

SHAKESPEARE'S GROUNDINGS

SHAKESPEARE'S GROUNDINGS
A STUDY OF SOME OF THE HUMBLE CHARACTERS IN
THE PLAYS AND THEIR RELATION TO THE AUDIENCE.

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The Groundlings in Shakespeare's Plays

I

Introduction: An Infinite Variety

In the renaissance of twentieth century criticism much has been made of the point that Shakespeare was a popular playwright. That is to say that in his own time his plays were what we call box-office hits. By using evidence from Henslowe's Diary and Accounts together with the still-extant building contract for the Hope Theatre, Prof. Harbage concludes that the average daily attendance at the Rose Theatre in 1595 would be approximately 1,250 paying customers. A full house would be in the neighbourhood of 2,500.¹ Such occasions would occur on holidays or for the premiere of a new play by a well-known playwright.

The purpose of this essay will be to examine in some detail that part of Shakespeare's audience which paid its penny to get into the pit or standing room. The plays themselves have stories that revolve around the fortunes of kings and queens, lords, ladies and people of gentle birth. Yet it is equally true that the plays are also crowded with figures whose counterparts could be seen among the "groundlings" on any afternoon when the flag was raised over the theatre to signify that a performance was to take place. Shakespeare's plays present an almost infinite variety of characters drawn from the humbler walks of life. We see rustic dwellers, both real and poetic, shepherds and shepherdesses, a tremendous gallery of soldiers of the lower ranks, and a multitude of domestics of both the upper and lower grades. Besides the innumerable hewers of wood and drawers of water from the great establishments of the nobility and the wealthy merchants, we have the Elizabethan and Jacobean equivalents of the more recent Admirable Crichtons or the Becky Sharp of the early days at Queen's Crawley. They are the Panthinos and Lucettas who tread their way

¹ Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare's Audience, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 21

through the plays, from the earliest to the latest. There are apprentices in the guise of Roman mobs, and then again appearing in their own persons. From the ranks of the journeyman the playwright presents weavers, carpenters, tinkers, tailors, haberdashers and an armourer. From the host of functionaries who catered to the travelling public comes a portrait gallery ranging from Mine Host of the Garter and Mistress Quickly down to Francis, the drawer at the Boar's Head, and the ostler at Rochester. The paid or unpaid upholders of the law are represented by a memorable company of constables that includes Dull (Love's Labour's Lost), Elbow (Measure for Measure), and Seacoal (Much Ado About Nothing). With them march criers, scriveners, sheriff's officers, gaolers, and over and over again, the citizens of the watch. Ranged on the other side of the fence is a notable company of law-breakers: keepers of bawdy houses, their pimps and alluring wares, murderers, witches, robbers, rebels, and the incomparable Barnardine, the condemned murderer who was too busy sleeping to find time to come to his own execution. There are messengers, musicians, attendants, and even school-teachers of the kind that still survived as ushers in Dotheboys Hall, and more authentic educational establishments.

Henri Fluchère has pointed out that the dramatist whose audiences must have included the real life counterparts of these humble characters, did not write one part of a play for the people seated in the covered galleries and another part for those patrons standing in the pit. The popularity of Shakespeare's plays and those of his contemporaries who wrote for the public playhouses, shows that the groundlings must have enjoyed the verbal fencing and wit, and that the ladies and gentlemen in the galleries must have equally enjoyed the low comedy and the intervention in the plot provided by representatives of the common people.²

² Henri Fluchère, Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1956), p. 23.

In order to make this last point somewhat clearer it may be profitable to consider the kind of people the groundlings were. To a modern reader or spectator the lower and middle class people who appear on the stage must inevitably seem less rounded than they did to the early audiences. When they are allowed to speak for themselves in the plays, as they sometimes are, we can recognize the bond of our common humanity with them. If they are permitted to say much, we may even recognize that they have modern descendants who are familiar to us. For the most part though, these Elizabethans who belong to what we euphemistically term the "service occupations" have little or nothing to say. They appear to us as mere dramatic devices to forward the action of the play or to provide background atmosphere. Yet if we hear of a modern play that has in it a role for a school teacher we may be reasonably sure, that if the play has even slight merit, it will attract more than a sprinkling of school teachers into the audience. In the same manner we may assume that the local constables and men of the watch in Shakespeare's plays would be critically observed by some part of the Elizabethan audience.

There are other difficulties in the way of our full appreciation of those characters who so often only "stand and wait." The passing of the learned but thread-bare school master has occurred within recent memory. Holofernes (Love's Labour's Lost) wore different clothes and spoke a different kind of garbled pedantry, but as a type he is still recognizable to the older members of modern audiences. But the conditions in many other occupations have changed immeasurably. There is little resemblance between the discharged veterans of Elizabeth's campaigns in the Low Countries and Ireland, and the modern recipients of aid from the D.V.A. The race of domestic servants is a rapidly vanishing one, in which pride in service rendered and loyalty to a noble lord or influential City magnate has been replaced by more mercenary motives. And some picturesque occupations have vanished entirely. There is no one to carry on Flute's trade of bellows-mender or perpetuate the tinkering of the befuddled

Christopher Sly.

Professors Harbage and Holmes³ have done much to lift the mists that time has spread over these long-departed members of the humbler classes. To their research much of the following material is indebted. In order to ascertain the kind of people who paid their penny to the "gatherers" Prof. Harbage has examined a great deal of contemporary evidence, much of it from hostile sources. The hostility of the Puritans is accountable from their religious scruples. The prevailing mood of London merchants inclined to Puritanism, which was peculiarly favourable to promoting a moral and social climate in which stable conditions among the populace favoured the growth of trade. In a period of rising prices and almost stationary wages there was a keen competition for the available spending money of the consumers. But "dropping daily into the gatherers' boxes were thousands of pennies that otherwise might have crossed London counters."⁴ To religious scruples was added economic opposition to the competition provided by the public playhouses. From a merchant's point of view the new theatre companies were unnecessary. (

The commonest designations for plays throughout the career of Shakespeare were "blasphemous", "lascivious", "obscene", but then any oath or religious figure of speech was "blasphemous", and scene of lovemaking "lascivious", and any allusion to sex "obscene".⁵

James Burbage built the Theatre in 1577⁶ and the Curtain was built a few years later in the same area beyond the city walls.⁷ It was

³ Martin Holmes, Shakespeare's Public, (London: John Murray, 1960).

⁴ Harbage, op. cit., p. 15.

⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶ F. E. Halliday, The Life of Shakespeare, (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1961), p. 48, Pelican edition 1963.

⁷ Ibid., p. 76.

in one or other of these theatres that Shakespeare first produced such plays as The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Romeo and Juliet, King John and Much Ado About Nothing, to mention a few of several. Shoreditch, the locale of these theatres, was part of the borough of Finsbury. Martin Holmes points out that Finsbury in Shakespeare's day was an eminently respectable location. Many city merchants had built their family homes in this district and it was to this clientele of merchants, their families, and household domestics, that such plays as Romeo and Juliet were primarily addressed.⁸ The incidents in this play were ones that would be familiar to the Shoreditch family audiences, and Capulet himself is more easily recognizable as a prosperous City merchant than as an Italian Renaissance nobleman. His words in the banquet scene are distinctively London and not Verona.

You are welcome, gentlemen! Come, musicians, play.
A hall, a hall! give room! and foot it, girls.
More light, you knaves; and turn the tables up,
And quench the fire, the room is grown too hot.
Ah, sirrah, this unlooked-for sport comes well.

The spectacle of the city authorities quelling street riots, the low comedy, the back chat, and the high-comedy repartee, would all be items familiar to the experience of these Shoreditch audiences.

In the Two Gentlemen of Verona, produced for the Theatre, the playwright is thinking of Thameside London and not inland Verona when he speaks about the tide. (ii.i.14 Pelican edition). The same play shows another instance of how the dramatist catered to his audience's sense of decorum. The role of Eglamour seems to have no other purpose but to provide an impeccable male companion for Sylvia on her journey to the forest. His lady and true love has died, and he has vowed lifelong chastity. His obvious age is an added precaution to ensure that the proprieties will be observed. (IV.iii.20-21). The bond plot of the Merchant of Venice would be full of meaning and interest to an audience made up largely of City merchants and

⁸ Holmes, op. cit. p.24

their dependents.

It is with this latter class, the domestic dependents, that we are primarily concerned, and here Prof. Harbage offers us great assistance in our attempt to recreate the flesh and blood of the early groundlings. An examination of the somewhat scanty statistical economic information available leads him to the following interpretation.

A wage earner of that time (c. 1595-1600), in spite of generally rising prices for food and other commodities, could go to the theatre almost as cheaply as his modern counterpart can go to the movies... He could purchase no other commercialized pleasures at our modern rates.⁹

Professor Harbage based his comparison with prices of the 1940 era. Since the .25¢ movie is now a dollar or more the relative cheapness of playgoing is even more apparent. He deduces that the average weekly rate for a craftsman was about seven shillings. A small shop-keeper would make slightly more.

Descending now to the lower end of the scale, to those below the rank of artisan, to the carman, the peddler, the ditcher, and the household drudge - most of these could have found a holiday penny not urgently needed to keep body and soul together... but their numbers would have been limited indeed.¹⁰

To establish the point that playgoing was relatively cheap and within the range which a member of the lower or lower middle class could afford, Prof. Harbage surveys the cost of rival attractions and other small luxuries. Against the penny admission charge to the pit of a public playhouse may be set the following current prices: a quart of sack, 8d.; a quart of ale, 4 d; a pipeload of tobacco, 3 d; the cheapest ordinary, 3 d; or a small book, 12 d.¹¹ It needs little evidence to demonstrate that such an amusement as the theatre was cheaper than visits to the ale-house,

⁹ Harbage, op. cit., p. 56.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 61.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 59.

drabbing, gaming, or resort to the skittle-alleys with their concomitants of side-bets and liquid refreshments. Play production had its failures as well as its successes and was a grim business then as it is now. By way of illustrating this point the fate of some contemporary plays may be gauged from their receipts as given in Henslowe's Diaries and Accounts. Julian the Apostate with only three performances was a failure; Philippo and Hippolito with twelve was an average success; and the Wise Men of West Chester with thirty-two was a great hit.

Admission prices were calculated, as prices in general were, to what workmen could afford to pay. We must conclude, first, that audiences were composed largely of shop-keepers and craftsmen, people of low income taking advantage of the almost unique opportunity to get their money's worth; and second, that those who limited their expenditure to 1d. and remained "groundlings" must not be thought of as a rabble.¹²

One of the chief complaints made against public playhouses by contemporary denouncers, either Puritan divines or civic dignitaries prodded on by merchants feeling the pinch of competition, was that the play-houses fostered absenteeism among artisans and apprentices. There was undoubtedly some truth in such a contention, for of necessity the hours of playgoing usually coincided with working hours. It is likely that there was some degree of exaggeration also. The Finsbury merchants who went to The Theatre or the Curtain would likely be escorted by some of their household domestics who were given the treat as a reward for their services. Some would probably be needed simply as escorts to establish security in the streets, or to attest the importance of the family on such a public occasion. The domestics would occupy the pit while the family would pay the extra penny or pennies required for admission to the covered seats. Shop-keepers, even small ones, could to some extent regulate their hours of business since there were no chain stores to compete with. They enjoyed a considerable degree of independance and

¹² Ibid., p. 64.

we may safely suppose that many a shrewd small shop-keeper considered a weekly visit to the play as a relatively cheap reward for the otherwise unpaid services of his wife and assistant. Younger sons and daughters of working age would share in the treat or perhaps be left "to mind the shop." This was a practice still quite popular in my own younger days. There were in any case more public holidays then than now, and many groups of workmen had their own private holidays. In some cases also relatively well-paid craftsmen would have irregular periods of rest between jobs.¹³ It should also be remembered that workmen were not so rigidly regimented in their hours as they are now. In the days of hand tools jobs could be left for a few hours without seriously interfering with the flow of production. Prof. Harbage's estimate of 15,000 people per week attending public playhouses in 1595 seems quite reasonable, even apart from the statistics from which he makes his conjectures.

The essentially law-abiding character of the audiences is seen in the fact that in an era of frequent riots and street disturbances the Records for the County of Middlesex show no account of frays that actually originated within the theatres during Shakespeare's own period.¹⁴ Order within the playhouses themselves seems to have been preserved by the gatherers without any outside assistance. There is no record of playhouse employees functioning as "bouncers." The "gatherers" of pennies at the door were, in fact, sometimes elderly widows holding their positions as a company obligation.¹⁵ Prof. Harbage quotes an interesting observation from one of the many foes of the playhouses, the Archpriest William

¹³ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 108.

Harrison, who was issuing an edict to Roman Catholic priests to cease their visits to the playhouses.

For few of either sex come thither, but in their holyday apparel, and so set forth, so trimmed, so adorned, so decked, so perfumed, as if they made the place a market of wantoness.¹⁶

In slightly more recent terms it would seem that it was customary for the audience to wear its Sunday best when it attended the performances at the Globe or other of the public playhouses. The people had in fact come to enjoy in peace something they had paid good money for, and they were determined to see they got their money's worth. In another of his works Prof. Harbage develops the thesis that Shakespeare was an exceedingly moral playwright who was writing for an audience which expected and demanded high moral standards which they themselves believed in. He allows himself a very effective imaginative reconstruction of the effect which King Lear may have made on his auditors and which I think is worth quoting:

One can see a father and his daughter, their arms touching in the London twilight, ready to trudge let us say to Hackney, or to step into their private barge for the brief voyage to Whitehall Stairs. They know what the play (King Lear) was about. It is a terrible thing, perhaps the most terrible of all things, when a father turns against his own child, or the child against its own father. They knew this before they came to the theatre, Shakespeare knew that they did, and he has left them in firm possession of a truth, which life, infinitely more powerful than art as a teacher, has taught them. He has given their homely truth a wonderful, a beautiful investiture.¹⁷

Before concluding this general discussion of the groundlings in Shakespeare's audience there is one further point to consider. Fluchère has pointed out, that as a commercial playwright, Shakespeare must have been addressing himself to his whole audience. It would have been impractical

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁷ Alfred Harbage, As They Liked It, (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 56, (Harper Torch Book edition, 1961).

to address himself first to one segment in the galleries and then turn to the other half in the pit. From the point of view of a writer it was a tribute to the universality of his genius and the wide range of his sympathies that he could engage the interest of all classes at once. Much has been said and written of this aspect. Almost as interesting is the reverse side of such a situation: why were the groundlings so engrossed? That they were is evidenced by the fact that they constituted about half of the paying customers on an average day. The universality of the themes of love, redemption, revenge, evil, murder, and ingratitude, will no doubt partly account for the answer. But the same themes were constantly expounded elsewhere, notably in the pulpit. Why did the groundlings come to the theatre to hear more about these themes? If we say it was the form or the plot which embedded these themes we have already assumed a certain amount of intelligent appreciation in our standees. Yet the love of a good narrative could have been satisfied elsewhere and perhaps for little or no cost. If we go further and admit that curiosity about the ways, manners, and characters of the great world brought them, we have admitted that our groundlings had a well-developed capacity for theatrical enjoyment. It would be straining at gnats and swallowing camels to admit this much, and yet deny the capacity to follow the thrust of wit, the subtle probing of motivation or the pitiless logic of cause and effect which forms so important a part of the tragedies and comedies.

There is no doubt that there has been some underestimation of the literacy of the common people. Many children were taught their letters by elderly people for a modest pittance. Free grammar schools were a common feature of the period. The apprentices, who were so generally vilified by Puritan divines for their attendance at playhouses, were usually young men who came from solid-middle-class families.¹⁸ The sons of unskilled

¹⁸ A. Harbage, Shakespeare's Audience, p. 82.

labourers and agricultural workers were generally barred from apprenticeship, and some guilds insisted upon property qualifications in the parents and educational standards in the boy. Many of the apprentices, probably the majority of them, had about as much formal education as Shakespeare himself. It is reasonable to assume, I believe, that even among the standees were many who were as capable of following the plays with intelligent appreciation, as the gentry themselves.

There still must have remained a fair-sized sector of the groundlings who were in fact illiterate, and yet must, for the most part, have followed and enjoyed both the words and the actions. In Chapter XVII of his Biographia Literaria, Coleridge discusses Wordsworth's choice of low and rustic life for the subjects of certain of his poems. He is convinced that Wordsworth is only partly right in attributing Michael's sterling qualities to his lowly rustic birth. Low birth in itself does not produce high thoughts. Michael, Ruth, and the others have had some compensating advantages.

It is not every man that is likely to be improved by a country life or by country labours. Education, or original sensibility, or both, must pre-exist, if the changes, forms, and incidents of nature are to prove a sufficient stimulant.¹⁹

Yet Coleridge says he is not unaware of the instances in which low birth and lack of education have produced men of sensible and reflective natures. The Bible, the liturgy and the hymn book, together with "natural good parts" have achieved this result in England. We may safely assume that the illiterate people who attended the public playhouses were mostly of this kind. They would have represented the better and more solid part of the lower classes. This is of course a generality that would apply only to those groundlings who went for love of the play, and would not

¹⁹ S. T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria (1817), in Criticism: The Major Texts, ed. by W. J. Bate, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952), p. 381.

apply to those of the illiterate class who went for some more or less worthy ulterior motive. Personally I would go somewhat further than Coleridge in assigning intelligence and sensibility to the uneducated. Many years ago I spent several months in an isolated community in Quebec where many of the older inhabitants were unable to read or write. Yet I found that these people had frequently developed admirable powers of reasoning and reflection. They had a more limited range of intellectual material at their disposal since this was long prior to the days of television and even the radio was practically unknown. But they were capable of thinking deeply upon those things they knew of, and the things they knew of comprehended most of the ultimate problems of life and death that have always confronted man. Those Londoners of Shakespeare's audiences who could be classed as illiterate undoubtedly had, for the most part, similar powers of reasoning and reflection. In addition they had the wider knowledge of affairs that came from living in a bustling metropolis.

It is no wonder that the groundlings appear so frequently and in such numbers in Shakespeare's plays. No one as sensitive as he was to impressions could overlook them, or exclude them from his plays. In their way they are as interesting and significant as the great ones of the earth who occupy so much of the front of the stage. It will be the task of this essay to recover, if possible, some of the same knowledge the early audiences possessed, and to give these groundlings some of the roundness they originally had.

II

The Song of a Constable

Some parish puts a constable on,
Alas without understanding,
Because they'd rule him when they have done,
And have him at their commanding;
And if he commands the poor, they'll grutch,
And twit him with partial blindness;

Again, and if he commands the rich,
They'll threaten him with unkindness.
To charge or compel 'em he's busy, they'll tell him;
In paying the rates they'll brawl;
Falls he but unto do what he should do,¹
I warrant you'll displease them all.

The above stanzas form part of a Ballad attributed to Jacobus Gyffon, Constable of Albury, Anno 1626. It will serve as an introduction to the discussion of the constable, a frequent figure of fun in Shakespeare's comedies. The other plays, however, show us another side of the picture and will also invite consideration. Though there is no evidence that constables were ever officially assigned to duty within the playhouses of the period, they were such a numerous and conspicuous class that many of them must have been found in the audiences when they were off-duty.

During the reign of Elizabeth there was an increase in the number of Justices of the Peace and a great enlargement of their functions and responsibilities. One of the foremost problems of the Queen's government, as it had been of her royal father's, was to rehabilitate the administration of the Criminal Code and the Common Law. In Elizabeth's case there was the additional problem of carrying through this rehabilitation on what was initially an empty treasury. Consequently and characteristically the Queen employed unpaid help for this purpose and threw the brunt of the burden of law enforcement on the local Justices of the

¹ A. V. Judges, The Elizabethan Underworld, (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1930), p. 488.

Peace and the leet or parish organizations. The actual enforcement of the law was entrusted to the citizens who acted as the local constables and members of the watch. In parishes large enough to need more than one constable we find such titles as headborough, thirdborough, Chief Watchmen and so on. The first two titles would apply particularly to members of the constabulary in urban or semi-urban corporations. Some of the London Boroughs would consist of densely-populated areas. On the other hand the Corporation of Beverley in Oxfordshire actually dwindled to such an extent that it voluntarily requested the withdrawal of its charter. It is in the records of such Corporations and of the County Quarter Sessions that we find the documented appearances of those groundlings in whom we are interested. The great members of society have left plentiful records of themselves and their deeds. In the Cony-catching pamphlets and similar works we have a whole literature dealing with the criminal underworld of Shakespeare's period. The Poor Act of 1597 and its successors have left the very poor on some sort of documented record. But it is only when the lower middle classes get into trouble and appear before the Justices of the Peace that we get a glimpse of them. And the glimpse is usually an unfavourable one, although the testimony of witnesses in the court provides another valuable piece of evidence about our groundlings.

To understand the importance of the constable in the scheme of things it will be helpful to take a look at some of the popular literature of the Elizabethan underworld. Even allowing for deliberate sensationalism in the literature it is evident that crime was both widespread and enormously varied in its nature at this time.

The Cony-catching Pamphlets of Robert Greene seem to be founded upon a first hand acquaintance with the London underworld. The highwayman Luke Hulton in his Lamentation has set the pattern and established the taste for a kind of "confession" literature that is as popular as ever in our own day. The revelations of Mrs. Gerda Munsinger and the extraordinary interest which they have aroused is sufficient evidence of an enduring

thirst for such "confessions." Thomas Harmon in his Caveat for Cursitors (1566) gives us some idea of the variety and extent of the problems that confronted Elizabethan law-enforcers. In a far from complete list of the various types of criminal he enumerates such defiers of the law as: rufflers, up-right men, hookers or anglers, rogues, wild rogues, priggers of prancers, palliards, fraters, Abram-men, whipjacks, counterfeit cranks, dummerers, drunken tinkers, swadders, jarkmen, patricoes, demanders for glimmers, bawdy-baskets, autem morts, walking morts, doxies, dells, and kinchin morts and coves.²

Harmon gives us also an idea of the extent to which these hordes imposed upon and terrorized the inhabitants of lonely districts. In mentioning the various places in and around London where they gather in bands to spend their nights, he mentions Ketbroke, standing by Blackheath, half a mile from any house.

There they boldly draw the latch of the door, and go in when the goodman with his family be at supper, and sit down without leave, and eat and drink with them, and either lie in the hall by the fire at night, or in the barn if there be no room in the house for them. If the door be either bolted or locked, if it be not opened to them when they will, they will break the same open to his further cost. And in this barn do sometimes lie forty up-right men with their doxies together at one time. And these must the poor farmer suffer, or else they threaten to burn him and all that he hath.

There may of course be some journalistic dressing up in such accounts but the recorded statements of objective observers are sober enough. An Italian visiting England observed that in spite of the severe laws "there is no country in the world where there are so many thieves and robbers as in England; insomuch that few venture to go alone in the country, excepting in the middle of the day, and fewer still in the towns at night, and least of all in London."⁴

² Ibid., pp. 66-7.

³ Ibid., p. 109.

⁴ Ibid., p. xv.

Judges also quotes Harrison's Description of England (1577) to the effect that three or four hundred were hanged each year, and that thirteen thousand masterless men were apprehended in searches in 1569 while ten thousand others were reported to be still at large. The effect of the prolonged Spanish Wars certainly did nothing to lessen the numbers of "masterless men" as we shall have occasion to note in Chapter III of this essay. Quoting from the same William Harrison, John Dover Wilson writes, "What notable robberies, pilferies, murders, rapes and stealings of young children, burning, breaking and disfiguring their limbs to make them pitiful in the sight of the people, I need not to rehearse."⁵

One of the more substantial charges which the Puritans brought against the play-houses was that they were the resort of thieves and cozeners. It would be idle to deny that any such public gathering in those days could be free from the attentions of cut-purses and the like. Not even Fall Fairs in this moral country of ours are free from the unwelcome notice of their modern counter-parts. On the other hand it would be illogical to suppose that Shakespeare's audiences were largely made up of thieves and rogues. After all, to make it worth while one must have enough prospective victims to make cozenage profitable. If every second or third person in the audience were a thief the pickings would be unprofitably small.

That there were enough of them around to warrant the attention of the playwright is evident from the character of Autolycus in The Winter's Tale. His song in IV iii contains such cant terms as doxy, pugging and aunts. To the audience he announces:

My traffic is sheets; when the kite builds, look to the lesser linen. My father named me Autolycus, who being, as I am, littered under Mercury, was likewise a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles. With die and drab, I purchased this caparison, and my revenue is the silly cheat.

⁵ John Dover Wilson, Life in Shakespeare's England, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1920), p. 236.

In King Lear when Edgar decides to assume a disguise he takes upon himself the role of an Abram-man.

... My face I'll grime with filth;
Blanket my loins; elf all my hair in knots;
And with presented nakedness outface
The winds and persecutions of the sky.
The country gives me proof and precedent
Of Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices,
Strike in their numbed and mortified bare arms
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;
And with this horrible object, from low farms,
Poor pelting villages, sheep-cotes and mills,
Sometimes with lunatic bans, sometimes with prayers,
Enforce their charity... (II.iv).

In spite of the proportion of the role assigned to Autolycus it is the constable and his brethren of the watch who repeatedly turn up in the plays and it is to them that we now turn. Theoretically the constables were elected or appointed by the leet or parish, or corporation in the case of a town. The office was unpaid in theory although there were no doubt minor perquisites such as gifts at Christmas. Human nature being what it is, and the constable's lot being what it was, it is not surprising to find that theory and practice did not always coincide. A very illuminating account of what actually happened is provided in Measure for Measure.

Elbow, one of Shakespeare's comic creations, has brought his prisoner Pompey before Angelo and Escalus, the acting rulers of Vienna. His presentation of the case against the accused has been so circumlocutory that the bored Angelo leaves Escalus to conclude the hearing alone. The further presentation of the case is so ineffective that Escalus is forced to release the prisoner with a warning.

Turning then to Elbow he comments on the length of time that Elbow has held the office of constable - seven and a half years.

"I thought, by the readiness in the office, you had continued in it some time."

This is heavy irony but entirely unnoticed by Elbow.

"Alas", continues Escalus, "it hath been great pains to you. They do you wrong to put you so oft upon't. Are there not men in your ward sufficient to serve it?"

"Faith sir", replies Elbow, "few of any wit in such matters. As they are chosen, they are glad to choose me for them. I do it for some piece of money and go through with all."

It seems clear from this that it was common practice for many citizens to evade their duties by bribing one of the weakest minded among their number to assume the office of constable in perpetuum. The determination of Escalus to remedy this illegal abuse is seen in his next remark: "Look you bring me in the names of some six or seven, the most sufficient of your parish."

The petty constable was the servant of the Justices of the Peace and the master of his parish or ward or leet division. He served for a year, or until he could persuade the appointing authority to find a successor. His duties were varied, numerous, and frequently unpleasant.

All the unpleasant duties came his way while the churchwardens and overseers get the credit. In addition to the duties mentioned [in Giffon's Song at the head of this chapter], all new arrivals in the parish must be checked, and if possible hustled out of it, lest they become a charge [on the poor rates]; tramps failing to account for themselves had to be put in the stocks. Now and again there would be violent and humiliating encounters with the professional bullies of the road. If he let a prisoner escape, the parish had to pay a fine to the royal⁶ government, and to repay any damage to the injured party or parties.

Other duties included the whipping of rogues, checking begging vagrants, often discharged soldiers, for their passes and licenses to beg, collecting local rates and tax warrants for which he was often abused and sometimes accused of graft. He served notices of impressment only to find that the husband had gone into hiding and left a scolding wife to taunt him. He had to find jurymen for the various kinds of court and attend the

⁶ Judges, op. cit., pp. xlvi-vii

Sessions himself with his prisoners, "And though the case be never so plain, / Yet kissing shall go by favour. / They'll punish the leastest, and favour the greatest,... / And who may dare speak 'gainst one that is great?"⁷

We shall notice other peculiar and onerous duties as we glance through some of the contemporary records of court cases. As we proceed we shall see it will become readily apparent why the office of constable was not one eagerly sought for.

There was a Jury of Presentment at Hereford against Thomas Dansey, gentleman, Thomas Smyth, gentleman, Robert Smyth, gentleman, Leonard Wallwene, gentleman, with twenty-four other malefactors unknown, for assembling in warlike array on the seventeenth day of April 1613, in the city of Hereford, armed with swords, reaping hooks, sticks, knives and other weapons, offensive and defensive, and attacking one Lewis Burch, a constable, riotose et routouse verbaverunt, multaverunt, vulneraverunt, et maletractaverunt ita quod de vita eius desperabatur.⁸

A circumstance not to be wondered at against such odds and such weapons!

Further reason for the reluctance of most parishioners to enter on the job of constable may be found in the following case:

"A Petition of William Jefferis formerly constable of Longdon praying the justices to give an order for suppressing the profanation of the Lord's day." After recounting the brawls caused by people from neighbouring parishes coming on the Sabbath to Longdon to indulge in morrice-dancing and fisticuffs after divine service, the petitioner deposes how an excommunicated woman had been introduced (for pay) into the church during the morning service and that a youth had been bribed to denounce her at the beginning of the sermon. The tumult in the church had grown to such proportions that the service had to be abandoned and the major part

⁷ Judges, "The Song of A Constable," op. cit., p. 489.

⁸ Documents of the Corporation of Hereford. Thirteenth Report, Appendix Part IV on the Historical Manuscripts Commission. (London, 1892), p. 339.

of the congregation rushed out and fell to morrice dancing and other amusements well ahead of the scheduled time. The petitioning former constable then continues. "Upon the Sabbath day in 1615 some of Elsfeld's men coming to the said sports made an affray upon the smith's man of Longdon.... The principal actor in this affray was one Sandy of Elsfeld, who since, has cut off his neighbour's arm for doing the office of constable upon him."

Orders were made for Sandy to be of good behaviour, and for "the constables to bring all morrice dancers, who dance during divine service, before Mr. Jeffray."⁹ All of which must have been insubstantial consolation for the armless constable.

Much has been made of the humour provided by the immortal Dogberry, the constable of Much Ado about Nothing. Dogberry's charge to the Watch (III.iii) gives us some idea of a constable's duty. "You are to arrest all vagrom men." This was a standing order to the constables in most parishes. It was based mainly on the fear that vagrants would become a charge on the parish. If there was one thing the Elizabethan or Jacobean citizen seemed to hate it was the payment of taxes. For the poor who really belonged to the parish there is abundant record of concern in the wills of the time. Apart from the endowment of hospitals and alms-houses many citizens left legacies to such institutions, usually for the provision of a stated number of loaves or other kind of food to be provided annually. There are numerous entries in the corporation or parish records of sums of a penny or more being assessed upon all citizens for the relief of the poor. It was this type of assessment that seems to have aroused local resentment. Hence the zeal of constables to arrest vagrants and despatch them quickly on their way. A fair proportion of these vagrants were discharged soldiers as well as displaced and unemployed labourers looking for new places of employment. Besides posing a possible threat to the parish assessment such people were apt in their desperation to attempt

⁹ Documents of the County of Gloucester. Reports of the Historical Manuscripts Commission, (London), p. 294.

robbery, often accompanied with violence. There were probably plenty of other constables who like Dogberry preferred prudence to valour in the handling of such people.

Dogberry's second instruction to his aides was, "Well, you are to call at all ale-houses, and bid them that are drunk get them to bed." It was once again a counsel of prudence. If they won't go home leave them till they are sober. If they are surly or combative tell them you thought they were somebody else!

On the subject of handling drunks there is a very interesting item from the proceedings of the Quarter Sessions of the Corporation of Wells for the year 1612.

The constables of Calne made a petition in favour of reducing the number of ale-houses, and diminishing the strength of the ale, so that it be sold for a penny a quart, "otherwise this sinne of drunkennes will never be avoided, men are so bewitched with the sweetness of the stronge lycoure." They plaintively add that no man will be sworn witness against drunkards, because the most part love these cup-companions. One man they denounced as unfit to keep an alehouse for "he will tipmirrie himself."¹⁰

It would appear that the constables of 1612 had as much trouble as their modern counterparts in making drinking charges stick.

It was in Fielding's time that the name of "thief-takers" was applied to his special police force.¹¹ But "thief-taking" had always been one of the prime duties of the constabulary and Fielding established his special group because of the ineffectiveness of the borough-man. Apparently Dogberry's descendants all too frequently acted upon his precepts: "the most peacable way for you, if you do take a thief, is to let him show himself what he is, and steal out of your company."

In view of what has been said about the constables of the period it

¹⁰ Records of the Quarter Sessions of Wilts. Reports of the Historical Manuscripts Commission (Various Manuscripts, vol. 1), (London, 1901), p. 85.

¹¹ Chambers Encyclopaedia. Article on Police.

is easy to understand why they so often appear in the plays as figures of fun. As long as the better class of citizenry was permitted to evade its responsibilities it was inevitable that the smaller parishes and boroughs should appoint men like Elbow as their Headborough. And as long as men like Elbow officiated it is small wonder that others like Sandy of Elsford should take dire vengeance upon neighbours who "performed the office of constable upon them." Apart from the relative impunity with which Sandy was able to cut his neighbour's arm off there was a multitude of unpopular or unenforceable tasks allotted to the constable. In 1619 for instance the headborough of King's Norton found and arrested certain persons in the parish for playing a card game, "trump", for money.¹² The constables were expected to enforce attendance at church services and to smell out papists and dissenters. In 1578 the Dean and Chapter of Wells issued instructions that the constables were to be sent for by the Churchwardens respecting persons that do without just and lawful cause refrain from coming to church or are "hynderers and contemners of the religion sett forth by her Majestie*, or "who have any masse-books, superaltares, or any such things belonging to the masse."¹³ (

The records of the Corporation of Exeter contain the abstracts of a number of interesting homicide cases in which constables figured as arresting agents. The records of the Dean and Chapter of Chichester abound with punishments and public penances for incontinence and adultery. The public penance usually took the form of standing before the pulpit in a distinctive white garb during the sermon and of standing before the Market Cross in the same garb for three consecutive market days; with the constable beside the penitent.

The figures of the constable and watchman therefore provided Shakespeare with at least two aspects of which he made frequent use in

¹² Documents of the County of Gloucester. Reports of the Historical Manuscripts Commission. (London), p. 283.

¹³ Records of the Quarter Sessions of Wells. Reports of the Historical Manuscripts Commission. (Various Manuscripts, vol. 1). (London), p. 68.

his plays. In the last scene of *Romeo and Juliet* we have the entrance of the watch summoned by Paris's page. They are most businesslike in their approach to their job. "The ground is bloody; search about the churchyard; / Go, some of you, whoe'er you find, attach." They apprehend Romeo's man and the Friar, and collect the instruments of death and the tools Balthasar had brought for opening the Capulet's tomb. They appear not unlike a modern homicide squad going into action. It is the Mayor of London with his officers and their citizen watchmen who break up the brawl in *1 Henry VI* (I.iii) between the followers of Cardinal Beaufort and the Duke of Gloucester. Throughout the plays we see them quietly making their arrests and marching their prisoners off. This is doubtless the side of the police work of the period that Trevelyan had in mind when he said that Elizabeth's volunteer unpaid system worked reasonably well.¹⁴

There was, however, the other side of the picture as we have seen it illustrated in the manner of Elbow's appointment to office, and Shakespeare does full justice to it in the persons of Dogberry and Elbow. All too frequently the local policeman was a figure of ridicule. A taste of power had made him drunk and his language aped that of his betters by birth and education. Ignorance was displayed by the misuse of pretentious words. Elbow dragged his prisoners before Angelo by announcing he had brought before "your good Honour two notorious benefactors." (1.ii line 55). His witness is ~~his~~ wife whom he detests is an honest woman. With unconscious irony he refers to himself as "the poor Duke's constable" instead of the Duke's poor constable. Dogberry displays the same characteristics from the very first of his appearance in *Much Ado About Nothing*. When he parades his minions for duty he addresses them, "First, who think you the most desartless man to be constable?" (III.iii). The Timid Seacoal is nominated for this dubious distinction. "You", says

¹⁴ G. M. Trevelyan: Illustrated English Social History. (Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1944), vol. 2, p. 32.

Dogberry, "are thought to be the most senseless and fit man for the constable of the watch."

Seacoal (George or Francis - Dogberry seems to call him by both names) is promoted to the position of lantern-bearer, and under the character of Second Watchman proceeds to illustrate even more than Dogberry the inherent weakness of the unpaid volunteer system as it often operated at the lowest level. When he is charged to halt any late wanderer he is quick to see the difficulty of the situation. "How if a will not stand?" As for bidding the drunks to get home to bed, "How if they will not?" When Verges tells him to wake up the nurse of a crying child and bid her still it, neighbour Seacoal is again prompt with his doubts and difficulties. "How if the nurse be asleep, and will not hear us?" These tremendous difficulties are all beyond Dogberry's powers of adequate solution. Seacoal, fortunately for himself and his prudent associates has his own reliable solution for difficulties. "We will rather sleep than talk: we know what belongs to a watch," and "Let us go sit here upon the church-bench till two, and then all to bed."

It was not till 1856 that County Police Forces were made mandatory, and the Seacoal tradition of village constables remained till at least the Napoleonic era. In his story of the "Three Strangers" Thomas Hardy presents us with a rural constable whose abilities and inclinations make him a direct descendant of neighbour Seacoal.

"Your money or your life!" said the constable sternly to the still figure. "No, no," whispered John Pitcher. "'Tisn't our side ought to say that. That's the doctrine of vagabonds like him, and we be on the side of the law." "Well, well," replied the constable impatiently: "I must say something, musn't I? and if you had all the weight of this undertaking upon your mind, perhaps you'd say the wrong thing too! - Prisoner at the bar, surrender, in the name of the Father - the Crown, I mane!" 15

In Love's Labour's Lost Shakespeare has presented us with an

15 Thomas Hardy, The Three Strangers in Stories and Poems of Thomas Hardy (London: MacMillan Scholar's Library, 1947), p. 24.

almost tongue-tied rustic constable in the person of Dull. His first remarks establish him in the genre of Elbow, Dogberry and Seacoal. He has a message which he must give into the Duke's own hand. He must "reprehend" his own person. But beyond stating his name later on he remains silent throughout his fairly lengthy stay on stage. His purposes however have been fulfilled. He has arrested his prisoner and delivered the prisoner and Don Armado's messenger. (I.i). Dull appears again in I.ii, gives in one short speech the Duke's instructions concerning Costard and Jaquenetta and then remains silent during the remainder of the scene. His contribution to IV.ii is characteristic. When Holofernes the pedantic schoolmaster and the equally pedantic curate Sir Nathaniel are learnedly discussing the appearance of a deer and sprinkling their talk with Latin tags, Dull interrupts, "'Twas not a haud credo; 'twas a pricket." From this position he cannot be budged, and to this rock of certainty he clings throughout the ensuing windstorm of learned ignorance.

Yet it is worth noticing that no matter how naive and stupid Shakespeare's constables may sometimes appear they do have one (good) quality in common. They are all honest citizens motivated by a sense of duty and respect for law and order. Dull arrests his friends without question and brings them to court. Elbow may lack perception but certainly shows dogged determination in his pursuit of evil-doers. He knows what is morally and legally right even if he is unable to put his conviction into the right words. Dogberry's cohorts have no great zeal for their job, but when wrong-doing walks in front of them they have no hesitation in arresting two gentlemen of superior rank. It is neighbour Seacoal who gives vent to a fine piece of honest indignation, even if the words are addled. "We have recovered the most dangerous piece of lechery that ever was known in the commonwealth." Amazingly in the two latter instances there is no suggestion of bribery; no hint that "matters can be settled quietly."

It is perhaps indicative of Shakespeare's maturing opinion of the law that Measure for Measure is the latest of the plays we have been discussing. In Love's Labour's Lost and Much Ado About Nothing there has been an acceptance of the shortcomings and stupidity of the police forces. In Romeo and Juliet the efficiency of some borough forces has been equally accepted. But it is obvious in Measure for Measure that the dramatist was not satisfied with the ineptness of Elbow. He can still enjoy him as a figure of fun. But he wants him replaced by something better. Else why does he devote time in the play to expose the manner of Elbow's annual election to office? Or why does he put Escalus to the business of sending for the names of some six or seven of those who have been shirking their duties?

It was unfortunately to be a matter of centuries before the taxpayers could be persuaded to part with enough money to provide efficient police forces. It may be questioned whether that desideratum has even yet been reached. Yet there the constables and men of the watch stand as Shakespeare placed them. Some efficient, some stupid; some more timid than others, but all honest and at a pinch, resolved to uphold the law when the call of duty presented itself. Their lot was not often a happy one but the system worked - "reasonably well."

III

ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH.

The present chapter will deal briefly with the private soldiers who found their way on the stage in the First and Second Parts of Henry IV and in Henry V. While soldiers are introduced into numerous other plays by Shakespeare, they are often non-speaking characters intended to fill out a battle scene or wait upon some Captain or Lord. They are also occasionally developed to possess recognizable individual traits. Such are Corporal Nym, the Sargeant in the second scene of Macbeth, Francisco in Hamlet and the French sargeant and the Master-Gunner of Orleans in 1 Henry VI. The three plays selected, however, have a certain kinship. It is not only that their historical settings belong to a compact and consecutive period of time, but the dates of their composition fall closely together. The majority of critics assign the date of the plays to the period from 1597 to 1599.

In limiting the discussion to these three plays I am motivated by other considerations than those of mere convenience. It was once common practice to see some relationship between the theme and mood of certain plays and some biographical details in the playwright's life. We heard of certain plays that belonged to the "dark period".

There seems to have been a period of Shakespeare's life when his heart was ill at ease, and ill content with the world or his own conscience; the memory of hours mis-spent, the pang of affection misplaced or unrequited, the experience of man's worser nature, which intercourse with ill-chosen associates, by choice or circumstance teaches; - these as they sank down into the depths of his great mind, seem not only to have inspired it into the conception of Timon and Lear, but that of one primary character, the censurer of mankind.¹

That from about 1600 to 1609 his mind was pre-occupied with the

¹ Hallam, Literature of Europe, vol. iii, p. 568 quoted by Charles Knight ed., The Stratford Shakespeare, (London: Griffin, Bohn and Co., 1861), vol. i, p. 128.

tragedy of life is certain. To assert that his persistent selection of tragic themes in those years was unconnected with his own personal inner life, that he turned to tragedy simply because he thought it would pay, and kept to it simply because it actually did pay, would be to assert a psychological absurdity.²

Bradley also advances a similar view to those expressed above. The existence of this distinct tragic period, of a time when the dramatist seems to have been occupied almost exclusively with deep and painful problems, has naturally helped to suggest the idea that the "man" also, in these years... was heavily burdened in spirit; that Shakespeare turned to tragedy not merely for a change, or because he felt it to be the greatest form of drama and felt himself equal to it, but also because the world had come to look dark and terrible to him; and even that the railings of Thersites and the maledictions of Timon express his own contempt and hatred for mankind.³

There is no doubt that biography can contribute much to the understanding of a poet's works. Yet it is not without its dangers, for it often involves reading into a play more than the biographical material warrants. This is particularly true in the case of a poet like Shakespeare. Granted we have a larger amount of biographical material than is usual for an author of the period, yet it is still far from exhaustive. The variety of reasons offered by way of explaining the "tragic period" indicates that we still have more conjecture than fact in determining the influence of biographical events upon the plays. These various explanations include jilted love, the betrayal of a business trust, or

² T. Seccombe and J. W. Allen, The Age of Shakespeare, (London: Bell and Sons, 1928), vol. ii, p. 84.

³ A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1904), S.M.L. edition 1964, p. 62.

the disgrace of the Earl of Southampton after the disastrous Irish expedition of Essex.⁴ The last-mentioned explanation is further weakened by the fact that Southampton was already in disgrace with the Queen for his unauthorized marriage, long before he left on his equally unauthorized trip with Essex.⁵

While not rejecting the help of biography where it is unequivocally pertinent, it seems to me that there is another source of abundant light available if we accept one reasonable premise. The premise is simply this: that as an intelligent, practical citizen Shakespeare was keenly interested in the affairs and conditions of his time, and that such an interest was bound to reflect itself in his own work. That such a premise is at least arguable may be inferred from his own successful career. He did not rise to a position of eminence by ignoring or being unaware of the moods and opinions of his public. Nor are we warranted in assuming that he was solely interested in box-office receipts and indifferent to the events and movements going on in his world. I have selected Henry IV and V because I think it can be demonstrated from them that public events did have a decided impact upon Shakespeare's work. And I further believe that, in part at least, this demonstration can be effected by a study of the common soldiers who appear in these plays. The method at any rate will not suffer from the disadvantage of resting upon some highly speculative theories about Shakespeare's inner responses to conjectured events that themselves are based upon insecure hypotheses. We shall take the words the players use and apply to them the light available from known facts and conditions in the political and social environment.

To set off with our feet firmly on the ground it is relevant to

⁴ Charles Knight, op. cit., i, 128.

⁵ Edward P. Cheyney, A History of England From the Defeat of the Armada to the Death of Elizabeth, (New York: Peter Smith, 1948), vol. 11, p. 477.

notice that all three plays under consideration were first acted at the Curtain between 1597 and 1599.⁶ This playhouse was situated in Finsbury. Holmes in his book, Shakespeare's Public, describes it as being at that time a good residential district. Many of the city merchants had recently built substantial homes in the neighbourhood, and it was also frequented by law students from the Inns of Court. The Right Honourable the Lord Chamberlain's company were much like the resident repertory company of later times. The audience was comparatively orderly, moral, and regular in attendance, and fairly sophisticated. The influence of such an audience on the playwright can perhaps be seen best in such a play as Romeo and Juliet which was staged first at ^{The} Theatre, also in Finsbury. Capulet was a London merchant rather than an Italian Renaissance nobleman. The Veronese street-brawls looked amazingly like London street incidents. The wit and repartee were of London entirely. The activities of Sampson, Gregory, Peter, Abraham and the musicians were of interest to the servants of the London merchants, for these servants formed an essential part of the groundlings in the pit audience. It was therefore basically a citizen audience that our plays were written for, and it is fair to assume that while the plays may have represented a type of escapism, they were grounded, not on incomprehensible fantasies, but on realities and problems that formed part of the audience's own lives.

In speaking of the flowering of literature and the rise of nationalism in the latter half of Elizabeth's reign, it is easy to fall into the fallacy of assuming that the general tone of the period was one of unalloyed national exuberance. Such was actually not the case, as a consideration of the problems facing citizens of both high and low degree will show.

First of all, the England of 1599 (the date of Henry V) was

⁶ Martin Holmes, Shakespeare's Public, (London: John Murray, 1960), p. xii.

a war-weary country. The conflict with Spain had dragged on for over thirty years. The first ominous blow had been struck when Philip II had covertly rejected English help in defending the Americas. The fighting began in 1568 when a vastly superior Spanish fleet made a unilateral declaration of war and treacherously attacked Hawkins and Drake at St. Juan de Ulua. Drake's Commando-type ~~raid~~ on Nombre de Dios in 1573 was typical of the sporadic fighting that characterized the earlier part of hostilities.⁸ It was not till 1585 that Elizabeth, alarmed by the weakness and confusion in France, signed a formal treaty of alliance with the United Netherlands, and committed English soldiers to a land war in Europe. From then on there had been a steady drain upon the man-power and wealth of the country. Such episodes as the capture of Cadiz by Drake in 1587 and the Defeat of the Spanish Armada averted, but did not remove, the threat to national security. The Treaty of Vervins in 1598 had taken Henri IV and France out of the war completely. The treaty had left Elizabeth with the option of signing within six months. Such an act meant abandoning the United Netherlands to the full force of the Spanish power.

Camden in his Annales enumerates the arguments that the peace party were advancing. It is interesting to note them as ~~indicative~~ ^{indicative} of the public issues that were being debated by thoughtful persons of the period.

The reputation of England as a disturber of world peace would be lessened; the assassination of the Queen would be less likely; it would put an end to the onerous war taxation; the Irish rebellion would die out; Spain, Flanders and Germany would be open to English trade again; a more widespread war and the possibility of ultimate failure would be avoided; it would put an end to the alliance with a democratic United Netherlands.⁹

⁸ S. T. Bindoff, Tudor England, (London: Penguin Books, 1950), p. 255.

⁹ Cheyney, op. cit., p. 447.

The recent assassination of William the Silent and other Protestant leaders by Counter-Reformation emissaries lent force to the second argument; the ruin of the cloth trade and the consequent unemployment made the resumption of continental trade seem very attractive. The division in the country is evident from the fact that Burleigh was in favour of signing the treaty while the still powerful and popular Essex opposed it. It was the Queen herself who finally rejected the offer of a peace that involved the dishonour of abandoning the Dutch. It is also more than likely that Elizabeth foresaw that Philip, after disposing of the Netherlanders, would proceed to attack an England bereft of its last ally.

That such an eventuality was probable is proved by Philip's protracted negotiations with the Irish rebels, The O'Neill and The O'Donnell. From 1591 Spanish envoys, ammunition and arms, and small bodies of troops were annually dispatched to Ireland. Continual promises of large-scale invasion forces were made to the Irish chieftains, but Philip delayed sending a sizeable force until 1601, when it was too late to achieve the success that might have been gained before Mountjoy had had the opportunity to reorganize the English administration and defences. Yet in 1599 it appeared extremely likely that the English might be forced out of the country entirely.

The troops scattered through the country (Ireland) or engaged in military operations were unpaid, ill-equipped, dissatisfied, and untrustworthy because of the many Irish among them who were secretly in sympathy with their rebellious fellow countrymen, and were in many cases ready for mutiny or voluntary disbandment.¹⁰

The tenuous hold of the English forces on the country is illustrated by another passage from the same writer.

In distant Connaught the Governor, Sir Conyers Clifford, in 1598 with a little band of a hundred and twenty English and a few

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 470.

hundred Irish soldiers, and with not a barrel of gunpowder for his musketry, was holding the province precariously by a mixture of policy and force against the almost irresistible force of the northern uprising.¹¹

It was against this background of political trouble that Essex, once the Queen's favourite, was dispatched to Ireland in March, 1599, with a force of over 15,000 men. Unfortunately, whatever his defects as a military commander may have been, the general was given neither the latitude nor the means to prosecute his mission within the time allotted by the Queen. It is against the optimistic background of his setting-out that King Henry V must be seen. It was hoped that the mere appearance of such a force and such a leader would quell the rebellion. In his Chorus to Act V Shakespeare was prematurely visualizing a return in triumph. It was an expectation that, without a doubt, was shared by most of the audience.

But now behold,

In the quick **forge** and working-house of thought,
 How London doth pour out her citizens.
 The mayor and all his brethren in best sort,
 Like to the senators of th' antique Rome,
 With the plebeians swarming at their heels,
 Go forth and fetch their conquering Caesar in:
 As, by a lower but loving likelihood,
 Were now the general of our gracious empress,
 As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,
 Bringing rebellion broached on his sword....¹²

The empty-handed and precipitate return of Essex in September, his ill-conceived attempt at rebellion and subsequent execution, were

¹¹ Ibid., p. 469.

¹² King Henry V, V, Chorus, 22-32.

not events calculated to increase any national exuberance there may have been.

But political anxieties were not the only problems facing the solid citizens of the period. Closely allied to the political worries were the economic woes.

The years following 1593 were largely years of dearth, high prices, poverty and turbulence. The trade war with Germany, the extension of the rebellion in Ireland, the continued unemployment and consequent poverty in the cloth-making districts and in London led to widespread vagabondage, suffering and complaint.¹³

Elizabeth had inherited a ruined treasury and despite her thrifty management and the able administration of such men as Burleigh and Walsingham, the drain of continuous wars kept the Exchequer depleted. A steady sale of royal demesnes and the granting of monopolies were palliatives that ultimately defeated their own ends. In spite of a genuine reluctance to impose additional taxation the circumstances of her reign made such additional impositions unavoidable. Just how steady the drain in men and money was may be gauged from the fact that between 1589 and 1595 Elizabeth sent five expeditions to Northern France alone to help Henri IV in his struggle against Philip.¹⁴

Elizabeth's reliance on volunteer unpaid help has been noticed in an earlier section of this paper. But the Administration's reliance upon this unpaid help was not confined to the enforcement of law at the local level. Drake's operations in 1585-7 were organized as semi-official joint-stock operations. The Queen furnished troops, some of the ships, and some of the money. Of the twenty-three ships which Drake took to Cadiz, six belonged to the Queen, the remainder were merchantmen and privateers. Though some of

¹³ Cheyney, op. cit., p. 259.

¹⁴ S. T. Bindeff, op. cit., p. 278.

these raids paid handsome dividends (the Queen's share of the Cadiz raid was over £40,000), many of them showed a loss.¹⁵ This became increasingly so as the hostilities dragged on. Besides the burden of direct taxation there were also the increasing deficits of naval losses which the merchants were compelled to shoulder while exports were shrinking. It is not difficult to understand the gloomy feelings of many of the London merchants, or to account for the widespread unemployment and poverty among the working classes. The latter was so great that some observers believed the country suffered from overpopulation. Cheyney quotes a writer of 1596 to the effect that "if some speedy order be not taken for the removal of the surplusage, or at least the basest and poorest sort of them into some foreigne place of habitation, the realm cannot possibl[e] long maintaine them."¹⁶

Nor was the plight of the poorer classes much better in the country. Besides poor trade conditions the effect of enclosure was also beginning to be felt. Many rural people were being forced into vagabondage and beggary. The misery was compounded by a series of bad harvests. There were five of these in the seven years between 1593 and 1599. A Midsummer Night's Dream, usually attributed to 1595-96, reflects one of these dismal crop years.

Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
As in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea
Contagious fogs; which falling in the land,
Hath every pelting river made so proud
That they have overborne their continents:
The ox hath therefore stretch'd his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
Hath rotted ere his youth attain'd a beard:

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 270.

¹⁶ Cheyney, op. cit., p. 35.

The fold stands empty in the drowned field,
And crows are fatted with the murrion flock...¹⁷

There were bread riots in London in 1596, and in the same year the apprentices rioted over the price of butter. As a deterrent five of the youths were convicted of high treason and were hanged, drawn and quartered.¹⁸ Away from the city the unrest was even graver. The administration set price controls for grain, ^{and} quotas for growers to deliver, bought from abroad what it could, ^{and} passed a National Poor Law at the Parliament of 1597, but the situation nevertheless remained disturbing. Exports of grain were forbidden, but the armed forces constituted in themselves an unbearable drain on the country's slender resources. An Oxford preacher declaimed that the famine "maketh the poor to pinch for hunger and the children to cry in the streets not knowing where to have bread." In Newcastle the town accounts included payments for burying "poor folk who died for want in the streets," and for the "victualles for the relefe of the sick folk afield and within the towne."¹⁹

That the merchants and solid citizens in the audiences at The Curtain had grounds for apprehension is made clear by other details in Cheyney's History. In Somerset sixty vagrants seized a cartload of cheese that was being taken to the fair and divided it among themselves (p. 26). In the same county in 1596 there was a trial of a group of thieves. They acknowledged that they had lain in an ale-house for three weeks, stealing a sheep at night, cooking and eating it. In a certain remote haybarn forty to sixty vagrants had gathered, stealing and cooking all kinds of food. When the inhabitants complained of them to the justices of the peace at the Exeter sessions, the justices ordered the

¹⁷ Midsummer Night's Dream, II, i, 88-96.

¹⁸ Cheyney, op. cit., p. 33.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

neighbouring township officers to arrest the outlaws, but the constables declared they were afraid to adventure against them. Near Lynn in Norfolk in the year 1597 the desperate poor seized and unloaded a vessel laden with grain. (p. 25).

A reflection of these hard times is seen in the inn-yard scene at Rochester in I Henry IV (ii, i) "Peas and beans are as dank here as a dog," remarks the Second Carrier. "This house is turned upside down since Robin Ostler died." "Poor fellow," rejoins his fellow-carrier, "a' never joyed since the price of oats rose." It seems obvious that the references to spoiled peas and beans and the rising price of oats are topical allusions. It is certain that they would be understood and their force appreciated much more in the Finsbury of the late fifteen-nineties than they are today, unless we also are aware of the string of bad harvests, rising prices and general scarcity of those times.

It is time to turn to the soldiers that comprised Falstaff's "charge of foot" in I Henry IV. "I never did see such pitiful rascals," comments Prince Hal (IV, ii, 64). The Battle of Shrewsbury was fought in 1403 but the anachronistic reference to "a caliver" shows that the troops Shakespeare had in mind were rather more contemporary than those who marched against Hotspur. The Prince was not the only person to comment on the miserable appearance of Falstaff's company.

A mad fellow met me on the way and told me I had unloaded all the gibbets and pressed the dead bodies. No eye hath seen such scarecrows. (IV, ii, 37f)

Even Falstaff himself did not want to be seen in public with them and refused to march them through the city of Coventry. "The villains march wide betwixt the legs, as if they had gyves on; for indeed I had most of them out of prison." Modern productions of the play stress the comic outlandish appearance of these ragamuffins, and to a modern audience the episode is entirely comic. The roguery of Falstaff seems

rather innocent and in line with some modern business practices that are easily condoned if they are successful. But to Finsbury audiences that first saw the play it would appear in a somewhat different light. The knife would cut too near the bone to be wholly amusing. They would recognize Falstaff's men for the troublesome vagabonds that all too often menaced their goods, and, at times, even their lives. They might smile at Sir John's business ethics, though even this is doubtful, for honest dealing was a greatly esteemed commodity among the London tradesmen and merchants. But there can be little doubt about their hearty approval of Falstaff's reply to Prince Hal's comment about their beggarly appearance. "Tut, tut; good enough to toss; food for powder, food for powder; they'll fill a pit as well as better." The sentiment undoubtedly coincided with the feelings of many in the audience. As Falstaff more than implied, these men were rascals at heart. The one shirt the hundred and fifty boasted between them was stolen from "my host at St. Alban's." And the rest of the men would supply their deficiencies in the same manner. "They'll find linen enough on every hedge." No countrywoman's laundry spread out to dry would be safe from their passing by. The first audiences were as convinced as their later Victorian mercantile counterparts that "honesty was the best policy" - because it paid. And when during the battle scene (V, iii.) Falstaff appeared solus and informed the audience that "there's not three of my hundred and fifty left alive" the event would be seen as a remarkably appropriate dispensation of Providence, and particularly so, if among the audience there were any justices of the peace on a visit from Somerset or Exeter.

The topic of impressment occurs in both Parts I and II of Henry IV and is in itself a fascinating study, even apart from Falstaff's misuse of his commission. In the first place it is well to note that it is another anachronism. The armies of Henry IV and of his son were essentially feudal armies buttressed to some extent with foreign mercenaries. Impressment was unknown to the feudal period because it was unnecessary. The

king and his great nobles had their private armies, raised for particular occasions from their own retainers and vassals. The mass of the common people were spectators even later, while the nobles waged their campaigns of mutual extermination during the Wars of the Roses. The new Tudor nobility were prevented by their careful monarchs from indulging in the luxury of maintaining military establishments. The Tudor army was definitely the monarch's own army and it was from this circumstance that the practice of impressment arose.

Necessary though the practice was for the New Order it was inevitable that it should lend itself to the kind of perversion used by Falstaff. In 2 Henry IV, ii we have an excellent description of the modus operandi. The local justice of the peace has been notified of the Commissioner's forthcoming visit and has prepared a nominal roll of eligible recruits. In this particular case Justice Shallow has been allotted the task of providing four recruits for the army. To provide for the possibility of one or two being rejected by the Commissioner, presumably for reasons of physical unfitness or on compassionate grounds, he has summoned six candidates for conscription. The assumption, of course, was that the justice was loyal, dispassionate and honest. Generally speaking the assumption was correct, although it can be seen that it would be a great temptation to hold back the men who were most valuable to the operations of the manor or vill, or to get rid of some undesirable man.

Another great and, in Falstaff's case, unwarranted assumption, was that the person with the royal commission for impressment was a person of integrity. Justice Shallow's two most likely soldiers, Mouldy and Bullcalf, were able to buy themselves out of military service by bribing Lieutenant Bardolph.

Bard. Sir, a word with you: I have three pound to free Mouldy and Bull-calf.

Fal. Go to: well.... For you, Mouldy, stay at home till you are past service; and for your part, Bull-calf, grow till you come into it.

Shal. Sir John, 'sir John, do not yourself wrong; they are your likeliest men, and I would have you served with the best.

(2 Henry IV. III. ii).

It is interesting to note that Lieutenant Bardolph also took his "cut" by holding back a pound which he did not think proper to mention to his captain. The policy of Falstaff was nakedly and unashamedly set forth in I Henry IV, (IV. ii. ii ff).

I press me none but good householders, yeomen's sons; inquire me out contracted bachelors, such as had been asked twice on the banns... such toasts-and-butter, with hearts in their bellies no bigger than pins' heads, and they have bought out their services.

In other words he sought out men with money at their disposal, and who were in circumstances that made them unlikely volunteers for service. From them he had received three hundred pounds to "forget about the whole thing." For a considerably smaller sum he had bribed beggars and vagabonds to enlist and had done some cheap purchasing from prison keepers. The profits from such trading were obviously lucrative but hardly calculated to increase the efficiency of the royal army. Yet there can be no doubt that among the Finsbury audiences there were many civilians who were aware of such dealings, and perhaps had even connived at them. These passages in the plays may be construed as an attack upon pernicious practices, but what is certain is that Shakespeare was portraying a situation well-known to his auditors.

The extent to which impressment was practiced is seen in a minuted State Paper, partly in Burleigh's handwriting, and dated August, 1596. It declares that 17,800 pressed soldiers had been sent out to foreign parts and 3,293 had been sent to Ireland since 1589.²⁰ It should be remembered that in ¹⁵⁹⁶ the great Irish campaigns had not yet taken place

²⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

in 1596. The quality of such troops may be seen from the fact that there was a serious mutiny of the "drafted" men at Ipswich in 1596. They had "utterly refused to goe beyond the seas," disembarking after they had been put aboard, threatening to march to London and to stir up the rebellious there.²¹

Nor are we lacking in information about the fate of the "pressed" man once he got into action. We have already noticed the extent to which Essex's forces were decimated by sickness without even fighting any major engagements. We are reminded that the troops he came to relieve were "ill-paid and ill-equipped". "Unpaid" would be more correct in many cases; and even after the Government sent reinforcements and supplies to Ireland in 1599 it made no provision for the arrears of pay owing to the troops already there.

No reliable statistics of casualties seem available, but some idea of the numbers involved can be seen in the Administration's plans for the Irish Campaign of Essex. His initial force consisted of about 15,000 men when he embarked in March. The original plans included 3,000 replacements to be dispatched in August or September and an additional 2,000 if required. It seems reasonable to suppose from this information that a man's chances of not returning home were about one in three. And if he were fortunate enough to return it would be merely to a life of begging or vagrancy.

The records of the Corporations and Quarterly Sessions of the Counties have a constantly recurring entry from 1599 on. From the Records of the Quarter Sessions of the County of Wiltshire we give a few random selections.

3 July 1599. Pensions of 50 shillings granted to William Chiler, who served under Capt. Edward Digges in Munster, and to Thomas Willis, who served under Capt. Edward North, and who both brought certificates from Mr. William Waad, Clerk of the Council. One

²¹ Ibid., p. 28.

pensioner, Robert Lyde, to be struck off.²²

30 Sept. 1600. £5 granted as a pension to Henry Venn for service in Ireland.²³

1 Oct. 1601. Pension of £5 granted to Robert Bungay who served under Capt. Egerton in Ireland, and the same to Thomas Doggett who served under Capt. Garrett.²⁴

A more detailed account of the fate of an impressed man fortunate enough to survive several campaigns is found in the same records under the date of 11 Jan. 1602.

Roger Rashwood of Halston, Suffolk, is examined by the justices. (Apparently on a charge of vagrancy). He says that the Michaelmas before the Earl of Leicester went to the Low Countries he was pressed for service there, served one year under Captain Hunnyngs until he was slain, and then for another year under Captain Charles Hunnyngs; was then wounded and discharged, and returned to Halston, where for six years he lived by his trade of chapman; then went to Ireland about the time of Lord Mountjoy's going there, and served for more than a year; returned to London, and about Midsummer 1601 went voluntarily to the Low Countries, received her Majesty's pay, and served a whole year under Captain Ball, and had a gentleman's pay of the States; was hurt in his thigh at the siege of Ostend, and on returning to England came down to Wiltshire.²⁵

²² Historical MSS Commission, vol i of a Report on MSS in Various Collections, (London: H. M. Stationer's Office, 1901), p. 69.

²³ Ibid., p. 70.

²⁴ Loc. cit., p. 70.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 71.

The record does not say whether he was acquitted of vagrancy or imprisoned. But from the numbers of vagabonds already noticed it seems clear that there must have been many similar cases to that of Roger Rashwood. He seems to have had a civilian occupation, chapman, but to have been one of those "trade-fallen" people of the kind that Falstaff impressed. We may be reasonably sure that if any potential sources of material for impressment were in the Finsbury audiences, they would be found among the groundlings. The good householders of the "toasts-and-butter" type would be in the galleries.

It is only necessary to turn to King Henry V to realise that the royal army was, fortunately for the country, not entirely composed of "discarded unjust serving-men, younger sons to younger brothers, revolted tapsters, and ostlers trade-fallen", together with "gaol-birds." In the characters of John Bates, Alexander Court and Michael Williams, Shakespeare has drawn vivid portrayals of men who were worthy descendants of the famous yeomen of Poitiers and Crecy. In his Introduction to the Arden edition of King Henry V J. H. Walter has pointed out the epic characteristics of the play.

Undoubtedly the speeches of the Chorus are epical in tone, but they have another epical function, for in the careful way they recount the omitted details of the well-known story, they secure unity of action.

.....

The moral values of the epic will to a large extent depend on the character and action of the epic hero, who in renaissance theory must be perfect above the common run of men and of royal blood, in effect, the ideal king.²⁶

Prof. Walter proceeds to enumerate the qualities of the ideal king as Shakespeare has presented them in the person of Henry V. He is a Christian, learned, versed in theology, devoted to the establishment

²⁶ King Henry V, (London: Arden edition, 1960), p. xvi.

of justice. He himself should show clemency and exercise self-control. He should allow himself to be counselled by wise men, familiar with humble people, yet not corrupted by them; zealous for the defence and preservation of his state; hostile to idlers, parasites and flatterers, and wearing his dignities with the right spirit. In giving body to the ideals he adopted from Erasmus and Chelidonium, Shakespeare has surrounded the ideal king with learned counsellors such as the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely, and with such brave and wise leaders as Salisbury, Westmoreland, York and Sir Thomas Erpingham.

But the poet has improved upon the advice of his preceptors Erasmus and Chelidonium, by seeing that the ideal king is served not only by ideal clerics and nobles, but also by ideal soldiers. Some of them, such as Gower, Fluellen, MacMorris and Jamy, are representative of the junior officers, while others, like Court, Bates and Williams, are drawn from the ranks of the common soldiers. Their appearances, though brief, serve to give us some glimpse of what their creator's ideal man in the ranks was like.

They make their appearance on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt, (IV. 1. 85). By way of contrast to the careless drunken revelry we have seen in the French camp, these men are sober and grimly prepared for action before the dawn breaks. Their alertness is evident from the way in which they challenge the disguised King's approach. Bates is obviously the realist of the party. In his first speech he informs his friends that "we have no great cause to desire the approach of day." When the king says that no matter what fears a king may have he should not show them, Bates replies,

He may show what outward courage he will, but I believe, as cold a night as 'tis, he could wish himself in Thames to the neck, and so I would he were, and I by him, at all adventures, so we were quit here. (IV. 1. 114).

It is not fear that Bates displays here, but a realistic appraisal

of the enfeebled condition of the English army and the overwhelming odds opposed to them. His unshakeable courage is evident from his final words when he breaks up the altercation between the King and Williams.

Be friends, you English fools, be friends: we have French quarrels enow, if you could tell how to reckon. (IV. 1. 228).

It is an expression of plain common sense. "There is a job to **do**; let's get on with it. The job is to fight the French and that will take all the breath and energy we can spare. Your arguing between yourselves is a waste of time and effort right now." It was the kind of plain speaking that the groundlings would appreciate, and he couched his thought in the colloquial language of the groundling. The thought behind his words, "If his (the king's) cause be wrong, our obedience to the king wipes the crime of it out of us," was echoed centuries later by another English poet. Tennyson, paying tribute to the bravery of later yeomen's sons in the Charge of the Light Brigade wrote,

Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Some one had blundered:
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.

The sturdy independence of Bates is indicated in his reply to the king's contention that every man is responsible for his own private sins. No king can expect to fight with an army made up entirely of "unspotted soldiers." "I do not desire," replies Bates, "that he should answer for me; and yet I determine to fight lustily for him." (IV. 1. 195).

From the point of view of the "bit" actor Williams has the "juicy" part in this scene. But this should not blind us to the portrayal of Bates as an Englishman of the common sort who possessed within himself all those traditional and solid qualities that gave the nation its confidence

that an English soldier was worth three French ones. Michael Williams merely emphasises the quality of bravery and independence that Bates displays. To it he adds that **tough** of dash that solid citizens admired, and that **fierce** jealousy of his prerogatives that all Londoners cherished. Alexander Court is the strong silent type of Englishman, well-known among the people. He has only one common-place remark to the effect that day is breaking. No doubt many a tongue-tied groundling, often gravelled for lack of matter, saw a kindred spirit in Court.

Yet taken together these men portray a representative cross-section of the nation's lower classes. Their courage, independence of mind and spirit, and their matter-of-fact approach to danger was typical of the ideal soldier. They accepted the responsibility "to doe my duetie in that state of life unto which it shal please God to cal me."²⁷ Nor would these stalwart yeomen see anything incongruous or forced in the king's address to them before the battle itself.

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
 For he to-day 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).

We cannot be sure why Shakespeare should at this time have chosen to give us ^a play about the ideal king with his ideal leaders and soldiers. It is possible that more than one factor influenced him. It may have been the menacing gravity of the Irish situation and the fear of an escalation of the Spanish conflict. Possibly he felt that the chronic unrest and general disillusionment of the times called for a refurbishing of ideals. Or it may have been written with an eye to the not-too-distant accession of James Stuart, about whom there were already disturbing

²⁷ First Prayer Book of Edward VI, (1549). Intro. W. B. (Turnbull and Spears for the Ancient and Modern Theological Library, u.d.), p. 230.

rumours in England. Certainly it cannot have been taken as any criticism of the Queen. When she opened her last Parliament on 30 November 1661 she addressed them in words that were as applicable to any year of the preceding decade.

Though God hath raised me, yet this I count the glory of my crown, that I have reigned with your loves... It is not my desire to live or reign longer than my life and reign shall be for your good. And though you have had, and may have, many mightier and wiser princes sitting in this seat, yet you never had, nor shall have, any that will love you better.²⁸

It was unfortunate that a long time was to elapse before a mightier and wiser prince occupied her seat, if indeed any ever did. If Shakespeare's portrayal of the ideal king was written for Elizabeth's successor, it was seed scattered on very stony ground. But whatever the destiny of the ideal king may have been in England's subsequent history, there can be no doubt of the influence that the common soldier was destined to wield. It was only natural that, both good and bad, they should have appeared in Shakespeare's plays. They were an inescapable and prominent part of his milieu and it is reasonable to suppose that some notice of them was inevitable. It would be comforting to imagine that only the good ones formed part of the pit audience. But no one in London in the fifteen-nineties could be unaware of the existence of such a large and numerous class as the common soldiers. Both the good and bad representatives of the species were an inescapable part of the daily scene. If, as we believe, Shakespeare was writing his plays for general appeal, he would hardly have ignored such a group, who were not only numerous in themselves, but must have been united by ties of kinship or friendship to practically every other member of his audiences. At any rate we may be certain that the soldiers on stage were readily recognizable both as individuals and types. The few words or speeches allotted

²⁸ S. T. Bindoff, op. cit., p. 306.

to them would "speak volumes" to the audience. It has been the purpose of this chapter to fill out a few pages of those volumes and to restore some of the general knowledge that belonged to the members of the original audiences.

IV

Bawds and Morts

While I have tried to establish that, generally speaking, and in spite of the abundant denunciatory sermons of the period, the audiences in the theatres were orderly and respectable, yet it cannot be denied that there must have been a goodly sprinkling of less desirable citizens who frequented the play-houses. It is a fact that is just as applicable to-day. Wherever a crowd is assembled for the sake of entertainment there will be at least a fringe of undesirables. So among Shakespeare's audiences there were inevitably present professional ladies plying their trade. If contemporary writers such as Greene, Dekker, Hutton and Middleton are to be believed, these females must have comprised a numerous and ubiquitous sorority. They were the real-life counterparts of Doll Tearsheet and Mistress Overdone. In both Measure for Measure and Henry IV Part II we have glimpses of bawds that must have been taken from life.

Doll Tearsheet is a lively and realistic portrayal of a practicing mort. Her occupation is established in Act II.ii of Henry IV, Part II, even before she appears on the stage. The Prince remarks that her kinship to Falstaff's diminutive page is "as the parish-heifers to the town-bull," and later, "This Doll Tearsheet should be some road." "As common," rejoins Poin, "as the way between St. Alban's and London."

Her first appearance draws the Hostess's remark, "you have drunk too much canaries," and the answering "hem" undoubtedly represents the hiccup of Doll's somewhat flushed and half-tipsy condition. She has been engaged to entertain Falstaff, and the scene that follows is riotous low comedy. Yet the note of the grim reality behind the buffoonery is never far absent. "We catch of you, Doll, we catch (diseases) of you," says Sir John. From mildly berating the knight she turns in real earnest to belabouring Pistol for his advances. She obviously has some blurred

notions of professional etiquette - never more than one at a time. But when a brawl appears likely to ensue between Falstaff and Pistol she is quick to second the Hostess's efforts to keep the peace.

Eastcheap, the location of the Boar's Head Tavern where this action takes place, was within the city limits, where the illicit trade in love was much more strictly supervised. In Thomas Dekker's Lantern and Candlelight there is an interesting description of how the bawds and morts managed to circumvent this rigid supervision. When they become too notorious or "hot" to stay in the suburbs, their usual place of business, they are drained out of the suburbs... and as a clear stream are let into the city."¹ It merely means a change in the modus operandi.

If before she (the mort) ruffled in silks, now she is more civilly attired than the housewife. And where must her lodging be taken up, but in the house of some citizen, whose known reputation she borrows, (or rather steals), putting it on as a cloak to cover her deformities? ... And though the law threatens to hit her never so often, yet hath she subtle defences to ward off the blows. For if gallants haunt the house, then spreads she these colours: She is a captain or lieutenant's wife in the Low Countries, and they come with letters, from the soldier her husband. If merchants resort to her, then she hoists these sails: She is wife to the master of a ship, and they bring her news that her husband put in at the Straits, or at Venice, at Aleppo, Alexandria or Scanderoon, etc.... but if the stream of her fortunes run low, and that none but apronmen do launch forth there, then keeps she a politic sempster's shop, or she starches them.²

This provides an interesting sidelight on the Hostess's attempts to quieten Pistol and prevent a brawl that might bring complaints from the neighbours, for, "I must live among my neighbours." (IV.iv). She is already under suspicion as she makes clear a little later on.

I was before master Tisick, the deputy, the other day; and, as he said to me, - it was no longer ago than Wednesday last, - "Neighbour Quickly," say he; - master Dumb, our minister was by then; - "Neighbour Quickly," says he, receive those that are civil, for, "saith he,

¹ Thomas Dekker, Lantern and Candlelight (1608) reprinted in A. V. Judges, The Elizabethan Underworld, (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1930), p. 349.

² A. V. Judges, loc. cit.

"you are in an ill name;" - now he said so, I can tell whereupon; "for," says he, "you are an honest woman, and well thought on; therefore take heed what guests you receive; Receive," says he, "no swaggering companions." There comes none here; - you would bless you to hear what he said....

The last remark of Mistress Quickly would indicate that she has taken a very optimistic view of her trouble. It would be hard to imagine any grave citizen uttering eulogies under the circumstances described above. But the main picture itself is perfectly clear. Dorothy Tearsheet was not the kind of boarder whose light could be concealed for too long under a bushel. The frequent visits of gallants had attracted neighbourly notice from more sober-minded citizens. And so we have the Hostess summoned to appear before a deputy-alderman and a clergyman. Suspicion apparently lacked positive proof but the warning was clear enough: fewer visits from swaggering gallants who do not belong in this neighbourhood.

Though swords were drawn between Falstaff and Pistol the affair was soon settled and Pistol ejected. Doll turns back to the business in hand, "Alas, poor ape, how thou sweats't! Come let me wipe thy face; come on you whoreson chops:- Ah rogue! I love thee." Her professionalism is underlined by the remark of the unnoticed Poins, "Is it not strange that desire should so many years outlive performance?"

Doll's final appearance is a brief comment on the tragic fate of her kind. In Act V we meet her again. She has been arrested for complicity in the beating to death of a man by Pistol, with whom she has obviously taken up after Falstaff's departure for the wars. She has already run her short and predictable course. From the young woman of II.iv with a hearty lust for life, with a vigorous tongue and body, she has become just another drab destined for the gallows, or gaol at best. Yet she is not unsympathetically presented and we feel with her the common bond of our humanity, frail though it may be here. Whether or not Shakespeare was pointing a conscious moral in limning her downfall we have no difficulty in accepting her as a woman, and as one who once had some attractive human qualities.

It is not only the low but lively humour she brings to her scenes; her shameless tongue-in-cheek cozening of old Sir John; her trick of feigned pregnancy; her command of Billingsgate in scolding first Pistol, and then the beadles, but her obvious zest for living that makes her not merely interesting but engaging. Small though the written part is, it is worthy of the talents of a first-rate actress, as Frances Hyland proved in the 1965 production of Falstaff at the Ontario Stratford Festival. Whatever else may be said for or against the lady, we do not forget her once we have known her. She is anything but a stage prop or a mechanical link in the plot. She is her own dramatic justification. What more does she need?

Her final appearance, however, does point up one of the most worrying problems for the London authorities. That was the association of other crimes with prostitution. Though murder was not infrequent in the red light district there were lesser crimes which flourished in abundance in the stews. This close liaison between bawdy houses and crime seems to have been one of the chief complaints against the brothels. These complaints found literary expression in Robert Greene's Cony-Catching Pamphlets. In the following extract from the Second Part of Conycatching Greene points out not only the dangers of prostitutes per se but the accompanying perils the cony puts himself in.

But let all men beware of such common harlots, who either sit in the streets in the evenings, or else dwell in bawdy-houses, and are pliant to every man's lure. Such are always foists and pick-pockets, and seek the spoil of all such as meddle with them, and in cozening of such base-minded lechers as give themselves to such lewd company, are worthy of whatever befalls them, and sometimes they catch a Spanish pip, and they have no more hair on their heads than on their nails.³

These lifts have their special receivers of their stolen goods... either some notorious bawds, in whose houses they lie, and they keep commonly tapping-houses, and have young trugs in their house, which are consorts to these lifts...⁴

³ A. V. Judges, ibid., p. 165.

⁴ A. V. Judges, ibid., p. 171.

Prof. Holmes credits the Finsbury Curtain with the first production of Henry IV Part II. There can be no doubt ~~that~~ such an audience of citizens and servants recognizing Mistress Quickly and Doll as characters drawn from real life. Nor would the lamentable conclusion to Doll's career cause any surprise to such an audience. The picture drawn by Mistress Quickly of her appearance for questioning by the deputy would be a type of occurrence familiar to some of the more solid burghers in the audience. It might in fact remind them very much of their own similar dealings with like-minded slippery characters. And if there were any Dolls among the auditors Mistress Quickly's handling of the Inquisitors would tend to confirm their own feelings of superiority to the Law.

Measure for Measure presents us with another view of the underworld. The appearance of Pompey and Mistress Overdone suggests that Shakespeare was still writing for an audience that delighted in comedy of a very broad turn. Although the first recorded performance took place at the Royal Court on the 26th of Dec. 1604 there is neither internal nor external evidence to show that the play was specially written for a Court performance. Whether or not we rule out the possibility that it may have been produced earlier at the Globe, we cannot avoid the conclusion that the low comedy scenes featuring Pompey, Elbow and their like had the Globe audience in mind. We have only to note the absence of such rude humour in plays that we are reasonably certain were written for selective audiences of the better-educated kind. Midsummer Nights Dream, Love's Labour's Lost and The Comedy of Errors will serve to establish the point of a difference in tone. The bawdy-scenes in Measure for Measure have an earthy reality that is not found in the other three plays we have just mentioned.

Mistress Overdone completely lacks the light-hearted feather-brained inconsequence of Mistress Quickly. She is the completely commercialized article. There is nothing attractive about her or her establishment. Her first appearance in the play is greeted by Lucio with "I have purchased as many diseases under thy roof as come to -" Second

Gentleman: "To three thousand dolours a year." (I.ii). At the end her essential weakness of character is perhaps emphasised by the fact that she is in the tubs herself, taking the traditional brine-cure for venereal disease. It is her servant Pompey who seems to be doing the planning and making the decisions. By contrast Pompey is a much more interesting character albeit a thoroughly unpleasant one. He has a pretty turn of wit if one has a stomach strong enough to stand it, whereas there is no sparkle of gaiety of any sort about Mistress Overdone.

One passage throws further light on Greene's description of a prostitute being forced from the suburbs back into the City.

Pom. You have not heard of the proclamation have you?
Mrs. Over. What proclamation, man?
Pom. All houses in the suburbs of Vienna must be plucked down.
Mrs. Over. And what shall become of those in the city?
Pom. They shall stand for seed; they had gone down too, but that a wise burgher put in for them.

It was this last point, protection for brothels by powerful interests that provoked the following outburst from Thomas Dekker in his Lantern and Candlelight. He is giving a description of London as it was observed by an emissary of Lucifer.

Into the suburbs he went. And what saw he there? More ale-houses than there are taverns in all France and Spain. Are they so dry in the suburbs? Yes, pockily dry. What saw he besides?

He saw the doors of notorious carted bawds like Hell-gates stand night and day wide open, with a pair of harlots in taffeta gowns, like two painted posts, garnishing out those doors, being better to the house than a double sign.

After pointing out the way in which their advertising and operation is carried on with the full knowledge of the authorities, Dekker continues:

Are not constables, churchwardens, bailiffs, beadles and other officers, pillars and pillows to all the villainies that are by these committed? Are they not parcel **bawds to wink at** such damned abuses, considering they have whips in their own hands, and may draw blood if they please? Is not the landlord of such rents the grand bawd? And the door-keeping mistress of such a house of sin, but his under-bawd? Sithence he takes twenty pound rent every year for a vaulting-school, which from no artificer living by the

hardness of the hand could be worth five pound? And that twenty pound rent he knows must be pressed out of petticoats!⁵

With such contemporary practices under his notice it is little wonder that Shakespeare makes Pompey say to Mistress Overdone,

Come, fear not you: good counselors lack no clients. Though you change your place, you need not change your trade: I'll be your tapster still. Courage! there will be pity taken on you: you that have worn your eyes almost out in the service, you will be considered. (I.ii).

Pompey is as good as he promised. When next we meet him he is under the charge of the constable Elbow.

Elb. He, sir! a tapster, sir, parcel-bawd; one that serves a bad woman, whose house, sir, was, as they say, plucked down in the suburbs; and now she professes a hothouse, which, I think, is a very ill house too. (II.i).

An audience composed mainly of solid burghers and "apronmen" would get the point as well, if not better, from Shakespeare's treatment, than they would from Dekker's virulent frontal assault. Such an episode would, I believe, leave a Court audience unimpressed by its element of exposing vice, whereas it would stir very definite emotions in the audience at a public theatre. I think this provides a good reason for supposing that it was primarily the Globe audience that the playwright had in mind when he wrote these scenes in Measure for Measure.

The treatment of the Courtesan in The Comedy of Errors differs greatly from the presentation of Doll Tearsheet and Mistress Overdone. Some of the difference of course may be due to the simple fact that the author was growing older and that his reaction to some social problems was becoming more definite and condemnatory. Yet I believe the major differences in treatment must be attributed to the differences between the audiences for which the plays were primarily written. The Comedy of Errors according to the Gesta Grayorum was performed at Gray's Inn on the twenty-eighth of December, 1594.⁶ It was therefore directed to a highly select

⁵ A. V. Judges, ibid., pp. 347-8.

⁶ F. E. Halliday, A Shakespeare Companion, (London: Duckworth, Penguin edition 1964), p. 112.

audience of lawyers, students, young gallants and their ladies, as part of the Twelve Nights' festivities. For such a fashionable audience bent on light-hearted entertainment special treatment was required, and was forthcoming. The account in the Gesta Grayorum makes clear the nature of the occasion and the difficulties under which the Players laboured.

... it was thought good not to offer any thing of Account, saving Dancing and Revelling with Gentlewomen; and after such Sports, a Comedy of Errors (like to Plautus his Menechmus) was played by the Players. ... about Nine of the Clock at Night... there arose such a disordered Tumult and Crowd upon the Stage, that there was no opportunity to effect that which was intended... The Lord Ambassador and his Train thought that they were not so kindly entertained, as was before expected, and thereupon would not stay any longer at that time, but, in a sort, discontented and displeased. After their Departure the Throngs and Tumults did somewhat cease, although so much of them continued, as was able to disorder and confound any good Inventions whatsoever.⁷

That the actual performance turned out so disappointingly does not detract from the obvious care that the dramatist must have taken in his preparations. The choice of theme and the adaptation of popular classical models indicate that Shakespeare kept in mind what he fondly hoped would be the audience's taste. His idealistic treatment of the Courtesan also shows that he was expecting an audience much more receptive to classical lore than he actually got. The Courtesan's part in the play is slight but interesting from our point of view.

The chain of errors from which the comedy takes its title revolves about the appearance in ancient Ephesus of two sets of twin brothers whose existence is unknown to each, and who are constantly being mistaken for each other. Antipholous of Ephesus has ordered a necklace from Angelo the goldsmith. He intends to give this to his wife Adriana. When, however, his wife locks him out of the house while she is dining the wrong and

⁷ F. E. Halliday, ibid., p. 185.

confused twin Antipholus of Syracuse, the brother from Ephesus decides to have dinner with a courtesan, whom he already knows, "a wench of excellent discourse; Pretty and witty; wild, and yet, too, gentle". (III.iii).

He sends Angelo home to get the gold chain which he now intends to give to the Courtesan. But Angelo meets the wrong Antipholous on the road, forces the necklane on him, skips the engagement at the Courtesan's home, and thus paves the way for further plot complications. In the description of the Courtesan there are definite echoes of Thaïs and similar accomplished heterai of Ancient Athens. She is beautiful, cultured, charming, and dedicated to wise, witty conversation, with more intimate pleasures in prospect, while the prosaic wife is devoting herself to the homely chores of household management. There is little connection between this ideal female companion and the more sordid creatures in the pages of Greene and Dekker. She is the very antithesis of Mistress Overdone. The Courtesan, with her polite, polished and obliging beauty was in fact such a benevolent creation as the gallants of Gray's Inn might have delighted in if they had been a little less riotous and somewhat more sober. She would certainly not have carried any conviction of flesh and blood reality either at Southwark or Finsbury.

Shakespeare's final word on the subject of professional prostitutes was a damning one, made in the late play, Timon of Athens.

Briefly, and their appearance in the play is restricted to IV.iii, Phrynia and Timandra, mistresses of Alcibiades are accompanying that **merc**urial character into exile, when they encounter Timon beside his cave. Alcibiades, having heard of Timon's financial reverses, offers the latter some of his own inadequate resources. "Put up thy gold," replies Timon. "Go on, here's gold. Go on." The sight of Timon's gold rouses Phrynia and Timandra to join in a thrice-repeated chorus, the burden of which is, "Give us some gold, good Timon. / Give us more gold... / Believe't that we'll do anything for gold."

The whole episode provides us with one of Timon's bitterest tirades upon the corruption of society. Usurers, mothers, maids, babes, lawyers and priests are all mercilessly pilloried, but the heaviest curses are directed against whores. His first remark about Phrynia is,

... This fell whore of thine
Hath in her more destruction than thy sword,
For all her cherubin look.

He sees prostitution and its syphillitic effects as one of the great underlying causes of society's corruption.

... Make curl-pate ruffians bald,
And let the unscarred braggarts of the war
Derive some pain from you. Plague all...

There are a number of interesting points to consider about this scene. First we should note that the ladies are neither hags nor common street solicitors. Even in exile Alcibiades was a person of note and a general in command of a sizeable army. From all that Shakespeare and his source Plutarch tell us, we may reasonably assume that the ladies were at least superficially attractive. In fact Timon specifically refers to Phrynia's "cherubin look." The mistresses are to outward appearance duplicates of the Ephesian Courtesan in The Comedy of Errors. It is their presentation that is so radically different. Granted the Ephesian appears in a light amusing comedy, it was not one without a few satiric barbs. At the close of I.ii Antipholus has a few stones to sling at Ephesus, that town "full of cozenage." It is a far cry from this to the grisly realism of Timon: "Down with the nose, / Down with it flat, take the bridge quite away."

In dealing with his usual audiences either in Southwark or Finsbury it seems obvious that Shakespeare did not believe in mincing matters about prostitutes. Whether a whore sat in a "taffeta gown" outside the door of a stinking brothel in Kent Street or walked in silks beside a perfumed fop, she was still an object of aversion and detestation. In three of the four plays we have considered in this section

there is little or no attempt to glamorize the whore. The single exception is in the one play, The Comedy of Errors, which as we have seen, was produced with a very special audience and a very special occasion in mind. It seems inescapable to conclude that Shakespeare wrote with his audiences very much in his mind. And to carry the argument the one step further that the facts seem to justify, he wrote not just for an audience ~~but~~ for one particular definable audience.

A second curious point in Timon of Athens arises from the simultaneous employment of two mistresses, and the even more curious circumstance that most of their speeches are spoken as a unison chorus. In her work on Shakespeare's Imagery Miss Caroline Spurgeon remarks that the central image in Timon is that of dogs. "Dogs fawning, eating, lapping, licking, feasting on the blood of the animal they killed, dogs licking up the remnants."⁸ Shortly before the appearance of Phrynia and Timandra Timon proclaims, "Destruction fangs mankind." Just after their exit we hear, "Go great with tigers, dragons, wolves and bears." I suggest that what Shakespeare had in mind in the episode was a particular kind of dog-image: that of wolves howling for their prey. Certainly the image could not have been far from his mind while the ladies were howling together for gold.

The idea of a pack of wolves being suggested by Phrynia and Timandra acting what is really material for a single part becomes more credible when we consider the sources of the play. North's translation of Plutarch's Lives is generally accepted as the most direct and commonly agreed-on source for Timon.⁹ Plutarch's Life of Alcibiades concludes with his assassination by the darts and arrows of the barbarians. At this time he is living in exile with Timandra. On the day of his death he

⁸ Caroline Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells Us, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1935, Paperback edition 1965), p. 198.

⁹ Maurice Charney, Study Notes to Timon of Athens, (Toronto: Signet Classics, 1965), p. 156.

relates to her his ominous dream of the previous night. After his death Timandra takes up the dead body and gives it as decent a burial as her circumstances afford. There is no mention of Phrynia in the Life at all, and Timandra's part is that of a loyal and affectionate woman, genuinely attached to her master, even in death.

Surely the addition of Phrynia to the scene can only be accounted for by the suggestion that wolves hunt in packs! A single individual does not pose the threat to society that a group or a class does. The use of two mistresses is more in keeping with Timon's denunciation of a society that was tainted with the greed and corruption of whores. The difference between Plutarch's presentation of Timandra and Shakespeare's gold-digging harpies is striking. It reinforces the impression that the playwright was addressing an audience of sober citizens and mechanics who were little disposed to glamorize what was an obvious festering source of corruption in the nation.

Where did Shakespeare find Phrynia? The answer may shed some light on his "little Latin and less Greek." *φρύνη* of course is merely a toad. The idea adds to the repulsion which Shakespeare undoubtedly felt for prostitutes, as the toad is usually considered to be a loathsome object. Liddell and Scott in their Greek Lexicon provide the additional information that Phrynia, a derivative, was a name commonly applied at one time to Athenian courtesans. Whether Shakespeare got the word from original or second-hand acquaintance he seems to have been aware of its connotations and to have made good use of them in assigning the name to his second repulsive prostitute. The technique of using two very minor characters for a single part is, I suggest, another striking example of the dramatist's superb stage sense. His indictment of prostitution is all the more damning for its economy of words with a wealth of suggestion behind them.

Give Me Excess Of It

The musical activity of Elizabethan and early Stuart England was in its way as remarkable as the upsurging drama of the period. The works of Dowland, Byrd, Tallis, Nicholson, Orlando Gibbons and the ubiquitous Anon. were at least as noteworthy in their sphere as the literary efforts of Peele, Greene, Marlowe and Ben Jonson. It has been customary for the mention of Elizabethan music to conjure up the picture of an aristocratic young lady standing at the virginals, or of Queen Elizabeth dancing a galliard or pavin with the Earl of Leicester, to the accompaniment of a consort of viols or recorders. Nothing could be more one-sided or partial than such a picture. Music, like the drama, was the popular possession of all classes of society in Shakespeare's period. It may be helpful to recall the way in which the hiatus in ecclesiastical music had been filled by the time Orlando Gibbons became organist at Westminster at the age of twenty-one, in the year of James the First's accession. When the Latin Mass became the Service of Holy Communion in English, the old European church music set to Latin syllabication had to be largely scrapped, although it is true that men like John Merbeeke continued to use the old Gregorian idiom. From the void Tallis, Tusser, Redford and others created an entirely new and satisfying form, the Anglican chant. This new music was sung not only in the large cathedrals and abbey churches but also in the parish churches, and it was familiar to the commons as well as the gentry. The very street cries of old London were musical miniatures in themselves, familiar to high and low. Some of these were even expanded into songs that were familiar in court and tavern. Thomas Whythorne's Buy New Broom (1571) is a well-known example of this musical universality. In beginning his work on Shakespeare's Use of Music Professor Long remarks,

The Elizabethan Age is often referred to as the Golden Age of English song. Vocal music pervaded the life of that time to

an extent which we hardly realize. The songs of the period reflect the manners and tastes of all stations of society, and the range of emotions of its people.¹

When we turn to the plays of Shakespeare we are confronted by an embarrassment of musical riches. We find a frequent use of both vocal and instrumental performers. Folk songs and street songs formed the basis of most of the vocal music in the public playhouses. These usually had strongly marked rhythms, simple singable melodies, and were not by any means, free from the "broadness" often associated with popular music. The burden of the Forester's song in As You Like It is a good example of this.

Take thou no scorn to wear the horn;
It was a crest ere thou wast born:
Thy father's father wore it,
And thy father bore it:
The horn, the horn, the lusty horn
Is not a thing to laugh to scorn. (IV.ii).

Another type of vocal music, the "ayre" is to be found in plays produced for either the public or the private playhouse. The madrigal or canzonet on the other hand was strictly an art song. Its performance required a high degree of technical skill and its audience appeal was to the more sophisticated and better-educated. Hence it was usually confined to plays produced for the private theatres.

But even in the public playhouse the range of instrumental music was extremely varied. Simple songs and dances in the plays are sometimes accompanied by the pipe and tabor, sometimes by the cittern, a folksy cousin of the lute, or by the fiddle. But the list of other instruments used in the theatres of the period includes the whole families of lutes and recorders, viols, rebecs, violins, hautboys or shawms, flutes, fifes, cornets, sackbuts, trumpets, cornets, horns, kettledrums, tabors, timbrels and regals, the last-named a type of small portable organ.

¹ John H. Long, Shakespeare's Use of Music: A Study of the Music and its Performance in the Original Production of Seven Comedies. (Greensville: University of Florida Press, 1955), vol. 1, p. 1.

The type of music and instrumentation varied according to the requirements of a particular play. The First Part of Henry VI opens with the funeral of the late King Henry V at Westminster. The stage directions, wherever they came from, begin: Dead March, Corpse of King Henry V discovered, lying in state. The occasion was one which seized the minds of the late King's subjects as a spectacle of sorrowful majesty. Contemporary chroniclers portrayed in detail the journey of the funeral procession from the coast of England, through the Kentish countryside, across London Bridge by torch-light, and into the great Abbey. Even to this day on a solid oak beam above the Henry V Chantry can be seen the King's helmet, his shield, and his saddle. They are still magnets for the crowds. This early play of Shakespeare's was probably produced for Philip Henslowe's theatre, The Rose. From Henslowe's account book of 1598, some years after the production of I Henry VI, we find a list of musical instruments in the possession of the Admiral's Men. The list gives three trumpets, one drum, one treble viol, one pandore, one cittern, one sackbut, one bass viol, one chime of bells and three timbrels.² Prof. Long later comments that,

It would appear that the number of instruments used in a particular play might vary from a trumpet and drum to an orchestra composed of a five or six piece consort augmented by about three trumpets and one or two drums, - a hypothetical total of between ten and twelve pieces.³

We may reasonably assume that the opening of I Henry VI made full use of the available resources to create a sombre and impressive spectacle against which the ensuing quarrel of the nobles would provide a dramatic contrast.

The purpose of the funeral music is obvious enough. It provides

² Ibid, p. 34.

³ Ibid, p. 36.

an appropriately sombre introduction to a play that is a tragic unfolding of weakness and treachery, folly and murder. The frequent alarums, excursions and retreats, and the heraldic flourishes announcing the entrances of royalty would have provided plenty of work for the trumpeters and drummers. The mournful notes of the recorders would no doubt have been heard during the opening funeral procession. It was a method of creating suitable atmosphere that Shakespeare was to use many times in his history plays and tragedies, perhaps never to better effect than in the closing scene of Hamlet. A dead march. Exeunt, bearing off the bodies; after which a peal of ordnance is shot off.

Lest we should consider that such stage directions were the original contributions of Rowe and later editors we should bear in mind the famous premiere of King Henry VIII at the Globe. The ordnance was real enough on that occasion to set the theatre on fire. This particular play, containing elements of the masque as well as of the history play, makes plentiful use of music. The entrance of the King in I.ii is heralded by a flourish of cornets. In I.iv the entrance of the Lady Anne Boleyn is introduced by the music of hautboys, as is Cardinal Wolsey's entrance later in the scene. The King and others, masqued as pastoral shepherds, have the same prelude. There follows: Music. Dance. and when the King exits it is to a flourish of trumpets. Trumpets are in evidence again as part of the great trial scene, and the famous air "Orpheus with his lute" is sung in Queen Katherine's apartments by one of her ladies-in-waiting. "Take thy lute, wench: my soul grows sad with troubles; Sing, and disperse 'em, if thou canst." The music and words fit the melancholy mood of the scene.

In sweet music is such art,
Killing care and grief of heart
Fall asleep, or hearing die. (III.i).

In Act IV we have the spectacle of Anne's coronation which requires a lavish use of trumpets and hautboys. The following scene includes the deposed Katherine's famous vision, with its "sad and solemn music" followed by the dance of the six spirits.

Kath. Saw you not even now a blessed troop
 Invite me to a banquet, whose bright faces
 Cast thousand beams upon me, like the sun?
 They promised me eternal garlands, Griffith, which I feel
 I am not worthy yet to wear: I shall assuredly.

There need be no question here of the authorship or date of the stage directions since they are so plainly indicated in the text itself. The climactic christening scene evidently was considered an opportunity for the dramatist to pull out all the musical stops. The scene begins with the procession preceded by Trumpeters sounding. The arrival of the King and his guard calls for another flourish. The epilogue itself stresses the great use of trumpets in the play.

'Tis ten to one this play can never please
 All that are here: some come to take their ease,
 And sleep an act or two; but those, we fear,
 We have frightened with our trumpets.

However, it was unnecessary on that first presentation to stress the message. The fateful ordnance took care that nobody slept through the whole performance. But the examination of this play, I believe, shows the extent to which Shakespeare (or whoever did write the play), relied upon musical effects to support his dramatic intentions. By the same token it shows the appeal of music for the audiences of the period.

Although the public playhouses catered to crowds of two to three thousand on their big days, it would be a mistake to compare the acting companies' resources with those of modern musical comedy productions. The Admiral's Men and the Lord Chamberlain's Men had nothing like the resources of personnel that a lavishly produced modern musical such as Camelot can command. The plot charts of the older Elizabethan plays show adult casts usually of five to eight players. By doubling or even quadrupling roles Cambises King of Persia, which calls for 38 parts, was acted by a cast of eight.⁴

⁴ Gerald Eades Bentley, Shakespeare and His Theatre, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 32.

This utilization of available resources is strikingly evident in Shakespeare's handling of musical effects. He was in fact governed by two factors in his writing: one was the personnel available within the ranks of the company; the other was the kind of audience to which the play was directed. We shall deal first with the problem of utilizing the personnel available at the time of writing.

The plays assigned to the period 1597-1604 reveal the growing musical resources at Shakespeare's disposal. In As You Like It two pages sing "It was a lover and his lass" in unison; apparently they were not quite up to taking solos. I Henry IV, however, has a solo part for a boy singer: Lady Mortimer sings in Welsh. It looks as though Shakespeare were taking advantage of a Welsh boy's talents; and there was in the company at the time an apprentice called Robert Goffe, who may have been Welsh. The company also had at this time a singer who could take small parts. In Much Ado About Nothing Balthazar is one of Don Pedro's train and can engage in the dialogue, as well as sing a set-piece, "Sigh no more, ladies." Amiens in As You Like It is a similar role which is given such songs as "Under the greenwood tree," and "Blow, blow, thou winter wind." A third song "What shall he have that killed the deer?" is assigned to a lord, and there can be little doubt that it was sung by Amiens.⁵ The wholesale-wedding ceremony at the end of this same play, and the ensuing dance, are further indications of the resources the dramatist was deliberately utilizing for the occasion.

Equally significant for illustrating the point that musically Shakespeare was writing with the company personnel in mind, is the kind of part for which he did not provide songs. Will Kemp seems to have been the chief comedian until his retirement early in 1599. Apparently he did not sing. At least we find no songs for the parts he performed: Costard, Dromio of Ephesus, Launce, Bottom, Grumio, Shallow, Launcelot, Dogberry

⁵ William Shakespeare, The Complete Works, ed. by C. J. Sisson, (London: Odhams Books, 1954), 1 vol., Intro. p.1.

etc. When Kemp was replaced by Robert Armin Shakespeare's company acquired a capable singer as its chief comedian. Feste is the chief vocalist in Twelfth Night. He becomes the singing clown in King Lear as he breaks into snatches of popular song. In Hamlet the gravedigger sings a garbled version of an old song by Lord Vaux.⁶ But the vocal resources of the company increased to such an extent that when The Tempest was produced Armin was given the non-singing part of Trinculo, while the comic songs of Stephano and Caliban were given to Richard Cowley and John Lowin respectively.⁷

It was Richard Burbage for whom the parts of Othello, Romeo, Hamlet, Leontes, and Prospero were written. Burbage, it is known, was no singer, therefore it is not surprising to see that these roles are unprovided with vocal embellishments. Yet if a musical lead had been available, how effective it would have been for Romeo to have serenaded Juliet beneath her balcony. If ever a situation called for a light romantic tenor strumming a lute this was it. As Benedick in Much Ado About Nothing Burbage was given four short lines of a popular song to sing (V.ii).

The god of love,
That sits above,
And knows me, and knows me,
How pitiful I deserve, -
I mean in singing;

He breaks off with this apology, indicating how badly he has sung. He has no voice "for festivals." There can be no question that as far as music was concerned Shakespeare wrote not only with the resources of the cast in mind but also with an eye to its limitations.

The corollary of this proposition is that he also wrote with the particular tastes of his different audiences in mind. To bring out this matter more clearly it may be helpful to look at the musical activity of

⁶ Supra., loc. cit.

⁷ Thomas Whitefield Baldwin, The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), Chart I between pp. 227 and 229.

three different plays, one of which had the Finsbury audience originally in mind, another the Globe, and a third the Blackfriars.

Music is introduced into Romeo and Juliet at the masked ball of the Capulets (I.v). "Come musicians, play. / A hall, a hall! give room and foot it, girls." Music plays, and they dance. The music continues throughout most of the scene. It is obviously a vigorous dance, for the room soon grows too hot. It seems likely that the dance was a simple lively one with a strongly marked rhythm. The players were no doubt the same three who accompanied Friar Laurence and the County Paris when the latter came to claim his bride on the intended wedding-morn (IV.v). Peter (the non-singing Kemp) gives us their names: Simon Catling, Hugh Rebeck and James Soundpost. The names are almost rustic in their simple appropriateness; the instruments they typify are certainly the kind that would be found accompanying an old-fashioned folk-dance; and the fact that the three players also have small speaking parts suggests a great deal about the still slender resources of the company. Incidentally, Dr. Long describes the rebeck as an instrument of three strings, the country cousin of the viol. It was so much an instrument of the middle and lower classes that no music for it has survived.⁸

All of this fits in well with what we know of the Finsbury audience that patronized the Theatre where Romeo and Juliet was first performed. It was composed of tradespeople in comfortable circumstances, and their households. Country dances accompanied by a two or three-piece band and singer⁹ would be their idea of a good time with good music. It

⁸ J. H. Long, op. cit., p. 19, vol. 1.

⁹ Act IV. v. 135, "Peter, "O, I cry you mercy; you are the singer: I will say for you." It is likely that the Third Musician was a singer who could accompany himself on the cittern, another instrument of un-aristocratic associations. If, as is likely, this was the case, it would have given a more normal accompaniment. The third instrument, besides the rebeck and cittern would have been a percussion piece to mark the strong rhythm, either a tabor or a tambourine. The cittern was easy to play and usually of cheap construction.

is interesting to compare this homely and simple instrumentation with that used by Shakespeare when, with augmented resources, he was arranging a Midsummer Night's Dream about the same time for a private performance before an upper-class audience. Titania's Lullaby, "You spotted snakes with double tongue" belongs to a type of song usually set to a specific instrumental accompaniment. Although the actual instrumentation is conjectural, Prof. Long says that a rather large grouping would be indicated; the classic broken consort - a lute, a mandore, a treble viol, a base viol, a cittern, and a flute or treble recorder would have been appropriate.¹⁰ The homespun badinage of Peter and the First Musician in Romeo and Juliet is further evidence of the folksy nature of the audience to which it was addressed. The Third Musician, practically a non-speaker, is a type of the owlish stooge that has never disappeared from the stage and abounds in modern T.V. It is a pity that we have no way of knowing whether the "delayed take" had yet been discovered. The Third Musician would have been a "natural" for it.

We turn now to As You Like It, one of the comedies produced for the Globe audience. We have noted before that the Globe audience was more cosmopolitan than those at the Finsbury theatres. Yet while there would be many gallants and people of fashion in the galleries the bulk of the spectators would undoubtedly be drawn from more bourgeois elements. This variety in the constitution of the audience is reflected in the variety of the music. The Duke/Frederick's first entrance is announced by a flourish. This seems to be the only certain use of trumpets in the play and it seems likely therefore that it was played by the one or two regulars of the company. We have noticed the part played by Amiens in singing his three songs. It is worth noting that they are of a popular nature and at least two of them have a burden or chorus where the cast in general join in. The part of Touchstone was played in 1600 by Robert Armin. It is reasonably certain therefore that he sang the snatch of an old ballad,

¹⁰ J. A. Long, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 87.

"O sweet Oliver. / O brave Oliver." The song of the two pages, "It was a lover and his lass" may have been^{to} Thomas Morley's famous setting. Prof. Long adduces several reasons that make this probable.¹¹ But whether it should be classed as an art song or not the rustic setting is in keeping with Shakespeare's conception of a pastoral play for popular consumption.

The music of Act V, Scene iv, is obviously of a different nature. The "still music" which preludes the entrance of the god Hymen may have been played by a consort of recorders hidden in the music room.¹² It probably continued quietly through the god's speeches. As for the Hymn to Juno, the line "Whiles a wedlock hymn we sing," suggests that it was sung by a chorus formed from the actors on the stage. In which case it would have been a fairly simple setting suitable to such heterogeneous talents. Yet it need not have been simple to the point of naive rusticity. Most of the actors had received a sound musical training and some, like Robert Armin, were still practicing professionals. It would be no amateur pick-up group of waits. Dr. Long, in fact, refers to this episode as a miniature masque. It would appear then that the appeal of the music up to this stage, while broadly popular, did not neglect the more refined taste of some members of the gallery. It would in fact be suitable to the heterogeneous audience that filled the Globe on opening day. The closing dance is obviously a lively one, designed to bring the play to a jolly, good-natured ending.

Duke S. Meantime, forget this new-fall'n dignity
And fall into our rustic revelry.
Play, music! And you, brides and bridegrooms, all,
With measure heaped in joy, to the measures fall.

We are back probably to the popular three-piece dance band that we saw in Romeo and Juliet. They were tried and proven performers, cittern, rebec, and tabor. This band was probably part of the regular company.

¹¹ J. H. Long, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 155.

¹² J. H. Long, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 157.

Whether the players of the "Still Music," were also part of the regular company is more problematic. Their limited part in the action suggests that they may have been hired specially for this performance and could have been borrowed from the Blackfriars or some other private theatre. It is also possible that they were just "common musitians" lured for the occasion from the less lucrative field of tavern playing. The main point, however, is that an effort was being made to cater to an audience of widely different musical tastes. It was mostly popular stuff but with a bow in the direction of the more musically educated.

For our third look at a play and its music in relation to the audience, we turn to The Tempest. As we have previously pointed out, the differences between the "late" comedies and those of the middle and early periods are most naturally accounted for by the difference in audiences. If this thesis has any validity we may expect to find a significant difference between music designed, as that of the Tempest was, for a private playhouse, and the music of the earlier dramas that had the public playhouses in mind.

A glance at the music immediately suggests the prominence of masque-like features. The fondness of James I and his Court for the Masque is well-known. Since Shakespeare was writing this play for the Blackfriars Theatre, and possibly for a Command Performance as well, it was good business for him to cater to this taste in his prospective auditors.

We note in I.ii the entrance of Ferdinand and Ariel (invisible) playing and singing the haunting "ayre", "Come unto these yellow sands." The magic effect intended by this music is made clear by Ferdinand's ensuing comment:

Where should this music be? I'th air, or th'earth?
It sounds no more; and sure it waits upon
Some god o' the island.

Ariel's first song is followed almost immediately by another, "Full fathom five thy father lies." The songs have some integral part in the drama. The former sets the mood of magic which pervades the whole

play, while the second serves to remind Ferdinand of the presumed loss of his father in the ship-wreck. But there is no doubt also that the songs were intended to have some intrinsic worth of their own. They are art songs requiring more than average technical skill on the part of the singer and they are of a kind that would appeal to auditors who had a consuming addiction to the Songes and Ayres of John Dowland and his contemporaries. We may be reasonably sure that it was not the electric-guitar equivalent of the period, the cittern, but the classic and more difficult lute that the singer accompanied himself with. The following scene (II.i) shows Ariel casting his spells over the visitors to the island. Enter Ariel playing solemn music. The music is designed to produce drowsiness.

Ant. Do you hear me speak?

Seb. I do; and surely
It is a sleepy language.

Then Ariel sings his warning song into the sleeping Gonzalo's ear. We have obviously an accomplished vocal soloist with adequate skill as a lutenist also. It would seem likely, however, that there were at least two other musicians concealed in the music room to supply an accompaniment that would be approximate in effect to that of the later harpsichord. The later scenes call for more musicians, and we may be reasonably sure that once the musicians had been hired, any competent producer would have ensured that he got value for the money paid to them.

We have later the songs of the drunken Stephano and Caliban.

The master, the swabber, the boatswain, and I,
The gunner and his mate,
Loved Mall, Meg, and Marian and Margerie,
But none of us cared for Kate.

The boy-musician playing Ariel shows his versatility when he breaks in on Stephano's song, "Flout 'em and scout 'em," with "That's not the tune." He then proceeds to burlesque the song to his own accompaniment of the humble pipe and tabor. The pipe was usually played with one hand. It is almost like introducing a mouth-organ into a chamber-music concert. Apart from showing us a dramatist still pursuing the laughs, the episode

gives us an idea of the expanded musical resources of the company since the Curtain days. This accession of musical strength is even more evident in the masque-like events of the second half of the play.

Solemn and Strange Music (III.iii).

Alonzo. What harmony is this? My good friends hark!

Gonzalo. Marvellous sweet music.

Enter several strange shapes, bringing in a banquet; and dance about it with gentle actions and salutations.

After this dumb show to music, one practical object of which was to fill in the time needed to set the banquet table, we have,

Alonzo. What were these?

Sebastian. A living drollery.

Afterwards Ariel vanishes in thunder, then to soft music, enter the Shapes again, and dance, with mocks and mows, and carrying out the table. Though the music has again a utilitarian purpose we may be sure that this was minor and incidental to its real purpose, which was to give the audience what it was expecting - a medley of song and dance in the graceful convention of the pastoral.

Act IV.i presents the audience with even more of the same mixture. This time we have the descent of the goddesses, Iris, Juno and Ceres, who join together in singing a wedding hymn of the type we saw in As You Like It.

Honour, riches, marriage, blessing:
Long continuance and increasing,
Hourly joys be still upon you,
Juno sings her blessings on you.

The first lines were apparently a solo sung by Juno but the other boy-actor-musicians probably turned it into a vocal trio. When the song ends the stage is filled with the usual idealized rustics of the masque. Enter certain Nymphs... Enter certain reapers (properly habited): they join with the Nymphs in a graceful dance. This prescription for a "graceful" dance differs significantly from Duke Senior's "rustic revelry" in As You Like It. It is a difference that is attributable solely to the difference between the Globe audience and that for which The Tempest was

written. In the same scene we hear the "noise of the hunters." The text indicates the yelping of hounds but it would be unrealistic to assume that the horns were silent, since there were so many musicians available. Ariel's final contribution is one of the brightest of all Shakespeare's art songs, "Where the bee sucks, there suck I."

There must have been an unusually large group of musicians available for such a play. Prof. Long says.

Robert Johnson is believed by most scholars to have composed the music to "Full Fathom Five" and "Where the Bee Sucks" for the revival of the play in 1613. It is also quite probable that he composed the music, now lost, for "Come unto these yellow sands" and for the masque song of the goddesses.

It thus seems safe to assume that an unusually excellent group was available for use with the King's Men. Johnson's collaboration with the company... is some evidence that lesser instrumentelists and dancers may have been used also.¹³

No matter what the actual collaboration may have been, it is evident that the number of musicians involved was a large one. When we consider the number of other private theatres competing with the Blackfriars, the number of influential nobles who maintained their own musical establishments, the ecclesiastical schools for choristers, and the numerous references to "common musicians" we must believe that they constituted a sizeable group of professionals. Besides the numbers we find **working** in the theatre, we may assume that many others would spend a busman's holiday looking over the opposition, perhaps to pick up useful hints, or possibly merely to criticize. In view of what we shall say about their salaries, they would most likely be found among the groundlings. The remaining part of this section will therefore attempt to offer some knowledge of what this host of musicians was like off the stage.

The company with which Shakespeare became identified seems to have evolved from the experiences of a number of actors who had had a provincial as well as a London background. They were men who had known the vicissi-

¹³ J. H. Long, op. cit., vol. II, p. 113.

tudes of touring from town to town. Actors, musicians and tumblers were once linked together as objects of opprobrium. Before his death in 1588 the Earl of Leicester maintained two organizations of five players each. One of these had the position of "manager of the musicians and tumblers."¹⁴ It is already apparent that the actors as a class were rising above professional musicians in the social scale. The unfortunate tumblers never do seem to have made the grade socially.

By 1590 the Admiral's Men and similar companies had come to consist of three or four different groups within the organization. The patented members who were the Shareholders of the Company were invariably actors, although most of these had received a prior musical education, often as choristers or members of a Boys' Company. The second group consisted of the hired men. These were paid a weekly salary by the actors. They would take the parts of Lords, Gentlemen, citizens, soldiers, etc., and were also used as stage-keepers, book holders, musicians, box-holders and in similar capacities. The third group consisted of boys who played the parts of children and of females. These boys were apprenticed to individual actors and there were rarely more than three or four in a company at the same time.¹⁵ If these youngsters were both good and fortunate they would later fill a vacancy in the membership of players. The odds were, however, not in favour of their reaching such a position, and if they did not quit the theatre entirely, they would become hired men or even musicians.

After 1590 the companies seem to have turned more and more to the help of professional musicians as hired men. It was, of course, an advantage if these musicians could handle small speaking parts, or if any of the players could sing as Armin and Lowin could. Around the year 1600 the average weekly salary for a hired man in the theatres was about 6/8 d.

¹⁴ T. W. Baldwin, op. cit., p. 80.

¹⁵ G. E. Bentley, op. cit., p. 32.

This was very close to the earnings of an average craftsman of the period. But whether the employment was subject to seasonal dislocations I have been unable to discover. Since the salary was on a weekly basis it seems likely that protracted spells of bad weather could have resulted in loss of earning power. In any case some of the hired men would be employed only on a casual basis.

The Actors' Remonstrance of 1644 says, in part, Our Musike that was held so delectable and precious, that they scorned to come to a Taverne under twentie shillings for two houres, now wander with their Instruments under their cloaks, I mean such as have any, into all houses of good fellowship, saluting for roome where there is companie with Will you have any Musike, Gentlemen?¹⁶

The Carolean prosperity of the musicians had obviously suffered from the restrictions put on play-acting and other entertainments by the Puritan Parliament. It is likely that this picture of the theatre musicians' adversity gives us a truer idea of the musicians' lot in the later Elizabethan period than we get from the records of their comparative prosperity under the first Stuarts. The "twenty shillings for two houres" music if divided among a small group or consort would work out to about the six shillings a week of the hired men of the early seventeenth century.

We have a glimpse in 2 Henry IV of the type of musician who probably never got beyond the stage of pub-playing. In II.iv, the Drawers at the Boar's Head Tavern are making preparations for entertaining Sir John Falstaff. The first Drawer directs his assistant to cover the apple-johns and set them on the table. "And see if thou canst find out Sneak's noise; mistress Tear-sheet would fain have some music." Later on Sneak appears with his fellows and their "noise."

Page. The Music is come, sir.

Fal. Let them play; - Play, sirs. -
Sit on my knee, Doll..."

"Noise" after all may have been a suitable description of the sounds produced by artists reduced to catering to such a situation. Pre-

¹⁶ T. W. Baldwin, op. cit., p. 121.

sumably the music continued during the knight's portly amours.

The Actors Remonstrance just quoted gives us a view of the close but unfortunate connection between the "common musitions" and the tavern. It seems obvious that tavern playing was an alternative form of employment to theatre playing. The Remonstrance makes it clear that to the professional musician it was a decidedly inferior form of work. Sometimes the connection between the musician and the tavern was even closer than just playing there. From the Records of the Dean and Chapter of Wells we offer the following without comment.

Nov. 5, 1591. - Roger Rugge, vicar-choral, admonished, that before the first day of January next he shall surcease from keeping an alehouse and from selling ale any longer.¹⁷

The Records of the Corporation of Southampton provide us with another example of the relationship between the musician and the ale-house. In this case the relationship appears to have been both too close and too obvious.

5 May 1620 - Stephen Chaplyn, one of the musitions of this towne beinge for drunkennes and other mysdemeanours by him oftentimes committed thought an unfit person to be one of the Companie of Musitions of the same Towne, and therefore he this day being called to this house and forbidden to be anie more of the saide Companye, his Lyverie was taken from him...

And a later entry, "He had the Lyverie redelyvred again, uppon that he will not be drunken againe hereafter."¹⁸

There is plenty of evidence in the Reports of the Historical Commission to indicate the low esteem and suspicion with which professional musicians were regarded, at least in the provinces. Although the pro-

¹⁷ MSS of the Dean and Chapter of Wells, Hist. MSS. Commission, (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1914), vol. II, p. 321.

¹⁸ MSS. of the Corporations of Southampton and King's Lynn, Hist. MSS. Commission, (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1887), p. 28.

ceedings of Courts of Justice, civil or ecclesiastical, are bound to give a one-sided picture of any group, yet the following extract may indicate how hard it was even for the innocent to get permission to make an honest living by their music.

12 Sept. 1634, - A Certificate from the Mayor, the Recorder, and Bartholomew Cox, Justice of the Peace, of the City of Wells, as to the respectability of Henry Loxton of Wells, who desires to use his profession of a musician in the City of Exeter.¹⁹

For a final look at the status of professional musicians of the period I shall submit a series of entries from the Communar's Accounts and the Proceedings of the Chapter of Wells Cathedral. The extracts will shed some light on the financial emoluments of musicians. It is perhaps unfortunate that most of our knowledge of musicians in private life should come from ecclesiastical sources. And from the bare entries provided from the Reports of the Historical Commission it is usually impossible to tell whether any particular vicar-choral was a clerical or lay musician. There were both kinds to be found. Usually the difference is unimportant for even a clerical vicar-choral was more of a musician than a priest. In any case he was one of the poorest of the clergy, and his lot was not much if any better than that of any other professional entertainer or any artisan. It is refreshing to find in this particular case two vicars-choral who had both spirit and some independent financial resources. Or at least plenty of courage. The chief point of the extracts however is the very human characters and situations that emerge from these dry bones.

Communar's Accounts

1590-91. - 10 l. to Thomas Merist, schoolmaster; 2 l. to John Clark, organist, and 26 s. 8 d. ex gratia.

1591-92, - 10 l. to Thomas Merist, schoolmaster; 2 l. to John Clark, organist, and 26 s. 8 d. ex gratia.²⁰

¹⁹ Records of the City of Exeter, Hist. MSS. Commission, (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1916), p. 200.

²⁰ The ex gratia payments represent the standard fees for seven funerals.

14 June 1592, - Hugh Pounce alias Sugar and Thomas Wilestede convicted of divers offences and excommunicated.

16 June 1592, - Hugh Pounce absolved.

12 Oct. 1592, - Resolved, that John Clark and Nicholas Clunn, vicars choral, for refusing the offices of escheator and tabellar, to which they were respectively elected, be deprived of their emoluments for six months, and if they shall hereafter persist in their contumacy, to be expelled from the church forever.

23 Oct. 1592, - John Clark and Nicholas Clunn, persisting in their refusal of office, are absolved from the penalties imposed upon them, and Hugh Pound and Humphrie Bailie are elected in their stead.²¹

It seems that Hugh Pound may have been absolved on 16 June, but apparently he was not forgiven. He made a convenient scapegoat that solved what appears to have been a mighty fluttering in the dovecotes. The Communar's Accounts ceased for several years after 1591-2 so we may never know whether John Clark continued to enjoy the fruits of his "contumacy."

²¹ MSS. of the Dean and Chapter of Wells, pp. 320, 322, 324.

VI

The Receipte, Relief and Lodginge of Wayfaring People.

Inns, Alehouses and Taverns were a prominent feature in an age when trade and commerce were rapidly expanding. Travelling from one town or city to another was no longer restricted, as in earlier ages, to pilgrims, great landowners, and the frequenters of fairs. Fynes Moryson in his Itinerary (1617) spoke of the conditions he found in English Inns during his travels.

There is no place in the world where passengers may so freely command as in the English Inns, and are attended for themselves and their horses as well as if they were at home, and perhaps better, each servant being ready at call, in hope of a small reward in the morning. Neither did I ever see inns so well furnished with household stuff.¹

In 1587 William Harrison in his Description of England had already written,

Such is the capacity of some inns that they are able to lodge two or three hundred persons and their horses at ease, and thereto with a very short warning make such provision for their diet,² as to him that is unacquainted withal, may seem to be incredible.

Inns, alehouses, and taverns appear in the Falstaff plays. The two Inns that we are introduced to are the Garter, (Merry Wives of Windsor), and the unnamed inn at Rochester. The famous Boar's Head is described as a tavern. It may be helpful in understanding the background of the plays to appreciate the difference between the three kinds of establishment we have referred to, although as we shall notice Shakespeare seems to blur the distinction between alehouses and taverns. Both were usually inferior kinds of establishment to the inn proper. The statute of the

¹ J. Dover Wilson, Life in Shakespeare's England, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1920), p. 79.

² Ibid., p. 82.

first year of James the First's reign governing inns defined the ancient and true use of inns and victualing houses was for the "Recepte, Relief and Lodging" of wayfaring people travelling from place to place."³ The legitimate traveller was permitted to obtain drink at hours forbidden to local residents, since many travellers did not stop for the night until the hour was late. Innkeepers and alehouse keepers were required to keep one or more beds for the lodging of strangers. Tavern keepers, on the contrary, were forbidden to harbour travellers.⁴ Yet in King Henry V we find the Hostess of the Tavern complaining of the gossip, probably well-founded, of the time when she had kept lodgers.

Pistol. Nor shall my Nell keep lodgers.

Hostess. No, by my troth, not long: for we cannot lodge and board a dozen or fourteen gentlewomen that live honestly by the prick of their needles, but it will be thought we keep a bawdy-house straight. (II.i).

Considering that we found Doll Tear-sheet in II Henry IV, (II.iv), as an inmate of the Boar's Head we cannot avoid the suspicion that Mistress Quickly had, in fact, been running at least two different kinds of business enterprise.

As one would expect, the quality of inns seems to have varied from good to bad, with many intervening degrees between the extremes. The Garter Inn at Windsor (Merry Wives of Windsor) seems to have enjoyed a good reputation for its accommodation. Mine Host, though a man full of practical jokes, seems to have been well-esteemed by such reputable and solid citizens as Masters Page and Ford. Even his readiness to employ Bardolph as a drawer may be taken as a mark of the Inn's superiority. After all he was an officer in the retinue of a noble knight and may have

³ Joan Parkes, Travel in England in the Seventeenth Century, (Oxford: The University Press, 1925).

⁴ Parkes, loc. cit.

been presumed to be, ipso facto, a very gentlemanly type of tapster, above the usual run of such employees.

That there was the other type of inn is all too evident from the abundant travel literature of the period. Miss Parkes retails the description of one that must have ranked among the worst. She is relating the experiences of John Taylor, the Water-Poet, in the Rose and Crown at Nether Stowey in 1649. On arriving there about four in the afternoon after a tiring journey,

he found the Hostess out of town, mine host sufficiently drunk, the walls and ceilings adorned with rare Spider's Tapestry, and the smoke so palpable, that he could scarce see anything else. Mine host 'swing'd off' half a pot to him, bidding him be merry, and asked if he would like any powdered beef and carrots for supper. Taylor answered, with all his heart; then being weary of the house, went and sat three hours in the street, where the host often visited him. At last, seven o'clock struck, and Taylor returned indoors to see if supper was ready, his 'hungry selfe halfe-starved with expectation'. He found the fire out, no beef boiled, mine host fast asleep, and the maid attending to the hogs. Awaken- ing the master, he asked him where the beef was, but got no other answer than that he desired him to be content with eggs fried with parsley. Taylor then asked to be shown to his room, which he found 'sutable to the rest of the house'. There he stayed till nine o'clock expecting supper, when the host came and told him there were no eggs to be got. So, purchasing a piece of bread and butter, he went to bed. But it was only to receive torments from an 'Ethiopian Army of Fleas.'⁵

The last-mentioned detail suggests that the inn at Rochester (I Henry IV, II.i) may have been somewhat similar

- 2 Carrier. I think this is the most villainous house in all London road for fleas: I am stung like a tench.
- 1 Carrier. Like a tench? by the mass, there is ne'er a King in Christendom could be better bit than I have been since the first cock.
- 2 Carrier. Why, you will allow us ne'er a jordan, and then we leak in your chimney; and your chamber-lie breeds fleas like a loach.

⁵ Ibid., p. 144.

To say nothing of smells! But William Harrison tells us that there were many inns offering excellent service and accommodation. He was particularly impressed by the abundance and cleanliness of the napery and linen, the daily change of bed sheets, the affability and genuine hospitality of the Host, the demeanour of the servants and the cheapness and excellence of the food.⁶

In the inns men of inferior condition use to eat at the host's table, and pay some sixpence a meal; but gentlemen have their chambers, and eat alone, except perhaps they have consorts and friends in their company. The horse's meal will come to twelvepence or eighteenpence the night for hay, oats and straw, and in summertime commonly they put the horses to grass, after the rate of threepence each horse.⁷

At about the same time that John Taylor was having such a wretched time at Nether Stowey, the angler Izaak Walton was enjoying a far different experience at an alehouse. After catching his Chub with the white spot on its tail he will lead his companion to an honest ale-house,

Where we shall find a cleanly room, lavender in the windows, and twenty ballads stuck about the wall. There my hostess, which I may tell you is both cleanly and handsome, and civil, hath dressed many a one for me and shall now dress it after my fashion... Come, hostess, how do you do? Will you first give us a cup of your best drink, and then dress this Chub, as you dressed my last... when I and my friend were here about eight or ten days ago? But you must do me one courtesy, it must be done instantly.

Hostess. I will do it Mr. Piscator, and with all the speed I can.⁸

Alehouses were in a way the poor man's inns. Their accommodation was usually more modest and their charges correspondingly lower. In Southwark they seem to have possessed an evil reputation as we have noticed, but there is no doubt that outside the red-light districts there were to be found many others as respectable and clean as the one described

⁶ Wilson, op. cit., pp. 81-2.

⁷ Ibid., p. 78.

⁸ Izaak Walton, The Compleat Angler, (London: Dent Everyman edition, 1916), p. 52.

by Walton. There was, however, particularly in the country parishes, a tendency to regard alehouse licenses as suitable provision for invalids and widows who might otherwise require assistance from the rates. Thus we find in the Herts County Records Thomas Grunwin of Wheathamstead petitioning the Hertfordshire Bench that, as he was sickly and not able to work and maintain his family,

and as they were civill honest persons, and situated by the road-side at a fitting place for the relief of passengers, and formerly an alehouse, that the Justices might grant him a licence to draw and utter beer.⁹

But apparently widows granted a licence did not always turn out to be decent "civill" keepers of honest houses. Bishop Earle found it incumbent to fulminate against one of these merry alehouse widows in the following terms:

She can only dress fine and Entertaine the soldiers. She is the Loadstone that attracts men of Iron, Gallants, and Roarers... Her lipps are your welcome, and your entertainment her companye, which is put into the reckoning too, and is the dearest parcell in it.¹⁰

Strictly speaking taverns were not supposed to offer overnight accommodation. But there seems to have been a wide discrepancy between the explicit and severe language of the regulations and the laxity with which the law was enforced. The Boar's Head Tavern appears to be a good example of this, as we have noticed. That taverns were chiefly drinking places may be gathered from the papers which the Prince found in Falstaff's pocket when he discovered him "sleeping it off" behind the arras. Gallons of sack, anchovies to beget more thirst, and Item, Bread, a halfpenny (I Henry IV, II.iv). Its use as a rendez-vous for the Gadshill robbers,

⁹ Parkes, op. cit., footnote, p. 132.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 133.

and its abundance of female lodgers mentioned in Henry V suggest that Shakespeare was taking as its model one or more of the notorious houses which Dekker and Greene so profitably, for themselves, exposed.

12

No discussion of travelling conditions in this period would be complete without some notice of the roads themselves. The expansion of business and commerce had brought about an increase in the use of the roads. It was an increase that the frugal nature of Elizabeth's government was unable to cater for. Nor was the Queen's reliance upon "voluntary" effort of much help in maintaining such mediocre standards as existed. To turn again to William Harrison's Description of England,

Albeit that the intent of the statute [of Elizabeth, 1587] is very profitable for the reparations of the decayed places [in the roads], yet the rich do so cancel their portions, and the poor so loiter in their labours, that of all six, scarcely two good days' work are well-performed and accomplished in a parish at these so necessary affairs. Besides this, such as have land lying upon the sides of the ways do utterly neglect to ditch and scour their drains and water-courses for better avoidance of the winter waters... whereby the streets do grow to be so much more gulled than before, and therefore very noisesome for such as travel by the same. Sometimes also, and very often, these days and work are not employed upon those ways that lead from market to market, but each surveyor amendeth such by-plots and lanes as seem best for his own commodity and more easy passage unto his fields and pastures.¹¹

The slackness with which the statutory six days of road work was carried out was not the only reason for the poor condition of the roads. The home counties were sadly deficient in stone and other material suitable for road-construction. The soil on which the roads must be built was often heavy clay or loam. A load of flint or rubble thrown on the surface would soon disappear in the wet winter season. Stony farms that had once been considered not even fit for sheep-grazing found a new source

¹¹ Dover Wilson, op. cit., p. 76.

of wealth in their sterile acres. Prehistoric monuments were demolished to add to the road-beds; shrines and monastic ruins were turned to the same purpose, flint, chalk, lime, cinders and even bundles of gorse and heather were used to fill up the pot-holes and ruts. And the effect was always transitory as the mire engulfed each successive imposition.

Both Mr. Wilson and Miss Parkes remark upon the way in which the highways were allowed to decrease from fifty feet in width to ten or twelve feet. Trees and bushes were allowed to grow wild beside the verges and even to encroach upon the Highway itself. In the Gadshill robbery we notice how the thieves were able to shelter behind the trees at the foot of a hill so steep that the travellers had to dismount to save their horses. The trees and tall shrubs beside the narrow roads had the effect of holding off the drying power of the sun and wind. Hence many of these places were ideal for traps set by the highwaymen who abounded throughout this period. It was not unknown for some of these naturally miry places to be given additional water by local robbers to ensure that vehicles would bog down at a particular place and become even easier prey than they normally would have been. Harrison bemoans the fact that from the fifty feet of land required by the law for the roads width,

whereby the traveller might either escape the thief, or shift the mire, or pass by the laden cart without danger of himself and his horse; now they are brought unto twelve, twenty, or six and twenty at the most... the error is so common, and the benefit thereby so sweet and profitable to many by such houses and cottages as are raised upon the same.¹²

In the more rural parts of the country the trees and shrubs encroached to such an extent on the road that it was no uncommon thing to send a footman with an axe ahead of the vehicle to clear the way.¹³ Where, however, the land was fertile there was another cause of encroach-

¹² Wilson, loc. cit.

¹³ Parkes, op. cit., p. 11.

ment. Landowners would farm the road allowances and eventually consider them their private property. This practice found expression in a proverbial saying, "There is good land where there is foul way."

Nor was the condition of the roads improved by the kind of traffic they had to bear. Herds of cattle, flocks of sheep, and in the west, wild ponies, were driven to market towns. If you have ever seen what thirty or forty head of cattle can do to a farm lane in rainy weather you may have some idea of the condition of roads that were annually churned up by perhaps thousands of sheep and cattle. Horse-hoofs too, are not particularly kind to a dirt road, or one that is made of sinking loose rubble. Even in earlier times such traffic had produced impassable roads in wet seasons. But by our period the traffic on the roads had become much more varied. Strings of pack horses, farmer's ploughs with box-like attachments, and rough two-wheeled farm carts, were joined by the heavy lumbering waggons of the carriers. Frequently these were drawn by as many as twelve or fourteen oxen or horses. There was also the stage-waggon, a slow and uncomfortable but convenient method of travel for the poor and sickly. These heavy lumbering waggons with four wheels and weighty loads were a menace not only to the road surface but to other passengers who had to pass them in the frequent narrow places on the way.

It was apparently a pack train that set out from the Inn at Rochester, accompanied by a party of travellers riding horseback. The First Carrier refers to his horse, not yet packed, and the turkeys in his pannier were "quite starved." The gentlemen, according to the Second Carrier, have great charge, "they will along with company." The efficacy of the trust in numbers was sadly misplaced. But one of the noticeable things about highway robberies was the lack of murderous violence. In view of the many charges for which a person could be hanged it seems unlikely that the fear of punishment was a deterrent that discouraged the thief from taking life as well. It is likely that the travellers and carriers surrendered so quickly and meekly because they knew that if they did their lives were reasonably safe. A final commentary on the condition of the roads comes from I Henry IV.

In the opening scene the King turns to Sir Walter Blunt.

Here is a dear and true-industrious friend,
Sir Walter Blunt, new lighted from his horse,
Stained with the variation of each soil
Betwixt that Holmedon and this seat of ours.

3

It is time now to turn our attention to the people who travelled the roads and worked in the hostelryes and whom we find in the plays themselves. That is, the people, who on any given day, might have been found taking their holiday among the Finsbury or Bankside groundlings.

The carriers in the Inn-Yard at Rochester represent the cream of the common people who used the highways. Their investment, if they were owners, was substantial. And if they were employees they could look forward to substantial tips in addition to their regular pay. John Earle, one of the "Character writers" gives us a description of a Carrier in his Micro-cosmographie, published in 1628.

A carrier is his own hackney-man, for he lets himself out to travel as well as his horses. These carriers have long covered waggons in which they carry passengers from city to city; but this kind of travel is tedious, by reason they must take their waggon early, and come very late to their inns.

We note it is four by the day according to the First Carrier in I Henry IV, (II.I). "Charles' wain is over the new chimney." So though Shakespeare's Carriers have pack-horses rather than waggons and carry produce instead of passengers, their hours and habits are similar to those described by Earle. The author continues,

He is a great afflicter of highways, and beats them out of measure; which injury is sometimes revenged by the purse-taker. No man domineers more in his inn, nor calls his host unreverently with more presumption, and this arrogance proceedeth out of the strength of his horses. He forgets not his load where he takes his ease, for he is commonly drunk before he goes to bed.¹⁴

¹⁴ Wilson, op. cit., p. 80.

By substituting trucks for horses in the above passage we realize the type is not dead but flourishing more than ever. Only we call them transport drivers. And very good fellows they are - and were. We may be sure that these characters with their rough homely talk were well understood by the merchant men and shop-keepers who frequented the Curtain where these plays were presented. Probably just such fellows had that very morning delivered a gammon or two of bacon and some fresh poultry at their places of business or at Leadenhall or the Poultry.

The employees of the inns constituted a very numerous class. They were frequently praised by travellers for the readiness and excellence of their service. It would seem that their wages were meagre but that, as frequently today, they relied upon gratuities for a good part of their income. "The hired servants," comments Harrison, "are appointed at the charges of the goodman of the house, who in hope of extra-ordinary reward will deal very diligently, after outward appearance, in this their function and calling."¹⁵

But testimony appears to be equally unanimous that many of them looked for better rewards than wages and tips. Harrison goes on to say,

Herein nevertheless many of them are blameworthy, in that they do not only deceive the horse oftentimes of his allowance by sundry means, except their owners look well to them; but also make such packs with slipper merchants which hunt after prey, that many an honest man is spoiled of his goods as he travelleth to and fro, in which feat also the counsel of the tapsters or drawers of drink, and chamberlains, is not seldom behind from wanting. Certes I believe that not a chapman or traveller in England is robbed by the way without the knowledge of some of them.¹⁶

He then goes on to describe the ways in which the ostler and the chamberlain "case" the prospect as he comes into the inn. The chamberlain

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 82.

will handle his capcase and judge its coin content from the weight. The tapster will watch the traveller's purse when he pays the shot for his drinks. "For albeit their money be safe for the time that is within the inn... yet after their departure the host can meke no warrantise of the same."¹⁷

The chamberlain at the Rochester Inn was one of these dishonest servants. He has gleaned his information and passes it on to Gadshill.

Cham. Good morrow, master Gadshill. It holds current that I told you yesternight: There's a franklin in the wild of Kent hath brought three hundred marks with him in gold: I heard him tell it to one of his company, last night at supper: a kind of auditor; one that hath abundance of charges too, God knows what.

Gads. Give me thy hand; thou shalt have a share in our purchase.
(I Henry IV, II.i).

The case of the Gadshill robbery involved "other Trojans that thou dreamest not of." It was for Shakespeare's period an unusual feature of the situation. Generally speaking the ordinary highway robber was one of those whom Gadshill referred to as "foot land-rakers" and "long-staff sixpenny strikers." It was not until the Civil War ruined many of the squirearchy that gentlemen as a class turned to the profession of highwayman. In Elizabethan times most of the practitioners came from the ranks of the vagrant poor, particularly the discharged unemployed soldiery.

The evils of the situation were compounded by the inefficiency of the methods taken by the government to deal with the swelling problem. The chief burden for the suppression of highway robbery was placed on the hundred within whose limits the robbery had been committed, the inhabitants being bound, on the raising of the hue and cry, to bring the thief to justice, or on failure to do so, to reimburse the victim to the extent of half of his loss. Other hundreds called upon to follow the hue and cry were to be equally liable to half the loss sustained, if it was shown that

¹⁷ Ibid., loc. cit.

they had neglected pursuit. (27 Eliz. c. 13, 1584-5)¹⁸

It was no wonder that the highwayman, mounted on a swift horse and knowing the lie of the country, with an ill-directed, ill-disciplined, and perhaps half-hearted rabble to pursue him, should frequently escape the hands of justice. Nor was it any wonder that so many desperate vagrants took advantage of the system's inefficiency rather than starve to death. Even when these knights of the road were not actually members of the lower classes they frequently disguised themselves as such. We have the case of Prince Hal and Poins in their buckram suits to illustrate the trick.

John Clavel, who published his Recantation of an Ill-ledde Life in 1625, was a highwayman of good family who through the influence of powerful friends was able to escape the gallows. In his confessions he gave away many of the tricks of the trade, one of which was as follows;

There will ride up to you... a countryman dressed in russet doublet, leather breeches, steeple hat with greasy brim, and rolls of hay twisted round his legs above his hob-nailed shoes. Carrying a goad and mounted on a wad of straw, he will begin to chat with you, and you, amused at his silly answers and country speech, will be taken unawares, when whistling Robin Hood or some country catch, he seizes you the whiles his companions, who rode at a distance behind, come up to fleece you.¹⁹

Such were the numbers of people who wandered the roads during the decades at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth that no one was really safe. Cautious people travelled in company for mutual comfort and protection. Some even advocated night travel as offering the best opportunity of evading thieves who usually lay up in some barn or farmhouse overnight. Pedlars and itinerant merchants were especial objects of prey, for their wares were easily

¹⁸ Joan Parkes, op. cit., p. 152.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 173.

disposed of, and the stocks of ribbons, silks, glass and printed ballads represented as high a degree of affluence as most of the prigs were capable of comprehending or being able to utilize.

We have noticed Lieutenant Bardolph's ready acceptance by the Host of the Garter and have suggested a reason for the Host's quick acceptance of his services. No doubt the Host felt quite capable, from long experience, of making sure that Bardolph did not consume too much free beer and wine. A much truer picture of the real tapster is to be found in Francis of the Boar's Head Tavern. Like the members of the underworld the tapsters have their own special jargon which they offer to teach the Prince. But it is so simple and limited that the Prince can achieve proficiency in it in "one quarter of an hour." Apart from the slang of drinking Francis is "one that never spake other English in his life, than - 'Eight shillings and sixpence,' and 'You are welcome;' with this shrill addition, - 'Anon, anon, sir! Score a pint of Bastard in the Half-moon,' or so." To go to the playhouse would be a rare treat for one of his limited abilities and understanding. We may be sure that when he did go he would pay only the single penny required for admission to the pit.

We have one final point to consider. That is whether we can detect any signs that the plays under consideration were written for particular audiences. The Henry IV and V plays were written for the Curtain, in all probability, and I think that the picture of the groundlings given in these plays definitely points to the kind of audience we found at Finsbury. The humour of the tavern scenes in particular is aimed at the risibilities of a fairly plebeian crowd. It is broad and farcical with a strong infusion of earthy language. The Mistress Quickly of II Henry IV and Henry V is no more than a forty-second cousin of the Mistress Quickly of the Merry Wives of Windsor. Neither are strong on understanding but there the resemblance seems to end. The former is a semi-respectable bawd; the latter a housekeeper to a respectable citizen. When Simple reports

that a fat old woman has gone up to Falstaff's room at the Garter we in the audience know it is Falstaff himself, but just to keep us even from the suspicion that such things would be tolerated at his Inn we have the host shouting upstairs, "Here's a Bohemian-Tartar tarries the coming down / of thy fat woman. Let her descend, bully, let her descend; / my chambers are honourable: Fie! privacy? fie!" Such emphasis on honourable chambers at the Boar's Head would have been as ironical as the dozen or fourteen gentlewomen that lived honestly by the prick of their needles. The difference here is that we believe the Host means what he says. We can only assume that the author wanted us to believe him whereas he could count on the Finsbury audience being sceptical about the honest needlewomen, and also undisturbed by them.

It is of course the fifth Act of the Merry Wives that makes it abundantly clear we have an audience of vastly different tastes from that of the Curtain. Besides the masque-like quality of the scenes in Windsor Park we have Falstaff's mock-heroic speech at the opening of Scene Five. Even if we did not have the traditional story that the play was written at the Queen's request, to see Sir John in love, we could be sure that it was designed for a courtly audience. The dates of registry, 1602, and of the First Quarto, 1602, rule out any notion that it could have been designed for the Blackfriars, since that theatre did not come into the possession of Shakespeare's company till 1608. There are, however, other strong indications that the Merry Wives was written at about the same time as the other Falstaff plays. The Finsbury company, as we noticed earlier, was very much like the later repertory companies. Certain actors were typed and had parts obviously written for their particular talents. Apart from the characters such as Bardolph, Nym and Falstaff himself it seems reasonable to speculate that some of the early characters who do not reappear in their own persons in the Merry Wives most likely re-appear in similar roles. Unfortunately we have no clue as to the names of the

actors who played in the Merry Wives. Thomas Pope who played the part of Fluellen in Henry V would have been an obvious choice for the part of Sir Hugh Evans. Since his will was read in 1603²⁰ it is at least possible that he may have taken the part, but positive proof is lacking. There is also a close resemblance between the bombast of Pistol in the earlier plays and the bluff bravado of the Host of the Garter. Yet the differences are also significant. If we can assume that the two parts were written for the same actor, as they very likely were, the difference in tone between the two parts would be very satisfactorily accounted for by a difference of taste in the audiences.

There may be one other point noted in winding up this discussion. Dr. A. Bentley, in a different connection, stresses what he calls "the placeless" character of Shakespeare's productions for the Globe. He remarks that there is no edition of Troilus and Cressida published in the first hundred years of its existence which has any indication of place, or any act or scene division.²¹ It seems to me that he might have based his argument on most of the plays produced for the public playhouses. The histories, of course, would be an exception at times to this "placelessness", for here the dramatist was bound to known facts. Westminster Hall and Abbey could not, for any London audience, have been located anywhere else. But certainly for example, the Italian settings of The Merchant of Venice, Romeo and Juliet, and Much Ado even, could have been placed in England just as well. Twelfth Night with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew was thoroughly English in everything but the accident of place-names. The same point could be made of most of the Roman plays, particularly Julius Caesar and Coriolanus. Their citizens and their mob scenes were

²⁰ T. W. Baldwin, The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), p. 234.

²¹ G. E. Bentley, Shakespeare and his Theatre, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 53.

essentially of London rather than Rome. It seems quite likely that the Bankside and Finsbury audiences understood these plays in a native rather than a foreign context. The bond theme of the Merchant of Venice, for instance, would be understood as a familiar arrangement of the kind that was part of the City of London's daily business. Only the bizarre angle of the pound of flesh would be attributed to alien influence.

But just as Shakespeare could not avoid placing King Henry V's embarkation at Southampton, or Anne Boleyn's Coronation at Westminster, so he could not avoid placing the nocturnal revels in the Merry Wives at Windsor, another historical royal residence favoured by the Queen. For a public playhouse he might have placed the revels almost anywhere without disturbing anyone's sense of fitness. It is worth arguing that Windsor was chosen as the locale for the play because in this particular case, the knowledge of the audience demanded a more strict attention to this detail of location than was necessary in the other comedies and later romances. Taken in conjunction with the masque-like features, and the singing of the boy-fairies, it seems evident that once again Shakespeare was writing for a special audience. The burlesque on a duel fought for "honour," the brief snatch of popular bawdy ballad sung by Mistress Quickly, "and downe, downe, adowne a"e6c. suggest a courtly audience in a holiday mood. Whether or not the Merry Wives of Windsor was in fact first presented for the Queen and her Court on holiday at Windsor, it seems fair to suggest that the play itself was admirably suited to such an audience on such an occasion.

VII - Conclusion

The thesis that Shakespeare, as a popular dramatist, was writing for all the audience all of the time, needs one major qualification. He wrote for different audiences at different times. An examination of the different audiences for which he wrote points irresistibly to one general conclusion: he deliberately slanted his work to suit the tastes of the particular theatre audience where his plays were to be first produced. A list of such theatres would include The Rose, The Theatre, The Curtain, The Blackfriars, The Globe, Gray's Inn and possibly two premieres for Court performance.

It has been customary to consider Part I of Henry VI and Titus Andronicus as the immature apprentice productions of a fledgling playwright who was trying to break into the limelight already occupied by such luminaries as Kyd, Greene, Marlowe and the writers of the old history plays. This is a valid contention but it should also be placed beside the fact that these plays were first produced at the Rose in Southwark.¹ Close at hand were the Paris Garden and one other popular bear-baiting location. For at least a century before Shakespeare's time Southwark had been a rough district with an unsavoury reputation. Jack Cade and his rebels had made it their headquarters, and after the suppression of the rebellion Southwark had sheltered Hugh Roberts and his Regiment of Rogues.² In late Elizabethan times it was a suburb of dealers in leather and metal goods, and contained many small workshops. These people provided at least a nucleus of respectable citizens as a local audience. But the chief attraction of Southwark was its freedom from supervision by the authorities across the river.³ For small traders and artisans were

¹ M. Holmes, op. cit., xiii.

² A. V. Judges, op. cit., pp. 411-2.

³ Ibid., p. 496.

not the only people who appreciated this relative freedom from supervision. The Bermondsey Street area in the Borough was noted for its numerous fences, or receivers of stolen goods. Actors and bear-wards found refuge here from Puritan repression. And the Kent St. district was notorious for its brothels and criminals. The Borough was in fact the playground for citizens who found it inconvenient to seek their pleasures in London itself. And much of the Borough retained its reputation for centuries "as a haunt of disreputable people rather than as a place of industry."⁴

The bearing of these facts on Henry VI Part I and Titus Andronicus should be apparent. There was already an audience conditioned to appreciate "blood and thunder" drama of The Spanish Tragedy kind. It was not an audience in which wit and elegant taste predominated. But it did appreciate the spectacle provided by the old chronicle and historical plays such as Cambises King of Persia, Misfortunes of Arthur, Troublesome Reign of King John, Marlowe's Edward II, and Tamburlaine.⁵ Besides spectacle this latter group of plays also offered plenty of bloodshed in high places. For Henslowe the formula had proved notably profitable. Even if he did not give the young Shakespeare specific terms of reference, which he probably did, it was not the place or the occasion for a newcomer to embark on wholesale innovations. It seems reasonable therefore to assume that these two early plays were written to a prescribed formula, and hence for a particular audience. On no other terms than these could Shakespeare have hoped for success and further engagements.

The nature of the audiences at The Theatre and The Curtain has already been mentioned in Section I of this Essay. Shoreditch or Finsbury had once possessed a reputation not dissimilar to that of Southwark. This goes back to the days when in a very real sense the Englishman's home was

⁴ Judges, loc. cit.

⁵ J. Bakeless, Christopher Marlowe, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1938), p. 99.

indeed his castle. Feudal architecture was designed with a view to defence against the assaults of marauding enemies and the animosity of aggressive neighbours. Security was a cardinal feature. This accounts for the clustering of homes around strongly built castles or within walled cities. But with the advent of the Tudors and the disappearance of warring barons a new type of architecture was possible. The grim stone fortresses with their narrow slits suited for archers gave place to the mullioned windows of homes that were primarily designed for more comfortable living. Prosperous London merchants in the late Elizabethan era grew tired of their cramped quarters with their first floor workshops, and their upper levels devoted to store rooms and living quarters. The City proper, within the narrow confines of walls, did not lend itself to their expanding ideas. It was natural that they should build their new spacious low-level homes outside the City walls but still close to their places of business. Finsbury was a natural choice, and we do in fact find that many London merchants built their fine modern homes in this district. With them they brought law and order and it was here that James Burbage built The Theatre.

There is undoubtedly room for the idea that Shakespeare as a playwright was undergoing a process of development in technique as he grew older and more experienced. But it seems to me that this idea does not necessarily exclude the corollary that part of the difference between Titus Andronicus, produced at the Rose, and Richard III, written for the Theatre, was attributable to the changed character of the audience. These Finsbury audiences were primarily citizen-audiences, together with their families, servants and a good sprinkling of lawyers and students from the neighbouring Inns of Court. "The fledgling lawyers," says J. C. Sissons, "were especial lovers of the theatre."⁶ The consequence of the change in audience-composition was better plays based on a single book instead of loosely strung

⁶ G. J. Sissons, "The Theatres and Companies", in H. Granville-Barker's and G. B. Harrison's edn., A Companion to Shakespeare Studies (New York: Doubleday and Co. Anchor Books, 1960), p. 17.

series of episodes as in Henry VI Part I. Richard III is a fine example of the unity that Shakespeare was able to produce as a result of catering to a more homogeneous and sophisticated audience. It was also an audience on which dramatic innovations could be more safely practiced. It was at the Theatre that Richard II was first produced and this play is notable for a significant development in Shakespeare's dramatic technique. In the character of the King, particularly in the second part of the play, we are made aware of something deeper than the external events of the play. There is a subtle and penetrating analysis of the King's inner nature and the conflicting elements within his own soul. Queen Margaret's first appearance in Henry VI Part III introduced to the stage a new type of character.

Exeter: Here comes the Queen, whose looks bewray her anger:
I'll steal away.

K. Henry: Exeter, so will I...

Queen Margaret: Who can be patient in such extremes?
Ah, wretched man! 'would I had died a maid,
And never seen thee, never borne thee a son,
Seeing thou hast proved so unnatural a father!
(I, i)

It is the first appearance of the femme fatale upon the English stage and a notable addition to the gallery of character portraits. The Queen in her own right is a fascinating major character and a worthy forerunner of the great ladies of tragedy who were to follow; Cressida, Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra and Volumnia. The Curtain was operating in the same neighbourhood as The Theatre during the playwright's early career and what has been said of the plays produced at the one applies also to the other.

It was in 1598 that the actors themselves built their own playhouse, the celebrated Globe. For the first time we have the actors as masters in their own house. No wonder that the history of the Globe theatre is one of glory as well as of prosperity, that its company was the most solidly organized of all, in the highest repute, attracting to itself the best actors and the finest dramatic work of the age, and was fittingly chosen, when James came to the throne, to be the King's Men. Shakespeare was working, as actor and dramatist, under the fairest and most stimulating conditions that the time could afford.⁷

⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

The list of Shakespeare's plays produced at the Globe is a significant one for our purpose. It begins with As You Like It, and includes Julius Caesar, Measure for Measure, All's Well that Ends Well, Timon of Athens, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Pericles, The Winter's Tale, and possibly Twelfth Night, although Whitehall and the Middle Temple have also been assigned to this last-named play.⁸ The Globe audience was a more cosmopolitan and sophisticated one than that of the Finsbury theatres. On the whole it was one more alive to the cut and thrust of witty repartee, to the appreciation of fine language and figurative conceits, although it still retained a love for vigorous action. Civil strife and street brawls tend to fade into the background now that the merchant audience has been largely replaced. It is worth noting that ⁱⁿ Julius Caesar, where these elements still occur, was one of the first of Shakespeare's plays produced at the Globe, and it probably represents, to some extent, a carry-over of ideas from Finsbury. But the problems of internecine strife are replaced by others more suited to the concerns of the new audience. This is, of course, partly accounted for by the change in the political climate. With Mary Queen of Scots finally disposed of there was a steady abatement of concern about the problem of royal succession that had vexed the nation for so long. In the last years of the reign the accession of James VI of Scotland was increasingly regarded as inevitable. The prospects of rival claimants to the throne and ensuing civil war were dispensed with. Trade was safe for another generation.

Attention could now be turned to other matters. It is significant that all the problem plays, so-called, belong to this period. Interest in external events was replaced by a growing concern with morals and manners. Measure for Measure reveals a pre-occupation with the disparity between the law arbitrarily enshrined in a code and the natural or moral law. Timon of Athens is a play very much concerned with contemporary morals and

⁸ F. E. Halliday, A Shakespeare Companion, (London: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 505.

manners. It is a biting criticism of hucksterism and time-serving. The Poet, the Painter, the Jeweller, the Merchant and the gold-digging court-ess are Jacobean as well as Athenian. The burden of the play seems to be that everybody and everything had a price. It was as applicable to seventeenth century London as it was to Athens in the fifth century B.C. No doubt Shakespeare's own experiences of the vicissitudes of noble patronage lay behind some of the bitterness. And there may have been a venal politician by the name of Francis Bacon, and others like him, in the audience.

The concern with manners and morals is also seen in some of these plays which Shakespeare produced for still another kind of audience. It is only necessary to recall Hamlet's remarks on drunkenness and the merciless exposure of the fallen rogue Autolycus in The Winter's Tale to illustrate the point. Comment of this kind would have been utterly out of place and probably not even understood at the Rose or at Finsbury.

The "private" Blackfriars theatre was leased ^{to} the King's Men in 1608. It was apparently a rectangular hall. The fact that it was roofed over gave it the advantage over the Globe and other "public" theatres of being able to operate in winter or inclement weather. A factor of significant influence on the character of the audience was the variation in admission charges between the public and the private theatres. At the former the top price was a shilling and the general range ran from 1d to 3d. Admission prices in the private theatres ran from 6d to half a crown. The lower classes and to a considerable extent the lower middle classes must automatically have been excluded from the Blackfriars theatre by simple economic considerations.

The list of plays believed to have received their first performance at Blackfriars or at least to have been designed with Blackfriars in mind is an impressive one; The Winter's Tale, Pericles, Cymbeline and The Tempest. The early Love's Labour's Lost was also first

produced in a private theatre, or possibly at the Earl of Southampton's home during one of the plague years. Othello's first recorded performance was "By the King's Maiesties plaiers. Hallamas Day being the first of November A Play in the Banketinge house at Whitehall called The Moor of Venis."⁹

These plays divide naturally into two groups: tragedies and romantic comedies. The appropriateness of the latter group to the private theatre is readily apparent. The songs and dances found in them could be far more effectively staged because of the superior acoustics of a hall. The influence of the masque, which became so popular in the reign of James I, is evident in the later comedies of Shakespeare. The musical interludes and the light pastoral touches would have a far different appeal from the plays designed for the earlier theatre audiences. Prof. Holmes makes the point that the audience at a private theatre would be largely composed of courtiers, fashionable men about town, and the better educated people. Such an audience would appreciate the phantasy of Enter... Ariel, invisible, playing and singing, and the haunting words and melody of "Come unto these yellow sands" and "Full fathom five thy father lies." The imagery and fancy of such songs is very different in tone from the sturdy songs of the boisterous earlier comedies. In thinking of the music of these "Blackfriars" plays one cannot help recalling the songs of Ophelia or the final stage directions in Hamlet: A dead march. Exeunt, bearing off the bodies.

The more intimate atmosphere of the private theatres was favourable to the presentation of such tragedies as Hamlet and Lear. In the open air of the Globe some of the fine nuances of characterization would often be lost or blurred, and these are tragedies that call for a close relationship between the players and the audience. The loss might be compared to what one would feel on hearing Hamlet from the back of the

⁹ J. C. Sissons, op. cit., p. 17.

O'Keefe Centre as against a presentation of the same play in the Old "Vic" on Waterloo Road. The indoor stage at the Blackfriars also made possible some tentative efforts at stage lighting and scene-painting as well as allowing for the use of more "machines."

It is possible that Shakespeare was serious in his remarks to the Players when he recalls, "it was never acted; or if it was, not above once; for the play, I remember, pleased not the million; 'twas caviare to the general." Whether he was giving a sop to his audience of gentle-folk or merely playing with words, it could be fairly argued that the playwright was conscious of the difference in the audience. And for our purpose this is sufficient.

Whatever may be thought of the foregoing remarks there can be little quarrel with the proposition that such plays as A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost and The Merry Wives of Windsor were written for special audiences.

A Midsummer Night's Dream has combined two different sets of actors - the parts of the adults to be played by professionals, and the parts of the fairies, which it is plausibly conjectured were to be played by members from a company of boy actors. The fact that there is no mingling of these characters on the stage, except for Bottom in his ass's head lends credibility to the idea of two such separate companies. We are aware from Hamlet's remarks to the Players of the rivalry between the professional actors and the boys' companies. The construction of this play would permit separate rehearsals for each company and avoid causes of friction arising from too many joint rehearsals. Mr. Halliday and others agree that the play was probably written for a wedding entertainment, possibly that of the Earl of Derby and Elizabeth Vere, daughter of the Earl of Oxford, which took place in 1595. This conjecture would certainly account for the unique collaboration between the boys and the professionals. The concluding Epithalamium spoken by Oberon points strongly to the idea of a wedding-celebration.

Now, until the break of day,
 Through this house each fairy stray.
 To the best bride-bed will we,
 Which by us shall blessed be;
 And the issue there create
 Ever shall be fortunate.

For our general proposition that Shakespeare wrote with a particular audience in mind it should only be necessary to find one clear-cut example. A Midsummer Night's Dream does this but it is by no means a solitary instance. "The Inns of Court also celebrated great occasions with dramatic entertainments.... They (the lawyers and students) gave their own shows, and they also brought in professionals, as on the famous occasion when Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors was performed, as part of the revels, on a Grand Night at Gray's Inn in 1594."¹⁰

Without delving too deeply into the vexed question of dates to be assigned to the first productions of the plays I shall accept Prof. Halliday's authority that Titus Andronicus and the Comedy of Errors had their original productions within a year or so of each other.¹¹ The difference between these plays is more than a difference between Tragedy and Comedy. Nor do I think that any supposition of artistic progress on the author's part is sufficient to account for the difference in so short a span of time. Both plays are modelled on classical examples, Seneca in the one case, and Plautus in the other. Yet the difference in tone and approach is so very noticeable that it seems obvious some other factor must be considered. The difference between the original audiences, the one at the Rose, and the other at a private presentation, offers the most convenient explanation. The gruesome qualities of Titus Andronicus were an attempt to satisfy an established taste for violence and bloodshed, and an apparent attempt to outdo anything that had been previously attempted in this line. The denizens of Southwark who could be lured from the Paris

¹⁰ F. E. Halliday, op. cit., p. 346.

¹¹ F. E. Halliday, op. cit., pp. 497 and 112.

Garden would be just the kind of audience that could appreciate the inordinate number of mutilations, the flinging about of severed heads and hands, the "rape and villainy" that abound in the play. On the other hand the Comedy of Errors never transgresses the verges of polite decorum.

The case of the Courtesan is a notable example. Elsewhere, as we have seen in Measure for Measure and Timon of Athens, Shakespeare could be realistic and even savage in his denunciation of prostitutes as a class. But in this play the Courtesan is lightly, almost romantically handled. With such an abundant quantity of the real article in the Borough of Southwark for first-hand study, it is unlikely that Shakespeare would have ventured such an idealized sampling of the species without running a serious risk of being ridiculed off the stage. The Courtesan would, in the confines of the Rose, have indeed been "caviare to the general." The nature of her portrayal in the Comedy of Errors would, even without any other evidence, demand our assumption that the play was not written for Henslowe's Rose but for some other audience.

Recognition of the fact that Shakespeare wrote primarily for his audiences, and that these audiences were, on occasion, vastly different in their nature, should lead to certain salutary conclusions. It should help to banish for ever the cherished notion that he was a school and college author to be studied in text books, with a view to formal examinations. It should establish for ever the absolute professionalism of Shakespeare's approach to his work. Whatever levels of meaning critics may profess to discern in his unconscious mind, it is clear that his own approach to his work had but a single aim. He was writing, as far as he could, with the object of persuading certain special groups of people to pay good money for the pleasure of viewing his dramatic works. When this approach is adopted by modern producers and actors, as it has been for instance at the Canadian Stratford Festivals, we find that he still has a tremendous popular appeal. I do not mean that all the tricks and devices used by Michael Langham and others are commendable but that the general

approach is sound, and consistent with the kind of thing that Shakespeare himself would approve.

It is time to return to our Groundlings. They were, in the Aristotelian sense, imitations of the originals that the dramatist found in such numbers in his audiences, particularly in those that attended the Finsbury theatres and the Globe. It is noteworthy that it is in the works written for these play-houses that we find the richest and most abundant portrayals of the Groundlings. It is necessary to recall but a few of the many: The numerous servingmen in Romeo and Juliet, the citizens in Julius Caesar and Coriolanus, the low-life characters from the stews in Measure for Measure. Even Macbeth, primarily concerned with royalty and feudal aristocracy has its background of attendants serving at the banquet, the immortal Porter who was permitted to steal a whole scene, the oldest inhabitant with his predictions of forthcoming woe, the gallant sergeant, as well as messengers, murderers and soldiers. The Henry IV-V trilogy is remarkable for its vivid sketches of characters on the road and in the inns, as well as for its detailed view of the common soldier.

The full measure of Shakespeare's professionalism lies in his transfer of these groundlings from the pit to the stage. In plain terms he wanted them in both places. To accomplish this laudable and profitable operation he was more than ready to modify the conventions of his classical models. The groundlings had more than a passing interest for their recorder, and I suggest that no appreciation of Shakespeare's work is complete without some recognition of their part in his plays. **An interesting, but not particularly profitable, test of the groundlings' contribution, would be to rewrite one of the plays by leaving them out entirely. It might then be possible to ascertain how much of the rich texture of the drama springs from their presence.**

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