

## Captain Tucca, Captain Hannam, and Falstaff

by Robert Detobel

Captain Tucca in Ben Jonson's play *Poetaster or The Arraignment* is "one of the most compelling milites gloriosi in drama". In the first three sections of the following paper: Vocabulary, References, and Character, it will be shown that Captain Tucca echoes another illustrious figure of drama, Sir John Falstaff, a cross-relation which seems to have completely eluded editors of Jonson's play. The fourth and last section deals with the identity of the mysterious Captain Hamman who, according to Thomas Dekker, was the model for Jonson's Tucca.

### I. VOCABULARY

Both Falstaff and Tucca regularly address their interlocutors as "rascal," "rogue," "varlet". "Whoreson" is another term which enjoys the preference of both. The word occurs 38 times in Shakespeare's plays, of which 16 times in *1 and 2 Henry IV*, a percentage of 42. In Jonson's 16 plays (including the unfinished *Sad Shepherd* and the fragment *Mortimer*) the word occurs 14 times, of which 6 in *Poetaster*, also a percentage of 42. However surprising the exact equality of the proportion, more significant is another parallel. In *2 Henry IV*, Falstaff uses "whoreson" 5 times within the space of a single scene, namely the scene I.ii (ll. 13, 35, 35, 107, 112). It is the scene in which Falstaff is confronted with the reproaches of the Lord Chief Justice. Of the six uses in Jonson's *Poetaster* four also occur within a single scene, V.iii (ll. 181, 400, 416, 430). It is the scene in which Tucca is confronted with the judicial power of the emperor Augustus, who condemns him to bear a double-fronted mask over his head, "That he may look bi-fronted, as he speaks." (428).

### II. REFERENCES TO HENRY IV IN POETASTER

In III.iv Captain Tucca has his two pages, Pyrgus I and Pyrgus II, demonstrate their histrionic qualities by declaiming passages from some popular plays of the day. All these plays but two are unequivocally identifiable, the quotes from them being almost verbatim. These plays are: the inevitable *Spanish Tragedy*, Chapman's *Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, and Peele's *Battle of Alcazar*.

It is a curious phenomenon that the editors of Jonson's play seem to have been unable to rec-

ognize the nature of the two other passages, recited by Pyrgus I and Pyrgus II respectively. Though these texts, contrary to the others, are not literal quotes from existing plays, they are recognizable paraphrases of existing play texts: of Shakespearean texts to wit. And both paraphrases refer to Falstaff. Only dimly does the editor of *Poetaster* in the Revels Plays series perceive the analogy of the first declamation with *1 Henry IV*, II.iv.381-2, 386, 388-9, where Falstaff, impersonating Prince Hal's father, says: "I must speak in passion and I will do it in King Cambyses' vein", and continues:

Weep not, sweet Queen, for trickling tears are vain...  
For God's sake, lords, convey my tristful Queen,  
For tears do stop the floodgates of her eyes.

In the corresponding passage in *Poetaster*, Tucca announces that Pyrgus I will speak in "King Darius' doleful strain"(211):

O doleful days! O direful deadly dump!  
O wicked world! And wordly wickedness!  
How can I hold my fist from crying thump  
In rue of this right rascal wretchedness! (212-215)

Historically, Darius is Cambyses' successor on the Persian throne; in Jonson's play his "doleful strain" echoes the "passionate vein" of Falstaff's King Cambyses. The other lines are spoken by Pyrgus II:

What? Will I brave thee? Ay, and beard thee too.  
A Roman spirit scorns to bear a brain  
So full of base pusillanimity. (227-229)

Here the editor of Jonson's play in the Revels Series opts for a lost Roman play or an unidentified parody of Jonson's. The parody, however, is, if less than obvious, not that difficult to identify. The first line is taken from Jack Cade's reply to Iden in *2 Henry VI*, IV.x.36-7: "Brave thee? Ay, by the best blood that ever broached, and beard thee too." Being only once used by Shakespeare, the word "pusillanimity" leads us straightway to act IV.iii of *2 Henry IV*. In the last two lines are put together several elements from speeches by Falstaff in this scene: "... that I may justly say, with the hook-nosed fellow of Rome, three

words, 'I came, saw, and overcame' (40-41) ... A good sherris-sack hath a twofold operation in it. It ascends me into the brain .... The second property... is the warming of the blood, which before, cold and settled, left the liver white and pale, which is the badge of pusillanimity and cowardice ...(94-104) Hereof comes it that Prince Harry is valiant; for the cold blood he naturally inherited from his father he hath like lean, sterile and bare land manured ... with excellent endeavour of drinking good store of fertile sherris, that he is become very hot and valiant. (115-120)."

### III. CHARACTER

In I.i of Jonson's play, Tucca is characterized as "he that presses every man he meets with an oath to lend him money." Falstaff's bills are generally paid by Prince Hal or not at all. "I was a virtuously given as a gentleman need to be; virtuous enough; swore little; diced not above seven times - a week; went to a bawdy-house not above one in a quarter - of an hour; paid money that I borrowed - three or four times;" (*I HIV*, III.iii.13.17). Mistress Quickly has pawned her plate for him (*2HIV*, II.i). At the end of *2HIV* he owes Justice Shallow "a thousand pound" and cannot repay it (V.v-73-90).

Both Falstaff and Tucca are able quickly to commute between diametrically opposite stands or statements. When in *I HIV*, II.iv, Hal reveals that the "band" of aggressors at Gad's Hill consisted but of himself and Poins, Falstaff, who before had described this encounter as taking place in the blackest darkness, has no qualms about pretending he had recognized the Prince and therefore had not pursued him: "By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye. Why, hear you, my masters, was it for me to kill the heir-apparent? Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules: but beware instinct - the lion will not touch the true prince? instinct is a great matter. I was now a coward on instinct." (262-69). In *Poetaster*, III.iv.16-22 Tucca first treats the two lictors, Roman constables so to speak, who have arrested the poet Crispinus, as unworthy fellows: "Do you hear, you goodman slave? Hook, ram, rogue, catchpole, loose the gent'man, or by my velvet arms -". When thereupon one lictor strikes up and disarms him, he turns excessively amicable: "Kiss thy hand, my honourable active varlet, and embrace thee, thus." His page comments: "O patient metamorphosis!"

Both Tucca and Falstaff are incarnations of the *miles gloriosus*, the bragging captain. Though

Falstaff represents infinitely more and is, besides, a perspicacious oberver and critique of the common nonsense in the common seens, for instance that of Justice Shallow, the *miles gloriosus* is arguably foregrounded in him. "The virtue of the trick" he intends to play on him at Gad's Hill, Poins explains, "will be the incomprehensible lies that this same fat rogue will tell us when we meet at supper, how thirty at least he fought with, what wards, what blows, what extremities he endured" (*I HIV*, I.ii.180-3).

Falstaff's only two notable feats of arms are mere farces. In *I HIV* (V.iv) he counterfeits his death to escape having to fight with the fierce Scot Douglas. Again he pours us one of his famous counter-interpretations, this time in a cup full of deeper sense: "I lie, I am no counterfeit: to die is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man, who hath not the life of man: but to counterfeit dying, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed." (114-119). Then, seeing the corpse of young Percy, he stabs him one more and boasts of having killed the redoubtable rebel Hotspur. His other feat, in *2HIV*, IV.III, is the capture of another "famous rebel" (61), Sir John Coleville of Dale. But this capturing is child's play and, indeed, proceeds like a children's game. Coleville seems to surrender under the impression of Falstaff's torrential speech and over-dimensioned belly, "more of his courtesy than your deserving," (42) as John of Lancaster comments to Falstaff. Besides, his only notable military activities are his conveying a company to Coventry (*I HIV*, IV.ii) and his mustering (*2HIV*, III.ii). Here, then, the relationship between Shakespeare's Falstaff and Jonson's Tucca should be clear. When in *Poetaster*, V.iii, the emperor Augustus asks the Roman aristocrat Cornelius Gallus whether he knows this captain boasting of his valiant deeds in the emperor's service, Gallus answers: "He's is one that hath had the mustering or convoy of a company now and then. I never noted him by any other employment." (194-5).

### IV. CAPTAIN HANNAM

In V.iii of *Poetaster* the poets Crispinus (John Marston) and Demetrius Fannius (Thomas Dekker) are arraigned for having calumniated Horace. They are administered an emetic pill causing them to throw up their bathetic word formations. If the Horace of the whole play cannot be understood as

a self-portrait of Jonson, note that this last scene justified Marston and (mainly) Thomas Dekker in representing Jonson as some “Horace” in their retaliating play *Satiromastix or The Untrussing of the Humourous Poet*. Now it is Jonson’s turn to be “arraigned”.

In this arraignment of Jonson, the same Captain Tucca plays a central role. From the preface “To the World” it can safely be concluded that Ben Jonson had accused Dekker of having filched his creation, the figure of Captain Tucca, in other words to have plagiarized Jonson. To which Dekker replies: “A second Cat-a-mountaine mewes, and calles me barren, because my braines could bring foorth no other Stigmaticke than Tucca, whome Horace had put to making, and begot to my hand: but I wonder what language Tucca would have spoke, if honest Capten Hannam had bin borne without a tongue? Ist not lawfull then for mee to imitate Horace, as Horace Hannam?”

What is the meaning of “had honest Captain Hannam been born without a tongue”? It is a fairly senseless pleonasm to understand the phrase literally. Indeed, Captain Hannam would then have been speechless. And if Captain Hannam were Captain Tucca, the latter would still have been Ben Jonson’s creation or, in Dekker’s own words, would have had “to put him to making”. Dekker could not have returned the implied reproach of plagiarism.

Plagiarism is a literary category. It is not in the real world one has to look for Captain Hannam but in the world of letters, preferably of the theatre. Nonetheless all scholars have been looking out for a real Captain Hannam and have advanced a plurality of candidates, one more unconvincing than the other: none, to their own avowal, satisfactory. Given the parallels between Captain Tucca and Shakespeare’s Falstaff, one meaning, the most plausible one, would be that Dekker meant Jonson himself had borrowed or copied something from Shakespeare. In this case a link should exist not between Captain Tucca and Captain Hannam but between Captain Hannam and Falstaff.

Such a link does exist. Falstaff was involved in the robbery at Gad’s Hill between Gravesend and Rochester. John or Jack Hannam too. In a letter of May 1573 to Lord Burghley, John Wotton and William Faunt complain: “So it is, Right Honourable, Wootton and myself riding peacable by the highway from Gravesend to Rochester, had three calivers charged with bullets, discharged at us by three of My Lord of Oxford’s men; Danye

Wylkyns, John Hannam, and Deny the Frenchman, who lay privily in a ditch awaiting our coming with full intent to murder us.”

In other words, like Ffluellen (Roger Williams), John Falstaff (Captain Hannam according to Thomas Dekker) was a sometime follower of the 17th Earl of Oxford.

## NOTES

At the root of this short article is an exchange between Kurt Kreiler and me. I was studying Ben Jonson’s *Poetaster*, and still am, under the aspect of Jonson’s own dichotomy between the Ovidian and the Horatian concept of poetry.

It is clear that Ovid in Jonson’s play is to some extent a representative of Shakespeare, Horace to some extent a representative of Jonson himself. Probably, very little can be learned from Jonson’s play beyond this conceptual setting. It was Kurt who drew my attention to Tucca as sort of Jonsonian reincarnation of Shakespeare’s Falstaff. This threw an entirely new light on Thomas Dekker’s preface to *Satiromastix*, the satire on Ben Jonson.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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