The Pneumopathology of the Puritan:
Adaptations of Hooker by Shakespeare and Voegelin

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In *The New Science of Politics* as well as in *The History of Political Ideas*, Voegelin comes to his analysis of Puritanism by way of Richard Hooker, focusing in part on Hooker's account of the psychological techniques through which Puritanism advanced its cause. While mindful of Hooker's shortcomings as a philosopher, Voegelin praises and relies on his diagnostic acumen. His analysis of "the psychological mechanism that is put into operation in the creation of mass movements"1 [1] is as useful now for understanding modern gnostic movements as it was then in analysing the radical response to the emergent Anglican ecclesiastical order. It was Hooker's insight into the psychological origins and political consequences of the Puritan movement that enabled him to present the mechanism by which the Puritans would implement on a mass scale the desire of the movement's egomaniacal members that their private will be established as the public will, a revolution which would destroy the reality of and hope for the common weal of the nation.2 [2]

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In his discussion of Hooker, Voegelin draws attention to an interesting problem. If the Puritans are as Hooker says they are, then the deformed condition of their souls makes them immune to the sort of persuasive speech that characterises his writing. Hooker even identifies the armory of replies to which the Puritans resort whenever they are questioned or challenged, replies which had the effect of closing down discussion and further insulating their movement from critique. And so, even though it was the agitation of Puritan revolutionaries that forced Hooker's hand, the point of writing cannot be to persuade them of their error, since the disease itself precludes treatment of that sort. Rather, the point of writing, following Voegelin's assessment of the situation, is twofold: first, the theoretic purpose of re-asserting the "traditional standards of intellectual order," and, secondly, the memorial purpose identified in the opening sentence of the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*: "that posterity may know we have not loosely through silence permitted things to pass away as in a dream."3 [3]

The goal of this paper is to explore the way in which Hooker's contemporary Shakespeare used another sort of writing to produce a similar pathology of the Puritan soul. Shakespeare's comic portrait of a Puritan in his play *Twelfth Night* seems to draw on Hooker's depiction of the Puritan in the preface to his *Ecclesiastical Polity*. An analysis of the play suggests that when Shakespeare turned his attention to Puritanism he shared Hooker's and Voegelin's insight into the source of the movement's psychological attraction, and that he also understood that the spiritual and psychological defects of the movement somehow made it immune to rational debate and

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philosophic correction. While Hooker offered his theoretic and memorial reply, Shakespeare constructs his reply to the Puritans through the use of drama and laughter.

I begin with a brief summary of Hooker's psychology of the Puritan method of winning adherents. Since the Puritans' arguments for religious reform cannot persuade on the basis of their truthfulness, the movement relies on an elaborate system of deceit in order to make itself attractive to people. Hooker identifies a six-step procedure by which Puritan leaders "win the people's affections unto a general liking of the Cause." These steps will be familiar to everyone from Voegelin's discussion of them; I rehearse them here briefly in order to introduce Shakespeare's use of them.

The first half of the Puritan technique consists of three steps in which the leaders of the movement first posit a crisis and then propose a solution to the crisis. First, "in the hearing of the multitude, the faults especially of the higher callings are ripped up with marvelous exceeding severity and sharpness of reproof." Through repetition of such criticism, the critics attach to themselves an aura of great virtue, since only people who are deeply righteous would be so disturbed by the faults of others. Secondly, the disorder to which they have called attention is attributed to the current form of government; by such attributions, the Puritan leaders take on the appearance of wisdom, of being observant and subtle in their ability to identify causes of disorder. Thirdly, an exclusive and comprehensive solution is proposed. The only solution to all
evils is their own form of government, their program of reform. The point on which this is made saleable is its novelty: those who are ill desire most the treatment they have least tried.4 [4]

The second half of the Puritan method is particularly appropriate to Shakespeare's presentation of the Puritan type in *Twelfth Night*. It is here that the Puritan leaders effect a rhetorical transfer of authority to themselves; the transfer of authority is accomplished through the use of what is both sword and shield for the movement, the Bible. "By fashioning the very notions and concepts of men's minds in such sort, that when they read the Scripture, they may think that everything soundeth towards the advancement of that [Puritan] discipline, and to the utter disgrace of the contrary."5 [5] It is at this point, of course, that the practices of reasoned interpretations and rational debate lose their purchase, once the Puritan cause takes up what Voegelin identifies as their "koran", revelation in the form of a text presented through a specific interpretation which is itself not open to critique. Note that the interpretation of scripture which Puritans seek is a consequence of a prior psychological or spiritual manipulation which they effect in their audience; the mind must be, Hooker says, "perverted beforehand" in order to make this reading of the Bible possible and effective. Three things are necessary: a prior opinion or desire, the Bible, and interpretation. Each element is independent of the others, but each is necessary for the full dynamic through which the Puritan desire reaches the point of being recommended as normative policy. The initial opinion regarding the need for their rule does not

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4 [4] Ibid, Preface.3.6,7,8.

derive from the text; it is the precedent to the interpretation and it derives only from the soul of the Puritan.

The sequel to this false exegesis is the promise that such interpretations which bear the taint of being both novel and radical can be gleaned only by the special illumination of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit moves them to see in Scripture what others cannot, a special revelation which serves to set the group apart not only by reason of what is found in scripture, but even by the fact that they are able to find it.

The final step is the codification of this special status through the kinds of categorical distinctions common in the Johannine writings: the distinction between God's children and "the rest of the world," between the godly brethren and worldlings.6 [6]

The Johannine divisions of humankind into godly and worldly are put to use when the Puritans need to defend their radical positions on church government and their unlikely interpretations of the Bible. Divine favour is the spring of all self-defense and once divine favour is proposed, any sort of defense can be predicated on it. Criticism of the Cause is based on worldly standards, not divine; their arguments are intellectually deficient because God's chosen are the simple; and if someone observes that the Puritans are acting like madmen, they reply that "Christ's own Apostle was accounted mad."

As Voegelin observes, the tendency of Puritans to defend themselves in these ways made public engagement with them virtually impossible. The normal rules of discussion and debate

6 [6] Ibid, Preface.3.11.
are lost on them, and Hooker's own attempt to mount a persuasive, public critique of the movement bears a "tone of despair."

In light of the demonstrable difficulties ecclesiastical authorities had when they tried to engage the Puritan revolutionaries, it is interesting to take note of the way in which playwrights writing decisively outside the domain of ecclesiastical debate take on the Puritan movement. Theatre is a public event, and it is a space in which, to use Hamlet's phrase, the play holds "the mirror up to nature," or, in Voegelin's language, the playwright participates in the representation of society to itself.

For Shakespeare's fellow playwrights, the stage Puritan was a stock comic figure whom they frequently brought out for an easy laugh. Making fun of Puritans in the theatre at that time was something of a cheap sport since the Puritans had no friends either in the audience or among those who supported the theatre. The broad caricatures of Puritans on the Elizabethan stage were usually light in content and drew mainly on stereotypes of the self-righteous, slow-witted finger-wagger. Strangely, Shakespeare seems to have had comparatively little interest in lampooning Puritans and he largely leaves them out of the purview of his drama except for a few notable cases, the most obvious of which is the character Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*.

Malvolio is the only character in Shakespeare to be identified as a Puritan. He works as a steward in the household of the countess Olivia, a powerful unmarried woman in Illyria. Olivia finds that Malvolio is useful in protecting her from unwanted suitors and for enforcing discipline among the hangers-on who cavort around her property. At the same time, Olivia recognises his serious flaws: when she witnesses him railing against the play's fool Feste, she offers a blunt diagnosis of his character: "You are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distempered
appetite. To be generous, guiltless, and of free disposition is to take those things for bird-bolts that you deem cannon bullets" (1.5.85-88).7 [7]

Midway through the play Malvolio rises in the middle of the night to put an end to the loud partying of the play's under-the-stairs crowd, Sir Toby Belch (Olivia's uncle), his friend Andrew Aguecheek, Feste, and Olivia's waiting woman Maria. He rebukes them and threatens to get them thrown out of the household. Toby replies with what has become the play's best-known line, "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?" (2.3.107-108). Malvolio has no answer and he storms out, presumably intending to make good on his threat to bring them out of favour with Olivia. The revelers huddle and Maria tells them something about Malvolio: "sometimes he is a kind of Puritan," she says. But she immediately qualifies this statement. "The dev'l a Puritan that he is, or anything constantly but a time-pleaser, an affectioned ass that cons state without book and utters it by great swathes; the best persuaded of himself, so cram'd, as he thinks, with excellencies, that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him" (2.3.136-41). And it is through her knowledge of these faults, Maria says, that she can devise a trick which will humiliate him: the letter trick. She is able to imitate Olivia's handwriting and she will write a letter in Olivia's hand and leave it where Malvolio will find it. The letter will be such that Malvolio will believe that it is Olivia's statement of love for him and will go and "make an ass" of himself in front of her. Maria does not, however, reveal here what a huge interpretive leap it will take for Malvolio to arrive at this conclusion and it is in this leap that Malvolio demonstrates that his Puritan credentials are quite strong.

Malvolio obviously meets the first few criteria of Hooker's six-point analysis. He is known as a constant critic of the faults of others; he believes that the current structure of authority in the household is responsible for what he sees as a lack of discipline; and he further believes that the morals of the household would undergo a transformation if the rule of Olivia were to be replaced by his own rule.

But transforming morals is really not Malvolio's greatest desire and here Shakespeare displays an insight into the Puritan soul that is comparable to the diagnostics of Hooker and to the historical pathologies found later in Hobbes and Voegelin. Malvolio shares with historical Puritans an apparent concern for discipline and moral exactitude, but these concerns are a pious fraud used to conceal what is in fact at the heart of his character, a desire for power and a goal of reforming society according to his own private will. I would refer here to Voegelin's assessment of Hobbes' view of the Puritans: Hobbes saw that "men who are moved by their religious conscience to civil war, for the purpose of imposing their creed on others, are not moved by the spirit, but are guilty of pride, of *superbia* in the Augustinian sense, to the point of madness. Hobbes diagnosed passionate self-assertion, the *amor sui*, as the formative force of the Puritan conscience; he understood its dictates as a manifestation of *libido dominandi*."8 [8] This analysis applies well to Malvolio, Shakespeare's stage version of the Puritan revolutionary. The self-love identified by Olivia is manifested, first, in Malvolio's systematic closure of his soul to the dialogue and eros of other characters and, secondly, in his attempt to disrupt the order of Illyrian society in a way that would lead to his own assumption of authority. Those over whom

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he would exercise his power, however, know enough about him to devise the trick that will, in
the play on the stage, cause him to display his madness to the point of being undone by it.

The scene in which Malvolio finds the forged letter is one of the funniest scenes in
Shakespeare. The characters who are conspiring against him Belch, Aguecheek, Fabian, and
Maria meet along a pathway, drop the letter Maria has written in the path, and retreat to a spot
behind a tree where they can watch what happens when Malvolio finds it. Malvolio saunters
onto stage and, assuming he is alone, proceeds to demonstrate that he is already deep in a fantasy
of ruling the household. He is trying to find evidence that Olivia loves him, and he wonders
aloud what it means that she "uses me with a more exalted respect than anyone else that follows
her" (2.5.24-5) his conclusion he expresses with the subjunctive, "To be Count Malvolio!"

He proceeds immediately to imagining what life would be like as Count Malvolio. The content
of this imagined episode focuses on two points: first, a suggestion of the sexual and domestic
subjugation of Olivia and, second, the moral censure of Toby Belch. He rehearses in great detail
how he would relate to Olivia and Toby as Count Malvolio and only then does he find the
letter. The point of having Malvolio go through this fantasy before finding the letter is obviously
to demonstrate the way in which his mind is already "perverted beforehand" by his desire for
power in the household. We can presume that those desires are long-standing for Malvolio, that
he has long yearned for elevation to a position of authority but has simply been waiting for
opportunity to present itself. That opportunity, such as it is, comes in the form of the forged
letter; Maria has devised this trick because she knows that Malvolio's secret desires will make
the trick successful. She knows what he will do to the letter.
What he does to the letter bears out the claim of Hooker regarding Puritans and their
texts. His time on stage in the scene is divided into two parts by his discovery of the letter; what
transpires after he finds it mirrors the content of his soliloquy, though now he rehearses his
desire for power with reference to the forged letter, which he uses as an external source of
authority and sanction for his desires.

Malvolio sees the letter lying on the ground. He can perhaps be forgiven for thinking that
the letter is written by Olivia; after all, Maria had said that she could imitate Olivia's
handwriting. But note how he uses the writing to identify the letter's source. Looking at the
outside of the sealed letter, he declares, "By my life, this is my lady's hand. These be her very
c's, her u's, and her t's, and thus she makes her great P's. It is in contempt of question her hand"
(2.5.82-85). Now, as we learn a moment later, the outside of the letter reads, "To the unknown
beloved, this and my good wishes," a phrase which contains neither c nor p. Yet Malvolio
declares, "These be her very c's, her u's, and her t's, and thus she makes her great P's." It is a
bawdy, rather crude joke, as he spells it out that this is Olivia's "cut", slang for genitals, with
which "she makes her great P's." He then breaks the letter's seal, which significantly bears the
image of Lucrece. Already, then, even before he constructs his interpretation of the letter's
contents, there is a strong suggestion that his desires and his character are infected with an
intention of violation. The image of personally violating Olivia is bad enough, but it is used here
to signal the nature of what he, and the Puritans whom he signifies, intend toward society. The
graphic sexual joke and the suggestion of rape display in personal terms the nature of the power
he seeks, a power oriented according to the private desires of those who would wield it rather
according to the needs of the society that would grant it. Malvolio would have Olivia, and with
her all of Illyrian society, remade according to his own desires. The letter trick displays the way in which he would first justify this project by fashioning a text in his own image.

He opens the letter and proceeds with his interpretation. The letter reads:

Jove knows I love,

       But who?

Lips do not move,

       No man must know.

I may command where I adore,

       But silence like a Lucrece knife

With bloodless stroke my heart doth gore.

       M.O.A.I. doth sway my life. (2.5.92-95;100-103)

Malvolio dallies around with parts of this passage for a while figuring that "I may command where I adore" refers to him since he is Olivia's servant but what really grabs him is the line, "M.O.A.I. doth sway my life," just the sort of puzzle a bibliolator might love. Searching for himself in the line, he wonders, "If I could make that resemble something in me." Finally, he gets it his name begins with the letter M, just like M.O.A.I. does. Unfortunately, "A' should follow, but "O' does." He is not discouraged, though, and he quickly comes to his interpretive conclusion: "to crush this a little, it would bow to me, for every one of these letters are in my name." That is good enough for him. The matter is decided and he turns to the second half of the letter, in which the writer commands certain behaviours.
Maria has included in her forgery a list of outward signs that Malvolio is to adopt in order to signal that he has read and understood the letter; this call for Malvolio to broadcast his understanding of the text through outward signs has an obvious referent in the Puritan concern to adhere only to prescriptions from scripture in matters of dress and ceremony. He is to smile at the author of the letter but be antagonistic toward kinsmen, and he is to wear certain kinds of clothing, specifically yellow stockings and cross garters, styles which Maria informs us Olivia actually detests. Further, the letter commands, "Let thy tongue tang arguments of state" (2.5.141). By this point, Malvolio is gripped with excitement and anticipation. He declares, "I will be proud, I will read politic authors, I will baffle Sir Toby, I will wash off gross acquaintance, I will be point-device the very man. I do not now fool myself, to let imagination jade me; for every reason excites to this, that my lady loves me" (2.5.152-56). To use Hooker's language, when Malvolio looked at the text, everything in it pointed to the advancement of his cause. He exits the scene saying, "I will do everything that thou wilt have me" (2.5.167-68).

By the end of the scene, Malvolio has derived a justification and plan for the coming revolution entirely from his interpretation of an unsigned letter. The interpretation, however, only follows from his previously existing desire for authority and inclination toward feelings of election. Into this one scene Shakespeare has telescoped most of Hooker's portrait of the Puritan technique. From the severe critique of other's faults, the belief that his own rule is the correction, the perversion of the mind requisite in order to find himself in a text, and the interpretation itself. Central to Shakespeare's presentation of the Puritan here is the conjunction of the desire for power and a text.
At this point I would call attention to an important issue that pertains to Shakespeare's methods. Shakespeare, Hooker, and Voegelin each come to Puritanism by way of the same aspects of the movement, the revolutionary political action hiding behind piety and justified through elaborate psychological deceit involving koranic texts and techniques. But Shakespeare's critique, of course, is presented in the form of drama, and there is a significance to this that should not be overlooked. The ideological fantasies of Malvolio are exposed and dismantled on a stage and before an audience who on a daily basis served as audience to the real-world theatrics of London Puritans. Further, the defeat of Malvolio in the play is itself accomplished by an ingenious and comical bit of stagecraft devised by the play's rambunctious Puritan baiters: Malvolio is tricked into putting on a damning display of his madness while his antagonists watch from behind a tree. Shakespeare in this respect surpasses the theorist or the pamphleteer because his medium provides an audience with the possibility of participating in the critical diagnosis and comical defeat of the Puritan, as the audience not only watches those who oppose the Puritan on stage but then joins them as they all knowingly watch the Puritan put on the spectacle that will lead to his undoing. Since the critique relies on comedy, and since comedy only works if the soul is open and attuned to the situation that provides the premise, the critique is participatory and pedagogic.

When we next see Malvolio, he comes to Olivia smiling like a madman, cross-gartered and in yellow stockings. Olivia, unaware of the trick that has been played on him, repeatedly asks Malvolio what is wrong with him, why he is dressed so strangely and why he keeps smiling at her. What is most interesting about the exchange between Malvolio and Olivia here is that even as she keeps addressing him directly and referring to his present behaviours, all he can do is refer to the letter; their conversation quickly devolves to the point that each statement of Olivia is
answered by him with a line from the letter, lines that, of course, have no relation to the conversation Olivia is trying to carry on with him. He quotes the letter accurately and with confidence, assured that it provides a sufficient explanation of his odd behaviour, even as Olivia makes it obvious that she has no idea what he is talking about. Olivia leaves exasperated and directs Toby to look after Malvolio, which Malvolio says "concurs directly with the letter" since it gives him a chance to antagonise kinsmen. And finally when Toby, Maria, and Fabian arrive and press upon Malvolio how odd he is acting, he declares with the Johannine defense, "You are idle shallow things, I am not of your element. You shall know more hereafter" (3.4.118-20).

When considering the historical reality of Puritanism, Hooker was perhaps as great a diagnostician as one could hope for. Still, the vision of civil and ecclesiastical polity he articulated could not withstand assaults from Puritan revolutionaries and what Voegelin identifies as their anti-philosophic, anti-civilisational, gnostic reforms. The way of rational debate and the sort of "big tent" Anglicanism attempted under Elizabeth offered only a partially stable civil order which eventually descended into civil war. Voegelin offers some conditional, qualified praise of the solution proposed by Hobbes, who wrote from a vantage from which he could see the progression from the street corner Puritan to the New Model Army. The suppression of the Puritan libido dominandi could only be accomplished through the threat of punishment, not through the call to participate in a community ordered according to the love of God.9 [9] Shakespeare has no interest in the development of a civil theology of the sort

9 [9] Ibid.
proposed by Hobbes, though he too seems to envision the need for punitive solutions. The threat to civil order posed by a Malvolio is such that one might justifiably violate certain political principles that normally adhere in a society in order to suppress it.10 [10]

Shakespeare treats Malvolio in a way that is peculiar for him. One of the most striking qualities of Shakespeare's drama is the great liberality with which he handles his characters. No character is wholly without good or without evil and nearly everyone is at least a candidate for moderate correction either by another character or by the dramatic necessity of the play itself. Malvolio, however, largely disqualifies himself from others' liberality by reason of his overweening self-love and his intractable ill-will. After he appears before Olivia clothed in secret signals and speaking in code, he is taken away by those who played the trick on him and placed into what seems to be a sort of holding cell or madhouse on Olivia's property. He is visited there by the fool Feste, who dresses up as a parson for the occasion. Feste, as the parson, interrogates Malvolio on a number of points, ostensibly to determine if he is mad. The interrogation is somewhat disingenuous and is played up for great comedy, but it establishes one important point, that Malvolio is not mad in the rudimentary sense; he is still able to understand sensory data and he has some ability to make sound judgments. The integrity of his wits in this regard highlights the severity of the spiritual disease which nevertheless remains.

The confinement of Malvolio and the treatment he receives in the madhouse are harsh, but in the aesthetic of the play the confinement serves a particular purpose. First, it is only while Malvolio is confined and removed from Illyrian society that the play's resolution occurs. While

he is confined, other characters are either married or betrothed and the result of these unions is a re-ordering of the society. Specifically, Illyria is reordered around the erotic, daemonic forces present in the twins Sebastian and Viola. Sebastian marries Olivia, Viola marries the duke, and the result is a restructured civil order in which authority descends from the twins, who are erotically and philosophically adept in a way that no one else in the city is. This resolution, incidentally, is neither Elizabethan nor Hobbesian; spiritual authority is not an adjunct of the political office, nor is it denied its transcendent point of reference. The second purpose of Malvolio's confinement in the play is to demonstrate further the incorrigibility of his disease and to suggest that liberality is inappropriate for such an illiberal soul. Neither the confinement, the interview with Feste, nor the reordering of Illyria has any corrective effect on Malvolio. He is released from his cell by the order of Olivia just in time to witness the play's magnificent display of erotic revitalisation. Informed of the letter trick, Olivia even extends to Malvolio a generous offer of reconciliation and a promise of justice. But he is unaffected by what he sees and what he has undergone and he storms out sneering at the gathered couples, and at the audience as well, "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you" (5.1.368). And, of course, he did get his revenge, about forty years later.