

Types & Shadows

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COUNTERPOINT by Esther Mürer

Why "Types & Shadows"?

Quaker lore does not exactly teem with pithy phrases about the arts--at least not the sort calculated to encourage artists. Our title--more fully "Types, figures and shadows" is perhaps the *kindest* term our ancestors might have used. It comes from the Epistle to the Hebrews, a book beloved of early Friends.

The idea was borrowed from Platonic philosophy, which posits a realm where the ideal forms of everything that exists are kept. Somewhere there is, say, an ideal balloon of which all earthly balloons are but pale copies or shadows. (At the age of two my daughter Phoebe really began to believe this.)

The writer of Hebrews gives the Platonic idea a Jewish twist. For him the forms, events and institutions of the Old Testament are **antitypes** which **prefigure** or **foreshadow** the coming of **Christ, the true Substance** which makes the types and shadows obsolete.

For early Friends the idea of the primacy of "Christ the Substance" came to mean a near-total rejection of sensory means of grace, and of symbolism. The *immediate* experience of God was the goal, and symbols were felt as obstructions.

And yet, as Thomas Kelly writes in his essay "Quakers and Symbolism", immediacy cannot be communicated to others except through the mediation of symbols. A symbol by definition points to something beyond itself. If I point to the sunrise, I mean you to look at the sunrise, not at my finger.

Symbols, of course, easily become idols--ends in themselves. Our gestures become ever more mannered, the sunrise is forgotten. The danger is ever-present that I may become obsessed with "My Ministry" not because it heals, not because it speaks truth, but because it's *mine*.

This is a pitfall for any ministry. Are artists more prone than others to fall into it? Certainly it's harder to avoid the trap when the possibility that one's art might be ministry is not acknowledged in the first place. What if early Friends, instead of shunning the arts, had recognized art's healing and prophetic powers and had sought ways to help artists grow in the spirit?

The realm of sense and symbol--of "types, figures and shadows"--is where we, as artists, live. This is as it should be. The Truth which we as Friends are called to publish can never be

anything but fragmentary, for we cannot publish Truth-in-general any more than we can speak language-in-general. We must speak a specific language, work in a specific medium. And however great our skill, the nature of the medium will set bounds to our ability to convey our vision.

And yet we must go on trying to convey it. For as Thomas Kelly said, "Where there is no impulse to communicate the good news, there it is doubtful whether there is any living good news to share."

Our types and shadows are needed. If we are faithful, they may provide islands of unity and meaning in the jangling sea of cynicism and discord which surrounds us. If we can point others to the sunrise, we do not labor in vain.

Is there any living good news?

If so, can I put it into words? Can I express it symbolically? Can I share it by nonverbal means?

How do I as an artist let my life speak?

How do I discern when I am falling into idolatry? What do I do about it?

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Performances by the Friends' Theater Group:

The Tryal of William Penn and William Meade

by Andrew Mills

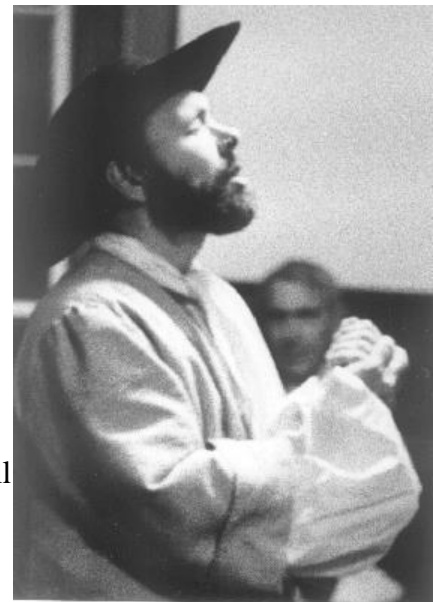
. Since September 1994, the Friends Theater Group has performed the play *The Tryal of William Penn and William Meade* fourteen times with warm acclaim from audiences.

The Group constitutes one of the outreach activities of the Fellowship of Quaker Artists, which was formed in 1992-93 by artists and performers of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Its first two plays were Dylan Thomas's *A Child's Christmas in Wales*, performed in December 1992, and Margaret Hope Bacon's *The Night They Burned Pennsylvania Hall*, depicting an exciting series of events in the life of Lucretia Mott, performed in the fall of 1993.

Then in 1994 the Friends Theater Group undertook to perform *The Tryal of William Penn and William Meade*;

The play depicts the historical trial of William Penn and fellow Quaker William Meade in London in 1670. In the trial, the Recorder of London and the Lord Chief Justice applied enormous pressure on the jurors to get them to pronounce a verdict of "guilty" on both Penn and Meade for creating an "unlawful assembly" of Quakers at a street meeting which the court said had led to a "tumult." But the jury persisted in their view that Penn and Meade were not guilty of creating a tumult. In desperation, the Lord Chief Justice required that all the jurors be kept in the "hole" for three days and nights without food, water or even a chamber pot. Still the jury did not yield, and so they were thrown in jail again and fined to boot. The result of the jury's steadfastness was that the British Parliament passed a definitive statement which thenceforth protected the independence of juries, specifying as it did that the practice of fining or imprisoning jurors for verdicts was illegal.

The play is directed by Mary DeAngelis of Trenton (NJ) Meeting. Mary and Margo Gulati, of Rancocas (NJ) Meeting, created it from the writings of early Friends and other Restoration figures. The actors include amateurs—Friends and members of other denominations—and four



professional actors. Two Friends from Trenton Meeting, Rebecca Erickson and Martha Tate, were enlisted to make the costumes. Doris Pulone of Mt. Holly (NJ) Meeting has served as coordinator and business manager, as well as taking a role in the play.

The Tryal of William Penn and William Meade is designed for audience participation. Eleven of the twelve jurors are selected from the audience just before the play begins. The director gives the volunteer jurors basic instructions as soon as they are seated, and in the process gives them, and the audience, an introduction to the play's historic background.

The play is designed to be performed in period courtrooms and meetinghouses. It requires no sets; the historic site itself is the site. It is intended to be performed without lighting or amplification of sound.

The Tryal of William Penn and William Meade was first performed at the Community College of Philadelphia on September 28, 1994. Subsequent performances were given at the Reading, Mount Holly, and Central Philadelphia meetinghouses; the old courthouses in Dover and Georgetown, Delaware; the Media- Providence Friends School, the Wilmington Friends School, and the Quakertown (NJ) Monthly Meeting. In October 1995, a shortened version was performed for the Pendle Hill General Board Meeting at Pendle Hill. A performance is planned in Chester County next fall.

Many Friends and non-Friends have been enthusiastic about the performances. A minute from Crosswicks (NJ) Monthly Meeting noted that on December 3, 1994, "over 200 people occupied our Meeting- house...to attend both the Tryal and the English Tea following. A waiting list was necessary, since we sold out two weeks in advance. We...[have] received several inquiries for attendance and membership as a result." Robert McKim wrote concerning the performance in Dover, Delaware: "From writer to director, cast to supportive staff, you have attained a marked success in fulfilling your hope to enrich at least this community. Your investment provided an afternoon of entertainment and fun while conveying an episode of history that continues to impact the lives of each of us here after three centuries. So, thank you—profoundly—for all of that!"

The Friends Theater Group welcomes opportunities to present the play again at other meeting houses and historic buildings in the area. Interested parties may contact Mary DeAngelis for information.

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