

UTTERING ANGELS AND MINTING METAPHORS: SOME NUMISMATIC TROPES IN EARLY MODERN BRITISH POETRY

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I

THE English coin known as the angel offered early modern writers a golden opportunity for punning.¹ There are well-known examples in *Measure for Measure*, in which the character Angelo provides a third point of metaphorical reference; saying of himself, for example:

Let there be some more test made of my mettle
Before so noble and so great a figure
Be stamp'd upon it. (I. 1. 48–50).²

Other coins, notably the crown, also encouraged wordplay; we have further examples not very much later in *Measure for Measure*, when dollars are elided with dolours, and a 'French crown' puns on the 'French disease', syphilis, of which a bald crown was one symptom (I. 2. 39–41). Furthermore the slangy metonymic habit of calling coins 'crosses', owing to the fact that crosses appeared on the reverses of many medieval coins and persisted in low-value pieces, and behind the coat of arms of most silver coins, under the Tudors, presented another locus for punning on an ambiguity – like that of the angel – between money and the sacred. But the angel occupied a privileged tropological place in early modern English literature; that is, it took an important place in the metaphorical artillery.

It provided, in the first place, a neat way of commenting ironically on the vice of avarice – the sin that venerates gold as 'angelic' – while the 'angelic' aspect of lucre is subverted by the pun's inherent irony. Some writers spell it out. In a poem of around 1632 entitled, 'Come wordling see what paines I here do take, | To gather gold while here on earth I rake',³ the miserly speaker at first rakes in his angels:

Come to me and flye
Gold Angels I cry,
And Ile gather you all with my Rake.

But by the end of the poem, the angels have turned to devils: 'The Divell and all he will Rake'. And indeed, the accompanying woodcut depicts a small black demon under the man's rake, amidst piles of coin.

The angel pun also allowed more subtle writers to exploit a tension between the material and the metaphysical, often ostensibly stressing the heavenly meaning, while the baser, bathetic side of the ambiguity would be sure to get the upper hand in reading, wielding as it does the ironic force. Shakespeare's Richard II declares that

For every man that Bullingbrook hath pressed
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown
God for His Richard hath in heavenly pay
A glorious angel. (III. 2. 58–61).⁴

¹ The fullest recent study of numismatic and economic language in English renaissance literature (though it deals only with selected dramatic texts) is Fischer 1985, but her discussion of the angel is brief (p. 41). Misleadingly, she records only the original 'Per Crucem' legend, which does not appear on angels of the period about which she writes. Baker 1959 is an older consideration of the angel, with a few comments on English poetry, while Allen and Dunstan 1941 provided a sound consideration of monetary and numismatic references and vocabulary in the renaissance dramatists, citing many passages of interest.

² Text from Shakespeare 1997.

³ N. P. [Martin Parker?] 1638. Two poems on one sheet; Pollard and Redgrave 1986–91, cat. no. 19076.

⁴ Text from Shakespeare 1984.

Andrew Gurr, in his Cambridge edition of the play, notes that ‘The contrast of steel with gold leads Richard on to gold as money, in “pay” and “angel”’.⁵ To this may be added that there were indeed gold crowns and half-crowns in circulation in Shakespeare’s time: the first were uttered in 1526 as part of Henry VIII’s ‘Wolsey’ coinage. Gurr also observes that ‘Richard’s contrast between Bullingbrook’s conscripts and God’s paid angels has a touch of materialism which serves to intensify its impracticality’.⁶ True, in some measure; but the materialism does not simply show up a naïveté in the king’s thinking. Perhaps Richard, the eloquent commentator and spin-doctor of his own demise, is deliberately extending the material financial associations, which he attaches to Bullingbrook, into a divine set of associations, attached to himself, necessarily using the metallic and numismatic terms and images (whence the sense of materialism emanates) as a rhetorical hinge.

It was not only in poetry that the angel was able to bear sacred significance. The angel, despite fluctuations in fineness, was minted at the higher, medieval gold standard, never in the lower quality ‘crown gold’ issued by Elizabeth and James; and this both betokened and buttressed its particular prestige.⁷ As Donald C. Baker wrote, the angel was ‘almost a national symbol’, ‘recognized abroad as the characteristic coin of England’;⁸ hence, as he points out, ‘it would be a very likely guess that, owing to the coin’s significance as a symbol of their own power and its proverbial integrity among the people, successive administrations were hesitant to tamper with its integrity, preferring to reduce its size’.⁹ The angel had a very special aura. From at least the reign of Henry VII, it had been the standard coin bestowed upon sufferers from ‘the King’s Evil’ during touching ceremonies in which it was used as a touchpiece, or ‘healing piece’.¹⁰ There is a reference to such ceremonies in *Macbeth*, IV.3, in which mention is made of a ‘golden stamp’. The type image of the angel – St Michael triumphing over a dragon¹¹ – and its original legend, ‘PER CRUCEM TVAM SALVA NOS CHRISTE REDEMPTOR’,¹² as well as its standard legend from Mary’s reign through James’s, ‘A DOMINO FACTVM EST ISTVD (ET EST MIRABILE)’ (Fig. 1 a),¹³ were well suited to this purpose, leading some scholars to believe that it was originally introduced by Edward IV specifically for touching, though the suggestion is no longer seriously entertained.¹⁴ At the other end of its history, Charles I seems to have minted only small numbers of them, ‘substantially produced as “touch-pieces”’ (Fig. 1 b).¹⁵ It continued to be the standard coin for such use until replaced by a non-circulating medal in 1664 by order of Charles II.¹⁶ Plainly, the angel bore a sacred significance in these ceremonies, but even such rituals were not without material aspects: an angel was a very significant monetary gift. And indeed, the gift of gold angels was preceded by less emblematic gifts of silver pennies (in the time of Edward I, at least).

⁵ Shakespeare 1984, 117.

⁶ Shakespeare 1984, 117.

⁷ Value: initially 6*s.8d.*; raised to 7*s.4d.*, then 7*s.6d.* under Henry VIII’s second coinage (1526–44), and again to 8*s.* in 1542 (continuing so under his third coinage from 1544). In 1551 it reached a value of 10*s.* which it maintained from the coinage of Edward VI onwards, excepting a period from 1612 to 1619 under the second coinage of James I, when it rose to 11*s.* It also seems to have been briefly worth 7*s.4d.* in early 1526, and 9*s.8d.* in 1549–52; and, on the evidence of a doubtful and still baffling proclamation existing in manuscript, it has sometimes been supposed that from 1562 (purportedly till 1572) Elizabeth ‘called down’ the value of all currency, during which putative hiatus the angel resumed its original value of 6*s.8d.*: Kenyon 1884, 121, 128, and Brooke 1932/50, 193, both accepted the hypothesis, and are still sometimes followed; Oman 1932 took pains to refute it, and Craig 1953, 122 dismisses it as a ‘canard’. See also Challis 1978, 127–8.

⁸ Baker 1959, 87.

⁹ Baker 1959, 91.

¹⁰ On ‘touching’, see Crawford 1911, Farquhar 1916 and 1917, and Woolf 1979.

¹¹ On the reverse, a sea-borne ship, with a shield amidships displaying the royal arms.

¹² ‘Through your cross, save us, Christ our Saviour’.

¹³ ‘This is the work of the Lord and it is marvelous [in our eyes]’. Mary and Elizabeth used the longer inscription from 1553–1603; James omitted the ‘ET EST MIRABILE’.

¹⁴ E.g. Farquhar 1916, 70. NB. Some of Henry VII’s angels were inscribed ‘IESVS AVTEM TRANSIENS PER MEDIVM ILLORVM IBAT’ (‘But Jesus passed through the midst of them’); Charles I’s, ‘AMOR POPVLI PRAESIDIUM REGIS’ (‘The love of the people is the protection of the king’).

¹⁵ Sutherland 1973, 164; cf. Farquhar 1916, 114.

¹⁶ Farquhar 1916, *passim*.



Fig. 1. a) Angel of James I. b) Angel of Charles I, with the AMOR POPULI legend. Both coins are pierced for suspension. Images © Fitzwilliam Museum.

In connection with this ceremonial and talismanic role of the angel, a well-known poem, ‘The Pilgrimage’ by George Herbert (1593–1633), offers another literary example.

Here I was robb’d of all my gold,
Save one good Angell, which a friend had ti’d
Close to my side. (ll. 16–18).¹⁷

The angel here is clearly a coin, but metaphorically figured as a guardian angel. The materiality of the image does not seem problematic, partly because the pilgrim shows no symptoms of worldly greed, and partly because the angel acts as a kind of amulet. It is *tied* to the speaker, suggesting that it has been pierced for the purpose, like a touchpiece. In this case the type of the angel is given real symbolic significance. After the (rose-)noble, which was said to have been worn as a good luck charm on account of its legend, ‘IESUS AVTEM TRANSIENS PER MEDIUM ILLORVM IBAT’,¹⁸ the angel was the most likely coin to be worn in such a way. From at least the time of Queen Mary, it appears common for angels used in the King’s Evil ceremony to have been pierced and worn as a pendant by the sufferers: a Venetian ambassador records such a ceremony in a letter of 1556.¹⁹

Numismatic ‘angel’ tropes also appear in Latin literature of the period. Consider this, from the Scottish courtier-poet John Dunbar’s *Epigrammaton* (1616):

De Angelis Iacobi Regis

Pauci Iovae Angelum petunt tutorium:
Iacobi at angelos petunt quamplurimi. (III. LXXIII).

[On the Angels of King James. Few seek the guardian angel of God, but how many seek the angels of James.]

A conventional antithesis between heavenly and worldly angels is combined with implied praise of the monarch (and the quality of his coinage). At the same time, James is associated with the worldly side of the divide, which *might* seem somewhat depreciatory; but (as we shall see again in Barnfield) the division is not as morally sharp as in (for instance) the more sermonising ‘rake’ poem. Compare this, by the celebrated Welsh epigrammatist John Owen (c.1564–1622):²⁰

Da mihi Angelum & ego Dabo tibi spiritum, —

Spiritus huic sanctus promittitur; *Angelus* illi
Michael; hic *Munus* polluit, ille *Manus*.

[Give me an Angel, and I will give thee the Spirit.

The Spirit here, and Angel, *Michael*
Is promis’d there; here Gifts, there Hands excell.]²¹

¹⁷ Herbert 1941, 141–2. See also Baker 1959, 92, on this poem; and 93 for his remarks on Herbert’s ‘To All Angels and Saints’.

¹⁸ See Evelyn 1697, 86, where some such superstition is alluded to; and Farquhar 1916, 49, who claims that they were often taken into battle as an amulet.

¹⁹ See Farquhar 1916, 94, and Crawford 1911, 67.

²⁰ Owen 1612, I. 32, i.e. VIII. 32 according to the later numbering.

²¹ Trans. Thomas Harvey, from Owen 1677.

Here the distinction between the heavenly and the material is made into a sharp moral contrast: Owen alludes to corruption in ecclesiastical preferments. Note that St Michael is explicitly mentioned.

But in Neo-Latin literature, another important punning possibility emerges, along the lines of the old quip, attributed to Gregory the Great, '*Non Angli, sed Angeli*'. Thus, in an epigram by John Owen entitled '*L'argent fait tout*':²²

Protexit generosa tuum te Francia (a) *Scutum*;
 (b) *Angelus*, est *custos*, Anglia tuta, tuus.
 (a) *L'escu.* (b) *L'angelot.*

[The (a) Shield, O generous *France*, advanc'd thy Van:
 (b) An Angel, *England*, was thy Guardian.
 (a) *L'escu.* (b) *L'Angelot.*]

The French *scutum* is the *écu*, named after the shield that appeared upon it, and known to the English, with whom it was one of the most commonly circulated of foreign coins, as the French 'crown'.²³ It was thus a rival to the coinage of English monarchs. Owen takes advantage of the military implication of '*scutum*', but he is also pitching the prestigious Angel against a French coin of long-standing prestige and familiarity. And his readers may well have remarked that the Angel had nearly twice the value of the *écu*, which had been set at 6*s.*4*d.* until shortly prior to its demonetization in 1560,²⁴ and was thus closer to the English crown, or indeed the half-angel (both 5*s.*). Because 'Anglus' and 'Angelus' are much closer than 'English' and 'Angel', poets in Latin could make more explicit verbal links between the angel (as synecdoche for the national coinage) and national identity: a theme we shall encounter, *without* the Latin pun, in the English verse of Richard Barnfield.

II

Richard Barnfield's long stanzaic poem *Lady Pecunia* (1598, revised in 1605) is a curious specimen of extra-canonical English verse. '*Lady Pecunia*'²⁵ is a personification not simply of wealth, but money, more materially understood: a 'Goddesse of Gold' (stanza 2).²⁶ Now, it is almost certainly true that *all* British numismatic treatises of the early modern period point out the derivation of *pecunia* ('money') from *pecus* ('cattle'), usually suggesting, both that cattle formed a pre-monetary basis of exchange, and that early coins were called *pecunia* because stamped with the image of a cow.²⁷ Given that this seems to have been a well-known idea amongst the educated, the word *pecunia* would be likely to suggest the physicality of coinage.

Lady Pecunia is full of numismatic tropes, and especially puns. The Lady 'may be kist; but she may not be clipt' (stanza 53). And it is in the nature of such puns to cause ambiguities of register and tone. Clipping, a widespread and widely condemned crime, is figured as a sexual misdemeanour, while the kissing of 'Lady Pecunia', a fetishization of money imagined in physical terms, is, in keeping with the rest of the poem, sanctioned – though in a way which imbues it with a touch of erotic audacity. Or again, his puns on 'Sovereign' (see stanzas 16 and 33) confuse the monarch with her money. But this is precisely the point; the coinage issued in her name, stamped with her image (as most coins, including the sovereign but excluding the angel, were), are seen as a kind of emblematic offspring of the Queen, indexes to authority, imbued with value by her impress, so that the monarch controls, and is vicariously present in financial transactions.

²² Trans. Thomas Harvey, from Owen 1677, II. 16, i.e. IX. 16.

²³ On the circulation of foreign gold in England, see Deng 2009 and Kelleher 2007.

²⁴ See Challis 1978, 218; Kelleher 2007, 216.

²⁵ Barnfield 1605 (first published 1598).

²⁶ References to this poem are to stanza numbers in the 1605 edition.

²⁷ E.g. Camden 1614, 196; Leigh 1680, 43 (who cites a possible derivation from the skin of cattle 'out of which mony was Coynded'); and Evelyn 1697, 4.

In Barnfield's *Epistle Dedicatory to Elizabeth* (still printed in revised versions after Elizabeth's death), he writes of 'Lady Pecunia':

She is a Lady, she must be respected:
She is a Queene, she may not be neglected.
This is the shadow, you the substance haue,
Which substance now this shadow seems to craue.

'Lady Pecunia' is explicitly identified with the 'Queene'. In the couplet, 'This', the 'shadow' of the Queen, may be the poem, and its allegorical Lady; or (and here is the underlying trope) it may mean the coin which the Lady represents, and which in turn represents Elizabeth. Indeed, the talk of shadow and substance fumbles around the essential difficulties of the concept of money – the alliance of intrinsic value and representative value, and the disconnection between the two. The coin stamped with an impression of the Queen may be called the 'shadow', or representation, of the 'substance' or original. In which case, Barnfield ascribes monetary value to the crown – to royal decree, and thus to the semiotic face value – while the gold and silver is merely a 'shadow'. This is implicit. Explicitly, Barnfield is talking of his poetic endeavour, which 'craves' Elizabeth – invokes her, strives to do her justice, and sues for her good grace. A tropical implication of this is the notion of eloquence and writing as (respectively) treasury and coining, and of printing and publication as minting and 'uttering', or circulating. More wittily, combining the two interpretations, the poem and the poet might really seem to be craving the 'substance' of financial assistance.

It is in this vein that Barnfield reaches almost at once for an angel pun: 'You golden Angels helpe me to indite'. So he beseeches his monetary muse in the second stanza. And thus the conventional invocation *topos* turns into, not merely a pun for a pun's sake, but a joke about patronage. He continues:

You, you alone, can make my Muse to speake;
And tell a golden tale, with siluer tongue:
You onely can my pleasing silence breake;
And adde some Musique, to a merry Songue. (3).

Three things are happening here. One is the use of bland clichés, 'golden tale', 'silver tongue' to extend the monetary joke. Another is the continuation of the patronage theme: only the *theme* of money can make his 'Muse to speake', he seems to say. But what the lines jokingly imply is that only the *provision* of actual money can allow him – or cause him against his will – to break his 'pleasing silence'. This is in keeping with another poem by Barnfield, published in the same volume, *The complaint of Poetry, for the death of Liberality*, which complains about the indigence of poor poets, and the paucity of patrons. The third notable aspect of the passage is its musical theme. The angels 'adde . . . Musique' to Barnfield's 'Songue'. This invokes traditional iconography of choring, trumpeting angels; but also the idea of the musical coin, the pleasing ring of precious metals – one means of testing purity.

With this in mind, the 'golden song' and 'silver tongue' clichés begin to seem marginally less bland. And indeed, because it reflects upon his own poetic activity, Barnfield returns to this musical vein at other points in the poem. He talks of the enchantment of 'a golden Songue' (23), and says that coinage 'charmés the eare, with heauenlie harmony' (45), where the 'harmony' of the coin suggests its purity. So, in Dekker's 1607 play *The Whore of Babylon*,²⁸ the order 'head all the speares | With gold of Angell-prooffe' (V. 3. 16–17) refers to the superior quality of angel gold (though both Elizabeth and James minted 'crown' gold, angels were always minted in 'fine' gold – and James's only in small numbers).

Then, in the following stanza, Barnfield writes:

Like to another Orpheus can she plaie
Vpon her treble Harpe, whose siluer sound
Inchants the eare, and steales the hart awaie,
That hardlie the deceit thereof is found.

²⁸ Dekker 1953–61, vol. II, 491–586.

Although such Musicke, some a shilling cost,
Yet it is worth but Nine-pence, at the most. (46).

‘Treble’ refers to the high pitch of the ring of gold and silver coins; but why a harp? In 1605, the image of the harp reminds us that, with James’s coinage, the Irish harp now appeared for the first time on English coins, and indeed the previous stanza celebrates Union explicitly:

Stand forth who can and tell, and truelie saie
When England, Scotland, Ireland and France,
He ever saw Pecunia to displaie
Before these daies; O wondrous happie chance. (45).

But the ‘Orpheus’ stanza (46) is present in almost exactly the same form in the first edition of 1598, without this context, and before the Union. It is all the more perplexing forasmuch as that stanza’s almost satirical concern with ‘deceit’ comes out of the blue in the 1598 text, amidst paeans of praise for ‘Pecunia’. But, upon inspection, it does indeed seem to be a kind of ironic aside, adverting to the debased coinage: what else could be meant by the ‘deceit’ which allows an ambiguity of value between a shilling and ninepence? And, sure enough, there is good reason to suspect that even in 1598 the image of the harp is a loaded one, and the poet is, just for a moment, glancing at Ireland, where the harp featured prominently on coin reverses: in fact, the Irish shilling was colloquially known as a ‘harp’. It was Elizabeth’s second Irish coinage (1561) that first introduced fine silver to the Irish currency (her third coinage reverted to base silver); but the Irish shilling was worth only ninepence in England, being struck at a lighter weight than its English counterparts (Fig. 2).²⁹ The cryptic allusion then makes sense: the music is deceitful, because, the purity being as high as the English standard, the silver rings true, and one might expect the value to be standard too.



Fig. 2. Fine-silver Irish shilling of Elizabeth I. © Fitzwilliam Museum.

In the 1605 text, the allusion is still apposite, for James had issued a fine silver coinage for Ireland in 1603, accompanied by a proclamation valuing the new shilling at twelve pence sterling, engendering a muddle that had to be solved by another proclamation explaining that twelve Irish pence were equivalent to nine English.³⁰ Barnfield’s 1605 text is less equivocal and more specific, adding a further stanza to elaborate the reference and draw out the adversion to Ireland:

But Ireland alone, this Musicks sound
Being clad in Siluer, challenge for their coine,
What though amongst vs much thereof be found,
Authoritie, no subiect dooth inioyne
Aboue his worth to countenance the same,
Then men, not coin, are worthy of that blame. (47).

In other words, only in Ireland does the quality of silver coin need to be queried, because only the Irish coinage suffers from the proliferation of base silver amongst its fine silver. And although remnants of earlier debased coinage, and indeed the current Irish shillings, also cir-

²⁹ Simon 1749, 37 and Colgan 2003, 96.

³⁰ Colgan 2003, 104.

culate within England, it isn't a problem, since the crown doesn't enforce the face value of base coin, and the worth of the fine Irish shilling in the kingdom of England is officially set at its true silver value of ninepence.

I conclude my consideration of pecuniary 'music' by suggesting that a sensitivity to the theme may reveal interesting and unexpected possibilities. For example, Herbert's 'The Church-Porch', stanzas 64–5:

Man is Gods image; but a poore man is
Christis stamp to boot: both images regard.
God reckons for him, counts the favour his:
...

Restore to God his due in tithe and time:
A tithe purloin'd cankers the whole estate.
Sundaies observe: think when the bells do chime,
'Tis angels music; therefore come not late.³¹

The discussion is of *alms*, *tithes* and time: money is a central concern, as seen in the language of 'counting' and 'reckoning'. 'Stamp' could then be understood numismatically, the two 'images' relating to the two sides of a coin. In light of these associations, 'angels music' might suggest the 'music' of gold. This gives the lines an ironic undertone: if you are the kind of person who might be tempted to 'purloin' a tithe, you should tell yourself that the church bells are like the ring of cash – and then you won't be late.

Returning to Barnfield, consider his other 'angelic' tropes. In the revised version of *Lady Pecunia*, he talks of the death of Elizabeth.

But now more Angels then on Earth yet weare
Her golden Impresse; haue to Heauen attended
Hir Virgin-soule ...
Life, she hath changde for life (oh countlesse gaine)
An earthlie rule, for an eternall Raigne. (37).

The stanza draws a conventional value-distinction between life and eternal life, but Elizabeth's earthly angels (still circulating after James's accession) are still spoken of with some reverence, as relics, so to speak, of the late queen. He continues, a little later, to speak of 'Bounty', which when Elizabeth 'left the earth',

... had almost died;
Hoping with her, in heauen to haue been sainted,
And mongst the rest an Angels place supplied. (39).

By this time, the pun is rather tired and gratuitous; but the conceit of 'Bounty' in danger of expiring with Elizabeth, only to be revived by James – a conventional piece of ingratiating flattery if ever there was one – calls up the well-worn trope; and, like *Lady Pecunia*, the allegorical *Bounty* is given material associations with coinage: she would be a heavenly angel, just as she had been manifested on earth in earthly angels.

In all of this, what might give us pause for thought is the question of irony; not only because the materiality of coin tropes may seem to cast a shadow of base or lowly associations over Barnfield's praise of his sovereigns (as, indeed, it undermines the high-flown spirituality of the 'angelic' tropes); but also because we are principally dealing with puns, and puns are jokes. Numismatic-heavenly angel tropes, considered logically, are very apt to figure the monarch's temporal power *and* divine right. But they remain, at bottom, flimsy wordplay, jokes. Of James, Barnfield says:

A thousand of his Angels garde him sleeping,
And all the hoast of heauen protect him waking. (41).

I can excavate no pointed significance from these lines, unless it be that James's wealth and economic authority (symbolized by his name and image on the coinage of the realm) is a

³¹ Herbert 1941, 21–2.

protection to him; but why 'sleeping', in particular? It seems that the numismatic associations of 'Angels' is, though in the context unavoidable, redundant and intrusive here – rendering the antithesis pointless.

And so we might wonder about all of Barnfield's eulogizing of Elizabeth and James, whether we *ought* to find the materialism problematic. Barnfield seems to think not. The surface irony of his poem (which does, as expected, moralise about greed, corruption and counterfeiting) does not, apparently, reach very deep; this '*encomion*' of money's rather anodyne moral proves nothing more than this:

Even so Pecunia, is, as she is vsed:
Good of her selfe, but bad if once abused. (54).

Furthermore, materiality – the *matter* of coinage – is a point of great politico-symbolic and economic importance:

Siluer and Golde, and nothing else is currant,
In England, in faire Englands happy Land,
All baser sortes of Mettals, haue no Warrant,
Yet secretlie they Slip, from hand to hand. (29).

In an age when only gold and silver money was coined in England, the relation of the material weight and purity, whence comes each coin's commodity value, and the inscribed value, set by the monarch's authority, was a central problem.³² Inflation was a continual process in early modern England, and the dramatic debasement of gold and silver coinage which occurred under Henry VIII and continued under Edward caused considerable consternation. With the rapid burgeoning of a global economy, the birth of a modern money market, and growth in the exchange of commodities at home and abroad, the English high renaissance must have been rather disorientating. Questions of value, anxieties about money, are easily found in the literature of the age. The literary obsession with counterfeiting, for instance, is at bottom an obsession with the slippery relationship between face value and intrinsic value: in a society using only precious metals for coinage, it is not simply a question of real or false money, but of the amount, and the purity, of metal in any given coin, *complicated* by the stated denomination or decreed currency value, subject to fluctuations and geographical variations. Valerie Forman has considered such concerns, taking as a case study *The Roaring Girl* by Middleton and Dekker.³³

And even beyond strictly economic considerations, the public imagination appears to have been much exercised by the mere notion of purity, for its own sake, in the precious metals of the coinage. Hence, perhaps, the quasi-moralistic register of Barnfield's deprecation of the 'baser' metal coinage (tokens and foreign coin). Royal proclamations regularly warned the population about – and either banned or set values for – foreign denominations, and forgeries of English coins, in debased metals. Stephen Deng has discussed literary depictions of foreign coins in terms of the imagery of venereal disease, calling particular attention to Donne's mockery of imported coins (as opposed to his pure angels) in the Elegy, 'The Bracelet'.³⁴ At any rate, Donne, in that poem, which I will discuss shortly, was not unusual in his praise – witty though it may be – of the intrinsic material virtues of gold,³⁵ and hence of the famously fine gold of the angel which, through decades of inflation and frequent debasements of the currency, had never yet fallen from its lofty integrity.

Barnfield is thus celebrating the purity of English coinage, which had to compete with imported coin. It was a symbolic point of national and royal prestige.

The time was once, when faire Pecunia, here,
Did basely goe attyred all in Leather:
But in Elizaes raigne, it did appeare,
Most richly clad; in Golde, or Siluer either. (34).

³² For a discussion of this problem in literary and linguistic terms, see Fabel 1997, 237–46.

³³ Forman 2001.

³⁴ Deng 2009.

³⁵ Cf., for instance, Hawkes 2001, 152–3.

The implication that leather money was circulating at some time in recent history – so as to be a barbarism over which Elizabeth triumphed – is pure nonsense, although a tradition (not since verified) is mentioned in Camden's *Remaines* according to which, 'in the confused state of the Barons warre, the like [leather money] was vsed in England, yet', Camden admits, 'I neuer sawe any of them'.³⁶ Leather money was sometime used in siege situations on the Continent; it is possible that the same happened in England. But, contrary to Barnfield's implication, Elizabeth's predecessors had only ever uttered gold and silver coinage for general circulation (and Elizabeth herself had introduced copper coin to the Kingdom of Ireland). He goes on:

And as the Coine shee did repurifie,
From baser substance, to the purest Mettels:
Religion so, did shee refine beside. (35).

– although, in the next stanza, he concedes that 'No garden can be cleans'd of every Weede'. The economic achievement of Elizabeth's coinage was great. Its triumph was not so much the continued issue of good coin, which had indeed been begun by her brother and sister, but rather the recalling, countermarking, reminting and eventual demonetization of the extant debased coin – no small feat; though, to be fair, Mary had set in motion this process too. After the debased coinages of Henry and Edward, it was Mary who raised the standard of fineness across the board. Where Henry and Edward had minted, for the first time, gold of only 22 and even 20 carat, Mary minted only gold at 23ct. 3½gr. fineness; and while the quality of silver coinage had reached an all-time low under Edward (dipping to 3oz. fine in 1551, restored to 11oz. 3dwt. later that year), Mary succeeded in maintaining a fineness of 11oz. (.916), i.e. almost sterling, although she did continue to utter a small quantity of silver coins at only 3oz. fine. It was Mary who began tentatively to recall the debased coin, of which some was shipped to Ireland to serve currency requirements there.³⁷ Elizabeth effectively completed the eradication of debased coin in the English currency, although still shipping old base pieces, and, like Mary, newly struck base pieces, to Ireland. In England she kept up the higher standard of silver, increasing it to sterling (11oz. 2dwt./925) from 1582; but she reintroduced (and James maintained) 'crown' gold (22ct.) alongside the 'fine' gold (23ct. 3½gr.).³⁸ The angel, of course, was unaffected.

III

One of the most sustained and dynamic metaphorical treatments of the golden angel is Donne's *Elegy, 'The Bracelet'*.³⁹ He has lost his mistress's golden chain, and is obliged to repay her in angels, which are to be melted down to make a new chain. Donne declares that he mourns the loss of the chain, not as a *memento*, or emblem of their love, 'Nor for the luck sake; but the bitter cost' (l. 8). The coins are:

... twelve righteous angels, which as yet
No leaven of vile solder did admit,
Nor yet by any way have strayed or gone
From the first state of their creation,
Angels, which heaven commanded to provide
All things to me, and be my faithful guide ... (ll. 9–14).

The angels are guardian angels, and their purity is figured in terms of the pristine heavenly nature of unfallen angels (ll. 9–12). The notion of fallen angels returns later:

Thou say'st (alas) the gold doth still remain,
Though it be changed, and put into a chain.
So in the first fall'n angels resteth still

³⁶ Camden 1614, 198.

³⁷ See Challis 1978, 115–18, Simon 1749, 34–42, and Josset 1971, 91 and 97–9.

³⁸ See for instance Challis 1978, 227–8, and Sutherland 1973, 152.

³⁹ Donne, 1990, 9–12. The reader may compare the reading of this poem given in Hawkes 2001, 162–4.

Wisdom and knowledge, but 'tis turned to ill;
 As these should do good works, and should provide
 Necessities, but now must nurse thy pride.
 And they are still bad angels; mine are none,
 For form gives being, and their form is gone. (ll. 69–76).

The melting of the coins would be, in the simile, analogous to the fall of Lucifer's rebel angels, and the gold, as jewellery, would then serve only vanity, whereas now (Donne daringly implies, invoking inter-denominational theology and equating Christian Charity with the buying power of authorized money) the coins do 'good works'. They can buy him things *better* than bracelets, more useful than the gold they contain. And yet the gold itself, in its angelical monetary form, is ironically fetishized. Donne is skirting around the notion of idolatry, and pushing at the notion of what Marx would much later call the fetish-worship of metal money.⁴⁰ He alludes to the Aristotelian conception of form, resolving, through mock argumentation and with mock solemnity, that the re-formed gold would no longer be 'angels' at all. They would lose their semiotic significance and worth. For they would not only lose the impress of St Michael; they would lose their inscribed monetary value, and be reduced to their – more essential, perhaps, but less secure – commodity value: twelve angels' worth of gold in weight, but no longer, it may be, in cash value. Donne's wit keeps fingering the obscure gap between bullion and coin, between commodity value and representative monetary value, never forgetting, all the while, the semiotic import of the coin and its angel. In this, he brushes up against the most fundamental uncertainties of the economy of his age, and of ours.

Yet the most basic achievement of Donne's use of the angel trope lies in his sophisticated playing-out of the tensions between the material and the metaphysical. For Donne extends the earthly/heavenly coupling, or polarity, of the basic angel pun into the mastering tension of his poem. Conflating the secular and religious, he figures his doomed angels as martyrs:

Shall these twelve innocents, by thy severe
 Sentence (dread judge) my sins' great burden bear?
 Shall they be damned, and in the furnace thrown,
 And punished for offences not their own?
 They save not me . . . (ll. 17–21).

But the notion of their bearing the sins of others introduces a Christological element, buttressed by the verb 'save'. In a later section, Donne addresses the mistress using the words of the Lord's Prayer – 'But thou art resolute; thy will be done' – and proceeds with an image that, in this context, recalls the Virgin Mary and the burial of Christ:

Yet with such anguish as her only son
 The mother in the hungry grave doth lay,
 Unto the fire these martyrs I betray. (ll. 80–2).

Biblical allusion is further compounded by a glance at Judas in the speaker's curse of the 'finder' of the chain, whom he wishes shall be 'with foreign gold bribed to betray | Thy country, and fail both of that and thy pay' (ll. 97–8); gold, in keeping with the poem's theme, substituted for silver talents. In Donne we find the pun on 'angel' really at home in its tropical environment, working in the service of a poem that treats of ostensibly superficial and material concerns in a suave, witty manner, whilst recurrently invoking the divine. The 'Metaphysical' poet contemplating his angels is really contemplating the 'metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' of value, as Marx famously put it.⁴¹

Coda: the afterlife of angels

After 1642 no more angels were ever to be minted. The Commonwealth introduced a new coinage, with new denominations, new designs, and (for the first time) only English inscrip-

⁴⁰ See Marx and Engels 1975, 312.

⁴¹ Marx 1867, vol. 1, I, §4, ¶1.

tions. But the old angels were still circulating. Before the introduction of his own purpose-made touchpieces in 1664, Charles II had bought up old angels for use in touching ceremonies.⁴² These ceremonies, and their central ritual object, the angel, were highly symbolically charged in the Restoration. And although angels were becoming scarce, the pun persisted, particularly with poets of a royalist bent. Witness William Austin's *Joyous Welcome to Queen Catharin*.⁴³ This showy, recondite paean, probably recited during the first reception of the queen in London, invites its audience to ascend to heaven with the ecstasy of the occasion, while golden angels, symbols of the divine right presumably used as part of the royal celebration – perhaps scattered in largesse, or distributed as part of a touching ceremony⁴⁴ – symbolise their quasi-angelic sojourn in the empyrean:

With thunder of her praise then all consent
To make our voices cleave the firmament:
Then enter in, while Earth's gold Angels here
Remain to figure our blest beings there. (p.[8], A4v).

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⁴² Farquhar 1916, 81, 110, 134 and Farquhar 1917, 97. Keay 2008, 70–1, 112–19, a recent consideration of Charles II's touchings, seems unacquainted with the numismatic evidence, supposing purpose-made 'medals' in use before the 1660s (p. 71).

⁴³ Austin 1662.

⁴⁴ John Tatham offers no clues in *Aqua Triumphalis* (1662), but neither does he mention Austin's poem. Evelyn and Pepys record nothing relevant to this question. A numismatic explanation of Austin's 'gold Angels' remains most likely.

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It was she who uttered the first words: "I'm very glad to see you. It was nice of Jon to think of bringing you down to us." It is a powerful stylistic device commonly used in modern literature to reveal the character's psychology or temporary mental state. Though represented speech is neither direct nor indirect speech, it has some traits in common with both of them. Like indirect speech represented speech is characterized by: (a) the use of the third person of pronouns instead of the first person