The Names of Thomas Dekker's Devils

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A STRIKING FEATURE of Thomas Dekker's *Newes from Hell*[1] is the use of synonyms for the name of the devil. Hidden under this satanic or devilish polyonymy is criticism and satire of the society Dekker inhabited. Also, the author's ideas concerning religion, social customs, and values can be unearthed. The method to be followed here is to investigate the connotative value which the names or name-metaphors carried in the literature of the period. The suave and witty style in which the book is written merely serves as an ironic background for the realism that appears after unmasking the devils.

Throughout the work the emphasis is on the satirical connotation of the synonyms, and this stress is carried to extremes in order to make hell a metaphor for England. As Dekker puts it,

> this is certaine, that [the kingdom of hell] tis exceeding rich, for all Vsurers both Iewes and Christians, after they haue made away their Soules for money here, meete with them there againe: You haue of all Trades, of all Professions, of all States some there: you haue Popes there, aswel as here, Lords there, as well as here, Aldermen there, as well as here. Soldiers march there by millions, soe doe Cittizens, so doe Farmers; very few Poets can be suffred to liue there.[2]

Dekker establishes his metaphor and then reinforces it through names for the devil—and his name is legion.

Dekker uses some twenty-seven names for *devil,* applying them to the various manifestations of that dark prince's multi-faceted personality to illustrate the aspects of contemporary religious, political, and social life. These names fall into three classes: (1) Comic titles of respect: *Don Belzebub, Don Lucifer, Don Pluto, Cavaliero Cornuto, Monsieur Malediction, Monsieur Malefico, Lord of Tartary, Prince of the Devils, Grand Sophy of the Whore of Babylon, his Devilship, his Infernallship,* and *the great Tobaconist, the prince of Smoake and darknes.* (2) Titles of minor office:

Paymaster of Perdition, Headwarder of the Horners, Captaine of the damned Crew, Colonel of Coniurers, Lieftenant of Limbo, Workemaster of Witches, Serieant Sathan, and *M. Gunner of Gehenna.* (3) Names of satirical or sarcastic connotation: *Mammon being God of no beggars, Coyner of Light Angels, that great Dego of Devils, the cloven-footed Synagogue (the devil's court), Behemoth, Leviathan,* and *Cacodaemon.* There is even a *Malvolio,* the devil's secretary.

Although the above classification indicates that Dekker was consciously aware of certain prototypes of the devil in the contemporary world scene, and also shows that he was using the synonyms in a plausible governmental hierarchy, the listing is deceptive, for under the names smoulders the religious, political, and social satire. The connotations interact to such an extent that sometimes one name spreads over all three fields; for example, *Coyner of Light Angels,* with its panoply of wordplay, satirizes all three. Therefore, along with the superficial classification of names, which of course parallel general phases of English and even European life, a further classification must be made in order to illustrate how Dekker built his metaphor on different, more specific levels, and especially on the dangerous, for the author at least, level of contemporary satire. The interplay of the satire among the religious, political, and social scene makes the classification rather difficult as far as listing is concerned; actually, each name must be considered separately in order to point out the various implications that are not always apparent without tracing the history of the term.

In analyzing the names I shall begin with satire on the contemporary foreign political and religious policies. The titles in which *Don* appears suggest Spain and Italy, hated by Englishmen for their Roman Catholicism. The Mediterranean countries, however, appealed to the English imagination; romance, intrigue, and exoticism attracted the average Elizabethan and Jacobean, but his protestant turn of mind often repulsed such vanities. In compensation, Englishmen relegated the whole matter to the Christian hell. Two French titles, *Monsieur Malefico* and *Monsieur Malediction,* personify abstractions of vices. *Malefico* denotes 'witch,' while *Monsieur Malediction* appears to be a parody on "benediction," a derivation from "benedict." *Benedict* meant 'the blessed one';

Benedictine was the name of a Roman Catholic monastic order in France, as well as in England. The new blend, *malediction,* would, therefore, mean 'the cursed one,' and suggests that Dekker was thinking of a "cursed French Catholic." *Prince of the Devils,* although a conventional appellative, carried further weight as a Machiavellian allusion. *Cavaliero,* formerly meaning 'a courtly gentleman,' that is, 'a cavalier,' about 1600 came to denote, with the suffix of the South added, 'a fawning, swaggering fellow.' *Cornuto,* meaning 'horned,' is the Italian for 'cuckold.' Shakespeare uses both terms in *The Merry Wives of Windsor,*[3] among other allusions to Philip II of Spain, whom many Englishmen hated almost as an article of religion.

Dego of Devils, when its etymology and connotation are revealed, constitutes what is perhaps Dekker's most dangerous allusion. In 1604 James I made peace with Spain, a very unpopular move to many people of England, and one which proved unprofitable to the merchants as well. Dekker, reflecting public opinion, apparently disapproved, and trod on libellous and treasonable grounds when he wrote: "The very bowels of these Infernal Antipodes, shall bee ript vp, and pulled out, before the great Dego of Diuels his own face: Nay since my flag of defiance is hung forth, I will yeelde to no truce."[4] This is a direct reference to the treaty drawn up by James I. But who is the Dego? Presumably the King of Spain. The matter goes further however. *Dego of Devils* is not listed earlier than 1607 by the *OED.* In Webster, *History of Thomas Wyat, Wks.,* 1830, II, 298 (written 1607), occurs this quotation: "A Dondego is a kind of Spanish stockfish, or poor John." But *Dego* or *Diego* in Spanish would be translated into English as *James.* James I, in Dekker's opinion, then, had just become a Spanish stockfish for his promulgation of the treaty.

Dekker shows his protestant bias in a pattern of religious and political allusions which satirize the Roman Catholic Church. The allusions weave a politico-religious network which reaches out, in name etymology, towards the Latin nations in satire and parody. The immediate target of the satire lies, nevertheless, at closer range. The names are a commentary on the foreign policies of James I, whose court was attempting a tight-rope political balance in order

to satisfy the political ambitions of several religious groups. Dekker, it seems, feared the Papists more than he did the others.

Having alluded to James I, Dekker went on to the Pope, whom he called *The Grand Sophy of the Whore of Babylon,* an epithet perhaps not quite as treasonable as the one applied to King James. *Grand Sophy* was the title of the Persian rulers in the dynasty from 1500 to 1736, and Dekker is credited with generalizing the word *sophy* to designate 'a great ruler or person.' Since 1545, *the Whore of Babylon* has been applied as an epithet to the Roman Catholic Church by its enemies.[5] There is also a pun on the word *sophy*. The Pope held his power by employing sophistry, according to Dekker, and, therefore, should carry the title of *Grand Sophy of the Whore of Babylon*. The name would take on an additional connotation of 'spurious reasoning' and 'semblance of deceit.'

One term, *Workemaster of Witches,* does not appear to have any political connotation, but it does apply to the Pope as a 'creator of witches.' *Witches,* in the sense as used here, would probably apply to the Jesuits as lesser devils, since the Jesuits were infamous to Dekker for their exercise of subtle reasoning. *Workemaster* was commonly applied to the Creator or God, and is so used in the Coverdale Bible of 1535 (Wisd. vii, 22); however, in the sense of 'creator' the term appears in Job xiii, 4, as "ye are workmasters of lyes."

Turning his sights on the domestic scene, Dekker uses merchants and money hoarders who prevent the circulation of money in London, a situation which did little to fill the purses of authors. *Paymaster of Perdition,* considered in relation to Thomas Nashe's pecuniary pleading in *Pierce Pennilesse,* alludes to the request that the devil pay out the great wealth hoarded in the coffers of hell; but *paymaster* connected with *perdition* makes the devil a paymaster of damnation. The devil, or "creditor," does not pay gold to those in need, but he can and does pay damnation, or "imprisonment." Included here is one of Dekker's first epithets: "he [the devil] is a damn'd lying Cretan, because he's found in Two Tales between one matter."[6] *Cretan* is ultimately derived from Greek *kretismos,* which means 'Cretan behavior,' or 'lying.'[7] Dekker is accusing the devil of lying because he has not released the gold as had been

promised. *Mammon being god of no beggars* to designate the devil is self-explanatory. The rich did not care for the conditions of the poor, and the devil, pursuant to Nashe's *Supplication,* still did not release the gold which he, or the moneylenders of London as a whole, had hoarded. *Coyner of Light Angels* is a pun on the English gold coin, called more fully at first the *Angel-Noble,* being originally a new issue of Noble, and having for its device the Archangel Michael standing upon and piercing a dragon. The use of the word *light* appears to carry a twofold wordplay: 'light'—'levity,' and 'light'—'burning.' There is also the possibility of a play on the worthlessness of the coins, at least in so far as utility for the poor is concerned. *Behemoth* and *Leviathan* are figurative terms designating men of vast and formidable power or enormous wealth. Dekker's use of *Leviathan* in this sense is the first recorded usage. Rancor against the Jews explains the designation of the devil's court as the *cloven-footed Synogogue.*

The cluster of names alluding to the hoarding of wealth, and to creditors who persecute the poor men who borrow money without means to repay, indicates Dekker's no doubt authentic concern with money at the time of the composition of his book. The next devil, *Serieant Sathan,* represents the bridge between the hoarding devils and the devils who operate the prisons. He is the devil who was too much in evidence when the Leviathans and the Behemoths requested their money from the debtors. The application of *sergeant* to *satan* has an interesting history; also the two terms are not found connected in quotations given in the *OED,* although they twice occur within the same passages:

> 1513. Bradshaw. *St. Werburge* I. 1024. "The minister of mischef & sereaunt of sathans."
> 1570. Satir. *Poems Reform.* xix. 78. "That apostat, that Feyndis awin Seriand."

First, as is well known, *sergeant* denoted 'servant,' and still retains some of the quality of that meaning. The title has also been applied to lawyers. Other shades of meaning, however, had crept into the word by 1606: "An officer whose duty is to enforce the judgments of a tribunal or the commands of a person in authority, one who is charged with the arrest of offenders or the summoning of persons to appear before the court." This, of course, was the common mean-

ing of the term during Elizabethan times.[8] Two figurative passages throw further light on Dekker's application:

> 1600. Tourneur *Transf. Metam.* xli. "One day? Nay sure a twelve months' time t'will be Ere seriant death will call me at my door."
> 1602. Sh. *Hamlet* V. ii. 347. "Had I but time (as this fell Sergeant death Is strick'd in his arrest) Oh I could tell you."

Dekker's designation of the devil as "seriant Sathan" extends the trend of the metaphor from a court summoner to one who is feared, to death personified, to the evil one himself.

From the devil who summons debtors and offenders to the master devils who control the legions of the poor is but a simple step. In the latter group may be found such synonyms as *Colonel of Coniurers, Captaine of the Damned Crew, Lieftenant of Limbo,* and *M. Gunner of Gehenna.* In this pattern all the titles are alliterative, raising a question as to why Dekker chose military terms for the devil. Apparently, he noticed that military titles corresponded in alliteration with the names already applied to hell, that is, *Damned Crew, Limbo,* and *Gehenna.* Conjurers were persons with supernatural powers who could call up spirits, evil or good, and the terminology is often found in Elizabethan plays, the most famous to us being the forceful Dr. Faustus and Prospero. *Colonel,* relatively a new term, appeared in England about 1580 in translations of Italian military treatises; Dekker, in need of an alliterative parallel for his *conjurers,* found one at hand, conveniently supplied by the hateful Italians, which made it even more attractive as a title for one who should lead the columns in hell—a name, moreover, that seemed to correspond with the power of the conjurer, as well as with stylistic demands. Having set the alliterative pattern with military titles, Dekker followed it. *Captaine of the damned Crew* refers to the often brutal leader of the crews of beggers, all too familar to Dekker, who abounded in the streets of London. *Lieftenant of Limbo* may have been a common contemporary pun on the Leftenant of the Tower, or it may have been Dekker's own coinage—there is no evidence of the phrase elsewhere. Limbo, traditionally an environ of hell, has been used figuratively as a prison, and the keeper of the Tower normally appears as a Leftenant. Obviously, Dekker was concerned with some contemporary restriction, whether with imprisonment or threat of imprison-

ment, for this hierarchy is relevant to military or law enforcement.

The appellative *M. Gunner of Gehenna* requires separate treatment, since it does not fit neatly into the above pattern, and, furthermore, it seems to have been a product of a more jovial mood. The name may have been influenced by a passage in one of Shakespeare's plays, but it is more probably a conscious creation by Dekker, for the choice of both parts of the phrase is certainly unique. *Gehenna* is a christianized symbol for hell as Christ used the term in Mark ix. *M. Gunner,* or *Master Gunner,* is the chief gunner in charge of ordnance, or figuratively the one who discharges fire and brimstone in hell, and, therefore, in this respect the term is related to the cluster with military titles. Shakespeare, *Henry V,* III, Prol. 32, turns the gunner into a servant of the "devilish cannon": "The nimble gunner with the lynstock now the devilish cannon touches." Dekker, forging all the meanings into a vague and almost unanalyzable structure, adds to the already overloaded epithet another meaning, 'the author of salvos or broadsides.' The passage from the text reads: "What newes, what newes, what squibs, or rather what peeces of ordinance doth the M. Gunner of Gehenna discharge against so swacie a suitor [Nashe]."[9] There is more wordplay on the phrase "swacie a suitor," for Cupid was also known as a "gunner" and a "suitor." Dekker may have been merely adding a touch of persiflage at the round of Elizabethan and Jacobean court sonneteers.

Other names, *his devilship, his Infernallship, Cacodaemon,* and *Headwarder of Horners,* do not have enough in common to form a pattern. *His devilship* and *his Infernallship* appear to be nothing more than sarcastic appellatives directed against the English proclivity for saying "his Lordship." The Lords, however, controlled patronage for authors, and to Dekker, often in need of a patron, they were in reality devils. *Cacodaemon,* promising to yield much, means 'evil spirit,' and seems to be only another synonym for the devil. *Headwarder of the Horners* is perhaps the simplest one of all. The devil supposedly has horns; cuckolds have horns; therefore, why not place the devil as the headwarder of all cuckolds and makers of cuckolds?

A final term rounds out the metaphor of hell. Being bombarded with morality plays, Puritan propaganda, and brimstone sermons,

the Englishmen of Dekker's day could hardly avoid seeing immediately an analogy between their concept of the smoky denizens of the devil and the smokers of tobacco. Dekker had in mind London and its smoky, gloomy fog when he drew an analogy with the dungeons of hell, for to him London was a part of hell. The first designation of the devil as a tobacco addict occurs in a passage on the first page of Dekker's book: "I have hamerd out this Engine, that has beaten open the Infernall Gates, and discoured that great Tobaconist the Prince of Smoake and darknes, Don Pluto."[10] The devil, then, resides in London. Two quotations concerning the use of the term *tobacco* taken from Dekker's works are,

> 1609. *Gull's Horn-bk.* ii. II. "The thick tobacco-breath which the rheumatic night throws abroad."
> 1612. *If it be not good Wks.* 1873. III. 293. "I think the Divell is sucking Tobaccho, heeres such a mist."

The London fog was indeed stifling even in 1606. The implication of the tobacco name-metaphor forces the location of hell, according to Dekker, to England.

Newes from Hell, then, on Dekker's personal plane may be news from prison or simply London—a prison or a city filled with many devils, witches, conjurers, and poor persecuted men, all in the power and at the mercy of rulers, or master devils, each named by the author. Dekker, although not the artist that Dante was, attempted something similar to that which Dante has been accused of. To things that he did not like he gave names of the devil. All the author's contemporary society is here under various synonyms: The Pope as the Grand Sophy, James I as the Dego of the Devils, priests under the names of Don and Monsieur, military devils, menial devils, great rich devils, even the vile fog of London. The devil had many faces and as many names, each name representing a characteristic trait or aspect. The satire is efficiently camouflaged by the synonyms, for Dekker's readers no doubt thought pictorially, and the devil with his cloven hoofs, his forked tail, and his sharp horns, along with hell and its eternal fire and brimstone, was real enough to enter directly into the affairs of the sometimes witch-ridden Jacobeans. It is certain that few would have looked beyond the pictures to the ultimate implications and invisible properties ensuing from the names. After all, the devil was extremely hot and subtle, but hardly as subtle as Dekker proved himself here.

NOTES

[1] *Non-Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker,* ed. by Alexander B. Grossart (London, 1885), II. Hereinafter this edition will be referred to as *Works. Newes from Hell* was written in 1606, some fourteen years after Nashe's *Pierce Pennilesse, His Supplication to the Devil,* to which Dekker's work is a sequel. *Newes* is a book that does not readily yield its meaning to a casual reading, for Dekker is often oblique and allusive in his references and style, a healthy tone for a broadside writer to use, especially if he were anathematized already as Dekker, who was in and out of Debtor's prison, had been.

[2] *Works,* p. 99.

[3] III. v. 71: "The peaking Cornuto, her husband." II. iii. 77: "Cauliero Slender." As a title or term of Address, *Cavaliero* appears in a work by Nashe, "The Return of the Renowned Cauliero Pasquill" (1589).

[4] *Works,* p. 100.

[5] Brinklow *Compl.* X. iii (1874), 20: "That abhoymnable whore of Babylon (Rome I meane)."

[6] *Works,* p. 90.

[7] The first quotation in the *OED* is taken from Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World* (1614). Also see *Titus Andronicus,* I. 12.

[8] The first quotation is taken from Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors,* ii. 56: "Oh yes, if any houre meet a Seriant, a turnes backe for verie fear." The second appeared in 1606 and may or may not have been read by Dekker: Bishop, *Heaven upon Earth:* "When ... thy conscience, like a stern Sergeant, shall catch thee by the throat and arrest thee on God's debt."

[9] *Works,* p. 131.

[10] *Works,* p. 89.

Mountains and Rivers still murmur the voices of the nations long denationalized or extirpated.—Plagrave.

On a rural mail box near Twin Falls, Idaho, there is lettered about the shortest name on record, simply "P. Oe."—R. E. Woods.