

his successors do not. As products of a very different time and world we come at Shakespeare with our vision diminished and refocused. His generation was one of the last to see the world that St. Augustine described as “a fair field fresh with the odor of Christ’s name.” Before we dismiss that description out of hand as sentimental piety, we would do well to try to understand the circumstances that made it anything but pious (in our pejorative sense) for the Saint and made it the means whereby a genius like Shakespeare could write dramatic poetry that comes close to bringing into simultaneous focus the totality of human experience.

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To the Editor:

A fundamental question raised by Richard Levin’s article, which he himself fails to raise, is surely: Was Shakespeare himself a Fluellenist? “Anyone familiar with modern criticism of Shakespeare,” says Levin, “need not be told how popular the pursuit of Christ figures has become” (pp. 304–05). Yes, but why has it become so popular? Isn’t it conceivably because Shakespeare has himself provided ample material for this pursuit? And if he has provided ample material, mayn’t he have done so—at least, to some extent—consciously and willingly?

The only substantial reason Levin has to offer in answer to these questions is implied in his own rhetorical question: “How can we believe that Shakespeare would write such a devastating parody of the selfsame method of ‘figure’ hunting that he expected, according to these critics, of his own audience” (p. 309). But to his question we may well answer (in Celtic fashion) with yet another question: How can we be sure that Fluellen’s speech is a devastating parody of this method? Isn’t Levin doing with the words of Fluellen just what he criticizes another critic for doing with the words of the Duke in *Measure for Measure*: that is, taking them out of their dramatic context, and applying them to a quite different situation? Isn’t he, like his figure of Fluellen, finding “figures in all things” in that, whenever he finds a Shakespearean critic discerning a hidden similarity between a character in a play and a person in real life, or between a phrase used in a play and a phrase used in the Bible or in some book of the time, he straightway dubs it “Fluellenism.”

When we turn to Fluellen’s speech in the context ignored by Levin, namely Act IV, Scene VII of *Henry V*, we soon find reason for doubting that it is really a parody—or at least, a devastating parody—of “figure” hunting. Certainly, there is something amusing in the

way Fluellen explains the parallel he has noticed between King Henry and Alexander the Great. The logical steps he takes to prove his point are, of course, absurdly inadequate. Yet strangely enough he does succeed in getting his point across both to his hearers and to the audience. Scholars like Levin may labor the obvious: that Henry is not Alexander. I suppose Fluellen would himself be the first to agree with them, though not without the protest: “It is not well done, mark you now, to take the tales out of my mouth, ere it is made and finished.” Yet through his words, and even through the inadequacy of their logic, Shakespeare impresses on the mind of his audience an unforgettable association between these two historical names.

What then, we may ask, was the dramatist’s purpose in making this association between Henry and Alexander within the terms and context of this play? Surely not the irrelevant purpose of gibing at theologizers! Wasn’t there something else o’er which his melancholy sat on brood? A possible purpose, in view of the patriotic element in the play, was to present Henry in the light of the great Macedonian conqueror. At the same time, in view of the complementary satirical element in the play, this light, as projected by Fluellen, is more of a mock-heroic than of a heroic nature. In its further details, moreover, as given by Fluellen after Gower’s rude interruption, the light is not unaccompanied by darkness: inasmuch as the comparison points to a certain ruthlessness in Henry, who is ready, not only to reject his old friend Falstaff when the occasion calls for it, but also to command the slaughter of all the French prisoners (which is chiefly emphasized in this scene).

There is a sense, indeed, in which Levin may well ask how Shakespeare could write such a devastating parody of this method, as he imagines it to be. Only the correct answer to his question is not precisely the answer he evidently expects. After all, don’t we find Shakespeare himself offering us an example of this very method in the words, not of a character, but of the Chorus, which draws an open parallel between Henry returning from France and “the general of our gracious empress . . . from Ireland coming”? Was ever inconsistency more glaring, if we accept Levin’s interpretation of Fluellen’s words? And yet, as if to compound his inconsistency, the dramatist goes on in the same Chorus to call Henry a “conquering Caesar,” as if his former comparison with Alexander were not enough. We may, of course, object that Alexander was a Greek, and Caesar a Roman, whereas Henry was an Englishman (or a Welshman). But then we are objecting, not to any Shakespearean critics, but to Shakespeare himself. And, in any case, what does the objection make against the point of the comparison? A comparison is a comparison. No one, not even the

wildest of theologizers, maintains that it is an identification.

It is perhaps no trivial coincidence that these same worthies of antiquity come together again in *Hamlet*, though in an altered context, in the course of the prince's melancholy reflections on death and the grave, as he recalls how even the great Alexander died and returned to dust, "like imperious Caesar." Such is not the end of *Henry v*, where the dramatist studiously avoids all mention of his hero's death, though mentioning that he was succeeded by Henry the Sixth. We have to infer that Henry died and returned to dust, being "but a man"; and that *sic transit gloria mundi*. For, as Fluellen so truly observed, "there is figures in all things."

As for Levin's interpretation of these words as a "devastating parody," may we not answer him with those other words of Gower to Pistol: "Will you mock at an ancient tradition?"

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To the Editor:

Richard Levin argues that Shakespearean critics who find Christ figures in Shakespeare are like Shakespeare's Fluellen in *Henry v*, who, in the belief that there are "figures in all things," found that Henry's life mirrored Alexander's "indifferent well," comically making use of some absurdly far fetched parallels. Levin pokes fun at a number of instances of Christ figures that he has collected—many of them are sufficiently odd to make it easy to do so—and asserts that these are not to be regarded as "abuses of this method; they *are* the method itself" (p. 308). These Shakespearean critics, he states, are like those who compiled a list of "astonishing" similarities between the assassinations of Lincoln and Kennedy: since any two events must have some similarities, one can always draw up such a list of coincidences.

It is all very clever—and quite beside the point. For the critic is not in the position of the compilers of the Lincoln-Kennedy list. He does not assert that history has a cabalistic meaning; he asserts that, to hypothesize a play about Kennedy in which, say, a choric character discourses about the greatness of Lincoln and Kennedy, the dramatist is suggesting a comparison between the two men. The critic need not agree with this comparison to assert that the dramatist has suggested it. Of course, critics who find "figures in all things" and who are devout believers in the myth of Camelot might, like many theologically oriented Shakespeareans, impose such a comparison where it is not justified, but this would be an abuse of critical method, not the use of an inherently invalid one.

But we need not deal in suppositions. All the critics who have written on Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* have agreed, in an epidemic of "Fluellenism," that this play drew an analogy between the Salem witch hunts and the McCarthyism of its day. I am afraid that most of them would continue to do so even after reading Levin. They might point out in support of their position that the phrase "witch hunt" was currently used to refer to McCarthyism and that in Miller's adaptation of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* the fomenters of mass hysteria against Tom Stockmann echo Red-baiting clichés while Tom's wife, referring to their plan to emigrate to the United States, says, "I'd hate to go half around the world, and find out we're in the same place." Levin, sticking to his argument, could retort, first, that the reinforcement gained from *An Enemy of the People* is simply "a self-sustained chain reaction" (p. 311, n.) such as that in which "a character's credentials for Christ figurehood" (p. 311, n.) are "established by comparing him to other alleged Christ figures" (p. 311, n.) and, second, that the belief that Miller's audience, alive to the issues of its time, must have been reminded of McCarthyism as a "postulation of a special audience with special viewing habits" (p. 310). I think that most of us, however, would remain convinced, and rightly so, that *The Crucible* has reference to McCarthyism.

What is easier for us to see in a contemporary play is also true of Shakespearean drama. It is not only to parallels in events that some of the so-called Fluellenist critics point but to biblical echoes and allusions in the dialogue such as the echoes and allusions in *An Enemy of the People*. This Levin entirely disregards. He speaks sarcastically of the claims of a critic to "undeniable and undismissable plot correspondences" (p. 309), but what the critic wrote was "verbal and plot correspondences," and Levin makes no attempt to deal with this matter of verbal correspondences that suggest a comparison between a character and Christ.

Levin also does not examine the evidence of the scholars who argue that Elizabethans regarded the universe as a divine pattern whose figures repeated each other, with the good Christian being, as one seventeenth-century writer put it, a "microchristus." Although he is the author of a book on multiple plots in Elizabethan drama, Levin does not seem to realize that the parallels between the main plots and subplots, which of course are not merely coincidences collected by "Fluellenist" critics, had their origin in the Elizabethan mode of regarding the universe as made up of repetitions of a basic pattern. But an understanding of this is just as important for reading Shakespeare as is an understanding of the climate of opinion of Miller's audience for reading *The Crucible*.

Before closing, I wish to make two statements. The first is that Levin is not the first discoverer of "Fluel-