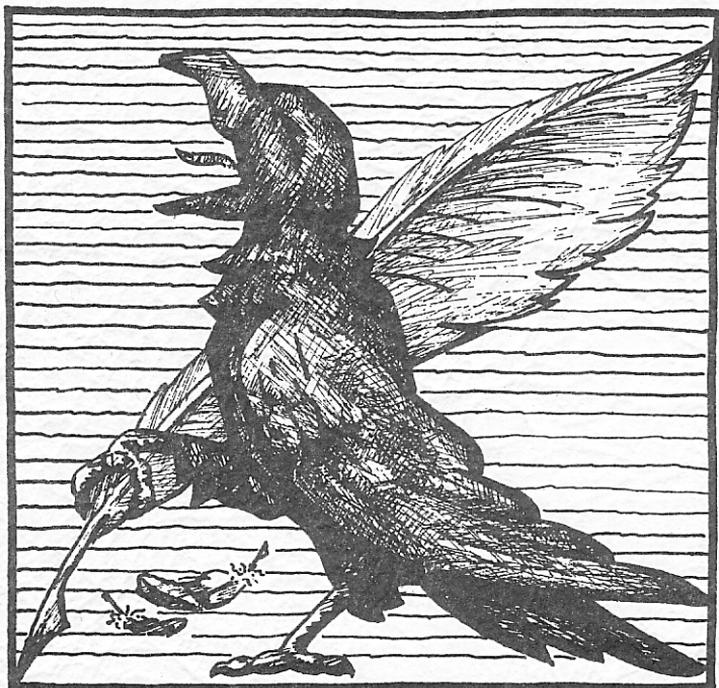


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About anyone so great as Shakespeare, it is probable that we can never be right; and if we can never be right, it is better that we should from time to time change our way of being wrong.

— T.S. Eliot

What we have to do is to be forever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions.

— Walter Pater

The problems (of the arts) are always indefinite, the results are always debatable, and the final approval always uncertain.

— Paul Valery

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Anachronisms **by Victor M. Depta**

**This modern man, look how he chaffs and creaks
for a lack of that greased wheel of everything
the mouth of grunts and yawps
like the opulent vowels and endomorphic consonants
of Whitman and, of course, Falstaff.**

**I see the two as they jostle and banter up the hillside
flapping their arms lugubriously in the brush
and then, tumbling on their backs
the one calls out for beef, the other sack—
the first as hoary as a mossy log or rocks
the other warty as a plump squash.**

**What host is this, roars the tub with legs
who's called us up this hilly symbol of death
a puritan?
He's scalded and plucked my diction till I'm breathless.
Why can't he speak?**

**It's an allegorical slope, the other said—
we're to glimpse, in the refracting depth of the soul
the original sun
yet cast it as a window of contorted saints in the weeds
as the litter of gorgeous trash among us here.
Why don't we go to town?
I'll loiter, and you can drink beer.**

Reflections of a Shakespearian Anthologist by Robert B. Heilman

I.

These reflections—and perhaps *recollections* would be a better word—may resemble a *confessio fidei*, a *peccavi*, a *caveat emptor* (or *caveat editor*), a *Bildungsroman*, the record of an *éducation sentimentale*, or just an operator's manual. Having acknowledged polyglot options, which could establish me as a comparatist, I leave the naming to observers. They may well think of other and less resonant designations.

The anthologist's *Lehrjahre* began with the Harbage connection. Harbage had edited the first batch of essays on the tragedies, and I was to do a sort of codicil to his will. The trouble was that I had worked for Harbage on the Pelican series (granted, he trusted me only with *Cymbeline*, a play through which, as editor, one could do harm to only a tiny fraction of the whole Shakespeare readership). Seeing how fast Harbage covered immense editorial acreage, I must have begun to think that anyone could do it. This original syncopation of reality was reinforced by the Mack connection: Maynard Mack, the general editor of the series, assured me that I could knock off the anthology with one hand. I believed it. After all, it came from an earlier Yale.

The Harbage-Mack mirage may turn into a real oasis, i.e., a quick book, if one habitually devotes days and nights, including weekends, year round, to reading other professors of Shakespeare. But if one is seduced by more trivial pursuits, or if one's mind tends to wander, or if one sinks into the loose life of what is usually called the generalist, one may at any given time not be quite up on all those other professors, however worthy they are. It turned out that in the twenty post-Harbage years—it was only sixteen at first, but it grew, it grew—there were at least seventy-five books dealing with Shakespeare tragedies. As for articles, only the Marder Mass Memory Machine, still in utero, could count them; anthropologically I am only a pre-computer-oid, palaeo-pencil-prehensile type. This epiphany of numbers threw me into a depression, and I despaired in the wilderness. Then light dawned: there are other explorers: call on their maps and trails. Don't be an egotist, or a Henry James governess counting on herself alone to fend off darkness. So I queried various friends in the industry: do tell me which recent critiques of tragedy you rate highest. Obviously all these just souls would be of one

mind, and my table of contents would take quick form. Alas, alas. Though dozens of titles poured in, virtually no Shakespearian loved and venerated the same *opera* that anyone else did. The fixes that I had foreseen stayed will-o-the-wispish. If a title was mentioned by more than one person, it was by only one more than one. I shed some tears and stayed gloomily in the wilderness, alone.

Several years later I emerged with a mass of data—giant folders of notes on contents, attitudes, virtues and vices, and size of pieces read. But an awful problem remained: to eliminate about ninety percent of these and live with the rest. The series editor had told me that things did not get sticky until one got to the permissions stage. But here I was stuck in stickiness at the first stage—selection. I was pulling up one leg at a time in a long, slow-sucking movement of semi-extraction. That is what exercising free will is like. The series editor said, “Just pick the best essays.” The best essays—that’s a charge you give to a committee, not to an editor fickle-fidgeting among his frailties. He tries out an inclusion, and promptly thinks, Am I being quirky or cranky? He tries out an exclusion and promptly thinks, Am I being quirky or cranky? I looked at my grades on the essays, for I had yielded to the habit of two score and ten classroom years and put a letter grade on each. Imagine my shock: on more than half my prospects I had put the grade A/B. It seemed to mean, “Doesn’t quite send me, but doesn’t quite put me off.” Little help there. So I had to let some unarticulated background rules come out of the closet of my mind, and tried them.

One rule goes something like this: “Anthologist A does not anthologize Anthologist B if B has failed, when opportunity offered, to anthologize Anthologist A.” But then there turned out to be a spot which could be decently filled by coldhearted Anthologist B. Try Rule 2: Anthologist does not anthologize any critic who has panned any work by Anthologist. But by leaning over backward—an intensified form of moral uprightness—I had to admit that a piece by an unfriendly commentator had merit. Out went Rule 2. I toyed with a rule that Shakespearians in *-ian* were solider souls than those in *-ean*, but found that the *-ians* are in a minority; minorities, alas, do not move merchandise. Rule 3: no spokesmen for a fashion only. Very difficult to apply. When is a fashion just a passing passion, or a more or less permanent alteration in, or addendum to, the persisting ways of doing things? Well, I found one clue: if Shakespearian Alpha refers to Shakespearians Beta, Gamma, and Delta as belonging to an earlier school, or calls Beta’s work “old fashioned” (as in the phrase “old-fashioned humanism”), we can be reasonably sure that Alpha feels himself surfing on a wave of new

fashion and will be looking for the next big roll after that. Let him surf on, but in other seas.

Rule 4 I believe held. It was the rule of style. It has several subdivisions. Rubric 4A was: low grades for any commentator whose mind is so tormented with puzzling depths that he cannot convert them into lucid English. Of course I was wracked by the terrible suspicion, apparently felt by many colleagues, that if I could not make head or tail of a piece of prose, that fact alone might establish the thought as 100-proof, bonded in some high-grade intellectual warehouse. Others must judge whether, unbeknownst to me, my wimpish suspicion of hidden profundity in murky prose undermined the rule of decent clarity. Rule 4B: no traffic with I-prancers. An I-prancer is a critic who wrestles with himself in public, leaping all over the place in a question-and-answer duel with himself. Thus he has to use the first-person singular pronoun five or ten times in every paragraph: the battle of conscience comes off as the rattle of ego. (In *Missouri Review*, 7 (1983), 266, I painted an ampler portrait of this type.) I think I won this one. Rule 4C: exclude anyone who says “adumbrate” when he means “hint” or “sketch,” who says “theoretician” when he means “theorist,” “modality” when he means “mode,” or, most of all, says “methodology” when he means “method.” I am not sure how firm I was here. In our profession there is something of an epidemic of hypersyllabism, sesquipedalian magic, and intimidation by abracadabra, and it may mildly infect even writers of generally good stylistic health. I hope to transmit only a minimum of infection.

After a semi-eternity of wrestling with principles, possibles, and passwords, one risks action. One feels the pull of representativeness: all the tragedies have to be represented, and some writings—like the consistently masterful essays of Kenneth Muir—slowly assume an air of non-excludability. Gradually one’s pro-ing and con-ning (one wishes it were cunning) push one sluggishly toward a short list. The ultimate act of exclusion and inclusion seems, in retrospect, less a judicial decision or rational determination than an often insecure response to vague osmotic pressures exerted by the not wholly identified movements of red and blue pencils of the psyche, pencils more pink than red, and more grey than blue. And even at the last minute one is pestered by alternatives that nag at one, unwilling to go away.

II.

The second stickiness—the permissions phase—may settle some of the residual iffiness. A prohibitive price tag may help. One publisher demanded not only a mountain of dollars but also a mousy printing

limited to 1500 copies. Good-bye, author; one problem solved. Permissions departments vary in style—from prompt and organized to indifferent or even chaotic, from courteous to rude. About one essay I wrote letters for a year—letters mostly unanswered, and this without explanation or apology. Publishers vary in attitude—from pleasure in being anthologized to asking standard fees to thinking that the only kudos is escudos and hence treating the anthologist as a Brink's truck asking for ambush. Mostly they start high and test the anthologist's missile defenses. If he is tireless enough in discussion, he may uncover admirable extents of reasonableness. Occasionally a permissions official may be enchantingly brief. In one case I wrote a reply seeking, with careful explanations, a modification of a proposed fee that seemed a bit plump. Without delay came back a xerox of my letter, the space below my signature marked only with a boldly written, and initialed, "OK." One longer correspondence was agreeable throughout: it was with an English woman who negotiated with a singular mixture of promptness, candor, grace, and even humor (qualities more likely to emerge on the other side of the Atlantic). And although this record has to be mainly anonymous, I have a special reason for identifying this correspondent both businesslike and charming. She was Miss S. A. Milford of the Oxford University Press, original English variety. One could not see the name S. A. Milford without wondering. Finally I popped the question: was she a scion of the famous Humphrey, whose name all students of English have seen on so many title pages? She bore my curiosity with good humor: various marriages among her forebears had enabled her to be, if not lineal descendant, at last a double grand niece of Humphrey Milford. This first contact with a double grand niece, and a delightful one, seemed a special achievement—a bright event in the life of an anthologistic drudge.

III.

Then, once one has struggled pantingly out of the two molasses barrels of selection and permission, one suddenly finds that there is a third stickiness—editing. Granted, the clip, paste, and xerox routines reek less of molasses than of Cream of Wheat boring. It is a shade less tedious when one is trimming a very long chapter (writings on Shakespearian tragedy rarely suffer from anorexia). Such surgical streamlining does not always delight the creator or merchandiser of the outsized model. From one essay I proposed removing several parenthetical passages in which the author mentioned other works of his that had nothing to do with Shakespearian tragedy. My proposal greatly alarmed the permissions person. By verbose humility in explanation, I preserved the cuts, but I was

told that the author remained displeased.

To save space I sought to eliminate all footnotes except those needed to identify materials in the text, since many other notes tended to bootleg in secondary essays. My reductive effort ran afoul of considerable parental affection; to some begetters of footnotes I seemed a pitiless abortionist or infanticide. In time, however, a manuscript of bearable magnitude emerged: I copy-edited it, engaged the best copy-editor I knew to copy-edit it some more, and shipped it to the publishers, observing the most fully prescribed steps and procedures. It seemed safe to risk a bit of the “at last” sentiment, even while fearing that my sternly bookkeeping publishers had already fined me, or would fine me, out of all royalties.

But now the true stickiness number three seized me: I fell into the ruthless embrace of a latter-day copy-editor. By “latter-day copy-editor” I mean an actual contemporary type in the more spartan publishing operations. The type can be defined objectively by behavioral criteria. It has to be a person without literary knowledge or experience, without language sense, but with an A+ record in a course in copy-editing in some junior college. The course has to consist in memorizing rigorous rules that are based neither on taste nor on civilized literary practice. One rule is that the word *man* and its pronouns are dirty words. (My first experience with a latter-day copy-editor came in an earlier essay. I alluded to Malraux’s title *Man’s Fate* and found it edited to *Everyone’s Fate*; I used the familiar words “average sensual man” and found them edited to “average sensual person”; and, above all, I quoted an eminent Renaissance divine and found his words edited to “No person is an island.” Colleagues will understand my anticipation of professional fame as the modernizer of an old French phrase and of John Donne.) Hence, my Shakespeare introduction became liberally peppered with that ungainly pair “he or she.” The editor inflexibly enforced a rule that that clauses must be restrictive and *which* clauses non-restrictive—a rule that ignores the diversity of intelligent practice. She—when I say *she* I of course mean *he or she*—hunted down every *which* before a restrictive clause and relentlessly changed it to *that*. Thus she corrected nine of fifteen scholars, English and American, whose chosen pronouns had survived editing at both commercial and university presses. I screamed in vain.

Another apparent rule was that all lines of quoted verse, even if fractional, are placed flush with the indented left margin. When authors used second-half lines, as they often did, I pushed and shoved in a struggle to get these moved to the right side. What often resulted was a singular compromise: the second-half line in the middle of the line space.

Another latter-day copy-editorial rule that I have run into repeatedly is that if a word isn't in the dictionary, it doesn't exist. Hence when I coin a word, I am punished. In my introduction I was glancing a little at critical vogues, at the way in which, with our passion for fashion, we turn old masters into new targets. To denote those en route from Olympian eminence to wayside markers, I hit upon the word *refutands* (by analogy, it need hardly be said, with *multiplicand* or the more modish *analysand*). What a horror I released. The editor naturally did not find *refutand* in the dictionary, so she expunged it on the spot. But something had to go into the vacant space, so she filled the blank by applying a rule which I infer may be stated thus: if a word is not in the dictionary, replace it with a dictionary word found on the dictionary page where the non-existent word would be found if it weren't non-existent. So she replaced my *refutands* with *refuters*. What matter that it means the opposite of the original? That it makes logical nonsense of the passage? Well, in time I got *refutands* back, but a combination of tantrums and quasi-epileptic seizures is a strenuous way of preserving textual meaning.

Occasionally I try to explain to latter-day copy editors that dictionaries are not divinities, but compilations of (a) traditional usages and (b) contemporary *pseudodoxia epidemica* that have managed to appear in print somewhere; that such compilations are not acts of exclusion against invention; that neologisms have a right-to-life even if they are not errors embraced by a newspaper; and that a dictionary's populist inclusiveness does not compel me to say "disinterested" when I mean "uninterested," or to say "gender" when I mean "sex." But latter-day copy-editing seems strong; the Third Reich of stickiness for book compilers may stick around indefinitely.

No one will be surprised to learn that the editorial regimen which advanced my education let appear, in the printed text, not only some normal typos, so to speak, but also some amazing ones.

IV.

I hope not to sound like a schoolroom Richard II, with a mirror. So I pass on from the perils of the process to the main problem of the product: is it entirely peripheral to the doings of Shakespearians? People who address themselves to the problems that exercise Shakespearians, I learn from an official document, "frequently offer challenging, controversial ideas, often sparking debate on significant issues in the field." This is a record of frightening achievements, one that no mere anthologist can hope to live up to. An anthologist might be defined as a minor professional who accepts his own insignificance. How could such a one

“challenge” via “significant issues”? Perhaps he could essay a loud bang by denouncing anthologies as the by-blows of harmful drudges, but that would only challenge a minority and, worse, suggest moral showboating, i.e., exhibitionistic penitence. If he praised anthologies as a *sine qua non* of instructional life, that wouldn’t challenge anyone except the rare soul who really does read all those books and is convinced that everyone else should, too. Or, instead of simply asserting value, he might delve into the underlying functional mode of the anthological tool. The line might be that it is the simplest possible contributor to an indispensable diversity of perspective. Without this a student might fall into the illusion of perceiving a play as an identifiable literary object instead of remaining indecisive before a multiplicity of signs and conventions without constitutive power, and hence free for infinite critical trampolinage. The anthologist might evolve a theory of the anthology *per se*, and disassemble it into a myriad of distant motives, attitudes, and habits, and of course its own aporia. He would very likely conclude, then, that the anthology is only, and can only be, self-referential, that though purporting to be about Shakespeare, it is unable to be about anything but anthologies. Hence, paradoxically, it is at the beck and call of the reader, who can alone determine what it is. And if readers do not determine it into an irremediable infinity of significations, it is because some of them constitute a community of interpretation.

But clearly this will not do. Such musings glide away from the only true issue that can come up here: not the nature of the anthology, but the utility of the anthologist’s revelations. Can knowledge of his tribulations aid the instructor in teaching Shakespeare? The answer, I fear, is no. It is worse than that this knowledge may actually handicap the instructor. For, knowing what the anthologist went through, the instructor will surely find it far less easy to seize that simple and direct pleasure of the classroom podium—establishing his own expertise by revealing to his students, with suitable indignation, the anthologist’s sins of omission and commission.

No, my acts of revelation cannot, I realize, live up to the performance of colleagues who have challenged and controverted and thus become provocateurs of intellectual rioting among Shakespearians. I cannot think I prod, much less *prodesse*. But perhaps *delectare*? And thus be half Horatian? That is an imaginable effect. For my tale has been one of sufferings, and it is the sufferings of others that contribute to everyman’s sense of well-being, and hence, *a fortiori*, delight.

The University of Washington

Shakespeare's Bombast by Charles Frey

He seems to want to substitute *logos* for myth, discourse for theater, demonstration for illustration. And yet, within his very explanations, another scene slowly comes to light, less immediately visible than the preceding one, but, in its muffled latency, just as tense, just as violent as the other, composing with it, within the pharmaceutical enclosure, an artful, living organization of figures, displacements, repetitions.

This scene has never been read for what it is, for what is at once sheltered and exposed in its metaphors: its *family* metaphors. It is all about fathers and sons, about bastards unaided by public assistance, about glorious, legitimate sons, about inheritance, sperm, sterility. Nothing is said of the mother, but this will not be held against us. And if one looks hard enough as in those pictures in which a second picture faintly can be made out, one might be able to discern her unstable form, drawn upside-down in the foliage, at the back of the garden.*

I. Shakespeare's bombast as aggressive and false pride in the inflated speech of males.

We have receiv'd your letters full of love;
Your favors, ambassadors of love;
And in our maiden council rated them
At courtship, pleasant jest, and courtesy,
As bombast and as lining to the time:
But more devout than this in our respects
Have we not been, and therefore met your loves
In their own fashion, like a merriment

(LLL V. ii. 777-784)¹

The Princess, I think, gives a fine prescription for how we might take much of Shakespeare in our time: as a kind of merry bombast. Have we better choices?

Bombast is padding, "lining," in clothes. Transferred to speech and writing, the term suggests grandiloquence, pomposity, inflation, an over-reaching or pride. Bombast enters the language of love when that language becomes overfull. The men's "favors" to the women were bombast, too, because they were ultra-copious, aggressive, threatening, producing "A lady wall'd about with diamonds" (V. ii. 3). Too much lining: making the clothes, the gifts, the man, falsely impressive, oppressive. Bombast is fat-language, stomach-talk. Falstaff is a "sweet creature of bumbast" (1 Henry IV, II. iv. 326), sweating in swollen ego-talk

that argues all others frail, naked, undressed in comparison. Iago tells how Othello “nonsuited” the “off-capp’d” mediators (l. i. 12):

... he (as loving his own pride and purposes)
Evades them with a bumbast circumstance
Horribly stuffed with epithites of war. . . .

Stuffed, prideful circumlocution, an act of going around, walling, lining the subject, making it bigger than it should be, need be, material language lung-ed loud and long: this is bombast. This is Shakespeare.

The Princess, Hal, and Iago are Shakespeare’s only characters to use the term “bombast.” Strange company, but they all want to cut the bombast figure down to size, to show how horribly stuffed are the conventional (male) languages of courtship, fellow-ship, and war. Would they substitute, like the company of deconstructors, perhaps, their own self-denying versions of pride?

II. Background: bombast as *Latinate amplitude*.

We must not forget that when Nashe speaks of the swelling bombast of a bragging blank verse the word was still vivid with metaphor. Bombast was stuffing—the material and the process by which unaccommodated man was endowed with bulbous curves. Nashe and his circle were perfectly familiar, by first-hand experience, with the analogous literary process and, with their usual disregard of *tu quoque*, were always ready to hurl the term at a rival. Greene’s gibe at Shakespeare’s bombasting out a blank verse expresses as much envy as criticism. It was the writer’s business to dress and deck his subject, even to inflate it, if this was done with ‘art.’ No hollowness or redundancy was felt, because language itself was loved and pursued as a great and urgently delightful reality. The chronicle plays, Shakespearian and other, are excellent examples of this nation-wide satisfaction in *bene dicere*.²

“No hollowness” was felt by whom? It is true that the men’s bombast poetry in *Love’s Labor’s Lost* was reprinted admiringly in *The Passionate Pilgrim*. Shakespeare’s contemporaries then saw this bombast as straight Shakespeare, did they not? They also accepted as Shakespeare’s the bombast of his Dedication for *The Rape of Lucrece*:

The loue I dedicate to your Lordship is without end: wherof this Pamphlet without beginning is but a superfluous Moity. The warrant I haue of your Honourable disposition, not the worth of my untutored Lines makes it assured of acceptance. . . .³

Shakespeare’s bombast thus escapes the safe confines of criticized

characters in his plays. Indeed, its romance-ic, Romansick fullness becomes one of its main claims to fame.

Shakespeare was introduced into American education in order to teach elocution through such arguably bombastic speeches as those of Richard II on the vanities of kingship, Othello explaining his marriage, or Henry V exhorting his men to war.⁴ Even twentieth-century teachers have endorsed and promoted the Shakespearean drive to inflate English in the name of wealth, power, and supremacy in expression. The rhetorician above, who equates inflation with the pursuit of “language itself,” elsewhere approves an Elizabethan impatience with the “monosyllabic small change of which the native part of our language so largely consists”:

The educated Englishman became critically and linguistically self-conscious; he acquired standards and powers of comparison. He was compelled to consider England's place in the Republic of Letters. In the phase of expansion, fine words, racy phrases, exuberant sentences appealed not only through novelty and contrast, but also as ammunition; it was as patriot that the Elizabethan developed his linguistic sense.

Shakespeare's plays not only harvest the linguistic wealth of this period of expansion, but . . .⁵

Do you hear it here? The jingle of the jingo, the tingle of the lingo? Shakespeare, once again, interprets his interpreter who would discount our native, colloquial small change in favor of linguistic wealth, the Republic of Latinate letters. Poetry becomes a supreme diction. This attitude is endemic still:

Hamlet as a ‘character’ may be confused, but his poetry is not; he is less a ‘character’ than a poetic voice, speaking from a height overlooking his problems. That is our primary fact. It may be untrue to life; people do not speak like that, but there it is, and we have to make what we can of it. If we succeed, we end up by having a supreme experience.⁶

Instead of reducing Shakespeare to the vernacular, you have done the reverse; you have begun with the vernacular and found its parallel in the lines of the play. You are ascending toward Shakespearean language, poetry, and imagery; you are not descending from it. . . . Allow the Shakespearean version to soak in for some minutes. A considerable minority, at the least, will assert that the Shakespearean version presents the same idea in greater depth, with more overtones, and with greater power.⁷

Teacher: Prove that Shakespeare's plot is inferior but his poetry memorable.

Student: This play haunted my soul—
it sank in the quicksand of my mind.⁸

Shakespeareans often encourage us to short-change the vernacular for. . . for what? The wealth, the power, of a nonvernacular language? Shakespeare's poetry becomes "memorable," "supreme," precisely because "people do not speak like that?" Because they have Roman "ammunition"? Perhaps the outstanding linguistic trait of Shakespeare's most secure bombaster, Pistol, is his egregious, aggressive Latinism: "What? shall we have incision? Shall we imbrue" (2*HIV*, II iv. 196); "His heart is fractured and corroborate" (*HV*, II i. 124), etc. But, once we leave the company of Pistol, Fluellen, Don Armado, Holofernes, Osric, and all the other plainly comic bombasters, are we sure where to stop? What character in *Titus* can escape the charge? What Prince in *Troilus* runs free?⁹ What history play is untainted? How Latinate is *Othello*? (I iii. 261):

I therefore beg it not
To please the palate of my appetite,
Nor to comply with heat (the young affects
In me defunct) and proper satisfaction.
 . . . No, when light-wing'd toys
Of feather'd Cupid seel with wanton'd dullness
My speculative and offic'd instruments,
That my disports corrupt and taint my business. . . .

Or *Macbeth*: "the multitudinous seas incarnadine" (II ii. 59). Or *Lear*: "By all the operation of the orbs, / From whom we do exist and cease to be; / Here I disclaim all my paternal care, / Propinquity and property of blood" (I i. 111). And so on. Not just the regal or noble characters—Hamlet, *Timon*, *Leontes*, *Prospero*, *Posthumus Leonatus*, *Coriolanus*, *Caesar*, and the rest—but the men generally of their class speak this enriched, Latinate language. To what effect if not bombast?

The usual defenses of Shakespeare's ornate, Latinate style are that we should like it because it "enriches" an otherwise limited Germanic word-horde, that inkhorn terms have become acceptable, that double epithets, Latinate and Germanic, provide admirable plenitude, that Latinate, ostentatious language is free and witty, and that copious ornamentation and not "meaning" is the true end and pleasure of Shakespeare's art.¹⁰ Nowadays, if you question Shakespeare's Latinate copiousness or inflation, you may be regarded as a kill-joy, an anti-esthete, a lugubrious meaning-monger, or an undeconstructed "interpreter." You may be assigned to the ranks of such misunderstanders of Shakespeare as *Greene* or *Jonson* (wishing that Shakespeare had blotted out a thousand lines) or *Dryden* (complaining of Shakespeare's "serious swelling into bombast") or *Pope* (faulting Shakespeare's "verbose and bombast expression") or *Arnold* (despairing that Shakespeare's language

is “so artificial, so curiously tortured”) or Bradley (decrying passages “obscure, inflated, tasteless”) or Tolstoy (hating Shakespeare’s “pompous volubility”) or G.B.S. or, horrors, some of the new feminists. Or you may be referred to the work of those who deny that Shakespeare strays from the “diction of common life,” though such denial makes a mockery of the vast range in levels of diction from the predominating ones in Shakespeare that are relatively Latinate, ornate, amplified, and copious to the rarer examples of plain style and low diction, most often among women, children, and the uneducated.¹¹ And even if it is argued that the diction of common life may include “an elaborately patterned, euphuistic style of speaking and writing, full of classical allusions as evidence that one was not a member of the herd” because “in court, legal, and aristocratic circles, there were people who talked and wrote in this way,”¹² still the argument distorts the meaning of “common” toward a silly tautology: Shakespeare’s Latinate, bombastic diction was the diction of common life because Shakespeare, lawyers, and aristocrats commonly used it.

Never quite common enough, the persons who wrote and talked in the Latinate style were almost all males trained in an intensive, sex-exclusive, and limited educational system which fostered a language of male-oriented oratory, forensic aggression, “bombast.” Consider their schools.

III. Bombast and the Latin Grammar School.

At the grammar-school an Elizabethan schoolboy’s lessons, enforced by not infrequent ‘jerks of the breech,’ continued from seven in the morning until five in the afternoon. The curriculum consisted chiefly of Latin, and its hard core was Lyly’s *Grammatica Latina*, which by royal decree was the sole authority for use in schools. Having mastered the rudiments of grammar, the pupils went on to read certain approved works and authors, such as the fables of Aesop, the maxims of Cato, the eclogues of Virgil and Baptista Spagnolo (the ‘good old Mantuan’ beloved of Holofemes), Cicero, Sallust, Horace, Ovid and the *Copia Rerum et Verborum* of Erasmus. They learned little else. . . . If Shakespeare did not receive this discipline at the Stratford school, it is surprising. His plays and poetry seem to reveal an intimate familiarity with the whole process of education as it existed in his youth. . . . He seems to be always giving indications of having in the first instance acquired his Latin and little Greek at the feet of Holofemes himself, and of having failed to relish the experience.¹³

When will we begin to take seriously the implications of the near-certainty that Shakespeare studied Latin ten hours a day for ten years

and under the conditions of “a brutality towards boys which not only, and not surprisingly, reflected the violence of personal life which remained part of the Tudor scene, but also found a new sanction in the Calvinistic insistence on the essential depravity of man.”¹⁴ Shakespeare, spending the first few years of his life at home in a predominantly oral, vernacular culture, with parents who may well have been nonliterate in important ways, abruptly began the study of Latin, the phenomenally intensive study of Latin in Latin, for most of his waking days for a decade. What a way to be driven (as most of us may be in growing “up”) out of the body and into the mind! And what were the effects of such training?

Since the student had read and imitated almost exclusively Latin authors, the style of his expression was necessarily Latinate, complex in form and vocabulary if not completely Ciceronian. . . . Othello’s ‘round unvarnish’d tale’ is set in a strictly patterned exordium or introduction which comes straight out of the textbook.

Furthermore, the study of rhetoric gave the most diverse literary genres a more or less oratorical cast, largely because the dominance of oratory in ancient culture had never been effectively challenged.¹⁵

The stuffing of bombast is, then, not solely Latin. It is school-talk and oratory, the weaning of English not only away from vernacular vocabularies but also from vernacular “small-talk,” from languages of privacy, intimacy, reciprocity, conversationality. Ciceronian techniques of composition produce Ciceronian discourse. “These techniques, comprising the core of grammar school discipline, were applied to both composition and the reading of classical Latin literature in a manner which formed the Renaissance creating and responding mind.”¹⁶ That is, Latin Grammar School forced Shakespeare to write ornate, Latinate, inflated, oratorical discourse. Shakespeare’s bombast, in this sense, merely betrays an accentuation of his tendency toward oratorical inflation and forensic aggressiveness throughout his texts. Whether Latinate in diction or not, his bombast is the pervasive and unloving language that reveals and revels in its power to order, encadence, manipulate, persuade, and assert the Will, not in reciprocity and willingness to fall silent for listening, but in prideful dominance:

Now by my mother’s son, and that’s myself,
It shall be moon, or star, or what I list,
Or ere I journey to your father’s house.

(TS, IV. v. 6-8)

We are the makers of manners, Kate; and the liberty that follows our places stops the mouth of all find-faults, as I will do yours, for upholding the nice fashion of your country in denying me a kiss; therefore patiently and yielding. [Kissing her.] You have witchcraft in your lips, Kate; there is more eloquence in a sugar touch of them than in the tongues of the French council; and they should sooner persuade Harry of England than a general petition of monarchs.

(HV, V. ii. 270-279)

Bombast wars upon the peaceful speech of heart's ease, of plain trust and affection, upon language that *could* be calm, mild, relaxed, private, quiet, a listening language, and converts it to bragging, lying celebration of Will. Bombast charges and over-charges not only grand words but mundane ones into self-aggrandizing power-play. All words.

Because we today think of the Elizabethan period as an age of bombast we tend to think that only the heavy words are significant. In fact, many of the more ordinary words were charged with meaning through the controversies of the time, and it is important to pay attention to them.¹⁷

The example is “nothing,” a fair thought to lie between maids' legs. Who, what men, charged that word with meanings of their own angry fear?

But bombast in Shakespeare associates itself most often with a Latinny attitudinizing of male speakers, Roemen. Why? Shakespeare, educated like the rest of his fellows in a boys-only Latin Grammar school, endured a puberty rite there, and, “in helping to maintain the closed male environment the psychological role of Latin should not be underestimated. It was the language of those on the ‘inside,’ and thus learning Latin at even the infra-university level was the first step toward initiation into the closed world.”¹⁸ Latin language study with its emphasis upon flogging, fear, and treasured initiation into realms of manly virtue, courage, and civic accomplishment, was essentially an initiation rite, an entry into the ranks of manhood, a male world of Roman power.

Those who were initiated, as Shakespeare was, into the Roman restruct tended to write according to the resultant extra-vernacular, “classical” ethos:

This Latin orientation of formal literary training gave to all literature a curiously public, and formal, although not necessarily an unemotional cast. This was because Latin was no longer a vernacular language. The vernacular enters into areas of life where other languages cannot enter—the family, intimate personal relationships, and, most of all, the depths of the individual consciousness initially opened and permanently occupied by the terms and the concomitant concepts through

which the individual first becomes conscious of his own existence as he learns to think and talk . . .

The result of this dominance of a nonvernacular language on criticism is marked. Literature tends to be judged as somewhat doggedly public, free from intimacy, exterior. . . . Habituation to nonvernacular modes of expression tended to strengthen and make more virile the intimate notes in communication when these did appear, inevitably, in vernacular productions.¹⁹

Doggedly public, virile, and so never-for-long vernacular Shakespeare. So. Long.

IV. Bombast and intimacy.

As the extreme of a tendency found throughout Shakespeare, bombast amounts to an attitude of mind, an ideology of language and desire. Shakespeare's language, with one new word in every ten and with more than 500 now-dead words, with more than 600 Latin neologisms,²⁰ with its recurring Latinate diction, its ornate rhetorical flavor, its brocaded, figured, baroque or even mannerist cast, is definitely not the language of common life, not the language of women, or children, or the poor, or the non-urban or urbane, or Jews, or Ethiopes, or Indians, or anyone but one educated as its author was educated. The language of Shakespeare is a curiosity, not a model, certainly not a model for the language of democratic education, nor for intimate communications among diverse peoples seeking reciprocal understanding.²¹

Indeed, Shakespeare himself adverts to the barriers of his own non-intimate, virile, raised-diction styles which form the staple of his dialogue when, in his *Sonnets* and plays such as *Titus*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, *Othello*, and *Troilus and Cressida*, he questions the very capacity of such language to express or kindle pity, affection, trust. Many of the plays, in fact, depict Latinate, oratorical, forensically-powerful males—generals, princes, rich men, proud men—facing a need to communicate intimately with persons out of their element—wives, children, plebians, the deepest humanity of their colleagues, their inmost selves—and finding themselves unable to do it successfully, lacking, it might be said, a language of equality, reciprocity, and genuine connection, a language of listening and mutual discovery, a language of a nonbombastic self:

if they did hear,
They would not mark me; if they did mark
They would not pity me; yet plead I must,
And bootless unto them.

per se denies deep integrity, at-one-ment. The speech of his characters generally becomes less Latinate as it “descends” to women, children, the uneducated.²³ And Shakespeare seems consistently to have associated a plain style with deep communication, deep feeling. In the Sonnets, “he exploits the emptiness and grandeur of the high style to establish his own sincerity and seriousness.”²⁴ But is Shakespeare’s “plain” style really so plain? And, even if you judge it to be occasionally so, of what *relative* significance are the occasions? Even colloquial language may stiffen: “the colloquial language of one century may be the formal language of the next.”²⁵ Shakespeare may, to be sure, have identified the speech of certain women in his plays with a language of integrity, but the question remains whether he ever found or endorsed a style of nonsentimental “directness and utter candour”: “The linguistic problem is acute, perhaps even beyond the range of the mature Shakespeare.”²⁶

We may be tempted to reinhabit alleged Elizabethan uncertainties as to whether human will could ever become so free from infection as to work “the salvation of language from sophistry”: “On the one hand, the new eristics coupled with a renewed skepticism had called all in doubt; on the other hand, without language the center, human reason, cannot hold.”²⁷ Despite his skepticism (only sporadic?) toward languages of status, power, and colonial bearing, and toward the chance of democratically disseminating our language—

You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red-plague rid you
For learning me your language!

(Tmp., I. ii. 362-364)—

Shakespeare never thoroughly explores attractive alternatives. Unlike Samuel Daniel, Shakespeare seems hardly to have “envisioned a maturing English as the future language of colonial responsibility,”²⁸ though Cranmer’s prophecy of James I (*HVIII*, V. v. 51) that “the greatness of his name / Shall be, and make new nations” might suggest otherwise. We are left with the question: in how many senses the language of the closed male environment reflects an ill will?

Shakespeare was of an age, and not for every time, at least not equally. The generally orotund, loud, rapid, lengthy speaking in his plays is too proud, too rhetorical, for the needs and interest of our day when the many virtues of nonverbal communication, of ethnic, street, and children’s eloquence, of writing as discovery, and of participatory art forms are being explored. Yes, Shakespeare uncannily explores moments of quiet recognition and reconciliation in his plays and makes the verbal

magician drown his book, but that is not, proportionately, what the plays are about. Much more they concern our whirled, whorled world of words, the prison of our grammar, and its willing cost. Some of our strongest critics see that in Shakespeare:

The whole play, much as it questions linguistic artifice, is constructed in terms of linguistic artifice, and leaves no room for alternatives other than linguistic. [LLL]

At this play's [*Othello's*] heart lies a critique of the artificiality built into stylized language and the behavior which that language permits and even encourages.

In this play [*Troilus and Cressida*], Shakespeare shows us—unflinchingly, since words were his livelihood and his life—the dangers in words, in their ‘mereness,’ their automatic substitution for real response and engagement, and in their tricky grandiloquence as well.²⁹

But how easily such seeing is blinked aside:

What at first sounds like bombast in Antony's speech is naturalized in the course of the play, until his way of speaking becomes a standard against which other men are judged. . . . At the play's start, Philo had called a spade a spade, or even a shovel; in contrast, Antony and Cleopatra spoke in love's arrogant, idealized overstatements. By the end of the play, Philo's linguistic practice is blocked out by Antony's hyperbole coming true, until we too believe that ‘the nobleness of life’ is for such lovers to embrace.

Such an exercise in ‘undoing’ allows us to see, even more clearly than without its contrasts, Shakespeare's customary habits of ‘doing,’ of examining and enriching traditions.³⁰

Is there, then, no belief or relief beyond formality? and beyond “enrichment”? Can Shakespeare's or any public drama tell? What experience, what wisdom, what integrity can break the grip of learned, learn-ed language? None? “Curiously, Shakespeare has presented Hamlet as a university student. But each time it is the knowledge of a learned grammarian which is displayed.”³¹ Hamlet, the ultimate bombaster, genius-victim of child abuse at the endless grammar school, trapping the critic grammarians of each later day. One such, whose book speaks of *Redeeming Shakespeare's Words*,³² thinks he sees Hamlet, at the last, cancelling the wordy absence of presence:

though ‘words,’ as Gertrude says, ‘be made of breath,’ truth must be made of life. And although words can continue temporarily an almost independent existence, life will ultimately show

through.

In his own spiritual pilgrimage, Hamlet moves from a world filled with words, words, words, to a place where the rest is silence. He did not, happily, know that generations of scholars would reverse the process.

“Life,” apparently, shows through by means of death, silence. Some life. And scholars succeeding Hamlet have hardly been able to re-verse the process any more than, or as well as, Shakespeare could himself—leaving no play of rest or silence.

VI. Contra.

To oppose an essentially Shakespearean language of power or bombast to a language of “intimacy” absent from or unrealized in Shakespeare is to embark upon a fallacious enterprise. The concept of bombast—beginning with uses of the term in Shakespeare, all of which are highly suspect as themselves in context either lying or distorted or inapplicable, all themselves bombastic—quickly expands from the likes of Pistol and Don Armado, who are from the outset under-privileged, comically de-flated characters, to privileged male speakers such as Hamlet or Lear whose assertions of personal power may be all the more effective and frightening as they self-consciously abandon claims to linguistic force. That is, the heralded “language” of reciprocity and intimacy in no way escapes the masks and projections of power or manipulation inherent in all human intercourse. In this sense, non-bombastic language, while accorded a privileged position vis-a-vis bombast (just as private, domestic, youthful, and feminine are being privileged over against public, political, mature, and male) must itself be rife with subtler versions of competition, status moves, and power plays: always already “the privileged terms in such hierarchical oppositions are inhabited by their opposites. . . .”³³ Intimacy, after all, is the very breeding ground of difference, even violence. Most arguments (inevitably bombastic?) of great violence, like most murders, involve intimates, inmates. Conversely, standard forms of bombast are comically self-declaratory, purgative, exhaustive of the will to fight, substituting words for wounds, talking the talk in order not to walk the walk. And, of course, a hallowed social function of drama itself is to allow us a moment’s bombastic topsy-turveydom in order to proceed a trifle more freshly with enduring conventions, structures, and intimacies that permit the great ongoingness of life.

What furthermore, could possibly be dramatic about the never-

exampled but allegedly nonbombastic language of reciprocity and peaceful intimacy so lauded in the preceding argument? Shall Shakespeare be faulted for not showing mothers and babes cooing together? Or for not showing our murmurs over a quiet game of chess? Miranda knew better. Or some imagined bubbly babble over the feast of fellowship? Is there not, moreover, a further confusion in equating a language of intimacy with informality, quietness, calmness, relaxation, and so on, as if the rigid declamations of marital, familial, clan, and societal strife were not the very condition and appropriation of true intimacy? Must the language of love be singularly colloquial, spontaneous, sleepy, vague, groping, unthoughtful, documentary, grained with pause, snuffle, and “uh”?

As for the specific complaints of Latinism, the argument has wholly failed to recognize, or at least to concede, the degree to which conventions of high diction, ornate syntax, class-conscious grammar, and speechifying, power-grabbing delivery may be nullified by context and tone. When Hamlet says, “Absent thee from felicity a while,” no audience in the world becomes offended, or should be so, at the dying actor’s diction. All attentive energy is absorbed in Hamlet’s intimacy with Horatio, the man who is not passion’s slave yet whom Hamlet is filching from suicide. When Macbeth says that his bloody hand will “the multitudinous seas incarnadine,” the essential linguistic transaction with the audience is an apprehension of the spreading, staining power of a little blood, or “so much blood,” necessarily evoked in the complexifying vocalics of ornate speech (followed here by the whole-world unity of “one red”).

And as for the complaint that Shakespeare’s habits of diction smack too much of the closed male environments of grammar school (if not also his acting company and patriarchal society in general), the point would seem vitiated by the fact that so many generations of women have now read, watched, and acted the plays without noticeable strains of incomprehension, boredom, or sense of assault. Unless you will argue that women’s historically proved interest in and praise of Shakespeare’s language is but patriarchal puppetry, you must concede it strange that women have shown such satisfaction with Will.

Really the argument against “bombast” amounts to an anti-intellectual, anti-verbal prejudice in theater criticism. Once one begins asking for shorter, quieter, more intimate, and more direct speeches, where will one stop before demanding pure body language, nonverbal communication, as a guarantee of sincerity and truth in feeling? We may grant what Shakespeare certainly knew: “The physical part of language

is naturally forceful, it is universal and affective, and it speaks particularly to the vulgar."³⁴ But since exploration of the powers of language is our past and destiny, why not celebrate what it reveals rather than revile what it celebrates?

Bombast, finally, has been equated with aggressive male Will (spear-shaking) as suggested by intonations thought dictated by contexts in the passages selected. Such intonations, however, are radically controlled by the free play of readers, actors, directors. Shakespeare's "bombast" is but writing for which he may have intended or refused to intend any of a thousand tones and for which we may do the same. No convention of context is so rigid as to prevent tonal free play. Language is not enclosed; it is pure Will, whose conventions are so complex, even if freedom is denied, as to amount to, appear as, root freedom. No bombast is immune from potential self-questioning, self-defeat. An actor of Richard III has been heard to shout "My kingdom for a horse???" The question mark, this almost insignificant signifier is at everyone's disposal. . . who can resist hinting at the backwash that would correct each necessarily misproportioned utterance. . . here the manuscript trails. . . out. . . unending. . . ly?

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Notes

*Jaques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 142,43. Writing, discourse, Derrida, any essaying: "Uprooted, anonymous, unattached to any house or country, this almost insignificant signifier is at everyone's disposal, can be picked up by both the competent and the incompetent, by those who understand and know what to do with it, and by those who are completely unconcerned with it, and who, knowing nothing about it, can inflict all manner of impertinence upon it." (p. 144).

¹LLL, V. ii. 777-784, quotations of Shakespeare from Riverside edition, ed. G.B. Evans, et al. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1974).

²Gladys D. Willcock, "Shakespeare and Rhetoric," in *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Assoc.*, 29 (1943), (Oxford: Clarendon, 1944), p. 54.

³Riverside edition, p. 1722.

⁴See, Henry W. Simon, *The Reading of Shakespeare in American Schools and Colleges: An Historical Survey* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1932), chap. 2; Esther Cloudman Dunn, *Shakespeare in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), chap. 12.

⁵Gladys D. Willcock, "Shakespeare and Elizabethan English," in *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, ed. Harley Granville-Barker and G.B. Harrison, (1934, rpt. Garden City: Anchor, 1960), p. 129.

⁶G. Wilson Knight, "The Teacher as Poetic Actor," in *Teaching Shakespeare*, ed. Walter Edens, et al. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 299-301.

⁷Abraham Bernstein, *Teaching English in High School* (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 223.

⁸Reported in Mira P. Brichto, *Shakespearean Drama As It Is Taught and Learned in Three Urban Secondary School* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1977), pp. 46,47.

⁹Muriel L. Bradbrook, *Shakespeare: The Poet in His World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), p. 13: "in *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare was to write a whole play in specially Latinate diction."

¹⁰Alfred Harbage, *William Shakespeare: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1963), pp. 17-19; David M. Zesmer, *Guide to Shakespeare* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1976), pp. 15-17; Maurice Charney, *How to Read Shakespeare* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), pp. 54,55; "Many of Holofemes' terms of Art, like intimation, explication, and insinuation... are so ordinary today that no one would suspect them of once having formed part of a comic turn. Posterity has here vindicated the industry of the pedant." G.D. Willcock, *Shakespeare as Critic of Language* (London: Shakespeare Assoc., 1934), p. 13; "Thus ornament, which by us may be deemed irrelevant if not intrusive, is essential to the Elizabethans, not as the expression of meaning but as the pleasure of art." Marion Trousdale, *Shakespeare and the Rhetoricians* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1982), p. 94. But such variants of excessive aestheticism are neatly countered by Benedetto Croce's observation that the rhetoricians have never truly reconciled their love of ornament and that "fitting" which "coincides with expression itself." *Aesthetic*, trans. Douglas Ainslie, rev. ed. 1927 (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1966), p. 429.

¹¹"The conditions of Shakespeare's art did not permit him to stray far from popular idiom, but even if they had, his mind was of a cast that would still have found the material upon which it worked mainly in the diction of common life." Frank P. Wilson, *Shakespeare and the Diction of Common Life* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1941), p. 5. See Willcock, "Shakespeare and Elizabethan English," p. 120; D.S. Bland, "Shakespeare and the 'Ordinary Word,'" *Shakespeare Survey*, 4 (1951), pp. 49-55; Muriel St. Clare Byrne, "The Foundations of Elizabethan Language," *Shakespeare Survey*, 17 (1964), rpt. *Shakespeare in His Own Age*, ed. Allardyce Nicoll (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 223-39.

¹²Kenneth Hudson, "Shakespeare's Use of Colloquial Language," *Shakespeare Survey*, 23 (1970), 45.

¹³M.M. Reese, *Shakespeare: His World and His Work*, rev. ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1980), pp. 8-9.

¹⁴Kenneth Charlton, *Education in Renaissance England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 124. Charlton goes on to detail the ways in which this Latinate education was turned "into a grind of mechanical repetition": "What Rabelais referred to as 'verbosification' and the 'gymnastics of nothingness,' Milton was still, a century later, calling 'gerund grinding'... Rhetoric, which Cicero, Quintilian and the humanists had meant to be an essential tool in the hands of the educated man of affairs had now, paradoxically, become the trade mark of the cloistered pedant, mere Ciceronianism... Instead of acting as breeding grounds for humanist ideas, a distinct possibility at the beginning of the period, the grammar schools became instruments of national policy, a means of strengthening the State against religious innovation. The grammar schools of Renaissance England had become to the nation what the voluntary elementary schools of the nineteenth century were to their various denominational sponsors, instruments for maintaining the status quo." (pp. 127-30)

¹⁵Walter J. Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 63-64.

¹⁶Miriam Joseph, *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language*, 1947, rpt. (New York: Hafner Pub. Co., 1966), pp. 266,87.

¹⁷N.F. Blake, *Shakespeare's Language* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 50.

¹⁸Ong, *op. cit.*, p. 121, and see p. 128.

¹⁹Walter J. Ong, *The Barbarian Within* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 181. Compare F.P. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 27, extolling "with what nobility" Shakespeare transmutes the diction of common life upward.

²⁰Bryan A. Garner, "Shakespeare's Latinate Neologisms," *Shakespeare Studies*, 15 (1982), 149-70.

²¹"How definitely this American training in rhetoric was a preparation for a later career in pulpit or legislature or courtroom (for theatre, too, though this fact would not have been admitted) is shown by the absence of elocution in a volume constructed exclusively for 'young ladies.'" Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

²²"Yet in the different voice of women lies the truth of an ethic of care, the tie between relationship and responsibility, and the origins of aggression in the failure of connection." Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982), p. 173.

²³H.M. Klein, review of *Shakespeare's Stil*, by Jurgen Schafer, in *Shakespeare Studies*, 9 (1976), 365.

²⁴A.J. Gilbert, *Literary Language from Chaucer to Johnson* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 79.

²⁵G.L. Brook, *The Language of Shakespeare* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1976), p. 33.

²⁶S.S. Hussey, *The Literary Language of Shakespeare* (London: Longman, 1982), pp. 178, 79. "These women tried to find a personal style in which to express their intimate thoughts and feelings. Until about the middle of the twelfth century Latin was *de rigueur*, and when women tried to escape its rigidity, and the rhetorical rules of composition, they would be accused of writing badly when they were simply trying to say what they meant." Paula Neuss, "In Pursuit of Intimacy," review of Peter Dronke, *Woman Writers of the Middle Ages*, in *TLS*, Feb. 17, 1984, p. 172.

²⁷Arthur F. Kinney, "Rhetoric as Poetic: Humanist Fiction in the Renaissance," *ELH*, 43 (1976), 440. But see Margreta de Grazia, "Shakespeare's View of Language: An Historical Perspective," *SQ*, 29 (1978), 374-88.

²⁸Arthur B. Ferguson, *Clio Unbound: Perception of the Social and Cultural Past in Renaissance England* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1979), p. 314.

²⁹Rosalie L. Colie, *Shakespeare's Living Art* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 43, 166, 349.

³⁰Colie, *op. cit.*, 206, 351.

³¹T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakespeare's Smalle Latine & Lesse Greeke* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1944), 2.671.

³²By Paul A. Jorgensen (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1962), p. 120.

³³Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), p. 168. "The poet's insight into such an ambiguous power may well have had something of a 'cursed spite.' His tragic heroes have an extraordinary command of the language, but instead of earning them 'honour, love, obedience, troops of friends' (*Macbeth*, V. iii. 25), it drives them to deeper and deeper isolation, a solitude in which they are estranged not only from everything and everybody else but even from themselves. Who can say how far the most destructive efforts of word-play were with him reaction or surrender to a poet's loneliness?" Michel Grivelet, "Shakespeare as 'Corrupter of Words,'" *Shakespeare Survey*, 16 (1963), 74. "A literary text simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode. . . ." Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), p. 17. It would be perverse, no doubt, to suggest that there may indeed be an element of "crazy-making" in such remarks as these three.

³⁴Jane Donaworth, *Shakespeare and the Sixteenth-Century Study of Language* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1984), p. 76.

Male Sovereignty, Harmony and Irony In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by D'Orsay W. Pearson

As is well known, the belief in the male's sovereignty in marriage and subsequently as head of his household had been hammered, figuratively, into the Elizabethan consciousness. The theory was divinely sanctioned. Children were governed by commandment; women in marrying were reminded, with the authority of St. Paul, that the husband was naturally fitted to be his "wyves heade, even as Christe is the heade of the church."¹ The official "Sermon on the State of Matrimony" described woman as the "weaker vessel," not because of lack of physical stamina but because she was "a weak creature, not endued with like strength and constancy of mind" as was her male counterpart, so that she was therefore "more prone to all weak affections and dispositions of mind. . . ."² She was to be guided by a male, first her father and then her husband, who was to regard her peccadillos with tolerance: "she must be spared and borne with" (p. 554).

Moreover, the homily stressed that feminine subjugation was a source of concord or harmony in marriage:

For this surely doth nourish concord very much when the wife is ready at hand at her husband's commandment, when she will apply herself to his will, when she endeavoureth herself to seek his contentation, and to do him pleasure, when she will eschew all things that might offend him. . . . (p. 556)

The husband, in turn, could "nourish concord" by "considering these her frailties" and sparing her (pp. 554,55).

Despite this restating of a centuries-old traditional view, the author of "The Sermon on the State of Matrimony" was not so sanguine about masculine superiority and feminine inferiority as the passages just quoted might suggest. Marriage was a meritorious state for women, we read, because they "must specially feel the griefs and pains of matrimony, in that they relinquish the liberty of their own rule, in the pain of their travailing, in the bringing up of their children" (p. 557). This suggests that feminine obedience is not a natural condition but rather one of "estate." Such unnatural obedience, the "Sermon" suggests, comes not from recognition of superior worth of the male but from an artificial concentration upon role. Whatever her husband's failings, the wife was charged,

this only must be looked upon, by what means thou mayest
make thyself without blame. . . And therefore bring not thy
excuses to me. . . Go thou, therefore about such things as
becometh thee only, and show thyself tractable to thy husband.
(pp. 558,59)

In short, dutifulness was to be achieved only by an act of self-immolation of will—an act not only psychologically unrealistic but one which also violated one of the stated purposes of marriage, to “live together lawfully in perpetual friendly fellowship” (p. 551).

The ironic dual vision of feminine obedience—that it is a natural condition because of difference of kind and that it is in fact a fiction imposed by the role, one which can be achieved only by concentrating on role—is present throughout the “Sermon.” Reader or auditor can accept the traditional view, presented with the weight of historical authority and sacred injunction, but only if the ramifications of admissions such as those above are not followed to their logical conclusions. In the “Sermon,” despite its insistence upon the tradition of masculine sovereignty, lie the seeds of a more “modern” view of feminine obedience and duty.

Like the “Sermon,” *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* approaches the question of male sovereignty ironically, developing, at different levels of perspective, both conventional and unconventional statements about masculine sovereignty and harmony. The comedy has long been identified as a play about love and marriage, a play perhaps written for the “occasion” of a noble wedding.³ Nevertheless, the importance of Elizabethan theories of marriage and family to its characterization, its movement, and the ultimate statement it makes about feminine subjugation have not been adequately explored. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is infinitely more than a play about the “lawlessness and laughableness” of love.⁴ It is more than an exploration, in terms of Platonic referents, of the dominance of the rational soul (Theseus) over the concupiscent soul (Hippolyta), as Paul Olson suggested when he recognized that the concept of male sovereignty in marriage, as it leads to harmony, is a central concern of the comedy.⁵ Shakespeare’s play does more than examine the ideologies of male sovereignty in family and married life. It shows us instead the chaos which results when female subservience is foresworn and masculine sovereignty ignored. Yet to say only this would be to oversimplify. In terms of movement and plot resolution, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* seems to assert that harmony follows automatically upon the establishment of male dominance and wifely obedience. Working against this simplistic position, however, are

individual male-female relationships which ironically show that concord is achieved by magic and “policie”; by fiat; by achievement of feminine will; by mutual recognition of the value of intent.

In the initial scenes of the play, Shakespeare rapidly introduces a multiplicity of disjunctive sovereignty-obedience relationships. There is Theseus, who “won” Hippolyta “doing [her] injuries” and “woo’d” her with his “sword.”⁶ Egeus enters to demand that his daughter be forced to wed Demetrius on pain of death, even though she favors Lysander. The lovelorn Helena has been spurned by Demetrius, who has abused his sovereign role in courtship (Helena claims of her sex, “We should be woo’d, and were not made to woo” [II i. 242]), while Bottom and his rustic fellows propose to act out the tragic results of disobedience to parental authority. The authority figures command, threaten, and decree, though their rhetoric fails to persuade those who by tradition should be dutiful.

Thrown into relief by the rebellion of conventionally obedient figures, the masculine sovereignty of Act I shows itself as tyranny. By polarizing obedience to an either-or dichotomy, the playwright associates sovereignty not only with ego-centered inflexibility but also with a long list of negative terms: “death,” “injuries,” “disfigure,” “mew’d,” “barren,” “austerity,” “spotted,” “inconstant,” and, in the case of the rustics, “lamentable” and “cruel.” As a result of the insistence upon obedience, the initial world of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is one of striking dis-ease. The apparent amity of Theseus and Hippolyta is no exception, for as they discuss their forthcoming marriage their attitudes toward it are strikingly different. Theseus sees the moon “lingering” his desires, “Like to a step-dame, or a dowager, / Long withering out a young man’s revenue” (I i. 4-6). Hippolyta appears to soothe, yet her reply suggests no similar wish to hasten the passage of time. Four days, she says, will “quickly steep themselves in night; / Four nights will quickly dream away the time” (I i. 7-8). When Egeus puts forth his demand that the Duke enforce the Athenian law which gives him life or death control over his daughter Hermia should she continue to refuse to marry Demetrius, his insistence on her conforming to his choice of two equally eligible suitors falls within the letter of the law but ignores a reciprocal view of his duty, to consider his daughter’s preference if other circumstances are equal.⁷ Theseus’ “love” for his captive bride—if such it is—has not bred in him charity toward others who love; the “mercy” he exhibits for Hermia when he offers her the chaste life of a nun illustrates early in the play the arbitrary, uncompassionate quality all male sovereignty exhibits, for it offers merely a different form, albeit a preferable one, of sterility.

Because of this substitution of tyrannical force for benevolent sovereignty (the “Sermon” warned the husband not to be too stiff, “so that he ought to wink at some things, and must gently expound all things, and to forbear” [p. 554]), the initial climate of Athens is unfavorable to courtship, to procreative marriage, to friendship and even to the most primitive attempts at art. Except for Hippolyta, who as martial conquest is a royal prisoner, the individual victims of a world where masculine sovereignty is abused determine on an exodus to Northrup Frye’s green world, which holds out the promise of fulfilling their differing ambitions. Bottom and his crew think to perfect their inappropriate wedding play. Hermia and Lysander seek his aunt’s domicile, where they will be wed. Demetrius aims to return Hermia to Athens and to marriage or death, while Helena tags after, convinced that Demetrius’ indifferent presence is preferable to his absence.

It is at this point in the play’s action that Shakespeare presents his final disjunction of masculine sovereignty and feminine obedience—Titania and Oberon. For the other males and females paired in the play, marriage is a future state. For Oberon and Titania, it is a present misery. Titania has pitted her will against that of her sovereign lord, refusing to give him the changeling son of her late devotee; she has, she says, forsworn Oberon’s “bed and company” (II. i. 62). The disruption of the traditional husband-wife power structure, we learn, has consequences far beyond the division of the fairy kingdom into two courts. The whole world, of nature and of man, is in chaos. Not only have the seasons reversed themselves, the crops rotted, the animals become diseased. Titania tells her estranged husband:

The nine men’s morris is fill’d up with mud,
 And the quaint mazes in the wanton green,
 For lack of tread, are undistinguishable.
 The human mortals want their winter here;
 No night is now with hymn or carol blest

.....
 And this same progeny of evils comes
 From our debate, from our dissension;
 We are their parents and original.

(II. i. 98-102; 115-117)

Clearly, the violation of the tradition of female obedience has affected not only the fairy world but also the world of nature and human society, which is bereft of not only recreation and dalliance (note the sexual innuendo in “the quaint mazes in the wanton green”) but also of spiritual communion as well.⁸ Most significantly, what is absent from the society is communion and harmony, suggested by the absence of game and song.

Retrospect, it has been said, is essential to an understanding of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.⁹ Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in II. i., as the actions of the fairy deities reflect backward to illuminate the “dis-ease” which afflicted Athenian society in Act I. As deities, Oberon and Titania seem clearly modelled on the anthropomorphic deities of antiquity. They are more powerful than the world they rule, yet they have human weaknesses.¹⁰ They are possessive. They favor specific mortals: Titania, Theseus; Oberon, Hippolyta. They cheat, wrangle, are strong-willed. They may be sexually promiscuous (see II. i. 70-80). They are not omniscient—note Oberon’s ignorance of the presence of another Athenian youth in the forest. But most importantly, their disharmony is reflected in the disruption of harmony in nature and society. These are fertility deities gone wrong;¹¹ and one is reminded of the earth’s growing parched and sterile as Ceres sought futilely for Persephone.¹²

But II. i. does more than inform past action. It also foreshadows the future. Titania had charged that the world’s malaise grew out of husband and wife “debate” and “dissentation”; Oberon offers a cure, one which epitomizes the play’s movement toward denouement:

Do you amend it then; it lies in you.
Why should Titania cross her Oberon?
I do but beg a little changeling boy
To be my henchman.

(II. i. 118-21)

In Oberon’s view, in Titania’s obedience and subservience lies the cure for natural and social ills; when the proper power equation is renewed, there will be harmony in both the fairy kingdom and the world of men.

Significantly for Shakespeare’s examination of male sovereignty and its relationship to harmony, the mere statement of a solution cannot resolve the difficulty. The estrangement between the fairy queen and her lord is perpetuated because Titania refuses to give Oberon the child. “The fairy land buys not the child of me” (II. i. 122), she declares, giving as an excuse for her willfulness the devotion of her votaress:

And for her sake do I rear up her boy;
And for her sake I will not part with him.

(II. i. 136,37)

Oberon reveals his anthropomorphic affinities when he acts to achieve revenge for this slight to masculine sovereignty. He determines:

Thou shalt not from this grove
Till I torment thee for this injury.

(II i. 146,47)

He plots. Once in possession of the potent juice of love-in-idleness, he will

... watch Titania as she is asleep,
And drop the liquor of it in her eyes;
The next thing then she waking looks upon
(Be it on lion, bear, or wolf or bull,
On meddling monkey or on busy ape),
She shall pursue it with the soul of love.

(II i. 177-82)

His scheme, stripped of its lyricism, amounts to shaming Titania into obedience by casting her into a dotage latent with bestiality.¹³ Thus Oberon, like Theseus and Egeus, sees the exercise of power—here the power of malefic magic and “policie” rather than the power of arms or of the law—as the answer to feminine disobedience. His recourse to such extreme means argues the same ego-centered masculinity which was seen in Theseus, Egeus and Demetrius; Titania joins Hermia and Helena as figures whose individual desires are of little importance. Oberon, like his mortal counterparts in the play, acts upon the Machiavellian belief that the end justifies the means.¹⁴

Viewed from this perspective, the magic in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is neither playful nor benign. Like all erotic magic, it is aimed at affecting the unnatural.¹⁵ With Puck as its agent, however, it becomes merely inept and bungling; as a result of its ineptitude, negative judgment of Oberon's perverse revenge is deflected. Nevertheless, the results of his plot eddy outward, affecting not just Titania, in much the way that the results of their quarrel spread beyond the fairy kingdom. None of the mortals who fled Athens appears immediately likely to find in the wood the solutions he sought. Puck, furnishing a “monster” for Oberon's plot, metamorphoses Bottom and deprives the rustics of their principal actor. Oberon's sympathy for the lovelorn Helena is frustrated when Puck anoints the wrong youth's eyes, and the love triangle which caused problems in Athens simply shifts its apex from Hermia to Helena. Helena discovers that “to be translated” into Hermia's “favor” (I i. 191, 186) is not worth all the world except Demetrius. And while Puck can report to Oberon that “My mistress with a monster is in love” (III ii. 6) and “Titania wak'd and straightway lov'd an ass” (III ii. 34), Titania and the audience see her doting directed at a “gentle mortal” (III i. 137) who phlegmatically has a stronger appetite for hay than for sex.¹⁶

Oberon's plotting is successful in one respect; he does achieve marital dominance. Having confronted Titania in a compromising scene of his own devising, he reports to Puck:

When I had at my pleasure taunted her,
And she in mild terms begg'd my patience,
I then did ask of her her changeling child
Which straight she gave me. . . .

(IV. i. 57-60)

Having successfully degraded his wife into obedience, Oberon can afford, in the words of the "Sermon," to "consider these her frailties" and "undo / This hateful imperfection of her eyes" (IV. i. 62,63). Unethical cunning, not a natural superiority, has righted the traditional power ratio. Harmony, a quality hitherto absent from both human and supernatural realms, returns first to the fairy kingdom, then to earth, and finally to mortal society. Oberon commands:

Sound, music! Come, my queen, take hands with me,
And rock the grounds whereon these sleepers be.
Now thou and I are new in amity. . . .

(IV. i. 85-87)

The measured movement of dance, seen in the fairy round, is transmitted first to earth and then to the sleepers, whose own potential harmony has remained in suspension until the deities' seminal disharmony was resolved.

First to enjoy this return to order are the young lovers. Oberon's "benevolence" in extending the power of love-in-idleness to Demetrius and Lysander had resulted in brawling—between Hermia and Helena, between Demetrius and Lysander, and among the mispaired lovers. Now when they wake Lysander is cured of his infatuation with Helena by the juice of "Dian's bud" and loves where he first loved; Demetrius, still under the influence of love-in-idleness, dotes where he first wooed. Theseus, in an abrupt about-face, silences Egeus' intransigent insistence on controlling Hermia's future with the voice of rule; the father by fiat gains a daughter who does not contest his will.

Resolution has been delayed for an exemplary "divine" act of feminine obedience, so that "Jack shall have Jill; / Naught shall go ill, / The man shall have his mare again, and all shall go well" (III. ii. 461-63). In point of dramatic time, the traditional comic denouement comes after the one "married" couple in a marriage play achieves harmony because the wife obeys her husband.

Nevertheless, this structural affirmation of the relationship between

obedience and harmony is not Shakespeare's total commentary on either harmony or its source. While structure may confirm the rightness of male sovereignty and its essential importance to harmony, individual relationships suggest that male sovereignty, like appreciation of the rustic's performance, is a matter of illusion and poetic faith. Ironically, it involves feminine will and willingness, not immolation of will. Hermia's speech in Act I had sounded this theme:

So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,
 Ere I will yield my virgin patent up
 Unto his lordship, whose unwished yoke
 My soul consents not to give sovereignty.

(i. 79-82)

Masculine dominance in the play comes not from that natural superiority which the "Sermon" dutifully recorded from tradition, but within the frame of male-female psychological tension which the "Sermon" recognized and for which it could only posit self-immolation of the feminine will. Titania, perhaps, foregoes her desire to retain the changeling, but her obedience is an act of self-defense, not the result of dwindling into a prescribed role as "wife." Egeus gains his obedient daughter only when confronted by a higher authority than his own; ironically, he is obedient to masculine rule in a way none of the women is. Lysander and Demetrius have silent, and apparently obedient, wives, because their wives' souls so consent for the moment. And the tragic tale of the tyrannical sovereignty practiced by the parents of Pyramus and Thisbe is turned to comedy by the amateurish performance of the rustics.

Theseus' relationship with Hippolyta is more problematical and complex, for as the former Queen of the Amazons, those early "feminists,"¹⁷ Hippolyta's is a more ingrained and sustained clinging to individual rule; her characterization is one of Shakespeare's most subtle achievements. I have already noted the polarization of attitudes toward the couple's forthcoming marriage in Act I; critics before me have observed that their responses to the tales of the four young lovers embody differing aesthetics.¹⁸ This kind of disputatiousness on Hippolyta's part, an indirect rebellion against masculine sovereignty, is in fact one of her most sustained characteristics. Except in Act V, her appearances are limited to two brief scenes, the introductory frame scene and the hunting scene of IV. i. Here, as in the frame and in Act V, Hippolyta will not allow Theseus' assertions to go unchallenged. In the hunt scene, when Theseus praises his own hounds, she counters:

I was with Hercules and Cadmus once,
 When in a wood of Crete they bay'd the bear
 With hounds of Sparta. Never did I hear
 Such gallant chiding, for besides the groves,
 The skies, the fountains, every region near
 Seem'd all one mutual cry. I never heard
 So musical a discord, such sweet thunder.

(112-18)

Hippolyta practices a frustratingly subtle, *civil* form of rebellion to masculine superiority, managing to contradict her betrothed's pronouncements even as she seems merely to comment. There is not, either here or in Act I, a verbal signal that she is disagreeing with Theseus. This she gives only after she is wed. After listening to Theseus' apostrophe to fantasy and imagination, she counters:

And all their minds transfigur'd so together,
 More witnesseth than fancy's images
 And grows to something of great constancy. . . .

(V. i. 24-26)

That our experience of the play tends to support her conclusion is here unimportant. What she is telling us is that as a wife she refuses to subdue her own judgment to that of the man she has married, signalling her disagreement through more *witnesseth* and the "But" (23) which introduces her speech. Her open refutation of her husband's grandiloquent theorizing could be viewed as a final push for independent rule; more probably it argues her own differing self-concepts as betrothed and as wife. In the first identity, her position was equivocal; a captive and a royal guest, formalized decorum dictated the degree of her civility. As wife, one of two who make one in flesh, she demonstrates that one flesh does not for her imply as well one mind—her husband's. Hermia and Helena, conditioned to pay lip service to masculine sovereignty by their society, become acquiescent once they have what they desire. Despite her marriage, Hippolyta withstands acceptance of Theseus' "rule," if thus it can be interpreted, until almost the end of the play. He accepts the rustics' performance, for

. . . what poor duty cannot do, noble respect
 Takes it in might, not merit.

(V. i. 91-92)

Not so for Hippolyta; the play is "the silliest stuff that ever I heard" (210); she is "a-weary of this moon" and wishes it would change (251). Only gradually is she caught up in the spirit of tolerance toward the play

which the male spectators share, so that she exclaims, "Well shone, moon. Truly the moon shines with a good grace" (267-68), and "Beshrew my heart, but I pity the man" (290). Harmony here is achieved through game and play; she has been slowly won over to accept the amateurish effort with the same spirit that Theseus, then Lysander and Demetrius, accept it. The amity of Theseus and Hippolyta is the result of mutual tolerance of the disparity between act and intent.

The total harmony at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has a tenuous quality; it rests for the most part on Machiavellian trickery, as in the case of Oberon and Titania, or on the gratification of female desire, as with Hermia and Helena. The effect may be sweet; but it is not lasting, though it allows for a universal harmony in the play world ultimately and provides excuse for the fairies' lustration of the brides' bed.

In the final analysis it is not male dominance and feminine obedience publicly acknowledged which provide for the harmony at the end of the comedy. The Theseus of Act V posits a more realistic basis for harmony than either sovereignty or obedience. It is probably not accidental that his acceptance of the rustic's dramatic offering recognizes the deficiency of duty and the importance of "noble respect" which takes cognizance of intent and not merit. Nor should it go unnoticed that Hippolyta, who initially contradicted the claim that the slow waning moon "lingered" and "withered" desire, now wishes the moon to change. What we see at the end of the comedy, in the relationship of Theseus and Hippolyta, is a harmony based on a mutual vision of duty: the recognition of the disparity between intent and performance, or more simply, an insight into the nature of reality. Both share a mutual attitude toward imperfection which accepts the chasm between the theoretical and the real. Act V is not incidental to the plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; ¹⁹ it is essential to establishing a viable resolution to the questions and actions introduced in Act I.

If Shakespeare's final commentary on the source of harmony in marriage differs from that of the ecclesiastics, it is not so widely disparate as it might at first appear. The "Sermon" itself reveals that its author was caught between the authoritative, traditional version of masculine superiority and sovereignty and a more empirical vision of human action and human motivation, a dilemma which for a churchman could have only one resolution, the ecclesiastically sanctioned one of feminine obedience, however unrealistically it might be achieved. Shakespeare too paid his dues to the traditional view in structuring *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but he was not bound by that tradition. In individual instances, he shows that masculine sovereignty, or its illusion, results

from trickery, from fiat, or from feminine will achieved. The playwright's final technique for achieving harmony, and structurally his ultimate one, owes little either to sovereignty or obedience and everything to tolerance and mutually reciprocal acceptance of imperfection and intent. This binds two into not just one flesh but into fellowship as well.

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Notes

¹"The Fourme of the Solempnization of Matrimonye," *Queen Elizabeth's Prayer Book 1559* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1911), p. 127.

²*Sermons or Homilies Appointed To Be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory* (London: C. and J. Rivington, 1825), p. 554.

³See, for example, E.K. Chambers, *Shakespeare: A Survey* (London: Sedgwick and Jackson, 1925), p. 79; John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare and His Comedies* (1957; rpt. London: Methuen, 1968), p. 90; Harriet Hawkins, "Fabulous Counterfeits: Dramatic Construction and Dramatic Perspective in *The Spanish Tragedy*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest*," *Shakespeare Studies*, 6 (1973), 51.

⁴Chambers, p. 81.

⁵"A *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Meaning of Court Marriage," *ELH*, 24 (1957), 101. Shirley Nelson Garner, "A *Midsummer Night's Dream*" Jack Shall Have Jill; Naught Shall Go Ill," *WS*, 9 (1981), 47-63, takes a more negative view of the theme of sovereignty; she suggests that the play "affirms patriarchal order and hierarchy, insisting that the power of women must be circumscribed" (p. 47). For treatments which deal with "order" or Theseus as symbol of order, see Madeline Doran, "A *Midsummer Night's Dream*: A Metamorphosis," *Rice Institute Pamphlets*, 46 (1960), 116; Blaze O. Bonazza, *Shakespeare's Early Comedies: A Structural Analysis* (London: Mouton, 1966), p. 122; David Young, *Something of Great Constancy* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1966), p. 89.

⁶L. i. 16-17. All quotations are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

⁷Henri Bullinger, *The Christen State of Matrimonye*, tr. Miles Coverdale (London: J. Gough, 1543). Chapter V is entitled, "To a right mariage / must children al so haue the consent of theyr parentes"; Chapter VI (Siga. Bliiii^v-Ci^v) stresses that "The parentes ought not to constrayne ther children to matrimonye / nether to mary them a fore theyr tyme": "In this poynt ought not the parentes to take to much vpon the selues because of theyr auctorite/ nether to abuse or to compell theyr childe eyther (because of filthy advauntage or lothsomnesse in taking payne) to let him go & have no respect vnto him. For an ungodly and unhappy thing is it in the cause of mariage to compell a yonge man agaynst his will / to take such one as he hath no hart vnto. For in mariage ought to be the consent of both parties with the consent of theyr parentes" (Sig. Bliiii^v).

⁸Rose A. Zimbardo, "Regeneration and Reconciliation in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Shakespeare Studies*, 6 (1973), 35-50, also sees the chaos in nature stemming from the discord between Titania and Oberon.

⁹Peter G. Phialas, *Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies: The Development of Their Form and Meaning* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1966), p. 25.

¹⁰See G.M.A. Grube, "The Gods in Homer," *Phoenix*, 5 (1951), 62-76. See also Anca Vlasopolos, "The Ritual of Midsummer: A Pattern for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 31 (1978), 21-29, for an excellent discussion of the ecclesiastical and primitive associations of the date in the play's title.

¹¹For a discussion of Titania's connection with Hecate (and thus Persephone), see my "Unkind' Theseus: A Study of Renaissance Mythography," *ELR*, 4 (1974), 295n. T. Walter Herbert, *Oberon's Mazed World* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 40-44, discusses Titania's Dianic associations as well as paralleling the fairy court to the classical one on Olympus.

¹²The story of Ceres and Persephone is not the only classical tale suggested by *MND*. The verbal battle between Oberon and Titania is strongly reminiscent of the quarrel of Hera and Zeus in *The Iliad*, XV. Young, p. 14, suggests that Bottom's metamorphosis parallels events associated with Circe, Midas and Apuleius; David Ormerod, "A *Midsummer Night's Dream*: The Monster in the Labyrinth," *Shakespeare Studies*, 11 (1978), 39-52, suggests the wood as the "Cretan maze transported across the seas" and Bottom as a "metamorphosed Minotaur" (p. 52). An excellent study of the Theseus-Minotaur-Pasiphae myth in *MND* is M.E. Lamb's "A *Midsummer Night's Dream*: The Myth of Theseus and the Minotaur," *TSSL*, 21 (1979), 479-491.

¹³Ormerod, pp. 40-43, and Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (New York: Norton, 1974), pp. 223-229, would not see the bestiality as "latent"; to both it is actual.

¹⁴Richard Hooker, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1593), 2 vols. (London: Dent, 1907), esp. I, 167-185, for a contemporary discussion of will. Oberon's "end," the return of Titania to her properly obedient role, may be good, but his "means," the attempt to persuade her through degradation, is not. Actions were judged unethical both when good means were used to achieve a bad end and bad means were used for a good end.

¹⁵See my "Witchcraft in *The Winter's Tale*: Paulina as 'Alcahueta y vn Poquito Hechizera,'" *Shakespeare Studies*, 12 (1979), 195-214. See also David Bevington, "But we are spirits of another sort: The Dark Side of Love and Magic in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Proc. of the Southeastern Inst. of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Summer, 1975, *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 7, ed. Siegfried Wenzel (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1978), 80-92.

¹⁶Lamb, p. 481, commenting that Bottom is "oblivious to her [Titania's] charms," also sees his sex drive as limited.

¹⁷Celeste Turner Wright, "The Amazons in Elizabethan Literature," *SP*, 37 (1940), sees them as "the foremost ancient examples of feminism" (p. 433) but goes on to claim that Hippolyta, at the end of the play, is "a tamed and contented bride; her husband has shrunk her back into the bounds prescribed for women by nature. . . ." (p. 437).

¹⁸Howard Nemerov, "The Marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta," *Kenyon Review*, 18 (1956), 633-41. See also Richard Henze, "A *Midsummer Night's Dream*: Analogous Image," *Shakespeare Studies*, 7 (1974), 115-123.

¹⁹Anne Barton, "Introduction" to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Riverside Shakespeare*, suggests that Act V is "superfluous" in terms of plot, and concerns itself "principally, and even somewhat selfconsciously, with the relationship between art and life, dreams and the waking world" (p. 219).

Chaucerian *Solempnytee* and the Illusion of Order in Shakespeare's Athens and Verona by Thomas E. Moisan

In Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*, the word "solemnity" produces some analogous, and analogously ironic, reverberations. Denoting various temporally ordered rites and festivities either in progress or impending, the invocation of "solemnity" in each work effectively italicizes the fragility of those rites, calling our attention to them even as they are disrupted, deferred, and otherwise dislodged from the foreground of our attention by the irruption of things most "unsolemn" and "untimely," by disorderly events and rude emotions, and, of course, by the threatened importunities of time itself and the mortality inseparable from time. Expressive of a "solemnifying" impulse to impose an artful order upon the "rough-and-tumble" of experience, recursive appeals to solemnity in each work reveal, instead, how insusceptible to such order experience is, how illusory the order imposed, and how ineffectual those who would impose it. In short, references to "solemnity" in the three works allude to and help to shape allegories of solemnity subverted and point to some interesting affinities the three works share both in their thematic concerns and rhetorical construction. To be sure, there is an obvious asymmetry in the relationship of these works as there are conspicuous differences among them in genre and temper. Still, the permutations undergone by the image of "solemnity" in the three help us to read them, not only individually, but as an interconnected, intertextual group, enabling us to see more clearly, for example, how the height and sobriety of *The Knight's Tale* get reflected—if refracted—in the mirthful comedy of its Shakespearean offshoot, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and how the comedy of the *Dream*, in turn, mirrors—if obversely—the very "midsvetur'd piteous overthrows" of its tragic contemporary, *Romeo and Juliet*, that it would seem to make sport of. In the light of this "solemn" analogy, then, the three works emerge, not as representatives of three different experiences, but as three variants on the same experience, three re-visions of the same book, read and re-writ by Chaucer and Shakespeare with varying emphases but comparable irony.

In what sense, of course, there is anything ironic or subversive, or even worthy of comment, attached to the role of *solempnytee* in *The Knight's Tale* is not immediately clear from its first appearance in the work, where it is but one of a pile of details the Knight shovels into an

exuberant eight-line sentence of introduction to duc Theseus and the proximate occasion of the tale to follow:

Ful many a riche contree hadde he wonne;
 What with his wysdom and his chivalrie,
 He conquered al the regne of Femenye,
 That whilom was ycleped Scithia,
 And weddede the quesen Ypolita,
 And broughte hire hoom with him in his contree
 With muchel glorie and greet solempnytee,
 And eek hir yonge suster Emelye. (A.864-71)¹

The Knight is fond, we know, of things and, presumably, personages chivalric, and yet sensitive—if not uniformly responsive—to the demands of narrative economy, and the result here is a gush, and rush, of encomium fused, or confused, with circumstantial detail, in which the distinct temporal strands of Theseus’s martial career are elided in the indefinite *whilom* of the present account, and in which praise for Theseus’s general military prowess genially merges with news of more particular exploits, both military and amorous, to form one celebrative tableau of *Theseus Victorialis*, riding along, as the Knight tells us in the very next sentence, “with victorie and with melodye” (872). Yet the “confusion” wrought by the Knight in this tableau is even more deeply pervasive. For the paratactic mucilage with which the description is held together, with its “and” ’s and its “with” ’s, effaces the grammatical and, hence, semantic, distinctions among the sundry qualitative terms with which the description is studded. This levelling effect is most conspicuous in those “with-” phrases scattered throughout: “with his wysdom and his chivalrie,” “With muchel glorie and greet solempnytee,” “with victorie and with melodye.” Now, no good third or fourth year Latin student could parse these phrases without thrilling to the fine differences rendering them as so much rhetorical mixed fruit, without appreciating, on the one hand, the balanced construction of “his wysdom and his chivalrie,” and, on the other, the hint of hendiadys in “glorie and solempnytee,” and the trace of zeugma in “with victorie and with melodye.” In the flow of the Knight’s narration, however, rhetorical discriminations, along with ablatives of instrumentality, manner, and attendant circumstances, dissolve and decline into a mosaic of so many ablatives of accompaniment, coequal presences and participants in the celebration of Theseus-on-high: wisdom and chivalry, glory and solemnity, victory and melody, Hippolyta and Emely. In this celebration, then, *solempnytee* stands, not simply as the manner in which Theseus brings his conquered foe-cum-bride Ipolyta home, but as an element as integral

to the definition of Theseus the Conquerer as is the bride he has conquered, the wisdom and chivalry with which he has conquered her, and the victory and melody that respectively secure and signify that conquest

Construed this way, *solempnytee* and the assemblage of detail in which it is embedded very much call to mind the features Angus Fletcher associates with the “allegorical style”: an “emblematic, isolated, mosaic imagery” and “paratactic order” evocative of “the ritual that accompanies religious observance.”² We sense the allegorical character of this style all the more when we find *solempnytee* and other elements of Theseus’s portraiture recur as if in formulaic configurations. Thus, when, having already encountered Theseus returning home to Athens “with muchel glorie and greet *solempnytee*,” we later find him returning “hoom to Athens his citee/With alle blisse and greet *solempnytee*” (2702), we more fully perceive him, not as a duke, but as the abstract of ducal *imperium*, with Athens less a place in which he lives and reigns than one to which he formally processes; we are tempted to play with these tags as bits of hendiadys and surmise that for this duke the *solempnytee* of ceremonies and festivities is all of his bliss and much of his glory!

To see Theseus allegorized in this way, though, is to learn nothing of his administrative capacity or of his ability to deal with what may loosely be called the “real” world, and we may wonder from the Knight’s opening description of Theseus whether we are simply not supposed to raise that issue, or whether its very omission is a tacit invitation to raise it. Perhaps, however, our knightly narrator does raise the issue, if in an indirect manner, in the exercise of his editorial discretion. *Greet solempnytee*, after all, may seem a strong enough phrase, indeed, could pass for a transferred epithet: a *greet solempnytee* for a great conquerer, than whom, the Knight tells us, “gretter was ther noon under the sonne” (863). Still, it is an elliptical expression as well, and its formulaic repetition only teases us to supply what has been “ellipsed.” Here, we should recall that Theseus is not strictly a stroyteller, but a teller of “olde stories,” in part a translator, but also a redactor. In the “olde storie” the Knight is transcribing, Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, references to *solennitate* and its cognates are imbedded in fulsome descriptions of sundry chivalric rites—rites that the Knight mentions only to abridge.³ As the Knight uses it, *solempnytee* is a metonym, an allusion, a piece of rhetorical shorthand. Yet allusions share their etymological roots with illusions and may, therefore, glance at the things to which they allude from a playful, perhaps even derisive distance, and short hand may be short for short change: Theseus and the *greet solempnytee* in which he

seems to live, move, and have his being are in some literal sense diminished by the very language that emblazons them.

Naturally, we assume that the Knight's purposes in this condensation are economic, not derisive, and reflect a desire to proceed apace with the story, not to diminish that chivalric grandee from whom the "olde storie" in Boccaccio takes its very name. The difficulty the Knight seems to have, however, is in deciding what that story is, where it ought to begin, and what, in fact, the greet *solempnytee* of Theseus has to do with it. Other concerns obtrude, and in foreshortening Theseus's *solempnytee* the Knight acknowledges their pressure and produces some dissident juxtapositions.

So it is that, having introduced Theseus and set him on his triumphal journey home, the Knight promptly cuts away from him, leaving him riding along "with victorie and with melodye. . . And al his hoost in armes hym bisyde" (872-4). True, the Knight does not cut cleanly away from Theseus, but with an odd admixture of praeterition and redundancy, enumerates all of the highlights from Theseus's Amazonian adventure to which he has just alluded, the battle with the Amazons, the wedding feast with conquered Ipolyta, and the procession home, only to say that he would describe these in detail if he could, but since he cannot, he will not (875-85). Yet this regression in the name of economy only reinforces our sense that the Knight appears to perceive his opening celebration of Theseus to have been a false start, a pre-cursus that leaves the Knight having, as he says, to "ayeyn bigynee" (892).

When the Knight does begin again, it is to set about what we take to be the "real" story of the tale, the concatenation of adventitious incident, violent emotion, and supernatural prestidigitation that comprises the history of Palamon and Arcite. Yet the launching of this history is attended by a note of protest sounded by Theseus who, "In al his wele and . . . mooste pride" (895), is rather nonplussed to find his solemn progress interrupted and marred by the untimely presence of the ululant widows from Thebes. So much is ceremony a part of his being that his first thought is of the slight done to the festive occasion and, through it, to his honor. "What folk been ye," he asks, "that at myn homcomynge/ Perturben so my feste with crynge?. . . Have ye so greet envye/ Of myn honour, that thus compleyne and crye" (905-08)? In the immediate context, these questions find ready answers. In the context of the work as a whole, however, they have a deeper pertinence and are less readily answerable. For *The Knight's Tale*, with its Boethian "now-up-now-down" fluctuations, is fretted with unpredictable, untimely events that "perturben" Theseus's festivities and, by implication, the honor and the

person embodied therein. Indeed, as the story of Palamon and Arcite unfolds, it becomes pertinent to ask which it is that is untimely: the events which impinge upon Theseus's *solempnytee*, or the *solempnytee* itself, which would pretend that experience can be anything but unpredictable and untimely.

This question of timeliness is especially germane to that moment in the tale when, in another feint at narrative concision, the Knight turns with dispatch from his description of the fatally overthrown Arcite, his "brest tobroken," his face black and bloodless (2961-63), to record the second of Theseus's triumphal returns to Athens, "with al his compaignie. . .With alle blisse and greet solempnitee" (2700-02). The graphic specificity with which the Knight recounts Arcite's injuries makes the formulaic diction attached to Theseus seem all the more allegorically abstracted, all the more distanced from the Boethian buffets with which we were only a moment before concerned, and our sense of this distancing is sharpened by our sense of the incongruous simultaneity with which, while Arcite lies abed in no little distress, Theseus "al" blissfully and solemnly processes. We might ask whether the Knight is as sensitive to the incongruity as we are; after all, it is because he himself has taken the shears to his source material again that the transition is as abrupt as it is and the juxtaposition as emblematically pointed.⁴ Yet he no sooner alludes to this new round of *solempnytee* than he apologizes for it, hastily explaining why, Arcite's unhappy fall notwithstanding, the show must go on. Even as Theseus had earlier bristled that the women of Thebes should "perturben" his feast, so here he cannot permit Arcite's bad luck to "disconforten" the rest of the "compaignie." Besides, *sunt qui*, "men seyde...that Arcite shal nat dye" (2704-06), and, anyway, it is only right that there be some *solempnytee* to celebrate the "heigh discrecioun" with which Theseus managed the formal combat between Palamon and Arcite and their respective supporting casts: nobody has died, yet, though Arcite is about to, and one other warrior has been lanced through the chest, while the "compaignie" in general has been "soore yhurt," with an assortment of broken limbs and "othere woundes" (2707-11). The more the Knight rationalizes the bliss and *solempnytee* with which Theseus brings the tournament he has staged to a close, the more forced that bliss and the more precarious that *solempnytee* seem, and the more we perceive this node in the Knight's narrative to be but an untimely excursus which the Knight himself is not loath to terminate. Three days of solemn festivity collapse into one line (2736), and the Knight dashes ahead, and back, to carry on where he had left off, resuming his clinically explicit account of Arcite's progress towards

death (2743ff).

Interspliced with this account, the *solempnytee* by which Theseus is emblemized becomes the emblem of his curious position in the work as a whole. Signaling, on the one hand, the control Theseus exerts over events, it also shows Theseus to be caught up in the relentless flow of those events and controlled by more numinous forces; the control he exerts is as illusory as the *solempnytee* signifying that control is evanescent. Put less dogmatically, the jagged integration of the solemn and sanguinary here reinforces our sense that in the tale the Knight is coping with two stories, two distinct allegories of experience with competing claims that the Knight has difficulty in fusing seamlessly, the one incarnated in Theseus and his measured chivalric formalities, the other in the volatile career of Palamon and Arcite to which Theseus, interested, involved, and influential as he may be in it along the way, is ultimately irrelevant. Still, though the Knight may view his material through a bifurcated lens, he harbors no consciously subversive designs and papers over the seam as best he can. Theseus emerges ascendant as ever, solemnizing in nuptials the union higher powers have already ordained, and solemnly intoning his own Boethian variation on “whatever is is right” (2987-3093). The effect achieved is a winning one, and the Knight’s tale is acclaimed by all of the pilgrims, Chaucer tells us, as noble and memorable, though “namely,” especially, by the “gentils everichon,” a lingering trace, perhaps, of a seam not fully obliterated, a dissidence not fully resolved (3109-13).

Yet what—to forge a transition that might have done the Knight proud—have such seams and dissidences to do with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*? Of what relevance are the tensions we detect in the rhetorical structure of *The Knight’s Tale* to that “picture,” as Nevil Coghill has called it, “of a world with no ill will” we encounter in the *Dream*?⁵ In fact, once we tally the extrinsic “things” Shakespeare may have “gotten” from *The Knight’s Tale* such as details of plot and names of characters, are we left with any bases for a more intrinsic comparison?

To be sure, all of the elements at work in *The Knight’s Tale* are present in the *Dream* as well—if less at work than at play—adventitious incident, emotional volatility, supernatural sleights-of-hand, even, for that matter, a rhetoric of solemnity, interlaced with the dramatic action of the *Dream* as it had been with the narrative action of the *Tale*, and indissociable, once again, from the characterization of Theseus. Indeed, in the *Dream*, as in *The Knight’s Tale*, recurrent references to solemnity and pomp cling to Theseus with something of the force of a personal signature. When Theseus comes, solemnity is generally not far behind (I.

i. 11; IV. i. 133, 184; V. i. 355),⁶ and when Theseus speaks we hear very much the diction, cadences, and syntax that had dotted the portraiture of his counterpart in *The Knight's Tale*. Hence, with distinct echoes of the martial fanfare and blissful melody that had accompanied the Knight's Theseus, we hear Shakespeare's Theseus promise the recently vanquished Hippolyta to put aside the bellicose mien in which he had first paid his attentions to "wed thee in another key,/With pomp, with triumphing, and with revelling" (I. i. 18-9),⁷ while, later, he proposes that the newly reconciled and reapportioned quartet of young lovers go back with him and Hippolyta; "Away, with us, to Athens. Three and three,/We'll hold a feast in great solemnity" (IV. i. 183,84).

There seems, in fact, to be something formulaically insistent about this pattern of reference linking Theseus to solemn rites, something rather self-conscious in the way in which Shakespeare cycles and recycles the *topoi* of solemnity from *The Knight's Tale*, rather as if he had read Harold Bloom and were perversely exorcising his anxiety of influence by italicizing his Chaucerian borrowings. We cannot, of course, ignore the possibility that these borrowings came to Shakespeare, second-hand and pre-cut, from earlier dramatizations of *The Knight's Tale*.⁸ Still, the effect of these bits of Chaucerian solempnytee in the *Dream* is both to evoke the ambience of the "olde stories" to which the Knight had hearkened and to situate Theseus and his solemn rites in a realm of allusion, a realm adherent to its own laws of temporality and logic, and at once self-referential and self-absorbed.

The features of this realm are very much in evidence, for example, in that curious moment in Act IV, when Theseus, happening upon the fugitive lovers asleep in the forest, promptly deduces that "No doubt they rose up early to observe/The rite of May; and hearing our intent,/Came here in grace of our solemnity" (IV. i. 132-34). Now, this observing of the rite of May we have heard mentioned before, in Act I, when Lysander reminds Hermia of the "wood" where once he met her "with Helena/To do observance to a morn of May" (I. i. 166-67). At that time we may have been reminded, in passing, both of the folk custom of "bringing in the May" and of the idiom "to doon observaunce to Maie" recurrent in *The Knight's Tale* (1046, 1500), and when Theseus repeats the phrase with small variance in Act IV, its allusive force is only amplified.

Fortunately so, for in responding to it as an allusion, as a piece of coded language, as something other than a literal statement, we are better able to overlook the liberties Theseus's remark takes with literal sense. By what ratiocinative principles, after all, does Theseus conclude

that four young people found sleeping next to each other at daybreak had gotten that way “in grace” of his “solemnity”? Had they too come, with Hippolyta, to watch Theseus hunt? For that matter, how does Theseus come to be observing a rite of May in a play entitled *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*?⁹

That the literalism of such questions does violence to our sense of this moment only attests to how much our interpretative antennae inure themselves in this play to the suspension of the claims of literal truth and to the interpenetration of dream and waking, and the figurative and representational. Indeed, solemn rites belong to both the world of Athens and the realm of faerie, rendering any distinction we might make between the illusory and the “conventional” worlds of the play rather tenuous, and showing a connection between Oberon and Theseus rather less tenuous than either we or Theseus himself might have assumed. Earlier in this same scene, we might recall, we hear some familiarly Thesean language when Oberon, celebrating his reconciliation with Titania, proclaims that he and she “will to-morrow midnight, solemnly, / Dance in Duke Theseus’s house triumphantly” (87-88), the same triumphal dance step, perhaps, that Theseus envisions when he choreographically instructs Hippolyta and the amorous gang of four to exit with him “three and three. . . in great solemnity.”

To see reflections of Oberon in Theseus’s taste for solemn rites, though, is but a short step from acknowledging the centrality to Theseus’s ordered and respectable world of the eroticism we associate with the priapian world of Oberon. Indeed, in the *Dream* the generalized solemnity of *The Knight’s Tale* is distilled into particularized “solemnities,” and what in Chaucer had been a metonym for celebrative rites of a decidedly martial stripe becomes a metaphor, and, perhaps, a euphemism, for ceremonies of a different, less military kind, as Hippolyta makes clear at the outset of the play, when she reminds the impatient Theseus of just how short a time it will be before the moon, “like to a silver bow / New bent in heaven, shall behold the night / Of our solemnities (L i. 9-11). With this slight alteration in the meaning of “solemnity” goes a subtle but significant modification in the characterization of Theseus, and along with it a significant shift in emphasis through which the *Dream* diverges from its Chaucerian antecedent. This modification is evident in the slightly different terms on which we first encounter Theseus in the two works. If in *The Knight’s Tale* we meet a Theseus in the height of his glory, having just won and wedded Hippolyta, in the *Dream* we come upon a Theseus only poised on the verge of fulfillment, having “won” and “wooed” Hippolyta under Mars’s banner

and now set to do the same under Venus'. If in *The Knight's Tale* we never see Theseus in a state of more perfect joy and glory than we do in that opening tableau, in the *Dream* Theseus's joy and glory are always yet to be perfected, are ever contingent upon the amorous solemnities in the offing. So it is that when Theseus and Hippolyta chance upon the sleeping lovers, Theseus's purposes in being in the forest—and, perhaps, the reason that he is so quick to assume that in their supine position the youths have come to “grace” his “solemnity”—appear as much venerean as venatic. Unlike the Knight's Theseus, who is described as a servant, not only of Mars, but of Diana the Huntress (1682), the Theseus of the *Dream* seems to be a more diffident hunter—of venison; much more eager is he to retire with his “fair queen” to the mountaintop to listen to “the musical confusion / Of hounds and echo in conjunction” (IV. i. 108-10).

Hence, the references to “solemnity” stapled to Theseus's appearance in the *Dream* have a persistently, though humorously, subversive force. Heralds of the fullness of bliss to come, they are not very covert reminders that that bliss has not come yet, allusion being, once again, the purveyor of illusion. Even as time and the flow of events had rendered Theseus's moments of *solempnytee* in *The Knight's Tale* fragile and evanescent, so in the *Dream* time and other concerns intervene between Theseus and the consummation, as it were, of his “solemnities.” Now, fair Hippolyta,” Theseus exclaims in the opening line of the play, only to reveal forthwith that “Now” really means “not now,” and that the “nuptial hour” now drawing on “apace” is still four “happy” but “long lingering” days away (I. i. 1-6).

Theseus's impatience at this prospect is quite in keeping with the amorously hyperactive reputation accorded him in literary tradition, a reputation of which neither Shakespeare nor Chaucer was likely to have been unaware.¹⁰ In *The Knight's Tale* Theseus gently alludes to his amorous *curriculum vitae* when, evincing understanding and sympathy for the excesses to which passion has carried Palamon and Arcite, he notes, with some understatement, that “I woot it by myself ful yore agon, / For in my tyme a servant was I oon” (1813-14). In the *Dream*, however, Theseus is less forthcoming. To be sure, he claims insight into the psyches of lovers, attributing to them the “seething brains” of lunatics and poets, “that apprehend / More than cool reason ever comprehends” (V. i. 4-7). Yet he neither professes to be one of their company now, nor confesses, with the Knight's Theseus, to having been one “ful yore agon.” Rather, for Shakespeare's Theseus the experience of love is something to be conscribed within the temporally appointed bounds of his “solemnities,” the vagaries and fancies attendant upon love excised and

consigned to “antique fables,” “fairy toys,” and the “shadows” of plays. As in *The Knight’s Tale*, however, it is Theseus’s “solemnities” that occupy the shadows, shoved there by the unruly passions and antic shapes that hold centerstage.

When the moment arrives we have been anticipating since the first line of the play, the veritable “Now” of Theseus’s nuptial “solemnities,” Theseus, like his namesake in *The Knight’s Tale*, is permitted to exit with his vision of an amatory world solemnly regulated intact; inscribed in the couplet form, there is a note of play-ending finality to his parting statement that “A fortnight hold we this solemnity / In nightly revels and new jollity” (V. i. 369-70). Yet the play has not ended. On hand to have the final words and, in fact, the care and keeping of the “solemnities” Theseus is now celebrating are the very elements in whose reality Theseus has neither any belief nor interest. As Puck had promised earlier (III. ii. 461-2), nought has gone ill and Jack has gotten his Jill, but the effect of the ending is to intimate lightly that such outcomes are hardly *de rigueur*. As we hear Puck and Titania and Oberon marshal their benefactions against all of those dark forces and “blots of Nature” that so fascinated Jan Kott in the play,¹¹ we feel Theseus’s two weeks of “solemnities” reduced, ever so good naturedly, to something no less precarious, no less susceptible to going awry than love itself, something, as Lysander described it earlier in the play, “momentary as a sound, / Swift as a shadow, short as any dream” (I. i. 143-44).

To the degree that the *Dream* humorously shows us that love is precarious, that it is susceptible to going awry and being “cross’d,” and that, again in Lysander’s words, “quick bright things” tend through love to “come to confusion” (I. i. 149), it glances, of course, at the central premises of its likely contemporary, *Romeo and Juliet*, and reminds us that the worlds of the two plays are not as remote from each other as we might initially assume. How close they come to tangency is suggested by the respective roles played by the *topoi* of solemnity in the two works. In both references to solemnity have rather a conative force: they reflect an attempt to assert order in the face or midst of the importunities love necessarily entails. In the *Dream* the ultimate frailty of Theseus’s solemn rites calls our attention to these importunities as hypotheses, as specters of what *could* happen; in *Romeo and Juliet*, where fortune and the stars preside in place of the amorously benevolent fairies, the hypothetical becomes the actual, and the violation of solemnities reflects the incursive and destructive pressure of a love turned unlucky and allied with death.

Yet if the role played by “solemnity” brings into sharper focus the

kinship of *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, does it also link *Romeo*, then, to *The Knight's Tale* and the *solempnytee* therein? Yes, though it were an idle exercise, indeed, to claim that the word "solemnity" in *Romeo and Juliet* bears anything like the force of a direct allusion to the *Tale*. If, after all, Shakespeare is indebted to any one work for the word, it is most likely the prose version of the *Romeo* story that appears in Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, where the word occurs in cognates at moments in the story roughly corresponding to the points in the play at which it appears.¹² In his use of the word, though, Shakespeare gives it an allegorical pointedness and ironic weight quite unlike anything he would have found in Painter or Brooke or other versions of the *Romeo* story, and rhetorically reminiscent of the allegorical configurations we have encountered, not merely in the *Dream*, but in *The Knight's Tale* as well.

We feel ourselves to be in the realm of allegory when "solemnity" is first mentioned in *Romeo and Juliet*, at the Capulets' party, as Tybalt, discovering that *Romeo* has made himself one of the guests, asks irately, "What, does the slave / Come hither, cover'd with an antic face, / To flee and scorn at our solemnity?" (L v. 55-56), and is good enough to repeat the charge only several lines later when, for his Uncle Capulet's information, he points *Romeo* out as "A villain, that is hither come in spite / To scorn at our solemnity this night" (62-63). Now, Tybalt is a man of few words, and he tends to repeat the ones he uses; nevertheless, the reiterative pattern of his speech in general and the reiteration here of "solemnity" in particular have a significance beyond what they may suggest about the range of Tybalt's vocabulary and intellect. For one thing, they enable us to recognize immediately in Tybalt a character locked into a particular rhetorical role, as identifiably locked into it as *Romeo* appears riveted to the role of heartsick Petrarchan lover at the outset of the play, though unlike *Romeo*, Tybalt will never evince the slightest capacity for extricating himself from that role. It is quite in character for Tybalt to speak "irately" here because he is nothing more than a figure of ire, ever furious, fiery, and implacable in his hatred of anything or anyone bearing the label Montague. Were we to look for a Chaucerian antecedent, we might find one adorning the wall dedicated to Mars in Theseus's jousting theater, where among other personifications of violence we find the figures both of Ire and Contek, Strife, "with bloody knyf and sharp manace" (2003).

That this figure of ire come to life should repeat the word "solemnity" necessarily gives that word something of an allegorical resonance. Moreover, there is a touch of allegorical *prosopopoeia* in

Tybalt's outrage over his, or "our," fleered and scorned "solemnity." We sense, of course, an element of transference here: fleer and scorn at "our" solemnity and you fleer and scorn at "us." At the same time, there is something familiar about this symbiosis between man and solemnity. We have seen it before in the characterizations of Theseus in both *The Knight's Tale* and the *Dream*, and in the question Tybalt angrily asks of no one in particular we hear the indignant inflections of the questions the Knight's Theseus puts to the widows of Thebes when they "unceremoniously" interrupt his triumphal procession. For the affronted Theseus and Tybalt these questions may be rhetorical, in that the answers to them are all too self-evident or easily recoverable. Yet as we saw in *The Knight's Tale*, at a deeper level these questions are not rhetorical and reflect a genuine, and pregnant, apprehension of forces beyond the questioners' control.

Yet surely there is some irony, if not insincerity, in Tybalt of all people, this maker of mayhem and violent misrule, worrying about the violence done by Romeo to the Capulets' "solemnity." We feel that any "solemnity" that depends upon Tybalt for its safekeeping is already compromised, and that, of course, is the point. Such is the strength of the fissiparous forces powering the machinery of the play and the society of Verona that an appeal to "solemnity" is virtually an allusion to its negation, not merely an attempt to preserve it, but an acknowledgement that it has already been lost, the ultimate in allusion-begotten illusion!

The irony we hear in Tybalt's words only deepens when "solemnity" is reinvoked in the lugubrious "lamentations" scene, where the sleeping Juliet is mistaken for dead and obstreperously mourned by her parents, her nurse, and her presumptive groom-elect. Here, Death is, naturally, the villain and Juliet the lamented, though in the curious evolution of the mourners' rhetoric these facts come close to being obscured. At one point in the proceedings, for example, Capulet demands to know, not of Death, but of the "Uncomfortable time," "why cam'st thou now / To murder, murder our solemnity?" (IV. v. 60-61). A surprising question, this, and we might be forgiven were we either to wonder whether death is ever timely, whether there is some "now" at which death is not "Uncomfortable," or to ask why, the demands of meter notwithstanding, Capulet should lament, not his murder'd daughter, but his murder'd "solemnity." Psychologically, it is true, the transference here is understandable: it is far easier to acknowledge the scuttling of a wedding feast and decry that than it is to acknowledge and lament the loss of a child. Accordingly, when de-allegorized, Capulet's question, like Theseus', like Tybalt's, is transparently rhetorical and readily answered: of course, the "Uncomfortable

time" had no right to come "now" to murder the "solemnity" for which Capulet had only in the previous scene (IV. iv. 3-28) been busily preparing; death is inconsiderate. Again, though, the question has a deeper, less answerable thrust; death appoints its own time, and, thus, it is the "solemnities" that are untimely, that stand as artificial contrivances for excluding or regulating aspects of experience that cannot be excluded or regulated: death, love, time itself. Capulet's nuptial solemnity here is voided by the immanence of death, even as his earlier solemnity in Act I inadvertently becomes the introit to a "misadventur'd" and lethal nuptial.

To be sure, death has not actually come in the "lamentations" scene, since, as we and Friar Lawrence know, Juliet has not died, and thus, this tableau of "solemnity" subverted is but a rehearsal for the impact of the misfortunes for which we have been preparing ourselves since the Prologue to Act I, its own untimeliness an emblem of the untimeliness governing much of the action of the play and, Shakespeare seems to perceive, human aspirations in a world run on invisible mainsprings. The scepticism implicit in this perception links the play to the worlds of both the *Dream* and *The Knight's Tale*, and in the part it plays in illuminating this scepticism the image of "solemnity" in each work makes good on Alice Miskimin's claim that "Shakespeare's and Chaucer's art reciprocally illuminate each other."¹³

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NOTES

¹For all references to Chaucer's text, see *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F.N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961).

²*Allegory: The Theory of A Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1964), p. 171.

³For example, the material compressed within 11. 865-83 in *The Knight's Tale* takes up much of Books I and II in the *Teseida*. See *Teseida*, ed. Salvatore Battaglia (Firenze: 1938).

⁴Again, Boccaccio's treatment of these events is far more spacious, and the transition he makes from Arcite's plight to Theseus's official festivities lacks the razor-cut appearance it has in *The Knight's Tale*. See the *Teseida*, Bk. IX, st. 4ff.

⁵"The Basis of Shakespearean Comedy," *Essays and Studies*, 3(1950), 13.

⁶For all references to Shakespeare's plays see *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974).

⁷Ann Thompson cites this as one of the clear Chaucerian echoes in the *Dream* in her *Shakespeare's Chaucer: A Study In Literary Origins* (New York: Barnes & Nobles Books, 1978), p. 88. See also Coghill, "Shakespeare's Reading in Chaucer," *Elizabethan And Jacobean Studies: Presented to F.P. Wilson in Honor of His Seventieth Birthday* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), p. 88, and J.W. Hales, "Chaucer And Shakespeare," *Quarterly Review*, 134(1873), 91-92.

⁸See Thompson, pp. 29,30, and Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1923), Vol. I, p. 128.

⁹For a discussion of Shakespeare's conflation of the folk rites of the May and Midsummer, see Harold E. Brooks, ed. *The Arden Shakespeare A Midsummer Night's Dream* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1979), pp. lxxviii-lxx.

¹⁰One of the "legends" in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, after all, concerns Ariadne, towards whom Theseus' conduct is not above reproach. Theseus' lusty reputation in the Renaissance surfaces casually in Shakespeare's most likely source for *Romeo and Juliet*, Arthur Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet*, ed. J.J. Munro (London: Chatto and Windus, 1908), when the narrator describes the beautiful Juliet as a maid "Which Theseus or Paris would have chosen to their rape," l. 198.

¹¹*Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1984), pp. 69-88, *passim*.

¹²*The Palace of Pleasure: Elizabethan Versions of Italian and French Novels (1567; rpt. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966)*, Vol. III, pp. 83, 111, 113.

¹³*The Renaissance Chaucer* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 45.

“It Was Not I”: Defense Mechanisms in *Twelfth Night* by Richard A. Levin

Twelfth Night, like many of Shakespeare's comedies, tends to divide critics into two opposing camps. One group of critics believes that the play traces the emergence of an ideal society united by its adherence to festive or romantic values. The other critics believe that the play describes the way of the world, where a set of privileged characters consolidates its social position through marriage, while extending warmth and welcome to outsiders only when to do so suits its purposes. I believe that Shakespeare provides an alternative set of signals which allows us to interpret the play in either of these two ways. In the present essay, I will develop the latter, more realistic approach, by showing that Shakespeare's complex characterization makes it difficult to divide the winners and losers in Illyrian society along clear moral lines.

Shakespeare makes the apportionment of praise and blame very difficult by having his characters manipulate situations in order to shift guilt away from themselves. To discuss the strategies they employ, we may draw on a psychological vocabulary, principally Freud's terminology referring to defense mechanisms. It is worth pointing out, however, that whatever aid this conceptual vocabulary has provided the modern world, the phenomena it describes have long been recognized. Thus, the defense mechanism known as projection, which can function to assuage conscience by blaming others for deeds of one's own, is memorably defined in the New Testament: "Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure" (Titus 1:15). Shakespeare draws on the Bible, as well as on many other sources and the direct observation of life, in order to identify the same human tendency. For example, Timon of Athens laconically comments on a poet planning to write a satire: "Wilt thou whip thine own faults in other men?" (V. i. 39). And Shylock reverses the tables on his opponents by saying (I. iii. 157-59):

O father Abram, what these Christians are,
Whose own hard dealings teaches them suspect
The thoughts of others!

A more famous and complicated defensive strategy is identified in *Hamlet*, when the prince asks for his mother's response to the Player Queen's expression of love for her husband: "The lady doth protest too

much, methinks," Gertrude replies (III. ii. 230). Gertrude defines the defense mechanisms known as reaction formation, in which one insists on an emotion in order to hide its opposite. However, in her implied denunciation of the Player Queen, Gertrude invokes another defense mechanism: projection. She faults the Player Queen for a fault she herself possesses.

I turn now to *Twelfth Night*, focusing for the most part on moments late in the play, when we can best study the moral standing of winners and losers. At the beginning of Act V, Duke Orsino, accompanied by Viola (disguised as the male page Cesario), arrives at Olivia's house. Suddenly, officers enter, with Antonio under arrest, and he explains his presence in Illyria by speaking of his affection for Cesario, whom he mistakes for "his" twin brother Sebastian:

A witchcraft drew me hither.
That most ingrateful boy there by your side
From the rude sea's enraged and foamy mouth
Did I redeem. A wrack past hope he was.
His life I gave him, and did thereto add
My love without retention or restraint,
All his in dedication. For his sake
Did I expose myself (pure for his love)
Into the danger of this adverse town;
Drew to defend him when he was beset;
Where being apprehended, his false cunning
(Not meaning to partake with me in danger)
Taught him to face me out of his acquaintance,
And grew a twenty years removed thing
While one would wink; denied me mine own purse,
Which I had recommended to his use
Not half an hour before.

(V. i. 76-92)¹

Why, we may ask, does Shakespeare carefully recapitulate action that we have already seen? I think the answer is that Antonio's account represses some information and rationalizes certain motives. Antonio, for example, makes no mention of Sebastian's repeated attempts to detach himself from his friend. When we first see them, Sebastian is trying to end the relationship which started when Antonio saved Sebastian from the sea. Antonio nevertheless follows Sebastian into Illyria, and upon overtaking him confesses to an emotion far less Platonic than the one he refers to when speaking to the duke: "My desire / (More sharp than filed steel) did spur me forth" (III. iii. 4-5). When Sebastian resolves, in spite of Antonio's entreaties, to sightsee alone in the city, Antonio presses his purse on Sebastian, an allegedly disinterested offer of generosity which in fact may be an effort to bind Sebastian to him, by making him feel either

gratitude or guilt. While the portrait of Antonio in *Twelfth Night* seems to me largely favorable, Shakespeare nevertheless allows us to see in him rather serious blemishes.

The wretched and disillusioned Antonio does not become, of course, one of the winners in the play. His appearance, however, causes others who are or will be winners, to invoke defense mechanisms. The problem for Orsino is that Illyria wishes to hold Antonio culpable for deeds which can also be seen as laudable—in a maritime battle, Antonio fought valiantly against heavy odds, wounding the duke's nephew as he did so. Antonio's countrymen then made peace with Illyria by paying a bounty, but Antonio refused to go along with this mercenary reconciliation. When Duke Orsino first sees Antonio under arrest, he pays brief homage to his heroic deeds; then he heaps abuse on Antonio and blames him for his plight (V. i. 69-72):

Notable pirate, thou salt-water thief,
What foolish boldness brought thee to their mercies
Whom thou in terms so bloody and so dear
Hast made thine enemies?

The duke rationalizes, positioning himself to punish Antonio by putting Antonio into the wrong. Fortunately for the latter, Olivia's arrival at this moment deflects the duke's attention.

Antonio also puts Viola on the spot. We cannot help thinking that she knows very well that she has been mistaken for her brother, and that were she not fearful of disclosing her identity, she would both comfort the disillusioned Antonio and see to it that a search was made for Sebastian. We recall that when Antonio, mistaking her for Sebastian, intervened to save her from Sir Toby, Viola both heard Antonio call her Sebastian (III. iv. 378, 391), and acknowledged to herself that she must have been mistaken for Sebastian, "for him I imitate" (395). Nevertheless, Viola now acts thoroughly baffled, and tells the duke concerning Antonio merely that (V. i. 66-68)

He did me kindness, sir; drew on my side;
But in conclusion put strange speech upon me.
I know not what 'twas but distraction.

We must conclude, I think, that Viola either deliberately withholds disclosure of her identity, or she represses the thought that she has been mistaken for her brother.

Finally, when Sebastian enters and sees Antonio under arrest, he too must deal with his conscience, for he has failed to keep an appointment

with Antonio and has instead embraced that “flood of fortune” (IV. iii. 11) which came his way when Olivia confused him with Cesario. Like Viola, though in a different way, Sebastian has betrayed Antonio. He says, however, “Antonio, O my dear Antonio, / How have the hours racked and tortured me / Since I have lost thee!” (218-20). Sebastian invokes two defense mechanisms, reaction formation and projection. He insists on his own discomfort, when he has not been discomforted in the least. He also alleges that he has experienced the suffering which has actually been Antonio’s and not his own.

The duke, Viola, and Sebastian are all winners in *Twelfth Night*—the duke is born great, Viola achieves greatness, and Sebastian has greatness thrust upon him. I have suggested that defense mechanisms help the three of them to win or consolidate social position. If this is true, if the successful characters sometimes act from self-interested motives, then we must ask whether Malvolio, the character most abused in the play, is a scapegoat who suffers for sins which he shares with many others. Is the abuse heaped on him telltale evidence of shortcomings in Illyria?

We have, of course, no difficulty penetrating the defense mechanisms Malvolio invokes in order to conceal from himself his more selfish motives. When he enters to silence the late night revellers, he presents himself to Sir Toby and Sir Andrew as a loyal steward protecting the propriety of his lady’s household (II. iii. 87-93):

My masters, are you mad? Or what are you? Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do ye make an alehouse of my lady’s house, that ye squeak out your coziers’ catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice? Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you?

We detect Malvolio rationalizing his ambition, making himself more worthy of position than either of the two knights who disgrace their rank. As C.L. Barber comments, Malvolio “is or would like to be a rising man, and to rise he uses sobriety and morality.”² Later, when Malvolio repudiates sobriety and morality in order to don yellow stockings and go cross-gartered, he rationalizes his ambition in a new way, by thinking that he will become Count Malvolio by making a love match with the countess.

Sir Toby’s defense mechanisms are certainly more beguiling, but perhaps no more laudable. He denounces Malvolio’s effort to quiet the revelry by making himself a spokesman for festivity (II. iii. 114,15):

Art any more than a steward? Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?

Though some critics have taken Sir Toby at his word and made him a symbol for the cause he espouses, we may alternately see him as a rounded character who, like Malvolio, embraces a cause for ulterior reasons. Sir Toby must try to repress knowledge of the fact that he is no reveller but an old drunk; and, to the extent that the repression fails, Sir Toby must rationalize the situation by making himself a spokesman for “cakes and ale” and an opponent of Malvolio’s pharisaical “virtue.” Finally, by “thouing” Malvolio and insisting on his low rank, Sir Toby reassures himself that he won’t fall from his own marginal perch at Olivia’s home (“Am I not consanguineous?” he has just demanded of Maria).

By way of contrast, Maria seems thoroughly conscious of her desire to manipulate the situation to her advantage. Before Malvolio exits, he threatens to report her complicity in the revels. Moreover, by destroying Sir Toby’s enemy, she can advance her campaign to marry the knight. She has these thoughts in mind as she sets out to humiliate Malvolio before her mistress’ eyes. Sir Toby, meanwhile, never acknowledges what lies behind his enthusiasm for Maria’s plot. Instead, he describes it as suitably aristocratic entertainment, “sport royal” (II. iii. 172). For stalking Malvolio, Maria is his “beagle true-bred” (179), and in appreciation for her “jest” he will marry her (II. v. 185-86). But whether we look to Sir Toby or Maria, we see that their own ambitions lie behind Malvolio’s ludicrous exposure of his own.

The conspirators eventually decide to take their plot a step further; they will treat Malvolio as if he were possessed by the devil, in order to get him to believe that he actually is so. This act of gratuitous cruelty has often puzzled critics, and I would like to suggest that one motive behind the strategy may be psychological projection on Sir Toby’s part. Sir Toby certainly has a tendency to see devils all around him. For example, when Cesario first arrives at Olivia’s house, Sir Toby answers Olivia’s query about who is at the gate by saying: “Let him be the devil and he will, I care not. Give me faith, say I” (I. v. 128,29). On later occasions, Sir Toby refers to Cesario as the “devil” (III. iv. 244, 284). And when Maria invites Sir Toby to observe Malvolio’s strange outfit, he answers her “Follow me” by saying, “To the gates of Tartar, thou most excellent devil of wit” (II. v. 207,8). It would certainly be consistent with Sir Toby’s overall attempt to avoid facing his own inner agony if he forced another person to experience it too.

Malvolio's suffering puts Illyria on trial; unless his wrongs are in some way righted, our hearts will not be entirely with the revellers as they prepare at the end of the play to celebrate a double wedding. Malvolio takes his case to Olivia, as he should, for he was acting on her behalf when he came into conflict with Sir Toby and Maria, and it was Olivia who delivered him into Sir Toby's untrustworthy care. We must examine, therefore, Malvolio's confrontation with Olivia.

Olivia had, it is true, initially expressed concern for her ludicrously outfitted steward, saying, "I would not have him miscarry for the half of my dowry" (III. iv. 65,66). These words must be intended to placate her conscience, however, for Olivia never gives Malvolio another thought until Viola, while explaining her male attire, happens to mention Malvolio's name. Suddenly Olivia recollects herself (V. i. 280-82)

They say, poor gentleman, he's much distract
A most extracting frenzy of mine own
From my remembrance clearly banished his.

Olivia rationalizes her neglect of Malvolio with a homeopathic analogy; one frenzy drove out another, leaving not a trace. And since a frenzy is emphatically an irrational state, Olivia can hardly be held responsible for her neglect.

Olivia might be accused more bluntly of preoccupation with her own life. After Malvolio's sober letter is read her, she sends for him, then, while waiting, returns to her own concerns. She is newly married and newly embarrassed, having discovered that she first fell in love with a woman, then married her twin brother by mistake! Moreover, in the wake of Olivia's marriage, she treated the duke with haughty disdain. Hence, she now welcomes him warmly as if they were already in-laws—"think me as well a sister as a wife"—and adds that she will foot the bill for a double wedding celebration at her home!

Against this background, Malvolio must make his claim. He enters, blinking from the light into which he has been newly readmitted; though his voice has been heard in the Sir Topas interlude and his words when Fabian read his letter, he has not appeared on stage since he came before Olivia in Act III absurdly dressed and filled with equally absurd expectations. Now his hopes have been crushed and he has put aside all thought of preferment. Gone completely is his fawning manner. Sure that he has been wronged by Olivia, he rehearses the facts of the case—though they are humiliating to him—and then asks "Why" she has mistreated him? "Why?" he asks again, and a third time, "Why?" Malvolio is the Job of this little world: his tribulations have tested his faith to the

uttermost

Olivia's immediate instinct is to deny guilt. To Malvolio's first accusation, "Madam, you have done me wrong, / Notorious wrong" (V. i. 330,31), Olivia responds: "Have I, Malvolio? No." When she hears his case, she replies with relief that the handwriting in the letter is Maria's, not her own. Thus reassured of her innocence, she promises to get to the bottom of the conspiracy and to let Malvolio be both "the plaintiff and the judge / Of [his] own cause" (356,57).

At this point, Fabian slyly speaks up. He suggests vaguely that both sides have committed equal wrong, so that the "sportful malice" of the conspirators "may rather pluck on laughter than revenge" (368). Moreover, Fabian also counsels Olivia to let "no quarrel, nor no brawl to come, / Taint the condition of this present hour." Fabian tempts Olivia to indulge herself at the moment of her marriage.

Olivia falls in with Fabian's suggestion, offering Malvolio pitying words, instead of action: "Alas, poor fool, how have they baffled thee" (371)! Olivia not only rationalizes her failure to act on Malvolio's behalf, she also projects her own sense of discomfort, since she no less than Malvolio has appeared foolish, in her case by confusing a man with a maid.

That Malvolio has been declared fair game is quickly made evident, for Feste takes the opportunity to revenge himself on his opponent (372-79).

Why, "some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrown upon them." I was one, sir, in this interlude, one Sir Topas, sir; but that's all one. "By the Lord, fool, I am not mad!" But do you remember, "Madam, why laugh you at such a barren rascal? And you smile not, he's gagged"? And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges.

To understand this attack and its importance in the play, we need to consider the history of the conflict between Feste and Malvolio. When Feste, dropping an air of affected indifference, carefully sought to jest his way back into Olivia's favor, Malvolio opposed him. Not only did his remark seem to threaten Feste's status at the household; it contained a grain of truth, since Feste's wit has grown somewhat "barren." The play makes clear that he has come to realize that his talents will never be recognized in Illyria; he will merely be patronized and handed a coin or two. In other words, Feste knows he needs the protection of Illyria, yet resents receiving it. His disillusionment with society is challenged by Malvolio's singleminded devotion to his ambition. Feste watches resentfully while Malvolio is buoyed with the illusion that love and

fortune await him. As soon as the truth is apparent and Feste is free to urge the lesson home, he projects his own frustrations onto Malvolio, and says, in effect, "You are hated, not loved; you are a failure, not a success."

Is Illyria really as indifferent to others as Feste seems to think? Malvolio apparently agrees, for he leaves with the memorable exit line: "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you." His metaphor, which recalls the metaphor Maria and Sir Toby have used while stalking Malvolio, suggests the complicity of the entire group. Of course, after Malvolio departs, we hear of a hoped for reconciliation, and then of the "golden time" that awaits the lovers. To what extent Malvolio's indictment continues to ring in our ears as the celebration gets underway, I am not prepared to say. Presumably readers and audiences will continue to give a variety of answers. That they will do so suggests that the realistic and festive readings of the play both make a necessary contribution to our understanding of Shakespeare's comic world.

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Notes

¹All quotations from *Twelfth Night* are from the Signet edition of Hershel Baker (1965).

²*Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 257.

Professor Levin was a close friend of Bill Bennett and one of the first of the associate editors chosen for *The Upstart Crow*. The present article was received after the publication deadline for the memorial volume. It included the following tribute to our founding editor:

When I first met William Bennett, at the Shakespeare Association Conference in San Francisco in 1979, I was impressed with the strength of his convictions. He believed that in studying Shakespeare we had to avoid ensconcing ourselves in critical orthodoxies. Shakespeare held in suspension many possibilities, while each generation tended to consider only restricted aspects of his work. An open mind, a flexible response, would help us to see Shakespeare more fully. I understood why Bill Bennett had chosen to edit a new Shakespeare journal. In the years that followed, the pages of *The Upstart Crow* reflected Bill's commitment. I mourn his loss, but am grateful for what he started.

**“And Nothing Pleaseth but Rare Accidents”:
Suspense and Peripety in *1 Henry IV*
By Dorothea Kehler**

Most of Shakespeare's contemporaries would have known that Henry Bullingbrook succeeded in preserving a unified England and in passing the crown on to his son Hal, who, despite a wild youth, became the nation's greatest warrior king. For the Elizabethan audience the unfolding of the historical plot of *1 Henry IV* would have presented no major surprises. Shakespeare's "givens" are that as king, Bullingbrook led no crusades, England was never divided between the Percies and the Mortimers, Glendower never legally ruled Wales nor Douglas Scotland, and Hal reformed. Consequently, the historical characters in *1 Henry IV* lack genuine alternatives. The king cannot yield to the demanding Percies but must crush them if he is to keep England for his heir. No more can they "accept of grace and love" (IV. iii. 112)¹ since their past disloyalty to Richard II locks them into a pattern of disloyalty:

Worcester. The King will always think him in our debt,
And think we think ourselves unsatisfied,
Till he hath found a time to pay us home.

(I. iii. 286-88)

Above all, Hal must emerge as one "Who never promiseth but he means to pay" (V. iv. 43). As a history play *1 Henry IV* is perforce teleological, the broad outlines of its action predictable. That modern audiences are generally unfamiliar with fifteenth-century English history should not obscure Shakespeare's accomplishment. An important problem Shakespeare confronts and solves in *1 Henry IV* is how to create suspense despite the limits of fact.

For dramatic purposes, the legends surrounding Hal are closely akin to fact and must be equally privileged by the playwright. If legend has it that Hal turns away from vice, then he must turn away from Falstaff, the Vice incarnate. The possibility of doing otherwise is foreclosed. No less than the Percies, Hal and Falstaff are locked into their destinies. Hal's soliloquy is not a mere rationalization of his unprincely behavior or a statement of good intentions. Much like the Prologue to *Romeo and Juliet*, it functions as a contractual promise. In return for our credence, the speaker incurs a debt of action consistent with his soliloquy:

I know you all, and will a while uphold
The unyok'd humor of your idleness,

.....
If all the year were playing holidays,
To sport would be as tedious as to work;
But when they seldom come, they wish'd for come,
And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents.
So when this loose behavior I throw off
And pay the debt I never promised,
By how much better than my word I am,

.....
I'll so offend, to make offense a skill,
Redeeming time when men think least I will.

(I. ii. 195,96, 204-10, 216,17)

Yet, however proleptic, Hal's soliloquy leaves us with several questions: Will the Hal who pays his debt be the same Hal who has just spoken, or will his character change? How will he pay his debt? And when? That is, how long is "a while"? Raising such questions early in the play is one way that Shakespeare adds dramatic interest in the face of known events.

Another way of creating suspense is to elicit sympathy for those doomed to defeat. This device marks an advance in Shakespeare's historical dramaturgy over the *Henry VI* plays, far less compelling than *1 Henry IV* because in the former so often we are distanced from the characters rather than engaged. In *1 Henry IV* the audience is invited to feel for many of the rebel party. The torrential description of Henry IV's "poppingay" reveals Hotspur from the first as the most gifted speaker of the play, all the more appealing for being oblivious of his talent and contemptuous of poetry. An idealist however misguided, an impetuous boy-man, a charming husband—these facets of Hotspur's character please. Hotspur's ally Mortimer, grave peacemaker and ardent newly-wed, appeals through his sincerity. These rebels are all the more likeable for their having won their wives' hearts.

The wives themselves personify vulnerable femininity, each in her own way, for neither Lady Percy's sprightly solicitude nor Lady Mortimer's melodious yearning can impart to these women the power to influence a course of events bound to change their lives so bitterly. Sympathy also goes out to Vernon, whom honesty compels to laud his princely enemy in poetry turned prophecy (IV. i. 97-110 and V. ii. 51-68). The audience cannot but hope that these attractive, ill-fated characters will be spared. One effect, then, of Shakespeare's turning the historical Hotspur into a young man, making a frustrated lover of Mortimer, introducing the rebels' wives, and giving Vernon a silver tongue is to evoke a complex response in which the desire for gratification of

historical expectations wars with compassion for the losers. The poignancy of an inexorable progression toward foreseen calamity is heavy with a special kind of suspense, perhaps as gripping as the suspense felt when the audience does not know what the future will bring.²

But Falstaff, the Saturnalian rebel, holds first place in our affections. Bouyant, outrageous, Falstaff charms and appalls the audience even as he charms and appalls Hal. Appropriately, much of the play's suspense has to do with Falstaff's fate, and, appropriately, a prominent mode of creating suspense is through a disjunction between the comic tone of Hal's encounters with Falstaff and the darker resonance of the concomitant emblematic images. The ambiguity and tension reflected by this disjunction defeat teleology. For example, Act II, scene ii, is devoted to the uproariously funny robbery; yet we see that, although cased in his vizard, Falstaff is, of course, known to Hal, whereas the disguised prince successfully deceives Falstaff and the other thieves. Here the humor of the scene, suggesting that Hal will find a way to spare his tavern cronies, is mixed with an emblematic portent of disaster for Falstaff, the would-be manipulator. Having seen Falstaff fooled by the clever young man who plans "rare accidents," we are reminded that Falstaff's tenure is precarious. Again we wonder, how long is "a while"?

In effect, the play teases us much as Hal and Poincotease Francis; we receive conflicting signals and are uncertain whether to give priority to the comic moment or to the imagistically promised end. The calling of Francis is itself an excellent example of this disjunctive technique. Critics have argued that Francis, the apprentice who could find it in his heart to run away from his master, is a stand-in for Hal, who shares the same uneasy relationship *vis-a-vis* Henry IV.³ Accordingly, the stage direction describing Francis' reaction as he is called from opposite directions mirrors Hal's conflict in choosing between feckless pleasure and sober responsibility: "Here they both call him; the drawer stands amazed, not knowing which way to go" (II iv. 79). But this argument seems questionable because Hal has already indicated which way he is going ("So when this loose behavior I throw off"), and history has told the audience that he got there. Having kept his promise historically, Hal can no more change his resolution in mid-play than Hotspur can forego honor, or Worcester and Northumberland hesitate over the sacrifice of Hotspur, or Bullingbrook trust Hal, or Falstaff understand Hal's true nature. Rather, as the butt of Hal's practical joke, Francis is made to appear ridiculous. Surely, Hal neither sees himself nor wants us to see him as ridiculous. Thus, while our amusement at Francis' plight—the

comic moment—makes us anticipate continued revelry, Hal's contempt for the indecision Francis emblemizes, Hal's refusal to be a Francis, make us fear that Hal's single-mindedness spells Falstaff's rejection.

Suspense is again generated by the blend of comic dialogue and ill-boding stage imagery implicit in Hal's and Falstaff's lines that punctuate the play-within-the-play. When Falstaff plays the king, he receives Hal's deference: "Well, here is my leg" (II iv. 388), says the prince, making a deep bow, the conventional expression of respect for authority and order. But shortly after Falstaff begins to berate Hal and defend himself, Hal insists that the roles be reversed.⁴ Although Hal is now in authority, Falstaff, playing the prince, does not bow to his sovereign:

Prince. Well, here I am set.

Falstaff. And here I stand. Judge, my masters.

(II iv. 438-39)

Falstaff is asking the thieves, Mistress Quickly, and Francis to judge whether Hal can play the role of king as well as he. But through the universal language of gesture, Shakespeare prepares his masters, the members of the audience, to pass sentence on Falstaff—to judge whether the heir apparent can afford to entertain so anarchic an individualist as Falstaff for his companion. The image of Falstaff's irreverent posture, all the more conspicuous for following hard upon Hal's bow, helps to stack the cards against the knight. Falstaff's subsequent disregard for all of his obligations as an officer of the king is emblemized in this neglected obeisance, characterizing him as a danger to the state. Here, despite the high comedy of Falstaff's mock-regal monologue, through the stage imagery we not only sense his impending rejection but are being prepared to approve it.

One question that hangs over this central scene is whether Hal can afford to keep Falstaff; another is whether the prince—and the audience—can afford to reject him, to "banish plump Jack, and banish all the world" (II iv. 479,80). So moving and direct is Falstaff's presentation of freedom's claims in the eternal conflict between freedom and responsibility that Hal's "I do, I will" (II iv. 481) seems almost too easy, too glib. But Hal's climactic sentence is actually informed by ambiguity. Rather than baldly embodying the doom the audience has been expecting and dreading, his reply is indefinite: "I do" says now, "I will," later. For the time both Falstaff and the suspenseful rising action of the play are reprieved. "A while" is not yet over.

During the rest of the scene the disjunction between the surface comedy and its darker undercurrents prevails. In the sheriff episode,

off-stage sound effectively substitutes for emblematic imagery to create foreshadowing. Here Shakespeare anticipates *Macbeth*, for the sheriff, who arrives immediately after Hal's "I do, I will," seeking to apprehend Falstaff for the theft of three hundred marks, is heralded by "A knocking heard" (II iv. 481); DeQuincey's famous observations on the porter scene are relevant to the sheriff's knocking as well: "the knocking at the gate is heard; and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced . . . the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live. . ."⁵ The sheriff's knocking calls a halt to both Falstaff's role-playing identification as Hal's alter-ego and to Hal's easy idleness in Eastcheap. True, Hal returns to the Boar's Head in Act III, scene iii, but only to give Falstaff his marching orders. Just as Sir John Bracy's news of the rebellion reminds us of the larger political issues at stake in England—*Respublica*—so the sheriff's knocking recalls the workaday world of commerce sweetened by piety, where unsuspecting travelers, ordinary people, when robbed will feel the loss, whether victimized in sport or in earnest. If the knocking at the gate suggests that *Macbeth*'s hellish triumph cannot endure, the sheriff's knocking similarly presages an end to Falstaff's reign, undercutting the mirth of the play-within-the-play.

As Falstaff hides from the sheriff, Shakespeare once again blends the comic and the premonitory, speech and action, to create contradictory expectations about Falstaff's fate. Thus, while Peto entertains us and an amusedly contemptuous Hal by reading aloud Falstaff's revealing accounts, the knight lies "Fast asleep behind the arras" (II iv. 528), helpless and vulnerable, his pretensions exposed, his great bulk concealed.⁶ He is, however, heard. Peto's unflattering simile—Falstaff is "snorting like a horse" (II iv. 529)—while vividly describing a nonverbal effect, looks back to Hal's earlier awareness—also expressed through animal imagery—of Falstaff's "unyok'd humor"; Hal's words in Act I are made flesh as Falstaff becomes a sleeping yet obstreperous beast, unable or unlikely to accept the yoke of duty and therefore bound to be discarded. But with a characteristic flash of dramatic acumen, Shakespeare transforms Peto's words, a grim reminder of Hal's soliloquy, into the apex of comedy as Falstaff's stentorian snores resound through the theater. By the end of the great tavern scene we feel much as we did at its beginning—awaiting Falstaff's rejection, yet finding it conceivable that somehow we may be spared the loss of so boundlessly diverting a character. The presentation of verbal and nonverbal signals at cross-purposes with each other suspensefully draws out the movement toward a seemingly inevitable conclusion.

That conclusion is at hand in Act V, scene iii. Although Hal doesn't

share the audience's knowledge of how damnably Falstaff has misused the king's press or of the fatality rate borne by Falstaff's ragamuffins, he is infuriated by Falstaff's ill-considered battlefield jest

*Prince. What, is it a time to jest and dally now?
He throws the bottle at him. Exit.*

(V. iii. 55)

At this point the audience feels that Hal has had enough. In another sense, Falstaff has had enough too, having escaped rejection until almost the end of Act V. The audience has had an entire play in which to enjoy "the humorous conceits of Sir John Falstaffe."⁷ Why then does Shakespeare avert the promised and long-prepared-for rejection of Falstaff at this emotionally and dramatically apt moment?

The reasons that suggest themselves, although conjectural, are a corollary of the techniques Shakespeare uses to sustain suspense in a known narrative. Chief among these reasons is that since the audience's predisposition toward Falstaff as a source of endless laughter is built into the play, his rejection is an expectation we are loathe to have satisfied. Whether teaching the play or observing theater audiences, one sees that even when Falstaff reports the wholesale slaughter of his recruits, few find him detestable: at any rate, he keeps on getting laughs. Perhaps what saves him is that we do not see the recruits; remaining off-stage, they are less than props. Or perhaps, having already created Richard III, whose victims are not props but characters the audience has already seen and sympathized with, Shakespeare knows that in drama, if not in life itself, wit covers a multitude of sins. Besides, the Falstaff who leads his ragamuffins where they are peppered is also the mercurial presiding genius of the tavern, the pert chewet who lightens the self-justifying exchange between Worcester and Henry IV, the *miles gloriosus* who deals a death blow to death-dealing honor. These Falstaffs are not easily surrendered.

Moreover, if Shakespeare had been contemplating a sequel (that *The History of Henry the Fourth*, as it was originally entitled, ends with Mortimer, Northumberland, and Glendower still at large strongly suggests this), he too would have been reluctant to surrender Falstaff, a major dramatic asset. Thanks to *2 Henry IV*, Falstaff's rejection can be deferred. "I will" counts for more than "I do," and Shakespeare can continue to sustain suspense through another historically predictable play. It is not that Hal reneges on his promise but rather that "a while" is far longer than the audience had anticipated.

Another reason for averting Falstaff's rejection is to save the trium-

phant comic tone of *1 Henry IV*. The darker tone of *Part Two* results as much from Falstaff's public humiliation as from his degeneration and Prince John's duplicity. Shakespeare has equally distressing events to contend with in *Part One*: in savaging the rebel cause, history has bereft the audience of Hotspur and widowed Kate, sent Vernon to the block, and set Mortimer on the fatal road to Harlech. To lose these characters, all of whom had a claim on our sympathies, and to lose Falstaff as well, would threaten the generic coloration of the play. Whether, in the face of Falstaff's rejection, it could stand as "mature comedy"⁸ is dubious. Certainly, Falstaff's evasion of his just deserts contributes to our final, albeit perhaps guilty, sense of satisfaction.

But most especially, Falstaff's continued acceptance is necessary for Shakespeare to shape one of the cleverest peripeties in dramatic literature. By saving his father's life, Hal has kept the first promise made to himself and to the audience, the promise of "redeeming time": "Thou hast redeem'd thy lost opinion" (V. iv. 48), says the king. Unknown to the king, Hal has also kept another promise: "I will redeem all this on Percy's head..." (III. ii. 132). Why unknown to the king? Boldly, Shakespeare alters history (which tells us that Hotspur was killed by an unknown) in order to satisfy the audience's expectations of a clash between the two young men, expectations created as early as the first scene with Henry IV's wish that his Harry and Harry Percy were changelings. But although Hal can slay Hotspur on stage, he cannot receive credit for it. That would be flagrantly unhistorical. As a reviser of an old play written by history, Shakespeare cannot take wholesale liberties with celebrated military events.

But of course Shakespeare did alter history, changing or omitting what he found in Holinshed and probably Daniel, substituting invention for fact to suit his dramatic purposes. He compresses the reign of Henry IV, has him appear far older than he was, has him plan a crusade early in his reign rather than during the last year of his life, and has Douglas send him a challenge to single combat on the battlefield; Shakespeare also moves the highway robbery forward to Hal's early teens and has Hal challenge Hotspur to single combat, then slay him. Omitted are references to Henry IV's parliamentary, Welsh, Scottish, and continental problems, and to his marriage.⁹

Nevertheless, with the exception of Hal's killing Hotspur, these are not the sort of changes likely to bother an audience, even an Elizabethan one. Were we Americans to watch a play about our own Civil War, we would bring with us to the theater a knowledge of major events, of how the great historical issues were resolved. Few would know when Lincoln

took office, how old he was when Gettysburg was fought (though we would expect him, like Henry IV, to be prematurely aged by the cares of office), or when he began making unfulfilled plans. Neither would we know what personal rivalries existed between war leaders nor the exact age at which the youthful foibles of prominent men were committed. Few would regard alterations of these facts as significant or even be aware of alteration. Fewer still would be aware of the omission of dramatically irrelevant congressional, foreign, or matrimonial matters. In short, the playwright can change what he can get away with. That Hal's killing Hotspur doesn't become known to the king suggests Shakespeare's recognition of the limits history imposes on literature.

Because of these limits, father and son must be satisfied with the redemption inherent in the "fair rescue," since Hotspur's slayer must remain anonymous. But to some extent the audience would be left unsatisfied, were there no one to take credit for so vital a part of the action. For us, therefore, the further pleasure of dramatic irony remains: we know who killed Hotspur, and the characters in the play know who killed Hotspur, but we know that (except for Hal, John, and Falstaff) they are mistaken. How does Shakespeare provide for such felicitous audience one-upmanship without violating his historical "givens?" To satisfy the demands of history, credit for Hotspur's killing must be returned to an unknown, a non-historical personage. To satisfy the demands of drama, credit must be displaced onto a major character. And so it is that Falstaff, meeting both requirements, becomes the vehicle of peripety, the serendipitous victor of Shrewsbury.

Why does the audience not feel betrayed, or at least misled, by Falstaff's final triumph? Beyond our pleasure in his company, or the aptness of a survivor surviving, is the fact that while Falstaff's rejection has been foreshadowed through the stage imagery, his triumph has been foreshadowed through the comic situations and exuberant wit. Just as Shakespeare teases us throughout the play by sending out simultaneously hopeful and threatening signals, so in Act V, scene iv, he resolves suspense by means of the same dual technique. When Falstaff, set upon by Douglas, "*falls down as if he were dead*" (v. iv. 76), we see an emblem of rejection, of a fall from Hal's grace, that keeps the promise implicit in the presentational or nonverbal imagery of 1 *Henry IV*. But shortly thereafter "*Falstaff riseth up*" (v. iv. 110) and delivers a rationalizing soliloquy ("*The better part of valor is discretion*") in his best comic vein, thus keeping the promise implicit in the play's humorous tone. Shakespeare finally harmonizes action—Falstaff's rising as a liberating metaphor for his role as survivor—with speech epitomizing the comic

utterance. In Falstaff's death and resurrection our contradictory expectations are gratified.

The peripety of Falstaff's emergence as hero further enriches the play in that Hal's crediting Falstaff with Hotspur's slaying deepens the prince's character. Hal's willingness to yield an "honor" that Hotspur, had he been in Hal's place would have coveted, bespeaks an inner sense of worth rather than a need for vainglorious self-aggrandizement. It also bespeaks Shakespeare's gift to Hal of a mature political sense.¹⁰ Whether altruism, political shrewdness, or a combination of both motivates Hal, the peripety tells us that for him it is enough that the battle is won, the rebel forces defeated, the kingdom still intact, the king still alive. The Hal of Shrewsbury pays all his debts and keeps all his promises.

The peripety makes good psychological sense, too. For Hal has been touched by Falstaff's seeming death, touched sufficiently to overlook Falstaff's sack-in-the-holster offense and to prolong "a while" beyond the duration of the play. Hal's joy at seeing Falstaff alive is expressed in his readiness to provide the lie to do him grace. Hal's wound, the king's danger, Hotspur's death, Falstaff's seeming death—all are lessons in mortality for Hal. In light of this shared mortality, Hal's lie is understandable, a way of saying "I'm so glad you're alive" from one old acquaintance to another. Spiritually the ultimate peripety, then, is not Falstaff's, despite his emblematic resurrection and wholly unpredictable triumph over Hotspur, but rather Hal's: thanks to a historical scenario, Hal undergoes a remarkable reversal of character from an initial resolution that many have taken for bloodless calculation to something like the magnanimity of a true prince.

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Notes

¹All textual references are to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G.B. Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

²Marjorie Garber's "Vassal Actors": The Role of the Audience in Shakespearean Tragedy," *Renaissance Drama*, 9 (1978), 71-89 is an enlightening discussion of conflicted audience response.

³See Waldo F. McNeir, "Structure and Theme in the First Tavern Scene of *Henry IV, Part One*" in *Essays on Shakespeare*, ed. Gordon Ross Smith (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1965), pp. 67-83, especially p. 70; and S.P. Zitner, "Anon, Anon: or, a Mirror for a Magistrate," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 19 (Winter, 1968), 63-70.

⁴He thereby creates another ominous image: that of Falstaff yielding up his seat to Hal and foreshadowing his own fall. Richard L. McQuire suggests that the reversal entails Hal's deposing Falstaff "just as he [Hal] will 'depose' his former life to become a true prince of the

realm" ("The Play-within-the play in 1 Henry IV," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 18 [1967], 49).

⁸Thomas DeQuincey, "On the Knocking at the Gate in 'Macbeth,'" *The London Magazine*, October 1823; rpt. in *Shakespeare's Critics from Jonson to Auden: A Medley of Judgments*, ed. A.M. Eastman and G.B. Harrison (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), p. 242.

⁹Regrettably, in the otherwise excellent BBC production of *Henry IV, Part One*, the most widely available rendering of the play, the director, David Giles, cut the calling of Francis, disregarded the bow called for by Hal's "here is my leg," and revealed Falstaff behind the arras, thus eliminating implications dependent on the visual tactics of theater.

⁷This phrase appears on the title page of the first quarto (1598); *The Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 882.

⁸See Cleanth Brooks and Robert B. Heilman's concluding discussion of 1 Henry IV in *Understanding Drama: Twelve Plays* (New York: Henry Holt, 1945), pp. 385-87.

⁹Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, IV (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 156-66.

¹⁰As Henry IV's subordinate, Hal is to his father as Ventidius is to Antony. Consider Ventidius' reply when asked his reason for not mopping up the fleeing Parthians:

a lower place . . .

May make too great an act . . .

Who does i' th' wars more than his captain can
Becomes his captain's captain; and ambition
(The soldier's virtue) rather makes choice of loss
Than gain which darkens him.

I could do more to do Antonius good,
But 'twould offend him; and in his offense
Should my performance perish.

(Ant. III. i. 12,13, 21-27)

Hal also manages to contain his ambition, gives no offense at Shrewsbury, and yet, at the same time, unlike Ventidius, he makes a great act.

Hector and the Theme of Honor in *Troilus and Cressida* by Stephen J. Lynch

In the bleak and corrupt world of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, Hector has often been cited by commentators as a heroic and magnanimous exception to the decadence that surrounds him.¹ A glance at Hector's actions in the play, however, reveals a frequency of contradictions disturbing enough to bring such an interpretation into question. While Hector spares his enemies in battle, he strikes his own armorer. He mistreats Andromache, yet sends a challenge to the Greeks to avouch her wisdom, beauty, and truth. He argues convincingly for the return of Helen to the Greeks, but suddenly agrees to keep her. He heeds Cassandra's divinations in the council scene, but later ignores her warnings of his forthcoming death. He refuses to fight Thersites, a self-confessed rogue, yet moments later he hunts down a man solely for his goodly armor. Hector insists that he is guided by honor, but his actions tend to be erratic and at times blatantly dishonorable. Several commentators have remarked on the questionable nature of Hector's honor, yet, their comments have tended to be either too general or confined to merely one or two specific instances.² An analysis of the entire range of Hector's actions in the play indicates that the notion of honor he pursues is flawed by a disregard for intrinsic virtue and an excessive desire for public reputation.

Shakespeare invites us to question the nature of Hector's honor even before he walks on stage. In a scene of apparently idle chitchat, Alexander informs Cressida about Hector's recent activity: "Hector, whose patience/Is as a virtue fix'd, to-day was mov'd:/He chid Andromache and strook his armorer" (I. ii. 4-6).³ In this first mention of Hector in the play, he is described as impatient, inconsiderate to his wife, and abusive to his servant. When Cressida inquires into the cause of his anger, Alexander responds with an explanation that sheds additional suspicion on the quality of Hector's honor: "They say he [Ajax] yesterday cop'd Hector in the battle and strook him down, the disdain and shame whereof hath ever since kept Hector fasting and waking" (I. ii. 33-35). Apparently Ajax has beaten Hector, and so Hector has beaten his servant and chid Andromache. Is this the "fair play" Hector boasts of in Act V? In this crucial first impression Hector is described not as a man of temperate virtue but of irritable flesh and blood, who like most characters in the play is swayed by unbridled emotions. He is subject to

a pride so consuming that, as Alexander reports, he can neither eat nor sleep.

When Hector first enters the stage, Pandarus provides a further suggestion of his character. Certainly Pandarus is not the most reliable commentator, but even his absurd exaggerations may contain a core of truth:

Pan. . . . Look you what hacks are on his helmet! Look you yonder, do you see? Look you there, there's no jesting; there's laying on, take't off who will, as they say. There be hacks!

Cres. Be those with swords?

Pan. Swords! anything, he cares not; and the devil come to him, it's all one.

(I. ii. 204-11)

Pandarus is probably wrong to claim that Hector does not care with what or from whom he gets the hacks, but he seems accurate in recognizing Hector's overriding concern for trophies of valor. They procure for Hector the public reputation he so much desires.

Though the remarks of Alexander and Pandarus may at first appear unreliable, they gain credibility by their correspondence with subsequent indications of Hector's character. In the next scene, Aeneas arrives in the Greek camp to deliver Hector's challenge:

If there be one among the fair'st of Greece
That holds his honor higher than his ease,
And seeks his praise more than he fears his peril,
That knows his valor, and knows not his fear,
That loves his mistress more than in confession
With truant vows to her own lips he loves,
And dare avow her beauty and her worth
In other arms than hers—to him this challenge!
Hector, in view of Trojans and of Greeks,
Shall make it good, or do his best to do it
He hath a lady, wiser, fairer, truer,
Than ever Greek did couple in his arms.

(I. iii. 265-76)

In seeking his praise in view of the Trojans and Greeks, Hector pursues the type of honor that Ulysses later expounds to Achilles: it exists only so far as it is "formed in th' applause" of other men (III. iii. 119). Like Ulysses, Hector equates honor with fame. His preoccupation with fame is even more evident when we consider the unconvincing motive he proposes for the challenge. He wants to prove, he says, that Andromache is "wiser, fairer, truer." A contradiction emerges when we recognize that though he offers to prove Andromache's supreme virtues, he did not treat her

according to her supposedly unparalleled worth. In private Hector mistreats her; in public she becomes a means for enhancing his reputation.

The deficiency in Hector's sense of honor can be gauged by comparing his challenge with the one proposed by Prince Hal in *1 Henry IV*. Hal certainly wants to enhance his reputation by combating Hotspur. As a "truant . . . to chivalry" (V. i. 94), he hopes to rectify his shortcomings. But Hal's challenge is founded upon a distinctly virtuous motive:

I am content that he shall take the odds
Of his great name and estimation,
And will, to save the blood on either side,
Try fortune with him in a single fight

(V. i. 97-100)

Hal desires to prevent the needless bloodshed of friends and enemies alike. In contrast, Hector sends a challenge not in the interest of the public welfare but strictly in an effort to gain personal glory. Though more mature and less hotheaded, Hector bears a closer resemblance to Hotspur. He wants "great opinion" (*1H4 IV. i. 77*), and he is indiscriminate in his means of attaining it.

In the Trojan council scene, Hector expounds upon a philosophy of value that ironically points to the inadequacy in his notion of honor. In reference to Helen, he argues that value must reside intrinsically in the person, not merely in the praise bestowed by others:

But value dwells not in particular will,
It holds his estimate and dignity
As well wherein 'tis precious of itself
As in the prizer.

(II. ii. 53-56)

Thus, according to Hector, Helen cannot be considered valuable just because value is attributed to her by the adoration and sacrifice of others. Hector's philosophy is fundamental for understanding the various forms of mad idolatry in the play, such as Trojan idolatry of Helen and Troilus' idolatry of Cressida, but it also serves as a theoretical basis for analyzing Hector himself. Is his greatest value—honor—internal and "precious of itself," or does it merely exist in the applause of the "prizer"? In other words, is Hector committed to intrinsic honor or solely to public reputation? It appears that he advocates the former in theory, but favors the latter in action.

Hector's demand for intrinsic value corresponds with the prevailing Elizabethan concept of honor as expressed by Robert Ashley in his

treatise *Of Honour* (c. 1596). Ashley's treatise is a testimony to the eminent importance of honor in Elizabethan England. He proclaims that "nothing is more excellent then honour."⁴ He is quite explicit, however, in defining the attributes of genuine honor. According to Ashley, honor is inextricably tied to intrinsic virtue:

Honor therefore is a certeine testimonie of vertue shining of it self, geven of some man by the judgement of good men. . . . Therefore we presuppose a great excellencie of vertue to be in him which shal be thought worthy of honour. (p. 34)

Moreover, Ashley insists that honor does not exist merely in the applause of the prizer: "neither is it risen out of the opinion of the multitude, nor out of the vaine boastinges of men" (p. 39). According to Ashley's treatise, Hector's honor would be considered deficient because of its disregard for "excellencie of vertue" and its emphasis upon "the opinion of the multitude."

Near the end of the council scene, Hector concludes his deliberation on moral laws with a sudden change of mind that further highlights the inadequacy of the honor he pursues. After twenty-six lines of convincing moral philosophy, he allies himself with the very position he has clearly proven immoral:

Hector's opinion

Is this in way of truth; 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 dependance
Upon our joint and several dignities.

(II. ii. 163-93)

In effect, Hector incriminates himself. Choosing to persist in a bad cause in order to preserve Trojan dignity, he deposes the authority of his "great mind" and succumbs to his "benumbed will" (II. ii. 178,79). Though Hector sees an opposition between the demands of reason and the demands of honor, Ashley argues that genuine honor should involve no such conflict: "the desire of honour is good which consists in this mediocritie of reason" (p. 43). Ashley is referring to Aristotle's golden mean between excess and defect—the temperate middle ground of good judgment that Hector eloquently advocates and quickly abandons. According to Ashley's philosophy, the true course of honor would have been for Hector to continue to oppose his younger brothers: "yet is our mind alwaies to be bent towards the right judgement of reason, that so neglecting the opinion of the multitude we may discern the faultiness of

th' extreames" (p. 43). By ultimately siding with the extreme position of Paris and Troilus, Hector indulges in an excessive desire for honor. Ashley's criticism of Caesar, Alexander, and Themistocles seems equally applicable to Hector and his Trojan brothers:

.. Ceasar, seeing the image of Alexander the Macedonian, is said to have wept because that being elder then he, yet he had scarce done any thing that was prayseworthy. Was he not arrogant and insolent herein, which wold not so much imitate his vertue, if any were, as envy his great fame and renowne? Neither was Alexander himself any lesse ambitious, who for that Democritus, a Philosopher, had affirmed that there were many worlds, wept because as yet he was not Lord of one of them. . . .Themistocles cold not sleep in the night because his mind so ranne on those Trophies and Victories of Miltiades. . . . Therefore such ought never to be the true desire of honour as these men had, least we fall into the vice of ambition whiles we thincke to mainteyne a certeine greatness and worthynes of mind. (pp. 45,46)

Like the ancient warriors cited by Ashley, the Trojans think they are preserving dignity when they are actually pursuing excessive and self-serving ambitions.⁵

After his volte-face, Hector makes another surprising announcement. He informs his brothers that he has already sent to the Greeks a "roisting challenge" (II ii. 208). This challenge, sent prior to the Trojan council, sheds suspicion on Hector's professed willingness to return Helen. If he truly wanted to end the war, why would he have reanimated the quarrel by sending a challenge to the Greeks? Perhaps there is method in his madness. A preoccupation with appearances may lurk behind his exposition on moral laws as well as his conscious decision to violate them. A careful look at the text supports such a possibility. His very first words in the council scene (and in the play) suggest his concern with image: "Though no man lesser fears the Greeks than I. . ." (II ii. 8). After some debating, he compliments Paris and Troilus for having "said well" (II ii. 163). Implicit in this phrase is a preference for rhetorical skill over moral content. Though Hector sees his brothers as incapable of making a "free determination / Twixt right and wrong" (II ii. 170-71), he nevertheless praises them for presenting brain-sick ideas with verbal finesse. At this point Hector launches his great speech on moral laws, shattering the arguments of his brothers by exposing the superficiality of their ideas, their inability to comprehend Aristotle, and their distempered blood. Why would Hector expound at length on moral laws only to end, finally, by agreeing with Troilus? It seems that his elaborate speech is

primarily a rhetorical performance, done for the sake of preserving his image as a man of superior intellect. Moreover, his ultimate decision to keep Helen is done for a like motive: to preserve Trojan dignity. Thus, his apparently conflicting actions—his refusal to keep Helen as well as his agreement to keep Helen—issue from a consistent concern with self-glorifying appearances.

After the council scene, Hector does not appear in the play until Act IV when he combats Ajax, mingles with the Greek commanders, and exchanges threats with Achilles. Putting those incidents momentarily aside, let us consider his actions in Act V when he prepares for battle while his wife, sister, and father attempt to dissuade him. Earlier in the play we heard reports of Hector's mistreatment of Andromache, but in Act V the impact of his rashness is enhanced because we actually see him "ungently temper'd" and offending his wife (V. iii. 1-5). Cassandra enters, echoing the sound advice Hector had spoken to his younger brothers in the council scene. She reprimands Hector for his "hot and peevish vows" and warns that "the purpose... makes strong the vow, / But vows to every purpose must not hold" in much the same way that Hector had earlier reprimanded Troilus and Paris for their "hot passion of distemp' red blood" and warned that "to persist/In doing wrong extenuates not wrong,/But makes it much more heavy" (V. iii. 16, 23,24; II. ii. 169, 186-88). Apparently Hector has degenerated to the distempered condition of his younger brothers. Like Troilus or the "hare-brain'd Hotspur" (1H4 V. ii. 19), Hector succumbs to the impulses, not of his brain but his spleen. He claims that the gods have heard him swear, and that he stands engaged to many Greeks in the "faith of valor" (V. iii. 69) to meet them in the field. But the gifts he offers the gods—his "vow" and "faith"—are to some degree what Cassandra calls them: "polluted offerings" (V. iii. 17). Hector responds to Priam, "I must not break my faith. / You know me dutiful" (V. iii. 71-72). Faith and duty to what exactly? Hector leaves the stage while providing the answer: "We'll forth and fight, / Do deeds worth praise, and tell you them at night" (V. iii. 92-93). Overriding his obligation to his wife, sister, and father, is his reckless and ultimately fatal desire for praise.⁶

Hector's treatment of his family seems particularly harsh when we consider the mercy he bestows upon his enemies. Usually in Shakespeare's plays mercy is a laudable virtue. According to Portia's famous speech,

The quality of mercy is not strain'd
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest

It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

(MV IV. i. 184-87)

Yet the quality of Hector's mercy is severely strained. He grants it freely in battle, but reserves little for his family or servant. When Troilus chides him for a "vice of mercy," Hector replies that mercy is "fair play" (V. iii. 37, 43). His word choice reveals more than he himself may realize: he engages in warfare more as a sport played for honor than a responsible effort to defend Troy. Nestor speaks a tribute to Hector that describes his mercy while suggesting self-display as its underlying motive:

I have, thou gallant Troyan, seen thee oft,
 Laboring for destiny, make cruel way
 Through ranks of Greekish youth, and I have seen thee,
 As hot as Perseus, spur thy Phrygian steed,
 Despising many forfeits and subduements,
 When thou hast hung thy advanced sword i' th' air,
 Not letting it decline on the declined,
 That I have said to some my standers-by
 "Lo Jupiter is yonder, dealing life!"

(IV. v. 183-91)

Hector has a propensity for what T.S. Eliot would call doing the right thing for the wrong reason. The generosity he displays in battle issues not so much from compassion as from a desire to elevate himself to a god-like stature.

We hear reports of Hector's mercy from Nestor and Troilus, but the first time we actually witness his mercy in battle is when he encounters Thersites. Since Hector will gain no honor from killing Thersites, he allows him to live:

Hect. What art thou, Greek? Art thou for Hector's match? Art thou of blood and honor?

Ther. No, no, I am a rascal, a scurvy railing knave, a very filthy rogue.

Hect. I do believe thee, live.

(V. iv. 26-30)

The irony is devastating. Hector seems at first to merit honor for not taking advantage of an unfair match, but that honor soon diminishes when we recognize that the long-term consequence of such a policy would be to exterminate all worthy men while sparing all rascals, knaves, and rogues. What he perceives as honorable behavior would ultimately deplete the world of honorable men.

The savagery of Achilles seems a distinct contrast to the generosity of Hector. Far from exercising mercy, Achilles leaps at any opportunity to

seize an unfair advantage. He intends to get Hector drunk on the evening before the battle: "I'll heat his blood with Greekish wine to-night, / Which with my scimitar I'll cool to-morrow" (V. i. 1,2). And the next day, after being spared by Hector, he returns with a band of Myrmidons: "Empale him with your weapons round about, / In fellest manner execute your arms" (V. vii. 5-6). After presiding over the gang slaying, Achilles mutilates the body of Hector by dragging it by his horse's tail through the field. Surely Hector would not stoop to the level of such blatant depravity.

Yet the actions of the two warriors are not entirely dissimilar. During their encounter in the Greek camp, they echo each other in an exchange of threats. Achilles belligerently invokes the gods: "Tell me, you heavens, in which part of his body / Shall I destroy him—whether there, or there, or there?" (IV. v. 242,43). Hector responds at first with courtesy and restraint, saying that "It would discredit the blest gods, proud man, / To answer such a question" (IV. v. 247,48). Then, ironically, he goes on to answer the question himself:

Henceforth guard thee well,
For I'll not kill thee there, nor there, nor there,
But by the forge that stithied Mars his helm,
I'll kill thee every where, yea, o'er and o'er.
You wisest Grecians, pardon me this brag.
His insolence draws folly from my lips,
But I'll endeavor deeds to match these words,
Or may I never—

(IV. v. 253-60)

Though Hector adopts a gesture of courtesy, he acts in essentially the same belligerent manner as Achilles. He echoes Achilles's threat, pauses to beg pardon for his folly, and ends with a second threat. Moreover, the two heroes share an inordinate desire for reputation. In Act III, Achilles announces his primary concern: "I see my reputation is at stake, / My fame is shrowdly gor'd" (III. iii. 227,28). And in Act V, after murdering Hector, Achilles commands his soldiers to shower praise upon himself: "On, Myrmidons, and cry you all amain, / 'Achilles hath the mighty Hector slain!' " (V. viii. 13,14). In his pursuit of honor, Achilles goes to greater extremes than Hector. But however immoral Achilles may be, he is not altogether different from his opponent. In deciding to keep Helen, Hector acted according to the same priorities. For both warriors, the acquisition of personal glory takes precedence over any moral considerations. Though Hector elicits our sympathy far more than the brutal and unprincipled Achilles, his magnanimous virtues of courage and gener-

osity ultimately prove tarnished with the same weaknesses that afflict the Greek warrior.

By Act V degradation becomes the cultural norm for the Greeks and Trojans. Cressida proves false, Troilus's war for honor becomes a vehicle for revenge, and Achilles resorts to a cowardly and savage murder of Hector. Characters debase themselves, and Hector takes part in the overall drift toward degradation as he succumbs to greed in his pursuit of a Greek in goodly armor. Though Hector has just spared Thersites, he now slays a Greek in a desire for something more substantial than honor: "I like thy armor well; / I'll frush it and unlock the rivets all, / But I'll be master of it" (V. vi. 28-30). Standing over the body, he comments: "Most putrefied core, so fair without, / Thy goodly armor thus hath cost thy life" (V. viii. 1,2). The irony is that Hector's remark applies not only to the corpse but to himself as well—his own goodly appearance that conceals a lack of intrinsic virtue. Committed to appearances, Hector resembles the Prince of Morocco who chooses a golden casket only to discover "A carrion Death" (MV II vii. 63).⁷

In the final scenes of the play, the similarity between Hector and Achilles is reinforced by Shakespeare's use of animal and feeding imagery. Nestor describes the martial exploits of Hector in language that recalls Ulysses' universal wolf of will and appetite:

There is a thousand Hectors in the field:
Now here he fights on Galathe his horse,
And there lacks work; anon he's there afoot,
And there they fly or die, like scaling sculls
Before the belching whale; then is he yonder,
And there the strawy Greeks, ripe for his edge,
Fall down before him like a mower's swath.
Here, there, and every where, he leaves and takes,
Dexterity so obeying appetite
That what he will he does, and does so much
That proof is call'd impossibility.

(V. v. 19-29)

When in pursuit of the Greek in goodly armor, Hector himself speaks the language of animal appetite: "Wilt thou not, beast, abide? / Why then fly on, I'll hunt thee for thy hide" (V. vi. 30,31). Standing over the putrefied corpse, he remarks: "Rest, sword, thou hast thy fill of blood and death" (V. viii. 4). According to the logic of the imagery, Hector becomes a predator feeding on the blood of his prey. Moments later, Achilles, standing over the corpse of Hector, speaks with similar imagery: "My half-supp'd sword that frankly would have fed, / Pleas'd with this dainty bait, thus goes to bed" (V. viii. 19,20). Thus the two great opponents, in their metaphorical

feeding, are linked in a mutual indulgence in degenerate appetite. In varying degrees they succumb to the same disorder: an excessive craving for fame and reputation.

Yet however inadequate and self-serving his sense of honor may be, Hector still embodies comparatively noble qualities. He is more courageous than Achilles, more self-controlled than the infatuated and later vengeful Troilus, less devious than Ulysses, and not besotted with the sexual desire that debilitates Paris. Aeneas, Ajax, and Nestor speak glowing tributes to his virtues of courtesy, generosity, and courage. Even Thersites, whose wit coins slanders like a mint, says nothing malicious of Hector. According to the opinions of his friends and enemies, Hector embodies the very highest ideals of Greek and Trojan society. In the eyes of the characters that surround him, Hector rises to the heroic stature that commentators have often assigned him: "a symbol of knighthood and generosity," "the most brilliant and sympathetic hero in the play," a man of "magnanimity and gentleness."⁸

But our response to Hector must go beyond the praise bestowed by his fellow warriors. He inhabits a world of near total corruption where vices are often mistaken for virtues. The very ideals for which the Greek and Trojans praise him are fundamentally deficient. Troilus, Ulysses, and Achilles repeatedly extoll fame as the highest attainable good—a goal that is pursued in both camps to the detriment of reason, morality, and the public welfare. The Trojans seek fame through an immoral retention of Helen, the Greeks through an immoral murder of Hector. In a world so lacking in ideals of intrinsic virtue, Hector is held up as a hero not so much to his credit, but to the discredit of the other characters.

Ironically, Hector is the character who most clearly indicates the waywardness of his own behavior. During the Trojan council, he demanded that values be intrinsic and precious of themselves. Yet his actions throughout the play demonstrate his overriding concern with the applause of the prizer. Moreover, he dies without ever realizing that he has failed to live up to his professed philosophy. The final words of Cassandra seem particularly revealing: "Farewell; yet soft Hector, I take my leave. / Thou dost thyself and all our Troy deceive" (V. iii. 89,90). Hector lacks introspection. Unlike Hamlet or Macbeth, Hector does not speak a single soliloquy of any significant length. He never looks deeply enough to recognize the breach between genuine honor and the superficial honor that he pursues. Even in his most blatant hypocritical action when he decides to keep Helen, he readily switches from one position to another, casually ignoring the gravity of his decision because he does not take moral issues to heart. Profound questions become for

him a matter for lip service, an occasion for making an impressive speech. Nevertheless, his exposition on the laws of nature and of nations operates as a moral standard in the play. Hector clearly prescribes the right course of action: Helen should be returned and the war ended. Unlike the question of revenge in *Hamlet*, the central issue in *Troilus and Cressida* is not wrought with a myriad of complexities. Genocide for a wanton adulteress is not an ambiguous issue. Though Hector quickly casts aside his own conclusion, his speech on moral laws establishes the fundamental immorality of Trojan honor.

Hector finally leaves two impressions: he is an ideal hero in the eyes of the Greeks and Trojans, and he is seriously flawed according to the distanced perspective of the play's audience. For the Greeks and Trojans, whose standards of evaluation are glory and fame, Hector represents their greatest success. But for the auditors of the drama, invited to evaluate Hector by the more discriminating standards of intrinsic value and moral obligation, Hector succeeds only in typifying the failure of Greek and Trojan society.

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Notes

¹For example, G. Wilson Knight sees Hector as a "symbol of knighthood and generosity"; W.W. Lawrence calls him "the most brilliant and sympathetic hero in the play"; Adrian Bonjour argues that "the only reproach that can be hurled against Hector throughout the play is an excessive generosity"; Mark Sacharoff claims that Hector's defects are merely a "handful of peccadilloes" and that the "dominant and lasting impression... is one of magnanimity and gentleness"; Reuben A. Brower describes Hector as "not only husband, brother, and Renaissance prince, but also knight-hero and courtly lover"; and Arlene N. Okerlund remarks that "Everyone in this universe except Hector is corrupt." See G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, 5th rev. ed. (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 71; W.W. Lawrence, *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*, 2nd ed. (New York: Ungar, 1960), p. 159; Adrian Bonjour, "Hector and the 'One in Sumptuous Armour,'" *English Studies*, 45 (1964), 107, n. 5; Mark Sacharoff, "Tragic vs. Satiric: Hector's Conduct in *Il. II* of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*," *SP*, 67 (1970), 519; Reuben A. Brower, *Hero and Saint: Shakespeare and the Graeco-Roman Heroic Tradition* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 250; and Arlene N. Okerlund, "In Defense of *Cressida*: Character as Metaphor," *Women's Studies*, 7 (1980), 14.

²Alice Shalvi recognizes the shallowness of Hector's honor: "he appears to be a noble, generous, worthy knight—but we are made aware that beneath the appearance lie pride, conceit, and self-esteem." Derick R.C. Marsh sees Hector as basically similar to the self-serving characters that surround him: "Hector's ideals are put to the service of his desire for glory, for they are contaminated by the same self-interest that taints the reasoning of

Ulysses or...the love of Troilus." And Douglas Cole describes the hypocrisy that permeates the play: "In the world of this play, the myths that men say they live by—honor, love, prowess, order, and degree—are contradicted by their behavior, which in most cases is founded on pleasure, envy, revenge, and self-delusion." See Alice Shalvi, "'Honor' in *Troilus and Cressida*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 5 (1965), 293; Derick R.C. Marsh, *Passion Lends Them Power: A Study of Shakespeare's Love Tragedies* (Manchester: Univ. Press, 1976), p. 37; and Douglas Cole, "Myth and Anti-Myth: The Case of *Troilus and Cressida*," *SQ*, 31 (1980), 82.

¹All quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

²Robert Ashley, *Of Honour*, ed. Virgil B. Heltzel (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1947), p. 30. All further references to this work appear in the text. I have occasionally modernized the spelling.

³For an opposing interpretation of Hector in the council scene, see Jean Gagen, "Hector's Honor," *SQ*, 19 (1968), 135. Gagen argues that Hector's resolve to keep Helen would have been considered honorable by Elizabethans since the conduct books of the time indicate that "gentlemen often felt compelled to fight duels in defense of their honor even when they were troubled or divided in mind over the justice of the practice." I would argue, however, that Hector's decision concerns not a duel but a war, not an individual but an entire nation. Even if we assume that Elizabethans would sympathize with an unjust duel fought for honor, surely in the case of Hector, with the welfare of a nation at stake, justice should be the deciding factor.

⁴Some textual evidence suggests that Hector's ill-temper may be untypical of his character. Alexander earlier remarked that Hector's patience "Is as a virtue fix'd," and in the scene just discussed Andromache implies that Hector's rashness is unusual: "When was my Lord so much ungently temper'd" (I. ii. 5; V. iii. 1). But it seems that Hector's temperate nature is like the "patience" that Kent says Lear so often "boasted to retain" (KL III. vi. 58-59). It dominated his past not present actions. Like the other characters in the play, Hector has become degraded with time.

⁵S.L. Bethell sees in this incident an allusion to the Biblical "whited sepulchre" in which the outward appearance disguises an inner corruption; thus, the putrefied core "becomes a symbol of all the play presents to us, an allegorical enactment of the theme of 'fair without, and foul within.'" See *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (1944; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1970), pp. 126,27.

⁶See note 1 above.

Hamlet: Revenge and Readiness by Gideon Rappaport

The intention of this paper is, among other things, to resolve the interpretive dilemma critics have faced in trying to determine whether *Hamlet* is predominantly a secular revenge tragedy or a redemptive Christian tragedy. The focus is on the complex dramatic moment, properly understood as the climax of the play, compounded of Hamlet's soliloquy in Act III, scene iii, and its remarkable relation to its context. And the method is, in part, simply to take Shakespeare at his word—that is, to accept as serious and fundamental axioms of life the commonplace professions of Renaissance thought that we in our own time tend to forget, to ignore, or to treat with condescension. Whether or not we believe that Shakespeare and his audience took seriously a phrase like “Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord” is of the utmost consequence in determining how, or even whether, we will understand a play like *Hamlet*. I am convinced both that Shakespeare did take such phrases seriously and recognizing that he did does not render the plays any the less complex, profound, or entertaining.

In the soliloquy of Claudius in Act III, scene iii, Shakespeare has dramatized, subtly but directly, the immobility of spirit that is despair. Through the revealing process of this soliloquy and the power of our empathic response to it, not only an understanding of despair but an experience and an actual fear of it have been conveyed to the audience. Now we seek relief. We want the villain returned to his place as villain, preferably by the hero, who should appear and relieve us of the momentary anguish by reminding us of the crime and the guilt of Claudius and by allowing us to reassume the posture of detached judgment of the evil king.

What follows instead is a twofold moral shock. Hamlet's soliloquy begins to paint Claudius's spiritual state brighter than we know it to be, and suddenly we find that we know more about the moral condition of Claudius's soul than Hamlet does. Thus, any relief we might have sought in a reiteration of the accusations against Claudius is prevented. At the same time we are made aware that Hamlet, so far from relieving us, is shocking us still further by giving voice to the single most evil attitude expressed in the play. Not only by the reversal of our expectations—both the immediate and the general ones—are we startled, but by the sheer depth of evil that Hamlet is uttering. If before we shuddered at feeling what the villain felt, now we are appalled by the degradation of our hero.

What exactly is Hamlet saying that is so degrading? Philip Thompson puts it thus:

At his one ready moment, in terms of the success or failure of his cause, Hamlet is (literally) damnably unready. In explicit renunciation of the readiness he later espouses, he declares himself unsatisfied by the mere hire and salary of killing the body and leaving the soul to God, demanding the eternal damnation of Claudius as the only possible means of relief for his personal shame and suffering (and thus setting out to write the ultimate revenge play). . . . A Christian audience would certainly have recognized that Hamlet's spiritual guilt is at this moment greater than that of Claudius, who, though he killed an unhouseled victim, did so only for his own advantage and pleasure and not for the sake of sending his brother's soul to Hell.¹

Hamlet, going beyond the distaste for imagining the salvation of his enemies implied earlier ("Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven / Or ever I had seen that day"—I. ii. 182,83),² has become guilty of supreme pride in assuming the divine prerogative of the final judgment of souls. In addition, he would consign Claudius to a fate worse even than the fate about which he himself and we have recently heard the dreaded specter cry, "O, horrible, O, horrible, most horrible!" (I. v. 80). The tale that the ghost refrained from telling lest Hamlet's blood freeze and he die of fright would presumably have been about purgatory; Hamlet now wants Claudius in hell. Claudius himself has reached no such depths of guilt. So gauged by both the audience's moral judgment and its emotional response, Hamlet here, to coin a vile phrase, out-Claudiuses Claudius.

But are we not at least partly in favor of Hamlet's plan for Claudius's damnation? Would not even the most upright in an Elizabethan audience have participated somewhat in Hamlet's desire to consign Claudius to perdition? If the answer is yes, that too serves to intensify the experience of Hamlet's dilemma, the horror at its implications. For to be momentarily won over to Hamlet's attitude is not therefore to forget one's Christian upbringing. So far from justifying Hamlet in the minds of an Elizabethan audience, sharing his attitude brings them to share also in the pain of his predicament, to taste the temptations to pride, to feel revenge pulling them away from what they know to be right. Being tempted by evil does not necessarily prevent the recognition of it as evil. The audience has seen this sufficiently demonstrated in Claudius, who is aware of his sin of despair though he does not renounce it. So the shock at Hamlet's words remains. Insofar as the audience tends to share Hamlet's attitude at this moment, it experiences the contradiction between that

attitude and its own values as dramatic tension, feeling at once sympathetic and appalled.

In addition, the shocking evil of this transformation is driven home to the audience by the dramatic irony in the last two lines of Claudius's soliloquy (III. iii. 97,98), in which at once both the inefficacy of Claudius's prayers and, hence, the mistaken nature of Hamlet's assumptions about those prayers are dramatized. But as ingenious and carefully wrought as this dramatic twist is, there is one greater dramatic reversal, unparalleled for simplicity and for power. Suppose that we the audience were suddenly struck deaf just as Polonius leaves the king and during the rest of the scene could only see the actors on stage and not hear them. We would see Claudius struggle with himself and finally fall to his knees in prayer. We would then see Hamlet enter, draw his sword as if to kill Claudius, but refrain from doing so and finally leave. Would we not judge these actions good? Here, through the conventions of the soliloquy, the play's central themes are given force. Here, in fact, is the dramatic climax of the play. In direct contrast to the appearances, we know, because he tells us in soliloquy, that Claudius's prayers are nothing, that his repentance is nonexistent. We know, because he tells us in soliloquy, that Hamlet hesitates to kill Claudius not out of virtue or fear or uncertainty or weakness or moral scruple but out of profound pride. And, by convention, while we hear both soliloquies, neither character hears that of the other. Thus, the contrast between what Hamlet sees and what we have heard is taken up and intensified in the contrast between what we see and what we hear, what we see and what we know.

In part this nexus of contrasts is a dramatization of Hamlet's sentence "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (II. ii. 249,50). And let us note what this phrase means. It is not a way of saying, "If you think something is good, then it is; if you think it is bad, then it is." Such a meaning is only possible in an age that has ceased to believe in God. For all the doubts and questioning that characterize the philosophical, moral, and religious investigations of the Renaissance, such a meaning is still foreign to it. What is perhaps not foreign to it is the statement "If you think something bad is good, then for you it is good, but in thinking so you have become bad." Hamlet's phrase must mean something like this: Good and bad are properties not of things but of relationships; they are not perceived except in relation to the state of the soul of the perceiver. Actions that would in themselves be good if the states of soul that produced them were good—praying, refraining from murder—are shown to be in fact bad when the evil thinking behind them is revealed. A smile is good if it is a smile revealing goodness. But "one

may smile, and smile, and be a villain.”

Moreover, this moment of contrast between what we see and what we know, in dramatizing the difference between what may seem and what is, dramatizes also the limits of our ability to perceive that difference. The audience experiences directly the limits of human knowledge, the inescapable ignorance in which all human action must take place. In observing Hamlet here using what only seems (Claudius' praying) as a justification for acting in a way that is, though seemingly good, in fact entirely evil, we the audience are momentarily privileged to approach the divine perspective—the perspective that is not distorted by any “shuffling,” the perspective from which all is seen as it is. We see Claudius defying Hamlet's augury (for Hamlet thinks Claudius is purging his soul in prayer) and Hamlet defying our own (for will we not have predicted that this would be the moment for Hamlet to kill Claudius?), each “To his own scandal.”³ In this scene, through the device of the soliloquy, with its conventional assumptions about the honesty and solitude of the speaker, and specifically in the remarkable juxtaposition of two soliloquies, the audience experiences as drama the truth of what Hamlet will himself learn invisibly in Act IV, that “There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will.”

But this understanding of the soliloquies raises a difficult question. Philip Thompson implies above that if Hamlet were at this point truly ready, he would kill Claudius. He adds,

Completing [Hamlet's] failure of readiness, since the entire court had just seen Claudius betray himself (or at least raise serious questions), Hamlet's defense of the killing [of Claudius] would have had convincing force.⁴

Though on this point the play has little to say, the response of the king to the mousetrap play, together with what we learn from the soliloquies, tempts us to argue that at this moment Hamlet ought to kill Claudius, that he is now not only spiritually bound, by the ghost's charge, and politically bound, by the king's own self-incrimination, but morally bound to kill Claudius, for behold the evil of the reasons for which he chooses not to do so. In fact, however, the same Christian audience that would have seen a deadly sin in Hamlet's stated reasons for putting off the killing of Claudius would also know that killing for revenge was wrong.⁵ Though Hamlet's reasons for refraining from killing are evil, we are not therefore entitled to conclude that killing Claudius would necessarily be good. We are shown, however, that if Hamlet had killed Claudius at this point, order in the rotten state of Denmark, as in the

invisible realm, might well have been restored. Perhaps Hamlet could have made a good case for his action. He had, after all, witnesses to the appearance of the ghost and to Claudius's response to the "Murder of Gonzago." In any case, Claudius's death here (as we realize later) would have prevented that of Polonius, and therefore those of Laertes, Ophelia, and Gertrude, not to mention Rosencranz and Guildenstern, even if Hamlet himself did not escape death. And, in the other realm, Claudius would probably have been consigned to the very perdition Hamlet wishes for him, not (as it could never be) through Hamlet's own will, but only (and rightly?) through his agency, for, as we have been shown, Claudius' soul is just now in the very state of evil which Hamlet assumes he will be able to detect it in at some later time, though Claudius is not even yet at his worst. In short, insofar as we the audience perceive things as if from the divine perspective, it appears that the killing of Claudius by Hamlet at this moment would be entirely right.

We are thus presented with a dilemma no less difficult and dramatically no less pressing than Hamlet's own: So far as the facts of the political world and universal order are concerned, we know that Claudius ought to be killed by Hamlet at this precise moment. So far as morality and thus the final judgment of Hamlet's soul is concerned, we know that Hamlet is evil in refraining from the killing for those reasons for which he does refrain, and yet that, according to the Christian outlook shared by Shakespeare and his audience, there can be no moral justification for Hamlet's taking revenge upon Claudius. Thus, this nexus of soliloquies has become not only the climax of the play, the moment of Hamlet's falling off from his noble virtue, an experience of despair (the worst sin) and of pride (the fundamental sin) and of the limits of human knowledge in relation to action (as seen from the divine perspective), but also, in this question of what Hamlet ought to do instead of what he does, a study of the nature of morality itself, of the meaning of action in a morally complex universe: the specific test case in revenge. It is Shakespeare, we see, who is writing the ultimate revenge play, for he has put the revenge play conventions to work in order to put revenge itself on trial.

It is clear that Shakespeare never manipulates emotions thus powerfully or raises questions so serious for their own sake. There will be a verdict, not only on revenge, but on all human action. The verdict begins to make itself felt dramatically within Hamlet's soliloquy itself. This terrible evil into which Hamlet has fallen would not on the one hand so easily justify itself to the modern audience (less than familiar with the appropriate Christian response to such a speech), and would not

on the other hand seem quite so perverse and frightful when seen aright, were it not for the curious fact that this evil attitude of Hamlet's is expressed not in a speech of passion and rage but in calm and apparently reasonable discourse with the self. In language and thought that pretend to be clear and utterly rational, Hamlet is descending into evil, talking himself into the prime sin. So rational does he appear to be that he admits into his thought the very truth that ought to turn the whole process around, namely, "how his audit stands who knows save heaven?" (III. iii. 82). Yet Hamlet ignores the implications of his own words, imagining that the state of Claudius's soul may be better than it appears to him and ignoring that equal possibility which we know to be the truth, that it is worse. Just as in the soliloquy that precedes this one Claudius' correct understanding of theological doctrine only emphasized his despair, so here we find Hamlet turning theology around to serve the purposes of his pride. The sin blinds each to the truth of what he speaks, and each is confirmed in his sin, Hamlet's now being the more egregious of the two.

Hamlet's misguided rationality here is telling. Of his previous soliloquies, all but the "To be or not to be" soliloquy begin and continue in strong melancholy passion and end in the restoration of the government of reason. In the soliloquy at I. ii. 129ff. (beginning "O that this too too sallied flesh would melt"), though his passion over the meager mourning and the "o'erhasty marriage" is certainly justified, he is correct, given what he then knows, to end with "But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (l. 159). In response to the words of the ghost in Act I, scene v, Hamlet launches into a great passion, but before the scene ends, he is able to make careful resolutions: He swears his companions to secrecy and plans to adopt an "antic disposition." In the soliloquy at II. ii. 550ff. ("O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I"), he begins in self-accusatory passion but in mid-speech suddenly observes his own extravagance, waxes reasonable, and reveals his sound plans for the mousetrap play. (So far as he can know, the ghost might be a devil, abusing him to damn him.) And even in the soliloquy at the end of the play scene, where his vengeful anger heralds the evil climax of the following scene (without, however, giving it away), Hamlet resolves to moderate his passion in speaking to his mother: "I will speak daggers to her, but use none" (III. ii. 396). Among much else, the soliloquies preceding the climax reveal a pattern according to which Hamlet's reason consistently supersedes his passion and thence prevails until the next occasion for an emotional outburst.

At the precise moment, Act III, scene iii, at which we expect a similar

flood of emotion finally to overflow the banks of reason and spend itself in the killing of Claudius (for Hamlet now knows Claudius is guilty), we find instead no passion and no outburst but a kind of evil rationality, the more malevolent for seeming to be independent of feeling and passion. This is clearly not the freedom from slavery to passion that Hamlet loves in Horatio, neither the Christian temperance nor the Stoic detachment that Horatio may be said to embody. There is something else that has stepped between Hamlet and his characteristic melancholy passion, something that seeks to take the form of reason but is not reason, something that, in fact, uses reason falsely to justify the most bitter of business, a vengefulness and cruelty more profound than any to which Hamlet's passionate outbursts could possibly have led him. Even if we fail to recognize it in the soliloquy itself, we discover what this monster is in the scene that follows.

If the double-soliloquy climax has in fact the importance I suggest it does, then we are bound to read the immediately following closet scene in its light. And when we do so, everything in it is revealed to be not only a gloss on the previous scene of Hamlet's turning but a proof of its meaning and a fulfillment of its terrible promise. The first thing that happens is that Hamlet's passion now reasserts itself and does overflow into the action of killing. But it is Polonius that Hamlet kills by mistake. Hamlet is himself again, but too late. Suddenly what the previous scene demonstrated to be true of the inner lives of Hamlet and Claudius is shown to be equally true of the external world—namely, that Hamlet's failure to kill Claudius in the previous scene, whatever its implications for morality, was in terms of the universal order a terrible omission. For now when Hamlet acts in what would then have been the right way (again from the viewpoint of world order, leaving aside that of morality), it is at the wrong time and in the wrong place; the wrong man is the victim.

But this is only the beginning. Hamlet then turns to his mother and shows her "The counterfeit presentment of two brothers." His speech, though passionate, is true in all it says. "What judgment / Would step from this to this" (III. iv. 70,71)? But compare the drama Hamlet here plays out before his mother to that which has just been played out before the audience. Have we not just observed—in soliloquy rather than painting—the presentment (counterfeit in another sense to sight but true in the hearing) of two kings, one a king only by usurpation, one a king only in *potentia*? Have we not noted, as evil as the former is, the terrible villainy of the latter? Might not Hamlet just now, with equal truth, compare himself to Claudius, or at any rate to his father, as he compares Claudius to his father, and might we not conclude, with equal justice, "O Hamlet,

what a falling-off was there”?

The moment we perceive this, everything Hamlet says reveals a reflexive application, for everything he asserts to be true of Gertrude is true of himself, perhaps of all sinners. Though the sins are different, the cozening at hoodman blind is the same. And all the passion and all the images that proclaim Hamlet to understand the nature of sin very well cry out at the same time that Hamlet is himself guilty.

Rebellious hell,
If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
And melt in her own fire.

(III. iv. 82-85)

But what is he saying? Again his own mouth speaks his condemnation, for he is seeing the mote in another's eye and not the beam in his own. It is Hamlet's reason that has pandered Hamlet's will, and we have already seen, or rather heard, precisely when and precisely how. All this is confirmed by the reappearance of the ghost at this instant, as it is by his invisibility to Gertrude. The ghost in fact does come his "tardy son to chide," as Hamlet says, but not for tardiness. The ghost comes "to whet thy almost blunted purpose." And what has blunted it is willful pride. Hamlet has put his own desire for personal revenge above the ghost's charge, which is to avenge his father's murder. The difference in the act may be nothing; in the thinking it is everything. A scourge and minister is so not by his own but by divine will. The moment Hamlet's own will intervenes, his mission, to kill Claudius as an instrument of justice, is forgotten and a new one, to damn Claudius for personal revenge, is substituted for it. We have observed this happening in Hamlet's soliloquy. His reason has pandered his will, and his will, like that of all men, "such fellows as I... crawling between earth and heaven," is corrupt.

As we might now expect, Hamlet's only remaining soliloquy breaks the pattern of the earlier ones. Where before honest passion was superseded by right reason, here reason continues to pander will. He begins by asking the appropriate question,

What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.
Sure He that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and godlike reason
To fust in us unus'd.

(IV. iv. 33-39)

But where reason panders will, one may reason and reason and be a villain. In the remainder of the soliloquy, Hamlet seeks, through a seemingly rational process of thought, to turn himself precisely into a beast, concluding with a determination unworthy of even his most violent outbursts of passion. He might well know “Why yet I live to say, ‘This thing’s to do,’” if only he were to turn the same scrutiny upon his own will that he has applied to his mother’s sins. We know why the thing remains, for we have observed why the deed was not accomplished at the only moment when it would have been possible to accomplish it. And the example of Fortinbras’s march to Poland is a smokescreen. We have already seen that when Fortinbras, “Of unimproved mettle hot and full, / Shark’d up a list of lawless resolute,” his enterprise failed. His march to Poland is honorable not because Fortinbras is able “greatly to find quarrel in a straw,” but because now his is an undertaking imposed by a higher authority to which he has rightly submitted his will. And the excitements to Hamlet’s reason and his blood *will* move him to act, but only when his will is purged and shaped into readiness as, politically speaking, that of Fortinbras has been already. Hamlet’s interpretations of Fortinbras’s action and of his own inaction are thus both incorrect, and this is revealed in his beast-like conclusion, “My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!”—a conclusion which the events of his sea voyage will force him to abandon.

If further support were required for the proposition that Hamlet is not a mere coward or a procrastinator or only a melancholic “thinking too precisely on th’ event” or a pawn of fate, but is himself responsible and guilty, we need only recall the words of the ghost at I. v. 84-86, which may be taken as the theme of Hamlet’s dilemma:

But howsoever thou pursues this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught.

He has heeded the latter stricture but failed the former. His mind has become tainted because between his charge and its accomplishment has intervened not time, not thought, not cowardice, not melancholy passion, but his own corrupt will—his pride.

All this being so, we are still left with our earlier question: How ought Hamlet to have behaved at the moment when for the wrong reasons he refrained from killing Claudius and when Claudius (according to what we know of the universal order) ought to have been killed by Hamlet? To arrive at the answer we must look for a moment to the remainder of the play. The climax at III. iii is clearly the point of Hamlet’s turning toward

evil, for which, because it results in his killing Polonius, he will eventually pay with his life. But there is a second turning point for Hamlet, namely the reversals of the sea voyage. The former turning takes place on stage, the latter, off. The former is a turning toward the self, the latter, away from the self. Both are turnings of the will; both are effected by providential circumstances. The switching of the letters that Rosen-cranz and Guildenstern carry and the adventure with the pirates constitute a demonstration for Hamlet of what we have ourselves seen demonstrated in the drama of the double-soliloquy scene, namely that “There’s a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will” (V. ii. 10,11). This is the first truth Hamlet must learn if his soul is to be purged. Notice that Hamlet is just now learning not *that* there is a divinity—that has never been in question—but what the relationship is between that divinity and men’s lives. Whatever his choices may be, good or evil, wise or foolish, they are woven into the fabric of reality according to a will that is not his own. And this realization makes possible Hamlet’s final comprehension, namely,

There is 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 it be not
now, yet it will come—the readiness is all.

(V. ii. 219-22)

Once he has learned the relevant fact about reality, he is able to strike the right attitude toward it. And that attitude is not a matter, strictly speaking, of morality, though it includes morality, nor is it a doctrine of inaction. It is, simply put, the doctrine of submission to the divine will, another expression of Christ’s “nevertheless not my will but Thy will be done.”

But, it will be argued, in the very next scene there is Hamlet finally killing Claudius in a vengeful passion. How can one assert that Hamlet has learned submission when the next thing we see him doing is engaging in the apparently immoral act of taking revenge? How does this answer the moral question surrounding the act of revenge? And what happens to the tragedy? Are we to say that the play has after all a happy ending?

I shall seem to digress to make one more point and then try to answer these questions. There is one further change to be observed in the play: Hamlet’s soliloquies cease in the fourth act. Up until his sea voyage, we have come to know Hamlet’s mind most deeply in his soliloquies. Suddenly they are no more, though the deepest things Hamlet utters remain to be spoken. After the sea voyage there is only dialogue and action, no soliloquy. Hamlet’s first turning, toward evil, is revealed in and

attended by a shift in the pattern of his soliloquies, from those in which reason supplants passion to those in which reason panders will. Hamlet's second turning marks the abandonment of the soliloquy altogether. Even at the most mechanical level of significance, this fact suggests that the soliloquy was a device suited for a particular purpose. Shakespeare uses the soliloquies to reveal something about Hamlet. When he ceases to use them, the thing is either sufficiently revealed or is no longer there to be revealed. In short, there has all along been some conflict, some contest, being waged within Hamlet, one that has been resolved after his sea voyage. This conflict is not between reason and passion, for both are still very much part of Hamlet's character at the end of the play and succeed one another in ruling him as often as ever.

We can get at this question of the disappearance of the soliloquy best, perhaps, by beginning with the one soliloquy we have left out of the discussion because it did not conform to the pattern we discerned in the rest, namely the "To be or not to be" soliloquy. Let me start by quoting Philip Thompson once more:

In the "To be or not to be" soliloquy Hamlet...elegantly phrases a conventional (Renaissance graduate student) explanation of the general human preference for quotidian misery over death, leaving Christianity completely out of the matter as the assignment dictated (impersonal, selfless). The speech is sweet-tempered and without personal urgency. . . . Compare this music of generalities—the mind, outrageous fortune, this mortal coil, the will, resolution, thought, great enterprises, etc.—with the several blood-and-guts outbursts and "the readiness is all" (personal, selfless).⁶

What this soliloquy shares with the others lies not in its similarity to them but in their common difference from what follows. To extend Thompson's language, what all the personal and self-filled soliloquies share with this impersonal and selfless soliloquy is a common distance from the personal and selfless statement of Hamlet's enlightenment. When filled with himself, Hamlet is passionate and proud. When engaging in a logical exercise, a traditional medieval *quaestio*,⁷ he is reasonable and unmoved. Nor are these two states of mind quite so far apart as they seem, for, as I have suggested, Hamlet's rationality, the very habit of mind that enables him here to engage in this exercise, prevails in each of the other soliloquies up until Act III, scene iii. Because of this, he is incapable of being carried away by passion to the degree that Laertes is; for example, he makes no such statement as

To hell, allegiance! vows, to the blackest devil!

Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!
 I dare damnation. To this point I stand,
 That both the worlds I give to negligence,
 Let come what comes, only I'll be reveng'd
 Most thoroughly for my father.

(IV. v. 132-37)

In saying this Laertes becomes a foil both for Hamlet's passionate desire for revenge and for his rationality. For Hamlet, and not for Laertes, death and its consequences are always present. He thinks and speaks about death and damnation throughout the play, attempting to come to terms with their implications for living, in particular for living under the charge of revenging his father's murder and under the emotional burden of his mother's o'erhasty and incestuous marriage.

But to the extent that Hamlet fears death's implications, to the extent that he would discover what death is in order to be sure of it and bring all the consequences of action under his control, to that extent is his reason, no less than Laertes' passion, tainted with pride. If his climactic error is wanting to damn Claudius's soul, has not his characteristic error been desiring to be the savior of his own? In any case, in refraining from killing Claudius for the reasons he expresses, he is guilty not only of seeking to act as the judge of souls but also of presuming to know the mysteries of heaven and hell, to be the master of death. For all his Renaissance doubt and correct observation of the facts of human existence in "To be or not to be," when it comes to the test, he forgets. He pretends to himself to know what death is when knowing it would serve the purposes of his revenge:

Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
 And that his soul may be as damn'd and black
 As hell, whereto it goes.

(III. iii. 93-95)

But for all the ghost says, and for all the contemplation and investigation of the question, death remains a mystery. To choose to know what death is before acting, to fear being dead, to pretend to know what it means to send another or oneself to death, all these are sins of pride, for they all imply that man can know "what dreams may come, / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil" when, in fact, he cannot. The fact of death, like the nature a man is given or the historical context into which he is placed, needs to be responded to, but not with any of the forms of pride.⁹

And now we can see why the soliloquies end at Hamlet's second turning. The conflict embodied in them is the conflict between the self and the world, between the personal will-nature-conscience and the nature of things, between a man's free will and providence, between

fallen man and judgment, between the difficulty and infinity of the choices a man must make and his ignorance about the context of those choices, i.e. "the undiscovered country." The question for Hamlet has been, all along, given his particular self, how is a man to live in harmony with the general principles of the universe? Given the answer to the logical *quaestio* "To be or not to be," namely that man will choose "quotidian misery over death," the implied life-question is "How?"

The soliloquies cease when Hamlet learns the answer. It lies in realizing that whatever a man does is taken up and made to serve the divine purpose; it lies in submitting to the divine will. It lies in readiness. And in the end all other readiness is included in the readiness to die, death being the final surrender of the will. What we know about death is akin to what we know about life—it is limited yet tempting knowledge. What we know about death is summed up in the "To be or not to be" soliloquy and in the graveyard scene. Those are the limits of our knowledge. Beyond this, death is "nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so," for, depending on who is speaking and when, death is "damnation" and "most horrible," or it is "felicity," or it is "silence." The readiness to die when death is what is willed by providence is all because it is the source of all other readiness to act in consonance with the divine will. This "personal, selfless" insight is as different from the personal, self-filled soliloquies as it is from the "impersonal, selfless" one. The Hamlet of the former soliloquies speaks the truth of the self while he is deaf to the divine will. The Hamlet of the latter speaks the truth of the world but has set aside the self "as the assignment dictated." The events of the sea voyage are an emblem of the meeting of the actual Hamlet with the actual world, after which the soliloquies are no longer to the purpose. Hamlet is now no longer a self apart from the world but a self engaged, a particular in right and harmonious relation with the general. It is in dialogue (and in dialogue with the friend he wears in his "heart of heart") that Hamlet speaks the deepest truth of the play, as it is only in dialogue with the world that he can have learned it.

At last we may return to the moral question raised by the double-soliloquy scene, and I believe we are now competent to answer it. How ought Hamlet to behave in Act III, scene iii, when it is for the wrong reasons that he refrains from killing Claudius? The answer seems to be that had Hamlet's will not gotten in the way at that moment, his passionate nature would have driven him to action. In other words, Hamlet is not responsible for what is God-given—either nature's livery (his birth, his wit, his melancholy "complexion") or fortune's star (his father's death, his mother's remarriage). What he is responsible for is the

choices he makes once those things are given. It is not then melancholy passion that taints his mind but pride and self-will. If the divine purpose includes bestowing not only the melancholy nature but the cue for passion upon Hamlet, it may well also include the use of both to effect its revenge. Hamlet's passion is as much the minister of providence as Hamlet himself, and this is shown at the end of the play when Hamlet kills Claudius not out of self-will but in a passion, the same sort of passion that has been characteristic of him all along. What this means is that there may be no moral way in which Hamlet might *choose* to kill Claudius in III iii, but there is a way in which providence might provide that Claudius be killed by Hamlet by putting Hamlet's passionate nature to work to kill Claudius in an outburst of emotion unhindered by moral scruple. (Notice my shift to the passive voice, the connection between "passive" and "passion.") In telling Horatio about his rash decision to read the grand commission given to Rosencranz and Guildenstern, Hamlet says, "let us know / Our indiscretion sometime serves us well / When our deep plots do pall" (V. ii. 7-9). Hamlet's very rashness and his passionate nature are tools of divinity.

What prevents Hamlet's called-for outburst of passion from leading to the death of Claudius in Act III, what prevents his rashness from becoming a tool of divinity, is simply his personal desire for ultimate revenge, the deepest plot of all. Had he renounced his own will in favor of that of providence, revenge would have been effected. It is this getting one's own will out of the way of providence that Hamlet means by "let be" at V. ii. 224. Thus the soliloquies cease not because Hamlet is no longer a melancholy or a passionate man but because he has learned that a man's melancholy is itself provided and provided for, that one may cease to be passion's slave only by becoming the servant of providence, and that the "vicious mole of nature" may threaten to damn a man, "His virtues else, be they as pure as grace, / As infinite as man may undergo" (I. iv. 33,34), but that the process is not inevitable, depending as it does upon the divine shaping and the will's own readiness to be shaped. All of Hamlet is redeemed, his melancholy passion as well as his virtue and nobility, when his will is submitted to that of providence. The conflict that the soliloquies are meant to expose is resolved neither in the transformation of a personal nature nor in death, but in the right relation to the divine.

Finally, lest this argument indeed appear to make of *Hamlet* a play with a happy ending, I shall call to mind that we need not demand the spiritual crushing of our hero, or for that matter of any of the characters, in order to retain the term "tragedy." Morton Bloomfield cautions that the

joy of the world implied in Christian tragedy differs significantly from the joy of the happy ending in this world in comedy.⁹ And J.V. Cunningham has shown that tragedy in the Renaissance consists not in the damnation of souls but in the ending of lives.¹⁰ The ending of *Hamlet*, as he demonstrates, is precisely tragic; it inspires woe and wonder in full measure, and does not do so the less for our conviction about Hamlet's spiritual regeneration. We would not out-Claudius Hamlet. Let us remember that it is wonderful, in both senses of the word, that he who would gain his life must lose it. Shakespeare has crafted a play that both depicts the tragic end of a great man and reveals its divine shaping. And his audience experiences as one both the pity and fear evoked by the former and the awe evoked by the latter. The unity *Hamlet* presents as theme is thus incarnated in the audience as experience, and we are brought to perceive the invisible, necessary, and redemptive union of the personal and the selfless, to live imaginatively the awesome and wondrous truth that life is both tragic and providential.

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Notes

¹Philip Thompson, in a letter to the author dated Nov. 18, 1976.

²All line references are to G. Blakemore Evans, ed., *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974).

³I take "scandal" at I. iv. 38 to suggest more than damage to reputation. J.V. Cunningham has argued persuasively (in a lecture at Brandeis University, Spring 1975) that in the context of ghostly visitations, allusions to purgatory, and words like "vicious," "guilty," "virtue," "grace," "corruption," "evil," "o'er-leaven," and "general censure" must imply a final judgment and that "scandal" thus implies damnation. The sense of the passage is that as one dishonorable custom can ruin an otherwise honorable nation in men's judgment, so one small evil can ruin an otherwise virtuous soul in God's—a fear that is later put to rest by Hamlet's recognition of the mercy behind the divine shaping of our ends (the "special providence in the fall of a sparrow"). Cf. the OED under "scandal" (sb. 1a, 1b, and 3 and v. 3) and Matthew 13:41 (Rheims). See also 1 Corinthians 5:4-8 for the image of leavening used in the context of references to sin and judgment, and Hilton Landry, "The Leaven of Wickedness: *Hamlet*, I. iv. 1-38," in *Pacific Coast Studies in Shakespeare*, ed. Waldo F. McNeir and Thelma N. Greenfield (Eugene, Oregon: Univ. of Oregon Books, 1966), 122-33, for an extensive (though in several respects questionable) discussion of the whole passage and its biblical allusions.

⁴Thompson, loc. cit.

⁵Expressing the desire for revenge is almost always in Shakespeare a sign of error: e.g., Kate's shrewishness (*Taming of the Shrew*, II. i. 29, 36), Malvolio's wounded vanity (*Twelfth Night*, V. i. 378), Shylock's villainy and misvaluation (*Merchant of Venice*, III. i. 54, 66-73), Iago's "motiveless malignity" (*Othello*, II. i. 294), etc.

⁶Philip Thompson, in a letter to the author received December, 1976.

⁷As J.V. Cunningham has called the "To be or not to be" soliloquy in a lecture at Brandeis University, Spring 1975.

⁸Philip Thompson comments (in a letter to the author posted May 17, 1985):

It is not that "he pretends to know what death is when such knowledge serves his purpose"—he "knows" as much about death as Dante and Claudius do, as much as any Christian does, knows that it sends the soul to judgment and if to an undiscovered country yet to one whose laws are published. His bad purpose depends on revealed truth; he has not invented Hell.

As a legitimate ruler in "This World," he should have felt that his duty was better fulfilled in executing a repentant murderer than it would have been in killing one rejoicing in his crime. On one level, his sin lies in breaking the law made especially for kings; on another, it lies in his truly damnable desire for a soul's damnation, in the identification of his hatred (not his mission) with the divine justice.

And I do not read the truth about death in "To be or not to be." What this passage does present is the truth about the fear of death in men for whom death is a closed book and suicide itself no sin (as the assignment specified).

⁹Morton Bloomfield, in a lecture series entitled "Medieval and Renaissance Tragedy and Notions of Tragedy," delivered at Brandeis University, Spring 1978.

¹⁰J.V. Cunningham, *Woe or Wonder: The Emotional Effect of Shakespearean Tragedy* (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1969), pp. 52, 56-59.

The Old Shepherd's Speech in *The Winter's Tale* by Mythili Kaul

During the last forty years Shakespearean critics have focussed attention on certain key passages of which the Old Shepherd's speech in IV, iv of *The Winter's Tale* would seem to be a good example. Considered as addressed merely to the immediate occasion, such passages appear disproportionately long. But, as has been shown, for example, in the case of Perdita's "flower" speech in this very play,¹ these speeches accomplish more than their immediate, ostensible purpose, and are in many ways, relevant to the whole play, and not just to the moment of their dramatic occurrence.

The Old Shepherd's speech deserves, but has not received, scrutiny along these lines. It has been almost completely ignored. Even a fairly recent critical study of the last plays lists it simply as an example of the sort of realistic detail Shakespeare uses to impart "verisimilitude" to a "romantic" play.² The speech, in fact does much more: it looks back to the opening scenes of *The Winter's Tale* and forward to the conclusion, suggesting some of the issues involved in the transition from the "tragic" action of the first part to the "comic" resolution of the second.

The speech, it will be remembered, occurs during the scene of the sheepshearing festivities and is addressed to Perdita, the Shepherd's purpose being to remind her of her duties as mistress and hostess of the feast:

Fie, daughter! when my old wife lived, upon
This day she was both pantler, butler, cook,
Both dame and servant; welcomed all, served all;
Would sing her song and dance her turn; now here,
At upper end o' the table, now i' the middle;
On his shoulder, and his; her face o' fire
With labour and the thing she took to quench it,
She would to each one sip. You are retired,
As if you were a feasted one and not
The hostess of the meeting; pray you, bid
These unknown friends to's welcome; for it is
A way to make us better friends, more known.
Come, quench your blushes and present yourself
That which you are, mistress o' the feast come on,
And bid us welcome to your sheep-shearing.

(IV. iv. 55-69)³

"Pray you, bid / These unknown friends to's welcome" is all that is

needed to answer the immediate requirement of the situation. That the Shepherd takes ten lines to come to these words no doubt provides verisimilitude, and shows up the old man's garrulity as well as his rustic inability to come directly to the point. At the same time, however, we note the substance of these opening ten lines, for in them the Shepherd recalls his dead wife and presents her as a model to be followed by Perdita in her present role as "mistress o' the feast." As "both dame and servant," as one who would welcome, serve, as well as "dance her turn," the wife is to the Shepherd the embodiment of the rites of hospitality.

This puts us immediately in mind of the play's opening situation where, too, the question initially is one of fulfilling the due requirements of hospitality. For although the setting and the language are different, Leontes, too, enjoins Hermione not to be "tongue-tied" (L ii. 27) but to help him in persuading their guest, Polixenes, to stay: "How thou lovest us, show in our brother's welcome" (L ii. 174). Hospitality is thus as much a value at the court as it is in the country, and the two cases are comparable in the recognition that upon women, as mistresses of the household, devolves the responsibility of upholding it, warmly and demonstrably. But when, in the Sicilian court, Hermione acts up to the model and becomes, as she puts it, Polixenes' "kind hostess" (L ii. 60), the consequences are disastrous. Hospitality by its nature involves demonstrative affection, physical proximity, and at least a show of intimacy. Where the Old Shepherd is concerned, these are utterly unambiguous. To him, his wife's drinking to each of her guests, "her face o' fire," her dancing "On his shoulder, and his," are the proper requirements of the situation, and he now recalls them as the signal marks of her success as a hostess. But where the Shepherd sees simplicities, Leontes is right away tormented by ambiguities. To him mingling "friendship far is mingling bloods" (L ii. 109), to entertain is to "derive a liberty / From heartiness" (L ii. 112-13), to be physically close is "to be paddling palms and pinching fingers" (L ii. 115)—so that in his case the upshot turns out to be suspicion and sexual jealousy. Thus, while the Shepherd's dead wife comes alive in his open eulogy, Hermione has to suffer the consequences of public humiliation and "death."

The issue, in fact, is not just one of hospitality. Other values are involved. While the Shepherd welcomes to his feast not only friends but also strangers, the guest who rouses Leontes' suspicion, we remember, is his dearest friend, his "brother" (L ii. 15), the man who next to Hermione and Mamillius is "apparent to [his] heart" (L ii. 177). In the country, that is, goodwill and trust lie at the base of human intercourse, so that strangers, "unknown friends," become "better friends." At court, on the other hand,

friends become estranged and longstanding affection turns into murderous hostility. Likewise, in the matter of kinship. For the most obvious thing we note in the Shepherd's speech is that the girl whom he calls "daughter" and whom he admonishes to emulate the ways of his honoured dead wife, is, in fact, the daughter of a man who had cast her off out of conviction of his wife's dishonour. This, moreover, when the Shepherd has assumed, no less than Leontes, that Perdita is a bastard, the result of "some stair-work," "some trunk-work," "some behind-door-work" (III. iii. 75-76). Unlike Leontes, however, he is not unwilling "to see this bastard kneel / And call me father" (II. iii. 155,56). Nor is greed his inducement for adopting Perdita in the first place, for it must be remembered that in Act III, scene iii, where he finds the infant, he decides to "take it up for pity" (III. iii. 78) before he finds the gold.

Trust, goodwill, compassion, openness to affection—these, then, would seem to be the contrasted set of values associated with the Shepherd's speech, if we read it in the context of the whole play. Such a reading would suggest a modification of the view that regards *The Winter's Tale* and the other last plays as essentially the drama of contrasted generations. In his study of *The Winter's Tale*, S.L. Bethell regards the Old Shepherd's speech itself as "another aspect of the contrast between older and younger generations."⁴ To the extent to which the speech goes beyond the comparison between the dead wife and Perdita, and points to the larger contrast between the Shepherd and his wife on the one hand, and Leontes and Hermione on the other, the contrast would be between two social settings or two modes of life, the pastoral and the courtly. The idea seems to be that the simple values necessary for human relationships, while acknowledged everywhere, are perverted among the sophisticated but still practiced and preserved among the simple. This is the social and moral significance of the pastoral. In this connection it is appropriate that Polixenes should describe his friendship with Leontes not only in pastoral terms but also in the past tense: "We were as twinn'd lambs that did frisk i' the sun, / And bleat the one at the other" (I. ii. 67-68). For obviously he is referring not only to a past period of their lives but to something, the idea of friendship itself, which is a matter of the past. By contrast the pastoral, the sheepshearing festivities within the pastoral, and the Old Shepherd's speech in the midst of these festivities, show us where and how the traditional values are still preserved, the Old Shepherd himself being presented as their chief transmitter—which is the point of his being described as "a weather-bitten conduit of many kings' reigns" (V. ii. 58-60).

The contrast in the Shepherd's speech between his wife and Perdita is in fact not a dramatic contrast at all. Its dramatic purpose is to suggest the process of continuity, the transmission of simple traditions through instruction and example. And, indeed, if we now look to the resolution of the play, it is apparent that Perdita, "the queen of curds and cream" (IV. iv. 161), the princess nobly born but nurtured by the rustics, is to be the agent of restoring the lost values to her father's court. And this is what happens with her return to Sicilia, followed by her "discovery," the reconciliation of Leontes and Polixenes, and the restoration of Hermione—all leading to the final "comic" resolution.

In this scene of harmony and fusion the rustics have a further part. For not only Perdita but the Old Shepherd and his son are transported to the court, receive "preferment" (V. ii. 123) and appear "in the blossoms of their fortune" (V. ii. 135). For them, however, this elevation does not mean the adoption of "court-odour" and "court-contempt" (IV. iv. 757,58). It involves a greater insistence still on simple human virtues, even to the point of pitying the rogue Autolycus in his present desperate straits and agreeing to intercede on his behalf with the prince. As the Old Shepherd puts it: "for we must be gentle, now we are gentlemen" (V. ii. 163,64).

On its side the court, in welcoming the rustics, demonstrates its readiness to accommodate the values indicated in the Old Shepherd's speech. The comic iteration of the Shepherd's son gives us a sense of this:

the king's son took me by the hand, and called me brother, and
then the two kings called my father brother, and then the prince
my brother and the princess my sister called my father father.
(V. ii. 151-55)

We notice, too, that the process whereby strangers become kin cuts, this time, across the widest possible social barriers.

University of Delhi

Notes

¹See Henri Fluchere, *Shakespeare* (London, New York, Toronto, Longmans, Green & Co., 1953), p. 183. See also D.A. Traversi's earlier analysis of several other passages in the play (*An Approach to Shakespeare* [New York: Doubleday, 1956], pp. 261-84) and F.R. Leavis' general observation regarding "the impossibility in *The Winter's Tale* of considering character, episode, theme and plot in abstraction from the local effects...of the poetry,

and from the larger symbolic effects to which these give life" ("The Criticism of Shakespeare's Late Plays," in *The Common Pursuit* [London, Chatto & Windus, 1953], p. 175).

²Howard Felperin, *Shakespearean Romance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 219,20.

³All references to *The Winter's Tale* are to *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Hardin Craig (Chicago, New York: Scott Foresman & Co., 1951).

⁴S.L. Bethell, *The Winter's Tale* (New York, Toronto: Staples Press, 1946), p. 43.

The 1986 Alabama Shakespeare Festival by Craig Barrow

As a person who has enjoyed the work of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival for over half its existence, I felt pleasurable anticipation in driving to Montgomery to see the new theater and the 1986 Shakespeare productions. Although I had seen the model of the new theater at the Festival in its last year in Anniston, seeing the new complex sitting on a hill with sedately paddling swans before it was another matter. The grounds of the theater are still being shaped, and the cultural park of which the theater is the most significant part will soon break ground for an art museum housing the collection of the Armory Gallery and the personal collection of Wynton and Carolyn Blount, whose gift built the new theater. The complex holds two theaters, the 225 seat Octagon and the 750 seat Festival Stage as well as tastefully furnished and decorated lobbies, a box office, a gift shop, and other public areas. Although no Shakespeare productions are scheduled this year for the Octagon, I did see one production in it, Regnard's *The Imaginary Heir*. While the size and shape of the Octagon fosters intimacy, patrons seated on the sides of the thrust stage may have a poor view depending on the centering of the action. The Festival Stage is marvelous, however. Like the Octagon it is a thrust stage in a theater that curves out like a lady's fan. Actors may enter from the sides and rear of the stage, from a trap door in the middle, and from two large ramps whose entrances are near the middle of, but below, the main seating area of the audience. These ramps create intimacy with actors and audience, but without either group inconveniencing the other. All seating is comfortable and close to the action with no seat further than 60 feet from the stage. Hugh Southern, of the National Endowment for the Arts, Olivia de Havilland, and Tony Randall have praised the theater complex extravagantly, but perhaps the most telling praise comes from Dennis Flower, Chairman of the Board of the Royal Shakespeare Company of Stratford, England, who says, "This theater surpasses everything . . . I'm going to be cautious—Englishmen always are—it's the finest theater complex and setting anywhere, anyplace, anytime." From what I have seen in England, Canada, and the United States, Mr. Flower may well be right. While the Festival is doing nine plays this season, only three are by Shakespeare, *Richard III*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

In his "Director's Notes" for the program of *The Merry Wives of*

Windsor, Londoner Tony van Bridge, who has directed Shakespeare in theaters throughout the United States and Canada, talks about the scholarly problems of Queen Elizabeth's supposed desire to see Falstaff in love, the anachronisms of the play, and the supposed shrinking of Falstaff's energy as a comic character due to the fading of the wit that in the Henry plays allowed Falstaff to escape traps set by Hal and by Falstaff's own discovered lies. The first two points van Bridge dismisses, saying that audiences hardly ever are troubled by these problems, but the third, on Falstaff, he argues by showing a progressive decline of Falstaff in all the Henry plays. As van Bridge says, "Falstaff was always a mountain of vanity, supported earlier by a dexterity of wit. Vanity is a quality that a man loses last." While van Bridge focuses on Falstaff in his notes, he suggests, since Falstaff is "the almost empty shell of the larger-than-life creature of the earlier plays," that the action of *Merry Wives* is larger than Falstaff. If so, one might well ask what that action is and how Falstaff fits into it.

J.R. Brown's *Shakespeare and His Comedies* provides a clue to these enigmas when he states, "Most of the *dramatis personae* of *The Merry Wives* are over-confident about appearances: Sir Hugh, Page, and Shallow forget that Slender's goodwill is not sufficient to enable him to play a lover's part; Sir Hugh and Dr. Caius are ridiculous in any role because they are too confident of their ability to speak English; Ford prides himself on his perspicacity but the 'truth' he sees derives only from his imagination."¹ In fact, as Brown shows, nearly every character is deceived by overestimating his own ability to deceive others and not be deceived himself. In terms of Bergson's *Laughter*, the most common comic device in the action is inversion, the trickster tricked. The Host deceives the would-be duelers, Dr. Caius and Sir Hugh, and he in turn is tricked out of his horses. The Pages deceive one another about Anne's marriage but are both deceived by Anne and Fenton, as Shakespeare nods slightly in the direction of Frye's sense of new comedy. Of course the keystone of this arch comedy is the would-be seducer of housewives, Falstaff, being tricked by Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford. That which allows all of these personages to be tricked is van Bridge's motive, vanity. Falstaff's situation is thus representative of nearly all of the characters. Like the others he must acknowledge a fault and join the right thinking of the Windsor community; the play then is a communal celebration in anachronistic eighteenth century terms, of right reason, after the flailing of vanity and error. Sir John is simply the greatest example in the play of a fault nearly all share.

The Alabama Shakespeare Festival production of *Merry Wives I*

think is successful in achieving this comic end. That the play is communal in nature is stressed by the crowd scenes, in which the cast is augmented by many extras, at play's opening and at its Herne's oak end, establishing a folk or group wisdom stronger than the vanity of individuals. While all performed well in the production, three were especially good, Betty Leighton as the malaprop spouting go-between of the lovers, the would-be lovers, and the plotters, who tells each what he wants to hear; Philip Pleasants as the jealous, frustrated Master Ford, who does and does not wish to see himself cuckolded; and Paul Thomas as a Falstaff who is a wit and a butt of wits. Each is remarkable in being able to attract the audience's interest and carry a play. Pleasants was superb in giving the audience the perspectives of Ford and Brook when disguised as the latter, and Thomas grew stronger in the course of the production as Falstaff. While Thomas seemed to have been influenced by Anthony Quayle's portrait of Sir John, even in terms of the fat man's muttering and shortness of breath in Quayle's version, Thomas brought his own talent to the character as well. The wives were good, Joan Ulmer particularly as Mistress Page, who radiated outraged middle class respectability at Falstaff's letter while also revelling in the plots to embarrass the stout knight. Pistol and Nym, played by Brian Martin and Peter Tkatch, were excellent in their proud refusal to decline delivery of Falstaff's love letters, and Claude Saucier as the ridiculous, mincing Slender and Robert Browning as the blustering Dr. Caius were fine also.

Alan Armstrong's costuming was of the period but too busy, featuring elaborate prints and designs. Dr. Caius' hat was so extravagant that Browning had to remove it occasionally so that his face could be seen. For the first half hour of the production, one had difficulty determining action, because the costuming was so distracting. Michael Stauffer's sets were good and relatively simple. He made excellent use of the main stage trap door to suggest the abode of Sir John, while the home-inn exterior was simple and effective. The scene in the forest was especially fine. All in all, the production was excellent.

Martin Platt, who last directed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the Alabama Shakespeare Festival in 1981, is the director of this year's production. The play has been done in a variety of ways over the years, the nineteenth century emphasizing natural spectacle and the twentieth, psychic fantasy and dream. In a fine essay, David Young has shown an action of concentric circles, each mirroring and sometimes influencing the other, with the ultimate power being the fairies, who, as Frye says, are "spirits of the elements" but essentially related to human life through service.² Plays within plays abound, from Oberon and Puck viewing and

modifying the romance of Titania and Bottom and the romances of the nearly interchangeable pairs of lovers to Peter Quince's love story of Pyramus and Thisbe. These lovers are in turn viewed by three married couples and the wedding party, who are viewed by Oberon, Titania, and Puck. And, of course, the entire cast was viewed, in Queen Elizabeth's day, by another wedding party. Dream, vision, and reason are key related terms in this play, as are lover, madman, and poet, with the potency and imagination of dream informing vision and reason. Love, as Helena says, "looks not with the eyes but with the mind" (I. i. 234), and this mind is a mix of dream, vision, and reason. Reason alone is not much help, for as Bottom says, "reason and love keep little company together" (III. i. 146, 47). Not surprisingly then, lovers run afoul of reason and authority, Theseus and Egeus, for unless reason is informed by dream and vision, love itself is chaos, with the ability to inflict suffering and death. As Theseus and Hippolyta know, the sword and injury can be a part of love (I. i. 16,17). The play, then, supports a number of generic possibilities in its juxtaposition of city and forest, night and day, according to Young. In the morality we progress from a fall from grace to a temporary prosperity of evil to divine reconciliation, while the romance goes through stages of separation, wandering, and reunion, and the pastoral romance through progressive scenes of society, wilderness, and improved society.³

The generic thrust of pastoral romance appears to be the aim of Platt's 1986 production, which Platt has set in Edwardian times through costuming and a staging verging on spectacle. These combine to contrast sharply with the fairy world of the forest so that public authority, judgment, and force are juxtaposed with magic, myth, and dream. As Platt has said in his "Director's Notes," "I found it essential to stress the true danger Hermia has put herself in when she violated the law by opposing her father," the world of authority, judgment, and force.

Instead of a stage where actors carry place on their backs, this production, especially in the scenes framing the forest, is heavy with statues, a bicycle built for two, props of all sorts, and the elaborate buttoned down quality of Edwardian dress. Edwardian theatrical spectacle surfaces in this production when a live dog is brought on stage with beaters in the hunting scene as the Duke discovers the sleeping pairs of lovers. Platt has taken great risks here, since such Edwardian spectacle could have overwhelmed the atmosphere of fantasy and dream in the forest, which it does not. In this production, Platt has even risked making the world of Oberon, Puck, and Titania spectacular. In place of natural forms and colors from the forest world, Michael Stauffer, the set designer, has created an abstract of metal trees from which

Oberon and Puck can rise and view the action, mechanically levitating, further emphasizing Edwardian stagecraft. Susan Rheume's costuming for the fairies also emphasizes artificial fabrics and metallic colors. Rather than characterizing the immortals as emanations of natural force, these appear to be the fairies of Victorian storybooks.

There are several excellent performances in Platt's production. Edward Conery plays a properly aristocratic Duke Theseus, politic and aware of social forms, while Egeus, as played by John Milligan, feels the crust of age in his absolute need to be obeyed. The two pairs of lovers, who frequently are cast as interchangeable adolescents, here appear as young adults, the Edwardian equivalent of Yuppies—Helena even wears glasses. This makes their transformation in the forest all the more profound, since each has more civilized fashions to lose. Evelyn Carol Case is an impetuous, defiant Hermia, Bruce Cromer a winning Lysander, while Tom Roling as Demetrius has the stolidity fathers love and Shannon Eubanks is a Helena who moves from prissiness to voluptuousness with ease.

Some of the greatest talent appears to shine among the mechanicals and the fairies, however. Claude-Albert Saucier enjoys the broad humor of his role as Flute/Thisbe, and Charles Antalosky, one of the ensemble's premier actors, plays Bottom's transformation and performance with winning physical humor. Greta Lambert's Titania and Philip Pleasants' Oberon are both masterful; they are at once royal, distant, and other-worldly, particularly Pleasants' Oberon. Jack Tkatch's Puck is disappointing; he is too familiar, a Tinkerbelle among greater forces. Although the play's Edwardian turn is surprising, it seems to work well, though not as well as the Festival production of *Richard III*.

If history, as Hayden White has been saying, exists only to defend institutions, then *The Tragedy of Richard III* as history play exists to defend the Tudors, so that Richmond appears as God's minister, to rid England of what A.P. Rossiter has called "the curse of faction, civil dissention and fundamental anarchy, resulting from the deposition and murder of the Lord's Anointed (Richard II) and the usurpation of the House of Lancaster"⁴ that culminated in the War of the Roses. In this view history becomes a morality play with Richmond as the good angel and Richard as the Vice. Tragedy here becomes what Robert Heilman calls melodrama, with Richard as aggressor and the people he dupes—Clarence, Buckingham, Hastings, Anne, young Dorset and Grey, and possibly Elizabeth—as victims. But many of these victims are not innocent; Richard has been able to use them because of their ambition and lust for power. Repeatedly, as the play chronicles Richard's ascent to

the crown, we see him persuading his victims to comply with his wishes despite their knowledge of his previous wrongs.

But even if the play involves some combination of morality and melodrama, as Rossiter and Heilman contend, this does not explain the general fascination with Richard. Rossiter points out the theatrical devices and metaphors Richard uses, his delight in “playing,”⁵ while Heilman elaborates this notion in suggesting that Richard resembles a picaresque hero and that for an audience, there is something fascinating, almost enjoyable, about Richard’s tricks. As Heilman says, there is in Richard “a certain gamesomeness, a certain friskiness in tactics, a quickwitted sizing up of weaknesses and openings, a virtuosity in role that we can ordinarily enjoy for their own sake; . . . But suddenly give the almost amiable trickster ruthlessness and treachery, and we find ourselves, if not painfully trapped, at least thrust into an ambiguity of response.”⁶ What does such a character do to the play’s genre?

Director Edward Stern sees the play as containing motifs from many genres but gaining coherence primarily from the character of Richard III—in short, dramatic unity derives from the hero much like Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*. What seems to fascinate Stern about the play is its theatricality, the theatricality of a young playwright confident in his powers, and the compelling character of Richard himself. Richard and Buckingham, as mentioned earlier, frequently use theatrical metaphors as they play the game of political advancement and in so doing “counterfeit the deep tragedian” (III. v. 5). But there are staged spectacles of theatricality as well in the play such as a funeral, a marriage proposal, beheadings, a battle, and a coronation. Not only does Stern play the ceremonial and ritual actions for all they are worth in this production, but he makes great use of Greek choral devices throughout the play. While Richard’s victims parade in his sleep before the battle of Bosworth Field, they also virtually appear at other moments when there are no spoken lines for them, culminating in their appearance in the battle. Considering the great number of people on stage in such scenes, it is important that the set design allows movement of people to facilitate their entrances and exits and that the image of crowds be promoted to make the ensemble appear even larger than it is. Michael Stauffer has designed a marvelous set for this purpose. The second level above the stage is really many levels, appearing as a wall unit composed of open-ended boxes of many sizes. The choral effects and great crowd scenes make effective use of such a set. In addition to the lines of the characters, change of place is shown by changes in hanging tapestries from the boxes of the set and by rolled carpeting and runners.

Obviously this play requires a Richard of extraordinary power, and it has one in Philip Pleasants, newly returned from *Amadeus* in New York. He was well prepared for his role as Richard by his performance of Iago, my favorite of the many roles he has played at the Festival. Richard's rhetoric must be convincing, since, as stated earlier, his victims, such as Anne and Elizabeth, have evidence of his ill will. He must accept their anger and spit like a devilish Christ or a Japanese wrestler in order to use their own force to overthrow them. This Pleasants does as he works through a crescendo of ever increasing difficulties to overcome while favoring the audience with many comic asides pointing to the weaknesses of his victims. The audience, many of whom are aware of Montgomery's place in the political theater of George Wallace and Martin Luther King, rewarded Pleasants with a standing ovation.

While the entire cast was superb, some performances require special praise. Edward Conery's mannered political adroitness as Buckingham mirrored Pleasants' portrayal nicely, and Tom Roling was excellent as a Hastings of fleshy appetite and a dim sense of evil and responsibility. Charles Antalosky as Clarence dealing with his murderers was also fine, but the women in the cast were magnificent: Joan Ulmer as Richard's mother, living to curse her son, Betty Leighton in the Hecuba-like role of Queen Margaret, Greta Lambert as the mourning but wooed Lady Anne, and Darcy Pulliam as Queen Elizabeth, who must confront the murderer of her children in his unusual role as suitor to her daughter. The choral grief of these women (IV. iv) was beautifully rendered. On the whole I thought the production of *Richard III* superlative, the best I have ever seen.

I foresee a good future for the reconstituted Alabama Shakespeare Festival. While solid productions require talent in acting, directing, set design, costuming and lighting, these elements are brought to fruition only through financial contributions, marketing and audience support. The Festival appears to have good relations with the City of Montgomery and the State of Alabama, both of which provide support. The business community, spearheaded by the Blounts, has also done its share. So too have the state's public colleges and universities. While I would encourage people to book the Festival's touring company, the best place to see the Festival is in Montgomery itself. When the art museum is completed, a potential audience from around the South can sample a variety of arts while they watch the plays throughout the week. Shakespeare lovers everywhere should take advantage of this opportunity.

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

***For information about the Festival, call (205) 277-BARD.**

Notes

¹John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare and His Comedies* (London: Methuen, 1968), p. 99.

²David Young, "Structure in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," in *Essays in Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. James L. Calderwood and Harold Toliver (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 141, 142.

³Young, p. 225.

⁴A.P. Rossiter, "Angel with Horns: the Unity of *Richard III*," *Shakespeare: the Histories*, ed. Eugene M. Waith (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 70.

⁵A.P. Rossiter, pp. 80-82.

⁶Robert B. Heilman, "Satiety and Conscience: Aspects of *Richard III*," *Essays in Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. James L. Calderwood and Harold Toliver (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 139.



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