THE DEVELOPMENT OF SHAKESPEARE'S VISION OF LIFE

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I N D E X

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare's artistic stature, measured by the immensity of his achievement both as poet and playwright, has remained undiminished after four hundred years of critical appraisal. More has been written about him and his work than it would be possible for one man to read in a lifetime of study, and as time goes on an ever increasing number of men will add their contribution to this vast volume of material. His ability to capture the imaginations of so many men over so vast a period of time is in itself a testimony to his genius.

In the time elapsed since Shakespeare's death the human condition has outwardly changed enormously. The size of the known earth itself has expanded with the opening up of the New World and Australia, while the population of the earth has increased proportionately. Man's scientific knowledge, so limited when Shakespeare died, has changed the shape and scope of human life, reaching its climax in 1945 with the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima and, more constructively, in 1969 with man's first hesitant steps onto a planet beyond his own.

Yet though the physical appearance of the earth would have changed beyond recognition to the Elizabethan man, he would recognise, walking among the maze of mechanical marvels, the same sort of creatures as in 1588 were killing each other with cannonballs rather than nuclear weapons or in 1492 were setting off to place their feet upon the rich soil of the New World rather than on the grey dust of the Moon. For the human appearance may change, wither and age with time, but the inner man remains basically the same and it is with this, therefore, that Shakespeare concerned himself. He writes of the essential truths of the human condition; man's hopes, fears, dreams, desires and passions which go to shaping the patterns of human life and which provide the raw materials with which the artist must work.

That art is intrinsically bound up with life is unquestioned, although the exact nature of the relationship has yet to be completely and accurately defined. Hamlet's suggestion that the "purpose of playing" (the art form that Shakespeare chose) "was and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (I) is as good as any. What has become generally accepted is the dedication of the artist to his work. The artist is as much bound up in his work as art is bound up with life. Mozart was composing at the age of two, while Titian, ninety-eight years old and too feeble to maintain a firm grip on the brush, growled "tie it to my hand" and carried on. Only death itself can come between the artist and his work; so many die with work half finished. As long as the artist lives, he must create, for the act of creation is life to him.

Yet Shakespeare, possibly the greatest of them all, laid aside his pen and retired to Stratford four years before his death. His last complete work, The Tempest, contains a very obvious acknowledgement of the parting of the artist from his art. The concept presented here, of a great artist who had consciously ceased to create, fired my imagination. What sort of conclusions about life could Shakespeare have reached if he could lay aside his art with such confidence? What had he achieved over that period of approximately twenty years in the writing of nearly forty plays that he could act so differently? The answer must be in the plays themselves. If the artist casts aside his art, then he must no longer need it. The reflection of nature in the mirror of his plays must be complete. Only if the artist has fitted together

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(I) Hamlet III, ii, 24.

composition that is of prime importance, but rather the order in which Shakespeare's vision of life changed. The early period is characterised by the harmony and optimism of the comedies, a feeling parallelled in the history plays by Shakespeare's affirmation of the Elizabethan belief that a divinely enforced law of order controlled history. This period gives way to a time of uncertainty reflected in the plays mentioned above, followed by the vision of the great tragedies characterised by pessimism, violence and destruction. Beyond this Shakespeare mingles both comedy and tragedy, but returns in the romances to an ultimately optimistic point of view. This suggestion should become clearer as the thesis progresses and will be elaborated on where necessary.

I have discussed the plays in the order in which Chambers believes them to have been written. This is a purely practical measure and should not be seen as an acceptance of his theories. I would further like to point out that within the limits of the groups in which I have placed the plays for study there is general agreement about the relative order of writing, for example Richard III is an early history play while Henry V was written much later. Similarly Two Gentlemen of Verona is one of the earliest of the comedies while Twelfth Night was among the last comedies written. We cannot be more certain of the order than this but I believe it is sufficient for my purpose.

THE HISTORY PLAYS

It is in the history plays that the pattern of development which was to govern all of Shakespeare's early work and would point ahead to the movement of the later plays, is most clearly to be seen. The reason for this may be found in the formal theory of history, resulting from an equally formal world view, upon which an Elizabethan historian or historical dramatist would have based his work. At this stage it can be said that Shakespeare complied with the trend of the time in his general acceptance of the Tudor-Elizabethan concept of the function of historical writing.

Both the theatre and the history of their country were sources of great interest and enthusiasm to the people of the time, hence the popularity of the history play which combined both these interests. In writing his history plays, Shakespeare was reflecting both popular and intellectual taste, the former demanding the dramatic presentation of the history of England, ~~while~~ the latter expecting such plays to reinforce the current belief concerning the laws which were thought to govern the progress of men's lives. A quotation from Tillyard's book entitled Shakespeare's History Plays explains this further: "...when Shakespeare began his Histories there was a strong popular desire to be instructed in the facts of history ... this desire was due in part to the rise in the patriotic temperature of England after the defeat of the Spanish Armada. ...the taste of a mixed audience would not be the only thing that swayed him; he would also have an eye to the status of history among the better sort of the ordinary educated man."(I)

Tillyard then expresses amazement at the degree of unanimity on the subject of the "status of history" to be

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(I) Shakespeare's History Plays by E.M.W. Tillyard - pg. 54.

found in Elizabethan thought. This unanimity, it is clear, stems from the universal demand for, and belief in, the concept of order as a ruling force in the lives of men and in the functions of the universe in which man lived. This order was imposed on man by God himself as a law designed to regulate and control the actions of man during his life on earth, and to define his relationship with the heavens above him, with his fellow men around him, the universe in which he lived and the plants and animals with which he shared the earth. Elizabethan man believed that there existed a great chain of being stretching from God, who was the highest in the chain and the source from which it origionated, through the angels, man and the lower forms of life to the lowest living thing, the oyster, "the top of an inferior class (touching) the bottom of a superior"(I). Within each class this great hierarchy manifested itself in microcosmic form. The feudal system which controlled Europe during the Middle Ages was a practical manifestation of the belief. The king, ruler by divine right and therefore appointed by and owing allegiance to God, delegated his powers to the great landowners, who swore allegiance to him. They in turn delegated power to the lesser barons who also swore an oath pledging allegiance to their direct superiors, and then through them to the king and ultimately to God. These barons had control of the lesser landowners and the peasants. Each man's position in the hierarchy was carefully calculated according to the rule of order and degree.

Belief in such a system must have given a feeling of absolute security to the men of the time. Each man knew his exact position in the great order of things. His relationship with his God, his fellow men and the things of

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(I) Ibid pg. 12.

of the earth on which he stood were precisely defined, leaving him neither room nor reason for doubt. The church, arbiter of God's word on earth, provided him with a carefully worked out code by which he might judge his own actions and the actions of his fellow men as being right or wrong. His life was given purpose and meaning when everything was seen to be "God's will", and at the end of it all he had the promise of salvation and eternal life after death. Without the security and faith which this system supplied, man would have found himself faced with a world shorn of all meaning; a world in which truly "chaos is come again".

History was seen as the process whereby this law of order and degree manifested itself in the activities of men living together as a nation under God ruled by his chosen representative on earth, the king. Despite man's inherent faults and weaknesses which tended to disrupt order, it was believed that this law would maintain control of men's lives, ultimately vanquishing all who sought to deny it.

In spite of this belief, the period of history which Shakespeare dramatises in his plays is far from being the most ordered and law-abiding that England has known. The exact opposite would be far truer. Rarely before had the hierarchy been so completely disrupted as from the time when Henry Bolingbroke deposed Richard II and claimed the crown of England as his own, king not by Divine Right but by the strength of his own arm. This period of disorder was to last until another Henry, Henry Tudor, Duke of Richmond, would wrest the crown from Richard III on Bosworth field and restore once more the rule of God's law to war-ravaged England. For the movement of Shakespeare's history plays is always towards an affirmation of a form of this

state of order; towards the crowning of Richmond or towards the portrayal of Henry V as the most perfect warrior king that England has had govern her; so this is why it can be said that Shakespeare generally affirms, in this early stage of his career, the whole system by which the Elizabethan viewed his world.

But, as so frequently happens, it is not the main stream of ideas that are the most interesting, but rather the often contradictory undercurrents of thought that make themselves felt despite the power and direction of the main. This main stream is the essentially optimistic interpretation which the Elizabethen world-view imposed on the facts of history as taken from such a source as Holinshed. The under-currents arise from the actions of men who disrupt the harmony history is supposed to have imposed on national life and so bring into doubt the belief that this view of history, and the vision of life from which this view stems, can adequately explain the nature and meaning of human existence.

For the problem that began increasingly to trouble Shakespeare was this: with his ever developing knowledge of basic human nature could he fit the man he had come to know into the rigid pattern imposed upon his nature by the demands of order and degree? In other words could man live according to his true nature and still obey the law of order? Could he be truly himself and still be a secure link in the great chain of being? More specifically, the question has to be asked whether a man like Falstaff can be fitted into the Elizabethan concept of history. If he does not fit in (as I believe he does not) then it must be asked in what sort of world will he be able to find it possible to live? Taking fully into account the essential truth and humanity of Shakespeare's portrayal of Falstaff, particularly

in relation to the artificial and unreal man that I feel he makes of King Henry V, the following question must be asked: if this strongly held view of the meaning and nature of human existence must deny a true and very real part of human nature (as embodied in Falstaff), and create artificial men in order to impose its particular pattern of meaning on events, then surely it is an essentially untrue, unreal and inadequate interpretation of the true nature of man and his universe?

I shall attempt to trace the simultaneous development of these contradictory currents of thought in the history plays, explaining what I consider to be the significance of such a contradiction in the broad development of my thesis.

The early history plays cover the period commencing with the death of Henry V, progressing through the Wars of the Roses to end with the Battle of Bosworth and the ascension of Henry VII, the first Tudor monarch, and ancestor of Elizabeth I, to the throne. They are generally grouped together as the first tetralogy, comprising the three parts of Henry VI and The Tragedy of King Richard III. Although each play is complete in itself, the tetralogy can also be read as a continuous whole, the ending of the one play leading directly on to the beginning of the next in chronological sequence. The tetralogy was probably written in the same order, and although scholars see signs of collaboration in Henry VI part I, the other three plays are generally accepted as being entirely Shakespeare's.

It is in these plays that the strictest adherence to the accepted Elizabethan view of history can be seen. A desire for order, a feeling of horror and revulsion at disorder, admiration for heroic and knightly deeds and an attempt

to justify the claim of the house of Tudor to the throne of England, all figure in this early group of plays. The hero, if there is to be one, is the power of history itself, bending men to its inexorable will despite all that the strongest men can do to stay its inevitable, God-decreed progress. King and commoner, Lancastrian and Yorkist, the greatest in the land and the humblest all vanish into the maelstrom of events that go to make up history. But the end justifies the means, all things are made equal, evil is destroyed and England is set once more clearly on the way of goodness, justice and mercy, a way which had been made painful and unclear by the desires and actions of wicked men. Yet despite the clear intention there appears in these plays, particularly in Richard III, an anti-hero who threatens, by the vitality and realism of his wickedness, the majestic but highly idealised march of the historical pageant towards its intended goal.

The impression received from the three parts of Henry VI is twofold; first, an overwhelming sense of chaos and secondly, in the centre of it all, a weak king whose ineffectiveness allows the state of lawlessness and causes the loss of half the English possessions in France.

A civil war is horrible in itself as brother turns on brother, father turns on son, and the blood of so many men is shed by those who have every cause to preserve their fellow countrymen from slaughter. Shakespeare heightens the horror of such a situation by telescoping time and picking only the most violent incidents in a long period of history in order to maintain a sustained impression of lies, deceit and treachery, of bloody murder and treacherous betrayal, of arbitrary slaughter and equally arbitrary change of allegiance; of chaos in the life of the country

the equal of which England has seldom known, and which, at all cost, must be avoided in the future.

The cause of this state of affairs is to be found, as I have suggested, in the nature of the king on the throne at the time, Henry VI. Henry the man is good and well-intentioned, but the basic fault lies not so much in his personal qualities as in the invalidity of his claim to the throne, stemming from the means by which his ancestors obtained that throne. For his grandfather, Henry Bolingbroke, had deposed and virtually murdered Richard II who had had every right to call himself God's annointed, chosen by Him to rule over the realm of England. A king who obtained his crown by deposing God's annointed no longer ruled by the grace of God, but by the strength of his own arm. The moment that arm lost its power this king could expect violence and lawlessness to overrun the land upon which he could no longer impose his will. For to the Elizabethan the nature of the king reflected the state of the country as a whole. A king who ruled by God's grace, administering God's laws would be as a fountain-head of purity whose presence would bless the realm he ruled. A king who held office by his own power rather than by the power of God could expect his people to act and think in the same way, for he was the standard by which they would judge. If might dictated the definition of right then any man with a strong army and a nerve to match could with little trouble proclaim himself king. Bolingbroke and his son had ruled the land because they were strong men. Henry VI was weak, the nobles seized their opportunity, and the long series of civil wars began.

The weak Henry VI had to pay a huge price for a crime committed many years before. He was trapped in the toils of a dual movement that had started long before his birth; one of violence and crime that would place him on the throne, and another of order and progress which, paradoxically

working through the same means but in a poetically just way, would drag him down from his high office. For the crime of Bolingbroke had introduced a cancer which had affected the very heart of England. Only when all traces of the disease had been cut away would the country know rest from her torment. The king, who stood for England, had become a symbol of disorder and injustice rather than one of goodness and stability.

Despite the quarrelling, power-hungry nobles, the riot of disorder starts relatively slowly owing to the stabilising influence of Talbot, who is the epitome of knightly perfection. The passage below may be quoted to show how perfectly Talbot acted out all the roles of the "verray parfit knyght", an ideal dear to both Elizabethan and Medieval hearts. He comes before his king to do his duty, delivering a speech which by its control, its measured rhythms and its careful positioning of words and phrases reflects the very essence of courtly chivalry:

> "My gracious Prince, and honourable peers,
> Hearing of your arrival in this realm,
> I have awhile given truce unto my wars
> To do my duty to my sovereign;
> In sign whereof, this arm that hath reclaim'd
> To your obedience fifty fortresses,
> Twelve cities, and seven walled towns of strength,
> Beside five hundred prisoners of esteem,
> Lets fall his sword before your Highness' feet,
> And with submissive loyalty of heart
> Ascribes the glory of his conquest got
> First to my God and next unto your Grace." (III, iv, 1)

The valiant warrior, fierce in battle, gallant to defeated foe, courteous to women, with a pride in his rank and nobility which will turn naturally to humility before his God and his liege lord is a type that will vanish from these plays after Talbot's death. In his place will come

men without honour, serving only their own interests, acknowledging no God except for expedient purposes, using the crown and not serving it and seeing it for what it is, a symbol of treachery and betrayal. The epitome of this type will be Richard of Gloucester, whose ascension to the throne will mark the high point of this sort of behaviour.

Talbot's chivalric attitude is backward rather than forward looking, for he is all that remains of an old order which will die out with him, an order which can only be reinstated when the man to whom men like him swear allegiance both inspires that allegiance and rightfully commands it. With his death there is nothing to ward off the flood of evil and all hope of peace and order must be lost until this flood has exhausted itself. Even the common people, usually left outside the world of politics, are affected as Cade and his half-crazed gang rampage across the stage. Any sort of movement towards order is immediately checked by the aspirations of one more ambitious noble or yet another ignominious betrayal. Even at the end of Henry VI part III, after the death of Henry, the complete overthrow of Lancastrian hopes, and the establishment of Edward on the throne, there is little reason for hope in the immediate future. The house of York is as guilty as the house of Lancaster of the crimes that have left England bloody and breathless. The treachery of Richard of York, the presence of the turncoat Clarence, the betrayal of Warwick by Edward and, above all, the emergence of the misshapen Gloucester as a very real power for evil suggests that the words "our sickness to grow better must grow worse" are more expressive of the situation than any hope of peace.

Few of the characters, except the noble Talbot, are worthy of our sympathy. The king is ineffectual, while

the nobles cancel out any good they may do almost immediately by some fresh act of violence or betrayal. Although there are occasional scenes of a more personal nature to be found such as when a son finds he has robbed and killed his own father, and a father his son, these scenes are intended to evoke the tragedy of the whole of England rather than that of a particular man.

I believe the young, inexperienced playwright would have avoided intimate, personal studies which would have required the delicate touch that a master might have acquired after years of practice. I also believe that a rigid adherence to the demands of the Elizabethan doctrine of history precluded the possibility of profound or psychologically true human studies. Men caught up in the toils of an impersonal process cannot be allowed wills of their own. At the same time, the strictly formal demands of such a process would have assisted the immature artist to write his play by providing him with a set of clear-cut formulae around which a play might be shaped with some success.

The evil that is portrayed in the three parts of Henry VI will be gathered up in the person of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, who will take all the sins of England upon his shoulders and die like a scapegoat sacrificed to the demands of history, and so finally rid England of the curse of Bolingbroke's crime. Shakespeare will have to create a worthy sacrifice, a man who will almost be able to stand up to the benign progress of history and bend it to his horrible ends. The fast maturing artist will be capable of creating such a man, but I believe he will find that at the same time he has created a form of monster which will threaten to destroy the very view of history that it is paradoxically supposed to affirm.

In The Tragedy of King Richard III Shakespeare allows,

for the first time in the history plays, one man, Richard of Gloucester, to take command of the stage, propelled not by the forces of history, but by some innate energy-source of his own. The fact that this play is both a history play and a tragedy suggests this is one of the earliest explorations that Shakespeare makes of the tremendous potential which is present in human nature for destruction - a potential that tends to ride rough-shod over any of the rules and systems of morality men create in order to keep its threat of chaos at bay. The conventional view of history is still the hero of the play, but the villain makes such a brave showing that this hero loses a good deal of dignity.

It is significant that the reason for the creation of such a character as Richard lies in the very belief which his presence tends to deny, that is belief in the benign progress of history as it manifests itself in the overthrow of Richard and the crowning of Henry VII. If the play had been written in the way of the first three plays of the tetralogy, it would not have achieved its aim. Richmond's rebellion against Richard would have been just another in a long series of rebellions, the one scarcely differing from the other. Richmond's actions had to be the final rounding-off process, with justice firmly on their side. Richard had to be very clearly created as a man who threatened to completely overthrow all the values that the Elizabethans believed the progress of history would affirm. Only then could Richmond's rebellion be justified. When creating Richard, however, Shakespeare ran up against the same problem Milton faced when writing Paradise Lost. The Devil, in order that he might seem capable of leading a revolt against God, had to be given so many human attributes that he became infinitely more credible, and, strangely enough, more sympathetic, than the idealistic forces of good opposing him. Admittedly,

battles are won by armies rather than individuals, but the play has been so dominated by Richard that the final handing over to Richmond who is an instrument in the hands of an impersonal force rather than a personality strong enough to supplant Richard, is stretching credibility a great deal. To the Elizabethan, (through whose eyes one should attempt to look) believing, as he would, this manifestation of the powers of order through divine power to be the only bulwark against the chaos that threatened to engulf him, it might have been a good deal more satisfying, but it would have pandered to his hopes and illusions rather than to his honesty.

Realising possibly that the character of Richard, while fully justifying Richmond's revolt, at the same time denied it credibility, Shakespeare made attempts throughout the play to control Richard's personal strength by making him out to be a "scourge of God" whose job it was to destroy what remained of the evil left over from the civil wars and by doing so to take upon his shoulders the burden of guilt, that is he is given a function which can be contained within the Elizabethan world view. As I have suggested, I believe he tends to destroy this system which attempts to contain him.

As victims of the "scourge of God", every character that Richard puts to death, except for the little princes, richly deserves his fate. We should have little sympathy for the Clarences and Buckinghams, but neither should we have sympathy for their murderer.

As a further attempt to contain Richard's personality, Shakespeare constructs many scenes in a ritualistic pattern thus fading Richard's personality into the background of the impersonal forces of history which this ritual invokes. Even the murder of Clarence is a formal exercise, the murderers

catechising their victim as to the reason for his death, while the second murderer, in the style of Pontius Pilate, ritualistically washes his hands of the deed. The wooing of Anne is also formally constructed, but Richard's obvious enjoyment of it all, and his gleeful

> "Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
> Was ever woman in this humour won?"
> (I, ii, 227)

does much to dispel the formal atmosphere by the sheer exuberance which bursts through the confines of the parallel pattern of construction. This kind of effect is seen throughout the play, as Richard's vitality constantly threatens to destroy the balance which the workings of history are attempting to impose.

When Richard is dragged into the great ritualistic chants (IV, iv) it is at the expense of leaving his real nature behind. He becomes as faceless as the three mourning queens, and we remain conscious of a different and very real Richard who exists outside the stifling realm of historical necessity. The Richard we know and often like is the man we meet in the first speech of the play when he points to the many roles he will play during the action of the play. The fact that Richmond is almost exactly the opposite of Richard, "instrument rather than actor"[1], whose personality is purposely played down to stress his role as God's agent, points to the problem that Shakespeare consciously or unconsciously uncovered in this play. There seem to be two worlds and two visions of life in Richard III. The one world is governed by the rule of order, and uses men as instruments rather

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(1) The English History Play in the age of Shakespeare by I. Ribner pg. 118.

than as individuals - creatures whose roles are planned for them by the great director, history. The fact that Richard loses his identity and becomes unreal when merged into the ritual which expresses this world has been noted. In the other world there are no rules but those imposed by the will of the strongest men, be they moral or immoral. Yet it is a world populated by real people, by men who are masters of their fate, recognisable as individuals who can invoke a human response of love or hatred. It is an intensely real world, and when it is compared with the other world, governed by preconceived and highly idealised values, it is seen to be infinitely more true and strangely, considering the actions of the men who embody it, much more desirable.

The vitality of the deformed king, the drive behind his ambitions, the skill with which he attains his ends, together with his honesty and the obvious pleasure he gets from his escapades form a bond between Richard and us. There is something magnificent about him, while the three lamenting queens are simply irritating. He refuses to become simply a mouth-piece for endless chants but decides to take his fate into his own hands, whatever the cost. To our way of thinking he is justified in doing so. He is deformed and has no other way to succeed in a cruel, callous and lawless world. He is scarcely made fit for survival and so must fight all the harder just to stay alive. With our modern, overdeveloped sensitivity to victimisation, and with our natural sympathy for the underdog, we see much of Richard in ourselves. A young revolutionary, who feels that violence is the only pure action left open to mankind, would find much in common with Richard. The fact that he is a victim of a nameless system that generally turns men into dummies makes him infinitely human in our eyes. His last cry for a horse would go right to the heart of the young protester

who would see in the sanctimonious Richmond an image of all that he hates in his own society. Furthermore, a villain with a sense of humour, who is openly honest about his intentions, and who preys upon people as evil as himself but not so pleasant has always been something of a hero. Even at the end, when Richard becomes little better than a demented beast, we still have admiration for a brave but wicked man who can make a good end fighting against odds which are so obviously against him. Although intellectually we should know that his death is for the better, we cannot help feeling regret at the passing of something so magnificent. This is how a modern audience might feel; like the man who, twenty-five years after the end of the Second World War, can look back and see Hitler's good points. The Elizabethan, basking in the power and glory of Tudor Elizabeth I, with a fear of national disorder almost instinctive within him, and seeing the end of Richard as embodying all his hopes for the ordered progress of his society, must have heaved a sigh of relief as the crown was brought to Richmond on Bosworth field.

Yet, to an honest, thoughtful man, even the most intense fear of disorder, coupled with an equally strong desire to share in the security which belief in a benevolent force of history gave to the Elizabethan, could not have prevented him from seeing the basic dichotomy which had sprung up in the course of the play. Two worlds had evolved in a play which had as its aim the complete affirmation of a belief which was supposed to unify men's actions into one great synthesis.

Perhaps it is too early to say that the Elizabethan concept of history had no place for real human beings. But it can be seen that the forces that tended to disrupt the order supposedly imposed by this view have their roots firmly founded in a very real part of human nature, and unless these opposing tendencies could be reconciled, the very basis upon

which the standard Elizabethan vision of life, a vision of life which Shakespeare also held at the time this play was written, would be in danger of collapse. It could be said that Shakespeare learnt a lesson from his work on Richard III, for the rest of the history plays are far more concerned with the nature of the people whose actions go towards shaping history, culminating in Henry V which is an attempt to blend the ideal and the real and so justify fully the faith of the ordinary Elizabethan in his world view.

The Life and Death of King John is a much neglected play, seldom performed and often cast aside by the critics in a few pages. Dating is a problem; Chambers claims that it was written after Richard II while Gareth Evans, in his collection of twelve books on Shakespeare for the "Writers and Critics" series claims that a "consensus" of opinion dates is as written prior to Richard II. It is usually attached to the first tetralogy in a rather haphazard way for much the same reason as the later Henry VIII is tacked on to the second tetralogy; its inclusion makes a nicely symmetrical pattern. Yet it does not seem to fit in at all, while from its plot there is left out a scene which the title of the play demands to be included, that is the signing in 1215 of Magna Carta which, together with the incident in the Wash, is the highlight of John's otherwise miserable reign.

A combination of the opinions of two critics may help to shed light on the important place which this play holds in the development of the history plays. Evans says that "the play has many excellent theatrical moments ... but it has an uncharacteristic untidiness and fragmentation of dramatic motivation and theme. This suggests not only

haste but a preoccupation with other matters. We may guess that Shakespeare was tending the growing seeds of Hal and Falstaff and impatiently dealt with this weedy plot of ground in the acres of English history."(1) Tillyard is somewhat more complimentary: "In sum, though the play is a wonderful affair, full of promise and of new life, as a whole it is uncertain of itself. In his next efforts Shakespeare was both to fulfil the promise and achieve a new certainty."(2)

Both feel that while there is much to be praised in the play, it lacks the unity and sense of purpose which will characterise the later work. More important, both see in the play the promise of greater things. Shakespeare in time of transition is always uncertain - later plays like All's Well That Ends Well and Pericles will bear the same marks as King John, and, in the same way, they will bear the seeds of future greatness. This play should therefore be seen as the awakening to consciousness in the mind of the artist of the problems which had presented themselves in Richard III, and the beginnings of his attempt to solve them. Although his belief in the correctness of the Elizabethan view of history remains largely the same, he begins to concentrate less on history visualised as an impersonal force before which the individual is helpless and more on it as a process shaped by the strivings of individuals. He will become more interested in the personalities of the people involved. These people will start to become unique human beings with minds and characteristics of their own. These human traits will be developed in plays that will attempt to deny neither historical nor psychological veracity.

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(1) Ibid pg. 39.

(2) Shakespeare's History Plays by E.M.W. Tillyard pg. 233.

In King John the first steps along this path are taken when Shakespeare begins to express a deep awareness of the dual nature of people involved in the actions that make up history. There is an attempt to bridge the gap between the private and public man by developing the theme of national unity which can stem only from the subordination of the individual's personal desires to the good of the nation as a whole. Potential for a national tragedy is present in the persons of a weak and sinful king (John) and a man who has all the ability, but none of the right to replace John on the throne (the Bastard).

The dual role of each man is clearly demonstrated. Which John is the real one, the noble king who hurls defiance at the ambassador of France:

> "Be thou as lightning in the eyes of France;
> For ere thou canst report I will be there,
> The thunder of my cannon shall be heard.
> So hence! Be thou the trumpet of our wrath
> And sullen presage of your own decay." (I, i, 24)

or the sly, scheming man who orders Arthur's murder and provokes the barons to side with France against him?

Which is the real Bastard? Is it the man who proclaims

> "Since kings break faith upon commodity,
> Gain, be my lord, for I will worship thee." (II, i, 597)

who condemns John and all kings with the words

> "Mad world! mad kings! mad composition!
> John, to stop Arthur's title in the whole
> Hath willingly departed with a part;
> And France, whose armour conscience buckled on,
> Whom zeal and charity brought to the field

As God's own soldier, rounded in the ear
With that same purpose-changer, that sly devil,
That broker that still breaks the pate of faith,
That daily break-vow, he that wins of all." (II, i, 561)

or is it the man who, over the body of the dead John, speaks the following very moving words:

"Art thou gone so? I do but stay behind
To do the office for thee of revenge,
And then my soul shall wait on thee to heaven,
As it on earth hath been thy servant still." (V, vii, 70) ?

They play different roles on different stages. As individuals they can be as selfish and expedient as they wish. As actors in the vast national pageant they must subordinate their base appetites to the good of the nation as a whole.

Each of the three men who have their eyes on the throne has a different claim. John has the claim of possession, but no kingly qualities. Arthur, with the legal rights on his side, is obviously unsuited to rule. The Bastard, though he has all the qualities of kingship, has not the birthright to fill this high office. The consequences of a weak king will be realised fully in The Tragedy of King Richard II, while the selfish desires of the worst side of the Bastard combined with his powerful personality will reach fruition in the person of Henry Bolingbroke. The suffering of the individual caught up in the plots and conspiracies of history is evoked in the exchanges between Arthur and Hubert when Hubert comes to put out Arthur's eyes. There is even a suggestion, though faint, that the common people will have a role to play in history when Hubert describes, in moving terms, the reactions in the

crowded streets to Arthur's death.

The attitudes of the individual are everywhere important. Although the Bastard correctly decides to obey the requirements of history in the national interest, it is shown as a personal decision that could just as easily have gone the other way.

The theme of rebellion too is treated on a personal level. Tillyard sees it as "occurring rather as a personal problem than as the master motive effecting the passions and fates of thousands of men"(1). Similarly, it is a sense of personal patriotism that brings the erring barons back to their duty.

The consequences of a weak king on the throne, the power which "commodity" has to move men; these will both be explored in later plays. The dual nature of man's personality resulting from the roles he has to play on two different stages will also be explored, as well as the possibility of combining the roles into one great synthesis. So it can be seen that King John marks an important stage in Shakespeare's development.

To the Elizabethan audience the theme of The Tragedy of King Richard II would be the most vital with which any history play could deal: the successful rebellion of a subject against his lawful king, the dethronement of that king, and his replacement as ruler by the rebellious vassal. The often repeated story of how the Earl of Essex asked the "King's Men" to perform this play on the eve of his rebellion against Elizabeth I attests not only the importance of such a theme, but also the vital nature of the link between the theatre and the daily lives of the audiences of the time.

In Richard II Shakespeare treats in depth an event which

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(1) Ibid pg. 232.

had previously only been mentioned in the first tetralogy as the action which had caused the chaos and bloodshed of the reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV and Richard III. The treatment is very different from that of the earlier plays. In his later works he is far more deeply concerned with the inner workings of the minds that guide history on its course. He provides motivation in human terms for the actions, or lack of action as the case may be, of the characters and therefore makes them far more real than the rather artificial men who so implicitly obeyed history's commands in the first tetralogy.

In Richard II, and in all the later history plays, Shakespeare is concerned with the character of the king as well as the character of the land the king must rule. Still with an orthodox view of history in mind, he takes a serious look at the possibilities of applying such a view to national life; of combining the ideal of a benign and ordered movement of human destiny with the reality of selfish, power-hungry men who will tread down every law man has ever created for the general good in order to further their personal aims and ambitions. The possibility of combining in the office of king a good man with one who has a just claim to the throne becomes of supreme importance.

Richard Plantagenet, when we first glimpse him, seems to be every inch a king. He handles with steady control a potentially explosive situation as two of his proudest and noblest vassals fight it out on a matter that touches the most prized possession of each, his knightly honour. Richard's presence is magnificent, as the words of unquestioned authority and true regality flow from his sacred mouth:

"Then call them to our presence: face to face
And frowning brow to brow, ourselves will hear
The accuser and the accused freely speak.
High stomach'd are they both and full of ire,
In rage, deaf as the sea, hasty as fire."
(I, ii, 15)

Yet this magnificent-sounding creature is the same king who will yield up the office he prizes so highly without so much as a skirmish. Why, if he sounds and seems so powerful, does he not act with equal strength and purpose?

As the play progresses we come to realise that Richard is a man excelling in speech but quite unable to act; that his magnificent presence is not a reflection of his true character, but depends for its substance on the support of a complete and carefully ordered system. Richard can handle the scenes of ceremonial, the scenes where each man involved knows his rightful place in the medieval hierachy and where his own part could be played according to the book, in the full confidence that all those around him will also play their own roles in the same way. But when he is faced with a real situation that does not proceed according to the rules of a medieval tournament, he is totally at loss for an adequate response, so that his lack of ability begins to show behind the scenes of ritual.

For Richard is out of touch with life, trying to play an essentially modern game by rules that are long outdated. Because he does not think according to the needs of the time he cannot act according to their needs either. Richard's tragedy is that of a man who is unable to adapt and so bridge the gap between ideal and reality, between what should be and what actually is. He is the living embodiment of an ordered, hierarchical view of history; of a way of looking at things which is out of date, impractical and ultimately

dangerous to a man who allows himself to be lulled into a false sense of security by the promise it makes of a controlled, ordered and safe progression of events. This is not to say that Shakespeare has abandoned the ideal of order as the governing factor in human life. He has rather acknowledged that a state of order can no longer be expected simply to occur, but must be achieved by men through their own efforts. The divine law must be administered by men before such a happy state of affairs is likely to come about. Hence the concern with the nature of man in these plays.

Richard II opens with a set scene of medieval ceremonial. The monarch takes his rightful place in command of the action and receives the respect and obedience of all. We can see a continual affirmation of the fixed and proper order of things which the presence of the king symbolises. Examine this speech of Bolingbroke's:

> "First - heaven be the record to my speech!
> In the devotion of a subject's love,
> Tend'ring the precious safety of my prince,
> And free from other misbegotten hate,
> Come I appellant to this princely presence." (I, i, 30)

First there is the appeal to heaven, from which all justice must ultimately stem; then there is affirmation of loyalty to the prince and an expression of the desire to serve him with no other motive than that of service itself, a service free from all personal ambition or hatred. All these noble words will be turned into a fine mockery by Bolingbroke's later actions as his personal desires bring prince and all tumbling down to their destruction. For the moment Bolingbroke steps outside the world of court ceremonial he becomes a completely different man.

Accusation and counter-accusation follow in strict order. Then comes the final gesture; the throwing down of the gage and the challenge to trial by combat:

"I'll answer thee in any fair degree,
Or chivalrous design of knightly trial." (I, i, 80)

Richard knows his part and plays it well; the fountainhead of justice to whom all can appeal with confidence for a fair and just trial:

"Were he my brother, nay, my kingdom's heir,
As he is but my father's brother's son,
Now by my sceptre's awe I make a vow,
Such neighbour nearness to our sacred blood
Should nothing privilege him nor partialize
The unstooping firmness of my upright soul." (I, i, 116)

The style is one of high rhetoric - note the careful balancing of the first line and the sublime confidence of the last. The appeal is to the unquestioned authority of his sacred office and to the symbols that affirm its power. Yet this whole speech is superbly ironical, for Richard will rob Bolingbroke of his property with equal impartiality, even though he were his "father's brother's son".

In this scene the tone is of a man confident of his position. He stands with all the power of heaven at his back, and with his bowing nobles before him, confirming the strength of his power. He has about him all the symbols of his office and is both a part and the controller of the ceremonial which bolsters up and makes real to him the system which he embodies. Act I, i shows a system functioning perfectly with all of its parts behaving

normally. The world we see is one of order, chivalry and justice, yet it contains two men who, by their later actions, will show that they no longer judge their actions by the standards which this scene so obviously affirms.

Act I, ii contains another affirmation of these standards, but from a different point of view. Gaunt and the Duchess of Gloucester are discussing the rights and wrongs of avenging Woodstock's death. It is clear in both of their minds that the king is implicated but the attitude of Gaunt, whose decision prevails, is clear. Richard is God's annointed, in whose person the health and security of the whole country rests, and there is therefore no justification whatever for taking action against him to satisfy a personal desire for revenge. But John of Gaunt is old, and will soon die. Except for his brother, York, he is the only man in the play who attempts to live according to the rules of conduct which he affirms. For "the old order changeth, yielding place to new", and the transfer of power had already begun. It is Gaunt's own son, Bolingbroke, who will pull the king from his throne for just such a personal reason of revenge, while it is Richard's illegal action which will motivate this revenge. Both these young men pay lip-service to the code of ethics, but none obeys it unless it suits him.

Old Gaunt is aware of the changed state of affairs. His speech beginning:

> "This royal throne of kings, this scept'red isle,
> This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars," (II, i, 40)

expresses the feelings of a man who knows that, with him, a whole way of life is passing, and that something infinitely worse has come to take its place. England "is now leased

out - I die pronouncing it - like a tenement or pelting farm". She is no longer true to herself nor to the beliefs that maintained her pre-eminent in Europe. Only when she returns to these standards which she has so sadly abandoned (when there is a good king on the throne in the person of Henry V) will she regain her former glory and greatness of spirit (as exemplified in the battle of Agincourt).

Richard himself is a glorious anachronism, a puffed bag of words, full of the sounds and gestures of a king, but judging his actions by an outmoded set of standards and therefore unable to grasp the consequences of either his own injudicious actions or those of the angry Bolingbroke. He sees his realm as a farm (Gaunt's words mentioned above should not be forgotten here) which can be worked at will without taking into account the human needs of the people who inhabit it. He handles the first scene well because it comes within the limited scope of his abilities. Word, thought and action are at one; a state of affairs which will not be seen again in this play. The situation in this scene is essentially artificial. The characters involved are playing at a game knowing full well its dream-like quality. Tillyard says that "we are...in a world where means matter more than ends, where it is more important to keep strictly to the rules of an elaborate game than either to win or lose it".(1) The Elizabethans, with their love of and admiration for knightly deeds would have enjoyed it, but they would have also appreciated the unreality of the situation, for their heroes were men of deeds as well as words. Men like Sir Philip Sydney could write the most beautiful poetry and at the same time lead forays into the Low Countries where he would

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(1) Ibid pg.252.

meet his death in truly heroic fashion. The problems that Elizabeth faced when she tried to squeeze money for the war against Spain from her 'loyal' House of Commons would also be intensely relevant to the play. Richard does not understand this sort of thing for he is king by Divine Right and therefore believes he has no need to stoop to practicalities like the correct financing of his wars in Ireland. When he provokes an equally illegal reaction by his mistakes his control breaks down and he becomes ineffectual. He has no formulae to apply to the situation that has arisen because Bolingbroke's action lies outside the scope which the rules embrace. According to these rules, no such thing as the dethronement of a king would ever occur, so Richard has nothing to lean upon when Bolingbroke's rebellion brings about just such an unheard of situation.

He is at loss for deeds, but not for words. His love of formality and ritual bear him up until his very life is in danger, and only then is he compelled to act, attacking the murderers with unaccustomed ferocity.

He has turned the surrender of his throne into an exercise in rhetoric:

> "With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
> With mine own hands I give away my crown,
> With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
> With mine own breath release all duteous oaths;"
> (IV, i, 207)

His farewell to his queen is equally formal, and seems to lack all human feelings:

> Richard : "Go, count thy ways with sighs; I mine with groans.
> Queen : So longest way shall have the longest moans.

Richard : Twice for one step I'll groan, the
way being short
And piece the way out with a heavy
heart."

(V, i, 89)

The ritual which was once his strength, becomes here his refuge. He is attempting to find escape from the horror of all that surrounds him by means of the distancing and impersonalising patterns and words of formal speech.

The mirror he holds up to his face shows him the thing itself; a man without the support of an ordered world view to give substance to the reflection. The king no longer shows "the age and body of the time its form and pressure". He is simply the reminder of an age that has passed away. The time, for him, is "out of joint", and all England has become a "prison" which will kill him as surely as he shatters the mirror. For England has no need of a king like him. The groom may love him as a man, but it is the great roan, Barbary that symbolises the country at large, needing not some personal quality but rather the weight of authority and a firm grip on the reins to guide her to greater glory.

Bolingbroke is quite prepared to obey Richard as long as his commands are legally valid. It is within Richard's rights to banish him, but it is not within his rights to take away what is rightfully his. Those to whom evil is done do evil in return. Richard goes outside the law and Bolingbroke, in order to protect his own interests, follows him. Richard has violated a basic rule of conduct which every king must obey, and the people feel themselves threatened:

"The commons hath he pill'd with grievous taxes;

> And quite lost their hearts; the nobles hath he fin'd
> For ancient quarrels and quite lost their hearts."
> (II, i, 246)

The only recourse is to go beyond the pale of law and meet the king on equal ground, be he God's deputy or not. For a king may be appointed by Divine Right, but he must act in accordance with God's law. If he denies this law by breaking it himself, he is denying the very source from which his power springs. He lays himself open to all the lawlessness of which men are capable.

Although his dethronement is wrong to the legal mind, in the context in which it takes place it is not only necessary, but to a great degree correct. Bolingbroke's role as usurper is in no way stressed by Shakespeare, and emphasis is laid on his ability to rule well and to provide a sound system of justice tempered by mercy. Bushy, Green and the rest meet their just deserts, and England is a good deal better off for their passing. Only Richard remains, a figure of pathos, a perplexed and ineffectual man completely at a loss to explain the reason behind his abrupt change of fortunes. Bolingbroke's claim to the throne may be unsound to the purist, but to all other men he is the better king.

Two of the parallels first suggested in King John have now been developed. Richard, like the young Prince Arthur, has all the right to rule but possesses no practical ability. Bolingbroke, cast in the same mould as the Bastard, is very capable of ruling but has no legal claim to the throne. The later plays in this tetralogy will concern themselves with combining all that is good in each of these men into the perfect prince, Henry V. The nature of the country that the king has to rule is also examined and must be taken into account if the king is to rule well.

New forces have arisen while older ideas have become obsolete. The two parts of Henry IV will rarely show us any of the pageantry of a medieval court, but will rather take us into the back streets and taverns of London to watch Sir John Falstaff, Knight and Gentleman, and the Prince of Wales mocking in play the tired and guilt-ridden king. We shall watch a future king as he gets to know what is bad as well as what is good in his people in order that he may be able to rule for the good of all. Reaching through and beyond the rigid, calcifying world of what has become empty ceremonial, the two parts of Henry IV break into a different world in order to examine the state of affairs as it truly exists, and not as it ideally should exist.

The tone and quality of the opening speeches of Richard II and Henry IV suggest by their difference the distance that separates the two plays. Both start with a king's speech. Richard speaks as follows:

> "Old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster,
> Hast thou, according to thy oath and band,
> Brought hither Henry Hereford, thy bold son,
> Here to make good the boist'rous late appeal,
> Which then our leisure would not let us hear,
> Against the Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Mowbray?"
>
> (1, i, 1)

All the easy confidence so typical of the early Richard flows through these lines. Compare the tone of Henry's opening speech:

> So shaken as we are, so wan with care,
> Find we a time for frighted peace to pant,
> And breathe short-winded accents of new broils
> To be commenc'd in strands afar remote.
> No more the thirsty entrance of this soil
> Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood;

No more shall trenching war channel her fields,
Nor bruise her flow'rets with the armed hoofs
Of hostile paces ...
Therefore, friends,
As far as the sepulchre of Christ
Forthwith a power of England shall we levy."
(1, i, 1)

No longer do the controlled, confident tones of Richard ring across the court, reminding all of the peace, stability and security of England. The country, like the king that rules her, is exhausted by uncertainty and strain. There is to be found only the weariness and the wish to escape into those happy times that were, as Henry dreams of the old ideal of a crusade to fight for God in the Holy Land. It is the sort of thing that Richard or Richard's father might have done, but Henry is several reigns too late. For the glorious age of chivalry is past, and with it the holy way of life one associates with the image of the knight in shining armour. All the good causes are dead and gone. The times are changing, and the suffering of Henry symbolises the suffering of the whole country as it lives through the uncertain time between the breakdown of one set of values and the establishment of a new set in the minds and hearts of the people.

The dream of a crusade to the Holy Land is rudely shattered when Westmoreland enters with the news that the north is in open revolt. It is England that needs rescuing, and so the dream of a death in Jerusalem fades for Henry into an inferior replacement as he finds himself dying in Jerusalem room of his own castle.

Sad though it may be for Henry, it is a symbol of hope for England. The words of Blake's poem "Jerusalem" express admirably the message of this action :

"I shall not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land".

Gaunt's England, the almost holy "other Eden, demi-paradise", had become a "tenement farm", her greatness undermined. But a new reign had begun, the reign of a king who by his perseverance and integrity would build a new Jerusalem in England by returning her once more to God's laws and God's ways. For it is in the Jerusalem room that the old king dies and his son, Henry V, succeeds to the throne and it is here, therefore, that the foundations of a new age of faith, hope and justice are laid. England will become once more worthy of her sacred name through the worth of the man who holds the highest office in the land.

Enough has been said, I think, on the theme of the "education of the perfect prince" which is developed in the two parts of Henry IV. Hal is influenced by the attitudes to life and kingship expressed by his father, by Hotspur and by Falstaff. Taking the best from each, he becomes the perfect prince. A sense of duty he gets from his father, an enthusiasm for virtue from Hotspur; he tempers these with sympathy for the common man from Falstaff and so holds the promise, at the end of Henry IV part II, of fulfilling all the requirements of a true king that Shakespeare has worked out in his history plays.

In the course of Hal's education we are shown a side of life which never before appeared in the history plays. For the first time a nobly born man gets insight into the way in which the vast majority of his people lives, and, although rejecting a good deal of what he sees, by way of comparison he comes to see many of the faults inherent in the way of life

to which the ruling classes had been accustomed. In the process he begins to act and think like a recognisably real human being.

Men like Hotspur are criticised throughout, both by the words of Hal and Falstaff, and by their own actions when campared with their words. Hotspur's

> " ... methinks it were an easy leap
> To pluck bright honour from the pale-fac'd moon;"
> (I, iii, 201)

becomes exceptionally foolish next to Hal's

> "I am not yet of Percy's mind, the Hotspur of the north; he that kills me some six or seven dozen of Scots at a breakfast, washes his hands, and says to his wife 'Fie upon this quiet life! I want to work!"
> (II, iv, 99)

Set in the sort of context that we saw developed in the opening scene of Richard II, Hotspur would have appeared a brave and magnanimous youth, a "theme of honour and renown", but in the same play as Sir John and his companions he is made to seem a blustering fool who will gladly sacrifice his own life, and the lives of all his men, for some foolish cause like a technical point of "Honour". He is a precursor of the brutal Fortinbras who is ready to risk the lives of 20,000 men for a little plot of land not big enough to bury the dead of the battle. He is as outmoded as Richard II, and the only thing that recommends him is his vitality. The way in which he finds outlets for this vitality is criticized at every turn. Honour may be a word to Falstaff, but when it is made real by Hotspur, it manifests itself in the tragic picture of a country torn apart by yet another series of

civil wars. It is the kind of honour that England could well do without.

This is not to suggest that all that Falstaff does is correct. In fact, very little that he does can be seen as admirable. If one should not enjoy wading to the knees in the blood of one's fellow country-men, neither should one, as Falstaff does, fail to respond to the call of one's duty when king and country are threatened. A compromise is struck in the portrayal of Feeble, the tailor, who avoids conflict of any sort where possible, but bears himself as nobly as the rest when he sees that conflict is a part of his duty. Feeble's following speech epitomises this attitude, and it is noteworthy that the words are put into the mouth of one of the poorest and weakest of the king's subjects, yet it sums up the attitude of Henry V himself:

> "By my troth, I care not; a man can die but once; we owe God a death. I'll ne'er bear a base mind. An't be my destiny, so; an't be not, so. No man's too good to serve's Prince; and, let it go which way it will, he that dies this year is quit for the next."
>
> (part II-III, ii, 228)

The problem when assessing these plays is the same one that faced the modern reader of Richard III. The values that are so sound in these plays have undergone a shift of emphasis, particularly for the younger modern reader. Whereas a few years after the defeat of the Armarda English audiences might have swelled with pride to watch the slaughter at Agincourt, the England of today would have paid more attention to the words of Falstaff, who with the glorious gift of laughter runs down everything that is vaguely connected with the establish-

ment or its way of conduct. We have no time for the heroics of war - all that died out with the dead of the Somme or in Hiroshima. Now people are asking the very Falstaffian question "what would happen if they gave a war and nobody?" The American who escapes the draft by fleeing to Sweden has much the same attitude as Falstaff when he pretends to be dead in order to save his life in the middle of a crucial battle. Falstaff is far too modern and far too sympathetic for the modern audience to condone King Henry's stern banishment of the friend of his youth at the end of Henry IV part II. He is an anti-hero of the type that so often gains all the sympathy in modern literature, and is furthermore quite delightful in almost every way.

In a similar way, Hal's choice is no longer split among three ways of life each of which has a valid but partial claim on his loyalties. Hotspur's fanaticism sends cold shivers down our spines, while the harshness of the guilt-ridden Henry IV in his attempts at discipline go altogether against the modern belief that each individual should be free to choose his own way of life and his own future. Above all, we have no instinctive need for the positive aspects to be found in Henry's character, that is his ability to maintain peace and stability in an extremely restive period of English history.

We shall face the same problem when assessing the new king, Henry V. The prince who so admirably defies his father's lack of humanity will lose all sympathy when he becomes the man who urges his men once more into the breach at Harfleur, or uses his bishops to justify another bloody foray into France. We think of Falstaff and Poins and cannot help but remember the lesson that the youthful experience of Hal

taught us and should have taught him; that real, live men are being mangled beyond recognition in that breach, and not simply some sort of chess-men in a game to further the glory of England and her king.

Henry V's character can only be appreciated from the Elizabethan point of view and judged accordingly.

More than anything else, Henry could not allow Falstaff's ideas to gain control of his way of judgement. Falstaff, for all his humanity and realism, is a symbol of disorder in a sphere of action in which no such disorder could possibly be allowed. Tillyard says that there is "no need to be ashamed of having an affection for Falstaff, as long as we also acknowledge that we must cast him off".(1) It is what he calls our "official selves" that must do the casting off while our "unofficial selves" will strive to keep him. For we may not wish to live according to the ways of Hotspur, but we would not want to see a man like Falstaff in control of the country.

Rarely are these official and unofficial selves not at loggerheads, yet in Henry V Shakespeare attempts to reconcile these constantly warring opposites. From the modern point of view he fails by a long way. As with Richard III, I believe even an Elizabethan would have had strong reservations. The walking epitome of virtue that we are shown in Henry V bears little or no resemblance to the vital young man we saw developing in the course of the two parts of Henry IV. From a real human being Henry becomes a stuffed dummy whose actions are largely unreal. The attempt to bridge the gap between the ideal and the real

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(1) Ibid pg. 291.

has failed, for while Falstaff's desperate "banish plump Jack and you banish all the world" is not entirely true, one does feel that, with Falstaff, the possibility of Henry remaining a real, credible character has also vanished. In Henry V I see another Richmond, another Hotspur and another image of the earlier Richard II. These men could only be judged as probable creations so long as there were no real men like Richard III, Hemry Bolingbroke or Sir John Falstaff nearby to give the lie to their credibility.

So Falstaff has to be hastily removed from Henry V for just this reason. We could not believe in Henry and his bloodthirsty actions if there is a Falstaff at his elbow reminding his men that honour is simply a "word", and that it would be foolish and dangerous to obey the orders of a man who expects them to build a wall with their bodies. So Henry V becomes a regressive step that solves no problems. A play that has to banish an essential and very real part of humanity in order to justify the actions of its main character must be based on a false or only partially viable vision of life.

In this play Shakespeare acknowledges, whether consciously of unconsciously, the failure of his attempt to prove that the Elizabethan view of life, from which the view of history came, could adequately explain either man's nature, his position in the universe or his relationships with his fellow men. The artificiality of so many of Henry's actions, together with the measures that are necessary in order to bolster up our sympathy and credulity, attest, therefore, the essential artificiality of the Elizabethan world view. The element in man's nature which tends toward violence, destruction and disorder, toward what we

now call anti-social behaviour, is far stronger than any moral system which attempts to control it, and so any affirmation of some optimistic view of life within the framework of this moral system can only succeed at the expense of this basic, true and undeniable part of life itself. People who epitomise this anti-social part of human nature must be left outside an optimistic play like Henry V, therefore, if this play is to run its desired course.

This was the last complete play that Shakespeare wrote purely as a history play. Later, although he used historical actions as bases for his plots, the plays were seen as tragedies and not as histories. In them we shall see that if any positive value is to emerge, it must be created not by rejecting the worst part of man's nature, but by working through it, and affirming some hope for mankind despite all that the worst in human nature can do to tempt man to despair. The infinite beauty of Cordelia's love for Lear, for example, is far more real than any action of Henry V, for it has the whole tragedy of Lear's blindness and arrogance as its background.

The concept of order will not be abandoned. In the later plays there is a constant need for order, but Shakespeare will refuse to sacrifice the demands of truth in order to bring about that order. His purpose will be to find a higher order in human life which will encompass and transcend the worst that disorder can do. This is what he fails to do in the history plays. The characters who embody chaos, evil and destruction are at all times more real than those who stand for the benign forces of history as the Elizabethan saw it.

The period of the great tragedies, when these destructive forces will run riot, killing all in their path, is at hand.

THE COMEDIES

During the period in his life in which he was writing the history plays, Shakespeare was also at work on a series of comedies.

I believe that this is not merely a coincidence, but results from the fact that Shakespeare's comic vision and the Elizabethan view of history, upon which the history plays were based, both stem from the same belief: that there was a powerful, God-decreed factor in human life that guided society towards a state of perfect order, and that when this state was reached, human beings would be as near perfect as possible. Geoffrey Bush, in his book on the subject of Shakespeare and the Natural Condition, defines the aims of the doctrine of order and points out the similarities, in this respect, between the comedies and the histories, supporting the suggestion made above:

"...the end of comedy is the triumph of the idea of order. It is in the histories and the comedies that Shakespeare's vision moves towards absolute conclusions: the histories and the comedies are indeed arguments of hope, looking toward a promised end. Their motto is "respice finem"; in the broadest sense their endeavour belongs to Bacon's and Spenser's effort to reach certainty.

"The immediate concern of the comedies is with persons and events; but above things in themselves, and governing what happens, is the idea of an ordered society. The idea shapes the plays, directing events toward a happy ending, and no natural fact can prevent it. The end of each comedy is the moment when society reaches a perfect idea of itself, and the progress of the individual characters is toward this perfect idea: when they confront nature, their encounter is with a continuance that is guiding them toward the realization of themselves. Only the fools...stand aloof from the natural continuance; lovers join themselves to a persausion that is leading society toward a dream of perfection. The comedies share the desire for com-

plete statement; their vision is of character and event striving toward meaning; and to make possible the realization of meaning and order the art of comedy imposes meaning and directs what takes place. It is Shakespeare's art that...arranges the happy endings."(I)

I have quoted at some length for I believe that Bush's comments express exactly the conclusions I reached in my own reading of the plays. The histories and the comedies are both based on the same belief, and will both, by absolute standards, fail for the same reasons. In themselves they may be brilliant works of art, but as far as the "effort for certainty" of which Bush speaks is concerned they cannot supply any adequate answers to the questions about the nature of human existence that faced Shakespeare and the men of his time. If Shakespeare was to find an order and a pattern of meaning running through human life, he could not find it by means of the system upon which the Elizabethans based their world view; belief in a system of order leading toward perfection through which the happy endings of the comedies and the triumphant climaxes of the history plays were attained.

Again Bush has some cogent comments to make: "There is a tendency of the mind to seek out meaning; the Elizabethan doctrine of order belongs to this effort toward conclusive statement. The doctrine of order has not survived:...The history of the great chain of being...is the history of a failure; more precisely and more justly, it is the record of an experiment in thought carried on for many centuries by many great and lesser minds, which can now be seen to have had an instructive negative outcome."(2)

(I) Shakespeare and the Natural Condition by G. Bush - pg. 23.

(2) Ibid - pg. 6.

Bush goes further, adding this significant comment: "And while the idea of order has not survived, Hamlet and King Lear have survived: they belong to a different enterprise of the mind, concerned with matters more personal, more obscure, and more exacting of our fears and affections. They are an experiment in thought that did not end in failure; and what is striking about them is that their outcome is so incomplete and inconclusive."(I)

It is directly after Shakespeare has finished work in the comic and historic genres that the first of the above-mentioned plays was written. I have attempted to trace how Shakespeare tried to fit human nature, as he came to know it, into the frame-work of history, as he knew it, and how he was unable to do this without turning his heroes into artificial men speaking platitudes, or without banishing from the plays men representing an essential part, however reprehensible it may be, of human nature. Richard III had to be overcome not by a man but by a representative of God himself, while Falstaff had to be banished from Henry V in order that Shakespeare might portray his version of the perfect prince. Yet despite his cruel rejection of the friend of his youth, Henry still turns into an artificial character, whose most credible action is the ordering of the slaughter of the prisoners at Agincourt. Another quotation from Bush will help to throw light on thesort of problem that men like Richard or Falstaff present, and also suggest a further link with the comedies: "The fool is not a progress toward himself, the fool is always himself, and he preserves what he is by ignoring a world rushing headlong toward weddings. The fool is a fact, and he is the only fact that cannot be governed by the comic dream...he is a reminder that the moment of perfection realised by the comic dream is only pretending."(2)

(I) Ibid - pg.6.
(2) Ibid - pg.3I.

He then specifically mentions the role of Falstaff and the problem this sort of man presents to the writer of history plays: "So Falstaff is the fool of the history plays. He steps out of the way of English history, an intruder who announces himself in the face of the commonwealth; and in Falstaff the idea of order meets its most dangerous fact." (I)

We are reminded that facts cannot be avoided. Falstaff refuses to be trapped or bullied into laying down his life for an empty word like honour and so lies down playing dead in the middle of an important battle. On the more positive side he is the sort of man who would have reminded King Henry that it is real flesh and blood with which he is planning to fill up the breach at Harfleur; men who would rather walk and live upon the earth than lie rotting beneath it. The deformed Richard of Gloucester, rejected by the world "rushing headlong toward weddings" ("For I, that am not made for sportive tricks"), used as the scape-goat of history, has other elements of the fool about him; the fool as victim, used by those more fortunate than him for their own ends and then cast aside. Richard plays them at their own game, makes "fools" of them, and, for a time, takes all.

In the later comedies in particular the fool as a character comes into his own, culminating in the picture of the melancholy Feste left alone on the stage at the end of Twelfth Night while the lovers go happily to bed. It is the fool who is given the last word, and, even if his message is rather vague, his presence alone is sufficient to remind us that, as Bush says, it is all pretending and that people do not really live happily ever after. It is a delightful dream, but it remains for the present only a dream, to be remembered as something pleasant but very unreal when we eventually awake.

(I) Ibid - pg.3I.

On a broader scale, Richard III and Falstaff remind the playwright that there are men who believe in a different sort of nature, the sort that delights in chaos, disorder and destruction. When manifested in human nature, this aspect of nature makes the men it controls stand outside the ordered progress of society toward a perfect realisation of itself. It makes them prefer to take their fates into their own hands and to decide for themselves in which direction their lives will flow. The near triumph of Richard III, and the deaths of Hamlet, Lear, Othello and the rest will attest the power these men possess to influence not only their own lives but also the lives of those around them. The comedies and histories ignore this sort of man or deny him his full potential for evil. That is why these plays are able to come to such certain conclusions and yet why they have about them an air of artificiality or of dreamlike unreality. This is also why the later tragedies have in their outcome the feeling of incompleteness and inconclusiveness of which Bush speaks, but yet why they are at the same time so great.

The movement toward uncertainty, toward collapse of belief in the power of the concept of order to provide a full and adequate picture of human nature is as visible in the comedies as it is in the history plays. Despite the fact that the comic dramatist can choose his own material for plot and character and thus steer clear of a situation that might upset the balance of the whole play, unsettling elements constantly crop up, particularly in the later comedies. Any tragic or potentially tragic elements that appear will be there because the artist wishes them to be there, and I believe that they will be a surer sign to the reader of doubts in the dramatist's mind.

To all intents and purposes the comedies will remain sunny, golden and happy throughout, even the later ones still leav-

ing the audience with a feeling of affirmation of an optimistic view of life. My concern will be with the undercurrents of pessimism which will be found in the plays like shadows around even the brightest of objects. By concentrating on these undercurrents I may give the impression that I view all the comedies as dark, gloomy plays unsuited to be called comedies. This is, of course, not so, for they are among the best that English literature possesses.

This is why these plays are still worthy of being produced even though the system of belief that inspired them has long since been abandoned. Within the limits set by this system of belief they give brilliant insight into life and human nature. It is simply that this system limited the scope of the plays. The sort of search for certainty of which Bush speaks will never be completed until the searcher has explored all he can find. Eventually Shakespeare had to leave the warm, secure but limited world of harmony and order and wander into a new and terrifying realm of experience where there is nothing to be sure of but basic human passions with their enormous and almost inconceivable ability to both affirm and deny, to destroy and create. Such unbridled destruction will sometimes be more terrible than the human mind can bear, while any sort of positive values will be given added meaning by comparison against the worst that man's "worser genius" can do.

Often acknowledged to be the earliest of the comedies (although some critics would like to date it after Love's Labour's Lost), Two Gentlemen of Verona is possibly also the least popular. Evans sees the cause of this unpopularity as being "the combination of a complicated plot, a remote world, insufficiently realised characterisation and a good deal of

highly wrought dramatically awkward verse."[I] Shakespeare had difficulty in adequately reconciling theme, plot, verse and intention in order to achieve a satisfactory conclusion to his play. There are too many disparities, too many incongruities and too many loose ends hastily gathered together in the last scene to leave the audience with a feeling of satisfaction when the play is over.

The characterisation of Proteus, one of the main characters, is mainly at fault here. At the beginning of the play, in his first speech after being left alone by his friend Valentine, Proteus describes himself as being the ideal hero for a romantic comedy:

> "He after honour hunts, I after love;
> He leaves his friends to dignify them more:
> I leave myself, my friends, and all for love.
> Thou, Julia, thou hast metamorphis'd me,
> Made me neglect my studies, lose my time,
> War with good counsel, set the world at nought;
> Made wit with musing weak, heart sick with thought."
>
> (I, i, 63)

Self-pitying, changed into an unknown creature, useless to himself and his society under the power of a feeling that can never be called love, he is an ideal person for the healing power of the comic vision to help by returning him to a true knowledge of himself, by allowing him to understand the nature of true love and by making him seek out the company of men rather than avoid it.

Furthermore, when we meet Julia we see firstly how impossible it is for a sound relationship with such a girl to have the effect on a man Proteus claims and secondly that Proteus has to make an immense change in himself before he can become truly worthy of her. Yet the play, instead of

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[I] Shakespeare I by G.L. Evans - pg.82.

working to improve Proteus's position, proceeds to make him appear far worse than he origionally was, turning him from a foolish, deluded young man into a faithless, malicious creature who repels rather than attracts sympathy. His attempts to win the love of Silvia show a facet of his character which is the cause of the failure of the play as a convincing comedy. Proteus is no longer a deluded young man who can be returned to a true way of thinking within the framework of the comic vision of life. He sinks below the level from which comedy is able to save him into a world more suitably handled by the tragicomic or tragic type of play - into a world of evil rather than simple delusion. Delusions of the sort so typical in a romantic comedy result from a basically good person's (like Orlando in As You Like It) suffering from some sort of misconception of himself and of the world around him. The sort of action of which Proteus is guilty results from the workings of a basically evil character which can only be changed by the full power of the tragic vision of life. Proteus is no longer deluded but likable. He becomes morally reprehensible and his change of heart at the end is neither convincing nor pleasant, for we all know that Julia deserves a far, far better man for her husband. The disparity of the natures of the two people involved in this match remains too big; it spoils the ending and leaves us with a feeling of dissatisfaction.

I do not think that at this stage the failure of Two Gentlemen of Verona should be seen as resulting from the failure of belief in the comic vision of life, but rather as the result of the immature artist's knowing too little about how to control his material and to pick character and plot satisfactorily in order to explain his meaning. The subtle boundary between comedy and tragedy has yet to be explored, and the fault here is of too little technical

skill rather than too much understanding of human nature and the human condition. In the later comedies the tragic element made itself felt because it could not be denied. In this play it slipped in unawares because the technical immaturity of the artist could not prevent it. So Two Gentlemen of Verona should be seen as an example of the early gropings of the artist, for there is much to commend it. The treatment of Launce, and to a lesser extent Speed, is particularly delightful and holds the promise of great things. It is an experiment in mode, form and content; a stepping stone to greatness. Shakespeare must have been aware of the faults and have learnt from them as his work progressed.

In the next play I shall discuss, The Comedy of Errors, Shakespeare avoids making anything like the same mistake. He confines the action to an exploration of the full, farcical possibilities of the coming together in the same town of a family consisting of a father, mother and two identical twin sons having identical brothers as man-servants. Each member of this family has not seen the others for many years and believes them to be dead. The only tragic element in the play is the initial picture of old Aegon condemned to death for his illegal entry into Epheseus:

> "Proceed, Solinus, to procure my fall,
> And by the doom of death end woes and all."
> (I, i, I)

This is, however, the starting-point of a play that follows a steady though intricate path away from the dark realms of tragedy, through the bright though chaotic world of farce,

to end in happiness for all. Aegon finds a family, wife finds husband, brother finds brother and man finds wife. There is no chance of the sombre tone of the opening scene's casting the slightest shadow over the rest of the play, for immediately after sentence is passed on Aegon the first servant is beaten in place of his twin and the fun begins.

Even the unfaithfulness of Antipholus of Epheseus is not seen as wrong, but merely the result of a temporary estrangement from his true nature which is easily rectified within the comic vision of life. The words of his wife, Adriana, suggest this:

> "O, how comes it,
> That thou art then estranged from thyself?
> Thyself I call it, being strange to me,
> That, individable, incorporate,
> Am better than thy dear self's better part."
> (II, ii, II8)

If his own wife can see it as being no more than an estrangement that can soon be rectified, then there is little reason why we should think otherwise. Indeed, the whole of Antipholus's relationship with the courtesan is so lightly treated that it has none of the normal feelings about it we associate with adultery.

The theme is simple. The chaos that occurs in most of the play results from the inability of people to distinguish the true nature of things. This theme is an important one, but the fact that it is presented in terms of such incredible situations assures the lightness of its treatment. It would appear far more enjoyable on the stage than read, for without the farcical quality of the actions themselves it becomes a little trying as mistake follows mistake with lit-

tle perceptible variation. Well handled and played at a brisk pace it should be very funny on the stage.

The Taming of the Shrew is, in my opinion, one of the most delightful of the comedies. It is the handling of the main plot that makes it the success it is. Both the Shrew and her Tamer, Kate and Petruchio, are warm, sympathetic people who play a part alien to their true natures in order to forstall and outwit the other in the role he or she has assumed. The change that takes place in the course of the play is for the better for the true nature of each is revealed. Kate changes from a hard-bitten man hater (a role she has assumed in order to protect herself from the dowry-seeking males that pursue her) into a submissive and tender wife while Petruchio, boisterous and belligerent in response to Kate's hardness, becomes as gentle and considerate as any woman could wish. The stages in their change of character are skilfully handled as they come closer and closer to a true realisation of themselves and so to a state of being truly suited to each other.

Petruchio progresses from the callous beast who plays on a woman's weakest point - her desire not to have her wedding-day spoilt in any way - to the gentle teaser of the meeting on the road with Vicentio. The wager at the end rounds off the action with Kate's speech on the nature of the ideal marriage. Only Kate could have made that speech, for the sentiments she expresses are the natural result of the whole development of the play.

It is here that the reason for the success of the play is to be found. The ending is in no way contrived, but is the logical and natural conclusion to all that has gone before. Petruchio and Kate have reached an understanding that

will enable them to stay together through many marital battles yet to come (the independent spirit of each holds promise of these). It is not the simple fact that they are married that is important, but rather the state of their minds, which holds promise of a golden future. It is in their understanding of each other that the hope that springs from comedies (of which Bush spoke in the passage quoted earlier) is to be found. It binds them together spiritually and physically, and it is from their union that a child, symbol of life to come, of the continuance of the human race, will be born.

Love's Labour's Lost.

Evans states that, in writing this play, Shakespeare was "deploying satire and he used contemporary events as his material"(I). I find it difficult to define the limits of either comedy or satire, which seem to overlap. The obvious critique of a particular, artificial way of life, and the fact that the end of the action does not result in the usual comic conclusion of a spate of marriages seem to justify the classification of this play as a satire. The illusions under which the four men labour are so preposterous, however, that any possibility of the bitterness that often accompanies satire's creeping in is easily avoided, and the general impression is one of geniality and good humour. The men are deluded rather than malicious; the only people they hurt are themselves, and the result is all very satisfactory. The "engineers" are justly "hoist with their own petar" and suffer the due consequences of their earlier foolishness, the ending being an admirable example of poetic justice. Costard's "crime" of talking to a woman, for which

(I) Shakespeare I by G.L. Evans - pg. 96.

he received a year's imprisonment, is imposed upon those who sentenced him, and for the same "crime". They are banished from the presence of woman for a whole year to do hard penance, in order that they might learn the real value of love and of learning, as well as of that "special grace" of which Berowne speaks in the first act when, even before the oath is taken, he fortells how all will be forsworn:

> "Necessity will make us all forsworn
> Three thousand times within this three year's space;
> For every man with his affects is born,
> Not by might mast'red, but by special grace.
> If I break faith, this word will speak for me:
> I am forsworn on mere necessity." (I, i, 147)

Berowne's warning is borne out in Costard's subsequent actions. Costard justifies his "crime" in a more earthy way than Berowne would have done, but he says essentially the same thing when he pleads that "it is in the manner of a man to speak to a woman." (I, i, 109)

The conclusion to which the action leads is inevitable:

> "Let us once lose our oaths to find ourselves,
> Or else we lose ourselves to keep our oaths."
> (IV, iii, 357)

But even then it is not so simple. They have played at being scholars with little success, now they will play at being lovers just as fruitlessly. The art of love, like the wisdom of true knowledge, cannot be studied in books alone. The four men have erred on the side of the ridiculous and must be punished in a way that will make them the wiser for it. They must learn in the hard school of experience the error of their ways.

The early comedies reach their culminating point in what is clearly the happiest of the comedies, A Midsummer-night's Dream. This happiness is the result of the complete integration of the comic vision of life into all aspects of the play. Harmony in the human world and in the world of the supernatural is the keystone of the play. The chaotic, discordant scenes in the forest outside Athens are invested with an air of complete unreality; the unreality of a dream or of the child's world of fairies, elves and magic potions that can do strange things to men who come into contact with them. The three plots are beautifully interwoven, the world of love and of the court mixing quite naturally with the fairy-land of the enchanted wood and the boisterous yet good-humoured roughness of the mechanicals from the stalls of Athens market place.

The whole play moves steadily toward the absolute harmony of the last act. This act is concerned in its entirety with the expression of the "happy ending" that traditionally concludes comedy, an action usually confined to the last scene of the last act. Lovers and in-laws, children and parents, subject and ruler, nobility and simple folk, mortals and fairies all combine in a joyous celebration of the rites of marriage, a celebration that was implied from the beginning and never lost sight of even in the wildest moments in the wood.

Yet, within the span of a few short years, happiness of the dream captured in this play will turn into the horrible nightmares of Lady Macbeth and her husband, while the light and airy Oberon and Titania will become the three bearded hags who stir Macbeth to such bloody and unnatural actions. The perfect harmony of life so well expressed in A Midsummernight's Dream will turn into a "tale told by an

idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Yet through and beyond this expression of disillusionment and disenchantment will come Prospero's

"We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."

in The Tempest.

The progress and nature of so violent a change is surely worthy of study.

The comedies generally ascribed to the period immediately following A Midsummernight's Dream are The Merchant of Venice, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It and Twelfth Night; or, What You Will. All of them are brilliantly written and conceived, but each of them differs considerably from the dreamlike happiness of its immediate predecessor as far as tone and quality are concerned, for it is in these plays that the undercurrents of disillusionment more powerful than that with which the comic vision can contend become visible.

So strong are these disturbing elements in The Merchant of Venice that G.L. Evans, writing in 1969, goes so far as to classify this play as a tragicomedy. (Shakespeare II - pg. 105.)

Although the play ends with the traditional coming together of happy couples in a celebration of love and marriage, there is too much bickering and fighting, too much hypocrisy and double-dealing along the way for this conclusion to give any satisfaction. For the play turns on a clash inside the personalities of the characters concerned between

a superficial adherence to a Christian way of life and the actual application of a harsher, more selfish and distinctly money-orientated set of values. The Bassanio-Portia love plot is directly linked to the Shylock-Antonio loan plot by the fact that the money was originally borrowed in order that the impecunious Bassanio might woo the wealthy Portia with a facade of wealth to bear him up. This sort of confusion of love with wealth and natural values with mercenary values is prevelant throughout the play. Bassanio clearly muddles the two values. Salerio, a friend to Antonio, speaks the following speech, imagining how he would react if he were in Antonio's position:

> "Should I go to church
> And see the holy edifice of stone,
> And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks,
> Which, touching but my gentle vessel's side,
> Would scatter all her spices on the stream,
> Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks,
> And, in a word, but even now worth this,
> And now worth nothing?" (I, i, 29)

He confuses his religion and his employment, because his money means more to him than his faith, while he talks of the imaginary ships as if they were women. It is also worth noting that in the first scene Salanio, on seeing Antonio's downcast eyes, first suggests that his enterprises might have been disastrous in order to cause such grief, and only later asks the very obvious question (remembering that this is supposed to be a romantic comedy) "Are you in love?".

Lorenzo, even though he romantically rescues the fair Jessica from the clutches of her cruel father, is deeply

concerned with the financial possibilities of his match, and it is rarely that we hear the eloping couple discussed without the word "ducats" appearing somewhere in the conversation.

The extreme example of this sort of confusion of values comes, as we would expect, from a Jew. Shylock's lament for the loss of his daughter is comical and yet pathetic in the way he mixes up ducats, daughters and Christians:

> "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!
> Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!
> Justice! the law! My ducats and my daughter."
> (II, viii, I5)

Yet there is no difference in his confusion of values and that of the Christians in the play. If there is a difference to be found it is one of degree rather than of kind.

It is here that the tragicomic element of the play is to be found: in the similarity between the basic attitudes of the opposing parties in the play. The entire action of the play stems from a basically false set of values so that it becomes impossible to judge who is truly "guilty" and who is "innocent". It is a little like the situation in Troilus and Cressida where Greek and Trojan both talk of honour yet fight a war over a dishonourable cause, the beautiful whore, Helen. In both plays there are no absolute standards by which to judge. Perhaps Portia tries to infuse some sense of decency into the proceedings but her conscious and carefully planned entrapment of Shylock after she has spoken so nobly of "the quality of mercy" somewhat tarnishes this attempt. No person embodies a traditionally "good" set of values, for each is as morally

confused as the next. The characters can therefore be judged only in relation to one another, and it is by so judging that another disturbing element in the play appears.

Shylock, although he loves money more than life itself, and hates all Christians, is open and honest about his love and his hatred and, furthermore, holds true to his religion. He is a Jew and exacts justice with the precision of the Old Testament text that demands an "eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth". He is honest about the irrational but very real nature of his hatred:

> "Now, for your answer:
> As there is no firm reason to be rendered
> Why he cannot abide a gaping pig;
> So can I give no reason, nor will I not,
> More than a lodg'd hate and certain loathing
> I bear Antonio, that I follow thus
> A losing suit against him." (IV, i, 52)

The Christians, however, also love money as much as they love life. Yet they profess to follow the teachings of a man who said that the merciful are blessed, that a rich man cannot hope to enter the kingdom of heaven, and that man must turn the other cheek if he be wronged. So Portia can <u>speak</u> very well on the "quality of mercy", yet she will exact the penalty from the Jew with all the relish one could expect from the agent of a just but unforgiving God:

> "Soft!
> The Jew shall have all justice. Soft! No haste.
> He shall nothing but the penalty." (IV, i, 315),

while it is Gratiano who echoes so triumphantly the previous crowings of Shylock,

"O upright judge! Mark, Jew. O learned judge!"
(IV, i, 307)

with an attitude that is so typical of the Christians in this play and so foreign to the teachings of the faith they profess to follow. Once the law is swung to their advantage, the men who pleaded so eloquently for mercy are now only interested in paying the Jew out in his own coin. But they are hypocrites as well as mercenary men while Shylock is honest about his hatred. Furthermore Shylock makes a moving case for the underdog, while the Christians reject him with the sort of "holier-than-thou" attitude which all men find distasteful. This is a part of Shylock's memorable speech:

> "I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions, fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? ... If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his suffrance be by a Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me, I will execute; and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction."
> (III, i, 51)

This speech captures the theme of the whole play. Shylock is a victim who is given the opportunity to pay his oppressors out in their own coin. When the trial turns against him he returns to his role as victim, while his oppressors become about as pleasant as bullies ever can become.

With hero and villain both guilty of the same false values, and with the villain a good deal more attractive because of his honesty than the supposed heroes, the play takes on a quality that is very close to that of tragi-comedy. I am aware that this interpretation is not the conventional one, but from my reading of the play I feel I cannot see it any other way.

For Bassanio, Portia and Antonio may live happily ever after, but they are no closer to an awareness of either their faults or the true nature of their religion than they were at the beginning. This sort of growing to awareness seems to me to be an essential part of both comedy and tragedy. Without it tragicomedy appears. Nothing has really been solved in The Merchant of Venice and a good deal of bitterness has been infused into life. To me, this play is a bitter foretaste of Shakespeare's later work.

A conversation between Hero and her maidservant Margaret will help to bring out the key theme of Much Ado About Nothing. They are discussing the style of Hero's nightgown, and while Margaret is enthusiastic about it, Hero is clearly worried:

Hero: "God give me joy to wear it, for my heart is exceeding heavy.

Margaret: 'Twill be heavier soon, by the weight of a man.

Hero: Fie upon thee! art not ashamed?

Margaret: Of what, lady, of speaking honourably? Is not marriage honourable in a beggar? Is not your lord honourable without marriage? I think you would have me say 'saving your reverence, a husband'; an

> bad thinking do not wrest true speaking
> I'll offend nobody. Is there any harm in
> 'the heavier for a husband'? "
> (III, iv, 22)

Hero is lost in a romantic dream of marriage and has no concept of the real nature of a marriage relationship. Her attitude finds its counterpart in that of her husband-to-be, Claudio, who is just as much out of touch with the realities of the situation. He loves her for her superficial beauty and her wealth, having no knowledge of her human qualities, for he woos her through an intermediary and deserts her also on the word of another man. The true nature of love, the true nature of a marriage relationship and their own true natures are quite beyond the realm of their understanding. The feeling they have for each other can in no way truly bind them together in a real and lasting relationship. Their way of thinking does not involve them more deeply with life, but removes them from it into a world of romantic ideals which have no connection with reality. So Hero cries "shame" to the practical Margaret while Claudio will gladly desert his bride on his wedding night. He has to be ordered to stay and consummate his marriage by the understanding Don Pedro. They are ideal hero and heroine for yet another romantic comedy.

A new vitality is injected into this age-old theme by the presence in the play of two of the wittiest sceptics Shakespeare ever created, the eternally quarrelling Beatrice and Benedick who are the chief source of delight in Much Ado, embodying exactly the opposite attitude to life to that of Hero and Claudio.

At first their attitude seems to be so extreme that they become self-defeating like Claudio and Hero. They are unable to even have a conversation with each other, let alone contemplate marriage. Compare Beatrice's attitude to marriage with that of Hero's:

Leonato: "Well, niece, I hope to see you one day fitted with a husband.

Beatrice: Not till God make men of some other metal than earth. Would it not grieve a woman to be over-master'd with a piece of valiant dust, to make an account of her life to a clod of wayward marl?" (II, i, 48)

Whereas Hero lives in the world of dreams, denying to herself the physical side of her make-up, Beatrice goes to the other extreme, unable to conceive of man as being anything else than a base, physical creature. She sees no higher qualities in man whatsoever.

Benedick is little better. Of the power embodied in music to move men he says:

"Is it not strange that sheep's guts should hale souls out of men's bodies?" (II, iii, 55)

While he acknowledges the power of music he reduces it, as Beatrice reduces marriage, to its components, taking all the magic out of it.

Hero and Claudio stand at one extremity of man's vision of himself, while Beatrice and Benedick stand at the other; the wholly romantic dreamers opposed to the wholly realistic sceptics. Both visions of man are inadequate, leaving out an essential part of human nature. It is in the reconciliation of these opposites to the

detriment of neither that salvation and true knowledge lie. Hamlet sums up the problem in a central speech of his play. He too is split between these two visions of human nature, but the clash is too big to be bounded by one mind, and tragedy results. To one side of his thought man is "the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals", while to the other man is no more than a "quintessence of dust". (Hamlet II, ii, 306) The doubts of Beatrice and Benedick, protected from despair by the security of the comic vision, can be used as a basis upon which a true understanding of life can be built. Poor Hamlet, holding both extremities within the limits of his mind, cannot make the reconciliation in time, falls into inertia and is killed by the plotting of the key figure in the play who has decided to give in completely to his base nature, the king. Claudio and Hero have the same protection as Beatrice and Benedick, with the result that they are able to come to terms with reality for their disillusion is creative rather than destructive.

It is through their constant doubting and questioning that Beatrice and Benedick are able to experience the true mystery of things. Listen to the hesitancy yet simultaneous feeling of wonder in the following lines:

Benedick: "I do love nothing in the world so well as you. Is it not strange?

Beatrice: As strange as things I know not. It were as possible for me to say I lov'd nothing as well as you; but believe me not, and yet I lie not; I confess nothing, nor I deny nothing...I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest."

(IV, i, 267)

They struggle to understand and define the paradox of love and fail, yet, paradoxically, they simultaneously succeed. They go further when Benedick tries to make his love more concrete by performing some action to prove his sincerity. Beatrice takes him literally:

"Kill Claudio." (I, iv, 287)

The only way to judge such a love, as she comes to believe it, is by staking it against life itself.

Benedick: "Ha! not for the wide world.
Beatrice: You kill me to deny it. Farewell."
(IV, i, 289)

The whole world, life itself: these are the things used to define such a love, for it is to these things that love gives meaning. This discussion has about it the ring of the later tragedies, of Othello's

"My life upon her faith." (Othello I, iii, 294)

of Desdemona's

"Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?"
(Othello IV, iii, 66)

or Antony's

"Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall! here is my space."
(Antony and Cleopatra I, i, 33)

The comic vision deals with the same matters as tragedy but believes that man need not actually stake his life in order to affirm the values in which he believes, and that, if a mistaken value has been applied, it need not cost him his life. Tragedy demands that the supreme test be made. Othello must lose his life in order to rediscover his faith in Desdemona while Antony must lose his world in order to show up Cleopatra's love at its best and purest. And it is when Shakespeare's faith in the ability of people to come to terms with life breaks down that the words of comedy turn into the deeds of tragedy.

The achievement of Beatrice and Benedick lies in their ability to take the best qualities from each of these opposing views of mankind shown in the play and to combine them in a state bordering on perfection, yet knowing all the time that it is in the tension between these opposites that the spark of life is generated:

> "Thou and I are too wise to woo peaceably."
> (V, ii, 63)

It is only by a constant questioning and constant reaffirmation of the value of their relationship that certainty is to be found. Benedick (benedictus) and Beatrice (beatus) have found themselves and each other and are truly blessed.

It is worth noting that the scepticism of Beatrice and Benedick is couched in prose similar to that of Falstaff. It provides in quality as well as in content a comparison against which one can judge the romantic poetry of Hero and Claudio or the rhetoric of Henry V. This

sort of contrast will reach its climax in the interchanges between Lear, his Fool and Mad Tom on the heath as the old man struggles to understand, in prose, the basic facts of human existence shorn of any grandeur, the grandeur that can make of life so splendid but also so unreal and often dangerous a thing.

As You Like It is just another romantic comedy when examined superficially ending, in true style, with four marriages and a happy dance of celebration after many twists and turns on the way. It also contains the ingredients of an excellent pastoral comedy, yet the manner of treatment turns the play into a satire on the ideals of a pastoral existence rather than a celebration of them.

Generally the satirist presents life as it is and ridicules or attacks it because it does not meet man's ideals of what life should be like. Shakespeare goes about things the opposite way; he presents or evokes an ideal way of life and then makes fun of it because it is out of touch with life as it really is. It is this approach that gives the play its sometimes harsh and definitely critical tone so different from the early comedies.

In the love plot it is Rosalind who is the chief agent of this critical process. She refuses at all times to mystify love, never letting Orlando get away with any of the clichéd views of love with which he is so free, as for example when in response to Orlando's claim that he will die if his suit is not successful, she replies:

> "Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love." (IV, i, 93)

Love is seen as a bond between human beings with the same potential weaknesses as the humans who fall in love:

Rosalind: "Now tell me how long you would have her, after you have possess'd her?
Orlando: For ever and a day.
Rosalind: Say 'a day' without the 'ever'. No, no, Orlando; men are April when they woo, December when they wed: maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives." (IV, i, I27)

Yet this is the same Rosalind who confides to her cousin:

> "O, coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love! But it cannot be sounded; my affection hath an unknown bottom, like the Bay of Portugal." (IV, i, I84)

She is able to keep the experience she is undergoing in perspective and, viewing it from outside and inside, is able to come to understand its true nature. She knows of both the folly and glory of love. There is a similar tension within her to that which Benedick and Beatrice experienced, a tension that keeps love alive and makes it very real and very wonderful:

> "Love is merely a madness; and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do; and the reason why they are not so punish'd and cured is that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too."
> (III, ii, 368)

The presence of Touchstone in the play gives real

meaning to Rosalind's statement that the "lunacy" of love is "ordinary". We leave the world of courtly love and enter the same sort of world as we did with Falstaff - and we come to understand the basic similarity of all men. The Touchstones of the world also fall in love, and though they have different natures and different backgrounds they are still able to feel the same sort of feeling binding them in loyalty and faith to another human being as the noblest of the noble. It is in the recognition of the common nature of all men and the simultaneous recognition of his humble position that Touchstone's virtue lies:

> "A poor virgin, sir, an ill-favour'd thing,
> sir, but mine own; a poor humour of mine, sir,
> to take that that no man else will."
> (V, iv, 55)

This is what he says of his bride, Audrey, and it is because of his humility and his humanity that he earns a place in the final marriage scene, a reminder to all of a part of life that is so often forgotten.

It is in his down-to-earth comments, his refusal to pander to any sort of illusion and his general honesty that Feste of Twelfth Night, the grave-digger in Hamlet and Lear's Fool can be foreseen. The fool's right to criticise with impunity, to get right to the heart of a matter and to seek, in his nonsensical patter, beyond the limits of rational diction and thought is all claimed for himself by Jaques in his discourse on the role of the fool which appears in Act II scene vii:

> "I must have liberty

Withal, as large a charter as the wind,
To blow on whom I please, for so fools have."
(II, vii, 47)

These lines contain the essential purpose behind the scene on the heath in King Lear, for the three mad fools hurl abuse at the world with the same freedom and energy as the storm that rages all around them.

With Touchstone, adding his discordant note to the play, is the melancholy Jaques who, in the true spirit of the melancholiac, criticises everything in sight: both the society that springs up in the forest and the court from which the forest-dwellers have fled. Yet his criticism has none of the positive value of Touchstone's. He seems to reject anything, good or bad, and rarely seems to see the brighter side of things. He too holds the foretaste of things to come: for example his speech proclaiming that "All the world's a stage" (II, vii, 140) has about it, although to a lesser degree, much the same ring as Macbeth's

"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing." (V, v, 24)

Jaques's rejection of the good things in life, of faith in men's ability to come together in harmony and aid the progress of their society toward perfection is symbolised by his rejection of the dance at the end:

"So to your pleasures;
I am for other than for dancing measures."
(V, iv, I86)

His concern with the "foul things of life" reminds us of Macbeth who paid the full, tragic price for his attention to the three witches (foul things if ever there were) and his rejection of all the human bonds that give joy and meaning to life. Jaques is the dissenter. A little like Falstaff, he is the reminder that there are men whose natures reject the ideals of marriage and all that it symbolises. With the power and ambition of Macbeth directing such a rejection the consequences for mankind are terrible.

There are other presentiments of things to come, germs of ideas that will be developed to the full in the later tragedies. The Duke's self-conscious

"This is no flattery; these are counsellors
That feelingly persaude me what I am."
(II, i, IO)

when talking of the cold winter winds finds tragic expression in Gloucester's

"I see it feelingly." (King Lear IV, vi, I49)

which expresses Lear's experience after his agonised question

"Who is it that can tell me who I am?"
(King Lear I, iv, 229).

Similarly Jaques's

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude." (II, vii, 174)

expresses Lear's entire experience on the heath and is horribly echoed in Lear's

"Spit, fire; spout, rain.
I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;
I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children."
(King Lear III, ii, 14)

and

"Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once,
That makes ingrateful man." (III, ii, 8)

More examples could be found, but these few give one some idea of how Shakespeare's mind was turning. The whole play is more realistic and harsher in tone than the earlier comedies, particularly that happy play also set in the forest away from the city - A Midsummernight's Dream.

For the happy cave in which Duke and followers lived is soon to be abandoned by the happy believers in the comic vision of life to the melancholy Jaques and his concern with the "foul things" of this world. It will turn into a cell of the "prison" which Hamlet says the world has become, into the hovel in King Lear from which Tom emerges to strip from Lear the last vestiges of his sanity, into the cave in which Timon incarcerates himself and then, miraculously, it will become Prospero's cell on the enchanted island where Miranda and Ferdinand will be discovered playing chess for "all the world".

Twelfth Night; or, What You Will returns from the woods to the town, but in an altogether darker mood. This mood has been noted by several critics. John Middleton Murray says it contains a "silvery undertone of sadness, which makes it perhaps the loveliest of all Shakespeare's high comedies".(I)

W.H. Auden adds: "I get the impression that Shakespeare wrote the play at a time when he was in no mood for comedy, but in a mood of puritanical aversion to all those pleasing illusions which men cherish and by which men lead their lives. The comic convention...prevents him from giving direct expression to this mood, but keeps the mood disturbing, even spoiling the comic effect".(2)

Philip Edwards goes even further: "For all its vitality and humour, Twelfth Night is not only darker than As You Like It; it is in many respects an uncomfortable play".(3)

All point to the same quality. As a comedy it is quite adequate, but there are also to be seen undercurrents of something other than comedy which disturb the even tenor of the comic progression toward certainty and point away from the great comic synthesis of the sort seen in A Midsummernight's Dream.

The ending of the play is true to the comic way of things, for the lovers are happily united in matrimony, yet this state of harmony is restricted to the lovers and does not extend through all levels of the play. The other characters have given up their obligation to combine with

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(I) Shakespeare by J.M. Murray - pg. 225.

(2) "The Atmosphere of Twelfth Night" by W.H. Auden contained in Shakespeare's Comedies edited by L. Lerner.

(3) Shakespeare and the Confines of Art by P. Edwards - pg. 63.

the rest of the human race. They have split off into little groups each with its own idea of how to live, each idea clashing violently with the other or others. Malvolio rejects the drunkenness of Sir Toby and the conciliatory attempts of Olivia and storms forth, vowing revenge. There is no place in the ordered world of love for the chaotic, Falstaffian figures of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Maria, and so the men are sent to the surgeon to be cured, railing at the world in general and drunken fools in particular, although Sir Toby does marry Maria "in recompense" for her efforts to trick Malvolio. Neither has the world of love a place for the fool, Feste, who is left alone on the stage at the end of the play, a melancholy reminder of the impossible nature of the lover's dreams. The comic vision has only partially imposed its will, for it is unable to find a space in the world it creates for a large part of mankind.

Even the joy of the lovers is overshadowed by the nature of their love and the way in which they came together. Right until the last scene their way of looking at love has been a rejection of life rather than a commitment to it. Both Orsino and Olivia are afraid of the possible consequences of truly falling in love and so take refuge in a world of suffering of their own creation, which involves no kind of relationship with other men and which can be controlled with ease. Olivia cuts herself off from society in order to "mourn" her dead brother, while Orsino similarly isolates himself because of his "love" for Olivia, a love which has no chance of ever being fulfilled.

Shakespeare has to rely on chance and confusion in order to bring them out of their isolation. Olivia marries someone she has never met before because of a super-

ficial likeness to a "man" she thinks she loves while Orsino proposes marriage to a woman whom he had thought to be a man for most of the play.

As far as the love plot is concerned this play ends where most other comedies begin. The eye has made its choice and many complications will ensue before the heart confirms the arbitrary decision of the senses. Twelfth Night is an effort to bring the lovers to the stage where they can meet each other properly for the first time. Particularly in Orsino and Olivia there is a fear of life which makes them withdraw from society, rather than a faith in life so necessary to the comic vision, which makes for absolute commitment to society in particular and to life in general. The tendency to split into little groups at the end denies that there is any common ground between men. Feste's song of love, which in most comedies could be expected to be a song of celebration of joyous accord between the sexes, full of hope for a bright future, turns into a sad little ditty full of weariness and uncertainty about tomorrow:

> "What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
> Present mirth hath present laughter;
> What's to come is still unsure.
> In delay there lies no plenty,
> Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty;
> Youth's a stuff will not endure."
>
> (II, iii, 46)

The accent is on physical beauty that will fade. There is no hint of any sort of higher meaning in life, only a suggestion of future grief.

Most critics point to Feste's songs in particular, and his presence in the play in general, as being the chief

source of the underlying sadness. He makes fools of all the others with their silly behaviour, and sings for the joy of it, yet he openly pockets the money his master throws him. The world has become hard and cruel, and the poor fool must fend for himself.

So he is left alone at the end of the play, and the last word, in the form of a song, is given to him. This song comes close to reflecting the nature and mood of the play as a whole. Like the play it seems to be trying to say something sad, but, also like the play, it is prevented from doing so by its form, which insists on the repetition of the same old refrain each time. It implies the passing of time and with it a growing to maturity and an accompanying disillusionment and despair. It speaks of love and marriage, yet at the same time of fools and drunkards. It makes an attempt to begin at the beginning and then work it all out ("A great while ago the world began"), but it gives up the attempt ("But that's all one") and seems to accept the impossibility of saying what it wants to say within the limits of the form chosen for it. And anyway, people do not really wish to hear such things even if they were expressible, preferring pleasure to truth. But, like the song, they cannot avoid the "wind and the rain" that falls everyday, darkening the clear sky and dampening their spirits, to bring the eternal note of sadness into human affairs. I quote it in full:

When that I was and a little tiny boy,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
A foolish thing was but a toy,
For the rain it raineth every day.

fools"), to stand outside the happy world comedy seeks to create, to disobey the supposedly God-given law of order, and to follow their own selfish instincts, usually to the detriment of the human race as a whole. The comic vision prevented them from manifesting their full potential for destruction and disorder, but it did so by avoiding or ignoring them and not by controlling them. By doing so, it showed its inability to help in the quest for certainty which Bush suggests was at the heart of the Elizabethan belief in the concept of order, and simultaneously its own essential faults. If it could not work, if it could solve no really important problems, then it must be based on a false premise and must therefore be rejected, even though the state of harmony it promised was so desirable to the Elizabethans. Shakespeare still believed in a need for order and admired all the qualities he saw in men who lived according to its rules, but he could no longer believe that it was inevitable that order would manifest itself in men's lives and in society, that is he no longer believed it was a principle in a divine plan.

Still with a desire for order in mind, he turned away from the comic vision of life to a new attempt to find some basis upon which order could be truly established on earth, and so once more achieve some sort of certainty as to the nature and meaning of life. He does this in the later plays by making this need for order and certainty simply a human need rather than a God-given certainty, which is as strong, but no stronger, than the human potential for disorder, disruption and evil. He will then write plays in which both human types struggle to assert what they think to be the best way of life.

This struggle will be carried on with no certainty

of the good's ultimately and surely triumphing as always occurred in the comedies and histories. If man wishes for a law of order to manifest itself then he himself will have to make himself live according to the dictates of such a law, and if he fails, it will be due to his own weakness or deficiency. The stakes for which the men of the future plays will be playing will be life itself. Any victory will attest the meaning and value of life, while defeat will lead to inevitable death. Yet even if the champions of "the good" are destroyed, as they so often are in the tragedies, their struggle will attest a value of life far greater than we have ever seen before in Shakespeare's work because, even though they die, their struggle will be measured agaist the strength of their opponents and valued by the stakes for which they are playing.

The ability to conceive of such a struggle will have been made possible in the playwright's mind only by his giving away completely to the doubts about the security of the human condition, as assured by the Elizabethan world view, which had been building up in his mind as he had been writing the histories and the comedies. He would now refuse to approach any re-evaluation of life with any pre-conceived notions, preferring to believe only in the enormous potential present in every man for both affirmation and negation, hope and despair, for everything that is good and everything that is bad. For this is the "different enterprise of the mind" of which Bush speaks in the passage quoted earlier, the outcome of which is so "incomplete and inconclusive" because it is concerned with "matters more personal, more obscure, and more exacting of our fears and affections". Its achievement, and the truth of the feelings it arouses, are

attested by the greatness of the works produced by such an enterprise and by the stature of the man who produced them in the eyes of the world.

THE EARLY TRAGEDIES

During the early period of his career Shakespeare wrote five plays which can be called tragedies. Three of them, Richard III, Richard II and Julius Caesar are more often called history or political plays because of the nature of their plots and themes. Only Titus Andronicus and Romeo and Juliet are seen as tragedies without further qualification, and it is remarkable that Titus is probably the least popular of all the tragedies, while Romeo and Juliet is possibly the most popular.

It is easy to find reasons for the unpopularity of Titus. This early, immature study of the worser side of man's nature turns into a bloody Senecan revenge tragedy in which we loose all sympathy for the hero, coming to view him with the sort of loathing usually reserved for a man like Iago. Titus falls far short of achieving the stature of a true tragic hero whose struggle redeems human nature, but sinks rather to the level of a beast bent only on personal revenge on men and women as depraved as he is. The clash is one of evil with evil, and so while there is a steady movement in the play towards a complete breakdown of order and the rule of law, there is no simultaneous development of an affirmative, redemptive value which gives meaning to the tragic hero's death and to human life in general which we have come to associate with tragedy. Any positive value is imposed outside of the tragic experience of the hero, as the "good" Romans under Lucius and the "good" Goths join forces to free Rome from the control of such depraved and unnatural creatures. Before they arrive, however, these creatures have destroyed each other, literally and figuratively preying on each other, and so all that is left to do is to instate Lucius king and so assure the return of order and good government in the state.

A comparison of the sort of action that takes place shows little difference between Titus and the later tragedies. Hamlet contains as many corpses, the deaths in the final scene follow just as quickly upon each other, and an army, under Fortinbras,

takes over to restore the land to a relative state of equilibrium. Similarly in Macbeth the hero turns into a sort of beast and an army of exiles in the service of "the good" returns to restore order and good government, while no action in Titus is more horrible than the blinding of Gloucester in King Lear. But the objection is not to be found in the nature of the action itself. It lies rather in the lack of motivation for such an action.

Titus plunges a sword into the chest of one of his sons and the action is horrible. Macbeth kills a king who the previous day had heaped him with honours, but the horror we feel is not a simple horror of violence as such but rather a deep inner motion of the mind as it follows the twistings and turnings of Macbeth's soul on the torturous road towards murder. Titus's action remains a simple deed without any meaning. Macbeth's action opens up to us a deeper insight into a whole attitude to life, and its consequences expand in their significance into a profound exploration of human nature itself. The conflict is not a simple one of good against bad such as we find in the early tragedies but involves problems which question the very nature of man and the values by which he lives his life.

I refer once again to Bush's comment which I quoted in connection with the comedies, but is eminently applicable here: "... Hamlet and Lear have survived: they belong to a different enterprise of the mind, concerned with matters more personal, more obscure, and more exacting of our fears and affections. They are an experiment in the thought that did not end in failure: and what is striking about them is that their outcome is so incomplete and inconclusive".(1) Perhaps this points to the reason why we find Titus so uninspiring. Our response is simple because the play is so clear-cut that everything can be

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(1) Shakespeare and the Natural Order - G. Bush pg. 6.

taken at face value. We know exactly where our sympathy lies. There is no human conflict to be found that could exact the sort of response that one would expect to Hamlet or Othello; there is nothing to get us involved in the action. It may have been easy for the groundling who had to choose between bear-baiting or this play for his afternoon's entertainment, but it did not satisfy the young playwright who in the future would steer well clear of this sort of thing until, working through the comedies and histories, he gathered knowledge of and insight into human nature and the motives behind human actions to write plays that would grip the minds of his audiences completely rather than rely on the appeal of cheap violence to fill his theatre. It is mode of treatment rather than themes that will change, for the revenge theme will occur again in Hamlet, while in the process of a man's alienation from nature and from life itself which is a part of Titus will become the theme of a whole play in Macbeth.

J.C. Maxwell, in his introduction to the Arden edition of Titus, also finds many similarities between this play and both Othello and King Lear, particularly in Titus's simplicity and his willingness to destroy someone dear to him for the sake of his honour. "He is, like Othello, essentially an isolated figure, though Shakespeare has not yet devised an adequate presentation of this: the feigned madness is the best he can do at the culminating point".(1) His anger and inflexibility are similar to Lear's and like Lear's this anger will be directed at a well-loved child. Maxwell also points out that Titus never arrives at the sort of healing self-knowledge which Lear achieves.

Both of Maxwell's points further define the suggestion made earlier, that the immature playwright can see the outward

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(1) Titus Andronicus by J.C. Maxwell pg. xliv of the introduction.

actions that go toward the making of a tragedy but is unable to express the inner workings of the tragic hero's mind. This sort of understanding is necessary both for the great tragedies of the sort that Shakespeare wrote later and for the redemptive power of the tragic experience to manifest itself. Titus cannot be made to arrive at self-knowledge simply because the playwright himself does not have sufficient insight into human nature to write of such things. It is only after the practice of the comedies and the histories had borne fruit in an understanding of the tragic potentialities of life that comes from such writing that a great tragedy could be written, for it is only then that the causes of conflict within the human heart are fully understood.

That is why in Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare steers carefully clear of such inner conflicts, preferring to write a play about a clash of two families embroiled in physical conflict and about the clash of allegiance that will destroy the two "star-crossed" lovers. By so acknowledging his limitations he writes one of his most popular plays.

But it was more than just the nature of the tragic conflict in Romeo and Juliet that made him feel more at home when writing it. "A young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love", and Shakespeare was no exception. He was already busy, in keeping with the fashion of the day, writing a series of sonnets to his love, while at the same time working on a number of romantic comedies. To write a tragedy of love would have been the obvious thing to do in the circumstances.

The influence of the comedies is very apparent, firstly in the introduction into tragedy of essentially comic figures and situations, and secondly in the treatment of the love theme in the initial stages of the play when Romeo thinks he is in love with Rosaline.

But for the background of the brutal and senseless street

brawl, the lines Romeo speaks, and the attitudes he strikes as well as the way in which Shakespeare treats the situation could have come straight out of any comedy. A simple example shows how superficial the feeling is that Romeo claims to be experiencing. He is bewailing the lot of a man in love to his cousin Benvolio when Capulet's servant comes up with a list of invitations to the party where the tragedy will really begin:

> "Not mad, but bound more than madman is;
> Shut up in prison, kept without my food,
> Whipt and tormented, and ---God-den, good fellow."
> (I,ii,54)

The ease with which his train of thought is distracted from his fearful "torment" attests the superficiality of his feeling and fully justifies Mercutio's mockery of his state of mind. The situation is comic, and the last line of Romeo's speech is worthy of any romantic comedy.

Yet the style of the play is formal and often ritualistic; as if Shakespeare was writing a great love epic in traditional form. The influence of comedy becomes apparent here for although the play moves in ordered patterns to its formal conclusion there is throughout constant criticism of any formal, "bookish" attitude towards experience; of the tendency (of which Romeo's words are a fine example) to romanticise and mystify experience out of all proportion to its real nature. This criticism prevents the play from becoming too ritualistic and so emphasises the uniquely human nature of the tragedy.

As I have suggested, the influence of the comedies is felt in the introduction into the action of characters like Mercutio and the Nurse; characters who are the chief agents of the sort of criticism mentioned in the previous paragraph. Yet it should be noticed that the influence of such characters wanes as the

play approaches its tragic climax. The comic earthiness of the Nurse and the cynical wit of Mercutio have no place in high tragedy. Shakespeare cleverly kills two birds with one stone, both initiating the tragic action and clearing the ground of characters likely to hinder the action with the death of Mercutio.

Mercutio is excellent so long as he is criticising a human folly like Romeo's unreal love for Rosaline which is causing only imaginary suffering, but when he has to criticise a folly like the quarrel between the two houses, a folly that is causing real suffering and which can only be stopped at the cost of even more suffering, then he must be banished from the play. His wit is too cynical, too belittling of everything to allow the real value that stems from such suffering to accrue. He cannot conceive of any higher and greater human aspirations, for it is his nature to belittle everything, in a wholly negative way. He can no more make Romeo see reason over his love for Rosaline than he can prevent the quarrel between the two houses from running its course. Both stem from the irrational part of man's nature that can be the cause of great folly but also the source of everything that gives meaning to human existence, courage, nobility of character, dignity, magnanimity and so forth. In the sort of world that we see in this play, where irrational human folly can only be prevented by an equally irrational process- human love - Mercutio is out of place. For from Mercutio's death will come nothing but "worm's meat", while from the deaths of the two lovers will come golden statues and the ending of a centuries-old quarrel. Mercutio dies in a way that suits his style of living "accidentally, irrelevantly, ridiculously; in a word, prosaically"(I), as the result of an accidental thrust in an unnecessary sword-fight. He has given a much needed perspective but has solved nothing. This is in itself a telling

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(I) Shakespeare's Early Tragedies by N.S. Brooke - pg. 83.

comment on the sort of world he inhabits.

Yet the fact that Shakespeare's as yet immature tragic vision could still find space for a man like Mercutio or a character like the Nurse shows a significant development. Similarly his use of scenes involving minor characters marks the beginning of what would later become a much used and extremely effective technique. He opens the play with a scene involving the servants of the two houses in order to bring out the absurd, irrational but horrific nature of the quarrel between the two houses, thus laying the groundwork for the whole play. So many of the later tragedies will open with just such a scene in which Shakespeare will set the tone of the whole play. Even the great tragedies will contain comic figures like the grave-digger in Hamlet or Roderigo in Othello as Shakespeare fits all types and all classes into the pattern of his plays, attempting to come to terms with the whole of human experience.

For all this, however, Romeo and Juliet remains what Brooke calls "a formal exercise in romantic tragedy, given the kind of overt formality if structure and verse which rather suggests the order of a stately dance".(1) The young playwright was still testing his capabilities in a relatively unexplored field, always having the rules of formal tragedy to fall back upon should he find himself in difficulties.

More important still, as in Titus, the moral response of the audience is never in doubt. We are able to pass judgement on the two houses with the same confidence as the Prince of Verona, for the play was written with faith in the ultimate manifestation of a rule of order and harmony in life, despite all that the worser side of human nature can do to prevent it. This belief is essentially the same as inspired the histories and comedies and made them such optimistic statements about

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(1) Ibid - pg. 81.

the nature of human existence; a belief that was breaking down as Shakespeare journeyed further into his exploration of human nature.

Romeo and Juliet is concerned with a conflict which may need the power of tragedy to resolve, but which still ends, despite the death of the young hero and heroine, in a promise of hope for the future so reminiscent of the comedies. The contrast between this play and Shakespeare's much later attempt at writing a tragedy, Julius Caesar, is striking.

In Julius Caesar, unlike any of the earlier plays, there is no certainty as regards our moral response for there are no morally clear-cut characters or situations. For Shakespeare, without the certainty and security that belief in a concept like order gives, life becomes a much more difficult matter with which to contend. Instead of a simple affair involving a conflict of good and evil in which the good eventually triumphs, it becomes a problematic affair with the only really certain fact to cling to being that life is uncertain. It becomes a jumbled mixture of good and bad with no clearly discernible dividing line in between or, as Shakespeare himself has expressed it so much better; "the web of life is a mingled yarn, good and evil together". (All's Well That Ends Well IV, iii, 64) The dangerous nature of such an existence is well brought out in this line. Life becomes a trap; the sort of trap into which Hamlet, Lear, Othello and Macbeth will fall before its secrets are unravelled.

The ambiguous nature of the man who provides the play with its title, Julius Caesar, gives us insight into the equally ambiguous nature of the play as a whole. It is

from this ambiguity that the uncertainty as to the correct moral response to the play, mentioned above, stems.

Is Caesar "the noblest man that ever lived in the tide of time" that Mark Antony makes him out to be, or is he the megalomaniac epileptic out to enslave Rome that Cassius says he is? Not only do we have two conflicting opinions of Caesar's true nature, but we have no way of judging how sincere each opinion is, for Cassius is so envious of Caesar's power that his judgement is completely warped, while Antony uses the qualities he supposedly sees in Caesar to stir up the mob to violence and to feather his own nest. Even when viewed strictly from the point of view of the audience without the bias of one of the character's opinions, Caesar seems to be a strange combination of arrogance, pride, egotism, superstition and physical weakness, indecision and foolhardiness. He seems to be an easy target for the manipulations of Antony, Calpurnia, Decius Brutus and the conspirators and rarely seems worthy of the intrigue and violence that takes place because of him.

We come to see that his own character is of little importance, for he is only valued by men insofar as they are able to use him for their personal ends. When he is an agent of their ambition they bow and scrape:

> "Peace, ho! Caesar speaks." (I, ii, 2)
> "When Caesar says 'Do this', it is perform'd."
> (I, ii, IO)

but when he threatens to prevent their own rise to power they cut him down without a thought. For in this play a man is obeyed only for as long as he has the brute strength to enforce obedience, and not because he has the backing of the

law. His power is a law unto itself before which all men yield, unless they are powerful enough to overcome him and make their own word law by the strength of their own arm. Antony's humility before the triumphant conspirators is so typical of this sort of attitude. He is fearful for his life and too weak at the time to enforce his own authority, and so must make peace with the conspirators until he can use the violence of the mob to gain control of the city. The violence of the mob, epitomised by the way in which it kills the poet because of a coincidence of names and the cynical way in which Antony disinherits the very people who brought him to power, is confirmation of the fact that the fall of the conspirators has not brought a return of the rule of law to Rome but simply the transfer of power from one ambitious and unscrupulous group to another. This power will be used with equal selfishness and as few scruples by Antony and Octavius as it was by Cassius or by Caesar. So if it is the spirit of Caesar that Brutus cannot avoid and that will destroy him, then it is the spirit of megalomania, deceit, lies and treachery. This spirit seems to inspire every action that takes place.

The tragedy, if any, is to be found in Brutus's attempt to assert some sort of moral standards in a world that has no concept of such things. Brutus becomes the victim of his own integrity. He tries to be true to himself and to his values in a world where men are never true to themselves but rather to the needs of any particular situation with which they happen to be faced. Hence Antony is humble to the conspirators and conciliatory to the mob at first, until he has subtley swung them over to his way of thinking, when he becomes openly inflammatory. Because Brutus cannot conceive of

such hypocrisy and judges men by his own, constant standards, his actions so often become ironic rather than tragic. The supreme irony comes when the mob calls for him to "be Caesar" and so become the very thing he was trying to prevent. He does not understand that justice and freedom are obsolete words, or expressions to be used for personal ends. He cannot see that the mob need to be ruled, and that a powerful Caesar could only be replaced by another powerful man, be he Cassius, Antony or Octavius. His complete lack of insight into the realities of his condition turns him from a potential tragic hero into something closer to a fool, who cannot even commit suicide properly.

The divided and ambiguous responses elicited by most of the characters in this play reflect the ambiguous moral nature of the play as a whole. For the first time in one of Shakespeare's plays we are uncertain as to where our sympathies should lie. For it is in this play that the breakdown of moral certainty finally comes to the surface and becomes the most important impression that we get of the play. This uncertainty is no longer, as in Twelfth Night, a mere undercurrent threatening to disturb, but never succeeding in disturbing the moral balance and ultimate order of the play. Julius Caesar is the break-through into a different world-view; a vision of life that can only be seen in perspective after a complete and profound reassessment of human nature.

For with the writing of Julius Caesar Shakespeare expresses the final breakdown in his belief in the old order of things. To him there was no longer a factor in human destiny that made for an ordered progress towards perfection, or in society that gave a valid code of behaviour, true to all, upon which bonds of faith and trust could be built up between men. Such a code of behaviour, held by all, based

on a system in which all men believed, made life a simple affair. One could easily and correctly judge one's own actions and the actions of one's fellow man. More important one could interact with other men knowing that he believed in and desired the same sort of things as the rest of mankind, and would act accordingly to these commonly held beliefs and desires. One could trust other men with the certainty that the trust was reciprocated, and one could obey the law because the law stemmed from a system that had the ultimate perfection of mankind as its aim, and was therefore the obvious thing to obey.

Shakespeare, while writing the histories, comedies and early tragedies, came to realise that there was a large part of humanity that did not fit in with this system of belief, preferring to disobey its laws and stand outside its carefully ordered scheme of things. He saw the system had no place within its framework for this large part of humanity, and that it had no power to protect itself from the destructive tendencies of these people. With this realisation came a collapse of his belief in the system and all it meant to him.

Man was no longer a link in a great chain of being, because the unifying factor which was supposed to have joined up the chain was found to have no power to bind men in relationship to his fellows, to the world around him, or to his God. Each man became an isolated unit with no common ground between him and any other man (which belief in an objective moral system should have supplied), with no common code of beliefs to ensure his physical or spiritual security and with no law to control his interaction with his fellow man but the law of brute force. This is the sort of situation that faces the men of Julius Caesar.

History, instead of being a divinely guided progress towards the establishment of order in the state, becomes a Machiavellian power struggle with one tyrant brutally preying on another, the only order stemming from the tyrant's realisation that his power is secure only when he can control his sources of power - his friends, the army and the mob.

So the rule of faith gives way to the rule of violence. History remains an impersonal force, but in a totally different way from the generally held Elizabethan view. It became similar to Engels's view, which held that each man applied his personal energy in an attempt to guide the progress of history. Six or seven strong men, all pushing history in opposite directions will cancel each other out, so that history, although it moves, will go in a direction which none of them desire. Only when all opposition has been neutralised can one strong man guide history on the path he plans. He then sets up his own personal standard of "the good" which is in no way subject to divine decree. In an insecure world, even this arbitrary imposition of a moral code can give security to the frightened and helpless among men. When the mob tell Brutus to "be Caesar" they are demanding this sort of temporary security rather than no security at all.

Julius Caesar is the exploration of a political situation from which all objective standards of "the good" have been banished and in which arbitrary, selfish standards are applied by brute force. In Hamlet Shakespeare will explore the tragic consequences of such a situation when an individual with a strong sense of and desire for an ordered and morally sound society is faced with, and is expected to act in, a world that denies all he seeks.

HAMLET

Although Julius Caesar is Shakespeare's first conscious statement that life as he had come to know it was not the harmonious and ordered affair that it was supposed to be, this play has less impact than a play written on a similar theme but probably a little later, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Brutus's lack of insight into his position, his ignominious death, and the triumph of men who are obviously lacking in any sort of moral integrity, alienates the audience from Julius Caesar, while the intense consciousness and eternal questioning, the youthfulness and impulsiveness of Hamlet and, above all, the ability of the audience to identify so strongly with him, make him the ideal tragic hero, and his play a favourite among playgoers throughout the world. We tend to remember Julius Caesar because of Antony's speech over the body of the murdered Caesar. The very nature of the struggle waged by Hamlet grips us because it reflects a struggle that most people have undertaken at some stage in their lives. Julius Caesar, for all it says about an essential and very real part of human experience, remains relatively distant from us and becomes an action of a number of actors, awakening chords of meaning in us, rather than an intimate experience brought directly home to us. The main reason for this is, I think, the limitations of Brutus as a tragic hero. Because of his stoicism his vision of life is limited and the scope of the play built around him becomes limited. There are no such limitations to Hamlet's vision. It ranges between heaven and earth, reaching into the very core of human experience.

The mention of the word "Hamlet" is usually sufficient to provoke intense discussion from almost any person who has read or seen the play, for no work has so captured the

imagination of the world as this has. The number of critical works written about it and the diversity of the opinions expressed attest its provocative nature. It seems to lay itself open to any number of interpretations, each of which seems in some way valid or helpful to one's own interpretation of the play. This openness to a variety of interpretations, and the way in which this play has fascinated so many people for so many years suggests to me that Shakespeare is dealing with a theme that has more than just the usual meanings to most people. Its theme seems to reflect an intimate and personal part of most men's lives.

As I have suggested earlier, it seems to be concerned with the response of a sensitive individual to a morally ambiguous world. How does this relate so clearly to the experience of every man?

Each man as he attains a state of moral consciousness, leaves the world of childish innocence and comes to realise that he has to live and act in a world that has become strange and mystifying. He has to come to terms with this world. He has to come to know his own nature and the nature of human existence. He has to develop moral standards by which he must judge the nature of existence, his own actions and the actions of the men all around him. He has to find a guiding principle by which he must live his life. For all the experience and teachings of his elders and of the thinkers and philosophers throughout the ages, he has ultimately to work out these things for himself, and through this to realise a sense of his own identity and of his position in the world. Until he works out a principle upon which to base his judgements, a principle that will give a pattern of meaning to all aspects of his life, existence will seem to be a meaningless flow from birth

to death, devoid of any purpose. This principle will integrate his own experience with that of his fellow men and will give meaning to his own life and to the events that occur all around him.

In times when an objective moral system was firmly embedded in man's moral consciousness, this sort of problem scarcely arose. All that the developing young man had to do was to study the moral code that had already been worked out for him. I have already attempted to show how Shakespeare could no longer believe in the system of belief held in his times. In the context of this thesis, Hamlet would therefore express the coming of age of Shakespeare's vision of life as he leaves the secure, comfortable world of the comedies and histories (secure and comfortable because even at their worst, most violent moments, there is always the knowledge in the mind's of the audience that all will turn out for the best) and moves into a completely different world where there are no standards by which to judge, and only the desire to affirm some sort of standard to guide the individual on his first, uncertain steps into this world.

In a larger sense, the attempts of the young prince to come to terms with life and with the actions of the men and women all around him, reflect the task which all of us face at some time in our lives to come to terms with our own lives and to ascertain our own identity and our role in life. Whether this struggle is conscious or unconscious is of no consequence, for the poetry of the play and its powerful symbolism will evoke a response deep in our sub-conscious.

Hamlet is the story of three kings; a king that was, a

king that is, and a king that is to be. The symbolic importance of the king to the Elizabethan audience should not be forgotten here. The king was not merely a man in high office, but a symbol for the nation as a whole. Upon him depended the health, security and vigour of the state. A good king meant an ordered, happy people while a bad king corrupted the entire state, leading to insecurity and uncertainty's spreading through the land. The king had to be intensely conscious of right and wrong for he was God's representative on earth and had therefore to give the justice of God to all who sought it. A king's son had to be more conscious than most of the importance of the role he had to play in life, and of the standards by which he was to judge and evaluate life, for it will be by these standards that a whole nation will also live and judge.

The three kings in the story represent the past, the present and future in the moral affairs of the nation, and, in the context of this thesis, symbolise the past, present and future of Shakespeare's vision of life.

The Ghost speaks from the certainty of the past to a young man whose concern is with the present and the future. It therefore speaks with the confidence of a man who is assured of his condition and of his ability to differentiate clearly between right and wrong. It has judged Claudius according to its set of standards, found him guilty and informs Hamlet of the actions that it requires of him.

The crime Claudius committed is barbarous in itself, but on a symbolic level has far greater significance than merely a simple case of murder. The moral integrity of an entire nation has been overthrown by his deed, and he is left on the throne, the living symbol of this tragic state of affairs. The speech the ghost of old Hamlet speaks in

which he describes the manner of his death describes not only the poisoning of a body, but also the way in which, symbolically, the poison corrupted the security and health of the body-politic:

"Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole,
With juice of cursed herbona in a vial,
And in the porches of my ears did pour
The leperous distilment; whose effect
Holds such an enmity with blood of man
That swift as quicksilver it courses through
The natural gates and alleys of the body;
And with a sudden vigour it doth posset
And curd, like eager droppings into milk
The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine;
And a most instant tetter bark'd about,
Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust,
All my smooth body."

(I,v,61)

The security not only of the king, but of the people of Denmark has been cast down by a sudden and scarcely understood influx of evil. The king who rules, who symbolises the new state of Denmark's moral health, has killed in order to obtain the throne. His presence on the throne makes a mockery of the concepts that were taken for granted in old Hamlet's day; justice, integrity, honour. A whole moral system, that bound men together, allowing them to live in harmony with one another, is crumbling. Young Fortinbras, whose father gave up life and land on a point of honour, is secretly preparing to have his revenge. The King of Denmark lives a lie, acting out his sacred office (and none will deny that superficially Claudius has about him all the attributes of a good king) but in reality being a man more worthy of inhabiting a gibbet than a throne. The old order has passed away, and the new

order is a very different thing. The young Hamlet is left with a vague memory of things as they used to be, and a startlingly vivid impression of things as they are. All too conscious of the importance of his task, he has to come to terms with, and attempt to impose some order on a moral situation that seems to be guided by no abiding principle, but changes with the whims and lusts of weak or evil men.

The Polonius-Laertes-Ophelia sub-plot is used by Shakespeare to show how this rotten state of affairs is not only confined to the actions of the king, but pervades the whole land. I have already suggested above that the Fortinbras incident shows how the moral laxity has spread seemingly throughout the earth. It is significant that the scene in which the Ghost tells Hamlet of the nature of the king on the throne is sandwiched in between two scenes concerning Polonius's family. The contrast between the moral tone of the two scenes shows immediately the concrete effect of the symbolic transfer of power from one king to another of which the Ghost speaks.

Act I, iii shows a pleasant domestic scene. Laertes is gently warning his sister of the dangers involved in falling in love with a prince. Hamlet will one day be king, and cannot therefore allow personal feelings to effect in any way his actions, for upon him depends the "health and security" of the whole state. (I, iii, 21) Similarly, as a loyal subject, who should have the good of the country at heart, Ophelia must subdue her personal feelings before her patriotic duty. Laertes's advice is excellent in its way and expresses all the wisdom of a moral man with a sound sense of duty and an alert awareness of his position and role in the society in which he lives.

In the same way the advice Polonius gives to his son is classic in its way and provides Laertes with an eminently valid code of behaviour capable of giving him a sure guide through any situation that may confront him in his life to come. It provides principles for the interaction of all men on a sane and rational basis leading to the good of all. The words befit the dignity of an old man who has learnt from his experience and has lived his life with integrity to receive the rewards he so justly deserves, an honourable position as advisor to the highest in the land.

There then follows the shock of the Ghost-Hamlet scene in which we discover that the man whom Polonius serves, who should be the living epitome of all that Polonius has mentioned, is little better than a common murderer. The symbolic meaning of this revelation is driven home in very concrete terms when the benign and dignified old man of Act I, iii, who preached the golden mean and gave a father's blessing to his departing son, turns into a repulsive creature quite prepared to besmirch his son's reputation in order to save himself a little money. The wise old man becomes a rambling fool who cannot remember from one moment to the next the way in which his devious train of thought is turning. The speech he reeled off to his son was, and still is, a set speech to be learnt by rote and recited at appropriate times, but with the full knowledge that it means nothing to either listener or speaker. It remains a gesture and little more.

Similarly we find the noble Laertes, who spoke so well of the waiving of personal grievances or affections for the good of the state, and of respect for the person of the king, is the same man who will burst in at the head of a mob shouting "to hell allegiance" in order to take his

revenge on just such a person for just such a personal motive. It is all a game they play, talking of words like "honour" and "justice", but, when it comes to the test, acting in an unjust and dishonourable manner. So it is the same noble Laertes who can sink to using an unblunted, poisoned weapon in what is supposed to be a friendly duel. As the poison rotted the body of King Hamlet so it has poisoned the soul of the whole nation.

Hamlet, after hearing the Ghost's words, is also put to the test. He is expected to take decisive action, of the sort that demands moral certainty before it can even be contemplated, and yet he has no moral standards by which to judge his actions. It is here that the reason for his supposed inability to act is to be found.

His position is an impossible one. Claudius has killed a king and taken his throne. Hamlet is told by the Ghost to do <u>exactly the same thing</u> and yet view his own actions as being wholly laudable. It is clear, therefore, that it is essential that Hamlet knows that what he is doing is right, good and just. He must undergo the experience I discussed briefly at the beginning of the chapter. He must come to terms with himself, his fellow men and his God. There is absolutely no room for error, for a man's life, another man's soul, and the future of a nation are at stake. It is little wonder that Hamlet thinks of himself as being suspended between heaven and hell, and even less wonder that he cannot take a decisive step, for he has no moral basis upon which to act. The self-assured member of the audience, confident in his ability to judge life, sees Hamlet as a procrastinator evading his responsibilities with his endless speculation. Hamlet, in the centre of a whirl of frightening experience, unsupported by any clear-cut moral vision, is

taking upon himself the most burdensome task it is possible to undertake. He isbeing over-responsible rather than irresponsible, for he is tragically aware of the nature of the situation and of the consequences of any error of judgement on his part. Before he can act he must be certain.

Why is he not certain of his moral standpoint? The Ghost's position is clear. There is no doubt in its mind as to the nature of and punishment for Claudius's crime. But Hamlet is not his father. He is a young man faced for the first time with the problem of taking a decisive step upon the outcome of which the security of his own soul and of the Danish state rests. The task is burdensome, and it is little wonder that Hamlet cringes from the onerous undertaking before him:

> "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right!"
> (I, v, 189)

We must remember that he is not his father and, more important, his father's world, his father's "time", is not his own. He is faced with a completely different situation from any his father might have faced; and this is symbolised by the nature of the man on the throne. He is therefore doing the natural thing; firstly seeking proof, and secondly looking around him to find out how others react to the situation and also to discover the nature of the world in which he lives. The things he sees horrify him, and derange his moral bearings completely.

His mother, the person whom he loved most after his father, has openly abdicated her connection with and faith in all that his father symbolised and gone over to Claudius.

Her marriage to him suggests both the sickness of the world and her acknowledgement, whether consciously or subconsciously, of her adherence to and approval of the lack of principles for which he stands.

With the shock of the Ghost's words comes the added shock to the world-weary Hamlet of Ophelia's unwarrented rejection of his love for her. He then takes a perculiar, seemingly irrational step yet one which, I feel, captures perfectly the spirit in which Hamlet would like to face up to life, and the difference between his attitude and that of those all around him. Ophelia comes running to her father to tell him the following story about Hamlet:

> "...as I was sewing in my closet,
> Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbrac'd,
> No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
> Ungart'red and down-gyved to the ankle;
> Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
> And with a look so piteous in purport
> As if he had been loosed out of hell
> To speak of horrors - he comes before me."
> (II, i, 77)

Compare this description to the one Rosalind gives to the love-sick Orlando of the typical lover in As You Like It III, ii, 346:

> "A lean cheek,...a blue eye and sunken...a board neglected...Then your hose should be ungarter'd, your bonnet unbanded, your sleeve unbutton'd, your shoe untied and everything about you demonstrating a careless desolation."

One finds that the description fits exactly. Hamlet is

playing the role of the traditional lover in order to demonstrate by external show how much and how truly he loves her. To Hamlet the outward appearance of the man reflects truly his mind. Remember his bitter words to his mother that his black clothes were not merely the "suits and trappings of woe" but the reflection of a profound feeling of grief in his heart. Ophelia, brought up in the world of Polonius and Laertes, Claudius and Gertrude, a world of hypocrisy and deceit where the noblest of exteriors can hide the blackest of hearts, has no concept of such integrity and is unknowingly made to act in a way as deceitful as those around her. Her corruption is a concrete example of the way in which evil men, working in the guise of goodness and duty, can turn the purest and noblest of minds into an instrument of equal deceit. Hamlet asks Ophelia of the whereabouts of her father, knowing full well that Polonius is hiding behind the pillar, listening in. She answers "at home, my lord", and the disaster is complete. To Hamlet no-one is pure, no-one is honest, no-one is trustworthy and there is nothing left for which it is worth living, while the things for which men die are not worth anything either.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, men with whom Hamlet speaks of "the rights of our fellowship, ... the consonancy of our youth, ... the obligation of our ever-preserved love", in other words, men who are supposed to be his friends, are betraying him to the king.

A player king acting out his mourning for the death of a fictional character, is as sincere in his emotion as the people living all around Hamlet. If the actor can play out his suffering so convincingly, might not any man do the same? His tortured face does not reflect a tortured mind, but rather a serene one, happy in the success with which he plays his part.

Hamlet watches an army of twenty-thousand men marching to attack a patch of land not big enough to provide burial place for the dead of the battle. It seems utterly worthless, yet the Poles are garrisoning it with equal enthusiasm.

The young prince finds himself living in, and trying to reconcile, two worlds. One is an ideal world once real, but now no more than a dream; a world in which the king was just, his mother was pure, the Ghost was a true spirit, Ophelia was innocent, Laertes was a noble youth, Polonius a wise old man, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern his true friends, and men fought for something worth fighting over. But for the names of the people concerned (and this, if anything, increases the horror of it all) this world in no way relates to the real world he sees before him, a world in which the king is a murderer, the Ghost is an illusion (Gertrude cannot see the Ghost), Ophelia is a liar, Laertes a bloodthirsty barbarian, Polonius is evil, friends are enemies and men die for no purpose. The whole world is transformed. Denmark becomes a "prison". This "goodly frame the earth" becomes a "sterile promontory"; "this most excellent canopy the air" becomes no more than a "most foul and pestilent congregation of vapours". Man, without any abiding and just standard by which to judge himself, changes from "the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals" into a "quintessence of dust". (II, ii, 298-307)

The awful dichotomy in his mind between what he knows man should be and what he sees man really is, paralyses him. The act of killing the king, or any action for that matter, must, to a moral man like Hamlet, be performed with the assurance that it is good, correct and meaningful within the context in which it is performed. Hamlet could have acted in the ideal world, the world that exists in his mind, but cannot take any planned action in a world that makes a mockery of any attempt

at meaningful action. The moral confusion, and the feeling that he must act, to which he is prompted by the demands of the ideal world in his mind, lead to strange consequences. Acting on the spur of the moment, and believing that he has caught Claudius in the middle of yet another underhand action, he plunges his sword into the arras, only to find he has killed Polonius. Yet a few minutes earlier he has found the king praying in the audience chamber, only to argue himself out of taking revenge then, because the king's soul would go to heaven instead of hell. These struggling attempts to impose some sort of value-judgement on his experience lead him into contradiction, unnecessary violence and a temporary loss of sympathy on the part of the audience. The tired, repentant king on his knees is far more sympathetic than the arrogant young man rationalising his actions in a manner more reminiscent of Laertes.

Further irrationality is to follow. He watches the funeral procession in the graveyard and then jumps into the grave to grapple with Laertes who has been loudly proclaiming the strength of his love for Ophelia. This sort of positive statement, in a world where everything seems to be void of meaning, is exactly the thing for which Hamlet has been searching. He springs into the grave not because he hates Laertes (a few lines earlier he had referred to Laertes as a "noble youth") but because he envies Laertes's ability to find something of value in a sterile world and to take decisive action in a situation that so closely mirrors Hamlet's own. The words Hamlet uses are decisive and significant:

> "This is I,
> Hamlet the Dane." (V, i, 251)

Failure to find meaning in life means a failure to find any meaning or substance in himself, while a chance to affirm meaning is a chance to affirm his own identity. The identity crisis so often appearing in modern literature stems from exactly the same problem.

The irony of the situation is so typical of the whole play, for the man whom Hamlet envies is the same who is in the act of plotting to kill him with a sharpened and poisoned sword in a friendly duel. Similarly, Hamlet is so desperate for any sort of action, even though this action is dangerous and futile.

This play does, however, manage to reach a state of resolution and does not, like Julius Caesar, leave one with the feeling that nothing has been resolved.

Hamlet bridges the gap between the real and the ideal worlds in that important scene in the grave-yard. He comes to realise that, in the grave, the vision of man as "the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals" becomes at one with the concept of man as being merely a "quintessence of dust". There is no longer a dichotomy; Alexander and Caesar become one with the lawyer and the clown. Similarly old Hamlet and Claudius, "Hyperion to a satyr", would be levelled as equals in the all-humbling dust. Thus the absolute standards to judge men's faults are presented not in terms of human greatness but rather of human insignificance. Good and bad, right and wrong, moral and immoral fall away before the simplicity of the grave. The grave-digger is the fool of this play, saving Hamlet from a meaningless rush to disaster. "How absolute the knave is" says Hamlet, acknowledging the only absolute standards in the play, the standards by which he must judge. All arbitrary standards fall away before the absolute standards of life and death, standards

which all men have in common and before which all men can be judged equally. It is against this absolute standard that Hamlet judges Claudius's actions and his own potential revenge. No matter that the time is out of joint, no matter that the old order has broken down; life is still life, murder is still murder and incest is still incest:

> "Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon -
> He that hath kill'd my king and whor'd my mother;
> Popp'd in between th' election and my hopes;
> Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
> And with such coz'nage - is't not perfect conscience
> To quit him with this arm? And is't not to be damn'd
> To let this canker of our nature come
> In further evil?"
>
> (V, ii, 62)

The puzzled man of the early parts of the play who behaved like an adolescent for all his thirty years of age has turned into an assured, mature man well aware of the eternal sameness of life despite its outward appearance of change. He can see through a man like Osric:

> "Thus has he, and many more of the same bevy,
> that I know the drossy age dotes on, only got
> the tune of the time and outward habit of en-
> counter - a kind of yesty collection, which
> carries them through and through the most fann'd
> and winnowed opinions; and do but blow them to their
> trial, the bubbles are out."
>
> (V, ii, 181)

A man who is in touch with only the outward appearances of the age, instead of realising, like Hamlet, the eternal and unchanging nature of the value of life, is doomed to condemnation.

Hamlet has answered the question he asked in his soliloquy beginning "To be, or not to be" which demanded whether life was worth living. Life is now worth living, and to take it from another man is a crime no matter the circumstances.

This is the final statement of the play. Shakespeare, wandering for the first time in an uncertain world stripped of all values, has affirmed that since life is worth living, then it is worth struggling on to discover what it is that can give meaning to life. The exact nature of this value is not defined; for the moment "the rest is silence". The struggle ahead is an immense one, for Shakespeare must virtually reassess the nature of man, nature and the cosmos. He senses the immensity of the task he has set himself, and the closing scenes are full of forboding for the future:

> "But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here
> about my heart;"
>
> (V, ii, 204)

With only the certainty that life is worth living, and with the knowledge that evil man, unrestrained by any God-given code of behaviour, will strike men down with the same cunning as Hamlet used to destroy Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, life becomes a very problematic affair. Yet Hamlet brushes aside his fears:

> "Not a whit, we defy augury: there is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come, if it be not to come, it will be now; if itbe not now, yet it will come - the readiness is all. Since no man owes of aught he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?"
>
> (V, ii, 211)

In an ambiguous world, where all seems uncertain, where there is no pattern of meaning whatsoever but that imposed by the arbitrary whim of selfish men, one cannot live in a constant state of fear. The superstitious man could see portent of evil is so many natural incidents that occur all round him, and therefore never act. Shakespeare realises that all men must die at some time and this fact, together with the all-humbling power of the grave, makes one of all fears and hopes, all actions and all words. In this arbitrary world all that man can do is to be prepared to face fully and with confidence whatever fortune flings in his path, knowing that the only certainty he can hope to achieve is the certainty that there is no certainty. Death is a fact, evil is a fact, despair is a fact, enmity is a fact. If one can accept this and be prepared to face the consequences one has achieved much.

Shakespeare, in this play, has acknowledged that the faith and belief upon which he based his previous work is no longer valid to him. He has acknowledged, through the prolonged struggle of his hero, the paradoxical nature of life. He has accepted that it is impossible to believe in a world of perfection (the sort of simple, uncomplicated world for which Hamlet yearned), in the face of the imperfect world around him. Neither can he believe that there is a power directing human destiny towards a state of perfection. The divinity of this play, the divinity that "shapes our ends", seems to be nothing more than blind chance. So Shakespeare refuses to impose a pattern of meaning on life because he has found that there is not one. Hamlet's acceptance of the uncertain nature of life expresses the playwright's similar acceptance and his decision to meet life on its own terms for what it is, and not for what he would like it to be.

In the uncertainty of this tentative conclusion he has

written a greater play than ever before, revealing a far greater and more profound knowledge of life than was seen in the earlier plays. The honesty and integrity with which he faced the bitterness of his conclusions are reflected in the stature of this work of art and in its power to excite the interest of people wherever it is performed, studied or read.

Hamlet dies affirming that which he believes as the moment of quiet in the hall gives way to the violence and horror of the duel scene. His conclusions do not save his life, but that was not what he expected. He has come to understand a small part of the mystery of human life, and with this he is satisfied. The quietness and tranquillity of that scene in the hall reflect the state of mind of a man who has come to terms with life and has, according to the limitations of his experience, been satisfied. It is the tranquillity of a man in possession of his soul, and how different it is from the despair of the man of the first soliloquy or the yearning of the man who seeks after some Utopia because he cannot face the truth of the situation as it stands. The progression of the play is therefore from the state of mind of a man who has had his world turned upside down and hates it, to that of a man who has come to accept the situation in which he finds himself. Shakespeare must now attempt to find out how the world can once more be put on a firm footing and made into a secure and happy place.

In Hamlet the ground has been cleared. Shakespeare has acknowledged his situation, however unpleasant it may be, and has affirmed the basic value of life. He has also partially explored the nature and effects of the evil side of man which tends to make of life a meaningless, empty affair that is scarcely worth living.

This play is the key play in the development of his vision

of life, as it closes off one way of looking at life and simultaneously opens up a whole range of problems which will provide the subject-matter for the later plays. Like the feeling around Hamlet's heart, it bodes ill for the future, yet, like the man who expresses this forboding, it affirms, in tragic terms, the basic dignity of man and the value of human life.

THE PROBLEM PLAYS

The date of composition of Troilus and Cressida is generally placed very close to that of Hamlet. Its bitter tone, its uncertain ending, its lack of a firmly integrated moral system and its tortured verse certainly belong to the same period as Twelfth Night, Julius Caesar and Hamlet. The extremes to which this bitterness and inconclusiveness are carried put it in a class of its own, however, and make it appear to be a reflection of one of the worst periods in the playwright's life. There are absolutely no redeeming features in its bleak outlook; not even the feeling of hope that results paradoxically from the death of a tragic hero. This play could be an exploration of the moral world of Hamlet without the moral strength of the young prince himself to give to it a feeling of striving after something worthwhile. The sense of some sort of higher power is lacking. It is vague enough in Hamlet, but the consciousness of its presence was always there, even although for most of the time it seemed completely impotent. Hamlet's preoccupation with a moral struggle and with the importance of finding some meaning in life gives value to the play. There is no such struggle in Troilus and Cressida. Moral values become the subject of the sort of speeches we would expect from Polonius, and therefore have little bearing on the actual course of events. To the characters in this play it would be more pleasant to live in a world governed by a valid moral system, but the lack of such a system is no deterrent to action as it was to Hamlet. Hamlet has a conscience that prevents him from acting because he no longer has a valid moral basis upon which to act. Ulysses merely regrets the fact that without order in the Greek camp it is more difficult to continue the war against Troy.

The characters of Troilus and Cressida seem to be searching for some sort of value and meaning in life, but it seems to be more an intellectual search than a quest to which their whole passionate being commits itself. As Charles Williams puts it in an essay on "Troilus and Cressida and Hamlet": "They have a speciously intellectual vocabulary, they toil at defining themselves in terms of mind. Their subtleties are the subtleties of argument; they lack the consummation of essential being." These are half-men, for they lack the ability to feel the pain of conscience although they talk so well of the matters with which conscience usually deals. They know that concepts like "right" and "wrong" exist, but they try and arrive at knowledge of them by the wrong methods. This results in two scenes in the play unique to Troilus and Cressida, the two great debates that turn on points dear to the Elizabethan heart, morality and order.

Ulysses speaks long and eloquently on the need for order in the Greek camp, an order based on the due acknowledgement of degree:

> "Take but degree away, untune that string,
> And hark what discord follows! Each thing melts
> In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters
> Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
> And make a sop of all this solid globe;
> Strength should be lord of imbecility,
> And the rude son should strike his father dead;
> Force should be right; or, rather, right and wrong-
> Between whose endless jar justice resides-
> Should lose their names, and so should justice too.
> Then everything includes itself in power,
> Power into will, will into appetite;
> And appetite, an universal wolf,
> So doubly seconded with will and power,

Must make perforce an universal prey,
And last eat up himself." (I, iii, 109)

This speech is the direct expression of the condition of man as Shakespeare has come to see it; a state of affairs expressed dramatically in Hamlet. When men no longer obey the rules of order chaos follows, and the best as well as the worst types of men are destroyed. Justice becomes a meaningless word and it is the strongest that triumphs.

Hector speaks equally well to the Trojans on the subject of nature, justice and true values:

"Nature craves
All dues to be rend'red to their owners. Now,
What nearer debt in all humanity
Than wife is to the husband? If this law
Of nature be corrupted through affection;
And that great minds, of partial indulgence
To their benumbed wills, resist the same;
There is a law in each well-order'd nation
To curb those raging appetites that are
Most disobedient and refractory.
If Helen, then, be wife to Sparta's king -
As it is known she is - these moral laws
Of nature and of nations speak aloud
To have her back return'd. Thus to persist
In doing wrong extenuates not wrong,
But makes it much more heavy." (II, ii, 173)

Ulysses and Hector talk about the same thing, yet the "moral laws of nature and of nations" that are supposed to "speak aloud" through them have no more real influence on the course of events than the words of the supposedly mad Cassandra. This is the central irony of the play, that the truth, the only thing that can save these men

from destruction, is cast aside and jeered at. The world has indeed gone mad.

If Hector is the conscience of Troy and Ulysses of the Greeks then we need not wonder why this madness reigns. Immediately after his noble speech Hector adds:

> "Yet, ne'er the less,
> My spritely brethren, I propend to you
> In resolution to keep Helen still;
> For 'tis a cause that hath no mean dependence
> Upon our joint and several dignities."
> (II, ii, 189)

The lightness of the term "my spritely brethren" suggests that Hector has gone through with the burdensome task of making the required gesture to formal morality and then, his duty done, he drops back into his true self. His speech was so much nonsense for it is his "dignity" and not his moral conscience that guides his course of action. Similarly Ulysses turns the honourable challenge from Aeneas into a Machiavellian trick to get Achilles back into the fight against Troy, the quicker to ensure her downfall. These men have no conception of the meaning of the words they are saying. This comes across to us not only in the contradictions between their words and their actions but also in the tortured nature of the verse Shakespeare makes them speak. Their words do not flow naturally, as if coming from morally confident minds. Their speeches sound as if they come from the mouth of a man who has a vast vocabulary in a foreign language but has as yet no command of the idiom of the language:

"'Tis mad idolatory
To make the service greater than the god;
And the will dotes that is attributive
To what infectiously itself affects,
Without some image of th' affected merit."
(II, ii, 56)

"Checks and disasters
Grow in the veins of actions highest rear'd,
As knots, by the conflux of meeting sap,
Infects the sound pine, and diverts his grain
Tortive and errant from his course of growth."
(I, iii, 5)

The cause of this state of affairs lies deeper than a simple disparity between words and actions. The Greeks with their desire for order and the Trojans with their noble ideals of chivalry and knightly deeds have ignored the basic fault from which all their disasters stem. They are living and dying for a cause that is in no way worthy of their attention - the beautiful whore, Helen of Troy:

"For every false drop in her bawdy veins
A Grecian's life has sunk; for every scruple
Of her contaminated carrion weight
A Troyan hath been slain; since she could speak,
She hath not given so many good words breath
As for her Greeks and Troyans suff'red death."
(IV, i, 71)

All man's noble aspirations, all his ability for faith and trust and courage, for loyalty, service and virtue, for everything that is good and fine in his nature has been soiled and turned rotten by the fact that all this noble potential is expended in a false and unworthy cause.

The Trojans see Helen differently:

"Fair Diomed, you do as chapmen do,
Dispraise the thing that you desire to buy;
But we in silence hold this virtue well:
We'll not commend what we intend to sell."
(IV, i, 77)

Both points of view are equally sick. The Greeks know Helen for what she is yet still die for her while the Trojans put infinite value on someone who is quite worthless.

This play has a moral structure like the house built on sand in the biblical parable. It is based on a false foundation and must inevitably fail any test to which it is put, with disastrous consequences. The result is that the play ends as inconclusively as the duel between Ajax and Hector. The endless, meaningless fight goes on, without even the many deaths able to give meaning to life. Unlike Hamlet's death, the deaths in this play are in the service of an unworthy cause and therefore affirm nothing but the degradation of man after he has abandoned all attempts to better himself.

The love theme manages, at tremendous cost, to achieve some glimmering of understanding but this darkens rather than lightens the end result. Troilus has invested his capacity for love in an unworthy creature. He deems his Cressida divine, while she is in reality a sophisticated whore. The lines of Hector proclaiming that "'tis mad idoltory to make the service greater than the god" spring once more to mind. The fact that the lovers are brought together through the agency of Pandarus adds to the unwholesome quality of their relationship. Troilus's love

progresses from a form of comic parody, reminiscent of young Romeo in love with Rosaline, through the happiness of fulfilment, to the grief of parting and then to the bitterness of final disillusionment. Hamlet's disillusionment with love in particular and life in general caused the paralysis of will which eventually brought about his downfall. Troilus manages to find a solution to this problem by immediately transferring the love he had for Cressida to equal hatred for Diomedes:

> "Hark, Greek: as much as I do Cressid love,
> So much by weight hate I her Diomed."
> (V, ii, 165)

It is the old way of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and an attempt to turn two wrongs into a right. This price that Troilus pays and the compromise he makes throw away the last opportunity for tragedy in this play. Similarly it is the last opportunity to affirm any real and lasting value finally lost. To Troilus it is not his love that is important but the satisfaction and outlet of a deeply felt personal emotion. The form of outlet does not matter so long as the sufferer does not have to put up with unbearable pain. Life becomes an arbitrary process of pandering to one's personal feelings at the expense of human dignity and human values.

Troilus, after he has witnessed the scene between Cressida and Diomedes, stays to

> "...make a recordation to my soul
> Of every syllable that here was spoke."
> (V, ii, 114)

The words are similar to Hamlet's after his meeting with the Ghost, but Troilus's words are not spoken with the confidence of a man who has found some form of certainty in an uncertain world like Hamlet but rather with the horror of a man who has faced final disillusionment. Troilus has no ghost to remind him that heaven itself is concerned but just a simple, unquestionable fact as the love scene takes place before his eyes.

> "The bonds of heaven are slipp'd, dissolv'd, and loos'd
> And with another knot, five-finger-tied,
> The fractions of her faith, orts of her love,
> The fragments, scraps, the bits, and greasy relics
> Of her o'er-eaten faith, are bound to Diomed."
> (V, ii, 154)

He too has to bridge the gap between the ideal world in which Cressida was true and men were true to their ideals and a world in which Cressida is false and men die for no reason. What can bridge that gap? What can bind the two worlds as one?

> "Nothing at all, unless that this were she."
> (V, ii, 133)

Because the fact is true, because Cressida's action is undeniable, Troilus's faith in everything that seemed good and noble is lost forever. Cressida's sin has invaded his world of faith and corrupted everything in it. If Troilus had played the man, if he had played the true tragic hero and stuck to his belief in the intrinsic value of life, the play would have been Hamlet all over again. But he cannot rise to the occasion and prefers, like the

rest of them who have discovered there is no practical value and personal gain to be had in adhering to one's principles, to play the beast and, consumed by self-destructive hatred, become something less than a man.

One of the problems presented in Hamlet, concerning the possibility of action in an immoral world, has been solved, but at the expense of the dignity of man. This play is therefore to me an expression of the worst aspect of Shakespeare's vision of life, for it contains a picture of moral bleakness devoid of any redeeming features. Even the full horror of King Lear is redeemed by the proportionately beautiful love of Cordelia. Like Troilus, she was disillusioned by one that she loved but, unlike Troilus, she preferred to retain her love for her father despite his cruelty toward her. The "ripeness" of which Edgar speaks is shown by Cordelia, but in Troilus and Cressida there is nothing but disease and decay. Even Thersites, the fool of the play, abandons the traditional role of the fool as a touchstone of common sense and basic values and becomes as sick as the play in which he appears. There is no one to give a sense of moral perspective by which we might judge these men and women. E.M.W. Tillyard sums it all up: "In Ulysses's speech on Degree the angelic end of the chain of being is omitted; and this is typical of the whole of Troilus and Cressida. The human beings here provide their own background. In Hamlet the setting is nothing less than the whole universe."(I) Troilus and Cressida is a terrible indictment of men without faith.

Any affirmation of faith that Shakespeare makes will have to stand up to the test implied in the vision of life expressed in this play. Any attempt to affirm the dignity

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(I) Shakespeare's Problem Plays by E.M.W. Tillyard - pg. 85.

of man will have to rise up above the possible degradation of the human spirit experienced in this play. So it can be said that the greatness of the later tragedies is to be found here. Troilus and Cressida explores one extreme of human nature, the living embodiment of which are people like Iago, Regan, Cornwall, Goneril and Lady Macbeth. These people are physical realities and their deeds are very concrete. They can be denied as much as Troilus can deny the presence of his Cressida in Diomedes's arms or Gloucester can deny his blindness and his pain while faith is an abstract concept that cannot be weighed, measured, bought and sold but which has the power of giving value and dignity to human life. Shakespeare's effort in the tragedies will be twofold; to test his belief in the value of such a faith against all that this very real, negative side of human nature can do and to develop a series of symbols by which he might better define and make concrete the nature, quality and power of this faith. Before he embarked on this effort he probably wrote two plays, All's Well That Ends Well and Measure for Measure, both of which mark a significant development in his changing attitude to life.

The dating of All's Well That Ends Well has always presented problems, for beyond the fact that it is a mature comedy, little certainty has been reached. It is dated before Hamlet by some scholars, after Hamlet by others, while a third group would have it written at two seperate periods in the playwright's career. From my point of view, the content of the play will, I believe, show an important development in Shakespeare's comic vision

in particular and the rest of the plays in general.

Bertram, the "hero" of the play, is a member of the younger generation and seems to be cast in the same mould as Hamlet and Laertes. Like them he is bidden by the stern voice of morality to behave in a strictly moral way. Like Laertes, but unlike Hamlet, he finds that to do so would impose immense responsibilities upon him and also force him to give up many of his personal desires and ambitions, so he conveniently forgets all he has been told. Hamlet has nothing less than a ghost, speaking with all the authority of heaven and hell to tell him what to do. Bertram, like Laertes, has only human voices to advise him, and so their message is soon forgotten when he is put to the test. His mother tells him to behave as his father would have done:

> "Be thou blest, Bertram, and succeed thy father
> In manners, as in shape! Thy blood and virtue
> Contend for empire in thee, and thy goodness
> Share with thy birthright! Love all, trust a few,
> Do wrong to none; be able for thine enemy
> Rather in power than use, and keep thy friend
> Under thy own life's key; be check'd for silence,
> But never tax'd for speech. What heaven more will,
> That thee may furnish, and my prayers pluck down,
> Fall on thy head! Farewell." (I, i, 54)

The King of France speaks in a similar vein:

> "Youth, thou bear'st thy father's face;
> Frank nature, rather curious than in haste,
> Hath well compos'd thee. Thy father's moral parts
> Mayst thou inherit too!" (I, ii, 19)

In these passages can be seen a strong demand for the continuance of moral behaviour from one generation to the next

as if life was always run according to the same standards. But, as Shakespeare has so clearly shown in Hamlet, "the old order changeth, yielding place to new". Shakespeare's deeper insight into life had made him realise that there is absolutely no guarentee that the old ways of doing things were best or even right. Morality and order, he had come to see, was no longer God-given and enforced, but merely principles which could possibly make of life an easier and happier business, but which could be ignored with impunity by those who wished. Many men, like Bertram, find that it is easier and more pleasant to do things their own way. The words of his mother and his king are not sufficient to bring him over to a different way of thinking. So he breaks every rule in the book, defying everything that had once seemed a sacred and eternal pillar of morality.

He defies his mother by refusing to obey her commands to acknowledge his wife; he defies no less a person than the king by stealing off to the wars in direct contradiction to the royal order; he defies conventional morality by committing what he believes to be adultery with Diana; he defies the dictates of family honour by giving the ring away; he denies the bonds of friendship by allowing Parolles to be "tortured"; and he surrenders his personal integrity by attempting to lie and bluster his way out of his predicament. Furthermore, he is completely casual about his crimes. Without a firm guiding principle in life nothing is of value to him, and so he can include his wife's death quite casually in a list of achievements for the day:

> "I have to-night dispatch'd sixteen businesses, a month's length apiece; by an abstract of success: I have congied with the Duke, done my

adieu with his nearest; buried a wife,
mourn'd for her; writ to my lady mother
I am returning; entertain'd my convoy;
and between these main parcels of dispatch
effected many nicer ends. The last was
the greatest, but that I have not ended yet."
(IV, iii, 81)

He is a complete picture of unredeemed youth, ignoring the dictates of his elders, defying the commands of convention, and allowing his personal desires to rule his life. Everything normally seen as valuable becomes meaningless to him. Honour, to Bertram, has truly become no more than a "word".

The person who saves Bertram from the possible tragic consequences of his sins and so brings about the happy ending is Helena. She is altogether a different person from Bertram. Like him, she inherits a pleasant outward appearance from her father, but, unlike him, she also manages to retain her father's purity of spirit. She is thus able to perform the role destined for her in the play as a healer and redeemer of souls and a preventer of both physical and spiritual death.

The king, as in Hamlet, is a symbol for the whole land. A country inhabited by people like Bertram is rotten and decaying spiritually, symbolised by the king's disease which is slowly killing him. When Helena physically cures the king, therefore, her action symbolises her power to spiritually cure a man like Bertram whose actions have gone to make the kingdom the decaying place it is. Furthermore, she is seen as God's agent, obtaining her power from Him and giving Him all the credit:

"But most it is presumption in us when
The help of heaven we count the act of men.
Dear sir, to my endeavours give consent;
Of heaven, not me, make an experiment."
(II, i, 150)

"Heaven hath through me restor'd the King to health."
(II, iii, 62)

Her role as Bertram's saviour will be seen in the same light. The countess's farewell to her suggests she has divine power:

"What angel shall
Bless this unworthy? He cannot thrive,
Unless her prayers, whom heaven delights to hear
And loves to grant, reprieve him from the wrath
Of greatest justice." (III, iv, 25)

She is the living embodiment of divine grace which at this stage in his career seems to Shakespeare to be the only thing that can save mankind. It has the power to help when men most need it but are least likely to acknowledge their need. So for all his conscious efforts to do what would be considered wrong, Bertram is guided by the hand of grace onto the correct path. The problem is that although his actions are worthy his mind is still far from sound, for he has no sense of conscience and will have to rely on Helena for guidance and judgement. So his reconciliation with her is a hurried affair. He speaks only three lines, and although he promises to love her "dearly, ever, ever dearly", there is little evidence in the play that he is capable of keeping any promise. The hurried and rather forced nature of this reconciliation reminds

one of the earlier Two Gentlemen of Verona, yet the failure of All's Well seems to be the result, as opposed to the earlier comedy, of too much insight into the human condition rather than too little.

Purely from the point of view of this thesis, this play can be interpreted in two different ways, both of them failures in some way.

Firstly, it could be seen as the conscious acknowledgement of the failure of a conventional moral outlook. Man, as embodied in Bertram, could be seen by Shakespeare as basically immoral; a selfish creature trying to look after his own ends. Reason, wise advice, conventional morality all fail to redeem him. Only divine grace, a concept beyond man's comprehension and beyond his power to evoke, can save such a man from damnation and the playwright from despair.

Secondly this play could be seen as an attempt to close the gap between the real and the ideal visions of life which Shakespeare had discovered in his exploration of human nature. In this comedy there is a distinct change in the nature of the hero. Bertram is no longer good but deluded. He is flagrantly immoral and will go to any lengths to satisfy his selfish desires. By uniting him and Helena Shakespeare attempts to bridge the gap mentioned above, Helena's triumph over Bertram symbolising the triumph of good over evil while still allowing the other, worser side of man's nature its full potential. Apart the husband and wife fulfil all Shakespeare's requirements. Unfortunately Shakespeare could not bring them together with any sort of success. Helena has to resort to the old substitution-in-bed trick to entrap her man, and the ending, as I have suggested, is an equally contrived affair. Together Bertram and Helena

may be very happy, but as a symbol of hope for mankind their union is very unsatisfactory, for working once more within the framework of the comic vision of life, Shakespeare has again been forced to reduce the power of evil to a parody of itself, easily overcome by the forces of good. In the larger context of Shakespeare's work to date, human nature remains at odds with itself.

Tillyard calls this play a "problem play" and terms it a failure. The failure, he says, is the result of a "failure of the poetic imagination" (I) in its execution, as if Shakespeare did not believe in what he was writing. Tillyard also points to the much more realistic nature of the hero and heroine when compared with those of the earlier comedies. This also supports my theories on Shakespeare's purpose in writing All's Well. With regard to this purpose, I would place this play in time of writing very close to Measure for Measure, the next play with which I shall deal. The Duke, too, is seen as a divine agent, like Helena, working behind the scenes to achieve an essentially comic ending to a potentially tragic situation. He also has to resort to the bed-trick and some rather underhand methods in order to bring about this satisfactory conclusion. So in both plays Shakespeare seems to be almost desperately seeking some source of hope before the great wave of pessimism soon to sweep over him and produce the great tragedies would engulf him completely. Measure for Measure is a more profound attempt to encompass within the framework of the comic vision a far greater degree of potentially tragic material than had ever been allowed in the comedies to date.

(I) Ibid pg. 94.

Measure for Measure is, from the point of view of this thesis, one of the most interesting plays Shakespeare ever wrote. In this play he attempts to do much the same thing as in All's Well but with a good deal more determination. He makes the tragic element far stronger, so attempting to encompass all aspects of human nature, and to put a far greater value on any redemptive quality that may emerge. The first two acts of this play are therefore worthy of a tragedy, and the stage is set for disaster and the piles of corpses usually associated with the ending of a Shakespearean tragedy.

The tragic conflict in the play reflects very clearly the conclusions about life Shakespeare had reached at this stage of his career. First it might be noted that Angelo is attempting to enforce a law that is obsolete, and which denies an essential part of human nature, turning all who attempt to live by its dictates into something other than warm, living flesh and blood. This is captured in descriptions of Angelo given to us when it is believed that Angelo lives according to the letter of the laws he is so stringently applying:

> "Lord Angelo is precise;
> Stands at guard with envy; scarce confesses
> That his blood flows, or that his appetite
> Is more to bread than stone." (I, iii, 50)

> "...with full line of authority,
> Governs Lord Angelo, a man whose blood
> Is very snow-broth, one who never feels
> The wanton stings and motions of the sense,
> But doth rebate and blunt his natural edge
> With profits of the mind, study and fast."
> (I, iv, 56)

When his true nature does become apparent a tragic situation develops for he is prepared to kill Claudio in order to express that nature. The result is a vast difference between what man is and what he should be.

Isabella is much the same sort of person as Angelo. When we first meet her she is about to enter a convent, to deny the physical side of her make-up, to abjure forever the company of men and to live according to the dictates of a strict and artificial code which she, in her warped enthusiasm, would have made even more life-denying.

So we are faced with a Hamlet-type situation where the ruler, under a front of respectability, is as depraved as the lowest in the kingdom, and where any attempt to live according to conventional moral standards leads to a tragic situation. Isabella is prepared to stick absolutely to her chosen code of behaviour, even at the expense of her brother's life. Shakespeare is demonstrating that her strict adherence to a "moral" way of life is just as dangerous and anti-life as Angelo's complete surrender to an "immoral" way of behaviour. Shakespeare makes the situation tragic by causing both Angelo and Isabella to make their moral decisions against the background of Claudio's imminent death. The tragic flaw lies not only in Claudio's original crime, but in the disparity between the attitudes of Angelo and Isabella and the false basis upon which each of them builds his or her life. With death as the inevitable outcome of this moral confusion the situation is truly tragic.

The disguised Duke then appears and begins a series of carefully planned manoeuvres in order to bring about the happy conclusion and yet still provoke the affirmation of a positive value in life which we usually associate with

tragedy. This value must not be seen as part of a conventional and organised system (shown by the actions of Isabella and Angelo to be inadequate for the needs of the time), but neither must it seem to be a God-given value imposed upon mankind by a divine agent. It must come freely and naturally from the human heart.

This is why the Duke goes through the lengthy, rather cruel and seemingly unnecessary manoeuvres in which he plays with the emotions of the characters, particularly of Isabella, in the final scenes. He is trying to keep Isabella in a tragic situation and to make her believe completely that depraved man has done his worst and is therefore deserving of everything that the very depths of hell can do to punish him. In the light of Angelo's supposed execution of Claudio, Isabella, with every reason to condemn him to the worst possible fate, pleads for his life. Her plea for his life, seen in the light of her brother's execution, is a gesture that affirms the redemptive power of human love. If this is unclear, a comparison with a similar action in King Lear may help to clarify things.

Lear unjustly rejects his daughter in the same way as Angelo denies life to Claudio even although he had promised to pardon him. Lear, after a night of fearful suffering, learns of his mistake and wakes to find himself in the tender care of the very daughter he has treated so cruelly, just as Isabella pleads for mercy to be shown to Angelo when she has every reason to hate him. Lear realises what he has done, and offers to drink any poison Cordelia has for him, for she has every reason to hate him, while Regan and Goneril had none. Cordelia merely murmurs "no cause, no cause". She does not think in terms of simple retributive justice, of "measure for measure", but can conceive

of and put into practice a justice of a higher sort. She sees the need in her father and freely responds to this need with her love. This sort of love can override the worst that our "worser genius" can do and make a despairing man see hope once more for the human race. The love Isabella exhibits is the sort of love we associate with Christ, who loved all men irrespective of how evil or how cruel they were, and it is in this love that hope for mankind is to be found. Yet Shakespeare, in the context of Measure for Measure and King Lear makes it a purely human attribute.

So the Duke contrives to make Isabella show mercy for Angelo, when rationally he is beyond hope. She exhibits selfless love, affirming like Cordelia that she has "no cause" to exact retribution.

Why does this play not seem as effective as Lear even if it affirms exactly the same value as the one that comes out of that far greater play? As I have suggested, Cordelia's love flows from her own humanity and needs no divine intervention in order to make its message felt; and it is affirmed against the background of Lear's suffering on the heath and the final death scene. Although Isabella affirms exactly the same value and shows the same sort of selfless love, the way in which her gesture is brought about makes it seem an altogether lesser thing. There is no suffering, but only a number of careful contrivances and a clever trick to bring it about, and the happy ending plays down its value. Isabella's statement of love and mercy has been brought about by a sort of fairy-godmother in the form of the Duke who, although invisible to the characters, is visible to the audience throughout. As a result the audience does not experience

the great upsurge of emotions resulting from the tragic possibilities of the situation, but rather views it all with the equanimity of people who know that a happy ending is assured. So we pay a smaller price for exactly the same merchandise, and, because it has been devalued in our eyes, we feel cheated. Shakespeare saw the inadequacies of this play, for from then on, through the writing of six great tragedies, we are always in doubt as to whether there is a "divinity that shapes our ends". The gods will take no active partin the tragic movement of these plays. They may cast incense down to bless the love of Cordelia and Lear, or they may laugh at the unnatural Coriolanus, but they will remain clearly outside the action, impartial observers to the great struggle that evolves.

Eventually, when the tragic storm has spent all its energies, Shakespeare will write plays with the same idea in mind as he had in the writing of Measure for Measure, that is to write full blown tragedies with comic endings. However far-fetched it may sound, I would therefore call Measure for Measure the first of Shakespeare's romances! Before he can successfully write such plays, however, he will have to make the profound study of human nature which we shall find in the tragedies.

THE GREAT TRAGEDIES

Hamlet, the first of the four plays considered to be Shakespeare's greatest works, took the first steps toward what can be called a redefinition of man. Shakespeare, after realising that the currently held view of the nature and meaning of human life could no longer adequately explain the complex creature he had come to know as man, had to start from the beginning and reassess human nature, the meaning and purpose of human existence on earth, and the nature of human relationships. The four great tragedies, concerned as they all are with the inner workings of the human mind, form the bold outlines and fill in many of the details of the new picture of man that emerges. The later tragedies and the romances will put the final touches to this great effort of Shakespeare's creative imagination.

I attempted to show how in Hamlet Shakespeare takes the first steps toward this goal. In the graveyard scene he affirms the oldest and simplest bond that binds men together as human beings, their common physical shape and their mortality. Higher values may come and go, human greatness may temporarily outshadow human insignifigance, but no man can deny this eternally true law of outward appearance which all men must obey. It is as old as the earth itself, the earth from which all men are made and to which, in death, they must return. Furthermore, as the grave-digger affirms by his riddle, this law will last until doomsday, or as long as the human race exists.

To Shakespeare, wandering as he must have been in a confused and contradictory world of experience, this realisation that there existed some sort of never changing, eternally true aspect of human life, however basic, must have brought the same relief as it did to Hamlet, who used

it to pass final judgement on his uncle. As for moral judgement on Hamlet's own actions, "the rest is silence". Hamlet is concerned that Horatio present the facts of his story to the people in order that they might judge his actions themselves. We will find it difficult to judge simply as right or wrong any of the tragic heroes with which this chapter will deal. This, I think, is because in these plays Shakespeare is not at all concerned with a moral code as such. He has learnt from his earlier work that any attempt to fit man into a simple moral pattern must end in failure and probably end in disaster. Before he can judge man as being right or wrong, he must first find out what man is. In the great tragedies this is his prime concern, and I believe it is here that the reason for their greatness is to be found. Simultaneously a form of ethic may evolve, but it will never be dogmatic, and it will generally rely on abstract concepts like faith and love for its form rather than the dry letter of the law. Indeed, the tragic hero will usually have so many faults that it will be impossible to judge him in the "normal" way. One must go beyond the boundaries of reason and enter the world of feeling and insight in order to assess these unhappy and yet very great men whose corpses are carried off at the end of each play when their long struggle is finally over.

Othello, the Moor of Venice is the first play with which I shall deal. It is a play of violent extremes, for never has there been a hero more noble and upright in both appearance and character, and never has there been a villain more malevolent. Yet the destinies of these completely different men are closely interwoven throughout the play until Othello becomes almost a part of Iago, like a hand

Iago uses in order to carry out his bloody purpose. They become as one person as far as their actions are concerned, and yet even at the end, when Iago has abundantly accomplished his purpose, they are still worlds apart insofar as our attitude toward them is concerned. It is with the reason for this difference that Shakespeare is concerned and he explores it from a number of different angles. I believe that this play is concerned with the impossibility of adequately and correctly judging a person's words or actions simply by the outward appearance of the actions or the superficial meaning of the words. One must go deeper and study the motive behind an action or set of words before making a moral judgement. Then, however, the judgement may not be so easy to make. So often in this play the same action can mean different things to different people while words, if no account is taken of the person who speaks them, or the motives which cause them to be spoken, violently mislead on many occasions. I will isolate a number of passages and attempt to point out how easily one can be misled. It should be pointed out that as one never judges Othello from the purely superficial point of view this sort of interpretation may seem a little unnecessary. One should, however, hold in mind both the theme of the play suggested above and the subject of this thesis.

The following speech is heard at the end of Act I:

> "And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
> 'Has done my office. I know not if't be true;
> Yet I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
> Will do as if for surety." (I, iii,381)

These lines are obviously spoken by Iago in an attempt to explain his attack on the life and happiness of the Moor yet, if one examines the meaning of the lines alone, they might just as well have been spoken by Othello about Cassio. All Iago's actions in the play, and, after he has implanted the seeds of jealousy in Othello's mind, all of the Moor's stem from exactly the same cause and bring them both to disaster and to a painful death. Both will unjustly kill their wives, and both will be tortured to death, Othello mentally by the machinations of Iago and Iago physically by the official torturer. Both will have allowed an irrational jealousy to corrupt their minds and both will use this jealousy, which is completely unsupported by any real evidence, as a basis for the most cruel and unnecessary actions. They are roundly condemned in similar terms by Lodovico. He calls them both "slaves" (V, ii, 295; V, ii, 235), and it would scarcely be a coincidence and nothing more that Shakespeare should apply the same term to two such different people within the space of sixty lines. There is little to choose between the irrationality, the cruelty and the violence of these men and yet there is so much that distinguishes them. Iago has died for nothing, for a petty jealousy not only of his wife's supposed relationship with Othello but also of the "daily beauty" that he sees so vividly present in Othello's life and so sadly lacking in his own.

Othello, for all the outward similarity, is a completely different person, and it is the nature of this difference that is important in this play. Noble of mind and strong of body, he has endured many hardships and won to his high office of trust by his own greatness of spirit. It is his past greatness and courage that won for him the

love of Desdemona. He marries her, yet he is aware that by doing so he is placing himself in danger, for he is leaving the previous stage of his life in which he enjoyed the freedom of having to do a simple duty, and entering a far different world, the world of human relationships:

> "For know, Iago,
> But that I love the gentle Desdemona,
> I would not my unhoused free condition
> Put into circumscription and confine
> For the sea's worth." (I, ii, 24)

Yet he stakes his freedom and his life on his faith in Desdemona.

The irony of the above quotation is profound, for it is Iago who will provide the danger in the new sphere of life Othello has entered. Othello can control Iago so long as he remains his anchient whose duty it is to obey Othello's orders, but when he begins to advise Othello on a subject of which Othello is ignorant and he is cunningly wise, trouble commences. For, ironically, by handing himself bound to Desdemona he is also placing himself in the power of Iago. Incredible though it may seem both Iago and Desdemona view life from the same point of view, though the nature of each may make this statement sound ludicrous. Yet if we examine the actions of Iago and Desdemona, we find that there is little to differentiate between the two.

Iago is past-master at the art of hypocrisy. He plays a double game, pretending to be "honest Iago" while hiding behind his honest exterior a black and hate-filled mind. Desdemona, in the early stages of her relationship

with Othello, is, in her own way, equally hypocritical. She pretends to be afraid of the Moor, while secretly loving him. Brabantio, her father, is the one who is fooled, and he warns Othello of this in a key speech:

> "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:
> She has deceiv'd her father, and may thee."
> (I, iii, 292)

Desdemona, like Iago, believes that if the motive is right, then the telling or acting out of a lie is perfectly justified. As I suggested earlier, it is only the difference in motive that enables us to distinguish Desdemona as a noble young woman and Iago as a evil man although both, in essence, are guilty of the same sort of deception.

Brabantio's speech points out an aspect of the basic theme of the play and to the fault which allows Othello to make so many cruel mistakes. Brabantio's "eyes" have been deceived by Desdemona's actions, just as Othello's eyes are deceived by the subtle Iago. Othello is not able to see beyond superficial appearances and judges purely on external actions. He demands "ocular proof" at all times, and lays himself open to Iago's skilful juggling of the external evidence. Thus, by showing the extent to which reliance on superficial appearances as a basis for value judgements can mislead, Shakespeare underlines his theme. The noblest of men can become little different to the most evil of men while the purest of women will die in tragic circumstances, all because of a handkerchief and an incorrect and foolish attitude to life.

Desdemona exhibits all the virtues and all the ability

to handle life which her husband lacks. She very clearly sees beyond external appearances to the true value hidden beneath, invisible to all but the wise and noble. She it is who sees beyond the blackness of Othello's face (perhaps this is why Shakespeare chose as the hero of this play a Moor, black of face and ugly in appearance) to the purity of his heart:

"I saw Othello's visage in his mind."

She also realises that at times a "deserving woman" may "in the authority of her merits, ...justly put on the vouch of malice itself" in order to bring about some good and noble action.

Her husband, for all his innate nobleness of mind, is unable to manifest his nobility as far as human relationships are concerned, simply because he views the world from a limited and inadequate standpoint. It is abundantly clear where the fault lies. Othello has been a soldier all his life. When the play opens he is commander-in-chief of the Venetian armies in their war against the Turks. It is clear that, when he marries Desdemona, he attempts to transfer the values of his military way of life to the new world in which he finds himself. This is the world of irrational human emotions and relationships which cannot be run with the precision of a military campaign. Yet he continues to judge this world in his old way. He greets his wife with the finest compliment he can pay:

"O my fair warrior!" (II, i, 179)

The value judgements necessary for combating physical

adversity of any sort are very few. When fighting a battle they do not exist. The protagonists are automatically in the right, and God is on their side. The antagonists are automatically in the wrong, and their God is a false God. The enemy is clearly discernible for he will both be wearing a distinctive uniform and will behave in a belligerent manner that will leave no doubt as to his intentions. There are no personalities involved for one kills quite impersonally a man one does not know and against whom one has no personal animosity. How different is this world from the world of subterfuge and jealousy, of pettiness and personalities that Othello now finds about him! It is no wonder that he cannot cope with the situation, and it is even less wonder that he falls an easy victim to the wiles of Iago, a man who seems to be straightfoward and honest (he is one of Othello's officers and therefore clearly one of Othello's friends) and one who knows Othello's weakness for the evidence of his eyes rather than of his heart.

This conflict between the evidence of the eyes and of the heart, the essential conflict of the play, tears and torments poor Othello until he loses his reason. It is vividly captured in so many scenes, and in every scene it is made clear by Shakespeare that the eyes are wrong and the heart is right in its judgement. Othello dismisses Cassio on the evidence of his eyes, or rather of Iago's eyes. The conflict, and the wrongness of the choice made, are clear:

"Cassio, I love thee;
But never more be officer of mine." (II, iii, 240)

Yet, from the military point of view, the choice is quite correct. A commander-in-chief cannot allow personal feelings to sway his judgement to the detriment of the efficiency of his army. If it was a simple military matter there would be no problem. The audience, however, knows that it goes far deeper than this, yet perhaps judgement should be reserved. For worse is to come. Othello has to make the same sort of choice concerning Desdemona, and it is here that the conflict becomes truly tragic. Shakespeare captures precisely the rhythms of Othello's agonised uncertainty in this central scene of the play:

Othello: "Let her rot, and perish, and be damn'd to-night; for she shall not live. No, my heart is turn'd to stone; I strike it, and it hurts my hand. O, the world hath not a sweeter creature; she might lie by an emperor's side and command him tasks.
Iago: Nay, that's not your way.
Othello: Hang her! I do but say what she is: so delicate with her needle, an admirable musician...
Iago: She's the worse for all this.
Othello: O, a thousand, a thousand times - and then of so gentle a condition.
Iago: Ay, too gentle.
Othello: Nay, that's certain. But yet the pity of it, Iago! O, Iago, the pity of it, Iago!" (IV, i, 177)

The last words of the quotation, like so much else in the play, are profoundly ironic for it is to the very man who feels no pity, who has caused this tragic situation, that Othello in his torment appeals. Othello makes his decision, chooses the evidence of his eyes above that of his heart, and pays the price. Yet his innate purity, even if it leads

to strange conclusions, and the obvious attempts he makes at acting at all times with integrity and honour, save him from becoming worthy of the same loathing with which we come to view Iago. Even if the Cypriots and Venetians view him with horror the audience, with insight into his sublime simplicity and the cunning of Iago can view his fall with pity. In his worst moments the daily beauty of his life does not desert him, and in his anger, his madness and his suffering he is quite magnificent. Othello himself, even at the end, still attempts to give proof of the purity of his actions. The strange little story he tells of the Turk at Aleppo, who beat the Christian and insulted Venice, is affirmation of Othello's constant desire to serve and defend Venice, and of his feeling that he has betrayed her. He dies by his own hand, doing something he has done all his life, destroying evil and thereby serving the state that employs him. It is thefinal irony of the play that he can do both these things by destroying himself.

Cassio's story is remarkably similar to that of Othello. The same sort of ironies and parallels are demonstrated throughout its telling. Iago and Cassio are made to appear similar to each other in several superficial ways and yet seem completely different underneath. Both are officers to Othello, but whereas Cassio serves out of selfless loyalty, Iago serves Othello only to serve himself. Shakespeare makes both out to be Florentines, but while Iago uses the name as a form of insult:

"One Micheal Cassio, a Florentine..." (I, i, 20)

Cassio uses it as a compliment to Iago:

"I never knew a Florentine more honest."
(II, i, 44)

The coincidence of the birthplace is not, I believe, an accident, but is intended by Shakespeare to help develop his theme in every tiny detail. Iago manipulates Cassio into exactly the same situation as Othello so that Cassio seems to be a tool wielded by Iago to help him attain his aims with Othello.

In the sub-plot Shakespeare points most clearly the theme that one action can seem entirely good or entirely bad depending upon the way it is interpreted and the standards by which the interpreter judges. Iago advises Cassio to ask Desdemona for assistance in his attempt to win back Othello's favour. Cassio realises how wise this advice is and departs gratefully. Iago then makes the following speech which clearly states Shakespeare's meaning:

"And what's he, then, that says I play the villain?
When this advice is free I give and honest,
Probal to thinking, and indeed the course
To win the Moor again? For 'tis most easy
The inclining Desdemona to subdue
In any honest suit: She's fram'd as fruitful
As the free elements...
How am I, them, a villain
To counsel Cassio to this parallel course,
Directly to his good?" (II, iii, 325)

To Cassio this advice is all to the good, but to the unknowing Othello it will mean disaster and to the evil Iago triumph. This speech more than ever underlines the realisation that had arisen in Shakespeare's mind of a need for a valid set of standards by which to judge life, based

on a full understanding of the intricacies of human nature.

Men like Iago would have to be taken into account if such a system of judgement were to be evolved. The simplicity of Othello and Cassio, although magnificent in its way, is out of date and dangerous in the same society as Iago. This play, although it does not advance anything like a new moral system by which one might judge life, goes much further than Hamlet in helping to define the nature of man and in finding some value to give meaning to life. Hamlet had left man a physical creature, bound to his fellow men by the similarity of physical appearance, but by little else. Both Cassio and Othello, the victims in this play, talk of a higher value which gives meaning to their lives and makes them consider themselves to be worthy human beings. Cassio speaks as follows:

> "Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial."
> (II, iii, 254)

His reputation as a trustworthy officer and man of honour has been stripped from him and he no longer considers himself human.

Othello has put his trust in Desdemona, staking his life "on her faith". When she breaks faith he sees this as an act of degradation that turns man into something like an animal ("goats and monkeys") and little better. There are, it would seem from this, ways of behaviour that are commonly considered by men to be worthy of the dignity of the human race. They exalt man into his position as "the beau-

ty of the world, the paragon of animals" while their lack turns man into a "quintessence of dust" and no more. So is is not just by his physical shape that one can tell a man (Iago has all the outwards attributes of humanity) but by his inner nature. Othello has to learn the painful lesson that appearances deceive, that one may "smile and smile and be a villain". He has also learnt that the proof offered by his feelings is generally more valuable than that offered by his eyes.

Shakespeare has learnt that there is far more to mankind than "meets the eye". He has realised that there is a factor in human nature that can give meaning to human life without which life is scarcely worth living. The exact nature, quality and power of this factor will be fully explored in King Lear, the greatest of the tragedies.

In Act IV, vi of King Lear the mad old king comes face to face with the blinded Gloucester. In his talk to Gloucester he speaks the following words:

> "A man may see how this world goes with no
> eyes. Look with thine ears." (IV, vi, 150)

These words capture in essence the central theme of Othello: that one cannot judge the world by superficial appearances alone. Othello's anguish when he did not realise this is testimony to its tragic potential. King Lear takes us upon a further exploration of the tragic possibilities of life.

In this play Shakespeare seems to have a two-fold purpose. His primary aim is to define the principle which he believes can give new meaning to life in terms of human relationships, that is in terms of its ability to bind men

together ortear them apart; in its ability to give meaning to life or to make of it a purposeless existence. Secondly he attempts to show, through the suffering of Lear on the heath, the chaotic and painful nature of life when shorn of any binding factor. This should become clearer in my analysis of the play.

A little explanation of the first point is necessary first. To my mind there are four basic relationships in human life, each of which depends on an initial value judgement for their establishment. One has a relationship with oneself, that is a knowledge and concept of one's own identity. Another is one's relationship with one's fellow men. The third links one to a god of some sort, and the fourth links one to the universe around one. This last relationship is the simplest, and requires for its establishment only the conclusions Hamlet came to in the grave-yard, that is the common physical nature of all men. With this as a basis other relationships can grow. The other three relationships are created in the spirit rather than in the body and depend upon a valid and true value judgement for their establishment. For, depending upon the values by which one lives one's life, one will establish one's own identity, one's relationship with one's fellow men and with one's god. A simple example may illustrate this.

If one believes that discipline is essential for the realisation of one's true nature, one will behave in a disciplined way, one will mix with people who hold similar ideas, and one will class as enemies people holding contradictory ideas. One's deity will be something like the God of the Old Testament, who issued a rigid code of laws to his people and smote them with fire and brimstone every

time they disobeyed his orders. The greatness of Shakespeare lies in his ability to conceive of a set of values that can potentially bind all men together and alienate none. He conceives of a set of values which, like the essential physical similarity of all men, hold true for all men and can form the foundation upon which all men can establish a higher set of relationships that will bind each man in harmony with his fellow men.

As far as the secomd aim of the play is concerned, it can also be seen as the expression of a feeling that had been developing in Shakespeare's mind, and expressed in the plays, for some time. As I have attempted to point out in this thesis, Shakespeare came to realise that the system of belief to which he had subscribed had failed completely to fulfil its purpose. It no longer provided an adequate foundation upon which a happy life could be based. The consequences of such a realisation are almost too immense to contemplate. Everything that had been of value in life (as judged by the standards of this old vision of life) had suddenly become meaningless. Chaos, and all that that meant to the Elizabethan, had come again. But this was chaos in the mind and in the spirit rather than in the state. I believe that Lear's suffering on the heath reflects the suffering of a mind after its realisation that everything that seemed valuable in life had come to be worth nothing simply because the standards by which it had judged their value had proved to be false. Shakespeare will use the four relationships mentioned above to express the horror of a mind so afflicted.

All of Shakespeare's earlier plays point toward this one great play. It is here that he gives expression to a state of mind that had initially only been reflected in an

undercurrent of sadness and doubt running through the bright world of the comic vision of life. In King Lear a whole world dies, and a whole vision of life is broken down until life becomes as bleak and hostile as the storm-swept heath upon which Lear stands in his worst hour.

Lear, when first we meet him, is the epitome of confidence. The world to him is a perfectly ordered and easily controlled place in which a whole kingdom can be divided up at the sweep of a hand and where love can be demanded and received at the snap of the royal fingers. In order to prove this (although it is in no way doubted in the first scene) he demands, as the price of a third part of his kingdom, a verbal affirmation from each of his three daughters of their complete and devoted love. Regan and Goneril respond enthusiastically, for to them, as to Lear, love can be valued in the same way as land. But Cordelia, Lear's favourite daughter, can only say "nothing". "Nothing will come of nothing, speak again", growls her father, and he is quite correct, but only to his twisted way of thinking. By his present standards and those of Regan and Goneril she has done a cruel and stupid thing. By her own standards she has done what is right. As in Othello the same words can be simultaneously right or wrong depending on the attitude of the listener or speaker. Lear, by rejecting Cordelia, places himself firmly in the same world of action as Regan and Goneril and in the same sphere of thinking. The suffering he experiences when he realises this world is not what it seems and this way of thinking is void of anything worthwhile will be the suffering on the heath, until he finds that Cordelia's "nothing" will turn, through his new vision of life, into "everything".

But much has to occur before he realises his mistake.

Kent, his loyal servant, realises the time has come to take sides, and out of love for his master informs Lear that he is a fool. Lear rebukes him for his insolence. Kent then makes the following significant statement:

"Be Kent unmannerly
When Lear is mad." (I, i, 144)

These words introduce an important theme in the play, the question of sanity, madness and how to judge the difference. Kent is here making a value judgement, defining what he considers to be normal in human actions. By his standards, which are the same as those of Cordelia, Lear is mad. To Lear it is Kent who is mad. A breach in the initial unity of the play has been made. Life is no longer an harmonious whole and mankind has been split up into a number of bickering factions simply because the standards which Lear uses to judge his people are false. Lear rejects Cordelia and denies that he ever had such a daughter. He banishes Kent and exchanges harsh words with France, who also deems Lear to be mad. France considers Burgundy, who has refused to marry Cordelia without a substantial dowry, as a fool who has no concept of true value in people. Lear's relationships with his daughter, his servant and his fellow-king have collapsed because of this clash of values. Kent adds another telling remark:

Lear: "Now by Apollo--
Kent: Now, by Apollo, King,
Thou swear'st thy gods in vain." (I, i, 157)

Lear no longer stands at one with the gods, for he has rejected them by his actions just as sure as he has rejected

Cordelia, Kent and France.

All he has left are his two daughters who spoke so bravely of their love for him. Should they deny him, as deny him they will, then the only proof he has of the validity of his values will collapse. With this collapse the final relationship of the three discussed earlier, a sense of his own identity, will also collapse. This is exactly what happens. Goneril sends him and his retinue from her castle, and Lear's world starts to crumble. His own identity starts to break down:

> "Does any here know me? This is not Lear.
> Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?
> Either his notion weakens, or his discernings
> Are lethargied.-Ha! waking? 'Tis not so.-
> Who is it that can tell me who I am?"
> (I, iv, 225)

This is confirmed in a speech a few lines later, when Lear clearly states the importance of his relationship with his two daughters, and how they can affect his concept of his own identity:

> "I have another daughter,
> Who, I am sure, is kind and comfortable.
> When she shall hear this of thee, with her nails
> She'll flay thy wolfish visage. Thou shalt find
> That I'll resume the shape which thou dost think
> I have cast off for ever." (I, iv, 305)

But Regan, too, rejects him and is quite willing to turn him from her castle door even on such a night. Lear, in his folly and his blindness, does not realise what he has done wrong, and until the last minute tries to judge love

by his old, warped standards which had made Regan and Goneril seem worthy of his kingdom and his trust. Regan offers to let him keep fifty knights while Goneril will only allow twenty-five. He turns to Regan with the following words:

> "I'll go with thee.
> Thy fifty yet doth double five and twenty,
> And thou art twice her love." (II, iv, 257)

If he relies on material objects as evidence of love or hatred then he will suffer immensely, as did Othello over the handkerchief. Lear is judging by the same sort of standards and has lost everything because of it. His power, his position, his train, his daughters, his friends and his gods have all deserted him. He stumbles onto the bare and storm-swept heath with his world crashing about his head, his life suddenly made meaningless. Without anything to give it meaning life becomes as bare and hostile as the heath upon which he stands, while the storm raging all around him is symbolic of the suffering that is beating upon his sanity and the turbulence that is so violently disturbing his once calm and confident nature.

Yet, in his agony, the rough justice of the elements is comforting to the cruelly used old man:

> "I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;
> I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children;
> You owe me no subscription. Then let fall
> Your horrible pleasures." (II, ii, 16)

He is still unaware of his condition, however, for he is still thinking in terms of debt and obligation. The full

meaning of his situation is brought home to him by the emergence of Tom from the hovel. Lear, after seeing Tom, makes the most important speech in the play so far. He expresses the state to which man degenerates when shorn of all higher values, with only his physical appearance left to assure him of his humanity:

> "Why, thou wert better in a grave than to answer with thy uncover'd body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated! Thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off you lendings! Come, unbutton here."
>
> (III, iv, 100)

The significance of these words is far-reaching. Note the use of the image of the grave in the first sentence and reflect back upon the graveyard scene and its significance in Hamlet. Man, with no higher beliefs or values, is no more than a simple physical creature, and little better than an animal. The symbol of clothing is important here. Just as Tom is physically unprotected from the fury of the storm, so Lear, unprotected from the horror of the void by any valid and meaningful moral system, is defenceless against the fury of the storm that rages within his soul. Lear is morally and spiritually defenceless, and expresses the insight he has gained into his condition by removing his clothes. This symbolic use of clothing is of great importance in this play and will be developed further.

Life has been stripped of all façades and all illusions. Man has become the "thing itself" to Lear, and in his ravings on the heath the problems opened up in Hamlet and Othello are brought once more to light and fully explored. All the norms and standards by which we live our daily lives are questioned. Lear in his madness can see more clearly than all the "sane" people in the play. Who is more mad, the old king who speaks the following lines containing an undeniable truth about life:

> "Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand.
> Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thy own back;
> Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind
> For which thou whip'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.
> Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;
> Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,
> And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
> Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it."
> (IV, vi, 160)

or the Duke of Cornwall who puts out Gloucester's eyes for the "crime" of going to help the old king in the storm? Nothing is more cruel, more sick and more unjust than this action, yet because it is done by the ruler of the land, Cornwall nearly goes unpunished for it. As Lear says:

> "A dog's obey'd in office."

The problem presented here has been discussed in Shakespeare's work as far back as Richard II, when John of Gaunt refused to take action against the man clearly guilty of complicity in Woodstock's murder, simply because he was the King of England. How Shakespeare's attitude has changed! The need

for a valid set of standards by which to judge all men irrespective of their office is clearly urgent. Even more important is a value in life capable of redeeming man from his enslavement by his worser self.

Lear's surrender of all his old values, even at the cost of such enormous suffering, makes it possible for him to gain insight into a new value that can fulfil the need expressed above. His loss is a form of spiritual death from which he is reborn, like a helpless child, to the love of Cordelia, which will give him fresh and true meaning in life. Shakespeare expresses Lear's awakening as a return from the grave:

> "You do me wrong to take me out o' th' grave."
> (IV, vii, 45)

He has been born again to a new life and has become a different man. Gone is the arrogant self-confidence of the early scenes. Instead we see gentleness, doubt and humanity:

> "Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?
> ...I know not what to say."
> (IV, vii, 52)

It is significant that Lear is woken to the sound of music. This symbol of harmony and happiness is important particularly in Shakespeare's later plays. It is also significant that Lear, while he slept, was dressed in fresh clothes. The naked Lear on the heath, unprotected from the horror blowing through his mind, has once more been spiritually clothed by the love of his daughter and by the mean-

ing her love gives to his life.

How different is her love when compared to that of Regan and Goneril! Its nature soon reveals itself as Lear tries to make amends for what he has done:

> "If you have poison for me I will drink it.
> I know you do not love me; for your sisters
> Have, as I do remember, done me wrong:
> You have some cause, they have not."
> (IV, vii, 72)

Cordelia's reply is infinitely simple and infinitely beautiful:

> "No cause, no cause." (IV, vii, 75)

This can only be explained according to the values with which Cordelia judges life. To one way of thinking she has every "cause" to hate her father and would be justified in taking any revenge on him she desired. Logically, rationally she has cause. But the nature of her love goes far beyond the limits of cold reason, and it is here that Shakespeare sees hope for mankind. Hamlet said that "use every man after his desert, and who shall 'scape whipping?". Logically, rationally the entire human race is so deep in sin that the best we can hope for is a life after death of eternal damnation. Human love of that sort Cordelia bears her father, going beyond the limits of reason, debt, obligation and merit, has the power to save mankind from itself. This sort of love can only be compared with the love Christ showed for the world. Indeed, a Christian interpretation of this play would be entirely in order. But although the play can be explained in terms of orthodox Christian dogma, its

meaning goes beyond the limits of dogma to express an eternal truth about life itself.

The concrete effects of Cordelia's love are demonstrated immediately after the battle, when Lear and Cordelia, prisoners to Edmund, are sent away to prison. This is Lear's speech:

> "Come, let's away to prison.
> We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage;
> When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
> And ask of thee forgiveness; so we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too-
> Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out-
> And take upon's the mystery of things
> As if we were God's spies; and we'll wear out
> In a wall'd prison packs and sects of great ones
> That ebb and flow by th' moon." (V, iii, 8)

A critic like Nicholas Brooke would have Lear once again mad, but these words seem to me to be far from the ravings of a madman. The words of Lovelace's poem are called to mind:

> "Stone walls do not a prison make,
> Nor iron bars a cage."

We are also reminded of Hamlet's lament that, in a world without anything to give value to life, Denmark becomes a prison. In Lear's new world, with the sort of value provided by Cordelia's love, a prison cell becomes the whole world. Within its confines two human beings are able to perform the purest and most meaningful actions possible to man, those of blessing and forgiveness. Lear

is beyond the petty intrigues of the court of which he was once head and the pitiful ambitions of worldly men that "ebb and flow by the moon". With the insight gained from his experience of Cordelia's love he sees into the heart of life itself and takes upon himself "the mystery of things". The exact meaning of such a line need not be explained, for its suggestive power is more than sufficient.

The next line is very significant not only in this play but in the plays as a whole:

> "And (we'll) take upon's the mystery of things
> As if we were God's spies."

This is one of the few times in the tragedies that the term "God" replaces "gods". The phrase "God's spies" suggests a relationship between God and mortals, as if Lear, with his new insight into life, was seeing the world through the eyes of God himself, or at least was capable of judging life in the same way as God himself might judge; with compassion, understanding and love. The way in which this contact with and awareness of God is achieved in this play is best explained by an old proverb:

> "I sought my God, but my God eluded me;
> I sought my soul, but my soul I could not find;
> I sought my brother, and I found all three."

One's own nature and identity, as well as the nature of the supernatural, can only be worked out in purely human terms. Seeking out and loving one's fellow men is the only way of finding oneself and one's God, and it is here, as I have suggested earlier, that hope for the future of the human

race is to be found. In King Lear Shakespeare does not have to resort to using a sort of supernatural conjuror like the Duke in Measure for Measure to work out his happy ending, neither does he, as in the early comedies, have to leave out or ignore mankind's almost limitless potential for evil. King Lear encompasses all this and still manages to affirm a value that can assure the progress and happiness of mankind, even if it is at the cost of the lives of Cordelia and her father. Shakespeare is working in purely human terms, for he realises that human beings must be able to help themselves before they can expect any help from God.

So the gods stay neutral, taking no direct part in the action. Yet they do acknowledge the value of Cordelia's love, and the courage and sacrifice of the old king needed to become worthy of this love:

"Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The gods themselves throw incense."
(V, iii, 20)

So Lear and his daughter go off to prison, content with the world and secure in their mutual love.

But the full tragedy has to be played out, and the final affirmation of the values previously expressed must be made in the face of death itself in order to attest the meaning they give to life. In the final scene Shakespeare uses the full symbolic weight of all that has gone before. The attitude of the gods is finally made clear. "The gods protect her" prays Albany, only to open his eyes to the terrible picture of the old king with his beloved daughter dead in his arms. The gods are completely neutral.

Lear's friendship with the men all around him collapses as he calls them all "dogs and murderers". All that Cordelia stands for is dead to him. Significantly he says she is as "dead as earth". Looking back one recalls that the living bond with the earth, binding him in community with all men, was the only bond he had left to cling to on the heath. The earth, from which new life springs eternally, is finally dead to him, and there is no hope of another rebirth. The full realisation of what has happened, the absolute finality of death, comes upon Lear:

> "Thou'lt come no more,
> Never, never, never, never, never."
> (V, iii, 307)

He then does a curious thing, asking that one of his buttons be undone. In the light of remarks made earlier on the symbolic significance of clothing, his action becomes understandable. With Cordelia dead and her love lost to him he becomes once more "unaccommodated man", with nothing to protect him from the horror that is bearing in on him from all sides. Once more the storm of uncertainty and futility is lashing his mind, but this time the destruction is complete. Body and soul must die, for the earth as well as the heavens have been destroyed. The "everything" of Cordelia's love has once more turned to "nothing". Yet he cries out that he sees something on her lips. Is it the pallor of death, or is his tone more triumphant? Is he affirming once more the absolute necessity of believing in something if man is to survive? Is he trying to fool himself she is still alive? The value to him would be beyond assessment:

"(she lives). If it be so,
It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows
That ever I have felt." (V, iii, 265)

He never gives up, and endures until the end; "ripeness is all". His tragedy and his glory are complete.

This last scene, packed as it is with symbolic meaning, contains a line which I find very interesting but inexplicable. Lear cries:

"And my poor fool is hang'd!" (V, iii, 305)

We know that it is Cordelia who has been hanged, so an attempt seems to be made here to relate her and the Fool. The Fool and Cordelia are never on the stage at the same time, for when we first meet the Fool Cordelia has left for France with her husband, and it is significant that the moment she appears on the scene again the Fool disappears and is never seen again. They seem to be two sides of the same coin, as if Cordelia's love for Lear was a form of sublime folly. Indeed, as I have suggested, it goes far beyond the bounds of reason.

As for Regan, Goneril and Edmund, their position is clear. Seeing life through the cold, rational eyes of self interest, and having no idea of the sort of true values that give real meaning to life, they consume themselves and perish unmourned. The curses Lear throws at them are full of animal images, or, as Cassio puts it in Othello, man without any spiritual values is merely "bestial". It is this part of human nature Edmund idolises when he claims "nature" for his "goddess". Lear comes to a true understanding of "nature", while Edmund, labouring under a mis-

conception, perishes accordingly - a chilling testimony to the effects on humanity of a life without love. The final judgement on the two sisters and their way of life is delivered by Albany in an argument with his wife, Goneril. He says:

> "You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
> Blows in your face." (IV, ii, 30)

Goneril and her sister are so wicked, so devoid of human traits, that they do not even have this last, basic relationship to bind them into the great community of men. They are unworthy of the very dust from which all men are fashioned. They are inferior to even the "thing itself", and are in no way human.

The Gloucester-Edgar-Edmund sub-plot mirrors, on a different level, Lear's story. Whereas Lear abused a higher form of love, Gloucester abused physical love, and both paid the price for their transgressions in a proportionate manner. Lear lost his sense of values and could not "see" clearly while Gloucester had his eyes put out by the Duke of Cornwall; that is Lear lost his spiritual sight while Gloucester lost his physical sight. Both go through a form of death to be reborn to a new way of seeing things, and this way is shown to them by the children whom they had mistreated and misjudged in their earlier blindness.

Gloucester's tragedy gives perspective to Lear's. I see Gloucester's suicide attempt as being an exploration of a possible way out for a mind torn by the suffering of Lear and Gloucester. Both of them are driven beyond endurance by the lack of tenderness in the world, but whereas Lear is prepared to endure spiritual death, Gloucester sees physical,

self-inflicted death as the only way out of his torment. His son, Edgar, expresses the necessity of Lear's type of endurance:

"Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither;
Ripeness is all." (V, ii, 9)

It is easy and pleasant to give up, but there is little hope that a better world will come from it. Lear carries on to receive the love of Cordelia that redeems even the suffering he has undergone.

King Lear, therefore, seems to me to be the culminating point toward which the earlier works had been developing, while being at the same time a stepping stone to the future. Using ideas, images and symbols developed and perfected in this play - love as the abiding principle which gives meaning to life; the child as a symbol of hope for the future; and the relationships which can only be built up through love- Shakespeare will continue his exploration of the human condition. His next play, Macbeth, will be concerned with the effects on a man's life if he turns his back on the bonds that bind men together and the obligations which such bonds impose on men.

Using similar terminology, symbol and metaphor, Shakespeare explores in Macbeth a movement in the hero's life exactly opposite to that in King Lear. If Lear, in the course of the play, comes to learn the true meaning of life and finds infinite value in life, then Macbeth changes from a man who has everything to a man who values life at less than nothing.

In the beginning of the play we hear of, and see briefly, a happier Macbeth; the valiant soldier who, heedless of the danger, defends his king and country against rebellion and foreign invasion simply out of his sense of duty. He is seen as the noblest and bravest man in Scotland, high in favour and honour, a man among men. One of the men whom Macbeth defeats is the Thane of Cawdor, a rebel like Macdonwald who has been "unseam'd from the nave to th' chaps" by Macbeth after which his head has been "fix'd upon our battlements". Cawdor is stripped of his title by Duncan who then orders that it be conferred upon Macbeth.

> "What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won."
> (I, ii, 69)

This is one of those lines containing a weight of meaning far beyond its context. For with this title Macbeth will inherit all his predecessor's attributes. He becomes a rebel who, like Macdownald, will have his head cut off and placed upon the battlements. He too is a "gentleman" upon whom Duncan built an "absolute trust". Furthermore, he will lose his life in the same careless manner as Cawdor. Compare this description of the manner in which Cawdor faced his death with Macbeth's attitude to life just before the end of the play, and one will see that the description, though brief, fits exactly:

> "Nothing in his life
> Became him like the leaving it: he died
> As one that had been studied in his death
> To throw away the dearest thing he ow'd
> As 'twere a careless trifle." (I, iv, 7)

What I am suggesting is that Macbeth is the study of how a man can come to view life as being so empty and meaningless that he will throw it away as if it were a "trifle". The wheel of the play will come full circle from the death of one Cawdor to the death of another. The intervening space will be concerned with the study of the style and manner of life that can lead to such a way of death. What is lacking in Macbeth's life that he values it so slightly? By his actions Macbeth becomes anti-life, and his way becomes the way of death as one by one all the things that make life worth living are stripped from him.

In the process of stripping a noble man who has every reason to live down to a depraved monster who can only think of dying, Shakespeare, besides furthering his exploration of human nature which is the prime purpose of these plays, affirms in a different way to King Lear the absolute necessity of building up a worthwhile set of standards which can give value to life. Macbeth violates all the bonds that bind men together in a society and allow the society to function peacefully and well, and in doing so denies everything that goes to make him recognisable as a human being and becomes instead a monster. Life becomes to him

> "...but a walking shadow, a poor player,
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more; it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing." (V, v, 24)

These lines are not, as is sometimes suggested, Shakespeare's final and all-encompassing statement on the basic futility of life, but rather his final comment on the effects on a man's vision of life if he lives as Macbeth does. If a man in-

dulges his selfish desires at the expense of all the bonds and obligations that link men together in the new order of humanity Shakespeare is evolving in these plays, then everything that gives meaning to that man's life will desert him, until life, in human terms, is not worth living. These natural bonds, and the outward actions that result from a knowledge of the sanctity of these bonds, are the pivot upon which this play turns.

It goes further than this. The witches are obviously evil, working toward Macbeth's eventual destruction, yet they speak the truth a good deal of the time. Macbeth has been made Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth does have to fear Macduff, and does die at the hand of a man not born of woman, after Birnam wood has come to high Dunsinane. The mixing of fair and foul, a key theme in the play, is apparent here. So what is important is not the words the witches speak but the way in which they are interpreted and acted upon. Banquo, too, is promised future greatness but does not succumb to evil ways like Macbeth. He remarks on the fact that to him the prophecies "sound so fair". It is Macbeth who starts when he hears them, yet it is not the words, but his own "horrible imaginings" which "shakes so (his) single state of man". (I, iii, 138) The witches have no power to ruin Macbeth if he will not ruin himself. This idea is expressed later in the play, when Macbeth pleads with the doctor to cure his tormented wife:

Doctor: "...she is troubled with thick-coming fancies
That keep her from her rest.
Macbeth: Cure her of that.
Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow

Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?
Doctor: Therein the patient
Must minister to himself." (V, iii, 38)

Macbeth and his wife have only themselves to blame. The cause and cure of their sufferings lie within their own hearts. Fairness and foulness are likewise only to be found there. As in the suffering of Lear and the healing love of Cordelia, Shakespeare expresses his ideas in purely human terms. Man himself can build up or break down any value he sees in life, the only basis from which to work being the rough clay from which he is moulded. Perhaps it is significant that Banquo and Macbeth meet the witches on a "blasted heath" as bare and desolate as the one on which Lear suffered his madness. Both Lear and Macbeth start from the beginning, but whereas Lear's progress is steadily upward, Macbeth takes the other path, denying instead of affirming, and so completes his own disaster.

But at the root of all evil there is a human cause, however unnatural or inhuman the action may be. The final irony of the play hinges upon this fact. The tyrant Macbeth, so steeped in "bloody and unnatural acts" that he is no longer human, believes he will not die because it is impossible for two more unnatural actions to take place, that is until a man is not born of a woman and until a wood gets up from Birnam and walks to Dunsinane. The prophecy is fulfilled, and he dies. The wood moves, by human agency. A man is not born of woman, but is cut from her body by the hands of the doctor. It is superbly ironic that a man who has heard prophecies and fulfilled them by his own a-

gency could not conceive of the possibility of other men's making the impossible come true as well. The lesson learnt before repeats itself. It is not the action itself but the human motivation behind the action which is important. The office of king may seem fair to Banquo, but the manner in which his comrade takes over and carries out that high office makes it something to be feared. The moving of a wood may seem unnatural, but the human motivation behind its movement makes it something good. Macbeth's story shows how incorrect motives can turn everything that is fair into everything that is foul.

Lady Macbeth, after reading her husband's letter about the strange occurrences on the heath, paints a picture of her husband as being the type of man whose inward thoughts make him fully worthy of all the honours, both real and promised, heaped upon his head, a man whose motives are, in fact, pure:

> "Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
> What thou art promis'd. Yet do I fear thy nature;
> It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great;
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly
> That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
> And yet wouldst wrongly win.
> Thou'dst have, great Glamis, that which cries
> 'Thus thou must do' if thou have it;
> And that which rather thou dost fear to do
> Than wishest should be undone." (I, v, 12)

Lady Macbeth cannot conceive of her husband's achieving his goal unless he plays false in some way. She forces him to think in the same way as she does, and he starts to violate the faith men have put in him because of his previously pure

motives and honourable way of conduct. By murdering Duncan he breaks a double trust:

> "He's here in double trust:
> First, as I am his kinsman and his subject-
> Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
> Who should against his murderer shut the door,
> Not bear the knife myself." (I, vii, 12)

All that protects man and society from anarchy are these bonds of trust which should arise naturally from human nature. The moment the murder is conceived this nature starts to die in the Macbeths, and with it the blessings which a life lived according to this nature brings. Lady Macbeth's

> "Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here."
> (I, v, 37)

is a conscious plea to be turned into something other than a human being. It might be noticed that the sex of the witches on the heath is uncertain. Lady Macbeth is a fourth witch, working on her husband's mind and forcing him along his unnatural path, yet it is strange that this inhuman woman, who expects her husband to violate all the laws of nature and of nations, cannot herself do what she expects of her husband:

> "Had he not resembled
> My father as he slept, I had done't."
> (II, ii, 12)

The bond between father and daughter, the natural affection between child and parent, prevents her from murdering Mac-

beth's only stumbling block to the throne, Duncan. Thus the conscience of which Hamlet speaks makes of her a coward.

Macbeth himself does the deed, breaks the double trust, and immediately starts to suffer for it. He puts himself beyond the pale and excommunicates himself by his actions from the blessings normally accorded human beings:

> "But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen'?
> I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen'
> Stuck in my throat." (II, ii, 29)

Those blessings, which most men regard as everyday occurences to be taken for granted, will no longer be accorded him. The rest and refreshment of sleep will be denied him:

> " 'Sleep no more;
> Macbeth does murder sleep'-the innocent sleep,
> Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,
> The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
> Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
> Chief nourisher in life's feast." (II, ii, 35)

The nightmares he speaks of later and Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking are symbolic of the blessings of rest and tranquility of mind, resulting from a clear conscience, that are denied them. These are two people whom conscience has not turned into cowards. They act, and the "dreams" of which Hamlet speculated, which gave him "pause", are the nightmares of this unhappy pair. But no longer do they have to die in order to be punished for their deeds. Life itself can be heaven or hell, depending upon the way it is lived.

The reference in the above quotation to "life's feast" looks ahead to the feast scene, disrupted by Macbeth's further crime. The feast is not just a meal, but a whole ceremony symbolic of the blessings of life. Friends are gathered together in perfect harmony to nourish themselves physically and spiritually. The harmony and order it symbolises are broken by Banquo's bloody murder. The feast opens with the words:

> "You know your own degrees, sit down.
> At first and last the hearty welcome."
> (III, iv, I)

After the appearance of the ghost and Macbeth's guilty behaviour it breaks up in confusion and disorder, its harmony destroyed:

> "At once, good night.
> Stand not upon the order of your going,
> But go at once." (III, iv, 117)

Macbeth, later in the play, sums up the dismal state of affairs his life has become:

> "My way of life
> Is fall'n into the ~~sear~~, the yellow leaf;
> And that which should accompany old age,
> As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
> I must not look to have; but, in their stead,
> Curses not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
> Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not."
> (V, iii, 22)

Blessings have been exchanged for curses; real honours, of the sort heaped upon him by Duncan, have been replaced

by "mouth-honour". It is ironic that Macbeth, playing the role of outraged witness to Duncan's murder, predicts exactly what will happen in Scotland after the crime, and describes the consequences which will later overtake himself:

> "Had I but died an hour before this chance,
> I had liv'd a blessed time; for, from this instant,
> There's nothing serious in mortality-
> All is but toys; renown and grace is dead;
> The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
> Is left this vault to brag of." (II, iii, 89)

Blessings turn to curses. All turns to nothing. Life becomes a "tale told by an idiot" without meaning now that a man has abandoned his faith in himself and in the human race and broken his sacred trust.

Once more the "time is out of joint". Examine Ross's later words:

> "But cruel are the times, when we are traitors
> And do not know ourselves." (IV, ii, 18)

Macbeth turns traitor, literally to his king and symbolically to his humanity, and becomes a mad animal. Macduff, after killing Macbeth, proclaims the significance of his death with the following words:

> "The time is free." (V, viii, 55)

Macbeth's actions do not disrupt his own peace of mind alone, but affect the lives of every man, woman and child in Scotland. It is significant that Macbeth, like

Claudius, becomes king, putting the "time" out of joint. Evil sits on the throne in the place of goodness, the moral order is overthrown, and all men are forced, against their wills, to commit some unnatural act. Macduff is forced to cast off his allegiance to his king and flee his native country. Furthermore, he is forced to deny his natural duty to defend his family, a thing going against all nature, as Lady Macduff points out in her discussion with her son. Macduff too has become a "traitor" who "wants the natural touch". Through no fault of his own he denies his nature and pays a tragic price.

Similarly Malcolm, the heir to the throne, is forced to deny himself, that is to deny his own honour and integrity in order to find out whether Macduff is a true man or a spy in Macbeth's service. A Hamlet-type situation develops, where no man trusts his fellow. As I have suggested, the basic situation is remarkably similar to that in Hamlet, but the angle from which this situation is examined is different. Macbeth is written from the point of view of the man on the throne.

Macbeth denies his duty to his fellow men, and by so doing denies himself and his God. In doing so he has denied life itself, and all that is left for him to do is to die well. Having rejected life, having studied the ways of death and death-in-life, there is nothing else left to him.

In the great tragedies the boundaries of human nature have been defined, while no real moral judgement has been passed. Yet no concrete certainty has been achieved, for Shakespeare's definition of man has been made using terms like faith, love, understanding and the like. All that

has been made real are the consequences for man if he manifests love and faith, or if he fails to do so. The exact nature of love and faith remains a mystery at the heart of these plays, helping to make them the great works of art they are.

In the later tragedies, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus and Timon of Athens, Shakespeare seems to leave the inner workings of the human mind and begins to explore the actions of man in society when he either manifest or fails to manifest his true nature through his love for others. It is upon this sort of love that Shakespeare has come to depend for the building up of a new, sane and ordered society on earth; of a brave new world.

THE LATER TRAGEDIES

If King Lear shows us "the thing itself, unaccommodated man", Antony and Cleopatra goes to the other extreme. Man becomes a demi-god whose "legs bestrid the ocean", whose "rear'd arm created the world". He is no longer a "quintessence of dust" (Hamlet), whose life is a dreary succession of "tomorrows" leading to "a dusty death" (Macbeth), but a creature in whose "lips and eyes eternity" is to be found. "Kingdoms are clay", but man, at his best, becomes "fire and air", the noblest of the elements. Cassius's vision of Caesar bestriding the "narrow world like a Colossus" comes true in the persons of Antony, Octavius and Lepidus, the "triple-pillars of the world". Lepidus, a lesser figure, soon drops out, and battle is then joined between the two remaining Colossi for supremacy of the world. But there are two worlds in this play; the world of Rome and the world of Egypt, and torn between the two is Mark Antony, a soldier of Rome, but the lover of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt.

The world of Rome is stable, rational, humourless and self-denying. It is also efficient, practical and true to itself. It gets things done, it achieves its aims, it wins its battles by both land and sea and conquers the land of Egypt. Octavius becomes emperor of all the world and the people of the earth breathe a sigh of relief. His government will be efficient, giving to the world much needed peace and stability, even if this means that the taxes will be collected with equal efficiency. Yet, for all this peace and stability, life will become a very drab and colourless affair. Men will not die of over-excitement, but they may die of boredom and monotony. Life will become rather cold and calculating, as cold and calculating as the man who governs it.

The tragedy of this play is that this sort of life has no place in it for the values and way of life of the world of Egypt. Just as Cleopatra's dream is beyond the comprehension of Dolabella, so the way of life which induces such grandiose visions can find no place in the world as we know it, but must "needs find new heaven, new earth" in order to exist. For Antony to live as he would like to with Cleopatra, "Rome in Tiber" must "melt", and the "wide arch of the rang'd empire fall". The two ways of life cannot co-exist, just as earth and water, the base elements, cannot mix with fire and air, the noble elements. There is glory in the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra, but there is, if we stand outside and observe, a large measure of sadness. Shakespeare is acknowledging a form of failure. The "nobleness of life" may be to "do thus", but it is a nobleness leading necessarily to death if it attempts to live in the same world as the real world of Rome. If one is to dream in the way Cleopatra dreamed of Antony, reality will destroy the dreamer, but not the dream. Life may seem grander for their way of leaving it, but the magnificence will soon fade into memory and become something longingly remembered, rather than an action bringing hope and promise for the future. For the child Cleopatra nurses at her breast (the child is a symbol of this hope and promise to Shakespeare), "born" when the bond of "husband" and "wife" is finally acknowledged, is the asp, a child bringing death rather than life.

Would it have been possible for the two worlds and the two visions of life to co-exist? Would it have been possible for the two lovers to have lived affirming their way of life? Was it necessary that they die in order to stay true to themselves? One of the key images in the play

suggests that the play achieves its only possible conclusion.

Each year the Nile comes down in flood, overflowing its banks and bringing death and destruction to the people who live near it. Yet, at the same time, its floodwaters deposit rich soil on its banks in which the farmers grow the corn necessary to feed the Egyptian people. If the river does not overflow the people will starve. It seems that only from this sort of violent and often destructive excess can anything of value come, with men as well as with the Nile. Remove the ability to destroy and break down and we shall lose simultaneously the power to create and build up. This is the lesson Rome has not learnt. The first words heard in the play are spoken by a Roman criticising Antony's actions in Roman terms:

> "Nay, but this dotage of our general's
> O'erflows the measure." (I, i, I)

The Romans would have the Nile like the Tiber, never overflowing. Death and destruction might have been prevented, but the richness of life would also have been lost. For everything to the Romans is controlled and "measured". A situation is coldly weighed up in terms of advantage and disadvantage. Antony's challenge to Octavius to personal combat is considered by Octavius to be not to his "vantage", and so is (quite rightly from his point of view) rejected. When the whole world is at stake it is foolish to throw everything away on a point of "honour". Yet we remember that the gentle Desdemona would not betray her husband "for the world", and we compare the beauty and purity of Antony's love for Cleopatra. It is this impulsiveness of

Antony, this sublime "folly" that makes him the man he is, the giant of Cleopatra's dream, who towers above the world even though he has been defeated by Octavius. It is this "folly", this ability to live and love to the overflowing that makes him and mars him. Enobarbus is inspired with the same sort of folly:

> "The loyalty well held to fools does make
> Our faith mere folly. Yet he that can endure
> To follow with allegiance a fall'n lord
> Does conquer him that did his master conquer,
> And earns a place i' th' story." (III, xiii, 42)

The Fool in King Lear, like Enobarbus in that he criticises everything foolish his master does, is as faithful to Lear as Enobarbus is to Antony. It is here that the relationship between the Fool and Cordelia in King Lear becomes clearer. Both, against all reason, stay loyal to the mad old king, having every "cause" to leave him, yet going beyond the limits of reason to manifest the sort of irrational, illogical, but very beautiful and real love which they have for Lear and which Enobarbus has for Antony. As Enobarbus says, their faith is "mere folly" with no practical reward, yet it earns them a place in the story. It is only because of his folly that Antony's story is worth telling. It is only through the folly of his love for Cleopatra that she is inspired to transform their lives in such a glorious manner.

Shakespeare here goes beyond the bounds of reason, which is able to control only the "baser elements" of life, and reaches out to explore the mystical quality of human love, with its power to transcend the petty limitations of this world and, like Cleopatra, to "make defect perfection"

and redeem all the faults and follies of the human race. Its power, embodied in Cleopatra, is made concrete by the very scene from which the above quotation was taken, Act II, ii. In it Enobarbus, the hardened old campaigner whose language can really only be expected to be monosyllabic or obscene, is transformed into a poet speaking glorious verse, simply because he is talking about this enchanting woman. Her love for Antony not only gives infinite meaning to their own lives, it transforms the world around them, turning it into a place of pomp and magnificence, peopled by beautiful people, even as it transformed the crusty old Enobarbus.

So when they die the earth is "not worth the leave-taking", yet it is here on earth that life must go on, and it is here that Shakespeare must find a way for his heroes to live good lives and stay alive. The love of Antony and Cleopatra is not fit for the earth, or, the earth is not fit for the love of Antony and Cleopatra. A "new heaven, new earth" must be found in order that such "nobility of life" may survive. While alive they have transformed the world, but after their death man becomes once more little better than a "quintessence of dust", carefully measured and controlled by Octavius Caesar, but dust nevertheless.

Both ways of life, when compared with one another, are seen to be inadequate. Whereas the love of Antony and Cleopatra was not of this world, the values of Octavius are too much with it. His way of life smacks too much of the horrible logic of Regan and Goneril. Octavius is prepared to give his sister to Antony in marriage in order to help him maintain control of his half of the world, valuing her affection in the same way as Lear once did, equating love and material values. Antony can only believe in love by surrendering his claim to material things.

So this play places at opposite extremes that which Shakespeare must reconcile in the romances. Dream and reality, bounty and waste, glory and practicality, this world and the next must somehow be made all one if man at his best is to live on the earth in hope, in love and in freedom.

Coriolanus, although it is a story of a soldier of Rome like Antony and Cleopatra, is very different in style and atmosphere from its predecessor. The way of life we see is no longer soft, rich and opulent but hard, cruel and narrow; as hard as the steel of Coriolanus's sword, as cruel as the wars in which he revels, and as narrow as the streets of Rome and the petty visions of its inhabitants. Coriolanus is the last of Shakespeare's overtly political plays, dealing with men in society and the bonds that keep society together, as well as the forces that drive it towards destruction. After realising in Antony and Cleopatra that it is the people like Octavius and Coriolanus that control the world his tragic vision of life seems to become more bitter, to end with the extreme bitterness of Timon.

The nature of the hero of the play is strangely akin to that of an earlier Shakespearean character. Could not Hotspur in Henry IV part I have said in the middle of a battle:

"Sir, praise me not;
My work hath not yet warm'd me. Fare you well;"
(Coriolanus I, v, 17)?

Or might Coriolanus not have claimed that

"...it were an easy leap
To pluck bright honour from the pale-fac'd moon;"

as Hotspur did with such exuberance in Act I, iii, 201 of Henry IV part I? For this play might be the study of a Hotspur-type figure taking the key role in a political action, and of the consequences for society if such a thing occurred.

Like Hotspur, Coriolanus loves battle, for in battle a man can win much honour, and it is honour Coriolanus prizes most. But, like Hotspur's concept of honour it is self-sufficient. It lacks the wider human context which should be the touchstone of such a value, and so becomes predatory, living off itself, since it is both a cause and an end in itself. Lacking this touchstone, which would make it something for the general good of society, it becomes, because of its aspiring nature, something that seems superior to common human values and so turns into pride, producing the scornful words Coriolanus has for the plebs, and leading to his inevitable downfall. If this value is put into society it will lead to the breakdown of human ties, and to the wild claim of the hero that he can

> "...stand
> As if a man were author of himself
> And knew no other kin." (V, iii, 35)

It will lead to Coriolanus throwing in the face of the Volscians that "like an eagle in a dove-cote" he alone "flutter'd your Volscians in Corioli", and to his death at their hands.

Like Hotspur, Coriolanus is a destructive machine who glories in battle. The greater the slaughter the greater the glory gained to his extremely limited way of thinking, just as his mother reckons the number of

wounds on his body to be directly proportionate to the amount of glory her son has gained:

Menenius: "Where is he wounded?
Volumnia: I' th' shoulder and i' th' left arm;
there will be large cicatrices to show
the people when he shall stand for his
place. He received in the repulse of
Tarquin seven hurts i' th' body.
Menenius: One i' th' neck and two i' th' thigh -
there's nine that I know.
Volumnia: He had before this last expedition
twenty-five wounds upon him.
Menenius: Now it's twenty-seven; every gash
was an enemy's grave." (II, i, 140)

Coriolanus has become an objectfor making war and is no longer a human being. He unknowingly admits this himself when he leads a charge against Corioli shouting

"Make you a sword of me?" (I, vi, 76)

little realising how apt the description is. He is a sword, a weapon of war upon the substance of which twenty-seven gashes mean as many dead men. It is exactly like the gun-fighter in a modern western film, notching the butt of his gun for each victim he has gunned down. But an object like Coriolanus is only needed in time of war. In peace it is oiled and put away until it is needed once more.

The analogy can be carried further. A weapon, with no feelings to create bonds of loyalty or love, will kill friend and foe alike, depending upon the person who wields it. It is there to be used and its trade is destruction. So it is with Coriolanus. Just before comparing himself

to a sword, he has called the Romans on to battle, telling any who hold

> "...his country dearer than himself"

to follow him into the fight. Yet this is the man who will a little later turn against his own country because he feels it has insulted his personal honour, and who will fight for the Volscians as efficiently as he fought for Rome. Like the sword he knows no true honour, but is concerned only with himself, true to his "nature" (which in no way resembles human nature as Shakespeare has come to know it), and to the function for which his mother created him.

The analogy of the sword can be taken a step further into the clash with the tribunes in Rome. The people by themselves are easily taken in by Coriolanus; power by itself can easily conquer. It is only when this power is confronted by an equal or stronger force that trouble occurs. The tribunes stir the people up against Coriolanus, accusing him of "pride". Yet Menenius tells them to look at themselves and they will find

> "...a brace of unmeriting, proud, violent, testy magistrates - alias fools - as any in Rome."
> (II, i, 40)

Only sword can conquer sword; only pride, violence and stupidity can overcome itself. When Coriolanus is all-powerful nothing can defeat him, and he knows it. After Volumnia has defeated him with a weapon far stronger than any sword he admits that

"All the swords
In Italy, and her confederate arms,
Could not have made this peace." (V, iii, 207)

Similarly it is the pride of Aufidius that brings about Coriolanus's downfall. A man with little honour left, traitor to his own and his adopted country, Coriolanus is finally lost to himself when Aufidius flings the taunt of "boy" at his head. There was never a truer word spoken. Coriolanus is a boy, the son of his mother, and all that he has done was done at her bidding or under her influence.

For it is Volumnia who praises Coriolanus's son for being in one of his father's moods when he "tears a gilded butterfly" to pieces and then wonders why her son leads the Volscian army

"...with no less confidence
Than boys pursuing summer butterflies,
Or butchers killing flies." (IV, vi, 94)

The butterfly image is purposely repeated her. Volumnia has released upon the world a terrible instrument for destruction, and then wonders why she is among its intended victims. She does not realise that she has created this machine without instilling into it any ideas about such things as human values, in the cause of which its energies should be expended. The irony is profound. The woman who has ever praised her son's victories looks on with horror as he is about to achieve his greatest victory. The woman who taught her son to despise the people allies herself with those people in order to destroy her son. The man who grew angry at the accusation of

"traitor", who proudly proclaimed his loyalty to his country, is acting in a traitorous manner, rebelling against the very country he is supposed to hold so dear, allying himself with men he is supposed to hate, and all because he has no concept of his duties to his fellow men.

For Coriolanus has not a spark of humanity in him, and he can only be attacked by his own weapons, or by the woman who made him what he is. For only the creator has the measure of that which has been created, and it is significant that throughout the play it is only Volumnia who can control him. It is even more significant that in order to master him she is forced to employ the very weapons which she fostered within him. So her final victory is achieved through the language of pride, which is scorn:

> "Come, let us go.
> This fellow had a Volscian to his mother;
> His wife is in Corioli, and his child
> Like him by chance. Yet give us our dispatch.
> I am hush'd until our city be afire,
> And then I'll speak a little." (V, iii, 176)

These are the last words she speaks in the play. She has created him and she will destroy him. Just as she does not regret what she has made of him, so she expresses no fears for his safety, after he warns her that her victory over him may prove "most mortal" to him. His only weakness is his bond with his mother. It is not a bond of love but one of reliance which she has forged and which she will break.

This bond can be expressed in the same way as that in which Menenius explains the relationship of the dif-

ferent parts of the body-politic to the whole. If a part of the body-politic is diseased it is cut off, like a diseased limb, lest the health of the whole be ruined. Coriolanus is constantly referred to as a canker by the plebians and is cast aside in order to assure peace in Rome. Just as a part of the body-politic or of the human body is cast aside when it becomes a threat, so Coriolanus, who is only an extension of Volumnia's dream of glory, is also discarded and destroyed by her when she realises that he can no longer be successfully guided along the correct path. She destroys him and she does not regret it, or, if she does, we are not made to see it. The last words she speaks are ones of rejection and denial of son by mother while

> "...the heavens do ope
> The gods look down, and this unnatural scene
> They laugh at." (V, iii, 183)

How different is this from the incense cast down upon the harmony and love of Lear and Cordelia by the all-seeing gods. The relationship between Volumnia and Coriolanus is directly opposite to that between Lear and Cordelia, and achieves a proportionate conclusion, as expressed in the reaction of the gods.

It is left to Aufidius to sum up Coriolanus's faults and virtues:

> "First he was
> A noble servant to them, but he could not
> Carry his honours even. Whether 'twas pride,
> Which out of daily fortune ever taints
> The happy man; whether defect of judgement,

To fail in the disposing of those chances
Which he was lord of; or whether nature,
Not to be other than one thing, not moving
From th' casque to th' cushion, but commanding peace
Even with the same austerity and garb
As he controll'd the war; but one of these -
As he hath spices of them all - not all,
For I dare so far free him - made him fear'd,
So hated, and so banish'd. But he has a merit
To choke it in the utt'rance. So our virtues
Lie in th' interpretation of the time;
And power, unto itself most commendable,
Hath not a tomb so evident as a chair
T' extol what it hath done.
One fire drives out one fire; one nail, one nail;
Rights by rights falter, strengths by strengths fail."
(IV, vii, 35)

It is clear from this speech that human virtue is not complete in itself and cannot be valued except if placed in the wider context of human society and the needs of the time. This passage contains the most explicit statement so far of what Shakespeare means by the word "time", which seems to be a key concept in the tragedies since Hamlet proclaimed that the "time" was "out of joint". Antony told Cleopatra to "be a child o' the times", while Othello told Desdemona to "obey the time". Coriolanus's fault is simply that he has not obeyed the "time". The harsh steel of war failed to soften and bend in times of peace. This quotation from Ecclesiastes III, i expresses this law the best:

"To every thing there is a season, and a
time to every purpose under the heaven:
A time to be born, and a time to die; a
time to plant, and a time to pluck up
that which is planted;
A time to kill, and a time to heal; a

time to break down, and a time to
build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance."

Coriolanus has no concept of this sort of flexibility. Shakespeare has discovered that a man can only be true to himself if he is true to the world all around him. Coriolanus, through his pride and arrogance, proclaims that he can stand

"As if man were author of himself
And knew no other kin."

By saying this, by denying his kinship with his fellow men, he is denying himself. He cuts himself off from life, has no concept of his actions taking place in a wider human context, and stands like a brittle but weakly embedded stick in the great stream of time and change, which must sweep him away with its inevitable power. So the gods mock him for his folly and his unnatural touch. Devoid of any of the bonds with his fellow men which would have kept him attuned to the "times", he must cling all the harder to his pride-boosted ego lest he lose himself, not realising, like Lear, that the only way to save himself is to do just that.

He never reaches the awareness of the true tragic hero and dies still flaunting his pride to the equally arrogant Aufidius. We are never allowed to see the inner workings of the minds of the characters in this play, and just as Coriolanus has no links with his fellow men so he has no bonds of sympathy with us. Yet the lesson is well taught: Serve oneself and one will destroy oneself; serve others

and one serves oneself. Cut oneself off from society and one will become an unnatural creature to be feared, hunted and destroyed.

The austerity of Coriolanus after the opulence of Antony and Cleopatra is striking. Coriolanus might be an exploration of the world that would remain in Antony and Cleopatra after the deaths of the two lovers. As I have suggested, Shakespeare realised that it was in this sort of world that redemption had to be sought, but there is little cause for hope to be found in Coriolanus. The few bright points - the eloquent silence of Coriolanus's wife or the wisdom of Menenius - are incidental rather than important in a play that seems to turn inward on itself; "one fire drives out one fire; one nail, one nail".

If there is "small choice in rotten apples", there is even less in the pride of Coriolanus, Aufidius, Volumnia or the tribunes. Like the Roman and the Volscian who, in the middle of the play, meet to exchange views and reports concerning their respective cities, the people in this play seem to care about little but themselves. We may have to seek out our fellow-men in order to find ourselves, but what are we to do if we find that they are as rotten as the ones we find in this play? How can we "obey the time" if it remains sadly "out of joint"?

The bitterness of this play seems to overflow into Timon of Athens. Shakespeare has to abandon the "new heaven, new earth" that Antony sought in order to find redemption for the human race here on earth. But to look around himself at its inhabitants, and to stare up at a heaven that seems to contain no God, seems to give only bitterness as its reward. Perhaps there was a corner of his soul containing only this bitterness that had to be fully examined

before he could cast off the pessimism of the tragic vision of life. Perhaps he felt he had to come to terms with all the anti-life possibilities of such a vision before being able to commence the task of reconstruction undertaken in the romances. Indeed, it is hard to conceive of a more negative attitude to life than the one expressed in Coriolanus and, more particularly, in Timon of Athens, the last of the tragedies with which I must deal.

Timon of Athens resembles Coriolanus in its bitterness of tone, but whereas Coriolanus by its action implies a rejection of human bonds, Timon goes a good deal further, openly expressing his complete rejection of life itself, condemning completely the whole of mankind, except his servant Flavius. The only redeeming feature of the play is to be found in the Alcibiades sub-plot, which closely resembles the story of Coriolanus, but also suggests that Timon's attitude is, to say the least, extreme. The First Senator points out that

> "All have not offended;
> For those that were, it is not square to take,
> On those that are, revenge: crimes, like lands,
> Are not inherited." (V, iv, 35)

Timon cannot come to this way of thinking, however, and roundly condemns all men as knaves, fools and flatterers who sought only his money. Money, the power it wields, and its ability to replace real, spiritual values in men's lives with material values, is the central theme of the play.

The exact dating of this play is uncertain. There are so many speeches in it which closely resemble passages

in King Lear that many would have it dated closer to Lear and do not, as Chambers does, see it as the last of the tragedies to be written.

Thematically Timon is a dead end, leading only to the sterility of a sea-washed grave, with few if any redeeming features. A comparison with King Lear will help to make this clear.

In Timon as in Lear we see in the initial stages of the play a man living confidently in a world which is completely under his control. At first glance it is a world of gifts and feasts, of friendship and love; of all the things that make life worth living. Timon controls this world and, like Lear, can speak in an assured manner of the values that go toward making it what it is:

> "O, what a precious comfort 'tis to have so many
> like brothers commanding one another's fortunes!
> (I, ii, 100)

Timon thinks he can "command" the fortunes of his friends just as Lear thought he could "command" the love of his daughters and friends. Both are laying themselves open to a rude shock, for money, like love, can only be given when the donor wishes to give it. The need of the recipient, however desperate, is not sufficient to command an immediate response. Cordelia's love for Lear, which redeems all his sorrows, suggests that even if Lear misinterpreted the nature of love, he was still concerned with a real and positive value which, when truly understood, had infinite redemptive power. Timon makes the mistake of putting his faith in money, which has no spiritual power whether used correctly or incorrectly, which can

only cause further suffering and which can give no meaning to his anger, his suffering and his pain. He becomes bankrupt in spirit as well as in body for he has built up the worser and better sides of his life on a completely false premise, and as a result his penury as well as his wealth is a form of self-indulgence which must ultimately destroy him. It is Apemantus who points this out to him:

> "If thou didst put this sour-cold habit on
> To castigate thy pride, 'twere well; but thou
> Dost it enforcedly. Thou'dst courtier be again
> Wert thou not beggar." (IV, iii, 238)

He never learns his lesson and continues on his path to self-destruction. For there seems to be the mark of death on Timon. He is living on borrowed time, borrowed money and bought friends. Note the senator's words:

> "I must serve my turn
> Out of mine own; his days and times are past,
> And my reliances on his fracted dates
> Have smit my credit." (II, i, 20)

The selfishness of this entire play, a selfishness that Shakespeare has come to see as self-destructive, is captured in the senator's words.

Timon ignores Flavius when his servant tries to tell him the true state of his affairs. He attempts to buy off the truth with even bigger parties and greater gifts to his "friends". His refusal to listen to words which he knows will force him to face the truth is expressed in this passage:

Flavius: "I beseech your honour, vouchsafe me a
word; it does concern you near.
Timon: Near! Why then, another time I'll hear
thee. I prithee let's be provided to
show them entertainment." (I, ii, 173)

He plunges once more into a gay round of entertainments, trying desperately to ignore the truth as he and his friends attempt to

"...shut their doors against a setting sun." (I, ii, 139)

Their day is past, the times are changing, and they indulge in orgies of physical gratification in order to blot out the true state of their spiritual predicament. It is significant that Timon uses the image of the sun to announce his death:

"Sun, hide thy beams. Timon hath done his reign."
(V, i, 221)

The long-endured suffering of the tragedies has come to an end, the "long days task is done", and the world waits for a new sunrise on a better world.

Lear, in his time of suffering, comes to understand the suffering all men undergo, particularly the lowliest and poorest in his kingdom, and he speaks with moving compassion:

"Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en

Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just."
(King Lear III, iv, 28)

Apemantus puts the same suggestion to Timon in a speech that echoes that of Lear:

"Call the creatures
Whose naked natures live in all the spite
Of wreakful heaven, whose bare unhoused trunks,
To the conflicting elements expos'd
Answer mere nature - bid them flatter thee."
(IV, iii, 226)

Timon, lost in an egocentric contemplation of his own miseries, has no comprehension of this sort of compassion:

"A fool of thee. Depart." (IV, iii, 232)

His "superflux" is money not love, the money he finds in the earth and distributes with curses. The earth in this play is as dead as it seemed to Lear after Cordelia's love, the only thing that gave value to his life, had been denied him by her death. A world without love(which is the sort of world Timon of Athens explores)is a terrible place. Compare Lear's

"None does offend, none - I say none."

with Timon's

"I'll example you with thievery:

> The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction
> Robs the vast sea; the moon's an arrant thief,
> And her pale fire she snatches from the sun;
> The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves
> The moon into salt tears; the earth's a thief,
> That feeds and breeds by a composture stol'n
> From gen'ral excrement - each thing's a thief."
> (IV, iii, 433)

"None does offend" has changed to "all do offend". Compassion has changed to hatred. Man, to Lear at his lowest point "the thing itself", does not appear the same to Timon:

> Apemantus: "What things in the world canst thou nearest compare to thy flatterers?
> Timon: Women nearest; but men, men are the things themselves. (IV, iii, 315)

The whole world is composed of flatterers to Timon. Strip everything else away, and flattery will remain.

So Timon, with his warped vision of human nature, rushes from the one extreme to the other, flinging "one day diamonds, next day stones", both equally destructive, at his flatterers in particular, and the world in general. The feast, long a symbol to Shakespeare of good fellowship between men, becomes a mockery and Timon's grace becomes a travesty of the real thing, calling curses rather than blessings down upon the assembled company:

> "Let no assembly of twenty be without a score of villains. If there sit twelve women at the table, let a dozen of them be - as they are. The rest of your foes, O gods, the Senators of Athens, together with the common lag of people, what is amiss in them, you gods, make suitable for destruction. For these my present friends,

as they are to me nothing, so in nothing
bless them, and to nothing are they welcome." (III, vi, 78)

This prayer expresses the depths to which the tragic vision of life can sink. All men have faults and all men can be punished accordingly. All are guilty of some crime and all will suffer for it. Timon's "nothing" is truly the "nothing" from which "nothing" will come. It leads, without any redemptive value to redirect it, to a dead end, to complete and final negation without any hope of something better to come. Timon's criticism is everywhere negative, leading only to the depths of pessimism. A totally tragic vision of life, without a belief in the positive values that generally accrue from tragedy, leads only to death. A greater value is needed to redeem sinful mankind from its plight than simple retributive justice, otherwise who would escape Timon's fate?

So Timon's life draws near its inevitable end. He makes a telling comment near his death:

"My long sickness
Of health and living now begins to mend,
And nothing brings me all things."
(V, i, 184)

This reminds one of Cleopatra's

"My desolation does begin to make
A better life.",

but the difference is marked. Whereas Cleopatra has "immortal longings" in her, Timon, in the same breath, talks

of writing his epitaph. Cleopatra's physical death will glorify her spirit, redeem her own wrongs and those of Antony, and turn the two lovers into fire and air, the noblest of the elements. Timon's strange inversion of normal values, when he calls health and living a "sickness", points further to his general anti-life attitude. He is a creature of this world who is moved by the spirit, if we can call it that, of the material. He has gained the whole world, but lost his own soul. His values are dead values, compounded of a dead substance, and from them no life can be created. Timon of Athens is a play about the world of Lear stripped of Cordelia's love; it is concerned with base man, a "quintessence of dust", and no more. The regenerative power of human love is dead to Timon. He sees only the folly of human nature and its destructive side. His ways are the ways of death because of this. It is foolish to ask, as Bradley does, "Who buried Timon?". It is of absolutely no consequence, unless one wishes to apply to the play the same fearsome logic that has destroyed so many of Shakespeare's villains. His death is inevitable, for he is a dead thing from the beginning of the play.

What is important is that Timon lies buried near the sea in a grave

> "Upon the beached verge of the salt flood,
> Who once a day with his embossed froth
> The turbulent surge shall cover."
>
> (V, i, 214)

The earth in which Timon lies buried is truly dead. Nothing will grow in salt-laden earth, so Timon's grave will remain bare of beauty and life forever. It is the final

symbol of Timon's way of life. Lacking love, faith and the ability to forgive he is a dead thing. Timon makes money his god (see Act V, i, 44-52) and is therefore dead in spirit. By using this dead, inanimate substance as his standard of value he makes his whole existence meaningless, whether, as at the beginning of the play, he lives with all the luxuries money can buy around him or whether he rejects the world completely. Either way he is doomed to a sterile existence, to a barrenness of spirit from which no life can spring. He is one of the hollow men, the dead men, in a world without love.

The tragic vision has been entirely played out. The ending of Timon, leading nowhere, is completely logical. The destructive side of human nature has been explored to the full and is shown to lead, if fully manifested, to the complete negation of all life. The ending is, ironically, as unreal and untrue as the "and they lived happily ever after" type endings of the comedies. No matter the suffering, no matter the hardship, man continues, and not only continues but also prevails. Despite the worst that destructive man can do there is always a Flavius (as in Timon) or a loyal and upright retainer (like the servant who attacked the Duke of Cornwall as he was about to put out Gloucester's eyes) to remind us that there is another, very real side to life. In the tragedies Shakespeare has come to realise that the greater the suffering the more man is inspired to rise above himself, to affirm some sort of higher values and to manifest his belief in human dignity. The best example of this is the love of Cordelia when compared to the extreme suffering of her father.

So in the face of what seems to be a limitless poten-

tial in man for evil, there has been uncovered a factor, just as limitless, that can rescue man from the predicament in which this potential for evil places him - the mystical but very real power of the human heart to love with no reward expected, unremittingly, unstintingly and completely. This power can turn man from a base creature of earth and clay into a noble being composed of fire and air, "the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals". The dichotomy Hamlet had seen, the gap that to him seemed impossible to bridge, has been finally closed by this power, so that Shakespeare can return to a more real comic vision of life and a basically optimistic outlook.

The suffering of Timon, Macbeth and Coriolanus showed him that men cannot survive alone. They are inextricably linked to other men, and the only power that can forge valid links between men is the power of love. Without these links man becomes predatory, feeding on himself. Man can only understand and realise his true nature by paradoxically ignoring himself and seeking out his fellow men in love, faith and charity. Even the worst suffering can be soothed away by this sort of love. So Shakespeare, without invoking the aid of some supernatural power, has made of life once more an optimistic progress towards a better, if not a perfect, world, despite the worst our "worser genius" can do.

So he turns from the tragedies an older, wiser but much happier man, believing in the power of love, while simultaneously never underestimating the strength of the force love has to overcome. Still doubting, still questioning, he turns to the romances in order to express his new-found faith. Its value, as well as its tenuous nature, will be fully expressed before the artist is able to lay

down his pen, the long day's task complete.

THE ROMANCES

Pericles, Prince of Tyre is considered to be the first of the romances, that is it was the first of the new type of play Shakespeare started to write after the tragic period had run its course. His start was very uncertain, for it is generally acknowledged that Shakespeare was responsible only for the composition of the last three acts. Yet even if one takes only these last three acts into account, there is still much in this play that seems almost immature, as if the great playwright and tragedian had found himself ill at ease working with strange material in a way to which he was unaccustomed. I get the impression that Shakespeare was still uncertain of exactly what he was trying to do, with the result that he picked unsuitable material (or took over this material from his co-author), and attempted to mould it into a pattern of which he was as yet unsure. Cymbeline, too, suffers from this fault. This inability to make the chosen plot adequately express his purpose accounts for the many strange and unmotivated actions Shakespeare puts into these two plays. As I suggested much earlier, Shakespeare in time of transition is always unsure, as we saw in Measure for Measure and All's Well.

In Pericles a number of such events occur. Shakespeare is forced to resort to a form of conjuring trick in order to reunite Pericles and his wife, while the plot of Cleon and his wife against Marina's life has little dramatic motivation. We are told all too briefly of Dionyza's jealousy, and although rationally the action is justifiable, emotionally there is little to make us accept it. Similarly it seems strange that Pericles, who has just lost his wife, should be prepared to leave his only daughter in the hands of comparative strangers in a foreign country for roughly twenty years, never returning to see

her in all this period of time. The miraculous revival of Thaisa after her death and burial at sea is also never poetically evoked and therefore never made emotionally convincing. The action of the play shifts its ground so often that the poet is forced to make apologies, and the play suffers because of this. There are also so many threads to be gathered up at the end, and therefore so many to follow through the body of the story that, even if we do not lose track half-way, we never quite have time to become involved in the story, the poor motivation for so many of the actions adding to this effect.

Yet through all this, one can still see something of what Shakespeare is trying to do. The seeds planted here will bear abundant fruit in the later romances.

Marina, born of the sea, a child of storm, of the worst that nature run riot can do, redeems the cruelty of nature, and subdues the cruelty of man by her virtue. She will be in a position, because of her maidenly virtues, to give back to Pericles his sanity, when he "for this three months past hath not spoken". When Pericles has been restored to himself, the whole world seems a better, more harmonious place, as human nature and physical nature show themselves at their best, moving in perfect time to the "music of the spheres". The suffering of Pericles, Thaisa and Marina gives way to true happiness as they are once more united.

Shakespeare, in the light of the work he did in The Winter's Tale, was trying to explore the consequences of the manifestation of a value in life which could overcome that the destructive, negative side of human nature could do. He was, in fact, trying to write a full-blown tragedy with a comic ending, combining in a play the worst and best in human nature and still affirming his ultimate faith in

the goodness of human nature.

In the light of this the faults of Pericles become apparent. The separation of Pericles and Thaisa is the result of the malevolence of the physical universe rather than of man. The suffering of Pericles may be very real, but is it tragic? The only tragic element in the play is the jealousy of Dionyza over Marina's ability to outshine her own daughter, which leads directly to the loss to Pericles of his own daughter. Yet Cleon and Dionyza then fade out of the play altogether. Neither Pericles nor Thaisa experience true tragic suffering, nor do they achieve the insight accorded the tragic hero. This is because their suffering is not due to some action on their part, neither to a fall from fortune after a human error. As I have suggested, the loss of Thaisa is natural, one that we all have to bear, and is in no way similar to the way in which Hamlet, for example, lost his father. Similarly Pericles, although he has been led to believe that his daughter is dead, has not taken the trouble to see Marina for twenty years, and such profound grief is inexplicable. Shakespeare will achieve a much more satisfactory result in The Winter's Tale, where the loss of wife and daughter is due to the insane and unfounded jealousy of Leontes, who will, through the suffering caused by his loss, learn and grow wiser. Spiritually Pericles has nothing to gain, for he is the perfect prince. In fact, his breakdown on the news of his daughter's death he acknowledges to be weak and unworthy:

"I
Have suffered like a girl." (V, i, 135)

The tragedy, if any, lies with Marina. She is condemned to death for no reason, and her anguish is extreme:

> "Why should she have me kill'd?
> Now, as I can remember, by my troth,
> I never did her hurt in all my life.
> I never spake bad word, nor did ill turn
> To any living creature. Believe me, la,
> I never kill'd a mouse, nor hurt a fly;
> I trod upon a worm against my will,
> But I wept for it. How have I offended,
> Wherein my death might yield her any profit,
> Or my life imply her any danger?"
> (IV, i, 74)

She comes upon the basic tragic fact of life: the destructive urge stems not from the seat of reason, and so often kills the good and spares the bad. There is "no cause" for her death, yet envy and pettiness condemn her to death. On the positive side, however, there is "no cause" why a man should be good, why a maid should be virtuous, yet the fortitude with which she bears her suffering, and the strength with which she clings to her virtue, miraculously justify themselves, because it is only through them that she is in a position to be united once more with her father. She too, however, is given no insight typical of the tragic hero. Her strength is the sort John Webster might have admired, as she clings to her "integrity of life", but it is not Shakespeare's way. His characters grow, develop and achieve insight. Little of this is to be found in this play.

But a start has been made and an idea has been born. The destructive, negative forces must be implanted more firmly in human nature, suffering must be caused directly

by these forces, and from this suffering insight must grow which can lead to a comic reconciliation resulting from a true understanding of the human situation.

Just as important, an atmosphere has been established, an atmosphere of underlying evil (incest, murder, prostitution, jealousy), and at the same time a feeling of mysterious, magical powers for which nothing seems accountable. There is a dead queen restored to life and a girl, scarcely human, born of the elements and of the tempest, rising like Venus from the waves, a child of the sea. She has about her all the strange power of the sea, and seems to be better than nature itself "when to the lute she sung and made this night-bird mute". She has the power to make the heavenly music audible that Pericles calls "the music of the spheres", which can only be heard when not merely man, but the universe itself, rejoices at the establishment of harmony. So men and the universe are "in time", moving to a harmony as beautiful as it is indefinable.

Cymbeline opens to a world in confusion. The king has attempted to deny the bonds of love between Imogen and Posthumus, and instead of allowing fair to marry fair, a union that would bring joy and peace to all the earth, he prefers to force an unnatural bond between fair and foul, between Imogen and Cloten. Because of this action no harmony is possible, "you do not meet a man but frowns". Hypocrisy and duplicity abound. The queen, while showing sympathy for the lovers, is working toward their downfall, while the Second Lord in Act I, ii pretends to support the evil Cloten, while really loathing him and all he stands for.

Further evil is brewing. The noble Posthumus:

"A sample to the youngest; to th' more mature
A glass that feated them; and to the graver
A child that guided dotards." (I, i, 48),

breaks the trust his love imposes upon him, and debases that love by making it the subject of a bet. He thereby places a false value on love, judging it by material standards rather than by faith. By placing such a value on love he lays himself open to the same fate as Othello, who demanded "ocular proof" of Desdemona's love. Once again the material "proof" is provided by the clever machinations of the unscrupulous villain, and the suffering starts.

The problems of King Lear are hammered out again. Should one judge and evaluate one's life by standards that can be weighed, measured and proved, or by standards which, although invisible and indefinable, nevertheless seem to exist in a very real way? So once again it is asked, who is the fool, Imogen or Cloten? Who is mad, Cloten or Imogen?

Cloten: "To leave you in your madness 'twere my sin;
I will not.
Imogen: Fools are not mad folks.
Cloten: Do you call me fool?
Imogen: As I am mad, I do;
If you'll be patient, I'll no more be mad;
That cures us both." (II, iii, 99)

The misunderstanding here rests on the different standards by which the two people involved in this strange conversation judge their situation. The answer to the problem presented has been worked out in King Lear. The "madness" of Lear on the heath is far saner than any of the words or actions of his two cruel daughters. But since the Regans, Gonerils and Clotens rule the world, the

good people, who affirm their faith by their way of life, are forced to suffer because of this, until nature in the fullness of time destroys the evil and restores the balance in life without which the human race cannot exist.

It is here that the key to the romances is to be found. Each romance has its action spread over a number of years. The Tempest, with an action of six hours duration, is the culmination of long years of suffering for Prospero. Time, it appears, is the great healer, working in two ways to restore order and harmony to mankind. Given time the evil people will destroy themselves just as surely as they have disrupted the harmony of society and the peace of mind of the men all around them. Because they have, by their indulgence of the worst side of their natures, cut themselves off from their fellows by denying their obligations to the human race, they have only themselves as a source of strength, and, literally feeding on themselves, destroy themselves. Secondly, given time, the basically good person, the tragic hero, can, through suffering, learn from his mistakes and come to understand his true nature better. Once more "in time" with his fellows, his God and the universe all around him, he will be "in time" with himself. This is part of the reason for the constant reference to time throughout the tragedies. The best way to express its meaning is to draw an analogy between the condition of man, as Shakespeare sees it, and an orchestra of musicians.

The orchestra, in order to produce a beautiful and harmonious effect, must follow the score and play in time to the rhythm beaten out by the conductor. Should only one person decide to ignore the score and play out of time with the rest, he will disrupt the entire orchestra, dis-

tracting those musicians around him and making the entire piece of music sound discordant. But because he ignores the rhythm, the "time" to which everyone is playing, he has cut himself off, as it were, from the harmony which they all have in common, the harmony which bound them together as a unit, and which enabled them to produce such beautiful music. Furthermore, he has gone against the set score, refusing to follow the notes on the sheet of music in front of him, the music that had defined the nature of the tune they had all been playing. As a result he has nothing to guide him on his discordant way but his own devices. Because, inevitably, he is not a great musician, his imagination will fail him and he will lapse into silence. It should be noted that if two people simultaneously decide to go against the score and the natural rhythm and play out of time then, although they are united by a common desire, they will not play the same discordant tune. Being out of time divides people while being in time unites. And so it is with the human race.

Let the human race be the members of the orchestra, let the conductor be God (always beating out the rhythm even if men choose to ignore it) and let the guiding music be true human nature. Let the villain be the man who decides to go against the rest on his own selfish way, disrupting the tune and throwing those near him into disarray, in the way that Macbeth and Claudius corrupted their entire kingdoms, or in the way Iago destroyed Othello. Let the fact that two discordant musicians cannot play the same tune be an expression of the fact that evil people, because they are united by no abiding principle except their own desires, must eventually destroy themselves or each other in the way that Regan and Goneril did. As suggested in Pericles, the

music of the spheres, providing the great rhythm to which the entire universe should move, is always playing, and man, if he tries hard enough in the correct way, can hear it and move in time with it. The discords of evil men may dull the ear to its sound, but with time, and as the evil exhausts itself, the good man will be able to distinguish between the discords of his neighbour, and the true rhythms of faith, love and understanding. Eventually he will learn his lesson, and return, after a temporary distraction, to the old rhythm, finding himself once more at one with all things, moving in perfect time with the whole of nature. He is fully expressing his own true nature and is at one with other men no matter the relationship - be it father to son, friend to friend or simply man to man. He is at one with his God, and is moving to the same harmony that keeps the heavenly bodies moving on their sublimely regular patterns across the sky.

Yet within the limits of nature there is another form of "time", the time which is always changing, the time men must obey, the time that gives to Shakespeare a deeper understanding of human life. In the world around man the seasons change from spring to summer to autumn and to winter. Yet winter, the coldest and deadest time of year, changes miraculously to spring as the world blossoms forth in all its freshly born glory. So it is with men, the winter of suffering giving way, in the fullness of time, to the spring of new life and new hope awakening. When Imogen is reconciled with her father, she expresses her happiness using an image of the passing of the seasons:

"You are my father too, and did relieve me
To see this gracious season." (V, v, 400)

The long winter of her suffering, caused by the unjust separation from all that gave her happiness in life, has turned into a new spring, a "gracious season" when love and understanding blossom with a beauty surpassing any tree or flower. A line from Antony and Cleopatra is called to mind:

> "My desolation does begin to make
> A better life." (V, ii, 1)

but whereas Antony and Cleopatra had to die in order to find "new heaven, new earth" fitting for their love, Shakespeare can create this new heaven on earth with his deeper insight into life and his new-found faith in man. Just as winter is necessary and must be endured if the spring to follow is to be enjoyed, so suffering is a necessary part of life, giving a greater understanding and appreciation of the higher meaning of life. So the world quit by Antony and Cleopatra, a world that did not seem worth their "leave-taking", miraculously gives birth to a new earth, a world which "such a pair" might happily inhabit.

The ideas expressed above reach their full fruition in The Winter's Tale, a play in which Shakespeare gives expression to the themes and ideas he has been developing in the "winter" of his life, the period in which he wrote the great tragedies. He will also give expression to his own development, and to the final conclusions his new vision of life has reached.

In The Winter's Tale the long journey comes in sight of home. The struggle for clear expression, often painfully inadequate in Pericles and Cymbeline, is over, and the stamp of the master, in full control of plot, theme and

symbol, is to be clearly seen throughout. Everything Shakespeare has learnt is ordered and worked into the fabric of this play. The dream of the poet, expressed so long ago in A Midsummernight's Dream, is fulfilled. "Imagination" in all its power "bodies forth the forms of things unknown", and the poet's pen, writing with all the skill at its command, "turns them into shapes, and gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name". The feeling of harmony and hope is complete in this beautifully written play, yet it has about it a ring of truth which the early comedies never had. It is concerned with human achievement, encompassing all that is best and all that is worst in human nature, that which is best giving it its happiness and harmony, and that which is worst giving it its ring of truth. The happiness, the beauty, the dances and the flowers, together with the perfect harmony of man and wife, parents and children, and of the highest and the lowest in the land, are reminiscent of the harmony that reigned at the end of A Midsummernight's Dream, as the fairies flitted through the darkened palace of Theseus to bless the married couples.

The wheel has come full circle, but the price has been paid. Just as it took Leontes sixteen long and painful years to achieve his final happiness, so it took Shakespeare a similar period, through the dark years of Timon, Hamlet, Troilus, Cressida and Lear, before he could once more fully express his belief, founded on his understanding of human nature, in the ultimate triumph of man's better nature over his worst. The difference between the early comedies and the romances, which could be called later comedies, is plain. No longer are fairies needed to bless the happy couples. Man himself, by his fortitude in suffering, by his endurance and by his love, has blessed himself, and the gods cast down their incense.

The play opens with a scene of perfect harmony. Two kings, raised as brothers, are being praised for the strong ties of love that bind them together. By this love two kingdoms are bound together in perfect harmony. When it is manifested in the form of Leontes's love for Hermione a child is born, the young Mamillius, "a gentleman of the greatest promise that ever came to...note", in whom the hope of the kingdom, the Hope for the future, rests. It is out of this harmony, brought about by love, that hope for mankind will come. The state these happy people find themselves in is a state of grace, for by their love for each other they have made themselves worthy of grace.

Hermione has persauded Polixenes to stay in Sicilia. The following conversation takes place:

Leontes: "Hermione, my dearest, thou never spok'st
To better purpose.
Hermione: Never?
Leontes: Never but once.
Hermione: My last good deed was to entreat his stay;
What was my first? It has an elder sister,
Or I mistake you. O, would her name were Grace!
But once before I spoke to th' purpose- When?
Leontes: Why, that was when
Three crabbed months had sour'd themselves to death,
Ere I could make thee open thy white hand
And clap thyself my love; then didst thou utter
'I am yours for ever'.
Hermione: 'Tis grace indeed.
Why, lo you now, I have spoke to th' purpose twice:
The one for ever earn'd a royal husband;
Th' other for some while a friend."
(I, ii, 88)

It is clearly expressed here. Two actions that bind man to man and man to woman in love and accord bring about a state of grace on earth. Hermione's last three lines above stress

the fact that it was a human action that brought about this happy condition.

Another human action, Leontes's jealousy, brings about a fall from this paradise. It turns men into beasts and honest men into scoundrels. All right values are turned upside down by his foolish action. Camillo is the epitome of honesty in this play, yet he is used by Leontes as if he were behaving opposite to his true nature. This is, of course, because Leontes is not being true to his nature:

Leontes: "Thou art not honest; or,
If thou inclin'st that way, thou art a coward,
Which hoxes honesty behind, restraining
From courses requir'd; or else thou must be counted
A servant grafted in my serious trust,
And therein negligent; or else a fool
That seest a game play'd home, the rich stake drawn,
And tak'st it all for jest." (I, ii, 242)

The disease which is infecting Leontes's mind is making the whole world sick:

Camillo: "Good my lord, be cur'd
Of this diseas'd opinion, and betimes;
For'tis most dangerous." (I, ii, 296)

Leontes refuses to see his mistake, and because of this apparent breaking of faith by Hermione, the whole world comes to nothing. Yet his own lack of faith has made the world worth nothing to those around him:

"Why, then the world and all that's in't is nothing;
The covering sky is nothing; Bohemia nothing;
My wife is nothing; nor nothing have these nothings,
If this be nothing." (I, ii, 293)

We know that it is indeed "nothing", a trick of Leontes's imagination, but in that it exists in his mind it has the power to remove all value from life and truly make the world seem worth "nothing". The "music of the spheres" is no longer heard and "an ill planet reigns". The ability of a person like Leontes to effect all around him is expressed in the clearest way. Although by absolute standards one can easily tell the honest men and the honest actions, by Leontes's warped standards nothing is clear. He sees Polixenes's flight to save his life as proof of his friend's guilt. Camillo becomes a coward and a fool simply because he does not agree with his master's incredible suggestions.

It is ironic that both Leontes and Antigonus use similar ways to express the absolute necessity of believing in Hermione's purity, which is a symbol of all that is good in life. Leontes says the world will come to "nothing" if it is true that Hermione has betrayed him. Antigonus says the same thing. He stakes the lives of his own children on her faith, saying that the world, without those things which her faith and purity symbolise, is worth nothing more than dung:

> "If it be so,
> We need no grave to bury honesty;
> There's not a grain of it the face to sweeten
> Of the whole dungy earth." (II, i, 154)

Hamlet saw men without higher values as being no more than a "quintessence of dust". Antony saw kingdoms without men with some sort of faith to people them as being mere "clay". The same sort of idea is expressed here. The debasement suggested by Leontes's accusations has brought the whole earth to its lowest possible value. Even if Hermione's innocence is clear, the ability of faithless men to destroy everything

of value, and even taint the purest of creatures, is made obvious. The world becomes a diseased place full of diseased people in conflict with one another. Leontes is a combination of Lear and Othello, rejecting through his delusions his wife, as Othello rejected Desdemona, and his child, as Lear banished and disowned Cordelia. He cuts himself off at the same time from his friends and his servants and becomes a lonely, suffering creature. His actions break up the pattern of faith that had held the happy life of the early scenes together. Friend denies friend, man denies wife, master accuses servant and parent denies child all because Leontes got it into his foolish head that he had been made cuckold - a truly tragic situation. Hope for the future is lost as Mamillius, its symbol, dies. The gods themselves are denied as Leontes accuses the oracle of lying.

The symbolic nature of the oracle's message is complex:

> "Hermione is chaste; Polixenes blameless;
> Camillo a true subject; Leontes a jealous
> tyrant; his innocent babe truly begotten;
> and the King shall live without an heir,
> if that which is lost be not found."
> (III, ii, 130)

It is here that Shakespeare works out the relationship between man and God, a relationship explored in the early plays but never fully expressed. Shakespeare seems to believe that the actions of men can place them in a state of grace and can similarly cause them to fall from this state. The first three acts of this play are concerned with this. To be in a state of grace means that one has received the

side of human nature can do to prevent it. The state of grace that existed before Leontes's jealousy can be compared to that of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the fall, when they had no knowledge of sin or its consequences, and could only be good. With the knowledge of sin man was given freedom of choice, with the result that the new grace, bought at the price of suffering caused by evil, will be a truly "better" thing, for it has a value beyond measure, the value of life itself.

For Perdita, like Marina, is a child of storm. The storm has always been a symbol to Shakespeare of evil, of tragedy and destruction; of all that is worst in human and physical nature. The storm in Othello, the storm in King Lear, is the same storm that rages round the frail blankets protecting the abandoned Perdita. Out of the suffering of the storm, out of the tempest of tragedy and all that causes it, will come, almost impossibly, new hope for mankind, symbolised in the frail child which holds, despite its own weakness and despite the fury of the storm that rages all around its blankets, infinite hope for the future. Compare Wordsworth's "Michael" lines 46-7:

> "...a child, more than all other gifts,
> Brings hope with it, and foward looking thoughts."

In Perdita is symbolised that strange quality found at the end of most tragedies, that feeling of hope and optimism that one senses despite the horror of the many corpses that usually litter the stage. It seems a frail thing to us (the child that symbolises it is only a few days old), but it is very real and very beautiful, gaining added beauty by contrast with the terrors that surround it, and in

the fullness of time it will fulfil its promise. So we return once again to the concept of time, and, once again, the symbol of the child is quite perfect.

A child is conceived in love, and will only be ready to be born in a fixed period of time. It will be delivered only through suffering and labour. It cannot be forced to grow up, but must be given time to grow to full strength and understanding. Nature will see that this process of growing up is carried out in the proper way, and it is only the cruelty of man that can prevent this process. So it is that man, through love, can create this state of grace on earth, and it is only through time that the promise of this state of grace can be fulfilled. Similarly it is only the actions of men that can destroy this state of grace or prevent the fulfilment of its promise. God does not actively control this new law of harmony and order in human destiny. He is the "unmoved mover", always present, yet never actively involved. If man wishes to draw nearer to God, then he can do so, for God is always approachable through the medium of human love. But the decision rests entirely in human hands.

It is important to note that while Leontes is suffering and repenting of his sins, Perdita is simultaneously growing up, to fulfil, in the ripeness of her beauty as a woman, the promise of the tiny girl-child that was left for dead on that inhospitable shore. The parallel process is important. Man may seem to be unable to bring about a return to the state of grace that has been lost; but by his suffering, which purges him of his sins, and his faithfulness to the ideas of goodness and love that make life worth living (symbolised by Leontes's faithfulness to the memory of Hermione, whose actions brought about the initial state of grace), a blessed condition can once more be achieved. It is a new and "better"

state of grace, symbolised by Perdita who holds, through her love for Florizel, the future of the human race securely in her hands.

The wheel has come full circle for Shakespeare too. This play might be seen as the story of the development of his vision of life. The early hope and optimism we saw in the early comedies might be the state of grace existing in this play before Leontes's jealousy disrupted the steady progress of life. The period of jealousy, when men turned into beasts and the world into "nothing", can be compared to the period of the tragedies when Shakespeare explored man's full potential for evil. Just as Perdita was born when Leontes's jealous rages were at their worst, so out of the despair and nihilism of the great tragedies was born new hope for mankind, for side by side with the suffering of Lear, was created the love of Cordelia. It was in King Lear that the symbol of the girl-child as bearer of hope for the future was first used. As the re-establishment of grace, but this time a "better" grace, came about in the play just studied, so Shakespeare returned once more to what is essentially a comic vision of life, but this time a "better" comic vision, encompassing and transcending all that is evil and destructive, and making life once more appear the steady progress toward perfection dreamed of so long ago in the early comedies. Just as Leontes's new love and understanding has sixteen long years of pain and remorse to give it value, so the comic reconciliations of the romances have as their background the battlements of Elsinore, the blasted heath, Othello's bedchamber and Timon's sterile grave, to give infinite value and a true meaning to their message of hope.

If Shakespeare had stopped writing after Cymbeline one could have said that the conclusion had been forced and

therefore seemed artificial. The Winter's Tale, however, reflects fully and without distortion an all-encompassing picture of nature, in all its beauty and cruelty. The demand that Hamlet made, that playing should hold "the mirror up to nature", has been fulfilled. This play reflects a mind at peace with itself and its surroundings, a peace born of suffering and torment, a faith hammered out on the anvil of reality, as real as that which gave it shape.

If Shakespeare had said all that he wanted to say in The Winter's Tale, why did he then write The Tempest? The harmonious and complete vision of The Winter's Tale quite adequately explains how the artist could with satisfaction put down his pen, discard his role as the ever-searching creative artist, and retire in peace to the country. Harmony had once more been restored to human life, not God-given and imposed, but created by humans through the strength of their own endeavour. In the process of doing this Shakespeare had explored all fields of human experience. There was no more that could be said without a feeling of repetition creeping in. The genius of the artist, by finding a new order in the fragmentary and muddled experiences of life, had explored the ways of good and evil in his imagination, and had achieved, in twenty years of unrelenting labour, more than most people could achieve in several lifetimes.

In The Tempest Shakespeare works out his final conclusions by taking a step backwards and examining, through the figure of Prospero, what it has all meant to him as an artist and as an individual. He might have said, "I have written so much, found out all these marvellous things

about life, but what is it really all worth to me?" In The Tempest he attempts to provide an answer.

In his work he has been all-powerful. He has married people off at the turn of a phrase, and has killed them just as easily. He has made them go through the most excruciating mental and physical torment, for it was he who caused the eyes of old Gloucester to be put out, and subjected Lear and the Macbeths to their mental tortures. Yet, in mitigation, it was he who caused the serving man to raise his hand, in the cause of justice, against the Duke of Cornwall, and made Cordelia, with every cause to hate her father, give him the love he so desperately needed. By his art he had moved men around the apron stage like puppets, making them play out, in their living and their dying, in their suffering and loving and hating, all the possibilities to be found in that strange bundle of paradoxes called a human being. He has been a sort of god, making the very elements obey his every whim, stirring up floods and tempests and stilling them again with a wave of his magic wand. In The Tempest he becomes mortal again, returning from the isolated world of art, over which he had absolute control, into the world of everyday life, in which his power is "most weak". The play seems to run on two levels, the one with Prospero as an actor in the action, and the other with Prospero as the embodiment of the artist, looking on from outside at the action taking place on the stage. That Prospero is, to all intents and purposes, Shakespeare himself in no way detracts from the value of this play as a work of art.

The artist is a dreamer par excellence. Yet all people, at some stage in their lives, indulge in day-dreams, in which they control perfectly their own destinies and the destinies of those around them. All of them have to "come back

to earth" eventually, just as the artist must leave the world of art and live a normal life like the rest of us. Our day-dreams and a work of art are similar in that both attempt to create a world in which the individual, be he artist or casual dreamer, has absolute control over a given situation, control which he never has in his life. The materials from which each dream is created are the same, the world and our experience. Day-dreams usually end happily, for it is not in man's nature to wish himself harm. The artist, however, is made of different stuff. His greatness lies in the courage with which he imagines situations that do not lead to happiness. He can acknowledge all parts of human nature and all aspects of human experience as being an integral part of the long dream of art. So with the artist the dream is not an escape, as it usually is with the day-dreamer, but an act of commitment. But just as the day-dreamer should not expect his dreams to come true, so the artist must acknowledge the unreality of his newly-created world in practical terms, and not become too involved in his work. There must always be a Prospero-type figure behind the scenes, constantly reminding him that all that appears so wonderfully before him is merely an "insubstantial pageant" that must fade. So the tragedies should not send us into the depths of despair, while the comedies should not give us an unreal faith in man's goodness. The failure of a dream has prompted some men to suicide, while the realisation of a dream has made others believe they are gods. All men need a touch of basic humanity to save themselves from the extremes of either position; "ripeness is all".

Prospero has become a god, for we are dealing with a successful dreamer. Yet it is in The Tempest, when the god

is at the height of his power, that Shakespeare acknowledges the weakness of his ordinary humanity. His art, embodied in the figure of Ariel, has made him all-powerful. He acknowledges this power, and simultaneously abjures it:

> "I have bedimm'd
> The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
> And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault
> Set roaring war. To the dread rattling thunder
> Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
> With his own bolt; the strong-bas'd promontory
> Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up
> The pine and cedar. Graves at my command
> Have wak'd their sleepers, op'd, and let 'em forth,
> By my so potent art. But this rough magic
> I here abjure; and, when I have requir'd
> Some heavenly music-which even now I do-
> To work mine end upon their senses that
> This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
> And deeper than ever did plummet sound
> I'll drown my book." (V, i, 41)

It is the elements he has been able to control, but only some heavenly music can control men, for he cannot change basic human nature. Birnam wood may have come to Dunsinane, but human hands brought it there. The Ghost may have ordered Hamlet to take revenge, but it is Hamlet's nature that prevents him from doing so. That is why Prospero's ending is "despair", unless the power of prayer comes to his rescue. For ultimately, when all is said and done, the power of art solves nothing. It may provide men with knowledge and insight to help them go the better through life, but it can never replace the actual process of living. Life must be lived by faith, which is a purely human activity. Art is a cold onlooker and guide; it is humans who have

to live life in actuality. Ariel is not human, and has no human feelings, but only the theoretical knowledge that such feelings exist. This point is made clear in his discussion with Prospero on the plight of the King of Naples and his band:

Ariel: "Your charm so strongly works 'em
That if you now beheld them your affections
Would become tender.
Prospero: Dost thou think so, spirit?
Ariel: Mine would, sir, were I human.
Prospero: And mine shall.
Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,
Passion as they, be kindlier mov'd than thou art?"
(V, i, 17)

It is Prospero the human being who acknowledges his common humanity with his fellows in their suffering, and is able to perform an act of "virtue" by forgiving them while having just "cause" to hate them. Ariel cannot perform such an action, for he is not human and therefore beyond the realm of right and wrong, hatred and forgiveness. He is merely a tool of humanity, to be used to help others to attain virtue through better understanding, and no more. The virtue itself lies in the soul of the man who controls the spirit. Shakespeare is saying that art is only a means to an end, and under no circumstances an end in itself. It could be theoretically used for both good and evil purposes, but Shakespeare suggests here that it is usually used for the good, as Ariel points the way to his master. "If the decision were mine", he says, "I would be merciful."

Despite all the suffering and cruelty, the tendency of all of Shakespeare's plays has been toward this sort of statement. Art must affirm, or it will defeat itself, for there will be, without human agency, nothing to give it form and substance. Under the power of evil, Ariel was a helpless prisoner, until the human Prospero set him free. He is used by Prospero, but only so long as evil abounds. The moment perfect harmony is restored, the spirit of art is no longer needed, and it is set free to become one with the elements of which it is made. It is only in a society where there is a struggle between good and evil that art is created. So through his art, Shakespeare has discovered that art is useless unless intrinsically linked up with life. He has also discovered that evil will continue to exist, despite all the artist can do. This is symbolised in the misshapen Caliban who, despite all Prospero's efforts at reformation remains

> "A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
> Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains,
> Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost;
> And as with age his body uglier grows,
> So his mind cankers." (IV, i, 188)

As long as the human race endures, evil will abound, and, as long as evil exists, men will create art. Art will always tend toward the good, but will inevitably tell the same tale. So man seems to be caught in a vicious circle, and we see more clearly than before why Prospero's ending is "despair". In that he has acknowledged Caliban as his "own", he has acknowledged his common humanity with the rest of mankind, and also that part of man's nature that will, despite all efforts to the contrary, continue to

destroy everything that is of value. Even the best of men cannot deny this. The artist, at the height of his power, is trapped in this vicious circle by his own inherently faulty make-up, which, despite everything, will always be ready to drag him down. The only thing that can break the circle is an act of faith, expressed in prayer:

> "And my ending is despair
> Unless I be reliev'd by prayer,
> Which pierces so that it assaults
> Mercy itself, and frees all faults."
> (Epilogue, 15)

Ultimately we must, like Kierkegaard, take a leap of faith into the unknown, hoping and believing we will land in the arms of God.

The faith Shakespeare has built up is embodied in the person of Miranda, whom Prospero has protected and nutured for sixteen years, and watched grow to fulfilment. This faith has the ability to transform the world, in Miranda's eyes turning the gang of robbers and murderers that invade the island into a collection of the most wonderful creatures imaginable. Through the eyes of faith the old world of sordid reality becomes a "brave new world" inhabited once more by god-like beings. Prospero's cynical "'tis new to thee" reflects the youth and immaturity of this faith which he has had to isolate and protect, lest it be corrupted by reality and made as old and tired as he has become. It has much to see and much to learn, but it is filled with hope and optimism. Miranda, with the loyal and upright Ferdinand by her side, may truly be able to build a new world on the ruins of the old.

The final bow has been taken, and the curtain has been

rung down for the last time. The Tempest is a fitting conclusion to one of the greatest efforts of the creative imagination ever undertaken. The fullness, richness and completeness of Shakespeare's vision of life is scarcely to be equalled. The immensity of his achievement is staggering. We can but say the word "genius" as an inadequate way of summing up, and then stand, lost in wonder and admiration for the man who created it all. Shakespeare himself writes his own epitaph, which justly reflects the value of his achievement:

> "O, wonder!
> How many goodly creatures are there here!
> How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world
> That has such people in't!" (The Tempest V, i, 182)

Shakespeare himself is the prime wonder of this new world, transforming life into a glorious pageant to the triumph of human dignity. The tone of Miranda's words point to the freshness of one's own vision of life, the feeling of compassion for all mankind, and the wonder with which one views the world after feeling fully (or as fully as possible), the power which Shakespeare's work has to move one. The feeling soon fades, but never completely. Life is the better for it, and this, as far as I can see, is all Shakespeare himself would have wanted.

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