

THE IDOLS OF THE TRIBE

THE IDOLS OF THE TRIBES:  
A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF THE  
COMMENTATOR IN SHAKESPEARE'S  
TRAGEDIES

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Scope and Contents: General problems concerning Shakespeare's ethical stance are related to the role of the commentator in his drama. A survey of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama indicates that there was a development from formal choric devices toward commentating characters who are absorbed into the dramatic structure. Factors which may have influenced Shakespeare's use of the commentating figure are suggested. After a preliminary study of Shakespeare's methods of presenting commentary in his history plays, the thesis concentrates on the varied ways in which Shakespeare develops the role of the commentator in his major tragedies. The conclusion relates the problems which Shakespeare examines by means of this distinctive feature of his tragic vision to the work of other major Renaissance writers.

There are and can be only two ways of searching into and discovering truth. The one flies from the senses and particulars to the most general axioms, and from these principles, the truth of which it takes for settled and immovable, proceeds to judgment and to the discovery of middle axioms. And this way is now in fashion. The other derives axioms from the senses and particulars, rising by a general and unbroken ascent, so that it arrives at the most general axioms last of all. This is the true way, but as yet untried.<sup>1</sup>

The Idols of the Tribe have their foundation in human nature itself, and in the tribe or race of men. For it is a false assertion that the sense of man is the measure of all things. On the contrary, all perceptions as well of the sense as of the mind are according to the measure of the individual and not according to the measure of the universe. And the human understanding is like a false mirror, which receiving rays irregularly, distorts and discolours the nature of things by mingling its own nature with it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Bacon, The New Organon and Related Writings, ed., by F. H. Anderson (New York, 1960), XIX, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., XLI, p. 48.

TO MY PARENTS

## PREFACE

I have used the Tudor Edition of Shakespeare's Complete Works, edited by Peter Alexander, throughout this study.

The Bibliography contains a selective list of the works which I have found useful in conducting this study. Complete references for the footnotes are supplied. I have also included references for the minor dramatic works which I have discussed. I have not, however, included references to the works of the major dramatists which I examined since such works are generally available and my discussion does not involve reference to any specific edition.

I would like to acknowledge help from several sources in the preparation of this thesis. First and foremost I wish to thank Dr. B. W. Jackson who has supervised my work. His patient criticism, perceptive suggestions and constant encouragement have helped me immeasurably in shaping this thesis into its final form. He has, indeed, given the impression of being "As one, in suff'ring all, that suffers nothing". My thanks are due also to the trustees of the Queen Elizabeth II Ontario Scholarship whose grant enabled me to undertake this research. I am grateful to the Graduate Studies Office at McMaster for the travel grants which enabled me to make indispensable visits to the Folger Shakespeare Library. I owe a debt of gratitude to Maurice James who first aroused my interest in Shakespeare and helped to shape my ideas with his own profound enthusiasm and scholarship. Finally, I would like to thank my wife whose sympathy and encouragement have helped me throughout the writing of this thesis. Her criticisms and suggestions have been a constant resource for me in clarifying my ideas.

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# I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1

I am concerned in this study with a group of secondary characters in Shakespeare's tragedies whose dramatic functions have been too readily taken for granted. Characters such as Enobarbus, Horatio, Apemantus and Lear's Fool are often regarded as comfortably straightforward, known entities that can be labelled "choric", base camps from which to begin the desperate struggle of scaling the major peaks - the tragic heroes. Far from being simple and obvious, the function of such characters is of the very essence of the complicated process of tragedy. It is through the views of characters such as Mercutio, Friar Laurence, Kent and Menenius that the problems of the tragic hero are re-examined from a different perspective. There is no way of fitting such characters into a rigid pattern. They are not used unvaryingly in a conventional way to serve a simple dramatic function. They respond in distinctly individual ways to the particular circumstances of the tragic world in which they find themselves. Often friend to the hero, they are as likely to turn up in Fool's motley, as servant, as cynic, or trusted counsellor. There is no epithet which will adequately cover all of them. I shall call them generally and most frequently 'commentators', though some of them fit more comfortably into that role than others, some maintaining a role of detached observation, others becoming embroiled in action. They are commentators in the sense that they usually offer an independent viewpoint which we can distinguish from that of the hero, a version of events based usually on a seemingly detached evaluation which contrasts with the versions of those enmeshed in the action. I shall also call some of the characters 'plain-dealers', 'truth-

tellers', 'blunt, honest men', 'worldly-wise observers' when such a description seems to pinpoint more clearly a particular aspect of their commentary.

Obviously each tragic world in Shakespeare is isolated, with separate problems which demand different solutions. Yet all of these characters seem to have certain broad-based functions in common. Many of them attempt to draw the hero away from the dizzying heights of tragic involvement to a more familiar and established world, or they try to interpret the world in which they find themselves in what, in more normal conditions, might be seen to be a realistic way. Almost all of them are, in their various ways, blessed with the belief that they can see the world through clear eyes, and that in a reasonable, common-sensical way they can perceive truths about the nature of their world which seem to be obscured from those around them. I think that Shakespeare was constantly aware that certain of the secondary characters must be used to bridge the gap which the development of tragic situations interposes between hero and audience. The unifying factor in a study of such characters is that they seem to be used in a distinctive way to communicate effectively the impact of tragedy to an audience.

The tragic heroes are remarkable and unusual characters and it is not to be thought that we can easily have traffic with such men. They have to be interpreted to us, translated or transmitted through a variety of mediums - our representatives in the tragic world who find themselves far from the normal world which we, the audience, inhabit. It is generally recognized that we would be unable to comprehend fully the tragedy of Lear if we did not see it set against the more 'normal' preoccupations of the Fool, Kent and Poor Tom. In face of Lear's titanic anger on the heath, his vagabond entourage bend their entire efforts to the accomplishment of one seemingly very simple and normal task - they struggle to find shelter for Lear, to get him in out of the rain.

This normal reaction to the weather tests the will and wit of all characters around Lear for the entire central section of the play. It is the interposition of these characters, whose endeavours in contrast to Lear's preoccupations seem ludicrous, which enables an audience to understand more clearly the extraordinary nature of Lear's struggle with the gods and his need for divine retribution to punish his daughters.

It has long been a critical commonplace that Lear's world is much more appallingly tragic by virtue of its contrast with the world of Gloucester. Because Gloucester is both bewildered by his situation and seeks consolation in commonplace sentiments that are the coin of a much more general attitude to grief and distress, Lear's world is distanced by contrast but also made more apprehensible because of the careful gradation of tragic forces. A younger brother abusing his father's ear against an elder brother is closer to normal experience than a king carving up his realm on the basis of a competition in rhetoric. We are not at home in any part of the Lear world but we can bear to be in it and can open ourselves to its terrible meanings more successfully because Gloucester's family shares the same world. Shakespeare's tragic world is above and beyond us but it reaches us and affects us deeply because of its complex portrayal of secondary characters sucked into the tragic whirlpool, characters who can relate easily to an audience because they, too, are bewildered and appalled by the magnitude of events around them.

I take it that the whole world of the tragic hero as a literary fiction, as an intensification of even abnormal experience, was beyond the experience of every member of the Elizabethan audience. The term 'normal', then, as referring to the commentators, is used relatively. These characters in Shakespeare's tragedies operate on assumptions which are more nearly in conformity with those of the real world with which the Elizabethans, in their vast multiplicity of

lives, were familiar. Many of the characters in which I am interested are foremost in the tragedies in which they occur in providing a constant presence of normality against which we may judge events which take us beyond our previous experience.

The Elizabethan audience, which was familiar with morality plays and comedies based on stereotyped characters, had learnt to make simple and predictable responses to drama. Much of Shakespeare's art in the tragedies seems to me to have been developed in order to defeat this simple reflex habit of interpretation. By taking one event and producing multiple facets of that event through the varied and cross-cutting responses of each character he made it impossible for the audience to stand aloof in moral certainty. We have to realize that Shakespeare does not disappear behind one character but into all of them and their situations. An intelligent audience will not be able to resist Shakespeare's pressure. Using all the devices at his disposal he will force it to assume a ubiquity similar to his own.

It is true that the commentators seem to act as our representatives in the tragic world. It is not that we identify with them but that we take their responses, frequently ones of 'common sense', as expected normal responses to the situations in which they are involved. They exhibit responses that we might expect, that even we ourselves might make. Some of them are cynics, 'realists' or 'plain-dealers' as with Thersites and Apemantus. Many of them are experienced and know the ways of the world. They may scold, lecture, exhort or rail; they may wish to cure the folly rampant in their world or they may merely laugh at it. Whitaker has said that Shakespeare, adjusting his sources for didactic purposes, expands or invents characters such as Enobarbus, Horatio and Menenius to serve as his mouthpieces.<sup>1</sup> Such an assumption is, in my view, a mistake.

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<sup>1</sup>V. K. Whitaker, "Shakespeare's Use of his Sources", PQ, XX (1941) p. 384.

I hope to show that they have no such simple function and that Shakespeare wishes us to steer around the most immediate and obvious kind of parable structure to a more complicated conclusion. Shakespeare, far from using these characters as a ventriloquist uses his dummy, often embroils them in the action, undermines their assured detachment and exposes their suggestions and advice as impracticable in the situations on which they comment. Tragedy inevitably corrodes their sense of detachment; it sucks the commentator into the whirlpool and mingles his version of events with many others. It is because such characters can become embroiled that we see the limitations in a view which makes confident judgements on others whilst assuming a personal immunity to folly. Often, of course, the prophecies of doom made by such characters are fulfilled, but not before the situation has caught them by the heels and demonstrated their own vulnerability.

The straightforward assumptions of the world of black and white morality are raised only to be questioned in the development of the characters I shall discuss. I must make it clear that I do not wish to imply that Shakespeare eschewed moral conclusions or found better ones than the medieval plays had offered, only that, in a more sophisticated age with a more comprehensive awareness of and insight into individual psychological problems, he found it necessary to tease out the full implications of the complicated tragic structures which he had set in motion.

We are not meant to hold the views of the commentators lightly for they are often shrewd and capable men, but we are meant to observe how difficult it is to act reasonably in a world as complicated as that created by the tragic hero. If, from a sense of superiority, we condemn such characters, we ignore much that Shakespeare is trying to accomplish. Many of the commentators are very attractive and elicit considerable sympathy from us. We must remember

that although they strive to maintain a detached and rational viewpoint, they lack the privileged immunity of the audience. As we struggle to make sense of the suffering before us we should be aware that it is often from the suffering and bewilderment of the commentators that we have a great deal to learn.

Shakespeare often uses the relationship between the hero and commentator to present contrasting views on some of the crucial problems which puzzled the Elizabethan age. Certainly these problems do not appear in every play, but if we take the tragedies as a whole we can see the importance of the relationship. Shakespeare, in the conflicting views of the hero and the commentator, explores the problem of whether man is agent or patient of his own destiny. He contrasts the static character with the dynamically developing character, and as a consequence contrasts also the conceptual world-view of the one with the perceptual world-view of the other. We are made aware of the distinction between the simple character who pursues order and the complex character who brings chaos. The involved active character faces the detached contemplative character. The man who prides himself on his rational abilities advises the character overwhelmed by passion. The one believes himself to be in contact with reality and attempts to steer his companion out of the world of illusion by combatting folly with wisdom. Stated thus bluntly this is an oversimplification of the subtle analyses which Shakespeare undertakes. In examining the plays in detail I shall endeavour to examine the great variety of ways in which Shakespeare tackled many of these problems. Shakespeare was magnificently endowed with the ability to see both sides of any question and this distinctive gift is nowhere more clearly marked than in the relationships between hero and commentator. Marion Smith in her book on other aspects of this subject says:

The double vision of life is not confined to lunatics, poets and lovers who awake on a May morning in a wood near Athens; it is the hallmark of the questioning, the creative spirit, which is not satisfied with simple answers to complex problems or with the application to human experience of watertight categories and rigid value-judgements. It is a state of mind which cannot entertain a concept without a simultaneous and lively awareness of its opposite, which is "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after" not merely "fact and reason" but consistency and certainty.<sup>1</sup>

There are, of course, many plays of Shakespeare's where one could choose to examine the detached viewpoint of commentators. In the comedies there are many clowns and truth-tellers such as Feste, melancholic observers such as Jaques, loyal counsellors such as Lafeu and Gonzalo, blunt speakers such as Paulina, and commentating servants such as Speed. But in comedy the views of a commentator are not put under the same destructive pressure that we find affecting them in tragedy. In the ethical pattern of re-educating and restoring the world their common-sense attitude is often quite adequate to the occasion. Many commentators are in their very element in the world of comedy because characters and situations are tractable enough for them to point toward a happy conclusion. Throughout Elizabethan comedy we find a vast variety of commentators, rational men unafflicted by bad humours, wise counsellors and witty clowns who undertake to cure the world of its folly. But it was left to Shakespeare to examine the problem of what would happen to such characters when they were introduced into the tragic world. They are one of the distinguishing marks of Shakespearian tragedy, for we find very few such characters in the tragedies of any of Shakespeare's contemporaries and for this reason alone we should attach special significance to them.

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<sup>1</sup>M. B. Smith, Dualities in Shakespeare (Toronto, 1966), p.3. For another view of Shakespeare's ability to present multiple versions of a situation, the debate structure of many plays, and an examination of the relevance of Keat's views see: Clifford Leech, "The 'Capability' of Shakespeare", SQ, XI (1960), 123-136.

Some readers may feel that I have included characters who cannot, properly speaking, be called commentators; other readers may feel that I have omitted a study of characters whom they consider to be commentators. In the rich variety of Shakespearian characterization it is difficult to isolate clearly identifiable groups, for the individual characters are always stretching out to indicate their relationships with other characters outside one's consideration. I have made several generalizations in this introduction but clearly they cover some but by no means all of the characters on which I am focussing my attention. Thersites and Friar Laurence would appear to have no relation to each other even under the broadest terms of reference. But if we see them as polar extremes of a continuum, and place between them characters such as Apemantus, Faulconbridge, Kent, Enobarbus, and Menenius, we may perceive some connection. The connection, of course, is not in the details of their characters but in their function in the structure of the plays in which they appear, in their presentation to the audience of an independent and significant viewpoint which is crucial to the problems examined by the play.

I have studied a few of the History plays in which Shakespeare seems to be working out preliminary devices which he later used in the tragedies. I have studied one or more characters in all of the major tragedies save Macbeth. The exception is instructive, for the older pattern of de casibus tragedy exhibiting the career of a tyrant is nearer to the surface here than elsewhere in Shakespeare. We are closer, too, to the gloomy atmosphere presented in other tragedies by Jacobean dramatists. There is no place where a blunt truth-speaker might take his stand in such a world, for the remorseless villain-hero sweeps all opposition and open comment aside. The fate of Banquo, who might well have served as a commentator, indicates the dangers of a detached viewpoint in Macbeth's world. Lady Macbeth is endowed with considerable qualities as a blunt-speaker

yet she can hardly be said to be a representative of the normal world. Macbeth, of course, like other tragic heroes, faces the criticism of his own conscience. But the truth-speakers in this world - the Weird Sisters - comment ambiguously and far from attempting to avert tragedy they help to ensure its inevitability. Their detachment is not undermined nor are they ever subjected to the catastrophic consequences of tragedy. There is no open and honest criticism from anyone uninvolved in the action designed to alert Macbeth to the consequences of his bloody career. In the other tragedies advice or criticism is open and free, or in the special case of Othello has the appearance of being open and free. The nature of the villain-hero and the dominance of evil which we note in Macbeth explains, perhaps, why Shakespeare's contemporaries, many of whom devoted their tragedies to similar subjects, found no place for commentators in their work.

Many of the commentators I have chosen to examine have an intimate relationship with the hero which admits them to a position of major significance. Most of them are remarkable in that they are either totally invented by Shakespeare or they are elevated to a significance out of all proportion to the fragmentary details we have of them in the sources of the plays in which they appear. In view of this and because of the repeated appearance of the commentators in the tragedies I assume that Shakespeare had important functions for them to perform. It is remarkable also that many of them have little significance in terms of plot; they could be removed from the plays without causing any major change in the course of the action. And yet no-one would deny that the plays would be immeasurably diminished if they had not been included. Hamlet without Horatio, King Lear without the Fool, Antony and Cleopatra without Enobarbus - how could an audience relate to the heroes and fully comprehend their tragic situations without such secondary characters? After their many years of dutiful service the functions of such characters should not be too readily taken for granted.

In dealing with the group of characters whom I have broadly defined as Shakespeare's commentators I am immediately involved in two problems that have been the cause of much contention in modern criticism. I shall discuss, ✓in a general way, the problems of psychological verisimilitude in Shakespeare's characters and the ethical implications of his plays. in order to make clear at the outset where I stand on the two problems that have loomed largest in post-Bradleyan Shakespearian criticism. It is necessary to do so because the characters with which I am dealing have very frequently been taken to be amalgams of conventions tactically used by Shakespeare to illuminate the meaning of his plays with scant attention to psychological verisimilitude. They have also been frequently taken to represent Shakespeare's ethical implications, to stand in a choric relation to the play as Shakespeare's mouthpieces. Throughout this study I am engaged in an attempt to demonstrate that neither of these critical commonplaces is acceptable. It is necessary, therefore, to grapple with some of the general theoretical problems as a background for the analysis of individual characters.

Writers such as Schucking, Stoll and Bethell have attacked Bradley's detailed character analysis by proposing to explain Elizabethan drama in terms of conventions. Bradley, it is true, was influenced in his analyses by modern methods of character portrayal. But these critics in refuting Bradley have also been influenced by the practices of modern creative writers. If characterization is not as detailed, motivated, consistent and self-explanatory as in the modern novel then to these critics it is not psychological at all. It is as though the possibilities for psychological characterization had suddenly sprung full-grown from Freud's forehead. In the highly detailed modern novel the linear chain of cause and effect produces what are taken to be consistent and

coherent characters. It is easy to see that this method of character depiction can become as mechanistic and artificial, as remote from reality as those principles on which Stoll and others claimed Shakespeare based his own methods. Clearly we have no concern with Lear's wife, Lady Macbeth's children, or Hamlet's courses at Wittenberg; to point out that Shakespeare shows no concern with such detailed matters does not prove that he was not interested at all in personality and psychology. Elizabethan psychological theories will not explain Shakespeare's characters for us, but the lack of Freudian detailing, of modern techniques of artifice by means of psychology, does not prove that Shakespeare had no interest in personality - it merely proves that he lived before Freud.<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare's tragedy adopts the convention of putting the relationships between individuals under a pressure that forces radical change. The changes may be unlike the method of character development in modern drama, modern psychology, or the modern novel, but they are consistent within their own terms and within the experience of the play.

In reaction to Bradley's tendency to search for the dimensions of the novel within the drama many of the 'new critics' turned towards the treatment of the drama as a poem. The host of ingenious textual interpretations concerned with the poetic structure frequently stem from the assumption which poor Lamb entertained<sup>2</sup>, that a performance of Shakespeare's plays gets in the way of a true

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<sup>1</sup>We must remember, however, that the Elizabethan dramatist's method of developing characters, though it may not accord with modern psychological theories, may well have fitted in with theories held by his audience. As Madeleine Doran has said: "A certain type of person would be expected to do certain things, a certain passion to result in certain actions, and no explanation would be necessary. That we are inclined to label lack of motivation may often be only our failure to recognize a reason for action clear to an Elizabethan audience". Endeavours of Art, (Madison, 1954), p. 251.

<sup>2</sup>Lamb, of course, had opportunity to see only highly modified versions of Shakespeare's plays in productions which were often mediocre.

appreciation of them. Only a philistine would claim that we must confine our analysis of a play to our primary experience of it in the theatre, but we must not bury that experience of the dramatic structure unfolding to us for the first time under interpretations of scissors and paste complexity, rambling all over the canon to prove a point dear to our own self-esteem. There must surely still be some value in analyzing the ways in which Shakespeare designed his plays for a live audience, the infinite pains he took to relate his themes dramatically, the devices that he displays for involving an audience while the play is in progress, not over many months in the study, but in the two hour's traffic of the stage. In studying the commentators for exactly the above purposes, I find myself in agreement with Fergusson's caveat in face of the new criticism:

In general, the new critics have taught us to read any literature with more understanding; and, since we lack a theater, we need their lore in order to read dramatic literature also. But a drama, as distinguished from a lyric, is not primarily a composition in the verbal medium; the words result, as one might put it, from the underlying structure of incident and character. As Aristotle remarks, "the poet, or 'maker' should be the maker of plots rather than of verses; since he is a poet because he imitates, and what he imitates are actions". This distinction shows where my intention diverges from that of the properly literary critic: I am in search of that dramatic art which, in all real plays, underlies the more highly evolved arts of language.

It is essential to approach drama not merely as an end product on which to exercise ingenuity, but also to approach it from the writer's side as process, as means. A dramatist faces very basic and practical problems in structuring his work, in ensuring that his plot, themes, characters and action will attain a maximum impact on an audience. It is worth asking in criticism not only what answers, what ideas a play produces, but what questions a dramatist

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Fergusson, The Idea of a Theatre (New York, 1953), pp. 21-22.

asks himself in working his way towards those answers. We can ask why out of a few brief references in Plutarch, Shakespeare fashioned the important figure of Enobarbus. Shakespeare considered the character essential in his interpretation of the tragedy and we can ask how he develops the character and what specific dramatic functions it serves. To say that he is an amalgam of conventions or a choric figure is to dodge the issue of the ingenuity of his construction. I do not take him to be a mechanism or to have a dramatic life outside the play, but I do take him to be a totally explicable character within the terms of the play in which he appears. Wilson Knight's warning against critical extremism is still valid:

The older critics drove psychological analysis to unnecessary lengths: the new school of "realistic" criticism, in finding faults and explaining them with regard to Shakespeare's purely practical and financial "intentions", is thus in reality following the wrong vision of its predecessors. Both together trace the process of my imaginary critic, who, thinking to have found an extreme degree of realism in one place, ends by complaining that he finds too little in another. Neither touch the heart of the Shakespearian play.<sup>1</sup>

In face of the increasing amount of material concerned with Elizabethan stage conventions we certainly are no longer justified in treating characters as case-histories which can be explained in terms of modern psychological theories as long as we are willing to work the pieces of the puzzle together. We can, however, avoid being "hag-ridden by conventions"<sup>2</sup> and we may still search for psychological verisimilitude consistent with the terms of stage illusion. A sole concern with personality problems in drama is far too restrictive. But if we are to have explanations of broad symbolic significances in the drama entirely

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<sup>1</sup>G. Wilson Knight, "On the Principles of Shakespearian Interpretation", in Norman Rabkin, ed., Approaches to Shakespeare (New York, 1964), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>S. L. Bethell, Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition (London, 1944), p. 97.

at the expense of personality, then this seems a very heavy price to pay. We find such interpretations in works by Watkins<sup>1</sup>, Bethell<sup>2</sup>, and Ribner<sup>3</sup>. In the pendulum swing of critical activities there are too many either/or propositions, as though a writer concerned with details of personality must inevitably exclude any preoccupation with wider symbolic significances or vice-versa. When Ribner, in order to emphasize symbolic function in character, claims that Lear's Fool is merely a mechanism operating as the conscience of the King in whom we must expect no psychological consistency, that Cordelia appearing at the end of the play as a spirit of love and forgiveness has no psychological connection with the Cordelia of the first scene, that Shakespeare had two Cleopatras in mind, the whore and the woman transfigured by love, and made no attempt to reconcile them, we are surely in a world of theory where we must cut our nose off to spite our face. This kind of extremism reduces the drama to a parade of static symbols, denies the dynamism, the pattern of growth within dramatic action. If those who would have psychological consistency at all costs expect the detail of motive and character of everyday life they must be denied. It is a convention of the stage that tragedy far from being like everyday life is a unique experience. Shakespeare presents not peasants in a hut but King Lear in a hovel at the crisis of his life. It is a mistake to carry such characters outside the confines of the play speculating in 'ifs' and 'buts', but we can understand the development of Lear from the experiences he suffers within the play. In relating Elizabethan drama to its inheritance from medieval drama we must not obscure the fundamental

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<sup>1</sup>W. B. C. Watkins, Shakespeare and Spenser (Princeton, 1950).

<sup>2</sup>Op. cit.

<sup>3</sup>Irving Ribner, Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy, (London, 1960).

differences in technique between them. Of course the characters in King Lear array themselves in opposed camps of good and evil but they are not static characters, for we see them grow individually in response to unique situations. Of course Ribner and others are right to point out the elements of Everyman in Lear, but the play is not about Everyman. There are dimensions of the play in which Lear's problems are Everyman's, but there are other dimensions in which the problems are uniquely Lear's. We recognize the relevance of Lear's pre-occupations to ourselves yet we do not identify with him. The Renaissance concerns with a universal morality and the problems of individuality fuse in Shakespeare. To attempt to make one aspect emerge triumphant over the other is to ignore the brilliance of the fusion which Shakespeare achieved. Earlier drama may have emphasized one aspect and later drama the other, but in Shakespeare each individual character traces out his unique destiny which nevertheless relates him to all men.

In making an analysis of character and the dynamics of character growth and interaction I am aware that I may be involved in what is considered an old-fashioned occupation. I hope to avoid the snares of romantic criticism and to use recent scholarship in Renaissance studies without allowing it to force upon me extremist views. The dangers of historical criticism were amply demonstrated by the enthusiastic embrace of theories about Elizabethan psychology and physiology, which frequently illuminated many passages at the expense of reducing Shakespeare's characters to stereotypes and of enlisting the dramatist's support for a bewildering multiplicity of contradictory theories. One of the unfortunate aspects of this kind of criticism was that it emphasized stereotypes and the static characterization of Elizabethan comedy without making much headway with the dynamic characterization of Elizabethan tragedy. Madeleine Doran has noted the distinction carefully:

With static characters, whether typical or not, the dramatic problem is how to rescue them from monotony by progressive revelation of character. With characters that develop, the problem is how to show change without loss of coherence and unity. For perfect consistency is of course not a necessary condition of either. The problem of static characters is primarily the problem of comedy,<sup>1</sup> the problem of developing characters primarily of tragedy.

The distinction is crucial to this study because Shakespeare's commentators are frequently characters who would find themselves at home in comedy. It is their misfortune that they find themselves in the world of tragedy, and Shakespeare is faced with the problem of taking essentially static characters endowed with a fixed, conceptual view of the world and providing us with a convincing development in such characters in the alien conditions of the rapidly changing tragic world. I am particularly interested in the interaction between the hero and his companions for I assume that Shakespeare's meaning cannot be elicited from individual characters, but from clusters or constellations of characters, characters who must be related, balanced and contrasted by their attitudes to specific problems.

Until recently characters in modern plays and novels have tended to be developed lineally with a clear chain of cause and effect explanations for their actions. Shakespeare's characters show lineal development also, but flower in all directions in a mosaic pattern that will not bend to the stern and limiting science of cause and effect. In the nineteenth-century drama, which followed Ibsen's influence, we are constantly aware of the precision in time and place - a fixed evolution that allows no leeway to the imagination. The Acts of a play are designated "the following day", "later the same afternoon",

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<sup>1</sup>Madeleine Doran, Endeavours of Art (Madison, 1954), p. 256.

"three days later", events constantly being fixed and related to previous happenings. All this is in marked contrast to the vagueness of many of Shakespeare's time schemes. How long does the action of King Lear take - days, weeks, months? No-one need inquire. Characters change over a period of time and Shakespeare allows us the entire latitude of our imagination to supply whatever time we require to accept the metamorphoses before us. The action of Macbeth occurs continuously before our eyes but at no point are we expected to accept that this chaotic career is compressed into a few days. We watch selected incidents from a lengthy career, and everytime Macbeth comes on stage we are aware that the ravages of sleeplessness and guilt have been corroding his soul in the unspecified interval since his last appearance. We can, therefore, if we are not totally conditioned by the helter-skelter rate of modern theatre, the more easily accept radical change in character. Because Elizabethan drama so magnificently ignores the so-called classical unities it allows a much freer scope to characterization. Anyone who had watched Tamburlaine was aware that drama could choose as its scope a total career involved in a global enterprise. The medieval audience after all had watched the history of the world from Creation to Last Judgement telescoped into a day. This is a very far cry from modern plays exhibiting a day in the life of a few characters in a specific room, reaching ever backwards into the past for explanations that are keys to the understanding of the action now before us. In examining the characters of Shakespeare's commentators it is well to remember that they maintain relations with the hero over long periods of time. Many of them cling tenaciously to a fixed attitude in response to the threatening chaos around them. It is frequently their rigidity, or their gradual yielding under pressure, which highlights for us the radical changes in the heroes with whom they are associated. In reference to these fixed points we can see that the dynamic evolution of the hero is not

arbitrary; we become aware of the extraordinary and unique pressures that induce change. The gradual erosion or change of even the seemingly fixed characters enables us to see how all-encompassing are the effects of tragedy.

The most important point to remember in dealing with psychological verisimilitude is that drama is a live interaction, it is not a finished product that can be totally apprehended in the study. Those critics who find Shakespeare's characters inconsistent or unconvincingly motivated forget that dramatic composition is a contract drawn up between an audience and a writer. I am concerned with the ways in which Shakespeare structured his plays to have a maximum effect on a live audience. Shakespeare's plays are constructed with bewildering subtlety to make an impact on an alert audience fully participating in a theatrical experience. On the very simplest level the characters are convincing because they have a living reality before us. Norman Holland, taking this very basic approach, has sought to find a path between the extremes of criticism that I have discussed:

The wise man chooses to make them real, for how else could he experience the play, except by relating himself to the characters on the stage as people that he has known or been? From the lines we are hearing, we re-create the characters, the words on the page controlling and shaping the characters we create. Then, as in that writer's cliché, the characters "take on a life of their own" and they in turn shape and inform the words on the page. In short, we are not quasi-scientific observers of a phenomenon outside ourselves, historical as the Romantic critics would have it, or the words-on-the-page as the New Critic would have it. Rather we are involved with the text and it with us in a way that demands the description of a harshly scientific word - feedback. We and the words-on-the-page bind ourselves in the literary transaction, a process as mutual as any bargain. Once we accept this bridge, namely, that we in the audience make the characters real, we are in a position to see how a character like Mercutio can be both realistic and as Wilson Knight would have him "purely symbol [ic] of a poetic vision".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Norman N. Holland, "Mercutio, Mine own Son the Dentist", in G. R. Smith, ed., Essays on Shakespeare (London, 1965), p. 9.

The arguments which have been conducted over interpretation of character have been inseparably linked with the wide spectrum of views concerning the ethical implications of Shakespeare's plays. The quarrel again is concerned with Bradley's method of interpretation, with such writers as Weisinger<sup>1</sup> and J. I. M. Stewart<sup>2</sup> stoutly undertaking his defence against the attacks of Lily B. Campbell<sup>3</sup>, Peter Alexander<sup>4</sup>, L. C. Knights<sup>5</sup>, Robert Langbaum<sup>6</sup> and others. I shall quote a wide variety of views in detail in this section because it is a central issue with which this study attempts to deal. J. Leeds Barroll in a recent paper has re-examined the fundamentals of the problem:

It could be said that if we consider the matter of seeking for the "meaning" of a play, it seems clear that we intend to inquire into the problem of what I would term the author's "ethical stance". If a play is to be comprehensible, even on the most elementary levels of "conflict" and "resolution" for instance, can we not assume that there is inherent in the work a certain "ethical orientation" according to which an audience may be expected to "judge" those various activities enacted on the stage? No matter how sophisticated the terms of such judgments need to be, and no matter how nice the possible ethical distinctions, may it not ultimately be assumed that the author constructs the conflicts and tensions of his

<sup>1</sup>Herbert Weisinger, "The Study of Shakespearian Tragedy since Bradley", SQ, VI (1955), 387-396.

<sup>2</sup>J. I. M. Stewart, Character and Motive in Shakespeare (London, 1949).

<sup>3</sup>Lily B. Campbell, "Concerning Bradley's Shakespearian Tragedy", in Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes (New York, 1952).

<sup>4</sup>Peter Alexander, Hamlet, Father and Son (Oxford, 1955).

<sup>5</sup>L. C. Knights, "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" in Explorations (London, 1946).

<sup>6</sup>Robert Langbaum, "Character Versus Action in Shakespeare" SQ, VIII (1957) 57-69.

play according to some definable value system.<sup>1</sup>

This is precisely the attitude that Bradley's critics accuse him of refusing to countenance. His critics found a disconcerting lack of moral certitude in his studies. Langbaum<sup>2</sup> sees the issue as an either/or emphasis between character and action. If we identify with the characters, sympathize with them in their soliloquies, then we lose our capacity to judge their actions, for "the central character is no longer the Aristotelian 'agent' of the action but the creator of its meaning. Drama, in other words, gives way to melodrama, to the dramatic monologue".<sup>3</sup> I am in sympathy with Langbaum's attempt to combat the idea, inherent in Bradley's method, that the play is merely an episode in the character's career,<sup>4</sup> but that alone still leaves the question of the nature of Shakespeare's ethical stance untouched. The dominance of the dramatic structure ✓ must remain inviolable, yet it must still be admitted that we apprehend the plot and the action only through the characters. The meaning of the play is ✓ made clear to us not through any one character but through the relationships between the characters, and the variety of their responses to the same situation. Even when a tragic hero is isolated we can only understand him by paying close attention to those he is isolated from. Characters are understood in their ✓ reaction to situations, but the situations are created both by themselves and by the constellation of attitudes of the other characters around them. It may appear, however, that what Ribner had to say against Bradley is an accurate

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<sup>1</sup>J. Leeds Barroll, "Ethical Premises in Shakespearian Criticism", in W. R. Elton, ed., Shakespearian Research Opportunities, The Report of the Modern Language Association of America Conference, II (Riverside, 1966), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Langbaum, "Character Versus Action in Shakespeare", SQ, VIII (1957) 57-69.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 61-62.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 68-69.

criticism of my own approach to the tragedies:

Bradley recognized the philosophical dimension of tragedy and he sought for a moral order in Shakespeare's tragedies. If no such order emerges from his study, it may be largely because he sought for Shakespeare's thematic content not in the total complex of each play, but in the operations of dramatic character realistically appraised. Such analysis could lead only to unanswerable mystery, for stage creations analysed as though they were human beings could reflect only the mystery and seeming indirection of human life. Bradley could lead his readers only to a Shakespeare without positive belief, to a conception of tragedy merely as the posing of unanswerable questions and to a moral system in the plays which is upon close analysis not moral at all. Such a tragedy as Bradley found in Shakespeare could have been written only in the secular Renaissance of the nineteenth-century historians, and not in the Renaissance which more recent scholarship has revealed to us.<sup>1</sup>

There is a great deal of justice in these remarks but they lead to a criticism of Shakespeare which, rushing to the opposite extreme, endows the dramatist with a wide variety of very positive beliefs which still depend on the ethical stance of the critic rather than on Shakespeare. There is no method of proving whether those who interpreted Shakespeare by the light of the secular Renaissance of the nineteenth century have been able to define Shakespeare's ethical stance better than those critics such as Lily B. Campbell<sup>2</sup> who, reasserting Christian humanism in this century, have sought to emphasize a didactic element in Shakespeare. Historical criticism, by matching, somewhat arbitrarily, sentiments in Shakespeare's plays with popular Elizabethan theories of moral philosophy, has attempted to prove Shakespeare's Christian orthodoxy. As Ornstein has said this is rather like interpreting Arthur Miller in the light of Norman Peale, and he has insisted that: "We must distinguish between popular and intellectual levels of thought when discussing the cultural milieu of any dramatist. And we

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<sup>1</sup>Irving Ribner, Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy (London, 1960), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>L. B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes: Slaves of Passion (Cambridge, 1930).

must recognize the difference between a moral intuition expressed in art and the traditional platitudes of systematized ethics".<sup>1</sup> Much of this study is based on that difference and I see no purpose in confining Shakespeare to the orthodoxies of popular morality when it seems to me that it is exactly that kind of morality which the dramatist is holding up for a close and probing examination. A scholar who has given patient and detailed study to the problem of theological interpretation has given a devastating rebuttal to those who have sought most zealously to interpret Shakespeare through their own Christian beliefs:

. . . the Protestant Reformation, in its educational programs, provided the student who had advanced to the level of literary study with an almost totally non-Christian literary fare and with a similar conception of literature. Religious instruction was given, to be sure, but the basic educational fare was in the classics. I know of no reason to suppose that the separation between literature and theology which characterized sixteenth-century Protestant practice both in England and on the continent would have been bridged when it came to interpreting (or writing) Shakespeare's plays.

If all we can do in facing the enigmatic depths of Shakespeare is to plunge in to salvage scraps of moral platitudes floating, admittedly with deliberate provocation, on the surface, then surely it is time to call a halt to criticism. The least we can do before such complex structures is to keep our minds open to a multitude of possibilities. I am assuming that the translation of the plays into a sequence of simple Christian moral imperatives is an inadequate response to them. To quote R. M. Frye again: "The point to be emphasized is that Shakespeare was not writing plays which can be theologically categorized as pro-Christian or anti-Christian, but that he was primarily concerned with the life of man within the secular order, where Christian and non-Christian

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Ornstein, "Historical Criticism and the Interpretation of Shakespeare", in Norman Rabkin, ed., Approaches to Shakespeare (New York, 1964), p.173.

<sup>2</sup>R. M. Frye, Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine (Princeton, 1963), p.78.

ideas frequently overlap and coincide".<sup>1</sup>

There is a danger also, however, that an emphasis on secular interpretations can be as wide of the mark as theological approaches. Those critics such as D. G. James<sup>2</sup>, Arthur Sewell<sup>3</sup>, and Geoffrey Bush<sup>4</sup>, who have emphasized the moral aim without allying it to a religious vision, in possession of the recent Renaissance scholarship as they are, nevertheless still reflect the secular spirit of the twentieth century. In a century which worries about fragmentation and the disintegration of the moral community of mankind these writers look to Shakespeare for a programme to fill the vacuum. Uncertainty there may have been in the late sixteenth century, but there was no vacuum, and such an interpretation is at odds with what seems to me to be Shakespeare's challenge to established moral assumptions. To use Shakespeare to reinforce values either Christian or secular that seem to be disappearing in this century still leaves us far removed from the ethical stance that Shakespeare took in his own day.

This problem is peculiarly relevant to this study because the characters whom I am examining have frequently been taken as the keys to Shakespeare's meaning. Leeds Barroll has examined the paradox inherent in this judgment:

Much is said, for instance, of "choric" characters, and of the "irony" produced by "contrasting" scenes. At certain stages in argumentation, however, to speak in this manner is to end what has not really begun. For such a methodology

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 132-133.

<sup>2</sup>D. G. James, The Dream of Learning (Oxford, 1951).

<sup>3</sup>Arthur Sewell, Character and Society in Shakespeare (Oxford, 1951).

<sup>4</sup>Geoffrey Bush, Shakespeare and the Natural Condition (Cambridge, Mass., 1956).

produces a kind of circularity. If a given character is not actually named Chorus by the author, we cannot really establish the figure as "choric" simply because we may ourselves approve of his commentary, and if one goes on to use such "choric" statements as guides to the meaning of the play under consideration, one simply trifles with language. Approving of the statements of a specific character whom we then choose as the "choric figure", we are simply using our own approval as guide to what we "deem" the ethical orientation of the play itself.<sup>1</sup>

✓ The important point, of course, is that these characters do not stand outside the structure of the play, they are involved in its ultimate implications. They give us cues to part of the meaning of the play, but the full meaning of the play comes from the total structure of which they are as much a part as the hero himself. In such characters Shakespeare presents straightforward ethical responses to complicated situations but he does not identify himself with those responses.

I do not wish to imply that Shakespeare presents such a bewildering variety of attitudes that the plays are in the end not moral at all, or that by complicating the responses to seeming simple questions they are made unanswerable. In face of dogmatically didactic interpretations, however, I would support the view of Willard Farnham: "We are justified in saying that the greatest Greek tragedy and the greatest Gothic tragedy never make tragic justice an entirely open book, and that they are in a certain sense unmoral, because they are concerned with much deeper ethical difficulties than those of squaring life with some simple and well-accepted moral code".<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare's art

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<sup>1</sup>J. Leeds Barroll, "Ethical Premises in Shakespearian Criticism", in W. R. Elton, ed., Shakespearian Research Opportunities, The Report of the Modern Language Association of America Conference, II (Riverside, 1966), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Willard Farnham, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (Berkeley, 1936), p. 438.

seems to be concerned with the examination of the reflex responses that often masquerade as morality, with an examination of the complexity that lies behind the simple assumptions that many people take for granted.<sup>1</sup> It is because his analysis is so detailed, relentless, and far reaching that his plays probe moral issues in depth beyond the broader concerns of the old morality plays. The plays can concern themselves with complex examinations ✓ of moral questions because they are concerned with complex personalities. In order to extract simple moral themes from the plays one has to simplify the characters, disconnect the detailed personalities which Shakespeare gives us, reduce them to conventions, puncture their stage humanity, ultimately, maybe, put labels on them. If we reduce Shakespeare to the level of popular moralist then we ignore the entire complexity of his dramatic structure. Ornstein is correct in warning us that we are incapable of interpreting Shakespeare's moral intention unless we understand, "how moral judgments are translated into the artifice of poetic drama and apprehended by an audience".<sup>2</sup> It seems to me that Shakespeare operated on the principle, which anyone seriously concerned with moral problems accepts, that a morality which does not include and take account of the bewildering complexity of human events is no morality at all. I am inclined to agree with Hardin Craig when in referring to the complexity of Shakespeare's analyses he regards him as a leader and innovator:" . . .

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Ornstein has said something similar: "Because he sees the world feelingly, Shakespeare performs the immemorial service of the artist to society: he humanizes the categorical imperatives which the stern didacticist offers as the sum of ethical truth". The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison, 1960), p. 223.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Ornstein, "Historical Criticism and the Interpretation of Shakespeare", in Norman Rabkin, ed., Approaches to Shakespeare (New York, 1964), p. 173.

✓ Shakespeare was the Bacon of literature. He was as great a discoverer and analyst in the field of human life and its relations as Bacon was in the field of natural sciences".<sup>1</sup> To say that the moral to be drawn from King Lear is that a man who upsets the order of things reaps the harvest of his folly is only to state a basic truism from which Shakespeare begins his examination. We suffer all the catastrophes which folly let loose in the world can create; through the varieties of individual response we learn the variety of human folly; we watch a man who because of his singular experience can throw all values into question. The play is not a reaffirmation of our assumptions but an exploration beyond those assumptions; the experience of the play changes our way of relating to the world. John Lawlor has characterized this sense of revelation: "Tragic experience is the blessed transformation of our merely defensive capacity to bear the ills of others. For once we are wholly exposed and yet perfectly exempt. So we may indeed look - and, it may be for the first time, see".<sup>2</sup>

I have said that if we learn about Everyman in these plays it is not from one man but from the total pattern of characterization. In this study I am engaged ✓ in examining characters who seem on the surface to represent the average response, the common-sense of Everyman, in situations that are far from average. Frequently, they represent the ordinary, straightforward morality that some critics have tried to see as the total meaning behind the play. Shakespeare tests this ✓ ordinary morality in the extraordinary situations that such characters find themselves in. There is a sense in which Shakespeare's contrast between hero

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<sup>1</sup>Hardin Craig, "Shakespeare and the Normal World", Rice Institute Pamphlet, XXXI (1944), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>John Lawlor, The Tragic Sense of Life (London, 1960), p. 173.

and commentator fits the dominant pattern of conflict in modern history described by Lowenthal: "One might almost say that the prevailing philosophy of human nature since the Renaissance has been based on the conception of each individual as a deviant case whose existence consists very largely in his efforts to assert his personality against the restrictive and levelling claims of society".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Leo Lowenthal, Literature and the Image of Man (Boston, 1957), p. 41.

## II

### CHORUSES AND COMMENTATORS

So many of the characters with which I am concerned have been called 'choric' that it is worth examining what qualities they have in common with the formal chorus as employed in Elizabethan drama. Any dramatist who wished to include a sententious and didactic commentary in his plays had a ready-made model in Seneca's drama, or could adapt that model to develop the more informal type of blunt-speaking, truth-telling commentator. I propose, therefore, to make a brief survey of the formal and informal devices designed as commentary within a play in order to assess what tradition Shakespeare had to work with or against when he came to include characters such as Lear's Fool, Enobarbus and Horatio in his major tragedies.

Cunliffe long ago suggested that since knowledge of Greek tragedy was confined to so few Elizabethans the dramatists had to content themselves with the model of Seneca.<sup>1</sup> What is surprising, however, is that the Elizabethan's use of the chorus is frequently much closer to the Greek's use of the device than it is to Seneca's. There is a fundamental difference between the Greek practice of involving the chorus in the dramatic structure and Seneca's practice of detaching the chorus and making it serve narrative and dramatic functions. The Senecan type of chorus with its elaborately reflective, didactic speeches was not suited to the exciting spectacles of rapidly changing dramatic action which the Elizabethan public theatres began to present. The Greek chorus is used tactically to involve the audience in the experience of drama.

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<sup>1</sup>J. W. Cunliffe, The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy. (Hamden, 1965), p. 11.

Fluchère emphasizes the element of communal ritual in Greek drama created by the effect of the chorus on the audience:

... the Chorus represents at the very heart of the drama the lively conscience of dramatist and public alike. The Chorus, a third personage urging, fearing, hoping, begging, lamenting and rejoicing, represents the meeting-point or bridge by which the indispensable collaboration between artist and spectator is effected. Through the Chorus the audience realizes what is at stake, takes part in the struggle, frees itself, on the ideal plane, from an oppression that nothing but the mind can lift.<sup>1</sup>

There were a number of ways of achieving this effect and a survey of the practices of the Greek dramatists indicates a wide variety in the use of the chorus. Such a survey should help to make clear that the simple labelling of Shakespeare's commentators as 'choric' devices does not help to distinguish their functions in any precise and meaningful way.

The Aeschylean chorus is usually detached, standing back to watch the action helplessly. The Sophoclean chorus, as Aristototele commended it over the Euripidean usage, is a co-actor. Since only the audience is aware of the inevitability of the unhappy ending, the Sophoclean chorus is enveloped in illusion. It does not surround the play with guilty feelings and gloomy anticipations since it is largely in the dark as to the ultimate direction of the play, which depends on the character and action of the hero. The task of the chorus, therefore, is to follow the action rather than lead the audience. Fergusson has described the general characteristics of the Sophoclean chorus:

The chorus may be described as a group personality, like an old Parliament. It has its own traditions, habits of thought and feeling, and mode of being. It exists, in a sense, as a living entity, but not with the sharp actuality of an individual. It perceives; but its perception is at once wider and vaguer than that of a single man. It shares,

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<sup>1</sup>Henri Fluchère, Shakespeare and the Elizabethans (New York, 1956), p. 82.

in its way, the seeking action of the play as a whole; but it cannot act in all the modes; it depends upon the chief agonists to invent and try out the detail of policy, just as a rather helpless but critical Parliament depends upon the Prime Minister to act but, in its less specific form of life, survives his destruction.<sup>1</sup>

It can be seen how those Shakespearian characters who have been called "choric" supply some of these functions in that they, too, follow the action; they are dramatically involved rather than being detached as narrative accompaniment. But it is surely obvious, also, that as individuals they do not act as the "conscience of the race",<sup>2</sup> they have nothing like the same communal function. They may have a representative function as 'normal' men but that function is undercut because they are tied to the action in individual ways. Sophocles' use of the chorus is not uniform, for although it was easy enough to fashion a chorus as long as the theme remained public, it became increasingly difficult to do so when tragedy turned to private themes. There is a danger that the public conscience will simply get in the way or appear out of place when the themes become private. Sophocles' solution was to tie it to the action in a partisan way. The chorus veers in its sympathies from one side to the other in Antigone; in Electra it supports the heroine throughout. In Ajax it makes no pretence to the detachment of an ideal spectator holding a median position between opposing factions: it supports unwaveringly the hero's position throughout. By the time of Oedipus Tyranus it is totally subordinated as an actor in the drama responding only in terms of the action of the play and bringing no philosophical reflective comment from outside. The themes are still largely public but with the increasing involvement of psychological characterization a simple detached stance for the chorus became increasingly difficult to manage

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Fergusson, The Idea of a Theatre (New York, 1953), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

and relate meaningfully to the complications of individual problems.

The New Tragedy began to deal with problems of purely private interest, and Euripides, therefore, began to strip the chorus to minimum functions. As Kitto has said, once drama became sensational what could a chorus most usefully do except stay out of the way in order to speed the action along?<sup>1</sup> Instead of being involved in the action it is used for new ironic purposes described by Fergusson:

The beautiful lyrics sung by Euripides' choruses are ... incidental music rather than organic parts of the action; they are not based upon the feeling that all have a stake in the common way of life and therefore in the issue of the present action. Euripides' individualistic heroes find no light in their suffering, and bring no renewal to the moral life of the community: they are at war with the very clear, human, and malicious gods, and what they suffer, they suffer unjustly and to no good end. Where Sophocles' celebrated irony seems to envisage the condition humaine itself - the plight of the psyche in a world which is ultimately mysterious to it - Euripides' ironies are all aimed at the incredible "gods"<sup>2</sup> and at the superstitions of those who believe in them.

The Greeks, in their use of the chorus, faced problems that again became peculiarly acute in the Elizabethan age. The chorus can be used in the Aeschylean fashion to represent the community only when the beliefs of that community are settled and agreed. Even a cursory glance at the Elizabethan scene indicates that there was no such clear consensus of norms. The age was one of questioning, exploration, burgeoning individualism, and consequently we find no chorus celebrating in ritual fashion a prevailing moral code. Normative characters in drama can be used to represent a measure of truth or they can be used ironically to point up the inadequacy of common moral assumptions,

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<sup>1</sup>H. D. F. Kitto, Greek Tragedy (New York, 1954), p. 362.

<sup>2</sup>Francis Fergusson, The Idea of a Theatre (New York, 1953), p. 46.

and I think Shakespeare used them for both of these purposes, but they cannot be taken as unambiguous indications of the author's moral stance. We can find reaffirmation of this point if we turn to Seneca and examine the use made of his chorus by Elizabethan dramatists.

The most significant use of Seneca, for the problems I am examining, has been summarized by Whitaker: "Seneca's tragedies ... presented structured plays, at least by medieval standards, and they largely concentrated on a particular failure to master a hostile Fate in the only way available to man - by subjecting human emotions to human reason conforming to the law of nature."<sup>1</sup> This pattern had already found its place in the morality plays and writers eagerly embraced the authority of Seneca. With stories centralized on a series of sensational crimes Seneca's chorus repeats lugubriously the terrible cost to the community of such excesses. The chorus as a group of helpless spectators has little to do with the major characters and is incapable of averting catastrophe. This aspect of helplessness appears in Shakespeare's commentators who, although they become involved and often essay a variety of active postures, are equally incapable of averting the tragic process. The rhetorical function of the chorus is to heighten the context of violence in which the story is set. They ask for the protection of the gods but have to abide patiently while their society comes to ruin. Far from being omniscient the chorus is often, like gullible mobs in Elizabethan drama, willing to hope for the best as a means of sublimating its fear of the worst. They accept surface shows for true coin as in their celebration of the unexpected amity of

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<sup>1</sup>V. K. Whitaker, The Mirror up to Nature (San Marino, 1965), p. 44.

the brothers' reunion in Thyestes, III. There was little in this function that Shakespeare could use in his commentators for it was one of their chief qualities that they alone refused to be taken in by outward shows. The reconciliation of Caesar and Antony is set into perspective by Enobarbus' mocking commentary. The Senecan chorus speaks mainly to the audience, lamenting and reflecting without ever becoming involved in the plot, or without ever being used to warn, chastise or confront the characters concerning its fears about the consequences of their actions. It habitually descants on the mutability of fortune, the impermanence of beauty and life; it fills in the broad framework of general truths, often by reference to related myths upon which the particular story operates. It provides pauses in the action and, by reflecting on past actions and harbouring misgivings about the future, it weaves the story together with a thread of lyrical and philosophical commentary. It is the means of relating the particular world of tragedy to the general world of the audience. Lest we should be alienated by the enormities of the events before us we are constantly warned that we are all subject to the same inexorable powers of love, lust, nature, decay, death and Fate. Similar reflections are salted throughout the works of Shakespeare but they are altered by characters integrally related to the action, and we judge their statements in relation to their experience. The Senecan chorus is nearer in sentiment to the audience than it is to the actors, it indicates an unbridgeable gulf between the audience and the action of tragedy. Shakespeare's commentators may attempt to bridge that gulf but increasingly they find themselves drawn away from the audience and into the tragic world. They have, perhaps more in common with Seneca's wise counsellors, such as Phaedra's Nurse who attempts to advise her mistress against her addiction to illicit passions, (Phaedra, I), although the Nurse rapidly yields in order to become her accomplice.

If we summarize some of the philosophical reflections of Seneca's choruses we can see how closely they correspond to the themes developed by didactic Elizabethan dramatists. In Hercules Oetaeus, III, the chorus descants on the inevitability of death which will ultimately conquer even the gods. In Phaedra, III, and Hercules Furens, II, it reflects on the calmness of nature in contrast to the turmoil of human affairs. The power of love over everything, not excepting the gods, is discussed at the end of Phaedra, I. We are warned of the danger of great fortune in Hercules Oetaeus, II, Phaedra, IV, Thyestes II, and Agamemnon, I. Peace is praised in Agamemnon, II, and the simple life is eulogized in Octavia, V. These themes could be duplicated endlessly in Elizabethan drama but it is important to remember that in Shakespeare they are not lyrical, abstract reflections, set pieces detachable from the drama; they are interpreted through character and situation in the heat of involved action. There has been a tendency in some modern critics to interpret the soliloquies in Shakespeare as philosophical reflections, out of character, serving the choric function of providing a general perspective against which to judge the particular action of the play.<sup>1</sup> It is my view that if the relationship between the audience and the play world is correctly understood even the commentating characters are serving functions diametrically opposed to those of the Senecan chorus.

Some critics have attempted to defend English drama from the influence of Seneca at all costs. Howard Baker<sup>2</sup> seems to be a classic example of the either/or school of criticism, seeking to knock down one extreme theory in order

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of this view see Robert Langbaum, "Character Versus Action in Shakespeare", SQ, VIII (1957), 57-69.

<sup>2</sup>Howard Baker, Induction to Tragedy (Baton Rouge, 1939).

to replace it with another. He shows insufficient awareness of the Elizabethan dramatist's habit of seeking multiple authorities to validate his practice. It is nothing to the purpose to attempt to prove either that Seneca was a sole influence or that similar native traditions entirely invalidate that influence, since the Elizabethans were only too prone to seek in all directions to find precedents for their own tendencies. They would take what they needed from both traditions without feeling that they had neatly to choose one or the other to make life easier for literary historians.<sup>1</sup> Baker has warned us against linking sententiousness too closely with Seneca since the habit of "commonplace" moralizing was universal.<sup>2</sup> Clemen has gone so far as to deny any didactic intention in Seneca:

In the final analysis, however, the shrewd dicta scattered through his plays are a product of his preoccupation with rhetoric. They are his way of adding rhetorical point and colour to his writing, and of giving his emotional outbursts a sophisticated and rational form of expression, which, with the admixture of stoic doctrine, turns them into a species of hybrid creation, a compound of thought and feeling. But Seneca's sententiae are not meant as hints to the audience, pointing the way to his meaning, the role that such forms of expression so often assume in Elizabethan drama.<sup>3</sup>

This seems to me to be an extreme view, although one can readily agree that the Elizabethans heavily emphasized the didactic element, stripping away the Senecan habit of digression and elaboration which had tended to cloud the moral teaching. In this reinforcing of common tendencies from many directions there is, perhaps, no single cause and effect relationship, but the sententiae of Seneca were

<sup>1</sup>For a more balanced account of Senecan influence see H. W. Wells, "Senecan Influence on Elizabethan Tragedy: A Re-Estimation", Shakespeare Association Bulletin, XIX, No. 2., (1944), 71-84.

<sup>2</sup>Baker, op. cit., pp. 152-153.

<sup>3</sup>Wolfgang Clemen, English Tragedy Before Shakespeare (London, 1961), pp. 69-70.

certainly close to hand in drama. What Seneca's intentions were are outside my scope but that the Elizabethans exploited his work for their own didactic purposes seems to be undeniable, and in particular they used the themes of his choruses to adorn their plays with general reflective comment. Cornwallis<sup>1</sup> clearly exemplified the Elizabethan habit of ransacking the ancients. He takes sententiae and meditates on them to suggest ideas that might be useful to a prince in his practice of government. He shows interest only in the sententiae and seems little concerned with the plays taken as a whole. Many of the dramatists, of course, are much more deeply indebted to Seneca than was Cornwallis. Shakespeare himself owed a great deal to Seneca in his early career, but the device of the formal Chorus he avoids almost entirely. His use of commentators is much closer in spirit to the Greek habit of involving the chorus in the tragedy, of making it an actor. Shakespeare's commentators place a high value on their detachment: they would teach their world, they have Senecan leanings. It is Shakespeare's purpose to demonstrate that they are not mere observers of the action like the Senecan chorus, but that, like the Greek chorus, they are inextricably involved in the tragic action. Cunliffe has characterized the development of the choric function:

Seneca's use of the Chorus was a plain forewarning of its ultimate fate. In the early plays of Aeschylus supreme importance is attached to the Chorus, which was the kernel from which the drama had sprung. In Sophocles the Chorus has become subordinate to the dialogue. In Euripides its connection with action is often slight; in Seneca this connection disappears altogether; the Chorus is already<sup>2</sup> on its way to exclusion from the play and final disuse.

The chorus had by no means disappeared by the Elizabethan period but it was not easily accommodated by its drama. The public theatres found use for a variety

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<sup>1</sup>Sir William Cornwallis, Discourses upon Seneca the Tragedian (London, 1601).

<sup>2</sup>J. W. Cunliffe, The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy (Hamden, 1965), p. 34.

of devices akin to the Chorus but they rarely confined themselves to the strict Senecan formula. This commenting from outside the action, this straightforward teaching of the audience, may have been admirably designed for the rhetorical process of reading as opposed to full dramatic performance, but it inevitably diminished that atmosphere of a totally absorbing play-world that the Elizabethan theatre came increasingly to present. Those playwrights whose didactic zeal outran their theatrical art tended to employ the device of the formal Chorus. In its purest form we find it in the academic writers avowedly imitating classical tragedy. This indebtedness to Seneca, which allowed the academic writers to infuse large doses of fatalistic Stoicism and elaborate set-pieces of philosophical reflection, continued throughout the period without being influenced by the less formal style of the public theatres. I shall examine the use of the chorus in both of these traditions in order to highlight the novel method of Shakespeare's contrasting device of the commentator. If we are to get past the cliché of Shakespeare's characters being 'choric' figures in disguise, then we have to trace with some care the development of the chorus, its disappearance from the public theatre and the consequent change in the relations between the characters and the audience, which Shakespeare used so carefully to maximum advantage.

A group of writers associated with Lady Pembroke, after her brother Sir Philip Sidney's death, made an attempt to reform tragedy on a classical model, and their efforts continued throughout the 1590's and early 1600's. Seven writers who between them produced about a dozen plays were involved.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The group taking its inspiration from Robert Garnier produced three kinds of plays: (1) direct translations from Garnier - Lady Pembroke's Antonie and Kyd's Cornelia; (2) direct imitations - Daniel's Cleopatra and Brandon's Octavia; (3) plays based on Garnier as a general model with more freedom of treatment - Fulke - Greville's Alaham and Mustapha, Daniel's Philotas, the four Monarchicke Tragedies of Alexander, and Lady Carew's The Tragedy of Mariam.

This deliberate attempt of a coterie to keep a form alive, to refine tragedy and reduce it to rules was doomed to failure in face of the rich and violent variety of the public theatre. As an academic exercise it took certain parts of the French scheme of tragedy, the confidante, the chorus, the nuntius, the soliloquy, but was not able to assimilate them into the English tradition. These writers reflect a Senecan influence filtered through the French dramatist, Robert Garnier. They found Garnier's modifications of Seneca to their taste since he had removed all the gory melodrama, which so appealed to the popular stage, and emphasized the didacticism. These writers also followed Garnier's example of closely linking the chorus with the action. Paradoxically, therefore, it is these writers, rather than those imitating the Senecan chorus in the public theatre, who most clearly anticipated Shakespeare's involvement of the commentator in the action. But these academic writers, having little sense of the stage, never exploited the full implications of the chorus as co-actor as Sophocles had done. These writers seem to go deliberately out of their way to avoid giving any sense of full dramatic life to their work. Drama becomes, even more ✓ than it had in Seneca, a means of transmitting philosophical reflections. Clemen has noted this in summarizing Garnier's dramatic method and also, therefore, that of his English imitators:

It is not to act that the characters are brought on to the stage, ✓ but to make speeches; and indeed Garnier does not call them actors, but interlocuteurs and entrepailleurs. There is a minimum of action, and the narrative method, by which the substance of the play is embodied in a series of reports, retrospective narrations, and deliberative or persuasive speeches, seems on the surface to be identical with that of Seneca. However, Seneca, in his speeches constantly gives the events and the elements of action in his plot some importance by his manner of relating them, whereas Garnier completely ignores the concrete particulars and the life-giving details of his stories. He is almost exclusively concerned with states of mind and with the spiritual reactions of his characters to the circumstances,

usually the result of past events with which they are faced.<sup>1</sup>

It can readily be seen how diametrically opposed this is to Shakespeare's method and yet how he was able to include much similar material without any loss to the vitality of the action. Since Shakespeare used Daniel's Cleopatra and may have known Lady Pembroke's Antoine, a translation of Garnier's play, it is possible that he had access to a number of these academic plays. Yet with these examples of a chorus as a co-actor in tragedy he pursued his own method of individualizing his commentators. This tradition of the chorus persisted in these amateur plays entirely uninfluenced by the public theatre tradition. Elizabeth Cary was probably writing The Tragedy of Mariam around the time Shakespeare was engaged with Hamlet and her adherence to the revived tradition of classical tragedy is unchanged. But she is virtually the last remnant of the short-lived revival. This tradition persisted for exactly those reasons which I suggested earlier had supported the Greek chorus. Its heavy didacticism appealed to a small group of people who shared the same norms. It reflects their ethical norms and, since the plays were performed in private to a sympathetic audience, it could speak adequately for a homogeneous group. But these people formed an aristocratic coterie which by no stretch of the imagination could be said to represent the conscience of the race.

Other attempts had been made to produce a chorus by writers outside Lady Pembroke's coterie. They were far different from the tradition I have just considered. Witherspoon has noted the distinction: "In the plays not influenced by Garnier's dramas the choruses are as a rule quite detached from the action. Often there seems to be no connection whatever, and the chorus is

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<sup>1</sup>Wolfgang Clemen, English Tragedy Before Shakespeare (London, 1961), p. 31.

thought of as being merely a poem appended to the act, rather than the expression of a group of people on the stage".<sup>1</sup> In Gorboduc, Gismond of Salerne, Soliman and Perseda and The Misfortunes of Arthur we find this didactic and detached audience on the stage.

The method of this tradition is exemplified in Gorboduc. The function of anticipating the action and of signifying its broader meaning is performed by a dumb-show symbolizing in simple parable fashion the import of the action to come. These simple episodes with an explanatory moral make it clear that the action is an illustration of principles conceived outside the play for a specific didactic purpose. Drama is a practical demonstration of firmly held principles. The Chorus in Senecan fashion at the end of each act relates back to the dumb-show and enunciates yet again the general principles of good government which Gorboduc rashly ignores, acting throughout as an anonymous voice of wisdom. But we find wisdom speaking from within the play and here begin to see the development of the wise-counsellor and truth-teller. Eubulus is clearly the author's mouthpiece, a sage counsellor advising action to circumvent catastrophe. Clemen has related this figure to the consigliere of Italian tragedy and claims John of Gaunt and Kent as descendants of this tradition in Shakespeare.<sup>2</sup> Yet it is worth remembering that these figures in Gorboduc are virtually as anonymous as the chorus. Philander and Dordan, the two good counsellors to Ferrex and Porrex, are interchangeable; they are devoid of personality. Yet they make a distinct advance in that they relate to individual situations. The

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<sup>1</sup>A. M. Witherspoon, The Influence of Robert Garnier on Elizabethan Drama (New Haven, 1924), p. 159.

<sup>2</sup>Wolfgang Clemen, English Tragedy Before Shakespeare (London, 1961) p. 52-53.

Chorus deals only in universals; it talks not of Ferrex and Porrex but of youth, not of Gorboduc but of Kings, not of Brittain but of all countries. The remarks of the Chorus are directed at the audience, put in solely for its benefit with little concern for development of action or character. The play, of course, is not written as a dramatic conflict between living people, but as an 'exemplum' for a moral discourse. The authors do not leave the audience for one moment to work out the significance of the events, they supply a series of illustrated lectures with a final lecture from Eubulus of one hundred lines to sum up the series. It is important, however, that we note the appearance of the wise-counsellor as one of the 'characters', developed possibly as Clemen suggests from the 'Expositor' or 'Doctor' of the Morality Play who appeared as an Epilogue.<sup>1</sup> The wise-counsellor or companion has a complicated history in Elizabethan drama, but it is towards such characters in Shakespeare that we are working. In Gorboduc, at the beginning of the tradition, the wise advisers supplement the function of the chorus; in Shakespeare at the maturity of the tradition they have a far more complex function.

The fact that there were attempts at commentary in the native tradition outside the influence of Seneca may explain the extraordinary diversity of choric devices and commentators in the plays for the public theatres which I wish to examine next. Bale's King Johan had included an interpreter. We find epilogues, prologues, interpreters and the nuntius all consistently explaining the action to the audience in the Chester and York Miracle Cycles, in Everyman and the Four Elements. In the medieval metrical tragedies there is the tradition of commentators providing connecting links. And in The Mirror for Magistrates

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

of 1575, with which most of the playwrights were familiar, we find connecting links in which Higgins converses about the action with Morpheus. Certainly the dramatists refused to tie themselves to the formal Chorus of anonymous citizens as the only method of providing a commentary on the action. We have to remember that different options were open to the dramatist, such as that of the Vice-figure as presenter and mischievous creator of the action, a malign commentator so thoroughly examined by Spivack.<sup>1</sup> Of this tradition Shakespeare made use in his characterization of Iago, Edmund, Aaron, Richard III and Don John. The literary genetics of the period are so complex that it is impossible to produce a clear-cut diagram leading directly to Shakespeare's commentators. I can only attempt to outline some of the broader trends that were current in early Elizabethan drama indicating why few of them provided a complete solution that Shakespeare could find ready-made when he faced the problem of including commentary in tragedy.

The chorus was an adequate device as long as it was used in plays like Gorboduc, advising a prince of general dangers to the welfare of the state, exhibiting the iniquities of past rulers, descanting on the revolution of Fortune's wheel, providing the didactic function of the narrator featured in accounts of de casibus tragedy from Boccaccio down to The Mirror for Magistrates. It cannot be denied, however, that in the very broadest terms the function of a formal chorus was gradually exhausted as the Elizabethan theatre developed. There is a movement from alienated, helpless observation from outside the action to the commentator brought inside and finally swallowed by the all-embracing action. Early in the period of native English drama human events are uncomplicated

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Spivack, Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil (New York, 1958).

because of the polarization of good and evil, and the chorus holds the events at a distance directing moral judgement without engaging in any close involvement with the characters. The drama, as Leavis would say, does not act out its morality: the audience does not experience the tension of dramatic conflict—it does not in Keats' phrase 'burn through' the experience. With the gradual removal and metamorphosis of the choric function the audience is brought into closer contact with the action. With the commentator as much at the mercy of the action as the major characters the audience is forced to explore and experience the complications of human events. Shakespeare's commentators are almost pied-pipers leading us into the action. Instead of presenting the key to the play they are now part of the problem which the play presents. I cannot examine all the plays involved in this change, but by the examination of a few of them I can give some indications of the general trend. I would reiterate that to attempt to document the change decade by decade is impossible, for the pattern is not uniform. Peele in David and Bethsabe can use the chorus in a fairly straightforward Senecan fashion in 1599 whereas an inferior play like Locrine four years earlier has reduced the choric function to that of prologue explanations of the dumb-shows uttered by Ate, hot for revenge, with Ghosts supplementing the didactic lessons throughout.

The change begins to manifest itself when the public theatres had whetted the appetites of their audiences for sensationalism. The period inherited from the medieval tradition two views of tragedy depending on whether the world was thought to be innately good or evil and therefore whether man could be held responsible for his own fall. This duality persisted throughout the Elizabethan period with man sometimes being admonished to be virtuous, at other times seen as a victim of some unpredictable chance. Depending on whether man was viewed as agent or patient of his own destiny we begin to get radically different methods

of developing tragedy. Baker has described the process:

Then, with the enlargement of the scope of mechanical retribution, two things happened: everyday didacticism, with its untragic interest in the art of living successfully in the world, flourished as it had never flourished before; but the frequent arbitrary assignments of unfitting retributions, especially in cases where the crimes were not manifest, gave ostensibly didactic tragedies a sensational cast. At the same time the tendency to see tragedy as an illustration of the prevailing insecurity of the world had excellent representation; but the concomitant morality de contemptu, which grew dim in Boccaccio, faded out still more: the result is definite sensationalism. So - in simplest terms - tragedy became either narrowly didactic or irresponsibly sensational.<sup>1</sup>

In some plays, therefore, the chorus persists with the clear function of providing moral precepts; in other plays it is metamorphosed to increase the sensational element. The division, however, was also involved in the development of dramatic technique. As soon as a writer appeared who could create complex characters and situations which could throw into question the straightforward didacticism of a chorus, then the audience inevitably became involved in the drama as a complicated experience. No longer was drama simply an illustration or exemplum of a preconceived moral message. Kyd was, of course, the dramatist who produced that change. Kyd found the means of creating and communicating the suffering of human beings so effectively that an audience could no longer react with a reflex response to say how we should approve or disapprove of their actions. The change was, as I shall discuss later, bound up with the problem of the morality of the revenge code.

The chorus in The Spanish Tragedy is represented by the Ghost of Andrea and Revenge, and is clearly not used to perform merely mechanical functions.

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<sup>1</sup>Howard Baker, Induction to Tragedy (Baton Rouge, 1939), p. 203.

Kyd lavishes much space on it and the long opening sequence is almost a guarantee of blood and horror to come. The Ghost is not so much a presenter of the action as a special audience to a play performed at Revenge's request. By dividing the chorus Kyd dramatizes it and splits two of its functions, that of fear and uncertainty, and that of foreknowledge and prophecy. Their function is almost totally one of creating suspense. Revenge assures us that he will bring disaster on Andrea's enemies and the audience watches eagerly to see how it will be accomplished. The chorus is also an essential element in the structure of ideas in the play. Since the play examines the ethics of revenge ✓ it is important to have a detached viewpoint from those not immediately involved. ✓ Revenge is an absolute, a kind of mindless force set loose in the world. Andrea, however, learns that it involves more than he had bargained for. He starts out eager for revenge but soon discovers that in its sweeping course it destroys his friends as well as his enemies. The chorus thus presents two contrasting versions of revenge, the abstract force set loose that hungers for complete destruction and the helpless human audience, Andrea, powerless to stop the course of action. It does not relate directly to the audience a didactic purpose. The audience must gauge its own response to the play in relation to the bloodlust of the chorus and to the viciousness of the characters. The anxiety and confusion of the Ghost in the later acts must inevitably alienate the audience which can no longer take the chorus as its representative but must weigh its actions against the total complex of the play. Our involvement with the characters is partially caused by our sense of the limitation of the commentators, a dramatic method that comes to fruition in Shakespeare.

With the emergence of the professional playwrights in the Elizabethan theatre, drama became less overtly didactic. The writer was not as concerned to tell his audience how they should receive his play or what good might come

to them if they heeded admonitory lessons. As Willard Thorp has pointed out, the old-fashioned didactic element is almost entirely absent from the prologues and epilogues of plays written by the University Wits.<sup>1</sup> Instead of appealing to the audience to learn goodness from the spectacle of evil they appeal for permission to entertain, and ask for applause. We must remember, too, that when we find sententiousness in their drama it is not always very profoundly based. Madeleine Doran has reminded us that the inclusion of sententiae and moralizing: "is not necessarily indicative of the dramatist's real artistic end, which may be to tell an entertaining or an arresting story; the sententiousness may be laid on - not necessarily hypocritically or cynically - in deference to a convention, and so appear accidental to the true organizing impulse of the play".<sup>2</sup> This seems to be clear in a play such as Greene's James the Fourth. The Induction and framing story, which continues as a chorus throughout, promises to demonstrate the corrupt nature of the court which Bohan, the presenter, has abandoned. Illustrations of pride and pomp are called up and supplemented with mimed tableaux. The chorus instead of simply reducing the story to verbally transmitted didactic moral statements, elaborates it with complicated audio-visual aids. But gradually this function disappears to be replaced by dancing and sheer clowning; the didactic intention originally stated disappears since the happy ending makes it irrelevant. Great care, therefore, is required in judging how different writers exploited the choric device. Greene obviously is poles apart from Jonson who in Catiline uses the chorus, as one might expect,

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<sup>1</sup>Willard Thorp, The Triumph of Realism in Elizabethan Drama (Princeton, 1928), pp. 39-40. ✓

<sup>2</sup>Madeleine Doran, Endeavours of Art (Madison, 1954), p. 98.

in a completely orthodox classical manner, seriously adhering to a tradition which, in Jonson's view, should not be lightly flouted. The only way to make a correct judgement is to follow Doran's advice:

What we have to look for is whether a play stays on the level of story for its own sake, that is for diversion solely, or whether it moves to a level of greater thoughtfulness, where questions of value are raised; and if it does, whether story and value cooperate, so that artistic design and meaning are one and the same thing. On that level the question of moral purpose tends to resolve itself. For serious dramatic art, if in some sense of Aristotle's terms it is an imitation of action and of life, must throw into relief human problems and purposes. It need not be, and generally is not, didactic in the directive sense of the Horatian doctrine, since the greater the artist and the deeper his perception, the less likely is he to give categorical answers to the questions raised, the less likely to wish to<sup>1</sup> propel his listeners to any particular course of action.

This is a crucial distinction once we move from plays in which the chorus is the instructor of the audience to plays in which the commentator within the play presents a viewpoint which is only one amongst several that the dramatist is examining. If we wish to see the commentator as a chorus clearly indicating the didactic intention of the play then we overlook the enormous pains that the Elizabethan dramatists went to in fusing design and meaning in order to avoid 'categorical answers'. The fusion, of course, was not achieved overnight and in examining the commentators within plays throughout the period in which Shakespeare wrote, it is clear that they do frequently embody a didactic message. Most of these characters, however, occur in comedies. When we turn to the tragedies it is remarkable how few writers employ the commentator which we find to be so ubiquitous in Shakespeare. It is worth examining a few of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 352.

the attempts at including the plain-dealer in tragedy by Shakespeare's contemporaries, and asking why the other tragedians found no place for the character.

In Thomas of Woodstock the plain-dealer takes the centre of the stage. His plainness is mentioned on virtually every appearance, and admiration for this quality, allied to his unimpeachable sense of honour, is heavily emphasized. He wears plain clothes and throughout the play his character and philosophy are associated with them in deliberate contrast to the foppish fashions affected by Richard and his followers. A healthy England is associated with plainness and a corrupt England with the dreaded Italianate fashions. In this court of sycophants with a headstrong, immature king, it is Woodstock's role to press, jester-like, unpleasant truths on his monarch. It is clear that the audience is meant to accept the justice of his charges against the corrupt court and to condemn the impetuous partiality of the king. The play is clearly polarized into good and evil with Woodstock the leader of the good counsellors who wrestle to save Richard's soul. Woodstock has the characteristic insight and gift of prophecy of the truth-teller. Throughout he voices the virtues of old England in face of the encroachments of the new Italianate politics, and in this stance anticipates several of Shakespeare's commentators. The popularity of this stereotype of the blunt, honest Englishman we can gather from Greene's comedy, George a Greene, The Pinner of Wakefield. The pinner's unswerving loyalty, his stirring yeoman qualities, his irrepressible candour, and his demolition of aristocratic fops, probably won him much popularity in the public theatre. It is possible that Shakespeare traded on the popularity of this stereotype in constructing characters such as Faulconbridge, Enobarbus and Kent.

Beaumont and Fletcher were the only writers to employ the plain-

dealing commentator with any consistency and their practice may have resulted from Shakespeare's influence. Mardonius in A King and No King is a blunt soldier cautioning his master Arbaces against his lustful desires, and he serves a function similar to that of Enobarbus, though he is by no means as fully rounded a character as Shakespeare's creation. In Thierry and Theodoret we find the typical honest adviser in Martell, who is concerned to expose the coward Protaldy, the Parolles-like paramour of the queen. His function is supplemented by De Vitry, a blunt, disappointed soldier, and between them they smoke out the villainy of the queen. Ultimately, however, they are incapable of averting the catastrophe for it is based on an intrigue outside their knowledge. The good men are not advisers to passionate heroes but are enlisted in the cause of virtue to expose the evil intriguers. This pattern is little changed from the polarization of forces in the morality play structure. The honest advisers, therefore, have little of that complex significance that we associate with Shakespeare's commentators.

Chapman frequently placed blunt speakers at the centre of his tragedies. Bussy d'Ambois is more akin to Coriolanus than he is to Shakespeare's commentators in that his plain-dealing reinforces his pride which ultimately undoes him. Overburdened with wrath, he allows passion to cloud his reason. But Chapman, who constantly sets up just, resolute men against scheming politicians, did not develop all of his heroes in this way. His characters often fall into that familiar pattern of the plain soldier equipped with blunt honesty set upon by crafty courtiers. Clermont D'Ambois and Admiral Chabot are true to their principles without rushing to the extremes of unbalanced, proud and passionate self-justification. They are reasonable men, and they are firm in their principles and the more admirable because they cannot be bought and sold by conspirators. They offer a commentary on the corruption of the world around

them, but because they are central figures we have no sense of their detachment or of a balance of forces as in Shakespeare's plays. Chapman makes his ethical stance transparently clear so that there is no ambiguity hovering around the honesty of these plain-dealers. Again we detect the persistence of the morality play structure.

Jonson, as I mentioned earlier, uses an orthodox classical chorus in Catiline. In Sejanus, however, he employs a less formal device. It is a measure of his isolation from the prevailing trend of adapting and metamorphosing the chorus that he felt called upon to apologize for the liberty he was taking.

In a preface To the Readers he says:

First, if it be objected, that what I publish is no true poem, in the strict laws of time, I confess it: as also in the want of a proper chorus; whose habit and moods are such and so difficult, as not any, whom I have seen, since the ancients, no, not they who have most presently affected laws, have yet come in the way of.<sup>1</sup>

Here is testimony from the purist of the inadequacy of the Elizabethans in handling the chorus. Yet one cannot help feeling that if Jonson had allowed himself the flexibility of his contemporaries he might have written better tragedies. His tragedy, in the de casibus tradition, is static; it eschews action to concentrate on long-winded rhetorical speeches. It would not be Jonson, of course, if he did not attempt to supply a choric device as close to classical tradition as possible. There is a group of characters constituting a faction opposed to Sejanus. Some members of this faction, such as Silius, Sabinus and Cordus are destroyed by Sejanus as the play advances. Two of them survive throughout and are there, chorus-like, to receive the messenger's news of the bizarre dismemberment of Sejanus and his children and to point the moral

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<sup>1</sup>Ben Jonson, Ben Jonson's Plays, Vol. 1. (London, 1910), p. 308.

at the conclusion. The distinguishing factor about Lucius Arruntius and Marcus Lepidus, for my purpose, is that they are obviously in the line of the plain, blunt-speaking truth-tellers that we find in Shakespeare. By pointing up the differences between Jonson's and Shakespeare's exploitation of the characters I can, perhaps, demonstrate Shakespeare's unique development of the commentator.

The characters I have mentioned in Jonson are there entirely for the sake of the audience and relate not at all to the main characters of the play. They are powerless and exist in a world where to speak the truth bluntly is to invite swift reprisal. Only Silius, at his trial, accuses Sejanus openly when his doom is already sealed. The rest are often in Sejanus' presence but they speak only to each other or 'aside'. They constantly translate the tricky rhetorical manoeuvrings of Sejanus and Tiberius to the audience, interpreting the sinister intent behind the glözing words. It must be said that in terms of dramatic economy their testimony is frequently superfluous since the audience is present at the private conspiracies which the public appearances are designed to disguise. They also serve, as did the formal chorus, to lament the lost glory of former times and to fill the air with heavy forebodings of future disaster. Lepidus and Arruntius exchange and reduplicate observations in strophe and antistrophe. Their criticism, being sealed off from Tiberius and Sejanus, gives us none of the sense of a real conflict of viewpoints that we find in the relations of Lear's Fool, Apemantus and Enobarbus with their masters. It is this involvement, this criticism voiced for all to hear, this sense of loyalty and concern to aid an erring friend, that marks off Shakespeare's characters from the traditional subservience of the chorus. The role of commentator, scarcely changed from that of the formal chorus, is preserved only so long as it is never directly involved in the conflicts of the major characters. These commentators observe, they suffer, but they do not effectively interfere, they do not draw us into

the total involvement that so clearly characterizes Shakespearian tragedy. In Sejanus we feel alienated from the maniacal power-struggle between Tiberius and his ambitious enemy. The commentators succeed in emphasizing that sense of alienation so that we are never capable of relating to the characters or of relating their experience to ourselves.

Shakespeare did not go to Jonson to learn how to write tragedy. If anyone provided hints for his tragic method it was clearly Marlowe. Edward II has few passages that one can define as didactic interpolations of the author. The play acts out its own morality and the sympathy of the audience is constantly shifting first from the tyrannous Edward and then back to him as the Machiavellian Mortimer grows in power and corruption. Isabella is torn between the two, a character clearly in conflict, analyzed in careful detail and conceived not as a static type but, like all the characters, finely attuned in her development in response to the events around her. Bevington has seen this pattern of characterization as a result of confusion on Marlowe's part, an interpretation that seems to me to be misguided, but he has pointed out the distinction in method between Marlowe and the writers of morality plays where

... this scheme of divided paths for the opposed protagonists invariably separated the godly from the profane, and rewarded each according to his merit. Its structural force in Edward II similarly implies a contrast between a meek but worthy king and his depraved persecutor. Marlowe's preoccupation with complexity of character, however, forbids such a plain interpretation of right and wrong... The result is that his characters occupy two spheres, human complexity and moral abstraction.<sup>1</sup>

Marlowe made no use of the device of commentator but he is the only dramatist who shows any clear anticipation of Shakespearian tragedy. It is in their

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<sup>1</sup>D. M. Bevington, From "Mankind" to Marlowe (Cambridge, 1962) p. 236.

concern with the complexity of character that the two dramatists probed along a path that had implications for the structure of tragedy far different from the methods of dramatizing material which were passed down through the tradition of the moralities.

As for the other dramatists of the period we find few of them attempting tragic structures along the lines of Shakespeare's. There are no plain-dealing commentators in Webster and Middleton, which suggests that their choice of material, Italianate melodrama, precluded their presence. I am not trying to suggest that there is any special virtue in Shakespeare's truth-tellers that ensures a qualitative superiority of the plays in which they occur. It is merely that their presence seems to me to be especially significant in the creation of Shakespeare's distinctive tragic world. If they do not appear in Webster, Middleton, Tourneur or Ford it is simply that they would have no function to serve in the kind of stories that these writers chose to dramatize. We cannot imagine characters such as Enobarbus allied to anyone in these galleries of grotesques. It is clear that such characters can only have a home in a world less fallen. Cornelia, Vittoria's mother in The White Devil, makes a protest against the sinful world that she stumbles on but she is quickly swept aside by Flamineo. The murky world of plot and counterplot admits no territory on which an objective observer might take his stand. In that sense we are more totally alienated from the tragic worlds of these writers than we can ever be from Shakespeare's. There are no median characters to relate the audience to the major characters. We observe a chamber of horrors, a world where evil reigns supreme. In The Duchess of Malfi, Antonio Bologna and Delio are honest characters, but they are not critics or objective observers of the action, and they are soon reduced to the intrigues characteristic of their enemies. It is usual for Shakespeare's commentators

to be unconnected with the intrigues around them. Though they are allied to the heroes they do not participate directly in the double-dealing and counterfeiting that often surrounds them. When we search the tragedy of the writers mentioned above we rarely find characters who eschew all practice of intrigue. The dominance of evil is almost an accomplished fact at the outset. The forces of resistance to evil are at a low ebb and have no chance of success. Those forces in Shakespeare are still vigorous and they are an essential component of the audience's awareness of man as agent of his own destiny, and of the potentiality of goodness in man.

I have tried in this chapter to indicate a few of the various ways in which the choric device was employed in order to indicate how fundamentally at variance with the practice of his contemporaries was Shakespeare's use of the commentator. I have adopted a mosaic approach in attempting to indicate something of the range and variety of dramatic practice. Inevitably I have had to omit mention of other significant devices that relate the audience to the play-world which the Elizabethan dramatists used. The induction and the framing story frequently used in the private theatres, and especially by Marston, were highly sophisticated devices for manipulating the audience in a manner very similar to that of Brecht's Verfremdungseffekt. The use of Epilogue and Prologue, as well as of soliloquy, might well be considered in this study, but the concatenated nature of Elizabethan studies is obviously endless and I have chosen to confine my attention to choric devices because, without a correct understanding of them, Shakespeare's commentators, and therefore the meaning of his tragedies, are liable to misinterpretation. It is essential that we remember the depersonalized nature of the formal chorus. It can supply information to a character or be used as a 'straight' man to hear necessary information, but it cannot become involved in the action. The very helplessness

of the chorus constituted its validity as an observer; it had no specific stake in the battle of vice and virtue save the general good. In the Greek tragedies, of course, it is frequently allied to a faction, but in Seneca we find a greater sense of detachment. Its concern with the general perspective is the reward of detachment. Shakespeare, however, in developing his commentators realized that there are limitations as well as virtues in detachment. A character standing outside a conflict may not fully appreciate the problems that it generates for those involved. But involvement in a problem blinds a person to the objective judgement of others. It is this insoluble paradox that Shakespeare explored in his linking of the reasonable commentator with the passionate hero. The paradox is inherent in the nature of the formal chorus but it could only come to fruition once the commentator was endowed with a distinct personality. We give our attention to a man who seems to observe his world objectively, but we experience the difficulties of maintaining that objectivity as he is drawn into the tragic web of events. Such characters are, as I have indicated, key elements in the tactical manoeuvrings of the dramatist in his strategy of involving or alienating his audience. The formal chorus presented information and an interpretation which could be taken at face value. In Shakespeare's tragedies we have to weigh all the information we receive against our knowledge of the character imparting it. This is part of the general shift in the characterization of the period from abstraction to character, from stereotype to individual. This is why I find critics who reduce Shakespeare's characters to the mechanical artifice of conventions inadequate. In a sense, therefore, Shakespeare has avoided the device of the chorus as it was practised in Elizabethan drama and returned to a practice akin to that of the Greek tragedians with which I opened this chapter. In making his commentator a co-actor he has, like Sophocles, drawn his audience into a terrifying proximity

with the tragic hero. The dramatists employ different methods but the result is the same in exposing us to the human complications of tragic events. If Shakespeare's commentators are to be called 'choric' we had better be sure that we know to which tradition we are relating them.

The chorus used as a didactic device rather than as a co-actor in the Greek tradition, seems to me to belong more properly to the narrative tradition and, indeed, as I have implied, it is to supply the function of narrator in the metrical tragedies that Elizabethan dramatists often employed it. We find the habit of authorial intrusion passing into the novel from Fielding down through Thackeray to Dickens, a habit which Henry James took considerable pains to censure. John Bayley has noted that this habit is a widespread concomitant of the novel form:

But on the whole novelists are less concerned with establishing the effectiveness in a worldly sense, of their characters, than of making use of their insight or employing them as a target for the author's own. And what might be called the novel-reading morality, in which insight replaces achievement and superior awareness is insensibly taken for granted as superior value, has had a wide effect on our contemporary critical outlook.<sup>1</sup>

This habit of identifying the 'superior awareness' of his commentators with Shakespeare himself seems to me to be a result of habituation to the novel form. The chorus as mouthpiece was a habit of narrative and gives evidence of what Bayley has called the 'tyrannical and manipulative' bond between the author and his character.<sup>2</sup> Drama in its highest achievements does not permit us that direct link with the author which the novelist can so easily use. We must not make the mistake of replacing Bradley's interpretation of character through the psychology of the novel with the mistake of endowing Shakespeare's

<sup>1</sup>John Bayley, The Character of Love (New York, 1963), pp. 161-162.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

drama with the novelist's habit of intrusion on the relations between character and audience. The tendency in Elizabethan drama is away from the habits of narrative, as I have tried to show in the evolution of the chorus, towards the purer drama of structures organically conceived with independent characters. Again Bayley has observed the important distinction:

For although Shakespeare's plays are full of observers, self-appointed commentators on human folly who would be invaluable to the novelist, they remain subordinate and do not show up what they survey, or determine its value and status. In the world of poetic drama they are themselves actors who have chosen a particular role to play, and - as in the case of Thersites and Apemantus - it is well understood by all that they are playing it because they can manage no other. In the fictional world, on the other hand, the observer is by convention "sincere" and transparent; he has not assumed a role which suits<sup>1</sup> his purposes; his impartiality makes him truly formidable.

Critics have too often assumed that Shakespeare's observers have that directive and authoritative function commonly found in the commentators which appear in the novel form. I am attempting to interpret their function under the far different conditions of dramatic form.

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<sup>1</sup>ibid., p. 163.

### III

#### SHAKESPEARE'S COMMENTATORS - POSSIBLE INFLUENCES

In searching for the literary forebears of Shakespeare's commentators we have seen that to make an obvious link with choric devices in earlier plays is inadequate and misleading. Shakespeare was an innovator and is not found doggedly following old traditions and conventions; rather, he exploits them for his own particular purposes. Yet it is incorrect to picture Shakespeare as a total revolutionary striking out into new territory on his own; he is a central figure just because we find so many tendencies of his age brought to full fruition in his dramatic art. Historical criticism is essential in studying Shakespeare but only if it can recognize that he cannot be fully explained in a lineal and mechanical pattern of cause and effect. We can recognize the influences of a vast variety of conventions and ideas in his work but a true appreciation of Shakespeare only comes with an examination of what he makes of those influences. I would like to analyze in this chapter a heterogeneous variety of influences that have a bearing on Shakespeare's use of the commentator. The influences vary from the exigencies of the theatre to the broad spectrum of Renaissance philosophy. The possible influences are very numerous and I can only give a selection of those that seem to me to be most relevant. I hope that by indicating the diversity of the range I shall avoid the kind of blinkered historical criticism that seeks to reduce the extraordinary diversity and complexity of Elizabethan drama to tidy and neat formulations. Again by adopting the mosaic approach and looking at my subject from a variety of angles I can, perhaps, indicate how central a problem the question of Shakespeare's commentators is.

## 1

To start at the simplest level, it is worth remembering that despite many attempts to ramble through the medieval heritage and broader philosophical patterns in order to understand the structure of Shakespeare's plays we may still be ignoring very basic explanations that derive from the functional mechanics of the Elizabethan theatre. The commentators in Shakespeare's tragedies may appear so consistently simply because of the presence in the company of an actor who had established such a role.<sup>1</sup> Even in the repertory companies of today in England, Canada and the United States, with their access to a much larger pool of acting talent, we find that actors tend to develop a 'line' of parts, and especially in companies producing Shakespeare's plays we find actors who year after year, having established their place in the company, tend to appear in the same kind of parts. Given a list of the plays to be performed and a knowledge of the company one can predict with some accuracy the casting before the director assigns what is still called a 'line' of parts. It is obvious that in companies of more restricted size, such as those in Elizabethan theatres, this kind of stereotyping may well have been extensive; indeed the wide use of stereotyped characters in the period may in part be explained by such theatrical conditions. Yet it is also well to remember that, paradoxically, the smaller the company the more flexible an actor's 'line' may have been if the dramatists wished to supply the variety for which the Elizabethan audience had such a voracious appetite. Baldwin, in his massive study, has examined the problem in detail and I shall quote extensively from his findings. His evidence, the few surviving cast

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<sup>1</sup>For an analysis of the structure of morality plays dependent on the composition of acting companies see D. M. Bevington, From "Mankind" to Marlowe (Cambridge, 1962).

lists, is unfortunately scanty, but he comes to the following conclusion about the practice of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatres:

Thus an examination of these plays with assigned parts has shown us that each actor had a definite line, that there were five or six principal men actors and two or three apprentices, that each play was so written as to contain a representative of the line of each principal actor, thus typically containing eight major "lines", six for men, and two or three for apprentices. There was very evident understanding as to the duties of each class in the organization, the major parts for men being supplied by members, the parts for women being supplied by apprentices, and the minor parts by hired men. It is evident then that the division of labor was very definitely established, and that the play was regularly fitted to the company, not the company to the play.<sup>1</sup>

It is Baldwin's opinion that under such theatrical circumstances we can discount psychological presentation since the actor performing consistently the same role in a variety of plays strove only to be himself under fictitious circumstances. It follows from this that the type of play changes not only as a concomitant of the dramatist's artistic development but also because of the change in the type of actors in the company. Baldwin notes that the four periods of Shakespeare's writing correspond to the four major reorganizations of his company.<sup>2</sup> It seems possible, therefore, that the appearance of a blunt, plain-dealer in Shakespeare's plays can be simply explained by the appearance of a suitable actor. So at least Baldwin leads us to believe:

John Lowin ... is the bluntly humorous, bluff character. To him falls the impolite villain, the gruff counsellor, the plain-spoken friend. He is the cruel tyrant Caesar, revelling in blood even from his youth, the honest Jacomo,

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<sup>1</sup>T. W. Baldwin, The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company (New York, 1961), p. 197.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 305-306.

who is an exceedingly lame Iago and could have given Lowin but little joy; the equally honest Flaminius, relentless devil incarnate, hounding the hero for love of evil, of brusque, imperious manner, haughty and overbearing; the wise old counsellor Eubulus, who mistakes blunt impudence for plainness of speech, humorous withal; the equally humorous and blustering Belleur, the brave but bashful lover, who wins by main strength and awkwardness, or rather is caught because of it; and the "huffing Lord Aubrey", who in his own imagination is "A wise man and a valiant man, a just man"; but to his enemies a "swash buckler" nevertheless.

Thus by examining cast lists for Beaumont and Fletcher's plays he establishes a "line" of parts for Lowin. He then proceeds to extend that line backwards to the parts that Lowin probably played in Shakespeare's plays. But even from the above quotation the 'line' seems very broad indeed; villain, counsellor, tyrant, lover, swashbuckler - one can see common elements in the parts but surely the range is rather extensive. When Baldwin extends the line back into Shakespeare his case seems to me to break down. Amongst Lowin's parts he includes Falstaff, Parolles, Lucio, Gloucester, Banquo, Aufidius, Iago, Apemantus, Iachimo, and Autolycus.<sup>2</sup> That list seems to cover an extensive range of characterization and, though it includes several of the characters with whom I am dealing, it is difficult to link Iago with Gloucester or Banquo with Parolles in anything other than a superficial way. Baldwin's speculations, we must remember, are based on a few cast lists and the weighty superstructure of his argument must not lead us to forget this slender base. His analysis, indeed, is a particularly apt example of the historical criticism that reduces a wide diversity of material to a rigid formula. It leaves a wide variety of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 178-179.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 248-249.

questions unanswered. One might inquire whether other writers who produced work for this company also produced similar parts for Lowin, or whether the absence of such parts in other writers indicates the lack of such an actor in other companies. The only way in which one might elucidate this problem would be by examining work of playwrights who wrote for a number of companies to see if their work was appropriate for the character types developed by the actors of each company. Such a labour is beyond the requirements of this study and the evidence is, in any case, so fragmentary as to make any conclusions almost arbitrary. Clearly many writers adopted their style when writing for children's companies. Marston's plays are often carefully prepared with an eye to the irony of adult material being played by a juvenile troupe, especially in the deliberately ingenuous inductions. Harbage has noted the difference in subject matter and characterization in the plays produced for the private theatres.<sup>1</sup> Yet, even with the evidence available, Baldwin's definition of a 'line' seems to be so broad as to be almost meaningless. His distribution of parts amongst some of the older members of the company, as opposed to the obvious juvenile lead or clown, seems to be arbitrary. Shakespeare's long association with and knowledge of his company, his position as actor-playwright, his stream of parts for Burbadge, the necessity of supplying plays for a fairly constant number of professionals - these and many more factors would indicate that Shakespeare was influenced by the composition of his company. This does not mean, however, that he was limited, any more than a man having chosen to write a sonnet is limited by having to compress his thoughts into

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<sup>1</sup>Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions (New York, 1952).

fourteen lines. We can see that a playwright, once he accepted the limits of the company in the matter of numbers and gained knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses, was in a position to write for maximum advantage.

The admission that the constitution of the company did not determine necessarily the characterization of the plays is to be found in Appendix VIII in Baldwin in his discussion of Jonson's practice:

The reasons for our difficulty in assigning parts are chiefly two. In the first place, Jonson constructed his plays primarily to suit himself rather than to suit the company. He seems to have written his plays to express his own ideas, and then to have placed his plays where he could best get them produced. The result was something like the fit of ready-made clothes, which may fit a number of people after a fashion, but rarely fit anybody well. While the suit may fit many, there is no way of telling to what particular individual of the many it did actually belong.<sup>1</sup>

The emphasis here is almost comic for it seems, absurdly, that Jonson is to be limited because he does not fit Baldwin's theory, as though Shakespeare was a good company-man and Jonson a bit of a free-lance rebel in expressing "his own ideas". And yet, despite the fact that Jonson does not fit the pattern, he was an extraordinarily popular and successful writer. Surely any theory that cannot account for this fact is somewhat suspect. And yet it is important to remember that Shakespeare probably did write to exploit the particular gifts of his company. It is unwise, however, to lay too much emphasis on the deterministic element of the company. Did Shakespeare fit his writing to his company or the company fit its acting to his drama? This is something of a chicken and egg question, but clearly there must have been influence both ways.

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<sup>1</sup>T. W. Baldwin, The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company (New York, 1961), p. 436.

Certainly there is a consistent line of commentators, but they are so varied in their individual development within the tragedies that it is impossible to imagine that Shakespeare found any serious restriction of his dramatic aims in the limitations of his company. Even if one actor played most of the parts that I shall examine, it is clear that he must have been a versatile and flexible instrument. The relationship of hero and commentator may have been influenced by the rapport generated between a couple of actors over a number of years, though we can never prove the matter, but it did not prevent Shakespeare from developing that relationship from an extraordinary diversity of angles. The appreciation of Shakespeare begins, as I said earlier, not from a definition of the means at his disposal but from an understanding of his exploitation of those means. There are, however, other factors involved, apart from the acting of John Lowin, to help in explaining the appearance of commentators in Shakespeare's plays.

## 2

I have already examined the function of the chorus and the commentator in the tragedy of the period. Whilst doing so I mentioned that commentators appeared much more frequently in the comedies. I would like now to examine that tradition in a little more detail to demonstrate what Shakespeare may have owed to it and how the function of such commentators was inevitably radically transformed when they were transferred to the tragic world.

The function of commentator has a long history in the character of the Vice, for he is frequently the presenter of the plays in which he appears, and seems frequently to improvise the action out of his own mischief. Ambidexter in Cambises is typical in his habit of elaborating mischievous tricks to point out to the audience the folly of his victims. He supplies many of the functions

of the chorus in apprising us of events that happen offstage, keeping the story going with narrative links, and anticipating the action by revealing the pranks he will attempt. He observes the action throughout and yet is one of the chief movers in it. Preston supplements his role with Epilogue and Prologue and with a choric character, Commons Cry, to ensure that the audience draws the correct moral. But it is the Vice who is most active in curing the world, and it is in this role as active intriguer that he anticipates so many of the comic characters of the later drama.

The role of the Vice became rapidly fragmented in the drama of the late 1590's with the appearance of a large variety of comic types - some specializing in a disgusted observation of the world, such as the malcontents and melancholics, and others, such as the satirical intriguers, specializing in involvement to ratify their observations. There is an extraordinary variety of characters who are disaffected from the world, or who enjoy a position of detachment in commenting on the folly of those around them. They may turn up as malcontent foreign travellers, professional jesters, bastards, rural plain-dealers, stoics, cynical railers, misanthropes and blunt soldiers. Often they are the butt of the humour, but increasingly, with the vogue of satire developing, they attempt to 'cure' the world. Shakespeare's Jaques, because he stands aloof from the action, has often been taken to be the dramatist's mouthpiece. But as a well-known type recently returned from the continent, overcome with boredom and an exaggerated melancholic pessimism, he is surely the butt of the play. The popularity of the honest plain-dealer, however, is not to be doubted, as his claim to fame in the Character Books, which were beginning to appear, attests. Jorgensen<sup>1</sup> has shown how Barnaby Rich built his reputation almost

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<sup>1</sup>P. A. Jorgensen, "Barnaby Rich: Soldierly Suitor and Honest Critic of Women", SQ, VII (1956), 183-188.

entirely on the role of blunt soldier. He combined this with the role of the "honest man" as it became increasingly popular in the drama. This type frequently attacked the vanity of learning and the sophistication of the court in works such as Robert Wilson's The Cobler's Prophecie and Breton's The Scholler and the Soldier. This aspect is clear in Rich: "I confesse my self to be ill beholding to mine own tounge, that could never flatter, lispe, nor lye ... I speake plainly, and I meane honestly, and although my wordes be not embroydered with high morality, I care not, for I leave that to Schollers".<sup>1</sup> The disaffection from the world of court and learning, as well as the open criticism of women also practised by Rich, is to be found variously represented in Mercutio, Iago, Thersites, Enobarbus; and Henry V, of course, elaborately fulfills the tradition when courting Katherine.

The vogue of satire around the turn of the century brought a throng of these plain-dealers to the stage and the tradition has been expertly analysed by Campbell<sup>2</sup> and Kernan<sup>3</sup> in such detail that I need only to note comparisons and contrasts with the characters with which I am concerned. In Chapman's An Humorous Day's Mirth Lemot very early designates himself as the principal scoffer who will make it his task to point out the folly and humours that afflict his companions. In his manipulation of all characters, arranging a final exhibition of their folly and a deflation of all the humour figures, he clearly has affinities with the Vice. Dowsecer, too, with his wise saws on the general

<sup>1</sup>Barnaby Rich, The Honestie of This Age (1614), ed., Peter Cunningham (London, 1844), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>O. J. Campbell, Shakespeare's Satire (Hamden, 1963).

<sup>3</sup>A. B. Kernan, The Cankered Muse (New Haven, 1959).

ills of the world, is something of a truth-speaker, and his insight enchants many of his listeners, though he is ultimately as vulnerable to the folly of love and to Lemot's pranks as the rest of the characters. This play clearly exhibits a satirical method that we find in many of the comedies written around the turn of the sixteenth century.

Between 1599 and 1606 Marston probably wrote eight plays in a wide variety of popular forms and each contains a satirist. In Freevill in The Dutch Courtesan, as in so many of Marston's satirists, we find sexual innuendo as an essential component of his speech. We find a similar preoccupation with bawdy wordplay in Shakespeare's commentators from as early as Faulconbridge through Mercutio, Iago, Lear's Fool to Enobarbus. Such joking doubtless delighted the audience and, on occasion, is more obviously angled at the Puritans, the enemies of the theatre. This freedom and openness of speech may well have contributed to the popularity and vogue of the commentator. Malheureux in The Dutch Courtesan is something of an Angelo-like Puritan and his severe censure of the world is set against Freevill's maturer knowledge of the ubiquity of vice. Thus the commentator can appear to be the champion of the audience in defeating the enemies of their beloved theatre whilst, at the same time, exhibiting the theatre's salutary function in censuring vice. Freevill, like the old Vice, operates in collusion with the audience, informing them every step of the way of his intrigues and intentions and of the lessons to be learned from the folly exhibited before them. In comedy this relationship between intriguer and audience needs to be especially close because the latter needs to be assured that everything will turn out well. In such plays we are rarely in suspense about the outcome. We are interested in the skill of the plotting, and in the artistry with which the intriguer presents his lessons. The important fact to remember about the commentator in comedy is that he has the ability to

control the situation. Feliche in Antonio and Mellida is never in danger himself of succumbing to the follies practised by those around him. He refuses to bend to the custom of the time, eschews sycophancy, and speaks bluntly to those who would reduce him to their own fantastical habits. It seems much easier to say of these characters in comedy that they might appear to come very close to representing the author's position. Given such immunity from folly and such control of situations they seem to have none of the problems or weaknesses of commentators in tragedy. But the problem of the detached commenting figure eventually became apparent even in comedy. The basic paradox of the character, which Shakespeare developed so richly, became apparent when the ultimate implications of satire began to be worked out. The satiric commentator, purporting to be a stoic fool disinterestedly chastizing mankind, is constantly in danger of being overwhelmed by his spleen and his disgust at the world. Observing a railer spitting envy and hatred of mankind an audience becomes aware that commentary may be merely a different brand of folly. It may have been from this aspect of the comic tradition that Shakespeare gained the intuition of the value such characters might have when transferred to tragedy. Kernan has already performed the service for comedy that I am proposing to undertake for tragedy when he declared his purpose to be, "to demonstrate that the Elizabethan and Jacobean satirists are best understood as conventional figures designed for a specific function in satire, not as spokesmen for the author's views or direct reflections of their own characters".<sup>1</sup> In thus separating author and character Kernan has done us a great service, especially

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

in evaluating Marston and rescuing him from the psychiatrist's couch to which many critics have strapped him. The problem for the satirist is that, as a commentator, he must strive to present the truth, but he must also make vice appear ugly and dangerous. There is an inevitable drift towards exaggeration, and in his zeal to expose a corrupt world he may himself appear unbalanced and unhealthily savage. The satyr satirist has the qualities of roughness, and the plainness of the honest exposé of the world 'as it is'. Shakespeare first experimented with such a character in Faulconbridge. In producing Thersites he supplied the most radical extension of the cynic's role, and seems to me to have fastened on the problem of the commentator which he then developed in his tragedies. Apemantus and Iago trace their kinship back to the satirists and are developed in different directions in keeping with the demands of the tragedies in which they occur. I shall examine all of these characters since, although they may appear to have more kinship with the satirists of the comedies, they seem to me to be the kernel out of which Shakespeare developed the crucial contrast of hero and commentator in his tragedies.

The satirist-commentator in his plain-speaking derives largely from the example of Roman satire and owes a debt also to Cynic-Stoic primitivism with its sense of alienation from all the artifices of civilization, from the vanity of learning and the refinements of the court. It is possible to see this tradition flowing through Thersites, but we are not to assume that Shakespeare endorses the ascetic ideal. Shakespeare himself is a much more balanced observer than his "railer" and is always quick to see the dramatic conflict possible in the exploitation of opposing points of view. The Cynic's antagonism to the courtly world, simply laid down in Troilus and Cressida, becomes extraordinarily complicated in the sophisticated analysis of King Lear, where that detached observer Thersites has now been proliferated into a series of roles, the Fool,

Kent, Edgar, Lear himself. The commentary once made rather glibly by the satirists of comedy has become profound and perplexing in the web of tragic events. The paradox, as I have said, was potential in comedy; we are aware of it in Thersites who, like Macilente, rails at the world without attempting to move in it, and therefore seems futile and sterile.

The problem for the satirist is how to act in this world. There is a tension between the demands of reflection and those of action which I shall discuss in a later section. Merely to observe implies irrelevance, to act requires involvement, which undercuts objective judgement. The satirist's disgust with the depravity of the world constantly leads him to the involvement of becoming a tempter, leading on his victims to expose and scourge them. His role thus takes on sadistic overtones and instead of remaining an observer he becomes the central intriguer.<sup>1</sup> The malcontent and satirist as intriguer frequently has a totally personal stake in the plot, Vindici as Piato, or Altofronto as Malevole scourge the world for specifically vengeful purposes. Even when the satirist acts in the general interest it is difficult to prevent the audience from being alienated. In his intriguing, because he considers himself immune to folly, he lacks charity, and his single-minded concern to scourge the world reveals a moral sickness within himself. The key to the satirist's character is his rigidity in insisting on viewing the world in black and white terms. As Kernan has put it, "For him virtue is virtue and vice is vice, and he carefully avoids any airy speculations about human complexity or the mysterious nature of the universe. The ways of his fathers are good enough

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<sup>1</sup>For a fuller discussion of these problems see Kernan, op.cit., pp. 210-211.

for him, and a healthy society, not ultimate knowledge or personal salvation, is his stated goal".<sup>1</sup> In the antithesis presented here we immediately recognize the contrast between Shakespeare's tragic heroes and their accompanying commentators. The writers of comedies began to filter in, behind their satirical commentators, human complications that gave the audience an awareness that there are more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in a satirist's philosophy. We recognize truth in the observations of Thersites and Macilente, but it is transparently clear that the authors do not intend us to embrace their attitudes as a working philosophy of life. To quote Kernan again, since he makes a point which I am at great pains to emphasize in this thesis:

Each character must endure comparison with other characters, and his theories and actions are objectively tested by being followed out to their conclusions. But the nature of the dramatic mode was not the only force working for the complication of satire, for the Elizabethan poets, even some of the inferior ones, had a habit of placing every act, attitude and point of view in the widest possible perspective. Heaven and Hell appear to have been their spatial boundaries, and Creation and Judgement their temporal limits.<sup>2</sup>

As long as the comic intriguer was successful in restoring society to normality without revealing any moral sickness in himself the ethical pattern remained uncomplicated. But as soon as the satirist, in victimizing the world, becomes included as a butt of the author's humour, then we are moving towards the more complicated pattern of Shakespearian tragedy, where the commentator helps the audience to understand why normality cannot reassert itself. Shakespeare's commentators are, with the exceptions mentioned above, never

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

as sick as the satyr satirist, and yet, in Shakespeare's gentler and more charitable handling, they are significant for an audience in a somewhat similar manner to Marston's characters; that is to say they are incapable of responding to the complexity of the world; in order to judge the world they have to simplify it. They diagnose folly in others that they are unaware of in themselves. The contrast in tragedy is, of course, much more effective simply because of the opportunities of associating the straightforward commentator with the complicated psychological detail of a tragic hero. The satirist in comedy is frequently merely one static type amongst many others, but in tragedy the commentator is often a stable man in the alien and abnormal world of tragedy.

The commentator in comedy has an opportunity to control or exploit the folly of the world in which he lives. The commentator in tragedy finds that his efforts to control and direct those around him are constantly frustrated. In The Malcontent, for example, there is no danger of irrevocable catastrophe because Mendoza's highly elaborate plotting is exploited by Malevole to bring about results opposite to those that Mendoza intends. In tragedy either the evil intriguer is dominant or the characters operate within no framework of a manipulated plot that will save them. The veils of illusion are torn away too late, and in working towards the discovery of the real nature of his situation the hero destroys the world around him. A character in comedy, such as Angelo in Measure for Measure, may intend to act in a criminal way, or even think he has done so, but the development of the plot is subject to the control of others, such as Vincentio, and evil purposes are ultimately frustrated. Many characters in comedy come to an acknowledgment of the folly of which they have been guilty and can be rewarded because their acts have not caused irreparable damage. The satirist-intriguer, who manipulates characters

in order to lead them to a salutary recognition of their folly, is often the directing and controlling agent of the plot. But in the tragic world the commentator's wisdom is unheeded, his purposes frustrated, and he is frequently overwhelmed either by the evil dominant in a world directed by others over whom he has no control, or by the folly which rages in the world beyond the control of anyone. In a sense, therefore, the inability of the tragic world to produce a directing and controlling common-sense figure who can save man from the ultimate implications of his own weaknesses, constitutes the inevitability of tragedy. The problems of tragedy go too deep to answer to the simple solutions that the observers offer. The awareness of a disparity between a simple view of the world and the complex detail of tragic situations is one of the things that Shakespeare communicated to his audience through these characters, but he could never have aroused this awareness in us if tragedy had simply followed the old ethical and didactic pattern common to the de casibus, homiletic and morality traditions. The characters would, as I have indicated, merely have replaced the chorus. But Shakespeare began to write tragedies when the influence of a new and popular form was becoming dominant. The moral ambiguities involved in the revenge code produced dramas in which judgement in response to human complexity was no longer simple.

## 3

Revenge was a subject which presented problems to the Elizabethans ✓ that a simple reflex morality was not able to solve. The moral dilemma which revenge presented made dramatists examine anew the kind of techniques required to delight and instruct their audiences. Having to explore the motives of revenge and the justification or lack of it for the actions it entailed led the dramatists to an exploration of conflicts within man's mind. The forces

for good and evil, which had hitherto fought for the soul of the hero by attacks from without, now took up their habitation within his mind, and presented the confusing torments of possible courses that could no longer be labelled with complete assurance - morally correct, morally false. Heroes are caught in moral dilemmas and, in the absence of a chorus directing us along well-trodden paths, the audience is frequently exposed to similar dilemmas in coming to terms with the behaviour of the characters. The audience must now wrestle with problems that are either objectively presented without a commentator or presented with a commentator who cannot supply us with a ready solution and is himself overwhelmed by the action. This kind of tragedy inevitably increased audience involvement with the complicated process of the play and reached its peak in the work of Shakespeare. It is significant that Shakespeare's early efforts in the tragic mode, Titus Andronicus and Romeo and Juliet explore the intricate and destructive nature of the revenge theme. In his first major tragedy, Hamlet, he again used the revenge theme as a means of approaching problems which absorbed him throughout his great tragedies. In this play Shakespeare brought to the fore all those problems I have mentioned before, which so preoccupied the great tragic dramatists, and analysed them with a penetrating and sophisticated insight; man embroiled in illusion or reality, man as agent or patient of his destiny, man as passionate or reasonable creature, man as an active or contemplative organism. It is impossible to watch a scene of this play without being faced with a development of some aspect of these dualities. If an audience were told unambiguously what to make of Hamlet and his revenge, then the dualities would dissolve, but it is precisely because we are not told, and because we have to weigh a multitude of factors and data hitting us from all angles in trying to determine our

attitude to Hamlet and his problems that we are exposed to the complexity of the revenge theme and of tragedy itself.

✓ The moral ambiguity of the revenge code revolves around a man's need to satisfy his own honour opposed to an awareness that revenge should be left in God's hands. The dilemma became crucial in the late Elizabethan and Jacobean period with the excessive honing of the sense of honour cultivated under the new courtly codes. There was an extraordinary increase in duelling activities in the reign of James due, no doubt, to many factors. French and Italian influence became widespread, the flourishing of a newly created gentry with the paint hardly dry on their heraldic devices who were competitive and sensitive to insult, the inability of James to control his court and his unwise cultivation of favourites, the bribery that could set people on to 'manufacture' duels in order to remove political enemies - these must have been a few of the influences which set the young-bloods boiling. There was, of course, a perpetual stream of condemnation of revenge from the pulpit and from the writings of moral philosophers, but they were not the only voices raised on the subject. There was a feeling that a man had some obligation to restore his honour when he could hope for no redress from the law due to a lack of legal evidence. There were many, of course, who still felt that all redress must be left in God's hands. The result that this diversity of views had on the theatre is described by Fredson Bowers:

... the audience of the theaters seems to have made the customary compromise between a formal set of religious and moral ethics and an informal set of native convictions. Under these circumstances - and the evidence of the tragedies bears out the theory - the revenger of the drama started with the sympathy of the audience if his cause were good and if he acted according to the typically English notions of straightforward fair play. It was only, as with Hieronimo (although this example may seem the most debatable of the many available), when he turned to "Machiavellian" treacherous intrigues that the audience began to veer against him. That

the majority of stage-revengers- Hieronimo, Titus, Hoffman, Sciarrha, and Rosaura, to name only a few - met their death, may be attributed either to the fact that they turned from sympathetic, wronged heroes to bloody maniacs whose revenge might better have been left to God; or else that the strain of the horrible situation in which they found themselves so warped their characters that further existence in a normal world became impossible and death was the only solution.<sup>1</sup>

It can be seen at once how vastly at variance this kind of drama is with that directed by an instructive chorus. The audience responds to the experience of the play and has to be alert to changes and shifts in mood and character in order to interpret the play. Without falling into the habits of romantic criticism or into Shelley's adulation of Prometheus it seems clear to me that it became possible for an audience to entertain sympathy for a hero whose actions could not be clearly defined, in terms of strict orthodoxy, as morally correct. If the action of revenge was not always ultimately endorsed, it did, at least, become possible to realize that a reflex moral response was not adequate in such complicated situations. The problem is presented most acutely in Hamlet. Are we expected to condemn the hero for contemplating revenge, or are we to condemn him for 'procrastinating', or are we to sympathize with the insoluble dilemma in which he finds himself? Critics have endlessly supported a variety of interpretations, and that in itself is surely testimony that the play was designed to present a problem to which there is no easy solution. Anyone who seeks to avoid the intricate nature of the riddle which the play presents is surely ignoring the basic inspiration from which the play springs - the ambiguity of the revenge code which unquestionably perplexed the Elizabethans.

The problem was complicated by the fact that it was possible to believe

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<sup>1</sup>F. T. Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642. (Gloucester, Mass., 1959), p. 40. I am heavily indebted throughout this section to the analysis presented in this book.

that God, on occasion, employed human instruments as his agents in accomplishing his heavenly vengeance. And yet a man who pursues his own vengeance is endangering his eternal jewel, even when all occasions inform against his delay. Even if an audience may sympathize with a revenger's designs he must inevitably die for his presumption. The dilemma is stated clearly by Bowers: "The audience is sympathetic to the revenger so long as he does not revenge. At the conclusion the audience admits its sentimental satisfaction with the act of personal justice but its ethical sense demands the penalty for the infraction of divine command".<sup>1</sup> In The Spanish Tragedy, Titus Andronicus, Antonio's Revenge and Hamlet the hero is caught in a crossfire between ethical imperatives and the honourable desire for personal satisfaction. Because the hero is caught in a complicated series of events in which it is difficult to decide what is the morally correct action required, the audience must inevitably sympathize with him in a situation which destroys his hopes, hounds him to insanity, and brings him to his grave. He may cleanse the world of the evil of the original crime but that may involve the death of the innocent, and the disorder caused by the pursuit of revenge has to be expiated by the hero in his death.

Revenge tragedy, in which good and evil could be inextricably mixed within a single character, opened up a new range of dramatic expression. The revenge hero frequently caught in a crisis of conscience seeks into his own motives and thus forces the audience to examine the springs of action. The way out of this ethical dilemma came increasingly to be solved by the development of the villain-revenger who provided opportunities for bizarre and sensational crimes without any drastic wrenching of the audience's moral outlook. But the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

villains are observed objectively and the audience left to come to its own conclusions without any heavily didactic clues from the author. In Chettle's Hoffman, Lorrique, as a commentator, makes wry remarks on his master's plans and comically resigns himself to villainy. But Hoffman is no self-conscious villain in the tradition of the Vice, he is convinced throughout of the correctness of his actions and is presented with complete objectivity. Consistent to the end, he offers no repentance and regrets only that his revenge had not been more complete. The audience must come to its own conclusions without any prompting from authorial mouthpieces. In Tourneur's The Revenger's Tragedy the characters are presented with a similar objectivity, for Vindici is unaware of his own villainy, and the society in which he exists is so bizarre that it is difficult for the audience to stand clear from the abnormal atmosphere and judge Vindici's behaviour. In a world where evil is so rampant it is difficult to establish any scale of moral culpability. Tourneur attacks the problem of evil from a multiplicity of viewpoints in a structural manner reminiscent of Shakespeare and with a riddling ambiguity that Tomlinson has related to 'metaphysical' wit.<sup>1</sup> The play clearly condemns revenge but it is only at the end of the play that we can get the monstrous nature of Vindici's crimes into perspective. Webster presents another aspect of the problem in The White Devil. It is clear to any audience that Vittoria and Brachiano are guilty, and yet their punishment, in the revenge accomplished by Lodovico and Francisco, is as much to be condemned as the behaviour which occasions it. The characters in Webster cannot easily be classified as 'black' and 'white'. The infectious nature of evil taints all, and the audience, if it chooses to sympathize with some characters rather

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<sup>1</sup>T. B. Tomlinson, A Study of Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy (Cambridge, 1964), pp. 109-110.

than others, must accept the frailty and inadequacy that goes with them.

Revenge tragedy turned away from moral ambiguity to moral certitude in its disapproval of revenge practised by obviously Machiavellian villains.

✓ Yet the theme of revenge offered opportunities to explore the internal conflict within character and turned, therefore, to an emphasis on psychological insight.

In the greatest writers we are exposed to the problems of persons trapped in difficult situations, which demanded structural techniques far beyond those of the older drama of stereotyped villains and conventional horrors. But only Shakespeare seems to have capitalized fully on the experience of writing revenge tragedy in realizing the implications of complex ethical problems.

✓ The sources of many of Shakespeare's tragedies are written in a simple didactic tone but he transforms and elaborates them to produce those rich, organic structures that are so distinctive. This is a result, I suggest, of the problems that the revenge tragedy posed, for once it was realized that good men could commit vengeful deeds it became necessary to re-examine the sources of action and character. Drama began to expose not merely men's actions but their own bewilderment in face of the choice of actions open to them; hence the increasing importance of soliloquy. It became necessary not merely to record but to analyse, not merely to provide answers but to raise questions. The problem of revenge raised the complications of plot and character onto a new level, as Bowers indicates:

The revengers of blood undertook an enormously difficult task hampered by every conceivable obstacle. The insistence of their duty, the imperfectness of their means, their frequent lack of knowledge of whom to seek, and their comparative helplessness in the grip of circumstances, stretched them on the rack of human emotions and made them peer into the causes of<sub>1</sub> their action and the great questions of life and death.

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<sup>1</sup>F. T. Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642 (Gloucester, Mass.), p. 280.

Shakespeare did not forget the experience he had gained in writing Hamlet. It is because he clung so tenaciously to the principle of a multi-faceted and exhaustive analysis of human events that he required commentators in his tragedies.<sup>1</sup> The commentators are, so to speak, survivors from before the flood of revenge tragedy.

We cannot imagine, as I have observed before, where such characters could function in the later Jacobean tragedy, where the atmosphere is so claustrophobic, oppressive, almost sulphurous, that there is no room for plain-spoken observation and criticism. Their presence in Shakespeare's plays, their refusal to keep quiet, is one of the keys to the distinction between his tragic vision and that of his contemporaries. We have only to imagine their removal from their respective plays to realize how much more oppressive the atmosphere of those plays would become. But the old polarization of characters has been transformed and, however much we may attend to the commentators, we have to recognize, too, that there are qualities in the hero which we admire and which makes impossible any total acceptance of either's point of view. Shakespeare passes on to us what Bayley has described as an author's "sense of human differentiation":<sup>2</sup>

What I understand by an author's love for his characters is a delight in their independent existence as other people, an attitude towards them which is analogous to our feelings towards those we love in life; and an intense interest in their personalities combined with a sort of detached solicitude, a respect for their freedom.<sup>3</sup>

The motive of revenge in so many plays provides evidence of the

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<sup>1</sup>Poetry, and particularly the sonnet-sequences, in this period often follows the structural method of presenting multi-faceted viewpoints to particular problems. In an extensive analysis Patrick Cruttwell has viewed this habit as one of the most dominant and distinctive methods of poetical composition in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, The Shakespearean Moment (New York, 1960).

<sup>2</sup>John Bayley, The Character of Love (New York, 1963), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

irresistible and remorseless course of hot blood. It is not an exaggeration to compare the shock that Freud supplied to nineteenth-century rationalism in his revelation of the dark forces of the unconscious to the shock supplied to the rationalist moral philosophers of the sixteenth century by the display of uncontrollable passion attendant upon the revenge code. The paradox in England was complete since the cold, calculating revenge of Italian tradition was condemned whilst the open, straightforward revenge, more in line with English notions of fair play, was considered more favourably. All acts of passion are not to be condemned, nor all reasonable reflections to be endorsed. The revenge tradition brought two problems sharply into focus, the merits of reason as against passion, and the merits of contemplation as against action. Since these dualities are analysed by Shakespeare again and again in his confrontation of hero and commentator I shall examine finally the wider sphere of philosophical views in which such problems were examined. ✓

## 4

I have suggested that in the shift from didactic drama, accelerated by the problems of the revenge theme, there appeared in tragedy an increased emphasis on psychology, a view that has been opposed by many modern critics. Madelaine Doran, however, in a book which exhaustively analyses the conventional elements in the drama, affirms this emphasis:

A way to intensify tragedy came by a shift of emphasis in the Christian ethical scheme from its theological to its psychological aspect. Aristotelian - Thomistic ethics saw the attainment of virtue as the active victory of reason over the will, which in turn governed the passions in the interests of reason. Potentiality for tragedy lay in the disruptive force of runaway passion. The more narrowly ethical side of this scheme had been expressed in the morality play, with its contest between the virtues and the vices for the soul of every man. And the forms and terms of the morality play were not to be

forgotten in later tragedy. But it was the psychological side of the scheme, the conflict between reason and passion, that widened the possibilities for tragedy in the Elizabethan period. In the highly developed psychological theories of the passions in which there was at the time such great interest, dramatists found means of deepening motivation and of intensifying internal conflict. This making of the conflict personal gave, in turn,<sup>1</sup> new immediacy, poignancy and subtlety to the moral problem.

But there are many critics who recognize this change in method but who find no fundamental change in aim. Beneath the encrustation of characterization the pattern is little changed from that of old morality plays such as Wit and Science where Reason moulds the behaviour of other abstractions and remains unswayed by the allegorically portrayed passions competing for man's soul. Characters such as Friar Laurence, Lear's Fool and Enobarbus are seen by some to continue this tradition in pointing out the dangers of passion. Franklin Dickey<sup>2</sup>, following in the footsteps of Lily Campbell<sup>3</sup>, sees Shakespeare as a champion of the rational man offering moderating restraint to the slaves of passion. But there has been far too widespread a tendency to assume that the Christian humanist's emphasis on the 'ideal' of reason controlling passion was uncritically adopted as a moral aim by the dramatists. Certainly a great number of the sixteenth-century books of moral philosophy support the view that the act of sin is primarily intellectual and therefore involves erroneous reasoning. Such books suggest that since the will is subservient to reason it ought to accept what reason proposes. Shakespeare's commentators whose outstanding virtue is their honesty would appear to fit Charron's description

<sup>1</sup> Madeleine Doran, Endeavours of Art (Madison, 1954) p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> F. M. Dickey, Not Wisely But Too Well: Shakespeare's Love Tragedies (San Marino, 1957).

<sup>3</sup> L. B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes: Slaves of Passion (Cambridge, 1930).

of the balanced, ordered and natural way of living:

So then the true honestie (the foundation and piller of wisdom) is to follow nature, that is to say, reason. The good and the end of man, in whom consisteth his rest, his libertie, his contentment, and in a word, his perfection in this world, is to live and do according to nature, when that which is the most excellent thing in him commandeth, that is to say, reason.<sup>1</sup>

But it did not escape the notice of Elizabethans that man in actuality did not live in accordance with these ideal precepts, and new voices were raised suggesting that a study of man as he is, rather than as he ought to be, might be profitable. This uncompromising pragmatism is clear in Bacon:

I am building in the human understanding a true model of the world, such as it is in fact, not such as man's own reason would have it to be; a thing which cannot be done without a very diligent dissection and anatomy of the world. But I say that those foolish and apish images of worlds which the fancies of men have created in philosophical systems, must be utterly scattered to the winds.<sup>2</sup>

I would suggest that Shakespeare in his own 'diligent dissection and anatomy' may also have been concerned with the world 'as it is in fact'. We blind ourselves to the subtleties of this analysis if we take his major concern to be a demonstration of what 'ought to be'. The least we can do is to recognize that there was an entirely different tradition than that of Christian humanism to whose influence Shakespeare was open. Hiram Haydn in an extensive study analyses this tradition, which he calls the Counter-Renaissance, and summarizes it thus:

... it was as much in protest against these Christian humanists' preoccupation with the value of humane studies, against their "moralism", as against the abstract studies and intellectualism of the Scholastics, that the Counter-

<sup>1</sup>Pierre Charron, Of Wisdom (London, 1607), p. 262.

<sup>2</sup>Francis Bacon, The New Organon, ed., by F. H. Anderson (New York, 1960), I, cxxiv.

Renaissance developed. Throughout the sixteenth century every aspect of the inherited medieval synthesis and the fundamental principles of Christian humanism is challenged. And no characteristic of this second movement of the Renaissance is stronger<sup>1</sup> than its rejection of the established exaltation of reason...

Haydn documents this widely diversified movement which proclaims the rights of a full and uninhibited life of the passions, the senses and the instincts, and, whilst claiming that the temper of the movement is not Anglo-Saxon, notes that it leaves its mark on Marlowe, Raleigh, Chapman, Harvey, Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare and Donne.<sup>2</sup> Cunningham has suggested that the development of a variety of ideas, exploited by Elizabethan dramatists, tended to support the view that man's reason is a frail bulwark against the overmastering power of passion: ✓

In the first place, there was the development of mechanistic psychology, the Galenic psychology of humours, with its emphasis on the involuntariness of strong passion... In the second place, there was the development of a voluntaristic metaphysics in the Franciscan school associated with the name of Duns Scotus, and the subsequent extension of this point of view to ethics. The issue of this movement was the predestinarianism of the Reformation with its emphasis on the helplessness of man, and particularly of his reason, and the corollary interest in Stoic Fate, which was supported by the prestige of Seneca's tragedies.<sup>3</sup>

I am not trying to enlist Shakespeare in the vanguard of a movement championing the passions since that would be as mistaken a view as the cheerful assumption that Shakespeare's commentators, representing reason, are his mouthpieces. But I am suggesting that in such a complex tradition Shakespeare's attitudes

<sup>1</sup>Hiram Haydn, The Counter-Renaissance (New York, 1960), p. xiii.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 66-67.

<sup>3</sup>J. V. Cunningham, Woe or Wonder: The Emotional Effect of Shakespearean Tragedy (Denver, 1951), p. 112.

are not likely to be simple. That the problem was not automatically solved even by moral philosophers is clear in Coeffeteau: "... there is not any one hath ~~bee~~ more famous nor whose subject hath ~~beene~~ argued with greater contention, than that which concernes the quality of the Passions of the Soule, that is to say, whether they be good or bad, and if they be compatible with any eminent vertue or can subsist with it".<sup>1</sup> The usual solution was that of Wright: "Passions are not only not wholly to be extinguished... but sometimes to be moved and stirred up for the service of virtue".<sup>2</sup> They must always, according to Wright, be controlled by reason. The writers in the Christian humanist tradition had to acknowledge the ability of passion to contribute to virtue, since the Bible had given many examples of the passionate nature of God and Christ, as we can see in Coeffeteau: "he who was never subject to sinne and whose soul was advanced to the height of graces and vertues, had Passions and humane affections, the which could never command over reason, or transport it, but receive a law from it".<sup>3</sup> But, of course, we are still in the ideal world. Christ may set an example but it was an ideal almost beyond attainment for post-lapsarian man. The tragedies, indeed, demonstrate vividly what happens ✓ in the actual world where the unmastered sway of passion creates havoc. There is clearly no doubt of this threat in Shakespeare, but the question is not whether passions could be dangerous, which no one would deny, rather it is how, or even if, such passions can be controlled. The forces of reason obviously fail

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<sup>1</sup>Nicholas Coeffeteau, The Table of Humane Passions (London, 1621), p. 52.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Wright, The Passions of the Mind (London, 1601), p. 31.

<sup>3</sup>Coeffeteau, op cit., pp. 56-57.

in Shakespeare, yet we dodge the problem if we plunge straight for the moral conclusion that tragedy occurs when passion dominates reason in man. If the hero followed the commentator's advice in many plays then catastrophe would be averted, but it is exactly Shakespeare's concern to demonstrate why the hero cannot take that advice, why in his situation reason is of no avail, why advice based on a general philosophy does not seem to fit when we come to a particular case. The dilemmas in which the heroes find themselves do not yield easily to rational solutions, because they reflect the world as it is, not the simplified and idealized patterns of moral philosophy. Coriolanus can have his honour or the consulship, Antony can have the Empire or Cleopatra, Lear can have power or wisdom; the alternatives offered in the tragedies are designed to demand sacrifice. The heroes impossibly want the best of both worlds and yet their presumption draws from us a sense of awe, even of admiration. The commentators are soberer men; they see the world as being run according to certain rules and they are content to fit themselves to them instead of trying to fit the world to themselves. The distinction between these two strategies has been connected with the opposition of machiavellism to the medieval synthesis by Wyndham Lewis:

... the man of the world, if we erect him into a figure, is one of abnegation. His is essentially a system of defence and not of attack. He is a man who is himself small and weak, but who has acquired, who lives in the midst of, a powerful defensive machinery. He is in a sense the champion of the mechanical, and the constant adversary of the individual. His strategy is not the daring, ambitious strategy of machiavellism; but a system of maxims that vary little from age to age in the free-masonry of the world.<sup>1</sup>

I do not wish to associate Shakespeare's heroes too readily with the

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<sup>1</sup>Wyndham Lewis, The Lion and the Fox (London, 1927), p. 187.

"machivellism" described here. The contrast between the man of action and the worldly-wise man described by Lewis seems to have much in common with the contrast between hero and commentator in Shakespeare. Shakespeare's commentators, however, are frequently forced beyond their own limitations. If reason is being upheld as the method of saving the world it seems odd that these rational men often appeal to us most when they yield to the 'natural' behests of passion. Is Lear's Fool not more sympathetic when he determines against his better judgement to follow his master loyally on to the heath, than when he was taunting Lear? Is not Enobarbus more sympathetic when overwhelmed by betrayal of his master, than when he abandoned Antony with the cold logic and calculated reasoning of the wise man avoiding folly? Is not Faulconbridge more attractive when he passionately embodies his country's cause, than when at the outset he adopted a cynical detachment pursuing his own best interests? Similar questions can be applied to the major characters. Are we to condemn Cleopatra for committing suicide rather than yielding to Caesar, or Coriolanus for yielding to Volumnia rather than destroying Rome? Such questions can be multiplied endlessly and they are not easily answered. Virtue resides neither on the side of reason nor on the side of passion. In response to actual situations we find no easy solutions. The commentators seem to provide solutions but they turn out to be impracticable. Wilson Knight states the dilemma clearly:

We shall gain nothing by applying to the delicate symbols of the poet's imagination the rough machinery of an ethical philosophy created to control the turbulences of actual life. Thus when a critic adopts the ethical attitude, we shall generally find that he is unconsciously lifting the object of his attention from his setting and regarding him as actually alive. By noting "faults" in Timon's "character" we are in effect saying that he would not be a success in real life: which is beside the point, since he, and Macbeth, and Lear, are evidently dramatic successes. Now, whereas the moral attitude to life is positive and dynamic and tells us what we ought to do, that attitude applied to literature

is invariably negative and destructive. It is continually thrusting on our attention a number of "failures", "mistakes" and "follies" in connexion with those dramatic persons from whom we have consistently derived delight and a sense of exultation.<sup>1</sup>

If we convict characters of 'flaws' and 'taints' and accept quite simply that they deserve their fate then we have to recognize also that we condone the destruction of much that is good in man. In a world where good and evil are inextricably mixed we have to recognize, as Farnham reminds us,<sup>2</sup> that ironically, if we cling to the moral view of things, catastrophe may appear to be partly produced by good itself.

Shakespeare's views, therefore, on the virtues of reasonable restraint are not to be narrowly confined, and they can be understood only in the experience of individual plays. He seems frequently to handle the idea that reason must control man with the dry and subtle irony of Erasmus. In Chalonier's translation of the Moriae Encomium we find Stultitia constantly delighting in the frailty of man's reason, pouring scorn on the idea that the passions can be easily controlled. Allowing due weight for the complex irony of Erasmus, she is concerned to rub our noses in the facts of life:

In primis, I take it for all readie granted, that all the affections of man, pertaine unto Folie. In as much as philosophers put this distinction betwene a wyseman, and a foole, that the one is ledde by reason, the other by sensualitee, and therefore dooe the Stoikes seclude all affections from a wyseman, as so many diseases of the mynde. But that notwithstanding, these affections are not onely sette in steede of pilottes to suche as would recover the porte of wysedome, but also in any acte of virtue, are like certaine prickes, or incitations provokynge a man

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<sup>1</sup>G. Wilson Knight, "On the Principles of Shakespeare Interpretation", in Norman Rabkin, ed., Approaches to Shakespeare (New York, 1964), p. 40.

<sup>2</sup>Willard Farnham, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (Berkeley, 1936), p. 438.

to dooe well. How ever in this pointe the Archestoicke Seneca strongly againsaieth me, who in no wyse will allowe a wyseman shoulde have any maner affection in hym. But what he taketh that way he leaveth man, no man, but rather a newfounde god without bodily sence, such as never was, nor never shall be. Yea to speake plainlier, he dooeth naught els than fourme a stone image of a man, without feelyng, or any maner inclinacion perteinyng to a man in deede. Let the Stoikes therfore (if they list) take theyr wyseman to theim selves, and make much on hym alone, or (if they thynke good) go and dwell with him in Platos citee, or in the lande of Fairie, or Utopia.<sup>1</sup>

Shakespeare seems to have been close to this position of accepting man's limitations instead of chasing tantalizing chimeras of perfection. His tragedy, especially in the relations of commentator and hero, seems to depict the disparity between the theories that men hold concerning their reason and the passions that in reality dominate their lives. Those who believe in the possible perfection of mankind are committed to castigating man with didactic exhortations whether in the sixteenth or the twentieth centuries. Those who accept the imperfection of man's moral security can both sorrow over his condition and celebrate his triumphs in adversity. Shakespeare is a long way from Swift's parody of rationalism in the Houynhms but in his commentators he recognizes the limitations of the reasonable man.

The problem of why the reasonable men are ineffective is bound up with the distinction between detached contemplation and active involvement. There is no doubt that the Renaissance accepted the necessity of a Prince's action being constantly moderated by the influence of wise counsellors. There were dozens of books, many translated from the Italian, which described the counsellors required by a Prince. Blundeville's book<sup>2</sup> is typical in describing

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<sup>1</sup>Sir Thomas Chaloner, The Praise of Folie, translated from Erasmus' Moriae Encomium (London, 1965), pp. 39-40.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Blundeville, A very brief and profitable Treatise declaring how many counsells and what manner of Counselers a Prince that will governe well Ought to have (London, 1570).

the brain's trust of men of wide experience and observation that should surround a Prince. The running of a state was clearly a developing science in which the pragmatic man, well travelled and with sharpened perception, was invaluable. Yet a counsellor who operated solely on ideally rational principles forgot that he was dealing with an individual, a distinction made by

Guicciardini:

In that which concerns affairs of state one must not so much consider what is according to reason, the duty of a prince, as his probable conduct in the light of his nature or his habits, for it often happens that princes do not do their duty, but rather what appears to them good; and he who chooses to make a decision<sup>1</sup> by other rules exposes himself to enormous blunders.

It is this distinction which makes the life of many of Shakespeare's commentators so difficult. Their advice misses its mark because they cannot fully comprehend the nature of the characters with whom they are involved. Their incomprehension is inevitable by the very nature of human differentiation, by virtue of the fact that as observers of a situation they are fundamentally cut off from the pressures brought to bear on the hero actively involved in the situation. The impasse involved in this differentiation is aptly summed up by Lewis:

The emotion caused by the spectacle of some event may be different from that experienced by a participant; indeed usually it is. It is also of a different kind. Not mingled with action, the sense of the event in the spectator is even of a different character. Further, provided with that sense, and that sense only, it would be impossible to act. The audience sees one event, and the actor sees another. Action has one pair of eyes, contemplation another: or action has hardly any eyes at all - they are in any case very rudimentary.<sup>2</sup>

The commentator may thus represent what would be ideally possible were it not

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<sup>1</sup>Francisco Guicciardini, Guichardin: Pensées et Portraits, translated by Juliette Bertrand (Paris, 1933), Pensées, 18, quoted in Hiram Haydn, The Counter-Renaissance (New York, 1960), p. 226.

<sup>2</sup>Wyndham Lewis, The Lion and The Fox (London, 1927) p. 150.

for the fact that we are in this actual situation with this particular character which makes such a solution impracticable. In this contrast we are surely close to the very springs of tragedy. We are made aware by the soliloquies of how a man involved in action looks at himself. The commentator makes us aware of how such actions look to a man comparatively uninvolved. Indeed, the audience is alerted to the complexities of action by the presence of the commentator, for by noting the gulf between the two we can see why one man stumbles inevitably into a tragedy where to an observer there is no inevitability involved. The audience is by its nature detached and it might be expected that it would be pulled towards the contemplative position of the commentator. But its exposure to the problems of the hero's active involvement in practice prevent such an easy identification. Again we are caught in the crossfire between the ideal and the actual. The ideal balance is clearly stated by Barckley:

But because a civill life requireth continuall action, mans felicitie cannot consist in contemplation, except there should be one felicity of a private man, and another of a Common-wealth. And therefore after Varro, mans felicitie (so long as he liveth in this world) doth neither consist in rest nor in action, but rather in a mixture of both together: if there must be one felicitie of a common-wealth and of a private-man: for the minde cannot thoroughly have the fruition of perfect contemplation, untill it be separated from the body. And Aristotle saith, that as a horse is borne to runne, an oxe to till the ground, and a dogge to hunt; so a man is borne to two things; to understand and to do...<sup>1</sup>

It is, of course, precisely the distinction between the felicity of the private man and that of the commonwealth that the new emphasis on psychological characterization in tragedy explored. This ideal balance cannot be maintained

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<sup>1</sup>Sir Richard Barckley, The Felicitie of Man (London, 1631), p. 365.

as the polarization of hero and commentator indicates. Perhaps if it could be maintained tragedy would not occur, but Shakespeare's emphasis is on making clear to us why it is not and cannot be maintained.

Shakespeare was fascinated by the problems of action throughout his career. Henry VI ruminates at Towton on the pleasures of retirement; the recluses in the Forest of Arden are much exercised by the subject; the ascetic retirement in Love's Labours Lost and Orsino's debility in love bring the problem of inactivity into question; Falstaff reflects on the dangers of action; Thersites mocks its meaninglessness; Vincentio in Measure for Measure after his truant seclusion is forced into a flurry of activity; Brutus is brought to a crisis point in his decision to join the conspiracy; the subject is central to the structure of Hamlet; Antony hovers between shame at his inaction and desire for retirement; Timon's retirement from the world is contrasted with the action of Alcibiades. There is a general tendency throughout Shakespeare's work to attack those characters who retire to a position of mere contemplation.<sup>1</sup> But he did not condone the frenzy of the new Renaissance life of action that stemmed from Machiavelli's theories. The commentator's position becomes precarious in the world of tragedy because the consequences of action are so far-reaching. The hero sweeps commentary aside with the defiance of Montaigne:

I therefore hate this trouble-feast reason, and these extravagant projects, which so much molest man's life and these so subtle opinions; if they have any truth, I deeme it over-deare, and find it too incommodious... And without so nicely controlling them, I follow mine own naturall inclinations.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of Shakespeare's views on action, the necessity of action and of suffering its consequences see: Hardin Craig, "Shakespeare and the Normal World", Rice Institute Pamphlet, XXXI (1944) 33-38. For a contrasting view which regards Shakespeare as placing contemplation at the top of his ethical hierarchy see: Wolfgang Weilgart, Shakespeare Psychognostic (Tokyo, 1952) pp. 177-193.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Montaigne, Essays, trans. by John Florio (New York, 1920-24), III, 278.

The authentic cry of individualism chafing itself against the fetters of restraint can be heard here. The commentator is constantly engaged in diverting man from his natural inclinations in order to save society. Yet, as I have said, lacking the first-hand experience of the situation he cannot grapple with it effectively. The nature of tragic action is such, however, that it engulfs all, and the commentator frequently finds himself irrevocably drawn into the action. At such a point of active involvement his reason may desert him. This transformation is neatly summed up in Sidney's Arcadia when Musidorus, who had earlier harangued the lovesick Pyrocles with a clear programme of how to overcome passion with reason, himself falls in love and is forced to admit, "I find indeed, that all is but lip-wisdome, which 'wants experience'".<sup>1</sup>

The development of several of Shakespeare's commentators seems to point to the limitations of "lip-wisdome". In the failure of Shakespeare's commentators to divert tragedy, in their succumbing to the follies of their world, and in the gradual movement of the hero towards enlightenment we can see that Shakespeare is presenting a tragic world in which man learns only through his own experience. Shakespeare explores the paradox that the commentator who possesses knowledge and wisdom is ineffective as an actor, whilst the hero, acts with disastrous effectiveness and purpose exactly because he is ignorant. Heilman has noted that there is a deliberate resistance to self-knowledge in tragedies such as Dr. Faustus and Macbeth, while in others such as Othello and King Lear the rush of emotion which produces the blindness of ignorance is only slowly

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<sup>1</sup>Sir Philip Sidney, The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia (Cambridge, 1912), I, 18, 3.

conquered and painfully pushed aside.<sup>1</sup> Certainly the road to self-knowledge is an arduous one in tragedy, but whatever impediments are put in his way it is the tragic hero who must push them aside. The commentator's lessons go largely unheeded because the road to self-knowledge is the most difficult that man undertakes. Again, it is through the limitations of the commentator, through the hero's stubborn rejection of the short-cuts to self-knowledge, that the audience comes to understand this aspect of tragedy. Shakespeare takes another common moral assumption and tests it in the difficult circumstances of tragedy, as Heilman indicates:

"Know thyself", one of western man's oldest moral exhortations, comes easily and frequently into the perceptorial mouth; hence it may seem to have a routine obligation that, as long as it is not forgotten, may be easily fulfilled. To Shakespeare the dramatist, carrying out the command is indispensable to well being; yet carrying it out so difficult as to border on the impossible... Some prior image of the self, some dream, some aspiration stands in the way of seeing what has really been felt and done. Not that what one has done and been does not get into the consciousness. Shakespeare never takes the cynical view that man is totally obtuse or insulated against self-knowledge. Rather he knows<sup>2</sup> the difficulty of coming to it, and likewise of evading it.

Shakespeare leads his heroes to the truth by a sort of inductive method, for they have to leave behind their assumptions and delusions and concentrate on the facts of their experience if they are to arrive at understanding. And what Shakespeare does for his heroes he does for his audience so that his method for both is akin to that described by Bacon: "we must lead men to particulars themselves, and their series and order; while men on their side must force them-

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<sup>1</sup>R. B. Heilman, "'Twere Best Not Know Myself: Othello, Lear, Macbeth", SQ XV No. 2 (1964), p. 91.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

selves for awhile to lay their notions by and begin to familiarize themselves with facts....<sup>1</sup> Anyone clinging to the concepts of older tragic forms in approaching Shakespeare's tragedies is as likely to be at sea as a person who approaches the empirical science of Bacon with the well-established precepts of sixteenth-century moral philosophy as his guide.

The road to knowledge for the tragic hero is through ignorance and the road to wisdom through folly.<sup>2</sup> The idea is, of course, an old one, though the emphasis of Christian humanism on reason had somewhat obscured it. St. Paul had stated the paradox: "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written 'He catches the wise in their craftiness', and again, 'The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile'".<sup>3</sup> Many of Shakespeare's 'wise' commentators are caught in their craftiness. If they start out with assurance in their wisdom they often have to become fools in order to come to terms with and to understand the nature of their world. We should not regard this as a condemnation of their character, for Erasmus had declared the doctrine to be so widespread that even Christ himself was guilty of folly: "Christe hym selfe mindyng the relefe and redempcion of mankyndes folie, although he was the ineffable wisdom of the Father, became yet a maner foole, wheras takyng mans nature upon hym, he was

<sup>1</sup>Francis Bacon, The New Organon, ed., by F. H. Anderson (New York, 1960), I, xxxvi.

<sup>2</sup>For a study of the variety of Renaissance attitudes to folly see: Walter Kaiser, Praisers of Folly: Erasmus, Rabelais, Shakespeare (Cambridge, 1963).

<sup>3</sup>I Corinthians, 3, 18.

founde both in fourme and habite lyke unto other men".<sup>1</sup> There is a sense in which the tragic hero is a sacrificial, scapegoat figure, a representative of the folly rampant in the world who must suffer so that we may gain enlightenment from the tragic experience. The commentator is sacrificed also in his futile attempt to represent the normalcy of reason combatting the catastrophes that man in his stubborn ignorance brings on himself.

I have tried to indicate in this section why the wider philosophical framework of ideas available to Shakespeare will not support the view that he automatically championed the cause of reason. The full documentation of the views opposing the Christian humanist's attitude is to be found, as I have indicated, in Haydn's book.<sup>2</sup> Yet there is no point in trying to encapsulate Shakespeare in either of the opposed traditions, as Haydn points out,<sup>3</sup> because he straddles both and includes views from both sides. I have tried to suggest a wider perspective in which to view the commentator-hero relation, rather than the narrow 'moralism' through which it has often been interpreted. Shakespeare would have been an infinitely less significant writer if he had not been open to the wide diversity of influences which I have touched on throughout this chapter. As the method of this chapter indicates, we must look for possible influences in all directions but we cannot confine him to any one school of thought or any simple cause and effect relationships. I can only suggest the

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<sup>1</sup>Sir Thomas Chaloner, The Praise of Folie, translated from Erasmus' Moriae Encomium (London, 1965), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>Hiram Haydn, The Counter-Renaissance (New York, 1960).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 651, pp. 666-667.

range of influences that might have contributed to the creation of the commentators without being able to assert positively any clear connections. But as Erasmus' *Stultitia* might say, I cling to the wisdom of prudence when the folly of experience is required. It is time to take Bacon's advice and get down to the facts by following the commentators into the complicated experience of tragedy, where I hope to examine, in more detailed illustration, some of the ideas that I have suggested so far.

#### IV

#### COMMENTARY IN THE HISTORY PLAYS

##### 1

I start out by examining a number of the History plays because they contain scenes and characters that have frequently been called 'choric'. At the time that Shakespeare's History plays were written many dramatists had used the formal Chorus and it might be thought that a young dramatist learning his trade would have been influenced by the choric devices in plays such as The Spanish Tragedy and Dr. Faustus. But even from the very outset Shakespeare found a variety of ways of exploiting and modifying this formal dramatic device. To call these scenes and characters that I shall examine 'choric' assumes rather vaguely that they have a simple dramatic function that is readily understood by all. From the very beginning of his career Shakespeare associates commentary, however crudely, with individual character enmeshed in the structure of the play. Such characters can be more fruitfully analysed in terms of independent personality than in terms of authorial disguise. I hope to show, therefore, that the function of the commentator as it appears in his major tragedies was first explored by Shakespeare in the History plays.

In the Henry VI trilogy there is no character consistently detached from the action offering didactic hints, generalizations, reflections on or anticipations of the action. Occasionally a minor character will close a scene with a speech designed to alert us to the significance of recent events, but, for the most part, the cyclic pattern of rise and fall draws forth and requires

little comment. The characters are locked in a power struggle that implicates anyone who comes near it. They are too busy seeking their own advantage to be able to stand outside the struggle offering an objective and independent commentary. It is clear enough to any audience that those who strive for power mount only to be toppled. The nightmare sequence of faction, conspiracy, betrayal and death speaks volumes by itself. There is no chorus pointing to the general ruin that occurs when hunger for power possesses men, because general ruin is the substance of the action continually before us.

The formal Chorus is trustworthy because it is powerless, without hope of influencing the action or of immediate advantage to be gained from its observations. In the sense that Henry VI himself is powerless and helpless in the hands of the feuding barons he comes closest to being a commentator on the action. In his memorable soliloquy at Towton on pastoral delights (3 Henry VI, II, v) we are aware of the lost world of normality that the Chorus had frequently invoked in Seneca. The abnormality of the ruined state is illustrated in the tableau-like scenes of the son who has murdered his father and the father who has murdered his son. Interwoven with their personal laments is Henry's general lamenting commentary on the state of his kingdom.<sup>1</sup> The King, sitting amidst the ruins of his country, is more conscious than anyone else of a general danger that quite escapes those engaged in the internecine strife. But we have only to imagine a formal Chorus substituted here to see how im-

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<sup>1</sup>Willard Farnham relates him to the tradition of the chorus: "Henry thus is able to fill the place of an ascetic medieval chorus, scorning the ambitious life which produces such a succession of tragic falls. But this is not a drama showing the other worldliness of medieval asceticism or offering its religious morality. Though Henry has some saintly qualities, he is only a secular saint, one who would retire from an evil world, yet one who has no sure other world of goodness for his retreat. His scorn of the world therefore leads to despairing philosophic inactivity". The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (Berkeley, 1936), p. 387.

measurably less significant the scene would be. Henry in attempting this detached role reminds us that the person least suited to the helpless, fearful position of a chorus is a King. His concern for the general welfare is identical with that of a chorus, but he should not be grovelling beneath the mighty pother lamenting ruin, but above it, controlling events in order to ensure that general welfare. In hoping to become anonymous amongst shepherds, shepherds who might, indeed, in Greek tragedy have constituted the formal Chorus, he emphasizes his own personality and its disastrous consequences for his society.

In Richard II John of Gaunt's speeches before his death provide another commentary, in the lament tradition, on the degeneration of England. Gaunt, dying and powerless to initiate further action, can only warn and prophesy. Shakespeare clearly intended the scene to act as a framework of righteousness and indignation to contrast with the plans of the King and his favourites. Gaunt's remarks are directed towards the general good in the manner of many a chorus familiar to us in other plays. They are grounded, however in the indomitable and incorruptible personality of the elder statesman, which Shakespeare has in a few short scenes sketched for us. His image as a responsible statesman makes his judgement the more significant for an audience, which feels that his death is the crumbling of the last bulwark against the advances of a regime that has forsaken the principles of righteous government. Nor is Gaunt's commentary isolated from the devices of the plot, since Richard can soon confiscate his property, an act that will lead to his undoing. A chorus can comment but usually it cannot cause any diversion in the course of events. It can persist throughout a play because it is so impotent; it cannot disappear from a play, or be lost to the world because so frequently it represents the world, or at least the society in which the action takes place. An audience feels very strongly that Gaunt's absence will enable the headstrong king to pursue without check

that course which the dying statesman so accurately prophesies.

There is an interlude at the end of Act III which provides generalizing comment on the action. Shakespeare clearly needed a pause between Richard's initial submission at Flint Castle and his deposition at Westminster Hall. He chose to present in Act III, Scene iv, an incidental character, insignificant in the plot, powerless save for the ability to comment shrewdly on the events and to bring the news of Richard's fall to his queen. The gardener's application of the parable of the unweeded garden to the corrupt state is characteristic of the habit of the Senecan chorus of relating particular events to a general law of natural existence.<sup>1</sup> We have been concentrating on the intrigues of great men throughout this play. For a brief instant Shakespeare shocks us out of this world by showing us what it must look like to an ordinary man. The gardener and his servant do not gape at a mighty world beyond their comprehension, they reduce it to the humble world of weeds and caterpillars, thus commenting shrewdly on the carelessness that has blighted Richard's stewardship. In the deposition scene which follows, the politicians will elaborate this commentary in their own terms, giving a vivid illustration of how the untrimmed weeds can choke the sovereign oak. The material of this scene could have been handled by a chorus but Shakespeare's bent was always towards significant contrast, and vivid dramatization. We are aware that a humble gardener has a broader understanding of the nation's affairs than has the king himself and, in that vivid moment of his pity for the unhappy queen, we are aware of the pass to which Richard's fortunes have brought the monarchy.

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<sup>1</sup>See R. J. Dorius, "A Little more than a Little", *SQ*, XI (1960), 13-26 for an examination of the pervasive gardening imagery throughout the tetralogy of plays from Richard II to Henry V. This scene is central in establishing the elaborate metaphorical relations.

Richard, in his soliloquy at Pomfret Castle, approaches the manner of a chorus in generalizing, as the essential condition of humanity, his own particular problems. His conclusion that all men share the same fate (V, v, 38-41) is perhaps the commonest sentiment to be found in the Senecan chorus. But the method of reaching this conclusion (V, v, 23-38) is peculiar to Richard and his personality. Still amusing himself with his taste for elaborate conceits he examines the habit of playing multiple roles that estrange men from themselves, and in particular his own movement from kingship to beggary, from exaltation to despair. This habit of role-playing has been at the very core of Richard's behaviour, the method by which he has melodramatized himself throughout the play. In breaking through the veils of illusion he almost begins to feel that his personality is dissolving and that he is becoming the common voice of humanity. There is no need for a chorus offering general observations beyond the grasp of the characters, for Shakespeare repeatedly demonstrates how man can reach his own general conclusions within terms of his own experience and within the growth of his own personality.

In the sources from which Shakespeare drew much of his material these general philosophical observations were frequently offered by the narrator, Commonplaces inserted for didactic purposes are found throughout Holinshed, as in the following comment on the fall of Richard II: "But such misfortune (or the like) oftentimes falleth unto those princes, which when they are aloft, cast not doubt for perils that may follow".<sup>1</sup> In many plays the chorus took over directly this habit of the narrator. Shakespeare took note of such comments but transmitted them from their narrative function of authorial comment into

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<sup>1</sup>Geoffrey Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, Vol. III (London, 1960), p. 408.

the substance of his drama. Our concept of Shakespeare's plays as organic and independent structures must result in part from his ability to allow his characters to discover the nature of their own world without attempting to break into the atmosphere of that world, and the audience's relation to it by obvious authorial intrusions.

There are some scenes in Richard III which are closer in function to that of a formal chorus than anything I have examined so far. I have noted that Shakespeare frequently introduced scenes containing incidental characters to comment on the events of their day. The conversation of the citizens in Act II, Scene iii, dwells on the personalities involved in the struggle for the crown following Edward IV's death. The uneasy populace makes prophecies about the future and harbours a sense of foreboding. We find in their speech parable-like exempli from nature which had been passed down from medieval sermons and homilies as well as from the Senecan chorus:

When clouds are seen, wise men put on their cloaks;  
 When great leaves fall, then winter is at hand;  
 When the sun sets, who doth not look for night?  
 Untimely storms make men expect a dearth.  
 (II, iii, 32-35)

This interlude is the closest that Shakespeare comes, in his first tetralogy, to the formal chorus, in that the citizens are virtually anonymous and their personalities irrelevant to the action of the play. They represent a larger body, the populace, and we attend to them in that capacity as though they represent England set over against the feuding barons.

It is possible that Shakespeare took some hints for providing these periodic pauses from The True Tragedy of Richard III,<sup>1</sup> though we may note how

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<sup>1</sup>Anonymous, The True Tragedy of Richard the Third, 1594, The Malone Society Reprints (Oxford, 1929).

the anonymous source play employs formal devices which Shakespeare eschews. There is a Prologue between Truth and Poetry transmitting expository information about what has happened, where in the story we are to begin, and what attitude we are to take to the chief character. The function of helping along the story is given to a Page-boy who appears at significant stages in the rise and fall of his master, Richard. These speeches are ill disguised narrative links not completely digested into the dramatic process, for three of these appearances are soliloquies directed at the audience and the fourth is an exchange of information with Report. The play is rounded off with an Epilogue divided between two messengers and two queens who, in a sketchy survey, bring history up to date in order to work in a conventional eulogy of Queen Elizabeth. The play, in relating general observations or narrative material, employs rather crudely allegorical devices such as Truth, Poetry, and Report, or incidental characters such as the Page. Shakespeare employs some incidental characters, and this possibly results from the episodic structure of the chronicles.

✓ Cumulatively a series of minor characters perform the function of providing a perspective different from that of the major characters involved in the power struggles. Later, in the more centralized tragic structures, Shakespeare was able to encapsulate the greater part of this commentary in one character. There are still, of course, incidental characters in the tragedies who elaborate on the major themes; the Porter in Macbeth, the gravedigger in Hamlet, Philo and Demetrius in Antony and Cleopatra. Such characters supplement the functions served by those characters involved in the dramatic structure on a long-term basis. In a few characters in the Histories Shakespeare prepared the way for his development of characters with extensive commentating roles.

Critics in dealing with Richard III almost invariably note that the queens, and especially Margaret, serve a choric function. There is no means

of knowing if Shakespeare was influenced by Legge's play, Richardus Tertius, where three generations of women look back over the past, comment, and shower curses on the tyrant, since such scenes in both plays can be traced back to common sources in More and Hall. Bullough notes that

Shakespeare may have taken some hints from Legge, but he organized his play on different lines, reducing the chronicle element...and increasing the importance of his women to provide links with the Henry VI plays and to serve as a substitute for the Senecan chorus.<sup>1</sup>

Shakespeare ignores historical fact in order to secure Queen Margaret as a link with the earlier plays in the tetralogy, for she never returned to England after being ransomed, and her first appearance in Act I, Scene iii, amidst the divisions at court in 1483 ignores, for dramatic purposes, her actual death a year earlier. As a dragon out of the past, powerless and reduced to threatening curses, she was an ideal figure for voicing the themes and plots of the past which can be related in a menacing manner to similar events occurring under Richard's tyranny. She acts almost like the Senecan revenge ghost in carrying the memory of past struggles to add its burden to the current menace. She is frequently called a hag, and is, indeed, like a witch with her spell-binding repetitive language, her invoking of past horrors, and her curses which seem to haunt her enemies. When she presides over the lamenting women (IV, iv) she has the air of one who has triumphed in a collaboration with fate so that she seems almost to be a precursor of the Weird Sisters.

We have to remember that if we study the play in isolation we miss much of the effect that impressed an Elizabethan audience, which may well have

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<sup>1</sup>Bullough, op. cit., III, p. 242.

followed the tetralogy with all the avidity of the modern follower of serials. We may study the tetralogy as a whole but we cannot, perhaps, recapture the effect on an audience which had watched the rise and fall of Margaret through four plays. An audience might well have remembered in vivid detail those moments of triumph and agony to which she constantly returns in Richard III. She is one of the most complex characters in the tetralogy, and any audience which had followed her extraordinary career would have a far richer fabric of memories, a far more detailed awareness of personality to work on, than a formal chorus could supply. Shakespeare was willing to exploit certain functions of the chorus in his use of Queen Margaret only so far as they could be expressed through her vivid personality.

In Act I, Scene iii, as Richard argues with Queen Elizabeth and her family, Queen Margaret in the background interweaves her commentary on his glozing words. The scene establishes the fact that she has at last moved to the sidelines. After her many battles, conspiracies, victories and losses, she has to be content now with commentary. She can have no further hope of taking the centre of the stage because the regal candidates through which she grasped at power, her husband and son, have been destroyed and she has become a powerless contender in the dynastic struggle. Most of the contenders in the Histories are removed rapidly from the scene without any opportunity to comment. Margaret has survived by a hair's breadth and now lives on like a lone survivor of a wreck, washed up beyond the reach of the tide on the shore where she will be joined by exhausted survivors from other wreckages. Initially her curses light on all, for the world is peopled with her enemies, but as the play proceeds, in the fissile manner of power struggles, those once opposed become united. No-one, of course, would suggest that Margaret's commentary is dispassionate but, though she is surrounded by enemies, she is capable of distinguishing

between them. Removed from the struggle she can now perceive its pattern and that is the greatest step towards self-knowledge that can be made in her world. At the end of the pattern herself, fortune having brought her low without offering any hope of raising her to the heights of power again, she can now observe its effects on others. It seems to be the melancholy lesson of this first tetralogy that only those disqualified from personal power-seeking can see the general havoc wrought by it.

It must be said also, however, that whatever function she has to serve as a commentator, Margaret is in no sense designed as a mouthpiece of the author. She may voice some perceptive insights but this does not prevent her from being the same old Margaret. Her fiery personality has merely been forced into different channels. Her experience has not taught her an alternative method of organizing or influencing events. On the contrary, she relies on the continuation of the cycle to accomplish a revenge that is now beyond her power. She is severely limited, crippled by a frenzied anger, as the audience is surely meant to note. The audience attends to her prophecies but can see in her attitude no hope of England's release from its travail. Foresight and a limited kind of wisdom have been forced on her; she did not embrace them voluntarily. There is no fearful hope, as in so many choric utterances, that disaster will be averted, rather there is a call from the gates of death to bring down the kingdom in ruin:

Live each of you the subjects to his hate,  
And he to yours, and all of you to God's!  
(I, iii, 302-303)

We should be careful, therefore, when we label her function as being 'choric', for we may too easily conceal a less obvious function. Consumed by envy and hatred, she is almost hubristic in her spleen. We realize that the charge of lunacy against her is not entirely irrelevant. She is the figure of ultimate

decay, a symbol of humanity's self-destructive potential in a mad world of mad composition.

Margaret's scenes are also important in providing elaborate cross-references contrasting characters at different phases of the cycle of fortune. A chorus could provide us with these contrasts but it is more vividly dramatic to have the characters themselves confronting each other and to leave the audience to draw the conclusions. Margaret's appearances are strategically placed to gain effective dramatic contrasts. Her first verbal onslaught occurs in Act I, Scene iii. In the previous scene we have watched Gloucester mesmerize Anne like a spider embalming its victim in spittle. Anne had reached the end of the cycle of fortune by losing her husband and father to the murderous hand of Richard. Yet by the end of the scene she is ready to begin the cycle once again by a disastrous marriage. At the beginning of Scene iii we observe, in the feuding of the nobles, another queen who is standing at the height of her fortune, in the middle of the cycle before she begins her descent. We remember that Elizabeth Grey was talked into marriage by a blunt and urgent Edward in much the same manner that we have just observed in Anne's capitulation. Elizabeth will indeed repeat the pattern later in this play when she is talked out of her unwillingness and allows Richard to marry her daughter. Indeed Shakespeare transfers to the wooing of Anne which we have just observed, the material from the chronicles devoted to that subtle persuasion of Elizabeth. It is possible that by transferring the material and introducing Elizabeth at the height of power, immediately succeeding the wooing of Anne, he is foreshadowing her ultimate degradation. An audience familiar with the chronicles may have picked up such echoes. Because Shakespeare so consistently thrusts together characters with a parallel fate, it is probable that the enriching pattern of contrast and echo was carefully calculated.

The scene is full of references to ascent and descent in fortune. Elizabeth at the pinnacle of power is aware that only Edward's wisp of life stands between her and the jerk of fortune's wheel onwards. The unpredictable nature of fortune is mockingly generalized by Richard:

the world is grown so bad  
That wrens make prey where eagles dare not perch.  
Since every Jack became a gentleman,  
There's many a gentle person made a Jack.  
(I, iii, 70-73)

This is a threatening reference to what Richard considers the unworthy origins of Elizabeth and neatly anticipates the entrance of Queen Margaret who, in her early career, was constantly attacked for the same reason. Her dowerless marriage, achieved by the flattery of Suffolk, raised enemies against her. Richard's speech to Elizabeth here is an echo of a speech he made to Margaret at the height of her power, and when she now enters powerless and frenzied the echo is ominous:

Iron of Naples hid with English guilt,  
Whose father bears the title of a king -  
As if a channel should be call'd the sea -  
Sham'st thou not, knowing whence thou art extraught,  
To let thy tongue detect thy base-born heart?  
(3 Henry VI, II, ii, 139-143)

The scene also presents an intermediate level in another structural pattern for it occurs between two of Richard's triumphs. Lady Anne has been ensnared by Richard's flattery; she falls because she wavers in resolution, moving from open hostility to abject submission. The scene, following the virtuoso display of what Queen Margaret calls "the wrangling pirates", is concerned with Clarence's murder. He, too, has wavered from one side to another, fallen victim to Richard's seeming love, and is now to be nudged off the wheel of fortune into a malmsey butt. In between these two scenes we observe Queen Elizabeth in open opposition to Richard; momentarily she abandons her opposition

to side with him against Margaret (I, iii, 240). We have, perhaps, been reminded by anticipation of her later submission to Richard's wooing, and we have heard Margaret's prophecy of her doom (I, iii, 241-246). Elizabeth, too, begins in open hostility and ends in submission. She is a waverer and fits the pattern of the inflexible Richard's victims. She is eventually judged and doomed by Richard: "Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman!" (IV, iv, 431).

By the time of this second scene with the lamenting women Margaret's prophecies have begun to bear full fruit:

So now prosperity begins to mellow  
And drop into the rotten mouth of death.  
(IV, iv, 1-2)

The structure of the scene is highly formalized in the lament tradition, the misericordia of women bereft of their kin. There is some competition in grieving but the essence of the scene is in the unity of those equally powerless left solely to the resources of sorrow. Alternating the refrain in the litany of their woe, they come close to the choric manner. In its long catalogue of woes it provides a pause in the headlong carnage of Richard. It is a pause before the final storm, for this long night of terror is soon to be brought to a close by the arrival of Richmond. The episodic nature of the chronicle play with its multitude of events was illustrated by principles of repetition and variation on a few basic themes. Shakespeare used a variety of methods for breaking up the rigidity of the pattern. One of the most obvious functions of these interludes with the queens is to rein in the galloping progress of the play. They afford an outlet for purely verbal relief. It is as though the play gathers up a head of pressure through the suppression of dissent by Richard and then finds an outlet through the vituperation of Margaret. Yet the very limitations of verbal relief emphasize the tyranny of Richard:

Duch. Why should calamity be full of words?  
Q. Eliz. Windy attorneys to their client woes,  
 Airy succeders of intestate joys,  
 Poor breathing orators of miseries,  
 Let them have scope; though what they will impart  
 Help nothing else, yet do they ease the heart.  
 (IV, iv, 126-131)

Women are set to catechize each other on how to curse. Margaret retires gluttled with satisfaction that others have been reduced to her misery. But there is an important distinction between this general expression of sorrow and that of a chorus. A chorus objectifies and generalizes sorrow beyond the bounds of personality. The women here recall particular calamities that have occurred to them. Their past glory is contrasted with their present misery. They have not been helpless observers of the struggle, hapless victims of actions beyond their comprehension. That Elizabeth is not even now exempt from folly we can see in what ensues in the remainder of the scene; she can still be the agent of bringing further catastrophe on her kin. Only Margaret exhibits any comprehensive grasp of the inclusive nature of the calamity and she uses that knowledge only to taunt her enemies. The women are at one in the lament but they are individualized in their method of expressing it, for they each have a history behind them that we have observed, which has brought them by individual paths to this common fate. The effect of the scene, perhaps, comes not from the normal choric tradition but from the fact that these once powerful women have been brought to a position as impotent as that of a chorus. The distinction is an important one. An audience may share in the helplessness of the formal lamentation of a chorus which represents suffering humanity everywhere subject to the rule of great ones. An audience may pity the grief of the queens but it cannot feel any kinship with them since they are of the world of the powerful. The irony of their position weighs equally with our sympathy. In relation to them we assume the position that Lear hoped for:

and we'll wear out  
 In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones  
 That ebb and flow by th' moon.  
 (King Lear, V, iii, 17-19)

In the world of the Histories we are the ones helpless to alter the pattern of events, and the choric function of drawing conclusions from the action is left largely to us. Even when we have seemingly choric characters interpreting events for us the audience must draw conclusions that are beyond the comprehension of the characters on the stage. By using characters individually related to the pattern of history for purposes of commentary, Shakespeare was able to build multiple ironies. Shakespeare's concern in the History plays was to examine the way that man forges his own career and becomes ineluctably trapped by the consequences of that career. The general process of history remains fairly constant though the personalities vary widely, as Warwick observes in 2 Henry IV:

There is a history in all men's lives,  
 Figuring the natures of the times deceas'd;  
 The which observed, a man may prophesy,  
 With a near aim, of the main chance of things  
 As yet not come to life, who in their seeds  
 And weak beginning lie intreasured.  
 (III, i, 80-85)

The way in which the massive detail of individual careers could be shaped into repetitive patterns absorbed Shakespeare. He ensures that the pattern emerges through the personalities themselves without any superimposed prompting from a chorus. A chorus, when explicitly didactic, causes a disjunction between the author's meaning and the audience's ability to experience it. In Shakespeare we have no such disjunction because the characters themselves become aware of the wider significance of their experience. This awareness does not necessarily make them more rational human beings, more capable of dealing with events—indeed it makes Queen Margaret almost inhuman—because it is the paradox of this pattern of rise and fall that it is perceived only

by those who have completed it. We are not told by Shakespeare that human beings are blindly egotistical, we are given the experience of it again and again in many individual cases.

## 2

Faulconbridge in King John is Shakespeare's first extended attempt at producing the role of a commentator. We can see in him some of the features in embryo which Shakespeare was to develop in the commentators of the tragedies. The Bastard's function of reflecting and elaborating some of the major ideas of the play is Shakespeare's invention though the original concept of the character comes from Hall's description of Dunois, the Bastard of Orleans, and from its elaboration in Shakespeare's source play, The Troublesome Reign of King John. Shakespeare's vigorous introduction of Philip rapidly establishes his attributes as a plain dealer determined to understand the ways of the world. His openness and honesty win him immediate favour at court. "A good blunt fellow" (I, i, 71), the King calls him and exclaims in appreciation, "Why, what a madcap hath heaven lent us here!" (I, i, 84). Many of those constituent parts discovered in some later commentating characters are here already—plain-dealing, wit, bawdry and detachment. The innuendo and sexual allusion are largely absent in the source play. Shakespeare enabled his Bastard to act more boldly and jest more freely of his origin by ensuring that the mother did not appear during the cross-examination before the King. His vigorous and playful use of language wins him familiarity with royalty at first blush. According to the psychologically stereotyped categories of the Elizabethans a bastard would be gay, free-thinking and exuberantly active because he was more likely to be conceived in love; the stealth of the coition ensured that more zeal would go into his making than in the routine sexual

habits of marriage. The bastard, less likely to be brought up under stern parents, would thus be more independent, more detached, and often more valourous than those who suffered a more orthodox upbringing. The source play puts most of its emphasis on the Bastard's fiery nature, his bravery and burning sense of honour. But we find there too his no-nonsense attitude contrasting with the calculated intrigues of the other nobles. In the source play this plain-speaking reflects throughout a firm loyalty to the King which gives the character a greater surface consistency than Shakespeare's version. Shakespeare was trying for more elaborate effects and he loads more complicated dramatic functions onto the character. The element of sophisticated self-consciousness in the detached observer descanting on the corruption of political expediency is Shakespeare's invention. The development of the character from a position of gay, cynical detachment to that of loyal and heroic man of action owes little to the earlier play. By attempting to produce change and development in the character Shakespeare can probe in greater depth the problems of honour, allegiance, and self-interest which were treated in a more straightforward manner in his source. By means of soliloquy, wit and exuberant language, by endowing him with a capacity for self-analysis and reflection on the thorns and dangers of this world, Shakespeare produces from a limited stereotype a character rich in possibilities. ✓

We soon find him scoffing at the customs of his world in his first soliloquy (I, i, 182-219). Mocking the affectations of the time, he determines, like many later commentators, to use his ability to see through the world and to maintain the distinction between appearance and reality, to support an attitude of detachment:

Which though I will not practise to deceive,  
 Yet, to avoid deceit, I mean to learn;  
 (I, i, 214-215)

Like some of the later commentators, too, he has a role as special companion to the leading character and is in a privileged position to comment. The epigrammatic and playful tone of his lines reminds us of Lear's Fool and Enobarbus. It is primarily in the colloquial rhythm, the vigorous idiom of his speech that we recognize Faulconbridge. This habit of speech detaches him from the rest of the characters, for he alone eschews the high-flown rhetoric of war that is such a constant feature of this play. This delight in deflating the windy suspirations of others is a common feature of the commentator's role. It marks him off from the prevailing verbal structure that encompasses everyone else. It adds to his bluntness by giving the impression that he cannot be blinded by the surface grandeur of language, the brave shows of rhetoric, by which men seek to disguise reality. The elaborate speech-making on the battlefield at Angiers is set in perspective by the Bastard's wry comments. He is used, like some later commentators, as a bridge between the audience and the action, reinterpreting the swelling events of the imperial theme on a much more down-to-earth level (II, i, 455-467, II, i, 496-609). His repeated attempts to enrage his enemies and to pour scorn on the entire proceedings enables the audience to perceive clearly the duplicity and horse-trading of medieval politics. He has affinities with both the Vice and the Lord of Misrule when he reduces diplomacy and battle to its ultimate absurdity by suggesting that the opponents join forces in destroying the prize over which they are fighting before demolishing each other. (II, i, 403-407). This device of stripping the surface ceremony to its ludicrous and vicious essence is employed again by Enobarbus in his comments on the diplomatic manoeuvrings of Antony and Octavius (Antony and Cleopatra, II, ii). The solution to the crisis at Angiers, the declaration of love between Lewis and Blanche, no more deceives Faulconbridge than Antony's match with Octavia

fools Enobarbus. The Bastard's presentation of a version of events alternative to that of the surface appearance accepted by all the other characters owes nothing to the sources. Even at this early point Shakespeare is elaborating the functions of a detached observer in order to enrich his audience's perception of the basic conflict of ideas which his play explores. That conflict is brought more clearly into the open in the soliloquy which closes the scene.

The famous speech on Commodity has been frequently labelled as a choric comment on a major theme of the play. Indeed, Faulconbridge's entire role is often described as choric. Whitaker says that Shakespeare "built the Bastard into a kind of chorus who pleads for national unity".<sup>1</sup> Campbell says that "he is remembered chiefly because, as chorus, he says some of the most admirable things in the play".<sup>2</sup> In this particular speech Faulconbridge's function is akin to that of a chorus in the sense that he is sufficiently detached to see that his own side is as guilty as his opponents. It formulates into a general commentary on man ideas derived from the observation of particular events. Many choruses had descanted on the sway of Fortune, and the Bastard merely switches the traditional attack to Commodity which holds the world subject:

That daily break-vow, he that wins all,  
Of kings, of beggars, old men, young men, maids,  
(II, i, 569-570)

But the speech surely has more than a choric function, for this transmitter of worldly wisdom is not himself immune to the effects of action. Being aware

<sup>1</sup>V. K. Whitaker, Shakespeare's Use of Learning (San Marino, 1964), p. 124.

<sup>2</sup>L. B. Campbell, Shakespeare's "Histories" (San Marino, 1947), p. 166.

of the folly of the world and being involved in that same world he is presented with a dilemma that Shakespeare examined again and again. He first explored the dilemma in the character of Faulconbridge and solved it in a manner that he never used again. It is not satisfactory to label a character 'choric' when he himself recognizes that he is not merely an observer and must involve himself in the action of his world in order to survive. Despite his clear observation of the world at the beginning of the speech, by the end of it the Bastard proclaims in full consciousness that he will commit himself to the follies of his world. He claims that his detachment is based merely on his own lack of profit from Commodity (II, i, 587-588). Determining not to miss his chances for profit he does not stumble into corruption but claims to embrace it by deliberate policy. His speech graphically describes the relative nature of judgement in human existence. In describing what it is like to be involved in the world of action he gives us a more personal speech than any we might expect from a chorus:

Well, whiles I am a beggar, I will rail  
 And say there is no sin but to be rich;  
 And being rich, my virtue then shall be  
 To say there is no vice but beggary.

(II, i, 593-596)

The Bastard bears some relation to the Senecan chorus in that his speeches, two of them key soliloquies, close four of the five acts. But all save the last one, with which he closes the play, turn on specifically personal problems, problems which he has in fact solved by the end of the play. The key to the structure of ideas in this play is not in veiled choral comments but in the experience of Faulconbridge, in the growth of his character as he moves increasingly towards the centre of the play. There is no serious conflict of roles and allegiances here such as Shakespeare was to develop in his later commentators.

From the outset he is in the world for his own gain, but Shakespeare is able to develop his part so that his gain serves the public good. Faulconbridge never faces the problem of Enobarbus, Kent or Lear's Fool, who have to choose whether to follow their own best interests or whether to sacrifice themselves for their masters. He avoids the destructive impact of this role-conflict, so common in the later tragedies, and therefore survives and emerges as a hero at the end of the play. The later commentators are faced with the stubborn, intractable nature of tragic heroes. Faulconbridge faces only the feeble king, and his world is crying out for a hero to enter the action and teach virtue by example. But he does go through a crisis of conscience before he emerges as a hero. The lure of private ambition does conflict with his duty and though it is satisfactorily resolved the character development here does point to the later tragedies, for it involves the opposition of action and reflection.

His action initially is supported by a cynically reflective nature and a Machiavellian determination to practise policy. He tramples over brother and mother for the gain which he acknowledges as his major aim; his concern to destroy Austria is entirely personal; he accepts a commission, presumably lucrative, to raid religious houses; in short, England's cause is to him, throughout the first half of the play, incidental to his own ascent. It is in his response to the death of Arthur that we begin to see emerging signs of nobility, for he realizes that he is committed to a side which undertakes actions that revolt his conscience. The Bastard had determined to yield to the humour of the times, but he now finds that there is something within him still of that critical evaluation of other men's actions. Having fitted himself to the times he must now suffer with the times, as he demonstrates in the key speech which fixes his perplexity in our attention. This speech, beginning;

I am amaz'd methinks, and lose my way  
Among the thorns and dangers of this world,  
(IV, iii, 140-141)

illustrates that the discord in the land, mirrored here in the discord within the Bastard's soul, has reached a crisis point. It presents clearly his confusion over his present action in contrast to his former assurance in detached reflection. He can still perceive the nature of the world and though he has allied himself to one of the armies of Commodity he has not yet stooped to sin and can judge objectively the crimes of others with his honour still intact.<sup>1</sup> And yet this sudden loss of confidence, this faltering of the exuberant and carefree Faulconbridge, indicates to us that he has begun to feel the suction towards the whirlpool of folly that he had formerly held up to scorn. There is now no time for him to detach himself from the world and make a leisurely examination of his relation to it, for while he does so England may fall. He is caught by a train of events, forced with half-suppressed misgivings to enlist on a side whose actions he cannot condone. The Bastard has been forced down from his reflective perch to experience the confusion of a man acting in a world riddled with folly. His dilemma may appear to be similar to that of Lear's Fool or Enobarbus - a choice between knavery and folly. Faulconbridge can abandon his master by pursuing a path of disloyal knavery. On the other hand the Bastard, knowing that he is committing himself to a path that he has formerly judged to be one of folly, can decide to help his king. There is no standing by to make choral comments on the world. This speech certainly laments, in the manner of many a chorus, England's desperate situation, but it is made by a man who, unlike a chorus, has the means of resolving the situation. The dilemma which Faulconbridge faces is not, in fact, as extreme

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<sup>1</sup>For a valuable discussion of these themes see, J. L. Calderwood, "Commodity and Honour in King John", in E. M. Waith, ed., Shakespeare: The Histories (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965).

as that of later commentators. The hero of the History plays is ultimately England, and in this patriotic atmosphere it is not folly to commit oneself to the cause of one's country. A country is, indeed, much more amenable to salvation than is a Lear or an Antony. Faulconbridge does not have to commit himself to the folly of King John; he commits himself to something greater than King John, and the country's fate turns on his action. The personalities within the power struggle may be destroyed by their pursuit of Commodity. Heroic action does not, however, involve the salvation of these personalities; it demands the restoration of a state that they have corrupted. Sacrificing the cause of Commodity and the cynical reflection that went with it, he can act without stumbling into folly and heroically earn his reward. A pathway opens up in which action, honour and wisdom, and salvation of self coincide to lead to a satisfactory resolution. It is instructive to remember that for the commentator in tragedy no such pathway ever comes into view.

Faulconbridge cannot, therefore, be described in any meaningful way as a 'choric' character. He starts out dispossessed and illegitimate and moves throughout the play towards power until he represents finally the legitimacy of England's honour.<sup>1</sup> Like many commentators he starts out as an appendage of the plot. He could be excised from the play for the first three acts without radically altering the plot, though the development of the thematic structure would be immeasurably diminished. In the latter part of the play he is so integral to the action that his function could not be taken by anyone else.

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<sup>1</sup>For a dissenting voice on recent critical attempts to see consistency in the development of Faulconbridge's character as a patriotic hero and an early prototype of Henry V, see J. C. Van de Water, "The Bastard in King John", SQ XI (1960) 137-146. I cannot accept her view that Shakespeare produces in the Bastard a congeries of conventions with no attempt at consistency. In my view the radical change in the character is deliberately designed and achieves a remarkable measure of success.

As a concomitant of his changing function Shakespeare's method of individualizing him also changes. His speech at the outset is salted with insolence and innuendo. This manner of speech, though not entirely muted, begins to give place to heroic battle rhetoric. The most outstanding change is in Shakespeare's abandonment of one of his dominant methods of presenting the Bastard's perceptive insight, the agency of vivid soliloquy. The soliloquies of the first two acts set both Faulconbridge and his world in perspective. As his involvement in the action increases, his opportunities for detached reflection disappear. Like all commentators he leads the audience into an involvement with the action, but we do not have to face with Faulconbridge the disquieting consequences of the dissolution of the commentator's function, for the commentator turns hero and we emerge triumphant from the action. The final speech celebrating the salvation of England has frequently been described as a closing chorus. But the speech is not a generalizing jingoistic tag and would sound hollow coming from the mouth of anyone but Faulconbridge if we consider the compromises that the other characters have submitted to in order to survive. The speech belongs appropriately to Faulconbridge because he has become the voice of England and earned his right to celebrate its survival. In listening to this speech we look back over his development and realize that in him alone is the conflict between Commodity and Honour resolved. That speech might have been given by other writers to a chorus as a conventional moral which the author wished to thrust at us. We have a far richer perception of the themes of the play satisfactorily resolved by Shakespeare because we have watched their implications acted out in the experience of a developing and fully realized character. There is no doubt that Shakespeare would have executed his design with more precision when his talents had fully matured, for it cannot be denied that the amount of material which he attempts to control is constantly in danger of destroying his design.

But in Faulconbridge we can observe Shakespeare tentatively exploring a vein that was to yield rich rewards in his later work.

## 3

I have reiterated my belief that the description of a character as 'choric' is not merely a matter of labelling but affects the entire meaning of a play as well as the relation of the audience to its structure. If Shakespeare was transmitting thinly disguised didactic messages through such characters then surely we would expect him to be doing something similar when he came to use a formal chorus. His use of the Chorus in Henry V seems to me to be a novel one and I would like to present an analysis which suggests that even here his presentation of commentary is subjugated to a totally dramatic design. Other critics have not seen it in this light; in his use of the Chorus Shakespeare "seems to have felt that his dramatic technique was inadequate to the subject"<sup>1</sup> and he "confessed ultimate failure to convert history into drama".<sup>2</sup> Yet none of the critics explains why no narrator had been required in King John, for example, which radically compresses historical time, and where the action leaps back and forth across the Channel. Shakespeare's audience can never have expected the kind of realism for the absence of which the Chorus apologizes. If they had accepted the tents of Richard III and Richmond a few feet apart on the same stage with ghosts flitting between, they were hardly likely to feel the lack of prancing steeds and of flotillas for crossing a channel that they had been imaginatively o'erleaping these many years by means

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<sup>1</sup>Geoffrey Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, III, (London, 1962), p. 349.

<sup>2</sup>V. K. Whitaker, Shakespeare's Use of Learning (San Marino, 1964), p. 131.

of the poet's evocative imagery. Shakespeare seems to have been confident enough, by the time he wrote this play, to perform the virtuoso feat of pointing out the inadequacy of the stage whilst overcoming it in the self-same speeches of the Chorus with vividly evocative poetry. It is the most dazzling example of Shakespeare's comprehension of the use of convention. Instead of assuming that he is admitting defeat by taking the line of least resistance we might look for more positive reasons why Shakespeare so radically altered his basic dramatic structure.

In this play Shakespeare broke the mould in which he had cast all his Histories hitherto. That repetitive cycle of rise and fall, of fractious barons roaming England and France to seek out their advantage, is finally thrust aside. The last remnant of that struggle in the treachery of Cambridge, Grey and Scroop (II, ii) is an echo of the past. The king's decisive crushing of that conspiracy brings a whole era to an end. He advances on France with a united front, the factions having buried their enmity in a patriotic crusade. It matters not at all that historically this reign occurs before that disastrously fractious reign that he had chronicled earlier. Throughout the two tetralogies the action moves towards the emergence of Henry Richmond in the one and Henry V in the other as saviours of their country. In the context of all nine of his History plays, covering the period from the reign of King John to that of Richard III, the action moves towards the emergence of a king self-aware and capable of uniting and controlling his country. The concord amongst the nobles in Henry V is remarkable and Shakespeare cleverly sets it off by relegating the conflict and fractiousness to the commoners; Pistol and Nym concerning Mistress Quickly, Fluellen with MacMorris, Williams with the disguised King and Fluellen, Fluellen with Pistol. He also contrasts the concord of the English high command with the petty squabbles amongst the French barons.

This change from a self-lacerating to a united nation required a change in dramatic structure and one of Shakespeare's ways of signalling that change was the inclusion of the Chorus. The functions of this Chorus would at first sight seem to be straightforward. It provides narrative bridges and exhibits appropriately patriotic sentiments. But those critics who take the function of the Chorus for granted ought to realize that none of its speeches provide information absolutely necessary to our comprehension of the play, a fact noted by Johnson at the end of his 1765 edition of the play.<sup>1</sup> In comparison, say, with the spare and obviously functional employment of the chorus in Doctor Faustus, or with its essential narrative importance in Dekker's Old Fortunatus, Shakespeare's Chorus is supererogatory. If we excised the part we would not affect the story a jot, though, of course, we would radically alter the structure of ideas and the mood and atmosphere of the play. Whether the Chorus speaks for Shakespeare I shall examine in a moment, but it certainly emerges out of the history cycle as though England had at last found its true voice; it is an abstract extension of the function that Shakespeare had first essayed in Faulconbridge. The cause of battle seems, in the glowing rhetoric of the Chorus, to have passed from individual personality to the whole nation. If I may parody the solemn Freudian paradigm, it is as though we have been labouring in the world of the id for many decades and have emerged at last into the world of Henry V's healthy ego. The superego that strives for the communal good in ideal patriotic exuberance is represented by the Chorus whose sentiments

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<sup>1</sup>W. D. Smith finds the choruses so functionally unnecessary that he suggests they were added by another hand for a performance at court in 1603. Without accepting this rather extreme conclusion, I would point to his discussion, which contains many useful examples of the redundancies, irrelevancies, and often seemingly deliberately misleading passages in the Choruses regarded from a functionally expository point of view. "The Henry V Choruses in the First Folio", JEGP, LIII (1954), 38-57.

the king struggles to implement.

Throughout the play there are moments when the English forces are united in a patriotic fervour which approaches the ideal vision of the Chorus, but there are moments, too, when we are aware of the limitations of this picturesque idealism. As with all of Shakespeare's later commentators, so also with his formal Chorus - they embody part but not all of the truth. The Chorus cannot embody the whole of the truth because it demonstrates no cognizance of the inglorious aspects of war. The king, however, sees both sides of the war. He can inspire men to the heights of patriotism at Harfleur and Agincourt, urging them against a French army on whose effeteness Shakespeare lavishes considerable pains. But Henry is also forced to listen to his soldiers in the depth of their disillusionment. The king, however, is not wracked throughout by any internal conflict. His conflict of roles had been resolved in 2 Henry IV and, though he is isolated in his responsibility on the eve of Agincourt, his problem is not so psychologically debilitating as to undermine him in the manner of the heroes of the later tragedies. His problem, like the somewhat different problem facing Faulconbridge, admits a solution within terms of the play in the heroic action of Agincourt. Henry V is a public hero and he accepts the responsibility of the public good. That is why the Chorus is so appropriate in this play, because it celebrates throughout the public glory for which Henry strives.

I am not suggesting that Shakespeare specifically allegorizes the Chorus but he needed a voice that would represent one extreme of the spectrum of ideas on patriotism, as Pistol represents the other extreme. The king, as I have suggested, holds the balance. He cannot be the embodiment of patriotic zeal because he is faced with the human responses which separate men from their ideals. But if the king is to be properly heroic, then no other man must over-

shadow him by an unquestioning acceptance of the virtues of patriotism. If Shakespeare, as I read the play, is presenting a structurally balanced selection of views on the nature of patriotism and the justice of war, then inevitably he has to choose a representative of extreme patriotism that is lacking both in personality and in involvement in the action of the play. Personal needs and the dangers of involvement tend to make men fall away from the ideal of unquestioning loyalty represented by the Chorus. Pistol's rapacious cowardice is a clear indication of the way in which men fail to live up to the heroic ideals of tradition which the Chorus presents. Drama had long supplied a convention that permitted a commenting voice from outside the action. The only time that Shakespeare required comment from outside the action of his play he used a formal Chorus. This Chorus is, therefore, very important to the argument of this thesis because it demonstrates the total detachment that many of the commentators are incapable of maintaining. The Chorus can remain outside the events of the play, uninfluenced by them, because it has no character in any meaningful sense. Being immune to the world it observes, the Chorus is static; its lyric exuberance persists throughout because there is no dynamic principle involved in its depiction that can induce development. The Chorus can reflect and intensify the moods of the play, but we cannot apprehend this in terms of character because it is involved at no point in interaction, and because Shakespeare wished it to represent throughout a constant and static principle of patriotism. Although the function of the Chorus is clearly outside the action of the play it is still encapsulated within the total structure of ideas in the play and that poses the problem of how Shakespeare intended us to interpret this function.

Productions of this play in recent times have run to a variety of extreme interpretations. Olivier's film version, reflecting the miraculous

heroism of the Battle of Britain, as the original play itself, many have claimed, celebrated the destruction of the Armada, appeared to operate on the assumption that Shakespeare's meaning was to be elicited from the attitude of the Chorus. A more recent London production played in tin hats and gas-masks amongst trenches, and Michael Langham's production at Stratford, Ontario in 1966 with its Brechtian emphasis, operated on the assumption that Shakespeare's sympathies lay with the informal 'chorus' of soldiers. By a rather brutally managed irony the formal Chorus thus appeared to be jingoistic, ludicrously out of touch, in the painting of pretty verbal pictures, with the agonizing realities of war. To interpret Henry V in either of the above manners is to be unjust to the balance of evidence in the play. If we assume the Chorus to be Shakespeare's mouthpiece we are hard put to it to give sufficient weight to the evidence of the soldiers. If we emphasize the soldiers' views exclusively then we have to interpret large sections of the play in terms of a crude and heavily obvious irony that is not characteristic of Shakespeare's method. In either case we ignore the fact that Shakespeare places Henry in a central position of mediating the dialectical contrast. Shakespeare has shaped Hal through two plays with a kind of education unique among the English kings of whom he wrote, so that at last the glories and horrors of martial struggles can meet in the perception of one man. The plainest thing about the complicated structure of this play is that Shakespeare was not writing heavily weighted propaganda for one side of the problem or the other. Gilbert dwells on the horrors of war in his study of the play, and emphasizes elements of satire and parody which undercut the commonly accepted theme of patriotism. In my view he is, at times, too severe, but his conclusion is soundly balanced:

So Shakespeare could take from the old play, from the Chronicler, from the popular legend, his heroic conquering monarch, and heartily put him on the stage. Yet the poet's

mirror did not reflect military glory only. Its image of the truth showed also the English soldier dead in the dunghill, the field grown up to weeds, and the infant spitted on the pike. In his imitation of life, the poet did not confine himself to one aspect or the other. So Henry V is not merely the happy warrior, nor is he merely a biting satire of the conqueror's ambition. In desire for an immediate and narrow unity we are not to insist on one or the other only.<sup>1</sup>

The mixture of low-life comedy with the hallowed events of history was not Shakespeare's invention. In the source play, The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth, from which he took many hints we find a similar admixture.

In the episodic nature of the source play there is little evidence of the unifying design, the total structure of ideas, that Shakespeare was to make of history. The source play does not relentlessly examine the traditionally received account of Henry's conquest; rather, it follows tradition and enlivens it with comic interludes. The art of Shakespeare's drama is that of placing scenes, of setting up a contrast of attitudes which illuminates a structure of ideas regulating the play. For this purpose he elaborated much of Pistol's part, invented the whole of Fluellen's part and the group of common soldiers present at one of the critical moments of the play. One of the ways of balancing the views presented by this sub-plot world was to introduce the Chorus.

The Chorus, as presenter of the play, begs admittance to act as our guide and appears regularly before the opening of each act to speed us on our way. If we examine these choric prologues and weigh them against the content of each act we may come to an understanding of their significance. If the ultimate meaning of the play is less clear-cut and less obvious than the propagandist demands, then we can only suggest that Shakespeare's purpose was to examine those

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<sup>1</sup>Allan Gilbert, "Patriotism and Satire in Henry V" in A. D. Matthews and C. M. Emery, eds., Studies in Shakespeare (Coral Gables, 1953), p. 64.

complications of human thought and action that so conspicuously elude the comprehension of the propagandist.

The Chorus in the Prologue to Act I paints a rose-tinted spectacle of historical events which the tawdry costumes of the stage can but poorly imitate. By a remarkable theatrical trick Shakespeare manages to invert the intentions of the Chorus for, in attempting to carry us up to the poetic heights to reach for a glorious reality, it is the most obviously theatrical device in the play. The speech of the Chorus most consistently reflects the artificial, hyperbolical rhetoric of the stage so that in begging us to forget the stage it constantly reminds us of it. Because it embodies an unquestioning belief in the glory of war, it presents a vision which does not adequately cover any man's actual experience of war. Shakespeare works on this contrast throughout his play, for he has many scenes to exhibit which are far from the pomp and glory of which the Chorus speaks, scenes which are tawdry indeed, ragged men who on this unworthy scaffold hardly aid the swelling scene. A play which tried to live up to the grandiose invocation of the Chorus would appear tawdry indeed, but a play which capitalized on the tawdriness of the stage, on the ordinariness of human response, might seem more like real life, more real, indeed, than the tantalizingly impossible vision the Chorus presents. This first Chorus, then, sketches in a picture of the 'warlike Harry' and the glorious panoply of battle to come. It anticipates not the particular action of the first few scenes but the expedition to which all the action tends.

In the First Act we turn from the florid invocation to the political details of how the expedition came to be undertaken. The king establishes himself at once as a shepherd of his people intent on securing authoritative support for a just war. Whether we find the genealogical ramblings of Canterbury comic or not, it is clear that Shakespeare devotes a whole Act to establishing

the unity of the Church and the barons in England's cause. Shakespeare clearly indicates that we are in an entirely new world and to that extent fulfills the picture of a puissant nation which the Chorus had celebrated at the outset. The scenes constantly invoke that golden age of Edward III and the Black Prince so that our eyes are turned on this new king as a rising sun who will return England to its former glory (I, ii, 278-280).

The Prologue to Act II presents us with material designed for lyrical intensity, a patriotic hymn describing a nation girding its loins. The information concerning the conspiracy provides us with no material that we do not obtain by other means during the ensuing action. The information has a similar function to many of the Brechtian devices of anticipation. It is necessary that the new sense of England's harmony must not be set at nought by signs of further treachery springing up again. When we come upon the conspiracy it does not disturb our faith in England's new-found unity because the Chorus has already informed us that we will ship for France, whereby we may deduce, even if our memory for history is rusty, that the conspiracy is put down. By anticipating the treachery we are inured to surprise and can concentrate on the masterly fashion in which the king deals with it. The scene thus becomes one of reinforcing our admiration for Henry's regal qualities and of confirming the unity by rooting out the last signs of disharmony.

It must also be observed that the speech which serves as Prologue to this Act makes no mention of the action which fills two-thirds of it. It can hardly be said that the scenes in Eastcheap contribute to the picture of an England transformed into an ideal state. Henry himself may be reformed but Shakespeare saw no point in abandoning his unrepentant associates when they could be used to elaborate richly on the major concerns of the play. The Chorus throughout the play exhibits no knowledge of this world resistant to the poetic

vision of a mighty nation eager to fall upon its enemies. We do not expect the hyperbole of the Chorus to acknowledge their pedestrian concerns. But though the Chorus can ignore these characters, the king can not, and the comic scenes add up in the audience's mind to illuminate the king's contemplation of

the wretched slave  
Who, with a body fill'd and vacant mind,  
Gets him to rest, cramm'd with distressful bread;  
(IV, i, 264-266)

It is interesting to note, therefore, that the Chorus does not merely fail to mention these disturbing elements, it seems deliberately to avoid them. In the Prologue to Act II we are prepared for the embarkation at Southampton:

The King is set from London, and the scene  
Is now transported, gentles, to Southampton;  
There is the playhouse now, there must you sit,  
(Prologue, II, 34-36)

The Chorus is interested only in the main line of the story, only in the king and his cause, not in any embellishments. There is even the implication that there is nothing further of interest in this narrative until the king appears:

But, till the King come forth, and not till then,  
Unto Southampton do we shift our scene.  
(Prologue, II, 41-42)

The Chorus in elaborate manner rushes us forward to Southampton. It is with some surprise, then, that on entering Act II we find Shakespeare lagging behind in Eastcheap. Our sights have been set well above the Boar's Head Tavern:

Now all the youth of England are on fire,  
And silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies;  
Now thrive the armourers, and honour's thought  
Reigns solely in the breast of every man;  
(Prologue, II, 1-4)

Shakespeare tempers this public eulogy with the private humours of Pistol and Nym, which aim at a little less than the reign of honour. This inconsistency might, perhaps, be more easily explained by assuming a late shuffling and addition of scenes or incomplete revision, were it not in line with the entire

development of the Chorus, whose poetic vision is played off against the reality of the everyday world. Those critics who have assumed that the Chorus was designed to link an episodic narrative together and prepare the audience for rapid transitions might note not only that it is almost entirely superfluous in that role, but also that its function might often be more fruitfully examined as a deliberate lack of bridging and preparation for what actually goes on.

It cannot be accidental that the first scene in the Boar's Head parodies the rhetoric of politics in the court world that we have just left. There is division over the title and possession of a piece of property, Nell Quickly; there is an exchange of insults; there is a determination to fight it out, and concord is established by linking us back to the major theme in the resolve to bury the quarrel in France. The 'humorous' exchange between Pistol and Nym, with its absurdly overblown conceits and threats, is a comical reflection of the stern rebuttal of the Dauphin's insulting joke. The contrast here, of course, is in the excesses of the bragging, flyting match as opposed to the king's restrained and dignified retort to the French, and the lack of purposeful action that comes from the shouting match as opposed to the king's resolute expedition to conquer France. The overblown battle rhetoric of Pistol acts as admirable counterpoint to the genuinely ecstatic patriotism of the Chorus. Pistol's determination to profit by the war is a far cry from the honour which reigns in the breasts of all the youths of England. It must be said, however, that the rogues, who give not a fig for honour, are gradually eliminated from the play. The Lord of Misrule, Falstaff, who had his being in more frivolous days, dies without being given opportunity to make an impact on the crusade; soon Bardolph is hanged, later Nym is reported to have been hanged, and Nell Quickly is said to be dead. Only Pistol, soundly battered, crawls back to England. None of them interacts with the king, save Pistol in his encounter

with Harry "Leroy". Only Williams draws out the old Hal, and he for conspicuously opposite reasons to those of former companions. Falstaff and his friends had little concern with honour as long as there was profit to be made, but it is Williams' zealous pursuit of honour which brings him to attention and reward. The new England offers no secure place for the former revellers. This, however, does not prevent us from recognizing that the Chorus' version of events is a considerable gloss on reality.

The Prologue to Act III contains thirty-five lines, and of these only nine and a half at the most can be described as transmitting information; the rest is poetic embellishment. We have already learnt at the end of Act II that Henry is footed in France. The evocation of the channel-crossing in vivid pictorial imagery serves more as a transitional pause than for the contribution of information. The patriotic tone is reinforced with the description of a deserted England and the proud, invading army. Only at the close of the speech are we told rapidly about the siege of Harfleur as answer to the unsatisfactory French terms. The two succeeding scenes are set in dialectical contrast, reflecting on this invocation. The king continues the martial rhetoric in his Harfleur speech, living up to the ideal set by the Chorus. The laggards from Eastcheap fall away from that ideal, tempering valour with very heavy doses of prudence. Bardolph's entrance, opening Act III, Scene iii, inevitably punctures that vein of resounding rhetoric that Shakespeare has sustained unbroken for almost seventy lines. Anything less "like greyhounds in the slips, / Straining at the start" can scarcely be imagined. The rhetoric of the Chorus and Pistol is again juxtaposed. They both employ rhetoric of obviously literary origin. The Chorus aspires to the patriotic lyrical strains of a Spenser, magnifying honour to a point that ignores human weakness. Pistol borrows the fustian terms and epithets of the traditional stage braggart to hide his aversion

to honour and to cover his human weakness. Hotson has described how the Chorus glorifies Henry whilst Pistol provides a comic parody of him:

[Pistol's] gift is a daemon possessing him with the conviction that he is essentially a Locrine, a Cambyzes, a Tamburlaine. Not, of course, the insane notion that he is a real tyrant king, but the wildly absurd one that he is a player king. Thus he can rehearse valour without requiring courage, carry tempest<sup>1</sup> in his voice without running any measureable danger.

By providing this parody of heroism Shakespeare induces us to believe the more in the genuine heroism of Henry. That Pistol will twice get his pretence of bravery accepted - Fluellen's eulogy of his work at the bridge and LeFer's submission - indicates how careful one has to be in recognizing true valour. All the world's a stage to Pistol and he has his moments of glory even as he is also pelted with rotten vegetables when the audience, in this case Fluellen, sees through his performance.

The debate between Fluellen and MacMorris presents more evidence of the tawdry reality of war. The squabbling of the national representatives is a comic reduction of those factional struggles which had, in earlier plays, rent England asunder. The scene, though no threat to that united cause of which we have heard so much, nevertheless indicates the petty disputes, the touchy pride, the varying views on military strategy, which affect men in war. Shakespeare can thus represent the reality of war without allowing any factionalism to taint, in any serious way, the king's cause. Henry will eventually become involved in that groundbass of petty squabbling and rivalry which continues throughout the play, but only when his cause has ultimately triumphed and as a relaxation from his singular purpose, and even then he will turn it into an

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<sup>1</sup>Leslie Hotson, 'Ancient Pistol', in Shakespeare's Sonnets Dated and Other Essays (London, 1949), p. 61.

opportunity to reward the virtue of Williams and display his own magnanimity. In contrast to his habits as Prince, Henry speaks to no-one beneath captain's rank until the critical eve of Agincourt (IV, i). It is well to keep this in mind when speaking of the king's much celebrated 'common touch'. There are many scenes which carry on a ribald commentary on the glorious action, but Shakespeare carefully dissociates the king from them all, despite his former proclivities, until late in the play, by which time, although we have not forgotten Prince Hal, we have had ample opportunity of recognizing the kind of king he has turned into.

In the Prologue to Act IV we look again in vain if we seek vital narrative information. We have seen the English offer a challenge to battle, we have heard of the sickness of their troops and we have observed already "The confident and over-lusty French" despising their English opponents. The Chorus merely reviews this material, but it also creates that midnight calm, that pause on the brink of the storm, in which Henry's tour amongst his soldiers can take place. The Chorus utters that magic word in English history and raises the spirit of the times - 'The name of Agincourt'. The function of the Chorus here is almost that of a priest presiding over and ushering in this sacred ritual of patriotism, this re-enactment of a miracle. The magnificent imagery of this speech could have been divided up amongst the characters but, isolated from the action, its cumulative impact swelling into a hymn of praise to the king helps to set up an atmosphere of reverence which causes the audience to pause and focus its attention. There is a sense here of ritual mimesis in which the priest-like Chorus announces the stages of the re-enactment, which are subsequently performed, thus bringing us to that sense of order and unity aimed at by religious rites. This hallowed atmosphere created by the Chorus is supported by echoes of Christian tradition in the action itself.

The king is something more than human in the speech of the Chorus. He is 'like the sun' with miraculous restorative powers; as he moves in the darkness, 'A little touch of Harry in the night', he has affinities with Christ as the light of the world. The king is the saviour of the English, and as Christ came down to earth and took upon Him the image of a humble carpenter's son so the king walks amongst his men disguised, dividing his thoughts with them, attending to the humble almost as though they were his flock and he their shepherd. I am, of course, forcing to the surface those associations which must remain vaguely at the back of our minds as we watch these scenes. The imagery of communion, however, is obvious enough. Henry's famous battle speech to his soldiers, as unlikely a band of crusaders as the fishermen disciples themselves, emphasizes the significance of St. Crispian's day and the ritual sharing of blood:

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
 For he today that sheds his blood with me  
 Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,  
 This day shall gentle his condition;  
 (IV, iii, 60-63)

The speech draws its strength, too, from the tradition of the comitatus, but in its emphasis on the few, on the chosen, it reminds us of the disciples in a hostile land. Henry is depicted as God's chosen instrument to subdue the pride of the French who have little to say of God and are pictured almost as effete heathens hungering only for glory. The king's anguished soliloquy on the hard duties of being a chosen leader is also, perhaps, uttered in the loneliness of the night on the eve of a great trial, a very distant reflection of Christ's agony in Gethsemane. Finally and more fancifully there is a very faint echo of the journey to Emmaus in Williams' exchange with Henry, for, having failed to recognize his master disguised in the night, the revelation comes as a shock later on with the king's bounty. These echoes work collectively to

create a general atmosphere of religious dedication which is ultimately rewarded with a miracle, the battle losses at Agincourt - "O God, thy arm was here!"

A great deal of this atmosphere of ritual stems, as I have suggested, from the speech of the Chorus. But we must also note that there are other elements in the Act which prevent it from becoming a totally formalized ritual and which place the battle firmly in the human sphere. The Chorus' version of events is a less than adequate account of what we see, and demonstrates clearly how the glory of tradition covers up less heroic details. We realize, if we think about it for a moment, that the Chorus' version of Henry's tour amongst his soldiers is deliberate misdirection, a lack of preparation for the scene as Shakespeare writes it. The king does not appear like a sun to thaw his soldiers' fear, but moves disguised, unknown to his soldiers, not to impress and inspire them but to be depressed and dispirited by them. His experience amongst them begins with comic familiarity and insults from Pistol and ends almost in a brawl with Williams. The Chorus would have us believe that men, inspired by the king lost their sense of human weakness and vulnerability. Shakespeare inverts the situation to show how the king becomes aware of his human limitations in his contact with his men. In his debate with them the disguised king has to offer an elaborate theory of self-justification. He receives answers rooted in the immediate fears of men far removed from the theories by which the powerful seek to justify war. Instead of being inspired by a national ideal, or even a little touch of Harry in the night, they are suspicious, uncertain, anticipating the worst. The rhetoric of battle may evoke greyhounds in the slips but the play also presents a king isolated in the understanding of his cause in Bates':

Then I would he were here alone; so should he be sure to  
be ransomed, and a many poor men's lives saved.

(IV, i, 120-122)

I am not implying that Shakespeare is making a wholesale attack on war but clearly he does not accept unquestioningly the idealism of tradition.<sup>1</sup>

In the king's soliloquy after the departure of his soldiers the dialectical arguments of the play are resolved. The king's talk of Ceremony and its pageantry deals with surface appearances, that triumphant exterior view which the Chorus has presented. In his talk with his soldiers the king has at last come in contact with its opposite, that care for the self, unmindful of greater causes. The king is incapable of living the carefree day-to-day existence of his soldiers or of being blinded by the ceremonial trappings of his office. He has to recognize, in full consciousness, the lonely burden of being of mortal clay with the superaddition of regal duty. At last in the history cycle a king appears who, by the nature of his strange education and his practical application of role-playing, comes to an understanding of himself and of man's limitations while he is still at the top of Fortune's wheel. This understanding is affirmed by his unwearied ascription of his every success to God's favour.

The Prologue to Act V is the most functional of all in terms of transmitting narrative material and it is the only one which concentrates on abridging the story. Since we return to the English camp in France immediately it could be argued that there was no necessity for recounting the king's return home and from thence back to France. Since Shakespeare is so free in his treatment of history there seems to be no reason why Henry could not have proceeded straight to the French court. But such a telescoping of events was not to

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<sup>1</sup>Fluellen is used throughout the play to indicate the disparity between war as it should be fought according to hallowed tradition and the kind of war that is actually fought with its murdering of defenceless boys, an act distressful to the Welshman because it deviates from the copy-book. Fluellen is a comic parody within the plot of the homage to tradition that the Chorus presents outside it.

Shakespeare's advantage here. Even if historically Henry had not in fact returned home it would have been necessary for Shakespeare to find some matter to form a transitional pause here. The atmosphere of war which has coloured this play must be brought to an end to prepare us for the gay badinage and courtship which concludes the play. The description by the Chorus of Henry's reception in London not only crowns the patriotic fervour which has built up throughout the play but also neatly rounds off the preoccupation with war by a celebration of the return to peace. Even so we must note that the Chorus in providing the narrative link suppresses, in fact, more than it reveals. We are told of the triumphant return to England and a second visit to France for the composition of a treaty. No mention is made of Henry's second invasion of France, a four-year battle campaign the treaty for which was not concluded until five years after Agincourt. Shakespeare had chosen to reduce the battles of five years to one swift and decisive campaign. This streamlining of events frees him to explore a sub-plot world and to elaborate a variety of moods and attitudes. We must look to the Chorus, therefore, not as a device for getting over recalcitrant material or for experiments in epic forms - no dramatist who chops a five-year campaign to two lines finds historical fact an impediment - but as a device designed for strictly dramatic purposes. The Chorus laments the inadequacy of the stage for transmitting history even as Shakespeare is using it to distort history in order to fit his own dramatic patterns.

The Chorus, then, is throughout the play a strategically used device embodying the popular tradition which glowed, perhaps, in the memory of an Elizabethan audience, and is set up to contrast with Shakespeare's exploration of 'what really happened'. The Chorus is akin to the later commentators in enabling Shakespeare to explore the distinction between the ideal

and the actual. Tradition tends to rub away the encrustation of human detail that obscures or mitigates the glory of past triumphs; it glamourizes and has an infinite capacity to forget the human weaknesses amongst the human strengths. There is some truth still in tradition, but it is not the whole truth. Tradition, in other words, operates on exactly the same principles as Shakespeare's Chorus. Shakespeare did not wish to destroy the glory of Agincourt but he realized that by injecting episodic detail he could make it more convincing. The inclusion of Pistol and the disillusioned soldiers does not enhance the glory of the battle. There could be no greater travesty of chivalry than Pistol's dealings with LeFer to contrast with Exeter's report of York's heroic death (IV, iv, 7-32). The one must inevitably bring tears of laughter to our eyes even as the other brings tears of sorrow to Exeter's. But we accept Shakespeare's battle more readily than that of tradition because it is more firmly based in human experience. It has been said that a vacation in a foreign country is worth a thousand books about it, or that an hour of practical application is worth months of theory. The Chorus is the thousand books of tradition and theory, the drama itself is the actual experience. In our experience we come across many things that verify theory and what we have read, that fill out momentarily an ideal pattern, but we also come across many details and experiences for which theory cannot account. We come out of our experience with a respect for theory, but with a respect modified by our knowledge of its limitations. Shakespeare's plays achieve their immediacy and impact not by presenting simple theories of human behaviour but by exposing us to the experience of its complexity.

In examining this play I have tried to show that even when Shakespeare used a formal Chorus we should be careful of assuming that he adopted the practice of many of his contemporaries and made it his mouthpiece. Even in the use of the Chorus uninfluenced by the action of the play Shakespeare inevitably

made it part of his larger dramatic designs. Like the later commentators it presents a distinctive version of events to which it is dangerous to attach superior value. The audience comes to a full understanding of the play's meaning not by accepting the Chorus' version of events but by examining it in relation to the other views presented. The Chorus has a special relation to the hero and enables us to come to an understanding of him. The method, of course, is opposite to that of tragedy but the ultimate effect is similar. Most commentators present an ideal of behavior which the hero has fallen away from or is incapable of attaining. The Chorus assumes that idealization to be achieved in reality by its unblemished king. The audience perceives that though the king has saintly propensities he is also a human being who must face his own limitations and those of his men. War, patriotism, honour and glory in reality are more complicated matters than the Chorus suggests. As with the commentators, we recognize elements of truth in the Chorus' views but we have to supplement them with impressions gained from other sources. As a commentary on the play Shakespeare's Chorus is unique in Elizabethan drama in the complexity of its functions and in its intricate relations to the total dramatic structure.

In the final speech of the play the Chorus once again apologizes for the inadequacies of the stage, and yet we, who look back on all such scenes as Pistol grovelling before Fluellen's leek, are unlikely to concur in the judgement which Shakespeare makes on himself:

In little room confining mighty men,  
Mangling by starts the full course of their glory.  
(Epilogue, V, 3-4)

The singularity of Shakespeare's version of the story lies in the ample room that he has allowed himself and the mangling by starts in such a varied way the full course of the action. It is the Chorus that has 'pursu'd the story'

but the art of this play surely lies in the so-called 'mangling'.

## CYNICAL COMMENTATORS

## 1

In Troilus and Cressida we have the bitterest and most degraded of Shakespeare's commentators. Thersites' comments are the extreme symptom, the external sign of the sickness that wracks his society. His language is full of references to diseases, especially skin ailments, and he is himself an itching scab on the skin of society. He separates himself from the series of cross-cutting deceptions and illusions which involve all the other characters. He reduces all human actions to the dimensions of his own jaundiced truth that the general law of animal greed and lust unchecked by reason and restraint dominates human behaviour. He is a truth-bearer but a limited one because he lives in a limited world. As John Bayley<sup>1</sup> has pointed out there is something peculiarly restricted about the atmosphere of this play; it does not lead the imagination outward towards a speculative enlargement of the moods, themes and characters within it; it turns the mind inwards to the claustrophobic world of sterile relationships. One of the causes which helps to produce in us this sense of a sealed-off world is the character of Thersites. He prevents us from entering into full imaginative sympathy with the characters.

In all the sources which Shakespeare might have read, save only Chapman's Homer, Thersites does not appear. His central function in this play is elaborated out of a vivid vignette of sixty or so lines in Homer.<sup>2</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup>John Bayley, "Shakespeare's Only Play", in B. W. Jackson, ed., Stratford Papers on Shakespeare, 1963 (Toronto, 1964), pp. 58-83.

<sup>2</sup>Geoffrey Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, VI (London, 1966), pp. 120-122.

examining his character it may be thought that I am separating him from the tradition of "comicall satyre" which I discussed in an earlier chapter and to which he more properly belongs. Many critics have accepted him as a chorus to the play and he has many affinities with other commentators that I am discussing. Thersites has been carefully related to other satirists.<sup>1</sup> It has been suggested that his ranting bitterness may have resulted from Shakespeare's attempt to design the play for an Inns of Court audience which had a particular taste for satire.<sup>2</sup> But however much we may relate him to a theatrical vogue he is still one of the most alarming creations of the theatre. No version of the story so far had made such a wholesale attack on the weakness of human nature. It looks at the outset, if we assume the Prologue to be Shakespeare's, that the play will have a pattern similar to the one which I traced in Henry V. The Prologue launches into a rhetorical speech that seems to give promise of a traditional interpretation, heroic action, grandeur of tone with a sauce confectioned from horribly stuffed epithets of war. The language of the Prologue gives every reason to expect an epical treatment, 'princes orgillous', 'the ministers and instruments / Of cruel war', 'war-like fraughtage', the resounding catalogue of the gates of Troy 'with massy staples / And corresponsive and fulfilling bolts'. After all this sabre-rattling rhetoric we might well expect to be thrust into some noble preparation for war. What, in fact, we get in the first scene is Troilus mooning around the stage, taking his armour off, incapacitated by passion from fulfilling his calling to martial deeds of epic valour. There is nothing sublime about the theme of love in this play, its imagery is dominated by a coarse commercial and appetitive vocabulary

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<sup>1</sup>See O. J. Campbell, Shakespeare's Satire (Hamden, 1963); A. B. Kernan, The Cankered Muse (New Haven, 1959); Robert Kimbrough, Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida" and its Setting (Cambridge, 1964).

<sup>2</sup>W. W. Lawrence, "Troilus, Cressida and Thersites", MLR XXXVII (1942), 422-437.

of trade.<sup>1</sup> The theme of war is coloured with pettiness and base political manoeuvrings. Brooding over these two themes is Thersites, the opponent of all traditions of the story that are romantic, epic and heroic.

There is throughout the play an air of decadence and irresponsibility, an unhealthy atmosphere in which adults seem only to be capable of acting like spoilt children. The play, far from adding to men's statures by epical enlargement, reduces the traditional heroes to the sulkiness and capriciousness of children. There is repeated emphasis on the youth of Troilus, and his love of Cressida is marked by the impetuosity of adolescence. The petulant behaviour of the heroes in the Greek camp reinforces this impression of immaturity. Much of the seriousness of the action seems to be reduced by presenting it in the form of games. Elaborate deceptions and constant role-playing provide the substance of a variety of games in which the characters are embroiled. Perhaps Shakespeare took his hint for staging elaborate games from his sources, for there is to the modern mind always something sporting and organized about a war that allows for opposition of champions in single combat. The organized game-element of medieval tournaments<sup>2</sup> is more evident in this play than elsewhere in Shakespeare, and he uses it to emphasize a fundamental lack of seriousness in the war. The war is not being fought for land or power but for a woman who hardly seems worth the bother even to many of the participants. It is a young man's war, almost a pastime, in which men seek for honour and self-esteem.

It is no accident that many critics have felt this play to have a peculiarly modern tone. The preoccupation of much recent literature has been to

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<sup>1</sup>Raymond Southall, "Troilus and Cressida and the Spirit of Capitalism", in Arnold Kettle, ed., Shakespeare in a Changing World (New York, 1964), pp. 217-232.

<sup>2</sup>For an analysis of the game-element in war see Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens (Boston, 1950), Ch. V.

exhibit the hollowness and meaninglessness of a world in which people, incapable of finding the springs of their true humanity, play endless games. The elaborate rituals of Beckett's world frequently reduce men to that level of animal existence which Thersites rails about. Ionesco's plays invariably trap characters in ritualistic games which destroy their ability to communicate and to act effectively. The films of Antonioni and Fellini have frequently explored a decadent high society where love, even the ability to contact another human being, have been replaced by futile games, rituals, charades. The study ✓ of psychology has made us fully conscious of the roles we employ to stage ourselves and to deceive and manipulate others. In this play we have a virtuoso display of role-playing both in self-dramatization, as with Troilus, Cressida, Ajax and Achilles, and for the purposes of manipulating others, as with Pandarus, Ulysses and Nestor. This role-playing is the matrix of the game structure. The shock to the audience comes through its awareness of the epic-cum-chivalric tradition contrasted with the adolescent game world that Shakespeare makes of it. Thersites is the means of making effective the shock which Shakespeare's interpretation of the story provides for the audience. To him both war and love are games played by fools and he relates to them merely as a spectator. It must, however, be acknowledged at the outset that though Thersites appears on one level to be a detached observer of events, on another level he presents the most extreme example of immature behaviour. He is like a nasty boy stigmatized by all, who yet manages to claim attention by name-calling and abuse issued from the skirts of the crowd, ready to screech at everyone, but ready, also, to run away when the rough-housing games get uncomfortably close.

I can best indicate the frivolity and immaturity of the characters in these two worlds, which Thersites so scorns, by picking out an incident from each of them. The atmosphere at Troy is, perhaps, best caught in Pandarus'

elaborate recounting to Cressida of Troilus' witty answer to Helen concerning the hairs on his chin (I, ii, 104-162). The emphasis on Troilus' extreme youth fits everything that we see and hear of him (I, ii, 106-112). The immoderate laughter, the general falling about the place, which Pandarus reports greeted Troilus' pert and somewhat feeble jest, amazes the audience as much as it does Cressida. The vaguely precious and frivolous atmosphere of courtly love, in which mirth, love and honour are pursued with excessive passion, dominates Troy.

In contrast to this the Greek camp in Act I, Scene iii, must initially seem to be one of august and mature council. The rhetoric is as clotted with latinisms and hyperbole as anything in Shakespeare and seems far removed from the jests of Troy. But the scene gradually reveals behind the sage counsel a diseased world that is as irresponsible as that of Troy. In Ulysses' speech (I, iii, 142-184) Shakespeare emphasizes the atmosphere of the world of play by casting Achilles' activities in the terms of the theatre. The great champion, who has retired to his tent sulking, amuses himself with Patroclus' impudent parodies of the Greek leaders. There is surely an echo here of two truant schoolboys amusing each other with mimicry of their masters. Our first report of Achilles is far removed from any tradition of the heroic warrior. Homer had certainly emphasized this moody aspect of Achilles, but he did not also suppress evidence of his valour as Shakespeare does throughout. Achilles' rolling about in laughter at Patroclus' mimicry seems as absurd as the excessive mirth at Troilus' jest about the forked hair. The streak of mockery and maliciousness is common to both. The political world of the Greek camp is as fraught with debility and immaturity hiding behind grandiose rhetoric as is the world of courtly love in Troy.

Against the elaborate rhetoric and formal speech patterns of the two

camps Shakespeare sets Thersites. The diplomacy of the characters prior to his appearance, whether in the love poetry or the political speech-making, has sought to gild and ornament in elaborate phrasing the fundamental disease which afflicts both camps. This speech finds its obverse in Thersites whose language is excessive in an entirely opposite direction, for he attempts to strip away all the superficial civilities in order to expose the disease:

Agamemnon - how if he had boils full,  
all over generally?  
And those boils did run - say so. Did not  
the general run then? Were not that a botchy core?  
Then there would come some matter from him;  
I see none now.

(II, i, 2-9)

After our sojourn amongst the civilities of high society this comes like an obscene gesture, a deliberate shock, thrusting corruption in our face, reminiscent of Swift's practice in Gulliver's Travels. These shock tactics also give the play a modern cast reminding us of Baudelaire's poetry or surrealist films. The violent anti-art gestures of the Dadaists designed to upset the composure of a bourgeois world wrapped in civilized complacency have much in common with Thersites' imagery. He attacks the hypocrisy of the civilized world which disguises its appetitive spirit in love and war with the ornate trappings of rhetoric. Like the Dadaists he seems to be fascinated with the grotesque for its own sake so that his destructive commentary often appears to be irresponsible in its gratuitous excess. If we have hitherto suspected the diseased nature of society we now watch it exposed in Thersites, who bursts like a boil on the skin of the play and spreads the poison of his spleen across it. The exchange between Ajax and Thersites (II, i) is a parody of all the diplomatic rhetoric we have heard in the previous scene. Men almost at the level of snarling dogs are contrasted with those characters who in earlier scenes were engaged in the exchange of courtierly compliments. The chivalric

challenge carried by Aeneas contrasts with the thumps administered by Ajax to his 'dog', his 'bitch-wolf's son', 'his toadstool', his 'whoreson cur', his 'stool for a witch'.

Thersites' method of exposing folly in others by word-play is in the tradition of the court fool. He is a truth-teller as we can see immediately in his understanding of the commercial spirit of the war which underlies the vauntings of honour. In twitting Ajax he employs the imagery of market transaction which echoes throughout the play: "Thou art here but to thrash Troyans, and thou art bought and sold among those of any wit like a barbarian slave" (II, i, 44-46). With his clear understanding of the practice of the politicians he mocks both Achilles and Ajax: "There's Ulysses and old Nestor — whose wit was mouldy ere your grandsires had nails on their toes — yoke you like draught oxen, and make you plough the wars" (II, i, 101-103). Thersites attacks all impartially because mankind is his butt. He is also impervious to attack, blows only loosen his tongue the more. He resides at one extreme of the spectrum of commentators presented by Shakespeare. He is the most completely detached from the action of the play, existing entirely for purposes of reflection. He could be totally excised from the play without affecting the plot. It is because he is so totally alienated from the action that he is never brought to any serious reckoning for the corrosive nature of his commentary. Bayley has noted this immunity:

He is unique in receiving no setback or corrective at the hands of his fellows, as do all Shakespeare's other cynics and railers. Parolles, Apemantus, Enobarbus, Falstaff, Iago above all, are in their respective ways placed and diminished by the positive mass and movement of the plays they are in. But Thersites is supreme in his.

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<sup>1</sup>John Bayley, "Shakespeare's Only Play" in B. W. Jackson, ed., Stratford Papers on Shakespeare, 1963 (Toronto, 1964), p. 73.

The poverty of spirit evident in the characterization of this play is nowhere more obvious than in the fact that there are no resources for dealing with the railing Thersites, a character who has little to endear him to an audience and who presents no useful or hopeful alternative to the corrupt world on which he vents his spleen. Perhaps only Hector might be expected to answer Thersites, but in the Trojan debate (II, ii) devoted to justification of the war we find that he also is vulnerable to folly. Having censured the young hot-heads for their irrational zeal in supporting a foolish war he later on commits himself to the war with an excuse very reminiscent of 1960's diplomacy, that of 'face-saving'. Hector, the only person besides Thersites to recognize the absurdity of the war, immediately embraces the folly that he has exposed:

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 dependence  
 Upon our joint and several dignities.  
 (II, ii, 188-193)

Thersites enters in the following scene like some devil drawing spells to ensure the calamity of those who would commit themselves so easily to folly. He prophesies, he conjures the gods, he rains down curses. He reduces the overblown rhetoric of the previous scene which had described Helen as, "a theme of honour and renown, / A spur to valiant and magnanimous deeds" (II, ii, 199-200) to his own coinage, a "war for a placket", "All the argument is a whore and a cuckold". The war started by a whore and cuckold is producing, in Troilus and Cressida, another whore and cuckold whose suffering will amuse Thersites. In the uneasy air of impermanence consequent upon a world shackled to political necessity, relationships never have time to mature, subject as they are to the anxiety and pressure of war. In the History plays the shifting of

alliances made for a chronic instability which destroyed the natural bond between men. There is a great deal of gratuitous frivolity in this play but we cannot help *noticing* the shaping influence of the war, the atmosphere of men grasping at pleasure before the troops leave. Cressida will be handed round and fondled like a prize of battle in the Greek camp. This is partly her fault but it is also the fault of the world in which she lives, a world which fights in the name of honour and dignity whilst systematically destroying those qualities. Wars and lechery reign supreme in this world, the one being a function of the other. We accept Thersites' testimony as a just comment on his world, but not as a general law of human behaviour. Some of Shakespeare's commentators can be described as normal men, representatives of common sense or, like Lear's Fool, the voice of popular wisdom. Thersites' vision is peculiarly personal and far, indeed, from being normal in our world or his. He is limited in not being able to see beyond his own world, he has no ideal, not even a norm to aim for. The norm, or even the best that can be expected, is the degraded world around him, and therefore he has no hopes and no advice to offer. Although he can divine folly in others he also is related in many ways to the brands of folly classified in books such as Garzoni's<sup>1</sup>, and he relates to the well-known type of malicious and despightful Fool who made his appearance in the character books. Stephens describes a 'ranke observer' with characteristics which clearly could be applied to Thersites:

Neither must he hope to amend the age, or himself;  
because he never intended the first; and the last he  
forgets (though he intended it) through vaine glory;  
as being transported with his pride onely, that he hath  
observed, and can observe againe. Briefly he resembles

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<sup>1</sup>Tommaso Garzoni, The Hospital of Incurable Fooles (London, 1600).

a foolish patient, who takes a costive pill to loosen his body: for whilst hee meanes to purge himselfe by observing other humors, hee practises them by a shadow of mockage, and so becomes a more fast corruption: if he doo<sup>th</sup> not therefore fee<sup>le</sup> the disease, hee dies hide-bound.<sup>1</sup>

His limitation is an extreme version of that incipient in many of Shakespeare's commentators - detachment. The world is a theatre providing entertainment for him alone. Admittedly he is a vociferous audience, throwing cat-calls at the actors, but he tries to avoid serious involvement in the action. To him war is a game caused by, in Ulysses' phrase, 'daughters of the game' - the game of prostitution. Thersites' view is upheld in the confrontation of Hector and Ajax which is fought in the lists, broken off courteously because of the consanguinity of the combatants, and followed by the mingling of heroes and spectators in the refreshment tent. Thersites also regards love as a game and Shakespeare ensures that he is present at the seduction of Cressida (V, ii) which is presented as a play within a play, within a play. Ulysses and Troilus observe Diomed and Cressida and Thersites observes them all. He acts as commentator, audience and epilogue to the performance. The scene is the most graphic example of his spectator role, of his use of the whole world as a play designed for his own entertainment. He makes wise-cracks, anticipates the action and virtually hugs himself with pleasure at the way in which it fulfills his own philosophy of the world. An audience is inevitably sensible of Troilus' anguish, however excessive it may appear, and is consequently alienated from the smirking glee of Thersites who demonstrates no spark of human fellow feeling. Admittedly his cracks are almost entirely at the expense

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<sup>1</sup>John Stephens, Satyrical Essayes, Characters and Others (London, 1615), p. 179.

of Diomed and Cressida, but no pity for Troilus pierces his soul which feeds entirely on human depravity. In this scene Thersites is almost a parody of an omniscient and malevolent god looking down on the human comedy, predicting catastrophe and enjoying its outcome. He is also like a fanatical Puritan going to the theatre to confirm his prejudices that it purveys a decadent view of life. He goes to the show and comes away well satisfied that he was astute enough to anticipate the plot. Though Thersites is the audience within the play, the audience outside the play has the advantage of him, for it watches him watching the lovers and, since there can be no doubt about the outcome because everyone is familiar with the story, we have time to ponder Thersites' behaviour. His reaction is unseemly in the eyes of the audience. It is one thing to perceive men's weaknesses and to comment on them, but it is another thing altogether to glory and delight in men's misery. Thersites' behaviour is counterpointed by that of Ulysses, who attempts to calm Troilus and save him from further pain. We are aware that Troilus' folly is partly self-willed, but we are meant to feel sympathy because the bizarre alternative to sympathy seems to be the unhealthy glee of Thersites. Thersites thus fulfills a function common to many of Shakespeare's commentators. We accept from him a version of the truth but his limitations point to other views beyond his grasp. Thersites may have a god-like omniscience in this scene but by our human sympathy, however moderate, we are reminded that he is not only less than a god, but perhaps even less than a man. This impression is confirmed on the battlefield, the show to which he next gives his attention: "Now they are clapper-clawing one another; I'll go look on" (V, iv, 1-2).

His creeping about the field in search of entertaining conflicts is the most extreme example possible of his alienation from action. In all of Shakespeare's battles only Falstaff has a parallel distaste for martial feats,

and he has a consistently positive acceptance of the joys of life at all costs to back up his cowardice, an attitude totally lacking in Thersites. The formalities of the tourney have gone and we are in the chaos of serious battle, as we can see from the evidence of Act V, Scene v, and the treacherous slaying of Hector. Out of all the amorous exchanges, the courtly frivolity, the peevish idleness, the crafty policy, and the formal games, the savagery of war suddenly erupts. Diomed and Troilus run like madmen about the field, Achilles and Ajax come like raging beasts from their tents, the veneer of courtesy is swept aside as Hector is butchered and dragged by horses round the field. Yet Thersites still finds amusement in the show and bellows from the sidelines like any spectator at a game:

The cuckold and the cuckold-maker are at it. Now, bull! now, dog! 'Loo Paris, 'loo! now my double-horn'd Spartan! 'loo Paris, 'loo! The bull has the game. Ware horns, ho!  
(V, vii, 9-12)

War is sport to him, the pleasures of the hunt, but it is a spectator sport. On two occasions, against Hector and Margarelon, he momentarily becomes the hunted and has to scuttle to earth. He grovels and whines and saves his skin. Yet his running away points out one thing clearly to the audience; Thersites may have powers of perception but he is a totally non-functional member of society. He cannot join in the action at any point and therefore has no powers of affecting it. If most of the characters are incapacitated from action by love, idleness or pride, Thersites is incapacitated by his hatred of mankind. This play does not present us with heroes, Thersites ensures that the glamour of legend remains an illusion, but in this realistic world of wars and lechery he remains the least erect of spirits. He can hardly be accepted as Shakespeare's mouthpiece unless we conceive the dramatist to have abandoned all hope for humanity.

Thersites has all those qualities which we associate with most of Shakespeare's commentators. He exposes folly in others, indulges in witty word-quibbling, salts his language with sexual allusions, punctures the grandiose rhetoric of those around him, bluntly assaults all and sundry, refuses to fall victim to the dominating illusions of his world. But he lacks a fundamental allegiance either to another man or to his country, which is so important an element in other commentators who are capable of relating both to their own world and to ours. Thersites, we feel, is alienated from his own world and from our world because he has created the world in his own image. He descants on the pride of others without ever acknowledging that he himself feeds on pride - a pride in the accuracy of his vision and his exemption from the weakness of others. Like the hero in Camus' The Outsider he has lost all sense of human community. Like Lear on the heath he rails against everyone, but he lacks Lear's capacity to learn through suffering. He is a manifestation of the absurd and, clinically speaking, he approaches that state of mental disturbance which has so absorbed recent playwrights such as Genet, Ionesco and Beckett. His speech is littered with images of disease, he is incapable of distinguishing between the level of human and animal nature - an attitude which would have won him few friends amongst the Elizabethans. If he had not immunized himself from suffering, he would soon, perhaps, end up like Gulliver talking to horses. But Gulliver is aware of the Yahoo elements in himself as Thersites never is. He maintains his balance on this side of lunacy because he makes of his occupation his own self-therapy. By venting his spleen on the world he can remain above it. To some extent he suffers from the malaise of the existentialist. Like Sartre's Roquentin he is sickened by the world around him and yet must cling to that sense of perception and awareness as his only hope of sanity. But the perception, as with Roquentin, is fundamentally debilitating. This

perception of the arbitrariness and chaos of events undermines the will and ability to do anything about them. Save for his railing, which is totally ineffective, which indeed delights him because it is ineffective and thus proves the accuracy of his vision, Thersites submits himself totally to the flux of events. We are aware that he is parasitical, for his very existence depends upon the continuation of folly. His sense of identity is figured entirely in negatives. He is sterile, static and self-satisfied: "Ask me not what I would be, if I were not Thersites; for I care not to be the louse of a lazar, so I were not Menelaus" (V, i, 61-63). Yet Thersites' function is not exhausted in this play because the characters in his world do not break through illusions to new truths. The characters in this play have not travelled as far in understanding by the end of Act V as Lear, in his play, has by the end of Act III, where his jester disappears and the king, in effect, becomes his own Fool. Thersites never really gets beyond the threat of the whip to the point of serious communication. He does not, in fact, need butts, for his language is as vicious and corrosive when he is on the stage alone as when he is assailing all and sundry. Crippled and unattractive he has that characteristic of the stigmatized, the compulsion always to hit hard and to hit first as a means of protection. Alienated from humanity the whole world must be destroyed to soothe his own sense of the injustice with which that world treats him. He can function in this world only because it has reached that stage of decadence where cripples spouting nihilism are found amusing. The glee with which Achilles and Patroclus pursue him and plead with him to rail is indicative of the bankrupt resources of intelligence in this play. This extreme satire, which because it stings a little gives people the illusion that they are alive, even sophisticated, has come back to prominence in recent years with the vogue of 'sick' humour, and may help to explain why the arctic atmosphere of this

play seems to be particularly modern.

Shakespeare in this play, as so often elsewhere, is peeling away the glamour of tradition to show us 'what actually happened'. He takes the folly hinted at in his sources and exposes it to our view. Though Thersites is the prime agent of exposing folly, he is himself the prime example of it. He hopes for endings rather than beginnings, for destruction rather than creation and in that sense is different from all of the other commentators I am discussing, save Iago. He is the bizarre image of mankind reduced to its last resource - hatred. At the only point at which action is required of him he grovels in fear and runs away. He avoids dying for causes in which he does not believe, but we cannot imagine that he survives to fight for causes in which he or any other human being could believe. We are meant to attend to his exposure of human folly but we are meant also to appreciate that he is guilty of a folly beyond that of any of the butts of his commentary - that of negating his own humanity.

## 2

Timon of Athens is structured in a fundamentally different way from Shakespeare's other tragedies. Indeed, many critics have had difficulty in regarding it as a tragedy at all and have preferred to interpret it as a didactic play, a Jacobean morality. There has been little critical attention paid to this tragedy by comparison with Shakespeare's other tragedies, partly because of the infrequency of its stage production, partly because of its incompleteness and doubts about its authorship, but above all, I think, because the substance and meaning of the play appear to be less ambiguous than those of the other tragedies. In composition the play has not been worked on long enough to create that harmonious, organic structure which produces a complexity

which can be endlessly analyzed. Wilson Knight<sup>1</sup>, making a virtue of necessity, has claimed that simplicity is the play's supreme quality, and has dazzled us with a pyrotechnic display of enthusiastic superlatives. He has not succeeded, however, in rescuing the play from that category in limbo which testifies to critical confusion - the problem plays. It is not the material of the play which is problematical, but the fact that Shakespeare appears to have written the play which leads to much of the stunned and evasive response in face of its sombre structure. The play is something of a smaller hill separated from the main cordillera of Shakespeare's tragedies, but it serves no purpose to invent difficult ways of getting to the top. What, perhaps, we might do more fruitfully when we have struggled with the play is not to look up to the main peaks, but to look backwards at the foothills of tragedy, for this play gives us a very good vantage point for examining earlier and older stratified forms which were metamorphosed in the great upheaval of Shakespeare's major tragic period.

The play is in an unfinished state; the Alcibiades' plot especially shows signs of incomplete absorption into the main structure. If, however, we take this play as a clear glimpse of Shakespeare's workshop, then we raise as many problems as we solve. There are morality play elements in Shakespeare's plays but we note them exactly because they are completely subjugated to a different structure and exploited for other purposes. Timon of Athens in many of its particulars has the appearance of the source plays, such as King Leir, which Shakespeare habitually altered. It certainly does not remind us of a

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<sup>1</sup>G. Wilson Knight, 'The Pilgrimage of Hate', in The Wheel of Fire, Ch. XI. (London, 1930).

completed Shakespeare play, or, even more important, of any stage of development which he might have gone through to arrive at a completed tragedy in his usual vein. The reason for this incongruity lies within the subject matter of this thesis - the commenting devices which Shakespeare uses to mediate between his characters and his audience.

The play in terms of structure would present few problems had it appeared anonymously in the 1590's or even amidst the vogue for satire at the end of the century. The quality of the verse alone would have alerted a student to acknowledge the culmination of the tradition of didactic morality. But the theme of misanthropy, the kinship with King Lear, the torrent of imagery, make it more probable that the play was written in the Jacobean period at a time when Shakespeare's major tragedies seem to have exploited almost beyond recognition the older structures of tragedy. That old pattern of play as illustration with commentators directly illuminating the didactic significance for the audience had gone into steady decline. What is amazing about Timon of Athens is that it returns so frequently to that older habit, a habit that Shakespeare had largely avoided even at the outset of his career. If there is any key to this anomaly it lies in the material itself, the intractable nature of the story. The play can be partly illuminated, I think, by contrasting it with the other plays containing commentator-hero relationships. Critics have frequently talked about 'choric' material in other plays, but in this play there is a greater amount of material which appears to be choric than in all of the other plays put together. Shakespeare tries to set up the relationship between hero and commentator, but in this play it could not develop along the broadly familiar lines which I have been describing. The reason for this is that the story is not amenable to Shakespeare's usual development of the tragic pattern. His

other tragedies are, of course, obviously distinct in mood and structure, but they have one thing in common - they grew to a point of recognition, to a triumph over illusion, where hope can grow out of chaos. This play, like Troilus and Cressida, has no resources to demonstrate that even in defeat men can triumph over folly by a recognition of their own illusions.

In the older didactic moralities, and especially in the homiletic domestic tragedies characters did often recognize their folly, but this was usually achieved by a sudden volte-face in characterization, a remarkable death-bed repentance, not by a gradual revelation through the experience of suffering. In such plays it does not matter much whether the hero is convincingly released into an awareness of his own folly, since the significance of the play does not lie primarily in his particular experience but in the general moral lessons appended. We are told how to avoid evil not how to triumph over it. The careers of characters in the old de casibus tradition are not spiritual voyages in self-discovery; they do not have anything individual, anything based on their particular suffering to communicate to an audience. The plays which stemmed from the pattern set down in The Mirror for Magistrates may, perhaps, be explained more easily in terms of the comfort that they afforded to the theatregoer oppressed by the whimsical application of power, than by the practical advice which they offered to those in power. People can thus believe in the ideal of good government and work off their resentment against its lack of application in practice by cheering the downfall of the wicked in the theatre. Shakespeare, however, developed a more complicated tragic process in which man could grow to a point of self-awareness, in which he could come by a convincing process of development to 'readiness' so that an audience feels that he has not died in vain and can the more easily endure the suffering inflicted on the hero.

The reason that Timon of Athens does not affect us in any way comparable to the impact of the other tragedies is that it does not grow towards any point of recognition and hence does not release the audience from the dominance of the general didactic pattern. It seems clear that Shakespeare had it in mind to develop the play along the lines of his other tragedies in that he included a radically limited commentating figure in the person of Apemantus. As elsewhere the commentator is detached from the world sagely offering truths which the hero refuses to accept. Usually we find that Shakespeare opposes the conceptual reflective world of the commentator to that of the perceptual active world of the hero. The hero, even though his perceptual view may be grounded in illusion, can attend to his own particular development and can, therefore, free himself from those illusions. Much of the sense of tragic loss is caused by our realization that the hero has come to self-awareness and a true understanding of the nature of his world at the point at which he must leave it. However much an audience may recognize the truth of the commentator's conceptual view of his world it realizes, also, that the tragic hero must pursue the road to wisdom along the path of folly.

Timon of Athens is a play full of characters holding a conceptual view of things and they find their extreme representative in Apemantus. But the hero is himself a character who moves from one conceptual world to another, from the benevolent to the misanthropic. There is, of course, growth from one state to the other, though it is telescoped into a few speeches. Timon, in relation to the heroes of Shakespeare's other tragedies, is a case of arrested development. In the nature of the story as Shakespeare received it, a story which he felt either he could not alter, or, at least, had not altered by the time he laid down his pen, there is no principle of growth within the major character which could lead towards the recognition of his own folly.

There is, of course, a growth in hatred, but that is away from recognition or awareness. The catharsis cannot occur because there is no opportunity for release, though, as I shall try to show, Shakespeare contemplated one. We cannot value the individual experience of Timon more than the general principles which his career adumbrates because he learns from it nothing that he can pass onto the audience, nothing that is fruitful for the world after he leaves it, since his triumph in death is a fully conscious negation of life itself.

It has often been noted that this play has special affinities with the morality tradition. The clear and constant pattern of decline from a high pinnacle reminds us of those Everyman figures who are stripped of property and friends. There are, however, no angels arriving with roses to pelt the hero's enemies and save his soul. Timon pelts his own enemies and dies unrepentant. Yet his decline could be easily translated into the allegorical characterization of the moralities. Riches, surrounded by Flattery and Deceit, Lucre and Greed, falls to ruin and receives counsel from Despair, Friendship, Faithful Service. He is still sought by Greed, Flattery and Lechery but Riches, having turned to Misanthropy, eschews fellowship. Certainly, summarized in this way, the morality pattern is a travesty of the play. Yet it is not so much a travesty in this play as it would be elsewhere in Shakespeare, if only because the characters here are less clearly individualized. The characters, save for Timon, Alcibiades, Flavius and Apemantus, tend to be schematized into groups rather than fully realized as individuals. We have the tradesmen and artists coining gold out of Timon's benevolence, Timon's 'friends' - greedy and fickle, his loyal and faithful servants, independent Senators commenting on the action. Part of the difficulty of individualizing characters lies in the story itself, for Timon in prosperity treats all men impartially as his friends. He does not develop significantly varying relations with people but levels them all with his

munificence. In adversity he does exactly the same, making all men impartially his enemies; they may come to him for different reasons but he presses gold on them all in order to corrupt them.

It may appear at the beginning of the play that we are in a golden age of trust and munificence and many critics have found it difficult to fault Timon for his generous disposition. But in the Elizabethan world which so valued the golden mean in its theories of morality it would be clear that Timon was courting danger in his practice of golden excess, in his inability to distinguish between parasites and friends. The audience is apprized of the danger in the Poet's description of Fortune's hill (I, i, 66-91). Shakespeare seems to apologize for the commonplace nature of the observation in the Painter's reply:

'Tis common.  
A thousand moral paintings I can show  
That shall demonstrate these quick blows of Fortune's  
More pregnantly than words.

(I, i, 92-95)

The apology makes the point more obvious and fits in with a pattern developed throughout this play in which such common knowledge is available not only to the audience but to any idle bystander in the play, and yet is not available to Timon. Shakespeare's tragic heroes often ignore the commonplace observations offered to them by their commentators, but they do so because they must test such common assumptions in their own experience. Timon does not test them; rather he serves simply as an illustration of the accuracy of these commonplace assumptions. In the first scene of the play he acts as if he lives in a prelapsarian world unaware of the appetitive, policy-ridden, commodity-searching society around him. There is a sense in which he is as mad before his fall as he is after it, as alienated in spirit from mankind in his sumptuous feasts as he is in the desert. The cement which holds together his conceptual framework in both worlds is gold. Gold is the great leveller, it makes all men weigh alike

as he indicates in aiding his servant to a rich match:

What you bestow, in him I'll counterpoise,  
And make him weigh with her.

(I, i, 148-149)

What the play demonstrates, however, is that no amount of gold can bring Timon to a balanced view of his world.

Apemantus, being of the ilk of Thersites, is the commentator who sets a sour edge on all the civilities and pleasantries of this seemingly benevolent world where Timon waves his wand to effect a miraculous harmony. His stock-in-trade is discourtesy, abuse, the old jokes which demonstrate men to be knaves and fools, the imagery which dissolves the distinction between animal and human nature. It is but to be expected that Shakespeare's most degraded commentators occur in plays which present his least favourable estimate of humanity. Apemantus' pride in his perception is as debilitating as Thersites'. In a world of false ceremony he eschews ceremony altogether as the only means of retaining his integrity. He will accept none of the social conventions, refusing the good-morrow (I, i, 181-183), the farewell (I, i, 264-268), and the welcome (I, ii, 23-25). It is the rejection of even such normal punctiliousness that marks him out as a man proud of his individuality almost to a fault. He fits Earle's description of 'A Blunt Man': "whose wit is better pointed than his behaviour, and that course, and impollisht not out of ignorance so much as humour... He starts at the encounter of a Salutation as an assault, and beseeches you in choller to forbear your courtesie".<sup>1</sup> If Timon is too trusting of mankind we can see at once that there is little sustenance to be gained from the other extreme. There is some justice in his admonishment of Apemantus:

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<sup>1</sup>John Earle, *Micro-Cosmographie*, (1628), ed., by Edward Arber for English Reprints (London, 1904), p. 55.

Fie, th' art a churl; ye have got a humour there  
 Does not become a man; 'tis much to blame.  
 They say, my lords, Ira furor brevis est; but  
 yond man is ever angry. Go let him have a  
 table by himself; for he does neither affect  
 company nor is he fit for't indeed.

(I, ii, 26-31)

Apemantus' rejoinder, "I come to observe", confirms his totally reflective, anti-social role. An audience will accept him, as it accepts Thersites, for the insights he offers into his own world, but it will see him also as a creature of that world, static and sterile, with no constructive function in it.

Like Thersites, Apemantus exposes the hollowness of ceremony. Timon dismisses ceremony as being foreign to his world:

Nay, my lords, ceremony was but devis'd at first  
 To set a gloss on faint deeds, hollow welcomes,  
 Recanting goodness, sorry ere 'tis shown;  
 But where there is true friendship there needs none.

(I, ii, 15-18)

Apemantus immediately gives him an example of real lack of ceremony in his rude behaviour designed to contrast with the artificial atmosphere which Timon takes for 'true friendship'. Timon's inability to distinguish men from the substance of ceremony in which they cloak themselves results from his weakness for psychological projection. If he is benevolent all the world must be benevolent, just as later on all the world must be savagely destructive because he is savagely destructive. Apemantus interprets the ceremony of the feast for us (I, ii, 37-51), and in a traditional manner he prophesies catastrophe. He is not, however, quite as alienated from the world as Thersites was. He demonstrates a genuine affection and admiration for Timon. He does not so easily delight in other men's miseries and his jibes are meant to alert Timon to the reality of his situation. He regrets rather than cheers on the folly of his friend. But his grace before meat (I, ii, 60-69) indicates that his

main concern is with the preservation of his own integrity. Apemantus is not so energetic as Thersites in wishing for the ruin of the world but he is as convinced of the ultimate reign of chaos. His vision is as conceptual and static, and he is as powerless as Thersites to affect his world. His sombre vision offers no hope to the audience, "Who lives that's not depraved or depraves?" (I, ii, 134).

There is, however another commentator in the play who, far from being concerned with the superiority that his perception gives him, is deeply and genuinely concerned for his master. Flavius is characterized in the role of the faithful, truth-speaking servant. He alerts the audience to the precarious state of Timon's fortunes and has enough fellow-feeling to translate the substance of his reflection into action, albeit too late. The ineffectiveness and cynicism of Apemantus throughout is set against the genuine attempts of the faithful servant to keep the spirit of human community alive. Flavius bleeds inwardly for his lord, finding him not simply a local example of general folly but a particular man to be pitied. The interlude of word-play between the cynic and the jester (II, ii) helps to reinforce the contrast with Flavius. Surrounding the interlude are Flavius' attempts to enlighten his master about his precarious position. This is set in contrast with Apemantus' idle jesting which is more concerned with making fun of the servants than with saving Timon. Apemantus walks away from Timon at the very point where Flavius has broken through the world of illusion and folly which binds his master. Flavius' intervention combines elements of truth-telling, of the lament-tradition, of prophecy and of genuine sympathy, which I have noted in other commentators. He offers Timon his own version of his prodigality, he sermons his lord not from an alienated posture of savage criticism, but with tears, admiration and the heartfelt love of one man suffering for another. He is by far the least detached

of Shakespeare's commentators for the very reason that he commits himself wholeheartedly to the service, though not to the folly, of his master. He applies his observation to a specific situation only rarely generalizing his remarks into a philosophy. He has nothing of the wit, sexual innuendo or absolutist philosophy of many of the commentators. I call him a commentator in the sense that he offers a consistently alternative viewpoint and a method of organizing human relationships which contrast not merely with Timon's but with those of the whole Athenian world. He thus helps the audience to set his world into perspective. His evidence throughout the play is vital in understanding its total meaning, because he offers the selfless love which is the ultimate answer to the misanthropy of Apemantus and Timon. Flavius perceives the true nature of his society and pierces to the core of Timon's trouble by divining his weakness for psychological projection, "That thought is bounty's foe; / Being free itself, it thinks allothers so", (II, ii, 233-234).

As soon as Timon's ruin is bruited abroad the whole world is divided into two kinds of observers; those who guard their purses and are suddenly marvellously perceptive about the dangers of prodigality, (III, i, 21-29) and the servants who, in their loyalty to Timon, are detached from this world and outraged by it (III, i, 50-62). The play is completely given over to a commentary accompanying Timon's troubles, for in the absence of any complex character relations there is no other way of dramatizing the material. The visit to Lucullus is immediately duplicated by the visit to Lucius and, though their strategies for refusing aid are varied, the structure and impact of the scenes are only marginally different. Shakespeare dramatizes these creditors splendidly but only within terms of their specific scenes; they are vignettes, almost caricatures, but they lack any continuous dramatic life. It is for this reason that Flavius stands out so much because he has continuous dramatic life and

develops consistently in relation to the action. Timon switches from one extreme to another, his creditors do likewise; Apemantus is static throughout; only Flavius and Alcibiades, who is not fully developed, are conceived dynamically.

The use of incidental characters for specific functions is clear in the appearance of the Strangers commenting on the behaviour of Timon's creditors (III, ii). They are independent and totally detached, being specifically designated as strangers to exempt them from the corruptness of Timon's friends. They add significantly to the didactic element by generalizing from the specific situation in the manner familiar to us in the Senecan chorus:

O, see the monstrousness of man  
When he looks out in an ungrateful shape! —  
He does deny him, in respect of his,  
What charitable men afford to beggars.  
(III, ii, 71-74)

And the scene closes with a comment which sums up one of the themes of the play, the collapse of an older world of trust and order in face of the new world of policy and profit:

But I perceive  
Men must learn now with pity to dispense;  
For policy sits above conscience.  
(III, ii, 84-86)

This kind of incidental commentary, so completely undisguised and springing not from deep experience in the action nor from fully developed characters, is uncommon in Shakespeare's tragedies. The disappointed servants are also enlisted throughout this section of the play to add commentaries on man's corruptness. There is a manner of speech which almost becomes epidemical here, for everyone is busy making neat maxims of the order of the observation by Timon's servant, "And this is all a liberal course allows: Who cannot keep his wealth must keep his house", (III, iii, 40-41).

It is worth noting something about the structure of the scenes of this play for it will indicate how large a part commentary plays throughout. There is an extraordinary amount of soliloquizing by minor characters and most scenes are closed with the summary reflections of one or more characters aimed directly at the audience. If we follow the career of Timon up to the time of his departure from Athens, the pattern is quite clear. Act I, Scene i, contains Apemantus' commentary throughout and is summed up by two anonymous lords praising Timon's bounty. Act I, Scene ii, has the commentary of the cynic and Flavius throughout and presents Apemantus alone at the end with a menacing summary. Act II, Scene ii, has the same commentators and is closed with Flavius' comment, spoken obviously to himself. Act III, Scene i presents the rejection by Lucullus and is summed up by the servant alone on the stage. Act III, Scene ii, presenting the rejection by Lucius, is closed by the comments of the three strangers. Act III, Scene iii contains the rejection by Sempronius and is again concluded by a soliloquizing servant. Act III, Scene v, dealing with the subplot, closes with Alcibiades reflecting on his rejection. Act III, Scene vi closes with anonymous lords summing up their disappointing experience at the chaotic banquet. By the time that Timon exiles himself to the wilderness, reflection and soliloquy begin to take over the stage. It is clear that the action of the play is encapsulated in commentary, much of it coming from incidental characters, in a manner that I am trying to demonstrate is not found elsewhere in Shakespeare. I must confess, therefore, that the method of construction in this play is an anomaly. I can only suggest that the play is an experiment, or that its obviously schematized and uncompleted nature indicates that Shakespeare may have abandoned it because the nature of the material was resistant to his more characteristic tragic method.

The first half of the play, then, has multiplied commentaries from

a variety of sources which indicate a general awareness of a policy-ridden world not perceived by Timon. In the second half of the play the entire process is reversed and the commentary comes from Timon, who now has a cynical philosophy which he implies impartially to everyone. I have suggested before that the repetitive pattern of commentary is a result of Timon's inability to distinguish between individuals. It is also partly a result of the plot structure which is transparently simple. There is no intrigue in this play, no clash of mighty opposites, no conflict of wills, no fully developed reciprocal relationships. The latter, of course, touches one of the significant points made by the play, for, in a world dominated by gold, relationships are shallow and ephemeral. A play which is based on men's inability to make serious and lasting relations thus cuts itself off from the complexity and involvement of individual will and motivation which was the substance out of which Shakespeare shaped his other tragedies. Timon's disillusioned view of the world is monotonal, repetitive and static exactly because the world in which he lives seems to be monotonal. He can only repeat his loathing with slight variation, because he cannot differentiate between men. Timon, who was formerly in charge of a wild plutocratic prize-giving, turns to the task of setting up a centre for distributing hate propaganda. Hitherto he has been completely sociable, the victim of the reflection and speculation of everyone. The entire world now becomes the victim of his speculation and reflection, and the dominant mode of his speech turns to soliloquy.

As a commentator on the corruptness of the world his first act on leaving the city is to curse in vivid detail every strata of society contained in Athens (IV, i). That he is as bigoted and inadequate a commentator as Thersites is made apparent at once. His soliloquy, which damns all human community, is immediately contrasted with Flavius' reaffirmation of human bonds

and fellowship in his treatment of his fellow servants (IV, ii). These loyal servants are still in the Athens that Timon has damned to general perdition. The hero's nihilism is compared with the wisdom of his servants who can see quite clearly the treachery of Timon's friends without allowing it to undermine their own loyalty. Flavius' gesture of sharing his wealth indicates that bounty still exists and the servants in their collective sympathy thus ratify the continuation of those ideals of friendship in some men that Timon formerly had dangerously taken for granted in all men.

Timon's new absolutism of hatred, which ignores individual nature as did his bounty, prefaces the huge third scene of Act IV:

Who dares, who dares,  
In purity of manhood stand upright,  
And say 'This man's a flatterer'? If one be,  
So are they all; for every guise of fortune  
Is smooth'd by that below. The learned pate  
Ducks to the golden fool. All's oblique;  
There's nothing level in our cursed natures  
But direct villainy. Therefore be abhorr'd  
All feasts, societies and throngs of men!  
His semblable, yea, himself, Timon disdains.  
Destruction fang mankind!

(IV, iii, 13-23)

Timon's philosophy is so absolute that it includes even himself. In order for it to be tenable there must be no exceptions. The scene proceeds to test this philosophy in the procession of pilgrims that come to this oracle. Timon has usurped his humanity, he calls himself a beast, he scratches up the earth for roots. In order for this commentator to prove his philosophy on mankind he must reduce all men to the level of beasts.

Most of his visitors confirm his philosophy. Alcibiades pities his condition but, ignoring his counsel, accepts the gold. Phrynia and Timandra beg for gold claiming that they will do anything for its possession; they accept the counsel for the sake of the gold. Apemantus enters as a truth-bearer

again to point out the nature of Timon's latest folly. He castigates his 'unmanly melancholy' and mocks Timon for imitating the beasts. Yet Apemantus had once refused to countenance the distinction between men and beasts which he now so vociferously proclaims in mocking Timon. The truth-telling does not flow one way only. Apemantus is called villain, fool and knave justifiably because he comes only to rail and offers no friendship and no advice which is useful to Timon. He misinterprets Timon's melancholy for he assumes that the misanthrope would be a courtier again if given the opportunity. In this sense Apemantus flatters his own ego since he prides himself on his own voluntary alienation from the world. Timon is like him in his negative philosophy built on pride, which is surer what it would rather not be than what it would be; when Apemantus warns him not to assume his likeness, as though he has pride of patent in his hatred, Timon says, "Were I like thee, I'd throw away myself", (IV, iii, 218). He calls Apemantus' hatred a revolt against nature, motiveless and malicious. They are both obsessed with infringements on their prerogatives of hatred:

<u>Apem.</u>	Art thou proud yet?
<u>Tim.</u>	Ay, that I am not thee.
<u>Apem.</u>	I, that I was
	No prodigal.
<u>Tim.</u>	I, that I am one now.
	(IV, iii, 275-277)

This is a parody of identity, and is bizarre in its reduction of mankind to its lowest level. Here are two men who hate the pride, selfishness, greed and folly of mankind demonstrating all those qualities in trying to ensure for themselves the cachet of being the most genuinely alienated. Wilson Knight, who found so much grandeur in Timon's hatred, seems to have overlooked its absurdity, its grotesque pettiness, its pathetic foolishness. Apemantus diagnoses the misanthrope's folly accurately, "The middle of humanity thou

never knewest, but the extremity of both ends", (IV, iii, 299-300). But, of course, we are aware that the cynic himself does not know both extremities but remains statically at one. Of all Shakespeare's plays this one most clearly exhibits the impotence of the detached observer, the limitation of all views of the world which cannot be tested in the fire of action. Apemantus has railed against the world and yet he has had no effect on it; he has not saved Timon from his fall and has merely the personal satisfaction of saying 'I told you so'. Timon rails against the world but he does not substantially affect it; his desire to destroy Athens is frustrated and he remains only a seven-day wonder, a bizarre shrine, a curious beast to be gaped at. He is akin to many of Shakespeare's commentators in overestimating his effective influence. There are only two solutions for the commentator who stands outside his world incapable of committing himself to it; he can either live off his bitterness and pride himself on his superiority, like Thersites and Apemantus, or he can resolve the entire conflict between action and reflection by pursuing a path to death, like Timon.

It is important to remember that Lear becomes a commentator alienated from his society, reducing man to animal level, applying general rules to all mankind. He, too, projected his ills on the world - all men are bedevilled by ungrateful daughters. But Lear grows beyond that point, as Timon never does, because, in finding Cordelia, he makes a genuine human contact which restores his faith, which permits him to ask forgiveness and to rejoin the human community. That the play proceeds to destroy all his hopes for a redeemed world does not invalidate his genuine return to the human community. His rejection of the world is seen as madness, as it is in Timon, but he is given opportunity to recover from madness. Timon is given the same opportunity but rejects it, and

is, therefore, a much less moving figure than Lear. In the entire procession that has come to Timon he has found only reinforcement for his philosophy and has even had the pleasure of degrading himself almost to animal imbecility in his flyting match with Apemantus. But the visitors who succeed Apemantus are bandits, and instead of being corrupted they are converted to virtue by the sight of Timon. This interlude is only a preparation for the final and most important visit in this scene - that of Flavius.

One honest man in the world raises the category of mankind above the level of animals and proves Timon's all-inclusive philosophy to be false. Timon knows no man; he only assumes a knowledge of mankind. At this point in the play he is forced to recognize for the first time the individuality of man. Flavius offers his services and all he possesses to a man from whom he can hope to gain nothing. He thus, in his pity, revives the spirit of human fellowship and community, the natural bond between men that Timon has never known. Timon states his naive absolutism once again:

I never had an honest man about me, I.  
 All I kept were knaves, to serve in meat to villains.  
 (IV, iii, 477-478)

And yet in the audience's experience all the servants were faithful. Timon is finally forced to make the admission which destroys his philosophy:

Forgive my general and exceptless rashness,  
 You perpetual-sober gods! I do proclaim  
 One honest man - mistake me not, but one;  
 No more, I pray - and he's a steward.  
 How fair would I have hated all mankind!  
 And thou redeem'st thyself. But all, save thee,  
 I fell with curses.

(IV, iii, 495-501)

The hint is present on which he could build a sane view of the world, but Timon is incapable of sharing the trust that is offered to him. He draws back and instead of modifying his philosophy he uses Flavius' as though he

were the exception that proved the rule. He suspects him of ulterior motives; he tries to corrupt him with gold; he tries to remake the world in his own image. The hubris of Timon becomes clear at this point. He assumes the god-like power of controlling the world and making it suffer for his injury. Timon rejects Flavius because he is no nearer to understanding the true nature of fellowship than he was before his self-imposed exile. Flavius' offer here is not merely a challenge to Timon's misanthropy but to the entire pattern of his life. Flavius, then, comes at the end of this long scene to destroy the reflective sterility that Timon has adopted. In direct contrast to the two cynical commentators he puts his trust in the world by offering to participate in it. He offers a genuine human relationship in contrast to the parody of human relationship that we have witnessed earlier in the squabbling of Timon and Apemantus. It is probable that the end of the story, Timon's well-known and unequivocal epitaph damning mankind, precluded any change of heart on Timon's part. I said earlier that this play lacks the full tragic impact because there is no genuine moment of recognition. Timon moves toward freeing himself from illusion but relapses back into folly. Timon recognizes one man but he does not understand the principle involved in such recognition - that all men are individuals capable of loyalty and friendship as well as of villainy and folly. That principle is the key to his problem, for in recognizing his own individuality he would recognize his own responsibility for his folly.

The fact that Timon has failed to break out of the circle of his folly is emphasized by the opening of Act V. The Painter and Poet appear, as at the beginning of Act I, in search of Timon's patronage, and it is almost as though the play were beginning all over again. The world itself, we see, has changed little, only Timon's conception of it is different, though his function as Plutus is substantially the same. Having met one 'honest' man it is as

though Timon would debase the very word by overexploiting it on the first sycophants he meets. He calls the Poet and Painter 'honest men' on eight separate occasions as though the image of Flavius burned in his memory. But soon the malaise of his existence will be solved:

My long sickness  
Of health and now begins to mend,  
And nothing brings all things.  
(V, i, 184-186)

The only solution he can see for mankind is universal suicide on his hanging-tree, an ironical reference, perhaps, to the cross - a cross which will bring neither redemption for himself nor mankind. Redemption is left to Alcibiades who spares Athens from the wrath which Timon wished inflicted on it. Alcibiades brings to Athens the perception and wisdom which had been excluded from Timon's conceptual absolutism. One of the senators makes clear the necessity of judgement and distinction in governing human affairs. His simple statement, "All have not offended", (V, iv, 35) puts in four words the obvious truth which had eluded Timon throughout his life. The last scene underlines the necessity for continuity, the re-establishment of human bonds which Flavius had tried to offer Timon. When the Senator says:

Like a shepherd  
Approach the fold and cull th' infected forth,  
But kill not all together.  
(V, iv, 42-44)

He speaks of a world with which we are familiar and from which we have been estranged in the madness of Timon.

Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Lear and Cleopatra come to terms with their own humanity by brushing aside the illusions that have plagued them throughout their careers, but Timon does not. He dies in the illusion of his cynicism and demonstrates an inability to learn from his experience. Hope lies elsewhere in characters such as Flavius and Alcibiades who can act in the

world instead of alienating themselves from it. Such a simple moral can be drawn from this play exactly because the hero himself becomes a commentator incapable of exploring and revealing to an audience the complexity of human action. I have emphasized the simple moral judgements required of an audience in this play because Shakespeare seems to demand such judgements by the constant pressure of commentary throughout. What Shakespeare tells us in this play is similar to many of the things which he tells us in the other tragedies, but the way in which he communicates his meaning is totally different. We do learn things through the experience and suffering of the hero, but only, as it were by default. We learn not the truths to which the hero comes but truths to which he does not come, truths which that final epitaph indicate were beyond his reach. In the absence of any involvement or exploration on Timon's part we are forced to fall back on the obvious didactic significance. In other plays the simple conceptual world-view of the commentator is a contrasting structure whereby the audience may grasp the complexity of events in the tragic world. But in this play there is no complexity to grasp or experience. There is no tension, hardly even any contact, between the views of commentator and hero. Timon merely intensifies the folly of Apemantus. The hero becomes an alienated and cynical commentator, and such commentators, as I have tried to show, grasp less than the whole truth about the tragic world. Flavius and Alcibiades recognize the folly of their world but commit themselves to an attempt to restore it. Timon suffers at the hands of this world but out of his folly comes no wisdom. However anomalous the structure of this tragedy, the fact that it fails to convey the full tragic impact which we are familiar with in Shakespeare can be explained in terms of the limitations of the hero. That those limitations are bound up with the problems of the detached commentator surely confirms the argument of this thesis.

In examining the character of Iago I am aware of the manifold factors which divide him from all the other commentators with which I am dealing. He is much more conspicuously linked to the tradition of the Vice than to the congeries of friends, advisers, fools and plain-dealers which I am examining. I include him for purposes of contrast for several reasons. He is used in the most obvious manner as a link between the audience and the hero, and our response to Othello is regulated by our awareness of Iago's sinister convictions. Spivack who has examined his relationship to the Vice says: "He is the showman who produces it [the play] and the chorus that interprets it, and his essential relationship is with the audience".<sup>1</sup> Iago is also, of all the commentators I am dealing with, the one most universally accepted within the play in which he occurs as worldly-wise, sound adviser, plain-dealer, 'honest', detached observer. If we approach him from within the play-world, see him as he is accepted by all save Roderigo, then he surely appears to be Enobarbus, Fool, Faulconbridge, Kent and the others rolled into one. Othello is totally different in structure from Coriolanus, Antony and Cleopatra and King Lear in that the entire plot rests on the fact that the truth-telling commentator accepted by the characters within the play is also the villain known and accepted by the audience outside the play world.

The pull between loyalty and self interest is apparent in Faulconbridge, Lear's Fool and Enobarbus, but in Iago we have only the appearance of loyalty disguising a total self-interest. The paradox of the commentator had become apparent, as I mentioned in an earlier chapter, in satire. There is a tendency

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<sup>1</sup>Bernard Spivack, Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil (New York, 1958), p. 31.

for the satirist in descanting on the folly of the world to go further, amusing himself by tempting his world to commit folly. The cynical nature of mischief practising on the world was also a part of the older Vice-tradition. Iago, who seeks practical demonstration of man's folly to bolster his own sense of superiority, merely extends the function of Thersites and Apemantus to its logical conclusion. There is a sense in which the tragedy is accomplished because Iago is able to build up his public role on the widely accepted stereotype of the blunt, honest soldier with which the Elizabethan audience had become familiar. An audience accepts the credibility of Iago to the characters on the stage because they had already been made familiar with such blunt truth-tellers. It can also believe that such 'honesty' can be allied to villainy because the paradox of the blunt speaker had become apparent to them in the role-playing politics of Machiavellian theorists. It is clear that in such cross-cutting traditions it was becoming increasingly difficult to divine whether honesty was innate or merely an assumed role. Jorgensen<sup>1</sup> analyses the attempts to distinguish between honesty and knavery as a general problem in other plays of the period, claiming that the constant repetition of the word 'honest' in *Othello*, far from appearing as a cheap irony, would have seemed to a contemporary audience evidence of a complex and troubling problem. Empson,<sup>2</sup> too, has analysed the complex significance of the use of the word in this play. That the period became fully aware of the dangers of honest, worldly-wise men is clear from the satirical descriptions of them in the 'character' books.

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<sup>1</sup>P. A. Jorgensen, "Honesty in Othello", SP XLVII (1950), 557-567.

<sup>2</sup>William Empson, The Structure of Complex Words (London, 1951), pp. 218-249.

Earle's description of "The World's Wise Man" fits Iago well:

It is a proof of his sufficiency that he is not called wicked, but wise. A man wholly determined in himself and his own ends, and his instruments herein anything that will do it. His friends are a part of his engines, and as they serve to his works, used or laid by; indeed he knows not this thing of friend, but if he give you the name, it is a sign he has a plot on you. Never more active in his businesses, than when they are mixed with some harm to others.... Successful commonly in these undertakings, because he passes smoothly those rubs which others stumble at, as conscience and the like; and congratulates himself much in this advantage.<sup>1</sup>

The difficulties of interpreting the behaviour of blunt men is clear in Cornwall's rebuke to Kent in King Lear. Kent, who is indeed an honest man, is described in terms that fit Iago (II, ii, 90-00). Earle in another character attacks 'An Ordinary Honest Man' who

Is one whom it concerns to be called honest, for if he were not this, he were nothing: and yet he is not this neither, but a good full vicious fellow, that complies well with the deboshments of the time, and is fit for it.... He rails against none but censurers, against whom he thinks he rails lawfully,<sup>2</sup> and censurers are all those that are better than himself.

Babcock<sup>3</sup>, who has also applied this passage to Iago, suggests another possible irony in the use of the word 'honest' since Earle's use seems to imply that the word is used to describe social inferiors. Iago, the embittered Ancient, may be reacting to the condescension of his superiors in his determination to cause havoc, "as honest as I am". The epithet, constantly applied to him, may imply a menace not only to the audience but to Iago himself since it may reinforce the barriers of rank which he is so conscious of in his disappointment at being rejected for the lieutenancy. However many ironies we wish to relate to

<sup>1</sup>John Earle, "Microcosmography &c. (1628)" in Richard Aldington ed., A Book of 'Characters' (London, 1924), pp. 218-219.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>3</sup>Weston Babcock, "Iago - An Extraordinary Honest Man", SQ, XVI (1965) 297-301.

the use of the word 'honest' in this play it is clear that the character of Iago is placed amidst a confusing network of meanings that would have disturbed a contemporary audience. The characters on the stage treat him at his face value as 'honest', the audience is aware that he is related to a common type increasingly recognized as an 'honest' man in the pejorative sense of the word - a man employing a mask.

Since the play depends so much on the disparity in awareness between audience and actors it is necessary that amidst all the confusion of the opening scenes the certainty of Iago's duplicity should be established. Shakespeare solved the problem easily with the invention of the poor dupe, Roderigo. He is the only character in the play to whom Iago reveals his role-playing. He serves as an admirable foil for the preliminary exposition of Iago's character, for, being already in the villain's pocket, there is no chance of his revealing the true nature of the Ancient. It is worth noting that though Roderigo is often on the stage in the early parts of the play he speaks to none of the major characters save Iago. He scuffles twice with Cassio but otherwise contacts them hardly at all. He does not even exchange a 'good day' with Othello and never communicates with Desdemona, the object of his lust. Iago keeps him, "Like an ape an apple in the corner of his jaw; first mouthed, to be last swallowed"; (Hamlet, IV, i, 17-18). Roderigo, for the most part a spectator of the action, is a bonus audience to whom Iago can display his ultimate contempt for humanity.

Iago is depicted in a multiple series of roles in the first two scenes. He plays the role of disappointed soldier for Roderigo, a familiar stereotype for a contemporary audience. He exhibits himself as schemer in his friend's interest in arousing Brabantio. Without identifying himself to Brabantio, he figures as a foul-mouthed scandal-monger. With Othello he is

loyal, open-hearted, protesting a strong conscience and a lack of iniquity, a defender of his lord's name and a counsellor of cautious concealment. In a brief exchange with Cassio he falls into the broader vein of rough soldier's talk and exhibits his mettle in drawing upon Roderigo in his master's defence. In these swift exchanges he demonstrates his ability to be all things to all men. We are immediately absorbed in Iago's mystery: "I am not what I am". We observe with alarm that congenial quality which will lead all characters to seek his advice.

Roderigo, with his immediate hopes repulsed, is the first to come for advice: "What will I do, thinkest thou?" (I, iii, 303). Iago's reply makes clear his own conceptual philosophy which sees man as agent of his destiny. Men are safe only so long as they control their passions with reason. Love is lust since it endangers the sovereignty of reason. His views are akin to those of many of Shakespeare's commentators; it is his exploitation of this philosophy that divides him from them. His advice to Roderigo is sound and apt:

If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions. But we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts; whereof I take this that you call love to be a sect or scion.

(I, iii, 326-332)

The advice is familiar enough but the conclusions he draws from it, in leading Roderigo deeper into folly, are 'most preposterous'.

Iago's exchange with Desdemona, on their arrival in Cyprus, also links him closely to Shakespeare's other commentators. As has often been observed the scene is patterned on exchanges between ladies and their professional jesters. Iago adopts the riddling speech that we find in Lear's Fool. He speaks in the same sing-song jingles. He indulges in the witty word-play which

exercises minds such as Mercutio's. He revels in the indecent sexual allusions and quibblings familiar to us in the speech of Enobarbus. He presents an inverted, topsy-turvy picture of the world which discovers folly in virtue, the stock-in-trade of all court jesters. Desdemona seeks his opinions on a flippant, professional level in order to distract herself from her deeper concerns. Iago gives the impression of trying to relieve the strain by setting his wits to search out witty paradoxes. His wit, his detached observation of folly, his blunt, even coarse, jokes can have no sinister overtones for those on stage. Only the audience sees the sinister implication of his chaff, for what everyone takes to be amiable jesting is in reality Iago's philosophy poured into the old paradoxes which make fools laugh in the alehouse. Iago despises women and virtue, his riddling speech indicates his true opinion that whatever qualities women may combine they are all equally foolish. He gives his final eulogy of the "deserving woman", enumerates her qualities, and ends with the jester's characteristic inversion in claiming that she is fit nevertheless only, "To suckle fools and chronicle small beer" (II, i, 159). Iago "praises the worst best" not in jest but from his deepest convictions. His jests are, in fact, a covert attack on Desdemona herself. It demonstrates Iago's ability to encapsulate in one role behaviour which satisfies others and furthers his own ends. Most other 'honest' men in Shakespeare's tragedies are bedevilled by the dual inability to satisfy others or achieve their own ends. Iago's remarkable behaviour in this scene makes clear why it is so difficult to detect his true nature. He stages himself in a role not very far removed from his real nature. He educates everyone in the cynicism which is at the root of his nature, recreating the world in his own image. He can be vulgar with Desdemona, cynical, callous and even mocking with Cassio and Othello.

His detachment and his philosophy are openly expressed and he is believed in the more because he disguises himself so little. He creates uncertainty in all those around him, estranges men from themselves and redirects them along paths that reinforce his cynicism. Openly they submit their innocence to his experience. His view of the corrupt nature of the world is not after all very different from that of Thersites, Apemantus, or even Lear's Fool, save that they are trying to show everyone a world external to themselves whereas Iago reveals a world that exists only in his own mind. The more Iago tries to demonstrate the corruptness of the world to others the more he comes to believe in it himself. We have evidence in several soliloquies that Iago has the capacity to believe his own fabrications. The smouldering passion, the frantic motive-hunting of his soliloquies indicate, as Rosenberg has noted<sup>1</sup>, a chaotically disturbed emotional nature concealed beneath his mask of rationality. It is the most alarming facet of Iago's character that, far from being superior to the illusions that he creates, he also is a victim of them himself. He cannot distinguish between the evil that he believes exists in the world and the evil he has set loose in the world. There are limitations in the wisdom of all commentators and such characters often yield to the folly in the world around them. Iago makes no endeavour to cure the world. He is a secret carrier of a deadly disease, and he merely apes the clinical detachment of the physician in order to inoculate his virus into others.

In Act II, Scene iii he attempts to inoculate Cassio. Giving the outward impression of good fellowship with his snatches of song and the rough crudities of the barrack room he continues his role as jester. His relationship to many of the characters in the play depends, in his familiarity with

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<sup>1</sup>Marvin Rosenberg, "In Defense of Iago", SQ, VI (1955), 145-158.

his social superiors, on the licence of the Fool. We see him in the scarcely concealed formal role with Desdemona and Cassio. He constantly returns to fool more money out of his employer, Roderigo, and thus proves him again and again to be a fool. His relationship with Othello borders on a grotesque parody of Fool-master associations at several points, in the sexual innuendo, the quibbles and riddles with which he torments the Moor.

His behaviour to Cassio after his dismissal is sympathetic, friendly and spiced with advice which under normal conditions would be judicious. He puts the best face on a bad business and puts his wisdom at the service of yet another seeker for advice:

And what's he, then, that says I play the villain?  
When this advice is free I give and honest,  
Probal to thinking, and indeed the course  
To win the Moor again?

(II, iii, 325-328)

I have noted that most characters who perform the function of counsellor in other plays are unsuccessful in getting good advice accepted because the circumstances in which it is offered make it inadequate. Iago's advice is accepted because it is both wise and adequate when it is given; it is Iago himself who makes it dangerously inadequate by altering the circumstances in which his advice is acted upon.

Iago is not merely astute in playing a public role close to his private nature; he is also capable of finding congenial roles for his victims. He can intuit the roles in which they will be most successful and thus turn their virtue into pitch. Roderigo must perforce believe Desdemona to be lecherous and Cassio lascivious if he is to have any hopes for himself. Cassio must play the courtier to Desdemona, a role in which he has already demonstrated his proficiency, if he is to be reinstated in Othello's good graces. Desdemona will inevitably play to perfection the role of generous and sympathetic sup-

plicant for Cassio. In this ability Iago again is at the opposite pole to the other characters I am examining. Menenius, Enobarbus, the Fool, Mercutio and Apemantus all suggest roles to their friends which they are quite incapable of playing. Iago has the prophetic and prescient anticipation of catastrophe, which we find in the other commentators, but where they fail to avert catastrophe he succeeds in ensuring it by finding a role which the tragic hero in his world plays only too well.

Iago's method of attack in undermining Othello is of a somewhat different kind from that which he applies to his other victims. He is aware of the Moor's free and open nature and he cannot afford to exploit that to his own advantage. Othello refused to run away from Brabantio in the streets of Venice; he defended himself openly before the Senate; he dismissed Cassio openly and with full confidence in his judgement. Iago, therefore, reduces him to a secrecy and intrigue alien to his nature by revealing to him a version of Venetian social manners that he had not hitherto suspected. This version is, of course, a description of Iago's own behaviour, a public front of honesty concealing secret intrigue. Othello must learn more about the strange and secret ways of this new world before he acts, and in the process must himself ape the practices of the super-subtle Venetians. He has returned from his campaigns and conquered like a prince in a fairy story. Iago presents the fairy story as a ludicrous world of illusion in face of the reality of Venetian practices. Hence Roderigo, Cassio and Desdemona rely on Iago because he shares the same world; his advice is in various ways in line with Venetian customs with which they are familiar. Othello, ignorant of that world, relies on Iago because he is the only man willing to educate him in an environment which he suddenly finds to be alien. Iago's worldly wisdom works both ways and he is in a median position in being both a Venetian and a man who has accompanied Othello in his

element on his foreign campaigns. Most of the tragic heroes estrange themselves from their own environment and it is the job of their advisers to try to bring them back to a recognition of reality. Othello's adviser deliberately estranges him from the reality of his environment by superimposing the illusion of a new reality on his own uncertain knowledge of his world. Othello does not carry with him vast illusions based on his own experience within society; he has experience only in war. Iago can, therefore, build his version from the foundations upwards. The experience after all was very familiar to Shakespeare's contemporaries since they had been supplied with many examples of the soldier's inability to adjust from the casque to the cushion. If a native soldier had difficulty coming to terms with the corruption of the court and the intrigue of domestic life, then how much easier it is to accept a Moorish general's discomfort on being faced with the corruption of a European city. Iago, like Lear's Fool, as a man who can see behind the surface of things, can attempt to educate his master by showing him the 'real' nature of his world. Apemantus, Thersites, Enobarbus and Faulconbridge tirelessly expose the hypocrisy, greed and policy which underly the surface civilities of their worlds. Iago makes the pretence of doing something similar. Other heroes reject the judgement of their commentators because it attacks them at the very foundations of their being. Othello does what no other tragic hero can do; he accepts another version of reality in the belief that he is saving himself from a corrupt world. In contradistinction to all the other tragedies which I am examining, he ensures his tragic fall by accepting instead of rejecting the suggestions of his 'truth-teller':

This fellow's of exceeding honesty,  
And knows all qualities, with a learned spirit,  
Of human dealing.

(III, iii, 262-264)

In this play, then, Shakespeare has turned the relationship of hero and commentator inside out. Othello's acceptance of Iago's advice explains, perhaps, why critics have dwelt so frequently on Othello's gullibility. Tragic heroes are wont to pursue their own paths of heroic folly, brushing aside all advice. It is monstrous and unbearable that tragedy should be so inevitable. It is easier to escape the sway of evil by convicting Othello of credulity and thus diminishing the power of Iago. But it is surely one of the points of Shakespeare's tragedies that folly is difficult to avoid. The real terror of the play lies in the fact that Othello's folly is explicable whereas Iago's villainy is not.

In dealing with Othello, Iago rapidly becomes a slave of his own plot. Othello will never become a mere tool like Roderigo. He enters into the intrigue and Iago's success soon depends as much on his ability to keep up with the Moor as to lead him by the nose. Othello accepts a grotesque blood-brotherhood at the end of Act III, Scene iii, and invests his plan with the ritualistic language of a purifying sacrifice. Iago's oath is offered as a cynical parody of his own involvement, but in reality he is inextricably involved. His dedicated declaration is something of a parody of the position that many detached commentators reach in tragedy. At some point they must decide whether to remain detached or whether to commit themselves to the process of the play, a decision which presents loyalty and self interest as alternatives. Iago makes a mock pretence of loyalty to serve his own self-interest. He commits, "wit, hands, heart, / To wrong'd Othello's service!" (III, iii, 470-471). Most commentators believe they can avert tragedy; Iago makes the mistake of thinking he can control it. He will guide the Pontic sea whose course ne'er feels retiring ebb, and he will try to escape the chaos he is creating, but he is simply swept along by the force he unleashes. Iago is like many commentators,

too, in that he only partially understands the nature of the tragic hero; he does not understand the all-embracing destructive potential of a character of heroic dimensions. Iago, even with his double role, and with all the ingenuity in the world, cannot maintain a detachment which will prevent him from being swept along in the swift current of tragedy. Iago, who had been cocksure of all things, who had created that corrosive sense of uncertainty in others, at last becomes a victim of uncertainty too. He has to struggle with Othello to keep his mind on revenge, and in the last two acts is in a state of suspense about the outcome of events which he had once so firmly controlled. His detachment from his plot is eroded and he gradually falls victim to that same condition that he had formerly observed in others - the vulnerability to the consequences of one's own actions. He is vulnerable where he suspects least danger - in his careless assurance concerning Emilia.

Emilia has the bluntness, the coarseness and some of the cynicism of her husband without any of his guile. Although she has unsuspectingly implicated herself in Iago's plot, she is detached, an authentic commentator with an independent version of events. On sheer intuition she trips over the truth without realizing its full implications. Her suspicions, reiterated again and again throughout Act IV, Scene ii, mark her insight as being beyond that of those around her who are all equally abused and bewildered. She has the experience of corruption which Othello and Desdemona lack. She knows the ways of the world and can divine jealousy in Othello almost as soon as it takes possession of him. Yet she is cynically suspicious of the world of men and has as little trust in their innate virtues as Iago has in women's. She holds her tongue concerning the handkerchief because she has little trust in the excuses men find to feed their jealousy. For the rest of the time she speaks out bluntly and boldly, expressing her opinions of Othello, Iago and men in

general.

In her exchanges with Desdemona in Act IV, Scene iii, she resorts to the witty, riddling speech of the jester, which Iago had earlier adopted. She enjoys sexual innuendo and the logical paradoxes by which men, in order to master folly, in fact commit themselves to it. This calm before the storm in which we observe a companion's witty attempts to distract her mistress from fearful thoughts takes us right back to that uneasy calm after the storm on the arrival in Cyprus when Iago had chopped logic to amuse Desdemona. She had waited then as she waits now for the arrival of Othello. Emilia is an authentic commentator, also, in the sense that worldly and coarse though she may be she is normal, sane and straightforward. The bedroom scene with the chatter of the two women is itself the essence of normality, an island of sanity in the dark passions which dominate the men of the play. The talk of bed-linen, of nightgowns, of Lodovico's handsomeness, of men's stubbornness, reminds us of what the normal world can be like when Iago is not present. The scene is one of the few in which Iago does not appear, hence its comparatively placid atmosphere.

Emilia has throughout come closest to suspecting the truth. She needs only one link to complete the chain of her suspicions. It is of the utmost importance that she trusts her mistress' virtue on sheer faith before she understands the plot. It is testimony that in one person trust in the integrity of others and faith in human virtue has survived. It is the ultimate proof of Iago's botching that he has left throughout one strand of his plot dangling - Emilia's knowledge of the handkerchief. His plot from the very beginning, it appears, contained a flaw. We become aware of the paradox that Othello, who is of a free and open nature, is destroyed when he forces his spirit into the secrecy of intrigue, whilst Iago, who is of a secret and

malignant nature is destroyed by his momentary lapses into a careless freedom and openness. Iago fails because he comes up against a quality completely alien to him - the human strength embodied in loyalty, faith and trust. Emilia, like many characters before in Shakespeare, will speak the truth whatever the cost. Truth, a dog that has for so long been whipped to kennel, must finally burst forth: "'Twill out, 'twill out. I, peace! No, I will speak as liberal as the north", (V, ii, 222-223). Emilia comes now as the truth speaker not to avert the tragedy but to explain it. The real truth-teller at last fires out the false one.

In Cinthio it is Othello who is put to torture and cannot be induced to talk. But in Shakespeare it is Iago who is incapable of understanding and admitting his own folly. The eloquent and moving final admission of this Othello contrasts admirably with the silence of Iago. The passionate man finally comes to knowledge and speaks; the worldly-wise man now bankrupt of all knowledge, which he conceived to be superiority, remains silent. His silence at the end of the play has been taken as Shakespeare's shrewd concealment of his inexplicable mystery. Yet surely there is more to it than that. Iago, who has been wont to explain his every move to the audience and to caper in front of Roderigo, has nothing to say because the source of his power has been removed. His dynamism rests entirely on concealed evil, on being able to live in two worlds, the world of foolish mortals and the lone world of Iago playing in the private theatre of his mind to his own applause. The only folly that can injure his self-esteem is that of being found out. In a world which knows Iago he can no longer play roles and thus has no use for speech. There is no opportunity for deception and therefore none for self-approbation. An audience does not need to know how Iago will be tortured or what he has to say for himself; it needs only to know that he has been silenced. All the dualities which Shakespeare

examined in his other hero-commentator relationships, action and reflection, passion and reason, illusion and reality, folly and wisdom, are treated in a different key in this play. Certainly Iago is related to many other literary traditions but, as I have tried to show, some of his qualities can be related to the commentators of the other tragedies. Iago holds a conceptual view of the world, and it is through his limitations that the audience comes to an understanding of the contrasting nature of the hero. Commentators find difficulty in surviving the effects of the tragic world and even this parody of an honest man finds it impossible, even with the power that his deception gives him, to survive with his withers unprung. The net designed to enmesh them all snares Iago, too, for tragedy does not yield to honest men, whether they are sincere or not.

## VI

### ROMEO AND JULIET

There has been endless discussion of Shakespeare's ethical stance in Romeo and Juliet. It has been assumed by many critics that the characters are victims of Fortune and that the tragedy is a result more of accidental circumstances than of the moral fallibility of its characters. Many critics, in the last century particularly, assumed that Friar Laurence is a choric character and that the audience is meant to accept his plea for moderation as a condemnation of the headstrong lovers. Gervinus interpreted the play in this way and to one degree or another the same view was taken by Horn, Tieck, Ulrici, and Kreysig. Dowden poured scorn on this approach in an argument to which I shall refer later. The entire controversy has been re-examined in an interesting essay by Gordon Smith.<sup>1</sup> Other critics, who regard the love of Romeo and Juliet as a transcendent quality not to be reduced by those in search of simple moral conclusions, have always abounded. It is clear that our attitude to the play will be very largely determined by the way in which we interpret those characters who advise the lovers or comment on the action in which they are involved. Benvolio, Mercutio, the Nurse and Friar Laurence supply the lovers with a stream of advice, and Prince Escalus comments generally on the feud which is the context in which their love is set. The meaning of the play must depend, in part at least, on whether any or all of them represent

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<sup>1</sup>G. R. Smith, "The Balance of Themes in Romeo and Juliet", in G. R. Smith, ed., Essays in Shakespeare (London, 1965), pp. 15-66.

Shakespeare's judgement in the play, or whether they are subject to a larger structure of ideas in which Shakespeare places all the characters.

The problem is compounded at the outset by the source material, by the attitudes inherent in the works on which Shakespeare may have drawn. As Bullough summarizes it:

Boiastuau and Painter find the story interesting for 'the variety of strange accidents', the 'novelty of so rare and perfect amity', and its illustration of the violence of passion. They condone Friar Laurence's conduct because he loved the young couple and hoped to make peace between their families, and so he is let go in peace 'without any note of infamie'.<sup>1</sup>

Brooke in a preface to his poem, The Tragical Historye of Romeus and Juliet outlines in detail his didactic intentions. He condemns the lovers, and their counsellors are described as "dronken gossypes, and superstitious friers (the naturally fitte instruments of unchastitee)".<sup>2</sup> But the preface turns out to be more of a sop for those readers keen for didactic literature than an advertisement for its actual content. Brooke's treatment of the characters is much more sympathetic than his harsh warning would lead us to expect. The use made of the story in earlier versions would not matter, of course, since Shakespeare can be trusted to have developed his own interpretation, were it not for the fact that critics have approached the play in manners as widely varying as those of the writers of the sources. Evidence has been adduced which would make the play live up equally well to Brooke's preface and to the more genial treatments of Boiastuau and Painter.

Shakespeare and Brooke both open their versions with a sonnet, but

<sup>1</sup>Geoffrey Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, Vol. I, (London, 1957), p. 276.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 284-285.

whereas the latter gives a detailed synopsis of the narrative, Shakespeare's Chorus concentrates far less on detail and much more on the more 'public' theme of the reconciliation of the feuding families through the sacrifice of the lovers. Brooke in his 'Argument' does not mention the opposed factions once. Shakespeare's Chorus uses the following phrases -- "Two households", "ancient grudge", "new mutiny", "civil blood makes civil hands unclean", "the fatal loins of these two foes", "parents' strife", "parents' rage". The emphasis is overwhelmingly on the folly of the parents and not on that of the children. Brooke certainly starts his poem with a general account of the feud but gives us no local example of it. In Shakespeare we are given at once a vivid example of the civil broils, and everything thereafter is placed in relationship to this clash between the two households. The Chorus does not give us any didactic commonplaces, it does not voice a text which the play will illustrate, but it does focus our attention on the feud as the framework of the entire action. In this play folly and disorder dominate society from the outset and we jump into the middle of it. This public folly persists as one of the forces driving towards tragedy throughout.

The evanescent bloom of the love of Romeo and Juliet is the only sign of health and hope for their society to recover from its disease. That they have to die in order to bring reconciliation constitutes, of course, the tragedy. We cannot imagine any cynical railer, such as Thersites, brooding over the society and encompassing lovers as well as parents in his jaundiced vision; that would make the tragic reconciliation impossible. Thersites is sick enough to hunger for the destruction of society. The advisers in Romeo and Juliet have one thing in common - with a variety of methods and according to their own particular lights, they want a society restored to health. Yet between them, even in their well-meaning aid, they help to ensure tragedy.

Prince Escalus enters in the midst of the riot which erupts in the first scene. He is not a detached observer in the manner of those who sit on the sidelines merely reflecting on the action and who are unwilling or incapable of initiating action. He is detached in the sense that he is one of the only two characters in the play who are set apart from the feud in being uncommitted to either faction. He attempts to control the situation from above as Friar Laurence attempts to control it from within. He brings the power of justice to solve the situation as Friar Laurence brings the power of sympathy and understanding for the same purpose. The signs of anger in his first speech (I, i, 79-101) are the measure of the seriousness of the situation. The Prince has clearly reached the end of his tether in that he now threatens the most extreme punishment within the power of law. The threat of death thus hangs over the play from the outset, and Escalus in his comments on the dangerous nature of the feud supplements the evidence of the Chorus' opening sonnet.

Benvolio is akin to Horatio in that he attempts to moderate the impetuosity of his friend with sound advice. Of all the young men in this play he is the least hot-headed, as we can see from his attempts to break up the street brawl in the first scene instead of revelling in it like Tybalt. He gives a fair and objective account of the fight to Montague, and sympathetically describes his own observation of the moody Romeo. His counsel to Romeo, countering morbid passion with sensible practicality, is the kind of wisdom that the whole of Verona could make use of. He attempts to cure the folly of passion by suggesting a rational and detached judgement of the situation. It is ironical that his suggestion of burning out the fire of one love with another (I, ii, 45) works with a vengeance at Capulet's feast and initiates the tragic action, for it leads Romeo into the very heart of the dangerous territory of

the feud. This danger threatening the love from the outset is re-emphasized in the Chorus' portentous anticipation of the secret love at the beginning of Act II. The feud is rarely absent from the consciousness of the lovers themselves and the actions and attitudes of their confidantes and advisers are conditioned by it. I can deal best with the advisers first associated with the lovers by examining their careers separately, before proceeding to the involvement of Friar Laurence.

McArthur<sup>1</sup> has provided a useful summary of the variety of critical responses to Mercutio, from those who see him as a superfluous and vulgar buffoon, a sop to the groundlings, to those who see him as a gay and admirable courtier in Shakespeare's timeless world. Haydn has related him to Hotspur in his violent allegiance to honour.<sup>2</sup> M. B. Smith finds a far different companion for him:

For all his scintillating wit, his extravagant flights of fancy, Mercutio is the realist, even, as Enobarbus is in Antony and Cleopatra, the "ironist" of the play. One of his functions is to make fun of affectation, and especially of affectation in love and war.

Henderson<sup>4</sup> has examined him as an inheritor of a tradition mocking love that stems from Boccaccio. Faulconbridge, Enobarbus and Iago are also related to this tradition in that they tend to express values hostile to those dominant in the dramas in which they appear. This attitude, as I have indicated, is common to many of the commentators I am discussing. It is possible, of course,

<sup>1</sup>Herbert McArthur, "Romeo's Loquacious Friend", SQ, X (1959), 35-44.

<sup>2</sup>Hiram Haydn, The Counter-Renaissance (New York, 1950), p. 600.

<sup>3</sup>M. B. Smith, Dualities in Shakespeare (Toronto, 1966), p. 102.

<sup>4</sup>Archibald Henderson Jr., Family of Mercutio, DD, Columbia University, 1954.

to use this aspect of Mercutio to reinforce a specific moral interpretation of the play as Dickey does:

The melancholy lover whose humors had amused English audiences for the better part of a century is represented in Romeo; the commentator who extracts all the sport he can from the lover's folly is Mercutio. There is no witty Mercutio in Brooke; in Shakespeare he serves not only as Tybalt's victim but also to complete the comic dramatic personae of the love play.... But like his predecessors he does more than supply comic contrast with the lover whose wounds are real. Mercutio serves to keep us from taking the lovers too seriously at the beginning of the play, and contributes to the richness of the lyrical comedy of the balcony scene.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever way we interpret Mercutio it is clear that he is presented as a contrast to Romeo and as a commentator on his amorous preoccupations. He repeatedly counsels his friend not to sink into debility and lovesick inactivity. His detachment from the thrall of love, his exuberant wit and his love of sport, contrast with Romeo's involvement in love and the complications which arise from it. Mercutio's Queen Mab speech (I, iv, 54-95) is a virtuoso display of the commentator's awareness of the illusions and dreams which blind men to the true condition of their world. Mercutio's view is comprehensive and includes a wide range of conventional occupations. It emphasizes his own reflective detachment and his sense of superiority to the dangers of illusion. He often mocks Romeo's love by aping the habits and terms of the lover. In his ribald comments on Romeo's behaviour he presents the audience with an alternative attitude to love, but he does not necessarily win unquestioning approbation of his mockery. Romeo's comment, "He jests at scars that never felt a wound", (II, ii, 1) clearly defines the gulf which exists between the subjective and objective responses to experience, between the involved and the uninvolved.

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<sup>1</sup>F. M. Dickey, Not Wisely But Too Well (San Marino, 1957), pp. 72-73.

Mercutio is detached, too, in that, like Horatio and Hamlet, he has a sense of the authenticity of his own nobility. He finds sport in mocking "affecting fantasticoes" (II, iii, 28-35) such as Tybalt. He has little time for the new "fashion-mongers" of the Renaissance and is critical of the new cult of duelling, a cult to which he proves to be vulnerable. He endeavours to stand outside the affectations of love and war offering his own attitude as a model. He is like many commentators in wishing to persuade others to share his detachment and his critical and conceptual view of the world. He tries to distract Romeo with his witty sallies and bring him into that jesting vein of good fellowship which is his element and which he prefers to Romeo's new occupation: "Why, is not this better now than groaning for love?" (II, iv, 85). Mercutio thus tries to divert the hero from a path that will lead to tragedy, though his reasons for doing so are merely to reclaim a roistering companion. He implies, however, that Romeo is a local example of his own general philosophy that a man goes against his nature by submitting to the folly of love (II, iv, 85-89).

Mercutio has that function of the commentator which punctures men's dreams by facing them with a reality reduced to its basic details. His jesting, his repeated reduction of love by bawdy suggestion to the physical details of copulation serve as a contrast to the sublime rhetoric of Romeo's love poetry. Mercutio's wit is brilliant and his attitude typical of the society of young men who protest, for the purposes of masculine solidarity, their freedom from the sublime transports of love, and who descant merely on its physical pleasures. Mercutio's version of love, as the audience can see quite clearly, is far wide of Romeo's transfiguring experience of it. Mercutio's convictions enable us to come to a clearer appreciation of Romeo's. Romeo will jest with his friend but he will not yield to his cynical view of women. The

views of hero and companion as always are irreconcilable because the one experiences a situation whilst the other merely observes it. Romeo's view of life is transformed; Mercutio's is confirmed. Mercutio has maintained a sense of detachment from the feud; he is invited to the Capulet's feast and is a friend of the Montagues. He is, however, incapable of retaining his detachment from the civil broils. In Act III, Scene i, his impetuosity and his sense of honour lead him to his doom. The scene balances the major themes of grace and rude will, common sense against unruly passion, in the behaviour of Benvolio and Romeo on one side and Tybalt and Mercutio on the other. However much he may have mocked Romeo's enslavement to passion and the folly of duellists, Mercutio proves to be equally vulnerable once the temper of his blood is aroused. The temperate Benvolio attempts to avert trouble but Mercutio in reply projects his own fiery nature onto his pacific companion (III, i, 5-9, 15-29). Like some of the other commentators he finds that loyalty to his friend undercuts his own sense of detachment. Though he attempts to retain his objectivity, "A plague a both your houses!" (III, i, 88) he recognizes his folly too late, and dies as soon as he steps inside the dangerous circle of the destructive and conflicting forces of the tragedy.

Mercutio, as friend of Romeo, is paralleled to some extent by the Nurse as friend of Juliet. She teases and taunts and presents to the audience a bawdy reduction of love to its physical element which enables the audience the better to appreciate by contrast the sublime, lyrical love-poetry of Juliet. As an aged virago well seasoned in the trade of love, she provides a cynical woman's worldly-wise attitude to love. Like Mercutio's her speech turns ever towards the groaning of the bedchamber. Romeo can be associated in the freer men's society with witty companions, but Juliet in the protected environment of her home can be exposed only to the 'wisdom' of older women. Shakespeare

unnerringly exploits the two social networks to provide appropriate contrasts to the zeal of his young lovers. The effect of Benvolio and Mercutio in their attempts to restrain Romeo's impulsiveness is to isolate him in our attention. The effect of Lady Capulet and her husband's stubbornly commercial attitude to love, along with the Nurse's gross sexual innuendo, is to isolate Juliet. The two lovers are not only set apart because they cross the boundaries of the feud but also because they are surrounded by characters who have little concept of the transporting ecstasy of young love. The language of sexual gratification, of parental sternness, and of advantageous matches surrounds the arias of romantic poetry uttered by the lovers in their precious encounters snatched from a hostile world. We are not asked to judge irascible parents or wilfull, disobedient lovers, for the rights and wrongs of the matter cannot be reduced to the simple precepts of a book of conduct. We note that the young couple's view of love is tragically at odds with the attitudes current in their society.

Mercutio thinks Romeo foolish in pursuing his course of love. The Nurse never attempts the detachment from the love affair practised by Mercutio; indeed, she is instrumental in affecting the marriage of the lovers. But she is equally inadequate in the task of understanding the real nature of the companion whom she so confidently advises. She practises a detachment from the spirit of the love of Romeo and Juliet and recognizes not at all its significance for them. Even with her knowledge of their marriage she can ignore it and encourage Juliet to marry Paris (III, v, 213-226). In her willingness to patch the situation with cloth of any colour we are aware that her understanding is limited and her advice is simple, inadequate and irrelevant in the complications of the tragic world. Her function as adviser is exhausted, as Juliet makes clear:

Ancient damnation! O most wicked fiend!  
 Is it more sin to wish me thus forsworn,  
 Or to dispraise my lord with that same tongue  
 Which she hath prais'd him with above compare  
 So many thousand times? Go, counsellor;  
 Thou and my bosom henceforth shall be twain.  
 (III, v, 236-241)

Yet another secondary character enables an audience to perceive the isolation of a major tragic figure. The conflict is insoluble. If Juliet were the kind of person who could take the Nurse's advice, the situation could never develop in the direction of tragedy. In reducing this complicated tragic situation to her own simple terms the Nurse enables an audience to appreciate why, for Juliet, there is no simple solution.

I turn now to Friar Laurence who wins the trust of both lovers, and who establishes his services as a sage counsellor on a more comprehensive basis than do either Mercutio or the Nurse. According to Dickey, "Shakespeare's Friar, unlike Brooke's, is a true chorus whose words give the necessary moral base from which to judge the tragedy".<sup>1</sup> Certainly some parts of the play might appear to support such a conclusion, but ultimately the complex detail of the play exposes such a view as superficial and inadequate. The friar is detached from the feuding factions. His introduction in Act II, Scene iii, sets up the contrast of his quiet, retired, reflective life with the passionate activities dominating Verona. His introductory soliloquy (II, iii, 1-30) has often been analyzed as a key to a major theme of the play - the opposition of grace and rude will. It is the kind of reflective commentary which extends the significance of the events before us into a general philosophy related to the cosmic order. It prepares us, of course, for the conflict in Romeo's

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<sup>1</sup>F. M. Dickey, Not Wisely But Too Well (San Marino, 1957), p. 106.

distraught mind when he arrives shortly seeking advice, but it also relates to the feud which dominates the play. Verona has nurtured the lovers and will provide their tomb. It has perverted the natural order with its festering enmity and strains men from their fair use toward abuse. The virtue of the young lovers will be turned into a vice which will bring calamity on society. The vice of the feud is dignified by the action and honour of the duel. In the balance of grace and rude will the latter is clearly taking over and the canker of death will eat up the bloom of love which could save society. Any audience familiar with the outline of the story will find relevance not only to Romeo's passion but prophetic insight into the forces dominating the whole society. Although Friar Laurence has, in his philosophical way, diagnosed the sickness afflicting society, he is not allowed to stand aside, detached from the action. He is immediately dragged into the centre of things and begins to put his theory into practice. His action stems directly from this speech, for he becomes a kind of herbalist for human emotions. He will attempt to use the flower of the love of Romeo and Juliet to cure a sick society:

For this alliance may so happy prove  
To turn your households' rancour to pure love.  
(II, iii, 91-92)

But he flies in the face of his own knowledge; for flowers have dual properties; they can be destructive as well as curative:

Within the infant rind of this weak flower  
Poison hath residence, and medicine power;  
For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part;  
Being tasted, slays all senses with the heart.  
(II, iii, 23-26)

The Friar is aware of the dominance of rude will in Romeo and twits him for his fickle transfer of affections from Rosaline to Juliet. Like Benvolio he restrains Romeo's zeal with moderate counsel, aware of the dangers of precipitate haste. The entire play is dominated by hasty actions - sudden

street brawls, rapid courtship and marriage, the urgency of the marriage to Paris, the hurried journeys back and forth to Mantua, the culminating helter-skelter convergence on the Capulet's tomb. The play is run at a killing pace of forced action which allows neither pause nor reflection. The only sanctuary in the play is Friar Laurence's cell before Romeo bursts in. The Friar tries to maintain his more leisurely concept of time with his eye on the future, but Romeo is concerned only with the immediate moment:

But come what sorrow can,  
It cannot countervail the exchange of joy  
That one short minute gives me in her sight.  
(II, vi, 3-5)

The Friar demonstrates his awareness of the dangers of hasty action even as he commits himself to it. He voices a general comment (II, vi, 9-15) which applies to the entire action without acknowledging that he, too, is compelled by the unreflective haste which controls activities in Verona. We have seen the Friar early in the day warning that haste leads to stumbling, yet we find him performing the marriage rites for Romeo and Juliet in the afternoon. The audience realizes that the Friar is one of the few people who is detached from the feud and capable of rational reflection on it, but it also notes that he is entangled in the problems of the feud almost immediately. He resolves a feud in private which has not yet reached its culmination in public. Almost as soon as the couple have been married the Friar's hope for the restoration of harmony is immediately shattered. Of the Friar's own action it can be said, "Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow", (II, vi, 15).

The problem of moral culpability in the play is complicated by the ethics of the revenge code. Romeo is caught in that crossfire of responsibilities which I discussed in an earlier chapter. If we condemn Romeo automatically then we simplify a problem which many Elizabethans found to be perturbing and

complicated. Romeo yields to the imperatives of the feud which has caused such disorder in his society, but the conflict in which he is caught is not an easy one to resolve. At no time prior to Act III, Scene i, has he shown any tendency to pursue the feud for its own sake. His behaviour is contrasted with that of Tybalt whose every speech breathes death, and with that of Mercutio, who, with little provocation and at the first opportunity, engages in the feud. Romeo makes strenuous attempts to prevent the feud and to appease Tybalt, and is thereby the cause of his companion's death. Romeo clearly is dominated immediately by his surging blood. It is not that he forgets Juliet, for he blames his love which has "soft'ned valour's steel!" (III, i, 112). His reputation is stained and he fights to regain his honour and avenge his friend. His dilemma is typical of that presented by the revenge code - he can spare Juliet's kinsman at the cost of shame and dishonour, or he can clear his reputation at the cost of blighting his love. Surely the point of this carefully constructed trap is not to lead us into an easy condemnation of Romeo but to make us aware of the inescapably harsh process of tragic circumstances. The whole problem is reviewed in Juliet's reception of the news (III, ii) for she, too, is caught in the conflict of loyalty between her kinsman and her love. Even though Romeo has killed her cousin and blighted her marriage she recognizes her husband's need to protect his honour (III, ii, 91-95). If there is an easy solution to this complicated problem Shakespeare certainly does not make it clear to the audience. The judgement of Prince Escalus (III, i, 183-194) re-emphasizes our awareness of the sickness that afflicts the society, but instead of solving the problem it compounds it. In this play no amount of law-making, interference or exhortation will cure society, for society must cure itself in coming to a recognition of its own folly.

The contrast between theoretical observation and practical experience

is made quite clear in Act III, Scene iii, where Friar Laurence attempts by reasoned persuasion to comfort the distracted Romeo. The scene is very similar to Vincentio's comforting of Claudio in Measure for Measure (III, i). The reflective philosopher can talk easily of death or banishment, his detachment allows him to find hope where the man involved can find only despair. Certainly we may regard Romeo's response to his banishment as excessive but we recognize that the advice of Friar Laurence, however sane, is easier to give than to receive. Romeo describes once again the gulf which divides the commentator on tragedy from the subject of it:

Thou canst not speak of that thou dost not feel.  
Wert thou as young as I, Juliet thy love,  
An hour but married, Tybalt murdered,  
Doting like me, and like me banished,  
Then mightst thou speak, then mightst thou tear thy hair,  
And fall upon the ground, as I do now,  
Taking the full measure of an unmade grave.  
(III, iii, 64-70)

Friar Laurence can no longer issue generalized observations from a specific situation, for he is involved in the action itself and his speech is now directed toward saving Romeo from a desperate act. He does not stand outside the action offering only philosophical panaceas but inside it initiating plans. The Friar, far from being Shakespeare's mouthpiece, provides yet another example of the difficulties involved in attempting to find a solution to a tragic situation. Dowden, in rebutting Gervinus, made many of the points which I am outlining here, though in a language heavy with a condemnation which I find a little excessive:

It is impossible to agree with those critics, among others Gervinus, who represent the friar as a kind of chorus expressing Shakspeare's own ethical ideas, and his opinions respecting the characters and action. It is not Shakspeare's practice to expound the moralities of his artistic creations; nor does he ever, by means of a chorus stand above and outside the men and women of his plays, who are bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh... Friar Laurence also is moving in the cloud, and misled by error as well as the rest. Shakspeare has

never made the moderate, self-possessed, sedate person a final or absolute judge of the impulsive and the passionate. The one sees a side of truth which is unseen by the other; but to neither is the whole truth visible. The friar had supposed that by virtue of his prudence, his moderation, his sage counsels, his amiable sophistries, he could guide these two young, passionate lives and do away with the old tradition of enmity between the houses. There in the tomb of the Capulets is the<sup>1</sup> return brought in by his investment of kindly scheming.

Friar Laurence is subjected to the complications of the feud and, in a worsening situation, is obliged to make the best of a world which, far from being rapidly restored to harmony as he had originally hoped, is careering toward tragedy:

Thy Juliet is alive,  
For whose dear sake thou wast but lately dead;  
There art thou happy. Tybalt would kill thee,  
But thou slewest Tybalt; there art thou happy too.  
The law, that threat'ned death, becomes thy friend,  
And turns it to exile; there art thou happy.  
A pack of blessings lights upon thy back;  
Happiness courts thee in her best array;  
(III, iii, 135-142)

This Panglossian philosophy is surely a travesty of the hopes which the Friar had harboured but a few hours earlier. Where before he had hoped to resolve the feud, he now has to accept its terms, even exploit it, to cheer up Romeo. The most significant change here is in the Friar's attitude to time. At the marriage he had warned Romeo against a momentary view of the world. But now he himself clearly lives in a world which must put aside former hopes by living in the moment and making the best of it. Calm rumination has given place to advice and plans improvised at a moment's notice. He is now forced to live as much on dreams and hopes as the lovers themselves are:

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Dowden, Shakspeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art (New York, 1875), p. 107.

But look thou stay not till the watch be set,  
 For then thou canst not pass to Mantua,  
 Where thou shalt live till we can find a time  
 To blaze your marriage, reconcile your friends,  
 Beg pardon of the Prince, and call thee back  
 With twenty hundred thousand times more joy  
 Than thou went'st forth in lamentation.

(III, iii, 148-154)

Since no-one has been able to heal the feud before the recent breach this sounds, at this desperate juncture, very much like pie in the sky. The Friar, like many commentators, believes that catastrophe can be averted and a happy ending secured. Vincentio in Measure for Measure can manipulate all the characters to ensure a happy ending. The Friar in Romeo and Juliet, however, has only imperfect control of two characters and his plotting never determines and shapes the situation; it merely responds to outside circumstances which ultimately overwhelm it. He is the only character in the play who makes any effort to bring about reconciliation. His plot helps to heal the feud but in a manner that he had not expected.

The Friar had married the pair with a general hope but no specific plan that they might resolve the discord of their families. He is rapidly involved in extraordinarily complicated plans to save even the very lives of the lovers:

O, Juliet, I already know thy grief;  
 It strains me past the compass of my wits.

(IV, i, 46-47)

The plan which he devises is far from moderation and calm restraint:

Hold daughter; I do spy a kind of hope,  
 Which craves as desperate an execution  
 As that is desperate which we would prevent.

(IV, i, 68-70)

If we remember his confident assurance earlier, "Wisely and slow; they stumble that run fast", (II, iii, 94) we can realize how much the Friar has yielded, of necessity, to the forced tempo of his world. He is now involved in an

elaborate plan of faked death and cemetery reunion which demands complicated and precise timing.

The entanglements which the Friar has got himself into become abundantly clear in the scene following Juliet's supposed death (IV, iii). He returns to his old role of counteracting excessive passion, using a specific occasion for general philosophizing, demanding that moderation be achieved through reason and claiming that every situation can be rationalized to one's advantage. And yet, of course, his behaviour here is merely role-playing, complete deception. We realize that the only time that the Friar can act as he did at the outset, as a sage commentator offering in his detachment the comfort of philosophy, is when he lies and dissembles. His role as trusted commentator is now merely one of the devices used in his total strategy. The action in this play has been so successful in drawing the rational and detached observer into its orbit that it has now brought him to the position of using that role to disguise his own involvement in the most desperate action of the play.

A series of accidents and the impetuosity of the lovers finally defeats the Friar's plan. The Friar who had once counselled against haste lacks the speed to avert the catastrophe. "Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow", (II, vi, 15) becomes ironically true in the accidental and tragic confusion of timing which destroys the lovers. The Friar, who had once castigated Romeo for blaming everything on fortune, now himself blames fortune for the failure of his plan (V, ii, 17).

The Friar is absolved of blame at the end because the fault lies elsewhere, as the Prince makes clear in bringing the play full circle. He returns to the theme of the feud with which the Chorus had opened the play. Disorder in society brings punishment to all. The Prince and the Friar have

been unable to prevail against the feud, passionate self-will, poisons, accidents, and the breath-taking haste of the action. The Prince implies that all are guilty, not excluding himself, for the occurrence of the tragedy. If we take the play as a moral exemplum on the dangers of excessive passion we surely diminish its importance. The Friar is used tactically as Stoll suggests:

It is in the interest of drama that the Friar is permitted to have his say, his point of view; in some small part it is even in the interest of drama that this humdrum prudence is given expression; but when he bids the young pair 'love moderately', he does not fill the role of a chorus, or else the poet's efforts to arouse our emotion and call forth our whole sympathy for them would be defeated.<sup>1</sup>

If Thersites and Apemantus represent one extreme of commentary in their unwillingness to act at all, in their total incapacity to see any hope for society, then Friar Laurence represents the other extreme in his willingness to rationalize everything and to resort to the most extraordinary measures in attempting to help his society. But they are equally ineffective in averting tragedy. Shakespeare uses a wide variety of observers and advisers in this play and yet between them they cannot avert tragedy. In their various ways, however, they enable an audience to understand and respond to the love of Romeo and Juliet, and to understand also the tragic process which brings the lovers to their deaths.

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<sup>1</sup>E. E. Stoll, Shakespeare's Young Lovers (Oxford, 1937), pp. 41-42.

## VII

### MENENIUS

Menenius Agrippa in Coriolanus is not as detached from the action as some of the commentators I am dealing with. Whitaker claims that he is like Enobarbus in serving as a chorus to the action.<sup>1</sup> But in the opposition of patricians and plebians, however politically astute he may be as a mediator, he clearly shares the principles of the class to which he was born. His role as observer-moderator, however, is made possible because he is associated with a hero who presents an extreme and uncompromising version of the patrician's attitude. Much of the imagery and action of the play is concerned with Menenius' attempts to moderate Coriolanus' inflexible stance. The hero in this play carries to an extreme many of the qualities I have described in the commentators in other plays. He is a plain-dealer abruptly voicing his thoughts whatever the cost. He eschews flattery and constantly seeks independence from the political manoeuvres of his world. He holds a static, conceptual view of the world, and finds himself trapped in a conflict of roles to which he can find no solution.

Menenius does know the ways of this world and has the political acumen to manipulate others for the advantage of his friend. Though he is committed to the action throughout he is a genuinely median character in that he is the most successful in bridging the opposed worlds of patricians and

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<sup>1</sup>V. K. Whitaker, Shakespeare's Use of Learning (San Marino, 1964), p. 201.

plebians. He realizes that one has to live within terms of the current political situation instead of in opposition to it and, therefore, shares the realistic view of many commentators that it is impossible to have the best of both worlds. Coriolanus cannot retain his disdain for the plebians and expect to be successful in seeking political office. Menenius, however, shares the fundamental weakness of many commentators in that he underestimates the singularity of the personality with whom he is dealing. He represents to some degree the voice of reason in the play and believes that the power of reason will prevail to avert tragedy.

The part of Menenius is not invented by Shakespeare, but, like the parts of Enobarbus and Thersites, it is given an importance out of all proportion to the hints provided in the source. In Plutarch Menenius had already died before the events with which Shakespeare deals took place. Shakespeare resurrects him to supply that key median role between audience and hero. With the compromising and politically astute Menenius in the foreground we are able to put more clearly into perspective the inflexibility and political incompetence of Coriolanus. The political world of Rome requires the wisdom of Menenius to maintain its stability, but it is in the nature of tragedy that such characters do not prevail. Rome is in a political ferment in which more liberal democratic rights must be conceded. Menenius has the wisdom to see that the paternal government of the aristocrats must be administered with more circumspection than hitherto. He commits the folly, however, of supporting the candidacy of Coriolanus, who, of all the patricians, is the one most unfitted for the consulship at this specific juncture. He demands, like many other commentators, something that is not in the nature of his friend, and he must learn to his cost what the force of that nature is.

There has been endless argument as to whether Shakespeare is con-

demning the arrogance of the patricians in the behaviour of Coriolanus or deploring the anarchy which the many-headed mob threatens. We should note that Menenius sees dangers in the uninhibited sway of either. What Shakespeare faces us with in this play is not a hopelessly corrupt political system but a society struggling for democracy clashing with a political candidate who is temperamentally fitted only for autocracy. Coriolanus might have made a magnificent warrior dictator, but, as Menenius is aware, the very least that is acceptable in this situation is a benevolent dictator. What we have to remember is that many characters in the play demonstrate considerable political insight. The argument about whether Shakespeare sides with patricians or plebians misses the point of the play. The citizens, though easily led, are frequently depicted as sensible, even judicious men. The tribunes, who have been pictured by many critics as villains, are astute political leaders. The patricians are not despicably arrogant, and Menenius is certainly shrewd enough to yield to political necessity. This world indeed has all the elements for establishing a successful polity. But it has one single flash-point, one character capable of destroying the entire system. It is in Coriolanus that we find most of the evidence for the dangerous arrogance of the patricians, and it is against him that we find all the mutinous behaviour of the mob gathering.

Although the theme of the play may appear to be more public, more involved in sociological and political problems, it is, in fact, exactly parallel to that of Shakespeare's other tragedies. In the inevitable logic of one man's destiny society is brought to the brink of chaos. Marcius is necessary to the state to keep the Volscians at bay but he is necessary only in his proper military sphere. The dangers of the soldier moving from casque

to cushion were well known to the Elizabethans.<sup>1</sup> This play provides a spectacular example of that danger. Coriolanus is quite happy to fight and to despise the civilian populace, a stance not unusual in soldiers and not particularly dangerous if it is guided by executive control. Jorgensen has noted how hostile soldiers habitually were to the world of civil life:

Martialists seemed temperamentally incapable of defending their own status without attacking the more artful occupations and thereby displacing themselves further from the civil company. It was equally natural that in defending their vocation they should exaggerate rather than conceal the rude traits of which critics had accused them. These traits became, in a way, a badge of their profession. In the idealized versions given them by the military defenders, they represented not pointless rudeness but plain honesty.<sup>2</sup>

The tragedy of this play is concerned with the unusual situation which arises when Coriolanus allows himself to be persuaded to seek civil power. There is no cynical railer in this play mocking an irredeemably sick society, for the only railer is Coriolanus himself and the society becomes sick because of his railing. Menenius attempts to avert the inevitability of tragedy; but by urging the candidacy of Coriolanus he is partly responsible for ensuring a tragic outcome.

In the first scene Shakespeare rapidly sets up a series of contradictory attitudes to Caius Marcius. It is important to note that though the citizens enter with a grievance about famine their resentment immediately focusses on Marcius. It has often been observed that the imagery of the play deals with the constriction of the normal processes of society. There is some blockage preventing the free flow of a healthy political system. The blockage is

<sup>1</sup>P. A. Jorgensen, Shakespeare's Military World (Berkeley, 1956).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 225-226.

immediately identified:

- 1 Cit. First, you know Caius Marcius is chief enemy  
to the people.  
All. We know't, we know't.  
1 Cit. Let us kill him, and we'll have corn at our  
own price.

(I, i, 6-10)

It may be, of course, that Marcius is merely a scapegoat figurehead for the mob, but the rest of the play does not support this conjecture. Whatever the mob says about the patricians, it is only against Marcius that they proceed. That they are not merely an unthinking rabble is made clear in the opposition of views between the two chief citizens (I, i, 13-43).

The entrance of Menenius comes immediately following the condemnation of Marcius' pride:

- 2 Cit. Worthy Menenius Agrippa; one that hath  
always lov'd the people.  
1 Cit. He's one honest enough; would all the rest were so.  
(I, i, 49-51)

Even if, for the vociferous First Citizen, Menenius is only the exception that proves the rule, he is clearly held up for the audience as an immediate contrast to Marcius. The First Citizen has so far described the world in terms of a polarized class-struggle, and yet the first patrician that we meet has the people's trust. He is significantly called 'honest', although as we see later he is rather less honest than the citizens suppose, since he frequently demonstrates his disrespect for them in private whilst acknowledging the necessity of humouring them in public.

Menenius' behaviour is diplomatic, familiar, jocular, cautiously paternal, and he employs a homely analogy which is the stock-in-trade of politicians of all periods. The scene may remind us of the endless handshaking, baby-kissing, and the whistle-stop campaigning of modern politicians. Such a comparison is appropriate, I think, because Menenius is a brilliant portrait

of man the political animal. Menenius' fable of the belly and the limbs, which indeed adumbrates this portrait of man as a political animal in an amusing way, has been analyzed so exhaustively that I will not dwell long on it. The citizens have already implied that their system represents the mechanical solidarity of a class-divided society. Menenius counterposes this with a theory which Spencer and Durkheim have made familiar under the name of 'organic solidarity'. Menenius' fable establishes the conceptual frame of reference in which the patricians work. It has the same generalizing effect of reducing all behaviour to an ordered, cosmic system which we come across so often in the speeches of the Senecan type of Chorus. It establishes at the outset of the play a framework of order and degree with which the Elizabethans were familiar. The analogy is astutely designed for the nature of the political situation - the resentment concerning the famine. Menenius calls up the concept of the hierarchical order in attributing the dearth to the gods and he does nothing in the play which would indicate that he has any doubts in that order. He faces political opportunists in the tribunes and is aware of the necessity of shrewd manoeuvring to maintain the status quo, but all his efforts are directed towards supporting the hierarchical order. That this order was no longer taken for granted and was open to interpretation is evident in the arguments of the First Citizen, but no-one suggests that the old order should be abolished. The argument is completely involved with the question of how that order should be administered. It is Marcius who brings that question to crisis point. Menenius, with all the politician's flare for handling hecklers, interprets the social order to the benefit of the patricians, but he has no sooner completed his parable than Marcius enters reinforcing the grievances of the commons against the abuse of power.

Marcius' language and behaviour are designed not only to affirm the

opinion that the citizens have already expressed concerning him, but to contrast with the vision of organic solidarity which Menenius has offered the people. That harmonious little world of man is shot to pieces in Marcius' demotion of all commoners to animal stature. In Menenius' terms the First Citizen is only the great toe but he is at least part of the human body politic. In Marcius' view the people are first 'scabs' and shortly 'curs', 'hares', 'geese' and finally 'fragments' - a declension not designed to win any support for the reality or even the illusion of democracy. It is worth noting that Marcius, in addressing the citizens, habitually employs the language of Thersites and Apemantus; he feeds on his own sense of superiority and his poor opinion of the world. The opposition between Marcius and the commons becomes clear. They have already suggested resorting to their pikes to redress their grievances and they carry bats and clubs. Marcius itches to descend on the mob and wreak havoc "as high / As I could pick my lance", (I, i, 197-198). Menenius' method of going into the streets to explain the philosophy on which society works is countered with Marcius' belief that the slaves should be kept in ignorance (I, i, 188-198).

Shortly, however, we have another attitude to Marcius when his aid is sought to fight the Volscians. His soldier's pride, though excessive, is less dangerous when applied to external enemies than when it is put in service against his own people. Marcius, speaking of Aufidius, makes it clear that he fights not so much for the state but for his own pride:

Were half to half the world by th' ears, and he  
Upon my party, I'd revolt, to make  
Only my wars with him. He is a lion  
That I am proud to hunt.

(I, i, 231-234)

Ironically, of course, Marcius will revolt against his party to join Aufidius;

his pride is so enormous that he can find an object to hunt even greater than Aufidius - his own country.

Everyone in the first scene talks about Marcius - the citizens, the senators, the tribunes - everyone, that is, except Menenius. His concern is with appeasing the people and avoiding civil dissension. He thus stands out in this first scene as an independent voice capable of interpreting the political situation without exacerbating it. His effect is nullified by the impetuosity of Marcius, a pattern of events which persists throughout the play. The scene is thus set for the relationship between a shrewd campaign manager and a hopelessly inept political candidate. The one believes in the system, his party, his country and hopes to mould his candidate; the other does not believe in the system, refuses to be moulded, and becomes disaffected from his party and his country. There could hardly be imagined a more unpromising or ominous political campaign.

Marcius is superb in isolation as his single-handed capture of Corioli indicates. His attitude to the common soldiers, to public praise and to the laurels of battle indicate his extraordinary self-sufficiency and his inability to accept social customs - qualities which are to incapacitate him in his campaign for political office. We can admire Marcius' achievement but we must note how limited and specialized it is. When his mother in welcoming him home mentions her ambition of political office for him, Coriolanus demonstrates his knowledge of his proper sphere:

Know, good mother,  
I had rather be their servant in my way  
Than sway with them in theirs.  
(II, i, 192-194)

The opposed forces concerned with Marcius' candidacy meet at the beginning of Act II, Scene i. The tribunes share with Menenius the gift of

tactical manoeuvring and political opportunism. This is an important scene in establishing that relativity of judgement on which tragedy so much depends. It is clear that the tribunes regard their troubles as stemming entirely from Coriolanus. They fear that their new-won powers will be nullified if Marcius comes to office. Menenius demonstrates that one's reaction to a situation depends on exactly where one is situated. To the 'right-hand file' it is the tribunes who are the dangerous power-seekers.

The audience can see that however Menenius may have humoured the people his patrician temper is not to be doubted. But his chaffing of the tribunes is not the arrogant spleen of Marcius. He employs a kind of plain-dealing, bluff, backchat and the needling, direct assault of political debates. He has cultivated an image dear to many politicians - the plain, blunt, honest man who invites instant trust. In his behaviour with the citizens he was not above exchanging chaff with their ringleader to emphasize a common bond which he reiterated in phrases such as "my countrymen", "my good friends", "mine honest neighbours". But here with the tribunes he has no crowd to impress and he permits himself the rougher tactics of political in-fighting. He has not changed his attitude, presented in the first scene, that neither the people nor their representatives know their own best interests, but he has changed his method of attack. As a seasoned campaigner he enjoys a scrap and is more than a match for the tribunes, as Coriolanus certainly is not. He disarms his opposition by himself declaring the worst things that can be said against him (II, i, 43-60). He does not dismiss the tribunes as dogs unworthy of consideration, but fastens on their pride, their abuse of power and their incompetence in wielding it. A politician cannot simply disdain the opposition, he must argue on issues. His parody of their law proceedings (II, i, 62-74) is the kind of reduction to absurdity by blunt truth-telling which the court-fool practised.

Yet the tribunes are aware that this manner is a tactical one for which Menenius is famous, as we can see from Brutus' remark:

Come, come, you are well understood to be a perfecter giber  
For the table than a necessary benchman in the Capitol.  
(II, i, 75-77)

This is one politician speaking to another in the accepted acrimony of debate; it is far from the sublime arrogance of Coriolanus which will brook no opposition.

Menenius manipulates his role as plain-dealer and in that sense is unlike many of the other characters with whom I am concerned. Coriolanus contrasts with him in that he does not merely manipulate the role of plain-dealer, he embodies it and is incapable of taking on any other role. Menenius, aware of his own facility in manipulating roles, is unable to understand the incapacity of others in the basic tactics of the political arena. Only by noting in these early scenes the antithetical development of the complete soldier and the complete politician will we be prepared to understand why the former cannot be turned into the latter.

The tribunes' and plebians' criticism of Marcius has been borne out by his behaviour. Menenius' criticism of the tribunes and plebians, their fickleness and their ignorance concerning their own best interests, is borne out by the citizens' sudden hero-worship of the returning victor and the tribunes' determination to quash it (II, i). The patricians and plebians are at one in welcoming home the victor from Corioli. The next time they are at one will be in trying to prevent him from returning home. The disastrous candidacy of Coriolanus for the consulship fills the interim.

In Act II, Scene iii, two officers set up opposing views of Marcius' political capabilities. As a preface to the election and the catastrophe which follows there could be no clearer indication that the event before us requires

a complex sense of discrimination. It is a summary by two "outsiders", two incidental and anonymous characters, who cannot easily be identified with any faction. The exchange has none of the acrimony of the earlier wrangling; it is carefully argued in a reasoned manner. That insoluble conflict between Marcius' deserts as a soldier and his potential danger as a politician is given a further airing. The Second Officer believes that his integrity and his pride are virtues which will prevent him from hoodwinking the people in the manner of super-subtle politicians. The First Officer whilst conceding Marcius' merits, observes that he is not satisfied with his superiority but actively seeks the hatred of the people to support it. Thus the two summarize all that has gone before and prepare us for what is immediately to follow - the conflict between Coriolanus' pride and the necessary custom of flattering the people by the act of humility which must be performed in the forum. The argument is clear but it is not resolved. The First Officer concedes that 'he's a worthy man'; that, however, is not the point at issue. They have not been arguing about his general worthiness but about his fitness for a specific political office. Shakespeare thus indicates that the question cannot be solved by outside commentary or prejudgement but can only be determined in the event itself.

In the ensuing debate the patricians speak only of Marcius' military prowess and the reward due to him, the opposition questions only his fitness for political office. Despite all the diplomacy of Menenius the custom of suing for voices in the market-place cannot be avoided. As Shakespeare makes clear, and as the tribunes realize, it would be impossible to imagine a custom more calculated to destroy Coriolanus. Menenius makes a tactical error in forcing Marcius to comply with the ceremony. He demonstrates, however, the politician's respect for ceremony and assumes that all men like himself have

the ability to turn such situations to their own best advantage. Because of his fundamental error in judging Coriolanus' character he is now obliged to enter that section of his development where he has most in common with the commentators who combat the passion of their friends with reason and the necessity for moderation.

Menenius' advice from this point onward is designed to save Coriolanus from catastrophe. It is similar to the advice of Enobarbus in that if there was any hope of its influencing the person to whom it is applied the danger of catastrophe could never have arisen in the first place. If Antony could give up his 'Egyptian dish', or Coriolanus his arrogant sense of superiority, the inevitability of their tragedies would disappear. If Coriolanus were to heed Menenius' advice he would have to give up those very attitudes and convictions which make him Coriolanus. Lawlor has written of the way in which tragedy works towards a point of forcing a choice of alternatives on the hero:

Fate must be shown as a limitation of the character's field of choice - not, be it emphasized, his power of choosing, but the things there are to choose from. His whole universe must be narrowed to a single 'either-or' and the 'or' must represent what he cannot do without ceasing. <sub>1</sub> to be the character introduced and established for us.

The torment which Coriolanus suffers in facing his choice is clear right away:

Cor.

What must I say?

'I pray, sir' - Plague upon't! I cannot bring  
My tongue to such a pace. 'Look, sir, my wounds!  
I got them in my country's service, when

<sup>1</sup>John Lawlor, The Tragic Sense of Life (London, 1960), p. 121.

Some certain of your brethren roar'd, and ran  
From th' noise of our own drums'.

Men.

O me, the gods!

You must not speak of that. You must desire them  
To think upon you.

Cor.

Think upon me? Hang 'em!

I would they would forget me, like the virtues  
Which our divines lose by 'em.

Men.

You'll mar all.

I'll leave you. Pray you speak to 'em, I pray you,  
In wholesome manner.

(II, iii, 48-59)

We are yet again faced with a passionate hero who sweeps aside the advice of a rational friend. The contrast of the soldier used to commanding and the politician used to entreating is clear. The distinction is made explicit in Menenius' reiteration in his fervent entreaty, "Pray you speak to 'em, I pray you", the very words on which Coriolanus has just choked.

If a man would seek political office he must abide by the rules. Marcius is unfit for office because he considers himself above rules, a law unto himself - "Let me o'erleap that custom" (II, ii, 134). He soon demonstrates his awareness of the conflict in which he is caught in yielding to the custom in the Forum (II, iii, 109-121). The only solution to this conflict is the compromise suggested by Menenius, but Marcius is incapable of playing his role convincingly and admits that his heart is not in it (II, iii, 91-100). His inability to yield to the common custom is the result of no outside pressure. Before he enters the market-place, the commons indicate that they are not unwilling to confirm his office; their behaviour to him is not provocative. The whole ritual is carefully staged to show that it is Coriolanus who does not fulfill his part of the bargain. He has tried to perform his duties but he would not be Coriolanus if he were capable of performing them fully.

It is typical of Shakespeare's sure dramatic instinct to introduce Act III, Scene i, in which Coriolanus irrevocably mars his political fortunes, with a reference to the military world. It is as though Marcius, about to step into an alien sphere, looks back on his real profession. It reminds us, too, that although peace reigns at the moment, a Rome without Coriolanus will invite a renewal of hostilities. The confidence of the senators rests on the protection of Coriolanus' consulship. The argument which destroys that consulship is excessive on both sides. Marcius' arguments receive no support from the patricians. The tribunes overreach themselves in their zeal in prosecuting their case. Menenius is aware of the danger on both sides and attempts to control the outburst of passion. He continually calls for calm, he asks for moderation on both sides but cannot resist the force of Coriolanus' anger. The argument is not, in fact, between patricians and plebians but between Coriolanus and the tribunes. Coriolanus attacks the patricians for not living up to his exalted concept of their worth. The only patricians who speak, Menenius and the First Senator, are not engaged in reinforcing his arguments but in shutting him up. The scene resolves itself into a struggle between those who are aware of the necessity of correct timing in politics, "Not now, not now", "Well, no more", "Come enough", and Coriolanus who, in his ignorance of political tactics, finds any time suitable to give vent to his spleen. He lacks even the awareness of tact which Macbeth exhibited when he had bought

Golden opinions from all sorts of people,  
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,  
Not cast aside so soon.

(I, vii, 33-35)

Golden opinions from all sorts of people are nothing to Coriolanus at the side of his own opinions. If he could bestow awhile a small amount of what

he has little - patience, the situation could be saved, but Menenius cannot control Marcius' temper as easily as he had controlled the First Citizen's. Whatever the convictions of the patricians may be, they are aware of their vulnerability and wish to avoid civil dissension. Coriolanus' taste for battle is so great that he cares not if the opposition is an enemy or his own countrymen. The isolated position of Coriolanus is indicated in the following exchange:

<u>Cor.</u>	Stand fast; We have as many friends as enemies.
<u>Men.</u>	Shall it be put to that?
<u>1 Sen.</u>	The gods forbid! I prithee, noble friend, home to thy house; Leave us to cure this cause.
<u>Men.</u>	For 'tis a sore upon us You cannot tent yourself; be gone, beseech you. (III, i, 231-236)

Coriolanus at the opening of the play had been named as the specific cause of the threat of civil war. He now bids for support to start a civil war on his own account. Menenius' commentary (III, i, 255-260) puts the problem succinctly. Marcius' nature is too noble for the world; it has the virtues and the vices of the old patrician order which make it impossible for him to survive in the new polity. "His heart's his mouth" and he lacks that controlling reason which makes Menenius willing to patch the situation with cloth of any colour.

The skill of the wily politician is clear when within a little more than seventy lines he converts the tribunes from a violent determination to execute Coriolanus without trial to an acceptance of the correct lawful procedure, thus securing the civil order which has been so perilously threatened. Few of the other advocates of reasoned moderation that I have examined ever achieve this central position in the plot structure. Only Friar Laurence becomes involved deeply in the plot and he only in one strand of it. Iago, of

course, virtually controls the plot but as I have indicated he is rather an exceptional case. Menenius, in fact, offers to take charge of the hero and yield him to justice. It is the best compromise that he can achieve but it will not be good enough. Marcius has only one mode of operation with the commons - attack. He attacked them from the first moment he came on the stage, he even berated them when they were fighting on the same side at Corioli, he scorned them in the forum and has just drawn his sword on them. The one thing which is obvious to the audience but which escapes Menenius is that Coriolanus is absolutely consistent in his behaviour. Menenius' statement that he will bring Marcius, "Where he shall answer by a lawful form, / In peace, to his utmost peril." (III, i, 325-326), appears, therefore, to be the utmost folly based on wishful thinking. The situation has developed in such a way that Menenius can only attempt to save the life of his friend and the civil order of the state by a method which will ensure his friend's banishment and the exposure of the state to complete overthrow. The straws of reason clearly stand little chance in the maelstrom of tragedy.

The maelstrom is clear in the invocation to chaos which Marcius offers immediately following Menenius' promise. If one wanted an example of compromise being overwhelmed by stubborn constancy one could nowhere find a more absolute phrasing (III, ii, 1-6). It is hardly an omen for the presentation of the accused "in peace". Coriolanus is put through a kind of desperate crash-course in political role-playing. Reason can only offer him the advantage of peace and personal power as a reward for this duplicity, neither of which, we are aware, hold as prominent a place in his mind as honour. He does not yield ultimately to reason at all but only to his mother's scolding. The scene contains a magnificent display of material dealing with the histrionic art of

politics. There is something grotesque about this green-room rehearsal seconds before stepping on the stage. Here the old world of aristocratic privilege faces the new world of Machiavellian policy. Coriolanus tries to salvage his honour in face of the onslaught of the politics of necessity. Shakespeare had written of many politicians of the new world combatting representatives of an older order. Mark Antony in Julius Caesar, Macbeth, Claudius, Iago, Edmund, Cornwall, and Octavius are all accomplished in the art of political duplicity. But perhaps nowhere else has Shakespeare so concentrated the forces of manipulating politicians at work on a simple unpolitical nature as completely as in this scene. He is not so much concerned to take sides here as to make clear the tragic consequences of this clash of world-views. If Coriolanus stands on his honour the society will move towards chaos; if the political forces suggesting compromise prevail the society will move towards chaos with equal rapidity. In this conspiratorial atmosphere in which Coriolanus is ensnared we are aware that neither honour nor policy can triumph. We are aware that everyone around the hero could play the compromising role successfully. But even as Coriolanus goes off to play the role with Menenius as his prompter we realize that he can not dissemble:

You have put me now to such a part which never  
I shall discharge to th' life.

(III, ii, 105-106)

Coriolanus has had little time to con his part or to practise it and, with barracking from the audience, which the tribunes have already rigged for the performance, he soon forgets his part and nothing that the prompter Menenius can do will prevent the play from ending in tragedy.

It is absurd to argue that the blame for the catastrophe lies either with the policy-making patricians or the machinations of the tribunes and the

fickle mob, when the tragedy results from the combination of both forces and Coriolanus' inability to satisfy either. At the opening of this act, before the struggle started, the threat of foreign attacks was mentioned, and Coriolanus closes the act with the same threat. Both the factions have by their own lights attempted to guard the security of the state and have succeeded only in ensuring its vulnerability. Menenius has put the paradox succinctly:

Consider further,  
That when he speaks not like a citizen,  
You find him like a soldier;  
(III, iii, 52-54)

If the patricians had been able to realize that his qualities as a soldier did not make Coriolanus an adequate citizen, and if the commons had realized that his inadequacies as a citizen did not nullify his qualities as a soldier, the banishment could never have occurred.

Menenius' role as peace-maker and controller of unruly passions is not ended with his failure to save Coriolanus from the wrath of Rome. He has still to try to save Rome from the wrath of Coriolanus. His innately pacific and moderate nature we can note in Act IV, Scene ii. Volumnia berates the tribunes, and yet, when Menenius would appear to have little to lose now, he does not join her in railing but attempts to calm her and prevent further conflicts. The tribunes, like Menenius, are circumspect politicians waiting to see how the situation develops before hurling accusations about. Volumnia is not concerned with the state but only with the injustice done to her son. Yet she will shortly have to turn politician as the only person who can save the state, though even then her arguments are largely personal.

In the false confidence of peace in Rome which follows the entente

at Antium, Menenius is still cautious in his behaviour (IV, vi). He is said to have grown "most kind" by the tribunes. He concurs that all's well with Rome but still feels that, if Marcius could have temporized, the state would be better still (IV, vi, 16-17). The shrewdness of this judgement immediately becomes apparent with news of the invasion. The folly of the tribunes in hounding their defender from the city makes the peace of which they are so proud look fragile indeed. But how slender Menenius' knowledge of Marcius really is becomes obvious in his immediate rejection of the news of the new alliance:

This is unlikely.  
He and Aufidius can no more atone  
Than violent'st contrariety.  
(IV, vi, 72-74)

But shortly it becomes apparent to all that Coriolanus is as much a cause of dissension when he is absent from Rome as when he is present.

In this new crisis it is left to the outsider, Aufidius, to sum up in his oft-quoted speech (IV, vii, 28-57) the character which has so baffled Rome. It is a detailed analysis and has often been taken as the key to the character of Coriolanus. It should be remembered, however, that Aufidius makes one mistake common to all those who have had dealings with Marcius - the politician's weakness of believing that he can be manipulated to serve one's own purposes. The patricians believe that they can tutor Marcius to the consulship without endangering the state; the tribunes think that they can oust him from Rome without endangering the state; Aufidius thinks that he can lead him to Rome in order to endanger the state and is as far wide of the mark as the other politicians.

Menenius' initial rejection of the suggestion that he sue for peace before Coriolanus is sound (V, i, 1-7). It almost seems as if the peacemaker

is at last beginning to understand the uncompromising nature of Coriolanus. He will merely reflect on the catastrophe instead of attempting to prevent it. Yet it is characteristic of him that when he yields in accepting the task, he immediately rationalizes his decision (V, i, 47-58). It is a sad moment for Menenius and prepares us for his humiliation. He tries to cheer himself up with the most unlikely suggestions. The earlier embassy had been rejected because Coriolanus' belly was empty! The absurdity of this is enough to make the audience gasp. As if a good breakfast or the lack of it would change such a titanic nature as that of Coriolanus! This is the last pathetic resource of the reasonable man in face of the extraordinarily passionate nature which is beyond his comprehension. It is like humming a song to drown out the noisy threat of an impending tornado. Nowhere in Shakespeare's tragedies is the limitation of reason and the fragility of confidence in it more evident. Here again we see the disparity between the response of the normal man and the nature of the tragic hero.

Menenius, who has never lost confidence in his power to shape Coriolanus' behaviour, receives his defeat and final humiliation in Act V, Scene ii. The man who had once so easily counselled Marcius finds it difficult now to gain even an interview. His power is shrunk to the point where he has to beg with soldiers. He is mocked, called "a decay'd dotant" and dismissed as a nobody. His confidence in his influence and in his powers of reason are amply displayed (V, ii, 57-75). He assumes a certainty where not even a possibility of success exists, and he receives a crushing rebuff. All his behaviour has led up to this scene; he has battled throughout against the inflexibility of Marcius, and at last he becomes a victim of it. In order to save his face before the mocking soldiers Menenius has to resort to mere

railing, a desperate nihilism completely foreign to his former behaviour. After all his strenuous activities he at last announces his disillusion concerning all influence and action. He has striven always to avert catastrophe but now, falling into the vein of Thersites, he consigns the world to its doom:

I neither care for th' world nor your general; for  
 such things as you, I can scarce think there's any,  
 y' are so slight. He that hath a will to die by himself  
 fears it not from another. Let your general do his worst.  
 For you, be that you are, long; and your misery increase  
 with your age! I say to you, as I was said to: Away!  
 (V, ii, 97-102)

Coriolanus' act of rebellion against his own country is unnatural, but the only way that his unnatural behaviour can become clear to him is on a personal level. He says rightly that "colder reasons" cannot prevail with him, but the warmer passion of blood easily subdues him. Coriolanus has never yielded to political reasoning and he does not do so with Volumnia; he yields to a passionate temper which is the equal of his own. Volumnia is the only person in the play who can influence Coriolanus, and on two occasions, simply by threatening to withdraw her approbation and stamp out on him in anger, she prevails with her son. On the first occasion she ensures his banishment, on the second she ensures his death. Her success clinches the logic of the play, for she alone shares Coriolanus' belief in elevating the sense of personal duty above the sense of public duty.

Menenius has already been employed pointedly by Shakespeare for ironical purposes when he denied any possibility of an alliance between Aufidius and Coriolanus (IV, vi) after the audience had already witnessed the entente. The same device is repeated after the scene of Coriolanus' submission to Volumnia. Menenius' confidence in his own belief that Coriolanus will never

yield is set against our prior knowledge. It is ironical that Menenius has at last come to a fuller measure of understanding of Coriolanus and his passionate, singular nature and yet he still makes an error of judgement. He gives an accurate picture of Coriolanus as an engine of destruction with almost god-like power (V, iv, 17-24), but he has not perceived that along with this arrogant invulnerability to reason goes an almost child-like vulnerability to the passionate disapprobation of his mother. At the opening of the play we were told that he fought wars only to please his mother. Coriolanus has indeed throughout eschewed the larger audience, rejecting the praise of generals, soldiers, plebians and patricians alike. For such a singular nature the audience is necessarily very small and must be of like temperament. Throughout the play Marcius is an incompetent actor whether he stands before tribunes or people or patricians. The only audience that he is willing to please is his mother. Menenius knows nothing of such a private theatre; his arena is public and political and he can play whatever part brings most success. Now he has finally come to an understanding of the inflexibility of Marcius and resigns himself to the inevitability of catastrophe. The ruin of the state is finally averted by those forces which he is not equipped to understand. He is a competent politician but he understands the world of Coriolanus' family as little as Coriolanus understands the world of politics.

Menenius is obviously the sagest and shrewdest politician in Rome, and in the normal world he would surely be a success. Yet his career is marked by one blundering judgement after another. Few people would deny that he is the most rational character in the play, and the one most concerned with the stability of the state. But his rationality has one significant blind-spot which is shared by many of Shakespeare's commentators. He believes that all other

people are, or can be persuaded to be, as rational as himself. It is because the commentators are so convinced of the powers of reason that the audience becomes aware of the overwhelming power of passion. The tragic hero lives in the world of illusion but the commentator also lives in illusion in believing reason to be dominant in man. The pity and the terror in Shakespearian tragedy are so overpowering because the powers of reason are shown to be of so little avail. The ineffectiveness of the commentator in averting tragedy yet again brings to our attention the fundamental vulnerability of man's ordered world. By demonstrating the way in which a passionate nature sweeps aside all rational attempts to maintain that sense of order, Shakespeare clearly indicates the cause of man's vulnerability out of which his tragedy is fashioned. At least part of the cause of the fundamental vulnerability of man's ordered world is based on the ineffectiveness of the commentator.

Of all the characters I am examining Menenius is one of the shrewdest and most active, and yet paradoxically he makes more mistakes than any of the others. He taxes his wits to save his society from threats of chaos from all angles. Perhaps the only way he could have ensured peace would have been to block Marcius' candidacy. Instead he becomes his campaign-manager. Thereafter all his actions accidentally frustrate his ultimate purposes and the irony arises whereby the forces of reason are allied to the forces of passion to ensure catastrophe. Coriolanus' friends ensure that he pursues a path alien to him, and he dies, not as a soldier fighting for or against Rome, but as a victim of Aufidius, the basest Machiavellian politician in the play. He is destroyed by the political game which he has never come close to understanding.

## VIII

### ENOBARBUS

In Antony and Cleopatra we find a wide variety of versions and interpretations of each situation which occurs in the tragic destiny of the lovers. There is a total polarity in the atmospheres and values of Rome and Egypt and this gives us from the outset a double system of versions of every event. We watch Antony being torn asunder because he has one foot in each world. As we observe Octavia's submissive behaviour in Antony's presence, we are inevitably reminded of the wiles of Cleopatra; as we watch Antony's indulgence with Cleopatra, we are aware of the threat of the calculating politics of Caesar. To accept only Antony's and Cleopatra's version of their love would be to ignore the catastrophic effect which their relationship has on the world around them. To accept Caesar's version would be to submit ourselves to his passionless realpolitik without giving due weight to some of the admirable qualities which the love undoubtedly possesses. Every character and event in the play responds to the nature of this grand amour; there are constant references to it, versions and parodies of it. Shakespeare has represented, in the geographical locations of the play, that peculiar inside-outside quality of love - the isolation and intense involvement of those inside the affair, the alienation and detachment of those outside it. The imagery, the human relations, the rhetoric, the sense of time, are widely at variance in the two worlds. For the major part of the play only Antony and Enobarbus are exposed to both climates. We attend the more readily to Enobarbus' apparent detachment from both worlds, for he is committed neither

to Antony's fascination with Cleopatra nor to Octavius' political drive.

We are, of course, in the very first scene plunged into the inside-outside version of love which dominates the dramatic method of this play. The division between head and heart in Antony, his desire to be complete within either of the worlds which demand his allegiance, are outlined and played out for the audience in the dual versions of observers and participators. It is Antony's tragedy that he cannot have the best of both worlds, that he cannot find completeness and peace in either. In face of the tauntings of Cleopatra he attempts to identify his home as Egypt:

Here is my space.  
Kingdoms are clay; our dungy earth alike  
Feeds beast as man. The nobleness of life  
Is to do thus,

(I, i, 34-37)

Having thus bent the dimension of space to his imagination he soon does the same with time, "There's not a minute of our lives should stretch / Without some pleasure now", (I, i, 46-47). The lovers are constantly engaged in attempting to bend these unyielding dimensions to their own wills. Cleopatra, based in Egypt, attempts to create a world which will run to the rhythm of their love. Antony wavers between the timeless, languorous inactivity to which he submits in Egypt and the hasty, decisive action required of him as one of the triple pillars of the empire. In the opening scene, Antony strives to find completeness and satisfaction in his love, but the observers, Philo and Demetrius, make the audience aware of the larger sphere of Empire which Antony is forsaking. Whatever we may think of Cleopatra's taunting and of Antony's spectacular declarations of love, we must be aware that there are bystanders who regard the relationship as less than sublime. Jorgensen has noted that there is a long tradition of soldiers in Elizabethan drama protesting the

idleness of their generals in love.<sup>1</sup> Typically, they present an unsympathetic attitude toward the seductress and hope that the conqueror will regain his lost manhood and return to his martial occupation. An audience aware of such a tradition would accept the convention, embodied here in Enobarbus as well as Philo and Demetrius, as typical of relations between general and soldier without jumping to the conclusion that the soldiers are mouthpieces of the author. They approach the love not with any sense of it as a sublime communion but merely as folly of a degrading kind. The triple pillar of the world and the queen of Egypt have been reduced to "strumpet's fool" and "gipsy" in little more than a dozen lines. We are faced at once with the problem which the play explores. Whose Cleopatra is the 'real' Cleopatra - Antony's, Octavius', Enobarbus', Philo's? That will depend on whether the character is inside or outside the affair. Even Antony's attitude in Rome will be different from his attitude in Alexandria. Nandy calls the opening an example of Shakespeare's "dialectical vision" and points out that "the accommodation of two incompatible views results, not in a paralysis of judgement, but in a sharpening of our awareness of the situation".<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Philo's judgement represents a common response in Shakespeare's day to the generally known legend. Shakespeare may have deliberately taken a conventional response as the starting point in his exploration of "what really happened", inviting an audience to find out whether the story was as simple as Philo's disgusted judgement would indicate.

The story as Plutarch presents it, the version most familiar to

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<sup>1</sup>P. A. Jorgensen, "Antony and the Protesting Soldiers: A Renaissance Tradition for the Structure of Antony and Cleopatra", in G. R. Smith, ed., Essays on Shakespeare (London, 1965), pp. 163-181.

<sup>2</sup>Dipak Nandy, "The Realism of Antony and Cleopatra", in Arnold Kettle, ed., Shakespeare in a Changing World (New York, 1964), p. 174.

Elizabethans, is used to exemplify the dangers a man courts by his self-indulgence and his dereliction of duty. Marc Antony with the responsibilities of empire allows his vice to grow until he has pulled the world down in destruction about his ears. The traditional interpretation of the medieval Christian moralists used the story to teach the evils of lust. An embodiment of animal lechery, Cleopatra is associated with the devil and is paired with Antony, a drunken fool damning his soul in response to her temptation. Shakespeare acknowledges these versions of the story in the attitudes of many of his characters without feeling it necessary to commit himself to them.

In the initial exchange between the lovers we find some things which confirm Philo's attitude, but surely we reduce the stature of the characters if we see no more, if we accept this somewhat 'backstairs' version as the whole truth. There is a capaciousness and a reckless total commitment about Antony's hyperbole that is awe-inspiring. We are not asked to admire this love uncritically or melt before Antony's magniloquence, but we gasp before the dangers of those who would be all in all to themselves at the cost of banishing everything else. Throughout the play Antony and Cleopatra deal in superlatives, reckless extremism, as though they could seal themselves off from the world by the completeness of their love. As in so many tragedies of this period it is the magnitude of the folly which hypnotizes us. We are appalled, terrified and yet exhilarated by the implications of such folly let loose in the world. This is not the folly of any gipsy and strumpet's fool; it is a folly which can shake empires. And yet we can see also how those outside the ambiance of this love, those who, living in the everyday world and knowing that it cannot be bent to satisfy one man's will, can have slight regard for such a love, prizing it at no more than the basest practice. Danby

has, I think, described correctly the balance of judgement required:

To have any judgment at all is to choose, apparently, either the judgement of the soldiers at the beginning of the scene or the lovers' own self-assessment that immediately follows it.... To entertain either judgment, however, is not enough. The deliquescent truth is neither in them nor between them, but contains both. Antony and Cleopatra is Shakespeare's critique of judgment.<sup>1</sup>

I am suggesting in this thesis, of course, that Shakespeare presents a critique of judgement in all of his tragedies.

At the end of the scene Philo clearly states a personality problem of central importance to the play:

Sir, sometimes when he is not Antony,  
He comes too short of that great property  
Which still should go with Antony.  
(I, i, 57-59)

This problem of identity is one which troubles Antony throughout. Philo clearly regards the 'real' Antony to be the great general and campaigner, and regards his present behaviour as a betrayal of his true properties. Yet Antony has just staked his identity, his true property, on being the lover of Cleopatra. Demetrius supplies evidence from Rome that the version of Antony current there is that he is estranged from his true self (I, i, 59-61). We have also had Cleopatra's version of an Antony who betrays himself by his submission to Caesar and Fulvia. She sees his concerns with the empire, far from being his true property, to be derelictions of his duty in Egypt. For the rest of his life Antony attempts to establish for himself his own true nature. He is at the mercy of a punishing conflict of roles which for him is not to be reconciled in this life. When he makes his choice of role it will involve death, a death unnecessary in response to the immediate

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<sup>1</sup>John Danby, "The Shakespearean Dialectic: An Aspect of Antony and Cleopatra", Scrutiny, Vol. XVI (1949), p. 201..

situation but inevitable in terms of the total conflict which has plagued him.

Cleopatra and her servants, Octavius, Pompey and Octavia present us with a variety of interpretations of Antony's character and actions and yet we are aware that their self-interest, their prodigal demands on Antony's magnanimity, makes their testimony less than objective and disinterested. The character which an audience must most obviously rely on for a balanced judgement is Enobarbus. He is a plain, blunt soldier who will allow no man to buy his opinion and who will speak his mind in face of all the world. His functions as ironic, knowing observer, oracle of coming and assessor of past and present events, have led many critics to describe him as a chorus. But, as Wilson has observed, his full humanity completely separates him from impersonal pseudo-Senecan choruses with their staid moralizing.<sup>1</sup>

The character of Enobarbus is almost entirely Shakespeare's creation and we must presume, since the dramatist makes so much of him, that he had very specific dramatic functions in mind for him when he conceived his version of the story. There are three references to the character in Plutarch and Shakespeare made use of only one of these:

Furthermore, he dealt very friendeley and curteously with Domitius, and against Cleopatraes mynde. For, he being sicke of an agewe when he went and tooke a little boate to goe to Caesars campe, Antonius was very sorry for it, but yet he sent after him all his caryage, trayne, and men: and the same Domitius, as though he gave him to understand that he<sup>2</sup> repented his open treason, he died immediately after.

In Plutarch the desertion occurs before the Battle of Actium whilst in Shakespeare it is not until after this battle at the end of Act III that

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<sup>1</sup>E. C. Wilson, "Shakespeare's Enobarbus", in J. G. McManaway, G. E. Dawson, E. E. Willoughby, eds., J. Q. Adams: Memorial Studies (Washington, 1948), pp. 407-408.

<sup>2</sup>Geoffrey Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, Vol. V, (London, 1964), p. 298.

Enobarbus chooses to forsake his general, dying thereafter not of an ague but of a broken heart.

In none of the other sources and analogues is there a comparable figure. In Garnier's The Tragedie of Antonie, done into English by the Countess of Pembroke in 1595, we find Lucilius as a friend of Antony. The play which alternates slabs of rhetorical observations does not delineate character in detail. Lucilius, after the Senecan fashion, utters wise saws and exchanges conventional remarks with Antonie on the nature of fortune. He provides in no way an alternative version of events since the two characters simply echo and re-echo each other's thoughts. The idea of having a secondary character of Antony's camp but not of Antony's mind is, it would seem, entirely Shakespeare's. As the only significant observer of events in both Rome and Egypt, Enobarbus' role as a commentator is comprehensive. As an intermediary figure who loves Antony, he provides a contrast to Cleopatra's hunger for Antony, and Caesar's political need of him. His independence from Antony provides a contrast to the sycophantic, submissive and frequently frivolous entourage which surrounds Cleopatra. Amid the mercurial moods and temperaments of those around him he stands out like a rock of assurance to which the audience is instinctively drawn. When that rock finally crumbles, the import of the event will be a very significant part of the meaning which Shakespeare wishes to convey to his audience.

Our first encounter with Enobarbus comes in Act I, Scene ii, a scene which initially seems to concern itself with a low-keyed version of those endless discussions of fortune so familiar in plays of the Senecan fashion. The scene seems almost to be a parody of those traditional discussions, but this backstairs chatter, revolving around sexual allusions, interpreting fortune entirely in terms of sexual fulfillment or frustration, is really a calculated

reflection of the main story, where any audience knows that sexual attraction and destiny will be inextricably bound together. However frivolous the behaviour, the presence of the soothsayer adds an air of portentous inevitability to the story. The oracular predictions of Enobarbus later in the play are an important element in maintaining this atmosphere. It is significant that Enobarbus has little to do with the frivolity of the Egyptian group in this scene. His talk can be light and bawdy but it always has a sharper bite and a more immediate direction than the aimless prattle here. His one contribution is a characteristic down-to-earth reduction of the airy fantasies which the women are weaving: "Mine, and most of our fortunes, to-night, shall be - drunk to bed", (I, ii, 44).

In Cleopatra's presence Antony is constantly avoiding those facts which remind him of his truancy from Rome. Cleopatra, of course, is one who would rather hear flattering lies than unfavourable truths. She can disguise facts until they are unrecognizable. In her presence Antony is incapable of fixing his attention on the facts which should stir him to action. When he is by himself he is hungry for the truth in order to steel his determination to leave Egypt:

O, then we bring forth weeds  
When our quick minds lie still, and our ill told us  
Is as our earing.

(I, ii, 106-108)

In this scene the messengers present the news from Rome which will pull Antony thither, but it is Enobarbus who interprets the frantic response from Cleopatra which this news will release. His behaviour in this scene is laconic, even cynical at times. He greets Antony's determination to escape from Egypt with no special enthusiasm. He will await the event. This love affair is after all so mercurial, lived so much from day to day, that anything might

happen. As Demetrius had said at the end of the first scene, "I will hope / Of better deeds tomorrow", (I, i, 61-62). Enobarbus knows the lovers well and prophesies the coming storm which the intended departure will produce. He knows that under the aegis of Cleopatra it is easier to make resolutions than to carry them out.

The blunt soldier's prescience is designed almost as a warning to Antony in a manner reminiscent of the Fool's warning to Lear concerning the reception he will receive from his daughters. This soldier's truth-telling and oracular insight often remind us of the practices of a court-fool. Enobarbus has the freedom to travel and to fight, and a status which gains him admittance to councils, a privilege which would not be so readily permitted to an allowed fool. But his kinship with the most professional of truth-speakers is an important component in the audience's response to him. His speeches are filled with sexual allusions, puns and quibbles. He has a delight in language, especially in picking up words to reveal a sexual meaning:

Ant. The business she hath broached in the state  
Cannot endure my absence.

Eno. And the business you have broach'd here cannot be without you; especially that of Cleopatra's, which wholly depends on your abode.

(I, ii, 165-169)

Enobarbus revels in satirical mockery. To Antony's, "Would I had never seen her!" (I, ii, 147) he replies with a devastating reduction of grand events to everyday reality:

O sir, you had then left unseen a wonderful piece of work, which not to have been blest withal would have discredited your travel.

(I, ii, 148-150)

He thus reduces this passionate entanglement to the level of a tourist visiting monuments with which he can boast of familiarity on his return home.

In response to the news of Fulvia's death Enobarbus evinces no false

sentiment. His cynical brusqueness accurately reflects Antony's lack of regret. His comment is characteristic of the Fool in the way in which it fastens on a particular event in order to make a general observation on man's situation in homely metaphor:

Why, sir, give the gods a thankful sacrifice. When it pleaseth their deities to take the wife of a man from him, it shows to man the tailors of the earth; comforting therein that when old robes are worn out there are members to make new.

(I, ii, 156-160)

The speech of Lear's Fool is full of such observations and of that epigrammatic cutting to the nub of the matter, to the blatant reality of a situation, which we find Enobarbus employing here:

... your old smock brings forth a new petticoat; and indeed the tears live in an onion that should water this sorrow.

(I, ii, 162-164)

The indirect nature of the communication lends a peculiar quality to the structure of the entire interlude. Antony makes a series of statements upon which Enobarbus embroiders witty observations and interpretations. There is almost an air of a comedy routine in which Antony acts as 'feed' or 'straight-man' to spark off his friend's elaborate jests. Antony's statements are terse and peremptory, and at no point does he respond directly or comment on Enobarbus' observations until he finally shuts him up. Indeed he constantly turns to new matter, or reiterates his determination to depart, in interrupting the flow of Enobarbus' jests, as though he would avoid or shut out their implication. That Antony is galled by Enobarbus' persistence in presenting the kind of unsavoury facts which must be very much in the forefront of his own mind is clear from his final reprimand, "No more light answers", (I, ii, 170). Light the answers may be, but they are very much to the point, as Antony

knows, for he has himself spoken earlier of his "Egyptian fetters" and "this enchanting queen". His silencing of Enobarbus here reminds us of the much more powerful responses of Lear to the incessant goading of a Fool who voices his own inner fears, "Take heed, sirrah; the whip".

Before we next encounter Enobarbus we tour the Mediterranean to hear a variety of responses to Antony's behaviour. In Rome we observe Caesar's anger at Antony's bondage in Egypt; in Alexandria we observe the emptiness of Cleopatra's world once she is abandoned by Antony; in Messina we have a summing up of Antony's dual allegiance in Pompey's initial joy at his truancy in Egypt, and in his attempts to make the best of the news of Antony's recent return to Rome. We are aware of Antony's decisive influence and his indispensability, whether by presence or absence, to a variety of people. No sphere seems to be complete without Antony, and Antony can find completeness in no sphere.

Enobarbus is used in Act II, Scene ii, to reinforce this antithesis. In the two interludes, which enclose the quarrel and reconciliation of Antony and Caesar, he reinforces the status of Antony's generalship, but also graphically describes the forces which are undermining Antony. We have seen the blunt soldier detached and mocking, and we shall see him so again, but we must remember that he does not function only in the office of observer and commentator. In this scene we see signs of that conflicting pull of allegiances which will eventually bring his downfall. We may tend too easily to identify Enobarbus as the voice of reason, but this scene indicates that he is not completely detached from the passionate excesses of the world around him.

We find Lepidus attempting to enlist his aid in checking Antony's temper in order that the ensuing confrontation may not be as stormy as everyone

anticipates. Enobarbus refuses to bend to the necessity of the time. His loyalty to Antony here indicates that he is not uninfluenced by the heated passions which have been generated:

I shall entreat him  
To answer like himself. If Caesar move him,  
Let Antony look over Caesar's head  
And speak as loud as Mars. By Jupiter,  
Were I the wearer of Antonius' beard,  
I would not shav't to-day.

(II, ii, 3-8)

The soldier's touchy sense of honour will brook no slighting of his general and he will have none of Lepidus' cautioning against the dangers of "private stomaching". His stubbornness draws from Lepidus the reproach that his attitude lacks reason, the quality with which critics so readily identify Enobarbus, "Your speech is passion; / But pray you stir no embers up", (II, ii, 12-13). Thus Lepidus, who has asked Enobarbus to check Antony, now has to caution him against starting any trouble on his own initiative.

The straightforward function of this introduction, of course, is to heighten the tension in anticipation of the edgy, fractious behaviour in the scene to come. We are about to face serious condemnation of Antony, but Shakespeare neatly reminds us that Antony does not stand isolated. If we are aware of the detailed care of Shakespeare's art, we read the cue correctly and weigh Caesar's condemnation against the loyalty of Enobarbus whom we are aware is no sycophantic lackey of his master.

In the ensuing debate, which underneath its diplomatic surface is constantly in danger of becoming a judicial inquiry into Antony's behaviour, Enobarbus returns to his role as laconic commentator. His brief remarks appear on the surface to be designed to decrease the tension, but they also pour scorn on the whole proceedings. His remarks are prophetic and they demonstrate his awareness of the hollowness behind the temporary diplomacy of amity (II,

ii, 101-110). Antony rebukes him because the sting of truth resides in his observations, thus forcing Enobarbus into the habit of the truth-speaking jester:

Eno. That truth should be silent I had almost forgot.  
Ant. You wrong this presence; therefore speak no more.  
Eno. Go to, then - your considerate stone!

(II, ii, 112-114)

The infirmity of Antony's purpose ensures the impermanence of any arrangements which he makes. He will shuttle back and forth over the widening gulf of his allegiances until he is no longer able to bridge it. Enobarbus has already discovered this truth about his general's indecisive nature which it takes Antony the rest of his life to learn. The infirmity of Antony's purpose is discussed by the soldiers in greater detail at the end of the scene.

Because it is so often set aside as a purple passage the superbly functional nature of the description of the meeting on the Cydnus has often been overlooked. Coming as it does immediately following Antony's departure to 'despatch' the business of his marriage to Octavia, it re-emphasizes the precarious nature of the newly-forged bond between two of the triple pillars of the world. It raises that mesmerizing head of the serpent of old Nile; it brings the languorous atmosphere and the sensual luxuriance of Egypt into the cold expedient bustle of Roman politics. The atmosphere of one world is constantly intruding on the atmosphere of the other in this play. The impression is cleverly reinforced here in the central descriptive passage (II, ii, 194-222), as has often been observed, by the shifting of the verbs from past to present as the description progresses. It is as though the memory of the moment is so vivid that Cleopatra seems to be sailing at this moment right into Rome.

The description is not out of character coming from Enobarbus, because his speech is throughout prodigally endowed with a full-blooded

enjoyment and use of language to catch sensual nuances. We must note that though he reports as an observer, he aspires to no role of detachment. It is as though the spirit of Cleopatra has momentarily captivated Enobarbus and through him enchants Maecenas and Agrippa. This testimony is very important in our balancing of the versions of the love affair. If Cleopatra can thus charm the blunt soldier, and by report draw admiration from Romans close to the heart of Caesar, then we can see the intended contrast to Octavius' cold contempt. The respect, of course, is for the flesh in a characteristic soldierly fashion, but its dominant tone is far above Iago's description of Othello's boarding his land-carrack. Octavius Caesar and Sextus Pompeius may regard Cleopatra as a whore, but Antony is clearly not alone in appreciating her qualities.

The imagery, the atmosphere and harmony of the Cydnus' meeting is absolutely at odds with the jarring dissonance of the previous scene. The implied depth and fullness of the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra is deliberately juxtaposed to the shallow and shabby compromise just achieved. We can see that the atmospheres of Rome and Egypt are fatally incompatible. Enobarbus' famous eulogy, oracular in its ominous significance, presses that point home (II, ii, 238-254). It is not a speech which commits Enobarbus to unquestioned support of Antony's folly; it merely states the inevitable assumption of one who knows the lovers thoroughly. The speech is not, however, as it is often described, simply a choric comment. It yields just tribute to and admiration for Cleopatra's fatal qualities from one who is becoming increasingly aware of the tragic conflict in which his master is entangled. But Enobarbus' insight has not yet brought him to an understanding of the conflict in which he will find himself embroiled.

The description also serves to emphasize the special quality of Enobarbus as a link between the two worlds. He is the only person, outside of Antony, who is obviously not debarred from making such disclosures, who can interpret the mystery of Egypt to those who have been denied experience of the wonder. However soaring the rhetoric and awesome the aura created, the speech does savour, it must be confessed, of the kind of exotic descriptions of foreign wonders which soldiers habitually use on their return home in making the mouths of fellow officers water. But if there are echoes of that mode then it is the supreme example of its kind.

In taking us back to the beginning of the affair, to an event which occurred before the point at which the play opened, this description returns us to a magically uncomplicated moment which stands violently in contrast with the interwoven intrigue and probable results of the diplomatic solution just initiated. In the next scene (II, iii) we are obviously meant to look back from that brief, hurried parody of a marriage between Octavia and Antony, where we hear only of their separation necessitated by Antony's duty, to this extraordinarily rich and elaborate ritual of the first meeting between Antony and Cleopatra. As Enobarbus makes the speech it acts almost as a spell or incantation which withers the bloom of Antony's new marriage at the moment of its inception. We are reminded by this description of the last words which we heard pass between Antony and Cleopatra. The words ring ominously in our memory in view of the new complications to which Antony is committing himself here:

Our separation so abides and flies  
 That thou, residing here, goes yet with me,  
 And I, hence fleeting, here remain with thee.  
 (I, iii, 102-104)

The genuine harmony of the Cydnus meeting makes us aware that an underlying

dissonance is growing beyond anybody's capacity to still it. There is no hope of a return to that sublime harmony until the end of the play when Cleopatra is "again for Cydnus", (V, ii, 227).

It is significant that Shakespeare is at constant pains to reinforce Enobarbus' status, worth and reputation. Maecenas and Agrippa show special regard for him. Menas demonstrates admiration for his former deeds (II, vi). Pompey, too, makes a point of welcoming him, and yields tribute to his special quality of plain-speaking (II, vi, 71-80). Enobarbus' reputation is above the squabbles of faction and he draws praise impartially from all. On almost every occasion that he appears he is sued to for his opinions. His continuous stream of prophetic remarks (as at II, vi, 116-127) indicates that he alone seems to recognize the true nature of his world.

Shakespeare makes great use of the insight of the commenting figure in his tragedies, but while he is exhibiting the valuable nature of their observations he must also be preparing his audience for the ultimate entanglement of such figures in the tragic web of fate. Lest the universal admiration of the characters in the play for Enobarbus encourage us to believe him to be above human folly, he is made to join wholeheartedly in the degrading revels on Pompey's galley. In a scene which obviously satirizes the political world outside Egypt, in which the three pillars of the world are reduced to drunken stupor, we might expect that a commentator would have many laconic observations to make. But as Caesar notes, "Strong Enobarb / Is weaker than the wine", (II, vii, 120-121). The only commentary we hear comes from the two serving men at the beginning; thereafter the scene speaks for itself. Enobarbus appoints himself as unofficial master of the revels. He may in a short while (III, ii) have satirical remarks to make about Caesar, Antony

and Lepidus impartially to indicate that he is not taken in by their professions of amity, but on board the galley he is at one with them in their excesses. Anyone who would too readily deny consistency to Shakespeare's characters should note the way in which the dramatist carefully prepares the ground for their ultimate development. There is a danger in producing an all-seeing commentator that he will remain so far above events that he can never be convincingly involved in them. Enobarbus' knowledge, we are constantly reminded, does not possess the omniscience of divinity: like the insight of all of Shakespeare's commentators, it is flawed by human weakness.

Until Act III, Scene vii, Enobarbus has not come directly into conflict with his superiors. He has stated his admiration and support for his general, he has prophesied his future, he has made fun of him, and he has joined in his revels, but there has been no serious division of opinion between the two. Enobarbus knows how this world goes and can afford to observe it without any diminution in his loyalty to Antony. Such detachment can exist only in a slack current before the flow of events speeds up in the turbulent stream of disorder produced by tragedy. In tragedy many characters have to make a choice concerning their personal destinies. The extreme pressure of tragic events demands involvement and eliminates the possibility of detachment. Marion Smith notes how many characters in this play face a choice between alternative courses, and how difficult it is to choose correctly with the aid of reason alone:

... Pompey must choose between personal integrity (or, if we are less charitable, reputation) and personal ambition, Caesar between the pursuit of power he believes necessary for the peace of the Roman world and loyalty to his pledged word. That the less important character makes what seems the nobler if less expedient choice leads the audience to judge Caesar in part by Pompey. Menas and Enobarbus must choose between fidelity and what they regard as commonsense, and the different ways in

which they come to similar conclusions give us more sympathy for Enobarbus than we might otherwise have had. Ventidius must choose between honour for Rome's sake and prudence for his own, and his choice tells us something about Rome and about Antony. Dolabella must choose between loyalty and truth, Eros between obedience and devotion, and from their choices we learn as much about Caesar, Cleopatra and Antony as about Dolabella and Eros. These are inescapable choices, without possibility of compromise. Circumstances preclude the middle way, and, for all the tricks she plays later in order to call "great Caesar, ass unpolicied", even the pastmistress of vacillation, Cleopatra, comes in the end to realize that this is the heart of the matter:

Ant: Of Caesar seek your honour, with your safety. O!

Cleo: They do not go together.

(IV, xv, 46-7)

"The stars irreconcilable" so divide not only men but values that they cannot "stall together in the whole world".<sup>1</sup>

The problem of choice is clearly a major theme of the entire tragedy. The dilemma in which Enobarbus finds himself is particularly important, for, being a normal man, he serves to some degree as the representative of the audience. We might expect him to escape this conflict of choices because of his apparent detachment. The audience the more readily understands the all-involving nature of tragedy when Enobarbus, who has observed so accurately the problems of his world, finds himself facing an inescapable dilemma.

It is in Act III, Scene vii, that the current of events starts to move so rapidly that Enobarbus begins to feel it tugging at his own destiny. For the first time he comes into open conflict with both Antony and Cleopatra. X His advice to Cleopatra to stay at home and to Antony not to wage battle by sea lacks his usual air of bantering detachment, though it is characteristically prophetic. His advice now savours of serious concern for the welfare of his

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<sup>1</sup>M. B. Smith, Dualities in Shakespeare (Toronto, 1966), pp. 192-193.

general and for the side on which he himself stands. There is a new urgency and directness about his speech. The last bastion of his faith, the supremacy of Antony's generalship, is beginning to crumble in the all-encompassing sweep of folly. It is significant, too, that Enobarbus is no longer alone in his role as prophet. Canidius and a common soldier seek to dissuade the general from his rash course. Enobarbus' role as sole commentator begins to disappear appropriately at the moment when his destiny begins to be inextricably tangled with the gathering pace of events. If hitherto we have looked to him for our information, in Act III, Scene x, we find information and criticism coming from another source. By transmitting the news of the shameful defeat at Actium through Scarus, Shakespeare is able to present a much more savage condemnation of the behaviour of Antony and Cleopatra than we could yet expect from Enobarbus, though he has accurately foreseen the debacle. Responses to the catastrophe are neatly differentiated, and Enobarbus' loyalty is emphasized. We are at a point where men have to unite their destinies with their general's or sever their ties by desertion. There is a clear sense in this scene that loyalty obviously involves the danger of death. Enobarbus makes it clear that his loyalty is not automatic and unquestioning:

I'll yet follow  
The wounded chance of Antony, though my reason  
Sits in the wind against me.

(III, x, 35-37)

He is rapidly approaching that fork in the path of his destiny where the dictates of the heart cannot be reconciled with the dictates of the mind. In a world of folly and violent passion Enobarbus has been singled out as a voice of reason but with a haphazardness that prepares us for the coming conflict. In a normal world we might say that his statement here signifies his capitulation

to the folly around him. But the world of tragedy is not a normal world, and we have to balance his loyalty against the desertion of Scarus and Canidius. The situation has reached such a pass that it is difficult to act honourably and reasonably at the same time. Normal responses and 'correct' moral choices are set upon the wrack of complicated tragic circumstances. Enobarbus finds himself at the node of a series of conflicting obligations where passion, reason, folly, honour, loyalty and treachery become inextricably confused. The conflicting nature of his roles, of loyalty to his master or self-preservation, admits no satisfactory solution. In cleaving to his master he has to ignore the promptings of reason and embrace folly in order to maintain his loyalty and honour. If he responds to his reason, resists the folly of his master and saves himself, he will be acting treacherously and dishonourably. The situation demands commitment and action, and at such a point rational reflection from the sidelines is not only useless but impossible.

In Act III, Scene xiii, Enobarbus' function is clearly in process of change. His ironic commentary continues as a disturbing ground-bass reflecting on the oscillating moods of Antony's temper. His commentary now, though still based on a reasonable assessment of the situation, is almost entirely personal. In his initial exchange with Cleopatra he makes it clear that his faith in Antony's generalship is broken, since he lays blame for the catastrophe of Actium entirely on him. Thereafter all but one of his speeches, as directed correctly, I think, by Capell, are 'asides' leading up to a final soliloquy. His role as public commentator is gone. Like Lear's rage on the heath, Antony's temper has little time to pause for the adjurations of a truth-teller. Nor are Enobarbus' comments any longer spoken aloud for all to hear, since he is now fully absorbed in temporizing

with his own safety. With infinite care Shakespeare documents the way in which Enobarbus separates his own destiny from that of his general. The drunker Antony becomes with his own passionate bravado, the soberer Enobarbus becomes in his rational response to it. Antony wildly builds himself up to determine on one final throw. Cleopatra wavers treacherously towards Caesar. In Plutarch, Enobarbus had defected before Actium but Shakespeare delays his departure and enlarges its significance by demonstrating the pressure which such an impossible situation puts on a normal, reasonable and loyal man. Although many people are destroyed by the folly of Antony and Cleopatra, it is through the conflict in Enobarbus that the audience most clearly apprehends the difficulty of dissociating oneself from such folly when it is set loose in the world. The commentator who has judged the folly of others is brought to a position where he too has only a choice of follies.

In response to Antony's wild offer to fight Caesar in single combat, Enobarbus makes a crucial observation which states succinctly a view on which I have suggested Shakespeare based his tragic method:

I see men's judgments are  
A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward  
Do draw the inward quality after them,  
To suffer all alike.

(III, xiii, 31-34)

This exactly describes the relativity of judgement, the proliferating versions of events, which mark the structure of Shakespeare's tragedies. The commentators are the most outstanding example of how this observation is illustrated in the plays. Enobarbus' judgement by the end of this scene will be a parcel of his fortunes. His observations are no longer rationally detached; they reflect his own involvement in the events. The nature of the conflict in his mind is clear when he acknowledges the absurdity of folly and yet seeks momentarily to

embrace it:

Mine honesty and I begin to square.  
The loyalty well held to fools does make  
Our faith mere folly. Yet he that can endure  
To follow with allegiance a fall'n lord  
Does conquer him that did his master conquer,  
And earns a place i' th' story.

(III, xiii, 41-46)

We are aware of the ambiguous nature of the word 'honesty' here, for though it may be honest to be loyal, is it also honest to support and encourage folly? Another commentator has been brought to the point where action and reflection do not square. His speech may still be characteristically in the mode of generalized, homely metaphor, but its significance is now entirely personal:

'Tis better playing with a lion's whelp  
Than with an old one dying.

(III, xiii, 94-95)

It is Antony's final desperate fling to fight against all odds which hardens Enobarbus' resolve. We might have expected his faith to revive when Antony determines to fight the land war he had urged on him. But Antony's bravado is now a species of hubris, an attempt to do the impossible:

Now he'll outstare the lightning. To be furious  
Is to be frightened out of fear, and in that mood  
The dove will peck the estridge; and I see still  
A diminution in our captain's brain  
Restores his heart. When valour preys on reason,  
It eats the sword it fights with. I will seek  
Some way to leave him.

(III, xiii, 195-201)

Having witnessed Antony's behaviour we acknowledge the justice of this observation; it is a speech characteristic of a truth-teller. But there is a sense in which we are beyond truth-telling, for we have to balance Antony's foolhardiness against Enobarbus' treachery. Desertion is not an action that has been admired by any society, and is a capital crime in all armies. Enobarbus, caught in a conflict between his head and his heart, has made his choice. The

audience is inevitably caught in a similar dilemma. We admit the correctness of his reasons but we are involved in an emotional reaction against his desertion. The judgement which he makes in the speech on Antony quoted above can be reversed to apply to himself. It is the enlargement in Enobarbus' brain which has produced a diminution in his heart; his reason has preyed on his valour. Is he wrong in abandoning Antony? Our emotions cry out 'yes'. Would he be sensible if he cleaved to Antony? Our reason cries out 'no'. Is reasonable desertion morally right and foolish loyalty morally wrong? If Shakespeare wished us to make a simple judgement for or against Enobarbus he would not have exposed us to the full complications of a tragic situation.

We are made to see, in what remains of Enobarbus' part, that though his head causes him to desert it cannot ultimately conquer the loyalty of his heart. Antony is as magnanimous a general as any soldier could wish for. We are aware in Act IV, Scene ii, in face of Antony's splendid declaration of fellowship and trust, of the treachery and deceitful behaviour of Enobarbus. The commentator is muted here and his old function gone. Remarkably his function becomes the polar opposite of his former role. Whilst he was loyal to Antony he had the right to mock the folly of his general. Having abandoned his general he now serves to highlight all his graces and virtues. Antony's magnanimity in sending on Enobarbus' treasure despite his desertion (IV, v), is designed to emphasize that power of love which can conquer the promptings of the mind, a power which Enobarbus had ignored in his desertion.

After the catastrophe of Actium, Antony's character is rehabilitated from the low esteem into which it has fallen. The desertion of Enobarbus enables Shakespeare to demonstrate by contrast those pre-eminent qualities of his tragic hero which shine forth the more brightly when his fortunes are

at their lowest ebb. Antony's camp exhibits friendship, affection, love and oscillating passions in contrast to the cold logic, the machine like efficiency and calculating reason dominant in Caesar's camp. The momentary dominance of reason in Enobarbus carries him to Caesar's camp, but as soon as we see him there (IV, vi) we feel he is out of place, and he immediately feels himself to be so, as Nandy has noted:

Enobarbus changes masters and clearly expects some gain for it. Yet this is where he is most deeply disillusioned. Enobarbus has been throughout the play the source of what one might call critical realism: he is that in person. But he is not attuned to the amoral cynical realism of the Roman world. He has forgotten the proverb about turncoats. In Caesar's world, turncoat once, turncoat always, and Caesar has no use for him, as he has no use for Alexas, Canidius, and the rest of the time-servers. And what awakens Enobarbus to a realization of this fatal lapse in his 'reasoning' is the treasure that Antony sends after him. That generosity cannot really be justified in terms of 'reason'; it is nearer allied to the spontaneous and extravagant bounty that characterizes the Egyptian pole. Critical realism must still be humane, and it is nearer to the human, if illogical, generosity of Antony, than to the cold, calculating policy of Caesar.<sup>1</sup>

Enobarbus' dilemma is one central to the play. To embrace the folly of Antony and Cleopatra is to bring disorder and catastrophe to the world; but to yield to the political, passionless order of Caesar is to abandon many of the real qualities of friendship, loyalty and love which make life worth living. Enobarbus' fate indicates the hollowness of policy and its stratagems. Undervaluing his affection for Antony, Enobarbus' reason does not save him from death.

Enobarbus, a truth-teller, a man who knows the ways of the world, a plain-dealer, dies ultimately because he has dealt deviously, has not

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<sup>1</sup>Dipak Nandy, "The Realism of Antony and Cleopatra", in Arnold Kettle, ed., Shakespeare in a Changing World (New York, 1964), pp. 185-186.

understood himself and his own passions. Starting out as man who clearly distinguishes his identity by his honesty, he ends up as a man ashamed of his loss of identity through his own dishonesty:

O sovereign mistress of true melancholy,  
The poisonous damp of night disponge upon me,  
That life, a very rebel to my will,  
May hang no longer on me.

(IV, ix, 12-15)

Those members of an audience who, in their detachment, too readily make simple moral judgements, and who are eager to proclaim the supremacy of the rational man in a tragic world of passionate folly, are surely invited by Shakespeare to consider the fate of Enobarbus with some care.

## IX

### HORATIO

Horatio, it has been said, "Should be regarded as the ideal commentator, like the similar characters in Jonson's plays, Cordatus, Crites, Horace: he is reason expressing reasonable judgment on the action".<sup>1</sup> In fact Horatio does not supply a great deal of verbal commentary on the action and yet his presence, in a sense, itself acts as a comment. It is not so much what Horatio does which wins attention but what he is. Schoff has said of him:

... judged by his speech and actions, it remains true that Horatio is very nearly a nobody. It is only through Hamlet that we feel that his presence on stage supplies Hamlet with one decent and loyal associate in the mad and rotten world in which he finds himself: one person on whose reports or testimony he can rely; one person to whom he can speak openly and freely. Otherwise, Horatio would remain for the audience merely a "messenger", a "Nuncio".<sup>2</sup>

This relationship between hero and companion in Hamlet is one of the best examples of Shakespeare's sense of human differentiation in creating character. The nature of the plot in this play makes it inevitable that they are differentiated in their responses to the events occurring around them, but this does not undermine their sympathetic understanding, the respect of each for

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<sup>1</sup>J. V. Cunningham, Woe or Wonder: The Emotional Effect of Shakespearean Tragedy (Denver, 1951), p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>F. G. Schoff, "Horatio: a Shakespearean Confidant", SQ, VII (1956), p. 55.

the independence of the other.

The nature of the revenge theme, as it is interpreted by Shakespeare, ensures many modifications of the commentator's role which are not required or not possible in the other tragedies. Enobarbus, Menenius, the Fool, Thersites, Apemantus, set themselves apart from the folly of the world in which they live and offer a moderating influence in the hope of maintaining either a stable world or some sense of detachment for themselves. In Hamlet, however, the corruption which threatens the stability of the world has been established before the opening of the play. Lear divides his own kingdom, Coriolanus clings to his proud bearing, Timon to his misanthropy, and Antony to his "Egyptian dish". These heroes initiate the actions which lead to tragedy; they are active agents in their own destruction as their companions attempt to make clear. Admittedly Hamlet compounds his own problems but his fate is initially imposed from outside. The problems with which he grapples, the truth of the ghost's testimony and the guilt of Claudius are not figments of his own imagination or chimeras resulting from his own folly, as the sympathetic support of Horatio makes clear. The commentator in this play is inevitably more detached than many of the characters I have examined because of the peculiarly personal and isolating responsibility which the revenge code imposes. One of the fundamental features of Shakespeare's tragedies, the complicated experience of the tragic heroes which separates them from detached commentators responding conceptually to their problems, is presented in an extreme form in Hamlet.

The task of revenge is a lonely and personal one and this is emphasized by the presence of Horatio who, with all the sympathy in the world to offer, can aid his friend only marginally. The imperatives of the revenge code forbid Horatio's interference; his objectivity must be sympathetic rather than critical.

He offers some criticism but of a kind which will aid Hamlet in the pursuit of his plan instead of diverting him from it. He cannot criticize Hamlet for pursuing the task imposed by the Ghost since it was he who brought Hamlet to the Ghost to seek out its significance. He cannot encourage Hamlet to sweep to his revenge since that would be folly considering the ambiguity of the Ghost's testimony. He cannot advise Hamlet to avoid revenge since he is as convinced as his friend that the task cannot be avoided. He cannot exhibit any superior wisdom in wrestling with the ethics of the revenge code for the substance of the play is the exploration of that very problem by a brilliant and subtle intellect. Horatio can, of course, offer the image of a normal, stable and reasonable man, but even in that function he cannot be used as a simple contrast to the hero. For Hamlet, in his essence, is normality at its best burdened with an abnormal and tragic task. We see flashes of his graceful and attractive nature throughout, especially in his relationship with Horatio. Many of the qualities which I have associated with the commentator are in this play to be found in the hero. He is witty, given occasionally to sexual innuendo, enjoys puncturing grandiose rhetoric, indulges in word-quibbling, has an astute insight into the nature of his world. Often we find him attempting a detached observation of himself and the world around him. He is loyal to his true friend and fundamentally out of tune with the new world of Machiavellian action, though his task forces him to the secrecy of intrigue. Hamlet combines, therefore, to some extent, the role of commentator and hero. At one moment he acts on sudden, passionate impulses and at another he attempts detached observation of himself. He acts and is the critic of his own action. It is because Hamlet's role is so comprehensive that the role of his companion is so muted. Horatio offers footnotes to the hero's development

instead of fulfilling a critical function or offering an alternative version of events to the audience. It would have been difficult to transmit the complicated nature of events without Horatio as an audience within the play. Because he alone shares Hamlet's knowledge the audience is better able to appreciate the singularly heavy and lonely task thrust upon Hamlet.

His function at the opening of the play is very important. We are faced initially with a rapid and confusing interchange between soldiers on guard, soldiers bawling into the dark uncertain of each other's identity. It is important that this uncertainty, this groping for identity, this sense of fear, is established at the outset. For much of the play Hamlet attempts to reach certainty concerning the testimony of the ghost; everyone else attempts to reach certainty in divining the causes of Hamlet's antic disposition. The uncertainty is compounded by Horatio's, "What, has this thing appear'd again to-night?" (I, i, 21). The fact that the 'thing' turns out to be an apparition is calculated to cast the Elizabethan audience adrift, because of the variety of views on the subject, on the boundless seas of uncertainty. We have two people who have seen it and one who has not and who, moreover, does not believe in its existence. Horatio is like a naive subject in an experiment, he is a test-case and is established at once as a kind of representative of the audience. If we can see one of the characters on the stage in uncertainty then as he becomes convinced of the existence of the ghost a like conviction is induced in ourselves. Horatio being sceptic and scholar acts as a kind of guarantor of the ghost's presence:

Before my God, I might not this believe  
Without the sensible and true avouch  
Of mine own eyes.

(I, i, 56-58)

When ghosts appear they have to be explained. Throughout the first

movement of the play, until indeed the establishment of Claudius' guilt, we are much concerned with attempts to divine the true nature of the ghost and what it portends. Horatio's initial response establishes his normality, for his explanation is conventional and commonplace. He provides us with a great deal of historical information (I, i, 79-111) interpreting the ghost as a herald and portent of troubled times. Later on in the play when we look back to this opening scene we may wonder why on earth Shakespeare chose to present through Horatio this huge speech of expository information which turns out to be concerned with matter peripheral to the major events of the play. Shakespeare never fails to shadow in the larger political framework in which his characters exist in tragedy. We are aware throughout of a larger political arena within which the struggle of Hamlet and Claudius takes place. We have ambassadors to Norway, Fortinbras' army, the mission to England, Laertes' intrusion at the head of a mob, Fortinbras' return, all of which remind us of the world outside Hamlet's lonely task. But one cannot help, in retrospect, regarding Horatio's explanation of the ghost as something of a deliberate 'blind', Shakespeare's method of throwing us off the scent to surprise us later. It is, of course, possible that to an audience familiar with an older dramatic version of the story Horatio's explanation would appear ironically to be wide of the mark. Horatio's interpretation is eminently reasonable; it is a sort of public explanation wildly at odds with the private explanation which is revealed to Hamlet. There are, of course, more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in Horatio's philosophy. At the outset Horatio seeks to relate the ghost's presence to the action of Fortinbras. At the end of the play he attempts to explain to Fortinbras the result of the ghost's appearance which was wide of any connection with the Norwegian, who now accidentally and ironically can stumble into his profit. Surely one of the ironical facts

about the revenge theme is that the hot-head Fortinbras, of whom we have heard only that he has sharked up a list of lawless resolute and that he has tramped off to Poland to dispute a worthless plot of land, should thus accidentally complete his revenge. The opportunist inherits where Hamlet, the epitome of all that is not hot-headed opportunism, lies dead. The theme of revenge thus ironically comes full circle from Horatio's initial explanation of the ghost's appearance. This explanation, so simple and straightforward, does not correspond to the complicated nature of the tragic world which is revealed to us. The exasperating silence of the ghost inevitably leads the characters to speculation; we have guesses at its significance, we have talk of the habits of ghosts, but by the end of the scene we are no nearer to the mystery. Horatio leads us into the play and he leads us to the hero for whom the mystery is designed. Having applied his logic, learning and reason to the problem, having attempted to elicit some message from the ghost even at the peril of his life and soul, and having failed to pierce the mystery, he takes his only opportunity for significant action in the entire play:

by my advice,  
Let us impart what we have seen to-night  
Unto young Hamlet.

(I, i, 168-170)

When Horatio comes to the prince in the second scene he receives a warm welcome and immediately calls forth a gracious and friendly side of Hamlet's character. Momentarily with Ophelia, briefly with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, with the players, with Laertes before the duel, and most particularly with Horatio throughout, we are made aware of the nobility of character which is being destroyed in the prince because of his heavy burden. Enobarbus helps to expose the magnanimity of Antony, and the Fool becomes the subject of Lear's magnanimity, but no other commentator so consistently brings

out the admirable qualities in the hero's character. The alternation in Hamlet's moods is clear at once for, having momentarily brushed aside his melancholy in joyously welcoming his friend, he is immediately plunged into the dark complications of the tragic world by the news which his friend brings. It has often been observed that the three young men in this play are designed as a contrast to Hamlet. Laertes and Fortinbras each represent the man of rash and unthinking action which Hamlet cannot easily become. Horatio, in his detachment, caution and reasoned responses, represents the courtierly and graceful normal man which Hamlet can never become after he has listened to the ghost.

We first note Hamlet's vulnerability to bursts of impulsiveness in his determination to follow the ghost in Act I, Scene iii. It is principally Horatio who attempts to restrain his companion's wild imagination. Like other commentators, he tries on several occasions to oppose the powerful impulse of passion with sage and cautious counsel. He allies himself with Marcellus in attempting to cross the path of destiny marked out for Hamlet. "My fate cries out", is the Prince's response to Horatio's graphic picture of the road to madness which Hamlet may be following:

What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,  
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff  
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,  
And there assume some other horrible form,  
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason  
And draw you into madness?

(I, iv, 69-74)

Here we have an attempt to divert the hero from his path such as we get in Friar Laurence calming the distraught Romeo, Menenius counselling the impetuous Coriolanus, in the Fool's attempts to get Lear out of the storm. Horatio's solicitude for his friend fits Overbury's description of 'A Wise Man':

His mind enjoyes a continuall smoothnesse; so commeth it,  
that his consideration is alwaies at home. He endures the  
faults of all men silently, excepts his friends, and to them  
he is the mirrour of their actions; by this meanes, his  
peace commeth not from Fortune, but himselfe.<sup>1</sup>

Hamlet acknowledges this quality in his friend later on, but in the throes of passion he sweeps the reasoned caution of Horatio aside. Horatio's remarks are, of course, ironically prophetic in that the ghost's news brings Hamlet almost to the verge of distraction and causes him to assume his antic disposition.

When the companions catch up with the Prince after his colloquy with the ghost, Horatio tries to bring Hamlet's exhilaration into a more temperate course of behaviour (I, v, 125-126; I, v, 133). But Horatio soon has to acknowledge that he is in a world which does not respond to the demands of normal behaviour, "O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!" (I, v, 164). Hamlet recognizes the abnormality of the situation and responds with a speech which definitively measures the difference between the unusual world of the tragic hero and the more normal world of his companion. It is a speech which might be applied to almost any of the characters with which I am dealing. Horatio has moved into alien territory where his habitual responses are inadequate:

And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.  
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.  
(I, v, 165-167)

The characters which I am examining often give the appearance of being strangers in a new world to which they are unable to give welcome because the nature of this world is beyond the dreams of their philosophy. Enobarbus dies in a ditch

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<sup>1</sup>Sir Thomas Overbury, Characters or Witty Descriptions of the Properties of Sundry Persons (1614) in Richard Aldington, ed., A Book of 'Characters' (London, 1924), p. 103.

estranged from Antony, the Fool and Poor Tom disappear on the heath, Kent gets scant recognition from Lear for his services, Menenius is turned away from Coriolanus' tent, Apemantus is unwilling and Flavius is forbidden to share Timon's harsh environment. Horatio, however, although he is in a wondrous strange world, is not alienated from the hero. He is not alienated, defeated or dismissed because he is not fundamentally in conflict with the hero. He is the only character whom Hamlet trusts sufficiently to share the secret knowledge of the ghost's revelation. In three of the plays with which I am dealing the adviser survives to the end for the same reason, because he shares the secret on which the plot is based. Friar Laurence helps to engineer the secret plot of the marriage between Romeo and Juliet. Iago is a special case, but though the audience knows he is in conflict with Othello, the Moor does not. He shares his secret plot with his trusted adviser in a kind of grotesque blood-brotherhood, a parody of friendship which contrasts with the very essence of friendship which we find in the relations between Hamlet and Horatio. The fact that in each play a secret which the commentators share must survive almost to the end of the play ensures their relative immunity to the destructive nature of tragedy until late in the play. Iago's secret is exposed by others but Friar Laurence and Horatio survive in sole knowledge of what has taken place. I shall discuss this problem again at the end of this study but it is important to remember that the unusually close relations between hero and companion are cemented by their shared secret, which separates and isolates them from all other characters in the play.

Hamlet makes clear in his eulogy (III, ii, 52-84) how fully he values the qualities of Horatio. None of the other commentators ever comes close to receiving such praise save Iago, and Othello's praise of him serves different

dramatic functions. In this moment of pause before the action hurtles on we get another glimpse of the judicious and generous Hamlet who, had he been put on, might have proved most royal. Lear, Othello, Coriolanus and Antony have to struggle desperately to come to terms with their worlds but Hamlet's magnanimity is devoted throughout to a recognition of that normal world which he is rapidly losing. He is aware of the values of the balanced man, of moderation and stoical endurance. Horatio is the ideal of the normal man and in him we find many of the qualities delineated separately in other commentators. Kent is stoical, Enobarbus and the Fool endeavour to avoid slavery to the passions, Friar Laurence and Menenius attempt to maintain a balance between judgement and blood. And yet these characters have a tendency to become a pipe for Fortune's finger. Horatio is, perhaps, immune to Fortune because he submits to the necessity of the tragic action without attempting to stand in its way. Having recognized and stoically submitted to the abnormal world in which he exists he does not attempt to extend his influence beyond his own limitations.

Hamlet's eulogy significantly sets off Horatio from every other character in the play. The play is full of characters who are pipes for Fortune's fingers. Hamlet says later that he is not a pipe to be played on by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the way that Claudius plays on them. Polonius, Gertrude, Laertes and Ophelia are all used by Claudius to the detriment of their fortunes. Hamlet, a victim of the ghost's injunctions, is a slave to his Fortune. Even if we consider the tragedies collectively, Horatio is something of an exception. No character who becomes so closely involved in the world of the tragic hero survives with his stature fully intact. Characters such as Malcolm, Aufidius and Albany survive, not an association with the tragic hero,

but a direct opposition to or a detachment from the hero. Enlisted in the ranks of virtue or policy they survive to fight another day, but none of them approaches this ideal picture of Horatio who is closely associated with a tragic hero and yet is immune to the destruction which normally accompanies such an association.

Immediately following this eulogy Horatio is drawn further into the tragic web, by being set on to observe Claudius, but he never becomes a prey to the spider of destruction at its centre. Horatio is the more remarkable because he shows little sign of being reduced to the camouflage of deception and role-playing which the intrigue demands. His openness and straightforward behaviour mark him off from the rest of the characters and make him the more admirable to Hamlet. Throughout the play Hamlet is absorbed and possessed by the problem of getting beneath the surface of things to search out their significance, hence his impatience with those involved in playing deceptive roles. He suspects Claudius of it; he is convinced that Ophelia is playing a part; he rapidly pierces Polonius' attempts at deception; he easily discovers that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are set on to play parts; he can neither believe that Gertrude is sincere in her grief for his father nor that she can be sincere in her love for Claudius. He cannot tolerate Laertes' melodramatic plunge into Ophelia's grave nor Osric's affectations. Above all we remember his concern with the troupe of actors and their ability to dissemble. Even in actors he cannot tolerate extravagance in their performance, and rounds fiercely on them when they indulge in it. All these concerns are sparked off in him because of his agonized need to come to certainty, to establish the truth about the world in which he lives. And yet Hamlet ironically is the character most accomplished in role playing, in deceptive appearances. Horatio alone is

exempt from this intrigue, this elaborate use of masks; he stands apart from the intrigue and the shifts and deceptions to which it puts men, and so escapes the universal vulnerability to Fortune.

It must be recognized, however, that Horatio survives not merely because of his own virtues but because of the quality of the hero with whom he is allied. Hamlet contains within himself both sides of the dualities that I have described as being split often between hero and commentator in other plays. He is aware of the dilemma presented by the choice between action and reflection, a choice stated by Sewell as follows, "To address ourselves to the world in action may involve us in evil; but not so to address ourselves is to be less than man".<sup>1</sup> The revenge code presents the problem in an acute form, for the simple passionate reflex response may subvert the reason to the will. But the alternative to this is also unsatisfactory as Nietzsche pointed out:

Understanding kills action, for in order to act we require the veil of illusion; such is Hamlet's doctrine, not to be confounded with the cheap wisdom of John-a-Dreams, who through too much reflection, as it were a surplus of possibilities, never arrives at action. What, both in the case of Hamlet and of Dionysiac man, overbalances any motive leading to action, is not reflection but understanding, the apprehension of truth and its terror.<sup>2</sup>

The old heroic reflex response of the medieval knight has been cramped into perplexing moral issues. Hamlet's struggle against the loss of innocence requires the sympathy of Horatio. He does not require the guerilla tactics of a character such as Lear's Fool to apprise him of a distinction between illusion and reality, for Hamlet's problem is the crippling awareness of that

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Sewell, Character and Society in Shakespeare (Oxford, 1951), p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals, trans. by Francis Golffing (New York, 1956), p. 51.

very distinction. We are no longer in that situation described by Heilman, "Innocence plus action: the dream of rich fulfillment that haunts men, and creates the heroes of popular romance for men content to forgo questions".<sup>1</sup> We cannot imagine alternative views which could be presented by a commentator that are not already covered by Hamlet's questioning spirit. Reasonable action is difficult if not impossible in the circumstances, reflective deliberation is fatal to the cause of hasty action required in the situation. Hamlet is eventually forced to a solution that is anathema to the rational man and to the stance that most commentators habitually take. But Shakespeare has surely constructed the situation in such a way that neither we nor Horatio can find fault in Hamlet's submission to rashness in the agony of his dilemma:

Rashly,  
And prais'd be rashness for it - let us know,  
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well,  
When our deep plots do pall; and that should learn us  
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will.

(V, ii, 6-11)

That the moderate Horatio completely acquiesces to this proposition indicates Shakespeare's unwillingness to solve complicated problems in the manner of orthodox moral philosophers who assumed too readily that the authority of reason was an effective panacea for all problems.

Horatio survives, then, not merely because of his own nature but because Hamlet has such a comprehensive grasp of his own problems. Horatio indicates by his muted role why we cannot make detailed generalizations about the commentators. In a way each tragic world gets the commentator it deserves and we cannot define their functions so mechanically as to imagine that any two of them could be interchanged. These characters may have very broad-based

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<sup>1</sup>R. B. Heilman, "To Know Himself: An Aspect of Tragic Structure", Review of English Literature, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1964), p. 54.

functions in common but it is necessary always to emphasize the contrasting methods which Shakespeare used to utilize those functions. Horatio is essentially an audience, an audience of one to whom Hamlet reveals his plots and his intentions. Like any audience he is helpless, though his sympathy periodically moves him to offer advice. Like other commentators he is placed between the audience and the hero, but he does not misunderstand or simplify the problems of the hero; rather he brings us into a closer understanding of them because of his sympathy. The revenge-code as Shakespeare presents it in this play is something of a trap, and the absence of any plain-dealing commentator offering to avert tragedy intensifies an audience's awareness of the inescapable nature of that trap. Hamlet shares his secret with Horatio but not his task. Accidentally or deliberately the Prince kills all those leagued against him, but even though he has one sole friend, he never comes close to suggesting any participation that would imperil his friend's life. Horatio contributes a great deal to the maintenance of balance in Hamlet's mind - his attempts to present a down-to-earth realism after the play scene to restrain Hamlet's wild imagination are typical - but he contributes virtually nothing to the revenge plot. It is because he has permitted Horatio to contribute so little direct help to Hamlet that Shakespeare has presented the most moving picture of the revenge hero. Kyd's Hieronimo loses contact with the normal world: he pursues the madness of his own design without giving us much sense of what it is like to be alienated from the sane, normal world. Tourneur's Vindice breaths only the air of the revenge world and has none of Hamlet's ability to regret his loss of contact with a healthier world. Hamlet lives in a fallen world; his family and friends have yielded to the tempter, Claudius. It is for that reason that Hamlet values Horatio and requires him as the lone

survivor, the one unsullied soul, to live on in order to exempt him from the corruption that has marked the decline and fall of his world.

Shakespeare manages to keep Horatio in the audience's eye even when the Prince is absent on his voyage to England. It is possible, of course, only to have him in the King's presence when other matters than the cat and mouse game with Hamlet occupy the stage. Horatio is a bystander throughout Act IV, Scene v, which is largely concerned with Ophelia's madness. His close association with the Prince makes him almost his representative here, for we realize how painful the scene would be to Hamlet. It is also possible that his mute presence acts as a significant point of reference when the wild and blood-thirsty Laertes comes fuming onto the stage. The contrast to Horatio increases our awareness that Laertes has become passion's slave as his blood dominates his judgement. We may surmise that he will shortly become a pipe for Fortune's finger to sound what stop she pleases.

In the graveyard scene Horatio acts as a kind of 'straight-man' giving the Prince a chance to display his intellect, wit and grace. He has little to say, save once to caution the Prince who pursues his ruminations "too curiously", and yet we have the impression of a deep and close communion between them in this scene. They are, of course, two university wits playing imaginative metaphysical games, but there is, too, a current of sadness, a sense of approaching death behind the bizarre joking. Hamlet displays some of that stoical patience and indifference to fortune which he admires in his friend. It is the last time that we see the two friends unburdened by a specific concern with immediate danger and yet, of course, this fascination with death is a signal of the gloom which clouds their youth. Hamlet fences wittily, the keen rapier of his mind probing the significance of death, as shortly he will fence

in earnest with Laertes and learn the enigmatic secret for himself. The scene might have been written with only Hamlet and the gravedigger chaffing each other, but it would have been less effective. The presence of Horatio again links Hamlet with and separates him from the normal world. Hamlet's fascination with death is almost morbid, as Horatio seems to indicate, but his hopes of avoiding it are so slim that his preoccupation is understandable. However the scene does not present only a bout of wit, for Hamlet is drawn first into a partial involvement with death in his ruminations on Yorick's skull, and then even to a symbolic death when he jumps into Ophelia's grave. The scene, in its movement from detached wit to passionate railing in the grave, seems to oppose an echo of the reflective days that the students may have enjoyed at Wittenberg with the extraordinary nature of the tragic situation in which they now find themselves. Jokes about death give place to its reality, and the normal existence, which Hamlet might once have hoped for with Ophelia, is set at naught.

Horatio is an audience for the revelation by Hamlet of his experiences at sea (V, ii). He seeks out the information, but does not interfere with his plans. He is outraged by Claudius' behaviour, "Why, what a king is this!" but when Hamlet asks him if he is not justified now in killing the king, Horatio offers no direct confirmation. He turns Hamlet's attention to the immediate danger and to the shortness of the time at his disposal. Again we have that sense of a man in total sympathy with the hero who has remained uninvolved in the action itself. Horatio has stood by while Laertes has entered at the head of a mob, while Hamlet and Laertes are at each other's throats in Ophelia's grave, and while Hamlet describes his clever and impulsive destruction of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The events in this tragic world are so extraordinary

that we can only retain any contact with the normal world through the observation of Horatio's comparative detachment. From the moment when he tries to explain the visitation of the ghost to the moment when he tries to explain the carnage at the close, he is the audience's bridge into the tragic world. Tourneur, Middleton and Ford rarely provided such bridges; in their works we are presented with a corrupt and diseased world far removed from any world with which most of us are familiar. In Hamlet that bridge is there until the end, and the exchange of wit between fellow spirits is revived once again when Hamlet twits Osric for his false affectations. Horatio and Hamlet are allied for the last time against the new and fashionable corruptness of court manners. In the genuine nobility of their behaviour they seem to be survivors from an older dispensation, from the golden age of the old Hamlet for whom they share a mutual respect, which had its being before the dominance of the policy-ridden world of Claudius and his minions. Hamlet has described to Horatio early in the play the decline in the customs and reputation of Denmark (I, iii, 13-22). He enjoys now a final exercise of his wit which demonstrates his superiority to the world to which he has been forced to submit.

Horatio, who has patiently submitted to Hamlet's plans, makes one attempt to interfere. Hamlet senses the approach of his fate and his companion attempts to dissuade him from the combat. But Hamlet in his complex experience has learnt the necessity of stoical acceptance and endurance. He has twisted and turned between the demands of blood and judgement but has finally reached that point of indifference to fate which he had earlier praised as a quality in Horatio. His companion in the sincerity of his love tries momentarily to avert the inevitable tragedy, but he does not pursue the point. Horatio has frequently demonstrated a firm faith in God's order and he now yields to

Hamlet's patient submission to providence.

When Hamlet lies dying Horatio at last yields to a rash impulse, allowing his blood to rule his judgement in his attempted suicide. It is the ultimate gesture of loyalty and it enables us to see that Hamlet has reached a wisdom in his experience beyond that of Horatio. He accepts the buffets of fortune and reverses roles with his companion. The hero, who has so often been the victim of impulsiveness, now restrains his companion from a rash act of folly and assigns a task to him. So many commentators disappear from Shakespeare's plays because they misunderstand the nature of inevitability in a tragic situation. Horatio who has understood and has submitted to that inevitability must survive, even though drawing his breath in pain, to communicate his understanding to the world.

It is in this final task that we come to appreciate fully the unusual nature of Horatio as a commentator. I have noted earlier that in plots constructed around intrigues it is necessary that secrets remain intact until a late stage of the play. Comedy often specializes in this kind of secret intrigue, but there both the practisers and the victims of intrigue are present at the end to piece together the information which provides them with general illumination. Twelfth Night, The Merchant of Venice and Cymbeline, to name only the most obvious, end with this kind of virtuoso revelation which untangles the plots. Measure for Measure hovers towards the darkness of the tragic world, perhaps because only one man possesses all the secrets. The revelation at the end of that play is a sustained and ingenious piece of dramaturgy which tends to compensate for the fact that the secret on which the play is based demands a considerable suspension of disbelief on the part of the audience. It is the nature of tragedy that secrets barely survive their disastrous outcome. A commentator who shares such secrets is obliged to abandon his role of critical

detachment for one of sympathetic involvement, though in Iago the sympathy is feigned. The relations between Horatio and Hamlet, Friar Laurence and the lovers, Iago and Othello are closer than those between other commentators and heroes because of the intimacy induced by secrecy. Enobarbus, the Fool, Apemantus, Mercutio and Menenius do not share in a secret intrigue and are the freer to comment on action which they regard as foolish. Friar Laurence's cell, Hamlet's private exchanges with Horatio, Iago's secret plotting with Othello, are far from the public forums which other advisers demand. Iago and Friar Laurence become inexorably involved in the consequences of their plots because they are responsible for them and the catastrophe which ensues. Horatio, however, is protected from this involvement because he acts only as a patient listener to Hamlet's plot, not as an agent of it. Only Horatio and Fortinbras survive in the play. Fortinbras survives and inherits the kingdom, because he has arrived just in time, so to speak, not to be involved. Horatio survives because Shakespeare has taken particular care to protect his role as spectator and not to give him any damaging involvement in the action.

Horatio opens the play with an attempt to divine the threat to order which the ghost represents. He has sympathized with Hamlet's desire to cleanse Denmark of corruption. His final words in asking for the burial of his friend are designed to ensure the restoration of an ordered state:

But let this same be presently perform'd,  
Even while men's minds are wild, lest more mischance  
Or plots and errors happen.

(V, ii, 385-381)

Horatio, who has been in a unique position to observe the course of tragedy with immunity, lives to profit by his experience and to work and hope for better days. The chaos of the abnormal world of tragedy cannot be averted

by the normal man. But Horatio, that sane and well-balanced man, can come into his own when the world is returned from the awe-inspiring heights of tragedy to a world of order which we recognize. The destructive dilemmas often faced by the commentator are in this play faced by the hero, which may explain in some measure why Hamlet has so often been found to be the most complicated and endlessly fascinating creation of the tragic mode.

KING LEAR

I have reserved until the end an extensive study of King Lear for it is in that play that Shakespeare undertakes his most profound and penetrating exploration of the problems of truth-telling, of detached commentary and of conflicting versions of events in the tragic world. The Fool is obviously the most detached and professional of observers in the play but there is also a number of other characters attempting to comment on Lear's actions and endeavouring to divert him from their tragic consequences. The structure of the play is different from that of the other tragedies in that the folly which makes tragedy irrevocable occurs at the very outset of the play. In most of the other tragedies the commentator attempts to prevent the hero from committing what he considers to be foolish actions. In this play a variety of characters try to save the hero from the consequences of what they consider to have been his initial act of folly. The contrast between the extraordinary nature of the tragic hero and the world of more normal men who surround him is at its extreme in this play. We have a variety of characters attempting to avert tragedy or trying to operate within terms of a conceptual philosophy which reduces the world to some sense of order. We have a truth-teller, a plain-dealer, a jester, a fake madman, a platitudinizing philosopher and a cynic. In Cordelia, Kent, the Fool, Poor Tom - Edgar, and Edmund we have an extraordinary array of characters observing the world and offering independent versions of events from their own individual standpoints.

And above all, of course, we have Lear himself who moves towards a position of detached observation commenting on the nature of his world from the depths of his harrowing experience. We can recognize in these characters some of the elements of the commentators with whom I have dealt hitherto. There are similarities which we can relate to Faulconbridge, Thersites, Apemantus, Enobarbus, Mercutio, Menenius, Horatio, Iago, Timon and Flavius. In this play Shakespeare seems to gather a wide variety of attitudes which he explored in other commentators and relate them together in his most complex analysis of the tragic world. The combined resources of a variety of characters offering truth-telling, advice, commentary, prophecy and sympathy are ultimately of no avail in averting tragedy.

I can, perhaps, best indicate Shakespeare's method of presenting a series of cross-cutting versions of a single event by examining the complex structure of the first scene. Here we have a classic example of Shakespeare taking a seemingly simple event and elaborating around it an extraordinarily complex series of attitudes which prevents the audience from applying simple, reflex judgements.

Lear's supremacy is established at the outset. Gloucester and Kent appear to have little idea about Lear's "darker purposes". Lear enters and delivers his own exposition in ornate and ceremonious language. It is now that the kingdom is to be divided into three - information which seems to have been beyond Kent and Gloucester who had spoken only of the "moieties" of Albany and Cornwall. It is now that the daughters are to profess their love and Lear is to abdicate. It is now that France and Burgundy are to be satisfied. Lear has spoken it and it will be so. This is the impression which the court and the audience must be given because in a very few moments

we are all to be shocked into the recognition that for at least one person present Lear's word is not law.

The essential nature of the demand for a profession of "which doth love us most" is obviously a ceremonial formality. Lear does not mean, and we should not take him to mean, that he will, with a completely open mind, give the best portion to the highest bidder. It is obvious that he expects an expression of greater and truer love from Cordelia in order to enable him fittingly to present her with the superior portion which he has prepared for her. This, after all, is a great moment in court. Lear having ruled for many years has just announced that he is about to release the reins of power. The coronet, presumably for the crowning of Cordelia, is ready. Another competition for Cordelia's hand is to take place following the present ceremony. This is Lear's last appearance as an all-powerful king before his court and he ends his reign with an elaborate ceremony.<sup>1</sup> The reason why the competition fails is not that it is an absurd imposition but that Lear and Cordelia have totally different versions of its significance, just as Burgundy and France will have different versions of the significance of their competition for Cordelia's hand. It is essential that the audience and the court accept the nature of the ritual as an elaborate, if somewhat self-indulgent, ceremony so that we may all be as shocked as Lear by Cordelia's rejection of it.

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<sup>1</sup>F. G. Schoff, "King Lear: Moral Example or Tragic Protagonist", *SQ*, XIII (1962), pp. 157-172. This paper discusses the first scene, argues for the tragic stature of Lear and exempts him from moral culpability in the division of the kingdom. In rescuing Lear from moral condemnation, Schoff falls too easily into a simple condemnation of Goneril and Regan which, in my view, equally upsets the balanced arguments of the play at this point.

The flattery of Goneril and Regan reads almost like an exercise in that art. Lear replies in equal superlatives, "Be this perpetual", "To thee and thine hereditary ever", playing his part as well as they. The code of the court is respected and Lear's power re-affirmed by their speeches. In this world of appearances Goneril and Regan, like Edmund, "study deserving". That they have flattered the King, Goneril receiving, perhaps, more marks than Regan in her studied exercise in rhetoric, no one doubts. But there is nothing in their behaviour which suggests irrevocably evil natures. Shakespeare has carefully avoided a preparatory discussion between the two in which they calculate the roles they will play, such as we find in the source - King Leir. They will take no part, as they did in the earlier version, in arousing Lear's anger against Cordelia. The King is entirely responsible for his own actions.

The only conclusion that we can draw from Cordelia's two warning 'asides' amidst the affable proceedings is that she is conscious of not being very proficient at the kind of speeches her sisters appear to be so good at. They are in no way a preparation for "Nothing"; they are merely "the tardiness in nature" which France talks about later. But "Nothing" is absolute and its repetition by Lear is sufficient to indicate a shocked silence, a moment, in any production. It seems to come not merely as an objection to this formal ceremony but as a climax to a lifetime of experience. The point about this "Nothing" is that it has a disruptive force not arising simply from the lack of the "glib and oily art". It brings the entire relationship between a father and his favourite daughter to a crisis point. The rest of this opening scene is concerned with elaborating attitudes to this bald and uncompromising statement, with presenting versions of the truth about its real

significance. It is, perhaps, the most outstanding example of the blunt, truth-telling speaker confronting the tragic hero's world of illusion.

It is this absolute negative to which Lear objects, this frontal assault on all his designs. Without her "Nothing", her other speeches would be lame but they would not be as disastrous. Urged to speak again, Cordelia claims to love her father "According to my bond". Though this may be something better than nothing it now seems to add insult to injury. It is a rejection of Lear's world because it is a claim to limit Lear's power over Cordelia. It is a statement that not all people can be bought and sold; it is independent; it refuses to avoid facts. She opposes Lear's passion with a sober, rational statement of her affection. But this first attempt to persuade Lear to recognize the normal world in which daughters may divide their affections naturally between father and husband, far from bringing Lear to a recognition of a rationally ordered world, only encourages him to dominate his world with his will and passion. This frustrated attempt to gain Lear's acceptance of a view of the world alternative to his own sets the pattern of the play. The first truth-teller who comes to Lear is violently cast aside.

Lear casts aside Cordelia in words as superlative as those he used in distributing his lands to the flattering daughters. He clings to the language of ceremony which Cordelia has rejected (I, i, 107-119). Lear is caught in the conflict between words and deeds. For him the shows of rhetoric and ceremony are everything. He makes the common error so clearly described by Guicciardini:

Men ought to pay a great deal more attention to substance and realities than to ceremonies. And yet it is incredible how easily people fall for soft kind words. The reason is that everyone thinks he merits being highly esteemed, and therefore will be indignant if he thinks you are mindless

of what he is sure he deserves.<sup>1</sup>

Two of Lear's daughters comply with the King's views on ceremony and are opposed by both Kent and Cordelia who are concerned with the reality of deeds rather than the illusion of words. Lear is repulsed again and again in the play and his refuge is the grandeur of rhetoric. He labours under the delusion that by words alone, by curses and howling vituperation he can bring the world into conformity with his will. Cordelia does not deny her love for Lear, rather she refuses to submit to the illusion of ceremony on which he establishes his absolute authority over his world.

We should be aware, however, of too easily condemning Lear. Many critics have found Cordelia's rejection difficult to accept. Her love lacks the depth which overlooks the immediate difficulties in the interest of the beloved's welfare. Is she not heartless, we might ask, in leaving her father to the tender mercy of her sisters when, by a slight deception, she might have saved all the trouble? Battenhouse says:

Her behaviour in the opening scene's crisis, while less gravely faulty than Lear's, is allied to his and helps precipitate his "hideous rashness". For she, too, seeks self-justification and acts from a sense of rightness tinged with self-regard.<sup>2</sup>

He notes also that her method of dividing her love according to merit is akin to the calculating spirit of Lear's dividing his kingdom according to merit.<sup>3</sup> But many critics have claimed that no honest person could comply with Lear's demand of a declaration of love in exchange for wealth. Yet surely the demand is outrageous only because Cordelia rejects the terms of the ceremony and

<sup>1</sup> Francesco Guicciardini, Maxims and Reflections of a Renaissance Statesman, trans. by Mario Domandi (New York, 1965), Series C, 26, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> R. W. Battenhouse, "Shakespeare's Moral Vision", in B. W. Jackson, ed., Stratford Papers on Shakespeare, 1964 (Toronto, 1965), p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

chooses this moment to assert her independence. The point about the scene is not that it asks us to apportion blame but demands that we recognize the irreconcilable nature of the opposed views of the personalities involved. We can make out a case partially justifying either Lear or Cordelia but it will not alter the fact that tragic situations do not yield easily to simple judgements of right and wrong.

The scene draws its strength from a familiar, indeed universal, situation - the break in dependancy of the child from the parent. It is a moment that most people have to go through, and manage with varying degrees of success. We must note, too, that the ritual distribution of land is really a grandiose expansion of the children's game of "kiss me and I'll give you a penny". It is out of such familiar material that Shakespeare shapes this extraordinary situation. Lear is, of course, a father upset by the disobedience of his daughter, but in addition to that he is also a complete autocrat with a dizzying sense of his own power and of what is due to him. Cordelia, too, is no less extraordinary, for even this early in the play we can appreciate that to stand up alone against Lear's will is an act of unusual boldness. Like many of the truth-tellers I have examined, she believes that she can stand outside the plague of custom, that she can expose the illusions of this world with a rational and logical commentary. In fact, of course, she does not tell the truth here; her love is greater than her sisters; she is faithful to Lear and does, in effect, what she denies she will do at the outset - she leaves her husband in order to live and die with her father.

The initial impulse toward tragedy, then, comes from a clash of personalities both equally resolving an internal conflict of roles by stubbornly cleaving to their own uncompromising version of the truth. Lear relinquishes

his affection for his daughter in favour of his autocratic prerogative to have the world ordered as he pleases, and Cordelia relinquishes her love for her father in favour of her immediate need of establishing her independence. The attitude of each wilfully sets aside the real love that they have for each other. It is not one attitude or the other which is the sole cause of tragedy but the coincidence of two opposed views which cannot stall together in the whole world.

The family crisis is deepened and generalized by two intrusions into it, those of Kent and France. Lear who had dismissed his daughter in the thundering language of his ceremonial rhetoric begins to explain to Kent why Cordelia's rejection is such a catastrophic reversal of his plans. He had been willing to relinquish his power, to yield his daughter in marriage in exchange for a continuation of his prized relationship with this favourite daughter. Lear may be self-indulgent but he is so in a way that is familiar to many fathers. The intrusions of Kent and France, by providing further versions of what has happened enable us to examine aspects of that enigmatic "Nothing" which has so disturbed the King.

Kent comes, like Cordelia, as a blunt truth-teller to apprise Lear of the real nature of the world in which he exists. Lear immediately resorts to the threat of his power, "The bow is bent and drawn; make from the shaft", (I, i, 142). The hunting metaphor is appropriate, for Lear will track down and despatch all those who oppose him. Kent impulsively proceeds to present his version of what has happened. Perillus, in the source play, made a token objection but never seriously came between the dragon and his wrath. He accompanied Leir in his travails without the subterfuge of disguise, and he offered a stream of moralizing comments obviously designed to point out the

conclusions to be drawn by an audience. Kent, however, is a fully realized character and no mouthpiece of the dramatist. He has been faced with a new idea of his King as a man who, in confusing fatherhood and kingship, will pull the world about his ears and who will demonstrate his power by throwing it all away. Kent finds this act, as does everyone else in this scene, foolish and senile. Lear believes himself to be completing his life correctly - a belief which paradoxically we see later accords with the precepts demanded in the forged Edgar-letter - but "these same crosses spoil him". Of Kent's protestation: "ever honour'd as my King, / Lov'd as my father", (I, i, 139-140), we note that it contains exactly the kind of combination which Lear demands, but coming now too late, as it does, and from an outsider, we can only mutter 'that's wormwood'. But Kent's statement of what he sees as having happened soon develops to the point of thorough rudeness. The entire scene presents a constantly shifting surface of speech patterns. There is an oscillation between highly elaborate modes of speech and plain, ungilded statements which mirrors the shifting emotional tension of the scene. Lear moves throughout the play from rash and angry fulminations at one extreme to attempts at formal, controlled periods of ornate phrasing at the other.

There is something heroic about Kent's intrusion here because it sacrifices personal safety to a higher cause. But the sacrifice is also futile and foolish in that we can already see that Lear is not a man to be crossed, and that blunt speaking can only worsen instead of ameliorate the situation. We feel that at the very best Kent can only supply a tangible object on which Lear can let the full measure of his wrath descend. If Kent hopes to have any moderating influence on Lear then perhaps the worst tactic he could adopt is to interrupt him in the full flight of his anger, thus ensuring his own

banishment and the negation of any influence he might have at court. His hope of affecting Lear is scotched in the very utterance. He offers to be the King's physician and claims "To plainness honour's bound / When majesty falls to folly", (I, i, 147-148). Yet Lear is in a passion precisely because he has just been offered such plain-dealing by Cordelia. Kent's method of attack looks very much like folly itself and would have been so described by Downname who offers advice on how to calm an angry man:

The first meanes to mitigate anger in another, is to use silence: for as the fire cannot long continue if the wood be taken from it, so anger cannot long indure, if words and crosse answeres be not multiplyed: whereas on the other side, crosse speeches and perverse replies, make the chollericke man proceed from anger to rage, from folly to fury and madnesse.<sup>1</sup>

Cordelia was dismissed for saying nothing and Kent can have little hope of success by saying too much. Kent, in fact, makes himself virtually a scape-goat figure in this continuing ritual. It is not just that Lear is more severe on Kent than on Cordelia, banishing him on pain of death, but leaving her to be rescued by France, it is that Kent is not of Lear's family, is an intruder from without, an angry one, who dares to tutor the king on his duties. Kent as a commentator on what has occurred offers himself as "the true blank" of Lear's eye and instead becomes the target for the shafts of the king's anger. Kent prides himself on his loyalty and service, on his willingness to suffer death for his master and proves his duty ironically by courting the danger of Lear's sword. To engage in a 'flyting' match with Lear at this point demonstrates a considerable limitation of understanding. Certainly Kent

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<sup>1</sup>John Downname, Spiritual Physicke (London, 1600), p. 77.

can see something of the truth but he can find no means of making his commentary effective. If the truth is always to come to Lear in this guise then we can see that Lear will soon be mad indeed. We do not, of course, condemn Kent since there appears to be no way of bringing a king so convinced of his own rightness to his senses. But we note the further establishment of the pattern whereby independent commentary, far from releasing Lear from his illusions, only confirms him in the correctness of his own convictions. The truth-teller compounds rather than solves the problem.

The altercation does, however, prevent any further wrangling between Lear and Cordelia and satisfactorily enables the subsequent scene, in which Cordelia is chosen as a bride, to take place with a certain amount of dignity. One wonders into what strange ways the scene would have fallen had Lear to offer his daughter without the position he has acquired, and the relief of anger afforded him, in opposing Kent. But Kent also enables the audience to realize what a hopeless compromise Lear has reached in retaining only:

The name, and all th' addition to a king:  
The sway, revenue, execution of the rest,  
Beloved sons, be yours;

(I, i, 135-137)

His first act after yielding all his powers is to turn round and banish one of his loyal counsellors - hardly the act of a man determined on a quiet retirement.

Kent's response to Cordelia's rejection, then, is to upbraid Lear for accepting appearances for reality, for accepting ceremony instead of true worth. We must note, however, that Kent's attitude does not come close to grips with what was actually said. "Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sounds / Reverb no hollowness", (I, i, 152-153) is a highly periphrastic blurring of the original impact of Cordelia's bluntness. There is a mythopoeic quality about Shakespeare's method of structuring this scene. An event occurs and immediately

versions of that event proliferate so that it becomes difficult to remember exactly what did happen. Kent blurs the event by presenting it as he interpreted it; but it may not be the version which the audience saw, and it is certainly not what Lear saw. We must not assume that Kent's view is that of the dramatist or the view which he wished the audience to take. The version of each character contains some truth but only in the sum total of all versions can the audience grasp the whole truth. Block has described Shakespeare's method in a similar manner to the one offered here:

In effect, through the superbly fair presentation of opposing and apparently irreconcilable points of view and through consistent and significant modifications of character, he has succeeded in creating that tension on the part of the audience which results from their sympathies being so equally divided that they become the victims and suffer all the throes of what may fairly be termed schizophrenic frustration.<sup>1</sup>

This first scene is full of rejections, and hot upon the conflicts of Lear and Cordelia and Lear and Kent comes Burgundy's rejection of Cordelia. But at last the scene, after so much of spite and antipathy, reaches a moment of acceptance. France's intrusion into this distraught world is, in some respects, similar to Kent's. They are both outside the family quarrel, but whereas Kent cries "I'll tell thee thou dost evil" (I, i, 166) seeming to sense a serious danger in this rift, France comments:

Is it but this? A tardiness in nature,  
Which often leaves the history unspoke  
That it intends to do!

(I, i, 235-237)

His is the comment of one detached from the family and court looking on and belittling their quarrels. Having missed the actual confrontation he reduces

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<sup>1</sup>E. A. Block, "King Lear: A Study in Balanced and Shifting Sympathies," SQ, X (1959), p. 499.

it now to the level of a mild family tiff. But the intractable material of family quarrels will not yield to the sweet reasonableness of those detached from the emotions which engender them. We see some truth in this healthy minimization of the rupture, but we can see how irrelevant it is to Lear who is not an outsider and who cannot attain such detachment.

The pattern of the interlude follows the traditional outlines of the heroic rescue of the damsel in distress. First France emphasizes the amazing nature of what Lear has done. He brings to our attention, lest we forget, the special regard Lear had for his daughter (I, i, 213-223); "reason without miracle" cannot explain the sudden change. Cordelia's explanation comes as a considerable gloss on what has happened. Her version in retrospect is that she had lacked "the glib and oily art". But Lear was not looking merely for flattery but for a declaration of submission to his will and his plans. That is what Cordelia had denied him, hence the violent response. Of course Lear must appear to be a fool to France if his disfavour has such a feeble excuse as Cordelia implies. But the audience must not accept France's view any more than it did Kent's. Shakespeare, in France's amiable reduction of the serious import of the event, is pointing out the limitations of the detached view, the disparity between surface appearances and their deeper significances, the complexity of which the entire scene puts under extensive examination. To an audience which has lived through that electrifying, shocked silence, and the tempestuous anger which it produced, France's version must appear an oversimplification. We can sense the importance that Lear attaches to the event in his every speech, in his method of running his court, in his concept of his own power. Lear may be a fool but not for the reasons which France suggests. If he is to change it will not be through the rectification

of a momentary aberration of behaviour but through a reorganization of the total world-view which permeates his personality.

Shakespeare, then, deliberately exposes us to the outsider's sensible viewpoint, to one not emotionally involved in an antagonism in which emotion plays such a vital part. His considerations we are made to see are "Aloof from th' entire point". France's evaluation of Cordelia's worth, as well as Cordelia's own evaluation of herself, are a reflection of Kent's version and are opposed to those of Lear and Burgundy.

Finally Goneril and Regan give us yet another version of the events in what amounts to a post-mortem on the whole situation. How they have regarded their father in the past comes vigorously to life. Why they had the sense to comply with his wishes is clearly indicated. How things will turn out is firmly outlined. The two should not be made to simulate hissing diabolism. If their exchange is played at a thoroughly domestic level the scene is enriched. It becomes, as it is in other respects, a natural growth out of a family crisis; words such as these are spoken over and over in innumerable families, but the situation takes on epic proportions when a man of Lear's nature is the object of the determined tutoring of impatient daughters. In the old play the two sisters played an active part in the disgrace of Cordelia but here they keep their counsel, girding their loins and saving their shot for the anticipated battles ahead. Their version of events is not to excuse Cordelia's behaviour but to emphasize Lear's folly. To these daughters he is a compound of senility, choler, folly and inconstancy. He has "ever but slenderly known himself". There is no sense in them yet of disposing of the king in favour of their own power. Their concern is to protect themselves from Lear's "unruly waywardness", a reasonable concern from

their point of view if we consider what has just occurred. But their attitude, like that of the other characters, is tinged with a self-regard which makes us wary of accepting their version of events.

I have written at length on this first scene because it is the clearest example of Shakespeare's exploration of the relative nature of judgement in the tragic world. There are a large number of commentators in this play, and we have to understand that from the outset Shakespeare is exposing the conflicting and irreconcilable nature of individual viewpoints on which he concentrates so much in tragedy. In this first scene we have blunt speakers, plain-dealers, seemingly detached commentators, and yet we cannot assert the pre-eminence of any one version of the truth. Throughout the play Lear is surrounded by characters who attempt to point out to him the illusions in which he is ensnared. Yet even from this first scene the audience can appreciate that, though rational views come to him from a variety of characters, he can make little use of them. Sewell has pointed out that throughout the play there is an irony:

... which lies in the contradiction between the rightness of what is said and the wrongness of its being said by that particular character or in that particular situation, or in that particular manner. Lear is old and his age is full of changes, but his daughters should not say so. There is no reply - no reply but 'Nothing' - to Lear's request that Cordelia should outdo her sisters in protestation of her love; but Cordelia should not make that reply. Kent should warn the King, but loyalty asks for more mannerly phrasing. The vision that is discovered in character in the early part of the play is that vision which sees, in all its complexities, the play in conduct of mere 'reason' and 'rightness' at odds with that other play of something more than 'reason', something more than 'rightness'. So much is this the theme of the first Act that we may risk the judgement that this is what the play is<sup>1</sup> about. Nature, we are to learn, needs more than reason gives.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Sewell, Character and Society in Shakespeare (Oxford, 1951), pp. 114-115.

Sewell sees this as a feature unique to this play, whereas I have tried to show that it is common to all of Shakespeare's tragedies. But there is no doubt that this feature is most extensively displayed in King Lear with its multiple commentators confronting the hero at every moment. Hardly a moment passes throughout the entire length of the play, during the time that Lear is on stage, when he is not being presented with one version or another of his folly. The structural method which I have examined in this first scene is repeated throughout the play.

In the second scene of the play we become acquainted with a cynical commentator who has qualities akin to those I have described in Iago and Thersites. He is a man of observation who uses his insight not to save others but to doom them for his own benefit. Edmund soliloquizes before the audience and has the Vice-like propensity of exhibiting his mischief. Whatever purposes he puts his observation to, he obviously shares the philosophical view of several of the commentators with which I have dealt that man is the agent rather than the patient of his own destiny. He has the exuberant sense of detachment of Faulconbridge and Iago and the cynical sense of superiority of Thersites and Apemantus. He owes allegiance to nothing outside himself, and his commentary, like Iago's, is uttered entirely for his own benefit. His attitude, however, enables the audience to come to terms more easily with the forces which rule Lear's world.

Lear's elaborate and ceremonial attempt to divide his kingdom is placed between two interludes concerning the sub-plot which take the father-child relationship in a light and flippant way. Gloucester at the opening of the play treats the bastardy of Edmund with a jocular, sentimental affection. Edmund's self-revelation is equally jocular but far from sentimental. His

audacious sense of independence is far different from Cordelia's assertion of love according to her bond. Edmund refuses to stand in "the plague of custom" but for far more sinister reasons than Cordelia, who has in her innocence much more in common with Edgar. Edmund, like Goneril and Regan, is skillful in using words for his own benefit. In the forged letter he sets down principles which reflect ironically on Lear's attempt to crawl unburdened towards death. The attitudes of Goneril and Regan at the end of the first scene are paralleled by the supposed impatience of Edgar in the letter. There are obviously many contrasts and parallels between the two worlds even on a cursory glance. The second scene itself is a kind of commentary, almost a parody, on the main plot. It enables us to see how one man clinging to his version of the world can initiate events leading to tragedy. Edmund is totally different from Lear in terms of personality but he is equally convinced that he can force the world into conformity with his desires. Lear seeks to dominate the world by the force of his will, by the power of his passion, by exhibiting to all his sense of what is owed to him as a king. Edmund seeks to dominate the world by the pretended submission of his will to his father, by the superior power of his reason, by concealing from all his sense of what is due to him as a bastard. The one assumes supreme power and descends to the depths of beggary, the other starts from the baseness of his bastardy and scales the heights of power. Lear at the outset retains absolute conviction in the medieval world order of degree and hierarchy. Edmund represents the new world order of Renaissance action and policy whereby the old assumptions are overthrown when "Edmund the base / Shall top th' legitimate", (I, ii, 20-21). Shakespeare lived in a time very much aware of the conflict of these two philosophies and his tragedies repeatedly explore the problems which such a conflict raised. Edmund's

commentary is, therefore, not merely relevant to his own actions in the sub-plot, it is the manifesto of many of the characters who attempt to force Lear to recognize the nature of the world in which he lives.

The world to which Lear has unwittingly committed himself in his division of the kingdom, a world which will breed occasions against him, soon becomes clear in the behaviour and practices of Goneril and Oswald (I, iii). The world of degree in which Lear believes gets a rude shock when the king receives slight regard from the merest servant. Kent, however, returned in disguise, reinforces Lear's illusion by claiming to find authority in his face, an authority which is no longer current. Kent, indeed, returns very little changed from the plain, blunt, honest man whom Lear had so recently banished. He had tried to protect Cordelia who had flouted Lear's authority and had been banished for his folly. Now, however, when Oswald flouts Lear's authority he takes the king's side. According to the jester Kent is again guilty of folly (I, iv, 97-103) for he persists in supporting those in disfavour, Lear's fortunes being now on the wane as much as Cordelia's were so recently.

The Fool on his entrance immediately falls into his professional habit of calling others fools and proving it by logic to gain his reward.<sup>1</sup> He proves Kent to be a fool at once and proceeds to call Lear a fool on eight separate occasions before Goneril appears and makes it transparently clear

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<sup>1</sup>For discussions of the variety of folly exhibited in this play, and of the various meanings attached to the word in this play see the following: William Empson, "Fool in Lear", Sewanee Review, LVII (1949), 177-214; R. B. Heilman, This Great Stage: Image and Structure in "King Lear" (Baton Rouge, 1948), pp. 182-192; C. S. French, "Shakespeare's 'Folly': King Lear," SQ, X (1959), 523-529.

to the King how accurate the Fool's prophecy and judgement are.

The Fool is an educator and he takes Lear back to school, to a world of nursery rhymes and jingles, in order that he may learn about his new place in life. The Fool, by his blunt and bitter barbs, tries to show Lear the situation which he is now in; against Lear's illusion of his autocratic authority he thrusts the reality of Lear's powerlessness. The jester does this in the manner of many commentators by puncturing the rhetoric of his master. As Lear reaches for his majestic curses the Fool cuts in with the language of the nursery, the alphabet of folk-wisdom, the kind of truths which one can teach to any child but not to Lear. The two characters who had in the first scene attempted to divert Lear from his illusion had suspected the treatment Lear would receive from Goneril and Regan. Lear himself vaguely suspects neglect, but the Fool takes the absolute dominance of the new regime as an accomplished fact. We have already been told that Goneril intends to put Lear to school again:

Old fools are babes again, and must be us'd  
With checks as flatteries, when they are seen abus'd.  
(I, iii, 20-21)

The jester attempts to present his own lesson to Lear in this second childhood in order to prepare him for the severity of his martinet, schoolmistress daughters. Kent, like Lear, is living in the past and is quickly placed in the corner with a dunce's cap. His first mistake had been to take the part of one out of favour for which he was banished. In supporting Lear against Oswald he is guilty of the same folly and will soon, the Fool might anticipate, find himself out on the heath in a storm for his mistake. It is of crucial importance for us to remember that the jester's first jibe at Kent (I, iv, 97-103) will ultimately apply to himself. By including a jester in his play,

Shakespeare was able to use him not only as a commentator on the folly rampant in his world, but was also able to demonstrate how even the jester himself in the tragic world will inevitably be guilty of folly. The Fool is the most professional of commentators, detached by the very nature of his function, free to observe and criticize, required to contemplate and illuminate the folly of those around him. I have suggested that the commentator's natural habitat is the world of comedy. Lear's Fool is Shakespeare's most radical experiment in placing a comic character in the tragic world. In the development of his role Shakespeare explores the ultimate implications of the paradoxical nature of the commentator's function. Even for the jester with his devastating prophetic insight there will be no escape from the general folly set loose in his world. He is aware from the very outset of the relative nature of truth in the tragic world, a world where each man insists on the accuracy of his own version of reality:

I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are.  
 They'll have me whipp'd for speaking true: thou'lt  
 have me whipp'd for lying; and sometimes I am  
 whipp'd for holding my peace.

(I, iv, 180-183)

The jester takes the stance of the detached observer but it must be remembered that he supports Lear, remains loyal to him, and never has any sympathy for the new regime. Like so many commentators he is a supporter of the old world of hierarchy and degree. His conceptual framework conditions his criticism. His images and the simple catechism which he attempts to press upon Lear are all concerned with the dangers of inverting order, with the topsy-turvy world which Lear has created by abdicating. Truth is banished to the kennel whilst Lady the brach stinks by the fire; Lear ought to wear motley for giving his land away; he has carried his ass on his back over the dirt; he has exchanged

his golden crown for his bald crown; he has made his daughters his mothers; he has taken down his breeches and given his daughters the rod; the cuckoo bites off the head of the hedge-sparrow; an ass may know when the cart draws the horse. This incessant flow of images in vivid detail creates a series of illustrative panels reminiscent of the graphics of Brueghel the Elder, depicting the grotesqueries of the disordered topsy-turvy land with which Lear may decorate the walls of the nursery which he is just entering. The Fool's images have the economy and didactic appositeness of popular woodcuts, they flash across our mind in constant juxtaposition with the tempestuous excesses of Lear's anger. As a fantasy version and drastic reduction of reality they have the menacing, dramatic quality of Bosch's surrealist images, and they underline the basic relationship of Goneril-schoolmistress and Lear-pupil, which the King tries to shut out of his consciousness by grasping at ceremony and rhetorical extravagance. Lear's version of the truth meets Goneril's head on. He describes his knights in a manner which supports his concept of ceremony and hierarchy:

My train are men of choice and rarest parts,  
That all particulars of duty know;  
And in the most exact regard support  
The worships of their name.  
(I, iv, 263-266)

Goneril's version of the knights fits her own uncereemonious determination to readjust the hierarchical order:

Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires;  
Men so disorder'd, so debosh'd and bold,  
That this our court, infected with their manners,  
Shows like a riotous inn.  
(I, iv, 240-243)

The truth of the matter cannot be established since that which looks like riot to Goneril might very well appear to be the 'particulars of duty' to

Lear. What strikes us is the accuracy of the Fool's prophetic insight into the new order of power which has been established. Lear is, indeed, shortly playing bo-peep "What, fifty of my followers at a clap!" (I, iv, 294); he is a hedge-sparrow, an egg with no nest, a sheal'd peascod, as time unfolds what plighted cunning hides.

The jester, as a rational observer, is not concerned, as are Enobarbus and some of the other commentators, with pointing out the dangers which his master must avoid. Rather he attempts to make clear the dangers which have resulted from Lear's initial act, and which the king must be aware of if he is not to sink further into folly. Lear's illusions are based not only on what he might do but on what he has already done; his folly is past, present and potentially future. The Fool's task is to warn against folly in the future by making the folly of the present and past clear to the King.

The Fool is closely linked in our minds with Cordelia. He is first mentioned as pining away since her absence (I, iv, 72-73), and it is his task to make Lear aware, as she had first tried to do, of the correct evaluation of the relative love of his daughters.<sup>1</sup> The jester acts as Lear's conscience, "the ayenbit of inwit" as Doran calls him,<sup>2</sup> for Lear, who initially held the correct evaluation of his daughters, has sought to bury his knowledge. It is significant, therefore, that the Fool scarcely ever mentions Cordelia since, so to speak, he represents her and the truth which she had tried to impart to Lear. The Fool carries on the attack on Goneril and Regan which Cordelia

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<sup>1</sup>For a more detailed view of the relationship of the two, see T. B. Stroup, "Cordelia and the Fool", *SQ*, XII (1961), 127-132.

<sup>2</sup>Madeleine Doran, *Endeavours of Art* (Madison, 1954), p. 256.

had made on her departure. The jester does not reproach Lear for his treatment of his favourite daughter; he allows Lear to come to his own conclusion concerning his injustice, merely feeding in the data that will lead him to that conclusion. The Fool sets up the problems and Lear must provide the answers. But Lear, still at a very primitive stage of learning, lacks the deductive logic of his jester and proceeds by the method of trial and error; hence his departure from Goneril's household in hopes of a better reception at Regan's. The Fool attempts to prepare him for a repetition of the lesson (I, v). The difference between the hero and the commentator is much the same as in the other tragedies I have examined. The commentator can abstract general lessons from particular experience by a process of deductive logic based on his certainty in his conceptual view of the world; by this means he is able to prophesy events. The hero in the grip of his own illusions cannot accept the views of the commentator because he has to experience the events themselves in order to rid himself of his illusions.

The Fool shares the opinion of Goneril and Regan that Lear has regressed to the powerlessness of childhood and that he must be schooled in obedience. This atmosphere of the schoolroom must be emphasized because the Fool's role is largely pedagogical.<sup>1</sup> The scenes between Lear and the Fool are grotesque because the King's grandiose conception of the power of his regality is constantly exposed to the Fool's concept of his master's childish powerlessness. In giving away his kingdom Lear appears to the audience to have returned essentially to the role-playing game-world of childhood.

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<sup>1</sup>For an examination in detail of the process of Lear's education and of the specific lessons which he learns see Manfred Weidhorn, "Lear's Schoolmasters", SQ, XIII (1962), 305-316.

He is 'pretending' to be king, though he does not know it. He wants his toys and playmates - his hundred knights and the ceremony which goes with them - but he is punished by the daughters that he has made his mothers, who send his playmates away because he will not learn his lesson, that their rowdy games are annoying. Lear runs away in a temper tantrum and sulks his way to his other daughter-mother whom he hopes will indulge the games of his dotage.

It is, perhaps, worth digressing for a moment and anticipating the development of the play to note a pattern which has not received much attention. Lear's most obvious development is his descent from the sophistication of regality to the status of beggary, and his identification with unaccommodated man. But the King after he has yielded his power to his daughters also undergoes the entire developmental process from childhood to old age within the rest of the play. I do not wish to suggest that a play by Shakespeare is simply case material for psycho-analytical interpretations, but one cannot help noticing that Lear undergoes a consistent process of development which corresponds with many of the stages which modern psychologists have categorized.<sup>1</sup> I outline these stages crudely, recognizing that there are many areas of overlap, and that the mere naming of stages only helps us to look from an unusual angle at the development which every audience broadly recognizes in Lear's character. This pattern of development is important from my point of view in that the various commentators play significant and different parts in accidentally helping Lear along the road of his evolution.

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<sup>1</sup>The stages of development which I have described in the following discussion are based mainly on the model drawn up by Erik Homberger Erikson. The pattern of his model is very similar to that agreed on by several psychoanalysts, though his description of the individual stages is somewhat different. See E. H. Erikson, Childhood and Society (New York, 1963).

Lear starts his re-education in the first developmental stage described by the psychologist Erikson as the period in which the child learns to trust or distrust the world. His development begins, therefore, after he has relinquished his absolute authority and returned to a dependency on his daughters, after he has made his daughters his mothers as the Fool appropriately puts it. Lear certainly comes rapidly to distrust Goneril and puts his trust in Regan, but is rebuffed there also. The Fool, as I have observed, constantly feeds in the data required to break Lear's trust in his daughters. In the next stage of Erikson's model we observe the alternative of submission to or rebellion against authority. Lear rebels against what he regards as the unnatural authority of his daughters and stamps out onto the heath. Once on the heath Lear begins his monumental rebellion against the authority of the gods and nature itself. In the phase labelled as the latency period by Erikson the individual learns social behaviour, a sympathy for and empathy with others. This is a marked phase in Lear's development when he pities his Fool and makes his splendid offer of shifting his superfluous to the poor, naked wretches of whom he has taken too little care. His extraordinary social relationship with Poor Tom indicates his ability to recognize suffering in others. Up to and including the latency period, according to the observations of the Swiss epistemologist Jean Piaget<sup>1</sup>, the individual assumes that justice comes from an authority above, as Lear had done in seeking to bring down the vengeance of the gods on his daughters. By the end of the latency period the individual comes to acknowledge that justice is man-made. Lear having failed

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<sup>1</sup>The theories of Piaget are lucidly set out in J.H. Flavell, The Developmental Psychology of Jean Piaget (Princeton, 1963).

to exact vengeance from the gods institutes his own trial and arraigns his daughters. In the crisis of adolescence the individual faces the problem of ego-identity or ego-diffusion. Lear, who can be said to have clung tenaciously to his ego-identity, at last yields to ego-diffusion when, in recognizing his kinship with unaccommodated man, and in trying to teach this knowledge to the blind Gloucester, he finally rids himself of the illusions of kingship and ceremony. Lear attempts to dissolve his regal identity into his common identity with Everyman. The stage of young adulthood which succeeds this usually involves marriage, the linking of one's own personality to another through love. Lear in being restored to Cordelia finds a resolution for his crisis of identity in the healing love which she brings. He ties his fate to hers in the revival of a love which he has not known since he rejected her at the outset and thus initiated his process of re-education. Following this phase comes the problem of finding an appropriate niche in life, a modus vivendi which will support this new relationship. Lear's attempt to resolve this problem is the escapist one of living safely in solitude with his beloved daughter in order to protect himself against the ravages of the new power structure from which he has so far suffered. The niche in life which Lear hopes for is put clearly in his "Come, let's away to prison" speech (V, iii, 8-19). But the happiness of adult life must yield to old age where, bereft of one's companions, one can ruminate wisely or unwisely on one's life. Lear, having rejected his daughter at the outset, and having proceeded throughout the entire developmental cycle, finally returns to the bitterness and disillusionment of old age when Cordelia is taken from him and he is left to die alone of a broken heart.

I recognize that stated in this blunt manner the above might serve as

a parody of the rich fabric of the play. It is no doubt possible to force the material of the play into a dozen different patterns. It is not the exact correspondence to the pattern which matters but whether the pattern illuminates any general progress in Lear's character which the audience feels to be intrinsic to the play. The evidence of Lear's return to second childhood is so blatant at the outset that I have thought it worthwhile to pursue this metaphor of development, running the danger, no doubt, of arousing mirth at what may be thought to be an excessive oversimplification of the play. Yet no-one would deny that Lear appears to grow from the ignorance of second-childhood to the wisdom of maturity within the play. It may be thought absurd to try to fit the development of one of the most extraordinary characters in literature to such a straightforward and psychologically normal pattern. But it is precisely because Lear is so extraordinary that he must go through the entire process of development, although in the most abnormal situations which drama can imagine, in order to come to terms with the nature of his existence. The commentators accompany Lear in his process of redevelopment, endeavouring to aid him in coming to terms with his situation. Inadvertently, however, they drive Lear towards a radical re-examination of the nature of existence, an exploration which is beyond their individual and collective understanding.

The Fool is aware that the old hierarchy has been replaced by the new one based on the abuse of power. One of the first lessons which Lear must learn is that his authority does not rest merely on the fact that he is Lear but on the kingship which reinforced that authority and the power which went with it. At Goneril's home (I, iv) Lear moves towards a crisis of identity based on the illusion of his power. He begins by questioning the identity of Goneril, "Are you our daughter?" (I, iv, 217) but shortly has to fall into

the pretence of questioning his own identity. His questions at this stage are rhetorical but they indicate the path he will take. I quote the passage in full to make clear the moment so heavily emphasized by Shakespeare when Lear begins, so to speak, to be born again, to start from the anonymity and powerlessness of childhood in building up a radically new personality:

Lear. Are you our daughter?  
Gon. I would you would make use of your good wisdom,  
 Whereof I know you are fraught, and put away  
 These dispositions which of late transport you  
 From what you rightly are.  
Fool. May not an ass know when the cart draws the  
 horse? Whoop, Jug! I love thee.  
Lear. Does any here know me? This is not Lear.  
 Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?  
 Either his notion weakens, or his discernings  
 Are lethargied. - Ha! Waking? 'Tis not so. -  
 Who is it that can tell me who I am?  
Fool. Lear's shadow.  
Lear. I would learn that; for, by the marks of sovereignty,  
 knowledge, and reason, I should be false persuaded  
 I had daughters.  
Fool. Which they will make an obedient father.  
Lear. Your name, fair gentlewoman?  
 (I, iv, 218-235)

Does not Lear in this exchange follow a kind of symbolic process of death in the loss of his faculties and the dissolution of his understanding, and of rebirth in his reawakening into a new world where he knows neither himself nor his daughters? And, if I may crack the wind of the phrase, the Fool serves in the office of undertaker and midwife in facilitating the change.

In Act I, Scene v, the process of awakening must continue because Lear is unwilling to recognize how extensive this new and alien environment is. The Fool persists with his elementary analogies and it is worth noting that his habit of speech, that of finding animal analogies for human situations, is a habit ultimately adopted by Lear himself. Momentarily Lear assumes the role of jester (I, v, 35) occasioning the remark that he would "make a good fool", a role which ultimately he takes on in catechizing the blind

Gloucester.<sup>1</sup>

Kent's blunt truth-speaking has been allied to folly from the outset and, however clearly he may see the villainy of the world, he is, like Lear, slow to recognize the new power-structure. He scorns Oswald (II, ii, 32-33) and dismisses Cornwall's threat with confidence (II, ii, 122-127). What Kent cannot see is that the reasons he gives for avoiding punishment are precisely the reasons why he is being stocked. He gives a splendid commentary on the policy employed by the new government (II, ii, 67-79), but he relies too heavily on being in the King's service, as Lear himself relies too heavily on the assumption that he is still king. Kent is like Lear in his enjoyment of excessive language in berating others. He demonstrates his inability to smile as the wind sits and hence, as the Fool prophesied, he is soon out in the night catching a cold. Cornwall indicates the limitations of bluntness when it is informed by pride (II, ii, 90-99). Clearly Kent is patterned on a common type which I have discussed in earlier chapters and his behaviour here fits perfectly Earle's description of a blunt man:

Hee chides great men with most boldnesse, and is counted for it an honest fellow... He is generally honest, but more generally thought so, and his downe rightnesse credits him as a man not well bended and crookned to the times.<sup>2</sup>

Haydn has linked him in his sharp comments on the court to the satirical tradition:

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<sup>1</sup>William Empson sees Lear as a character possessing elements of the natural, the clown, the lunatic, throughout. He interprets the character as a kind of extended metaphor of the various meanings of the word 'fool'. "Fool in Lear", Sewanee Review, LVII (1949), 177-214.

<sup>2</sup>John Earle, Micro-Cosmographie (1628) ed., by Edward Arber for English Reprints (London, 1904), p. 56.

Kent is the second kind of satirical commentator, the "sturdy wise man". He is indeed a perfect doctrinal Stoic, who endures the stocks and all fortune's buffetings with "apathy"... But he is also the Stoic "plain man" who imitates Cynic behaviour as "the expression of the right and duty of the truly virtuous man to rebuke evil in others". (Epictetus, Disc., III, 22,13).<sup>1</sup>

One cannot help feeling, however, that if all of Lear's hundred knights behaved as rudely as Kent, the daughters, from their own point of view, had considerable justification in objecting to the entourage. Kent exposes the uncompromising viciousness of the new rulers, but getting stocked for his insolence and reinforcing their case against Lear's followers is not the most helpful way of demonstrating Lear's power. Kent, therefore, follows the pattern of many of Shakespeare's blunt speakers, for in attempting to bring about one thing he ensures its opposite. He seeks to assert Lear's authority and becomes, in fact, a specific example for demonstrating to Lear his loss of authority. He wishes to help his master but drives the tragedy relentlessly along its path. Accidentally he helps to trigger Lear's movement to the next phase of his development - his rebellion against the authority of his daughters.

Kent has demonstrated his folly amply, and the jester shortly embraces folly in full consciousness.<sup>2</sup> He has indicated throughout a clear knowledge

<sup>1</sup>Hiram Haydn, The Counter-Renaissance (New York, 1960), p. 108.

<sup>2</sup>Folly, of course, is a very complicated concept as it is explored in this play, but I use the term here in the sense of the general conclusion reached by R. B. Heilman, "We have, then, two implied definitions of folly. As the word is used by Kent, it implies that the wise man will protect himself at least negatively, so to speak, by the mere avoidance of such needless actions as putting one's enemies into power. As Goneril applies the word folly to Albany's arguments, she implies that the wise man's duty to himself is taking affirmative, self-aggrandizing action, regardless of who gets hurt in the process. Yet these definitions have one sense in common: folly is not looking out for oneself in the world". This Great Stage: Image and Structure in "King Lear" (Baton Rouge, 1948), p. 185.

of the power-structure, but he is also aware that he is in a world where the alternative to folly is knavery. There is no median way of escape for himself or Lear. As Traversi puts it:

In the world as the Fool envisages it, with social differences reduced... to a contrast between 'bags' and 'rags', he whose only trust is in the mutations of Fortune, 'that arrant whore', is poor indeed. Circumstances, according to the Fool's philosophy, help those who are in a position to help themselves; the rest, in a society exclusively devoted to the acquisition of wealth and the power which accompanies it, have only resignation open to them. In the light of this disillusioned clear-sightedness, the whole course of Lear's future tragedy is already apparent.<sup>1</sup>

The Fool's total commitment of his fate to Lear is, in a sense, a heroic rebuttal of the new politics. There can be no professional role for a court-jester who follows a master whose court is every minute being diminished. He has mocked Kent for being incapable of smiling as the wind sits. He knows the dangers of clinging to the wheel of Fortune when it is past the height, but his loyalty to Lear conquers his sense of safety. The Fool finds himself early in this play at the crossroads which several of Shakespeare's commentators face. He must abandon his loyalty and save his skin or must throw in his lot with his master who follows the road of folly which he has himself accurately analyzed. There is no third course in tragedy and the Fool rises in the audience's esteem for recognizing the dilemma, though he thereby acknowledges his inability to find any alternative mode of action which will avert tragedy. In placing his loyalty above his sense of safety, and in recognizing that his sense of detachment is merely theoretical, he makes in full consciousness a choice which few other commentators perceive so clearly:

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<sup>1</sup>D. A. Traversi, "King Lear (1)" Scrutiny Vol. XIX, No. 1 (1952), p. 59.

Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill,  
 lest it break thy neck with following; but the great one  
 that goes upward, let him draw thee after. When a  
 wise man gives thee better counsel, give me mine again.  
 I would have none but knaves follow it, since a fool  
 gives it.

That sir which serves and seeks for gain,  
 And follows but for form,  
 Will pack when it begins to rain,  
 And leave thee in the storm.  
 But I will tarry; the fool will stay  
 And let the wise man fly.  
 The knave turns fool that runs away;  
 The fool no knave, perdy.  
 (II, iv, 70-83)

This speech is the key to the Fool's role, and a significant indication of the difficulties of detached observation in any tragic world. It is, in a way, a tragedy in little, for the Fool, free of all illusions, recognizes his own involvement in folly and the inescapable fate which is consequent upon such involvement. Many commentators fail to take the ultimate step of applying their insight into man's vulnerability to folly to themselves, but the Fool does not make that mistake. This speech plays out early, in a minor key, the admission of folly which Lear himself will have to make.

That this is a turning point in the Fool's role is clear from the fact that he abandons ever after his method of goading Lear to the truth about his daughters. He has nothing to say in the subsequent interview with the daughters though he had been irrepressible in the previous interview at Goneril's home. Lear must now learn his own lessons and the Fool dedicates himself to the task of saving the sanity of Lear whom he has so far continually harried with information which has helped to unsettle the king's wits. He has divided the world into knaves and fools, a division which roughly corresponds with the dominant world-views held by opposing groups of characters in this play. The fools are largely those who believe in the old dispensation of the

hierarchical order, and they include Kent, Lear, Gloucester, Edgar, Albany and the jester himself. The knaves are the believers in the new power-politics - Regan, Goneril, Edmund, Cornwall and Oswald. Kent has descanted on the manners of this new world and the Fool has acknowledged the attitude required to survive in it. But the jester is incapable of the sharp practices required, and he remains loyal to the old order, fulfilling a pattern which Sewell sees writ large through the play, "The movement of the play seems to be from conduct (and character) in which reason is governed by self-regard, to conduct (and character) in which reason is transformed by compassion".<sup>1</sup> He "can smell him that's stinking", (II, iv, 70) - meaning Lear's corrupted fortunes - but he refuses to leave his master. Necessarily, therefore, he begins increasingly to lose his function as a commentator in the play.

The three truth-speakers whom I have mentioned so far have not succeeded in diverting Lear from his tragic fate. Given Lear's personality, indeed, it is difficult to imagine anyone who could successfully help Lear. Cordelia has helped to initiate tragedy by crossing Lear. Kent has tended foolishly to confirm Lear in an authority which he does not have, and has brought down the wrath of the daughters on Lear's head by his persistent bluntness. The Fool, in apprizing Lear of his folly, has with his bitter barbs helped to bring Lear steadily closer to madness. He has, as Downname described the general process, made his "... admonition altogether unprofitable...no man can abide (and therefore much less an angry man) to have his gauled faults, too much rubbed, or the woundes and diseases of his mind, healed and cured, with too sharpe a corrasive and lothsome potion of insolent and bitter wordes".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur Sewell, Character and Society in Shakespeare (Oxford, 1951), p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>John Downname, Spiritual Physicke (London, 1600), pp. 79-80.

However reasonable, blunt, honest and sincere the three truth-speakers may be we cannot help noticing that they have aggravated rather than relieved the situation. Between them they offer no constructive mode of action that Lear might make use of, and Lear is left to canvass alternatives for himself.

In Act II, Scene iv, Lear reviews a whole series of possible courses which he might take and which he will examine in closer detail on the heath. Still imperfect in his lessons, he glances at several answers to the problem in which he is engaged. Throughout the scene he fitfully reminds himself that he will require patience if he is to retain his sanity, a theme richly elaborated on in the heath scenes. Lear passes over in mockery the possibility of asking forgiveness of Goneril, yet in terms like the ones he adopts here he will ultimately seek the forgiveness of Cordelia. His kneeling then will be undertaken in true humility. It will not be the ironical parody which he can afford here in rejecting Regan's suggestion that he should plead with Goneril:

Ask her forgiveness?  
Do you but mark how this becomes the house:  
'Dear daughter, I confess that I am old; [Kneeling.  
Age is unnecessary; on my knees I beg  
That you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food'.  
(II, iv, 150-154)

He calls on the gods twice to revenge the injustice done to him (II, iv, 188-191; II, iv, 270-277), a tactic which he practices initially on the heath, though he later abandons it as fruitless. He also mockingly glances at the idea of returning to Cordelia as a solution to his difficulties (II, iv, 211-214), a solution which will later appear to be much more realistic than it does here. He compares himself to beggars, though he does so in order to observe

a distinction which he will deny on the heath (II, iv, 263-264). Finally in anticipating his madness he fears the threat of the most radical solution of all (II, iv, 55-57; II, iv, 119; II, iv, 285). Although at this stage Lear rejects all these solutions as inadequate, it is important to note that he is already involved in trying to find answers to his problems. What is significant about the survey which he makes in this scene is that none of the ideas and solutions he canvasses are suggested by the commentators. They have no suggestions to offer, and will be prosaically concerned with keeping Lear out of the rain while he is trying to test all these ideas on the heath.

Lear is surrounded by more commentators, truth-speakers and loyal advisers than any of the tragic heroes whom I have so far examined. In several plays the detached, rational man offers advice which is ignored by the hero, but the loyal followers in this play are strained to the utmost in attempting to maintain even the most basic kind of communication with Lear. They are incapable of fully understanding the nature of Lear's struggle. They are there, of course, to help the audience to understand the magnitude of Lear's problems. They are not involved so much in offering rational solutions to the hero as in attempting to save his very sanity. Lear, above all tragic heroes, in exhausting his companions and ridding himself of them, indicates the essential loneliness of the extraordinary personality at odds with his society. The scenes on the heath make clear the radical disjunction between the personality of the tragic hero and all those around him. Lear's quest isolates him from the more normal preoccupations of his companions. Regan, in returning to the imagery of schooldays as she attempts to justify herself for rebuffing Lear, inadvertently pierces to an essential principle of tragedy -

that man in his lonely fate must teach himself his own lessons:

O sir, to wilful men  
The injuries that they themselves procure  
Must be their schoolmasters.

(II, iv, 301-303)

Many characters engage themselves as Lear's schoolmasters but none of them is as successful in tutoring Lear as is his own suffering.

The distance which separates Lear from his followers is measured at once in our first view of the King raving on the heath (III, ii). Juxtaposed with this wild, titanic, almost mythopoeic figure, is the Fool sitting, so to speak, in the eye of the tornado, attempting with his few scraps of irrelevant jesting to divert the hubristic passion of his master. Nowhere in Shakespeare is there a more extreme contrast between the rational commentator and the hero transfigured by passion. As Lear attempts to marshal the elements in order to bring destruction on mankind, the Fool attempts to press home the basic reality that they are in a thunderstorm and likely to get very wet! The Fool's inability to understand the dimensions of Lear's passions, even to communicate with him, is clear in the suggestion which he makes, "Good nuncle, in; ask they daughters' blessing", (III, ii, 12). It is because Lear has already rejected such a solution that they are out on the heath. The Fool who had rejected the world of the knaves in order to follow Lear now suggests that they submit to that world. The audience must feel that however reasonable this suggestion may sound as a way of getting out of the rain, it is, in this situation, as mad as Lear's attempts to control the elements. The Fool is now as far out of touch with the nature of the world he is in as Lear was earlier, when the jester's barbs struck home. In suggesting that flattery, "court holy water", is the best course to adopt, he is suggesting that the fools join the knaves, and is thus, under the increasing

strain, ignoring the distinction which had made his loyalty so admirable. He has dropped his criticism of Lear because he has committed himself to folly, and he is now beginning to forfeit his right even to accompany Lear because he is incapable of coping with the problems that Lear's folly has given rise to. His jingle about the cod-piece (III, ii, 25-36) is essentially a piece of time-serving, such as Kent had mocked in Oswald, for he is now reduced to the desire for shelter at all costs. Lear is concerned with the principles of justice; the Fool is concerned with mere survival. When the Fool says, "For there was never yet fair woman but she made mouths in a glass", (III, ii, 35-36) I assume an oblique reference to Goneril and Regan. The jester is, in effect, excusing the daughters' behaviour since all women practise vanity and hypocrisy. If all women play roles for the sake of policy, the jester seems to imply, we might as well ask their forgiveness in order to get out of the storm. The Fool's comments, far from being in tune with Lear's conscience, are now diametrically opposed to Lear's sentiments, and yet they help Lear into the next phase of his development.

The King is not so absolutely consumed by his preoccupation with seeking justice from the gods that he ignores his companions. He begins to move into that phase of social behaviour in which his sympathy for others makes him aware of a wider sphere of human suffering. One of the most moving moments of the play occurs when Lear puts aside his own struggle in order to take pity on his companions. It is as though Lear has responded subconsciously to the Fool's moment of weakness in which he suggests a return to the daughters. He determines to submit to the necessity of shelter for the sake of Kent and the jester who are incapable of imagining the kind of struggle in which he himself is involved. The King has so far been enshrouded in his own regal

conception of what is due to himself. It is a significant moment in his evolution when he becomes aware of other men's problems and it prepares the way for his later identification with unaccommodated man:

Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold?  
 I am cold myself. Where is this straw, my fellow?  
 The art of our necessities is strange  
 That can make vile things precious. Come, your hovel.  
 Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart  
 That's sorry yet for thee.

(III, ii, 68-73)

The phrases here, 'my boy', 'my fellow', 'our necessities', 'your hovel' and Lear's sorrow indicate a new social consciousness which the King has hitherto shown little evidence of possessing. His paternalism and his magnanimity in the midst of his tumultuous struggle are heroic. His companions are reduced to pity and fear, and they make no significant advance on their previous loyal behaviour; the Fool indeed regresses. But Lear can challenge the heavens and still find time for pity born out of his new experience. The extremity of weather on the heath is, indeed, nothing to Lear for he has many things to learn from his suffering. One cannot help feeling that his more rational companions are unable to profit much by their experience exactly because they are blocked by their sanity. The play resolves itself into a struggle between those who endeavour to get Lear into a dry bed and the King's contrary attempt to expose himself to the elements and to shed his kingship in finding his identity with a beggar.

That we are now in a topsy-turvy world is indicated by the Fool's prophecy at the end of Act III, Scene ii. His statement is an ironical inversion of the corruption of the real world. The world, the Fool implies, progresses only by the present corrupt methods. In his vision of a Utopia in which men are false to their own evil natures he sees the threat of confusion.

The Fool, who has suffered for his loyal pursuit of his master, mockingly observes that the tantalizing vision of perfection cannot be given substance because it is alien to man's vicious nature. In line with his new submission to the power of the knaves in his desire to return to the daughters, he accepts the diseased practices of the world as the best that one can hope for. This despair is the ultimate phase of the Fool's development; he can go no further and will soon disappear from the play. Lear will pass through the same phase but he will develop beyond it. The exhaustion of the Fool's function has come when Lear, with nothing more to learn from the jester, pities him. Antony magnanimously sends Enobarbus' treasure to him after his treachery and the rational man dies of a broken heart. The Fool, too, will disappear from his play because of his limited understanding of his master, and because the strain of the tragic world is too much to bear.

We can see that his function is exhausted from the fact that he is now replaced as a commentator by Poor Tom. Lear has no further use for the limited rationality of his Fool; in his growing madness he must have a bedlam beggar to turn to. It is important to realize that the play comes to a possible ending immediately prior to Poor Tom's entrance. Lear on the heath has been learning of his kinship in suffering with other men. He has been learning about his responsibility for his people and has demonstrated a new-found gift for magnanimity. He makes it clear that he needs to remain in the storm in order to retain his sanity (III, iv, 6-22), but he sends his Fool into the comfort of the hovel. He utters his great prayer, "Poor naked wretches" (III, iv, 28-36) and acknowledges that he has taken "too little care of this" suffering which afflicts others. Now in any more conventional didactic drama this might be the cue to a happy ending with the repentant father, willing

to shift his superflux, fortuitously rescued by his faithful daughter. Instead of being the end, it is a new beginning as Lear moves inexorably from one truth to another in the process of his development. Lear is still at the stage of pitying others from above with that majestic sense of magnanimity which can pity wretches who live in a manner which the King has not been familiar with hitherto. It is, indeed, a moving moment, a sincere prayer, but it is a gesture which a King can afford. It is in accord with much of the advice offered by Charron to the wise prince whom he admonishes to attain honesty and patience:

Another vertue requisite in a Prince in a second degree is magnanimitie and greatnes of courage, to contemne iniuries and bad speeches, and to moderate his choler; never to vex himselfe for the outrages and indiscretions of another.<sup>1</sup>

Lear, we may say, seems at this point to be conforming to the model of the wise prince. But Lear has not yet got to the root of the problem - his discovery that it is only ceremony which divides kings from beggars. Lear still has to penetrate to the truth about the handy-dandy nature of the world. Having reached the new stability of socialized behaviour and the sense of responsibility for other men, Lear is blasted by a thunderbolt in the shape of Poor Tom. The new commentator comes out of the hovel in which the old one tries to find rest from the storm.

I wish to examine this moment in greater detail in order to come to an understanding of the effect which Poor Tom has. He is, perhaps, the most radical extension imaginable of the commentator's role. Most commentators offer reason in order to divert their masters from folly, but Lear is already

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<sup>1</sup>Pierre Charron, Of Wisdome, trans. by Samson Lennard (London, 1607), III, p. 367.

well beyond the stage where that kind of commentary can be offered. Poor Tom offers an image of madness—what Lear will become if he pursues his path of folly. Edgar partly to disguise himself but partly also, I feel, to help Lear, presents the image of fallen man, mad and writhing in agony, in order to drive Lear back to sanity. He becomes instead the pretext for Lear's more penetrating understanding of the nature of his world. The bedlam beggar is the embodiment of the image of disorder which other commentators, in this and other plays, have warned about. He is, as Lear fully recognizes, "the thing itself". I concentrate on the scene because it is an important lynch-pin in my argument that Shakespeare explodes the old conventional and didactic morality by demonstrating the inadequacy of all commentators in averting, or even coming to terms with, the nature of the tragic world. They offer the wisdom of the normal world where happy endings can be secured. Lear has, so to speak, just come to the point where a happy ending might be accomplished, but he must drive on towards the ultimate implications of tragedy.

We are, in the heath scenes, in a mythopoeic world, and Poor Tom is very close to many a myth, the myth of the 'possessed one'. He is Ajax killing sheep, Orestes pursued by the furies, the exiled Oedipus in his gruesome rags, Odysseus among the ashes seeking the truth about Penelope, even Apollo at the court of Laomedon, even the thunder of Zeus himself, that reward of hubris. The thunder and its significance have been challenged by Lear; not only Apollo but Hermes preceded Lear into hovels; myths about gods refused entrance abound everywhere; Lear's fight with the storm has essential affinities with the world of myth, going back to the earliest stories ever told of gods or men. Poor Tom's effect is that of the thunderbolt, that ultimate vision which blasts man. When Actaeon saw the goddess Diana naked, he was torn by his own hounds.

When Lear sees Poor Tom, essential man, one of the poor naked wretches, his sanity finally cracks under the impact.

The scene has, however, even more important affinities for my purposes, and if we contrast it with a scene from medieval drama we can better appreciate what Shakespeare was trying to do. In The Castle of Perseverance, at the point at which Mankynde finally enters the castle protected by the Virtues, the Bad Angel runs forward to call on fiends such as Flypergebet and Bakbytere to attack and bring Mankynde to destruction. Poor Tom is one "whom the foul fiend vexes" (III, iv, 61). His speech is entirely that of one who has not been saved by the virtues but who is hounded through the world by such as Flibbertigibbet. He is one of the damned and he gives his sermon from the far side of damnation; his world is a hell-on-earth, the misery that man can fall into, a warning to Lear.

It is possible that fake-Bedlams thought it wise to give this moralizing, minatory advice the better to appeal for alms. There is, perhaps, nothing so successfully loosening to the purse-strings as the sight of a man driven mad by his sins, offering his advice to and requiring pity from those who may thus regard themselves as being much better placed in the eternal scheme of Providence. He works in a manner similar to the Fool in the sense that a Fool beaten for his insults or rewarded for them is a figure onto whom one's bad luck is shifted, a scapegoat figure who is paid for bearing the hard knocks of the world. So the Bedlam stands as a warning of what one may become, and yet is rewarded exactly because he makes his audience aware that they have not become like him and can afford to display brotherly charity to demonstrate and reinforce this fact even further.

Poor Tom offers a catalogue of the sins which have brought him to

his present misery, and yet much of what he says instead of serving as a warning only parallels Lear's experience. His speech at III, iv, 50-62 gives the general pattern of the errors which the fiend has forced him into. But Lear, too, has been led through fire and flame, through ford and whirlpool, o'er bog and quagmire. Lear has been proud of heart and has attempted the impossible in casting away his power and continuing to demand obedience. His actions at the homes of his daughters were indeed an example of riding on a trotting-horse over four-inched bridges. Lear has coursed his own shadow for a traitor in the crisis in his sense of identity at the home of Goneril, and in his increasing sense of guilt at his betrayal of Cordelia. But Lear refuses to believe in the foul fiend, though he recognizes in the experience of the Bedlam a parallel to his own career by insisting that Tom's daughters have brought him to this pass. Tom portrays himself as an agent of his own destruction, but Lear is prepared only to believe that man is patient and victim of his fate.

Tom returns to the attack with a sermon. He enters his pulpit with an obscene liturgical incantation and halloos his congregation: "Pillicock sat on Pillicock-hill. Alow, alow, loo, loo!" (III, iv, 75-76). He takes as his text a series of injunctions:

Take heed o' th' foul fiend; obey thy parents; keep thy  
words justly; swear not; commit not with man's sworn  
spouse; set not thy sweet heart on proud array.  
(III, iv, 78-81)

all but one of which can be applied to Lear's relations with his daughters. As an exemplum Tom takes his own career of depravity. His attack is basically on the courtly world, its corrupt and sophisticated ceremony - that ceremony which Lear had taken so much for granted as being necessary to his own sense of importance. Tom continues in a bizarre manner the commentary which we have

so far heard from Cordelia, Kent and the Fool on the corruption inherent in the courtly world. The essence of the speech resides in the fact that it comes as if from a fallen courtier. The corruption in the only world of order in which Lear had hitherto believed is unambiguously exposed. It was all very well for Lear to pity the poor naked wretches and the misery of man on the heath but Tom has been brought to misery in that court world, the loss of which the King has so far mourned. The effect of this is to move Lear to the realization that the whole world, both court and heath, is irredeemably corrupt and miserable, and that there is no distinction between them. Poor Tom in attempting to warn Lear of the dangers of the outcast only succeeds in making Lear aware that all men are outcasts. By the time that Tom closes his sermon with "suum, mun, nonny", a parody, perhaps, of a latin benediction, Lear has been brought to his next stage of development in the new crisis in his sense of identity. He will find out who he is even if he has to run naked on the lightning stricken heath. The massive irrelevance of the rational man in this situation is made clear by the Fool's response to Lear's stripping off his "lendings": "Prithee, nuncle, be contented; 'tis a naughty night to swim in", (III, iv, 109-110). The Fool is now not only essentially off the point but almost sacreligious in his suggestions.

Tom comes to save Lear, then, from the foul fiends sent by the bad angels to prevent his salvation at the gates of the Castle of Perseverance - in this case, the hovel. There is in all of Tom's behaviour something quintessentially medieval. His fear of fiends, his hallucinations of them constantly vexing his peace of mind, reminds us of the allegorical figures of medieval drama. He comes to Lear as a version of Mankynde or Everyman, a figure with whom the audience normally identified itself. Here is exactly

the figure for whom Lear is searching, one of those 'Poor naked wretches' onto whom Lear, with a kind of shortsighted magnanimity, had intended to shift his superflux. He is presented with unaccommodated man who might, indeed, be a figure very little changed from medieval drama were it not for the fact that the audience is also aware that this figure is Edgar with the complicating sophistication of multiple roles which that implies. Hence the irony of "here's three on's are sophisticated!". Lear mistakes him for Everyman, a figure in whom he can pity the condition of man. Shakespeare thus takes a figure from earlier drama and immensely complicates the issue by making him not a representative Everyman but a fake faker of madness. I have observed that the Fool has been caught in a conflict of roles between his normal function of detachment in the traditional license of the jester and his role as a victim of folly no longer capable of apposite commentary. Poor Tom is also forced into a conflict of roles by Lear's exhausting quest. Because he is incapable of answering Lear's questions he is forced to abandon his role as Everyman and return to his role as Edgar, the loyal son in simpler disguises following the less complex fate of his father. The intensity and strain of the situation becomes too much - he cannot daub it further. Admittedly he gives Lear an individual history of his career as a servingman, lucky in love and then fallen, an anticipation as it happens of Edmund's development and similar in many ways to Oswald's career, but it is a catalogue of events in the life of Mankynde seduced by all the Vices. Whether Tom individualizes himself or not is hardly to the purpose since Lear has use for him only as Everyman. To put the matter quite crudely, the rapid exhaustion of this role is inevitable, for such a medieval abstraction cannot exist for long in a drama based on the details of personality. Mankind is no longer a general figure fought over by Virtues and

Vices. We are now, after the Renaissance and the Reformation, aware of the fate of Everyman in this play but our awareness is not at the level of simple generalization and abstraction. What we learn about Everyman has to be interpreted through the detailed and complicated nature of Lear's extraordinary experience.

At Gloucester's entrance (III, iv, 109) Shakespeare leans very heavily on the tradition of medieval drama. Here we have a superb example of medieval drama being exploited by Renaissance man, for it has all the strength of those mighty clashes of moralized abstractions plus the overwhelming impact of Lear's personality wedded to it. Here, in a sense, we have Lear amidst the complications of his own experience attempting to search back to the general outlines of man's condition. The medieval dramatist had not bothered himself with the details of individuality because, in the last analysis, we are all equally frail, open to temptation and sin. From his point of view Everyman might just as well be a beggar as a king since no special dispensation is made for status and position. What we have in King Lear is an extraordinary individual, a man who has given away his kingdom, lost the affection of his daughters, his position, his possessions, and exchanged the world of kingship for that of beggary. On the heath he is engaged in exacting divine retribution or, failing that, in constructing a philosophy which will adequately explain this change in his fortunes. His exploration will eventually lead him to a radical inversion of medieval belief. He comes to reject the idea that Mankind is a battlefield for Good and Evil in a struggle umpired by God, and finds that in the absence of God the world is a conflicting chaos where we are all role-players with 'lendings' attempting to justify our self-interest. But at the point of the play with which I am dealing he resembles

Mankynde in The Castle of Perseverance. He throws off the sophisticated temptations of this world and the illusions of power in order to recognize himself as nothing more than a poor, bare, forked animal. Lear, however, does not go on to accept the protection of the Virtues by entering the Castle of Perseverance. That would be a Nahum Tate ending which would turn the drama into a straightforward didactic Morality play. Trumpets sound, Cordelia rides over the hill, Lear repents, is returned to power, curtain.

The important point, however, is that this is exactly what Poor Tom thinks will happen when he produces for us this tremendous moment of medieval theatre. He recognizes the enormous mental effort involved in Lear's symbolic unbuttoning, his wild, almost ceremoniously ritualistic moment of identification with common man. The King has at last, it seems, been purged of his personality problems. He is at the entrance, so to speak, of the Castle of Perseverance, ready maybe to submit patiently to the hymn singing of the Virtues above and to enjoy their bombardment of the Vices with roses. What Poor Tom does not know is that in order to get to this position Lear has had to test the justice and retribution of the gods and has found them wanting. Poor Tom's behaviour at the entrance of Gloucester with his torch is completely in the tradition of the medieval theatre:

This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet; he begins at  
curfew, and walks till the first cock; he  
gives the web and the pin, squenes the eye, and  
makes the hare-lip; mildews the white wheat,  
and hurts the poor creature of earth.

(III, iv, 113-117)

Tom utters his spell in order to defend the castle against the foul fiends, preparing for the siege that inevitably follows, in medieval drama, man's abandoning of his evil ways. At this point the stage is so topsy-turvy, plagued by storms, madmen, beggars, fools, that the audience might well expect

anything to happen. The appearance of a 'walking fire' can be produced in such a way, with Tom's terrified incantation, that the audience can almost be unhinged into believing that this really is Flibbertigibbet, and his howling fiends. With Gloucester probably scarved up against the storm it takes some considerable time before he is recognized. It takes over fifty lines before he identifies himself as Gloucester, though Kent must have given him some recognition earlier in stage business. But in any case there are a number of fearful questions bawled into the dark (III, iv, 124-126), which indicate that those on stage do not immediately recognize him, and we may deduce that the audience was not meant to recognize him immediately either. I would certainly produce the scene with Kent, Fool and beggar grouped around Lear as defence against this frightening intruder. Most of the scene is taken up with Poor Tom's gibbering about the fiends. Everyone on stage is stunned into silence, leaving his mutterings as the only explanation of the 'walking fire', which is that the foul fiend has come to catch Lear by the heels at the moment that he has set aside his kingship and his pride.

Yet we must pause and question, for is not the consequence of this frightening moment of theatre likely to prove one of the most explosive moments of bathos imaginable? After this incantation, this yelling into the night, this moment when the fiends seem to have been let loose (we must remember that the witches of Macbeth had stalked the stage so recently as to make it possible for fiends not only to be presented but also to be accepted), after this moment on the edge of the abyss, will it not come as the most outrageous comic relief to discover that we have no fiend at all but only poor old Gloucester come to offer a night's lodgings?

This is one of Shakespeare's most daring tricks of theatre but he

protects us from the kind of shock that would release us into laughter by making Gloucester's recognition a slow process dying away from this climax. Lear never recognizes him, and Poor Tom, for obvious reasons, cannot make a public recognition. This leaves Kent and the Fool, and a good producer will leave them to make a recognition that becomes gradually clear to the audience while Poor Tom is still at his incantation and after the initial terror has begun to die down. It is the very fact that Poor Tom cannot make a public recognition which protects us from surprise, for on the one hand he keeps up his patter and thus holds Lear's attention by emphasizing the character he has established, and on the other hand he has to intensify his faking in order to protect himself from Gloucester's recognition. This smoke-screen of fiends and of the fallen condition of man is convincingly kept up and prevents any sudden transition, as well as any all-round recognition, which would make nonsense of Tom's original suggestion..

This scene is an extraordinary piece of theatre craft and has a remarkable function. It consciously brings us to a climax traditional in medieval theatre as a turning point, the defence of repentant man, makes us pause and look at it so that we realize its inadequacy in this situation, and then drives on straight through it to the new kind of exploration of individual folly that Shakespeare had made possible in drama. In a play which is an extended analysis by the Renaissance mind of the kind of problems that the medieval playwright dealt with, albeit in entirely different terms, Shakespeare pauses on the way to his own solution at the point where medieval drama had found its solution, and thereby implies how much further we shall have to go when we are dealing with a character as complicated as Lear. Poor Tom may go on gibbering about the fiends but their relevance is exhausted,

and the reason why their relevance is exhausted is, by a superb irony, exactly because the apparition had in fact turned out not to be Flibbertigibbet at all but Gloucester. The fiends fail to appear, despite Tom's fear, because the fiends, as this play goes on to show, are in man's mind. It is this point that Lear understands, for he has no fear of fiends, rather he pities Tom for the extremities which have reduced him to such hallucinations. That earlier world of devils with horns, of the externalized battle of Virtues and Vices is gone and we must now explore the conflict which rages in man's mind. Flibbertigibbet will not appear in order to taunt Everyman because we are now concerned with an individual fate and that individual is King Lear, a man driven by external pressure and internal conflict to madness. Lear has called on the gods to no avail; Tom has called on the fiends and they have not materialized; Lear must move onwards to a vision of man as a creature who is unaided in and responsible for his own destruction.

Poor Tom tries to ensure a happy ending by staging a medieval version of the salvation of man. He will frighten Lear with fiends and drive him to repentance. In this play we have a commentator who is turned inside out. Edgar comments on the play not by means of rational observation but by his insane antics. Instead of running behind Lear shouting out warnings, he rushes ahead shouting warnings back to Lear who is tottering on the brink of chaos. His speech issues from the abyss of disorder and insanity which the king is approaching and his images are concerned with that animal world of topsy-turvyland of which the Fool has warned Lear. The effect of the Fool in suggesting a rational view of the world is to drive Lear towards madness, the effect of Tom, in depicting insanity, is to draw Lear into the abyss of madness. In trying to force the distinction between himself and Lear he has

made him aware of their similarity. In bringing Lear to the Castle of Perseverance he has ensured that he cannot enter it, for Lear now believes that there is not enough virtue in the world to save a man. Poor Tom has tried to show him a vision of fiends and has succeeded in showing him a new vision of man. He has tried to present an image of a fallen man and has exhibited an image of a fallen world. Lear will still accept no-one else's interpretation of the world but will pursue his own. Tom does his best to exhibit himself as the lowest and most degraded specimen of mankind and Lear takes him to be as wise as a learned Theban, a kind of Diogenes who suffers this discomfort for his own profit.

Poor Tom's running-commentary on the world of fiends, his version of the chaos which befalls the foolish and sinful man, does not halt Lear's developmental process. He has no need of shelter now, "First let me talk with this philosopher". I have talked of the parallels with mythical material but at this point Lear tries to break out of the myth. The gods had driven Greek heroes into a mad frenzy; Ajax kills sheep; Hercules slaughters his family; they are victims of an order beyond their vision. Lear in his madness attacks the myth itself; he commits that ultimate act of hubris by questioning the very idea of order itself: "What is the cause of thunder?". He has found the gods inadequate and the fiends non-existent; he begins now to probe the idea that the essential condition of man is chaotic. Tom's function has been to exhibit chaos, not explain it. Lear has seen chaos in his own court, in the tempest and in the bedlam-beggar. In realizing that his own conception of order is based on false ceremony and the 'lendings' with which man deceives himself he no longer needs to be told how to avoid that condition which he now regards as natural for man. The Fool and Tom have tried to tell him how

to avoid it, but he now needs to know why it is unavoidable. In one step he immediately grows beyond the help of Poor Tom, probing questions that are beyond his capacity, as a fake-madman, to understand. Lear, the only authentic madman in this world of fools, beggars and ordinary men limited by their sanity, will search out the reason. Poor Tom says that his study is "How to prevent the fiend and to kill vermin" (III, iv, 155) thus uniting mental and physical hygiene, a study that is not adequate in meeting the demands which Lear has to make. Lear will still keep with his philosopher, with his good Athenian, because, surrounded now by sane men, Tom is the only man with whom he can communicate. The beggar hoping to frighten Lear off has cemented a grotesque blood-brotherhood of lunatics.

In Act III, Scene vi, Poor Tom has to join forces with the Fool in attempting to distract the King. He warns Lear of the fiends and the Fool engages in irrelevant jests. The Fool takes his material at random from the jest book (III, vi, 9-10), and Lear, with his triumphant reply of man's ultimate folly of indulgence in the false glory of kingship, (III, vi, 10), leaves him to complete his riddle with a pathetic irrelevance, (III, vi, 11-14). The King now ignores his companions; their desperate jokes launched into a void are incapable even of drawing recognition from him. The King has moved into that phase of development where he no longer assumes justice to be dispensed from on high. Justice is man-made and Lear will apply it himself.

We have seen in many plays how the hero is impervious to the suggestions of his companions, and in this scene we have the most radical example that Shakespeare ever produced of the distance between commentator and hero. Lear lives now completely in his own world beyond the reach of sane

moderation. The bedlam-beggar and the jester play into each other's hands, in their snatches of song and refrains designed to make a joke of the trial, as though they would free Lear from the labyrinth of insanity. They have taken part in the education of Lear, but now he is organizing games which tax them beyond the limit of their wits. Lear is now as stubborn in pursuing his education as he was stubborn at the outset in rejecting it. The grotesque nature of this trial-scene arises not only from Lear's madness but from the sanity of his companions. It is not merely the passion of Lear which is frightening but the gulf which separates him from the rational man. That bond between hero and commentator, which Shakespeare had stretched ever more tenuously in his tragedies, finally breaks in this scene where the rational world and the lunatic world part company. Lear, needing increasingly to be rid of his entourage of helpful and protecting companions, needing to cast aside all those who have hope of an ordered, sane world, finally exhausts them in this scene and casts himself adrift on the heath. The Fool tries to press home a reality which Lear no longer recognizes: "Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool", (III, vi, 51). Poor Tom has failed to save Lear and becomes aware of his limitations in finding himself forced from the role of bedlam-beggar into the role of Edgar disguised as guide and protector of his father: "My tears begin to take his part so much / They mar my counterfeiting", (III, vi, 59-60). As a faker of madness he cannot keep up with the wild and whirling imagination of Lear, the genuine madman. He is reduced to taking his cues from Lear; he pretends to frighten off the dogs which Lear has imagined (III, vi, 64-72). He sinks exhausted, his functional use to Lear finished with, "Poor Tom, thy horn is dry", (III, vi, 74). With an uncanny sense Lear in his madness seems to realize that he has finished with

the beggar. He does not like the fashion of Tom's garments and bids him change them, almost as though he had seen through his disguise and had no more use for the part he is playing (III, vi, 77-80). Lear needs the answers to fundamental problems, "Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts?" (III, vi, 76). The Fool can see only joint-stools and Tom only fiends, so there is no hope of an answer there and Lear must abandon them to continue his search. The Fool speaks his last line, acknowledging in his "I'll go to bed at noon", (III, vi, 85), that he will seek death in the prime of his life. Whichever of the many suggested meanings of this line we take, the Fool clearly signifies his submission to the topsy-turvy land which Lear has created.

The play has reached a climax at this point and Shakespeare has ably prepared us for the fact that Lear no longer has any use for his Fool, for the loyal Kent, or for Poor Tom. They all lose contact with Lear at the same time. No audience can ever have been surprised at the disappearance of the Fool since he has long ceased to provide any functional communication with Lear. For a climactic moment Poor Tom brought a truth home to Lear, but he has proved unable to explain that truth and has fallen back more and more desperately on mere bedlam-talk, which Lear is past needing. Most commentators provide an important contrast with the hero, and Lear's companions have done that. Lear has suffered from his experiences and his companions have suffered from the observation of them. But in lacking the impact of the experiences themselves the companions are incapable of coming to terms with the lessons which Lear is learning. Lear can only hope to communicate now with people who have experienced the cruel injustices of the world, with those who have a kinship in the kind of suffering which has brought him knowledge.

He has made much of Poor Tom, called him an Athenian philosopher, assuming that his misery has produced wisdom in him. Lear will choose the blind and tormented Gloucester as the man to whom he will reveal his own new and searing vision of the world. He will become his own Fool, he will become a commentator on the world. Shakespeare finally produces in this play a commentator who speaks not with the voice of reason but with the voice of insanity. But if the audience is to appreciate Lear's commentary, his vision of chaos, there have to be those on stage who do not.

Lear has worn out Poor Tom and the Fool, and Shakespeare now turns to his sub-plot to create the kind of suffering man whom Lear must attempt to enlighten. Lear's apocalyptic vision is heightened by the level of understanding to which Gloucester attains. Shakespeare presumably in order to distinguish the special nature of his own tragic vision juxtaposes his main plot with a story patterned on the structure of the old didactic moralities. Gloucester's story has very much more in common with the tone and temper of the old source play, King Leir, than does the main plot itself. It has a foolish hero and a wise, loyal companion who attempts to ensure a happy ending, who offers sound moral advice and points to the road of salvation. Poor Tom had little success in directing Lear towards salvation but he finds his proper place in dealing with Gloucester.

I have tried to indicate throughout this thesis how Shakespeare's tragedy, and particularly his use of the commentators, exposed the inadequacy of the old didactic drama as a means of exploring the full complexity of human events. I would like now to place the keystone in this argument by attempting to show how Shakespeare encapsulated an example of this older form of drama in his own supreme tragedy, thus demonstrating the disparity between his own

vision and that of his predecessors. Shakespeare, so to speak, exhumes the old didactic drama, sets it within his play, and finally buries it with the catastrophic end of his main plot. The platitudes of Edgar and Gloucester are set beside the agonizing experience of Lear, and are found to be wanting. I have suggested that Shakespeare developed the functions of his commentators out of those moralizing sentiments which had punctuated the action in the older dramas. In Shakespeare the reasonable man is of little avail in checking folly. In this play he extends the contrast of hero and commentator into the contrast between two entire plots. Lear, as I have tried to show, exhausts all the sane men around him. By contrast we can see how Gloucester's companion, Edgar, works a much more ordinary and pliable mortal to a point of repentance, regeneration and salvation, issuing throughout statements of moral import. The audience can appreciate the relevance of Edgar's comments to Gloucester's world, but it is forced to recognize how totally inadequate they are when applied to the gigantic dimensions of Lear's world.

The manifesto of this new morality is presented at the end of Act III, Scene vi, when Poor Tom is buried and Edgar born again in the image of homo patiens.<sup>1</sup> Edgar gives voice to that popular morality which finds comfort in the fact that others are worse off than oneself. It is, perhaps, the normal morality of the audience, of theatre-goers, who watch the fall of the

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<sup>1</sup>Many critics have found no consistency in the characterization of Edgar, and have reduced him to a congeries of conventions exploited by Shakespeare for a variety of dramatic needs. Leo Kirshbaum declares: "One cannot say the character is improbable; properly speaking, there is no character - there is only a puppet". "Banquo and Edgar: Character or Function", Essays in Criticism, VII (1957), p. 10. It will be evident from my discussion that I have no sympathy with such a view.

mighty and comfort themselves with the thought that they have no power to hazard such dangers. The sub-plot presents a kind of everyday morality which may be good enough for ordinary mortals but which helps little in solving the problems of a mighty saga-family. Edgar establishes himself as a kind of audience to Lear's world and sets himself to learn lessons from it. Edgar gives a correct sense of proportion to his own griefs by setting them beside Lear's. But what "mates and bearing fellowship" can the King find for his griefs? That is surely one of the points of the play - that Lear's experience, like that of all of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, is so extraordinary that it cannot find ease in the comfort of ordinary morality. Indeed, ordinary morality flourishes, perhaps, because it is protected from such shattering catastrophes. Edgar throws off his disguise because he has pretended, as Poor Tom, to have suffered to the point where his sanity was shattered. Having seen the reality of such an experience he has to abandon the presumption of such a role. Edgar as an honest mortal for the workaday world finds comfort and instruction in the suffering of Lear (III, vi, 102-110). He will think better of himself henceforth:

Mark the high noises; and thyself bewray,  
When false opinion, whose wrong thoughts defile thee,  
In thy just proof repeals and reconciles thee.  
(III, vi, 111-113)

Edgar's patient submission is established and stands in vivid contrast to Lear's restless search for an explanation of his suffering, which we have observed earlier in this scene.

If Edgar has no business competing with Lear in insanity, he can still play the part of Poor Tom with Gloucester, for his blind father is willing to be led and can eventually be convinced to avoid the foul fiend, as Lear

can never be. When we meet Edgar in Act IV, Scene i, we find him reflecting philosophically on his condition, making the best of a bad situation.<sup>1</sup> His initial soliloquy is the kind of comfort left to the patient man who expects little from the world, the man who is contented to sleep on the floor because it means that at least he cannot fall out of bed. When he encounters his blinded father, he is cheering himself up with the belief that things can only get better.

Lear constantly makes events, is himself an event, whereas Gloucester is a victim of events. When, after being blinded, Gloucester is told that Edmund hates him, he accepts his mistake and asks forgiveness for his sins against Edgar in a matter of two lines (III, vii, 90-91). This is in marked contrast with Lear's struggle throughout the play against his daughters, the elements, and the gods before he can do anything so simple as to ask forgiveness. Lear has to convince himself that the world is governed by folly before he can come to terms with his own folly. Gloucester acknowledges his folly at once and plods on. Gloucester and Edgar set their problems immediately in the context of general concepts. Their method of extracting general lessons from particular situations is reminiscent of the habits of the Senecan chorus. Most of Act IV, Scene i is cast into this mode of moral generalization and platitude drawn from individual experience:

I stumbled when I saw: full oft 'tis seen  
Our means secure us, and our mere defects  
Prove our commodities.

(IV, i, 20-22)

As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods -

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<sup>1</sup>Edgar's success in patiently suffering and learning from experience is examined by Hugh Mclean, "Disguise in King Lear: Kent and Edgar", SQ, XI (1960) 49-54. The article also contains an interesting contrast between the functions of Edgar and Kent in applying the lessons they learn from their observation of the mighty events of tragedy.

They kill us for their sport.  
(IV, i, 37-38)

'Tis the times' plague when madmen lead the blind.  
(IV, i, 47)

All the evidence points to the fact that the experiences of Gloucester and his son merely confirm their conceptual view of the world. Lear, because of the nature of his experience, has felt it necessary to construct a totally new philosophy for himself. Gloucester and Edgar simply fall back on the commonplaces of traditional philosophy. It never occurs to either of them to question the cause of thunder, for they accept the given order of providence, inscrutable though it may be.

Heilman<sup>1</sup> talks a great deal about commonplaces and choral comments coming from various characters, and regards them as summaries of the central problems of the play. It seems to me wrong to call such comments 'choric', as though Shakespeare provides them as keys to the meaning of his play. The comments are appropriate to the characters who speak them and to no-one else. The Fool's epigrams and Edgar's commonplaces fix these characters for us in the total structure of ideas. The inclusion of an enormous amount of commonplace material in this play is Shakespeare's method of showing the kind of thoughts on which men subsist, and how they try to cheer themselves up or explain the confusion of events which surrounds them. Men struggle to compress their enormous sufferings into manageable platitudes; they struggle to verbalize their feelings of bewilderment and relate them to some sense of order so that they may quell their discomfort. But the audience is meant

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<sup>1</sup>R. B. Heilman, This Great Stage: Image and Structure in "King Lear" (Baton Rouge, 1948).

to be aware of the limited and platitudinous nature of their speech, and the final injunction of the play defeats this comfort sought in commonplaces. The maxims and traditional saws are insufficient in explaining this immense experience - men will have to speak what they feel not what they ought to say.

Edgar, as a detached observer must find some comfort within his philosophy to avert Gloucester from the tragic path which he is pursuing. What is remarkable about Act IV, Scene i, is the patience of the suffering and the kind of reflex, moral response to it which is so far from Lear's hurling of defiance at all and sundry. Even the parallelism to the events in the main plot is designed for purposes of contrast. Within fifty lines of meeting Tom, Gloucester is taking pity on the poor, offering his purse, shaking his superflux onto the unfortunate. Again we remember Lear's titanic struggle before he could reach the simplicity of his prayer to the "Poor naked wretches". Gloucester and Edgar are too normal to require an extended *search* in lunacy to find solutions for their problems. They are conceived on the scale of the old King Leir who, because he could resort to philosophical commonplaces and respond to the advice offered by traditional morality, was enabled to reach a happy ending. This normal world is only the base on which Shakespeare builds the superstructure of his main plot. If Shakespeare had written tragedies only about characters such as Gloucester and Edgar he would have been a didactic dramatist of minor stature. Edgar and Gloucester have between them a philosophy which can save the normal world. Lear discovers a philosophy which reduces man to the level of animals and which denies any sense of civilized order. Such a philosophy contains no hope of salvation for the world. The death of Lear's old personality and the birth of his new one

occupy the entire length of the play. Gloucester has only to fall face downwards on the stage to rise a new man. He enacts the fall of man and learns to repent by the revelation of a miracle. The pliable and credulous nature of Gloucester in Edgar's hands reminds us of how imperiously Lear had subjected Poor Tom to his will. Poor Tom was forced to play Lear's games; Gloucester is willing to suffer and even to believe in Edgar's games. Edgar claims that a fiend forced Gloucester into his attempt at suicide, and Gloucester accepts his explanation:

I do remember now. Henceforth I'll bear  
Affliction till it do cry out itself  
'Enough, enough' and die. 'That thing you speak of  
I took it for a man; often 'twould say  
'The fiend, the fiend'. He led me to that place.  
(IV, vi, 75-79)

Edgar is, in fact, of all the commentators whom I have examined in Shakespeare's work, the only one who saves his master and presses advice on him which averts tragedy instead of ensuring it. He succeeds, I suggest, because he has the task of advising, and guiding a sub-plot character instead of a tragic hero. The contrast between the two is obvious when, immediately following his repentance, Gloucester is faced with Lear, "fantastically dressed with weeds". One has only to try to imagine Gloucester ever dressing himself in flowers to see the significance of the juxtaposition. Lear having achieved his vision of a chaotic and anarchic world now attempts to communicate his vision to those who, having suffered themselves, might be able to understand it. But Lear finds merely the world of the sane which he had left behind on the heath. Gloucester has been blinded but he has not been blasted by hubristic experience. Born back into the world of stoical acceptance of fortune's buffets he can make nothing of Lear's vision of disorder. Accepting both the gods and the fiends, Gloucester has no need to search the nature of

man for the evil which dominates his world.

Lear now is his own Fool, he knows all the answers, all the reasons for the world's condition. He is the commentator to top all commentators because he does not seek to avoid chaos; it has become his element and he will communicate his vision to all the world. He explains the handy-dandy nature of the world, he describes the jungle laws on which man operates, he describes man in terms of animal imagery. The vision is so obvious to Lear that even a blind man may see it. He has finally rid himself of the illusions of ceremony and power. He no longer accepts flattering rhetoric, for he has come to grips with his own limitations. The struggle which had begun at Goneril's home when he had questioned his own identity has come to an end:

They flatter'd me like a dog, and told me I had  
white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were  
there. To say 'ay' and 'no' to everything that I  
said! 'Ay' and 'no' too was no good divinity.  
When the rain came to wet me once, and the wind  
to make me chatter; when the thunder would not peace  
at my bidding; there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em  
out. Go to, they are not men o' their words. They  
told me I was everything; 'tis a lie - I am not  
ague-proof.

(IV, vi, 96-105)

Lear has at last found out what it is to be a man. He will play the role of king now in order to mock it. The course of nature goes on and he recognizes that he has no ability to stop it. Lear has become an observer of the passing show. His hallucinatory world bears out all his predictions. With his superior insight he is now invulnerable to the world. This arctic vision is a radical extension of the jaundiced view shared by Thersites, Apemantus and Timon. The first two were not inclined to abandon their proud vision as the world's knowers. The last was given an opportunity

to abandon his vision when the love of Flavius was offered to him but he rejected it. Lear has not yet finished his development and he will complete the process which the others were incapable of fulfilling. In such radical misanthropy one exception destroys the entire philosophy and Lear meets his exception in Cordelia.

In his encounter with Gloucester he tries to communicate what he has seen but finds no way there. He is a man apart and in the world of Greek myth such a character would inevitably be torn asunder by his own forces. Lear is a detached commentator now but he tries to communicate his knowledge, the truth about a world stripped of illusions, born of his terrible experiences.

That is his situation when they come to bring him to Cordelia. He has run away once already, and again he resists and runs away from Cordelia. The situation is very similar to the Sophoclean version of the story of Philoctetes. Lear has the bow of power - his new insight and explanation of the world, and he has the suppurating wound - the madness which alienates him from mankind and which can only be cured by humility. He exercises his powerful insight with Gloucester, and seeks to infect him with the madness which has produced those insights. He is almost brutal in attempting to make Gloucester share his vision. He offers him his own eyes but, of course, the wound and the bow go together; the powerful insight is a kind of compensation for the wound of madness. But the wound isolates the individual from his community so that he can take no pleasure in the power of his bow. Put your bow at the service of the state, says the old story, submit your pride and yield possession, and Aesculapius will cure your wound. Lear wants the cure, he asks for surgeons because he is cut to the brains, but he is unwilling to comply with the condition which is the price of the cure. The only distinction

which the commentator possesses, as Thersites, another character with suppurating wounds, was aware, is his insight. Lear, now playing a parody of his role as king, finds that there are those who still labour under the illusions he has shed and he mocks them by running away to play hide-and-seek. His separation from Cordelia is, however, finally overcome, and the pattern of myth in which the hubristic hero is torn to pieces, is broken it seems; medicines have cured the 'great rage' in Lear. Aesculapius, the doctor, makes him fit for society again. Yet his first words:

I am bound  
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears  
Do scald like molten lead.

(IV, vii, 46-48)

sound like the ultimate throes of a man torn asunder. The Philoctetes' pattern, however, seems about to be fulfilled. It depends on the union of Lear and Cordelia, that next phase in the king's developmental cycle. Lear places her in heaven, far from himself in hell. But he feels the pin-prick and kneels to her, is humble before her, says he is old and foolish, finally submits. The completion of the Philoctetes' pattern seems to be underlined by the stage-direction at the beginning of Act V, Scene ii, describing the passage across the stage of Cordelia and Lear at the head of their army, "Enter with drum and colours, the Powers of France over the stage, CORDELIA with her Father in her hand". Lear, then, has left his vision behind, has stepped out of that isolation and, like Philoctetes, been cured of the wound that separates, or so it appears. The last scene demonstrates how both of these statements are wrong. The speeches on the way to prison show a Lear who can still only make private use of the bow, whose wound still isolates. His speech is the perfect formulation of the commentator's role. He will stand detached from the world and comment on its folly, insulated from its tragic

effects. I have spent the greater part of this thesis demonstrating that such a hope of remaining uninjured by events cannot be realized in the tragic world. Here we have the statement of the illusion which so many of the characters I have examined shared in attempting to cure the illusion of their masters. Lear does not even wish to cure the world; he wishes merely to make private use of his vision for his own and Cordelia's sake. In the mad world Lear could not communicate his vision; returned to the normal world, he cannot maintain it. His speech is an epitaph on all commentators:

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

(V, iii, 8-19)

It is a paradisaal vision of man able to observe the folly of the world without being subject to it. It is a dream of escaping the all-involving pattern of tragedy. Lear may wish to make private use of his vision, but the evil that he had seen cannot so easily be excluded in spite of his restored faith in the gods.<sup>1</sup> The Philoctetes story is not shattered by Lear's final impossible wish; it is not fulfilled by Lear, that is all. His speech before prison is

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<sup>1</sup>William Empson commenting on this speech links Lear with the attributes of the allowed-Fool as clown and lunatic: "The few activities that he does suggest are so mixed that though wise they still seem to have the incoherence of folly; the idea is guarded from clear statement, but we are to think of him as sane and yet leave him all the halo that he acquired in his madness and all the inconsequence that he learned from the clowns". "Fool in Lear", Sewanee Review, LVII (1949), p. 205.

a challenge to the pattern of myths - of blasted Semele, of torn Acteon, of those who saw the gorgon, of the Psyche who looked with her oil lamp at the sleeping Cupid. Lear believes that he has found a situation in which he can have the vision without its consequences. Ironically it is his urgent desire to go to prison which provides the opportunity for Edmund to destroy his hope. Lear believes that he has escaped the consequences of hubris, but there is one final thunderbolt which will blast him.

Meanwhile everything is working out towards a happy ending. Albany, indeed, makes several attempts in the last scene to bring the story to a happy close. In the sub-plot Gloucester dies in happiness, rewarded for his repentance and patience. Edmund is overcome by Edgar and the wicked sisters cancel each other out. The morality which Edgar has upheld seems to be finally triumphing. Yet the distinction between the two plots of the play has been clear throughout. A doomed, hubristic house has worked out its fate against the background of a more ordinary parochial family. The sub-plot knows nothing about hubris; it trusts in the gods and attempts, in terms of a morality that any Jacobean audience would have recognized, to make sense of the catastrophe in which it is engulfed. Now hubris - and Lear himself is a study in just that 'going beyond' - has in classical tragedy the ambivalence of destroying a man and bringing him to the truth, of destroying him because he has seen the truth. Edgar, with the help of the blind Gloucester, is patiently extracting a viable morality from the desperate experiences he is going through. For a brief moment his philosophy is to be triumphant in the last Act, but at the expense of "the great thing of us forgot". Homo patiens has his victory however short-lived. But Shakespeare takes his tragedy to a point which destroys the happy solution of the didactic morality drama which he has

embedded in the structure of his play. The working out of just rewards for good and evil characters is suddenly set at nought when the innocent die with the guilty.

Finally the familiar pattern of classical myth is completed. All the observers, fools, loyal servants, beggars have attempted to avert tragedy. Lear seeks to escape tragedy by becoming an observer himself. He is the only tragic hero in Shakespeare who clears aside all his illusions, comes to a moment of recognition and release, and then returns to the ultimate illusion - his belief in his immunity to tragic fate. He is finally crushed by the vision of death, the final phase of his development which returns him to the railing bitterness of old age from which he had started on his long journey. Desperately, to those standing around helpless and appalled, he cries his recognition of the finality of the image of death, "Do you see this? Look on her. Look her lips. / Look there, look there!" (V, iii, 310-311).

What many critics refuse to see, in insisting perversely that Lear dies of joy in the belief that his daughter is alive, is what Shakespeare is doing to the audience here, what the ultimate implications of tragedy are when all commentators and the hero himself have failed to avert that tragic vision of death. Shakespeare shows us Lear whose fate is like that of Semele blasted by the vision of Zeus, and then he turns the tables on us and forces us to face that blasting vision itself. The experience of Lear by the audience is a hubristic experience. The audience 'go too far', they become greater than men, they see the unseeable; therefore they know death. The members of the audience are induced into a hubristic act; they see the vision - death and its significance - and are exalted in a theatrical consummation. They "die, bravely,

like a smug bridegroom". The sexual image of the visionary ecstasy followed by detumescence or death - the Semele legend - is the essence of the audience's experience. Yet this hubris is possible for the audience only because the sub-plot is there to re-build the stable world of justice, truth and virtue on earth and in heaven. The sudden erupting into that new world of happy endings in the last scene of the ultimate catastrophe is what induces hubris in the audience and gives it a final knowledge which is deathly. The ultimate refusal to comment, to reconstruct the ordered world which ends all other tragedies by Shakespeare, the brief end-picture of men without Lear, senselessly and uselessly concerned with carrying on living, indicates that Lear's vision has blasted society to its very roots.

I have talked often about myth and the gods in this section but one final distinction is important. The vision which blasts Lear is not only no god at all, but is, indeed, a chaos, an understanding of what it is to be a man alive in a world which lacks coherence and an ordered pattern. It is a complete vision and has many aspects: the true significance of man in Poor Tom, the true nature of justice and morality in society, the vulnerability to folly of the virtuous as well as the vicious, the intense isolation of each man in his own prison, the desperate and inescapable nature of human destiny, and the finality of death. But in both myth-vision and Lear-vision understanding, incommunicable understanding, is the essence. The glory of King Lear as a play is that it does communicate the incommunicable to us, the audience. We share Lear's shattering knowledge of death, a knowledge which each man comes to for himself. This is made possible not only by the presentation of the actual facts of the vision through Lear's speeches and experience, but also, since it is of their essence that we should realize that they are incommunicable, by the sub-plot with its patient and careful building of that

very world which Lear sees to be false, and which is proved to be false by the final catastrophe of the play. Lear's vision is given its ultimate force, as I have tried to show, by a whole series of observers who fail to accept it to prevent Lear from reaching it. Everyone in the play takes Lear's vision to be madness, but it is that vision which ultimately triumphs, leaving sane men speechless. The commentators are more prominent in this play than any other which Shakespeare wrote and as they fall by the wayside they leave Lear to probe to the ultimate explanation of their inadequacy. It is not an inadequacy for which we are asked to condemn them. It is the gap in their understanding which the audience is asked to fill by recognizing the nature of the tragic world. A variety of characters have attempted to create islands of sanity and hope; they have sought shelter from the storm of tragedy in a variety of conventional moral attitudes. But it is the nature of Shakespeare's tragedy to invade all spheres, to blow its cruel and destructive wind into the firmest of shelters. It destroys any audience which hopes for easy, rational solutions to fearfully complicated situations, just as it smashes through the hopes of Albany, Edgar, Kent and even the repentant Edmund in this play. The normal world, so completely represented in this play by the sub-plot, has no way of rationalizing Cordelia's death.

We, the audience, are of the sub-plot world. We willingly suspend disbelief in its favour, we try to believe in its triumph, but Edmund's order of death lurks in our minds. In the normal world we share the views of the commentators and their hopes for sanity and order, but we are divorced from them in exposing ourselves to the complete vision of tragedy. It seems as if the rational world of the commentator and of the sub-plot is about to

be re-established, a death-cell reprieve for humanity, when Lear enters with Cordelia dead in his arms. But by then we have been taught to see, to have ourselves the vision of Lear, and, when he tells us to look on death, we do and understand what we are looking on. We protect ourselves from such devastating visions in our everyday lives, but tragedy enables us to go beyond our normal experiences. It does so by presenting to us, as I suggested at the outset of this study, characters akin to our normal selves trapped by the tragic world. We can see that vision which Gloucester cannot see though all his letters had been suns. In that final speech of Lear's, as he gazes on death, we have a vision of the awful odds we are facing.

There have been many answers to this situation as we face it in Lear's howl of despair; to the philosophy there are very many more. But the commentating characters on whom I have written never provide a philosophy which can survive such a situation. When the hero himself seems to have found in insanity a solution which other detached observers and advisers have tried to find in rational and moderate suggestions, he is destroyed. The audience is offered no healing comfort through the traditional precepts of morality; indeed it is forced into an awareness of the terrifying inadequacy of conventional morality in tragic situations. There is no solution offered in this play except the play itself. The only justification for writing it - for writing a play showing that life is not worth writing about - is that it produces a Lear, and that it is life itself which has produced such a terrifying vision.

## XI

### CONCLUSION

It has been said often enough that a critic of Shakespeare tells us more about himself and the age in which he lives than he tells us about the dramatist. Shakespeare, as I have tried to show, was abundantly aware of the limitations of the individual's point of view. Critics, whether they have idolized Shakespeare's tragic heroes or held them up as examples of foolish conduct to be condemned, have often tended to interpret the plays in the light of their own ethical principles. The range of views imputed to Shakespeare is astonishing. Hamlet's attack on the excesses practised by actors interpreting a play might well be applied to the critics of Shakespeare's drama. Every critic might defend himself against the accusation of excess with the innocence and pride of the First Player: "I hope we have reform'd that indifferently with us, sir." They would, however, fall short of the absolute demand made by Hamlet: "O, reform it altogether." To reform the habit altogether is not easy and I make no pretence of having succeeded. I have, however, tried to bear in mind two principles which would help in some measure to prevent the excessive interpretations which Hamlet deplored.

I have tried to fulfil Kitto's dictum: "The business of criticism is not to help us to feel but to explain how the artist contrives to make us feel."<sup>1</sup> I have concentrated on the structure of Shakespeare's drama and on

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<sup>1</sup>H. D. F. Kitto, Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study (New York, 1954), p. 263.

the way in which that structure and the conflicting ideas which it contains shape an audience's response. I have tried to indicate that Shakespeare respects the integrity of the dramatic structure by refusing to supply clearly designated authorial comments. The least that a critic can do is to follow Shakespeare's habit of avoiding easy solutions. In other words I believe that the method of analyzing the plays must follow as closely as possible, within the limitations of the objectives which the critic sets himself, the method by which the plays were written. I have avoided forcing the individual plays into a neat pattern, for patterns tend to obscure the details which it was Shakespeare's purpose to exhibit.

I have also worked on the principle that Shakespeare's abundant sense of human differentiation ought to inform the spirit of criticism. Cunningham has formulated this principle in the following manner:

... our purpose in the study of literature, and particularly in the historical interpretation of texts, is not in the ordinary sense to further the understanding of ourselves. It is rather to enable us to see how we could think and feel otherwise than as we do. It is to erect a larger context of experience within which we may define and understand our own by attending to the disparity between it and the experience of others.

We must cleave to this principle of interpreting literature in our analysis of Shakespeare because it is exactly this principle of human differentiation on which so much of his dramatic method rests. The relationships between heroes and commentators rest on Shakespeare's unflagging ability to represent the inviolable nature of separate responses to tragic situations. If we are eager to employ either commentator or hero as spearheads in propagating our own

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<sup>1</sup>J. V. Cunningham, "Ripeness Is All", In Norman Rabkin, ed., Approaches to Shakespeare (New York, 1964), pp. 137-138.

personal philosophies, then we violate the balanced and irreconcilable nature of the conflict which they represent between them. In straightforward didactic drama it is clear what a man must do in order to be saved, for theoretical knowledge and the application of that knowledge are not fundamentally at odds. It is the disparity between theory and practice which constitutes much of the essence of tragedy. We must resist the temptation to interpret Shakespeare's tragedies in terms of what the characters ought to do, and concentrate our attention, as Shakespeare himself did, on what in reality, because of their natures, they must do. Only in that way can we respond to the separateness of individual human beings which Shakespeare prized so much.

There is a danger, of course, in emphasizing the inviolable nature of each individual character. By concentrating on certain aspects of his plays it is possible to enlist Shakespeare's support for theories of alienation and loneliness which have figured so largely in modern existentialist philosophies. I do not think that there is much justification for carrying this kind of interpretation to the radical extreme represented in the work of Jan Kott,<sup>1</sup> or the modern productions of Shakespeare, principally by Peter Brook which are influenced by his views. It may serve a purpose in the polemics of modern theatre to find a close relationship between the work of Samuel Beckett and Shakespeare, but it is a wild distortion to view Shakespeare's heroes as inmates of the existentialist's hell, suffering agonies in the lonely prison of the self. My analysis of the separateness of commentator and hero may be thought to support Kott's views. But the communication between hero and commentator has not completely broken down; each fights vigorously to assert

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<sup>1</sup>Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary (New York, 1964).

the pre-eminence of his own view of the world. They have little in common with the incoherent, fragmented representatives of humanity in Beckett's arctic vision. Life on all-fours amidst a mumbling awareness of alienation is far from Shakespeare's richly elaborate exploration of man's full humanity. Such a secular and sombrely pessimistic view of Shakespeare seems to me to be as misguided as the optimistically religious view of Shakespeare as a Christian Humanist. We must not, in our eagerness to exempt Shakespeare from the pessimism of the existentialists, rush to the opposite extreme by supporting the 'moralism' of those critics whose work I have discussed in earlier chapters. Those critics who have interpreted the Renaissance in a way which enables them to claim Shakespeare as an ally of modern Christian humanism have been warned by Kristeller that the view

... that Renaissance humanism was in its origin a religious movement, or even a religious reaction against certain antireligious tendencies in the Middle Ages, seems to me ... wrong or exaggerated. I am convinced that humanism was in its core neither religious nor antireligious, but a literary and scholarly orientation that could be and, in many cases, was pursued without any explicit discourse on religious topics by individuals who otherwise might be fervent<sup>1</sup> or nominal members of one of the Christian churches.

Instead of making Shakespeare a spokesman for the various philosophies of the twentieth century, we can more profitably relate him to the searching, questioning spirit which he shares with those writers of his own day who eagerly faced new and disturbing problems. Throughout Europe we find writers probing the dualities of passion and reason, the ideal and the actual, the contemplative and the active existence, and similar problems. By relating Shakespeare to this relentless, questioning spirit which fastened on the accepted

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<sup>1</sup>P. O. Kristeller, Renaissance Thought (New York, 1961), pp. 74-75.

and received truths and exposed them to vigorous scrutiny, I can summarize the points which I have endeavoured to make.

Throughout the Renaissance we can trace the gradual movement away from the tribal, corporate, medieval world-view towards the fragmentation of the private, specialized viewpoint of the individual. In Shakespeare's tragedies the commentators have a key role to play in the dramatic exploration of the conflict between individual will and the concept of an ordered society. Thersites and Apemantus stand aside commenting on the ruins of their worlds. The societies around them are devoted to greed, lust, ambition, personal gain and are lost in the competitive and appetitive spirit of Renaissance individualism. Men still endeavour to cover the nakedness of their desires with ragged shreds of the old ideology of honour, degree, and an ordered world. The cynics brush aside this sop to decency. In Shakespeare's major tragedies, however, the commentators fight this new world of fragmented individualism with a firm belief in stability and order. They cling heroically to the idea that man need not pursue the tragic path toward chaos if he thinks rationally and acts prudently. They still try to operate in the old tribal way with a sense of loyalty, honour, and concern for the corporate good. The vulnerability of the concept of order in the rapidly changing Renaissance world is, however, emphasized by the fact that such characters are often detached, ineffective and overwhelmed. Such characters represent a traditional way of looking at the world. They present an assured and comforting philosophy to which an Elizabethan audience must have instinctively responded. Shakespeare did not espouse the destructive individualism of the tragic hero, but he demonstrates that the assertion of the principles of the old conceptual philosophy of order is no longer efficacious in ensuring a stable world. Shakespeare's commentators often seem to be like

the dying priests of an outmoded religion in an alien land. They try to proselytize and spread their message but are sacrificed, incapable even of saving themselves by means of their own philosophy. They utter the traditional solutions, offer the familiar panaceas, but find no response in a world which they thought they had understood so well. They occupy the place in Shakespeare's tragedies of what Bacon called "The Idols of the Tribe" in his own empirical philosophy.

It is natural for a society disturbed and uncertain in the face of new trends to turn to older and conservative modes of thought for reassurance. Bacon, in attempting to establish his own philosophy, found the habits of thought established under the old dispensation and inherited by his age a stumbling block in coming to terms with current problems. In attempting to establish the science of the particular he had to clear aside the tendency to view problems in universal terms:

The Idols of the Tribe have their foundation in human nature itself, and in the tribe or race of men. For it is a false assertion that the sense of man is the measure of all things. On the contrary, all perceptions as well of the sense as of the mind are according to the measure of the individual and not according to the measure of the universe. And the human understanding is like a false mirror, which, receiving rays irregularly, distorts and discolours the nature of things by mingling its own nature with it.<sup>1</sup>

Shakespeare's commentators assume that their sense is the measure of all things. Their method of operating by the measure of the universe comes into conflict with the measure of the individual presented in the problems of the tragic hero. As they mingle their own natures in the tragic situation they experience difficulty in maintaining a true-mirror reflection of their world. It seems

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Bacon, The New Organon and Related Writings, ed., by F. H. Anderson (New York, 1960), XLI, p. 48.

probable that Shakespeare deliberately embodied in many of these characters the hopes and ideals of an ordered world which the audience of his day may well have shared. They are Idols of the Tribe in the sense that they represent those views on which Elizabethans had traditionally established their sense of control over a coherent and meaningful universe. One has only to read the voluminous works of the moral philosophers of the day to realize the amount of faith which was pinned on the rational and prudent view of an ordered world. Many of the commentators must have had a natural and immediate appeal to Shakespeare's audience. They have, indeed, ever since the plays first appeared, been the idols of those critics who have attempted to depict them as Shakespeare's mouthpieces for castigating the ruinous results of passionate excess. But it cannot have escaped the Elizabethans' notice, as it should not escape ours, that these idols are broken by the process of tragedy. Order is often re-established at the end of Shakespeare's tragedies but not before it has become clear that the commentator has no resources which will secure order. Order succeeds catastrophe; it does not prevent it. From stability we move through chaos to stability again. The commentator can find no way of abridging this cycle, of short-circuiting the tragic process.

Shakespeare destroys the idols of the tribe but he does not, of course, set up the destructive tragic hero as the new idol to be worshipped. Like Bacon, he wishes to describe things as they really are; he questions the old assumptions and explores the nature of individual man. Shakespeare is close to Bacon at many points in the method of his exploration. The philosopher claims to proceed from familiar ground to new territory by deliberate policy:

For I thought it good to make some pause upon that which is received; that thereby the old may be more easily made perfect and the new more easily approached. And I hold the improvement of that which we have to be as much an object as the acquisition of more. Besides which it will

make me the better listened to; for "He that is ignorant (says the proverb) receives not the words of knowledge, unless thou first tell him that which is in his own heart".<sup>1</sup>

Shakespeare seems to use his commentators for a similar purpose. They present views which must have been in the hearts of many of his audience. They gain for Shakespeare the attention which he required in his exploration of the territory of tragedy. The views of the commentators break no new ground but in their ultimate development, in their destruction and ineffectiveness, they lead the audience to a new and profound experience of the unpromising nature of tragedy. Shakespeare may well have echoed Bacon's plea for patient submission to his total design:

And now I have only one more favor to ask (else injustice to me may perhaps imperil the business itself) - that men will consider well how far, upon that which I must needs assert (if I am to be consistent with myself), they are entitled to judge and decide upon these doctrines of mine; inasmuch as all that premature reasoning which anticipates inquiry, and is abstracted from the facts rashly and sooner than is fit, is by me rejected (so far as the inquisition of nature is concerned) as a thing uncertain, confused, and ill built up; and I cannot be fairly asked to abide a tribunal which is itself on trial.<sup>2</sup>

In observing the inquisition of nature in Shakespeare's tragedy the audience is warned by the example of the commentator of the prejudgement and premature reasoning which anticipates inquiry. When critics find choric functions for the commentator they are setting up for interpreting the plays a tribunal which Shakespeare is himself putting on trial.

The nature of Bacon's exploration was far different from that of Shakespeare's, but the bases from which they operated were very similar. One

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

of the fundamental ideas behind Shakespeare's tragedies seems to be aptly summed up in Bacon's statement: "The human understanding is of its own nature prone to suppose the existence of more order and regularity in the world than it finds".<sup>1</sup> If it is thought that I have emphasized too heavily the careful analysis of individual situations demanded of an audience by Shakespeare, it should be remembered that one of the leading thinkers of Shakespeare's own day emphasized again and again the necessity of observing particularized details in coming to terms with the world. Bacon's whole system of thought was concerned with the labyrinthine complexities which he considered man had hitherto ignored:

... the universe to the eye of the human understanding is framed like a labyrinth, presenting as it does on every side so many ambiguities of way, such deceitful resemblances of objects and signs, natures so irregular in their lines and so knotted and entangled. And then the way is still to be made by the uncertain light of the sense, sometimes shining out, sometimes clouded over, through the woods of experience and particulars; while those who offer themselves for guides are... also puzzled and increase the number of errors and wanderers.<sup>2</sup>

Here again we have accidentally a formulation of the audience's experience of Shakespeare's commentators who offer themselves as guides and succeed only in compounding the errors of the world in which they find themselves.

The coincidence of views in the two writers is not always so accidental. In The Advancement of Learning Bacon discusses at length the very problems which in this thesis I have analyzed in Shakespeare's work.<sup>3</sup> He discusses the virtues of the active and contemplative life. There is a

<sup>1</sup>ibid., XLV, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Francis Bacon, The Works of Francis Bacon (London, 1824), I, pp. 160-235.

detailed discussion of the ways of controlling folly and passion in man, and the duty of advisers in helping those in error. His analysis distinguishes carefully between private and particular problems, and the more general problems which endanger the safety of the state. The fact that Bacon found place for such a lengthy discussion and placed it as a conclusion to one of his major works indicates the critical nature of the problems for the age in which he lived. Like Shakespeare, Bacon was aware of the perplexing difficulties involved in ensuring the pursuit of the virtuous life. The philosopher spares no pains to emphasize the necessity of knowing the particular details of an individual nature before there can be any hope of remedying the errors into which it has fallen:

First, therefore, in this, as in all things which are practical, we ought to cast up our account, what is in our power and what not; for the one may be dealt with by way of alteration, but the other by way of application only. The husbandman cannot command neither the nature of the earth nor the seasons of the weather, no more can the physician the constitution of the patient, nor the variety of accidents. So in the culture and the cure of the mind of man, two things are without our command; points of nature and points of fortune: for to the basis of the one, and the condition of the other, our work is limited and tied. In these things therefore, it is left to us to proceed by application... But when that we speak of suffering, we do not speak of a dull and neglected suffering, but of a wise and industrious suffering, which draweth and contriveth use and advantage out of that which seemeth adverse and contrary, which is that properly which we call accomodating and applying. Now the wisdom of application resteth principally in the exact and distinct knowledge of the precedent state or disposition unto which we do apply; for we cannot fit a garment, except we first take the measure of the body.<sup>1</sup>

I have suggested that many of Shakespeare's commentators fail to come to terms with the nature of the heroes with whom they are involved; they endeavour to fit a garment without taking measure of the body. The problems which they

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., I, p. 179.

encounter in advising the tragic heroes are predominantly what Bacon calls "points of nature and points of fortune". They endeavour to effect a process of alteration in the very nature of the tragic hero. Bacon and Shakespeare are at one in their belief in the power of knowledge which comes from suffering. It is clear, however, in many of Shakespeare's tragedies that the hero learns wisdom from his own suffering and not through the lessons applied from his suffering by his adviser. Shakespeare carries the adviser to a point of tragic involvement which is outside Bacon's range of interest. As a dramatist developing the full complexity of human situations Shakespeare was able to explore the ultimate implications of the problems which Bacon discusses more generally. Shakespeare's plays themselves give ample evidence of "the exact and distinct knowledge" which Bacon considered to be so important.

Cervantes explores in Don Quixote many of the problems which we have found preoccupying Shakespeare. His contrast of Sancho Panza and the Knight of the Woeful Countenance has much in common with Shakespeare's linking of commentator and hero. Sancho is featured often as a truth-teller attempting to clear aside the chimeras which confuse his master. As an earthy realist he is blunt, bawdy and absorbed in the pleasures of this life. Despite his detachment and his continual commentary on the madness of his master, he yields to the world of fantasy. The whole work, and especially Sancho's observation, is a virtuoso examination of the distinction between illusion and reality, between the valiant, active life and the quiet, reflective life. Sancho, concerned with survival at all costs, is contrasted with the Don who will risk life and limb at the slightest provocation provided honour is at stake. Cervantes took many of the paradoxical dualities which puzzled his age and developed them with magnificent ingenuity and fresh insight in the multiple ironies of

his masterpiece.

Don Quixote desperately attempts to revive the spirit of the medieval world-order. His actions are based on an ethical code in which selfless sacrifice for chivalric ideals is taken for granted. Because he lives entirely in the world of illusion, his reflective ideals and his active aims coincide. Cervantes constantly implies that the Don's crusade against the new life of Renaissance action and against the self-regarding individualism which destroys the older ideals of virtuous and altruistic service is not as foolish as we might at first think. The Don is certainly mad but he possesses many of the virtues which are so conspicuously absent in the world of sanity that surrounds him. The Manchegan causes immense havoc in the bourgeois world dominated by the selfish, appetitive spirit of personal profit. Sancho is, of course, trapped in a dilemma between the active and reflective life. He can see the wineskins, windmills and sheep which his master assails, but his reflection on his master's folly leads to no solution because he is himself partly committed to those illusions in his hopes of gaining the governorship of an island. Like many of Shakespeare's commentators he attempts to educate his master: to his master's version of events he opposes his own totally different version. Sancho's character is, indeed, a superb study of the dilemma faced by Renaissance man. He would like to have believed in the old ideals, the sense of purpose, the dedication to a worthy cause, but his knowledge of the real Renaissance world constantly clouded this vision of what he imagined to have been a simpler and nobler world. Like Don Quixote, many of Shakespeare's commentators have faith in an older system of order, but like Sancho they are forced to recognize by the hard knocks which they receive that the world does not accommodate itself easily to an ordered pattern. Cervantes

illustrates how the noble ideals, the sense of purposeful action and a meaningful order to which man can dedicate his life, can exist now only in the mind of a madman. As I have tried to show, the sense of reality which Shakespeare's commentators exhibit often turns out to be an illusion in the conditions of the tragic world. Their belief in a rationally ordered universe, and Don Quixote's attempt to subdue the windmills, are not unconnected. Though their methods of approach are vastly different, it is no accident that two of the giants of Renaissance literature expended so much ingenuity in exploring the same problems.

Many of the disturbing problems which Cervantes and Shakespeare dramatized in their work were treated in a more abstract and philosophical way by Montaigne. Like Bacon, he insisted on questioning traditional beliefs and wished to determine whether such beliefs any longer had relevance in the rapidly changing Renaissance world:

... for the opinions of men are received according to ancient beliefs, by authority and upon trust, as if it were religion and law: that which is commonly held about it is an accepted jargon; this assumed truth, with all its clutter of arguments and proofs, is admitted as a firm and solid body that is no more to be shaken, no further to be judged of; on the contrary, every one, as best he may, corroborates and fortifies this received belief with the utmost power of his reason which is a supple utensil, pliable and to be accommodated to any figure: and thus the world comes to be filled with lies and fopperies.<sup>1</sup>

It is the received beliefs which the commentators seek to corroborate and fortify. We find also in Montaigne the awareness of the relative nature of truth which Shakespeare used to question "ancient beliefs" and "accepted jargon":

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<sup>1</sup>Michel de Montaigne, Essays of Montaigne, trans. by Charles Cotton, (London, 1877), II, p. 280.

Now, if on our part we received anything without alteration, if human grasp were capable and strong enough to seize on truth by our own means, these being common to all men, this truth would be conveyed from one hand to another; and, at least there would be some one thing to be found in the world, amongst so many as there are, that would be believed by men with an universal consent: but this, that there is no one proposition that is not debated and controverted amongst us, or that may not be, makes it very manifest that our natural judgment does not very clearly comprehend what it embraces; for my judgment cannot make itself accepted by the judgment of my companion, which is a sign that I seized it by some other means than<sup>1</sup> by a natural power that is in me and in all other men.

It is this very issue of differing judgment which is so often the point of conflict in the relations between commentator and hero in Shakespeare.

If there were a "universal consent" in the interpretation of a situation then tragedy would be impossible; errors could be recognized and rectified.

The proliferation of versions of any event in a Shakespeare tragedy bear out Montaigne's statement here of the individual nature of human judgment.

Montaigne goes even further and suggests that man's search for the truth demonstrates that the certainty for which he grasps is ultimately beyond his reach:

Should I examine, finally, whether it be in the power of man to find out that which he seeks, and if that quest wherein he has busied himself so many ages has enriched him with any new force or any solid truth: I believe he will confess, if he speaks from his conscience, that all he has got by so long an inquisition is only to have learned to know his own weakness. We have only by long study confirmed and verified the natural ignorance we were in before. The same has fallen out to men truly wise which befall ears of corn; they shoot and raise their heads high and pert, whilst empty; but when full and swollen with grain in maturity, begin to flag and droop; so, men having tried and sounded all things, and having found in that accumulation of knowledge

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., II, p. 314.

and provision of so many various things, nothing massive and firm, nothing but vanity, have quitted their presumption and acknowledged their natural condition.<sup>1</sup>

The quest of Shakespeare's tragic heroes has much in common with this pattern describing man's coming to terms with his own ignorance. It should be recognized, too, that it fits the development of many of Shakespeare's commentators. They may start out confident in their knowledge of the world but many of them are forced to recognize their own ignorance when they find themselves stumbling into acts of folly. In discovering his own vulnerability the commentator learns: "the greatest part of what we know is the least of what we do not know, that is to say, that even what we think we know, is but a piece, and a very little one, of our ignorance".<sup>2</sup> One of the great cries of the Renaissance was "Know thyself" and Montaigne and Shakespeare were aware how difficult and bruising that task is.

These two writers were also aware that man's rational powers could be as much of an obstacle as an aid in this quest for self-knowledge. Reason must not be allowed to fust in us unused, but it must not be regarded uncritically as the instrument which will solve all problems:

... for as much as reason goes always lame and halting and that as well with falsehood as with truth; and therefore 'tis hard to discover her deviations and mistakes. I always call that appearance of mediation which every one forges in himself, reason: this reason, of the condition of which there may be a hundred contrary ones about the same subject, is an instrument of lead and wax, ductile, pliable and accommodable to all sorts of biasses and to all measures, so that nothing remains but the knowledge how to turn and mould it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., II, pp. 223-224.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., II, p. 224.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., II, p. 318.

The difficulty faced by Shakespeare's commentators is not simply that those around them will not respond to the rational pleas which they make, but that the reasoned views which they offer often aggravate tragic situations and entail their own jeopardy. The varieties of ways in which the 'biasses' of reason work are evident from the range of characters which I have discussed. The sinister Iago, the bitter Fool, the cynical Thersites, the loyal Flavius, are alike in that each considers himself to be a rational man and directs his comments against the irrational folly which holds sway around him. As detached observers they attempt to maintain a consistent position based on what they consider to be the absolute truth embodied in their own rational judgment. But, however much man may esteem reason, it is difficult to maintain a consistent position especially amidst the involvement of tragic situations:

... both we and our judgment, and all mortal things,  
are evermore incessantly running and rolling, and  
consequently, nothing certain can be established from  
the one to the other, both the judging and the judge  
being in a continual motion and mutation.<sup>1</sup>

It would be possible to find points of comparison between Shakespeare's work and that of many major Renaissance writers. I have selected comparisons with a few major writers in order to give some brief impression of how widespread was the concern with the problems which I have analyzed in Shakespeare. All of the major writers of the Renaissance in their own ways wrestled with these problems. It is, in my view, their penetrating and uncompromising analysis of these problems which in a large measure distinguishes them as major writers. Some of the modern critical approaches which I have discussed cut Shakespeare off from his natural fellowship with the greatest Renaissance minds. If we

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., II, p. 369.

concentrate on Shakespeare's relevance to modern problems we diminish his stature as one of the leading explorers of Renaissance problems. If we relate him too closely to the didacticism of the orthodox moral philosophers of his own day we do the same thing.

Shakespeare did not come upon the full implications of the commentator's role and the problems which it entailed at the outset of his career. I have suggested that he worked his way to a clearer and more specific delineation of the role as his career advanced. There is no neat diagrammatic and linear development of the role in his plays and we should expect none, for Shakespeare wrestled with a multitude of problems throughout his career, and no methodical programme impeded the freedom of his exploration. We do, however, have a general sense of the increasingly central significance of the commentator in Shakespeare's full exploration of the tragic mode.

In the vogue of Elizabethan Chronicle plays nationalism had supplemented the old chivalric ideology in celebrating the virtues of the active life. There is no conflict between the active and reflective modes of existence, for the patriotic hero can sweep to victory, his own energy safeguarding instead of threatening the public good. Faulconbridge recognizes the appetitive, commercial spirit of individual ambition, but in allying his own ambitions with the national safety he is no threat to his society. Henry V has some uncomfortable comments of reflective detachment but finds a heroically active role in meting out God's justice in England's miraculous triumph over the French. Nationalism enabled men to bring their actions into conformity with the highest ideals of their reflective life. Shakespeare became increasingly concerned with the problems of the individual man whose actions, instead of reasserting harmony, created widespread disorder. In Romeo and Juliet

he essays a number of observers, some cynically detached, others genuinely sympathetic and concerned. He seems to explore in the play a wide variety of reflective stances which he was later able to coalesce into the rich, many-sided commentators of his mature tragedies. In his depiction of cynics such as Thersites, he developed to its logical conclusion one aspect of the commentating role - the incapacity of the detached and perceptive observer to relate in any fruitful way to the corrupt world around him. Thersites, as a commentator, comes closest to revealing the despair which lurks behind the late Elizabethan anxiety about the crumbling of the concept of a stable world-order. Most of Shakespeare's commentators fearfully foresee the chaos that will come; Thersites accepts it as having already arrived. In a modified and far subtler way, Shakespeare developed the implications of this sense of detachment in the commentators of his mature tragedies. In several of Shakespeare's major tragedies the commentators have become key elements in the meaning of the play; they have become indispensable to his exploration of the tragic world and of those problems which recur throughout Renaissance literature.

In describing the limitations of the commentators and their inadequacy in finding solutions to tragic situations I am not suggesting that there are obvious solutions which they overlooked. Shakespeare did not set up rational observers as straw-men simply for the pleasure of knocking them down. Several of the commentators offer the best advice that can be expected in the terrible situations in which they are caught. The inadequacy in tragic situations is not always in particular individuals. Shakespeare implies that for certain situations man has no adequate solution. Through the development of the commentator's role an audience does, however, become aware of how difficult

it is to live one's life according to the abstract precepts of philosophy. Philosophy of its very nature is an abstract and detached study, a way of holding the world at arm's length and evaluating it. The commentators entertain explicitly formulated philosophical theories about the nature of their world. Those heroes such as Hamlet, Lear and Timon, who muse extensively in a philosophical manner, strike us immediately as having affinities with the various types of commentating figures. The philosophies of such tragic heroes, however, are improvised out of their own suffering and experiences. By generalizing their suffering into more abstract terms they hope to retain some sense of control over their world. Many of the commentators also believe that their philosophical viewpoint gives them some control over their world. But in Shakespeare's tragedy, knowledge comes from suffering, and suffering results largely from man's heroic but futile attempts to control his world and bend it to his will.

The commentators tend to win our admiration and sympathy in proportion to their own suffering, a suffering which may be either directly personal or may be interpreted through an obvious fellow-feeling for the sufferings of the hero. Many of them gain our sympathy not merely because they are destroyed by the tragic events but because they come to recognize their own limitations. Shakespeare's tragedy, as I have noted often enough, indicates the universal vulnerability to folly. It moves us profoundly because there is a fellow-feeling in suffering. That feeling is often communicated to the audience through the sufferings of the commentator as well as those of the hero. This tragic vision is not ultimately pessimistic since man does not submit to his fate without protest. Indeed, we have some sense of triumph that man can undertake a heroic and painful struggle to come to terms with his world.

Many of the commentators fail in the task which they set themselves: of averting tragedy by attempting to alter the nature of the tragic hero.

Such a task is itself, perhaps, impossible as Guicciardini suggested:

To be sure, if a man could change his nature to suit the conditions of the times, he would be much less dominated by Fortune. But that is most difficult, and perhaps even impossible.<sup>1</sup>

I have grouped a wide variety of characters together as commentators, but finally there are basic differences which must be emphasized. They start out in ignorance of the nature of the tragic world, but the degree of sympathy which we accord to them is related to the degree of their recognition of the tragic world in which they find themselves. Characters such as Horatio and Flavius do not suffer severely; they submit patiently to the world in which they exist and devote themselves to sympathetic support of the tragic hero. Enobarbus and Lear's Fool win considerable sympathy from an audience because they make some progress in recognizing the nature of their own worlds and the tragic dilemmas which exist in them. Edgar, too, wins our sympathy in his acknowledgement of suffering beyond that of his own, and in his ability to find a useful role for himself in a terrifying world. Menenius wins somewhat less sympathy because of his persistence in failing to come to terms with the nature of Coriolanus. Apemantus elicits little sympathy for his cynical assumptions, Thersites even less, and Iago none at all. These three are static characters convinced of their own wisdom. What the audience learns from them depends to some degree on the inability of the cynics to learn from their worlds. They endeavour to maintain a detachment which is so complete that it cuts them off from the knowledge acquired from personal experience and

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<sup>1</sup>Francesco Guicciardini, Maxims and Reflections of a Renaissance Statesman, trans. by Mario Domandi (New York, 1965), Series C, 31, p. 49.

suffering, or the sympathy for it in others. Another of Guicciardini's maxims applies to them:

Let no one trust so much in native intelligence that he believes it to be sufficient without the help of experience. No matter what his natural endowments, any man who has been in a position of responsibility will admit that experience attains<sup>1</sup> many things which natural gifts alone could never attain.

These commentators exhibit the limitations of a totally conceptual view of the world and the stubborn egoism which goes with it.

Such a relative scale for describing an audience's response to the commentators is oversimplified, but it does help us to recognize one of their significant functions. The more they respond to their world and become involved in it, the less able are they to maintain a generalized, conceptual philosophy. The more each responds to an individual and particular experience the more each becomes an example of it. If we take the commentators as a whole, therefore, the ones which Shakespeare makes least attractive are those who revel in the accuracy of their own judgment without opening themselves either in sympathy or understanding to the tragic complications of individual situations. This is surely important in gauging the kind of response which Shakespeare wanted from an audience. The more detached we are, the more cynical we are likely to be and the more prone to prize a sense of our own superiority and invulnerability to folly - the closer, in other words, to the attitudes of Thersites and Iago. If we can rid ourselves of the sense of superiority, if we can forego the pleasure of enjoying the difficulties of others, if we can take the pains to expose ourselves to and understand the folly

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Series C, 10, p. 43.

exhibited in the tragic world, we shall be close to what Shakespeare undoubtedly regarded as the genuinely admirable humanity of Flavius and Horatio. But all the commentators, whether by their involvement or the lack of it, help equally to indicate to an audience the involvement which Shakespeare demanded of those who would understand fully his tragic vision.

There are a vast number of reasons why Shakespeare's tragedies are outstanding in the dramatic work of his period, but one of the reasons why they affect us so deeply is that the commentator's role in a variety of ways paves the way to a profound experience of the ramifications of the tragic vision. In the tragedies of so many of Shakespeare's contemporaries we are in a melodramatic, airless world of bizarre characters involved in ingenious murder, torture or incest. There is something undeniably stagey and unreal about a great deal of Jacobean tragedy. There is a lack of the richness, warmth and balance which we find in Shakespeare's drama. We ought to ponder how much of the comparatively healthier atmosphere of his plays is due to the presence of the commentators who so often act as our touchstones of normality in the labyrinthine world of tragedy. The idols of the tribe are often destroyed, but they are destroyed for our benefit. We do them a disservice if we fail to respond properly to their sacrifice.

I have thrust together a diverse group of characters for the purposes of this study. I have been at pains to maintain distinctions between them even while suggesting that they have significant functions in common. It may often have seemed that I consider Shakespeare's commentators to be the most important aspect of his tragedies. I am aware, of course, that their importance can be over-emphasized. It has been my concern that the function of these characters should not be too easily taken for granted. I hope that

in my arguments I have not fallen into the error described so accurately by Bacon:

The human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion (either as being the received opinion or as being agreeable to itself) draws all things else to support and agree with it. And though there be a greater number and weight of instances to be found on the other side, yet these it either neglects and despises, or else by some distinction sets aside and rejects, in order that by this great and pernicious predetermination the authority of its former conclusions may remain inviolate.<sup>1</sup>

After examining so extensively the limitations of the rigid, conceptual views of so many of Shakespeare's commentators, I hope that I have not, in my own commentary, been guilty of the same folly. If I have, however, committed the folly which I have imputed to others, it would, by a neat irony, reinforce my interpretation of the pattern of behaviour and the vulnerability of the commentator.

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Bacon, The New Organon and Related Writings, ed., by F. H. Anderson (New York, 1960), I, XLVI, p. 50.

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