Shakespeare and Christian Hermetism: *religio mentis*

a study of esoteric thought in four plays

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This thesis is dedicated to my supervisor

Dr Heather Beviss Kerr

1957-2019

_a gifted scholar, greatly missed_
Hermes Trismegistus as depicted on the floor of the Duomo at Siena c.1488
William Shakespeare as depicted on the title page of the First Folio 1623
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Abstract

This thesis analyses four plays by Shakespeare for evidence of Shakespeare’s familiarity with Hermetic thought. I interpret *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, *King Lear* (Quarto and Folio), *Othello* and *The Tempest* in the light of the esoteric religious philosophy now known as Christian Hermetism principally, but not solely, as it is articulated in the texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, formerly *Pymander*.

The thesis is in two parts: two contextual chapters, and four exegetical. The first chapter recounts the advent of the pagan texts in Renaissance Florence in the fifteenth century where, purged of magia, they were hailed as a *prisca theologia* contemporaneous with Moses, translated from Greek into Latin by Marsilio Ficino and reconciled to Christianity. The chapter summarises the theosophy of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and the work of the first translators, Marsilio Ficino and Lodovico Lazzarelli, who also authored the dialogic commentary, *Crater Hermetis*. The second chapter traces the history of the transmission of edited and new translations of the texts in early sixteenth century England, and also in Catholic and Huguenot France where they were favourably received by episcopate and royalty. I establish that the Hermetic texts were known in late Tudor England where much of the doctrine was heretical to the prevailing Calvinism. Those in England familiar with the Hermetic religious philosophy include John Dee, Philip Sidney, and Walter Ralegh and the Durham House set which included George Peele, George Chapman and others whose knowledge of the Hermetic texts is not disputed. Shakespeare was their contemporary and this study asks if there is evidence in some of his plays that he too knew of this eirenic philosophy whose optimistic gnostic doctrine, extolling knowledge and love, brought with it the hope of ecumenism and religious toleration.

The exegetical chapters employ a close reading intertextual methodology. I find evidence that Shakespeare has a comprehensive knowledge of Hermetic doctrine not previously recognized. I suggest that the *Crater Hermetis* may have influenced the dramaturgy of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and I find that, by comparison with *The Tempest*, Shakespeare’s understanding of the Hermetic religious philosophy grows more profound over time. In *King Lear* I find evidence that the king’s progress toward knowledge of self may be interpreted as the Hermetic
ascent toward spiritual rebirth, while a Hermetic hermeneutic reveals Othello to be Lear’s mirror image illustrating his descent into ignorance. I find evidence that connects three of the selected plays to the 1579 French translation and commentary by Bishop Foix de Candale.

My study has benefited from translations of works only recently available in English: the translation of the *Crater Hermetis* by Wouter Hanegraaff and Ruud Bouthoorn, and the translation of Claudio Moreschini’s *Hermes Christianus* containing his prolegomena to Foix de Candale’s commentary on the *Pymander*. Fundamental to this study is Brian Copenhaver’s 1992 translation of the *Hermetica*, which I have supplemented with Foix de Candale’s French translation and commentary.

I conclude that, although the Hermetic philosophy, which is both a religion of the mind and a religion of the world, has slipped largely unnoticed through the pages of Anglophone history, the Christianized Hermetic discourse and doctrine has influenced Shakespeare’s thought in ways not previously suspected. Recognizing Hermetic thought in Shakespeare’s plays enriches our appreciation of his dramatic artistry, especially as it pertains to his portrayal of the human mind, and expands our understanding of the contribution which his plays made to religious debate in a tumultuous age.
Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the university to restrict access for a period of time.

I acknowledge with gratitude the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.
Acknowledgements

I must first acknowledge my debt to past and present scholars in my field of inquiry. First and foremost, Dame Frances Yates whose books inspired me and Professor Brian Copenhaver whose modern translation and commentary of the *Hermetica* has been invaluable. I am also grateful to Professor Wouter Hanegraaff for alerting me to the fact that Bishop Foix de Candale’s translation and commentary on *Pymander* is available in digitized form from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

I have been particularly grateful for the opportunity to audit lectures on Reformation Theology at the Adelaide College of Divinity and to present at conferences – ANZAMEMS in Wellington, New Zealand and ESSWE in Erfurt, Germany – where the response of other delegates was always appreciated. Closer to home I have valued the interest, support and encouragement of friends over several years. At risk of offending many I name a few: Marilyn Hunt, Jürgen Kracht, Jane Peace and Sandra Reynolds. I am especially grateful to my son Michael for always making time to read and discuss the latest chapter. And my special thanks for his knowledge of the period, his long experience and not least his enthusiasm must go to Dr David Hilliard.

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For their supervision of my work I thank Dr Helen Payne whose knowledge of the period in general and of Elizabethan and Stuart court life in
particular saved me from blunders. And my thanks must also go to Associate Professor Lucy Potter for her efforts to see the project through to completion, and to Professor Stephen Muecke who made time toward the end to read the thesis and check my French translations.

I dedicate this work to the late Dr Heather Kerr who for most of this project was my principal supervisor. Her positive approach and her gift for asking penetrating questions helped shape the study in its early days. As a Shakespeare scholar, her knowledge of the field was invaluable. The loss of her scholarship, her insights, her warm encouragement and her wise advice generously and kindly given, is incalculable.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge that whatever flaws are in this paper can only be laid at my door.

Finally, I gratefully acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.
A Note on the Texts


References to Hermetic texts are drawn principally from *Hermetica*: the Greek *Corpus Hermeticum* and the Latin *Asclepius* in a new English translation by Professor Brian P. Copenhaver. Copenhaver’s work comprises seventeen texts: Books I to XIV and Books XVI to XVIII and the *Asclepius*, translations of the Greek and Latin of the Budé edition also used by Nock and Festugière. The former group derives originally from the fourteenth century manuscript translated by Marsilio Ficino in 1463 (MS A Laurentianus, Florence), while the remaining three tracts were translated by Lodovico Lazzarelli (Biblioteca Comunale, Viterbo).

Copenhaver’s translation is complemented in this study by the 1579 French translation and commentary of François Foix de Candale: *Le Pimandre de Mercure Trismegiste de la philosophie Christienne, Cognnoissance du verbe divin, et de l’excellence des oeuvres de Dieu, traduit de l’exemplaire Grec, avec collation de tres-amples commentaires*. Par François Monsieur de Foix, de la famille de Candale, Capitale de Buchs, etc. Evesque d’Ayre, etc. à très-haute, très-illustre, et très puissante Princesse, Marguerite de France, Roine de Navarre fille & soeur des Rois très-Chrestien (accessed online from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France). Foix de
Candale’s translation includes as chapter XV three tracts taken from Johann Stobaeus and the *Suda*, which were first added to the *Corpus Hermeticum* by Adrian Turnebus in 1554. Foix includes chapter XVI, merges chapter XVII with chapter XIV and, following Turnebus, he omits chapter XVIII.


Within the study the treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum* are referred to as Books rather than chapters which Foix prefers. References are given as *CH* followed by the number of the book and the section inside square brackets e.g. (*CH IV [3]*).

The name for God, Poimandres, sometimes given in the literature as *Pimander*, is spelt *Pymander* throughout.
Other symbols used when quoting from the *Hermetica* replicate those used by Copenhaver:

- angled brackets `< >`: insertion of a word or words
- square brackets `[ ]`: removal or a word or words
- pointed brackets `{ }`: a word or words regarded as unintelligible or otherwise problematic
- ellipsis `...`: a lacuna or gap in the text

Translations from the French are my own except where otherwise acknowledged.

A Note on Hermetism and Hermeticism

Throughout this study, ‘Hermetism’ is distinguished from ‘Hermeticism’. Antoine Faivre and others have usefully proposed that the term Hermetism be restricted to the religious and philosophic discourse in and around the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius*, which were first published together in 1505 in Latin and are now collectively known as the *Hermetica* (1998, 109). The term, Hermeticism, is reserved for that whole ensemble of magical ideas, related to Hermetism, including alchemy, *magia*, astrology and cabala, most of them practical, some theoretical, that were known in antiquity and which coalesced in the Renaissance. They do not form part of this study. Shakespeare himself may not have made this distinction; the plays show knowledge of both discourses, alchemy being the link between them, as the alchemical process, which transforms base metals into pure gold, functions as a trope of the gnostic ascent of the soul toward spiritual purity.
This study has its origin in the provocative and inspirational work of Dame Frances Yates, and could not have been carried out without the invaluable English translation of the *Hermetica*, by Professor Brian Copenhaver. The study has also been enabled by Wouter Hanegraaff and Ruud Bouthoorn’s first modern English translation of and commentary on the works of Lodovico Lazzarelli, and by the more recent Italian research of Claudio Moreschini translated by Patrick Baker which provided a prolegomena to the 1579 French commentary of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, then known as *Pymander*, by Bishop François Foix de Candale.

Towards the end of my study, I was made aware that the French version which still awaits translation into English, has been digitized and is available from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. As a result, I have been able to cross-reference the modern English translation with a Renaissance French translation potentially available to Shakespeare, and been spared at least those blunders that may have arisen from hanging too much on a word not in the sixteenth century translation.

Copenhaver pays tribute to Yates for making Hermes ‘truly prominent once again for students of early modern intellectual history’ and he records that Yates ‘detected Hermetic influence in major figures of the Renaissance literary canon, including Sidney, Spenser and Shakespeare’ (lix). This study attempts to respond to the challenge implied in those words, by inquiring into the presence of Hermetic thought in certain plays by Shakespeare. However, while Yates’ view of Renaissance Hermetic thought embraced the whole gamut of *magia*, alchemy, astrology and cabala, my study examines Shakespeare’s knowledge of the gnostic religious philosophy, free of all magic and without reference to cabala, as it is contained principally but not exclusively in the pages of the *Corpus Hermeticum.*
Introduction

*Berowne:* What is the end of study let me know?

*King (Ferdinand of Navarre)*: Why, that to know which else we should not know.

*Berowne:* Things hid and barred you mean from common sense?

*King:* Ay, that is study’s god-like recompense. (1.1. 55-58)

*Love’s Labour’s Lost.* William Shakespeare, 1598

*Poimandres to Hermes Trismegistus:* This is the final good for those who have received knowledge: to be made god.

*Corpus Hermeticum* (Book I [26])

A few words of teasing banter in the opening scene of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* appear to echo the serious promise made by Poimandres (or god) that knowledge makes a man a god.¹ At one level they reflect Berowne’s objections to study by foreshadowing the epistemological debate – opposing common-sense knowledge arising from the active life to knowledge learned from books. At another level, they hint at the revelatory knowledge of God that rewards the study of self that is central to the religious philosophy of Christian Hermetism. The seemingly tenuous connection between these two dialogues highlights the question that motivates this

¹ The first Latin translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* was titled *Pymander, sive de potestate et sapientia Dei* after the name given to god, Poimandres or Pymander, in the first treatise. The body of texts was referred to by that name until 1854, since when the collection has been known as the *Corpus Hermeticum* (Moreschini 2). In this study the title is abbreviated to *CH*, each treatise is referred to as a Book and each section of a Book is numbered and enclosed in square brackets, as *CH I [1]*.
study: is there evidence in his plays that Shakespeare was familiar with the religious
philosophy of Hermetism as it is articulated in the texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum*
and its companion text the *Asclepius*, collectively known as the *Hermetica*?

The aim of my study is to address that question by interpreting four
literary / dramatic texts by Shakespeare in the light of the Hermetic corpus. The play
texts selected – *Love’s Labour’s Lost, King Lear* in Quarto and Folio, *Othello* and
*The Tempest* – each deal with issues associated with knowing, love, and the mind,
while the *Corpus Hermeticum* introduces Poimandres as the ‘mind of sovereignty’
(CH I [2]) and presents ‘a theory of salvation through knowledge or *gnosis*’
(Copenhaver xxxvii). According to the Hermetic doctrine, it is knowledge of self or
*noesis*, activated by love, that leads to knowledge of god or *gnosis* and to becoming
like god.

Since antiquity, Hermetic thought has traditionally been associated with
*magia*, alchemy and astrology and, since the Renaissance, with a Christianized cabala
which Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) introduced, and Johannes
Reuchlin (1455-1522) and Friar Francesco Giorgi (1466-1540) developed. However,
this study draws largely on the religious and philosophic thought found in the
theoretical texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which first entered the Latin West in
1460, purged of all reference to magic and alchemy and of almost all mention of
astrology, and hitherto largely neglected in Shakespearean scholarship.

Shakespeare’s texts are the focus of this study, but Shakespeare lived and
wrote in an age when religion mattered. Christian men and women, preoccupied with
the salvation of their immortal souls, looked to religion for guidance on how to live
in order to save one’s soul for eternity. Wherever possible I situate the plays in
relation to the world outside the theatre by referencing contemporary religio-political events, such as the Edict of Nantes, which coincided with the publication of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* in 1598, and contemporary religious controversies. These include the determinist Calvinist doctrine of predestination opposed by the doctrine of free will espoused by Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) and referenced in *Othello*, and the perennial philosophical question of life after death which I argue underlies *The Tempest*.

No issue was more controversial than the issue of mankind’s salvation. Luther (1483-1546) decreed that faith alone would save mankind, while Calvin (1509-1564) taught that God had already determined who was elected to salvation before Adam’s Fall in Eden, and that Man is powerless to affect God’s sovereign will. In response, at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) the Catholic Church decreed that, although ‘God necessarily takes the initiative in salvation through grace’ justification requires man’s cooperation with God, that ‘humanity retains free will after the Fall’ and that ‘God’s grace is available through the good works which humans can perform’ (MacCulloch 235). In short, for the Reformed church Man’s justification is effected by faith or by grace and without his cooperation, while for the Traditional church it is effected by cooperation with God and the labour of good works (*Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 914). In both cases, God’s will is sovereign. By contrast, the Hermetist, on the path toward *gnosis*, or knowledge of the mind of god, uses the mind to direct the will freely to choose how to act, and destiny is in one’s own hands. I return to the issue in connection with Edmund in *King Lear*, and with Othello, where the question of theological determinism is complicated by astrological determinism. In a century where the divisions in the Church engendered intolerance, hatred, war and bloodshed, a gnostic and eirenic
religion, such as Christian Hermetism where good works and service are motivated by agape or love of each other as Christ commanded, may have appealed to many of Shakespeare’s contemporaries.

However, the relationship between religion and literature has long been an uneasy one as Brian Cummings observed in 2012.² For many years the debate over Shakespeare’s religious sympathies had swung between his perceived Traditional Catholicism and an assumption of his inclination to Reformed Protestantism. However, in the last decade of the twentieth century historians revised their view of the extent to which the Reformation, which had been effected politically by legislation from the top, had taken hold in late Tudor England (Christopher Haigh, Eamon Duffy, Michael Questier). A new view of Catholic resistance to change and the persistence of Catholic sympathies at the grass roots level led to a landmark conference at the University of Lancaster which spearheaded a ‘turn to religion’ in Shakespeare studies.³ The consensus position reached by academics at the Lancaster

² Brian Cummings. Shakespeare and the Reformation. Lecture read at the British Academy.

³ The 1999 Lancaster Conference to investigate Shakespeare’s religion and religion in Shakespeare’s plays generated papers from twenty-seven scholars published in two volumes in 2003: Theatre and Religion, and Region, Religion and Patronage, edited by Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay and Richard Wilson. The same year saw Dennis Taylor and David Beauregard’s edited collection on Shakespeare and the Culture of Christianity in Early Modern England with papers from a further sixteen scholars. In 2004, Jackson and Marotti reviewed the position in “The Turn to Religion” in Early Modern English Studies. In 2006 English Language Notes devoted an entire issue to religion in Shakespeare, and in 2011 Jackson and Marotti published an edited collection of ten more papers. This century has been punctuated with individual volumes on religion in Shakespeare’s plays from scholars both established and new including Kristen Poole (2000), Stephen Greenblatt (2001), Richard
conference and in the following decade is that Shakespeare’s plays reveal the
dramatist ‘as a religious sceptic who was intellectually and emotionally attached to
some of the features of the “old religion”’ meaning Catholicism (Jackson and Marotti
2011, 4-5). The possibility that some plays may also reference an esoteric spiritual
dimension or that the canon contains evidence of non-conformism has rarely been
considered. Robert Schwarz in 1989 discussed ‘Rosalynde among the Familists’ in
As You Like It, and in 2003 Margaret Jones-Davies argued that Cymbeline is saturated
with hermetic poetics: ‘hermetic language’ (207), ‘coding’ (208) and symbolism.
Nevertheless, her opinion that ‘[r]eligious hermetism was a common ground of
agreement between the warring factions’ (205), is not borne out by the historic
evidence. The Lancaster conference concluded that ‘we will read [Shakespeare’s]
plays differently if we attend to their Catholic sub-texts’ (Miola in Wilson 2003, 31).
The findings of my study are easily reconciled to that conclusion, with the
qualification that we will understand the plays differently if we also recognize
Shakespeare’s familiarity with the Hermetic intertexts.

There has been a similarly uneasy relationship between Hermetic thought
and academia, which the installation of a chair in the History of Hermetic Thought
and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam has done much to rectify. Since
1999 a new confidence in the field and its methods has helped to dispel ‘the common
antipathy against esotericism’ which formerly relegated students of the esoteric to
obscurantism (van den Broek 11) or the ‘lunatic fringe’. As Allison Coudert summed
up its new status after a decade: ‘No longer marginalized, esotericism must now be

Wilson (2004), Beatrice Groves (2007), David Beauregard (2008), Adrian Street (2009),
viewed as an integral part of Western religious, intellectual and cultural history’ (120). As far as I am aware, the current study breaks new ground in locating Shakespeare study within that esoteric sphere where the discourse of Christianized Hermetism circulates.

In juxtaposing the religio-philosophic Hermetic texts with the four dramatic texts listed above, this study brings together those two spheres of discourse, drama and esoteric thought, for the purpose of intertextual comparison by close reading and to allow a Hermetic exegesis of the plays. The methodology employed is both intertextual and hermeneutic. The Hermetic texts function as intertexts, defined by Michael Riffaterre as ‘one or more texts which the reader must know in order to understand a work of literature’ (56). Riffaterre’s definition is analogous to a paralogue, or a text ‘that illuminates the intellectual, social, theological or political meanings in other texts’ (Miola 2004, 23). Miola identifies seven types of intertextuality and categorizes three variables amongst them, including the whole panoply of verbal echoes and what the audience or reader brings to and recognizes in the text (2004, 14-25). The premise of this study is that knowledge of the Hermetic intertexts will illuminate the significance of some aspects of the plays under scrutiny and add a new dimension to our critical understanding and interpretation of those plays in their historic religious context.

The basis of the comparison is principally consonance of thought, but I also consider connections such as revisions, verbal echoes, direct verbal borrowings, allegory and other connections likely to indicate the playwright’s familiarity with the Hermetic texts. The relationship between text and intertext is sometimes linear, for example when the intertext sheds light on or lends significance to an idea in a play, and sometimes circular when the play itself seems to illustrate and dramatize a
concept from the intertext. The former is akin to what Paul Ricoeur calls ‘a hermeneutics of faith’, where the aim is to restore the Hermetic meaning inherent in the text but now lost to time and unfamiliarity (Josselson 1). Ricoeur distinguishes this from ‘a hermeneutics of suspicion’ which problematizes the text as one that embeds coded meanings recoverable from outside the text itself. The betrothal masque redolent of the Eleusinian ritual of rebirth in spring that entertains the lovers in *The Tempest* seems to exemplify this form.

Each of the selected plays is interpreted in the light of Brian Copenhaver’s modern English translation of the *Hermetica*.\(^4\) However, in order to overcome the limitation of employing a translation not known in Shakespeare’s day, I frequently cross-reference Copenhaver’s translation with the French translation and commentary of Bishop François Foix de Candale (1512-1594), *Le Pimandre de Mercure Trismegiste de la Philosophie Chrestienne* published in 1579 and therefore potentially available to Shakespeare.\(^5\) Foix de Candale’s work includes a chapter omitted by Copenhaver (chapter XV containing fragments from a c.500 C E *Anthologium* compiled by Johannes Stobaeus), and omits chapter XVIII which Copenhaver includes. It is true that a new Greek edition by Adrian Turnebus (1554), as well as Latin translations and one earlier French translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (by Gabriel du Préau in 1549) were also potentially available, but for

\(^4\) The first English translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* by John Everard was published posthumously in 1650. It was based on a Latin version by Francesco Patrizi published in 1591, *Nova de Universis Philosophia*.

\(^5\) Foix de Candale’s French translation has been recently digitized by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and may now be read online.
the purpose of this exploratory study and for its relative ease of access, I limit the contemporary religious intertext to the French translation, supplemented by its extensive commentary written by Foix de Candale. I complement the translations of the *Corpus Hermeticum* with its companion text the *Asclepius*, and with a late fifteenth-century dialogic commentary on the Hermetic corpus, the *Crater Hermetis*, made by Lodovico Lazzarelli (1447-1500).

When the manuscript of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, purchased by the Florentine merchant prince Cosimo de’Medici, was translated by the Greek scholar, priest and physician, Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) of the Florentine academy, the fourteen tracts aroused great interest. They were believed to be the *prisca theologia* (earliest theology), the work of the legendary Hermes Trismegistus, a pagan contemporary or predecessor of Moses. De’Medici also purchased numerous texts of Plato, most of which were previously unknown in the West. After completing his translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Ficino translated all the Platonic texts as well as those of some neo-Platonists: Plotinus, Porphyry and Proclus, and went on to write and publish extensive commentaries and a ‘highly original interpretation’ of Plato’s works, the *Theologia Platonica* (Vyvyan 1961, 26). John Vyvyan has written an insightful and comprehensive exegesis of Shakespeare’s debt to Plato throughout the canon, or more precisely, of Shakespeare’s debt to Ficino who interpreted Plato in the light of what he believed to be the anterior texts of Hermes’ *Pymander*. Sarah Hutton felt that Ficino’s unusual interpretation of Plato was an eclectic reading.

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*Visitors to Siena in Italy after 1488 could see Hermes Trismegistus depicted in mosaic on the floor of the Duomo and labelled as a contemporary of Moses.*
influenced by neo-Platonists, such as Plotinus, and that ‘the Hermetic writings were important confirmation of his reading of Plato’ (69), while Frances Yates pointed out that ‘Renaissance Neoplatonism’ was underpinned by Hermetic mysticism (1972, 2000, 219). In fact, the texts of the Corpus Hermeticum, written in the first centuries C E, syncretise thinking found in Plato (c.420-347 BCE); the Stoics; Philo (c.20 BCE-50 C E), a Hellenic Jew from Alexandria, whose concept of the Word or Logos probably influenced the Gospel of John; middle neo-Platonists such as Plotinus (205-70); the Syrian Porphyry (232-303); Iamblichus (c.245-c.325); Proclus (412-85); and pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (c.500), whom Moreschini names as ‘Plato’s legitimate heir [. . . ] more so than the pagan Platonists’ (144). In addition, the Hermetic texts draw upon the book of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible, some epistles of Paul, and the Gospel of John in the New Testament, as well as the Gnostics, and other sources. It is important to remember that Ficino believed the Hermetic texts to be anterior to Plato and prophetic of the coming of Christ. It is also important to remember that, unlike the numerous technical Hermetic texts known in antiquity that dealt with magic, alchemy and astrology, the fourteen tracts which Ficino had were theoretical, entirely free of magic and alchemy, and almost devoid of astrology. Lazzarelli, however, was working from a longer manuscript with three additional tracts (Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn 4) one of which, Definitions of Asclepius to King Ammon situates the sun at the centre of the cosmos, and also tells of astral daemons which determine one’s destiny at birth. These three additional chapters, entitled Diffinitiones Asclepii were later published in Paris in 1507 by Symphorien Champier. In Chapter Five, I connect one of these with Othello.

Although concepts such as astral demons may have challenged Christian orthodoxy, early Catholic translators, such as Lazzarelli, found ways of reconciling
Hermetic thought to Christian teaching. In 1501 Lazzarelli’s admired but eccentric mentor ‘Mercurius’ da Correggio, to whom Lazzarelli had gifted his manuscript, presented the manuscript to an ambassador of the French king, Louis XII. Champier, who was one of the king’s physicians, is believed to have been present at the time. Ficino’s translation was already known in France thanks to a new edition published in 1494 by Lefèvre d’Etaples. Then in 1505 Lefèvre published another edition of Ficino’s translation of the Corpus Hermeticum to which he appended the Asclepius, and Lazzarelli’s Crater Hermetis. The latter work, described by Hanegraaff as ‘one of the purest and most explicit examples of hermetic-Christian syncretism’, has been recognized ‘as a work of pivotal importance to our understanding of Renaissance hermetism’ (2005, 57).

In this work Lazzarelli develops his arguments in the form of a didactic dialogue with Ferdinand I of Aragon, king of Naples and Sicily (1423/24-1494) who ‘intent on contemplation’ desired ‘peace of mind’ (Crater Hermetis, 1.3, 169). Ferdinand was of great interest to the French who had a long history of warring for possession of Naples and Milan. I will argue that he is the Ferdinand for whom Shakespeare named the king in Love’s Labour’s Lost and the prince of Naples in The Tempest. The former provides an unusual historic link between the world of the play and the real socio-political world in which the esoteric Hermetic text was read. The play appears to dramatize aspects of the reunion of the Catholic Marguerite de Valois with her estranged husband Henri Bourbon, Huguenot king of Navarre between 1579

7 It is not entirely clear how Champier obtained the manuscript, but Hanegraaff cites Vecce who identified Champier as a physician seen talking with Correggio (2005, 41 n.133).
and 1582 (Viennot 199 n. 399). Furthermore, there is substantial evidence, discussed below, that during those years Foix de Candale’s *Le Pimandre*, dedicated to Marguerite, was read and discussed openly at the court of ‘*le roi son époux*’. It is clear from the record of translations, editions and transmission that from 1494 to 1579 the Hermetic texts were received most favourably in France both by the Catholic court and the episcopate. Texts and commentaries were not only openly dedicated to bishops, but also undertaken by bishops such as Foix de Candale who was Bishop of Aire and kinsman to Henri of Navarre.

By contrast, evidence of the transmission and reception of the Hermetic texts in England is more problematic. After early interest by John Colet, who corresponded with Ficino, Thomas More (1478-1535), who translated the *Life of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*, and by visitors to England such as Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466/9-1536), followed by Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535), there is little recorded before Dr John Dee (1527-1608) produced the famously obscure *Monas Hieroglyphica* in 1564. Recognized as a polymath extraordinaire, Dee was an astronomer, astrologer, alchemist, Catholic priest (Parry 29) Greek scholar and mathematician as well as a Hermetic Magus. He shared an interest in geometry with Foix de Candale. Yates argues that Dee may have influenced Shakespeare’s conception of ‘Prospero: Shakespearean Magus’ in *The Tempest* (1979, 1999, 186-192 passim). Dee’s documented interest in Hermetism begins with his time in Paris in 1550 when he lectured on mathematical philosophy to a class that

included Adrian Turnebus. In 1554 Turnebus published a new Greek edition of the
*Corpus Hermeticum*, including fragments from Stobaeus, mentioned earlier, and
Lazzarelli’s *Diffinitiones Asclepii*, which Dee owned (French 55). Dee’s enigmatic
*Monas Hieroglyphica* (1564) which undertook to ‘enable man to release himself from
his body and return to his original divine nature’ (French 7) is purely Hermetic. His
vast library ‘where the Hermetic corpus . . . occupied a prominent corner’ (Sherman
xiv), was available to his friends who included Philip Sidney (1554-1586) and
members of the Sidney circle, as well as Walter Ralegh (?1554-1618) and the
Durham House set.

It was Sidney who undertook to translate *De la Vérité de la religion chrétienne* by his friend the Protestant Philippe du Plessis Mornay (1549-1623) who
had originally dedicated the work to Henri of Navarre.9 Yates notes that the
marginalia record Mornay’s frequent recourse to the *Pymander* and the *Asclepius*,
and describes Mornay as ‘an example of how men were turning to the Hermetic
religion of the world to take them above these conflicts’ (1964,1991, 176-177). She
is referring to the continual religious wars between the Catholic League, led by the
duc de Guise, and the Huguenots that were devastating France.10 Nevertheless, while
Jeanne Harrie correctly calls for more evidence to support Yates’ opinion of Mornay
(505), it is a matter of fact that Henri of Navarre, a man probably sympathetic to
religious Hermetism, was able to legislate religious peace in France.

9 The implication of the dedication is that the Huguenot king of Navarre looked with interest
on religious Hermetism.

10 The Huguenots were French Calvinists.
In 1583 a most idiosyncratic kind of Hermeticism was brought to London by the eccentric Giordano Bruno (1549-1600). He may have dreamt of ‘a universal empire, which would heal the wounds of sixteenth century society’ (Gosselin and Lerner 27), but, as Yates observed, ‘his panacea for the religious situation of Europe [was] a return to magical Hermetism and magical Egyptianism’ (emphasis in original) (1964, 1991, 179). He visited London between 1583 and 1585 and dedicated two of the six books he wrote in those years to Sidney. They both exemplify his highly original interpretation of ideas to be found in the *Corpus Hermeticum*.¹¹

Another who knew Dee, who sought his advice on navigation, and who was in a position to borrow his books, was Walter Ralegh, whose knowledge of Hermetism is clear from his *History of the World* published in 1614. Ralegh’s coterie included Ferdinando, Lord Strange, whose playing company, Strange’s Men, was the first to perform plays later attributed to Shakespeare on the public stage, possibly Christopher Marlowe, and the poets George Peele and George Chapman – all contemporaries of and probably known to Shakespeare. Like Marlowe whose *Massacre at Paris* drew on the events following the marriage of Henri Bourbon and Marguerite de Valois, Chapman was knowledgeable about affairs at the French court and wrote at least three plays employing that knowledge.¹² More immediately

¹¹ *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, is about expelling the vices and purging the spirit of error, while *The Heroic Frenzies*, inveighs against wasting time on the love of woman in favour of the spiritual love of God which inflames the soul with the love of wisdom.

¹² *Bussy d’Ambois* about a former lover of Marguerite de Valois, assassinated just before she travelled to Navarre in 1579, *The Revenge of Bussy d’Ambois* and *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron*. 
relevant to my study however is an assertion by Jean Jacquot, Chapman’s biographer, that he ‘connaissait bien’ Ficino’s Latin translation of *Pymander liber de potestate et sapientia Dei* (74 n.30). Jacquot connects the vision that Chapman claimed inspired him to translate Homer with passages borrowed from Books I and X of *Pymander* and argues convincingly that other works of Chapman such as *The Essay on the Soul, The Shadow of Night, Banquet of Sense* and *The Tears of Peace* not only cite frequently from Plato, Plotinus and Ficino, but are saturated with ideas from the *Hermetica* (19, 225).

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) is another who may have taken an interest in philosophic Hermetism. Steven Matthews in his dissertation on Bacon noted cautiously that ‘his particular Christian theology [. . .] facilitated a sympathetic reception of particular Hermetic ideas’ (380). In addition, in the 1590s, a scatter of overt references to Hermes or Hermes Trismegistus in the writing of men such as Gabriel Harvey, Peele and Thomas Nashe, as well as in the report of the Christmas revels held at Gray’s Inn in 1594, the *Gesta Grayorum*, suggests that others in England knew of the ostensibly pagan works too.

Several scholars have identified hints of paganism in the plays of Shakespeare (J. C. Maxwell; D. G. James; W. R. Elton; E.A.J. Honigmann). Frank Kermode compares Prospero to Hermes Trismegistus himself, calling upon the words which Bacon used of King James VI and I: ‘Your Majesty standeth invested of that triplicitie, which in great veneration was ascribed to the ancient Hermes; the power and fortune of a king, the knowledge and illumination of a priest, and the learning and universalit of a philosopher’ (1605, 1952, 2).
Since Yates’ seminal work, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* in 1964, a number of scholars have attributed Shakespeare’s use of magic and alchemy and even cabala to the influence of Hermeticism. Harold Bloom compares Prospero to a Sufi, ‘like himself descended from the ancient Hermetists’ (666). John Mebane saw Prospero’s art as both ‘quite literally Hermetic magic’, albeit magic that ‘strives to effect moral and spiritual reform’ (179–80). In addition, there has been a cluster of doctoral theses that have linked the Hermetic tradition to one or other of Shakespeare’s plays through his use of magic, typically playful folk magic as with Puck, in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and subtle alchemical references in *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest* amongst others.\(^\text{13}\) For Bloom, the plays remain ‘aesthetically, cognitively . . . morally, even spiritually . . . beyond the end of the mind’s reach’ (xvii). I suggest that despite the cultural changes that have occurred since the plays were written, a knowledge of the religious philosophy in the pages of the *Corpus Hermeticum* may bridge that gap and bring the plays once again within ‘mind’s reach’.

Paradoxically, the Hermetic texts taught that their message should both be kept secret and made available to any who were willing to set foot on the path to

Nevertheless, as I said, their message of love, peace, harmony and service, and their promise of salvation to all who were prepared to follow the way of Hermes to knowledge, would have held an obvious attraction for men and women looking to rise above the disputation, confusion, division and warfare that accompanied the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter Reformation.

Currently the Greco-Egyptian Hermetic texts, their theosophy and the narrative of their arrival in Renaissance Italy are known principally to those few students and scholars who specialize in the history of esoteric thought. For that reason, my study is in two parts. The first two chapters lay the foundation for my inquiry into the four plays, by sketching the provenance of the Corpus Hermeticum – its appearance in the Latin West, its theosophy and its subsequent translation, transmission and reception in France and into England.

In Chapter One I recount the advent of the Corpus Hermeticum in Renaissance Florence in 1460, and discuss the texts in general terms. (The narrative of how Hermes / Mercury became Hermes Trismegistus, and evidence of the warm reception accorded him in fifteenth century Italy may be found in Appendix I.) A summary of the theosophy contained in the two initiatory Books, I and XIII, is followed by a discussion of the early translator, Ficino, and his younger contemporary, Lazzarelli. (An outline of the remaining books of the Corpus Hermeticum, the fragments from Johann Stobaeus, later added as Chapter XV, and the Asclepius, known in Latin translation since about the fifth century, may be found in Appendix II.)

Chapter Two traces the transmission and reception of edited and new translations of the Corpus Hermeticum and Hermetic thought from Italy to England.
and to France and back into England during the sixteenth century. I note the emergence of conventicles of men and women such as the Family of Love and the Pléiade, the founding of the Academies and the practice of reading or listening in discussion groups. I discuss the legacy of Colet, Thomas More, Erasmus and Agrippa and note the influence of religious Hermetism on their thought.

In France, from as early as 1494, the texts were edited, translated and well-received by both the episcopate and the court, including the court of Henri of Navarre, a kinsman of Bishop Foix de Candale who dedicated his published French translation and commentary to Marguerite de Valois in 1579. Her interest and enthusiastic response is well-documented in her Mémoires, letters and poetry. By contrast, the clearest evidence of knowledge of religious Hermetism in late Tudor England lies in the personal booklists of men such as George Puttenham, Andrew Perne and Dee, in ideas embedded in the work of Dee himself, Sidney, Marlowe, Chapman and Ralegh, and in references to Trismegistus by name. In acknowledging these works I situate the plays of Shakespeare within a stream of alternative religious thought that spread steadily, if sometimes underground, through the long century from 1494 to 1614 and beyond.

In the second part of the study a Hermetic exegesis shows that all four plays deal with mind, with knowledge and with love which are at the core of Hermetic doctrine, though hardly unique to it, and do so in different ways.

In Chapter Three: Love’s Labour’s Lost, the path to self-knowledge deferred, I argue that the play has a connection with an historic politico-religious situation in France. King Ferdinand of Navarre, who wants his court to devote themselves to contemplative study in order to reach the promised ‘god-like’ status,
simultaneously references both Henri Bourbon, Huguenot King of Navarre, and Ferdinand of Aragon, King of Naples, who was instructed in the way of Hermes by Lazzarelli. Seen in the light of the Hermetic doctrine, the play raises the contemporary debate about knowledge acquired from the vita activa opposed to knowledge derived from the vita contemplativa, and reveals that true love is in the mind and reached through service to others. I conclude that Love's Labour's Lost entertained the Protestant English court of Elizabeth with a love comedy that satirises Henri of Navarre's real-life political experiment in religious toleration which ended with the amorous exploits of husband and wife.

The two plays at the heart of the study, King Lear and Othello, each deal with a Hermetic view of the mind and its motivations to act, with the mind disordered, with knowledge of self and knowledge of the other, and with the purifying and perfecting power of love, whether filial, charitable, Platonic or erotic, opposed to the destructive power of lust.

In Chapter Four: King Lear, the path to self-knowledge and spiritual regeneration, I argue that the transformation of King Lear's mind to knowledge of self and compassion for others dramatizes the union of understanding and sensation explained in Book IX of the Corpus Hermeticum. I argue that the altered behaviour of the King from autocrat to loving father allegorizes the spiritual journey of the soul or the ‘way of Hermes’ to gnosis and spiritual salvation. I argue that a comparison of the events in the two interactive plots of King Lear with the concepts grown from seeds ‘from some demonic being’ (‘adulteries, murders, assaults on one’s father’ etc. CH IX [3]) provides evidence of Shakespeare’s familiarity with the Corpus, possibly via Sidney’s Arcadia. Furthermore, a comparison of characters’ minds and motives with the twelve ‘torments of matter’ listed in Book XIII (such as ignorance, lust and
deceit), furnishes evidence suggesting that the Corpus Hermeticum is Shakespeare’s *source proximate* (Miola 2004 19). I review the textual, bibliographic debate which led to the current critical opinion that the 1623 Folio revised edition of *King Lear* is a substantially different play from the first Quarto of 1608, and argue that a Hermetic exegesis provides a coherent rationale for the revisions.

The argument in Chapter Five: *Othello*, the path to self-knowledge reversed, is that Othello's transformation upends Lear's trajectory to culminate in Othello’s ruin. I compare *King Lear* and *Othello* and discuss the power of Mind or Reason to control Passion or Sensation. I briefly review the conflicting contemporary doctrines on the place of free will, choice and fate in mankind’s salvation, and argue that the play raises for debate the issue of determinism, whether theological or astrological, and the capacity of Man to use his mind, as Hermes teaches, to direct his will to act in a way that can overcome fate. I argue that Iago is Othello's fate personified; the man who was at the height of his powers and believed himself to have achieved perfection is transformed into a ‘dolt as ignorant as dirt’ and deceived into choosing to destroy the woman he loves in order that his astral fate may be realized, namely to die by his own hand. In this way, *Othello* illustrates the vulnerability of a good man to evil and that, as Hermes teaches, the source of human evil is in the mind of Man not God.

In Chapter Six: *The Tempest*, the path to immortality, I contend that this complex play yields to a layered exegesis which reveals a literal interpretation, an allegorical alchemical interpretation and a metaphysical or spiritual interpretation. I propose that in reconciling Milan and Naples, the play heals a long-standing historic wound in French memory. I suggest that *The Tempest* offers some profound answers to questions about the nature of reality, about the Hermetic / Platonic doctrine that
soul and body separate at death, the immortality of the soul and the idea that the death of the body is nothing more than change and dissolution. These concepts are addressed in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the Stobaean fragment found in Foix de Candale’s translation and commentary. Finally, I contend that Shakespeare has constructed in Prospero a man who is the epitome of a Christian and a Hermetist who, after years of contemplative study, ascended to the world of the intellect where he acquired the god-like qualities promised to the Hermetic Adept and combined them with the qualities of his Christian God. I conclude that in Prospero, Shakespeare has created the archetypal Christian Hermetist.

Overall, from the evidence of Hermetic thought in the selected plays, I find that Shakespeare was familiar with the distinctive Hermetic view of the twofold nature of Man and the way of Hermes to the salvation of the immortal soul, and that he knew and drew on the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Asclepius* and the *Crater Hermetis*. I find that he most probably consulted the French translation and commentary by Foix de Candale, but the possibility that he knew other translations not included in this study, cannot be excluded. The finding sheds new light on Shakespeare’s religious sympathies in a time of religious upheaval and raises two previously unforeseen questions which warrant further investigation. First that some of Shakespeare’s plays may have been discussed while in manuscript by conventicles of men and women not connected with the theatre, such as the Familists for example; second, that Christian Hermetism may have been perceived by some in England as a viable, eirenic, religious alternative to the continual war, division and bloodshed being carried out in the name of Christ.
Part One

Chapter One

Christian Hermetism in the Renaissance: the texts, the theosophy and some early translators

About the texts

When the *Corpus Hermeticum* – for many years known as *Pymander* – entered the Latin West after Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, the texts were believed to be of the greatest antiquity and written by one man, Hermes Trismegistus, revered as King, Philosopher and Priest. Despite some difference of opinion about the chronology, there was general agreement in the Renaissance that a line of prophets stretched back to Adam to whom God had revealed the secrets of the universe, and forward through Abraham to Zoroaster who taught the Persians, Hermes who taught the Egyptians, and Moses who taught both the Hebrews and the Egyptian priests from whom Orpheus, Pythagoras and then Plato learnt the secret wisdom.14 Giovanni Filoramo describes the Hermetic theosophy in the texts as ‘a form of revealed knowledge’ lying ‘between the Greek rationalist tradition and

14 After reviewing the long debate which continued into the twentieth century, Moreschini asserts, ‘The once debated Egyptian setting of the Hermetic texts has now been securely established by Garth Fowden, and they are recognised as “the Hellenistic transformation of a very ancient cultural and religious heritage”. It is now a *communis opinio* that the theosophy of Hermes Trismegistus in its various forms (philosophy, alchemy, astrology, magic) effectively arose in an Egyptian setting’ (7).
Eastern wisdom’ (in Moreschini 10). Christian scholars in the Renaissance did not doubt the antiquity of the texts. They viewed the salvific religion of Hermes Trismegistus as the precursor of Christianity and ranked it with the other monotheistic Abrahamic religions – Judaism and Islam.

Although the Latin *Asclepius* and a variety of other popular Hermetic texts had been known in Western Europe, the fourteen fragments of the Greek texts, now known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, were previously known only to Byzantine scholars. Moreschini suggests that the *Corpus Hermeticum* as we know it, free from all vestiges of magic, may have resulted from the deliberate omission of writing ‘with a more obvious pagan significance’, and argues that the eleventh-century scholar Michael Psellos may have been responsible for expurgating all reference to magic and occultism from the texts that arrived in Florence in 1460 (2).

The Greek texts were purchased by Cosimo de’Medici (1389-1464), the great merchant-prince, patron of arts and letters, and translated into Latin by the scholar, priest, physician, Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) of the Florentine Academy.\(^{15}\) De’Medici also acquired numbers of Platonic dialogues – a major part of the canon – as well as neo-Platonic works, none of which were previously known in the West and which Ficino set about translating. Ficino follows Lactantius in seeing Hermes

\(^{15}\) Marsilio Ficino translated only the first fourteen books of the *Corpus Hermeticum* which were all that he had. Three additional chapters (Chapters XVI-XVIII) were added later by Lodovico Lazzarelli, working from a different manuscript. Problems associated with the printing and transmission of Ficino’s translation are touched on in the next chapter. Ficino devoted the rest of his life to translating and writing commentaries on the works of Plato and some middle neo-Platonists.
‘as a prophet of Christianity’s triumph over ancient religion’ (Moreschini 145) and he agrees with those who identify Hermes’ attribution to god of ‘power, wisdom and goodness’ with the three Persons of the Trinity (Moreschini 134). Even so, Hanegraaff argues that it was Lodovico Lazzarelli who was the true Christian Hermetist because he was convinced that the Hermetic texts validated Christian truths, and he both understood and spread the Hermetic message (2015, 181).

The attraction of the Hermetic texts to Renaissance Christians was their antiquity. For humanist scholars, fascinated to return ad fontes, the texts, revered for their status as prisci theologi, had the appeal and authority of the well-spring of all religions. Whether god had made the revelation first to Zoroaster, to Moses or to Hermes, as Eugenio Garin pointed out in 1955, it was the whole concept of ‘a universal revelation hidden behind the “symbols” of historical religions’ which fuelled the idea of tolerance associated with the Corpus Hermeticum (in Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn 6). Hanegraaff observes that the recovery of this lost source of divine revelation ‘at a time when the moral degeneration of the church was becoming more obvious every day’ seemed Providential (2012, 8). The implication of its timely recovery is that the God-given wisdom contained in the ancient texts was to provide a guide for those reformers, both Catholic and Protestant, who wanted ‘a return to what each of them saw as its origins and foundations’ (Hanegraaff 2012, 9). Hanegraaff cites Charles Schmitt who observed that Agostino Steuco’s De perennis philosophia, published in 1540 ‘puts emphasis on the continuity of valid knowledge through all periods of history’, thereby affirming, ‘the unity, the universality of the one, perennial faith’ (2012, 9). Hanegraaff finds another thread in the Renaissance discourse on ancient wisdom, namely the pia philosophia, which carries a sense of progress, evolutionary growth and ‘a gradual “education of humanity” to prepare it
for the final revelation’ (2012, 9, 10). It is this understanding of the discourse of the ancients, both theologians and philosophers, that carries the uplifting sense of limitless possibilities. Thus, to readers in the sixteenth century, the Hermetic texts provided a discourse grounded in and validated by the authority of the past, while at the same time both asserting man’s aspirations to perfectibility and imagining the concomitant possibilities of a tolerant utopian society.

Nevertheless, as the philologist Isaac Casaubon was to demonstrate so persuasively in 1614, far from being the work of a precursor of Moses, the texts were in fact, the work of several hands, and written over a long period in the centuries following the birth of Christ. In other words, the Hermetic texts were roughly contemporaneous with the synoptic gospels and the growth of middle neo-Platonism. That being so, the direction of influence is always going to be problematic.

From Hermes to Hermes Trismegistus

The story of how Hermes of Alexandrian antiquity, known to the Egyptians as Thoth, conductor of the dead to the underworld, became Mercury and emerged as the prophet Hermes Trismegistus, as well as an outline of the iconographic record of his warm reception in Renaissance Italy may be found in Appendix I.

According to Moreschini, Casaubon was motivated to find the true faith in the original Christian message. He was not the first to doubt that Hermes Trismegistus was a contemporary of Moses. In 1567, Gilbert Genebrard in Paris dated the Hermetic texts to 303 BCE. Teodoro Angelucci and Cardinal Baronius also doubted the texts’ authenticity, albeit for different reasons (Moreschini 273-276). To the list of critics prior to Casaubon, Hanegraaff adds an English man, William Harrison, 1570 (Hanegraaff 2012, 75, n. 291).
About the Hermetic Theosophy

The *Corpus Hermeticum* takes the form of dialogues between Hermes and God (who introduces himself as ‘Poimandres, mind of sovereignty’) (*CH* I [2], XI), Hermes and his son Tat (IV, V, VIII, X, XII, XIII), and between Hermes and Asclepius (II, VI, IX, XIV). For Fowden, this dialogic form ‘emphasizes [the] primarily didactic intention’ of the writings and he notes that ‘different texts are aimed at readers or auditors at differing levels of enlightenment’ (97). A-J. Festugière believes that ‘the intention of the treatises is to use a problem debated in [ancient] schools to initiate discussion’ (Moreschini 11). His opinion is consistent with the style of the Platonic dialogues where philosophical issues are embedded, and also with dramatic dialogues where, as I will argue, Shakespeare embeds religious and philosophical questions that invite debate. Jean-Pierre Mahé is of the opinion that some of the treatises, particularly those that appear discontinuous, are intended to provide space for silent meditation when one may see the god within, in the mind’s eye (2004, 103). This is also explained in *CH* V [2] and in X [4-5] and XIII [3]. Within and between the treatises, ‘Hermes professes the most contradictory opinions on all the topics he treats’ (Moreschini 11). While the texts consistently present God as good,

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17 It has been suggested that *poimēn andrōn*, (shepherd of men) is ‘the best etymology’ for the name for God, ‘Poimandres’, used in Book I of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (Reitzenstein, Bardy, Joly, Pearson, in Copenhaver 1992, 95).

18 Mahé is discussing the *Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius* and was doubtless influenced by the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945, both of which he translated. For details of the Armenian versions of the former and of the Codex Clarkianus found in the Bodleian Library at Oxford in 1988, see *The Way of Hermes*, translated by Clement Salaman et al. (2000).
they sometimes emphasise his transcendence, and at others his immanence ‘amounting to a complete pantheism’ (Dodd 17). God is the Monad (CH IV [10]) and he is also Nous or Mind (CH I [2, 9, 12]). Certain tracts conceive of the existence of a second god entrusted with the creation of the world: ‘The mind who is god, being androgyne and existing as life and light, by speaking gave birth to a second craftsman, who, as god of fire and spirit, crafted seven governors’ (CH I [9]). This second god is Logos: ‘The lightgiving word who comes from mind is the son of god’ (CH I [6]).

Essential themes of the *Hermetica* include the nature of God (CH I [6], V [1-3]), VI [4], the twofold nature of Man (CH I [15]), the divinity and perfectibility of Man (CH I [19], IV [6-7], XVI [15-16]), *(Asclepius [6]*) and the salvation of the soul by knowledge of self, leading beyond reason to revelation and the reciprocated knowledge of the Mind of God (CH X [15]). Gabriel du Préau, a French translator, insisted that the Mind of God, the divine intellect, resides within the mind of Man (Faivre 1995, 428). Moreschini explains that it is God himself who procures our salvation (10): ‘For god does not ignore mankind; on the contrary, he recognizes him fully and wishes to be recognized. For mankind this is the only deliverance, the knowledge of god. It is ascent to Olympus’ (CH X [15]).

Other themes are Man’s freedom to direct his will to make choices; causes, referencing the creation of the world (III [1]); the origins of evil (CH IV [8],

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19 A phrase from the *Asclepius [25]* leads Fowden to call philosophical Hermetism *religio mentis* or a ‘religion of the mind’ (95). Copenhaver translates the phrase as ‘reverence of mind’, while Ferguson prefers, ‘reverence of Soul’ *(Asclepius [25]), 242.*
XVI [15-16]), (Asclepius [18]); and change which explains death in terms of the return of the material body to its elements, the immortality of the essential soul (CH VIII [1], XI [15], XII [16], XVI [9, 14]), (Asclepius [2]), and its spiritual rebirth either in this world (CH XIII [13]) or the next (I [24-26]).

The different treatises are not of equal importance or function. Book I: (Discourse) of Hermes Trismegistus: Pymander, and Book XIII: A secret dialogue of Hermes Trismegistus on the mountain to his son Tat: On being born again, and on the promise to be silent (completed, as we now know, by the codex discovered at Nag Hammadi), for example, are both regarded as initiatory texts which outline a journey to be undertaken by degrees, at first in private study, and later ‘under the guidance of a spiritual master’ (Fowden 98).

In Book I, Hermes is given an account of creation in ‘an endless vision in which everything became light – clear and joyful – and in seeing the vision I came to love it . . . Darkness arose [and] changed into something of a watery nature, indescribably agitated and smoking like a fire; it produced an unspeakable wailing roar’ [4]. The whole passage about the vision [4 and 5] seems to have inspired Hendrik Niclaes who founded the sect known as the Haus der Liebe or Family of Love, George Chapman to translate Homer and, I argue, may have influenced Shakespeare’s conception of the tempest in the play of that name. Pymander explains how ‘Mind the father of all, who is life and light, gave birth to a man like himself whom he loved as his own child’ (I [12]). Unlike Genesis, the first book of the Corpus

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20 N H Codex VI: The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth, which was not known in the sixteenth century.
*Hermeticum* emphasises the joy and love which Mind, Nature and Man all took in creation [12-14]. The Book asserts unequivocally that ‘unlike any other living thing on earth, mankind is twofold – in the body mortal but immortal in the essential man’ [15]. This characteristically Hermetic view of Man reflects the Christology of Bishop Nestorius (c.386-c.450) namely that ‘there were two separate persons in the Incarnate Christ, the one Divine and the other Human’, as opposed to the orthodox teaching that ‘Christ was a single Person, at once God and man’ (*Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1138).

Genesis teaches that God made man in his own image and after his likeness (I:26), and Pymander tells Hermes that Nature ‘brought forth bodies in the shape of the man. From life and light man became soul and mind; from life came soul, from light came mind’ (*CH* I [17]). Man may be made in God’s image but to become god-like, Man must direct his will to choose the good. Pymander explains that ‘the one who recognized himself attained the chosen good, but the one who loved the body that came from the error of desire goes on in darkness, errant, suffering sensibly the effects of death’ [19].

Pymander then outlines the way to death available ‘to the reverent’ [22]. At each stage of the journey the ascending soul surrenders the vices which it acquired on its descent to earth through the planetary spheres, and as the material body is

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21 Nestorius taught that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine, in other words that the Incarnate Christ was two separate Persons: the divine Logos and the human Christ, united under one prosōpon or persona (*Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1138).

Prosōpon, from ancient Greek, refers to a face, countenance or mask, and also references a dramatic part, character or outward appearance.
released ‘the senses rise up and flow back to their particular sources’ [24]. Book I lists the energies that will be surrendered at each of the seven planetary levels before entering the region of the ogdoad [25-26]. Foix de Candale in his commentary on this Book names each sphere (‘Lune, Mercure, Venus, Soleil, Mars’ and so on), details the senses that were acquired from each on the descent, and emphasises that the celestial bodies can only incline or predispose the soul which retains its freedom of will to carry out or to reject the impulse (86). As Fowden points out, Book I is unusual in treating the vision of God as something that may be experienced only after the soul has been separated from the body by death (99). Pymander concludes the book with an exhortation urgently to spread the message: ‘This is the final good for those who have received knowledge: to be made god. Why do you still delay? Having learned all this, should you not become guide to the worthy so that through you the human race might be saved by god?’ (I [26]).

Book XIII by contrast tells of palingenesia or a spiritual regeneration while still alive: ‘bursting into a new plane of existence previously unattained’ (Fowden 108). There Tat receives apparently instantaneous purging of the twelve torments listed as: ignorance, grief, incontinence, injustice, lust, greed, deceit, envy,

22 This provocative call to evangelise the message and save the human race is echoed in the Rosicrucian manifesto, *Fama Fraternitatis* or Rumour of the Brotherhood published in 1614, calling for the reformation of the whole wide world, *Allgemeine und General Reformation, der gantzen weiten Welt*: ‘When now these eight brethren had disposed and ordered all things in such manner . . . that everyone was sufficiently instructed, and able perfectly to discourse of secret and manifest philosophy . . . they separated themselves into several countries . . . that their Axiomata might in secret be more profoundly examined by the learned’ (243) (in Frances Yates, 1972, 2000. 236-25).
treachery, anger, recklessness and malice (*CH XIII* [7]). In silence he receives the transforming knowledge of god, of joy, of continence, of perseverance, of liberality, truth and so on (XIII [8]). In short, reborn through the knowledge of God, he assumes the attributes of God and becomes a god like God. As Moreschini puts it: ‘the supernatural powers, which are hypostases of god, penetrate man and construct the divine person, the logos, within him, and with their arrival alone, expel the vices that originate from the constitutive matter of man’s former self. […] It is being itself that must be changed’ (20); he notes that ‘the idea of a union between man and god’ may also be found in the *Acts of Thomas*, and in John 3: 3-6 (20). However, the purging is not automatic. If he is to save himself, Man must choose to overcome the torments that beset him beginning with the torment of ignorance.

William Grese observes that it is the emphasis on spiritual regeneration without which man cannot know god, which distinguishes Book XIII from the other books of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. But the concept of regeneration is not unique to Hermetism and is found in other Hellenistic mystery religions (Grese 72), such as the Eleusinian rites, which I will argue were known to Shakespeare, and also in the

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23 This notion, being ‘godded with god’ was central to the sect calling themselves the Family of Love.

24 The *Acts of Thomas* was declared heretical at the Council of Trent. John 3: 3-6, ‘Jesus answered [Nicodemus] Truly, truly, I say unto you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God. […] unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.’
Egyptian story of Isis and Osiris. Book XIII ends with the singing of the secret hymn of praise to the one who has brought about spiritual enlightenment:

Holy knowledge, you enlightened me; through you, hymning the intellectual light, I take joy in the joy of mind (XIII [18]). Life, preserve the universe within us; light, enlighten it; god, {spiritualize} it. For you O mind, are a shepherd to your word. (XIII [19])

Finally, Hermes exhorts Tat to ‘promise to be silent about this miracle, and reveal the tradition of rebirth to no one lest we be accounted its betrayers’ [22]. This is the challenge for followers of religious Hermetism: to promulgate a message that must remain secret and may only be revealed to initiates. In discussing King Lear I will argue that Book XIII with its zodiac of human behaviours and feelings and their remedies not only sheds light on Shakespeare’s conceptualization of his characters and their psychology but that the play also illustrates the doctrine contained in the Book. More about the Hermetic theosophy may be found in Appendix II.

In retrospect it is clear that the efforts of sixteenth-century theologians to establish Biblical revelation as pure and absolute truth were frustrated by the intrusion of pagan thought. The books of the Hermetica, showing the way to salvation, were validated for some Christians by passages such as the ones summarised above. Some passages are redolent of Genesis, and of John’s Gospel, but others are heretical. The

25 It is precisely from hymns such as this that Gilles Quispel posits the existence of a Hermetic Lodge in Alexandria. Professor Quispel writes confidently: ‘It is now completely certain that there existed before and after the beginning of the Christian era in Alexandria a secret society, akin to a Masonic Lodge’. “Preface”. The Way of Hermes. Salaman et al. (10). See also: G. Quispel. “The Asclepius: From the Hermetic Lodge in Alexandria to the Greek Eucharist and the Roman Mass.” Gnosis and Hermeticism. Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (69-77).
heresies include the Hermetic view of Man as having two parts, divine and human, recognizable from Nestorian Christology, and the capacity of Man to find redemption for himself through following the way of Hermes to knowledge of the Mind of God within. Armed with this knowledge, the Renaissance scholar would read in Book I that he had an obligation to use the knowledge to be a ‘guide to the worthy’ [26] and save the human race, and in Book XIII that he must ‘Promise to be silent and reveal the tradition of rebirth to no one lest we be accounted its betrayers’ (CH XIII [22]). In the next chapter we will see how this conflicting advice was obeyed by some and ignored by others, but I turn first to a brief discussion of two fifteenth-century Italian translators of the Corpus Hermeticum.

*Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499)*

The eminent Greek scholar, priest and physician was engaged in the translation of some of Plato’s works when the Greek manuscript of the Corpus Hermeticum fell into his hands. It had been purchased by his patron Cosimo de’Medici along with previously unknown works of Plato. As Moreschini points out, the erudite Ficino was already ‘well acquainted with certain aspects of medieval Hermetism’ (133), and by 1463, Ficino had translated into Latin fourteen tractates of the Greek Corpus Hermeticum, which were apparently all that he had. Having fulfilled his patron’s wish to read the ancient theology before he died, Ficino then devoted himself to the rest of the Platonic texts. To complement his translations, Ficino wrote commentaries on the newly recovered writings and produced some eighteen books on Platonic theology. He translated the ‘discourses on love’ [173] in the Symposium, where Plato had written:

> For I know not any greater blessing to a young man who is beginning life than a virtuous lover, or to the lover than a beloved youth’ (178). . . Love is
the eldest and noblest and mightiest of the gods, and the chiefest author and
giver of virtue in life, and of happiness after death. (Symposium, 180)

Ficino’s comments on the book famously transformed Plato’s philosophy of love into
a doctrine of chaste Platonic love, while endorsing ‘Plato’s belief that the soul’s
spiritual ascent to ultimate beauty was fuelled by love between men’ (Kraye 79). As
a consequence, Ficino has been seen by some as more Platonist than Hermetist
(Moreschini 152). Michael Allen, for example, holds that ‘Plato was the sublime
philosopher for Ficino, and Hermes only a distant precursor’ (Moreschini 138).

Nevertheless, Moreschini, following Sebastiano Gentile, argues that
Ficino’s respect for the Egyptian Hermes Trismegistus preceded his translation of the
Corpus Hermeticum (133, 134), and did not pass away over time (155, 156, n.79). In
1471, Ficino’s translation of the Corpus Hermeticum bearing the title Liber de
potestate et sapientia Dei, Pimander (usually shortened to Pymander after the name
for God used in the first book), was printed at Treviso, but apparently without
Ficino’s knowledge or consent.26 The editio princeps was so badly flawed that
Hanegraaff doubted that Ficino really understood the central tenet of Hermetism in
what he was translating, and felt that he ‘completely missed both the special religious
connotations and the central importance of the Greek word gnosis and its cognates’
(2009, 3). Hanegraaff noted that Ficino avoided the dangerous word ‘gnosis’, (as

26 The culprits were the Flemish Geraert van der Leye and his Italian colleague Francesco
Rolandello (Hanegraaff 2015, 184). The badly flawed edition circulated throughout Europe
in various edited versions and vernacular translations for the next eighty years. In 2011,
Maurizio Campanelli published his extensive research on the editio princeps of 1471 set
from Ficino’s manuscript, and the nine subsequent editions printed from it between 1481 and
1551. He found the original printed Latin translation was so corrupted with textual errors
that in many places it made no sense (Hanegraaff 2015, 185).
indeed did Lazzarelli), and chose a less incendiary cognate, ‘cognitio’ (2015, 195-6).

Furthermore, Hanegraaff argues, Ficino seemed to have missed or misunderstood a key Hermetic message about seeing with ‘the eyes of the heart’ or ‘the mind’s eye’, and notes that one entire sentence from the crucial initiatory Book XIII was omitted from the Treviso edition. Another error occurred because the word ‘not’ was omitted from the Greek original (CH IX [10]), obliging Ficino to misinterpret the sentence. As a result, the reader misses the vital message that knowledge of God (gnosis) is a gift from God and can not be communicated through ‘reasoned discourse’ but ‘only beheld directly by some faculty beyond the senses and reason’ (Hanegraaff 2015, 189).

Despite Hanegraaff’s doubts, Ficino’s scholarship is not in question. Stephen Clucas, for example, reports that John Dee, a noted Greek scholar himself, made a margin note on his copy of Ficino’s Omni Divini Platonis Opera that the Republic has been ‘right well translated’ (2011, 233). Ficino’s preference for ‘cognitio’ over ‘gnosis’ may have been a simple precaution, since the doctrine of gnos is was anathema to the church and as we know from the Nag Hammadi codices, the Gnostic gospels had been deliberately hidden and omitted from the New Testament. Moreschini argues that Ficino ‘join[ed] Christian revelation with Hermetic doctrine’ (155) and also found agreement between Hermes and Plato. Indeed, he seems to have assimilated Plato and the neo-Platonists to Hermes Trismegistus, whom he believes to be their source, and both to Christianity, when he asserts for example in his Platonic Theology that ‘the human soul – a soul moreover which was immortal, free and most fulfilled in God’, has a divine component (Arnold
Both John Vyvyan and Leland Miles, neither of whom refers to the *Corpus Hermeticum* in their writing, found Ficino’s position on Platonism to be so idiosyncratic that Vyvyan coined the term ‘Marsilian’ to describe it, as we see below, and Miles called it ‘uncharacteristic’ (148). Arguably, a student of the *Corpus Hermeticum* might recognise those same anomalies as Hermetic.

Hanegraaff is of the opinion that Ficino’s failure to have his translation printed indicated his lack of interest (2015, 184). However, given the admonitions to secrecy quoted above (*CH* XIII [22]), and the importance of restricting the message to those willing to undertake the path to becoming an Adept, Ficino may well have taken a deliberate decision to limit access to the mysteries in a way that is impossible once a manuscript is printed and published. There is no doubt at all about Lazzarelli’s enthusiasm for Hermetism yet he, too, did not publish his translations, presenting them instead to his admired mentor ‘Mercurio’ da Correggio, who after Lazzarelli’s death, passed the manuscript to an ambassador of Louis XII in Lyon in 1501.28

It is possible that Agrippa reveals the reason for Ficino’s reluctance to publish in Book III of *The Third and Last Book of Magic and Occult Philosophy*, an early version of which he took to England in 1509/10. Chapter II opens with this

27 Jonathan Arnold quotes from the Preface to *Platonic Theology* where Ficino finds in Plato’s philosophy a strongly Hermetic cast: ‘Since Plato holds the soul to be a kind of mirror in which the divine countenance is easily reflected, his scrupulous step by step search for God continually prompts him to turn towards the beauty of the soul, understanding the famous oracle “Know thyself!” to mean above all that whoever desires to know God should first know himself’ (63). See also D. P. Walker. *The Ancient Theology* (1972, 68-73); G. Mallary Masters. *Rabelaisian Dialectic and the Platonic-Hermetic Tradition* (1969, 2-3).

28 More details are given in Hanegraaff and Bouthoor, 38-44.
warning, the sense of which Ficino would also have found in the *Corpus Hermeticum*:

Whosoever therefore thou art that now desirest to study this science, keep silent and constantly conceal within the secret closets of your religious breast, so holy a determination; for (as Mercury saith) to publish to the knowledge of many a speech thoroughly filled with so great majesty of the deity, is a sign of irreligious spirit; and divine Plato commanded that holy and secret mysteries should not be divulged to the people; Pythagoras also, and Porphyrius consecrated their followers to a religious silence. (443)²⁹

In the opening chapter of Book I of his famous *Liber de Vita* (Book of Life), Ficino lists Nine Guides for Scholars undertaking the ‘bitter, arduous and long journey . . . to the highest temple of the nine Muses’ that is Olympus, the goal of life’s journey as we are told in Book X [15] of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (3). Vyvyan, in *Shakespeare and Platonican Beauty* published in 1961, just three years before Yates’ work which brought the Hermetic tradition to the attention of English-speaking scholars, finds that Ficino’s original (‘Marsilian’) attempts to harmonize Platonic doctrines with Christianity are quite unorthodox and he quotes Ficino’s Hermetic *Letter to the Human Race*, beginning: ‘Cognosce teipsum, divinum genus mortali veste indutum!’ (Know thyself, divine race clothed with a mortal garment!), but does not acknowledge its affinity with the *Corpus Hermeticum* (VII). Contrary to orthodoxy,

²⁹ Donald Tyson lists five reasons for silence or circumspection concerning the holy doctrine of Hermes: ‘lest it be prophaned by the entrance and presence of a throng of listeners’ (*Asclepius*); profane minds cannot grasp holy doctrine and mock those who preach it; silence allows divine enlightenment of the doctrine to occur (*CH XIII*); it is futile to attempt to express the inexpressible; translation distorts the sense of the writings and causes obscurity, – only when the Egyptian words are spoken does ‘the force of the things signified work in them’ (*CH XVI*) (445).
Ficino acknowledges the intrinsic divinity of man (Vyvyan 1961, 35), rejects the Catholic doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (1961, 42) and ‘develops the doctrine of pre-existence’ (1961, 46). All of these ideas are contained in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Vyvyan observes that Ficino harmonizes the notion of the Platonic ascent with current theology ‘to the satisfaction of Catholics and Protestants alike’ (1961, 49), although that could hardly have been Ficino’s intention in 1474! But most significant for the Hermetist, Vyvyan shows that in his *Commentary*, Ficino ‘formulated the characteristic Renaissance belief in the creative power and absolute supremacy of love’ (38). Fortunately for him, writes Vyvyan, ‘the revolutionary nature of his findings does not seem to have been appreciated by the ecclesiastical authorities during his lifetime for it is hardly possible that they could have wittingly permitted its dissemination’ (50). Giuseppe Saitta, writing of Ficino’s philosophy, Vyvyan’s ‘Marsilianism’, or arguably, Christian Hermetism, in 1923, still unaware of Ficino’s interest in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, had this to say:

This concept [that man is a “child of God” truly in his own self essence] completely broke through the boundary within which religion had been enclosed by Catholicism, pointing towards a free religion, which is the same as liberty of thought. In this way, the Italian Renaissance inspired a process of religious renewal, less widespread, but more profound than the Reformation.30

Vyvyan’s interest in Platonism in the works of Shakespeare obliged him to account for the presence of romantic love in those plays by recourse to Baldassare Castiglione and *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) (53). Here chaste Platonic love is complemented by the chivalric tradition of courtly love. However, as we will see, Hermetism itself

with its philosophy of unification and reconciliation, is perfectly allegorized as love
and marriage, often conveyed as an alchemical trope. More recently, Jonathan Arnold
also attributes the sixteenth-century fashion for the literature of love to Ficino’s
commentary on Plato’s *Symposium*, which he sees emerging in Castiglione’s *Il
Cortegiano* in 1528, and also in ‘the Elizabethan poets, Philip Sidney, George
Chapman and Edmund Spenser’ (59), but makes no mention of their contemporary,
Shakespeare.

*Lodovico Lazzarelli (1447-1500): The Corpus Hermeticum and his Commentary – Crater
Hermetis*

Hanegraaff makes a cogent and persuasive argument that only Lodovico Lazzarelli
really understood the Hermetic message of spiritual regeneration and convincingly
reconciled the texts to Christianity. In his *Fasti Lazzarelli* writes:

> Jesus is the Logos and the Word, the Mind and Wisdom,
> who first was Pimander in the mind of Hermes.31

In the Preface to the *Crater Hermetis*, Lazzarelli claims to have become ‘so absorbed
in the study of the divine books of Hermes Trismegistus and also in the most holy
words of Moses and the prophets, and most of all in those of Jesus Christ our Saviour,
that all other writings [. . . ] have completely lost their appeal to me’ (Hanegraaff and
Bouthoorn 46). Even so, he took time to write and publish a long poem on the
silkworm, *De Bombye*, an allegory of the resurrection:

(Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn, 19).
Child of God, whom I revere with my mind, whom I praise with my song
For hidden under this veil lies the palingenesis,
the wedding of the Word, and the birth-giving of the Gods.32

Hanegraaff interprets the last lines of the long poem ‘as foreshadowing the initiation into the mystery of spiritual regeneration’ (2005, 55), a theme which is central to Lazzarelli’s ‘most important hermetic work’, the Crater Hermetis (2005, 55). The imagined dialogue is between Lazzarelli (speaking as one whose mind has been illumined by Pymander-Christ), Ferdinand I of Aragon, King of Naples and Sicily (1423/4-1494) (the son of King Alfonso the Magnanimous of Aragon), who is his ‘pupil’, and his Secretary of State, Giovanni Pontano (a poet and astrologer). Early in the discourse, Lazzarelli tells the latter: ‘I am a Christian, Pontano, but I am not ashamed to be an hermetist as well’ [4.1]. This open avowal of the compatibility of Christianity with Hermetism was to be echoed by other Christians throughout the century, including certain members of the French episcopate. As Hanegraaff’s detailed footnotes reveal, Lazzarelli’s dialogic commentary is saturated with references to both Old and New Testaments, and to the Corpus Hermeticum which Lazzarelli had translated in the entirety of its seventeen Books. References to Plato, Philo and Dionysius are scattered throughout this learned dialogue.

Lazzarelli’s choice of a dialogue for his commentary on the Hermetica is itself instructive, as it is not only modelled after the Platonic and Hermetic tradition, it also validates the words which Lazzarelli had translated in Book XVI [2] that the written (Greek) language was ‘empty’, but that speaking the words (in the Egyptian language admittedly) had the power to effect a spiritual transformation in the

32 Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn (54).
listening disciple. In short, the Hermetist must first listen (audi), to the spoken word, then see (vide), that is, know with the mind’s eye, and remain silent about the mystery (tace). Unlike Ficino, for whom Hanegraaff argues the divine Plato was the ultimate authority, Lazzarelli agrees with Porphyry that ‘the original fountain of wisdom is in Egypt’ and that ‘true felicity can be obtained only by self-knowledge’ (Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn 63). Lest the point be understood as a reference to the maxim of the Delphic oracle to ‘know thyself’, he is unequivocal in his assertion to Ferdinand that ‘I do not take an oracle of Apollo as my point of departure, but the teachings of Hermes’ (Crater [6.1]) (Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn 183).

In his dialogue Lazzarelli addresses Ferdinand’s questions about the way to self-knowledge, to knowledge of god, and about the soul. Convinced that Hermes is the Messenger of Great Counsel sent as the Prince of Peace to conciliate man and god (Crater, [1.1]), Lazzarelli ignores the dangerously heterodox and heretical references to a second god which are in the Corpus Hermeticum (I [6]), and adopts the orthodox view of the relationship of the person of Christ to God, pronounced at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, namely that Christ is one Person in two Natures ‘truly God and truly Man’ (1.1) and inseparably united. In this Lazzarelli departs from the Nestorian view that Christ was two separate persons, which is reflected in the Hermetic view of the twofold nature of Man (CHI[15]). With similar confidence, he confronts the dangerous ‘magic’ idolatrous clauses in the Asclepius [23-24; 37-38], arguing, as Hanegraaff explains, that Hermes had indeed lapsed into idolatry, but as a pagan living before the Incarnation, he was still not perfectly enlightened.

33 Video, videre vt. (mind) to observe, be aware, know. Collins Latin Dictionary.
and was therefore unable to attain perfect knowledge of God, whereas we, Christian Hermetists, are able to ‘go beyond Hermes’ wisdom and attain that perfect knowledge of God, by means of which [we] may participate in God’s “fertility”, and ‘create souls’ (2009, 10). Lazzarelli, as we will see, was to influence Cornelius Agrippa and through him, John Dee.

As we know, Lazzarelli had access to a more complete Greek manuscript which he collated with Ficino’s original manuscript, producing a body of seventeen chapters. The last three chapters, including the Definitions of Asclepius, exhort the readers to praise god, and live in harmony and peace, brought together by the charm of love, by which is meant eros (CH XVIII [14]). Focussing on eros, rather than agape, has had the effect of generating a link to a key hermetic trope which several scholars have recognised in some of Shakespeare’s plays, namely alchemy. The erotic union or alchemical wedding is a crucial operation in the creation of the philosopher’s stone which is conceived by uniting the hot, dry, male principle (sulphur) with the cold, moist, female principle (argent vive or mercury). ‘Through this “marriage” of opposites the goals of the opus, the production of gold and its metaphysical equivalent was obtained’ (Abraham 35).

The art of alchemy was ‘the great passion of the age’ (Abraham xv) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and was practised in all the courts of Europe including, as Glyn Parry’s recent biography of Dee has revealed, the English court (85). Lyndy Abraham lists ten or more men and women close to the court and in circles surrounding Dee, Walter Ralegh, and Henry Percy earl of Northumberland,
the ‘wizard earl’ so-called, who ‘pursued the art of alchemy’ (xv). The practical alchemy of the laboratory, involving the marriage of elements and a process which achieves purity through progressively driving off all impurities until the quintessence of pure gold is achieved, is clearly analogous to spiritual alchemy or the mystic ascent of the purified soul described as the Hermetic way to salvation. It is becoming increasingly clear, writes Abraham in the Introduction to her Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery, ‘that Hermetic and alchemical thought deeply influenced the Elizabethan and Jacobean culture, and that writers of the stature of Shakespeare, Jonson, Donne [. . .] drew on a rich source of alchemical imagery for their writing’ (xv).

There is no denying the widespread interest in alchemy and magic in sixteenth-century England and Europe, nor indeed the presence of magic in some of Shakespeare’s plays, but the overwhelming teaching which readers could learn from the books of the Corpus Hermeticum was the way of Hermes to salvation, to perfectibility and divinity, knowledge of self, love of the other and knowledge of the mind of god. At its heart, the Hermetic doctrine appears no different from that of peace and love taught by Jesus Christ.

In the next chapter I continue the narrative of the reception of the new editions, translations and commentaries of the Hermetica and the Crater Hermetis as they were transmitted in manuscript and print in sixteenth-century France and England.

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34 Abraham’s list includes Sir Philip Sidney, his close friend, Sir Edward Dyer, his sister, Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, Ralegh’s half-brother, Adrian Gilbert, and the mathematician Thomas Hariot (xv).
1. Florence 1463 trans. Ficino tractates I-XIV *Pymander* (*Corpus Hermeticum*) MS (*Latin*)
2. Treviso 1471 Ficino tractates I-XIV *Pymander* (*Latin*)
3. Ferrara 1472
   a. Venice 1481
4. Rome 1482 Lazzarelli I-XIV + XV-XVII (*Diffinitiones Asclepii*) + *Asclepius* (*Latin*)
   (MS given to ‘Mercurio’ da Correggio)
   b. Venice 1491
   c. Venice 1493
   d. Paris 1494 ed. Lefèvre d’Etaples
      (owned by Colet; seen by Erasmus?)
   4 a. Lyon 1501 Correggio presents Lazzarelli’s 17 chapters in MS. to ambassador of Louis XII
   e. Mainz 1503
   f. Paris 1505 ed. Lefèvre d’Etaples
      + *Asclepius* and *Crater Hermetis* commentary by Lazzarelli ded. to Bishop Briçonnet
   4 b. Paris 1507 Symphorien Champier publishes Lazzarelli’s *Diffinitiones Asclepii*
5. Florence 1513
   g. Venice 1516
   5 a. Basle 1532 (owned by Dee?)
   h. Lyon 1549 (*French*) trans. du Préau
      (owned by Puttenham?)
   i. Basle 1551 (owned by Dee?)
6. Paris 1554 Turnebus (*Greek*)
   includes *Diffinitiones* + Stobaean fragment XV (owned by Dee)
7. Bordeaux 1574 Foix de Candale (*Greek and Latin*) ded. To Catherine de Medicis
   1579 Foix de Candale (*French + commentary*) ded. to Marguerite de Valois
   5 b. Cracow 1585 Rosselli (owned by Dee?)
8. Ferrara 1591 ed. Patrizi
   8 a. England 1650 trans. Everard (*English*)

Fig. 1 15th to 17th century translations, editions and commentaries of *Corpus Hermeticum* and *Asclepius* (*Hermetica*) adapted from Wouter J. Hanegraaff. “How Hermetic was Renaissance Hermetism?” *Aries* (2015): 179-209.
Chapter Two

The transmission and reception of Christian Hermetism in France and England in the long sixteenth century

‘Having learned all this, should you not become guide to the worthy so that through you the human race might be saved by god?’ (CH I [26])

‘Promise to be silent and reveal the tradition of rebirth to no one lest we be accounted its betrayers.’ (CH XIII [22])

In this chapter I trace the transmission and reception of the texts of religious and philosophic Hermetism in France and England, and I describe the influence of the newly translated Hermetic corpus detected in the thinking and practices of certain eminent men and women of the period. I do this in order to contextualize the plays of Shakespeare explored in this study within a current of alternative religious discourse that appears to have flowed, sometimes sporadically and underground, through the long sixteenth century from 1494 to 1614 and beyond.

The texts of the Hermetica carry a number of ideas that were regarded by the Traditional Church as heretical; some were also later deemed heterodox by the

35 Typically the influence of Hermes has been identified by modern Anglophone scholars as neo-Platonic, or sourced to the Bible, the Church Fathers or to church tradition. In the sixteenth century, when the Corpus Hermeticum or the Asclepius was not named, it may have been to protect the writer from accusations of dabbling in the occult because Hermes’ name carried the taint of magic.
Reformed Church. Gnostic soteriology was abhorrent to both. Calvinists denied free will, and in England, religious toleration which Antoine Faivre claims as the sign that Hermes is passing (1995, 39), was officially regarded as a mischief and deplored at every level. Alexandra Walsham explains that men and women felt it their Christian duty to denounce heterodoxy in order to save the soul of the sinner – ‘to persecute was to display a charitable hatred’ (2006, 2). Nevertheless, beneath the history of the century that records events of religious intolerance and barbaric cruelty lies another that, as Walsham observes, is harder to write – a history of tolerance (2006, 29). It is also harder to find. Nevertheless, a brief survey of the century reveals that eirenic, ecumenical and charitable discourse, along with a view of a New Man perfectible through his own efforts, all having an affinity with religious Hermetism glints occasionally not far beneath the surface.

Key figures in the transmission of the Hermetic thought that entered England in the sixteenth century include John Colet, Thomas More and Desiderius Erasmus, Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples, Symphorien Champier, Cornelius Agrippa and François Rabelais, Adrian Turnebus, François Foix de Candale, Jean Bodin and Philippe du Plessis Mornay, Philip Sidney, Giordano Bruno and Dr John Dee.

36 These heretical ideas include: salvation by knowledge of self achieved through contemplation and a trance-like state leading to supra-rational knowledge of God or gnosis; a God both transcendent and immanent; a second Mind creator-craftsman; creation as the ordering of existing chaos; the divinization of Man; the divinity of the human soul; the free will of Man; the perfectibility and limitless aspiration of mankind.

37 Faivre enumerates other Renaissance currents which, although most lie outside the purview of the present study, I list here: the Christianised Cabala (112) (associated with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Johannes Reuchlin, Agrippa, and Francesco Giorgi); and the
John Colet (c.1466-1519) spent some years in Italy and Paris (1493-96) after graduating from Oxford.³⁸ Sears Jayne speculates that his study of Genesis may have led Colet to make contact with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola who had just published his *Heptaplus*, and through him to learn about Ficino (44). The new edition of Ficino’s *Pymander*, recently published by Lefèvre d’Etaples in Paris in 1494, would have been available to Colet. Having returned to England, Colet exchanged letters with Ficino in Florence until the latter’s death in 1499.³⁹ In the light of Hanegraaff’s concerns about the key Hermetic message being misunderstood from the botched *editio princeps*, this exchange of letters allowing for discussion and clarification becomes extraordinarily significant.⁴⁰ The influence of both Pico and

theory and practice of medicine and astrology of Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim or Paracelsus (114-115). Faivre adds white magic which makes use of ‘names, rites and incantations, with a view to establishing a personal relationship with entities […] that belong to the […] *mundus imaginalis*’ (115). He lists the best-known representatives of the latter group as Ficino himself, Agrippa, Dee and Bruno. To this *philosophia occulta* Faivre adds ‘various forms of arithmology (the sciences and symbolism of numbers), and speculations on music’ (Faivre, 1998).

³⁸ Colet, Dean of St Pauls appointed his friend, William Lily, the scholar and grammarian, as the first headmaster of St Paul’s School. Lily’s grandson was John Lyly, the playwright and contemporary of Marlowe, Peele, Chapman and Shakespeare.

³⁹ Jayne’s book, *John Colet and Marsilio Ficino*, published in 1963, is his response to the discovery in the library of All Souls College Oxford of a first edition of the *Epistolae* of Ficino published in Venice in 1495. He includes about 5000 words of marginalia in Colet’s hand (4) and two letters from Ficino to Colet (dated 1498 and 1499), in one of which he explains ‘the difference between intellect and love’, apparently in answer to a previous letter (82).

⁴⁰ Hanegraaff reports from Maurizio Campanelli’s recent research, that the Treviso *editio princeps* of Ficino’s *Pymander* was nothing less than ‘an authentic textual disaster’. Moreover, he claims, attempts, such as those of Lefèvre d’Etaples to correct the printed Latin
Ficino on Colet has been documented by Leland Miles in *John Colet and the Platonic Tradition*, which was published in 1962 just two years before Yates’ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. Like John Vyvyan, Miles is forced to identify what can now be recognized as characteristic of Hermetic thought as an ‘uncharacteristic’ position taken by Ficino in *Theologia Platonica* (148). For example, as Miles explains, Colet exalts love over faith, inspired by Ficino’s argument that love, whether romantic or divine, transforms the lover into the object loved, and finally that it is love which brings the goodness or perfection prerequisite to union (148-9). Most revealing of all, Miles notes that ‘Colet supports his point by using the Ficinian term “gods” rather than the conventional Pauline term “saints”: men must become gods before they can merge with God’ (149). The Pauline triad of faith, hope and charity, Colet re-orders as hope, faith and love which he equates with purification, illumination and perfection (that is likeness to God), the stages through which the soul must pass on its mystical ascent (140). Miles refers to the stages as ‘Dionysian’, but they are clearly also Hermetic. Miles asserts that Colet ‘appropriates Ficino’s doctrine of reciprocal love between God and man’ and describes the actual union ‘in terms of a Plotinian ecstasy foreign to Pauline mysticism’ (149). Both the notion of reciprocity and of the union being achieved in an ecstatic state beyond sense or reason are also purely and distinctively Hermetic. That same Hermetic concept of reciprocal love also inspired Colet to write in *Right Fruitful Monition*: ‘Remember, as a man

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translation and improve subsequent editions, resulted in ‘a wide range of variant readings of an original that had already been wholly corrupt in the first place’ (2015, 184-185).
He went on to interpret the Eucharist: ‘At the table of the Lord [. . .] the communicants of Christ are transformed into Him’, in a way that was later to help Protestants cast off the superstition associated with transubstantiation, and approach the mystery of the Eucharist in a spirit of love. Miles saw Colet as ‘“a transition figure” who harboured both Catholic and Protestant sympathies’ (Kaufman 1977, 311 n.71). Hanegraaff’s fears that Ficino himself had failed ‘to understand the specific religious message’ of the Corpus, namely of salvation to be achieved ‘by means of “supra-rational” knowledge or gnosis’, and that as a consequence the doctrine was overlooked (2015, 205), would seem now to be unfounded, at least in the case of Colet and by extension his confidants.

Colet was a good friend of Sir Thomas More and both men formed a lasting friendship with Erasmus who first visited England in 1499. Peter Kaufman notes that the ‘nature and extent of Erasmus’ intellectual indebtedness to John Colet’ has been much disputed, but Ivan Pusino, who studied the influence of Pico on

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41 The idea of the lover becoming the beloved is also in Bruno’s De Gli Eroici Furori in his interpretation of the myth of Diana and Actaeon, and it influenced Marguerite de Valois. In the Fourth Dialogue of The Heroic Enthusiast, Tansillo tells how young Actaeon sees a ‘face more beautiful than e’er was seen [. . .] and the great hunter straight becomes that which he hunts/The stag [. . .]his own great dogs quickly devour’. Actaeon signifies intellect pursuing wisdom and beauty urged on by love; ‘ravished out of himself by so much splendour, he became the prey [. . .] for having absorbed the divinity into himself it was not necessary to search outside himself for it’. Cicada responds: ‘For this reason it is said “The Kingdom of Heaven is in us”; Divinity dwells within, through the reformed intellect and will’ (Williams 66-8).

42 Quoted by Miles who refers to the Hermetic notion of reciprocal love as Ficino’s (135).
Erasmus supports Kaufman’s opinion that it was Colet who introduced Erasmus to the writings of Pico and other Florentine neo-Platonists, including Ficino (297). Pico himself, or his thinking, made an impression on More, who was sufficiently intrigued by the man and his interest in the ‘secret misteryes of the hebrewes, Caldyes and Arabies’ to translate both his Works, and the Life of Pico written by his nephew, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, thereby introducing ‘many things drawen owt of ye olde obscure philosophye of Pithagoras, trismegistus, and orpheus’ to the English-speaking world (28). More wisely chose to omit the section about Pico’s use of Jewish Kabbalah to prove the truth of Christian revelation.

In 1509 Erasmus was again in England staying with More and writing In Praise of Folly. Susan Bruce records that the two men together had earlier translated into Latin some of the Lucian dialogues, such as Menippus, which helped shape More’s Utopia (xii). Certainly, More sent the manuscript to Erasmus who was responsible for some of the marginalia. As a novel both serious and satirical which mixes real people and fictional characters, the book reads like a manifesto for a land where ‘all things be common to every man’ (119), where money is held in contempt (121), and where religious tolerance prevails:

no man shall be blamed for reasoning in the maintenance of his own religion. For King Utopus, hearing that the inhabitants of the land were before his coming thither at continual dissension and strife among themselves for their religions . . . made a decree that it should be lawful for every man to favour and follow what religion he


44 Cited by Travis Curtwright (15-41). More undertook the translation as a gift for Sr. Joyce Leigh of the Poor Clare convent.
would, [. . .] so that he did it peaceably, gently, quietly and soberly [. . .] and use no kind of violence. (More 108-9)

Yates calls this eirenic Utopian law which argues for religious toleration ‘the distinctive badge of religious Hermetism’, for a people she cautiously suggests ‘are perhaps Christian Hermetists’ (1964, 1991, 186). In my view, More’s idea of religious toleration, which at first sounds rather like the multi-faith society described by Jean Bodin at the end of the century, \(^{45}\) is soon revealed as rather more Erasmian in the assertion which follows that there can be only one true religion: \(^{46}\)

Furthermore, though there be one religion which alone is true, and all other vain and superstitious, yet did he well foresee (so the matter were handled with reason and sober modesty) that the truth of the [sic] own power would at the last issue out and come to light. [. . .] Therefore all this matter he left undiscussed, and gave to every man free liberty to believe what he would. (More 109)

Then comes the caveat:

Saving that he earnestly and straitly charged them that no man should conceive so vile an opinion of the dignity of man’s nature as to think that the souls do die and perish with the body. (More 109-10)

Not only does the ‘tolerant’ King Utopus insist that Utopians believe in the immortality of the soul (a belief shared with Hermes, Plato and later Christians), but they must also believe in a providential God and an after-life where vices will be punished and virtues rewarded. Antinomians and believers in metempsychosis are to be deprived of all honours and excluded from public office in Utopia. Finally, such

\(^{45}\) Jean Bodin. *Colloquium of the Seven about Secrets of the Sublime*, passim.

\(^{46}\) Erasmus, like the English in the Elizabethan and Stuart years and even beyond the 1689 Act of Toleration, held the view that toleration was a necessary civility to be extended to speakers as they engaged in the search for a single, common and universal truth (Remer 307).
misguided men will be given the opportunity to dispute, but only with priests, ‘hoping that at the last that madness will give place to reason’ (More 110). It is a view of religious toleration which owes more to Erasmus than to Trismegistus. More obviously knew Pico’s thought from translating the Life and Colet we know had read and corresponded with Ficino. Thus when Erasmus visited them in England, it is reasonable to conclude that they read the Florentine Neoplatonist / Hermetists and discussed them, with Ficino’s own letters to Colet open before them.

Both Colet and Erasmus were spokesmen for widespread dissatisfaction with the state of the Catholic Church as an institution in the years preceding the Reformation, as was Lefèvre d’Etaples (Kaufman 1977, 298), editor of Ficino’s *Pymander*. All three men were associated with the early reception of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and all are now renowned for their calls for reformation of the Roman Catholic Church. However, the extent to which each was personally influenced by the Platonic / Christian / Hermetism of the Florentine Dionysian / neo-Platonists is difficult to assess at this distance. All three, like More, remained staunchly loyal to the Catholic Church even as they called for reforms. Where Miles found the influence of Ficino in Colet, Erasmus is remembered now, in addition to his calls for an eirenical solution to religious problems, for his insistence on the ability of human beings to exercise their free will and, by their own choice, to control their destiny. Twenty years after meeting Colet, Erasmus was to fall out with Luther, bitterly and publicly, over the issue of the extent to which man had freedom of will. In the *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* or *Handbook of a Christian Knight*, written soon after his first visit to England, and published in 1503, Erasmus writes of the human being having ‘a middle soul’ located between the body and the spirit ‘which is modelled on God’s own nature’. The soul being drawn both to the incorporeal spirit and to the corporeal
body, the human being ‘through his will is free to choose whichever side he wishes’, ‘Therefore, the spirit makes us gods.’ Erasmus connects this view both with Paul’s Letter to the Thessalonians (I, 5, 23), where he refers to body, soul and mind, and with Origen, and it is readily recognisable in the Corpus Hermeticum Book IV. As Stewart MacDonald observes, ‘he was anxious to emphasise that the philosophy and wisdom of the ancients constituted eternal truths which were compatible with the teachings of Christ and of the early Church.’ (3). In this, we can see now, his thinking is consonant with, or indeed may have been influenced by, Lazzarelli.

In a study entitled Erasmus and the Process of Human Perfection: Philosophy of Christ, Sylvia Fitzpatrick refers to Erasmus’ ‘version of Christianity’ (1), as ‘first and foremost a way or method of human perfection’ (5):

The Erasmian programme of perfection relies on an intimate knowledge of the self. [. . . ] He believed that the human mind contains the divine spark or image of Christ and that if we access this by a process of self-knowledge we will then discern for ourselves the way or method of perfection, which is the philosophy of Christ [original italics]. (100)

In describing Erasmus’ philosophy as one that aims at perfection to be achieved through self-knowledge, Fitzpatrick effectively identifies his ‘philosophy of Christ’ with the philosophy of Hermes. Erasmus’ writings reveal a deep understanding of

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47 From Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. The choice between the incorporeal spiritual world and the corporeal material world is represented in the Pythagorean Y which opens Dee’s Monas Hieroglyphica.

48 CH IV [7] Choosing the stronger then [. . .] not only has splendid consequences for the one who chooses in that it makes a human into a god [. . .] choosing the lesser has been man’s destruction.
ideas that are also in the *Corpus Hermeticum*: the importance of exercising free-will on the path to Christ, the importance of self-knowledge, and the promise of Hermes Trismegistus to the perfectibility and divinity of Man. Given that Erasmus took as his device a depiction of Terminus, associated with Hermes, and that a friend referred to him as Termaximus (that is, Trismegistus), (Fitzpatrick 187), I conclude that Erasmus may have been personally affected by the message of spiritual regeneration. The spirituality, piety and eirenicism which marked Erasmus’ private life quite possibly originated in, or were at the very least validated by, the *Hermetica*. Erasmus made a third visit to England between 1509 and 1511, when he stayed with More. His visit coincided with that of the young Agrippa of Nettetsheim, later to become notorious for his knowledge of the esoteric philosophy, but there is no record of their having met.

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettetsheim (1486-1535) arrived in England late in 1509. Three years earlier, he had been at the University of Paris where Donald Tyson claims that he gathered around him ‘a group of scholars pursuing studies into the occult mysteries’ (xvi).\(^{49}\) What is certain is that when Agrippa was in Paris, several newly published texts of the Hermetic corpus were available for purchase. These were Lefèvre’s 1505 edition of *Pymander* and *Asclepius* to which he had added Lazzarelli’s commentary, *Crater Hermetis*, somewhat abbreviated, and Champier’s 1507 Latin *Corpus Hermeticum* complete with Lazzarelli’s last

\(^{49}\) Tyson later refers to the group as an ‘occult brotherhood’(xvii), which gives a sinister cast to what may in other circumstances have been perceived as the sort of discussion group that emerged later in the century.
chapters. Not only that, Reuchlin’s work on the Kabbalah, *De Verbo Mirifico* (1494), had been followed up with *De Arte Cabalistica* (1506). Pico had connected Hermetic *Magia* with Cabala and Pythagorean mathematics (Yates 1964, 1991, 146); Reuchlin further developed the idea, and Agrippa, whose books reveal his deep fascination with number, gave a series of lectures on Reuchlin at the University of Dôle in Bordeaux, in the summer of 1509 (Tyson, xviii). Erasmus, though a friend of Reuchlin, did not like Cabala (Yates 1964, 1991, 165), and his dislike for the subject or perhaps a desire for secrecy may account for the absence of a record of a meeting with the young Agrippa, who in 1510 was in Oxford attending Colet’s lectures on St Paul. Agrippa brought with him to England an early version of the now famous *De Occulta Philosophia Libri Tres* (Three Books of Occult Philosophy), liberally studded with references to Hermes. His interest in number he shared with Trithemius, Abbot of Sponheim, to whom he dedicated the *Libri Tres*, and who responded with a letter including the warning:

> Yet this one rule I advise you to observe, that you communicate vulgar secrets to vulgar friends, but higher and secret to higher and secret friends only. (lvii)

Trithemius’ own work, the *Steganographia*, is about ways of communicating secrets cryptographically so that the meaning is hidden in plain sight.

50 Lefèvre d’Etaples removed Pontano from the dialogue and altered Lazzarelli’s opinion of the wisdom lineage, putting Moses before, not after, Hermes Trismegistus (Hanegraaff 2009, 14-15).

51 Years later, after the publication of *De vanitate scientiarum et artium* in 1530, Erasmus wrote to Agrippa from Friburg in 1531 and again in 1533, admiring ‘the courage and the eloquence’, and revealing that, being compelled to abstain from study after supper, he had employed a famulus to read Agrippa’s book to him (Haydn and Nelson 394-5).
Agrippa’s deep understanding of the Hermetic way is revealed in his *Oratio in praelectione Hermetis trismegisti* (1515): ‘[Hermes] instructs us moreover in the knowledge of oneself, the ascent of the intellect […] the divine union, and the sacrament of regeneration’ (in Keefer 1988, 619). In other words, Hermes instructs us on the path to follow in order to achieve the promise made here in the First Letter of Peter:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1, 3)

Hanegraaff, who identified the supra-rational spiritual regeneration that comes from *gnosis* as the *sine qua non* of Hermetism (2008, 128), feared, as we saw, lest the flawed first edition of Ficino’s translation may have obliterated the message (2009, 3), but Agrippa, who had the opportunity of reading Lazzarelli’s translation, seems not only to have understood it but to have recognised that it complements the Christian message. Indeed, Hanegraaff sees that Lazzarelli’s translation holds the key ‘to understanding Agrippa’s mature […] religious perspective as presented in *De Occulta Philosophia*’ (2009, 6). Michael Keefer gives a brilliant exposition of the problem that presented itself to Agrippa, namely the confounding of holy writ with gnostic heresy. He holds that for Agrippa, Hermetic rebirth is both ‘the highest form of magic’ and at the same time, ‘the purest form of Christianity’ (1988, 621, 650). Despite the vilification of posterity, who condemned him as a black magician, Agrippa fits the description of a Christian Hermetist as aptly as did Lazzarelli.
Hermes in France: translation, transmission and reception by court and episcopate

In the latter part of the fifteenth and the early part of the sixteenth century, France had engaged in territorial wars with Spain over Milan and Naples, but that did not halt the interchange of people, texts and ideas between France and other parts of Italy nor the spread of Florentine neo-Platonism, nor of Hermetism.

If it was Colet who introduced the Florentine neo-Platonicists to early Tudor England, it was Symphorien Champier of Lyon (c.1470-1538) who brought Lazzarelli to France. Whereas Champier himself seems to have been largely ignored in Anglophone history, his contacts and connections make him a key figure in the transmission of Hermetic thought in France, although his own contribution is largely inconsequential. For Copenhaver, Champier’s interest lay in his being ‘a leading proponent of medical humanism’ and ‘an early reader of Ficino’ (1978, 95-96).

52 France and Spain had fought over possession of Naples and Milan for decades. Ferdinand I (referred to as Ferrante King of Naples), the illegitimate son of Alfonso King of Aragon, is the Ferdinand whom Lazzarelli tutors in the Crater Hermetis. René I d’Anjou and his son, Duke Jean, contested the kingdom of Naples in a battle commemorated in a long poem by Lazzarelli. When Ferdinand died in 1494, Charles VIII of France asserted his inherited Angevin claim to the crown of Naples, and invaded Italy; he took Naples, but was driven out of Italy by an alliance between Maximilian I, Spain and the Vatican. In 1499, Louis XII invaded again and took Milan and Naples, but was driven out of Naples in 1503 by Spain. In 1515 François I, having won the Battle of Marignano, concluded a peace treaty allowing him to keep Milan while Spain kept Naples. In 1521, François was drawn into war again and lost Milan; attempts to retrieve Milan in 1525 were disastrous, and led to François being captured by the Spanish and forced to sign a treaty (Cambrai, 1529), in which he renounced all claims to Italy. It is arguable that Shakespeare makes use of these events in setting The Tempest.

Moreover, a discovery by Carlo Vecce in 1988, reported by Hanegraaff (2005, 41 n.133), sheds light on Champier’s role in the passage from Italy to France of Lazzarelli’s manuscript, which the latter had presented as a gift to his eccentric mentor, ‘Mercurio’ da Correggio in 1482. Champier is believed to have been present when Correggio, invited to visit Louis XII in Lyon in 1501, presented the king’s ambassador with Lazzarelli’s precious manuscript. One must assume that Champier was permitted to make a copy of the manuscript because he published it in Paris in 1507. Champier’s interest in Ficino, and his decision like him to ‘treat medicine and theology as interdependent disciplines’ probably stems from his time at the University of Paris, before 1495, where he was taught by, among others,

54 The evidence lies in two letters: one from Trithemius quoted in Copenhaver (1978, 51), the other from Pietro Aleandro, a manuscript hunter (Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn 40). They record a visit from Mercurio da Correggio to King Louis XII in Lyon in 1501. This Correggio, a man of great wealth but allegedly of little formal education, lived with his family a life of ostentatious poverty. He believed himself to be and convinced others that he was Pymander and the son of God. Lazzarelli was devoted to him and made him a gift of his unpublished manuscript translation of seventeen Books of the Corpus Hermeticum. Lazzarelli having died in 1500, Correggio, invited to speak to the French King who was interested in his practice of medicine and alchemy, presented Louis with his writings (Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn 41). Trithemius reports that the doctors at the royal court were ‘amazed and astonished that a man too unlettered to have an adequate knowledge of Latin should have talents so profound, especially in medicine’ (Copenhaver 1978, 51). To the king’s ambassador he presented, what Maria Paola Saci has ascertained was Lazzarelli’s translation of the Corpus and the three chapters known as the Diffinitiones. One letter records that ‘Mercurio was disputing with one of the king’s physicians’, a man later identified by Vecce as Champier (Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn 40, 41 n.133).

55 Hanegraaff traces its passage from the ambassador to Aleandro who ‘took it with him to Venice in 1503 and then to Rome, from where Egidio da Viterbo could have taken it to Viterbo’ where it remains to this day (Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn 41).
‘Johannes Colar britannus’ who is probably John Colet (Copenhaver 1978, 46), the Englishman who so admired Ficino.\textsuperscript{56} Certainly his explanation of why he, a doctor, was so interested in theosophy, stems from Ficino as much as from the \textit{Corpus Hermeticum}. Champier’s response – ‘that it is because nature has joined soul to body in us by means of the \textit{spiritus}. The body is cured with the remedies of medicine, the \textit{spiritus} . . . is regulated and nourished with aerial scents and sounds and chants’ (Copenhaver 1978, 54) – reflects Hermes’ teaching on the healing power of music and the importance of tuning ‘the inward lyre’ and adjusting it to ‘the <divine> musician’ (\textit{CH XVIII} [5]). Shakespeare may be thinking similarly of the power of music to nourish the spirit when he introduces music as ‘the food of love’, or speaks of the ‘harmony [. . .] in immortal souls’ which can only be heard in heaven, or when he fills the isle with ‘Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not’.\textsuperscript{57}

When Champier published Lazzarelli’s complete \textit{Pymander} in Paris in 1507, it was in a climate made favourable by the publication two years earlier of Lefèvre’s second edition of Ficino’s \textit{Pymander}, along with the \textit{Asclepius}, a commentary condemning the bad magic therein, and Lazzarelli’s abbreviated \textit{Crater Hermetis}. This time, Lefèvre dedicated the work to a Bishop, Guillaume Briçonnet. The fact that Briçonnet was also ‘remembered for his spiritual correspondence with Marguerite de Navarre’ (Ferguson 189), raises the possibility that her well-known interest in Evangelical ideas and her support for the reformers may have owed

\textsuperscript{56} Champier claimed to have studied with Pico in Paris, and Copenhaver thinks Champier’s ‘assaults against occultism’ derived more from Pico and his nephew than from Ficino (1978, 55).

\textsuperscript{57} from \textit{Twelfth Night}, 1.1.1; \textit{The Merchant of Venice}, 5.1.63; \textit{The Tempest}, 3.2.137.
something to the Hermetic texts as well as to the neo-Platonists. Queen consort of Navarre (1492-1549), and the sister of François I, Marguerite d'Angoulême, the wife of Henri II d’Albret, and grandmother of Henri of Navarre had made Nérac a great religious and humanist centre (Champeaud 81). She was greatly admired in France, as much for her intellect and her writing as for her kindness and generosity.\(^{58}\) In the spirit of true agape, she initiated reforms in convents and hospices and founded the Hôpital des Enfants Rouges for abandoned children in Paris. Growing up, she had access to the famed library of illuminated manuscripts and printed books at the Angoulême court in Cognac and was rumoured to have carried with her at all times Ficino’s translation of Plotinus’ *Enneads*.\(^{59}\) Erasmus admired her, as did François Rabelais, who dedicated *The Third Book of the Heroic Deeds and Sayings of the Good Pantagruel* to her. Queen Marguerite remained a loyal Catholic but her only surviving child, Jeanne d’Albret (1528-1572), hastened the pace of reform when she inherited Navarre, now converted to Calvinism, married Antoine of the House of Bourbon (1518-1562), and became the mother of Henri Bourbon of Navarre. In 1533

\[\text{\textsuperscript{58}}\text{\textsuperscript{58}}}\text{During her lifetime she was also admired in England. Elizabeth while still a princess translated her *Miroir de l’âme pécheresse* (*Mirror of the sinful soul*), as a gift for her stepmother, Catherine Parr. The Queen’s mother, Anne Boleyn while in France (1515-1522) in the service of Queen Claude, the sister-in-law of Queen Marguerite, may have met her and been influenced by her radical views.\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{59}}\text{\textsuperscript{59}}}\text{Poetry Foundation. [http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/marguerite-de-navarre](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/marguerite-de-navarre) accessed 2/09/15.}\]
Marguerite’s fourteen-year-old nephew, later Henri II of France, married Catherine de Medicis, and the Valois family tree was split in two.\textsuperscript{60}

In Lyon, Champier was in touch, ‘either intellectually or personally with the best minds of his time’ (Copenha\textsuperscript{ver} 1978, 75). It was to Lyon that Agrippa came in 1524 as physician to the queen mother, Louise of Savoy. For the few years he was there, Agrippa moved in the same circles as Champier, who mentions a meeting he had with ‘Agrippa germano viro multiscio’, who is probably Agrippa von Nettesheim (Copenha\textsuperscript{ver} 1978, 75).\textsuperscript{61} Rabelais (1483/1494?-1553) physician, former Franciscan and writer is another who came to Lyon, and whose works were certainly known in England.\textsuperscript{62} G. Mallary Masters analyses Rabelais’ books from the perspective of Rabelais’ interest in Plato which is well-known, and also in the \textit{Corpus Hermeticum} which is not so well-known, and in ‘the dialectic common to both’ (2). However, for Masters, ‘Hermetism’ includes magic, astrology, alchemy, cabala, the initiatory cults of Pythagoras and Orpheus, as well as Platonism and neo-Platonism, complicated, as he says, by their association with Christianity. In the chapter entitled ‘Rabelais hermeticus’ (72-97), Masters explicitly defines ‘hermetism’ in terms of the black arts, while the religious Hermetism of the \textit{Corpus Hermeticum} is conflated with neo-Platonism in the chapter, ‘Rabelais Platonicus’ (14-36). Masters sees that Rabelais

\textsuperscript{60} In fact the Catholic branch was further split between the Catholic royalists, loyal to the king, and the militant Catholic Guisards, loyal to the duc de Guise.

\textsuperscript{61} Hanegraaff notes that Agrippa and Champier may also have met when both were lecturing in Pavia in 1515; Agrippa was lecturing on Ficino, and Champier was in the medical faculty (2009, 16 n.51).

\textsuperscript{62} Books I and II of \textit{Gargantua and Pantagruel} were first translated into English in 1653.
is as scathing about alchemists and the sale of indulgences as he is satirical of astrologers, but that even while indulging in the comic ironic inversions for which he is famed, nevertheless reveals an understanding of the quest for self-knowledge and of the goal of universal harmony. From Rabelais’ ‘facetious versions of some of Champier’s titles’, Copenhaver is sure that he knew of Champier’s works (1978,73-74). Indeed, it is not unreasonable to conclude that two physicians in the same town, both attached to the court, would have known each other, and that Rabelais would have had the opportunity to read Champier’s publication of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. In 1549, Gabriel du Préau dedicated his French translation of the *Hermetica* and the *Crater Hermetis* to Cardinal Charles de Lorraine. Five years later, Adrian Turnebus published the first Greek language edition of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. To Ficino’s original fourteen tracts, Turnebus added three fragments from Stobaeus and one from the *Suda* as Chapter XV.

It was in those years, during the reign of Henri II that the group of seven poets known as the Pléiade began to meet at the home of Jean-Antoine de Baïf. Roger Howell observes that their interest in Greek language and literature ‘was connected with neo-Platonism and probably with magic and mysticism as well’ and that ‘they were proponents of a sort of ecumenical movement’ where Catholics and Protestants came together (159). History records that in an increasingly literate society, as more printed books were becoming available men and women gathered in

63 ‘It contains a dedication to Lancelot de Carle, Bishop of Riez, a friend of Ronsard, by Angelus Vergicius.’ (Walker 1972, 68).

64 In Greek mythology, the eldest of the Pléiades was Hermes, son of Zeus and Maia.
small groups to share reading of books and manuscripts with like-minded others, often with a scholar acting as ‘facilitator’ (Jardine and Grafton 35).

It was also in the mid-fifteenth-century that conventicles of men and women began to gather in private houses to read the works of a German mystic, Hendrik Niclaes (1502-1580), a merchant mercer and architect of the *Familia Caritatis* or *Das Haus der Liebe*, first heard of in East Friesland in 1540. A prolific and singularly obscure writer, Niclaes signed himself HN which also stood for *Homo Novus* in his writing; his teaching closely resembles Hermetic doctrine in many respects. The goal of his followers was to live a life so pure that they would become god-like or ‘godded with god’. The sect spread into France where it was known as *La Maison de la Charité*, and in 1555 arrived in England where it was called the Family of Love. In London in the late 1570s the sect rose to unwanted prominence, as we shall see below, before being outlawed and sinking quietly out of sight.

In 1570 the French king, Charles IX, founded the first of the great musical academies, Baïf’s *Académie de Poésie et Musique*; the aim of the academy was to achieve union between poetry and music (Yates 1947, 19). The plan, which sounds distinctively hermetic, was to revive the music of the ancients because ‘these

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65 Virtually all Niclaes’ doctrines are shared with the Hermetic philosophy: toleration of all religions; Man is perfectible; Man is born free from sin; (for the Hermetist, evil comes from Man when he chooses ignorance); Man’s will is free; life is a journey to the *terra pacis*, or the land of peace to be found within; we should live in imitation of God from whom we came and to whom we can return in this life; that our lives should be filled with loving service to others; that through silent contemplation and examining our souls we can achieve self-knowledge, be spiritually regenerated and enter into union with the Divine Mind (Familists called this being ‘godded with god’); that only after that mystic experience can regenerated Man be baptised as a ‘New Man’: *Homo Novus*. 
melodies [. . .] are believed to have the power of refining and purifying the minds of the auditors, and, through this purification, of initiating them into higher states of knowledge’ (Yates 1947, 36). As we saw, Champier had also claimed therapeutic and psychological effects for music (Copenhaver 1978, 54).

Soon after the establishment of Baïf’s academy, the apothecary Nicholas Houël, founded the *Maison de la Charité Chrétienne* in Paris in 1576 (Ingman 226).66 Yates describes it as ‘a combined orphanage, school, hospital, and pharmacy’ where ‘music forms part of the cure and the curriculum’, and suggests a possible link between Houël’s establishment, the Family of Love and the court of Henri III (1947, 157). Given the importance attached to music in the *Corpus Hermeticum* (XVIII), and the therapeutic effects of spiritual harmony, it is possible that Houël’s generous act is also linked to the *agape* associated with Hermetism.

In 1574, twenty years after the Turnebus edition, François Foix de Candale, Bishop of Aire, published another edition of the Greek *Hermetica* and a Latin translation, based on Turnebus’ edition of fourteen treatises, to which he had added the fragments from Stobaeus mentioned earlier, and two treatises from Lazzarelli. Moreschini praises Foix de Candale as ‘among the greatest Hermetic philosophers of the sixteenth century’ (189). Foix dedicated the work to the Queen Mother, Catherine de Medicis. It is reasonable to suppose that she looked favourably on a work whose first Latin translation had been commissioned by Cosimo de’ Medici of the great dynasty from which she herself was descended. In 1579, Foix de Candale published his French translation and an extensive commentary on the *Corpus*

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66 In a discussion of religious tolerance in the poetry of Jean de la Jessée, whom she suspects of being a Familist, Heather Ingman notes that Jessée was a friend of Houël (280).
Hermeticum, entitled *Le Pimandre de Mercure Trismegiste de la philosophie Chrestienne*. He dedicated the work to the Queen’s daughter, the Catholic Marguerite de Valois (1553-1615), who was about to be briefly reunited with her husband, Henri of Navarre, at the Huguenot court in Nérac.

In short, in France, the Hermetic texts were openly received at the highest levels by both the episcopate and the court. Cardinal Jacques Davy du Perron was not afraid to quote from the scriptures and pagan philosophers in the same sermon, in a marriage of sacred and profane that was apparently common at Vincennes, and which outraged the Catholic League who accused Henri III of condoning sorceries (Yates 1947, 170-1). Yates quotes from a famous *discours spirituel* of the Cardinal, excerpts that suggest his acquaintance with the *Hermetica*. For example, in speaking of a truth beyond reason, and the desire which the soul has of knowing the Divinity, du Perron says:

> Our soul receives only images and appearances instead of truth and reality; as when we see visions in dreams and stretch out our hands to grasp them, it is only air and shadows that we grasp, and no solid body. So it must not be thought strange if [. . .] our soul cannot satisfy herself, nor assuage the desire she has of knowing, in anything save the manifest vision of the Divinity. For all other knowledge feeds her only on semblances and representations, filling her with nothing solid [. . .] but there in that glorious vision of God which we await in the other world [. . .] it will be his own Essence, who is the Essence of Essences, the origin and source of all being which [. . .] will communicate itself to our soul, as our soul is infused and spread throughout our body. (Yates 1947, 168)

While in the *Corpus Hermeticum* we read:

> One dares to say, Asclepius, that god’s essence (if in fact he has an essence) is the beautiful but that the beautiful and the good are not to be detected in any of the things in the cosmos. All the things that are subject to the sight of the eyes are as phantoms and shadowy illusions (*CH VI* [4]). God is in mind, but mind is in soul, and soul is in matter . . . (*CH XI* [4])
Du Perron speaks openly, not of faith in God but of the Hermetic desire of the soul to know God, and he refers to the ephemeral nature of reality found in Plato and also in Stobaeus. I argue below that Shakespeare references these same issues about the nature of truth and reality in *The Tempest*. The Cardinal also refers to the pagan belief in pantheism, and to ‘the Sun, which the Egyptians called the invisible God’ (in Yates 1947, 169). He defines God as ‘an intellectual sphere of which the centre is everywhere and the circumference nowhere’. Yates alleges he is influenced here by Nicholas of Cusa, but the definition was also linked graphically to Trismegistus at about that time. Nevertheless, despite this evidence that the Hermetic texts were read with approval in France, whatever eirenic ideas they contained did not prevent the country from being torn apart by eight civil wars in the years between 1563 and 1585.  

The involvement of Catherine de Medicis in the bloody massacre of Protestants on St Bartholomew’s day in 1572 earned her a lasting reputation for ruthlessness. She had made several previous attempts to reconcile Protestant and Catholic differences, and with the Chancellor, Michel de l’Hôpital (1507-1563), she had convened the Colloquy of Poissy in 1561.  

67 The French Wars of Religion began in 1563 after the assassination of François de Guise; they were repeated in 1568; 1572 (the massacre on St Bartholomew’s day); 1573; 1575; 1577; 1580; 1585.

68 The conference at Poissy brought together the French bishops under Cardinal F. de Tournon and the Protestant ministers led by the Calvinist Theodore Beza (*Dictionary*, 1304). It failed to bring about a reconciliation when Catholics and Protestants were unable to agree over the Eucharist, but was followed by a decree of tolerance granting some rights to Protestants in France. The decree was ignored by followers of the Duc de Guise who
de Valois, a devout Catholic, records in her Mémoires for 1561, that when she was but eight years old, many ladies and lords of the court tried to convert her to Huguenotism at that time and that it was only with the greatest difficulty that she resisted (74-5). The whole court, she writes, was infected with the heresy, and even her brother the duc d’Anjou (who was to become King of France, Henri III), had been prevailed upon to change his religion. In 1572, Catherine attempted reconciliation again, through the marriage of her daughter to the Huguenot Henri of Navarre. The subsequent events on St Bartholomew’s day are too well-known to repeat here. Marguerite was placed in an invidious position and wrote, ‘the Huguenots were massacred a group of worshipping Protestants at Vassy and the first religious civil war began soon after. De l’Hôpital was a moderate, a Catholic with a Protestant wife and children, who advocated religious toleration to be achieved by peaceful means. He held that a ruler should be prepared to put the interests of the state above religious factions, a position later described as politique.

69 [1561] ‘To keep my religion at the time of the Colloquy of Poissy when the whole court was infected with heresy, I had to withstand the urgent persuasions of several lords and ladies of the court and even my brother d’Anjou, now King of France, who even as a child had not been able to escape the influence of wicked Huguenotism, constantly calling on me to change my religion, often throwing my Book of Hours into the fire, and giving me instead psalms and Protestant prayers and forcing me to take them’. [1561] Et la résistance aussi que je fis pour conserver ma religion du temps du colloque de Poissy, où toute la Cour était infectée d’hérésie, aux persuasions impérieuses de plusieurs dames et seigneurs de la Cour et même de mon frère d’Anjou, depuis roi de France, de qui l’enfance n’avait pu éviter l’impression de la malheureuse huguenoterie, qui sans cesse me criait de changer de religion, jetant mes heures souvent dans le feu, et au lieu me donnant des psaumes et prières huguenotes me contraignant les porter (Mémoires, 74-5).

Marguerite’s memory does not always accord with documented evidence such as her letters, and it is possible that writing long after the event she is attempting here to damage her brother, Henri III (Mémoires, 47).
suspicious of me because I was a Catholic and the Catholics because I was married to the King of Navarre who was a Huguenot' (*Mémoires*, 97). After six years of marriage she was eventually permitted to join her husband at the court in Nérac in August 1579 and stayed with him until January 1582.\(^7\) Her *Mémoires* written afterwards and not published until 1626 record her memory of how they accommodated their religious differences:

[1579] A happiness which lasted the space of the four or five years that I was in Gascony with him, spending most of our time at Nérac where our Court was so brilliant and so delightful that we did not for a moment miss the French Court: we had with us there the Princess of Navarre, my husband's sister, since married to my nephew the duc de Bar; I had besides a great number of ladies and young women of my own, and the King my husband was attended by a large group of lords and gentlemen, all as honest men as the most gallant to be seen in any Court; and we regretted only that they were Huguenots. But of these differences of religion there is nothing to say; the King my husband and the Princess his sister going to one side to listen to a sermon, whilst my household and I heard mass in a chapel which is in the park; as I left, we gathered to stroll together either in a beautiful garden, ornamented with long avenues bordered with laurel and tall cypress trees, or in the park, along the paths which ran for three miles beside the river. The rest of the day was spent in innocent amusements; and after dinner and in the evenings, there was usually a ball (199).

But Fortune, envious of such a happy life (which seemed, by reason of the peace and harmony that prevailed, to scoff at her power, as if we had not been subject to her capriciousness), in order to worry us, stirred up new reasons for war between the King my husband and the Catholics, making the King my husband and the Marechal de Biron (who, at the request of the Huguenots, had been

\(^7\) Her memory enlarges two and a half years to ‘four or five’ (*Mémoires*, 199 n. 397). Navarre himself who had been obliged to convert to Catholicism and had been under house arrest since the St Bartholomew’s day massacre, managed to effect his escape in 1576 with a handful of loyal friends and make his way back to Nérac.
appointed the King's [meaning her brother Henri III] lieutenant in Guyenne), such enemies, that although I tried to bring them together, I could do nothing to prevent it. They made their separate complaints to the King. The King my husband insisted on the removal of the Marechal de Biron from Guyenne and the Marechal accused the King my husband, and the rest of those who were of the so-called reformed religion, with wishing to violate the peace treaty. [1580] To my great sorrow, the division thus begun grew ever greater and I was unable to do anything about it. (200)\textsuperscript{71} Details such as these from Marguerite de Valois’ Mémoires provide a clear picture of how religious toleration was practised at the Huguenot court. Protestants and Catholics came happily together in their social life and worshipped just as happily apart. In England, by contrast, only five years later in 1584, for a Catholic priest to administer the sacrament was outlawed as treason. Without the insight from the Mémoires, the significance of the men whom Shakespeare names in Love’s Labour’s Lost would be lost to reader and audience. We must assume that there were some in Shakespeare’s audience who recognised the Catholic Armand de Gontaut, duc de Biron, in Berowne. The other lords attending the king in Shakespeare’s play are Dumaine who was Charles de Lorraine, duc de Maine or Mayenne (1554-1611), the Catholic younger brother of Henri de Guise, Navarre’s implacable enemy, and Longaville who was Henri d’Orléans, duc de Longueville; his sister was married to Navarre’s cousin Henri, Prince of Condé (1552-1588). With this knowledge we see that Love’s Labour’s Lost, where the King and his friends swear to devote themselves

\footnote{For French original see Appendix III. The Editor of the Mémoires, Eliane Viennot, notes that the fame of the Nérac court must have reached England and inspired Shakespeare to write Les Peines d’amour perdues or Love’s Labour’s Lost. She does not suggest how this may have happened nor why Shakespeare and his court audience may have been interested (199 n.399).}
to self-improvement, self-denial and contemplation in order to achieve the promised
god-like status, unites Catholic and Protestant in the same way as the real court at
Nérac promoted religious toleration.

Not long before Marguerite arrived in Nérac with her entourage, she had
received the Hermetic books translated into French and dedicated to her by Foix de
Candale. Only months earlier, she had also received the *Discours de l’honneste
amour, sur le Banquet de Platon par Marsille Ficin*, translated by Guy Le Fèvre de
la Boderie. La Boderie (1541-1598) an apparently unwavering Catholic, a poet and
philologist, was secretary to François duc d’Anjou, the King’s brother, and had
translated a number of Ficino’s and Pico’s works. It seems reasonable to conjecture
that Marguerite took her new books with her to Nérac to read aloud in the company
of others, possibly in the royal library. Moreover, Agrippa d’Aubigny, ‘inventor

\[\text{\textsuperscript{72}}\text{ Although completed in 1572, Foix’s translation was published in January 1579, in Bordeaux.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{73}}\text{ La Boderie published in French translation: Ficino’s commentary on Plato’s Symposium; his De Triplici Vita; Pico’s De Hominis Dignitate and Francesco Giorgi’s De Harmonia Mundi (Walker 66).}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{74}}\text{ Damien Plantey describes the library as it was in 1580, divided into two parts, for private study, and for entertainment where games such as chess were played. Amongst the collection he lists books of poetry sacred and profane, books of music for church and court, a history of the French wars in Italy and, cheek by jowl on the shelves, prayer books, Protestant books of psalms and Catholic books of hours. There was also a fountain and an artificial garden composed of flowers of silk and gold wire and a little silver tree enamelled in green. It offered for every season of the year a natural setting encouraging conversation both literary and spiritual (152). It is possible that Shakespeare had the library setting in mind when he ended Love’s Labour’s Lost with songs for Hiems and Ver.}\]
and designer of masquerades and tourneys’ in which Huguenots and Guisards performed together at the French court, has described an academy at Navarre ‘in imitation of Henri III’s academy’ in Paris (Yates 1947, 257, 258). Clearly, its fame had spread to England, for Shakespeare makes his character Ferdinand, King of Navarre refer to it in the opening lines of Love’s Labour’s Lost:

Navarre shall be the wonder of the world,
Our court shall be a little academe,
Still and contemplative in living art. (1.1. 12-14)

Loris Petris in a recent paper refers to the neo-Platonism relished at the Nérac court. She acknowledges that Jean Balsamo established in 1991 that the plethora of new French translations from the Tuscan neo-Platonists was of interest to the men and women gathered in Navarre. However, it is clear from Petris’ discussion of Pibrac’s long poem L’Ombre de Bussy (The Ghost of Bussy) that the neo-Platonism which so fascinated the court was derived from the Hermetica and could properly be termed Hermetism. Petris argues that Pibrac is acknowledging and giving voice to Marguerite’s neo-Platonic proclivities in the dialogue of Flore to Lisis in the poem. However, when the two lovers become one in a reciprocal spiritualised love, Pibrac

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75 ‘la topique néoplatonicienne goutée à la cour de Nérac’ (Petris 283)


77 Pibrac wrote the poem for Marguerite following the assassination of her former lover, Bussy d’Amboise in 1579. Twenty years later in England, Chapman wrote two plays about the same man.

78 ‘Pibrac connaît la propension néoplatonicienne de Marguerite et il sait y répondre’ (Petris 283).
reveals his knowledge of the *Pimandre* and of Foix de Candale’s commentary. Marguerite de Valois herself employs the Hermetic concept of the androgynous nature of God in letters to her friend the duchess of Nevers in 1579, and later to her lover Jacques de Harlay, seigneur de Champvallon, in 1583. The Hermetic notion of man’s becoming one with God is here interpreted as the power of love to restore and complete the divided couple, as La Boderie wrote in the translation of Ficino which he dedicated to Marguerite: ‘When they were divided, love pulled the two halves together to repair and restore the whole’ (Petris 283). 79 Petris points out that Marguerite echoes his words, writing to Champvallon: ‘Love can only be perfect through the harmony of two souls united by the same will’ (284). 80 It seems clear that the Queen of Navarre had read and assimilated the ideas in the Hermetic texts. There can be little doubt that the works of the Florentine neo-Platonists, as well as Foix de Candale’s French translation of and commentary on the *Corpus Hermeticum* were read, possibly aloud, and discussed in the library by the gentlemen who surrounded the King, and the ladies who followed in the train of the Queen, constituting, around 1580 an ‘Academy of Navarre’ to rival the Palace Academy in Paris.

*Hermes in late Tudor England: the transmission and reception of the Hermetic texts*

In the years before and after 1580, diplomatic contact between the English and French courts, associated with an attempt to unite the crowns in marriage, was frequent and friendly and provided an opportunity for texts of all kinds to be brought

79 ‘Depuis qu’ils furent divisez, la moitié fut par amour tirée à sa moitié, pour refaire et restituer l’entier’ (Petris 283).

80 ‘L’amour ne peut être parfait que par l’accord de deux âmes unies par une même volonté’ (Petris 284).
from France to England.\textsuperscript{81} It is no secret that English men and women of letters knew and read the French poets, for the evidence in print is indisputable.\textsuperscript{82} There is no reason to doubt that other French publications, such as Foix’s translation and commentary just published in 1579, aroused similar interest in England and were obtained by travellers or brought as gifts.

In 1579 a group of Commissioners led by Jean de Simier was in England for several months to negotiate the terms of the projected marriage between Henri III’s younger brother, François, duc d’Anjou (1555-1584), and Queen Elizabeth. Although ostensibly a Catholic, like his brother the King, François was a \textit{politique}, suspected in France of harbouring sympathies for the reformers.\textsuperscript{83} The \textit{politiques} were Catholic moderates who, as a matter of policy, prized peace and tolerance, putting the unification and pacification of the state above religious adherence. It was

\textsuperscript{81} Under Elizabeth, successive Kings of France were made members of the Order of the Garter. Charles IX in 1564, Henri III in 1575, and Henri IV in 1590.

\textsuperscript{82} Sidney Lee in the Introduction to \textit{Elizabethan Sonnets} (1904) outlines the frequent and egregious practice of the Elizabethan poets of borrowing, by translation and paraphrase, without acknowledgment, from the French poets. Sidney, Edmund Spenser and Thomas Watson, Anne Cecil de Vere, Samuel Daniel and Thomas Lodge all flagrantly plagiarise Desportes and Ronsard, not to mention the older poets, Clément Marot and Jacques du Bellay. Shakespeare’s use of Belleforêt’s \textit{Histoires Tragiques} as a source for \textit{Hamlet} is not disputed, even though it was not Englished until 1608. Harold Jenkins, editor of 1982 Arden edition of \textit{Hamlet} suggests the 1576 edition of Belleforêt as Shakespeare’s likely source (89). Margrethe Jolly in 2012 found over fifty echoes from the French source, ‘whether exactly parallel, adapted or transposed’ (\textit{Parergon}, 29, 92).

\textsuperscript{83} Suspicious of a French Catholic, the English were divided over the match, Leicester, Walsingham and Sidney opposing it, and Lord Burghley and the earls of Sussex and Oxford being in favour.
a policy consistent with Hermetic thinking, even if it cannot be shown to have been motivated by it.

D’Anjou himself made several visits to England, and in 1581 he was accompanied by Jean Bodin, who had been a member of his entourage for ten years. Bodin charmed the English with his wit and erudition, but his religious views were hard to determine. In 1562 he had signed the oath of loyalty to the Catholic faith, but in 1569 he was arrested and imprisoned as ‘an adherent of the new religion’ (Kuntz xxi). His ‘new religion’ has generally been understood as Protestantism but it is possible that what was meant was Hermetism. According to his translator and biographer, Marion Leathers Daniels Kuntz, Bodin was both ‘profoundly religious’, intolerant only of Atheism, and also felt that ‘true religion requires no church’ (xxix). This is a sentiment which the Familists also shared. In her magisterial study of the *Colloquium heptaplomeres*, Kuntz notes the frequency of Bodin’s references to Hermes Trismegistus and concludes that the book was at its core Hermetic (liv). Again, like the Familists, and also like Hermetists, Bodin’s *Colloquium heptaplomeres*, not published in his lifetime, makes the case for complete religious toleration of all faiths. Kuntz quotes Pierre Mesnard who described Bodin as having ‘a grand conception of salvation open to all, Christians or pagans on equal footing’ (xx). The concept of universal salvation is not the only one that Bodin shares with Familism and the *Corpus Hermeticum*. In an earlier work, *Universae naturae theatrum*, he wrote that ‘God created the universe through the exercise of His free will, and He bestowed free will on man’ (in Kuntz xxxiv). In the *Theatrum* Bodin wrote: ‘I have placed before your eyes good and evil, life and death; choose therefore the good and you will live’ (in Kuntz, xxxiv). The words echo Hermes telling Tat about the effects of choice: ‘choosing the stronger . . . has splendid consequences . . .
in that it makes the human into a god’ (CH IV [7]). Moreover, they imply a Hermetic notion that evil originates with mankind. As Hermes says: ‘the evils for which we are responsible, who choose them instead of good things, are no responsibility of god’s’ (CH IV [8]). Kuntz remarks Bodin’s admiration for Ficino, Pico and the ancient theologians. The diary of John Dee records a meeting with Bodin at Westminster (10), but before I discuss England’s most famous proponent of Hermetism and others whose knowledge of Hermetism is also recorded, I turn to the emergence of the Family of Love in England.

Whereas Familism was a well-kept secret in France until the Plantin archive was opened in the late nineteenth century (Mangani 72), in England the sect rose suddenly to public prominence around 1579 and then seemed to disappear after 1582. In fact, the group continued invisibly, without attracting attention, and enters the public record again after the accession of James VI and I. Christopher Marsh names 116 individual men and women or families either accused of belonging to the Family, identified from other sources such as wills, or ‘probable Familists’. From his close examination of the wills of known Familists, Marsh concluded that the frequency of the innocent phrase ‘loving friends’ was a probable indicator of a member of the society. Ten of the known Familists held positions close to the Queen as Yeomen of her Guard (Marsh 116). They were under the captaincy of Christopher Hatton (Marsh 117) and later under Walter Ralegh whom we know to have had an interest in the Hermetic philosophy.

The best evidence that the Family of Love was regarded as a serious alternative religion comes from an exiled priest living in Paris, Robert Parsons, who in 1580 wrote: There are at this day in your Majesties Realme, ‘fower known religions . . . distinct both in name, spirite and doctrine . . . the Catholickes, the
Protestants, the Puritanes and the householders of love’. The sect was attacked from all sides. Protestants thought their belief in free will and charitable good works favoured Catholicism, and their views on perfectibility and living purely were too Puritan; Puritans reviled them for denying the doctrine of original sin; they were despised by Catholics as hypocrites and cowards for their policy of dissimulation or equivocation which allowed them to evade prosecution by lying about their private beliefs while conforming outwardly with the prevailing religion, a practice known as Nicodemism.

Between June 1575 and January 1581, the Privy Council dealt with nineteen items concerning the sect or its members. In October 1580 the Queen issued a Proclamation against the Familists. However, ‘the horrible secte of grosse and wicked heretiques’ was never pursued. Familists who had been arrested, interrogated and imprisoned, were released. No Familists were hanged, and by the end of 1582, the matter was no longer a concern. Nevertheless, the possibility that the teaching that Niclaes was promulgating was influenced by Hermetic thought, and that the Familists were practising Hermetic teachings at the grass roots level, cannot be ignored.

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84 Robert Parsons. A brief discourse containing certain reasons why Catholiques refuse to goe to Church, Douai, 1580, from ‘The Epistle Dedicatorie (to Queen Elizabeth)’. Cited by Martin. (1989, 217 n.9).

85 In John 3:1-2 Nicodemus asked Jesus about the nature of rebirth.

86 See also Acts of the Privy Council XII, 232: ‘we are given to understand that there are divers persons terming them selves to be of the Familie of Love, maintaining erroneous doctrines and using private conventicles contrarie to her Majesties lawes’ (in Marsh 111).
Another, closer to the court, whose name has been associated with Hermetism is Philippe du Plessis Mornay. Mornay was one of those Protestants who had sought refuge in England after the terrible events of Saint Bartholomew’s day. He was especially close to Sidney and Leicester who, Mornay’s wife recorded, were ‘her husband’s closest friends during the eighteen months [1577-1578 and 1580] he spent in London on a [diplomatic] mission from the King of Navarre’ (in Howell 55). He was a friend of the king and a regular visitor at the Huguenot court and Yates cites him as an example of ‘how men were turning to the Hermetic religion of the world to take them above these conflicts’ (1964, 176). Robert Kinsman also describes him as ‘a Protestant Hermetist’ who ‘believed that religious tolerance would be attained by a return to a Hermetic religion of the world’ (in Harrie 501). Nevertheless, despite his obvious knowledge and interest, Jeanne Harrie doubts Mornay’s commitment to Hermetism. She argues that his references to Hermes Trismegistus in his *Traité de la vérité de la religion chrétienne contre les athées, épicuriens, payens, juifs, mahométans et autres infidels* (published in Antwerp in 1581), are confined to this one work where they are augmented by references to ‘all non-Christian authorities whose works demonstrated conformity with Christian truth,’ including other *prisci theologi* (505). Foix de Candale, by contrast, Harrie describes as ‘a convinced and enthusiastic Hermetist’ (513). Both men wanted to see the reunification of the church, but neither man was willing to compromise his commitment to his confession. The bishop sought a peaceful solution, but Mornay, a soldier as well as a theologian, like Sidney was willing to take part in a just war. That Sidney undertook the translation of Mornay’s *Traité de la Vérité* is an indication of
his sympathy for his friend’s religion and politics.\(^{87}\) Clearly Mornay’s work was present in England and there is a possibility that Hermetic works relating to the *Traité*, such as translations of *Pymander*, were also made available to the translator. Whether or not Hermetic texts arrived in England at that time, Hermetic thought certainly did, in the person of the eccentric and extraordinary Giordano Bruno.

Bruno (1548-1600) of Nola, excommunicated by his Dominican order for doubting the divinity of Christ, had arrived in Paris in the early 1580s where he published two books on the magical Hermetic art of memory (Yates 1964, 1991, 190, 191). He trailed in his wake the whole tradition of magic, astrology, alchemy and cabala long associated with Hermeticism. He would have had opportunity in Italy to see the *Pymander*, and in Paris he could have read Foix de Candale’s Latin translation published in 1574.\(^{88}\) But he had moved beyond finding the Christian message in the pagan texts. In 1583, sent to London by Henri III, Bruno was staying at the embassy where Mauvissière was French ambassador. While his views on the centrality of the Sun, or on the impossibility of the Trinity, may have intrigued or possibly horrified those who heard them, Bruno’s visit to London seems to have stimulated an interest in Hermetic thought. He was made welcome at the Italian-speaking court of Elizabeth and, in the nearly three years he spent in London, he produced six books in Italian, presumably for the edification of the travelled, Italian-speaking court. The first of

\(^{87}\) After Sidney’s death the translation was substantially revised and completed by Arthur Golding, who may therefore be supposed to have been sympathetic to the views expressed. Golding is famous as the translator of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* very well-known to Shakespeare.

\(^{88}\) He spoke no English and it is possible that he spoke no French.
these, *La Cena de le ceneri* or *The Ash Wednesday Supper* (meaning the Eucharistic meal), conveys his belief that a political alliance could best be effected by a unification of religion; this was to be achieved through his idiosyncratic Hermetic theory of the Eucharist that transcended the controversies over transubstantiation.\(^89\)

Bruno dedicated one of his most daringly heretical books, *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante* (*The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*), to Sidney, who may have read it with his circle. It concerns expelling the torment of ignorance as ‘the preparatory condition for achieving reason’ (de Leon-Jones vii).\(^90\) Another work also dedicated to Sidney, *De Gli Heroici Furori* (*The Heroic Frenzies*) asserts in the Preface that ‘It is truly [ . . . ] the work of a low filthy animal nature to have made oneself the constant admirer, and to have fixed a solicitous attachment upon or around the beauty of a woman’s body’ (Rowland 175). Bruno expatiates on this theme, repudiating the pursuit of unrequited love as unworthy of Man, calling it a mania or madness, as Plato did in *Phaedrus*, and arguing that only the love of knowledge and God is worth the pain. On the one hand Bruno may be responding to Sidney’s long sonnet plaint of unrequited love, *Astrophel and Stella*; on the other hand, his revelation of the power of knowledge and love to transform captures the Hermetic struggle of the soul to reach the divine light achieved when ‘by virtue of harmony and the fusion of opposites, the intellect becomes one with the affections and man realizes the good and rises to the knowledge of the true’ (Williams 20). The poems illustrate in typical

\(^{89}\) The interpretation is expounded by Edward A. Gosselin and Lawrence S. Lerner in their Introduction to *La Cena de le Ceneri* (35-7).

Brunian terms the Hermetic path to spiritual *gnosis*, without ever mentioning Hermes. The concept of the necessary melding of the intellect and senses is contained in Book IX of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (*On understanding and sensation*), and in Chapter Four I discuss the use Shakespeare makes of this concept in *King Lear.*

Sidney’s biographer attributes Sidney’s interest in an ‘ecumenical religious movement which would unite all Protestants and perhaps eventually all Christians into a common body’ to Bruno (Howell 112), but he could also have heard that same proposition from his mentor and friend that most famous of all English Christian Hermetists, Dr Dee. The death of Colet in 1519, and the return of Erasmus and Agrippa to Europe *circa* 1510, might have spelt an end to Hermetism in England had not Dee devoted himself to it. He is most famous for the enigmatic and opaque *Monas Hieroglyphica*, which Clulee describes as ‘a daring and inventive proposal for a symbolic language that had the power to reveal the divine plan of creation, to explain the workings of the material world in the principles of alchemy and to assist in the mystic ascent of the soul’ (2005, 197). Yewbrey and van Dorsten suggest that the Monas may be ‘Dee’s proposal for a cosmopolitan, non-sectarian, tolerant religion . . . designed to prepare mankind for salvation’ (1988, 78). The monad or ‘root of all things’ (*CH IV* [10]), a language that will assist the ascent of the soul, a tolerant religion that will prepare mankind for salvation are ideas readily sourced to the religious philosophy of the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

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91 Hilary Gatti claims that Shakespeare and Marlowe both penetrated to the heart of Bruno’s thinking. In verbal parallels with *Lo Spaccio*, she finds ‘a Brunian core’ in *Hamlet* (141-42).
Dee’s travels took him to Europe where he had many friends and was greatly respected. As a young man he had studied with and befriended Mercator and was the friend of Ortelius the mapmaker and Plantin, the printer. Both Ortelius, who was a kinsman of Sidney’s friend Daniel Rogers, and Plantin were known to Sidney and both are known to have belonged to the sect, Das Haus der Liebe (Woolley 63). His biographer, Peter French, speculated that ‘Dee may have gleaned some of his religious ideas from the secret sect known as the Family of Love’ (124 n.2), but did not recognise those ideas as Hermetic or connect them with Dee’s ‘belief that his Hermetic religion of love transcended that of any contemporary church’ (123).

Dee’s home at Mortlake housed ‘England’s largest and most valuable collection of books and manuscripts’ (Sherman 30). The library catalogue which he made in 1583 listing between three and four thousand titles is witness to his catholic interests. He owned the works of Plato and Aristotle, Seneca, Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles, Plutarch, Plotinus, Reuchlin, and a manuscript copy of Trithemius’ Steganographia. He is said to have kept his copy of Agrippa’s De occulta philosophia libri tres acquired in 1550, open on a lectern at all times, which suggests that he consulted it frequently. Dee possessed Plato’s Timaeus in the ‘lingua gallica’, acquired in Paris in 1551, and he owned and annotated Ficino’s Latin translation of Plato’s works – his detailed marginalia have been discussed by Stephen Clucas (2011, 227-247 passim). He also owned Ficino’s commentary, the Theologia Platonica published by Froben in Basle in 1532.92

92 Johann Froben (1460-1527), who published for Erasmus and for More, used a printer’s emblem that showed the caduceus of Hermes held by two hands emerging from clouds, entwined by two serpents and topped by a dove of peace. By 1532, Froben having died, the
Of his Hermetic library, Roberts and Watson list about twenty-five works attributed to Hermes Trismegistus many of which relate to alchemy, the philosopher’s stone and astrology. But he also possessed several editions and translations of the *Corpus Hermeticum* including one published in Basle. The lists made in his own hand of the books in his library and the dates he acquired them include ‘*Mercurii Trismegisti Poemander, graecè . . . paris 1554*’. This is almost certainly the Turnebus Greek edition of the *Corpus Hermeticum* mentioned earlier (French 55). In their catalogue of Dee’s library Roberts and Watson also list a *Corpus Hermeticum* in Greek acquired in 1567 with ‘frequent Dee marginalia’ (161). In addition to the works already mentioned the list includes the *Corpus Hermeticum* in Latin, the *Asclepius* and another *Poemander*. It is very likely that Dee owned the edition printed in Cracow in 1585 prepared by Hannibal Rosselli and accompanied by detailed commentary. Parry records that Dee was in Poland at that time and, newly reconciled to Catholicism, made his confession to Friar Rosselli (187). Rosselli shared Dee’s interest in angels and it is reasonable to suppose that Dee obtained, or at least read, Rosselli’s commentary on a work which he already knew. If that were

printing house was run by his son, Hieronymus and continued to employ the caduceus emblem. I am not claiming here a necessary connection between Froben and the religious Hermetism of Hermes Trismegistus, but a version of the emblem, where the caduceus is flanked by cornucopiae and grasped by two hands in a friendly handshake was later employed by Andreas Wechel. The emblem was obtained by the printer Nicholas Okes and used for the title pages of Quarto *King Lear* and *Othello*, which I argue in later chapters may indicate a connection between those plays and Hermes / Hermes Trismegistus.

93 Turnebus, a Greek scholar like Dee, had attended Dee’s lectures on mathematical philosophy in Paris in 1550 (French 31).
the case, then Dee had access to yet another edition not corrupted by the printers’ errors which had so distorted the Treviso edition more than a century before.

Dee’s were not the only Hermetic texts in London. Three book lists made by George Puttenham, author of *The Arte of Poesie*, between 1562 and 1580 include *La Puissance et Sapience de Dieu et la Volonté de Dieu*, 1557, Paris, which is probably du Préau’s 1549 French translation; he also lists Ficino, Mirandola and Erasmus (Willis 222). Andrew Perne, Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge is another who owned a copy of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and may have been sympathetic to the teaching. In short, in Shakespeare’s time, Hermetic texts were available in London and elsewhere in Latin and Greek, and also in French. From these resources manuscript copies could be made and disseminated to groups of men and women to read, listen to and discuss, as was the custom.

Not only was Dee an avid collector, his diary and his reputation reveal him to have been a generous lender (Halliwell). Peter French likens his home to the ‘Platonic academies in Florence’ last seen in London in the days of More and Colet (60). William Sherman describes the ‘Mortlake Hospice for Wandering

94 Perne, whom Patrick Collinson describes as ‘Catholic-Protestant-of no religion, or Neutral’ (1994, 180), presided over Peterhouse ‘where Papists, Protestants and Puritans all contrived to coexist without any of the factional turmoil which periodically distracted [. . . ] some other colleges’ (203). Perne was also rector of Balsham and in 1575 was obliged to investigate reports of Familists in the parish. Collinson reports that after listening to the parishioners, Perne did little or nothing about them (1994, 202). See also MacCulloch (209-210).

95 French also suggests that Dee’s library looked forward towards the Royal Society (60).
Philosophers’ where a visitor might bump into Francis Bacon, Richard Hakluyt, the governors of the Muscovy Company planning voyages to the North West passage, or the Queen and the Privy Council (40). Dee’s own diary records visits from men directly and indirectly connected with this study including ‘Jan 16th 1577, ‘the Erle of Leicester, Mr Philip Sydney, Mr [Edward]Dyer’ (2). In 1581 he records making acquaintance with Jean Bodin ‘in the Chambre of Presence at Westminster’ (10). After his return from abroad he records several visits from the earl of Derby, Will Stanley, in 1595, sometimes accompanied by his countess, Elizabeth Vere Stanley (55, 59), and on 9th October 1595 he dined with Sir Walter Ralegh at Durham House (54).

Dee is clearly a nodal figure in the transmission of Christian Hermetism. For most of the sixteenth century he was welcome at court, and he had friends in high places, such as the children of the Duke of Northumberland, whom he tutored. Through his third wife, Jane Fromonds, who had been lady-in-waiting to Lady Howard, he was connected to Admiral Charles Howard, patron of the Admiral’s Men (Woolley 115). He was friends with the Walsinghams, Leicester and the Sidney circle which included Gabriel Harvey and Edward Dyer. Sidney’s Arcadia, as I argue in Chapter Four, shows evidence of knowledge of the Corpus Hermeticum, and Harvey

96 Stanley was the younger brother of Ferdinando Lord Strange, whose company Strange’s Men was the first to perform plays later attributed to Shakespeare on the public stage.

97 Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, Ambrose, earl of Warwick, and Mary Dudley Sidney and her son, Philip Sidney, and daughter, Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke.
mentions Hermes in a work attacking Thomas Nashe, so it is at least possible that Dee introduced them to the Hermetic books.

Dee also knew Ralegh and tutored his captains on the use of the astrolabe. Ralegh’s set who met at Durham House in the 1590s included Henry Percy earl of Northumberland, George Peele, George Chapman and possibly Christopher Marlowe. In an earlier study I found evidence of Marlowe’s familiarity with the Hermetica and of Bruno’s influence. The evidence that ‘Hermes Trismegistus’ had entered the discourse of the day comes from several extant literary works. Peele in 1593 paid tribute to Northumberland for ‘following the auncient reuerend steps / Of Trismegistus and Pythagords’, and the Prince of Purpoole mentions Trismegistus by name at the 1594 Christmas revels for Gray’s Inn, as we shall see in the next chapter. And Chapman’s French biographer, Jean Jacquot, after noting his frequent debt to Plato, identifies both ideas and specific passages in his poems and plays that have been influenced by the Corpus Hermeticum. These include the vision that brought Homer to Chapman to be Englished, which Jacquot likens to Hermes’ vision of Pymander (CH I [1-4]) (3). Jacquot praises Chapman’s ability in Monsieur d’Olive to convey emotions through the music of poetry which he compares favourably to Shakespeare’s gift (222 n.66), and he finds direct borrowings copied by Chapman from Ficino’s Latin translation of ‘Pimander Ch VII’ (226-7 n. 84). Ralegh’s History of the World, written for the young Prince Henry Stuart heir to the throne (see Fig. 2), also reveals his own familiarity with Hermetic thought. The title page of the book

carries symbols connecting it with the Hermetic tradition, and the Preface deplores ‘the private contention, the passionate disputes, the personal hatred and the perpetual war, massacre and murders for religion among Christians’ (in Bradbrook 45), the very injuries which a tolerant, eirenic, world religion could heal.

Fig. 2 Title page of The History of the World, showing the Providential Eye (also the symbol of Osiris), Walter Ralegh, 1614
France managed to achieve religious toleration through a legislated peace, the Treaty of Nantes. But in the last decades of Elizabeth’s reign, England was forced to maintain constant vigilance against invasion from Catholic Spain and fifth columnists at home while also supporting Protestant allies in France and the Netherlands. Religious toleration was despised and an ecumenical or universal church was unthinkable. Domestic peace was achieved by means of Draconian legislation. Dissent was silenced by the censorship laws implemented by the Master of the Revels and by the Stationers’ Register. In the 1590s Archbishop Whitgift expanded his remit to apprehend Catholic priests to include non-conformists – dissenters were to be pursued with the same rigour as practising Catholics. Marlowe was caught in this net, accused of spreading Atheism. In the subsequent investigation, one of those persuaded to Atheism by Marlowe’s eloquence claimed that there would shortly be ‘by his & his felowes persuasions as many of their opinion as of any other religion’.99 MacCulloch explains that ‘Atheism’ was ‘a blanket term for religious doubt of any kind’ (693). The implication of the allegation is that Marlowe is one of a number of fellows who are spreading the word about an unorthodox religion, not that they are denying God. An informer reported in 1593 that ‘Marloe had told him that hee hath read the Atheist lecture to Sir Walter Raliegh & others’ and accused the Privy Council ‘saying that they are all Atheistes & Machiavellians, especially my Lord Admirall’. The damaging report confirms and lends veracity to allegations made in 1592 by Robert Parsons who accused Ralegh of conducting a ‘school of

99 BL Harleian MS 6848 f.191
Atheism’ in Durham House and expanded the libel to include Lord Burghley and most of the Privy Council.\textsuperscript{100}

The evidence is tenuous and possibly incapable of proof; nevertheless, given what we know about Ralegh, Marlowe and Chapman’s interest in Hermetism, I cannot exclude the possibility that the enthusiasm of Marlowe and his fellows for Atheism was the passion of a convert for Christian Hermetism. Taken as a whole, the body of evidence suggests that in Calvinist England Hermes Trismegistus was known to an educated few, such as members of the Inns of Court, and that the \textit{Corpus Hermeticum} was discussed privately in ‘little academes’, by men such as the Sidney circle, with Dee at Mortlake, or at Durham House in the Strand by Ralegh’s coterie of friends. Dee, Ralegh and even the Queen have been suspected of sympathising with the Familists. And the possibility that the tolerant and clandestine sect in their pursuit of individual perfection and god-like status, constituted a viable alternative religion with an affinity to Hermetism cannot be excluded. But in the 1590s, as plays later attributed to Shakespeare began to come to the public stage, the extremes of orthodoxy whether Jesuit or Puritan, as well as all kinds of non-conformism were officially silenced.

In the second part of this study I discuss four of Shakespeare’s plays: \textit{Love’s Labour’s Lost, King Lear} and \textit{Othello}, and \textit{The Tempest}. Each play deals in

\footnote{Responsio ad Edictum Elizabethae translated as \textit{Advertisement Written to a Secretary of My L. Treasurer}, 1592.}
different ways with the key motifs of Hermetism: knowledge and love, the mind and its attributes, free will and choice, thought, imagination and memory. *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, to which I turn first, concerns different kinds of knowledge and different kinds of love in a small French kingdom practising religious toleration.
Part Two

Chapter Three

_Love's Labour's Lost:_ the path to self-knowledge deferred

_Love's Labour's Lost_ entertained the English court of Elizabeth with a light-hearted love comedy where the king’s plans to follow the ascetic life and ascend to god-like status and immortality are delayed by the arrival of the ladies. In this chapter I argue that _Love's Labour's Lost_ has a connection with an historic politico-religious situation in France, and that King Ferdinand of Navarre simultaneously references both Henri Bourbon, Huguenot King of Navarre, and Ferdinand King of Naples who was instructed in the way of Hermes by Lodovico Lazzarelli. I argue that the play may be read as a satire on a real political experiment undertaken by Henri of Navarre, a notorious womaniser, attempting _via_ the inner reform demanded of the Hermetic initiate to model religious toleration in his kingdom. I review first the critical opinions concerning the dating of the play and examine the historic politico-religious context, before discussing the play itself and Hermetic interpretations of the play. While no single literary source has ever been identified for the play, I suggest that the open-ended structure of _Love's Labour's Lost_ owes a debt to a now obscure French play written in the style of Old Comedy, _La Néphélococugie ou la nuée des cocus_ (Cloud-cuckoo Land). Finally, I argue that _Love's Labour's Lost_ has echoes of Lazzarelli’s dialogue with King Ferdinand, the _Crater Hermetis_, and of the _Corpus Hermeticum_ itself.

_A Pleasant Conceited Comedie called, Loves Labors Lost. As it was presented before her Highnes this last Christmas_ was first made available in print in
1598, ‘newly corrected and augmented’, a claim which implies an earlier script. Presumably it was played to the court audience during the 1597 Christmas festivities or earlier, but Abel Lefranc dated the writing of the play between 1588 and 1596 (411). H. R. Woudhuysen describes it as ‘a distinctly odd and difficult play’ with ‘some hidden meaning which can be recovered only if the right key to it is found’ (Arden edition, 2001, 1). Various keys have been tried by critics over the years. Each one has unlocked something different and meaningful in the play, indicating a play capable of generating multiple meanings. It is my contention that there is a discourse hitherto unrecognized: a Hermetic subtext. Far from puzzling Queen Elizabeth and her court, the play overflows with recognizable allusions to events known to them, such as the visit of Marguerite de Valois and her ladies to her estranged husband, Henri of Navarre. As I shall show, research published in 2012 has revealed that the planned reconciliation of the Catholic princess and her Huguenot husband foundered on behaviour which outraged her brother Henri III, and presumably either shocked or amused the English court.

Fixing the date of the Christmas performance of Love’s Labour’s Lost with some confidence between the Gray’s Inn revels held between Christmas and Candlemas 1594-5 and its publication in 1598, invites the question why the French court and the behaviour of the King of Navarre should be of interest to the English

101 It is not known which company performed the play. There is no performance recorded in the public theatre. A letter from Sir Walter Cope to Robert Cecil Viscount Cranbourne in 1604 advises that after a search for a play that the Queen (Anne) had not seen, Burbage had revived Loves Labors Lost which would be ‘played to Morowe night at My Lord of Sowthamptons’ (quoted by Felicia Londré 43). The next recorded performance was in 1839 (Londré 23).
court in those years. In 1936 Lefranc listed a number of details in Love’s Labour’s Lost which any in the English court familiar with the court at Nérac would have recognized.\textsuperscript{102} The history of Anglo-French relations in the decades preceding the play is instructive because, although the events of Love's Labour's Lost are not historical, there is evidence to suggest that the plot recreates an aborted attempt at religious toleration in Navarre, which anticipates the Edict of Nantes, granting religious toleration to all Protestants in Catholic France. The ratification of the Edict coincided with the publication of Love’s Labour’s Lost, the first of the canon to be attributed to Shakespeare in print on the title page.

\textit{England and France 1589-1598 – from the accession of Henri IV to the Edict of Nantes}

As a Protestant king, Henri of Navarre had enjoyed excellent relations with the English court. Many of his followers, such as Philippe du Plessis Mornay, whose religious work Philip Sidney had begun translating, and the young earl of Essex, were mutual friends. However, following the assassination of Henri III in 1589, Henri of Navarre unexpectedly became king of Catholic France. With the rise of the hostile Catholic League led by the Guise family, the way was opened for ‘full-scale civil war and invasion by Spain’ (Hammer 92), which if successful would place England

\textsuperscript{102} These include the tragic death of Hélène de Tournon, daughter of Marguerite de Valois’ principal lady-in-waiting, who died of love in 1576. Her mother left the Queen’s service and sent another of her daughters in her place (Lefranc 424). Rosaline’s words to Katherine: ‘You’ll ne’er be friends with him [Cupid]: ’a killed your sister.’ (5.2.13) are probably a reference to the sad event. The household accounts for King Henri indicate that nine tapestries depicting the ‘Neuf Preux’ (Nine Worthies) were moved from Pau to Nérac in November 1578 (Lefranc 425). They provide a possible inspiration for the choice of entertainment.
in peril. Paul Hammer claims that Robert Devereux, earl of Essex, idolised Henri (234), and ‘found inspiration in the cause and friendship of the French king’ (92). Favoured by Queen Elizabeth, and keen for military honours, Essex accepted the command of an English force sent to assist in the besieging of Rouen in 1591 and, despite the failure of the campaign in which his brother was killed, remained intensely loyal to Henri. Henri converted to Catholicism on 25 July 1593 in the Abbey of St. Denis. According to Hammer, Elizabeth ‘disliked and profoundly distrusted Henri’ (243), and reluctantly assisted him only because it was crucial for England’s defence. Nevertheless, Essex maintained correspondence with the king, and between June 1593 and July 1595, he and Francis Bacon played host to Antonio Pérez, sent to England by Henri. Pérez, having fled Spain in 1591, where he had been secretary to Philip II, was an invaluable source of inside information on Spanish affairs, and his flamboyant style has been suggested as the inspiration for Don Adriano de Armado, the braggart soldier arriviste at the court of Navarre in Shakespeare’s play (Yates 1936, 13). At home, Essex took on the role of his late stepfather, the earl of Leicester, in hosting visiting dignitaries, including Catholics, and from the 1590s he began to support ‘toleration for loyal anti-Spanish Catholics’ (Hammer 174). His toleration of moderate Catholics may have been strengthened by his dislike of ‘Topcliffian’ brutality and the shocking fate of Robert Southwell S.J.

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103 The failure earned Essex the Queen’s bitter anger, despite his having the support of powerful men in Burghley, Christopher Hatton, Lord Hunsdon and Charles Howard the Lord Admiral.
in 1595. Despite suspicions that he had converted, Essex remained committed ‘to international Protestantism and the need to confront Spanish power’ (Hammer 143), but whereas Essex saw Italy as the home of Christendom, Hammer claims that it was France which Essex saw as ‘the stage of Christendom’ (393). For Essex and his supporters, France was the place where religious toleration, despised by the English, could be achieved. As Hammer notes, demonstrating that he was not anti-Catholic allowed Essex to continue to support Henri even after his conversion to Catholicism (178).

Having placed the play in the political landscape, I now examine the evidence for two questions relevant to this inquiry: first, was the Huguenot / Catholic convert Henri IV sympathetic to Hermetism, and second, is the fictional King Ferdinand of Navarre interested in Hermetism? The latter question will be addressed below. The answer to the first may lie in a letter from Robert Naunton to ‘le Compte d’Essex’, dated 26 March 1597 (Ungerer II, 128). The letter refers to the king’s having secretly taken part in the Eleusina Sacra, ancient Greek springtime rituals of fertility, rebirth and purification. Although it is true, as Fowden says, that the

104 “Topclifflian” (meaning excessively brutal, after the notorious priest-hunter and torturer Richard Topcliffe)’ (Hammer 174 n. 130). Southwell was hanged and bowelled alive before a watching crowd.

105 For the letter, see Chapter Six. Naunton (1563-1635), undercover and officially fulfilling the role of tutor, was employed by Essex to keep him informed of affairs at the French court.

106 Mackey’s Symbolism of Freemasonry refers to the Eleusinia (sic) as the most popular of the mysteries dedicated to Demeter (or Ceres as she appears in The Tempest); they represent the loss and restoration of Persephone, ‘and the doctrines of the unity of God and the immortality of the soul’ (Clegg 337). Robert Macoy devotes several pages to the ‘Eleusinia’
relationship between Hermetism and mystery religions is much debated (148), both involve ‘a secret discipline leading to purification, a vision of the divine realm and spiritual illumination or rebirth’ (149). On the one hand, Hermetism is silent and contemplative, requires oral group instruction, and study of the Hermetic texts leading to a personal, inner spiritual experience, such as Ferdinand of Navarre swore to follow with his friends in the play:

Our court shall be a little academe,
Still and contemplative in the living art. (1.1.13-14)

On the other hand, as Fowden acknowledges, mystery religions typically required ‘special priesthoods, cult-places and ceremonies’ (9), and a mystery cult ‘may play a part in the lower stages of spiritual progress’ (150). It is not impossible that the Eleusinian ritual of purification and rebirth reported by Naunton had a Hermetic significance for the king and his friends. The very fact that Naunton wrote to Essex in this way, referring to the Eleusina Sacra without explanation, implies that Essex already knew about the ritual.107 What Naunton’s letter puts beyond doubt however, is that at Easter 1597, prior to the Edict of Nantes, Henri IV and some of his followers

in his Dictionary of Freemasonry and makes claims for their peculiar ability to ‘reform the manners and perfect the education of mankind’ (137). Without giving anything away to the uninitiated, Macoy reveals that a Herald begins the rites by ordering ‘the profane and the impious’ to depart (136), and elsewhere Fowden connects the ‘herald’ referred to in the mysteries with the herald sent by God in Book IV [4] of the Corpus Hermeticum (149 n.28).

107 These rituals are of interest to Freemasons, but for now, any connection between Hermetism, the Eleusinian mysteries and Freemasonry remains no more than an intriguing possibility.
were able to reconcile their Protestant / Catholic Christianity with a pagan, possibly Hermetic, ritual of Spring and rebirth.

France 1572-1579-1585 – from the marriage to the reunion to the final separation

After the appalling bloodshed of St Bartholomew’s Day 1572, following the wedding of Protestant Navarre with Marguerite de Valois that was intended to unite France, Henri spent more than three years under house arrest in Paris. When he escaped and returned to his home in Nérac he undertook an unusual experiment, which Gregory Champeaud argues prepared the way for the sojourn of his wife, who returned to him in 1579 (2012, 79-90). Because this experiment informs Love’s Labour’s Lost, as I will argue, I now outline Champeaud’s claim.

Champeaud points out that when Henri returned to Navarre he was in an untenable position. The Peace of Beaulieu, signed in 1576, made him the Catholic king’s representative as Governor of the province of Guyenne (Aquitaine), while simultaneously he was leader of the Huguenots (Champeaud 79). His response was to surround himself with a circle of about 150 men representing both confessions, thereby creating a ‘laboratory of co-existence’ which constituted a genuine experimental centre of toleration (Champeaud 80). As we will see, the experiment did not last long but it showed what was possible. Henri wrote to a friend: ‘There are two religions here. You would not believe how well they get on with those of the [Catholic] Religion which have likewise come to find me here’ (in Champeaud 83). Navarre is so close to the Spanish border that the arrivistes who came to find

108 Il en est des deux religions. Vous ne sauriez croire comme ils se sont bien accordés avec ceux de la Religion qui m’y sont pareillement venus trouver.’
him undoubtedly included Spaniards such as Don Antonio Pérez who was to seek asylum in the Béarn in 1591, and whose affectations may have lent colour to Don Armado in Shakespeare’s play. Given that since the days of Henri’s grandmother, Marguerite de Navarre, Nérac had been one of the great religious and humanist centres of royalty open to theologians, philosophers, poets and artists, it was appropriate that Henri should make his principal court there, where it became a miniature Louvre (Champeaud 82). Marguerite’s diary records, as we saw, how she and the king her husband arranged their separate places of worship, and how happy their separate parties seemed to be, strolling around together by day and dancing at night. Champeaud contends that the dual confessional ‘political laboratory’ prepared the way for the ‘poetical laboratory’ composed of poets, such as Guillaume du Bartas, and musicians of both confessions, whom Marguerite brought with her in 1579 (90). It seems likely that together they created an albeit short-lived model state for the religious toleration which Henri as Henri IV, King of France, and converted to Catholicism, hoped to achieve for France in the Edict of Nantes.

There is substantial evidence to suggest that Henri and the friends assembled with him at Navarre after 1576 had the opportunity to encounter the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Bishop Foix de Candale, esteemed as one of ‘the greatest Hermetic philosophers of the sixteenth century’ (Moreschini 189), had published an annotated Greek text and Latin translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* in 1574. Dedicated to the Queen Mother, it was available in Paris at a time when Henri was living there under house arrest. The translation was followed by the lengthy French translation and commentary dedicated to Marguerite de Valois and presented to her on the eve of her visit to Navarre in 1579. A letter to her brother the king, soon after her arrival, records a request to allow Foix de Candale to live near her and her
husband to manage and attend to [their] affairs (Angard and Chichkine 23). Moreover, a letter from an Italian diplomat records that she and her brother, the duc d’Anjou passed Lent 1581 with Foix in Cadillac (Angard and Chichkine 55). Her biographer, Eliane Viennot, writes that it has long been known that Marguerite encountered great philosophic texts at the end of the 1570s, and twenty years later was still devoted to Platonism and Hermetism. Her continuing interest in Hermetism is confirmed by the sonnet below which clearly shows her knowledge and assumes that knowledge in her readers:

Is it to attain the great name of Pymander
That silent and mute, you are always dreaming,
No, not dreaming but rather thinking and meditating
On the most god-like subjects that the mind can understand?

Her sonnet, Sur les œuvres et silences d’Antoine La Pujade appeared in Œuvres chrestiennes in 1603.

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109 "l’épistolière demanda que Candale [. . .] pourrait <<demeurer près du roi mon mari et de moi, pour entendre et vaquer aux affaires [. . .] comme il a autrefois fait >> '(Angard and Chichkine 23).

110 ‘On sait depuis longtemps que Marguerite dut s’initier aux grands textes philosophiques à la fin des années 1570, [. . .] et que, vingt ans plus tard, elle était toujours férue de platonisme et d’hermetisme’ (Giacomotto-Charra 209).

111 Est-ce pour acquérir ce grand nom de Pimandre
Qu’en silence et muet allez toujours rêvant,
— Non rêvant! mais plutôt pensant et contemplant
Aux plus divins sujets que l’esprit peut comprendre.
Lefranc drew attention to the Mémoires of Marguerite de Valois as the probable source of the visit of the princess and her ladies, in Love’s Labour’s Lost (414). A recent paper by Laurent Angard and Vladimir Chichkine confirms details of the visit but draws attention to the discrepancy between Marguerite’s memory of events and the reality. The fact is that in 1577 the Peace of Bergerac was signed, and Henri III, Marguerite’s brother, ratified the Edict of Poitiers, a virtual forerunner of the Edict of Nantes, intended to stabilise the court and neutralise the Guise faction (Angard and Chichkine 17). However, Navarre’s Protestant companions denounced the Peace, and in Provence Catholics refused to recognize the Edict (Angard and Chichkine 19). Marguerite emerges as the peacemaker able to talk to both sides. She had great influence over her younger brother the duc d’Anjou and increasingly over her husband (Cooper 51). Despite the infidelities on both sides, she was politically loyal to her husband, and he expressed affection for her and made her welcome when she first arrived with her mother the Queen (Angard and Chichkine 21). The ‘idylle néracaise’ ended in tears, however, not only because, despite their combined efforts, the religious civil wars did not cease, but also because the marriage ended. Henri became infatuated with one of Marguerite’s maids of honour, Françoise de Montmorency (La Fosseuse) who bore him a son (stillborn), while Marguerite took Jacques de Harlay, Lord Champvallon as her lover and allegedly bore him a son in

112 Although E K Chambers was sceptical because the Mémoires were unpublished in Shakespeare's lifetime (William Shakespeare I 338), other sources such as correspondence both private and diplomatic were available.

113 In April 1580 Marguerite wrote to her friend the duchesse d’Uzes ‘je vous jure avec vérité que, tout ce que je puis faire pour servir à la paix, je le faisé’ (Angard and Chichkine 29). (I can tell you truthfully that everything that can be done to bring about peace, I have done.)
mid-August 1583 (Cooper 67). Her brother the king was outraged and ordered her to return to her husband which Marguerite at first refused to do. She returned to him briefly in August 1584 and departed Nérac forever on 19 March 1585 (Cooper 76). She remained under house arrest in the king’s castle at Usson for twenty years, and Champvallon, from the security of his home in Sedan, asked Elizabeth of England for asylum (Cooper 67-8). As Richard Cooper’s paper shows, all this was known in England via correspondence from Henry Killigrew-Davison, from Ambassador Amyas Paulet to Lord Burghley and to the Queen, and from Lord Cobham to Burghley and to Sir Francis Walsingham (46-64 passim; 74). In addition, the events took place at a time when the two courts were in frequent diplomatic contact to negotiate a possible marriage between Elizabeth and Anjou. One additional source of gossip about the scandals at the French court presented itself in the person of the Hermeticist Giordano Bruno, sent to London by Henri III in 1583. The irony of the licentious court at Nérac, aspiring to immortality by following an ascetic doctrine which taught that lust is the cause of death, would not have been lost on the English.

To sum up, the reconciliation of Henri of Navarre with his Catholic Queen briefly carried the hope of religious peace for France. On the available evidence it is likely that the couple were interested in Hermetic texts, which were available in both Latin and French in the translations of their kinsman, Bishop Foix de Candale, who was on hand to teach and explain the way of Hermes. But the briefly happy marriage, a state where religious toleration and peace prevailed, and the concomitant hopes of an end to civil war were all lost to sexual desire. In other words, the labours of love were lost in lust. The research outlined above, published in Albineana 24 has provided a more detailed backstory for the play than has previously been available. It is clear now that for an English court with a knowledge of French
affairs, *Love's Labour's Lost* would have been both highly topical and hugely entertaining as early as 1586.

**Love’s Labour’s Lost: Hermetic subtext and sources**

In *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, a princess from Catholic France arrives in Huguenot Navarre bringing with her the epicene and ‘honey-tongued’ Boyet (5.2.334), who acts as messenger between the two courts. Lefranc alleges that Shakespeare modelled Boyet on the fifty-year-old Guy du Faur, seigneur de Pibrac (1529-1584), Marguerite’s chancellor (418). Loris Petris claims that Pibrac, who was also a poet, knew and understood Marguerite’s interest in the ‘neoplatonism relished at the court of Nérac’ (283). Famed for his eloquence like Boyet in the play, Pibrac accompanied Marguerite to Navarre and fell in love with her (Lefranc 418). She fended him off with the same sort of persiflage that the princess offers Boyet (2.1.13-19), whom Katherine mocks as ‘Cupid’s grandfather’ (2.1.254), (Lefranc 420). Margaret Tudeau-Clayton has pointed out that most of the Protean array of functions which characterize Boyet, and which Berowne ironically exposes in the course of the play, also belong to Mercury (that is, Hermes) (Clayton 209). The mythical Hermes’ principal function is as go-between but his role as god of merchants is hinted at in the princess’ reference to the ‘base sale of chapmen’s tongues’ (2.1.16), and as a pedlar (like his son Autolycus), when Berowne calls him ‘wit’s pedlar’ (5.2.317). He is the god of games of chance, ‘Monsieur the Nice / That when he plays at table chides the dice’ (5.2.325-6), (Clayton 210-216). When he acts as an usher (5.2.328),

114 ‘Pibrac connait la propension néoplatonicienne de Marguerite et il sait y répondre. La toptique néoplatonicienne goûtée à la cour de Nérac informe le discours’ [de *L’Ombre de Bussy*, par Pibrac] (Petris 283).
Woudhuysen also likens him to Mercury (259 n.328). Later, the arrival of Marcadé in Mercury’s role as psychopomp confirms that Mercury comes from the princess’s world of Catholic France (SD 5.2. 711) (Berry 1969, 76).115

At the end of the play, by sending the king to ‘some forlorn and naked hermitage, / Remote from all the pleasures of the world’ (5.2. 789-90), the princess shows how well she understands Ferdinand’s plan to spend time ‘Still and contemplative’ (1.1.14), in order ‘to know which else we should not know’ (1.1.56), and for that study to be rewarded with the esoteric knowledge – ‘things hid and barr’d’ (1.1.57) – that confers ‘god-like’ status (1.1.58). The princess understands the king’s aspiring mind and his wish for an uplifting inner spiritual experience:

Was that the King that spurred his horse so hard
Against the steep uprising of the hill?
[. . .] Whoe’er ’a was ’a showed a mounting mind. (4.1.1-2; 4)

Her words reflect a line from the Discours philosophiques, by Pontus de Tyard, where the “raising of the intellect” is thought of as a mountain on which are many paths [. . .] all directed towards the summit’ (Yates 1947, 77-8).116 The chapter ‘opens with the statement that the true life of man consists in the raising of the intellect towards the understanding of divine things, without being sunk in sensuality and matter’ (Yates 1947,78). The doctrine may be sourced to Book IX of the Corpus

Mary Ellen Lamb claims that Marcadé is named for Philippe Emmanuel de Lorraine, duc de Mercoeur, known to the English as Duke Mercury and a prominent member of the League (50, f.n.2). Another explanation of his name is that he is one who mars Arcady.

Pontus de Tyard was a poet of the Pléiade and ‘a musical humanist of Baïf’s academy’ (Yates 1947, 77). His Discours philosophique was published in 1587.
Hermeticum, (On understanding and sensation), and also to Book IV [6] [7]. Moreover, it is the doctrine that underlies King Ferdinand’s opening words in the play:

Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,
Live registered upon our brazen tombs
And then grace us in the disgrace of death;
When spite of cormorant devouring time,
Th’endeavour of this present breath may buy
That honour which shall bate his scythe’s keen edge,
And make us heirs of all eternity.
Therefore, brave conquerors – for so you are,
That war against your own affections
And the huge army of the world's desires –
Our late edict shall stand in force. (1.1.1-11)

Here the king is urging his friends to exchange the hunt for fame and honours whose rewards lie in the mortal and material world of brass plaques on tombs (1.1.1-3), for an endeavour which will lead to life eternal (1.1.7). Eternity is the reward of a contemplative and ascetic life spent battling desire – a life which King Ferdinand, Dumain, Longaville and Berowne, joined by Don Armado, have sworn to follow for three years.

In learning to resist the mortal and corporeal desires of the flesh and devote their minds to study – ‘Not to see ladies, study, fast, not sleep’ (1.1.48) – the king and his friends will be following the teaching found in Book IV of the Corpus (the Crater Hermetis). There King Ferdinand could read, like his namesake Lazzarelli’s pupil, that people who missed the gift of mind ‘have sensations much

117 ‘There are two kinds of entities, corporeal and incorporeal, corresponding to mortal and divine’ (CH IV [6]); ‘Choosing the stronger [. . .] makes the human into a god’ (CH IV [7]).
like those of unreasoning animals’ and ‘they divert their attention to the pleasures
and appetites of their bodies’ (*CH IV* [5]). Hermes tells Tat that the way to possess
mind and to understand god is first ‘to hate your body’ (*CH IV* [6]). The king
understands what is involved in living a virtuous life, as he and his men will ‘war
against your own affections / And the huge army of the world’s desires’ (1.1.9-10)
while they undertake the sort of meditative and disciplined life that will lead to *gnosis*
and immortality. Longaville understands that they are undertaking to study a
philosophy of mind: ‘The mind shall banquet though the body pine’ (1.1.25).
Dumaine, too, knows that he is renouncing the delights of the corporeal world and
joining the company of philosophers:

> To love, to wealth, to pomp, I pine and die,
> With all these living in philosophy. (1.1.29-32)

Only Berowne reduces the high-minded enterprise to three years of superficial study
which he derides:

> As painfully to pore upon a book
> To seek the light of truth, while truth the while
> Doth falsely blind the eyesight of his look. (1.2.74-6)

He objects that ‘Too much to know is to know naught but fame, / And every godfather
can give a name’ (1.1.93-4).\(^\text{118}\) Despite his disparaging protestations, Berowne agrees
to join the others ‘And bide the penance of each three years’ day’ (1.1.115), equating
the spiritual journey to immortality with three years of corporeal deprivation. The
king has already proclaimed ‘That no woman shall come within a mile of my court

\(^{118}\) In Act 4 the audience sees Berowne's objections played out in Nathaniel and Holofernes;
the curate and the pedant are both 'book-learned', and delight in larding every sentence with
a Latin phrase, but lack feeling and are supercilious toward Goodman Dull.
On pain of losing her tongue’ (1.1.119, 122-3). And ‘If any man be seen to talk with a woman within the term of three years, he shall endure . . . public shame’ (1.1.128-30). Within moments Berowne exposes the absurdity. The king will be forced to break his own oath because the French King’s daughter and her ladies are about to arrive. Next minute Dull comes in with Costard, who has ignored the proclamation and been arrested by Armado for ‘hearkening’ after Jaquenetta’s flesh (1.1.213), which is of course what Armado himself desires. The king pronounces sentence, but the arrival of the ladies and Boyet soon after cannot be resolved gracefully. The situation moves from absurd to farcical when the lords hit upon the solution to lodge the princess and her ladies outdoors ‘in the field’ (2.1.85).

However, when the men fall predictably in love the immediacy of present desires drives out all thought of three years of disciplined self-study that will bring them Hermes’ promised immortality. Berowne is besotted with Rosaline but, still attached to the material world, persuades himself that everything worth knowing can be learnt from a woman’s eyes: ‘From women’s eyes this doctrine I derive:/ [. . .] they are the books, the arts, the academes’ (4.3. 324, 326).\footnote{In \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream} when Helena understands that Demetrius ‘errs, doting on Hermia’s eyes’ (1.1.230), she goes on to assert a Hermetic sentiment: ‘Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind’ (1.1.234).} The parting advice of the ladies to each of their lovers suggests that they want the men to return to their original plans: Longaville promises Maria that he will ‘stay with patience’ (5.2.823); Dumaine too is advised to wait (5.2.815). Berowne must undertake some charitable service in a hospital, while the king is enjoined by the princess to spend a year in silent contemplation, ‘Remote from all the pleasures of the world’ (5.2.790).
Choosing temperance over impetuosity, altruistic *agape* over self-love, and seeking the self-knowledge that will dispel ignorance are all given in the *Corpus* as virtuous choices that lead to knowledge of self and *gnosis*. The play’s ending where nothing has changed (except perhaps for the pregnant Jaquenetta), nothing is resolved and all is deferred but still open to possibilities is characteristic of the genre, Old Comedy, discussed below. In both, light-hearted farce exposes the serious target of the satire to laughter.

Several sources of ideas in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* have been suggested in addition to Marguerite de Valois’ *Mémoires*. They include the Gray’s Inn Christmas Revels, first published in 1688 as *Gesta Grayorum* (Elam 1985, 89; Woudhuysen 63-4) (see below), as well as Sidney’s *An Apology for Poetry* (1579-80) and *Lady of May* (performed in 1578 or 1579) (Woudhuysen 2-6). Pierre de la Primaudaye’s *L’Académie Françoise* (1577, translated 1586), has been linked to the choice of four men gathered to discuss philosophy (Bullough 1, 427-8, 434-5; Elam 1984, 125), and Rolf Soellner suggests that Shakespeare might have taken the idea of spiritual warfare from Erasmus’ *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* (79-80). Rabelais’ *Gargantua et Pantagruel* (1532; 1534), has been proposed as the source of the name ‘Holofernes’ (Woudhuysen 110), and the word ‘honorificabilitudinitatibus’ has been traced to Erasmus’ *Adagia* (1500), where it praises Hermes (Hutton 393). Sidney, Erasmus and Rabelais, as we saw in Chapter Two, have all been connected with an interest in the Hermetic texts. The anonymous *The Marriage of Wit and Science* (1567) has been suggested as a model for the structure of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*.

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120 ‘Gaudet honorificabilitudinitatibus Hermes / Consuetudinibus, sollicitudinibus’ (Hutton 393).
(Lennam 54-60 passim), but I argue below that Pierre Le Loyer's *La Néphélococugie* (1576) influenced both the open-ended structure of the play and other features associated with Old Comedy.

Frances Yates saw a connection between a sonnet of Sidney’s, where he describes himself as a ‘slave-born Muscovite’ and the four lords’ decision to apparel themselves ‘like Muscovites or Russians’ (5.2.121), enslaved by love for the ladies whom they visit in Navarre’s park in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (1936, 133-4). Woudhuysen also finds a link between the king’s party disguised as a ‘mess of Russians’ (5.2.361) and the Gray’s Inn Revels of Christmas 1594-5, where it was recorded in *Gesta Grayorum* that the Prince of Purpoole’s court was visited by some ‘Russians’. The Inn’s Christmas revels begin with the first counsellor’s advice to the ‘Prince’ to ‘seek fame and eternise his name by war’ which stands in direct contrast to the opening lines of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. There Ferdinand exhorts the lords to relegate fame to the material world and seek immortality through the knowledge that makes us ‘heirs to all eternity’ (1.1.7). Ferdinand’s sentiment is closer to that of ‘The Second Councillor advising the Study of Philosophy’ who advocates the pursuit of knowledge and, hinting at the Persian Zoroaster and Hermes, tells the ‘Prince’ to:

> bend the Excellency of your spirits to the searching out and discovering of all whatsoever is hid in secret in the World, that your Excellency be not as a Lamp that shineth to others, and yet seeth not itself; but as the Eye of the World, that both carrieth and useth Light. Antiquity, that presenteth unto us in dark Visions, the Wisdom of former Times, informeth us, that the Kingdoms have always had an Affinity with the Secrets and Mysteries of Learning. Amongst the Persians, the Kings were attended on by the Magi; (34) [. . . ]

Thus, when your Excellency shall have added depth of Knowledge to the fineness of Spirits, and greatness of your Power, then indeed shall you lay a Trismegistus:
and then, when all other Miracles and Wonders shall cease, by reason that you shall have discovered their natural Causes, yourself shall be left the only Miracle and Wonder of the World. (*Gesta Grayorum*, 35)

The ironic tone exaggerating the powers that Hermes promises and mocking the ‘Prince’ who, having unlocked all Nature’s secrets, will be the only ‘wonder of the world’ left, suggests that Hermetism is an in-joke known to all the guests gathered there. The passage may have been written by Francis Bacon who was a resident member of the Inn at the time. There is little doubt that Antonio Pérez, the likely model for Don Armado, was Bacon’s guest that night (Ungerer II, 397). As Keir Elam recognizes, when Ferdinand asserts that ‘Navarre shall be the wonder of the world’ (1.1.12) he is referencing not only the Second Counsellor in the Gray’s Inn Revels and Pico della Mirandola, but also the Hermetic *Asclepius* (1985, 89).  

Clearly, the name Hermes Trismegistus, abbreviated to ‘Trismegistus’, was familiar to the audience gathered at Gray’s Inn. In fact, it is one of several references to Hermes or Hermes Trismegistus which have survived in published works and indicate that the name had entered the discourse of the day. That is by no means proof that Christian Hermetism was part of that discourse, although the reference to the ‘ascending spirit’ quoted by Gabriel Harvey in *Pierce’s Supererogation* (1593) suggests that the writer is familiar with the Hermetic corpus or its teaching:

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121 The phrase occurs in Pico’s famous oration, *On the Dignity of Man*, and is taken from *Asclepius* (6) where Hermes tells him ‘a human being is a great wonder, a living thing to be worshipped and honored; for he changes his nature into a god as if he were a god’ (Copenhaver 1992, 69).
'You may discourse of Hermes’ ascending spirit, of Orpheus’ enchanting harp, of Homer’s divine fury, of Tyrtaeus’ enraging trumpet, of Pericles’ bouncing thunderclaps, of Plato’s enthusiastic ravishment, and I wot not what marvellous eggs in moonshine, but a fig for all your flying speculations when one good-fellow with his odd jests, or one mad knave with his awk hibber-gibber, is able to put down twenty of your smuggest artificial men, that simper it so nicely and coyly in their curious points.' (1593, 19)\textsuperscript{122}

In that same pamphlet Harvey refers to the apostle Paul as ‘a Christian Mercury’ (41).\textsuperscript{123} Thomas Nashe, Harvey’s enemy, also clearly knew the name and uses it as synonymous with that of the Greek god Hermes in Summer’s Last Will and Testament written in 1592-3 and published in 1600.

Winter: Till Hermes, secretary to the gods,  
Or Hermes Trismegistus, as some will,  
Weary with graving in blind characters,  
And figures of familiar beasts and plants,  
Invented letters to write withal. (1260-64)

(in McKerrow 1958, 273)

Also in 1593 George Peele penned The Honour of the Garter in tribute to Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland, on the occasion of his installation as a Garter Knight.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{122} Quoted by Harvey from John Eliot’s Ortho-epeia Gallica (1593) in Pierce’s Supererogation. (1593, 19).

\textsuperscript{123} Paul and Barnabas performed a miracle at Lystra and the writer records that the people thought they were gods and called Paul ‘Hermes’ because he was the chief speaker (Acts of the Apostles, 14, 12).

\textsuperscript{124} Peele was one of the University Wits, so-called, and possibly also a member of the coterie of men who surrounded Sir Walter Ralegh which had probably included Marlowe and was known to include the earl of Northumberland, Thomas Hariot, the mathematician, and Matt
Ad Maecenasatem Prologus
Plaine is my coate, and humble is my gate,
Thrice noble Earle, behold with gentle eyes
My wits poore worth: euen for your noblesse,
(Renowned Lord, Northumberlands fayre flower)
The Muses loue, Patrone, and fauoret,
That artizans and schollers doost embrace,
And clothest Mathesis in rich ornaments,
That admirable Mathematique skill,
Familiar with the starres and Zodiack.
(To whom the heauen lyes open as her booke)
By whose directions vndeceiueable,
(Leauing our Schoolemens vulgar troden pathes)
And following the auncient reuerend steps
Of Trismegistus and Pythagords,
Through vncouth waies and vnaccessible,
Doost passe into the spacious pleasant fieldes
Of diuine science and Phylosophie;

It seems that Peele is paying tribute to the earl for turning his steps away from the well-trodden paths of the book-learned schoolmen toward Trismegistus and his divine philosophy, much as the King of Navarre wishes to do in the play. In addition, as we saw, Ralegh himself revealed his knowledge of the Hermetic texts in his *History of the World* written while he was in prison. The title page of the book was surmounted by the all-seeing Eye of Osiris that clearly indicates the Hermetic content, and which recalls the Eye of the World in the Second Counsellor's speech to the Inn.

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Roydon. For a time, some scholars believed that the phrase ‘school of night’ used in the play referred to this group.
Woudhuysen argues that *Love’s Labour’s Lost* is a riposte to Sidney’s condemnation, in *An Apology for Poetry*, of the practice of mixing genres, resulting in plays that are ‘neither right tragedies, nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns’ where they ‘thrust in clowns by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters, with neither decency nor discretion’ (135). This may be true of the clown Costard, whose name is slang for ‘head’, but elsewhere in the *Apology* Sidney’s thinking is consonant with Shakespeare’s in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. Sidney, like Berowne, criticizes men (such as the curate and the pedant in the play), who think learning is an end in itself and give themselves to astronomy or music or mathematics only to find ‘by the balance of experience […] that the Astronomer looking to the stars might fall into a ditch’ (104). Berowne is critical of men who acquire knowledge of no practical use in order to ‘give a name to every fixed star’, but ‘Have no more profit of their shining nights / Than those that walk and wot not what they are’ (1.1.89-91). However, unlike Berowne, Sidney appreciates that it is not knowledge of indiscriminate facts but knowledge of self, the Hermetic *noesis*, that leads one to ‘well-doing’ or acts of charity. He writes:

> the highest end of the mistress-knowledge . . . stands (as I think) in the knowledge of a man’s self . . . with the end of well-doing and not of well-knowing only[. . .]

> the ending end of all earthly learning being virtuous action, those skills, that most serve to bring forth that, have a most just title to be princes over all the rest. (in Shepherd 104)

The notion resonates with the *Corpus Hermeticum* which teaches that ‘when mind has entered a reverent soul, it leads to the light of knowledge. Such a soul as this [. . .] [is] always blessing all people and doing them good’ (*CH X* [21]). But Berowne has yet to learn to know himself and acquire the god-like mind which the king promised would be study’s recompense (1.1.58). Berowne must learn what Sidney
knows, namely that love is in the mind and leads to charitable acts. In Act 4, waxing eloquent about ‘Love’, Berowne lists its power to double (4.3.305) or intensify all the corporeal senses (4.3.308-13). Then in a neat sophism he argues that it is religion for the men to repudiate their oaths (Not to see ladies etc. 1.1.48) because religion teaches charity and charity is love. He ends his speech, with a half-jesting rhetorical flourish: ‘who can sever love from charity?’ (4.3.339).

The notion of a symbiotic relationship between *eros* (*amor*) and *agape* (*caritas*) or ‘well-doing’, which Sidney appears to understand, and Berowne has chanced upon by sophistry is found in Lazzarelli’s dialogue with King Ferdinand. He explains the mystery of love to the king (28.1) and immediately follows with a warning referencing the Eleusinian goddesses. Hanegraaff explains that ‘Lazzarelli’s understanding of love appears to be more reminiscent of *eros* than *agape* (although he would undoubtedly have considered the latter to be included in the former)’ (2005, 70). When, at the end of the play, Berowne beseeches his mistress Rosaline to ‘Impose some service on me for thy love’ (5.2.828), she invokes *agape* that prince of skills, and commands him to the virtuous action which Sidney saw as the highest end of self-knowledge. He is to serve a twelvemonth using his jesting wit to cheer ‘the speechless sick’ (5.2.839). The whole ‘love is charity’ episode seems to be underpinned by a Hermetic subtext traceable to Ferdinand and Lazzarelli’s dialogue (28.2).

A contemporary work which provides, as Woudhuysen cautions, more of an analogy than a source for *Love’s Labour’s Lost* is *L’Académie Française* by La Primaudaye (1545-1619). His widely read work, translated into English by Thomas
Bowes in 1586, is recommended reading by the Prince of Purpoole (29). La Primauday, a Protestant, and follower of Jean Bodin, like him believed in religious toleration. He spent a lifetime at court and was gentleman of the chamber to the duc d'Anjou, a politique (Yates 1947, 124), and part of the dual confessional coterie that surrounded the duc. In the dedicatory epistle, his translator, Bowes, explains that the author’s purpose was ‘the practice of vertue in life, and not the bare knowledge and contemplation thereof in braine’ (1594, 3rd edition, 3). He alludes to the well-known debate about the relative merits of the vita activa and the vita contemplativa. The sentiment both echoes Sidney’s opinion given above and resonates with Shakespeare’s satire of the silent, contemplative utopian retreat that King Ferdinand attempts to create in Navarre, which was a ‘cloud-cuckoo land’ doomed to failure, unless accompanied by ‘the practice of vertue’ and the will to resist desire.

In L’Académie Françoise, four young men, friends from Anjou, meet in a garden to discuss moral philosophy. They give their discourse the title Academy after Plato. However, from the first day it is clear that they are undertaking the Hermetic path to salvation through gnosis or ‘that knowledge which we ought to have of ourselves as being the storehouse of all wisdom and beginning of salvation’ (10). Quoting Socrates’ famous precept written in the temple of Apollo, they plan to emulate him in seeking to know themselves, but go beyond Socrates adding that ‘the perfect knowledge of ones selfe, which consisteth in the soule, is in such sort joined with the knowledge of God, that the one without the other cannot be sincere and

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125 ‘Item, Every Knight of this Order shall endeavour to add Conference and Experience by Reading; and therefore shall not only read and peruse Guizo, the French Academy, Galiatto the Courtier etc’. Gesta Grayorum, 29.
perfect’ (11), or in other words, *gnosis*. They attribute the sentiment to Plato, but it is entirely consonant with the *Corpus Hermeticum* which teaches that ‘he who has understood himself advances toward god’ (I [21]). They determine to follow Plato who is alleged to have said ‘That the perfect duty of man is, first to know his owne nature: then to contemplate the divine nature: and last of all to bestow his labor in those things which may be beneficial to all men’ (12). As we saw above, the precept may be found in the *Corpus Hermeticum*: ‘Such a soul [. . .] always blessing all people and doing them good in every deed and word in memory of its father’ (*CH X* [21]).

There is no shortage of models for the pedant Holofernes who is a fund of arcane and pointless knowledge, much of it in Latin. Woudhuysen suggests Rombus from Sidney's *Lady of May* (2), while Yates, in addition to John Florio and Harvey, offered Richard Lloyd the tutor of William Stanley, later 6th earl of Derby, mainly because of his play on the Nine Worthies, published in 1584 (1936, 12).126 Holofernes the pedant, Nathaniel the curate, and also Don Armado the braggard and his page, young Moth, are all redolent of the stock characters of the *commedia dell'arte*, while Armado as mentioned earlier, has a probable live counterpart in Essex's protégé, the ageing Antonio Pérez.

Fictional characters such as Holofernes and Nathaniel, Costard and Dull, and historic characters such as the Worthies, are mixed with real men in the persons

126 William Stanley (1561-1642) was issued with a passport in February 1576 and is known to have spent several years travelling in Europe with his tutor. As a descendant of Henry VII and Marie Tudor Queen of France, he would have had entrée to the courts of France. In 1586 he returned to France with his father the 4th earl of Derby, then ambassador to France.
of Navarre’s four courtiers. None of the men named was at Nérac in the years of Marguerite’s sojourn there. All were military men, and their names appear to have been chosen because of their confessional allegiances. The youngest, Longaville, Henri d’Orléans, duc de Longueville (1568-1595), was Henri’s cousin and a Huguenot who fought against the ultra-Catholic Guise faction. By contrast, Dumaine, that is duc de Mayenne, Charles de Lorraine, (1554-1611), was a Guise, head of the Catholic League and Navarre’s bitter foe. Similarly, Armand de Gontaut, baron de Biron (1524-1592), a likely model for Berowne, was a Catholic who had fought for the Guise, and whom the king had made maréchal de Guyenne. He was a constant problem for Henri and never ceased to undermine him. He was behind an attempt to poison the king, and in September 1580 laid siege to Nérac (Cooper 52-3). No editor has seen Berowne (baron de Biron) as a Catholic opponent of Navarre, but Marguerite de Valois’ diary makes his constant opposition clear. Consequently, an English court audience for the performance ‘before her Highnes this last Christmas’ would have known that two of the men swearing to study with Navarre were Catholics and understood that the court at Nérac was a place of religious toleration.

Shakespeare’s decision to name all three French courtiers for men possibly known personally or by repute to the court audience contrasts with his choice of a Spanish name for the King of Navarre. I suggest below that the King of

127 Some scholars (Yates 1936, 3; Woudhuysen 68) have acknowledged that the character Dumaine is named for the Guisard Duke; after Navarre’s conversion they were technically on the same side.

128 It is also possible that ‘Berowne’ references Armand’s son, Charles de Gontaut (1562-1602), who was baron de Biron after the death of his father.
Navarre is named for a real King Ferdinand whom Lazzarelli instructed in the way of Hermes, as recorded in his *Crater Hermetis*. The princess, also termed ‘Queen’, was identified as Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre in 1919 (Lefranc 412). Her knowledge of and interest in Hermetism is beyond dispute, but her ladies in the play are not real persons, unless Katherine is named for Catherine de Bourbon, Henri of Navarre’s sister.

The hierarchical grouping of the characters reflects the distinction between intellect and affect made in Book IX of the *Corpus, On understanding and sensation*, which emphasises the importance of harmonious balance between mind and body. The king’s plan is that he and his courtiers will deny all bodily desires for sex, food and sleep – ‘Not to see ladies, study, fast, not sleep’ (1.1.48) – and devote themselves entirely to contemplative study and the intellectual life. Unexpectedly swept away by passion, they must learn to balance the senses with the intellect. On the other hand, the princess and her ladies already possess both understanding and feeling and are wise enough to know that the men must learn to temper passion with patience. The princess in particular understands from her reference to ‘his silent court’ that the three years of ‘painful study’ when ‘No woman may approach’ involves more than book-learning (2.1. 23-4). At the end, when the

\[\text{[Footnote]}\]

129 Discussing whether *Love’s Labour’s Lost* Q1 was set from authorial copy, Woudhuysen makes the following observation: ‘The Princess starts off as Queen in 2.1.13 but for the rest of the scene is Princess. She is Queen throughout 4.1 and 5.2 except for one moment when she appears as Lady’ (308).

130 The Book teaches that in human beings, sensation, which is material and mortal, must be combined with understanding, which is essential and immortal, unlike in other living things where ‘sensation is combined with the natural character’ (*CH IX* [1]).
king relents and wants to break his oath, the princess will not let him: ‘So much I hate a breaking cause to be / Of heavenly oaths, vowed with integrity’ (5.2. 355-6), because she understands the significance of his vow.

The high-born royals and noble men and women contrast with the low-born Jaquenetta and Costard, who, ruled by their senses and having little understanding, ignore the king’s edict and immediately gratify their desire. Holofernes and Nathaniel, the bookmen, represent pure intellectuals, devoid of all feeling, who delight in Latin phrases, but whose book-learning does not extend to self-knowledge. Dull, whom Holofernes describes as ‘unpolished, uneducated, unpruned, untrained’ and ‘unlettered’ (4.2.16-18), Nathaniel calls ‘only an animal, only sensible in the duller parts’ (4.2. 26-7). Dull, having no understanding and little feeling, is thereby lowest in the hierarchy. Nevertheless, while the curate and the pedant are saturated with the book-learning which Berowne derided, the audience quickly sees that it is only Dull who has the sense to know a pricket when he sees one (4.2.12). Despite this concession to Dull’s common sense, the lower order characters in Love’s Labour’s Lost, lacking harmonious balance between understanding and sensation, all perform like stock characters redolent of Old Comedy.

Love’s Labour’s Lost and Old Comedy

Although no single literary model has ever been identified for Love’s Labour’s Lost, Alfred Harbage saw its affinity with the plays written for Paul’s Boys in the 1580s because of the numerous parts for women, and with the works of their manager, John Lyly, such as Campaspe (131). Trevor Lennam felt it owed something to a morality play presented at court in 1567/8, The Marriage of Wit and Science about a king and his courtiers, ‘wits who would be scholars seeking “the light of truth” – Wisdom’
Woudhuysen suggested that Shakespeare was challenging Sidney’s precepts of what a play should be. But in calling the play ‘odd and difficult’ (1), he may have been thinking of the many features that characterize Love’s Labour’s Lost as Old Comedy. Rather than defying Sidney, as Woudhuysen surmised, Shakespeare seems to be attempting an unfamiliar kind of comedy. Northrop Frye provides a useful description of the characteristics of Old and New Comedy from which it is possible to recognize many of the unusual or ‘odd’ features of Love’s Labour’s Lost. They include a dialectical structure, distinguished by an agon or contest such as the verbal sparring between the lords and the ladies, and a ‘processional or sequential form, in which characters may appear without introduction and disappear without explanation’ (3), such as Holofernes, Nathaniel, and Marcadé. Other features are ‘the introduction of historical figures’, such as the Nine Worthies, and ‘personalities as representatives of larger social forces’ (3). For example, the king as representative of the Calvinist wishing to study Hermetism, and the princess, accompanied by Boyet, representative of Catholic France already familiar with Hermes / Mercury. Other features that Frye describes and which are to be found in the play are the vaudevillean dialogue, long harangues, and the mood of a musical comedy (4). The musical presence is affirmed by the fact of Moth’s song, ‘Concolinel’ (3.1.3), by the last two songs, by Ver and Hiems, and by the cascade of love sonnets and songs.

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131 Holofernes and Nathaniel appear late in the play, without notice, in 4.2, where they personify Berowne's point about wasting one's eyesight to acquire arcane knowledge that adds nothing to life. Marcadé conveniently drops into 5.2, at line 710 to bring an end to the interminable play about Nine Worthies.
which lend themselves to a lute accompaniment. When the lords disguised as Muscovites enter accompanied by blackamoors (5.2.158) it is to music, and there are other opportunities for music during that scene when the disguised lords mistakenly woo the wrong ladies, unaware that, forewarned, the ladies have also masked their identities.

The predominant tone of Old Comedy is satirical. If Shakespeare wanted to mock Henri’s failed attempt to follow the way of Hermes to self-discipline and self-knowledge while he was cuckolding his wife and being cuckolded by her, then Le Loyer’s La Néphélococugie ou la nuée des cocus (Cloud-cuckoo Land), modelled on Aristophanes’ The Birds, in the genre of Old Comedy was a perfect model.

Evidence that Shakespeare knew Le Loyer’s play comes not only from the open-ended structure and other features which their two plays share with Old Comedy, but also from Le Loyer’s practice of using names from Rabelais, as Shakespeare arguably does with Holofernes, and with the character, Cornard, who, Perret says, ‘corresponds to the Greek comic bomolochos or hanger-about for scraps’ (61).

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132 Recent research has identified Moth’s song as: ‘Quand Colinet faisoit l’amour’, ‘a comical erotic chanson about male genitalia’ intended to mock the oblivious Armado. (Ross W. Duffin, “Concolinel” Moth’s Lost Song Recovered?” Shakespeare Quarterly 66 1 (2015): 89-94.

133 Le Loyer’s play is about two old cuckolds, Genin and Cornard, who flee from home and find refuge with birds, all cuckoos, with whom they unite against their enemies to build ‘a fantastic city in the clouds. [...] Their new society is besieged from above and below, by gods and men, but the downtrodden birds and bird-people are victorious at the end of the comedy’. Like Aristophanes’ play, La Néphélococugie is allegorical and the satire is comprehensively aimed at religious tyranny, judicial corruption and ‘the charlatans and parasites’ that invaded Athens and sixteenth century France alike (Perret 22).
Cornard calls to mind Moth when he mocks the curate and the pedant telling Costard that ‘They have been at a great feast of languages and stolen the scraps’ (5.1.35-6). Another connection between both plays and the historic context comes from the seemingly inexplicable choice of a song about the cuckoo: ‘O, word of fear, / Unpleasing to a married ear’ (5.2.889-90) to end a play which makes no mention of adultery. In short, the number of parallels with a genre associated with social satire, tends to confirm my suggestion that Shakespeare’s play has a similar purpose.

King Ferdinand and the Crater Hermetis

Mary Ellen Lamb confessed to finding the name ‘Ferdinand’ for the King of Navarre ‘puzzling’ (49). A text and likely source for the name is one that connects King Ferdinand and Hermetism – Lazzarelli’s Crater Hermetis. The full title of Lazzarelli’s commentary is A Dialogue on the Supreme Dignity of Man, entitled the Way of Christ and the Mixing Bowl of Hermes, by Lodovico Lazzarelli of Septempeda, Christian Poet. Dedicated to the divine Ferdinand of Aragon, King of Sicily. Ferdinand of Navarre at the opening of the play announces his intention to retire for three years into a world of discipline and self-study. In this, he resembles the historic King Ferdinand of Naples who also retreated from public life in order to devote himself to contemplation. As Lazzarelli tells King Ferdinand:

134 It is not impossible that an early version of the play before it was ‘corrected and augmented’ carried some reference to the adultery which we now know ended the happy sojourn in Navarre and the marriage of Henri and Marguerite, and that when the reference was cut the song was retained.

135 Ferdinand I of Aragon, King of Naples and Sicily (1423/4-1494).
‘I thought you worthy [. . .] to come and share this happiness of mine: you who in these latter days of your life have left the reins of government to your eldest son Alfonso and, intent on contemplation and pious works, have devoted yourself to attaining peace of mind.’ (1. 3)

Lazzarelli assures King Ferdinand that he is a Christian, but ‘not ashamed to be an hermetist as well’, because the teachings do not clash with Christian doctrine (4.1). He tells the king ‘everything that we shall here investigate regarding true felicity, we will draw not only from the doctrine of the Gospel, but also from the teachings of Hermes’ (4.3). Ferdinand replies: ‘Let us come right to the point. . . how would I be able to know myself?’ In reply, Lazzarelli tells him that ‘When he was asked that question, Pimander answered Hermes: “Embrace me with your mind and I will teach you everything you wish to know.”’ (5.1) After a long prayer, he continues:

‘Hermes says that God, having created all things in the beginning, exclaimed: “Increase, grow up and multiply [. . .] And you, who have been given an inheritance of mind, recognize your origin and take heed of your immortal nature, and know that love of the body is the cause of death.” And that matches what Moses says in the book of Genesis. These words of Hermes contain the tree of life, by which we live, as well as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which brings us death. And as you see, the main point of this precept is that we should know ourselves’. (6.2)

As Hanegraaff points out, ‘the fundamental precept of “self-knowledge”, the nature of which forms the starting point of the Crater Hermetis, is here explained by

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136 Hanegraaff notes that the idea may also be found in Genesis 1:28: Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over [. . .] every living thing that moves upon the earth (2005, 183, n.36).
Lazzarelli with reference to *C.H.* I [18]’ (Hanegraaff and Bouthoor 185 n.39). Hence, anyone familiar with the *Corpus Hermeticum* or with Lazzarelli’s dialogue with Ferdinand of Naples, would recognize that when in the play, King Ferdinand encourages his friends to ‘war against your own affections / And the huge army of the world's desires’ (1.1.9-10) in order to find the immortality they seek, he is echoing Lazzarelli’s warning to the other King Ferdinand about death being the consequence of yielding to desire. Moreover, those with knowledge of the *Corpus Hermeticum* or the *Crater* would recognize that when Ferdinand of Navarre swears to be ‘still and contemplative in living art’ (1.1.14), in order ‘that to know which else we should not know’ (1.1.56), the king is alluding to the tree of life. Berowne, on the other hand, referring to ‘the thing I am forbid to know’ (1.1.60) is alluding to the tree of knowledge. Finally, in the process of learning what can only be known through silent contemplative study, the king and his friends will become ‘god-like’ (1.1.58). This is precisely the promise made to those who have self-knowledge in

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137 Previously, Hanegraaff explained that ‘love is seen as the key to the knowledge of God and thus to true self-knowledge (*gnosis*)’ and observed that Lazzarelli’s idea of love seems to be closer to *eros* than to *agape* (2005, 70).

138 The king’s use of ‘should’ in ‘should not know’ is ambiguous; the phrase means both ‘[otherwise] would not know’ and ‘ought not to know’. Berowne picks up the second meaning.

139 That the princess and her ladies are perceived as already having god-like status is hinted at by Dumaine speaking to his ‘most divine Kate’ (4.3.80); Longaville calls Maria ‘a heavenly love’ (4.3.63), Berowne is entranced by the girls’ ‘heavenly eyes’ (5.2.761) and refers to ‘heavenly Rosaline’ (4.2.217), while Boyet reports that the King called the princess ‘an angel’ (5.2.103).
the Corpus: ‘This is the final good for those who have received knowledge: to be made god’ (CH I [26]).

In the opening scene of Love’s Labour’s Lost the references to the Corpus Hermeticum and the Crater Hermetis are quite explicit and direct. Woudhuysen observes that in the Quarto, the king is given as ‘Ferdinand’ throughout 1.1, and that thereafter, except for four speeches in 2.1, he is given as ‘Navarre’ (308). One possible explanation is that the playwright was thinking of the king as Ferdinand, being instructed in Christian Hermetism by Lazzarelli as he wrote the first scene and then, given the location of the play in Nérac, reverted to thinking of the king as Henri of Navarre. Other details which confirm that Shakespeare had Henri and the castle at Nérac in mind as he wrote include the billets-doux the king sends to the princess (5.2.7-10) (Lefranc 422 n.2), and the tapestries mentioned above depicting scenes of the Nine Worthies which were moved from Pau to Nérac in preparation for the Queens’ visit (Lefranc 425).

It is well known that when Socrates asked the oracle in the temple at Delphos the way to happiness and the ethical life, the answer was: ‘Know thyself’. But Lazzarelli tells Ferdinand, ‘Let me make clear that I do not take an oracle of Apollo as my point of departure, but the teachings of Hermes’ (6.1). The hope and expectation at the end of the play is that the songs of Apollo they have been enjoying will be replaced by the rigorous precepts of Mercury / Hermes. But the contemplative life is not easy and ‘The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo. You that way, we this way’ (5.2.917-8). There is to be no union yet. They must all go their

140 Henri was famous for writing his love letters on both sides of the paper and in the margins.
separate ways and any hope of a tolerant, eirenic marriage of Protestant Navarre and Catholic France effected through a reformed Hermetic Christianity is lost for the time being.

At the end of the play the Elizabethan court audience might see that transforming Protestant Navarre into the ‘wonder of the world’ (1.1.12), which required men to follow the virtuous ‘way of Hermes’ and create a state of god-like men, was an unrealisable fantasy like the Cloud-cuckoo-land of Le Loyer’s play. However, the eirenic union promised after a twelvemonth in the play did become a reality, not through a reconciliation or the marriage of opposites but through legal process when in 1598 France ratified the Edict of Nantes and legalized religious toleration.

In Chapter Six, the exegesis of *The Tempest* reveals a play where opposites are reconciled through the union of Naples and Milan, both famously lost to the French by King François I, great uncle of Henri of Navarre, and where I will argue, the island setting is a trope for a place where the immortal soul / mind of each of the drowned await eternal life. But I turn first to two plays which I argue illustrate the ‘torments of matter’ that beset the minds of men and exemplify one man’s ascent to knowledge of self and another man’s descent to ignorance.
When the *True Chronicle Historie of the Life and Death of King Lear and his Three Daughters with the unfortunate life of Edgar etc.* was published in 1608, the title page displayed a printer's emblem showing the caduceus of Hermes. The wand is entwined by two
Chapter Four

King Lear and the path to self-knowledge and spiritual regeneration

In this chapter I review some critical opinions of King Lear and turn to the debate that finds the presence of Christianity in a pagan world puzzling. I suggest that the play is informed by both Christian and Hermetic thought. I summarise the two principal sources of the play, the anonymous King Leir and Sidney’s Arcadia, and note that the former Christianises the well-known old story and the latter takes place in pre-Christian times. I posit that the plot of Sidney’s tale is structured round some of the seven evil concepts sown in the mind listed in Book IX of the Corpus Hermeticum and I argue that in combining the two works, Shakespeare fleshes out each character’s behaviour with motivating traits, feelings, habits of mind or ‘torments of matter’ listed in Book XIII of the Corpus Hermeticum. I will argue that the transformation of the king lends itself to interpretation as a journey of the soul

snakes, topped by Pegasus, embellished with wings and cornucopia, and held by two hands clasped round the stem. The emblem belonged to Chretien Wechel (d.1554), was used by his son Andreas, and was later owned by Nicholas Okes who printed the Quarto for Nathaniel Butter, publisher and bookseller. The emblem appears only twice on publications of a play firmly attributed to Shakespeare – the second occurrence is on the first Quarto of Othello published in 1622 and also printed by Nicholas Okes, this time for Thomas Walkley. The choice of emblem may be innocent or it may indicate the Hermetic sympathies of the printer, the publisher or the playwright or the Hermetic content of the plays.
which allegorizes the Hermetic ascent to self-knowledge as he gradually overcomes his torments. I contrast Lear with Gloucester, and discuss three kinds of madness associated with three good men – Lear himself, his Fool and Edgar. I turn to the wicked characters and connect the behaviours of Goneril, Regan and Edmund to the torments given in Book XIII. Edmund’s contempt for astral influences resonates with Book I [25] and is discussed here in connection with revisions to the Quarto. I review the textual, bibliographic debate which has led to the current critical opinion that the 1623 Folio edition of *King Lear* is a substantially different play from the first Quarto. I argue that the ending of the Quarto reflects an understanding of spiritual rebirth occurring after the death of the body as described in Book I of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, while the final moment of Lear’s joy in the Folio edition of the play confirms his rebirth in this life and is closer to the teaching of Book XIII. I suggest a Hermetic rationale motivates many of the revisions to the Quarto.¹⁴²

*The Critical Debate and Sources of King Lear*

‘No other Shakespearean play has had such strong condemnation and such awe-inspiring praise simultaneously heaped on it’ asserts Grace Ioppolo of *King Lear* (2003, 1). Clearly scholars are divided in their opinions of this play. Moreover, as

¹⁴² NOTE: In this chapter, references to Shakespeare’s play are from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986. Scene and line references are from the Quarto *History of King Lear* (1027-1061); Act, scene and line references are from the Folio *Tragedy of King Lear* (1063-1098).

In my discussion throughout this chapter, words added in the Folio edition are in bold and excisions from the Quarto are italicised. When a citation occurs in both Q and F with minor differences, I prefer F.
textual study of the Quarto, the Folio and the conflated editions of the play has established, there is more than one *King Lear* for scholars to grapple with. Nevertheless, few would disagree with Charles Gildon for whom in 1710 the injustice of Cordelia’s death raised ‘Indignation and Horror’ (in Ioppolo 2003, 48). Samuel Johnson in 1765 was 'so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them’ (Ferrell 99). Two hundred years later, Jan Kott agrees: ‘In the whole Shakespearian repertory I can find no scene as revolting as Cordelia’s death’ (281). In truth, the manner of her death off-stage is left to the imagination, but Kott is alive to the grotesque and absurd. Nevertheless, I will argue that our understanding of Lear’s plight is complemented by the heightened sensations occasioned by Cordelia’s death as Hermes explains in Book IX, and that while the fact and manner of her death may shock us, it is the timing of her death in Lear’s mind which has significance for Lear’s own apotheosis, and which distinguishes the ending of the first Quarto edition from that of the first Folio.

John Keats and other Romantics who were interested in Hermetic thought understood that *King Lear* is a play about the mind, whether or not they knew Hermetism as a *religio mentis*.\(^1\) Charles Lamb asserts that it is Lear's mind ‘which is laid bare'; he feels that *King Lear* is a play to be read because: 'On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read

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\(^1\) Jennifer Wunder in *Keats, Hermeticism and the Secret Societies* (2008), notes that ‘in a late October 1817 letter to Bailey, Keats appears to be examining many hermetic ideas espoused by Paracelsus, the Rosicrucians, and various Masonic groups and synthesizing them with his own perspectives' (98).
In the twentieth century, A. C. Bradley agrees with Lamb that the play is ‘too huge for the stage’ (1904, 1960, 247), arguing that while *King Lear* is not the best of his plays, it is ‘Shakespeare's greatest work’ (243), because it appeals ‘not so much to dramatic perception as to a rare and more strictly poetic kind of imagination’ (248). I suggest that a Hermetic exegesis supports Lamb’s opinion that reading the play allows the reader access to Lear’s mind, and that this simultaneously has an effect upon the mind of the contemplative reader, moved like Gildon, Johnson and Kott amongst others, to ‘howl’ (5.3.232) silently with Lear and share his grief. Some scholars claim a similar transformative effect for Book XIII of the *Corpus Hermeticum* which tells of ‘rebirth and apotheosis’ as K.W. Tröger claims, and is intended to work spiritual regeneration in those who read it as Richard Reitzenstein argues (Copenhaver 1992, 181-2).

Concerning the religious nature of *King Lear*, criticism of the play has swung between interpretations of the play as sublimely Christian with a providential God, or as grimly pagan and utterly godless. Bradley sees the entire play as about Lear’s redemption (285), Geoffrey Bickersteth thinks Cordelia personifies Christ (in Elton 3-4), while R.W. Chambers, who sees the play as a tale of redemption through suffering, calls it ‘a vast poem on the victory of true love’ (49). Roy Battenhouse recognizes numerous biblical echoes (270-282 passim), but even while he asserts that

King Lear is a tragedy concerned, by definition, with human downfall (269), he observes in Lear’s response to grief at the end of the play ‘a kind of spiralling upward’ (289) which speaks of a very different trajectory. Battenhouse’s sense that the action has ‘cycled upward’ (289) resonates with my argument that spiritually Lear is undergoing the Hermetic ascent to gnosis. At the other extreme, D. G. James sees no sign of Christian doctrine in King Lear, but only a world of savagery and evil (1951, 70), and Kott, writing in the ruins of post-war Poland, sees it as ‘a play about the disintegration of the world . . . brutal and tragic, serious and grotesque’, both nihilist and absurd, and hails Shakespeare as a political visionary (296-7).

In 'King Lear' and the Gods, William Elton undertook to examine the validity of the view that ‘Lear is an optimistically Christian drama’ (3). Elton analyses four attitudes to providence that were known in Shakespeare’s day and which he thought contributed to the pattern of Shakespeare’s play. They include the ‘prisca theologia or virtuous heathen view’ that virtuous pagans like Cordelia and Edgar could attain salvation (75-114); the pagan-atheist view, personified in Goneril, Regan and Edmund (115-146); and the pagan-superstitious view represented by Gloucester (147-170). Elton has difficulty fitting Lear into these categories and resorts to Deus Absconditus (the concealed god) for the protagonist himself (171-263). Elton holds that to view King Lear as an ‘optimistically Christian drama’ is seriously to misinterpret it, and that ‘the play is in its premises ostensibly pagan’ (171). He does not include Hermes Trismegistus among the pagan prisci theologi, but it is the core of my argument that Lear’s travails along the path to redemption and salvation, which some critics see as Christian, are also recognizable as the ‘way of Hermes’ to salvation and that the play has both Christian and Hermetic resonances. Both search for God. The difference between
them is that Christians search for a redemptive God external to them, while the gnostic Hermetist finds within oneself the palingenesia that liberates one from ‘fate and materiality’ (Fowden 109) either in this life (CH XIII [3]), or the next (CH I [24-26]).145

Virtually no recent criticism touches the issue of Lear’s journey to self-knowledge, possibly because, as Paul Jorgensen admits in his 1967 Introduction to Lear’s Self-Discovery, it had become a cliché even then. Jorgensen’s own fresh look at Lear’s journey does not address the problem of whether or not Lear finds salvation ‘as the final stage of self-knowledge’ or, in other words, by gnosis. This Jorgensen admits is ‘a thornier question’ (1967, 31). In 1972, Rolf Soellner devoted an entire book to Shakespeare’s Patterns of Self-Knowledge, arguing from his premise that lack of self-knowledge is ‘the spring for most of Shakespeare’s plays’ (281). In a work of great erudition, Soellner contends that the Elizabethans were saturated in the Socratic notion of self-knowledge (nosce teipsum) (xi). However, as we saw, the knowledge of self that proceeds from the examined life which Socrates advocates is not the same as the noesis which leads the contemplative Hermetist to the purging of the ‘torments of matter’, to gnosis and spiritual rebirth.146 In support of his argument,

145 It is this liberation from ‘the “tent” of the earthly body’ that ‘Hermetists thought of as “rebirth”’ (Fowden 109).

146 The interest in self-knowledge in the literature of the Renaissance is frequently ascribed to the humanist interest in Plato and Socrates who attributed the advice to the Delphic oracle – advice which Lazzarelli specifically repudiates (Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn 26.2, 249). However, alongside books urging the moral imperative of the examined life and emphasising the study of the body, such as Sir John Davies’ Nosce Teipsum (1599) or Pierre Charron’s Of Wisdom (trans. c.1612), are numerous books urging knowledge of self as a prerequisite
Soellner cites from Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* and *Somnium Scipionis*, books of moral philosophy ‘widely used in the schools’ in Shakespeare’s day (9), both of which are identifiable *loci classici* in the *Corpus Hermeticum* (I [18], 112; V [5], 140). Similarly, he cites *De Officiis* where, following Plato, Cicero lists the four cardinal virtues (justice, prudence, fortitude and temperance) noting that: ‘of these, temperance was most closely associated with self-knowledge’ (11). As we shall see, intemperance accompanied by ignorance of self, is amongst Lear’s greatest corporeal torments.\footnote{147}

In short, while some critics see Shakespeare’s *King Lear* as informed by a classical humanism of pagan origin, but not necessarily Hermetic, others interpret it as Christian. I contend that the origin of each position may be found in the two works which, it is generally agreed (Bullough VII, 270, 284; Muir xxxiv, xxv; Knowles 12-35), are the principal sources of the play, namely, the early anonymous play *The True Chronicle History of King Leir, and his three daughters etc.* which is

to knowledge of God or *gnosis*, although they do not use that term. Jorgensen quotes from Pierre de la Primaudaye who wrote in *The French Academie* (1594): ‘self-knowledge is “a guide to leade him [man] to the true knowledge of God”’ (1967, 32), and Ralegh, in his Hermetic *History of the World* asserted that ‘[i]t is therefore Death alone that can suddenly make man to know himself’ (in Jorgensen 1967, 20).

\footnote{147} Soellner expands his argument with examples such as those from the *Enchiridion* (1502), where Erasmus, who may have been influenced by the *Hermetica*, writes of the need to balance and reconcile the warring elements of passion and reason, and warns that self-control is necessary for salvation (4). Soellner also cites the Jesuit, Diego de Estella in a translation by Thomas Rogers (1586), whom he terms a ‘*nosce teipsum*’ author. De Estella writes that ‘the knowledge of ourselves bringeth us to the knowledge of God’ (16). This is a key tenet of Christian Hermetism, which distinguishes it from the Socratic dictum.
predominantly Christian, and a tale from Sidney’s long novel, *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* which is not.\textsuperscript{148} Although there is nothing in the early sources to suggest that Lear and his daughters lived in Christian times, when the unknown author of *King Leir* dramatized the tale, he gave it a bias not only Christian but post-Reformation.\textsuperscript{149} Early in the play, Leir refers to Gonorill and Ragan as ‘the kindest girls in Christendom’ (6. 91). From scene 17 the play is punctuated with Christian references such as ‘King of Heaven’ (19. 162), ‘just Jehova’ (19. 205), ‘the will of God’ (19. 210), ‘high anointed of the Lord’ (19. 250), ‘see what God will send / When all means fail, he is the surest friend’ (23. 98), and towards the end, a furious Gonorill insults Cordella calling her ‘Puritan, dissembling hypocrite [. . . ] I’ll make you wish yourself in Purgatory’ (30. 68-71) in a curious amalgam of confessions, which for a London audience was tantamount to denouncing her as a Familist.\textsuperscript{150} The irony of Gonorill’s

\textsuperscript{148} *Old Arcadia* was completed in 1581, while *New Arcadia* was unfinished at Sidney’s death in 1586. A composite *Arcadia* was published in 1590.

\textsuperscript{149} The date of the play has never been securely established, and it may have been written for the Queen’s Men before 1587. Sarah Beckwith suggests *King Leir* derives from ‘the late 1580s or early ’90s’ (91). It is probably the Queen’s Men’s play performed by Queen’s Men and Sussex’s Men together at the Rose in 1593/4. Henslowe records receiving 38 shillings for kinge leare on 6 april 1593 and 26 shillings on 8 april 1594 (Henslowe’s Diary. Ed. R. A. Foakes, 21).

\textsuperscript{150} See Chapter Two and also Kristen Poole who points out that Knewstub in denouncing Familists in 1579 called them Puritans, not because they were seeking ‘ecclesiastical or moral reform’, but because they ‘bragge of all perfection’ (74-75). Familists were notorious for protecting themselves by dissembling and ‘verbal hypocrisy’ (83). J. W. Martin records that Archbishop Sandys attacked Familists for hypocrisy and suggested that they resembled
reviling Cordella as a dissembling hypocrite would not have been lost on the audience who had seen her overblown protestations of love for her father rewarded with a third of his kingdom. The anonymous playwright darkens the story of ungrateful children with the addition of Ragan's plot to bribe a murderer to kill her father (19). He adds further complexity to the characters such as Ragan who, when the plot is exposed, feigns indignation and blames Cordella (22.56-8). Leir eventually admits his fault and even forgives his ‘unkind Girls’ (24.58). The tale ends happily. Leir confesses the whole sorry saga to a weeping, compassionate Cordella and her husband; mutual requests for pardon are met with mutual forgiveness and love and, after ‘the just revengement of the wronged King’ (30.48), reconciliation, Christian forgiveness and compassion conclude the play. However, apart from the abuse of their father and the idea of murder, concepts which are listed in Book IX [3], the plot of King Leir appears to owe little to the Corpus Hermeticum.

By contrast, the Arcadia story, which is clearly the source of the Gloucester plot that Shakespeare added to King Leir, incorporates most of the demonic concepts listed in Book IX. In the French translation made by Foix de Candale in 1579 and potentially available to Sidney, the evil concepts sown by the demons are: ‘adultaires, meurtres, parricides, sacrileges, impieitez, estranglemants, precipitacions’ (292) (acts of adultery, murder, killing one’s father, acts of sacrilege, impious (irreverent or godless) acts (such as suicide), strangling, hurling oneself from ‘church papists’ (197); Lord Burghley referred to them as ‘papistical’ in a letter to Walsingham in 1578 (Martin 216, n.5). It may be significant that, despite having been entered in the Stationers’ Register in 1594, there is no record of the play in print until 1605 following the publication of A Supplication of the Family of Love, addressed to King James in 1604.
a high place). The seven demonic concepts are not connected to the seven deadly sins. Three of the concepts reflect commandments from God given to Moses: (6. Thou shalt not commit adultery; 7. Thou shalt not kill; 8. Thou shalt honour thy father and mother). Scott finds parallels in CH I [23] and [25] and VI [1] and [3] (Copenhaver 1992,151). In CH I [23] Poimandres speaks of ‘the avenging demon’ who arms the evil person ‘for lawless deeds so that greater vengeance may befall him’. The reference will be picked up in the next chapter in connection with Iago and Othello.

151 All references to Sidney’s Arcadia in this section were found in Bullough VII.
The brothers are reconciled. Although Leonatus’ compassionate treatment of the father who had rejected him, and forgiveness of his brother are truly Christian, Sidney’s version refers neither to pagan gods nor to the Christian God. However, the events of the tale of the Paphlagonian prince – adultery, the intention to murder, the physical assaults on the father, the wish to commit suicide by jumping from a rock – mirror four of the concepts sown in the mind by evil demons listed in Book IX. While adultery and murder are not uncommon elements in narrative plots, it is the addition of the other less usual ideas that strengthens my opinion that Sidney is following the *Corpus Hermeticum* as he plots the tale of the Paphlagonian king. Moreover, the deception (‘fraude’), ‘malice’ and ‘envie’ used to describe the wicked son may be found amongst the torments listed in Book XIII. But while Sidney as novelist does no more than prosaically list them, in Shakespeare’s hand those same qualities become powerful motivators of the dramatic action. Moreover, I argue that whereas Sidney uses the demonic concepts from Book IX to structure and drive the plot in *Arcadia*, by contrast in *King Lear*, Shakespeare draws on the zodiac of torments listed in Book XIII to define and motivate his characters to enact the demon’s wicked ideas so that it is the characters whose idiosyncratic ‘torments of matter’, akin to personality traits, feelings, or habits of mind, that drive the action. Hermes explains them as follows:

‘This ignorance, my child, is the first torment; the second is grief; the third is incontinence [intemperance]; the fourth, lust; the fifth, injustice; the sixth, greed; the seventh, deceit; the eighth, envy; the ninth, treachery; the tenth, anger; the eleventh, recklessness; the twelfth, malice.’ (*CH* XIII [7])

The two narratives, *Arcadia* and *King Lear*, seamlessly spliced in *King Lear* now interact in ways that allow Shakespeare to provide compelling motivations for the characters’ behaviour. In doing so he goes beyond Sidney’s tale and draws on the
material torments listed above. For example, Goneril is motivated by the torment of lust to commit adultery, murder her sister and take her own life, while Gloucester, whose downfall is the result of the lust that had led him to adultery years earlier, wants to end his life by ‘falling from a cliff’ at Dover. Regan’s envy, malice and reckless anger define her character and motivate, for example, her impetuous murder of the servant who came to Gloucester’s aid. Edmund’s greed, deceit and treachery, which motivate his wicked actions, single him out, as he dissociates himself from those who would blame their behaviour on the stars and, declaring himself the author of his own wickedness, consciously chooses to be bad. By contrast, the virtuous characters, Edgar and Cordelia, as well as Kent and Albany, do not harbour any of the evil demons’ seeds but are associated with truth, especially with the Words of truth, and with compassionate Love. Cordelia, for example, is explicitly associated with Truth ‘who puts deceit to flight’ (XIII [9]), from the outset when the King exclaims upon her refusal to flatter:

Lear: So young and so untender?
Cordelia: So young, my lord and true.
Lear: Well, let it be so. Thy truth then be thy dower. (Q 1.99-101; F 1.1.106-8)

In the old King Leir, by contrast, the King attributes Cordelia’s answer to her pride: ‘Why how now, Minion, are you growne so proud?’ (l. 285), and she responds explaining that he has misconstrued her ‘playne meaning’ (l. 301). There is no explicit reference to connect Cordelia to truth in the early play. It is purposeful alterations such as this which support my argument that Shakespeare is using the play to illustrate a Hermetic point. Similarly, it is significant that Edgar reveals the truth about himself and about their father to the mortally wounded Edmund, whose machinations took the form of deceit and treachery. As Hermes tells Tat, Truth expels
deceit and, upon hearing Edgar's words, Edmund recognizes truth and admits: ‘‘Tis true’ (5.3.164) in words added in the Folio.

R.G. Moulton observed in 1885 that in Shakespeare’s play ‘the two plots work side by side’ and that in each the tragic action emerges ‘from the initial error committed by the protagonist’ (in Bullough VII, 286). However, a Hermetic exegesis discriminates between those ‘initial errors’. Gloucester’s error is the torment of lust which in Hermetic doctrine is ‘the cause of death’ (CH I [18]), while Lear’s errors are his lack of self-knowledge and the intemperate rages which, as I discuss below, he conquers on his journey to spiritual rebirth.153 Whereas Moulton argues that Lear’s tragedy is one of ‘excessive retribution for his pride’ (in Bullough VII, 286), a Hermetic reading interprets his end as a joyful apotheosis achieved in Act 4 after the purging of ignorance, intemperance, injustice and grief.154 Whereas Bullough believes that Gloucester and Lear have similar deaths ‘between joy and grief’ (284), a Hermetic hermeneutic distinguishes Gloucester from the king. Gloucester, too late to seek forgiveness or give his blessing to his son (5.3.193-70), dies alone in darkness conflicted between joy and grief, while (in the Folio version), Lear meets death in joy, purged of his torments and surrounded by men who love him.

153 Like Soellner, Elton linked the idea of Lear’s rage being opposed to Gloucester’s lust to Erasmus, whose Folly believes that Jupiter has set up Anger and Lust against our Reason (in Duthie 380).

154 Dover Wilson and Nicholas Brooke have also both observed that Lear’s redemption and regeneration occur in Act 4 (in Duthie 378).
The Transformation of Lear

From Hermes’ list we learn that ignorance is the principal torment followed by incontinence (intemperance), injustice and grief. These are the torments which afflict Lear who, unlike Shakespeare's other tragic heroes, has committed no crime and has no blood on his hands. In the course of the play, read as an allegory of his soul’s journey to spiritual rebirth, Lear slowly conquers his torments. Ignorance gives way to self-knowledge, he learns to temper his immoderate wrath, he attempts to bring his elder daughters to justice, and eventually, having found compassionate love commensurate with his understanding, his grief over losing Cordelia is replaced by his joy at being reunited with her. In short, the torments which Lear suffers and overcomes on his journey are four of those which Hermes revealed to Tat before explaining how, by summoning the powers which will expel them, he can ‘cleanse’ himself of his tormenters:

 ‘To us has come knowledge of god, and when it comes, my child, ignorance has been expelled. To us has come knowledge of joy, and when it arrives, grief will fly off to those who give way to it. [8] The power that I summon after joy is continence [temperance], O sweetest power! Let us receive her too, most gladly, child. As soon as she arrives, how she has repulsed incontinence! [. . . ] This next level, my child, is the seat of justice. See how she has expelled injustice, without a judgment’. (CH XIII [9])

A comparison of King Lear with the source play King Leir, reveals that Regan’s words: ‘‘Tis the infirmity of his age; yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself” (Q 1. 283-4; F 1.1.292-3), are a conscious and deliberate departure from the old play. There it is Gonorill who says of her father: ‘For he you know is always in extremes’ (l.195). In his King Lear, Shakespeare takes care at the outset to establish that Lear does not know himself. For the Hermetist this means that the king must overcome this ignorance of self in order to know god and achieve spiritual rebirth, because ‘he
who has understood himself advances toward god’ (CH I [21]). Just before this pronouncement Hermes had explained the different outcomes for those who have knowledge of self and those without it:

‘the one who recognized himself attained the chosen good, but the one who loved the body that came from the error of desire goes on in darkness, errant, suffering sensibly the effects of death.’ (CH I [19])

Here, I argue, is the Hermetic rationale for the twin plots in the new version of the old play, where Shakespeare contrasts the essential mind of the spiritual Lear with the body of the mortal Gloucester, a material man ‘soil[ed ]with vice’ (Book IX [5]). Lear must learn through suffering to know himself, and attain ‘the chosen good’, while Gloucester’s fate is to wander on in darkness feeling his way toward death. Regan’s perceptive assessment of her father’s lack of self-knowledge is followed by Goneril’s confirmation: ‘The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash’ (Q 1.285-6; F 1.1.294-5). This lets us know that Lear’s explosive temper is ‘long-engrafted’ (Q 1.287; F 1.1.297) and juxtaposes the two elements, Lear’s lack of understanding and his ungoverned rage. We see the evidence in his attempts to bribe his daughters publicly to express their love for him. In furiously casting out the daughter who calls his bluff by confronting him with the truth that he is making of love a material commodity, he reveals that he neither understands nor feels compassion for her.

It is a critical commonplace that for Lear to know himself he has first to learn to feel, through the experience of real suffering. Stanley Wells for example says of Lear, ‘physical suffering can bring mental revelation [. . .] people will not begin to see until they learn to feel’ (1980, 2002, 64). The same sentiment resonates with Book IX where Hermes explains to Asclepius: ‘Both sensation and understanding
flow together into humans, intertwined with one another, as it were. For without sensation it is impossible to understand, and without understanding it is impossible {to have sensation}’ (CH IX [2]). According to the Corpus, the index of understanding will be reasoned speech, and the gradual progress towards gnosis will be accompanied by a growth in feeling. Hence as Lear’s mind sinks increasingly out of touch with reality (a condition best described as ‘mad’) he ascends into understanding of himself, the mark of which is his reasoned speech, and with that growing understanding of self is entwined understanding of others, signalled by new feelings of empathy as we shall see.

With conscious artistry, Shakespeare plots Lear’s transformation; it is a journey that mirrors the path traced for the initiate in Book XIII of the Corpus Hermeticum. First, Lear’s gradual transformation from ignorance to self-knowledge is signalled by changes to his sense of identity. From the first Act, Shakespeare accompanies Lear’s spiritual growth with the realisation that others in his world also commodified love, and that the love and respect formerly shown to him were for his title and his lands, not for himself. In Goneril’s palace, he cannot command the respect he formerly took for granted. He begins to doubt his own identity: ‘Who am I, sir?’ (Q 4.75; F 1.4.76) is followed by ‘Does any here know me? Why, this is not Lear. [. . . ] Who is it that can tell me who I am?’ (Q 4. 220, 225; F 1.4.208, 212). From ‘King’ he slips into his identity as ‘father’, but still commands like a king: ‘The King would speak with Cornwall; the dear father / Would with his daughter speak, commands, tends service’ (Q 7.263-5; F 2.2.273-4). By Act Three he pities himself, reduced now to a ‘weak and despised old man’ (Q 9.20; F 3.2.20) at the mercy of the storm. Later, hallucinating, confusing Gloucester with Goneril, he admits that he no longer has any authority: ‘the thunder would not peace at my bidding’ (Q 20.100-
but still to his distracted mind he is ‘every inch a king’ (Q 20. 105; F 4.5.107). He is still on the way to knowledge of himself when, stripped bare of the garments of kingship, Cordelia’s gentlemen find him and take him to the French camp, where he sleeps.

Second, Lear must learn to temper his wrath, by controlling his hasty temper. Enraged to new heights by Goneril’s criticism of his ‘all-licensed fool’ (Q 4.195; F 1.4.183), of his ‘knights and squires / Men so disordered, so debauched and bold’ (Q 4.235-6; F 1.4. 219-220), and of his own lack of decorum: ‘As you are old and reverend, should be wise’ (Q 4.234; F 1.4.218), Lear utters a most terrible curse condemning his ‘thankless child’ (Q 4.283; F 1.4.269) to childlessness. In his rage and grief, close to hot tears, he appeals to the Goddess Nature to convey sterility into his daughter’s womb: 155

Dry up in her the organs of increase,
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honour her. (Q 4.272-4; F 1.4.258-260) 156

155 Like Edmund in scene two, Lear calls on the Goddess Nature (1.4.273), who the Corpus tells us is the Goddess of Creation. In Book I, Pymander tells Hermes that Mind, the father of all who is life and light, gave birth to a man like himself whom he loved as his own child, whereupon the man looked through the cosmic framework, displaying to lower nature the fair form of god. ‘Nature smiled for love when she saw him’ [14]. The man saw a form like himself in water and, wishing to enter it, ‘inhabited the unreasoning form. Nature took hold of her beloved, hugged him all about and embraced him, for they were lovers’ (CH I [14]). ‘Because of this, unlike any other living thing on earth, mankind is twofold – in the body mortal but immortal in the essential man’ (CH I [15]).

156 ‘honour her’ as in the eighth commandment: ‘Honour thy father and thy mother [. . .]’.
The full implications of his curse are to be found in the *Corpus Hermeticum*:

Prudent people [. . .] regard the making of children as a duty in life to be taken most seriously and greatly revered, and should any human being pass away childless, they see it as the worst misfortune and irreverence. After death such a person suffers retribution from demons. This is his punishment: the soul of the childless one is sentenced to a body that has neither a man’s nature nor a woman’s – a thing accursed under the sun. (*CH II [17]*)

Lear’s terrible curse is cruel enough in this world, but a Hermetic reading shows that his ungoverned rage has condemned his daughter to perpetual torment in the next life.

Forced now to depart, Lear sends letters ahead to Regan and only then, as his suffering begins, does he admit his folly in banishing Cordelia from his heart: ‘I did her wrong.’ (*Q 5.24; F 1.5.25*). The words surface from deep within. He departs from Goneril’s palace, fearing that he is going mad, and the Fool remarks on his lack of wisdom (*Q 5.43-4; F 1.5.43-4*). In the second Act, Lear learns to control his temper with patience. Bewildered at finding Regan away from home, infuriated by Regan’s and Cornwall’s failure to greet him when he arrives at Gloucester’s castle, and enraged at finding his messenger in the stocks, he explodes furiously, before interrupting himself with the possibility that Cornwall may have a reason for the neglect of his duty: ‘Maybe he is not well . . . We are not ourselves / When nature being oppressed, commands the mind to suffer with the body. I’ll forbear’ (*Q 7. 267-271; F 2.2.277-281*). It is the first glimmer of his understanding that others might have feelings, but it is a struggle for him. Regan begs him: ‘I pray you, Sir, take patience’ (*Q 7. 300; F 2.2.310*). Then Goneril’s cool indifference infuriates him and he warns her: ‘I prithee daughter, do not make me mad’ (*Q 7.376; F 2.2.391*). When he decides to stay with Regan believing in her tender heart, she rebuffs him telling
him ‘those that mingle reason with your passion / Must be content to think you old’ (Q 7.392-393; F 2.2.407-408). As we have seen, she knows him better than he knows himself and her choice of words reminds us that he has not yet succeeded in tempering rage with reason. In other words, at this point on his journey, Lear is not yet cleansed of the torment of intemperance, and the sensation and understanding which should ‘flow together into humans’, are not yet ‘intertwined with one another’ (CH IX [2]).

A minute later, Lear is begging the Heavens for patience: ‘You Heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!’ (Q 7.430; F 2.2.445). It is from the few references to patience that critics, such as Hannibal Hamlin, have argued that the Old Testament Book of Job has ‘deeply and persuasively informed [this] play’ (2011, 129).157 While I do not dispute that Hamlin and others find a ‘constellation of allusions’ here (2011, 132), the analogy is difficult to sustain because the biblical Job is from the outset a blameless and upright man who exhibits patience in adversity, and unswerving faith in God, for which God rewards him with beautiful daughters and long life. Nor are Kent and Gloucester in any sense ‘Job’s comforters’ for Lear, although the Fool might fill the role occasionally. Unlike Job, Lear is at the start of

the play an intemperate autocrat, ignorant of his own ‘torments’, one whom adversity transforms into a temperate or patient man.

In Act Three, the previous pattern repeats itself. Lear’s raging at the storm gives way to self-pity. He feels himself as much a victim of the storm as of his daughters, and submits to the elements, reduced now from king to ‘A poor, infirm, weak and despised old man’ (Q 9.20; F 3.2.20). Still self-pitying, he believes himself to be ‘a man / More sinned against than sinning’ (Q 9.60; F 3.2.60). Buffeted, and in Hermetic terms, ‘cleansed’ (or in Christian terms ‘baptised’), of his inner torments by the terrible storm, Lear becomes aware of the transformation taking place in his mind and cries out: ‘my wits begin to turn’ (Q 9.68; F 3.2.67). As ignorance dissipates knowledge grows, and with understanding he begins at last to feel what others feel. He turns to his Fool:

Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold?
I am cold myself. (Q 9.69-70; F 3.2.68-9)

[ . . . ]

Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart
That’s sorry yet for thee. (Q 9. 73-4; F 3.2.72-73)

At this point, understanding of and feeling for the suffering of others begin to combine in him. Refusing to take shelter, Lear tries to make sense of things but finds that ‘this tempest in my mind’ prevents him from feeling anything except ‘filial ingratitude’ (Q 11.12, 14; F 3.4.12, 14), and he refuses to allow himself to think about it: ‘Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all, – / O, that way madness lies . . . No more of that’ (Q 11.19-21; F 3.4. 20-22). Then, at the midpoint of the play, Shakespeare brings understanding and sensation together in Lear’s great speech where reason and compassion unite. Lear extends his pity for the Fool, whom he can
see before him, to all suffering mankind wherever they are. Significantly, physical suffering, such as the homeless poor experience, brings with it compassion, *agape* or charitable love. When compassion enters Lear's heart, he wishes to pray but before he seeks shelter for himself in the hovel, again he thinks first of his Fool:

**In, boy; go first. You houseless poverty** –

**Nay get thee in. I'll pray and then I'll sleep.** (3.4.26-7)

These two lines, evidence of the compassion that has entered Lear’s heart, first appear in the Folio where they preface Lear’s great reverential prayer for all the hungry poor and homeless and his confession of his part in their misery:

Poor naked wretches, whereso’er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loop’d and window’d raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O! I have ta’en
Too little care of this. Take physic, Pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
And show the Heavens more just. (Q 11.25-33; F 3.4.28-36)

The significance of his prayer at the midpoint of the play cannot be overestimated; the speech displays a reverence of mind in Lear that is synonymous with Hermetic piety (*Asclepius* [25]). Hermes warns Asclepius that ‘the reverent will be thought mad’ [25], and at this point Edgar enters in his guise as Mad Tom, and Lear begins to remove his own clothes in an act of madness. The king now understands that without the trappings of kingship and authority he himself is no different from other men. He knows now that ‘Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou [Edgar] art’ (Q 11.97-8; F 3.4.100-101) and he tries to tear off his clothes. Literally and dramatically, he is behaving like a mad man, allegorically he is removing the trappings of authority, but spiritually he is taking a step on the
path to self-knowledge and rebirth. The *Corpus Hermeticum* reveals that in approaching god:

> you must first rip off the tunic that you wear, the garment of ignorance, the foundation of vice, the bonds of corruption [. . .] Such is the odious tunic you have put on. (*CH* VII [2] [3])

Hermes is referring of course to the material and mortal body, which at the end Lear leaves behind.

Third, now that his rage is tempered, Lear has still to deal with the torment of injustice which the *Corpus* teaches will be expelled by justice (*CH* XIII [9]). Justice and injustice are the ‘chief preoccupation of the mock trial’ in Quarto scene 13 as Roger Warren observes (50). In scene 13, as the king grows increasingly out of touch with reality, he arraigns his daughters. He orders Edgar and the Fool to take their places on the Bench, creating thereby an ‘ensemble of madness’ (Warren 45), real and assumed.\(^{158}\) Edgar and the Fool can see that Lear’s mind is disordered and hallucinating and they briefly enter into the imaginary situation (Warren 51). In the Quarto scene, Lear’s discourse blends the reasoned logic of court formalities – ‘Bring in the evidence’ (31), ‘Thou robed man of justice’ (32) with the memory of his daughter’s cruel treatment – ‘She kicked the poor King her father’ (43). In effect, Lear’s mind merges his memory of the injustice in the topsy-turvy world where his children had authority over their father with the injustice of the ‘False justicer’ who let [Regan] escape (51). The scene blends his memory (of cruelty), which is a

\(^{158}\) Warren’s focus is on the difficulties in staging the scene and the positive effect that its omission from the Folio has on preparing the audience for ‘the climactic meeting of the mad Lear and the blind Gloucester in 4.6’ (49).
property of mind, with understanding (of corruption) which is the instrument of reason. But the Corpus Hermeticum teaches that ‘Mind differs from understanding . . . Understanding is the sister of reasoned speech, or each is the other’s instrument’ (CH IX [1]). It is arguable that the changes made to the Quarto scene 13 where mind and reason merge were made to illustrate the point that although Lear has lost his mind, he has not lost his reason.\footnote{159}

In his examination of the motives and consequences of those changes, Warren argued convincingly that eliminating the mock trial scene had the effect of allowing the later scene (Folio 4.5) to provide a concentrated focus on ‘the way [Lear’s] mind works, of the logical connections which underlie the mad remarks and which make the speeches effective in both dramatic and psychological terms’ (50). I agree with Warren that the later scene emphasises Lear’s reason. But I go further and suggest that a possible motive for the elimination of the scene lies in the distinction which Hermes makes between mind and reason, and the consequence of the change is to illustrate, as I said above, that Lear’s mind though apparently deranged, retains reason.

In support of that claim I turn to the addition in the Folio where Lear amplifies the ‘False justicer’ whom ‘the strong lance of justice’ cannot touch because he is protected by the symbols of his Authority:

\begin{quote}
Lear: \textit{Plate sin with gold,}\newline
\textit{And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;}\newline
\textit{Arm it in rags, a pygmy's straw does pierce it.}
\end{quote}

\footnote{159 In the next chapter I contrast Lear with Othello whose mind remains sane even as his reason is being distorted with false information.}
None does offend, none, I say, none; I'll able 'em:
Take that of me, my friend, who have the power
To seal th' accuser's lips. (4. 5.161-166)

The addition in the Folio to Lear’s speech lends resonance and weight to Edgar's response:

Edgar: O! matter and impertinency mix'd –
Reason in madness! (Q 20.163-164; F 4.5.170-171)

Edgar’s words now illustrate and exemplify Hermes’ notion that the mind, though out of touch with reality may still retain reason. Others have seen this. Muir, for example, observes that the theme of ‘reason in madness’ is essential to the play’s meaning (1960, 33).

A second consequence of omitting the scene where Lear’s disturbed mind still has memory of his daughters’ ill treatment, allows memory in a later scene (Q 21; F 4.6) to function as the sign that sleep has restored him to health. Once Lear is found by Cordelia’s scout, he is taken to the French camp and at last able to sleep, as we saw earlier. In the Folio, Lear wakes to Cordelia’s kiss (4.6.24), but in the Quarto edition, Queen Cordelia’s entrance is accompanied with music, we hear that Lear ‘hath slept long’ (Q 21.16; F 4.6.16), the doctor calls for the music to be louder (21. 23), and Lear wakes to music. The episode calls to mind a passage from the Corpus Hermeticum which speaks of understanding and sensation being in harmony when sleepers awake:

{It seems to me that [. . .] when sleepers wake, <understanding> and sensation <are always combined>. At any rate, <sensation> is distributed to body and to
soul, and, when both these parts of sensation are in harmony with one another, then there is an utterance of understanding, engendered by mind. (CH IX [2])

When Lear wakes, restored, he remembers everything. He is sane enough to know that he may not be in his ‘perfect mind’ (Q 21.60; F 4.6.56), but the evidence that his mind is restored is in his memory and his awareness of reality. He knows his age, ‘Fourscore and upward’ (Q 21.59; F 4.6.54); he knows that he is in fresh garments, and in an unfamiliar place; and importantly he recognises Cordelia, remembers how her sisters treated him and how he treated her. He asks her to ‘forget / And forgive’ (Q 21.83; F 4.6. 76-7). In short, his speech completely dispels any suggestion of permanent dementia. It is crucial to the Hermetic reading that Lear has recovered his mind at this point. The doctor confirms this when he tells Cordelia: ‘the great rage / You see, is killed (cured) in him’ (Q 21.76-77; F 4.6.72-3).

His choice of the word ‘rage’ to mean Lear’s madness, unites that madness (going mad), with Lear’s intemperate anger (getting mad), both of which are now killed. Not all critics appreciate the significance of this. Ioppolo, for example, says only that the ‘mad Lear is reunited with his loving daughter’ (2003, 98). But Lear’s mind is now fully aware of his own role in what has passed, and this knowledge of self combines with his new

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160 In all quotations from Copenhaver’s translation of the *Hermetica*, angled brackets indicate the insertion of a word; square brackets, the removal of a word, and pointed brackets a word regarded as unintelligible or problematic. See Front Matter.

161 In the Folio the doctor’s lines are given to a ‘Gentleman’.

162 Shakespeare’s decision to send Lear temporarily mad may rest in this very double meaning since in English ‘mad’ can mean both a loss of mental capability and also an excess of anger.
joyful experience of a love that is selfless. He is no longer interested in confronting his ungrateful daughters when he and Cordelia are taken prisoner in the British camp:

*Cordelia*: Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?

*Lear*: No, no, no, no! Come, let’s away to prison; We two alone will sing like birds i’ th’ cage. (Q 24. 7-9; F 5.3.7-9)

He wants only to ask Cordelia’s forgiveness and ‘live / And pray, and sing’ (Q 24.11-12; F 5.3. 11-12). This too appears to echo the *Corpus Hermeticum* where Hermes tells Tat that once he has been purified, the secret hymn of rebirth can be divulged:

Powers within me [meaning the powers which overcame the torments], sing a hymn to the one and the universe [. . .] Holy knowledge, you enlightened me; [. . .] I take joy in the joy of mind. (*CH* XIII [15-18])

The penultimate sentence of Book XIII warns the reader to ‘promise to be silent about this miracle, child, and reveal the secret of rebirth to no one lest we be accounted its betrayers’ [22]. The Hermetic implication of their singing together is that Lear’s torments have been vanquished.

From this point Lear’s knowledge of self has grown into understanding, he has learnt to temper his wrath, he has experienced compassion, he has tried to bring his miscreant daughters to justice, and now grief is replaced by joy. In Hermetic terms he has rid himself of the torments of ignorance, intemperance, injustice and grief and is ready to be spiritually reborn. Traditional Christian critics like Bradley, Bickersteth and R.W. Chambers all agree that it is at this point that Lear attains redemption. In short, Christian redemption and Hermetic apotheosis are two sides of the same coin.

*Lear's essential spirituality contrasted with Gloucester's materiality*

The rulers in Shakespeare’s two sources, *King Leir* and *Arcadia* are similar in several respects. To distinguish them when he combines the stories, Shakespeare makes the
Prince of Paphlagonia into the Duke of Gloucester, but he must also distinguish Lear who achieves self-knowledge and spiritual rebirth (whether in this life or the next), from Gloucester whose ‘error of desire’ leads him to death. Evidence that Shakespeare is consulting the *Corpus* in his conception of these characters comes from the care he takes to separate ‘understanding’ and ‘sensation’ from physical ‘seeing’ and ‘feeling’. ‘See’ can mean both literal eye-sight and ‘know’ or ‘understand’ (as in ‘I see what you mean’). ‘Feel’ can refer both to physical touch and also to emotion. Lear’s discourse includes the language of intellect and understanding: ‘mind’, ‘reason’, ‘known’, and ‘knowledge’, as well as of sensation or emotion as in ‘wrath’ and ‘passion’. The discourse around Gloucester employs the language of sensation, both literal and physical: ‘let him smell / His way to Dover’ (Q 14.91-92; F 3.7.91-2); ‘You cannot see your way’; ‘I stumbled when I saw’ (Q 15. 15, 17; F 4.1.17, 19); ‘to see thee in my touch’ (Q 15.21; F 4.1.23). Even when Gloucester suddenly realises that he has been deceived into believing ill of Edgar, he says only ‘O, my follies! Then Edgar was abused’ (Q 14. 89; F 3.7.89). After a spontaneous act of charity, giving his purse to ‘Poor Tom’, Gloucester echoes Lear’s wish to share superfluity with the poor and uses ‘see’ ambiguously:

> Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
> That slaves your ordinance, that will not see
> Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly; (Q 16.65-67; F 4.1.61-63)

His words reflect Hermes’ doctrine that ‘without understanding it is impossible {to have sensation.}’ (*CH IX* [2]). Then, when the eyeless Gloucester meets Lear again, Lear joshes him, using ‘see’ to mean ‘know’ or ‘understand’:

> *Lear*: You see how this world goes.
> *Gloucester*: I see it feelingly!
Lear: What! art mad? A man may see how this world goes with no eyes. (Q 20. 142-46; F 4.5.143-47)

Lear sees (in both senses of the word) clearly. Gloucester can feel but has no insight into the cause of his own misery. And Shakespeare seems to understand the doctrine of the interdependence of understanding and sensation outlined in Book IX of the *Corpus Hermeticum* well enough to make a wry joke.

I turn now to another passage in Book IX which introduces the idea of the man who has received good seeds from god – ‘virtue, moderation and reverence’ – but who ‘may appear to be mad’ to the multitude (CH IX [4]). This ‘god-fearing person’ to whom all things are good and who, even when ‘they lay plots against him . . . alone makes evil into good’ (IX [4]) may be the inspiration for Shakespeare to disguise Edgar as ‘Mad Tom’.

*Three kinds of madness: Tom o'Bedlam, Lear, the Fool*

In none of the sources of Shakespeare’s play is there a precedent for the king to go mad. However, in Book IX of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, immediately following the list of the seeds which the mind conceives from god and from demons, the fourth paragraph introduces the element of ‘madness’. Shakespeare's decision to let the old king suffer in the mind and to introduce contrasting kinds of 'madness' in two other characters may derive from Hermes’ explanation to Asclepius:

> 'Few seeds come from god, but they are potent and beautiful and good – virtue, moderation and reverence. Reverence is knowledge of god, and one who has

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163 ‘It will have been noticed that in none of the fifty or sixty versions of the Lear story in existence before Shakespeare's play does the old king go mad.’ (Muir 1975, xxxix n.2).
come to know god, filled with all good things, has thoughts that are divine and not like those of the multitude. This is why those who are in knowledge do not please the multitude, nor does the multitude please them. They appear to be mad, and they bring ridicule on themselves. They are hated and scorned, and perhaps they may even be murdered. [. . .] The godfearing person, at least, will withstand all this because he is aware of knowledge, for all things are good to such a person, even things that others find evil. If they lay plots against him, he refers it all to knowledge, and he alone makes evil into good.’ (CH IX [4])

Here may lie the impulse to create the god-fearing and virtuous Edgar who deliberately feigns madness, but who at the end ‘alone makes evil into good’. In terms of the plot, in order to escape capture, Edgar deliberately poses as Poor Tom, a madman from Bedlam, someone to be avoided. In Hermetic terms, Edgar’s goodness marks him as one who is reverent and likely to be reviled as ‘mad’. That Edgar's understanding is intertwined with feeling is clear when his tears for the king 'begin to take his part so much / They mar my counterfeiting’ (Q 13.55-6; F 3.5.19-20). Edgar regrets (‘O fault!’ (5.3.184)) that he revealed the truth of his identity to his father too late. As he reports to Edmund, the sudden conflict between the extremes of grief and joy caused the old man’s flawed heart to break before he could ask his son’s forgiveness (Q 24.193-196; F 5.3.188-191).

Edgar’s function in the play, disguised as Poor Tom o’Bedlam, a gibbering idiot, is to provide a necessary foil for Lear, whose hallucinatory madness, brought on by lack of sleep, the night in the storm and the shock of his daughters’ ingratitude, has to be distinguished both from a decaying mind (senile dementia) and from mere idiocy. In order for the Hermetic gnosis to be realised, Lear’s mind must retain reason. While Poor Tom spouts gibberish, and pretends to be raving, Lear, speaking with courtesy and reason, takes him for a Greek philosopher, ‘learned Theban’, ‘good Athenian’, and attempts to engage him in a rational discussion on the
The episode sharpens the contrast between Lear’s reasonable speech at a time when his exhausted mind is losing touch with reality, and Edgar’s deliberate nonsense, feigned to disguise his reality. Lear’s mind is still capable of understanding hypocrisy and double standards as well as corruption in high places. ‘[H]andy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief?’ (Q 20.148; F 4.5.149-150) he asks. As we saw, it is Edgar who observes that Lear, though his mind appears deranged retains his reason, when he comments on Lear’s ‘Reason in madness’ (Q 20.164; F 4.5. 171).

The character of the Fool is another of Shakespeare’s additions to the source story; no natural Fool, he is a professional Fool, a wise Fool. As the touchstone of sanity and good sense, his Fool provides a foil for Lear as he descends into madness. He reprimands Lear: ‘Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise’ (Q.5.43-44; 1.5.43-44). Lear's reply sounds the two key concepts (understanding and sensation), like notes in a chord: ‘O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven! / Keep me in temper. I would not be mad!’ (Q 5.45-46; F 1.5.45-46).

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164 Critics frequently cite Shakespeare's use of Samuel Harsnett's *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603), as the source of Edgar's gibberish (*King Lear*. Ed. Muir.1975, 239-242). It is possible that the borrowing goes in the other direction as Greenblatt points out, see below. Bullough reveals that ‘to expound us these new devils names’ Harsnett calls upon ‘Porphyrius, Proclus, Iamblichus, and Trismegistus, the old Platonical sect that conversed familiarly, and kept company with devils’ (414-5). It is not clear why Harsnett should have attributed knowledge of the devils’ names to Platonists and neo-Platonists unless to discredit them.
The note ‘mad’ once struck, continues to reverberate throughout the next three Acts, providing contrast with the ascent of Lear’s reasoning mind.

I suggest that just as the old *King Lear* and Sidney’s *Arcadia* provided Shakespeare with the principal sources for the intertwined plots and characters of *King Lear*, the *Corpus Hermeticum* has contributed to his understanding of human behaviour. The Hermetic texts appear to provide a blueprint for the architect-playwright’s intelligent design of the play, and his insights into the minds of his characters. I turn now to the psychology of two wicked women.

*The Characterisation of Goneril and Regan in Hermetic terms*

Unlike Lear, Goneril and Regan are not cleansed of their torments, namely lust, deceit, envy, anger, recklessness and malice. Hermes continues with his list of the powers that oppose those torments, naming perseverance, liberality and truth:

’Now in fourth place I summon perseverance, the power opposed to lust [. . .] The sixth power that I summon to us is the one opposed to greed – liberality. And when greed has departed I summon another, truth, who puts deceit to flight. And truth arrives. See how the good has been fulfilled my child, when truth arrives. For envy has withdrawn from us, but the good, together with life and light has followed after truth, and no torment any longer attacks from the darkness. Vanquished, they have flown away in a flapping of wings.’ (*CH* XIII [9])

The lust which torments Goneril is not countered by ‘perseverance’ (that is, continued resistance), while Regan's malice, envy, anger and recklessness also stay with her. None of the wicked characters makes the ascent toward knowledge which frees the soul of its torments. These vices persist in each of them even after the arrival of Truth in the person of Cordelia, who is prevented by her father from confronting them. Both the elder daughters die violent deaths.
A Hermetic exegesis reveals how carefully Shakespeare has crafted his characters to illustrate how torments, when neither recognized nor resisted, will destroy one. For example, in Quarto 16 / Folio 4. 2, Goneril speaks lovingly to Edmund, gives him her favour to wear, and kisses him. When he has gone she compares him to her husband, exclaiming to the empty air:

**Oh the difference of man and man!**
To thee a woman's services are due:
My fool usurps my body. (4. 2. 27-9)
[My foot usurps my body. (Q 16. 28)]

This is the moment, when she is thinking of Edmund, that the demon plants the seed of adultery in her mind to be nurtured by her feelings of lust. To emphasise the point that she would prefer to have Edmund in her bed, ‘**Oh the difference of man and man!**’ was added to the Folio edition. In the same scene Goneril hears the news of Cornwall’s death, and her immediate reaction is to begin to fear her sister as a rival in her desire for Edmund:

*Goneril*: One way I like this well;
But being widow, and my Gloucester with her,
May all the building in my fancy pluck
Upon my hateful life. (Q 16.82-85; F 4.2. 51-4).

But Goneril is still married to the good Albany, whom she loathes, while Regan, now widowed, is free to marry again. In the Quarto, Goneril’s lust for Edmund gives way to the torment of envy: ‘**I had rather lose the battle than that sister / Should loosen him and me**’ (Q 22. 20-21). However, this line does not appear in the Folio, and from her words two scenes later we learn that, while the Quarto depicts her envy, in the Folio it is not envy but her adulterous lust for Edmund that has opened the way for the demon to plant the idea of murder. When her sister cries: ‘**Sick! O, sick!**’ and Goneril replies in an aside: ‘**If not, I'll ne'er trust poison**’ (Q 24.93-4), altered in the
Folio to: ‘If not, I'll ne'er trust medicine’ (5.3. 89-90), we know that she has had a hand in her sister’s affliction. It is lust, too, which is the cause of her plan to eliminate her husband, Albany. Minutes later, when Edmund has fallen to Edgar, and Albany confronts her with the letter in which she betrays him, she retires (5.3.SD 149). Albany who knows her better than anyone, orders someone to ‘Go after her. She's desperate. Govern her’ (Q 24.157; F 5.3.152). Before long we learn that the demon has planted the impious or godless idea of suicide, desperation has overtaken her, and she has stabbed herself:

_Edgar_: What means this bloody knife?

_Gent_: 'Tis hot, it smokes;

It came even from the heart of – O! she's dead.

_Albany_: Who dead? Speak, man.

_Gent_: Your lady, sir, your lady: and her sister

By her is poisoned. She confesses it. (Q 24. 218-222; F 5.3. 198-202)

Edmund then admits: ‘I was contracted to them both’ (Q 24. 223; F 5.3.203). A Hermetic exegesis reveals how in constructing his characters, Shakespeare illustrates how the evil seeds of adultery, murder and suicide, once germinated by the motivating torments of lust and deceit, become active.

Regan, who knows herself as well as she understands her father, admits in the first words we hear her speak that she is ‘made of that self mettle as [her] sister’ (Q 1.64; F 1.1.69). Like many a younger sister, she follows her elder sister in everything and tries to outdo her. Lear, who understands her as little as he understands himself, believes her when she says ‘I am glad to see your highness’ (Q 7.290; F 2.2.300). He still hopes her ‘tender-hafted nature’ will not force him to reduce his retinue as Goneril commanded (Q 7.329; F 2.2.344). In high rage and close to tears, Lear stamps out into the storm occasioning Goneril’s words: ‘“Tis his own
blame; / Hath put himself from rest and must needs taste his folly’ (Q 7.448-9; F 2.
2. 462-3). Similarly, Regan, combining smug self-righteousness with malice, echoes her elder sister and justifies their cruelty telling Gloucester:

O sir, to wilful men
The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters. (Q 7.459-461; F 2 2. 474-6)

When her husband takes the decision to put the disguised Kent in the stocks for the morning, Regan wants her father’s messenger left there ‘till night, my Lord; and all night too’ (Q 7.129; F 2.2.131). She seems to relish cruelty. When we see her next, she has turned her malice to Gloucester, and when he is bound to a chair, she plucks his beard in an act of irreverence to the old man who is her host. She appears to enjoy Gloucester’s agony as his eye is torn out, and when he begs for help she cries maliciously: ‘one side will mock another; th’other, too’ (Q 14.68; F 3.7.68). On fire now, angered when a servant comes to Gloucester’s aid, she seizes her husband’s sword and without hesitation recklessly murders the man (SD Q 14.77,79; F 3.7.77,79). After Cornwall’s death, Regan conceives the idea of marrying Edmund, but when she realises that Goneril has the same idea she begins to suffer the torment of envy:

Regan: Tell me but truly – but then speak the truth –
Do you not love my sister?

Edmund: In honoured love.

Regan: But have you never found my brother’s way
To the forfended place? (Q 22. 8-11; F 5.1. 8-1

In Regan, the idea of performing assaults on her father and subjecting her father’s loyal friends Kent and Gloucester to abuse, is fed by the torment of malice, while her disposition to anger and recklessness leads her to unpremeditated murder. Without the knowledge of self which their father is so painfully acquiring, neither Regan nor
Goneril can recognize and make the choice to vanquish the torments listed in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and must suffer their torture (*CH* XIII [7] [9]).

The *Corpus Hermeticum* provides Shakespeare with a comprehensive zodiac of traits, feelings and habits of mind that motivate his characters to behave in ways that audience and readers find convincing, because we recognize the ways human beings have always behaved and still do behave. The Hermetic texts also provide a coherent rationale for many of the revisions made to the Quarto edition – revisions so substantial that current scholarship now treats the Quarto and the Folio as two different versions of the play. In support of this claim I consider more of the revisions made to the Quarto edition of the play and argue that they serve to enhance the Hermetic ideas in the play.

*How Many Texts? Quarto excisions and Folio additions*

In his path-breaking work on the revisions to *King Lear*, Steven Urkowitz asserted that there are three texts of this play (1980, 3). He listed first the Quarto, *His True Chronicle Historie of the life and death of King Lear and his three daughters with the unfortunate life of Edgar, sonne and heire to the Earle of Gloster* which was published singly in 1608; next *The Tragedie of King Lear*, the edition that was included in the First Folio of 1623; and last, the conflated editions made from both of them.  He could have added two more, both the early *True Chronicle History of King Leir* and a late seventeenth century adaptation. In 1681, Nahum Tate, in adapting Shakespeare’s play, chose to bow to the demands of natural justice and end the play happily with the marriage of Edgar and Cordelia. According to Wells, Shakespeare's version was 'too much for some audiences' and Tate's adaptation held the stage until 1843 (1986, 1025).
contains about 100 lines not printed in Q; it does not contain about 300 lines (including one whole scene) which are present in Q; it also differs from Q in hundreds of substantive readings and divides the play into acts and scenes. (Fitzpatrick 27)

For these reasons, Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, editors of The Complete Works, felt that the ‘substantial revisions’ to the Quarto, which were both ‘local’ and ‘structural’, had resulted in a ‘substantially different text’ that justified their including both Quarto and Folio texts, edited nevertheless, in the collection (1025).\textsuperscript{166}

While the fact of the revisions is ‘incontestable’ (Taylor 1983, 429), and their nature and effects have been variously explained by textual scholars, the date and authorship as well as a convincing rationale for the revisions continue to be a matter of debate. Taylor, in an erudite and comprehensive chapter in The Division of the Kingdoms, concludes that the Quarto was ‘originally composed in late 1605 to early 1606’, and that the revisions published in the Folio were undertaken in 1609 or 1610 (1983, 429).\textsuperscript{167} Concerning the authorship of the revisions, Wells followed

\textsuperscript{166} The editorial practice of conflating the Quarto with the Folio, which began in the eighteenth century has come under increasing scrutiny since the 1970s, and although the conflated text results in ‘redundancy or confusion’ as Granville Barker wrote (in Wells et al. 1986, 1025), it continues to be the text both most often read and performed.

\textsuperscript{167} While the dating of the composition may be earlier than Taylor concluded, his dating of the revisions is supported by the neat italic booklist of twelve tomes of plays belonging to Sir John Harington made before his death in 1612. The list of the contents of each tome shows King Leire old in the first tome, K. Leir of Shakspear in the second, and K. Leyr W. Sh in the eighth. As for the date of the first composition of The Historie of King Lear, it could have been written at any time in the 1590s after the publication of Sidney’s Arcadia in 1590. Concerning the alleged sources, Montaigne was already available and as Greenblatt points out, Harsnett may have borrowed from Shakespeare (‘Shakespeare and the Exorcists’
Taylor (1983, 351-429 passim), and argued that alterations made to the Quarto text which appear in the Folio represent an act of conscious revision on Shakespeare's part (1986, 1025). Wells is confident that the 1608 Quarto ‘represents the play as Shakespeare originally wrote it’ (1986, 1025), but he is not confident of the reasons for those revisions:

This is a more obviously theatrical text. [. . ] The reasons for these variations, and their effect on the play, are to some extent matters of speculation and of individual interpretation. Certainly they streamline the play's action [. . .] and may have been dictated in whole or in part by theatrical exigencies or [the revision] may have emerged from Shakespeare's dissatisfaction with what he had first written. (1986, 1063)

It was Urkowitz's contention originally that the revisions were done carefully 'to bring the text into accord with important theatrical values – concision, contrast and surprise' (55). Nevertheless, even Taylor admits, in respect of the excision of the mock trial scene, that ‘if we are to believe that Shakespeare himself did the cutting, most of us will need to be persuaded that the omission actually improves, rather than defaces the play’ (1983, 90). William Carroll also doubts that ‘Shakespeare’s own “theatrical” revision are an improvement’ (229). Although the date and authorship of the alterations to the 1608 Quarto cannot be established beyond doubt, the critical consensus is: first that the revisions substantially affect some roles, and second that ‘[t]here is nothing opportunistic about them’ (Kerrigan 218).  

While it is true that in J. L. Halio. Ed. Critical Essays on Shakespeare’s King Lear. New York, 1996), a possibility which allows a date for the Quarto before 1603.

Kerrigan has analysed the revision to the part of the Fool and concludes that it ‘significantly alters the Fool’s personality’ (218); Urkowitz observes that the variants in the admittedly small role of Albany ‘raise crucial dramatic issues for readers and performers’
brevity is usually accepted as an index of a script being prepared for the stage, in my view, the thrust of the changes is too consistent to have been dictated by ‘theatrical exigencies’. I agree with Kerrigan that the revisions are not opportunistic, but carefully and purposefully done. It is my contention that most of the revisions that affect characterization incline towards bringing the motivations for action of the characters closer to the Corpus Hermeticum.

**Toward a Hermetic exegesis of King Lear**

I argue that many of the revisions to the Quarto are motivated by an underlying rationale sympathetic to Hermetism. Some revisions to the Quarto and their consequences have already entered the discussion above. Others, both excisions and additions, are explained below in the light of passages from the Corpus Hermeticum. In the first example I consult the French translation available in Shakespeare’s day and find an unusual word – ‘machinations’ – used by Foix de Candale in his Commentaires that suggests that Shakespeare may have been consulting Foix’s Pymander.

The first example comes from an extensive revision that occurs in Act 1 scene 2. Several lines listing a dozen predictive effects of eclipses that Edmund tells Edgar in the Quarto, beginning with ‘unnaturalness between the child and the parent’ (Q 2.139-144) are altered and given to Gloucester in the Folio. Gloucester lists eight consequences of ‘These late eclipses in the sun and moon’ (Q 2.103-109; F 1.2.101-109; (1980, 80); Michael Warren notes that about half of the 300 lines excised from the Quarto were taken between Act 3 scene 6 and Act 5 scene 3, resulting in substantial diminution in the role of Kent before his last words of grief as Lear dies (1983, 70-71).
107), several of which have already come to pass. His speech is then augmented in the Folio as follows:

This villain of mine comes under the prediction: there’s son against father. The King falls from bias of nature: there’s father against child. We have seen the best of our time. Machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves. (1.2.107-112) (my emphasis)

When Gloucester leaves the stage, Edmund mocks the idea of behaviour being determined by the stars:

This is the excellent foppery of the world: that, when we are sick in fortune – often the surfeits of our own behaviour – we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars, as if we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves and treachers by spherical predominance . . . (Q 2. 113-118; F 1.2.116-121)

The discourse in this scene from line 103 to 132 (Q); 101-130 (F) references both Book I sections [24-26] of the Corpus Hermeticum, and the detailed commentary on that Book made by Foix de Candale. In Book I, Pymander tells Hermes that as the soul journeys toward death it ascends through the seven planetary spheres yielding up, in order, the moral fault that predominates in each sphere and which it had acquired on its descent:

‘Thence the human being rushes up through the cosmic framework, at the first zone surrendering the energy of increase and decrease; at the second, evil machination, a device now inactive; at the third the illusion of longing, now inactive; at the fourth the ruler’s arrogance, now freed of excess; at the fifth unholy presumption and daring recklessness; at the sixth the evil impulses that come from wealth, now inactive; and at the seventh zone, the deceit that lies in ambush.’ (CH I [25]) (my emphasis)

Obviously Copenhaver’s translation, ‘evil machination’ was not available to Shakespeare. However, in a translation which was extant in Shakespeare’s day, Foix
de Candale prefers ‘l’entreprinse’ and translates the clause as follows: ‘A la seconde l’entreprinse des maux qui est fraude sans effect’ (83), (‘At the second, the evil undertaking, which is deceit, [becomes] ineffective’). But in his commentary Foix explains ‘l’entreprinse’ as ‘machination’ (86). Shakespeare, revising the Quarto, appears to have borrowed the unusual word from Foix’s commentary. Foix devotes several pages of discussion to this single clause, and his explanation and his language are reflected both in Gloucester’s words (‘machinations, hollowness, treachery’) and in Edmund’s monologue that follows.

In the commentary, Foix elaborates the point giving a name to each of the seven planets and specifying the fault which predominates in each sphere. For example, in the second planetary sphere, which belongs to Mercury, the ascending soul yields up the evil machinations (‘machination des maux’) such as deceit (‘fraude’) acquired in the descent, but not necessarily carried out during life. In the lines added to the Folio (1.2.107-12, see above), Gloucester is speaking specifically of the second sphere where Foix explains ‘machinations des maux . . . qui est fraude’ predominate:

A LA SECONDE ceinture ou sphere, qui est Mercure, il luy rend la disposition, preparation & inclination, qu’elle avoit reçeu par les actions, de L’ENTREPRINSE, ou machination DES MAUX, & preparation ou disposition,

169 The word ‘machination’ occurs only twice in the canon, both times in this play in passages added in the Folio. An unusual word which entered the language in 1549 (OED), it has an exact counterpart in French, ‘la machination’. The second occurrence was added to a speech by Edgar to Albany: ‘If you miscarry, / Your business of the world hath so an end / And machination ceases’ (5.1.34-36).
QUI EST FRAUDE, qu’il portoit en l’ame, SANS EFFECT (86).\(^{170}\) (my emphasis; caps in the original)

(At the second zone or sphere, which is Mercury, he yields up the disposition, preparation and inclination to evil machination acquired through his actions, and the preparation or disposition to deceit that he carries in his soul [becomes] ineffective.)

Edmund’s monologue (partly quoted above) that follows hard upon Gloucester’s exit, concurs with Foix’s position. Foix counters the idea of astral determinism by explaining that a celestial body can only give the soul the disposition but not the obligation to act: ‘De tant que l’action du corps celeste, ne peut donner à l’ame que l’inclination, ou disposition, & non la necessité de l’effèct’ (86). (‘Insofar as the action of a celestial body can only incline or predispose the soul and not compel the effect of that inclination’). Similarly, Edmund is scornful of ‘drunkards, liars, and adulterers’ who claim ‘enforc’d obedience of planetary influence’ (1.2.122-3), and of those who blame their ‘goatish disposition on the charge of a star!’ (1.2.125-6).

Indeed, Edmund mocks any form of ‘heavenly compulsion’ or ‘spherical predominance’ (1.2.120, 121) having an effect on his own behaviour, exactly as Foix explains.

In short, Foix emphasises that the stars can predispose but never compel, and Edmund concludes by repudiating all astral influences on himself and asserting total responsibility for his own evil actions, saying ‘I should have been that I am had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing’ (Q 2. 126-128; F 1.2.128-30). Although Foix does not deny planetary influence, he explains that the

\(^{170}\) Majuscules indicate words that are in the French translation of the passage in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. The surrounding words are Foix’s comments.
soul has free will to act upon or to reject it – ‘il reste à la liberté ou arbitre de l’âme de l’effectuer ou repousser’ (86) (‘it is up to the freedom or the will of the soul to carry out or to repulse it’). Action cannot occur ‘sans le consentement de l’arbitre’ (‘without the consent of the will’). Clearly Edmund believes he is exercising his own free will in choosing to do evil. However, Gloucester’s words referring to the predicted ‘machinations, hollowness, treachery’ etc. (F 1.2. 110-111) are given substance in the action within minutes.

In a speech added in the Folio, Edmund immediately appears to be acting under the influence of the second planetary sphere when he reveals his evil machinations. His scheme is to betray Edgar and deceive their father. To that end he invites Edgar to ‘retire with me to my lodging’ and advises him to ‘go arm’d’ (1.2.157, 159). His plan invites the question whether Edmund is fated to act in this way or is freely choosing to deceive. It is a moot point. One answer, offered in Book IV of the Corpus, is that when he asserted his right to the land of ‘Legitimate Edgar’ (1.2.16), motivated by his traits of envy and greed, Edmund made a choice for the material, corporeal, sensible and mortal world which ‘has been mankind’s destruction’ (CH IV [7]). Whether he was fated to make that choice by ‘the [star] demons on duty at the exact moment of birth’ as Hermes teaches in Book XVI [15] is a matter for debate. The issue is taken up in the next chapter in connection with Othello.

Other revisions similarly indicate the influence of Hermetic thought on the play. For example, Q 17, where Cordelia is depicted as suffering grief on hearing of her father’s condition, has been excised. Since grief is one of the torments or states of mind that must be purged by the ascending soul, removing the scene is consistent with a desire to portray her as having achieved perfection. Another excision affects
Lear’s characterization. It is important that at the end of his life Lear is seen to be of sound mind and fully aware of who he is, who Cordelia is, and how he has injured her. With full understanding of himself, combined with feelings of compassionate love, comes the knowledge of God which accompanies spiritual rebirth. For that reason, the madness must be shown to be temporary, brought on by the injustice of his daughters’ treatment, exacerbated by sleep deprivation, and not an indication of senility or second childhood. Hence, in the Quarto when Goneril instructs Oswald to provoke her father by treating him negligently, she justifies her order, telling him ‘Old fools are babes again’ (Q 3.19). Five lines of that speech, beginning ‘Idle old man’ (Q 3.16-20) suggesting that Lear is in a second childhood, have been excised from the Quarto, and do not appear in the Folio.171

In addition, the Hermetic description of ‘the godfearing person’ who is ‘aware of knowledge’ (CH IX [4]), provides a motive for the alterations in the characterizations of Albany and Edgar, discussed in detail by Urkowitz (80-128 passim). He observed that changes made to the Quarto, in giving the last speech to Edgar in the Folio, increased Edgar’s role in the scene while reducing Albany’s (125). In the Folio it is Edgar, not Albany, who is left alone to carry the lessons learnt into the future (5.3.299-303), exactly as we would expect of a revisionist following the Corpus IX [4]: ‘If they lay plots against him, he refers it all to knowledge, and he alone makes evil into good.’

171 Incidentally, it follows from this interpretation that the ambiguity of ‘child-changed father’ (4.6.15) is resolved in favour of a father who has been changed by his children, rather than a father who has been changed into a child.
In another scene, when Lear realises that naked Edgar is ‘the thing itself’, ‘a poor bare, forked animal’, he struggles to rid himself of his own clothes. The Quarto has ‘Off, off, you lendings! Come on, be true.’ (11. 99), which may be a scribal error, but the Folio alters the line to ‘Off, off, you lendings! **Come, unbutton here**’ (3.4.102). In Hermetic terms, in divesting himself of his clothes, Lear is symbolically and spiritually approaching self-knowledge and rebirth, because the *Corpus* reveals that in approaching god, ‘you must first rip off the tunic that you wear, the garment of ignorance, the foundation of vice, the bonds of corruption’ (*CH VII [2] [3]). Again, in nearly his last words Lear asks Kent to ‘undo this button’ (Q 24.304; F 5.3.285). In Hermetic terms he is divesting himself of the corporeal, material, mortal world and preparing his soul for the incorporeal, essential and immortal world to come.

Finally, I address two questions: what was achieved by altering Lear’s end in the Quarto? And the question that has always bedevilled the play: why did Cordelia have to die? A Hermetic reading offers answers to both.

Earlier I argued that *King Lear* traces the trajectory of Lear’s soul toward his spiritual rebirth, which is the path to *gnosis* and salvation. When, rested and refreshed, Lear is reunited with Cordelia, the last torment leaves him. He knows himself, remembers what he did, knows Cordelia has cause to harm him, and asks for her forgiveness. The doctor confirms that ‘the great rage’, which may mean his temper or his madness, has left him. When next we see him with Cordelia they are both captives, but it is clear that his grief over his daughters’ treatment of him has been replaced with the joy of being with Cordelia and the prospect of years in her company. According to Book XIII of the *Corpus*, once all the torments have ‘flown away in a flapping of wings’ (*CH XIII [9]), rebirth and apotheosis can begin. It is
well-known that the moment of Lear’s death in the Folio differs from that in the Quarto where Lear’s last words are:

And my poor fool is hanged. No, no life.
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
And thou no breath at all? O, thou wilt come no more.

Never, never, never. – Pray you, undo

This button. Thank you, sir. O, O, O, O! (Q. 24. 300-304)

From his last words in the Quarto: ‘Break, heart, I prithee break’ (Q 24. 306), it is clear that the torment of grief has returned at the moment of death. This has implications for the moment of apotheosis. Once again, it is a moot point whether having achieved perfection and apotheosis in life, one can regress. The addition to the Folio solves the problem. The line ‘Break, heart’ is given to Kent, and Lear’s last words in the Folio are:

Do you see this? Look on her. Look her lips.
Look there, look there. (5.3.286-7) He dies.

The addition of those two lines has puzzled critics, although Bradley was aware that their effect is to allow Lear to die in ‘unbearable joy’ (291), believing that his darling lives. A Hermetic hermeneutic suggests a rationale for the addition. Lear, having already achieved gnostis and apotheosis at the end of Act 4, cannot regress. Grief cannot return and he dies now, as Bradley saw, in joy. The earthly part of his soul’s journey is complete.

Book I of the Corpus teaches that rebirth and apotheosis are ‘accessible only after the death of the body’ (Copenhaver 1992, 183). But in Book XIII Hermes tells Tat: ‘noone can be saved before being born again’ ([1]). For Lear to be born again he must conquer the last torment – grief. We have seen Lear overcome his
passionate temper, watched his efforts to bring his miscreant daughters to justice; we have witnessed his growth into knowledge of himself, matched by his compassion and understanding of the true nature of Love. The difference between the timing of Lear’s death in the Quarto, when he is tormented again with grief, and in the Folio, where joy prevails, reflects the difference between the two initiatory Books, I and XIII, about the moment of apotheosis.\textsuperscript{172}

In the final minutes of the play Lear enters bearing Cordelia, \textit{pietà}-like, in his arms. Contrary to all the sources as far back as Geoffrey of Monmouth and against the demands of natural justice, Cordelia is murdered. The effect of her death on the Romantic and later critics was horror, revulsion and indignation at the injustice. However, I suggest that those sensations are experienced afterwards on reflection, and that it is the sight of Lear with Cordelia in his arms that shocks the audience and brings a surge of compassion for Lear.

In the \textit{Corpus} we read that for understanding to occur in the mind, it must be accompanied by sensation. In other words, bodily sensation must extend to the mind and soul and when that occurs full understanding and transformation of self will follow.

\textsuperscript{172} In Book I spiritual rebirth takes place after death when, ‘beyond the ogdoadic region. . . having become powers, they enter into god’ (\textit{CH I} [26]). In Book XIII rebirth and divinization can occur in this life once all the torments have been overcome: ‘Now I am not what I was before. I have been born in mind’ (\textit{CH XIII} [3]). ‘The arrival of the decad sets in order a birth of mind that expels the twelve; we have been divinized by this birth’ (\textit{CH XIII} [10]).
‘Can understanding be understood without sensation, however, in the way that one pictures images when dreaming?’ ‘It seems to me that . . . when sleepers awake, understanding and sensations are always combined’ . . . At any rate sensation is distributed to body and to soul, and, when both these parts of sensation are in harmony with one another, then there is an utterance of understanding engendered by mind.’ (CH IX [2])

To understand Lear fully, we must feel what he feels. For a minute or two, as Lamb knew, our poetic imagination is activated and we are Lear. We are in his mind. At that moment when audience and readers empathise with Lear’s suffering, when heightened understanding and compassion unite, it is possible that we ourselves may experience a spiritual transformation.

Shakespeare and his fellow playwrights were very aware of the effect a play could have on members of the audience. His contemporary Thomas Dekker admired the playwright ‘who can move the hearts of his audience, who can make even the ignorant among them “applaud what their charm’d soul scarce understands . . . infusing them with raptures’” (in Kirsch 2015, 26). Four hundred years later, Richard McCoy comments on the transformative power he finds in Shakespeare’s plays which ‘can still inspire feelings akin to communion’ (83), and cites Coleridge who saw dramatic illusion as a ‘means of access to a higher truth’ (80).

A theatre-goer who in the last moments of King Lear were to experience a rush of compassion akin to the heightened awareness that precedes gnosis could potentially take a step on the path to self-knowledge and spiritual regeneration. For the studious reader, King Lear has the power to complement Book XIII of the Corpus

173 From the Prologue to If It Be Not Good (1612).
Hermeticum that ‘Lese-Mysterium or reading-mystery’ whose purpose is to teach the initiate (Copenhaver 1992, 182).

Conclusion

King Lear contains evidence highly suggestive of Shakespeare’s close knowledge of the two initiatory books of the Corpus Hermeticum as well as of Book IX, and of the translation and commentary by Foix de Candale. Shakespeare’s knowledge of the Hermetic texts has two implications for this study. First, I argue that the play’s function is to dramatize one man’s journey along the Hermetic path to salvation and illustrate for audience and reader how choosing to follow the doctrine, or not, can change one’s life. Second, I find that a Hermetic hermeneutic, particularly of Book XIII, appears to reveal the well-spring of Shakespeare’s deep understanding of the human mind. The comprehensive zodiac of ‘torments of matter’ which are traits of personality, dispositions, or habits of mind, some of which all human beings possess to a greater or lesser degree, has provided the architect / playwright with the motivators that prompt his dramatic creations to act as they do, and which shape their relationships.

In the next chapter, I will discuss how, in Othello, Shakespeare colours his characters from the same palette, and invites debate on issues concerning the avoidance of one’s destiny, on whether regression from perfection is possible, on free will and choice, and on the origin of evil.
Fig. 4 Title page of first Quarto of *The Tragedy of Othello The Moor of Venice* bearing the emblem of Hermes’ caduceus gripped by two hands, published in 1622. It was printed by Nicholas Okes for Thomas Walkley.
Chapter Five

Othello: the path to self-knowledge reversed

In this chapter I suggest that Othello may be understood as a riposte to King Lear. After noting the source and context, I compare Othello to King Lear and I argue that the Moor’s transformation from a ‘perfect soul’ (1.2.31) to an ‘ignorant’ dolt (5.2.160) is a reversal of Lear's ascending trajectory from ignorance of self to gnosis.

I argue that in creating Othello, Shakespeare draws on the same ‘torments’ or traits that characterize Lear, and that he equips Iago with the same array of ‘torments’ that beset the wicked in King Lear. I put the case that in dramatizing Cinthio's story, Shakespeare has drawn attention to the then topical theological debate on predestination as opposed to free will, presenting it in Hermetic terms as the struggle between a destiny determined by the stars and a mind that can do as it wishes. Interpreted in that Hermetic light, Iago is revealed as the personification of an astral demon whose mission is to ensure that Othello does not thwart his destiny, namely, to die by his own hand. I argue that Iago accomplishes his mission by deliberately and systematically planting demonic concepts in Othello’s mind that affect his reason and judgment, thereby manipulating his will and causing him to act as Iago wishes.

I conclude that the whole tragic episode involving the presumption of adultery, as well as murder and suicide raises both the epistemological problem of knowing one’s own and another’s mind, as well as the question of ultimate responsibility for a crime perpetrated by one compelled to act by destiny.
Othello: the source of the play

It is well-known that Shakespeare found the story of Othello in De Gli Hecatommithi by Giovanni Battista Giraldi, known as Cinthio. But it was Alfred Hart who dated ‘The Moor of Venice’ to 1601-2 following the visit of the Moorish Ambassador from the King of Barbary to the court of Elizabeth in 1600 (in Honigmann 1997, 2 n.1). A translation of John Leo's A Geographical History of Africa was printed that same year, where Londoners could read that Berbers were:

most honest people. . . and destitute of all fraud and guile; not only imbracing all simplicitie and truth, but also practising the same throughout the whole course of their lives. . . No nation in the world is so subject unto jealouzie; for they will rather leese their lives, then put up any disgrace in the behalfe of their women. (in Bullough VII, 209)

Shakespeare's choice of a Moor to personify a temperate man of ‘a constant, loving, noble nature’ (2.1.287) who, made suspicious by his trusted Ensign, is consumed with jealous rage and murders his wife, owes something to both those events. That the Moor in question is a mercenary soldier renowned for his prowess in the field accounts for two other aspects of Othello's character that contribute to the sad outcome of this play – namely, that he takes his orders from above without being required to understand the reason for them, and that he places absolute trust in the men closest to him.

The Tragedy of Othello was performed at Whitehall before King James in November 1604; King Lear was performed for the king in December 1606. However, while the visit of the Moorish ambassador suggests a likely date for the writing of Othello after 1601 and before November 1604, my exegesis suggests that
King Lear is the anterior text.\textsuperscript{174} When the plays were first printed in Quarto, both carried an old printer’s emblem of the caduceus of Hermes held by two hands gripped in a friendly handshake on the title page.\textsuperscript{175} The implication is that both plays are somehow connected to Hermes. However, the emblem is only one of the similarities to be observed from reading these plays, which in performance may appear to have little in common.\textsuperscript{176}

Othello and King Lear compared and contrasted

Both plays underwent substantial revision before their publication in the First Folio in 1623; in each case both the purpose and the putative author of the revisions have attracted comment. The current critical consensus is that in each case the revisions were probably authorial.\textsuperscript{177} In the previous chapter, I argued that many of the revisions to King Lear enhance the affinity of the play with Hermetic thought;

\textsuperscript{174} Traditionally dated after the publication of Harsnett’s A Declaration of Egregious Popishe Impostures in 1603, the Quarto King Lear could have been written at any time after the publication of Sidney’s Arcadia in 1590. As Greenblatt points out, Harsnett may have borrowed from Shakespeare (see page 160 n.166).

\textsuperscript{175} There is an enigmatic line in Act 3 that may be an oblique reference to this emblem. Othello says to Desdemona: ‘The hearts of old gave hands / But our new heraldry is hands, not hearts’ (3.4.46-7). A heart behind clasped hands was the emblem used on some Familist works printed by Plantin.

\textsuperscript{176} Whereas King Lear is played out en plein air where violence rages and the tragedy has universal reverberations, Othello is an inward-looking domestic tragedy of abuse taking place within a curtained bed in a locked room.

\textsuperscript{177} For the provenance of King Lear see previous chapter. Honigmann in Arden 3rd edition of Othello, argues that Q and F derive from two different autograph manuscripts but quotes Greg who was impressed by the ‘Shakespearian quality of both versions’ (1997, 356-7).
however, not all additions to *Othello* had that effect. Nevertheless, Honigmann compares ‘the strengthening of Edgar in the Folio version at the end of *King Lear*’ with the strengthening of Emilia in *Othello* and argues that the ‘two different tragedies were revised for a similar purpose (viz. to permit a humane “morality” to reassert itself at the close)’ (1982, 159). Honigmann sees both Edgar and Emilia as contributing to the restoration of a moral world. Edgar to Edmund and Emilia to Iago both effect this restoration by speaking Truth, which the *Corpus Hermeticum* teaches ‘puts deceit to flight’ (XIII [9]).

I argue that the endings of both plays affect audiences and readers in a way that marries understanding with strong feeling and brings about that knowledge of self which Hermes teaches brings us closer to the god within and to our own spiritual rebirth. Others have experienced that too, without necessarily connecting the effect with Hermetic doctrine. Kim Hall for example asserts that ‘*Othello* appeals as much to the passions as to the mind’ (23) and comments on the ‘peculiar sense of being involved in the action’ (221). Marvin Rosenberg observes that ‘from the beginning, men wept at *Othello’*, and he asks: ‘How did the playwright do it? What was his artistic design?’ (1961, 1993, 209). A Hermetic exegesis sheds light on Shakespeare’s artistry by demonstrating how in Hermetic terms even a soul that has reached perfection and gnosis may be susceptible to the seeds of doubt carefully and deliberately planted in the mind by a demon (*CH* IX [3]). In dramatic terms, a ‘perfect soul’ (1.2.31), a noble man of honour and glorious reputation is deceived into

178 It must be acknowledged that the lengthy addition to Emilia’s speech on sexual equality (4.3.85-102) has no obvious direct connection with the *Hermetica*. 
committing murder, believing that he is acting honourably. But it is not enough to commit the act. The demon is not satisfied until Othello commits an act of such enormity that once he knows the truth and understands what he has done, distraught with grief, he cannot live with the knowledge. ‘What you know, you know’ (5.2.300) are virtually Iago’s last words. It is the knowledge more than the act that precipitates Othello’s destiny, namely death by his own hand. We wept with Lear and for him too. The wonder is that we weep for Othello.

In both plays, the line between Christian and pagan is blurred. Traditional critics like Roy Battenhouse stress the Christianness of Othello (94), while Irving Ribner even finds a biblical analogy with Desdemona as ‘a reflection of Christ’ whose death may ‘spring man’s redemption’ (112). Another critical Christian view posits that Othello ‘takes upon himself the full office of God’, while Iago is Satanic and Desdemona symbolizes ‘truth, goodness and beauty made flesh’ (Bryant 142, 145). Even more recent critics such as Stanley Cavell hold, like Norman Rabkin, that ‘Othello is the most Christian of [Shakespeare’s] tragic heroes’ (129). On the other hand, Dennis Taylor sees Othello as a contradiction, one who at the end ‘plays the Catholic hero striking the Turk, or the Protestant hero striking the anti-Christ’, even while acknowledging that ‘the person he is striking is himself’ (23). Julia Lupton also argues that Othello is divided, but for her the division is between ‘Islamic and pagan origins’ and she references Daniel Boyarin who argues that Othello is ‘unambiguously a Muslim’ (186, n. 21). Marjorie Garber sees Desdemona and Iago as ‘good angel’ and ‘bad angel’ engaged in a psychomachic struggle for Othello’s soul (593), while a Hermetic reading suggests that Iago wants Othello’s reasonable mind as well as his incorporeal soul.
It is true that Desdemona’s language is recognizably Christian; for example, denying Othello’s accusations that she is a strumpet she does so in the strongest terms she knows: ‘No, as I am a Christian.’ (4.2.84); ‘No, as I shall be saved’ (4.2.88), and in her cry, ‘O heaven, forgive us!’ (4.2.90). Robert West concludes of Othello that ‘[i]t affirms no transcendent heaven and hell, but it does affirm a morality agreeable to Christianity’ (342). The morality of love, truth and compassion is one that Christianity shares with Hermetism. Othello admittedly knows something of Christian belief as, about to murder his wife, the man who may be a convert to Christianity urges her to pray, as he ‘would not kill thy unprepared spirit’ (5.2.32). On the other hand, he speaks of prophetic magic sewn into a handkerchief by an Egyptian sibyl using the silk of sacred worms, given to him by his mother on her deathbed. It is the handkerchief which Emilia has stolen from Desdemona, and which ‘to lose’ or give’ away were such perdition / As nothing else could match’ (3.4.69-70). The reference to a pagan sibyl carries an allusion to the pagan Hermes Trismegistus. Towards his end, in an amalgam of Christian and pagan, Othello agonizes over his fate at the day of judgment when he will meet his ‘ill-starred’ wife (5.2.270). Filled now with remorse he wants to be roasted in sulphur and washed ‘in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!’ (5.2.277). His agony recalls for the audience Iago’s plan to plant a ‘dangerous conceit’ (3.3.329) that will ‘Burn like the

179 There is no such detail in Cinthio's source. The prophecy is validated by the ensuing events.

180 The pagan Hermes was associated with the prophetic sibyls. The image of Hermes Trismegistus depicted on the floor of the Cathedral of Siena is surrounded by ten sibyls.
mines of sulphur’ (3.3.332), and also resonates with Hermes’ explanation to Asclepius of the punishment reserved for the irreverent and godless soul:

‘Do you not see what tortures the irreverent soul suffers, howling and shrieking,
I'm on fire, I'm burning. I don't know what to say or do. I'm eaten up, poor wretch, by the evils that possess me’. (CH X [20])

While Othello appears to the Christian audience and reader as a former Muslim mercenary with links to Africa, fighting now for a Christian master, a Hermetic reading recognizes a once ‘perfect soul’ (1.2.31) whose will is perverted by a demonic being into making choices that reduce him to a godless, irreverent and material man capable of murder.

In both King Lear and Othello the protagonist loses touch with reality for a time and experiences a sort of madness. On the one hand, although Lear’s exhausted mind causes him to hallucinate and imagine bringing Goneril to justice before him, as we saw, reason never quite deserts him, and he is fully restored after a long and healing sleep (Q 21; F 4.6). On the other hand, Othello, at first sceptical that Desdemona should play him false with Cassio, reasonably demands to ‘see before I doubt’ (3.3.193). But when Iago obligingly provides him with a reason to doubt, firing his imagination with a luridly erotic dream of his own invention (3.3.416-428), Othello loses consciousness and falls to the ground in a trance or petit mal seizure (SD 4.1. 43). Afterwards, Othello’s mind is much changed for the worse; his impaired mind distorts reality, reason and judgement desert him as Iago intended and predicted, and he enters the material realm, governed by his senses. The result is that he cannot recognize Desdemona’s truth, but only the sensation of her smell ‘so sweet that the sense aches’ (4.2.70), the feel of her ‘skin as smooth as monumental alabaster’ (5.2.5), and the taste of her ‘balmy breath’ (5.2.16). The great love that
began as a meeting of minds (1.3.253, 1.3.266), where they each repudiated the body, has become for Othello entirely sensual. In Hermetic terms, Othello’s loss of reason reduces him to the level of the beasts who, unable to reason, are governed by their senses.

In King Lear, as we saw, the wicked characters enacted ideas listed in Book IX of the Corpus Hermeticum. Those concepts – adultery, murder, assaults on one’s father, the irreverent act of suicide, and strangling – which entered the minds of Goneril, Regan and Edmund, were, as Hermes taught, sown in the mind by some putative, unspecified ‘demon that steals into the mind to sow the seed of its own energy’ (CH IX [3]). In Othello, by putting Iago centre stage Shakespeare gives a form and identity to such a demon. Book XVI explains in some detail how the demonic beings work to ‘reshape our souls to their own ends’ ([14]). ‘Hermes has called this government “fate”’ (CH XVI [16]) and, as we will see, the account in Book XVI fits Iago’s modus operandi perfectly, as the demon Iago becomes, in a Hermetic exegesis, the personification and governor of Othello’s fate.

From a Hermetic perspective, Othello’s path is the reverse of Lear’s. Where Lear journeys from ignorance of self to knowledge, from intemperate rage to self-control, from grief to joy, Othello passes from ‘perfect’ to ‘ignorant’, from self-control to apoplectic rage, from joy to grief. Joel Altman observes that within Othello itself ‘there is an obsession from the very beginning of the play with figures of

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An alteration to the Quarto supports this reading. Desdemona’s words implying sensual pleasure: ‘My heart’s subdued / Even to the utmost pleasure of my lord’ (1.3.252-3), have been removed from the Quarto and replaced in the Folio with ‘Even to the very quality of my lord’.
reversal’ (135). He identifies ‘this psychological topsy-turvydom’ with the rhetorical figure of *hysteron proteron* meaning that the natural order of events is reversed and argues that the device ‘figures Othello at large and also in several particulars’ (133-4). Altman claims that *Othello* is a play where ‘under the sway of passion, effects precede causes (rationally construed)’, and every kind of improbability leads to ‘the phenomenon of preposterous conclusions’ (132-133). The improbabilities have attracted criticism since Thomas Rymer in 1693; it is the speed with which Othello is convinced of Desdemona’s guilt in the absence of evidence, and denied the opportunity to question the principals and get to the truth of the matter, that is most puzzling.\(^{182}\) As we will see, in the last part of this chapter, who or what Iago is and how and why he does what he does are questions whose answers may lie in the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

Altman’s cogent case for reversals within *Othello* lends weight to my argument that Othello’s transformation reverses Lear’s, and supports my observation that both plays draw on the same parts of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. In Book XIII where Hermes reveals the secret of spiritual regeneration to Tat, he lists twelve ‘irrational torments of matter’ ([7]) which the soul accreted ‘in its fall through the

\(^{182}\) Rymer claimed ‘certainly never was any Play fraught like this . . . with improbabilities’; he was particularly exasperated by the characterisation and called the play a fable (in Hadfield 46). The entire action after arrival in Cyprus takes ‘some thirty-three hours’ (Ridley 1976, lxviii). The so-called ‘double time scheme’, first observed by Christopher North in 1849, condenses and intensifies the Iago / Othello / Desdemona action, while simultaneously allowing time for Roderigo to grow tired of plying Iago with jewels to buy Desdemona’s affection, for news of the Turkish defeat to travel back to Venice, and for Lodovico and Gratiano to travel from Venice to Cyprus with the news that the Governor is to be replaced.
zodiac’ (Copenhaver 1992, 187), and which must be purged if one aspires to perfect one’s soul. All twelve torments belong to characters in both King Lear and Othello. As we saw in Chapter Four, the torments that beset Lear on his transformative ascent to gnosis are overcome by knowledge of self, self-control and joy. These are the very qualities that Othello of the ‘perfect soul’ possesses at the outset only to lose as he regresses. In King Lear, the wicked receive poetic justice, while in Othello it is the innocent, the naïf and the gullible who suffer injustice.

In King Lear, Cordelia’s Truth and Christian forgiveness open the king to joy and salvation, while in Othello Desdemona’s forgiveness comes too late and Emilia’s truth leads to his grief and destruction. In King Lear Shakespeare shares eight torments amongst Goneril, Regan and Edmund, while in Othello, the same cluster, with the addition of jealousy, provides Iago with the constellation of torments with which to destroy his victims, as we shall see.183

That Othello knows himself and his worth to the state is established when he is first on stage and, advised by Iago to go indoors because Brabantio is after him, he stands his ground confidently, saying:

Not I, I must be found.
My parts, my title and my perfect soul
Shall manifest me rightly. (1.2.30-2)

His confident assertion resonates with the words of Hermes who teaches that the soul which has reached perfection is a soul which has knowledge of itself, because ‘[t]he

183 They are lust, greed, deceit, envy, treachery, anger, recklessness and malice (CH XIII [7]). Jealousy is subsumed in the Hermetic text under ‘envy’ which Hermes explains ‘forms below in the souls of people who do not possess mind’ (CH IV [3]).
Moreschini points out however, that because the perfect ‘reach perfection on account of a free decision of their own’, the ‘certainty in individual free-will’ is not absolute, and ‘destiny is still a problem’ for them (16). A Hermetic exegesis therefore suggests that Othello in Act One is a man who, throughout his life, has used his mind and reason to direct his will to virtuous acts that led to knowledge of self and perfection of soul. With respect to Lear, I argued that the revisions to the Quarto at the end of the play imply that once the king’s torments are purged, they cease to afflict. However, in Othello, Shakespeare invites us to consider whether torments once purged in this life can return. Can knowledge of self regress to ignorance? By the last Act, Othello, the general who once knew what and who he was, no longer knows himself. Emilia condemns him as a ‘dolt, / As ignorant as dirt!’ (5.2.159-160). When Lodovico comes looking for him, Othello refers to himself in the past, asking if he wants ‘he that was Othello’ (5.2.281). Othello, the man who had fashioned his own life, bewildered now and ‘perplexed in the extreme’ (5.2.344), realises too late that he has been ‘wrought’ (5.2.343), by Iago’s villainy.

From the first scene, we see that Othello not only knows himself, but that he stands high in the opinion of others, renowned for self-control. The evidence is in the action when Brabantio, stirred up by Roderigo on Iago’s orders, demands Othello be arrested for enchanting and stealing his daughter. Othello refuses to be drawn into a fight, and offers to answer the charge peaceably. Later, when a mutiny breaks out on Cyprus, also instigated by Iago, Othello leaves his nuptial bed to quell the riot

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The word ‘virtue’ here seems to refer to an innate quality or nature.
with his authority. When his efforts to get to the source of the ‘barbarous brawl’ (2.3.168) are thwarted by Iago’s feigned innocence, and by the wounded Montano’s plea of self-defence, Othello admits to feeling anger: ‘My blood begins my safer guides to rule / And passion, having my best judgment collied / Assays to lead the way’ (2.3.201-3), but his feelings are still well under his control.

However, the poisonous seeds of jealousy planted by Iago have begun to grow, and his ‘tranquil mind’ is disturbed (3.3.351) and ‘eaten up with passion’ (3.3.394). By Act 4, Othello is so ‘shaken by the bodily passions’ (CH X [8]) that he strikes Desdemona. Lodovico, who obviously knew Othello’s reputation for self-control, is astonished by the change he sees in him, and cries:

Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate
Call all in all sufficient? This the nature
Whom passion could not shake? (4.1.265-6)

The words echo a phrase from the Corpus Hermeticum:

For the soul, when it is blind and discerns none of the things that are nor their nature nor the good, is shaken by the bodily passions, and the wretched thing becomes – in ignorance of itself – a slave to vile and monstrous bodies, bearing the body like a burden, not ruling but being ruled. (CH X [8])

This is the path of Othello’s transformation from a man whose emotions are controlled by reason to one shaken to destruction by intemperate passion, unaware

\[185\] Copenhaver translates the passage from the Greek as above: ‘For the soul . . . is shaken by the bodily passions’ (CH X [8]). Nock and Festugière give ‘l’âme . . . subit les secousses violentes des passions corporelles’ (I, 117). In translating the same passage, Foix says of the soul: ‘elle brunche aux passions du corps’ (X [8], 359). In the absence of a dictionary definition, I conjecture that ‘brunche’ is a dialect word for ‘shake’. 
that his mind has been poisoned and that he is ‘not ruling but being ruled’ (CH X [8]) by Iago. It is in this state of mind that he is completely taken in by Iago's duplicity in the bloody duel between Roderigo and Cassio, and praises ‘brave Iago, honest and just’ (5.1.31). Allowing himself no reasonable doubt of Desdemona’s infidelity and believing Cassio to be dead, he resolves to end Desdemona’s life. His words as he leaves reveal his thoughts: ‘Thy bed, lust-stained, shall with lust’s blood be spotted’ (5.1.36-7). When next we see Othello he is approaching Desdemona’s bed, and his words are a continuation of that thought:

   It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul!
   Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars,
   It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood
   Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow . . . (5.2. 1-4)

Different editors have suggested various interpretations of the word ‘cause’. Noone has connected Othello’s two speeches uttered in sequence but in separate scenes. But the Corpus Hermeticum is adamant ‘that desire [lust] is the cause of death’ (CH I [18]). We conclude that Othello’s belief in Desdemona’s adultery is, to his deluded mind, sufficient cause for the act he now resolves to take, namely, to end her life.

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186 Ridley suggests that the cause is Desdemona's 'unchastity', but goes on to say that 'what precisely Othello means is far from clear' (1976, 177, n.1); Honigmann suggests the cause may be chastity, purity or 'the good of the world in general' (1997, 305 n.1); Bate and Rassmussen give 'offence / reason for action' (2009, 117 n.1); Hall suggests 'cause of justice, the offense itself which must be corrected in the name of justice'; this seems to imply that the cause is adultery (2007, 150, n.1).
In *King Lear*, it was Gloucester, the material man, for whom the adulterous lust that produced Edmund ‘Cost him his eyes’ (Q 24.169; F 5.3.164). In *Othello*, Shakespeare takes pains to establish that Othello’s love for Desdemona is not tainted by lust. From his own words to the Signoria, theirs is a true marriage of minds ‘as soul to soul affordeth’ (1.3.115). That the love between him and Desdemona was a meeting of minds is confirmed by Desdemona who tells the Signoria, ‘I saw Othello’s visage in his mind’ (1.3.253). When adding his voice to that of Desdemona before the Senators, Othello assures them that he will not be tempted to put personal pleasure before his duty to the State, ‘to please the palate of my appetite’ (1.3.263). He assures them that he is of an age when youthful lust has died, and his attraction is to Desdemona’s mind (1.3.263-6). Harold Bloom claims that ‘nothing that the Moorish captain-general says or does reflects an authentic lust for Desdemona’ and doubts that the marriage was consummated (457). However, a Hermetic interpretation of the absence of lust would lead one to conclude, not that the marriage was not consummated, but that their love is true and lasting. When the two are reunited after their separate voyages to Cyprus, we hear Othello’s happiness as he greets her with ‘O my soul's joy’ (2.1.182), and see for ourselves that their love is not a mere lust of the blood but a true marriage of minds and souls:

Amen to that, sweet powers
I cannot speak enough of this content,
It stops me here, it is too much of joy. (2.1.193-5)

And yet, within a day, bereft of reason by the passion of ‘a jealousy so strong’ practised ‘upon his peace and quiet / Even to madness’ (2.1. 299; 308-9) that judgment cannot withstand it, he turns to the senses and demands the ‘ocular proof’ (3.3.363). After barely two days on Cyprus, the same man is racked with remorse, grief and suffering too great for him to allow himself to live. One line reveals his
torture as he understands with horror what he has done and how he has been deceived:
‘O Desdemon! dead, Desdemon. Dead! O, O!’ (5.2.279). How does it happen that, within such a short space of time, a man of honour and valour, a man loving and beloved, should become so obsessed with sensual ideas of adultery and lust that he is deluded into believing that the only honourable choice before him is to kill the thing he loves? In Book IX, *On understanding and sensation*, Hermes’ words to Asclepius suggest that the answer lies with Othello's understanding:187

> ‘For sensation to have a share in understanding is human, but as I said before, not every person enjoys understanding. One will be a material, another an essential person. As I mentioned, material people surrounded by vice get the seed of their understanding from the demons, but god saves those who in their essence are surrounded by good.’ (CH IX [5])

Unlike King Lear who was surrounded by good people who loved and respected him (Kent, his Fool, Edgar and Cordelia), Othello is alone. Isolated by race, colour, culture, and position and possibly also by creed, his only confidant is Iago whose *raison d'être* is to destroy him. We believe Iago when he tells us in soliloquy that Othello is deceived by appearances and ‘thinks men honest that but seem to be so’ (1.3.398-9). We believe it because Othello is so totally convinced of the honesty of the man who has admitted to us that he is not really who he appears to be: ‘I am not what I am’ (1.1.64). It is precisely that trusting nature which Iago exploits as he plants the seeds of adultery and murder by strangulation (4.1.204), which are nourished by Othello’s feelings of jealousy, disgust, revenge, betrayal and dishonour that map the

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187 It seems significant that despite his reputation, knowledge and experience of the Turk, Othello is not invited to be part of the decision which the Senators reach through reasoned discussion. They deduce by logic that the Turk is bound for Cyprus not Rhodes (‘this cannot be, / By no assay of reason’ (1.3.18-19)), and issue orders to the general accordingly.
path to Desdemona's death and his own self-destruction. A Hermetic reading recognizes Iago as a ‘demonic being’ that steals into Othello’s mind to sow ‘the seed’ from which Othello conceives the ideas of murder and suicide (*CH* XIII [3]).

Kim Hall, collating a variety of texts which provide cultural contexts for *Othello*, describes the interest in ‘reason’s ability to control passion’ as a ‘phenomenon of the early modern period’ (315), and traces contemporary discussions of passion to ‘humoral and complexion theory’ (318). These theories associate a person’s inner or spiritual state with the physical appearance; they are, as she says, ‘thoroughly intertwined with ideas of gender, nation, and ethnicity’, and they assume that passions or emotions are feminine while reason and intellect are masculine (318). While these theories may explain the growth of compassionate feeling in King Lear as the growth of his feminine side, they do not explain Othello’s loss of control, nor the subjugation of his reason and judgment accompanied by overwhelming passion. Earlier we saw that the Moor’s susceptibility to jealous passion was consistent with the ethnic stereotype probably held by the audience, but there is nothing effeminate in Othello’s torment. While these theories attempt to connect human differences in generalized terms to observable behaviours and physical appearance, the Hermetic texts provide a model that attributes individual human differences to the mind, rather than to physical qualities such as gender and ethnicity. As Hermes says:

‘At any rate, <sensation> is distributed to body and to soul, and, when both these parts of sensation are in harmony with one another, there is an utterance of understanding, engendered by mind. Mind conceives every mental product: both the good, when mind receives seeds from god, as well as the contrary kind, when the seeds come from some demonic being.’ (*CH* IX [2] [3])
Iago is well aware of his role as the metaphorical gardener that is implied here as we will see from his conversation with Roderigo (1.3.320-333). He also knows that ‘we have reason to cool our raging motions’ (1.3. 330-331). In Book IX of the Corpus Hermeticum we read that ‘mind is so powerful [that] when it has been guided by reason up to a point, it has the means to get [to] the truth’. ([10]). Iago knows that if he is to succeed in his mission to destroy Othello, and prevent him from discovering the truth, namely that Desdemona is chaste, he must deprive Othello of reason by putting the Moor ‘At least into a jealousy so strong / That judgment cannot cure’ (2.1. 298-300). Hall cites a possible source of the danger of failing to master the ‘troublesome passions’ like jealousy in L’Académie Françoise by Pierre de la Primaudaye:

> the soul which being filled with infinite perturbations [. . .] is carried away with inconstancy and uncertainty into a stream of troublesome passions, which, if they be not cut off and mastered by reason, draw a man into utter destruction. (325)

The passage occurs in the chapter Of the diseases and passions of the body and soul and appears to be a commentary on the Corpus Hermeticum which also has something apposite to say about this particular disease of the soul:

> A great disease of the soul is godlessness, and next is mere opinion; from them follow all evils and nothing good [3] . . . But those human souls that do not have mind as a guide are affected in the same way as souls of animals without reason. For angers and longings [passions and desires] are irrational vices that exceed all limits [4]. (CH XII)

Copenhaver’s comment on the word ‘opinion’– the next ‘disease of the soul’ – (see above), adds an interesting dimension to the discussion. Translated from the Greek doxa, the word means both ‘the “reputation” one has in the opinion of others – hence, “glory”’, and also ‘a state of mind between ignorance and knowledge’ (1992, 158),
that is, doubt. Shakespeare unites these two meanings in the characterisation of Othello as a man of glorious reputation brought down by doubt. Where Lear's ascent to *gnosis* was achieved through physical suffering as he discards his torments, Othello's descent to ignorance is marked by the psychological torture he suffers in his mind through doubt.

Paul Jorgensen sees ‘know’ and ‘think’ and their cognates in the play as ‘leit motifs’, noting how the word ‘think’ supplants the word ‘know’ in the mouths of both Othello and Iago after the first scene of the third act (1964, 265). However, after observing that Othello is the least thoughtful of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, ‘not intellectually equipped to enlarge by his own sense of tragedy upon man’s plight in general’, Jorgensen comments that Shakespeare ‘alters the quality and function of thought’ in *Othello* (1964, 265). In fact, the alteration is from the meditative hero like Hamlet and Macbeth who *thinks about*, to Othello who *thinks that*, in the sense of being unsure of what he knows.

Iago uses the word in this sense when he claims as motive for his hatred of Othello that ‘it is thought abroad that ’twixt my sheets / He has done my office’ (1.3.386-7). Othello uses it when, on the rack, his peace of mind gone (3.3.351), not knowing what to think, he lurches between opposed beliefs echoed in the sickening see-saw rhythm of his words:


\[188\] Copenhaver directs us to Plato's *Symposium* where Socrates tells Agathon that there is a mean between wisdom and ignorance which is ‘right opinion’ [202A] (1992, 158).
By the world,
I think my wife be honest, and think she is not,
I think that thou art just, and think thou art not. (3.3.386)

Othello requires evidence from his senses before he believes. He asks for ‘the ocular proof’ (3.3.363) before demanding ‘a living reason she’s disloyal’ (3.3.412). But instead of a reason, as we saw, Iago plants a sexually arousing scene in Othello’s mind’s eye that swamps reason and which, for the credulous Othello, removes all doubt. When Iago swears ‘I am your own forever’ (3.3.482), the real meaning is reversed. From that point, Othello and his will are Iago’s forever. 189

Free will and choice, destiny and the origin of evil

I am arguing that the thrust of the action of the play is towards Iago’s domination of Othello’s reasoning mind and subversion of his will in order to fulfil his destiny which is to die by his own hand. In an early scene Iago manipulates the young Roderigo, as he will later manipulate Othello, to make the choice that will destroy him. Having told Roderigo that the scales of life are balanced between reason and sensuality, he derides Roderigo’s obsessive love as ‘a lust of the blood and a permission of the will’ (1.3.349). Hermes teaches that lust can be purged by ‘perseverance, the power opposed to lust’ (CH XIII [9]), but Iago does not advise Roderigo to summon his strength and choose to resist. He provokes him instead into countering his virtue with his will.

Rolf Soellner claims that ‘an interest in the manipulation of the will’ was in the air at the time Shakespeare wrote Othello (268). In fact, throughout the late

189 Honigmann agrees with this reading and compares the relationship to that of Faustus, who sold his soul, with Mephistopheles (1997, 240, n.482).
sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the extent to which men and women were free to make choices that would affect the fate of their immortal souls was profoundly controversial in England and the Netherlands. Not only was the Reformed Church divided from the Catholic Church on this issue, the Reformed Church itself was divided over whether Man had free will. At one extreme, followers of Calvin were taught that God had decided before Adam who was destined for salvation and who for damnation. Moreover, Calvinists were taught that not only did Christ’s sacrifice redeem none but the elect, but that men and women were powerless to affect their destiny. For Calvinists, God was ‘the author of Adam and Eve’s fault and hence of all human sin’ (MacCulloch 375). Foix de Candale, a Catholic bishop, challenged this doctrine, calling it a blasphemy to suggest that God was responsible for evil (643). At the other extreme, Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) of the Netherlands, believed that the fate of men and women was not predestined, but that they were entirely free to choose to act in ways that would ensure their salvation (Dictionary 107).

Between these extremes lay the teachings of the Catholic Church and the Lutherans. In mediaeval times, the Catholic Church had reconciled St Augustine’s

190 In a margin note to his commentary on Chapter XIV section 7, Foix writes: ‘Calvin en ses institutions blaspheme de rendre Dieu aucteur de mal’ (643).

191 In his treatise, On Free Will, Augustine argues that Man erred by necessity and through ignorance because as a consequence of inheriting Adam’s sin, he ‘has not the freedom of will to do what he ought’. Man should humbly confess and ask for God’s help (Battenhouse 219).
teaching with Origen’s doctrine of human free will. Furthermore, at the Council of Trent (1545-63) the Catholic Church formally rejected the Protestant doctrine of predestination that renders mankind powerless but acknowledged that justification is a transformation that ‘requires man’s cooperation with God’, or in other words they made a place for Man’s having free will (Dictionary 914). Because Arminius’ views were compatible with the Catholic teaching on free will, his followers were suspected of sympathising with the Catholic Spanish. In England, which had long supported the Netherlands in their resistance to Spanish domination, Arminian doctrine on free will was viewed as treasonous as well as heretical.

Even more extreme than Arminius, followers of Pelagius denied the doctrine of original sin and held that men and women are entirely free to choose good by virtue of their God-given nature and without the need for God’s grace (Dictionary 1248). Battenhouse recognizes Pelagianism in Iago’s theory of free will as he expounds it to Roderigo (380-384). When Iago tells Roderigo ‘tis in ourselves that we are thus, or thus’ (1.3.320-333) he is effectively echoing Hermes’ advice to Tat

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192 Origen (c.185-c.254) a native of Alexandria who received a Christian education, ‘a biblical critic, exegete, theologian and spiritual writer’, was ‘well-versed in the works of the Middle Platonists and studied pagan philosophy and literature’ (Dictionary 1193). He was writing at the same time as the Corpus Hermeticum was being written and, as far as can be known, since no original works have survived, he was a mystic who taught that ‘all spirits were created equal, but through the exercise of their free will they developed in hierarchical order and some fell into sin’ (Dictionary 1194).

193 Pelagius was a late 4th early 5th century British theologian whose ideas were supported by Bishop Nestor.
that ‘Mind can do as it wishes’ \((CH \ XII \ [8])\).\(^{194}\) Arminius himself was accused of the heresy of Pelagianism which in this respect is clearly identical to Hermes’ teaching. The dispute about free will was formally resolved in favour of Calvinism and predestination at the Synod of Dordt in 1618-1619. Consequently, when the first Quarto of \textit{Othello} was published in 1622, it was in the context of a continuing, heated, divisive debate about free will, with serious political consequences.\(^{195}\)

Nevertheless, the widespread theological debate over the relative merits of predestination and free will did not preclude a general belief in a sympathetic correspondence between the macrocosmos and the microcosmos. In Garth Fowden’s words, astral influences on the character and lives of men and women were ‘part of the common coin of late pagan thought’ (117). They are implicit for example in Book I \([24]\) and \([25]\) of the \textit{Corpus Hermeticum} and explicit in Book XVI, but they are not unique to the Hermetic texts. Belief in astral influences on terrestrial affairs was also commonplace in Shakespeare’s time.\(^{196}\) In \textit{King Lear} Shakespeare has Kent explain the difference between Cordelia and her sisters saying, ‘The stars above us govern

\(^{194}\) As Salaman et al. put it: ‘Since it rules all things and is the soul of God, \textit{Nous} is able to do just as it wills’ \((XII \ [8])\).

\(^{195}\) The issue continued to divide the Church of England, Charles I and Archbishop Laud favouring the Arminian position on free will. Wesleyan Methodism which emerged in the eighteenth century was sympathetic to Arminianism.

\(^{196}\) The evidence that these beliefs persist into the third millennium is in newspapers and magazines which regularly publish horoscopes making predictions based on people’s zodiac sign at birth.
our conditions’ (Q 17. 34). Similarly, Othello at the very moment that he becomes aware of the enormity of the act he has just committed cries: ‘My wife, my wife! What wife? I have no wife’ (5.2.96) and looks for ‘a huge eclipse / Of sun and moon, and that th’ affrighted globe / Should yawn at alteration’ (5.2.98-100). Moments later, he addresses Desdemona, whose own fate was prophesied in her birth name (the unfortunate one), as ‘ill-starred wench’ (5.2.270). Earlier, in doubt and despair over Iago’s lying hints of Desdemona’s infidelity, Othello too believed that his unavoidable destiny – to be cuckolded as he thinks – was conferred at birth:

'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death –
Even then this forked plague is fated to us
When we do quicken. (3.3.279-281)

Fowden, referring his readers to the Hermetica – the Asclepius and Book XVI of the Corpus Hermeticum – explains cosmic sympathy as follows:

The creative and beneficent powers of God flow through the intelligible and sensible realms to the sun, which is the demiurge around which revolve the eight spheres of the fixed stars, the planets and the earth. From these spheres depend the daemons, and from the daemons Man who is the microcosm of creation . . . The divine powers that bind this closely-knit structure together are sometimes called ‘energies’. . . These energies derive from the sun, the planets and the stars and they operate on all bodies (77).

The daemons . . . are simply personifications of these sympathetic energies – they may be either good or bad, but they are emanations, possessing neither body nor soul. Needless to say, their effect on human beings is all the more insidious for that. They penetrate to the very core of the body and attempt to

197 The line does not appear in the Folio.

198 Fowden draws attention to CH XVI [10-16] and XII [21]: ‘If they are entirely energies, my child, by whom are they energized?’ (78 n.16).
subject the whole man to their will. This, expressed figuratively, is the crucial doctrine of fate. (78)

Whereas Books IV and XII of the *Corpus Hermeticum* stressed that men with mind are free to direct their will to choose, Book XVI introduces the complication of ‘demons on duty at the exact moment of birth, arrayed under each of the stars [who] take possession of each of us as we come into being and receive a soul’ (CH XVI [15]). These astral demons ‘follow the orders of a particular star and are good and evil according to their natures’ (CH XVI [13]). They ‘govern this earthly government. Hermes has called this government “fate”’ (CH XVI [16]). It is my contention that Shakespeare has imagined Iago as just such a soulless astral demon made corporeal, resulting in the half-man, half-devil that Othello recognizes (5.2.398). Samuel Taylor Coleridge famously called Iago ‘a motiveless malignity’ (in Hall, 221-222). A Hermetic reading agrees. Iago has no motive to harm Othello; he is simply a malign demon, made corporeal for the purpose, following the orders of Othello’s zodiac star. In other words, he is the personification of Othello’s fate.

Astrological determinism and theological determinism have much in common. Orthodox Protestants in Shakespeare’s audience might argue that Othello’s unavoidable fate was ordained by a sovereign and infallible God, while others might be inclined to see Othello’s destiny as controlled by the demon energized by the zodiac star that predominated at his birth. Either way, the pagan Stoic idea of fate ineluctable is referred to openly in the play.

The Hermetic discourse *On the mind*, found in Book XII, offers those possessed of mind and reason a way to escape their fate. Hermes explains that ‘all people are subject to fate . . . And what is fated affects all people. Yet those who possess reason, whom (as we have said) mind commands, are not affected as others
are’ (*CH* XII [6] [7]). Book IV reiterates that although not all men possess mind (*CH IV* [3]), those who do, have the freedom of will that enables them to choose between the essential, divine, incorporeal, intelligible realm inhabited by god and the material, mortal, corporeal, sensible realm that leads to ‘mankind’s destruction’ (*CH IV* [6], [7]. In short, essential man can control destiny with mind, as Hermes explains to his son Tat:

> ‘This being so, there is nothing dimensional among intellectual beings, and thus, since mind rules all and is the soul of god, mind can do as it wishes’. (*CH* XII [8])

Man can choose the intelligible path to knowledge or ‘virtue of soul’ (*CH X* [9]) or the sensible path to ignorance that is ‘vice of soul’ (*CH X* [9]). If he chooses the former, fate cannot touch him. However, as Stobaeus warns, when Man is no longer directed by mind or *nous*, he is no longer free, because ‘having “chosen the material world”, he (Man) is driven by the forces which work in the material world’ (*SH* VIII §7) (in Scott III, 395). As Moreschini explains, ‘Fatal destiny rules only carnal man’ (236). In short, destiny has no hold over the soul of essential man so long as his mind and reason direct his will to choose the path to virtue. But as we see Iago manipulates Othello’s mind, deliberately disturbing his reason and judgment so that the choice to commit the act that will incur the dreadful outcome is driven by emotions and not by reason.

Shakespeare is careful to establish at the outset that Othello has the qualities of an ‘essential’ man – knowledge of self, reason and mind. When Iago urges Othello to avoid a confrontation with (as he thinks) Brabantio, Othello stands his ground knowing himself to have a ‘perfect soul’ (1.2.31). Such a soul, having achieved perfection in this life, indicates a mind that has attained *gnosis*, and should
be proof against fate. The term ‘perfect’ is used several times in the Hermetic texts to describe those with mind. For example, in The mixing bowl or the monad expounded by Lazzarelli in the Crater Hermetis, after explaining that god shared reason but not mind with all men, Hermes tells Tat that god invited all men to immerse themselves in the mixing bowl with the result that:

‘All those who heeded the proclamation and immersed themselves in mind participated in knowledge and became perfect people because they received mind.’ (CH IV [4])

Foix also uses the word ‘perfect’ in his translation of the passage:

‘Parquoy tous ceux qui ont ecouté le cri, & se sont plongez en la pensée, on teste faicts participants de cognoissance, & ayant receu la pensée, on este hommes parfaicts.’ (153)

According to Hermetic doctrine, the perfect ‘reach perfection on account of a free decision of their own’ (Moreschini 16), but the motion of the cosmos plays a part (CH IX [5]) and for that reason ‘destiny is a problem for perfects’ (Moreschini 16). Destiny is a problem because, acting on the orders of the stars, the demons on duty at the exact moment of birth take possession of our souls, but not our reason; we all have reason, which for a very few is enlightened by ‘a single ray of god’ ‘shining upon him in his rational part’ that will nullify the effect of the demons and avert our destiny (CH XVI [16]). ‘All others the demons carry off as spoils, both souls and bodies, since they are fond of the demons. . .’ (CH XVI [16]) – Othello’s fate, to be ‘ensnared. . . soul and body’ (5.2.299) by the man he liked and trusted seems to be a reflection of Asclepius’ words.

The original Hermetic manuscript is unintelligible and problematic at this point. Copenhaver suggests: ‘{And it is this love that} misleads and is misled.’ (XVI [16]). But in the translation available in Shakespeare’s day, Foix writes ‘C’est la
raison qui deçoit ou est decevé & non l’amour’ (728). (‘It is reason which misleads or is misled, not love’). Foix’s translation may shed some light on Shakespeare’s decision to have Iago deceive Othello’s reason by feeding him misinformation, although it is arguable that Othello’s love for his Ensign also affected his judgment. Either translation sheds light on the events of the play.

To return to the point – even though ‘Mind rules destiny’ (Moreschini 237) and can set ‘a human soul above fate’ (XII [9]), destiny may still control the mortal body. However, in his commentary Foix asserts something different: ‘destiny not only rules bodies . . . it also has the greatest power over the soul’, which is subordinated to it (511-516 passim), and that while the body may be subjected to destiny, the soul of the noble man is not (525). Only when it commits the sin of ‘despising and refusing the aid of the holy Mind’ is the soul subject to destiny (Moreschini 237). This interpretation sheds light on Iago’s plot to overcome and incapacitate Othello’s mind, compromise his reason and judgment and thereby ensnare his soul. To this end he penetrates Othello’s mind, ‘practising upon his peace and quiet / Even to madness’ (2.1.308-9) and pours ‘pestilence into his ear’ (2.3.351) with the result that Othello’s will is no longer directed by his mind, which has ceased to function reasonably, but is at the mercy of overpowering sensations. Othello’s mind no longer does as he wishes. Othello’s mind does as Iago wishes.

Othello’s despairing cry, ‘Who can control his fate?’ (5.2. 263) implies that he feels powerless to avert the destiny that awaits him. Nevertheless, natural justice for Desdemona’s cruel and undeserved death demands that Othello be punished in this world and damned in the next. Tat raises a pertinent question when he asks Hermes:
'If it is absolutely fated for some individual to commit adultery or sacrilege or do some other evil [such as murder], how is such a person still to be punished [ ] when he has acted under compulsion of fate?’ (CH XII [5]).

Tat’s question, like Othello’s, raises not only the issue of responsibility for evil, but the issue of the origin of evil itself. The debate is further complicated by Pymander’s telling Hermes in Book I that while he himself, Mind, is present to the reverent ([22]), he gives way to ‘the avenging demon’ who arms the evil person ‘the better for lawless deeds so that greater vengeance may befall him’ ([23]). And in Book XII Hermes tells Tat that fate decides that a man deserves punishment and ‘compels him to commit the crime in order that he may incur the suffering’ (Scott II, 345). According to this, the reason he deserves punishment and has rendered his body and soul vulnerable to destiny is that ‘he has rejected God’s offering of nous’ or mind (Scott II, 345). As Hermes tells Tat, ‘the evils for which we are responsible, who choose them instead of good things, are no responsibility of gods’ (CH IV [8]). In other words, mankind is the author of evil, not an astral demon acting under orders, not God, but Man or in this case, Othello.

Once again the point is moot. Can it be argued that Othello’s responsibility for Desdemona’s murder is mitigated on the grounds of diminished responsibility? Did Othello, blinded by his trust in his Ensign, actively choose to reject mind or was he passively deprived of its reason and judgment by Iago? Was Othello complicit in his destiny? If Iago is human then he must bear some responsibility for choosing to manipulate Othello’s will as he did. If Iago is an astral demon whose mission was to compel Othello to commit a crime so heinous that, being the honourable man that he was, he would suffer sufficiently to die by his own hand, then Othello was powerless to choose and cannot be blamed.
In his last words to Iago, Othello demands to know “Why [that demi-devil] hath thus ensnared my soul and body?” (5.2.299). His question is clear proof that Othello knows exactly what has happened to him, although perplexed as to the reason. It is not the act per se, but the knowledge that his lawless act was neither justified nor honourable that occasions Othello’s violent grief and despair that leads him to kill himself. Iago’s answer ‘What you know, you know’ (5.2.300), and his refusal to speak another word is the clearest indication that corporeal Iago exists merely in order to see that Othello fulfils his destiny. In effect, Iago exists for no other purpose. As he tells us, he is not what he is.

_Iago: the mind reader_

'I am not what I am' (1.1.64). What is he?

In the previous section I addressed the matter of Iago’s motivation and concluded that he has no motivation to harm but is acting under orders of Othello’s birth star. In this section I address his methods and find that he alternates his demon self, whom he reveals in soliloquy as he plans his strategy, with the human self who carries out the plans. I argue that Shakespeare has modelled the human Iago on Edmund and endowed him with the same list of evil ‘torments of matter’ that beset the three wicked personae in _King Lear_.

Despite the title of the play, Iago, described in the cast list as ‘a Villain’, is the dominant character in _Othello_. He has a repertoire of devilish torments which he calls on in soliloquy and which explain his actions. I am suggesting that his

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199 Although the word ‘devil’ is frequently used, the word ‘demi-devil’ occurs in only one other play in the whole canon. Prospero refers to Caliban as a demi-devil (5.1.272).
torments match those listed in Book XIII of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Principal amongst them is malice, manifest as hatred, which he justifies as anger with Othello and envy of Cassio, but which has no real motive. Next are deceit and treachery which, as we shall see, manifest in the same tactics that Edmund used: feigned reluctance, artful cleverness, fabrication and manipulation of evidence, and outrageous lies. Iago exploits Roderigo’s lust for Desdemona and enriches himself from the young man’s pocket, for greed. He exploits Othello’s love for Desdemona and his sense of honour by taunting him with the image of her lustful behaviour and arousing his jealousy. At the end of the play he becomes angry with Emilia who exposes his lies, and recklessly stabs her. One way or another, Shakespeare incorporates every one of the ‘irrational torments’ into this play, as I argue he did in *King Lear*. But Iago’s signature trait is deceit; he sets the duplicitous tone when he swears by the two-faced god, Janus (1.2.33) and casts a miasma of doubt over the whole play.

Iago has perplexed literary critics who place him on a continuum where at one extreme he is a decent man, passed over for promotion, cuckolded and rightfully resentful, who took understandable if excessive revenge, while at the other he is a comic Vice figure from a Morality play, Satan, or a devil personified. Tucker Brooke calls him a man of ‘honesty and innate kindliness’ (48), ‘a man of warm, sympathetic qualities’ (49). Marvin Rosenberg cannot agree that Iago is basically a decent man, but he also defends Iago against critics like Robert Heilman who ‘finds
serpent and devil references that identify Iago “with the devil himself” (145 n.8).\textsuperscript{200} Leah Scragg reminds us that Iago is ‘traditionally motiveless’ (53), and Coleridge calls him ‘a being next to devil only not quite devil’ (1849, 262). E. E. Stoll calls him ‘a devil in the flesh’ (231), while for Bloom he is ‘not the Christian devil or a parody thereof, but rather a free artist of himself’ (464). Nevertheless, the word ‘devil’ occurs more often in \textit{Othello} than in any other play by Shakespeare. Bernard Spivack sees Iago as the successor to the allegorical Vice figure (57), whom he resembles through making the audience complicit in his plans, but M. R. Ridley rejected the description of him as ‘an incarnate fiend’, and calls him ‘the master of destiny’ (1976, lxi). Ridley’s opinion resonates with my Hermetic interpretation of Iago as a soulless demon made corporeal acting under orders of Othello’s zodiac star to ensure that, though already ‘perfect’, he does not avert his astral destiny.\textsuperscript{201} Despite these differences, the critical consensus is that Iago is a being unique in Shakespeare and generally acknowledged as the worst of his villains.

On his own admission Iago is not what he appears to be. Who or what is he? For the Hermetist he is twofold, being both wicked demon acting under orders of Othello’s birth star and, temporarily, a human being. He is Othello's fate, his own astral demon clothed in flesh, given some qualities that mark him as human, such as


\textsuperscript{201}More recent critics have seen the contemporary relevance of issues in the play to do with ‘gender, race, sexuality and status’ (Hadfield 1), and Robert Matz in 1999 explored the significance of male on male relationships in \textit{Othello} in a paper entitled ‘Slander, Renaissance Discourses of Sodomy and \textit{Othello}’. 
age (28), a wife (Emilia), a Spanish name, and a place alongside the general in battle. Apart from those details, the human Iago, unlike Othello, has ‘no biographical self’, as Paul Cefalu points out (285) and, I might add, no foreseeable future after uttering his final word.

It is as a demon that he takes the audience into his confidence in soliloquy, making us complicit, horrified watchers of his evil as he reveals the torments at his disposal and his *modus operandi* as he plants the poisonous seeds of doubt in the mind of Othello. At the end of the play when he has achieved Othello's destiny, namely his ruination by his own hand, Iago refuses all explanation, suffers no remorse and closes his mouth forever (5.2.300).

As a human being, Iago is Othello's ensign, Emilia's husband, Desdemona's protector, Roderigo's go-between and Cassio's comrade-in-arms. He has a reputation for honesty and trustworthiness that protects him for most of the play, but his actions belie his reputation, as audience and readers know. When the action begins we learn that he has already told Roderigo that he harbours the very human quality of hate for Othello (1.1.5-6). Next he casts around for a reason to explain that hate, and a human motive to justify what he has been sent to do, namely to effect Othello's destiny. Altman, who identified Iago’s practice of reversing the logic of events in this way as the rhetorical figure *hysteron proteron*, claims it is characteristic of Iago to ‘assert a conviction, then rapidly adduce evidence to show cause’ (134).

The most egregious example occurs in soliloquy, when sneering at Roderigo’s gullibility, he reiterates his hatred for the Moor and follows this with a vague hint at adultery as motive for that hate: ‘And it is thought abroad that 'twixt
my sheets / He's done my office’ (1.3.386-7), before admitting that it may not be true but it ‘Will do as if for surety’ (1.3.389) (my emphasis). Iago's decision to treat an improbable possibility as certainty foreshadows the terrible doubts and imagined reality of adultery that he plants in Othello's mind. Iago’s words highlight the central problem of blame in Othello in words that echo a passage from the Corpus Hermeticum. When Tat asks how one who has acted under compulsion of fate is to be punished (XII [5]), Hermes answers:

‘As mind quells anger and longing [passion and desire], it acts differently in each individual, and one must understand that some of these are men who possess reason and that others are without it. (XII [6])

‘One who has reason will not be affected because he has committed adultery, my child, but as if he had done so, nor will he be affected because he has murdered but as if he had murdered.’ (XII [7]) (emphasis in original)

The act on which the entire tragedy of Othello depends did not take place. The torment of jealous rage which attacks Othello's reasonable mind depends on the act ‘as if’ it had taken place. The word ‘adultery’ is never used, and the act takes place only in Othello's mind where the demon Iago has planted it.

How does Iago achieve his ends? If Iago is a soulless energy, such as Fowden described above, made corporeal, then his modus operandi will be to insinuate himself into Othello's mind and disable his reason so that he is able to control Othello's will. Iago knows exactly how to do this, and he practises on Roderigo. He explains to Roderigo his understanding of how humans can use their will to make choices that shape their lives. Roderigo, planning to drown himself on learning that Desdemona, whom he loves obsessively, has married Othello, tells Iago, ‘I confess it is my shame to be so fond, but it is not in my virtue to amend it’ (1.3.319). Iago responds with a long exposition on the will which, as we saw, would have been
particularly topical at the times the play was performed and published. His response disabuses Roderigo of the notion that ‘virtue’ is an unchangeable quality conferred at birth, and tells him that it can be changed, because it is ‘in ourselves that we are thus, or thus’ (1.3.320). But after telling the young man that it is up to us to master our destiny using our minds to direct our wills to make the virtuous choice, he plays on Roderigo’s weakness of mind to ensure that he chooses the path that leads to his downfall.

Having advised Roderigo that ‘the power and corrigible authority of this lies / in our wills’ (1.3.326-7), Iago reminds him that mankind has ‘reason to cool our raging motions’ (1.3.331), to balance sensuality and protect us from the ‘preposterous conclusions’ to which the ‘blood and baseness of our natures’ would otherwise drive us (1.3.328-9). To make his point, Iago uses the analogy of a garden: ‘Our bodies are gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners’ (1.3.321-2). He explains to Roderigo that ‘if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce’, let the garden grow ‘sterile with idleness’, or ‘manured with industry’ the choice is entirely ‘in our wills’ (1.3.322-3; 325; 327). But he neglects to say who chooses which plants to nurture, which to neglect. Pico della Mirandola also uses this analogy in his famed Oration where he says the seeds come from God. There Pico echoes Hermes’ words that Man can choose the path to divinity and immortality or the lesser route to mortality:

Thou [. . .] art the molder and maker of thyself; thou mayst sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer. Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures which are brutes. Thou canst grow upward from thy soul’s reason into the higher natures which are divine.

[. . .] It is given to him to have that which he chooses and to be that which he wills [. . .]. At man's birth the Father placed in him every sort of seed and sprouts of every kind of life. The seeds that each man cultivates will grow and bear their fruit in him. If he cultivates [. . .] the seeds of sensation, he will grow into a
brute. If rational, he will come out a heavenly animal. If intellectual, he will be an angel, and a son of God. (5)

Iago does not advise Roderigo how to choose which herbs to cultivate; he restricts his choices to the mortal or material world of sensation as if he knows that material choice ‘has been mankind's destruction’ (*CH IV* [7]). A passage in Book IV, referred to earlier, appears to provide a source for this idea. Hermes tells Tat that ‘God shared reason among all people [. . .] but not mind’, and that the people who did not receive mind ‘have sensations much like those of unreasoning animals . . . they divert their attention to the pleasures and appetites of their bodies’ (*CH IV* [4] [5]).

Roderigo is one of those with reason but without mind. A Hermetic reading interprets Roderigo’s fate as assured when he confesses that he is unable to find the will to resist his passion for Desdemona. His obsessive love or lust for Desdemona is the indication of his choice for the material or corporeal realm that ‘has been mankind’s destruction’ (*CH IV* [7]). In following Iago's self-serving advice to put money in his pocket and not give up hope of enjoying Desdemona, Roderigo seals his own fate. The moment he begins to reason that Iago’s ‘words and performances are no kin together’ (4.2.185), Iago smooth-talks him, sets him up to kill, or be killed by, Cassio and eventually delivers the fatal, murderous blow, in the dark, himself (SD 5.1. 61).

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202 Book XII says something different: Hermes tells Tat that Mind quells ‘anger and longing’, but that ‘it acts differently in each individual, and one must understand that some of these are men who possess reason and that others are without it’ (*CH XII* [6]).
How is it that the men whom Iago dupes all call him honest until the fifth act, while reader and audience can see his duplicity from the beginning? Audience and reader have the advantage of setting the deeds of the human Iago against the words of the demon Iago which in soliloquy he confides to us alone. Earlier I argued that Othello’s descending trajectory reverses Lear’s Hermetic ascent. Now I examine parallels between the human Edmund and the demon Iago who borrows Edmund's human tactics to conceal his evil and deceive his dupes.

Iago builds one man's trust in him by feigning reluctance to speak ill of another. When Othello asks him about the fracas which the audience knows was engineered by Iago, he claims not to know (2.3.175), and when pressed he names Cassio, at the same time protesting: ‘I had rather have this tongue cut from my mouth / Than it should do offence to Michael Cassio’ (2.3. 217-8). Later Iago's disingenuous reluctance to doubt Cassio’s honesty by weighing his words ‘before thou giv’st them breath’ (3.3.122) completely hoodwinks Othello who knows the ploy but dismisses it because:

. . . such things in a false disloyal knave
   Are tricks of custom, but in a man that’s just
   They’re close delations, working from the heart,
   That passion cannot rule. (3.3.124-7)

In fabricating evidence to mislead, Iago is without equal. Possibly the best example of his artful cleverness is his response to Othello’s reasonable demand to see evidence of Desdemona’s infidelity before he doubts her honesty (3.3.193). Where Gloucester demanded of Edmund ‘auricular assurance’ (1.2.93), Othello, increasingly tormented, threatens Iago with ‘deeds to make heaven weep’ (3.3.374) if he cannot give Othello the ‘ocular proof’ (3.3.363). Though ‘eaten up with passion’ (3.3.394), at this stage Othello still retains his reason. Iago twists the knife and asks Othello if
he would like to turn voyeur and see his wife in the act. He fills Othello’s mind with images of goats, monkeys, wolves on heat. Maliciously, protesting he is driven to it ‘by foolish honesty and love’ (3.3.415), he caps the performance with the most outrageous lie that he himself has lain with Cassio and heard him talking in his sleep about Desdemona. It takes only the mention of the strawberry spotted handkerchief for Othello’s reason to be usurped by passionate jealous rage demanding Cassio’s death. When next the two are together Iago drips more inflammatory pestilence into Othello’s imagining mind: ‘kiss in private’ (4.1.2), ‘naked in bed’ (4.1.3), ‘handkerchief’ (4.1.10), and slanders Cassio, conjuring up each baseless detail by asking ‘What if . . .?’ (4.1.24).

In humanizing Iago, Shakespeare endows him with the tactics that Edmund employed, but in characterizing Iago as demon, Shakespeare references concepts attributed to ‘some demonic being’ (CH IX [3]), namely ‘adultaires, meurtres, impietez, estranglements’ (Foix 292) (acts of adultery, murder, the godless act or suicide, strangulation), as well as drawing on the ‘irrational torments of matter’ which are listed in Book XIII [7]). Hermes’ explanation of how ideas enter the mind through the agency of a demon who steals into the mind ‘to sow the seed of its own energy’ (CH IX [3]) resonates strongly with Iago’s explanation uttered in soliloquy of the effect on Othello’s mind of the concepts that he is sowing:

The Moor already changes with my poison:
Dangerous conceits are in their nature poisons
Which at the first are scarce found to distaste
But with a little art upon the blood
Burn like the mines of sulphur. (3.3. 328-332)

In King Lear the concepts are worked almost invisibly into the fabric of the play. But I suggest that, in Othello when we hear Iago planting the idea of murder by
strangulation (4.1.204) in Othello’s mind, we witness ‘the avenging demon’ arming his victim the better for the ‘lawless deeds so that the greater vengeance may befall him’ as Pymander told Hermes in Book I [23]). In fact, Othello does not follow Iago’s advice to the letter, but chooses to smother Desdemona instead. Nevertheless, the method of murder that Iago suggests appears indebted to Foix’s translation. In Hermetic terms, the astral demon Iago is acting under orders to compel the material and irreverent Othello to commit the crime and incur the suffering that he will deserve as a consequence of the act. Pursuing this argument, it becomes clear that Othello’s destiny, ‘the preposterous conclusion’, was to die by his own hand when the full knowledge of what he has done destroys his will to live. The demon Iago has accomplished his mission by manipulating Othello to reject the guidance of the mind or nous given him by God.

When Iago is operating as a demon, the ‘irrational torments of matter’ – malice greed, envy, lust – are all part of his repertoire as well as the deceit and treachery which he shares with Edmund. He reveals them in soliloquy, taking us into his confidence as he steps out of his human role and speaks directly to the audience in the manner of Vice, as Spivack observed in the Allegory of Evil. Malice, greed and envy he reveals in his first soliloquy. Ill-will towards the Moor is Iago’s overt motivation throughout: ‘I hate the Moor’ (1.3.385) he tells us, but for no very

203 In Cinthio, the Ensign’s bizarre plan is to beat Desdemona to death with a stocking filled with sand, before disguising the murder by having the ceiling collapse upon her (Bullough VII, 250).

204 This is the answer to Tat’s objection to punishment for a crime which fate compelled one to commit. It is explained at length by Scott (II, 344-5).
convincing reason. Similarly extorting money from Roderigo seems to be motivated more by amusement than greed, done ‘for my sport and profit’ (1.3.385). And desire to get Cassio's place does not seem to arise from bitter envy. In fact, Iago is curiously passionless, and in an aside casts himself as a spider who will delight to ‘ensnare as great a fly as Cassio . . . to strip you out of your lieutenancy’ (2.1.168-9; 171-2). But when Othello, deceived by his machinations, promotes him to lieutenant, it is clear that Iago never intended to desist, as he continues with his plans for Othello’s and Cassio’s ruin. Lust and the idea of adultery are Iago’s concern in his second soliloquy as he reveals his plan to slander Cassio to Othello, alleging lustful behaviour, ‘I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip, / Abuse him to the Moor in the rank garb –’ (2.1.303-4) and adds the gratuitous comment that Cassio has also seduced his wife Emilia. Once again his topsy-turvy logic is at work. He soon reveals that he plans to entrap Cassio by getting him drunk. How he plans to deceive and betray Othello, he reveals to us in the soliloquies that follow.

Iago's duplicity defines him. Not only does he incite riots more than once, he changes sides and either re-enters on the other side or appears as the innocent, newly arrived on the scene. In the second brawl incited between Roderigo and Cassio, both of whom it would suit him to have dead, he comes from behind and wounds Cassio in the leg (SD 5.1. 26), then finishes off Roderigo, all the while shouting for help against the treacherous villains who ‘Kill men i’th’ dark’ (5.1.63). A minute later, he is blaming Bianca for the fracas and calling for a chair out of feigned concern for Cassio (5.1.96).

Iago's treachery is unparalleled. He exploits Roderigo's obsessive love, strips him of every penny, mocks him and then murders him. Cassio whom he claims to resent because he has the lieutenancy, is slandered and nearly killed in Iago’s
mission to ruin Othello. Desdemona he claims to love because she will contribute to
Othello’s ruin, but he betrays her trust in him in order to complete Othello’s
destruction. After winning Cassio’s trust and advising him to beg Desdemona to
plead with Othello for his reinstatement, which we are well aware is a piece of the
plan to entrap and destroy Othello, Iago boldly challenges the audience to call him
villain, ‘When this advice I give is free and honest’ (2.3.332). He is both smug and
brazen. It is a masterly touch to have him simultaneously admit and deny his
wickedness while claiming to counsel Cassio ‘Directly to his good’ (2.3.345). And
lest there be any doubt as to his status as demon he tells us:

When devils will the blackest sins put on
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows
As I do now. (2.3.346-8)

Delighting in the most cunning of all his deceptions where he dupes Othello into
misinterpreting what he is witnessing between Cassio and Desdemona, he tells us:

As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad.
And his unbookish jealousy must construe
Poor Cassio's smiles, gestures and light behaviour
Quite in the wrong. (4.1.101-4)

But ‘truth puts deceit to flight’ (CH XIII [9]). When confronted with Emilia's truth –
‘You told a lie, an odious, damned lie! / Upon my soul, a lie, a wicked lie!’ (5.2.176-
7) – Iago loses his customary sang froid. From his angry response to the threatened
exposure of his deceit, and his reckless efforts to silence Emilia, we are left in no
doubt that Iago fears she will prevent him from completing his mission. When Emilia
refuses to be silenced and finds the courage to expose Iago’s villainy, she reveals the
truth about how the handkerchief was lost. Faced with truth, Iago reacts in a very
human way with anger and stabs his defenceless wife (SD 5.2.232). The reckless act
completes the array of ‘irrational torments of matter’ that define him in his human guise.

When Othello realises he has been deceived by a demon, he wants to know why. ‘Demand that demi-devil / Why he hath ensnared my soul and body?’ (5.2.298-9). What motive could Iago have? Paul Cefalu argues that Iago’s ‘hyperbolic mind reading’ is the ‘cause of his seemingly motiveless evil’ (266). To understand Iago’s uncanny ability to interpret and access the thoughts of Othello, Roderigo, Desdemona and the others, Cefalu explores Iago’s ‘Theory of Mind’.\(^{205}\) He argues for an integration of cognitive literary criticism with the psychoanalytic, explaining that while the former explains how characters think, the latter is better equipped to explain why. After postulating Iago’s ‘constitutional discontentedness’ as a motive for envy and cruelty, Cefalu concludes that ‘Iago doesn’t clearly know why he hates Othello’ (278), and searches for reasons in his unconscious mind. That Othello does not know why the ‘demi-devil’ has ensnared him indicates that he cannot read Iago’s mind, although he once suspected that Iago ‘hadst shut up in thy brain / Some horrible conceit’ which he begged Iago to reveal: ‘If thou dost love me, / Show me thy thought’ (3.3.117-9).

Othello dies convinced that the destiny that he believed he had overcome by surviving battle is no longer his to control:

\[
\text{with this little arm and this good sword} \\
\text{I have made my way through more impediments}
\]

\(^{205}\) A phrase borrowed from philosophy and psychology to describe awareness of the existence of other minds and our knowledge of how to read other people’s minds.
Than twenty times your stop: but O vain boast,
Who can control his fate? 'Tis not so now. (5.2. 260-63)

Calvinist and pagan agree that Man is powerless to affect the destiny that God ordained, or the fate determined by the stars at birth. The Hermetic answer to Othello’s feeling that events are out of his control is that only Mind can overcome fate because ‘Nous is able to do just as it wills’ (CH XII [8]). But in this play Shakespeare invites us to consider the question of a man whose perfected soul should have ensured his salvation but whose mind proved susceptible to manipulation by a malevolent force. Where does the ultimate responsibility for the murder of Desdemona and the death of Othello lie?

Jane Adamson has argued that the ‘central critical questions’ culminate in the last scene (11), where audience and reader are forced to judge Othello. She contrasts the opposed views of well-known critics such as Coleridge and Bradley who see Othello as a vulnerable but noble hero to be pitied as the victim of a man of ‘hellish cunning’, with those of others, like F.R. Leavis, who see him as the egotistical culpable agent of a devil (12). A Hermetic hermeneutic reconciles these opposed views, showing that Iago, the ‘demi-devil’ is both human being and wicked demon. Othello is both the pitiable victim of the human Iago and the culpable agent / dupe of the demon Iago.

**Conclusion**

Honigmann observed that in Shakespeare's work, ‘many different dramatic purposes are carried forward at any given moment’ (1998, 162). Clearly there is no single right

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206 Translation by Salaman et al.
way of reading *Othello* and every reader brings his or her own experience to the text. A Hermetic hermeneutic suggests that in *Othello*, Shakespeare is exploring how an astral demon works upon the mind, reason and will by planting concepts that activate strong feelings, which if recognized and controlled by the reasoning mind have no harmful consequence, but which if allowed to distort reason and understanding, can overpower mind and lead to disaster. In addition, the play raises the question of responsibility for action and consequent retribution for one who has acted under compulsion of fate as posed by Tat in Book XII [5].

The separation of mind from reason which is so clearly explained in Book IV of the *Corpus Hermeticum* allows Shakespeare to create in Othello a man whose reason was compromised though his mind remained sane, in contrast to Lear, a man whose mind retained reason even *in extremis*. Lear had slowly to learn to know himself, while Othello rapidly lost touch with the man he once knew himself to be. In the next chapter I turn to *The Tempest* where I will argue Shakespeare introduces the Hermetic concept of death of the body as change and dissolution, and addresses the final problem of knowing reality.
Chapter Six

The Tempest: the path to immortality

I cried ‘Is it a shade or man I see?
And he replied: ‘No, not a man. Not now.
I was once though.’

Dante to Virgil, (Divina Commedia, Book I, Canto I, 75-77)

In this chapter I argue that The Tempest may be understood at three levels: the literal, the allegorical and the metaphysical. But the discourse of each is not discrete; words are ambiguous, meanings dissolve across porous boundaries and Hermetic thought colours the play. A literal interpretation grounds the play in history that was not only of interest to the French court but also connects with Alfonso and Ferdinand, King of Naples his son, who was initiated into the Hermetic paideia by the poet Lodovico Lazzarelli (see Chapter One). I will argue that both the allegorical and the metaphysical layers are suffused with Hermetic thought. As an alchemical allegory the structure becomes a trope for the purifying Hermetic ascent, while a metaphysical interpretation links the play to the discussion of truth and reality in Chapter XV (the Stobaean fragment) of Foix’s translation.

These hermeneutic levels are reflected in criticism of the play which tends to be split between materialist critics such as Walter Cohen who sees the play literally in terms of ‘the racist and imperialist bases of English nationalism’ (401) and who search the historic record for a literal storm and shipwreck; critics who support an alchemical reading, exemplified by Peggy Muñoz Simonds (1997, 538-570 passim); and a metaphysical or spiritual interpretation exemplified by Colin Still in Shakespeare’s Mystery Play, and G. Wilson Knight in Myth and Miracle.
I will argue that at the level of metaphor, the alchemical structure of *The Tempest*, which Simonds noted, serves as a trope for the Hermetic progress of the soul from turmoil to perfection, and allegorizes the violent tempest as part of that process. I also argue that at the metaphysical or anagogical level this most beautiful and mysterious play may be read as an exploration of the life of the soul after the death of the body, and that Shakespeare has met the challenge of dramatizing reality – in the Platonic sense of life outside the cave – as an illusion of the stage. A number of critics have observed the elusive, ethereal, dreamlike qualities of the play (Don C Allen; Colin Still; D. G. James 1967). These traits come, I suggest, from the characters’ hovering between the corporeal life of the body in the (unreal) world we know as reality, and the life of the incorporeal yet strangely embodied and conscious souls in the world of the island that is simultaneously an illusion of the stage and the illusory ‘real’ world of sprites and shades that we may encounter after death. I contend that *The Tempest*, when interpreted as a play about the life of the immortal soul after the death of the body, not only takes a position on the contemporary theological debate but is also open to the Platonic / Hermetic idea of the nature of reality itself. In this interpretation Prospero plays the part of hierophant initiating Ferdinand into the mysteries. Finally, I suggest that by uniting Naples and Milan, the play effects the reconciliation of the Italian city states lost to France by Henri IV’s

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207 Plato proposed that the people we see as inhabiting the real material, corporeal and mortal world are but shadows or illusions in the cave. It is when we leave the cave to enter the spiritual incorporeal world of the immortals that we find reality or truth. The ultimate Truth, some say the only Truth, is God. Stobaeus explains this in the chapter added to the *Corpus Hermeticum* as Book XV.
great uncle François I, making it appropriate entertainment for the French court of Henri IV and his second wife Marie de Medici of the famed Italian dynasty.

To put the arguments in context I begin with a word about known references to *The Tempest* in the seventeenth century, before discussing the literal, and the metaphorical readings. I preface the metaphysical interpretation with a brief outline of the theological debate about the soul and finally turn to Prospero. He, I argue, represents a man who, through long years of contemplative study has ascended the Hermetic path and attained god-like status such as that to which Ferdinand of Navarre aspired. For much of the play Prospero behaves like a mortal man with god-like powers, a Hermetic Magus, while in the Epilogue he reveals himself as a Catholic Christian who begs our ‘indulgence’ to set him free, presumably from limbo. In short, a Hermetic hermeneutic interprets Prospero as a Christian Hermetist and, when the Epilogue is added to a performance, as a Christian Hermetist with Catholic sympathies.

*The play in performance and print*

From the Revels Accounts, it is known that *The Tempest* ‘was presented at Whitehall before ye kinges Maiestie’ (Chambers 1923 II, 342) at Hallowmas 1611. It was listed again in 1613 as one of several performances at court to celebrate the betrothal of the Princess Elizabeth Stuart to Frederick the Elector Palatine. There is no further mention until it appears on the Stationers’ Register in November 1623 and is placed first in the Folio collection of plays by William Shakespeare published that same month. As Stephen Orgel points out in his introduction to the 1987 Oxford edition there is no reason to assume that 1611 was the first performance although he believes it to be an early one (62), but Kositsky and Stritmatter argue from apparent parodic
references to *The Tempest* in plays as early as 1603 (*Darius*) and 1605 (*Ayrer’s Die Schöne Sidea*; Jonson's *Eastward Ho*), that the date of writing could be as early as 1603 (2009, 3).

*A literal reading*

In the latter part of the twentieth century post-colonial sympathies and ideologies began to inform much of the criticism of the play. Prospero is ‘demonized’ and Caliban ‘sentimentalized’ as a victim robbed of his inheritance (McDonald 17). Francis Barker and Peter Hulme assert that “‘English colonialism’ provides *The Tempest*'s dominant discursive “contexts”” (201). According to Russ McDonald, interest in the place of the Strachey letter and the Virginia pamphlets (see below) has become increasingly censorious and shrill ‘in delineating the text’s relation to the problems of cultural tyranny, political freedom and exploitation’ (16). Knowledge of the contemporary interest in English settlement (whether that led by Ralegh to Roanoke in 1585 recorded by Hariot, or later encounters with native Americans in Virginia or Jamestown) has intensified that interest. The effect has been, as McDonald points out, ‘a critical usurpation of the dramatic sovereignty of Prospero’ (16), and by extension, an attack on earlier studies that are now considered ‘limited for their neglect of political issues’ (16, n. 8).

Critical opinions of Prospero, Ariel and especially of Caliban reflect the diversity of interpretations. Prospero, as Orgel says, is understood as ‘a noble ruler and mage, a tyrant and megalomaniac, a necromancer, a Neoplatonic scientist, a colonial imperialist, a civilizer’ (11). Orgel himself sees Prospero as an angry man whose memory of his past is ‘punctuated with expletives and retrospective rage’ (15) and repudiates the traditional interpretations of Prospero as a god. David Taylor also interprets Prospero as a tyrant as well as a ‘usurper’ (510), ‘sorcerer and patriarch’
and ‘oppressor’ (517). Hallett Smith calls him ‘a rather testy and impatient man’ (10). Lytton Strachey finds Prospero ‘self-opinionated and sour’, a man whose gravity is ‘another name for pedantic severity’ (90). Jonathan Bate holds that ‘Prospero’s mistake was to pursue learning for its own sake rather than as a means to a political end’ (2008, 4). Bate also argues that Prospero himself is the source of Caliban’s baseness, and that ‘the only profit from the language lessons delivered to him by Prospero and Miranda is the ability to curse’ (2008, 7).

In short, numerous contemporary critics find Prospero no god but a deeply flawed mortal who has enslaved the rightful owner of the isle, Caliban. The playbook terms Caliban ‘a salvage and deformed slave’, and Prospero calls him ‘[d]ull thing’ (1.2.285), ‘beast’ (4.1.140) and ‘demi-devil’ (5.1.272). In the hierarchical order of being, as understood by Shakespeare’s audiences, and also in Hermetic terms, Caliban is to Prospero as Dull is to Ferdinand of Navarre. Lacking reason, both are closer to the beasts, but unlike Dull, Caliban has feeling, which makes him subject to the irrational torments of matter, specifically lust, greed and general malice. His base nature makes him impervious to nurture and, dominated by the torment of lust, he attempts to violate Miranda without remorse. He is easily led by Stephano and Trinculo, also greedy, into the temptation to steal from and murder Prospero. Nevertheless, whether or not Caliban symbolizes Prospero’s own corporeal bestial nature, he is clearly well under Prospero’s control. He resents his master, as we see when Prospero remembers the ‘foul conspiracy / Of the beast’ against his life’

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208 Even so, Bate had previously noted the beauty of Caliban’s language, for example when Caliban assures Stephano that ‘the isle is full of noises / Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not’ (3.2.133-4).
(4.1.139-40). By nature, Caliban is subservient. Even when he attempts to free himself from Prospero's control, it is only to give allegiance to Stephano whom he first revered as a celestial being. But Caliban is also half-devil. Like Iago, that other ‘demi-devil’ (5.1.272), Caliban is resistant to any ‘print of goodness’ (1.2.354), and although Shakespeare has ‘not honour’d [him] with / A human shape’ (1.2.283-4), the poet has endowed Caliban with personality and emotions. He is by no means so comely as Iago, but nor is he so wicked. At the end he is remorseful and sees the error of his ways: ‘What a thrice-double ass / Was I, to take this drunkard for a god, / And worship this dull fool!’ (5.1.295-7).

In Hermetic terms Caliban is visible, corporeal and base, lacking intellect and ruled by his senses; he is either mortal like his mother or immortal like his demon father. By contrast, Ariel resists a literal, material interpretation being invisible, incorporeal and from the ethereal world of the immortal sprites to which he will return after delivering Prospero’s promise of ‘calm seas [and] auspicious gales’ (5.1.314). It is Ariel who ‘perform’d to point the tempest’ (1.2.194) as Prospero bade him.

Vivid accounts of wild storms running ships aground near the Bermudas in 1609 brought back to England by those attempting to colonize Virginia have been suggested as a source for The Tempest. Despite ‘a long line of literary storms which lie behind the play’ (Kermode 1954, xxvii n. 3), the Bermuda event is traditionally used to date Shakespeare’s impulse to write the play to 1610. Orgel for example notes that the play is ‘almost certainly indebted’ to the 1610 letter from Sir William Strachey describing the circumstances of a voyage to Virginia where ships were blown off
course and wrecked in Bermuda (62). However, that Strachey's letter was any kind of source has been disputed on the one hand by Roger Stritmatter and Lynne Kositsky, and hotly defended on the other, by Alden T. Vaughan. In 2007 Stritmatter and Kositsky argued that Strachey was a notorious plagiarist and that the letter arrived too late to have been even a manuscript source for Shakespeare (453-461 passim). In 2009 Kositsky and Stritmatter, deploring the dominance of Americanist readings of The Tempest, welcomed the renewed interest in the Mediterranean contexts of the play and proposed Richard Eden's 1555 translation of Peter Martyr's De orbe novo decades (1516) as Shakespeare’s ‘prime source of New World knowledge’ (2009, 4). Eden, they argue, through repeatedly calling on the analogy between Aeneas and the Renaissance voyagers, ‘folds together the Mediterranean and colonial frames of reference that are also conflated in The Tempest’ (2009, 3).

Eden's analogy with Aeneas the voyager may have led Shakespeare to Aeneas’ Mediterranean voyage narrated in Book VI of the Aeneid. Certainly, Shakespeare’s

209 The letter was first published in 1625 in Purchas his Pilgrimes as a “True Reportory of the wreck and redemption of Sir Thomas Gates Knight, upon and from the islands of the Bermudas, his coming to Virginia and the estate of the colony then and after under the government of the Lord La Warre, July 15, 1610”.

210 Kositsky and Stritmatter note that Eden's version of Martyr's narrative draws examples from Virgil's Aeneid, and from Ovid's Metamorphoses, both of which provided Eden with substantial material and ‘a copious vocabulary of natural history’ as well as names found in The Tempest (2009, 6). Like Stritmatter, Michael Brennan praises Richard Hakluyt's 1587 Paris edition of Martyr's works, with its dedication to Sir Walter Ralegh and its appreciation of 'Martyr's first-hand accounts of exploration and conquest' (240). Like Hakluyt, Montaigne also drew on Martyr and Eden, and both provide credible sources for Shakespeare's play; for example, the name Caliban is believed to be derived from Montaigne's essay On Cannibals.
debt to Virgil in *The Tempest* has long been known (Still 1921, 16-33; Whittington 2014, 98-120).

It is possible that the storm that opens *The Tempest* engineered by Prospero’s god-like powers is a conflation of the watery darkness that opens the *Corpus Hermeticum* created by Pymander, and the storm that blew Aeneas’ fleet off course and landed the Trojans in Carthage. In that tale the storm was engineered by the goddess, Juno, and calmed by Neptune. The connection with the *Aeneid* is clearly deliberate as there are several rather forced references to the widow Dido and Carthage (2.1.73; 2.1.80). Latinists in Shakespeare’s audience would know that after leaving Carthage, the Trojan fleet dropped anchor at Cumae near Naples where Aeneas sought the means safely to visit Dis in the underworld and speak with his father. There he saw the shades of drowned sailors he had known in life, such as Orontes and Palinurus. And there he saw and wept for the shade of Dido amongst the other shades waiting in the afterlife. It was this episode in Book VI of the *Aeneid* which both gave the pagan Virgil his status among Christians and also provided the model for Dante’s meeting with Virgil in the *Inferno*. In my view, the Mediterranean voyage from Carthage to Naples was strategically chosen to remind the audience of Aeneas’ voyage from Carthage to Naples and his visit to the underworld.

Kositsky and Stritmatter go on to argue that Eden's translation of Martyr provided a ‘historical template for the sibling contretemps between Prospero and

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211 Other sources which may have informed Shakespeare's dramatization of the storm at sea include Erasmus’ *Naufragium* (in Soellner 363) and the 'great storm at sea' which Pantagruel met in Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (Book IV, XVIII).
Antonio’ (2009, 6). As Kositsky records, Martyr dedicated his book to Ascanio Sforza (1455-1505), youngest son of the first Sforza Duke of Milan, whose brother Lodovico seized de facto power in Milan before being deposed by the French forces of Louis XII in 1499. Kositsky argues that Shakespeare's interest in these intrigues is ‘confirmed by his adoption of the specific names Alonso and Ferdinand for two Tempest protagonists; both names were traditional among the Aragonese in-laws of the Sforzas’ (2009, 7).

In pursuing this line of research, I find that the history of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century struggle of the French to dominate Spanish Naples and Milan provides an even more direct and specific source for Shakespeare’s play. In 1460, the French Duke Jean II d’Anjou lost Naples to Ferdinand I, the son of Alfonso the Magnanimous of Aragon, who was supported by Alessandro Sforza (Hanegraaff and Bouthoorne 9-10). This is the Ferdinand of Aragon, King of Naples whom Lazzarelli instructed in the way of Hermes. Milan, which since 1277 had been in the possession of Louis XII's great grandmother's family, the Visconti, was lost to the Sforza in 1450. It was Louis XII (1462-1515), who conquered Milan in 1499 and Naples in 1501. Naples was subsequently conquered by Ferdinand III in 1504, and Milan by Massimilian Sforza in 1512. Inheriting his childless uncle's crown in 1515, the 20-year-old François I (1494-1547) great uncle of Henri IV, returned Milan to France in 1515, only to lose it to the Sforza in 1522. His efforts to reclaim Milan for France in 1525 led to huge loss of life, a catastrophic defeat, two years as a hostage of the Spanish and the eventual exchange of his two little sons for his freedom. All this would have been well-known to the English, as Mary Tudor, daughter of Henry VII, was briefly Queen of France as the third wife of Louis XII, and Anne Boleyn, the Queen’s mother, was educated in the French court where she became the friend
of Marguerite of Navarre, Henri IV’s grandmother. Lord Strange, whose company was the first to stage plays later attributed to Shakespeare on the London stage, and his younger brother, Will Stanley, were descended from Henry VII through Mary Tudor, Queen of France and later, Duchess of Suffolk. Any in England who knew of the humiliating loss suffered by François I might see deep political and religious implications in *The Tempest* for the French. In the play the Spanish King of Naples apologises to the Duke of Milan and is forgiven; then the kingdom of Naples and the duchy of Milan are united peacefully through what I argue is an alchemical or Hermetic marriage.

*A metaphorical reading: the storm as allegory, the structure of the play as alchemical*

The storm, which is a convenient plot device to bring the characters together after the passing of many years, has been subjected to a wide range of interpretations. In addition to the documented records and literary sources just mentioned, the *Corpus Hermeticum* supplies details of a vision which Pymander granted to Hermes that may have provided a source to Shakespeare.212 In several respects Ariel’s account of the storm and his role in it, particularly his description of the flames flickering up the masts and along the yards resembles Pymander’s vision. Ariel reports to Prospero how well he has obeyed his commands and created a spectacle:

> in every cabin,  
> I flam’d amazement: sometime I'd divide,  
> And burn in many places; on the topmast,
The yards and boresprit, would I flame distinctly, 
Then meet and join. (1.2.197-201)

Pymander gave Hermes a vision of:

Untempered fire [which] leapt up from the watery nature to the height above. The fire was nimble and piercing and active as well, and because the air was light it followed after spirit and rose up to the fire away from earth and water so that it seemed suspended from the fire. \(^{(CH I [4])}\)

Simonds however, interprets Shakespeare’s treatment of the storm as an allegory of the alchemical process \((1997-8, 538-70\) passim). John Mebane also notes that alchemists used the word ‘tempest’ as a metaphor for ‘the boiling process which removes impurities from base metal and facilitates its transmutation into gold’ \((181)\). The alchemical process is analogous to the ‘way of Hermes’ which led the contemplative person from the turmoil and corruption of the dark material world to ascend by degrees, shedding the dross of the corporeal world at each level until purified and perfected in soul and mind; having achieved gnosis, the initiate can be spiritually reborn, incorporeal and immortal.\(^{214}\) The analogy with spiritual alchemy supports my argument that The Tempest is principally concerned with the nexus of

\(^{213}\) The flame, mentioned in Eden's History of Travel, as St. Elmo’s fire \((Kermode, 1987, 22\ n.200)\) is also known as Hermes’ fire.

\(^{214}\) It should be reinforced here that practical alchemy plays no part in religious Hermetism, and for that matter is specifically refuted in the first Rosicrucian manifesto, Fama Fraternitatis. Shakespeare makes no direct mention of alchemists, as Lyly does for instance in Gallathea or Jonson in his satire The Alchemist, but he understands the alchemical process and in The Tempest employs it as a structural trope.
Christian and Hermetic teachings about immortality, that is, with the life of the purified and perfected soul / mind after the death of the body.\textsuperscript{215}

The English court, in common with most of the courts of Europe, took a keen interest in the practice of alchemy (Parry 71). The court audience would, I think, have delighted in recognising the nuanced allusions to the alchemical process in \textit{The Tempest}, and many would have understood that process as a trope of spiritual \textit{gnosis}. For those in the audience versed in alchemy, the courtiers emerging from their

\textsuperscript{215} Simonds identifies nine stages of the alchemical process the first three of which allegorize the events of the opening scenes of the play. However, terms with alchemical significance are not confined to the storm, and a recognizable alchemical discourse is threaded throughout the play. The first stage of the alchemical process, the separation or \textit{divisio}, parts the targeted ship from the rest of the fleet, but it also arguably separates the souls of the drowned from their bodies; the next stage of \textit{salsatura} or marination sees the King and his courtiers plunge into the ocean 'in the cycle of solve et coagula' (Abraham 1998, 179). Lyndy Abraham explains that sea water is a synonym for the \textit{prima materia} or mercurial water which is the solvent for the stone. ‘The alchemical king (the raw matter of the stone)’, ‘must be marinated in sea water before he is rescued and brought to dry land (signifying the coagula)’ (Abraham 1998, 179). The main stages of the opus are the \textit{nigredo}, or blackness which represents putrefaction or distraction (Simonds 542); the iridescent peacock green when the heat increases, the sulphur and mercury change colour and the metals become white hot (the \textit{albedo} or silver stage), and finally the \textit{rubedo} stage when the metal becomes pure red gold. All are recognizable in the play: \textit{nigredo} is captured in Miranda's words: ‘The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch’ (1.2.3). The \textit{albedo} stage, ‘symbolized by all things pure, white or silver’ (Abraham 1998, 5) surfaces in Ferdinand’s protest that ‘the white cold virgin snow upon my heart’ (4.1. 55) will curb his dalliance, followed immediately by the rainbow of Iris’ ‘wat’ry arch’ (4.1.71), and Juno’s peacocks (4.1.74) which supply the iridescent green; later in that same scene Ariel calls one of the hounds by the name of ‘Silver’ (4.1.256). At the very end, when grief has been replaced by the joy of finding that which was lost, Prospero forgives all whether they were penitent or not and Gonzalo urges that the whole amazing episode be recorded ‘With gold on lasting pillars’ (5.1. 208).
drenching with their garments ‘being rather new dyed than stained with salt water’ (1.2.61-2), immediately references the alchemical arcanum, the mercurial water, the water of life which does not wet the hands (Abraham 213). Similarly, the marinating and drowning of the King in sea water, and his subsequent resurrection is recognisable as part of the process of the making of the Philosopher’s Stone. Abraham explains that ‘the kingdom is renewed when the king follows the alchemical philosopher’s advice to have the opposite sexes marry’ . . . and ‘the philosopher’s son is born, himself a king, stronger and purer than his father’ (112).

Hearing from Gonzalo that the King and his party have been wandering around in a ‘maze’, ‘through forth-rights and meanders’ (3.3.2-3), a court audience would recognize that the maze signifies the alchemical labyrinth, ‘a place of confusion, geographical or mental’ (Abraham 113) for the Court Party. They are in Prospero’s power. It is only when Prospero decides to dissolve the charm (5.1.64) that sense and reason are restored, they ‘learn to discriminate between the true and the false’ and emerge from the ‘labyrinth of illusion’ (Abraham 113).

In this scenario it is not hard to cast Prospero as the alchemical philosopher, Alonso as the once unregenerate king, a reborn Ferdinand and the already perfect Miranda enacting the marriage between opposite sexes, and to envisage that Ferdinand of Naples will be a stronger, purer king than Alonso. In short, viewed in this way, the whole play becomes an enactment of the alchemical process and the trope **par excellence** of Ferdinand’s spiritual rebirth.

A **metaphysical reading: the immortal soul**

The concept of an immortal human soul that survives the death of the body may be traced back to Plato where for example Socrates asks Simmias whether death is not ‘the separation of soul and body’ (*Phaedo* [64]). For Plato, the soul was the true self
imprisoned for a time in an alien body. There is ‘no specific teaching on it in the Bible beyond an underlying assumption of some sort of afterlife’ (Dictionary of the Christian Church, 1520). However, a doctrine of life after death that is surprisingly similar to Hermetism entered Judaism in the period between the testaments, that is in the early years of the Christian era at approximately the period that the Corpus Hermeticum was being written. It teaches ‘that every human being is a composite of two entities, a material body and a non-material soul; that the soul . . . departs from the body at death; that though the body disintegrates in the grave, the soul by its very nature is indestructible; and that it continues to exist for eternity’ (The Encyclopedia of Judaism, 2000, I, 200). The author of this entry remarks that ‘not even a hint of this dualistic view of the human being appears in the [Hebrew] Bible’ (200) However, this concept of Man as twofold is central to Hermetic thought. The idea that death is the separation of soul from body, which originated with Plato, the idea that the soul itself is immortal and indestructible and that in death the body is not destroyed but only changed, these ideas are the substance of Book VIII of the Corpus Hermeticum and are incorporated into Book XV section 11 (678) of Foix de Candale’s Pymander.

Over time, the soul came to be regarded as an image of God, and St Augustine endowed it with memory, intellect and will, but the idea was not generally accepted until the Middle Ages. The Christian church was divided over whether the soul died with the body to be resurrected on the Day of Judgment when it would face retribution. The Catholic church invented interim stages known as limbo for the guiltless and the unbaptized, and purgatory where sinners had to spend time until
purified for heaven (Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, 1030-1032).²¹⁶ The Reformed church countered with the idea of ‘soul sleep’, or the belief that the soul sleeps until the resurrection. Most commonly, Christians are taught that the soul is immortal, but that it dies with the body to be resurrected with the body on Judgment Day; most Protestants hold that judgment follows immediately upon the death of the body. Hermes, as we know, taught that ‘unlike any other living thing on earth, mankind is twofold – in the body mortal but immortal in the essential man’ (CH I [15]). Foix de Candale elaborates the idea in his commentary on Section 11 of Book XV, the Stobaean fragment that is devoted to a discussion of death (678). As a Christian, Foix de Candale distinguishes the death of mortal beasts without soul from that of Man whose soul, inspired by the breath of God when he made Man in his image, lives on, so long as death has separated it from the contaminating flesh (679). In his commentary, Foix compares Stobaeus’ fragment to Book VIII of the Corpus Hermeticum (679). There Hermes tells Tat ‘we must speak about soul and body and say in what way the soul is immortal’ (VIII [1]). Death, he claims, is not destruction but only change, since the material body is part of the cosmos and ‘none of the things in the cosmos is destroyed’ (CH VIII [1]). He explains that at death the mortal, corporeal body is recycled into the immortal, indestructible cosmic elements; that is why nothing is ever destroyed. In Book XI Mind (Pymander / God) also refutes the

²¹⁶ Limbo is a theological invention of the Catholic Church, being that place where unregenerated souls, by which is meant those who die guiltless or unbaptised, can ‘enjoy full natural happiness’ though excluded from ‘supernatural beatitude’ (Dictionary of the Christian Church, 982). In Dante’s Divina Commedia, limbo is the first circle of Hell where Virgil, who has been living with other great poets including Homer, offers himself as guide to Dante.
idea that death is any kind of destruction and explains: ‘Death is not the destruction of things that have been combined but the dissolution of their union’ (CH XI [15]). Hermetism therefore defines the death of the body as change and dissolution into its original cosmic elements.

Shakespeare appears to be referencing these ideas when Ariel comforts Ferdinand. He refers to the death and dissolution of the drowned king as a ‘sea-change’ (1.2.403) and when Prospero disappears the pageant, he foretells that the illusion, like the world and us who are but dreams, will all ‘dissolve’ (4.1.154). Though the mortal body may dissolve and change, the immortal soul lives on. However, neither Hermes nor Foix in his commentary addresses the problem of whether the individual soul continues to exist as a separate conscious entity. Both Nock (I, 85) and Scott (II, 190) suggest that by omitting the issue, the passage in Book VIII implicitly denies that individual consciousness survives the death of the body. However, the question of whether the part of the conscious mind that accounts for one’s personality and identity, that is the memory and imagination, will survive the death of the body is answered by Ficino in his Platonic Theology. David Leech notes that as a Christian, ‘Ficino also requires an afterlife embodiment, and not only because of an obligation to defend the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of the dead’ (309). Ficino’s thinking about a soul possessed of memory appears to reconcile Plato on the separated soul with Hermes’ teaching on the soul as incorporeal and ethereal and with the Christian notion of a soul resurrected in a recognizable body.217 It is this

217 Since Ficino believed Hermes preceded Plato, he sees Plato as the debtor. Following Casaubon’s revelation in 1614, it became obvious that the reverse was true and that the authors of the Hermetic texts drew on Plato.
marriage of Hermetic doctrine and Christian belief which I argue underpins Shakespeare’s thinking in *The Tempest*.

Shakespeare may also have found sources for this idea in Virgil’s *Aeneid* and in Dante’s *Divina Commedia*. Aeneas encountered recognizable embodied souls on his visit to the underworld in Book VI, as we saw, and Dante tells how the long dead Virgil acting as hierophant escorted him through the Inferno. In *The Tempest*, the men we saw go down with the sinking ship, the souls whom Miranda saw ‘dash’d all to pieces’ (1.2.8) appear before us in fresh clothes, walking about and wondering at the isle, their different personalities intact. Can they be real?

Theodore Spencer observes that *The Tempest* is Shakespeare’s ‘final treatment of the difference between appearance and reality’ (43). I make the case for a metaphysical interpretation of *The Tempest*, both in the discussion it prompts about the nature of reality and in what a Hermetic hermeneutic of the play implies about the life of the immortal soul after the death of the body. Chapter XV in the French translation and *Commentaires* by Foix opens with Hermes telling Tat: ‘It is not possible for Man (being an imperfect animal, made up of imperfect parts) to speak with confidence about reality’ (649). Man, he explains, is imperfect because he is

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218 Book XV (649-683) consists of three fragments of writing by Stobaeus and one from the *Suda*, which Turnebus added to his fourteen chapters of the *Corpus* in 1554, and which Foix de Candale included as Chapter XV in the French translation dedicated to Marguerite de Valois in 1579. Scott believes Turnebus found the texts he included in Trincavelli’s edition of the *Florilegium* published in Venice in 1535-6 (III, 305).

219 ‘De la verité, ô Tat, il n’est possible l’homme (estant animal imparfaict, composé de membres imparfaicts . . .) en parler seurement’ (XV, 1, 649). Scott explains that the same Greek word translates as ‘true’ for a proposition and also as ‘real’ for a thing, and that in this
made up of a mix of the cosmic elements, although each element is real when unmixed: ‘Fire is only fire and no other thing, earth is earth and no other thing: air is only air, but our bodies are made up of all of them’ (649). Shakespeare seems to be drawing on this idea when Ariel warns the king: ‘I and my fellows / Are ministers of Fate: the elements, / Of whom your swords are temper’d’ (3.3.60-62). It is precisely because they are elemental that Ariel and his fellow ministers of Fate are invulnerable. It is the clearest statement we have that Ariel’s ministers, the Shapes, and later the goddesses, the nymphs and the reapers are incorporeal spirits from the other world – the world of reality. Leaving aside the obvious difficulty of how we (unreal, material, corporeal mortals) in the audience can see Ariel and his company, we share in the stage illusion that the King and the Court Party are able to see the invisible Ariel disguised as a Harpy. We should ask Alonso: ‘Is it a shade or man I see?’ as Dante asked Virgil. The tenor of the question is to know whether Alonso and the others have crossed over. As soon as we confront that question, the play shimmers with ambivalence. What is visible is unreal. Only the invisible is real. As we shall see, Hermes explains to Tat that it is the Mind of God, who is real and invisible, that makes visibility (CH V [1]).

fragment from Stobaeus the word signifies ‘real’ and ‘reality’ (III, 309). Foix has chosen to translate the Greek as ‘verité’ or truth, but as the rest of the chapter makes clear, he is discussing reality.

220 ‘Le feu est seulement feu et rien autre chose: la terre est mesme terre et rien autre chose: l’air est le mesme air, mais nos corps sont composés de toutes ces choses’ (649).

221 I follow Kermode’s punctuation and note, rendering the meaning: ‘We are the elements of which your swords are tempered; therefore they cannot hurt us’ (1987, 89, n.61).
I turn now to Prospero. As we saw, opinions are divided over whether Prospero is a god, a Hermetic magus or a mortal man. Traditional critics tend to see *The Tempest* as the apotheosis of Shakespeare’s career and Prospero as speaking for the playwright. Wilson Knight for example suggests two readings: in one, Prospero becomes ‘the “God” of the *Tempest* universe’, while in the other ‘Prospero is not God but Shakespeare’ (1947, 1985, 25, 26). Spencer also describes Prospero on his enchanted island as ‘like a god, controlling the world of nature and the elements’ (46). Wilson Knight suggests that Shakespeare was projecting his own spiritual experience into the play which ‘traces [. . .] the past progress of his own soul’ (23). Frank Kermode observes that Prospero’s Art functions as an exercise of ‘the supernatural powers of the holy adept’ (1987, xlvii) and is symbolic of ‘the world of mind’, not ‘the world of sense’ which Caliban inhabits (1987, xlviii). Kermode’s comments on the worlds of mind and of sense resonate with Hermetic doctrine about understanding and sensation to be found in Book IX; his reference to the powers of the Adept acquired after contemplation also chime with Hermetic teaching. It is, claims Kermode, ‘the practical application of a discipline of which the primary requirements are learning and temperance, and of which the mode is contemplation’ (xlviii).222 In support of his argument, Kermode cites briefly from Agrippa. The reference is drawn from a longer passage in Book III Chapter III of *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* where Agrippa describes ‘what manner of person a magician ought to be’:

222 It is worth recalling that it was knowledge of self and temperance which Lear had to learn, and that the *Corpus Hermeticum* lists ignorance and intemperance as two of the irrational torments of matter to be overcome on the way of Hermes to spiritual rebirth.
Therefore it is meet that we who endeavour to attain to so great a height should especially meditate of two things: first, how we should leave carnal affections, frail sense and material passions; second, by what way and means we may ascend to an intellect pure and conjoined with the powers of the gods, without which we shall never happily ascend to the scrutiny of secret things, and to the power of wonderful workings, or miracles: for in these dignification consists wholly, which nature, desert, and a certain religious art do make up. (448)

Agrippa is alluding to the means by which the aspirational man should contemplate the way to leave his corporeal or mortal entity and find the way to ascend to the mind of God and acquire god-like powers. His words seem to provide a model for the character of Prospero. D. G. James locates Agrippa’s magician in the context of ‘the revival of Hermetic and neo-Platonist thought in the Renaissance [and of] attempts in the sixteenth century to syncretize these teachings with Christianity itself’ (1967, 60). Like John Vyvyan, James sources the revival to Ficino, and is also fully aware of Pico’s influence on sixteenth century thought, particularly in the distinction Pico makes between daemonic magic, and ‘that which properly belonged to a Christian magus’ (1967, 54). But whereas Michael Keefer makes a cogent argument for Agrippa’s being a Christian Hermetist (1988, 622), James, perhaps believing Agrippa’s reputation as a black magician, sees Shakespeare’s concept of Prospero, the ‘holy and priestly magus’ (1967, 61) as a reaction against Agrippa. Orgel calls Prospero an ‘illusionist’ (47), an ‘enchanter’ whose powers are ‘explicitly theatrical’

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223 It is of interest that James acknowledges as invaluable the help of both C.S. Lewis, the noted Christian scholar, and Frances Yates whose Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition he recognizes as ‘a work of profound learning’ (viii).

224 In Chapter Two I sourced Agrippa’s thought to the fifteenth century translations of the Corpus Hermeticum and noted the importance of his book to John Dee.
in ways that align the magician with the playwright (50). However, he is critical of those who refer to the magician as a ‘Renaissance scientist’, and those who interpret the play as allegory and find alchemical metaphors in the structure, as Simonds does (51).

C. J. Sisson calls Prospero ‘a magician, a conjuror’ whose magic ‘is philosophy in its higher reaches’ (75), and Simonds interprets Prospero as both magician and alchemist who has the goal of restoring the Golden Age or a biblical Eden (1997, 539). In this reading, Ariel, as messenger, represents a volatile Mercurius (Simonds 1997, 542). Simonds expresses a view of Prospero as ‘Shakespeare’s Renaissance analogue to Orpheus’ (1995, 63). Her opinion that Shakespeare is ‘primarily interested in . . . reform during an age of Reformation’ (1995, 61) strikes a sympathetic note with the argument underlying this thesis. Simonds contrasts the music that fills the isle, the ‘sounds and sweet airs’ (3.2.134), with the discordant ‘cacophony of baying dogs’ (1995, 76) and links the former to Apollo and the world of the intellect with the latter’s Dionysian world of discordant passions. In describing the harmony achieved in this play, Simonds turns to Book XVIII of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and quotes Hermes’ advice that to achieve harmony you ‘should tune the inward lyre’ (88, n.13).

Mebane also references Hermes,

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225 Hallett Smith claims that a Jacobean audience would have regarded Prospero as a sort of scientist whose science came from books (1969, 5); Simonds describes *The Tempest* as ‘a theatrical exercise in alchemical transmutation’ (1997-8, 541).

226 Foix omitted Book XVIII from his translation. If Shakespeare is referencing the line from Book XVIII as Simonds suggests, the inference is that he has access to another edition of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. 
claiming Prospero’s Art is both Hermetic and theatrical – magic that not only ‘creates visions’ but also ‘strives to effect moral and spiritual reform’ (179-180). James calls Prospero a ‘priestly and spiritual magician’ (1967, 60), while Kermode views him as a neo-Platonic mage with the powers of the ‘holy adept’ (1987, xlvii). For Kermode, Prospero is a prince and a scholar (xlviii). He likens Prospero to King James whom Francis Bacon lauded, saying that the king:

standeth invested with that triplicitie which in great veneration was ascribed to the ancient Hermes, the power and fortune of a King, the knowledge and illumination of a Priest, and the learning and universalitie of a Philosopher.\(^{227}\)

In effect, Kermode is comparing Shakespeare’s conception of Prospero to Hermes Trismegistus. The thrust of this body of criticism is towards an extraordinary conflation of Prospero with Hermes Trismegistus and his creator Shakespeare himself.

Prospero’s ‘god-like’, behaviour, seen in his power to control the elements as well as the minds of his daughter, other men, and the beings of the isle, is reminiscent of King Ferdinand of Navarre who aspired to god-like status to be achieved through an ascetic life and contemplative study. Prospero speaks of his own years of ‘being transported / And rapt in secret studies’ (1.2.76-7), dedicating his time ‘To closeness and the bettering of my mind’ (1.2.90). The Adept who can ‘Put the wild waters in this roar’ and also ‘allay them’ by his Art (1.2.1-2) deserves the epithet god-like. But what is God like? The Corpus supplies an answer, namely that

\(^{227}\) Kermode quotes from Cleland, *The Institution of a Young Noble Man*, but it was Bacon who wrote the lines in the dedication to the king of the First Book of *The Advancement of Learning*, 1605.
God ‘is invisible and entirely visible’ (CH V). While God himself is not-begotten, unimagined and invisible, ‘in presenting images of all things he is seen through all of them and in all of them’ (V [2]). God himself can only be seen with the ‘mind’s eye’ (V [2]), that is, with understanding and imagination:

‘This discourse I shall also deliver to you in full, O Tat, lest you go uninitiated into the mysteries of the god who is greater than any name. You must understand how something that seems invisible to the multitude will become entirely visible to you. Actually, if it were <not> invisible it would not <always> be [. . .]. Also, while remaining invisible because it always is, it makes all other things visible.’ (CH V [1])

Hermes’ words explain how an invisible God makes himself visible to us, and how while remaining invisible himself, he makes other things visible to us; this is the secret or mystery of Hermetic initiation (Nock, 1960, 58). It is a secret which Prospero imparts to Ferdinand celebrating the betrothal with a masque as we shall see.

In Act 3.3 Shakespeare gives dramatic substance to this metaphysical idea of invisibility when the stage direction positions Prospero above the stage ‘invisible’ (3.3.SD 18) directing and orchestrating the action.228 Below Prospero in this scene ‘Strange Shapes’ bring in a banquet, dance to ‘solemn and strange music’ and invite the King to eat (SD 17). Still invisible, Prospero watches as Ariel obeys his thoughts. Disguised as a Harpy, Ariel makes the banquet vanish in thunder and lightning, before accusing the men, condemning them to ‘Ling’ring perdition – worse

228 There is no reason to doubt that the stage direction is authorial. The Tempest is notable for the number and detail of its stage directions. The choice of ‘invisible’ is presumed to be authorial as it is present in the First Folio and all subsequent Folios.
than any death / Can be at once’ (3.3.77-78), and vanishing to the sound of thunder.\textsuperscript{229} The words ‘ling’ring perdition’ seem to echo a phrase – ‘eternele perdition’ – which occurs in Foix de Candale’s commentary on Section 10 of Chapter XV (678).\textsuperscript{230} The context of the phrase in the play where it is directed at the ‘three men of sin’ (3.3.53) is identical to the context in Foix’s commentary where he is listing the sins which deserve this awful punishment.

Hermes tells Tat how difficult it is to know God and how impossible for a visible, corporeal being to describe an invisible, incorporeal being. One is transient, the other eternal, one is created in the imagination, the other is real. Doubtless we can see the corporeal with our eyes and what the eye can see, the tongue can tell, but that which is incorporeal cannot be comprehended by our senses and is seen only in the mind’s eye.

In the next scene, invisible again, Prospero joins Ariel and watches Stephano and Trinculo tempted to steal from him, before setting his Spirits ‘in shape

\textsuperscript{229} In Shakespeare's Mystery Play Still draws attention to ‘a notable resemblance’ between the banquet presented to the Court Party in The Tempest (3.3.17 SD), before the Harpy (Ariel) made it vanish ‘with a quaint device’ (3.3.53 SD), and the banquets in the underworld described by Virgil as ‘furnished out with regal magnificence’, which ‘those who, while life remained, had been at enmity with their brothers’ were debarred from touching by the chief of the Furies (31). In fact, Still notes ‘a striking and sustained resemblance between the story of the Court Party, initiation records in general and Virgil’s Aeneid VI in particular’ (16).

\textsuperscript{230} The theological meaning of ‘perdition’ is complemented in French by a second nautical meaning, where it signifies a ship in distress, breaking up or driven ashore (Harrap). Shakespeare uses the word with this meaning when he assures Miranda that no harm has come to the souls on board the wreck ‘not so much perdition as a hair’ (1.2.30).
of dogs and hounds’ (4.1. 254 SD) to hunt them about. The paragraph from Book V quoted above concludes with Hermes telling Tat:

The very entity that makes visibility does not make itself visible; what <begets> is not itself begotten; what presents images of everything <is not> present to the imagination. For there is imagination only of things begotten. Coming to be is nothing but imagination [1]. Clearly, the one who alone is unbegotten is also unimagined and invisible, but in presenting images of all things he is seen through all of them and in all of them; he is seen especially by those whom he wished to see him. (V [2])

In his commentary on this passage, Foix explains: ‘So every phantasy which develops in the mind is only the living depiction of the thing which the eye or some other bodily sense wishes to imagine’ (195). William Jones clarifies the notion in these terms: ‘all bodies and their qualities exist, indeed, to every wise and useful purpose, but exist only as far as they are perceived’ (in Scott II, 159). As Walter Scott explains in his commentary on the passage, the phantasiai or fleeting images presented to the imagination signify ‘an opinion formed in the mind as the result of an impression on the senses’ (II, 159).

231 Foix de Candale’s translation of passage [1] reads: Comme toujours estant, et manifestant, il n’est pas manifesté, il n’est pas engendre, mais faict en l’imagination toutes choses imaginables, de tant que imagination n’est que des seules choses engendrées, a cause qu’imagination n’est que generation (192).

232 ‘Toute vision qui le faict donc en la pensée n’est que viue representation de la chose, que loeil ou autre sens corporel desire concevoir’ (195).

233 The quotation is attributed to Sir William Jones and is taken from Hargrave Jennings, The Rosicrucians (147), (Scott II, 159).

234 Scott consulted Plato, Sophist (264 A) for this definition.
This idea is given dramatic substance when we hear that each member of the Court Party either perceives the isle differently or else perceives a different isle. Adrian and Gonzalo, both good men, experience the island as ‘of subtle, tender and delicate temperance’ (2.1.41), where ‘The air breathes upon us most sweetly’ (2.1.45) and the grass is ‘lush and lusty’ (1.2.51). By contrast, Sebastian and Antonio, usurper and would-be usurper, see and smell the isle as ‘rotten’ (2.1.46) ‘perfum’d by a fen’ (2.1.47), where the grass is ‘tawny’ brown (2.1.52). In short, we are inclined to doubt that the isle has any objective reality. The apparently material world of the isle, and by extension our world, is an illusion like the shadows in Plato’s cave, and the only reality is incorporeal and invisible. The ultimate Truth, some say the only Truth, is God, as Stobaeus explains. God / Pymander, both invisible and immortal, is also Mind, and Hermes asserts that for mankind ‘Nothing is more god-like than <mind>, nothing more active nor more capable of uniting humans to the gods and gods to humans; mind is the good demon’ (CH X [23]).

In the Perfect Discourse, Hermes tells Asclepius that the highest part of Man is his intellect comprised of soul, consciousness, spirit and reason or nous that brings him closer to the Mind of God or Nous. Hermes goes on to say that these four higher order elements are matched by ‘four [lower order] faculties of thought, consciousness, memory and foresight by means of which [Man] knows all things divine’ ([11]). It is my contention that each one of these faculties plays a part in Shakespeare’s representation of Prospero’s mind and in his control over the minds of

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235 Foix de Candale translates: ‘de laquelle n’est chose plus divine ny de plus grand efficace, ny qui plus conioigne les hommes aux Dieux et les Dieux aux hommes’ (407).
others. Thought includes ‘incorporeal imagination’ (*CH* XI [18]), which travels at
the speed of light, and, as I argue, animates Ariel. When Prospero summons him, he
calls ‘Come with a thought’ (4.1.164) and Ariel replies ‘Thy thoughts I cleave to’
(4.1.165). He is capable of instantly carrying out anything that Prospero thinks. He
can ‘fetch dew / From the still-vex’d Bermoothes’ (1. 2. 228-9), and ‘drink the air
before me, and return / Or ere your pulse twice beat’ (5.1.102-3). As Mind tells
Hermes:

> ‘in incorporeal imagination things are located differently. Consider what
encompasses all things, that nothing bounds the incorporeal, that nothing is
quicker not more powerful [18].

> ‘Consider this for yourself: command your soul to travel to India, and it will be
there faster than your command. Command it to cross over to the ocean, and
again it will quickly be there, not as having passed from place to place but
simply as being there.’ (*CH* XI [19])

Thinking at the speed of light is one of the powers that makes Man god-like. It is
Ariel who instantly brings the thoughts of Prospero’s mind into visible reality,
whether it be in raising the tempest, creating sounds and sweet airs, presenting a
banquet, bringing fellow spirits from the aether, or joining with Prospero, both of
them invisible, to tempt, confound and punish Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban. In
Hermetic terms, Ariel embodies pure intellect and is without empathetic feeling,
although he knows what it is. When he tells Prospero about the condition of the king
and his followers, the three men of sin having lost their reason, and the others being
‘Brimful of sorrow and dismay’ (5.1.14), he reveals that were he human, he would
feel compassion for them:

*Ariel*: . . . if you now beheld them, your affections

Would become tender.
Prospero: Dost thou think so spirit?

Ariel: Mine would sir, were I human. (5.1.18-20)

In Hermetic terms, Ariel is an incorporeal agathodaimon, once the unwilling hostage of Sycorax, but ‘too delicate / To act her earthy and abhor'd commands’ (1.2.272-3). In this reading, he is an extension of Prospero’s incorporeal mind – his thought and imagination. He is known only to Prospero, speaks only to Prospero, and is ‘invisible to every eyeball else’ (1.2.304).

Consciousness ‘is added to understanding’ (Asclepius, 6) and includes her sister ‘reasoned speech’ (CH IX [1]), and sensation (CH IX [2]). Through Ariel, Prospero is able to affect the conscious minds of others to suit his purpose. Ariel puts members of the Court Party to sleep, leaving Antonio and Sebastian to plot ‘open-ey’d conspiracy’ (2.1.296). Later, when Ariel addresses the ‘three men of sin’ (3.3.53) he affects their minds, makes them ‘mad’ (3.3.58) and so ‘knit up in their distractions’ (3.3.90) that Gonzalo is concerned that the madness or ‘ecstasy’ may provoke them to harm themselves. When we see them again, charmed and within Prospero’s circle, their brains are useless, ‘boil’d within [their] skull’ (5.1.60). At Prospero’s command solemn music slowly dissolves the charm, and reason and senses are gradually restored to them. As Hermes teaches, ‘reasoned speech’ and sensation ‘flow together into humans’ but are eliminated in ‘dream-vision’, although ‘{when sleepers wake, <understanding> and sensation <are always combined>}’ (CH IX [2]).

As for memory, Hermes tells Asclepius: ‘The understanding of human consciousness, what it is and how great it is, comes entirely from memory of past events’ [32]. In The Tempest, as Prospero reminds the three men of sin of the remorseless cruelty with which they treated him and his daughter, they are released
from their dream-like trance and ‘their rising senses / Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle their clearer reason’ (5.1. 65-7). Speaking almost to himself, Prospero observes: ‘Their understanding / Begins to swell: and the approaching tide / Will shortly fill the reasonable shore’ (5.1.79-81). Alonso remembers that three hours earlier he was ‘wrack’d upon this shore’ (5.1.137) and lost his son Ferdinand. Earlier we heard that Prospero’s own memory of the events that brought him and Miranda to the isle is clear and detailed. In the course of recounting what happened to them, he acknowledged his own responsibility and blamed himself for awakening ‘an evil nature’ in his false brother (1.2. 92-3). For the Hermetist such self-knowledge is the necessary prelude to gnosis.

That Ariel is the embodiment of Prospero’s thought, that Prospero can use his mind to control the conscious minds of others, and that his own memory of past events is vivid has not gone unnoticed by critics, although they do not connect them with Asclepius’ list. The fourth faculty of foresight has not been recognized, but I suggest that it motivates the beautiful speech which concludes the masque with Juno and Ceres. The spirits have vanished into their element, ‘thin air’ (4.1.150), and Prospero predicts that at some future time the unreal and illusory, material world – ‘the baseless fabric of this vision’ (4.1.151), the ‘insubstantial pageant’ (4.1.155) – will all similarly ‘dissolve’ and ‘leave not a rack behind’ (4.1.154, 156). He foresees that the ‘great globe’ of the world, and all heirs of the world, that is future generations, including us who ‘are such stuff / as dreams are made on’ (4.1.156-7) will dissolve without a trace.

The notion that ‘we’ mortals are unreal and illusory and destined to be dissolved into the cosmos belongs to the Corpus Hermeticum as we saw earlier. Corporeal matter is dissolved and recycled into the cosmic elements which are
eternal. In this way nothing is ever destroyed. In Book XII Hermes tells Tat: ‘There never was any dead thing in the cosmos, nor is there, nor will there be’ [15]. When Tat asks whether things that live in the cosmos die, Hermes tells him: ‘They do not die, my child; as composite bodies they are only dissolved. Dissolution is not death, but the dissolution of an alloy. They are dissolved not to be destroyed but to become new’ [16]. Knowledge of the Hermetic philosophy sheds light on Ariel’s lovely song to Ferdinand about the death of his drowned father whose mortal remains lie on the sea floor:

Full fathom five thy father lies;
   Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
   Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
   Into something rich and strange. (1.2.399-404)

This is the fate of those whose ‘little life is rounded with a sleep’ (4.1.157-8) – to return to the immortal cosmos transformed into something new, rich and strange. But what of the conscious mind and the soul? Where is the incorporeal soul or spirit of this mortal, Ferdinand’s father? God, says Foix echoing Socrates, separates the spirit from the flesh in death (679). Hence, when the audience sees Alonso again in Act 2, despondent over the loss of his son (2.1.118), we remember that Ariel has reported the king drowned. Now we must believe either that Ariel was mistaken or tricking or lying, or that Alonso has parted from his mortal self and we are witnessing his now embodied soul. Alonso and, by extension, the rest of the Court Party who had been on the foundering ship are, in this metaphysical hermeneutic, all spirits or embodied souls.
Prospero as Hierophant

Colin Still treats *The Tempest* as a ‘psychological pilgrimage described (after the manner of the pagan rites) as a journey through Purgatory to Elysium and beyond’ (121), and closely resembling Aeneas’ passage from Purgatory to Elysium (162). He identifies those pagan rites as the initiation ceremonies employed in the *Eleusinia Sacra*, and finds them in the masque presented to Ferdinand and Miranda. Kermode is sceptical and asks for ‘some better account of the provenance of these ritual patterns which might explain their presence in Shakespeare’ (1987, lxxxiii). He does not deny the presence of initiation rites in *The Tempest* but suggests that ‘the ceremonial magic of the neo-Platonic tradition incorporates elements of the Mysteries’ (1987, lxxxiii). Kermode may feel it is incautious to connect the betrothal masque to the *Eleusinia Sacra* in the absence of evidence and prefer to look to neo-Platonism as a source. However, documented evidence providing support for Still’s opinion in the form of Robert Naunton’s letter to Essex entered the public domain in 1976 thanks to the research of Gustav Ungerer. The letter reports King Henri IV’s involvement in the *Eleusinia Sacra* rituals of rebirth at Easter 1597. The fact that Naunton sent it to Essex without further explanation suggests that the Spring fertility ritual was known on both sides of the Channel. The implication is that some of the court audience would have recognized the ritual and appreciated its significance in signalling Ferdinand’s spiritual rebirth. The letter, dated ‘5 April, 1597, endorsed Mr Naunton au Compte d’Essex, 26 March, 97 at Paris’, made reference to the Eleusinian mysteries being secretly celebrated by ‘Vitellius’ (Henri IV) that Easter:

The k. is said at the campe to be come towarde Beauvais thereabout to treate with his councell, which are yet here. But here it is muttered that he is stealing from his business this holie time to visit his Mris [. . . ]. But these *Eleusina*
Sacra are now growen to be misteries not to be told in Gath in no wise. 
(Ungerer, II 128)

The ritual pattern of descent or loss followed by an ordeal or a search for the one who was lost, culminating in the regeneration or rebirth of the one who was found is a narrative that frequently interests Shakespeare in the last plays.\(^{236}\) It is the pattern not only of the resurrection of Christ, but also of numerous myths of immortality, such as Isis’ search for Osiris, Orpheus’ for Eurydice, or Demeter’s for Persephone (Ceres’ for Proserpine) which Prospero in the role of hierophant presents to Ferdinand and Miranda.\(^{237}\) The pattern of descent, suffering, transformation and the vision that precedes ascent is readily discernible in The Tempest. It is a journey of the soul, and the Hermetic ascent to gnosis. For the king and the Court Party, the drowning in turbulent sea water represents both the descent and the ritual cleansing; the wandering in search of the lost son enacts the ordeal and suffering; after a period of sleep followed by semi-consciousness some emerge transformed, others not. Alonso is transformed and aware of his transgression, but upon seeing Ferdinand exclaims lest he be a ‘vision of the island’ (5.1.176).

Ferdinand’s journey is similar to the king’s, but not the same. Shakespeare explicitly associates him with Hell when he plunges overboard. Ariel reports that as he leapt he cried: ‘Hell is empty / And all the devils are here’ (1.2.214-236)

\(^{236}\) The pattern is repeated in Cymbeline, Pericles and The Winter’s Tale.

\(^{237}\) From the Nicene Creed: ‘One Lord Jesus Christ . . . who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven. And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man. And was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven.’
5). The ordeal of grief as he weeps for his drowned father is allayed by the beauty of the music which draws him towards Miranda. Upon seeing him, Miranda recognizes ‘A thing divine’ (1.2.421), while Ferdinand thinks she is a goddess. Things seem unreal to him and he admits: ‘My spirits, as in a dream, are all bound up.’ (1.2.489). As an ordeal, Prospero imposes the pain of physical labour. Once Ferdinand has ‘stood the test’ (4.1.7), Prospero gives him his daughter Miranda and prepares him for initiation.

That the masque is intended as an initiation to spiritual rebirth and immortality is clear from the conditions Prospero imposes. The initiate must be prepared by an ascetic diet of ‘fresh-brook mussels, wither’d roots and husks’ (1.2.466).238 The ceremony may not be witnessed by the profane. Only Ferdinand and Miranda see it and Miranda is already ‘perfect and peerless’ (3.1.47). In Hermetic terms, as her name suggests, Miranda is ‘a great wonder, a living thing to be worshipped and honored’ (Asclepius [6]). Ferdinand is twice cautioned to eschew lust, not to ‘break her virgin-knot’ (4.1.15) before the ‘full and holy rite be minister’d’ (4.1.17), and to ‘be more abstemious’ (4.1.53). Next, the blessing must be witnessed in silence: ‘No tongue! all eyes! Be silent.’ (4.1.58). Those in the know in Shakespeare’s audience would know that because the man and maid are to be united in true love, the love goddess Venus and her ‘waspish headed son’ (4.1.99) have been excluded lest they charm the couple into breaking the vow of abstinence prematurely. Ferdinand, only a few hours ago believing himself in Hell now sees that

238 In Love’s Labour’s Lost, the King and his friends agreed to accompany their study with fasting.
he has reached ‘Paradise’ (4.1.124). When Ferdinand tells Alonso that he has ‘Receiv’d a second life’ (5.1.195) from Prospero, a Hermetic reading indicates that he is referring to a spiritual rebirth and, initiated, to be on the brink of immortality.

Still contends that the whole play is shaped by the ‘Lesser Initiation’ of the Court Party and Ferdinand’s ‘Greater Initiation’ into the mysteries, whose rites ‘were an enigmatical representation of certain religious truths’ (84). For the initiate, a vision of the deity is the culmination of the rite and, as Still observes, Ferdinand is granted a vision of Ceres, ‘presiding deity of the Eleusinian cultus’ (47). Still compares Ferdinand’s meeting Miranda with Dante’s meeting Beatrice (162). Presumably Still believes that Miranda will guide Ferdinand to Paradise, as Beatrice guided Dante. In this reading, the enchanted island is Ferdinand’s Elysium to Dante’s Eden. Still goes so far as to say that the ‘Poet has reproduced […] both the substance and the form of the Christian and non-Christian traditions’ (120), and makes the claim that ‘for all mankind, whether pagan or Christian, there is but one Way to Salvation’ (126). By contrast, a Hermetic reading would deny Still’s assertion, because Hermetism offers an alternative path to salvation – the gnostic way of Hermes.

A Hermetic hermeneutic gives rise to questions about the fate of the others on board the doomed vessel. Have any of them survived and if so in what sense? As mortal men or as incorporeal shades? Rereading the first act in the light of this interpretation yields a new understanding of the events. We can now ‘believe’ that the ship we saw in trouble was indeed ‘Dash’d all to pieces’ (1.2.8) and that the men on board all perished just as Miranda witnessed. There has been editorial comment over the significance of the anacoluthon after the word ‘soul’ in Prospero’s comforting explanation to Miranda:
I have with such provision in mine Art
So safely ordered that there is no soul –
No, not so much perdition as an hair
Betid to any creature in the vessel. (1.2.28-31)

First and Second Folios have no punctuation after ‘soul’, while Third and Fourth Folios insert a comma. Later editors replaced the comma with an em-dash, which Kermode follows, while noting that other editors supply the word ‘lost’ to complete the sentence. A Hermetic interpretation suggests that Prospero breaks off because he is reluctant to say what has happened. If he uses ‘soul’ in the same sense as Miranda uses it when she says, ‘Poor souls, they perish’d’ (1.2.9) that is, as a synecdoche for ‘man’, he would be telling her an untruth to deny that they were lost. If he uses ‘soul’ as a synonym for ‘spirit’, breaking off suggests he is unwilling to let her know the truth that the voyagers’ mortal bodies are five fathoms down but their immortal souls have survived and they are all shades, even she. When Miranda first sees Ferdinand she is sure he is a spirit (1.2.414), and Prospero quickly explains that he ‘eats and sleeps and hath such senses / As we have’ (1.2.415-6). She is yet to discover as Aeneas did when he visited the world of the afterlife that there the shades also banquet and feel. Prospero’s soothing words to Miranda, telling her ‘There’s no harm done’ (1.2.15), and his assurances that all has been done ‘in care of thee’ (1.2.16), may now be read as his plan to find her a companion for the afterlife.239

239 Some in Shakespeare’s audience would know that Aeneas grieved to find the widow Dido wandering amid the shades in the Mourning Fields before fleeing back to her former husband, Sychaeus, who returned her love. Aeneid, VI [440].
Prospero has been compared as we saw, to Hermes Trismegistus, to King James and finally to Shakespeare himself. A hermeneutic which blends Hermeticism with Christianity interprets Prospero as both Hermetic Magus and Christian and places the character in the long line of Christian men who were also Hermetists that included Lazzarelli, Agrippa, Foix de Candale and finally Shakespeare’s contemporary, the real-life Magus John Dee (Yates 1979, 1999, 186-192 passim). From the wild storm at the outset to the ‘calm seas, auspicious gales’ (5.1. 314) at the end, Prospero controls the elements like a Magus. It is in the Epilogue when his ‘charms are all o’erthrown’ (Epilogue 1) that he reveals himself as a Christian man.

Shakespeare’s achievement is to fashion Prospero in Hermetic terms as ‘a human [who] is a god-like living thing’, ‘a mortal god’ (CH X [24] [25]). With his mind he can control not only the elements, but also the minds of others, inducing sleep, charming men, creating illusions by making the invisible visible. As a Magus, he can by his Art ‘Put the wild waters in this roar’ (1.2.2), replicating Pymander’s vision granted to Hermes:

Then the darkness changed into something of a watery nature, indescribably agitated, and smoking like a fire; it produced an unspeakable wailing roar. (CH I [4])

Prospero is a Hermetist who, through long and patient study, has attained the ‘god-like’ status promised to the Adept. He himself remembers how he retreated from the world (as Lazzarelli’s King Ferdinand did, and as Shakespeare’s Ferdinand of Navarre eventually did), dedicating himself to ‘secret studies’ (1.2.77), and ‘the
bettering of my mind’ (1.2.90) that led to self-knowledge.\textsuperscript{240} In demanding the return of his dukedom and redressing the injustice that was done to him, as a Hermetist he purges himself of the torment (5.1.132-3). However, Christianity and Hermetism merge in this play. The Christian spectator or reader might interpret that same action as Prospero behaving like the ‘God of the island’ enacting the justice of the God of the Old Testament, or in forgiving his brother’s ‘rankest fault’ (5.1.132) as the merciful God of the New. When Prospero reassures Miranda, distressed and compassionate for those she has seen perish in the storm that he raised with his powers, that ‘There's no harm done’ (1.1.15), the Christian in the audience might recognize the providential God to whom Christians appeal for those in peril on the sea. The ‘Ling’ring perdition’ (3.3.77) that the messenger / angel Ariel (SD 3.3.52) promises Alonso, connotes loss and punishment for the Hermetist, while for the Christian, it signifies eternal damnation in Hell.

The New Testament God of mercy who promises forgiveness to all who do truly and earnestly repent is also recognizable.\textsuperscript{241} Forgiveness and sin play no part in gnostic Hermetic thought, but harbouring an ‘irrational torment’ like anger would be recognized by a Hermetist as a barrier to spiritual rebirth. Prospero’s reaction to the conspirators surprises Miranda who had never before seen him ‘touch’d with

\textsuperscript{240} In the \textit{Crater Hermetis}, Lazzarelli refers to Ferdinand King of Naples, son of King Alfonso of Aragon, and father of another Alfonso, having ‘in these latter days of your life [. . .] left the reins of government to your eldest son Alfonso and intent on contemplation and pious works [. . .] devoted yourself to attaining peace of mind’ (1.3).

\textsuperscript{241} ‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness’ (1 John 1.9).
anger’ (4.1.145). From this perspective, Christian forgiveness is the power which Prospero summons to overcome his last torment of matter, anger. When Alonso asks for pardon (5.1.119), Prospero embraces and implicitly forgives him. Prospero pits his noble mind against his justifiable rage and hurt at ‘their high wrongs’ (5.1.25), and chooses the virtuous action, that is, he chooses to forgive and not to punish:

Yet with my nobler reason ’gainst my fury
Do I take part: the rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance: (5.1.26-8)

The word ‘virtue’ carries a resonance that is both Christian and Hermetic. The word ‘virtue’ carries a resonance that is both Christian and Hermetic.242 Similarly shared is the sensation of compassion which leads Prospero to weep ‘fellowly drops’ with ‘Holy Gonzalo’ (5.1.64, 62). Sebastian’s offence against his brother is ignored, but despite his disgust, Prospero forgives his own brother unconditionally (5.1.131). Antonio’s lack of response is one of the many ‘loose ends’ (Miko 3) in the play. That he neither asks for nor wants forgiveness raises for the Christian the question of his salvation, by referencing the contemporary debate within Protestantism over whether Christ died to redeem all or died only for the elect. Antonio raises the issue of whether Christ’s forgiveness extends to the unrepentant sinner. For Catholics in the audience, the debate hinges on whether Prospero’s forgiveness will sufficiently redeem Antonio’s sin or whether he must spend time in purgatory.243 The Hermetist in the audience would require the men to identify the

242 For the Hermetist, ‘the virtue of soul [. . .] is knowledge’ (CH X [9]). The knowledge of god is the only deliverance for mankind. ‘It is ascent to Olympus’ (CH X [15]).

243 Calvin’s dogma of predestination taught that before Adam God had pre-determined who would be saved and who would be damned. Whether they sought it or not, the elect would
torment that had led them into error and summon the appropriate power to overcome it. Caliban, who is also offered Prospero’s pardon (5.1. 293) promises to ‘seek for grace’ (5.1.295). His words reference a then current debate about the irresistibility of God's grace. We must assume from his words that Caliban has been taught this, but whether he, a ‘demi-devil’ (5.1.272), has a soul, is one of the elect, or will be offered prevenient grace, is another question for the audience and reader to debate.244

Prospero (and possibly Shakespeare too) ends the play as a Christian with a paraphrase of the prayer which Christ taught his disciples, known as the Lord's Prayer. Kermode noted this in a footnote to the Epilogue (134), and McAlindon also noted an echo of the prayer in Gonzalo's words as the ship went down: 'The wills above be done' (1.1.66) (340).245 In the Epilogue, Prospero turns to us in the audience and asks us to pray for the Mercy that ‘frees all faults’ (18) by forgiving all. Like the Christian who asks that his or her trespasses be forgiven, ‘as we forgive those who trespass against us’, Prospero asks us to forgive him ‘As [we] from crimes would pardon'd be’ (Epilogue 19) and save him from ending in ‘despair’ (Epilogue 15). Whether it was a sin to despair of salvation and to lose hope in God was another

be saved by Christ's sacrifice. Calvin's concept of atonement limited to the elect was opposed by those who believed that Christ's sacrifice atoned for the sins of all, as John taught: Jesus Christ 'is the expiation of our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world' (1 John 2:2). Purgatory is a twelfth century doctrine of the western Catholic Church.

244 For those in Shakespeare’s day who saw Caliban as a denizen of the New World such as Ralegh or Hakluyt spoke of in Virginia, the debate was about whether God's mercy extended to the unbaptized who, through no fault of their own, had not heard the Good News.

245 His words paraphrase the Lord’s Prayer when the Christian asks that ‘Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’.
heated debate within the Reformed religion in the last decade of the sixteenth and early part of the seventeenth century. Finally, Prospero’s last words: ‘Let your indulgence set me free’ (Epilogue 20), employ a word that is both innocently secular and pregnant with meaning in Catholic Christianity. The implication for the Catholic Christian is that Prospero is asking the living audience to intercede for his soul with prayers that will release him from the island, perceived either as limbo, if you believe him guiltless, or purgatory if you see him as a sinner.

Over the action of The Tempest, Hermes shimmers and flashes visible to those who can see with the mind’s eye. He is the mercurial messenger, Ariel, creating illusions in the minds of men so that we are never sure if it is a shade or a man we see. He is present as the invisible psychopomp ready to escort souls to their next stage. And he is present as the god of thieves tempting Trinculo and Stephano with ‘glistening apparel’ (4.1.SD 193). This is Hermes the mythical god in many guises.

Whereas in the three plays already discussed, I have argued for the presence of religious / philosophic Hermetic thought, and found neither magic nor

246 A treatise on the subject by the physician Timothy Bright was published in 1586 and widely circulated. A Treatise of Melancholie. Containing the causes thereof ... with the phisicke cure, and spirituall consolation for such as haue thereto adiøyned an afflicted conscience. London: Vautrollier. 1586.

247 The word ‘indulgence’ occurs only three times in the Shakespeare canon; elsewhere it is used in the secular sense of ‘allowing’ something and not associated with prayer.

Indulgences: The remission by the Church of the temporal penalty due to forgiven sin, in virtue of the merits of Christ and the saints. Indulgences can also be gained by the living for the souls in Purgatory but only by an act of intercession (Dictionary, 829-30).
alchemy, in *The Tempest* Shakespeare has delighted his audience with both, not to mention the music which fills the air. In the apotheosis of his artistry, the mind that created Prospero has brought us face to face with mythical Hermes, mystical Trismegistus and the Mind of God, the creator himself.
Discussion and Conclusion

In sixteenth century Europe ‘it was religion that coloured the universe’ (Febvre 131). Religion mattered. God mattered. And nothing mattered more to men and women than the salvation of one’s immortal soul. But religion was a source of anxiety, doubt and scepticism. It was also a site of controversy, intolerance and war. The Church, Traditional and Reformed, agreed on the immortality of the soul, although they may have forgotten the pagan origin of the concept, but on the question of the route to salvation, the Church was divided. There was disagreement over whether salvation was the reward of faith and merit, of faith alone or whether one’s destiny had already been decided by God before Adam’s Fall in Eden. By contrast, the body of pagan Hermetic texts that arrived in the Latin West in 1460 offered individual men and women a path to salvation through knowledge-of-self and love-of-others to the reciprocated love and knowledge of God or gnosis that was empowering and enabling. Translated by Marsilio Ficino of the Florentine Academy and hailed as prisca theologia, the Corpus Hermeticum brought with it the hope of reconciliation, tolerance and peace.

Who knew?

Followers of the Reformed Church able now to read the Bible in their vernacular, would have found no mention of soul in either Testament. The concept originates with Plato, who held that ‘the immortal soul is the true self imprisoned for a time in an alien body’ (Dictionary of the Christian Church, 1520). Nevertheless, by the fifth century the soul had come to be universally regarded as an image of God (Genesis I:26) and St Augustine explained it as an image of the Trinity comprising memoria, intelligentsia and voluntas (Dictionary, 1520).
This study was undertaken to address the question of whether Shakespeare knew. I asked if there is evidence in his plays that Shakespeare was familiar with the Hermetic religious philosophy principally as it is articulated in the texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and I find that in all four plays selected for this study – *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, *King Lear*, *Othello* and *The Tempest* – there is evidence that the playwright has a substantial knowledge of the Hermetic doctrine, not previously recognized. I find that, with the possible exception of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, Shakespeare’s understanding of the Hermetic theosophy and his close knowledge of the *Corpus Hermeticum* is more extensive and more profound than could have arisen from hearsay or casual discussion. The evidence of Hermetic thought in the selected plays led me to the conclusion that Shakespeare not only studied the texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and knew the companion text, the *Asclepius* but that he also studied the commentaries available at the time – Lazzarelli’s *Crater Hermetis* and Foix’s lengthy commentary on his French translation, the *Pymander*. Close similarities of thought and verbal borrowings connecting the plays with the *Commentaires* led to the conclusion that Shakespeare was also reading Foix’s French translation of *Pymander*. That does not exclude the possibility that Shakespeare consulted other translations and commentaries.\(^{249}\)

\(^{249}\) Other translations available at the time, which future scholars may wish to examine, were the translation and commentary by Friar Rosselli probably owned by Dee, and the new translation published by Francesco Patrizi in 1591. Patrizi used only the fourteen chapters that were known to Ficino and rearranged the order of the chapters. He based his version on that of Turnebus and Foix de Candale and, like him, included two books derived from the Stobaean fragment; he also added the *Asclepius*. (Scott, III, 321; Yates 1964, 1991, 182).
It must not be forgotten that the *Hermetica* themselves syncretise many of the ideas circulating, probably in Alexandria, in the first centuries after the birth of Christ when, as Isaac Casaubon established in 1614, the texts were actually written. Some ideas found in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius* can also be found in the Hebrew Bible, the synoptic gospels, especially the gospel of John, the letters of Paul and other books of the New Testament, the Gnostics (who were carefully excluded from the New Testament), several books of Plato, the Stoics, Philo and the middle neo-Platonists and pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. In many cases, the similarities between the Hermetic texts and the plethora of sources may be attributed either to a common source or to a direct borrowing, although the direction of influence is often hard to determine. Shakespeare scholars over the decades have recognized most of these sources, both Christian and pagan, in the plays.

Shakespeare’s knowledge and use of the Christian Bible, including the small Geneva Bible used by Protestants, was established by Richmond Noble over eighty years ago (1935) and more recently by Naseeb Shaheen (1987), and Roger Stritmatter (2001). Towards the end of the twentieth century, historians revised their view of the extent to which the Reformation had taken root in late Tudor England (Haigh, Duffy, Questier). A new appreciation of the Catholic resistance to change at the grass roots level led to a renewal of interest in Shakespeare’s religious sympathies and a landmark conference at the University of Lancaster in 1999. The Lancaster conference proved to be a ‘turn to religion’ in Shakespeare studies and there was discussion of Shakespeare’s sympathetic treatment of Catholics in his plays. The consensus of the conference was that the plays reveal ‘a religious sceptic who was intellectually and emotionally attached to some features of the “old religion”’ of Catholicism (Jackson and Marotti 2011, 4-5). Nevertheless, when so many plays are
set in Catholic countries, it is arguable that referencing Catholic discourse, holy orders or sacraments lends necessary authenticity to the character more than it reveals the playwright’s religious preferences. These remain opaque, protected as Gary Taylor notes by ‘the systematic cultivation of ambiguity and equivocation in Shakespeare’s writing’ (2003, 248). Taylor sounded a caveat against concluding with certainty what Shakespeare believed. However, a number of scholars at the conference (Peter Milward S.J., Carol Enos, Miola) demonstrated Shakespeare’s memory for Catholic discourse, and Miola concluded that ‘we will read [Shakespeare’s] plays differently if we attend to their Catholic sub-texts’ (in Wilson 2003, 31). My research concurs with this conclusion. In fact, in view of the favourable reception granted to the Hermetic texts in Catholic Italy and France, this study complements the findings of the Lancaster conference, with the qualification that we will understand Shakespeare’s plays differently if we add a Hermetic dimension to our reading and viewing.

In addition to Shakespeare’s knowledge of Christian texts, John Vyvyan has established his use of Platonic ideas, and his knowledge of Ficino’s *Theologia Platonica*, a book owned and annotated by Dee and potentially available to Shakespeare. Prior to Frances Yates’ seminal work on Giordano Bruno, a number of scholars had commented on Shakespeare’s interest in paganism (Elton, Maxwell, Kermode). Since the publication of Yates’ work, Anglophone scholars (Gatti, Mebane, Perrault, Versluis) have found evidence that Shakespeare knew of the *magia*, alchemy, and astrology that characterize the numerous practical Hermetic

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250 Fourteen plays or about two-fifths of the canon are set or have scenes set in Italy.
texts that also interested Bruno who preferred ‘the magical religion of the Egyptians. . . to any other religion’ (212). The presence of magic in Shakespeare’s plays is undeniable, but this study has focussed exclusively on his knowledge of the religious philosophy of Hermetism.

Of Shakespeare’s contemporaries, knowledge, sometimes profound knowledge, of Hermes Trismegistus and Hermetic thought has been noted in connection with the published works of John Dee, Edmund Spenser, Philip Sidney, George Chapman, Christopher Marlowe, and Walter Ralegh, while others such as Gabriel Hervey, George Peele and Thomas Nashe have, at the very least, an awareness of the existence of the Hermetic corpus in sixteenth century England. A clearer picture of the transmission and reception of the Hermetic texts in Catholic France has resulted from the meticulous research of the scholar Maurizio Campanelli (Hanegraaff 2015). My research has identified the thread of Hermetic discourse in ideas that may be sourced directly and indirectly to the *Hermetica* in the writing of Colet, Erasmus, Rabelais, Marguerite de Valois, La Primaudaye, du Plessis Mornay and Bodin. Recent research published in *Albineana 24* (2012) has established the interest of the Huguenot court both in the translation and commentary of *Pyramander* published by Foix de Candale in 1579, and also in modelling religious tolerance at the court of Navarre. Despite this, the religious Hermetic texts themselves have long been marginalized in Anglophone scholarship, and virtually ignored in Shakespearean scholarship. Thus, there has been little substantial research to date to suggest that Shakespeare knew of or consulted the *Corpus Hermeticum* or related texts such as the *Crater Hermetis*.

In this study, which treats the Hermetic texts as intertexts in Riffaterre’s terms and juxtaposes them with the selected plays for the purpose of comparison,
knowledge of the Hermetic intertext has illuminated and given significance to the religious and philosophic Hermetic ideas inherent in the plays – meanings lost to us in the passage of time. Furthermore, without ever proselytising, Shakespeare plants the seed from which religious debate can grow, while never revealing his own religious leanings. In this he resembles Plato whose dialogues are famed for the skill with which he detaches himself from controversial subjects for debate. In constructing, and indeed inhabiting his characters with purposeful artistry, Shakespeare also distances himself from the big religious questions of the age, such as whether Man’s will is free, and raises others such as the origin of sin or one’s responsibility for evil. Through the dramatic mechanisms of characterisation in dialogue, through setting and plot, and through the literary mechanisms of ambiguity and allegory, Shakespeare creates space for a religious debate to arise. It is a debate to which Hermetic ideas can now make a contribution, as this thesis argues, although Shakespeare’s own beliefs remain tantalisingly obscure.

The evidence of Hermetic thought that I have identified in the selected plays includes: the divinity of Man referenced in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and realised in *The Tempest*; the twofold nature of Man, both material and essential; the importance of knowing oneself (*noesis*) as a step on the journey of the soul to

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251 Hermetic thought was gradually rejected in the seventeenth century. Everard’s English translation of Patrizi’s edition was published posthumously in 1650. Keats and other Romantics showed interest in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and interest was again revived by the theosophical movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. But despite interest from serious scholars such as Richard Reitzenstein, Nock and Festugière, Walter Scott, C.H. Dodd and Paul Oscar Kristeller amongst others, the texts slipped out of sight, and were for many years virtually forgotten by mainstream academia.
knowledge of the god within (gnosis), and spiritual regeneration in this world or the next (in King Lear); the role of mind and reason in directing the will to make virtuous choices that ensure salvation; and the origin of evil (in Othello). The separation of the mortal, material body from the immortal, essential and incorporeal soul at death may have originated with Plato, but the notion that death is not destruction but only the dissolution of the mortal body which will undergo a ‘sea-change’ and be recycled back into the elements of which it was composed is found in the Corpus Hermeticum and in The Tempest. I find that the plays and the Hermetic texts are connected by verbal echoes between text and intertext, in direct verbal borrowings, in the playwright’s revisions, and in a general consonance and affinity of thought. Where alchemy is present, it is coded as allegory, a trope for the purifying Hermetic ascent.

Love’s Labour’s Lost and The Tempest both reference the Hermetic doctrine that Man, through long contemplation leading to knowledge of self or noesis, can achieve gnosis. The former play openly and apparently with the approval of the Master of the Revels and the Stationers’ Register, allows King Ferdinand to speak the gnostic heresy that the recompense for the proposed three years of contemplative study is to become ‘god-like’. It is a phrase borrowed from the Corpus Hermeticum – ‘the human is a god-like living thing’ (X [24]), the man with knowledge will ‘be made god’ (I [26]), and resonates with the phrase used by the Family of Love – ‘to be godded with god’. When Love’s Labour’s Lost was published, the title page announced that it was ‘newly corrected’; there is no way of knowing now if more explicit heresies were removed in the process, but clearly, the word ‘god-like’ remained and, as it stands, the academic debate about the way to knowledge – via the vita activa or the vita contemplativa – was an old one and would have caused no alarm. I argue that there is a connection between Ferdinand king of
Navarre, who aspires to god-like status in the play, and his namesake, Ferdinand, king of Naples, who was tutored in the contemplative way of Hermes, ‘the road that leads to life’ (1.1, 167), and culminates in knowledge of god. The connection between Navarre and Naples links the play with Lazzarelli’s *Crater Hermetis* and grounds the stage fiction in historic fact.

It is Lazzarelli who associates contemplation with love. In the *Crater Hermetis*, he tells Ferdinand that ‘first contemplation excites love, and then love turns the human mind to God’ (24.2. 243), but as Hanegraaff points out ‘Lazzarelli’s understanding of love appears to be more reminiscent of *eros* than of *agape* (although he would undoubtedly have considered the latter to be included in the former)’ (2005, 70). At the end of Shakespeare’s play, the pleasures of the court are temporarily abandoned while King Ferdinand and the lords resolve, for one kind of love, to embrace an ascetic life of another kind of love, namely service to others, for a twelvemonth. For love of Rosaline, Berowne is to serve ‘the speechless sick’ (5.2.839), and the king is to test his love by spending a twelvemonth in contemplation, ‘austere [and] insociable’ (5.2.793) in a remote hermitage. The light of Lazzarelli’s dialogue in the *Crater Hermetis*, when shone on *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, reveals the significance of these loving impositions and lends religious substance to

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252 Lazzarelli equates the way of Hermes with a line from the Gospel of Matthew, 7.14.

253 Hanegraaff has shown that Agrippa knew Lazzarelli’s commentary (2009, 10), so it is possible that it was known in England through John Dee who admired Agrippa and owned his work.
what has often been understood as nothing more than a light-hearted musical comedy with a puzzling ending.

Like the real Ferdinand, king of Naples, and the fictional Ferdinand, king of Navarre who both retired for a time from their princely duties, Prospero, duke of Milan, neglected his civic duties in order to pursue ‘secret studies’ (1.2.77) and ‘the bettering of [his] mind’ (1.2.90). In the figure of Prospero Shakespeare shows what it means to have achieved the god-like status that the young King Ferdinand aspired to in Love’s Labour’s Lost. Using his god-like mind (‘Nothing is more god-like than <mind>’ (CH X [23])), Prospero, this ‘god of power’ (1.2.10), can control the elements and the minds of others. Prospero himself assumes multiple identities – learned Hermetist or Magus, father, brother, duke – and in the Epilogue he speaks like a Christian and a Catholic. But for most of the play he is the director of the action, controlling all with his god-like mind.

In The Tempest, ideas that may have originated with Plato or with Ficino or with Virgil, poetry from Ovid, ideas from the Hermetica and prayers from the Christian liturgy all melt and dissolve in the fertile mind of the creative playwright who transforms those ideas so that they appear to be organic, inherent properties of the characters and through them of the dramatic action. Hermetic thought colours and is coloured by other thoughts. For example, the play blends the Hermetic view of the twofold nature of Man with the Platonic teaching on the permanent separation of soul and body after death and the Christian belief in resurrection. A Hermetic exegesis of the consecutive scenes where Alonso is both drowned and alive reveals an idiosyncratic view of the resurrected soul permanently separated from the body, and
lays bare with great comfort and beauty the metaphysics of death.\textsuperscript{254} The idea of death as the dissolution of the mortal body returning to the elements, found in Book VIII of the \textit{Corpus Hermeticum}, helps the audience understand that the body of the drowned Alonso is undergoing a sea-change and that what we see on stage is not a man but his shade – his embodied spirit, with soul intact and retaining conscious mind, and memory of his past actions.

There are other aspects of the dramatic discourse that bloom when understood in the light of the Hermetic teaching. In \textit{The Tempest}, the purifying Hermetic ascent for example is glimpsed through the alchemical colours passing from the pitch-black tempest through peacock green to silver and to ‘gold on lasting pillars’ (5.1.208). The qualities of mind that Prospero exhibits, thought (which includes imagination), consciousness, memory and foresight can be sourced to the \textit{Asclepius} [11]. Chapter XV about Truth and reality, visibility and invisibility, is the probable origin of our disorientation when as spectators we suspend disbelief and believe that the stage illusion we are witnessing is real, only to hear from Prospero that the great globe, signifying the real world and we ourselves are similarly illusory and bound to dissolve without a trace. The movement between reality and unreality, visibility and invisibility, illusion and delusion, sleep or trance creates a dream-like sense of enchantment in this play that eludes attempts to interpret the play in purely

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\textsuperscript{254} In the mediaeval church St Thomas Aquinas taught that body and soul constitute a human unity, and though separated at death will eventually be reunited and reach their highest destiny in a life of abiding union with the risen Christ (\textit{Dictionary}, 822).
\end{flushright}
Hermetic terms and calls up memories of Aeneas at Cumae, or of Dante asking Virgil whether he is man or shade.

I conclude that in conceptualising Love’s Labour’s Lost and The Tempest Shakespeare drew upon his memory of the Crater Hermetis and Ferdinand’s dialogue with Lazzarelli, as well as Books V and X of the Corpus Hermeticum, but particularly Book VIII and sections of Chapter X – almost certainly in Foix de Candale’s French edition. The conclusion is supported by the ideas about truth and reality and about the nature of the invisible god which were discussed in relation to The Tempest. The notion reflects the thinking of Stobaeus as it occurs in chapter XV of Foix’s French translation based on the 1554 Greek edition of Adrian Turnebus. In Miola’s terms, the several intertexts are functioning, transformed in Shakespeare’s memory, as a ‘source remote’ (2004, 20).

By contrast, King Lear and Othello both reveal the playwright’s close knowledge of several books of the Corpus Hermeticum. The first Quartos of The True Chronicle Historie of King Lear, 1608 and The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice, 1622, both carried the old printer’s emblem featuring the familiar caduceus of Hermes, grasped by two hands in a friendly grip. There is a strong possibility that the emblem was chosen to indicate Hermetic content to anyone intending to purchase the play.

The evidence of verbal borrowings that I found strongly suggests that Shakespeare also knew the Commentaires on the Pymander made by Foix de Candale. The infrequent word, ‘machination’ found in the commentary (Foix 86), added during revision of the Quarto, is used twice in the Folio King Lear and nowhere else in the canon. Similarly, ‘eternele perdition’ (Foix 678), admittedly not quite so
rare, is borrowed for *The Tempest*. The context in which each was used by Foix closely resembles the context in which the word occurs in the plays, suggesting that Shakespeare may have Foix’s text at his elbow as he revises his characters – an example of what Miola calls the ‘source proximate’ (2004, 19).

*King Lear* and *Othello* are both known to have undergone extensive, probably authorial, revisions. In the case of *King Lear*, the revisions that abbreviated and rewrote parts of the Quarto were so substantial that Quarto and Folio are now treated as independent versions. *Lear* is unique in the canon in that Quarto and Folio preceded by the source play *King Leir* provide a series of three plays where alterations may reasonably be assumed to be purposeful and authorial. A Hermetic exegesis suggests a rationale for these changes and I argue from a close examination of a number of revisions that they serve the purpose of dramatically illustrating the Hermetic teaching. Leir, whose behaviour is described by Goneril as ‘extreme’ in the anonymous play, is revealed by Regan in the Quarto *Lear* as a man who has ‘ever but slenderly known himself’ and is in need of the knowledge-of-self that following the way of Hermes brings. And Cordelia who is ‘proud’ in *King Leir*, becomes ‘true’ in *King Lear* Quarto and Folio The only inconsistency in my argument that most of the alterations tend towards fine-tuning Hermetic thought, lies in the decision to remove music, so important to the union of sensation and understanding in the awakening mind (*CH IX [2]*) from the Folio scene where Cordelia enters and Lear awakes.  

255 By contrast, in *The Tempest*, when sense and reason gradually return to the minds of the entranced miscreants, Prospero calls for ‘a solemn air . . . the best comforter / To an unsettled fancy’ (5.1.58-59). In many ways the entire play is one great symphony.
A Hermetic hermeneutic reveals in both *King Lear* and *Othello* Shakespeare’s deep fascination with the human mind and his understanding of human psychology. Mind is central to Hermetic doctrine which holds that God is mind and life and light (*CH I* [12]). Hermetism is a religion of the mind, as Fowden saw, which teaches that Man must use his mind, first to know himself (*noesis*) and then to know the mind of the god within (*gnosis*). Shakespeare portrays Lear’s mind as it is being driven to the brink of madness. Although distraught with grief, hallucinating, raving and exhausted, almost deranged for a time, Lear’s mind retains its reason throughout, and he is restored to health and normality by sleep. In Othello we see the opposite. Shakespeare creates a mind that retains its sanity but whose reason is compromised by his trust in a friend who subtly feeds him the poison of doubt. Even more subtle is the deft way in which Shakespeare, in *King Lear*, embeds the concepts seeded by wicked demons – adultery, murder, assaulting one’s father, the impiety of suicide, jumping from a cliff – which a character possessed of one or more of the twelve traits of personality, dispositions, or habits of mind known as ‘torments of matter’ – lust, greed, deceit, anger, malice and the rest – chooses to enact. In this way the dramatic action in *King Lear* springs organically from the very nature of the *dramatis persona*. The men and women who people Shakespeare’s stage reveal their natures in the words he puts into their mouths. They choose to do what they do, because they are what they are – even Edmund who thinks he knows who he is, and even Iago, who claims not to be what he is. It is up to audience and reader to be alive to the dramatic irony inherent in discrepancies, or in the case of the King or of Othello, to wonder at the change.

Thinking about the two tragic plays in this study, in the light particularly of Book XIII where Hermes lists habits of mind that are universal to mankind, I felt
I had tapped the well-spring of Shakespeare’s profound understanding of the human mind and human behaviour. From Hermes’ teaching that the path to perfection demands inner reform, Shakespeare understands that it is one’s innate self that motivates one’s choices and actions. This is not to diminish one whit the genius that gave dramatic life to those human qualities, but perhaps to explain why the plays he wrote continue to transcend time and place – ‘not of an age, but for all time’.

Not only does Hermetic doctrine inform Shakespeare’s artistry in creating his characters, but Shakespeare does not resile from embedding Hermetic ideas pertinent to current religious controversies, or philosophic debate, or from contributing to a view of the mystery of the afterlife. Othello’s plight, for example, challenges all thinking readers to consider the legal and moral issue of culpability: to what extent is he responsible for the choice he made? Othello confronts the theologian with the question of the origin of evil: the Christian finds the answer in original sin, while for the Hermetist it is Man himself whose mind directs his will to act. Othello also openly invites discussion of the then current Arminian controversy on free will and choice which is crucial to Hermetic doctrine.

For all these reasons I conclude that the Hermetic texts constitute a unifying, coherent and credible source for Shakespeare’s portrayal of human psychology and the mind of Man that we find in these plays.

My research into Hermetic thought in Shakespeare’s plays has given rise to two previously unforeseen lines of future inquiry. First, the possibility that the conventicles of men and women who are known to have met clandestinely to discuss religious matters may also have read aloud, listened to and discussed plays in manuscript. Second, considered below, that Hermetism may have been perceived by
some as a viable alternative religion, capable of bringing about the toleration and peace that the divided church in England and Europe so desperately needed.

Writing about Shakespeare’s plays as books as well as playscripts, Lukas Erne pointed out that while ‘performance tends to speak to the senses . . . a printed text activates the intellect’ (2003, 23). Shakespeare, argues Erne, is a literary dramatist who wrote to be read. The practice of men and women from all strata of society of meeting in groups led by a friend or guide, as they read, listened to and discussed ideas, raises the possibility that they read manuscripts as well as printed books. Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton note the common practice amongst the educated to employ a scholar to act as ‘facilitator’ of their reading, and they cite Sir Henry Wotton who wrote in his commonplace book, ‘A friend to confer readings together most necessary’ (30-78).

The custom of the laity to meet secretly in conventicles to read, hear and discuss the vernacular Scriptures was established in the late fourteenth century by the Lollards, and although the movement declined, the practice, known as ‘the prophesyings’, of lay people meeting, often with clerics, persisted in Elizabeth’s reign, despite her disapproval. Groups of men and women like the Familists (forerunners of the Society of Friends or Quakers), who appear to have been practising the ‘way of Hermes’ to perfection and becoming ‘godded with god’ are known to have met in each others’ houses. There they discussed the copious writings of Hendrik Niclaes, such as the Terra Pacis, which I argue bear a striking similarity to the Hermetic doctrine. Other groups, closer to the city and the court, like the Sidney circle, or Dee’s visitors at Mortlake, or Ralegh’s coterie meeting at Durham House in the Strand, all had connections to Hermetic thought, either overt or covert. Any of these groups, as potential students of the Corpus Hermeticum, could have found that
reading and discussing *King Lear* and *Othello* illuminated their understanding of the doctrine.

Both the tragedies in this study appear to be literary texts, revised, in my view, more for readers than for a theatre audience. John Heminge and Henrie Condell in their introduction to the First Folio in 1623 urged *the great Variety of Readers* to

> Reade him therefore, againe and againe: And if then you doe not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger, not to understand him. And so we leave you to other of his Friends, whom if you need, can be your guides.

The clear implications are first that there is matter in the plays that repays deep study and repeated reading, and that readers who may not immediately understand a play should enlist a Friend of the playwright to guide them, and second that the practice of reading with a facilitator is not new. I argued that the revisions to *King Lear* tended towards enhancing the Hermetic content, and I suggest now that some of the alterations may have resulted from discussion of the manuscript undertaken by readers of the play seeking to understand the Hermetic texts.\(^{256}\) If men and women made shorthand copies of what they were studying for their own later use then there are implications here for what Adele Davidson has called ‘The Textual Mystery of *King Lear*’ (2011). She argues that many of the errors and anomalies in the first Quarto of *King Lear* may be attributed to the compositors’ having first to reconstruct a longhand copy from a shorthand copy. The shorthand copies, she found were not made during a live performance by a professional scrivener as was commonly

\(^{256}\) However, the strongest support for my speculation here that readers may have suggested amendments to the plays comes not from an alteration to Hermetic thought but to Emilia’s long speech about a woman’s sexual needs and men’s double standards (4.3.85-102) which was added to the Quarto and which in my view can only have come from a woman.
supposed, but taken from a manuscript copy of the play (31), made by a shorthand amateur. The possibility that men and women not immediately connected with theatre gathered to listen to and to read Shakespeare’s plays in manuscript, and occasionally made copies for their own use that found their way to a printer, warrants further inquiry.

Second, the idea that Christianised Hermetism was seen as a viable alternative religion warrants investigation. In the years of interest to this study, the religious upheavals meant that Christians in England may fairly be said to have held beliefs somewhere along the spectrum of Catholic, Protestant and Puritan, with the Church of England occupying the middle way. And we should not dismiss Robert Parsons’ accusation in 1580 when he wrote to the Queen letting her know that he knew of a fourth religion, ‘the householders of love’, who were in her realm. 257 However, while to practise the Traditional religion was deemed a heresy and after 1584, a treason, the boundary separating the two confessions was quite porous. 258 Michael Questier has drawn attention to the numbers of converts, even serial


258 ‘For the Elizabethan Crown, the prosecution of dissenting religious belief as treasonous or seditious, rather than heretical, would be the means by which the religiously divisive would be silenced and wavering subjects would be convinced of the necessity of submitting to authority.’ Edwin Owen Williams, “Trials of conscience: Criminalizing religious dissidence in Elizabethan England” (January 1, 2003). Dissertation from ProQuest. Paper AAI3087484. [http://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI3087484](http://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI3087484).
converts, including clerics, to and from Catholicism.\textsuperscript{259} Fundamentally, the convert was always looking for assurance of salvation. The Queen herself is famously quoted as desiring not ‘to make windows into men’s hearts and secret thoughts’, and a gentleman as close to the court as the Queen’s witty godson, Sir John Harington of Kelston, could describe himself with impunity as all three: a ‘Protesting, Catholique Puritán’ (3).\textsuperscript{260}

The situation was further complicated by disagreements not only between orthodox Protestants but also amongst the numerous dissenting sects such as the Freewillers, Anabaptists, Arians, Nestorians, Arminians and radical Separatists, or by non-conformists such as John Penry and Robert Browne.\textsuperscript{261} Other groups were more difficult to detect because they conformed outwardly in order to keep the law and avoid prosecution while maintaining their real beliefs inwardly. These so-called Nicodemites, who practised dissembling and equivocation and were accused by their neighbours of lying and hypocrisy, included both Church Papists and the members of the tolerant Family of Love.\textsuperscript{262}

\textsuperscript{259} Notable serial converts include Dr William Alabaster (1568–1640) and Archbishop Marc’Antonio de Dominis (Questier 55). Conversion was far from a simple matter. Theologically, converts weighed up the authority of the Church Fathers and Church Tradition against the authority of the Scriptures. Politically, the royal supremacy was pitted against the primacy of the Pope.

\textsuperscript{260} John Harington Kt. of Kelston. \textit{A Tract on the Succession to the Crown} (A.D. 1602).

\textsuperscript{261} Mentioned in \textit{Twelfth Night}: ‘I had as lief be a politician as a Brownist’ (3. 2. 34).

\textsuperscript{262} Church Papist was a term of abuse, for those English Catholics who outwardly conformed to the established Protestant Church and yet inwardly remained Roman Catholics. They were part of ‘the amorphous mass of individuals who conformed fully, partially or occasionally
Only Familism and, arguably, nascent Freemasonry, offered a space where confessional divisions and traditional rituals were irrelevant. The continuing presence of Familists, largely unrecorded after 1582, is documented in the mid-seventeenth century when they evolved into the Society of Friends or Quakers; references to Freemasonry in the sixteenth century are similarly rare. Some writers, perhaps privy to secret knowledge, have identified passages in Shakespeare which they argue symbolically or directly reference Freemasonry. David Stevenson describes Freemasonry as ‘a religious fraternity without religion’ (124), and notes with the established [Protestant] Church’ (Walsham 2014, 10). The Family of Love was a religious sect founded in East Friesland, c. 1540 by Hendrik Niclaes. It rose to prominence in England in the 1570s and 1580s when it was discovered that members of the Queen’s Yeomen of the Guard, known as her ‘Spears’, belonged to the sect.

Niclaes invited to the Family of Love: ‘All lovers of truth, of what Nation and religion soever they be, Christian, Jew, Mahomites or Turk and Heathen’ (in Heather Ingman 225).

John Everard (?1584-1640) whose translation of Patrizi’s edition of the Corpus Hermeticum was published posthumously in 1650 was also a Familist.

Freemasonry is another topic which for many years was avoided by academic historians, who possibly regarded it as a disreputable subject of study. David Stevenson, then Professor of History at the University of Aberdeen, acknowledges as much in the preface to his 1988 book, The Origins of Freemasonry (1). He dates the earliest record of speculative Freemasonry in Scotland to the very end of the sixteenth century and devotes a large part of the chapter on the Renaissance contribution to issues associated with this study: neo-Platonism, Hermeticism, the Reformation, and the Rosicrucians (77-124 passim).

that there are ‘resemblances between Hermeticism [sic] and freemasonry which cannot be dismissed as mere coincidences’ (85).

Following the stream of Hermetic thought as it ebbed and flowed throughout the sixteenth century, and the recurring references to an ‘other religion’, to a *novis philosophia*, and to what modern critics have termed ‘a Hermetic religion of the world’, ‘a new religion’, or ‘a cosmopolitan non-sectarian religion’ raises the possibility that there may have existed an alternative religious movement that has slipped unnoticed from the official Anglophone history of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. A tolerant religion based on knowledge-of-self, compassionate love-of-others and of god, that ignored all artificial divisions imposed by the institutional Churches and brought men and women together, might have been able to heal the ruptures that had plunged the century into bloody religious war. It was not to be. Nevertheless, the notion lends credence to the possibility that there were conventicles of men and women in England meeting like La Primaudaye’s young men in Anjou, or like the Familist gatherings in East Anglia and Devon, who were intent on studying the Hermetic texts and following the way of Hermes to Olympus. The Family of Love and Freemasonry were both linked to Hermetism and both presaged the phenomenon of Rosicrucianism that erupted in Germany in 1614. The Rosicrucian manifestos that called for reformation of the whole wide world are strongly Hermetic in orientation, and connected with known and suspected Hermetists in England, Dee and Bacon. The two manifestos, a third entitled *The Alchemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz*, sometimes connected with *The Tempest*, also warrant further investigation.

Jean Dagens describes the long sixteenth century as ‘the golden age of religious Hermetism’ (6). But Jeanne Harrie concludes that the suggestion that the
The popularity of Hermetism is ‘related to the growth of eirenic, reunionist opinions needs further research’ (1978, 514). My research has suggested to me that the century was studded with a few good men and women who wanted the peace that religious tolerance would bring, without necessarily advocating the ecumenism that embracing Hermetism might effect. Identifying this stream of alternative religious thought that began in Italy, spread through France into England and was still alive and of interest to some in England after the civil war, has allowed me to situate the plays in this study in a particular politico-religious context not previously acknowledged. On the evidence before me, it is tempting to conclude that Shakespeare himself was an active and conscious participant in the dissemination of Hermetic thought, however, more extensive exegesis of the canon in the light of other editions and translations of the Hermetic texts should be undertaken before the matter can be confirmed.
Epilogue

Hidden in plain sight. The hermeneutics of suspicion

The Anglican church of the Holy Trinity in Stratford-upon-Avon has a plaque commemorating the poet Shakespeare high up on the north-east wall. It was commissioned by persons unknown and placed some time between 1616 and 1623, probably close to 1620. The first two lines are in Latin, a language which only a small fraction of the population could read at the time.

![Epitaph to Shakespeare](image)

Fig. 5 The epitaph to Shakespeare on the monument in the Church of the Holy Trinity, Stratford-upon-Avon, c.1620

Inside this Christian church it is surprising to read an epitaph that lists a pagan trinity: a King, a Philosopher and a Priest (or hierophant – one of Hermes’ many roles). Some who visited the church may have suspected a connection with Hermes Trismegistus, King, Philosopher, Priest to whom Bacon had compared King James. But the king is not James, nor even Solomon. Pylium references Nestor, King of the Pylians, whose name also belonged to Nestor, the bishop whose understanding of Christ as two
persons, human and divine, was rejected at the Council of Ephesus, but is reflected
in the Hermetic view of Man as two persons: corporeal and incorporeal. Socrates
refers to the great philosopher famed for the dictum ‘Know thyself’ which is the first
step on the way of Hermes to salvation. Maro, Publius Virgilius, is Virgil, the poet
whom Dante met leading Homer and some other great poets through the Inferno.
Dante was headed for Paradise, but according to the epitaph, the soul of the great
poet Shakespeare is on Olympus. As the *Corpus Hermeticum* proclaims: ‘This is the
only salvation for man: knowledge of God. This is ascent to the highest abode of the
gods. It is ascent to Olympus’ (*CH X* [15]).

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot. *Four Quartets*
Appendix I

From Hermes to Hermes Trismegistus

Let us be clear that ‘Hermes’ called ‘Trismegistus’ is a construct, not a single man as Moses or Zoroaster are believed to have been. Originating in Egypt, famed in the ancient world for its magic, he is a composite of Thoth the Egyptian moon god, and the Greek Hermes. For the Greeks, the gods were supranational, so it is no surprise that by the third century BCE, in Hellenic Egypt, the Egyptian magician-god, Thoth (Theuth in Plato’s *Phaedrus*), was identified as Hermes. Like Hermes, Thoth was the guide of the souls of the dead, and appeared to Isis while she was trying to put Osiris back together. Both Thoth and Hermes were messengers of the gods, interpreting and mediating between the divine and the human; the art of interpretation or hermeneutics took its very name from Hermes; to both were attributed the invention of writing.267 They were the gods of eloquence, lords of wisdom and protectors of all knowledge; they were both associated with medicine, and also with invention, trickery and invisibility. Hermes is also linked to Terminus the god of boundaries and endings, and as Alison Shell has pointed out, makes an appearance in that identity in both *The Winter’s Tale* and *Two Noble Kinsmen* (2010, 224).

Unlike Thoth who was represented in hieroglyph as a baboon or as an ibis-headed man, Hermes was represented in winged cap or broad-brimmed traveller’s hat, shod in winged sandals, and carrying a snake-entwined caduceus. Hermes was the god of trade and commerce and also a musician, the inventor of the

267 Fowden posits that his ‘characteristic function in the Hellenistic period [was] as the logos or ‘word’, the interpreter of the divine will to mankind’ (24).
lyre, which he gave to Apollo to appease him (*The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, 288). The Romans identified Mercury, their own god of merchants and trade, particularly the corn trade, with Hermes. Mercury shared all of Hermes’ attributes, and like him was represented in winged hat and shoes and bearing the distinctive caduceus (*Oxford Companion*, 374). Quick-witted, intellectually brilliant or ‘mercurial’, his day is Wednesday (*mercoledi*), his number is 4, and he has a planet named for him. Paradoxically, this inventor of writing and god of eloquence is also the god of secrecy and silence.

Like Mercury, the son of Jupiter and Maia, Hermes also had a genealogy: he was the son of Zeus and Maia, eldest of the Pleiades, and the father of Autolycus, who like his father was a master of fraud and theft. Thoth’s genealogy is less certain and more complicated and would not detain us here were it not that Cicero in *De Natura Deorum* listed five different Hermes, the third of whom was the son of Zeus and Maia, while the fifth fled to Egypt where he gave the Egyptians their laws and alphabet and was known as Thoth (Fowden 24). In a sort of reverse Euhemerism, around 196 BCE, the Jewish scholar, Artapan, assimilated the god Hermes/Thoth to Moses (Faivre 1995, 76). Somewhat later, Christian apologists like Clement of Alexandria were prepared to see Hermes-logos as prophetic of Christos-logos, and he was represented as a Good Shepherd, carrying a sheep (Faivre 1995, 22). Similarly, Faivre claims, although Hermes is not mentioned in the Qur’an, Arab historians ‘quickly identified him with Idris’, who is also Enoch from Genesis (1995, 19).

As elusive as *argent vive*, his name and symbols simultaneously and ambiguously reference the mythical pagan god and the legendary Egyptian magus. It is really not possible to say exactly when writings about astrology, practical alchemy,
magic and theurgy began to circulate under the name of Hermes and when the title Trismegistus was added. It is the case that hundreds of texts have been attributed to him over the centuries, but the texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum* that concern us here are believed to have been written in the same milieu as the synoptic gospels, and the Latin *Asclepius* somewhat later. Stanton Linden shows that, in spite of the momentous exposure by the philologist, Casaubon, of the texts’ true provenance, the influence of Hermes Trismegistus was ‘enormous and long-lasting, extending from the earliest alchemical writings down to the late seventeenth century’ when Sir Isaac Newton wrote his *Commentary* on the *Emerald Tablet* (27). In other words, years that included Spenser, Sidney, Marlowe and Chapman, where the influence has been noted, and Shakespeare, where so far it has not.  

That Hermes and Trismegistus, now Christianized, were welcomed in Florence is clear from Botticelli’s famous *Primavera*. The Roman goddess of love, Venus, whom Ficino had described as ‘a nymph of excellent comeliness [. . . ] beloved by God’, now has Christian / Hermetic virtues: ‘Her soul and mind are Love and Charity’ (156).  

Venus is the focus of the painting, the little love god Cupid (also known as Eros), blindfolded, flies overhead aiming his arrow at one of the three Graces who are clasping each other in a circle. Zephyrus and Mercury bookend the scene, and Mercury uses his caduceus to push away a few clouds from the lush garden

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268 These currents continued to flow well beyond the years of this study and may be seen in Robert Fludd, the Cambridge Platonists, Tommaso Campanelli, Valentin Andreae, Jacob Boehme, Athanasius Kircher, Michael Maier, Andrew Marvell, John Keats, William Blake, Mozart, Hegel, W B Yeats and many more.

where flowers and fruit hang together on the trees. Edgar Wind recognized in the
painting the three phases of the Hermetic process: the *emanation* in Zephyr’s descent,
*conversion* in the dance of the three Graces and *reascension* in the person of the
feathered Mercury (125). While Botticelli was carrying out the commission for
his patron Lorenzo in 1480, the pillars in the Salone Sistino in the Vatican Library
were being decorated with paintings of the ‘inventors’ of writing. Hermes-Thoth or
‘Mercurius-Thoyt-Aegytiis’ is there holding the caduceus and wearing the winged
hat (Faivre 1995, 134-5). In 1488 a portrait of Hermes Trismegistus in mosaic was
placed on the floor of the cathedral in Siena, then under construction. Faivre records
the surprising fact that soon after this, Pope Alexander VI, ‘the protector of Pico della
Mirandola’, ‘commissioned a great fresco in the Borgia apartments of the Vatican,
abounding with Hermetic symbols and zodiacal signs’ (1995, 40); there Trismegistus
is fixed forever in the company of Moses and Isis. Any sixteenth century visitor to
Florence, Siena or Rome could see at once that Trismegistus was revered, and in a
Christian setting. Faivre points out that Hermes Trismegistus appeared in illustrated
manuscripts even before 1461, but it is in the second half of the sixteenth century that
he was first represented in the presence of an armillary sphere (representing the works
of God), and a pair of compasses, the geometer’s instrument (implying that the world
is the product of intelligent design) (1995, 133). The image is labelled ‘Trismegistus’
and encircled by the words: *Deus est sphaera intelligibus cuius centrum est ubique*

270 Wind claims ‘it is practically certain’ that *Primavera* and its companion piece *The Birth
of Venus* were commissioned by or for Lorenzo di Pier Francesco, the cousin of Lorenzo the
Magnificent, and a pupil of Ficino (113).
et circunferentia nusquam (God is an intelligible sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere). Faivre also describes a painting by Giorgione dated to 1500, not labelled and therefore liable to interpretation, but which appears to connect Trismegistus with the architect’s instruments; it depicts three men: an old bearded man holding a manuscript, who could be Trismegistus, a younger turbaned Oriental, and a young European holding the geometer’s instruments of compasses and square (1995, 133).

A century later, Jean-Jacques Boissard (1528-1602), depicted an unmistakable Trismegistus standing in front of discarded weapons of war, and a caduceus where the twin snakes appear to be knotted together; he holds an armillary sphere aloft in his right hand and a book in his left hand. The symbolism seems to suggest that his pagan origins have been discarded and Trismegistus stands now for peace and knowledge. There is a remarkable similarity between Boissard’s image, engraved by Theodor de Bry, and another dated to 1594 of Christianus Philosophus depicting a man standing before the evidence of God’s creation: sun, moon and stars, surrounded by the wonders of earth, sea and sky, holding aloft an armillary sphere in one hand, while in the other he grasps a book entitled Verbum Dei. From his mouth issue the words, ‘Meditabor Verbum atque Opera Jehovae’ (I will ponder the Word and the Work of God). For the reader who is able to place Boissard’s engraving of Hermes Trismegistus in the context of the ‘Christian Philosopher’, Hermes Trismegistus has been Christianised.
Appendix II

More about the Hermetic theosophy

Book IV bears the title: *A discourse of Hermes to Tat: The mixing bowl or the monad.*

Lazzarelli used the title in his commentary, *Crater Hermetis – A Dialogue on the Supreme Dignity of Man, entitled the Way of Christ and the Mixing-Bowl of Hermes.* In this Book we learn that ‘God shared reason among all people . . . but not mind’ [3]. Mind he put in a great mixing bowl which he sent below with the instruction to all to immerse themselves in it. ‘All those who heeded the proclamation and immersed themselves in mind participated in knowledge and became perfect people because they received mind’ [4]. It is in this Book that we learn again the importance of choice. One may reach perfection as a result of a decision made by one’s free will: ‘Choosing the stronger [. . .] has splendid consequences for the one who chooses – in that it makes the human into a god’ [7], but ‘certainty in individual free will is not absolute’, or as Moreschini has it, ‘destiny is still a problem for perfects’ (16). It is an issue that I raise in connection with *Othello.*

Festugière cites Book V, *That god is invisible and entirely visible,* as an example of a particularly optimistic *gnosis,* but also describes it as ‘a leading example of the eclecticism and incoherence that he finds characteristic of the *Hermetica*’ (Copenhaver 140). It is about seeing with the mind’s eye, and about the power of dreams to lift one above the earth in order ‘to see the motionless set in motion and the invisible made visible through the things that it makes!’ (*CH V* [5]):

271 In *Timaeus* [41], the demiurge used a *krater* (or basin) to mix the world soul.
‘Would that you could grow wings and fly up into the air, lifted between earth and heaven to see the solid earth, the fluid sea, the streaming rivers, the pliant air, the piercing fire, the coursing stars, and heaven speeding on its axis above the same points’. \((CH\ V\ [5])\)

This vision of the cosmos, Nock and Festugière source to Cicero’s *Dream of Scipio* (Copenhaver 140). An important function of this Book is to initiate Tat in the mysteries. Hermes tells him:

‘O Tat, lest you go uninitiated into the mysteries. . . You must understand how something that seems invisible to the multitude will become entirely visible to you. . . Also, while remaining invisible because it always is, it makes all other things visible. ([1]) . . . Clearly, the one who alone is unbegotten is also unimagined and invisible, but in presenting images of all things he is seen through all of them and in all of them; he is seen especially by those whom he wished to see him’. \((CH\ V\ [2])\)

Later Hermes reminds his son:

‘this is the god invisible and entirely visible. This god who is evident to the eyes may be seen in the mind’. \((CH\ V\ [9])\)

The issue of how Man might know the reality of God is taken up again in Book VIII and is the concern of much of Book XV, the Stobaean fragments. I discuss these ideas in connection with *The Tempest* in Chapter Six.

The title of the short Book VIII: *That none of the things that are is destroyed, and they are mistaken who say that changes are deaths and destructions* really says it all. The Book falls naturally into three parts concerned with God, the cosmos and mankind. ‘God is in reality the first of all entities, eternal, unbegotten, craftsman of the whole of existence’, by whose agency ‘a second god came to be in his image . . . everliving because he is immortal’ but not eternal like the father [2]. For this reason, since ‘the cosmos is a second god and an immortal living thing’, and ‘all things in the cosmos are parts of the cosmos, but especially mankind’, it follows
that in death the body is not destroyed but only changed back into the elements of the cosmos [1], while the soul being immortal is indestructible. Finally, Hermes tells Tat, the father decided that unlike other living things, mankind should possess ‘mind’ putting him ‘in a relationship of sympathy with the second god and of thought with the first god’ [5].

The next treatise, Book IX, clarifies the relationship of mind to understanding: ‘Mind differs from understanding as much as god differs from divinity’ [1]. On understanding and sensation: [That the beautiful and good are in god alone and nowhere else], begins by explaining how understanding differs from sensation, and that the two are ‘intertwined with one another’ in human beings (CH IX [2]). Sensation belongs to the material (or mortal) man, understanding to the essential (or spiritual) man, and the two are mutually dependent. We also learn that ‘Mind conceives every mental product’, both the good which come from god as well as ‘seeds from some demonic being’ [3], which the god-fearing person will withstand, ‘because he is aware of knowledge’ [4]. Concepts sown in the mind in this way by the demons include ‘adultery, murder, violence to one’s father, sacrilege, ungodliness, strangling, suicide from a cliff’ [3]. This point is taken up in Chapter Four, in connection with the events of the plot in Arcadia and King Lear.

Book X, *The key*, continues the lesson, first warning that ‘the vice of soul is ignorance’ [8], while ‘the virtue of soul, by contrast, is knowledge’ [9]. Fowden points to ‘a useful distinction’ between two types of knowledge: *epistēmē* (science), which is the product of *logos* or reason, and *gnosis* (knowledge of the Mind of God) which is the product of understanding (*noesis*) with faith (*pistis*) (100, 101). It is in this Book that we learn that knowledge of god consequent upon knowledge of self or *noesis* is ‘ascent to Olympus’ [15]. Hermes explains to Asclepius that even though all things that exist have senses, ‘knowledge differs greatly from sensation’, for *gnosis* is the goal of *epistēmē*, ‘knowledge is the goal of learning and learning is a gift from god’ (X [9]), but ‘all learning is incorporeal using as instrument the mind itself’ (X [10]). The doctrine appears to underlie the decision taken by the lords in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* who swear to renounce the things of the flesh in order ‘to know which else we should not know’ (1.1. 56).

In Book XI, Mind (*Nous*) or God himself, speaks to Hermes about causes and change. He repeats the doctrine that ‘Death is not the destruction of all things that have been combined but the dissolution of their union’ [15]. Having dealt with the corporeal, Mind goes on to consider the speed and power of the incorporeal imagination than which ‘nothing is quicker nor more powerful’ [18]. The mind may ‘command your soul to travel to India, and it will be there faster than your command’ [19]. In this way by virtue of the quickness of thought, Man becomes like god who also has ‘everything – the cosmos, himself, <the> universe – like thoughts within himself’ [20]. Thus being equal to god, Man can understand god, and like god can

Foix de Candale, in his 1579 translation available in Shakespeare’s day gives: ‘adultaires, meurtres, parricides, sacrileges, impietez, estranglemants, precipitacions’ (292).
command the elements. In *The Tempest* I will argue that Prospero, as god-like magus, commands both the elements and their sprite Ariel who, as thought made corporeal, is the agent of Prospero’s imagination.

In Book XII Hermes is once again speaking to Tat about Mind, ‘the very essence of god’ [1]. We read that mind can quell anger and longing and that god has granted mankind ‘mind and reasoned speech which are worth as much as immortality’ [12]. Mind is powerful enough to conquer destiny, but Tat raises the question of retribution for one who commits a crime ‘under compulsion of fate’ [5]. It is a problem that is relevant to *Othello*.

In Book XIV Hermes purports to offer ‘a more mystical interpretation’ of ‘the nature of things’ to Asclepius [1]. He deals with the crucial question of causes, of the Creator god and his creation. It is the issue which made an absolute division between the Catholic Church’s ruling on *creatio ex nihilo* and the pagan assertion that *nihil ex nihilo fit*. Hermes tells Asclepius: ‘For I maintain that things begotten come to be by the agency of another; it is impossible, however, for anything to be older than all begotten entities unless it alone is begotten’ [2]. Concerning God the maker, however, this Book differs from the theology of Books I and XIII, asserting that between ‘what comes to be and who makes it [. . .], there is nothing, no third thing’ [4]. ‘For the two are all there is . . . and it is impossible to separate one from the other’ [5]. In other words, there is no intermediary Logos.

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273 The idea that God made the universe out of existing matter ‘received its death blow in the conflict with Gnosticism’. The thesis of *creatio ex nihilo* ‘was dogmatically formulated at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215’ (*Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 429).
Although Book XV is missing from the modern English *Corpus Hermeticum*, it was available in the 1579 French translation by Bishop Foix de Candale, based on the 1554 Greek edition published by Adrian Turnebus. The chapter begins by asserting the impossibility that Man, being imperfect, could speak with confidence about ‘la verité’, by which Hermes means the truth or reality of God. Foix quickly reassures his readers that Hermes is referring to ‘une essence divine’ and establishes Stobaeus’ Christian credentials by connecting Hermes’ words with Jesus Christ ‘when he said I am the way, the truth and the life’ (649). In section 2, Hermes tells Tat that everything on earth is not real but only a copy of reality (651). The doctrine echoes Platonic doctrine on Forms, ‘that there is nothing real here below’ and is taken up again in section 10 in connection with the difference between forms that are ‘invisible, divine and real’ and visible ‘corporeal things’ (672). In section 11, the third Stobaean fragment (Moreschini 191), the writer finds it necessary to speak of death, feared, he says, by the common people because they

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274 To his edition of the fourteen chapters translated by Ficino, Turnebus added three fragments by Stobaeus as well as one from the *Suda* as Book XV. Walter Scott in *Hermetica*, Vol. III alleges that Turnebus found the passages in an edition of the *Florilegium* of Stobaeus published by someone unknown in Venice in 1535 or 1536.

275 ‘De la verité, O Tat, il n’est possible l’homme (estant animal imparfaict, composé de members imparfaicts, et tabernacle constitué de divers corps et de plusieurs) en parler seurement’ (Foix, Chapter XV [1]), (649).

276 ‘Toutes choses donc, O Tat, qui sont en la terre, ne sont pas verité, mais imitations de verité’ (651).
do not understand it. Man is different from all other animals; brute beasts die and their bodies change and dissolve, but in Man the soul, the divine essence, separates from the flesh at death (679). Foix himself compares Stobaeus’ fragment to Book VIII of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (679).278

Book XVI, *Definitions of Asclepius to King Ammon on god, matter, vice, fate, the sun, intellectual essence, divine essence, mankind, the arrangement of the plenitude, the seven stars, and mankind according to the image,* was not available to Ficino, but was added, along with Books XVII and XVIII, by Lodovico Lazzarelli. The Books, which Lazzarelli would have been reading in Greek, warn against translating the tractate into Greek lest the secret meanings be lost or distorted. The clear implication is that there existed an original in a language other than Greek which can only have been Egyptian, and that the Egyptians had a low opinion of the Greeks, their ‘empty speeches’ and ‘inane foolosophy’ (*CH* XVI [2]). Jorgen Sørensen adopts Reitzenstein’s notion that the texts were a *Lese-mysterium,* ‘designed to perform very much the same function as the rituals of mystery cults’, in other words they were ‘supposed to cause spiritual illumination in the reader’ (41).279


278 Moreschini provides precise information about Foix’s use of the passages which Turnebus inserted from Stobaeus as well as a passage from the *Suda,* which is section 12 (683-686), (190).

In short, Book XVI illustrates ‘the transition from ritual text to devotional and meditative literature’ (Sørensen 57). The Book gives an image of the sun ‘situated at the centre of the cosmos wearing it like a crown’ and steadying ‘the chariot of the cosmos’, fastening the reins to itself, which are: ‘life and soul and spirit and immortality and becoming’ (CH XVI [7]). It was a passage to which Copernicus (1473-1543) referred, and which he took as affirming the correctness of his theory established empirically by mathematics. It draws on the Egyptian view of the Sun as a divinity, and may also derive from the Greek myth of Phaeton the charioteer in Plato’s Phaedrus (246-254). In this Book, Asclepius tells Ammon how the sun arrays ‘troops of demons under the regiments of stars, an equal number of them for each star’ (CH XVI [13]). Some of these demons are ‘mixtures of good and evil’; ‘granted authority over the things of the earth [. . .] they produce change [. . .] and ‘at the exact moment of birth, arrayed under each of the stars, take possession of each of us as we come into being and receive a soul’ (CH XVI [14, 15]). He continues: ‘With our bodies as their instruments, the demons govern the earthly government. Hermes has called this government "fate"’ (CH XVI [16]). I discuss in the chapter on Othello the use Shakespeare appears to make of this notion in his characterization of Iago.

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Copernicus wrote: ‘In the midst of all resides the Sun. For who could place this great light in any better position in this most beautiful temple [of the world] than that from whence it may illumine all at once? So that it is called by some the lamp of the world; by others the Mind; by others the ruler. And Trismegistus calls it the visible god’. Quoted by Frances Yates in a BBC radio 3 talk, published in The Listener and in Ideas and Ideals in the North European Renaissance vol 3, 256.
Foix de Candale incorporates the few lines discussing the reflections of incorporeals that constitute book XVII into Book XIV in his *Pymander* (738) and, following Turnebus, omits the next chapter entirely.

Book XVIII seems rather different from the rest of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. It presents god as a ‘tireless musician’ who not only produces ‘harmony in song’ but also provides ‘the rhythm of the music appropriate to each instrument’ [1]. If the instrument, meaning ‘us’, is defective, no one should blame the musician. The treatise exhorts all men to ‘tune the inward lyre and adjust it to the <divine> musician’ [5]. It ends with a panegyric praising the almighty, exhorting men to ask forgiveness from the god from whom emanates the energy above to the cosmos here below, reminding us that ‘beings are not different from one another’, that ‘all have one mind, the father’ and that ‘the charm that brings them together is love, the same love that makes one harmony act in all things’ [14]. The final paragraph advises us to extend our reverence for god to praise for kings, whose virtue lies in their being ‘the arbiter of peace’, through the ‘discourse that brings peace’, whose name is ‘the token of peace’ [15]. In short, the last Book speaks of peace and love in a way that is absolutely consonant with the message of the Prince of Peace and King of Love, and which rings with the confident hope that through forgiveness and love man can achieve reconciliation and a life of harmony.

‘To me this Asclepius is like the sun.’ A *Holy Book of Hermes Trismegistus addressed to Asclepius*. This Book, the *Asclepius*, referred to as the *Logos teleios* or *Perfect Discourse*, was translated from the Greek possibly as early
as the fourth century. It is in this Book that we read the now famous words, which prompted Pico della Mirandola’s *Oratio de hominis dignitate* (c.1487):\(^{281}\)

‘a human being is a great wonder, a living thing to be worshipped and honoured: for he changes his nature into a god’s, as if he were a god; he knows the demonic kind inasmuch as he recognizes that he originated among them; he despises the part of him that is human nature, having put his trust in the divinity of his other part. [. . . ] He cultivates the earth; he swiftly mixes into the elements; he plumbs the depths of the sea in the keenness of his mind. Everything is permitted him: heaven itself seems not too high, for he measures it in his clever thinking as if it were nearby [. . . ] He is everything, and he is everywhere’. [6]

The passage shares the Nestorian view of Man as both human and divine found in Book I [15].

The *Asclepius* was sometimes attributed to Apuleius, who is generally held responsible for the four controversial paragraphs citing bad magic [23-4] and [37-8], where Trismegistus speaks of humanity having ‘been able to discover the divine nature’ [37] and how to make ‘statues ensouled and conscious, filled with spirit and doing great deeds; statues that foreknow the future and predict it by [. . . ] prophecy’ [24]. The Book ends with a prayer, a thanksgiving for ‘a father’s fidelity, reverence and love’, and for the gifts of mind: ‘consciousness, by which we may know you; reason, by which we may seek you in our dim suppositions; and

\(^{281}\) Hanegraaff notes, after Moreschini, that ‘the “Dignity of Man” was a popular theme in this period’ and suggests that the original title may have been *Oratio ad laudes philosophiae* or similar (Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn 167). Shakespeare’s debt to Pico may be seen in Hamlet’s praise of Man: ‘Hamlet: What a piece of work is Man [. . . ] in apprehension how like a god’ (2.2.305-8).
knowledge, by which we may rejoice in knowing you’, and lastly with a shared pure meal ‘that includes no living thing’ [41].
Appendix III

From the Mémoires of Marguerite de Valois:

[1579] Félicité qui me dura l’espace de quatre ou cinq ans que je fus en Gascogne avec lui, faisant la plupart de ce temps-là notre séjour à Nérac, où notre Cour était si belle et si plaisante que nous n’envisions point celle de France: y ayant Madame la princesse de Navarre sa sœur, qui depuis a été mariée à Monsieur le duc de Bar mon neveu, et moi [ayant] bon nombre de dames et filles, et le roi mon mari étant suivi d’une belle troupe de seigneurs et gentilshommes, aussi honnêtes gens que les plus galants que j’aie vus à la Cour; et n’y avait rien à regretter en eux, sinon qu’ils étaient huguenots. Mais de cette diversité de religion il ne s’en oyait point parler, le roi mon mari et Madame la princesse sa sœur allant d’un côté au prêche, et moi et mon train à la messe en une chapelle qui est dans le parc; d’où comme je sortais, nous nous rassemblions pour nous aller promener ensemble ou en un très beau jardin qui a des allées de lauriers et de cyprès fort longues, ou dans le parc que j’avais fait faire, en des allées de trois mille pas qui sont au long de la rivière. Et le reste de la journée se passait en toute sorte d’honnêtes plaisirs, le bal se tenant d’ordinaire l’aprè-s-dînée et le soir. (199)

Mais la Fortune, envieuse d’une si heureuse vie (qui semblait, en la tranquillité et union où nous nous maintenions, mépriser sa puissance, comme si nous n’eussions été sujets à sa mutabilité), excita pour nous troubler nouveaux sujets de guerre entre le roi mon mari et les catholiques, rendant le roi mon mari et Monsieur de maréchal de Biron (qui avait été mis en cette charge de lieutenant de roi en Guyenne à la requête des huguenots) tant ennemis, que, quoi que je pusse faire pour les maintenir bien ensemble le roi mon mari et lui, je ne pus empêcher qu’ils ne vissent en une extrême défiance et haine, commençant à se plaindre l’un de l’autre au roi – le roi mon mari demandant que l’on lui ôtât Monsieur le maréchal de Biron de Guyenne, et Monsieur le maréchal taxant mon mari et ceux de la Religion prétendue d’entreprendre plusieurs choses contre le traité de la paix. [1580] Ce commencement de désunion allant toujours s’accroissant à mon grand regret, sans que j’y pusse remédier. (Mémoires, 200)
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