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THE WOMAN'S PART

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For they shall yet belie thy happy years,
That say thou art a man; Diana's lip
Is not more smooth and rubious: thy small pipe
Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,
And all is semblative a woman's part.

By

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ABSTRACT

A study of the boy actor and sexual disguise in
Shakespearian comedy.

FOR MY PARENTS

And I had a whisper from a ghost, who shall be nameless,
that these commentators always kept in the most distant
quarters from their principals in the lower world, through
a consciousness of shame and guilt, because they had so
horribly misrepresented the meaning of those authors to
posterity.

Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels

Even as the sun with purple-colour'd face
Had ta'en his last leave of the weeping morn,
Rose-cheek'd Adonis hied him to the chase;
Hunting he lov'd, but love he laugh'd to scorn.
Sick-thoughted Venus makes amain unto him,
And like a bold-fac'd suitor 'gins to woo him.

.

With this she seizeth on his sweating palm,
The precedent of pith and livelihood,
And trembling in her passion, calls it balm,
Earth's sovereign salve to do a goddess good:
Being so enrag'd, desire doth lend her force
Courageously to pluck him from his horse.

Over one arm the lusty courser's rein,
Under her other was the tender boy,
Who blush'd and pouted in a dull disdain,
With leaden appetite, unapt to toy:
She red and hot as coals of glowing fire,
He red for shame, but frosty in desire.

William Shakespeare, Venus and Adonis

PREFACE

In the chapters that follow I attempt to show the importance of the Elizabethan boy actor in the design of four women's parts in Shakespeare's comedies: Julia, Portia, Rosalind and Viola. The "line" of disguised heroines offers a point at which what we neatly term character, dramatic structure and theatrical practice fuse. The purpose of examining the relation between a fact of performance in the Elizabethan theatre and a favourite plot-device in Shakespeare's comedy is to get at dramatic character as it is perceived on the stage rather than on the page and so to illuminate its place within the larger dramatic design and structure of ideas of which it is a part. In discussing the boy actor and the four disguised heroines, I try always to emphasize the variety in Shakespeare's use of sexual disguise and in the way of seeing upon which it draws.

I quote Shakespeare from the texts of the new Arden editions, except for The Taming of the Shrew, Much Ado About Nothing, Hamlet, Troilus and Cressida and the Sonnets, which have still to appear. For these, I have used the single volume edition of the Pelican Shakespeare, prepared under the general editorship of Alfred Harbage.

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My greatest and most enduring debt is to my parents, and to them this study is dedicated--uncurrent pay indeed.

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K.R.S.G.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: SHAKESPEARE'S UNGAIN HOYDENS

This is a study of some of the women's parts that Shakespeare wrote for his leading boy actors during his long professional association with the Lord Chamberlain's-King's Company. It concentrates for the most part on the comedies he produced in the first ten years or so of his career, and it centres on those heroines who disguise as young men: Julia, Portia, Rosalind and Viola. It is an attempt to polish up--and, in some respects, to repair--the pair of playgoer's or reader's spectacles described by Bernard Beckerman:

The frame of these spectacles is not plastic or horn but history. The lenses are not optical glass but accumulated dramatic practice and theory. Fashioned by generations of creative and critical theater artists, these glasses are compacted of preconceptions about what constitutes drama and how it produces its effects.¹

The purpose of examining the "line" of disguised heroines in Shakespeare's comedies is to reconstruct and show the importance of a theatrical tradition and a way of seeing that the English theatre lost when boys ceased to play the parts of women and the first actress stepped forth onto the stage. Shakespeare seems to have been peculiarly sensitive to the possibilities of this tradition and it shapes his conception of dramatic character in the comedies.

The conjunction of the tradition of boys playing women and the favourite device of sexual disguise in these plays offers a specific avenue of approach to the dreadful summit of that cliff that beetles

o'er his base--the vertiginous subject of dramatic character in Shakespeare. It approaches the design of character through dramatic structure and the theatrical circumstances in which Shakespeare worked. The combination of transvestist boy actor and sexual disguise in the comedies plays a major part in the development of Shakespeare's concept of mature, full personal identity and in his evolving mastery of techniques for articulating this notion of identity in specific dramatic practice. The multi-faceted, flexible identity so extensively dramatized in the parts of the disguised heroines points forward to the characters of the mature tragedies and to the multiple identity of a Hamlet or an Antony. The women in the comedies provide a model for the concept of multiple identity that energizes the design of characters as radically different as Desdemona and Cleopatra, each in her own way a tragic heroine in search of a comedy.

In the comedies, the boy actor--whose working life was spent, even more than that of his older fellows, being what he was not--is the structural focus of this evolving conception of multiple dramatic identity. The theatrical fact of the boy actor fundamentally affected Shakespeare's strategies of characterization. The stage figure of a boy playing a woman contained an in-built ambiguity which Shakespeare could manipulate in a variety of ways or, alternatively, could ignore whenever it suited him to do so. This flexibility enabled him to emphasize the ambiguity in writing a Rosalind disguising as Ganymede or to disregard it entirely in writing a Beatrice. In this way, the boy actor offered yet another source of the theatrical self-reflexiveness that characterizes the dramaturgy of his plays and the

idiom of their thought. Like the device of the play within the play, the "trick" of the boy actor could be used to blur distinctions between play and audience. The device of sexual disguise turned the boy playing a woman into an actor within the "real world" of the play and the other characters into members of a "real life", on-stage audience. The ability of the audience in the theatre to say with any great certainty where play-world ends and the audience's world--the "real world"--begins is teasingly undermined: we watch an actor play a character who becomes an actor (by disguising) and performs before an audience of other characters who are actors on the stage in front of us. This kaleidoscopically unstable pattern, dissolving into and out of focus, is closely connected with the concept of multiple identity--the actor-like ability to play a number of parts on the stage of the real world. Shakespeare's sleight of hand mastery in manipulating the boy actor and the play within the play has the effect of continually redefining the audience's way of seeing the play and their understanding of their changing relation to it. We are educated in the dynamics of multiple awareness, the need to shift our perspective or to balance several different ones at the same time. The sheer variety of ontological status that Shakespeare can give his boy-woman is basic to the pyrotechnic displays in which he ceaselessly explores the psychology of perception, continually directing our attention to the dynamics of our responses, to the various ways we relate ourselves to actors and to the play they perform.

Introducing a collection of chiefly theoretical essays on English Renaissance drama a decade ago, Norman Rabkin detected signs

of a tendency to view "the work of art as a complex and highly determined shaping of an audience's responses".² Such a tendency is of especial significance for our understanding of the way of seeing demanded by Shakespearian drama and the boy actor's function within it. Rabkin's observation contains two propositions, pointing in seemingly opposite directions, and both merit attention. His emphasis on the work of art as something active, designed to shape an audience's responses, directs attention to the artist's purposes, his strategy, his design on his audience. In short, it seems to deflect us from the work of art itself--in its (dis)guise as pudding or machine--and so to bring us up against that erstwhile demon of literary studies the Intentional Fallacy. But, of course, what it actually brings us up against is the Intentional Fallacy Fallacy. The philosopher of art Stanley Cavell, eloquently refuting the argument of Beardsley and Wimsatt, has rescued from opprobrium the notion of works of art as "intentional objects" in the sense that everything that is there--in the work of art, in "the poem itself"--is something that a man has done and, in doing it, has meant it and so is responsible for it--whether he consciously, explicitly intended a particular shading of significance is irrelevant.³ As Cavell points out, the correct sense of the question "Why?" directs us further into the work: it directs our attention to the way it works upon us, to the "unique significance of our experience of a work of art", as Michael Goldman defines "meaning".⁴

This emphasis on the experience shaped by a work of art returns us to Rabkin and his second proposition: that the manipulation of an

audience's responses is a proper and available subject for critical analysis. Recent years have seen a burgeoning of reader-oriented criticism on non-dramatic literature, and Cavell's broadly humanist position has received implicit support most notably in the form of Stanley Fish's intensive readings of seventeenth-century texts and his "affective stylistics". Fish focusses attention not on the spatial context of the printed page but on the temporal context of a mind's experience of a text as it engages with it in the process of reading. In studying a text, Fish asks the eminently sensible question "what does this word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, chapter, novel, play, poem, do?", and the answer involves "an analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time". Meaning becomes an event; what a text does is what it means, and it does it to a reader. Response is, therefore, a legitimate--for Fish, the only--subject for analysis. Fish refutes the Affective Fallacy, affirming that

the great merit . . . of kinetic art is that it forces you to be aware of 'it' as a changing object--and therefore no 'object' at all--and also to be aware of yourself as correspondingly changing. Kinetic art does not lend itself to a static interpretation because it refuses to stay still and doesn't let you stay still either. In its operation it makes inescapable the actualizing role of the observer.⁵

Fish's account of our experience of kinetic art has an obvious relevance to the study of drama, whose performance institutionalizes the actualizing role of the observer in the silent community of the audience. Bernard Beckerman has well and briefly observed that the purpose of dramatic criticism is "to achieve an adequate description of the interaction between performer and playgoer, for the art of the

theatre lies in that interaction".⁶ This is easier said than done. Our highly developed techniques of close verbal analysis do not take us very far if we try to reassemble into one whole the linear patterns of plot, character, language and thought that literary criticism has traditionally extracted for discussion, and instead try to describe our accumulating relation to and understanding of a play in performance. As Beckerman points out, we have a much less adequate critical vocabulary for such a description than for a purely literary analysis. (What terms can we draw upon in describing the difference in dramatic structure between a "scene" by Shakespeare and one by Ibsen?) Of course to make discussion of a play practicable, we must in some sense temporarily dismantle it into what we discern to be its constituent parts; we must isolate certain aspects for attention, emphasizing one element at the expense of another. Ideally we should try to keep all its elements, their relation to each other and our accumulating relation to them, in our minds when we set out to examine a play, but we must have a point of entry.

The boy actor in Shakespeare's Company provides such a point of entry. Michael Goldman has observed that "any discussion of a Shakespearean play that does not treat the proper acting of it as part of Shakespeare's fundamental design is not a discussion of the play as a work of dramatic art".⁷ The purpose of focussing on the boy actor is to get at the dynamics of performance--not of specific productions--through an examination of one basic fact in the original acting of Shakespeare's plays. The text of a play is primarily a design for performance, notes for its actors and director. (It is

perhaps worth noting that it is the only form of "literature" that we regularly cut.) John Marston was especially insistent on this. In the Preface to The Fawn (1605), he reminds his readers that performance is a defining characteristic of drama: "Comedies are writ to be spoken, not read. Remember the life of these things consists in action". He has lingering reservations about publishing a play because its "life rests much in the actor's voice".⁸ The medium of drama is acting; dramatic language is language to be spoken by actors--Burbage, Olivier, Brando, whoever. Accordingly we must attend to the demands Shakespeare's plays make on his actors--what he asks them to do and what he gives them to do it with--as they are his means of shaping an audience's responses.

The last sentence raises the crucial question "Whose response?"--yours may be different from mine. This is a problem to which Shakespeare continually attends, and the plays show his abiding concern with the dynamics of response--the ways an audience relate themselves to a play, and the mingling of subjective engagement and objective detachment in their responses. Each member of an audience is, like Hamlet, locked into the subjectivity of his own perception. The experience he brings to the theatre is uniquely his own, and different people watching the same play see different things, like eyewitnesses whose accounts of a road accident vary greatly. It is the experience of being one amongst many in an audience watching a play, not his unique perception of that play, that he shares with his companions. And it is that shared experience we mean when we say "we" in speaking of the audience. The design of Shakespeare's plays reveals an acute

awareness of the variety of subjective response, and it is this subjectivity--now uniting us with the characters and other members of the audience, now separating us from them--that Shakespeare so frequently manipulates. The scene in Troilus and Cressida in which Troilus watches Cressida and Diomedes, Ulysses watches Troilus watching them, Thersites watches the four of them, and we watch them all, is an object lesson in multiple perspective and the variety of subjective response. Troilus, Ulysses and Thersites watch the same scene, but each has his own different understanding of it. And ours is different again. The "truth" of the characters' various responses--Thersites' verdict on Cressida, "A proof of strength she could not publish more, / Unless she said, 'My mind is now turned whore'" (V.ii.109-10), is justified by what he has seen of her and accords with his view that all women are whores anyway--denies us any sense of a superior objectivity. It is to this variety of response that Shakespeare continually directs our attention through the device of the formal play within the play.

In Love's Labour's Lost, the courtly audience make impossible the successful performance of the Pageant of the Nine Worthies by refusing to piece out the actors' imperfections with their thoughts. Costard's assertion, "I Pompey am,--", is challenged by Boyet: "You lie, you are not he" (V.ii.541). As Berowne observes, "'tis some policy / To have one show worse than the King's and his company" (V.ii.508-9), and the arrogant young courtiers, having had their own show spoilt and mocked by the women, are determined to ruin the Three Worthies' show. The Princess's readiness to play the part

Costard assigns her--"Great thanks, great Pompey" (V.ii.553)--her pleasure in the show and her remark "That sport best pleases that doth least know how" (V.ii.512) anticipate Theseus' kindly indulgence of the mechanicals in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Despite his good will--"Our sport shall be to take what they mistake" (V.i.90)--the young nobles' literal-minded response to the relation between actor and part in the "lamentable comedy" of Pyramus and Thisbe disrupts the performance. The chattering courtiers equal the literal-mindedness of Bottom and his fellows, and the combination makes dramatic illusion impossible. The performance reveals the inadequacies of the audience as an audience as much as it reveals those of the amateur actors; the young lovers fail to see the little play's relevance to their own experience. The shortcomings of the audience of "Pyramus and Thisbe" implicitly provide a few lessons for Shakespeare's real audience. The "lamentable comedy" underlines the achievement of the modern professional drama by mocking an older, out-dated drama--it recalls such plays as Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes (c. 1576)--and by the inescapable fact that this display of bad acting is by "the best in this kind" (V.i.208), Shakespeare's Company.

"The Murder of Gonzago" in Hamlet extends Shakespeare's concern with the relation between an audience's experience outside the theatre (when they are not an audience) and its understanding of a play inside it, and with the efficacy of drama in holding the mirror up to nature. We watch Hamlet watching the audience of another play: the focus of attention--Hamlet's, Horatio's and ours--is Claudius's response. The very processes of an audience's engagement in a play

become the scene's subject. In focussing our attention so intently on how Claudius responds to the play, Shakespeare makes us attend to the ways an audience make sense of a play, how they relate it to their own lives. The sense Ophelia makes of the play is rather different from what Claudius makes of it; not all the characters are in the know. It is on this distinction that Hamlet has built his strategy:

I have heard that guilty creatures sitting at a play,
Have by the very cunning of the scene,
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaimed their malefactions.

(II.ii.575-8)

Thus the variety of response that Shakespeare touched upon in Love's Labour's Lost and A Midsummer Night's Dream becomes in "The Murder of Gonzago" the pivot on which the play within the play turns. In effect, the travelling players perform two plays simultaneously: one about "a murder done in Vienna" (III.ii.230)--even this seems to confound Ophelia--and one about a murder done in Denmark. But only Hamlet, Horatio and Claudius recognize the play within the play within the play. Even "The Mousetrap" inside the old-fashioned, melodramatic "Murder of Gonzago" can catch the conscience of the King: "The King rises!" (III.ii.255)--to the bait. Despite Hamlet's anxieties about the crudeness of the acting, his experiment in audience response works.

"The Murder of Gonzago" holds the mirror up to the variety and ambiguity of our own responses to Hamlet. To bring onto the stage a group of players to perform a creaky old play has the effect of emphasizing by contrast the "reality" of the world of the framing play. But it also reminds us that Gertrude is a boy actor, that Hamlet is Burbage, and that we are faced with the same problems as

the audience in Elsinore. Like the characters, who are continually listening and watching, we attempt to decipher ambiguous and misleading external signs--the red herring about the cause of the Ghost's appearance in the first scene; the abundant sources of doubt and uncertainty which Stephen Booth and Michael Goldman have emphasized.⁹ Both audience and characters are forced to piece together clues in an attempt to pluck out the heart of Hamlet's mystery. The play continually frustrates our desire--as it does Hamlet's--for full or secure knowledge. Hamlet's sea journey during which he changes in some sense is excluded from the play; like Claudius, we can only draw uncertain inferences from what we see of its results. After Hamlet's death, Horatio must "draw [his] breath in pain, / To tell my story" (V.ii.337-8): he must tell the court what it is they have seen.

This sleight of hand dexterity in exploring the epistemological problems of seeing and knowing is not confined only to the formal play within the play. It is also apparent in the informal or--to use Anne Righter's word--the "undeclared" play within the play.¹⁰ The most striking example is Othello, which for its first four acts is in effect a play within a play directed by Iago. He shares Hamlet's skill at predicting how the members of his audience will respond; he is a paradigm of the dramatist manipulating an audience's responses to what they see. Othello demands incontrovertible evidence of Desdemona's adultery: "give me the ocular proof"; "Make me to see 't" (III.iii.366, 370). Iago complies by staging a little play for him. As director, as well as author and actor, he casts the Moor

as the eavesdropping cuckolded husband and as audience, in which role he gives him a little coaching, particularly about what to notice:

encave yourself,
And mark the jeers, the gibes, and notable scorns,
That dwell in every region of his face;
For I will make him tell the tale anew,
Where, how, how oft, how long ago, and when,
He has, and is again to cope your wife:
I say, but mark his gesture;

(IV.i.81-7)

Having misled Othello about the script, Iago confides in the real audience, casting them as mute, consenting extras in his play, by describing the real script--"Now will I question Cassio of Bianca" (IV.8.93)--and underlining his ability to predict and manipulate his audience's response to what they see:

As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad,
And his unbookish jealousy must conster
Poor Cassio's smiles, gestures, and light behaviour,
Quite in the wrong.

(IV.i.100-4)

Iago is, of course, quite right. Having been told what to see and how to respond, Othello sees and believes: "His gesture imports it" (IV.i.135-6). Bianca's unexpected and unscripted appearance in Iago's play seems at first potentially a comic and disruptive intrusion of the real world beyond Iago's control into the play world he has constructed; but with her production of Desdemona's handkerchief for Othello to see, she is safely cast and accommodated within the plot of his citizen comedy. Othello, who needs no prompter, takes his cue: "By heaven, that should be my handkerchief!" (IV.i.155).

The multiple awareness that Hamlet and Othello draw upon and the teasing juggling of the relation between seeing and knowing in an audience's experience in the theatre are most sharply focussed on the

body of an actor in the statue scene (V.iii) in The Winter's Tale. Hermione's resurrection is one of the few occasions on which Shakespeare keeps a secret from his audience. The play has led us to believe--and if we know Greene's tale we can be sure--that Hermione is dead, and so the statue is stone. But whether it is stone or flesh in the dramatic fiction, in theatrical fact it is a boy actor standing as still as he can. It is this fact--that Hermione's statue is represented by the actor who played Hermione earlier--that makes her resurrection continually possible in this scene and makes us aware that our hopes for a happy ending are sustained by our knowledge of the workings--not of the world or even the world of the play--but of the theatre. In wishing a happy ending at this point when all the evidence has told us that Hermione is dead and that this must be a statue, we go behind the dramatic fiction to the fact of theatrical performance.¹¹ Similarly in King Lear, Shakespeare plays on our knowledge of how the story ends. He continually indulges our expectations of a happy ending--we know the source is a tragicomedy--only to frustrate our hopes by Cordelia's death. Our objective (as we thought) knowledge of the story is shown to be painfully subjective--only one amongst many ways of knowing the story of Lear and his three daughters. In Troilus and Cressida, the Prologue gives us the official version of the history of the siege of Troy; his words assure us that we do indeed know the story. But the first thing we see is a sulky adolescent mooning around--"Why should I war without the walls of Troy / That find such cruel battle here within?" (I.i.2-3)--and this is the

renowned Troilus. Again the position of superiority we thought we had by virtue of knowing the story is swept away. The assumption implicit in the stage-critic Damplay's complaint at the end of Act IV of Ben Jonson's The Magnetic Lady (1632), that here the author's "Play might have ended, if hee would ha' let it; and have spar'd us the vexation of the fift Act yet to come, which every one here knowes the issue of already, or may in part conjecture" (Chorus, 21-4),¹² is one that Shakespeare never tires of subverting. He draws upon all the possibilities that the kinetic nature of drama gives him in keeping us continually aware--to adapt Fish's phrase--of the changing "it" of the work of art and of ourselves as correspondingly changing.

The multiple awareness manipulated by the play--whether old-fashioned drama or an undeclared play--within the play, the juggling of on-stage audiences and the playing off a story we know against the version we are watching is also drawn upon in Shakespeare's use of the boy actor, especially as a woman disguised as a boy. The boy actor allowed Shakespeare a similar flexibility in juggling the levels of the audience's awareness, yet this element of Shakespeare's working conditions and its place in the design of his plays have received virtually no critical attention.¹³ Colley Cibber's scornful description of the boy actors as "ungain Hoydens"¹⁴ sets the tone for subsequent comments lamenting the pitiful inadequacies of Shakespeare's boys. The most memorable example is perhaps the actress Helen Faucit's self-congratulatory remark:

Think of a boy as Juliet! as "heavenly Rosalind!" . . . How could any youth, however gifted and specially trained, even faintly suggest these fair and noble women to an audience?

Woman's words, woman's thoughts coming from a man's lips, a man's heart--it is monstrous to think of! One quite pities Shakespeare, who had to put up with seeing his brightest creations thus marred, misrepresented, spoiled.¹⁵

Despite the regrettable lack of Miss Faucit's services, Shakespeare chose to write such parts as Juliet and Rosalind for his leading boy actor, and it seems clear enough that the parts were designed to suit the boy actor's peculiar capabilities. Shakespeare belonged to that small group of player-dramatists who enjoyed a day to day involvement in all stages of production--casting, rehearsal, performance--with the company for whom they wrote their plays. Such close involvement in the activities of the Lord Chamberlain's-King's Men--for whom Shakespeare wrote exclusively from the organization of the Company in June 1594 to the end of his career--would inevitably have given their chief dramatist an unusually intimate knowledge of the capacities of the individual actors. As he later wrote Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Macbeth and Antony for Burbage, so in the 1590's he wrote Julia, Portia, Beatrice, Rosalind and Viola for his leading boy actor. In discussing Shakespeare's women, we must always keep this in mind.

When attention has been given to this fact, the tendency has been to simplify the women's parts so that they fall easily within the very limited capacities (as the critic sees them) of Shakespeare's boy actors, and some critics have gone to considerable lengths to do this.¹⁶ It is often observed that the women's parts are almost always much shorter than the male parts. But this takes account of neither the importance of genre in this matter nor the exceptions that prove

the rule, such as Portia or Rosalind--less than twenty lines shorter than Lear--or Cleopatra, which though shorter than Antony is longer than the leading male parts in many of the other plays. Until quite recently the view that Shakespeare had his comic heroines disguise as young men so as to facilitate the performance of his boy actors and so conceal their deficiencies in playing women held virtually unchallenged sway, despite the irrefutable evidence of Beatrice or Cleopatra. The widespread desire to deny any apparent difficulty in the women's parts--the argument for a formal acting style is only the commonest and most obvious strategy--is extraordinary when we remember that these parts remain the peaks to be scaled in the career of any modern actress--in a sense they mark the stages of her progress--and that in some of them disasters are more common than successes.

Virtually no helpful information about specific boy actors in Shakespeare's company--or any other adult company for that matter--has come down to us. At an early age a boy was apprenticed to an older actor, beginning his career with the most minor roles--children and pages, a silent court lady, a maid perhaps--and graduating to a leading female part perhaps in his mid-teens. The age at which a boy in an adult company would be given such a part and the length of his career are matters only for speculation. The one solid fact that scholars have accepted--Fenn and Bird were still playing women into their twenties--turns out to have been the product of doubtful guesswork.¹⁷ Yet even if actors did not continue playing women into their twenties, it seems unlikely that the boy who played Rosalind or Viola or Cleopatra was a little boy. Some were at least

adolescents and in legal documents were sometimes called young men.¹⁸

The women's parts in all of Shakespeare's plays could be managed by between three and five boys. The pairing of female parts in the comedies of the second half of the 1590's--Helena and Hermia, Portia and Nerissa, Beatrice and Hero, Rosalind and Celia, Viola and Olivia--suggests that the Chamberlain's Company had two very gifted boy actors, one tall and one short, the taller of whom was considered good enough to take parts, such as Portia and Rosalind, that dominate their plays. Most of the comedies have a third minor female character, implying the presence of another younger and less experienced boy.

The style of acting in Shakespeare's theatre--was it formal or natural?--is a subject fraught with traps into which we may be all too easily seduced by the desire to generalize from the rather scanty available evidence. The boy actor has made his appearances in this debate. Those who argue for a formal style declare that Shakespeare could not have got naturalistic acting from his boys and so the acting was either wholly or predominantly formal.¹⁹ The most balanced and sensible statement on the subject comes from John Russell Brown who argues that

formalism on the stage was fast dying out in Shakespeare's day, and . . . a new naturalism was a kindling spirit in his theater. This naturalism was not what we understand by the word today, but, in contrast to formalism, it did aim at an illusion of real life.²⁰

The evidence we have suggests that what was true of the adult actor was also true of the boy actor. Contemporary accounts make no concessions and the boy actor, like his older colleague, strove to

merit John Webster's words: "What we see him personate, we thinke truely done before us".²¹

The most striking piece of evidence relates to the leading boy actor of Shakespeare's Company itself. An Oxford don described briefly a visit to Oxford by the King's Men in 1610 during which they performed Othello. His reference to the performance concentrates, not on the celebrated Burbage, but on the skill of the boy actor who played Desdemona:

Moreover, that famous Desdemona killed before us by her husband, although she always acted her whole part supremely well, yet when she was killed she was even more moving, for when she fell back upon the bed she implored the pity of the spectators by her very face.²²

This impressive tribute to the competence of the boy actor--who is not mentioned as such; the personator has become the woman personated--receives support from other sources. An English traveller's account of a visit to a theatre in Venice in 1608 offers implicit testimony to the skill of English boy actors: "I saw women acte, a thing that I never saw before, . . . and they performed it with as good a grace, action, gesture, and whatsoever convenient for a Player, as ever I saw any masculine Actor."²³ In Ben Jonson's The Devil is an Ass (1616), there is an account of how in real life the boy actor Dick Robinson, masquerading as a lawyer's wife, attended a dinner and got away with his impersonation. The Puritans' attacks on the playing of women's parts by boys points to their ability, in the words of John Rainoldes, "to counterfeit her actions, her wanton kisse, her impudent face, her wicked speeches and enticements".²⁴ Stephen Gosson declares that the boy actors put on

"not the apparell onely, but the gate, the gestures, the voyce, the passions of a woman".²⁵

If we turn to a slightly later age, we have the prompter John Downes's glowing account of Kynaston, one of the last transvestist boy actors, who "being then very young made a complete female stage beauty, performing his parts so well . . . that it has since been disputable among the judicious, whether any woman that succeeded him so sensibly touch'd the audience as he".²⁶ Downes's judgement is confirmed by Samuel Pepys, who is also struck by Kynaston's beauty as a woman.²⁷ Nearer still to our own day, Ellen Terry saw the greatest actor of our age as Katherine in a school production of The Taming of the Shrew in 1922, when young Laurence was only fifteen years old: "This gives us an idea of what the boy-actors in Shakespeare's time were like, yet people assume they were clumsy hobbledehoys".²⁸ In Tokyo in 1976 a Japanese actor was cast as Lady Macbeth because Japanese male players have traditionally been regarded as supremely able to convey femininity.²⁹ And we should not forget the extraordinary skills of the modern-day female impersonator--as opposed to the comic drag artist--whose fascination for his audience lies in the magically complete transformation of his sexual identity; as far as the eye can tell, he is what we know he is not.

The proficiency of the boy actors greatly disturbed the Puritans: the figure of a woman played by a boy actor on the Elizabethan stage was sexually both complex and subversive. Comments by John Rainoldes, an Oxford don involved in a debate in

the 1590's on the propriety of boys playing women, and William Prynne, a Puritan who hysterically attacked the immorality of the stage at interminable length, emphasize an audience's continuing consciousness of the boy actor as a boy whilst he is on-stage as a woman. Rainoldes asks

Can wise men be persuaded that there is no wantonnesse in the players partes, when experience sheweth that the audience's senses are moved, affections are delited, heartes though strong and constant are vanquished by such players? that an effeminate stage player, while he faineth love, imprinteth wounds of love?

Such transvestism, he remarks earlier, leads to practices of "beastlie filthiness, or rather more than beastlie".³⁰ Prynne supports this view:

This putting on of women's array (especially to act a lascivious, whorish, love-sicke Play upon the Stage) must needs be sinful, yea abominable: because it . . . excites many Adulterous filthy lusts, both in the Actors and Spectators; and draws them on both to contemplative and actual lewdnesse.³¹

Similarly Stephen Gosson declares that the boys' acting is full of "effeminate gestures to rauish the sence; and wanton speache, to whet desire too inordinate lust".³² Clearly to these three men at least the sexual identity of a woman played by a boy actor was powerfully ambiguous in its mingling of masculine and feminine sexuality.

[The source of the Puritans' condemnation of the boy actors--their awareness of the boy behind the woman--provides Thomas Heywood with his main argument in defending the practice of transvestist playing: "But to see our youths attired in the habit of women, who knowes not what their intents be? who cannot distinguish them by their names, assuredly knowing thay are but to represent such a

Lady, at such a time appoynted?"³³ Of course the same may be said of the boy actor's older fellows who play princes or soldiers or Greek heroes. Thomas More wrote of an earlier generation of actors that the audience know perfectly well "that he that playeth the sowdayne is percase a sowter", yet if anyone should address him as such another spectator "might hap to break his head, and worthy for marring the play".³⁴ This is equally true of the Globe audience watching the professional Burbage as Hamlet and then as several other characters in the space of a week. "Enter Kempe and Cowley" very aptly expresses what must have been the audience's initial response to the first appearance of Dogberry and Verges. As Samuel Johnson observed, an audience never really forget they are in a theatre watching a play. But this awareness of the stage as a stage and the actors as actors is not a constant—clearly its place in our experience of Ibsen and Shakespeare is very different: it can be manipulated in various ways. Writing of this dual awareness of play world and real world, S. L. Bethell has argued that the dominant characteristic of what he calls the popular dramatic tradition is "multi-consciousness": that is, "the audience's ability to respond simultaneously and unconsciously on more than one plane of attention at the same time".³⁵ It is upon this capacity for multiple awareness that the play within the play and the boy actor playing a woman could draw.

Bethell's principle of multi-consciousness fits very well the awareness of the actor stressed in the responses of Rainoldes, Prynne and Heywood to boys playing women. But it must be remembered that

the account of the performance of the King's Company's leading boy as Desdemona at Oxford in 1610 presents a different response, and the variety of response should be emphasized. Clearly an audience "forgot" that the boys were male when the dramatist wanted them to do so. In a period of extravagant expenditure on stage costumes--Henslowe lists a cloak that cost more than a third of what Shakespeare paid for a house in Stratford--and one that frequently used lavish apparel as a metaphor for our transient, earthly identities, the contribution of magnificent gowns in transforming a boy into Desdemona or Olivia or Beatrice should not be underestimated.

For an audience to see for a moment characters such as Desdemona or Juliet or Brutus's Portia as young men would have been disastrous. They are women entrapped primarily by their femininity, more securely and fatally bound than any of the heroines in the comedies. Portia the model wife, who, like Kate Percy before her, begs her husband to share his worries, finds that she has "a man's mind, but a woman's might" (II.iv.8). A woman such as Lady Macbeth, who, like Tamora before her, aspires to a man's might, calling the spirits to unsex her--"Come to my woman's breasts, / And take my milk for gall" (I.v.47-8)--so that she can enter the political fray, is masculine and so unnatural. But her masculinity is rather different from Rosalind's as Ganymede and does not depend in the same way on the audience's awareness of the actor who plays her. If Shakespeare could make his audience forget that the boys were male, he could of course also choose to remind them of this fact. Robertson Davies denies any significance to the "many instances . . .

in which the female characters make remarks which might be taken as drawing attention to the fact that they were played by boys".³⁶ Such remarks relate almost exclusively to the comic heroine who adopts masculine disguise, and remarks of this kind by the heroine herself or the other characters constitute one means by which Shakespeare creates and directs his audience's sense of the ambiguity in the heroine's identity. He draws upon a multi-conscious response in which the audience's perception of the figure of the disguised woman is at moments vitally conditioned by their knowledge of the boy actor's sex.

In his notes to Beaumont and Fletcher's Philaster, Lamb remarks: "What an odd double confusion it must have made, to see a boy playing a woman playing a man: one cannot disentangle the perplexity without some violence to the imagination".³⁷ Little sustained effort has been made to disentangle this perplexity in Shakespeare's comedies. The device of the heroine in masculine disguise has long been praised as one of their most charming elements. By means of it Shakespeare gives his heroine a "special intimacy"³⁸ with the audience. Victor Freeburg lumps sexual disguise in with all other kinds of disguise as a device whose introduction initiates and whose discovery resolves confusion; its value lies in complicating the plot. In passing he remarks on the "piquancy" and "whimsical attractiveness" that the use of boy actors may have given the part of the disguised heroine.³⁹ Surprisingly Anne Righter treats disguise rather cursorily, remarking unhelpfully that "Deceit, both comic and tragic, frequently implies disguise",⁴⁰ but making no

distinction amongst the various kinds of disguise. The disguises of Vincentio and Edgar are theatrically very different from those of Portia and Rosalind. Even the psychoanalytic critics have shown uncharacteristic restraint. Before the recent growth of feminist criticism, only Northrop Frye stressed the central importance of sexual disguise to the form and thought of Shakespeare's comedy. In Frye's analysis of the structure of comedy, sexual disguise belongs to the second of its three phases: the "period of confusion and sexual licence . . . that we may call the phase of temporarily lost identity". This phase is usually portrayed by the heroine's "loss of sexual identity", signified by her disguise as a young man. Frye's analysis is open to several criticisms. His relentlessly synthesizing vision stresses broad generic similarities at the expense of individual characteristics. He blurs important distinctions: he sees no differences in the disguises of Portia and Viola, and he brackets together "the activity of the heroine, or, in some cases, her passivity" as the usual means of bringing about the creation of the new society.⁴¹ His categorical definition of the heroine's sexual disguise as a loss of identity ignores the fact that it is at least as much an extension of identity, a testing of the self in new roles. Finally, he says nothing about the theatrical dimension of the sexual disguises nor about their place in the comedies' thinking on sexual and social relationships.

Shakespeare's disguised women are closely related to changing ideas about sexual identity and marriage in the sixteenth century. The woman wearing masculine dress was not merely a stage-type--

Freeburg notes forty examples--but was also a social phenomenon that attracted great attention. The fashion of women adopting masculine apparel appears to have been quite widespread in Italy, where it was noted by English travellers, and in Gl' Ingannati the heroine in her boy's clothes remarks that she has "seen hundreds in Rome dressed like this".⁴² The most famous English example was Mary Frith, or Moll Cutpurse as she became known, who confessed in court that "being at a play about three quarters of a year since at the Fortune in man's apparel [she had made various] immodest and lascivious speeches", as well as sitting on the stage to sing a song.⁴³ Moll is the central character of Middleton and Dekker's The Roaring Girl (c. 1608) which presents her as the possessor of considerable, if unconventional, moral integrity. But elsewhere the adoption of masculine dress by a woman is declared to signal moral degeneracy and promiscuity, as in the two pamphlets Hic Mulier and Haec-vir (1620) which attack the masculine woman and the feminine man.

The fashions of masculine and feminine dress were converging in a number of points. In Middleton's A Mad World, My Masters (1604-6), Follywit remarks that in disguising as a woman he need only put on a skirt as the doublet is the same for men and women. Barnaby Rich comments on "this wearing and this imbrodering of long lockes, this curiositie that is used amongst men in freziling and curling of their hayre: this gentlewoman-like starcht bands".⁴⁴ In The Two Gentlemen of Verona Julia has only to "knit [her hair] up in silken strings, / With twenty odd-conceited true-love knots" (II.vii.45-6) for it to pass as a boy's. William Harrison wrote

that he had "met with some of these trulls in London so disguised that it hath passed my skill to discern whether they were men or women" and that "women are become men, and men turned into monsters".⁴⁵ Such transvestist tendencies in fashion raised questions not only about the custom of differentiating male and female in dress from puberty onwards but also about the various assumptions concerning masculine and feminine sexuality.⁴⁶ In Beaumont and Fletcher's Love's Cure, or the Martial Maid (c. 1622-3), the heroine has been brought up as a boy and her brother as a girl. When their parents try to revert them to kind--a variation of the nature versus nurture theme--they meet with no success. This growing interest in the blurring of sexual distinctions in an age that had very clear established notions of what a man was and what a woman was, rigidly differentiating their respective roles and areas of activity, colours much of Shakespeare's comedy.

These sexually subversive trends had connections with developments in humanist thinking on the position of women in a male-dominated society which restricted their social roles to daughter, wife and mother, each defined in relation to the men of the family. Agrippa describes the constraints of their position:

A woman by and by as soon as she is borne, and from the first beginning of her years, is detained in sloth at home, and as incapable of another Province, she is permitted to think of nothing besides her Needle or the like, when afterwards she reacheth ripenesse of age, she is delivered up to the jealous rule of her husband, or else shut up in the perpetual Brideswell of Nuns.⁴⁷

He might almost be describing the severely restricted situations in which so many of Shakespeare's women--most obviously Hermia--find

themselves trapped. The new interest in the status of women affected ideas about love and marriage and so about the balance of power between male-female relationships and all-male relationships. The tension between the claims of love and the powerful medieval code of masculine friendship is most clearly present in various forms in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Merchant of Venice, Much Ado About Nothing, All's Well that Ends Well, Othello and even Antony and Cleopatra, in which Cleopatra's tactic of "temperament", crossing Antony at every opportunity, staging scenes, forcing him to commit himself to her again and again, is designed to banish Roman thoughts, to prise him loose from the male-dominated world of "the young man" Caesar's Rome (III.xi.62), where politics and revelry are for men only. Tradition placed a man's relationships with other men before his relationships with women, even his beloved. Beatrice's "Kill Claudio!" (IV.1.285) challenges this priority which is seen in its most horrible form in Othello: "I am bound to thee for ever" (III.iii.217). Francis Bacon and Robert Burton celebrated friendship above love. "In life", writes Bacon, love "doth much mischief; sometimes like a siren, sometimes like a fury".⁴⁸ For Burton, love is a "mad and beastly passion", whereas friendship between men is virtuous and controlled by reason.⁴⁹ Women are fickle, their minds very opals, whereas men are constant. Anti-feminist satires increased rather than decreased in number during the sixteenth century. Bishop Aylmer's opinion of women in a sermon given before Queen Elizabeth is--despite some politic hedging--perfectly clear:

Women are of two sorts: some of them are wiser, better learned, discreeter, and more constant than a number of men; but another and worse sort of them are fond, foolish, wanton, flibbergibs, tattlers, triflers, wavering, witless, without council, feeble, careless, rash, proud, dainty, tale-bearers, eavesdroppers, rumour-raisers, evil-tongued, worse-minded, and in every way doltified with the dregs of the devil's dunghill.⁵⁰

The Homily on Marriage, one of the many from which all parsons were instructed by the Crown to read in church every Sunday from 1562 onwards, employs more restrained language, but still makes clear the inferior status, rights and character of all women, whether wives or not:

the woman is a weak creature, not endued with like strength and constancy of mind; therefore they be the sooner disquieted, and they be the more prone to all weak affections and dispositions of mind, more than men be; and lighter they be, and more vain in their phantasies and opinions.⁵¹

Such widespread hostility to love and distrust of women reinforced the system of arranged marriage founded on the basic sixteenth-century social notions of family and property. Montaigne affirms its value:

A man doth not marry for himselfe, whatsever he aleageth; but as much or more for his posteritie and familie. The use and interest of marriage concerneth our off-spring, a great way beyond us. Therefore doth this fashion please me, to guide it rather by a third hand, and by another's sence, then our owne.⁵²

In the sixteenth century, the family was primarily an institution for passing on a name and property, and a pragmatic calculation of family advantage was the accepted principle on which children were married off. The arranged marriage was a means of securing the best possible deal for the family: the daughter was her father's property to bestow on the suitor of his choice, as Capulet gives Juliet to Paris or

Baptista sells Bianca to the highest bidder. Although until the end of the sixteenth century almost all children were so conditioned by their upbringing and so economically helpless that they agreed without much complaint to the marriages arranged for them by their parents, the situation was not identical in all social classes. The less land or property a family owned, the less was the parental or familial control over the choice of marriage partner. So, in The Merry Wives of Windsor, Fenton frustrates the bourgeois Pages' plans for their daughter by marrying her secretly and presenting the arrangement to her parents as a fait accompli. This marriage is readily accepted, but when Hermia challenges her father's wishes in A Midsummer Night's Dream he threatens her with death or the nunnery and disinheritance; the difference in response derives from the amount of property involved in each case. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the children of rich, landed families could and usually did marry early, but they rarely married the person of their own choice. Like Hermia, a girl of a landed aristocratic family would have to put up vigorous and persistent resistance to her parents' plans if she was to have any hope of marrying the man she had chosen for herself. Children lower down the economic scale enjoyed a slightly greater freedom of choice, but financial considerations and parental pressures still predominated.

There were, however, several factors encouraging a trend towards greater liberty of choice in marriage. The Christian humanists--Colet, More, Erasmus, Vives, Elyot, who published The Defence of Good Women in 1545--had produced a body of work emphasizing

the value of education for women, reassessing the relations of husband and wife, and stressing the need for a greater measure of independence in the position of women. The emphasis of Protestant moral theology on "holy matrimony" gradually brought about a modification of the rigid system of the arranged marriage. To retain the notion of "holy matrimony" it was essential that a couple should develop some affection for each other, and so it was necessary to allow children some right to reject their parents' candidate on grounds of personal antipathy. The sermons' emphasis on the importance of married love played a part in what Lawrence Stone calls "the shift from a kin-oriented to a nuclear family".⁵³ The Church's encouragement of a more intense emotional bonding in marriage thus weakened familial influence. Beatrice shows herself au courant when she remarks: "It is my cousin's duty to make cursy and say, 'Father, as it please you'. But yet for all that, cousin, let him be a handsome fellow, or else make another cursy, and say, 'Father, as it please me'" (II.i.45-8).

The weakening of familial influence made the married couple a newly independent unit, set apart from the family. Increasingly dependent on her husband alone and responsive to the Church's stress on the place of mutual affection and loyalty in marriage, the wife began to answer her husband's demands on her with reciprocal ones of her own. In Wilkins's Miseries of Enforced Marriage (1606), Scarborough lectures Clare on proper wifely devotion--"To be a wife is to be dedicate"--but she replies "As women owe a duty, so do men".⁵⁴ Wives begin to ask, like Adriana in The Comedy of Errors, "Why should

their liberty than ours be more?" (II.i.10).

Lawrence Stone has grouped these impulses towards greater personal independence with others in the growth of what he calls "affective individualism", which he defines thus:

firstly, a growing introspection and interest in the individual personality; and secondly, a demand for personal autonomy and a corresponding respect for the individual's right to privacy, to self-expression, and to the free exercise of his will within limits set by the need for social cohesion: a recognition that it is morally wrong to make exaggerated demands for obedience, or to manipulate or coerce the individual beyond a certain point in order to achieve social or political ends.⁵⁵

This notion is close to Shakespeare's thinking on individuation as it relates to the situation of women in the comedies. In these plays he is continuously interested in how women can achieve a greater degree of personal autonomy in a society dominated by men. His heroines free themselves from the narrow constraints that bind them. Again and again he explores the circuitous routes women must follow to become independent enough to win--or, once won, to keep--their chosen men, extending their old roles and shaping new ones to solve the problems they face in seeking to direct their own lives. In this enterprise their chief resource is the flexibility most characteristically signified by the adoption of disguise.

It is this flexibility that enables the disguised woman not only to reorder her own life but also to rejuvenate that of her society. Susan Snyder observes that "Comedy celebrates the flexibility that ensures new life. In character relationships, in plot movement, and in perspective it rejects single necessity for multiple possibility".⁵⁶ In Shakespearian comedy, those who initially disdain

love and marriage and, like the courtiers in Love's Labour's Lost or Beatrice and Benedick, commit themselves to celibacy, or, like Bertram, to a succession of one-night stands, expose their own immaturity. To live and die a virgin is, as Parolles points out, "against the rule of nature" (I.i.133-4). All the heroines-- Beatrice only needs prompting--have nature on their side: they reject singleness and commit themselves to the winning of a mate in marriage. In the comedies, maturity and marriage are closely connected; marriage is seen as a form of self-extension and self-completion, a necessary stage in the growth to maturity. In Erasmus's Praise of Folly (1511), Folly reminds the audience that Plato called "the madness of lovers . . . the highest form of happiness. For anyone who loves intensely lives not in himself but in the object of his love, and the further he can move out of himself into his love, the happier he is".⁵⁷ Love, then, is a way of breaking free from and transcending the single, separate self, and this idea pervades Shakespearian comedy. In comedy, Shakespeare worked out a conception of mature, multiple identity--as opposed to the immature, single (in both senses) identity to which his men almost invariably try to cling--largely through the use of disguise in designing his heroines for the boy actor who disguised to play his part and then must disguise again.

Shakespeare was, of course, working along parallel lines in the histories, in such multi-faceted characters as Richard II--"Thus play I in one person many people" (V.v.31)--and Hal, that epitome of role-playing man placed between the Vice-like fluidity of Falstaff

and the lunatic rigidity of Hotspur: "I am now of all humours that have showed themselves humours since the old days of goodman Adam to the pupil age of this present twelve o'clock at midnight" (II.iv.90-3). In the histories, the concept of multiple identity is developed in Shakespeare's examination of kingship and the demands it imposes on the individual personality. (It is worth noting that there is no major woman's part in Richard II or the Henriad. They are Burbage plays: in the histories, the flexible, multiple identity is the right of his parts. One might speculate on how far Shakespeare's division of his labour between histories and comedies in the 1590's arises from or reflects internal company politics.)

The conception of multiple identity that Shakespeare developed through exploring kingship in the histories and disguise in the comedies also energizes the tragedies. In Shakespearian tragedy, the flexibility that is discovered and realized in disguise in comedy is usually an initial characteristic of the tragic hero. The problem of Hamlet and Antony is not to achieve a multiple identity, but rather to retain it in circumstances that fatally threaten it. Macbeth discovers in himself potentialities that lead him to murder Duncan, but these very qualities ultimately make it impossible for him to survive this deed that is never "done". Lear casts off his role as king in a great scene of his own staging and then perversely continues to play it, only to find that in the new drama he has set in motion he is allotted only a bit-part. Only Othello lacks a flexibility comparable to that of these four tragic heroes, and his distinction is closely related to the profound influence of Shakespearian comedy

on Othello. The Moor, self-taught in the courtly love conventions of his adopted culture, grows out of the lovers in the comedies. His identity and conception of love are single, and fixed, and the problem he encounters is the comic one of maturing identity, now extended beyond courtship into marriage. When Iago suggests alternative ways of seeing his experience and Desdemona, new factors to be taken into account, Othello cannot cope:

I think my wife be honest, and think she is not;
I think that thou art just, and think thou art not.
I'll have some proof:

(III.iii.390-2)

Clutching at the certainty of proof one way or the other, Othello loses his carefully constructed identity--"Othello's occupation's gone!" (III.iii.363)--but not with the beneficial results of losing oneself to find oneself in the comedies: chaos is come again. In the tragedies, with the exception of Othello, what in the comedies is the solution to the problem posed becomes the problem itself. The tragic hero's inability to shed his flexibility paradoxically produces the most unyielding rigidity: the square peg of the hero will not fit the round hole of the role his situation demands of him. It is this conflict that sparks the characteristic assertion of inviolable identity: "My name's Macbeth" (V.vii.7); "I am / Antony yet" (III.xiii.92-3); "I am Duchess of Malfi still"; and even, "I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman".

The concept of multiple identity in Shakespeare's plays is, of course, closely connected with the Globe's reputed motto "Totus mundus agit histrionem", a version of the Renaissance commonplace best expressed by Erasmus and Montaigne:

Now, what else is the whole life of man but a sort of play? Actors come on wearing their different masks and all play their parts until the producer orders them off the stage, and he can often tell the same man to appear in different costume, so that now he plays a king in purple and now a humble slave in rags.⁵⁸

All the world doth practice stage-playing. Wee must play our parts duly, but as the part of a borrowed personage. Of a visard and apparence, wee should not make a real essence, nor proper of that which is another. Wee cannot distinguish the skinne from the shirt.⁵⁹

Identity outside the theatre is as much a role as the identity of a character on the stage. The Mayor of Bordeaux and Michel, Lord of Montaigne are as distinct as Burbage and Henry V and Henry V and the public role of king. What distinguishes Shakespeare's characters is not simply that they are actors as are all men, but that so many of them employ essentially theatrical strategies in organizing and making sense of their experience, in fashioning their selves. In disguise in the comedies and in playing the king in the histories, Shakespeare continually explores the concept of identity as performance. Shakespeare's characters typically approach the problems of their lives--of being themselves--as an actor approaches the problems of a part. This is clearest in Hamlet, who repudiates not only the theatrical enterprise when he asserts he has "that within which passeth show" (I.ii.85), but also the very core of his being itself. For in Shakespeare being is playing, and a man's identity is composed of "actions that a man might play" (I.ii.94), just as Burbage's part is a design composed of signals to suggest an inwardness of self in Hamlet. The part of Hamlet is on one level a recapitulation of Burbage's major roles on the stage so far: the Prince (Hal), the lover (Romeo), the mad hero of a revenge play (Hieronimo), the aspiring

noble murderer (Brutus). Now, in being Hamlet, he must play them all. This concept of identity as performance is most starkly expressed in the Fool's reply to Lear's question "Who is it that can tell me who I am?": "Lear's shadow" (I.iv.238-9). Actor and part are not one: Lear plays the man he is--and badly, in the Fool's opinion. The practice of doubling minor parts in the Elizabethan theatre must have reinforced this way of thinking about identity. That the audience would accept one actor as several minor characters in the same play suggests a flexibility in their notion of dramatic character--of what a character on the stage actually is--which the one-actor-one-part procedure of the modern subsidized theatre largely disregards. In Shakespeare's comedies, it is the flexibility of his actors, of his audience's way of seeing, and of his heroines confronting their experience in disguise--all the various kinds of flexibility we have observed--that unlocks their distinctive dramatic energies.

CHAPTER TWO

SOME OF THESE TRULLS: DISGUISES OF LOVE

In A Defence of Poetry (1595), Sidney criticises contemporary dramatists for playing fast and loose with the unities of place and time, "the two necessary companions of all corporal actions". On the contemporary stage, he complains,

you shall have Asia of the one side, and Afric of the other, and so many other under-kingdoms, that the player when he cometh in, must ever begin with telling where he is, or else the tale will not be conceived Now, of time they are much more liberal: for ordinary it is that two young princes fall in love; after many traverses, she is got with child delivered of a fair boy; he is lost, groweth a man, falls in love, and is ready to get another child; and all this in two hours' space:¹

Despite Sidney's strictures this practice continues in the 1580s and, in the early years of the next decade, finds its most accomplished exponent in Shakespeare, whose diligent negligence in the matter of the unities has become almost legendary. In the course of the 1580s and early 1590s the popular drama's neglect of the unities of place and, more importantly, time becomes central to its attempts to present the development of character in time. The popular drama's flexible notion of dramatic time is crucial in the movement from an Italian-influenced comedy with fixed, static characters--most obvious in stock types like the senex or the amoroso--to a comedy centred on individualized characters in transition. To present the transformation of character demands the dramatization of more

story-time than can be plausibly accommodated in the action of a single day. The nine months of story-time of Brooke's The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet (1562) must be compressed into "two hours traffic of our stage" (Rom., Pro., 12); accordingly the transformation of character must be telescoped into two hours stage-time. The dramatists' growing interest in character in process and in a character's capacity for change--through which time becomes an aspect of character--gradually enforces a new relation between the presentation of character and time. The relation between this development and the figure of the disguised heroine can be traced by examining several plays written in the fifteen or twenty years before Shakespeare produced The Two Gentlemen of Verona, in which the new concern with character fuses with the tradition of the disguised woman for the first time.

The heroine disguised as a young man makes her earliest known appearance in the anonymous Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes, written as early as 1576, revived by the Queen's Men around 1583 and finally printed in 1599. The princess Neronis disguises as a page-boy to flee her kidnapper, the King of Norway, and enters the service of a knight who is, unknown to her, Sir Clyomon, her disguised lover. The play has a great deal of plot--but not much else--and its action, with its various journeyings, covers months. Extensive use is made of what Anne Richter has called "extra-dramatic address"--it makes up the greater part of the play--and Sir Clyomon belongs to the period before the idea of the "self-contained play" had become firmly established.² The characters speak as readily and as easily

to the audience as to the other characters: "Jesu, what a gazing do you make at me, to see me in a gowne?" (1474),³ demands Subtle Shift when he appears "very brave". The play shows no interest in the development of character; the characters are static, ending the play as they began. We understand the characters--in so far as they have "character" to be understood--by what they tell us of themselves. Neronis's disguise neither complicates her character nor changes her relation to the audience. In disguise she speaks exactly as she did before she donned her page's outfit. The only change is a slight anxiety about the possibility of the audience's censure:

Neronis, ah who knoweth her, in painfull Pages show?
But no good lady will me blame, which of my case doth know:
But rather when they heare the truth, wherefore I am
disguised,
Thaile say it is an honest shift, the which I have devised:
(1262-4)

The "honest shift" of Neronis's disguise is set against the devious "shifts" of which the play's Vice-like Subtle Shift repeatedly boasts:

Ah Sirra, here was a shift according to my nature and
condition,
And a thousand shifts more I have, to put myself out of
suspition.

(934-5)

The morally reprehensible flexibility of his identity--a condition of his fixed role as Vice-figure--contrasts with the virtuous constancy which Neronis embodies.

Disguise in Sir Clyomon is used to conceal temporarily one character's identity from another, so prolonging and complicating the action. Disguise and identity have no psychological relation in the play and so Neronis's disguise is never a means of characterization.

The same is true of the disguises of Gallathea and Phyllida in John Lyly's Gallathea (c. 1584-5; printed, 1592), written for a boys' company and a courtly audience, with different assumptions about the nature of a play and the relation between its actors and audience. Like the author of Sir Clyomon, Lyly has no interest in creating characters whose experience changes or educates them. He has Gallathea gesture briefly at the psychological dimension of sexual disguise--"How now, Gallathea, miserable Gallathea, that having put on the apparel of a boy thou canst not also put on the mind!" (II.iv.1-2)⁴--but never develops this. Lyly is interested solely in designing an elegant dramatic debate on the familiar subject of love and chastity. The sexual confusion involved in the disguises and the girls' falling in love with each other is significant only in terms of its place in this debate as a demonstration of the irrational, self-deceiving nature of love. At the end of the play, Venus declares she will resolve the situation by transforming one of the girls into a boy, but "Neither of them shall know whose lot it shall be till they come to the church door" (V.iii.173-4). The resolution is perfectly appropriate because the girls are interchangeable tokens in an exquisitely constructed intellectual game played by Lyly, his actors and the court audience.

In Robert Greene's historical romance The Scottish History of James IV (c. 1590), the last pre-Shakespearian play to be discussed here, we encounter a dramatist who is, unlike the authors of Sir Clyomon and Gallathea, attempting to dramatize the transformation of character. The play presents the fall of the Scottish King in his

"lawless love to Ida" (II.ii.82)⁵ and his subsequent reform. Greene devotes most of the play to the King's degeneration and its private and public consequences. James's moral education is compressed into only two speeches after the announcement of the extraordinarily virtuous Ida's marriage in the final scene. Greene's difficulty in designing the character of the King is one that Shakespeare had to negotiate later in writing the part of Proteus: the metamorphosis into penitent is too abrupt and has not had adequate preparation in the preceding scenes. Set against the moral fall and rise of the King is the unchanging constancy of his Queen, Dorothea. Her role is that of Patient Griselda, gladly submitting to whatever treatment her husband cares to mete out to her. Rejecting the Scottish nobles' criticisms of the King's conduct, she declares

thou misconstrest his intent.
He doth but tempt his wife, he tries my love:
This injury pertains to me, not to you.
(II.ii.84-6)

But the King's warrant for her death complicates her role as a Griselda-figure. The threat of death fractures that role by making it impossible for her to continue to fulfil it at the court: "Since presence yields me death and absence life, / Hence will I fly disguised like a squire" (III.iii.119-20). Her escape in disguise is an evasion of the dictates of the role and of the new dangers involved in continuing to play it. Dorothea's disguise as a young man has, however, no organic relation to her role as a Griselda-like exemplar of constancy; it is simply the safest means of undertaking her journey. The disguise has no psychological dimension. When

Lady Anderson finds herself physically attracted to the young squire, the development is treated only as a second example of the uncontrollable nature of desire; her fall and abrupt repentance mirror the King's in miniature. To dramatize growth in Dorothea's character is not part of Greene's purpose: Dorothea exemplifies long-suffering wifely constancy pure and simple:

But constancy, obedience, and my love,
In that my husband is my lord and chief,
These call me to compassion of his estate;
Dissuade me not, for virtue will not change.
(V.v.68-71)

Ultimately her evasion of the dictates of the Griselda-role by her flight from the Scottish court is shown, paradoxically, to have preserved it, and she can return to the court to unite her husband and father in peaceful harmony.

In these three plays disguise is what Freeburg treats it as in all Elizabethan comedies: merely a plot-device or complicating factor.⁶ Disguise and character remain discrete; disguise has no psychological dimension. In The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Shakespeare establishes a new and much more complex relation between disguise and character. Like the other early comedies, The Two Gentlemen of Verona shows us Shakespeare tackling the problem that Robert Greene encountered in creating his Scottish king--that of dramatizing the development of character in time. In Shakespeare's first comedies this problem centres on his conception of love. In Love's Labour's Lost, Berowne's most famous speech defines love as a force of education and therefore of change, transformation, growth:

From women's eyes this doctrine I derive.
 They sparkle still the right Promethean fire;
 They are the books, the arts, the academes,
 That show, contain, and nourish all the world;
 Else none at all in aught proves excellent.

Let us once lose our oaths to find ourselves,
 Or else we lose ourselves to keep our oaths.
 (IV.iii.345-9, 356-7)

Love effects an interior transformation of identity. In the early comedies, Shakespeare is working out and developing techniques for dramatizing this process of education and growth. In Love's Labour's Lost, his would-be scholars break their oaths in discovering, like Musidorus in Arcadia, that no man can "resist his creation Certainly by love we are made, and to love we are made".⁷ But their education through love--~~Rosaline speaks of Berowne's~~ "reformation" (V.ii.859)--is to take place in the year and a day following the two days' action of the play itself. Thus both their education and the test of separation which constitutes an important part of it--and which so many of Shakespeare's lovers must undergo--is projected beyond the period of the play and beyond the tidy conventions of the traditional comedy, a point of which Berowne, frustrated of the desired happy ending, is acutely aware:

Ber. Our wooing doth not end like an old play;
 Jack hath not Jill: These Ladies' courtesies
 Might well have made our sport a comedy.
King. Come, sir, it wants a twelvemonth and a day,
 And then 'twill end.
Ber. That's too long for a play.
 (V.ii.864-8)

Shakespeare explicitly points out to his audience that he is not writing "an old play".

On the one occasion in the early comedies when he does write

such a play, it is "the most lamentable comedy, and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe", performed by actors who are clearly not "the best in this kind" (V.i.208), and starring Bottom who has proved himself singularly ill-equipped for the roles of lover and actor. Bottom seems to have been written almost as a paradigm and parody of the fixed, static character of the older drama. In the confusion of psychological and sexual identities in A Midsummer Night's Dream, the literal-minded, unimaginative Bottom remains resolutely himself, unchanged and unchangeable. His experiences in the forest have no effect on his sense of his own identity; he seems scarcely to notice that Titania is trying to seduce him. He wants to play all the parts in the mechanicals' play, but he "can play no part but Pyramus" (I.ii.79) and plays even this one incompetently, unable to assume a fictitious identity. Bottom knows exactly who and what he is. He instructs Quince to tell the audience "that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver" (III.i.18-21). His certainty of the fixity of his identity distinguishes him from the play's other lovers. At the sight of Bottom newly-adorned with the ass's head, Quince exclaims: "Thou art translated" (III.i.113-4). But, of course, he is not. Bottom lacks the capacity for change or transformation.

In The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Shakespeare is centrally concerned with characters who are translated; with young lovers who are in some sense changed by their experiences and go at least some of the way towards realizing their potentialities through growth. From the moment in the first scene when Proteus declares in soliloquy that love of Julia has "metamorphos'd" him (I.i.66), the play

explores the various kinds of transformation and constancy which Proteus and Julia embody or enact in their respective roles as lover and mistress. The fluidity of identity that they share--though its sources and value differ--distinguishes them from Valentine and Silvia who are essentially fixed characters, the faithful friend and lover and the constant mistress familiar from earlier romances.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona shows the education through love of both Proteus and Julia as they test themselves in the roles that the conventional codes of courtly behaviour assign them. Julia's disguise is central to the experience she undergoes and, for the first time, the heroine's disguise becomes the means of educating her lover, even though Proteus's capacity to learn is limited.

As well as contrasting the pairings of the lovers, Shakespeare contrasts the men and the women and their respective conceptions of love and courtship. This contrast is developed within the framework of the conventional love-versus-friendship débat-theme. When Valentine offers Silvia to Proteus in the final scene he is in the established tradition of men who, finding themselves rival lovers, place friendship before love and are then, as in Endimion, rewarded for their magnanimity by being given love as well--a bonus for good behaviour. Shakespeare, however, subverts the assumptions of this conventional resolution, not only by his satirical management of it, but also by his presentation of Julia and Silvia, the prominence he gives them in the play, and their obvious personal superiority to the men--a superiority in love that is signified visually by the figure of Julia in disguise as Sebastian.

As well as the code of friendship, the letter and spirit of courtly love pervade The Two Gentlemen of Verona. Valentine, who scorns love by which "the young and tender wit / Is turn'd to folly" (I.i.47-8) on his first appearance, displays, on his second, the "special marks" of a lover and is transported by the sight of a glove:

Ha! Let me see; ay, give it me, it's mine.
Sweet ornament, that decks a thing divine!
Ah, Silvia, Silvia!

(II.i.4-6)

Like Proteus, Valentine is "metamorphosed with a mistress" (II.i.29-30). He is the courtliest of courtly lovers in the same sense that Romeo is the most dejected of dejected lovers at the beginning of Romeo and Juliet. The object of his idolatry, however, persistently tries to evade the mannerisms and constraints of a formal courtly relationship. From her first words Silvia mocks the excesses of courtly expression:

Val. Madam and mistress, a thousand good morrows.

Speed. [Aside.] O, 'give-ye-good-ev'n! Here's a
million of manners.

Silvia. Sir Valentine and servant, to you two thousand.
(II.i.91-4)

Later, when her two "servants" Valentine and Thurio vie to show off their wit before their "mistress", Silvia deflates their contrived display: "A fine volley of words, gentlemen, and quickly shot off" (II.iv.30-1). In this attitude she is aligned with Speed, whose mocking commentary on the affected manner of Valentine the courtly lover, and on the situation generally, punctuates Valentine and Silvia's first meeting in the play. On this occasion (II.i), Silvia tries to make Valentine retain the letter to a rival which he has

written at her request solely out of "duty to your ladyship" (II.i.100):

Val. No, madam; so it stead you, I will write
 (Please you command) a thousand times as much
 And yet--
Silvia. A pretty period. Well, I guess the sequel;
 And yet I will not name it; and yet I care not.
 And yet take this again; and yet I thank you,
 Meaning henceforth to trouble you no more.
Speed. [Aside.] And yet you will; and yet another 'yet'.
 (II.i.91-4)

Speed underlines the stylized affectation and the intention of Silvia's confusion. The role of courtly mistress and idol in which her suitors cast her is so narrowly circumscribed that she has to resort to the pretence of staging this absurd charade in order to give Valentine a hint about her feelings whilst still remaining within the bounds of modesty.

Both the "mistresses" in The Two Gentlemen of Verona find themselves severely constrained by the forms of modesty. Julia bemoans Lucetta's failure to insist that she read Proteus's letter:

What fool is she, that knows I am a maid,
 And would not force the letter to my view!
 Since maids, in modesty, say 'no' to that
 Which they would have the profferer construe 'ay'.
 (I.ii.53-6)

The dictates of modesty conflict with her actual feelings. Knowing how she should behave, Julia plays the "maid", but Lucetta chooses to neglect her cue. Modesty is an obstacle to the establishment of a relationship, as Speed points out to Valentine: "For often have you writ to her, and she in modesty, / . . . could not again reply" (II.i.155-6). In the "balcony" scene in Romeo and Juliet, Juliet, realizing that Romeo has overheard her, casts off the form of modesty and speaks openly of her feelings:

Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face,
 Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
 For that which thou hast heard me speak tonight.
 Fain would I dwell on form; fain, fain deny
 What I have spoke. But farewell, compliment.
 Dost thou love me?

(II.ii.85-90)

Juliet's directness contributes to the exhilarating and liberating effect of that scene; she is breaking the rules, brushing aside Romeo's allegiance to the forms and his desire to swear his constancy by the moon. But in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Silvia must proceed indirectly and her hint encounters only Valentine's ridiculous and irritating obtuseness. He is blind to the "jest unseen, inscrutable, invisible, / As a nose on a man's face, or a weathercock on a steeple!" (II.i.128-9), and Speed has to explain to him the significance of Silvia's behaviour after her departure. Valentine's obtuseness surfaces again in his encounter with the Duke in III.i, when he confidently offers him advice on wooing in "the fashion of the time" (III.i.86). His display of conceit is immediately mocked in the cloak and ladder business when he is once again made to look absurd. In the same scene, his courtly discretion in concealing his love from the Duke, as Proteus concealed his from his father earlier (I.iii), is parodied by Launce: "He lives not now that knows me to be in love, yet I am in love, but a team of horse shall not pluck that from me; nor who 'tis I love; and yet 'tis a woman; but what woman I will not tell myself" (II.i.263-7). This routine culminates in his "cate-logue of her conditions", undercutting the courtly ideal with a Touchstone-like pragmatism in which wealth "makes the faults gracious" (III.i. 272,358).

Courtship in The Two Gentlemen of Verona is formalized, impersonal and governed by elaborate conventional courtesies. On Proteus's arrival at the Duke's court, it is perfectly acceptable for Valentine to ask Silvia to "entertain him / To be fellow-servant to your ladyship" (II.iv.99-100) because there is no personal relationship to be infringed upon. The men speak frequently and with unfounded confidence of the nature of their love, of women's love and of the way to win a woman. Valentine, of course, advises the Duke on tactics. The Duke in his turn reassures Thurio--who is, like Paris in Romeo and Juliet, the spanner thrown in the works by the woman's father--about Silvia's eventual acquiescence:

This weak impress of love is as a figure
Trenched in ice, which with an hour's heat
Dissolves to water and doth lose his form.
(III.ii.6-8)

This description might be more appropriately applied to Proteus, the practised lover, who criticises Thurio's performance as courtly lover and offers him some hints on how to succeed in the role:

You must lay lime, to tangle her desires
By wailful sonnets, whose composed rhymes
Should be full fraught with serviceable vows.

Say that upon the altar of her beauty
You sacrifice your tears, your sighs, your heart.
(III.i.68-70, 72-3)

But when Proteus follows his own advice in wooing Silvia he is summarily rejected and mocked:

Prot. Sir Proteus, gentle lady, and your servant.
Silvia. What's your will?
Prot. That I may compass yours.
Silvia. You have your wish: my will is even this,
That presently you hie you home to bed.
(IV.ii.88-91)

Silvia refuses to play the "mistress" to Proteus's courtly lover and vigorously attacks his deceitfulness and inconstancy. She asserts: "I am very loath to be your idol, sir" (IV.ii.125), but that is the role which the men's idea of women imposes on her. To Valentine, she is a "heavenly saint" (II.iv.140). In the scene in which she arranges her escape (IV.iii.), Silvia speaks to Eglamour in the inflated conventional courtesy style; it is the only way of conversing with the men in this play. They wish to court much in the fashion of Romeo and Rosaline. Valentine's speech on his banishment recalls Romeo's on his:

And why not death, rather than living torment?
 To die is to be banish'd from myself,
 And Silvia is myself: banish'd from her
 Is self from self.

(III.i.170-3)

His reponse is impeccable but absurd because his courtly ideal of Silvia and the worship due her grounds their courtship on the maintenance of a distance between them. Romeo, abandoning his non-relationship with Rosaline and responding to Juliet's initiative, exchanges that distance for direct contact and intimacy. The audience feel the impact of Romeo's banishment because he has something from which to be banished. But the relationship of Valentine and Silvia is without intimacy. Excepting the final scene of the play, they have only two scenes together. They are never alone and the elaborate indirectness of the letter-scene with Speed indicates the degree to which their contact is impersonal. Julia has only one scene with Proteus in which she is not disguised: the brief parting (II.ii). In the story in Montemayor's Diana (trans. 1598) which is the play's main source,

the courtship of Felix and Felismena, from whom Julia and Proteus derive, is much more extensively treated. Shakespeare has reduced the courtship to a circuitous exchange of letters and a parting. Before the final scene of the play, Julia shares as many lines of dialogue--a mere sixty to seventy--with Silvia as she does with Proteus. In contrast, Romeo and Juliet share one hundred and thirty lines of dialogue in the "balcony" scene alone. The separation of the lovers is a defining characteristic of courtship in The Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Impersonal courtship is set against the intimacy of masculine friendship. Valentine's eulogy on Proteus, though it quickly turns out to be mistaken, emphasizes that friendship is at least founded on shared experience: "from our infancy / We have convers'd, and spent our hours together" (II.iv.57-8). Throughout the play Valentine is a pattern of the virtuous friend, an exemplar against whom to judge how far Proteus falls short of the ideal. When, at first sight, Silvia instantly supplants Julia in his heart, Proteus is more--but not much more--concerned about his betrayal of Valentine's friendship than of Julia's love:

To leave my Julia, shall I be forsworn;
To love fair Silvia, shall I be forsworn;
To wrong my friend, I shall be much forsworn.
(II.vi.1-3)

The duties of friendship are primary; but when put to the test, self-interest or, in Proteus's phrase, the wish to "prove constant to myself" (II.vi.31), proves the stronger, and he betrays Valentine to the Duke--in the name of "the law of friendship" (III.i.5),

of course. He will seek "a sweeter friend" (II.vi.30) in Silvia. The value that the men place on friendship and the dubious nature of their love--Proteus's inconstancy, Valentine's idolatry, and the curious feeling that prompts Thurio to rush off to the forest "more to be reveng'd on Eglamour / Than for love of reckless Silvia" (V.ii.50-1)--threaten the position of the women, reducing them to tokens in a game played by the men alone. But Julia and Silvia are not the mere passive love objects, idols or tokens which the men's conception of courtship requires them to be. Their love is not a "weak impress" and it involves a commitment to lovers' being in the same place at the same time that is absent from the attitude of the men. Both Julia and Silvia try to loosen the restrictions imposed on them by the conventional social role of feminine passivity and modesty: they take an independent initiative and go after their respective men. Valentine is content to wander the forest bewailing his separation from Silvia, with no thought of doing anything about it:

Here can I sit alone, unseen of any
And to the nightingale's complaining notes
Tune my distresses, and record my woes.
(V.iv.4-6)

Not so Silvia; she engages Eglamour as chaperon and flees to the forest. Julia's impropriety in disguising as a boy and undertaking her journey alone is greater and she is very conscious that in following Proteus to the Duke's court she will be compromising the modesty proper to a virtuous and chaste young lady:

But tell me, wench, how will the world repute me
For undertaking so unstaied a journey?
I fear it will make me scandalis'd.
(II.vii.59-61)

Julia's disguise is "a disguise of love" (V.iv.106), as she says at the end of the play, a poignant metaphor for her constancy and one that underlines Proteus's shabby inconstancy. Her youthful femininity is clearly established in her first scene--Shakespeare gives his boy actor more than a quarter of Julia's lines in this scene--when she plays the "maid" by saying no when she means yes and comments on how characteristically feminine is her behaviour. The scene also makes clear her inexperience: it is she who asks the more worldly Lucetta's advice--"Wouldst thou then counsel me to fall in love?" (I.ii.2)--and it is Lucetta who comments on the suitors as Julia listens attentively. In the scene in which she decides to follow Proteus in disguise, she displays absolute faith in the "divine perfection" of Proteus (II.vii.13) and in his vow of "true constancy" (II.ii.8):

A thousand oaths, an ocean of his tears,
And instances of infinite of love,
Warrant me welcome to my Proteus.

His words are bonds, his oaths are oracles,
His love sincere, his thoughts immaculate,
His tears pure messengers sent from his heart,
His heart as far from fraud as heaven from earth.
(II.vii.69-71, 75-8)

Her words are poignantly ironic as the preceding scene has shown Proteus "metamorphos'd" once again, this time at the sight of Silvia. Julia idealizes Proteus as the perfect lover, confident that he is incapable of the "lover's perjuries" (Rom., II.ii.92) that so worry Juliet in the "balcony" scene. Nor is Julia troubled, as her prototype in the Diana is, by any thought that "if he were once seene or known of the Ladies in that Court (more beautiful and gracious then my selfe)

by occasion whereof, as also by absence (a capitall enimie to love) I might easily be forgotten".⁸ Julia's youthful idealism is to be short-lived and the process of disillusion is dramatized by means of her disguise.

In the scenes in which Julia appears disguised as the page Sebastian, Shakespeare creates what Bertrand Evans terms "a structure of discrepant awarenesses",⁹ in which differences in the awarenesses of the participants and differences between the participants' awarenesses and ours as an audience are exploited. The chief effect of this is, of course, dramatic irony by which Shakespeare creates the audience's sense of the psychological and sexual ambiguity of Julia disguised as Sebastian. In this way he explores the relation between Julia's character as it has already been established in the scenes with Lucetta and the demands which the assumption of her disguise imposes on her. The ambiguity of a character in disguise playing another character--she acts a part in a way which earlier disguised heroines had not--is crystallized in Julia's expressing herself from what is effectively a dual point of view. Her disguise becomes an aspect of her character as the audience perceive it. In the serenading scene, when Julia first discovers Proteus's inconstancy, the poignancy of the page's comments to the Host--"the musician likes me not", "He plays false, father", "that change is the spite", "I would always have one play but one thing" (IV.ii.55, 57, 67, 69)--and our privileged recognition of their full implications establishes the "special intimacy"¹⁰ that has been seen as characteristic of the disguised heroine's relationship with the audience. Julia's

realization that her image of Proteus is mistaken and her recognition of the constancy of men and the fragility of love when put to the tests of time and separation are mediated through her performance in the role of Sebastian. When Proteus sends his newly-engaged page to Silvia with Julia's ring, the tension between self and disguise-role breaks through at his mention of Julia:

Julia. She is dead belike?

Prot. Not so: I think she lives.

Julia. Alas!

Prot. Why dost thou cry 'Alas'?

Julia. I cannot choose but pity her.

(IV.iv.74-7)

She is like "an unperfect actor on the stage, / Who with his fear is put besides his part" (Sonnet 23). The control of her feelings on which the successful maintenance of her disguise depends is momentarily lost in her spontaneous "Alas!" But the situation is saved: "'Tis pity love should be so contrary; / And thinking on it makes me cry 'Alas'" (IV.iv.83-4). In the person of Sebastian she expresses what she has newly learnt. In her soliloquy after Proteus's departure, Julia contemplates the dilemma brought upon her by her love and the disguise that grows from it. She is

To praise his faith, which I would have dispraised.

I am my master's true confirmed love,

But cannot be true servant to my master

Unless I prove false traitor to myself.

Yet I will woo for him, but yet so coldly,

As (heaven it knows) I would not have his speed.

(IV.iv.103-7)

Like Viola later, Julia finds herself a victim of her disguise: she discovers that true service--in a play that returns repeatedly to the relationship between master and servant and "mistress" and "servant"--

involves a denial of self. The sacrifice of her female sexual identity in her masculine disguise comes to signify this visually on-stage. Julia's literal metamorphosis for love and her readiness to "prove false traitor to myself" is set against Proteus's figurative metamorphosis--"Thou, Julia, thou hast metamorphos'd me" (I.i.66)--and his egoistic determination to "prove constant to myself" (II.vii.31).

In the serenading scene, Julia and Silvia are connected by their criticism of Proteus. Julia's criticism is necessarily confined to brief ambiguous remarks about the music to an inconsequential third person. Silvia harangues Proteus directly, easily deflating him. His only answer to her attack on his unfaithfulness to Julia and Valentine is a ludicrous lie: Julia is dead and so is Valentine. Shakespeare chooses not to allow him the lengthy justification to be found in Montemayor. Once again, the lover is made to look absurd, the woman sensible. This episode and Julia's later visit to Silvia to collect the picture Proteus has requested stress that the women are on the same side, tacitly bound together by common sense and a shared faith in the value of constancy in love. In Montemayor, the lady falls in love with the page and his rejection of her leads to her death.¹¹ Shakespeare drives no such wedge between his women. Julia's visit is the only occasion on which the two women speak to each other but the episode is remarkable for the harmony of outlook that it quickly establishes. Silvia gives Julia the answers she most dearly wants to hear. She rejects Proteus's gift of Julia's ring:

Silvia. Though his false finger have profan'd the ring,
Mine shall not do his Julia so much wrong.

Julia. She thanks you.

Silvia. What say'st thou?

(IV.iv.134-7)

As in her earlier "Alas!" when speaking to Proteus, Julia's disguise slips momentarily and she is put beside her part; her gratitude surfaces. She responds to Silvia's sympathetic interest--"Is she not passing fair?" (IV.iv.146)--in words charged with the poignancy so marvellously present in Viola's words on her father's daughter who loved a man:

She hath been fairer, madam, than she is:
When she did think my master lov'd her well,
She, in my judgment was as fair as you.
But since she did neglect her looking-glass,
And threw her sun-expelling mask away,
The air hath starv'd the roses in her cheeks,
And pinch'd the lily-tincture of her face,
That now she is become as black as I.

(IV.iv.147-54)

The self-distancing involved here and the movement from "she" to "I" that presents the false appearance of Sebastian as true are expressed in theatrical terms in her next speech on playing "the woman's part" (IV.iv.158). As Anne Richter says, this speech sets up "a series of illusions receding into depth of which the most remote, the tears wrung from Julia by the stage presentation of a lover's perfidy, in fact represents reality":¹²

And at that time I made her weep agoood,
For I did play a lamentable part.
Madam, 'twas Ariadne, passioning
For Theseus' perjury, and unjust flight;
Which I so lively acted with my tears
That my poor mistress, moved therewithal,
Wept bitterly; and would I might be dead,
If I in thought felt not her very sorrow.

(IV.iv.163-70)

In evoking the Chinese box complexity of the theatrical status of Sebastian--a boy actor playing a woman playing a boy describing how he played a woman on the stage before Julia--these words crystallize the restrictive, imprisoning aspect of Julia's disguise, which denies her any fruitful or direct outlet for her feelings and turns them back into herself so that she is both actor and audience. The part of "true servant" to Proteus is, indeed, a "lamentable" one, but she must act it "lively". Silvia is moved to tears by the page's words and offers her purse "For thy sweet mistress' sake, because thou lov'st her" (IV.iv.175). Julia's comment as Silvia departs--"And she shall thank you for't, if e'er you know her. / A virtuous gentlewoman, mild, and beautiful" (IV.iv.177-8)--underlines the concord between the two women and strengthens the impression that if the women rather than the men were in control in this play the complications would be speedily resolved. This scene is the culmination of the process by which Shakespeare has expanded Julia and, to some extent, Silvia beyond the cardboard-cut-out figure of the woman in the traditional friendship story, significant only as a token in the testing of the friends.

The final scene of the play turns this on its head as the men, firmly in control, persist in reducing the women to such tokens. In this scene Valentine is placed in exactly the same situation as Julia in IV.ii: he, too, overhears Proteus's wooing of Silvia and so discovers his friend's unfaithfulness. When he intervenes to prevent Proteus's assault on Silvia, his words are concerned only with the treachery of his "friend of an ill fashion" for whose sake he must

"count the world a stranger" (V.iv.61, 70). He totally ignores Silvia's presence; she is merely incidental to the main issue. Proteus suffers a four and a half line outbreak of conscience and Valentine declares:

Then I am paid;
And once again I do receive thee honest.
Who by repentance is not satisfied,
Is nor of heaven, nor earth; for these are pleas'd:
By penitence th'Eternal wrath's appeas'd.
And that my love may appear plain and free,
All that was mine in Silvia I give thee.
(V.iv.77-83)

In the terms of the code of friendship, Valentine's sentiments are impeccable and his magnanimity unimpeachable. But his renunciation of Silvia is ludicrous, laughable and exasperating. We respond with impatient irritation--it is the last straw. Silvia is to be a mere silent bystander whilst the men decide who shall have her. We rebel against the attempt to resolve the complications in the manner of the traditional friendship story because the women have too much substance to be reduced to the narrow role Valentine's values would impose on them. If his renunciation is the last straw for the audience, it is certainly too much for Julia: "O me unhappy!" (V.iv. 84). The slips she has made earlier--her cry "Alas!", giving the wrong letter to Silvia, her thanks to her rival--have prepared us for her swoon and error with the ring in this scene, signalling the difficulty of sustaining her disguise. Her femininity finally disrupts her disguise irrevocably, despite her attempts to cover up her slip. The men, oblivious to Silvia's presence, respond immediately to a page's swoon. In disclosing her identity to the

others, Julia presents her disguised appearance as a visual metaphor for both the constancy of women and the inconstancy of men:

Behold her that gave aim to all thy oaths,
 And entertain'd 'em deeply in her heart.
 How oft hast thou with perjury cleft the root!
 O Proteus, let this habit make thee blush.
 Be thou asham'd that I have took upon me
 Such an immodest raiment; if shame live
 In a disguise of love!
 It is the lesser blot modesty finds,
 Women to change their shapes, than men their minds.
 (V.iv.100-8)

In the burlesque of the friendship code in the final scene of Peele's The Old Wives' Tale (c. 1593), Eumenides is prevented from hacking the passive and resigned Delia in half with his sword only by the other friend's relinquishing his claim. In The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Julia's masculine disguise allows her to intervene indirectly in Valentine and Proteus's pass-the-parcel treatment of Silvia, who, as a mere woman, is powerless. She affirms feminine constancy by adopting the shape of inconstant man; she plays the male role of "true servant" better than Proteus, sacrificing her female sexual identity in so doing.

The resolution of The Two Gentlemen of Verona has been severely criticised and almost universally condemned as a failure. The most frequent and representative comment on the play is that the characters other than Julia and Launce

are so bound by the conventional limitations of romance that they never achieve any dramatic existence. Any life that Julia and Launce achieve arises from the fact that they are permitted to escape these limitations or lie outside them in the first place. If only Valentine or Proteus had been allowed to escape also, the dramatist could have used that character along with the other two to effect a dramatically satisfying resolution.¹³

There is a large helping of wishful thinking in such comments, a desire to have Proteus and Valentine what they patently are not. At one level there is indeed an uneasiness in Shakespeare's handling of dramatic character and it centres on the design of Proteus and especially his reform in the final scene. But the critics' righteous outcry against the ending fails to recognize a significant aspect of Shakespeare's purpose in his presentation of the men not only in this comedy but also in the ones that follow it. Again and again the comedies insist on the lasting immaturity of men, the tenacity with which they cling to adolescence. In the figures of his young lovers, Shakespeare seeks to balance opposing impulses: a latent capacity for some kind of growth and a protean changeableness that reveals the persisting emotional instability of the adolescent. The deceitful flexibility Proteus shows in playing false the roles of friend and lover recalls a character of an older kind such as Subtle Shift, the Vice-figure in Sir Clyomon, whose actor-like fluidity is a condition of his fixity of character, of his incapacity for real change or growth. In Proteus, a Vice-like fluidity of identity becomes a signal of the possibility of eventual, genuine change, once his inconstancy is mastered. As lover and friend, Proteus is set against the static character of Valentine who sustains the conventional roles of faithful friend and constant "servant" with adolescent fervour and in a manner impossible for the former. Proteus is an attempt to dramatize emotional volatility in a more detailed way than in the group of young courtiers in Love's Labour's Lost.

Proteus's reform is presented in two brief speeches in the final scene:

My shame and guilt confounds me.
 Forgive me, Valentine: if hearty sorrow
 Be a sufficient ransom for offence,
 I tender 't here; I do as truly suffer,
 As e'er I did commit.

Than men their minds? 'Tis true: O heaven, were man
 But constant, he were perfect. That one error
 Fills him with faults; makes him run through all th' sins;
 Inconstancy falls off, ere it begins.
 What is in Silvia's face but I may spy
 More fresh in Julia's, with a constant eye?
 (V.iv.73-7, 109-14)

Proteus's repentance immediately follows his moral nadir: his attempted rape of Silvia. Shakespeare compresses his entire moral education into ten and a half lines. The latter part of the final scene takes some pains to shore up this fragile last-minute conversion, though it does not seek to persuade us that Proteus is really a reward worth Julia's efforts. They both assert their happiness (V.iv.118-9), and the presence of dull Thurio deflects some of the criticism from Proteus:

Sir Valentine, I care not for her, I:
 I hold him but a fool that will endanger
 His body for a girl that loves him not.
 I claim her not, and therefore, she is thine.
 (V.iv.130-3)

By comparison Proteus appears in a slightly more favourable light and is spared the criticism that the Duke directs at the "degenerate and base" Thurio (V.iv.134). But, at the same time, the suddenness and ease of Proteus's repentance sounds an off-key note in the harmony of the ending's "one mutual happiness" (V.iv.171). Proteus's repentance is deliberately abrupt and schematic. To bring off a last-minute

conversion of this kind, an actor must be able to lay the groundwork for it, however slight, earlier in his performance. Shakespeare has given the actor of Proteus no such opportunities.

We may contrast his very different procedure in The Taming of the Shrew. The transformation of Katherine is carefully prepared, although actresses often seem unaware of this, so landing themselves with all kinds of problems when they come to her final speech. Petruchio's tactic of taking Katherine's role of shrew upon himself--rather as Julia plays the masculine courtly love role of "true servant" in shaming Proteus--eventually forces her to take another: the obedient wife. This transformation, however, does not appear like a bolt from the blue. In her concession in the argument about whether it is the sun or the moon that shines so bright--

Then God be blessed, it is the blessed sun.
But sun it is not when you say it is not,
And the moon changes even as your mind.
What you will have it named, even that it is,
And so it shall be for Katherine;

(IV.v.18-22)

in greeting the old man as a "Young budding virgin", then retracting it with the excuse that her eyes "have been so bedazzled with the sun" (IV.v.36, 44); and again in granting Petruchio a kiss (V.i.), Katherine--and the boy actor who played her--is given a chance to rehearse the role before the long final speech in which she plays it to the hilt before her incredulous audience and with her director looking on.

Shakespeare gives the actor who plays Proteus no such assistance in planning his performance at least partly because

Proteus's education differs in nature and extent from Kate's and because his conversion is meant to appear abrupt and superficial. He is to change from prevented rapist to reinstated, if shoddy, romantic hero in the time it takes to apologize because changeableness and shallowness are his chief characteristics. His numerous debate-like soliloquies never succeed in suggesting that Silvia's dethronement of Julia is anything but a foregone conclusion. His first words on the subject are:

Even as one heat another heat expels,
Or as one nail by strength drives out another,
So the remembrance of my former love
Is by a newer object quite forgotten.
(II.iv.188-91)

When we see him next he is debating pros and cons, but the switch of his love seems as easy as Romeo's to Juliet from Rosaline, whose invisibility in Romeo and Juliet means that Romeo's relationship with her has no on-stage existence. It is presented solely in terms of his adopting the conventional poses of the Petrarchan lover, so making the exchange the more readily accepted. Romeo's switch reveals a growth in maturity, whereas Proteus's indicates his continuing immaturity. All that happens to Proteus between his parting from Julia and his repentance in the final scene is that he reveals what was latent in his nature as in his name. This is not change or development or growth: he simply fails the test of separation, which Romeo passes, and shows himself constant only in inconstancy. And the ease of his repentance is only one more proof of his nature.

The tenacious resistance to the process of growing up shown by young men remains one of Shakespeare's continuous concerns in the

comedies. The brief repentances, sudden switches of allegiance and abrupt changes of attitude that he gives to so many of his young men--Berowne and his fellows, Proteus, Benedick, Claudio, Orsino, Bertram--indicate not only their emotional instability but also their shallowness. They are all, in Beatrice's words, "clod[s] of wayward marl" (II.i.54). In this respect Proteus sets the standard for Shakespeare's young lovers: he appears shallow because that is what he is. That he is so cannot be put down wholly to unsureness of technique on Shakespeare's part. Proteus's education is so partial because he is capable of no more, and only rarely are his successors much better. The young men in Love's Labour's Lost must undergo a year-and-a-day-long training programme. On hearing Borachio's confession, Claudio can instantly revert to his former position: "Sweet Hero, now they image doth appear / In the rare semblance that I loved at first" (V.i.238-9). The ruttish Bertram lacks even the off-setting virtues that make the behaviour of a Romeo or an Orlando tolerable. As Feste says, "sin that amends is but patched with virtue" (I.v.46-7). Shakespeare became more adept at writing Protean lovers--the long debate-like soliloquies rapidly disappear and the preparation for whatever limited education there is to be becomes more solid; though the details change, the essential outline remains the same. The behaviour of Proteus, Claudio, Bertram and Troilus is only tolerable because of their extreme youth, on which Shakespeare repeatedly insists. Their devotion to the code of courtly love is presented as an adolescent game whose rules are an incapacitating and enduring obstacle to their attainment

of maturity. They are reluctant to set out on the road to adulthood and the process of growing up drags on interminably. Proteus and Valentine do not move very far along the road. They try to cling to the familiar code of friendship, continually postponing the more demanding and less secure commitment of marriage.

Whilst the men fool around with courtly love, the women must simply wait patiently for them to have done and grow up. For Julia and Silvia that wait threatens to be long. The alternative is to seek some way to escape the narrowly restricted position that the men's devotion to the codes of courtly love and masculine friendship imposes upon them. Through her disguise Julia gains a degree of masculine freedom of action that is denied Silvia, who has to rely on the unreliable Eglamour. It is also through her disguise that Shakespeare dramatizes the process of her growth from youthful, naive idealism to maturity. Her experience of disguise brings a new understanding of her relationship to Proteus. By disguising and playing the part of Sebastian, Julia becomes an actor--in her speech on the "lamentable part" she played in the Pentecost pageant she becomes indeed a boy actor playing a woman--and undergoes an exploration of self in an essentially theatrical performance on the stage of the play's "real world". In The Two Gentlemen of Verona, the "woman's part" turns out to be the masculine one of "true servant" and Julia plays it to the life, shaming Proteus, who can only play false, by the competence of her performance. Shakespeare inverts traditional psychological thinking here, as he does in all his comedies: it is always his young men who are inconstant, unpredictable,

their minds very opals, and his women who are constant and stable. But his women are played by boys, and so it is not only the women who show the men that they are better able to play the masculine roles of "true servant" and constant lover, but also the boy actors who prove the same to their adult colleagues. Members of the younger generation of Shakespeare's company show the older generation how it is done, and, in their parts as women, have to wait for that older generation, playing younger than their real ages, to grow up.

The theatrical circumstances in which Shakespeare worked are mirrored in the play itself. A boy was apprenticed with the aim, of course, of graduating eventually from women's parts to leading male parts like Proteus which an older and more senior actor played--hence the point of Hamlet's inquiry about the "little eyases":

Will they pursue the quality no longer than they can sing?
Will they not say afterwards, if they should grow
themselves to common players--as it is most like, if their
means are no better--their writers do them wrong, to make
them exclaim against their own succession?

(II.ii.339-44)

The plots of The Two Gentlemen of Verona and the other comedies pit the boy actor as a woman against an adult actor in a male part which the boy is being trained to take over one day. The woman always wins her man; the plot is always on the boy actor's side in cornering the older actor. Julia's triumph is enacted on a larger scale in the women's outwitting of the courtiers in Love's Labour's Lost, and this aspect of plotting is more extensively developed in The Merchant of Venice and All's Well that Ends Well. In connecting so closely--almost as cause and effect--the freeing of the woman from her restricted position and the education of the man, The Two Gentlemen

of Verona points the way forward for Shakespearian comedy. One might say that the part of Julia implicitly makes a case for more dramatically dominant women's parts. Julia's position, however, remains fairly restricted even when she is disguised as Sebastian--it is only by her chance swoon that she gets her man. Like Bertram later, Proteus is the most intractable of raw material and Julia's freedom of action is not sufficiently great to enable her to do very much with him. If the young men in Shakespeare's later comedies appear more receptive to the lessons the women have to teach--Bassanio and Orlando learn more than Proteus--it is not so much because of their own merits as because Shakespeare has given their women greater freedom to circumvent the defences of their stubborn immaturity. This necessitates giving the woman control over the plot and so shaking up the hierarchy of the acting company by giving the major part to the apprentice boy actor.

This is partly a theatrical consequence of writing plays that show masculine friendship giving way to marriage as the primary relationship and the movement away from a notion of love as a "mad and beastly passion". The plot must be designed to give the woman scope enough to challenge male dominance, direct the action to suit her purposes, and so educate and win the man of her choice. The Merchant of Venice shows a major change in the relation of the heroine to the plot. It makes a much more aggressive stand on the relation of love and friendship than The Two Gentlemen of Verona and extends the conflict beyond the marriage ceremony. Having nominally obtained the man she wants, Portia has still, like Helena in All's

Well that Ends Well, to lick him into shape as a husband. The increased difficulty of her task necessitates greater freedom of action and this is mirrored structurally in the way Portia takes active control of the plot from the moment the contents of Antonio's letter are revealed. Julia never has that kind of grip on the action of The Two Gentlemen of Verona.

CHAPTER THREE

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING BALTHAZAR: TURNING TO MEN IN THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Critical writing on The Merchant of Venice can boast diametrically opposed and apparently contradictory interpretations of every important character and incident in the play. Shylock is either a "diabolically inhuman"¹ monster or a "scapegoat", a man whose leaden outside conceals gold within, exposing the hypocrisy and wickedness of the Christians in the play.² As his chief adversary, Portia is either the flawless romantic heroine or nothing better than "a callous barrister", a hypocrite like the other Christians.³ Similarly Bassanio is the ideal Renaissance lover or a fortune-hunter with an eye to the main chance; Antonio, a model of Christian charity or the play's true Shylock; and Jessica, an idealized picture of the Christian convert or a dishonest and disloyal daughter, callously deserting her father. Portia's manipulation of the law in the trial has been both praised as brilliantly just--"triumphantly and appropriately a quibble"⁴--and condemned as an indefensible piece of deceit. The play's chief lovers, Portia and Bassanio and Jessica and Lorenzo, have received equally divergent judgements: they are either materialists or exemplars of the prodigality of true love. This is infinite variety indeed. Gratiano's decision to swear by "double-headed Janus"

(I.i.50) seems almost to have been prophetic. We must, the critics tell us, take sides--either with Shylock or with Portia and the Christians--and stand by our choice.⁵ The assumptions of E. E. Stoll's question persist: "How can we for a moment sympathize with Shylock unless at the same time we indignantly turn, not only against Gratiano, but against Portia, the Duke, and all Venice as well?"⁶ The kind of black and white judgement that such a question invites seems peculiarly inappropriate to a play that argues the falsity of such neat and absolute distinctions. The Merchant of Venice deals in shades of grey and continually raises the problem of appropriate response and judgement. An audience's response to a character is continuously in flux; response occurs in time as a part of our accumulating relation to the action. To "fix" a character by taking as a constant one aspect of the audience's response to him--he is a fortune-hunter--and projecting it throughout the play is to simplify and falsify the character's dramatic existence. An audience's response is dynamic, not fixed, as we have seen in Shakespeare's use of the play within the play to explore the variety and ambiguities of subjective response.

The question of appropriate response is most acutely raised by Shylock, whom Shakespeare worked up from the barest hints in the play's major source, Ser Giovanni's Il Pecorone (1558). It is Shylock who has most consistently polarized audiences' responses and critical interpretation. The two extremes of interpretation that the character has enjoyed have had their counterparts on the stage. In the second half of the eighteenth century, Macklin's Shylock was remarkable for

"the malevolence, the villainy and the diabolical atrocity of the character". In the later nineteenth century, Irving's Shylock was dignified, "venerable, lonely, grieved, austere: he moved with pride and grace; his anger was white and tense; in defeat he called forth pity and awe", almost falling as he left the stage for the last time "with a long, heavy sigh".⁷ Both Macklin and Irving considered III.i to be the part's major scene, and we may look at the concluding section of that scene to see how their respective conceptions of Shylock "play", how far each fulfils the potentialities of the text. Shylock's appeal for racial tolerance--"I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes?" (III.i.47-66)--disturbingly combining reasonableness and inhumanity, is over. The departure of Salerio and Solanio is followed by Shylock's conversation with Tubal:

Tub. Antonio (as I heard in Genoa)--

Shy. What, what, what? ill luck, ill luck?

Tub. --hath an argosy cast away coming from Tripolis.

Shy. I thank God, I thank God! is it true, is it true?

Tub. I spoke with some of the sailors that escaped the wrack.

Shy. I thank thee good Tubal, good news, good news: ha! ha! heard in Genoa!

Tub. Your daughter spent in Genoa, as I heard, one night, fourscore ducats.

Shy. Thou stick'st a dagger in me,--I shall never see my gold again,--fourscore ducats at a sitting, fourscore ducats!

Tub. There's some divers of Antonio's creditors in my company to Venice, that swear, he cannot choose but break.

Shy. I am very glad of it,--I'll plague him, I'll torture him,--I am glad of it.

Tub. One of them showed me a ring that he had of your daughter for a monkey.

Shy. Out upon her!--thou torturest me Tubal,--it was my turquoise, I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor: I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys.

Tub. But Antonio is certainly undone.

Shy. Nay, that's true, that's very true,--go Tubal,
 fee me an officer, bespeak him a fortnight before,--
 I will have the heart of him if he forfeit, for
 were he out of Venice I can make what merchandise I
 will:

(III.i.89-118)

What is most striking here are the extraordinary shifts, changes, shades of Shylock's mood. He alternates at breathtaking speed between flights of dismay at his own losses and of exultation at those of Antonio. His alternations of feeling are so extreme and explicit--Tubal delivers his news like a deadpan straight-man (unconsciously) feeding his partner--that they invite hostile laughter, as well as bravura acting. At this point Shylock is the caricature stage Jew, the miserly, malevolent villain, and the lines are designed to allow the actor to milk the caricature for all it is worth.⁸ Clearly only one response to this Shylock is possible. But then, just when the audience think they have solved the problem of appropriate response, Shakespeare throws in Shylock's mention of Leah's ring and a moment of great poignancy. Shylock is suddenly a deserted father, a widower, tormented. And then the caricature returns once more, but qualified by the preceding moment. The audience's position is like that of Launcelot Gobbo who, prompted to different courses of action by his conscience and the fiend, puzzles over the difficult question of the appropriate--the "right"--response to the Jew.

Shylock's conversation with Tubal denies the audience a single simple response. He is both caricature and human being, both torturing monster and tormented victim, both Macklin's inhuman

villain and Irving's suffering gentleman--all in the space of seconds. The Shylock of Macklin or Irving fulfils only one aspect of this passage; each diminishes the conception. When Irving interpolated a scene of Shylock's return at night after Jessica's escape, to knock at his closed door and wait as the curtain fell, and when Kean added "No, no, no!" after his "would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin!" (III.i.81-2), each actor, implicitly acknowledging a difficulty, was attempting to simplify Shylock's complex stage identity. But Shylock is, like Janus, "double-headed": the design of the character is fundamentally ambivalent. The ambivalence apparent--indeed almost paraded by Shakespeare--in this short exchange with Tubal is manipulated most extensively in the court scene (IV.i). In that scene, as throughout the play, Shylock is a touchstone: our response to him at any given moment partly defines our response to the other characters and especially to the goings-on in Belmont and Antonio's relation to them. His words on Leah's ring, his avowal of constancy, affect how we see Jessica and Lorenzo's "unthrift love" (V.i.16) at this point. Shylock complicates our responses: he poses problems.

One further example may suffice here. Shakespeare continually plays off the audience's response to Shylock against their response to Antonio. In his first scene Shylock quickly establishes himself as the object of the Elizabethan audience's prejudices: the stage Jew. His response to Antonio, the perfect friend of the play's opening scene, in his malevolent "How like a fawning publican he looks! / I hate him for he is a Christian" (I.iii.36-7). It is

Shylock who first introduces a specifically religious prejudice. Antonio's appearance polarizes the audience's responses. His Christianity acts as a conductor for the audience's hostility to Shylock: "Mark you this Bassanio, / The Devil can cite Scripture for his purpose" (I.iii.92-3). But Antonio's self-righteousness reveals a prejudice as intense as Shylock's--"I am as like to call thee so again, / To spet on thee again, to spurn thee too" (I.iii.125-6).

Reappearing in Belmont in the final scene, Portia likens the light of a candle to the shining of "a good deed in a naughty world" (V.i.91). Nerissa replies

When the moon shone we did not see the candle.
Por. So doth the greater glory dim the less,--
 A substitute shines brightly as a king
 Until a king be by, and then his state
 Empties itself, as doth an inland brook
 Into the main of waters:--music--hark!
Ner. It is your music (madam) of the house.
Por. Nothing is good (I see) without respect--
 Methinks it sounds much sweeter than by day.
Ner. Silence bestows that virtue on it madam.
Por. The crow doth sing as sweetly as the lark
 When neither is attended: and I think
 The nightingale if she should sing by day
 When every goose is cackling, would be thought
 No better a musician than the wren!
 How many things by season, season'd are
 To their right praise, and true perfection!
 (V.i.92-108)

This discussion of the relative nature of goodness is especially resonant in a play so concerned with judgement and justice, reward and punishment. In a sense, Portia's words also illuminate a central aspect of Shakespeare's dramatic technique in The Merchant of Venice. Shylock's presence in this play allows Shakespeare to present the literal and metaphorical contracts and bonds of personal relationships--

friendship and marriage--in a manner unusually cynical for one of his comedies, without appearing to undermine their value totally. In Shakespeare's exploration of the materialism of human relationships, both business and personal, Shylock's presence protects the other characters at the same time as it comments on them: his materialism shields them from the full effects of the admissions the play makes about them and their society. As Portia says, "Nothing is good (I see) without respect", and Shylock is there to deflect onto himself the brunt of the audience's censure.

The ambivalence built into Shylock is of the kind S. L. Bethell describes when, in discussing dramatic character generally, he remarks on the importance of an Elizabethan audience's "ability to keep simultaneously in mind two opposite aspects of a situation".⁹ This capacity is continuously drawn on in The Merchant of Venice. Ambivalence is not a characteristic of Shylock alone. In the final scene, accusing Bassanio of infidelity and rejecting his oath of innocence sworn by "thine own fair eyes / Wherein I see myself" (V.i. 242-3), Portia declares

Mark you but that!
In both my eyes he doubly sees himself:
In each eye one,--swear by your double self,
And there's an oath of credit.

(V.i.243-6)

All the main characters in the play have double selves, and so sustain the apparently contradictory critical readings we observed above; one qualifying the other, one predominating, then the other, making our responses and judgements difficult, shifting, relative. This Janus-like duality is built into the larger design of the play. The Merchant

of Venice contains a number of "tricks"--elements that appear to mean one thing, but turn out to mean another or, more exactly, to have two meanings simultaneously. Shylock's bond, Antonio's generosity, the law in the trial and the gift of the ring share this quality, but it is most fully embodied in the ambivalent "double self" of Portia and Balthazar, the lady and the lawyer.

Approaching Portia's disguise from Julia's earlier disguise, what is most striking is the absence of the psychological and sexual ambiguity that characterizes the figure of Julia as Sebastian, most notably in the speeches of self-contemplation in IV.iv with Silvia and in the page's account of playing "the woman's part" (IV.iv.158). If we turn to Portia's disguise looking for these qualities, we will inevitably conclude that it is poorer in conception and execution than the disguises of Julia and, later, Rosalind and Viola. One critic has remarked that in The Merchant of Venice "Shakespeare was still at the stage of experiment and his use of disguise here is less successful than it was in The Two Gentlemen of Verona".¹⁰ Juliet Dusinberre expresses a widely held opinion when she writes that "Shakespeare evaded in The Merchant of Venice the problems that he created for himself in Twelfth Night and As You Like It".¹¹ These comments assume that the dramatic nature of sexual disguise and its range of potential dramatic effects remain constant in all contexts. Such a view fails to take account of the possibility that Shakespeare, confronting different problems in The Merchant of Venice, conceived sexual disguise in different terms, and that therefore to treat Portia's disguise as if it should be like Julia's or Rosalind's is

inappropriate and falsifies the distinctive characteristics of her disguise as Balthazar. The dramatic relation between Balthazar as a role and Portia as a character is fundamentally different from that between Sebastian and Julia and the other heroines and their disguises.

In Il Pecorone, the Lady of Belmont is a fine and beautiful widow who has, the sea-captain tells Giannetto (Bassanio), ruined many gentlemen, for she has made a law "that anyone who arrives must sleep with her, and if he can possess her he must take her for his wife and become lord of the port and all that country. But if he fails, he loses everything that he has".¹² In The Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare has Portia's father make the law, makes Portia a virtuous daughter, replaces the sexual test with the lottery of the caskets, and discards the mercenary motive--Portia stands to gain nothing except a husband. The lady's situation becomes a paradigm of the position of the daughter as her father's property to be bestowed on a husband of his choosing. Portia complains "O me the word 'choose'! I may neither choose who I would, nor refuse who I dislike, so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father: is it not hard Nerissa, that I cannot choose one, nor refuse none?" (I.ii.22-6) The arranged marriage, which caused Hermia and Juliet such problems, becomes a game, a lottery in which Portia, like a princess in a fairy-tale, is literally the prize. The appallingly restrictive constraints of her situation and her enforced passivity are stressed repeatedly; "the lott'ry of my destiny / Bars me the right of voluntary choosing" (II.i.15-6), she

tells Morocco. Silvia's literal imprisonment in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, locked in a tower by her father, becomes in Portia's situation a more terrible metaphorical imprisonment: "If I live to be as old as Sibylla, I will die as chaste as Diana, unless I be obtained by the manner of my father's will" (I.ii.102-4).

The overnaming of the suitors in the first scene in Belmont (I.ii) recalls Julia's first scene in The Two Gentlemen of Verona. There it is Lucetta who comments on the suitors whilst Julia listens. Here it is Portia who comments and, unlike Lucetta, offers criticism not praise. Nerissa names the suitors--three times as many as in The Two Gentlemen of Verona--and Portia mocks them wittily. We laugh with her at their expense here, as we do later when, knowing what she thinks of her other suitors, we hear her assure Morocco that he stands "as fair / As any comer I have look'd on yet / For my affection" (II.i. 20-2). All the suitors, those named and those who appear in person to condemn themselves out of their own mouths, are made to appear conceited fools, braggarts, nincompoops. All the "casket" scenes emphasize Portia's superiority to the suitors and her ability to deal with them directly, without the aid of other men--there is no Boyet or Lafew or even Touchstone in Belmont. At the same time they underline the powerlessness of her situation. "I had rather be married to a death's-head with a bone in his mouth, than to either of these: God defend me from these two" (I.ii.49-51), says Portia of two of the suitors: He must, for she cannot refuse if either should choose correctly. In the "casket" scenes the world of Belmont is clearly defined as feminine, yet ironically governed by the will of a

dead man. Shakespeare stresses Portia and Nerissa's concord, their relaxed, harmonious intimacy--they do not come to blows as do Julia and Lucetta: they present a united front to the world of men and to the seemingly interminable stream of suitors.

Portia's satiric description of youthful masculinity when she announces to Nerissa her plan of disguise is similar in character to Rosalind's speech on her intended disguise at the end of Act I in As You Like It. Both display high-spirited pleasure at the thought of playing a man:

When we are both accoutered like young men,
I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two,
And wear my dagger with the braver grace,
And speak between the change of man and boy,
With a reed voice, and turn two mincing steps
Into a manly stride; and speak of frays
Like a fine bragging youth: and tell quaint lies
How honourable ladies sought my love,
Which I denying, they fell sick and died:

(III.iv.63-72)

Portia could be describing Ganymede with his captivating vitality and balance of masculine and feminine. But this description has nothing in common with the sober doctor of laws of "so young a body with so old a head" (IV.i.160-1) in the court scene. It is far removed from the ruthlessly efficient lawyer dispensing justice with the utmost rigour and in accordance with the minutest details of the letter of the law. The effect of the speech is to create expectations that are then flatly unfulfilled: we are given something very different. And not only is Balthazar very different from Portia's description of how she will play a man but there is nothing in the doctor of laws to remind us of this "unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractised" (III.ii.159),

as she rather modestly terms herself. Shakespeare gives Portia more pre-disguise scenes than any of the other heroines, firmly and extensively establishing her character before she disguises. Furthermore he returns her to female dress for the entire fifth act, unlike the other heroines. The emphasis in the "casket" scenes on both Portia's resilient femininity and on her ability to cope efficiently with men has the double effect of preparing the audience to accept more readily her disguise as a lawyer--she is an intelligent, capable woman--and of making the transformation into Balthazar sexually all the more miraculous. There is an absolute distinction between Portia and Balthazar.

Portia's disguise, unlike those of the other heroines, reveals no interest in exploring the psychological consequences and implications of a sexual disguise. This is a crucial difference. The sustained use of dramatic irony by which Shakespeare emphasizes the psychological and sexual ambiguities of the heroines' disguises in the other comedies--for instance in the serenading scene and in Julia's meeting with Silvia in The Two Gentlemen of Verona--is absent in the trial. The "special intimacy" that the other heroines share with the audience is never established. Portia speaks only as Balthazar, not in a "double voice" as Julia does to Silvia or, later, Viola does so poignantly in the "Patience on a monument" scene with Orsino (II.iv). Portia plays one role unambiguously and continuously. Only once in the trial does Balthazar speak so as explicitly to remind the audience that he is really Portia: after Bassanio's offer to sacrifice "life itself, my wife, and all the world" (IV.i.280) to save

Antonio: "Your wife would give you little thanks for that / If she were by to hear you make the offer" (IV.i.284-5). By reminding the audience that Balthazar is Bassanio's wife, these words have the effect of emphasizing the completeness of her transformation into Balthazar. The entirely different identity she has assumed is wholly masculine, wholly Balthazar's: she is transformed into a new character and, most importantly, a man. The theatrical fact of the boy actor makes Portia's sexual transformation complete, for the boy actor simply discards the female dress and characteristics of Portia, dons a lawyer's gown and plays Balthazar, a young doctor of laws. Balthazar is, in Rosalind's words, "all points like a man" (I.iii.112) because that is what he actually is.

Samuel Pepys's comment on the performance of Kynaston, one of the last boy actors to play women, in the role of Jonson's Epicoene, or The Silent Woman (1609) is perhaps illuminating in this context. He is particularly struck by Kynaston's appearing first "the prettiest woman in the whole house" and then "the handsomest man". We may compare his slightly wonder-struck comments on Nell Gwyn's performance as a boy: "She comes in like a young gallant; and hath the motions and carriage of a spark the most that ever I saw any man have".¹³ What fascinates him in each case is the extraordinary completeness of the sexual transformation. It is, we may assume, this kind of transformation that the boy actor in the Lord Chamberlain's Men effected in playing first Portia, then Balthazar and then Portia once more.

The sexual transformation effected by Portia's disguise is

central to the play's treatment of the love-versus-friendship débat-theme that Shakespeare had already handled, as we have seen, in The Two Gentlemen of Verona. In The Merchant of Venice he pits the claims of the legal bond of marriage against those of masculine friendship, whose primacy was sanctioned by the still powerful medieval code of "god-like amity" (III.iv.3). Portia's disguise, her performance in the trial and her recovery of the ring enforce and focus the sexual dimension of the conflict centred on Bassanio's divided loyalties. Through Portia's disguise Shakespeare adapts the débat-theme framework to dramatize the struggle between heterosexual love and homosexual love in the triangle of Portia, Bassanio and Antonio. Antonio and Bassanio's relationship is not so easily fitted into the conventional friendship category of the love-versus-friendship débat as earlier critics of the play believed and, indeed, still appears to be the case to some.¹⁴ Certainly the feeling of Antonio, "the tainted wether of the flock" (IV.i.114), for Bassanio--Solanio says "he only loves the world for him" (II.viii.50)--resists accommodation within such a scheme, even taking into account the oft asserted intensity and emotionalism of Renaissance friendships. We need only glance at Proteus and Valentine to realize how much more intense and less immature is Antonio and Bassanio's relationship. It is perhaps more appropriate to think of a Renaissance friendship such as that of James I and Buckingham. Much critical ingenuity has been expended in evading this conclusion. Recently Antonio has even been described as a "father surrogate",¹⁵ an interpretation that requires a much more determined reading of subtext than any of which

an advocate of the other persuasion could be accused. D. J. Palmer has commented that "critics who try like Salerio and Solanio to discover the cause of Antonio's sadness are wilfully ignoring its dramatic point: 'In sooth, I know not why I am so sad.'" ¹⁶ If this is so, we must conclude that Shakespeare fritters away the first one hundred and thirteen lines of the play by having the characters discuss something that is irrelevant and in which we are not intended to be the least interested. The dramatic point is precisely the uncertainty surrounding the cause of Antonio's sadness. Palmer's comment conflicts with the effect of the opening scene and the way in which Shakespeare has dramatized the audience's first encounter with Antonio and Bassanio.

It cannot be denied that the play does begin by focussing our attention on the "marvellously chang'd" (I.i.76) Antonio, on speculation as to the cause of his sadness, or that the scene does offer the audience an explanation. Salerio's suggestion that the cause is Antonio's concern about his business affairs is flatly rejected. Solanio's suggestion that he is in love receives a "Fie! Fie!" (I.i.46), "an exclamation of reproach rather than a clear negative". ¹⁷ This line is short. There is a pause before Solanio says "Not in love neither" and immediately changes tack, offering a comic--and uncontentious--explanation: "let us say you are sad / Because you are not merry" (I.i.47-8). At the appearance of Bassanio, accompanied by Lorenzo and Gratiano--"better company", "worthier friends" (I.i.59, 61)--all but Gratiano show themselves eager to leave Antonio and Bassanio tactfully alone together, a

response which Bassanio is quick to notice, seeming a little reluctant to be left alone with his friend: "You grow exceeding strange: must it be so?" (I.i.67). Once alone with Bassanio, Antonio brushes aside idle chit-chat and comes straight to the point:

Well, tell me now what lady is the same
To whom you swore a secret pilgrimage--
That you to-day promis'd to tell me of?
(I.i.119-21)

Bassanio answers Antonio's directness with elaborately indirect and slightly embarrassed requests for yet more money. Twice Antonio reproaches him for this long-winded beating about the bush--"herein [you] spend but time / To wind about my love with circumstance" (I.i.153-4)--and asserts his absolute and unquestioning generosity: "My purse, my person, my extremest means / Lie all unlock'd to your occasions" (I.i.161). Bassanio then proceeds to describe his projected journey to Belmont not so much in terms of intended marriage but rather as if it were a business venture, emphasizing that both he and Antonio will profit materially from it. Antonio immediately agrees to rack his credit "even to the uttermost" (I.i.181) and the scene ends. The first half of the scene invites the audience to ponder the cause of Antonio's sadness and the second half presents that cause: his imminent separation from Bassanio. To Antonio Bassanio "owe[s] the most in money and in love", but his purpose is "to get clear of all the debts I owe" (I.i.131, 134). The scene is tense with an unspoken sundering of ties.

This is not to say that the scene is a love-scene. There has been a trend in recent productions to make this scene and other

moments in the play explicitly homosexual. Jonathan Miller emphasized this aspect in his National Theatre production with Laurence Olivier, and another recent production in London had Antonio and Bassanio kissing in this scene and others. Such directional touches both recognize an important element in the play and falsify the manner in which Shakespeare presents it. There is no justification in the text for such intimate physical contact--behaviour which on the Elizabethan stage would direct the audience's anti-homosexual feelings against the characters involved, a response on which the design of Marlowe's Edward II (c. 1592) is founded. What the text does make clear is that the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio is of great intensity, of love, most importantly on Antonio's side, and strong enough for its claims to counterbalance those of Bassanio's newly established relationship with Portia--indeed proving to be the more powerful allegiance--at vital moments in the play. The effect of several of Shakespeare's alterations to Il Pecorone is to increase the importance of the Antonio-character and to embody in him an explicit and potent threat to Portia's sway over Bassanio's heart. Shakespeare makes the Antonio-character Bassanio's friend instead of his godfather, thus importing into the story the love-versus-friendship débat in the first place. The action of the play hinges as much on the conflict between Antonio and Portia for possession of Bassanio's love as on that between the Christians, led by Portia, and Shylock. But the nature and extent of Antonio's feeling for Bassanio and of his challenge to Portia's position as wife become clear to the audience only gradually. At the beginning of the play Antonio

remarks of his sadness:

how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
I am to learn:

(I.i.3-6)

Like Antonio, the audience learn what stuff his sadness is made of and whereof it is born. The nature of his feeling for Bassanio becomes apparent by stages: in his instant agreement to Shylock's "merry bond" (I.iii.169); in the moving account of the friends' emotional parting (II.viii); in the power of his letter (III.ii); and, finally, in his readiness to sacrifice himself in the trial scene, "a tainted wether of the flock, / Meetest for death,--the weakest kind of fruit" (IV.i.114-5) in an otherwise virile, heterosexual society. At the opening of the play, however, Antonio appears the embodiment of the virtues of friendship, the paragon of boundless generosity, only too ready to "give and hazard all he hath" (II.vii.9).

When arranging his loan in I.iii Antonio, as exemplar of the principles of "god-like amity", instructs Shylock:

If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not
As to thy friends, for when did friendship take
A breed for barren metal of his friend?

(I.iii.127-9)

Antonio argues that there are distinctly separate codes for personal relationships and business relationships. Shylock, however, blurs the distinctions, treating all alike and applying the terms of love and friendship to commercial transactions:

I say
To buy his favour, I extend this friendship,--
If he will take it, so,--if not, adieu,
And for my love I pray you wrong me not.

(I.iii.163-6)

Such phrasing is not confined only to Shylock. In The Merchant of Venice love is consistently described in financial or commercial terms: debts, bonds, bargains, contracts. Salerio observes that

ten times faster Venus' pigeons fly
To seal love's bonds new-made, than they are wont
To keep obliged faith unforfeited!

(II.vi.5-7)

Bassanio owes Antonio

the most in money and in love,
And from your love I have a warranty
To unburthen all my plots and purposes
How to get clear of all the debts I owe.

(I.i.131-4)

Antonio demonstrates his love by racking his credit to the uttermost. Bassanio declares that Portia is "nothing undervalu'd / To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia" (I.i.165-6); Morocco asks--rhetorically-- "shall I think in silver she's immur'd / Being ten-times undervalued to try'd gold?" (II.vii.52-3). Contemplating his expedition to Belmont Bassanio's "mind presages me such thrift / That I should questionless be fortunate" (I.i.175-6); Shylock speaks of "my bargains, and my well-won thrift, / Which he [Antonio] calls interest" (I.iii.45-6). Verbal links between love and commerce are made again and again, and the economic aspects of all the main relationships in the play are continually emphasized. Shakespeare punningly invokes the various forms of making suit: for love, for money, for justice. Bassanio, Morocco and Arragon make suit to Portia, and Gratiano to Nerissa, Lorenzo to Jessica. Bassanio and Antonio make suit to Shylock: "moneys is your suit" (I.iii.114). Shylock pursues "a losing suit" (IV.i.62) against Antonio in the trial. Seeking a new

master, Launcelot makes suit to Bassanio--"thou hast obtain'd thy suit" (II.ii.137)--and Gratiano, too, appeals to Bassanio: "I have suit to you" (II.ii.169). Shakespeare is especially insistent on the relation between finance and marriage, and it is in the presentation of the relationships of Portia and Bassanio and Jessica and Lorenzo that this connection is most extensively developed. In a play that contains an almost programmatic definition of love in the motto on the leaden casket--"Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath" (II.vi.9)--it is striking that the lovers' adherence to this principle is not without ambiguity. As Morocco remarks, in a rare moment of insight, those who "hazard all / Do it in hope of fair advantages" (II.vii.18-9). Bassanio, Portia, Jessica and Lorenzo share a sound grasp of what they have to gain from their marriages.

The Jessica and Lorenzo subplot is not Il Pecorone, although it is to be found in a different form in another possible source, Masuccio's Il Novellino. The conduct of Jessica and Lorenzo's relationship parallels and contrasts with that of Portia and Bassanio: both relationships involve a casket, a disguise and a ring. The subplot presents a woman escaping the restrictions of her position as daughter and making the choice of her husband for herself:

O Lorenzo
If thou keep promise I shall end this strife,
Become a Christian and thy loving wife.
(II.iii.20-1)

Jessica's evasion of the will of her father, whose motto "Fast bind, fast find,--/ A proverb never stale in thrifty mind" (II.v.53-4) applies as much to his daughter as to his other property--underlines the narrow constraints endured by Portia, who cannot choose, but

must obey the will of her "virtuous" and "holy" father, whose "good inspiration" (I.ii.27, 28) of the lottery is little more than a fairy-tale version of the attitude implicit in Shylock's favourite proverb. Yet Jessica's elopement has another aspect. Lorenzo promises to assist his friends when it is their turn "to play the thieves for wives" (II.vi.23), and indeed the elopement is also a robbery: Jessica throws down the casket of jewels and gold to Lorenzo and then goes back inside the house to "gild myself / With some moe ducats" (II.vi.49-50). The elopement of these unthrift lovers involves urgent economic considerations: they need ready money. Furthermore, for Jessica there is a religious profit to be gained by marriage to Lorenzo: "I shall be sav'd by my husband,-- he hath made me a Christian" (III.v.17-8). Shakespeare holds the two sides of the escape in tension. Lorenzo's eulogy on Jessica whilst she fetches the ducats--

Beshrew me but I love her heartily,
 For she is wise, if I can judge of her,
 And fair she is, if that mine eyes prove true,
 And true she is, as she hath prov'd herself:
 And therefore like herself, wise, fair, and true,
 Shall she be placed in my constant soul.
 (II.vi.52-7)

--counterbalances the impression of the elopement as a robbery and quells any niggling suspicions that perhaps he is interested only in her money.

The relation between the financial and romantic aspects of marriage that Shakespeare emphasizes in his handling of Jessica and Lorenzo's elopement is most fully developed in the scene of Bassanio's choice of the casket (III.ii) which is permeated by the language of

commerce. Shakespeare prepares extensively for this scene, particularly in his presentation of Bassanio. In no other Shakespearian comedy do the chief lovers meet for the first time so late in the play and this reflects the play's stress on the initial situations of the lovers, Portia bound by her father's will, and Bassanio in debt and virtually penniless. Bassanio's money troubles--a problem he shares with Jessica and Lorenzo--set him apart from the other romantic heroes of the comedies. Orsino, Benedick, Berowne and the others never have to worry about finding money as Bassanio does, though one of Claudio's first questions about Hero is "Hath Leonato any son, my Lord?" (I.i.262); they are conveniently equipped with private fortunes or the assurance of a good inheritance. But Bassanio, unable to manage his financial affairs efficiently, needs money, and the easiest and speediest way to get it is by finding himself a rich wife. The opening scene of the play establishes him as a fortune-hunter. He describes his expedition to Belmont as a business enterprise in which Portia--"a lady richly left", of great "worth"--is the "golden fleece", the "thrift" (I.i.161, 167, 170, 175). Petruchio, too, first appears proclaiming "wealth is burden of my wooing dance" (I.ii.66), but he already has a fortune and once the formality of his business transaction with Baptista is concluded (II.i) finance is forgotten until the very end when, as a bonus, Baptista given him a second dowry.

Having established Bassanio so clearly as a fortune-hunter in his first scene, Shakespeare then gradually prepares the audience to accept the young man as a suitor worthy of Portia. In his first

scene itself, his mercenary aspect is slightly qualified: Portia is singled out not only because she is rich, but also because "sometimes from her fair eyes / I did receive fair speechless messages" (I.i. 163-4). Portia's praise of Bassanio at the end of her first scene is lent weight by her earlier ridicule of her other suitors. Her words go some way towards qualifying the image of a mercenary fortune-hunter in the first scene. The rowdy Gratiano is manipulated as a foil for Bassanio, as Shakespeare had earlier used Thurio to shield Proteus in the last scene of The Two Gentlemen of Verona. His ready granting of Gratiano's suit (II.ii) before he knows what it is, though a slight matter, recalls Antonio's earlier magnanimity. The granting of Gratiano's request allows Bassanio to appear as the spokesman for restraint and decorum: "pray thee take pain / To allay with some cold drops of modesty / Thy skipping spirit" (II.ii.176-8). The announcement, after Arragon's departure, of the imminent arrival of another suitor prompts Nerissa to remark "Bassanio, Lord Love, if thy will it be!" (II.ix.101). And, of course, it is. The action moves towards the inevitable casket scene and Shakespeare draws on the audience's awareness of how the fairy-tale convention works: the third suitor is always successful. Bassanio's casket scene is immediately preceded by Shylock's conversation with Tubal--the long scene is framed by two of Shylock's five appearances in the play--which shows the ascendancy of materialist values in personal, indeed familial, relationships as well as in business relationships. Shylock bewails the loss of "two thousand ducats in that, and other precious, precious jewels; I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the

jewels in her ear" (III.i.79-81). Jessica is treated as indistinguishable from his other property, and the contrast provided by Shylock's materialism here has the effect of making the emphasis on finance in the succeeding casket scene appear in a better light, at the same time as that very contrast enforces the audience's recognition of a connection.

The contrast between the emotional texture of Bassanio's casket scene and the scene with Shylock before it is striking. This scene has an emotional and poetic richness, a sense of joy welling up as the scene moves to Bassanio's choice of the casket--a movement accompanied by the first sounds of music in the play--that is very different from anything so far. The half-bored, yet impatient, tone of Portia's dealings with her previous suitors has gone:

I could teach you
How to choose right, but then I am forsworn,
So will I never be,--so may you miss me,--
But if you do, you'll make me wish a sin,
That I had been forsworn. Beshrew your eyes,
They have o'erlook'd me and divided me,
One half of me is yours, the other half yours,--
Mine I would say: but if mine then yours,
And so all yours;

(III.ii.10-8)

Portia's new love strains against submission to the rules of her situation and the lottery; her refusal to cheat makes the scene all the more tense and lays all hopes on Bassanio alone. His long speech of deliberation displays motives impeccably ideal and disinterested. His "And here choose I,--joy be the consequence!" (III.ii.107) can be an electric moment in production, and Portia's words of exalted joy (III.ii.108-14) crown the moment as Bassanio discovers her

portrait and embarks on another persuasively romantic and idealistic speech. But this speech concludes with the diction of legal contracts:

So (thrice-fair lady) stand I even so,
As doubtful whether what I see be true,
Until confirm'd, sign'd, ratified by you.
(III.ii.146-8)

Portia, wishing that she were fairer, richer and so would "Exceed account", defines "the full sum of me" (III.ii.157) and describes her forthcoming marriage in terms of its financial consequences as a business transaction: she presents herself as a piece of property with a new owner:

Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours
Is now converted. But now I was the lord
Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
Queen o'er myself: and even now, but now,
This house, these servants, and this same myself
Are yours,--my lord's!--I give them with this ring,
Which when you part from, lose, or give away,
Let it presage the ruin of your love,
And be my vantage to exclaim on you.
(III.ii.166-74)

The courtly mistress becomes the subordinate wife, and the transition from daughterhood to wifhood constitutes a movement from one dependent economic relationship to another. Portia gives Bassanio the ring which is the symbol both of their love in its ideal aspect and of the legal bond that embodies it, and she spells out the conditions of the contract, to which Bassanio swears adherence:

when this ring
Parts from this finger, then parts life from hence,--
O then be bold to say Bassanio's dead!
(III.ii.183-5)

In hazarding all, Bassanio has certainly realized "his fair advantages" (II.vii.19). The language of the fortune-hunter reappears, but now

it is Gratiano, not Bassanio, who boasts of the marriage as the "bargain of your faith" and declares: "We are the Jasons, we have won the fleece" (III.ii.193,240). While still impressing the financial aspect of the marriage on the audience, Shakespeare spares Bassanio from taint and allows him once again to be the spokesman for decorum and responsibility: "And do you Gratiano mean good faith?" (III.ii.210).

It is into this mood of harmony and imminent sexual pleasure-- Gratiano wants to "play with them the first boy for a thousand ducats" (III.ii.213-4) and seems keen to set about winning his wager as soon as possible--that the messenger from Venice intrudes. The arrival of Salerio with Antonio's letter to Bassanio prevents the sexual consummation of Portia and Bassanio's relationship. Bassanio's dilemma of conflicting loyalties is settled by Portia's taking an active initiative: she offers to match Antonio's financial generosity twenty times over "to pay the petty debt" (III.ii.306) and then declares

First go with me to church, and call me wife
And then away to Venice to your friend:
For never shall you lie by Portia's side
With an unquiet soul.

(III.ii.302-5)

This scene differs from the story Shakespeare found in Il Pecorone in two points: the lovers' relationship is consummated before the Bassanio-character returns to Venice, indeed before they are married; and there is no letter. It is also worth noting that in the source the Antonio-character not only does not intervene but also does not know the true purpose of his godson's expeditions. These changes

increase the influence of the absent Antonio. Shakespeare gives the letter great prominence; first its contents are made clear to the audience and then it is read aloud:

my bond to the Jew is forfeit, and (since in paying it,
it is impossible I should all live), debts are clear'd
between you and I, if I might but see you at my death:
notwithstanding, use your pleasure,--if your love do not
persuade you to come, let not my letter.

(III.ii.315-20)

Antonio's appeal to Bassanio's love for him reveals the exact nature of his bond with Shylock and contrasts sharply with his words at their leavetaking when, Salerio says, he told Bassanio to

'stay the very riping of the time,
 And for the Jew's bond which he hath of me--
 Let it not enter in your mind of love:

(II.viii.40-2)

The bond with Shylock is revealed to have a profound emotional significance for Antonio. It is a desperate attempt to hold on to Bassanio, to bind Bassanio to him. It is his response to the threat to their friendship posed by the expedition to Belmont and to the prospect of his friend's drifting away from him which it implies--hence his immediate and apparently carefree readiness to agree to the "merry sport" (I.iii.141) of the bond. Antonio's letter claims the payment of Bassanio's debt of love, fusing the languages of love and commerce in a way that he has earlier condemned in Shylock.

Shylock's repetitive raving about his determination to have his bond in the next scene is placed immediately after the reading of Antonio's letter which also calls in that bond and is instrumental in shattering the joyous mood of the scene in Belmont. Clearly the effect of this scene is hostility towards Shylock and sympathy with Antonio.

But, at the same time, the audience are made to recognize that Antonio, too, will have his bond: Bassanio is to place the claims of Antonio and the code of friendship before his marriage. The effect of Shylock's malevolent fury is to shield Antonio by making his letter of the law adherence to the bond in the sphere of personal relationships appear less reprehensible by contrast. Antonio may indeed "give and hazard all he hath" for Bassanio's sake, but he has his "hope of fair advantages" (II.vi.9, 19). His letter creates a direct conflict with Portia's marriage to Bassanio. But that relationship is an investment that Portia is determined to protect: "Since you are dear bought, I will love you dear" (III.ii.312). In packing her husband off to Venice and Antonio, she concedes her claim on his love--the legal claim of a wife--only to reassert it absolutely in the court scene and the last act.

The sexual innuendo of Nerissa's question after Portia announces her plan to disguise, "Why, shall we turn to men?" (III.iv.78), is extremely relevant to the disguise and to the action of the final two acts. Portia and Nerissa are, in effect, dressing as men as a means of getting their husbands, at last, into bed. To win them back from the all-male business world of Venice--where the men "converse and waste the time together" (III.iv.12), as Portia says, attending a succession of businessmen's dinner parties and indulging in the "shallow fopp'ry" (II.v.35) of gentlemen's revelry--the women must take on the appearance of men. The strongly masculine atmosphere of Venice contrasts with that of Belmont which, though initially governed by the will of Portia's dead father,

gradually becomes dominated by the women. In the final act, it is Portia herself who resolves the complications of the situation: there is no male figure such as the Duke in The Two Gentlemen of Verona. In breaking free of her restrictive situation by eloping with Lorenzo, Jessica--the only woman to appear (briefly) dressed as such in Venice in the entire play--has to dress as a young man. It is perhaps significant that a wind favourable to Bassanio's departure for Belmont causes the cancellation of a dinner party and planned revelry: "No masque tonight,--the wind is come about" (II.vii.64). Venturing into the outer world of Venice, Portia must deal with a more specific threat to her marriage than an excess of masculine bonhomie: Antonio. In her disguise she adopts a masculine sexual identity to enable her to operate actively in Venice and so to displace Antonio's hold on Bassanio's affections and loyalties. In the love-versus-friendship structure of The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Julia's disguise is ultimately a means of indirect intervention by which she recovers Proteus. Portia's disguise is a means of direct intervention to recover her husband, not, of course, from another woman, but from another man. That the play deals with the breaking of the marriage bond not a bond between lovers is a crucial difference. Portia, unlike Julia, has no qualms about disguising as a man. She intervenes strictly on her own terms--those of a wife--and rigorously imposes these on the two men in Acts IV and V.

The action of the great court scene is double. Its basis is the dual nature of Antonio's bond with Shylock: the financial bond

with the Jew is also a personal bond with Bassanio. When Shylock calls in his bond with Antonio, the latter, in turn, calls in his with Bassanio. But the court scene also sets Shylock's bond—which simultaneously embodies and caricatures the bond of "god-like amity" as the lottery of Portia's father both embodies and caricatures the arranged marriage--against Portia's bond of marriage. The scene's action is in two stages. Shylock's bond focusses the trial itself; the marriage bond, the ring episode that concludes it. Portia is pitted against Shylock to save Antonio and pitted against Antonio to save Bassanio. In defeating Shylock's design, she is also defeating that of Antonio, who is almost as eager as Shylock that the apparently inevitable judgement should be given and the condition of the bond fulfilled:

Make no more offers, use no farther means,
But with all plain and brief conveniency
Let me have judgment, and the Jew his will

Most heartily I do beseech the court
To give the judgment.

(IV.i.81-3, 239-40)

Antonio is to be a man saved against his will. With Portia's words "Why then thus it is,-- / You must prepare your bosom for his knife" (IV.i.240-1), Shylock and Antonio appear to be on the point of receiving the judgement they both want, giving Shylock Antonio's heart and by this sacrifice allowing Antonio a final grand proof of his love for Bassanio, so reaffirming the bond between them and Bassanio's debt of love:

Grieve not that I am fall'n to this for you:
For herein Fortune shows herself more kind
Than is her custom: it is still her use

To let the wretched man outlive his wealth,
 To view with hollow eye and wrinkled brow
 An age of poverty: from which ling'ring penance
 Of such misery doth she cut me off.
 Commend me to your honourable wife,
 Tell her the process of Antonio's end,
 Say how I lov'd you, speak me fair in death:
 And when the tale is told, bid her be judge
 Whether Bassanio had not once a love:
 Repent but you that you shall lose your friend
 And he repents not that he pays your debt.
 For if the Jew do cut but deep enough,
 I'll pay it instantly with all my heart.
 (IV.i.262-77)

In Antonio's words, the loss of his "wealth" is less the loss of his fortune than the loss of Bassanio to Portia. Antonio, finally, applies the diction of finance to love in a fashion more complete than any other character. He will literally pay Bassanio's debt with all his heart. Antonio sets his sacrifice and his love in explicit opposition to Portia's love for Bassanio. And Bassanio, whose new-found generosity is emphasized in this scene (IV.112-3, 205-8, 315, 323) responds instantly:

life itself, my wife, and all the world,
 Are not with me esteem'd above thy life.
 I would lose all, ay sacrifice them all
 Here to this devil, to deliver you.
 (IV.i.281-3)

The threat to Portia's position implicit in Bassanio's generosity is crystallized and recognized: "Your wife would give you little thanks for that / If she were by to hear you make the offer" (IV.284-5). Unknown to Antonio and Bassanio, Portia is literally "judge" and she proceeds to give sentence--in favour of Shylock.

For the first two-thirds of the scene Shylock is the caricature stage Jew of other moments in the play. He whets his knife "Not on

thy sole: but on thy soul (harsh Jew)" (IV.i.123), as Gratiano's taunt has it. His preparations, with scale and knife, his horrifying enthusiasm (IV.i.248-50), his exultant praise of Balthazar--all present him as the comic, diabolical stage villain, the butt of the audience's hostility: "I cannot find it, 'tis not in the bond" (IV.i.258). With Shylock in absolute ascendancy, convinced of his triumph, spurred on by the "Daniel come to judgment"--"The law allows it, and the court awards it"--Portia suddenly turns the tables on him and on Antonio: "Tarry a little, there is something else,--" (IV.i.219, 299, 301). This is the turning-point of the scene. Portia's quibble defeats Shylock, and the audience's response is relief and pleasure--it is indeed the sport to have the engineer hoist with his own petar. But then Balthazar goes further. Shylock's adherence to the letter of the law in the first movement of the scene has its mirror image in Balthazar's even more rigorous adherence to it in the second movement. The audience's admiring delight in Balthazar's ingenuity mixes with awe at his ruthless, merciless efficiency. The young doctor of laws has a second trump card up his sleeve: "The law hath yet another hold on you" (IV.i.343). This unexpected hold on Shylock allows the inhuman "mercy" (IV.i.374) of the forced conversion which Antonio inflicts on him.

Portia frustrates Antonio's attempts to sacrifice himself as a final gesture of his love for Bassanio, relentlessly applying the letter of the law to protect her own bond with Bassanio. By the end of the trial, her comment "For as thou urgest justice be assur'd / Thou shalt have justice more than thou desir'st" (IV.i.311-2) applies

as much to Antonio, with his eagerness for "judgment", as to Shylock. Antonio and Portia act in their own interests, each asserting the primacy of the claim of his or her bond. Shylock declares: "The pound of flesh I demand of him / Is dearly bought, 'tis mine and I will have it" (IV.i.99-100). His words echo Portia's description of Bassanio as "dear bought" (III.ii.312). Like Shylock, she will have her pound of flesh; she will protect her investment. She will impose the terms of her marriage contract, just as earlier she adhered so rigorously to the law of her father's will. Shylock is punished for the kind of rigidity that both Antonio and Portia practise in their dealings with Bassanio. Antonio forces the men-before-women principle of the friendship code on Bassanio, and Portia must be equally rigid in order to recover her husband. The behaviour of the men forces her to play their game according to their own rules, pressing her claim in Shylockian fashion. In the trial itself, Portia prevents Shylock's attempt to cut out Antonio's heart; in the ring episode, she goes on to complete her own design: she cuts Bassanio out of Antonio's heart.

Critics have almost unanimously dismissed the ring episode--and so one-fifth of the play--as "but superficial matter" after the court scene.¹⁸ This verdict fails to recognize that the ring episode is almost a re-enactment of the trial itself, but focussing this time on the play's second bond: the marriage bond. That Balthazar is really Portia asserting her claim as wife on Bassanio is the only reason for Act V: a genuine Balthazar--or, for that matter, aged Bellario, the shadowy legal expert who hovers behind Portia's

triumph--could have saved Antonio and Bassanio returned to Belmont. Only the conflict in the triangle of Portia, Bassanio and Antonio necessitates the ring episode. In Balthazar's request for the ring Bassanio received from Portia, the conflict between Bassanio's feeling for Portia and for Antonio is again explicitly raised. The audience are reminded of the ring's significance and of Bassanio's vow concerning it:

Good sir, this ring was given me by my wife,
And when she put it on, she made me vow,
That I should neither sell, nor give, nor lose it.
(IV.i.437-9)

In Il Pecorone, Giannetto grants the request of his own accord. But Shakespeare has Bassanio refuse at first and then send the ring after Balthazar at Antonio's request:

My Lord Bassanio, let him have the ring,
Let his deservings and my love withal
Be valued 'gainst your wife's commandment.
(IV.i.445-7)

Once again Antonio sets the claims of his love in opposition to Bassanio's marriage with Portia, and Bassanio, agreeing immediately to his request, again puts his feeling for Antonio before Portia and his vow to her. Ironically, in reaffirming his continuing influence over Bassanio, Antonio plays into Portia's hands. What the concluding scene in Belmont will reveal to Antonio and Bassanio is the extent to which they are bound not to Balthazar--"For in my mind you are much bound to him" (IV.i.403), observes the Duke--but, unknowingly, to Portia. The tactic that worked for Balthazar in the trial works again for Portia in this scene--the lady has learnt from the lawyer: she pulls the trump card of Balthazar's identity from her sleeve, as she

produced the quibble and the law depriving Shylock of his property earlier.

The long final scene completes Portia's judgement of Antonio begun in the court scene. In that scene she prevented his sacrifice of "all my heart" (IV.i.277) for Bassanio's sake. In this scene she asserts her total possession of Bassanio and asserts it in explicitly sexual terms. The ring, whose fame as a symbol of a sexual organ is surpassed only by that of the sword, is the source of the scene's innuendo and talk of infidelity. John Doeblner, in his study of iconic imagery in Shakespeare, interprets the ring in The Merchant of Venice in religious terms as a symbol of chastity and argues that "the literal ring becomes a figurative circle in which chastity is returned to itself".¹⁹ Such an interpretation does not take proper account of the circumstances under which the ring was originally given away and misrepresents the scene's references to the ring which are bawdy because the scene concerns, not an ideal chastity, but sexuality and infidelity: "Well, while I live, I'll fear no other thing, / So sore, as keeping safe Nerissa's ring" (V.i.306-7). The ring in this episode is the ring of fabliau. Mery Tales and Quick Answeres, a miscellany published in 1567, includes the following tale:

A man that was ryght iolous of his wyfe, dreamed on a nyght as he laye a bed with her and slepte, that the dyuell aperd vnto him and sayde: woldest thou nat be gladde, that I shulde put the in suretie of thy wyfe? Yes, sayde he. Holde, sayde the dyuell, as longe as thou hast this rynge vpon thy fynger, no man shall make thee kockolde. The man was gladde thereof, and when he awaked, he founde his fynger in *****.²⁰

The ring in The Merchant of Venice--as well as being the symbol of the marriage contract--is similarly a comic sexual symbol. The bawdy to which it gives rise brings us back to the sexual transformation of Portia's disguise.

It is in V.i. that we find the kind of dramatic irony that is, as we have seen, absent in the court scene during Portia's performance as Balthazar. Portia responds to Bassanio's infidelity by threatening to commit a like infidelity with the doctor of laws: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. We are repeatedly reminded of Portia's sexual transformation in the earlier scene. Bassanio declares: "No woman had it, but a civil doctor, / Which did refuse three thousand ducats of me" (V.i.210-1). Portia retorts:

I will become as liberal as you,
I'll not deny him anything I have,
No, not my body, nor my husband's bed.
(V.i.226-8)

Portia endows Bassanio's gift of the ring with an explicitly sexual significance. In adopting her disguise as Balthazar, Portia sacrifices her body as Antonio offers to sacrifice his body in the bond with Shylock. She turns to a man--assumes a wholly masculine identity--and receives the ring from Bassanio as such--as Balthazar and not as Portia. Her prediction is proved accurate: the men do indeed "think we are accomplished with that we lack" (III.iv.61-2). Bassanio's symbolic gesture of infidelity is committed with a man at Antonio's request. By her disguise Portia crystallizes a dual sexuality that matches the "double self" (V.i.245) that she perceives in Bassanio: she shows her capacity to be both woman and man, wife

and friend to him, as Bassanio recognizes when he says: "Sweet doctor, you shall be my bedfellow" (V.i.284). By the sleight of getting the ring as Balthazar, Portia has fastened the homoerotic tendency of Bassanio's sexuality and the obligations of masculine friendship onto herself. Consequently there is no room for Antonio, "th'unhappy subject of these quarrels" (V.i.238). The bond Antonio gives in this scene parallels his original bond to Shylock, but whereas the earlier bond was an attempt to hold on to Bassanio, this bond relinquishes any hold on him:

Ant. I once did lend my body for his wealth,
Which but for him that had your husband's ring
Had quite miscarried. I dare be bound again,
My soul upon the forfeit, that your lord
Will never more break faith advisedly.

Por. Then you shall be his surety: give him this
And bid him keep it better than the other.

Ant. Here Lord Bassanio, swear to keep this ring.
(V.i.249-56)

That Portia gives Antonio the ring to return to Bassanio does not show, as Alexander Leggatt asserts, that "he has a share in their happiness".²¹ In returning the ring, Antonio acknowledges that he is excluded from that happiness--he is not married off at the last minute like his counterpart in Il Pecorone--and that Portia has defeated him and displaced him in Bassanio's heart. Accordingly he can stand bound for Bassanio's future faithfulness to Portia. Significantly, Portia accepts Antonio's bond as Bassanio's "surety" and not any renewed oath from her husband. Portia's judgement of Antonio is completed by the letter she gives him. The casualness of her announcement that his argosies have survived--"You shall not know by what strange accident / I chanced on this letter"

(V.i.278-9)--creates the impression that Portia herself is in some mysterious way responsible for their reappearance: she pays off the remaining financial debt and Antonio's final claim on Bassanio is removed. Antonio's words "Sweet lady, you have given me life and living" (V.i.286) recall Shylock's words at his moment of greatest desolation: "you take my life / When you do take the means whereby I live" (IV.i.372-3). The trump card of Balthazar's identity leaves Antonio as the trump card of the law left Shylock. While appearing to return to Antonio what he began with--except Bassanio--Portia leaves him, like Shylock, with nothing. He has "outlive[d] his wealth, / To view with hollow eye and wrinkled brow / An age of poverty" (IV.i.265-7). In asserting her claims as a wife, Portia, "the unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractised" (III.ii.159), ultimately proves herself to have become the most adept businessman of them all.

If Portia has a natural descendant it is less Rosalind or Viola than Helena. The plots of The Merchant of Venice and All's Well that Ends Well are very different from those of comedies of courtship like The Two Gentlemen of Verona, As You Like It and Twelfth Night in which an unmarried woman must disguise, for various reasons, and venture forth into the world to obtain the young man she wants for her husband. Like The Taming of the Shrew, the plots of The Merchant of Venice and All's Well that Ends Well have a second stage. Portia and Helena find that though they have won their men, they have not yet won husbands. As Helena says of herself, "'Tis but the shadow of a wife you see; / The name and

not the thing" (V.iii.301-2). The marriage ceremony marks the end only of the first stage. Portia and Helena have a second task to perform: like Petruchio with Kate, they must make their husbands conformable. Helena's task is even more difficult than Portia's because of the intractable raw material she has chosen. To his mother, Bertram is "a rash and unbridled boy" (III.ii.27); to Parolles, "a foolish idle boy, but for all that very ruttish" (IV.iii.207). He obstinately clings to his adolescent immaturity--he is determined to remain "A lover of [Mars's] drum, hater of love" (III.iii.11)--and he reveals his shallowness most damningly in his dealings with women--he contemptuously dismisses Helena as "my clog" (II.v.53), and the bedding of Diana is but a minor matter, to be squeezed in amongst the "main parcels of dispatch" (IV.iii.86) with which he busies himself in a single night. To break down his stubborn resistance to the process of growing up, Helena is forced into deviousness that has outraged numerous critics whose response shows their wish to maintain the very stereotype of meek feminine passivity whose debilitating social consequences Shakespeare is attacking. It is Bertram's shoddiness--the most striking example of the impoverished values of the court society's younger generation--that makes the bed-trick necessary.

Meditating on virginity, Helena asks Parolles, that expert on the state of the market, "How might one do, sir, to lose it to her own liking?" (I.i.147). Recognizing that "Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie" (I.i.212), this Ophelia-with-gumption embarks on the obstacle-strewn course of losing her virginity to her own

liking. Having successfully kept her side of the bargain with the ailing King, she has a free choice of the rather lightweight group of courtiers. Helena's freedom in being able to choose or reject any of these young men is a reversal of Portia's severely restricted position as the prize of a similar game. The justification Bertram offers for rejecting Helena--"In such a business give me leave to use / The help of mine own eyes" (II.iii.107-8)--is one offered in vain by several of Shakespeare's women who have undesirable suitors thrust upon them. Here, too, it fails. But the only alternative for a Hermia is the cloister, whereas a Bertram can wed, refuse to bed his wife and fly to the Tuscan wars, spurred on by Parolles, that "snipp'd-taffeta fellow . . . , whose villainous saffron would have made all the unbak'd and doughy youth of a nation in his colour" (IV.v.1-4)

To th' wars, my boy, to th' wars!
 He wears his honour in a box unseen
 That hugs his kicky-wicky here at home,
 Spending his manly marrow in her arms,
 Which should sustain the bound and high curvet
 Of Mar's fiery steel.

(II.ii.274-9)

Bertram's friendship with Parolles is very different from Bassanio's with Antonio, but it constitutes just as great an impediment to the young man's attainment of adult maturity. The all-male business world of Venice has its counterpart in All's Well that Ends Well in the adolescent machismo of Bertram's insatiable, Boys' Own thirst for war and battle-honour. He must be prised free of Parolles and the bond of masculine friendship. The unmasking of that man of words is a step in the right direction and one that assists Helena

by opening his eyes to at least one of his follies.

Finding that Bertram lays siege to Diana's "honestest defence" (III.v.74), Helena sees her chance for active intervention and takes it, like Portia, without a second thought. The successful bed-trick, however, does not end her difficulties. The closing movement of the play is a race against time: Helena's happy ending is won in the face of stiff opposition--the side-effects of her "death"; the marriage arranged with Lafew's daughter; the King's newly acquired determination to let bygones be bygones. With the King and the others busily preparing another very different ending to the play, Helena can shape the ending she desires only with great difficulty. But she has not been written out of the play yet. Having stage-managed the confusion that Diana and Bertram create between them in the final scene, Helena solves her own riddle and stages her well earned ending:

There is your ring.
And look you, here's your letter. This it says:
When from my finger you can get this ring
And are by me with child, &c. This is done;
Will you be mine now you are doubly won?
(V.iii.304-8)

Like Portia, Helena has had to win Bertram twice over to make him conformable and, again like Portia, a ring proves her right to her chosen prize. She has played Bertram's game according to his own rules and has won it.

Portia and Helena would be two good answers to the question Parolles asks after his unmasking: "Who cannot be crush'd with a plot?" (IV.iv.314). Portia is the first of the comic heroines to

take control of the plot in the centre of the play and direct it to the ending she wishes. In The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Julia never achieves this degree of freedom and power. Only Juliet attempts something similar in directing her relationship with Romeo up to their separation. Her subsequent loss of control, as she finds herself under pressure from other figures and insufficiently free to get round the impediment of the feud which ultimately dooms Romeo, is one cause of Romeo and Juliet's shift from comedy to tragedy.²² The power over the plot that Shakespeare gives Portia is matched, indeed surpassed, by that he allows Helena. Bertram is a more difficult proposition than Bassanio, the morally impoverished fashionable society of All's Well that Ends Well is more of a problem than the Venetian business world, and so Helena's freedom needs to be all the greater: she takes hold of the action from Act I. In both plays a woman, and so a boy actor, dominates and manipulates the plot to refertilize a society threatened by the sterile values of men played by senior actors. Clearly this affects the position and status of the other parts in the play. Portia's triumph is at the expense of the sharer's parts of Shylock and Antonio, and her ascendancy reduces the major male parts to second fiddle. More explicitly than in The Two Gentlemen of Verona and Love's Labour's Lost, the younger generation teach the older generation some lessons, and the teaching operates at the levels of both story and theatrical performance. In The Merchant of Venice, All's Well that Ends Well and As You Like It, Shakespeare selects plots that allow him to design a dramatically

dominant woman's part. When his source does not give the woman this kind of dominance, he alters it to embody in his heroine the dramatic energy that shapes the plot. This is never more striking than in Rosalind, whose power in directing the action of As You Like It anticipates such later dramatist-figures as Iago and Prospero.

CHAPTER FOUR

ALL POINTS LIKE A MAN: THE IMPROBABLE FICTIONS OF GANYMEDE AND CESARIO

The comic dynamic that we have observed in The Merchant of Venice and All's Well that Ends Well takes three forms: social, dramatic and theatrical. In terms of dramatic structure, the first necessitates the second, and the second necessitates the third; they operate in series. The social dynamic shows the advantages of women's having greater independence, more control over their own lives, especially in the choice of a husband, and a greater say in the affairs of men. This thinking on what we might (fashionably) call sexual politics shapes the dramatic dynamic that governs the choice and handling of plot, making the woman's part the dramatically dominant one and giving it power over the action and other characters. It follows naturally that if the play's major part--its energizing part--is to be the woman's part, it goes to a young apprentice in the company. So is introduced the theatrical dynamic that mirrors within the structure of the acting company the kind of upheaval in traditional thinking that is advocated in the comedies. The disruption of the established socio-sexual hierarchy dramatized is thus reflected in the disruption of the hierarchy of the little self-propagating society of the Chamberlain's Company--sharer-masters, hired men, apprentices--that is necessitated by

casting and performing these plays.

Of course, the hierarchy in the acting company was not dependent only on age and economics. It was also affected by the popularity of individual actors and specific kinds of role: the audience exerts an important influence. The boy actor who played Rosalind in As You Like It, which most ostentatiously embodies the disruption of the sharers/masters-apprentices hierarchy, must have been regarded by both the Company and the audience as something more than just a young apprentice, even though that was his status in the economic structure of the Chamberlain's Company. And it should be remembered that when As You Like It was first produced the little eyases were already carrying it away, Hercules and his load too; boy actors drew audiences to the theatres, and in this sense Shakespeare was certainly giving the public a play as they liked it. More thoroughly than any of the other comedies, As You Like It belongs to its heroine and to the boy actor who played her-- Orlando, the longest part for an adult actor, is not even half as long as Rosalind--and in it the comic dynamic underlying The Merchant of Venice and All's Well that Ends Well is most fully realized. What most strikingly differentiates Rosalind from the other disguised heroines and makes her so extraordinarily free to act as she chooses is her relation to the plot, and in this respect As You Like It marks a radical advance in comic structure, an advance only hinted at even in The Merchant of Venice.

That the plot of As You Like It is inconsequential--indeed almost non-existent in terms of "story"--has long been observed.

Once everyone is in Arden--and that is accomplished by Act II--the plot is suspended and replaced by a series of casual encounters among the various characters, with Rosalind as their linchpin. The pace and close plotting of the opening act only underline this change. There are two strands to the plot of As You Like It. Firstly, the framing political story which is not only presented in terms that are essentially fairy-tale, but is forgotten for most of the play. Over this strand of the plot Rosalind has no control. But over the second, the interpersonal action that takes up most of the play, she achieves total control. She can resolve and bring to fruition this strand at any point from the beginning of Act III, when she discovers that Orlando is in the Forest as well as her father. Though the women originally flee the court "To seek my uncle in the Forest of Arden" (I.iii.103), as Celia, says, once there, Rosalind makes no effort to reveal herself to him--indeed quite the opposite (III.v.31-4). Discarding this intention, Rosalind, her "woman's fear" hidden in her heart beneath "a swashing and a martial outside" (I.iii.115-6), takes over from Celia--who takes the initiative and directs things at court; she banishes herself with Rosalind and formulates the plan to seek her uncle in disguise--and controls people and events to the very end of the play. Her disguise as Aliena's brother effects a transformation of her character in keeping with her masculine sexual persona: "I could find in my heart to disgrace my man's apparel and to cry like a woman. But I must comfort the weaker vessel, as doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to

petticoat; therefore courage, good Aliena" (II.iv.3-7). She eagerly seizes the masculine role that goes with her disguise and proceeds to give a performance as Ganymede which is theatrical in a way that the disguises of Portia--her performance as Balthazar is just as accomplished, but its spirit is different--or Julia and Viola are not. The presence of Celia and Touchstone as confidants allows Rosalind to cast off her disguise as Julia and Viola cannot; she can take breaks between shows. Rosalind is never a captive victim of her disguise like Julia and Viola, reduced to passivity by the difficulties of their situations, locked into the dilemma posed by the role of "true servant". Rosalind's disguise is never a wickedness because the plot allows her complete control of it.

Of course Portia, too, is in full control of her disguise, but she is working against the difficult challenge created by the intransigence of the men in the play. Rosalind is never up against it as Portia is--or at least as we are led to believe she is before she produces her saving quibble. Shakespeare moves Rosalind in and out of disguise as he does not the other heroines, and the effect is to make her appear more of an actress, showcasing her talents in a series of comic scenes. In the central plateau of As You Like It, Shakespeare creates a new comic structure by abandoning the conventional notion of plot and so freeing his heroine more completely than ever before. The element of playfulness in her performance as Ganymede--the other heroines' disguises are never playful--has much to do with the relaxation of constraints effected by the shift from the working-day world of the court to the holiday

world of Arden. At Duke Frederick's court, if Rosalind should "outstay the time" (I.iii.84) the penalty will be death; in the Forest, there is no clock. Time in the plots of The Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Merchant of Venice, Twelfth Night and All's Well that Ends Well is very different: the passage of events creates problems, confusion, crisis, most clearly in Helena's race against time in the closing movement of All's Well that Ends Well. But the world of Arden operates very differently from Illyria or Venice: in this magically "green" world, Rosalind can do as she pleases when she pleases--and her so doing constitutes the "plot". The scenes in the Forest contrast her with three other women, each in a traditional mould--the passive Celia, who criticises Rosalind for being too free in her behaviour; the scornful courtly mistress whom Phebe plays; Audrey's down-to-earth country simplicity--and show her discarding these traditional ideas, mapping out her own direction, redefining both a woman's relation to men and her place in the world. The holiday in Arden constitutes a temporary movement to a timeless world where things can sort themselves out under Rosalind's watchful eye and an ailing society can renew itself.

More than the earlier comedies, As You Like It presents a court society in serious trouble, disrupted by the tensions of family, economics, fashion and convention; a society of shifting and indeed disintegrating values, afflicted with rootlessness and desperately in need of rejuvenation. The play's concern with rediscovering what is "natural"--in behaviour, in social and sexual relations--as a restorative for the sterile artifice of

society looks forward to Hamlet, Troilus and Cressida and especially All's Well that Ends Well, in which a withdrawal to a "green world" to revitalize society is not possible, and so Helena's task is all the more difficult. Orlando's praise of Adam's selfless generosity clearly expresses one aspect of his society's condition:

O good old man, how well in thee appears
 The constant service of the antique world,
 When service sweat for duty, not for meed.
 Thou art not for the fashion of these times,
 When none will sweat but for promotion,
 And having that, do choke their service up
 Even with the having; it is not so with thee.
 (II.iii.56-62)

And Adam's having to leave after so long is the play's profoundest and most affecting indictment of the court society. His uprooting bespeaks the shallow values of this newfangled world:

Oli. Good Monsieur Charles! What's the new news at the
 new court?
Cha. There's no news at the court sir, but the old news.
 That is, the old Duke is banished by his younger
 brother the new Duke
 (I.i.96-100)

The "new court" is characterized by lethargic, but nervy, boredom. Oliver's jejune wit is shared by the women, who have nothing better to do than to exchange excruciatingly clever, brittle jokes about Nature and Fortune, and the men ease the tedium with one-sided wrestling matches. The general nervousness is explained by the tyrannical, "humorous" Duke and his obsession with "family". "Thou should'st have better pleas'd me with this deed, / Hadst thou descended from another house" (I.ii.216-7), he tells the victorious Orlando, who is advised to leave the court in consequence. Justifying his banishment of Rosalind in a wonderful display of

paranoid political reasoning, he declares: "Thou art thy father's daughter, there's enough" (I.iii.54). The situation at court is precarious at best, and even the foppish, posturing Le Beau recognizes that there is "a better world than this" (I.ii.274).

That "better world" is under construction in Arden. But the back-to-nature woodland society of the exiled Duke--though the greenest of Shakespeare's green worlds--is not presented unambiguously. In Shakespeare's source, Thomas Lodge's Rosalynde (1590), the life in the Forest is repeatedly praised and the life at court as frequently criticised. Lodge's romance has no Touchstone continually insisting that "now I am in Arden, the more fool I; when I was at home I was in a better place" (II.iv.13-4). His reservations about the bliss of life in Arden seem to be shared by the exiled Duke himself, who not only asks the rather shaky rhetorical question

Now my co-mates and brothers in exile,
Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?
(II.i.1-4)

but also remarks that "True it is that we have seen better days" and numbers himself and his fellows amongst the unhappy (II.vii.120, 136-9). The Duke and the many young gentlemen who flock to him every day may "fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world" (I.i.118-9), but the present time is not the Golden Age, and as always in Shakespeare withdrawal achieves nothing. The Duke, in his ready acceptance of his exile, amusing himself with picnics and deer-hunts, is irresponsible, like Vincentio burying himself away in

his study whilst the machinery of Viennese law gradually grinds to a halt or Prospero handing over Milan to his brother so that he can study the liberal arts.

As in all the romantic comedies, in As You Like It the younger generation offer the way to society's renewal. But the pervasive sense of disaffected rootlessness in this play focusses on the chief male representative of that younger generation: Orlando. At the wrestling match, he tells Celia and Rosalind that

if I be foiled, there is but one shamed that was never gracious; if killed, but one dead that is willing to be so. I shall do my friends no wrong, for I have none to lament me; the world no injury, for in it I have nothing; only in the world I fill up a place which may be better supplied when I have made it empty.

(I.ii.176-82)

Orlando begins the play inert and bored, restlessly knocking around the family estate. His insistent complaint is that Oliver denies him his rightful education and has "trained me like a peasant, obscuring and hiding from me all gentleman-like qualities" (I.i.68-70).

Frustrated of any more fruitful field of activity, young Orlando, brimming with the energy of adolescence--he retaliates to Oliver's slap with a wrestler's lock and explodes into the exiled Duke's picnic with sword drawn--is reduced to taking part secretly in wrestling matches. His wrestling and aggressive volatility in the first half of the play are another, modified version of the familiar adolescent allegiance to machismo present in so many of Shakespeare's young men. His appeal for the match to continue when Frederick steps in to halt it--"Yes, I beseech your Grace, I am not yet well breathed" (I.ii.205-6)--is adolescent macho bravado, showing off his physical

prowess before the admiring women.

But as young men in the comedies so often discover, love is a more demanding business than friendship with other young men or chasing after honour in battle or even winning wrestling matches against impossible odds. It is quickly apparent that women are a terra incognita to Orlando. Rosalind's gift of her chain sparks no response and nor does her broad hint: "Sir, you have wrestled well, and overthrown / More than your enemies" (I.ii.244-5). Orlando is nonplussed, unable to speak, reduced to "a mere lifeless block" (I.ii.241). He takes refuge in the Romeo tones: "But heavenly Rosalind!" (I.ii.279); and once in the Forest, he moons around decorating trees with amateurish love poems:

Hang there my verse, in witness of my love
And thou thrice-crowned queen of night survey
With thy chaste eye, from thy pale sphere above
Thy huntress' name, that my full life doth sway.

Run, run Orlando, carve on every tree
The fair, the chaste, the unexpressive she.
(III.ii.1-4, 9-10)

He is the conventional, dejected courtly lover--"I am that he, that unfortunate he" (III.ii.385)--with Petrarchan vocabulary newly polished, and as silly as Romeo in love with Rosaline or Valentine with Silvia.

Orlando clearly needs a good education--though not the one he thinks he needs--and in the long central plateau of As You Like It Rosalind gives him just that. Unlike Julia, Portia and Helena, she does not have to prise her man free from the bond of masculine friendship and all it represents; she has no opposition other than

his extreme youth and immaturity. But she still has to lick him into shape as a lover and future husband. And in doing so she, too, has something to learn about love; the lesson of the wooing game benefits them both. Responding to Celia's efforts to cheer her up, she agrees to seek ways of enlivening existence at the court: "From henceforth I will, coz, and devise sports. Let me see, what think you of falling in love?" (I.ii.23-4). The wrestling match turns the sport of love into something more serious: her pensive silence returns, but now "some of it is for my child's father. O how full of briers is this working-day world!" (I.iii.11-2). Her notion of love has acquired a sexual aspect. She is suddenly thinking in terms of a husband and child, and now court life imposes a newly oppressive strain on her. The flight to the Forest releases her from restrictions and ultimately enables her to take the initiative with Orlando, circumventing, by her disguise, his obstructive tendency to become "a mere lifeless block" in her presence.

Ganymede's teasing refusal to believe that Orlando is a lover, because "There is none of my uncle's marks upon you" (III.ii.359), mocks the conventional masculine idea of the courtly lover "sighing every minute and groaning every hour" (III.ii.297-8), and at the same time criticises him for not even living up to his sex's own ludicrous standard.

Ganymede's cure insists on the similarity between boys and young women:

At which time would I, being but a moonish youth, grieve,
be effeminate, changeable, longing and liking, proud,
fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant, full of tears,

full of smiles, for every passion something and for no
passion truly anything, as boys and women are for the
most part cattle of this colour;

(III.ii.397-403)

Ganymede's account of the fickle weaker sex sounds more like a description of Shakespeare's inconstant, volatile young men--a composite figure of Proteus, Romeo and Orsino--than of his stable, constant young women. The similarity is focussed in the figure of Rosalind as Ganymede and the boy actor who is both--a figure of Chinese box complexity: a boy actor playing a constant young woman playing a boy playing an inconstant young woman. In the wooing game, the theatrical fact of transvestist acting becomes the dramatic fiction; one dissolves into the other as Ganymede plays "Rosalind". In agreeing to play Ganymede's game, Orlando agrees to do exactly what an Elizabethan audience agreed to do in watching a play: to take a boy for a woman. Ganymede's cure is quintessentially theatrical, a play within a play.

Rosalind is already familiar with the therapeutic and educative value of watching a play. She looks on as the posturing Silvius, that most literary of shepherds, speaks of his love to Corin in a thoroughly self-dramatizing fashion:

Or if thou hast not broke from company
Abruptly as my passion now makes me,
Thou hast not lov'd.
O Phebe, Phebe, Phebe' Exit.

Ros. Alas, poor shepherd, searching of thy wound,
I have by hard adventure found mine own.
(II.iv.37-42)

Rosalind's response is a paradigm of identification, of one of the ways that we relate drama to our own lives. It is another version

of the play within the play effect that catches Claudius's conscience. Silvius and Phebe's relationship is experience theatricalized, "a pageant truly play'd" (III.iv.48), in which the stereotypical forlorn servant and scornful mistress play scenes for their own delectation. He piles on the pleading humility before his goddess, and she plays hard to get with an ease that comes from having played the scene so often. Once again, courtly love is seen as a serious obstacle to the development of an adult relationship. Rosalind, however, has other ideas: "I'll prove a busy actor in their play" (III.iv.55). She takes upon herself another theatrical cure, and Ganymede, a member of an audience dissatisfied with the play being performed, enters the fray with instructions for the cast:

You foolish shepherd, wherefore do you follow her
Like foggy South puffing with wind and rain?
You are a thousand times a properer man
Than she a woman.

But mistress, know yourself. Down on your knees
And thank heaven, fasting, for a good man's love;
For I must tell you friendly in your ear,
Sell when you can, you are not for all markets.
Cry the man mercy, love him, take his offer;
(III.v.49-52, 57-61)

This attempt to bring Phebe and Silvius to their senses provides Rosalind with a rehearsal for her more important performance in the wooing game.

In Rosalynde, the game takes the form of "The Wooing Eglogue Betwixt Rosalynde and Rosader".¹ After listening to one of Rosader's sonnets--Lodge's heroine is not a critic of poetry like Shakespeare's--Rosalynde replies with a cynical sonnet, which he answers with another romantic one. Finally, Rosalynde is convinced of his love and yields

by finishing off his rhyme. Shakespeare, of course, makes something very different out of this situation. His wooing game looks back to the kind of game Petruchio played with Katherine, but Rosalind's cure is his most intensive game-cum-therapy session. Rosalind fulfils the duties of director and author as well as actor, casting herself in one part and then another: Rosalind "in a holiday humour and like enough to consent"; Rosalind "in a more coming-on disposition"; Rosalind the bride (IV.i.65-6; 107-8, 117-8). She puts Orlando through a series of auditions--how would you play this scene? How this one?--prompting Celia when she appears to forget her lines: "You must begin, 'Will you Orlando--'" (IV.i.122). Celia's presence as an on-stage audience for Rosalind's little play continuously directs our attention to the latter's performance: "It pleases him to call you so: but he hath a Rosalind of a better leer than you" (IV.i.63-4). Through her playing of roles, Rosalind makes her disguise a medium for the exploration of self by setting up as a fiction experience with which her contact is new. In playing "Rosalind", she moves herself through all the stages of a relationship: courtship, the marriage ceremony, married life, even adultery. Her performance is an exercise in self-knowledge in which she plays purposefully inaccurate projections of herself, studying Orlando's response and her own by means of the distancing effect of her disguise.

Orlando's performance in the wooing game is poor in comparison with Rosalind's. His participation in the game is, of course, ludicrous--why does he not do something instead of wasting his time fooling around in the Forest with a well-spoken young country lad?

After all, it is Rosalind who "my full life doth sway". Furthermore, he turns up late for the performance, and Ganymede upbraids him roundly for his dismal unpunctuality (IV.i.36-9). In playing the lover, he spouts courtly love clichés worthy of Silvius, and Rosalind counters them with cynical retorts:

Ros. Well, in her own person, I say I will not have you.

Orl. Then in mine own person, I die.

Ros. No, faith, die by attorney. The world is almost six thousand years old, and in all this time there was not any man died in his own person, videlicet, in a love-cause.

Ros. Now tell me how long you would have her, after you have possessed her?

Orl. For ever, and a day.

Ros. Say a day, without the ever. No, no, Orlando, men are April when they woo, December when they wed. Maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives.

(IV.i.87-94, 135-41)

At every opportunity, Rosalind confronts Orlando with a view of women and relationships that is both at odds with and more realistic than his Petrarchan idealism. And all this is new to Orlando:

Orl. But will my Rosalind do so?

Ros. By my life, she will do as I do.

(IV.i.149-50)

Such riddling replies from Ganymede constitute one element creating the peculiarly theatrical resonance of the game. The name "Rosalind" is spoken nineteen times: "Am not I your Rosalind?" (IV.i. 84). Its insistent repetition directs the audience's attention to the complexity of the character on the stage--we recognize the identity of theatrical fact and dramatic fiction in this scene. The audience see Rosalind coaching Orlando in the role of lover in a scene whose

ostentatious self-reflexiveness shows them at the same time an apprentice boy actor coaching an older actor in a part that he is being trained to take over. This double focus gives a peculiar charge to the way Rosalind auditions Orlando in various scenes of courtship and then invariably upstages him almost at once, finding fault with his performance and suggesting improvements. But the boy actor, too, is being educated. By playing Rosalind, he is "learning" from the bewitching feminine constancy that she embodies; the inconstant, changeable boy is learning the constancy that, according to traditional thinking, men possess, but in Shakespeare's comedies invariably lack. Furthermore, in teaching Orlando a more adult conception of love and the lover, the boy who played Rosalind was implicitly setting down rules for his own future behaviour--and performance--as a lover. As in his scenes with Orlando the boy actor coaches a senior actor in a part he will one day play himself, so in the scene in which he disrupts Silvius and Phebe's "pageant truly play'd" he coaches one of his successors, the less experienced boy who plays Phebe. In lecturing her, he passes on what he has learnt about how to play a woman to the next generation of leading boys.

Only by discontinuing the game with Ganymede, by releasing the boy from the part of Rosalind and abandoning all the play-acting can Orlando prove that he has grown up. Saving his brother from the lioness--the first fruitful, mature use of his aggressiveness in the play--causes him to miss his second lesson, and when next he encounters Ganymede, he is changed. Oliver is to be married: "O,

how bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man's eyes! By so much the more shall I tomorrow be at the height of heart-heaviness, by how much I shall think my brother happy in having what he wishes for" (V.ii.42-7). Not once does he call Ganymede "Rosalind":

Ros. Why then tomorrow I cannot serve your turn for
Rosalind?

Orl. I can live no longer by thinking.

(V.ii.48-50)

Orlando has grown out of the game, and Rosalind responds immediately: "I will weary you no longer with idle talking" (V.ii.51). At last she sets the plot moving again and steers it to its resolution. She brushes aside the general disregard of time in Arden and replaces it with her emphasis on "tomorrow":

Tomorrow meet we all together. [To Phebe] I will marry you, if ever I marry woman, and I'll be married tomorrow. [To Orl.] I will satisfy you, if ever I satisfied man, and you shall be married tomorrow. [To Sil.] I will content you, if what pleases you contents you, and you shall be married tomorrow. [To Orl.] As you love Rosalind meet. [To Sil.] As you love Phebe meet. And as I love no woman I'll meet. So fare you well. I have left you commands.

(V.ii.113-22)

The "busy actor", who has taken such pleasure in playing roles and directing the action, commits himself to resolving all the complications. It is worth comparing the resolution of the confusion here with that in A Midsummer Night's Dream. In the earlier comedy, Oberon and Puck must sort things out for the foolish mortals. In As You Like It, as in The Merchant of Venice, the heroine has become capable of crystallizing the comic society. At the opening of the final scene, Rosalind reaffirms her promise "to

make all this matter even" (V.iv.18). Then the busy actor, having explored her experience in her own "pageant truly play'd", stages her return to feminine costume and her true sexual identity in the form of a masque. If Hymen appears to be Amiens turned rather hurriedly into a makeshift god, that only emphasizes Rosalind's theatrical control, and in the Elizabethan theatre the practice of doubling would leave the audience uncertain whether the actor was indeed meant to be Hymen or Amiens-as-Hymen. The Epilogue is a formal acknowledgement of the boy actor's control over the action of the play. As Rosalind points out, "It is not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue" (V.iv.198). Its speaker is initially Rosalind, but finally the boy actor who played her: "If I were a woman, . . ." (V.iv.214). The fiction of sexual identity that permits the play's performance is dissolved by the actor who has so busily contrived it.

Rosalind's vigorous direction of the action supremely fits Susan Snyder's observation that in the comedies "Disguise confers power".² But after As You Like It, Shakespeare alters the relation between the disguised heroine and the plot. Viola's sexual disguise recalls not Portia and Rosalind, but Julia. Her disguise cannot be said to confer power for she never achieves a dominant hold on the plot. The dexterous plot manipulation that is built into the part of Rosalind is entirely absent from her relation to the plot of Twelfth Night:

How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly
And I, poor monster, fond as much on him,
And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me:

What will become of this? As I am a man,
 My state is desperate for my master's love:
 As I am woman (now alas the day!)
 What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe?
 O time, thou must untangle this, not I,
 It is too hard a knot for me t' untie.

(II.ii.32-40)

Such thoughts would never occur to Rosalind, who unties the Gordian knot herself and makes all this matter even. Viola's disguise is initially liberating, but ultimately restricting, imprisoning-- "Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness, / Wherein the pregnant enemy does much" (II.ii.26-7)--and it never puts her in a position to manage the action. In Twelfth Night, the only woman who successfully directs things is Maria in the subplot. Viola has to be rescued twice, once by Antonio in her duel with Andrew and once by Sebastian in the final scene.

Twelfth Night differs from Shakespeare's most likely source, Gl' Ingannati (1537) by the Academy of the Thunderstruck in Siena, in this emphasis on the heroine's passivity and isolation. In Gl' Ingannati, Lelia (Viola) has her old nurse as a confidante and is already in love with Flamminio (Orsino) when she enters his service disguised as a boy. Sent to woo Isabella on his behalf, she tries to persuade the young woman to put an end to Flamminio's suit, even offering as a bribe a sympathetic response to Isabella's eager declarations of love. The denouement is brought about by the combined actions of Lelia and her nurse. In Twelfth Night, however, Viola is an outsider with neither confidante nor friends in Illyria and falls in love with Orsino only after entering his service--she is the only comic heroine to disguise before meeting her man.

Shakespeare increases the importance of the twin brother's role and gives a much greater influence to chance in resolving the complications of the plot. Having set up the complications of the Olivia-Cesario-Orsino triangle of frustrated desire by the end of Act I, Shakespeare introduces Sebastian, whose presence guarantees a solution to the confusion. We know at once that the problems can (and will) be solved simply by bringing together Viola and Sebastian in the same place at the same time, and of course Shakespeare has already shown his adeptness with such a plot in The Comedy of Errors. Skill in managing such a plot consists precisely in postponing the inevitable meeting until the end of "two hours traffic" of the stage, so reducing the characters to essentially powerless tokens in the dramatist's overall design.

The mood of passive inactivity is set by Viola on her first appearance: "What else may hap to time I will commit" (I.ii.60). This faith in the workings of time--Rosalind of course trusts nothing to time and in Arden she has a world where this is possible--is not confined to Viola alone. Illyrian society is characterized by its inertia. Realizing she is attracted to Orsino's young messenger, Olivia declares "Fate, show thy force; ourselves we do not owe. / What is decreed, must be: and be this so" (I.v.314-5). Orsino languishes on "sweet beds of flowers" (I.i.40), dining on the "food of love" (I.i.1), incapacitated by his self-regarding passion for Olivia. Sebastian, called by another man's name and dragged before the priest by a woman he has never seen, can only wonder if he is dreaming and wish that "If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep!"

(IV.i.62). The only energies in the play lie in the subplot, and these achieve nothing more than the futile practical joke played on Malvolio. When a character tries to do something--Malvolio responding to greatness thrust upon him by leaping into action as a lover or Antonio rescuing the young man he takes to be Sebastian from the danger of the dreaded Sir Andrew's weapon--his efforts meet only uncomprehending resistance and frustration.

The inability of the characters in Twelfth Night to act effectively is largely shaped by the difficulty they have in seeing and knowing their world. The play presents an almost infinite variety of ways in which what Feste calls "knowledge of myself" (V.i.189) is frustrated by the fallibility and inadequacy of speech and sight. Language in Illyria is continually deceptive, surprisingly open to misinterpretation and ambiguity. Andrew, the accomplished linguist, is puzzled by the meanings of "accost" and "pourquoi" (I.iii.38, 90). Toby confuses "lethargy" and "lechery" (I.v.125-6) and bewilders Cesario by inviting him to "taste" his legs (III.i.79). And the young man responds with a pun on "understand" (III.i.80-1). Even Maria's handwriting assumes a disguise in the letter-trick. Orsino plays the sophisticated language game of courtly love; for him, love seems chiefly to consist in speaking masterly (II.iv.22). Feste, Olivia's "corrupter of words" (III.i.37), is most sensitive to the difficulties of unambiguous speech, even in such a simple statement as one's address: "Troth, sir, I can yield you [no reason] without words, and words are grown so false, I am loath to prove reason with them"

(III.i.23-5).

The confusion caused by the duplicity of language is increased by the failings of the eye. When Maria tells Feste disguised as Sir Thopas that "Thou might'st have done this without thy beard and gown, he sees thee not" (IV.ii.66-7), she expresses a general truth about perception in Illyria. Throughout the play characters watch other characters, scrutinize their appearance and make deductions from what they see--or think they see. Viola studies the sea captain's "fair and outward character" (I.ii.51) and decides he is trustworthy. Cesario asks to see Olivia's face and declares it "beauty truly blent" (I.v.242). These two judgements are exceptional by their accuracy. The Elizabethans, of course, valued sight as the highest of the senses, as Samuel Daniel observes:

to represent unto the sense of sight and forme and figure of anything, is more natural in act, and more common to all creatures than is hearing, and thereupon sayeth Aristotle, that we love the sense of seeing for that by it we are taught and made to learn more than by any other of our senses.³

But sight was also considered the sense most vulnerable to error, and Twelfth Night is as obsessed with the ambiguities and subjectivity of "ocular proof" as even Othello. Olivia encounters Sebastian and sees Cesario, and so do Toby, Andrew and the others in the tangle of mistaken identity. In the duel, the terrified and reluctant swordsmen, each having been told the other is a "most skilful, bloody, and fatal opposite" (III.iv.270-1), fail to see each other at all.

Cesario's appearance is closely scrutinized by almost everyone

in the play at some point: Maria sees "a fair young man" (I.v.102); Malvolio describes him as "Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy" and admits he is "very well-favoured" (I.iv.158-9, 162); Olivia declares he is beautiful when he is angry (III.i.147-8). The androgynous quality of Cesario's appearance, emphasized by the similarities in fashions for young men and women, allows Olivia to see his masculine aspect and Orsino his feminine. This ambiguous quality is stressed repeatedly, most explicitly by Orsino:

For they shall yet belie thy happy years,
That say thou art a man; Diana's lip
Is not more rubious: thy small pipe
Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,
And all is semblative a woman's part.
(I.iv.30-4)

Orsino describes a woman, but cannot see her. In Illyria, Viola is pricked for the man's part of Cesario. The characters' inability to see accurately or reliably is, of course, bound up with the play's treatment of love which is, as Rosalind says, "merely a madness" (III.ii.388) and enters through the eyes, as Olivia knows:

Methinks I feel this youth's perfections
With an invisible and subtle stealth
To creep in at mine eyes.
(I.v.300-2)

Only Sebastian, swept off to the Church by Olivia, is

ready to distrust mine eyes,
And wrangle with my reason that persuades me
To any other trust but that I am mad,
Or else the lady's mad.
(IV.iii.13-6)

But he submits to the liberating Illyrian follies, whilst still recognizing that "There's something in't / That is deceivable" (IV.iii.20-1).

Nothing in Illyria is as deceivable as Cesario, and the theatrical quibble in Orsino's words "a woman's part" underlines the complexity of the stage figure called "Cesario"--a boy playing a woman playing a boy. In answer to Olivia's question "Are you a comedian?", Cesario asserts "I am not that I play" and later tells her "I am not what I am" (I.v.184-5; III.i.143). Viola simultaneously is and is not Cesario: the boy actor plays one character with two names. But he does so in a fashion rather different from that in which he played Rosalind and Ganymede and Rosalind's various versions of herself. Rosalind moves in and out of disguise; she plays scenes as Ganymede, not an entire play. Unlike the other disguised heroines, Shakespeare gives Viola--and his boy actor--only one brief expository scene (I.ii) before she assumes her disguise. The scene neither firmly nor substantially establishes her character--the captain has as many lines as she. When next the audience see her, she is Cesario, and Cesario she remains to the very end of the play. Consequently, Viola and Cesario are integrated to a greater extent than the characters and disguise-roles of the other heroines; Viola is dissolved in Cesario. She has no long self-expository soliloquies, like Julia in The Two Gentlemen of Verona--a seventeen line soliloquy in Julia's part (IV.iv.90-107) becomes a brief aside in Viola's: "yet a barful strife! / Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife" (I.iv. 41-2). And since she has neither anyone to whom she can speak openly of herself as a woman nor any out-of-disguise scenes, she is forced to speak of herself continuously as a man. Her response to her experience is mediated through the responses of Cesario, and thus

Cesario becomes her customary way of expressing herself, becomes indeed her "character" as the audience perceive it. We do not know what Viola is like, for we never see her after that first scene; we know only what she is like as Cesario.

Cesario's ambiguous identity is the centrepiece of the complex structure of shifting, mercurial identities in Twelfth Night. Virtually all the characters wear metaphorical "disguises". Character becomes an individual's theatrical self-projection and proves an elusive fiction. Identity is precarious. False names abound--Cesario, Agueface, Mistress Accost, Roderigo, Count Malvolio, Sir Thopas. Illyrian society, with its emphasis on acting the part by dressing the part, points forward to a society whose notion of identity embodies Polonius's dictum "the apparel oft proclaims the man" (I.iii.72) and to such masters of fashion as Parolles and Osric. Cesario and Sebastian are costumed identically and so, in Illyria, are interchangeable. Malvolio's movement from steward to lover to madman is charted by changes in his costume. Feste is transformed into Sir Thopas by a props-room beard and gown, Olivia wears mourning, and Orsino presumably dresses untidily like the distracted lover. The characters ceaselessly cast themselves and each other in roles. Feste can even play both Master Parson and the Fool at once. At the end of the play, he begins his song as himself, Feste, but ends it in his real life part of the actor Robert Armin: "But that's all one, our play is done, / And we'll strive to please you every day" (V.i.406-7). Viola plays Cesario playing the courtly lover in wooing Olivia,

having been commissioned by Orsino "to act my woes" (I.iv.26). Cesario is cast by Sir Toby as "a very devil" in a duel (III.iv.288) and by Olivia as "husband" (V.i.141). Sir Andrew seeks with pathetic ineptitude to play the lover, but needs Sir Toby as a prompter in handling even Maria:

Sir To. And thou let part so, Sir Andrew, would thou
might'st never draw sword again!

Sir And. And you part so, mistress, I would I might
never draw sword again.

(I.iii.60-3)

The nearest he comes to wooing Olivia--he speaks not a single word to her before the final scene--is to watch another man court her on behalf of still another man who is absent. He takes note of Cesario's elaborate courtesies and phrases so that he will be the better able to play the role when he gets the chance: "'Odours', 'pregnant', and 'vouchsafed': I'll get 'em all three already" (III.i.92-3). Cast by Sir Toby as a deadly duellist, he has difficulty even in playing a man, and Toby must coach him yet again: "So soon as ever thou see'st him, draw, and as thou draw'st, swear horrible" (III.iv.178-80). At every point Sir Andrew punctures the character of scholar and musician that Toby has created for him by displaying "all the good gifts of nature" (I.iii.27-8).

Malvolio, Olivia's other wooer on the spot, is as accomplished at self-dramatization as Sir Andrew is inept. He rehearses thoroughly for a projected performance as Count Malvolio--Maria says "he has been yonder i' the sun practising behaviour to his own shadow this half hour" (II.v.16-8)--and Maria's plan gives him a stage on which to play. He will enter "in my branched velvet gown, having come from

a day-bed where I have left Olivia sleeping" and "frown the while, and perchance wind up my watch, or play with my [Touching his chain]--some rich jewel" (II.v.46-8, 59-61). He has even learnt his lines for his great scene: "Saying, 'Cousin Toby, my fortunes having cast me on your niece give me this prerogative of speech'" (II.v.70-1). Maria's letter is easily accommodated as a prop: "To the unknown beloved, this, and my good wishes. Her very phrases!" (II.v.92-4). In a play so full of examples of irrational response, Malvolio is marvellously reasonable in his self-deception: "I do not fool myself, to let imagination jade me; for every reason excites me to this, that my lady loves me" (II.v.164-6). It is supremely fitting that he, so concerned with the appropriate costume for Count Malvolio, should be declared mad because he takes to wearing yellow stockings gartered in the latest fashion. The undesired role of madman is one that he finds extremely difficult to cast off because his audience are so committed to it. In answering Feste's question to Pythagoras, there is no way he can show by his reply that he is sane; either answer will serve Sir Thopas's purpose, and this is partly why the scene is disquieting.

Like Malvolio, both Olivia and Orsino create self-deceptive images of themselves, acting out elaborate forms of self-conscious behaviour, externalizing their feelings for all the world to see. Orsino is, of course, in love with his own image of himself as a "true lover" and he adopts the appropriate poses. Although at his first sight of Olivia "Methought she purg'd the air of pestilence" (I.i.19-20), in the play itself he does not set eyes on her until the last scene, when he finally tears himself away from his bed of flowers.

He is content to moon around his palace--another of Shakespeare's little all-male societies--listening to music, and his image of Olivia as the scornful courtly mistress--"yond same sovereign cruelty" (II.iv.81)--appears increasingly at odds with the women we see. Orsino is the comedies' most savage picture of the self-centred lover. He tells his bosom companion

There is no woman's sides
Can bide the beating of so strong a passion
As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart
So big, to hold so much: they lack retention.
Alas, their love may be called appetite,
No motion of the liver, but the palate,
That suffers surfeit, cloyment, and revolt;
But mine is all as hungry as the sea,
And can digest as much. Make no compare
Between that love a woman can bear me
And that I owe Olivia.

(II.iv.94-104)

This scene is poignantly absurd, as well as sharply satirical: Orsino rambles on about Olivia and the strength and constancy of his illusory, egotistic love for her, whilst the woman who loves him sits listening, disguised as a young man. In a rare moment of insight, Orsino gives Cesario the benefit of another pronouncement drawn from the great heap of his wisdom, ludicrously unaware of how exactly his generalization applies to himself:

For boy, however we do praise ourselves,
Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn
Than women's are.

(II.iv.32-5)

Orsino is but poor stuff, "changeable taffeta" (II.iv.74)--the description of inconstant woman in the Homily on Marriage fits him to a T⁴--and the passive Viola can try to improve him only indirectly

through her account of her sister who loved a man (II.iv.108-19). Orsino's tender question, "But died thy sister of her love, my boy?" (II.iv.120), is the only occasion, before the final scene, on which he shows concern for someone other than himself. Viola finally earns her man, as Julia did, by playing the role of so-called masculine constancy. She wins her man by her example; for her "service done him, / So much against the mettle of your sex, / So far beneath your soft and tender breeding" (V.i.319-21).

Olivia is as elaborately self-absorbed as Orsino and as adept at self-dramatization:

like a cloistress she will veiled walk,
And water once a day her chamber round
With eye-offending brine

(I.i.28-30)

But she is more easily shaken out of her self-absorption than Orsino; she abandons her vow at the first sight of an eligible young gentleman. In her scenes with Olivia, Viola mocks the elaborate style of the courtly lover, which Orsino practises unto the last: "Most radiant, exquisite, and unmatchable lady--I pray you tell me if this be the lady of the house, for I never saw her" (I.v.171-3). No matter what the lady looks like, she will be radiant, exquisite and unmatchable. Viola mocks the part she has studied whilst she plays it. And like the other sensible young women in Shakespeare's comedies, Olivia, too, mocks the artificial courtly style:

Now, sir, what is your text?

Viola. Most sweet lady--

Olivia. A comfortable doctrine, and much may be said of it. Where lies your text?

Viola. In Orsino's bosom.

Olivia. In his bosom? In what chapter of his bosom?

Viola. To answer by the method, in the first of his heart.

Olivia. O, I have read it: it is heresy. Have you no more to say?

(I.v.223-32)

What differentiates this scene from those in which Rosalind or Silvia poke fun at the conventions is that they are already mocked by the disguised heroine herself in acting by them--she produces a string of clichés. In the indecorous action of sending Malvolio after Cesario with her ring, Olivia takes the initiative in love like Rosalind or Silvia. But in Twelfth Night, the active woman loves another woman, and Olivia's feeling is rather different from Phebe's crush on Ganymede. Like Juliet, she speaks frankly:

To one of your receiving
Enough is shown; a cypress, not a bosom,
Hides my heart: so, let me hear you speak.

Viola. I pity you.

(III.i.122-5)

In Olivia's wooing of Cesario--and these are the play's key love scenes; Viola shares twice as many lines of dialogue with Olivia as with Orsino--the kind of feminine initiative that is liberating and beneficial in the other comedies can lead only to disappointed frustration. And the disguised heroine's response--"I pity you"--promises no cure of the kind Rosalind administers to Phebe. The poignant sadness that underlies the scenes with Olivia and Cesario derives from the strength of Olivia's love, its irrational self-deception--"Yet come again: for thou perhaps mayst move / That heart which now abhors, to like his love" (III.i.165-6)--and our recognition of the frustration to which it is destined.

The feeling of frustration also hangs over Antonio's loyalty

to Sebastian. Their friendship contrasts strikingly with the parasitic relationship of Toby and Andrew. The intensity of Antonio's selfless affection for Sebastian stands out from the shallow, ephemeral feelings of most of the other characters:

For his sake
Did I expose myself (pure for his love)
Into the danger of this adverse town.
(V.1.80-2)

He not only gives Sebastian his purse, but hazards all for him in following him to Illyria without a disguise. "You do mistake me, sir" (III.iv.336), he tells the officer who arrests him. But Antonio is the only character in Twelfth Night who cannot get away with pretending he is what he is not. The constancy and power of his feelings make his rejection by the young man he thinks is Sebastian all the more painful. In Illyria, even a man such as Antonio falls prey to mistaken judgement.

The numerous literal and metaphorical disguises, the mercurial switching of roles, the changes of costume, the errors in perception that they cause--all create a tangle of deceptive fictions that displaces any objective reality that Illyria might possess. When Malvolio sees the letter in the garden and his reverie is broken, this *seems* to him to signal the disruption of his fantasy by external reality. To him, the letter is "real"; but for Toby and the others who watch him, and for the audience who watch all of them, it is part of a trick. The letter perpetuates Malvolio's self-deceptive image of himself--it is proof to this rational lover--as he moulds this new intrusion of

the "real" to suit his fantasy. As in the Chinese box scene in Troilus and Cressida, when Troilus, Ulysses and Thersites watch Cressida and Diomedes, Shakespeare is instructing the audience in the subjective nature of perception and so significance. Malvolio's subsequent attempt to cast Olivia in what he sees as her appropriate role is punished by the imposition on him of a further fiction--he is mad! Similarly, Olivia's mourning is broken by the appearance of Cesario. But this intruder from the "real" world beyond her walls turns out to be a fiction by which she is deceived. After Malvolio's appearance before Olivia in yellow stockings and cross-gartered, Fabian marvels "If this were played upon a stage now I could condemn it as an improbable fiction" (III.iv.128-9). His words crystallize the way that reality in Illyria assumes the attributes of fiction, the improbability of a play. When disguised as the parson and about to perform for Malvolio's benefit, Feste argues "'That that is, is': so I being Master Parson, am Master Parson; for what is 'that', but 'that'? and 'is' but 'is'?" (IV. ii.15-7). His pronouncement on the nature of reality is, of course, mock logic and founded on a false premise: "I being Master Parson, am Master Parson". But it is this false premise--that the disguise represents Feste's true identity, that the actor is the character he plays--that permits the ambiguous certainty that "that" is "that" and "is" is "is", and so permits drama. In Illyria, it is only on a person's exterior identity that judgements can be made; Hamlet's distinction between "seems" and "is" has dissolved. In Twelfth Night, the theatrical fact of performance--an actor plays the

character he "is"--is built into the dramatic fiction; this is "reality" in Illyria. "All the world doth practise stage-playing".⁵ When the boy actor as Viola as Cesario tells another boy actor as Olivia that "I am not that I play" and "I am not what I am", the words direct the audience's attention to Viola as an actress played by an actor, and so to the problem of defining her identity on the evidence of our fallible perceptions. For the audience, Viola is Cesario: what we call her "character" is his. Cesario is immediately named on his first appearance (I.iv.2). But Viola, before him, was not. "Viola" is merely a name, and one that is not spoken until more than halfway through the final scene (V.i. 239). The Elizabethan audience seeing the play for the first time did not know Cesario's real name until the very end. In a play with such a proliferation of names, the central character has only a false one.

Viola's name is returned to her by Sebastian, and the play's resolution hinges on his existence as an identical twin for Cesario:

Duke. One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons!
A natural perspective, that is, and is not!

Ant. How have you made division of yourself?
An apple cleft in two is not more twin
Than these two creatures. Which is Sebastian?

Olivia. Most wonderful!

(V.i.214-5, 220-3)

But Sebastian's appearance in this scene on-stage together with Cesario, so setting the two of them side by side for the characters' and our inspection, impresses on the audience, as Anne Barton points out, the "dissimilarity in the appearance of the actors playing Viola

and Sebastian" and not "that marvellous identity hailed so ecstatically by the other characters".⁶ No less an authority than Ben Jonson vouches for the unlikeness of "twins" on the Elizabethan stage. He told Drummond that "he had an intention to have made a play like Plautus['s] *Amphitrio* but left it of, for that he could never find two so like others that he could persuade the spectators they were one".⁷ Clearly if Jonson could not find actors who could pass for identical twins nor could Shakespeare. In Twelfth Night, so insistent on the fallible, subjective nature of sight, the lack of actor twins makes the figure of Sebastian extremely problematic. When he first appears, we see at once that he is not identical with Cesario. But how are we to respond to what our eyes tell us? Is the difference in the twins merely a problem in casting? (And so, is the ideal casting for the parts identical twins?) If they are reasonably similar in appearance--we know they are dressed identically and in Illyria clothes count for a lot--are we to accept the "twins" convention? (Can we accept it?) Or is what we are seeing another version of the major problem of the characters--they simply cannot see what is before their eyes? Twelfth Night insists again and again on the subjective nature of perception, and these questions raised by the twins create a problem in our experience of the play, in our own seeing. Jan Kott, in his reading of the play in terms of myth and androgyny, has argued that Sebastian and Viola should properly be played by one person,⁸ and in the Russian film of the play cinematic conjuring tricks made this possible.⁹ But such an alteration radically distorts the ending of the play. In

Gl' Ingannati, Fabrizio and Lelia never appear on the stage together, and so one actor could play both parts. Fabrizio and Lelia would indeed be identical stage twins, and so the audience would be in the same boat as the characters--is this Lelia or Fabrizio coming on? But Shakespeare chooses to make things difficult for himself--and for us. Orsino's assertion "One face, one voice, and two persons!" is disproved by the evidence of the audience's own eyes. The happy ending is founded on a manifest fiction.

Sebastian's presence imposes on Cesario the "real" female identity signified by the name "Viola", so rescuing her from the consequences of her disguise's wickedness. Viola is almost persecuted in this scene, accused of actions of which she is innocent by Antonio, Olivia, Orsino, the priest and Andrew. Rather than releasing herself from the situation by simply discarding her disguise, she chooses once again to be passive:

And I most jocund, apt, and willingly,
To do you rest, a thousand deaths would die.
(V.i.130-1)

The untying of the knot of complications is marked by uncertainties. Viola offers to prove her identity by showing Sebastian her "maiden weeds" (V.i.253). Olivia finds herself married to a man by accident a man she mistook for someone else because he was dressed like him. Thus his clothes, and any similarity to Cesario he may have, have gained Sebastian a wife. Orsino accepts as his wife a boy whom he was prepared to kill a few moments before and who turns out to be a woman whom he has never seen in "woman's weeds" (V.i.271). The "One face, one voice, one habit" of Cesario's dual sexual identity

is divided into "two persons", Sebastian and Viola, masculine and feminine, so that the marriage pairings can be accomplished.

The subjective fallibility of sight signified by the unlikeness of the twins is thus built into the happy ending--indeed it enables it to take place--and this is one element colouring Twelfth Night with sadness. To achieve the happy ending, the audience are literally invited to see what is not there. The only aspect in which Cesario and Sebastian are identical is in their status as young men and actors dressed alike. The ending first asks the audience to see them as physically identical young men, and then asks that one of them be seen as a woman. When Orsino takes Viola's hand, what the audience see is two young men holding hands, one of whom they must pretend is a woman, for Cesario's transformation into Viola is projected beyond the play; he will change his costume to become a woman, like the boy actor preparing for a performance. Only by intentionally misinterpreting the evidence of their own eyes can the audience accept the play's resolution. In a scene claiming to clear up misconceptions, the audience must choose whether or not to deceive themselves as the characters have been deceived, in order to believe the "improbable fiction" of the happy ending. The audience are invited to discard their rational sense and so themselves participate in and complete the Twelfth Night folly in which things, in Orsino's formula, are and are not.¹⁰

In Gl' Ingannati, Fabrizio says of one of the characters that "His madness seems to consist in thinking that young men are

women".¹¹ That "madness" was built into the audience's way of seeing in the Elizabethan theatre. The transvestist boy actor offered Shakespeare an extraordinarily flexible resource in designing the woman's part. That the acceptance of a talented boy actor as a woman was a basic principle of his audience's way of seeing in the theatre allowed Shakespeare to play numerous variations on the convention. The in-built sexual ambiguity of a woman on the Elizabethan stage provided him with a source of self-reflexiveness which he could draw upon in writing Rosalind or ignore in writing Juliet or Beatrice. In the figure of the woman in sexual disguise in the comedies, Shakespeare juggles theatrical fact and dramatic fiction, the habits of perception and the conventional assumptions about social and sexual roles that an audience bring to the theatre, and concepts of identity. By transforming a character into an actor, the adoption of disguise makes identity self-reflexive, multi-layered, theatrical: "I am not what I am" is only the most explicit statement of the ambiguous, ever-shifting relations between identity and roles, between the actor and his action, which informs Shakespearian comedy. In the comedies, the boy actor focusses both Shakespeare's evolving notion of a multi-faceted personal identity and his exploration of the psychology of perception inside and outside the wooden O of his theatre.

NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: SHAKESPEARE'S UNGAIN HOYDENS

1. Bernard Beckerman, Dynamics of Drama (New York, 1970), p. 3.
2. Norman Rabkin, ed., Foreward to Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama (New York, 1969), p. viii.
3. See Stanley Cavell, "A Matter of Meaning It", in his Must We Mean What We Say? (1969; Cambridge, 1976).
4. Michael Goldman, Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama (Princeton, N.J., 1972), p. 3.
5. Stanley Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics", New Literary History, 2 (1970), 126-7, 140.
6. Bernard Beckerman, "Dramatic Analysis and Literary Interpretation: The Cherry Orchard as Exemplum", New Literary History, 2 (1970), 402.
7. Michael Goldman, "Acting Values and Shakespearean Meaning: Some Suggestions", in David Bevington and Jay L. Halio, eds., Shakespeare: Pattern of Excelling Nature (Newark, Del.; 1978), p. 191.
8. John Marston, Preface to The Fawn, ed. Gerald A. Smith (Lincoln, Neb., 1965), p. 5.
9. See Stephen Booth, "On the Value of Hamlet", in Rabkin, and Goldman, Energies, Chapte VI.
10. Anne Righter, Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play (London, 1962), p. 144.
11. Like The Winter's Tale, the "tragical-comical-historical-pastoral" Cymbeline examines why we go to the theatre, what we seek there and what the experience satisfies in us. The extraordinary, outrageous manipulation of the convoluted

action of Cymbeline--a veritable rag-bag of familiar devices and styles--emphasizes the dramatist's capacity to bring the plot to the ending we desire and thus his power over our wishes. In Cymbeline, Shakespeare seems to be deliberately giving us as much as we will take--a god who descends on a property eagle, throws a thunderbolt and promises to take care of a happy ending just in the nick of time; a final scene that recapitulates the action of the entire play and is packed with surprises which surprise only the characters--and pointing out to us that we will take an outrageous amount.

12. Ben Jonson, The Magnetic Lady, in Works, Vol. VI, ed. C. H. Herford, P. and E. Simpson (Oxford, 1938).
13. The exceptions are W. Robertson Davies, Shakespeare's Boy Actors (London, 1939) and Michael Jamieson, "Shakespeare's Celibate Stage", in Gerald Eades Bentley, ed., The Seventeenth-Century Stage (Chicago, 1968).
14. Colley Cibber, An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, Comedian (1740; Ann Arbor, Mich., 1968), p. 55.
15. Helen Faucit, Lady Martin, On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters 3rd ed. (Edinburgh, 1888), p. 4.
16. See, for example, Davies, pp. 195-6.
17. See J.B. Streett, "The Durability of Boy Actors", Notes & Queries, new ser., 20 (1973), 461-5.
18. Marvin Rosenberg, The Masks of Othello (Berkeley, 1961), p. 9.
19. For the argument for formal acting, see Alfred Harbage, "Elizabethan Acting", PMLA, 54 (1939), 685-708.
20. John Russell Brown, "On the Acting of Shakespeare's Plays", in Bentley, pp. 41-2.
21. John Webster, "An Excellent Actor" (1615), quoted in Andrew Gurr, The Shakespearean Stage (Cambridge, 1970), p. 62.
22. Henry Jackson, from a letter dated 1610, in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, quoted in Gamini Salgado, Eyewitnesses of Shakespeare (London, 1975), p. 30.
23. Thomas Coryat, Coryat's Crudities (1611), 2 vols. (Glasgow, 1905), I, 386, quoted in Jamieson, p. 76.
24. John Rainoldes et al., Th'overthrow of Stage-Playes (1599), ed. Arthur Freeman (New York, 1974), p. 17.

25. Stephen Gosson, Playes Confuted in Five Actions (1582), quoted in J. W. Binns, "Women or Transvestites on the Elizabethan Stage?: An Oxford Controversy", Sixteenth Century Journal, 5 (1974), 96.
26. John Downes, Roscius Anglicanus (1708; Los Angeles, 1969), p. 19.
27. See Helen McAfee, Pepys on the Restoration Stage (New Haven, Conn., 1916), p. 225.
28. Ellen Terry's Memoirs, eds. Edith Craig and Christopher St. John (New York, 1932), p. 326, quoted in Jamieson, p. 75.
29. Marvin Rosenberg, The Masks of Macbeth (Berkeley, 1978), p. 174.
30. Rainoldes, p. 18.
31. William Prynne, Histrion-mastrix, The Player's Scourge or Actor's Tragedie (1632), quoted in Davies, p. 15.
32. Stephen Gosson, The School of Abuse (1579), quoted in R. A. Foakes, "The Player's Passion: Some Notes on Elizabethan Psychology and Acting", Essays & Studies, new ser., 7 (1954), 72.
33. Thomas Heywood, An Apology for Actors (1612), rpt. in Shakespeare Society of London Publications, Vol. 6 (Nendeln, Liechtenstein, 1966), p. 28.
34. Thomas More, The History of King Richard III (1557), in The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, Vol. II, ed. Richard Sylvester (New Haven, Conn., 1963), p. 81.
35. S. L. Bethell, Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition (1944; New York, 1970), p. 26.
36. Davies, pp. 57-8.
37. Quoted in Victor O. Freeburg, Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama (1915; New York, 1965), p. 22.
38. Peter Hyland, "Shakespeare's Heroines: Disguise in the Romantic Comedies", Ariel, 9 (April 1978), 23.
39. Freeburg, p. 102.
40. Righter, p. 149.

41. Northrop Frye, A Natural Perspective (New York, 1965), pp. 76, 83.
42. Geoffrey Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1957-75), II, 294.
43. Quoted in E. K. Chambers, "Elizabethan Stage Gleanings", Review of English Studies, 1 (1925), 77-8.
44. Barnaby Rich, The Honestie of this Age (1614), quoted in Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (London, 1975, p. 234.
45. William Harrison, Description of England (1587), quoted in John Dover Wilson, Life in Shakespeare's England (2nd ed. 1913; Harmondsworth, 1944), p. 131.
46. See Ernest Crawley, "The Sexual Background of Dress", in Mary Ellen Roach and Joanne Bubolz Eicher, eds., Dress, Adornment and the Social Order (New York, 1965), esp. p. 72: "The most distinctive social division is the permanent division of sex. Up to puberty this is more or less ignored, and the neutral quality of the previous stage is often indicated by the neutral connotation of the term 'child' and by a neutral fashion of child-dress. It is natural that the growth and maturity of the primary sexual characters should give these a prominent place in the principles of the distinguishing garb, and that they should, as it were, mould the dress into adaptive forms The main idea of dress as a material expression in a social form of the psychical reflexes from personality, and, in this case, sexuality, has here particular prominence".
47. Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, The Glory of Women, trans. Edward Fleetwood (1651), quoted in Dusinberre, p. 95.
48. Francis Bacon, "Of Love", in his Essays (1597), intro. Michael J. Hawkins (London, 1972), p. 29.
49. Robert Burton, The Anatomy of Melancholy (1621), intro. Holbrook Jackson (London, 1968), p. 56.
50. Quoted without reference in Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (London, 1977), p. 196. My account of marriage in the sixteenth century is heavily indebted to Stone's fascinating book.
51. Quoted in Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions (New York, 1952), p. 238.

52. Michel de Montaigne, "Upon Some Verses of Virgil", in his Essays (1603), trans. John Florio, intro. J. I. M. Stewart (New York, 1933), p. 765.
53. Stone, p. 138.
54. Harbage, Rival Trads., pp. 230-1.
55. Stone, pp. 223-4.
56. Susan Snyder, The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies (Princeton, N.J., 1979), p. 46.
57. Desiderius Erasmus, Praise of Folly (1511), trans. Betty Radice, intro. A. H. T. Levi (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 206.
58. Erasmus, p. 206.
59. Montaigne, "How One Ought to Governe His Will", p. 916.

CHAPTER TWO

SOME OF THESE TRULLS: DISGUISES OF LOVE

1. Sir Philip Sidney, A Defence of Poetry (1595), ed. Jan van Dorsten (London, 1966), pp. 65-6.
2. Anne Righter, Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play (London, 1962), pp. 19, 109.
3. Ed. Betty J. Littleton (The Hague, 1968).
4. Ed. Anne Begor Lancashire (Lincoln, Neb., 1969).
5. Ed. Norman Sanders (London, 1970).
6. See Victor O. Freeburg, Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama (1915; New York, 1965), pp. 2, 6.
7. Sir Philip Sidney, The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (1598), ed. Maurice Evans (Harmondsworth, 1977), p. 170.
8. Geoffrey Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1957-75), I, 233.

9. Bertrand Evans, Shakespeare's Comedies (Oxford, 1960), p. ix.
10. Peter Hyland, "Shakespeare's Heroines: Disguise in the Romantic Comedies", Ariel, 9 (1978), 23.
11. See Bullough, I, 245, 247.
12. Righter, p. 103.
13. Blaze Odell Bonazza, Shakespeare's Early Comedies (The Hague, 1966), p. 98.

CHAPTER THREE

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING BALTHAZAR: TURNING TO MEN IN THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

1. Paul N. Siegel, Shakespeare in His Time and Ours (Notre Dame, 1968), p. 245, quoted in Norman Rabkin, "Meaning and Shakespeare", in Clifford Leech and J. M. R. Margeson, eds., Shakespeare 1971 (Toronto, 1972), p. 90. Rabkin points out the play's ambivalence--the contrasting of opposed critical opinions in my opening paragraph is indebted to him in several points--in arguing that in "the understanding of art as of life the decision no longer to be tied up in fruitless attempts to reduce significant process and teeming multiplicity to prosaic meaning is a liberating beginning" (p. 104), but he does not say what such deeply rooted ambivalence is doing in this play.
2. Harold C. Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare (1951; Chicago, 1960), I, 85.
3. H. B. Charlton, Shakespearean Comedy (1938; London, 1966), p. 159.
4. M. C. Bradbrook, Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry (1951; London, 1964), p. 157.
5. See Sigurd Burckhardt, "The Merchant of Venice: The Gentle Bond", English Literary History, 29 (1962), 253 and John Russell Brown, Shakespeare and his Comedies (2nd ed., London, 1962), p. 70.

6. E. E. Stoll, Shakespeare Studies (New York, 1927), p. 318.
7. John Russell Brown, "The Realization of Shylock: A Theatrical Criticism", in John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris, eds., Early Shakespeare (London, 1961), pp. 189, 194, 195.
8. See Alan C. Dessen, "The Elizabethan Stage Jew and Christian Example", Modern Language Quarterly, 35 (1974), 231-45.
9. S. L. Bethell, Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition (1944; New York, 1970), p. 21.
10. Peter Hyland, "Shakespeare's Heroines: Disguise in the Romantic Comedies", Ariel, 9 (April 1978), 31.
11. Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (London, 1975), p. 267.
12. Geoffrey Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1957-75), I, 465.
13. Samuel Pepys, Diary, entires for January 7th, 1660-1 and March 2nd, 1666-7, quoted in Helen McAfee, Pepys on the Restoration Stage (New Haven, Conn., 1916), pp. 225, 244.
14. See Lawrence Danson, The Harmonies of The Merchant of Venice (New Haven, Conn., 1978).
15. Alice N. Benston, "Portia, the Law, and Tripartite Structure of The Merchant of Venice", Shakespeare Quarterly, 30 (1979), 384.
16. D. J. Palmer, "The Merchant of Venice, or The Importance of Being Earnest", in Malcolm Bradbury and D. J. Palmer, eds., Shakespearean Comedy (London, 1972), p. 103.
17. John Russell Brown, note on this line in his New Arden edition of the play, p. 7.
18. Charlton, p. 59. See also C. L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy (Princeton, N.J., 1959), p. 186; Palmer, p. 116; and Anthony B. Dawson, Indirections: Shakespeare and the Art of Illusion (Toronto, 1978), p. 15.
19. John Doeblner, Shakespeare's Speaking Pictures (Albuquerque, New Mex., 1974), p. 52.
20. Rpt. in W. Carew Hazlitt, ed., Shakespeare's Jestbooks (London, 1874), quoted in Russell J. Meyer, "Keeping Safe Nerissa's Ring", American Notes & Queries, 16 (1978), 67.

21. Alexander Leggatt, Shakespeare's Comedy of Love (London, 1973), p. 148.
22. A decade later Shakespeare expanded and complicated this pattern in designing Desdemona's role in Othello, exploiting the conventions and expectations of comedy even more continuously than in Romeo and Juliet. The opening movement of Othello gives us Iago and Roderigo, whose relationship recalls Toby and Andrew; Brabantio, a senex figure in the familiar mould of Egeus and Capulet; and a woman who seems to possess the flexible resourcefulness of the comic heroine confronting the difficulties of her situation. We gather from Othello's account of the courtship that Desdemona has taken the initiative:

She wish'd she had not heard it, yet she wish'd
That heaven had made her such a man: she thank'd me,
And bade me, if I had a friend that lov'd her,
I should but teach him how to tell my story,
And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake:
(I.iii.162-6)

In her first speech before the Senate, she affirms her independence of her father and, in refusing to remain behind in Venice, she confidently asserts her claim as a wife. She displays a social competence typical of the comic heroine, exchanging banter with both Iago and the Clown. But Othello extends Shakespeare's examination of the failings of courtly love beyond the courtship and into the marriage itself. With Othello and Desdemona's safe arrival in Cyprus the comedy is complete--

If it were now to die,
'Twere now to be most happy, for I fear
My soul hath her content so absolute,
That not another comfort, like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate--

(II.i.189-93)

and the cracks in their relationship and the failings in their knowledge of each other begin to appear as Iago revives the Don John-Hero-Claudio subplot of Much Ado About Nothing and directs it to a different ending. Ultimately Desdemona's deep-rooted passivity--most shocking in her unquestioning obedience to her husband even when he strikes her like a whore before Lodovico: "I will not stay to offend you" (IV. i. 242)--is revealed to be as great as Hero's, and she turns out to be tragically incapacitated as a comic heroine by the failings of perception and knowledge imposed by her cloistered upbringing in Venice:

Dost thou in conscience think,--tell me, Emilia,--
That there be women do abuse their husbands
In such gross kind?

(IV.iii.60-2)

Desdemona fails to fulfil the comic heroine's role of enlarging her lover-husband's understanding of love and marriage--a process supremely exemplified in Rosalind's education of Orlando; "The divine Desdemona" is never "our great captain's captain" (II.i.73, 74). In *Othello*, it is "my friend, thy husband, honest, honest Iago" (V.ii.155) who takes this role of educating the lover-husband, directing a citizen comedy of his own invention in which he casts Desdemona in only a minor part. In Iago, Shakespeare fuses the fluidity of the Vice-figure with that of the disguised heroine: like Viola, he can say "I am not what I am" (I.i.65). The inflexible Othello has no defences against Iago's calumny and Desdemona is incapable of changing things. Cf. Northrop Frye, "Characterization in Shakespearean Comedy", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 4 (1953), 27: "the role of the vice includes a great deal of disguising, and the type may usually be recognized by disguise The vice can also . . . be combined with the heroine, who usually disguises herself as a boy to forward her schemes".

CHAPTER FOUR

ALL POINTS LIKE A MAN: THE IMPROBABLE FICTIONS OF GANYMEDE AND CESARIO

1. Geoffrey Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1957-75), II, 211.
2. Susan Snyder, The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies (Princeton, N.J., 1979), p. 47.
3. Samuel Daniel, Preface to his translation of The Worthy Tract of Paulus Jovius, containing a Discourse of Imprese, quoted in M. H. Fleischer, The Iconography of the English History Play (Salzburg, 1974), p. 22.
4. See p. 28.

5. Michel de Montaigne, "Upon Some Verses of Virgil", in his Essays, trans. John Florio (1603), intro. J. I. M. Stewart (New York, 1933), p. 765.
6. Anne Barton, "As You Like It and Twelfth Night: Shakespeare's Sense of an Ending", in Malcolm Bradbury and D. J. Palmer, eds., Shakespearian Comedy (London, 1972), p. 176.
7. William Drummond, Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden (1711; rpt. London, 1924), p. 37.
8. See Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (2nd ed., New York, 1966), p. 314.
9. See Roger Manvell, Shakespeare and the Film (New York, 1971), p. 77.
10. Ben Jonson uses the boy actor to do something rather similar in Epicoene (1609). The revelation in the final scene shifts the focus from the fiction of the play to its performance. The unexpected removal of Epicoene's peruke to reveal a boy implicitly exposes the distorted hermaphroditic sexuality of virtually everyone in the play. The revelation that the dramatic fiction is actually the theatrical fact of performance--the woman is a boy--explodes the fiction of the play, reminding the audience that they, like the characters, accept a boy in woman's clothes as a woman. Jonson casts the audience's acceptance of the transvestist convention in their faces as evidence of their own deceivable and distorted notions of sexual identity.
11. Bullough, II, 319.

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