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ASPECTS OF THE DISGUISE THEME IN SOME
SHAKESPEAREAN PLAYS

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M. Litt., The University of Glasgow, 1975.

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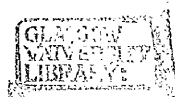
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SUMMARY:

Chapter I : The Comedy of Errors

This Chapter starts with the hypothesis that mistaken identity initiates all the confusion in the play, which in turn leads to a re-appraisal of the nature of identity. The recurring image of 'a drop of water' falling into the ocean suggesting an analogy to the losing or modification of self in relationships is then discussed. Mistaken identity leads to an assessment of an individual's response in the relationship of love, and the views of Adriana, Antipholus of Syracuse and Luciana are discussed. The chapter goes on to deal with other consequences of the growing confusion, namely physical violence, and the mental disorder manifested in the breakdown of a marriage, and spreading outwards to encompass the wider community. Explanation for the bewildering events is sought in supernatural forces. Finally, the chapter reiterates the central concern with identity in the play where errors have made the main characters unsure of their own natures.

Chapter II : Twelfth Night

This chapter begins with a discussion of the device of disguising a woman as a boy, which features so largely in the main character, Viola.

There is a comparison between As You Like It and Twelfth Night, which seeks to define the atmosphere of the latter as more disturbing and altogether darker. The significance of the title as related to the deceptions in the play is discussed. Orsino and Olivia are seen to be under delusions about themselves. So is Malvolio, the difference being that he is punished for his error. The role of Feste in exposing the truth about these characters is important, and Viola's disguise also exposes the ironies of self-delusion. However, such is the nature of the play, that these characters also fall victim to the pervasive ambiguity of events and actions. The comic element of the play personified in Feste and Sir Toby is shown to be ambivalent as well. All the confusion initiated by mistaken identity leads to frequent accusations of 'madness' between the characters. As in The Comedy of Errors, characters tend to blame outside forces for the bewilderment occasioned by disguise. In conclusion, the chapter sums up the essence of the play as a more disturbing working out of the arbitrariness and disorder first manifested in The Comedy of Errors.

Chapter III : A Midsummer Night's Dream

The introduction to this chapter establishes the fact that this play is concerned with disguise as it illuminates Shakespeare's investigation of his own craft. Dramatic analogies are constantly implied and attendant questions about the nature of dramatic illusion arise, issues which come to a head in The Tempest.

The experience of the lovers in the dream world of moonlit woods is discussed, stressing the inherent analogy of that to a dramatic situation. Then the nature of the Fairies is discussed, their powers of manipulation suggesting the powers of a dramatic artist, and their transient world reflecting the theatrical world of comic fantasy. The distinctive approach of the Mechanicals to their play raises the question again of theatrical illusion in Shakespeare's own play. The performance of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' by actors refusing to accept the conventions of dramatic disguise also introduces speculation about the structure of comedy, the potential for chaos within it which is avoided in a harmonious resolution. The dramatic implications of Bottom confronting Titania are then discussed, again with special attention to the analogy of the effect of artistic illusion in Bottom's 'rare vision.' Theseus' speech dismissing the lovers' experience in the wood, and questioning the value of imagination, is discussed; in the light of what Shakespeare has established in favour of ^{the} power of the dramatic imagination, Theseus' assumptions are repudiated.

Chapter IV : Henry V

Disguise in this play has political manifestations. Critics' arguments for accepting an unambiguous portrayal of Henry V are questioned. Henry is shown to be surrounded by prelates who are shrewd opportunists, and to possess a character closely akin to the cold, calculating Hal of the Henry IV plays.

What is really a war of aggression is made out to be a glorious, noble enterprise by the King's skilful rhetoric. Henry attempts to build up a public persona through words, the equivocal nature of which point to the truth beneath the facade. The comic element of Pistol and company expose the ironies of Henry's actions and words, in comic scenes deliberately juxtaposed with 'serious' war-mongering. The mere mention of Falstaff's death makes his presence loom large over proceedings, to shed a specially critical light on the glib political catch phrases. The comic element contained in Fluellen and Macmorris is discussed with reference to their exposure of the sordidness of war. The culmination of the ambiguity surrounding his character comes when Henry confronts his common soldiers in disguise, and feels his public persona is unconvincing to them. Agincourt is portrayed as a cruel, futile contest; and the waste of war is strongly emphasised in Burgundy's speech. Henry's courtship of Katherine involves him in another assumption of a public persona in order to win what is, in effect, one of the spoils of war.

Chapter V : Measure for Measure

The introduction discusses the term 'problem' play, and discusses the Duke's disguise with reference to his identity, and to the dramatic analogy suggested by his manipulative powers.

Angelo's dissembling is investigated, as it bears on the pervasive atmosphere of ambivalence within the play. The significance of Vincentio using a Friar's habit for his disguise is examined. Critics who claim that the play is an allegory of the workings of Divine Providence are discussed. The character of the Duke as it manifests itself in his actions and attitudes emerges as fallible, very human, and steeped in ambiguity. The inadequacy of the ending suggests the analogy of the Duke as a failed dramatist; a comparison between Vincentio and Prospero is made. The insoluble problem of the justice dilemma in Vienna is discussed, with particular reference to the Duke's response to it.

Chapter VI : King Lear

The introduction makes the point that the structure of this tragedy differs from the others in the Shakespeare canon in that the hero achieves a substantial measure of self-knowledge. Lear's first action of abdication initiates the process of his own suffering, in which he is forced to come to terms with a world stripped of deception. The importance of Kent and the Fool in Lear's alienation is discussed. The uneven course of his progress towards greater self-knowledge during the storm, in confrontation with Poor Tom, and Gloucester, is followed. Finally, Lear reaches the height of his development when he faces Cordelia,

confesses his culpability, and after their arrest, expresses a desire for a mystic withdrawal from the world. Cordelia's death, however, brings Lear to the depths of a despair which has no illusion of comfort, and he dies deprived of all hope. The experience of Gloucester is then discussed; it is an experience with some parallels to Lear's situation, but less intense and despairing. Edgar's disguise as it affects the major theme of perception in the play is examined. In conclusion, the overall impact of the play is summed up.

Chapter VII : The Tempest

This is a play very much concerned with questions about dramatic effect and the powers of art, as the introduction points out. The character of Prospero is found to be ambiguous and fallible under the guise which he projects of all powerful and all knowing magician. The dramatic analogy of Prospero's manipulation of characters and use of theatrical effects through Ariel is discussed. Also, his own attitude to his powers, and his bitterness at having his plans thwarted are examined. Caliban is the focus for Prospero's hatred; his character also reveals hidden depths, despite Prospero's unqualified condemnation. Such ambivalence in the main characters is reflected in the ambiguity of the play's setting, and the perspectives of the characters caught up in the confusion of the island.

The ending of the play is seen to deny Gonzalo's optimistic formulations. Prospero's Art, which culminates in the triumph of the masque at the marriage feast, is thwarted by Caliban, and Prospero ends the play in a mood of disillusionment. The implications of this on the question of dramatic effect in the play overall are discussed.

ASPECTS OF THE DISGUISE THEME IN SOME SHAKESPEAREAN PLAYS

INTRODUCTION

The term 'disguise' as applied to Shakespeare's plays has a very wide application. It is most obviously connected to one of Shakespeare's most insistent themes, that of deceiving appearances. With the dissimulating figure of the Vice, the possibilities of disguising a character to suggest deceit, first seem to have entered English drama in the morality and miracle plays. The implications of such disguise went even further, to suggest analogies with the actors who took part in performances of the plays. Anne Richter explains that it was with the brilliant, unscrupulous figure of the Vice that the age-old connection of actor with deceiver seems first to have entered English drama. Even before he had acquired a capital letter and command over all the other evil forces in the play, Vice possessed a quality which associated him naturally with the actor. Both, as the Puritans pointed out, were essentially hypocrites. As counterfeits, deep dissimulators, they persuaded honest men of things that were not so, and to aid them in their task, assumed names and costumes not their own. The association of Vice with the actor originates with Prudentius; in his Psychomachia, he provides two examples of vices who, realising they cannot prevail by force, attempt to achieve their ends by decking out an illusion as reality, when Avarice transforms herself into Thrift, and Discord into Concord. In the sixteenth century, the dramatists took up the histrionic aspect of Psychomachia, and the disguise theme became immensely popular.¹

This association of Vice with a man who deliberately assumes a role in order to destroy can be seen in figures like Richard III, Iago and Edmund. However, the theatrical device of disguise

¹ Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play, ch. III, pp. 68-69.

(London, 1962).

had a much wider use in Shakespeare than that of evil dissembler. Disguise was, in fact, an inherent part of the structure of Renaissance comedy, including Shakespeare's. Northrop Frye explains that at the core of most Renaissance comedy is the formula transmitted by the New Comedy pattern of Plautus and Terence. The comic structure "normally begins with an anticom~~ic~~ society, a social organisation blocking and opposed to the comic drive, which the action of the comedy evades or overcomes The second period of confusion and sexual licence is a phase that we may call the phase of temporarily lost identity."¹

It is this second phase that is usually portrayed by the stock device of impenetrable disguise. Northrop Frye continues to say that consistently with the main theme of comedy, the loss of identity is often a loss of sexual identity, with the heroine being disguised as a boy. There are, of course, other manifestations of the theme, most commonly that of identical twins, as in ^{The} Comedy of Errors. The third and final phase of Renaissance comic structure is that of the discovery of the identity, which takes place after the disguises have been dropped; the most common form of identity is the form achieved by marriage, in which two souls become one:

" it is usually the activity of the heroine, or, in some cases, her passivity, that brings about the birth of the new society and the reconciliation of the older one with it. This activity takes the form of a disappearance and return. The sexual disguise is the simplest form of this."²

This use of disguise is not confined to the comedies. E.C. Pettet, discussing Sidney's Arcadia, makes the point that an important convention of romantic story-telling was that of disguises, mistaken identities and lack of recognition. So the convention of miraculous disguises was in

1 A Natural Perspective: the Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance, ch. III, pp.72-76. (London, 1965).

2 ibid. pp.76-83.

keeping with the spirit of the romantic story, and disguise appears frequently in Shakespeare's last plays, the romances.¹ The connection of disguise with identity occurs again and again from the early comedies to the last plays. Characters under the delusion of disguise take on an unfamiliar role that often confuses them as well as their society; they are launched into a process whereby unexpected responses from people around them lead to a questioning of the nature of self. Thus, Antipholus of Syracuse voices doubts about his true self, '... if that I am I' (III. ii. 41, The Comedy of Errors); Sebastian distrusts his senses and his reason:

... I am ready to distrust mine eyes
And wrangle with my reason that persuades me
To any other trust but that I am mad;

(Twelfth Night, IV. iii. 13-16)

Hermia doubts her very existence and that of her lover! 'Am not I Hermia? Are not you Lysander?'

(A Midsummer Night's Dream, III. ii. 273)

Henry V starts to ask questions about the nature of kingship; Duke Vincentio in disguise (Measure for Measure), learns some strange facts about himself from Lucio.

Disguise is the catalyst that, through deceptive appearances and illusion, through the creation of an ambiguous atmosphere, throws the disguised character and his society into confusion. The loss of identity is resolved in comedy by an ending which restores identity and reconciles characters to each other. The process of knowing oneself is explored in the greatest detail and taken to a climax of exposition only in tragedy, and most specifically in King Lear: there the agonising search for the essence of a self stripped of distorting guises and delusions about the world, is crystallised in the suffering which Lear undergoes. His tortured question: 'Who is it that can tell me who I am? (I. iv. 236),

1 Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition, Chs. 1 and 4, pp. 28 and 33.
(London, 1949)

is the tragic equivalent of that bewildered uncertainty articulated by characters confronted with deception in the other plays. It is a paradox that only through the distorted perception engendered by disguise does a new perspective arise within characters affected by it. Often disguise leads to a situation so chaotic that it erupts in violence, as in The Comedy of Errors, Twelfth Night, and A Midsummer Night's Dream, but it also leads out of that to a reappraisal of individual identity, and of the interaction between the individual and his community.

All the plays discussed in the thesis contain, in varying forms of complexity, this use of disguise associated with identity. The plays range through early comedy to mature comedy, history, 'problem' play, tragedy, to a last play; examining such a broad spectrum of the canon, enables one to follow through the way in which Shakespeare developed the common theatrical device of disguise. Disguise, in fact, becomes much more than a theatrical device in the Shakespeare canon; its associations of transformation, metamorphosis, deceiving appearance, have a profound effect both upon the character in the disguise, and upon his community; it draws attention to the arbitrariness of perception, creates an unfamiliar environment, and ultimately affects the perspective of everyone concerned. Disguise is the device through which Shakespeare could draw attention to issues like the difficulty of distinguishing between appearance and reality, and the search for the true nature of a man's self; they are issues which recur in every play and which were to Shakespeare enduring problems. The Comedy of Errors sets out the characteristic pattern of the consequences of disguise: mistaken identity between two sets of identical twins leads to chaos in their community, and bewilderment about the validity of individual perception. Twelfth Night ^{uses} ~~uses~~ basically the same form of disguise, with the complication that one of the identical twins is a woman, and it creates a more complex atmosphere with more profound results than the early comedy. Henry V presents the same problems of identity and deception

with a slightly different emphasis; the King assumes a public persona that Shakespeare subtly undercuts by various ironies made evident by the comic element, and through the ambivalence of Henry's own words and actions. King Lear crystallises all the problems of deceptive appearance and search for a true identity encountered in the other plays in the definitive suffering which Lear undergoes.

All the plays have this element of disguise connected to identity and deception within them.

However, in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Measure for Measure, and The Tempest, another important aspect of the disguise theme is predominant, and that is what can be called the disguising aspect of art. Anne Righter pointed out the connection between the character of Vice and the actor; both were counterfeits, dissimulators persuading men of things that were not so by assuming names and costumes not their own. There is also a strong sense in Shakespeare that the artist presents a counterfeit of reality that he is a dissimulator presenting an audience with things that are not so by means of men disguised as actors, and the illusions which his imagination creates. Anne Righter's book, Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play, is an examination of the frequency with which the play metaphor occurs in his work; Shakespeare was always probing the nature of his own art, and the audience is conscious of watching an illusion which has no pretensions to be a direct reflection of life itself. Critics, like E.E. Stoll (Art and Artifice in Shakespeare), E.C. Pettet (Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition), Northrop Frye (A Natural Perspective), agree that Shakespeare used improbable situations, and did not bother over much about psychological truth in the portrayal of his characters. What Shakespeare does is to 'draw us away from the analogy to familiar experience into a strange but consistent and self-contained dramatic world.'¹

1 Northrop Frye, A Natural Perspective: the Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance, ch. 1, p.19. (London, 1965).

E. E. Stoll,

discussing Othello, says Shakespeare so convincingly creates and sustains the dramatic illusion, that psychological consistency and realism do not matter.¹ He further observes that to Shakespeare, the dramatic and poetic structure is more important than the characters, and emotional illusion is more important than verisimilitude. Shakespearean drama 'is not reality, or even perfect consistency, but an illusion, and, above all, an illusion whereby the spirit of man shall be moved.'²

Shakespeare draws attention to the nature of the illusion which he creates particularly in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Measure for Measure and The Tempest. In these plays, the Fairies, Duke Vincentio, and Prospero, are analogous to the dramatic artist with his superior manipulative power over characters; the activities in which they engage are, like the artist's activities, suffused with the use of delusions, deceptions and disguises, by which they lead their characters into a world of confused perception. Disguise is as important a theatrical device to the artists within the play, as it is to the creator of the plays. Indeed, the play metaphor can be seen as the overall disguising of reality, which is conceived by the artist's imagination as an illusion with a sustained life of its own that informs the real world of the audience but does not directly reflect it. The possibilities of art for widening the perspectives and increasing the understanding, are explored through the activities of the Fairies, Vincentio and Prospero; so are its limitations; limitations which Vincentio refuses to acknowledge, and which leave Prospero disillusioned and weary.

By concentrating in these plays on one of Shakespeare's commonest theatrical devices, disguise, it is hoped that the importance of its application to what were for Shakespeare continuing problems, will be recognised. It is also hoped that by focusing on the plays through this particular viewpoint, a new emphasis and even a new insight might be added to their interpretation.

1 E.E. Stoll, 'Art and Artifice in Shakespeare', ch. II. p.55. (London, 1933).

2 ibid. pp. 3 and 168.

Disguise in the form of mistaken identity initiates all the entanglements manifested in The Comedy of Errors. Harold Brooks states the issues involved most clearly:

"The twins appear the same, but in reality are different; those who meet them are led by appearance into illusion. Repeatedly one of the persons assumed that ^{he} shared an experience with another, when in reality he shared it with a different one. In consequence, the persons cease to be able to follow each other's assumptions, and become isolated in more or less private worlds. Mistakes of identity all but destroy relationship, and loss of relationship calls true identity yet more in question;.....madness or demoniac possession would be the eclipse of the true ^{self}, and sorcery might overwhelm it. The alien Antipholus and Dromios fear Circean metamorphosis; Egeon, that ^{he} has been deformed out of recognition by time. Yet the hazard of metamorphosis and of the loss of present identity is also the way to fresh or restored relationship. Antipholus the bachelor desires that Luciana will transform him and create him new, and Adriana's belief that in marriage the former identities coalesce and emerge identified with each other, is true if rightly interpreted."¹

Within the farcical situations of this early comedy, Shakespeare is probing the layers that mask reality. The Comedy of Errors displays the most important features of that 'disguise of identity' discussed in the Introduction.

1. H.F. Brooks, 'Themes and Structure in The Comedy of Errors' in Early Shakespeare. (Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 3, edited J.R. Brown and Bernard Harris, 1961) p.66.

Starting from the basis of mistaken appearances, the play leads into the confused perceptions referred to by Harold Brooks, attended by an atmosphere of supernatural metamorphosis and mounting violence; the characters emerge from this bewilderment finally into a state of restored relationships and reconciliation. It is significant in terms of the subject of this thesis that as early as his first comedy, Shakespeare's imagination was inspired by a story involving the theme of false-seeming.¹ R.A. Foakes, in his critical introduction to the Arden edition of The Comedy of Errors explains that Shakespeare altered the sources for the comedy, Menaechmi and Amphitruo, by introducing an element of romantic love in Adriana's jealousy and Antipholus of Syracuse's passion for Luciana, and adding the pathos of Egeon's situation. He also:

"Enlarged and complicated the element of farce by giving the twin masters twin servants, so multiplying the possibilities of comic confusion....His modifications of the sources are used to develop a serious concern for the personal identity of each of the main characters, and for the relationship between them; and the jesting of the Dromios, and the "errors" or mistakes of the complicated action continually support this main development."²

1 See also Honor Matthews, Character and Symbol in Shakespeare's Plays, part II, Ch. IV, 'Justice, Mercy and False-Seeming.' (New York, 1961) p.124.

2 ^{New} Arden Edition, The Comedy of Errors, edited by R.A. Foakes (London 1968), pp. Xiii - Xiii.

There is every indication, then, that Shakespeare was using farce, with its leaning towards the ^{absurd}, to explore serious issues; by modifying his sources, he could give expression to these issues in the most effective way. The Comedy of Errors is in no sense merely a light, frothy display of technique, an excuse to use mistaken identity as a complicating factor in the display of farce. The aspects of the disguise theme evident in the play point forward to an even more complex probe into deceptive appearances and confused identity manifested in a later comedy like Twelfth Night.

The first appearance of Antipholus of Syracuse in the play raises the concern with identity. 'I will go lose myself' (I.ii.30), Antipholus tells the merchant, inadvertently referring to the experience he will undergo where his identity is concerned. His soliloquy dwells upon what he feels is a loss of individuality:

So I, to find a mother and a brother,
In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself.

(I.ii.39-40)

Antipholus is uneasy at the prospect of suffering a dissolution of his own essential nature in the search for part of his family:

I to the world am like a drop of water
That in the ocean seeks another drop,
Who, falling there to find ^{his} fellow forth,
(Unseen, inquisitive) confounds himself.

(I.ii.35-38)

This image of 'a drop of water/That in the ocean seeks another drop' recurs in the play; it suggests here an analogy to the individual identity struggling to keep itself intact when finding itself in a community threatening to engulf it. The progression from 'seeking' to 'finding' through 'confounding' is a sequence borne out by the direction of the play. Antipholus will seek and find new familiar relationships, but in the process he will also lose himself in bewildered reaction to the strange behaviour of the citizens of Ephesus, and in his love for Luciana. The 'confounding' will involve the disorientation of his own sense of self, caused by an apparent inability in those around him to recognise this self-image. Antipholus of Syracuse's uncertainty will eventually become so extreme, that he will resort to blaming what befalls him on supernatural, malevolent forces.

The image of the drop of water as an analogy to losing oneself recurs in Adriana's speech describing the modification of an individual in the relationship of marriage. In a play where mistaken identity is continually forcing a reassessment of relationships, the image is particularly opposite:

How comes it now, my husband, O, how comes it,
That thou art then estranged from thyself? -
Thyself I call it, being strange to me,
That undividable, incorporate,
Am better than thy dear self's better part.
Ah, do not tear away thyself from me;
For know, my love, as easy mayst thou fall
A drop of water in the breaking gulf,
And take^o unmingled thence that drop again
Without addition or diminishing,
As take^o from me thyself, and not me too.

Adriana assumes that the love relationship consists of a total integration of the lovers' identities, hence she talks about being 'undividable, incorporate,' and compares the experience of loving to the drop of water falling into an ocean, which, by its very action, cannot retain the same shape as it had before its immersion. In the same way, lovers become so thoroughly unified that they no longer retain their former separate entities: 'we two be one' (141). Whereas Antipholus is uneasy at the prospect of his sense of identity becoming blurred, Adriana sees a modification of the identity being essential in the relationship of marriage. R.A. Foakes in the Arden edition of the play, comments on her attitude:

".....Adriana does not realize that her claim upon her husband is too possessive....

Adriana seems to desire to absorb her supposed husband's identity into her own, a desire which is shown finally to be jealous and possessive, and earns the rebuke of the Abbess at V.i.68⁶⁶,¹ "There is, one feels, more to it than that; theoretically, Adriana's concepts are borne out by the action of the play. The main characters in the play are all in a way like drops of water, falling into 'the breaking gulf' of a community that reacts unfamiliarly to them, and re-emerging with new experiences that have affected, or changed, their former lives." As for Adriana's jealousy, her husband's behaviour to the courtesan with whom he appears to be on familiar terms (III.i, 109-114), provides evidence for anxiety on the part of a wife.

1) op. cit., pp.33,34.

And although Adriana acknowledges the justice of the Abbess' reproof of her jealousy, she is completely justified in arguing for her wifely right to care for her husband in face of the older woman's churlish refusals (V.i.92-117).

Shakespeare's transference of the setting of The Comedy of Errors from Epidamnium, scene of Menaech^m, to Ephesus, deliberately relates to St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians dealing with the relations of husband and wife.¹ R.A. Foakes would not agree that Adriana exemplifies the qualities required of the ideal Christian wife by St. Paul in strictures such as:

"Wives, submit your selves unto your husbands,
as unto the Lord."

"For the husband is the wives^w head, even as Christ is the head of the Church, and the same is the saviour of his bodie."

"Therefore as the church is in subjection to (is subject unto) Christ, even so let the wives be to their husbands in everie thing."² However, there are further recommendations by St. Paul that Adriana's concepts of marriage seem to reaffirm:

"So ought men to love their wives, as their own bodies; he that loveth his wife, loveth him self."

".....let everie one love his wife even as him self...."³

¹ ibid., p.XXIX.

² Ephesians, ch.V, verses 22-24. The Comedy of Errors quoted from Arden edition, p.114.

³ ibid., verses 28,33.

The point is that Adriana's concept of marriage does not stress her possessive tendency, but emphasises the central theme about relationships in the play, namely, that individual identities become modified in some way by involvement with another person. What may seem an image of clinging possessiveness used by Adriana:

Come, I will fasten on this sleeve of thine;
Thou art an elm, my husband, I a vine.

(II.ii.173-4)

must be seen in the light of how she shortly afterwards describes the forces separating husband and wife:

Usurping ivy, briar, or ^{ale} moss,
Who all for want of pruning, with intrusion,
Infect thy sap, and live on thy confusion.

(177-179)

The vine may cling, but it is not parasitic or life-choking, it does not 'infect the sap' and thwart growth: it modifies the guise of the tree around which it clings, as love modifies the identity of each individual in the relationship. The point of the imagery is not Adriana's clinging possessiveness, but an emphasis on the intimacy which should exist between man and wife. Antipholus of Syracuse sees his love for Luciana in the same terms; he calls her 'mine own self's better part' (III.iii.61). This is almost exactly an echo of Adriana's affirmation to the Antipholus she believes is her husband that she is 'better than thy dear self's better part' (II.iii.123). Antipholus of Syracuse's statement of total ¹⁰integration with Luciana, 'I am thee' (III.ii.66), is similarly a reiteration of Adriana's insistence that husband and wife must be 'undividable, incorporate' (II.ii.122).

There is of course the complication in Antipholus' reaction that he feels bewildered and even threatened by Luciana's allure, but his basic expression of love reinforces that held by Adriana.

To add to this exploration of relationship between man and woman which all the 'errors' in the play give rise to, there is Luciana's reaction. This is very different from the basic idea shared by Adriana and Antipholus of Syracuse. Luciana argues for the total subjection of the woman by her husband; she is Katharina arguing with evangelical fervour after her taming in assertions such as 'he is the bridle of your will' (II.i.13) and 'let your will attend on their accords' (25). This may be in accord with St. Paul's strictures to wives to be 'in subjection' to their husbands, but it is a point of view vigorously opposed by Adriana;

There's none but asses will be bridled so.

(II.i.14)

One suspects that Shakespeare was as much against this subjugation, this forceful changing of the woman's intrinsic self to suit her husband, as Adriana's objection suggests. The image he gives to Adriana to describe marriage, of the 'drop of water' intermingling in the sea of relationship, is much more satisfying than Luciana's harsh terms. Indeed, Luciana's attitude is further illuminated by her later rebuke of Antipholus of Syracuse, when she extols the advantages of dissimulation.

....if you like elsewhere, do it by stealth,
 Muffle your false love with some show of blindness....
 Look sweet, speak fair, become disloyalty;
 Appare~~n~~ vice like virtue's harbinger.

(III.ii.1-28)

Here is the beginning of what will become one of Shakespeare's most important concerns, namely, the theme of deliberately deceptive appearance assumed as a plausible exterior that disguises the corrupt motives beneath it:

Bear a fair presence, though your heart be tainted;
 Teach sin the carriage of a holy saint,
 Be secret false; what need she be acquainted?

(III.ii.13-15)

whereas Adriana ^{uses} the image of fastening upon her husband's sleeve, believing that to be a way of grasping his substance, Luciana argues that the husband only has to make a show of belonging to his wife:

Though others have the arm, show us the sleeve;
 We in your motion turn, and you may move us.

(III.ii.23-24)

Adriana's image of the clinging vine, analogous to the love relationship, at least contains an element of impetus, of activity, within it; she may nag and cling, but she does something to keep the substance remaining within a relationship. Luciana, on the other hand, will be content with a position as malleable inferior. Adriana's 'drop in the ocean' image admits a more honest and healthy relationship than an assumption that the man will be 'bridle of the will' and permitted to dissemble.

The impetus of the play works towards characters 'losing' themselves and re-emerging with new awareness, and Adriana's image of marriage is in harmony with this, for it involves integration and new perspectives. This gives to the woman a more rewarding role than that of passive subordination and makes of a relationship more than an exercise in dissembling and suppression of the woman's ^{self}.

An assessment of the relationship of love is one consequence of mistaken identity; it causes Adriana to articulate her views on marriage to a seemingly uncaring husband; Luciana is given the impetus to air her views when besieged by a man whom she supposes is her brother-in-law; and Antipholus of Syracuse comes into contact with a woman who initiates the process which governs his progress through the play, 'losing himself' being 'confounded' and finally 'finding' himself in a new relationship. Another consequence of mistaken identity is the mounting physical violence in the play, and the attendant disorder which accompanies it. The violence is a direct result of confusion causing isolation of identities; in the ordinary course of events, the individual feels reflected back from the community a recognisable image of himself that reassures him about the validity of that self-image. In the play, however, characters find that their self-images are distorted because the community does not recognise them; such lack of reassurance about who one is leads to confusion, ^{outrage}, and a sense of frustration that can only be released in violence.

This pattern of isolation, growing frustration, and subsequent violence, recurs throughout the play. It begins in the first encounter between Dromio of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse (I.ii.41-94); the Dromio comes to summon his master to dinner, the master demands the money he left in the servant's safe-keeping, and growing irritation results in a beating for Dromio. This obviously initiates the complications when Dromio of Syracuse enters Antipholus of Syracuse's presence and is confronted with a report of his previous inexplicable behaviour. Antipholus threatens his servant in a way that indicates a very sure sense of the importance of his own identity:

When the sun shines let foolish gnats make sport,
But creep in crannies when he hides his beams,
If you will jest with me, know my aspect,
And fashion your demeanour to my looks,
Or I will beat this method in your sconce.

(II.ii.26-34)

Antipholus assumes that the moods of his ego must be the supreme criterion for regulating the behaviour of his Dromio: 'fashion your demeanour to my looks.' His subsequent conversation stresses the orderliness of a familiar, regulated universe: 'learn to jest in good time; there's a time for all things' (1.63). It is still early in the development of the play, and Antipholus can still take for granted a predictable, logical framework of events that must confirm his own sense of what is fitting. His Dromio, on the other hand, already plunged into confusion, victim of seemingly bizarre attacks, talks about being:

....beaten out of season,
 When in the why and the wherefore is neither
 Rhyme nor reason.

(II.11.47-8)

and makes the point by way of word quibbles that 'there is no time for all things' (99). He is caught in the misunderstanding and is a victim of Antipholus' arbitrary reactions. Antipholus will undergo this experience as well; the ego that demands exact reflection of itself here will be made so unsure of itself by the end of the play that it will fear it has been the victim of supernatural plots.

The image of an ass constantly applied to the Dromios is thematically linked to both the transformation motif and the pervasive violence in the play. Luciana ^{Answers} Dromio of Syracuse's fears of having been metamorphosed:

'If thou art chang'd to aught, 'tis to an ass.'

(II.11.199)

The image is reiterated by Antipholus of Ephesus to his Dromio:

'I think thou art an ass.'

(III.1.14)

Such a label of transformation is appropriate to both Dromios; they are subject to the wills of their masters, victimised, and beaten like the traditional beast of burden, as is evident when Dromio of Ephesus affirms his master's words:

'Marry, so it doth appear
 By the wrongs I suffer and the blows I bear.'

(III.1.14-16)

Caught between Adriana's blows and Antipholus of Syracuse's anger, Dromio of Ephesus extends the image of suffering like a beat^s of burden into a suggestion of martyrdom:

Adriana: Back slave, or I will break thy pate across.

Dromio of Ephesus: And he will bless that cross
with other beating;
Between you I shall have a holy
head.

(II.i.78-80)

The quibble on words that have religious associations, 'bless', 'cross', 'holy', indicates the extent to which both Dromios are scapegoats for the frustration of the Antipholus brothers. Dromio of Ephesus goes on to liken himself to 'a football,' (83) roughly treated by all parties. Such images of transformation and victimisation are a direct consequence of the isolation of identities and subsequent violence directed first of all at the Dromios, and then spreading to others in the community.

As the violence spreads, so does the disorder and the breakdown in relationships. In Act III, Scene i, Antipholus of Ephesus is refused entry into his own house, and debarred from the meal with his wife. Harold Brooks makes the point that bailed or broken feasts are recurrent symbols in Shakespeare of the breakdown of human fellowship.¹ It is not too early to see the beginnings of such symbolism in this play, for the gossips' feast at the end marks the restoration of relationship.

1. Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 3, p.68.

The violence and misunderstanding spread outwards to include merchants cheated of their fees, Pinch the doctor beaten and bound by Antipholus of Ephesus, and the courtesan deprived of her gift. The consequences of mistaken identity encompass the wider community, spreading confusion beyond those directly involved in the situation. To Adriana's bewilderment, in fact, Antipholus seems to be mad, and his behaviour has affected 'the citizens,' as she explains to the Duke (V.i.142); it is a term that includes the whole town of Ephesus in the atmosphere of confusion. And, in fact, mistaken identity has involved others, because in the play, the individual relies very much on the community for a proper reflection of himself. The definition of the identities of both Antipholus' brothers and their Dromios depends on social reaction. The individual and the society are bound in a reciprocal relationship; distorting the reflection of the self, breaking the boundaries of that familiar relationship, results in the individual reacting against the community either by violence or fear. Mistaken identity then, initiates a process that will inevitably affect 'the citizens' with whom the victims of the errors come into contact.

Besides the violence and disorder caused by mistaken identity, there is also a persistent belief that uncanny supernatural forces are directing the 'errors' in the play. The very ^Setting at Ephesus relates again to St. Paul's visit to that city associated with magic and sorceress.¹

1 The Comedy of Errors, Arden edition, p. xxix.

G.R. Elliott has pointed out what he calls the 'comic horror' attendant on mistaken identity, the genuine horror of mistaking one individual for another, because society considers individuality so important. He also details the strain of weirdness and bewitchment in the play reflecting this fear and confusion.¹ Northrop Frye draws attention to the repeated references to jugglers and wizards, and the insistence on madness, which 'bring the feeling of the play closer to the night world of Apuleius than to Plautus.' And he talks about the fear of the loss of identity being 'the primitive horror of the doppelganger which is an element in nearly all forms of insanity.'² Indeed, beneath the comedy of what befalls Antipholus of Syracuse in particular and the Dromios, there is a real sense of frightening isolation and total bewilderment finding expression in fears of the supernatural. By the end of Act I, Scene ii, Antipholus of Syracuse has been jolted into a state of uncertainty by the strange encounter with Dromio of Ephesus:

Upon my life, by some device or other
The villain is o'er-raught of all my money.
They say this town is full of cozenage,
As nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,
Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks...

(I.ii.94-105)

This sets the pattern for subsequent responses to inexplicable events; the eye does seem to be deceived, minds are jolted from familiar grooves of thought, bodies are symbolically transformed into asses that bear the

1. 'Weirdness in The Comedy of Errors,' University of Toronto Quarterly, LX (1939), 95-106.
2. A Natural Perspective: the Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance, (London, 1965) ch.III, p.77.

brunt of violent outbursts, disguise and deception seem to permeate the whole confusing sequence of 'errors'. The 'errors' are not, of course, caused by jugglers, sorcerers, or witches, as Antipholus believes, but are the direct result of mistaken identity. The shock of having to encounter strange and bewildering reactions from a community that suddenly ceases to recognise them, however, forces Antipholus and his Dromio to relegate their experiences to a realm that is full of the mysterious and inexplicable anyway. Failure to acknowledge an individual's identity throws that individual into a state of insecurity that either gives rise to blind rage, as in Antipholus of Ephesus, or unreasoning fear, as in his brother.

Antipholus of Syracuse's reaction to the identity of husband suddenly foisted upon him by Adriana (II,ii), is to ask bewildered questions to which he can find no answer:

What, was I married to her in my dream?
Or sleep I now, and think I hear all this?
What error drives our eyes and ears amiss?

(II.ii.182-4)

He mistrusts his senses, and blames the situation on a mistake that has a volition of its own, 'drives our eyes and ears amiss.' His confusion is further indicated by his decision to wait:

Until I know this sure uncertainty,

(185)

which is a contradiction in terms.

His Dromio's immediate reaction is to blame the puzzling events on spirits:

This is the fairy land;..... (189).

Antipholus of Syracuse, falling in love with Luciana, falls into this supernatural explanation as well; he feels that she is a spirit, although he cannot quite make up his mind whether she is ^{lead}ing him to destruction, like a 'siren' (III.ii.47-52), or whether she is a divine, goddess-like creature:

Teach me, dear creature, how to think and speak;
Lay open to my earthy gross conceit,
Smother'd in errors, feeble, shallow, weak,
The folded meaning of your words' deceit.

(III.ii.33-36)

Luciana is here for Antipholus a goddess capable of revealing supreme truths and leading him into a new awareness of being; he assumes that her words are shrouded in 'folded meaning' which he only has to penetrate to become aware of a divine message. It is because of his confusion that he projects onto the woman he loves this illusion:

Are you a god? Would you create me new?

(III.ii.39)

In fact, although Antipholus believes that he is undergoing a strange supernatural process, his experience of love is not so very different from that described by Adriana, in the sense that both feel their identity is changed in some way. Antipholus attributes this modification of the psyche to a supernatural cause only because, in his present state, even love can only be explained in terms of mystery.

The comic counterpart of this response is of course Dromio of Syracuse being pursued by the kitchen maid; he is convinced that she possesses powers of transformation, the origin of which are evil:

I, amazed, ran from her as a witch.
And I think if my breast had not been made of
faith, and my heart of steel,
She had transformed me to a curtal dog, and
made me turn i'th'wheel.

(III.ii.143-145)

Antipholus of Syracuse also reaches the point where he simply relegates the misunderstanding about him to malevolent forces. There is a certain irony in the fact that he receives what would in other circumstances be considered all the good fortune; he is offered free dinners, a gold chain, respect from the citizens of Ephesus, suits of clothing; yet to Antipholus:

Sure these are but imaginery wiles,
And Lapland sorcerers inhabit here.

(IV.iii.10-11)

When Dromio of Syracuse enters with a totally incomprehensible account of events, Antipholus can only offer up a prayer for deliverance:

The fellow is distract, and so am I,
And here we wander in illusions -
Some blessed power deliver us from hence!

(IV.iii.40-43)

The Courtesan enters immediately after this, claiming her chain, and again Antipholus of Syracuse's reaction is to see her as the personification of the worst of evil spirits:

Satan avoid, I charge thee tempt me not. (46)

He has developed from a state of believing that he is the victim of more or less genial magic, as in his confrontation

with Luciana, (III.ii.29-52), to a position where he feels threatened by evil powers.

The whole atmosphere of supernatural forces moving events builds up to the climax in Act V. Believing her husband to be in the priory, Adriana is told he has escaped and is seeking her; she can only confusedly relegate the sequence of events to mysterious phenomena:

....he is borne about invisible;
Even now we hous'd him in the abbey here,
And now he's there, past thought of human reason.

(V.ii.187-189).

Confirmation that events are 'past thought of human reason,' is given by the Duke's amazed reaction to the two identical brothers both present before him at the same time:

....which is the natural man,
And which the spirit?

(V.ii.333-4).

A similar assumption is reflected in Antipholus of Syracuse's question to Egeon:

Egeon art thou not? or else his ghost?

(V.ii.337).

Only in this last scene, when presented with the physical facts that have caused all the misunderstanding, are the characters finally rid of supernatural explanations. Such explanations have indicated the state of insecurity that isolated identities have undergone; unable to relate to each other, the individuals in the play have clutched at the only explanation that fitted

their confusion, that of being manipulated by forces outside themselves.

While one acknowledges that Antipholus of Syracuse and his Dromio have undergone a confusing and potentially even terrifying experience, it is the presence of Egeon in the last Act that adds a sombre note to proceedings. The old man's long explanations of the loss of his wife and son and his efforts to rediscover them in Act I, Scene i, are delivered in a tone of measured, solemn dignity that transmits a real sense of suffering and despair. And one must remember that Egeon's very life is at stake in Ephesus; neither of his sons, for all their confusion, are presented with that finality. Egeon's presence at the denouement adds an extra dimension of potential suffering. Antipholus of Ephesus does not recognise his father, and Egeon's lament is that 'time's deformed hand' (V.i.299), 'time's extremity' (307), has brought about such startling physical transformation in him that his son is no longer able to identify him. This is transformation by means harder to bear than the mistakes of similarity which beset the brother, for it is caused by grief and harsh circumstances and made poignant by Egeon's attempt to explain his son's lack of recognition:

but perhaps, my son,
Thou sham'st to acknowledge me in misery.

(V.i.323-4).

Although time the deformer and destroyer has also restored Egeon to his son and wife in the appropriate comic resolution of the play, his presence has brought a hint of real suffering to the proceedings.

The essence of The Comedy of Errors is to be found in the concern with identity which lies at the basis of so much that is said by the main characters. When Dromio of Syracuse asks his master:

I am transformed...am I not? (II.iiv.195)

it is not only a reference to metamorphosis, but hints at an anxiety about the very nature of self, which Antipholus reinforces:

I think thou art in mind, and so am I. (196)

At the end of this scene where Adriana and Luciana have first encountered the wrong set of men, Antipholus asks questions that reveal a complete spiritual, sensual and mental disorientation:

Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell?
Sleeping or waking, mad or well advis'd?

(II.ii.212-13)

And this disorientation leads him to feel insecure about his very sense of self-hood:

Known unto these, and to myself disguised.

(214)

The peculiar paranoia arises because Antipholus is not getting reflected back from society the image he expects, and is thus caught in a deep anxiety concerning the validity of that self-image. The self disguised becomes a major theme in subsequent plays, and the theme reaches its profoundest expression in King Lear. Lear has to work through the layers of his disguised self in torment and suffering to penetrate the reality of what he is.

No one could suggest that the seeds of self-anxiety in this early comedy were a preparation for the tragedy that came much later in Shakespeare's development; nevertheless, the interest is evident as early as this play. Antipholus of Syracuse, speaking to Luciana, articulates doubts about his true self:...."if that I am I," (III.ii.41) and Dromio, having just escaped from the kitchen wench, asks:

Am I Dromio? Am I your man? Am I myself?

(III.ii.73)

Beneath the obvious comic level, lies the beginning of what will develop into a major preoccupation for Shakespeare. The search for the truth of self, for the essence of identity, will culminate in Lear's question:

Who is it that can tell me who I am?

(I.iv.236)

Even in an early comedy, the consequences of mistaking identity are far-reaching; relationships are re-assessed, confusion mounts and explodes into violence, or manifests itself in fears of supernatural manipulation. Chaos reigns in the void created by characters islanded off from each other, and spreads to the community with which those characters are in contact. The disruption of order is resolved in the comic ending of reconciliation and discovery of familiar identities and new relationships. This comic ending does not, however, obscure the predominant atmosphere of the play which, despite the farce and fun, indicates an anxiety about the very nature of true identity.

This is the concern most closely associated with the disguise motif; immediately an identity is obscured, either deliberately or inadvertantly, the question of its genuine validity is raised. All sorts of other issues arise as a result of this, as has been seen in The Comedy of Errors, spreading outwards to affect others connected with the individuals concerned. The problems raised in this early play arise continually wherever disguise is used; the next chapter deals with Twelfth Night, which deals with those same concerns handled in a more skilful manner and raising more complex areas of significance.

The design of Twelfth Night is more complex than ^{that of} The Comedy of Errors, and there is a profounder treatment of the issues common to both plays. The Platonic twin situation is complicated by one of the members being a woman disguised as a young man; Shakespeare has also added a sub-plot based on the revels of a feast of ^{misrule} when normal restraints are overthrown, and an atmosphere of frenzied carousing prevails. Twelfth Night, though, is, like the early comedy, still essentially concerned with the consequences of deceptive appearance. Viola's disguise is an obvious indication of this, and here we come to an important use of the disguise theme in Shakespeare's work.

The device of having a woman disguised as a man already occurs in the earliest of the comedies; Julia resolves to visit her lover Proteus pretending to be a man (The Two Gentlemen of Verona), and thereby discovers how fickle his affections are. Julia in fact enters the service of Proteus as a go-between in his wooing of Silvia, a ruse that Shakespeare employs again in Twelfth Night. Of the other mature comedies, As You Like It has the heroine donning man's garb; this enables her to observe her own lover and expose the ridiculous, illogical aspects of his behaviour; being in love herself, however, she is also ironically a victim of the emotion she exposes in Orlando.

In just these two instances, then, the heroine disguised as a man complicates the action, makes discoveries about her own vulnerability, and adds a new dimension to the presentation of relationships in the plays. There are of course other instances when the same device is used, ranging from the comedies, The Merchant of Venice, for example, to the last plays, with Imogen's disguise in Cymbeline. Muriel Bradbrook comments on the device:

....physically it was easier for boys to appear in their usual attire but this could not have been a determining factor with a writer who created Beatrice. In taking up the part of a witty lad, the ladies were assuming not only a disguise but a definite stage role: one which Lyly had first developed, but Shakespeare had also used when in Love's Labour's Lost he invented Moth. The Boy's clothes are, then, no mere masquerade; they provide a second dramatic identity superimposed upon the first, and inter-lacing with it.¹

Miss Bradbrook makes the point that the character of a Rosalind or Viola is enlarged by the boy's disguise; this enables the character to inter-act in relationships in a way that would not be possible without the deceptive guise. By conferring a 'second dramatic identity' upon the heroine, Shakespeare adds to the ways in which he can explore the whole question of deceptive appearances, levels of reality, and anxiety about identity.

1 M.C. Bradbrook, The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy, ch.VI, p.88 (London, 1955).

However, the assumed role of witty boy never completely obscures the girl beneath the guise; Rosalind faints at the sight of her lover's blood, and Viola falls in love with Orsino; and the woman always exposes herself once the action has run its course through complications and dilemmas often made more intricate because of her disguise.

Twelfth Night and As You Like It were written at about the same time in Shakespeare's career, and both involve heroines disguised as boys. Twelfth Night rather than As You Like It has been chosen for study because it seems to be more the culmination of the essential spirit of the disguise motif as manifested in The Comedy of Errors. It is an altogether darker and less resolved play than As You Like It, displaying an atmosphere in which every character is lost in bewilderment and confusion at one time or another; illusions abound both in the deceptive appearance of Viola and Sebastian, and in the roles Orsino, Olivia and Malvolio imagine for themselves. Philip Edwards points to the difference between the two plays:

In As You Like It, liberation is by means of escape; in Twelfth Night, by means of inversion and mis-rule. As You Like It is a parable of healing: from habitations where there is hatred in families, the characters escape into a magic place which cures malice and provides for the lovers their proper partners. In Twelfth Night we remain in the city.

Liberation means the temporary lordship of Sir Toby, the subjugation of Malvolio, and the deception of almost every character in the play. 'Healing' is an inappropriate word for the comedy. A brother and sister are re-united by chance and the initial unhappiness of Olivia and Orsino is resolved in what may seem a satire of the 'Jack shall have Jill theme.'¹

Mr. Edwards also draws attention to the different emphasis in the songs of As You Like It and Twelfth Night. 'It was a lover and his lass' is an account of love finding fulfilment in the spring:

therefore take the present time,
For love is crammed with the prime.

The joy of 'taking the present time' is dominant, not the fact of growing old. In the second stanza of Feste's 'O mistress mine' however, the stress is elsewhere:

Youth's a stuff will not endure.²

There is also, of course, the tone of sad fatality in the song that ends Twelfth Night, with that refrain:

For the rain it raineth every day.

1 Philip Edwards, Shakespeare and the Confines of Art, Ch.IV, p.63 (London, 1968).

2 ibid, p.63.

The comparison between the two plays serves to bring the qualities of Twelfth Night into sharper focus. It is a play in which everything works towards greater distortion. We have already mentioned Viola's disguise; another important agent pointing out delusions and helping to perpetuate them, is the Fool. Feste's motley is in one sense just as much a disguise as Viola's male clothing. The origin of the wise and witty fool of Shakespeare's plays arose from the wandering minstrels and jesters of the early middle ages; they were willing to assume the guise of innocents and naturals in order to enjoy the privileged, if somewhat eccentric, position of the man in motley at a medieval court or manor house.¹ The disguise of the motley gives Feste a certain detachment through which he can comment on the atmosphere of delusion and distortion around him. However, in this play, not even the wise Fool is immune from the false assumptions engendered by deceptive appearances.

Once again we turn to an excellent essay by Frank Kermode in the Stratford-Upon-Avon series, to introduce the main themes of Twelfth Night; he writes about:

Shakespeare's pre-occupation with the comedy of mistaken identity, first as a brilliant apprentice-imitator in The Comedy of Errors, later with an increasingly deep brooding over the truth hidden in the dramatic convention; for, if it is accepted

1) See on this development of the stage Fool; R.H. Goldsmith, Wise Fools in Shakespeare, Ch.1, pp.5-7 (Michigan, 1955).

that all our dealings with reality are affected by an inability certainly to distinguish between what is said and what is meant, between things as they are and as they appear to be, between Truth and Opinion, then the comic errors develop a peculiar relevance to life itself.¹

The plot of the play turns, of course, on the errors arising from the apparent sameness of Sebastian and Viola; what appears to be so is not so. Similarly Orsino and Olivia are deceived by their own appetites....²

....out of the comic errors, out of the Plautine twins, has come a comedy of identity, set on the borders of wonder and madness.³

Feste's comment, 'Nothing that is so is so' (IV.i.9), could well be the key phrase to describe the pervasive atmosphere of delusion in the play. Commentators of the play all tend to stress that its title relates it to a period of festivity, as is evident in the sub-plot where the jokes and revels indicate a feast of misrule:

when normal restraints and relationships were overthrown. As the main title implies, the idea of a time of misrule gives the underlying constructive principle of the whole play.⁴

1. Frank Kermode, 'The Mature Comedies' in 'Early Shakespeare' (Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies 3, 1961) p.224.
2. *ibid.* p.226.
3. *ibid.* p.227.
4. L.G. Salingar, 'The Design of Twelfth Night,' Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol.IX, 1958. p.118.

L.G. Salingar goes on to write about the 'sat^{ur}nalian spirit' that 'invades the whole play.'¹ While not denying that the play is full of carousal and high spirits which contribute to the disorder, and that Feste's name also points to a spirit of festivity, the title does have another area of significance. The Twelfth Night after Christmas is traditionally the night of Epiphany, the celebration of showing forth the Christ child to the Magi, an archetypal symbol of the revelation of divine truth to those who come seeking it. The play makes use of this showing forth action, with results that are often a travesty of the Epiphany process; what is revealed leads not to enlightenment, but often to greater confusion, and involves the foolish, not the wise. The image thus suggested by the title is another device serving to build up layers of disguise and distortion around events.

The terms associated with the Epiphany process are implicit in the speech and actions of most characters in the play. Sir Toby questions Sir Andrew about his dancing talents:

Wherefore are these things hid? Wherefore have these gifts a curtain before^{the} them? Are they like to take dust, like Mistress Mall's picture?Is it a world to hide virtues in?

(I.iii.121-8)

Sir Toby knows Sir Andrew to be manifestly untalented in most areas of human endeavour; ^{the} 'curtain' drawn away to reveal his gifts will show little else besides the ability to 'cut a caper' (117), and to

1. ibid. p.118.

perform 'the back-trick simply as strong as any man in Illyria.' (119). The Epiphany image is applied to a witless young man; who can show forth little of value. Olivia is first described in the play by Valentine as appearing 'like a chorstress...veiled' (I.i.29); she has vowed to conceal herself thus for seven years in memory of her dead brother. It only requires one visit from Cesario, however, to get her to reveal herself:

....we will draw the curtain and show you the picture.

(I.v.233)

Again the word 'curtain' is used, as in Sir Toby's speech, to indicate the action of drawing away obscuring layers. However, Olivia's action is initiated by her falling in love with a woman in disguise, and leads to a complication of emotional tangles. In fact, her original cloistered existence was the result of an illusion centring around excessive love for a dead brother, and the unwitting simply leads her into another illusion of believing she loves a young man; Olivia has emerged from one form of confusion into yet more intricate levels of deception. She talks in a subsequent meeting with Cesario of how impossible it is to keep her love hidden:

To one of your receiving
Enough is shown; a cypress, not a bosom,
Hides my heart.

(III.i.122-4)

A murd'rous guilt shows not itself more soon
Than love that would seem hid; love's night is noon.

(149-150)

Again the emphasis is on uncovering emotion, on the fact that the real feelings will be understood by the lover. However, what Olivia hopes to show to Viola/Cesario is invalidated by the disguise, and she must suddenly switch these professions of love to Sebastian because he looks like her lover. The whole tangled situation makes a travesty of Olivia's revelation of the true state of her feelings; it is a travesty that becomes evident in Act V when Olivia attempts to make public her secret marriage by calling on the priest:

Father, I charge thee by thy reverence
Here to unfold - though lately we intended
To keep in darkness what occasion now
Reveals before 'tis ripe -

(V.1.152-5)

This revelation leads to the utmost bewilderment for Viola/Cesario who can only listen in astonishment, and drives the Duke to an angry outburst that threatens violence. The denouement of the play, when the identities of Viola and Sebastian are established, leaves the audience feeling that no advance of enlightenment has been achieved; Olivia is revealed to have mistakenly married the wrong person, and Orsino does a sudden about-turn on his previous professions of ardour, to take Viola as a wife. The conventional comic ending of the play glosses over these issues;

however, it cannot entirely dissipate ^{the} feeling that confusion has been built on confusion, and that we have been left with no final resolution.

The terms of the Epiphany image are applied to Viola as well in her original donning of a disguise; in conversation with the Captain she wishes that she might serve Olivia:

And might not be delivered to the world,
Till I had made mine own occasion mallow,
What my estate is.

(I.ii.43-5)

Viola desires a delayed 'deliverance' to the world in her true identity; so she goes about deliberately ^{to} obscure the truth of who she is, thereby initiating many of the mis-understanding of the play. And finally, the image applies as well to Malvolio's reactions. Maria entreats him in the false letter to 'cast thy humble slough and appear fresh' (II.v.148), and he does show forth in a new guise which exposes his illusions of egotistic grandeur. Reading the letter, Malvolio comments that:

Daylight and Champian discovers not more. This
is open.

(II.v.160)

Again, the 'discovery' is an ironic reversal of what really exists; instead of figuring forth the truth, the letter is leading Malvolio to form false conclusions.

Implicit references to the Epiphany process are conveyed in images associated with words like 'curtain,' 'shows,' 'unfold,' 'delivered,' 'discovers'; the title

then obviously has a wider significance than that of relating to the inversion of order caused by a feast of misrule. What is revealed, or thought to be revealed in the play, leads not to enlightenment and discovery of divine truth, but to further confusion; the Epiphany process brought to mind by this Twelfth Night is an ironic reversal of the original image of the event.

Orsino, Olivia and Malvolio are all beset by illusions concerning their emotions. These illusions are exposed largely by the presence of a disguised Viola and to a certain extent by Feste, in the case of Orsino and Olivia; Malvolio does not only have his illusions exposed, however; he is severely and cruelly punished in the jest perpetrated by Maria and Sir Toby, and in which Feste also takes a part. Although the self-delusions are exposed for the audience to see, none of the characters concerned gain any nearer self-knowledge by the end of the play; even Viola and Feste, who expose the illusions, are themselves victims of mistaken appearances and emotional confusion; the muddle which we have so far established is the predominant motif of the play, engulfs even the most perceptive characters.

Orsino's speeches on love reveal a nature that is luxuriating in the abstract passion. He talks about it in terms of appetite:

"If music be the food of love, play on,
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die. (I.i.1-3)

Alas, their love may be called appetite,
 No motion of the liver but the palate,
 That suffer surfeit, cloyment and revolt;
 But mine is all as hungry as the sea
 And can digest as much.

(II.iv.98-102)

Orsino may pour scorn on the shallow appetite of women's love in this second extract, but there is not much to choose between the terms in which he describes it, and the way he expresses his own emotions in the opening lines of the famous first speech. What is conveyed by both extracts is that love to Orsino is a process of extravagant self-indulgence of 'excess' and 'surfeit,' that continues until saturation point has been reached. His claim that the 'spirit of love....notwithstanding thy capacity/^e^{ive} ~~Recept~~th as the sea' (I.i.9-11), like the assertion in the second speech that his love 'is all as hungry as the sea/And can digest as much,' makes the point that his appetite for indulgence in passion is insatiable.

The sense of luxuriating in the emotion comes across in Orsino's highly elegant, richly sensuous lyricism, which invests his speeches with a tone of lush romanticism:

That strain again! It had a dying fall;
 O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound
 That breathes upon a bank of violets,
 Stealing and giving odour. (I.i.4-7)

Away before me to sweet beds of flow'rs;
 Love-thoughts lie rich when canopied with bow'rs.
 (I.i.41-2)

Indeed, what fascinates Orsino are the 'love-thoughts,' not so much the loved one. He plays the part of a lover to perfection; he is Romeo romanticising over Rosaline before having felt the full impact of love in the relationship with Juliet. Orsino indulges in the moodiness and changeability of the lover:

Enough, no more!

'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.

(I.i.7-8)

For such as I am all the ^{we} lovers are,
Unstaid and skittish in all motions else
Save in the constant image of the creature
That is beloved.

(II.iv.17-20)

And despite what he says about the shallowness of the female appetite, he admits the inconstancy, the transience of ardour in men:

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.32-6)

Feste indulges Orsino's morbid melancholy when he sings the maudlin song 'Come away, come away, death,' about a lover dying 'by a fair cruel maid' (II.iv.51-66). His acerbic comment after the song sums up exactly the Duke's superficial and quickly changing poses as lover:

Now the melancholy god protect thee, and the
tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for
thy mind is very opal. I would have men of such
constancy put to sea, that their business might
be everything, and their intent everywhere; for
that's it that always makes a good voyage of nothing.

(II.iv.73-78)

With his melancholy sighs, his calls for music and song, his constant dwelling upon the abstract passion of love, the Duke is making 'a good voyage of nothing.' Orsino is a man of sudden affections, but the depth of his feelings is suspect. Valentine comments upon the speed with which Cesario has gained favour; Viola returns with a statement that voices some anxiety about the very changeability Feste perceives as part of the Duke's character:

'You either fear his humour or my negligence, that you ^{||}call in question the continuance of his love. Is he inconstant, sir, in his favours?'

(I.iv.5-7)

Valentine's reply, 'No, believe me,' is not very reassuring. Indeed, by the end of the play, in the confusion engendered by the similarity of Sebastian and Viola, the Duke's 'love' has changed to threats of violence against Cesario, under the provocation of jealousy:

Why should I not, had I the heart to do it,
Like to the Egyptian thief at point of death,
Kill what I love? - a savage jealousy
That sometimes savours nobly.

(V.i.119-120)

My thoughts are ripe in mischief,
I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love
To spite a raven's heart within a dove.

(129-131)

Orsino indulges in the passion of jealousy, just as he indulged in the passion of love.

The assumed pose of lover is proved at the end to be merely playing of a part when Cesario becomes Viola and the Duke feels that she will make as good a wife as any. Orsino's claim to be attracted to Olivia's beauty:

....tis that miracle and queen of gems
That nature pranks her in attracts my soul.

(II.iv.86-7)

is shown to be very hollow indeed at the end of the play. The absurdity of this sort of love which relies so much on attractive outward appearance is here being strongly emphasised; it so happens that luckily for the comic ending of the play, Viola happens to be as attractive as Olivia, more available than her, and so can become the Duke's wife. Viola's disguise has constantly underli^hed the important theme of appearance, deceptive as it is in most cases, and when she takes it off, the falseness of the Duke's affections which he claims have been fixed on the beauty of Olivia, are exposed. Orsino has imagined himself in love with an image of beauty, has given free rein to his imaginings, and vicariously indulged his passion, while sending Cesario to act as go-between and ^{to} perform the actual wooing. When he claims in his first speech:

So full of shapes is fancy
That it alone is high fantastical.

(I.ii.14-15)

he is unaware that he is hinting at the absurdity of his own passive indulgence in an abstract emotion.

It is a comment unconsciously echoing Theseus' mocking analysis of the workings of the lover's imagination:

Lovers...have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.

(A Midsummer Night's Dream, V.1.4-6)

Orsino has thought himself to be in love, and indulged in imaginings and fantasies all proved false by the circumstances engendered by Viola's disguise, and by Feste's critical insights. Deceptive appearance has revealed deceptive emotion.

Olivia's grief for her dead brother is shown up in the same way to be emotional self-indulgence. Valentine hints that her resolution to live 'like a chaste...veiled,' in a studied pose of grief, signifies an unnatural dwelling upon the past:

All this to season
A brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh
And lasting in her sad remembrance.

(I.i.31-3)

Feste points to the foolishness of such unnatural grief in his exchange with Olivia; he asks why she mourns if, as she believes, her brother's soul is in heaven:

The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's
soul, being in heaven. Take away the fool,
gentlemen.

(I.v.69-71)

That the pose is exceedingly fragile, is of course obvious when Olivia unveils herself in her first interview with Cesario, (I.v.).

An important feature of that interview is that what has been called the 'disguise in art' theme in the introduction is present. Viola talks to Olivia like an actor having learnt his lines and anxious to deliver them correctly:

I would be loath to cast away my speech;
for, besides that it is excellently well penned, I have
taken great pains to con it.

(I.v.170-172)

In answer to Olivia's question:

Whence came you sir? (175)

Viola continues in the same vein:

I can say little more than I have studied,
and that question's out of my part. Good gentle
one, give me modest assurance if you be the lady
of the house, that I may proceed in my speech.

(176-179)

Olivia in fact asks 'Cesario' if 'he' is an actor:

Are you a comedian? (180)

to which Viola replies: "I am not that I play." (182)

Olivia falls in with the acting metaphor:

Now, sir, what is your text? (220)

'You are now out of your text. (232)

The interview is conducted as if Viola were an actor speaking prepared lines; on an obvious level this serves to distance her from Olivia, which is a deliberate and useful ploy on Viola's part.

More significantly, ^{it} is an ironic reminder that her disguise is really the disguise of an actor, and that what the audience is watching is a fiction. This technique is part of an artistic awareness that was present in Shakespeare as early as Love's Labour's Lost, as can be seen by the theatrical metaphors of the ending, and that is developed to a far greater degree in A Midsummer Night's Dream, which will be discussed in the next chapter. The appearance of a character in disguise, as Viola is here, makes the use of theatrical metaphors peculiarly opposite; the disguise not only affects levels of reality within the world of the play, but also reminds an audience that it is watching a dramatic performance, which presents a particular kind of distortion of reality. Such reminders occur again in Fabian's comment upon the gulling of Malvolio:

If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction.

(III.iv.133-4)

and ^{is} a certain element of theatricality when Feste dons a disguise to bate Malvolio. In this encounter, where we are made so aware that Viola is playing a role, both within the play, and as an actor of a play, Olivia's delusion is emphasised, as well as the different delusion an audience is under when watching a play.

In a subsequent interview, Viola assures Olivia:

I am not what I am.

(III.i.143)

to which Olivia replies: "I would you were as I would have you be." (144)

Olivia seeks to project her own image of Cesario's identity upon Viola; she does the same thing later when, after having married Sebastian, she encounters a bewildered Cesario and urges him:

'Be that thou know'st thou art.... (v.i.149).

Recognising the true identity has become impossible for Olivia; her judgements are entirely subjective and thus she projects her own image of what Cesario should be upon him. In a way, the self-absorption of Olivia's passion has led her to an irrational attitude towards Cesario/Viola, who shows not the slightest interest in her. In this, she is similar to Orsino, who also chooses to ignore the real state of his lover's affections. Both characters pursue the desired object without much reference to that person's feelings, and as a consequence both suffer under the delusion of mistaken assumptions about the direction and outcome of their love.

The delusions that beset Malvolio, and the advantage taken of them to perpetrate the trick, are undoubtedly more serious and complicated. As Olivia's steward, Malvolio is reliable, sober, efficient and conscientious; however, there is another much less attractive side to his character which he does not recognise, and which is exposed by Feste, Olivia and Maria even before the gulling starts.

Malvolio shows more than Puritan disapproval of Feste's jesting; he is positively spiteful:

I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal. I saw him put down the other day with an ordinary fool that has no more brain than a stone. Look you now, he's out of his guard already. Unless you laugh and minister occasion to him, he is gagged. (I.v.82-7)

This mean-spiritedness is rebuked by Olivia:

O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distempered appetite. To be generous, guiltless, and of free disposition, is to take those things for birdbolts that you deem cannon bullets. (90-3).

Malvolio is indeed, 'sick of self-love,' believing in his own image of himself as irreproachable and upstanding; as a consequence, his zest for life is jaded and crabbed by a superiority complex that spitefully criticises whatever he disagrees with as trivial. His totally egotistical approach to life denies tolerance; he stands in opposition to the self-indulgent, free-spirited Sir Toby, and to Feste's awareness of life's absurdities. The atmosphere of Olivia's household is one of generosity and 'free disposition,' for the mistress harbours dependants like Sir Toby and Feste under her roof in a spirit of easy tolerance.

Malvolio, with his spite and opposition to whatever is harmlessly frivolous and enjoyable, is the misfit in such an atmosphere. Maria pinpoints his faults very well;

The devil a Puritan that he is, or anything constantly but a time-pleaser; an affectioned ass, that cons state without book and utters it by great swarths; the best persuaded of himself; so crammed, as he thinks, with excellencies that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him; and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work. (II.iii.146-153)

All Maria has to do to gull Malvolio is to play upon his vanity and delusions of self-importance. At the mere suggestion that Olivia admires him, Malvolio is already launched into an imaginary world where his desire for position and a status of power and authority, can be fully indulged. Such is his opinion of himself, that it does indeed seem highly likely to him that Olivia is enamoured of his qualities. What emerges most clearly from Malvolio's delusions is the exciting possibility for him of absolute authoritative power; a relationship with Olivia would make possible the realisation of all his grandiose schemes for wielding authority, for being in a position which he feels as a man of great talents, he fully deserves;

To be Count Malvolio. (II.v.35)

And then to have the humour of state;
and after a demure travel of regard, telling them
I know my place, as I would they should do theirs,
to ask for my kinsman Toby - (52-5).

Seven of my people, with an obedient stare,
make out for him...Toby approaches; curtsies
there to me -

I extend my hand to him thus, quenching my
familiar smile with an austere regard of
control - (65-6).

That delightful scenario reveals a Malvolio
luxuriating in a very studied, self-conscious
pose of authority; typically, in his new status
he continues to affect a morally superior attitude
to Sir Toby in a serious admonition against
drunkenness and bad company. Maria's letter
simply confirms the delusion by playing on Malvolio's
vulnerability:

....some have greatness thrust upon 'em...
to inure thyself to what thou art like to be,
cast thy humble slough and appear fresh...Go to,
thou art made, if thou desir'st to be so. (142-158).

From then on, Malvolio is convinced that:

I do not now fool myself, to let imagination
jade me, for every reason excites to this, that my
lady loves me. (164-6)

Reason, of course, has nothing to do with his
response.

Malvolio has become isolated from reality by his own egotistical projections of a desired situation, and he is simply unable to relate to the truth any longer. He appears before Olivia with his fixed smile and yellow cross-gartered stockings, unaware that he cuts a ridiculous figure, and interpreting her astonishment as hiding signs of hidden favour.

It must be remembered that Malvolio is not the only character caught in a fantasy world of illusions; every other character in the play at one time or another is a victim of confusion, unreality, mistaken assumptions about the appearance of things. The difference is that Malvolio is more severely punished for his delusion than any of the others, as has been stated before. The jest begins to go sour when he is treated like a madman by the conspirators, and becomes the victim, not of a jest which he fully deserved, but of a rather cruel teasing. It is as if the elements of confusion and deception so predominant in every part of the play were concentrated in a climax^x of intensity upon Malvolio. Feste understands better than anyone else the fantasies that have brought about Malvolio's predicament; it is therefore fitting that the clown should carry out the final baiting by means of taunts that attempt to persuade Malvolio to accept a totally illusory situation. The episode has the same quality of theatricality which was noted in the interviews between Olivia and the disguised Viola.

Urged to put on the gown of a curate by Maria,
Feste replies:

Well, I'll put it on, and I will dissemble
myself in't, and I would I were the first that
ever dissembled in such a gown. (IV.ii.4-5)

In the middle of the interview, Maria makes the
point that the costume is unnecessary:

Thou might'st have done this without thy beard
and gown. He sees thee not. (IV.ii.66-7).

R.H. Goldsmith comments that the use of a
costume 'is for Feste an exercise in irony, since
the disguise was not necessary to the gulling of
Malvolio in a darkened cell.¹ It is, indeed, an
outward gesture reflecting Feste's sense of irony
which has been verbally evident throughout the play;
he is the one character who has been constantly
aware that the pose an individual assumes is rarely
an indication of true inner motive. By putting on
the costume, Feste reminds us again of the pervasive
theme of deceptive appearances in the play; he reminds
us of the wide-ranging consequences of Viola's
disguise, of the fact that supposedly 'genuine'
curates may dissemble as well, and that the man he
is about to confront is in his present situation
because he was taken in by mistaking false signs for
the truth. In short, Feste points to the pervasive
atmosphere of deception in the play. The use of
costume is also a deliberate theatrical device, a
physical putting on of a role, and again indicates

1 Wise Fools in Shakespeare, ch.VI, p.100.

Shakespeare's artistic awareness; he makes Feste dress up in the part to make the point that the playing out of roles exists not only for the characters in the play, but also that an audience must be aware of the fiction they are watching. Like the characters in the play, audience response to levels of reality is being tested.

In an ironic refutation of his earlier statement, 'Nothing that is so is so' (IV.i.9), Feste in the curate's habit tells Sir Toby:

"That that is is"; so I, being Master Parson, am Master Parson; for what is "that" but that, and "is" but is? (IV.ii.15-17).

Of course everything Feste says in the scene is a direct contradiction of this statement; as Olivia's 'corrupter of words' (III.i.37), the clown's teasing of Malvolio revolves around making what 'is' become precisely the opposite. Malvolio claims to have been laid 'in hideous darkness' (31), and Feste counters with a description of the room that stresses its lightness:

Why, it hath bay windows transparent as barricade^os, and the clerestories toward the south north are as lustrous as ebony; and yet complainest thou of obstruction? (IV.ii.37-40).

The opposition between the two goes on throughout their conversation in the emphasis on light and darkness; Malvolio insists the room is 'as dark as

ignorance, though ignorance were as dark as hell' (46-7), and keeps calling for a candle by which to write a note of protest. Feste turns the real appearance of what Malvolio perceives into 'nothing that is so is so,' and transforms the words of his victim into a madman's jargon. It is part of the irony in this topsy-turvey world of Twelfth Night distortion, that at the crisis point of the conspiracy against Malvolio, when he is being most severely pressured to think himself deluded, he is most clear-sighted and courageous. He refuses to be confused by Feste's attempts to break down his faith in himself: 'I think nobly of the soul' (56), or in what he perceives. When he claims to have been 'notoriously abused' (90), he is justified. The epithet 'mad' applied to Malvolio is also used of every other character in the play; the confusion into which he falls is part of the general atmosphere in which every character is immersed at some time. It is just that Malvolio's 'madness', his fantasies, have been more mercilessly exposed. Part of the unsatisfactoriness of the conclusion lies in the threat which Malvolio flings at the assembled company:

I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you.

(v.i.380)

The mood of reconciliation is soured by his indignation, and the feeling that what he has been through perhaps justifies such an attitude.

It seems unfair that all the fevered misapprehensions operating on every other character in the play should have been worked out to focus upon Malvolio in that final burst of cruel teasing.

The fact that Viola and Feste also fall victim to emotional deception and mistaken appearance, is an indication of how deep are the levels of confusion in the play. When Viola first makes up her mind to serve Orsino as a young boy, she casually assumes that events will take their course:

What else may hap, to time I will commit,

(I.iii.60)

Disguise at this stage seems to suit her purpose admirably. After Olivia has fallen in love with her, however, and having fallen in love with Orsino herself, disguise suddenly assumes another dimension:

Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
What will become of this? As I am 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.27-41)

Viola is now condemning disguise for the chaos that it perpetrates, and admits that she is helpless to do anything about the muddle.

Despite Viola's pessimism, it has already been established that her disguise initiates the kind of confusion that also illuminates certain false poses.

John Russell Brown in his book 'Shakespeare and his Comedies,' points to the fact that Viola's disguise in fact reveals the truth about love; her 'acting' shows up Olivia's false grief and Orsino's false love for Olivia.¹ This must not obscure the fact, however, that Viola also falls victim to the same maudlin attitude to love which Orsino revels in. L.G. Salingar^{ca} points to two scenes in the middle of the play where Viola is speaking in passionate terms and comments that:

her feeling seems muffled or distorted, since she is acting a part, and in both cases her tone is distinctly theatrical.²

The first scene referred to is the encounter between Olivia and Viola; Olivia asks what Viola would do if she were in Orsino's position:

Make me a willow cabin at your gate
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of condemned love
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Hailo your name to the reverberate hills
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out "Olivia!" O, you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth
But you should pity me.

(I.v.269-277).

The second scene is that in which Viola tells the story of her fictional 'sister' pining away for love:

1. op. cit. ch.VI, pp. 168-169 (1957).

2. 'The Design of Twelfth Night,' Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol. IX, 1958, p.122.

'She sat like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.'
(II.iv.115-16).

In the first instance, says Salinger^a, Viola speaks for Orsino in the spirit of his injunction to 'Be clamorous, and leap all civil bounds' (I.iv.21-2), while her image of repressed desire could apply to Olivia. He concludes that:

Her own development in the comedy is closely
attuned to the others.¹

Indeed, Viola does seem at these times to have succumbed to the emotional delusions besetting the other leading characters in the play.

Feste reflects in a different way the predominant note of helpless confusion in the play. His very name is ^{ambivalent} ~~ambivalent~~; it describes in one sense the festive spirit of the play personified in Sir Toby; it is out of that jollity, however, that the cruel trick on Malvolio arises and Feste plays a prominent part in this. Disturbing elements are attached to the spirit of festivity in the play. The associations which the Clown's motley give to Feste are also ironic; the qualities of foolishness and madness, which are an implicit mark of the motley, also affect all the other characters in the play. Malvolio is often accused of being 'mad', and the epithet is freely bandied about in connection with the others. Each becomes caught up in a private fantasy world that is unrelated to reality, and in that sense, all are as 'mad' as the traditional Fool figure.

Feste himself makes the point in conversation with Viola:

Foolery, sir, does walk about the orb
like the sun; it shines everywhere.

(III.1.39-40).

Then Feste, as well as finding ambiguity in the actions and attitudes of the characters, sees words as instruments of equivocation, adding to the layers of confusion. In his conversation with Viola, both point to the meaningless^{ness} of words, which can be manipulated to convey anything:

A sentence is but a chev'ril glove to a good wit. How quickly the wrong side may be turned outward!

(III.1.11-13)

Viola: Nay, that's certain. They that dally nicely with words may quickly make them wanton.

(14-15)

Feste:words are grown so false I am loath
so to prove reason with them.

(24-5)

Feste: I am indeed not her fool, but her corrupter of words.

(36-7)

When Feste gulls Malvolio, the equivocal words and deceptive appearance which he is so deeply aware of, fuse in his carrying out of the jest.

Feste's songs underly the irony of festivity that his name suggests:

What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;.....
Youth's a stuff will not endure.

(II.111.48-53)

The mood of those words is one of gentle melancholy, of a realisation that life is not all revelry and reconciliation; love disintegrates, the promise of youth turns into the barrenness of age. And the song with which Feste ends the play, conveys a spirit of resigned acceptance of the tribulation that blights all life has to offer. Feste, personification of the spirit of festivity, indicates that the superficial gaiety of comedy must be penetrated to reveal the mass of dark confusions and delusions which hover just below the surface. For even Feste, hiding wisdom and shrewd analysis behind the disguise of his motley, falls victim to the atmosphere of the play. He mistakes Sebastian for Cæsario, (IV.1) and thus on one level is caught up in all the elaborate business of mistaken appearance in the play. He also makes Malvolio a victim of his own revenge:

But do you remember, "Madam, why laugh you at such a barren rascal? And you smile not, he's gagged?" And thus the whiff of time brings in his revenges.

(V.i.376-9).

In this way he is accessory to the jarring emotion of revenge which intrudes into the comedy; it is because the jest against Malvolio is based on revenge, that Malvolio himself is excluded from the final reconciliation by his threat to retaliate; the festive characters initiate revenge and its consequences spread into the sour notes at the end of the play.

And by his own admission, Feste ^{Shares} the
folly common to all humankind:

Foolery, sir, does walk about the orb
like the sun; it shines everywhere.

(III.i.39-40).

The representative of the element of mis-
rule in the play is Sir Toby; he, like the rest
of the characters, is under a delusion; in his
case, it is the belief that the best way to live
is to eat, drink, be merry and avoid any self-
discipline. And, like the others, he also falls
victim to the unexpected muddled consequences of
his own schemes. The kind of sentiments expressed
by Sir Toby convey the impression of a Falstaffian
figure, revelling in a life of riotous enjoyment,
and eschewing any suggestion of reform, or hi^{is}
that he should discipline himself. Even time
imposes no limits of order upon Sir Toby:

To be up after midnight, and to go to bed,
then, is early. (II.iii.7)

and Malvolio's reprimand stresses this disorder:

Is there no respect of place, persons, nor
time in you? (II.iii.93).

Maria warns him:

...you must confine yourself within the
modest limits of order. (I.iii.9)

Sir Toby stands in direct contrast to Malvolio:

Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous,
there shall be no more cakes and ale?

(II.iii.114-115).

and he gives to the play an essential part of its atmosphere of spirited joking and mocking. He inverts the established values of sober, conscientious duty exemplified in Malvolio and turns Olivia's household into one where the spirit is set free to revel in riotous living:

I am sure care's an enemy to life⁽¹⁾

(I.iii.2)

(our life) consists of eating and drinking.

(II.iii.11).

However attractive Sir Toby's joyous self-indulgence might be when contrasted with the pose of grave self-discipline Malvolio assumes, the riotous disorder of his life includes dubious actions and attitudes. He takes the hospitality of his niece for granted, and makes a profit out of Sir Andrew's stupidity; most important, he carries the trick to expose Malvolio to extreme and cruel proportions. He has to admit to Maria that they have taken the jest on Malvolio too far:

I would we were well rid of this knavery.

If he may be conveniently delivered, I would he were; for I am now so far in offence with my niece that I cannot pursue with any safety this sport to the upshot.

(IV.ii.68-93).

Then Sir Toby's subsidiary plot that aims to make Sir Andrew fight Cesario goes awry as well; he encounters Sebastian (V.i.) and is physically beaten himself.

Sir Toby's merry, expansive personality delights in the good joke of showing up the hypocrite or coward but in a play where every motive is suspect, and the consequences of an action usually unexpected, the jokes mis-fire. The riot and revelry results in cruelty to Malvolio, and confusion besetting the perpetrator of that riot and revelry, Sir Toby himself. Malvolio and Maria both seek to restrain Sir Toby, and their comments against him contain valid points of criticism; he is under the delusion of an appetite for sensual enjoyment, and his self-indulgence leads to a level of wild behaviour that goes beyond the bounds of decency in the treatment of Malvolio.

The state of bewilderment which all the characters find themselves falling into in Twelfth Night finds expression in their frequent accusations of each other as 'mad', and in the tendency to relegate events to Fate, Fortune, the gods, some outside manipulating agency. Both trends are also to be found in A Comedy of Errors, but in this play the anxiety behind the trends is more cumulative and frenzied. The epithet 'mad' is applied to Sir Toby by Olivia:

He speaks nothing but madman. (I.v.106)

She also uses it with reference to Cesario:

If you be not mad, be gone; if you have reason, be brief. (I.v.197-8).

Malvolio applies it to the revellers:

My masters, are you mad? Or what are you?

Have you no wit. (II.iii.87-88)

and of course the revellers set out to prove that Malvolio is 'tainted in's wits', ^{Olivia} claims that she suffers from the same condition:

Go call him hither. I am as mad as he,
If sad and merry madness equal be.

(III.iv.13-14)

Antonio is accused of madness by the Duke's officers. And Sebastian, accosted by Feste and struck by Sir Andrew, like Antipholus of Syracuse, thinks everyone around him is mad:

Are all the people mad? (IV.i.27).

When he receives Olivia's attentions he wonders:

Or I am mad, or else this is a dream

(IV.i.61)

He subsequently ponders on the dilemma in a soliloquy:

....though 'tis wonder that enwraps me thus,
Yet 'tis not madness....
Yet doth this accident and flood of fortune
So far exceed all instance, all discourse,
That I am 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.3-16).

Sebastian, like Antipholus of Syracuse, has been isolated from the community in which he finds himself, by the new identity thrust upon him, and hence is in such confusion that he fears for his own reason. The widespread use of the word 'mad' in connection with the other characters as well, builds up the atmosphere of chaotic delusion which besets them all.

The world of Twelfth Night frivolity is in fact a state of uncertainty, arbitrariness, and confusion about emotions and identities. In the same sort of world in A Comedy of Errors, the characters came to believe they were victims of some supernatural force that manipulated the erratic series of events that befall them. A more sophisticated version of the same process recurs in this play, with the characters referring to a wider range of outside agents. Olivia, after suddenly falling in love with Cesario, articulates her helplessness in the situation by leaving the consequences to Fate:

I do I know not what, and fear to find
 Mine eye too great a flatterer for my mind.
 Fate, show thy force; ourselves we do not owe.
 What is decreed must be - and be this so!

(I.v.309-12).

There is a very strong feeling that the characters are not in control; this is conveyed as well by Viola:

O Time, thou must untangle this, not I;
 It is too hard a knot for me to untie.

(II.ii.40-1)

'Fate' or 'Time' - both are seen as outside forces which alone can bring clarity. Then Olivia, like Antipholus of Syracuse referring to Luciana, talks about Cesario's power over her as being an 'enchantment' (III.i.114). She implies that she has been in the grip of an experience against which it is futile to struggle, a kind of magic spell with great power.

Sebastian talks to Antonio in terms that similarly suggest he is the victim of outside forces:-

'My stars shine darkly over me; the malignancy of my fate might perhaps distemper yours.'

(II.i.3-5)

And Antonio tells Orsino that:

'A witchcraft drew me hither' (V.i.76)

putting the blame for his misfortune on malignant supernatural forces.

It is Malvolio, however, who most often refers to outside forces in terms of Fate, Fortune or the gods. He explains Olivia's supposed favours as:

'Tis but fortune, all is fortune.' (II.v.23)

Maria writes in the false letter: 'Thy fates open their hands...' (II.v.146) and Malvolio takes up the image:

'I thank my stars, I am happy....Jove and my stars be praised.' (170,172).

This reference to the auspicious power of Jove is repeated in subsequent scenes where Malvolio dwells upon his good fortune:

'I have limed her; but it is Jove's doing; and Jove make me thankful...

'Well, Jove, not I, is the doer of this, and he is to be thanked.' (III.iv.78-9, 87-8)

The editor of the Signet edition of Twelfth Night, Herschel Baker, comments that it is likely that Shakespeare here and elsewhere wrote 'God' for Jove, and the printed text reflects the statute of 1606 that prohibited profane stage allusions to the deity.¹

L.G. Salinger² says that these repeated references to Jove are much more likely to be a comic sign that Malvolio is coming within the orbit of romance. However, it seems even more likely that they are related to the references to outside forces made by others in the play. Arbitrary and erratic events overtake characters like Malvolio, Sebastian, Antonio, Viola and Olivia; in the face of these events they are helpless, and so relegate the cause to a source which, because of its mysterious nature, is liable to be arbitrary and erratic as well. Fate, Fortune, witchcraft, the gods, are all in the same league of extra-sensory existence; to characters thrashing about in a maze of confusion, failing to understand themselves and what is happening to them, these supernatural forces are the only scapegoat. They are also forces which cannot be controlled and in this sense are a useful reference point for characters who feel their lives are affected by random events in the face of which they are helpless.

Deception and disorder have been the predominating motifs in the atmosphere of Twelfth Night.

1 op. cit., p.51.

2 'The Design of Twelfth Night,' Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol.IX, 1958, p.134.

'Nothing that is so is so' has applied to characters under a misapprehension both about their own emotions, and about the external appearance and inner motives of those around them. The confusion is not resolved by the ending of the play, either; marriage seems a very arbitrary affair, and Malvolio perpetuates the revenge which has been practised against him. These elements, and the melancholy^{nature} of Feste's last song, leave us not with a conventional comic ending of reconciliation, but with a feeling that the disturbing features of the play are still present. Disguise has not only been a matter of Viola dressing up as a young man in the play; her deceptive appearance has only been the most obvious sign of the deception which covers words, deeds, and motives. Mistaken appearance has brought to light some of the delusions; however, if one applies the Epiphany motif of the title, what has been revealed brings no self-knowledge to the characters, and fails to resolve the confusions of the play, which still exist at the end. The broad movement of Twelfth Night reflects in part the themes applied to it from A Comedy of Errors; there is a similar bewildered reaction from the community resulting from mistaken appearance, building up towards threats of violence from Orsino and actual violence from Sebastian. However, the motif of delusion is largely extended and complicated to emanate not only from without the characters, but especially from within them.

Thus we have deception working from all sides to engulf the characters in disorder and helplessness, and to give to the atmosphere of the play its peculiarly disturbing and unresolved nature.

The action of this play raises fascinating and complex questions concerning the imagination of the artist and the nature of dramatic art. It takes us into a dimension of the disguise theme which finds its definitive expression in The Tempest. Stanley Wells, editor of the Penguin edition of A Midsummer Night's Dream, points out that this play, like The Tempest, is without a known main source.¹ Harriet Hawkins sees both plays as being different from other Shakespearean drama in that their action is viewed from the perspective of the play-wright:

Shakespeare seems to have organised these comedies to examine, while he spectacularly exhibits, the essential nature of his own art, his own fascination with the nature of dramatic illusion, his own pervasive concern with its power, and the limits and various kinds of truth that dramatic illusion may reveal or reflect.²

The use of theatrical metaphors and the artistic awareness which that implies, had been present in earlier comedies; it has been mentioned in previous chapters in connection with Love's Labour's Lost and Twelfth Night.

1 op. cit. p.17.

2 Likenesses of Truth in Elizabethan and Restoration Drama. Ch. 2, p.27 (Oxford, 1972).

However, the emphasis is very much more upon this feature in A Midsummer Night's Dream; we are made very conscious that we are watching the fantasy of fiction, whether in the lovers' antics in the woods, in the world of the Fairies, or in the Mechanicals' attempt to present a play. Dramatic analogies are constantly being implied, or explicitly suggested, and attendant questions about the value and strength of dramatic illusions are raised.

The experience of the lovers in the play involves the same process of confusion, isolation, erupting violence, and eventual reconciliation that characters have undergone in A Comedy of Errors and Twelfth Night. In this case, however, the process of distortion takes place in the dream world of the Fairies who perpetrate ^{dis}guises to confuse and bewilder. The Fairies do not initiate the illogical attitudes of the lovers, however; they merely exaggerate the absurd irrationalities of love to farcical proportions in an atmosphere well suited to building up illusions and bringing about transformations. The process that the Fairies initiate is essentially a dramatic one; like the artist, they work on attitudes that exist outside their fictional world, transposing them on the 'stage' of moonlit woods into a more concentrated form, and thereby illuminating and reflecting the essential truths that lie dormant in the 'real' world.

The transient and arbitrary nature of love is made quite clear before the lovers reach the wood.

Lysander talks about love being:

.....momentary as a sound,
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,
Brief as the lightning in the collied night.

(I.i.143-5).

Demetrius persistently pursues a woman who actively spurns him, in the irrational way of a lover:

Hermia: The more I hate, the more he follows me.

(I.i.198).

Helena's soliloquy stresses her illogicality in loving Demetrius, who actively dislikes her:

'And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,
So I, admiring of his qualities.

(I.i.230-1).

She admits the error, but cannot rectify it. The transformations which will occur in the woods are also implicit in the lovers' words. Helena, distracted by her passion, longs to be physically changed so as to resemble Hermia:

Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated,
The rest I'd give to be to you translated.

(I.i.190-1).

In her soliloquy, Helena comments:

Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
Love can transpose to form and dignity.

(I.ii.232-3).

This pre-figures Titania's induced passion for Bottom, which turns him in her eyes 'to form and dignity'; it foreshadows Helena's feeling that lack of love has turned her into an ugly bear, since Demetrius flees from her constantly (II.ii.100-3); and it erupts in the sudden inclination by Demetrius and Lysander to regard Helena as an object of supreme beauty.

When Puck pours the magic juice onto the lovers' eyes, he is merely causing the irrationalities and delusions that already exist to show forth. Helena personifies Love as the blind, witless Cupid:

Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.
Nor hath love's mind of any judgement taste;
Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste.

(I.i.234-7).

Puck personifies this kind of random, natural force working to confuse the lovers. There is also a dramatic analogy in this process; like a comic dramatist, Oberon through Puck manipulates his characters into confusion, bewilderment, and eventually reconciliation. That the juice is poured onto their eyes is significant, because distorted vision is part of the absurdity of love.

Helena calls Hermia's eyes 'lodestars' (I.i.183), and ^{determines} to 'have his (Demetrius) sight thither, and ~~back~~ back again.' (I.i.251).

The sudden dissolution of the lovers' oaths in the woods is pre-figured as well when Helena compares Demetrius' cooling passion to hail dissolving in heat:

For 'ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne
He hailed down oaths that he was only mine,
And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,
So he dissolved, and showers of oaths did melt.

(I.i.242-5).

When they are in the woods, the lovers really believe in their own passionate potestations as they change partners under the influence of the juice. Lysander vehemently protests that his love is guided by 'reason' as he awakes and sees Helena:

Who will not change a raven for a dove?
The will of man is by his reason swayed,
And reason says you are the worthier maid.

(II.ii.120-122).

The situation is not unlike that in A Comedy of Errors: Helena, like Antipholus of Syracuse, seems the recipient of all the good fortune, and, like him, rejects it as part of a conspiracy against her; the lovers feel a confusion of identity, and a growing bewilderment that results in eventual violence. Hermia, rejected by Lysander, feels very strongly the isolation of uncertain identity:

'Am not I Hermia? Are not you Lysander?

(III.ii.273).

She cannot find a rational explanation for Lysander's erratic behaviour, and so accounts for it through the absurd expedient of blaming her short stature. Every word she hears after this merely drives her deeper into the mire of misunderstanding, for she interprets whatever is said as a jibe at her size:

Helena: Fie, fie, you counterfeit puppet, you!

Hermia: Puppet? Why so? - Ay, that way goes the game.
Now I perceive that she hath made compare
Between our statures. She hath urged her height,
And with her personage, her tall personage,
Her height, forsooth, she hath prevailed with him.

(III.ii.289-293).

Here is exhibited a helplessness of will and mind, a complete fog of illusion and confusion, that ends in threats of physical violence by Hermia against Helena, and in violent confrontation between the men. What Oberon's juice has done is to expose the irrational elements of love by exaggerating the tendencies that already existed in their emotions before the lovers reached the woods.

When the lovers have woken from their 'dream', they find it difficult to recount their experiences:

Demetrius: I wot not by what power,
But by some power it is - my love to Hermia,
Melted as the snow,...
The object and the pleasure of mine eye,
Is only Helena.

(IV.i.163-170).

The associations of 'melted', that remind us of the fragility of lovers' vows, and the distorted perception conveyed by 'the pleasure of mine eye', hint at the main absurdities that were exposed by the dream experience. Demetrius, however, is unconscious of the ironic reverberations; he blames 'some power' for the strange happenings in what has by now become a familiar attempt to relegate the cause of inexplicable events to an outside force. Hermia's comment:

'Methinks I see these things with parted eye,
When everything seems double.'

(IV.i.189-90).

again unconsciously reflects the blurred perception which beset the lovers in the wood. Helena adds:

'And I have found Demetrius, like a jewel,
Mine own and not mine own.'

(IV.i.190-1).

Indeed, Demetrius' love for Helena rests on the tenuous basis of having been induced by a charm which has not yet been lifted; the bonds between the lovers prove to be as fragile outside the wood as they were inside.

These things seem small and indistinguishable,
Like far-off mountains turned into clouds.

(IV.i.187-8).

Thus Demetrius sums up the experience, which seems to him confused, distant, ephemeral and nebulous. The dream-like state which exists in the midsummer woods has established an atmosphere of transformation

and illusion that has bewildered the lovers, isolated them, and eventually reconciled them. In A Comedy of Errors and Twelfth Night, this process was brought about by mistaken identity; in A Midsummer Night's Dream the metamorphosis, both psychologically in the case of the lovers, and physical, in the case of Bottom's ass head, has been perpetrated by controlling agents in a way that is analogous to the creation of a dramatic situation.

It is important to establish the nature of the Fairies who produce the guises which confuse and illuminate. They are creations of Shakespeare's imagination, and thus part of the fantasy world of the play; but within their own sphere they do control and manipulate the lovers and Bottom, and, as already suggested, in some ways they are analogous to the figure of manipulating artist. Here lies the very clear distinction between the disguise theme in the first two plays discussed, and the disguise theme in this play; the theme in A Midsummer Night's Dream is concerned not only with isolation of identities and deceptive appearances, but refers constantly to the dramatist's use of guises and the nature of the dramatic illusion those guises produce. As creatures of pure fantasy, the Fairies make us aware of the imagination of the dramatist; as controlling agents in his own sphere, organising the lovers into particular reactions, and bringing out the absurdities of their emotion, Oberon in particular is analogous to the author of a comedy.

The Fairies of this play are not irresponsible children.¹ In the conversation between Puck and Titania's fairy in Act II, Scene i, it appears that Titania's followers have serious responsibilities in taking care of the natural world of growing things in the forest, whereas Puck interferes in the world of human affairs as meddler or, to those he favours, helper. The quarrel between Titania and Oberon has an effect on the natural world, and is based on the very human emotion of jealousy, both sexual, and over the child whom Oberon wants to make a 'knight' and Titania to keep 'crowned with flowers':

Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
As in revenge have sucked up from the sea
Contagious fogs...
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases do abound;

(II.i.81-117).

Floods occur; diseases spread, 'the seasons alter'; disorder in the macrocosm accompanies disorder in the body politic, here the state of fairydom. The Fairies and the natural world are indivisible. This discord^{which} exists within the Fairy world of the play, reminds us that Shakespeare's larger imaginative creation also contains within it disturbing elements that threaten the predominant motifs of regeneration and reconciliation towards which the comic form works.

1 See Ernest Schanzer, 'The Moon and the Fairies in A Midsummer Night's Dream', University of Toronto Quarterly, Vol. xxiv, 1954-5. pp. 234-246.

As early as Love's Labour's Lost, Shakespeare had been aware of the absurdities inherent in a comic form which required many weak 'devisings' to pair off couples in the interests of the conventional comic ending. It is just possible that there is an implicit ironic reference in Oberon's loss of control, to the difficulties an artist faces in making the best use of the dramatic ^{resources} at his disposal.

There is inherent in everything Oberon does a strong sense of urgency, of time being limited to the few hours before dawn. The Fairies are part of the dream world of night and moonlight, and vanish in the morning sun. Again, dramatic analogies are suggested: the fiction of which the Fairies are part also has a limited time-span on stage. And Oberon shares his sense of urgency with the Duke in Measure for Measure and Prospero in The Tempest; all three figures suggest in some aspects the controlling artist behind the scenes, who only has a certain amount of time to organise his characters through a play. Oberon warns Puck: '....look thou meet me ere the first cock crow' (II.i.267). When Puck urges him to hurry ^{as} more dubious spirits are already fleeing the morning's light, Oberon reassures him: 'But we are spirits of another sort' (III.ii.388-395). However, the reassurance is qualified; although he tells Puck that he has often 'made sport' with 'the morning's light', that seems to have been the limit of his daytime activities, for only 'like a forester' he 'may tread', a conditional allowance, 'till the

eastern gate all fiery red', until dawn. Daytime activity is confined to dawn, and even so, Oberon hurries Puck:

But notwithstanding, haste, make no delay;
We may effect this business yet ere day.

Puck warns again in Act IV, Scene i:

Fairy king, attend, and mark:
I do hear the morning lark. (93-4).

Oberon replies in a poignant tone, which suggests he has no choice in the matter and is leaving reluctantly:

Thou, my queen, in silence sad,
Trip we after night's shade,

(IV.1.95-6).

Puck also points to the transience of the Fairies:

.....we fairies, that do run
By the triple Hecate's team,
From the presence of the sun
Following darkness like a dream.

(V.1.373-6).

They belong to the world of the moon, with all its associations of distorting half-light and mystery, night and dreams, and the hazy confusion such conditions give rise to. The atmosphere surrounding the Fairies is steeped in 'the glimmering light' of moonshine, which promotes visual distortion by an effect of deceptive half-liquid luminosity:

Tomorrow night, when Phoebe doth behold
Her silver visage in the watery glass,
Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass -

(I.1.209-11).

The imagery of moonlight sets the scene for metamorphosis and distorted vision, and is exactly appropriate to the lovers' antics. The climax of the lovers' bewilderment comes when Puck overcasts the night to make it 'black as Acheron' (III.ii.357); the lovers can only experience sound and touch, run blindly over uneven ground, and are eventually completely exhausted. The coming of dawn is eagerly anticipated by Helena, 'shine comforts from the East' (III.ii.432), and morning light in fact dissipates the confusion of the night. The sun rises in vivid colours that provide a total contrast to the pale, gleaming of the moon's 'silver visage in her wat'ry glass':

the eastern gate, all fiery red,
Opening on Neptune, with fair blessed beams
Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams.

(III.ii.391-393).

As Theseus arrives with his hounds and horns, the atmosphere of the Fairy world disintegrates:

These things seem small and indistinguishable,
Like far-off mountains turned into clouds.

(IV.i.190).

The Fairies derive their particular qualities from the environment in which they live; the moonlit wood is a temporary region of metamorphosis, where illusion and distortion predominate. The Fairies too, are transient, fleeting, indivisible from the dream-worldⁱⁿ which they perpetrate their distortions and work their magic. They share these qualities with the dream-world of a play.

Puck's thorough enjoyment of the human muddle he causes, again suggests dramatic analogies. His exuberance at the task in hand, and his status as Oberon's assistant, fore-shadows the relationship between Prospero and Ariel. His observation as he watches the lovers becomes more and more confused, puts one in mind of an artist manipulating his characters in comedy to expose the absurdity of their emotions:

Shall we their fond pageant see?
Lord, what fools these mortals be!

(III.ii.114-115).

As he rectifies his error, Puck assures us:

Jack shall have Jill,
Naught shall go ill. (III.ii.461-2).

One thinks back to Love's Labour's Lost, when Shakespeare deliberately thwarted this sort of resolution.

Berowne: Our wooing doth not end like an
old play;
Jack hath not Jill: these ladies'
courtesy
Might well have made our sport a
comedy.

(V.ii.866-868).

The 'fond pageant' in this case will have the usual comic ending; but there is a thin dramatic dividing line between the fulfilment of the usual comic resolution, and an ending in which reconciliation is thwarted.

The Fairies, as controlling agents within their own sphere, have suggested parallels to the dramatic artist.

As part of the pure fantasy world within the play, identified so closely with the fleeting, ^{air}beam-like moonlit atmosphere, they are also analogous to a dramatic creation. Like a play-wright, they can only work their illusions for a limited time; like a play, the atmosphere of fantasy which sustains and creates them is soon dissipated. As creatures of the most exquisite fictional invention, the Fairies point to the possibilities of illusion in the theatre; when the lovers fall under their influence, they do not simply undergo a process of confusion; certain aspects of love itself are illuminated and the lovers are left reconciled, to recall a strange and mysterious experience. The features of their experiences in the fantasy world of moonlit woods and Fairies, ~~are~~ not unlike the experience of an audience responding to the fantasy world of a play; both are caught up in the fiction which the artist creates; the lovers undergo, and the audience sees, the confusion taking place in that fiction; the lovers ultimately are reconciled, and the audience is enlightened by the truth which emerges from the treatment of love; the lovers leave their 'dream' feeling strangely moved, and the audience leaves the theatre faintly bemused but with its imagination ~~totally~~ totally engaged and inspired.

Shakespeare investigates this question of the quality of dramatic illusion even further with Bottom's character. He juxtaposes his most ethereal and delicate creations with the rough literal-mindedness of a man incapable of understanding the nature of illusion, and makes Bottom the moving spirit in

a play full of characters who refuse to accept the conventions of dramatic disguise. When we first see the Mechanicals in Act I, Scene ii, it is obvious that they believe an actor's disguise is as effective in rousing the audience as the reality that disguise is supposed to represent. Quince cautions Bottom about the lion's part:

An you should do it too terribly you would fright the Duchess and the ladies that they would shriek; and that were enough to hang us all.

(I.ii.70-72).

This attitude is reiterated by Bottom who assumes that his stage death as Pyramus will be so effective that the ladies will have to be fore-warned in a prologue:

that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver. This will put them out of fear.
(III.i.19-20). He also advises Snug the joiner to assure the ladies that ' (he) is a man, as other men are' (III.i.40), and not a lion.

The Mechanicals cannot believe in the illusion of fiction; to them, what appears on the stage is 'real' and will affect the audience accordingly. Hence, the greatest use of natural props must be made; if the genuine article is available for performance, Bottom advises using it:

Why, then, may you leave a casement of the Great Chamber window - where we play - open, and the moon may shine in at the casement. (III.i.50-2).

If using the genuine article is impractical, then the actor must make absolutely clear what he represents:

Bottom: 'Some man or other must present Wall;
and let him have some plaster, or
some loan, or some roughcast about
him to signify Wall...'

(III.1.61-3).

Bottom believes that the actor's disguise convinces the audience of the reality. None of the Mechanicals can comprehend the subtleties of an audience's 'willing suspension of disbelief' when watching a theatrical performance.

The comedy of the Mechanicals' version of Pyramus and Thisbe centres not so much in the action, as in the continual failure to translate the action into the disguise of the character. We see not only Pyramus, or Bottom, but Bottom obviously disguised as Pyramus, 'the fact of the one doing violence to the fiction of the other', in C.L. Barber's words.¹ The Mechanicals destroy the illusion of the fiction they are trying to create by continually drawing attention to it. Snout laboriously explains his function as Wall:

'This loan, this roughcast, and this stone
doth show
That I am that same wall; the truth is so.'

(V.i.160-1).

That emphatic assertion, 'the truth is so', immediately dissipates illusion and turns it into a banal literalism. Similarly, Starveling as Moonshine tells the audience:

1 C.L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, ch.VI, p.151 (Princeton, 1959).

This lanthorn doth the horned moon present,

(V.i.233).

When the audience, in the spirit of this literalism, demands an even more faithful representation of reality:

Theseus: ...the man should be put into the lantern. How is it else the man i'th'moon?

(V.i.239-40).

Moonshine is forced to retaliate by the most dogged insistence that he is literally transformed by his disguise:

All that I have to say is to tell you that the lantern is the moon, I the man i'th'moon, this thorn bush my thorn bush, and this dog my dog.

(V.i.250-2).

His defence sounds so absurd because Moonshine, like the rest of the Mechanicals, insists that for the purposes of the play, 'the lantern is the moon', and not that it is simply 'like the moon'.

Theseus replies to Hippolyta's dismissal of the Mechanicals' play:

The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them... If we imagine no worse of them than they of themselves, they may pass for excellent men.

(V.i.209-13).

Theseus is Baconian in his attitude towards art, believing it to be a pleasant entertainment containing little of real value; 'the best in this kind are but shadows.'

He has already spoken rather condescendingly ^{of} the distorting power of the imagination in his famous comment on the lovers' experience (V.1.2-22); here he acknowledges the facility of the imagination to transform even a poor performance into something better. The imaginative improvement he talks about is ironically demonstrated in both his and Hippolyta's reactions to Pyramus' speech on finding the dead Thisbe:

Theseus: This passion, and the death of a dear friend, would go near to make a man look sad.

Hippolyta: Beshrew my heart, but I pity the man.
(V.1.280-2).

'If imagination amend' the performance, something of value may be extracted from the ruins. It is precisely because of their failure to engage the audience's imagination through dramatic illusion, that the Mechanicals move us to laughter rather than to tears. Harriett Hawkins claims that the play within the play asks:

....what are the right assumptions about theatrical illusions? How does one bring moonlight into the Duke's banquetting chamber or onto the Globe? The Mechanicals' play demonstrates that if you do it with a character like Moonshine it will not work except for comic purposes. What about Shakespeare's poetry then, does it succeed in giving us the atmosphere of moonlight?

Yes and no. It ensures that we accept moonshine imaginatively, but never suggests that we literally believe in its presence; thus, even as Shakespeare imaginatively figures forth moonlight, Bottom and company remind us that it is literally impossible to do so.¹

Miss Hawkins is of course right to suggest that the Mechanicals' play raises the question of theatrical illusions in Shakespeare's play; however, it is naive to assume that because Shakespeare does not suggest that his audience accept moonshine literally, his poetry has somehow only partially succeeded in conveying the right atmosphere. Shakespeare is surely stressing the point that it is as unnecessary to believe literally in moonlight's presence in 'Pyramus and Thisbe', as it is in A Midsummer Night's Dream; or, on another level, that the audience is not expected to take literally the disguise of Bottom's ass head, or the appearance of Fairies in the play. However, the poetry which creates these elements, and the situations out of which they arise, is completely successful in building up a fiction which remains credible so long as the play lasts. Shakespeare's poetry unquestionably succeeds in conveying the atmosphere of 'glimmering light', because he is willing, unlike Moonshine, to evoke a response from the audience by engaging its imagination.

1 Harriett Hawkins, Likenesses of Truth in Elizabethan and Restoration Drama, ch.2, p.32 (Oxford, 1972).

Moonshine points to nothing other than the absurd literal disguise of himself as the moon; Shakespeare never attempts a literal representation, but through poetic suggestion establishes exactly the appropriate setting of distorting half-light and mystery for Fairy activities.

When Bottom, playing the stabbed Pyramus, jumps up to talk to the Duke, or replies to comments made by the Athenian audience, Harriett Hawkins suggests that Shakespeare is not only violating the dramatic assumptions of his audience, but also exposing the power and absurdities of the imagination.¹ Again one disagrees, for the emphasis is on the essential need for imagination, both in actor and audience, more than on the absurdity of the imagination. Bottom is absurd because he refuses to be anything other than himself, either in the Mechanicals' play, or in the presence of Titania; he refuses to allow his own or his audience's imagination to actively submerge in the dramatic illusion. And when Shakespeare makes Quince say:

This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn brake our tiring-house. (III.1.3-4)
he is not only, as Harriett Hawkins asserts, pointing to the absurdity of the suspension of disbelief, but going far beyond that. Although the 'green plot' is literally non-existent, the nature of dramatic illusion requires from both

1 ibid. p.32.

playwright and audience an imaginative faith which accepts the metaphorical figuring forth of aspects of real life. Again, what Shakespeare stresses is the need for the suspension of disbelief in actors and audience, if the fiction of the play is to succeed.

The play of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' has parallels with Romeo and Juliet, and, as such, points to another aspect of theatre, the thin dividing line between similar dramatic situations that can make one play into comedy, the other into a tragedy. If the actors in their guises were successful, 'Pyramus and Thisbe' would be a tragedy; the ending of Romeo and Juliet could have been manipulated into the usual comic reconciliation. The play outside the play, A Midsummer Night's Dream, also contains within it potentially disturbing elements that are kept at bay in order to turn the events into comedy rather than tragedy. The threats to the ethereal magic of the Fairy world have already been mentioned. There are other reminders that reality intrudes into the comic world in the form of potential violence or cruelty. Theseus' relationship with Hippolyta grew out of violence:

....I woo'd thee with my sword,
And won thy love doing thee injuries.

(I.i.17-18)

Theseus puts a harsh edict upon Hermia to thwart the natural relationship of young lovers:

Either to die the death, or to abjure
For ever the society of men.

(I.i.65-66).

Egeus is typical of so many harsh, intransigent fathers in the Shakespeare canon, who refuse to allow the fulfilment of their childrens' emotions. And the lovers' experience in the woods could have ended in violence, not in reconciliation; that there is potential harm in the situation as implied in Hermia's nightmare:

Ay me, for pity! - What a dream was here!
Lysander, look how I do quake with fear!
Methought a serpent ate my heart away.
And you sat smiling at his cruel prey.

(II.ii.153-6).

As it happens, she wakes into another dream where this symbolic imagery is actually realised in Lysander's rejection of her. The spirit of paradoxical ambiguity emerges as well in imagery juxtaposing concord and discord; Hippolyta comments on the baying of the Spartan hounds:

I never heard
So musical a discord, such sweet thunder.

(IV.i.16-17).

That the discord is musical, and the thunder is sweet, indicates the optimism of the comic spirit dominating darker elements in this play. Theseus comments on the lovers after their 'dream' in the same terms, pointing out the paradox of their new behaviour:

I know you two are rival enemies.
 How comes this gentle concord in the world,
 That hatred is so far from jealousy
 To sleep by hate, and fear no enmity?

(IV.i.141-4).

'Gentle concord' is the comic outcome of the lovers' experience in the woods; it could very well have had a different result. The equivocal nature of the description of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' evokes this response from Theseus:

'very tragical mirth'.
 Merry and tragical? Tedious and brief?
 That is, hot ice and wondrous strange snow.
 How shall we find the concord of this discord.

(V.i.57-60).

The sense of duality within the wider comedy of A Midsummer Night's Dream, is summed up in that last line. Indeed, the comic form as a whole has inherent within it ambiguities, paradoxes, and duality. C.L. Barber's thesis on the play puts it in the context of other 'festive comedies'; these comedies move us into the 'release' of the holiday world, with its fantasy, laughter, freedom from care, inversion of *diurnal* authority. However, by various forms of counterstatement, a strong idea of alternative values is given, and the comedy moves towards a deeper awareness, achieved through the dialectic of the values of release and the ever-present sense of the 'real' world.¹

1. Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, chs. 1-3.

Northrop Frye in his book 'A Natural Perspective', stresses a similar kind of duality in comedy; a 'sense of festivity' and a 'sense of alienation' need to co-exist for the full catharsis of comedy:

Part of us is at the wedding feast applauding the loud bassoon; part of us is still out in the street hypnotised by some grey-bearded loon and listening to a wild tale of guilt and loneliness and injustice and mysterious revenge. There seems no way of reconciling these two things. Participation and detachment, sympathy and ridicule, sociability and isolation, are inseparable from the complex we call comedy, a complex that is begotten by the paradox of life itself, in which merely to exist is both to be a part of something else and yet never to be a part of it, and in which all freedom and joy are inseparably a belonging and an escape.¹

The ambivalence which Shakespeare stresses both in 'Pyramus and Thisbe', and in the wider comedy, raises speculation about the very nature of comic form. Northrop Frye again points to the different manipulation of similar patterns in A Midsummer Night's Dream and Romeo and Juliet which turns one of them into a comedy, and the other into tragedy.

Just as in A Midsummer Night's Dream the drive toward the fulfilment of love is carried

1. op. cit. ch.III, p.103-104.

through by the fairies and the tragic side of the story is reduced to parody, so in Romeo and Juliet the drive toward the fatal conclusion is in the foreground and the unseen impulses that prompt the lovers to fall in love so suddenly and so completely are suggested only by way of parody, in Mercutio's account of a fairy 'hag' who evokes dreams of love from lovers.¹ Had the Mechanicals performed a really tragic play, it would have been a 'discord' in the general 'concord' of marriage festivities at the end of A Midsummer Night's Dream. The performance of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' which turns it almost into a farce, raises the question of the structure of a play, as well as raising speculation about the attitudes of actors and audience to the illusions they see on a stage.

This latter speculation is carried into the confines of the fantasy world of the Fairies when Bottom meets Titania. The intrusion of reality into a world of illusion is the process we have seen as the Mechanicals approach a play; this process is repeated in the way Bottom approaches Shakespeare's created illusions. The Mechanicals react to the ass head as an act of supernatural metamorphosis:

Quince: O monstrous! O strange! We are
haunted!....

(III.1.98).

1. Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy,
ch. 2, p.60 (Toronto, 1967).

Snout: O Bottom, thou art changed... (109)

Quince: Bless thee, Bottom! Bless thee!
Thou art translated! (111)

Indeed, what has befallen Bottom is a literal transformation, a disguise about which he is unconscious. Titania's eyes are distorted to perceive in Bottom's gross form a vision of delight, and she too is unconscious of the true absurdity the spectacle presents. In spite of these delusions, however, Bottom remains the literal-minded weaver, and Titania the delicate Fairy figure. Bottom remains true to himself, just as he does in the drama of 'Pyramus and Thisbe'; on neither occasion does he allow the fact of himself to be absorbed by the fiction of his disguise or the fantasy in which he finds himself. Bottom addresses the Fairy Queen in his usual tone of practical, down-to-earth speech; he answers Titania's poetry with prose, and turns her ethereal attendants into ordinary objects of domestic use. Using terms like 'Methinks, mistress' (III.i.135), and colloquial expressions like 'gleak' (139), Bottom speaks to Titania in his own character of a weaver holding a normal conversation with an ordinary woman. He breaks the poetic flow of a line like:

Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful,

(III.i.140)

by replying 'Not so neither'. The romantic illusion which Titania attempts to construct out of the encounter is foiled by Bottom's practicality:

....to say the truth, reason and love keep
little company together nowadays - (136).

That is an unconsciously ironic comment on the lovers' antics in the wood, as well as on Titania's enraptured response to himself. Bottom appears to cope very well with the fantasy world into which he has been thrust, by translating it into his own terms, and not submitting to the pressures upon him to fit Titania's illusion. Even the ass head is very much a superficial addition that merely means that as well as being a weaver, he feels 'marvellous hairy about the face' (IV.1.24), and has 'a great desire to a bottle of hay' (32).
Titania claimed:

....I will purge thy mortal grossness so
That thou shalt like an airy spirit go,
(III.1.151-2).

In her deluded imagination, Bottom might well be 'an airy spirit', but as the audience sees him, he has remained the rather loud, rough, funny weaver.

However, Shakespeare's sense of irony emerges when we are presented with Bottom's reaction to his experience. This simple, literal-minded rustic, is more profoundly affected by his 'dream' than the lovers were, and hints at dimensions of fantasy which Theseus condescendingly dismisses in his speech.

'I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream.

Methought I was - there is no man can tell what.
 Methought I was - and methought I had - but man
 is but a patched fool if he will offer to say
 what methought I had. The eye of man hath not
 heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand
 is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor
 his heart to report what my dream was! I will
 get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream.
 It shall be called 'Bottom's Dream', because it
 hath no bottom; and I will sing it in the latter
 end of a play before the Duke, Peradventure, to
 make it the more gracious, I shall sing it at
 her death.

(IV.i.203-216).

Even through Bottom's linguistic confusion, there
 emerges a deep sense of awe that recalls a visionary
 experience. Attention has been drawn to the resem-
 blance to I Corinthians, Ch.2, verse 9 (Bishops'
 Bible):

The eye hath not seen, and the ear hath not
 heard, neither have entered into the heart of man,
 the things which God hath prepared for them that
 love him ¹.

Frank Kermode, in an essay in the Stratford-
 Upon-Avon Studies series, emphasises the mystical
 elements implicit in Bottom's experience.

1 Quoted from the New Penguin edition of A Midsummer
 Night's Dream ed. Stanley Wells, p.155.

The love-affair between Titania and Bottom contains allusions to 'The Golden Ass', a story of Classical antiquity about the transformation of Apuleius^{written} by Beroaldus, on which great superstructures of platonic and Christian allegory had been raised. Mr. Kermode claims that 'there is every reason to suppose that these mysteries are part of the flesh and bone of A Midsummer Night's Dream'.¹ Referring to Bottom's dream, he sees in it a fusion of the mystery of the Classical myth, and the Christian myth of St. Paul's conversion:

Apuleius, after his transformation, might not speak of the initiation he underwent; but he was vouchsafed a vision of the goddess Isis. St. Paul was initiated into the religion he had persecuted by Ananias in Damascus. What they have in common is transformation, and an experience of divine love...Bottom's dream is ambiguous, enigmatic, of high import. And this is the contrary interpretation of blind love, the love of God or of Isis, a love beyond the power of the eyes.... Bottom is there to tell us that the blindness of love, the dominance of the mind over the eye, can be interpreted as a means to grace as well as to irrational animalism; that the two aspects are, perhaps, inseparable.²

There is indeed, in Bottom's explanation, a deep sense of mystery and hints of mystical vision.

1 op. cit. Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies 3, Early Shakespeare: ch.10, p.218.

2 ibid. p.219.

Apuleius) could not speak of his initiation, but underwent a profound spiritual experience; Bottom can hardly speak coherently about his transformation, but when he does so, utters words that recall the Pauline 'deep things of God.' When he decides to name it 'Bottom's Dream', because it hath no bottom, he implies that its intangibility makes it totally mysterious since it has no foundations in reality, and also that it is unfathomable, the depths of the experience cannot be plumbed.

But while acknowledging this aspect of Bottom's reaction, one must also take account of the dramatic analogies which are implied. Confusion of the senses has also been a prominent theme in the experience of the lovers within the fantasy world of Fairies. An echo of Bottom's linguistic confusion comes out as comic farce in the play of:

'Pyramus and Thisbe':

'I see a voice. Now will I to the chink
To spy on I can hear my Thisbe's face.'

(V.i.189-190).

This confusion all takes place within situations that are paralleled to the dramatic illusion on stage. What Shakespeare does is to make analogies between the incoherence within that fantasy world of Fairies and 'Pyramus and Thisbe', between the shifting perspectives encountered by the lovers and Bottom, and the complications and anomalies of his own play. Distortion and transformation, fantasy and mystery, are to be found in A Midsummer Night's Dream, just

as they are to be found in Bottom's 'rare vision'. Out of the illusions and random experiences within the fantasy world, the lovers, Bottom, and the wider audience of Shakespeare's play, all emerge with a sense of something valuable having taken place, a profound enlightenment of the imagination, which might be difficult to communicate, but is nevertheless present. Bottom himself wishes to communicate his vision in song; he wants to translate the confused impressions into an artistic form that will be performed at the end of another artistic form, the play. What he has to say is jumbled, but it contains glimpses of profound perception, and the most appropriate way to communicate it is through the medium of art. Shakespeare is wryly commenting on the nature of his own 'rare vision', given to us through the medium of A Midsummer Night's Dream; the message may be conveyed by means of insubstantial and ethereal creations perpetrating delusions, and to men like Theseus it may seem merely an entertainment, but for the artist the message consists of profound insights and it is these which he struggles to convey through his art. At the end of the play, Shakespeare makes one of his ethereal creations draw attention to the parallel between the 'dreams' of fantasy experienced by the lovers and Bottom, and the 'dream' of fantasy in which the audience has indulged while watching A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Puck (to the audience):

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended:
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend.
If you pardon, we will mend.

(V.1.413-420).

The Mechanicals constantly made inept explanatory comments that their play was but a play, and not real life; Shakespeare ends his play suggesting that it was only a kind of dream. However, the kind of dream he has shown us in the Fairy world and Bottom's experience delicately suggests that the fantasy world making up the play may be, in the words of Paul Siegel, 'a kind of enchanted mirror displaying unseen truths'.¹ Out of the complexities of dramatic illusion, through the medium of art, Shakespeare strives to convey his 'rare vision;' communicating exactly what he perceives is difficult: 'man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had', but an audience caught up in the fantasy takes from it a valuable imaginative experience, sensing in it profound depths of meaning:

'It shall be called 'Bottom's Dream', because it hath no bottom;...

Theseus' famous speech on the imagination at the beginning of Act V, must be seen in the light of the lovers' experience and Bottom's reaction to the fantasy world that the Duke so easily dismisses.

1. Paul R. Siegel, "A Midsummer Night's Dream and the Wedding Guests." Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol. IV. p.143.

In the first place, Theseus is a shadow dismissing other shadows; he patronisingly calls the lovers' awareness into question, while himself being part of the artist's creative imagination. For the moment, Shakespeare chooses to make his character step outside his disguise to question the validity of the imagination that creates the disguises and delusions of a play; it is a superb irony that one of the tools of the trade should be questioning the nature of that trade. And although Theseus is so superior in his attitude towards fantasy, his assumptions are exposed as inadequate. His opening observation, for example, is simply a vast generalisation:

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.

(V.i.7-8).

The imagination is 'all compact' between lunatic, lover and poet, only in the sense that unique creations of fancy emanate from such a source. However, the kind of visions figured forth by lunatic and lover are essentially private ones; the poet transcends the merely private and creates an all-embracing artistic view that can include the lunatic and the lover's private mental worlds, and, in its totality, can include every other kind of experience as well. The poet's particular gift is to transform the private vision into the universal, shared and recognised by his audience. So the scope and nature of the poet's imagination is rather different to that of lunatic and lover.

dismiss the strange accounts so patronisingly:

But all the story of the night told over,
And all their minds transfigured so together,
More witnesseth than fancy's images,
And grows to something of great constancy;
But howsoever, strange and admirable.

(V.1.23-27).

The last two lines are as vague a summation of events as the lovers gave, but, like Bottom, Hippolyta senses the value of what occurred, 'strange and admirable'. She is convinced that something did happen to the lovers in the woods, and that it is not merely a nebulous and fleeting experience, but 'grows to something of great constancy'. The audience, like the lovers, Bottom, and Hippolyta, has to decide for itself whether the illusion of the play has offered 'something of great constancy' or, like Theseus, whether it offers little more than amusing entertainment. Will the play grow in the consciousness of the audience into a cohesive artistic experience of great significance? Shakespeare leaves the question open, and by ending his play with the Fairies, and Puck's apology for 'this weak and idle theme/No more yielding but a dream' draws attention again to the need for evaluating the fantasy he has created.

C.L. Barber gives some weight to Theseus' condescending attitude towards the imagination, by asserting that A Midsummer Night's Dream, is partially a play in the spirit of Mercutio's mocking of fairies and dreams in *Romeo and Juliet*:¹

1 Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, ch.6, p.159.

Romeo: Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace!
Thou talk'st of nothing.

Mercutio: True, I talk of dreams,
Which are the children of an idle brain,
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy;
Which is as thin of substance as the
air.....

(I.iv.55-104).

However much Mercutio mocks at fairies and dreams in Romeo and Juliet, it is Romeo's dream fore-boding that is proved true in the fiction of the play. However much Theseus belittles the visions of the imagination as the embodiment of 'airy nothing', the experience of the play as a whole, and the extraordinary reaction to the fantasy world by the most unreceptive of literal-minded rustics, presents the audience with another response that sees in dramatic illusion deep and meaningful significance. The play has reflected in its own unique way, the complications, ambiguities, and shifting perspectives of reality itself; it has raised pertinent questions about the nature of love, the sort of experience an artist offers in a play, and the kind of experience an audience carries away from a play. A Midsummer Night's Dream has made use of disguise and its attendant themes of transformation and metamorphosis to investigate questions about art and artistic awareness that will culminate in a play like The Tempest; in both plays Shakespeare draws attention to the fiction with a daring virtuosity that triumphantly proclaims the value of the artistic experience while not denying its limitations.

In the three comedies which have been examined, disguise was seen to manifest itself in issues concerned with identity, role-playing, and the discrepancy between appearance and reality. The emphasis in A Midsummer Night's Dream was very much on the dramatic implications of disguise. Dissembling and mistaken assumptions of appearance, transformations and metamorphoses in the comedies had social effects; they confused characters and delayed for a time the eventual reconciliation towards which the play was working. The focus in the history plays is upon the political world, and where dissembling takes place, as in Richard III, it reflects upon that political world. Henry V displays the most interesting features of the disguise theme; it is the play wherein the effects of dissembling and equivocation are most skilfully and subtly used to suggest the double standards of the political world. There is in Act IV a scene where the King appears disguised among his soldiers, and is disturbed to discover that his rhetoric on the nobility of war is not accepted by members of the rank and file of his army. This scene is only the culmination of a pervasive atmosphere of ambiguity within the play; from the first Henry assumes a public persona designed to convince his nation of the righteousness of his political objectives.

When he dons the cloak of disguise in Act IV to learn that common soldiers have not been convinced by his public guise, the exposure of dishonesty and self-deception reflects in that one scene the trend of the whole play. In this scene, the exposure is explicit, and the criticism of Henry V's glib assumptions is obvious. In the rest of the play, Shakespeare ironically and subtly undercuts the King's public persona by exposing the rhetorical and equivocal nature of his words, the cool, calculating manner of his actions, the corruption of those surrounding him. The comic element in the play, although not as incisively critical of the political world as Falstaff in the Henry IV plays, nevertheless also provides an ironic commentary on the real brutality underlying the King's words and actions. Even the epic structure of the play, with its Chorus supposedly extolling every virtue of Henry V, contains within it hints of the real issues underlying the political rhetoric.

To question Henry V's rhetoric and speculate as to whether dynastic wars are ever justifiable, since they involve soldiers for whom the issue can have no real relevance, is not to import a twentieth century sensibility to Shakespeare: it was a topic that had arisen long before in Sir Thomas More's work. It is hard to accept the opinion of critics like Walter, who writes the

Introduction for the Arden edition of Henry V, that the play is simply an unambiguously presented portrait of a great and glorious King in the style of the chronologers. Shakespeare by this stage had already written eight history plays, all of which expose the corruption of the political world; by the time he was writing Henry V, though of course he must have been well aware of the popular image of the King as an historical hero in Elizabethan England, his artistic integrity prevented him from submitting to the popular myth, as the evidence of the play clearly suggests.

M.M. Reese argues that Henry's behaviour is condemned by standards not applicable to his time and state, and that the epic tone of the play in any case simplifies the complexities of human behaviour.

Epic praises heroes and denounces villainy. It does not deal in light and shade, and its blacks and whites have a definition too simple for the give and take of ordinary life. Aeneas is always 'pi^{us}' because the poet does not mean to complicate fundamental issues. So with Henry: if in the play his virtues seem super-human, this does not invalidate the seriousness of Shakespeare's purpose, nor, within the restrictions of the medium, the success of his execution.

Henry is appointed symbol of majesty, and the action of the play is directed to show him doing everything the age expected of the perfect king.¹

To argue for an unambiguous interpretation of Henry on these grounds is totally unconvincing. Mr. Reese's definition of the epic genre in the first place is questionable; it does not simplify fundamental issues, rather, it gives the complication of fundamental issues a universal significance. Aeneas is certainly not always 'placid'; indeed, the tension always present in epic is that of the hero's individual fulfilment striving against the claims of the collective society which the hero represents. To claim that the Classical epics and medieval epics like Malory's "Mort d' Arthur," and "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," deal with issues in clear terms of black and white is to ignore this inherent tension in the genre. Shakespeare may well have chosen the epic genre to show Henry V doing everything the age expected of the perfect king; this does not mean he was in total agreement with such an image of majesty. Far from the epic medium restricting the ironic reverberations, it could point all the more effectively to the discrepancy between a grandiose public projection of hero, and the shortcomings of that hero when analysed in terms of the real consequences of his words and actions, as they affect individuals.

1. The Cease of Majesty: A Study of Shakespeare's History Plays, ch. IV p. 96 (London, 1961).

Shakespeare presents the prelates surrounding the King as shrewd opportunists; they urge war against France not as holy representatives sanctioning the righteousness of the action, but in order to divert the King's attention from the Church coffers. Immediately a dichotomy is suggested between seemingly noble motives, and the underlying reasons which are purely selfish and in the interests of economic expediency. Ely asks the Archbishop during their conversation:

How now for mitigation of this bill
Urg'd by the commons?

(I.i.69-70).

And Canterbury talks about the danger of losing "the better half of our possession" (8), and of "making an offer to his majesty," (75). The Archbishop goes through the tedious business of justifying Henry's war on the grounds that in terms of feudal law his claim to the French throne through the Salic law was justified; this assumes that Henry V is indisputably the rightful heir to the throne of England, which the presence of traitors in his own camp, and the knowledge of what has come before and what will ensue after his reign, denies. In any case, the justification is shown to be something of a hollow sham, since the French ambassadors are already waiting at the door to offer the Dauphin's snub to Henry in reply to his claim for "some certain dukedoms"; the initial moves towards war have already been instigated by the King without prior consultation with his prelates.

What Henry is in fact doing, is using his Archbishop to take the responsibility for the final decision to go to war. This is a characteristic ruse with him; he blames everyone but himself for instigating actions:

.....take heed how you impawn our person,
How you awake our sleeping sword of war;
We charge you in the name of God, take heed;

(I.ii.21-23)

Canterbury's account of Henry's reformation into virtuous King from degenerate Prince, (I.i.24-59), might seem to indicate firstly, that Shakespeare wants the audience to take Henry V as an entirely different character from the Hal of the Henry IV plays; and secondly, that because the Archbishop speaks of the change in religious metaphors, giving it a metaphysical dimension appropriate to the King as supreme representative of God's rule on earth, Shakespeare wants the audience to see how closely he is following Hall's and Holinshead's stereotype of Henry V as greatest and most glorious of Kings:

yea, at that very moment,
Consideration like an angel came,
And whipp'd th' offending Adam out of him,
(T' envelop and contain celestial spirits.
Leaving his body as a paradise
(27-31).

Both of these critical assumptions are nullified by Ely's subsequent explanation:

The strawberry grows underneath the nettle,
And wholesome berries thrive and ripen best
Neighbour'd by fruit of baser quality;
And so the Prince obscured his contemplation
Under the veil of wildness, which (no doubt)
Grew like the summer grass, fastest by night,
Unseen, yet orescive in his faculty.

(I.I.60-66).

This may appear to be a confused metaphor, combining voluntary determination, 'so the Prince obscured his contemplation,' with involuntary change, 'grew like the summer grass,...unseen, yet crescive in his faculty.' However, Ely's 'no doubt' implies that it is pure conjecture on his part that the growth of virtue in the Prince was an act of Providence. The significant word is 'obscured', which conveys an impression of Henry actively and deliberately hiding his development; this assumption of a certain pose by Hal undercuts Ely's metaphysical interpretation of the King's transformation. There is an echo here of Hal's resolution in the Henry IV plays to act the part of wild dissolute and then suddenly affect a reformation which will astonish onlookers like Ely:

Hal: I know you all, and will awhile uphold
The unyok'd humour of your idleness;
Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
Who doth permit the base contagious
 clouds
To smother up his beauty from the
 world
That when he please again to be
 himself,
Being wanted, he may be more wonder'd at,
By breaking through the foul and ugly
 mists
Of vapours that did seem to strangle
 him...
...like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My reformation, glittering o'er my
 fault,
Shall show more goodly and attract
 more eyes

Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
 I'll so offend to make offence a skill;
 Redeeming time when men think least I will.

(Henry IV, Part I, I.ii.217-39).

The same metaphor and the same tone are used by
 Henry V in reply to the Dauphin's tennis ball
 jest:

And we understand him well,
 How he comes o'er us with our wilder days,
 Not measuring what use we made of them....
 But I will rise there with so full a glory
 That I will dazzle all the eyes of France,
 Yea, strike the Dauphin blind to look on us.

(I.ii.266-80).

Both speeches emphasise Henry's 'use' of other
 people in order to break out all the more 'glittering'
 and 'dazzle' his nation; and the speeches reveal
 a continuity of character between Henry as Prince
 and King, in both positions speaking detachedly
 about manipulating men in order to build up a
 certain public impression of his character. The
 Constable of France explains Henry's reformation in
 the more realistic human terms substantiated by
 the evidence, not in Ely's questionable meta-
 physical terms:

And you shall find his vanities forespent
 Were but the outside of the Roman Brutus,
 Covering discretion with a coat of folly;
 As gardeners do with ordure hide those roots
 That shall first spring and be most delicate.

(II.iv.36-40).

The planned spectacular conversion has been very
 successful, as is evident in Canterbury's eulogy,
 which makes it analogous to an archetypal struggle
 between Good and Evil.

However, even the Archbishop has to acknowledge the greater validity of Ely's explanation, which at least partially attributes the reformation to Hal's own will:

It must be so, for miracles are ceas'd;
And therefore we must needs admit the means
How things are perfected.

(I.i.67-69).

That Henry as Prince and King can coolly admit to such a calculated use of people and manipulation of role, brings to mind the sort of person Shakespeare describes in Sonnet 94:

They that have pow'r to hurt and will do none,
That do not do the thing they most do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow;
They rightly do inherit heaven's graces
And husband nature's riches from expense;
They are the lords and owners of their faces,
Others but stewards of their excellence.

The mood of the sonnet is akin to Hal's shrewd, calculating attitude towards his companions, 'I know you all', and to Henry V's similar statement, 'not measuring what use we made of them.' As degenerate Prince, Hal 'did not do the thing he most did show', as Henry V, Henry exhibits an aloof manipulation of events in a continuation of his character as Prince. Derek Traverso also refers to this sonnet in connection with Henry. He sees the struggle within the King being presented in terms of one between passion and controlling reason, as Canterbury's speech on mortification implies. Such control, essential in a King, is yet dangerous in its possible consequences, for it turns easily to cruelty and selfishness.

The King, like the man in the sonnet, has 'power to hurt' and may easily abuse it; he too, whilst moving others to action, must keep the firmest check on his impulses and watch his judgement. And he too can fall into savage indulgence. Traversi suggests that Henry as King, symbol of order, has to subdue his passions, that he is forced into a cold and calculating role because in his status, he is subject to constant self-restraint.¹ One agrees with the basic premise that Henry is cold and calculating; there is not much evidence, however, that this is the outcome of internal struggle; it seems the natural progression from his basic characteristics while still Prince Hal.

It soon becomes obvious that one of the main features of Henry V's public persona is his frequent use of rhetoric; he uses it to threaten, justify and condemn, and Shakespeare continually undercuts the political assumptions it conveys. First of all, the war against France which Henry would have his followers believe is noble and sanctioned by the Church, is exposed as a much more complex and sordid issue than that. There is a purely pragmatic political precedent for the war in Henry IV's dying words to his heir:

Therefore, my Harry,
Be it thy course to busy giddy minds
With foreign quarrels; that action, hence borne out,
May waste the memory of the former days.

(Henry IV, Pt II; IV.v.211-214)

1 Shakespeare from Richard II to Henry V, ch.v,
p.169 (London, 1957).

The 'memory of the former days', Bolingbroke's usurpation of Richard II, extends even into the most trouble-free reign of the period; the consequences of that usurpation are seen in the presence of traitors just before Henry V embarks for France, in his prayer before Agincourt promising to do penance for his father's misdemeanour, and in the irony of the King pinning faith on an heir who will become the doomed Henry VI.

The frequent long speeches Henry makes, for instance in reply to the Dauphin's tennis ball jest, in his condemnation of Scroop, in his address to the citizens of Harfleur, show his expert powers of cumulative rhetoric designed to sway a listening public. He can project himself as the honourable man betrayed, as the King unjustly insulted, as the General bent on stern measures, with a skilful manipulation of words. Shakespeare however, implicitly points to the equivocal nature of the words by which Henry V builds up his public image. If one tests, for example, the validity of the words in Henry's speech just before the entrance of the French ambassadors in Act I, Scene ii, it becomes apparent that he creates his own definitions as he goes along:

Now are we well resolv'd; and by God's help,
 And yours, the noble sinews of our power,
 France being ours, we'll bend it to our awe,
 Or break it all to pieces: Or there we'll sit,
 Ruling in large and ample empery
 O'er France and all her (almost) kingly dukedoms,

(I.ii.220-25).

The word 'noble' is modified by 'sinews of our power' to give it a meaning that suggests brute strength. Nobility as Henry uses it, means the ability to forcibly restrain, to 'bend' and 'break' his enemies by sheer force. And that force suggested by 'bend' and 'break' qualifies the next phrase Henry uses:

Ruling in large and ample empery
O'er France...

There is an ambiguity in that expression; it could imply that the King's future rule over a conquered France will be magnanimously generous. In the face of 'bend' and 'break', however, it is more likely to mean acquisition by pillage and booty. Canterbury at one point compared Henry's efficiently run kingdom to a well-ordered bee-hive, talking about the specific function each part of the populace would have to perform:

Others like soldiers armed in their stings
Make boot upon the summer's ^{in the} velvet beds,
Which pillage they with merry march bring home
To the tent-royal of their emperor -

(I.ii.193-6).

This sounds more like the 'large and ample empery' Henry intends. There is underlying all the King's rhetoric ^{an} strain of threatened harshness, particularly before Harfleur, which undercuts the impression he attempts to convey of a magnanimous nature.

When he replies to the French ambassadors' request for leniency, Henry projects the same sort of sham display of magnanimity in words which again reveal an equivocal meaning:

We are no tyrant, but a Christian king;
 Unto whose grace our passion is as subject
 As is our wretches fetter'd in our persons;

(I.ii.241-3).

The 'wretches fetter'd in our persons' immediately deflates the benevolent impression that Henry ostensibly conveys in 'Christian king' and 'grace'. Northrop Frye comments on this passage:

The social order the leader represents grows by conquest and successful battles; sanity depends on hysteria; law and stability depend on punishment. His palace is founded on a prison, as Henry V unconsciously indicates.¹

Henry is fond of constantly invoking God's name to sanction his course of action; the image that both he and his prelates project is that of a God of battles, which makes the description 'Christian king' dubious as well. What emerges from the public edifice of words by which Henry projects himself, is the character of a man ruthlessly determined to impose his will; this emerges despite the fact that Henry tries to cover over his real purpose with words designed to incline his audience to think of him as basically compassionate.

1. Fools of Time : Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy, Ch.1, p.37 (Toronto, 1967).

Shakespeare also draws attention to Henry's public persona through the comic element in the play. Falstaff in the flesh cannot appear because his devastating penetration of political expediency and deflation of rhetorical bombast would constitute too obvious a critique of a King so eulogised by chronologers and hero-worshipped by the majority of an Elizabethan audience. To claim that there is no critique operating, however, would be to ignore the main point of the comic scenes, and to forget that even the mention of Falstaff's death makes his spirit loom large over the proceedings. It would also be to ignore the deliberate way Shakespeare places comic scenes so as to comment on the seriousness of high politics. A.P. Rossiter comments on the use of comedy in the Histories:

Throughout the Histories it is in the implications of the Comic that shrewd, realistic thinking about men in politics - in office - in war - in plot - is exposed; realistic apprehension outrunning the medieval frame. Because the Tudor myth system of Order, Degree, etc., was too rigid, too black-and-white, too doctrinaire and narrowly moral for Shakespeare's mind; it falsified his fuller experience of men. Consequently, while employing it as frame, he had to undermine it, to qualify it with equivocations; to vex its applications with sly or subtle ambiguities; to cast doubts on its ultimate human validity, even in situations where its principles seemed more completely applicable.

His intuition told him it was morally inadequate.¹

The comic figures in Henry V are in fact much more effective than a critic like Traversi would have us believe. He claims that Pistol is empty of sense and the comedy that goes with it, that the empty brags of Pistol are the hollow echoes of comedy that has ceased, since Falstaff died, to illuminate events with its own distinctive life.² However, the comic scenes juxtaposed with serious scenes in Act II, effectively parody the high debates and plausible rhetoric of the politicians. The brawl between Nym and Pistol over money in Act II, Scene i, is a caricature of the quarrel between Henry V and the Dauphin in Act I, Scene ii, which is also a dispute over acquisition, over 'crowns' in both senses of the word. What Pistol and Nym do is crudely to show forth the basic greed which is hidden beneath the eloquent phrases of their peers. There is also present in Nym's nonchalant attitude to life's exigencies an implicit comment on the kind of environment the King creates for his people. In replying to Bardolph's assertion that Pistol has done him an injury, Nym says:

"I cannot tell; things must be as they may;
men may sleep, and they may have their throats
about them at that time; and some say knives have edges.
It must be as it may;" (II.1.22-25).

1. ²¹ 'Angel with Horns' and other Shakespearean lectures,
ch. 3, p.59 (London, 1961).

2. Derek Traversi: Shakespeare from Richard II to Henry V, ch. V, p. 193.

In Pistol's profession of brotherhood a rather different aspect of that army emerges. Pistol's rhetorical question, 'Is not this just?' is a superb parody of Henry V's continual insistence that he is justified in all his actions. To Pistol and his friends the sole justification for war rests in the phrase 'and profits will accrue'; this is an ironic indication of where the real motives for Henry's war lie.

Henry's confrontation with the traitors comes just before the description of Falstaff's death in Act II, Scene iii, a significant and deliberate juxtaposition. In the light of the King's own betrayal of Falstaff, his long harangues condemning the hypocrisy of the traitors ring very hollow. Again what one sees is a build-up of cumulative rhetoric designed to create the impression of a deeply injured man; that the sincerity of Henry's reaction is suspect is ironically pointed out by Shakespeare's placing of the scene, and the dramatist's deliberate use of echoes from Henry's own betrayal of a best friend. The King rails against Scroop for being a

cruel,

Ingrateful, ^{cow} savage and inhuman creature!
 Thou that didst bear the key of all my counsels,
 That knew'st the very bottom of my soul,
 That (almost) might have coin'd me into gold
 Would'st thou have practis'd on me for thy use.

(II.ii.94-99).

This sounds as if Henry is getting back some of his own medicine:

"And we understand him well,
How he comes o'er us with our wilder days,
Not measuring what use we made of them.

(I.ii.266-8).

His professions of absolute trust in Scroop:
'thou that didst bear the key of all my counsels,'
and 'that knew'st the very bottom of my soul,'
is totally uncharacteristic in the light of his
previous behaviour as Hal, and a quality for
which there is no evidence in the play. It might
well be that Henry is being carried away on the
floods of his own rhetoric.

'Tis so strange
That, though the truth of it stands off as gross
As black and white, my eye will scarcely see it.

II. ii (102-4).

Again, this sets off ironic echoes of Falstaff's
refusal to believe that he had been dismissed by
the King at the end of Henry IV, Part II. It is
also uncharacteristic of Henry to be so grossly
taken in by anyone. As Prince Hal he was always
capable of an astute judgement of people, and
as King he has not lost this cool detachment.
It sounds again as if Henry is using all the
resources of rhetoric to sway his audience into
believing in the figure of a deeply trusting
King, unjustly betrayed. This is evident partic-
ularly in the overblown metaphor which gives
Scroop's treachery archetypal proportions:

I will weep for thee;
For this revolt of thine, methinks, is like
Another fall of man.

(140-2).

A.P. Rossiter thinks that in Henry's treatment of the conspirators he is 'so obviously playing a publicity propagandapart, as Justice, iron-visaged, pitiless'.¹ That is the point, that Henry is playing a part: he condemns the guises of true friendship employed by Scroop and Cambridge to obscure their true motives, when he himself is an expert at dissembling in order to achieve his ends. In the speech, Henry mentions the qualities he most admires in men:

...are they spare in diet,
Free from gross passion, or of mirth or anger,
Constant in spirit, not swerving with the blood,
Garnish'd and deck'd in modest complement,
Nor working with the eye without the ear,
And but in purg'd judgement trusting neither?

(131-36).

This balanced, unemotional, detachment sounds very much like the kind of character Henry possesses, and brings to mind again Sonnet 94:

Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow.
That Scene iii follows this with an account of Falstaff's death is a direct indication by Shakespeare of the inadequacies of Henry's character.

The Hostess, Mistress Quickly, announces that:
"The King has killed his (Falstaff's) heart".

(II.i.88).

an image confirmed by Pistol:

"His heart is fractured and corroborate."

(II.i.124).

One cannot criticize Henry for rejecting Falstaff, knowing what Kingship meant to the Tudors; as King, he was morally bound to eschew the principles of disorder, anti-heroism, and sensuality that Falstaff represents.

1 'Angel with Horns' and other Shakespearean Lectures,
ch. 3, p.60.

It is the coldly self-righteous public manner in which Henry pays off a man who called him friend, in order to win the approbation of his respectable citizens, that one objects to. The studied gesture of dismissal at the end of Henry IV, Part II, is of course consistent with the character of a man who from the start admitted he was 'using' his companions. In banishing Falstaff without a tinge of regret, Henry eschews not only laziness, cowardice, and self-indulgence, but a whole way of looking at life that admits its anomalies and complex ambiguities. Falstaff also represented a particular perspective, an irony that could distinguish the false, the pretentious, the bombastic and hypocritical elements so rife in the political sphere; he could strip the rhetoric down to reveal the true implications underlying slogans like 'Honour' in war. Falstaff on one occasion tells Hal:

If sack and sugar be a fault, God help the wicked! If to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is dammed: if to be fat to be hated, then Pharaoh's lean kine are to be loved...banish Plump Jack, and banish all the world. (Henry IV. Pt.I.II,iv.524-535).

Hal replies, 'I do, I will,' and indeed he banished with 'Plump Jack' a humaneness, a certain understanding of common truths about life. Without Falstaff's perspective, Henry V can ignore the ambivalence of his own motives and rhetoric,

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once
 more;
 Having extolled the gloriousness of their
 cause, and
 urged his soldiers to prove their patriotism
 with fierce deeds of slaughter:
 "For there is none of you so mean and base
 That hath not noble lustre in your eyes."

(29.30).

Scene II follows with another dimension of the kind
 of soldiers in that army, and what they think of
 deeds of war. Bardolph echoes Henry's call:

On, on, on, on, on! to the breach, to the breach!

(III.ii.i.)

Nym however, refuses to respond to the war rhetoric:

Pray thee, Corporal, stay; the knocks are
 too hot; and, for mine own part, I have not
 a case of lives. The humour of it is too hot;
 that is the plain-song of it.

(3-6).

Pistol translates the plain-song into:

Knocks go and come, God's vassals drop and die;
 And sword and shield,
 In bloody field,
 Doth win immortal fame.

(7-10).

The realism with which Henry's stirring call to
 battle is interpreted by Nym and Pistol, recalls
 Falstaff's conversation with Hal before the Battle of
 Shrewsbury:

Tut, tut; good enough to toss; food for powder,
 food for powder, they'll fill a pit as well
 as better;
 tush, man, mortal men, mortal men.

(Henry IV. Pt. I, IV, ii.72-4).

Henry V's exhortation 'once more unto the breach,' is an invitation to his soldiers to become 'food for powder,' to 'fill a pit' with their bodies. Nym's avowal, 'I have not a case of lives,' and Pistol's disrespect for 'immortal fame' won by 'God's vassals dropping and dying,' are the faint echo of an insight expressed by Falstaff concerning the futile glories of death in battle:

What is honour? a word. What is that word, honour? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? he that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. It is insensible then? Yea, to the dead...honour is a mere scutcheon;

(Henry IV, Pt.I, V.i.136-143).

The Boy's reaction to battle is also Falstaffian:

Would I were in an alehouse in London! I would give all my fame for a pot of ale, and safety. III. ii. (12-13).

Falstaff says to Hal in the middle of the battle of Shrewsbury:

'I would it were bed-time, Hal, and all well.'

(Henry IV, Pt.I. V.i.126).

Henry's war rhetoric is interpreted by this section of his army as a call to death; 'fame' to them, like 'honour' to Falstaff, is an empty slogan which entails a futile sacrifice of their lives.

If Shakespeare's aim was to stress Henry V's ability to fuse together the whole of the British nation in common pursuit of a glorious victory,

then the inclusion of Captain Jamy seems rather pointless, knowing as we do that the Scots 'weasel' has had to be kept at bay while England preys on France. In fact, this other comic element in the play, like Pistol and company, exposes another dimension of Henry's supposedly noble 'band of brothers.' In Fluellen, Shakespeare is parodying all the qualities of a good soldier; his insistence on a definite order in war is ridiculed and exposed as meaningless; his naive gullibility leads him to being duped into believing Pistol is 'as valiant a man as Mark Antony' (III.vi.14), and therefore renders his opinions of Henry V as a great king suspect. There is a superb irony in the fact that Fluellen, who worships the King and the business of war, summons up the ghost of Falstaff by comparing Henry to Alexander the Great, who killed his best friend:

....as Alexander killed his friend Cleitus,
being in his ales and his cups, so also Harry
Monmouth, being in his right wits and his good
judgements, turned away the fat knight with the
great-belly doublet - (IV.vii.47-51).
To think of Falstaff's intelligent wit, and
compare it to the stupid and limited character
of Fluellen, is to see what Henry V has lost.

The savage attitude of MacMorris to war is far more realistic than Fluellen's insistence that there is a right and proper way to slaughter men.

His blood-thirstiness exposes the reality beneath Henry's war rhetoric, and his continuous invocation of God's name in oaths parodies the King's constant invocation of God's name in claims that his war is righteous:

"I would have blowed up the town, so Christ
save me, la! in an hour. (III.ii.95).

...and there is throats to be cut, and
works to be done; and there ish nothing done,
Christh save me, la! (III.ii.116-17).

...so Christh save me, I will cut off your
head. (136).

MacMorris is right of course when he retorts
to Fluellen:

"It is no time to discourse. (III.ii.108).
It is patently absurd to stop for a discussion on
military tactics in the middle of a battle; the
chaos and savagery of war makes nonsense of
Fluellen's assumption that war has 'ceremonies,'
'forms,' 'sobriety,' 'modesty' (IV.1.71-3): the
stark facts of the matter are that the French
slaughter the boys guarding the English army's
baggage, and Henry orders all prisoners killed
during Agincourt.

The comic element, then, qualifies Henry V's
rhetorical phrase, 'band of brothers.'

The English army is shown to consist of a variety of men and attitudes, ranging from the gullible, limited Fluellen, and the blood-thirsty MacMorris, to dissolutes such as Pistol. Henry of course cannot be blamed for the presence of such parasites as Nym and Pistol; the fact that they are present to undercut heroic ideal, however, is an ironic exposure of the true sordidness underlying Henry's plausible public announcements.

The culmination of all the ambiguity in the play occurs when Henry actually confronts two members of his 'band of brothers,' in disguise, and discovers what they think of his rhetoric. The Chorus opening Act IV gives the impression of the King spreading 'largess universal like the sun' among his soldiers; that impression is soon dispelled when Henry confronts Williams and Bates who do not seem at all inspired at the prospect of the approaching battle. In the first place, Bates simply does not believe in the public persona that Henry V has built up for himself:

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

(IV.1.115-119).

The desire to escape from danger is Falstaffian, and Bates includes Henry in the ranks of all common men whose main desire is for self-preservation. Henry assures him that the King does enjoy his present danger, to which Bates replies:

Then I would he were here alone; so should he be sure to be ransomed, and a many poor men's lives saved. (123-125).

Henry refuses to believe this is sincere, 'you speak this to feel other men's minds' (127), and makes his usual assertion that the King's cause is 'just and his quarrel honourable.' These common political catch-phrases 'justice' and 'honour', are always ambiguous in the History plays, and Williams' retort:

That's more than we know (130) renders them even more ambivalent. On one level, such a remark could be simply taken as an admission that complex political issues are not the concern of the ordinary soldier; however, neither the King nor the audience can avoid the suggestion that the question of his moral right to invade France is being raised. Bates argues for acceptance of the situation:

Ay, or more than we should seek after; for we know enough if we know we are the King's subjects. (132-4).

Williams insists on carrying the critique further, however;

But if the cause be not good, the king himself hath a heavy reckoning to make; (135)

The implicit suggestion is that Henry's war, stripped of attempts to justify it by the Salic law and political oratory, is a dynastic war of aggression undertaken in the interests of political and economic expediency; To refute this accusation would be impossible for Henry. As Williams continues, however, he shifts the emphasis from the King's responsibility for the war, to the King's responsibility for the sin of individual soldiers who die ^{un}slain in battle; this Henry can easily and eloquently refute, for no man can be held responsible for another's spiritual state. He takes advantage of the shift of emphasis to evade the main issue completely. Henry's assumption that he shares the bond of brotherhood with his common soldiers is strained to breaking point;

I think the king is but a man, as I am; the violet smells to him as it doth to me; all his senses have but human conditions. His ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man; (IV.i.103-107).

His disguise makes Henry's statement ambiguous; the speaker is the King under his heavy coat, far removed from ordinary men like Williams and Bates;

he appears to be a common soldier, but in reality is much more. In the same speech, Henry talks about having to assume a facade to hide his fear, 'lest he, by showing it, should dishearten his army;' (113-14). Wherever one looks in the scene, equivocal suggestions abound; even as a King, Henry is admitting the assumption of a pose. Henry claims invested authority in his very title, which sets him apart from his subjects to govern and command; whether he asserts that he is a common soldier at one with his men, or a King at one with his men, the claim entails ambiguity. The very fact that Henry has had to assume a disguise in order that his men might speak to him without reserve, is an indication of the anomaly that arises from his title.

In addition to learning how cynically the common soldier regards the practice of ~~ransoming~~ noble prisoners, the King also discovers that his men believe him to be human in a far more depreciatory sense than his public persona would admit. Williams scorns to believe the King's assertion that he will not be ransomed:

Ay, he said so, to make us fight cheerfully;
but when our throats are cut, he may be ransomed,
and we ne'er the wiser. (197-99).

When Henry attempts to deny this, he triggers off an outburst of jeering contempt from Williams, who sees a yawning gulf existing between King and commoner:

You pay him, then! That's a perilous shot out of an elder-gun, that a poor and a private displeasure can do against a monarch! You may as well go about to turn the sun to ice with fanning in his face with a peacock's feather.

(202-6).

To discover that an ordinary soldier regards with such scepticism the pose of heroic idealism Henry has projected of himself, leaves him badly shaken. In the soliloquy which follows he shows himself doubtful for the first time of the nature of his royal identity. However, even this soliloquy evinces more self-pity than any attempt to come to grips with the serious moral issues Williams has raised:

O hard condition,
Twin-born with greatness, subject to the breath
Of every fool..... (238-40).

Complaining about the great responsibility a King must bear, Henry claims that:

Not all these, laid in bed majestical,
Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave,
Who, with a body filled, and vacant mind,
Gets him to rest, crammed with distressful
bread;

(272-5).

The characteristic ambiguity of expression is present; the meaning Henry wants to convey is contradicted by the words he uses: 'the wretched slave' who is 'crammed with distressful bread' hardly gives the impression of men poor but care-free, and so much better off than the King. There is irony as well in the way Henry ends the soliloquy, bearing in mind that the battle of Agincourt is to commence at dawn:

.....in gross brain little wots
 What watch the king keeps to maintain the peace,
 Whose hours the peasant best advantages.

(287-9).

There has been little evidence to suggest that Henry keeps watch 'to maintain the peace.' Although he has distinguished the sham benefits of 'thou idol Ceremony,' the King fails to penetrate the ambiguities of his own rhetoric and political morality; physical disguise has enabled him to discover the scepticism of the common soldier towards the whole business of war, but it has not enabled him to penetrate the guise of his own public persona. James Winny comments:

It seems a mis-reading of Shakespeare's intentions to suppose that the King's argument with Bates and Williams, and the destructive analysis of ceremony that follows, were meant to supplement the source-material of the chronicles. This scene appears to have forced itself upon the play, insisting on a hearing without respect to the spirit and purpose of its dramatic context...Where Shakespeare becomes imaginatively engaged in the situations of Henry V, the ideas he develops are irreconcilable with the sense of lofty exaltation and splendid achievement that the Chorus asks the audience to expect of the play.¹

While agreeing with Winny that this scene strikes a discordant note in the general atmosphere of what the Chorus would have us expect

1- James Winny, 'The Player King': a Theme of Shakespeare's Histories, Ch.4, p.196. (London, 1968)

from the play, it has by no means forced itself onto the play. In fact, this is the culmination of a strain of irony and ambivalence surrounding the King's words and actions, that has been present from the beginning. Even the Chorus, before Act IV, by building up the impression of the efficacy of 'A little touch of Harry in the night' has contributed to this strain of irony.

In Act IV, Scene VIII, when Henry reveals his true identity to Williams, the ambivalence is again obvious. Williams defends his behaviour by replying:

Your Majesty came not like yourself: you appeared to me but as a common man; witness the night, your garments, your lowliness. And what your Highness suffered under that shape, I beseech you take it for your own fault, and not mine; for had you been as I took you for, I made no offence. (IV.viii.50-56).

Henry V is so removed from the spirit of common men to whom death is the reality and fine sounding causes merely dubious rhetoric, that only in disguise can he hear the truth of their opinion. Had Henry appeared with the trappings of 'ceremony' upon him, Williams would have behaved very differently; what the King does not realise in his soliloquy is that 'Ceremony' distorts perception as much as it conveys responsibility; it acts as a kind of disguiser of truth. There is a certain similarity between the astute realism of Williams, and that of Falstaff, and Henry V treats them in similar fashion as well; he pays off

Williams, just as he pensioned off Falstaff:

Here, uncle Exeter, fill this glove with
crowns,
And give it to this fellow.

(IV.viii.58-9).

Thus he attempts to dismiss the ironic insight from his own consciousness; Shakespeare the dramatist takes care to keep that level of irony consistently high throughout the play, however.

The battle of Agincourt, considered to be one of the greatest victories in English history by the Elizabethans, is presented by Shakespeare in four scenes which do much more to expose the savagery and sordidness of the struggle, than celebrate its chivalry. In Act IV, Scene V, and vi, the French and English nobility are seen to die in a chivalry of immense courage:

Constable: Let us on heaps go offer up our
lives.

(IV.v.19)

Exeter: Suffolk first died; and York, all
haggled over,
Comes to him, where in gore he
lay ^{in steeped,}
And takes him by the beard,
kisses the gashes
That bloodily did yawn upon his
face;

(IV.vi.10-13).

However, these scenes are qualified by the parody of ransoming prisoners in the exchange between Pistol and M. le Fer, and in the disclosures that prisoners are killed and innocent boys slaughtered, during the battle.

Stiffen the sinews, conjure up the blood,
Disguise fair nature with hard-favoured
rage;

(III.i.6-8).

Henry's reply to this superb declaration is what
one would expect of him:

If, Duke of Burgundy, you would the peace.....
...you must buy that peace
With full accord to all our just demands;

(V.ii.68-70).

Henry has always shifted the responsibility for his
own aggression onto other people, the Archbishop,
the Dauphin, the citizens of Harfleur; he does the
same with the responsibility for peace, which
can only be 'bought' from him for a price. Pistol
put it in cruder, but more realistic terms to
Male Fer:

As I suck blood, I will some mercy show!

(IV.iv.66).

James Winny's observation on this portrayal
of battle is that Shakespeare gives more prominence
to Pistol's service as 'brave, vaillant et très
distinguée seigneur' than to the King's active
personal contribution to victory. It is curious,
he continues, that a most glorious victory in
English history should be represented by the efforts
of an illiterate braggart to extort ransom from a
spineless coward, and a contradiction of what
Chorus promised before Act I:

Or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?

(12-14).

The manner of portraying Agincourt is in fact, not so curious; the whole play has been full of ironies and it is fitting that the climax of Henry's activities in France should be seen in all the ambivalence which surrounds the rest of his behaviour. The Chorus also carries this ironic undertone; it does not promise to present an impressive and exciting Agincourt, rather, asks whether it is possible to do so, and apologises for the fact that the play cannot reach the heights its subject matter deserves:

But pardon, gentles all,
The flat unraised spirits that hath dared
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object.

Prologue(8-11).

Shakespeare in effect covers himself from any criticism that may see his presentation of Agincourt as irreverent, by blaming the physical limitations of the theatre for failing to achieve the desired effect. In fact, what Agincourt shows, and the Duke of Burgundy's speech confirms, is the true sordidness of war.

Dr. Johnson said of Henry's courtship of Katherine:

I know not why Shakespeare now gives the king nearly such a character as he made him formerly ridicule in Percy.

Indeed, Henry assumes the persona of the bluff hearty soldier, just as easily as he assumes other persona to achieve his ends.

¹ Quoted from E.M.W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 132. (London, 1944).

Nothing could be more uncharacteristic of the Henry V we have seen up to now, detached and coolly designing, than this exhibition of a simple man who professes to know only the arts of battle. The most sophisticated rhetoric has poured out of the King before this in confrontation with the Dauphin's ambassadors, against the rebels, before Harfleur, in exhortations to his troops to be patriotic; that may have been all war rhetoric, but it evinced a command of words which could easily be turned to the subtleties of courting a refined and delicate French princess. By now, however, Henry has become an expert in assuming personas, and with the character of Hotspur he can ride roughshod over Katherine's delicacy and claim his rights over her with a minimum of fuss.

There is superb irony in Henry offering Katherine 'a good heart' (V.ii.167); echoes of Falstaff's heart, 'fracted and corroborate' (II.i.124) by the King, arise from the past. To claim that he is a man of simple and undeviating character is so obviously part of the guise Henry has for the moment assumed. When the King refers to the Princess as:

....our capital demand, comprised
Within the fore-rank of our articles,

(V.ii.96-7).

the real issue is revealed.

Katherine is to the King part of the spoils of war, part of the price he demands from Burgundy, and the terms of rough affection in which he addresses her are designed to make sure the prize acquiesces quickly.

The French nobles understand the real issue as is evident in their lewd jokes, when Katherine at hand, ^{as is evident in their lewd jokes, when} Katherine is referred to as a maiden city under siege by Henry:

Yes, my lord, you see them perspectively,
the cities turned into a maid; for they are
all girdled with maiden walls that war hath
never ent'red.

(V.ii.333-5).

The metaphor makes the point that acquisition of war spoils and the wooing of the Princess are closely identified.

L.C. Knights, writing in his [] essay
'Shakespeare's Politics,' comments:

'Shakespeare's political realism is based on a clear perception of the actualities of political situations. . . He refuses to allow the abstract and general to obscure the personal and specific. After the earliest plays on English history, Shakespeare's political plays are not shaped by a predetermined pattern of ideas: they are the result of full exposure to experience. . . They insist on setting every 'political' action in its widest possible human context and so . . . assessing it in relation to that context. . . Shakespeare's attitude towards Henry V is complex and critical.

The rhetoric of war, full of grand, vague generalisations, has been put into a human context by the critique of comic parody constantly operating against it. W.B. Yeats called Henry V a 'ripened Fort¹bras,' and an impression of futile aggression is conveyed by the play. The open criticism of the King voiced by Williams and Bates is simply the culmination of the implicit ironies that have existed throughout the play. By pointing to Henry's expert dissembling, his projection of various personas to achieve an end, Shakespeare has exposed the reality behind the King's political ambitions which masquerade under the catch-phrases 'just' and 'honourable.' Disguise and the ambivalence and ambiguity which it involves has been essential in evaluating the political concerns of this history play.

1. Essays and Introductions by W.B. Yeats, quoted from the essay 'Ideas of Good and Evil.' p. 108 (London, 1961).

The term 'problem-play' was first devised by F.S. Boas in his book 'Shakespeare and his Predecessors' (1896), and it is a term used by most critics to describe Measure for Measure. Boas included in this definition three other plays, Troilus and Cressida, All's Well That Ends Well, and Hamlet; he considered that all were concerned with sophisticated, 'artificial' societies, corrupt in the extreme, in which 'abnormal' conditions of mind and feeling are expected, and 'intricate cases of conscience' demand 'unprecedented methods' of solution:

Dramas so singular in theme and temper cannot be strictly called comedies or tragedies. We may therefore borrow a convenient phrase from the theatre of today and class them together as Shakespeare's problem-plays.¹

That Measure for Measure is an enigmatic and complex play is obvious from the amount of critical debate that it has engendered. Any attempt at broad definition, such as Boas makes, is bound to be inadequate; however, there is a certain atmosphere of unresolved paradox about the play that makes any interpretation of it necessarily complex. Disguise and dissimulation figure prominently in the action; A.P. Rossiter rightly claims that one of the main issues in Measure for Measure is about seeming justice in conflict with the rank reality of sex:

1. op. cit. p.345.

about honour in the guise of 'the demi-god Authority.' We are invited to 'see/If power change purpose, what our seemers be' (1.iii.53).

With the Duke, we explore a demoralized world in which, as elsewhere in Shakespeare,¹ rampant sexuality means disorder and chaos.

The Duke's disguise as a Friar, and Angelo's dissembling, are both essential to an investigation of the central dilemma of justice versus mercy in the play. Disguise also leads Angelo to speculate about the nature of his identity, and the Duke through Lucio learns some surprising facts about himself. There is also in the manipulation of characters by Vincentio the kind of dramatic analogy evident in Oberon's activities in A Midsummer Night's Dream, and Prospero's organising in The Tempest. The first part of Measure for Measure has all the potential of a tragedy; Claudio, Isabella and Angelo decide on profoundly different courses of action which seem bound to cause harm to each other: it is the Duke who in the second half of the play steps in to turn potential tragedy into comic resolution, thereby providing a commentary on the creative powers of the dramatist himself, who can similarly turn his play into tragedy or comedy.

That Measure for Measure is a play very much concerned with seeming and being is evident in

1 Angel with Horns, ch.6, pp.120-121. (London, 1961).

the imagery of dissimulation applied to Angelo. Isabella accuses him of 'seeming, seeming!' (II.iv.150) when he first suggests how she can free Claudio; she calls him 'this outward-sainted deputy' (III.i.92):

His filth within being cast, he would
appear
A pond as deep as hell.

(III.i.96-7).

O, tis the cunning livery of hell,
The damned'st body to invest and cover
In precious guards.

(III.i.99-101).

As the pun on his name suggests, Angelo is angel outwardly, and devil within; he is a false coin, not worth the value he outwardly displays. The Duke, condemning his deputy's treatment of Mariana, calls him this 'well-seeming Angelo' (III.i.224) and sustains the tone of Isabella's description:

O what may man within him hide,
Though angel on the outward side?

(III.ii.259-60).

Isabella in the last act demands that the Duke:

Unfold the evil which is here wrapped up
In countenance.

(V.i.118-19).

Everything said about Angelo points to the fact that he has assumed a mask to cover his own weakness. The most interesting feature of his character is that he is well aware of this, as his first soliloquy indicates:

Can it be
 That modesty may more betray our sense
 Than woman's lightness? Having waste ground
 enough,
 Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary
 And pitch our evils there? O fie, fie, fie!
 What dost thou? Or what art thou, Angelo?

(II.ii.168-173).

Angelo is struck by the paradox of being tempted into evil by the virtuous; his own dissembling brings him to confront the corruption of his own actions, and to question his own identity. The intensity of his soul searching makes of him here a figure not unlike King Lear, who is also brought to a realisation of false appearances, and to a tortured self-awareness. In his next soliloquy, Angelo again reveals the sort of insight into a world of deceiving appearances, that Lear shares:

O place, O form,
 How often dost thou with thy case, thy
 habit,
 Wrench awe from fools, and tie the wiser
 souls
 To thy false seeming! Blood, thou art
 blood;
 Let's write "good Angel" on the devil's
 horn,
 'Tis not the devil's crest -

(II.iv.12-17).

Under the 'robes and furr'd gowns' which 'hide all,' 'blood' is 'blood' or lust is lust. Angelo meets Isabella's threat to expose him by calling up his public persona, his reputation, 'my unsoiled name, th'austereness of my life' (II.iv.156), which is also a mask concealing his shabby treatment of Mariana.

This atmosphere of what Honor Matthews calls 'false-seeming'¹ in the play is initiated by the Duke's ostensible withdrawal from public affairs which

...leaves unquestioned
Matters of needful value.

(I.i.55-6).

He can thereby test Angelo by observing how he copes with the sexual corruption rampant in Vienna. While it is obvious that Angelo fails the test, and reveals himself to be as corruptible as the rest of the populace, the Duke's disguise also reveals him to be a weak and inadequate ruler. In his first speech he acknowledges that Escalus is more competent at a duty which, by rights, should have been his own:

your own science
Exceeds, in that, the lists of all advice
My strength can give you.

(I.i.5-7).

And although the Duke in conversation with Friar Thomas, gives as his reason for withdrawal that he wishes to test Angelo (I.iii.) there are indications in his opening speech that he is caught in a confusion of identities, and thus withdraws in an effort to seek greater self-assurance for himself.

1. Character and Symbol in Shakespeare's Plays,
Ch.IV. p.123. (Cambridge, 1962).

He refers to himself using both the personal and collective pronouns, which signifies that he cannot sufficiently distinguish between his role as a private individual, and his duty as a ruler responsible for a city. It is a stylistic device which Shakespeare is to use again in Lear's abdication scene, where it is obvious that the retiring monarch cannot quite give up the status of Kingship and revert to being an ordinary individual. Vincentio's confusion is evident: 'would seem in me t' affect speech' (I.i.4); 'since I am put to know' (5); 'my strength can give you' (7); 'there is our commission' (13); 'what figure of us think you he will bear' (16); 'elected him our absence to supply' (18). The Duke withdraws into another identity in an attempt to come to terms with the dilemmas that beset him in his public role as ruler of licentious citizens; in the event he does not succeed in resolving the social problems of Vienna, or in satisfactorily fulfilling himself as a private individual.

The question of why Shakespeare gave the Duke the disguise of a Friar is raised by Ernest Schanzer. One explanation is that, once having decided on the bed-trick, Shakespeare needed someone who would have access to the prison to overhear the scene between brother and

sister, and have sufficient moral authority to persuade Isabella and Mariana to accept the scheme; the most obvious disguise in the circumstances was that of a Friar. Schanzer rejects this in favour of the Friar's disguise being chosen rather for the way it fits in with the question of how a just and virtuous ruler conducts himself; as a Friar, the Duke can carry out counter-intrigue by spying on his subjects, and provide the exemplum of the conduct of a good ruler. Schanzer asserts that the suggestion for the Friar's disguise came from Whetstone's 'novella,' and that the device of the bed-trick only occurred to ^{Shakespeare} later.¹

While Shakespeare may well have had in mind the exemplum of the conduct of a good ruler when choosing the disguise of Friar for the Duke, this does not prevent him from showing up the inadequacies of Vincentio both as an individual and as a ruler. W.W. Lawrence sees little significance in the disguise; Shakespeare was:

merely repeating a device which he had already used more than once, whereby an ecclesiastic straightens out the complications of a difficult situation, and by his spiritual authority gives confidence and sanction to the execution of a ruse.²

1. The Problem Plays of Shakespeare, Ch. 2, pp.127-128. (London, 1963).
2. Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, Ch. 3, pp.92-3, (2nd ed. publ. London, 1960).

The issue is more important than that, however. Shakespeare altered the plot from the sources especially by giving prominence to the Duke. His disguise supplies point and reason for his sudden withdrawal from power; he can, under the guise, fulfil his desire to observe his people and how Angelo copes with them. He can act not only as 'deus ex machina,' but also as a kind of Chorus morally evaluating the action; and his sanction gives some authority in the eyes of the audience to dubious stratagems and deceptions employed to expose Angelo. To argue like Lawrence that the Duke's actions:

are mainly determined by theatrical exigencies and effectiveness; he is, as it were, a stage Duke, not a real person,

is to miss out on the real complexity which surrounds Vincentio's character raising anomalies and perplexing moral issues. The other extreme from regarding the Duke merely as a piece of theatrical machinery, is to see in the pun on his title, in the religious nature of his disguise, and in his bias towards mercy and forgiveness, a Christian allegory.²

E.M.W. Tillyard is surely right in objecting to all the allegorical interpretations of the play.

1 *ibid.* p. 72

2 See especially G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, (London, 1930), essay entitled 'Measure for Measure and the Gospels'; and R.W. Chambers' British Academy paper 'The Jacobean Shakespeare and Measure for Measure' (1937), reprinted in Man's Unconquerable Mind, (1939).

Whether the Duke is Providence (as Wilson Knight and R.W. Chambers assert); Rightful Authority conducting 'a controlled experiment' in moral education (F.R. Leavis, essay on Measure for Measure in The Common Pursuit p.160); or a secular analogy of the Incarnation (Roy Battenhouse in P.M.L.A. 1946, pp.1029-59); Dr. Tillyard's objection remains:

The simple and ineluctable fact is, that the tone in the first half....is frankly, acutely, human, and quite hostile to the tone of allegory or symbol. And, however much the tone changes in the second half, nothing in the world can make an allegorical interpretation poetically valid throughout.¹

Elizabeth Pope also raises a valid objection to those who claim that the Duke is a quasi-allegorical figure representing Providence:

Any Renaissance audience would have taken it for granted that the Duke did indeed 'stand' for God, but only as any good ruler 'stood for' Him; and if he behaved 'like power divine,' it was because that was the way a good ruler was expected to conduct himself.²

1. Shakespeare's Problem Plays, p.123 (London, 1950).

2. "The Renaissance Background of Measure for Measure," Shakespeare Survey, Vol.II, 1949, p.71.

Ernest Schanzer rightly states that the Duke is 'too complex to see as an embodiment of an abstraction of Divine Grace.'¹ Indeed, if he is Divine Grace, it is difficult to explain his inadequacies as a ruler, and his negative and very pessimistic view of life emerging in the 'Be absolute for death' speech. Wilson Knight acknowledges this latter difficulty; other 'Christian' commentators evade or ignore it.

The uncertainty in the Duke about his own identity which is evident from his first speech, argues for a character who is human and fallible, rather than representative of Divine Grace. He is essentially an enigmatic figure, exposed for many shortcomings within the course of the play. He has an assured image of himself which is seen to be erroneous; he tells Friar Thomas:

Believe not that the dribbling dart of love
Can pierce a complete bosom.

(I.iii.2-3).

The self-assurance that the expression 'a complete bosom' implies, is negated when he falls in love with Isabella, of course: Vincentio does not know himself as well as he thinks he does. In this scene with Friar Thomas, he unconsciously indicts himself as an inefficient ruler, by stressing the chaotic state into which Vienna has fallen:

¹ The Problem Plays of Shakespeare, ch.2, p.113

And liberty plucks justices by the nose;
The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart
Goes all decorum.

(I.iii.29-31).

The image is one of lax permissiveness that has
lead to disorder. The Duke admits that:

We have strict statutes and most biting laws,
The needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds,
Which for this fourteen years we have let slip,
Even like an o'ergrown lion in a cave,
That goes not out to prey.

(I.iii.19-23).

There is only a very slight admission of
culpability in '...for this fourteen years we have
let slip.' The imagery of this passage, 'strict
statutes,' 'most biting laws,' 'needful bits and
curbs,' 'like an o'ergrown lion...That goes not
out to prey,' conveys the fact that the Duke
has the legal machinery to rigidly, even
harshly, control his subjects if he so wishes.
Such evidence of possible harsh law enforce-
ment raises the dilemma of how strict justice
can be administered with mercy; the Duke is
aware of the tension between mercy and the law,
but for fourteen years he has evaded it, and
there is little evidence in the play that he
succeeds in resolving the problem. Liberty
opposed to justice, natural instincts opposed
to moral discipline, restraint opposed to
freedom, are the dilemmas Vincentio has allowed
to grow until he sees before him a threat of
legal and moral anarchy.

There is a pervasive atmosphere of spreading corruption in this play similar to the predominant atmosphere in Hamlet; depravity spreads through the whole population, involving innocent bystanders like Isabella in complicated plots to expose a villain. Vincentio's inactivity as a ruler has, to some extent, encouraged this state of affairs, and when he condemns Angelo in the last Act, using an image which most effectively conveys the spread of corruption, he must share part of the blame:

My business in this state
Made me a looker-on in Vienna,
Where I have seen corruption boil and
bubble
Till it o'errun the stew.

(V.1.315-18).

Friar Thomas mildly rebukes the very passivity of Vincentio, and argues that the task of reforming Vienna is more appropriate to his position than to a subordinate:

It rested in your grace
To unloose this tied-up justice when you pleased,
And it in you more dreadful would have seemed
Than in Lord Angelo.

(I.111.32-5).

Vincentio answers by claiming that Angelo can accomplish the task more effectively, simply because the population ¹⁵ used to a rule of lax permissiveness from their Duke; it is a very weak vindication of his inactivity.

There is every indication that Vincentio revels in the complexities of intrigue, particularly in Act V where he switches roles several times. Ernest Schanzer is right when he suggests that the Duke 'relishes the mystery-mongering.' Lucio's calling him 'the old fantastical duke of dark corners' (IV.iii.154) is not slander, but an accurate and vivid description of him. Schanzer cites the evident relish with which he behaves in the final scene, when as Duke he calls for himself as Friar, leaves the stage, returns as Friar and calls for himself as Duke, accuses his 'alter ego' of injustice and caps it all by declaring:

the Duke
Dare no more stretch this finger of mine
than he
Dare rack his own.

1.
(V.1.311-13)

Even Isabella is dubious ^{ever} ~~at~~ the Duke's involved method of revealing the truth, as she admits in conversation with Mariana:

To speak so indirectly I am loath.
I would say the truth, but to accuse him so,
That is your part. Yet I am advised to do it,
He says, to veil full purpose.

(IV.iv.1-4).

'Indirectly' and 'veil' are most appropriate words to describe Vincentio's behaviour.

1. The Problem Plays of Shakespeare, Ch.2, p.114.

One must not forget that he has already lied to Claudio about Angelo's intention in soliciting Isabella; and even about a serious issue like Claudio's death, the Duke lies:

Angelo had never the purpose to corrupt ^{her} ~~her~~; only he hath made an assay of her virtue to practise his judgement with the disposition of natures...Therefore prepare yourself to death.

(III.1.163-6).

When taking on a disguise, Vincentio committed himself to a pervasive ambiguity inherent in any assumption of false appearance. His tortuous methods are steeped in the confusion of this ambivalent atmosphere and hence become oblique and intricate; his character takes on the shadowy, enigmatic quality of a man who has become a dissembler in order to detect another dissembler; the anomalies of disguise all engulf the Duke to make him a strange and mysterious figure. He is no Divine Providence 'moving in mysterious ways his wonders to perform;' as his inept handling of human relationships in the last scene shows he is as much a victim of the confusion predominating in the play, as any other character.

Lucio continually draws attention to the enigmatic qualities of the Duke, exposing an identity which Vincentio refuses to own. Just as Isabella is Angelo's scourge, so Lucio is the Duke's;

I am a kind of burr, I shall stick,

(IV.iii.175).

Lucio asserts, and, indeed, deny him as he might, Vincentio cannot ignore the impact of his gossip. Lucio exactly pinpoints the ambiguity which surrounds the Duke once he has assumed the habit of a dissembler:

His goings-out were of an infinite
distance
From his true-meant design.

(I.iv.54-5).

It is, appropriately enough, Lucio who 'pulls off the Friar's hood, and discovers the Duke' in the last Act (V.i.353); this literal exposure of Vincentio is the climax of Lucio's probing, which has gone on throughout the play. The encounter between the two in Act III, Scene ii, is reminiscent of Henry V in disguise overhearing unsuspected truths from Williams and Bates, the content of which shake his self-assurance and reveal the hollowness of his public persona. Lucio calls the Duke's disappearance 'a mad fantastical trick' (III.ii.87), and his subsequent comments expand on this image:

The Duke yet would have dark deeds
darkly answered,

(III.ii.166)

...the old fantastical Duke of dark
corners,

(IV.iii.155).

This all emphasises the aura of mystery which surrounds the Duke's intricate activities; there is an element of the magician in his character. Lucio's more outrageous slanders on the Duke's reputation are a consequence of his abdication; rumour and gossip thrive in that situation, and, like lechery, are elements of human nature which cannot be legislated out of existence, as Vincentio realises:

What king so strong
Can tie the gall up in the slanderous
tongue?

(III.ii.177-8).

When Lucio contemptuously sums up the Duke as:

A very superficial, ignorant, unweighing
fellow,

(III.ii.132)

Vincentio springs to his own defence:

Let him be but testified in his own
bringings-forth, and he shall appear to the
envious a scholar, a statesman, and a soldier.

(III.ii.136-8).

The answer reveals an egotistic self-assurance which is not borne out by the facts; there is no evidence in the play that the Duke is 'a soldier,' and his claim to be 'a statesman' is ironic in the circumstances. This sounds like the kind of statement Vincentio earlier made to Friar Thomas, that 'love cannot pierce a complete bosom' (I.iii.2-3), which conveyed a superior opinion of his own character that betrayed his lack of self-knowledge. Like Henry V, Vincentio is disturbed by a cynical assessment of his qualities, and turns to Escalus for re-assurance; he is told that the Duke was:

One that, above all other strifes, contended especially to know himself.

(III.ii.222-3).

The words 'strifes' and 'contended' are significant: the Duke seems to think he has already achieved a large measure of self-knowledge, whereas Escalus presents the process as an ongoing battle, a struggle, not yet resolved successfully. It recalls the terms in which Isabella described Angelo, and which could very well apply to Vincentio as well:

...man, proud man,
Dressed in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured.

(II.ii.117-119).

The Duke's disguise fails as much to resolve his inner tensions as it does to provide him with solutions to the problems of Vienna.

There is much of Jacques (As You Like It) in Duke Vincentio; this emerges particularly in his admonition to Claudio to 'Be absolute for death' (III.1.5-41), a speech containing all the negative pessimism of Jacques' 'Seven Ages of Man' declamation, and which is largely ignored by the critics who equate the Duke with Divine Providence. Vincentio stresses the need to welcome death, as the business of living is unbearably grim; it is a curious attitude for a Friar to hold, lacking any Christian hope, responding to life and death in a passive and totally pessimistic manner;

Thy best of rest is sleep,
And that thou oft provok'st, yet grossly
fear'st
Thy death, which is no more.

(III.1.17-19).

To equate death to sleep is not usual orthodox Church opinion. The Duke also sees life in terms of sleep:

Thou hast nor youth nor age,
But as it were an after-dinner's sleep,
Dreaming on both.

(32-4).

Both life and death are imaged as states of suspended animation; life consists of no more than thwarted ambitions, discontent, pointless activities and frustration, a dream-like state that resolves itself into an equally dream-like state of death.

A.P. Rossiter comments on the speech:

'It cannot be the pseudo-Friar speaking Christian world-contempt: there is no redemption, no hint of immortality in the whole. The only certitudes are existence, uncertainty, disappointment, frustration, old age and death. It mentions values only as delusions. It determines an attitude of mind in which tragedy is quite impossible; in its sombre light all odds are gone....Everything exists; nothing has value. We are in the Jacobean equivalent of E.M. Forster's Marabar Caves, of "A Passage to India."¹

The supineness of the Duke's attitude, the passive acceptance of life and death as being negative, is thrown into relief by Claudio's speech in which he conveys most vividly the unknown, suspected horrors of death. The chilling detachment of Vincentio is shown up in its true colours when put beside Claudio's desperate desire to cling to life, in a speech that is reminiscent of the conclusion of Hamlet's soliloquy 'To be or not to be':

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where,
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice,
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world;....

1 Angel with Horns, Ch. 8, p.166.

The weariest and most loathed worldly life
 That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
 Can lay on nature is a paradise
 To what we fear of death.

(III.1.132-5).

The Duke lies to Isabella about Claudio's death
 in the same negative terms which he used in his
 speech:

That life is better life past, fearing
 death,
 Than that which lives to fear. Make it
 your comfort,
 So happy is your brother.

(V.1.394-6).

The Duke sees the only end of life to be that
 of death, and both states are valueless. Any
 mature contemplation of existence must accept
 death as an inevitable part of it; the Duke's
 emphasis on death, however, and the deep
 pessimism with which he views life, shows how
 partial and negative is his philosophy.

The other character in the play who shares,
 to an extent, the negative qualities of the
 Duke, is Isabella. Lucio explains to her the
 relationship between Claudio and Juliet in an
 image of natural fertility that is an analogy
 to consummated love:

As those that feed grow full, as blossoming
 time
 That from the seedness the bare fallow brings
 To teeming foison, even so her plenteous
 womb
 Expresseth his full tilth and husbandry.

(I.iv.41-4).

Isabella stands before Lucio as a nun who has just asked for stricter vows of chastity; in contrast to the mutually fulfilled Claudio and Juliet, Isabella's withdrawal into the religious life gives an impression of unnatural restraint. Initially in her interview with Angelo, she conducts a very restrained defence of her brother, almost giving up with the exclamation:

'O just, but severe law! (II.iii.42).

She has to be urged on by Lucio with a well chosen accusation, 'You are too cold' (46). One does not quarrel with her high ideals of chastity, which make her refuse to prostitute herself for a brother's life, but the way she reacts to Claudio's very understandable desire to live is priggish and unsympathetic:

O, fie, fie, fie!
Thy sin's not accidental, but a trade.
Mercy to thee would prove itself a bawd,
'Tis best thou diest quickly.

(III.i.152-5).

Similarly, her reaction to an account of Mariana's misfortunes is to offer a very negative kind of sympathy:

'What a merit were it in death to take
this poor maid from the world!'

(III.i.233-5).

A withdrawal from life is expressed as the solution to the problem in both cases.

It seems then, that Isabella and Duke Vincentio share certain basic characteristics, and, as such, are well-suited to be married at the end of the play. Although Isabella may share the Duke's life-denying qualities, however, she obviously wishes to remain a nun, and is silent after both proposals; Vincentio pays this no heed. All his actions in that last scene, in fact, must strike an audience as singularly inept. Angelo asks for punishment:

'Immediate sentence, then, and sequent
death
Is all the grace I beg.

(V.i.270-1).

'...I crave death more willingly than
mercy.
'Tis my deserving, and I do entreat it.

(V.i.473-4).

Instead, Angelo is commanded to marry the woman he deserted five years before. Even Lucio is instructed, against his will, to marry a whore. All the characters have had their power of choice and decision deprived by the Duke in a manner that suggests less an agent of Divine Providence than a rather incompetent dramatist. His insistence on these marital arrangements forces the resolution into avenues that may be satisfactory from a thematic point of view, but which are failures in a dramatic sense.

His obvious manipulation of characters throughout the play suggests a certain parallel with the activities of a dramatic artist; like Oberon in A Midsummer Night's Dream, and Prospero in The Tempest, Duke Vincentio enjoys special powers and is surrounded by a mysterious, magical aura.

Harold S. Wilson points to the similarities between Measure for Measure and The Tempest. Both Dukes control the action, but Prospero takes us into his confidence and explains his purpose as he goes along; Vincentio never explicitly states his purpose and we are left to deduce it from the course and outcome of the action. In The Tempest, Shakespeare uses essentially the same design but he alters his narrative method by making Prospero explain his purposes.¹ Wilson goes on to say that the same mingling of 'art' and 'artifice', to use Professor Stoll's distinction, is to be found in both plays. Measure for Measure is not a parable or an allegory, unless seen only in its symbolic aspect; it is an action, a drama, the Duke's mysterious and arbitrary conduct being like a fairy tale, and the effects of successful realism are mingled with the more obvious artifice of the Duke's role, in the same process² later repeated in The Tempest.

1. "Action and Symbol in Measure for Measure and The Tempest," Shakespeare Quarterly IV, 1953, p.375.

2. ibid. pp.380-1.

Furthermore, in each play the action is set going and guided by the Duke; the ruling conception of both plays is the virtue of forgiveness and the tempering of justice with mercy; in both dukes, there is a suggestion of 'earlier unworldliness and a consequent failure to anticipate evil or cope with it.' When each duke begins to act, his conduct seems to invoke supernatural aid and sanction: 'each duke is seen as the human agent who gives effect to the moral order of things as divinely authorised.' Both return to their Dukedom status at the end of the action. 'Prospero's method throughout The Tempest has been to deceive men for their own good; so with Duke Vincentio.' Whereas Vincentio solves the problem of how to judge with justice and mercy and influences people for good through disguise, Prospero achieves all this through magic. Both are also similar in the transitoriness they imply; and Wilson gives evidence of this in the theatricality of Vincentio's role, and his speech 'Be absolute for death' to Claudio, and to Prospero's words at the end of the marriage Masque and in the epilogue. He concludes that:

Measure for Measure is an important 'source' for The Tempest. The later play is a reworking of the theme of the former, employing

a different dramatic method and calculated for
a different dramatic effect.¹

It is useful to point out the dramatic parallels between the two plays, in order to stress that Vincentio, like Prospero, is in certain ways like a manipulating artist. One objects, however, to Wilson's assumption that Vincentio's conduct 'seems to invoke supernatural aid and sanction,' and 'gives effect to the moral order of things as divinely authorised.' It has already been shown earlier in this chapter that Vincentio's methods are tortuous and confused, and that, far from evincing any divine pattern, they testify to the fact that the Duke is lacking in self-knowledge and true understanding of the complexities involved; he does not influence people for good through his disguise, merely deprives them of their freedom of choice. Although Harold S. Wilson eschews the interpretation of the play as a parable or allegory, he errs on the side of Wilson Knight who argues that the Duke seems:

almost like the author himself telling us a story, speaking for the puppets and pulling the strings before our eyes, to show us how the mercy of the Sermon on the Mount transcends the limitations of human justice and fills human life with the radiance of love.²

1. ibid. pp.382-383.

2. G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire, p.79.

Wilson Knight here notes the theatricality of the Duke's role; he gives it the wrong bias, however, by saying that it evinces the grace of a Divine Providence. Critics who follow him, like Harold S. Wilson, interpret the spiritual references in the play as proof that the Duke is charged with heavenly power, that he moves in to protect men from themselves, that he converts evil intentions into good results and shields the weak and oppressed. That this spiritual dimension presents a benevolent controller in a Christian allegory is belied, however, by the inadequate character of the Duke, and by the unsatisfactory nature of his manipulation. This extra dimension of mystery and spiritual sanction that encompasses the Duke, is better understood as part of the deliberate attempt by Shakespeare to create an analogy between Vincentio's superior powers and the special powers that a dramatist exerts over his characters. Vincentio is much less like an all pervasive figure of spiritual authority, than a dramatist trying to deal with the random elements of complex experience manifested in his characters, and failing rather badly. When he imposes spiritual tests on his characters, as he does on Angelo, for instance:

Your scope is as mine own,
 So to enforce or qualify the laws
 As to your soul seems good.

(I.i.64-6).

Shakespeare is investing him with the kind of superior authority that Oberon and Prospero exert through their magical abilities.

Significantly, the Duke describes his withdrawal from Vienna in a theatrical metaphor:

'I'll privily away: I love the people,
 But do not like to stage me to their eyes;
 Though it do well, I do not relish well
 Their loud applause and aves vehement...

(I.i.67-70).

This is 'the old fantastical Duke of dark corners' retreating from the centre of the stage to direct affairs from the shadows of the background. The spiritual adoration of his subjects in 'aves vehement' stresses the extra dimension he possesses; translated into the terms of the dramatic metaphor, this invests him with the superior powers required by an artistic manipulator to direct the actions of his characters.

However, if the Duke is analogous to a dramatist, the analogy is to a failed dramatist, for his contrivances continually have to be modified, and the characters he tries to organise thwart his designs or silently resent them. Angelo hastens the time of Claudio's execution, causing Vincentio to change his plans.

Juliet defies his rebuke of her behaviour by replying:

I do repent me as it is an evil,
And take the shame with joy,

(II.iii.35)

and Barnardine refuses to submit to his execution:

I have been drinking hard all night and I will have more time to prepare me, or they shall beat out my brains with billets. I will not consent to die this day, that's certain.

(IV.iii.51-4).

And at the end of the play, Angelo, Isabella and Lucio are all obviously reluctant to obey the Duke's injunctions. Most critics agree that there is a difference in quality between the first half of the play, when we are imaginatively engaged in the dilemmas faced by Angelo, Isabella and Claudio, and the second half, where the consequences of their moral choices are negated by the Duke's manipulation. Harriett Hawkins (Likenesses of Truth in Elizabethan and Restoration Drama, ch.3 Oxford, 1972) and Philip Edwards (Shakespeare and the Confines of Art, ch.8 London, 1968), argue precisely this point, that Measure for Measure fails in the second half after a brilliant start, because Duke Vincentio takes the initiative of action, and the responsibility of choice, away from the leading characters:

We wish Shakespeare had allowed his characters to face the truths and consequences of the dilemmas and desires which once seemed their own dramatic business, not the Duke's.¹

These critics largely ignore the importance of Shakespeare's ~~portrayal~~^{portrayal} of the Duke as failed dramatic artist. Vincentio is confronted with legal and human dilemmas that are so complex as to be almost insoluble, and Shakespeare does not intend him to provide the solutions; however, his capacity for adequate response to the problems confronting him is being tested. In the forced resolution of Measure for Measure Vincentio's inept marital arrangements are an ironic reflection of the artist's own difficulties in interfering over much in the 'dramatic business' of characters at the end of a comedy. One has only to think of the mis-matches between Sebastian and Viola (Twelfth Night), Proteus and Julia (Two Gentlemen of Verona), Helena and Bertram (All's Well that Ends Well), and to remember the ending of Love's Labour's Lost, to know that Shakespeare was constantly aware of the absurdity of the comic resolution which requires an ending suggesting regeneration in the pairing off of couples, however inappropriate such union may be. There is no doubt that Measure for Measure is a complex play, and any attempt to be definitive about its interpretation would be misguided; it does seem, however, that Shakespeare is drawing attention to the Duke's excessive interference for a purpose.

Vincentio is like a bad dramatist who forces his characters into attitudes that are much too simplistic for their development. The real dramatist, Shakespeare, like the mock dramatist Vincentio, is confronted with complicated issues which demand some sort of response and organisation; the difference between the two is that Shakespeare is aware of the pitfalls to be encountered in trying to organise such random and intractable issues into an artistic form, whereas the Duke in his manipulations falls into the trap of thinking he has succeeded just by insisting on neat solutions which are totally inadequate for the situation. Vincentio feels that the complications of human relationships and legal dilemmas can be smoothed over by proper organisation, as the trite summing up of the events of the play in his last speech indicates:

Love her, Angelo.
I have confessed her and I know her
virtue.

(V.1.523-4).

Such an exhortation to Angelo reveals all the naivety and ignorance of human relations inherent in the Duke's attitude; in trying to settle their personal problems, Vincentio has totally reduced his characters and denied them any complex response of their own.

In dealing with the legal dilemmas confronting him, Vincentio also fails to make an adequate response; he is, in fact, like Angelo, in that he fails to make the necessary distinction between love and lust. He condemns Angelo, not for punishing the wrong person for the wrong 'crime', but because he was not morally irreproachable when he passed judgement:

He who the sword of heaven will bear
Should be as holy as severe;
Pattern in himself to know,
Grace to stand, and virtue go;
More nor less to others paying
Than by self-offences weighing.
Shame to him whose cruel striking
Kills for faults of his own liking.

(III.ii.249-256).

There are two clear issues at stake in Angelo's condemnation of Claudio: firstly, that it is obviously a futile way to deal with licentious sexual behaviour in Vienna, since the victim is not guilty of promiscuous behaviour; and secondly, that Angelo is being hypocritical. The Duke recognises only the latter fault; he is completely baffled by the riddle of how to apply proper justice to curb the permissiveness of Vienna's population. If his original mistake was to be too permissive a ruler, by the end of the play he has not rectified it, for he forgives everyone, and has come no nearer to finding out the best way to handle his populace.

Certainly Vincentio, by forgiving everyone, even the scourge of his own ego, Lucio, acts in a more humane way than Angelo, who rigidly adheres to the letter of the law; however, he mars that humane response by not leaving it at forgiveness, and insisting upon imposing his will on the personal lives of his characters. Again the artistic analogy is clear: the Duke is like a dramatist too busy forcing his characters into neat thematic patterns that are a dramatic failure, and refusing to tackle the dilemmas of a large social problem that arises from the circumstances of the play. The root of the problem of sexual permissiveness in Vienna is the tension between strict justice and mercy, which the Duke evades. He leaves to Angelo the power of deciding between 'Mortality and mercy in Vienna' (I.i.44), and his intervention in affairs does little to influence the wider issue of sexual corruption in Vienna. It is true that Angelo has been exposed as a hypocrite by the Duke's actions; however, he did at least make an attempt to exercise the law in Vienna, however misguided that attempt was, whereas Vincentio returns to rule in a city that he has allowed to deteriorate for fourteen years. There is no indication that he is more enlightened by the end of the play, and that he will be able to put an end to the ~~larger~~ corruption among his citizens.

Shakespeare, however, does realise the difficulties involved in the subject of the play; the title also brings to mind Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount, 'with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again,' and the dilemma of judging fellow human beings which that implies. Elizabeth Pope makes precisely this point; the warning of the Sermon on the Mount that each man will be judged as he judges presents a paradox which Renaissance commentators glided over and Shakespeare grappled with. Who is to return judgement for judgement, men who have been commanded not to judge, but to forgive, or God, who is described as merciful?

Measure for Measure then, in recalling the Sermon on the Mount, not only sets off Christian mercy against retaliation in kind but against the clemency that contents itself with taking into account the circumstances of the case as Renaissance political philosophers thought¹ right to do.

Escalus, who is the humane representative of the Duke's justice, seems to be the only character who is fully aware of the intricacies which human nature imposes on the necessary administration of justice.

1. "The Renaissance Background of Measure for Measure," Shakespeare Survey II. p.66 (Cambridge, 1949).

This is clear from his examination of the bawd; Pompey, when challenged, makes no attempt to deny his trade, simply denies the use of trying to suppress it:

Escalus: How would you live, Pompey? By being a bawd? What do you think of the trade, Pompey? Is it a lawful trade?

Pompey: If the law would allow it, sir.

Escalus: But the law will not allow it,

Pompey: nor it shall not be allowed in Vienna.

Pompey: Does your worship mean to geld and spay all the youth of the city?

(II.i.213-220).

Derek Traversi comments that the implications of this exchange are serious. To re-establish the law in Vienna is necessary. Failure to deal with the disease of which Pompey is a symptom involves the collapse of society under moral dissolution. But for Pompey and the great unconscious mass of humanity, the law is no more than a verbal caprice. The trade of bawd is 'unlawful' in Pompey's eyes, not because it degrades man's true dignity, but simply because the law in its mysteriousness 'will not allow it.'

To find for the law a necessary sanction in experience without depriving it of the firmness and impartiality upon which its maintenance depends, is the task which ultimately faces the Duke.¹ Pompey implies that as long as men need casual sex, the bawd provides a necessary function for the populace, and Lucio expresses the same attitude when talking to the Duke about lechery:

...it is impossible to extirp it quite,
friar, till eating and drinking be put down.

(III.ii.97).

The dilemma is really insoluble; all that Escalus can do is dismiss Pompey with a warning that he will be whipped next time he appears for the same offence, and Pompey leaves unrepentant:

The valiant heart's not whipped out of
his trade.

(II.i.243).

Lust is part of the human condition, and the strictest law code cannot contain it. Anne Righter argues that the whole bias of Measure for Measure denies rigidity, artificial judgement and simplification of what are shown to be the intractable, haphazard² phenomena of experience.

1. An Approach to Shakespeare, ch. IV p. 112
2. Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play, p. 178.

It is a play constantly emphasising the mystery of human motivation and action, in Isabella asking for stricter vows of chastity, in Barnardine insisting that there is a right time to die, in Angelo being tempted into lust by a virtuous nun, in the ambiguous figure of the disguised Duke himself. That living involves random and uncontrollable aspects is a message that Shakespeare imparts through his play, but which Vincentio seems unable to comprehend.

By the end of the play, there is no evidence that the Duke has learned anything, either about himself, or personal relationships, or how to improve the corruption in Vienna. Shakespeare raises an insoluble problem in the dilemma of justice versus mercy; no one expects the Duke to provide the solution, but the fact that he does not really ever tackle the dilemma is a significant reflection on his failure. Faced with a degenerate city, Vincentio foists the confrontation of its problems onto Angelo and deals only with the corruption of his case. His wholesale forgiveness of everybody at the end of the play does not really argue a superior Providential power answering Angelo's harsh law with mercy; rather, it raises the original problem of the Duke's lax rule which has led to the deterioration of Vienna.

The trouble is that his characters do not want the 'sweet end' he offers them, and that Isabella and Angelo have outgrown the kind of simplistic resolution he insists upon.

Shakespeare has used disguise most effectively in this enigmatic play, to expose the hypocrisy of deceit, to convey an impression of the Duke's character, and to suggest the difficulties of coping with complex human issues under the guise of art. The deception of appearances which we see in Angelo's behaviour and the crisis of identity which the Duke is forced into when he assumes his disguise, are the common themes that have occurred in other plays discussed in the thesis. The ^{dramatic} aspect of disguise suggested by Vincentio's manipulations finds parallels in A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Tempest.

Russell Fraser begins his introduction to the Signet Classic edition of King Lear with some comments that illuminate the overall development of the play:

In structure 'Lear' differs significantly from the other tragedies of Shakespeare. It is like them in this. It dramatises the fall of a hero who, assailed by the rebel passion, gives it sovereign sway and masterdom, and is in consequence destroyed. That is the case of Brutus, Othello and Macbeth.... But the resemblance is more ostensible than real. Ostensibly the play is one long denouement. In fact the declining action, which is the dogging of the hero to death, is complemented by a rising action, which is the hero's regeneration. Yeats' metaphor of the gyres is opposite. As the one wanes to nothing, the other, which lives within it, emerges. This emergent, or renaissant, action is a condition of the hero's loss of the world. The play fools us. Its primary story is not the descent of the King into Hell, but the ascent of the King as he climbs the Mountain of Purgatory and is fulfilled. The suspense the play develops is a function of the ascending action, which is not material but spiritual.

Battles and thrones are nugatory. What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?¹

Mr. Fraser points to the important difference between King Lear and the other tragedies, which is that Lear undergoes a profound experience of self-discovery, that leads to a level of spiritual growth which none of the other tragic heroes attain. If The Tempest is the culmination of Shakespeare's self-awareness of his own dramatic art, then King Lear is the definitive play dealing with the search for identity, and the consequences of mistaking appearance for reality. Lear begins the play as the embodiment of perverse self-will; surrounded by the flattery obsequiously given to him because of his position, he cannot distinguish the reality of his own character or the true motives of those surrounding him. He is an island unto himself, unable to penetrate the guise of self, or the falseness of others. By the end of the play, Lear has undergone a long and painful process in which successive layers of deception have been stripped away, both from his understanding of self and his perception of the world around him. Lear is supported during this stripping process by men in disguise; Kent, the Fool hiding his wit and wisdom under a motley, and Edgar.

1 op. cit. p.XXII (New York, 1963).

In a play where the most basic theme is the exposure of the truth underlying deceptive appearance, disguise permeates every level of the action.

Lear initiates the stripping process which determines the development of the play, in the first scene, by stating his intention to leave office and divest himself of the role of King:

'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our
age,

(I.1.40-1).

now we will divest us both
of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state.

(51-2).

With that decision, Lear begins to shed some of the most elaborate 'accommodations' that man keeps between himself and the natural world; that 'divesting' from office initiates a process whereby he will be thrust further and further into social and physical isolation. Northrop Frye comments that by his action, Lear deprives himself of his social context, exchanging the reality for the name of king:

Those who love Lear love him according to their bond, the tie of loyalty which is their own real life. Who is Lear to be loved apart from that? That is, what is the identity of a king who is no longer a king?¹

1. Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy,
Ch. 3, p.103 (Toronto, 1967).

The Fool, as always, realises the full consequences of Lear's abdication:

'I am better than thou art now: I am a
Fool, thou art nothing.' (I.iv.200).

'Nothing' is a word that reverberates throughout the play in different contexts; by his abdication, Lear has become 'nothing': he gives up the responsibility of governing a kingdom, while insisting on his rights to retain the crown, the retinue of knights, all the trappings and status of the position, in an attempt to keep the shadow while rejecting the substance. Like Duke Vincentio in Measure for Measure, Lear is caught between identities; when discussing the business of the kingdom, he uses the royal pronoun 'we'; when angry with Cordelia or Kent, however, the personal pronoun 'I' is used:

Cornwall and Albany,
With my two daughters' dowers digest the
third;
Let pride, which she calls plainness,
marry her.
I do invest you jointly with my power,....
Only we shall retain
The name, and all th' addition to a king.

(I.1.129-138).

Lear is confused as to the nature of his real identity, and precipitated into a quest for the truth about himself. As the play progresses, the tension between the 'I' of an individual, and the 'we' of a King, culminat@s in an

identification of Lear with the suffering of everyman.

Lear's abdication also leads to the upheaval of the political world upon which as king he has imposed a certain order. Northrop Frye again makes the point that the royalty of Lear held his society bound to greater nature symbolised by the stars in their courses, a world of order and reason that is specifically a world of human nature. With his abdication, we are confined to the lower physical nature of the elements, an amoral world where the strong prey on the weak.¹ The rejection of Cordelia by Lear in the trial of love to which he resorts as a consequence of his abdication, sets loose forces in Goneril and Regan that are bestial in their savagery. The violence that Lear does to his own nature in rejecting Cordelia, and the suffering he will have to undergo as a result, seem disproportionately harsh to be consequences of his initial decision. There is something obscure, almost elemental, about the forces unleashed by Lear's first miscalculation; that intense suffering which he has to undergo leads him to profound discoveries that make the play a definitive study in the search for identity and the deception of appearances.

1. ibid. p.104.

The surest indication of Lear's lack of understanding concerning emotional responses is evident in his insistence on a trial of love between his daughters. He believes that love can be assessed by words, and is taken in by the most plausible replies to his question;

'Which of you shall we say doth love
us most?'

(I.i.53).

Apportioning his kingdom according to the most suitable replies, Lear reduces love to a reward in a contest, defeating the whole purpose of his question. He cannot see that Goneril defuses her assertion;

'Sir, I love you more than word can
wield the matter;

(I.i.57).

by going on to explain at extravagant length the extent of her feeling. When Lear turns to Cordelia to offer her the best part of his kingdom in return for even more elaborate assurances of affection, her uncompromisingly honest answer is 'Nothing, my lord' (89). She refuses to join the word games which Lear's perverse demands have occasioned. At this stage, Lear is simply unable to grasp the falseness behind the flood of rhetoric emanating from Goneril and Regan; he cannot penetrate the deception of plausible speech.

Indeed, the King is unaware of the arbitrary meaning words can assume; he replies to Cordelia:

Nothing will come of nothing. Speak
again.

(92).

To his mind, words are a true indication of what the speaker feels; he prefers the flattery of Goneril and Regan to the genuine but practical reply of Cordelia:

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth. I love your Majesty
According to my bond, no more nor less.

(I.i.94-96).

Lear's inability to distinguish the discrepancies between word and deed, action and motive, between what seems and what is, makes it easy for Goneril and Regan to deceive him. The subsequent action of the play is designed to force the limitations within Lear into his own consciousness.

Lear is precipitated into a world of indifferent natural forces by the perversity of his own egotistical self-will. Edmund, Goneril and Regan are the representatives of the unrestrained selfishness of base appetites manifested in cruelty and lust; Goneril and Regan are often described in terms of beasts of prey, which emphasises their kinship to the predatory world of Nature. Their indifference to all claims but those of their own egotism, is made

explicit by Edmund, for whom man is simply part of the morally indifferent world of Nature, his business being to assert himself as cunningly as he can:

Thou, Nature, art my goddess, (I.ii.1)

All with me's meet that I can fashion
fit.

(I.ii.197).

Lear, in his rejection of Cordelia, reveals that he shares some of the characteristics of this attitude, as L.C. Knights points out: Lear's talk is of love and paternal care, but both his action in casting off Cordelia and his assumptions as they appear in moments of emotional stress, reveal a huge egotism:¹

Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee from this for ever. The barbarous
Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation messes
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighboured, pitied, and relieved,
As thou my sometime daughter.

(I.i.115-22).

The savagery of these terms conveys an inhumanity akin to the attitudes of Edmund, Goneril and Regan. Like Henry V, Lear uses words which nullify each other by their total contradictions: to speak of being 'well neighboured, pitied, and relieved' in the same breath as 'The barbarous Scythian....that makes his generation

1 Some Shakespearean Themes, ch.V, p.95 (London, 1959)

There is a basic paradox about the character of Lear: he relies for his sense of identity completely upon other people, and in the agony of his suffering and search for knowledge of self always turns outwards to those around him; even his curses and prayers are declamations addressed to other people. This makes of Lear in one sense, a very public character, whose spiritual development depends on the presence of Kent, the Fool, Poor Tom and finally, Cordelia; he is involved in a private crisis of agony which can ultimately only be partially resolved when he recognises the truth that these people put before him. Despite the intensely private nature of his crisis, Lear, unlike Hamlet, has no soliloquies; as a King used to long years of public rule, he seems unused to the introspection of private thought. Hamlet, in fact, gives away more of his essential nature through his soliloquies than Lear ever does in his declamations, which are always attended by other people; the old king retains more of the essential mystery of an individual whose motives, actions and suffering can never be fully understood. Those who surround Lear in his struggle towards self-awareness are therefore particularly significant in providing clues to his character, and in helping him to recognise the truth about himself and his situation.

It is significant as well that Kent, the Fool, and Poor Tom, the characters most closely involved in Lear's crisis, are all in disguise; Kent and Edgar are under physical disguise, and the Fool must hide his criticism under the licensed jokes which belong to the function of the man in motley, wit posing as foolishness. All three disguised characters are a comment on the extent to which Lear's perception is distorted, for he can only receive the truth that they offer him indirectly because it is disguised. The faithful Kent is banished for telling the truth; he warns Lear in the plainest terms of his folly in banishing Cordelia, being deceived by the flattery of Goneril and Regan, and giving up his kingly status: 'See better' (I.i.160), he urges Lear, advice which is violently rejected. It is a paradox stemming from Lear's initial rejection of the reality of his situation that the truth is subsequently only revealed to him through disguise. When Kent reappears after his banishment, Lear asks twice of him: 'What art thou?' (I.iv.9,19) it is a question asked of nearly everybody in the play, in an attempt to ascertain their real identity; Kent answers:

'I do profess to be no less than I seem,
to serve him truly that will put me in
trust,....' (I.iv.14-15)

'A very honest-hearted fellow,....

(20).

In a play full of contrasts, Kent is the exception to the norm established by Goneril, Regan and Edmund, who hide corruption beneath a fair exterior; he is the honest man whose master has rejected him for that very virtue, and who therefore has to return in a guise. That Kent has to resort to such measures emphasises the failure of Lear to penetrate the guise of corruption, ~~and~~ ^{and} the guise of his own ignorant self-will. Kent epitomises the faithful 'ideos' figure who gives up even his own identity to be near his master, in total contrast to the false servant figure of Oswald, who belongs to the unscrupulous world of his mistress.

Kent, however, recognises Lear's authority as well as his folly:

...you have that in your countenance
which I would fain call master.

(I.iv.28).

After his initial protest, Kent's function under disguise becomes largely to protect the King's reputation and defend his name. After his abdication, Lear's stature depends to some extent on the responses of those around him. The Audience is bound to reflect, for

example, that a King who could inspire the dogged devotion of a man like Kent must possess something else besides perverse self-will. Kent's presence checks any inclination to regard Lear as so foolish and wilful that his tragedy is inevitable; and his obstinate loyalty is a reminder of the possibilities of human nature for good, when the negative aspects of human nature in Edmund, Goneril and Regan threaten to predominate. For Kent, Lear is not only an embodiment of 'authority' (I.iv.32), he is 'thy master,...whom thou lovest,' (I.iv.6), 'Good King' (II.ii.160), and 'the old kind King' (III.i.28). He always addresses Lear as if he were still reigning, and fiercely defends his status in the face of the cruel disrespect of Oswald, Cornwall and Regan. Imprisoned in the stocks, punished once again, as he was by Lear, for plain speaking, Kent is the symbol of the lowest status that his master reaches in the public, political world. It is Kent at the end who understands the profound nature of Lear's suffering better than anyone else, and who makes the ultimate gesture of selfless devotion in wanting to join his dead master: from sacrificing his identity under a disguise to be with an erring master, Kent has moved to a desire to give up living to join his king.

This loyalty, and the fact that it has been present in disguise, points once again to Lear's potential in inspiring devotion, and to the tragedy of his inability to perceive the truth.

The Fool's *function* in Lear's suffering is intellectual, to aid the king as an instrument to self-discovery. The Fool emphasises the discrepancy between what Lear is and what he thinks he is; 'teach me' (I.iv.143) Lear asks, and that is what he proceeds to do under cover of the witticisms expected of a jester:

Lear: 'Dost thou call me fool, boy?'

Fool: 'All thy other titles thou hast
given away; that thou wast born
with.'

(I.iv.152-154).

Having pointed out the folly of Lear's action Kent comments on the Fool's remark:

'This is not altogether fool, my lord.'

(155)

And indeed, the fooling of the jester constantly points to the truth about Lear's nature and the cruel selfishness of Goneril and Regan. As with Kent, initially Lear cannot ^{accept} such truth, as the Fool realises:

Lear: 'Take heed, sirrah - the whip.'

Fool: 'Truth's a dog must to kennel;

he must be whipped out, when Lady the
Brach may stand by th' fire and stink.

(I.iv.114-116).

Such truth hurts Lear, as is evident in his reply referring to his Fool as 'A pestilent gall to me' (117). Every jest, every riddle and song emanating from the Fool contains a satirical reference to Lear's folly and to the amoral natures of Goneril and Regan. He has a limited time on stage, appearing first in Act I, Scene iv, after Lear has initiated his own tragedy, and not appearing again after Act III, Scene vi, when Lear retires after the storm to sleep. He is present only during the most intense peak of Lear's agony, and, as such, serves as a constant commentator on the folly that has led the king to his tragedy of suffering on the heath and in the hovel. The tragic intensity of such suffering cannot be long sustained, and the Fool's disappearance marks a transition into a new phase of self-awareness for Lear when he reminds us himself of his own folly. The Fool's last words:

'And I'll go to bed at noon.

(III.vi.84),

together with the Knight's words:

Since my young lady's going into France,
sir, the Fool hath much pined away. (I.iv.74-5)
and Lear's ambiguous statement:

"And my poor fool is hanged... (V.iii.307)
 which could as well refer to the Fool as
 Cordelia, point to his suicide as a result of
 Cordelia's banishment. The Fool has not only
 been a satirical commentator on Lear's folly,
 but has become a victim of it as well.

Lear's first reaction to the barely veiled
 disrespect of Goneril is to feel his status
 as Father and King being threatened:

"Are you our daughter? (I.iv.224).
 Goneril coldly advises him to "put away these
 dispositions which of late transport you from
 what you rightly are." (227-229). Lear is
 suddenly launched into a state where he does
 not know what he is:

Does any here know me? This is not Lear....
 Who is it that can tell me who I am?

(232-236).

Lear is painfully jolted by Goneril's unfamiliar
 response into new awareness concerning his
 own identity, and the nature of a daughter
 whom he had thought loving; a hitherto
 unsuspected world of deceptive ambivalence is
 revealed to him. With that new awareness,
 a sense of his own faults arises within Lear,
 which is the beginning of his achievement of
 greater spiritual maturity:

O most small fault,
How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show!
Which, like an engine, wrenched my frame
From the fixed place; drew from my heart
Of nature all love,
And added to the gall. O Lear, Lear, Lear!
Beat at this gate that let thy folly in
And thy dear judgement out.

(I.1v.273-9).

With that confession, Lear begins to see the horror of his imperception, which has led him to sever a familial bond in an action of the most unnatural kind. Yet Lear's progress towards enlightenment is slow and uneven, for even as he admits his sin against ^{human} nature in rejecting one daughter, he curses another in terms that identify him with the life-denying world of negative forces in the play:

Hear, Nature, hear; dear Goddess, hear:
Suspend thy purpose if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful.

(I.iv.283-5).

The curse against fertility, against the regeneration of life itself, is as futile and wasteful as Goneril's behaviour towards her father. When Lear leaves in a fury, he flings out as a defiant taunt to Goneril the warning:

Thou shalt find
That I'll resume the shape which thou dost think
I have cast off for ever.

(315-17).

The warning fore-shadows the growth in his political stature which will take place when France rallies round to avenge his indignities; it also indicates the growing self-awareness that will occur in Lear's madness; he will become much more of a King when he starts to think of the poor and needy among his people whom he has neglected. The kind of spiritual growth within Lear that Russell Fraser pointed out in his introductory remarks is achieved, but it is interspersed by bouts of bitterness, despair, and anger.

By the end of his encounter with Goneril, Lear is beginning to strive for self-control:

'O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet
 Heaven!
 Keep me in temper; I would not be mad!

(I.v.46-7).

Such confusion of mind has been caused because for the first time Lear is not receiving the familiar responses from those around him; he is being thrust into isolation by Goneril and Regan who refuse to reflect back the self-image of supreme importance Lear has been led to expect all his long reign. The bewilderment and new perspective of himself and his society that this raises in Lear, is a process that we have observed in all the previous plays discussed when characters suddenly find familiar responses to themselves denied by disguise. In Lear's case, his real self and the true nature of society is disguised from him, and the play shows a

gradual stripping away of this mistaken perception. The experience of bewilderment and chaos that beset Antipholus of Syracuse and his Dromio in A Comedy of Errors, or Viola and Sebastian in Twelfth Night, because society refused to recognise them as they saw themselves, was finally resolved in a comic ending. In the play which produces the definitive study of a man searching for his proper identity, jolted out of familiar assumptions about himself, the experience results in a crisis of agony and profound tragedy.

In his confrontation with Regan, Lear steadily has his alternatives of action denied; both daughters seek to reduce his status to 'nothing' to 'poor old man' (II.iv.271). He feels denied the very necessities that distinguish a man's life from that of beasts:

Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life is cheap as beast's. Thou art
 a lady:
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous
 wear'st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But, for
 true need,

(II.iv.265-9).

Lear has alienated himself from his kingdom, and he has been denied by his own family, and thrust from the company of other men: the world has denied him, so he retreats in Act III into a realm of natural forces, and into a state of mind which confronts man divested of the

Lear has become aware of a world of evil hidden under 'covert and convenient seeming,' and demands in vain that the corruption be revealed. This new vision that enables him to penetrate the deception of false appearance signifies his progress towards greater perception. However, he still identifies the culpability as existing outside himself, and does not admit that he must share the guilt of the 'wretch' or 'caitiff.' There is also at the end of this declamation a distancing of himself from the rest of humanity in self-pity: 'a man/More sinned against than sinning.' The audience would surely agree with his estimation of his own suffering; Lear, however, must go beyond the excesses of self-pity to acknowledge his own folly.

When he follows Kent's suggestion to enter the hovel, Lear begins to evince more than self-pity; he turns first to the Fool to ask about his discomfort, before commenting on his own:

'Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy?
Art cold?
I am cold myself.

(III.ii.69-70).

This simple act of kindness is uncharacteristic, and indicates to what an extent Lear's former responses are changing.

When ~~he~~ he is just before the hovel, Lear not only turns out of himself to the Fool again, 'In boy, go first' (III.iv.26), but identifies with humanity in his speech on 'houseless poverty':

Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed
sides,
Your looped and windowed raggedness,
defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have
ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic,
pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou ~~mayst~~ shake the superflux to
them,
And show the heavens more just.

(III.iv.28-36).

The speech conveys compassion for the victims of misfortune, and a sense of his own culpability in neglecting the welfare of the most helpless section of his kingdom.

L.C. Knights points out that as soon as Lear arrives on the heath he is forced to endure the physic of his vision of unaccommodated man; a vision which includes the suffering of the poor and the outcast, the indifference of Nature and all the disreputable impulses within man. From this point on the question put to Lear is how to cope with a world so revealed, stripped of his egotistical perception, and with the self so revealed.

It can be said that Lear does not cope at all, since from the entrance of Poor Tom, with whom he promptly identifies himself;

Didst thou give all to thy daughters?
And art thou come to this?

(III.iv.48-9).

He is mad. However, what this means is that, no longer subjected to the interference from the self hitherto offered to the world in the guise of Lear, he is free to express attitudes previously concealed from himself. In this region where honesty is compelled, mental and material guises alike being discarded, impulses issue forth freely.¹ In fact, Lear's madness is not a state of total unreason, but a balancing between reason and passion, and a means of discovery by which he learns to penetrate the guises which conceal the truth about himself and his circumstances.

Setting has a special significance in King Lear; the hovel represents, in Lear's phrase, 'the art of our necessities' (III.ii.70), mankind's essential need for shelter, however crude a form it might take, in order to escape the ravages of Nature as represented by the storm on the heath. The protection afforded by the hovel, the 'fire and food' to be found within, are attendant associations of social communion. Lear begged Kent 'Let me alone' (III.iv.4), to leave him out in the storm which he feels is

1. Some Shakespearean Themes, pp.104-5.

reflecting his suffering on a cosmic scale; Lear never escapes into that isolation which puts him beyond the reach of other people, however, and must continue to suffer in the hovel, through communication with Poor Tom. It is significant also that in this crudest of shelters Edgar, disguised as a man reduced to the lowliest status, is found hiding: the border between heath and hovel is a narrow one, as is that between Poor Tom and a wild beast, but the distinction is nevertheless firm. As the storm makes Lear realise the power of Nature to harm mankind, Poor Tom makes him discover man as unstripped, earth-bound creature, forlorn in an 'unaccommodating' world. Edgar's entrance as Poor Tom is part of the paradox of disguise in the play; dissimulation by Edgar jolts Lear into looking at men with a new vision, that sees beyond the deceptive layers of appearance to glimpse a part of their true natures:

And art thou come to this? (III.iv.49)

Is man no more than this....Thou art the thing itself. (III.iv.104-9).

Lear finds himself contemplating the nearest thing to naked, uncivilised man that he has ever seen, a beggar stripped of any of the inner or outer pretensions that help to create the great deception of appearance:

....unaccommodated man is no more but
such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art.

(109-10).

Edgar recounts the past history of 'the thing
itself' :

A servingman, proud in heart and mind....
One that slept in the contriving of lust, and
waked to do it....False of heart, light of
ear, bloody of hand; hog in smother, fox in
stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness,
lion in prey. (III.iv.85-95).

Such imagery of bestiality identifies him
with the world of Edmund, Goneril and Regan,
and their corrupt serving-man, Oswald. By
stressing the evil of his former life, the
corruption that flourished beneath a fine
façade, Poor Tom draws attention to the kind
of world by which Lear has been deceived. Lear
must see this man stripped of delusions about
himself, and physically manifested to reflect
the grossness of his former life, to have the
lesson of ambiguous appearance driven home to him.
It is ironic that when the King attempts to shake
off his own clothes, to remove the outward
vestiges of his distorting appearance and become
'the thing itself,' free of illusions, and
alienated from the rest of society, he has to
ask for help: 'Come, unbutton here' (111).

Free of illusions he may wish to be, but he can only endure his suffering in the presence of other people.

Poor Tom's talk is a continual reminder of life at its most exposed, stripped of all artefact:

'Poor Tom, that eats the swimming frog, the toad, the tadpole, the wall-newt and the water; that in the fury of his heart, when the foul fiend rages, eats cow-dung for sallets, swallows the old rat and the ditch-dog, drinks the green mantle of the standing pool; (131-6). This extremity of deprivation causes Lear to see mankind occupying a lowly place in the harsh, cold world of Nature. And the nature within is revealed as that of lust and cruelty; in the exchanges between Lear, Edgar, and the Fool, the recurring themes are lust and cruelty: they are the realities Lear discovers beneath appearances. In extending his perception

Lear feels that Poor Tom embodies wisdom; he calls him 'philosopher' (III.iv.159) and in the mock trial of his daughters creates him judge. Like the first trial of love with which he started his own tragedy, this also fails to achieve its purpose:

Arms, arms, sword, fire! Corruption in the
place!
False justicer, why hast thou let her'scape?

(III.vi.54-5).

Lear cannot hope to contain the cruelty of his daughters by treating it in this way. He withdraws from the attemptⁿ to sleep, the only escape from the intensity of his suffering which has involved ^{such} painful clarity of vision.

The next time Lear appears in Act IV, Scene vi, he enters 'fantastically dressed with wild flowers,' asserting his status:

No, they cannot touch me for coining; I am the King himself. (84).

The image is full of pathos; one remembers what Lear once was, and what he has become. At the same time, he is more of a King in his madness as he feels more compassion for needy subjects than he ever did in his sanity, and political forces are rallying to restore his status. The theme of his ravings constantly harks back to the cause of his suffering, deception by flattery:

'They flattered me like a dog. (IV.vi.97).

'Go to, they are not men o' their words: they told me I was everything; 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof. (105-7).

Lear also articulates the new vision received from the encounter with Poor Tom, which sees through appearance to find lust beneath:

Let copulation thrive;.....
To't, luxury, pell-mell! for I lack soldiers...
There's hell, there's darkness, there is the
sulphurous pit,
Burning, scalding, stench, consumption,
fie, fie, fie!
pah, pah! Give me an ounce of civet; good
apothecary, sweeten my imagination; there's
money for thee.

(IV.vi.116-133)

Lear's horror and disgust of sex is expressed again when he talks to Gloucester; both men encounter each other in attitudes of extreme suffering, and share the fault of having been deceived by plausible appearances and words. Gloucester's failure to perceive the truth is physically manifested by his blindness; Lear's conversation stresses the great sham of hypocrisy that envelops 'authority,' and the inability to see the corruption beneath the impressive appearance;

'Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!
Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thy
 own back;
Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind
For which thou whip'st her.....
Through tattered clothes small vices do
 appear;
Robes and furred gowns hid all.....
None does offend, none, I say, none; I'll
 able 'em...
 Get thee glasseyes,
And, like a scurvy politician, seem
To see the things thou dost not.

(IV. 4v. 160-74).

Indirectly, Lear refers to his own and Gloucester's mistake in 'seeming to see the things' that were non-existent, such as honesty in Goneril, Regan and Edmund, and failing to perceive the truth about their own situations. The final advice to Gloucester to endure his misfortunes is evidence of a change in Lear's own response to his suffering:

Thou must be patient; we came crying hither:
Thou know'st, the first time that we smell
the air
We waul and cry...
When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools.

(180-5).

Lear has striven for 'patience' to stave off his madness, failed to achieve it, become plunged into a state wherein he is forced to confront himself and the world shorn of distorting disguises, and through the agony of that confrontation, has emerged with a 'patience' profoundly more significant than the original use of the term implied. He sees the world as a 'stage of fools' upon which mankind assumes different guises and postures, and can expect only tragedy; it is a profoundly despairing vision that has emerged from Lear's own experience, and yet it is a vision that must be contemplated with fortitude. This time there is no attempt by Lear to evade the truth; the clarity of perception which his suffering has imparted, however painful, is accepted and endured.

Lear retired^s again from the intensity of his suffering, to sleep. He wakes to give articulation in a definitive image to the pain of the process he is being forced to undergo:

I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.

(IV.vii.46-8).

In facing Cordelia again, he reaches the culmination of self-discovery:

Pray, do not mock me:
I am a very foolish fond old man,

(IV.vii.59-60).

You must bear with me. Pray you now,
forget and forgive. I am old and
foolish.

(84-5).

The previous self-pity has gone; in its place is a simple declaration of his culpability and a desire for forgiveness. The narrow, imperious, intolerant Lear of Act I, Scene i, has been purged, and in his place stands a man who accepts the truth about being 'old and foolish' and needing forgiveness.

To accept his own culpability is a measure of spiritual maturity that reveals the extent of Lear's development; after his capture, he desires an escape into a mystical realm that is all of the spirit:

No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to
prison:
We two alone will sing like birds i'th'cage;
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel
And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live, down
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales,
and laugh
At gilded butterflies,.....
And take upon's the mystery of things,
As if we were God's spies...
Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The gods themselves throw incense. Have
I caught thee?
He that parts us shall bring a brand
from heaven,
And fire us hence like foxes.

(V.iii.8-23).

Lear seems to be talking about a mystic retreat from the world with words and phrases that have a metaphysical dimension: 'blessing,' 'forgiveness,' 'we'll pray,' 'take upon's the mystery of things,/As if we were God's spies,' 'sacrifices,' 'the gods themselves throw incense.' Lear's profound spiritual development can once again be deduced from this response: in the first scene of the play we were shown a man who took life at face value, who failed to see the discrepancies between word and meaning, appearance and reality; now we see a man who, through despair and suffering, has achieved an insight that is aware of 'the mystery of things,' the ultimate enigma that exists at the core of human activity and experience on earth. Lear desires to contemplate the immense complexities of life, the myriad obscurities and distortions that he now knows enfold the meaning of truth; his 'walled prison' becomes for him then, not a cell of confinement, but a place of liberation, of opportunities for spiritual activity and growth, in which the search for the essential meaning behind life's appearances is continuous.

This hope of spiritual serenity is shattered, however, by the death of Cordelia. Having achieved such a spiritual dimension through pain, Lear's last most tragic appearance holding the body of Cordelia, assumes cosmic proportions.

King Lear is Shakespeare's most profound tragedy, partly for this reason, that the hero dies without illusions about himself or the depths of his suffering, ^{in contrast to} ~~as~~ Othello ~~does~~, for example, ~~in~~ believing himself to have been 'an honourable murderer,' or Hamlet, believing he had accomplished his duty to his father. D.G. James makes the point that Macbeth and Othello are men of natural nobility destroyed by evil in themselves and destroying others; of Lear he says:

...the evil in him gives way to innocence. To call him the play's 'tragic hero' obscures the play to us; we can only properly see him as delivered from the entire worldly values of his long, earlier life, and entering, before his death, upon a new existence. We must say of him that he manifests no process of moral corruption, but a transfiguration, through the dissolution of his 'madness,' into a new life, and in this new life, blessing, forgiveness, and the deep mystery of things fill his mind.¹

Kent's epilogue is entirely appropriate:

He hates him
That would upon the rack of this tough world
Stretch him out longer.

(314-16)

The wonder of it ^{is} he hath endured so long.

(318).

'Endurance,' 'rack of this tough world,' 'bound upon a wheel of fire,' are the right images to convey

1. The Dream of Prospero, ch.1, p.18 (Oxford, 1967)

the intensity of Lear's long agony of self-discovery. What a price in suffering the old King has had to pay for his increased awareness of himself and the human condition.

Gloucester's experience parallels Lear's, although it is less profound and intense; he too is deceived by appearances, and through suffering learns to recognise Edmund's corruption, and the initial folly of believing in him. At the beginning of the play, Gloucester acknowledges the illegitimacy of Edmund in a light-hearted, crudely man-of-the-world manner (I.i.19-26); Edgar puts a morality bias on the existence of Edmund, making it a consequence of, and retribution for, Gloucester's sin of adultery:

The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes.

(V.iii.174-5).

However, the evidence of the play suggests less that Gloucester's initial folly was in having a bastard son, and more that, like Lear, he must pay the penalty of failing to recognise corruption. He relies completely on the evidence of the eyes; he says to Edmund who pretends to hide the false letter of Edgar's treachery:

The quality of nothing hath not such
need to hide itself. Let's see. Come, if
it be nothing, I shall not need spectacles.

(I.ii.34-6).

Gloucester insists on visual evidence of
Edgar's treachery; trusting his visual
interpretation of events, he makes the mistake of
seeing what is non-existent. This lack of
perception into the moral integrity of Edgar
is physically manifested in the physical
blindness forced upon Gloucester. Like Lear,
he is betrayed by his child, thrust into
isolation and has to suffer despair, in
which state he discovers more about himself and
his own circumstances. He acknowledges his
own culpability:

'I have no way and therefore want no eyes;
I stumbled when I saw.'

(IV.i.19-20).

and he can reply to Lear's assumption 'yet
you see how this world goes.' (IV.vi.150),

'I see it feelingly. (151).

Suffering has given him an extra dimension of
sensitivity, both to his own condition, and
to the inequalities of life: before his abortive
suicide on the 'cliff,' he addresses a prayer
to the gods:

Heavens, deal so still!
Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
That slaves your ordinance, that will not see

Because he does not feel, feel your pow'r
 quickly;
 So distribution should under excess,
 And each man have enough.

(IV.i.68-73).

The insight into the wretched condition of men is a pale reflection of Lear's realisation in his 'Poor, naked wretches' speech. Such parallel development emphasises the main themes of the play, the delusion of deception, and the consequent suffering which brings about greater self-awareness. However, Gloucester's despair lacks the grandeur and scope of Lear's suffering, and the King's final vision of 'the mystery of things.' Gloucester dies 'twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief' (V.iii.200), having the consolation of seeing an undisguised Edgar reveal himself; Lear dies in total despair holding the body of Cordelia. Every time Gloucester reaches the depths of despair, Edgar in some guise or other, is there to offer him comfort; Lear turns to others constantly in his suffering, but he is beyond the kind of consolation Gloucester can accept. Edgar provides his father with a vision of optimism that is constantly being undermined by the events of the play, and that is denied Lear.

Edgar's situation is similar to Lear's in the sense that he is alienated from society; he takes on a disguise, that strips him of identity, and status, so that he is reduced to

'nothing,' and Lear too is denied status and respect to become 'nothing'. Edgar, Lear and Gloucester are all on a solitary progress through unfamiliar and harsh experience, although the vision at the end of Lear's progress is more profound than that gained by the others. Edgar's most obvious motive for disguise is that of escape:

Whiles I may 'scape,
I will preserve myself; and am bethought
To take the basest and most poorest shape
That ever penury, in contempt of man,
Brought near to beast;

(II.111.5-9).

The form of disguise that he chooses has bearing on the main themes of the play. Bedlam beggars are men reduced to their lowest status, stripped of the 'superfluities' of rank and clothes which can obscure the real nature beneath; they are also victims of a society that has 'ta'en too little care of this'; and they signify a perversion of charity which is more pronounced in ^{the}unnatural responses of characters like Goneril, Regan and Edmund;

Strike in their numbed and mortified bare
arms
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of
rosemary;
And with this horrible object, from low farms,
Poor pelting villages, sheepcotes, and mills,
Sometimes with lunatic bans, sometime with
prayers,
Enforce their charity.

(II.111.15-20).

Northrop Frye suggests that Edgar's disguise poses the questions:

...what is left of a man when society eliminate his social and civilized context and think of him purely as an object in physical nature.¹ The answer given by satire is the Yahoo; the answer given by comedy is Caliban; and the answer given by tragedy is Poor Tom. Edgar's disguise forces Lear to contemplate this question, and therefore aids him in his discovery about self and the nature of mankind. The disguise is only a facade for Edgar, as his sympathy for Lear and his father threatens to reveal his real identity; in fact, Edgar's guise is more important as an aid to Lear's development than as an indication of his own spiritual status:

My tears begin to take his part ^{so} much
They mar my counterfeiting.

(III.vi.59-60).

In Act IV, Scene 1, Edgar mistakenly assumes that suffering can be measured, just as Lear assumed that love could be measured:

To be worst,
The lowest and most dejected thing of fortune,
Stands still in esperance, lives not in fear:
The lamentable change is from the best,
The worst returns to laughter.

(IV.i.2-6)

1 Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy.
ch. 3, p.106.

Immediately after this the blinded Gloucester enters, and Edgar is forced to modify his former assertion of despair:

'O Gods! Who is't can say 'I am at the
worst'?
I am worse than e'er I was.

(25-6).

From the entrance of his father, Edgar moves upwards from the guise of lowest, most desolate man, towards a reintegration with society. ^{Edgar} Even while leading his father to 'suicide', when he is ostensibly still supposed to be Poor Tom, Gloucester notices the difference:

'Methinks thy voice is altered, and thou
speak'st
In better phrase and matter than thou didst.'

(IV.vi.8-9).

Edgar denies the change in identity, but admits to a change in costume:

'Y'are much deceived: in nothing am I
changed
But in my garments.'

(10-11).

Certainly after the mock suicide, he ceases to be 'unaccommodated man,' and moves up a step to the status of rough but honest wayside wanderer, who takes it upon himself to act as a faithful guide to Gloucester. His disguise ceases to be solely a device by which he can escape notice, and becomes a means by which he attempts to evoke a positive response to suffering from his father:

in killing Oswald, Edgar is really destroying the shadow of his own previous disguise. The culmination of this service to his father, and the re-assertion of his own identity, comes in his combat with Edmund. He is unrecognised under full battle armour, and the Herald asks the characteristic question: "What are you?" (V.iii.120), to which Edgar replies, 'Know, my name is lost;' (123). Edmund can judge him by appearance only:

In wisdom I should ask thy name,
But since thy outside looks so fair
and warlike,

(144-5).

Only by vanquishing his original accuser, can Edgar purge the stigma surrounding his identity, and regain his 'name'. After the combat, he recounts his experience, from the time he was forced to escape:

[illegible]

(V.111.189-90)

to finding himself re-integrated with his father in the fellow-feeling of pity:

...became his guide,
Led him, begged for him, saved him from
despair;

(192-3).

Yet Edgar never understands the profound depths of suffering to which it is possible to fall, and which Lear experiences. He

In fact, when he does return, it is with the news that Lear and Cordelia have been captured. The final exhortation he makes to Lear: 'Look up, my lord' (V.iii.314), is a measure of how far he fails to understand the depth of Lear's suffering; it is left to Kent to sum up an agony of crisis that can have release only in death:

Vex not his ghost: O, let him pass!
He hates him
That would upon the rack of this tough
world
Stretch him out longer.

(V.111.315-17).

The ending of King Lear leaves one with a sense of loss more profound than any other of Shakespeare's tragedies. L.C. Knights believes that 'the positives emerging from the play are fundamentally Christian values,' that love is the redemptive force that finally saves Lear from the chaos of himself and the evil of Edmund, Goneril and Regan.¹ This explanation leaves out too much, and simplifies the complexity of the play by confining it to a moral scheme. The meaning of the play is to be derived from the activity and wholeness of the shaping imagination behind it, and not in any detachable moral; it is essential to move inside the play to discover its coherence. The religious and meta-physical statements made by the characters

1 "Some Shakespearean Themes, Ch.V. p.91.

must be seen in the pagan context in which Shakespeare has set the play: the gods are detached manipulators spinning a wheel of fortune that crashes its victims to death:

Gloucester: 'As flies to wanton boys, are
we to th' gods,
They kill us for their sport.'

(IV.i.36-7).

Northrop Frye rightly claims that Lear's tragedy is not morally explicable; all we see at the end of the play is an old man dying of an unbearable pain; we cannot see the tragedy in moral or conceptual terms, as purgatorial in the Dantean sense, where existence is taken over and shaped by a moral force.¹ D.G. James confirms this opinion by saying that the end of the play is comfortless, devoid of any sense of continuing order; the play confronts us with unresolved mystery.²

The play is full of disparate elements that cannot be explained away in a detachable moral. There are enormous discrepancies between Lear's initial act of folly, rejecting Cordelia, and Gloucester's sin of adultery, and the consequences that arise from those acts.

1. Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy.
Ch. 3, p.115.

2. The Dream of Prospero, Ch. 1, p.24.

The tone of the play is sometimes elemental, as in Lear's struggle in the storm, or cosmic, as in the apocalyptic imagery of his last appearance. At other times, the tone is barbarously primitive, even biological, as in the way Lear speaks about familial relationships:

The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation messes
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighboured, pitied, and
relieved,
As thou my sometime daughter.

(I.1.119-123).

But yet thou art my flesh, my blood,
my daughter.

(II.iv.220).

Lear himself appears obstinate and narrow at first; during his madness he is sometimes pathetic and absurd, often grand and profound; and in the final scene, he passes beyond judgement.

Any underlying comic assumptions of hope are denied in the play; even the Fool pines away to the point of death, Edgar's exhortations of hope are continuously negated, and Cordelia, containing within her character the promise of Lear's redemption and any potential for moral regrowth in the kingdom, is murdered. The mysterious, subterranean forces of chaos unleashed in Edmund, Goneril and Regan by Lear's initial folly, seem to overwhelm the positive forces of virtue in the play.

Lear does achieve as much self-knowledge as is possible in a world of human fallibility where the greatest illusion is to believe that the last illusion is dispelled; however, that enlightenment is achieved at a harsh cost. In this most definitive study of the deception of appearances, and the ignorance of self, Lear's heroism lies in penetrating the guises that obscure his awareness of self and of his world; however, that knowledge is attended by an intensity of suffering and ultimately, death itself. It is as if the theme of deception, so pervasive in previous plays, has been concentrated into a definitive image that shows the triumph and the tragedy of the man who attempts to confront the guise of self and comes to an awareness of the complex ambiguities of life itself.

CHAPTER SEVEN:THE TEMPEST

The Tempest is a definitive play with regard to the theme of artistic self awareness in the Shakespeare canon. By now it has been established that the disguise theme is manifested in two main ways: in a greater awareness of the identity within a character, and in the motif of theatrical illusion. In The Tempest, the process of losing oneself and recognising a new identity is part of the all pervasive concern with dramatic effect which is the central issue of the play. The atmosphere of the last plays is that of romance, inventive fiction, and fairy tale improbabilities; such an atmosphere is particularly conducive to confusing the judgment of the characters who find themselves in a bewildering world of shifting perspectives, and also of confounding an audience faced with swiftly changing 'planes of reality.'¹ These planes of reality, or different worlds, that constantly assail an audience watching the last plays, make for a recurrent sense of ambiguity. Shakespeare seems deliberately to be testing the stock responses of both his characters and his audience by presenting them with highly inventive, imaginative, and often strange situations.

This obvious interest in the effect of art is nowhere more apparent than in The Tempest. Even more than Oberon in A Midsummer Night's Dream and Duke Vincentio in Measure for Measure, Prospero is analogous to the dramatic artist. He uses dramatic devices like the illusion of magic, music, masques, to perpetrate delusions on his characters and lead them through a strange, imaginative experience from loss to re-discovery of self; and his magic is always referred to as Art. Prospero possesses superhuman powers that reach out from the actual, the concrete, to the undefinable, the 'something rich and strange' of Ariel's song, 'Full fathom five thy father lies,' (I, ii. 398). Yet he never loses his

1 E.M.W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's Last Plays, Part III, ch. iv, p.78. (London, 1951).

human dimension, displaying very human emotions of anxiety over his daughter, and anger over Caliban: 'His discontents and ambitions are extremely worldly.'¹ While Prospero is the originator of the illusory visions which beset the characters, his own character is part of the general ambiguous atmosphere of the island. Prospero's guise of a somewhat awesome magician in perfect control of events is often inadvertently dropped to reveal a curiously embittered, weary man, deeply aware of his own failure in certain directions: this ambivalence reflects upon the nature of a dramatic artist as well.

In assessing the identity of Prospero, one has to consider three ways in which he is presented to an audience; such complex presentation is the norm in a play where characters see things in vastly different ways. Shakespeare deliberately displays varying facets of their personalities and an audience has to make its own evaluations. So with Prospero the audience has to judge which is the most valid presentation of him. Firstly, there is the general impression Shakespeare wants to convey, of a magician, authoritative, and at the height of his power, which is only partly what Prospero is; he can command a storm at sea, and lead characters through a process of regeneration on the island. However, such a one-dimensional view of Prospero is suspect; Shakespeare asks the audience to look hard at his character and not to accept uncritically that first impression. Secondly, part of the Duke's character emerges from what he says of himself; this is also suspect, and invites critical inspection, for Prospero would have his listeners create a certain image of himself which Shakespeare implies is not entirely true. And thirdly, there is the more accurate image that emerges from a process whereby an audience critically assesses Prospero's responses in the way that Shakespeare implies they should, every time he ostensibly appears as authoritative magician, or tells Miranda ^{he} was harshly treated. Such

1 A.D. Nuttall, Two Concepts of Allegory, Ch. VI, p.142 (London, 1967).

a complex presentation means that an audience's image of Prospero is being modified all the time.

For example, Prospero's account of his banishment from Milan might *seem* ostensibly to be a justifiable explanation of the past to Miranda. Yet, on closer inspection, it appears to be a rhetorical, subjective account of events, the sort of explanation to be expected from a man anxious to exonerate himself from any blame:

I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated
To closeness and the bettering of the mind

(I. ii, 90-1)

There are close parallels here with Duke Vincentio's retreat from the political world, (Measure for Measure):

..... to my state grew stronger, being transported
And rapt in secret studies.

(76-7)

The similarity between the figures of Vincentio and Prospero has already been noted in the chapter on Measure for Measure. It is worth reiterating at this point in a remark made by Derek Traversi:

The similarity between Prospero and the Duke of Vienna, two characters separated as they are by several years of Shakespeare's most intense activity, is some indication of the continuity of spirit in which the plays were conceived.¹

The aura of enigma and ambiguity clings to both characters; mystery, secrecy, and magic seem to be their natural milieu. Also Prospero, like Vincentio, refused to acknowledge his culpability; he gives all the emphasis to the 'foul play' of his brother, without giving equal weight to the fact that his own neglect contributed to his being deposed. He makes sure that Miranda receives only one interpretation of the events:

that a brother should be so perfidious!' (I, ii, 67-9)

A treacherous army levied (128)

... i' the ' dead of darkness (130)

1 The Tempest, Scrutiny, Vol. XVI (1949), p.130.

She is thus rhetorically biased to present a subjective, partial account to Miranda, so that she will have the right opinion of her father. Little reason is proffered as to why the King of Naples was an "enemy inveterate." (121-2). The speech reveals another characteristic that Prospero has in common with Vincentio, namely, an assertive self-confidence as to his own worth, which really covers up a feeling of inadequacy revealed later in the play:

And Prospero, the prime duke, being so reputed
In dignity, and for the liberal Arts
Without a parallel;

(I, ii. 72-4)

The length of Prospero's narrative, and the fact that Miranda is so obviously bored by it, suggests two things. Firstly, as J. L. Bethell points out, Shakespeare was drawing attention to the play as a play by obtruding matters of technique upon the audience; Shakespeare's intention was to show that he could preserve the dramatic *unities* and mildly burlesque the extended narrative of past events that this classical technique required.¹ Prospero's extreme care in telling the narrative with the right emphasis, and his constant insistence that Miranda should be listening. 'Thou attend'st not?' (87), 'I pray thee, mark me.' (99), 'Dost thou hear?' (105), also implies that he needs reassurance. He has waited twelve years to tell his story and a correct response from Miranda is vital, as she is the *test* of whether he is justified in feeling badly treated; the Duke wants his own opinion of past events to be confirmed by Miranda, and he makes very sure that she does so by the way he tells the story.

In spite of the veneer of self-possession and control Prospero assumes, his true anxieties are revealed in this need for re-assurance. He has, after all, his self-acknowledged failures, namely, in dealing with Caliban.

this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine!

(V.i. 275-6)

1 "Antiquated Technique and the Phases of Reality," from Shakespeare: The Winter's Tale, a Casebook ed. Kenneth Muir, p.120.

Caliban thwarts him whenever he can; even Ariel at one point protests against continual servitude (I. ii. 242-300). Miranda responds in the required manner to his explanation on this occasion, but opposes him, albeit mildly, when Prospero mistrusts Ferdinand:

O dear father,
Make not too rash a trial of him, for
He's gentle, and not fearful.

(I. ii. 469-71)

Prospero is unsure about Ferdinand's integrity even after the young man had passed the test set for him.

Then, as my gift, and thine own acquisition
Worthily purchas'd, take my daughter: but
If thou dost break her virgin-knot before
All sanctimonious ceremonies may
With full and holy rite be minister'd,
No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall
To make this contract grow; but barren hate,
Sour-eyed disdain and discord shall bestrew
The union of your bed with weeds so loathly
That you shall hate it both: therefore take heed,
As Fymen's lamps shall light you.

(IV. i. 13-22)

The intensity of this declaration against breaking the rule of chastity indicates the extremity of Prospero's Calvinistic moral vision; it also shows a man using rhetoric to guard against failure. Unsure of Ferdinand, needing reassurance from Miranda, the veneer of total control reveals cracks. Indeed, Prospero at times seems to be uncertain about his own magical abilities; at the beginning of Act V, he takes stock of the situation in a manner that reveals relief that all is going well:

Now does my project gather to a head:
My charms crack not; my spirits obey; and time
Goes upright with his carriage.

(V. ii. 1-3)

Then again, he tells Miranda:

I find my zenith doth depend upon
A most auspicious star, whose influence
If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes
Will ever after droop.

(I. ii. 181-4)

His powers then 'depend' upon something outside himself, and he has to

admit to waiting for the most opportune time to seize before displaying them. Circumstances are not entirely under his control, and he is reassured when things do go well.

The guise of benevolence that the Duke assumes is undermined by close scrutiny of his responses as well. At the end of Act IV, he positively gloats at the helplessness of his enemies.

At this hour
Lies at my mercy all mine enemies.

(IV. i. 263-4)

Even when this response is later modified

the rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance.

(V. i. 27-8)

Prospero's 'nobler reason' has had to fight against his 'fury':

Though with their high wrongs I am struck
to th' quick,
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
Do I take part:

(V. i. 24-26)

The same tendency to anger is evident in his treatment of Ariel, who asks:

Is there more toil? Since thou dost give me pains,
Let me remember thee what thou hast promis'd,
which is not yet perform'd me.

(I. ii. 242-4)

He reminds Prospero of the 'worthy service' he has done him, and of the magician's promise:

'To bate me a full year.'

(249)

Prospero ignores this, and turns the argument round in order to stress his kind treatment of the spirit, exonerating himself from any blame:

Dost thou forget
From what a torment I did free thee?

(I. ii. 249-50)

He threatens Ariel with two alternatives, either service or slavery:

If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak,
And peg thee in his knotty entrails, till
Thou hast howl'd away twelve winters.

(294-6)

Despite his emphasis on his own kindness, Prospero is not a benevolent master; the intensity of his annoyance against Ariel, makes one suspect that there may be some truth in Caliban's assessment of the nature of the magician's control over his spirits:

Remember
First to possess his books; for without them
He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not
One spirit to command: they all do hate him,
As rootedly as I.

(III. ii. 39-93)

Prospero's powers of control might very well lie in his 'books', his superior knowledge; his spirits obey ultimately because he can exert forces over them that make them carry out his wishes. He rules by exerting an imperious will through superior power, not by benevolence. The same pattern of domination is exercised over Caliban. Prospero insists that he is treating with kindness an ungrateful creature who deserves only to be harshly curbed:

Thou most lying slave,
Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have us'd thee,
With as thou art, with human care;

(I. ii. 346-8)

and he uses threats to motivate the unwilling servant:

If thou neglect'st, or dost unwillingly
What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps,
Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar,
That beasts shall tremble at thy din.

(I. ii. 370-3)

Prospero becomes extremely irritated whenever he is not promptly obeyed, even by Miranda. He chides her compassion for Ferdinand:

What! I say,
"My foot my tutor?"

(I. iii. 471-2)

Silence! one word more
Shall make me chide thee, if not hate thee.

(480-1)

Prospero insists that his authority over people be instantly recognised; when Caliban calls him a 'tyrant', he is not far off the mark.

Prospero's powers eat in on him; they are destructive of self, rousing his fury immediately his imperious will is not gratified, prompting him to ingratiate himself with Miranda, Ariel, and even Caliban, in attempts to justify his behaviour as ^{being} perfectly correct and benevolent. Under the person he seeks to project, Prospero is, in fact, a man of powerful anger and spite, the latter quality indicated by his last words to Caliban, which take no account of his repentance:

Go to; away!

(V.i. 298)

The anarchic rebellion represented by Caliban is the antithesis of Prospero's desire for absolute control. His dedication to high-minded self-improvement, his insistence on a Puritanical self-discipline, his life of seclusion devoted to gaining knowledge, leaves Prospero unprepared to deal with the will or desires manifest in Caliban at one level, and Sebastian and Antonio at another. None of his high-minded pursuits, not all his resources, can prevent the destructive plots hatched by these characters. Prospero like Duke Vincentio attempts to impose a rigid process of salvation through suffering on his characters; it is a motif continually repeated in the play: Alonso's followers have to endure the storm and the bewildering delusions of the island before finding themselves anew; Ariel must undergo service before obtaining freedom; Alonso must suffer grief at losing a son before finding Ferdinand; Ferdinand must undergo a test of service before winning Miranda. Like a dramatist constructing a comedy, Prospero deliberately confuses his characters, leading them into situations of fear and loss, before they are allowed the consolation of enlightenment and reconciliation. However, again like Vincentio, Prospero encounters characters whose motives and actions cannot be confined within his schemes, and who will not recognise his authority as absolute.

The physical manifestation of Prospero's superior powers is Ariel,

the spirit through which the magician creates magic, building up an atmosphere of magic delusion, and through himself, followers through their strange experience of the island. Ariel is the personification of Prospero's extended reason; his presence suggests that the magician has creative and extension of dramatic powers, embodied in a spirit who could easily manipulate his master's will over characters. Such experimentation, and stretching of the resources of drama could most easily be done in a magic space, where fairies and spirits are acceptable. The serious intention behind the creation of a spirit like Ariel in the play is that of creating a magical-religious, metaphysical aura around Vincentio; in both cases, superior manipulative powers are being stressed. Shakespeare, through Prospero using Ariel, is testing the effect of such elaborate theatrical effects both on the characters within the play, and on the audience watching the play.

It was clear in A Midsummer Night's Dream and Measure for Measure, that Oberon and Vincentio, despite their extra dimensions, were subject to fallibility, and unable to control the complex of reactions within their scope. The same is true of Prospero in The Tempest; while Ariel is the symbol of Prospero's highest powers, Caliban is the symbol of all that thwarts the magician's high-minded schemes. But while Prospero's character itself is part of the ambiguous atmosphere of the play; while his guise of benevolent, self-assured controller cracks to reveal another personality beneath, so too is Caliban's character subject to very different perspectives. Prospero's comment that Caliban is:

A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
Punishment can never stick

(IV. i. 159-60)

indicates the helpless anger the Duke feels on confronting his slave. Related to the Duke's philosophy is the assumption that the virtuous, higher part of man's nature must restrain and control the lower, animal side of his character: that is why he insists so strongly on chastity before marriage. His attempt to control the baser nature of man has no success when he deals with Caliban. Ariel and Caliban can be seen as symbols of the polarity in man's nature, and also as symbols of polarity

in dramatic art. Caliban wishes to lead Stephano and Trinculo to murder, lust, and anarchy, those elements in art which threaten to intrude on comedy and turn it into tragedy; Ariel is used to confuse, yet ultimately to guide characters to safety and a new awareness, suggesting the capacity of the dramatist to bring his characters through bewilderment to a comic resolution. That Shakespeare sees the inadequacies of such comic resolution, however, is clear as early as Love's Labour's Lost: to be a valid reflection of life, comedy must include elements of disharmony, even if these are ultimately overcome. Caliban is the element of disharmony that threatens to upset Prospero's carefully laid schemes leading to ultimate comic resolution.

However, Prospero is not only threatened by forces from outside. As with the fairies in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Shakespeare through Prospero is exploring the relation of the illusions of art to the world of reality; Prospero through Ariel keeps his characters under the guise of illusion, just as the dramatist keeps his audience under an illusion. Prospero's special knowledge liberates him from the normal bonds of everyday life, and gives him the power to create out of a savage island a golden world where all things can be made to work for his benefit; like the poet in Lucretius' 'De Rerum Natura', who has special powers of imagination, he can make of the ordinary brazen world a refined and idealized golden realm. However, the creator of this golden world strives for tranquility, peace, virtue and order, and cannot achieve them: the world which Prospero's Art helps to mould, like the play which Shakespeare's poetry creates, reflects experience of bitterness, disillusion and failure assailing the creators from without and within. Prospero is seen by Alonso and Gonzalo at the end of the play as having striven for and achieved order and reconciliation, having brought about a triumph of enlightened reason in a chaotic world; the Duke himself, however, feels weary and somewhat sceptical of what he has achieved.

The important difference between Vincentio as dramatist and Prospero

with sadness, and a certain disillusionment. This strain continues to the end of the play, when Prospero acknowledges Caliban as his mark of failure, and speaks about the future in terms of death:

And thence retire me to my Milan, where
Every third thought shall be my grave.

(V. i. 309-10)

His state at the end of the play remains, 'foul and muddy' (V. i. 82): he has resolved the dilemma of some of his characters, and brought them through bewilderment and loss into new awareness, but his own self-awareness is burdened by a sombre disillusionment ^{concerning} the efficacy of his arts, and a nagging sense that he has failed. In this, the last of his romances, Shakespeare has created as the main character a man analogous to the dramatic artist, with all the resources of manipulation and theatrical effect at his command, who finds he cannot banish from his 'golden world' the random destructive elements dominant in some men, or resolve the anxieties about his own character. The germ of this idea was present in Measure for Measure, here it is worked through in much greater complexity and concentrating on the dramatic possibilities and problems that the central figure faces.

The focus for a great deal of Prospero's anger and frustration is Caliban. It has been shown that Prospero's character can be seen from different perspectives, and this also applies to Caliban. Having created a setting in which shifting perspectives, delusions, and illusions are the norm, Shakespeare takes full advantage of it to present his characters in different guises. It has also been shown that Prospero's authoritarian nature exhibits a kind of crabbed, dogmatic insistence that his opinion on matters must be the right one; this is particularly the case with Caliban. Shakespeare however, reveals in the motives and responses of Caliban a far more complex and less unregenerate character than Prospero would have us see. Caliban contains within him elements that are found in all the other characters of the play, including Prospero. He shares the ambition of overthrowing established power with Stephano and Trinculo, Antonio and Sebastian; he reacts in exactly the same way as Miranda to strangers who

he believes are 'gods'; he shares the same aspiration for a more harmonious state of being that Prospero cherishes, when he hears music. Caliban cannot simply be equated to the baser part of human nature, as Prospero insists; he personifies the random and unexpected elements of life which Prospero is so frustrated at not being able to control. Caliban's presence is an implied critique of the manipulator like Prospero, whose desire for order has outgrown his faith in the complexity and inherent potential of humanity.

When Prospero calls Caliban 'a savage and deform'd slave', it is not only an evaluative judgement: the description connects him to the wild men of the New World who, as Shakespeare must have read from explorers' accounts, inhabited the New Eden of the New Americas; such savages were popularly thought to be ugly, lustful and evil. Frank Kermode, in his Introduction to the Arden edition of The Tempest, writes:

The only undisputed source for any part of The Tempest is Montaigne's essay 'Of Cannibals' ... Montaigne's essay as a whole is relevant to the play, and it would appear that critical comment has been hampered by a failure to understand this. The essay, like the play, is concerned with the general contrast between natural and artificial societies and men, though Montaigne assumes, in his 'naturalist' way, that the New World offers an example of naturally virtuous life uncorrupted by civilization, whereas Shakespeare obviously does not.¹

Neither does Shakespeare go to the opposite extreme, however, in presenting primitive man as totally brutal and treacherous, as many of the voyagers reported him:

"There is ample testimony to the corrupting effect upon natives of contact with dissolute Europeans - Christian savages seek to convert heathen savages, as Fuller puts it and it is another element in the situation which interested both Montaigne and Shakespeare Nature is

1 op. cit., pp. XXXIV - V. (London, 1972).

not, in the Tempest, defined with the single-minded clarity of a philosophic proposition. Shakespeare's treatment of the theme has what all his mature poetry has, a richly analytical approach to ideas, which never reaches after a naked opinion of true or false.²

And certainly the character of Caliban does not come across as unregenerate and totally evil. There are extenuating circumstances for his rebellious attitude to Prospero; he thinks of himself as dispossessed master of the island, telling Stephano and Trinculo:

I am subject to a tyrant, a sorcerer, that by his cunning
hath cheated me of the island.

(III. ii. 40-1)

It is perfectly understandable that Prospero would appear as 'tyrant' and 'sorcerer' to Caliban, and that he should accuse him as he does in Act I:

This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first,
Thou strok'st me, and made much of me;
..... and then I lov'd thee,
And show'd thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
Curs'd be that I did so!
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own King: and here you
sty me
In this hard rock, whilst you do keep from me
The rest o' th' island.

(I. ii. 332-45)

Even when Prospero reveals the reason for that harsh subjection, namely, that Caliban attempted to rape Miranda, the basic premise of the speech is true: Caliban resents being denied freedom on an island which he considers his own by birthright. Caliban's first reaction to Prospero's initial kindness reveals a touching desire to please and help those whom he considers greatly superior to himself:

When thou cam'st first,
Thou strok'st me, and made much of me;
wouldst give me
Water with berries in 't, and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night: and then I lov'd thee,
And show'd thee all the qualities o' th' isle, ...

(I. ii. 334-9)

The same attitude is evinced when Caliban encounters Stephano and Trinculo:

I'll show thee the best springs; I'll pluck thee
berries;
I'll fish for thee, and get thee wood enough.

(II. ii. 160-1)

Such a spontaneous offer of service reveals not only a capacity within Caliban to please and assist; it is couched in terms which suggest a character living at the most basic level of existence, who thinks first of satisfying physical needs, and helping to ensure the survival of his new found masters. In this sense, Caliban may seem to symbolise the most basic needs in man to satisfy physical desires, and hence appropriately to be a slave to Prospero's higher Art, which seeks to bring about order and refinement. Shakespeare leaves room for speculation, however; it is conceivable that Caliban cannot conform to the moral strictures of the society represented by Prospero, and thus appears evil only because he is judged by values that are alien to his nature. In a different society, untrammelled by strict moral restraints, the satisfaction of lust may be seen as perfectly natural. It is the perfectly natural within Caliban that Prospero sees as unnatural and an evil tendency to be repressed, without much attempt to understand the reason for its existence.

Prospero may feel that Caliban is the vilest creature on the island, but Shakespeare makes it evident that there are worse villains. Antonio is called 'unnatural' (V. i. 76) by Prospero, which is a damning indictment of a man who behaves with all the unbridled instincts of a savage while supposedly belonging to the world of sophisticated civilisation:

I do forgive thee,
Unnatural though thou art.

(V. i. 78-9)

Prospero forgives Antonio and Sebastian, whose amoral cynicism flourishes unregenerate till the end of the play; he simply dismisses Caliban's request for pardon. Stephano and Trinculo are also members of the 'civilised' world, and yet are worse than Caliban in their inane self-indulgence. Although Caliban is the instrument which leads Stephano

and Trinculo to attempt to usurp Prospero, he at least realises his own folly at the end, while they remain sunk in drunken ignorance:

What a thrice-double ass
Was I, to take this drunkard for a god,
And worship this dull fool!

(V. i. 295-7)

It is significant that when Stephano comes across the writhing Calibano and takes Caliban for a four-legged monster (II. ii. 66), half of the monster turns out to be Trinculo; men who come from a sophisticated society share the same potential for corruption as a savage.

Caliban also shares some of Miranda's naivety and innocence when confronted with strangers. Miranda's reaction to the company which includes Sebastian and Antonio, is to marvel at 'a brave new world' (V. i. 184). The same ^{very} attends Caliban's reaction to Stephano and Trinculo!

There be fine things, an if they be not spirits,
That's a brave god, and bears celestial liquor:
I will kneel to him.

(II. ii. 117-19)

and to the assembled company Miranda confronts:

O Setebos, these be brave spirits indeed!

(V. i. 261)

Trinculo rightly calls Caliban:

A most poor credulous monster!

(II. ii. 146)

^{Caliban} shares Miranda's inability, and, indeed, unpreparedness, to see beyond external appearance to the reality underneath; both share the innocence of isolated individuals vulnerable to new experiences, and devoid of any critical criterion that would enable them to evaluate strangers whom they encounter.

Most extraordinarily, Caliban shares some of Prospero's propensity for vision and imagination, a quality conveyed in his appreciation of music:

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,
 Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
 Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,
 That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
 Will make me sleep again, and then, in dreaming,
 The clouds methought would open, and show riches
 Ready to drop upon me; that, when I wak'd,
 I cried to dream again.

(III. ii. 132-141)

That Caliban says this in the company of Stephano and Trinculo, emphasises the potential for sensitivity inherent in the 'savage' as compared to the dullness of men from civilised society. The 'riches ready to drop' in Caliban's dream are not defined, but they ^{hint} at a sense of wonder and mystery, of an awareness of a transcendent and supernatural life that is part of the creature's sensibility. The longing for the transient vision of harmony and delight which Caliban expresses on waking is poignant:

..... when I wak'd,
 I cried to dream again.

Like Bottom, Caliban is the last character one would expect to have 'a rare vision'; and also like Bottom, Caliban's dream is undefinable, but ^{is} ~~is~~ hinting at strange and precious sensations. Frank Kermode explains Caliban's reaction simply by commenting that:

He hears music with pleasure, as music can appeal to the beast who lacks reason; and indeed he resembles Aristotle's bestial man.¹

There is more to it than that; the imagery of transience and dreaming is connected to what Prospero says in dismissing the marriage masque:

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

(IV. i. 155-7)

Caliban shares the common humanity of all the other characters in the play; stumbling most of the time unconsciously through a harsh life, he

1 The Tempest, Arden edition, p.xlii.

sometimes experiences the relief of a vision of joy, a relief that soon dissolves. D.C. James comments that:

Caliban in his helplessness and dependence, is exposed to a mysterious and transcendent reality. This, in the end, is 'the thing itself', divided, in the encompassing darkness, between terror and love, despair and adoration, and aware, above all, of a transcendent, supernatural world.

Lear contemplates Poor Tom and asks 'Is man no more than this?' making that question the basis for an investigation into his own nature. Prospero when confronted by Caliban merely assumes superiority and a Calvinistic insistence that the creature is evil and beyond redemption:

A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
Nurture can never stick;

(IV. i. 188-9)

Miranda echoes her father's opinion:

Abhorred slave,
Which any point of goodness will not take,
Being capable of all ill!

(I. ii. 353-5)

Prospero becomes so angry with Caliban only partly because he represents the intrusion of evil into the magician's pattern of order; more important is that Caliban represents an aspect of humanity which Prospero fails to understand and whom even by Art, he is completely unable to control: he personifies a testing challenge to Prospero's understanding which the Duke is uncomfortably aware of having failed. That humanity which Caliban represents includes lust, murder, and desire for revenge; it includes things of great value as well, a quality of impressionable innocence, and the potential for sensitive vision.

The different perspectives by which we can look at Prospero and Caliban arise because of the ambiguous atmosphere of the play; this ambiguity partly derives from ^{its} setting ^{on} an island in the sea. The sea

is an obvious symbol of transmutation, and the island, strange and isolated, provides an environment conducive to mysterious delusions. It is the comic motif seen already in the comedies discussed, refined to great complexity: the characters of The Tempest face a storm at sea, are restored from the ocean onto an island full of confusing illusions, and end, under Prospero's guidance, with new-found identities and in a state of reconciliation. This deliberate placing of the characters in a strange world, enables Prospero to confuse them, and allows Shakespeare to stretch the dramatic imagination of his audience as well. The atmosphere is rather like that of the moonlit wood in A Midsummer Night's Dream, an area of deception that lends itself particularly well to enlarging the perspectives of characters and audience. Ariel's song to Ferdinand conveys precisely the process of transmutation and re-discovery which he and his father will undergo:

Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell.

(I. ii. 399-405)

Instead of death, father and son will rediscover each other alive; the 'sea-change into something rich and strange' will indeed affect some characters.

There are three principal areas of response to The Tempest, through the overall setting, through the characters, and through the symbolism, and all three areas are deliberately ambiguous. The setting of the play requires an audience to stretch its imagination; the characterisation, as has already been observed in Caliban and Prospero, is deceptive; and the symbolism is just as full of anomalies. Gonzalo assumes that the sea is an agent of purging and refreshing:

..... our garments, being, as they were, drenched in the sea, hold, notwithstanding, their freshness and glosses; being rather new dyed, than

stained with salt water. (II. i. 59-63)

The fact that the garments are 'new dyed' rather than 'stained', points to a possibility of fresh beginnings; however, the sea-change does nothing to regenerate Antonio and Sebastian. It is a part of the generally ambiguous atmosphere of the island that different characters perceive it in different ways. Gonzalo uses imagery stressing its freshness and bounty:

Here is everything advantageous to life. (II. i. 48)

How lush and lusty the grass looks! how green! (51)

Antonio and Sebastian deride Gonzalo's attitude, however:

Sebastian: ... he doth but mistake the truth
totally. (55)

They smell the stench of fens, and see little to subsist on around them. Derek Traversi states the key-note of the play to be judgement, and thus interprets the attitude of Sebastian and Antonio as indications of their wickedness:

Sebastian and Antonio, indeed, are no more than the successors of Iago. The grossness of their utterances, the evocation of 'rotten lungs' and the 'perfume' of the fen are typical inversions of the 'grace' images of Adrian and Gonzalo With no conception of value, divorced from that free reverence for the established order upon which any tolerable spiritual life must, according to Shakespeare, be based, the part of these two in The Tempest is necessarily destructive, anarchic, and that is why they, unlike Alonso, remain finally beyond the limits of Prospero's reconciling action.¹

It is highly arguable whether Shakespeare did advocate an uncritical 'reverence for the established order' in any of his plays, and, in any case, Traversi's moralistic interpretation misses the point of the deliberately different viewpoints which are built up in the play. After

1 The Tempest, Scrutiny Vol. XVI (1949), p.135.

all, Caliban and Prospero are seen in different lights and it is entirely fitting that the island should have a multiplicity of levels. The fact that Antonio and Sebastian are foolish and wicked, while Gonzalo is not really a fool at all, only adds to the recurrent sense of ambiguity in their comments about the island, for then Antonio and Sebastian are truly witty, and Gonzalo does talk like a naive old fool. It is really left up to the audience to decide 'the truth' of the matter; it is conceivable that Gonzalo sees the island in a vision of optimism that ignores its unpleasant aspects, and that Antonio and Sebastian see another side of what exists. After all, when Prospero starts working his magic to rouse the guilty, Antonio, Sebastian and Alonso find the island a most unpleasant place. Similarly, Caliban is familiar enough with the abundance of natural advantages on the island; he promises to show Stephano and Trinculo 'every fertile inch', (II. ii. 148) but at other times it becomes an environment of pain and terror for him, described as destitute of comfort, harsh and sterile:

'.... you sty me
In this hard rock

(I. ii. 344-5)

He is 'pinched' by Prospero's spirits, 'frightened with urchin-shows', 'pitched i' th' mire', 'led, like a firebrand, in the dark, out of his way':

For every trifle are they set upon me;
Sometime like apes, that how and chatter at me,
And after hate me; then like hedgehogs, which
Lie tumbling in my barefoot way, and mount
Their pricks at my footfall, sometime am I
All wound with adders, who with eleven tongues
Do hiss me into madness.

(II. ii. 4-14)

Such different experiences of the island are all part of the technique of presenting the play as a multiplicity of different planes of reality. The island provides a perfect medium for enveloping the characters in shifting hallucinatory visions. As Gonzalo observes after Prospero's "Shapcs" have left the banquet:

When we were boys,
Who would believe that there were mountaineers
Dew-lapp'd like bulls, whose throats had hanging
at 'em
Wallets of flesh? or that there were such men
Whose heads stood in their breasts? which
now we find
Each putter-out of five for one will bring us
Good warrant of.

(III. iii. 32-49)

In such an environment of shifting, deceptive guises, an audience is being asked constantly to test the validity of the theatrical illusion it encounters, whether that be character, symbol or setting. Thus, Antonio and Sebastian's opinion of the island cannot simply be dismissed as indicative of their wickedness.

Appearances, in fact, are absolutely no use as evaluative criteria in this kind of ambiguous atmosphere. At the end of the play Alonso sees Ferdinand and exclaims:

'If this prove
A vision of the island, one dear son
Shall I twice lose.'

(V. i. 175-7)

In this case, the 'vision of the island', the perspective induced by the environment, turns out to be true, but this is not always the case. When Miranda surveys the company around Alonso and remarks:

O, wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
That has such people in 't!

(V. i. 182-5)

she is deluded by appearances into a false estimation of a group that includes Antonio and Sebastian. It is the same false estimate of appearance that besets Caliban on seeing Stephano and Trinculo for the first time. And it is revealed at its most ridiculous level when Stephano and Trinculo prance about in Prospero's drying washing, believing their appearance transforms them into rulers of the island, (Act IV, Scene i).

Ferdinand and Miranda's response to each other also involves a false estimate based on a distortion of appearances:

Berdinand: Most sure the goddess
On whom these airs attend! (I. ii. 424-5)

Miranda: I might call him
A thing divine; for nothing natural
I ever saw so noble." (I. ii. 429-2)

They see each other transf^{orm}ed into 'things divine', and Miranda goes further:

There's nothing ill can dwell in such a temple;
If the ill spirit have so fair a house,
Good things will strive to dwell with 't.

(I. ii. 460-2)

Berdinand conforms to the Elizabethan ideal of virtuous beauty; Shakespeare through Prospero, however, questions such an assumption of a fair exterior reflecting virtue, by making Berdinaud undergo the test of fortitude and self-control before he can win Miranda. If it were simply a question of fair exteriors indicating virtuous behaviour, then Caliban as deformed and ugly slave would be totally wicked; such is the assumption Prospero makes, although it is not the character Shakespeare presents.

Prospero in Act V sums up the sort of comic process which his characters have undergone, through confusion to reconciliation, in appropriate sea imagery:

Their understanding
Begins to swell; and the approaching tide
Will shortly fill the reasonable shore,
That now lies foul and muddy.'

(V. i. 79-82)

However, the 'approaching tide' of recognition and re-discovery that 'will shortly fill the reasonable shore' does not entirely wash away all traces of the 'foul and muddy', all the anomalies and hints of pessimism that make up the fabric of the play. Gonzalo, who is the spirit of optimism in the play, sums up the new-found joy at the end in a sterile, cold image curiously out of keeping with the tenor of the rest of his imagery:

O, rejoice
Beyond a common joy! and set it down
With gold on lasting pillars.'

(V. i. 206-8)

Instead of seeing the reconciliation and marriage as fresh and natural, here is this image stressing the value and even durability of what has happened, ^{but} in a cold, hard form. Gonzalo goes on to recount what has emerged from the storm and the bewildering experiences of the island:

In one voyage
Did ~~Claribel~~ her husband find at Tunis,
And Ferdinand, her brother, found a wife
Where he himself was lost,

(208-11)

It is true that Ferdinand has found himself in a new relationship promising fulfilment and fruition; however, even that is tempered by the memory of Prospero's vehement declamation against lust, in which potential destructive forces in a relationship were vividly called forth:

If thou dost break her virgin-knot before
All sanctimonious ceremonies may
With full and holy rite be minister'd,
No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall
To make this contract glow; but barren hate,
sour-ey'd disdain and discord shall bestrew
The union of your bed with weeds so blatantly
That you shall hate it both: therefore take heed,
As Pyramus's lamps shall light you.

(IV. i. 15-23)

Gonzalo continues in his enumeration of the benefits gained by the end of the play; he points to the re-discovery of identities:

Prospero his dukedom (found)
In a poor isle, and all of us ourselves
When no man was his own.

(V. i. 211-13)

That again, is only partially true. Antonio and Sebastian never lost their old identities of self-seeking ambition and Prospero's reconised dukedom leads not to new hope and fresh beginnings, but only to thoughts of death:

Every third thought shall be my grave.

(V. i. 311)

Northrop Frye reiterates the sort of conclusions which Gonzalo comes to:

The island, then, is a place of confused identity in which a world of nothingness, symbolized by the tempest and the sea, separates characters

from a world of regained identity in which Ferdinand receives a 'second life' from Prospero, and the Court Party, as Gonzalo says, find their true selves again.... The Court Party wander through a 'maze' of hallucinations, and for them the conceptions of reality and illusion are reversed. In the cognition Antonio and Sebastian understand that their realistic efforts to gain power by assassination are what is unnatural, and so unreal, and that the marvels and wonders of the magical island are a part of a purgatorial cleansing of both their reason and their senses:

And as the morning steals upon the night,
Melting the darkness, so their rising senses
Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle
Their clearer reason. 1

(V. i. 65-3)

Of course, the transformations that Gonzalo assumes have taken place are not the whole picture; the resolution of the play is not as unequivocally optimistic as he makes out. Gonzalo is the personification of the comic principle in drama, which ends a play with new hope of fresh beginnings, renewed potential, and happy futures; it is the comic principle that makes the best out of the chaos of life, and triumphs over the threat of disorder inherent in characters like Sebastian and Antonio. Yet Shakespeare makes it obvious that Gonzalo's optimistic formulations, like the characters, the setting, and the symbols in the play, must be tested, and do not present the true version of events.

The comic optimism of the play is constantly tempered by the shadow of frustration which dogs Prospero's schemes. Act IV, Scene i, when Prospero conjures up his spirits to present the marriage masque, and to bless the young couple, seems to prevent a vision of harmony, and a promise of future joy. Ferdinand asks:

May I be bold
To think these spirits?

(IV. i. 112-20)

and Prospero answers:

Spirits, which by mine Art
I have from their confinement call'd to enact
My present fancies.

(120-3)

At this time Prospero's Art appears most capable of arousing wonder and joy. L. M. Tillyard points out how complicated are the means by which it is presented:

.... the masque is executed by players pretending to be spirits, pretending to be real actors, pretending to be supposed god-creatures and rustics.¹

The whole presentation is a triumph of Prospero's Art, and seems to suffuse the proceedings in the glow of a future that augurs only regeneration and fresh hope:

Ceres: Earth's increase, foison plenty,
Barns and garners never empty;
Vines with clust'ring bunches growing;
Plants with goodly burthen bowing;
Spring come to you at the farthest
In the very end of harvest!
Scarcity and want shall shun you:
Ceres' blessing so is on you.

(IV. i. 110-117)

The spirits promise the lovers a season of harvest followed by a season of regrowth; the winter of 'scarcity and want' will not visit them. Ferdinand's reaction to the rare spectacle is to wonder and rejoice:

Let me live here ever:
So rare a wonder'd fether and a wise
Makes this place Paradise.

(123-5)

Yet the Paradisical scene, the promise of future joy, the triumph of Prospero's Art, is soon over:

Enter certain Reapers, properly habited: they join with the Nymphs in a graceful dance; towards the end whereof Prospero starts

1. Shakespeare's Last Plays, ch. IV, p.80.

entirely successful; his special powers, his Art, cannot banish elements of disorder, ambition and revenge, from the drama he creates upon the island. And hence a pessimism creeps upon him, a sombre realisation of the limitations of his Art, a depressing sense that optimistic formulations such as Gonzalo makes are only a small part of the reality of situations; hence his spirits 'heavily vanish', and after the sweetness of harmonious music only 'strange, hollow, and confused noise' remains behind. Despite the ostensibly comic resolution of the play, this shadow of frustration hangs over it. Father and son are restored to each other, Ferdinand and Miranda represent the promise of youth and renewed potential, but Prospero dismisses Caliban with a peremptory: 'Go to; way!' (V. i. 298), and retires to a future where 'Every third thought shall be my reve.' (310).

Prospero in the Epilogue begs the audience's indulgence:

Let me not,
Since I have my dukedom got,
And pardon'd the deceiver, dwell
In this bare island by your spell:
But release me from my bonds
With the help of your good hands
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,
Let your indulgence set me free.

Prospero, dramatist within the play, asks to be set free; he suggests that the audience holds him in bonds the same way that he bound his characters to certain ends in his own drama. Shakespeare through Prospero stresses the close links between the artist and his audience; in using all the resources of Art in the play, strange settings, illusions, masques, Shakespeare, in a sense, was asking the audience to test the effects of such theatrical devices. He challenged an audience with new perspectives, and asked them to penetrate the guise of the art with which they were confronted, in order to extract its great and real value. Prospero ends up as a sour artist, thwarted by intractable and random elements that intrude into his creations, and remind him of the limitations of his Art. Shakespeare is not synonymous with Prospero, he is above him, the

manipulator behind the play as a whole, the ultimate dissembler, putting forward both the problems and achievements of a fictional character whose business is art. In all the last plays Shakespeare explores the possibilities of his own drama, in a play like The Winter's Tale the ending reflects a harmony and tranquility, a perfect optimistic resolution of dilemmas, and in the last scene, an affirmation that art is a close reflection of, but never an adequate substitute for, life. In The Tempest, Prospero, analogous to the artist, sees both art and life as something very insubstantial, a faded vision, a transient dream. A.D. Nuttall comments on the difference in atmosphere:

What we may call the affirmation of paradise has in The Tempest a far less confident tone than The Winter's Tale. In The Tempest alone of the Romances the divine marquee is broken up in confusion. The whole play, as compared to The Winter's Tale, is strangely perverse, like a piece of flawed glass a reservation as to the truth - value of the assertions love provokes seems to have reappeared. Time, the old grey destroyer of the Sonnets, was not, after all, put down by Love. After the enthusiastic reaffirmation of the later Sonnets and the first three Romances, a sadder and more complex reaction has set in, slightly ironical perhaps, but not at all cynical. The world has not been wholly redeemed by love, look at it. The subjective vision of the lovers may transcend objective facts, but it does not obliterate them. The lover has one level, the later another; perhaps, there are a thousand more such levels, each as unreal as the next.¹

The Tempest does not reach the optimistic conclusions of The Winter's Tale. Shakespeare, through Prospero, shows us a dramatist frustrated by the thwarting of his intentions to bring about a new world, murdered of evil and corruption, having become disillusioned with his art, and indeed, with life itself. It is tempting to equate Shakespeare with Prospero;

1 Two Concepts of Allegory, ch. VI, pp. 156-157.

however there is too much evidence that Shakespeare was detached from his main protagonist, critical of his imperiousness and lack of insight into Caliban's character - Prospero is like Vincentio, an analogy for a fictional dramatist, an opportunity for Shakespeare to examine some of the possibilities of his own craft, and to point to its possible effects on the creator. In using such manipulator figures, Shakespeare has been able, particularly in The Tempest, to examine the guises of drama in their effect on characters and audience; he forces scrutiny of the artefact of his craft by drawing attention to it in theatrical devices, and challenging an audience to test the validity of the diverse and complicated levels of reality thus reflected.

CONCLUSION

What has been suggested in the argument of this thesis is that Shakespeare used disguise in various forms to help illuminate themes that were of importance to him. The physical manifestations of disguise have been seen to have an immediate and obvious relation to the theme of the discrepancy between appearance and reality. Thus, all the disguise occurring in the seven plays discussed, from the inadvertent mistaken identity of Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse (The Comedy of Errors), to the shifting illusions encountered on Prospero's island, has raised speculation about the nature of reality.

Shakespeare has also examined the balance of the relationship between the disguised individual and his society. It has been shown that bewilderment, confusion, and often violence erupts when characters are confronted by unfamiliar levels of reality, as in The Comedy of Errors, Twelfth Night and A Midsummer Night's Dream. The individual in disguise does not receive his familiar image reflected back from society; this causes insecurity and a questioning of his essential nature. The pervasive concern with the nature of identity in Shakespeare is frequently accompanied by the use of disguise. Disguise inevitably points to the deceptive layers that hide the truth in life, and the distortions which prevent the true knowledge of self being attained.

This aspect of the disguise theme has been traced from early development in the farcial situations of The Comedy of Errors, to its culmination in the spiritual search undertaken by Lear. A slightly different emphasis of this concern with identity was seen in the role-playing of characters like Henry V, Vincentio, and Prospero. When their roles were penetrated, a different identity than that projected by their public images was revealed. The ambiguous and ambivalent atmosphere immediately established by any use of disguise, has been shown to be peculiarly suited to the exposition of the themes of deceptive appearance and the true nature of identity.

The thesis has also discussed another important manifestation of the disguise theme, namely, its connection ^{with} the examination of the nature of dramatic art itself. The very theatricality of disguise, which perpetrates illusions and deceptions, has been an essential device in the investigation of the effects of art and the manipulative powers of the artist. The disguises within A Midsummer Night's Dream, Measure for Measure and The Tempest in particular, have illuminated Shakespeare's questioning of the powers and limitations of his own dramatic craft.

Disguise has been approached in the thesis not simply as a physical concealing of the identity; it has much wider metaphorical implications, which

make it such an essential device in the exposition of the themes summarised in this conclusion. In its various forms it occurs in every Shakespearean play. However, the seven plays chosen for this thesis focus attention on the development of the most essential aspects of the disguise theme. It is to be hoped that discussing individual plays from this particular perspective has stressed the central importance of disguise in Shakespeare's work, while it has also given a different insight to the interpretation of the plays.

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