

TAKING THE MICK: CHARACTERS NAMED MICHAEL IN ARDEN OF FAVERSHAM, OTHELLO, AND THE KNIGHT OF THE BURNING PESTLE

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Abstract

When Shakespeare bestows the name Michael Cassio on a character in *Othello* he would doubtless have been aware of some distinguished antecedents, including his friend Michael Drayton and two other authors whom he did not know personally but was fond of reading, Michel de Montaigne and Miguel Cervantes. Less immediately, several historical persons of the name, perhaps most notably the Emperor Michael Palaeologus, are mentioned in a number of early modern texts. Michael does not seem to have been a common name in England, and it was also a name not much found in plays, or at least not in extant ones. In this essay I focus on three plays in which characters called Michael appear, *Arden of Faversham*, *Othello*, and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, and I shall argue that each draws in one way or another on one or more of the inherently paradoxical associations held by the name Michael in the early modern period, which suggested simultaneously money and sanctity, corporeality and spirituality, and past and future. All three of these Michaels, whether unwillingly or unwittingly, have the same effect of either causing or participating in the disruption of domestic relationships and the pitting of family members against each other. In their own very different ways, each of these three characters could be seen as emblematising or underlining the effect of sin in the home, and also perhaps as drawing attention to the dual nature of humans as having both a mortal (social, familial, and material) life and an immortal soul, in something of

the same way as Michael's strange status as both saint and archangel makes him eligible to be simultaneously understood both as someone who was once alive and as an entity always wholly spiritual.

Keywords: *time, agricultural calendar, coinage, archangels, saints*

When Shakespeare bestows the name Michael Cassio on a character in *Othello* (known only as the Corporal in the source story in Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*) he would doubtless have been aware of some distinguished antecedents, including his friend Michael Drayton (who discusses St Michael's Mount in *Poly-Olbion*) and two other authors whom he did not know personally but was fond of reading, Michel de Montaigne and Miguel Cervantes. Less immediately, several historical persons of the name, perhaps most notably the Emperor Michael Palaeologus, are mentioned in a number of early modern texts including Thomas Newton's *A notable historie of the Saracens* and Richard Knollys' *The General History of the Turks*. Michelangelo was mentioned in print in English as early as 1575, in Richard Eden's translation of Jean Taisnier's *A very necessarie and profitable booke concerning nauigation, compiled in Latin by Ioannes Taisnierus* (n.p.), and is remembered too by Nashe (n.p.), by Spenser (8), and by Ben Jonson (n.p.). Michael does not seem to have been a common name in England: a random sample of probate records finds two Michaels in Ipswich between 1583 and 1631 (Reed), while in the records for Bristol from 1542 to 1650 only one out of 97 men is named Michael (George). It was also a name not much found in plays, or at least not in extant ones: Fletcher has a character called Michael Perez in *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife* and *Monsieur Thomas* also has a Michael, while *Old Fortunatus* makes passing reference to the great bell of St Michael in Cyprus. In this essay I focus on three plays in which characters called Michael appear, *Arden of Faversham*, *Othello*, and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, and I shall argue that each draws in one way or another on one or more of the inherently paradoxical associations held by the name Michael in the early modern period, which suggested simultaneously money and sanctity, corporeality and spirituality, and past and future.

One particularly notable association of the name came from the fact that St Michael features on the English gold angel coin, which was the most valuable in circulation. This seems to be remembered in a number of Shakespeare's plays: Allan Shickman argues that the iconography of the coin, which 'depicts the winged and armored archangel St. Michael treading down the dragon devil' (7),

is significant in both *Measure for Measure* and *The Merchant of Venice*, where That the playwright had specifically in mind the archangel Michael, traditionally a protector of souls, is suggested not only by the allusion to the gold piece but is also indicated by a literary precedent. Michael is pictured in *Piers the Plowman* as a patron of merchants' (11). (Shickman notes that Michael is usually portrayed 'with scale in hand' [21] for the weighing of souls in a way echoed by Portia's insistence that scales must be used to weigh Antonio's flesh exactly).

Shakespeare would certainly have been well aware of the important figure of St Michael, regarded as the greatest and most powerful of the archangels. Alexander Top recounts how 'Michael the Archangel (Christ) ... stroue against the diuell about the body of Moses' (76) and declares that 'This Michael is the man-child that was borne to rule all nations with a rod of iron, and break them in peeces like a potters vessel'. (77) St Michael usually rides a flying red horse but in William Symonds' 1603 *Pisgah euangelica By the method of the Reuelation* he also has a black one which causes famine and a pale one, (82) making him in his own person three of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. This multiple identity is echoed in other early modern understandings of St Michael: not only is he both saint and archangel, but he also simultaneously recalls the past, through his fight with Satan, and foreshadows the future, through his association with the Apocalypse, and he has an even grander double identity in Hugh Broughton's 1591 *A treatise of Melchisedek*, which baldly refers to him as 'Michael (who is Christ)' (n.p). William Vaughan's 1630 *The arraignment of slander periury blasphemy, and other malicious sinnes shewing sundry examples of Gods iudgements against the ofenders* argues rather more subtly that Michael was a figure to be interpreted exegetically:

Michael the Archangell is the great Prince which stands for the Lords people. And, as S^t. Iohn recordeth in his Diuine mysteries, there was a battell in Heauen: Michael and his Angels fought against the Dragon, and his Angels, whom they ouercame by the blood of the Lambe, that is, by Christs innocency. This Michael (as many suppose) is no other then our Sauiour Christ. For euen as by the Dragon, the Arch-spirit of sinne is parable-wise included: so by this Michael, the Archangel of saluation might very well be figured. (Vaughan 45)

Francis Trigge's 1590 *A touchstone, whereby may be easilie discerned, which is the true Catholike faith* declares that the name Michael means 'who is like to the Lord' (295), while Everard Digby considers that Gabriel was the spirit of the moon and Michael the spirit of the sun (295). Thomas Adams' 1619 *The happines of the church* also connects the archangel to light when it remarks on 'how Michael came to be chose in Lucifers roome'. (41)

Despite his supposed power, Michael became the subject of some ontological quibbling, perhaps partly as a result of his unique dual identity as both archangel and saint, which gives rise to a question about whether he is to be understood as a spiritual or a corporeal entity. Roger Hacket's 1628 *A sermon preached at Nevvport-Paignell in the Countie of Buckingham* cited the idea of Michael's death as an impossibility, since archangels were immortal (n.p.), but George Abbot claimed that some unscrupulous Catholic priests had no qualms about displaying the supposed skull of St Michael (267). Such arcane questions did not however affect his status in popular culture: the saint's day was still widely remembered even after the Reformation because Michaelmas was one of the feasts used to measure time, as recalled by the name of Midleton's 1604 comedy *Michaelmas Term*, and as late as the 1570s a play at Spalding in Lincolnshire told the story of the fight between St Michael and the Devil with the aid of machines and fireworks (Stokes 421-22).

The three dramatic Michaels on whom I wish to focus are all quite different, but all inject a note of duality or ambiguity into the plays in which they appear. Michael in *Arden of Faversham* may be only a servant, but he is a rich and fascinating character, not least because so many things about him are contradictory. It is of course well understood that the characters in the play are expressive rather than consistent: Catherine Belsey pointed out long ago that 'Some of the dialogue between Alice and Mosby invites a response which contradicts the play's explicit project' because of the different ideological conflicts it is negotiating (133), and one could argue that the various moments in which words uttered by Michael appear to go off message are no different. I want however to propose a reading of Michael based on a belief that he is a character who gives an unusually strong sense of having an inner life, and one moreover which is at odds with his outward status in society. I would not push this so far as to suggest that there is the same degree of tension as there is between spirituality and corporeality in St Michael's dual status as saint and archangel,

but there is a sense that the Michael of *Arden* is a more complex and conflicted creature than his role in the plot might demand, and his ambiguous and shifting responses to the developing situation also shine a light both on other characters and also on matters of religion.

In the middle of the play, when both complication and uncertainty are at their height, there is a short but suggestive exchange between Michael and Greene:

Greene. Stay, Michael, you may not scape us so.

Michael, I know you love your master well.

Michael. Why, so I do, but wherefore urge you that?

Greene. Because I think you love your mistress better.

[*Michael*]. So think not I. But say, i'faith, what if I should? (3.140-44)

Michael admits that he is attached to Arden, but nevertheless agrees to help murder him; motive and action are at odds. So too, it seems, are appearance and reality, because Greene has formed the impression that Michael prefers Alice to Arden. Michael denies that this is so but then immediately concedes it as a possibility, an act of hedging which both implies that he does not trust Greene and also suggests that he has thoughts and emotions which he does not choose to display in public. That same sense of deliberate mystification is again in evidence when Shakebag says 'Michael, we hear / You have a pretty love in Faversham' and Michael replies 'Why, have I two or three; what's that to thee?' (3.145-7). Although Catherine Richardson's *Arden* edition prints a semi-colon after 'three', making the first part of the line a definite statement that Michael has more than one romantic interest, a comma seems equally (perhaps more) probable, and would make the line as whole mean something more like 'If I had two or three, what would that be to you?' Either way, there is an element either of dissembling or of withholding information; either Michael is reticent about the fact that Susan has his whole devotion or he is deliberately lying about it.

Ambiguity and ambivalence are inherent in virtually everything Michael says and does. When he first agrees to help Alice with the murder, he strikes a note of almost noble self-sacrifice, assuring her:

Why, say I should be took, I'll ne'er confess

That you know anything. And Susan, being a maid,

May beg me from the gallows of the shrieve. (1.164-6)

He not only promises to shield Alice but also makes it clear that he has not seduced Susan, and believes in her virtue. But within five lines these potentially admirable attitudes are completely cancelled out when he asks Alice to give Susan a message of a very different tenor:

But mistress, tell her, whether I live or die
I'll make her more worth than twenty painters can;
For I will rid mine elder brother away,
And then the farm of Broughton is mine own.
Who would not venture upon house and land
When he may have it for a right-down blow? (1.169-174)

The erstwhile squire of dames is suddenly and brutally revealed as an amoral and unscrupulous would-be fratricide. The only conceivable excuse (and it is a startlingly weak one) is that Michael apparently believes that this is how everyone would act, and the play does implicitly offer a reason why he might think that, because Arden himself lives in a house which was looted from the church. There are certainly signs of ideological deracination in lines such as Michael's exclamation to Black Will 'God's dear Lady, how chance your face is so bloody?' (3.135-6): the reference to 'God's dear Lady', which would have been commonplace when Michael was young, sounds an ominous and jarring note in a post-Reformation context and smuggles in a reminder of the moral and cultural damage wreaked by the loss of old certainties. Once a woman, in the shape of the Blessed Virgin Mary, stood for everything that was good and pure; now she has been dethroned as queen of heaven and womanhood is represented instead by the very different person of Alice. But even considered as a product of this disturbed social background, Michael stands out as conflicted: ruthless enough to think of poisoning Alice (14. 296-300), but careless enough to forget to dispose of the incriminating towel and knife (14. 388-92), he attains consistency only in his final speech: 'Faith, I care not, seeing I die with Susan' (18. 37).

Despite this one unequivocal assertion, however, there are persistent and particular tensions about what Michael says and how he says it. At one point Black Will subjects him to a rather unexpected harangue:

'Tis known to us that you love Mosby's sister;
 We know besides that you have ta'en your oath
 To further Mosby to your mistress' bed,
 And kill your master for his sister's sake.
 Now, sir, a poorer coward than yourself
 Was never fostered in the coast of Kent.
 How comes it, then, that such a knave as you
 Dare swear a matter of such consequence? (3.149-56)

Black Will's objection seems to be not to the fact that Michael has decided to kill his master but to the fact that he has *sworn* it, indulging in a specific form of speech generally associated with a higher stratum of society. This accusation of Black Will's puts pressure on other things Michael says and helps us notice that he has a striking variety of styles. As Catherine Richardson observes in her introduction to the play,

[Michael's] speech beginning 'Thus feeds the lamb securely on the down' (3.1.197-215) is elevated in its mood and subject matter, exploring the tension between his loyalty to his master and his desire to save himself from the wrath of Arden's murderers if he does not fulfil his promise to them to give his master up. The audience witness and share his thought-process and the emotions it entails directly through soliloquy, in a way that became very familiar in later tragedy but was still relatively new and super-exciting at this point. (Richardson 21)

This is all the more striking, Richardson notes, because 'Michael has already told the audience that he needs help to write a convincing letter, but his speech here is as rhetorically sophisticated as those of his betters' (21).

There is certainly a remarkable contrast between Michael's letter and some of Michael's speeches. As Richardson remarks, when Michael first mentions the letter he makes it plain that he intends to seek help with it:

But he hath sent a dagger sticking in a heart,
 With a verse or two stolen from a painted cloth,
 The which I hear the wench keeps in her chest.
 Well, let her keep it. I shall find a fellow
 That can both write and read, and make rhyme too.
 And if I do – well, I say no more.

I'll send from London such a taunting letter
As she shall eat the heart he sent with salt,
And fling the dagger at the painter's head. (1.151-9)

At a crucial point of this speech he cannot even explain what it is he hopes to achieve, falling back temporarily on 'well, I say no more' before he does in fact manage to say some more. But when the letter actually materialises it does not seem obvious that it has been produced by someone more eloquent than Michael himself:

My duty remembered, Mistress Susan, hoping in God you be in good health as I, Michael, was at the making hereof. This is to certify you that, as the turtle true, when she hath lost her mate, sitteth alone, so I, mourning for your absence, do walk up and down Paul's, till one day I fell asleep and lost my master's pantofles. Ah, Mistress Susan, abolish that paltry painter; cut him off by the shins with a frowning look of your crabbed countenance, and think upon Michael who, drunk with the dregs of your favour, will cleave as fast to your love as a plaster of pitch to a galled horseback. Thus hoping you will let my passions penetrate, or rather impetrate, mercy of your meek hands, I end. (3.3-16)

As effusions of passion go, this leaves something to be desired, ludicrously mixing flights of fancy such as 'impetrate' with the bathetic details of lost slippers and ways of treating minor riding injuries and offering a notably unhappy use of metaphor in the idea that Susan's glaring gaze could cut the painter's lower legs off. The fact that Michael has earlier announced 'I have gotten such a letter as will touch the painter' (3.1-2) certainly does seem to imply that he has obtained it from somewhere rather than written it himself, but the uneven texture may suggest that he had help with only part of it.

Whoever wrote it, Catherine Richardson is certainly right that the letter bears no resemblance to the great set-piece speech which Michael has earlier uttered:

Thus feeds the lamb securely on the down,
Whilst through the thicket of an arbour brake
The hunger-bitten wolf o'erprires his haunt,
And takes advantage to eat him up.
Ah, harmless Arden, how, how hast thou misdone,
That thus thy gentle life is levelled at?

The many good turns that thou hast done to me,
 Now must I quittance with betraying thee.
 I, that should take the weapon in my hand
 And buckler thee from ill-intending foes,
 Do lead thee with a wicked, fraudulent smile,
 As unsuspected, to the slaughterhouse.
 So have I sworn to Mosby and my mistress;
 So have I promised to the slaughtermen.
 And should I not deal currently with them,
 Their lawless rage would take revenge on me.
 Tush, I will spurn at mercy for this once.
 Let pity lodge where feeble women lie.
 I am resolved, and Arden needs must die. (3.197-215)

This makes perfectly sensible use of metaphor by figuring Arden as a lamb and his murderers as wolves, but it nevertheless sounds odd because it does not seem like something Michael would say. It is surprising that he should apostrophise his master by the familiar ‘thou’, and more surprising that he should present the decision to kill Arden as fundamentally his own rather than Alice’s or Mosby’s. Michael suddenly sounds less like a servant and more like a figure with agency at a moral crossroads, and the same note is sounded in a second soliloquy a little later:

Conflicting thoughts encamped in my breast
 Awake me with the echo of their strokes;
 And I, a judge to censure either side,
 Can give to neither wished victory.
 My master’s kindness pleads to me for life
 With just demand, and I must grant it him.
 My mistress, she hath forced me with an oath
 For Susan’s sake, the which I must not break,
 For that is nearer than a master’s love.
 That grim-faced fellow, pitiless Black Will,
 And Shakebag, stern in bloody stratagem –
 Two rougher ruffians never lived in Kent –
 Have sworn my death if I infringe my vow,
 A dreadful thing to be considered of;
 Methinks I see them with their bolstered hair,

Staring and grinning in thy gentle face,
And in their ruthless hands their daggers drawn,
Insulting o'er thee with a peck of oaths
Whilst thou, submissive, pleading for relief,
Art mangled by their ireful instruments.
Methinks I hear them ask where Michael is,
And pitiless Black Will cries, 'Stab the slave!
The peasant will detect the tragedy.'
The wrinkles in his foul, death-threatening face
Gapes open wide like graves to swallow men.
My death to him is but a merriment,
And he will murder me to make him sport.
He comes, he comes. Ah, Master Franklin, help!
Call up the neighbours or we are but dead! (4.58-86)

On this second occasion Michael becomes so carried away by his own rhetoric that he actually alerts Arden and Franklin by crying out, an act of complete madness which he has to excuse by claiming that he was disturbed by 'a fearful dream' (3.92), and although Black Will's imagined comment that 'The peasant will detect the tragedy' implies a disconnect in terms of both social status and genre, Michael does not sound like a peasant here. He also uses a shiny new word when he explains that he arranged to turn back to Rochester 'Because I would not view the massacre' (9.62), deploying a term which entered English immediately after the Massacre of St Bartholomew and whose novelty is capitalised on in the title of Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*. Since Kent's proximity to the Channel made it a favourite refuge for fleeing Huguenots, there is even a sense in which Michael sounds here almost like the voice of the county.

One obvious explanation for the stylistic variations of Michael's utterances might be that there was more than one author at work on the play, but not only do I not wish to go down the rabbit-hole of authorship, I think there might be another way of accounting for the apparent inconsistency of his characterisation. Catherine Richardson notes that 'While Holinshed mentions many more servants, the play uses Michael and Susan as a representative pair whose actions can be compared to those of their master and mistress' (115). Michael thus has to carry significant representational freight, being not only *a* servant but an emblematisation of *any* servant in such conditions, and I think his different registers also make him stand as a more general instance of a person

making a moral choice. It also seems suggestive that he controls doors (14.141, 172), because in some traditions St Michael guarded the gate of Paradise after the expulsion of Adam and Eve. The Michael of *Arden of Faversham* is no saint, but he does have symbolic value, and that does make him in some sense more than a simple mortal. Despite the relative insignificance of his role in the actual murder plot, Michael is one of the elements which make the play so resonant and powerful, and so much more than the record of a murder committed some time previously in a smallish country town.

The Michael Cassio of *Othello* is of a different nationality, profession, and social status from the Michael of *Arden of Faversham*, but the two characters have one thing in common: they are both implicated in the deaths of their masters, for even though Cassio is not Othello's servant in the same way as Michael is Arden's and is completely unaware of his own role in Iago's scheme, his very existence is the pivot on which it turns, and the fidelity or infidelity of a wife is a crucial factor in both cases. There is moreover a small but intriguing potential link between the two Michaels. The song which Cassio sings when drunk begins 'King Stephen was and-a worthy peer' (Shakespeare 2.3.85), and then offers four lines of purported anecdote about the king. King Stephen is by no means the most prominent of English monarchs and is indeed often forgotten, but he was buried in Faversham Abbey, whose gatehouse had become the house in which Thomas Arden and his servants lived. There is also another potential resonance of Michael Cassio's name. *Othello* has a recurrent interest in money – Iago's constant refrain to Roderigo is 'Put money in thy purse', and Desdemona would rather have lost a 'purse / Full of crusadoes' (3.4.25-6) than the handkerchief. Crusadoes are certainly coins which one would expect to find in Cyprus, since it was the last stop before Jerusalem, but the uneasy combination of money and religious iconography disturbingly encodes a reminder that while the excuse for crusades was the 'need' to capture the holy sites of Christendom, the real driver was desire for control of lucrative territory and trade routes. The presence of St Michael on the most valuable of English coins means that the name of Michael Cassio also comments on this hypocrisy.

Michael Cassio's dual name is particularly suggestive. Cassio both evokes Cassius and yet also simultaneously registers difference from it, reminding the audience of the differences between Romans and Italians; Michael, being in the form of Michele an ordinary Italian Christian name, stands

in apparent contrast to the potentially symbolic elements lurking within the names of *Othello* and *Desdemona*, but nevertheless smuggles in a hint of the archangel which we may perhaps feel is activated when Othello figures Desdemona's bedroom as an antichamber to heaven or hell. Michael Cassio certainly seems to bear symbolic freight in something of the same way as Michael in *Arden of Faversham* when Iago says 'If Cassio do remain / He hath a daily beauty in his life / That makes me ugly' (5.1.18-20), since this positions him as Iago's direct opposite in something of the same way that the Archangel Michael was the primary antagonist of Satan.

There is also a potentially suggestive detail in Iago's speech about gardening:

Our bodies are gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners. So that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness or manured with industry – why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. (1.3.321-7)

This is odd gardening advice; not many people want to plant nettles, and there is no obvious reason to weed thyme except that doing so can stand as a metaphor for the plucking of maidenheads. It would also be surprising to plant hyssop at the same time as weeding thyme since 'Hyssop was often planted with thyme, particularly in knot gardens, as they were thought to stimulate each other's growth' (Thomas and Faircloth 189). But the mention of hyssop is eye-catching given that William Lawson's 1618 *A new orchard and garden* instructs the reader that hyssop is best planted at 'Michael-tide' (Lawson 92-3), and it is also a rather striking coincidence that John Gerard, whose London physic garden was in the next street to Shakespeare's lodging (Nicholl 62), uses the name 'Archangell' for dead nettles in his *Herball* (Gerard 157). Iago views humans as completely free agents, but the name of Michael Cassio might remind us that there may be other and greater powers conditioning human behaviours and choices. Above all it suggests that humans, like plants, are trapped in time, but time in relation to gardens is as much seasonal and cyclical as it is linear: Michaeltide comes every year and plants that die back in autumn may return in spring, but humans die for ever and, according to Christian theology, will be judged after death and if found wanting will be dispatched to hell, where they will be at the mercy of St

Michael's adversary Satan. Michael Cassio, like Michael in *Arden of Faversham*, stands a little apart from the main domestic conflict of the play – if he had not been in Cyprus Iago could presumably have named another officer as Desdemona's lover, and it is Desdemona's supposed betrayal rather than that of Cassio which drives Othello to fury – but he is central to the way that it presents tragic experience as simultaneously trapped in time and gesturing towards the eternal.

The Michael of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* has far less agency than either of his two predecessors, and indeed might even be dismissed as little more than a cipher. He agrees with his mother that Jasper will be hanged before he receives her blessing, which could make him seem smug and unpleasant, but it is not clear that he really understands what's being said (Beaumont I,325), since he is clearly young (he asks later 'Is not all the world Mile-End, mother?' [II, 70]). He himself wants his father's blessing (I, 414) and asks why his father isn't going with them (II, 79). Later he is happy to go home: 'In truth my feet are full of chilblains with traveling' (III, 186-7). Mistress Merrythought proposes to 'place' Michael with the tapster of the Bell in Waltham (III, 569-70) so that he may be 'in some settled course of life' (IV, 171-2), but then switches to a different plan whereby 'We'll go to thy nurse's, Mick. She knits silk stockings, boy, and, and we'll knit too, boy, and be beholding to none of them all' (IV, 185-187). In the end they return to Old Merrythought (V, 225). Throughout this sequence of events Michael is entirely passive, obedient to his mother rather than initiating any course of action on his own account, and it is easy to guess that the child playing Michael was apprenticed to the actor playing Mistress Merrythought and, as is often the case, therefore interacts solely with that one character. Nevertheless, though Michael may lack agency, he is still a disruptive figure, since it is his mother's strong preference for him over her other son Jasper which leads her to leave Old Merrythought and break up the household. Once again, a character named Michael disturbs domestic harmony, and also echoes his two namesakes by raising questions of guilt, innocence and agency.

All three of these Michaels act either unwillingly or unwittingly, but all have the same effect of either causing or participating in the disruption of domestic relationships and the pitting of family members against each other. Is this because of the name? St Michael is certainly a bellicose figure, in that he is the personal antagonist of Satan (and is sometimes identified as having replaced

Satan as an archangel after his fall). If Iago can be seen as a devil, Michael Cassio could well appear his direct opposite. Michael Merrythought might also be understood as an antagonist, albeit of a very different sort, because at the same time as *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* explores the attraction of romance it grounds events through this tired, footsore child whose future must have some thought given to it. The Michael of *Arden of Faversham*, meanwhile, is his own worst enemy. In their own very different ways, each of these three characters could be seen as emblematising or underlining the effect of sin in the home, and also perhaps as drawing attention to the dual nature of humans as having both a mortal (social, familial, and material) life and an immortal soul, in something of the same way as Michael's strange status as both saint and archangel makes him eligible to be simultaneously understood both as someone who was once alive and as entity always wholly spiritual.

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