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Language and the Suspension of Reality in Cymbeline

1. Language as Reality

When, in my honour and delight, I was asked to take part in the Anglicization section on Jacobean Drama, my attention was focused on the religious poetry of the Metaphysicals, whose concern for words manifests itself in their searching for and inventing (in the literal sense of finding) the reflection of divine truth in human language. To the Metaphysicals, the very shapes and sounds of letters and, more generally speaking, the material substance of language, may, however imperfectly, represent the divine reality providing the coordinates of the speaker's earthly life. Jacobean Drama is contemporaneous with Metaphysical Poetry, but at first sight differences (most obviously for reasons of genre) seem to overshadow similarities. Thus the implicit views on language in a play like Cymbeline, written around the same time (1609-10)1 as several of John Donne's Holy Sonnets (and some time after his secular poetry)2 appear to be quite different. The atmosphere of the wortelful or supernatural so strongly to be felt especially in the latter part of the play3 suggests a relationship between language and reality characterized by fairy tale and magic rather than religious mystery and metaphysical truth. When one tries to listen closely to what is said about language in Cymbeline, however, and has a closer look at how language is shown to work, one may begin to ask oneself whether the supernatural dimension of speech is not perhaps a case in point of its general role in this play. And this is marked, as will be seen, by the influence on or transformation of reality by language or even by language as reality. In this perspective, an affinity to Metaphysical Poetry becomes

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1 See Bauer for this kind of iconic representation.
2 Roger Warren, in his recent Oxford edition of the play (1998), argues for 1610 (Introduction 65-67); J. M. Newsome, in the Arden edition (1955), more or less agrees with the date 1609 as the one that "has been generally accepted" (Introduction xiv). The Arden text, based like the Oxford and other modern editions on the First Folio, is cited in this essay, since it keeps for instance the Folio form of the name "Imogen," changed by Oxford into "Iolanta."
3 See Gage's introduction (e.g., xii, xvi) to her edition (1952) of Donne's Divine Poems. Gage dates the Songs and Sonnets between 1599 and 1607 (see her edition (1963) of The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets, e.g., xvi).
4 See for instance Aubertin, Ch. 2, especially 88-100.
visible. Keeping strictly within the limits prescribed to religious subjects on the Jacobean stage by the Act of Absences, Shakespeare does not have his characters expropriate on the Divine Word and its relation to human speech. But the very fact that language is presented as being more than a medium in this play, taken together with the verbal intervention of a ( pagan) deity, is related to the view of language as a common ground of the human and the divine. The suspension of disbelief required by the audience of 

5 Cymbeline might thus go hand in hand with the quite serious suggestion of a belief in the possible faculty of language to make listeners participate in a spiritual reality beyond, albeit closely connected with, the realities of their material lives.

More specific questions of genre seem not entirely irrelevant when it comes to the way in which language is shown to influence reality. From Aristotle onwards, it has been stressed that mythesis or action is the business of drama. Accordingly, the relationship of language and reality in drama will become manifest as a relationship of words and deeds, and if language is not simply a tool or a medium this will be seen from the way in which it is related to action. The particular form of drama to which Cymbeline belongs emphasizes this relationship. As Eugene M. Waith put it in his classic study on 

The Pattern of Tragicomedy in Rosennamoi and Fletcher, "the dramatic conflict becomes almost exclusively verbal, so that language is some measure supplanted rather than expresses action" (42). Waith says this with reference to A King and No King, which he expressly treats, however, as the example of "a new and sophisticated form of dramatic "entertainment." He is not concerned with Shakespeare, but his emphasis on action provides a key term for the discussion of language in Cymbeline. Shakespeare's play, participating, as Peggy Simpson and others have shown, 3 in quite a number of dramatic traditions, is closely linked to this "new and sophisticated" version of the tragicomic genre (which at the same time may be regarded as an archaic form, as it features, for example, allegory and pastoral). If the reality of a dramatic work (or "entertainment") is characterized by action, the fact that language may supplant action has a far-reaching effect on the representation of reality. As regards Cymbeline,

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

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

7 For the syncretic conflation of 'multi-form' Jupiter with the Christian God of the Trinity, see, for example, Book 3, ch. 10 of Aenidae (423-27 in Conpagni's edition). Cf. also Wind 232-33 (on a woodcut by Conrad Celtes in which Jupiter assumes the position of God the Father). For the Christianization of Jupiter, see also Scounce, e.g., 161-63 and index.

8 See especially ch. 1 in Simpson (19-65, "Cymbeline as a Renaissance Tragicomedy").
language and action are closely linked, even though I would qualify Waith's alternative of "supplanting" or "expressing" action. I would rather speak of language being at one with action or generating it.

2. Words and Action

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

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

10 Different kinds of speech acts in Cymbeline have been discussed peremptorily by Glazov-Corringan, even though I would hesitate to share the author's view that "the central descriptions of Cymbeline consistently refuse to be static in a manner which sharply contrasts with those of the tragedies and comedies" (389). I am not so sure, for example, that in Hamlet or Much Ado locations are "finalized within a static reference" (390).—A seminal study for the use of speech-act theory in Shakespeare criticism is that of Elam, who does not, however, include Cymbeline among the works analysed.
Still, all these are speech acts, i.e., words instrumental to or identical with the actions of the characters who control them. In Cymbeline, however, words may also coincide with or even determine those actions of their own accord. (Or it may be difficult to decide whether language or character is in control.) When Posthumus awakes from his dream in which he has a vision of his parents and brothers interceding with Jupiter on his behalf, he finds a tablet on his breast which contains the oracle later to be "construed" by the soothsayer. For the time being, it is an incomprehensible yet meaningful text:

"I'm still a dream; or else such stuff as madmen
tongue, and brain not; either both, or nothing,
Or sheerfroth speaking, or a speaking muck.
As sense cannot utter. Be what it is.
The action of my life is like it, which
I'll keep, if that for sympathy. (5.4.146-51)

There is an inner, substantial connection, a "sympathy" (OED 1.a.) between the writing and the action of Posthumus's life, which is all the more remarkable since the tablet is also called a "label" (5.5.431). In Shakespeare's time, a label as a piece of writing primarily meant "A small strip of paper or parchment attached to a document by way of supplement to the matter contained therein" (OED 7.2).11 Accordingly, the sympathy consists in the fact that Posthumus Leontes himself may be regarded as a text to be supplemented or explained by another text which in turn has to be explained or construed. Shakespeare's theatrical self-reflection of men and women being (merely) players here assumes the related and yet distinctive form of linguistic self-reflection: the actions of human lives are to be understood as or like verbal utterances—which implies that lives are not just ends in themselves but are signs; and, furthermore, that the meaning of these signs is not at all easy to "unite." In the soothsayer's performance at the end of the play, the audience is presented with a model of reading12 and of establishing connections between the form of words and their meaning, which deserves attention as an example of immanent language theory:

Luc.   Read, and declare the meaning.
Sooth (Reads.) When as a lion's whip shall, to himself
unknown, without seeking find, and be em-
braç'd by a piece of tender air: and when from a
stately cedar shall be lopp'd branches, which,
being dead many years, shall after revive, be
planted in the old stock, and freshly grow; then

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

12 See Giberter 166 on Jupiter's riddle as a parallel to the "reading" of characters required on the part of both actors and audience in Cymbeline.
shall Proverbs end his miseries, Britain be for-  

nate, and flourish in peace and plenty.  

Thus, Lenarus, at the lion’s whelp,  
The fit and spit construction of thy name,  
Being Lee-o-nus, doth impart so much:  
[To Cymbeline] The piece of tender air, thy virtuous daughter,  
Which we call mollis aer; and mollis aer  
We term it mulier: which mulier I divine  
Is fit's most constant wife, who even now,  
Answering the letter of the rape,  
Unknown to you, ensnared, were clip’d about  
With this most tender air. (5.5.435-52)  

For all its magic and even fantastic atmosphere, the scene emphasizes a method of understanding which, in the context, cannot but be taken seriously. Commentaries have come to the conclusion that Shakespeare here expresses distrust of language because the soothsayer’s deriving mulier from mollis aer is incorrect.13 ‘But this seems to me hardly an adequate reaction to the scene and in fact an oversimplification. For modern etymological standards are not to be applied to the early seventeenth century when the method of exploring the meaning of words by means of their supposed stems or components, as it was practiced by Varro and Iliodore and many others, was still largely considered valid.14 Shakespeare’s Philomuson, the soothsayer, is doing with Lovel’s tablet exactly what, for example, Lancalet Andrewes and other preachers of the time were doing, in all sincerity, with the word of God in their exegetical commentaries. When we look at the mollis aer etymology itself, the usual reference to Varro and Iliodore15 has to be qualified. ‘They’16 derive mulier from mollis, soft, but do so in a context suggesting the deficiencies of the female sex and its imbecillity as opposed to male fortitude (Iliodore 11.2.219). Medieval etymologists such as Rupert of Dussi included the imperfection of the female soul (and not just the weakness of the body) in this derivation (Klink 78).  

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

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

13 See, for instance, Glaun-Cringan 388 (“all the etymological roots which the soothsayer offers are, in fact, false derivations”), who refers to Sedway 621. In general, the shortcomings of language as presented in Cymbeline are emphasized by Hiret (e.g. 326—the failure of Pomezuus’s words to do justice to Imogen).  

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

15 Newworthy, in his note to 5.5.449, points out the attribution to Varro by Tertullian, Lactantius, and Iliodore of Seville. See, for instance, Iliodore 11.2.18 (“Mulier vero a mollis, tamquam mulier, deturca littera vel muta, appellata est mulier”). The etymology was ascribed to Varro by Iliodore and others.  

16
standards, for according to Walde’s and Hoffmann’s etymological dictionary mullier is indeed derived from a supposed comparative of mollis,17 but, even apart from historical considerations, it seems hardly possible to say, as T. W. Baldwin does, that Philoemerous’s interpretation is an example of “fanciful etymologies”18 or that for its very absurdity it indicates a distract of language. Furthermore, Shakespeare changes the context of female deficiency,19 by including are or are in the derivation. He obviously did not invent this etymological20 even though there seem to be no classical examples, but he uses it for his own purposes as an example of etymology as “true speaking” or “soothsaying” or “word-plays” as Cicero renders the Greek word etymologia (Topic 35). Again, twelfth-century scholiasts are not quite correct when they quote Renaissance sources such as Henry Stephen’s A World of Wonders to show that the etymology was considered “grotesque” at the time. Both those sources21

17 See the entry for “muller”; Fumme, in his New Variorum edition of Cymbeline, points out (without giving references): “The derivation of muller from the comparative mollis, of mollis, is now accepted as the true one.”

18 Baldwin 1:720, quoting Stephenus (1531), Calapine and Baret (1580), who derive “Muller... a mollis.”

19 This is not the only one; cf. Klink 78 on mollis horum (‘soothing the Lord’).

20 Without indicating the page. Moreoverly in his Arden annotation refers to Caxton’s Game of Chace as an early source of the etymology. It is to be found in Book 3, ch. 5, p. 123 in Caxton’s Game and Play of the Chace, 1474. Interestingly, the context is a psychomachic one: in this chapter, the hero says that Signeefryth the plainstman / sperer and Apheynut (118), the physiological effects of joy are described, which “bathe as mowe power to departe the sovote for the body as hathe the jonder” (123), especially in women “But this is not to greatly remembre of women as in or the men / For the women be liked vanto softe wepe or softe eye and forthere she is calleth muller whyeste it as mowe to soye in leanye as reye.” There is no question of fanciful etymologizing here, for the word is quite simply regarded as the result (“thence”) of an obvious physiological phenomenon. Caxton, by the way, strongly recommends that the physician should “nowse the proprietors of letters of gramer” (115). Assim, in his introduction (David), makes a reference to Cymbeline. See note 7 in the text of his A & Q, 7.4 (1887) 105 for the Caxton parallel.

21 Baldwin quotes Dewred’s first Arden edition, in which a certain Dr. Aldis Wright is quoted quoting from A World of Wonders: “the ancient Latinists... had no good derivation in giving Etymologia of Ancient Latin words; witness the notation of Muller, over mollis ant.” If Baldwin had looked up The World of Wonders itself, he would have found the opposite: on the page in question, Henry Stephen writes of Joe ubi and obvious Etymologying of the name of saints to be found in such books as The Golden Legend: “If any shall reply and say, that it is not to be wondered that the ancient Latins nowe rememered these Etymologia, considering the names were not then in use; I answer, that they had no good derivation in giving Etymologia of ancient Latin words; witness the notation of Muller, over mollis ant” (emphasis mine; “they” probably refers to the later writers of books like the Legenda Aurea rather than to the “ancient Latinists”). Stephen,
and the context of Cymbeline itself contradict such a view. For the air with which Imogen is identified by Philomarma transforms the (at least potentially) exognymic molto/malito etymology into something entirely appreciative: "which malter I divine / Is this most constant wife, who ever now, / Answering the letter of the oracle, / Unknown to you, unsooth, were clipp'd about / With this most tender air." Furthermore, the air contributes to the linguistic self-reflection in this scene, for it is the medium ensuring that the action of the characters' lives (and of the actors on the stage) develops from language.22

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

the humanist scholar-printer of Geneva, in a vein not unlike Erasmus's in the Luca Stultius (section 54, 142-56 in Welz's edition), makes fun of the "ruinful" notions, as cannot sufficiently be wondered at" to be found in Roman Catholic orthodoxy. All the same, the very extent to which he quotes these etymologies shows how delight being mixed with derision, an attitude also to be found in Erasmus as well as Agrrippa (see Bornhuet 477; on the Etienne family, see for instance Stennes 7.15).—The reference to Wright (A&Q 7.2 [1866]) and Stephen is also made by Furness (note on 5.5.33), where Stephen is quoted correctly but abbreviated in such a way that "they" is made to refer to the "ancient Latinists." 22

See, for instance, Agrrippa Book I, chapter 6, 96.

21 Cf. Donatus's Art grammatica: "Letters est pars minima vocis articulationis" (Keil 4: 267). Cf. Ben Jonson's definition in The English Grammar: "A Syllable is a perfect sound in a word, and consists of one, or more Letters. (e) A Letter is an indivisible part of a Syllable, (i) whose sound, or right sounding is perceived by the power, the Orthography, or right writing by the forms. (g) Proscodie, and Orthography, are not parts of Grammar, but diffus'd, like the blood, and spirits through the whole." (Jonson I 467)

23 On the passage, see Hartley 310. Seen against the background of such a poem as Donne's "A Valediction: forbidding mourning," Posthumus's turning into air at parting seems the precondition of the lovers' reunion. In Donne the lovers taking leave of each other "endure not yet / A breach, but an expansion, / Like gold to every thimmesse beate."—For
attention to the "air" or sound of "peace" and "peace," which makes the ears of the audience ring the "piece of tender air" (438) is followed by "peace and plenty" (443), then comes the "piece of tender air" again (447), then once more "peace and plenty" (459) and Cymbeline's announcement "My peace we will be begin" (460), the poet's way of saying that "The fingers of the poors above do tune / The harmony of this peace" (461-68), the King's resolution "Publish we this peace" (479) and "Our peace we will ratify: seal it with feasts" (484) and his affirming that "Never was a war did cease / (Fire bloody hands were wash'd) with such a peace" (486)—with which word the play ends.

The contexts in which the word peace is used here all point to the relation of language and action or text and life foregrounded by the oracle: "peace" is something that has to be done ("My peace we will be begin"), while it is also described in terms of writing: it is to be published as well as ratified and sealed. Furthermore, when an actor at the end of a play and in the context of a constant use of the homophonous peace and piece speaks of "this peace," he surely evokes a reference to this piece, namely the play itself which ends, like the action of the war, when the peace and the feast begin but which may well be published in manuscript or print like the peace.25 (Cymbeline was not printed before the first Folio, but of course might have been.) The play itself as a sequence of spoken words is a piece of air (we think of Prospero's "immortal mortal piece" melting into "this air"), which fits into the musical context of "peace" evoked by the poet'sayer: a man called Philaremous declares "The harmony of this peace" tuned by the poors above. A little earlier in the scene, imagery, that "peace of tender air," was expressly connected with music by Cymbeline's recognizing "The tune of twangell" (437). If melody and harmony come together here, the reference is also to the vocal art of language performed on the stage. The air is a common denominator of music and speech: air metonymically signifies melody or piece of music and at the same time refers to the medium in which spoken language works and reaches the

the possible influence of the country's "air" or climat e japonico, see Zachariasiewicz 1937-38.

25 The inner connection between "peace" and "language is, at least a negativo, suggested by the dictionary. See, for example, the sequence of entries in Pelagius's Synonymia sym辆车 (also suggesting the proximity of peace and piece): to make Peace, to make to Pacify, to make to Peace, to make to Silencing; a Peace, a Piece, a Morsel; the connection between piece and "morsil is suggested by the presence of the Latin synonyma in the heading to "Pace, to Morsel, to Announce." Under "a Woman," Pelagiusm has the (the Hebrew's very) M CAMERA a médile dicta.

26 Cf. OED air 19. a. conv. "... a piece of music... to be sung or played as a "so... "First ref. 1604 and quotation from 18th Grove; see also Strahle, whose entry on air begins, on the other hand, with Flesch's (Latin-English) dictionary of 1398 ("... the... Also a tune, a sound, a note, or an ayre of musicity or any ditty") and, on the other hand, with Morley's Plaine and Easie Introduction (1597, p. 180: "these (ballate) and all other kinds of light musick do saucing the Madrigale are by a general name called ayres.")
The audience is expressly treated to this tune beside Cymbeline calls it so. Posthumus, who still thinks he has killed his wife, in his despair and remorse exclaims that

... every villain
Be call'd Posthumus Locatam, and
No villainy less than 'twas. O Imogen!
My queen, my life, my wife, O Imogen, Imogen, Imogen! (5.5.223-27)

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

4. Language as the mosaic of Matter and Spirit

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

67 My attention was first drawn to this connection between spirit, music, air and ear by Leimbach, especially 95. Leimbach refers to Pico's "serena anima spiritus" (as quoted by Walker 7-8) as a paracrinia echoed and augmented by Shakespeare's.

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

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

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

30 For this brief summary, I am indebted to Klein 145-46.
31 Quoted by Klein 146 from chapter 21 of Cicero's De vita caelitus comparanda.
32 See Agrippa, Book I, ch. 69 ("De seminio aquae vitriolius verborum") 231-32; Klein 147. It may be an additional (however coincidental) connection between De oecusis philosophia and Cymbeline that Agrippa a little earlier mentions a soothsayer named Posthumius (Book I, ch. 55, 201; his source, according to Compagna's note, is Augustine's De civitate dei II.24). Another interesting analogy to Cymbeline and its mutual etymology consists in the fact that Agrippa's argument for the superiority of women is based on the etymology of the name of Eve (see Borchard 422). On the function of the air, see also Book I, chapter 6 ("De administrandis aquae et atis ventorum natura").
33 The whole subject of pneumatology comes into view at this point, but of course cannot be dealt with in such brief remarks at these. It may just be mentioned that air or breath or
tender air may thus be said to represent the medium that makes all meaningful intellectual exchange physically possible. Her repeatedly being called "angel" in an additional sign, of her spiritual nature: the close connection between "air" and "angels" is familiar from Dante’s poem, where the soul must take flight of flesh and "else could do nothing else." ("Air and Angels" 8) Imogen is literally the means or middle or tertium through "bearth" at the end of its play brings about a harmonious or meaningful constellation. This is exquisitely pronounced by Cyndoline, who says, upon Imogen's awakening and immediately before she listens to the "line of Imogen:"

"If this be so, the gods do mean to strike me To death with mortal joy." (5.5.234-35, emphasis added). Imogen, the air, is the means by which the gods, as it were, "do" her meaning. Thus, to a certain extent, the play reflects or allegorizes the working of language as a possible means of creating harmony.

spurious connecting the body and the soul in the form of spurious animus or psychic pnuma plays an important role in Golen’s physiology (see, for instance, On the Natural Faculties 2.6.97). For a reconceptualization of "Pneumatic Magic," see chapter 5 of Coalition.

E.g., Bolona’s reaction when he first sees Imogen-Fidele: "Sir Jacopin, an angel!" (3.7.13) and Arculina’s exclamation: "How angel-like be singing!" (4.4.48). Such laconism acknowledges Imogen’s angelic nature: "I lodge in fear. / Though this a heavenly angel, hell is here." (2.2.49-50). The feathers rhyme (which could still rhyme with air at the time, see Dryden e.g., § 126) and it was included the "air" of twelfth century, alluding to the topological connection of air and angel. The link between angel and singing reinforces this connection.

Cf. the connection with Cyndoline made by Duncan-Jones in her commentary on the first of Shakespeare’s Sonnets (line 4), where he "tender but" implies both the male offspring desired from the addresser and the wife giving birth to the son. Imogen is not only the "tender air" but also (before Gudenus suppress) "the hole," (1.1.4) of Cyndoline’s kingdom. For the link between spirit and inheritance (air and heir) see for instance Donne, Sermons 5: 58-76 (on Rom. 8:16), in which he explains different kinds of air or spirit and points out that the true spirit "in the spirit of regeneration, by which man is a new creature, a spiritual man" (65) so that "we are wise and know not, as that we are Cobblers with Christ... Heroes of heaven, which, is... an universal primogeniture" (73). On the political aspect of the heir in Cyndoline, see also Whickham: "tender air, moreover, in the form of the south wind, Zepherin, in a role in which Samuel Daniel allot a few months later to cast Prince Charles (days Cadmus-Avirgula [sic] in the guise of Ethery Festival" (105). In this thematic and stylistic context, it may be more than mere coincidence that the word primogeniture, as Inge Leininger points out to me, contains or encloses the theme of Shakespeare’s heroine.

For a similar verbal-musical effect in The Winter’s Tale, see Cerny. For the general context of music and magic, see for instance Walker especially Part I and II) and Hart (especially chapter 6, "Musical Harmony and Pythagorean Palace"). Walker 8-9 translations from Ficino’s commentary on Plato’s Timaeus (c. 38). "Musical妥善receives the element in which is the means of all (1.1.4), and reaches the ears through motion.... But musical sound by the movement of the air moves the body by purified
In this connection it is also worth noting that the only "really" supernatural element in *Cymbeline* is the label on Posthumus's breast. The appearance of the Leontads and even of Jupiter himself may be rationalized as insubstantial elements of Posthumus's dream; the written text, however, with its generative riddle-words, is actually there to be found by Posthumus after his awakening. Thus, in a clearly vertical scheme, the writing which is handed down from Jupiter via the shadows of the interceding Leontads to Posthumus forms the connection between the world of dream and myth and providence and the world of material reality.

But (and, without bunting too many bats, this *but* is essential in Shakespeare's tragicomic romance) there is no guarantee for success when it comes to language and its power to influence physical reality. 31 There is no verbal magic in the sense of abracadabra. 32 A scene in *Thelast* serves well to illustrate this point, as it makes clear the limits of "literary" verbal power also to be noticed in *Cymbeline*. In Act 4, scene 4, the King peremptorily commands his subjects to bring him his daughter Arachusa, who has disappeared in the forest, but he has to meet with a noble gentleman's fearless objections. Only if he commands "things possible and honest" (35), Dion says, is the King to be obeyed. Besides the topical-political aspects of this objection, the linguistic ones are remarkable, for the King continues:

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

The King claims for himself a verbal magic power based on the quality of the air involved, namely his kingy breath. Dion's answer to this is simply "no," but when the King insists he expatiates a little on this: the key word of his answer now is "corrupted." Apart from the fact that, even for a King, the influence of language upon reality is limited by natural laws, the moral state of the speaker influences the quality of the air and, accordingly, the effectiveness of his words. Later, when the King is morally reformed and repents of the wrongs done to Philaster and his own daughter, air it excites the aerial spirit which is the bond of body and soul: by emotions it affects the senses and at the same time the soul: by meaning it works on the mind finally, by the very movement of the nobles air it penetrates strongly. 33 In his chapter on the "General theory of natural magic," Walker stresses the close connection between *via musicae* and *via verborum*, the latter relating to the former like melody to harmony (80-81).

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

The effect of language in *Cymbeline* is thus to be distinguished, for example, from most of the paradigms given by Perry in her chapter on "Magical and Miraculous Language" (123-33).
Philaster appropriately answers: "Mighty sir, I will not do your greatness so much wrong / As not to make your word truth" (5.3.181-83).

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

This is where, in a certain sense, this talk comes full circle. If it is a characteristic feature of the tragicomic genre in the Jacobean form that language may supplant action, and if in the tragicomic romance of Cymbeline it determines and generates action, it never does so in an automatic sort of way. Even if Cymbeline is not openly concerned with religion in its Christian form, it is related to concepts of the word reflected and expressed by the metaphysical poets and preachers. John Donne, for example, speaks of the Logos as "Eius pars, ill action, all doing" (Sermons 8:175) and says to his audience that since it is "working upon them, by speaking to them, Be thou Verbum too, A Word, as God was; A Speaking, and a Doing Word, to his glory, and the edification of others" (8:52). But whereas in Donne's sermons and the poetry of the Metaphysicals the religious basis for a certain trust in the word is never entirely absent, this

39 See Walker's section on Pentonzezzi (107-11) for the importance of the speaker's and listener's spiritual disposition when the power of words is at stake. For instance, prayer "must come from the depthes of the heart and be sincere; for these are the spirits more strongly affected and more powerful in their effect on matter" (Walker 186, translating from De Incarnatiu (Halsey 1556) 235). In Cymbeline, cf. also the evil spirit of Imogene's false intervening "like the tyrannous breaking of the north" (5.4.36) before Imogene can set her parting "Betwixt two charming words" (53).
40 "I will remain / The loyalist husband that did d' er right troth. / ... And with mine eyes I'll drink the words you send" (1.2.26-27, 31).
References

Primary Sources


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