

Thus leaning on my elbow I begin



An insight into the revelatory nature of the soliloquy spoken by the Bastard in Shakespeare's history play, The Life and Death of King John.

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The beginning

“Thus leaning on my elbow I begin” is a statement spoken by the Philip the Bastard during a profound, cryptic soliloquy in the Shakespeare play, *The Life and Death of King John* (I, i, 194). Philip speaks this soliloquy immediately following his official recognition by King John and John’s mother, Queen Eleanor, acknowledging him as the bastard son of King Richard II and knighting him as Sir Richard Plantagenet. Otherwise, legally, Philip was recognised in law as the eldest son and heir of the late Sir Robert Faulconbridge and Lady Faulconbridge, his mother being Lady Faulconbridge. By accepting his bastard status as the natural son of King Richard, and vowing his undying service to King John as a knight, Philip gave up his legal title to the Faulconbridge estate and left his younger half-brother Robert to inherit his father’s property, as Robert wanted.

For those not already ‘in the know’, the statement “thus leaning on my elbow I begin” can seem fairly unremarkable, although in reality it is far from being so; therefore it is deliberately placed in a soliloquy that speaks of certain things that should alert the questioning reader or hearer, so that it is realised that “thus leaning on my elbow I begin” has far more to it than it first seems.

The Bastard’s Soliloquy

The soliloquy is as follows. This rendition is based on the Arden version of the original 1623 Shakespeare Folio text, edited by Jesse M. Lander and J. J. M. Tobin,¹ which modernises the spelling and punctuation, but I have retained the Folio italicising and some of the original spelling, capitalisation and punctuation where deemed important. (Of course, for those who wish to look for cipher hidden within the text, the original Folio text should be used.)

Bastard

A foot of Honour better than I was;
But many a many foot of Land the worse.
Well, now can I make any *loane* a Lady.
‘Good den, Sir *Richard!*’—‘God-a-mercy, fellow!’—
And if his name be *George*, I’ll call him *Peter*;
For new-made honour doth forget men’s names:
‘Tis too respective and too sociable
For your conversion. Now your traveller,
He and his toothpick at my worship’s mess,
And when my knightly stomach is sufficed,
Why then I suck my teeth, and catechise
My picked man of Countries: ‘my dear sir,’

Thus leaning on mine elbow I begin,
 'I shall beseech you'—that is question now;
 And then comes answer like an Absey book:
 'O sir,' says answer, 'at your best command,
 At your employment, at your service, sir;'
 'No, sir,' says question, 'I, sweet sir, at yours:'
 And so, ere answer knows what question would,
 Saving in Dialogue of Compliment,
 And talking of the Alps and Apennines,
 The Pyrenean and the river *Po*,
 It draws toward supper in conclusion so.
 But this is worshipful society,
 And fits the mounting spirit like my self;
 For he is but a bastard to the time
 That doth not smack of observation;
 And so am I, whether I smack or no:
 And not alone in habit and device,
 Exterior form, outward accoutrement;
 But from the inward motion to deliver
 Sweet, sweet, sweet poison for the age's tooth,
 Which, though I will not practise to deceive,
 Yet, to avoid deceit, I mean to learn;
 For it shall strew the footsteps of my rising.²

Some productions cut out this soliloquy, believing it to be unimportant to the play as a whole, but there they could not be more wrong. There are certain key things that the Bastard refers to in his soliloquy. These are: -

Ioane, Richard, George, Peter

Ioane, Richard, George and Peter are four italicised names appearing together in sequence on three successive lines that follow the two opening lines of the soliloquy. The first two lines concern Richard's choice of honour rather than commodity, which is one of the great issues that the play is all about, so the three lines that contain the four names constitute the real beginning of this extraordinary soliloquy.

Ioane is the same as Joan in normal spelling, but Shakespeare has chosen not to spell it this way. Joan was a generic name for a female rustic, which makes sense in the *prima facie* context of what the Bastard is saying ("Well, now can I make any *Ioane* a Lady"), and is also used as such by Shakespeare in the last line of the final song at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost*, where in the Folio it is spelt 'lone', without the 'a' and without any italicising: -

While greasie lone doth keele the pot.

However, the spelling of Joan as *Ioane* in the Shakespeare play of *King John* is remarkably accurate to its original Hebrew source, as the name is the feminine form of John, derived from

the Latin *Ioannes*, a translation of the Greek name Ἰωάννης (*Iōannēs*), which is itself a transliteration of the Biblical Hebrew name יְהוָה (Yôḥānān), meaning ‘Yahweh is merciful’.

The name ‘Yahweh’ is one of several renditions of the Tetragrammaton JHVH (יהוה), the vowels of which were originally never written down, the name being the Ineffable Name or Unutterable Name which can only be pronounced correctly by one who knows. Such knowledge refers to enlightenment—to experiential knowledge of and at-one-ment with truth. To have any understanding of how it might be pronounced, one has to know that the sacred vowels hidden within the consonants are IOA. The three vowels, IOA, represent the Holy Spirit or Breath of heaven, which the consonants ‘earth’ by giving them bodily form—a body in which they, the Spirit, are incarnate and hidden.

In terms of the name *Yôḥānān* or *Ioannes*, the ‘Y’ (or ‘J’) can be replaced by ‘I’, whilst the ‘H’ is an aspirate and therefore can signify breath or spirit, which leaves only the ‘N’ as a true consonant.

John (*Ioannes*) is the name of the man sent from God, to bear witness of the Light, as described in St John’s Gospel: -

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.³

Usually this man John is taken as referring to John the Baptist, the herald of Jesus Christ, but it also refers to the first man, male-female, as created by God in God’s image or likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). This first man has a form that is made from the original, universal, spiritual substance which, in Hebrew, is referred to as *Mayim* (מַיִם), translated as ‘waters’ (Genesis 1:2,6-7). The form of this first man, *Yôḥānān*, is represented by the Hebrew consonant *Nun* (נ)—our letter ‘N’—which means ‘fish’.⁴ From this comes the idea that we are all ‘fishes’ born from the waters or great ocean of life, and that Christ is the Fisherman.

This male-female ‘man’ (‘man’ means mind) is then recreated, as it were, by being breathed into the ‘dust’ (*adamah*) of the earth and is called Adam (male-female), who then separates into male Adam and female Eve.⁵ To begin with, they are innocent, knowing nothing, and have to learn, but their future development or evolution is to be able to bear witness of the Light. We bear witness of the Light by seeing and knowing that Light, which we do by experiencing it, living it, recognising it and manifesting it, until ultimately we become one with it. In this way we not only see or witness the Light for ourselves, but also enable others to see and witness it. It is then that we throw off the mantle of earthliness (*adamah*) and become John.

Using kabbalistic symbolism, such a person who has become someone who truly bears witness of the Light has been referred to in the past as a fish-man or fish-avatar, known to the Mesopotamians and Greeks as Oannes (i.e. Ioannes), who, coming out of the sea, taught mankind wisdom and brought civilization.

St Paul sums up this process, which is one of evolution, initiation, transmutation and enlightenment, in his letter to the Corinthians: -

Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.⁶

Knowing this, we should be alerted to the implied transmutation of persons in the Bastard’s soliloquy: Joan, the rustic, who is made a Lady; Richard, the gentleman, who has become Sir Richard; and George, the cultivator (i.e. Adam, the gardener), who becomes Peter, the hierophant of the mysteries.⁷ The remark “God-a-mercy, fellow!” refers to the meaning of the name John, and thus goes well as the response to the greeting “Good den, Sir Richard!”, meaning that Sir Richard has made the fellow (John) a knight, echoing the making of Joan a lady. Moreover, the inference is that George can become a sainted or illumined St George, the Red Cross Knight and slayer of the dragon of ignorance and vice; and likewise, Peter can become St Peter, an illumined hierophant of the Christian Mysteries.

This profound three-line opening sequence should alert us to what then follows, when Sir Richard, engaging the traveller in a catechetical conversation, says: “Thus leaning on my elbow I begin.”

First, however, we need to understand what a ‘traveller’ is, plus a few other things that the Bastard mentions.

Traveller

In the 16th-17th centuries, a traveller referred to a person of a certain standing and substance who travelled abroad in order to see, experience and learn about various countries and their customs, laws, religion, politics, music, poetry, literature, art, architecture and culture generally. Another name for a traveller was ‘passenger’. Such a person was distinct from a vagabond, who wanders idly from place to place and is without a permanent home or visible means of support. Shakespeare uses both terms, passenger and traveller, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, thereby making it clear that passenger and traveller mean the same: -

1st Outlaw. Fellows, stand fast: I see a passenger.

2nd Outlaw. If there be ten, shrink not, but down with ‘em.

3rd Outlaw. Stand, sir, and throw us that you have about ye.

If not, we’ll make you sit, and rifle you.

Speed. Sir, we are undone; these are the villains

That all the travellers do fear so much.⁸

The term ‘Passenger’ is also famously used on the Shakespeare Monument in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, where the enigmatic inscription challenges us not to rush by so fast and to read if we can—a challenge that many people miss or ignore: -

Stay Passenger, why goest thov by so fast?

read if thov canst...

The inscription “Stay Passenger, why goest thou by so fast? read if thou canst...” is pointedly alluded to in Thomas Vincent’s elegy commemorating Francis Bacon, associating Bacon directly and intimately with the Shakespeare Monument: -

... but your fame adheres not to sculptured columns, nor is read on the tomb, ‘Stay, traveller, your steps’...⁹

The only difference in the specific reference that identifies the tomb is that whereas the Shakespeare Monument uses the word “passenger”, Vincent uses “traveller” – but the sense is the same. ‘Traveller’ is also used in another elegy commemorating Francis Bacon in the same collection of *Manes Verulamiani*, published in 1626 on Bacon’s death: -

Think you, foolish traveller, that the leader of the choir of the Muses and of Phoebus is interred in cold marble? Away, you are deceived. The Verulamium star now glitters in ruddy Olympus...¹⁰

In Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, the travellers from Salomon’s House (the College of the Six Days’ Work) are seekers after truth, trading in commodities of light rather than commodities of matter: -

But thus you see we maintain a trade, not for gold, silver, or jewels, nor for silks, nor for spices, not any other commodity of matter, but only for God’s first creature, which was light; to have light, I say, of the growth of all parts of the world.¹¹

Worshipful Society and a Worship’s Mess

Freemasonry, livery companies and the Inns of Court are worshipful societies. The reference to a worship’s mess, however, identifies that an Inn of Court is meant. A mess is a group of four men dining together, which is how dining was organised at the Inns of Court, as it was considered that the best table conversation could be had in groups of four, which was one of the purposes of dining together in hall.

The Inns of Court in Shakespeare’s time were the Inner Temple, Middle Temple, Gray’s Inn and Lincoln’s Inn. Gala performances of Shakespeare’s plays were held in the halls of at least two of these—*The Comedy of Errors* in Gray’s Inn, as part of the Gray’s Inn 1594 Christmas Revels, and *Twelfth Night* in 1602 in the Middle Temple. *Love’s Labour’s Lost* was intended to be performed at the Gray’s Inn 1594 Christmas Revels, for which, like *Comedy of Errors*, it was written, but the Grand Night on which it was due to be performed had to be cancelled.

It is a moot point whether The Lord Chamberlain’s Men (Shakespeare’s company) were the ones who performed at the Gray’s Inn Revels, as it was usual for the students of each Inn of Court to organise, write and act in the plays and masques that were held in the Inn’s hall. In such ways their powers of invention and rhetorical persuasion were developed.

A great many of the Elizabethan poets were members of the Inns of Court, such as: George Gascoigne, Sir Philip Sidney, Francis Bacon, Anthony Bacon, Thomas Campion, Abraham Fraunce, Thomas Hughes, Francis Davison (Gray’s Inn); Francis Beaumont, William Browne, Thomas Sackville (Inner Temple); John Ford, John Marston, Sir John Davies, Henry Wotton (Middle Temple); Christopher Brooke, John Donne, and Thomas Lodge (Lincoln’s Inn).

Of all the Inns of Court, Gray's Inn was supreme in and thus famous for the invention and presentation of such dramatic entertainments.

The 1594 Gray's Inn Revels, *The Prince of Purpoole and the Order of the Knights of the Helmet*, was designed, supervised and to some extent written by Francis Bacon, who was made co-Treasurer of the Inn for the purpose of rescuing the good name of the Inn in respect of the Christmas Revels, which had had to be suspended for two years (1592 and 1593) because of the plague.

The Absey Book and Question and Answer

The Absey book—a corruption of 'ABC-book'—was an Alphabet primer used in school which contained the Catechism plus other religious teaching and a few prayers. The Bastard refers to his questions and answers as being like an Absey book, referring to the catechistic method of the schoolroom Absey book. His questions and answers, however, involve knowledge concerning the Alps, the Apennines, the Pyrenees and the river Po. The Alps are the mountains dividing Switzerland and France from Italy; the Apennines is the mountain range traversing most of the length of Italy; the Pyrenees are the mountains dividing France from Spain; and the River Po is the great river in northern Italy that flows eastwards from the Cottian Alps to the Adriatic Sea, down the middle of a wide valley that divides the Swiss Alps from the Apennines. In this vast Po valley are the famous 'Shakespeare cities' of Milan, Mantua, Verona, Padua and Venice.

Because of the reference to the worshipful society, worship's mess and the traveller, we know that the Bastard is describing a table discussion such as held at the Inns of Court. The reference to the Absey book and catechistic method of question and answer is, at one level, the Bastard's satire on polite discussion akin to what he calls "Dialogue of Compliment"; but, at another level, it suggests that the mess consists of men who are Freemasons or such, as Freemasonry uses the catechistic method to teach and test. However, the knowledge being shared is not that of the symbolism of Freemasonry, but of "light... of the growth of all parts of the world," as Bacon explains in his *New Atlantis*, this being the reason for the voyages of discovery instigated by Salomon's House.¹² This identifies the mess as belonging to the group that became known as the Fraternity of the Rosy Cross (i.e. Rosicrucians), which, according to Michael Maier, was first formed in England in 1570.¹³ Moreover, at the time when the Shakespeare play of *King John* is thought to have been written (mid-1590s), Francis Bacon was not only advising the Queen as her Counsel Learned and writing speeches, plays and masques, but he was also running an intelligence network with his brother Anthony, whose spies and intelligencers, plus 'traveller' friends, had visited and were still visiting the parts of Europe mentioned in the soliloquy.

The Absey or ABC book, therefore, also hints at Bacon's *Abecedarium Naturae* ('The Alphabet of Nature'), a cabalistic cipher system invented by Bacon that is described in Thomas Tenison's *Baconiana*,¹⁴ which uses mathematics, words and the alphabet to help comprehend the higher laws discovered in the metaphysical realms of nature, by mirroring their order. The Absey or ABC book is also a synonym for the Alphabet of sacred law, for in the Jewish kabbalistic tradition the Hebrew Alphabet represents the Word of God.

Observation

The Bastard, having referred to the worshipful society, then associates it with observation: -

But this is worshipful society,
And fits the mounting spirit like my self;
For he is but a bastard to the time
That doth not smack of observation;
And so am I, whether I smack or no.

In other words, members of the society are observers, to a lesser or greater degree. We observe the outer world with our two physical eyes, and the inner world with the single eye of the soul. The Bastard's remark, "And so am I, whether I smack or no," is a neat reference to the phonetic link between "I" and "eye", as well as to the amusing fact that he is a bastard (by birth) as well as being a member of the 'observing' society. The worshipful 'observing' society is a reference to what was called the Society of the Magi, also known as the Navigators, which are other names for the Rosicrucian fraternity, who observe and see both the heavens and the earth, outwardly and inwardly. Inward seeing is known as seership, and the great seer who is used as an archetype of seership is St John the Divine (also known as the Beloved).

Whereas the Craft degrees of Freemasonry have St John the Baptist as their patron saint, the higher Rosicrucian degrees have St John the Divine. Both societies (Freemasonic and Rosicrucian) are mystery schools of initiation, wherein the initiate rises by degrees—hence the Bastard's reference to the worshipful society fitting "the mounting spirit like myself".

Also, whereas the Craft degrees of Freemasonry have but one Master in charge of each lodge and one Grand Master heading the Grand Lodge, the Rosicrucians (initiates of the Holy Royal Arch Degree and above) are ruled by a trinity of three Principals or Grand Masters. They can be seen portrayed symbolically in the centre of the Masonic-Rosicrucian headpiece to the 1723 edition of *Shake-speares Sonnets*, published by Alexander Pope and Dr. Sewell to mark the centenary of the 1623 First Folio of Shakespeare plays. Two of the Principals have telescopes, looking at the Sun behind the sun (i.e. the divine Light), whilst the third is reclining on the ground, leaning on his elbow and pointing with the forefinger of his outstretched right arm and hand to what the others should observe.



**Masonic headpiece to the Bedson Medley edition of *Shake-speare's Sonnets*
published in 1723 by Alexander Pope and Dr. Sewell.
(Coloured by author; original B&W.)**

So now, with the Bastard's soliloquy references having prepared us, we can start to take note of and understand the Bastard's key sentence, "Thus leaning on my elbow I begin," and why it is placed in *The life and death of King John* that begins the Shakespeare series of history plays.

Thus leaning on my elbow I begin

The leaning is done on the left elbow, so that the right hand and arm is free.

The symbolic importance of this leaning has a particular connection with the Passover Seder,¹⁵ a special ritual feast performed by a Jewish family commemorating the Spirit of the Lord passing over the first-born of each Israelite family, because of the blood of a lamb, specially slain for the purpose, daubing the doorposts of the Israelite homes. The first-born of the Egyptians, on the other hand, all died. This led directly to the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt.¹⁶

The Seder itself is based on the Biblical verse commanding the freed Israelites (nowadays the Jews) to retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt: -

You shall tell your child on that day, saying, "It is because of what the LORD [JHVH] did for me when I came out of Egypt."¹⁷

The Seder includes reading the text of the Haggadah and other commentaries from the Talmud,¹⁸ telling the story of the Passover, discussing the story, performing special rituals, songs and blessings, partaking of symbolic foods placed on the Passover Seder Plate, eating matza (unleavened flatbread), drinking four cups of wine, and reclining in celebration of freedom.

During the meal there is a catechistic table discussion composed of questions and answers, which are begun by the standard Four Questions. The Four Questions concern the things in the Seder which are different now (i.e. when free) compared with before the Passover (i.e. when slaves). The first of the Four Questions concerns the reclining—the leaning—which is designed to stimulate curiosity and begin the catechistic conversation: hence the first meaning of "thus leaning on my elbow I begin".

The importance of leaning at the Seder is explained by the officiant to the other participants, the reason for it being that since their ancestors were slaves in Egypt, but then became free in this miraculous 'Passover' way, therefore they must act in accordance with their new status. Since it was the custom in those days for noble men (i.e. freemen) to eat while reclining on a sofa or on cushions, so today Seder participants are obligated to eat as noble men who recline.

Moreover, reclining (leaning) is done on the left side, not on the back and not on the right side. The reason given for this by the Seder officiant is that there are two pipes in the throat, one for air and one for food. By leaning on the left side, on the left elbow, the wind pipe is not hampered by the food. Of course, another reason is that the food and drink is handled by the right hand, which is left free to do so. There are also further reasons, for the physical

gesture of leaning and the accompanying ritual of the sacred meal are symbolic of far deeper things.

The epitome of the Seder, in Christian terms, is the Last Supper held by Jesus and his closest disciples, the twelve apostles, at which Jesus presided as the officiant. Strictly speaking, this Last Supper was not a usual Passover meal, as it took place prior to the betrayal, judgement and crucifixion of Jesus, whilst the true Passover meal was eaten by the Jewish families after sunset following the crucifixion, Jesus having represented the Lamb of God that is slain before the Passover so that its blood can be smeared on the doorposts. Jesus' body had to be taken down from the cross before the Passover began. The participants in the Last Supper were also male friends from different families, rather than a regular family of men, women and children as would have been normal at a Passover meal (Seder).

In other words, the Last Supper, although known as a Passover feast, was more akin to a sacred, ritualistic meal (*agape* in Greek, meaning 'holy') with bread and wine as key elements such as practiced in the mystery schools, the most famous of which were the Dionysian mystery schools. This also fits with the fact that Jesus, his father Joseph and uncle Cleopas were each known as *ben panthera*, 'son of the panther', which was the ascription given to the highest initiates of the Dionysian Mysteries, whose God (Eros) is Love. Dionysus ('Son of God') was known as 'son of the panther'.¹⁹

An epithet of Dionysus (also known as Bacchus) is 'Liberator', meaning that he is free and able to free others from slavery. Slavery, in initiatic terms, means being controlled by desires and thoughts that are wanton, impure, unloving, selfish, cruel or greedy, which result in unloving, unkind actions. To be free of such things means to be a master of life, a master of love. This is the real meaning of being free—and the word 'free' itself is derived from Sanskrit *pri*, meaning 'to love'. The sacrifice of the Lamb of God, which makes this freedom possible, refers to the oblation of the personal ego—symbolised by Aries, the zodiac sign of which governs the head—in humility and charitable (i.e. loving) service to others.

The Seder and the Passover story are allegories of these deeper truths, just as the Shakespeare play, *King John*, is an allegory based on history that has been reworked for the purpose. Moreover, the gesture of leaning on the left elbow is symbolic of a deeper truth.

The Left Side and Elbow

The word 'elbow' has a hidden meaning, wherein 'El' is an ancient name for God, and the 'bow' is emblematic of the intelligence of the heart, which fires arrows of wisdom or light: hence the symbolism of Cupid's bow and arrow. (Cupid, Latin *Cupīdō*, is also known as *Amor*, 'Love'; his Greek counterpart is *Eros*.) The symbolism is derived from Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs denoting Tefnut and Shu, the goddess and god of the heart, signifying divine intelligence and wisdom respectively.

Our intelligence, moreover, is also associated with our left-hand side. In Christian Cabala and Jewish Kabbalah, the Divine Intelligence (*Binah*), *Sephira* 3 on the Tree of Life, is on the left-hand side of the Tree.²⁰ Perception, or Judgement (*Geburah*), *Sephira* 5 on the Tree of Life, is

likewise on the left-hand side, beneath Intelligence (*Binah*). Perception/Judgement is called the left-hand of God, and is symbolised by an eye.

In the symbolism of Freemasonry, derived from the symbolism of Solomon's Temple, the Pillar of Strength is the left-hand pillar, *Boaz*, erected in Solomon's Temple on the north-east side of the temple entrance—the entrance being on the east side of the temple, whilst the Holy of Holies containing the Ark of the Covenant (i.e. high altar) lies in the west.

And he [Hiram Abiff] set up the pillars in the porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof *Jachin*; and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof *Boaz*.²¹

The Pillar of Strength symbolises that which supports, hence the Masonic saying: “Wisdom to design, strength to support, beauty to adorn.”²² It refers to the mind or intelligence that holds and thereby supports the wisdom, and provides the material by means of which the wisdom is given form as a thought-form. The Hebrew word *Boaz*, meaning ‘In strength’, is associated with *Boue*, the primeval chaos.²³ The word ‘Strength’ is also a translation of the Hebrew word *Geburah*. Hence the gesture of the left-hand, left-arm and left-elbow supporting the body as it leans to the left is symbolic of the meaning of the left-hand side that gives strength and support.

On the other hand, the right-hand Pillar of Wisdom, called *Jachin*, signifies the wisdom, which designs the form (i.e. thought-form) that is established in the dark formless matter of the mind. On the kabbalistic Tree of Life, ‘Wisdom’ is *Sephira 2, Chokmah*, at the top of the Tree's right-hand ‘pillar’. Directly below it is *Sephira 4, Chesed*, meaning ‘Mercy’ or ‘Compassion’. This is associated with Jupiter (Greek, *Zeus*; Latin, *Deus-Pater*), representing the Teacher. *Chesed* is known as the right-hand of God, and is symbolised by a heart. *Jachin*, meaning ‘I will establish’, is associated with the Greek name *Iacchos*, or Bacchus, the Son or Word of God.²⁴

It is affirmed in the teachings of Jewish Kabbalah that “whosoever advances in the study of the written and oral laws...unites the Blessed Name and the mystery of Jachin and Boaz.”²⁵ The Freemasonic formula for the combination of these, derived from the Old Testament and the meaning of the two names, is: “In strength I will establish this mine house.”²⁶ This was restated in another way by Jesus when he said, “Upon this rock will I build my church,”²⁷ and explained more clearly by Job as, “He is wise in heart and mighty in strength,”²⁸ and in Chronicles by the prayer, “The Lord give thee wisdom and understanding.”²⁹

Following ancient custom and kabbalistic design, the two ‘Great Pillars’ of Solomon's Temple, which were cast in brass, depicted the spiritual law or wisdom on the right-hand pillar, *Jachin*, and philosophical concepts and rules of behaviour on the left-hand pillar, *Boaz*. The philosophical concepts included the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences.

The Hebrew word *Kabbalah* means ‘the received wisdom’, which denotes the mind or intelligence that has received the wisdom and has given it form (thought-form) so that it might be understood and then put into practice. Another word for this is Philosophy, which means ‘the love of wisdom’, because it is the loving mind that can truly receive and understand the wisdom by turning the wisdom into loving thoughts, good thoughts, which,

when put into action, will manifest what love is. Hence arises illumination, for the mind, which observes and realises the result of the actions, will then know the truth.

The left-hand side is, therefore, associated with Kabbalah/Cabala, Philosophy, Understanding and Knowledge. Besides the eye, it is also symbolised by Night and the Moon, for the mind is dark (i.e. ignorant) until enlightened by wisdom. Wisdom is the divine light, but in the mind it is reflected (i.e. thought about and given form), hence the symbol of the Moon. The Wisdom, *Sephira 2 (Chokhmah)* on the right-hand side of the Tree of Life, is represented by Day and the Sun.

The left-hand side is, therefore, also associated with candlelight, with secret or concealed things, and with cipher, the language of the Kabbalah/Cabala.

A person who thus leans on his elbow, leaning to his left in the way described, is portraying by gesture a philosopher, a deep thinker who is pondering the truths of the universe and of life itself. He or she may not yet understand or know the truth, but is seeking the truth. Or he/she may know some truths but not all truth. Ultimately, however, the philosopher will know all truth and be fully enlightened as a result. What is called Melancholy is a description of this philosophical state of being, in all its various degrees of enlightenment.

Melancholy

According to the Galenic philosophy, prevalent throughout the Middle Ages, a person's psyche is composed of a mixture of four basic humours or temperaments. This philosophy, which has a Hermetic origin, associates the humours with the four fundamental alchemical elements and with four planetary influences: -

- phlegmatic (*water – Moon*) = undemonstrative; apathetic; unemotional; calm.
- melancholic (*earth – Saturn*) = thoughtful; pensive; contemplative.
- sanguine (*air – Jupiter*) = cheerful; optimistic; hopeful; confident.
- choleric (*fire – Mars*) = hot-tempered; irascible, passionate.

Each person's psyche is a mixture of all four, but usually one of the four will dominate the personality. In the initiatory process, we start off with the Moon level dominant, then add the best aspects of Saturn, then Jupiter, then Mars. The Moon level signifies the normal, mundane condition. From this we enter the melancholic state, with Saturn dominant. This dark humour was considered by public opinion to be the most unfortunate humour, but it is in fact the gateway and starting point of acquiring any true knowledge and spiritual growth. It is equated with the so-called dark night of the soul or psychological death which leads to rebirth, the awakening to some realisation of truth. Alchemists refer to this psychological state as that of the *Prima Materia*, in the darkness of which is born the shining white star of the new person, the new consciousness.

Saturn, who rules the humour, is seen as the Gatekeeper—the Great Initiator or Hierophant who both teaches and tests us, and who opens the gate for us to pass through (or not). Saturn is also known cabalistically as a synonym for knowledge—knowledge of truth, which is illumination. Saturn also signifies Time, personified as Pan, the Spirit of the Universe.

When a person is experiencing melancholy as a *Prima Materia* situation, and is therefore entering initiation, the thinking is contemplative, meditational, inquiring and imaginative, and there is an inspiring influence present. Neoplatonic thought saw this as 'inspired melancholy', the sign of genius and the humour of heroes and great sages. With this humour a person could climb to the stars, and become a star.

The key to arising out of this melancholic state is to combine and temper it with jovial influences—that is to say, to combine Saturn with Jupiter. Generally speaking, joviality is associated with merriment and good-heartedness, but esoterically it also signifies mercy or compassion. In one sense it means balancing the earthly melancholic humour with the airy sanguine humour, but in fact, it means far more than this. Francis Bacon reports this clearly, likening it to the conjunction of planets: -

But this is that which will dignify and exalt knowledge: if contemplation and action be more nearly and straitly conjoined and united together than they have been: a conjunction like unto that of the highest planets, Saturn, the planet of rest and contemplation, and Jupiter, the planet of civil society and action.

Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*.

This is a statement of the Renaissance ideal—the man of contemplation and action, represented as the philosopher-knight who can eventually become Hermes, the Enlightened One. The contemplation is philosophical, being a love of wisdom, and the action is charitable, being a deed of love.

In Hebraic teachings, the birth of the Messiah is said to occur when there is a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter, which produces the 'Star of Bethlehem'. When, added to this, there is a conjunction also of Mars, the Messianic birth is extra-special.

Mars represents the fire which is a necessary ingredient to reach to the uttermost heights, to give birth to the greatest star possible. This can mean that the fiery choleric humour is needed, but for the true philosopher this choleric humour has become a passionate and courageous fire of love, giving strength and vigour to the inspired state of jovial melancholy.

The *humor melancholicus*, when it takes fire and glows, generates the frenzy (*furor*) which leads us to wisdom and revelation, especially when it is combined with a heavenly influence, above all with that of Saturn.... Therefore, Aristotle says in the *Problemata* that through melancholy some men have become divine beings, foretelling the future like Sybils.... while others have become poets.... and he says further that all men who have been distinguished in any branch of knowledge have generally been melancholics.³⁰

Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia*: 'Saturn and Melancholy' (1533).

In this way the philosopher-knight becomes Hermes Trismegistus, knowing all truth and manifesting that truth to others.

Cornelius Agrippa, at one time an Imperator of the Rosicrucians, defines these three forms or degrees of expression of the inspired melancholic humour as artistic melancholy, philosophic melancholy and, ultimately, divine melancholy. Which level we each reach depends on the

capacity of our soul, whether, as Agrippa describes, to be fully concentrated in the imagination, or in the reason, or in the intellect—these three being three levels of the mind or soul, with the higher incorporating the lower.³¹

These three different states of Melancholia are depicted in certain key works of art.

For instance, the first stage of this inspired melancholy, the artistic melancholy, was carefully portrayed by the artist Albrecht Dürer in his engraving entitled *Melencolia I* (1514).



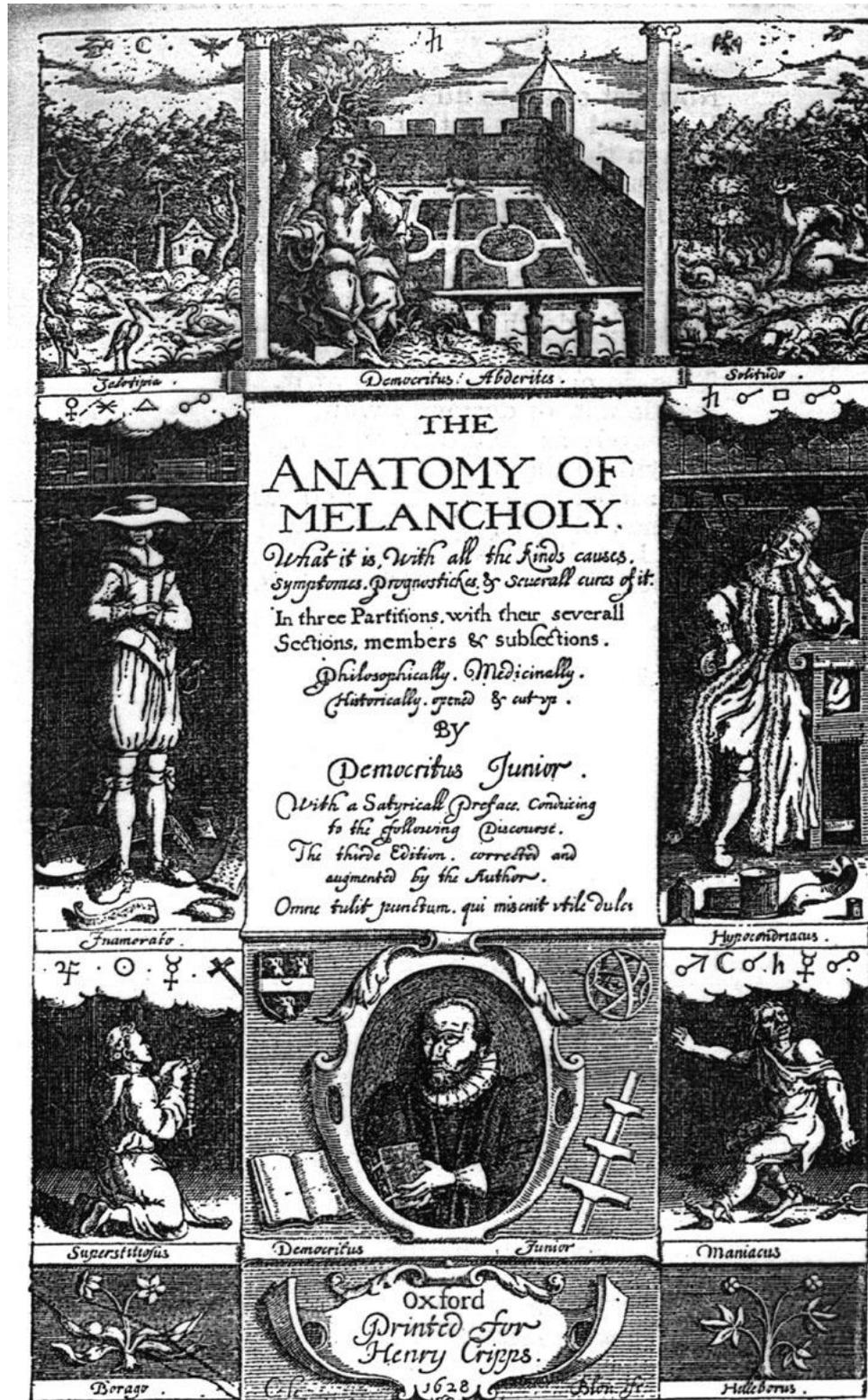
Albrecht Dürer: *Melencolia I* (1514)

Dürer also engraved a picture of the second stage, philosophic melancholy. This is portrayed in his picture of *St Jerome in his Study*, where Saint Jerome is shown seated at his desk, writing his translation of the holy scriptures or law of God, his cardinal's hat hanging on the wall behind him, his head haloed with divine illumination, a lion and dog lying peacefully together on the floor before him, and a skull on the windowsill.



Albrecht Dürer: *St Jerome in his Study* (1514)

Philosophic melancholy is also portrayed in the frontispiece to Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1628), wherein the ancient philosopher Democritus Abderites (c. 460-370 BC), a native of Abdera, Thrace, is depicted seated on the ground at the foot of a tree, leaning on his left elbow, with his head resting on his left hand and a pen held in his right hand. Behind him is a walled garden, whilst "over his head appears the sky, and Saturn Lord of Melancholy".



Robert Burton: frontispiece, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1628)

Democritus was a Greek pre-Socratic philosopher who formulated an atomic theory of the universe. Many consider Democritus to be the father of modern science.

Hypercondriacus is also shown in the melancholic position, seated on a chair. The whole frontispiece is modelled on the Tree of Life, so Hypercondriacus is depicted in the position of *Sephira* 5, Judgement or Strength, thereby emphasising the meaning.

Another portrayal of philosophic melancholy can be found in the frontispiece to *Truth brought to Light and discovered by Time* (1651), where King James I is shown seated in his canopied throne, eyes closed either in meditation or asleep, dreaming, with his head supported on his left hand and his right hand resting on a skull. James has Truth to his right and Time to his left, who are pulling back curtains to reveal him on his throne.



Frontispiece: *Truth brought to Light and discovered by Time* (1658)

An example of the third and final stage, divine melancholy, is portrayed by the memorial statue of Sir Francis Bacon located in a niche on the north side of the chancel of St Michael's Church, St Albans. He is shown seated on an armchair, wearing his Lord Chancellor's robes, leaning on his left elbow and slightly backward, with his head resting on his left hand, and gazing, eyes open, into the 'air' above the high altar.

This is the pose that signifies the great genius and seer who sees all truth and is illumined by it; for, symbolically, Lord Bacon is shown looking into the presence and heart of God, a place represented by the space immediately above the high altar. The high altar of a church is equivalent to the Ark of the Covenant, known as the Mercy Seat, which is the seat or 'throne' of the Presence of God, known in Hebrew as the *Shekhinah*.



Francis Bacon Memorial, St Michael's Church, St Albans

The three-panelled inscription on the memorial confirms this. The first (upper) panel of the inscription ends with the unusual *Sic Sedebat* ('Thus he sat'), which is taken from the Gospel of St. John in St. Jerome's Vulgate version of the Bible (John 4: 6). It describes Jesus at the well of Samaria, when he 'sat thus' and where he offered living water to drink and revealed himself as the Christ.

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Endnotes

- ¹ *King John*, The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series, edited by Jesse M. Lander and J.J.M. Tobin, 2018.
- ² *The life and death of King John*, I, i, 192-227 – page 2 of the Histories in the 1623 Shakespeare Folio.
- ³ John 1:6-8.
- ⁴ The Hebrew consonant *nun* (נ) is believed to be derived from an Egyptian hieroglyph of a water snake.
- ⁵ Genesis 1:7, 22-23.
- ⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:45-49.
- ⁷ Peter, the ‘Rock’, is a reference to the Foundation Stone of the Universe and is the title of the hierophant of the mysteries: hence the apostle Peter, when transmuted from Simon to Peter by Jesus, is given the gold and silver keys of heaven and earth, the emblem of the hierophant.
- ⁸ Shakespeare, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, IV, i, 1-6.
- ⁹ Thomas Vincent, *Elegy 7, Manes Verulamiani* (‘Shades of Verulam’) – a collection of 32 elegies published under the title *Memoriæ Honoratissimi Domini Francisci, Baronis de Verulamio, Vice-Comitis Sancti Albani Sacrum. Londini In Officina Johannis Haviland, 1626*. (Copies in the British Museum, Trinity College Library, Cambridge, and the Libraries of Jesus College and All Soul’s, Oxford.) Selections from the collection were reprinted in the 1640 and 1674 editions of *The Advancement of Learning*. A limited facsimile edition was published privately in 1950, edited by W. G. C. Gundry of the Middle Temple, Barrister-at-Law.
- ¹⁰ Anon., *Elegy 23, Manes Verulamiani*.
- ¹¹ Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis* (1627).
- ¹² Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis* (1627).
- ¹³ Michael Maier is alleged to have stated, in a manuscript residing at the University of Leiden (or Leipzig), the Society or Fraternity of the Golden and Rosy Cross had been founded in 1570 in England by members of a group whose origins lay in a group founded in 1510, in London, by Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim and led by Sir Thomas More, similar to the one Agrippa had set up in Paris. The founding and naming of this society or fraternity occurred immediately after the excommunication of Queen Elizabeth I by the pope, and was partly as a response to the papal threat and as a revival of ancient societies such as that of the Magi of Persia, Brahmins of India and Gymnosophists of Ethiopia. That same year (1570) the chivalric cult of St George, King Arthur and the Virgin Queen was begun in earnest in England—the primary emblems of the cult being the Red (i.e. Golden) Cross and the Rose. The fraternity had secret signs of recognition, was ruled by a President, and founded corresponding chapters of their society throughout Europe. (See Joanny Bricaud, ‘Historique du Movement Rosicrucien,’ *Le Voile d’Isis*, Vol. 91, July 1927, pp. 559-574. See also Hereward Tilton: *The Quest for the Phoenix: Spiritual Alchemy and Rosicrucianism in the Work of Count Michael Maier, 1569-1622*.)
- ¹⁴ Thomas Tenison, *Baconiana, or, Certain genuine remains of Sr. Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, and Viscount of St. Albans* (1679).
- ¹⁵ The Passover Seder is conducted on the evening of the 14th day of Nisan. The Seder, (Hebrew: “order”) is the religious meal served in Jewish homes on the 15th of the month of Nisan to commence the festival of Passover (Pesah).

¹⁶ This story is in the Book of Exodus (*Shemot*) in the Hebrew Bible.

¹⁷ Exodus 13:8.

¹⁸ The Haggadah is an ancient work derived from the Mishnah, and contains the narrative of the Israelite exodus from Egypt (*Pesahim* 10).

¹⁹ Andrew Collins , 'Jesus - Son of the Panther and the Cult of Bacchus-Dionysus' (<http://andrewcollins.com/page/articles/Jesus.htm>).

²⁰ The Hebrew word *Sephira*, plural *Sephiroth*, means number, from which is derived the word 'cipher'.

²¹ I Kings vii. 21.

²² William Harvey, J.P., F.S.A.Scot., (Provincial Grand Master of Forfarshire 1934-36), *The Complete Manual of Freemasonry*. Extract from First Tracing Board teaching: -

Our Lodges are supported by three great Pillars; they are called Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty; Wisdom to contrive, Strength to support, and Beauty to adorn; Wisdom to guide us in all our undertakings, Strength to support us in all our difficulties, and Beauty to adorn the inward man.

²³ Cited in 'The Pillars of Freemasonry' by N W J Haydon, Associate Editor of *The Builder*, St Louis, Mo., April 1926. See also Alex Horne, 'The Twin Pillars,' *King Solomon's Temple in the Masonic Tradition*, p 226-7. Wellingborough: Aquarian Press (1972).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ A E Waite, 'Pillars of the Temple', *A New Encyclopædia of Freemasonry*, p 280. New York: Weathervane Books (1970).

²⁶ Alex Horne, 'The Twin Pillars,' *King Solomon's Temple in the Masonic Tradition*, p 222. Wellingborough: Aquarian Press (1972). See also: A G Mackey, *The Lexicon of Freemasonry*, pp 355-356. Philadelphia (1867). A G Mackey, 'Pillars of the Porch,' *Encyclopædia of Freemasonry*.

²⁷ Matthew, xvi, 18.

²⁸ Job ix, 4; xxxvi, 5.

²⁹ 1 Chronicles, xxii, 12.

³⁰ See Frances A Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, Ch VI 'Melancholy: Dürer and Agrippa' (1979).

³¹ Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia: 'Saturn and Melancholy'* (1533). See also Frances A Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, Ch VI, 'Melancholy: Dürer and Agrippa' (1979).