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Shakespeare's Comedy: The Play and Its Audience

by

John Eric Lueders

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Thesis Director's signature:

Houston, Texas
April, 1976
For My Mother and Father.
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INTRODUCTION
In an article published in 1955, John Russell Brown wrote "Where (Shakespeare's) tragedies and histories seem to invite...serious criticism, the comedies evade it."\(^1\) Describing the attitude taken by writers on the comedies, he adds that they "have often restricted criticism to praise and the expression of enjoyment."\(^2\) Since Brown's essay appeared there have been dozens of books and thousands of articles paying serious critical attention to the comedies. Some of these studies have been so serious and straightfaced that the reader might forget that the object of study is comedy at all. Nonetheless, Brown's first remark is well taken: if the comedies have not evaded serious criticism, they have evaded the kind of criticism that does for a work of art once and forever. Our inability to pin down meaning in any literary piece is, I think, a sign of its value to us as human beings and as critics, and most of Shakespeare's plays fall into this category of ultimate, boundary expanding, ambiguity. Yet the urge to understand, if only in a way different from others, is strong in human nature, and this study must take its justification from that urge.

The criticism of Shakespeare's comedies has been equalled only in volume by the bulk of other Shakespearean criticism. Contained within this vast body of criticism are a wide variety of approaches, and one of the most fruitful and interesting has been what James L. Calderwood calls metadramatic.\(^3\) Basically, metadramatic criticism looks at self-reflexive elements in the play's structure—references to drama and acting, internal plays, pastoral, disguise, and deception. The interpretative ends to
which these self-reflexive elements can be put is various, but in general there are two ways to use this criticism: one is to treat the play as a record of its own composition; the other is to explore the relationship the play establishes with its audience. In my own practice, I have followed either (and other) as I considered appropriate.

Metadramatic criticism is not new. My first exposure to literary criticism came from the new critics. Their theoretical emphasis on the literary creation as a self-contained system of balanced oppositions I have largely rejected, but their critical practice, particularly Cleanth Brooks' in *The Well-wrought Urn*, led me in the direction of metadrama.² Brooks' discussions of poetry and plays deal in part with self-referential elements—the two urns in "The Canonization" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn," and the imagery of clothing in *Macbeth*. Art, in this view, provides a comment on its own particular mode of being, while at the same time it teaches us how to interpret itself; art is both the map and the landscape contained on the map. The new critics' main failure lies in their denial of art's affective qualities. Their invention of the "affective fallacy" speaks to our sense of individual differences and unique responses which make consensus difficult or, finally, impossible. But we cannot deny the importance of our experience, especially with drama whose whole existence is directed at giving us an experience. Simply because we cannot talk about a play's effect well, should we therefore deny its existence?

How well this study succeeds in dealing with the individual plays must serve as answer to the broad question of affective criticism. That works of art are capable of self-referential interpretation is less open to debate. Leslie Fiedler says:

There is a sense...in which a work of art is a history of itself, a record of the scruples
and hesitation of its maker in the course of its making, sometimes a defense or definition of the kind to which it belongs or the conventions which it respects. 5

Calderwood seconds Fiedler: "One thing an author cannot hide is his attitude to art." 6 When a poet writes a poem, no matter what else he is doing, he demonstrates what he believes poetry to be. This is an axiom of art.

What varies is the degree of self-consciousness. When Walt Whitman's poems list a long series of objects, men, and their actions, we are led to believe that Whitman's attitudes toward life and art are thus and so. The inductive reasoning that leads us to this conclusion is very different from the effect created by having the poem begin or end with "The reason I am such a long poem filled with a variety of experience and incident is that Walt Whitman believes the world is composed of these things and I am a model of that world." Among contemporary writers, Barth and Borges have made much from such comments by the work or its author.

Historically, comic drama has almost always had a strong self-referential element. Aristophanes' plays are full of direct address to the audience: the chorus may praise the play and criticize certain members and attitudes of the audience. New comedy tends to eliminate references to the play as an artificial construct, but, in the Renaissance, dramatists once more joy in the freedom to create complex structures that produce special effects by referring to their own complexity and their relationship to the life of the audience.

My impulse is to call metadramatic effects strictly comic or, at least, appropriate to comedy. Comedy already has a traditional detachment from the audience. The basic improbability of many comic plots and characters stamp them as artificial from the outset, and the further distancing provided by comments on the play's artificiality only work
variations on the play-audience relationship rather than damage the audience's emotional involvement with events on stage as they might in a tragedy. In a world of clear divisions, one could say with a degree of certainty that tragedy depends on its illusion being maintained so the strongest emotional attachment can be created and maintained between audience and character; comedy, on the other hand, can fool around with its status as recreation without suffering dilution. However, one of the messages Shakespeare's comedies drive home is this is no world of clear divisions.

Indeed one of Renaissance drama's strengths is a fertile cross-breeding of dramatic forms to produce sturdy hybrids. Lionel Abel, whose book *Metathetre*, suggests the name for the criticism here practiced, seems unable to digest this fact of dramaturgy. A classifier by nature, Abel creates the term metathetre to describe works that will not fit into his rigorously defined categories of comedy and tragedy. He defines metathetre as "theatre pieces about life as already theatricalized." But, in a sense, all drama is this, because it is about life and life is, like it or not, theatricalized. Calderwood suggests that the words "part," "role," "play," "act," etc. are common to both life and the theatre which yields in drama a constant "duplexity" of life and art. Northrop Frye says that "personae" the masks and roles that men adopt for dealing with each other are what "makes life theatrical even as it makes theatre life-like."

The assumption that men play roles and actors play men playing roles is basic to metadramatic criticism: "All the world's a stage," and vice versa. Anne Righter in her synoptic *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*, writes of metaphors within the play that relate the play to the world of the audience:
Used within the "reality" of the play itself, they also serve to remind the audience that elements of illusion are present in ordinary life and that between the world and the stage there exists a complicated interplay of resemblance that is part of the perfection and nobility of the drama itself as form.11

If we are to credit anyone with founding the school of Shakespearean metadramatic criticism it is Righter, but her book is mainly a series of instances, and the scope of her survey prevents a detailed analysis of the function of play metaphors in any single play. James Calderwood attempts such an analysis of the early plays. He says that in addition to "moral, social, political" issues, Shakespeare's plays are about "dramatic art itself--its materials, its media of language and theatre, its generic forms and conventions, its relationship to truth and the social order."12 Since he is concerned with the early plays, it is appropriate that his study deals primarily with technical aspects of drama, and he traces a convincing chart of Shakespeare's struggles with his art.

Although both Righter and Calderwood make some motion in the direction of relating metadramatic elements to the audience's experience of the play (most notably in connection with the comedies), neither places the main force of his argument on this issue. For me, when a play announces clearly that it is a play, it says to us "you are an audience." Four critics contribute to my understanding of how a play, particularly a Shakespearean comedy, shapes our experience. None is specifically a metadramatic critic, and some might raise objections to my use of their insights, but their contributions to this study must be acknowledged. Northrop Frye provides the notion of the "green world."13 The green world is an area embedded within a framework of imitative reality, but set off from that more straightforward and problem plagued area. The
typical comic action, in Frye's theory, involves a retreat from the first reality into the green world, a place of pastoral or arboreal retirement, where the complications of the basic world are worked out through recuperation or modification. The green world prepares its sojourners for a return to their work day worlds, now equipped to institute a new, less restricted, society. Sherman Hawkins provides a needed counter-pattern to Frye's green world comedy. In a brilliant essay (that contained so many of my own half-formed ideas that I felt he had stolen my horse before I had even set the barndoor in place), he posits an additional pattern in Shakespearean comedy which he calls the closed world. In it, characters do not retreat, but besiege, and the blockage that occurs is internal to the character rather than externally imposed. C. L. Barber's notion of "festive comedy" is loosely related to the patterns isolated by Frye and Hawkins. Whether the limiting factors are internal or external, the process of the comedies embodies the destruction of limitations. For Barber, the destructive and liberating force is festivity which Shakespeare expresses by "making the whole experience of the play like that of a revel." The disorder that reigns in comedy leads to a clarification of the relationship between everyday and holiday, and society and nature.

Though these critics differ in details, they all subscribe to the idea that there are certain structures in the play that represent levels of reality different from everyday reality. These heightened or simplified levels of reality are recreative and provide time out from normal life that correspond in some way to the recreative function of the play as a whole. They are in effect images of the play within the play; the effect of these inset worlds or play analogues on the characters helps to mold our response to the whole play as presented. The critic who brings all these ideas together, though they are implicit in the others is Harry
Berger, Jr.:

Simply as a pattern of withdrawal and return, the shuttling between normal and green, or brazen and golden worlds is of too widespread an incidence to be identified with the genius of a particular age and culture. The significant Renaissance contribution lies in the doubting of this pattern so that the second world or heterocosm assumes the status of a green world in relation to the audience.17

The "second world or heterocosm" is the world of the work as a whole which stands in exemplary relation to us as the green world stands to the characters in the play. Berger insists that we are to be affected by our experience of this second world:

Familiar examples of this pattern occur when Rosalind and Prospero carry the return from Adden and island through the playworld into their respective epilogues. The withdrawal has made everything clear: golden and brazen forms have been distinguished, are made to confront and reform each other. Now as the play world turns to artifice before our eyes, as the characters turn back into actors, we are asked to share the playwright's responsibility. It is up to us to respond to the words and images graven in our souls, to carry them home with us from the theater as Rosalind and Prospero did from their retreats, to transform the bounded moment of esthetic delight into a model or guide for moral action. What Rosaline and Prospero finally communicate as they fade is a lesson, a moral significance, which was rubbed vividly into the very grain of the fiction, which we can find there if we take the plays seriously enough to interpret them, and which those who do not submit to the plays as written do not see in the epilogues. This implies that profit is immanent in the very nature of artifice and fiction, yet that fiction can fulfill itself only by going beyond itself and invading life. It does this through open gestures of self-limitation, as when, by revealing itself as mere make-believe, it seals off its image, breaks the transference, releases the audience and consigns the fate of its rounded image to their wills.18

Although Berger sees the relationship of green world, second
world, and audience as common to all areas of Renaissance imaginative
and scientific thought, he takes these final examples from drama, from
comedy, and from Shakespeare. Drama is the most affective literary
genre, because it most directly connects art and life—people are actors
and actors are people. Much drama is also self-reflexive, especially
Renaissance drama. Much Renaissance literature contain worlds within
that correspond to and reverberate with the world without. I return to
the matter of degree that I slipped away from earlier. Comedy contains
all the aforementioned qualities in a greater degree and Shakespeare's
comedies to a greater extent than other Renaissance comedies. It should
add up to Shakespeare's comedy's being the comedy best suited to my
metadramatic-affective method. I think it is, but I am not dogmatic.
Literature seems to develop its own best criticism. A shoe will do to
drive a nail, until a hammer comes along, and the hammer is only as good
as the man who swings it. The true test lies in how well the nail is
driven.

If the methodology I introduce in this chapter proves more shoe
than hammer, it is because I have not used any of these ideas consistently.
(Calderwood simply refuses to write a methodology for his Shakespearean
Metadrama.) The lesson the comedies teach is that too rigid an approach
to anything leads to distortion and misinterpretation. The classic ex-
ample of this kind of misreading is Malvolio's forcing of "Olivia's"
letter: "To crush this a little, it would bow to me." The critic is
wise to avoid the steward's erring path.
NOTES


2. Ibid., 1.


8. Ibid., 60.


17. Harry Berger, Jr., "The Renaissance Imagination: Second World and Green World," Centennial Review, IX (1965), 74. Berger goes on to warn that "It would be misleading to think of the pattern within the second world as an image of the larger dialectic between second world and audience." In the case of Shakespeare's comedies, the two dialectics are often similar.

18. Ibid., 75.
19 J. L. Styan's work with drama has been devoted to demonstrating that drama is necessarily affective and that the criticism of plays should be the criticism of plays in performance or, less ideally I suppose, as imagined in performance. In Shakespeare's Stagecraft (Cambridge at the University Press, 1967), Styan says, "The study of audience response is a study of the audience in conditions of performance; the test of Shakespeare's stagecraft is in the theatre in action." (228) In his recent Drama, Stage and Audience (Cambridge University Press, 1975), he attempts to unravel the many strands (actors, script, stage properties, costume, lighting, etc.) that make up a play in performance in order to discuss certain elements singly. He sees plays as a complex system designed to work on an audience, not as a series of discrete elements capable of separate interpretation.

Proceed...

The Comedy of Errors I.i.1
The Comedy of Errors, Shakespeare's earliest comedy and perhaps his first play, already shows a remarkable talent at work. Shakespeare takes a farce by Plautus about misplaced twins, adds another pair of twin servingmen, a frame in which the first twins' father is sentenced to death, and considerable psychology to create a play that exceeds its source to the extent that the Roman play would be little studied did Shakespeare's play not exist. Yet, The Comedy of Errors is not Shakespeare of the first water and, as comedy, is atypical. Its broad farce has more in common with The Taming of the Shrew than with the romantic comedies and its domestic elements appear again only in The Merry Wives of Windsor. Moreover it is apprentice work, somewhat long of wind, at times excessively tedious when trying to be funny, and, though full of violent physical action, weds but imperfectly word and deed. It lacks the spectacular effects that Shakespeare will create by playing with the idea of playing. It is, in short, what one would expect of a young playwright writing at the dawn of a great age of the theatre—a play, in content, form, and genre, striving for completeness.

I

The theme of the play centers on incompleteness in every category of human relationship—social, familial, and individual. The first scene puts all these areas before the viewer in the form of old Aegeon's predicament. On the social level, in this play limited to the mercantile relations men establish, Syracuse and Ephesus are engaged in an apparently irrational war on each other's citizens. It is not a trade war, for
there is no mention of competition. Rather it is a set of laws that condemn merchants of either city to death upon entering the opposing town. Beyond saying that Ephesian law has arisen in response to Syracuse's bloody practices, Solinus offers little explanation for this regulation. However, Solinus's description of Syracuse's degradations is significantly given in terms more appropriate to internal dissensions—"intestine jars," "thy seditious countrymen" (I.i.11-12)—than war between two states; the function of these inappropriate words is to link the macrocosmic disorder to the inner division of characters like the Antipholi, Adriana, and Aegeon himself. As object of this under the circumstances politic, law, Aegeon must suffer the penalty of international division, but he also suffers from other varieties of disconnectedness. He has lost first his wife and one twin son, then his remaining son in search of the lost first. As he puts it, the loss is a merchant's venture: "Whom whilst I laboured of a love to see/I hazarded the loss of whom I loved." (131-32) This double loss prolonged over a period of years has rendered Aegeon a man for whom death, deserved or not, is a kind of kindness. The first scene is bracketed by couplets that express the death-in-life, that is, life without connections: "Proceed, Solinus, to procure my fall/And by the doom of death end woes and all;" "Hopeless and helpless does Aegeon wend,/But to procrastinate his lifeless end." (1-2, 158-59)

Thus, in the opening scene, Shakespeare puts forth Aegeon, whose painful situation, is the initial example of the problems of relation in Ephesus. All non-family relationships in Ephesus are mercantile.² Aegeon's situation results from a money feud, however indirectly, and in consequence he can buy out his doom. The Dromios are described as
having been "bought" (I.ii.58) and are technically less servants than slaves. The courtezan is what her name indicates. And all the men, with the exception of the Dromios, Pinch, and Solinus, are merchants. Businessmen pride themselves, justly or not, on their clearheadedness. I.ii opens with an Ephesian merchant advising Antipholus of Syracuse to pretend to be a merchant from Epidamnum to avoid the fate of Syracusan traders. In this one instance, the business mind's subversive flexibility mirrors that adaptable personality that in later years will form the subject and object of Shakespeare's comic enterprise. But more ordinarily, or ideally, the businessman proceeds by contractual arrangements that clearly stipulate conditions binding on the two contracting parties. When these conditions are fulfilled the business relation is completed. That businessmen are some of our greatest actors and their contracts some of our greatest fiction need not be gone into now. In this view, the canons of law are the literary criticism of the contract, critical glosses that will later find their place in The Merchant of Venice.

However, business in Ephesus is relatively straightforward—one thousand marks for a life, one hundred for a gold chain, one gold chain for a ring and considerations. Nonetheless, there are no contracts fulfilled. Even though every character is honest, the bulk of mistaken identity weighs against completion; the problem lies not in the contractual arrangement, but in one person's not being party to the contract and not being able to convince others of that fact. Not reading others aright is a fundamental comic misinterpretation and, as such, more a given of comedy than an inherently interesting ingredient. Much of the humor may arise from the careful intercalation of Antipholi and Dromios,
but it is this element that Shakespeare takes over in gross form from Plautus. What Shakespeare adds is the complex thematic function of the mistaken identity action; the missed connections and subsequent disorder that obtain in the business world are metaphors for the more serious disorder of the family and isolation of the individual.

The family relations are complicated by there being two Antipholi, but are already bad as the play opens. The base situation is the incompleteness of Aegeon's family. Aegeon, Aemelia, and Antipholus of Syracuse believe that their family is extant, but hopelessly split; Antipholus of Ephesus is apparently unaware of his missing relations. The physical separation of Aegeon's family depends on fated circumstances; Antipholus of Ephesus's second generation family is psychologically split and the reasons for this are more difficult to determine. Adriana blames the disjunction on her husband's frequent absences on business and what she suspects is the business of pleasure with the courtesan. Antipholus denies being unfaithful and attributes his disaffection to Adriana's shrewishness. (If the abbess is to be believed, Antipholus is right.) Whatever the first cause of this marital discord, the effect is to make the partners less than whole, healthy, individuals. Adriana's speeches are alternately full of self-pity and venom. Antipholus of Ephesus gives the impression of being more vicious than his brother; it is his Dromio who gives the long speech on beating (IV.iv. 30-40) and it is he who administers the gross punishment of Dr. Pinch. Where Antipholus of Syracuse is melancholy and bereft, Ephesus is ill-tempered and grumpy.

Family problems have a direct bearing on the individual's sense of completeness. Antipholus of Ephesus is continually at odds with the rest of Ephesus; the difficulties arise from his brother's presence, but,
in his paranoia, he attributes them to a conspiracy headed by Adriana. Adriana, in her turn, conceives of marriage as a blending of two fleshes into one—"undividable, incorporate." (II.ii.124) She adds by way of accusation, "If we two be one and thou play false/I do digest the poison of thy flesh,/Being strumpeted by thy contagion." (144-46) Love is a unity of two beings and any straying pollutes both partners. That she expresses these feelings of loss to the unwitting Antipholus of Syracuse only embodies the notion that her conversations with her husband have long been partial.

Antipholus of Syracuse is the image of his father's woes. He, too, acutely feels his lack of connectedness and his relationship with his Dromio is correspondingly closer; he describes his slave as "A trusty villain, sir, that very oft/When I am dull with care and melancholy/Lightens my humour with his merry jests." (I.ii.19-21) This closeness matters little in regard to number of blows struck, but it does characterize Antipholus of Syracuse as one who values companionship. His eager leap at Luciana whom he is certain to marry at play's end is another sign of his desire for relation. He most tellingly reveals the doctrine upon which the play focusses:

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:
So I, to find a mother and a brother,
In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself. (I.ii.35-40)

The sense is that the compulsive search for relation is self-destructive, but that without the quest there is no hope for connection.

Connection is completeness.\(^3\) Without relation there is neither love, nor community, nor self. The motion should be centripetal, all parties compacted into one globe, macrocosm and microcosm one as in the
amazing cook Nell whose physiognomy encompasses the world. But the motion here is either centrifugal or simply stopped. Antipholus of Ephesus continually tries to flee the center in which all his answers lie. According to Adriana, her husband flies from the marriage bed, center of a fertile society. In order that society be held together at all requires the bonds of an officer and later Dr. Pinch; to avoid such physical restraints Antipholus of Syracuse and his Dromio seek refuge in an abbey. Flight and constraint are linked in the play's locked houses, the abbey and Luciana's home. Outside are those who would enter, inside those who would escape.

If the play is to avoid flying apart or collapsing in on itself, some revelation is required. The fifth act provides the unknotted that ties society back together at all levels, and it does this by producing both twins at once. In a rather fatiguing series of speeches the day's misadventures are recounted—all, that wasn't me, that was he." All the business dealings are sorted out, as are the family and personal problems of Aegeon, Aemelia, and Antipholus of Syracuse. Even Adriana and her Antipholus are reconciled. The play's main action ends with general rejoicing and a proposed dinner at which all will be gone over in more detail:

And hear at large discoursed all our fortunes:
And all that are assembled in this place,
That by this sympathized one day's error
Have suffered wrong, go keep us company,
And we shall make full satisfaction. (V.i.395-99)

II

"After so long grief, such festivity!" (V.i.406) So concludes Aemelia, wife and mother in the reunited family. Thus, the action is finished, but not the play. For all that is brought together in plot,
much is left dangling in technique. In the later comedies, Shakespeare will use his technical mastery to create dramatic effects that depend on his appearing graceless. He becomes the clumsily clown whom we know to possess more skill than the acrobat, but here most of the falls are real. The *Comedy of Errors* is not a bad play, but it is not good Shakespeare; the welding of dramatic components is as shaky as was the marriage of Antipholus and Adriana.

We miss several elements of Shakespeare's art in this play. Most comic plots wear the aspect of improbability, and *The Comedy of Errors* is no exception; in fact, its fortuitous comings and goings make it the most clearly and consistently manipulated of all the comedies. Harold C. Goddard reflects the feelings of many critics when he says, "One can picture Plautus-Shakespeare making actual puppets or using bits of colored cardboard and moving them about on a table to keep the characters and situations straight." As this study will show, Shakespeare often turns gross plot manipulation to his own advantage, but not here; we might even add that Shakespeare only adds a few complications to Plautus's already convoluted series of actions. However, these complaints may well be out of order; we cannot expect an artist in the starting blocks to run faster than one in full stride.

Nonetheless, the plot is deficient in a more telling manner; it is almost wholly independent of character. Only Aegeon's situation is a result of his own motivations; all the rest of the situations are a result of plot rather than psychology. The characters do have personalities and wills: Antipholus of Ephesus is irascible; Antipholus of Syracuse is lost and mostly lonely; Luciana is commonsensical; and Adriana, though adjudged a shrew, has some heft to her arguments on freedom. The
characters are not simply counters in a stylized game, but the plot treats them as if they were. An argument could be made that, since the characters are treated as one entity by the society in which they move in spite of their being something else, the play is commenting on the rigidity and imposition of social roles, but Ephesus is not yet Illyria, and this argument would better fit the last comedy than the first. *The Comedy of Errors* lacks the spark that bridges character and action—the monster remains ungalvanized. Less floridly, both plot and character exist, but as independent rather than interdependent elements of the drama.

Another aspect we come to expect from Shakespearean comedy is playing with illusion and the dramatic conditions that make such a play a comment on drama itself. There is much talk about illusion in *The Comedy of Errors*; Antipholus of Syracuse describes Ephesus thus:

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,
And many such-like liberties of sin. (I.ii.97-102)

This description is wonderfully apt for *Twelfth Night* (even more so for Ben Jonson's *Volpone*), but in Ephesus illusion is illusory. No characters pretend to be other than they are, and the misunderstandings that arise result from a misinterpretation of reality which, if illusion at all, is very different from conscious deception practiced for whatever end. The inhabitants of this world have little conception of man as an actor; there are no plotters or playwrights here. The Dromios and Antipholi may read each other's and the citizen's behavior as deception, but it is not. Luciana alone has a speech which approaches the concerns of the later comedies with acting. She advises Antipholus that if he cannot
be faithful to his wife he should at least pretend to be: "Though others have the arm, show us the sleeve." (III.ii.24) (Hamlet's address to his mother is but elaboration of this notion.) But Luciana's address is misdirected and Antipholus (of Syracuse) can only marvel at this Ephesian "siren." (47) Her words just lie there.

In this metadramatic connection, the last act where Shakespeare will later marshall dazzling effects is straightforward and workmanlike. The unresolved elements will be explained offstage to "all that are assembled in this place," (V.i.396) a reference which might in another play refer to the audience, but which is as far as this play goes completely play-bound. We know exactly what has happened, because we have seen the whole of what the characters have only seen pieces.5

Nonetheless, a play can be successful with plot reflecting character or without self-conscious allusions to its own artistry. However, if it would hold the stage, it cannot, for long stretches, be boring or listless. The first scene of this comedy is some hundred and sixty lines of exposition and antecedent action; almost all the speeches are over twenty lines long and one is over sixty. No action takes place and, without considerable jazzing up, the scene falls like lead. Some lift to the action is given by the farcical episodes that make up the bulk of the play, but the last act again bogs down in the unnecessary explanation to the characters of what the audience already knows. The linkage of word and action is as tenuous as that of plot and character and more damaging to our experience. Granted that not all the information a playwright needs to communicate to his audience can be enacted and the limitation afflicting stage presentation will produce some of Shakespeare's greatest passages of poetry: Enobarbus's account of
Cleopatra on the Nile and Vernon's portrait of young Harry Monmouth mounting his charger in Henry IV are such unstageable wonders. From the play at hand, we can add the description of Nell the cook whose bad eminence rivals in ugliness the beauty of the other passages. This irresistible snatch on her complexion just scratches the surface of her monstrosity: "Swart, like my shoe, but her face nothing like so well kept." (III.ii.103–4)

Narration and description have their place in drama, but Aegaeon's long speeches have neither beauty, nor comic grossness, nor yet quite tragic starkness or grandeur. These shortcomings introduce a further example of incompleteness. The difficulties that beset the characters in reaching a complete and integrated life similarly bedevil their creator. The characters do not know what is going on in Ephesus and neither quite does the novice playwright. He has trouble connecting plot and character, speech and action, the same problems the characters have though suffered on the level of art rather than life. He also has trouble with genre, and it is in this area that he makes his first tentative gesture at metadramatic effect. No one would suggest that Shakespeare started to write The Tragedy of Aegaeon and wound up writing The Comedy of Errors. I would however suggest that he started the play as if he were writing a tragedy.

Significantly, Aegaeon's story is just that, a story, not a drama, and the story elements are what make it fall short of tragedy. In itself, Aegaeon's story has some interest. Solinus originally asks Aegaeon to "Say in brief the cause" (I.i.29) for his risky appearance in Ephesus. The long speech that follows stops dead any physical action, but has its own movement as the story of a man rising to prosperity, having a
family, and then being witness to and participant in the halving of his
good fortune. He even has the serial writer's sense to break off right
before the climax which leads Solinus to exclaim "Nay, forward, old man;
do not break off so;/For we may pity, though not pardon thee." (97-98)
With this response, Solinus may be the first example of an audience
within the play. Aegeon then winds his story out and concludes:

Thus have you heard me sever'd from my bliss,
That by misfortunes was my life prolong'd.
To tell sad stories of my own mishaps. (119-21)

The duke is moved to a certain extent: "Hapless Aegeon, whom the fates
have marked/To bear the extremity of dire mishap!" (141-42) But he is
insufficiently moved to pardon the old man; Solinus must abide by the
laws of Ephesus.

In the light of Solinus's later pardon of Aegeon, his first act
recalcitrance must be judged. The key to Solinus's dramatic reversal in
Act V, when he not only pardons but refuses the thousand marks he is
offered as ransom, lies in the nature of his response to Aegeon. I have
just said that Solinus is an audience to Aegeon's story; as with all
audience's he is in some measure a critic and his judgment is finally
aesthetic. As a tragedy, Aegeon's tale of woe is deficient; its ele-
ments, despite their tragic treatment, are more properly comic. Aegeon
is prosperous rather than noble; his fall has no cosmic ramifications;
he has at the end of the story one son and servant left, although he
ultimately loses these. The symmetry of his tale is too perfect,
therefore, too improbable. Like Romeo and Juliet it is too dependent
on fate; nothing Aegeon does precipitates the storm. None of these
deficiencies, alone or in combination, are sufficient to deny the story
tragic status. From less promising material, Shakespeare forged great
tragedy. Without entering too far the minefield of catharsis, I think we can locate Solinus's reservations: "We may pity, though not pardon thee." (97) Aegeon's story is pitiful; it is not also terrible. The reason it lacks terror is that it is not embodied and it is not finished. What makes us accept Othello and reject Thomas Rymer's mockery of its bare-boned plot is the play's magnificent enactment and its terrifying finality.

Aegeon's story, considered as tragedy or comedy, is disembodied, is talk, is emphatically not drama. The process of the play is the progressive embodiment of the comic conclusion of Aegeon's story. Solinus's decision to spare Aegeon's life is based not on the rescission of the vicious protective tariff, but on nothing more than the successful and satisfying completion of what heretofore partial and aesthetically unconvincing.

Why, here begins this morning story right:
These two Antipholuses, these two so like
And these two Dromios, one in semblance,--
Besides her urging of her wreck at sea,--
These are the parents to these children,
Which accidentally are met together. (V.i.346-51)

What fails as tragedy, passes as comedy.

Solinus is wrong, though, to attribute the conclusion to accident. We in the audience can feel the heavy hand of the author. He has partially succeeded in making a completed play. There are more connections missed perhaps than made, but the last bit of business on stage marks how far in the course of one play Shakespeare could progress. The distance from the lumbering opening to the reunion of the Dromios is the distance from story telling to living drama. The Dromios too have suffered the heavy hand of the playwright not to mention their masters
and they have nothing to offer us except themselves as characters. They are not of the wily servi of Plautus; they are instead the progenitors of the more durable and various Shakespearean line that includes Launce, Speed, Bottom and his rude mechanicals, the fortuitous Dogberry, and, by stretching, the omnivorous Falstaff and roguish Autolycus.

The Dromios are not ingenious innovators as the heroines of the later comedies will be, nor are they minor dramatists as will be some of their descendants. They are long-suffering and enduring, but their value lies in their self-consciousness and their easygoing acceptance of their lowly positions. Dromio of Ephesus states their position best:

Am I so round with you as you with me,
That like a football you do spurn me thus?
You spurn me hence, and he will spurn me hither:
If I last in this service, you must case me in leather.
(II.i.82-85)

Their only reward for suffering is our applause and they deserve it.

In my opinion, the play languishes until Dromio of Ephesus enters and delivers his breathless first speech (I.ii.43-52). With these brothers who know each other not at all yet share the same metaphors (e.g. II.ii.202-4 and III.i.16-19), life enters the play and love, of all the varieties presented, lease emulous and least thwarted. Appropriately then, the stage is at the end theirs alone. The reunion of Aegaeon's family has been restrained, indeed almost unacknowledged. We are left to imagine what will occur at the "gossiping" to which Aemelia invites everyone. The joyful moment to which the play has pointed from its opening lines is to be denied us—apparently, but not so. The Dromios remain on the deserted stage to demonstrate the comedy's theme of completeness, and they do not say it, they play it. They cannot determine which twin is oldest and should therefore leave first, but this problem which so vexes
Adrian and Antipholus of Ephesus is resolved by the two bondmen in a manner that puts their betters, and most of us, to shame.

Dro.S. We'll draw cuts for the senior: Till then lead thou first.
Dro.E. Nay, then, thus:
We came into the world like brother and brother
And now let's go hand in hand, not one before another.
(V.i.422-25)

Shakespeare ends his first comedy not with a formulaic marriage, but with a perfected example of his art, wedding theme and action, word and deed. He does this in one of the most purely good-natured scenes in all his canon.
NOTES

1 Harold Brooks, "Themes and Structure in The Comedy of Errors," in Shakespeare: The Comedies, edited by Kenneth Muir, (Englewood, N.J., 1965), 11-25. This is a good essay on the skill with which Shakespeare manages this early in his career to mount a play that is skillfully arranged, intellectually engaging, and thematically coherent.

2 Ralph Berry in Shakespeare's Comedies: Explorations in Form (Princeton, N.J., 1972) 35 *et passim* has a discussion of the kinds of relationships and communication that obtain in a business society.

3 Versions of this argument are presented in Brooks *op. cit.* and Richard Henze's "The Comedy of Errors: A Freely Binding Chain," Shakespeare Quarterly, XXII (1971), 35-41. Henze's article discusses the golden chain (as does Berry *op. cit*., 35); he sees it as the rectified image of society connected and fulfilled in connection. His argument is appealing, but, I think, too neat to fit adequately the facts of the play.


5 Bertrand Evans; Evans's discussion of discrepant awareness is admirably suited to a play like The Comedy of Errors, but his method is less applicable to the later comedies in which Shakespeare's interests are much more complex. Shakespeare's Comedy (Oxford at Clarendon Press, 1960), 1-9.
The Two Gentlemen of Verona and Love's Labour's Lost:

From Rhetoric to Drama
I will not consider The Two Gentlemen of Verona in any detail. This omission can be attributed to lack of time and interest. Of the comedies, it alone seems unactable, and the contradictions and shifts of character in the last act will tax the abilities of the best director. Moreover, these last act difficulties are not the playing with dramatic conventions that sends the audience from the theatre with expanded visions of art and life as the last act marvels of the later comedies will.

Nonetheless, Two Gentlemen does add to Shakespeare's comic achievement in the sense that it covers much the same ground as the later and much superior Love's Labour's Lost. It introduces the theme of romantic love combined with an inspection of the renaissance humanist's love of language for its own sake. Rhetoric and romantic love are almost inseparable in Shakespeare's comedies; both err in their devotion to forms and rules over content and feeling.

Of the characters in the play, Valentine and Proteus are most caught up in the Renaissance fascination for words. They spring full-blown like characters from Lyly, ever-ready to put their verbal talents to work; they debate on education and love; they write poems; they write letters; in short, they do with words all that a young humanist might be expected to do. They fail, however, to make their words meaningful. The main focus of their words is love but to them love is not an emotion of any significance, it is rather an occasion for verbal ingenuity whether it be sonnets or resolved: Cupid, blind or seeing? Their language has little connection with their feelings; they react to loss or reunion with the
stereotyped images of countless sonneteers. Moreover, this Petrarchan quality makes the play hard reading; the language is typically mannered, paradoxical, and convoluted; the meaning is with few exceptions trivial.

In contrast to the two male lovers are their servants whose attitude toward language and action undercuts the romantic posturings of their masters. This is particularly true of Launce. In almost every appearance Launce tries to capture meaning and make language into communication. Our first meeting with Launce and his cruel dog makes this point. (II.iii) In substance this departure scene parodies that between Proteus and Julia directly preceding. More important is its manner. Launce begins simply to explain the sorrow at his departure, but he feels that words are inadequate to the experience. A naive playwright, he says, "Nay, I'll show you the manner of it." (II.iii.14) Using various articles of clothing and accoutrements, he attempts to create a one-man, many character, drama. His hilarious failure in no way obviates his intent. He wants the audience to understand, to feel with him the sorrow at his parting and the indifference of Crab. He is an instance of honesty in the fact of the limits of language. By creating a drama where words and actions combine to form meaning, he hopes to win us over, to make us comprehend him as a feeling person. Though his drama falls flat and we are finally taken in by his disingenuousness, he is none the less our man for that. Launce rigorously eschews simile, one of the poet's basic tools, or uses it to such effect that it is nullified. He continues in this vein with his dog remaining "a dog at all things" a "pissing while" becoming in fact "a pissing while." No rhetorical figures stand between us and his meaning; as he says, "You shall judge." (IV.iv.16) His regard for being so doggedly unpoeitic is telling
one story that remains in the mind of most readers long after Proteus and Valentine have fled.

Launce and his compeer Speed have a more adequate view of language than the rhetoric-ridden male lovers, and their ability to make language reflective of human realities will be a subject of Shakespeare's later comedies. That Shakespeare this early in his career relates adequate language and adequate living with his own dramatic method (Launce's play) is a harbinger of better things to come. But, in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, successful analogues of the playwright's art are limited to the minor characters; Valentine and Proteus have learned nothing and have very little to tell us.

No one doubts today that Love's Labour's Lost is one of Shakespeare's most complexly realized early comedies. Moreover, no recent critic doubts that it is about the relationship between language and the reality of human emotions.¹ As in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, the language of the male lovers is disconnected from real feeling or trammeled by their love of wit. The process of the play is a gradual weaning away of the men from superficial and artificial language and emotions to an understanding of the seriousness of love. The means through which this is accomplished is wit turned against them to reveal their own folly,² and wit often embodied in analogues of the play as a whole.

An immediate contrast in the play is established between the men and the women by the two-world structure.³ The King of Navarre has attempted to construct an academy which will bring his court lasting fame in the face of time. The place he chooses for his Academe's setting is his own royal park. This park is characterized by Armado, if he may be trusted, as a "curious knotted garden." (I.i.249-50) In this formal
park, the unrealistic ground rules of Academe are set forth—"not to see
ladies, study, fast, not sleep." (I.i.48) It is here that men turn son-
net and deer are converted into witty conceits. The enclosed park is the
image for all the anti-generative and stifling powers inherent in the
men's original oath.  

Although the stage direction indicate a single scene, the action
does not. One of the principle sources of contention in the opening
action is over where to lodge the princess of France and her retinue.
According to the men's oaths, the women cannot be settled at court; they
are instead lodged in the "wide fields/" (II.i.85) It is clear from the
last scene that the men come from some distance to see the ladies. By
being associated with the wide fields rather than the artificial park,
the women are understood as being closer to the actual world of passions
and problems than the men. As Bobbyann Roesen indicates, the real
world gains access to the world of the play through the women's camp.
Through the women's embassade on behalf of an ambiguous debt, the whole
world of politics and war, history and time, is brought to bear on the
peculiar and fragile experience of Navarre. Furthermore, through the
women's eyes we see Navarre's courtiers moving, in retrospect, through
a more normal courtly society. (II.i.40-75) Finally, from the women's
direction, comes first the hints of pain and death caused by love, and
then the virtually mute but decisively present death of France's king.

The play then sets up two worlds: the men's, although not lack-
ing a kind of witty energy, can be characterized as artificial and
sterile in word and deed; the women's as cognizant of realities of emo-
tion and pain, but ultimately fruitful. The problem is how the men are
to be brought from one world to the other. The mechanism is witty satire.
In the opening scene, Biron represents this tempering satire. His attitude is best summarized by completing an earlier quotation:

0 these are barren oaths, too hard to keep,
Not to see ladies, study, fast, not sleep. (I.i.47-48)

He has the sense of reality to know "necessity will make us all forsworn." (I.i.150) But the effect of the artificial world is too great and he subscribes to the oath.

As is only natural, the men fall in love at first sight with the women. They all break their oaths and set to writing poems and talking in the most conceited Petrarchan manner. In a brilliant tour de force (IV.iii), Shakespeare has each successive lover perform an impromptu for a gradually accreting audience—Biron for us, the King for Biron and us, Longaville for the King, Biron, and us, etc. Biron's metaphor for these performances is that of a drama—"all hid, all hid; an old infant play." (IV.iii.78) Although the Arden editor glosses this only as a child's game, surely Ms. Roesen is correct in seeing this scene as the first of three plays within the play. This play reveals to the audience and to the men themselves their true feelings. The response to each man's poeticizing by his most immediate predecessor is characteristic derision. Each in turn takes his lumps, until Biron like a very satyr says, "Now step I forth to whip hypocrisy." (IV.iii.151) Biron's own hypocrisy remains unrevealed until the egregious Costard arrives to make the four courtly lovers complete. Each man's performance makes him an object of laughter for some of the others, but when each has been held up to scorn, they are all ready to become lovers. Their minor dramas have allowed them to break through, at least, their oaths to love.

This is not, however, their last step to obtaining the women.
Biron proceeds to justify the young men's oath-breaking. Among his sophistries is the assertion that love improves one's perceptions—"It adds a precious seeing to the eye." (IV.iii.333) The key word "precious" turns back on Biron with its connotation of "over-nice" and "over-refined." In keeping with this meaning of preciosity, the men's response to love is not to make some positive move in the women's direction, but to create a disguising. That Boyet, Biron's older and significantly single counterpart in the ladies' circle, overhears the Muscovite plot is appropriate. The women take countermeasures; they exchange tokens and permit themselves to be wooed by the wrong suitors. The women's wit turns the tables on the men ("sport by sport o'erthrown.") and the men withdraw in confusion. Upon their return in proprìa persona, the women mock them and reveal to them the superficial nature of an affection that can so easily mistake its object. Their play has been rewritten by the women and Biron feels it to be "dashed like a Christmas comedy." (V.ii.400) The men's chagrin at being fooled by surfaces leads to the famous speech of Biron's in which he pledges to give up "taffeta phrases, silken terms precise,/ Three piled hyperboles, spruce affectation,/Figures pedantical," in favor of "russet yeas and honest kersey noes." (V.ii.406-8 and 413)

At this point in the play, the audience might well expect that all problems have been resolved—the men are finally worthy of the women and marriages are in the offing, but not so. The third play within the play intervenes between the men's apparent achievement and the denouement which alters all. The "Pageant of the Nine Worthies" is another analogue of the play in which reality peeps through the now tattered costume of artifice. The minor characters, who have all along had their own problems with language, come a cropper in this historical review. As with Bottom
and his rustics, these would-be actors achieve their end of entertaining, but not as they purposed. As the princess says, "Their form confounded makes most form in mirth/When great things laboring perish in their birth." Biron's response underlines the parallel between this play and the disguising—"a right description of our sport." (V.ii. 520-22) Each playlet indicates a disparity between what is intended and the result; both yield laughter; the actor shows too clearly beneath his role.

The main purpose of the pageant is not, however, to show the minor characters' shortcomings, but to reveal the remaining flaw in the men. The response to the pageant is dual. The women accept the players' poor fare with the good grace later shown by Duke Theseus. The men, including this time Boyet, find themselves for once on the laughing end and are simply rude boors. We may at this point recall that Biron's rejection of rhetoric is still witty-rhetorical. Costard enters and says, "I Pompey am," and Boyet delicately ripostes, "You lie, you are not he." (V.ii. 549-50) The men's wit is of a piece with this ragging; the minor characters come off better than the gentles in this scene; they patiently bear the crude remarks and defend each other's poor performances. (V.ii. 585-90) Here wit makes way for abuse. The audience will certainly agree with Holofernes' "this is not generous, not gentle, not humble." (V.ii. 632) The men are revealed by the play to be still addicted to their own sense of humor; they still have one step to go, but the audience will not be there to see it.

The pageant becomes more and more chaotic with violence breaking out, at the men's instigation, between Costard and Armado. At this point another character enters the scene, one we have not seen but may
mistake for another masquer. In the space of four lines the action is turned around, for this is Mercade who almost without words communicates the news of the King of France's death.

Mercade: ...the news I bring is heavy in my tongue. The king, your father--
Princess: Dead, for my life!
Mercade: Even so; my tale is told.

As Holofernes has said, "Vir sapit, qui pausa locitur."

With time, which they had once thought to escape, bearing down on them, the men hurry to confirm their engagements, only to find that the women "had rated (their letters and vows) at courtship, pleasant jest and courtesy/As bombast and as lining to the time." (V.ii.789-91) The women had understood the men's intentions as "mockery-merriment." (V.ii.139) The men's love of wit has rendered language a source of laughter only, not a source of communication. The women finally reject words entirely as a means of communication with the men. The men must demonstrate their devotion in penitent action. The labors laid on the men replace the corrective laughter of the women that led them to their present state. The two explicit penances are wholly appropriate to the themes of the play: the King who eagerly undertook a three year separation from natural activities is enforced to do the same thing for a year; Biron, whose satire and wit have led in the end to misunderstanding, must attempt "to move wild laughter in the throat of death." (V.ii.865) These are the final victories of reality over the misused artifice of words.

Significantly, this satirical comedy, which places an abnormal world in opposition to a sane one with the sane world of the women victorious, is the first of Shakespeare's to make pointed comments about its own ontology. In a very real way, Love's Labour's Lost is Shakespeare's
own Academe, a "curious knotted garden" of complicated verse patterns, rhymes, puns, Petrarchism, Euphuism, and other outrageous affectations of language. Just as in Academe the images of the play have in one way or another broken down before the pressure of reality, so the artifice of the total play breaks down before the limitations of its form. The hard realities of the women's injunctions demand a year's servitude; the equally hard facts of dramatic production forbid the imitation of this action. As the characters say:

Biron: Our wooing doth not end like an old play;
Jack hath not Jill: These ladies courtesy
Might well have made our sport a comedy.
King: Come sir, it wants a twelvemonth and a day,
And then 'twill end.
Biron: That's too long for a play. (V.ii.884-89)

Although it satirized Academe's unreality, Shakespeare's own royal park must itself yield to the exigencies of a greater reality; the playwright's world of words admits the greater, teeming, reality of the audience.

Nonetheless, the play does not let the audience complacently rest in the shallow knowledge that the world is more real than the play. In virtually the same breath that destroys the play's artifice, Biron rocks the audience's natural assumptions about what they have seen. Our smug knowledge of genre and the expectations it arouses are turned against us. Certainly we know that comedies end with marriage and certainly this play was heading in that direction, but "Jack hath not Jill." The fairy tale conclusion is missing; in fact, any sense of well-knit ending is missing. What Shakespeare gives away with one hand, he takes back with the other. He admits the limitations of drama to encompass the complexities of reality, while at the same time, he claims for it the power to draw attention in an emotionally effective way to that complexity. It is one thing to know that words are finally inadequate to reality; it
it another and more telling to have words enact that cold proposition as experience. Biron's remarks make us aware that we are dependent on words—like comedy—and that, often our experience is vastly different from what words convey. This is the problem of the male lovers and it is ours. The play points to drama as one method of enacting meaning in spite of this necessary limitation of words.

Shakespeare closes with two more examples of words used to enact meaning. The first of these is the "Praise of the Owl and the Cuckoo" which Armado says "should have followed in the end of our show." (V.ii. 897 and 899) Instead of the botched jig the audience might expect to end the "Nine Worthies," we have a piece that fittingly ends a play about words that are too simple for the reality they try to reflect. From the description given by Armado, the audience can expect a reasonably straightforward debate between Winter and Spring; what it gets is something quite different. Ver's poem is a rather abstract melange of pleasant and indistinct pastoral activities and figures—flowers, shepherds piping, maidens washing clothes, larks and turtle doves; but cutting across this pastoral world is the discordant cry of "Cuckoo, cuckoo: 0 word of fear, / Unpleasing to a married ear." (V.ii.911-12) On the other hand, Hiem's song is a particularized description of the pains and bitter cold of winter. Paradoxically, winter's bird, the owl, sings a "merry note," while "roasted crabs hiss in the bowl...[and] greasy Joan doth keel the pot." (V.ii.939 and 935) It could be argued from the play's emphasis on reality over words that the cold reality of winter with its indoor compensations wins the débat, but to do this we are forced to neglect Spring's undeniable virtues. Each side has its own complex truth and, in juxtaposition, both sides point to an even more
complex truth; the poem is a model in words of a complex reality and a model of Shakespeare's dramatic method in which such juxtapositions create a world.

The moving last lines of the play are Shakespeare's for his audience: "The words of Mercury are harsh after the song of Apollo. You that way; we this way." (V.ii.940-941) These are indeed words full of the simple eloquence of separation, but it is a dull soul who finds nothing shocking in their being given utterance by that fantastical Spaniard, that man of fire new words, Don Adriano de Armado. Shakespeare's assignment of these fine lines to the least likely of characters is his final jogging of our preconceptions, preconceptions he has himself created. All the internal plays have revealed reality in different ways; the play itself has revealed a reality beneath its own mannered surface and beyond its limits; the song of the cuckoo and owl has created a complex of words imitative of the seamless complexity of reality. Don Armado's words reveal beneath the surface of the buffoon, a human actor capable of giving these lines their austere significance. 9 Again Shakespeare forces us to make the more flexible response to our experience. By turning the basic tools of drama (in this case character and actor) into a cutting edge against our preconceptions, he shows how artifice can suddenly precipitate the pain of reality.

Never before had Shakespeare so rigorously explored the basic materials of drama—the series of splits between character and actor, illusion and reality, and fiction and truth. His method in Love's Labour's Lost makes us realize in our own experience the problems of language dramatized on the stage. Armado's closing lines return us to the world outside the play, but remind us that the dangers of stereotyped
language and conceptions dramatized before our eyes are not limited to
actors in a theatre. One hesitates to call Armado a figure of the play-
wright, but we must accept as being true of the author what the King
says of Armado, "I protest, I love to hear him lie," (I.i.176) especially
when his lies bring home such complex truth.
NOTES

1For three recent interpretations along this line see D. A. Traversi, An Approach to Shakespeare, I, (Garden City, N.Y.) 1969, 85-96; James L. Calderwood, Shakespearean Metadrama, (Minneapolis, 1971), 52-84; and Ralph Berry, Shakespeare's Comedies: Explorations in Form (Princeton, 1972), 72-88.


3See Introduction, 5-8.

4See Sherman Hawkins, "The Two Worlds of Shakespearean Comedy," in Shakespeare Studies, III, 62-80. Hawkins puts Love's Labour's Lost in his "closed world" group of comedies, but recognizes that the men must finally enter the open world of the women. His approach accounts for the unnatural aspects of the men's oaths and sees the necessity for breaking through these oaths into love. I suspect he refuses to see the two physical loci, because his theory demands otherwise.


7Roesen, 414.


9Roesen is alone among the play's critics in finding Armado a sympathetic character from the beginning.
The Taming of the Shrew: Acting and Game
Three main problems face critics of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*: how to deal with the apparently incomplete Sly materials; how to relate the three main plot elements (Sly, Petruchio and Kate, and Lucentio and Bianca); and finally how to interpret Kate's final speech on female submission.¹ No single solution has been conclusive and this chapter takes as its justification yet another approach.² Rather general agreement already exists to the play's being concerned with what C. C. Seronsy calls "supposes," deceptions used to advance one's cause in the face of various obstacles. It is my contention that related to these supposes and lying behind them are the basic matters of creation and acting or playing. Without defining these elements too rigorously, we can say that creation can be related to the playwright's art and playing to the actor's. Creation and acting inform all three plots of *The Taming of the Shrew* and are vital to the understanding of the induction and Katherine's concluding speech.

I

The Induction introduces the theme of acting: Christopher Sly is induced to act like a lord; a lord acts like a servant. Of all the characters who become actors within the play, Sly is the one who makes the greatest change in appearance and the least change in the way he acts; through the lord's practice, he is metamorphosed from a prose-speaking drunkard without the price of a drink to a poetry spouting magnifico of a castle complete with lady wife, servants, and an acting troupe. Only by
the most skillful playing on his lusts is Sly convinced of his nobility, yet once convinced of his position he leaps into his new-found role of lord husband and demands his rightful prerogatives. As far as he is concerned, there is no longer a Christopero Sly.

Yet his effective change is from a man begging for a "pot of small ale" (Ind.ii.1) to one who demands a "pot o' the smallest ale." (Ind.ii.77) For all his new trappings, Sly is capable of only surface alteration and those mundane transmogrifications he has already endured. He remains:

Old Sly's son of Burton-Heath, by birth a pedlar
By education a card maker, by transmutation a bear herd,
and now by present profession a tinker (Ind.ii.19-22)

He is ignorant of drama and his later interruption indicates that he is no fonder of it for the introduction. His whole-hearted assumption of the role of recently recovered husband with its attendant simple but immediate lusts blunts his mind to an appreciation of the finer points of drama.

For all this indifference to art and his inability to really change, the drunken vulgar Sly is considered by most critics to be one of Shakespeare's remarkable early creations. Unlike Falstaff or Toby Belch whom he resembles in his love of drink and freelinking, Sly is incapable himself of creating an imaginary situation or deception; rather, like a more limited Bottom, he is largely remembered for his unconscious participation in the creation of another. The creation of Sly's delusion, not the character himself, is the center of the Induction and the creator of this illusion is the lord. As will so many characters in the internal play of The Shrew, the lord enters into the world of play almost accidentally, but once in, he embellishes and expands his deception
from the sheer joy of playing.

To understand fully the lord's metamorphosis from blunt huntsman to subtle stage manipulator, we must first consider the source for the Induction. The traditional purpose of the story of the beggar transported into luxury is to point up the vanity of the world's riches. In Goulart's version of the story, the beggar experiences exactly Sly's pleasures, is removed, awakes, and decides that it was all a dream. He, thus, demonstrates the fleeting nature of mortal joy and wealth. The metaphor of the "flattering dream of worthless fancy" (Ind.i.44) remains, as does a reference to Sly as a memento mori: "O monstrous beast, how like a swine he lies,/Grim death, how foul and loathsome is thine image." (Ind.i.34-5) Nonetheless, little of the original moral intent remains in Shakespeare's version. Instead of focussing on the didactic possibilities inherent in drunkenness, wealth or illusion, Shakespeare limits his attention to the elaborate mechanisms of created illusion, their effect on their creator, and on those he practices on.

The figure of the playwright in the Induction is of course the lord. The change he undergoes is deeper and, as far as the rest of the play is concerned, more important than the dramatic but superficial change of Sly. The lord moves from huntsman to, briefly, moralist to skillful manipulator of appearances. After Sly's brief opening appearance, the stage belongs for some hundred lines to the lord. He enters the perfect figure of a country squire concerned only with the care and quality of his hounds. After his brief animadversion on death, he immediately conceives of the notion of fooling Sly. There is nothing in his commonplace country character, to prepare us for his obvious relish in planning and carrying off this deception. It may be that the distance
from physical recreation in the field and mental recreation indoors is not so great, but the impression remains that the encounter with Sly opens up new vistas for the lord. Just as Sly, once convinced of his nobility, joins wholeheartedly, if halfwittedly, into the role created for him, the lord as fully enters into the joys of creating that role.  

He arranges a setting which appeals to sight, smell, touch, and hearing (Ind.i.47-51) and coaches his servants to attend Sly with all the care they would bestow upon a real lord. He adjures his men, however, not to overdo things, but to "do it kindly...handed with modesty." (Ind.i.64 and 66) Despite the lord's emphasis on moderation, he himself becomes more and more elaborate as he weaves his fiction. The arrival of the players provides him the opportunity for his first major elaboration. He starts to tell the players the truth about Sly: "I have some sport in hand." (Ind.i.91) Instead he stops and tells them a lie about Sly's being an uncultured lord. This elaboration could account for any untoward behavior on Sly's part, but so would telling the players the truth. Besides, Sly disappears after I.i without ever having a chance to disrupt the action. In the light of the actions of other characters, the lord's persistence in deception is clear. Like Sly caught up in illusion and demanding his husbandly rights, the lord is caught up in the creation of illusion; he wants to hold to his course and the more people fooled the better. Following the departure of the players, the lord devises his second great elaboration—the disguising of Bartholomew as Sly's wife. At this point his deception runs the greatest risk of discovery and Sly reveals his total incapacity to see his new reality as anything other than real.  

Sly's conviction is a result of the lord's virtuoso performance,
the construction and substitution of a false past for a real one. To do this the lord is forced not only to rehearse his men in their roles, but also to take a prominent part himself. Ironically, the part the lord adopts is that of a servant. As a servant, he begins the process of deception outlined in the first part of the induction. Briefly this process is as follows: the attribution to Sly of a long-standing lunacy during which he has been a victim of "abject lowly dreams;" the conversion of real events and people from Sly's life to characters and events occurring only in his dreams; the constant referral, throughout this process, to his senses for evidence; and finally an appeal to his lusts in the form of first pornographic paintings and then his "wife." The main emphasis lies in making Sly believe he is really a genuine lord.

The ease with which this deception is accomplished in what I suppose to be the pirated A Shrew stands in marked contrast to the detailed process in Shakespeare's play. Shakespeare's lord and his servants positively revel in making the illusion as circumstantial and realistic as possible. The love for realism in illusion reaches its logical conclusion in the lord's final metamorphosis into a prompter for Christopher Sly. The following exchange is the last the audience hears from its master of revels:

Sly: What must I call her?
Lord: Madam.
Sly: Al'ce madam, or Joan Madam?
Lord: 'Madam,' and nothing else: so lords call ladies. (Ind.2.110-113)

His final words are wasted trying to make the untractable Sly conform properly to his new role.

The importance of the Induction to the play lies in its introduction of certain themes. One is tempted to say that it introduces the
problem of appearance and reality, but in this early comedy, appearance and reality present little in the way of problems. In the cases of Iago or Don John, what the lord does to Sly becomes a monstrous process of destruction, but in the Induction the creation and maintenance of circumstantial illusions, of model fictions, is an activity designed solely for pleasure. Even the closer scrutiny of acting and creation of illusion provided in the inner play tends to confirm the page's description of drama: He says: "It [is] good you hear a play,/And frame your mind to mirth and merriment/Which bars a thousand harms and lengthens life."
(Ind.2.138-140)

II

The Induction then considers the creation of illusion only under the aspect of recreation. Ms. Greenfield to the contrary, the lord and his servants do not attempt to make of Sly anything more than an entertainment, nor does their playing do more than provide a pleasure that is its own end. Paradoxically, it is the fictive drama of The Shrew rather than in the base (fictive, also) reality of the lord's house that creation and acting have apparently practical ends.

C. C. Seronsy lists the many supposes (acts, disguises, and suppositions) which he sees as providing the unifying thread on which the three plots are strung. It would only be repeating his work to list them, but it will be valuable to look closely at certain supposes in the Lucentio-Bianca plot to determine what attitude is evinced toward them. The inner play of The Shrew opens with Lucentio, typical, young, Shakespearean lover, entering Padua with the noble intention of instituting "a course of learning and ingenious studies." (1.1.8) Just how ingenious his education will be is not yet clear to him. After more pious
cant on the joys derived from devotion to study, he is advised by his commonsensical servant Tranio not to be "So devote to Aristotle's checks/ As Ovid be an outcast quite abjured." (I.1.39) No sooner is this sound advice rendered than Lucentio's high-flown intentions crumble.

Lucentio's opening speech is an expanded version of the lord's comment on death, a brief nod at formal morality. In Lucentio's case, this nod is followed by a burning passion for Bianca. Far from abjuring Ovid, Lucentio embraces him to the point of teaching The Amores to his love and hiding love messages behind the Latin of The Heroïdes. (We have seen Ovid before in the wanton paintings depicting scenes from The Metamorphosis.) Like the lord of the Induction, Lucentio willingly embraces disguise and acting as means of attaining what he desires. Reversing the lord's metamorphosis downward from lord to servant, Lucentio changes from student to teacher. Another significant parallel with the lord's actions is Lucentio's treatment of Biondello; he first purposes to tell this servant the truth about his disguise, "to charm him first to keep his tongue." (I.1.214)* But, like the lord with the actors, the love of play takes over and he fabricates a story about killing a man to insure his servant's silence.

This pattern of playing beyond what is necessary to convince is apparent not only in the lord and Lucentio but also in Tranio, the pedant, and Petruchio himself. When Tranio seeks to enlist the aid of the pedant, he creates an artificial situation concerning the safety of Mantuans in

*The Oxford English Dictionary defines "charm" as to adjure as well as to bewitch or fool, its more usual modern meaning. Lucentio first means to adjure Biondello to go along with the trick, but, having been caught up in his act, he proceeds to bewitch him with his tale.
Padua. Similarly, as the pedant in his role of Vincentio, goes to meet Baptista, he is muttering:

...But I be deceived
Signior Baptista may remember me,
Near twenty years ago, in Genua
Where we were lodgers at the Pegasus (IV.4.2-5)

These lines are obviously the old man's rehearsal for the deception. When confronted with the real Vincentio, the pedant still tries to out-face him and manages, not surprisingly, to convince others of his act's reality; even Gremio who recognizes Vincentio is braved into accepting the pedant's version of reality.

Tranio and the pedant's actions may be necessary to create conviction, but they seem to be in excess of what dramatic probability demands. Their excess squares with the lord's case; he demands moderation, but once under the influence of acting, he expands his fictional world. In all these cases, the reason for over-reaching is simple or complex recreation, recreation not only for the ones who act but also for the audience. We enjoy seeing Tranio's pretentious imitation of his master, his detailed deception of the Mantuan, and the pedant's carrying the day against the real Vincentio.

Nonetheless, most critics assume that the deceptions and role playing in the Lucentio-Bianca, Gascoigne influenced, plot have a practical purpose--the achievement of Lucentio and Bianca's marriage. Forbidden to receive suitors until Katherine is married, Bianca is a typical new comedy heroine. Lucentio resorts to the time-honored method of disguise to gain entrance to her home and heart. In the sense that Lucentio could never have gotten access to Bianca without his going into disguise, this part of the deception is practical. But its incredible machinery--Tranio as Lucentio, Lucentio as pedant, pedant as Vincentio--
proves from a practical point of view to be unnecessary; the lovers elope. When Lucentio tells Baptista that he "made thy daughter mine, / While counterfeit supposes bleared thine eyne," (V.1.119-20) he can mean nothing more subtle than that Tranio distracted Baptista's attention while Lucen-
tia made away with his daughter. Seronsy would have these lines be cen-
tral, but there is no evidence that old Minola is sharp-eyed enough to
require supposes to the degree presented. Certainly Hortensio, who
when he is a lover is a fool, sees through Lucentio's disguise to the ex-
tent of dropping his suit. The flamboyant and wholesale substitution of
one person for another and Lucentio's remark on the supposed efficacy of
such substitution are themselves deceptive. The lovers are united through
the simple expedient of escape and are only accepted into society by Lu-
centio's renunciation of deception. Like the Induction, acting and crea-
tion in the supposes subplot are largely recreative, but as is perhaps
proper in a play-within-a-play the enjoyment is mainly the audience's.

III

For all the foregoing argument, there is one creation and one
actor that do produce a practical end--Petruchio releases through play-
ing a Katherine previously held in check and one who without his act would
remain a sterile shrew. Yet, as I hope to demonstrate, the reverse is also
true. Petruchio changes from an ego-centric fortune-hunter to a man
capable of resigning to his wife the last great speech of the play.

Petruchio comes to Padua "Haply to wife and thrive as best I may." (I.1.56) The wife-thrive rhyme reenforces the premium placed on wiving
"it wealthily in Padua;" (I.2.74) This prevalent treatment of women as
desirable only for their wealth finds its grossest expression in Baptis-
ta's decision to wed Bianca to the highest bidder, an action resembling
a prize cattle auction. Before meeting Katherine, Petruchio subscribes completely to this viewpoint; for him, if one is married "wealthily, then happily in Padua." (I.2.75) However, by the time he has completed his act, he has accepted Kate as a partner in the joint venture of marriage.

Upon accepting Hortensio’s commission to woo and wed the shrewish Katherine, Petruchio the fortune hunter is submerged in the role of tamer only to emerge marvelously changed at the end of the fourth act. Our first inkling, and his, of what Petruchio intends to do to woo Kate occurs in answer to Gremio’s doubt that he even wants to accomplish that feat:

Why came I hither but to that intent?
Think you a little din can daunt mine ears?
Have I not in my time heard lions roar?
Have I not hear the sea puff’d up with winds
Rage like an angry boar chafed with sweat?
Have I not heard great ordnance in the field,
And heaven’s artillery thunder in the skies?
Have I not in a pitched battle heard
Loud ’larums, neighing steeds, and trumpets’ clang?
And do you tell me of a woman’s tongue,
That gives not half so great a blow to hear
As will a chestnut in a farmer’s fire?
Tush, tush! fear boys with bugs. (I.2.199-211)

Petruchio has revealed a love of language in his previous speeches, but here he lets out all stops. A critic would be foolish to accept this quasi-Marlovian language at face value or the events they describe as anything other than imaginary. What they do reveal is a mind quick to construct fictional events and a bravado to carry them off. Much of his success will depend on these qualities.

Petruchio shares his love of language with Kate. As with Beatrice and Benedick, it is this quality that first draws them together. Hearing of her abuse of Hortensio, Petruchio exclaims, "I love her ten times more
than ere I did." (II.1.162) There follows that amazing scene of wit and vituperation where each attempts to outvie the other in scurrility. Yet something is wrong. Kate has in recent years been seen as the frustrated and neglected older daughter, taking out in spleen what she lacks in affection. In this view, she is portrayed as genuinely angry at Petruchio's intrusion and it must be granted that with Bianca she has been cruel and spiteful. No doubt she is neglected, but her anti-social (not simply anti-male) behavior may well spring from her failure to find another person with her quality of wit. In Petruchio she finds such a person.

A look at the pirated A Shrew will help here.* When A Shrew's Kate has had what passes in that abbreviated play for the grand name calling scene, she says to her father:

What do you mean to do with me,  
To give me thus unto this brainsick man,  
That in his mood cares not to murder me?  
She turns aside and speaks  
But yet I will consent and marrie him  
For I methinke have livde too long a maid,  
And match him too, or else his manhoods good. (77)

Her lines to her father (paralleling II.1.287-91) are deceptive; her lines to the audience reveal an already growing interest in Petruchio and a determination to match him at his own game; in short, they reveal a shrew already having found a playmate. There is nothing in Shakespeare's version strictly parallel to these lines, but, as a memorial reconstruction, A Shrew reveals how his Kate acted at this moment. Instead of the normal stage repressed anger while Petruchio describes her acquiescence in love and dismisses her apparent anger as a pre-planned act, there could be a tacit joining in; instead of Kate's silence being speechless anger it could be silent complicity and admiration for a master player.

*See Note 1
If this interpretation is farfetched, and I may have overstated Kate's response, the critic must nonetheless account for her appearance at the wedding. Baptista has said that the man to marry her must win her love. (II.1.129-30) Surely, if Kate took Petruchio's act at its face value she would shun him as a madman. Instead, she is beginning to understand that he is simply playing a role, while at the same time creating a role for her as "pleasant, gamesome." (II.1.247) In this reading of the play, Katherine is already at least partially won over by the end of I.1. Yet it is from this point on that Petruchio's actions are the most outrageous. There are several explanations for his subsequent violence. From the viewpoint of the audience, further chastisement is necessary for Kate. Marrying Petruchio, after engaging in an equal give-and-take wit combat is a too immediately pleasant fate for someone who has broken a lute over Hortensio's head and whom we have seen bind and beat her sister. She must suffer some abuse herself. Furthermore, her play with Petruchio has only taken the form of clever opposition; she has yet to join fully in the mutual creation of pleasurable fictions. This mutuality in play will be the positive image of marriage presented in The Taming of the Shrew.

Nonetheless, audiences have an almost universal reaction against Petruchio's behavior at the wedding and thereafter. He goes far beyond what we feel is necessary and verges in his pointless cruelty on psychopathology. Without taking refuge in the argument that The Shrew is a farce and that character and action in farce are traditionally gross and violent, I think we can see Petruchio's excesses as part of that pattern already isolated—the character being carried away by his role. Like the lord who counseled moderation and the participants in the Tranio-
Lucentio substitution, Petruchio becomes an overactor, a farce character, if we must, in a non-farce world.

The role he chooses for himself is the familiar figure of the wife-tamer. This folk and farce character is typically excessive in his reaction to his wife's shrewishness, but Petruchio never reveals any of this crudity until after he has already won Kate. In fact, prior to the wedding, he has been remarkably subtle. Both Heilman and Seronsy note the care with which the original interview is structured, how Petruchio supposes Kate to already possess those attributes which society prizes in a wife. However, we may justly wonder whether such a woman as pictured by Petruchio, a tame and relatively uninteresting spouse, is really what he wants. It is what he comes close to creating through his zealous wife-taming.

The marriage opens with Kate already beginning to have doubts about her previous interpretation of Petruchio's action; faced with the prospect of yet more rejection, she stands in danger of withdrawing once more into her anti-social shell. She entertains the idea that he is perhaps not a witty match but a "mad-brain rudesby full of spleen." (III.2.10) His arrival, madly attired, is not calculated to ease her mind on that score. His noble sounding "to me she's married not unto my clothes" (III.2.119) is beside the point, since the only firm thing anyone notices is his bizarre attire. It is important to notice that it is only after Petruchio arrives dressed as a clown, strikes the priest, and refuses to attend the marriage feast that Kate rises in just and irate opposition to his peculiar willfulness.

From this point on, she is virtually Petruchio's prisoner. Falling further and further into his role of tamer, Petruchio makes explicit
the ugly terms under which his society implicitly considers women:

I will be master of what is my own;  
She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house  
My household stuff, my field, my barn,  
My horse, my ass, my ox, my anything. (III.2.231-4)

These lines indicate a problem area. It is difficult from this point to Kate's ostensible capitulation, to tell just how conscious Petruchio is of the exaggeration of his activities. He no doubt thinks, with Peter, that "he kills her in her own humour." (IV.1.183) But as most critics admit, he far exceeds what is necessary. He is dangerously caught up in his act. Against his few comments explaining that it is an act (IV.3.49 and 166) we must weigh this starving, watching, and generally mistreating Kate.

Granted that this is the method used for taming hawks and that Kate's treatment is often compared to that process (e.g. IV.1.191-214) but as so often in Shakespeare, this iterative animal imagery is used to characterize the process itself as destructive of humanity.

In fact, under this mistreatment Kate reverts to her shrewish, contrary nature; where before she had interceded for Grumio on the road, (IV.1.77-83) she now beats him. (IV.3.30) In a continual struggle to preserve in the face of unfair odds her own sense of identity and freedom, she is forced to act continually in opposition to Petruchio, to try to make sense out of what appears to be madness. Not only does he rail against her, but against the tailor and all his own servants; even Hortensio who comes to learn of Petruchio is amazed at some of his ridiculous assertions—"Why this man will command the sun." (IV.3.198)

Throughout Kate has sought freedom from restraint; fleeing her home situation, she joins Petruchio's world of play only to find even greater strictures in her strange imprisonment. What finally becomes
clear to Kate is that if she is ever to have any freedom whatsoever, she must affirm Petruchio's apparent madness. Her surrender produces the paradoxical result of freeing her from his tyranny and him from the role that has made him a monster in the eyes of the audience. Hardin Craig first noted the change in Katherine that occurs on the return to Padua;\textsuperscript{13} Craig describes this as Katherine's learning how to make a joke. Katherine quits trying to sort out Petruchio's contrary assertions; instead she joins in. When Petruchio asserts that old Vincentio is a "young, budding virgin, fair and fresh, and sweet," (IV.5.37) Katherine begins to create an imagined blissful future for the old man which the audience might take to be Kate's own, or perhaps one such as she wishes for.

One reason for this conclusion is the substantial change in Petruchio. Critics have failed to notice, at least explicitly, that the alteration in Katherine's attitude toward Petruchio's obstreperousness results in the revelation of a new character in him. We have seen Petruchio as a hail-fellow-well-met, a braggart, a witty skirmisher, and an apparently demented and cruel husband. We have not seen the courteous young man who says to Vincentio, "withal make known/Which way thou travelest; if along with us,/We shall be joyful of thy company." (IV.5.50-52) Petruchio proceeds to tell Vincentio the whole truth about Lucentio and Bianca. He is no longer the man whose every word and action is controlled by his role as the irascible tamer of women; instead he has become a man capable of living with other men and at least one woman in a society where language is not attack, contradiction, or curb, but is simply communication.

With Katherine, however, Petruchio's communication takes that
common Shakespearean form of verbal play—the lovers against the world. As with Romeo and Juliet or Beatrice and Benedick, these lovers are not what they appear to their society. On the surface, Kate is tamed and Petruchio rules supreme, and it must be admitted that to some extent it looks that way to us. Petruchio sets the limits within which Kate improvises; he calls Vincentio a woman and Kate acts accordingly. Similarly, when he proposes the test of wives, he sets the stage for Kate, yet her impromptu speech on female submission is tour de force which perfectly rounds out the play.

IV

It is this speech that has caused the greatest difficulty for critics of The Taming of the Shrew. Is it serious or ironic or something in between? As I hope to demonstrate, it forms the greatest game in the play, a game that is carried on not only between Katherine and Petruchio, but more importantly between the playwright and his audience. First, however, the argument that it is to be taken at face value must be answered. There are various attitudes taken toward the speech's being serious. One group holds that Shakespeare simply believed with his age in male supremacy. This view is best answered by appeals to Shakespeare's dramatic treatment of women in general and in particular in plays contemporary with The Shrew, such as Katherine in Love's Labour's Lost and to a lesser extent Luciana in The Comedy of Errors. Additionally we may refer to our own experience of Kate's vitality. A more sophisticated version of this argument is that Shakespeare was writing farce and bowed, to some degree, to the demands of that rough and ready form. Again, the best objection is to our feeling for Katherine, who, though no Beatrice, Rosalind, or Viola, is the most appealing character in the play. To have
her reduced to the stock shrew is something most critics cannot accept. Nor are other characters in the play insensitive enough to Kate's suffering to make the farce effect pervasive.

The most interesting recent view of the play has been that best exemplified by Sears Jayne; he holds that the whole of the inner play, especially the taming, is Christopher Sly's dream with Sly playing Petruchio. This view is in many respects convincing: it accounts for the disappearance of the Induction characters from the play; it explains Petruchio's crudity; and indicates why Kate's last speech is so fulsomely subservient. Its problems are that it strives for a psychological realism—the whole of the taming being Sly's attempt to revenge himself of his page-wife's reluctance and Kate's last speech being the sign of his victory. This converts the entire action into a wish fulfillment dream, which in turn renders the play trivial: "For Christopher Sly all this (the play) is a convenient escape into a dream world where he, a meek and mild person, can vicariously enjoy the vigorous brashness of his desirable alter-ego, Petruchio." If this trivialization of a complex structure were not enough, the dream critics make no attempt to explain how or why Sly dreams the instructive and involuted patterns they find there.

The view to which I ascribe is not particularly new or radical. Stated simply it sees Kate's speech as ironic and gamesome, although not without cogent points. The speech is the culmination of Katherine and Petruchio's learning to play with each other: Kate helps Petruchio win his wager and allows him to appear the masterful, thoughtless husband their society demands; Petruchio permits Kate to hold the stage in the closing moments of the play. That the speech is part of a game between the two lovers is clear for several reasons. It follows the pattern set
up in the encounter with Vincentio, but on a more subtle plane. We recall that Kate elaborates on Petruchio's assertion that Vincentio is a woman. Here the suggestion is less blatant but still there: Petruchio says, "Tell the headstrong women/What duty they owe their lords and husbands." (V.2.130-31) Petruchio suggests the parallel between temporal rulers and husbands which Kate takes as her starting place.

She compares the disobedient woman to "a foul contending rebel/
And graceless traitor to her loving lord." (V.2.159-60) She echoes Petruchio's remarks on her own supposed obedience. He says, "Peace it bodes, and love and quiet life,/And lawful rule and right supremacy."

(V.2.108-9) She says,

I am ashamed that women are so simple
To offer war where they should kneel for peace
Or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway
When they are bound to serve, love, and obey. (V.2.161-64)

Some might argue that these terms are not ironic, that the hierarchical correspondences between nation and family are meant seriously. But, if this were the case, surely Petruchio's response would not be the one of obvious pride in his partner—"Why there's a wench! Come on and kiss me Kate." (V.2.180) This is followed immediately by Petruchio's "Come Kate, we'll to bed." (V.2.184) At the postponed wedding feast, at the moment of their greatest achievement together, comes the not heretofore extended invitation to consummation. Although Kate and Petruchio have been married for some time, there has been no mention of, indeed no time for, the union's sexual fulfillment. Only when they are at one in their gamesmanship can they be at one in their marriage.

Yet, as Lucentio and Vincentio's closing remarks indicate, their society remains unaware of their mutual jest. Hortensio and the others are convinced that they have seen a shrew tamed and many critics have
followed them in their error. Looking back at the preceding sections of this paper should make the reason for this mistake clear. One of the greatest pleasures in assuming an act is making it as plausible as possible, even if over-acting is required. The lord attempts to make Sly's deception as realistic as possible; the pedant evolves convincing details of his assumed past; Petruchio's terrifying realistic portrait of a shrew tamer convinces for a time the audience and himself. The picture of "Daphne running through a thorny wood,/Scratching her legs, that one shall swear she bleeds" (Ind. 2.59-60) and Bartholomew's onion "that shall in despite enforce a watery eye" (Ind.i.128) are but two more examples of art and play masquerading as life. What then can we look for from Katherine who, with the exception of Petruchio, is the cleverest character and best wielder of words in the play? It is to be expected that her act of submissive wife would be most convincing.

Still, some readers will find this argument casuistry; to them the following arguments are addressed. So far we have remained largely on the level of the action of the play. I have attempted to show that seeing Kate's speech as a game she creates in her role as tamed wife is entirely consistent with the roles and created situations of other characters, while seeing the speech as the contrite lesson offered by a Kate actually tamed is inconsistent with not only Shakespeare's normal practice, but also, and more importantly, with what we feel about her. Now I appeal to the audience's perception of what might be called an over-game, a game played between Kate and her creator and the audience. This over-game provides a highly artificial, only tangentially thematic, bridge between the Sly induction and the last scene of the play.

The opening lines of V.2 are:
At last, though long, our jarring notes agree;
And time it is, when raging war is done,
To smile at scapes and perils overblown.

To the critic and the Elizabethan audience these words signal the con-
clusion in concord of that ever popular contemporary dramatic form—the
history play. This echo, likewise, should call to mind Bartholomew's
riddling words to Sly on the subject of comedy:

Sly: Is not a comonty a Christmas gambold or a tumbling trick?
Page: No my good lord; it is more pleasing stuff.
Sly: What, household stuff?
Page: It is a kind of history. (Ind.ii.140-44)

It is not at all clear that "a kind of history" describes The Taming of
the Shrew; at first glance "household stuff" might seem more accurate.
The audience that expected a play of kings and rebels would be disap-
pointed at least on the literal level. Yet, as has been indicated, Kate
in her closing speech demonstrates that figuratively we have seen a his-
tory, a history where a rebel has been returned to the right rule of her
lawful lord. That this correspondence between state and family admits
of a doubleness of interpretation is clear; Shakespeare's attitude to-
ward orthodox Tudor historiography is at best ambiguous and to assume
that he accepts on a figurative level what he questions on the literal
level is dangerous. All the evidence has pointed to Kate's speech
being a game between wife and husband. With the largely extra-thematic
jest between Shakespeare and his audience, it should be clear that this
speech is not to be taken literally. The historical analogy running
through V.2 is as fragile as the peace mentioned by Lucentio. Kate is
no more broken to the harness than the "raging war" of courtship and
marriage is over for Lucentio and Hortensio.

The use of the historical correspondence in V.2 does, however,
virtually insure our proper response to Kate's speech by forcing us to change radically our perspective on the whole action. By recalling Bartholomew's words, we are reminded of the existence of the world of the Induction and of our own world of spectators. This is the primary function of Shakespeare's jest with our concept of "history." Indeed, the word "history" itself partakes of the dual perspective to be established; it relates not only to actual events, but also to the dramatic form, to what is real and what is created, at once. With the end of Sly's active participation at the end of I.1, the inner play's usurpation of primary dramatic reality has been complete. Unless the director mistakenly forces Sly to our attention, our memory of his existence pales before the immediate vitality and presence of the inner play. With the historical analogy, connections that have been held in abeyance come to the fore. We are reminded that the activities we have been absorbed in for the past two hours are part of a play within a play.

There are of course other analogies between the Induction than the historical. The husband's urging on their wives reminds us of the dog-loving huntsman, lord of the Induction. Similarly, the amount the lord would not take for his hound—twenty pounds—reminds us of the amount the husbands first wager on their wives—twenty crowns. The 20,000 extra crowns Baptista gives Petruchio for Kate's supposed amendment may be an oblique comment on Kate's value relative to that of the bitchy sister and widow. These added allusions to the Induction reenforce our perception of the artificiality of the whole action.

We are now reversing the process we experienced during and after the Induction; instead of growing closer to the world of Padua, we are withdrawing to the Induction and beyond it to everyday life. We view
Kate from a position of growing dissociation. Like Petruchio, we appreciate Kate's virtuosity as a partner equal to his talents, but our response is dual. We also appreciate her for an actress creating a tremendously difficult and complex effect.

The Elizabethans' attitude toward Kate's last speech would have been even more split than our own. The male actor who played Kate would, at this moment of looking back from one level of play reality to another more basic play reality, have necessarily called to mind his simulacrum, Bartholomew the page, who differs only from "Kate" in his level of assumed facility. At his point of greatest achievement as Kate the actress realistically portraying the penitent shrew, the actor pointed out the artificiality of both his role and his stage world.

The problem that Kate's final speech presents to the modern critic results from our lack of familiarity with Elizabethan stage conventions and conditions. Shakespeare could assume that his audience would grasp the history play parallels and the byplay with males playing female roles, and that they would refer them back to the Induction. These assumptions no longer prove well grounded and Kate's last speech, asked to do so much for its original audience, is perhaps no longer able to do enough to set up our perceptions.

Nonetheless, enough gets through to show a Shakespeare revelling in the very limitations of his stage. Just as the many actors in the play leap into their roles with ingenuity and some excess of zeal, Shakespeare converts his limiting stage conditions to liberating play. The running emphasis on clothing (Petruchio's clothing at church, the many disguises, and Kate's tailor) indicates a concern with the effect of costume on character. Petruchio's apparent madness parallels the creative
imagination of the playwright. Petruchio converts the wedding into a scene of robbery (III.2.236-40); changes his home into the image of a prison; he controls time and makes the sun or moon shine as he wills; and significantly, in a play concerned with female roles, he transforms an old man into a young girl. All of these metamorphoses took place everyday on the Elizabethan stage and Shakespeare's easy and unobtrusive handling of them indicates his growing sprezzatura with regard to theatrical elements in his drama; the poet knows he can do virtually anything with his crude tools.

These elements are only another way of educing the major themes of acting and creation. They contribute to the overall atmosphere of possibility or potentiality within which changes or releases in personality can be effected through the therapeutic use of creative play. As evident, creation and acting appear in many forms and their appearance is pervasive. Their effect has the danger of excess. But Petruchio's seduction into his restrictive role is more than offset by the freedom he finds in Katherine. For them, creation and acting are the expression of a previously unknown human relationship.

We must return, in closing, to that pernicious fellow Christopher Sly. That Shakespeare intended him to disappear from our consciousness is in our current state of knowledge uncertain; that the text as it stands enforces his disappearance is equally certain. Just as disguise or role-playing in the play have a seductive quality that cause a character playing a role to be, to greater and lesser extents, absorbed in and carried away by that role, so the inner play weans the audience away from the basic Induction reality to the point that that inner world's horizons are as far as they can see. I have indicated how this inner world at
the end turns away from its aspect as closed primary world and again points back to its ontological position as created world. However, the nature of the connection (our perception of the inner play's artificiality in relation to the Induction) is such that it indicates the artificiality of the whole. Simply to return at the conclusion to Sly the deceived drunkard would greatly lessen the wrench of returning to our own reality. Acting and creation in the play have taught characters about themselves and their limitations; in turn, their actings and creations have taught us something about what drama can do. Therefore, it is in keeping with, and appropriate to, the metadramatic effects already created that Sly is not, as some directors, A Shrew, and our own nagging and conventional expectations, would have it, metamorphosed back into "old Sly's son of Burton-Heath" but instead is drastically changed from doubly fictional lord to real actor, taking his bows before our astonished and liberated eyes.
1In listing problems, I have intentionally ignored the vexing question of bibliography—the relationship of Shakespeare's play to The Taming of A Shrew. I will, however, use A Shrew in a rather unorthodox manner. Peter Alexander in "The Original Ending of The Taming of The Shrew," SQ (1969), 111-116, makes a most cogent case for A Shrew's being a memorial reconstruction of Shakespeare's play. It differs from other bad quartos only in its wider divergence from its source. Alexander explains this greater variance by proposing either that the pirate-actor hired a poet to make his theft more opulent or that he fancied himself a poet in the Marlovian tradition. In either case, the actor carried with him not only the general notion of the plot and the vestigial Shakespearean bits that make Alexander's case so convincing but also a memory of how the characters were conceived and more importantly played. What Shakespeare as playwright and actor left implicit in his text, the pirate makes explicit and, in the case of Katherine, reveals what Shakespeare's idea of the shrew was.

2Serious contributions to the solution of these problems have been made by Robert Heilman, in his introduction to the Signet Classic, The Taming of the Shrew and C. C. Seronsy, "'Supposes' as the Unifying Theme in The Taming of the Shrew," Shakespearean Quarterly (Winter, 1963), 15-30. My main divergence from these critics is my emphasis on the meta-dramatic elements.


4Ms. Greenfield, The Induction in Elizabethan Drama (Eugene, Or., 1969), is on the wrong track when she divines some moral purpose in the lord's decision. It is not a test of a non-imaginative man by one of imagination. (48) Rather it is nearly pure sport, an attempt to see if a clever trick can make a "beggar...forget himself." (Ind.1.41)

5Sly himself refers to these same four senses once he is into the trap. (Ind.2.72-3)

6One assumes the discrepancy between Bartholomew and a real female and Sly's inability to detect this discrepancy is the comic point. Further discussion of men playing female roles will be found in IV.

7Greenfield. This does not mean that the audience will make no more of him.

8C. C. Seronsy, 17.

9Ibid.

11 Bullough cites sources for this.

12 Heilman, (XIX), Seronsy, (18).


15 Cutts, 47.

16 For example, Jayne's correct identification of Bianca's revelation as a shrew formally reversing Kate's pattern.

17 Seronsy at times seems to hold this view.

18 The conclusions of *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and Tamburlaine, Part I, *Richard III* V.5.16-33. *Henry V*, v.2.387-396 indicates state and family knit up with marriage to another Kate. *Richard III* begins with a similar speech by Richard, which, as in *The Shrew*, yields immediately to further faction.

19 A *Shrew's* author has Kate give a similar speech, but he draws the analogy between God's rule of the universe and man's rule of his wife. This admits of less ambiguity.

20 Whether modern audience's see the allusion to history plays is moot. It is almost certain that Elizabethan playgoers would recognize the parallels and remember Bartholomew's dangling remark.
"I'll be an auditor;  
An actor too perhaps."

A Midsummer Night's Dream  III.1.81-82

More seriously, he had not meant to suggest that "the femininity" of readership was a docile or inferior condition: a lighthouse, for example, passively sent out signals that mariners labored actively to receive and interpret; an ardent woman like his mistress was as least as energetic in his embrace as he in embracing her; a good reader of cunning tales worked in her way as busily as their author; et cetera. Narrative, in short, was a love-relation, not a rape: its success depended upon the reader's consent and cooperation, which she could withhold or at any moment withdraw; also upon her own combination of experience and talent for enterprise, and the author's ability to arouse, sustain, and satisfy her interest.

John Barth, "Dunyazadiad," Chimera
In recent years, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has emerged in criticism as the finest of Shakespeare's early comedies.¹ In it, we find the comic concerns of Shakespeare's early comedies—illusion, second worlds, and important secondary characters—but in a higher state of integrity and concentration. David P. Young asserts that the play is our "primary source for our knowledge of Shakespeare's own attitude toward drama, poetry, and the imagination,"² and most critics would be quick to agree. Nonetheless most critics, in their reconstruction of Shakespeare's attitudes have failed to delve deeply into the relationship between the play and the audience;³ this chapter will be concerned with that relationship.

However, it will first be necessary to establish the basic act of mind dramatized in the play and this act of mind is assembling disparates into appropriate wholes.⁴ On every level of the play's action, characters are engaged in trying to sort things out and then reassemble them into a synthesis. The whole movement of the play is, in Calderwood's words, a movement from "asymmetry to symmetry,"⁵ or more radically from apart to together. To a greater extent than any other Shakespearean comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* consists of a series of relatively discrete elements with no single element achieving affective suzerainty.⁶ The audience, like the characters, must sort out the various parts and reassemble them into a significant whole. Shakespeare demands that his audience become, not simple spectators, but active critics of his creation. As will become clear, the criticism demanded makes the audience
participants in the creation of the play's meaning and, in this play about art, the audience becomes artists.

I

We enter the world of the play through the presentation of Theseus's preparation for his wedding day. Perhaps the most noticeable quality in his first appearance is his nice sense of propriety: He says to Hippolyta:

    I woo'd thee with my sword
    And won thy love doing thee injuries;
    But I will wed thee in another key,
    With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling. (I.i.16-19)

Theseus conceives of social intercourse as a musical composition with different tunes for different occasions. His wedding requires "the pert and nimble spirit of mirth," rather than "Melancholy...the pale companion." (I.i.13-15) Moreover, he sees society itself as composed of distinct parts which must be orchestrated to produce the proper air of festivity. Accordingly, he instructs his master of the revels, Philostrate, to "stir up the Athenian youth to merriment." (I.i.12)

One of the merriments to which the Athenian youth is stirred is the play of Pyramus and Thisby. Theseus' choice of this work to be played at his wedding over the other offerings contributes to our notion of his sense of fitness. The first entertainment proffered is "The Battle with the Centaurs, to be sung/By an Athenian eunuch to the harp." (V.i.14-15)

Theseus' official reason for rejecting this poem is that he has previously recited it to Hippolyta; a more likely reason is its manifestly inappropriate subject matter—the breaking up of the Lapithae wedding ceremony by the lusty centaurs. The connection of this adventure with Hercules makes it twice inappropriate, for this hero was notoriously unlucky in
love: his labors the penance for murdering his first wife; his death, the result of his second wife's error.

The second device, the murder of Orpheus by the "tipsy Bacchans" is put aside because Theseus has already seen it; however, its subject matter is equally ill-suited to a wedding. Orpheus falls victim to the Maenads while wandering disconsolate after his second and final loss of his beloved wife Eurydice. The third offering, a lament for the plight of scholarship, falls victim to its form; Theseus says "that is some satire, keen and critical/Not sorting with a nuptial ceremony." (V.i.54-55) All three are rejected for not being in keeping with a wedding party, two for their violent stories of marriage interrupted, the third for its violence of manner.

However, if Theseus is such a connoisseur of the appropriate, why does he choose a fourth play whose subject matter is blatantly offensive to a wedding, the death of the unfortunate lovers, Pyramus and Thisbe? The reason is not far to seek. Where the previous plays had offended through subject or style, the fourth tribute's style redeems its subject. The poor showing of the mechanicals coupled with the deficiencies of their text produces a hilariously successful comedy out of an intended tragedy. Philostrate summarizes the play's effect as follows: "more merry tears/The passion of loud laughter never shed." (V.i.69-70)

Although Theseus can clearly bring together the necessary elements to create a social holiday, his role as artist of the public arena is made more difficult by the impingement on his achieved happiness by the disorder of the young lovers. As long as simple social arrangement is all that is required for society to take its form, Theseus is master. When passion intrudes into his realm, Theseus begins to have problems.
With the entrance of the lovers and old Egeus, the delicate social balance begins to shift from joy to potential tragedy. As befits Athen's duke, Theseus immediately responds to the impending disruption with an appeal to law; he carefully explains to Hermia her options under the law and, for the moment, everyone except Hermia, is willing to accept the problem on that basis. Egeus says "all my right of her/I do estate unto Demetrius." To which Lysander, after listing his own claims, monetary as well as passionate, responds, "Why should not I then prosecute my right." (I.i.96-7 and 105)

Hermia alone complains that there is more to love than reason and law. She admits to a certain compulsion that makes her disobey her father's word--"I know not by what power I am made bold." (I.i.59) Her feeling finds significant echo in Demetrius who prefaces his profession of rekindled love for Helena with "I wot not by what power,--/But by some power it is--." (IV.ii.168) Love would seem to exist in a realm separate from that of reason and law. In regards to love, Theseus can do little beyond asking Egeus and Demetrius to an inconclusive conference and, at the end, give social ratification to the metamorphosed lovers.8

Love is then a private matter, but the lovers more than any other characters in the play need sorting out into appropriate relationships. In fact, the sections of the play dealing with them are a series of trial and error arrangements designed to produce finally the best fit. The lovers themselves are not unaware of the problem of fit in love. Lysander and Hermia discuss the problem at length:

L: Ay me! for aught that I could ever read, could ever hear by tale or history, The course of true love never did run smooth; But either it was different in blood,
H: 0 cross! too high to be enthralled too low.
L: Or else misgaffed in respect of years,—
H: 0 spite! too old to be engaged to young.
L: Or else it stood upon the choice of friends,—
H: 0 hell! to choose love by another's eyes.
L: Or, if there were a sympathy in choice.
War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,
Making it momentary as any sound. (I.i.132-43)

Nature, custom, and fate league against lovers; there seems to be no point
in continuing, but Lysander and Hermia turn straightway from their pessi-
mistic analysis to plans of escape.

Their goal is the fairy-ridden forest of Athens, a locus corres-
ponding to Northrop Frye's notion of the green world. Here is brought
forward a concept of love that differs significantly from the rational
contracts that exist in the city. In a bit of action that is sometimes
played as a sly gesture of seduction, Lysander says:

One turf shall serve as pillow for us both;
One heart, one bed, two bosoms and one troth.

Rebuffed, he expands his attack:

I mean that my heart unto yours is knit
So that one heart we can make of it;
Two bosoms interchained with an oath,
So then two bosoms and a single troth. (II.ii.41-2 and
47-50)

A more unequivocally sincere version is given by Helena in response to
her mistaken notion that Hermia has joined with the men to mock her:

Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion
Both warbling one song, both in one key
As if our hands, our sides, voices and minds
Had been incorporate. So we grew together,
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted
But yet an union in partition. (III.ii.206-210)

She speaks in a like vein for twelve lines, all to the same effect. The
vision is reminiscent of Plato's description in his Symposium of the mys-
tical union obtained when two fragments of the original man-egg come
together.
The "union in partition" that is the image of love in the forest is a perfect example of disparates, even the opposites of male and female, being made into meaningful wholes; its very perfection, however, renders it unreal. Nonetheless, the manner in which these wholes are achieved is significant. From the standpoint of Theseus, the love of the young lovers is an aberration that can be dealt with but clumsily by law. Only in the more fluid environment of the forest can the lovers be united. Not that reason's claims are neglected; the audience can see the irrationality of the lovers. But, in Bottom's words, "Reason and love keep little company together nowadays," (III.i.146-7) especially in the Greek woods. Love's opposition to reason is given objective correlation in Oberon's imaginative vision of fitting relationships and the magic with which he brings about the mystical unions of the two pairs of lovers.

It is important to note that Oberon does not distinguish between the love that Lysander brings to the forest and the love created in Demetrius by the magic potion. Of Puck's mistaken application of the potion, he says, "Of thy misprision must perforce ensue/Some true love turned and not a false turn'd true." (III.i.90-1) Although Oberon implies that there is true love, (Lysander's) he does not indicate that Demetrius's love will be any less true for its creation through magic. Moreover, in Lysander's case, more magic in the form of a remedy is required to free his eyes from error. Despite Lysander's incorrect assertion that reason has made him see the light (II.ii.115-16) unifying love is the achievement of Oberon's vision of completeness and the supernatural power to make his vision actual.

This section has been concerned with the act of mind creating a synthesis from differences: Theseus creates an appropriate wedding; the
lovers finally pair up properly through Oberon's sense of fitness. Yet, Oberon's sphere has its own longstanding discord, the dispute between the king of shadows and Titania over the changeling boy. Their discord has spread into the realm of nature over which they jointly rule. (II.i.81-118) Oberon uses the same device to trick Titania that he used to sort out the lovers, but his potion here is judged in a different light which qualifies what has been said about love. The potion causes Titania to "madly dote" and its effect is to make her the paramour of a fool with an ass's head. Oberon calls this love a "hateful imperfection of her eyes." (IV.i.65-6) The end of the magic is, in both cases, the same, a wished for concord and a righting of imbalance. The sole difference seems to lie in Oberon's attitude: with the lovers, true love is created; with Titania, a shameful display. To find an answer to this discrepancy we must look to the relation between audience and play.

Before proceeding to that investigation, we must look at the fourth group in the play, the rude mechanicals and their problems of fitting out a play. Almost everything the mechanicals do is directed to bringing together the many elements necessary for state production into a unified whole. In their professions, the mechanicals are men who assemble or repair things—carpenter, joiner, bellows-mender, tinker, and tailor—and their efforts at putting on a play are in accord with their daily tasks. The first scene in which the clowns appear (I.ii) can serve as a model for their concerns. It opens with a question, "Is all our company here?" at once introducing the notion of a whole comprised of disparates. The scene continues through the assignment of roles, after which Peter Quince concludes "I hope here is a play fitted." (I.ii.66-7) But Quince's approach is too simple. He has not considered the problems of acting
techniques and make-up. These are the first inklings that more is necessary to a play than lines and actors. Presumably chastened, Quince leaves his troupe, after giving them their "parts,"* to "draw a bill of properties such as our play wants." (I.ii.108)

The actors' next appearance is signalled by the same kind of opening question—"Are we all met?" (III.i.1) Here the mere physical assemblage of the play gives way to more abstract questions of representation, of how to present a play at once credible, but not too credible. Basically, two attitudes are expressed by Bottom who is most interested in the problems. His attitudes are extremes on either side of a mean that can roughly be described as ordinary stage realism.10 Faced with the danger that their play be taken as reality, Bottom suggests that a prologue be written to explain that the play is only a play; in addition, the lion will tell the audience that he is no true lion. On the other extreme, the players will make their device more realistic by having either real moonlight flood the chamber or a player present moonshine; a similar dodge will be used for the wall that separates the lovers.

For all this tinkering around, the play remains, on its own terms, a miserable failure. This failure, in part, stems from the mechanical's inability to light on exactly what kind of play Pyramus and Thisby is. Quince designates it at first, "The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby." (I.ii.11-13) Bottom calls the play "This comedy of Pyramus and Thisby." (III.i.10-11) On Philostrate's list of official entertainments it is entered as "A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and his love Thisby; a very tragical mirth." (V.

*"Here are your parts." (I.ii.101) This traditional term for one actor's lines contains an inherent notion that a play is many parts made one.
i. 56-7) The brunt of the rustics' comments indicate that they understand the play as a tragedy, but their confusion in terminology finds validation in their results which are clearly comic.* Their indecision is a sign of their inability to make execution appropriate to conception.

The rustics provide in the boldest and barest manner an instance of that process of synthesis which is characteristic of all groups in the play. They also exemplify the least successful practice of that activity. Bottom's confident claim that their play "will fall pat." (V.i.187) is countered in advance by Philostrate's criticism, "In all the play/There is not one word apt, one player fitted." (V.i.64-65) How then is it that Pyramus and Thisby is the most eagerly awaited part of the play? Young states that Bottom's critical alterations of the play fail to take into account the imagination of his audience. 11 Equally as true, Philostrate's strictures do not consider the state of mind of the audience. Pyramus and Thisby, like the play of which it is a part, comes before the minds of an audience, both single and in concert, and our discussion now turns to that audience's own task of sorting and assembling.

II

Bottom's Dream provides one point where the audience-play nexus may profitably be examined. 12 Among the group of repairmen, assemblers, and fitters, Bottom the Weaver alone creates a basic product, cloth, and he alone experiences the world of the fairies, not through a glass darkly, but face to face. What he makes or fails to make of this complex experi-

*Indeed, Bottom's critical dicta can be split upon generic lines: the prologue and the lion's speech provide comic distance; the moon and wall are designed in theory to emphasize the immediacy of the events portrayed. Paradoxically, these latter have the effect, on stage, of creating still further distance, just as some film innovations (3-D) instead of creating a more real experience, call attention to the technical means by which such a marvel can be attained.
ience tells us much about Shakespeare's notion of the play's relationship to its audience. Bottom's dream:

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. (IV.i.206-217)

The brunt of Bottom's commentary falls on the incommunicability of his experience, but he has an innate urge to share it. Upon awakening from his sleep, Bottom has called for his companions. We may reasonably doubt that Bully Bottom calls out for fear; it is more likely that this character who is always "on-stage" is searching for an audience to whom he can communicate his experience. Expression however is not Bottom's forte. The garbled version of I Corinthians 1:9 (1.214-217) underscores his befuddlement. This familiar biblical text is part of St. Paul's exposition of communication between God and man. Paul tells us that God's plans for man are not to be perceived through the senses, but are conveyed through direct revelation. Moreover, once revelation has occurred the message is not to be further communicated except through "spirit taught words." 13 Bottom does not even have St. Paul's words at his command, much less those of the spirit, but he does have recourse to the words of that limited artist, Peter Quince. Bottom proposes to "get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream...and I will sing it at the latter end of a play before the Duke." (IV.1.218 and 220-221) The impulse to art, the ballad, marks Bottom's recognition that art is a means of making "the tongue to conceive,...(the) heart to report." If he can sing his vision, his subjective experience of the fairy queen can be
shared among the many, can be objectified for evaluation.

There are implicit in Bottom's Dream at least two elements: the clotted matter of the dream itself and the audience who would understand the dream. Bottom's Dream fades because of basic failures in both elements—expression plus interpretation. Bottom's simplicity can find no words to convey his dream matter. Furthermore, he becomes strangely taciturn: when Quince asks, "Let us hear," Bottom replies "Not a word of me," and "No more words." (IV.ii.34) He retreats from the possibility of art. Even more strange is the reticence of Bottom's audience. Bottom, after all, thinks he has only had a dream. The other mechanicals have seen their friend transformed into an ass before their eyes and they have been driven through the forest by unknown forces. Surely they should be more concerned about Bottom's safety than his loss of "sixpence a day during his life," but they are not. Both parties in the dramatic contract between play and audience are in violation. Bottom cannot give his dream utterance and his thickskinned audience are relatively indifferent to what should be a very good story.

As before, the actions of the rustic are a failed paradigm of the play as a whole; their failure to bring Bottom's dream into some appropriate relationship with their own understanding is a flawed mirror of other audience-play relationships in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Although audience and play must finally be united, I will for convenience's sake first discuss the idea of the work of art presented in the play. Theseus' generally critical remarks on the madman, the lover, and the poet point toward the true artist's triumph over Bottom's central difficulty—the inability to give his vision form:

More strange than true: I never may believe These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover and poet
Are of imagination all compact:
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,
That is, the madman: the lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name. (V.1.3-17)

The madman sees devils that no one else can; the lover sees beauty where others see ugliness. Both cases imply an audience, but the audience can in the former instance see nothing, and in the latter only error. Lovers and lunatics are, like Bottom, locked in a subjective and lonely prison.

In contradistinction, the poet's vision may originally be of a like subjectivity, but his power makes his dream sharable, can in some cases convert the individuals of an audience into a community of dreamers. He takes "the forms of things unknown," and "turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing/A local habitation and a name." By putting his vision into words, the poet creates an objective and lasting form. Like Adam, *primus artifex verborum*, he can give what no man has previously seen a name and, in the act of naming, the poet lets others see; the link is forged between one dreamer and another.

Despite the general tone of opprobrium that runs through Theseus's comments on the three types of dreamer, he inadvertently reveals the poet's power to communicate the else incommunicable. "The poet's eye in fine frenzy rolling,/Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven." No doubt Theseus intends to characterize the poet as Plato's madman, a mantic dervish when the poetic fit is on. But Plato's view is tempered by the frenzy's origin in divine inspiration. Four verses after the
scripture Bottom bungles are the words "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth." Both Plato and Paul saw that some men are blessed with the gift of penetrating the mysteries of the spirit and then being able to communicate these mysteries. I do not wish to suggest that Shakespeare sees the poet as a conduit from God to man, but, less exaltedly, that he uses the philosophically and theologically loaded notion to indicate that the poet's words can similarly communicate the subjective.*

Nor do I necessarily mean that such communication is simple or easy; pagan and Christian alike find the communication of mysteries often requires cunning or subterfuge, myth, fable, or parable, the poet's tools. Not usually having such momentous truths to share, the artist's task is considerably easier than the prophet's. The matter of his visions is not usually abstruse or ineffable, but, in the case of A Midsummer Night's Dream, the common legends of antiquity and English folklore. Even if the matter were more unfamiliar, there are signs in the play that visions can be communicated. With the exception of Bottom, all the characters who are convinced they have been dreaming are able to convey their "dreams" to other characters. Through the consistency of their compulsive recounting of their individual dreams, the lovers convince Hippolyta that their stories "witnesseth more than fancy's images/And grow to something of great constancy." (V.i.24-25) Titania's nightmare is immediately proved by Oberon to be actual. What are thought to be subjective experiences prove to be sharable and real.

However, the act of giving the dream utterance is insufficient

*Revelations are not of course technically unique or subjective, but man's experience of them are rare and transitory.
if the dream falls into a void, as Bottom's does among the mechanicals.
The dream cannot exist for anyone except the dreamer until it is brought
into conjunction with an audience willing to do some work in the imagin-
native assemblage. Perhaps no other play of Shakespeare's so clearly de-
defines possible audience-play (dream) relationships. At the original per-
formance of A Midsummer Night's Dream, which took place at a royal wedding,
there was a built-in tendency for that audience to notice parallels be-
tween themselves and the court audience in the play. Lacking that meta-
dramatic connection, modern audiences are nonetheless forced to focus their
attention on the audience-play relationship. David Young diagrams the play
as a series of concentric circles with ever widening groups of characters
watching characters with us watching everybody except possibly the play-
wright.¹⁴

It is not rare in Shakespearean drama to have a series of concen-
tric audiences and actors—we recall Love's Labour's Lost's series of
masculine love declarations. What is unique here is the degree to which
the circles are unable to remain truly concentric, independent. No sooner
does Oberon see the lovers than he determines to straighten out their dis-
order. More revealing is Puck's declaration on seeing the rustics: "What,
a play toward! I'll be an auditor;/An actor too perhaps, if I see cause."
(III.i.81-2) Puck, the practical joker, cannot long remain a simple
auditor and his participation is one primal image of the audience-play
relationship. Puck and his master simply cannot keep their hands off; no
more can the audience of the play remain in splendid isolation.

A more abstract version of the same inability to withhold parti-
cipation is the description of the singing Mermaid:

...once I sate upon a promontory,
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
That the rude sea grew civil at her song
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,
To hear the sea-maid's music. (II.i.149-154)

Oberon describes nature as being tamed, attentive, and almost participatory in star's desire to come nearer. Only Oberon's more-than-human distance permits him to see through the song to Cupid's dissent arrow. Another and more revealing image of art's affective nature is the episode of the hounds to whose "musical confusion/Of hounds and echoes in conjunction," (IV.1.114-115) Hippolyta and Theseus are to be audience. Quite consciously a description of the manner in which reality (hounds) and appearance (echoes) come together to create dramatic art (musical confusion), this event does not make its audience contemplative; on the contrary, memories are aroused in Hippolyta and on Theseus' part a discussion of the composition of the Spartan sound is forthcoming. Although before the fact, Theseus engages in one primary act of criticism--analysis. He explains how his hounds are "matched in mouth like bells,/Each under each." All that remains is for the whole to be reconstituted from its parts, the melodious cry from the pack's many tuned throats.

In the act of synthesis, the audience becomes like so many of those characters discussed previously, a crew of assemblers and patchers striving to make one fabric from Shakespeare's many strands. Duke Theseus, in part speaks of this act of synthesis when he counters Hippolyta's objections to the rustics' production: "The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them." (V.i. 213-4) While he characteristically denigrates art (shadows), the duke recognizes that art exists not as something independent of perception, but that art only comes into being at the intersection of art object and audience and that the audience bears a great responsibility in the
creation of art; in his view the audience must use its imagination too. Given his anti-art bias, Theseus' use of the word "amend" can be taken, indeed ought to be taken, to mean that in this case the audience's imagination must alter an inferior tragedy into successful comedy. But "amend" can also mean a less radical transvaluation of the art object, can mean simply to complete what is lacking, to make from a mass of separate but connected elements an appropriate whole.

This last meaning integrates indissolubly the audience with the play. The play is not only on the stage, nor the audience only in the pits; both's best life is somewhere between the two loci. In short, the play is what the audience makes of it. However, what the audience may make of a play is far from consistent. The playwright may create a community of dreamers, but each individual dreamer still somehow dreams alone; interpretations will vary. Even this aspect of the audience-play relationship finds expression in A Midsummer Night's Dream.

If the audience puts the play together, there are, within limits, many ways of getting the job done. The audience's activity parallels, in a manner roughly controlled by the author, the experimental coupling tried by Puck and Oberon on the lovers. Just as Oberon finally gets the lovers sorted out to his and our satisfaction, the auditors sort out the elements of the play to make their own final fitting, but final constructions will not be unanimous. Within the play Oberon has two clearly different judgments on the magic he uses. Hippolyta and Theseus disagree on the importance of the lovers dreams (antique fables and fairy toys versus something of great constancy) and the value of the rustics' play.

Despite conflicting interpretations, interpretation cannot be bypassed. Without the creative reassembling of the various strands of the
play, art remains as mute as the speechless courtiers of whom Theseus speaks: "Great clerks throttle their practised accent in their fears/And in conclusion dumbly have broke off,/Not paying me a welcome. Trust me, sweet,/Out of this silence, yet I picked a welcome." (V.i.97-100)
Even the silence must be interpreted and in doing so Theseus practices charity; he knows that something is meant and he understands it in the best light. This same charity should extend to the mechanicals who "if we imagine no worse of them than they of themselves, they may pass for excellent men." (V.i.219-220)

As members of an audience, we too must interpret and, like Theseus, we must always adopt the charitable attitude that our interpretation of the play will in the final synthesis mean something. However, A Midsummer Night's Dream has proved virtually impossible to pin down for once and for all. Almost every critic agrees that it is about art, but what about art varies. The very structure of the play--four complexly interdependent plots with no single plot long predominating--seemingly defies the most subtle interpretation. The play may indeed "grow to something of great constancy" but exactly what that something is is unclear. The multiplicity of interconnections, statements and counter-statements, characters and situations, provide for all practical purposes an infinite set of possible combinations. One can be forgiven for agreeing with Bottom, that Shakespeare's Dream "hath no bottom"

In that chapter of I Corinthians where Bottom borrowed his text, St. Paul asserts that the words of the spirit are "foolishness" (Verse 14) to the natural man and comprehensible only to the elect who "have the mind of Christ." (Verse 16) Between speaker and audience in this situation is direct communication, divinely wrought, beyond the power of men's words;
no interpretation is necessary or possible. In our world of less inspired speech, interpretation is always necessary, but always incomplete. Yet Shakespeare finds in the requisite act of interpretation, of assembling the welterworld of experience--be it in public ceremony, love, nature or art--into coherent and meaningful wholes, a basic, if always finally unfinished, human act in which men find some measure of earthly joy.

Surely, the rustics have more fun putting their play together, than they do in actually performing it. Similarly Oberon gets more joy from tricking Titania than he ever will from the Indian boy. The lovers' most intense experiences will be those of the mysterious in-forest wandering rather than their completed, but to our minds uncertain, marriage. So too our best action lies in our always to be, but never completed, putting the play together. The play demands this action of interpretation or assemblage, but the perfect interpretation is always a dream, the perfect children promised the three couples.

Nonetheless, we are not disappointed by our failure, nor does Shakespeare expect us to be. Interpretation is always exciting: John Barth speaks to this aspect of art when he says, "The treasure of art, which if it could not redeem the barbarities of history or spare us the horrors of living and dying, at least sustained, refreshed, expanded, ennobled, and enriched our spirits along the painful way." The audience's mind ever seeking to exercise its powers of puttings things together, of making sense, approaches the creative power of the artist and approximates in a new creation the artist's original. In this manner, Shakespeare makes us all, to varying degrees, artists. Even those who side with Theseus are implicated in the artist's creation of meaning. Yet not all members of the audience are up to the task.

Puck's closing words offer two options. Those to whom the play
is a "weak and idle theme" can consider it "no more yielding but a dream," (V.i.434 and 435) and making the play into a mere pointless vision is one way the play can be "mended." (1.431) This is the rustics' response to Bottom's Dream. Another way of turning the play into a dream is just not to pay attention: This is the lovers' response to Pyramus and Thisby. Justifiably anxious about their wedding nights, they see the play as an occasion for nervous wit, rather than as an exposition of their own forest folly. They should be in bed, not at the theatre.

The involved response is what Shakespeare would have us make. The actor playing Puck often delivers the epilogue in a manner somewhere between the character's and his own, thereby blurring the distinction between supernatural trickster and the man like ourselves. In direct address, he reaches out across the boundaries and gives us the choice ("If we be friends") of completing the circuit between audience and play. Throughout this speech, Puck speaks of the play as a poor, incomplete object that requires mending; that mending comes from the audience. Our applause is the outward and visible sign of our already accomplished inward involvement. Our reward is not the static knowledge of something completely and finally known, but the exhilaration that comes from the vigorous and dynamic mental work of assembling something that will not quite stay put. Appropriately, Puck and the playwright do not leave us with a sense of completion or termination. Instead, Shakespeare and his shifty creation give us only the promise of more and more plays, upon which we must and, more amazing, can exercise our own talent for creative synthesis.
NOTES

1 Frank Kermode goes so far as to assert that is the finest of the comedies. "The Mature Comedies," Early Shakespeare (New York, 1962) 211.

2 David P. Young, Something of Great Constancy: The Art of A Midsummer Night's Dream (New Haven, 1966)

3 Calderwood, James E., is a notable exception to this assertion. Shakespearean Metadrama (Minneapolis, 1971)

4 This procedure, as will be developed, bears a significant correspondence to the act of criticism, especially as it relates to A Midsummer Night's Dream. Young's basic method is to take a series of opposites and show how their opposition is bridged by the imagination. (At several points, 58-59 and 154, he provides schematic diagrams of opposites.) J. Dennis Hutton, "Bottom Waking: Shakespeare's 'Most Rare Vision," SEL XII (Spring, 1973), 217-219, follows a similar procedure whereby he demonstrates the subtle blending and transmutation in other characters of Bottom's simple dichotomy of life-roles—lover and tyrant. Similarly, C. L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy (Princeton, 1959), 119-162, explains how the contradiction between May and Midsummer Night is made good by the poet.

5 Calderwood, 126.

6 Young (100) comments on the play's unusual structure in having no single action that can be clearly defined as central.

7 Actually it is Theseus himself who saves the Lapithae wedding, not Hercules. The only centaur connected with Hercules is Nessus, in whose blood is dipped the shirt that drives the hero to suicide. Since Hercules' wife gives him the shirt, the connotations of this story would be similarly inauspicious.

8 Matters in regards to Theseus are not quite so simple. Despite Traversi's assertion to the contrary (An Approach to Shakespeare, I, [Garden City, N. Y., 1969], 139) Theseus does not univocally represent a rational social order. To the Greeks, Hercules and Theseus represented two ethical types, the passionate and the rational. Shakespeare blurs these distinctions by Theseus' attribution to Hercules of one of his own adventures, by making the historical friends kinsmen, and by having Oberon recount some of Theseus' fairy inspired and not so rational escapades.

9 Even Puck shares in this tendency of mind. Lacking Hermia to complete his repaired pattern of love, he comments on his sense of something missing, "yet but three? Come one more; Two of both kinds make up four." (III.i.436-37)

10 See Ralph Berry's discussion of the players' aesthetics, Shakespearean Comedy: Exploration in Form (Princeton, 1972), 102-105.
Young discusses Bottom's failure to credit his audience's imagination, 78.

Traversi (p. 255) Harold C. Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare, I, (Chicago, 1951), 79-80, et. al. see this speech as central. Goddard and Huston (208-9) assert that it presents the basic stuff of drama.


Young, 91-92

Young and other critics comment on the inescapable sense we as audience feel of Shakespeare's tremendous control over his various materials. No doubt we feel this to be true, but our feeling stems, I think, from the exertions we must make trying to keep up with the playwright, the sense we have that the play coheres coupled with our inability to tell exactly how. We know the lovers are matched up correctly, but few could reconstruct the detailed process by which this is accomplished. This control over complex materials parallels the control the author has over his audience. I have emphasized the audience's part in the dramatic equation; it is equally important to realize, that embedded in the play are the artist's controls over his audience. The play cannot mean just anything, for we follow the trails Shakespeare blazed. To our limited vision the path becomes obscured and while we all wind up in the same neck of the woods, our final resting places are not the same. The final value of art is finally not the final word on a poem, novel, or play, but the experience, never final, of attaining to whatever end is reached by the individual reader. To paraphrase Barth, "The quest for the treasure is the treasure."

John Barth, Chimera (New York, 1972), 25.
The Merchant of Venice: Shakespeare's Probative Comedy
Most critics have been reluctant to acknowledge the justice of Shakespeare's treatment of Jews in The Merchant of Venice. He sees with lofty clarity their grasping, avaricious, and cruel nature. Even Jessica, the would-be Christian, stands revealed in her thriving disloyalty to be her father's daughter. What is shocking in the above statements is not so much their flying in the face of modern humanitarian criticism as their not finding expression somewhere heretofore, for almost anything can be said about The Merchant of Venice and, with reservations, accepted. The play reveals Shakespeare's conformity to Renaissance racial notions; it reveals Shakespeare's revolutionary humanity in breaking through racial stereotypes: Belmont redeems Venice; Venice poisons Belmont: Bassanio is a friend, is a parasite: Portia is Shakespeare's noblest female character or a shoddy trickster. Almost any thesis, by ignoring inconvenient evidence, finds a congenial home in this, of all the comedies, Shakespeare's most equivocal play.

Almost any thesis—except mine. Alone among the comedies, The Merchant of Venice seems to lack metadramatic elements; it has no internal plays, lacks illuminating self-reflexive statements about drama, and uses disguise as disguise, not revelation. However, the very absence of these elements points to a radical methodological shift in Shakespeare's comic art, which forms the basis, not so much for the great comedies to follow, but for the later tragedies. To borrow a term from Werner Heisenberg's discussion of the theoretical limits of practical physics, we may say that this play is concerned with the indeterminacy (uncertainty) of
human knowledge and the mind's reluctance to fact this fact. Writing of the measurement of elementary particle behavior, Heisenberg says that when we isolate one aspect for measurement, we cannot be sure that other aspects remain at previous values. For example, if we measure velocity, we cannot be certain that energy remains constant at previously measured values. The limitations of our tools, in Heisenberg's case apparatus whose atomicity renders it unfit for measuring atoms and in Shakespeare's the human mind whose humanness limits it capacity to measure other human minds, precludes total certainty in regard to multiple characteristics. Hence, the principle of uncertainty which states that as certainty in regard to one characteristic increases, in regard to another it decreases.

This twentieth-century breakthrough in physics rhymes with developments in science that were taking place in Shakespeare's own day. Sir Francis Bacon's judgment on the contemporary state of science was that it was entirely too certain; the slavish obedience paid to the idols of the past prevented close examination of the facts of nature as they are. Even Copernicus had held that his heliocentric model of the universe was only a simpler mathematical analogy and not a true description; do not disturb God's universe had been his watchword. Bacon's method of escape from the restrictive manacles of classical science was a thoroughgoing and liberating skepticism. (Heisenberg's uncertainty is only the most recent avatar of Bacon's original impulse.) Bacon's program included a typically Renaissance provision for appropriate literary styles: the high style is the polished, classical, and rhetorical *magistral* which presents material in "such form as may best be believed, and not as may best be examined;" the second style is the *probative* which presents material as it may best be examined, and, in Bacon's own use, takes the form of aphorism.
In Stanley Fish's view, the *locus classicus* of the probative style is the *Essays*, which consist of a series of contradictory truisms laid side by side, each reflecting a general uncertainty on the others.³ No straightforward final position toward "Truth," "Love," or "Friendship" is forthcoming to a reader of Bacon's *Essays*. Instead, he receives an experience, and the experience leaves him in a state of healthy confusion and skepticism about received notions of the topics under discussion. The process of the *Essays* does not create a synthesis from polar opposites, but creates an openness to new ideas; their method is not dialectic, but disjunction.

Not wishing to read history backward,* I would nonetheless like to suggest that *The Merchant of Venice* is a probative play. The mind's pernicious tendency to leap from discrete particulars to unwarranted, abstract generalizations at the drop of a fact prompted Bacon to develop the theory and practice of the probative style. Critics are peculiarly drawn to making such leaps, but the more honest among us will admit that, like Gloucester's, our jumps are often more spectacular than real.⁴ Like Heisenberg's scientist, we isolate one chain of evidence and distort the whole to fit our one fact. Ordinarily this tendency in literary criticism is no great sin, for our response is controlled by the work, but when a work fails to exercise such control, to produce a simple or unified effect, to render a readily explicable theme, we are troubled and tantalized. The modern novel abounds in such problematical works—*Moby Dick, The Confidence Man, Lord Jim, Absalom, Absalom!* The common denominator in these works is that they are about their own method and the

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*The Merchant (1597), The Advancement of Learning (1611), Essays (1597-1617), Heisenberg (1925).*
problem of knowledge as much as they are about sailors or southerners.

Even in these representative works of the modern novel, though, some perspective for interpretation is provided. A narrator or narrators are given to help us place the action, to focus our vision, and to help us understand. Only The Confidence Man lacks the perspective from narration and for that reason has been the most difficult of Melville's complex canon. Where the other novels point to the difficulty of knowing, The Confidence Man suggests the complete impossibility of human knowledge. Plays of this sort are comparatively rare, but what is true of novels is true of drama. The metadramatic elements we have been discussing help the reader or viewer place the action and the method. Without a character with whom we can identify or self-reflexive elements, the audience is more or less at sea and latches on to whatever fragment of the whole it can, or it drowns. In A Midsummer Night's Dream, the references to playing, acting, and illusion guide the audience along certain clearly marked paths to the same general part of the forest; critics are in rough agreement as to where they are in that play. No such critical agreement exists with regard to The Merchant of Venice, and I suggest that this is because there are no metadramatic guideposts; each must blaze his own path. Where Shakespeare was our guide before, we are now on our own.

If A Midsummer Night's Dream is a fable for critics, The Merchant of Venice is an exam for same, and more often than not the answers are not A, B, C, or D, but an uneasy version of E—All (or None) of the Above.

I: Knowledge in the Fallen World

Given that The Merchant of Venice lacks the customary comic controlling point of view, we must determine the effect of this absence on the audience. One obvious effect is the radical critical disagreement
mentioned in the opening paragraph. However, if this play is a probative work, one which through equivocation and contradiction puts our minds into a healthy and active suspension of belief, then critical disagreement is only an outward sign that the play has partially done its work on the innards of an audience. I would suggest that this is the case, that the play leads us to certain conclusions, then brings those conclusions into disrepute. That critics tend to line up into warring camps is a sign of the mind's resistance to dealing in conjecture rather than certainty. Nonetheless, The Merchant of Venice is a play about the difficulty of human knowing and the dangers of misplaced certainty; its effect mirrors its content. Unlike Bacon and Heisenberg, Shakespeare puts these human limitations not so much under the category of natural frailty as under the Christian doctrine of fallen man. That this interpretation (or abdication from interpretation) can explain the peculiar effect of the play and redeem the oft-maligned Fifth Act, I hope to now demonstrate.

The demonstration must performe begin with a little sleight of hand. I have stated that the play lacks metadramatic devices to place the action and establish our attitude, and it does. However, like the novelists mentioned earlier, Shakespeare still minimally organizes our responses by making the subject matter of his play a model of its effect. The questions, Who are Jim, Sutpen, and Moby Dick? are telescoped into the questions, What are Lord Jim, Absalom, Absalom! and Moby Dick? Just so, Who is Antonio, the merchant of Venice? asks in part, What is the play that bears his name?

For its first one hundred lines, the play circles around its eponymous hero. There is something wrong with Antonio and nearly every character has an interest in discovering just what it is. Salarino and
Salanio suggest that Antonio is worried about his ventures at sea. They say that if they were Antonio, every wind would remind them of the fierce winds of sea. Salarino is so convinced of the truth of his own argument that he concludes, "I know Antonio/Is sad to think upon his merchandise." (I.i.39-40) Antonio replies, "Believe me, no." (41) Salarino suggests then that love is the source, but Antonio responds, "Fie, fie." (47) Salarino then gives up, "Then let us say you are sad/Because you are not merry." (47-8) No sooner have these two boulevardiers expended their ingenuity than a fresh approach is offered by Gratiano, who, wanting to be the center of attention through sheer volume of utterance, accuses Antonio of the same fault through mysterious silence.

None of the interpretations finally satisfies, but the impulse to interpret is profound in human action. As critics and directors are aware, Antonio, the center of the play's opening, demands that he be understood. Yet, perhaps no character in Shakespeare, besides that much understood man Hamlet, has so resolutely eluded our grasp. From different types of melancholic to several kinds of homosexual to, the latest in a long line of farfetched explanations, a man who exemplifies the feminine, compulsive gambler syndrome, Antonio has led the critical imagination a merry chase. No explanation of his behavior is completely adequate and this is, I think, the point. Clues exist to point the way to the heart of his problem, but they are either red herrings or ambiguous. Antonio says he is not worried about his money, but as later developments prove, he should be; he says it is not love, but certain remarks point to Bassanio as his sadness's origin. In making Antonio's problem so tantalizing, yet so inexplicable, Shakespeare introduces what I take to be a major part of this theme, man's urge to understand his fellow men and the
difficulty of realizing that urge without falling into subjectivism and oversimplification. Like Antonio's friends who find their own concerns and attitudes warping their interpretation of his behavior, many critics have found reflections of their own concerns, special knowledge, and maybe even, problems; they have been labelling Antonio, phlegmatic, melancholic, queer, and gambler, when an openness to the first scene would lead them to follow Antonio's opening assertion: "In sooth, I know not why I am so sad." (1)

What has been said about Antonio can with equal justice be said about his great rival, Shylock. Even more than Antonio Shylock has occasioned a wide spectrum of critical discussion, but his position has been more clearly seen as designedly equivocal. That he is more than a typical stage Jew, most critics are agreed; the main problem lies in his motivation—why does he hate Antonio enough to demand his bond instead of taking the money. Again, the play provides several clues: he is a Jew and hates Christians; his daughter has left him bereft; Antonio has mistreated him; Antonio has lent out money gratis and saved bankrupts from him. An impressive list, but like Iago's later, there are too many reasons, any one of which could explain the act, but taken together assume the air of rationalization.

Only at the trial does the last, best explanation come out and its naked insight brings us once more to the inexplicable:?

Say it is my humour, is it answer'd? (IV.i.43)

Shylock then lists a series of involuntary and unique reactions to rats, pigs, cats, and bagpipes. Of a like quality is his feeling for Antonio:

So can I give no reason, nor I will not, More than a lodged hate and certain loathing I bear Antonio, that I follow this A losing suit against him. Are you answer'd? (59-62)
We must be and yet we are not. Hatred is such a basic human emotion that we can all "feel" for it, but it is so basic and irrational that criticism cannot analyze it. Again our urge to generalize comes a cropper on the irreducible.

Because we cannot understand Shylock's motivation, we cannot fix our attitude toward him, cannot even tell his place in society. He is an alien, but integral, necessary even to Antonio. (It is after all his money that gains Bassanio entry to Belmont.) He likes Launcelot Gobbo and cares for his daughter, though he later would have her dead at his feet. He would not trade for a wilderness of monkeys the ring he had of Leah and scorns the Christian husbands for their willingness to sacrifice their wives (and later their own rings) for Antonio. Whenever an attitude is about to be founded, the ground shifts and certainty becomes conjecture. In I.iii.42-53, Shylock speaks an aside that convinces us of his undying hatred for Antonio; however, before the scene is over, he offers to lend the money without interest, because "I would be friends with you and have your love." (139) Granted that the "merry sport" of a pound of flesh bodes ill, but we are reading ahead to find premeditation is Shylock's offer, for as far as we know Antonio is sufficient. Even if Antonio forfeits, as the old take dooms him to, he is equally doomed to escape unscathed. Our response to the scene must needs be double (at least) and the closing altercation between Antonio and Bassanio, an image of our own internal debate:

    Ant: The Hebrew will turn Christian; he grows kind.
    Bass: I like not fair terms and a villain's mind. (181-2)

    No firm ground there. Often finding cause to make a minor
character his spokesman, Shakespeare is surely minimally present in
Launcelot Gobbo, who says of his blind father, "I will try confusions
with him." (II.i.39) Shakespeare is here trying confusions with us, his equivocal clues about character being the dramatic equivalent of Gobbo's directions to his father:

Turn up on your right hand at the next turning, but, at the next turning of all, on your left, marry, at the very next turning, turn of no hand, but turn down indirectly to the Jew's house. (42-45)

Having on our own found the Jew's house unfindable, we now turn to Belmont. If any image of the play exists, it is the caskets of Belmont; they are language (mottos) and substance (metals) united to create meaning. One imagines that in Shakespeare's theatre, they sat center stage, behind a curtain which was raised and lowered as the need arose. The central physical position reflects the central dramatic position they occupy in the first three acts, and, if anything in the play looks as if it can be interpreted, the casket apparatus is it. Yet like so many elements of this equivocal play, the closer we look at the caskets, the more distant and complicated their meaning becomes.

Our introduction to the caskets is, at first glance unequivocal: Nerissa explains:

Your father was ever virtuous; and holy men at their deaths have good inspirations; therefore the lottery, that he hath devised in their three chests of gold, silver and lead, whereof who chooses his meaning chooses you, will, no doubt, never be chosen by any rightly but one who shall rightly love. (I.ii.30-36)

The caskets are a device designed by a wise and virtuous man to winnow out the wheat from the chaff. Nerissa's statement indicates that there is a meaning to be read out of the caskets, but there are problems in the apparatus as described. Her certainty ("no doubt") that the lottery will "never be chosen by any rightly but one who shall rightly love" is complicated by the uncertainty created by the insertion of the first
"Rightly." Omitting this word makes the casket devide foolproof; left in, there is the troubling admission that one could perhaps choose the right casket for wrong reasons—that is, not "rightly."

More problematical is the relationship between the caskets' nomination as "lottery" and the emphasis on choice. Barber says of this, "The essence of a lottery is a discontinuity, something hidden so that the chooser cannot get from here to there by reasoning."8 Yet predominant in Nerissa's speech is choice, that something in the predestinate groom will respond to the correct casket and certify his election, and critics have had much ado to isolate this something. In spite of Barber's assertion that "most of the argument about gold, silver, and lead is certainly factitious,"9 we are invited by the play to go through that argument, to determine what it is that makes each suitor choose as he does.

Morocco demonstrates in his ratiocination, the critic's dilemma. He recognizes the essence of the lottery:

If Hercules and Lichas throw at dice
Which is the better man, the greater throw
May then be fortune from the weaker hand:
So is Alcides beaten by his page. (II.i.32-35)

However when faced with the caskets, Morocco rejects chance and seeks to reason his way to Portia. The suitor's difficulty is multiplied by the fact that each casket is not only of an ambiguously emblematic metal, but also has attached to it a motto. Such symbolic devices were favorites of the Renaissance, but normally had their explications attached rather than enclosed. After rejecting silver and lead for plausible reasons, Morocco lights on gold because Portia is the motto's "What many men desire" and "Never so rich a gem/Was set in worse than gold." (II. vii.54-5) He fails. Apparently his only fault has been in choosing the
incorrect side of a large heritage of commonplaces about gold: good as gold rather than "All that glisters is not gold." (65)

Aragon too relies on commonplace generalizations to reach the wrong conclusions. Unfortunately for critics such as Goddard, the generalization he adopts is the same moralization that Morocco finds hidden in the golden casket and which these critics would have been the unifying theme of the play. Rephrasing "All that glisters is not gold," Aragon castigates "the fool multitude, that choose by show/Not learning more than the fond eye doth teach." (II.ix.26-7) Being a much deeper man, he then launches into an investigation of the silver casket's motto: "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves." He finds there a reflection of his own interest, the concept of desert. He condemns the world for raising unworthy individuals to unmerited heights and for permitting "estates, degrees and offices" to be "derived corruptly." (41-2) Conversely, he decries the depression of true merit to low degrees and looks forward to a time when these injustices will be rectified:

How much low peasantry would then be gleaned  
From the true seed of honour! And how much honour  
Pick'd from the chaff and ruin of the times  
To be new-varnish'd. (46-9)

Although he has used his rather radical social, if accepted theological, argument to reach his decision, Aragon rejects its personal implications: "I will assume desert," he says, thereby choosing the wrong box. (51) His reward is traditionally a mirror that reflects his own egotism, an egotism that leads him to find his own ideas in the motto and a version of that natural human egotism that leads Antonio's friends to impose their own concerns on his ailment and critics their interpretations on the play.

Bassanio is an exception to the choice made through generalization.
Indeed, it may be said that he succeeds because he has no general ideas at all, at least, none that affect his behavior. Superficially, his remarks in contemplation of the golden casket echo Aragon's: "So may the outward shows be least themselves;/The world is still deceived with ornament." (III.ii.73-4) Next, he enumerates the mistakes derived from taking appearance for reality in law, religion, masculine bravery, and feminine beauty. In all of these fields outward appearance is taken for genuine merit. That Bassanio accepts this Renaissance commonplace does not lead him, like Aragon, to pick the silver casket. This he dismisses in two lines: "Nor none of thee, thou pale and common drudge/"Tween man and man." (103-4) Instead, he chooses the lead whose "Palesness moves me more than eloquence." (106)

Some have found in Bassanio's choice a sign of his ability to see through surfaces, in Traversi's words "to choose inner reality rather than the deception of outward show."¹¹ I for one cannot see this. He rejects silver for its "pale" color and chooses lead for its "paleness." Where Sigurd Burckhardt sees in "paleness" an obvious printer's error for "plainness," I find only confusion--but an intended confusion.¹² Bassanio's behavior on winning the lottery is surely not that of a man who has reasoned according to sound philosophical principles to an inescapable conclusion; he is not one of the "deliberate fools" who "have the wisdom by their wit to lose." (II.ix.80-81) In two beautiful passages, he compares himself to an exhausted athlete uncertain of victory and one who having heard a powerful speech has a feeling that "every something, being blent together,/Turns to a wild of nothing, save of joy,/Express'd and not express'd." (III.ii.183-5)

Bassanio's confusion extends to the audience, who has tacitly
been asked to make some sense out of the caskets. We cannot tell logically how Bassanio arrives at this choice, there being no logical pattern to his thoughts leading to that choice; yet, by a process of dramatic elimination, we know he must choose correctly. This mixed reaction returns us to the basic paradox involved with the caskets: how are choice and lottery to be resolved? The answer here is, they cannot. Indeed Shakespeare goes out of his way to keep the paradox before us unresolved. Bassanio is often cast, metaphorically, in the role of a classical hero, a man of choice and action. He offers to become one of the Jasons who pursues Portia-Medea (I.i.169-72) and in the casket scene Portia compares him to "young Alcides." (III.ii.56) These identifications imply purpose, power, and decision, but we ought to recall Morocco's nagging "If Hercules and Lichas play at dice." Bassanio himself further muddies the analogy with Hercules: "How many cowards.../Wear yet upon their chins/The beards of Hercules and frowning Mars." (83-5)

If blunt Hercules becomes a figure of equivocation, it may be only because our minds leap to the generalization, Hercules equals hero, and we forget the man beset by destiny. Yet what are our poor understandings to do halting after the meaning of the scroll in the blessed casket?

You that choose not by the view
Chance as fair and choose as true!
Since this fortune falls to you
Be content and seek no new. (132-35) (Italics mine)

I do not understand the first couplet; chance as fair and choose as true as what? As he has already chosen and/or chanced? Being an almost perfect balance of choice and chance, the scroll does not much help matters. Nor does looking at Bassanio. I can find nothing to stamp Bassanio as superior to either Aragon or Morocco. As much as they, he chooses by the
view, the only differences being a greater degree of confusion as to why and his success. I suggest that the confusion, both his and ours, is the point. We have seen something happen before our eyes that demands an explanation. That he is destined to win we know; why he is to win we must learn.

As Traversi's statement indicates, the simplest reaction is to look for some special quality in Bassanio that explains his success, and the quality closest to hand and most appropriate is the ability to see through surfaces to reality. Only there is nothing in Bassanio's previous characterization to indicate the presence of such a quality. In the first scene, he alone seems unaware that anything is wrong with Antonio. Given his attitude toward money, Bassanio, of all the suitors, seems most likely to choose the golden casket from its outward appearance. From this character, critics have been forced to create an erroneous consistency from selective distortion. The simplest explanation is that there is no simple explanation—indeed is no explanation in terms of choice.

Chance, then. Chance has about it a feeling of the unmerited which Bassanio's victory has; but it also has a feeling of the unexpected which Bassanio's has not. Our attitude toward Bassanio's expectations are less of simple chance than of perceived destiny or election. It is convenient to appeal to the idea that Shakespeare rigidly adhered to his source which had for him the effect of predetermining his action and dictating Bassanio's success, but Shakespeare alters his source in one crucial regard; he changes the motto on the third chest to "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath" from "Thei that chese me, shall fynde (in) me God hathe disposid."13 One who chose this latter motto would obviously be placing himself in God's hand and his triumph would be a sign
of divine election. No such supposition works with Bassanio, of whom we
cannot say for certain that he even reads the inscriptions. Pure chance
would seem to be the only explanation, but it does not really explain our
response. The feeling of certainty that lead is the casket and Bassanio
the man does not square with any moral precepts generated by the play.

The effect created by the casket sequence is similar to that of
Bacon's *Essays* in that contradictory generalizations are forced on the
mind with calculated force to create a suspension of belief. Bacon hoped
that this effect would shake men out of old erroneous conceptions and
make them find more flexible and accurate ones. Bacon's only error lay in
his belief that the optimism he held for the physical sciences also applied
to the altogether more murky realm of human morals. The essays on Truth,
Love, Friendship, etc. are amoral in their resolute refusal to take any
rigid position, and Bacon is scientific in his belief that out of trial
and error will come final propositions on ethics. In contrast, *The Mer-
chant of Venice* is moral in its ambiguity, because Shakespeare is
Christian in his belief that man's moral life is problematical and that
all human judgments are and will be only partial and incomplete.

II: Justice in the Fallen World.

Shakespeare's unwillingness to slight the irreducibility of
Antonio's and Shylock's passions is one sign that he will concentrate on
the problematical in morals and human knowing; the caskets are another,
and there are more. When Portia is first seen, she too suffers from a
variety of melancholy and it is not clear that it comes only from Nerissa's
conjectured surfeit. Portia's mind as much runs on Pauline doctrine:

> If to do were as easy as to know what were good
to do, chapels had been churches and poor men's
cottages princes' palaces. It is a good divine
that follows his own instructions: I can easier
teach twenty what were good to be done, than
be one of the twenty to follow mine own teach-
ing. (I.ii.13-16)

This is a paraphrase of Romans 7:15: "For that which I do, I understand
not; for what I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that do I." In
the fallen world men have an inkling of what they ought to do, but is is
most often easier to do otherwise. We have an immediate example of this
proposition in Portia's comments on her suitors. She anatomizes their
many shortcomings, but admits "in truth, I know it is a sin to be a
mocker." (61) Nonetheless, she mocks on. In a lighter vein, Launcelot
Gobbo soliloquizes on his duty to Shylock; casting his dilemma in a psy-
chomachic dialogue between his conscience and the fiend, he concludes
that "the fiend gives the more friendly counsel." (II.ii.31)

Added to this Christian notion that men are incapable of acting
according to their own best motives is the already mentioned classical
attitude that the world has reached a degenerate state. Aragon's remarks
on merit and Bassanio's speech on "outward shows" place this play so
concerned with gold firmly in the age of iron. One mutual property of the
age of iron and the fallen world is the abuse of language and again
Launcelot is representative. Previously noted are his deception of his
father and his defense of escape where words become a tool for slipping
out of responsibility. In III.v, Launcelot becomes a typical Shakespear-
ean clown whose metier is turning words inside out like a chevril glove.
His quibbles center around major themes of the play: religion is a
matter of concern only if it raises the price of bacon; love (the moor)
is a springboard for a bawdy joke; service and community (the dinner)
are matters put off by punning. Lorenzo's agitated response is telling:

The fool hath planted in his memory
An army of good words; and I do know
Many fools, that stand in better place,
Garnish'd like him, that for a tricksy word
Defy the matter. (71-75)

These lines might serve as a commentary on the trial scene immediately following; the better place, a woman garnished like a man, and the tricksy word defying the matter, all seem to apply. And we may recall Bassanio's judgment on the law:

In law, what plea so tainted and corrupt
But being season'd with a gracious voice,
Obscures the show of evil. (III.ii.75-7)

Such speeches must affect the way we understand the trial scene.

The trial takes center stage alone when the caskets are disposed of, and it occupies an analogous position in the play. A legal suit is something else that demands interpretation, but after having come through the confusing casket scenes, our expectations are modified. We no longer expect clear justice to shine through the proceedings. Our understandings, made more flexible and open through our inability to locate the merit of Bassanio's choice and tempered by our sense of a fallen world where men, especially in legal matters, deal in fallen words, can more easily accept an equivocal decision. The final verdict is certainly that.

The trial issues are clear cut; both principal's agree as to what constitutes the bond and what the penalty. Moreover, there is little to choose in the way of moral superiority between Antonio and Shylock. Shylock's "Hath not a jew" speech which reduces both Christian and Jew to the lowest level of animal mechanism reflects the true character of the play's moral underpinnings. Even Portia effectively identifies the two when she asks "Which is the merchant here and which the jew?" (IV.i.175) She cuts through surface differences, because she alone brings to the
trial a knowledge of man's fallen nature. The Duke cannot believe that Shylock really intends to exact the penalty for forfeiture, thinks his actions a fantastic pose; Portia knows that man is capable of anything.

A well-versed theologian, Portia knows as well the source of relief from the fall—God's mercy. Hence, the dialogue between the old law and the new which takes place in Venice's court. To be brief, Shylock unequivocally accepts the old law: "I stand here for law;" "My deeds upon my head! I crave the law,/The penalty and forfeit of my bond." (IV.i. 142 and 206-7) The old law's system is rigid and defined—an eye for an eye, three thousand ducats for one pound of flesh. The new law is not so clear, for it recognizes man's inherent and total weakness. The old law sees the lawbreaker as wilfully perverse; the new as incapable of avoiding wrong. In place of revenge, the new law's response to crime is mercy: "consider this,/That, in the course of justice, none of us/Should see salvation." (198-200)

Whether we see Portia's procedure at the trial as a careful plot or fortuitous improvisation, it is important to note that she gives the old law every chance to bow before the new. That Shylock's many refusals to admit mercy's argument boxes him into a position where the full force of the old law redounds on his head is his fault, not hers. That she dons the terrifying guise of Old Testament justicer, becoming in Gratiano's echoes everything Shylock expects of a judge in no way vitiates her stance as representative of the new law, for the new law exists in the fallen world and is as subject to perversion as the men between whom it mediates.

Like everything else in The Merchant of Venice, justice therefore must be equivocal. In our idealist souls we expect the triumph of right; in our practical minds we know that human justice is rarely right. Just
so, this. We expect and want Portia to make a good case in which our sense of justice is preserved; what we get is not so satisfying. Haynes in his *Outlines of Equity* sums up the professional view of Portia's victory: "How is the victim rescued? By the merest verbal quibble," a quibble that corresponds to the "popular faith—that the law regarded the letter, not the spirit."\(^1\) Now, the popular faith is often enough to let a playwright carry it, and surely we have a feeling that Shylock deserves in some measure what he gets—as a strict adherent of the old law done in by an even stricter, he is subject to this "poetic" justice. Nonetheless, I submit that our feelings are mixed on this crucial point. We laugh with Portia at her sneering catalogue of suitors, but with her we know, or should, that it is a sin to be a mocker. We likewise endorse emotionally the judgment against Shylock, but should acknowledge in part the injustice involved. Portia's use of the letter of the law is, in the cold light of reason, no more appealing than the Jew's.

She does, however, become the vehicle for mercy in the play. Through her agency, the Duke offers Shylock his life and Antonio remits a remainder of his fortune. To gain this pittance of reprieve, all Shylock has to do is become Christian and leave his estate to Lorenzo and Jessica. But even with mercy, we have qualms. Questions of religion aside, it is unclear why Antonio, Jessica, and Lorenzo, deserve any part of Shylock's moneys. The rabbit-out-of-the-hat law which provides for these penalties is too pat and is to be taken as such—it simply does not explain. The only things positive to be said for the mercy extended is that finally it ameliorates the letter by the spirit. According to the law, all Shylock's goods are confiscated; through mercy half remains to him, though at what expense through conversion we can never know. In
this respect, mercy in its pallid earthly version demonstrates a flexi-
bility totally lacking in strict adherence to law which would have penal-
ties rigidly set forth; a similar flexibility in regard to the interper-
tation of character in different situations is a quality the play tries

to develop in an audience. The last act drives this lesson home.

III: Virtue in the Fallen World

The puzzling fifth act has been seen variously as a lyric close to
the love plot, as an excrescence to be omitted in production, and as an
ill-managed attempt to cover over with poetry the crude matter that has
gone before. What it really does is to recapitulate in its elements the
previous action and to make explicit the whole anti-generalizing tendency
of the play. In this respect, it is a type of coda to the whole.

Like A Midsummer Night's Dream, the act takes place under the
aegis of the moon, but here are no shifting shapes of love and fancy;
instead, what shifts are already slippery ethical categories. In speeches
reminiscent of Salanio and Salarino's glorious initial descriptions of
Antonio's argosies, Lorenzo and Jessica open the scene with a series of
parallels between this night and others on which forsaken classical lovers
have watched and waited. Almost totally submerged in the beauty of the
language are the tragic facts of Troilus, Thisbe, Dido, and Medea, just
as Salarino's earlier "enrobe the roaring waters with my silks" (I.i.34)
has glossed the messy reality of shipwreck. Needed here is the counter-
voice of a Shylock to cut to the bone: "Ships are but boards,/Sailors
but men...waters, winds, and rocks." (I.iii.21-22 and 25) Portia ulti-
mately provides this counter, becoming the "cuckoo" known "by the bad
voice." (V.i.112-13)

But first a complicated series of analogies between the ideal and
the actual are set up. The first of these is Lorenzo’s description of heavenly and earthly music. Looking at the heavens, he comments on the music of the spheres:

There’s not the smallest orb which thou behold’st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young ey’d cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls:
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it. (60-65)

This music in praise of God is eternal, constant ("still quiring"), and completely unavailable to man’s fallen senses. Lorenzo goes on to speak of earthly music’s good effects. Earthly music is like heavenly music except that its effects for moral good are impermanent: "Nought so stockish, hard, and full of rage,/But music for the time doth change his nature." (81-2, italics mine) In this comparison is set up the basic pattern for what follows: heavenly-perfect::human-flawed.

The next element in the series is the candle and the moon of which Portia speaks. The human light is not noticed while the celestial light shines, but when the moon goes, the candle lights man to his home. Portia also adds the third element in a comparison of the candle to the moon:

So doth the greater glory dim the less;
A substitute shines brightly as a king
Until a king be by. (93-95)

To this series can be added the "inland brook" and the "main of waters." (97-98) We then have a system something like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Earthly (lesser)</th>
<th>Heavenly (greater)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Music</td>
<td>Music of the Spheres ::</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candle</td>
<td>Moon ::</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitute (inland brook)</td>
<td>King (main of waters) ::</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We must however add still one more element to complete and complicate the picture. Portia has compared the candles to "a good deed in a naughty world." (91) Therefore: Good deed in a naughty world : ?
The series is flawed, just like man's life and morality. However, I trust we know what logically fills the blank—a divine and unequivocal good deed, no example of which exists in the play, so far incapable of one is man.

But, if earthly music can for a time keep man from "treasons, strategems, and spoils," a good deed can, like the candle with its fitful beams, hold back some measure of the darkness. Therefore, Portia's poetical-analogical realization of how far short man's deeds fall of perfection does not lead to despair, but to speculation on the relative nature of human value judgments, speculations vital to an interpretation of the play. She hears the music of her house, and it has a new quality:

Portia: Nothing is good, I see, without respect.
Ner: Silence bestows that virtue on it, madam.
Portia: The crow doth sing a sweetly as the lark
When neither is attended, and I think
The nightingale, if she should sing by day,
When every goose is cackling, would be thought
No better a musician than the wren. (99-105)

Nothing is good without respect is the keystone of relativism. Only in relation to a certain setting or system can an object, creature, or event be judged good or bad.

How many things by season season'd are
To their right praise and true perfection. (106-7)

With no one listening, the crow sings as sweetly as the lark; the songs of the nightingale, goose, and wren are indistinguishable in broad daylight. Portia's speech has the effect of making the reader or audience question the final validity of any mortal value judgment, for earthly value is here shown to be tentative, shifting, and unfixed except with regard to impermanent circumstance. If the speech works (a subject to be considered shortly), many of our mixed feelings are explained. We can understand how Antonio can at one point be vicious and another beneficent;
how Shylock can at home be an object of sympathy and at court a source of terror, etc. In short, we can see how our judgments and feelings are affected by circumstances and perhaps learn that all human judgment is at the mercy of things beyond our control and the control of the characters we judge. Moreover, in the world of the play, no characters are simply good and bad, they are only to our limited faculties relatively good and bad, and doubly relative at that—relative to each other and relative to the changing scene.

Even Portia, in the eyes of some the transcendent lady of the comedies, is finally the cuckoo, a bird whose nurture lies in the nests of others—a substitute. (112-13) She is, by her own reckoning, that substitute who shines brightly as a king until a king be by. The nature of the play militates against the direct introduction of the true king, Christ, for The Merchant of Venice is almost solely concerned with human weakness, both the characters and ours. Nonetheless, in this section of contrast between human and heavenly, Christ is there if only by implication. His perfect goodness and perfect mercy are the touchstones by which we must measure the characters and His perfect knowledge, the standard to which our own understandings can only weakly aspire. His presence for a moment establishes a typical Renaissance dual perspective: relative to Christ, Portia's substitute goodness is very small indeed; relative to the world of the play, hers is paramount. She is after all a type for Christ's anti-type; her substitution as a judge pleading for mercy parallels His greater substitution as a man to the same end. That she is but a shadowy type is less a condemnation than a statement of the human condition. When we can see her under this dual aspect, helplessly fallen, yet hopefully imaging Christ's goodness, we have grasped part of the play's difficult method—the delicate balancing of opposed propositions to create a complex amalgam
of ideas around which the mind may fruitfully probe without ever complacently coming to rest.

From this point of balance, the play jolts to a close with the resolution of the ring plot and some unexpected revelations. The ring plot is in a sense a red herring, for, although Nerissa links it to the caskets ("What talk you of the posy or the value?" 151), there is really no compelling relation with that earlier episode. The rings bear a much clearer relation to the trial, where both sides have a modicum of right and any decision will be less than complete. Portia and Nerissa have every right to expect their new husbands to remain true to their oaths; Gratiano and Bassanio, given the circumstances, are right to give away the rings. It is even possible to see the forgiveness offered the men as like that given Shylock. But this analogy breaks down; the men have committed no crime and Portia's engineered plot is merely a playful form of fraudulent entrapment.

In my scheme, the ring episode is an example of Portia's just stated proposition--nothing is good without respect. We know from the dialogue that the quality of light has changed from full moon to no moon to false dawn--"Tis a day/Such as the day is when the sun is hid," (125-6) and Portia changes with the light. She shifts from reflexive commentator on human values to active, clever, sportive woman, a vision we have not had since her first scene. Moreover, we feel here none of the queasiness about her mental agility that characterizes our sense of her at the trial; here her wit is seasoned to its right praise and true perfection. Even the bawdry which might be offensive in a high-toned lady like Portia is a part of a proper twitting of an "unfaithful" husband. All of this may well be a function of the Venice-Belmont dichotomy which, in general,
I feel exists more in the minds of simplistic critics than in the play. However, in this instance, if Venice represents the real world of commerce and consequences and Belmont fairy tale and foolery, then the quality of our response to Portia in these two worlds must differ, and it does. Nothing is good without respect. Therefore, the discovery of Portia's disguise in court would mean disaster; in Belmont, it can only mean delight.

This does not mean that the play closes on a note of joy and completion. Portia does explain the mechanics of the ring plot, but no sooner is this accomplished than she produces out of thin air a letter revealing that three of Antonio's ships are safely and profitably come to port. Of this unexpected news, she says, "You shall not know by what strange accident/I chanced on this letter." (278-9) Nor do we ever. If we have missed the play's emphasis on indeterminacy, this final thrust toward mystery cannot make us reevaluate a simple experience of the play. However, to those who have recognized the playwright's anti-generalizing trend, the never explained good news is a nice last model for our experience; it leaves us asking a question.

Within the play, Portia promises to answer the questions and her last statement sums up, I think, our dominant feeling about the play:

It is almost morning  
And yet I am sure you are not satisfied  
Of these events at full. Let us go in;  
And charge us there upon inter'gatories,  
And we will answer all things faithfully. (295-9)

Unfortunately, or I should say, given the play's method, fortunately for us, clear daylight never comes in The Merchant of Venice. We are never made privy to the information that will satisfy fully our unhealthy human desire for certainty, certainty that enables Belmont to
accept Portia's judicial victory and to put Shylock for out of mind in
the last act. Instead, we are left in a state of healthy flexibility and
skepticism with regard to human judgments and value. Lest we forget our
common danger, Gratiano's closing lines remind us that here is a man who
consistently follows the simplest line. Gratiano has, of all the charac-
ters, the coarsest, most rigid, reactions. His crowing over Shylock's
defeat which emphasizes his total lack of fellow feeling is equalled only
by his total lack of curiosity about the events he has just lived through.
That he chooses to go to consummate his marriage is a natural human impulse;
that he would forego Portia's promised explanation and his crudity are not
so explicable. His preference for sex over revelation is characteristic
of his singlemindedness, and the bawdry in which his last speech is couched
shocks us into a recognition of our own tendencies. We can sympathize with
his desires, but his attitude makes us withhold full endorsement. So with
our total experience. We want to make the final judgment in which our
minds can lazily contemplate certainty, but the process of the play will
permit only the most active questioning of our responses. In this play so
concerned with judgments, the only judgment withheld is that of the
audience.

IV

Like many other critics of The Merchant of Venice, I find that my
concluding words are in the nature of a retraction. Not that I find my
argument an unconvincing account of the play as read, but that it places
too much emphasis on elements either slighted in performance or impossible
to perform. Part of my analysis of the last act, for instance, relies on
a close reading of a very few lines, requiring less than two minutes act-
ing time and possible of complete omission. They could never have on the
stage quite the reflective effect I describe and which I believe is true to a reading experience. A larger version of this feeling that there are two plays—the study and the stage versions—is the failure of the play in performance ever to square quite with our pre-conceived notions of what we should be seeing. Like the great tragedies, our reading experience is richer, though not necessarily more powerful, than our seeing.

The source of this problem, hinted at in the introduction, is Shakespeare's abandonment of his normal, metadramatic, comic method. Audiences are one species of mob and they require a firebrand to show them the way. (I do not mean this in a pejorative sense, for, given the right leadership, the mob formed from a theatrical audience can be led to enlightening and wonderful experiences.) Shakespeare's abdication of that role as firebrand is here determined by his selection of theme and is signalled by his refusal to guide his audience through his now recognized metadramatic means. Into the vacuum formed by Shakespeare's absence have rushed single-minded critics and egregious directors who have attempted to give our experience a more definitive form than it actually has. From my subjective moral stance, these directors and critics can be divided into two camps: those who would turn us into a good mob which decries Shylock's defeat only a little less than it would detest his victory and finds little of positive value in Belmont; and those, in my opinion, much worse, who turn us into a murderous, anti-Semitic mob, scenting blood in the air.

Nonetheless, the failures of understanding represented by these two factions are comprehensible, for here alone among the comedies Shakespeare refuses to shape significantly our experiences, and, it would seem, on purpose. He goes against our expectations in comedy by presenting
the serious difficulty of human evil, but the problem with the play is not, as Traversi suggests, that Shylock throws the comic action out of balance; indeed, we expect comedy to be unbalanced, good sweeping away bad, time and again. The problem here is the play's being too perfectly balanced. It presents a series of apparently easy distinctions (Antonio and Shylock, Christian and Jew, Belmont and Venice) which crumble under closer examination. In the fragments that remain one searches in vain for a simple, all explaining, point of view. This balance, which exists not as much in the antithetical pairs just listed as in our inability to be wholly "for" one side or the other of the pairs, links this comedy not only to the experimental prose of Bacon, but also to the radical definition of comedy—a work that breaks down sterile categories or attitudes in favor of a more open, and, in comedy's terms, healthy response. Why then so much trouble with the play? The answer lies in the degree of skepticism we carry away from a reading of it.* Where Bacon saw hope for future true generalizations, Shakespeare sees Portia's relativism, a relativism not to be resolved this side of heaven. And the simple truth (oh, dangerous statement) is that, in comic drama, we want not relativism but answers. To go against this human desire is Shakespeare's purpose here, and, although he can make us do it, he cannot make us like it. So engrained is the habit that for each essay like this that recommends suspending judgment, there will be ten with new "answers" to Antonio's ailment, Shylock's motivation, and the riddle of the caskets. Surely the man who created Portia with her profound knowledge of human shortcomings would have expected and accepted this human response, and it is likely

*None of this talk about balance may hold true for a one-sided stage production, but I suggest that in most acted versions at least some of the moral equivocation, so equivocal is the play, comes through.
that he did, for in the three great comedies which follow Shakespeare
returns to his tried, yet still developing, old method, once more letting
his audience in on the workings of the human mind and the creative inves-
tigation of it.
NOTES


4See Barber's retraction at the end of his discussion of The Merchant of Venice in Shakespeare's Festive Comedy (Princeton, 1958), 190-191.


6Ralph Berry in Shakespeare's Comedies (Princeton, 1972), 126-130, is responsible for this last belabored example.

7See "The Merchant of Venice or The Importance of Being Earnest," in Shakespearean Comedy, Stratford-upon-Avon-Studies 14, eds. Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer (New York, 1972), where D. G. Palmer demonstrates how most of the rhetoric in the play serves to mask the primal feelings with which the play is finally concerned.

8Barber, 174.

9Ibid., 174.

10Harold C. Goddard in The Meaning of Shakespeare, I, (Chicago, 1951), 81-116, sees the play as being organized around the appearance-reality dichotomy; good characters invariably can tell the difference.


12Sigurd Burckhardt, Shakespearean Meanings (New Haven, 1968), 209.

13Geoffrey Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (New York, 1957), 514. Burckhardt remarks on Shakespearean significant divergence from his source.


15Traversi, 193.
Illusion on Trial:  *Much Ado About Nothing*
Shakespeare's last three great comedies present, if abstracted, a remarkable series of essays on comic drama; and, although they mark a return to his metadramatic method, they do so in a way at once different and deeper than in his earlier practice. Where Shakespeare had been content in his previous comedies to play metadramatically with the gross physical conditions of his stage--actors, lines, costumes, sets, audience--he now turns to the more basic matter of all drama, illusion, and the moral problems to which illusion gives rise. Having mastered his tools, the craftsman questions his product.

*Much Ado About Nothing* (1598) represents a curious blend of the equivocal comedy of *The Merchant of Venice* and the concern with illusion that provides centers of focus for *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. Like the earlier play, *Much Ado* takes place in the relatively realistic world of men and action within which Beatrice can say, as Portia might have, "Well, we are all mortal." (I.i.60) On the other hand, like the later plays, it is more clearly a standard romantic comedy in which the arguments of love and art are entwined. The play is then intermediate; it stands between one play that steadfastly refuses to shape our experience and two whose graceful shapes force us to doubt the truth of the life they portray.

The world of *Much Ado About Nothing* has little of the green world or salt shot air of the later comedies. It has instead not a little of the gritty, grasping, life of Venice about. True, no one appears to work, but here is leisure bought by force of arms. As the play begins,
a cosmopolitan group of young warriors enters the narrow bounds of Messina for holiday after battle. Yet, what they gain is less respite than the continuation of war through other means; just as surely as Venice is battleground-marketplace of economic theories, and religious and legal principles, Messina is the bloody ground of social and sexual combat, where soldiers of either sex lay their personalities on the line.

No sooner does the messenger report that the physical battle is successfully concluded than the pioneer work for the second, greater, battle begins. Immediately we learn of the "merry war" betwixt Signior Benedick and Beatrice, (I.i.62) which takes the forms of a "skirmish of wit." (64) As Goddard notes, one characteristic of the world of Much Ado is its pervasive wit;¹ nothing enters Messina without undergoing a sea change of witty transformation, no person not reduced to his worst characteristic, no word not reduced to its sounds and associations. But wit is here no end in itself, no pleasurable way of whiling away the time; rather it is wit militant, continually probing intellect and character, its goal the destruction through belittling of its object. Wit takes its greatest toll of Benedick, who witty himself, has the misfortune to be matched against the wittiest person in the play, the non-pareil Beatrice. Of him, she self-servingly says, "In our last conflict four of his five wits went halting off, and now is the whole man governed with one:... let him bear it for a difference between himself and his horse." (65-69) This jibe occurs before Benedick even enters the play and is a sign of the battle readiness of the witty characters.

As we later learn, Beatrice's remark grows out of an earlier rebuff in love and is, therefore, not only self-serving but also self-protective; and much of the play's wit is self-protective. The witty
society's individuals are continually on stage, and, as with all actors, they are ever alert to criticism.

This leads to a second characteristic of Messinian society—an abiding sense of exposure. Benedick's language, especially with regard to love, is filled with the imagery of exposure. In I.i, he says, if I love "hang me up a door of a brothel house for the sign of blind Cupid," (254–6) "hang me in a bottle like a cat and shoot at me," (259–60) and that he should be turned into a sign reading, "Here you may see Benedick, the married man." (269–70) Recounting his defeat at the masquerade he states his situation in these words: "huddling jest upon jest with such impossible conveyance upon me that I stood like a man at a mark, with a whole army shooting at me." (II.i.251–54) This sense of exposure tends to confirm characters in their self-protective stances. Indeed, much of Claudio and Don Pedro's viciousness at the wedding can be seen as a reaction to being caught out so far in their opinion of Hero. No wit can stand to seem the fool before an audience of his peers.

The pervasiveness of wit and the strong sense of public vulnerability have a natural counterforce in mistrust and suspicion. In Messina, everyone distrusts everyone else, particularly where women are concerned. The play is filled with a superflux of Shakespeare's comic staple—cuckoldy jokes. Even Hero's dead mother's chastity is questioned in the opening scene. (I.i.109–11) In the forefront of these rusty jests is Benedick who asks the recently smitten Claudio, "Hath not the world one man but he will wear his cap with suspicion?" (198–99) His, and to some extent the play's, attitude toward women rests in this motto: "Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none." (246–48) The near fatal action of the fourth
act springs in large part from this attitude toward feminine virtue.

But suspicion is nowhere limited to that which the men hold for women. Supposed feminine weakness leads to equally strong distrust of the men who would avail themselves of that female failing. Feeling this defect most strongly, Claudio's attitude toward the other men is suspicion in the extreme. He says to Don Pedro who has praised Hero, "You speak this to fetch me in." (I.I.225) Don John, who has reason to know to what depths man can sink, assumes when he spies his brother wooing Hero that Don Pedro has betrayed Claudio; and when told of this (in Messina) natural assumption, Claudio immediately accedes to the truth of this false surmise: "Friendship is constant in all other things/Save in the office and affairs of love:...Trust no agent." (II.i.182-83 and 186). There are indications that even Benedick subscribes to Don John's account: "Twas the boy that stole your meat, and you'll beat the post." (205-6)

This then is the world of the play—self-protective wit, exposure, and sexual suspicion. A very unfortunate world, and one very unfortunately true to civilized life. It is, in its bare outlines, the world of Hamlet and the characters speak of it as such. Already cited is Beatrice's jesting recognition of man's frailty, "Well, we are all mortal." Later she describes man as "a valiant piece of dust...a clod of wayward marl." (II.i.64-65) and Benedick's final analysis is "man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion." (V.iV.109-10) All of these observations might have come to more disillusioned eyes than those of Shakespeare's premier comic squabblers.

The key to the difference between Italy and Denmark may well lie in that word "disillusioned," for no hard boiled group in comedy is so
thoroughly and multifariously illusioned as the sojourners in Messina. Almost all critics of the play have noted the importance and proliferation of deceptions in it,³ and deception may take its place alongside the other characteristics of the play's world. Again Hamlet comes to mind: in a society filled with immobilizing suspicion, one of the few ways of shifting things off dead center is to practice deception. Hamlet's madness and the mousetrap play are two such instances. The difference in Much Ado is that here our interest lies as much with the deceived as the practices of deception.

To further adumbrate the notion of deception it is necessary to point out that although this is a "closed world" comedy,⁴ there are, more than in Twelfth Night two relatively distinct areas of action—the public and the private. In the public arena, characters must keep their poses uncluttered and their lines of fire clear. In private, they can afford to drop the pose for awhile, as Benedick does when Claudio asks his opinion of Hero: "Do you question me as an honest man should do, for my simple true judgment; or would you have me speak after my custom, as being a professed tyrant to their sex?" (I.i.167-70) The private sphere is seen as a place of protection from the constant exposure of the public; Benedick again, of the supposedly abused Claudio—"Alas, poor hurt fowl! Now will he creep into sedges." (II.i.208-9)

Yet, paradoxically, characters in their most private moments are at their most vulnerable; when they think themselves to be most protected, they are most exposed; and to practice on someone so mistakenly self-possessed is the greatest wit of all:

The pleasant'st angling is to see the fish
Cut with her golden oars the silver stream,
And greedily devour the treacherous bait. (III.i.26-28)⁵

The first example of this paradigmatic action is at the masquerade. If
we credit the philosophers of holiday, then masquerades are normally areas of license and freedom from constraints; the mask is a shield from every day, but not in Messina. Instead, the masks are in practice transparent, and the women launch barrages of invective under a cover of mistaken identity. The men, locked in their supposedly impenetrable disguises, are at the women's non-existent mercy.

The masquerade also reveals a state of mind peculiar to societies like Messina's which might aptly be called "the long way about," nothing simple when something more complicated will serve. When Don Pedro divines Claudio's infatuation, he splutters an Occam's razor of social utility:

What need the bridge much longer than the flood?  
The fairest grant is the necessity.  
Look, what will serve is fit. (I.i.318-20)

Practical maxims all, yet, his first reaction to getting Hero for Claudio is this: "I will assume thy part in some disguise." (323) In this case, the long way about leads to unexpected complications and confusion.

This early failure notwithstanding, the long way about often proves the most straightforward way of getting some things done in this wit-twisted world—Benedick and Beatrice for example. These two are obviously destined for one another and just as obviously incapable of union on their own. Benedick has his bachelor's role up to which he must live, and Beatrice has a female version of that mask aggravated by Benedick's prior jilting. To unite these two skittish beings, deceptions are required and deceptions that conform to and take advantage of the working principles of Messina. The deceptions, for example, cannot be public lies for such would never stand up under the withering fire of wit. Instead, they must be private and indeed they take the form of inset pastoral dramas with single member audiences. In keeping with the
nature of the private arena, the objects of the gullings must be permitted a false sense of superiority and security, hence, eavesdropping. Public utterance in Messina is so shifty that listening in on characters conversing at their ease almost guarantees acceptance of what is said as truth. Privacy and eavesdropping combined are enough to outweigh the heavy burden of suspicion under which Beatrice and Benedick labor, and both are brought to be "horribly in love." (II.iii.241)

A problem well documented by the play and subsequent criticism is the troubling truth that complicated deceptions (almost always susceptible of metadramatic interpretation) can be as easily turned to evil as to good ends. The example here is of course Don John and Borachio's traduction of Hero. The elements are the same—privacy and eavesdropping, but Don John's illegitimate construction has the advantage of running with the hounds of Messinan belief. With Beatrice and Benedick, the work accomplished by deception is to arouse confidence in the possibility of fruitful union; with Claudio, all illusion has to do is to reconfirm the engrained distrust of women. The latter is the easier task and its results more easily find public vent.

That the public defamation of Hero's character is salved by yet another deception in no way invalidates the proposition that illusion can be evil. The friar's suggestion that everyone act as if Hero is dead does, however, present a more complicated portrait of illusion than the other deceptions. The friar is a man who defends the principle of trust, yet knows the world in which he lives, and therefore, gains trust by daring others to mistrust him.

Trust not my reading nor my observation, 
Which with experimental seal doth warrant 
The tenour of my book: Trust not my age,
My reverence, calling, nor divinity,
If this sweet lady lie not guiltless here
Under some biting error. (IV.i.167-72)

Moreover, his experience has convinced him that such a deception will have a beneficial effect upon those on whom it is practiced; Claudio will regret his cruelty and will experience a rebirth of love. He is, of course, dead wrong about Claudio who nowhere acknowledges the slightest responsibility for his actions: "I sinn'd not/But in mistaking." (V.i.284-5) The friar does, however, see a more practical side to his illusion:

If it sort not well, you may conceal her,
As best befits her wounded reputation,
In some reclusive and religious life,
Out of all eyes, tongues, minds, and injuries. (IV.i.242-46)

Only by death or its image can a character escape the limelit world of the play.

In the course of the play several aspects of illusion have been developed: Illusion can make people believe things (all the deceptions); it can change people by making certain things possible (the deception of Benedick and Beatrice); it confirms things we already know (Don John's); and it can hide something unpleasant (the friar's). Of these, only the last is perhaps inherently distasteful, and only the last does not lend itself to a metadramatic reading. Paul A. Jorgenson points out that "Nothing" in the play's title can very well refer to the nothing out of which the playwright wrests his play,7 and many other critics have had "much ado" to sort out the various lesser illusions or creations out of nothing of which the play is composed. Any and all of these subsidiary illusions can represent certain things that drama can do, but this is, I take it, not the point of the multitude of metadramatic deceptions. What Shakespeare is stressing in this play is the moral neutrality of illusion.

One fruitful approach to the moral neutrality of illusion is to
look at the one character who takes part in both the "amiable" and the "malicious" hoaxes--Margaret. Margaret's role in the deception of Beatrice is admittedly minor; she is the go-between who, carrying Hero's lies, lures Beatrice to the pleached bower. Her role in Don John's scheme is, however, central and more complex. Here she is the tool of Don John's tool, Borachio. Borachio says that he can make Margaret play Hero's part in a blue playlet, while he plays Claudio. (II.i.46-48) The problem with this plan is that if Margaret calls Borachio Claudio within earshot of the real Claudio the internal play loses all credibility.* Therefore, Don Pedro and Claudio must be placed "afar off in the orchard." (III.iii.161) We have no firm knowledge of what is actually said between Margaret and Borachio at this late night rendezvous; only that it looks convincing.

Moreover, we must surmise that Margaret was not informed of the evil intent of her lover, for she acts naturally enough in the preparations for the wedding. The most she can be accused of is a proclivity for the bawdy in speech and action. After Hero is slandered, Margaret still does not connect the supposed infidelity of her mistress with her own meeting with Borachio. Leonato, when the truth of the deception is revealed, believes that Margaret was "pack'd in all this wrong/Hired to it by [Don John],'" (V.i.308-9) but immediately following this grave accusation she is shown in banter with Benedick. The final judgment on her complicity is given by Leonato: "Margaret was in some fault for this,/ Although against her will, as it appears/In the course of question." (V. iv.4-6) The basis for this judgment (even exactly what it means) is

*This Claudio-Borachio confusion may be only a textual error, but, as will be noted, the malicious hoax is plagued by a general lack of clear definition.
unclear, but Margaret is obviously acquitted. Unless we suspect, some-
thing no one ever has, that Margaret is a preview of Lady Macbeth, blithely
leading the innocent lamb to the slaughter, we must with the play pronounce
her innocent through mitigation.

Why does Shakespeare spend so much time exploring the guilt or
innocence of such a minor character? I think it is because Margaret,
through her link to both sets of deceptions, is a representative of illu-
sion itself, and Shakespeare is interested in defending illusion in prin-
ciple. It is not that he would have us find illusion invariably benefi-
cial. He is too clear-headed for that. Rather he would have us find
illusion, like Margaret, not necessarily good, just not guilty.

Illusion, therefore, is neither good nor bad in itself; it is a
means. If so, what does this comedy have to say about discriminating
between illusions? One basis for comparison is the quality of workman-
ship. The friar's is a rough and ready deception designed on the spur of
the moment, and its failure to perform either of its purposed roles is a
function of its haphazard origin. The twin deceptions practiced on Bea-
trice and Benedick are, in contrast, admirably constructed. They play on
the individual weaknesses of those practised upon, and the actors are
good; "I should think this a gull, but that the white bearded fellow
speaks it: knavery cannot, sure, hide itself in such reverence," says
Benedick. (II.iii.123-25) As noted, the Don John-out-of-Borachio gull
is plagued by gaps. That we must acquit Margaret may indeed be only a
result of our not knowing enough about this deception. It takes place
offstage, and the only facts we have about it come in a wandering account
by Borachio, who admits himself, "I tell this tale vilely." Can the plot
be much better than its author?
Yet, on grounds of conviction created, there is nothing to judge, for all the deceptions reach their desired ends. And it is, finally, to the origins and ends of the illusion that we must turn for points of difference. Quite simply, and simple it is, the difference between Don Pedro's deceptions and Don John's lies in the intentions of their creators and the ends—marriage achieved and disrupted. Admittedly, this conclusion tells us little about illusion beyond its effectiveness for getting things done, but critics, notably Richard Henze, try to find more in the illusions and wind up caught in a logical bind. Henze's argument runs thus: "Wrong deception occurs when one trusts appearance and not one's intuition or 'soul,' when one depends on eavesdropping and circumstantial evidence instead of careful study, when one has too little trust in human nature. Right deception supports that trust." Apart from a general haziness, Henze's main flaw is that, by his definition, he would have to class Don Pedro's deception with his brother's. Benedick, Beatrice, Claudio, and Don Pedro, all trust appearances, eavesdrop, and credit superficial evidence. Benedick even goes against his "intuition" that he is being fooled because "careful study" of the appearances convince him otherwise. Henze's whole argument about right and wrong deception hinges on his belief that, in the play, illusion can be perceived as such. The problem is that no one in the play ever, by himself, sees through an illusion. Moreover, there are at least two illusions we would not have seen through. If Beatrice and Benedick were as clear-sighted as Henze gives them credit for being, they would never be united. Realizing this dilemma, Henze backs off a bit: "Appearances do not deceive, at least importantly [marriage unimportant in comedy?], if one trusts one's friends." How, pray, tell one's friends? Don John's feigned friendship is as impenetrable as any other deception in the play because appearances here do
deceive, and importantly, invariably.

No one sees through deceptions unless granted a special grace, and only two groups are vouchsafed such grace—the watch and the audience. This concession marks a return to Shakespeare's older method of comic construction in which he shows the audience how to interpret his work. The "watch" as their name suggests is a kind of surrogate audience; what they do in one instance, the audience does in all instances of illusion—see through it to the intentions which give it form. There are essentially three types of people in the play: the witty, suspicious people epitomized by Beatrice and Benedick; the ignorant, too trusting, represented by Dogberry and Verges; and the watch who are relatively undifferentiated humanity and the audience's stage brothers. Nothing could be more different than the first two classes: wit and intelligence versus malpropism and stupidity. Paradoxically, however, both of these groups are taken in by appearances, the first because it outsmarts itself and the second because Dogberry (most notably in his charge to the watch, I.II.iii.1-89) adamantly refuses to look at reality at all. Rather than perform his potentially unpleasant duties, Dogberry would have his men simply ignore offenders. It is to the watch's credit that they do not follow Dogberry's example of negligence. But they can hardly do otherwise, for Shakespeare's control is nowhere more apparent than in their coincidental and providential eavesdropping on Borachio and Conrade. This is an example of eavesdropping properly understood, something discovered that is truly meant to be secret, and as such is a paradigm for the audience's penetration of every secret in the play.

Given this special position vis a vis illusion, what conclusion can the audience draw about it? One lesson, albeit an equivocal one, is
that it is better to maintain reservations about appearances than to trust them fully. Again I must quarrel with Henze who argues that the play is "concerned to show the failure of suspicion and the success of trust." We in the audience have good reason to know that trust (Don Pedro's and Claudio's) can in some cases be pernicious; by the same token, suspicion would be fatal to Benedick and Beatrice's union. Therefore, any answer to the problem of how to deal with appearances must at this point be only tentative.

In fact, the play seems to insist that the problem is insoluble. The members of the audience can conclude that art, itself an illusion, enables us to see through its component illusions to the motives which underlie them. But art can only perform this function for us in art. It cannot teach us how to deal with illusion in our daily world, nor can it show us how to tell real from apparent friends. That we can eavesdrop from a place of vantage on the world of Messina should discomfit rather than make complacent, for there is no such lookout on our own world, a world disturbingly similar to that of the play. We have in our lives no equivalent to Shakespeare and, consequently, no fortuitous disclosures of the secret springs of human action.

As for the characters, what lessons do they learn? At least insofar as illusion is concerned, I suggest, none. The world of the play continues to the end unchanged. Claudio and Don Pedro reveal wit for the superficial thing it is as they mock the dead Hero; they question Dogberry "in his own divisions" (V.i.230) on Borachio's arrest, although Dogberry has already, in many words, said the villain "belied a lady." (222-23) But the light dawns slowly. Dogberry's clotted and painfully delayed laying out of the night's events may serve as an apt image for blinkered
and stoppered Messina. Even the abused older generation, Leonato and Antonio, get locked into dangerous and potentially fatal, positions. Knowing full well that Hero is alive, they challenge Claudio and Don Pedro for killing her. One would like to believe this an act, but like Benedick the old men are "in most profound earnest." (197)

The only unambiguously hopeful aspect of the play is the marriage of Beatrice and Benedick, but here as well the Messinan mode holds sway. Having been given hints that all was not right with their original spurs to love, Beatrice and Benedick almost back out of marriage. Only with the introduction into evidence of two "halting" (V. iv. 89; again the implied reticence) sonnets will the two submit to love. But even now Benedick gives the undercutting line: "Our own hands against our hearts," (91–92) as if the public still holds unchallenged sway over private emotions. Yet, once more the play waffles: Benedick asserts that public mockery has no power:

In brief, I do purpose
To marry, I will think nothing to any purpose that the world can say against it; and therefore never flout at me for what I have said against it; for man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion. (105–109)

If any further proof of Benedick's conclusion is wanting, the final lines of the play provide it. The play's final giddy oscillations are between the Messinan pole of suspicion and the faith, blind though it probably is, of the engaged Benedick. Benedick proposes "Let's have a dance ere we are married." (119–20) The dance, we have learned, is the appropriate conclusion for a piece of comic drama, the orderly recreative, qualities of the dance betokening a novo ordo seclorum. However, having been once cruelly deprived of a wedding and seeing no compelling reason to revalue the characters around him, Leonato says,
"We'll have dancing afterward." (122) That Benedick's insistence carries the day does not necessarily mean that the old man's suspicions are unfounded; nor does Benedick's assertion that Don John will get his comeuppance tomorrow strike the conciliatory note to which we are accustomed.

But, then, there is no normal Shakespearean comic ending, or comedy for that matter. Much Ado About Nothing is simply another of those unclassifiable and troubling works that so vex the critic and stimulate the audience. While not so rigorously ambiguous as The Merchant of Venice, this play is in many respects designedly problematical with particular emphasis on the problem of deception and illusion. The playwright has created a world so self-conscious and defensive that deception is the only effective method of operation, and he questions this method so much like his own. His answers are only tentative, but they seem to be that what is revealing and illuminating in art has both bright and dark sides and can do either good or evil in real life. Nor is dramatic illusion able to do much to prepare the audience for illusions that may be practiced on it outside the theatre's walls: ergo caveat spectator.
NOTES


3 Henze, Goddard, et. al.


5 Graham Storey, "The Success of Much Ado About Nothing," in Discussions of Shakespeare's Romantic Comedy (Boston, 1966), edited by Herbert Weill, Jr. Storey comments on the imagery of stalking and fishing that characterizes the deceptions played on Beatrice and Benedick.

6 Robert G. Hunter, in Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness (New York, 1965), 94, says, "Don Pedro's function is to create love. Don John's is to destroy it, and the means for destruction is the same as the means for creation."


8 Paul and Miriam Mueschke, "Illusion and Metamorphosis in Much Ado About Nothing," Shakespeare Quarterly, XVII (1967), 53-65. The implications of the terms "amiable" and "malicious" which the Mueschkess use to describe the hoaxes seem to be ignored; it is the hoaxers, not their hoaxes, that are amiable or malicious.

9 See Henze's article which treats several strands of imagery—food, sickness, etc.—which have both positive and negative implications.

10 Henze, 188.

11 Henze, 199.

12 Henze, 201.
As You Like It: Illusion Vindicated
In contrast to Much Ado About Nothing's ambivalent judgment on acting and deception, Shakespeare's next comic venture depicts a realm where analogies of the playwright's art, while having their origin in utility, become, if not ends in themselves, at least necessary and vital human activities. Shakespeare's endorsement of everyman's creative capabilities extends to a criticism of those people who fail to develop those potentials; like Jaques they are severely handicapped in the carryings on of life.

Once more adopting the green world formula of withdrawal and return, Shakespeare creates in As you Like It a play-world that more effectively and affectively embodies his theme than in his two previous pastoral outings—Love's Labour's Lost and A Midsummer Night's Dream. His theme is by now familiar—too simple and rigid a stance toward experience leads to both a misunderstanding and impoverishment of that experience. What is new is the wide spectrum of characters over whom this theme plays and his method of carrying that theme from a demonstration of it on stage to our experience as spectator.¹

I

It is appropriate that Shakespeare chooses the pastoral form for the further analysis of the relationship of his art to life. In David Young's words, pastoral has always been "in part a poet's country, an art about art."² Marinelli seconds Young with "Arcadia is primarily the paradise of poetry."³ But pastoral is not simply a withdrawal from life
into art and Marinelli goes one: "To arrive in Arcadia...is merely to have one's problems sharpened by seeing them in a new context of simplicity, by seeing art against nature and of being forced to conclusions about them." Thus, pastoral is the renaissance's typical tool for the adjudication between the claims of life and art, a kind of test tube for the artist interested in assaying his art against the values of life.

To these basic statements about pastoral must be added the injunction that in renaissance usage, pastoral is never simple carefree idyll; it is not a country landscape into which sophisticated courtiers slip for rustic contemplation or harmless enjoyment, or where shepherds nonstop sport with amaryllis in the shade. Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* runs the gamut of the seasons and their corresponding emotions and Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*, set in the fields, has its share of unpleasant intruders. Shakespeare's scholar's court of Navarre, no less than these, is violated by two traditional pastoral visitants—painful love and death. The spirits of Athens' woods, while in the main interested in man's well being, are served by the maladroit Puck. Typically then the pastoral ideal of simplicity and return to natural innocence is just that—an ideal. Pastoral gestures toward the golden, it remains firmly in the iron.

Just so, Arden: *As You Like It* 's first scene sets up the pastoral ambivalence. The Duke's wrestler Charles presents the ideal's position in describing the old Duke's banishment:

> They say he is already in the forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him, and they there live like the old Robin Hood of England: They say many young gentlemen flock to him everyday, and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world. (*I.i.120-25*)

Charles's praise of the pastoral retreat in the classical golden age is,
alone, unqualified; but this scene has opened with a strong criticism of rusticity. Speaking in his brother's orchard, itself a pastoral analogue, Orlando bemoans Oliver's denying him education:

My brother Jaques he keeps at school and report speaks goldenly of his profit: for my part, he keeps me rustically at home, or to speak more properly, stays me here at home unkept; for call you that keeping for a gentleman of my birth that differs not from the stalling of an ox? (I.i.5-10)

Two such remarks coming within 120 lines of each other point to two possible attitudes toward the pastoral into which the play's action will shortly move. Orlando's indicates that when he speaks of "golden" he means man's admiration for learning; to be golden is to be educated in man's eyes as opposed uneducated or "rustic." Significantly, he relates golden to the idea of social distinctions; he rankles at the subversion of his innate gentlemanliness. On the other hand, Charles, perhaps characteristically of one whose profession is recreation to others, sees as golden a world of timeout from the serious affairs of life. In words well above his intellectual means, the wrestler describes at once the idyllic golden age where no man need work for his food and the playing hoaky atmosphere of the English folk hero, Robin Hood. For him the pastoral is a Huckleberry Finn Mississippi of the mind where loaves providentially arrive on the water.

However, as Huck continually finds harsh reality breaking through his river romance, Charles's attitude must be balanced against Orlando's competing claims. From the opening scene Shakespeare subscribes to the renaissance's complex attitudes toward pastoral. Without duplicating the work of other critics, a summary discussion of the ambivalent way in which the pastoral is treated in As You Like It is in order. Perhaps most pointed is Touchstone's analysis of the shepherd's
life (III.13-23). Touchstone presents in condensed form the arguments for life in the fields versus life in the court. (The court is always the implied tail to pastoral's head.) In almost "self-consuming" prose, the clown asserts the positive attributes of pastoral (solitude, naturalness, and moderation), then, without changing anything but his attitude toward the givens of shepherd's life, revalues them (private, not sophisticated, not plentiful) negatively. It is Touchstone's manner (of which more later) to be omnivalent—to hold all positions at once, or, in effect, to hold none. In keeping with this extreme of negative capability, Touchstone goes on to deny that there is any difference between the courtier and the shepherd. Touchstone's slippery argument by analogy (courtier's civet equals sheep's tar) does not daunt the old shepherd and Corin gives up the argument with a beautifully simple statement of the self-sufficient pastoral ideal:

Sir, I am a labourer; I earn that I eat, get that I wear, owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness, glad of other man's good, content with my hard, and the greatest of my pride is to see my ewe's graze and my lambs suck.

(III.75-82)

However, for all Corin's assertion that court and country are different and by implication the country superior (46-49), the motion of the play moves in the opposite direction and Corin's words on another occasion serve to qualify his golden statement. In the parallel scene openings (II.iv. and II.vi.), escapees from the court world of ambition and irrational hatred arrive in Arden and, contrary to literary expectations, but not to experience, the traveler's find, instead of Eden, an extension of their own world: They find exhaustion, hunger, and even petty tyranny, for Corin's "master is of churlish disposition/And little recks to find the way to heaven/By doing deeds of hospitality." (II.iv. 80-82)
The denial of any practical difference between court and country is expressed in many other ways. Whenever the moralizing Jaques wants to score one against the old Duke's violation of the forest, he draws on his court experience—hunters are "mere usurpers, tyrants" and the crying deer's erstwhile comrades become in their natural indifference "fat and greasy citizens." (II.i.61 and 55) Drawing city morals from country matters is not surprising from Jaques whose levelling vision "most invectively...pierceth through/The body of the country, city, court," (II.i.58-59) but as we have seen it is not limited to him.

At first glance, Duke Senior would most clearly seem to distinguish morally the court and country. His first speech contrasts the "painted pomp" of the "envious court" with the natural life beset only with natural problems and his early conclusion is:

This our life exempt from public haunt  
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in everything  
I would not change it. (II.i.15-18)

Amiens' rejoinder that it is the Duke's "happy" ability of mind "that can translate the stubbornness of fortune/Into so quiet and sweet a style" (18-20) does not obviate the Duke's position; it only adds the incessant counterstatement. Nonetheless, we may fail to note the link between the court exiles and the cause of the "icy fang/And churlish chiding of the winter's wind," (6-7) which is according to Biblical tradition and the Duke "the penalty of Adam." (5) Adam, universal forefather and first exile, has made Eden impossible and has instead rendered human existence both at court and in the country forever less than perfect. That the Duke fails to make this connection and exalts the fields over the court may be a function of his easy going nature which through the play says, "Sweet are the uses of adversity." (12) Yet we would have to ignore
the alacrity with which he is willing to leave the forest for "the good of our returned fortune" (V.iv.180) to say that Duke Senior finally prefers "shrewd days and nights" (179) to his dukedom.

I may have well spent too much space belaboring the obvious, but it seemed necessary to point out that As You Like It's pastoral mode is far from simple, that it furthers pastoral's long dialogue with itself. The play, in greater detail than I can here afford to analyze, forms a balanced series of statement and counterstatement with regard to the question of woods versus world. Each area of experience is granted its rightful claims to the point that neither can gain our un-divided loyalty. Just as night and day have their particular excellences, so court and country: when we can have the virtues of both, we would be fools to opt exclusively for either.

II

I have so looked at the pastoral mode for one reason: the internal argument that goes on between court and country extends from the literary convention to the dramatic action, which as Helen Gardner points out is more continual meeting and debate than action at all.7 On the level of plot, the pastoral provides its green world norm of a time-less space wherein various modes of thinking can be tried on for size and worn or discarded according to fit. In this arena of conflicting approaches to experience, pastoral does function as a golden age or Eden; it is not so much a world free from reality as a place of respite from consequences. For all its non-pastoral (or typically pastoral) incursions, Arden does have an air of timeout from the exigencies of the workday world. As with comic drama, which in its blend of art and
life it images, the forest is a stage on which human problems and attitudes can be seen in their complexity without either the audience or the characters having to choose between or act on the balanced oppositions presented. Rosalind's harsh judgment on Touchstone's parody of romantic love poetry meets with a response that is a paradigm for all the human value decisions in Arden: "You have said; but whether wisely or no, let the forest judge." (III.i.129-30) And the forest is slow to rule.

The conversation from which the preceding quotation comes typifies the basic debate around which the play's action centers. The subject is nominally love,* but love considered under two aspects—art and nature. Rosalind has found a love poem expressing Orlando's high-flown praise of her beauty; Touchstone echoes with a snatch of bawdy concluding "He that sweetest rose will find/Must find love's prick and Rosaline." (117-18) Touchstone's parody takes two exceptions to Orlando's idealized worship: that love is often painful (the thorn in the rose); and that love is sexual (the punning "prick"). For all the truth in Touchstone's poem, we cannot help feeling with Rosalind that Touchstone has himself only a partial view of human love. Orlando's sonneteer's infatuation represents the abstract and artificial stereotypes of affection. We have reason to suspect that Petrarch and other sonneteers invented romantic love and that the patterns of thwarted love at a distance that they depict were adopted as real models for human experience. That this kind of love is limited and unsatisfactory is clear; that it still has currency today is a tribute to the blindness this play hopes to cure.

Touchstone's position is likewise limited: he represents in this

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*Nominally, because as I hope to demonstrate in Part III the real debate is between modes of experiencing.
debate the wholly natural claims of sexual appetite and his statement of his reason for marrying the naive Audrey reveals his position adequately: "As the ox hath his bow, sir, the horse his curb, and the falcon her bill, so man hath his desires; and as pigeons bill, so wedlock would be nibbling." (III.iii.80-82) Paradoxically implicit in Touchstone's lines are the image of man's desires as controlling (curb, bow, bill) whereas wedlock, man's artificial institutionalizing of sexual demands, is portrayed as freeing natural impulses to eat and sing. Contrary to expectation, Touchstone's images show sex as limiting, marriage as enabling. And perhaps the clearest paraphrase of this murky similitude is that marriage necessarily harnesses into useful social functions the anarchic sexual-animal component in man's makeup.

Certainly this seems to be the notion of marriage that the play endorses; marriage in Arden takes its ideal form in the mediation between the wholly abstract and empty sonneteering mode of Orlando and Silvius, and the almost completely sexual emphasis of the clown. Marriage is one of those graftings of the artificial and natural that Polians defies in The Winter's Tale: "an art/Which does mend nature, change it rather, but/The art itself is nature." (IV.iv.95-97) Marriage should steer a middle course between art and nature, thereby fulfilling both. The metaphor of grafting is prominent in the scene just described. From Touchstone's viewpoint, Orlando's poetry is "bad fruit;" (III.ii.122). It is full of references to the painter's and jeweler's art. Rosalind's response is to liken Touchstone and his poem with its almost wholly natural imagery to a bad graft—the medlar whose virtue she claims is to be rotten before it is ripe, i.e., his attitude limits his growth.

The play abounds in images of poor grafts. Already noted is the
somewhat insecure transplantation of the Duke Senior and his men to the
country. The most flagrant examples of trying to fuse the artificial
with the natural are the "tongues in trees" or Orlando's sonnets. A
more enlightening and interesting example is the botched marriage of
Audrey and Touchstone. In III.iii Touchstone represents the artificial
and learned lover, and Audrey the natural and unsophisticated. Touch-
stone employs all his classical knowledge, thus appealing to our own
conceit at recognizing the allusions, but the effect on Audrey is negli-
gible. While we congratulate ourselves on seeing the references to Jove,
Marlowe and later to Sidney's Defence of Poetry. (1. 19) Audrey balks at
the word "poetical." Touchstone has remarked that his punning wit has
been wasted on Audrey (although not on us or Jaques, our representative
for the nonce on stage), for she lacks understanding; and perhaps sensing
that gross inequity of minds does not bode well for marriage, he wishes
that the gods had made her poetical. Audrey asks if "poetical...is...
honest in word and deed." (17-18) Instead of answering her question in
a straightforward manner, Touchstone compasses Sidney's notion that the
artist never lies, because he never pretends to tell the truth, into the
slightly distorted "the truest poetry is the most feigning." (19-20);
and proceeds to argue that poetry is the language adopted by lovers,
consequently lover's oaths are feigning. There may be some tortured
logic to this, but I cannot grasp it, and it is doubtful that it is com-
prehensible, as acted dialogue. The simple sense seems to be that lovers
are liars.

That this is the case with Touchstone is made clear by the rest
of the scene, for all his rhetoric and chop-logic are aimed at the seduc-
tion of Audrey, who, being steadfastly honest and ignorant, refuses.
Accordingly, Touchstone has arranged a ceremony in the forest, in his reductive manner, to "couple" (45) him with Audrey. The presiding vicar demands that the woman be "given, or the marriage is not lawful." (70-71) Jaques presents himself and the lines that follow betray Touchstone's confusion for he has apparently hoped to make only a show marriage and not the genuine article. Thwarted in this, he decides to proceed, but Jaques warns that the priest "will but join you together as they join wainscot." (88-89) and the result will be a flawed ceremony. Now this is Touchstone's goal as he admits in an aside: "it will be a good excuse for me hereafter to leave my wife." (94-95) Circumstances force him to do the right thing and he must wait until the group marriage that closes the play.

What are we to make of this scene? I take it to be in part one attitude toward marriage and in part a comment on the play's method. The images of coupling and joining are mechanical, characterizing marriage as the artificial linking of two people. It is parallel to Orlando's poems on trees—a bad graft. Audrey's natural virtue and Touchstone's civil sophistries will have little in common save the legal act of marriage itself. As we have seen, the act as here presented is at its origin flawed and capable of rapid abrogation.

From the perspective of Shakespeare's art, Touchstone's description of poetry is as suspect as his attitude toward marriage. For him poetry is lying and behind his view is the long tradition of classical and renaissance rhetoric which portrayed public language as a means of moving men (in this case, women) to action. Through the martialing of the sensuous aspect of words, without regard to logic or ethics, the skilled rhetorician could convince his audience of the righteousness of
his cause. Words, then, are linked according to mechanical rules of rhetoric to the speaker or writer's intentions. The speaker's intentions could be good or evil, right or wrong, but to many contemporary, particularly early puritan preachers who were also enemies of the stage, rhetoric became identified with, at worst, lying or at best hiding the truth unnecessarily beneath a cloud of verbiage. The preacher's view is surely a description of Touchstone's rhetoric.8

Shakespeare's attitude toward Touchstone's idea of poetry and his use of language must be that it is severely limited. Although capable of creating great rhetoricians, Shakespeare uses his characters' verbal powers as a means of judging them, often censoriously. Antony, Brutus, Iago, Prince John, and aptly Romeo and Juliet come to mind. This is not to say that we do not enjoy skillful rhetoric. Jaques overhears all of Touchstone's argument and the pleasure he expresses at the clowns puns and naughty aphorisms is ours, but he cannot finally let the trickster have his will. Whether out of spite or morality, Jaques more or less forces Touchstone to be honest. Our role in this scene is an analogue of Jaques. We are at once amused by Touchstone's rhetorical tricks and implicated by our enjoyment in his seduction of honest Audrey. Probably this does not register on us so clearly as indicated, but we do feel pleasure in Touchstone's discomfiture and a sense of fitness in his reservation for marriage at the end of the play. For once we side with the spoilsport.

The double reading of this scene as on one level criticizing the mechanical and temporary notion of marriage and on another condemning Touchstone's use of language by making it fall on deaf ears well short of its goal is reinforced by the Vicar, Sir Oliver Martext. Martext is
so little realized as a character that he exists almost solely as a name. On the marriage level, his name primarily characterizes him as one likely to botch the marriage vows—a good choice for Touchstone's purposes. On the level of poetry, his is a marred text, an image of the mechanical grafting of artifice and nature. He stands on the formality of the ceremony, but falls on his failure to read aright the motives of the participants. His limitations stand out more clearly when he is compared with the god who finally stage manages the multiple marriages. Hymen's harmonizing message that there is joy in heaven "when earthly things made even/Atone together," (V.iv.114-115) stands in stark contrast to Marlowe's ill-natured persistence in sticking to his art. His persistence is the persistence of bad rhetoric with its imposition of sensuous form on abstract ideas as opposed to Shakespeare's own more testing and flexible art that uses method as a means of our arriving at his theme.

III.iii is flanked by first portraits in the forest of the other major pairs of lovers and its treatment of love and rhetoric are central to the other pairs. III.ii reintroduces the love affair of Rosalind and Orlando. It opens with Orlando hanging his verses on the forest's trees. This is immediately followed by the aforementioned account of Touchstone's chop-logic argument with Corin and Touchstone's parody of Orlando's first poem. The poems are connected with Touchstone's rhetorical style, particularly the first whose stilted one-rhyme style asks for and receives mockery.

The second, however, is less mechanical. The most significant part of this sonnet (149-60) claims that Rosalind is made up of the best parts of mythical and historical ladies, the loci classici of heroical-hysterical devotion. We may without too much damage to the sense of the passage
extract a phrase to serve as a summary guide to Rosalind's nature—"Rosalind of many parts." (III.ii.157) Without quite knowing it, Orlando has hit on what everyone knows, that it is Rosalind's main virtue to be able to adopt many roles without a limiting commitment to one until she dons that of wife (and we may imagine what variations she will work on that tired theme). To Orlando's credit we must add that the next to the last lines—"Heaven would that she those gifts should have"—betray a healthy doubt that she is in fact so celestial as he imagines.

Rosalind's flexibility in changing from scoffer at love as Ganymede to woman in love is a critical commonplace and dazzling. Beginning with line 172 and continuing to Orlando's entrance with Jaques, Rosalind is the giddy and breathless interrogator of Celia with regard to the wondrous apparition of Orlando in Arden. From that point to the end of the scene, she is the cool mocker of love's follies. Rosalind under this latter guise will "cure" Orlando of his love's madness. Her description of a previous cure wrought upon a young man has, however, in its clear overstatement an acknowledgement that Ganymede's cynicism is itself an extreme pose:

I draw my suitor from his mad humour of love to a living humor of madness; which was, to forswear the full stream of the world and to live in a nook merely monastic. (437-440)

In a play dedicated finally to the proposition that one must enter "the full stream of the world," the throwaway "merely" provides sufficient comment on both Jaques' refusal to join the returning exiles and the motion that love itself is a sterile exercise. To have one's doubt about romantic love ought not to mean love is thrown out the window; it is the rejection of love that is "monastic."

Rosalind endorses a less abstract and codified pattern of love.
In a woman not given to circumlocution, it is significant that the first epithet she applies to Orlando should be "my child's father." (I.iii.11) From the outset Rosalind's love roots itself in sexual and procreative realities. It might seem that I am making a case for Rosalind's being a female Touchstone, a character with whom she shares the ability to shift shapes. She argues in a vein of which the clown would surely approve that the old stories of men dying for love are lies (IV.i.94-108) and concludes that "men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but not for love." Patterns though they be for the windy-sighing romantic lover, the deaths of Triolus and Leander are reduced by Rosalind to their direct physical and unromantic causes—"grecian club" and "the cramp," but as her constant bemoaning of Orlando's lateness and the closing lines of IV.i indicate Rosalind is not without her romance side: "I'll tell thee Alienia, I cannot be out of the sight of Orlando: I'll go find a shadow and sigh till he come."

The self-mockery in these lines is a sign of her double vision and self-knowledge. Nowhere does her shifting but penetrating awareness find greater contrast than in Silvius and Phebe, the perfect pastoral reflexions of the courtly lover and his cruel-fair. These characters first appear immediately after Touchstone's abortive marriage and are described by Corin as a "pageant truly play'd, / Between the pale complexion of true love / And the red glow of scorn and proud disdain." (III.iv.56-58) The key, as Corin's country wisdom sees it, to Silvius's love in error is that it is "truly play'd." Silvius's love has no room for doubt about its object and, therefore easily flows into the mold, in words and deeds, of courtly love. Like the ideal form of courtly lover, he has no sense of self-preservation; his seriousness, gives away his happiness.
Phebe, on the other hand, exists in a fortified state of self-possession induced by Silvius's praise. She is perfectly needless—the model of the "proud disdainful." (53)

Rosalind's role in this subsidiary excursus on love is to show Silvius what he is throwing away, himself, and, at the same time to show Phebe what she is rejecting. Rosalind's method is quite simple: she praises Silvius as a "thousand times a proper man/Than she a woman." (III.v.51) Building up Silvius at Phebe's expense has the dual effect of making Phebe both fall in love with Ganymede and sympathize with his lovesickness. The desired outcome of mutual love is not immediate and the process of making Silvius more independent is never satisfactorily completed. Rosalind subsequently receives a love poem from Phebe and she tries to goad Silvius into some face-saving anger by reading it to him. She fails and concludes "Wilt thou love such a woman? What, to make thee an instrument and play false strains upon thee! Well, go your way to her, for I see love hath made thee a tame snake." (IV.iii.67-70)

Love likewise makes a tame snake of Phebe, who, as with all the not yet revealed lovers, agrees to abide by Ganymede's commands that will make all "atone" on the wedding day. (V.i.118-131) It is as if to love in the forest one must negate the individual will which is possessive and replace it with obedience to a magical power, Ganymede's "uncle" "a magician, most profound in his art and yet not damnable." (65-66)* Yet a counter-motion toward self-assertion is also evident. Only after Orlando says, "I can no longer live by thinking," (55) that is "by pretending," that Rosalind invents the magical uncle dodge; for Orlando, recess is over. In a similar motion, Phebe accepts Silvius not on compulsion, but

*This magician may be a nod at the dramatist himself.
because "Thy faith my fancy to thee doth combine." (V.iv.156) As for Silvius, even the whipped dog has his day.

What of successful love then? In their original states, Orlando, Silvius, and eventually Phebe are too much in idealized earnest. Touchstone and Audrey are too limited to solely fleshly interests. Of the abbreviated romance between Oliver and Celia, we can only judge by what Rosalind-Ganymede says, that it is a kind of honest and open sexual love at first sight, differing from Touchstone and Audrey in its match of intellectual equals and from Rosalind and Orlando in its immediately verbal nature. (It is also a product of a change in Oliver's character of which more later.) The best attitude toward love in the play is Rosalind's which is a living blend of the others. Hers is at once sexual and romantic, jesting and in earnest; it is a product of her own embodiment of the play's title and her willing renunciation of part of that implied freedom.

At the court, she had been the hemmed-in daughter of the exiled duke with no freedom of her own; paradoxically, as with the lovers whom she manages in the play, the point of Rosalind's greatest compulsion--her banishment--makes it possible for her to gain the greatest freedom. In the forest, Rosalind-Ganymede literally does as she likes it: she in her own words, decides to "prove a busy actor" (III.iv.62) in the plays of others and she directs them to a fare thee well. Yet, if the imposition of her will on others was all there was to Rosalind, I doubt critics would love her as they do. It is her mastery in dealing with other lovers connected with that opposite side, her own extreme vulnerability in the face of love, that makes her so appealing. And more than this, it is her clear recognition and acceptance of her equivocal state that makes us
admire her; she knows of what contradictions she is composed. We marvel at her quickness of wit and depth of feeling, two qualities which seldom find an easy accommodation in one personality. Love for Rosalind, then, is an emotion of skepticism and commitment. When she rails against lover's oaths, she rails against herself, and when she comments on women's change-ability she indictst herself as well as her sex. Nonetheless, in her contradictions are the best and most hopeful picture of love the play has to offer.

As You Like It with its plenitude of weddings is at pains to examine the nature of wedded love. Married love is, in the play's best definition, a state in which a free personality willingly assumes a yoke that makes it less free and by this subjection magically regains its freedom. Granted that this is abstract and paradoxical (plus not likely to square with our everyday experience), nonetheless it fits the facts of the play. All the characters have to give up their own freedom to get married. This is true even of Rosalind who is most free and, in binding herself to Orlando, has the most to lose. How can this definition work? To answer we must further look at two characters who contrast Rosalind and the play as a whole. Let it suffice for the moment to say that none of the lovers at play's end shrink from their vows.

III

So far I have talked mainly of how Shakespeare treats pastoral and love, and how he refuses to make the simple statement. I wish to go beyond those more limited topics to discuss what I take to be the play's main concern, which is the attitude with which one faces experience. Two extreme attitudes are possible and I have chosen for them names from politics—totalitarian and anarchist. In the characters
Shakespeare adds to his source, we find representatives of both viewpoints.

As a totalitarian with respect to his experience, Jaques reduces the many hues and colors of the world to his own, not necessarily dull, monotone. He is he admits possessed of a "humorous sadness." (IV.i.20) The adjective identifies him as one of those renaissance characters who are deformed by the predominance of one humour—in Jaques' case traveler's melancholy. His melancholy, as Rosalind perceives it, makes Jaques "disable all the benefits of (his) own country, be out of love with (his) nativity and almost chide God for making you that countenance you are." (34-36) In brief, Jaques is a cynic who finds little to admire of man and his works. Because of his hard-won singularity, he feels himself to have a particularly apt perspective from which to criticize others; and Rosalind is wrong to suggest that he dislikes himself: "I do love [my melancholy] better than laughing." (4)

The effect of this all-encompassing approach to the world is to impoverish Jaques' experience, for he has reduced himself to his melancholy. Amiens' tuneful "Under the Greenwood Tree," a not particularly doleful ditty makes Jaques sad and he loves it. "I can suck melancholy out of a song, as a weasel sucks eggs." (II.v.12-13) This sterile simile stands in contrast to the general trend toward fertility and profusion in comedy. More telling is Jaques' gift of summing up human character in charts. For instance, the curve of various melancholies can be plotted thus: scholars, emulation; musicians, fantastic; courtiers, proud; soldiers, ambitious; lawyers, politic; ladies, nice; lovers, an amalgam of the preceding. This short anatomy of melancholy is perhaps pleasing in its wit and partially correct, but it is far from complete on any specific
person. Pope's scrupulous search for and failure to locate a man's "ruling passion" would have little meaning for Jaques. He hits man off, right and left, to his own great satisfaction.

The problem is aggravated by Jaques' polished manner and many have taken for truth what only sounds good. He eloquently defends the practice of satire so that he can "through and through/Cleanse the foul body of the infected world." (II.vii.59-60) A noble purpose, but often forget that the successful satirist soon finds himself without employ- ment; in the absence of folly, wit goes a-wanting. Moreover, we now suspect that satire is more neurotic than moral in origin and satirists perhaps fortunate that the world will always provide their mania an ob- ject. Without going into the dark psychopathology of satire, we are certain that its goal is a corrected world which, for all it gains in or- der, it loses in variety. Just so with Jaques who finds himself the only right man in a wrong place; he is, he concludes, "for other than...dancing measures." (V.iv.199) To anticipate we can add: more for marching mea- sures he, where improvisation breeds disaster.

The totalitarian imagination is the satiric institutionalized and given means more substantial than airy words to impose its correct vision; next to Hitler and Stalin, Swift and Pope are remarkably and luckily re- strained critics of human excess. Another point of likeness between the satirist and the dictator is the discovery of the general in the perni- cious particular to the extreme end of reducing everyone to the general. The eighteenth century avoids this extreme by the particularity of their attacks, but Jaques' satire is emphatically general. In fact he hopes to avoid slander by his lack of specificity. Just as with romantic lovers, all lovers are the same will-less automatons, so in Jaques' satire all
sinners are the same and all are sinners. "Who can come in and say that I mean her/When such a one as she such is her neighbor." (II.vii. 77-78)

This generalizing reaches its high point in the speech, next to Hamlet's "to be or not to be," best remembered in Shakespeare, and often taken out of context to be the author's own philosophy.

All the world's a stage
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances. (II.vii.139-41)

The seven ages of man are Jaques' summary of man's experience. While it is true that much role-playing occurs in As You Like It, such draconian generalization cannot take into account the complex humanity encountered in the play, much less the more complex world beyond its boundaries. The key word, as earlier, is "merely" which discounts the importance of those deviations from the norm that go to make up individual personalities. Jaques' use of all indicates that he sees no exceptions.

Moreover, his examples of the seven ages of man are themselves negative; mewling, puking, creeping sum up the first two ages. The lover is as foolish as the play indicates and the soldier is known not so much for his valor as his vanity. Even the judge, a model of success, is a Chaucerian figure and an early version of Polonius. The last two ages show declining years when man becomes in Dr. Johnson's words "a driveller and a show." It might have been more proper for Jaques to say all the world goes through stages, seven, as follows. So mankind goes marching through set patterns at set ages to the grave--"mere oblivion,/Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything." (165-166) Jaques' vision of human endeavor finds its right counterpart in Macbeth's "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player/That struts and frets his hour upon the
stage/And then is heard no more." (V.v.24-26. Macbeth) It is instructive that Macbeth, tragic counterpart to Jaques' comic totalitaria
nism, is brought low by Macduff who signally differs from the run of men in
even so normative a human activity as childbirth. Jaques' ideas may pass
for "wisdom" in some circles, but Shakespeare for all his doubts about
the substantiality of his art and its metaphorical relationship to the
world, had, as this study indicates, more respect for the plenitude of
experience to let such simplification go unrebuked.

Both Rosalind and Orlando have their separate goes at Jaques.
Orlando probably comes off second best in his encounter with the melanc-
holic, but the argument is about love and there is just no convincing
someone else of the perfection of our loved one. Rosalind as is expected
bests Jaques. Her determination to make the most of her situation can-
not abide the presence of someone who would make the least of his: "Your
experience makes you sad; I had rather have a fool to make me merry than
experience to make me sad; and you travel for it too!" (IV.i.26-28)
Not surprisingly it is Rosalind's merry fool Touchstone, who with the
exception of the mock marriage episode, continually scores points of
Jaques, although Jaques often misses the point. Their first encounter
sets the tone: meeting Touchstone in the forest, Jaques perceives the
clown's view of reality corresponds to his own. "And so, from hour to
hour, we ripe and ripe,/And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot."
(II.vii.26-27) And in part it does. His view of marriage as primarily
sexual would strike a responsive chord in Jaques, as would his generaliz-
ing tendencies: "But as all is mortal in nature, so is all nature in
love mortal in folly." (II.iv.54-55) However, Jaques generalizations
noticeably exclude himself ("they, their" in the seven ages speech), as
the duke notes (II.vii.63-69). Touchstone includes himself firmly among the fools and lovers.

It may well be that Touchstone is mocking Jaques in the forest just as he mocks everyone else in the play.9 We have already looked at the debate between Touchstone and Corin on country and court; that episode points to his position as the philosophical opposite to the melancholic. Jaques has a fixed position with regard to experience; Touchstone has no position toward experience or any and every position which amounts to the same thing. We cannot determine with any certainty what the clown thinks, because he thinks everything; it is this quality which leads me to call him an anarchist, albeit an anarchist with regard to his own personality. As such he is a living retort to Jaques' philosophy of fixed stages through which men pass; Touchstone is nothing for long. Touchstone shares this shifting with Rosalind, but at base she avoids the following danger of anarchy. Where totalitarianism creates a society imical to personal freedom, anarchy creates no society at all. As an allowed fool, Touchstone exists, like Jaques, outside the basic society of the play and it is difficult to imagine a society that could absorb either eccentric as anything except an outsider. The parodist's perspective requires a stance different from that of those who accept the parodied at face value.

Of course, that perspective is shared for awhile by those who appreciate the parody and Touchstone is widely appreciated. Nonetheless, we would rather live with Rosalind than always face the shifting wit of Touchstone. The reason is simple. Rosalind creates a society built, in part, on skepticism, but which chooses, as society must, connectedness over isolation. Jaques' refusal to rejoin society signals that he knows
he does not fit in and his prediction of the ill-fated end of Touchstone's marriage indicates he knows the same of the clown. Totalitarianism's rigidity and anarchy's spinelessness both militate against the kind of free community most comedy institutes; extremes of order and disorder have their proponents, but the play presents a more moderate regime under which most people can more easily live.

What exactly is the nature of this new society? It is not simply the old society restored with the restoration of Duke Senior to his throne, although we cannot doubt that will be freer than Frederick's court. One attribute of the new moderate society will be one dramatically lacking in Frederick's system—self consciousness in a creative sense. Frederick's court was one truly ignorant of itself: Frederick hates Rosalind, Orlando, and Oliver; and Oliver hates Orlando without clearly knowing why. At the end of the play, Frederick has had a religious experience and must know why he restores his brother to the throne. The exact nature of the conversion is hidden, but the repentance and charity of Frederick's act is unmistakable. More obvious is Oliver's change of heart; he knows not why he hates his brother, but he certainly knows why he loves him. The process of unmasking emotions reaches its finale in the unmasking that closes the plot; there the disguisers show their true colors.

The significance of the emotional and literal unmasking is not schematically lucid: the solution of heart mysteries does not resolve itself into principles for living; rather it contributes to the atmosphere of learning about life and love that permeates the central section of the play. At the conclusion most of the characters have learned lessons that will enhance their experience. However, this self-knowledge is only the groundwork for the society which Rosalind creates. Upon
the ground of the firm self, Rosalind erects a structure whose only true counterpart is the play itself.

To say that Rosalind has a firm self is not to say that she knows who she is; it is to say that she knows who she is in situations and the play seems to indicate that people exist only in situations with other people, encounter and debate, thrust, parry, and hold.\textsuperscript{10} Rosalind is a creature of situations. When we first meet her she is an orphan-in-effect, occupying a place on the shaky suffrance of her irrational uncle. At this point, Celia is the more dynamic of the ladies, Rosalind the victim of two tyrants—Frederick and love. But as soon as she discovers she must be exiled, she discovers within her the quality that makes her such a favorite of critics and audiences—the ability to improvise. On the point of banishment, Rosalind's fears are such that we are hard pressed to credit the words she utters, in light of her later character: "Alas, what danger will it be to us,/Maids as we are, to travel forth so far!/Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold." (I.iii.110-112) However, with a little prompting from Celia, Rosalind enters her role with gusto, notwithstanding some misgivings, and devises the character she will use throughout the rest of the play, Ganymede, with "a swashing and a martial outside." (122)

Not being a practicing psychoanalyst, I am not prepared to discuss the psychological significance of the sex-role reversal, beyond saying that it frees Rosalind from the stereotyped submissive and helpless female role.\textsuperscript{11} The conversion from female to male is a shift from incapacity to great capability in mastering immediate environments. (One wonders what the psychologists would do with the fact that Rosalind is not only the most successful female in the play, but also the most
successful male.) The method of attaining such mastery is improvisation, the power to play with reality without either totally believing or totally doubting its significance. Successful improvisation is based on a clear understanding of situation and the possible responses people can make in a specific situation. Ordinarily when we praise a bit of improvisation, we are commenting on its truth to life (proximity to what we have often seen and done), but more importantly on the variations the improviser makes in the routine pattern. A good improvisation will show us the humor, banality, tediousness, or even absurdity that obtains in certain repeated situations. Of this activity Ganymede's proposal to improvise Rosalind for Orlando is a perfect example of the purpose—to show him one unflattering version of his love.

The important question now to be resolved is how Rosalind differs from Touchstone and Jaques who are both limited improvisational artists; both clown and melancholic try to show what people are like and, in Jaques' case at least, have a reforming bent. How do they fail? Jaques most noticeably fails in the scantness of his repertoire. His roles are limited to the seven ages of man which cuts out half of humanity right there. The great improvisationalist must know that one person of one age can be many things at the same time: "effeminate, changeable, longing and liking, proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant, full of tears, full of smiles," Ganymede's description of young women. (III.ii. 430-32) On the other hand, Touchstone errs on the side of singularity; he has no strong sense of the repetitiousness of human situations based on the constancy of human emotions. The mock marriage reveals his desire to be loosely married (III.iii.91-95) and almost immediately legally married (99). Looked at another way, Jaques' sense of the future is deterministic; man must amount to this (old Adam being an unanswered rebuttal
touch "mere oblivion"). Touchstone has no sense of the future at all.
Rosalind believes that with the proper play of cards one can create a
not too stringently defined future of happiness.

A model of the attitude that makes such flexible planning possible comes from Touchstone, often a bad example, but a good one in this one case: he recounts how he once escaped fighting a duel. After charting the seven stages (a mocking glance at the seven ages?) through which a quarrel passes, Touchstone comes to the nut on how to avoid violence: "All these you may avoid but the Lie Direct; and you may avoid that too with an If. I knew when seven justices could not take up a quarrel, but when the parties were met themselves, one of them thought but of an If, as, 'If you said so, then I said so;' and they shook hands and swore brothers. Your If is the only peacemaker; much virtue in If." (V. iv.103-8) The seven justices who cannot prevent the duel represent the law bound attitude congenial to Jaques and other who prefer to look to laws rather than life; once the quarrel is in motion there is nothing such individuals can do—all must be, must be. Hamlet's Laertes pleads recourse to similar experts, thus putting off forgiveness and determining tragedy. The principals in the duel, however, find a way around the violence; they simply convert the past into theater. By making reality hypothetical, they render it void of binding consequences; through imagination, they are able to work life-giving variations on a potentially deadly theme.

"Much virtue in If" may be understood to be the play's theme and we find the word prominently used by Rosalind: in V.ii.119-128, she uses the word five times setting up the miraculous marriages of the last scene. Of the five uses two are hypothetical statements which are impossible of
realization, but in three the playing becomes reality. I do not want to suggest that Shakespeare says that if one plays at reality, sixty per cent of the fooling will be fulfilled. This smacks too much of Jaquesism. Rather Shakespeare suggests that testing reality by means of play is more often than not a way of influencing reality along fruitful lines; even in the instances that fail (Rosalind's marrying Phebe) the function is, by showing the impossible, to disclose the possible (marriage to Silvius). The important thing is to have the agility of mind to take and make reality as it comes, instead of resigning to a predetermined fate.

We must add that in Touchstone's story, the principals are engaged in a radical kind of self-reservation and preservation. We do not learn the cause of the quarrel, but it can have been either trivial as with Touchstone's exception to a courtier's beard or something more serious such as Laertes's dead father. Our attitude toward Touchstone's "if" is necessarily ambiguous due to a scarcity of facts; it can be a sensible or a cowardly gesture. Whatever the case, the play does create a sense that there is a time for playing to cease. Touchstone's shortcomings have been pointed out earlier—be plays with reality to no end, whereas Rosalind plays with reality in order, in part, to change it, and, in part, to see which way to go. The basic difference lies in that much worked word "commitment." In keeping with the somewhat martial theme of this section, we may like Rosalind's position to that of a clever military tactician. Overall strategies have been laid down in advance, but it is the field officer's liberty to implement them as he sees fit. Through deceptive feints and control over time and position, he forms the enemy into the pattern most advantageous to him and only then does he "commit" his troops to battle. In this conscious choice, there is
everything to lose or gain and some circumstances are beyond the control of the ablest commander. Nonetheless, given the choice, most would choose Rosalind as their leader over Touchstone or Jaques; unfortunately most generals come from the latter camps of indecision or old-fashioned certainty. The kind of commitment that Rosalind undertakes is that of the general—she risks herself and her forces for something of greater value.* The love she seeks can be approached and molded by play, but it cannot be obtained without giving up her disguise. Without coercion, Rosalind must consciously choose to risk the liberty she has as Ganymede to gain what might be a greater prize—a happy marriage to Orlando. Her bravery in making this choice is greater than any character's in the play.

IV

Rosalind's final choice to embrace the reality she has helped create is mirrored by the playwright's, whose play makes a similar choice. Rosalind's decision is not entirely free as she has neither the desire nor the ability to remain a man all her life and she wants the fruition and connection that marriage can bring. Similarly, the playwright cannot have his play go on forever, nor does he want to. But, like Rosalind, Shakespeare makes the most of the collapse of his artifice.

The first sign that the play's reality trembles is the entrance of Oliver in IV.iii. Not counting III.i, a brief scene at Frederick's court, roughly two-thirds of the play has been in Arden. For the audience, events have passed seemingly in a temporal vacuum—"There's no clock in the forest." (III.ii.318-19) That time has been passing in the outside world is evidenced by Oliver's dramatic change in appearance and attitude.

*This is an ideal war I am talking about.
From the arrogant, spiteful, and violent young dandy of I.i he has become a contrite loving brother and "a wretch'd, ragged man, o'ergrown with hair." (IV.iii.107) Granted that Duke Senior gives Oliver "fresh array" (144), he still presents in his shaggy state a sign that real-court time has not stopped.* The pastoral artifice here receives a double blow in that not only is time re-introduced, but also physical violence, first in the form of the snake and lion, and secondly the napkin stained with Orlando's blood. At this point, the make believe of the forest starts to tremble and look thin. We are reminded that after all there is a world of action and consequences beyond all this wonderful talk.

One of the paradoxes of green world comedy is that the necessity to have the characters return to the base (real) world of the play often requires making the plot even less real. To simplify, there are three levels in the typical green world pattern—the reality of the audience, the reality of the court, and the reality of the pastoral retreat, each a little more artificial than the prior. In As You Like It the characters move from the court to the pastoral and make a motion at the end to return not simply to the court but to the level of the audience as well. (A less exaggerated form of this return occurs in A Midsummer Night's Dream.) The arrival and conversion of Oliver signals the start of this return movement—his new attitude makes it possible for Orlando to go home. To make possible the retrieval of the other characters requires miracles that make the deaths that end tragedy look easy.13

To enable Duke Senior to regain his throne requires that his wicked younger brother, who without our knowledge has organized an army

*Productions may ignore this transformation; they ought not.
to kill the court-in-exile, be converted and so abjure not only his evil ways, but also the world. This is done through the agency of an "old religious man." (V.iv.166) This character who never appears has been mentioned twice before by Rosalind, once as "an old religious uncle of mine" who taught Ganymede to recognize and cure courtly lovers (III. ii.361-62) and again as the magician who is to make the weddings possible. The amazing thing about this business is that Rosalind has made up her uncle from whole cloth, now at the end, her fictional uncle converts her real uncle. No stretching is required to see in his imaginary to real shift and his direct and indirect effects on the plot a figure of the playwright himself. His last appearance as the religious teacher provides the most shocking example in all Shakespeare of deus ex machina; no obstacle is removed so summarily as Duke Frederick and behind his fated removal we see the ungloved hand of the artist.

Most shocking to us perhaps, but not to the refugees in the forest; this rock causes no ripples in the still pond of Arden. It goes almost as unremarked as the unexpected appearance of Jaques du Bois, middle brother to Orlando and Oliver. And there is no reason that it should cause consternation, for truly remarkable events have just happened. Rosalind has been restored to her father and four marriages have just been plighted by a genuine deus ex machina, Hymen God of Marriage. The other signs and spurs to return to reality have at least been possible; Hymen has not that virtue. Yet most critics, seeing in the god a symbol of married unity, accept Hymen's words at face value.$^{14}$ His message is basically, "There is mirth in heaven/When earthly things made even/Atone together." (V.iv.113-15) This would seem to be an explanation of the play's final state, everything nicely sorted out, and for critics raised
on new criticism, a statement about the play's unified art. Nonetheless
when we test our feelings, there is something artificial in the extreme
about this entrance from the supernatural.\textsuperscript{15} No doubt dressed and speak-
ing differently from the other characters, much of Hymen's message is
covered by the wonder his appearance creates. He does tie the requisite
knots, but too neatly.

And too much neatness counts, especially in a play in which the
character most given to neatness is Jaques whose closing pronouncements
on the lovers closely echo the god's. Moreover, much of the play's argu-
ment has been against just this kind of cut and dried treatment of human
affairs, particularly romance. Rosalind's main criticism of love is
that people, lovers most, change and no one can predict what their feel-
ings will eventually be. Add the play's running emphasis on cuckoldry
and horns, and we find no reason to credit Hymen's optimism. It is always
pleasant to have gods announce perfection, but as humans we ought to watch
out.

I submit that Hymen's function is not to round off the action,
but to create a point of high artificiality which makes us as audience
question not only what Hymen says, but also the nature of what we have
been watching. Hymen gives the "Lie Direct" to all that has preceded in
the sense that we have become acclimatized to the reality presented by
the court and then the country; Hymen's artificiality only serves to
make manifest that all the worlds of the play are equally artificial,
the only difference being that their artifice is better hidden. In
effect, the play takes us in long enough to put across the theme—do not
trust roles and appearances and look out for generalization and simplifi-
cation—then ejects us from the world where that theme is embodied to
demonstrate emotionally its truth. We have trusted in Arden's reality in the way we trust any play's reality only to have that ground removed not at the full conclusion when we are ready for it, but before the plot has become clear. To have the plot knit up by a series of highly improbable appearances and reports has the effect of bowing to the demands of comedy, while converting those demands into gifts.

Hymen emphasizes the closed nature of experience; the god holds up an image of a world in which everything can be solved:

Feed yourselves with questioning;
That reason wonder may diminish,
How thus we met, and these things finish. (144-47)

Shakespeare wisely avoids trying to explain publicly how a Greek god manages to meet renaissance courtiers in a French forest. The god says this can be done, the playwright knows it cannot. Since Rosalind could have managed her own transformation realistically, the question of the god's necessity is nagging. Even an audience accustomed to masques would find Hymen hard to accept.

Hymen himself may indicate his unreliability in the ambiguous line, "If truth hold true contents." (136) "Contents" rhymes with "events" and, therefore, probably means satisfactions. It would be better for my argument if it were con'tents or things contained; even so, the pun is on. The two possible readings for the line are "If truth is true" or "If truth satisfies." In both cases the tell-tale "if" operates to call the statement into question and to create a not unhealthy skepticism and willingness to make accommodations in a less than ideal world, a world where ideas of truth may lead us to misjudge experience or expect more from a relationship than it has to offer. Too firm a hold on Truth with a capital "T" may, in a world of appearances, have more tragic consequences than
comedy can afford. "Heaven truly knows thou art false as hell," says Othello on his way to murder and suicide.16

Despite this one bit of good advice, Hymen speaks as befits a god with an imperial tone that suggests a grasp of experience well beyond the problematical. Yet for all his certainty, his very appearance creates uncertainty for us. Again it is up to Rosalind to balance matters, or rather it is up to the actor of Rosalind. I speak of the epilogue, for what Hymen does not do, the epilogue does. After the series of shocks and sudden shifts of character that compose the play's return to court reality, after the various hopeful and dire predictions, and after the duke's by now hopelessly equivocal "We will now begin these rites,/As we do trust they'll end, in true delights," (My italics, 203–4) the epilogue presents a summary and final example of the play's theme which opens to include the audience, no longer as spectator, but as participant.

Shakespeare's epilogues are various and most have dramatic function. Generally, the epilogues are spoken by characters (Puck, Chorus, Gower, Prospero) who, to simplify drastically, become actors only when they make the pitch for applause. In two cases (The king from All's Well That Ends Well, and the dancer who may have closed 2 Henry IV) the actor is predominant. In As You Like It a mixture of character and actor is present. Of the epilogues, Prospero's relationship to The Tempest is easiest to see, Rosalind's to her play the most significant.

The epilogue opens with an acknowledgment of its own unconventionality: "It is not the fashion to see the lady in the epilogue," (1) and indeed I can think of no play with a female character as epilogue. However, going against conventionality is Rosalind's thematic role and she adds, "It is no more unhandsome than to see the lord the prologue."
(2-3) So far Rosalind, for I take it that Rosalind's part is done in female costume and in character, has done what we have come to expect of her—justify the circumvention of stereotype; she is after all a lady who has greatly succeeded as a lord. She then launches into a discussion of the values of epilogues in general. Again the ubiquitous "if" appears, this time to make a statement subsequently shown to be contrary to fact: "If it be true that good wine needs no bush, 'tis true that a good play needs no epilogue." (3-4) So far so good, except the bush as advertisement precedes the wine and the epilogue follows the play. But Rosalind proceeds to declare that nonetheless people do use good bushes to signify good wine and good plays have good epilogues. If we have followed the argument so far (not likely!), we discover that it does not matter anyway, because here we have neither a good play nor good epilogue. Just what this gobbledygook means I cannot say; it has the appearance of logic, but has none. Its effect is to disorient us with regard to language and value. What if we think the play good? Are we fools or is Rosalind modest? These and many other questions can be asked, but no answers are forthcoming.

Suddenly Rosalind, whose every move we have followed, is enigma. Compared to Hymen's cadenced certainties, this is gibberish. Just who is this character standing before us? No longer pure Rosalind, but Rosalind as epilogue, part of a play rapidly coming to an end. Part of the new identity lies in the facts of production and is suggested by the phrase "what a case am I in then." (6-7) In these lines the actor refers to his sticky situation in having to justify a poor play; however, "case" has a secondary meaning of container. The actor is stuck as well in the container of Rosalind, a meaning bolstered later by the reference to costume—"I am not furnished like a beggar." (9)
The actor's problem is this: he has acted a character who through self-denial (disguise) and self-assertion (molding Orlando and others) manages to remake her future and attain what she desires. Now it is the actor's turn. He has denied himself by acting someone else and asserted his craft through characterization; he wants to remake his immediate future and receive his own peculiar satisfaction, our approval of his performance. To achieve this end, he must supplant Rosalind. As with Rosalind this requires some self-risk; we, like Orlando, can at the last say no. To insure our response the actor must "conjure" (10) us, not only in the sense of casting a magical spell, but also in the radical meaning of swearing us to a conspiracy. If we forgive him his weaknesses, he will forgive us ours. That the latter definition is predominant is apparent in the actor's going on to "charge" (ii.13) the audience to certain duties or tasks. In this, the actor of Rosalind, is borrowing a page from Rosalind's book. She has been the character who has sworn the audience to secrecy as well as the characters to certain acts. She has stood revealed to us in her strengths and weaknesses, and we have been on her side for this openness. The actor's time has come and as Rosalind grows opaque, the actor becomes clear.

It does not much matter whether the actor of Rosalind is a male or a female.* In either case the achievement is great—man becoming woman or woman man. I suppose some dramatic leverage would be obtained from the renaissance practice of a man's playing the female role and I can well imagine the business that attended the actor's apotheosis—the gesturing at the wedding dress, the gradual removal of strategic padding, and finally doffing the woman's wig. But what is important is not the sex

*For an actress some lines must be changed.
of the Rosalind actor, but the revelation itself. Moreover, it is not
even the actor's own idiosyncratic personality that stands on the darken-
ing stage; rather it is the generic actor—not Hamlet, but not Olivier or
Burton or Booth either. It is the figure of the actor who embodies what
the play has taught us to be.

The actor in the abstract is committed for the duration of his
role, but knows that tomorrow will bring other roles equally within his
capabilities. He knows that life is a series of situations that are
looked at most clearly from a point outside, but that it is given only to
angels to be lookers on. Therefore, within situations man had best be
as flexible as he can. I do not wish to suggest that Shakespeare believes
men are "mere" actors, but rather that we can learn from the actor who is
and is not at the same time. Life is not scripted, or, if it is, it
resembles a badly mangled rough draft rather than a finished, fully anno-
tated, edition.

The actor closes the epilogue with an appeal to love at his own
point of greatest vulnerability and perhaps ours as well. He charges
the audience with the same follies of love (simpering, concern for
breath, beards, and complexion) that the characters have exhibited.
Touchstone has said, "So is all nature in love, mortal in folly." Love's
conspiracy binds us to Rosalind and her actor. There is no escape, so we
must make the best of it and endorse the actor who has, after all, acted
us, the audience. Our applause convicts us of love and confirms us in our
role in the improvisation of life. It also commits us the society depicted
on stage, some wise, some foolish, some great, some small. Rosalind's
expansive image is fittingly the last to go.
NOTES

1 Critics who partially address this notion are: Kent Talbot Van Den Berg, "Theatrical Fiction and the Reality of Love in As You Like It," PMLA, 90 (October 1975), 885-893, who says that the theatrical metaphor is used as an image of love; and George Cirillo, "As You Like It: Pastoralism Gone Awry," English Literary History, 38 (1971), 19-39.


4 Marinelli, 11. This follows Empson who held that pastoral put the complex into the simple for evaluation.


6 A phrase used by Dr. Stanley Fish in his Renaissance Prose and Poetry class at the University of California at Berkeley to describe prose that makes assertions and immediately denies them. For a "self-consuming" story see Franz Kafka's "The Mouse Singer."

7 Helen Gardner, op cit.

8 This manipulation is seen by Ralph Berry, Shakespeare's Comedies: Exploration in Form (Princeton, 1972), 175-195, to be another form of the continual round of one-upmanship of which the play is composed. I agree with his argument that what Gardner calls "débat" (58) is actually too polite a word for the word duels and abrasive remarks that characterize so many of the play's encounters, but by limiting his essay solely to this aspect of the play, he seems to have written his least successful critique of the comedies.

9 Among others, Harold C. Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare (Chicago, 1951), 288 et passim, remarks on Touchstone's function as parodist; Goddard thoroughly dislikes the character.

10 Not a radical statement; all drama is this.

11 J. Dennis Haston in "'When I came to man's estate:' Twelfth Night and Problems of Identity," Modern Language Quarterly, 33 (1972), 274-288, addresses himself to the problem of disguise and its psychological equivalents in Viola's case. For her disguise provides a kind of holding pattern for maturity as well as a device for self-protection. Twelfth Night seems much more susceptible to such treatment than As You Like It.
The word "if" in *As You Like It* has received much attention in recent years. Kent Talbot Van Den Berg, *op cit.*, says of Rosalind's use of the word that it reconciles idealistic aspirations to the requirements of an enduring commitment. D. J. Palmer, "*As You Like It* and the Idea of Play," *Critical Quarterly*, 13 (1971), an article covering much the same ground as this chapter, says "in the world that now lies before them, there is indeed much virtue in vows made with if. 'If' is the provisional assent that play requires of us." (245) David Young's more extensive study, *op cit.*, describes the world of the play as follows: an "atmosphere of artifice and hypothesis is also engendered by the remarkable extensive use of the word 'if' in *As You Like It*, as though the grammar that most suited a world like this one was the conditional." (46) And he refers specifically to Touchstone's duelling speech as an oblique defense of feigning and hypothesis." (49)

Anne Barton, "*As You Like It* and Twelfth Night: Shakespeare's Sense of an Ending," in *Shakespearean Comedy*, edited by Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer, *Stratford upon Avon Studies* (1972), 167. Borrowing heavily from Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*, Ms. Barton describes the relative ease with which a playwright can extricate himself from a tragedy as compared to a comedy.

D. A. Traversi, *An Approach to Shakespeare*, I, (New York, 1969), 326, says Hymen closes the play with a "note of due solemnity." John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare and His Comedies* (London, 1962), 141, also takes Hymen quite seriously. Anne Barton, *op cit.*, 167 admits that the ending "veers toward the implausible," but "the classicism of the comedy declares itself in the assurance with which it exacts belief for improbabilities so considerable." (170) Thomas McFarland, *Shakespeare's Pastoral Comedy* (Chapel Hill, 1972), 118, says Hymen's "song provides one of literature's most elevated and explicit salutations to the aim and justification of comedy." He later admits (121) "Hymen cannot eradicate all signs of strain." An argument at once close and far from mine is given by Sylvan Barnett in "Strange Events: Improbability in *As You Like It*," *Shakespeare Studies*, IV, (Vanderbilt University, 1968), 110-131, edited by J. Leeds Barroll. He says "Hymen himself is part of the wonder that concludes the play" and attempts to naturalize the god "do an injustice to this (wonderful and implausible) element in the play." (122) Where Barnett and I part company is in his idea that the improbabilities are the result and sign of a "benevolent providence." (128)

In the only production of the play I have seen (University of Oklahoma Drama Department, Spring 1975), Hymen was almost hooted from the stage. The audience simply did not know what to do with the appearance of a god in an up-to-then realistic play. I will avail myself of this note to make a further speculation. In this production, the character who played Duke Frederick in a sullen and cruel manner doubled as Hymen in a mode best described as effeminate Oberon. The conclusion drawn is that the director wanted to create a parallel between the two tyrants of politics and love, showing both to be inappropriate. There is a theatrical tradition however that when the play was first mounted, Shakespeare took the role of old Adam, a character whose only force is moral and
exemplary and who disappears after the second act. Might it not be possible that the playwright also took on the role of Hymen and where the plot becomes most clearly contrived stands up boldly as contriver? Whether or not he did has little effect on my argument; had he done so it would only have intensified an already heightened sense of artificiality on the part of the audience.

16A book on this theme, which I have not seen, is titled If You See the Buddha on the Road, Shoot Him.
"No More Cakes and Ale"

You get born and you try this and you don't know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they don't know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug.

Absalom, Absalom!—William Faulkner.
In II.iii of Twelfth Night, Feste enters the downstairs society of the play and says to Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, "How now, my hearts! Did you never see the picture of 'We Three.'" (16-17) This minor remark, easily lost in the welter of words and requiring a footnote for modern readers to understand, points the way out of comedy and into tragedy. "We Three" is a painting or poster depicting two fools with the spectator making the third; it is an image of barefaced manipulation, for whatever his intellectual powers, the onlooker is willy nilly inducted into fraternity of folly. The treatment of human beings as objects without regard to their wishes, the stage managing of hopes and fears, and the molding of men into emotional and physical shapes not their own is one of the main themes of Shakespeare's last great comedy; it will be one of the themes of the great tragedies to come.

When the actor of Rosalind swears us to conspiracy it is with optimism that we have the flexibility to reshape our lives; Feste's closing song is pessimistic Jaquesism--life is ever thus.

Students of the comedies are fond of drawing parallels between Twelfth Night and Shakespeare's earlier comic works, and it is true that the motifs that appear previously converge here in great numbers. The family resemblance is particularly strong between last and first born. Twelfth Night repeats in a different key the main elements of The Comedy of Errors--shipwreck, separated twins, mistaken identity, madness, dream, and imprisonment. But, whereas in the earlier work the movement is toward clarification and freedom, the motion in the latter is toward confirmation in ignorance and continued emotional confinement. The Comedy
of Errors opens as potential tragedy and ends as triumphant, if still primitive and derivative, comedy; with the closing of the curtain in Twelfth Night we are well within the frame of potential tragedy.

I

The methods by which one moves from comedy to tragedy are as manifold as the number of tragedies written, but generally tragedy begins when an individual relinquishes control of his destiny. In tragedies where fate is prominent, the individual was never fully in control in the first place. Loss of control can come from the skillful manipulation of others forcing a character to make the wrong choices, or it can come through some mental or moral failure intrinsic to the character. Twelfth Night has examples of all three. In all cases, it is the loss of options that breeds destruction. Thus, Rosalind's slow, tentative, movement toward revelation has no place here; characters are bound and determined almost from the start.

The most exaggerated example of the man manipulated is Malvolio who becomes in his cross-gartering and dark prison the perfect example of role constriction. Role constriction can take a variety of forms, but ordinarily it involves letting one attitude take over the whole personality to the point that the individual's response to experience is both limited and determined. (In Viola's case it is a matter of surface swallowing substance.) Malvolio is many things—a critic of Feste, a "puritan," a "time server," and a loyal servant to Olivia who bears him some mistressly affection. (II.iii.151, 160) But he is also, and almost disastrously, an ambitious servant who would marry his mistress for the wealth and power she would bring. He is a case of man's inner bent
contributing to the deception practiced upon him.

Before we learn of his ambition, Malvolio has performed the
kill-joy role at Olivia's behest, although we cannot doubt it fits him.
In this aspect, he is as totalitarian as Jaques; he expects the world
to correspond to his straightlaced demands, but he lacks the power to
enforce his will, and it is only power to which he can appeal. He has
no other answer to Sir Toby's "Dost thou think, because thou are virtuous,
there shall be no more cakes and ale." (II.iii.122-23) (There is, of
course, no real answer possible.) The revelers take exception to Malvolio's
threat to their own roles and decide, with Maria's help, to turn him into
a "common recreation." (146)

Significantly, in the change from comedy to tragedy, references
to drama take on an ominous meaning in Twelfth Night and the gulling of
Malvolio is described predominantly in images taken from drama and animal
trapping. To deceive is put the gull into a play of one's own "device"
(176) and that play is equated with the trickery required to trap an
animal for sport. It is but a step to Hamlet's "The Mouse-trap."

Malvolio is already an actor of considerable talent. As Maria
says, he is "an affectioned ass that cons state without book and utters
it by great swaths." (II.iii.160-62) In an age obsessed with manners
and courtesy, Malvolio's efforts in this respect are not exceptional
and several other actors memorize speeches; Viola's first speech to Olivia
is to be given rote and, in a wonderful bit of fooling, Sir Andrew tries
to learn flowery words from "Cesario:"
"'Odours,' 'pregnant,' and
'vouchsafed,' I'll get'em all three ready." (III.i.101-2) But no other
character goes at acting with the urgency of Malvolio. We and the
"lighter people" are made privy to one of the steward's wish-fulfilling
performances. In II.iv, he acts a time, when three months married to
Olivia, "Count Malvolio" calls Sir Toby to account for his waster life. The arrogance of Malvolio versus the barely contained violence of Sir Toby make great theatre, but indicates a danger in illusion itself. Malvolio acts out his revenging fantasies and only a little thing (Olivia's love) keeps him from making his imaginings real. Sir Toby, as spectator at another's delusions, cannot, because of his fanatical devotion to himself and his way of life, distinguish between fact and fancy, and he threatens to turn the "common recreation" into a slaughterhouse: "O, for a stone-bow, to hit him in the eye." (II.v.51) This is an image of drama with all elements turned fatally awry.

In the comedies generally, Shakespeare's various stage manager and actor figures have used illusion as a principle of freedom and exploration. Here illusion is vindictive and self-confirming. All the conspirators have to do is write a script parallel to the one according to which Malvolio already acts. The play the plotters put Beatrice and Benedick into makes those characters see each other in new roles and lead new lives. They share with Malvolio an inclination to the behavior solicited, but they differ in the freshness of the roles. The deception of Claudio and Don Pedro, who are confirmed in their stale notions of female infidelity, is the type of deception in Illyria. The letter Maria writes in Olivia's hand urges Malvolio to "cast thy humble slough and appear fresh." (II.v.160-61, italics mine) In fact, solely the appearance is changed; snakeskin and snake look the same, only one is brighter.

Malvolio's deception, then, is one for which he is ripe. He is so disposed to the imaginary role that half the fun of the passage is
watching Malvolio wring his name out of the letters "M, O, A, I." (132)
So apt is he, so ready to believe that his hopes are truth, that he
distorts the illusion to fit himself, as the conspirators know he must:
"And yet, to crush this a little, it would bow to me, for every one of
these letters is in my name." (152-53) Given a little encouragement,
Malvolio's ambitious fantasy takes control of his life. Of Malvolio,
as later of Macbeth, it can be said "Look how imagination blows him."
(47-48)

The consequences are the perfect image of role confinement.
When next we see Malvolio he has fitted himself to the letter; yellow
stockinged, cross gartered, smiling, and surly, he is the comic butt.
He does speak unawares of the limitations his role entails: "This
does make some obstruction in the blood, this cross gartering, but
what of that?" (III.iv.21-23) Nonetheless, he gladly gives himself
over to his role and it is only when he reaches the perfected state of
his restrictive folly "in a dark room and bound" (148-49) that he
realizes, if then, he may have misread the letter and reality. I say
"if then" because many of the characters of Twelfth Night never see
through their folly to the more open vision common to comedy. Malvolio
persists in seeing himself as sane despite the world's attempts "to
face me out of my wits." (XXIV.ii.101) And there is the disturbing
possibility that in Illyria, where illusion and reality are close
allies, he is right.

Malvolio will appear again at the conclusion of the play, but
versions of him are everywhere in evidence. Comedy from Plautus to the
present has always had something to do with characters like Malvolio
who are limited to one main driving force. Ben Jonson's humour comedy
is but a local manifestation of common comic phenomenon given pseudo-
scientific status by Renaissance psychological theories. Moliere,
only slightly later, constructed a series of brilliant plays around
men ridden by singular manias. This method is not often Shakespeare's,
but in Twelfth Night almost all the characters, if not humour charac-
ters in the first place, are driven into adopting roles that vary from
the human norm. This human norm that comedy strives to depict is im-
possible to define, because definition in comedy is itself limitation.
Comedy tries to break as many bonds as possible without denying basic
human emotional needs such as sex, love, friendship, society. The
artificial in human relations must go and there is some question of
its departure in Twelfth Night.

Orsino and Olivia are two main characters variously bound by
notions that prevent their full development. Orsino's fatuous devotion
to love and fancy is obvious from the outset and is an exaggerated form
of Orlando's sonneteering adulation. What sets him apart from Orlando
is his mercurial nature. He opens the play with a paean on one musical
strain only to shift his devotion "even in a minute." (I.i.14) "Enough;
no more:'Tis no so sweet now as it was before." (7-8) He concludes his
first speech in an opaque justification of his skittishness: "So full
of shapes is fancy/That it alone is high fantastical." (14-15) Lest
we confuse this shifting quality with Rosalind's flexibility, we should
recall that Rosalind is more or less in control of her own metamorphosis,
while Orsino who knows the source of his changeableness has no control
whatsoever. This lack of control makes him capable of grandiose contra-
dictions. In II.iv, Orsino asserts that man's love is "more giddy and
unfirm, More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn, Than women's are."
(34-36) Yet, within seventy lines, he is praising his constancy at the expense of women: "Alas, their love may be call'd appetite, No motion of the liver, but the palate, That suffers surfeit, cloyment, and revolt." (100-102) The only thing constant about Orsino is his praise of Olivia: "I am as all lovers are, Unstaid and skittish in all motions else, Save in the constant image of the creature That is beloved."
(17-20) Note: it is the image not the women to which he is constant. To her image he shows single-minded devotion—he cannot, cannot, accept no for an answer. (91) Yet, we may question even this constancy, for at the end of the play Orsino slips his affections from Olivia to Viola with great ease; he states as reason only that Viola has been a loyal go-between—shades of Silvius and Phoebe! Henceforth, Viola shall be her "master's mistress" and "fancy's queen." (V.i.334, 397) With these Petrarchan epithets, we are still locked in sonnet fairyland.

Olivia's constriction, like Orsino's, is self-imposed. Rather than being actively practiced upon, both characters absorb certain literary or societal values and run with that cultural impedimenta. We suspect that Orsino was not always thus; Olivia describes him in glowing terms—"I suppose him virtuous, know him noble, Of great estate, of fresh and stainless youth, In voices well divulged, free, learn'd and valiant," and handsome to boot. (I.v.277-79) But when the play opens, this appealing figure has been replaced by the poetical fop, whose old personality has been replaced by "the book even of my secret soul." (I.iv.14) We can imagine what kind of book it is. We have no comparable prior knowledge of Olivia; all we know is the deaths of her father and brother have made her resolve to remain seven years in seclusion. A period of
mourning is comprehensible but the seven-year pledge to abjure the
"company/And sight of men," (I.i.40-41) accompanied with the maso-
chistic watering "once a day her chamber round with eye-offending
brine" (I.i.29-30) is not. Olivia's palace and Malvolio's prison share
the same grounds.

The artificial tears and seclusion are signs that the role Olivia
adopts is sterile, and it is sterility that Viola-Cesario attacks: "You
are the cruellest she alive,/If you will leave these graces to the grave/
And leave the world no copy." (I.v.259-61) Against her own will, Viola
argues for a more healthful response to life and offers Orsino's "fertile
tears" (275) as a corrective. Unfortunately, all Viola does is drive
Olivia from the madness of excessive grief to that of romantic love of
the sonnet variety. Olivia falls for Cesario's lines on his own supposi-
tious love making methods:

Make me a willow cabin at your gate,
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of contemned love
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Halloo your name to the reverberate hills. (287-91)

The hyperbolical quality of these lines may be intended by Viola, but
they, along with some Rosalind-like criticism, are what capture Olivia.
Both Olivia and Orsino are trapped by love and pursue the unattainable
object.

Viola is a character trapped not so much by others or her own
self-restrictive attitudes (although she participates in those types of
entrapment too) as by circumstances beyond her control. Like Olivia,
Viola is orphaned, but she has no establishment out of which to operate,
no relatives, and no social position.1 Her disguise as a man has not
the elective quality of Rosalind's who once in Arden could abandon it
and join her father. Rosalind's disguise starts in utility, but con-
tinues through joy in improvisation and exploration; Viola, in Bertrand
Evans' words, "has found no joy in the role," yet must remain in costume
because she has to. Why she must is unclear. J. Dennis Huston argues
that the play is about maturity and that she remains in disguise until
she is able to assume an adult role. Other plausible reasons for her
disguise are that she does not want to throw herself on the charity of
others or that since she cannot serve Olivia she might as well be close
to a potential source of protection—Orsino. Whatever the specific cause,
his feeling about her role is clear. She constantly complains about how
her disguise forces her into positions contrary to her wishes: "I'll do
my best/To woo your lady: (Aside) Yet, a barful strife!/Whoe'er I woo,
myself would be his wife." (I.iv.41-42)

Forced to play the man, Viola has to argue Orsino's position
against herself and the impotence of this position is anticipated by her
choosing to be a "eunuch," though she never acts this role. (I.ii.56)
Even before Malvolio is put into the conspirators' device, we have seen
Viola acting from a script not her own. In one of her first speeches
to Olivia, Viola says in response to a query, "I can say little more
than I have studied, and that question's out of my part," and a little
later she adds, "I am not that I play." (I.v.190-91, 196) A bit of dia-
logue further supports this notion:

Oli. Where is your text?
Vio. Most sweet lady,--
Oli. A comfortable doctrine, and much may be said of it.
Where lies your text?
Vio. In Orsino's bosom.
Oli. In Orsino's bosom! In what chapter of his bosom?
Vio. To answer by the method, in the first of his heart. (I.v.237-44)
Dialogue in comedy is often of this shared metaphor type and can be either admirable foolery or quite tedious, but here its function seems to be to point out how even in conversation one person can fall under the compulsive spell of others.

Leaving Viola for her brother is apparently a farewell to constriction and a welcome to freedom. His first description by Viola’s rescuer is "like Arion on the dolphin’s back." (I.ii.15) Arion, a Greek poet, was thrown into the sea, but was saved by dolphins charmed by his lyre. This image of the artist controlling his environment through his art is the only one in the play that positively treats art. Even though Sebastian is not particularly poetical and "bind(s) himself" (12) to a mast, he does act with "hope and courage." (13) Joseph G. Summers describes him as a character "who righteously and ineffectually insists on his own identity."¹ The important word is "ineffectually," because once he enters Illyria all his good qualities are quite beside the point. To the Illyrians, he is Cesario and is put into Cesario’s roles; the humor, if it is finally that, comes from his intractability, his poor fit in the society that thinks it knows him. Nonetheless, in his puzzlement and refusal to bow in the duel, he is true to his own character. When first mistaken for Cesario, he says, "Or I am mad, or else this is a dream," (IV.i.65) but soon decides "that this may be some error, but no madness." (IV.iii.10) For all this perceptivity and good sense, he gets written into Olivia’s play of marriage. Whether through astonishment or a desire to seize the main chance or even love (least likely), Sebastian joins the other puppets.

The downstairs characters do not escape the general string-pulling. Lesser Falstaffs, they appear the very stuff of freedom:
"Confine! I'll confine myself no finer than I am," but confined Sir Toby is. (I.iii.10-11) His life implies there is no life beyond eating, drinking, and carousing, but beneath this holiday surface is a vicious-ness that Goddard rightly calls the "parasitical world." Most notoriously preyed upon is Sir Andrew Aguecheek, living in hope of the greater wealth of Olivia, Aguecheek squanders, with Toby's assistance, his "three thousand ducats a year." (I.iii.22) For his spendthrift generosity, Sir Andrew gains the feigned friendship of Toby, the depth of which can be measured by Sir Toby's last lines: "Will you help? An ass-head and a coxcomb and a knave, a thin-faced knave, a gull!" (V.i.212-13)

This bit of nastiness is prompted by Toby's wounding at the able hands of Sebastian who is mistakenly apprehended as Cesario, the butt of Toby's mock duel. The whole bunch of conspirators are caught in their tricking of Malvolio. The further the game is carried, the deeper danger the revellers run, for Olivia does respect her steward's abilities: Toby admits "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 up-shot." (IV.ii.72-76) Trapped by this trap too, Toby is finally ensnared by the trapper—Maria. We can perhaps understand Toby's interest in this clever woman, but what she finds in Toby is unclear. A clue lies in her unsponsored status; a servant is shaky, a relation stable. It may be overstatement to call Maria a parasite on a parasite; it is somewhat easier to speculate about who will rule the marriage—Maria's fertile genius for manipulation or Toby's often booze-befuddled faculties? Sir Toby's prophetic questions to Maria can have but one answer: "Wilt thou set thy foot o' my neck...Shall I play my freedom at tray-trip and become
thy bond-slave?" (II.v.206, 208-9)

This pantheon of enslaved slavers would not be complete without a clown. In the eyes of most critics, Feste is a bridge between our world and the cautionary world of exalted emotions and delusions of the play proper. He also has a self-knowledge and freedom the other characters in their ignorance lack. Summers provides the best statement of Feste's position: "In the business of masking, Feste is the only professional in a world of amateurs...He never makes the amateur's mistake of confusing his personality with his mask." Clearly the worldly wisest character on stage, he passes on much good advice: he advises Olivia to give up her self-denying grief and his remarks on the relativity of vice and virtue are appropriate, if reminiscent of Jaques—"Any thing that's mended is but patch'd: virtue that transgresses is but patch'd with sin; and sin that amends is but patch'd with virtue." (I.v.52-55) To Orsino he gives the quibbling good counsel that one does "the better for my foes and the worse for my friends," because "my foes tell me plainly I am an ass: so that by my foes, sir, I profit in the knowledge of myself." (V.i.13-14, 21-22)

Unfortunately, most of his wisdom goes unacknowledged by those who could most profit from it. Olivia may benefit from the clown's argument that one ought not to mourn a soul in heaven, but it is Viola that effects Olivia's removal into life. And Orsino benefits hardly at all. The clown's small effect does not however provide limits to his actions. He has been gone when the play begins and he ranges freely between Olivia and Orsino's camps. Yet, in his way, Feste too is bound. Malvolio calls him a "set kind of fool," and his fooling sometimes smacks of the comic's "routine." As Barber says, "what Feste chiefly does is sing and beg." What Feste is free to be is a fee'd
fool and that in itself is a kind of prison. Viola, in part looking at her own condition, appropriately says:

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool; And to do that well craves a kind of wit: He must observe their mood on whom he jests, The quality of persons, and the time, And, like the haggard, check at every feather That comes before his eye. This is a practice As full of labour as a wise man's art. (III.1.67-73)

The fool is always a public creature, always "on," and always striving to adapt to his public. So the type, so the individual—except in Shakespeare. There we see Touchstone and Lear's fool in their private aspects. But not Feste. Where he has been and what he has done are shrouded in fierce reticence—"Let her hang me." (I.v.5) His closing song, only, reveals the grimace behind the grin. If Feste were Smoky Robinson, he might have sung this:

People say I'm the life of the party 'Cause I tell a joke or two Although I might be laughing Loud and hearty Deep inside I'm blue...

So take a good look at my face You'll see my smile looks out of place...

Outside— I'm masquerading Inside— My hope is fading...

II

Twelfth Night's characters are in John David Souther's phrase "prisoners in disguise." How did matters reach such a pass? The world of As You Like It is one in which men "fret the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world." At least this is true in comparison with Twelfth Night which may properly be called an iron age comedy. The play world can fairly be said to exist in reference to a more innocent and hopeful age recently departed. This was the time when Orsino
was "the fresh and stainless youth," when Olivia and Viola's fathers
and brothers were alive and sustaining. Orsino expresses the nostalgia
that runs through the play thus:

Come, the song we had last night.
Mark it, Cesario, it is old and plain;
The spinsters and knitters in the sun
And the free maids that weave their thread with bones
Do use to chant it: it is silly sooth
And dallies with the innocency of love,
Like the old age. (II.iv.44-50)

"To see this age! A sentence is but a cheveril glove to a good
wit: How quickly the wrong side may be turned outward." (III.i.12-14)

Only in Adam's times were words fully adequate to experience; with the
fall came lying and deceit, but potentially more disorienting and acci-
dentally destructive came simple misunderstanding. A lie can be exposed
if there is such a thing as truth, but Feste's statements on language
indicate that words are no longer a means of arriving at truth: "Words
are grown so false, I am loath to prove reason with them." (28-29) Given
his adaptability for personal gain, Feste is at once lamentor over and
profiter from language's disarray. "I am indeed not her fool, but her
corrupter of words," he says of his position at Olivia's. (40-41) In
a sense all problems are problems of definition and in Illyria the stuff
of definition, words, are no help at all.\textsuperscript{11}

The slipperiness of language is almost always a component of
comedy and in Ralph Berry's view \textit{Twelfth Night} is a play of "pseudo-
messages"--"Olivia's" letter, the spurious challenges, Viola's missions.\textsuperscript{12}
One message that comes through clearly however is that fate plays a large
part in human affairs and this notion is not exclusively, or even ordin-
arily, a part of comedy. Comedy builds on the human capacity to get
into, in almost any circumstances, hot water and then get out again.
The manner in which these situations arise may be improbable and depend on excessive coincidence, but they are seen as growing out of human weaknesses and strengths. Nonetheless, characters who blame fate for their own innate foolishness may be encountered in comedy and nowhere in greater profusion than in Illyria. Malvolio attributes his romance with Olivia to fortune—"Tis but fortune; all is fortune," (II.v.27) and later "It is Jove's doing...well, Jove, not I, is the doer of this." (III.iv.81, 91-92) Maria reads Malvolio's character well enough to know his predisposition to submit to external control: "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em. Thy Fates open their hands; let thy blood and spirit embrace them." (II.v.156-59)

This attitude is by no means only Malvolio's. In a series of early scenes, the image of man as a tool of forces beyond his ability to know or influence is placed before our eyes. Olivia closes her first interview with Viola as follows: "I do I know not what, and fear to find/Mine eye too great a flatter for my mine./Fate, show thy force: ourselves we do not owe;/What is decreed must be, and be this so."
(I.v.327-30) Immediately, enter Sebastian who says, "My stars shine darkly over me: the malignancy of my fate might perhaps distemper yours...My determinate voyage is mere extravagancy." (II.i.3-5, 9-10) Following this brief scene is Viola's dawning awareness of Olivia's affection for her as Cesario. As with the others, she feels powerless: "As I am a man, my state is desperate for my master's love;/As I am a 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 know for me to untie." (II.ii.38-42) In close order, three young people
have described themselves as completely helpless. Variously victimized,
these three are quite correct. Without saying the play is dominated by
a classical notion of fate, we can say that these characters are con-
trolled by outsiders, although they may not have to look as far as the
stars.

In addition to the many references to fate, the play abounds in
allusions to renaissance pseudo-sciences which connect the workings of
the body to the four elements and the heavens. How in a world where
freedom is thought to be circumscribed by astral and chemical determin-
ism can one regain control. One answer offered, perhaps as radical in
its time as it is commonplace in ours, is through the force of riches.
There are two characters whose actions are clearly determined by their
dependent relationship to society. We have already looked at how Feste's
profession makes him subject to others. To that I can only add that one
of the most outstanding impressions the clown makes on stage is how much
of his time is spent in the witty cadging of tips. The other financially
dependent character is Sir Toby Belch. Not only does Sir Toby live on
the economic suffrance of his niece, but to supplement his stipend he
preys on Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Though often turning his parasitism to
pleasure, Toby devotes much of his energy to dangling the carrot before
Aguecheek's bleary eyes.

Toby and Feste do not use money to manipulate others; instead
they manipulate to get money. The second scene introduces monetary in-
fluence to gain one's ends. After the captain's speech saying that
Sebastian may have been saved "perchance," Viola says, "For saying so
there's gold," and later she tells the captain that if he aids her, "It
may be worth thy pains." (I.ii.7, 18, 57) Antonio has a little of this
trait; when he gives Sebastian his purse, he treats Sebastian as one might a child: "Haply your eye shall light upon some toy/You have desire to purchase." (II.iii.44-45) Aguecheek's understanding of this principle of human action finds expression along with his cowardice in his desire to buy Cesario off: "Let him let the matter slip, and I'll give him my horse, grey Capilet." (III.v.313-14) Compared to Olivia however the rest are pikers. On one occasion she tries to give Viola a ring and later succeeds in giving her a locket. The original rejection of the ring only prompts Olivia to speculate on what a hard time the rich have in purchasing the lesser blessed: "O world, how apt the poor are to be proud." (III.i.138) Olivia also is the most conspicuously successful as a briber, for she does manage to buy Sebastian with a pearl. Marvelling, Sebastian calls his meeting with Olivia an "accident and flood of fortune." (IV.iii.11) While Sebastian may mean luck, it is more clear that Olivia means wealth when she, mistaking, urges Cesario to "Take thy fortunes up;/Be that thou knowest thou art, and then thou art/As great as that thou fear'st." (V.i.151-53)

Illyria is not Shakespeare's Troy, but it is a world where Sir Toby, a pretend-Pandarus, can say to an emissary of love, "My niece is desirous you should enter, if your trade be to her," (III.i.82-83) and the poetical count can call rejected love "unprofitable return." (I.iv.22) Money, fate, and the decay of language form a complex of correlates that locate Illyria in a fallen world. The iron age in greenworld comedy usually is the world to which the comic sojourners must return refreshed by their forest experience. In Illyria, however, there is no second world; iron is all there is.
III

Yet, Illyria does not leave only the impression that I have described in the preceding sections. The three weddings that are presaged in the last act are reminders that formally this is comedy; and the wit and poetical language, silver if not tragedy's gold, also point to a world not wholly mired in the hopelessness of internal and external restriction. But, if it is comedy, it is comedy very different from Shakespeare's usual practice. Not only do characters practice illusion on others, but the whole play may be an illusion practiced on the audience, for Twelfth Night is, I believe, an illusory comedy.

"The main business of Twelfth Night is illusion, error, and deceit," says Ralph Berry in a statement representative of most critical opinion. But in a way, the same can be said of many of the comedies, particularly the one closest in spirit to Twelfth Night, Much Ado About Nothing. Much Ado About Nothing's deceptions are almost identical to the gulling of Malvolio; they differ only in the substitution of plays for the letter and Don John's malevolence which outweighs in evil intents anything Marie and Toby can claim. Why then does Much Ado About Nothing seem more purely comic? Perhaps because we sense that Beatrice and Benedick have made some substantial development, and we cannot say that for any character in Illyria. Or perhaps we feel that at least some of the Messinans know what they are about some of the time. More likely, however, it is that evil illusion as practiced by Don John is successfully, if artificially, isolated from the society brought forth at play's end. In Illyria, its name a sign, illusion is pervasive, and while it has no dire consequences, we feel it easily might.

The very model of evil illusion is the whitened sepulchre; this
image receives early expression in *Twelfth Night*. Viola says to her

captain:

There is a fair behavior in thee, captain;
And though that nature with a beauteous wall
Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee
I will believe thou hast a mind that suits
With this thy fair and outward character. (I.ii.47-51)

Touching faith, soon supported by "I'll pay thee bounteously." (52)

Viola, who has greatest cause to know what duplicity people can bring
off, wants to pay a man to be good (read: keep her secret). Enlisting
the whitened sepulchre in the service of deception is but journeyman's
work in a play where no sand is not quick. I suppose what separates
*Twelfth Night* from *Much Ado About Nothing* is not the knowledge of evil
(*Much Ado* encompasses that), but the knowledge that evil can put on a
clean coat and walk undetected among honest men—no providential Dog-
berry in Illyria.

This study has been in part based on the assumption that in
comedy images of art are employed to comment on Shakespeare's own local
practice and to show the function of imagination in making both charac-
ter and audience more accessible to experience's vast offerings. Here
art has little to say to man and, beyond Arion as magical poet (itself
in retrospect misleading), art is either constrictive or sterile. I
opened this essay with "We Three," art that puts the audience right in
the frame without asking its leave. Olivia is consistently connected
with jewelry whose icy brilliance she would use to attract Cesario. In
images from the painter's craft, she describes her beauty as something
divorced from her character: "We will draw the curtain and show you the
picture...is't not well done?" (I.v.250) Browning's duke cannot treat
his duchess with more objectivity. When Olivia enumerates her beauties
she negates them: "item, two lips, indifferent red; item, two grey eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth."

(266-68) Witty perhaps, barren certainly; items in an auctioneer's catalogue. Viola in one of her oblique approaches to Orsino describes her "sister's" love this way:

She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. (II.iv.114-119)

"Was not this love indeed?" (119) Not if the comedies are to be trusted.

As art, so goes acting. I have already discussed images of acting in part I of this essay. They differ from previous comic practice in that they are limiting rather than expansive. Man is an actor, either following bad scripts of his own device or reciting lines of other men's invention. Even Fabian's "If this was played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction" (III.iv.140-41) lacks the resonance it might have in another play world. Paraphrased, these lines mean that Malvolio's actions are too absurd for life, too absurd even for drama. The remark reveals a mind ignorant of the richness of both life and drama. And poor disguise, almost the only constant in Shakespearean comedy, takes a beating. Sensing Olivia's love for Cesario, Viola says, "Fortune forbid my outside have not charm'd her.../Poor lady, she were better love a dream./Disguise I see thou are a wickedness,/Wherein the pregnant enemy does much." (II.ii.19, 27-29) This is disguise without a guiding intelligence, freewheeling over actor and acted upon. In this view, the actor is reduced to a "poor monster." (35)

Why this about-face? I think that what we are seeing is, in retrospect, preparation for the tragedies or an exploration of the
consequences of certain human activities that can lead to tragedy. What works in Arden, will not work as well or at all in Illyria which is finally closer to our world. Pastoral or second world comedies provide a laboratory where actions can be tested without having to prove their usefulness in a world of consequences. Arden and Athens' wood provide this kind of testing ground, and their lovers go through gyrations parallel to those in Illyria. The difference is that the earlier plays provide a figure of the artist-scientist, Oberon and Rosalind, a figure who finds apotheosis as the mage of the island, Prospero. Unfortunately, Illyria contains half a dozen demi-magicians none of whom exercises anything like benevolent suzerainty over his situations. They are the figures in Judith Sutpen's image of life, quoted as an epigraph to this paper. Design and counter design do not add up to an art of living, such as Rosalind supports, but to an ugly blur.

It is for this reason that the images of art in the play are nugatory or downright dangerous. The main referent of the images is no longer to art, but to life. Shakespeare had begun to mine this vein in 1 Henry IV and Richard II; there imagination had been a liability in the politic world. But this is the first time the precincts of comedy have been so systematically invaded. Violence arising from misunderstanding has largely been held in check and the attacks only sorties. Indeed, in Touchstone's account of the duel, imagination was a means of rendering potential violence void. In Illyria we have the other side of that coin. In Arden the real duel is turned into art; in Illyria, a duel
designed to be merely a play has head cracking consequences. (See *Hamlet*, vii) Viola-Cesario, the poor monster, the actor, becomes in Sir Andrew's terror "the very devil incardinate." (V.i.184-85)

The problems of illusion in life are endless and the characters do not know each other beyond surfaces. (Orsino has never at the end of the play even seen the feminine surface of Viola.) Three quotations sum up the muddle of illusion and reality in the play. On meeting Sebastian who disclaims being Cesario, Feste says, "Nothing that is so is so." (IV.i.9) He is calling Sebastian a liar, but Sebastian is no liar.

Donning the guise of Sir Topas, Feste quotes "the old hermit of Prague" who said, "'That that is is.'" (IV.ii.14-15, 17) A statement that things are what they are used to justify things being what they seem: "So being master Parson, am master Parson." He adds cryptically, "for, what is 'that' but 'that,' and 'is' but 'is.'" (IV.ii.18-19) What indeed? To these add Orsino's description of Sebastian and Cesario: "A natural perspective, that is and is not." (V.i.224) This has all the opacity in situ of the other quotations with the extra feature of being doubly oxymoronic—the mirror image is reality, and is and is not real; the distinction between art and life is twice submerged. However, the appearance of both twins at once marks the emergence of the play world from deep obscurity to relative, but only relative, clarity.

The comedies that endorse art have their problems coming to a successful conclusion and much of this study has dealt with the various methods Shakespeare uses to transmute base plot manipulation into gold. The end of *Twelfth Night* has its share of problems also. Anne Barton says of this play, "Shakespeare began to unbuild his own comic form at its point of greatest vulnerability: the ending."14 In Barton's view,
Shakespeare does this by admitting the "fiction of comic society," which is shown by the exclusiveness of the ending as opposed to _As You Like It's_ inclusiveness. Although I agree with Barton in general, I cannot see how the play can be properly said to end at all. Rosalind, Oberon, and Prospero can force their plays to a close because the plays have been held before us as consciously artificial. Illyria is real; what are unreal are the characters' attitudes and the situations they contrive for each other. Yet, they must live with the consequences of their illusions. Shakespeare does not shirk the responsibilities of his new orientation to illusion in life.

Therefore, while the plot has trotted out the requisite twins, who have had their stylized and totally unnecessary recognition scene, and the lovers who have been paired off, and the clown who has sung his last song and begged (yet again!) our applause, the play's action is not finished. At least three strands remain unknit: Malvolio is glaringly unincorporated; Antonio is a prisoner under great danger; and Viola's captain who has the means to work the transformation required for marriage "is now in durance, at Malvolio's suit," (V.i.283) and when Malvolio leaves he "hath not told us of the captain yet." (390) So the comedy ends—the main characters frozen in attitudes not far enough from their old, one man in chains on stage, another off; two real prisoners, and the prisoner in sport paradoxically most free, because simply not there.

"Thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges." (V.i. 385-86) Some of the most honest emotions of the play crop out in the last act and, like Feste's remark just quoted and Sir Toby's parting blast at Aguecheek, they are not the most attractive. Orsino threatens Cesario's life with "I'll sacrifice the lamb I do love." (133) And
Malvolio leaves the stage forever with "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you." (387) A dark picture, if I am correct. Then how can John Dover Wilson call Twelfth Night "this most exquisite of all Shakespeare's comedies."16 Harold C. Goddard calls it "the last unadulterated comedy."17 It may be that with the likes of Jan Kott contemporary Shakespearean criticism has entered a new dark age in which all comedy seems more black, but I think not. Instead, the darkness I see is there, "transparent as barricades...lustrous as ebony." (IV.ii.40, 42) But it tends to be hidden by the flashes of wit that lighten the darkness. The whole play has the surface sheen, the form itself of comedy, yet underneath the surface rough beasts are stirring.

Twelfth Night has a split personality. Our mirth covers the frantic and hot-house bloom of the lighter people's "fun;" and the avaricious and vindictive grounds from which it springs. Occasionally, as in Orsino's violence and Toby's last mad outburst, these emotions come bubbling up to disturb the calm waters. As do sporadic bits of unmotivated obscenity--"These be her very C's, her U's and her T's; and thus she makes her great P's." (II.v.97-99) More importantly, the marriages hide the intense loneliness that exists at the heart of Twelfth Night. No comedy is so lacking in friends and confidantes as this: the noblemen and women in Love's Labour's Lost have each other, the Antipholi have their Dromios, Portia has Nerissa, Rosalind her Celia; Viola has no one after I.ii, Olivia has no one, Orsino confesses to the air, and Sebastian has Antonio, the intemperate fulsome ness of whose affection makes the use of "friend" questionable; the only groups are of connivers. Only Kate is so bereft. The isolation in Illyria is terrifying in its completeness.

Yet this is not the vision of the first time viewer, nor even
necessarily the second. Like *Lord Jim*, *Twelfth Night* is a work whose implications deepen on reflection. Goddard's essay provides an excellent summary of his developing mixed feelings about the play.\(^{18}\) And he says of the conclusion, "we are too theatrically intoxicated to pay much attention to the Clown's song, which, if we listened to it, might have a sobering effect."\(^{19}\) Feste's song is sobering and, given the proper emphasis, can force us to recognize the incompleteness of vision that can see the play as "unadulterated comedy," which Goddard finally does not. Feste's songs have always been sobering affairs. Sung to the count, "Come away, come away, death" (II.iv.52-67) with its emphasis on a lover's death, shrouds, black coffins, and bones, paints a portrait of the stultifying, constrictive love in which Orsino so casually lounges. "O mistress mine" (II.iii.40-45, 52-57) is a song whose split verses presage the split in the play. The first verse's "Journeys end in lovers meeting/Every wise man's son doth know" is a deterministic lyric, although faith is expressed in benevolent providence rather than dour fate. "Trip no further" is a quietistic message equivalent to the time-will-tell attitude of Viola. The second stanza however is a *carpe diem* lyric which is traditionally activist. ("Thus, though we cannot make our sun/Stand still, yet we will make him run"—Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress")

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What's to come is still unsure:
In delay there lies no plenty,
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty,
Youth's a stuff will not endure.
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Seizing the day is a way of countering fate; all must die, yet since the future is unsure, man can within bounds affect the quality of the journey to his destiny. This is *As You Like It*'s philosophy—and comedy's too—of emphasizing shaping and doing, rather than waiting and enduring until
some external force pushes things off dead center.

Feste's last song too reminds us of *As You Like It*, but it is Jaques' rather than Rosalind's force that is felt. Feste is no longer the ambidexter (IV.ii.130-39) who plays clown and priest simultaneously and his song is the Seven Ages of Man writ small and rough. While Feste sings only of himself and his disillusionment, the wind and rain affect all men alike; by extension so do the stages through which the clown passes—a child's dream, man's estate with its knaves and thieves, a bad marriage and an unsuccessful career, the hangover after the raucous night before, fragments that ought not add up to a whole like, but often do. What is most distinctive and disheartening about this passage is not its determinism, but its weary and resigned tone. Kurt Vonnegut's all-obviating "so it goes" would not be out of place here:20

A great while ago the world begun,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain
But that's all one, our play is done,
And we'll strive to please you every day.

"That's all one," "What you will." The world is old and we are tired.

In only the last line does Feste the professional entertainer raise his weary head and become the pitchman for drama; we have after all paid with our money and applause to see the actors go through their turns, to see them become what we will. The clown may strive to please us every day, but he is well advised, since he lives in our world and we in his now, not to rub our gold too hard lest it prove brass. The comic playwright, who has never been just that, writes in *Twelfth Night* the husk of a comedy enclosing the germ of a tragedy and it is to tragedy or even more tragic-like comedy that Shakespeare now turns. *Twelfth Night* is not a tragedy, but its driven, deluded, deceiving and deceived characters are
portents of the approaching years of great tragedy. There shall be no more cakes and ale. For a while.
NOTES

1 Joseph H. Summers, "The Masks of Twelfth Night," in Discussions of Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies, edited by Herbert Weil, Jr., (Boston, 1966), 111. In this excellent essay, Summers describes the world of Twelfth Night as "parentless" in general with Viola's loss being the greatest.


4 Summers, 114.


6 Anne Barton comments on Feste as bridge or intermediary in "As You Like It and Twelfth Night: Shakespeare's Sense of an Ending," in Shakespearean Comedy, edited by Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer, Stratford Upon Avon Studies, 1972, 177.

7 Summers, 115.


11 Feste has earlier said "Words are ver rascals since bonds disgraced them." (III.1.24) This passage has caused much debate, a convenient, if outdated, summary of which is given in Horace Howard Furness's Twelfth Night: A New Variorum of Shakespeare (New York, 1964), First Edition, 1901, 182. Two positions are argued: that "bonds" refers to restrictions placed upon dramatic poets by the Privy Council in June 1600; or that it refers to the disgrace of words being put into shady business contracts (bonds). I read the "bonds" as meaning shackles as in the first position, but shackles in the sense that they are forced into functions opposed to their original use as tools for communication. The reference to the Privy Council's ruling is intriguing, though very speculative. If Feste is the image of the actor forced to suit his actions to a paying audience, then his attack on words in bonds may be an attack on further restrictions on free expression in art.

13 Ibid., 205.

14 Barton, 171.

15 Ibid., 179.


17 Goddard, 294.

18 Ibid., 294-306.

19 Ibid., 295.