/Abel comparison likewise breaks down in the final acts, although this might be accounted for in typological terms—i.e., as the Abel-like innocent victim of Proteus's envy and malice transforms symbolically into the Christ-like forgiver of his penitent friend and intercessor for the gentlemen outlaws.[21] In short, the ghosts of Cain and Abel that haunt the earlier portions of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* must be finally and emphatically dispelled in the sunburst of 5.4, with its manifold pardons, reunions, and reconciliations resolving into an image of perfect societal unity (i.e., "One feast, one house, one mutual happiness" [line 174]). Still, I contend that by then the play has already received an enriching and irreversible measure of potential darkness and dissonance from its subtle yet persistent Genesis 4 evocations.

Notes

1. See also *Henry IV, Part 1,* 1.3.38–40. All Shakespearean quotations here and below follow the texts as presented in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works,* gen. ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin, 1972).

2. It has often occurred to me (and to others, no doubt) that Shakespeare's Edmund and Edgar owe something to the intensely dualistic (and hence innately dramatic) Corpus Christi Cain and Abel portraits. In all honesty, nothing in the relatively primitive folk tradition of the mystery plays could forecast fully Edmund's malignant depth and complexity, but the method of character development through deliberate close juxtaposition and contrast, and especially the clear and immediate delineation of the Cain figure in terms of his arrogant, irreverent attitude and his distinctive diabolical rhetoric, seems broadly anticipatory. The medieval Cain typically enters cursing, complaining, declaiming against his brother, his father, and/or God, and Edmund announces his evil/recalcitrant presence in similarly striking fashion with his at once colorful and sinister "Now gods, stand up for bastards" speech (1.2.1–22).

3. Even the editors of the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford, 1973) have conceded that "No reason is given for the acceptance of Abel's offering" (5–6).

4. Wording from *The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D.8,* ed. Stephen Spector (New York: Oxford UP [EETS s.s. 11], 1991), 38. All surrounding quotations are from Genesis (RSV).

5. Arnold Williams, *The Common Expositor: An Account of the Commentaries on Genesis 1527-1633* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), 142.

6. For example, Sandys proclaimed in his "Christmas Sermon": "This is that seed of the woman which breaketh the serpent's head, that meek Abel murdered by his brother for our sin . . ." (quoted in Joseph A. Galdon, *Seventeenth-Century Typological World View* [The Netherlands: Mouton and Co., 1977], 15).

The basis for the Abel/Christ typological correspondence can be traced to the gospels. Luke (11.47, 49-52; RSV) records Jesus's rebuke of the Lawyers thus:

> Woe to you! for you build the tombs of the prophets whom
> your fathers killed. . . . Therefore also the Wisdom of God said,
> 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they

> will kill and persecute, that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechari'ah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.' Yes, I tell you, it shall be required of this generation. Woe to you lawyers!

7. "Love Letters in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*," *Shakespeare Studies* 18 (1986); rpt. in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona: Critical Essays*, ed. June Schlueter (New York: Garland, 1996), 133.

8. See T. H. Howard-Hill, ed., *Oxford Shakespeare Concordances: The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (New York: Oxford UP, 1969), 92–93.

9. David Lyle Jeffrey, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 121. Note: this final remark might easily be made of Proteus who, in his obsessive pursuit of Silvia, descends into what seems a progressively idolatrous state of mind, requesting finally Silvia's "picture" to which he vows "to sigh and weep" (4.2.120–122). Predictably enough, the lady answers reproachfully,

> I am very loath to be your idol, sir.
> But, since your falsehood shall become you well
> To worship shadows and adore false shapes,
> Send to me in the morning, and I'll send it (4.2.128–131).

10. Jeffrey, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition,* 4.

11. Saint Ambrose, *Cain and Abel* (book 1, chapter 1), in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation,* vol. 42, trans. John J. Savage (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1961), 360. St. Augustine's musings upon Cain's selfish character are also worth noting:

> [Cain] gave to God something belonging to him, but gave himself to himself. This is what is done by all those who follow their own will, and not the will of God; that is, those who live with a perverted instead of an upright heart, and yet offer a gift to God. They suppose that with this gift God is being bought over to help them, not in curing their depraved desires, but in fulfilling them. And this is the characteristic of the earthly city—to worship a god or gods so that with their assistance it may reign in the enjoyment of victories and an earthly peace, not with a loving concern for others, but with lust for domination over them. For the good make use of this world in order to enjoy God, whereas the evil want to make use of God in order to enjoy the world—those of them, that is, who still believe in the existence of God, or in his concern for human affairs. . . . (*City of God* 15.7, trans. Henry Bettenson [New York: Penguin, 1984], 604)

12. Speed refers to the "chameleon Love" in 2.1.58.

13. Here, Verona becomes emblematic of the static, insular self. Shakespeare's Christian ethic is consistently social: virtue should be active; love and energy should be directed outward to the world at large (i.e., to God and neighbor).

14. St. Augustine, *City of God* (15:2), 596.

15. Clifford Leech, introduction to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Arden 2nd series; New York: Routledge, 1994), lviii.

16. Augustine, for instance, observes that "Cain's was the diabolical envy that the wicked feel for the good simply because they are good, while they themselves are evil" (*City of God* [15.5], 601). Shakespeare, of course, excels in his portrayal of envy-driven villains, of which Iago represents the epitome. But for an example more clearly linked to the Cain/Abel paradigm, recall Oliver's response to his virtuous and popular brother, Orlando, in *As You Like It:*

> My soul, yet I know not why, hates nothing more than he. Yet he's gentle, never schooled and yet learned, full of noble device, of all sorts enchantingly beloved; and indeed so much in the heart of the world, and especially of my own people . . . that I am altogether misprised (1.1.152–157).

17. The connection is no doubt tenuous and probably entirely coincidental, but I cannot resist inviting comparison between the last four lines of this passage and the verses of Genesis 4 that follow:

> And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. (Gen. 4.10–2)

18. The final lines are:

> *Proteus:* O heaven, were man
> But constant, he were perfect! That one error
> Fills him with faults, makes him run through all th' sins;
> Inconstancy falls off ere it begins (5.4.111–114).

19. Proteus sends Silvia a dog as a gift, has a servant who is "tied" to a heartless mongrel, and at one point (4.2.14) refers to himself as "spaniel-like" in his pursuit of Silvia. See also Harold F. Brooks's explicit comparison of Proteus and Crab in "Two Clowns in a Comedy (to say nothing of the Dog): Speed, Launce (and Crab) in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*" (*Essays and Studies* 16 [1963]; rpt. in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona: Critical Essays*, ed. June Schlueter [New York: Garland, 1996], 76-77).

20. Note that while Proteus is consistently chained to the earth by his carnality, weighted down by the imagery of a base servant (Launce) and his ever-present dog (Crab—whose name directs us to an even lower link of the Great Chain), one higher branch of learning that he retains an affinity for is music. His best advice to the foundering Thurio for wooing Silvia is to

> Visit by night your lady's chamber window
> With some sweet consort. To their instruments
> Tune a deploring dump; the night's dead silence
> Will well become such sweet-complaining grievance.
> This, or nothing else, will inherit her (3.2.82–86).

Proteus subsequently serves as Thurio's "direction giver" in rounding up "gentlemen well-skilled in music," and it is ostensibly Proteus himself who sings "Who is Silvia?" beneath that lady's window (4.2). I note it only as a curiosity that, in the Genesis account, it is the Cain line in the antediluvian era that produces Jubal, "the father of all those who play the lyre and the pipe" (4.21; RSV). The reference to the sons of Lamech and their occupations (shepherds, musicians, and blacksmiths) is usually glossed as evidence both of cultural advance in the pre-flood period and of a core of merit which survives the stain of sin in the Cain line. In similar fashion, Proteus's association with music in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* may serve to underscore his latent virtue and foreshadow his eventual reclamation from sin.

21. To pursue the allegorical potential of the play's resolution still further, Valentine's final and successful plea for the pardon of the Outlaws, his recovery of them from the forest of Mantua, might be interpreted as a loose re-working of the medieval Harrowing of Hell narrative. True, there is no adversarial presence here, no eloquent, legalistic fiend to evoke the full tradition of the Devil's Law Case (such a performance would be saved for a later and greater comedy with a "Jew" in the role of Satan); nonetheless, the gentlemen-outlaws are "banished men . . . endued with worthy qualities" (5.4.153–154). Among them, two only are named—Moyses and Valerius (who, by report, pursue Sir Eglamour in act 5, scene 3). "Moyses" was, of course, a common sixteenth-century spelling of Moses, who, in the Harrowing of Hell tradition, is frequently the first mentioned of the Old Testament souls for whom Christ undergoes his triumphant post-resurrection descent. Allegorically, the names Moyses and Valerius must also suggest the Law (or Justice) and Truth; and it may be of some relevance to note that in later Devil's Law Case scenarios two of the Four Daughters of God, Justice and Truth, replace Satan in the adversarial role, contending with their sisters, Mercy and Peace, over the legality of Christ's *ex post facto* freeing of souls formerly damned by the Old Law (see, for example, *Piers Plowman*, Passus B).

In any case, the Outlaws confess to "such like petty crimes" as attempted kidnapping and manslaughter (4.1.47-52), yet they are swift to adopt Valentine, the "linguist," as "a king for our wild faction" (4.1.37). If in symbolic terms Valentine's final "boon" is not specifically a plea for regenerate souls in hell or purgatory, it surely begs broad comparison with Christ's intercession for sinners. The general pardon that the Duke subsequently grants might well be read as a figurative affirmation of the Christian spirit of mercy, which frees outlaws by transcending the strict letter of justice.

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